

The English Short Story in the 1890s

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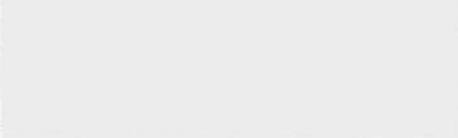
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This thesis was composed by myself.



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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to draw attention to the work of a sadly-neglected genre. The short fiction printed in England in the 1890s has great variety and scope, and there is much work of literary enterprise and value which merits close attention. The method of the thesis is to proceed by 'readings', in depth, of a large number of short stories, thereby highlighting the importance of the genre. The first chapter establishes the theoretical arguments which authors and critics of the 1890s applied to the genre, and places the short story in its general historical context. A distinction is made between the traditional magazine story to which most of the fiction conforms, and a new creative story, written by authors alert to the potential of the form itself. Chapter Two considers the achievements and drawbacks of the traditional story, and Chapter Three the range of new short fiction, through a survey of the most important (though little discussed) avant-garde periodicals.

The main concern of this thesis is with individual authors. My choice of which authors to discuss has been determined by considerations of quality: they are, in my opinion, the authors writing the best, most imaginative and innovative fiction in the period. These questions of literary excellence are investigated by detailed descriptions of the significant achievements of new authors as they experiment with, and so develop, the genre. Chapter Four documents Henry James's uneasy relationship with traditional magazine fiction, and his efforts to concentrate the reader's attention and his responsibilities towards the text. Chapter Five considers the work of Hubert Crackanthorpe in the wider context of realistic fiction in England and France, and contests the claim that English writers simply

plagiarise the work of Maupassant. Chapter Six treats the stories of the radical feminist author George Egerton, and the way her work combines uncompromising themes with highly conventional narrative techniques. Chapter Seven considers the technical innovations made by Frederick Wedmore, another underrated figure. His allusive, sophisticated stories make an important contribution to short fiction. All the various possibilities of the short story are realised in the work of a single writer, Rudyard Kipling. The astonishing range of his work, which is discussed in the final chapter, shows the short story flourishing—at its finest and most mature. It is in Kipling's hands that the English short story of the 1890s becomes a great art form.

## PREFACE

A great deal has been written about the 1890s. Particular attention has been paid to biographical work, and there are countless volumes of memoirs recalling the atmosphere and the personalities of this fascinating period. There is also a considerable amount of critical literature which discusses important developments and movements in drama, poetry and the novel. One form of fiction has, however, been virtually forgotten: the short story. The short story was arguably the most popular form of literature in the 1890s, and the public read a vast quantity of stories which appeared in well-established magazines, new periodicals and in volume form. Short fiction was eagerly discussed during the decade, yet there has been hardly any detailed twentieth-century work on the genre. It is the main aim of the thesis to draw attention to this neglected art, and to work of considerable variety and quality in the short fiction published in England in the 1890s.

There is a need for a study of short fiction which concentrates on the literary achievement of important, but still underrated, writers of the 1890s. Most studies of short fiction deal with the period rather inattentively. There are a number of general critical books on the history of short fiction; these, due to their broad nature, cannot dwell in great detail on the work of one period. The aim of such work tends to group the writers into particular 'schools', rather than deal with them as individual artists. Examples of such general books are: Evelyn Albright, The Short-Story (1907); T.O. Beachcroft, The Modest Art: A Survey of the Short Story (1968); H.S. Canby, A Study of the Short Story (1913).<sup>1</sup>

1. Full details of these works, and of others mentioned in the preface, are to be found in the bibliography.

Brief references to several of the lesser known authors of the 1890s are to be found in Ernest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel: The Day Before Yesterday (1938), and William C. Frierson, The English Novel in Transition 1885—1940 (1942). Wendell V. Harris has written the standard work on the history of the short story in the nineteenth century; his article remains the most valuable starting-point for all studies of short fiction in this period.<sup>2</sup> James Tye's thesis 'Literary Periodicals of the Eighteen Nineties' (1970) is also an indispensable source of factual information about short fiction in journals.

A more detailed study of the short story in the 1890s is made in H.E. Bates, The Modern Short Story (1941), though Bates challenges H.G. Wells's often-quoted opinion (made in the introduction to The Country of the Blind, 1911), that the 1890s was a period of major achievement in the genre. Derek Stanford's biographical anthology Short Stories of the 'Nineties (1968) reprints the work of several important, though neglected authors, as does Peter Keating's Working-Class Stories of the 1890s (1971). In general, modern critics treat the short story of the decade in passing, and in a historical way. This study brings the actual stories into much closer focus.

The many valuable and hitherto ignored reviews and articles published in the magazines of the 1890s provide much detailed and significant information, and these have been regularly consulted. The student of short fiction will find a wealth of comment and opinion on the genre recorded in journals such as the Academy and the Athenaeum. With the help of such contemporary material, this thesis attempts to

2. 'English Short Fiction in the 19th Century', Studies in Short Fiction, 6 (1968), 1—93.

emphasise the work of the most important creative artists of the period. Close attention to the fiction itself will reveal the high quality and literary value of the English short story in the 1890s.

...the same into captivity... the short story, which in the last fifteen years has become the most important form of English literature... Short stories had been written before Kipling's time, but they had never had a hold on the public.

In 1890, the year to which the writer Herbert Giles refers, short story authors suddenly seemed to have discovered the great possibilities of their form. Kipling, James, and numerous authors who wrote for one professional outlet as the Ladies' Book and the Illustrated were responsible for creating a style and concept that were which flourished in England during the last decade of the nineteenth century.

They did not only give to the creative possibilities which short story authors were exploring in the 1890s. It was also true that a report of their individual show... quality carrying quality. They picture the difficult... the writer, surrounded by the circle of eager short story authors... seem to reach a new point in popularity... to suggest that there are more factors involved in producing a story for publication than its inherent quality.

...of an artist actually... as women... they are not... world telling... material... they are rejected. They are usually written by persons... they have had no artistic training.

THE SHORT STORY IN ENGLAND, 1890-1914  
A Critical Study in Progress (1920)



## INTRODUCTION

Five years ago, with the advent of Kipling, a new form of writing came into popularity—the short story, and to-day the best fiction produced in England is in short story writing. Short stories had been written before Kipling's time, but they had never had a hold on the public.

In 1890, the year to which the critic Sherwin Cody refers, short story authors suddenly seemed to come alive to the great possibilities of their form. Kipling, James, and numerous authors who wrote for new periodicals such as the Yellow Book and the Savoy, were responsible for creating a vital and independent genre which flourished in England during the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Cody was not only alive to the creative possibilities which short story authors were exploring in the 1890s. He was aware that a popular genre produced in vast quantities would inevitably result in work of greatly varying quality. Cody pictures the difficult choice facing an editor overwhelmed by the claims of eager short story authors keen to reach a vast public in magazines such as the Strand or Cornhill. He suggests that there are more factors involved in choosing a story for publication than its intrinsic quality:

Many of the stories actually printed in the magazines are so commonplace they are not worth telling, and are not materially better than hundreds that are rejected. They are usually written by persons who have before written stories

1. How to Write Fiction: Especially the Art of Short Story Writing. A Practical Study of Technique (1895).

with valuable ideas in them, stories worth telling, and the editor in accepting the commonplace story by the same author assumes that if the author wrote one or more good stories, the present story must in some way be worth telling. (p.119)

The great majority of stories written in the 1890s are 'common-place', and owe their existence to such speculative editorship. The authors write what may be called 'format-fiction', paying particular attention to established principles of style, content and function. This body of literature has entertainment as its main aim; a noble purpose which is, sadly, often compromised by authors unwilling to vary their art. Three-hundred thousand copies of a popular magazine like the Strand in circulation each year offer convincing arguments in favour of the traditional story. This type of short fiction has a distinctive linear narration, and, always, a thrilling crisis. Characters make instantaneous moral and emotional decisions, and constantly live with the prospect of disaster or glorious joy before them. The stories end with satisfying conclusions: mysteries are solved, lovers reunited, order restored. The writers of the formula story invariably play safe, and their work is often perfunctory as a result. Whilst rigid conformity to the 'rules' of narrative composition can lead to repetitive fiction, the authors of the traditional short story do contribute a great deal of memorable work. The particular sub-genres of the detective, ghost and humorous story bring out all that is best in such fiction precisely because the aim of entertainment is significant; the authors allow their imagination a free range and are never over-serious.

The writers of the new short story make graver claims. It is a

feature of this new short story, with which the thesis is primarily concerned, that the authors would rather pose the reader moral problems than make him relax; accordingly, authors tend to take risks with their form in the search for creative effect. The failures of the new short story are often embarrassing, but the triumphs are magnificent. Stories like 'The Turn of the Screw' and Kipling's 'On Greenhow Hill' are, simply, great works of literature.

Features of the new short story in the 1890s include the constant exploration of new narrative voices and techniques; the introduction of radical and polemical themes; the development of an impersonal, documentary style; the free-ranging inquiry into topics of psychology and sexual emotion. New authors share a creative integrity: they wish to advance the means of expression within the short story, and they do so by experimenting with, and so developing the genre. This experimentation takes many different forms, and depends entirely upon the creative personality of each author. James is concerned with the role of the narrator; Crackanthorpe with language and an effectively reticent style; Egerton with ideals; Wedmore with irony and allusion. To experiment was Kipling's ideal, and his tales show the potential of the short story in the 1890s to the full.

It is, however, simplistic to assume that the traditional and the new short story are, by definition, incompatible and isolated types, and respectively poor or excellent in quality. The new short story owes much to traditional fiction, and surprising points of contact are often made. These occur, for example, in similar treatments of melodramatic emotions and situations. In the traditional story melodramatic situations create the high tension which authors felt was a literary virtue in its own right, and a vital feature of the reader's

entertainment. In the new short story, similar melodramatic events were meant to prompt the reader to a new awareness of the moral and social crisis present in daily life, and the fiction is often more disturbing. One common feature of the new short story of quality is this assault on the reader's equanimity: new short fiction will generally disturb, rather than pacify, the reader.

There are, of course, moments when authors have a gentler aim. In the so-called 'aesthetic' stories a lyrical and descriptive prose style is used to extract much metaphorical significance from a particular scene—be it pastoral or urban landscape. Stories by authors such as Oscar Wilde or Richard Le Gallienne, which concentrate on extravagant or poetical word-play for their effect, represent one sub-genre whose potential was quickly exhausted in the 1890s. Poetical prose tends to self-indulgence, and the author's rapture before his chosen scene seems suspect, especially to a reader anticipating a straightforward narrative and the minimum of description. The aesthetic stories do represent a serious attempt to develop the range of the genre, by moving away from the constant diet of dramatic plot and thrilling crisis; but the technique is essentially limited, and the actual results disappointing. It is ironic that the term 'aesthetic' has no great significance for the short story, since it was almost a cultural watchword during the 1890s.

The aesthetic short story is only briefly discussed because its ornamental prose cannot offer lasting satisfaction. The question of literary quality is central to this study, the aim of which is to discuss in detail the best short stories of the decade. The new authors themselves were only too aware that a genre represented by most magazine fiction could never be accepted as a serious and creative art form.

The new authors joined in a committed attempt to infuse variety, style and profound social comment into the genre, and to raise the standard of short fiction to an unprecedented height. A large number of compelling stories written during the 1890s testifies to the success of this great endeavour.

The terms which contemporary critics and authors use to describe the short story in the 1890s reveal their hopes for the genre, and point to a lively interest in theoretical debate. Henry James attempted to establish a list of formal descriptive terms, though they did not pass into current usage, each author preferring to remain faithful to his own particular choice of vocabulary. In common with other writers James uses one term with a variety of meanings, which depend on context and even mood. James's terminology can be qualitative: he will call one of his own stories a 'short story' (using quotation marks), to demonstrate approval. Yet he will also call a conventional story a 'short story' to emphasise the lowly station of such work. James often calls stories which he particularly admires 'nouvelles' or 'contes'; here he marks his respect for French fiction. The term 'conte' is often employed when discussing Maupassant, and suggests work with concise style and telling brevity. These French terms are also applied when James discusses the work of English authors whose writing has been influenced by French authors.

James regularly calls his own works of short fiction 'tales' or 'short novels'. The tale could be a highly foreshortened account of a single incident, in which case it would be termed an 'anecdote'.

An amplified survey of complex emotions would be called a 'picture'. A 'short novel' was an even longer work, involving more characters, a greater variety of settings and often a sub-plot. James uses his terminology to proclaim the need for a new type of long short story (the picture) for which there was no precedent, and no readily available vocabulary in the 1890s.

James's terminology is highly specialised. Other critics of short fiction use the French terms 'conte' and 'nouvelle'. Sometimes this vocabulary is present simply to show off the critics' sophistication, and the terms have no sharpness of definition. Critics also use French terms to demonstrate that they considered the best English short fiction worthy of special theoretical comment. They were careful to distinguish the genre from the novel, for short story authors, it was felt, had unique creative responsibilities. Harland, Wedmore and Crackanthorpe—all widely read in French literature—often speak of the 'conte'. Their critical discussions generally involve a survey of French influences and so the use of the term is natural. The American critic Brander Matthews, who was keen to be regarded as an authority on short fiction, regularly uses the term 'tale', and here he adopts Poe's use of the word. Matthews' basic term—and the one most commonly employed by contemporary commentators—is, however, the 'Short-story' (which he writes with a capital S and a hyphen). Critics also use the terms 'anecdote' and 'sketch', but without specific theoretical meaning. The tone of the term may be determined by the tone of the passage in which it is used. Thus 'sketch' may be complimentary if the critic is drawing attention to an author's skill in the brief space; or it may be derogatory if that author has failed to provide the customary clearly defined characters and regular linear plot.

Terminology in the 1890s depends on a wide variety of factors, from a critic's personal taste to a specific theoretical definition. Because of this often confusing state of affairs I have decided to use only two terms in this thesis to describe anything from the briefest to the longest work: 'short story' and 'short fiction'. In a study which considers a large number of works, the repetition of the adjective 'short' is sometimes monotonous, and for this reason I have also, very occasionally, used the term 'tale'. These three terms are synonymous.

## HISTORY AND THEORY

Andrew Lang and Paul Sylvester, writing in their introduction to a collection of French short stories in 1889, were despondent about the future of the genre in England. 'It is not probable', they admitted, 'that the stories in this little collection will win many English readers to an affection for the conte, though the translators hope against hope for this result'.<sup>1</sup> They felt they were working for a literary cause incomprehensible to the reading public. Short stories, it seemed, did not matter. If a Victorian critic talked about fiction, he meant, exclusively, the novel. Indeed Lang and Sylvester took a considerable risk in even publishing their book. They did not hold out much future for the sake of the short story form. This effort to awaken interest in the tales of Gautier, Mérimée, Balzac and others seemed foolhardy. The translators knew that they were having to entice the British reader, who liked to make one single effort to become involved in his text. To have to make, say, twelve efforts in one volume, was asking too much:

We prefer to make it only once, to get interested in the characters once for all, and then to loiter with them through, perhaps, 400,000 words of more or less consecutive narrative. If this theory be correct, short stories will never have much success in England, and, consequently, will not often be well written, because there is no prize in praise or money offered to him who writes them well. It would be hard to mention a single collection of contes which has really

1. The Dead Leman and Other Tales from the French, edited and translated by Andrew Lang and Paul Sylvester (1889), introduction, p.xii. Place of publication of all books cited is London unless otherwise stated.



prospered among English-speaking people, except the stories of Poe. (pp.ix—x)

Publishers and readers demanded their fiction in bulk, and authors were not encouraged to write short stories when the long novel had such a tight hold on the market. These factors kept serious short fiction—that is, stories dedicated to realising the full creative potential of the form, by experimenting with new subject-matter and new narrative techniques—out of magazines and books before the 1890s.

The Dead Leman makes a courageous bid on behalf of the form; but Lang and Sylvester select French, and not English, stories. Henry James, reviewing Maupassant's work in 1888, bemoans the fact that whilst the French have a well-established tradition of short fiction, English readers are content to 'take their fiction rather by the volume than by the page'.<sup>2</sup> Hence the 'little story is but scantily relished'. (p.374) James had a personal as well as a historical grievance; he could not get his own short stories published, since the market for them did not exist. Quality did not matter, for as James explained in a letter to W.D. Howells, again in 1888, 'though I have for a good while past been writing a number of good short things, I remain irremediably unpublished. Editors keep them back, for months and years, as if they were ashamed of them, and I am condemned apparently to eternal silence'.<sup>3</sup>

For Thomas Hardy, even five years later in 1893, the situation had not improved much. He repeated James's complaint when he wrote to Florence Henniker about her projected volume of short stories (to be published as Outlines in 1894). Editors were not interested, for short stories simply did not sell well:

2. 'Guy de Maupassant', Fortnightly Review, NS43 (March 1888), 374.
3. The Letters of Henry James, edited by Percy Lubbock, 2 vols (1920), I, p.136.

You must remember that in England there is very little to be made commercially out of short tales—and that publishers are as a rule shy of them, except those that are written by people who cannot write long ones successfully—an odd exception!—and have established a speciality in that line. 4

For the few writers of short fiction, for those who sought to publish stories in volume form, and for the literary historians, the message in the late 1880s was the same. 'We are still curiously behindhand in the short story', or, 'the art of writing Short Stories is neglected'. 5

The history of the short story throughout most of the nineteenth century showed the genre to be just as neglected, in the sense that the short story had little of the economy or unity of effect which were to become its hallmarks in the 1890s. Wendell Harris notes, rather sweepingly, that, 'wherever one looks among the short fiction of the first three-quarters of the century, including that of Dickens, Collins, Mrs Gaskell, Trollope, and Thackeray, one is more likely than not to discover a diffuseness that displays itself in lack of economy and uncertainty of tone'. 6 Exceptions were to be found in the stories of Blackwood's, established in 1817. This was the first magazine in the nineteenth century to provide a steady and respectable market for short fiction.

4. One Rare Fair Woman: Thomas Hardy's Letters to Florence Henniker 1893—1922, edited by Evelyn Hardy and F.B. Pinion (London and Basingstoke, 1972), pp.29—30.
5. George Saintsbury, 'The Present State of the English Novel [1892]', in The Collected Essays and Papers of George Saintsbury 1875—1920, 4 vols (London and Toronto, 1923—24), III (1923), p.122. [Brander Matthews], 'Short Stories', Saturday Review, 58 (July 1884), 32.
6. 'English Short Fiction in the 19th Century', Studies in Short Fiction, 6 (1968), 3.

The stories included sentimental romances, comic tales, accounts of legends, or narratives of strange events often in foreign lands. Edgar Allan Poe wrote in praise of the 'tales of effect, many fine examples of which were found in the earlier numbers of Blackwood'.<sup>7</sup> He referred specifically here to horror stories, though in an earlier essay called 'How to Write a Blackwood Article' he had effectively satirized the extravagant nature of such sensational fiction.<sup>8</sup>

Magazines such as Fraser's, Dickens' Household Words, Macmillan's and the Cornhill published melodramatic romances, moral stories, adventure and ghost stories. All of this short fiction, published in increasingly large quantities from the middle of the century, had a specific purpose to entertain and amuse the reader. There was no effort to portray everyday human experience. The standard of the fiction was generally mediocre, and written, as Harris comments, with 'consistent but uninspired competence'. (p.36) Short fiction up to the 1880s consisted of a great number of ordinary, generally sentimental tales, with very few examples of excellent work.

As a survey of those magazines which printed tales in the 1880s shows, the form was still not taken seriously. Magazine editors regarded them as pot-boilers, affording light relief from the omnipresent serial novel. No writer took advantage of the form, and no-one assumed that short stories could do more than pass the time of day. Even if there was, as the literary historian Brander Matthews said, a profusion of brief tales, 'they were, for the most part, the unimportant productions

7. The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, edited by James A. Harrison, Virginia edition, 17 vols (New York, 1965), XI, p.109.

8. Reprinted in Complete Works, II, pp.269—95.

of the less gifted writers'.<sup>9</sup>

The tales which appeared in Chambers's Journal in the 1880s were typical. The adventure stories, romances, fantasies and melodramas were serenely untroubled by any desire to extend the imagination of the reader. The standard clichés of chance meetings, quirks of fate, incredible circumstances or mysterious surroundings were constantly re-worked. Harper aimed at an élitist audience, dressed up the characters in fine lace, introduced historical themes and glamorous foreign settings to the standard romance-adventure format, and thought itself sophisticated. Macmillan's ran fantasy stories and romantic adventures in the 1880s, and made an effort to introduce some credibility to its short fiction by using reported narrative. The stories began with the narrator relating a tale told to him by another person. The narrative thus became an 'objective' discourse of factual truth. Longman's had a leaning towards the descriptive essay, but most of the themes were romantic or melodramatic. Men passed their great trials and women married their heroes on the last page. Altogether the fiction was inevitable, repetitive, and instantly forgettable. Since all these magazines depended on the serial novel, and such journals as Temple Bar, Cornhill, and the English Illustrated almost exclusively published serial novels, the short story had no choice but to comfort the reader. It made no claims, it soothed the nerves. The role of short fiction was merely to let the reader rest and relax from the bigger effort of his novel.

Two authors who were able to use reputations gained from writing successful novels in order to count on a market for their volumes of

9. The Short-Story: Specimens Illustrating its Development (New York, 1907), introduction, p.30.

short stories in the 1880s were Hardy and Stevenson. Neither relied on the story alone for their livelihood. Stevenson was highly conscious of the possibilities offered by the form of the short story. He saw that its brevity could be used to isolate a didactic point to considerable effect. In this he shows the influence of the fables of Aesop and Henryson, despite the historical settings of many of his stories. Otherwise his tales are extravagant romances dealing with bizarre situations and improbable events.

'Markheim' (in The Merry Men and other Tales and Fables, 1887, pp. 111—34) is a good example of Stevenson's macabre fiction. It is a grim story of a cold-blooded murder which becomes a study of the criminal's confusion, his motive and regret. The tale carries moral overtones on the nature of guilt and temptation. In this, it anticipates the psychological narrative of the short story of the 1890s, where considerable emphasis is laid on often neurotic mental tension, with a similar disregard for the strong rule of the plot. Stevenson deals with the great moral absolutes of good and evil in his story, whereas the later fiction concentrates on the realistic effect of psychological tension in specific domestic surroundings.

Stevenson is also in advance of his time in his belief, expressed in his essay 'A Humble Remonstrance', that in certain circumstances (mainly in the 'novel of character'), no coherency of plot is required. Far more important are 'the humours of the persons represented; these are, to be sure, embodied in incidents, but the incidents themselves, being tributary, need not march in a progression; and the characters may be statically shown'.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, 'Markheim', with its

10. Longman's, 5 (December 1884), 144—45.

emphasis on the murderer's mind, is a short story 'of character', with little attention to linear detail, a stress of psychological study, appealing to 'our intellectual appreciation of man's foibles and mingled and inconstant motives'. (p.143)

Hardy's stories in the 1880s, as one might expect, thrive on coincidence, the melodramatic and the gothic. Most of them are no more than queer anecdotes or unpleasant histories of jilted love and tragic misunderstanding. The material is chosen to take the reader's mind away from the tedious facts of urban existence; here he can be entertained by extraordinary ironies. The insistence on chance and coincidence means that the fiction lives much more for incident than for character. Technical ingenuity (getting the impossible to happen) makes the plot all-important. The interest of these 'mere stop-gaps' (as Hardy referred to his stories) is solely in the narrative.<sup>11</sup> The noble dames, the love-sick young men, the mysterious strangers from foreign lands are all as interchangeable as the brothers Halborough in a typical Hardy short story of the decade, 'A Tragedy of Two Ambitions',<sup>12</sup> as they follow each other's footsteps, thoughts and careers.

Despite the generally poor standard of the short story in the 1880s, historical changes in the early years of the next decade did however allow the form to flourish. A new attitude to short fiction begins to take effect. One vital reason for the acceptance of the story is to be found in the decline of the three-decker novel.<sup>13</sup> In mid nineteenth-

11. One Rare Fair Woman, p.156.

12. Universal Review, 2 (December 1888), pp.537-60.

13. See Guinevere L. Griest, Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel (Newton Abbot, 1970), pp.6-7.

century England, authors and publishers acknowledged that the three-decker was the foundation of published fiction. Authors made their reputations by writing three-volume novels, and consolidated those reputations through the circulating libraries, of which Mudie's Select Lending Library was the most influential. In the British magazine as well, 'the serial Novel is the one thing of consequence, and all else is termed "padding". In England the writer of three-volume Novels is the best paid of literary labourers'.<sup>14</sup>

By the late 1880s, this influence on reading matter and habits was waning. George Moore's bitter attack on Mudie's monopoly, printed in 1885 with the sarcastic title Literature at Nurse, showed how tyrannical the system was. No fiction was published that did not come in the three-decker form, or that did not conform to Mudie's puritan taste. Moore wanted the author to have complete freedom of choice both in his subject-matter and in his format. He made no specific claim for the short story, simply for the emancipation of fiction in general. The short tale would be able to flourish if the three-decker was removed, and Mudie's grip weakened. Moore's quotation from Carlyle, on the title-page of his pamphlet, intimated that the downfall of the three-decker was immediate. In 1894, libraries banned the three-decker novel, and only four were published in 1897. Moore's quotation reads:

One day the Mudic mountain,  
which seemed to stand strong  
like other rock mountains, gave  
suddenly, as the icebergs do, a  
loud-sounding crack; suddenly,  
with huge clangour, shivered  
itself into ice dust; and sank,  
carrying much along with it.<sup>15</sup>

14. Brander Matthews, The Philosophy of the Short-Story (New York, 1901), p.56.
15. Literature at Nurse; or, circulating Morals (1885), titlepage.

The disappearance of the three-decker coincided with a decline in the power and influence of Mudie's Library, and of the other lending libraries. This left a space for a new and shorter type of fiction which was filled by the single volume novel, and increasingly by the short story. A gradual change in reading material helped too. The acceptance of naturalistic and realistic authors from France helped to make English writers aware that there were new areas of human experience which could properly become the subject of fiction. Until 1885 French writers of the new school were largely ignored in England. There were a few clandestine imports of these 'obscene' novels, and that was all. But with Zola's fame at its height abroad, the French publisher Vizetelly resolved to publish English translations of his and other realistic works. Between 1884 and 1888 translations appeared of novels by Flaubert, Maupassant and the Goncourts, together with all of the Rougon-Macquart series up to La Terre. The free treatment of realistic themes, and the frank observation of working-class life helped to prepare the ground for a new type of short story. This short story dealt with people and not caricatures; real environments and not comfortable fantasy worlds. Realism, and the rise of the short story in the 1890s as an independent and serious art form, are inseparably linked. As a reviewer in the Athenaeum observed in 1894:

Along with the short story ("poisonous honey stol'n from France") has come a new licence in dealing imaginatively with life, almost permitting the Englishman to contend with the writers of other nations on their own ground; permitting him, that is to say, to represent life as it really is. <sup>16</sup>

16. 'English Literature in 1893', Athenaeum, 72 (January 1894), 17—19.



A change in publication methods helped to prepare for the influx of stories during the 1890s. The expansion of mass-circulating magazines, notably Macmillan's, Longman's and the Strand, helped to make the short story popular, and to give it an independent identity. The National Observer, according to H.G. Wells, 'was at the climax of its career of heroic insistence upon lyrical brevity and a vivid finish'.<sup>17</sup> The New Review continued the tradition of printing excellent short stories. The conservative pages of the Fortnightly Review carried good short fiction. As Wells remarked, the 1890s was a period of such intense interest in the genre that no short story writer 'of the slightest distinction went for long unrecognized'. (p.v) The Yellow Book printed avant-garde stories, and, as we shall see, did more than any other journal to establish the form in its own right. Similarly, the Key-notes series, published by John Lane throughout the 1890s, brought new writers of short stories to a large and enthusiastic public, keen to have their work in more permanent book form. The series included many new authors—H.D. Lowry, George Egerton, Henry Harland, Ella D'Arcy, Evelyn Sharp—who made their reputations by writing short stories.

By 1890, then, the short story was beginning to live in hope. Henry James had enough confidence in the artistic potential of the form to write to his brother William in May of this year to say that he planned to concentrate on his tales and disregard the novel. The future popularity of the short story depended on such moments of courage and confidence. James declared: 'The Tragic Muse is to be my last long novel. For the rest of my life I hope to do lots of short things with irresponsible

17. H.G. Wells, The Country of the Blind and Other Stories (1911), introduction, p.v.

spaces between. I see even a great future (ten years) of such'.<sup>18</sup>

Percy Addleshaw, reviewing Kipling's Many Inventions in 1893, emphasised the massive influence which Kipling had on that 'great future' simply by choosing to write short stories. By this time the genre was firmly established in English fiction:

At last the short story has taken firm root in English soil, though in France many a master of fiction has fashioned his most lasting creations in this form. But of late, certain English newspapers have caused a demand for such work, and Mr Kipling has been, more than any one else, its pioneer.<sup>19</sup>

The turning point was put even earlier by the Athenaeum. A review of English fiction in 1891 commented on the average merit of most books, and contrasted the novel, whose decline 'has not been arrested by the appearance of any new master', with the short story, which 'retains the popularity it has of recent years acquired, and appears to attract more talent to its service than a few years ago it could'.<sup>20</sup> From 1894 the Athenaeum gave a separate section to book reviews dedicated to the short story, rather than tacking critical comments at the foot of the novel reviews. The Academy kept up a very high standard of reviewing, in depth, selected volumes of short stories. In its new format, which began in 1898, short tales themselves began to appear. The impetus of the Yellow Book and other new periodicals helped this dramatic growth in the quality and quantity of the genre. Editors

18. The Letters of Henry James, I, p.165.

19. Academy, 44 (July 1893), 7.

20. 'English Literature in 1891', Athenaeum, 70 (January 1892), 19.

could now confidently sell their magazines using the short story, once so neglected. The short story, no longer in competition with the novel, had come to dominate the magazines of the 1890s:

The short story is an odd and wondrous thing. Publishers tell us that commercially it has little value, while (according to an enthusiastic "literary agent") the demand for it by magazine editors is enormous and increasing—and, indeed, anyone may see for himself that this is so. <sup>21</sup>

Indeed, by 1898 a reviewer was able to emphasise the importance of the genre by declaring that 'the short story had defeated the novel, or at least become its formidable rival'. <sup>22</sup>

In an important review written in 1898, Henry James takes the chance to discuss Henry Harland's short stories in a broader context. He suggests that it was the popular thing in literary circles to discuss the theory of the short story. James saw the growing importance of the short story as an awakening of consciousness. Short fiction could be written with genuine freedom of ideas, and by doing so could come of age. The methods and subject-matter of short fiction were at last mature:

Mr Harland's method is that of the "short story" which has of late become an object of such almost extravagant dissertation. If it has awaked to consciousness, however, it has doubtless only done what most things are doing in an age of organized talk. It took

21. Unsigned review of Comedies and Errors by Henry Harland, Academy Supplement, 53 (April 1898), 418.
22. Unsigned review of Stories in Light and Shadow by Bret Harte, Athenaeum, 76 (December 1898), 928.

itself, in the comparatively silent years, less seriously, and there was perhaps a more general feeling that you both wrote and read your short story best when you did so in peace and patience. 23

James overstates his point by referring to an 'extravagant dissertation' of the theory of the short story, as least as far as printed matter is concerned. There was no organised or comprehensive debate about the nature of the genre. The debate was mainly private and conversational. Much of it arose naturally from the advent of the Yellow Book which set new standards for short story writing. But this discussion led to very few theoretical documents in the form of articles and critical studies in the 1890s. This is both disappointing and surprising. A contemporary reviewer remarked:

We ought all to be full of useful information concerning the short story, for it has been much discussed; one expert has lectured amiably upon its idiosyncrasy; another, with the nicest skill, has written round and round it in reviews; the drawing-rooms of culture have echoed to its panegyric. And now, we know of it—precisely nothing. 24

Printed theoretical discussion of the form was available throughout the 1890s in three ways. The serious journals, carrying reviews of short stories, would sometimes alternate straightforward discussion of a specific volume with a more abstract criticism of what the short story could or should be doing. Several authors contributed essays to

23. 'The Story-Teller at Large: Mr Henry Harland', Fortnightly Review, NS63 (April 1898), 652.
24. Academy supplement, 53, loc. cit. The lecturer is Frederick Wedmore and the critic is Henry James.

these journals on the methods and achievements of their art. Finally, Brander Matthews wrote the first critical study of the short story form in English. The Philosophy of the Short-Story was not published until 1901, but the main argument had appeared in print as early as 1885. Nearly all of this criticism is written with an American emphasis. James, Harland and Matthews were all American, however much they were based in Europe. In turn their critical work is based on Edgar Allen Poe's seminal review of the second edition of Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales (1842). The sole important English theoretician, Frederick Wedmore, whose essay on the short story was not written until 1898, is heavily influenced by Poe and his later apologists. There was nothing in English criticism to match the lively and regular discussion of the theory and practise of the short story form which appeared in the 1890s in American literary magazines such as the Chicago Dial, the Boston Writer and the North American Review.<sup>25</sup>

The criticism which does appear in English journals—and the Academy and the Athenaeum are the most important—tends to work out theoretical clichés, rather than take a chance with spontaneous, suggestive debate. The actual nature of the review accounts for much of this conservatism. There would be neither the time nor, usually, the space for the reviewer to attend seriously to the subtleties of theory. As Andrew Land said, the 'system of hurry makes it difficult to secure a critic with special knowledge; indeed, such critics are extremely rare'.<sup>26</sup> However, standard estimates of the genre give some idea of the form

25. See Poole's Index to Periodical Literature, second, third and fourth supplements: individual articles listed under 'short story' and 'story'.

26. 'Literary Chronicle', Cosmopolis, 1 (January 1896), 71.

finding its range and its individual voice.

It was commonly held that 'the difficult art of writing a short story well' gave the author of the tale special problems which did not affect the novelist.<sup>27</sup> An art in its infancy had to learn the best means of presentation: tales could not do that by simply pretending to be 'boiled-down novels'.<sup>28</sup> The effect had to be original and the form of each story was of much significance. The writers of short fiction had to write as if the genre offered unique creative challenges, not as if it were discarded from the novelist's workshop. In the early years of the decade authors needed an example and a theoretical purpose to convince them of the creative potential of the short story. Otherwise, as one reviewer remarked, their tales simply and sadly illustrated 'what hardly needed proving—the incapacity of most English novelists to grasp the aim and object of a short story'. This was defined as the choice between 'a striking incident or a salient characteristic', upon which the author had 'to flash as it were, a concentrated glare of light . . . so as to bring it into high relief. Instead of that a short story is in England too frequently treated as a novel told shortly'.<sup>29</sup>

A new short story could avoid such failings by variety and vivid interest. The salvation of short fiction lay in the range of topics and narrative styles which could be used. The tale was, or ideally should be, brief enough to allow the adoption of each new narrative

27. Unsigned review of A Sappho of Green Springs by Bret Harte, Academy, 39 (March 1891), 279.

28. Academy, 44, loc.cit.

29. Unsigned review of Stories from "Black and White", Athenaeum, 71 (January 1893), 50.

technique to make a specific contribution to the outcome of each story. The story had its great chance to change and experiment. A novel could not do this so easily; it could not be anything but a regular and steady acquaintance, both for author and reader. A short story was faster, and it had the audacity to begin in crisis and to maintain itself at high tension.

The story had wide scope, too. It had the range to see how the quieter 'record of either an incident or a mood', the suggestive and intimate 'few words of narrative', or a 'series of crisp, direct studies' might suffice, as well as the straightforward narrative.<sup>30</sup> The constant guidelines were that short stories must be direct, concise and spare. There should be no superfluity of dialogue or narrative. A heavy emphasis on plot was also frowned upon. Bearing in mind that the short story should always be intelligible, there should be suggestion rather than definition. The story could be made intelligible by clarity of emotion and the depiction of strong character. It was necessary to know exactly where you were with the characters in each story. There was no time to be formally acquainted; the reader could not learn about people, he had to know them well from the very first word. As Addleshaw remarked:

If a short story is to be effective, the characters must be so introduced as to make the reader feel at once that he knows them personally. For in a work of this class the rapid and sure delineation

30. Academy supplement, 53, loc. cit.  
 Unsigned review of Dilemmas by Ernest Dowson, Athenaeum, 73 (August 1895), 159.  
 Unsigned review of Wreckers and Methodists by H.D. Lowry, Academy 44, 436.

of character is of even more importance than the plot.<sup>31</sup>

Here was the unique chance which the short story offered: the chance to be immediate and spontaneous. Wedmore was to call it distinction of 'pregnant brevity'.<sup>32</sup> To write 'too much at large, in a gossipy and trivial way', was the author's gravest mistake. It could be redeemed only by 'conciseness of method and clear definition of purpose'.<sup>33</sup> In this there was a clear conception of literary value. Arthur Morrison, contributing to a symposium on 'How to write a Short Story' in the Bookman (New York) in 1897, suggested that a good command of material was to be learned best from the stories of Maupassant. The perfect training ground for the young author was in these concise and essential tales. The author was recommended to read a story by the master and construct 'natural, detailed, unselected, unarranged fact' from the fiction:

Then let him compare his raw fact with the words of the master. He will see where the unessential is rejected; he will observe how everything receives its just proportion in the design; he will perceive that every incident, every sentence, and every word, had its value, its meaning, and its part in the whole.<sup>34</sup>

There was a strong critical feeling in the 1890s that a short story

31. Academy, 44, p.7.

32. 'The Short Story', Nineteenth Century, 43 (March 1898), 408.

33. Unsigned review of The Banshee's Warning and Other Tales by J.H. Riddell, Athenaeum, 72 (July 1894), 63.

34. Bookman, New York, 5 (March 1897), 45.



could become a perfect work of art. A story could be self-contained and complete. It could tell everything about its characters and its setting in the brief space. This was how the short story could overcome the limitations of its brevity, and turn shortness into strength. A short story could represent the sum total of its experience: create a world, a life, a mood, beyond which there was no need to go. The characters of a short story had no life beyond its final word. It was considered artistically irresponsible to publish work which did not bear in mind this desire for perfection of design and content. George Gissing's volume of short stories (Human Odds and Ends, 1897) was criticised simply because:

Some of the contents of this volume are not stories at all, they are the raw material of fiction, sketches, and studies, mere scraps and suggestions, without the unity and finish that in its way the conte, no less than the roman, demands. <sup>35</sup>

The belief that a short story could offer a complete and self-sufficient artistic experience was first expressed in Edgar Allan Poe's review of Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales, published in Graham's Magazine in 1842. <sup>36</sup> Poe is committed to the prose tale as a genre with exciting potential and independence. Its freedom from the novel gives it 'the immense force derivable from totality'. (p.107) The experience of reading a novel involves a constant process of recall, a constant reidentification with plot and character. You could not pick up a novel without remembering. The tale had no such leisure time, for its effect had to be intense, vivid and 'total'. The practise of reading

35. Unsigned review, Academy Fiction Supplement, 52 (December 1897), 125.

36. Reprinted in The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, XI, 102—13.

a short story was inevitably different, as was the practise of writing:

Simple cessation in reading, would, of itself, be sufficient to destroy the true unity. In the brief tale, however, the author is enabled to carry out the fulness of his intention, be it what it may. During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer's control. (p.108)

This was a chance that the perceptive author could not afford to miss. A special intimacy could be established between the reader and the text; the author had control over them both. The author needed to care above all that the story said everything which it was capable of. The effect of each word was crucially important. There could be no superfluity, since each part of the story had its preconceived place in the design of the whole. Here was the means by which an unblemished communication between text and reader could take place. The reader's active concentration means that he is always energetically alive to the tale. He cannot be tired by the art. It is the author's job to attend to the perfect shape of his tale, which lies between undue brevity and undue length. Its component parts all work together in the preconceived design to achieve the goal of unity. The art is all important:

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 tend 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 the one pre-established  
design. (p.108)

Poe's story 'The Sphinx', shows how this theory works in practise. 37

The narrator is staying with a New York relative in his cottage outside the city. A cholera epidemic means that each day brings news of the death of some acquaintance. These circumstances weigh heavily on the mind of the narrator, and he takes to reading gloomy works about omens. His sensible relative derides him for being superstitious. One day, in a drowsy mood, the narrator sees a 'living monster of hideous conformation' (p.352) and describes it in its awful detail. He takes its appearance to be an omen of his death. When he sees the monster a second time, he confesses to his companion what has happened. He believes he is going mad. The relative listens to a detailed description of the beast and tells the narrator that a simple and often repeated mistake in human reasoning lies 'in the liability of the understanding to under-rate or to over-value the importance of an object, through mere misadmeasurement of its propinquity'. (p.354) This is not a very comfortable or intelligible assurance. As the relative goes on to explain, in fact all this means is that the narrator has not seen a vast monster, but a death's head moth one-sixteenth of an inch away from his eye. The story ends at this moment of discovery.

In Poe's own critical terms, this is a perfect short story. Each detail of characterisation is essential to its total effect. The sensible relative has precisely the character which allows us to trust in his logical discovery of the insect. His calmness balances the narrator's nervous melancholy. This, in turn, is set at exactly

37. The Works of Edgar Allan Poe, edited by John H. Ingram, 4 vols (Edinburgh, 1874-75), II, (1874), pp.351-55.

the right psychological pitch, for it allows us to understand why he should describe the hideous monster. The mood of despair gives his fantastic narrative its momentary credibility. The setting and the activity of the characters are similarly well chosen. The dispute between the two men over the issue of omens prepares for the conclusion, with its sudden shift from gullible fiction to logical fact. There is never any doubt as to what opinion either man will hold. The relative's discourse on the weakness of human reasoning keeps the story in suspense; he can afford to tantalise both the narrator and the reader, since he holds the end of the story in his mind. We have no clear idea how his ideas tend until the abstract reasoning becomes a revelation of fact. Poe and his calm logician may indulge in their irony for a while.

Plot, character and argument provide for each other. The shock of the ending, in one instantaneous flash of appreciation, allows us to understand the story completely. With this knowledge, we can see exactly the tendency of each part of the text. Our reading is complete. Everything falls into place, and our experience of reading has become as perfect as the story. Poe has used his foreknowledge of the outcome of the story to establish its precise design. He withholds the vital information until the very last moment, keeping us in suspense until that moment when we satisfy the text with our full knowledge. We know at this moment, when we are just about to finish it, the story's fullest implications. We take our pleasure both in the argument and the art. Of course, we can never read the story, with the full meaning of the verb, again. Its mystery is lost the moment we understand the tale. The perfect art is also dispensable. We can never read Poe's story again without foreknowledge.

