CHAPTER – I
INTRODUCTION

Literature is the mirror of life. The myriad life style of the people belonging to different period has been reflected by different literary genres. Each period in the history of man seems to have a special genre of literature to represent its social and cultural mores. Elizabethan drama delineated the life of the early fourteenth century; poetry portrayed life in the romantic period; prose and essay of the eighteenth century enumerated the virtues and vices of the Victorians; poetry together with novel, narrated the later half of nineteenth and early twentieth century struggle of the common lot. The fragmented, war shattered life of the second half of the twentieth century is showcased in the short stories. After the Second World War the United States of America became the supreme power. So did the short story – the national art form of the country – come to the fore-front. It has gained new significance and is popular among the time conscious and leisure starved modern people.

Short story is one of the limbs of fiction. The Latin root of fiction “Fingere” means “to form, create”. Short stories were created by our ancestors and were orally recounted to amuse and to instruct each other even before the advent of written language.
The Egyptian papyri dating from 4000 – 3000 B.C., which contain “Tales of the Magicians”; and the great stories of the Old Testament are the most familiar of many short narratives that have survived from the ancient cultures of India, Greece, and the Middle East. The Greek historian Herodotus has said that Fables, terse tales with an explicit “moral”, were invented in the sixth century BC by a Greek slave named Aesop, though other times and nationalities have also been given for him. These ancient fables are today known as Aesop’s Fables. In Middle Ages the short fiction retained its popularity as fabliau, exemplum, or romantic tale. The other ancient form of short story, the anecdote, was popular under the Roman Empire. Anecdotes functioned as a sort of parable, a brief realistic narrative that embodies a point. Many surviving Roman anecdotes were collected in the thirteen or fourteen century as the Gesta Romanorum. The stories of the Arabian Thousand Nights and a Night were collected before the end of the thirteenth century, as were the Latin tales.

In the early 14th century, in Europe, the oral story-telling tradition began to develop into written stories most notably with Geoffrey Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, and Giovanni Boccaccio’s Decameron. Both of these books are composed of individual short stories which ranged from farce or humorous anecdotes to well-crafted literary fictions and set within a larger narrative story. The love for story-telling revealed in The Decameron and Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales continued from the renaissance and into the eighteenth century, with short
fictions taking on an even greater variety of forms. Throughout this long and complex history, one factor remained constant, and that is the vital relation between the written story and the oral tradition. This is a crucial fact to keep in mind when considering the development of the modern short story, since even the most sophisticated short fictions cannot succeed unless they conform in some way to the traditional rhythms of the story-teller’s art.

Short story emerged as a conscious literary genre only during the beginning of the nineteenth century, though it is among the most ancient and enduring of literary forms. Its development was closely associated with that of American magazine and its highest achievement has seen the virtual disappearance of fiction from the mass circulation market. Like the “novel” of the previous century it was the product of a special confluence of literary and cultural forces. These forces came together with particular urgency in early nineteenth-century America, so that the modern short story has some claim to be called an “American” art form. Edgar Allan Poe is said to be the father of the American short story. Poe’s review of Hawthorne’s Twice Told Tales is an important record in the history of short story as a literary genre. It provided Poe’s valuable ideas on short story to his successors. Poe has defined the nature of “Poetic Tale” (short story) as follows:
The tale proper, in our opinion, affords unquestionably the fairest field for the exercise of the loftiest talent, which can be afforded by the wide domains of mere prose. [In it’s] composition, the unity of effect or impression is a point of the greatest importance. It is clear, moreover, that this unity cannot be thoroughly preserved in productions whose perusal cannot be completed at one sitting. [So the tale should be a] short prose narrative, requiring from a half-hour to one or two hours in its perusal….. In the brief tale, however, the author is enabled to carry out the fullness of his intention, be it what it may. During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer’s control. There are not external or extrinsic influences – resulting from weariness or interruption….. A short story should be written for the sake of its last line….. The writer of the prose tale, in short, may bring to his theme a vast variety of modes or inflections of thought and expression – the ratiocinative, for example, the sarcastic, or the humorous.

Since this definition, writers belonging to various literary movement and groups, at various times, have offered their definitions but with little success. Present modern short story writers too have their own definitions of short story as pointed out by Laura Furman, in Story Matters. For instance, John Gardner has equated a story that works to a “vivid, continuous dream”. [readers slip into it,]
“forgetting the room [they’re] sitting in, forgetting it’s lunchtime or time to go to work. [They] recreate, with minor and for the most part unimportant changes, the vivid and continuous dream the writer worked out in his mind (revising and revising until he got it right) and captured in language so that other human beings, whenever, they feel like it, may open his book and dream that dream again”. (p.44)

Pam Houston says, “A surprise is what identifies a short story for me as a really worthwhile endeavor. If I do manage to write a story that doesn’t surprise me at all, I hope I have the sense to throw it away or put it away until one day when it might”. (p.3)

Susan Neville defines the traditional short story in geometrical terms: “Any single character’s life can go on infinitely in one direction or another – a line”, she says. “With a novel you pick an inch or two inches on the line … But a story … is more a point … a moment.” (p.7)

Martha Foley, in the foreword to “The Best American Short Stories of the Century”, had offered the following simple, open-ended definition of a short story: “A good short story is a story which is not too long and which gives the reader the feeling he has undergone a memorable experience”. (p.X)
Louise Erdrich has observed: “The best short stories contain novels. Either they are densely plotted, with each line an insight, or they distill emotions that could easily have spread on for pages, chapters”. (p.XI)

Once asked what she thought were the requirements of short fiction, Grace Paley has replied, “I hate the word fiction. In the “Times” there was discussion of Israeli writers and someone said, ‘we don’t have a word for fiction’. We just have the word ‘story’. It’s just the way I feel. I write what I am. I am a storyteller”. (p.7)

Clearly, there’s no one definition that all writers would agree on. But most will agree that character, visual imagery, tension of some kind, movement, and clarity of language must be present to make a work of short fiction compelling.

The short story has always been characterized by individuality, freedom, and variety. Flexibility and the capacity for change are its hallmarks. It will not be an exaggeration to state that no other literary genre is so close to the rapidly changing climate of the times in which it is written. The short story reflects the age “with vigor, variety and verve” (p.5) says William Pendem. From the late sixties of the twentieth century the world keeps on changing activated by the demon of change.
The short story has proved itself flexible enough to accommodate all. It can be a vehicle for conveying the most deeply felt social convictions, and it can also be a character study rich in psychological and emotional overtones in which conventional narrative and the linear sequential unfolding of incidents and plot scarcely exist. Like the new journalism, it can apply formal methods and techniques to actual events, and it can be a slice of life closely related to reportage, or it can concern itself primarily with visual effects, including experiments with typography and graphics. It can be in short as H.E. Bates observed, “anything the author decides it shall be” (p.5).

