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AUTHOR Myszor, Frank
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ABSTRACT

This paper is the beginning of a plea for a reconsideration of the way in which educators teach short stories. It is only the beginning because the paper's main purpose is to draw together literary critical perspectives on the short story and then briefly examine their implications for teaching. It is the convenient yet evasive nature of short stories that forms the basis of this argument. An examination of broad ranging critical approaches to the short story raises a number of important questions concerning classroom practices. First, what students expect from short stories is considered, comparing responses to a novel with those to a short story. The paper then considers how educators can help students read the lack of resolution in many short stories, noting that students could be asked to summarize the plot in a single sentence, thereby calling attention to what has been left out. How educators can help students to see the significance of the story frame is examined next. In this context, students must be encouraged to predict pasts and futures for the characters, preferably over a broad time span to encourage summarizing. Last, students need to be made aware of short story theories, in the same way that educators want knowledge of literary theory or of poetic diction to inform their responses to novels or poems. Contains 48 references. (TB)

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THE SHORT STORY - A HYBRID FORM:
IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

FRANK MYSZOR

JUNE 1994

"...probably the most difficult of all the prose forms of fiction..."
Malcolm Bradbury.

Introduction: A Convenient Vehicle

This paper is the beginning of a plea, a plea for a reconsideration of the way in which we teach short stories. It is only the beginning because my main purpose is to draw together literary critical perspectives on the short story and then briefly examine their implications for teaching. But why is a plea necessary at all? After all, short stories are extremely popular amongst teachers of English and the output of anthologies, with suggestions for teaching, continues apace. It is my contention that we rarely consider short stories for what they are but rather for what they are not: for example, they do not have the cumbersome length of novels nor the syntactic or lexical difficulties of poetry. Paradoxically, it is this convenient but evasive nature of short stories that forms the basis of my argument.

If the short story has become for teachers a kind of literary fast-food, an experience that can be digested between bells without ruining the appetite, it has also been denigrated in several other senses. The most common sin against the short story is that it is treated as if it were a shorter form of novel. Thus, Stratta et al (1973, p69) recommend short stories as a means of overcoming the problem of the length of novels. Benton and Fox (1985, p.52) consider the short story as a form in its own right but still equate length with stamina, with the implication that if you are not up to a whole novel, maybe you can manage a short story.

A more insidious kind of oversight comes from a diverse range of researchers and literary theorists working in an educational context. Squire's (1964) study of adolescents reading four short stories was a seminal work that greatly influenced a generation of teachers and researchers. Yet all of the conclusions about the varieties and processes of responding are applied to fiction reading in general. Squire does not seem to have considered the peculiar influence of the form on responses. The same applies to Mellor et al's (1987, 1991) feminist and post-structuralist teaching books on the process of reading: the use of the short story genre is incidental and in no way necessary to the theories demonstrated. My point is not to berate for failing to do what one never intended, but simply to emphasise what has frequently been present as a convenient vehicle but often overlooked as a specific focus of study.

In other respects too, the short story is an invisible genre. It is neglected in many leading histories of children's literature (Townsend, 1965; Carlsen, 1967; Egoff et al, 1980), which, if they

mention the genre at all, subsume it under prose fiction, whilst scrupulously devoting attention to various forms of sub-literature such as "T.V. tie-ins" and comics. Moreover, such accounts clearly value short prose forms, such as folk tales, for younger children yet fail to develop this line into adolescence; the assumption is that progress is only upwards to the novel. Surveys of children's reading interests corroborate this, implying either that adolescents do not read short stories or they are not deemed important enough by the researchers to warrant mention (Whitehead, et al 1977; Richmond, 1980).

I have perhaps painted an unduly pessimistic picture of the state of the modern short story in education. After all, anthologies for schools no longer assume that engagement with the subjects of the stories is enough. Recent collections have explored the development of the characteristics of the genre and the implications for reading (e.g. Benton and Benton, 1990). Yet we have not gone far enough in incorporating what is known about reader response theory and the nature of short stories themselves into a coherent methodology for teaching the short story.

What short stories are: implications for reading

Shaw (1983 p22), faced with defining the short story, writes: "Perhaps it is only possible to describe the short story by indicating what it is not, and remaining flexible as to what it is." In what follows I lay the foundations for a pedagogy of the short story by locating this flexibility between a series of oppositions.