Such are the limits and the profound pleasures of Poe's art. His writing, with its theoretical implications, had enormous influence on the short story of the 1890s. Poe's art provided the essential requirements for the traditional magazine story. This story was vivid and eminently readable; above all it offered Poe's 'totality'. Poe's theoretical ideas were disseminated in England by the American critic Brander Matthews. His article 'Short Stories', in the Saturday Review (1884)<sup>38</sup> owed much to Poe. Matthews acknowledged both Hawthorne and Poe to be the originators of the modern short story, principally for their 'ingenious originality'. (p.33) This was the first purely theoretical article to be printed in England on the subject of the short story, even though the author and his literary peers were American. Matthews in fact runs down both English and French short fiction, favouring the work of American authors. His article was expanded for Lippincott's in 1885, included in a collection of essays in 1888, and, finally, revised in The Philosophy of the Short-Story (1901), when Matthews did praise Kipling and other English writers.<sup>39</sup>

Matthews stresses that the short story author must work to make the most of his brevity. By doing so he could concentrate on the special effects of compression, which were not available to the novelist. The story should not aim at the generalised impression of life; that is too serious and too long-winded a demand. The tale required the instantaneous, original effect, with a touch of fantasy. That is what Poe would have wanted. But in taking Poe's ideas, Matthews inherits

38. Saturday Review, 58 (July 1884), 32—34.

39. 'The Philosophy of the Short-Story', Lippincott's, 36 (October 1885).

Pen and Ink: Papers on Subjects of More or Less Importance, (London and New York, 1888), 67—94.

the essential flaw in the theory of the perfectability of the short story. For in Poe's terms, the story can never develop. Characters cannot hold many or complex opinions. Their ideas are restricted by what the story demands for and from them. Poe seeks to give the short tale a life of its own, and to free it from the naive anecdotal form of the conventional magazine story. Matthews repeats the attack against that lesser form, and he does it more boldly than Poe. What neither of them realise is that Poe's perfect art is just as much a hybrid of the inconsequential magazine story: its art cannot save it from a mechanical inevitability.

Matthews wants us to see that the 'Short-story' in its genuine and serious form, is distinct from the casual anecdote, the 'short story' which he dismisses.<sup>40</sup> But his very claim for the individuality and potential of the new genre is based on terms which commit it to the eternal repetition of a perfect formula. Poe's formula is, indeed, dangerously attractive. But in accepting it Matthews does no more than lead the short story into the 1890s with a theoretical strait-jacket. He is an apologist for what the short story has done, not for what it might do. Matthews makes the right claim, for he is on the side of the short tale, at a time when it badly needed confidence. But his message is fifty years out of date.

The second purely theoretical review of the short story appeared

40. 'I have written "Short-stories" with a capital S and a hyphen because I wished to emphasise the distinction between the Short-story and the story which is merely short. The Short-story is a high and difficult department of fiction. The story which is short can be written by anybody who can write at all; and it may be good, bad, or indifferent; but at its best it is wholly unlike the Short-story'. The Philosophy of the Short-Story, pp.24-25.

thirteen years later. Its author was Henry Harland, editor of the Yellow Book, and a successful short story writer himself, with four volumes of urbane tales published in the 1890s.<sup>41</sup> His important article 'Concerning the Short Story' appeared in the Academy in 1897.<sup>42</sup> Again, Harland's theoretical position depends on the work of Poe and Matthews, particularly when he insists on the economy of the short tale. He shares Matthews' contempt for the 'usual short story to be met with in the usual magazine'. (p.6) This, Harland goes on to say, cannot be called art, because the author does not create, he manufactures. There is a crucial distinction between a story which seeks to celebrate its idea, and one which merely wants to force it into existence.

The true artist's idea for a story will demand concentrated intellectual effort. An idea will suggest a certain way of being written. The full potential will only be revealed by careful assessment of, for example, character and dialogue. There are right things to be said by one's idea, and the artist's task is to feel intuitively for the structure and the content of a story inside that idea. It is delicate, nervous and somehow mystical work. The artist has to communicate with his idea before he can write it in its best and most effective way. He has to find the perfect short story for each idea. The author of the magazine story treats his idea with scant respect. The business of writing is altogether more perfunctory. There is no contemplation, for there is no time to waste. The art is inevitably disregarded. This author is nothing but a manufacturer:

41. A Latin-Quarter Courtship (1890); Mademoiselle Miss (1893); Grey Roses (1895); Comedies and Errors (1898).

42. Academy Fiction Supplement, 51 (June 1897), 6-7.

He cannot afford to waste his raw material, he is concerned to make the very utmost of it. His raw material consists of things known in the trade as "ideas". Now when he is about to manufacture a short story he searches among the scraps, the odds and ends, the refuse of his "ideas", for the smallest and most worthless scrap that can, by hook or crook, be forced to serve his purpose. He picks up a meagre little incident, a meaningless little coincidence, a lifeless little invention; an "idea" of which, in conversation, he could give us the whole gist and substance in two minutes. (p.6)

This is a more eloquent reworking of Matthews' blunter distinction between 'Short-story' and 'short story'. The terms are now the manufactured as against the created art. Harland's further achievement is to suggest that the writing of short stories should be an exacting and subtle task. The author must learn to take charge of his all-important idea; but his authority is an intimate and personal one. The story should never deal with rough or simplistic emotions, but be 'especially marked by fine shades and distinctions'. (p.6) The short story must be elegant, and above all it must be beautiful. Harland follows Poe when he demands that an author should feel and understand his idea, that he should stand behind it and sense precisely the right way in which to write by and for that idea. The short story writer can never be taken by surprise by his fiction, because he will rely utterly on thinking the idea through before he commits himself to his first word. The writing, for all its intimacy, its precious complexity, is just as inevitable, and, ironically, just as manufactured as that of the old-fashioned short story. Harland's theory caters for the delicate



and the subtle, but the act of writing (as opposed to what is written) is highly regimented. The author must 'dissect' his idea, and 'study it, and understand it; and then he must put it together again . . . All this he must do before he begins to write'. (p.6)

Harland takes the writing of short stories very seriously. He also believes that they should be read with similar dedication. Poe's concern for the importance of the essential, and the eradication of the superfluous from each story, established a responsibility on the part of the reader. The author had to learn to trust the intelligence of the reader; his art could then be allusive, and irony and suspense could be used to full effect. Because it would simply take too long to suggest certain relationships, develop full character histories or concentrate on settings, the reader, in Harland's view, had to learn not to expect such detailed information. He had to learn instead—and here the short story offered unique possibilities in fiction—to read each word carefully, for each word had been chosen carefully to fit into the overall design. Now author and reader have to trust in each other's intelligent participation in the text:

The artist's difficulty will be . . . by selecting the essential, the significant, by rigidly excluding the unessential, by trusting as much as ever he may to the experience and imagination of his reader, and, finally and chiefly, by bestowing unstinted pains upon his manner of writing, so that each phrase, each word, each comma, shall be indispensable and right and effective—his difficulty will be to present his impression in the briefest space in which it can be presented without losing any of its significance or any of its beauty. (p.6)

Here is a new way of writing short stories. It is new because Harland allows for complexity and subtlety of characterisation, and because he requires that the fiction should be constantly allusive. The strength of the bond between text and reader makes this possible. Harland wants the story to be free from the mechanical plot, the mechanical idea—in fact free from the whole tradition of the adventure story, the romance or the melodrama. Such stories saturated the magazines of the 1890s. The new short story would not take the response and the limited requirements of the reader for granted. Harland trusts the reader, and he does not intend to write down to him. We pay the author the compliment of reading his story when we are alert and in our best mind, not 'when we are tired or feeble-minded'. (p.6) This is Poe's unblemished communication taken to its logical extreme. There is a flow of intelligent sympathy between author, text and reader, and this is the unique province of the short story. By the late 1890s, the short story had, at last, its optimistic and serious theory. It had shaken off some of the implicit drawbacks of Poe's aesthetic. The short story had its own 'special character . . . special qualities, and . . . special artistry'. (p.6)

The short story writer and art-historian Frederick Wedmore took Harland's principal ideas and used them in his essay 'The Short Story', published in the Nineteenth Century in 1898.<sup>43</sup> According to Wedmore, the short story is written for the enjoyment of an élitist and highly educated audience. The tale has to be precious and refined to satisfy such sophisticates. It was taken for granted that the reader would

43. Nineteenth Century, 43 (March 1898), 403—16. Reprinted in On Books and Arts (1899), pp.1—24.

participate in the allusive text. He must imagine, suspect, and discover inside the fiction: this was a true practise of reading. A short story could not be read at leisure. Wedmore believed 'in the short story, not as a ready means of hitting the big public, but as a medium for the exercise of the finer art—as a medium, moreover, adapted peculiarly to that alert intelligence, on the part of the reader, which rebels sometimes at the longueurs of the conventional novel'. (pp.406—07)

Such a precious attitude is a far cry from the attitude which led to the countless adventure and romance tales of a Strand or an English Illustrated. Wedmore wants the story to explore a considerable variety of themes and narrative techniques. He is the first theoretician to state categorically that plot has no essential part in a short story. It was enough if the author merely wanted to record a fleeting mood or describe a scene. For both Wedmore and Harland, a short story is above all a work of art. It is granted variety and significance by its brevity. Provided the author understands exactly what that 'pregnant brevity' can mean to the range and style of his text, then the art will offer the highest challenge. For, 'if it is well done, it has done this amazing thing: it has become quintessence; it has eliminated the superfluous; and it has taken time to be brief'. (p.408)

When the art is as significant as this, when the single word sets up a shock-wave of allusive meaning throughout the text, then it has to be read very seriously indeed. A story can 'be met by those only who are ready to receive it'. (p.409) The reader has to work for his joy. He cannot take it for granted.

As we shall see when discussing Henry James's short stories, the issue of the reader's involvement is crucial to his fiction. James's own published contribution to theoretical discussion of the genre in

the 1890s is limited to one article, published in the Fortnightly Review in 1898.<sup>44</sup> His influence is important, but it must have been largely conversational. James's friendship with Harland, and his involvement with the Yellow Book writers would have inspired that 'almost extravagant dissertation' about the form. James is acutely aware of the special responsibilities which face the short story author. He knows that the form has great potential, and he accepts, without question, the doctrine that the writer has to establish by creative 'feel' the right story for the chosen idea.

Such an attitude is made clear in his article 'The Story-Teller at Large: Mr Henry Harland'. The distinction between the anecdote and the true short story becomes, more sympathetically, a distinction between two kinds of writing which both have their roles to play. The 'rigour of brevity' will inspire the author to write either 'the detached incident, single and sharp, as clear as a pistol-shot', or it will inspire that 'rarer performance . . . the impression, comparatively generalised—simplified, foreshortened, reduced to a particular perspective—of a complexity or a continuity'. (p.652)

James was fascinated by this idea of foreshortening. He felt that it gave the short story unique opportunities of artistic effect. The risks taken in paring down a story in order to reveal only the essential relationships suggested by the central idea are great. Bad foreshortening, 'if it fails to mean everything intended, means less than nothing'. (pp.652—53) James praises Harland for the ruthless way in which he sacrifices everything which is not essential to his idea. He praises, as all the theoretical writers of the 1890s were glad to

44. Fortnightly Review, NS63, 650—54.

do, the artistic virtues of economy, clarity, selection and composition.

James continues such ideas in his prefaces to the New York edition of the novels and tales, published from 1907—09. In these prefaces, he argues that the short story demands an author's utmost concentration, and an intuitive understanding of the requirements of his chosen idea. It is necessary to 'appreciate' (the word is almost religious) that idea, and to discover precisely what kind of story, what kind of characters and themes, will best expound it. Writing a short story is for James, as it is for the other theoreticians, an inevitable movement from the abstract idea to the multiplicity of the text. The artist must seize on the art which may lie dormant in the simplest anecdote, and respond to the great variety of information there.

James talks specifically about such a practise in his preface to What Maisie Knew, a volume which included the tale 'The Pupil'.<sup>45</sup>

'The Pupil' was inspired by a chance story told to James one summer's day in an Italian train compartment. It concerned an American family with a precocious son who saw and judged the sham of his parents, with their high pretensions and low morals. James's perception allows him to search and discover inside this bare outline. He sees what the idea requires before he even thinks of his first word. But where Harland suggested that such a creative process was infinitely laboured, James's appreciation is instantaneous: 'here was more than enough for a summer's day even in old Italy—here was a thumping windfall. No process and no steps intervened: I saw, on the spot, little Morgan Moreen, I saw all the rest of the Moreens'. (p.xv)

45. The Novels and Tales of Henry James, New York Edition, 26 vols (1908—17), XI (1909).

The idea is so full of possibilities that it is an effort for James to keep his short story short. He is so alert to the suggestions inside the idea that the firmest artistic control is necessary to stop each short story from becoming a full-length novel. That is James's unique and joyous problem.

For James, a story can only present one side of the potential which is ever suggested by the idea. A story shows one aspect of life at one point in time. That a short tale shows an 'entire' experience (in Poe's terms) is the ironic pretence of art. It is here that James differs from Poe. In Poe's stories, there is no possibility of experience for the characters beyond the limited horizon of their individual tales. The stories end completed and self-sufficient. James's stories suggest lives and moral realities, shades of meaning and feeling beyond any final full stop. The whole of an idea in a James short story will always remain unwritten. As in 'The Pupil', there is always more to be said:

I must add indeed that, such as they were, or as they may at present incoherently appear, I don't pretend really to have "done" them; all I have given in "The Pupil" is little Morgan's troubled vision of them as reflected in the vision, also troubled enough, of his devoted friend. The manner of the thing may thus illustrate the author's incorrigible taste for gradations and superpositions of effect; his love, when it is a question of a picture, of anything that makes for proportion and perspective, that contributes to a view of all the dimensions. (pp. xvii—xviii)

James's high opinion of the short story was formed in the 1880s. His influence on the popularity of the form was considerable, simply because, like Kipling, he chose to write short stories and not exclusively novels, before the form became fashionable. Theories cannot survive without practise, and it is self-evident from the relatively small number of theoretical texts on the short story in the 1890s that the genre flourished well enough on its own. Kipling, the greatest exponent of the short story in the decade, was not concerned with the theory of art, and his tales are inventive and fresh because of this very freedom. Poe's important influence does at least help the form to its independence, but the disadvantages of the perfect, self-contained art meant that the true creative potential of the genre could not be fully realised this way. It could be realised by authors like James and Kipling, who instinctively understood the variety and scope of the genre. Without their encouragement and example short story authors would not have been able to experiment, or to realise the full potential of the genre. Only where these authors had the foresight and courage to take creative risks with the genre could it be called a great art form. James is keen to take that chance as early as 1889. The form needed such confident and practical pioneers; it could flourish without abstract theoreticians. After discussing Turgenev's short stories with the literary historian Taine, James felt inspired and confident in the future of the genre—so much so that he proclaimed his desire to concentrate solely on short fiction:

But his talk about him has  
done me a world of good—  
reviving, refreshing, con-  
firming, consecrating, as  
it were, the wish and dream  
that have lately grown strong-  
er than ever in me—the desire

that the literary heritage,  
 such as it is, poor thing,  
 that I may leave, shall  
 consist of a large number  
 of perfect short things,  
nouvelles and tales, illus-  
 trative of ever so many things  
 in life—in the life I see  
 and know and feel—and of  
 all the deep and the deli-  
 cate—and of London, and  
 of art, and of everything. 46

46. The Notebooks of Henry James, edited by F.O. Matthieson and  
 Kenneth B. Murdock (New York, 1947), p.101.



## THE TRADITIONAL SHORT STORY

Theoretical discussion of the short story in the 1890s suggests that there are two distinct schools of writing. Matthews talks of the 'short story', by which he means the ordinary magazine tale written for the simple purpose of entertaining the reader. He distinguishes this lesser form from the 'Short-story' by which he means the story which is written with high artistic standards and the purpose of stimulating the intelligent appreciation of the reader. Harland develops the idea that there are two distinct ways of writing short stories by referring to the 'manufactured' magazine story, and the artist's creative tale. James regards the genre in even more encouraging terms. For him, the distinction is between the highly fore-shortened anecdote, and a longer, more allusive text. Both have creative potential. Finally, Wedmore suggests that the usual magazine story has lowered reading standards, so that a complex and subtle short fiction can only be properly appreciated by the intelligent reader.

None of the theoreticians had much patience with the 'usual short story to be met with in the usual magazine'.<sup>1</sup> Theoretical issues are therefore only discussed in connection with the new short story in the 1890s. This discussion goes at least some way to inspire the new allusive and subtle texts. Such writing showed that the authors actively wanted to challenge a whole convention of short story authorship. This reaction was based purely on the concept of literary value. The 'usual' short story, it was felt, was written without intelligence

1. Henry Harland, 'Concerning the Short Story', Academy Fiction Supplement, 51 (June 1897), 6.

or spirit, and it pandered to a reader who wanted to be entertained in the most undemanding way possible. It was not worthwhile preparing a theory of creative fiction for such a reader.

Most stories in the 1890s were written primarily for the magazine market and had to conform to the notion that fiction offered entertainment for the reader who found more serious fare in the political articles; reviews; historical and geographical essays; discussions of current events, and the like, which made up the main part of each journal. The habitual function of the short story in the magazine was to relax the reader after the serious work involved in the argument or teaching of more weighty matter. Short tales succeed only where they 'can be read without effort and even with pleasure. They never bore if they never entrance; and many a worse companion for a railway journey could easily be found on the bookstalls'.<sup>2</sup>

The typical magazine story, then, had modest aims. It did not pretend to attain any high degree of artistic merit. The unvarying format, and the unvarying function demanded of the short tale led to a fiction marked out by clearly determined types of plot and character. Stories are written out of a sense of strict duty to the requirements of the preceding, and therefore influential, body of magazine literature. The usual short story of the 1890s responds to a tradition of writing established in the magazines, and it countlessly repeats the same virtues and patterns of writing. The writing is thus intensely conservative: it will always respect the traditional and proven authorship. No writer, it seemed, could challenge a tradition

2. Unsigned review of The Captain of the "Polestar" and Mysteries and Adventures by Conan Doyle, Scots Observer, 3 (April 1890), 552.

which was celebrated each week and month in a great range of magazines. Such a practise of writing short stories presupposes an unyielding duty to a tradition of writing. But what were the precise features of the traditional short story? The questions of length and function bear upon these particularities.

A short story author, preparing himself for a magazine tale, would have learned from the traditional story that the 6—8,000 words would have to relax and entertain his reader in a clear and concise way. His first task would be to choose an immediate and compelling idea for the story. The 'power of plot construction' would be as important as the need for 'something original in the way of a leading idea'.<sup>3</sup> Hubert Crackanthorpe, in his essay 'Reticence in Literature' in the Yellow Book, 2 (July 1894), referred to the callousness of public opinion in thinking that writing novels and short stories was somehow an automatic process. The reader is 'persuaded that in order to produce good fiction, an ingenious idea, or "plot", as it is termed, is the one thing needed. The rest is a mere matter of handwriting'.<sup>4</sup> Crackanthorpe makes the true artist's plea for the creative difficulty—that joyous problem—of his art. He complains implicitly that the story with its 'handwritten' idea has no time for subtlety, no space for allusion, and no call for ambiguity of the issues, motives, and emotions involved in the text.

Having chosen the one main idea for the story, the author needed

3. William Wallace, review of A Group of Noble Dames by Hardy, Academy, 40 (August 1891), 153.  
Unsigned review of A Group of Noble Dames, Athenaeum, 69 (July 1891), 35.
4. 'Reticence in Literature: Some Roundabout Remarks', Yellow Book, 2 (July 1894), 269.

to impose a strict linear sequence of events upon the subject-matter. A simple time-scheme was indispensable to traditional fiction. The story would have a logical sequence of beginning, middle and end; that pattern is the hall-mark of the conservative short story. 'The old theory of narration', as James Ashcroft Noble remarked in 1895, 'was that a story should be told with a beginning, a middle and an end, all definitely set down in black and white'.<sup>5</sup>

The author, having selected his idea and organised his plot, would need to inject vitality into a formula, which, for all its assurance, might still be accused of a certain blandness. That potential problem could be overcome by thrilling action and intense emotion in the tale. The author would choose an ending of crisis for his story. Crisis defines the traditional short story of the 1890s. The story would be written for the sake of its arrival at a moment of crisis, a calamitous high-point for the sake<sup>of</sup> which characters come into being, and through which they pass, redeemed or destroyed.

The whole convention of short story writing demands such crisis. The author would instinctively use the limited space of his genre to dramatize emotions, highlight urgent motives, and emphasise violent gestures. The moment of crisis would become the peak of the short story, its impact strengthened by the brevity of the form. The reader would be carried along the highly ordered linear sequence of the story, where life, usually at breaking-point, consisted of people with sharply defined motives acting in strict accordance with the author's chosen idea. The author would have no time to give his characters any chance to reflect; they would speak and act in extreme

5. Review of Episodes by G.S. Street, Academy, 47 (March 1895), 212.

haste. As a result the traditional story would stress plot rather than character, action rather than psychology.

The author, then, writing his traditional short story, would instinctively find his art motivated firstly by his choice of a dramatic idea; secondly by the call for a regular and linear shape (beginning, middle, end); and thirdly, by crisis. He would write a story whose momentum carried the reader swiftly through the text to the dramatic crisis. During the course of the story his characters would declare their feelings, and act upon them, without reflection, and with simple and immediate decision. The text would be perfectly lucid, and easy to read. Nothing (beyond the most obvious suspense) would be left to the imagination, and nothing would confuse the reader. The traditional magazine story of the 1890s is fiction utterly demystified.

This is the traditional way of writing short stories in the 1890s. It is writing done to a highly influential, and very successful formula. The author has a vast number of similarly constructed, similarly motivated tales to celebrate and confirm his choice of traditional narrative. But he writes with instinctive respect for the formula of narrative: his art is ever paying homage to the past. The moment the artist writes solely in this tradition, he writes out of narrative habit. He does not choose to explore or create, he repeats a formula, and he writes without spontaneity. The tradition takes over his individuality, and his stories become part of a successful yet finally deadening movement. His art, without creative vitality, is, to all extents anonymous. Countless traditional stories in the 1890s repeat the basic pattern, reiterate the same emotions and even the same words; these stories can contribute nothing new to the genre, and their authors are heedless of the potential of their form.

The traditional short story of the 1890s was to be found mainly in the well-established magazines. Blackwood's continued to publish stories throughout the decade, though the tales displayed little evidence of imaginative invention. One exception was Conrad's nouvelle The Heart of Darkness, which appeared in three monthly parts in 1899.<sup>6</sup> The Fortnightly Review published good, safe, witty stories of manners, like Vernon Lee's 'The Legend of Madame Krasinska'.<sup>7</sup> One outstanding feature was the publication of stories by Frank Harris, which appeared in the Fortnightly Review in this period. These robust tales provided conventional fare of adventure and romance, but with a refreshing awareness of psychological complexity. The tales are concerned with real moral difficulties, as well as the clear-cut certainties of narrative and character. Temple Bar printed steady and often excellent work by a number of highly regarded authors including Andrew Lang, Kipling, George Gissing and Ella D'Arcy. The Windsor Magazine published stories with a lighter and more humorous note, with regular contributions from Barry Pain, Pett Ridge and J.K. Jerome. The Academy, which started to print short stories in 1898, included very brief but conventional work, with a particular bias towards French stories in translation.

Traditional short stories were a staple feature of the new illustrated magazines which appeared with such dramatic effect in the 1890s. James Tye notes that, in magazine publication, the 'great revolution of the decade lay in the emergence of mass circulation Illustrated

6. Blackwood's, 165 (February—April 1899), pp.193—220; 479—502; 634—57.

7. Fortnightly Review, NS47 (March 1890), pp.377—96.



Magazines'.<sup>8</sup> The foremost of these magazines, with their brash and popular appeal, was the Strand, which started in 1891. The Strand, a monthly magazine, was made up of short articles, serials, short stories and verse, and aimed to have an illustration on every page. The Idler and English Illustrated both continued the tradition of publishing light and undemanding short fiction. Authors of the usual short stories could be secure in the knowledge that they could get their work published. The market was both immense and safe. Hence the majority of the short stories written in the 1890s owe their existence to the great established magazines, illustrated or not. This very security is the cause of narrative habit.

Giving the reader endless variations of a standard narrative format inevitably led to stale writing. But the ordinary magazine story did have its potential, however limited the form was by insistent demands for linear calamity in eight thousand words. Formula writing becomes positive and exciting when the problems are turned into strengths. The author can make a linear plot compelling by emphasising its forward chase through time; he can encourage high emotion and so make decisions and emotions work in dramatic peril; he can use the brevity of the genre to highlight and intensify mystery and suspense. Pace and tension can make the magazine story enthralling.

As a result, the traditional short story is at its lively and inventive best where there is a natural demand for taut plots and crisp style. These conditions induce the reader to anticipate his text eagerly, and a dedicated reader means an assured sale of the magazine. These virtues are extolled in the 1890s in the specific sub-genres of the

8. James Tye, 'Literary Periodicals of the Eighteen Nineties: A Survey of the Monthly and Quarterly Magazines and Reviews' (D. Phil. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1970), p.21.

detective story, the ghost or mystery story, and the humorous tale, which were the most popular forms of conventional fiction throughout the decade. Wendell Harris remarks that these very sub-genres had been the only 'successful exceptions to this well-nigh universal defect'<sup>9</sup> of diffuseness throughout the nineteenth century. The sub-genres have in common a precise effect to achieve in the short space—a crime to solve, a ghost to reveal, a comic event to describe—and in each sub-genre the author can utterly rely on the reader's suspension of disbelief. Since the reader's participation is enthusiastic, the writer's task is immediately made relaxing; successful magazine fiction is never over-serious. The story is, crucially, both a pleasure to write and to read.

The traditional short story reaches perfection in the sub-genre of the detective tale, precisely because the form demands all the features of conservative fiction (with the special additives of suspense and mystery), and turns them into positive attributes. Nowhere is this perfection better shown than in Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, which first appeared in the 1890s.<sup>10</sup> Doyle's working methods, outlined in his autobiography Memories and Adventures, show exactly how the traditional author writes with acute awareness and respect for the preceding body of literature. Doyle's aim was to use the short story's potential as a successful and profitable enterprise. Doyle felt that

9. 'English Short Fiction in the 19th Century', Studies in Short Fiction, 6 (1968), 3.
10. The two Holmes novels, A Study in Scarlet and The Sign of Four appeared first, in 1887 and 1890 respectively. The short stories—the Adventures and the Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes were first printed by the Strand in 1891—92 and 1892—93 respectively, before being published in book form. The next Holmes story was The Hound of the Baskervilles, serialised in the Strand in 1901—02.



if he could only work out a convincing artistic formula, then the magazine story could make his fortune. Doyle puts the short story firmly into the world of market forces.

Doyle's novels A Study in Scarlet and The Sign of Four had not popularised the character of Holmes. But the author was well aware of the great success of the early, and very influential, detective work, Fergus Hume's Mystery of a Hansom Cab (1888). Doyle had a safe narrative format, two main characters in Holmes and Watson, and the businessman's eye for a profitable market. Doyle was encouraged by the sheer number of magazines which were willing to publish short stories. All he had to do was to gauge the kind of story, and its precise format, which would be most successful. In this sense the Holmes stories are, as Harland put it, 'manufactured'. They are meticulously planned products, geared to a consumer market. As Doyle explains, authorship in the traditional short story is now a case of business acumen, and art a way of using the system of enterprise and profit:

A number of monthly magazines were coming out at that time, notable among which was "The Strand" . . . Considering these various journals with their disconnected stories it had struck me that a single character running through a series, if it only engaged the attention of the reader, would bind that reader to that particular magazine. 11

Doyle felt that the ordinary magazine reader would be prone to miss the occasional number, and thus lose the thread of a serialised novel:

Clearly the ideal compromise was a character which carried through, and yet instalments which were each complete

11. Memories and Adventures (1924), p.95

in themselves, so that the purchaser was always sure that he could relish the whole contents of the magazine. I believe that I was the first to realize this and "The Strand Magazine" the first to put it into practise. (pp.95—96)

'A Case of Identity' which appeared in the 'Adventures of Sherlock Holmes' series in the Strand is a fine example of traditional narrative.<sup>12</sup> The strongest feature of the story is its regular and linear plot, which consists of several episodic sections progressing naturally from each other. There is much emphasis on the quality of Holmes's detection and his command of the crisis and its denouement. The story concerns the deceit of one Mary Sutherland by her stepfather, who resorts to disguise in order to compel Mary to live with him and her mother, so that they can live off the interest of her capital.

The story, in common with other detective tales in the 1890s, thrives on order, suspense, and the absolute certainty of the case being solved. Watson's perpetual astonishment at the brilliance of the detective's deductions acts as a convenient articulation of our own surprise. Watson is 'reading' the short story with us, helping us as far as we can go into the mystery of the case. Watson forgets that he is transcribing the story for narration; his astonishment is perfectly ingenuous, even though he has lived through the events he now narrates. The stories depend for their effect on that time-gap. Watson narrates, in the present tense, in perfect forgetfulness of the past.

This naive narration is of crucial importance to the story. Watson acts, for Conan Doyle, as the perfect bluff. If the stories depended on the bare reasoning of the detective, it would be

12. Strand, (September 1891), pp.248—59.

apparent that the author had fitted the deductions to the answers, instead of making it seem that the deductions followed strictly from the clues. Watson's responses hide the flaws in the causal chain of deduction. Our viewpoint in the story is always screened by Watson's clumsy praise, for we never see Holmes's mind at work in the actual process of deduction. Because the brilliant 'flashes' of deduction seem to come from nowhere, our response as readers is to the momentary quality of the insight. The plot, with its relentless onward movement, stops us from pausing to consider the real nature of the insight. The story resists slow reading; to enjoy it, and to enjoy all traditional narrative, we have to read breathlessly, and without suspicion.

Moments of explanation and deduction in the detective story keep the plot moving regularly forward, in the inevitable linear sequence. The story moves on, with well-timed lulls to aid suspense, towards the conclusion when the motive of the crime is totally revealed, and the criminals are brought to justice. The story is perfectly self-sufficient and complete. Each Holmes story has its explanation and answer, for there is no mystery that cannot be solved. The experience of reading such a story, like the experience of reading any traditional tale in the 1890s, means a progression through discovery to perfect fulfillment of the text. The detective element means that we can read to a point of perfect satisfaction, because the story will finally yield all of its secrets. We are back with Poe, and his idea of the short story as a perfect, self-contained work of art. The traditional short story, of which Doyle's detective tales offer immensely enjoyable and perfect examples, has one principal aim: narrative delight. The pleasure of each story derives, as Poe suggested, from its completeness, and from the way that the final full-stop brings the

tale to a logical conclusion beyond which we have no desire or need to go. To read such a story does not entail serious commitment on the reader's part. We can relax before the logical movement of the magazine story because we know the problems of the plot will be resolved, or in some way answered by the denouement. There is no work for us to do when we read traditional short fiction; the narrative which demands our uncomplaining and even listless trust will soon lapse into a habit of writing.

We have seen how the theory of the new short story of the 1890s stresses the participation of the reader. James and Wedmore develop the issue of such close involvement in their own tales. But the great majority of the fiction written in the decade comforts the reader, rather than stretches his imagination. The traditional short story does not emphasise artistry for its own sake; its well-established formula precludes the need for such quest. This fiction has other less intellectual and more overtly pleasurable motives.

Such motives seem modest in comparison with the self-conscious artistic development of the new short story in the 1890s. All of the theoreticians believed in the artistic potential of the genre, just as they shared the belief that the traditional magazine authors were not alive to, or even aware of, the possibilities of the craft. Despite the theoretical commotion, the practise of writing short stories in the 1890s makes it clear that both traditional and avant-garde fiction share values and affinities. All the short story authors of the 1890s were able to make use of a long-established and still lively tradition of drama—the melodrama. This is not to say that authors used specific plots or situations from the plays in their stories. I am aware of only one short story in the 1890s which discusses the melodrama as

a stage-form, W. Pett Ridge's 'A Moving Melodrama'<sup>13</sup> which re-tells the plot of 'The Badchester Tragedy', played at the Bolders Theatre of Varieties. The connection between the short story and melodrama is one of affinity, and not one of direct influence. Short story writers used melodramatic situations, where these intensified dramatic states of mind and action, to highlight problems or choices. The actors could do so by their physical presence as much as by dialogue (which was, indeed, neglected or even dispensed with beyond the most basic utterance). The short story had to do so through sheer verbal force. Melodramatic situations provided the highly-charged immediacy which the authors required; both genres worked in the same tradition of fiction where impact was all-important, and where diffuseness of purpose or narrative could not be tolerated.

Melodrama was still a vital force in the late Victorian theatre. Even if the stage-tableaux and scenes of dire calamity and impending tragedy had become more sophisticated as the century progressed, melodrama still depended on its stock characters, with their black-and-white morals and emotions. Virtuous heroines and noble heroes were still threatened by unscrupulous villains. The plays are characterised by sensational incidents and by violent assaults upon the emotions of the protagonists. The plays are highly episodic. There is much incident, but little progressive plot. 'Each situation', as James L. Smith remarks, 'is more or less self-contained, and the dramatist sweeps us from one thrill to the next without bothering to explain the logical links between them'.<sup>14</sup>

13. In An Important Man and Others (1896), pp.97—102.

14. Melodrama, The Critical Idiom, 28 (1973), p.24.

A good example of the pace and conflict inherent in melodrama is to be found in the work of the innovative French dramatist R.C. Guilbert-Pixerécourt. A Wife with Two Husbands,<sup>15</sup> translated into English in 1803, has many typical features of the genre. Eliza, the heroine, marries the Count, thinking her first husband, Fritz, is dead. Her father has never forgiven her. Now blind, he is looked after by Eliza, though he is not aware that she is his daughter. Fritz, the villain, returns to claim his son, and to blackmail Eliza. Eliza suffers much moral turmoil as she is taunted by one husband and rejected by her father. Finally, Fritz is killed in a plot to murder the Count which misfires, and everyone is happily reconciled in the final scene. There is considerable amazement at Eliza's noble fortitude, and her impeccable behaviour during unfortunate distress.

The Only Way, by Freeman Wills and Canon Langbridge,<sup>16</sup> first produced in 1899, retains all of the features of melodrama, nearly one hundred years after A Wife with Two Husbands. The intense emotions, the assault on virtue, the frantic pace and the black-and-white characters are still very much evident. The play, a version of Dickens's A Tale of Two Cities, deals with the hiding, discovery and trial of a French aristocrat, Charles Darnay, who is first found innocent, then guilty, by an altogether fickle Revolutionary tribunal. The love-interest in the story—the hero is devoted to the pure and beautiful Lucie Manette—makes Darnay's sentence even more heart-rendering. Sydney Carton, who has a close physical resemblance to Darnay, is first seen as a rude and drunken character, but shows that he does in fact have

15. A Wife with Two Husbands: A Melo-Drame in Three Acts (1803).

16. The Only Way (1942).

noble sentiments as he instigates a plan to substitute himself for Darnay before the execution, so that the lovers may be happily reunited. The play ends with this dramatic change of character, the first rays of the rising sun touching Carton's face as he announces: "It is a far better thing that I do, than I have ever done". (p.88) In both plays, as in all melodrama, good stands resolute before evil. Eliza will never be swayed from virtue, however confusing her plight, and Carton makes his great sacrifice so that true happiness may eventually triumph.

The short story does not invariably share the happy ending, nor the direct contrast of good against evil, which are standard features of most melodramas.<sup>17</sup> What the short fiction does have in common with melodrama is belief in crisis. The tale in the 1890s shares the regular linear pattern, and often the strict episodic quality of the stage play. The short story displays the pace and hurry of melodrama, and also its clear emotional states of great despair or great joy. There is no time in either genre for wavering or contradiction of motive. The actions of the characters in the two forms are often similar. Women weep or faint, or are blithe with virtuous joy. When she throws herself at her father's feet to beg forgiveness, folds her son to her bosom, or enthusiastically embraces her friends, Eliza does what countless women do in the short story of the 1890s. These very gestures with their strong visual appeal, appear regularly in the short story, which must reinforce the language of intense emotion with dramatic poses. The melodramatic short story must make reading a way

17. Smith talks of the melodrama of defeat as well as the melodrama of triumph.

of seeing; and so the gestures of fainting, weeping or towering rage are emphasised for their visual appeal. Of course the illustrated magazines put the actual images before the reader, so that text collaborated with picture; the image is thereby fully realised, and the short story has its own tableau.

Melodramatic elements are at work in two types of short story in the 1890s which differ greatly in intention. The first type is the sub-genre of the detective tale. Here, as in the play, the stress is on frantic outward action; there is very little concern with inward psychological experience. We have seen how, in the Conan Doyle detective stories, the unravelling of the mystery is far more important than the reactions of Holmes and Watson, whose characters and responses we learn to take for granted. The detective tale and play share an unpretentious joy in writing, and a clear conception that the literary value of their art is directly related to the sheer pleasure of reading and viewing in a state of enthralled excitement. Both forms are actively concerned with the demystification of text, so that the motive for a crime can be readily identified, criminals seen for the immoral rogues they are, and good restored to its rightful place.

The Sexton Blake stories, which made their first appearance in the boy's magazines of the 1890s<sup>18</sup> show very clearly the links of the genre with melodrama. James L. Smith remarks that in melodrama, 'every crisis generates a suspense so acute it must be resolved at once. But without danger heroes and heroines are without interest.

18. The first Sexton Blake story, by 'Hal Meredith', appeared in the Halfpenny Marvel in 1893. Eleven Blake stories were written in the 1890s, eight of which were printed in the Union Jack. See W.O.G. Lofts and D.J. Adley, The Men behind Boys' Fiction (1970), p.21.



No sooner have they survived one situation, therefore, than the dramatist flings them headfirst into another yet more perilous'. (p.24)

'Tracked Round the World' by 'Sexton Blake, Detective'<sup>19</sup> epitomises such frantic danger. Blake pursues a criminal, whom we have seen, in the first of the story's seven chapters, murdering a detective in Ireland. The plot is rigorously episodic, and consists of Blake's adventures in tracking his man. Each chapter ends with the detective about to meet certain death, just as he is on the point of arresting the criminal. The villain takes a rather fanciful round trip in order to collect his reward, travelling from New York to Australia and back to Ireland. In the course of these travels, which mark the adventure element so important to the story, Blake is thrown into a river, chloroformed, supposedly thrown into the ocean, and regularly assaulted. Each episode sees Blake in deadly peril, which he overcomes by moral grit, intelligent reasoning, good fortune and strength.

The tale offers a perfect moral lesson. The criminal may be able to escape temporarily from the detective, but he cannot escape from his guilt. He knows Blake to be his master, and that he will eventually pay for his crime. There is never any doubt as to the outcome of the conflict, just as there is never any doubt about the triumph of the last act of a melodrama. The Blake stories have the certainty of melodrama, through the unshakeable observance of moral codes. As a result, the Blake tales are unique in detective fiction in that they have no need to stress the actual detective element. Melodrama puts higher store on the need for action rather than reasoning, and, for the Blake stories, this means that the actual work of detection always

19. Union Jack, 2 (February 1895), pp.1—14.

precedes the main part of the story. The police work is done so that the adventure can take over the story; there is hardly any investigation in the narrative. Blake's deductions are usually instantaneous. He always knows, as do his readers, exactly who the criminal is, what his crime is, and what its motive is. The narrative is uniquely open about these issues.

The melodramatic element in the Blake stories allows no time for any analysis of justice in deliberation. Criminals are always wrong (because they are criminals), and Blake and the forces of British Law are inevitably right. The outward action contrasts strongly, as it does in melodrama, with that inward moral certainty, that 'immobility' of moral values. In the Blake tales, the crime is always readily solved, it has no attendant mystery, and all the story requires is to show the active means by which the criminal is brought to justice. That undemanding narrative claim is a direct inheritance from melodrama. The Sexton Blake stories are melodramas in the stage sense of the word.<sup>20</sup> They share the clear emotions of melodrama, the hyperbolic language, the constant changes of scenery, the sensational and episodic plots, the black-and-white characters, and the regular references to storms, moonlit nights or baking suns. Perhaps the only essential difference is in the lack of music, for there is a strong visual element in the Blake tales. The beginning or ending of an important scene in a melodrama would consist of a tableau where the characters froze in dramatic immobile gestures: the active drama became, for some moments, a perfectly still image, an illustration. The visual element is provided in the Blake tales by similarly gripping illustrations

20. Smith, pp.6—7, remarks on the present misuse of the word.

of the most dramatic scenes. Much fiction in the 1890s, however, works outside this tradition of straightforward entertainment. There was a call for fiction to offer serious commentary on the problems and miseries of urban life. Here the new short story moves with certain developments in the novel. Realistic themes which, as we have seen, begin to dominate English fiction in the 1890s, meant a much freer and more responsible discussion of issues concerned with psychology, and more specifically with sexual emotions. The new short story treats similar topics as do pioneering novels like Hardy's Tess and Jude, George Moore's Esther Waters, and George Gissing's New Grub Street. Both genres deal frankly with the emotional pressures of urban life, often in working-class settings. Realism brings a new seriousness of authorship to the novel and the short story in the 1890s.

Some realistic authors expressed the appalling misery of life amongst the urban poor in quiet, matter-of-fact prose, simply 'listing' iniquities and injustices in disturbingly passive stories. Other authors (whom we are concerned with here) sought to highlight these problems by detailed accounts of extreme states of mind, and the analysis of distress or great confusion. Often the unremitting pressure of urgent moral problems leads characters to violent or highly-wrought actions. Tess's tragic calm before her arrest is given the perfect extravagant setting as she lies symbolically on the sacrificial stone of Stonehenge. Again, she can only resolve her desperate situation with any finality by murdering Alec D'Urberville. Both scenes show how Hardy, writing a novel which closely scrutinizes Tess's intense mental debate, effectively pictures such debate by melodramatic gestures.

The short story emphasises brevity and tension, and needs a dramatic vocabulary, and similarly intense actions, to make the impact of each tale immediate and powerful. The realistic authors of the short story in the 1890s were alert to the new material of psychological turmoil and mental stress, and to highlight such neurosis they found melodramatic gestures and extreme attitudes—particularly during the crisis of the story—especially valuable. Melodramatic states of deep despair or overwhelming joy gave writers of short fiction the intensity and turmoil which they found an absolute prerequisite for realistic fiction. Their characters, like those in melodrama, 'live and move and have their being with that sort of aching, over-charged emotionalism which we experience only for ourselves or others in moments of the keenest mental tension'.<sup>21</sup> Realistic writers of short fiction concentrate on inward states of mind, particularly where these are neurotic and confused. The fiction balances inward stress against outward stress with a resulting emphasis on violent physical gesture. The stories are unremittingly serious, and generally pessimistic.