The short story challenges the powers of the most skillful craftsmen and artists regardless of its form, subject matter and the intent. The short story writer has to feel his way along a tight rope between success and failure. He must be in command of the situation at all times and in all places for, within the limited boundaries of the form there is little room for lapses, false moves, irrelevancies, and technical blunders. The short story demands compression, economy, and an unerring sense of relativity.

A short story writer focuses his attention swiftly and clearly on one facet of man’s experience and illuminates briefly one dark corner or depicts one aspect of life and attracts his reader. The short story writer obviously cannot explore the by-paths of a situation or ponder at length the intricacy of a character. He must
constantly discipline and shape his subject matter to gain his desired effect. He must be a thoughtful person, literary artist, entertainer, and expert technician. The novelist can be digressive and discursive, careless here and slovenly there, yet still create a good or great novel. But for the writer of short story false moves or lapses are likely to result in total failure. In spite of all these challenges and demands the short story is as Henry James calls it, “blest” and “beautiful”. (p.5)

The short story is particularly compatible with the temper and temperament of the present age. Regarding the challenging complexities of the age, William Penden says:

the fragmented nature of contemporary life make it virtually impossible for most fiction writers to grapple with the fundamental verities that engaged the great nineteenth and early twentieth century masters from Dickens, Melville and Hawthorne, through Dostoesvski and Tolstoi to Hardy and Conrad. Revolutions and revelations in personal ethics and public morality; undreamed of social economic and geopolitical complexities; the explosion of anxiety, neurosis, tension, drug addiction, bewildering often horrifying scientific break through, Vietnam, the race situations, pollution, Watergate and their attendant ills and dislocations, all this has rendered almost ludicrous,
Browning’s comfortable assumption that all’s right with the world. (p.6).

The short story has become the literary mirror for reflecting such an age, an age in which the new tends to be obsolete by tomorrow, in which change seems more relevant than order and eventual destruction of the only reality. The short story best suits the age of science as it is basically empirical besides being “brief, elliptical, unwinking and very much alive” as William Penden describes it (p.6). The short story seems to be the most significant literary form of the post world war II years. So William Penden confidently says that the future, “Historians of American literature will find in the short story rather than in the novel or the drama and poetry the major literary contribution of recent decades” (p.7).

The genre may have reached its finest expression in such European writers as Flaubert and Chekhov and Joyce, but as opined by A. Walton Litz it can best be understood through an examination of its American “investors,” Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allan Poe. They were led to the short story in part by what Henry James would have called the “thinness” of American life, its lack of a rich and complex social texture: the brief poetic tale, rather than the sprawling novel of manners, seemed the natural form for their intense but isolated experiences. At the same time they were acutely responsive to the developments of English and European Romanticism. This collision of local and
fragmented social experience with a cosmopolitan artistic vision proved ideal for the growth of the short story in America.

The earliest representatives of the short story genre emerged from an amalgamation of sources and influence - the eighteenth century essay, the traditional ballad and tale, the new emphasis in the qualities of painting and drawing. The resultant new form was called “Sketches”. Irvin’s first short story collection was entitled *The Sketch-Book of Geoffery Crayon, Gent.* The form of the typical Irving story does not depend upon a tightly-organized plot, but rather upon detached point-of-view which, like the prospect from a mountain-top, endows the whole scene with a quiet emotional unity. Irving acknowledged as much, in his well-known letter to Henry Brevoort, where he declared himself less interested in “the story” than in “the way in which it is told”. Irvin’s great contribution to the form of the genre was his notion to “sketches”. They combined unity of scene and unity of feeling economically.

Irvin’s successor is Nathaniel Hawthorne who referred himself as “Lover of the moral picturesque”. He was not satisfied with mere “word painting”. Most of Hawthorne’s stories have the surface form of allegory or parable, suggesting a schematic interplay of ideas or moral concepts. This mechanical quality is softened and complicated by his attention to the ambiguities of human psychology. Thus the character names and the plot of *Young Goodman Brown*
belong to a world of simplified allegory ("Goodman," "Faith," the journey form home to forest); but the changes wrought within the mind of Goodman Brown are subtle and problematic, leading the reader to a divided view of the Puritan inheritance.

When at the end of the story Goodman Brown looks “sternly and sadly” into the face of his wife, Faith, and then passes on “without a greeting,” we have moved far beyond the schematic judgments of parable or allegory into the realm of the complex symbol. It is this psychological complexity that gives Hawthorne’s best stories their lasting power, and enables us to see them as prophecies of the future as well as commentaries on the American past. In My Kinsman, Major Molineux, for example, the surface historical allegory (New World against Old) is paralleled by a more ambiguous narrative of initiation into adult experience which has led some critics to describe the tale as a forerunner of Sherwood Andeson’s I Want to Know Why or Hemingway’s Nick Adams Stories.

In the American literary tradition, Hawthorne’s special position is mainly due to the introduction of themes of moral guilt and the anxious weight of the past. Most of the stories depicted moral drama that arose from the Calvinistic sense of innate depravity and Original sin. In his tortured and problematic treatment of the theme of guilt and expiation, Hawthorne has set a compelling pattern for many of his successors. And it was in response to this dark strain in
his fiction that Poe, Melville, and James produced some of their most revealing
commants on the short tale and its artistic possibilities.

In Hawthorne’s sketches, “the absence of effort is too obvious to be
mistaken, and a strong undercurrent of suggestion runs continuously beneath the
upper stream of the tranquil thesis” as Poe has observed in his review of The
Twice Told Tales. This power of “suggestion” seems to stem from a “truly
imaginative intellect” which is restrained or repressed in the sketches but given a
free and original play in the longer stories. And it is these stories that gave Poe
the occasion to develop his aesthetic of the “tale”.

Poe’s Philosophy of Composition and his review of Hawthorne’s Twice Told
Tales are significant contribution to the development of short story. His
aesthetics on tales was strictly followed by his immediate successors. Poe felt
that:

A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not
fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having
conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be
wrought out, he then invents such incidents – he then combines such
events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If
his very initial sentence tends not to the outbringing of this effect, then
he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should
be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to be one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed: and this is an end unattainable by the novel. Undue brevity is just as exceptionable here as in the poem; but undue length is yet more to be avoided.

Poe has accepted the romantic emphasis on unity of effect or “impression” and fashioned a psychological defense for the short story. Poe’s “tale” differs from the sketch or tale of earlier writers in many ways, and these differences are defined through its effect upon the reader. Psychological unity has superseded the traditional unity of action; a concept of organic totality links the reader’s response with the structure of the story. In his stress upon the appropriate length for the tale, Poe reaffirmed the storyteller’s primary concern with the attention span of his audience, but doing so in the context of a sophisticated romantic aesthetic that cherishes the “lyric moment”. The ideal short story that Poe never achieved, the economical story of Flaubert or Joyce in which every detail of setting and dialogue contributes to a single unifying design, is anticipated and justified in his marvelously suggestive review on Hawthorne’s *Twice Told Tale.*
His major point – that the short story provides the greatest range of possibilities to the modern artist, enabling him to use “a vast variety of modes or inflections of thought and expression” is a valuable contribution. Poe believed that the short story could stand at the juncture of prose and poetry, uniting the best qualities of each and reconciling Truth (Reason) with Beauty (Rhythm). Comic, grotesque, tragic, and logical effects can exist together in the same story, so long as they are united by some total effect on the reader.