Both Old and New

The modern short story is, as Elizabeth Bowen says, 'a child of this century,' (Bowen 1937) and yet, more so than the novel, it is a direct descendant of the earliest of narrative forms. In its modern form it arose in the mid nineteenth century in the work of Chekhov, Maupassant and Poe but was not fully recognised until later (especially in England) when its characteristics were crystallised in the reflections of Poe (1842) and reinforced by Matthews (1901). As a prose form, its relatively late emergence coincided with other significant developments in the mass media, namely the rise of journalism in the shape of journals and pamphlets, and later the beginnings of film. Both have influenced the short story but in vastly different ways. The former provided a market and a need for the popular variety whilst the latter has often been compared aesthetically (e.g. Bowen 1937) with the literary short story. To take this dichotomy further, the persistence of the short story in a popular form has frequently been cited as a reason for its continued marginalisation as literature. Others such as O'Connor (1963) have turned this state of affairs to advantage by romanticising the

rejection into a theory of the short story as a mouthpiece for 'submerged population groups'. But whatever the reason behind the relative neglect, it is certainly true that it is reflected in the thinking of the writers themselves, publishers, researchers into reading and specialists in children's literature.

Focusing still on this modern history it is possible to identify overlapping phases of development. Poe's oft-quoted 'unity of effect' was a landmark in defining the form and from our current point of view it is particularly significant that this should make implicit reference to readers. His more explicit decree that what could be read in a single sitting offered advantages over the novel, began a period of elevation which many now see as having reached its end with the dogmatism of works such as Matthews' (1901) 'The Philosophy of the Short Story'. Matthews added nothing to Poe and at the same time neglected the essential fluidity of a form which even today defies formal definition by powerful analytical tools such as those offered by structuralism.

The early roots of the short story are still visible in the frequently used technique of the frame story. Here, an external narrator introduces a situation from which a fictional narrator will emerge to tell the story, usually to a fictional narratee. In this way the modern genre exploits its origins in the oral story and it is therefore able to give the illusion of having the characteristics of this face to face situation: immediacy, simplicity, community and adaptability to the needs of the narratee. But these features of the narrative contract also apply to more 'natural' forms of narrative by means of which we make sense of the world - the anecdotes and narrative fragments of our everyday lives. The short story is old, then, both historically and psychologically. Fulfilling both of these criteria, perhaps, the importance of early stories is indicated by the number of purposes they served: entertainment, explanation, and education. Their emergence as entertainment is seen in records dated as early as 4,000 B.C. in the Egyptian stories, 'The Tales of the Magicians'. If we can trace a line of descendency from these forms to the modern genre, we need to ask what influence do they continue to exert in contemporary contexts of reception.

Historically and developmentally stories progress from the sequential towards the atemporal. In earlier forms, interest was sustained primarily through the sequence of events, a fact which seems to reflect young children's interest in folk tales, and a developmental model proposing the primacy of an ability to follow action or plots (Tucker, 1976; Thomson, 1987). In contrast, the short story, in its most developed form, has moved away from plot towards a structure centring upon the variously termed (and not always exactly synonymous) moment of crisis, revelation, epiphany, insight, initiation and so on, the emphasis being on subjectivity rather than external action. Similarly, as Townsend (1977) points out, children's literature preserves 'a sense of story', whereas progress onto 'adult forms', as

well as adult modes of response, presupposes, amongst other things, the ability to abstract patterns from the text considered atemporally. We may say that as far as the short story is concerned, this situation is partly a result of the poetics of the form and partly the enduring influence of New Critical approaches to interpretation. The immediacy of engagement evoked by oral stories seems to mature into what is later offered by novels, whereas short stories more often reflect the disquieting elements of twentieth century philosophy, which, as far as young adult readers are concerned makes for an uninviting and difficult form.

I want to argue that the modern short story sets into sharp relief what we might call linear and non-linear responses, or alternatively, the difference between process and pattern. Young readers are often led, when encountering short fiction, to expect the satisfactions of an alluring plot, an expectation frequently fulfilled by the appearance of the trick ending. But what begins as the application of a rudimentary narrative competence can become an obstacle to deeper understanding, for two reasons: first, because the story itself may offer little more than surprise; and, second, because the reader's experience may suggest that this is the only satisfaction to be gained from it. The second of these can be overcome through effective teaching, but it is when one is up against the complaint that 'nothing really happens' or that 'it only seems like the first chapter' that short stories appear to be somewhat intractable. There seems to be no literary precedent to provide an appropriate generic code for reading or interpretation. On the contrary, the end-loading of plots in a sequential manner actively discourages the disclosing of the short story's manifold 'secrets'.