This seriousness highlights the main difference between the two types of short story which have melodramatic elements. The detective tale is marked by a desire (which it has in common with the comic and ghost stories), to provide sheer pleasure and entertainment for the reader. The improbability of a Blake adventure, or the miraculous deductions in a Holmes story are vital ingredients of this pleasure; the writing is not to be taken too seriously in the sense that we never have to trouble about the reality of the situations which are

21. Unsigned review of Elder Conklin and Other Stories by Frank Harris, Athenaeum, 72 (December 1894), 786.

described. We have no moral involvement in the text, for it does not come close to our own experience. But the second type of melodramatic short story does claim such proximity. This story is written with the intense seriousness of the realist, and it makes a concerted attempt to bring us to an awareness and understanding of 'the keenest mental tension' of contemporary life. In doing so it uses the example of melodrama to confirm that life is lived from one urgent crisis to the next: unlike melodrama—which rather suggests than influences—the new short story concentrates on the nuances of neurotic problems themselves.

Authors see problems in terms of their own multifarious 'qualities' and not, simply, as a means of moving a plot forward. The stress is now on psychology and not action: mental turmoil cannot be taken for granted. The new short story has no patience with the moral certainty and triumphant assertion of status-quo which are intrinsic features of melodrama. The dramatic, urgent crises are now used in isolation to scrutinize doubt and mental anguish in detail. Melodrama provides the grand idea of crisis, vital to the realistic short story of the 1890s; it has no relationship with the complex particularities of such crisis. Melodrama offers a series of images, never a detailed vocabulary. The authors of the melodramatic and realistic short story work and discover in their own specialised tradition.

Amélie Rives's story 'Was it a Crime?' published in the Fortnightly Review has clear melodramatic elements.<sup>22</sup> The tale is about Stephen and Mary Drew who are very happily married. She is expecting her first child. Stephen, who is establishing himself as an architect,

22. Fortnightly Review NS47 (February 1890), pp.195—219.

wins a contract to build a church. Life seems to be treating the couple with rare favour. But Mary begins to have religious doubts, and feels that things are going wrong. One day the church collapses; Stephen dies, and Mary bears her child. The story is perfectly ordered. Unparalleled bliss is followed by cataclysmic disaster. The narrative movement has no complexity, and the story proceeds easily to its inevitable crisis. There are no half-measures about emotions (the couple feel either joy or total despair), architecture (the Church is a wonderful example of innovative design; it collapses because it is poorly constructed), or life itself (Stephen lives during his period of creativity, and dies when his work is shown to be irresponsible).

Since the very texture of the story is pushed to extremes, and since the momentum of the plot keeps the tension present, language and gesture have to be intense. Here the short story is truly melodramatic. The characters speak to each other, in stress or in pleasure, with longwinded hyperbole. Each feeling has singular importance, so that great demands are made by the characters both on their own capacity to feel the most 'profound' emotions, and on the very resources of emotional language. When Mary tries to express her feeling for Stephen, she does so as if her joy brings with it terrible responsibilities:

"Love, I was thinking how I love you and how I shall love your child. I was thinking what a dreadful thing it would be if I were not worthy in every way to be his mother. I was wondering if I were strong enough, mentally, morally, physically, to be what I should to him. I was asking God to help me. I was asking Him to make me worthy. I was wondering how much I could bear for his sake". (p.201)

This kind of emotional appeal suggests considerable stress, even if it makes mawkish reading. But such is the language demanded by the terms of the story, where buildings rise and fall, where husbands live and die with alarming suddenness. And when the words cannot express the intensity of feeling, mute gestures are made to describe the other extreme of despairing inactivity. Stephen feels that his building is going to collapse, and becomes immobile:

Stephen ate nothing, and could scarcely sit through his meals. He was very pale and the blood had settled about his eyes, making deep, purplish shadows. He seemed to be aging before her. (p.202)

Mary is affected by such misery, to such an extent that she 'felt as if molten lead were trickling through her veins in a throe of anguish that almost made her cry out'. (p.202)

Authors like Rives are not attracted to themes of domestic harmony and emotional contentment; an exciting story certainly could be written around the calamitous collapse of both a marriage and a church. Life in the melodramatic short story, as in the stage melodrama, is never very comfortable. Such fiction thrives on crisis, whether internal or external. Emotions and beliefs have to be unshakeably set, for the brevity of the genre allows no time for subtlety or shades of feeling.

In many melodramatic short stories, the elements of crisis, confrontation and eventual tragedy are strong. The tale does not share the melodrama's quest for, and achievement of, moral triumph. In H.B. Marriot Watson's hyperbolic stories of marital tension, the endings are generally tragic. 'The House of Shame'<sup>23</sup> is a good example

23. In At the First Corner and Other Stories (London and Boston, 1895), pp.20—62.

of fiction which explores keen mental tension. The tale concerns the shame of George Farrell, who has to admit to his wife Letty that he has spent a night with a prostitute. The shock of the revelation nearly kills her, and the story ends with a view of Letty's 'horrible look of panic' (p.62), an indication that she will never be able to forgive her husband. Watson writes a short story, and he chooses to write a relatively long one, around as slender an idea as that. As a result, the stress is mainly on the long description of mental turmoil. Watson makes the emotional responses to the revelation as fervent as possible. All feelings are intense. When Letty finally understands George's confession, they both suffer agonies of physical and mental torture:

His attitude, as he waited for her response, there, in the centre of the room, was one of singular despair. His mouth was wried with an expression of suffering; he endured all the pangs of a sensitive nature which has been always wont to shelter itself from pain. But still she made no answer. (pp.44—45)

When Letty does reply, her physical reaction is a direct expression of her mental one. It is a stage gesture. Melodrama is enacted for the reader in the pages of a book:

And then she seemed suddenly taken with a great convulsion; her body trembled and shivered; she wheeled half-way round with a cry; her eyes shone with pain. "George, George!" she screamed on a horrid note of agony, and swaying for a second to and fro, fell hard across the fender and against the live bars of the grate. (p.45)

The essential difference in this story, which marks it off from the drama, is that the protagonists confront themselves with their crises. The story is modern in that the drama is internal and



psychological, and not external and worked through the agency of a villain. The short story uses melodrama as a short hand for its own, modern, study of characters under stress. The gestures may be stage gestures, but they refer to intense, inward-looking neurotic problems.

The major problem with this sort of melodramatic short story is that the writing takes itself too seriously. The conventional short story cannot survive such frantic emotions or such dramatic gestures without eventually seemingly over-intense and indulgently neurotic. Formula writing can only be lively and positive when the writing is not over-serious, because then the author will write to the strengths of his convention. The most successful sub-genres in the 1890s—the ghost, comic and detective stories—have their triumph precisely because they take sometimes outrageous liberties with content. It is difficult to read seriously those melodramatic short stories which concentrate on psychology, for their neurotic, oversensitive characters are laughably complicated and unbelievably intense. The writers stare at the 'reality' of keen mental tension so hard that they can see nothing but psychological crisis. The writing is as outrageous as anything contained in a Blake plot. We are told that we must believe in the psychological fiction where we know that we do not have to believe in the reality of, say, a detective story. The outrage is, indeed, part of our pleasure of reading good formula writing, because the stories are written in the full knowledge that they will be read for sheer delight; suspending our disbelief is an intrinsic part of that entertainment. The experience of reading much of the new fiction which concentrates on mental problems is unhappy simply because the stories are written with mis-placed seriousness: that is the death-knell to the stories by Rives and Watson.

The short story can, then, celebrate the very conventions which often lead it into narrative habit, and the repetition of stock formulas. James Ashcroft Noble's story 'The Phantasies of Philarete' is written to celebrate a tradition, not to pay it worthless homage.<sup>24</sup> The story is written to be a pleasure to read, and it need not be taken too seriously: that is its strength. The plot is enthralling, if incredible, but we can relax enough in our reading to suspend disbelief gratefully. 'The Phantasies of Philarete' concerns John Errington, a poor journalist, who scrapes a living for his wife and children. As a rare privilege, he is allowed by Mackenzie, his influential publisher, to review a book by Hartmann West, which other critics have condemned. Errington enjoys the work, and praises it. He is prompted by his wife to write personally to West, rather tactlessly hoping that West will be able to find him work. West writes an invective letter to Mackenzie, who sacks his journalist. Errington's wife sees this letter and is so shocked by it that she dies; so does her daughter. Errington commits suicide, writing to tell West of the dire effects of his complaint. West's conscience is stricken; and he dies soon afterwards. Mackenzie writes a notice in the journal renouncing the condemnations of West's work, and 'revealing' that the laudatory article (written by Errington) was his own work.

The story has to deal with a large number of deaths in regular sequence. The only way the tale can maintain its credibility throughout such an improbable sequence is to allow each death no more than a moment's notice in the narrative. There is no time in such a story to ponder the deeper issues. The number of deaths enforces the theme of the terrible existence of the literary critic, not the moral problems

24. Yellow Book, 5 (April 1895), pp.195—225.

of death. The story has an imaginative license to deal with cause and effect as outrageously as it pleases. The clockwork motion of the plot precludes complexity of emotion or any notion of reality. We read the traditional short story dedicated to our entertainment for its black-and-white didacticism, and for its compelling drive and crisis, not for its realism. 'The Phantasies' succeeds because it does not ask to be taken too seriously: we are certainly not expected to reflect on the issues involved in the narrative, any more than we want to continue the investigation at the end of a detective story. The issues in the story are loud and clear because the story does the thinking for its reader. The successful traditional short story of the 1890s seeks to provide a comfortable moment of pleasure through the audacious strength of its plot.

The new short story in the 1890s has aims which can never be so modest as that. Authors whose work was published in the avant-garde journals make greater claims for the short story. They dismiss the often crippling influences of tradition, and they seek to discover new subjects and new narrative techniques for the genre. As we shall see, this exciting and original quest leads to writing which cannot fall into a mere habit of narrative.

## THE NEW SHORT STORY

The new periodicals of the 1890s offered the short story great, if short-lived, opportunities to develop the form and content of the genre. Magazines like the Albemarle, the Anti-Philistine, Cosmopolis, the Dome, the Scottish Evergreen, the Savoy, and above all the Yellow Book, aroused intense interest, furious debate and vindictive abuse during their brief and energetic lives. They did so, as far as their fictional content was concerned, solely on the strength of the short story. The genre was at its inventive best in the five or so years which spanned the first volume of the Albemarle (January 1892) and the final volume of the Yellow Book (April 1897).

The new periodicals offered the chance for young and brave authors—heedless of the conventions of traditional short story writing—to speak with imaginative freedom. These writers could be joyously responsible to their art alone. They could ignore the conventional demands of the reading public for the fictional staples of adventure, melodrama or romance. That public, in turn, slighted such an unruly fiction. The new periodicals were short-lived because, once the impact of their novelty had worn off, the public lost interest in a fiction which seemed pretentious, and which was manifestly difficult to understand. The periodicals became collector's items the moment they were published.

The stories were written for an intelligent élite which simply did not provide enough custom to pay for publishing costs, advertising costs and the like. Unlike the conventional short story, with its safe outlets in the established magazines, the new fiction was written very much at risk. Whilst the new short story made its often

radical claim for historical attention, it had to do so in the real and immediate world of market forces. The new short story demanded that it should be accountable only to artistic standards, and found that in order to survive it had to be accountable to the reading requirements of a philistine public. The conflict could not be resolved, and so the periodical died. Only the Yellow Book, of all the new magazines in the 1890s, had a large enough following to last for more than three years. The rest of the new journals, excellently printed, often edited with inventiveness and distinction, flourished for their few brief months, created a stir in the review columns of the well-established press, and disappeared because they could not sell enough copies.

Ironically enough, the rise of the short story, arguably the most important feature of the history of fiction in the 1890s, goes almost unnoticed by contemporary commentators. The new periodicals speak for a minority passionately concerned with the literary value of the short story, in a manner distinctly opposed to traditional ideas. The periodicals present avant-garde writing to a generally apathetic audience. But the situation is not quite so bleak. The collective impact of the new periodicals is enough to establish the story, in an astonishingly short period, as the chosen genre where new narrative techniques, new themes, and new styles of prose can flourish. There is hope, not despair, in the very ephemerality of the journals. Even if they cannot survive long, whilst they do survive, it is on their own terms of artistic integrity. Here is the triumph of radical fiction—not in terms of what is 'successful' or 'safe'; distinction comes from independence of thought and artistic freedom. The first of the new periodicals to celebrate these virtues was the Albemarle, which ran from January to September 1892, jointly

edited by Hubert Crackanthorpe and H.W. Wilkins.

The Albemarle evidently aimed for quality rather than quantity in all of its contributions. These ranged from discussions of liberal politics to articles on women's rights, travel, socialism, and interviews with leading artistic figures. At least one short story was included in each number. The short story, for the Albemarle and the other new periodicals, is now the staple form of fiction. The serial novel is completely absent from these journals. Indeed, the nearest the Albemarle gets to a serial is 'An Awkward Will', a short story by the Earl of Desart which ran in three parts from April to June 1892.<sup>1</sup> Even this story is only 7,000 words long. The short story, pressed for space in these elegantly produced pages, has to make its own special claims for attention. As a result the tone of the stories is serious, the themes are realistic, and the climaxes often pessimistic. 'An Awkward Will' is the only comic story in the journal, and its arch improbability (which concerns the exploits of the hero, Charlie, whose secret wishes come true with bewildering success), provides enjoyable relief from the more earnest short fiction.

The Albemarle gave Crackanthorpe, responsible for the literary content of the magazine, a great opportunity to publish a range of fiction which precisely matched his own output. The Albemarle appeared one year before Wreckage (1893) Crackanthorpe's first volume of stories. In the successive volumes, the very styles and themes which appear in the Albemarle's short fiction recur in his

1. Albemarle, 1 (April 1892), pp.149—51; 1 (May 1892), pp.187—91;  
1 (June 1892), pp.228—31.

own work.<sup>2</sup> Editorial choice—in a way unique to this periodical—profoundly affects the form and content of the magazine tales.

Crackanthorpe's aim was to write realistic stories in a quite impersonal prose. The more sordid the surroundings, the less emotional is the vocabulary. The writing presents its facts, and does not attempt to embellish them with morality. F. Mabel Robinson's story 'A Unit', in the first issue of the Albemarle<sup>3</sup> is written with exactly this kind of documentary realism. It concerns the cruel injustice of the workhouse system, as it affects one of the units, 'Arry', who is crushed and demoralised by the system. There is no melodramatic plea for compassion in the tale. Robinson lets the impersonal prose enumerate injustice after injustice. The only suggestion that the author might be any more than an impartial observer comes from the incantation of the words 'unit' and 'number'. This reticent prose must have delighted Crackanthorpe, as must the theme of 'Weekly Payments : A Humble Tragedy'.<sup>4</sup>

This tragedy, written by Kipling's sister Alice Fleming, appeared in the second number of the Albemarle. Like many of Crackanthorpe's own working class stories, 'Weekly Payments' is inevitably tragic and pathetic. The bleak poverty of the scene is relieved only by the dignity of the girl's suffering. This unnamed girl, recently married, buys a mirror for her bedroom. The Weekly shilling payment

2. Crackanthorpe printed two of his own stories in the magazine: 'He Wins Who Loses', Albemarle, 1 (March 1892), pp.104—11; 'Dissolving Views', 2 (August 1892), pp.80—83.
3. Albemarle, 1 (January 1892), pp.30—31.
4. Albemarle, 1 (February 1892), pp.66—70.

proves difficult to find. She dare not tell her husband. He dies in an accident, and his last wish is to be given a proper funeral. His wife pawns everything she owns to pay for this, including the mirror, although she has not paid off this last debt. She feels like a thief, and her guilt becomes so great that she commits suicide.

There is no hope in this story with its bare outline of plot. The factual prose keeps the emotions from becoming too sentimental, and concentrates on the uncomprehending fear which the girl feels towards the shopkeeper, who threatens her when she is unable to make payments on the mirror. We feel pity for the girl's unnecessary suffering, and sadness at the selfless way she carries out her husband's request.

If these two stories are close in mood and style to Crackanthorpe's realistic fiction, then the two descriptive stories which appear in the June issue of the Albemarle correspond to his pastoral sketches in Vignettes (1896). Crackanthorpe's stories are very short subjective impressions of tiny villages in France. They are no more than fanciful travelogues, written in a precious style with much affected feeling for the colour and shape of landscape. Such descriptive narratives appear frequently in the new periodicals of the 1890s. Crackanthorpe's admiration for the genre is reflected in his printing of R.B. Cunninghame Graham's 'The Evolution of a Village'<sup>5</sup> and Herbert Vivian's 'Dombovár'.<sup>6</sup> Both of these stories convey their author's artistic musings after their travels. The writers are suspiciously excited by their respective locations, for these are tales

5. Albemarle, 1 (June 1892), pp.204—07.

6. op. cit. pp.213—15.



written very much to order. Crackanthorpe's editorial policy in choosing short fiction for the Albemarle is one of gentle autocracy. He wants to give his journal variety in its fiction, from farce to grim realism to the descriptive travelogue. Each type of story is to be found in Crackanthorpe's own work. The journal begins with a realistic story, to announce its uncompromisingly modern stance. There is a place for comedy (Crackanthorpe wrote The Light Sovereign, a farce, with Henry Harland) as well as for the artistic narrative.

Such editorial autocracy has the merit of advancing only the latest fiction; or at least what Crackanthorpe considered to be the new short story. Other tales in the Albemarle confirm that such new fiction was generally pessimistic and concerned with the grim and sordid aspects of life. Where love appears in the stories it is either tragic or hopeless, and the emotion is generally despair or desolation. But a brave stand for such unprepossessing new short story writing had to be made, particularly in the face of traditional stories still dealing with the romance and adventure format.

The Anti-Philistine made its stand with grim and realistic short fiction. This periodical lasted for just four monthly issues from June to September 1897. Subtitled A Monthly Magazine & Review of Belles-Lettres: Also a Periodical of Protest, it was evidently keen to introduce radical journalism to the English press. It did so, in a rather hysterical way, by printing mainly American fiction. The Anti-Philistine was notable in that it printed stories and fables by Ambrose Bierce, whose work was not even recognized in America at this time. His tales are realistic and horrific, but their psychology is always compelling. The same cannot be said of Stanley Waterloo's

'The Dog and the Man',<sup>7</sup> an unpleasant story of cold-blooded revenge. A gentler note was introduced with Percival Pollard's 'Sister to Violets',<sup>8</sup> which, in common with all the Anti-Philistine stories, was written in a taut and sharp prose style. These stories ran to no more than a few pages, and so had no time to develop character or plot. Restrictions on the size of the new periodicals did much to encourage concise, economical writing. The very difficulties of publishing on a severely limited budget made the short story alert to the challenge of brevity.

A more languid approach to short fiction is made by the 'aesthetic' periodicals. The adjective is often applied to all the new periodicals of the 1890s, but it is best reserved for the ones which saw opportunities for their prose fiction to become a thing of decorative beauty. Periodicals such as the Pageant and the Evergreen consisted of short stories which had no connection with the harsh, vivid realism of tales in magazines like the Albemarle or the Anti-Philistine. The prose (as well as the poetry and art) was meant neither to shock a complacent political attitude, by presenting the iniquities of life in sordid urban settings, nor to outrage a philistine public by unremittingly grim psychological studies. The aesthetic journals demanded graceful and elegant prose. Here, the writer's challenge was not to describe the poverty of a pauper in 'emotionless' words. Rather, the challenge was in the word and the sentence as a source of mellifluous beauty. The stories are fables, dreams, and misty romances, set in pastoral landscapes or medieval

7. Anti-Philistine, 2 (July 1897), pp.65—73.

8. op. cit. pp.82—85.

castles. The short-lived Pageant was typical of the attractively and expensively printed aesthetic periodicals. Its art was chiefly of the Pre-Raphaelite school, and its fiction was romantic in inspiration.

The Evergreen, subtitled A Northern Seasonal, was similarly concerned with an elegant and decorative appearance. The Evergreen came out in four numbers, from Spring 1895 to Winter 1896—97, and aimed to instigate a Celtic, and more specifically a Scottish, renaissance in art and literature. The 'Proem' which introduced the spring number made it clear that such a renaissance would avoid the 'vision of slums'.<sup>9</sup> Realism meant no more than a multitude of 'clever writers emulously working in a rotten vineyard, so many healthy young men eager for the distinction of decay!' (p.10) The dissipated prose of decadence—clearly outlined here as the literature of realism—is discarded in favour of a new, inspiring, and morally healthy prose. Each section of each number is further divided into sections, containing short stories, poetry and art. The spring number took four themes, concerning spring in Nature, Life, the World and the North.

The stories in the Evergreen are decorative and pious. They are written to express commitment to Scottish ideas, and to a reintroduction of the standards of beauty and morality in fiction. As a result, the tales of the Evergreen have as restricted a house style as those of Crackanthorpe's Albemarle. The short story writer for the Evergreen has the chance to explore the possibilities of a new type of aesthetic prose. But too often the writing is merely posed

9. W. Macdonald and J. Arthur Thomson, 'Proem', Evergreen, 1 (Spring 1895), 10.

and the tales become no more than self-conscious eulogies of nature. The Evergreen has its artistic creed, and the short story has to follow it faithfully. The writer of short fiction is compelled to stand before Nature and respond with a kind of mystic rapture to its colours and tones.

Stories such as 'Lengthening Days' by W.G. Burn-Murdoch <sup>10</sup> or 'The Return' by J.J. Henderson <sup>11</sup> are typical of the pastoral-idyllic tales which fill the pages of the Evergreen. The stories are very short. They are self-consciously inspired by Nature's bounty, and the miracle of the changing seasons. In these tales, pale and beautiful girls waft delicately through landscapes of primroses and blossoms musing quietly about their perfectly behaved young men. The quiet rural retreats house wise parents, eloquent in country lore. Many of these prose-fancies incorporate lyrical outbursts of poetry, as if the medium of prose is too tawdry to capture the finest emotions which linger preciously in the heart of these silk-clad characters. When they are moved to act, it is generally in Pre-Raphaelite costume, and in pretty 'historical' settings. Only occasionally, as in 'Nannack' by George Eyre-Todd, are melancholy excursions made into contemporary life; generally the short story authors are content to linger in idyllic pastoral settings. <sup>12</sup> Gabriel Setoun's 'An Evening in June' is a representative example of an aesthetic story, concerned solely with the beauty of the country scene. The prose is quiet, sensitive, charming and dull:

10. Evergreen, 1, pp.44—46.

11. op. cit. pp.69—75.

12. Evergreen, 3 (Summer 1896), pp.129—41.

It was an evening in June, and the slumbrous air was heavy with the scent of roses and honeysuckle mingling with the smell of new-mown hay drying in the field beyond the garden. From the beeches rising high above the thatch-roofed cottage, and almost hiding the hill behind them, came now and again the flute-like notes of the mavis, while birds hopped about the berry bushes around her and twittered, talking to one another in whispers. 13

The short story, as it is represented in the Evergreen, is art produced to fulfil a purpose, however noble that purpose. The stories cannot escape their aesthetic destiny: they have to be beautiful, graceful and descriptive. The claim for the freedom of a renaissance paradoxically limits the terms of the fiction. In reacting against realism, fiction in the Evergreen has to adhere to new but rigidly imposed restrictions on the choice of subject-matter and theme. Great care is taken to give the short fiction of the Evergreen its specific identity, but the purpose is only lost in the artificiality of the pose. The ornamented, decorative prose style allows the contributors no freedom of choice. The short story is given definite aims by which it must flourish, and definite boundaries beyond which it dare not set foot. The short fiction in the Evergreen, as with its art and poetry, is elaborately doomed.

The short story has more breathing space in Cosmopolis, the international monthly review edited by F. Ortman and published between January 1896 and November 1898. The editorial policy, for all contributions (which ranged from reviews of literature and the theatre to articles on politics, history and art), was simple. Ortman chose

13. Evergreen, 1, p.119.

the best writers in England, France and Germany to contribute reviews, articles and stories in their own languages. As a result, the standard of Cosmopolis was uniformly high. The periodical aimed at a very small audience with cultured and artistic tastes, and expected the readers to be familiar with at least two foreign languages. In English, the distinguished critic Andrew Lang wrote a regular column of literary criticism and reviews. Short story authors who contributed to Cosmopolis included Vernon Lee, G.S. Street, George Gissing and Joseph Conrad. Henry James, always in demand for the launching of a new and serious periodical, wrote 'The Figure in the Carpet' for the first two issues of Cosmopolis, as well as 'John Delavoy' for the ninth volume in 1898.<sup>14</sup> One notable feature of the short stories which appeared in this magazine was their allegiance to light comedy. Other periodicals sought stories which were either grim and serious, or fey and decorative. Cosmopolis relieved the intellectual weight of its essays and reviews with sophisticated, ironic, and very well written short stories. John Oliver Hobbes's story ' 'Tis an Ill Flight Without Wings'<sup>15</sup> is an excellent example. The story relays the idealised thoughts and feelings of young Sir Claude Carisbrooke, as he muses on the virtues of an ideal woman. Claude drifts through life, taking part in elegantly futile conversation, the redundant poetry of which is neatly contrasted with the common sense of his mother, Lady Avon. As she is merely a woman she

14. 'The Figure in the Carpet', Cosmopolis, 1 (January 1896), pp.41—59; 1 (February 1896), pp.373—92.  
 'John Delavoy', Cosmopolis, 9 (January 1898), pp.1—21; 9 (February 1898), pp.317—32.
15. Cosmopolis, 2 (June 1896), pp.609—23.

is not expected to hold any useful ideas in her head; the story ironically displays the arrogance of such a paternalistic viewpoint, and throws a comic, if sometimes scathing, light on Claude's wan romanticism and his essential selfishness.

The editorial note in the first volume of the Savoy (January 1896) made it clear that the periodical would not compromise over standards in art, literature and criticism. The Savoy was to be uniformly excellent, yet it would neither be content to publish the work of well-known artists (the policy of Cosmopolis) nor to present 'only very obscure names' in order to attract notice. The editor, Arthur Symons, said that all 'we ask from our contributors is good work, and good work is all we offer our readers'. The Savoy appeared from January to December 1896, a total of eight issues, and Symons was determined to let artistic quality alone guide his editorial judgement. His first editorial continued:

We have no formulas, and we desire no false unity of form or matter. We have not invented a new point of view. We are not Realists, or Romanticists, or Decadents. For us, all art is good which is good art. We hope to appeal to the tastes of the intelligent by not being original for originality's sake, or audacious for the sake of advertisement, or timid for the convenience of the elderly-minded. (p.5)

Such wide provision gives the Savoy's short fiction an attractive variety. The Savoy, even more than the Yellow Book, with which it competed, contains more short fiction of high quality than any of the new periodicals of the 1890s. These stories bring the most innovative authors to the fore.

The first issue of the Savoy includes Frederick Wedmore's story

'To Nancy'<sup>16</sup> (completed in the second number), and Ernest Dowson's 'The Eyes of Pride'.<sup>17</sup> These two authors concentrate on telling their stories in defiance of any conventional regard for plot or narrative. Instead, their art stresses character and psychology. Dowson's tales for other issues of the Savoy show him to be concerned with the way a short story might linger over intimate moods and often sad relationships.<sup>18</sup>

W.B. Yeats and Fiona Macleod contribute stories of Celtic history to several numbers of the Savoy, and continue the Celtic renaissance in literature which was more forthrightly claimed by the Evergreen. Yeats's 'The Binding of the Hair'<sup>19</sup> is a brief but powerful story of a bard who tells tales of war to encourage soldiers before battle, and of the love his Queen feels for him. The treatment of his death, and the Queen's mourning, give the tale an effective tone of quiet yearning. Yeats's other stories for the Savoy<sup>20</sup> are less successful because they forsake the poetical and historical associations of Celtic literature for a denser, theological prose. The stories become too academic and arcane, as if the fiction is weighed down by the scholarship.

Realistic fiction is represented in the Savoy by Crackanthorpe's

16. 'To Nancy', Savoy, 1 (January 1896), pp.31—41.  
'The Deterioration of Nancy', Savoy, 2 (April 1896), pp.99—108.
17. Savoy, 1, pp.51—63.
18. 'Countess Marie of the Angels', Savoy, 2, pp.173—83.  
'The Dying of Francis Donne: A Study', Savoy, 4 (August 1896), pp.66—74.
19. Savoy, 1, pp.135—38.
20. 'Rosa Alchemica', Savoy, 2, pp.56—70.  
'The Tables of the Law', Savoy, 7 (November 1896), pp.79—87.



story 'Anthony Garstin's Courtship'<sup>21</sup> but the harsh, sordid poverty depicted in realistic fiction does not readily find a place here. Where the authors do describe hopelessness and emotional incompatibility the tone is usually one of quiet pessimism. Arthur Symons's own tale 'The Childhood of Lucy Newcome'<sup>22</sup> is a characteristically calm and desolate tale of an unhappy marriage, sickness, and morbid emotions. Lucy lives in a dreamworld, idolising her father, a weak man who is forever going to do 'great things'. Both her parents die, and the story ends with a picture of Lucy's intense loneliness. The story is written in a prose-style sensitive to the faintly attractive, self-pitying grimness of the theme and setting. The sentences are as listless and quiet as Lucy's father as he smokes his pipe in silence, 'doing nothing, neither reading, nor writing, nor sketching. All his interests in life seemed to have gone out together; his very hopes had been taken from him, and without those fantastic hopes he was but the shadow of himself'. (p.58)

O. Shakespear's tale 'Beauty's Hour: A Phantasy', which appeared in the Savoy in two parts, is one of the most successful short stories in the journal.<sup>23</sup> It tells the history of a plain and intelligent girl, Mary, who loves George, who in turn loves the beautiful Bella. Mary wishes that she could be beautiful for just one day. Miraculously, her wish is granted, and she is unrecognizable (at least facially) as the old Mary. She enters society and is courted where she has previously been ignored. She feels the difference between her two

21. Savoy, 3 (July 1896), pp.15—39.

22. Savoy, 8 (December 1896), pp.51—61.

23. Savoy, 4, pp.11—24; 5, (September 1896), pp.11—27.

selves, and what they mean to people, deeply and bitterly. She is saddened to find that George falls in love with the face of the new Mary, for her good character remains. Mary discovers too that society loves her for her physical appearance, and not for herself. She is admired for the most superficial reasons, and finds that men use her beauty to feed their own sexual vanity. Nobody is interested in her. As a result of her new appearance, Mary begins to see the real moral ugliness of the world, and to feel the intrinsic coldness of people's emotions. She is strong enough to keep control over her new self and the 'rewards' it brings, and never loses her firm reason. She dismisses the love-torn George because she finds Bella in real despair at losing him. She is too humane and charitable for the society which enthusiastically adopts her for her wonderful face. Its praise is worthless and immoral.

The idea which gives 'Beauty's Hour' its strength—the ambiguous triumph of Beauty in society—is simple and effective. The tale is never pushed along by the idea, just as it is not written merely to enumerate a number of moral points which the idea suggests. There is a real sense of discovery in 'Beauty's Hour', because Mary has to learn about her self and her real and false friends. She learns to be suspicious of those who proclaim their 'love' and 'affection' for her. The tale is strongly influenced by Henry James's 'Glasses' which had appeared in book form in England in the collection Embarrassments in June 1896,<sup>24</sup> three months before the publication of O. Shakespear's tale. In 'Glasses' similar points are made about beauty and the way society uses it as a commodity; society's opinion exerts a

24. Embarrassments ( 1896), pp.69—149.

terrible pressure on people to make them act in accordance with standards which have become part of the manipulating code of social acceptability.

In 'Glasses', Flora's beauty is 'disfigured' by her spectacles. Eventually she goes blind, and marries a dull and unattractive man who has, however, shown constant faith in loving her. Flora recovers her beauty, but not her sight. James's story has a clear and ruthless ironic message. Flora's blindness gives her the chance to attain happiness. She can reject the facile standards of society where, because it concentrates on facial excellence, and not on moral or emotional qualities, 'seeing' is in fact a terrible form of blindness. Society, not Flora, is morally disfigured.

A lighter comic touch is not, however, entirely missing from the Savoy. Ernest Rhys's 'A Romance of Three Fools'<sup>25</sup> is an unexceptional and entertaining farce, and stories like it prevent the Savoy from falling into the trap (which claimed several victims amongst the periodicals of the 1890s) of becoming too serious. The appearance of Joseph Conrad's tale 'The Idiots',<sup>26</sup> one of his first short stories, justly supports the editorial claim to print new writing of the best standard. But the Savoy could not survive on excellence alone. The journal lasted for just eight numbers, its demise due solely to a lack of financial support.

The Savoy did the short story the high service of allowing it great freedom and variety, but it was the Yellow Book which firmly established the story as a serious, creative and independent genre.

25. Savoy, 5, pp.57—69.

26. Savoy, 6 (October 1896), pp.11—30.

The most important feature of the Yellow Book was the chance it gave for the short story to be unrestricted by length or subject-matter. The traditional magazine story, as we have seen, ran to its strictly allotted six or eight thousand words. Henry Harland, the American editor of the Yellow Book, realised that the development of the short story could only take place if each author wrote according to his or her own conception of the length which each story needed to satisfy its central idea. It was Harland's radical belief that no author or editor ought to prescribe for inspiration or creativity, and that to lay a hard limit of eight thousand words on as subtle and complex a genre as the short story was to deny it progress.

Harland believed that the short story was due high respect. A proper and creative editorship would guarantee each author unlimited space for his short fiction. Harland made absolutely no restrictions on length or on subject-matter. The short story was an art form, and was not to be written to order, nor was it to provide comfortable padding for a magazine only notionally interested in art. The Yellow Book reveals—and it is the first and foremost of the new periodicals to do so—the short story written with its own creative terms, and its own creative freedom. Harland's practical service to short fiction, through his editorship of the Yellow Book, is immeasurable. The Yellow Book is the short story's outstanding testament of faith in the 1890s. As one critic wrote, Harland was instrumental in turning the short story from a conservative and repetitive genre into a creative art form:

What Mr Harland has done definitely for the art of the short story is to enlarge its scope, to give it fulness and richness, to link the incident with the rest

of life, and to convert what had been feared as embarrassing decoration into essential substance. <sup>27</sup>

Henry James, who discusses his reactions to the Yellow Book in his preface to the New York edition of The Lesson of the Master finds the possibilities of such authorial freedom exhilarating, and of great historical significance to the short story:

I was invited, and all urgently, to contribute to the first number, and was regaled with the golden truth that my composition might absolutely assume, might shamelessly parade in, its own organic form. It was disclosed to me, wonderfully, that—so golden the air pervading the enterprise—any projected contribution might conform, not only unchallenged but by this circumstance itself the more esteemed, to its true intelligible nature. For any idea I might wish to express I might have space, in other words, elegantly to express it—an offered licence that, on the spot, opened up the millennium to the "short story". One had so often known this product to struggle, in one's hands, under the rude prescription of brevity at any cost, with the opposition so offered to its really becoming a story, that my friend's emphasised indifference to the arbitrary limit of length struck me, I remember, as the fruit of the finest artistic intelligence. <sup>28</sup>

The Yellow Book was the longest running, if not quite the first, of the new periodicals, and the thirteen volumes appeared between April 1894 and April 1897. It was published at the Bodley Head, jointly by Elkin Mathews and John Lane for the first two numbers, and

27. Nation (October 1898), 299. Quoted in Katherine Lyon Mix, A Study in Yellow: The Yellow Book and its Contributors (Lawrence and London, 1960), p.61
28. The Novels and Tales of Henry James, New York Edition, 26 vols (1908—17), xv (1909), p.vii.

by John Lane alone for the following eleven issues. It was intended to be a quarterly of permanent merit, with works by already distinguished artists, as well as many contributions from the new writers. The Yellow Book was the size of an ordinary French novel (volume 1 was two hundred and seventy-two pages long) which gave the quarterly the unique opportunity to include both long and extremely short tales. The Yellow Book, unlike many contemporary journals such as the Albemarle and Cosmopolis, dealt exclusively with literature and art. The Yellow Book contained no news, no politics, very few reviews, and no advertisements outside bookseller's lists. As E. Lenore Casford remarks:

It was the first quarterly printed in England intended exclusively for men and women of letters and dependent solely for support upon its own intrinsic merit. The venture was both lofty and bold and could never have been carried out so successfully had it not had behind it the support of the coterie of young writers with whom Henry Harland had a wide and intimate acquaintance. <sup>29</sup>

Evelyn Sharp, who wrote a number of short stories for the Yellow Book, was just one of that group of lively artists. Talking about the writers who supported Harland and John Lane at the Bodley Head, she remarked that their 'real objectives were the sentimentalities and hypocrisies of a dying age, and in attacking these [ they sought ] to set up a new standard of beauty and sincerity in art'. With such noble aims there was a great future for 'the short story the "Yellow Book" tried so hard to graft on to the literature of this country'. <sup>30</sup>

29. 'The Magazines of the 1890's', University of Oregon Publication, Language and Literature Series, 1 (September 1929), 12.

30. 'A Group of the Nineties', Manchester Guardian, 19 January 1924, p.7.

This responsible effort, which the short story so obviously needed, gave the Yellow Book its place of prime importance in the history of the genre.

It would be misleading to suggest that there could be any such thing as a typical Yellow Book story—as one could for the tales of Cosmopolis, the Dome or the Evergreen. The strength of the Yellow Book's short fiction rests in its great variety. The short story could be as long as James's 14,000 word 'The Death of the Lion'<sup>31</sup> which opened the first issue, or as brief as C.S.'s 300 word impression 'Honi soit qui mal y pense'.<sup>32</sup> The range was just as flexible, and the Yellow Book gives freely of its space to conventional melodramas, decorative prose fancies, realistic tales, children's stories, psychological studies, allegories, ironic comedies and straightforward adventure tales. Every style of short story is to be found in the pages of the Yellow Book, from the traditional to the avant-garde. The Yellow Book offers an accurate representation of the state of short story writing in the 1890s. Such is its strength and importance.

Charlotte M. Mew's story 'Passed'<sup>33</sup> announces the uncompromising fact that the new short story could not be taken for granted by a reader accustomed to the easy and comfortable browse through the standard text of short fiction. The prose is weighty, the message obscure, there is no clear narrative line, and the whole short story is difficult to understand. 'Passed' describes the meeting of the narrator and a distraught girl in a church; the narrator is led back to the girl's

31. Yellow Book, 1 (April 1894), pp.7—52.

32. Yellow Book, 2 (July 1894), pp.144—45.

33. Yellow Book, 2, pp.121—41.

lodgings, where she is entreated to stay. A dead woman lies on the bed. After much inner confusion (there is hardly any conversation between the two) the narrator departs. She feels that she cannot help her distressed companion, nor live with her own instinctive confusion. Some months later, the narrator sees the girl again, but they do not speak. Charlotte Mew's story concentrates on psychology, and narrative support is almost disregarded. The reader accustomed to narrative clarity, and to a story with a clear sense of direction and a neat denouement, gets no help from 'Passed'. It is ambiguous, abstracted, and written in an agitated and neurotic style.

There is a more straightforward approach in Arnold Bennett's story 'A Letter Home', which appeared in the Yellow Book in July 1895.<sup>34</sup> This is a good example of the realistic short story. It concerns the last days of a poverty-stricken young man, who joins a crowd of tramps queuing to enter a public park, where they can at least sleep with some shelter. The man talks to his companion, Darkey, but he is obviously unwell and is eventually sent to hospital. He is ashamed of letting his mother down by sinking into such degradation, and writes to tell her of his impending death, asking forgiveness. Darkey arrives to see him, but he is too late. He is given the letter to post. That evening, Darkey has too much to drink, and he uses the letter as a match to light his pipe.

The clear story line, with its simple progression of incidents, means that the story never becomes overdramatised. The pathos of the young man's situation complements the grim setting, and there is a certain wry humour in his ability to hold an ironic view of his trouble.

34. Yellow Book, 6 (July 1895), pp.93—102.



The story is written in a plain style, and there is no attempt to force the feeling of social injustice to make a heavy moral point. In common with other realistic writers, Bennett shuns didacticism.

Frances E. Huntly's two stories 'Points of View' and 'Lucille' in the Yellow Book, 8, offer a quite different form and practise of short story writing.<sup>35</sup> 'Points of View' is written for the sole purpose of investing moments of emotional crisis with as much significance as possible. Such a story, as we have seen, has affiliations with melodrama. Each experience becomes thrillingly suggestive, and the prose is cluttered with verbal waste in this effort to dramatise the moment. The writing is self-conscious and precious. In the tale, a girl is kissed, and she finds herself incapable of rational thought. The cliché of romantic fiction is turned into a sacrament of neurosis. The author is ever keen to isolate the component parts of this mystical experience. So the girl 'tasted in that moment something of the weakness of womanhood—its pitiful groping artificiality, its keen passionate realness'. (p.51) Here is a story bawling its way to its dramatic conclusion in the name of psychological subtlety.

'Points of View' was written to emphasise emotional turbulence. 'Lucille', in direct contrast, is an elegant and urbane analysis of emotion and motive. The story is modern in its stress on analysis rather than plot, its lack of concern for the precise order of events, and the digressive psychology which makes the author linger eternally over the great question 'why?' The narrator worries at her story, shakes out snippets of conversation, accounts of emotions, and the spontaneous reaction to events, in an effort to understand her main

35. Yellow Book, 8 (January 1896), pp.47—60.

character's psychology. The tale takes its joy in enigma; it is not concerned with the precise states of emotion which feature in the traditional short story of the 1890s. 'Lucille' looks at life as if each moment were preciously vague. At one point the narrator catches Lucille's eye: the moment seems pregnant with importance, but who can say exactly why? The narrator offers no more than conjecture: 'I caught her look for an instant. . . it seemed to say something, hope something'. (p.59)

Mrs Murray Hickson's 'Our River'<sup>36</sup> is a typical example of the descriptive tale. If, by Harland's authority, the short story could literally make something out of nothing, if it could reject the need for plot and action, then there was a place in the Yellow Book for prose of quiet descriptive beauty, for immobile set-pieces of writing. But too often this writing is merely artificial. The author hopes that allusiveness might be sought in lists of fanciful words. Eloquence in natural description becomes no more than delicate verbiage. Tales like 'Our River' are word patterns of the most pretentious kind, written with an artificial melancholy and a superimposed tranquillity:

In these wonderful days of late September—hot as August, yet filled with the finality and sadness of Autumn—there come to me, beside the river, many imaginings, quaint, grotesque, and pathetic. Here, where the sunshine falls in quivering patches between closely-growing leaves, where the water rests, without stir or ripple, under the shadows; here, where the

36. Yellow Book, 10 (July 1896), pp.169—72.

current is so slow that my boat,  
 tied bow and stern to hazel boughs,  
 moves not, neither swings one inch  
 from her moorings—here I lie. (p.169)

The short story does no more here than affect the lyrical pose of a prose-poem. There is no spontaneity to the authorship. The tale is meant to be carried along by the eloquence of its diction, the charm of the internal rhymes, and not by the vigour of its plot. As a result, the story is simply predetermined. The 'poetry' is imaginatively redundant. As Max Nordau remarks in Degeneration (1895):

The writer gives himself the air of a painter; he professes to seize the phenomenon, not as a concept, but to feel it as simple sense-stimulation. He writes down the names of colours as an artist lays on his washes, and he imagines that he has herewith given the reader a particularly strong impression of reality. But it is a childish illusion, for the reader, nevertheless, comes to see no colours, but merely words. <sup>37</sup>

Richard Le Gallienne's 'Prose Fancies', which appeared regularly in the Yellow Book, are brief descriptive tales which offer no more than similarly verbose and languid surveys of romantic scenes. The edge of the brevity is lost in ornament and an often snobbish wistfulness. The eloquence of the swiftly curtailed view of a moment is, however, handled with a succinct effect by 'V', 'O', and 'C.S.' (respectively Stanley V. Makower, Oswald Sickert and Arthur Cosslett Smith). Here, the realistic settings give the momentary conversations, the glances and the actions, a genuine allusive quality. The prose is spare, not loaded with descriptive phrases, and the brief mention is

37. Degeneration, translated from the second edition, (1895), p.486.

enough to summarise what the long sentence can crush.