His detective fictions, like his earlier *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, combine intricacy with simplicity, and this combination is the essence of Poe’s art. *Arabesque*, which literally means “Arabian”, recalls the splendid world of the Thousand Nights and a Night and the ancient authority of the storyteller. Its more immediate suggestion, however, is of arabesque ornament, where the viewer is lost in the intricacies of the design unless he, like Dupin, can see the fundamental simplicity. We may take the epithet “arabesque” as a powerful metaphor for Edgar Allan Poe’s contribution to the development of the short story: his demonstration, in theory and in practice that within the narrow scope of the traditional tale an amazing number of diverse elements can be fused into a psychological and structural unity through poetic suggestion.

Like Poe, Melville too was influenced by Hawthorne. He was grasped by Hawthorne’s tragic vision. To Melville, Hawthorne was a symbol for the
potentialities of American fiction. In Hawthorne, he found a tragic tone that shamed the superficial optimism of American life and art. Melville has observed that inspite of “all the Indian-summer sunlight on the hither side of Hawthorne’s soul, the other side – like the dark half of the physical sphere – is shrouded in blackness, ten times black”.

The “power of blackness” which attracted Melville to Hawthorne runs through all of Melville’s major works; in Benito Cereno and Bartleby the Scrivener one can find the same themes that dominated Moby-Dick and Pierre. We find also the same ambiguity of treatment, and it is this quality that separates Melville from Hawthorne. Hawthorne’s moral vision is often complex or ambivalent, but there is a sense of control: the allegorical tradition gave Hawthorne a frame of reference, one explicitly humanistic and Christian. In Melville’s fictional world, nothing lies beyond the ambiguous problems of perception and moral choice, an unstable universe where even the sense of evil may be an illusion is depicted.

But most would agree on a moral frame of reference within which any interpretation must be validated. With Bartleby the Scrivener, however, the process of interpretation is much more creative, reflecting the open-ended structure of the work itself. “Bartleby” has been variously interpreted as a parable of Melville’s own artistic career, a drama of the impact of capitalist
society on the individual, a symbolic tale of anonymous urban life, a
psychological study of schizophrenia, or simply a presentation of the essential
“absurdity” of the modern world.

All these readings are related at some general level of interpretation, but
their variety suggests that Melville is more interested in how we see than in what
we see. Similarly, the complicated symbolism of black-and-white in *Benito
Cereno*, although derived from the traditional light-and dark of moral allegory, is
deployed ambiguously: the reader is so limited by Captain Delano’s partial mind and
the extracts from the legal deposition that he can never be entirely sure whether
Melville is inverting or affirming traditional values. This indeterminate quality is
intensified in *Bartleby*, where the story is as much the lawyer’s as Bartleby’s, and
the limited narrator becomes a psychological double for the reader. It is this
epistemological emphasis on the difficulties of knowing and perceiving that gives
Melville’s long tales their special fascination.

Melville could not be satisfied within the time span prescribed by Poe, and
in *Bartleby* and *Benito Cereno* the architectural designs of the novelist are clearly
evident. Both stories however, remain within the broad limits of the shorter
form, exhibiting a unity of scene and symbol – a powerful psychological totality
– that would be broken by the more diverse rhythms of the novel. The general
outline of Poe’s theory will still hold, in an examination of Melville’s short
fictions. In the case of Henry James, however, new definitions and discriminations came into play.

Henry James’s immense debt to Hawthorne is acknowledged explicitly in his critical biography of 1879, and implicitly throughout his hallucinatory tales. It was Hawthorne’s poetic command of the inner world which fascinated James; yet – unlike Melville – James had too strong a sense of social realism to accept the extreme reaches of Hawthorne’s poetic vision, where symbolism shades into allegory.

James is intent upon reducing *Young Goodman Brown* to a picture, not a parable, because he wishes to preserve decorum in fiction: disturbing psychological states can be dramatized in ghostly tales, where there is a traditional license, but in stories of contemporary or historical life the standards of dramatic realism should be observed. *Young Goodman Brown* must be seen as a picturesque sketch because James, in 1879, is unwilling to accept the parable as a fictional art-form; it is only later, in stories such as *The Jolly Corner*, that he can combine the demands of parable and realistic drama by using the theories of a new psychology. Henry James’s sense of decorum, his search for the “right” form to match each subject, is reflected in three titles given to his work: *The Europeans, A Sketch; Daisy Miller, A Study; and The Portrait of a Lady*. James’s short fiction really falls into two broad categories: the nouvelle or novelette, in
which the elements of the conventional novel are simply foreshortened; and the more concentrated story, where James is observing within broad limits Poe’s theory of the poetic tale, and the aim is an intense psychological unity.

The division between the two kinds is roughly dependent on length, since James rejected Poe’s doctrinaire emphasis on an ideal time span, preferring to let each subject or “donnee” develops to its full potential. This sense of elasticity is clear in James’s lyric praise of the nouvelle, which he identifies as a Continental form allied to the novel of manners. He turned Poe’s aesthetic rationale into meaningless formula. In this connection James has observed “In that dull view a “short story” was a “short story”, and that was the end of it. Shades and differences, varieties and styles, the value above all of the idea happily developed, languished, to extinction, under the hard-and-fast rule of the “from six to eight thousand words” – When for one’s benefit, the rigour was a little relaxed. For myself, I delighted in the shapely nouvelle”.

On the other hand, James clearly knew that a story such as *The Jolly Corner*, which depends on singleness of effect, belongs to a different literary kind. As an “adventure-story” of the mind, a brief drama of consciousness, it substitutes our modern understanding of the mind’s subconscious powers for Poe’s Gothic imagination, but the sense of psychological “doubleness” is much the same.
Like Poe, James knew that the unity and force of such a psychological tale lies in the reader’s mind, where the extraordinary events of the story find their dark but familiar counterparts. He has observed: “The moving accident: the rare conjunction, whatever it be, doesn’t make the story – in the sense that the story is our excitement, our amusement, our thrill and our suspense; the human emotion and the human attestation, the clustering human conditions we expect presented, only make it. The extraordinary is most extraordinary in that it happens to you and me, and it’s of value (of value for others) but so far as visibly brought home to us”.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the American short story was undergoing a transformation in subject matter rather than in form, while James was experimenting with the nouvelle and shorter forms under the influence of his European masters – Flaubert and Maupassant and Turgenev. The expanding frontier of the United States provided the substance for Mark Twain’s early stories, Bret Harte’s *California sketches* (*The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Sketches, 1871*), and *the Midwestern tales* of Hamlin Garland.

