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Chapter 1 : Rowman and Littlefield - Advanced Book Info - European Studies by Adam Nicholson - Issuu

The Cosmic (Cosmo)Polis in Naomi Mitchison's Science Fiction novels Carla Sassi [in: Caroline MacCracken-Flesher (ed), Scotland as Science Fiction, Lewisburg [Pa.]: Bucknell University Press, , pp.] Within Naomi Mitchison's vast and polymathic production, science fiction represents a.

Roberts Rabindranath Tagore O. Coppard Horacio Quiroga E. Hartley Mikhail Zoshchenko F. Byatt Alistair MacLeod A. Taylor, Monterroso, Mrs. It seriously antedates the coming of its great rival in prose narrative, the almighty novel. We can trace it into legend, myth, fairy tale, folktale, and fable. We can find it far back in the history of written narratives: Many of the great early collections of short stories are compilations, gatherings of preexisting oral tales. When in the ninth century an Arab scribe gathered together a thousand Persian, Indian, and Arab legends and called it *The Thousand and One Nights*, another of the great compilations was set down. Stories were added and subtracted, and in the early eighteenth century they were translated into the European languages. It has given us Aladdin and Sinbad but something else, too: He means to kill her the next morning, but night after night she tells a tale, leaving the story incomplete. So intricately are the stories woven that they save her life. The stories are the product of cunning art and skill, the tales have a purpose and human justification, and the story of their telling—now told to us, of course, by a further storyteller—is as important as the stories told. When the Black Death struck Florence in , perhaps a hundred thousand of its citizens died in the streets or were trapped in their homes, neglected and avoided by others. According to the storyteller Boccaccio, who was a witness, the entire structure of authority and human relations in the great city of Dante collapsed. Yet, according to his *Decameron* , this vast human tragedy was a dark mountain blocking the way to an enchanted plain: Seven young women and three young men gathered together and left the city for a garden villa nearby; they begin telling tales to each other as a diversion from other indulgences, which might, of course, be fatal. According to a carefully agreed formal plan, 10 stories a day were told for 10 days, each storyteller handing on the torch to another. These stories, too, came from the great Mediterranean pond: They mocked the church, took pleasure in roguery, enjoyed tricks and deceptions, and delighted in love. These stories, too, became part of the European and world pool. When a few decades later Geoffrey Chaucer had his 29 varied pilgrims and Chaucer, himself gathered in London for the great journey to Canterbury, each of them expected to tell two tales on the way, he borrowed some of these same stories. The *Canterbury Tales* are told in verse and prose, some of the stories high and romantic, some coarse and comic, each told by a distinctive narrator and pulled together by the author himself, who is one of the pilgrim party. The work borrowed its structure, as well as several tales for example, the story of patient Grizelda , from Boccaccio, and it established the complex story cycle as a prime source of English literature. So it has gone on. Writing and authors made stories ever more sophisticated and intricate; the sea of stories has grown ever more full. In the French contes and the fabliaux of La Fontaine and Perrault, the source of many of the most familiar fairy tales, without which Disney could not even exist, they inclined to the fantastic, even the gothic. In the traveling, exploring eighteenth century, they grew ever more exotic: At the end of the eighteenth century, in the great age of that new genre suitably called the novel, the modern short story was also emerging, drawing on the one hand on folk simplicities from the great world pool and on the other from the wit, complexity, and individuality of new European narrative. This, roughly, is the point of departure for the present work of reference. One key source of modern short fiction is the great search for the story that, fed by a sense of the strange and exotic, swept right across Europe in the following years, the era of romanticism. It was fed by a fascination with folk origins, popular narratives, and stored human experience but no less by a refreshed interest in the gothic, the strange, the grotesque, the remarkable, the wonderfully imagined. The refinement of the short tale is itself one of the most striking stories of nineteenth-century literature. We often grant Poe pride of place in the history of modern short fiction, and he indeed exploited the wide range of its forms: But the burst of modern short stories that followed during the course of the nineteenth century did not