Obviously, the argument does not apply to every encounter with short fiction, but it does mean that in selecting stories for the young we must be particularly careful. Since the advent of modernism there has been a tendency for short stories to depict experience as fragmentary and irresolute, often evoking responses that question accepted norms. Structurally, this is reflected in an eschewing of the traditional three part form of beginning, middle and end. Combine this with an intensity comparable to that of poetry and an often disquieting, inconclusive and sometimes elusive treatment of subject, and the demands on readers multiply. This probably accounts for the preference even among adults, for the length and complexity of the novel over the intensity and elusiveness of the short story. The emphasis on personal growth in English teaching over the last thirty years has meant that stories have been selected for anthologies primarily for their content. This has led to the dominance, in such selections, of what Lodge (1981) would call 'anti-modernist' writers, a pattern which has continued under the influence of social criticism in more recent years. Adolescents in particular, then, have been exposed to the more conservative forms of short story, and because of the emphasis on content there has been little inclination to teach through instilling an awareness of the evolution of the form, although

some recent publications (e.g. Abbs and Richardson 1990; Benton, P., and Benton, S., 1990) show that this situation is changing.

There is a sense in which short stories are particularly suited to adolescents. O'Connor's (1963) theory that the genre best acts as a mouthpiece for 'submerged population groups' - groups, that is, whose interests have somehow been marginalised - can also be applied to adolescence and in particular to moments of initiation into the adult world. But such experiences are often not presented in a positive light: they may appear traumatic or even show failure to take the required steps. Moreover, it is frequently not the protagonist who is aware of the significance of the seemingly mundane events taking place; this perception is left to the reader. If the very subjective experience which endows the external events with significance cannot be perceived by the reader, then the unity so important to the modern story disappears.

If May (1976) is correct when he says that there has been a movement away from both plot and character in short stories, then it would seem that two vital sources of response are in decline. Plot, as we have seen, is fundamental in prose fiction, and character provides a rich source of various kinds of identification. If readers are to identify, it must be with the situation and with what brief fragments of character there are in the text. Here, the short story is at a distinct disadvantage to the novel where plot and character, particularly in the children's novel, are essential to the sense of a cumulative experience - both for protagonists and readers.

Between the Novel and the Poem

The short story shares qualities with both the novel and the poem. Being a prose form it is often measured, as are its writers, against the novel, and yet in its creative origins and in the kind of reading it invites, it has much in common with poetry. Short story theory has often attempted to differentiate the shorter form from the novel and in the search for respectability, critics have turned towards poetry. However, as Shaw (1983) warns, to treat the short story as most successful when it possesses the formal intricacy of a lyric poem, is ultimately to denigrate the form. It should be clear at the outset that to situate the short story in between various other forms is not intended as a value judgement but an attempt to delimit the kinds of readings it might evoke.

In comparisons with the novel the most common strategy is to dichotomise the two kinds of world presented as: elaboration versus limitation; expansion versus intensity; evolution versus revelation; development versus revelation, and so forth. For the reader, which ever set of terms we choose, there is the implication of an experience which 'can move us by an intensity which the novel is unable to sustain' (Reid, 1977, p.2). In this sense the intensity is partly due to a

distinct inward-looking subject matter which some have described as essentially the transition from innocence to knowledge. But the intensity is also the result of the reading itself as a linguistic experience. Hanson (1989) argues that with the realist novel it is easy to assume that what one is reading about is life, whereas with the short story this referential function is diminished. Todorov (1977, p.107) also makes the point succinctly:

'The public prefers novels to tales, long books to short texts, not because length is taken as a criterion of value, but because there is no time, in reading a short work to forget it is only literature and not 'life'.'

What seems to be at stake here is the state of engagement in the story world that we often experience in the midst of a novel. What replaces it is a greater awareness of artifice - of the story shape and of the writer's use of language. This truncating of the usual effects of 'a middle' also means that there is more emphasis, as noted by Bates, (1941) on beginnings and endings. This framing effect suggests the 'enclosure' that Benton *et al.*, (1988) have used to describe the spatial quality of poetry, but there is also an increased 'sense of an ending' in the ever-present and imminent closure of the narrative form. Thus, in the short story there is a tension between the linearity of prose and the spatiality of poetry.