A common complaint about the fiction of the Yellow Book was that it was too dreary. 'Altogether, we cannot but feel relief' wrote a reviewer in the Academy, 'to think that the contributors of the Yellow Book have no hand in the control of this planet, so much in love with greyness are they, and so lacking in humour'.<sup>38</sup> The charge is not altogether fair. Kenneth Grahame wrote a number of witty and ironic stories for the Yellow Book, and Harland's own tales are often marked by a flippant comedy. M<sup>é</sup>nie Muriel Dowie's tale 'An Idyll in Millinery' is similarly roguish.<sup>39</sup> The story deals with the different outlooks on life which result from national characteristics, and it takes its place amongst the considerable numbers of short stories written in the 1890s about the interactions of people with different cultural backgrounds. The Yellow Book was particularly keen to print stories which showed the English in contact with the French, and many of Harland's own stories have French settings. Short story authors found the 'international' story to be very popular, and the considerable influence of Henry James's tales, many of which deal with Americans in Europe, sustains and inspires this tradition. James's imitators in the short story—notably Harland, Ella D'Arcy and Vernon Lee—concentrate on the elegant and urbane aspects of international life, with much emphasis on charming and 'intelligent' conversation. Dowie's story brings together English and French characters.

Viscount Liphook falls in love with a French assistant in a millinery shop. His love is clumsily English, hers more reckless. Melanie

38. Unsigned review of Yellow Book, 13, Academy, 51 (June 1897), 590.

39. Yellow Book, 10, pp.24—53.

remains charmingly non-committal about the relationship, whilst Liphook is ponderously infatuated. M<sup>e</sup>nie Dowie is too sharp an observer to let the romantic feeling obscure the shortcomings of Liphook's character. Sometimes, when the Viscount 'happened to think how it was all going to end, he had rather a bad moment, but thanks to his nature and training he did not think often'. (p.39)

When Liphook is actually forced to think, his ideas are unpleasantly polemical. Melanie's Jewish guardian expresses his feelings about Liphook's love, to be met by racist cant, which Dowie mercilessly exposes. The story finishes when Liphook, about to claim his true love, finds that she has left for France and an arranged marriage. He is not so shaken from his aristocratic senses to be more than momentarily stunned, and the story ends with the intimation that Liphook will soon re-establish himself in his solid English world.

Ella D'Arcy, one of the Yellow Book's most distinguished and prolific contributors, also wrote stories in this particularly English tradition of light ironic comedy. But her subject-matter in 'Irremediable', which appeared in the first volume, is of a more serious kind.<sup>40</sup> This story earned D'Arcy a high reputation. It is evidently a realistic story, for it deals with urban poverty and the tragic consequences of a misguided marriage. It is also naturalistic in the way it deals with the influence of urban pressure on human behaviour.

In 'Irremediable', a young London clerk on holiday in the country meets and proposes to a young girl who lives with her aunt in a nearby village. The marriage is a disaster. Willoughby realises that his 'love' for Esther (which is really misplaced vanity and chivalry)

40. Yellow Book, 1, pp.87—108.

has turned to hatred. Yet he is morally bound to live with his wife for, perhaps, the next forty years. They will share a life in close physical proximity, at an enormous emotional distance.

That theme of emotional disharmony is common to many stories of the 1890s, so common in fact that marital complaint begins to read like an inevitable urban litany. Willoughby has to face Esther's constant grudges: 'every affront or grievance, real or imaginary, since the day she and Willoughby had first met, she poured forth with a fluency due to frequent repetition'. (p.103) There seems no prospect of happiness. Anger is met by Esther's tears, and 'love' by mawkish appeals for affection. In the end, Willoughby can respond only with a huge and bewildering emotion. He feels only hatred for his wife: 'but when he understood the terror of his Hatred, he laid his head upon his arms and wept, not facile tears like Esther's, but tears wrung out from his agonising, unavailing regret'. (p.108)

Ella D'Arcy's story 'The Pleasure-Pilgrim'<sup>41</sup> which appeared in the Yellow Book in April 1895 offers a more confusing and irreconcilable insight into human behaviour, though in a more flippant ironic style. It is another 'international' story, showing the widely different characteristics of an Englishman and an American woman. The title of the story reminds us that it owes much to James's tales which deal with Americans in Europe, and in particular to 'A Passionate Pilgrim' (1871), which James wrote after his personal discovery of Europe in 1869—70.

Lulie, an American girl, who according to the English view is a notorious and loud-mouthed flirt, falls in love with Campbell, an English author, who according to the American view is cold and unemotional.

41. Yellow Book, 5 (April 1895), pp.34—67.

Lulie declares that she is madly in love with the writer, but since she has flirted with every man she has met whilst staying at the hotel where the two meet, her declaration is suspect. Campbell refuses to believe her love is genuine. A friend, who knows her emotional history, supports this attitude, and says that Lulie is merely playing with him. She continues to declare her love in earnest. One day the two 'lovers' have a shooting match. The author declares that if Lulie really loves him, she will shoot herself to prove that love. He is, naturally, joking. Lulie shoots herself. Campbell's friend sees this tragic death as either suicide inspired by genuine love, a terrible misadventure, or a piece of consummate acting. The final view would be the perfect artistic response to unrequited love. The story ends—somewhere between the black comedy of Oscar Wilde's 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime' and the ambiguity of James's 'The Turn of the Screw'—with plausible and mutually exclusive accounts of this death. We do not know what to think of the calamity, though the friend is convinced of the real motive of the death:

"The rôle she had played so long and so well now demanded a sensational finale in the centre of the stage. And it's the third theory I give the preference to. She was the most consummate little actress I ever saw". (p.67)

'The Pleasure-Pilgrim' shows that you cannot take things for granted, least of all emotions, and certainly not appearances. The flippant irony even goes so far as to pose the question 'what do things actually mean?' That is a large question for such a stylish and seemingly trivial tale. Even when drastic events occur in this story they provide no clue to character or feeling. Appearance relies on the perception of the individual, and must vary from person to person. Lulie is thus

both a flirt and a faithful lover; her death is great acting and the tragic expression of deep feeling. As in 'The Turn of the Screw' (though D'Arcy's story does not have the intellectual force and seriousness of James's great tale), narrative evidence is presented to the reader without hesitation, and quite openly: yet it is impossible to come to any tangible conclusion as to Lulie's real feelings. We need her secret thoughts in order to 'know', and that perception is of course denied us. The texture of the story is therefore absolutely ironic.

It was this kind of 'immoral' flippancy which led to the fierce complaints about the Yellow Book as 'a collection of semi-obscene, epicene, sham erotic and generally impotent literary and artistic efforts'.<sup>42</sup> The Yellow Book was offensive to public taste because it was unsacramental. A tale like 'The Pleasure-Pilgrim' offered the reader no standards by which emotions could be safely judged. Lulie says nothing which can be trusted, yet she says 'I love you' with conviction and authority. Truth could be the supreme lie, but there is no effective communication in a story where opposite opinions live in the same sentence. Ella D'Arcy's elegant story is also a tale of narrative anarchy.

It is a comment on the urbanity of the Yellow Book's short fiction that such radical and questing authorship is presented with easy grace. The new writers of short fiction used the Yellow Book to advertise a genre which was learning to express itself in ways unthinkable to the traditional magazine author.

42. Grafa, 7 (April 1894), 285. Quoted in Mix, p.92. See Mix pp.87-93 for a fuller study of the reception of the Yellow Book in England.



The new short story often fell into traps of its own making, as we have seen in this survey of avant-garde writing. Aesthetic fiction could be merely decorative; psychological studies could be overwrought and melodramatic; realistic stories could be reticent to the point of blandness. But there were triumphs for the new short story which could not have been won from the old adventure and romance tradition. A clear economy of writing, a flexibility of narrative, an honest and broad response to the real problems of urban existence, and a healthy and radical desire to turn the short story into a creative art form in its own right—these are attributes which give the short fiction of the 1890s genuine maturity.

Such artistic achievements are durable, and outlast the fashion of philistine public taste. The reading public in the 1890s would not support original and creative writing, and the rebellious early days of the Yellow Book soon passed.<sup>43</sup> The final numbers of the Yellow Book have little to offer the innovative writer, and the fiction—simply in order to sell copies—is sadly conventional. Before the Yellow Book disappeared, a critic in the Academy looked back on the quarterly with nostalgia. The reviewer lamented:

This fantastic quarterly does not grow in strength or beauty. It lacks a policy, a central idea, and has become merely an agglomeration of pictures and stories, all of which might appear with equal propriety elsewhere; whereas once—once things were not so; once The Yellow Book was a fighter in a definite, meritorious cause, and contributors were proud to believe that their work was unlikely to be accepted by Mr Harland's fellow editors.<sup>44</sup>

43. See Casford, pp.18—19.

44. Unsigned review of Yellow Book, 12, Academy, 51 (February 1897), 177.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### HENRY JAMES

Henry James, alone amongst the authors to be considered here, had a long and impressive career in writing short fiction before the start of the decade. James's short stories make a significant contribution to the quality of the genre in the late nineteenth century, and his work influenced many writers in the 1890s such as Harland, Wedmore, Ella D'Arcy and Vernon Lee. His tales first appear in the 1860s, and his art matures, and develops a wide range, over the next two decades. Many of James's tales of the 1870s and 1880s are concerned with 'international' themes, and deal with the contrast between American and European outlooks on life, and the often confused results of interaction between people of these two cultures. The stories are ironic, and suffused with an acute, occasionally satirical feeling for the comedy of manners. They are written in a leisurely prose style, which assists the lingering study of subtle emotions. James's work in this period includes the 'Italian' stories, written in Venice. Stories like 'The Aspern Papers' and 'Louisa Pallant' are seriously concerned with the issues which attend invasions of privacy, and the complicated moral problems which always seem to arise whenever there is affection or love in human intercourse. By the 1890s, then, James has a distinguished group of stories to his credit: his short fiction is obviously a serious means of creative expression. James's survey of sophisticated emotions and testing moral crises continues with the major tales of the 1890s, which freely develop these, and other, important issues.

Henry James devoted himself to the short story and the drama in the 1890s. After The Tragic Muse (1890) James printed only two

short novels in the period—The Spoils of Poynton (1897) and What Maisie Knew (1897). This concentration on short fiction helped to bring about a new creative vitality within the form. As Leon Edel remarked, James's reasons for this great devotion were partly economic. He 'announced to his friends that he was abandoning the writing of novels; these yielded revenue during serialisation, but had no sale in the bookshops. James would now write for the theatre in the hope of gaining a better livelihood; and by producing many tales, in the margin of his theatricals, he hoped to support himself adequately during this period'.<sup>1</sup>

James had been upset by the offer made by his publishers Macmillans of an advance fee of £70 instead of the usual £250 for The Tragic Muse, and he expressed his dissatisfaction by turning to a literary agent for financial management.<sup>2</sup> He turned to the short story and the drama for a fresh creative challenge. Excited by the prospect of writing economically and concisely, James remarked on these challenging aspects of short story writing in his Notebooks in 1891:

I must hammer away at the effort to do, successfully and triumphantly, a large number of very short things. I have done  $\frac{1}{2}$  a dozen, lately, but it takes time and practice to get into the trick of it. I have never attempted before to deal with such extreme brevity. However, the extreme brevity

1. The Complete Tales of Henry James, edited by Leon Edel, 12 vols (1962—64), VII (1963), introduction, p.10.
2. See Leon Edel, The Life of Henry James, 2 vols (Harmondsworth, 1977), II, p.14.

is a necessary condition  
 only for some of them—  
 the others may be of vary-  
 ing kinds and degrees of  
 shortness.<sup>3</sup>

Even at this early date James sees great potential in the genre. He allies the flexibility of the form to the inexhaustible range of human experience which the short story author could use. The artistic reason 'par excellence' is, then, 'simply the consideration that by doing short things I can do so many, touch so many subjects, break out in so many places, handle so many of the threads of life'. (p.106) The lucid onward march, and the limited range of themes and settings of conventional short fiction were not for James. His letters and comments in the Notebooks show an entirely fresh approach to the genre. James will write short stories with his own theoretical apparatus, his own terminology for specific types and grades of short fiction, and with his own allusive and dense prose style. These are radically new conceptions. James sets himself narrative goals inconceivable to the short story authors of the old romance-adventure tradition.

James's desire to experiment with new techniques and situations often led him well beyond the accepted 6—8,000 words prescribed by the magazines. His average tales are from 10—20,000 words long. James's terminology for the types of story which could be written paid no attention to their mere length; a concern which he felt was the besetting sin of magazine editors and authors.

James defined his terminology of the short story in the late pre-faces to the New York edition of his works, and in the Notebooks.

3. The Notebooks of Henry James, edited by F.O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York, 1947), p.105.

He hesitated to use the generally accepted phrase 'short story' without the qualification of quotation marks, and often used it to refer specifically to the conventional magazine story. On these occasions James implies disapproval of the limitation of size on the story. However, he does use the term 'short story' to refer uncritically to his own work: much depends on the specific context in which the term is applied. James also spoke of his own short narratives, and of those he admired, as 'tales', 'nouvelles' or 'contes'. This terminology emphasised his respect for the French tradition of short fiction, which he felt had the appeal of greater flexibility and length. The English magazine story could not offer such freedom. As Edel says:

He deplored the general tendency of magazines to disregard questions of "organic" form, and to consider short stories in terms of their shortness—that is to make them conform to some arbitrary word-count. This does not mean that he favoured an undisciplined prolixity. What he believed in was "masterly brevity", as he put it, and even more—"the idea beautifully developed".<sup>4</sup>

James divided his own short fiction into two categories: the tale and the short novel. This was an important distinction when the beautiful development of a tale such as 'The Turn of the Screw' led him to write over fifty thousand words—which by any other writer's standards would constitute a short novel. But James's clear definition

4. Complete Tales, I, introduction, pp.8—9.

of genre-terms should be respected. Within the term 'tale' he saw two possibilities, both 'produced by this rigour of brevity'. These were the 'anecdote' and the 'picture'. The anecdote was a highly foreshortened account of a single incident happening to one character. James described this familiar form, which is close to the conception of traditional short fiction, as 'the detached incident, single and sharp, as clear as a pistol-shot'.<sup>5</sup> Everything in the anecdote referred to its central idea; as a result of this, and not its short length, the tale achieved economy and direct motivation.

Sometimes the central idea of the tale would, by its intrinsic nature and quality, demand further explanation and suggestion, and the detailed survey of more characters and relationships. Most importantly, the role of the narrator within the story often called for an amplified text. The essential criterion was the nature of the idea which inspired the tale. James would never wish to stop 'anecdote' from becoming 'picture'. He revelled in the challenge of the picture, which he called a form 'of rarer performance', summarising it as 'the impression, comparatively generalised—simplified, foreshortened, reduced to a particular perspective—of a complexity or a continuity'.  
(p.652)

There were occasions when the 'idea' of the story demanded even further amplification. Here, closely argued opinions, and a greater number of character-actions were needed to attend to the subtleties of the central idea. Where greater perspective and continuity were needed the picture could develop into a short novel—as in What

5. 'The Story-Teller at Large: Mr Henry Harland', Fortnightly Review, 63 (April 1898), 652.

Maisie Knew or The Spoils of Poynton. With James, the idea of a tale might turn out to be the idea of a novel, so it is not surprising to find that his pictures and anecdotes often have to appear in consecutive issues of a magazine. Only the Yellow Book included long James tales in one number. James refers, in an entry in the Notebooks in 1893, to his desire to attend fully to the demands of the idea and to avoid undue length. He has lost some of the zeal for great brevity which marked his comments of 1890. By 1893 James concentrates far more on the picture than the anecdote. He is not concerned with mere prolixity, and feels that he is selling both idea and art short if he does not fully investigate the fine shades and feelings inside the story. In effect James claims the need for a new long short story which will avoid the unnecessary problems which result from extreme brevity:

The desire to escape from the  
cramp of the too intensely  
short possesses me; crowds  
back upon me and pulls me up  
—making me ask myself whether  
I am not creating myself need-  
less difficulties. God knows  
how dear is brevity and how  
sacred today is concision.  
But it's a question of degree,  
and of the quantity of impor-  
tance that one can give. That  
importance is everything now.  
To try and squeeze it into a  
fixed and beggarly number of  
words is a poor and a vain  
undertaking—a waste of time.  
(p.135).

The writer of the usual magazine story would have been horrified that his appointed limit of words constituted 'a poor and vain undertaking'. It had become inevitable that stories of a standard length would be provided to satisfy the magazine market. James has a new theory of short fiction based on narrative flexibility and allusive prose, but he has to write for a deeply conservative market. He answers

the problem by being prepared to write a large number of anecdotes to gratify the demands of traditional magazine editors, and in a manner which suggests he is writing mechanically.

We have seen that James worked in the established tradition of short fiction for financial reasons: his art is, after all, his trade. Necessity compelled James to pay regard to the traditional aspects of the short story, just as creative intelligence allowed him to attend to the virtues and strengths of the magazine tale. James explores these conventional devices, and his anecdotes are marked by lucid and regular plots, the role of chance, and melodramatic emotions. Several of these tales offer revealing insights into the way an author with new creative ideas could work within the established tradition of the 'old' short story. James sees that the traditional narrative has virtues of openness and narrative pull. Inevitability of plot may be countered by sheer audacity in the story-line. In 'The Private Life' James talks about the artist Clare Vawdrey, who writes just this kind of safe and clear narrative, and marches 'with his even pace and his perfectly good conscience, into the flat country of anecdote, where stories are visible from afar like windmills and signposts'.<sup>6</sup>

'The Visits' (in The Private Life, 1893, pp.215—239) shows James working happily inside a tradition of short fiction. He is ready to adopt melodramatic vocabulary and gesture where the central idea of the anecdote requires verbal and emotional hyperbole. The very slightness of the plot means that the story need not attempt great psychological depth. 'The Visits' tells the fateful story of Louisa Chantry. The narrator, an old friend of Louisa's mother, meets the girl whilst

6. In The Private Life (1893), p.7.



on a visit to some friends in the country. The narrator observes Louisa's attachment to the impecunious Jack Brandon, though since she only catches snippets of conversations and stray glances between them, she does not know how deep their friendship is. One day she passes Jack in a state of agitation and then comes across Louisa who is also in a state of distress. Louisa falls ill, and it transpires that she feels she has made a fool of herself by falling in love with Jack. Her will is broken; she feels a heavy weight of guilt because she cannot tell her mother of her 'sin'; she eventually dies, almost, it seems, out of conscious choice. The story works carefully towards the climax of Louisa's revelation to the narrator on her death-bed.

'The Visits' shows that James will never reject a narrative idea however trivial and incredible it might be. The idea has no emotional depth, but the story is written with economy and a sheer singlemindedness of narrative purpose. The narrator devotes herself to discovering Louisa's emotional history. Louisa has no option in a story as high-paced as this but to die of guilt. 'The Visits' is dedicated to the crisis of Louisa's seeming death-wish, and the discovery of the cause of that wish is all-important. Hence—and such creative decisions are instinctively made in countless stories in the 1890s—the only fitting language is frantic, ever searching for the 'truth' that will consummate the crisis of the narrative. 'Pathos' must be given its show, however monumental the pose. Louisa's death, and her pathetic diction, are necessary melodramatic elements in a story of such emotional crisis. The narrator is by Louisa's bed to the last:

I bent over her more closely  
to kiss her, and when I  
raised my head her mother  
was on the other side of

the bed. She fell on her knees there for the same purpose, and when Louisa felt her lips she stretched out her arms to embrace her. She had the strength to draw her close, and I heard her begin again, for the hundredth time "Mother, mother—" "Yes, my own darling".

Then for the hundredth time I heard her stop. There was an intensity in her silence. It made me wildly nervous; I got up and turned away. (pp.238—39)

James uses melodramatic gestures and language in conventional ways in 'The Visits'. The idea of his anecdote does not merit his complete creative engagement, and the writing sometimes seems perfunctory. James is only involved in the story when the narrator's personal effect on the tone and telling of the tale is at issue. James's use of a female narrator—rare in the short story of the 1890s, where it is usually implied that an unnamed narrator is male—gives his story a new sense of perspective. Certain situations would not arise in 'The Visits', like the deathbed scene, and the moment of Louisa's first confession, if the narrator were a man, since James feels that instantaneous trust in emotional problems is more likely to happen between two women. As a result of the narrator's sex, the story has its own special personality. Even in this slight story there is a conscious regard for the proper narrative 'voice' in which the tale of the kindly female narrator might best be expressed.

We read 'The Visits' in comfort because the emotions of the story are so plainly on the surface. We read in a similarly mechanical way when the formula story has a highly organised plot. Such a plot is evident in James's tale 'The Wheel of Time' (in The Private Life, pp. 59—125). 'The Wheel of Time' tells the story of Lady Greyswood and her brilliant, penniless son, Maurice. Mrs Knocker, her friend, has

a plain and very rich daughter, Fanny. The mothers attempt to match the pair. The boy, realising the situation, runs away, although he still admires Fanny. She is heartbroken. Many years later Fanny and Maurice have, separately, been married and widowed. Fanny is now beautiful, and she has a brilliant son, Arthur. Maurice has a dull daughter. Maurice falls in love with Fanny, but she rejects his offer of marriage. Thus she takes sweet revenge for her earlier despair. The son emulates his father by running away from Fanny's daughter when they are placed in each other's way. With a nice irony Maurice bumps into Arthur in Paris. Arthur has escaped to the same city where Maurice took his refuge many years before.

The plot is perfectly balanced and symmetrical. As readers, we are carried through the rigid causal sequence without hindrance. Our reading is so cosseted that we can easily guess the outcome of the story. We can even applaud our foresight when we conclude that the activities of the son and daughter will emulate that of their parents. The repetition of match-making, shying away and revenge is so regularised that we appear to be involved enough in the story to 'discover' its conclusion, and to take high satisfaction when events confirm our suspicions. Nothing inside the story shocks us from such complacent knowledge—not even (and the point demonstrates how lulled our senses are) the death of Fanny's daughter. The plot is enclosed, and the reading is serene and untroubled. The perfection of plot leads me to suspect that James may have intended 'The Wheel of Time' as a parody of the conventional magazine story. James implies that magazine fiction demands that each story be read without involvement or effort; the function of the literature is ephemeral entertainment, and as such it should not engage too close attention. James writes

the kind of story which seems to conform to such theory. Within this story we can apprehend events before they happen. We can easily match the past (Fanny and Maurice's affair) with the present (Arthur and Vera's affair), and in doing so congratulate ourselves on our attentive response to the text. But our insight and our activity are no more than narrative spoon-feeding. We can speculate that James is criticising the passive way we read such a mechanical story. The writing is—ironically—as mechanical as the authorship. James writes a story which perfectly conforms to ideas of magazine fiction in the 1890s. The story is oblivious to literary merit, for it performs a perfunctory and ephemeral function.

'Brooksmith' (in The Lesson of the Master, 1892 pp.180—201) also shows James working in the tradition of short fiction. He takes one neat central idea and works it through a series of episodes to a watertight conclusion. The traditional virtues of economy and a clear and regular narrative are to the fore. We see the butler Brooksmith first revelling in Mr Offord's cultured salon atmosphere. After the death of his master, Brooksmith moves from one seedy job to another, all of them lacking the elegant and articulate conversations which he feels so much a part of. This decline in fortune, and the story of Brooksmith's eventual death, are narrated by a regular visitor to the first salon.

James's use of the narrator, even in such a straightforward tale as this, with its central dominating idea, sets up several points of view inside the story. Because the narrator participates in the events, and knows Brooksmith personally, his comments have subjective authority. Yet the story is Brooksmith's and not the narrator's: the narrator's role is to record the facts too, so giving an objective level of

narration to the story. Summary and interpretation merge into one complex narration which helps the reader's full understanding of the themes and principles which may be discovered in the story. The points of view assure us that the full meaning of the text will gradually be exhausted in the course of our reading.

The narrator's dual task of summary and interpretation inevitably makes the story long. James admits in his Notebooks that he found it difficult to restrict even as simple an idea as the one for 'Brooksmith' to the correct magazine size. He talks of the urgent need for 'a very short pulse and rhythm', an intense summary, and a close attention to lateral development. With such guidelines the story 'should be a little gem of bright, quick, vivid form'. But there is still a sense of struggle in conforming to the 8,000 word rule. 'Brooksmith' proved to be 'a very tight squeeze into the same tiny number of words, and I probably shall find that there is much more to be done with this than the compass will admit of'. (p.104)

James puts all he can into his central idea—the discovery and explanation of Brooksmith's need for a cultured atmosphere in which to work creatively. He still finds that the simplicity of the main idea cannot restrain the diffuseness of the story. The very charm of giving the points of view their full authority leads to long analysis. Thus the form and content are traditional, but the narrative style is modern. So too is the prose style. The usual magazine story in the 1890s could not be written in James's finely shaded prose, where ideas merge smoothly, and where they are consciously thought through. 'Intellectual' knowledge in the traditional short story of the 1890s is instantaneous. The pace of the genre demands immediate decision; there can be no mental debate. James works with the traditional

economical idea of story, but this need for constant allegiance to a central idea paradoxically permits him to investigate the subtle moods of each thought. He turns a tradition to a psychological and stylistic use which had never been attempted before—or even conceived of—in the short story of the 1890s. The narrator in 'Brooksmith' muses quietly in a subtle and quietly logical way; his deliberations are quite new to the short story. For example, when the narrator is trying to pin down the precise reason for the success of Brooksmith's salon, the idea cannot be stated outright, it has to be intellectually tested and reasoned through:

When I am reminded by some uncomfortable contrast of to-day how perfectly we were all handled there I ask myself once more what had been the secret of such perfection. One had taken it for granted at the time, for anything that is supremely good produces more acceptance than surprise. I felt we were all happy, but I didn't consider how our happiness was managed. And yet there were questions to be asked, questions that struck me as singularly obvious now that there is nobody to answer them. (p.182)

Such questions would have seemed an outrageous waste of time for the authors of the traditional short fiction. Narrators had no business to investigate their material; they had, simply, to tell the story in all the thrill of instantaneous decision, immediate and uncompromising action and consistent linear movement. James's position in 'Brooksmith' is to argue that linear movement and economy may be virtues in their own right, but that they do not, and never should, preclude the right of the narrator to think problems through, and to emphasise psychological and intellectual nuance. The simplicity of

the idea in fact guarantees such 'prolixity'. James's belief immediately gives a further dimension to the story—which now works simultaneously in the old and the new traditions—by dramatising the character of the narrator. This dimension is neglected by the traditional first-person narrator like Conan Doyle's Watson, who is only keen to tell his breathless story: character is forgotten for the sake of action. 'Brooksmith' must be judged not only on the strength of its idea, but on the 'attractiveness' of its narrator. 'Brooksmith' is an experimental story. It shows James developing ideas about the role of the narrator and the need to analyse psychological states, whilst keeping a traditional respect for the brevity of the idea.

James's new short stories in the 1890s show how a single idea offers a multiplicity of ideas within the text. That artistic concept would have seemed almost heretical to the author of traditional fiction, whose single idea would reject needless speculation or investigation. James's contribution to the short story in the 1890s is precisely this use of suggestion within a tight narrative framework. There is so much which a look or a word can suggest about characters, and so much variety in life itself, that only the intrinsic nature of the fictional idea stops an anecdote from becoming a picture, and a picture a novel. The specific ideas and thoughts of James's characters suggest realms of meaning within the smallest space of a sentence or phrase, from which the whole fiction can expand. As James remarked in his Notebooks in 1895, 'now, when I embark on developments I'm lost, for they are my temptation and my joy'. (p.211) That is to say, James was far happier writing his 'pictures' than his 'anecdotes', which often seem like purely mechanical exercises in formula-writing. James's best short fiction sanctions the need for an often leisurely,

but always pertinent regard for the moment to moment psychological development.

The density of texture, of course, calls for closer attention on the part of the reader too. James is particularly concerned with the way the artist has to work under the pressure of market forces. The artists in the stories of literary life in the 1890s have to make conscious decisions as to whether they manufacture their tales to meet preconceived ideas, or whether they wait for artistic inspiration and risk poverty or public disdain. James specifies the problems of manufactured and created art—terms used by the theoreticians of the short story in the 1890s—in these angry and ironic stories. Whereas Conan Doyle saw writing short fiction in order to capture a particular market as a delightful enterprise, James found the question of market and audience a moral and artistic burden.

Hubert Crackanthorpe's lecture 'Some Remarks on the Art of Fiction' given as one of the 'Sunday Popular Debates' at the Royalty Theatre in London in 1894, publicised the topics of the creative artist and the manufacturer of literature who geared his work to suit public taste. Crackanthorpe is by no means as despondent as James, and he suggests that, far from losing an audience by writing sophisticated and subtle fiction, a new and cultured reading group would be created. The time is one of challenge and experiment:

The young men of today had enormous chances; they were working under exceedingly favourable conditions. Of course the literary artist was shamefully ill-paid, while he who catered for the public taste amassed a rapid and respectable fortune. But such an arrangement seemed entirely equitable, for the



essential conditions of the two cases were entirely distinct. The one was free to give untrammelled expression to his own soul, free to fan to the full the flame that burned in his heart; the other was a seller of wares, a unit in national commerce. To the one was allotted liberty and a living wage; to the other captivity and a consolation in Consols. Before long the battle for literary freedom would be won. A new public had been created, appreciative, eager, and determined, a public which "has eaten of the tree of knowledge, and will not be satisfied with mere marionettes".

Crackanthorpe's argument is clear. He distinguishes creative art, the work of the 'literary artist' as being the work of lasting literary value. This literature will be written for a 'new public' educated in taste and artistic appreciation. The novel, and most importantly, the short story, will find a receptive audience, and the outlets of the new magazines will supply that audience. It is no matter if the periodicals are ephemeral. The quality of the fiction is the most important factor, and the art will be judged on pure literary standards, and not popular appeal. By the side of the (admittedly ill-paid) artist works the writer who caters for public taste. His job is to supply stories for the magazine market, and to satisfy the huge demand for staple magazine fiction: the adventures, romances, light comic stories or detective tales. His work has a commercial rather than an artistic function, but it is not to be despised.

An alternative view to Crackanthorpe's cheerful and harmonious

7. A report of Crackanthorpe's lecture in Daily Chronicle, 13 February 1894, p.3. The lecture is printed in Yellow Book, 2 (July 1894), 259-69 with the title 'Reticence in Literature: Some Roundabout Remarks'.

picture had already been presented to the reading public with the appearance of George Gissing's New Grub Street in 1891. Gissing describes the problems which the hopeful and creative literary artist feels when he is compelled to work to strict deadlines, following rigid guidelines on the subject-matter and size of his fiction.

Gissing sees the literary artist as permanently oppressed by the need to write for a market system with which he has no sympathy, yet on which he depends for survival. The market crushes the art out of Reardon, the poverty-stricken novelist in New Grub Street. A reviewer of the novel highlighted the difficulties of writing for art's sake when financial and market forces held sway:

The book is almost terrible in its realism, and gives a picture, cruelly precise in every detail, of this commercial age. The degradation of art by the very necessity of its "paying its way" is put forward with merciless plainness. The bitter uselessness of attempting a literary career unless you are prepared to consult the market, and supply only that for which there is a demand, forms a sort of text for the book. Art for Art's sake is foredoomed to financial failure. 8

James has similar problems to those which face Reardon in New Grub Street, and which tormented Gissing himself. Crackanthorpe's new public did not seem to exist for James, writing his allusive and complex short fiction for a public accustomed to narrative lucidity. James the artist felt himself to be confronted by a literary system

8. Unsigned review of New Grub Street by George Gissing, Saturday Review, 71 (May 1891), 572.

which supported not art but professionally-written journalese. His anger at such a system was forcibly expressed in the essay 'Criticism':

Periodical literature is a huge open mouth which has to be fed—a vessel of immense capacity which has to be filled. It is like a regular train which starts at an advertised hour, but which is free to start only if every seat be occupied. The seats are many, the train is ponderously long, and hence the manufacture of dummies for the seasons when there are not passengers enough. A stuffed mannikin is thrust into the empty seat, where it makes a creditable figure till the end of the journey. It looks sufficiently like a passenger, and you know it is not one only when you perceive that it neither says anything nor gets out.<sup>9</sup>

James saw the formula short story as a 'stuffed mannikin'; Crackanthorpe had used similar imagery when talking of the 'mere marionettes' of glib and mechanical fiction. The formula story looked like a work of art, yet it was not art, because the writing was manufactured and habitual. However, the artist like James depended on the vastly popular magazines which cried out for formula stories. However scrupulous and high-principled James's art might be, he had a financial need to conform in some respect to the demands of magazine fiction. James's income depended on the sale of short stories in the 1890s—more so after the experiment with drama, which ended in the fiasco of Guy Domville in 1895. James's short fiction in the 1890s did indeed include stories with trivial and mechanical plots—'The Real Right Thing', 'Europe', 'Sir Edmund Orme' or 'The Way it Came'. Ideas

9. In Essays in London and Elsewhere (1893), pp.271—72.

are worked through in these stories with conventional emphasis on narrative momentum, melodramatic debate and romantic intrigue. The anecdotes (or 'pot-boilers', as James called them in less charitable moments) are written for duty, and their very slightness is attested by their brevity. A sure sign of James's creative involvement within his short story is its disregard for length, but these anecdotes hurry to their neat and water-tight conclusions.

If James permits himself to write conventional magazine stories, or, to put it more bluntly, to do hack-work, it does not mean that he cannot investigate resources within the convention which the writers of narrative habit overlooked: we have seen the kind of new investigative irony at work in 'The Wheel of Time', and a new psychological depth in 'Brooksmith'. Neither does James grant moral approval to systematic writing. On the contrary, his important sequence of stories about literary life—a grand idea which has no parallel in the short fiction of the 1890s—are specifically engaged with the problems which the creative artist has in working within a tradition and for a public hostile to work of high literary standards.

The tales of literary life have several dominant themes, which suggest James's own anger and anguish during the 1890s, when dramatic and periodical audiences paid little attention to his art. 'The Middle Years' shows how the artist struggles with his writing and his life; 'The Death of the Lion' and 'John Delavoy' criticise the public for being incapable of appreciating artistic genius, and preferring to worship the newspaper image of the artist instead of his actual work; 'The Figure in the Carpet' stresses the artist's dedication and imaginative toil. In these stories James emphasises the right of the artist to imaginative freedom, and to the pursuit of creative goals. He

is brought to the point of sometimes bitter irony when he realises that the artist hardly ever attains those desirable goals.

'The Death of the Lion' (in Terminations, 1895, pp.3—64) was first published in the opening number of the Yellow Book in April 1894. The narrator of the story tells how he tries to protect the literary artist Neil Paraday from the tiring attentions of his admirers: a crowd of sycophants who are not in the least concerned with Paraday's art, only with his glamorous position as a celebrity. One newspaper, representing thirty-seven influential journals is particularly persistent in attempting to gather gossip about the artist's private life. James's contempt for literary gossips moves him to end his story with the symbolic death of Neil Paraday, who finds the mental pressures of large-scale lionising too great to bear. <sup>10</sup>

James's use of the narrator in this story keeps us, as readers, at the same distance from Paraday as the glib admirers who attempt to pry the secrets of his private life from the narrator. The narrator has a responsibility to his friend as well as his short story, and we cannot expect to have full access to these aspects of character. The narrator is ever guarded about the deductions he makes from his story: indeed his special relationship with the harrassed artist grants his comments authority. But he does stand firmly between us and a sight of his friend's real character. James gives his tale a truly individual narrative voice, because the narrator has active

10. The opening of 'The Death of the Lion' on the other hand must have seemed tactless to Henry Harland, however delighted he was to launch the Yellow Book with a story by the Master of the new short fiction. The narrator talks (in Harland's adventurous new magazine) of a periodical 'almost past redemption' and a contributor who has been chosen 'only on the supposition that I had been cheap'. (p.3)

responsibility within the story. Such a character could not be achieved by a narrator who was, for example, merely recounting a story which he had been told. Neither could it be told by Paraday himself, because the story would lose the sense of objective distaste for the assault on privacy. James has thought very carefully about the precise point of view in which the tale might best be told: one of his major contributions to the art of telling short stories, which has far-reaching consequences for the development of the genre in the 1890s, is this range and variety of narrative voices. Narrators now become active participants and even guardians of their texts, and not simply passive transmitters of narrative fact.

'Greville Fane' (in The Real Thing, 1893, pp.249—75) is rather more relaxed a story than 'The Death of the Lion', though the issue which it deals with—the relationship between created and manufactured art—is central to James's beliefs. Greville Fane is a productive writer of very successful popular novels. She decides that since art is a trade and requires dedicated training rather than creative inspiration, her son should be brought up as a novelist. Leonlin henceforth leads a comfortable life, gathering material for books which remain unwritten. Greville Fane writes herself to death supporting this parasitic son, whom the narrator despises. The narrator of the story is himself a writer, but one who in contrast to Greville Fane rejoices in creative art, and not what he sees as manufactured narrative formulae.

The story has a conflict of interests which makes the narrator keenly aware of his responsibility to the reader. The narrator puts the creative artist's case forcefully, but without false rhetoric. This gives the story a strong objective argument: but the narrator's

personal involvement in the issues raised by his own narrative gives the tale a subjectivity which is a natural development of a characterised argument. The narrative has a tone of consistent debate (certainly nothing like a conventional crisis) which derives from the narrator's need to justify the conclusions from the story which he tells. Fact and argument give the narrative of James's short fiction a new and lively intelligence. As Wendell V. Harris says:

James's interest in point of view led him to make his narrators often much more than mere tellers-of-tales (with or without distinctive personalities) as they almost always had been earlier; each becomes an integral and functional part of the structure, mood, and meaning of the story. <sup>11</sup>

The narrator writes in response to genuine creative inspiration, and is ignored by a public apathetic to literary value. Fane writes romantic pulp and is immensely popular. She endlessly repeats a successful narrative formula: narrative habit is gloriously celebrated. The narrator of the tale speaks for himself, but also for James, when he talks of the struggle of his art, and he concludes by suggesting the splendid ease of Fane's writing:

If I hinted that a work of art required a tremendous licking into shape she thought it a pretension and a pose. She never recognised the "torment of form"; the furthest she went was to introduce into one of her books (in satire her hand was heavy) a young poet who was always

11. 'English Short Fiction in the 19th Century', Studies in Short Fiction, 6 (1968), 51.

talking about it . . . She had a shrewd perception that form, in prose at least, never recommended any one to the public we were condemned to address, and therefore she lost nothing (putting her private humiliation aside) by not having any. She made no pretence of producing works of art. (p.256)

'The Next Time' (in Embarrassments, 1896, pp.153—216) concentrates on the hazards which face the creative artist writing for a philistine public. Here the talented artist Limbert cannot support himself or his family because he will not sacrifice the literary standards of his taxing and difficult art. James makes a very personal and incisive point here. He argues that the magazine system supports mechanical narratives in the name of art, and is run by people who concentrate on the trivia of the artists' private lives rather than their work. The magazine editor will automatically print the stories which sell his journal, without reference to artistic merit. The artists like Limbert, with high imaginative standards, are sacrificed to the system.

The tales of literary life in the 1890s draw our attention to a tradition of reading and writing without effort or engagement. The true artist works outside this comfortable relationship: his stories demand the utmost concentration on the part of both author and reader. The question of the responsibility of the reader to the text is of great importance to James. The intelligent debate of the narrators in his stories must be shared by a reader alert to the objective and subjective value of their arguments. A narrator who makes a case from his story, as many of James's narrators do, can be fairly judged by a reader who is readily prepared to set the narrator's assessment of fact against his own. Such intellectual appraisal calls for a close



and attentive reading which authors of the short story before James would not have considered necessary.