These new areas of experience invigorated the language of the short story, until by the end of the century the short-story reader had before him a fictional chronicle of New England, the South, the Middle West, and the Far West, the stories of each region providing a faithful record of local customs and dialects.
This sense of America as a growing confederation of distinct regions, each with its local voice, forced the residents of the settled East to reassess their heritage, and writers such as Sarah Orne Jewett were to render the native experience in scrupulous detail. Applying to the life of the Maine Coast her favorite motto from Flaubert, “One should write of ordinary life as if one were writing history”. Miss Jewett, daughter of a village doctor, wielded her pen like a scalpel.

Harte, Mark Twain, Garland, Jewett, George Washington Cable, Joel Chandler Harris, O.Henry (William S. Porter), are some of the regional writers among many others. Often the writing is distressingly provincial, embodying all the worst aspects of “local color”. But in the case of those writers with an ear for actual speech and an eye for significant detail, especially Mark Twain, Jewett, and Garland, the colloquial style opened new literary frontiers. Sarah Orne Jewett’s meticulous control of Maine dialects in *The Courting of Sister Wisby* and Hamlin Garland’s command of Civil War slang in *The Return of a Private* reflect a new belief that the truth about America could not be told in a transplanted “literary” language, but only in the rhythms and figures of local speech. In their hands, as in those of the great French novelist Flaubert, the luminous local detail takes on a broad, symbolic meaning. The same is true of Mark Twain.

His *Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* may appear, on first reading, to be a piece of California folklore, but the cultural conflict between
East and West (between “Daniel Webster” and “Andrew Jackson”) is raised by Mark Twain’s artistry to the level of a national myth.

Mark Twain claimed in *How To Tell a Story* that the tall tale was not regional but “American”, and his entire career validates this belief that the most profound national truths must be expressed through the observed details of one time and one place. It was largely for this reason that Ernest Hemingway made his extravagant pronouncement, in *The Green Hills of Africa*, that “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*”. Hemingway and Faulkner and Sherwood Anderson – to name but a few of Mark Twain’s inheritors – found their task that much easier because the “regional” writers had broken through the genteel tradition to record the actual rhythms of everyday speech.

The regional short story writers were content to use standard forms, ranging from the anecdote (as in Mark Twain’s *Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*) to the symbolic tale but adapted from Poe or Hawthorne. The more sophisticated and self conscious writers began to explore the effects which the new subject matter and freedom of expression would have on fictional treatment, using terms such as “realism” and “naturalism”. The realist position, as articulated by William Dean Howells in *Criticism and Fiction* (1891), is essentially a plea for commonsense fidelity to the realities of contemporary life.
Although the imaginative “romance”, in the hands of a great writer like Hawthorne, had lifted everyday reality to a level of symbolic truth, Howells felt that the “practice of romance” by the ordinary artist was an evasion of reality, leading to melodrama and sentimentality. Howells wished that fiction be true to the accurate – although limited – observation of the American scene.

Howells’ caution is especially relevant to the short story, where the risks are proportionately larger than in the novel; and many of his sensible caveats have been observed by those twentieth – century short story writers who have taken suburban life and everyday matters as their chosen field. The standard New Yorker story whether dispassionate or ironic in its viewpoint, stays within the limits set by Howells, and in the works of John Cheever and John Updike we see what a master craftsman can accomplish in a fictional world where “sin and suffering and shame” are given a local habitation.

Other writers more systematic than Howells buttressed the argument for realism with theories drawn from Social Darwinism and from the writings of the French novelist Emile Zola, who sought to portray social and psychological forces with scientific accuracy. These “philosophic” realists, under the banner of “naturalism” or “veritism”, based their art on a deterministic view of human behavior, in which environment and heredity leave little room for free choice. Among the “naturalists” or “veritists” Hamlin Garland was the finest writer of
short fiction, as well as one of the least doctrinaire theorists. His essays in *Crumbling Idols* (1894) provide a persuasive theoretical basis for the prairie stories of Main-Travelled Roads (1891). Like Howells, Garland was reacting against the popularity of “romantic” fiction.

Literary nationalism ushered in the local color movement. It was a form of literary nationalism which magnified the sectional differences dramatized by the Civil War, but minimized the element of foreign influence. A scientific outlook, whether adapted from Taine, Darwin, or Spencer, seemed consistent with local color and other forms of realism not only because it invited close attention to the facts of natural setting or regional dialect, but also because it invalidated emotional extremes like Villainy or Perfect Love – so often found in romances and so rarely in American life. Advocates of literary realism contended that the romance was responsible for many of the social ills of America. Fiction which did not portray men within their real “social and Physiological limits” led to “suicidal extremes” of moral judgment. Emotional, imaginative tales at last destroyed the readers’ “power to recognize truth” and undermined their ability “to make independent ethical judgments”, thus virtually disqualifying them for democratic citizenship.

Many of the essays in *Crumbling Idols* were written at the time of the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, and they are infused with the conviction that
local color, “the native element, and the differentiating element”, is the “life of fiction”. Garland stands at the opposite extreme from Henry James: to him provincialism is not local vision, but “dependence upon a mother country for models of art production”. Like Whitman or the Impressionist painters, Garland wished the artist to work in the open air. The Chicago Exposition had introduced him to the works of the Impressionists, particularly Monet, and Garland’s aesthetic is avowedly theirs: the work of art should be a unified impression, not a mosaic; it should have a commanding center of interest; and its success should be judged by the effect it has upon the viewer or reader. This is the aesthetic of Poe’s tale and the picturesque sketch, recast in more modern terms and announced with the confidence derived from an expanding nation.

The achievements of major American short story writers during the 20th century would lead Frank O’Connor to declare, in 1963, that “the Americans have handled the short story so wonderfully that one can say that it is a national art form”. This sense of the short story as an “American” form was even a commonplace in William Dean Howells’s time. The popular magazines paid more for stories by successful writers like O.Henry than many novelists received for the work of months. The conditions of journal publication, and the increasing demand for “action” stories in an age of political imperialism, produced a whole generation of reporter-writers. The newspaper office became the training ground
for short story writers, but the academic world was not far behind, and handbooks on the criticism and writing of short stories proliferated.

This “decline” continued, with some notable exceptions, until the end of World War I, when a generation of great writers – Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner among them – turned its attention to the genre, and created the golden age of the American short story. These writers may be thought of as redeeming the genre from “journalization” through sheer talent and the imitation of European masters.

