**KINDS OF SHORT STORY**

Among the ways of looking at the subjects, themes, and art of the short story is to review the astonishing range and varieties of types of stories. These include tales, fantasies, humor and satire, character studies, confession, biography, history, education, religion, and local color types.

The ancient form of the *tale* can retain its power when used for the modern short story, as in “The She-Wolf” (1880) by Italian writer Giovanni Verga and “Mrs. Li’s Hair,” by Chinese writer Yeh Shao-Chun. *Fantasy* stories often combine the old tales tradition with supernatural details, as in the horror fantasy of British writer John Collier (for example, “Bottle Party,” 1939), Irish author Elizabeth Bowen (“The Demon Lover,” 1941), and British writer Saki (“Tobermory,” 1911). Other notable fantasies are “The Sailor-Boy’s Tale” (1942) by Danish author Isak Dinesen, “The Door” (1939) by American E. B. White, and “The Celestial Omnibus” (1908) by British writer E. M. Forster.

Another short story type is the *humor* story, intended to surprise, delight, and entertain; a related type of story, the *satire*, is designed to attack the ills of society. Some of the more famous humorous tall tales and animal fables were written by Americans Mark Twain (“The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County,” 1865) and Joel Chandler Harris (“The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story,” 1894). Modern small towns are the setting for the sardonic humor of stories by American James Thurber (“The Secret Life of Walter Mitty,” 1942, among many others) and Anglo-American P. G. Wodehouse (the Wooster and Jeeves stories, first appearing in 1914). More serious humor is at work in stories by Americans Eudora Welty (such as “Petrified Man,” 1939) and Dorothy Parker (“The Custard Heart,” 1939). Good examples of writers who produced stories of sober satire include Austrian author Arthur Schnitzler (“Fate of the Baron,” 1923) and American Mary McCarthy (“The Man in the Brooks Brothers Shirt,” 1941).

Some short stories are character studies, such as “The Gentleman from San Francisco” (1921) by Russian writer Ivan Bunin. Others are lyrical expressions of a character’s emotional state as in “First Love” (originally “Colette,” 1948) by Russian American author Vladimir Nabokov. Another type is the confession story, often done without the narrator’s awareness, as in “First Confession” (1944) by Irish writer Frank O’Connor. Still other stories fall under biography or history types, in which a life story or historical event is used for a work of fiction; Welty’s “A Still Moment” (a 1943 story about naturalist John James Audubon) falls into both categories.

The *education*story is set in academia or is concerned with the education of the main character, as in “Of This Time, of That Place” (1944) by American educator Lionel Trilling. The *religion* story can be either faithful to and supportive of organized religion or critical of it; “God Sees the Truth but Waits” (1872) by Russian Leo Tolstoy is of the faithful variety, but “The Sin of Jesus” (1955) by fellow Russian Isaac Babel is critical and questioning. There are also religious fantasies, such as “The Gardener” (1926) by British author Rudyard Kipling. Most of the stories of Americans Flannery O’Connor and J. F. Powers emerge out of a Catholic religious context.

*Local color* stories examine the mores and customs of rural and small-town life, sometimes sentimentally, as with the stories of Maria Edgeworth, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Sarah Orne Jewett, and George Washington Cable. The hardboiled first-person narrators of stories set in the big cities are often tough guys, as in James M. Cain’s “Dead Man” (1936), the many wisecracking stories of Dashiell Hammett and Damon Runyon, the more serious tough stories of Ring Lardner, and the literary stories of John O’Hara.

The short story was once a common publishing staple; many women’s, men’s, and family magazines and some newspapers regularly published the form from the 1840s to the 1960s. During this time the most popular mainstream genres were Western, crime, and romance, with science fiction, fantasy, horror, and occult stories a cut below. The most famous short-story writer of this period was O. Henry, just as Stephen King’s bestselling stories of the occult are the most well-known today. But literary writers have always published stories within the commercial genres. Such writers include American Edgar Allan Poe (horror), Britons Aldous Huxley and H. G. Wells (science fiction), Briton C. S. Lewis and American Ray Bradbury (science fiction and fantasy), and Americans Walter Van Tilburg Clark and Stephen Crane (Westerns).

The *short story cycle*, a series of stories unified not by plot but by the reappearance of a central character or characters in the same locale, was developed by Sherwood Anderson in his collection *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), by Hemingway in his Nick Adams stories, by Faulkner in his Quentin Compson stories, and by American writer John Steinbeck in *The Long Valley* (1938). Russian author Mikhail Lermontov focuses on character study in his cycle of stories *A Hero of Our Time* (1840). *A Sportsman’s Sketches* (1852) is a cycle of tales by Russian Ivan Turgenev in which a huntsman’s visits to various rural locales are used to paint a picture of Russian life during that time. The American author J. D. Salinger also produced a story cycle about the adventures of the eccentric Glass family, collected in books such as *Nine Stories* (1953) and *Franny and Zooey* (1961).