The American short story author Robert Barr contributed an article in the symposium 'How to Write a Short Story' (Bookman, New York, 1897) in which he drew attention to the easy life of the reader of short stories in England. Short fiction called for no creative effort on the part of the reader who demanded everything from his text, but was prepared to give nothing back to it:

I have, finally, a serious complaint to make against the English reader of short stories. He insists upon being fed with a spoon. He wants all the goods in the shop window ticketed with the price in plain figures. I think the reader should use a little intellect in reading a story, just as the author is supposed to use a great deal in the writing of it. While editor of a popular magazine, I have frequently been reluctantly compelled to refuse my own stories, because certain points in them were hinted at rather than fully expressed, and I knew the British public would stand no nonsense of that sort. The public wants the trick done in full view, and will have no juggling with the hands behind the back.<sup>12</sup>

This feeling was shared by all the writers of the new short story in the 1890s, and by James in particular, with his own special 'problems' of allusive and psychological material. Henry Harland voices the standard complaint for the English avant-garde writers in his essay 'Concerning the Short Story' in 1897. James was Harland's literary

12. Bookman, New York, 5 (March 1897), 43.

idol, and his praise in this essay leads him to expand Barr's point made that 'a rightly constructed short story should always allow the reader's imagination to come to the aid of the author'. (p.42) Harland demonstrates that writing short fiction creates a special dialogue between the reader and the author, who are mutually responsible to the text. Reading and writing must be done with eager concentration. This dialogue results in the new short story which cannot be read in the irresponsible way in which the usual magazine literature is hastily digested. Harland remarks that it 'takes two to make a masterpiece in every art; in the art of fiction it takes a writer and a reader. But if master-writers are few in this weary world, neither do master-readers grow on every bush'. 13

Harland continues by saying that popular magazine literature may be left to 'the man in the street or to the man in the train', (p.6) whilst the true creative short fiction, written by artists for artistic readers, will inevitably reach an élite audience. Harland shares Crack-anthorpe's belief that popular short fiction has immense importance, if not the same literary value as the art of the talented few. A reader's involvement in his text can only be gained by experience and taste, for 'the beauty of the short story is a beauty that one must learn to see'. (p.6) Harland continues:

But the average man—and  
it is he who, in England,  
determines the immediate  
vogue of works of art and  
forms of art—the average  
man naturally enough pre-  
fers surface-beauty to

13. 'Concerning the Short Story', Academy Fiction Supplement, 51 (June 1897), 6.

fibre-beauty, prefers the beauty he can perceive with half an eye to the beauty which he must learn to see. No wonder, then, that he does not take kindly to the short story. The short story is no doubt a compliment to his understanding, but it is a compliment which he would rather do without than seek to merit. (pp.6—7)

Many of Henry James's tales of the 1890s make us pay careful attention to the very act of reading. Reading becomes an artistic engagement. James's contempt for the critics and socialites who prefer literary gossip to literature is keenly expressed in the tales of literary life. That public, we are meant to feel, no longer has the capacity, let alone the desire, to read fully. James wants us to understand that reading must not be taken for granted, and to feel, on occasion, that somehow reading is even beyond the capability of the individual. James makes his most radical and original claim for the new short story of the 1890s by showing how the text can shun the very act of smooth and untroubled reading. His achievement is to make the reader become engaged in a responsible and committed activity. James's great tales do not offer the bland narrative assurances of the traditional story—the linear flow, the hyperbolic language or the clear-cut emotions. As Michael Egan has said, in reference to James's drama, the effort of creative reading in itself implies a criticism of a pampered Victorian public. Likewise in the new short stories, James's 'retort to Victorian audiences who would not or could not respond to the nuances which he, James, detected in a glance or unfinished sentence, was to compel them to view the action through his own eyes.

In effect, he made his audience Henry James'.<sup>14</sup>

'Sir Dominick Ferrand' (in The Real Thing, pp.45—128) suggests that James is eager to keep the complete certainty of the narrative from the reader's grasp—certainty which the standard short story text would take for granted. James makes a reference in his Notebooks (p.117) after his sister's death in 1892 about the worry and responsibility of destroying old family papers and letters connected with private affairs. This concern gave him the inspiration for 'Sir Dominick Ferrand'. This is the story of a young author, Peter Baron, who finds a secret drawer in a desk which he buys. The drawer contains scandalous letters of a famous politician. Baron cannot get his own literary work published by an editor who turns out to be more than keen to publish the sensational papers. Baron's dilemma—whether to make money by selling or to uphold a dead man's right to privacy and remain impoverished—is focussed by the love he feels for a fellow-lodger, Mrs Ryves. Mrs Ryves has a strange intuition that only trouble will result from opening the letters. The letters are finally burnt. Baron discovers that they are concerned with Sir Dominick's illegitimate child, who turns out to be Mrs Ryves herself.

The mystery element in the story centres on Mrs Ryves's strange intuition that something is disturbing Baron: the agitation brings her

14. Henry James: The Ibsen Years, Vision Critical Studies (1972), pp.94—95.  
G.S. Street puts a more sympathetic case for the much-maligned Victorian reading public: 'it is commonly called the great public, but I am rather sorry for it and would show my sympathy. It is so often attacked, poor thing, and I feel that it cannot defend itself . . . "Poor Public", I say gently, "what a shame!" But "brute!" shout the other writers, "many-headed beast! stupid, pig-headed, coarse, vulgar, imperceptive dolt! Get out!"' 'The Poor Public', in Books and Things: A Collection of Stray Remarks (1905), p.3.

to the author though she cannot know that he has discovered the secret papers. The revelation of the exact nature of the papers, and their connection with Mrs Ryves, does not depend solely on the simple relay of facts hidden from us during the narrative, pieced together and revealed at the crisis. In 'Sir Dominick Ferrand' we are not allowed so solid a narrative bedrock as that. The point of Mrs Ryve<sup>s</sup>'s intuition throughout the tale is precisely that, although we eventually learn why she does not want Baron to investigate the papers, her action is emotional and not based on tangible proof. Hence the very mystery of the story.

'Sir Dominick Ferrand' eventually ends with all the loose ends tied up, in a conventional and neat way quite in keeping with magazine fiction. Baron and Mrs Ryves are married, the incriminating papers are destroyed, and the couple start a new life in high expectation of success. The story does lead to its own comfortable conclusion. But during the reading of the tale we do not hold on to such assurance. We are, tentatively as yet, being asked to engage in the deduction, and to speculate on the reasons for Mrs Ryves's agitation, which must be as incomprehensible to us as it is to her, until we learn the nature of the letters at the end of the tale. James, through Mrs Ryves's doubt, is beginning to question that kind of narrative where the order and regularity of plot cushion the whole experience of reading. James introduces doubt and inexplicable fear into the narrative, and gives it a powerful metaphor in the condition of Mrs Ryves, worried without knowing why, urgent in her conviction that Baron will do some moral wrong if he opens the letters. She cannot explain her action, and James let the doubt exert its full mysterious force through the story. The scene where Mrs Ryves approaches Baron is not just one narrative

point in the smooth flow of the story. Like Mrs Ryves, we are held away from lucid and immediate explanation. We might be as dismissive as Baron in our reaction, but the events of the story show just how much is really at stake:

He admitted that the papers might be rubbish, and she conceded that nothing was more probable; yet when he offered to settle the point off-hand she caught him by the wrist, acknowledging that, absurd as it was, she was nervous. Finally she put the whole thing on the ground of his just doing her a favour. She asked him to retain the papers, to be silent about them, simply because it would please her. (p.72)

The crisis of the story is in fact ironic; Mrs Ryves tells Baron that she is illegitimate, but she never finds out that Ferrand wrote the letters that Baron finds in his desk. There is more than a kind of Hardy-esque ironic thrill at this revelation. Her very ignorance stresses a kind of reality of experience for her which is quite distinct from the experience of the reader. The narrative, though it progresses smoothly to a neat conclusion, is not completely closed, as it would be in a conventional story. If a character can act from an inexplicable motive, be proved right, and yet never discover that fact, then both the structure and content of a short story are beginning to find more complicated and advanced duties. These duties now involve both reader and author.

'The Private Life' (in The Private Life) also has a narrative purpose which involves the explanation of a mystery. This story, too, activates the reader's powers of detection and observation within the

text. The narrator of 'The Private Life' finds that the artist, Clare Vawdrey, has a ghost-writer. The plot of the story amounts to no more than that. The sheer simplicity of the plot is new to the short fiction of the period. 'The Private Life' does not need to depend on action. A number of people, all staying together in a Swiss hotel, walk and talk together. The narrator takes an active role in the story itself, and participates as much as he observes. There is no clear linear movement, simply a leisurely survey and minute analysis of people living together.

The story displays no drive or passionate desire to reach a dramatic conclusion. James makes the tale slow down, and linger over the introspective study of each episode, each sentence and each gesture: they may all have allusive meaning. The moment, with all the potential of psychological density, is being celebrated in a way new to the short story of the 1890s. Short fiction has the time and the right to be allusive. Because the actual telling of the story is extremely personal, we respond as much to the narrator's facts as to the nature of the narrative voice. The narrator does not perform the traditional role of surveying manners and actions in a clinical way. His desire to 'fix' the fleeting moments of the past in order to present the reader with a tangible narrative bears with it all the hallmarks of individual identity. The narrator is no longer compelled by the drive and logic of a story to summarise his narrative in all-embracing wisdom. He can be as confused or as wrong as is fitting to his character. James makes the narrative of his short fiction take on a new subjectivity which goes far beyond the traditional desire of the narrator to tell a straightforward story.

The narrator of 'The Private Life' is, at times, unable to come

to terms with what is happening in his story. The mystery element in the tale shows how shaky investigation can be. The narrator finds Vawdrey's ghost writer at work without yet knowing who he is. He explains his reactions at the moment of discovery:

I had a sense of mystification, which however deepened infinitely the next instant. I stood there with my hand still on the knob of the door, overtaken by the oddest impression of my life. Vawdrey was at his table, writing, and it was a very natural place for him to be; but why was he writing in the dark and why hadn't he answered? (p.26)

James's question in this short story is also about the reasons and motives behind people's actions, rather than the traditional emphasis on what people do. There are no writers in the magazine convention of the 1890s who could possibly be satisfied with the image of a man writing at a desk, a man who does not answer to a character's call. Yet James works psychological insights of great subtlety around such passive images, for he is concerned less with the way an image carries on the flow of a narrative than with the minute analysis of the motives behind the image. 'The Private Life', accordingly, draws attention to behaviour which takes place literally and metaphorically in the dark, outside the comprehension of narrator and character alike.

Life in this story gives its clues for the narrator to follow in order that he might make his discovery of the ghost-writer. Thus far the narrator's function is conventional. But the narrator is as susceptible to the doubt and insecurity of living as the other characters. Just because he tells the story does not mean that he understands its implications. The narrator's reaction to events can never be safely



retrospective. He has written his story, but he has to live it first, and that entails difficulties of communication. In this respect, there is one especially important scene in 'The Private Life'. The narrator visits Lord Mellifont in order to ask him to sign a picture; Mellifont is not in his room. We are given an insight into confused and stilted emotions in this seemingly innocuous episode. James stresses the precarious nature of behaviour when characters are under challenge. The narrator is caught undecided as to the propriety of knocking at Mellifont's door, and he is seen by Lady Mellifont at the moment of indecision. She has the right to ask him his business, as she is worried about her husband. The narrator has to admit, in his reply, that Mellifont has developed an affection for Mrs Adney, who has asked the narrator to secure the signature. The narrator finds himself in a trap where politeness and the truth can only hurt. The language of tact is seen, for a moment, to be deficient. Words become a mere show, because they have to hide true feeling, and their articulation is a struggle:

For a moment, as she stood there, we exchanged two or three ideas that were the more singular for being unspoken. We had caught each other hovering, and we understood each other; but as I stepped over to her (so that we were separated from the sitting-room by the width of the hall), her lips formed the almost soundless entreaty: "Don't!" I could see in her conscious eyes everything that the word expressed—the confession of her own curiosity and the dread of the consequences of mine. (p.49)

Much in this scene has to be inferred by character and reader alike. The narrative no longer carries lucid, instantaneous explanation

on the surface, so that deduction and understanding may follow the words automatically. The surface of narrative, in James's short fiction, is now complex and allusive, and it suggests that characters and readers carry out their tasks in confusion and flux. The polite society talk in 'The Private Life' hides, often unsuccessfully, a real private world where panic and confusion reign. Language and behaviour are no more than masks, worn by the 'artists' like Vawdrey and the professional actors like Mrs Adney: and in a sense, by the narrator of the tale himself, in whose transmission of the text we implicitly rely. We read the story as an article of ordered retrospection. But the narrator cannot have the peace of hindsight at the moment he lives his story. Narrative order is a charm. The task of 'The Private Life' is to show the confusion of life in the well-ordered salon setting.

In 'The Private Life' James tries to break the hold which narrative has on the form of the short story. Admittedly, the tale works towards a revelation and a neat explanation in the traditional way: we learn that Clare Vawdrey's art is not by his own hand; that his private life is essentially secret; and that his counterpart, Lord Mellifont, has a wonderful public manner but no inner private life. But the narrative no longer supports the story; narrative content is limited to the chance meeting that brings the characters together and gives the narrator his story to tell. There is much more sensitive concern for the moments of living which make up the story.

James's new short fiction stresses this engagement in the discovery of hidden truths of character and reaction, and it involves him in complex psychological analysis of shades of feeling and nuances of vocabulary. We are never oppressed by the sheer pull of narrative in this story, for we can and must read it with time to spare. Reading

calls for attention, investigation and positive activity, and it is in this task that James sees a new authority for the short story. This kind of authority had been reserved for the novel throughout the nineteenth century; now James was arguing that short fiction had the potential and the right to work out themes of profundity and significance.

'The Middle Years' (in Terminations, pp.167—98) investigates the lives of characters at risk. The relationship between art and life is also given attention. In the story abrupt emotions deny any chance of harmony between the characters. The story is narrated in the third-person by the middle-aged and invalid artist Dencombe, who has just received copies of his last work. He sees three people on the beach, and strikes up a relationship with one of them, Doctor Hugh, who is reading 'The Middle Years'. Hugh and Miss Vernham look after an elderly Countess, who is jealous of their attentions; so much so that Miss Vernham orders Dencombe to stop seeing the doctor on the grounds that Hugh is neglecting the Countess. She is peeved at losing Hugh's undivided attention and registers her complaint in the extraordinary way that James's female characters often do: she wills her own death. Dencombe dies in despair at the futility of his writing and "the madness of art". (p.197) He had hoped to have the time to write a finer book.

Life in this story is so fierce and unrelenting that risks are always being taken: that is the nature of human relationships. Life becomes too difficult to live when certain exacting conditions are not met. Dencombe, though an invalid, and thus removed from the pressure of physical responsibility, cannot escape the mental pressure of his art. The artist can never escape from life, but life gives the artist the most complex and bewildering material to work on. As Dencombe says:

"we work in the dark—we do what we can—we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task"'. (p.197)

James tells us in 'The Middle Years' that there can be a complete disparity between art and life. He shows Dencombe making a safe and romantic analysis of the relationship between the three people on the beach, which turns out to be hopelessly incorrect. His idyllic picture has nothing to do with the respectively aggressive, demanding, and gentle natures of real people. Art proves to have nothing to do with reality, as we discover in the unrelenting conflict of the story. Dencombe's fiction is indeed fantastic: his 'clever theory . . . that the young man was the son of the opulent matron, and that the humble dependant, the daughter of a clergyman or an officer, nourished a secret passion for him' (p.169) has no accord with fact. The romantic image makes us mistrust the artist's point of view, although we rely on a work of fiction, a work of art, to reach this understanding. In this way, the short story proclaims to its reader the message that reality depends solely on art for its transmission. Life and art do touch after all. Our assessment of the disparity between art and life is only made by believing that Dencombe is a 'real' and not a fictional character: to do that, we have to believe that the narrator's role is purely biographical; to treat, in fact, art as if it were life. The very experience of reading a work of art which is about life must convince us, despite the ironic misjudgement which Dencombe makes, that life and art are inseparable. We cannot trust Dencombe, but we have to trust James.

In 'The Marriages' (in The Lesson of the Master, pp.81—122) we cannot even trust to the impartiality of the narrator, though we begin to read the story with the automatic assumption that it has the authority

which James generally gives to third-person narration. 'The Marriages' tells the story of Adela Chart, her family and their relationship with Mrs Churchley, who is about to be married to Adela's widowed father, Colonel Chart. Adela disapproves of the marriage, because she feels that Mrs Churchley is vulgar, demonstrative and flashy. She constantly broods about her mother, who seems to her to be 'accomplished, clever, gentle, good, beautiful and capable'. (p.91) All of Adela's thoughts and actions in the story tend to an ideal image of wise and affectionate motherhood. Adela has obviously suffered a great psychological and emotional blow in losing her mother.

As a result, she attempts to dissuade Mrs Churchley from marrying—thinking to save her father from what she sees as certain disaster—by telling lies about Colonel Chart's character. The engagement is broken, and both Adela's father and her brother Godfrey are furious with her. It transpires that Godfrey depended on Mrs Churchley's help in releasing him from the ties of an unfortunate marriage, and is thwarted by Adela's interference. Adela finally confesses to Mrs Churchley, and learns that her lies had not been believed, that Mrs Churchley took an instant dislike to her and refused to consider living with her. Colonel Chart's defense of Adela led to the separation. The story ends with the announcement that Mrs Churchley is intending to marry one Lord Dovedale.

Nowhere in this story is there an authoritative narrative voice. As the tale progresses, we learn to trust and mistrust Adela's interpretation of events. We can see that the more her will is imposed on the lives of the members of her family the wiser we are to the blindness of her conviction: it seems completely unjustified that she assumes the right to make her father's emotional decisions for him.

He is, after all, quite capable of falling in love with Mrs Churchley without his daughter's advice. Part of our reading makes us suspicious of Adela's motives: we see that Adela is incapable of letting other people make their own personal decisions, that she is ignorant of life, priggish, and interfering. But we also pay her respect because she is alone, shattered by her mother's death, and acting with the noblest and highest of intentions: she is never selfish, and only wants the best for her father and brother. Everything seems clear to Adela—that her brother loves her, that her father needs her, and that her mother was indeed perfect. But Godfrey does not acknowledge his affection, her father makes his own personal decisions, and, because Adela's mother hardly mentioned by anyone else in the story, we never know what she was actually like. Adela's point of view seems to be insufficient to our full appreciation of the story.

Mrs Churchley, Godfrey and Colonel Chart all condemn Adela for her interference, or live to regret it. Their aggression seems to carry moral authority with it, and we might be tempted to use their reaction as the guideline for our own criticism. But the facts of the story make us hesitate to dismiss Adela's conviction that her family's connection with Mrs Churchley is potentially disastrous. Our instinctive reaction is to depend on the partiality of the narrator. But James makes his narration as impersonal and objective as possible. The prose has no tone or subjectivity to give us any clue as to the 'emotional tendency' of the narration. We are left to make up our own minds, for this narrative will not yield glib or easy answers. The 'understanding' of the story comes down to the interpretation of the individual reader. We cannot condone Adela's interference, but we do suspect that her instinctive mistrust of Mrs Churchley is in fact well-

grounded. The authority of objective third-person narration is a help here, and what we learn of Mrs Churchley's nature is that she is selfish, snobbish and frivolous. Adela feels an instinctive need to protect her brother; and her brother, with his slatternly wife, turns out to need protection from the real world. As we read the story, the sense is suggested, though never spoken, that the Chart family as a whole greatly misses the guiding and supporting hand of the dead wife and mother: the men make fools of themselves in love, and Adela makes a nuisance of herself in trying to act in her mother's spirit. Her interference is thus her triumph, though her brother cannot recognize it. Only Colonel Chart acts humanely by refusing to give Adela up when thinking of remarriage; it could be inferred that his decision not to remarry is in itself an act of unspoken faith and deep respect to his dead wife. The Charts' decisions prove right and humane only when notice is paid to the question, what would Mrs Chart have thought best for them? Adela, though confused, is closest to her mother's thoughts, for she acts all the time as if Mrs Chart were actually prompting her with advice and guidance. We end 'The Visits' with a growing sense of the dominant and benevolent assistance of the dead woman (her 'exquisite influence', p.91) and begin to see how greatly the family miss her. Indeed, the presence of Mrs Chart pervades the entire story. It can only be taken into account when we recognize the mistakes the family make without her, and their loss of direction and confusion in emotional matters. It is a spiritual presence, not a physical one, transmitted through Adela's constant recall of her mother, and the presence is stronger for its unspoken activity. 'The Marriages', in fact, is a ghost story, where the characters are simply too proud to admit to Mrs Chart's spiritual guidance; in this way we

can see that Adela's behaviour is sanctioned because she 'communes' with the memory (and thus the spirit) of her mother. It is an extraordinary achievement, for nowhere in the ghost story does James openly declare the supernatural element of the story: all depends on the involvement of the reader.

These inferences are the result of the closest attention to the text; they can be formed only by rereading, by mental debate, and by genuine harmony with the range of points of view in the tale. Characters are never entirely right or wrong; the objectivity of the third-person narration will never guide us to cast-iron meanings in the story. Narrative has, as it were, no straightforward authority, no single point to prove. The short story, in James's hands, has become highly complex and demands a new responsibility and maturity from its reader. 'The Marriages' remains uniquely open-ended, forever open to speculation, and forever rewarding the perceptive and intelligent reader. James is making us work as we read our short fiction.

The very complexity of our reading mirrors the complexity of life in James's tales. In a story like 'The Marriages' the decisions which the characters make for themselves and about each other are done for highly personal reasons, and as a result may often produce effects which are in opposition to the desires of the people they are intended for. You cannot make legislation for private emotions: although, as we have suggested, a case can be made for the intuitive and morally acceptable actions of Adela, however interfering she is—she has the sanction of her mother's spirit. Similarly, decisions which we as readers make about characters have to be formulated with imperfect information. The text has no simple formula for us to be automatically 'right' in our opinions of the characters. The intrinsic ambiguity of



the narrative—with Adela's prejudiced vision, and the calm objectivity of the third-person narrator—sees to that.

Many of James's tales in the 1890s show life to be highly complicated and sometimes unliveable. The theme of crisis and despair is common to his short fiction, but it has a psychological and narrative complexity which has little to do with traditional treatment of the theme. James's short fiction has an authority which commands our close and detailed attention to each text, and then leaves us to speculate, however astutely, on its varied 'meanings'. The traditional concept of reading short fiction in the 1890s is that a lucid text can be fully understood—writing and reading are self-sufficient. Nowhere in James's major short fiction are we given the easy satisfaction of such automatic assessment. James finds the art of writing and the art of reading short stories woefully inadequate.

What amounts to James's rejection of a tradition of passive and self-contained short fiction reaches its most polemical statement in 'The Turn of the Screw' (in The Two Magics, 1898, pp.3—169). James writes this most ambiguous and difficult of stories in the convention of the ghost story, which was one of the most popular of the sub-genres in the 1890s. James's short fiction includes several straightforward ghost stories. 'The Real Right Thing' (in The Soft Side, 1900, pp.85—103) introduces a ghost who bars the way to a dead writer's study to block the intrusion of a would-be biographer: the artist's privacy remains intact. In 'Sir Edmund Orme' (in The Lesson of the Master, pp.266—302) the ghost of Sir Edmund returns to ensure that a young lover will not be jilted. Sir Edmund had himself been jilted by the girl's mother. 'The Way it Came' (in Embarrassments, pp.219—63) tells the story of a man and woman who have the unenviable ability to see the

ghosts of close relations just before the relations die. In this story we have to judge the credibility of the narrator without any help from other 'objective' voices within the story—so our reading is both more active and less assured. We have to arrive at our own conclusions, and make deductions about the character of the narrator without help from the story itself. We are kept at a distance from the story. Such a complex engagement and inevitable distance from 'the meaning' of the story has no place in the traditional ghost story of the 1890s.

A typical example of such a ghost story is 'From the Dead' in E. Nesbit's Grim Tales.<sup>15</sup> The story is narrated by Arthur, who is tricked by Ida Belmont into marriage. She loves him, and so has a romantic excuse for her deceit. In fact Arthur returns her love, lives in bliss for 'three golden weeks, and then I left her'. (p.85) He leaves because Ida reveals, trusting in their love, how she tricked him with a forged letter. Arthur is still in love, but he departs in anger. He returns to forgive her but Ida has herself disappeared. He receives a letter from her after some months to say that she is dying. Arthur arrives at a remote farmstead too late, and is roundly abused for his behaviour by Ida's nurse. He is left with a child. That night, in bed, in the room next to the death-chamber, he hears strange noises, and the ghost of his wife appears. Ida asks for forgiveness. Arthur is too terrified to speak and shrieks in horror when Ida suggests a kiss. He finds her body outside his room, and muses on her ghostly appearance:

Now, whether it was catalepsy  
—as the doctors said—or whe-  
ther my love came back even  
from the dead to me who loved  
her, I shall never know; but

15. Grim Tales (1893), pp.79—109.

this I know—that, if I had held out my arms to her as she stood at my bed-foot—if I had said, "Yes, even from the grave, my darling, from hell itself, come back, come back to me!" if I had had room in my coward's heart for anything but the unreasoning terror that killed love in that hour, I should not now be here alone. (p.108)

'From the Dead' rather wearily carries out the proclaimed attributes of conventional fiction. The story moves to its allotted crisis with the appearance of Ida's ghost, it uses the required hyperbolic diction, it follows the strict linear pattern. Once the argument of the story is established, it can quickly move to the outlet of pure emotion in the crisis. All the feelings of the narrator are specific to the central idea of the story, so whilst there is a concentration and economy of language and effect, there can be no development or subtlety. The ghost element provides an additional vocabulary of set devices: creaking doors, strange noises, dramatic pauses and the conventional narrative question — "What will I see?" The whole story commits itself to the inevitable shock of the impossible. Ghosts do not exist, as the narrator and reader well know; the appearance of each phantom occasions unique surprise in story after story.

'The Turn of the Screw' needs other forms of inspiration than the conventional ones which motivate hack-work like 'From the Dead'. Contemporary reactions to the story suggest the immediate success of James's strange tale. A reviewer in the Athenaeum praised 'The Turn of the Screw' as 'one of the most engrossing and terrifying ghost stories we have ever read . . . Here the author makes triumphant use of his subtlety; instead of obscuring, he only adds to the horror of his conception

by occasionally withholding the actual facts and just indicating them without unnecessarily ample details'.<sup>16</sup> A ghost story, then, did not have to be frantic, or charged with simplistic suspense. James introduces a subtle and disturbing terror into 'The Turn of the Screw' which stresses psychological complexity. He has no need for the straightforward and lucid images of banshees in gothic chains, heroines in mourning wraps, heroes in poses of steadfast confrontation. James is concerned with the drama of the mind, and not the drama of the body.

'The Turn of the Screw' holds its reader by inviting us to take traditional comfort in the narrative, and then alienates us from the narrative so that we cannot trust the story in the way we instantly trust the narrative of a story like 'From the Dead'. This is done, as James explained in his preface to The Aspern Papers by means of 'the lively interest of a possible suggestion and process of adumbration; the question of how best to convey that sense of the depths of the sinister without which my fable would so woefully limp'.<sup>17</sup>

'The Turn of the Screw' is the narrative of a young governess, who leaves a vicarage in Hampshire to become the head of a small household at Bly. She gains the post after an interview with her 'handsome and bold and pleasant' (p.9) employer, who tells her to care for his nephew and niece (Miles and Flora, aged ten and eight). He specifies that she must not trouble him with any request. She is to be left in a strange house with no contact with the outside world. The girl arrives at Bly, still feeling swept off her feet by her employer, and in a

16. Unsigned review of In the Cage and The Two Magics, in Athenaeum, 76 (October 1898), 564.

17. The Novels and Tales of Henry James, New York Edition, 26 vols (1908—17), XII (1909), p.xx.

state of nervous anticipation about her great trial. She meets Mrs Grose the housekeeper, who is to prove a kind and thoughtful friend, and is captivated by the attractive and lively children. As the governess reflects, Bly seemed to offer her in the early days of her stay all the enchantment 'of a castle of romance inhabited by a rosy sprite'.

(p.19) It proves to be enchanted by other, more terrifying ghosts.

As the governess settles into life at Bly, she is presented with facts about the children which do not, however, arrive attended by explanation. Miles has been dismissed from his school, without any particular reason beyond the statement that "'he's an injury to the others"'. (p.21)

The governess cannot reconcile the lively young boy with someone who is supposed to have a corrupting influence. From the outset she has to fit speculation to the appearance of Miles's character.

Such a method, we begin to feel, is suspect, for the governess' misapprehension replaces truth: yet she has to rely on her own opinion. We have to read the narrative with extreme care, especially when the letter from Miles's school confuses the governess: 'it would have been impossible to carry a bad name with a greater sweetness of innocence, and by the time I had got back to Bly with him I remained merely bewildered—so far, that is, as I was not outraged—by the sense of the horrible letter locked up in my room, in a drawer'. (pp.26—27)

The governess begins to feel out of her depth. She has to assume responsibility for a boy 'whose education for the world was all on the point of beginning' (p.28) yet whose previous character she cannot determine. At this time of confusion she sees, as she walks through the grounds of Bly, a figure at the top of a tower: she mistakes the figure for that of her employer. Her first reaction is to suspect some gothic or Brontean mysterious stranger—'a mystery of Udolpho or an

insane, an unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement'. (p.34) This portentous appearance troubles her during her 'charming work' (p.36) with the children. The governess' fear is heightened when she sees the ghost for the second time, inside the house: 'on the spot there came to me the added shock of a certitude that it was not for me he had come there. He had come for someone else'. (p.39) We have no other narrative view of that 'certitude' though the idea is never dismissed from the governess' mind. Feeling becomes logical and unmistakable proof. Mrs Grose finds her in a state of shock, and she talks of the meeting. It transpires that she has seen the ghost of Peter Quint, her master's old valet. The governess is now convinced that Quint has come for Miles. She formulates a brave defence:

Something within me said that by offering myself bravely as the sole subject of such experience, by accepting, by inviting, by surmounting it all, I should serve as an expiatory victim and guard the tranquillity of my companions. The children, in especial, I should thus fence about and absolutely save. (p.50)

The rest of the story shows the governess absolutely dedicated to this Christian task. As a result the most innocent action will be seen as horrible proof of Quint's diabolic intentions.

There are more horrors to come. The governess next sees the ghost of her predecessor, Miss Jessel, as Flora plays by the lake at Bly. A further turn of the screw is made to the governess's reasoning, for she is convinced that Flora has seen Miss Jessel too. The governess will now never be swayed from her belief that the children are haunted and in communication with Quint and Miss Jessel. Not even the flat denial from the children dissuades her. She implores Mrs Grose to ask

Flora about Miss Jessel and instantly retracts, saying that the girl will lie to her anyway, and deny any acquaintance. The narrative offers nothing but the governess' point of view, where suspicion becomes hard fact. "'The more I go over it'" she says, "'the more I see in it, and the more I see in it the more I fear"'. (p.60) Correspondingly, the less we can trust to the logical and blinkered sweep of her conviction. Her narrative sounds deeply neurotic, and what is presented as a firm grasp on fact reads like unreasonable and dangerous sensitivity. The surer the governess becomes the less sure is our understanding of the truth and reality of her narrative. Our reading cannot help us to distinguish appearance from reality. The objective relay of facts which we depend on in the short story is no longer given. The story consists of a series of highly subjective intuitions, the truth of which we simply cannot assess: the text does not help the reader any more.

The governess, with self-confessed "'dreadful boldness of mind"' (p.69) can give us no proof beyond her clear deductions. The narrative is supremely ironic, for not only can we never trust her story, we have no means of constructing an alternative. All that we have as we read 'The Turn of the Screw' is the limited ability to read the text with suspicion. No other narrative perspective helps us to gain the accustomed objective insight into the exhaustible reality of the story. The full meaning of this text is held from us. The great majority of short fiction in the 1890s lets us take it for granted that each story will be self-contained, and that we will be able to read in the sure knowledge that the tale will easily yield all of its secrets. 'The Turn of the Screw' categorically rejects the comfort and indulgence of such a dialogue between the reader and the narrative. The reader of 'The Turn of the Screw' is as lonely and helpless before his story

as the governess is before the ghosts of Miss Jessel and Quint. Such is the daunting scope of James's story.

A measure of the extent to which all things become proofs of the governess' cause is made during the scene where Flora and Mrs Grose are present when she sees Miss Jessel; here we have the chance for tangible evidence that the ghosts really do exist, as we know they exist for the governess. Yet her companions evidently do not see Miss Jessel. Flora pleads to be taken away from the governess, falls ill and refuses to see her. We begin to suspect that the governess is protecting the children against her own private demons, and in doing so is terrifying the children. Flora is certainly terrified: "I don't know what you mean. I see nobody. I see nothing. I never have. I think you're cruel. I don't like you!" (p.139)

In the final scene of the story the suspicion that the governess herself is haunting the children is strengthened, even though this narrative can never confirm it. The governess desperately tries to protect Miles from the ghost of Peter Quint, and triumph in her task of expiation. Miles does not see the ghost, for he has his back to the window where the governess sees Quint. The governess' hysterical and ruthless interrogation makes Miles pronounce the words "Peter Quint"—the name and the final proof which she has wanted from him all through her story. His frightened words mark for her the clinching proof that the children are being tempted by diabolic powers. But Miles, whom the governess thinks to have finally saved, looks at his protector and continues, "you devil!" It would seem that the governess does not exorcise the devil from the children's lives, she exorcises the devil within herself. Miles dies at the moment of this ambiguous triumph, uttering 'the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss'. (p.168)



We are left at the end of 'The Turn of the Screw' with the intuition that the governess herself haunts the children. Miles's cry of "'Peter Quint—you devil'" is disarmingly simple and inexplicably ambiguous. 'You devil' might refer to Quint, it might refer to the governess: we cannot know for sure, because the story never allows us the narrative viewpoints from which we can make an objective assessment. Instantaneous objective truth of such a kind is the prime goal of traditional narrative in the short fiction of the 1890s. But when we read in this tradition we tend to read out of habit; James wants us to read creatively and alertly, yet 'The Turn of the Screw' will not be accessible even to the most carefully engaged reading.

We cannot even take getting to the story for granted. 'The Turn of the Screw' begins at some considerable distance from the real mood and tone of the main text. Two narrators prepare us for the principal narrative. The first narrator loves art and story in its fireside manner. He is joined by a company of guests in an old house, who while away the evenings by telling strange tales. Such would be an appropriate setting for a conventional ghost story—the Jamesian equivalent of a seat on a train, the place where the most inattentive reading takes place. This glib narrator cannot have responsibility for so serious a story as 'The Turn of the Screw', and he merely acts as a physical agent to publish the story for our eyes. Even the second person involved in the transmission of the text cannot take authority for the story. This character, Douglas, has to send for the manuscript of the tale. In doing so he leads us to believe in the sanctity and authority of the story. The governess must tell her story in her own words: her tale, we infer, can stand up for itself—it has the credibility of an autobiography. This introduction suggests that the

tale will supply profound narrative truth—the one thing which, in conventional terms, it cannot do.

'The Turn of the Screw' gives us a narrative which we cannot trust. Yet where else can we look in the story for the truth which we have learned to take for granted? Our experience of reading is useless. The moment we take it for granted that narrative is open and self-contained, we have fallen into a dangerous habit of reading. We cannot reconcile reality and interpretation in this story; all, in James's word, is 'adumbration'.

Our knowledge of the events at Bly is, as it is for Mrs Grose, no more than 'a knowledge half consternation and half compassion'. (p.48) As readers we are left in mid-air at critical moments, so that we do not know 'what happens next' when conventional narrative would exist to carry the narrative flow unobtrusively onwards. We only learn, for instance, of what passed between Miss Jessel and the governess when Flora is supposed to have seen for the first time, through the governess' recapitulation. We have a narrative authority which we cannot trust. The form of the narrative no longer does what we expect and want it to. A tradition of ghost stories tells us that mysteries can be clarified: 'The Turn of the Screw' has no such authority and confidence. The governess' narrative presents emotional, neurotic suspicion as fact: and when we ask, with Mrs Grose, "'but how do you know?'" her reply is simple: "'I know, I know, I know'." (p.49) Such direct assurance is bewildering and insufficient.

The governess says of her first meeting with Quint, 'so I saw him as I see the letters I form on this page'. (p.32) But in this story words cannot tell, they are no longer enough, for they are too subjective. Words are hysterical in the calm logic which they follow.

The narrative is a definite proof of spectres and ghosts that cannot be defined or proved. The narrative is too ambiguous to trust; and in the sense that we cannot ever understand or elucidate it in the way that a traditional experience of short fiction tells us that we can read, 'The Turn of the Screw' is impossible to read. We cannot approach the story beyond conjecture.

'The Turn of the Screw' is the most important short story in the 1890s because it is proof of a narrative finding itself wanting. James uses his tales of literary life to criticise a fickle public who do not essentially care for their art. The philistine reader works mechanically, and without mental engagement. 'The Turn of the Screw' does not co-operate with such a reader, neither does it yield definite conclusions to even the most alert and creative reader. This text is a radical and a despairing comment on those who take their writing and reading, in the tradition of formula writing, for granted. James's conviction is simply that we cannot afford to be so complacent; art itself, and the short story in particular, are too precious, and much too important for that.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### HUBERT CRACKANTHORPE

Critics of the English short story in the 1890s, writing mainly in the review columns of the well-established journals, were adamant in their opinion that French realism had a significant effect on the genre. Any writer who confronted the basic motives of human behaviour, or who stressed the role of sexual emotion and the sordid aspects of urban life, was a champion of Zola or Maupassant. Several writers were picked out as being particularly representative of the new realistic school in English short fiction. Hubert Crackanthorpe achieved a sometimes notorious reputation for his stories; and among other writers granted the label of realist were: Arthur Morrison, who wrote penetrating studies of working-class poverty in London's East end; H.D. Lowry, whose brief and powerful stories of harsh conditions amongst the poor in Cornish villages won great respect; Frank Harris, who described complex psychological states and violent behaviour in his still underrated stories; George Egerton, the feminist author; and, most surprisingly of all, Frederick Wedmore, who wrote polite stories about wistful and tragic people, and hated the very idea of realism. Even the urbane stories of Ella D'Arcy and Henry Harland were considered realistic because of their continental settings and bohemian atmosphere.

Contemporary critics of the realistic short story identified this new fiction (and, it seems, any particularly effective volume of stories) as being written under the specific influence of Maupassant. Flaubert, Loti or the Goncourts are very rarely mentioned in this context; Zola's name is only occasionally referred to. Crackanthorpe was said to have 'great power as a writer of short stories in the manner of which Guy

de Maupassant was a master'.<sup>1</sup> Frank Harris's Elder Conklin was a 'remarkable little book', which was considered to be the 'sort of book Guy de Maupassant might have written, had he been an Englishman'.<sup>2</sup> George Saintsbury, reviewing Life's Little Ironies, categorically stated that 'everybody who considered the two critically must have observed years ago the similarity between Mr Hardy and Maupassant'.<sup>3</sup> There is no attempt to investigate any relationship between, say, the new short story and the English novel, an omission which is particularly surprising in the case of Hardy. Critics looked to Maupassant as the founder of a new movement in an independent genre.

The critics distinguished several areas where they considered the influence of Maupassant to be most apparent. Maupassant's realism meant that he dealt with a range of subject-matter new to short fiction in the 1890s. It was also felt that the short story owed much to the realistic subjects in Zola's novels, and his philosophy of naturalism also influenced the genre. The general effect of the new subject-matter was to force the short story writers of the 1890s to consider unpleasant aspects of life, to be frank and open about the motives of people living in distress, and to reject, scrupulously, any notion of the ideal. Writers of realistic fiction wanted to show what life was really like; and such an aim prompted them to show that for a vast number of people it was filthy, degrading and oppressive. Realists chose working-class urban settings for their stories, and emphasised

1. Unsigned review of Sentimental Studies, Athenaeum, 73 (September 1895), 383.
2. Unsigned review, Athenaeum, 72 (December 1894), 785.
3. Academy, 45 (June 1894), 453.

the truthfulness of their narratives by removing the personality of the narrator from their fiction. This revealed the most specific debt to Maupassant, it was felt. The more impersonal and documentary the narration the better, for in this way a short story could become a completely objective record of genuine suffering and inhumanity. The facts were allowed to speak for themselves in the texts, and this very objectivity became an oblique indication of angry compassion. It was essential that the writer should not influence the reader's moral judgement: he should maintain disinterest in his attitude.

The stories of the realists were generally very brief. The startling effect of so much distressing emotion and behaviour in a brief space was highlighted by stories which often began in media re, and kept to an episodic pattern. Grim lives were revealed in a sequence of representative moments, often without the need for the traditional crescendo mounting to crisis. Realists, following the example of Maupassant, believed that an impersonal plot merited an impersonal method. They depicted harsh facts 'in a spirit of artistic compassion freed from moral bias'.<sup>4</sup> This probing and agnostic attitude made the withdrawal of narrative opinion essential, and stressed the documentary aspect of short fiction. As William C. Frierson has remarked, harking back to the critical tradition of the 1890s which saw Maupassant behind any new short story:

The new school followed the lead of Maupassant in narrating significant episodes of human life and conduct. No conventional idealization, no class distinctions, no

4. William C. Frierson, 'Realism in the Eighteen-Nineties and the Maupassant School in England', French Quarterly, 10 (March 1928), 36.

heroes, no heroines, no villains, no Nemesis, no spiritual consolations are provided in the grim and pathetic revelations of contemporary tragedy which the short-story writers of the nineties provided. <sup>5</sup>

One contemporary American critic implored English authors to write short stories with the example of Maupassant always in mind. Sherwin Cody's How to Write Fiction (1895) was developed from his 1894 volume with the same main title but a different and revealing subtitle: A Practical Course of Instruction after the French Method of Maupassant. <sup>6</sup> The later version differed by having three appendices, including a survey of modern English fiction with special reference to the short story. Cody's work is one of the few practical manuals for writing short fiction published in England in the 1890s. Cody himself was American, and his manual is in the now well-established American tradition of guides for young authors wishing to become popular short story writers for the magazine market. <sup>7</sup>

Cody's particular advice, that writers should follow the lead of Maupassant, is unique, as far as I know, and it suggests again the important hold that the French writer had on the imagination of critics in the 1890s. Cody saw Maupassant's greatness in his ability to combine the elements of four classes of the short story (tale; fable; study; dramatic sketch) into the 'complete drama'. He respected Maupassant's ability to work out each story to a perfect conclusion, and his intuitive

5. The English Novel in Transition 1885—1940 (Norman, 1942), p.49.
6. [Sherwin Cody], How to Write Fiction: Especially the Art of Short Story Writing. A Practical Study of Technique (1895).
7. e.g. Harry T Baker, The Contemporary Short Story: A Practical Manual [1919], and the articles on short story techniques in the Boston Writer in the 1890s.

selection of compelling short story ideas. He had particular praise for the way in which Maupassant chose his material from seemingly unexceptional incidents. Cody believed Maupassant's simplicity was the key to his greatness:

The peculiarity of the ideas on which Maupassant bases his short stories is the slightness in their original states as compared with the ample soul he gives and the richness of the dress. Unless the writer has a wealth of material in his own mind and heart, such simple ideas as Maupassant uses become flat and absurd. To take a very slight notion and build up a good story on it is the most difficult phase of the art. (p.38)

The English authors themselves grant general approval to the idea of French influence; but they very rarely mention the actual names of Maupassant, Zola or Flaubert. The specific proposition that these authors influenced English short fiction to a significant degree is made by the critics in the 1890s, and it suggests how eagerly they sought to establish a formal inheritance for the independent genre. The critics found glamour and contemporary relevance in the idea of a literary history of French influence, and they did not draw attention to the indigenous strength of the English short story. The authors have no compelling need for theoretical or historical terminology.