Among the earlier journalist-writers Stephen Crane had demonstrated that great short stories could be made of the same stuff as a news story, and with many of the same methods. A comparison of The Open Boat with the original newspaper account of the disaster shows how Crane had already begun, in his newspaper article, to “lift” the bare details of the event to a level of compressed and unified symbolism. Joseph Conrad said of The Open Boat that “by the deep and simple humanity of its presentation [the story] seems somehow to illustrate the essentials of life itself, like a symbolic tale”.

This ability to write a pure and economical descriptive prose which has the impact of “a symbolic tale”, but without the trappings of overt symbolism, marks the early stories of Ernest Hemingway, and we may attribute it in large measure to his training as a journalist. When Big Two-Hearted River was first published,
Scott Fitzgerald and a friend accused Hemingway of writing “a story in which nothing happened”, with the result that it was “lacking in human interest”. Hemingway replied that they “hadn’t even taken the trouble to find out what he had been trying to do”, and what he was trying to do is beautifully illustrated by his last-minute decision to cut a three-thousand-word coda in which Nick Adams mused upon life, painting, and the writer’s craft. With this coda *Big Two-Hearted River* would have been embarrassingly personal and didactic; without it the story stands in splendid purity, a completely satisfying description of a fishing trip that nonetheless “seems somehow to illustrate the essentials of life itself, like a symbolic tale”. Hemingway obviously learned the lesson of discretion and exactness from many sources, including the new poetry of 1909-22, but it was his journalistic experience that taught him to record the sequence of motion and fact, leaving the reader with the task of inferring the larger meanings.

Sherwood Anderson’s work, especially the related sketches of *Winesburg Ohio* (1919), provides a bridge between the major short story writers of the late nineteenth century and the world of Hemingway and Faulkner, both of whom were befriended and encouraged by Anderson at the start of their careers. Anderson’s impact upon his successors was general rather than specific. To the younger generation he stood as a symbol of artistic independence, since he had
begun his career as a disciple of naturalism and fought his way through to a personal and idiosyncratic style.

Anderson’s greatest gift to his more talented successors has been called by one critic “the liberation of the short story”. He attacked the formula magazine story, what he called the “plot story”, with considerable effect, always stressing the unique relation between the “seed” of a story and its final form. Whatever their defects his stories were a constant rebuke to the bland and “well-made” fictions of the popular magazine, which fitted so smugly into a few academic patterns. As he implies in *A Story Teller’s Story*, Anderson found the world a mysterious and uncertain place, where insight comes by fits and starts, but of one thing he was sure: that no Americans “lived felt or talked as the average American novel made them live feel and talk and as for the plot short stories of the magazines – those bastard children of De Maupassant, Poe, and O. Henry – it was certain that there were no plot short stories ever lived in any life” he had known anything about. In his own way, Anderson restored to the American short story its original promise of vitality and elasticity.

The short story became the agent of powerful artistic vision, with Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner, as with Poe, Hawthorne, and James. In his major short fictions – *The Rich Boy*, *Winter Dreams*, *Babylon Revisited*, and a half-dozen others – his feeling for social nuance and moral scruple is evident.
At his best, he combined a complex drama of character and incident with a unifying mood or “tone” as in the case of *Babylon Revisited* where the elegiac atmosphere of lost grandeur and gaiety is masterly welded.

Ernest Hemingway has achieved effects of concentration and immediacy which added a new dimension to his short stories. Like the young bullfighter in *The Sun Also Rises*, the young Hemingway could hold “his purity of line through the maximum of exposure”; and the stories of his first three collections – *In Our Time, Men Without Women, and Winner Take Nothing* – are the foundation of his lasting reputation. The stories of the mid-1930s, *The Short Happy Life of Francis – Macomber* and *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, are much praised and imitated. His stories were too powerful to be restrained by the academic distinctions, like anecdotes, sketches cantos and he completed the process Anderson had begun: the liberation of the short story from preconceived patterns.

Edgar Allan Poe derived the symbolic tale from the aesthetics of romantic poetry; a hundred years later, Ernest Hemingway brought to American short fiction the density and precision of the best modern poetry. His friend and mentor Ezra Pound had long before coined the motto, “Poetry should be at least as well written as prose”, by which he meant that English and American poets should imitate the economy and control of Flaubert or Joyce. In Hemingway’s early stories the debt is repaid. In stories such as *Big Two-Hearted River* and *A
Clean, Well-Lighted Place the leading tenets of Imagist poetry, as announced by Pound in his 1913 essays, are completely applicable:

1. Direct treatment of the “thing”, without evasion or cliché.
2. The use of absolutely no word that does not contribute to the general design.
3. Fidelity to the rhythms of natural speech.
4. The natural object is always the adequate symbol.

This drive toward a condensed and suggestive form is perhaps best displayed in A Clean, Well-Lighted Place, where Hemingway manages to characterize three people and establish a complex emotional situation within the compass of two thousand words, and without any authorial intrusion: all is accomplished by natural dialogue and discreet symbolism. The same tact and discretion is evident in Big Two-Hearted River, where Hemingway’s instinct for the luminous natural detail is developed in a story of scrupulous realism.

Taken in isolation, Big Two-Hearted River suggests the anxieties of a life balanced between two worlds. Poised between past and present, between the burned-over land and the swamp, where fishing would be a “tragic adventure”, Nick Adams can keep his equilibrium only through an elaborate devotion to the here-and-now, the customary demands of camping and fishing. Like the trout in the stream, he must not fight the current but balance himself against it. Much is
implied, almost nothing is stated. In stories like *Big Two-Hearted River* and *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* form and psychology are inseparable, and the stylistic ideals – dignity, restraint, economy of movement – become the unstated ideals of human behavior.

The influence of Hemingway and Fitzgerald on the modern American short story was mainly a formal one. William Faulkner, on the other, opened up a whole world of cultural and moral experience, and it was largely due to his example that Southern writers dominated the development of the short story during the years before and after World War II. The range of Faulkner’s achievement in the short form is evident in his *Collected Stories* (1950), where the stories are carefully grouped according to subject and narrative perspective.

The first section, *The Country*, shows Faulkner’s mastery of the hunting story and the tall tale, his ability to recast the subjects of Mark Twain and the regionalists in a modern form. Part Two, *The Village*, explores the broad expanse of modern Southern life, in techniques which range from Anderson’s grotesque anecdotes to Hemingway’s taut narratives. In Part Three, *The Wilderness*, Faulkner’s feeling for the semi-legendary past leads to some of his most original effects. In evoking the lost world of the Indians (*as in Red Leaves*) Faulkner employs a dignified and ritualistic style. Part four, *The Wasteland*, comments on World War I and its bitter aftermath, but in forms that come dangerously close to
the conventions of magazine fiction. *The Middle Ground* (Part Five) portrays the realm of death and nightmare, and in the final Part Six (*Beyond*) the stories are of the supernatural and the bizarre, of death and dreams. Thus the direction of the volume’s forty-odd stories is from the commonplace to the supernatural, from the local to the universal.