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always gratify this fine definition, which remains an elegant and illuminating convenience rather than a total truth. Yet they have often done so at the expense of many other important traditions: Yet most significant writers of short fiction have never felt themselves completely constrained by these principles, important though they are in giving short fiction a firm aesthetic character. Many of them have rightly seen the short prose fiction as one of the many means of narrative open to them. Our great writers of short fiction have often been our great novelists, playwrights, or poets, and so the history of the modern short story leads us on into the history of many other forms and genres. For that reason we often remember the short fictions of our writers as an image of their work at its most distilled, concentrated, perfect. Certainly Dostoevskii was never more memorable than in *Notes from the Underground*—even though we might fairly see that work of extraordinary and ironic self-revelation as the sketch or starting point for *Crime and Punishment*. Conrad was never clearer to us than in *Heart of Darkness*, his voyage up the Congo River into the inferno; Kafka was never more precise than in his strange *The Metamorphosis*. There have been writers—Isaak Babel, V. Pritchett, Jorge Luis Borges, Donald Barthelme, Raymond Carver—who seem to have felt fully at home only in the short story form, with its concentration, its minimalist rendering, its integral clarity, its exactness of narration, its power of revelation. The short story has served some literary traditions more strongly than others. Russian, European Jewish, Irish, and American literature have—for various cultural reasons, sometimes to do with the historic power of folklore—possessed stronger short story traditions than British or German literature, where there is a greater taste for the novel, the narrative tale, or the novella though there always was a major British tradition that, with writers like Rushdie and Kazuo Ishiguro, has grown stronger and far more cosmopolitan in recent years. In fact, the short story has played a central role in modern and postmodern writing throughout the West. Many of its finest practitioners, from Babel to Italo Calvino, belong to literary explorations of the past 80 years or so, and the form flourishes vitally still. Yet we should never forget that it truly is both an ancient and a highly international form. In recent years there has been an ever greater global spread of literary creation, influence, and crossover, a refreshed abundance of myth and legend. It starts in the great myth kitties of oral narrative, which crossed all national boundaries, and it was changed and refined through the age of writing and the emergence of the author, the multiplied storyteller, the perfected literary narrative, and the arts of experimental consciousness. At the end of his remarkable *Decameron*, Boccaccio, defending himself against charges of licentiousness, says of his stories that no one needs to read them; they do not go after people begging to be read. Yet they do; they are an intricate act of narrative seduction. This is part of the essential power of the short story and the novella. That is why many writers see short fiction as the most demanding of forms. Because the story of these shifts in the form have been told so many times before, I will focus my introduction to this reference guide on the development of the short story in the last half century. New literary movements usually begin as a reaction against whatever literary movement is predominant at the time, especially when the conventions of the existing movement become stereotyped. Realism, which dominated the writing of fiction during the latter part of the 19th century in Europe and America, was a reaction against the stereotyped sentimentalizing of the romantic movement that prevailed during the early part of the century. For the realists what mattered was the stuff of the physical world. By insisting on a faithful adherence to the stuff of the external world, the realists often allowed content—which was apt to be ragged and random—to dictate form. As a result, the novel, which can expand to better create an illusion of everyday reality, became the favored form of the realists, while the short story, basically a romantic form that requires more artifice and patterning, took on a secondary role. Ernest Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson, Katherine Anne Porter, and many others inherited from Anton Chekhov and James Joyce a technique of communicating complex emotional states by setting up artful patterns of simple concrete detail. As a result, the short story experienced a renaissance of respect not enjoyed since its beginnings half a century earlier with Hawthorne in America, Gogol in Russia, and Flaubert in France. However, in spite of this new kind of impressionistic realism introduced by Chekhov, Joyce, and Anderson early in the century, the form still retained its links to its older mythic and romance ancestors. Thus, two strains of the short story developed in the first half of the