Many journals sought the opinions of the writers of the new short story on their allegiance to French ideas and to the creed of realism. Most authors agreed with Crackanthorpe that the more relaxed attitude to realistic ideas in the 1890s was in itself a good thing, for it meant a new freedom in the choice of subject-matter. This freedom made it easier for the authors of short fiction to claim their own



individual 'territories', and so make an impact on publishers and the public. Crackanthorpe outlined the general historical change in his essay 'Reticence in Literature: Some Roundabout Remarks' in 1894. He noted that 'books are published, stories are printed, in old-established reviews, which would never have been tolerated a few years ago', and continued:

The opposition to the renaissance of fiction as a conscientious interpretation of life is not what it was; its opponents are not the men they were. It is not so long since a publisher [Vizetelly] was sent to prison for issuing English translations of celebrated specimens of French realism; yet, only the other day, we vied with each other in doing honour to the chief figure-head of that tendency across the Channel.

The 'figure-head' was Zola, whose works became extremely popular in England in the 1890s. The critical opponents of realism throughout the decade maintained that the objectivity of narration and the consistent emphasis on grim lives, which were essentially French traits, led to a misguidedly literal fiction. H.D. Traill, who described himself as 'a critic opposed to the theories and methods of so-called realism' felt that realists searched too closely for the truth, and gave a one-sided account of reality. Realists deluded themselves if they thought that their accounts were objective. Traill described the reaction of the critic opposed to realism, after reading the work of the novelist and short story author, Arthur Morrison:

8. Yellow Book, 2 (July 1894), 262. The 'honour' was a dinner held for Zola by the Authors' Club in 1894.

He has probably been girding up his critical loins for the task of showing that the realist has lost sight of art in the perusal and capture of naked Truth, when lo! he finds that even Truth herself appears to have altogether escaped her pursuer. He was preparing himself to detect and expose the aesthetic and artistic defects of a supposed product of literary photography, when to his amazement he discovers that the photograph, though it seems distinct enough to the gaze which concentrates itself successively on the various parts of the picture, yet fades, when the attempt is made to view it in its entirety, into a mere blur.<sup>9</sup>

Critics opposed to realism felt that the writers of the new short story concentrated on distressing subject-matter for the sake of novelty. They were dismayed that realists rejected a regard for beauty in stories of adultery, prostitution, alcoholism and thieving. Arthur Waugh restated the customary argument against realism in his essay entitled 'Reticence in Literature' in the first Yellow Book in April 1894. He remarked that the very objectivity of the realists led them to regard unpleasant and brutal facts to the exclusion of all other material. He takes an Aristotelian line in his rejection of realism. Aristotle, in his Ethics, had argued for a point between the extremes of Virtue and Vice which should guide human conduct. Waugh applies the alternative terms of liberty and license, and seeks for 'the pivot of good taste, the centre-point of art' between them. The mistake of the realist is to disregard the midway. Waugh, like H.D. Traill, sees

9. 'The New Fiction', in The New Fiction and Other Essays on Literary Subjects (1897), pp.9—10.

severe limitations in the realists' desire for a photographic record of life: 'the natural inclination of frankness, the inclination of the virtue in the rough, is to blunder on resolutely with an indomitable and damning sincerity, till all is said that can be said, and art is lost in photography'. (p.204)

Waugh felt that frankness for its own sake tended inevitably towards 'license'; more, it 'becomes a violence, in that it has degenerated into mere brawling, animated neither by purpose nor idea'. (p.206)

The realist took his subjects from the gutter without any genuine moral impulse or literary tact. Realists were too prone to jump onto a literary bandwagon. Such behaviour was irresponsible, and authors had 'lost their heads' by adopting realism as their creed: 'they have gone out into the byways and hedges in search of the new thing, and have brought into the study and subjected to the microscope mean objects of the roadside, whose analysis may be of value to science but is absolutely foreign to art'. (p.212)

These objections to the methods of realism were not shared by the writers of the new short fiction. But they regularly dissociated themselves from the restriction of the term 'realism'. George Egerton preferred to think of herself as a psychologist; Wedmore hated the idea of 'gutter-literature'; Crackanthorpe had no time for any terminology at all, and Arthur Morrison felt similar contempt for theoretical jargon. Morrison defended his 'realism' in terms of the necessity and desirability of being able to consider all aspects of life as material fit for fiction. In his 1897 essay 'What is a Realist?', he wrote:

It is the artist's privilege  
to seek his material where  
he thinks well, and it is no  
man's privilege to say him  
nay. If the community have

left horrible places and horrible lives before his eyes, then the fault is that of the community; and to picture these places and these lives becomes not merely his privilege, but his duty. <sup>10</sup>

The realist, then, is inspired by moral as well as literary duty, a fact often overlooked by opponents who saw the movement as a simple excuse for obscenity. Morrison saw his fiction and his moral responsibility in very clear terms, and he was not in the least interested in critical labels: 'I have never called myself a "realist", and I have never put forth any of my work as "realism". I decline the labels of the schoolmen and the sophisters: being a simple writer of tales, who takes whatever means lie to his hand to present life as he sees it'. (p.326)

Crackanthorpe was similarly disturbed by the narrow implications which critics saw in 'realism'. In his well-publicised interview with Zola (which appeared in the Albemarle in 1892) he discussed the situation of realism in France and England. Crackanthorpe asked Zola, in fact, whether the realistic movement in French literature was dying out. Zola's reply suggests his belief in the wider implications of literary frankness, rather than the narrow definitions of particular creeds, whether "'realism, naturalism, whatever name you give it'". <sup>11</sup> This opinion held much appeal for all of the English realists, and Crackanthorpe in particular. Zola saw realism as reflecting a fundamental change in the attitude of the artist in observing people and

10. New Review, 16 (March 1897), 328.

11. 'Realism in France and England: An Interview with M. Emile Zola', Albemarle, 1 (February 1892), 40.

their surroundings. Realism had a grand aim, and could be defined as "the result of man's continued search after truth. And that search after truth will exist as long as the human race continues to progress". Realism had profound authority precisely because of this frank search for the basic motives of human behaviour. Zola admitted that realists "have studied the human being a little too much from the point of view of the senses", but emphasised that they had made a permanent breakthrough in literature by confronting life openly, and without the distractions of 'false' romantic notions about human behaviour. If people acted because they were mean, sexually frustrated or jealous, bitter, weak or aggressive, then it was time to say so. Clearly, Zola believed that the fight had been won: "no more realism! You might as well say that there will be no more sun, no more stars, no more trees". (p.40)

This confidence motivates the work of the English realists, as they explored the new subject-matter, and developed new themes. Crackan-  
 thorpe discusses his personal response to realism, and the critics' understanding of the term, in his essay 'Reticence in Literature'—  
 the reply to Waugh's article. Crackan-  
 thorpe is unimpressed by any restrictive critical terminology, whether 'realism' or its opposite, 'idealism'. Each extreme had its drawbacks, and Crackan-  
 thorpe felt that the artist whose head was either in the clouds or the gutter was doing his fiction a disservice. There could be no wisdom or beauty in art when 'the pendulum of production is continually swinging from degenerate idealism to desperate realism, from effete vapidness to slavish sordidity'. Crackan-  
 thorpe is far more interested in the personality of the author, and the way character influences art, than the influence of external creeds. Fiction is sterile and academic if it merely obeys

rules, however radical or noble those rules may be. Behind Crackanthorpe's argument lies a deep belief in the range and potential of human intelligence, which can be fully expressed when the author follows his own creative intuitions. Without this effort fiction will have no character, and without character it can never be great or enduring:

And the novel, the short story, even the impression of a mere incident, convey each of them, the imprint of the temper in which their creator has achieved this process of adaptation and blending together of his material. They are inevitably stamped with the hallmark of his personality.

As a result of this, Crackanthorpe calls the disparity between realism and idealism 'a matter, not of aesthetic philosophy, but of individual temperament'. That temperament is all-important, and the true artist will discover his own unique technical resources and skills: he will have no time for fictional dogma. 'Realism, as a creed, is as ridiculous as any other literary creed'. (p.261)

Crackanthorpe's idea of the importance of the writer's personality owes much to Maupassant. Maupassant himself deals with the theoretical aspects and aims of the French realistic school of writers in his seminal essay 'Le Roman' first printed in 1887.<sup>12</sup> Maupassant indicates the vital role of each author's personality, and the effect it will have on the realistic novelist's work. Crackanthorpe's belief in the personality of the text derives from Maupassant's 'vision personnelle du monde'. (p.38) Maupassant argued that the main effect of the real-

12. Reprinted as Preface to Pierre et Jean, edited by G. Hainsworth (1966).

istic school was to show 'la vérité, rien que la vérité et toute la vérité'. (p.37) But this did not mean that art should become 'mere' photography. Maupassant was, like Zola and the English realists, excited by the range of achievements in subject-matter and style open to the realist, a range which highlighted the creativity and vigour of his art: 'le réaliste, s'il est un artiste, cherchera, non pas à nous montrer la photographie banale de la vie, mais à nous en donner la vision plus complète, plus saisissante, plus probante que la réalité même'. (p.40)

There was nothing objective about the author's personal belief in his fiction. Individual character was of paramount importance, for without character, the author could not write with conviction or integrity. Each writer had to follow his own instincts:

Contester le droit d'un  
écrivain de faire une oeuvre  
poétique ou une oeuvre réal-  
iste, c'est vouloir le forcer  
à modifier son tempérament,  
récuser son originalité, ne  
pas lui permettre de se servir  
de l'oeil et de l'intelligence  
que la nature lui a donnés. (p.38)

Henry James, himself a great admirer of Maupassant's short fiction, wrote a perceptive introduction to The Odd Number (1891), the only volume of Maupassant stories translated into English in the 1890s. He noted the independence of Maupassant's art, and realised that the key to the French author's genius and originality sprang from his desire to write according to his own experience and style. James makes the point that whatever inclination Maupassant may have had for a literary theory (Zola's naturalism for example) he still writes in his own, individual, way. Hence Maupassant's 'rarity' and strength:

M. de Maupassant takes his  
stand on everything that

solicits the sentient creature who lives in his senses; gives the impression of the active, independent observer who is ashamed of none of his faculties, describes what he sees, renders, with a rare reproduction of tone, what he hears, and is more anxious to see and to hear than to make sure, in advance, of propping up some particular theory of things. 13

James goes on to say that Maupassant 'has indeed a theory to the effect that [things] are pretty bad'. This 'theory' is a result of Maupassant's individual temperament—what James calls his 'strong, hard, cynical, slightly cruel humour'. (p.xv) This attitude is apparent in the selection of stories, which were translated by Jonathan Sturges. The Odd Number includes the famous story 'The Necklace' (which so impressed Sherwin Cody) and presents a wide range of themes and settings, from a tale of violent murder ('La Mère Sauvage') to one about the pacifying effect of nature on a dogmatic mind ('Moonlight'). The writing is always precise and controlled, and Maupassant attains that unity of effect in each story which shows his allegiance to Poe. Maupassant's effect on the English realistic writers works principally through his style and his technique: his beautifully controlled plots and his economical writing lead to the self-contained stories of the traditional pattern—introduction, crisis, denouement—which English writers though perfect and most worthy of emulation. In this sense Maupassant's stories are the great models which all writers of short fiction in the 1890s praised, not just the realists; this explains the critics' consistent desire to introduce Maupassant's name whenever

13. Introduction to The Odd Number, translated by Jonathan Sturges (1891), p.xv.



a short story deserved special attention.

The most specific influence on the new realistic writers of short fiction is Maupassant's objectivity of narration. There is never any sense of a narrator's intrusion in the tale—indeed most of the stories are told in the third person. In 'The Beggar' (pp.153—63) an inevitable conclusion casts a harsh light on the cynical and callous attitude of man to man. The beggar has crushed legs and has to support himself on crutches. The villagers grow tired of him, and come to a unanimous decision to refuse the beggar food and so 'be rid of him at last'. (p.157) Exhausted and near starvation, the beggar kills a chicken, is seen by the farmer, and cruelly beaten; he cannot defend himself. He is taken by the gendarmes to the capital of the district, still without food, and thrown into prison. The story ends on an ironic and seemingly dismissive note: 'the gendarmes did not think of his needing food, and they left him till the next day. But when they came to examine him, early in the morning, they found him dead, upon the ground. What a surprise!' (p.163) Maupassant records these distressing facts with detached objectivity, content to let the actions of the characters prompt the reader to moral decision. This cool tone, and this documentary narration, were seen by the realistic writers as the perfect way of confronting the callous and sordid affairs portrayed in their stories.

English realists acknowledged that Maupassant's tone and narration influenced their own writing; their debt to other French realistic authors remains secondary in importance. Realistic writers were certainly influenced by the philosophy of naturalism expressed in Zola's Rougon-Macquart novels. Zola wrote, with passion and integrity, about the degrading influence of squalid urban conditions on the lives of

desperately poor working-class people. His subject-matter made writers of the realistic short story in England turn to the overcrowded and mean conditions of urban life (which generally meant London life) and the harsh struggle for survival. Zola's short story technique, however, had no effect on realistic writers. The Attack on the Mill and Other Sketches of War, translated in 1892, includes straightforward adventure narratives, with traditional themes of courage and daring, and tragic love. 'The Attack on the Mill'<sup>14</sup> for example is a good, tightly written story with an effective plot about two lovers defending their mill against the Prussians; there is no avant-garde realism here.

Flaubert offered realistic writers the example of a scrupulous style, a high degree of artistry, and a dispassionate prose which earned much respect from authors trying to write objectively. Again, however, Flaubert's own short stories do not directly influence the realistic writers of short fiction in the 1890s. Flaubert's Trois Contes, for example (which were not translated into English during the decade) have none of the episodic drive of realistic short fiction, preferring a more relaxed and drifting account of characters and their lives. 'Un Coeur Simple' tells the quiet story of the hard life of Félicité, a servant.<sup>15</sup> It is longer than the typical realistic tale, and Flaubert regards Félicité with sad compassion rather than the grim detachment of so many English realistic writers.

The English authors of short fiction admired Zola and Flaubert, but there are no specific links between the work of French and English

14. The Attack on the Mill and Other Sketches of War (1892), pp.47—129.

15. Trois Contes (Paris, [1877]), pp.9—50.

schools of realistic short fiction. It is also apparent that there are surprisingly few specific instances of English short stories written under Maupassant's influence, by which I mean a characteristic combination of subject-matter, objective style and personality. I know of only two volumes of short stories in circulation in the 1890s which were written directly under the influence of the French master's method and personality. The first of these would have, perhaps, been read by only one of the realistic writers, George Egerton, who was able to translate Scandinavian literature. August Strindberg's Married was first published in 1885, but not translated into English until 1913.<sup>16</sup> These brief, powerful sketches of tragic and unhappy relationships demonstrate the futility of expecting love to last, and marriages to remain successful. Economic pressures always destroy romantic dreams. Strindberg outlines the dominant role of sexual emotion in these hard and cynical stories, and he shares Maupassant's 'slightly cruel humour'.

The second volume directly inspired by Maupassant's technique and personal vision of life is George Gissing's Human Odds and Ends.<sup>17</sup> Gissing's stories are very short, and have the barbed and arch Maupassant manner. Neither author is deceived by the petty tricks of his characters; they know their countrymen too well. The setting of Human Odds and Ends is typically realistic—an urban environment where poverty and disease prevail. Gissing describes, always at one remove from the action, mean and intolerant behaviour. In some stories people try to break away from the misery of their lives. In 'The Justice and

16. Married: Twenty Stories of Married Life, translated by Ellie Schleussner (1913).

17. Human Odds and Ends: Stories and Sketches (1898).

the Vagabond' (pp.20—37) the rich justice ruled by his wife is tempted into distant travel by an old schoolfriend, and dies in the prospect of a visit to South America. People in these stories stir up trouble and disappear when they find their own safety is threatened. In 'The Firebrand' (pp.38—55) a journalist returns north to agitate for a miners' strike for reasons of self-glory; but when a forged letter arrives threatening his life, he soon returns to London. Gissing's smugly self-confident characters generally find themselves outwitted by the end of the story. In 'The Prize Lodger' (pp.133—54) a rich man stays in lodging houses for no more than a year at a time, after which the standard of service invariably declines. When he finds one landlady who looks after him particularly well, he marries for reasons of convenience and self-interest; but he finds that his wife begins to nag him after all.

Gissing, like Maupassant, uses his stories to show people for what they are. Mean motives are always discovered, and human nature laid bare in swift, concise outlines. Both authors use the extreme brevity of their tales to concentrate on the essential points of each story. There is no superfluity and no verbiage. It is ironic that Gissing's volume aroused none of the usual critical emphasis on its 'French' aspects and no particular reference to the unmistakable influence of Maupassant's 'vision personnelle du monde'.

It is clear that whilst the critics of the short story in the 1890s assigned everything 'new' in the genre to the impact of Maupassant, the authors of the realistic short fiction were far less demonstrative; they felt that the whole generalised issue of realism was overemphasised by the critics, and that they owed a grander debt to Maupassant. English realistic writers chose their own specific area

of fiction rather than their 'school': their duty is personal, and not theoretical. The best of the English realists concentrated on particular settings, groups of people or types of character. Morrison kept to the East end, Lowry to his Cornish villages, Egerton to her oppressed women, and Wedmore to his reticent men.

The writers sought to express their private commitments in relatively narrow fictional locales: in this way each writer could claim public authority as 'the' expert in a specialised area of work. The creative desire to write about one compelling subject had its public reward, because readers could confidently expect a particular type of story from an author with a proclaimed, personal literary mission. Because the realistic writers kept to their chosen boundaries of place or character, direct influence from other writers was minimised. In this sense, Maupassant's influence on the short story in the 1890s has been consistently distorted by contemporary critics of the short story, and by modern critics like Frierson.

Maupassant's major influence may be seen in the way English realists made their choice of particular areas or characters. By doing so they stressed the individual character of their work—and here Maupassant's decree that each author should follow his own creative instincts takes effect. Maupassant's idea that writers should be themselves and write without recourse to external creeds displays its force when the writers concentrate on highly specialised locations and groups of people. In this way, each author develops his own writing personality, with unique creative effort.

One writer whom the critics placed in a line of direct descent from Maupassant was Hubert Crackanthorpe. An anonymous reviewer writing in the Athenaeum thought that Wreckage (1893), Crackanthorpe's

first volume of short stories, was an important contribution to English fiction precisely because of its French connection. Wreckage was highly praised:

We place at the head of the short stories of the year Mr Hubert Crackanthorpe's very remarkable studies called "Wreckage". Mr Crackanthorpe's book is notable by reason of the skill which he shows in giving direct, often brutal expression, in significant incidents, to the hard, bare realities of mainly sordid life. It is daring in the extreme; alike in subject and in method it suggests Guy de Maupassant; there is the same cynical acceptance of the animal passions as being really at the root of things.<sup>18</sup>

Crackanthorpe does not offer an unhumane or mechanical view of life, however hard, bare, or sordid the facts that he chooses to select for his fiction. The epigraph to Wreckage, from Germinie Lacerteux, expresses Crackanthorpe's plea for the humanity of his work. 'Que le roman ait cette religion que le siècle passé appelait de ce large et vaste nom: "Humanité";—il lui suffit de cette conscience; son droit est là'.

Crackanthorpe's work is intimately and courageously connected with the task of observing people for what they are; and this calls for shrewd and clear-sighted compassion. Crackanthorpe followed Maupassant's lead in absenting himself from the text, and relying on the objectivity of third-person narration. The facts and the characters speak for themselves. Wreckage is distinguished by an impressively

18. 'English Literature in 1893', Athenaeum, 72 (January 1894), 18.

reticent style which helps create the cool tone. Crackanthorpe uses as few words as possible to summon up brief pictures of misery. As one reviewer remarked, 'there is never anything superfluous or unmeaning in his sketches; he knows exactly what effect he wishes to produce, and discards everything which does not tend towards it'.<sup>19</sup>

'A Conflict of Egoisms' (pp.55—105) is a hard and daunting story. It tells of Oswald, a lonely writer who meets Letty, a neighbour. They marry, but soon drift hopelessly apart. Oswald finds the distraction of another person an intolerable burden, for he cannot concentrate on his work. Eventually he cuts Letty out of his life altogether. He decides to commit suicide, but dies naturally at the very moment of throwing himself off a bridge. The story shows Crackanthorpe detailing the personal despair of a particular type of male character, and it is the first of many stories which explore this theme. In 'A Conflict of Egoisms' two lonely people find no consolation in company—Oswald because he does not really want to know people; Letty because she cannot break down her husband's chilly reserve. Oswald soon ignores and avoids his wife. Letty gives up an active career for a romantic dream and finds that marriage only makes her brood on unhappiness. Her energy is gradually crushed. Oswald is simply oblivious to Letty's interests and character, and will not make the slightest effort to change his style of life to accommodate<sup>m</sup> his wife. He destroys himself and Letty by the sheer force of his guarded introspection. Their life together becomes a nightmare of silent reproach:

After this, in grim serenity,  
a whole month passed, while  
the breach between them stead-

19. Unsigned review of Sentimental Studies, Athenaeum, 73 (September 1895), 383.

ily widened. On Letty's part all signs of the smouldering fire within her disappeared beneath a permanent attitude of chilly apathy. By a mutual, tacit understanding neither spoke to the other, beyond attempting now and then some forced commonplace remark, when the tension of silence became especially intolerable. (pp.95—96)

In this story Letty finds loss in hope, and despair in romance. For Oswald, emotion means lowering his guard, and he prefers to avoid contact rather than reveal himself. Human contact induces morbid gloom and Oswald chooses to commit suicide because it offers blissful relief from the responsibility of human intercourse. Crackanthorpe's impersonal narration is the perfect medium to help us deduce that Oswald can derive only artistic pleasure from life. He cannot deal with existence except through his writing, which protects him from reality. With such gloomy logic Oswald can feel happy in the prospect of suicide. He has no thought for Letty. Death will be 'a long fall through the air—the water black, cold and slimy, the rush down his throat, the fight for breath, to sink down, down at once . . . the yearning for the peace of death swept through him'. (p.105)

The last story in Wreckage, 'Embers' (pp.215—32) also deals with the numbing effect of introspection and habitual loneliness: these are major themes in Crackanthorpe's work. Frank Gorridge is an ill-paid office clerk who has lived a monotonously regular life since his wife's departure. The first part of the story describes Gorridge's sordid life and surroundings with simple objectivity. Crackanthorpe merely makes an inventory of his character's room—noticing a chair, a deal chest,



a dirty shirt and a white cloth. We learn about Frank's character through these objects before we meet him. The sparse use of adjectives emphasises the poverty of the room. Gorridge, gaunt and hopeless in his despair, lives for habit. He copies manuscripts and addresses envelopes each evening merely to fill in time and to keep him from thinking. Each day is a counterpart of the preceding one, and habit locks Gorridge into a hopeless security.

The arrival of Frank's wife—long since fallen into an abject drunkenness—shatters this numbing routine. Crackanthorpe does not comment on the way in which she callously assumes that she will soon be able to deceive her husband into accepting her back into his life. The woman accosts her husband, and is imperiously ejected from his room by the landlady, leaving Gorridge incapable of movement or thought. His protective routine is gone, and when Gorridge wakes next morning, the methodical cluster of clothes is in disarray. Habit has been destroyed, and Gorridge has no routine to hold on to or to comfort him: 'when he awoke his mind was blank. Mechanically he looked at the chair on which his clothes always lay folded. It was empty. In a heap, there they were on the floor'. (p.227) This moment, described with short factual sentences, marks the beginning of Frank's decline. Habit now means giving his wages over to his wife who appears regularly to way-lay him on the dingy path home. They have both sunk to the lowest level: all that remains is silent suffering in a world of weariness.

The seven stories in Wreckage are concerned with the self-inflicted despair of lonely people who find it difficult to come to terms with emotion, and who take the responsibilities of life too seriously. Crackanthorpe's strong characters use and manipulate weak natures. Predatory characters, such as the rich man in 'Dissolving View' (pp.113—24),

use their self-confidence and callous strength to dominate, and then dispense with, human affection. The main character in 'Dissolving View' receives a letter from Kit, a poor chorus girl who used to be his lover. She has a child by him, and is dying. The man, feeling pangs of guilt, goes to see Kit and finds to his relief that she and her child have recently died. He marries with a clear conscience. Crackanthorpe lets the callousness and meanness of the man's actions speak for themselves, and lets the story seem impersonal.

Moral interpretation is left to the reader, though there is implicit appeal to our sense of moral judgement in the very impersonality of the facts of the narrative, and the lack of a narrator's active presence. This is the hallmark of realism in the short story, and it owes much to Maupassant. Crackanthorpe's honest investigation of oppression and domination makes for cheerless reading; but his view of the urban world has the authority of a narrative style which avoids all temptation of hysteria or didacticism. As Lionel Johnston, Crackanthorpe's most sensitive contemporary critic, observed, the sheer waste and despair involved in Wreckage paradoxically draws the reader towards a new investigation of the urgent need for safeguards against such urban tyranny: there is too much to lose, and too much needless suffering. Wreckage, by attending to the effects and consequences of misery, makes us alert to the vital need for moral energy and activity. Its appeal is deeply humane, and its realism inspired by great moral authority:

Its tragedies, often grimly humorous, were told with rare sureness of speech, an economy at once laconic and sufficient. It was an impersonal book, a sad and cheerless book, but it was not a mere piece of clever

and squalid literature. Mr Crackanthorpe's way of writing allowed us to feel the humanity in his themes. He chose no incidents, employed no phrases, for the sake of their misery and harshness: in a melancholy and painful book, there was yet no coarseness, no absorption in mere gloom, of the kind dear to "realism"<sup>20</sup> falsely so called.

In this review, Johnson noticed a change from the laconic style of Wreckage to the more relaxed style of Sentimental Studies, Crackanthorpe's second volume of stories published two years later in 1895.<sup>21</sup> Crackanthorpe's early style had a concise and understated force: now he allows himself a freer use of long psychological description. The mood of the book is still introspective, but there is a new lingering quality to his narrative. As Johnson remarks, Crackanthorpe 'surrenders himself to the fascination of describing character in long paragraphs of subtle analysis and reflection, and has fewer passages of terse and succinct narrative'. (p.218) Crackanthorpe retains the episodic structure of Wreckage, but explores character in much more depth than situation: he has learned much from Maupassant, and now feels mature enough to develop his own distinctive creative personality.

The first story in Sentimental Studies, 'A Commonplace Chapter' (pp.3—108) is ten times as long as the shortest story in Wreckage<sup>22</sup> yet it has a similarly economical and simple plot. The story begins with the marriage of Ella and Hillier. Ella is an innocent girl from

20. Review of Sentimental Studies, Academy, 48 (September 1895), 218.

21. Sentimental Studies and A Set of Village Tales (1895).

22. 'Embers' is 2,500 words long; 'A Commonplace Chapter' 25,000.

a country vicarage; Hillier a rising literary figure and journalist, a sophisticated man with much sexual experience. They move to London, and spend a few blissfully happy weeks together. Gradually their lives fall into dull routine. Hillier loses himself in his work, Ella tries to become 'smart' to please her husband, though she is desperately lonely. They live their own separate lives, much as Oswald and Letty did in 'A Conflict of Egoisms'. Hillier begins to visit prostitutes from confused motives of hurt pride and a desire for revenge—he feels Ella is an encumbrance. Ella is gradually numbed by the lonely domestic life, and feels hardened to the London social routine. The second section of the story introduces Hillier's cousin Swann, who loves Ella but is content to remain a noble and platonic friend. Hillier tells Ella of his latest infidelity, and she forgives him, though she realises that he will never change his nature.

'A Commonplace Chapter' works with the idea of habit which was of such importance to 'Embers', and develops it into the idea of the ritual behaviour of a middle-class urban community. Such a development naturally demands more psychological description, more space, and a grander vision of the scope and potential of the short story. Crackan-  
thorpe recognizes that a brief plot enhances the strength and profundity of long analysis. There is time to show Ella's first romantic notion of love and marriage, and the effect of society in crushing genuine affection and sensitivity from her life. When Hillier begs his wife's forgiveness after the exposure of his infidelity, his request and her response are both mechanical. Infidelity and forgiveness are part of the same tired ritual of modern life, and Crackan-  
thorpe gives his story a pessimistic conclusion by suggesting that similar actions are taking place all over London. Ella's forgiveness

is just one inevitable ingredient in a useless litany of despair. Her emotion is devoid of spontaneity, while Hillier's is mawkish: "I have been punished, Nellie . . . Good God! it is hard to bear . . . Help me, Nellie . . . help me to bear it". She unclasped his fingers, and started to stroke them; a little mechanically, as if it were her duty to ease him of his pain'. (p.108)

Once the routine of despair and deceit has been established in 'A Commonplace Chapter', there is little that can disturb it. Crack-anthorpe's characters never find easy ways out of their difficulties; they simply relapse into the habit of not dealing with them. The very prose in 'A Commonplace Chapter' is monotonous and dull. Crackanthorpe's impersonal writing means that there need not be a release of energy through excitable description; a plain diction is most appropriate to his stories. As Maupassant remarked, 'il n'est point besoin du vocabulaire bizarre, compliqué, nombreux et chinois', ('Le Roman', p.46).

Swann's detective work, and his exposure of Hillier's deceit seem irrelevant. Ella learns by the end of the story that forgiveness—that most Christian of virtues—may have had a place in the vicarage, but has no merit in the town. Hillier is too weak to resolve his personal struggle with infidelity by suicide. The story is left in this prospect of failure. Ella learns that her situation is far from un-

common:

Then, gradually, out of the weary turmoil of her bitterness, there came to her a warm impulse of vague sympathy for the countless, unknown tragedies at work around her: she thought of the sufferings of outcast women—of loveless lives, full of mirthless laughter; she thought of the long lone-

liness of childless women . . .  
 She clutched for consolation  
 at the unhappiness of others;  
 but she only discovered the  
 greater ugliness of the world.  
 And she returned to a tired  
 contemplation of her own pro-  
 spect. (p.104)

Ella, in this story, ends without the energy to solve her difficulties; Alec, the main character in 'In Cumberland' (Sentimental Studies pp.170—214) finds an embarrassing fund of active motivation. Alec is the vicar of an isolated parish, who, disillusioned in love, works assiduously at his living in poor surroundings. Nearly dying of an illness brought on by overwork, little food and self-neglect, Alec finds that his old love, Ethel, has visited him during his delirious sickness. On a later visit, Alec tells Ethel that he is certainly dying. She is moved by the pathos of his declaration, and says that she still loves him. Alec recovers, fired by this love, gives up his living, and plans to take Ethel away to start a new life together in Australia. Ethel is horrified to see Alec, and contemptuously rejects him.

Crackanthorpe describes this collision of interests with ironic humour. Each character uses the other's 'love' for selfish, sentimental purposes. Alec and Ethel are both committed to an idealistic concept of love, demanding total sacrifice, honour and passion. Alec is prepared to put this concept into practise, whilst Ethel is charmed by the idea, but not in the least interested in Alec as a person. Alec and Ethel have ideas of love, but their emotions and personalities never connect. Crackanthorpe exposes the consequences of such blinkered sentimentality with ruthless precision. Alec, seemingly on his death-bed, gains immense strength from Ethel's impetuous declaration

of love, and deludes himself into thinking that she will give up her comfortable home and her husband, to live with him in the outback. Ethel cherishes a romantic idea of love; Alec fits in neatly with her ideal of the grand illicit passion, as the dying man expresses his total devotion. She can experience tragedy vicariously, and luxuriate in her secret. Alec, who cannot move, is a safe object for her emotional game. He becomes an object of sentimental and completely unreal worship: 'she would remember him always. Every day, she would think of him, as he had asked her to do—she would never forget to do that . . . He would become the secret guiding-star of her life: it would be her hidden chapter of romance'. (pp.197—98)

Unfortunately for Ethel, the artistic idea soon turns to a more difficult reality. Alec, the main character in her little romance, returns to life believing that Ethel really means what she says. Crackanthurpe's description of Ethel's home environment gives us a sure indication of the emptiness of her declaration. Ethel's room is all sham: bright, glittering and useless—the perfect setting for her emotions. Crackanthurpe again makes a simple list of furniture tell us about a character's mind and taste. We see how impossible it would be for her to leave her 'natural' habitat. Alec, the lumbering, shoddy, tragic hero is soiling the crisp and tasteless room. Ethel is perfectly at home amongst the gilt and the glass:

She stood in the bow-window  
of her drawing-room, arrang-  
ing some cut flowers in slen-  
der pink and blue vases, stripped  
with enamel of imitation gold.  
Behind her, the room, uncom-  
fortably ornamental, repeated  
the three notes of colour—  
gilt paper shavings filling  
the grate; gilt-legged chairs  
and tables; stiff, shiny, pink

chintzes encasing the furniture; on the wall a blue-patterned paper, all speckled with stars of gold. (p. 208)

Ethel dismisses Alec after their embarrassing meeting, and masters the shock of the uncouth appearance of the real in her ideal setting; the traces of the collision are soon tidied away. Ethel's ideal of secret love remains, as untarnished as her furniture, and as she pushes her grim lover away, she announces her intention to maintain her belief in sentimental affection. She is already treating the present as the past, even viewing the scene with pleasant melancholy at the moment Alec stands gaunt before her: "'I shall always think of this morning", she continued, growing sentimentally remorseful as the sensation of rising relief pervaded her'. (p.214) The juxtaposition of opposing emotional interests was a theme which held much appeal for Crackanthorpe. The ironic and dauntingly comic potential of the theme was explored in the story 'In Cumberland', and it is a feature of stories as diverse in style as 'A Commonplace Chapter' and 'A Conflict of Egoisms'.

Conflict, opposition, and misunderstanding are important themes in Crackanthorpe's final and posthumous collection of short stories, Last Studies (1897). Henry James, who wrote an appreciation to introduce the volume, greatly admired Crackanthorpe's artistic individuality. He saw that Crackanthorpe was creating his own unique artistic language, and felt this to be an honourable and courageous task at a time when it would have been easy to depend on the convention of realism for artistic inspiration:

What he had his fancy of attempting he had to work out for himself, in a public air but scantily charged



with aids to any independence of conventions—thin as conventions had been worn; and to work out as a point of honour, an act of artistic probity, an expression adjusted to his own free sense of life, to a hundred things with which the unprejudiced observer could be confronted and surrounded. 23

James felt that it was an aspect of Crackanthorpe's courage that he not only tried to pursue an independent literary course, but that he chose to do so in a neglected form. Crackanthorpe could readily respond to the challenge of the short story with his 'almost precocious glimpse of the charm of the technical problem . . . it could fall in with his young dream of directness and firmness to try to make his own one of the neglected or unappreciated forms—an experiment both modest and resolute'. (pp.xvii—xviii)

Crackanthorpe experimented with the various forms of narration available to the short story author. The tight episodic insights of Wreckage offered the perfect medium for studies of sordid life and mean emotions. The dense psychological review apparent in the stories in Sentimental Studies called for a more relaxed, if still episodic narrative. Both styles emphasise mood and situation rather than plot. In Last Studies Crackanthorpe's plots are similarly unobtrusive and bare. Crackanthorpe concentrates on situation, character and the drama of conflicting wills and emotions.

'Anthony Garstin's Courtship' (pp.1—67) describes the love of Tony, a grim Cumberland farmer, for Rosa, a young country girl, who has been made pregnant by Luke Stock. Stock has left the village after

23. 'An Appreciation by Henry James', in Last Studies (1897), p.xv.

attempting to make up with Rosa. Tony's love for her is as forbidding as the Cumberland fells in which the story is set. He is determined to marry Rosa, though his mother, with whom he lives, disapproves of her. Tony finds out about the girl's pregnancy and offers to accept the child as theirs, if she will marry him. Rosa agrees, though she is scared of Tony. He tells his mother that he has made Rosa pregnant and must marry her, and demands Rosa's right to be made welcome in his mother's home. Tony's mother agrees, though she renounces her son. She feels trapped by her son's 'sin' and believes, in true Calvinist fashion, that he will pay for it. The story ends with a typical gloomy prognostication of the future.

There is an unusually strong stress on dialogue in 'Anthony Garstin's Courtship'—particularly in comparison with an early story like 'Embers' where the main character does not speak until the very end of the story. This stress on dialogue suggests Crackanthorpe's primary interest in character. The dialect also serves to impress on us the grim, harsh atmosphere. Tony's love seems as forbidding as the weather, and indeed our first sight of him is blurred by mist and rain; he seems at one with the elements. Rosa's urbanised sophistication (acquired in Leeds) contrasts strongly with Tony's inevitable seriousness, and the personal claim he feels he has on Rosa. Rosa's own feelings for Tony—a mixture of fear and awe—are irrelevant to the farmer. Her attempts to evade the destiny of her marriage are hopeless. Crackanthorpe shows this symbolically when he describes their meeting on the fellside. Rosa cannot escape her fate, as little as she can physically clamber past Garstin on the narrow path. Tony blocks the way, rejoicing that providence has given him this chance to claim Rosa. Crackanthorpe's simple, essentially monosyllabic prose

holds symbol, imagery and emotion together: 'he let her hands fall and stepped back from her. She could only see his figure, like a sombre cloud, standing before her. The whole fell-side seemed still and dark and lonely'. (p.48)

'Anthony Garstin's Courtship' makes much play with the naturalistic idea that environment significantly influences character. The bleak Cumberland landscape is the perfect setting for this hero's bleak emotion. In 'Trevor Perkins: A Platonic Episode' (pp.71—98) there is a similar correspondence. Trevor is affected by his urban surroundings, and by the fin-de-siècle mood of the community. Trevor's melancholic nature, and his inability to come to terms with urban life, are reminiscent of the characters in stories by another English realist, Frederick Wedmore. Crackanthorpe and Wedmore evoke urban mood, and the generally detrimental effect of city life, in stories which are characteristic fare of realistic authors in the 1890s.

Trevor Perkins is the archetypal Crackanthorpe male character: young, lonely and serious. He seeks companionship with Emily, a waitress in the café which he frequents in London. Typically, Trevor has no sexual interest in Emily, preferring the safety of spiritual friendship. Emily does not understand such fine cerebral distinctions, even if Trevor thought it worthwhile to discuss his sensitive feelings with her. She hopes, in a genuine and healthy way, that they might have a conventional love-affair.

One evening the two friends walk together in the city park. Emily acts according to strict demarcation lines in her emotional behaviour. Love, for her, is a ritual, with clearly marked rules. Since she has allowed Trevor to walk with her, she first allows him to take her arm. She responds by drawing close to him, and by calling him 'Trevor' in-

stead of 'Mr Perkins'. She expects him to kiss her. Trevor notices this affectionate behaviour as if it were mechanical, and uses his mental distance from the emotion to assume that he must stay with the physical relationship, rather than strive for the platonic friendship which he has decided he needs. In common with Crackanthorpe's other male characters, Trevor pays no attention to his friend's real character. Trevor turns a simple walk into an exercise in philosophical speculation. Emily is quite right to feel upset when her gloomy partner makes no effort to seem glad for her company. Trevor continues to suffer for friendship:

He seemed to see the vast obscurity of the Park, peopled with a multitude of wandering lovers, and there welled up in his heart that great compassion for the helplessness of humanity of which he had read in books. He understood all the pitifulness of human love, its crude, primitive basis, the curiously blinding glamour of its endless elaboration.  
(p.96)

Crackanthorpe obviously has little time for Trevor here, and his irony shows us just how negative and listless Trevor's worldview is. Both Trevor and Ethel (in the story 'In Cumberland') approach love obliquely through books. Ethel's taste and mentality were seen as the product of middle-class 'values'; Trevor's sorry mental state is discussed as the product of historical circumstances. Crackanthorpe again gives the specific locale of his story a background of general and grander themes: his short fiction has maturity and depth as a result.

Whereas Tony Garstin's love was dramatised by the feeling of Hardy-esque fate and Calvinistic morality, Trevor's 'cultivation of self . . .

represented the last word of a fin-de-siècle philosophy'. (p.81)

Tony's beliefs and emotions had been shaped by years of hard manual work, a stern inherited faith in retributive religion, and cheerless company. Trevor's weak and sensitive character, his withdrawal from company, and the feeling he gives of never being quite in touch with the present, stem, according to him, from external causes. He cannot help himself:

Yes, the curse of decadence  
lay over the land. The ancient  
idols had been cast down  
in the market-place. A new  
generation had arisen; a generation  
old before its time—  
"Venu trop tard dans un siècle  
trop vieux", as the French poet  
had sung; a generation doomed to  
the irreparable loss of the happy  
illusions of youth; a generation  
incapable of faith, groaning beneath  
an accumulation of precocious  
experience, eternally haunted by  
the hideous habit of introspection.  
(p.75)

The habit certainly confuses Emily, who simply wants a pleasant evening out. Whilst Trevor is weighed down by self-inflicted doubts, there seems little hope for their friendship. We leave the story, as so often in Crackanthurpe's work, in the gloomy prospect of unhappiness, for there is no indication that Trevor will ever really share in human relationships.

Aloof and introspective characters like Trevor, Alec, or Tony are best understood when the short story gives attention and energy to patient character survey. Crackanthurpe develops a short story style which concentrates on character rather than plot. Indeed there is no plot to speak of in 'Trevor Perkins', rather a 'situation'. The only activity in the story is the walk around the park, and much of this is

spent observing Trevor as he considers the daunting task of living in the 1890s. There is no insistence in Crackanthorpe's work on the development of the plot for its own sake, and this simple fact places Crackanthorpe outside the tradition of short fiction in the 1890s, with its stress on linear movement, crisis and denouement.

Crackanthorpe sees his characters in full, and sees them in grand perspective, because his stories never depend on the regular movement and progression of narrative. Ironically, like the characters he criticises for emotional listlessness, Crackanthorpe prefers introspective survey to active narrative movement. His stories do not need the framework or the ceaseless prompting of complicated plots, and they do not need to come to watertight conclusions. Crackanthorpe's major achievement in the short story in the 1890s is to understand that the form need not simply represent self-sufficient dramatic adventure, where final decisions either bring experiences to conclusions from which there can be no progression (as in death or parting); or where the nature of that progression is established without the prospect of change (as in a love-affair which reaches a happy state after much trial). Crackanthorpe never pins life down, and never suggests that conclusions mean final solutions. He hints that, given the consistently pessimistic nature of his characters, life will still be difficult, that his introvert men will spend lives of doubt and anxiety, long after the conclusion of the short story.

Crackanthorpe's strength as a writer stems from the way his literary talent works on a relatively narrow range of material: despair, loneliness, and characters of weak will. Like the other writers of the realistic short story in the 1890s he chooses a restricted fictional

locale and makes it his own. By such concentration he can freely develop his own independent skill as a writer. The changing techniques of writing—from the terse economy of Wreckage to the lingering flow of Last Studies—suggest Crackanthorpe's great care with form and language, and his desire to develop as an artist. He learned the best and the most difficult lesson from Maupassant, as Henry James (alone amongst the critics) observed. This lesson had nothing to do with theory or plagiarism of style and attitudes; it was simply that Crackanthorpe learned to write in accordance with his own individual artistic personality.