*The Collected Stories* of Faulkner offer a sense of a self-contained imaginary world which is the hallmark of Faulkner’s art. It also shows his many affinities, in subject and form, with the major writers of American short fiction. The Gothicism of Poe, the moral allegory of Hawthorne, the colloquial humor of Mark Twain, the realistic precision of Garland, the grotesque psychology of Anderson, the absolute precision of the early Hemingway have been assimilated by Faulkner and made his own.

Although Faulkner’s *Collected Stories* is one of the richest volumes in the history of the American short story, it does not indicate his full achievement in the genre. Faulkner was by temperament and inheritance a teller of tales, and even his most carefully constructed novels – *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* – grew out of short stories.

The careers of Faulkner and Hemingway spanned the great period of the American short story. Never before had so many talented writers turned their energies to the form, and each year between 1930 and 1960 could yield a
collection of impressive works. Especially prominent were the Southern writers of these years, who alone produced a substantial body of major fiction. Most of them followed the example of William Faulkner, who had shown how local history and social behavior could be turned into universal metaphors. Apart from Southern writers Bellow, Malamud, and Cheever showed the power of short story to crystallize the personal conflicts in any cultural setting through their stories.

The short story writers, who followed Hemingway and Faulkner were, quite simply, better informed and more intelligent about their craft than any of their predecessors. Many of them were literary critics, and all had a highly developed critical sense. They went to school, to their predecessors, both the great American writers of short fiction and the European masters: Flaubert, Chekhov, Turgenev, Joyce.

Their writings on the craft of the story reveal a detailed knowledge of the major theorists, and a close familiarity with the language of modern criticism: setting, tone, and point-of-view are their concerns. The criticisms of Robert Penn Warren, or the more scattered comments of Eudora Welty and Katherine Anne Porter, show the fact: that modern craftsman knows the history of his form, its limitations and potentialities. The best modern writers of the short story know how to talk to us – and themselves – about the practical and theoretical bases of their work. Self-consciousness was the great strength of the writers who
followed Hemingway and Faulkner. But it was also a limitation. Theirs was an art of consolidation.

Many good short story writers have emerged since 1940 than in any comparable span in American literary history, and more short story volumes have been published. But sadly, as the quantity of the short story increased, the quality began to suffer. Commercial mediocrity crept into the form with the blessings of the big business, mass circulation magazine editors. The insipidity of most family magazine fiction is an unfortunate chapter in the history of American literature.

The short story writers who grappled with adult concepts and problems had a difficult time seeking an outlet for their work. At that time, good quality weeklies like *New Yorker, Story, Esquire, Harpers* and *The Atlantic* helped in the growth and vigour of the short story. *The New Yorker* stimulated and helped shape the direction of the short story as a literary form. The short story has a tough competition from the television film, new journalism, and the highly specialized magazines which cater to very specific interest groups. The short story has not only survived but prospered during the decline of the magazine market that cradled it. Many diverse and talented writers continue to write short stories because it is a challenging and appealing literary form of our age.
By the end of the 1950s the time had come for new departures, a shattering and reforming of accepted methods. In the period following World War II, a group of writers, including Shirley Jackson, John Cheever, John Steinbeck, Jean Stafford, Eudore Welty J.D. Salinger Flannery O’Connor, reinvigorated and brought forth a great flowering of literary short fiction.


The 1970s saw the rise of the post-modern short story in the works of Donald Barthelme, John Barth and John Updike. The same decade witnessed the establishment of the Pushcart Press, which, under the leadership of Bill Henderson, began publishing the best of the independent and small presses. Minimalism gained widespread influence in the 1980s, most notably in the work of Raymond Carver, Ann Beattie and Bobbi Ann Mason. However, traditionalists including John Updike and Joyce Carol Oates maintained significant influence on the form, as did Canadian author Alice Munro.
John Gardner’s seminal reference text, *The Art of Fiction*, appeared in 1983. Many short stories written in America during the 1990s have magical realism. Among the leading practitioners in this style were Steven Millhauser and Robert Olen Butler. Stuart Dybek gained prominence for his depictions of life in Chicago’s Polish neighborhoods and Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* tackled the legacy of the Vietnam War. Louise Erdrich wrote poignantly of Native American life. T.C. Boyle and David Foster Wallace explored the psychology of popular culture. The first decade of the twenty-first century saw the emergence of a new generation of young writers including Jhumpa Lahiri, Karen Russell, Nathan Englander, Kevin Brockmeier, Jacob Appel, George Saunders and Dan Chaon. Blogs and e-zines joined traditional paper-based literary journals in showcasing the work of emerging authors.

Walt Whitman’s often-quoted statement that for a country to have great poets it must also have great audiences needs to be amended to read that to have great writers of any genre there must first of all be great publishers to present that which is good of its kind, new, meaningful, vital. As editorial, publication, and distribution costs continue to rise, the marginal literary forms become threatened and the role of the small-circulation literary magazine and the book publisher willing to publish first collections of stories assumes greater and greater importance. Some book publishers - Doubleday, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, and
Houghton Mifflin, for example – have published short story collections and helped in its development.

Closely related to this type of magazine are the two annual anthologies of superior stories originally published in American magazines and periodicals. *The Best American Short Stories* and the *O.Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories*. The first *Best collection* was published in 1916 under the editorship of Edward J. O’Brien. Growing out of O’Brien’s dedicated belief “in the democratic future of the American short story”, the annual *Best collection* have more than justified the editor’s hopes that these anthologies “may do something toward disengaging the honest good from the meretricious mass of writing with which it is mingled”. An enthusiastic and indefatigable editor, as well as sound critic, O’Brien continued editing these anthologies until his death in 1941. Since then the series has been edited without interruption by Martha Foley, and her successors.

In 1918 several members of the Society of Arts and Sciences of New York, many of whom had been associated with O. Henry during his Manhattan days, met to establish a “memorial to the author who had transmuted realistic New York into romantic Bagdad-by-the-Subway”. Out of this meeting grew the *O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories*, the first collection of which, edited by Blanche Colton Williams, was published in 1921. Like O’Brien, Williams sought “originality, excellence in characterization, skill in organization of plot, [and]
power in moving emotions”, and like him she was a knowledgeable and
dedicated editor. She was followed by her successors. Despite the differences of
opinion, over the years the editors performed their difficult tasks with admirable
awareness and dignity. It is impossible to overestimate the role played by these
collections in stimulating the development of the American short story.

As a conclusion to the above history of short story and as a pointer to its
future, Martha Foley’s introduction in the 1942 *The Best American Short Stories*
may be quoted.