It is already apparent that the same aspects of reader response theory as are applied to the novel pertain to the short story, but with some adjustments. Iser's (1978) 'gaps' (the indeterminate aspects of a text), for example, take on an extended meaning, for the short story works primarily through suggestion and compression. Hutchens (1977, p.59) expresses well the scale of the problem:

'The assumption of the short story is that we can see eternity in a grain of sand: that a single human situation, properly contemplated, will crystallize into a replica of an ultimate truth.'

Given the work entrusted to the power of single words and phrases, the reader has both more and less room to manoeuvre. Each part is integral to the whole and yet a single gesture or epithet will suggest ideas or qualities that reach out into other discourses, other experiences. For example, in the final lines of D.H. Lawrence's 'Fannie and Annie' (1922) the words 'mother' and 'assured' alone resolve the story, yet each requires the participation of a reader and a number of ideological assumptions. The responsibility for both integration and assimilation is ultimately the reader's. But if readers must both attend to words more closely than they are accustomed to with prose and yet also give more of their own experience, there is an increased danger of misinterpretation. To use Richards' term, there is a danger of stock responses and yet also a need for them, especially in establishing the short story's diminished sense of character.

There are other ways in which gaps mean something different in short stories. From its inception, the short story has eschewed the need for external commentary (Chekhov, 1924), a lack that was more significant in the nineteenth century than now, given the decline of authorial intrusion in the novel. Writers have instead turned to indirect forms of commentary - narrators' and characters' unwitting or conscious reflections, comments embedded in structure or metaphor - all of which require the coherence brought by a reader. With the short story there is less of a sense that the story can be enjoyed simply for its own sake, especially if its action is pointedly banal. The pressure to provide the missing commentary or interpretation constitutes an Iserian 'gap'. This may also be true in the more profound sense that the short story is the expression of something 'marginal' in society and is therefore 'unexplained' (Gordimer, 1968). The space that readers need for reflection (Fox 1979) is essentially after reading, given the importance of the sense of the whole. During reading readers have restricted opportunity to do this to the extent that they can, in vastly different ways, with novels and poetry. Therein lies a difficulty for young readers. Having experienced the story there is a danger of treating it thematically or as a statement of universal or gnomic import. This would confer the desired unity on the story but also have the adverse effect of reducing it to a statement to which the events themselves are seen as subordinate (Stroud, 1956).

Susan Lohafer (1983, p.50) writes that the short story, 'binds its readers less closely to the word than a poem does, and more closely to the sentence than a novel does.' This is particularly evident in more recent forms by writers such as Borges, which, like poetry, also invite a more self-conscious role on the part of the reader, calling into question not just the process of narrative but the medium of language itself. Similarly, the use of cataphora at the beginning of short stories (for example, the use of pronouns before their referents appear in the text) immediately binds the language of the text to the reader's creation of the story world; this linguistically marked usage draws attention to itself and therefore brings the short story closer to poetry. But the poetic influence also goes back to the roots of the modern genre as well as to the creative source. Poe's 'unity of effect' was in fact an idea that he had borrowed from poetry in as much as all 'high excitements' are necessarily transient and must therefore be read in a single sitting. It is perhaps less well-known that the 'effect' was not only to be induced in the reader, but rather like Booth's (1961) matching of implied author and reader, it was to be a direct reflection of the originating idea. For Poe this idea or 'effect' should be conceived in its entirety before writing, a process suggesting the later stages of consciously wrought deliberation. In contrast, the inspirational source for writing a short story seems to have much in common with the source of Romantic poetry, namely a significant moment or perception (Reid, 1977), although rather than focus on the sublime, the short story has emphasised transition, sometimes of a peripheral or even traumatic nature. But whatever its precise nature, recent writers refer to the same 'poetic insight' with which the short

story begins (Pritchett, 1986).

In Time Yet Out of Time

One of the difficulties of reading and writing about the short story stems from its position between a variety of forms. The simple dichotomies I propose are not independent of each other and in particular the one concerned with time is especially relevant to the distinction between the novel and poetry. Some writers believe (e.g. O'Connor, 1963) that the novel, especially in the nineteenth century, creates a sense of continuing life, whereas the short story's relation to time seems to be a characteristically twentieth century phenomenon. In an era which has dissolved all other certainties, Gordimer (1962, p.459) sums up the short story's role as 'the art of the only thing one can be sure of - the present moment.' In this respect there is an important link with contemporary philosophy such as existentialism and it is hardly surprising therefore that there is no easy solace on offer. This sense of unease arises partly from the central paradox that short stories attempt to capture the timelessness of a moment in prose form, but most importantly in narrative form, the essence of which is to project story time.