The authors of the new short story in the 1890s have a mutual desire to experiment, and so to develop, their literary form, making it a means of original expression and comment. They are united by literary endeavour. James, Crackanthorpe, Wedmore and Kipling in particular, attempt in their very different ways to explore the potential of the short story. The question of an independent genre with its own virtues and strengths is always in their minds. The stories of 'George Egerton', the feminist author whose best short fiction was written in the 1890s, contribute in a special way to this literature. Her work has been neglected since it achieved contemporary notoriety, and it has never merited extended critical survey. Yet she handles her art and her ideas with rare passion, in a way that puts the short story to militant and uncompromising use.

Egerton is alone, amongst the writers of the 1890s, in the way that she puts the need for the dissemination of ideas before the questions of form and art. It is impossible to separate ideas from art in a discussion of her work. Because of this commitment to ideology, Egerton stands apart from her fellow authors of the new short story. James's use of the narrator concentrates the reader's attention on the means of transmitting narrative information, and his characters do not so much have 'ideas' as shades of feeling. Crackanthorpe would never compromise the objectivity of his fiction by expressing personal beliefs in his work, however pained he might be by those characters who survive or are oppressed in the urban jungle. For these writers, and for other authors of the new short story, art must always come before personal conviction.



Egerton's work differs radically in intention. For this reason it merits close attention in a survey of the most original short fiction of the 1890s. Egerton uses her short stories to present powerful feminist arguments, and indictments of womens' oppression. Any discussion of her work must take contemporary feminist arguments into account; it will be fully rewarding when note of those arguments is combined with close attention to specific stories. In this latter work there is evidence of artistic quality and integrity, which secures Egerton's special place amongst the best authors of the new short story in the 1890s.

Evelyn Sharp wrote that, in 1894, when she was intending to live and work alone in London, it was considered irregular 'for a middle-class girl to have any other ambition in life than to sit at home and wait for a problematic husband, performing meanwhile such ornamental household tasks as were left over then a mother, elder sisters and competent servants had all had a hand in them'.<sup>1</sup> She felt that convention enforced dubious values. Where was the freedom, or the right to choose, in this system? Evelyn Sharp answered actively, went to London determined to make a career of journalism, and became a valued contributor of short stories to the Yellow Book. Her work is, ironically enough, sentimental and romantic, though one story, 'In Dull Brown', deals with the difficulties experienced by a young girl finding self-possession and a measure of liberation through her work in London.<sup>2</sup> The way to liberation seemed to be through what Blanche Crackanthorpe, in her influential essay 'The Revolt of the Daughters', called the 'three

1. Unfinished Adventure: Selected Reminiscences from an Englishwoman's Life (1933), p.52.

2. Yellow Book, 8 (January 1896), pp.181—200.

master-keys to life—self-respect, self-control, and self-reliance'.<sup>3</sup>  
 The case for women's rights could be credible if its theory was worked out by way of self-awareness. As Olive Schreiner, one of the most respected of the feminist writers in the 1890s, observed, 'our first duty is to develop ourselves . . . It is not against man we have to fight but against ourselves within ourselves'.<sup>4</sup>

But more than awareness was needed. The feminist argument called for action too: it was political in its demand for the vote, personal in its demand for the right of women to be treated and trusted as mature adults. In a society which kept them behind bars in an 'iron cage, wherein women are held in bondage, suffering moral starvation, while the thoughtless gather round to taunt their lingering misery',<sup>5</sup> it was vital for women to be accepted as individuals. Mona Caird, writing here in her forceful book The Morality of Marriage (1897), argued for such fundamental rights with lucid persuasiveness. Mona Caird saw an unjust system at work, where men enjoyed many advantages, and the women none:

For them a good education, encouragement in study, fostered talents, cherished opportunities; for them a good start in life, so far as lies in the power of parents to bestow, and on the father's death, the inheritance of the bulk of his property. For her, there is nothing but discouragement, opposition, eternal admonitions and reminders as to duty; while the fact is daily more borne in upon

3. Nineteenth Century, 35 (March 1894), 428.
4. The Letters of Olive Schreiner 1876—1920, edited by S.C. Cronwright-Schreiner (1924), p.151.
5. The Morality of Marriage and Other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Women (1897), p.97.

her that the one thing left to her, if she would not displease all her family and friends, is to marry, and so provide herself with a home and competence. (p.52)

The champions of the patriarchal system answered such arguments with contempt and irony. Male critics were astonished that women claimed the right to independence, property, or a career. They hoped that Feminism as personified by the 'New Woman', like 'New Realism' and 'New Literature', was just a passing phase.<sup>6</sup> Order and decorum would soon prevail:

The New Woman will not continue long in the land. Like other fashions, she is destined to excite notice, to be admired, criticised and forgotten. The liberty which she invokes will be fatal to her . . . Who would bind himself to spend his days with the anarchist, the athlete, the blue-stocking, the aggressively philanthropic, the political, the surgical woman.

Reactionary opinion was equally sarcastic when it came to the literature of feminism. Feminism was seen to manifest that contemporary disease, the fin-de-siècle temperament. Sex had been treated in the most offensively forthright manner by the French realists, and the English absorption of French ideas only spread the infection. It was particularly worrying that women were so keen to advance the doctrines of the fin-de-siècle, immersing themselves in the study of psychology and sexual feeling. It was difficult enough accepting that women knew the

6. Holbrook Jackson remarks on the prevailing use of the adjective 'new' in The Eighteen-Nineties A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century (1913), pp.22—24.
7. [W. F. Barry], 'The Strike of a Sex', Quarterly Review, 179 (October 1894), 317.

facts of life, without their claiming a right to express such knowledge in political or fictional terms. Here was a serious lack of reticence, and an assault on Morality itself. Hugh E.M. Stutfield, in his article "'Tommyrotics'" (1895) hoped that the assault was a transitory one:

Still, the popularity of debased and morbid literature, especially among women, is not an agreeable or healthy feature. It may be that it is only a passing fancy, a cloud on our social horizon that will soon blow over; but the enormous sale of hysterical and disgusting books is a sign of the times which ought not to be ignored. 8

In the same article, Stutfield singles out for attack George Egerton, the feminist writer of short stories whose two volumes Keynotes and Discords caused a sensation in the 1890s. Here was one of the main culprits, the female author of 'neurotic and repulsive fiction' who is 'oppressed with a dismal sense that everything is an enigma', whose works are indulgent tracts of 'nebulous cackle', (p.835) or obscene descriptions of sexual emotions. Stutfield pays no attention to Egerton's desire to describe honestly the deepest feelings and thoughts of women and to create a real vocabulary for a feminist cause. Stutfield admits in a later article, 'The Psychology of Feminism', that Egerton had real influence, although his concluding advice is partonising:

Numberless women wrote to her, women whom she did not know, and whose acquaintance she never made. "We are quite ordinary everyday sort of people", they said; "we lead trivial unimportant lives: but there is something

8. Blackwood's, 157 (June 1895), 834.

in us that vibrates to your touch, for we, too, are such as you describe". If so many hysterical people really exist, the best advice that can be given them is to try and cultivate a sense of humour and to "bake" in moderation. <sup>9</sup>

'George Egerton', her real name Chavelita Dunne, in whom ordinary women had such spontaneous trust, was born in Australia of Irish and Welsh descent. A cosmopolitan existence in South America, Germany Ireland and England involved an elopement to Norway where Chavelita married her lover, Henry Higginson. Here she immersed herself in Norwegian literature, and found the writings of Björnson, Strindberg, Ibsen and Olaf Hansson stimulating to her own creative ideas. She began to translate Hamsun's novel Hunger in 1891, married for the second time, and used her husband's first two names (his full name was George Egerton Clairmonte) for her nom-de-plume. The couple lived in Ireland, where, because of financial difficulties in running the household, George Egerton decided to write some stories to see if there was any chance of ready money that way. It was either that, so the story goes, or emigration to South Africa. She bought a penny exercise book and wrote Keynotes. <sup>10</sup> However conveniently romantic this biography is, legend does at least suggest that the author of the most controversial volume of short stories printed in the 1890s did nothing by halves. There was a drive and commitment to her art which reflected her own dynamic personality.

This energy makes a success of the manufacture of a literature which stresses ideological arguments above all. Interestingly enough

9. Blackwood's, 161 (January 1897), 116.
10. All biographical details from A Leaf from the Yellow Book: The Correspondence of George Egerton, edited by Terence de Vere White (1958).

Egerton's decision to write for financial gain, however radical her inspirational ideas, is precisely that made by the most traditional authors of magazine fiction from Conan Doyle onwards. The main consequence of Egerton's decision is not simply the reader's pleasure, however, for she aims to highlight moral wrong, and to liberate her readers from restrictive customs.

It is indicative of the hold that the short story was beginning to have on the reading public that Egerton's choice of form was made without hesitation. After all, the only precedent for a fictional argument which could be called feminist had been Olive Schreiner's novel The Story of an African Farm, which was in its fifth edition by 1893.<sup>11</sup> Here was a book which dealt frankly with sexual emotions, and studied the mysterious working of human psychology; its honesty and strength of purpose were considerable influences on Keynotes. With the rising popularity of the short story, Egerton could use a form perfectly suited to the expression of militant argument. She had no use for the restraint of plot, no use for the concept of character development over a long period of time. The conventional novel offered her nothing but the space to decorate her powerful ideas, and she did not have time to spare. Her arguments were hard and aggressive: what better way to give them immediate effect than in the short story, which offered both brevity and variety? Each story could attack a particular injustice, or a particular type of oppression. The cause and the form

11. Keynotes was a 'collection of short-stories that were many of them feminist tracts. It was regarded then as a road-breaking book, second only to The Story of an African Farm in advancing "the cause of women"'. Cornelius Weygandt, A Century of the English Novel [1927], p.348. From the review notices printed at the back of Discords the Queen remarked of Keynotes that 'not since the "Story of an African Farm" was written has any woman delivered herself of so strong, so forcible a book'.

naturally suited each other. The popularity of the form, and the speed with which short stories could be written, both compelled Egerton to her choice of genre. She needed to write fast for the sake of her ideas. Keynotes was composed in a sort of creative white heat: 'inside ten days I wrote six stories and sent them to T.P. 's Weekly'.<sup>12</sup>

T.P. Gill, who received the manuscript stories, was highly enthusiastic in public review. He was the first critic to proclaim the author's exciting potential, though he did not suspect that 'George Egerton' was a woman. 'The writer of these six manuscripts', he declared, 'is possessed of a remarkable and original talent. Indeed they even hint of genius'.<sup>13</sup> Art was one thing, however; sex was another, and Gill did not want to see any discussion of sexual emotion or behaviour in fiction; that sort of attitude smacked of realism. Gill wrote privately to Egerton to warn the author against unnecessary license. What were literature and morality without the guiding principle of decorum?

But taste after all is an instinct which has a bearing upon art, as well as on human morality, conduct, lots of things. To put it brutally you would not (however Scandinavian your ideas may be) invite your coachman, or even your bosom friend, to "assist" while you and your wife were engaged in the sacred mysteries. Why the deuce should you write it all out for them and give it to them to read about! (p.23)

12. John Gawsworth, Ten Contemporaries: Notes Toward Their Definitive Bibliography (1932), p.58. Quoted from Egerton's own preface to her bibliography, called 'A Keynote to Keynotes'. Actually she sent the stories, in the first place, to T.P. O'Connor's Weekly Sun.
13. A Leaf from the Yellow Book, p.22.

Egerton's point was that it was vitally important to 'write it all out'. She had written to her father two years previously (in another letter printed in A Leaf from the Yellow Book), complaining that the lauded doctrine of reticence did absolutely nothing to advance a true moral cause. It merely provided a means of saving face for the male offender, who could sin as much as he liked, as long as nobody knew anything about it. Egerton wanted a new honesty in discussing sexual matters, and not shallow hypocrisy: 'it is all humbug, part of the most positive British doctrine, of commit adultery, seduce any woman you can, in fact sin as you please but don't be found out. It's all right so long as you don't shock us by letting us know'. (p.11)

Keynotes aroused polarised reactions. The author was either a genius or a disgusting decadent. Discords, which followed one year later in 1894, simply confirmed these opinions. Reviewers were hurt by the lack of decorum displayed by Egerton and the feminists. A reviewer of Keynotes stated that the 'femme incomprise, when she goes on the war-path, is apt, we fear, to leave her good manners behind; she listens at key-holes, she treads on the reader's corns, she asserts her claim to the full enjoyment of the literary franchise, in an altogether too aggressive and noisy fashion'.<sup>14</sup>

This critical path led to condemnation of Egerton's treatment of sex and violence. Critics in the conservative press were appalled that anyone should suggest that men abused women, assaulted and hated them, and yet professed to depend on them. Egerton, by plainly stating that men did behave in these ways, was committing an outrage to both art and morality. One reviewer in the Athenaeum categorically said that Discords

14. Unsigned review of Keynotes, Athenaeum, 72 (February 1894), 146.



consisted of 'simply revolting studies of drink and lust and murder (there is no use in mincing matters), and should never have been printed'. The only consolation—one often repeated by journals opposed to feminism—was that, 'there are not wanting signs that the present outburst of sexual hysterics (for which, to their disgrace, women have been chiefly responsible) has spent its fury, and will give place before long to the saner methods of the recognized masters of English fiction'.<sup>15</sup>

More constructive criticism was written by those alert to new ideas, to the benefits of change, and to the energy of feminist arguments. These critics were ready to forgive those passages of feminist fiction which read more like propaganda tracts. They felt that it was of prime importance that feminist ideas were widely publicised; it was acceptable that a new movement should be over-zealous in its early stages. The ideas were all-important, and not the polish of the arguments. Books like Keynotes and The Story of An African Farm put forward strong condemnations of social and moral injustices, and looked closely at the ways women were oppressed in modern society. Such attitudes were worthy of serious attention because they were humanitarian, and above all angry. Women were fighting for a powerful new cause, as William Sharp, in his review of Keynotes pointed out:

At no time has the inner life of woman been so clearly, some will say so ruthlessly revealed. There are, for those whose eyes are opened, signals of profound import along the advancing line of humanity; and the most eager, the most intent, the most determined of the standard-bearers of the army of the coming generation are seen to be women.<sup>16</sup>

15. Unsigned review of Discords, Athenaeum, 73 (March 1895), 375.  
 16. Academy, 45 (February 1894), 143.

It was felt that Egerton's work was flawed because the argument occasionally turned fiction into propaganda. There was a limit to the beneficial effect militant argument could have on art, and that limit was reached when 'the power is ill-regulated and occasional, the art furtive and uncertain'.<sup>17</sup> Some reviewers were grateful, however, for the audacity of Egerton's book, and for the new voice which disregarded conventions and reticence, and which spoke the truth. Honesty had been lacking in English fiction for too long: it was time for a powerful new ideology to make its presence felt: 'for anyone who cares more for truth than for orthodox mummery, and for the real flood of the human heart than for the tepid negus which stirs the veins of respectability, this little book deserves a hearty welcome'.<sup>18</sup>

'A hearty welcome' is exactly what Keynotes did get. As far as figures are available, it seems, in terms of the number of copies published, to have been one of the most popular volumes of short stories published in the 1890s. The success of the book was unprecedented. It gave its name to the famous Keynotes series published by John Lane, in which much of the 'advanced' fiction of the period appeared. As the reviews themselves demonstrate, Keynotes caused a literary sensation amongst the critics, and a popular sensation amongst the public. Egerton was John Lane's best seller in 1893 and 1894, when Discords, the follow-up to Keynotes, ran into four editions. Keynotes itself was translated into seven languages in two years and, (so Richard Le Gallienne said in a letter to Egerton), 'had the largest sale in America of any short stories except Kipling's'.<sup>19</sup>

17. William Sharp, review of Discords, Academy, 47 (March 1895), 189.

18. Review notice from the back of Discords, in the Sketch.

19. A Leaf from the Yellow Book, p.51. Facts about the editions are taken from A Leaf and Ten Contemporaries.

The conservative press bemoaned the enormous popularity of 'books of this class' which had 'not unnaturally, a commercial success, and [are] for the moment . . . belauded by a clique of complacent admirers and tolerated by a long-suffering public'.<sup>20</sup>

The illustration which Punch printed to satirise the liberated woman in 1894 took the exploits of 'Donna Quixote' as its theme, and this line from Cervantes as its text: 'a world of disorderly notions picked out of books, crowded into his (her) imagination'.<sup>21</sup> The central figure is identifiable as George Egerton: she sits surrounded by books holding a large key triumphantly in her hand. Books by militant authors—Mona Caird, Tolstoi and Ibsen—join the Yellow Book (the actual title on the spine is "Yellow Art") and Mrs Crackanthorpe's 'The Revolt of the Daughters'. A female Knight jousts at the windmill of Marriage Laws, and a female soldier bravely attacks the dragon of Decorum and Mrs Cerberus, with her three heads, Mamma, Mrs Grundy and the Chaperon. The Tyrant Man—a decapitated head—gazes at Egerton's feet; his subjection is complete. Interestingly enough, this illustration was inspired not by Keynotes (which Punch had greeted with an excellent parody of the story 'A Cross Line' entitled 'She-Notes' by 'Borgia Smudgiton')<sup>22</sup> but by the appearance of the Yellow Book in which Egerton had a 'non-feminist' story. It was clear that she was accepted as a leader of the feminist cause. Exactly how far the basic ideas of that cause are expressed in her work can be seen from her own statements

20. Athenaeum, 73, 375.

21. Punch, 106—07 (April 1894), 194.  
The History of the Ingenious Gentleman, Don Quixote of La Mancha, translated by Motteux, 5 vols (Edinburgh, 1822), I, p.18.

22. Punch, 106—07 (March 1894), p.109; p.129.

about Keynotes.

She was certain that the short story had not been used before as a means of disseminating such militant ideas. She would use an original message, and present a new sort of female character. Her approach was to be psychological, and its subject the mind of the real woman. Egerton would be uncompromising and brave in her fiction:

I realised that in literature, everything had been better done by man than woman could hope to emulate. There was only one small plot left for her to tell: the terra incognita of herself, as she knew herself to be, not as man liked to imagine her—in a word to give herself away, as man had given himself in his writings. In that, I think I succeeded. <sup>23</sup>

There were to be no restrictions in her survey of the female psyche. Egerton would write just as she saw and felt things to be, and 'use situations or conflicts as I saw them with a total disregard of man's opinions. I would unlock a closed door with a key of my own fashioning'.<sup>24</sup> Egerton used her own knowledge of the subconscious, and of complexes and inhibitions. She had access to the early work of her trusted friend Havelock Ellis, whose Man and Woman had been published some months before Discords, and which she would certainly have read.<sup>25</sup> Both Keynotes and Discords consist of variations on a feminist theme. The books present a series of studies of both liberated and conventional attitudes to emotional and sexual behaviour. Each story makes a precise

23. Ten Contemporaries, p.58.

24. loc. cit.

25. Man and Woman: A Study of Human Secondary Sexual Characters, Contemporary Science Series (1894).

point about particular characters and situations in a feminist context. The volumes are 'psychological case-books'. This is not to belittle Egerton's ambition; rather to note the strong influence of Ellis's work.

These books help to establish a new frankness in the vocabulary of sexual emotions. Ellis's psychology and Egerton's fictional characterisation of sexual feeling stand together as a constructive critique of narrowminded Victorian attitudes to sex.<sup>26</sup> They join the works of Mona Caird and Olive Schreiner as pioneering books; great novels like Esther Waters, Tess and Jude take their part too in this tradition of writing. As Gail Cunningham says, novelists like Moore, Hardy, Meredith and Gissing, 'joined the battle for artistic freedom and began to write explicitly about topics associated with the New Woman'.<sup>27</sup> These authors, and others such as Sarah Grand, Grant Allan and M<sup>é</sup>nie Muriel Dowie, minutely surveyed problematic and unfortunate marriages, and 'showed ordinary women arriving through bitter experience at the New Woman's principle of personal freedom in selecting sexual partners'. (p.17) The great interest in Ibsen's plays also made for lively discussion of women's rights, after the first London production of A Doll's House in 1889.

Keynotes, published in September 1893, contained the six stories Egerton had sent to T.P. O'Connor's Weekly Sun. None of the the stories was published in magazine form, despite T.P. Gill's recommendation that she try the National Observer or the Speaker as alternative publishers.

26. But as late as 1897, when the first volume of Ellis's major work, Studies in the Psychology of Sex was published, the condemnation was instantaneous. The book drew legal proceedings against a bookseller, and the claim that it had scientific value was rejected by the judge as a pretence adopted for the purpose to sell an obscene book.
27. The New Woman and the Victorian Novel (London and Basingstoke, 1978), p.3.

Keynotes was then sent to Heinemann, who returned the manuscript 'with a note to the effect that the firm was not interested in mediocre short stories'.<sup>28</sup> The stories then went to John Lane, where Le Gallienne reported on them with considerable enthusiasm, urging their publication. Egerton had left no notification of her address, however, and it was not until she turned up at the Bodley Head in person to inquire after her stories that the volume was eventually published.

'A Cross Line' (pp.1—36), the first story in Keynotes, makes it very clear that the author sees women in a way unlike any other short story writer in the 1890s. It tells the story of a woman who loves her husband. He does not understand her complex and variable nature. She is attracted to a stranger who understands her intuitively, something which no-one else has ever done. They meet twice, and the story ends with the woman planning to see more of her friend—and to give him his 'moment' as she has given many other people their best moments: 'some have chafed at my self-sufficiency and have called me fickle—not understanding that they gave me nothing, and that when I had served them, their moment was ended, and I was to pass on'. (p.24)

Plot is relatively unimportant to the main task of this story, which is to explore the psychology of the nameless woman, and to investigate her liberated attitudes. The plot is used to provide situation, and is not a powerful element in the story, as it would be in the traditional magazine fiction. Egerton writes for the sake of people, not plots. She shows her characters developing and changing their ideas by the simple method of describing the same character in episodic set-pieces. In 'A Cross Line' the stranger meets the woman; the woman talks

28. A Leaf from the Yellow Book, pp.27—28.

to her husband; the woman meets the stranger again: the story is as bare as that. Events never push at the narrative.

Egerton has too many important ideas to discuss in her stories to allow impersonal plot a dominant role. Like other writers of the new short story in the 1890s she does not allow the plot to take a major role, as it continued to do in traditional magazine fiction. The new writers felt that a strong emphasis on plot led to complacent writing: the onward rush of the narrative left no time for moral argument or psychological study. Egerton works within this new tradition of serious short fiction in the 1890s where character and situation are all-important; and where, as a result, a profound analysis of the contemporary problems of living can take place. The writers of the new short story were drawn together by a mutual desire for the emancipation of the genre from the rule of plot. Innovative writers like James, Egerton or Kipling do not work to a common manifesto, but share the aim for a relaxed short fiction with new moral authority.

Egerton's opposition to ideals is evident in 'A Cross Line'. She sees the woman in the story for what she is; her thoughts and actions are the vital issues. That the woman acts according to 'male' instincts (she calmly considers committing adultery, even though she still loves her husband) is meant to shock the Victorian reader. But we cannot merely dismiss as 'immoral' any character who shows such firmness of thought, such independence, and such ability to stand by her own decisions.

One new aspect in this story is the woman's relaxed and mature attitude to sex. Egerton describes sexual emotion in an open and honest way, with no recourse to the sordid or suggestive. The woman enjoys making love, and admits, for the first time in any English short story considered here, to sexual needs. The woman has no need to be ashamed

of her body, nor of her feelings. Her liberation means that she has no burden of guilt, and she symbolically tries out the things which convention tells her are meant for men alone. She smokes, fishes, relishes her independence, has scant regard for domesticity, and simply enjoys being a woman. She is stronger than her husband, and needs him for completely different reasons than those provided by the conventional requirements of sexual relationships. She needs her husband for his weakness and not for his strength (or 'masculinity'). According to conventional types, the man has become the woman, the woman the man.

The husband does not understand his wife's complicated moods or thoughts. She responds to this very ignorance, and to his calm and unpretentious manner. At one point in the story she is thinking deeply; 'she dives into theories as to the why and wherefore of their distinctive natures, and holds a mental debate in which she takes both sides of the question impartially'. After this dialectical intensity, she wants to know what her husband is thinking, 'a look of expectation in her quivering nervous little face'. His reply is bathetic: he is not in the least concerned with psychology, but with fishing. He has time only to say "'I was wondering if lob-worms would do for—'" before she bursts out laughing and admits that he is "' the best emotional check <sup>ever</sup> I <sub>L</sub>knew". (pp.13—14)

The woman is happiest when she lets her thoughts follow their own course. She can think outside the confines of the story and its plot, restrained only by the limits of her imagination. The second section of 'A Cross Line' starts with a reported narrative of her thoughts as they occur. There is no urgent motive here, no direction and no plot. The thoughts and the images exist for the moment. The imagination itself is emancipated:



She fancies herself in Arabia on the back of a swift steed. Flashing eyes set in dark faces surround her, and she can see the clouds of sand swirl, and feel the swing under her of his rushing stride. Her thoughts shape themselves into a wild song, a song to her steed of flowing mane and satin skin; an uncouth rhythmical jingle with a feverish beat; a song to the untamed spirit that dwells in her. (p.19)

The emancipation results here in hysterical prose, with a torrent of adjectives and verbs. There is no denying the power or the passion of Egerton's argument, but such intensely romantic vocabulary does nothing to ratify the argument. This instance touches on a problem central to our reading and enjoyment of Egerton's fiction, because passages like this are frequent in Keynotes and Discords. Her stories are didactic: they seek, by close analysis of examples of male oppression and female liberation, to make the reader aware of the potential and practical iniquities of sexist attitudes, and to inspire humanitarian principles. Egerton's commitment to the ideals of emancipation occasionally lead her from art to polemic and dogma. Her stories have less authority here because the prose takes on a ranting and hyper-emotional tone. Both message and art are of great importance to Egerton's fiction—the two are in fact interdependent. Interdependence implies the responsibility owed by art to message, and vice versa, and it means too that the reader can apply artistic standards to the fictional arguments. We are less sympathetic to a short story which takes the opportunity to preach at us, as we are less sympathetic to overcharged prose, because of the lack of artistic control. Reviewers in the well-established

magazines were right to draw attention to the ill-regulated and dogmatic tone of some passages. Egerton sometimes forgets that she is an artist. In moments of reforming zeal, the force of her stories is lost when the art is unrestrained, when argument turns into dogma, or when the prose becomes, in her own words, 'rushing', 'wild', 'feverish', or 'untamed'.

Egerton celebrates the untamed spirit as the finest feature of her truly liberated woman. The woman in 'A Cross Line' is ruled by no man: she has a sure understanding of herself, and of the effect she has on the people in her life. She is unabashed in front of herself, and reliant upon her own strength. This means that she is free of people, not that she uses them. As she says to the stranger who calls out the best in her nature, all that she asks is privacy for herself: "people have needed me more than I them. I have given freely whatever they craved from me in the way of understanding or love. I have touched sore places they showed me and healed them, but they never got at me". (p.24)

Egerton will not compromise over that last admission. It sounds callous and egocentric. But if it is, she wants no dealings with an ideal woman: she is concerned with the real character of the woman in her story. Egerton knows how desperately some men cling to their false ideals about women; her champions are the truth-tellers. In 'The Regeneration of Two' (Discords, pp.163—253), it is the man who has to open the girl's eyes to her vanity—it is she who holds to false ideals. The woman in 'A Cross Line' is concerned with the falsity of male ideals:

He has fashioned a model on  
imaginary lines, and he has  
said, "so I would have you",  
and every woman is an uncon-  
scious liar, for so man loves  
her. And when a Strindberg or  
a Nietzsche arises and peers in-  
to the recesses of her nature

and dissects her ruthlessly,  
 the men shriek out louder than  
 the women, because the truth  
 is at all times unpalatable,  
 and the gods they have set  
 up are dear to them'. (p.23)

Nowhere does Egerton dismiss men in her stories—'A Cross Line' ends with the celebration of a true union between man and woman. There is a profound sexual and intellectual compatibility between the sexes, and in this story, the man needs the woman as much as she needs him. The plain fact is, as the main character of 'Now Spring had Come: A Confidence' (pp.37—67) says, that self-knowledge means 'a glimpse into the contradictory issues of one's individual nature'. (p.41) Nothing can be resolved by false ideology, or the image of woman as man would like to see her.

'Now Spring has Come' deals with friendship between man and woman. Feminists felt that it was difficult to maintain any enjoyable relationship between the sexes; the suggestion was usually made that any such friendship was potentially adulterous. It took an Olive Schreiner to laugh at the idea that marriage could deter her from continuing her many male friendships.<sup>29</sup> What mattered was that people shared their love and their time; the question of sex was irrelevant. The view, like the best of feminist views, is optimistic and humanitarian. Surely this was a better state of affairs than that outlined by Mona Caird:

It is certain that we shall  
 never have a world really  
 worth living in, until men

29. 'When there is such complete unity there never arises the least difficulty with regard to friendships with third persons of opposite sex. In my own case marriage has not touched one of my friendships, and there is something almost comical in the idea that it might'. The Letters of Olive Schreiner, p.217.

and women can show interest in one another without being driven either to marry, or to forgo altogether the pleasure and the profit of frequent meeting. Nor will the world be really a pleasant world while it continues to make friendship between persons of opposite sexes wellnigh impossible, by insisting that they are so, and thereby, in a thousand direct and indirect ways, bringing about the fulfilment of its own prophecy.  
(p.103)

'Now Spring has Come' celebrates the optimism of this argument. It is a fictional account of the meeting between George Egerton and the Norwegian novelist Knut Hamsun. Keynotes is in fact dedicated to Hamsun, 'in memory of a day when the west wind and the rainbow met'. A woman, one lonely afternoon, reads a book against which she has previously been warned as an example of the notorious realistic school. Although there is no confirmation, we can assume that the book referred to is Hamsun's Hunger. The woman feels a strong desire to befriend the author. They correspond, and find each other alike in nature; they are both untroubled by their unconventional desire for each other's company, so they arrange to meet. When they do so, they find that they instinctively know each other's deepest personal needs, and feel that they have known each other for a very long time. They delight each other, and each draws the best from the other's character. They are sad that they have to part, though they think of each other as friends rather than lovers. They arrange to meet again in the spring.

While they are apart the woman begins to fall in love with her friend. They meet again. Now she is hoping to win his love, but the Norwegian author is deeply disappointed that the girl of his dreams has somehow little to do with the pale, rather tired woman who confronts him.

She is broadminded enough to act sensibly in the face of his disappointment. She accepts that they are not in love, though for a time they pretend an affection which they do not really feel, from a desire not to hurt each other's feelings. The woman is strong and compassionate enough to understand her friend's emotions and does not blame him for not falling in love with her. Her reaction is mature and wistful:

'Tis true he had written  
me beautiful letters. You  
see he is too much of a word-  
artist to write anything else.  
Treated me badly? . . . No, I  
am not prepared to say that he  
did. I am glad he was too  
honest to hide his startled  
realisation of the fact that  
Autumn and Spring are differ-  
ent seasons, and that one's  
feelings may undergo a change  
in a winter. I do not see why  
I should resent that. Why, it  
would be punishing him for hav-  
ing cared for me. (pp.61—62)

One of Egerton's firmest convictions is that constructive attitudes to life can develop from solving such problems. The woman finds self-knowledge where she might have found only self-pity. She adapts and learns from new circumstances. Another story, 'A Little Grey Glove' (pp.91—114), also treats the problems of emotional upset with frank concern; it deals with the hostile reception a recently divorced woman gets from society, simply because she has committed the unpardonable sin of being the guilty party.<sup>30</sup> The story is told, unusually, by a male narrator.

This man has come into a vast fortune. He decides, as a result of his prosperity and new-found importance, to make a study of women,

30. For the historical background to divorce laws in the 1890s, see Cunningham, pp.4—5.

who have pointedly ignored him up to now because of his ugliness. This ugliness is transformed, by hard cash, to an interesting plainness which women find attractive. The story opens on this ironic and comical note. The man reads a great many novels to discover the nature of woman, but they tell him little. His real vocation is fishing, and he has the means to pursue this solitary sport all over the world. Having to be in England on business, he goes to Kent on a fishing holiday whilst his affairs are sorted out for him. He notices a guest in the hotel, and finds out that she is sharing the private sitting room with him.

Their first meeting is abrupt and painful. The man walks too close to her line when she is casting, and is literally hooked. The woman deftly removes the fish-hook (a modern Cupid's arrow) from his ear. They talk, meet regularly and seek out each other's company. She often spends the day in London, coming back tired and distressed. The man, transfixed by her grave charm, and her quiet, soothing nature, falls in love. He speaks to her one evening to ask if she is in fact 'free', for she wears a wedding ring. She replies that she has been divorced, which means, in the eyes of society, that she is stigmatised with the label of adulteress. How can the man want her, knowing this history?

He answers, for all his conventional character, unconventionally. He finds spirit to match the crisis, for his ideas are not shaped by the conventions of social morality. A solitary character, not having lived in society, the man follows his own true feelings. He argues that all he knows of his friend's character is based on the time they have been together. Her past has no meaning for him, and he is unwilling to be swayed by the doctrines of a society to which he does not belong. The woman of the past was a different person to the woman he loves,

and that love is all-important. It is a shrewd and powerful argument, and it answers the problem perfectly. The woman says that she will return to the hotel in one year's time, act in the meantime as if they were officially engaged, and marry him if he, too, returns. As a keepsake, she leaves him one grey glove. The man has no doubts that he will keep to the bargain, and leaves the story in the anticipation of great joy. The woman's response to his declaration is a brave one. She is frank enough to deal with the contingency and to see all the way round the problem. She allows their real feelings to become clear in the course of time, when they have had time to reflect on their care for each other:

"I am very desolate and your attention came very warm to me, but I don't love you. Perhaps I could learn to (with a rush of colour), for what you have said tonight, and it is because of that I tell you to weigh what this means. Later, when your care for me will grow into habit, you may chafe at my past. It is from that I would save you".  
(p.112)

The compromise is also highly romantic. The story works (as is often the case in Egerton's fiction) on two levels: it is a traditional romance story with a melodramatic plot, and a radical theme. The man meets the girl of his dreams, but she is less of a fairy-tale princess than a social outcast, with an 'immoral' past. The formula is romantic, the emotional situation non-conventional. The resolving of the crisis involves, likewise, both a fairy-tale pledge, and a mature response to difficult circumstances. Romance and Reality need each other. Egerton takes a problem which most Victorians would simply not speak about rationally and works it out on the pantomime stage. It is an extraordinary achievement, and the form of the short story emphasises its effect.

Egerton uses the traditional narrative forms readily available to any author and reader of short fiction in the 1890s, through widely advertised mass-produced magazines, and the increasing number of volumes of short stories. Feminist arguments inspire her major works, and these are radical and uncompromising. A similarly uncompromising avant-garde form would only alienate those readers whose ideas she is so committed to changing. What better synthesis for an author full of exciting ideas than to use well-known formulas of narrative, and traditional romantic situations, to express them? The art then has the strength and the familiarity implanted by tradition, and the reader does not find the text off-putting through its self-conscious modernity. New arguments and traditional narrative techniques make for a harmonious relationship which is instantly acceptable to the reader. 'A Little Grey Glove' shows too that Egerton does not have to turn her stories into brazen feminist tracts in order to disseminate new ideas. Indeed, she gives the argument the most traditional, and hence the most unexpected form possible; 'A Little Grey Glove' is perhaps the most surprising short story written in the 1890s, for the language and form it uses are precisely the language and form which it would be expected to dismiss.

'Now Spring has Come' was about Hamsun; Egerton's one uncollected story, 'A Lost Masterpiece: A City Mood, Aug. '93', was directly inspired by his novel Hunger. Egerton published her translation of Hunger in 1899, although she had probably finished the work as early as 1891, two years before 'A Lost Masterpiece'.<sup>31</sup> It was the first English translation of Hunger, and the only work by Hamsun available to the English public in the 1890s, although translations of the other Scandinavian

31. Hunger, translated by George Egerton (1899).  
Yellow Book, 1 (April 1894), pp.189—96 .



authors, Björnson and Ibsen (though not Strindberg) were readily available in the period. Her work cannot be said to have contributed greatly to the dissemination of Scandinavian ideas in English fiction, for the translation was unsuccessful, and a second edition, with a different publisher, was not issued until 1921.

Egerton found in Knut Hamsun an author who championed her own beliefs. He was unconventional, he had to struggle for his artistic ideals, and, above all, he believed in exploring the complexities of human psychology. She admired him as a 'sort of literary freebooter, fighting a place for his individual art through the ranks of conservative prejudice', a 'fantastic juggler tossing up the old-world values'. She admired him too for his fearless literary approach. Hamsun was 'a master at probing into the unexplored crannies in the human soul, the mysterious territory of uncontrollable, half-conscious impulses. He has no consideration for the weak places in humanity; he is merciless in his exposure of dark places, of all that borders on the abnormal, the insane'.<sup>32</sup>

Egerton demanded that the truth about such impulses be frankly recorded in art. She saw herself as a psychologist too, with a powerful and subtle talent. Given the inheritance of the story, it is strange that 'A Lost Masterpiece' had none of this commitment. It is a light and lyrical fantasy, based on the opening of Hunger. There, the starving artist is inspired to write a tremendous article for a newspaper. But he is constantly thwarted by seeing the shambling figure of an old man walking painfully along, always just in front of him. In Egerton's tale, an artist has come from the country to the town, feeling cheerful

32. *ibid*, from the 'Prefactory Note' pp.vii—viii.

and free, and observing people with a comfortable smile. Everything that he (or she) sees inspires him with themes for his art (as the milling crowd inspired the Norwegian with themes for his article). From these 'outward insignificant things' the artist 'knew that a precious little pearl of a thought was evolving slowly out of the inner chaos'. This pearl will remove the grim reality from urban life, and make the people aware of beauty: 'it would make them dream of moonlit lanes and sweethearting; reveal to them the golden threads in the sober city woof; creep in close and whisper good cheer, and smooth out tired creases in heart and brain'. (p.193)

Full of this compassionate ideal, the writer catches a bus and collects his thoughts, so that he might shape his conceit. But a woman is hurrying alongside the bus, and keeps on catching it up at the stops. The writer is frustrated, and he loses his literary gem. Inspiration disappears, and the writer is left with nothing but bitter regret. As with Hamsun's poet, the artist is similarly disillusioned after his moment of great creative thought. Egerton's writing here, with its breathlessly affected and oversensitive style, anticipates her other volumes of short stories in the 1890s. Symphonies (1897) and Fantasias (1898) are full of wan allegories and fey accounts of the mysteries of human psychology. The prose is self-conscious and certainly too pretty to activate the slight theme of 'A Lost Masterpiece'. Egerton needed a strong cause for her best work, and the first number of the Yellow Book could not give her that.

Discords is a book much closer to Egerton's heart. It is 'psychological', ruthless and unflinching. The work owes its themes of urban despair and male oppression to Keynotes, but is even more passionate. People feel more intensely, delude themselves more seriously, and

struggle more effectively. The stories have the melodramatic element so common to short fiction in the 1890s: emotions do not last long, so they have to make an immediate and forceful impact. The brevity of the genre makes it desirable for decisions to be made immediately, and for struggle to be catastrophic. There is much emphasis on the urgency of crisis, and the sheer pace of life. Discords is a book about women growing up, seeing things for what they are, and about taking pride and joy in such education. Life is hard; it is also in the hands of the individual to make the most of living. If society decrees the rights of the individual, then society is a danger. The work preaches doing, not accepting, and thus lies in the mainstream of feminist thought in the 1890s.

'A Psychological Moment at Three Periods' (pp.1—66) is concerned with the effect of accepted codes of behaviour working on a strong and melancholic nature, throughout the life of the child, the girl, and the woman. It shows the individual making her own decisions in the face of crisis, rather than following the course suggested by social convention. The story is finally about a girl coming to believe in her better self: it is therefore profoundly moral. 'The Child' (pp.1—8) merely describes some incidents in a young girl's life. Egerton concentrates on the life of the mind, rather than the life of physical action. The girl ends the episode confessing to her schoolfriends that something she has told them was in fact fabricated. She has to put herself through much self-abasement and shame to admit as much. Her religious conviction (the system of conventional right) tells her that guilt is necessary. The girl chastises herself before her friends, and gloomily asks her mother why God lets people live when they are so wicked. An insignificant act has become morally momentous.

'The Girl' (pp.8—20) often has insights into humanity which are invariably serious and melodramatic. She has aged merely that she might articulate her despair more clearly. The girl feels no real hope beyond the inviolability of her own pessimism, and has an intensely self-righteous and unshakeable faith in doom. At a fair, she notices the people enjoying themselves, and criticises them for taking God's image in vain. She is upset by an idiot boy playing a barrel-organ, and uses her anguish to criticise herself. She cannot see how vain her joylessness is:

"Oh, stop! Will that wretched air never stop? Ha! Ha! ha!"  
—with an hysterical laugh—  
"Oh, that poor creature! I am only seventeen, and is that what I shall find in the world to come—some poor idiot turning the organ for all the luckier born to dance?" (p.18)

The girl, like the child, is still horrified by the way God's creatures suffer. But she no longer has her mother in authority to tell her that she must put her trust in God. Her guardians are now faceless nuns who give her no advice and no compassion. She cannot trust in authority, as she has done before, and feels that she has to make her own decisions. The girl does not like the suffering of the animal at the fair, yet she cannot simply reproach herself. She has to rebel. The moment of decision is cataclysmic: the seeds are being sown for a new and realistic attitude to life. The girl questions the authorities which motivate her life, and rejects the oppression of God's rule:

"I wanted to love you, God; indeed, you know I did, but I can't, I can't, I can't. I love all those poor things of your creation far more, and oh, I hate to live! I don't want to—always I see the pain, the sorrow, underneath

the music—and I tell you"  
 —with a burst of passion  
 —"if I were a great queen  
 I would build a new tower  
 of Babel with a monster  
 search-light to show up all  
 the dark places of your mon-  
 strous creation". (p.19)

By the time the girl turned into 'The Woman' (pp.20—66), her philosophy really has been earned from experience. She no longer has the luxury of being able to stand apart from life and moralise on the things that distress her. She is a grown woman who has been through scandal and blackmail, and is now an outcast from society. Again, the story uses melodramatic situations to strengthen radical arguments. During the story she speaks to an old schoolfriend who has reappeared from 'The Child'. Now she is proud of her independence and strength; "I am afraid I know of no silver slippers to walk the thorny way. My own doctrine is a hard one. Endure, simply endure. Forget yourself, live as much as you can for others, get a purchase of your own soul some way, let no fate beat you". (p.58)

Certainly events and people conspire to make life unpleasant for the woman. A harsh, unrepentant man follows her; he is married, but he wants her as a lover. She refuses, but finally has to submit because he has got hold of some compromising letters. He blackmails her into becoming his mistress. He may have been able to buy her body, but he cannot touch her mind. She does everything he wants without losing her reserve, or her hatred of him. The relationship hardly brings the man the fun that he has anticipated, so he asks a middleman to ask her how much money she will accept to break off the liaison without telling his wife. She will not sink so low as to receive a bribe: she simply leaves having burnt the letters.

