

American Literature & Culture
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Mod 03 Lecture Number 18
Short Story (Lecture 13a)

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Good morning friends, so before I start with Flannery O'Connor and her short story Good Country People, I want to give you an overview of a short story as a genre. All of us know short stories and many of us enjoy reading short stories because of their easy accessibility, well most of the time. Now, but it is not as simple as it sounds. So there are certain complexities inherent in this genre as well. Basically a short story, so let's begin with the beginning, how is it defined as? It is defined as a brief work of prose fiction and can be analyzed in a similar manner as a novel. Historically, the genesis of short stories can be found in the Bible. Some famous stories include Accounts of Cain and Abel, The Prodigal Son, The story of Ruth and Judith.

A few examples of this kind of narrative are the folk tale, the fabuleux, the parable and the exemplar. Also think of Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales which was written in the fourteenth century and around that time, Boccaccio's Decameron in 1353, Cervantes, the writer of, the author of Don Quixote, so his work, Novelas ejemplares which was published in 1613 and La Fontaine's Amour in 1669. Also not to forget The Arabian Nights and all these are some of the best known collection of stories, so Boccaccio's Decameron, Canterbury Tales, La Fontaine's Amour, and Arabian Nights, so some of the greatest examples. And of course, we

have our own variation of the short story narration, narrative and genre; that is Jataka and the Panchatantra stories in Indian tradition.

It was in the nineteenth century that the short story narrative started to approximate its contemporary form. In England in the nineteenth century, Richard Steele and Joseph Addison evolved the tale with a purpose to drive home a moral. Then you had Walter Scott, who wrote Wandering Willie's Tale in 1824 which was first, which was the first English approach to the modern type of short stories. Robert Louis Stevenson, he wrote, he famously said and I am quoting him "There are three ways of writing a short story. You take a plot and fit characters to it. Or you may take a character and choose incidents and situations to develop it or lastly you may take a certain atmosphere and get actions and persons to realize it." I like you to take a look at this slide

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- For more on short story, go to:
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Short_story
- <http://www.americanliterature.com/ss/ssindx.html>
- <http://hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/engramja/elements.html>
-

slide to know more about short stories.

These are the web sites that could give you some more detailed information. Please take a look. Alright,

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short story and other literary genre A short story is a prose which is distinct from longer narratives such as epic novels and romance. It is essentially concerned with a single effect conveyed in a single episode or scene and involves a limited number of characters. A short story can have even one character and in more experimental examples, there need not be even a plot or a character. It may also happen that a short story may concentrate on the creation of mood or atmosphere rather than telling of a story. A short story focuses on the outcome of the events, for example Sherlock Holmes, O' Henry, Saki, Edgar Allan Poe often considered the originator of short story, Poe particularly and then still in the works of some artists there is more attention on character, the spiritual, moral and psychological qualities, for example in Hemingway and Chekov and Herman Melville, so they concentrate more on the spiritual and moral and psychological qualities and conflicts.

Strictly speaking, a short story differs from a novel in terms of magnitude. Poe, who was one of the earliest ones to theorize the genre, defines it as a narrative which can be read at one sitting from, let's say, half an hour to 2 hours and is limited to a certain unique or single effect to which every detail is subordinate. Scholars have always differed over the ideal length of a short story. D. H. Lawrence's *The Fox* which was published in 1923 is 30000 words long. Still like the novel, the form is flexible and capable of endless variety. But unlike the novel, it has no room for leisurely development of characters or the setting. Remarkable feature of the short story is that it often begins on the verge of the climax whereas its exposition and denouement are swift.

Talking about short story in America, Ok, so let me give you an overview of that as well. You have greats like Melville and Mark Twain, Bret Harte, Ambrose Bierce, O. Henry, Stephen Crane and Jack London also Sherwood Anderson who are the major authors, writers, Melville's *Piazza Tales* when we were talking about *Moby Dick* and introducing, getting introduced to Herman Melville. I have already talked about the *Piazza Tales*, particularly *Bartleby, the Scrivener* and then Mark Twain, he wrote that *Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, Bret Harte popularized the western, *The Luck of Roaring Camp* and other *Sketches* in 1870. Ambrose Bierce wrote the *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* in 1891 and O. Henry, he is the master of surprise endings or twists in the tale, for example *Cabbages and Kings* and it was published in 1904 and then Jack London and his several stories, adventurous stories and tales of the sea. So that's what, those are the greats, or the masters of short story as a genre in America.