We have seen that the short story 'isolates for scrutiny' (Hutchens, 1977 p.59) and typically focuses on a single moment of revelation, crisis, or pivotal change, and so forth. The paradigm length, if we bear in mind that the novel's is a lifetime, is twenty four hours - that ever-repeating 'sense of an ending' within which we all live. This radical curtailment of story time, and it may often be shorter, is usually left to imply what came before or went after. Thus readers are left to stitch the text into the time of their lives or other temporal discourses. The importance of these external temporal gaps, as we might call them, lies partly in their call for imagination and experience on the part of the reader, restoring the fragmented experience to its larger (or longer) context. But they are also essential to our critical judgement, as O'Faolain (1948) has observed. By way of contrast, they can set off the pointed experience against an implied continuing life, but by treating this moment in a more distanced way, they can sometimes expose the contrivance of an ending which is not integral to a story. For example, the twist at the end of O. Henry's (1905) 'The Journey of the Magi' becomes merely an ironic juxtaposition of events of little subjective significance if we imaginatively extend the story a little way beyond the text. Particularly in the absence of overt explanations, the need for a temporal context stresses the importance of the reader's imaginative re-creation of the antecedents and consequences of the pivotal moment of the story.

Turning to discourse, it is evident that short stories lock into a wider temporal frame in different ways. Ruthrof (1981) describes three forms of short story on a continuum between the novella and implicitly, the poem, each of which invites its own kind of reconstruction of the excluded time. In the first, the existential

moment is the climax of a linear sequence and the reader's reconstruction receives maximum guidance. In the second, a wider temporality is treated expositionally (perhaps as a flashback) alongside the moment that has been isolated. In the third, 'the pure boundary situation', the reader is denied explicit guidance towards the past and the future which must therefore be reconstructed in their entirety. This most radical and recent of forms (perhaps culminating in the 'short short story' - see Shapard and Thomas (Eds) 1986) is also the most demanding and disorientating for the reader. Not only must the wider structure be created but this must be done whilst experiencing the focal situation, as, for example, in Hemingway's 'The End of Something'. Instead of 'top down' and 'bottom up' processing, there is a psychic 'to-ing and fro-ing' of which the temporal is a guideline for other affective and cognitive responses. But it is an important guideline because it familiarises what the temporal isolation has defamiliarised.

These three idealised forms can obviously be realised by means of local textual strategies which give rise to infinite variation. A commonly used device at the beginning of a story is cataphoric reference - for example - use of a pronoun before its referent appears in the text. Beginning this way is abrupt for the reader but it shows several interesting phenomena in action. Although experientially jarring for the reader, the technique implies a story world already in existence before the reader's encounter with it. The reader is thus invited to construct this pre-existence at the same time as being impelled forward to find the pronoun's referent. At this early stage of reading it is easy to agree with O'Faolain's (1948) claim that suspense in the short story is intellectual rather than emotional, since it is curiosity that is aroused rather than emotional involvement. Later on, but depending on the story, there may be a deeper sense of involvement although we may hypothesise that this is attenuated by the impending ending and the heightened awareness of language. This is reflected to some extent in Lohafer's (1983) assertion that short stories do not offer a vicarious experience but merely a 'reality warp.'

To say that short stories characterise a situation is a good way of suggesting their position vis-a-vis time. They take a situation, a moment when people, places and events come together, and endow it with special significance by framing it off from the rest of time. And yet for the reader it is ephemeral, as all situations are, and therefore on reading, it is restored in time as the reader models it. An extension of this idea is that short stories gain in value after reading and that this retrospective view of the complete object may be more significant than the experience of reading itself (Pickering 1989). This may be true, if our comparison with poetry holds, but a memory is always a memory of something and in this case it is of a brief but tightly structured experience.

Both Verbal and Visual

In one sense, the verbal nature of short stories requires no further comment, but in considering that they are composed of words we are brought to the edge of some of the other dichotomies I have mentioned - between the oral and the written forms, between the older and the newer manifestations. But particularly relevant in this section is the quality of language to extend perceptions through time, perceptions that would in life be instantaneous: thus the polarisation between the verbal and the visual. Not unrelated to this is the ability of language to exclude, to name only those qualities chosen until more is perhaps revealed further on in the text. These are characteristics of all linguistic texts but especially of literary ones, where the selection and rejection of frames of reference is intimately connected with mental imagery. The question that arises then, is whether these features interact in a way that is particular to short stories.