“Against the tragic backdrop of world events today a collection of short
stories may appear very unimportant. Nevertheless, since the short story always
has been America’s own typical form of literary expression, from Washington
Irving and Edgar Allan Poe onward, and since America is defending today what
is her own; the short story has a right to be considered as among the cultural
institutions the country now is fighting to save…. In its short stories, America
can hear something being said that can be heard even above the crashing of
bombs and the march of Panzer divisions. That is the fact that America is aware
of human values as never before, posed as they are against a Nazi conception of a
world dead to such values”.

Among the American short story writers, John Updike occupies a special
and unique place. John Updike’s uniqueness emerges from a combination of rare
qualities like sincerity and skill, serenity and sensitivity, sagacity and simplicity
vigor and vitality, tenacity and talent, diligence and dexterity, intelligence and
integrity, and humanity and humour.

John Updike presents an insightful picture of the condition of contemporary
American writers in his article “The Cultural Situation of the American writer”.
John Updike points out that an American writer may be considered fortunate as
he inherits many assets like a wealthy motherland with literate citizens and a rich
language along with immense freedom. But these assets, Updike feels, do not
help a writer. Instead, Updike ruefully refers to the fact that the profession of a
writer in the United States, “has been sharply devalued in the last thirty years
and has suffered loss both in the dignity assigned to it and in the sense of purpose
that shapes a profession from within” (p.21). The Americans of the 1850s seem
to have immense confidence. But such confidence is impossible for the writer of
1950. Even Melville himself could not now write, “the world is as young as
when it was created and this Vermont morning dew is as wet to my feet as Eden’s
dew to Adam’s” (p.22).

Not only is the contemporary writer denied his professional satisfaction he
is also left to face financial problems. The writer must “find his way in a world
that can be cruel. The American writer struggles to survive as a small
entrepreneur in the world’s largest jungle of private enterprise” (p.23). The writer
remains “a gambler” something exhilarating at 20 but frightening at 40. The writers have to yearn for the blessing of Mammon. The main problem is that the American writer is “rather typically baffled and disgusted by what would seem his prime subject, the daily life of his society” (p.28). So the American writer is “uncertain as to what is expected of him” (p.28). The American writer, Updike ushers, is optimistic though he is in a pessimistic environment. As Melville wrote, they will be confident that, “the trillionth part has not yet been said, and all that has been said but multiplies the avenues of what remains to be said” (p.28).

Updike, sharing this confidence, with diligence and dexterity attempts to recreate the contemporary world of complexities in his simple, lyrical and beautifully symbolic world of fiction. Rupp H. Richard opines that:

John Updike is probably the finest stylist writing fiction today. He has tight control not only of the sentence and the paragraph but also of the eye and ear. Updike’s style reflects the disciplined imagination at work on the riddling surface of sense experience, probing for a way inside. Fidelity to the multiple small sensations of modern living is John Updike’s first achievement. Updike probably has more sheer talent than any other writer of our time. (p.7)
Updike seems to be one of the representative contemporary American writers. David Galloway feels that Updike has a vision of the spiritual sterility and loneliness of the modern environment and that he has “made a major and distinct contribution to our understanding of the contemporary milieu and presents us with an adequate critical mass that warrant such detailed analysis. The value of his diverse examinations of the absurd modern environment is of acute significance to this generation”. (p.10)

Updike won the prestigious National Book Award in 1964. His acceptance speech is quoted by George W. Hunt in “John Updike and The Three Great Secret Things”, Updike has said:

Fiction is a tissue of literal lies that refreshes and informs our sense of actuality. Reality is – chemically, atomically, biologically – a fabric of microscopic accuracies. Language approximates phenomena through a series of hesitations and qualifications; I miss, in much contemporary writing, this sense of self-qualification, the kind of timid reverence toward what exists that Cezanne shows when he grapples for the shape and shade of a fruit through a mist of delicate stabs. The intensity of the grapple is the surest pleasure a writer receives. Though our first and final impression of Creation is not that it was achieved by taking pains, perhaps we should proceed in the
humble faith that, by taking pains, word by word, to be accurate, we put ourselves on the way toward making something useful and beautiful and, in a word, good. (p.49)

Updike’s speech provides ample evidence to the fact that he is a sincere and committed creative writer reverentially recreating reality to do some good to his fellow men. Living in the “Gutenberg galaxy” Updike shines as a successful writer. Melville has said that to create a “mighty book” an author should deal with a “mighty theme”. But Updike deals with ordinary, mundane day-to-day affairs and yet achieves greatness. The satiric delineation of the everyday life of familiar segments of contemporary society has been the subject matter and theme for generations of fiction writers from Fanny Burney to Thackeray and Anthony Powell. In the nineteenth century, Henry James and others found in the contemporary scene the major source of their fiction. Following Henry James many American short story writers, turned their talents to the quietly perceptive, occasionally humorous, and almost always satiric depiction of contemporary manners and mores. In this regard, William Penden has pointed out:

Much of the most important American short fiction has been in this province of the usual and the unexceptional. John Cheever, John O’Hara, Peter Taylor and John Updike seem to be among the most representative of the many talented and perceptive writers who have
for the most part concerned themselves with incidents in the lives of ordinary men and women in familiar or immediately recognizable situations and have created a contemporary fiction of manners characterized by skill urbanity and insight. (p.30)

Of these chroniclers of the unexceptional, John Updike seems the most distinguished, appealing, and attractive because of his lucid, lyrical, and poetic prose which deals with both the mundane and the metaphysical themes. The metaphysical theme is dug deep into the common, seemingly simple experience. Only a diligent reader can delve into it. This implicitness acts as the main attraction of the author, and compels one to read his stories again and again. The depth in his stories demands a detailed study.

Apart from depth, Updike has amazingly varying talents. About his versatility Rachael Burshard has said:

Perhaps no contemporary author can match the overwhelming variety to John Updike’s publications. There is Updike the generous and amiable critic, Updike the urbane short story writer for the New Yorker, Updike the play Wright, wrestling a historical figure from anonymity; Updike the poet; and most important, there is Updike the novelist, for whom words and rhythms often achieve a breath taking lyricism. (p.1)
Updike’s sincerity, depth and talent have secured him a permanent place in American literary tradition. As pointed out in *Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing*, “He has the charm of a writer committed to writing as a special way of engaging the world. Through all his role playing and groping, his acts of homage and irony, Updike, offers, his prose style, his etiquette as a writer, as a model of perception and sensitivity”.(p.148)

John Updike was born in 1932, in Shillington, Pennsylvania. He graduated from Harvard College in 1954, and spent a year in Oxford, England, at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Arts. From 1955 to 1957 he was a member of the staff of *The New Yorker*. *The New Yorker* has played an important role in John Updike’s career as a short story writer. In this connection, in the foreword to *The Early Stories* John Updike has observed, “What would have happened to me if William Shawn had not liked my work? Those first checks, in modest hundreds, added up and paid for my first automobile. Without *The New Yorker*, I would have had to walk. I would have existed, no doubt, in some sort, but not the bulk of these stories”.

