

SHORTCUT TO SHORT STORIES

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Introduction

Early precursors for the short story include anecdotes, parables, fables, folk tales and fairy tales. What all of these forms have in common is brevity and morality. The ones having had a lasting impact such as "Cinderella" and Aesop's fables are contemporary versions of old, even ancient tales that can be traced back centuries through many different cultures.

Folk tales and fairy tales share many characteristics. First, they feature simple characters who illustrate a quality or trait that can be summed up in a few words. For example, much of the appeal of the Cinderella depends on the contrast between the selfish, sadistic stepsisters and the poor, gentle and victimized Cinderella. In addition, folk tales and fairy tales have an obvious theme for instance moral, good triumphant over evil. The stories move directly to their conclusions, never interrupted by an unexpected twist of plot. Tales are not anchored in specific times or places but "once upon a time" settings. The important thing is the action and the way it is described. All the characters of a tale the king, the queen, the servant, the children, the peasants, etc. they all speak the same. There is an equality of language between them.

Giovanni Boccaccio's "The Decameron" and the Geoffrey Chaucer "The Canterbury tales" both written in the fourteenth century were precursors of the modern short story in which they included individual stories worked together thematically within a large narrative framework. Grimm's fairy tales (1824-1826), an early collection of narratives and folk stories helped to pave the way for the development of genre, but it was not until the nineteenth century that the contemporary version of the short story emerged.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a proliferation of popular literary magazines and journals created a demand for short fiction (between 3000 and 15000 words) that could be published as a whole rather than in serial installments. Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Twice told stories" (1824) and Edgar Allan Poe's "Tales of Grotesque and Arabesque" (1836) were early collections of short stories. In fact because the short story was developed so quickly in the United States, it is commonly thought of as an American literary form. In Iran there were stories written both in prose and poetry dating back to the Keyanian and Acheamenides periods. Among the historic Iranian short stories, Thousand Nights and One, Kelile and Demnen are the most famous ones.

Short story is the exploitation of words in the highest level. It is distinguished by its relative brevity, which creates a specific set of expectations and possibilities. Short story often begins close to or at the height of an action and it is more limited in the number of characters which can develop. Usually focusing on a single incident, the writer develops one or more characters by showing their reactions to the event. This attention to character development, as well as its detailed description of settings which distinguishes the short story from earlier short narrative forms.

In many contemporary short stories, a character experiences an epiphany, a moment of illumination in which something hidden or not understood, becomes immediately clear. In other short stories thematic significance, or meaning, is communicated through the way in which the characters develop, or react over time.

Regardless of specifics of its format or theme, the significance of short stories is to illuminate varied insights regarding life and living. The opportunity to gain these insights is found when reading between the lines devoid of any limitation. It is only when gleaming that the truth is revealed between the lines and one can fully appreciate the stupendous and entertaining nature of these stories.

A major purpose of short story writing – not the sole purpose – shall be for us to find ourselves through the pages, our faults, mistakes and our moments of success.

A Short History of Tales

We refer to tale as what our parents used to tell us to put us to sleep. The tales would reinforce our imagination and would take us to different centuries and would make us familiar with their people and their customs, they would make us praise the goodness of the characters and condemn their evil. A tale shows us the misfortune of people and makes us sympathize with them. We become happy for their happiness. We become sad for their misery. We are excited by some of their actions and we also learn to be patient some time. We learn that man is subject to mistakes and so we should forgive others mistakes.

The tales grew up to their today's complicated forms. The tales turned to short stories and novels. There are tales which go back to 400 B.C. in Egyptian civilization. Gilgamesh, an epic (a heroic tale) goes back to 1400 B.C. We have tales from Homer which belong to 600 B. C. The epic of Esopos which was written by Plamude, a Greek priest, goes back to 1000 A.D.

In Europe, there were tales about animals, fairy tales and stories from Boccaccio (1313-1375) by the name of Descameron. Chaucer was influenced by him and wrote his own masterpiece, The Canterbury Tales after reading this collection.

In India, there were stories written both in prose and poetry. Stories about animals were written for the first time during Keynaan and Achaemenides. Later on during Arsacides and Sassanides, many tales and stories were written. Among the old Iranian stories, Thousand Nights and One and Kelile and Demneh are the most famous ones. It has been said that they were both Indian originally and were translated

into Pahlavi and later on into Farsi. Reading the old stories in Pahlavi, we divide them into two types:

1. Stories with Iranian Origin.
2. Stories with origins from other nations which were translated into Pahlavi.

Let's take the story of Thousand Nights and One as an example. Some researchers believe that it had an Indian origin and was translated into Pahlavi later on. Then some Iranian stories were added to it. It doesn't contain more than two hundred stories today.

What is a tale

Generally speaking when in a story, the writer puts more emphasis on unusual events rather than the characters and their development, that story is called a tale. The outstanding point of a tale is that the characters and heroes very seldom change but there are always a variety of events. A tale is usually told and it is the simplest form of literature. Its language is very simple and since it's written for common people, it is full of proverbs and slangs. The narration of tale is very simple, not bookish at all. A tale usually doesn't have a plot and it is only the narration of both real and unreal events, like the tale of Hassan Kachh.

A tale usually has the following qualities:

1. The main objective of creating a tale is to stimulate reader's curiosity and amusement. The heroes have always conflicts with evil. They fight evil and destroy it and may get killed in their struggle.
2. There is always a hero in a tale. Most of these heroes are flat characters and show evil or goodness. If they get injured through the tale, they would be healed very soon and nothing can hurt them very deeply. They believe in destiny and think that whatever should happen, would occur.

3. There are always two types of characters in a tale: good and bad. You can hardly find any character in between and the conflict is always between good and bad.
4. The heroes are usually a prototype, someone who becomes a symbol of courage or goodness, etc. Hassan Kachal is a prototype. We see lots of characters like him with different names in different tales.
5. The time and place of a tale is indefinite, they are both imaginary. The important thing is the action and the way it is described. We don't know where Hassan Kachal was from and when he lived exactly (during which century).
6. All the characters of a tale, the king, the queen, the servants, the peasants, the children, they all speak the same. There is an equality of language between them. You can't recognize the difference between the languages of different types of the characters. The difference between them depends only on their destinies, that's the only thing which makes their lives different. Whatever the characters do, they raise the surprise and appreciation of their readers.
7. For the last quality of a tale, we should mention its age. We usually tell our children the tales that we have heard from our parents. Having this in mind, we can conclude that a tale with mentioned qualities can't be something new or contemporary.

Once upon a Time (1991)

NADINE GORDIMER

1. Read the following story and write a paragraph to finish it:

Someone has written to ask me to contribute to an anthology of stories for children. I reply that I don't write children's stories; and he writes back that at a recent congress/ book fair/ seminar a certain novelist said every writer ought to write at least one story for children. I think of sending a postcard saying I don't accept that I "ought" to write anything.

And then last night I woke up — or rather was wakened without knowing what had roused me.

A voice in the echo-chamber of the subconscious?

A sound.

A creaking of the kind made by the weight carried by one foot after another along a wooden floor. I listened. I felt the apertures of my ears expand with concentration. Again: the creaking. I was waiting for it, waiting to hear if it indicated that feet were moving from room to room, coming up the passage — to my door. I have no burglar bars, no gun under the pillow, but I have the same fears as people who do

contribute: join with others in giving help

subconscious: one's mental activities of which one is not aware.