'Visual' in the present context has three related meanings: the origins of a story as a writer conceives it; the metaphor often used to explain the short story as an art form; the consequences of these two for readers' responses. With regard to the first, Robert Louis Stevenson writes:

'The threads of a story come from time to time together and make a picture in the web; the characters fall from time to time into some attitude to each other or to nature, which stamps the story home like an illustration ... This, then, is the plastic part of literature: to embody character, thought or emotion in some act or attitude that shall be remarkably striking to the mind's eye.' (quoted in O'Faolain, 1948, p.176).

For O'Faolain, this approach explains why Stevenson was a better writer of episodes, and, by implication, of short stories, than novels, as compared with the heavily discursive tendencies of Henry James whose short stories tended to lack compression. Other writers such as Wain (1984) and Pritchett (1971) use the word 'flash' to encompass both the origin and the effect of their writing. In these visual versions of Poe's unity of effect, the originating image reflects the self-contained moment represented in the story, and here the verbal and the visual (or the temporal and the spatial) seem to be acting in concert.

The second sense of 'visual' is explicit about the importance of the visual arts to an understanding of the short story. If the reading of poetry can be illuminated by comparison with looking at sculpture (Benton et al, 1988), the short story, in keeping with its more recent evolution, has more in common with recently developed art forms such as film. Bowen (1937 p.7) makes the connection on the grounds of common techniques such as 'oblique narration, cutting, the unlikely placing of emphasis.' Hanson (1989) develops this by pointing out that both forms deny discursive explanations, appealing less to reason

than to unconscious desires and associations. Put otherwise, we could say that both tend to present rather than comment, although a presentation can often be read as a comment, sometimes to the detriment of a story. These remarks seem to have some justification, especially in enabling us to distinguish the narrative techniques of short stories from those of the novel. Pickering (1989), however, suggests that short stories often transfer less favourably than novels into films, the reason for this being that visual images undermine the power of suggestion or resonance of the words of the original. If it is the reader's task to realise this power, then Iser's (1978) view that mechanical reproduction supplants the reader's role in the generation of images - lends support to this hypothesis. Instead of cinema, many have suggested that photography offers better grounds for comparison. Shaw (1983 p.14-15) sums these up:

'Because the short story often depicts one phase of a process or action, the complete time structure and experience of duration offered by film can be telescoped into a single striking image in which drama is inherent. If the photographic image is defined as a self-sufficient illumination which does not require the help of 'plot' or 'story' to give it meaning, then it is possible to say that the creation of images which do not need to be elaborated or explained, but which do expand in the reader's mind, is the storyteller's method of achieving a comparable effect.'

Refining this still further, Shaw says that the short story possesses 'the apparent casualness of a snapshot', a phrase suggestive of several qualities: the limited, framed moment implying much more; the deception of a low art form, especially when narrators imitate speech; the illusion of simplicity in either the effacement of a narrator or the speaking voice of an internal narrator. But is the idea useful for describing the reading of short stories?

I have already suggested that gaps can refer to the time on either side of a short story. The idea of story as snapshot gives this a spatial dimension, the reader's mental imagery acting as vehicle for the fusion of the story into a larger context of personal significance. This is not to deny the importance of intra-textual silences. In fact, as Shaw again indicates, it is often the unwritten, something she calls 'reticence', that takes on special significance. This can take the form of withdrawn narrators, laconic style, unstated feelings, literal silence between characters, restrictions of point of view, and so forth. The reader's interaction with these features will produce imagery that is dynamic and consciously busier than with the novel, but there is also the additional dimension that the story is short enough to be held in memory as a dominant image, a snapshot perhaps. However, there is a sense in which it remains dynamic after reading and this relates directly to the image of a snapshot. This brief cross-section of time cannot evolve its complexity through time as does the novel but it does so rather as a reflection on a complex moment, often the result of a contrast between overt actions and subjective impressions. Readers

too must reflect but there are several dangers: it is sometimes difficult to dislodge the dominant image of a story; the linear attractions of image building can discourage reflection after reading; the silences of the story are seen as requiring the explanations they deny and so the story is reduced to a formula or moral.