John Updike is a prolific writer who has won many awards, medals, honors and titles. He has won the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, the American Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award, the Rosenthal Award, the Howells Medal, PEN/ Faulkner Award for fiction, and Rea Award for
the short story among others adding up to an amazing and enviable tally of about twenty nine Awards. He has published thirty novels since 1958 apart from fourteen collections of short stories, ten books of poetry, a play and ten collections of essays. Of these fourteen short story collections, *The Same Door, Pigeon Feathers and other stories, The Music School and Museum and Women* are selected for a study on recurring themes and techniques. Since the stories in each volume are arranged in the order in which they were written, they provide a convenient index to Updike’s development.

During the period 1953 -75 John Updike has written hundred and seven short stories. All of them with an omission of the four following short stories entitled “Intercession”, “The Pro”, “One of My Generation”, and “God Speaks” have been selected and published in the book entitled *The Early Stories* in the year 2003. A majority of these early stories are included in the four selected collections. Hence they gain a collective significance. In the foreword to *The Early Stories* John Updike has commented upon the interrelatedness of these collections as follows, “each seems to have a purling flow that amounts to a story of its own, a story in turn part of a larger tale, the lived life evoked by these fragments chipped from experience and rounded by imagination into impersonal artifacts”. (p.XII)
The Same Door was published in 1959 and has sixteen short stories. They span a period from the beginning of Updike’s career to his establishment as a respected young artist. The collection marks a significant starting point in the literary life of the author. Richard Watts, Jr., in his article in New York Post has observed: “These stories are brilliant revelations of character through small incidents … They somehow reminded me of those unforgettable stories in James Joyce’s Dubliners”.

Pigeon Feathers and other stories was the second collection published by the author in the year 1962. It is acclaimed by many that this collection comprises of stories that stand as proof of the most sustained stylistic achievements of the author. Besides, the stories are far different from the well executed but some what superficial slices of life offered in the earlier stories.

In the second collection there is a decided shift in Updike’s treatment of his material. From the pure vignette like stories the author has moved towards the story which illustrates an idea. Though the locale is same, the concern is deeper. So most of the stories are frequently anthologized. Updike himself has said, “In my memory there is grayness to that period of my life in Ipswich a certain desperation out of which I struggled to piece together those lost fragmentary stories in Pigeon Feathers, which I think of, in retrospect, as my best”. In praise of this collection Granville Hicks in his article in Saturday Review has stated that
“Updike is not merely talented; he is bold, resourceful, and intensely serious… We hear talk now and then of a breakthrough in fiction, the achievement of a new attitude and hence of a new method; something like that seems close at hand in *Pigeon Feathers*”.

*The Music school* was published in the year 1966. It marks the transitional stage in Updike’s literary career. George W. Hunt has suggested that, “one must turn to the short story, especially those collected in *The Music School* for the materials that record this period of transition”.

The transition is marked by the change of Updike’s fictional locale. It has moved from Pennsylvania to New England. The stories no longer reflect boyhood reflections alone. They include adult concerns also. Updike remarks that the difference between the two geographical locations “are stages on my pilgrim’s progress, not dots on a map”. Charles T. Samuels in his review of the collection in *The Nation* has claimed that, “The Music School is Updike’s best collection, with superior examples of every sort of story that he writes… Is there another new American novelist who gives such continuous proof of the power of art?” (p.328-329)

*Museums and Women* was published in the year 1972 and has twenty nine short stories. Tony Tanner claims that each one of them is “extremely readable”
Updike has remarked in “The Dog Wood Tree – A Boyhood” that “Sex, religion and art are the three great secret things”. These three secrets and nostalgia combined with a sense of loss – personal, social and spiritual are the major recurring themes of the short stories. The study deals with these major recurring themes and the techniques employed in the select short story collections.

**Chapter II - The ceaseless quest for the three great secrets: sex, religion and art** - deals with the “Three Great Secrets”. Updike’s characters, a number of them include artist as well, are found to be seriously involved in the search of these three elusive secrets. As George W.Hunt has pointed out they overlap with each other and lead to the richness of the story in the collections. The chapter presents instances from the collections that delineate how the deep and unique religious concern of John Updike shifts sex from mundane sensuality to the solemn scaffoldings of religion and presents evidences that reflect the author’s profound religiousness besides, providing a brief account of the religious philosophy of Soren Keikegaard and the swiss theologian Karl Barth which shaped the author’s religious attitudes and his world view. The chapter concludes revealing Updike’s notions on art and artistic vocation and his compelling
commitment to the “transcription” of reality as reflected in the existence of the middle class people living in New England suburbia.

Chapter III – *The lingering plaintive melody of nostalgia and loss* - Portrays John Updike as an American romantic whose nostalgia is reflected as “a constant theme in his fiction” It also highlights instances of Updike’s characters’ flight to the past or memory not as an escape but as a tranquilizer or as an aid to understand or to tackle the challenging and unnerving present which is befuddled with flux and an overwhelming sense of loss. The chapter concludes pointing out how memory becomes a unifying structural principle in many of the stories in the collections, by citing suitable examples.

Chapter IV – *The treasure trove of John Updike’s techniques* – deals with the innovations and experimentation of the author in his efforts “to transcribe” the fragmented and frustrating realities of the promiscuous, pragmatic and secular American society. It also enumerates the special features of his prose which is simultaneously simple and ornate, lyrical and metaphysical besides, being precise, vivid and fresh. An analogy, drawn between James Joyce and John Updike on the use of the technique of epiphany, as explored by Alice and Kenneth Hamilton concludes the chapter.

George W. Hunt opines that the major recurring themes interweave, complement, and illuminate each other in each of his works. Like a musical
composition with themes and variations, these are his motives or tonic centers that, even when muted or wedded with subordinate themes, still resonate for the attentive listener. In addition to their significance as themes, there is often intermutuality among symbols and images whereby, for example, a sexual (or artistic) image will have, in subtle fashion, a religious referent, or an explicit religious image will disclose, besides, a sexual (or artistic) referent, and so on. An investigation of these symbol or image clusters as they interact with each other will point to the extraordinarily complex texture and multi-referential quality of his fiction.

Chapter II, III and IV deal with the recurring themes and techniques in the short story collections and seeks to identify the main concern of the author that compelled him to focus the same themes again and again in his short stories. Based on the analysis of the critical opinion on his short stories, the study suggests that John Updike is a serious author of profound spiritual depth. His spirituality colored his stories; it echoed in the tone, it illuminated his metaphors, it reverberated in the meditations of his characters, in short, it molded all the elements of his short stories.

In the concluding chapter the thesis is summed up highlighting Updike’s achievements as a short story writer and as a seeker of truth-The Truth which edifies, for he believed in the announcement of his religious mentor Kierkegaard that “only the truth which edifies is Truth for thee”.