Now some short story writers who are also prominent novelists, include D. H. Lawrence, Richard Hughes, Graham Greene who wrote *The Basement Room* and other stories and *May We Borrow Your Husband?* Et cetera, Nabokov and James Joyce, Somerset Maugham, his famous short stories include *The Casuarina Tree* in 1926 and *Ashenden* stories in 1928. So these are few of the most widely read storywriters of the twentieth century. The Russians have also made immense contribution to the genre of realistic short stories. Some examples include Alexander Pushkin who wrote the *Tales of Belkin*, *The Queen of Spades* and *The Captain's Daughter* and then Gogol who wrote about everyday things, events and ordinary people especially in *Notes of a Madman* and *The Portrait* and also *The Nose* and *The Overcoat*. Such was Gogol's impact on the genre that Turgenev, another great Russian author, he famously remarked, we all come out from under Gogol's overcoat.

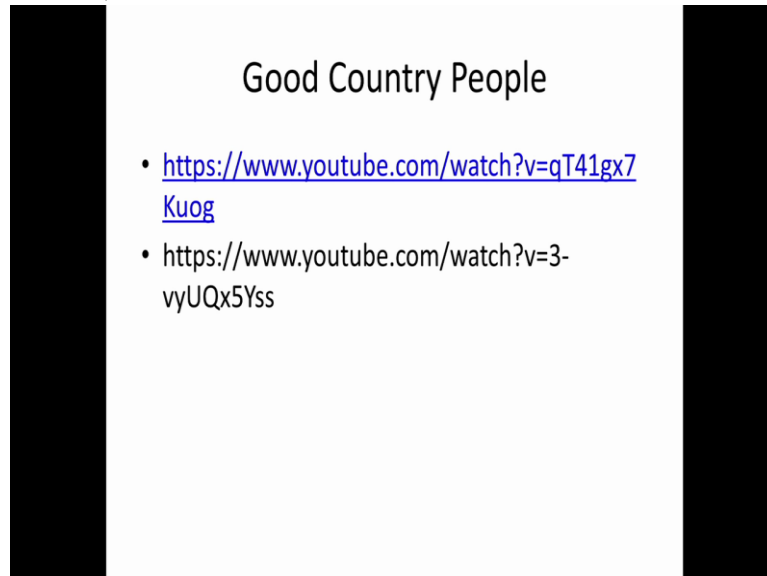
There is another sub-genre of short story which is the grotesque, The word is derived from the Italian grotta or cave and it denotes a decorative ornament consisting of medallions, sphinxes, foliage, rocks and pebbles since these were found in grotte, the caves, sixteenth century onwards the meaning was extended to its literary context, for example, in France Rabelais used the term to describe parts of the body and that became, you know, subsequently we talk about the genre of the body horror, grotesque. Grotesque also applied to paintings which depicted the intermingling of the humans, animals and vegetable forms as themes, for example, paintings by Rabelais, Grosz, Karl Persson, Goya, Raphael, Miguel and

Dalí. I am just trying to give you overlap of how cultural influences impact on literature as well.

Now Edgar Allan Poe, one of the foremost American poets and also short story writers, he wrote the Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque, these belong to that nature, grotesque and were popular in America as well as in Europe. In America, Flannery O'Connor is known for her tales of grotesque and macabre and that is something we are going to see in her Good Country People very soon. In Twentieth century, Kafka, the German writer has written a staggering 80 short stories. He experimented with a variety of lengths, style, themes and techniques and includes parables, fables, sketches, reports, letters, dialogs, dramatic dialogs and essays. , let me also introduce you to Truman Capote, the great American writer who believed that a story can be ragged by a faulty rhythm in a sentence or mistake in a paragraph or punctuation.

Ok, Truman Capote, the writer of In Cold Blood and more famously Breakfast at Tiffany's. Now remember, if Henry James is the master of the semi-colon then Hemingway is the king of paragraphing. It is also necessary to have interesting openings and signature endings for a short story, for example, Chekov's relatively non-dramatic and Maupassant and Saki highly shocking. Remember Maupassant, the writer of The Diamond Necklace and how it ends. One quality of short stories is its ability to tell stories by series of gestures, shots and suggestions with little explanation. This could be one of the reasons why some interesting films are adaptations of short stories. Some examples are Washington Square by Henry James which was made into The Heiress. F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, Jeremy Leven's Don, Don Juan Demarco and the Centerfold and Daphne du Maurier's Don't Look Now and Birds. So this was a very short introduction to short story and I want you to look at this particular slide

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Good Country People

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qT41gx7Kuog>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-vyUQx5Yss>

on Good Country People that we are going to start soon Here is a reading of the short story on the first link and the second link is a sort of dramatization of the story.

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So please do watch and go through these links before coming for the next class. Thank you very much.