Between the Poet and the Reporter or a High and a Low Art Form

Historically, the journalistic and artistic poles of the modern short story were in a symbiotic relationship. It has been claimed that the popular forms, in journals and magazines, have contributed, especially during its formative years in the nineteenth century, to the continuing critical neglect of the short story. Yet it is true that the disciplines imposed by editors' requirements (such as strict limitations on length) were instrumental in shaping the qualities also required by the more literary form. In a similar way, critical neglect seemed to fuel over-zealous claims leading perhaps to the hypostasing work of Matthews (1901). In a curiously circular motion, this position was shortly followed by a period of proliferation of manuals offering advice to would-be writers - the era of the formula story. During the present century several writers have observed the honorific status conferred through close comparison with poetry (Lohafer, 1983; Shaw 1983), again a reaction to critical neglect. Another manifestation of this polarisation has been aimed at writers. O'Connor (1963) for example, claims that the writer of short stories must be 'much more of an artist', whilst for Faulkner (see O'Connor, 1957, p.126) the failed poet wrote short stories, and novelists were born only after further failure at short fiction. At the other end of the scale, O. Henry, who has come to stand for the formula story, has been described as a tragic figure, the victim of commercial and literary values (Fagin, 1923). These shifts between reifying affirmation of quality and its converse ignore a recurring feature of the dichotomies I have proposed - the ability of the short story to combine diverse characteristics. Writing about the American short story, Pritchett (1971) takes the unusual step of elevating it by attributing its 'essentially poetic quality' to 'something raw and journalistic.' 'Journalistic' in the present sense therefore has two connected meanings. It refers to the past and present publication of short stories in ephemeral media, including radio; but it also suggests the features that the modern short story has inherited from these roots, which Shaw (1983) lists as 'immediacy, compression and vitality.' The meanings taken together imply ubiquity - the fundamental nature of storying - and versatility - the modern short story's ability to incorporate diverse features into a format more limited than that of the novel. But if the short story is closer to popular forms than the novel is (in both of these senses) how does this affect its reading? There is, of course, no simple answer. We might begin by saying that if a story falls into the popular category and is therefore 'popular', the responses it elicits are likely to be equally formulaic, or 'stock' as Richards would say, given an appropriate audience. Its readers would

be aware of some or perhaps all of the elements of the formula but unless reading in order to lay this bare, the control resultant upon the awareness would be part of the pleasure gained from the encounter. Such a story would exhibit a strong sense of closure, just as anecdotes in everyday life attempt, as Labov (1972) has shown, to ward off the question, 'So what?', especially in their denouement. There is, then, in both popular and 'natural' narratives a well-formedness that gives them their *raison d'être* and this will usually be accompanied by an unspoken acknowledgement of dominant ideology.

The literary short story is likely to mix elements of such a story with applications of artistic criteria. Shaw (1983) describes originality as the ability to combine 'comforting sameness' with 'disturbing areas' and Baker (1953) believes that better stories are satisfying on a surface level of action as well as with regard to meaning or psychological 'truth'. It must be acknowledged, though, that the swing has been towards the latter of each pair, so that readers may be lulled into the comfortable interest of the surface action but impelled towards irresolution, beneath which lies the psychology of the age. Typically, the reader is left pondering the appropriateness of the action and other structures to the underlying psychology, a situation that Baker (1953 p.120) describes thus:

'Reading becomes not an experience but an exercise in mental gymnastics for the critics and the initiated few.'

Texts and response are coterminous: there is less emphasis on succession than on synchronic reading, the unearthing of configuration. Even if we set aside this new sense in which short-stories are end-loaded, the literary short story differs from its popular variety in significant ways: there is likely to be a break from traditional story structures; there is a shift towards ideological challenge; and in the sense that the story will reach beyond itself (and ask its reader to do the same) it challenges the disposability of the form. To the extent that a story does not distinguish itself from the popular in this way, it is likely to be regarded as formulaic, and pedagogically, only worthy of study as an example of formula.

Baker (ibid) warns of the danger of the new formula, of the psychological impasse in short stories that leads many young adults to complain that they don't make sense. This view may be rather too extreme but he is right that there are a limited number of recurring ideas and terms used in discussion of the short story. Similarly, writers of short stories are liable to repeat themselves by projecting their own psychological style onto new situations. There is also perhaps a corresponding effect on readers deriving as much from the limitations of the form as from the preoccupations of authors. Rather like an art gallery, the short stories in anthologies often tend to cancel each other out, or, as Shaw (op cit) asks in connection with short story cycles, how many Joycean epiphanies can the reader take before being engulfed by the feeling of an empty application of

formula? If the short story is summed up by the mechanism of revelation, as it often is, then it is highly likely that, as a form it is more susceptible to such overload than either novels or poetry.