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centuryâ€™the stark new realistic style typical of Hemingway and his Russian compatriot Isaac Babel and the more mythic romance style of such writers as William Faulkner and Isak Dinesen. Singer, and Bernard Malamud during this period. The characteristics of the work of these writers are a focus on the grotesque, the use of traditional folktale structures and motifs, a concern with the aesthetic experience, a fascination with the dream experience, a search for style and form, an insistence on the importance of language, the use of surrealistic imagery, and the development of a tightly unified poetic form. This combination of both realistic and mythic styles continued up through the second half of the century, making short story writers of the period between and also roughly fall into two different groups. The conventions of the old romance form become the very subject matter of the stories of Borges, Barth, and Barthelme, while the conventions of Chekhovian realism are practically parodied in the hyperrealism of Carver, Beattie, and Ozick. The primary effect of this mode of thought on contemporary fiction is that the short story loosens its illusion of reality to explore the reality of its own illusion. Rather than presenting itself as if it were realâ€™a mimetic mirroring of external realityâ€™postmodernist short fiction often makes its own artistic conventions and devices the subject of the story as well as its theme. The short story as a genre has always been more likely to lay bare its fictionality than the novel, which has traditionally tried to cover it up. The most important precursor of the contemporary self-reflexive short story is the South American writer Jorge Luis Borges, who in turn owes his own allegiance to Poe and Kafka. Barth insists that the prosaic in fiction is only there to be transformed into fabulation. Great literature, says Barth, is almost always, regardless of what it is about, about itself. For Donald Barthelme, the most important postmodernist writer to specialize almost solely in the short story, the problem of language is the problem of reality, for reality is the result of language processes. The problem of words, Barthelme realizes, is that so much contemporary language is used up, has become trash, dreck. Barthelme takes as his primary task the recycling of language, making metaphor out of the castoffs of technological culture. He has noted that, if photography forced painters to reinvent painting, then films have forced fiction writers to reinvent fiction. Since films tell a realistic narrative so well, the fiction writer must develop a new principle. Collage, says Barthelme, is the central principle of all art in the 20th century. One of the implications of this collage process is a radical shift from the usual cause-and-effect process of fiction to the more spatial and metaphoric process of poetry. These very characteristics, of course, have placed Barthelme with such writers as Robert Coover, William H. Like the stories of his mentors, Chekhov and Hemingway, they communicate by indirection, suggesting much by saying little. The stories are like stark black-and-white snapshots of lives lived in a kind of quiet, even silent, desperation, told in a language that, even as it seems simple and straightforward, is highly studied and stylized. His characters give us the feel of emotional reality that reaches the level of myth, even as they refuse to give us the feel of physical or simple psychological reality. Although marital strife is perhaps the most common subject in modern American short fiction, Ann Beattie probes beyond the ordinary level of this theme by projecting the seemingly inevitable conflicts between married partners outward onto a metaphoric object or a mirrorimage third party. Beattie is not interested in something so ordinary and blatant as adultery as the cause of separation; rather she focuses on the elusive emotions and subtle tensions that often underlie breakups. Because of their delicate nature, the conflicts Beattie is concerned with cannot be expressed directly and discursively but rather must be embodied in a seemingly trivial object or an apparently irrelevant other person. One result of this realistic-minimalist technique is that, although a story may begin with seemingly pedestrian details, as the details accumulate, they begin to take on a lyrical tone and to assume a metaphoric importance. A number of contemporary short story writers have combined the realism of Chekhov and Joyce with the mythic and linguistic characteristics of Hispanic, Native American, and African-American cultures. There are hipper ways to get to gut and brain than with hot pokers and pincers. Cynthia Ozick, a Jewish short story writer in the tradition of Bernard Malamud, manages an almost magical blend of lyricism and realism to create a world that is both mythically distant and socially immediate at the same time. Although she is also a skilled novelist and poet, as well as the author of a number of essays on Judaism, art, and feminism, it is her short stories that most powerfully reflect her mythic imagination and her

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poetic use of language. Henry Prize Stories collection, is about a young Jewish woman in a German concentration camp whose infant is thrown into an electrical fence. Whereas novels leave us with a sense of completion, even satisfaction, short stories are apt to make us feel vexed, disconcerted, or mystified. Although we may not be sure why, we sense that the short story does not tell the same kind of story that the novel does.

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