What emerges from this discussion is a portrait of a form for which it would be unwise to offer pat conclusions. However, the flexibility with which I began seems to readily convert into a readerly requirement incorporating disparate antecedent forms. This pre-supposes an experienced reader which in turn suggests that the short story potentially makes heavy demands on young inexperienced readers. The situation is exacerbated by a string of associated pejorative concepts that often undermine the sense of resolution that many young readers require. Some of these are: an oblique view of events, disturbing subject matter, a fragmented vision, the danger of reduction or overload on the part of the reader, the tendency of short stories towards understatement. But an alternative optimistic view is that the reading of the modern short story is a fitting outcome to the development of a sophisticated narrative competence, being likely to exercise a wide range of narrative and interpretive skills. The versatility and irresolution of the form makes the short story useful for the researcher studying reading but also means that it can direct readers towards an awareness of narrative varieties and ultimately towards self-conscious reading. Thus it seems that the contrasting and sometimes conflicting qualities that comprise the short story both 'make it' and 'mar it' in an educational context.

Reading and Researching Short Stories in the Classroom

Given the possibilities and constraints of the previous section, we need to devise genre specific ways of working with short stories. Below are some suggestions for research and teaching:

1. What do students expect from short stories? What assumptions do they make when they encounter the form? We can begin to answer these questions by comparing students' responses to a chapter of a novel with responses to a short story. Drawing on an original study by Brown (1982), there are several ways of doing this. Perhaps the most effective is to take a short story, photocopy it and tell the students that it is the first chapter of a novel we are about to study. Thus they read it as if it were a novel, commenting (under guidance if necessary) on characterisation, thematic and structural development, setting and so forth, and with some emphasis on predicting what will happen in the short and long term. It helps, of course, if the students are used to giving their free responses in this kind of situation.

Beyond this basic format, many variations are possible. To achieve a more focused sense of the development of responses, the readers can be stopped at several points en route and asked

to respond. It is also worth considering the degree of plot closure implied in the story used; obviously, a degree of open-endedness adds plausibility to the idea of a continuation, but as I have indicated in the previous section, most modern short stories leave plenty of room here. To finish off the lesson, give the students time to consider how they would read the text differently if it were a short story. At this stage some students guess your intent but it is worth giving them further time before announcing that it really is a short story, for it is only now that they are obliged to read it differently (or indeed in the same way but that too is worth discussion). With students who have just had a diet of short stories it may be possible to reverse the process: give them the first chapter of a novel and let them read it as a short story. This may, however, be less effective since the whole technique depends on defamiliarising the familiar, letting them read according to their dominant genre expectation, distancing them from it and so raising awareness of the reading requirements of short stories. The major disadvantage with this method is that it can only be used once with each teaching group.

2. How can we help students to read the lack of resolution in many short stories? How can we alert them to basic plot structures? Having read a story, students are simply asked to summarise the action in a single sentence of about thirty words. Sharing the resultant statements reveals the basic shape of the plot, often showing in addition the assumptions that students make about resolution or indicating which parts of the story are problematic. More significant in the case of more intractable stories is what is left out of these accounts. This draws attention to what a plot-centred approach to reading leaves out (based on Lodge, 1981).
3. Following directly from the above, how can we get students to see the significance of the 'frame story' that denies access to pasts or futures (Ruthrof, 1981)? We must encourage students to "predict" pasts and futures for the characters in these stories, preferably over a broad time span to encourage summarising and avoid elaborate re-plotting. Comparison between pasts and futures helps to redirect attention inwards towards the story's pivotal moment (Reid, 1977) or frontier experience (O'Connor, 1963).
4. Do students need to be made aware of short story theories? Yes, in the same way that we want knowledge of literary theory or of poetic diction to inform their responses to novels or poems. At the risk of encouraging reductionist readings, short story schema such as those of O'Connor and Reid above, can be useful for comparing a number of stories. Though brief, these definitions are capable of realisation in an infinite number of ways and so are preferable to an approach which produces an

"aphorism as moral" as the final product of reading.

The above list is, as I said, only a beginning, but it does address in a practical way the theoretical issues I raised earlier, and begins to answer my plea that we treat short stories for what they are and not for what they are not.

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