Now she finds herself an outcast from society, because of a relationship forced upon her. The man escapes without blame, and she has to take the punishment for his immorality. The woman receives the insulting suggestion that she should retire to an establishment for 'reformed Magdelens'. She is sickened by such genteel sham, and will never hide from the truth, however much she has to suffer for a brutal man's sin. Like all Egerton's liberated characters, she is responsible for herself:

"I have always thought that each man or woman should bear as far as possible the entire effect of his mistakes or sins. It used to be a fancy of mine that if I were unfortunate enough to bring an illegitimate child into the world I would never disown it or put it away. I suppose it is my lack of orthodox belief which makes me unable to see that a bastard is less the fruit of a man and woman's mating than the child of a marriage blessed by priest or parson". (p.59)

The woman's philosophy allows her to be strong in distress, and the anger she feels for the people who use her never turns to bitterness. She puts her trust in self-education, and the story ends optimistically for all the moral tribulation. 'She wraps herself in a shawl, and sits watching. One great star blinks down at her like a bright glad eye, and hers shine steadily back with the sombre light of an undaunted spirit waiting quietly for the dawn to break, to take the first step of her new life's journey'. (p.66)

'Virgin Soil' (pp.145—62) is even fiercer than 'A Psychological Moment'. It finds Egerton, through her main character Florence, furious at the conditioning imposed on people's lives by conventional morality. The 'sacred mysteries' which T. P. Gill spoke of

so reverently are not always such a blessing, since 'marriage becomes for many women a legal prostitution, a nightly degradation, a hateful yoke under which they age, mere bearers of children conceived in a sense of duty, not love'. (p.155)

Florence's bitterness is understandable. She has been pushed into marriage by her mother when very young, to an older, worldly-wise man. The honeymoon is described as a kind of legalised rape. The man wants Florence's body, and has a husband's 'right' to take it. Florence's mother has not even told her daughter what sex means. The young wife returns home some years later, mentally and physically bruised by the man; he has disappeared with his latest mistress. Florence now sees life for what it is, but she has had to learn bitter experience. She has been prepared for the real world of lust and male oppression, by an 'idyllic' childhood in a country cottage. Florence returns to blame her mother for having made her take for granted that her life should have the ultimate aim of marriage, and for sheltering her from the reality of sexual experience. Her body and soul has been bartered to the glory of an institution. Florence leaves home for a second time, taking the train from the same platform where she began her life's journey five years previously. She travels, symbolically, in the opposite direction.

The story is plain and hard. It is about Florence's awakening to a real consciousness of how men use women, and it deals frankly with the feelings and discoveries of sexual intercourse. Florence discovers that the 'white gauze . . . of maiden purity' (p.157) is of no use in the harsh modern world. Egerton wants her readers to be awakened to the moral power of feminist argument; we must be shaken from our conditioning. Florence's mother is shaken, and her education is both abrupt

and rousing; she feels that the 'placid current of her life is disturbed'. This shock is meant for Egerton's audience too. Florence's mother is a symbol of the untutored reader, who has to be forced to notice the logic and power of feminist argument. After this discovery, mother and reader have a new view of life and behaviour; the argument and ideas in the short story have made their dramatic, and revolutionary effect. At this moment, George Egerton's fiction has achieved its triumphant goal:

Something of her child's  
soul-agony has touched  
the sleeping depths of  
her nature. She feels as  
if scales have dropped from  
her eyes, as if the instincts  
and conventions of her life  
are toppling over, as if all  
the needs of protesting women  
of whom she has read with  
a vague displeasure have come  
home to her. (p.161)



## FREDERICK WEDMORE

Frederick Wedmore is remembered more as an art historian than as a writer of short fiction. Nevertheless his stories make an important and distinctive contribution to the genre in the 1890s. Wedmore decided, at an early age, to devote himself to art criticism, and first worked for the Spectator. By the 1880s he had established himself as art critic of the Standard and the Academy. Wedmore began a series of studies on etching with work on the French engraver Méryon, and made his most important contribution to English art history as an exponent of French art and engraving. His taste was for the quiet and distinguished, the calm and unobtrusive, as his Studies in English Art show.<sup>1</sup> Wedmore has a particular love for the English landscape watercolourists like Cox, Turner, De Wint, Cotman and Crome, and these names appear in his short stories as arbiters of good taste.

Wedmore seems to have been a confident, elegant and gregarious man, quite unlike the shy and reticent figures in his short fiction. He enjoyed giving readings from his own verse and stories in tours throughout England, and, as The Times obituary remarked, had 'more energy than would be guessed from his appearance and manner', and was known as someone who 'lived much in the world, and "knew everybody"'.<sup>2</sup> This public manner is never evident in Wedmore's stories, which often use the guise of irony to hide real feeling; nor is it evident on the rare occasions when Wedmore talks about his writings

1. Studies in English Art, second edition (1876); Studies in English Art, second series (1880).
2. The Times, 28 February 1921, p.13.

Indeed, when he discusses artistic principles in the preface to his volume of stories, Wedmore's aesthetic is sounded as if in retreat. He apologises for claiming the reader's attention: 'but I have blown a big trumpet—have I?—at the door of a very little Show—my own Show of three slender stories. That is possible enough'.<sup>3</sup>

Wedmore's confidence seems to fail him when he discusses his work, and this preface is a very timid announcement of the arrival of one of the important avant-garde writers of short fiction in the 1890s. In his stories, which appeared first in volume form in 1877 with Pastorals of France, continued with Remunciations (1893), English Episodes (1894), and ended with Orgeas and Miradou (1896), Wedmore conceived new possibilities for the short story form. He spoke (in his essay 'The Short Story') of twenty years of profound interest 'in the artistic treatment of the Short Story', and concentrated on this genre in the 1890s.<sup>4</sup> He understood that a volume of stories could be more than a collection of disparate items, and challenged traditional assumptions of 'narrative habit' with his refined and yet 'formless' art. Wedmore's stories avoid the logical development and linear flow of traditional short fiction; they are highly personal and introspective. As with James's best stories, they have to be read with close and intelligent care. Wedmore in fact shared the belief, first expressed by James and Henry Harland, in the need for a new readership which would be actively involved in the subtle art of the short story; the three authors believed that writing and reading short fiction were creative acts. Wedmore directed his short

3. Preface to Pastorals of France (1877), p.4.

4. Nineteenth Century, 43 (March 1898), 406.

fiction at a limited audience, and felt that the short story was not a 'ready means of hitting the big public' but a medium 'adapted peculiarly to that alert intelligence, on the part of the reader, which rebels sometimes at the longueurs of the conventional novel: the old three volumes or the new fat book'. (pp.406—07)

Wedmore's relationship with the avant-garde authors of short fiction is not always an easy one. He shares the theoretical attitudes of Harland and James, who were both in the forefront of the revival of interest in short fiction in the 1890s. But that revival often put forward the idea that everything 'new' was also 'realistic', and Wedmore hated the very notion of realism. He writes in his preface to Pastorals of France that whilst he feels the time is right for a new direction in short fiction, he cannot ally himself with the realists and their stories of urban misery. Wedmore stays firmly in the country, and, what is more, in the French countryside. He recognises that it is impossible to write in times of social change without moving away from the mainstream of fiction, but cannot share the aims of the realists. Wedmore makes an individual choice to write about areas and characters which satisfy his own creative desires, and he takes pride in his firmly independent creative identity. This kind of personal decision is made by all of the best writers of short fiction in the 1890s who form personal 'creeds' rather than inherit those of literary schools. Wedmore's decision is certainly highly individual:

Only it seemed there could be no better opportunity than the present one, for me, to express a difficulty which must be just now very specially present to many makers of Fiction, but which I, for my own small part, here with cowardice avoid, in brief

descriptive writings which leave the problems of our complicated life, to deal, in remote places, with the tenderness of the old and the fancies of the simple . (pp.4—5)

Wedmore's attempt to widen the scope of the short story was praised by contemporary critics. The reviewer for the Bookman stated that 'the publication of "Pastorals of France" may be said to have revealed not only a new talent, but a new literary genre'. Renunciations was 'something quite unusual', and English Episodes gave Wedmore the reputation of one of 'the few successful writers of the short story in England today'.<sup>5</sup> Yet Wedmore's fame did not outlast his lifetime. Certainly modern critics mention his work only very briefly. Ernest Baker dismisses Wedmore as 'a good instance among the rank and file', and Frierson is only concerned that 'il suit la pratique des conteurs français plutôt que celle des conteurs anglais'.<sup>6</sup>

In this survey of Wedmore's short fiction of the 1890s it is important to consider first his one volume of the 1870s, Pastorals of France. Such detailed work is necessary because there has been no critical survey of Wedmore's work other than the most cursory survey. His short fiction develops gradually throughout the last decades of the century. Many of the themes and character-types which are

5. Unsigned review of Pastorals of France, Bookman (from selected quotations printed in the back of Orgeas and Miradou). Unsigned review of Renunciations, St James's Gazette, 11 January 1893, p.5. Unsigned review of English Episodes, Saturday Review, 79 (February 1895), 163.
6. Ernest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel: The Day Before Yesterday, The History of the English Novel, 10 vols (1924—39), IX (1938), p.227. William C. Frierson, L'Influence du Naturalisme Français sur les Romanciers Anglais de 1885 à 1900 (Paris, 1925), p.165.

found in the stories of the 1890s are present in Pastorals of France, and Wedmore is a writer who is particularly conscious of literary craft as a process of evolution and education. As a result it is valuable and necessary to see his work in this wider context.

Wedmore writes in a late story, 'The Poet on the Wolds', that 'others have something lasting. Nothing lasts, perhaps, for me'.<sup>7</sup> A similar self-effacement is present in the plot of the first story in Pastorals of France. 'A Last Love at Pornic' (pp.9—79) concerns Mr Rutterby, a middle-aged bachelor, with a comfortable income, and a shy retiring nature. Rutterby goes to stay with De Malmy, a French friend. He falls in love with Ondelette, De Malmy's young daughter, but he does not ask her to marry him, though it seems probable that she would accept. He tells her instead to marry a young suitor, Jules Gérard, and explains to De Malmy that he has no desire for the action to be thought of as self-sacrifice.

This story questions the need for a logical and forceful narrative sequence. The 'plot' is concerned more with what does not happen than with what does; there is little action to speak of, only the mental activity of Rutterby's thoughts about love and his avoidance of meeting or debate. Rutterby does not speak out or assert himself, and like Ondelette's chrysanthemum, "he will never get on in the world". (p.21) Rutterby would rather act on behalf of other people than for himself; he has little will-power. His first emotional question would always be at a distance from the event: not 'do I want this?' but 'is it right that the other person should have this?'. Rutterby uses argument to keep himself remote from action. He gives Ondelette up

7. Orgeas and Miradou, p.124.

by using the argument of propriety, and never lets her know about his feeling for her. He thinks in the manner of a man too long accustomed to himself, and he is invariably defeated by self-knowledge. Rutterby's reasoning is inevitably melancholic, though it imparts a certain grave nobility to the tone of the story. The story is calm and untroubled by violent ideas or actions. The artifacts of note are pictures (because pictures are still and immobile). The domestic interiors are always comfortable, dark and protective. Music plays an important part in the story: it is ordered and formal, yet expressive beneath the surface. Ondelette, unaware of Rutterby's feelings, says of her Bach that, "'the man who wrote that prelude must have felt something deeply. I wonder what it was?'" (p.30)

Intellectual exercise in the story is also dedicated to the serious and the academic; it is invariably unhurried and polite. De Malmy writes an archaeological article little by little, arriving at his conclusion with an ironically demonstrative statement, believing that "'after three month's labour, I think I have demolished my confrères theory"' (p.73) Everything in the story keeps contingency at bay. Even Rutterby's emotion is thought out rather than felt, and he is incapable of spontaneous demonstration. Nothing more distressing occurs in this 'love-story' than the discussion of the price of a painting by Crome, and there is no action more vigorous than Rutterby's grave touch of Ondelette's hand. Objects are referred to not in themselves but as images which call further pictures to mind. De Malmy's piano makes Rutterby talk of a spinnet by Van der Meer of Delft; a woodhouse makes him notice how "'Ostade would have liked to paint this place, with its half-lights and shades"' (p.66) Rutterby sees reality as an image, for by doing so he can protect himself from

life's activity. All the colours of the story refer to the central idea of reticence—they are all sombre. Rutterby does not want a light put on while Ondelette plays the piano, for it would spoil the interior. He likes the woodshed because it is dark. The sea is variously dark grey, green and brown. Rutterby's own room is panelled with dark wood, and only becomes cheerful at night.<sup>8</sup> All of these images confirm the quietness at the heart of the story. 'A Last Love at Pornic' is written not to demonstrate what could be, but to show what can never be. It is not written with the traditional narrative emphasis on people making things happen by active involvement, but to show life kept at bay. The story hides itself from action, as Rutterby hides from Ondelette. His 'self-sacrifice' amounts to a kind of self-interest, as Rutterby admits: "'she was born to make the happiness of some life that has a Future. Well, the Future is for this young man; the Past is for me. No, no, it is not all self-sacrifice, by any means, if I go away"' (pp.75—76)

'Yvonne of Croisic' (pp.83—142) also celebrates a non-event. Yvonne loves, and is loved by, Rohan, from distant Piriac. He wants to take her away, but she is tied to her family. The death of her mother makes her presence at home even more important, and Rohan leaves to take up his work as a fisherman. Both characters stick to their traditional lives and work. Wedmore has advanced even more in terms of narrative in this story; which is to say that he has almost given narrative up. There is no real plot in 'Yvonne of Croisic', and the tone of the prose is soft and undemonstrative. Wedmore uses

8. Wedmore notes that Browning's house overlooking Regent's Canal supplied him with details for Rutterby's room; See Memories (1912), pp.59—60.

a parenthetical style in his passages of natural description, and by doing so he selects the salient features of landscapes without urging his description on. His gaze lingers over the scene, and suggests a timeless quality which is fitting for both nature and for the characters of the story: 'the roads led nowhere, or rather . . . lost themselves at last on the wide belt of coast—here brown or green with its short grass, here grey and stony in its barrenness—that formed the top of the great cliff wall, beneath which lapped blue in summer, or thundered grey in late autumn and desolate winter, the ceaseless waves of the Atlantic'. (p.85)

Wedmore surveys landscapes with similar calm, and attention to colour and detail, in his art-criticism. In Studies in English Art he praises Gainsborough for the skill of the artist's choice and feeling for 'the selected moment and selected place of beauty and charm'.<sup>9</sup> That same motivation is at work in Wedmore's natural description. He sees his fictional landscapes as if they were carefully framed pictures, with an art-historian's regard for composition and colour. Both Wedmore's fictional descriptions of specific paintings are written with a calm style and a tendency to make a quiet inventory of the distinctive scenic features. The author and the art-critic write the same language. Wedmore describes the 'Postboy's Return' by George Morland with a sure attention to important details of light and colour, and watches quietly as 'the placid light of a still evening pauses on a bit of the low roof of farm-yard outbuilding, and touches to gold the greenery that struggles there'. (p.37)

Relationships in the village of Croisic are similarly placid,

9. Studies in English Art, second edition (1876), p.23.



for the life-style has been established over centuries. Rohan appears almost as a foreigner, and he is engaged in the dangerous and active work of fishing which is outside the collective comprehension of a village where all is 'patience, quietude, sobriety'. (p.86)

Everything at Croisic must take time, which is why Rohan's love, by nature strong and immediate, still cannot ruffle Yvonne's composure. She believes she cannot leave Croisic with Rohan, though she is unable to put this feeling into words. Wedmore seems unhappy, like Yvonne herself, when called upon to translate feeling into language, for language means bold commitment. Yvonne's emotional turmoil is passive: though she loves Rohan, she has other duties to fulfil. She finds it difficult to talk about these vital issues, and her dialogue with Rohan is restricted to unremarkable issues of travel, village life or fishing. They never talk about themselves. Yvonne's love is described as if it were a negative force, and Wedmore's language is almost apologetic at the display of feeling. Her love 'began quietly, and was of gentle growth, like any natural thing; and this girl, very capable of passion, was lulled rather than stirred by the presence in the lane with her of that brown, sturdy figure'. (p.88)

The voice of calmness and of negation takes the violence out of life, and the melodrama out of emotion. Wedmore refuses the opportunities, offered by the traditional short story, of crisis, relentless activity and episodic advance. He broadens the scope of his short story. 'Yvonne at Croisic' looks from a single love-story out to history and tradition. Wedmore gives the story the sense of many generations, and many dimensions of time and character. He is influenced in this ambition by the work of Henry James, who found it undesirable to limit the scope of even his shortest tale or anecdote.

Both authors suggest broad history in the shortest space.

Wedmore achieves his new perspective by establishing the interest of this story on Yvonne herself, but by being prepared to look beyond her to the beliefs of her family and the traditions of the Croisic people. She does not rule over the interest of the story as the conventional main character would do. One way this scope is emphasised is in the relentless repetition of the word 'Croisic': it establishes itself like a chant of identity. We learn that characters have lives which Yvonne know nothing about, just as she has a private life from which Rohan is excluded. This type of perspective is unheard of in the traditional short story in the 1890s, and it imparts a new maturity to Wedmore's fiction. Yvonne fiercely protects her privacy, and it excludes her from complete knowledge of the lives of her fellow characters: 'Yvonne's whole life had scarcely known other than that regular round—and Rohan had no part in it; nor she in Rohan, and whatever life might be his, in unknown places, beyond the furthest coast'. (p.101)

In this story emotion is always kept within. When Yvonne has lost Rohan, and her mother has died, she cries 'not indeed with voice or tears, but with her inmost heart, that long, cruel, endless, brilliant morning'. (p.136) Language cannot express Yvonne's 'primitive' and essential grief. The end of the story sees a return to old habits, and the feeding of the cattle symbolises the reestablishment of the trusted pattern of life. The disturbing drama of love and death are replaced by 'the order of accepted things'. (p.142)

'The Four Bells of Chartres' (pp.145—242) concludes Pastorals of France. It marks a development from the other stories in the volume, and this indicates Wedmore's careful choice in the order of

his short stories. They are grouped in such a way as to make each story advance from the last. The stories seem to learn from each other, and we are meant to read them in the exact order in which they appear in the book. In 'The Four Bells of Chartres' Wedmore wants to develop the idea that a short story might effectively treat the lives of several people, rather than concentrate on one or two main characters: this treatment had been previously adumbrated in 'A Last Love at Pornic' and given more emphasis in 'Yvonne of Croisic'.

Wedmore, in fact, finds that he has too much to do in 'The Four Bells', and his story is not a success. Outside life begins to demand attention. The very slow retrospective introduction of the Curé, who explains his hopes and thoughts for his niece Clémentine, has to give way to a flurry of activity unusual in a Wedmore story. Clémentine has to greet reality in a way Rutterby refused to, but Yvonne perceived as possible, despite her eventual refusal to leave Croisic. The pressure of life is much stronger in 'The Four Bells', and this strength is earned by reading separate stories in sequence, and reading to reach a cumulative crisis. The concept of a short story volume with stories both separate and interdependent is tentative in Pastorals of France: it is an idea worked out more radically in Wedmore's volumes of the 1890s.

'The Four Bells of Chartres' is in itself disturbed by these new demands on its space and time. It is uneven, and its movement is jerky. There is no cohesion between the Curé's preamble and the section of the story where Clémentine is courted by the brash newcomer Roquette. For the first time, a character of authority and forcefulness appears in Wedmore's fiction, to the discomfort of the Curé: Devallet is used to a lonely life in a small French village

and he finds himself with the daunting task of organising his neice's affairs. Clementine arrives fresh from Paris, from society, and life itself. The broad scope brings new anxieties and responsibilities to the story and to its characters.

We are brought to this crisis by a gradual emergence of potential trouble throughout the whole volume. Rutterby kept life and crisis at arm's length; Yvonne at least faces up to her personal crisis. Clémentine lives through her drama, and is defeated by it. Roquette, her husband, personifies the new brash note of demand which has been worked for in the very progression of the stories. Wedmore takes on a great deal in this story, for he surveys the lives of the Curé, Clémentine and Roquette: they all have their call on the story. Wedmore refuses to take the conventional narrative line and select one personality for close attention.

'The Four Bells of Chartres' is not as introspective as the previous stories. The outside world begins to trouble the characters, and for the first time emotional dialogue becomes a prominent feature in Wedmore's short fiction. Emotive words insist on getting spoken in 'The Four Bells'; in the earlier stories the characters rarely spoke, and when they did, it was to hide, rather than to display emotion. The Curé's sister lives in the noise and bustle of a provincial town, flattering herself that she leads society. And Roquette speaks with confidence, and at length, though his sentiments are often shallow. Nevertheless, he uses language, however glibly, and no other character in Wedmore's earlier stories trusts language. The Curé, being of the old school, mistrusts language even to the extent of feeling uneasy about letting Roquette and Clémentine talk alone for fourteen minutes. To an extent, the Curé is right to be suspicious. Roquette's fluency

suggests his brash character, and his inclination to take dangerous risks. He knows what he wants, but he does not have the strength of character to take responsibility for Clémentine. He no longer uses words in the ritual way characteristic of 'Yvonne of Croisic', where Yvonne's father only has to say ' "it is time to feed the cattle" ' for his daughter to be at peace: 'she understood that word, and, in a deeper sense than he, all that it signified of common task and lonely life resumed'. (p.141)

Roquette uses words as no other character in this volume does, and he is aware of his facility. But he does not use words with the profound authority and depth of Yvonne's father. He may be educated and sophisticated, but his vocabulary is artificial. Roquette mouths to the Curé pious sentiments about the obligations of friendship, but they are pat words. He is convinced by his own flippant rhetoric, as Wedmore, the narrator, points out with an ironic aside: 'how proper he looked when he made his little speech, followed by a silence that he meant should be effective! ' (p.201)

Roquette uses language to command, but he does not have the moral authority which his vocabulary implies. In fact Roquette is capable of cynical disregard, and though he wins Clémentine by power of words, he cannot control the circumstances which are brought about by his actions. The end spells disaster for Clémentine:

At last, ruin came, finding Clémentine stricken down with the commotion of the house—the old Curé arriving to fetch her away;—finding Adrien Roquette white with disaster, talking of pistols and poison to begin with, but settling down to everyday manners, and finishing up with a party of pleasure, while drawing-room furniture was seized for debts'. (p.237)

Roquette's casual disregard for misfortune is balanced by Clémentine's real grief, and she dies knowing that only the Curé's love has been constant. Roquette is well able to manoeuvre in the modern urban world, and he makes a second fortune and forgets Clémentine. The volume ends on this ironic note of worldly success, and, because we read the volume as a sequence of stories, the new values seem jaded and insincere beside the morals of the old 'pastoral' way of life. Pastorals of France is Wedmore's denunciation of realism.

George Cotterell's review of Renunciations, Wedmore's second volume of short stories, is important in that it is one of the early critical notices of the genre which takes the art of the short story writer very seriously. Cotterell was also sensitive to the new formlessness of Wedmore's art. He notes that Wedmore is outside the mainstream of short story writing:

Stories, however, they are not; for the mechanical involutions of plot are wanting, and no space is wasted on the trivialities which are so necessary to fiction. They are studies from the life, pictures that make plain to us some of the innermost workings of the heart. Of surplusage, in the shape of external incident, there is as little as possible.<sup>10</sup>

Cotterell admires the refined realism of Wedmore's art: a lot has happened since Pastorals of France, written sixteen years before Renunciations, and Wedmore is more sympathetic to the realistic temperament of the day. Pastorals of France taught us that we could read short stories in a volume in a sequential way; a similar regard to

10. Academy, 42 (December 1892), 601.

progressive understanding is evident in Renunciations. There is more activity in the book, and it deals with people who are beginning to give themselves away more readily. The title may stress the idea of giving up; the stories themselves reveal people who are willing to learn from life, and take an active role in living. In 'A Chemist in the Suburbs' (pp.13—43) Richard Pelse, unlike his counterpart Rutterby in 'A Last Love at Pornic', has actually lived and made firm decisions. He is confronted by life, and makes a strong effort to attain his desires. He is a self-made chemist with a prosperous business.

On his first holiday ever, he meets the woman of his dreams, with the improbable but symbolic name of Beatrice Image. She is rich and of an upper-class family; Richard is a working man. Because of this difference in class, their love is doomed. They part. Beatrice's house is close to Richard's shop, and one evening she calls in to see him, and hints that she will often return. Pelse is ecstatic, and amazed to find that his romantic dream seems to be coming true. He waits for her, but only receives a note saying that Beatrice loves him but that they can never marry; the barrier of class separates them. Richard leaves his prosperous shop and takes on a rundown business in a working-class suburb. He dies.

Despite the gloomy ending, things have changed in Wedmore's fiction. Pelse acts and thinks decisively. The prose of the 'new' story handles the changed attitude by being quicker, sparer and more excitable. The characters are more dramatic and expressive, and their alert and spontaneous activities are expressed in jerky sentences. Wedmore's characters have discovered that life can be fully experienced. Ondelette played formal, clear counterpoint to Rutterby; Beatrice opens Pelse's

piano and plays 'a while, Xaver Scharwenka's wild music', (p.14)

kisses him once and leaves.

The characters in this story are neurotic rather than calm; even Richard, who is quiet by inclination, ends the story reflecting on a passionate past. Wedmore describes the chemist as sensitive, flexible and subtle; his eyes are quick, keen and restless. He sees the stirrings of complex life outside the confines of his suburban shop, but he does not renounce his love for Beatrice. She tells him that they can never marry, and his decision to move his shop into a poor area is done with symbolic justification: he will proclaim his identity with the class that keeps him from Beatrice. Pelse makes an active decision, though it has negative results. This tone, which is more adamant than sacrificial, blends with a firmer narrative voice. Wedmore will not let a point of class criticism pass without standing up for his main character. Mr Pelse stays in a comfortable hotel and 'though a tradesman, he had tact as well as education; various interests and real kindness. He could mix quite easily with "his betters"—found his "betters" much more his equals than his neighbours had been'. (p.18)

As for Beatrice, she has left the quiet, introspective stability of an Yvonne far behind. She is impulsive, and her voice is compared to a musical instrument. She is wilful and independent, with a vocabulary which displays a passionate nature. Her speech is breathless and urgent. She both gives herself and holds herself back in a flurry of sensibility and self-criticism:

"Pretty, am I? But a little fool,  
after all. You treated me so  
gravely and so well. I had been  
flattered often enough. And I  
was mad to be respected . . .  
There is no chivalry left . . .



Your respect was flattery, too . . .  
 Here is my photograph, because  
 I trust you. But forget me,  
 forget me! " (pp.24—25)

Feeling is no longer automatically suppressed in Wedmore's stories. The diction and phrasing may be clumsy and self-conscious, but the melodramatic quality highlights real passion, and the sense of love at stake. There is a new sense of urgency in the story, because characters are trying for the first time to talk to each other. Life is no longer reticent and static; it is very much at risk.

'A Confidence at the Savile' (pp.47—69) confirms the new attitude which allows characters to live and speak with confidence. There is a relaxed air about the narrative, and the 'story' is really no more than a casual anecdote. Kenyon tells his friend Binns about a stay he has had with a French family. He gets on well with Margaret, who is also lodging with the family. One day he comes across her while she is asleep, with her mouth wide open. He feels this to be an 'indiscretion' which extinguishes all affection he has had for the girl. Kenyon wonders whether he has lost his chance, but Binns will not judge because he believes in "robust loves, rather than in sentiment combed out fragile and thin" '. (p.68) He feels that Kenyon has been oversensitive.

Wedmore is still seriously concerned with the discipline of writing, even in a lightweight story such as this. He conceals his own authorship by reporting Kenyon's actual words. This sanction of a personal narrative voice other than the writer's own allows the reader to judge the story on Kenyon's terms. We read 'A Confidence at the Savile' for two things: for the anecdote itself, and for what it tells us about Kenyon's character. Binns's mildly ironic comments give us

a perspective by which we are guided in that second activity, of estimating Kenyon's character. The facile evidence which Kenyon himself gives as a motive for leaving Margaret also helps us to deduce that the minor poet Kenyon is no more than a snob, with too high a regard for his own opinions. Wedmore allows character to reveal itself in this personal writing; he claims no narrative authority for the story.

This is a discipline of writing which one contemporary reviewer described as being 'more "thrown at your head", much more "clever", more conscious, and altogether more personal' than most contemporary short fiction.<sup>11</sup> Wedmore is concerned that a short story should engage the reader's active attention, and he is less interested in the traditional emphasis on logical narrative development. 'A Confidence at the Savile' is a very private story, told in 'the quietest corner in the house of the Savile Club—a spot to which the cigarette of the stranger is not encouraged to penetrate'. (pp.47—48) Ironically enough, Kenyon is not saved by the intimate setting of his anecdote. He says too much, and reveals himself too readily. Wedmore has implied that he is not personally responsible for his characters; his fiction has the air of reality.

Kenyon is certainly guilty of shameless egoism, and conveys a high opinion of himself in words of false modesty: he wants Margaret's mother to regard him 'as the producer of some not very faulty Sonnets' or as a critic of 'no mean authority'. (p.58) Binns thinks that Kenyon is living with his head in the clouds, and Wedmore introduces himself

11. Unsigned review of Renunciations, St James's Gazette, 11 January 1893, p.5.

in a footnote to put Kenyon gently into his place. The author advertises his distance from the text by this device; when he comments on Kenyon's remarks that Margaret is the only blonde he has known with a 'brunette's vigour', Wedmore inquires, are we 'to conclude that Mr Kenyon unconsciously reveals to us that hitherto his imagination had been fired by brunettes alone?' (p.54) This contradicts Kenyon's self-professed authority as a man of the world, and we are reminded that he is, after all, only a poet, with little experience of real life. Wedmore opens up new perspectives in this story which were inconceivable to the traditional artist concentrating on linear flow. His text incorporates criticism from the characters involved in the story, and from the 'impersonal' narrator of another man's story. Wedmore's art has a new freedom, and a new sense of quest.

'The North Coast and Eleanor' (pp.73—100), the final story in Renunciations, shows a continuing freedom of expression, though the narrative framework is more conventional. George Norton and Eleanor Lang are very old friends. They spend a happy holiday in Whitby, but they must eventually part and resume their separate careers. They take a last walk by the sea, knowing that if the tide rises behind them, they cannot return to the shore. They declare their love for each other, though they know that they could not live together. They choose to die by walking on, and ignoring the tide.

This story has broken away from the introspectiveness of the tales in Pastorals of France, and has moved towards melodramatic expression. The brake on George and Eleanor's love is appropriately sentimental—Norton's wife is still alive, though she has spent the last seven years in a hospital for the cure of dipsomaniacs. Wedmore's characters face the difficult issue of love outside marriage by urgent debate

and inquiry. Outspoken emotion is still a radical departure in Wedmore's fiction, and 'The North Coast and Eleanor' is concerned with the way individual rebellion against restrictive moral codes is brought about. In terms of Wedmore's art this movement towards melodramatic expression, and the conventional use of crisis and tension, suggest a change of direction, using, paradoxically enough, the most traditional forms available to any short story author. Wedmore uses melodramatic language and action to highlight the new freedom of his characters. Like George Egerton, who used melodramatic forms to disseminate radical ideas, and other new writers in the 1890s, Wedmore is quick to see new potential in traditional narrative techniques. The avant-garde short story is a blend of new and old techniques and attitudes, and the creative artists progress by wise compromise.

'The North Coast and Eleanor' is shaped by crisis; Eleanor and George choose to die together so that they might have their moment of love. Yet this crisis, and the great decision, are not simply imposed on the story, as they might be for a run-of-the-mill tale in the 1890s seeking sensation rather than moral drama. Eleanor and George have to work at the decision to commit suicide, and they have but ten minutes to move from friendship to love before the tide rises. They have to speak openly and urgently to each other, to pack as much experience as possible into those few minutes. Language has to be used positively, and to achieve a strength of will unheard of in Wedmore's early stories. In fact Eleanor tries at first to avoid the issue between the 'lovers', and uses words defensively as she chatters about the theatre, in order to divert George's attention. George approaches the discussion of their love by referring to side issues: he talks to her, but keeps his distance still, by mentioning Christianity and suicide. But the

two friends have to learn to talk as one, and it is not good enough for Eleanor to remark that George is getting ' "very tremendous" ' (p.94) That amount of effort has to be put into dialogue by them both, before love can be earned and sealed with the melodramatic death.

George and Eleanor share a passion which is bigger and more climactic than anything else in Wedmore's short fiction. Theirs is the first mutual bond which Wedmore allows, too, though it is brief and tragic. If we read the two serious stories in Renunciations as if in a sequence of 'opening out', and learning to live and talk, the climax is more impressive still. The lovers go to their certain death 'folded together in a wild embrace, which yet had, certainly, the sanction of her deepest being—had the full sanction of her soul'. (p.99)

English Episodes<sup>12</sup> is a still more experimental work than Renunciations. Apart from the first story ('The Vicar of Pimlico') the move towards formlessness and the elimination of narrative continue. Wedmore wants his prose to be as personal as possible, and his stories attain this quality by their informal shape and their introspection. The reader will believe that Wedmore is transcribing the thoughts of real people in his brief sketches: his presence as 'the author' is avoided as far as possible.

'The Vicar of Pimlico' (pp.11—40) repeats the basic formula of 'A Chemist in the Suburbs'. The Reverend Arthur Bradbury-Wells is attracted to the young and lively Millicent Sergison, and she admires him. They speak frankly of their affection, but Arthur eventually decides to renounce his love for the sake of duty to his church. Millicent and Arthur can at least enjoy each others' company. They seek

12. English Episodes, second edition (London and New York, 1895).

each other out, and share a strong and spontaneous affection. But the Vicar still finds that problem attends joy, and his strict sense of duty holds him back from declaring his love too openly. Arthur has to fight against his natural reserve before he can fully appreciate Millicent's love, and he approaches her with exaggerated courtesy. After a service, when he is keen to walk Millicent home, he cannot ask her simply if he can do so. He draws attention to his problem by pointing out that clergymen are like other people in "entertaining something like a wish to be allowed—because you are alone—to walk towards home with you" (p.28)

Politeness and duty eventually win, and Arthur gives Millicent up. He acts for his own interest, and makes a non-decision in refusing to see Millicent again. He does not consider what she might think of him, or what she might be prepared to sacrifice for his love. There is much celebration of Millicent's free spirit in this story, but Arthur never allows it to inspire him; his nature is one of unchanging reserve and melancholy. This story harks back to the tone and emotions of Pastorals of France. The remaining stories in English Episodes look forward, however, and explore new narrative techniques. There is no stress on plot for its own sake, and Wedmore's narrative voice (which maintained an ironic note in 'The Vicar of Pimlico') gradually disappears.

'Justice Wilkinshaw's Attentions' (pp.43—60) carries on from the flippant vein of 'A Confidence at the Savile'. It has a situation rather than a plot, and there is no conventional crisis in the story. Justice Wilkinshaw returns from Australia, and stays in a lodging house with a friend. He seems to be attracted to the landlady's daughter, Carrie, though he in fact uses her affection as an excuse to stay in

the house for as long as possible. Eventually he leaves without paying his bill.

The idea behind the story is that people can never know what is going on in another person's mind. Wilkinshaw uses this knowledge to 'criminal' effect. He exploits life by playing a suitable role as lover, and deals with events to his own ends. We only discover his deceit at the end of the story, when the ironic and comic purpose of the narrative is fulfilled. We are as duped as Carrie herself, and the text almost plays with us in the same way that Wilkinshaw plays with Carrie's affections. Wedmore's story has a confident irony and a relaxed anecdotal air which offers a welcome change from the intense seriousness of 'The Vicar of Pimlico'.

The following story in English Episodes, 'The Fitting Obsequies' (pp.63—74), is relaxed enough in style and content to take a joke even further. Mr Salting 'dies', but his body cannot be found. Some time later he is seen walking through a crowd with a lady friend, having decided to make a new life for himself after twenty years of respectable but dull marriage. As Joseph himself puts it, ' "I seemed to myself to have got deadly tired of Mrs Salting and the Surrey side" '. (p.73) Joseph looks after himself in a reasoned and responsible way which would have been inconceivable in an early Wedmore story. 'The Fitting Obsequies' and 'Justice Wilkinshaw's Attentions' comment on the first story in the volume, because they display the effort and action which it so patently lacks. That is why 'The Vicar of Pimlico' starts this volume, for its conservatism contrasts with the optimistic and rebellious composure of Mr Wilkinshaw and Mr Salting. The conception of the book, as a collection of independent and interdependent stories, is of central importance.

'The Fitting Obsequies' reaches an ironic revelation, through the discovery that Joseph has not committed suicide. There is a central artistic irony at work, in that the story is written about a main character who does not appear until the story is about to end. The minute we catch sight of Joseph, then the story must conclude—and the narrative focusses on literally nothing. The whole narrative structure is ironic. The story seems to have been written with the definite purpose of describing Joseph's disappearance and the arrangements for his funeral. The proclaimed purpose is rendered unnecessary by Joseph's presence. He is confident and happy:

With an air of calm and assured possession, easily distinguishable from that momentary pleasure or careful courtesy with which even in crowded streets a man makes talk to an acquaintance who is half a stranger, the middle-aged Brixton watchmaker—as favourable a specimen as you may wish to see of a respectable tradesman skilled at his craft—was walking in the society of a remarkably well-grown young woman, whose countenance, to do her justice, bore no sign of either care or guile'. (pp.70—71)

Joseph's daughter appears in the following story, 'Katherine in the Temple', (pp.77—86) a specific confirmation of the interdependence between stories. Katherine talks to a friend about a male acquaintance of hers, for whom she cared deeply. He is now dead. That is the substance of the story, which has no plot or narrative direction. Katherine's monologue simply recalls a friendship which gave her pleasure. There is no melodrama in her sadness, and there is no crisis at the centre of the story. The words have the natural air of a girl thinking aloud, and the story goes wherever Katherine's thoughts take her; the tone is intimate, and the choice of form influenced by the



dramatic monologues of Wedmore's friend Browning.

A personal quality is expressed with equal clarity in the form of the final story in English Episodes. 'The New "Marienbad-Elegy" ' (pp.89—109) is the most progressive piece of writing in this volume. There is no plot and no shape to the story, which consists of entries in a diary. Wedmore tells us in a footnote—thereby disclaiming authorship for the text—that the story consists of 'Extracts wrenched somehow from the locked and private Diary of an English poet'. (p.89) This poet talks about a friendship which could have turned to love, as well as about nature, poetry, music and the people around him. The diarist simply muses, and freely jots down inconsistent ideas. Wedmore implies that the traditional narrative of short fiction is impersonal because it tells the reader, eventually, all that he needs to know in the course of the story: it is finite. Wedmore's tales are inhabited by people, as distinct from characters, who are not concerned with form or narrative style. The diarist does not want to make firm declarations about life or art. He wants to enter into the flow of human relationships, and to enjoy life for its own sake. The poet lives out his ideas; he is not content to theorise for the sake of theory. And he learns from himself:

In close companionship, whatever  
you may receive, you must always  
give out something, and it is  
nothing less, and nothing else,  
than your own nature that to  
some extent you impart. In  
near association, to be sullen  
is to be poisonous; to be cour-  
ageous is to inspire courage;  
your contentment makes your  
comrade's hours seem to him, at  
the very least, endurable; and  
to be gay is to make glad'. (p.97)

The poet rejects any creed which cannot look outside itself; he is unhappy with anything which 'pertains to me of the narrowness of a sect, while even more obnoxious to me than the bigotry of the Puritan, is the Agnostic's self-satisfied sterility'. (p.90) This man can take into account what others think of him, something which the Vicar, at the beginning of English Episodes, could not do. The volume grows towards emotional and artistic maturity. The poet earns a joy in giving himself, as a result of the new openness of feeling. We discover how he talks openly, spontaneously and affectionately with his friend Sylvia. He is quietly optimistic, and responds eagerly to life. The poet ends this volume a long way from the opening note of negative renunciation, as he remarks on the freshness and beauty of being alive:

When I am with her, I feel more keenly than before the interest of this country, and praise the richness of its trees, the lush green of its pastures, the dignity of its encompassing hillsides, solid and bare against the travelling sky. (p.103)

Wedmore states his belief in the relationship between the individual short stories that make up a single volume in the preface to his last collection in the 1890s, Orgeas and Miradou. This relationship will be natural and instructive:

Unlike the imaginative pieces in my other volumes, those which here follow are bound together by no common name. The connection between them is not obvious enough to warrant it. Yet to the work of any one mind, however varied it may endeavour to be, limits which cannot be transgressed are set quite surely; and, without repetition, there must needs be relationship.

The first story, 'Orgeas and Miradou' (pp.13—38) is disappointing because the idea behind the narrative does not seem credible. Wedmore returns to France for the setting of the tale, and returns to the type of introspection which marked and marred Pastorals of France. The story shows the main character, Orgeas, as his wife leaves him. He is left alone to bring up his daughter Miradou; she dies at the age of eighteen. Orgeas waits patiently for eight days, after which time, according to popular Provençal legend, Miradou will return from the dead. At the end of the ninth day it is intimated that Orgeas himself dies in the delusion that Miradou has actually returned.

The idea of the story does not work; it is impossible to take seriously the idea of a man waiting for the impossible, and our disbelief undermines the pathos which the story is trying to stimulate. Orgeas has no contact with reality, and he is oblivious to anything but his hope. We do not even learn what Miradou herself was like, and it is difficult to read any story that seems to be so private that it cannot transmit information with satisfaction.

The next story in Orgeas and Miradou also deals with very private information, but it is more successful. 'To Nancy' first appeared in the Savoy.<sup>13</sup> The periodical version was published in two parts: 'To Nancy' consists of one long letter from the middle-aged Clement Ashton to his young friend Nancy Nanson; 'The Deterioration of Nancy' begins with an editorial comment from Wedmore saying that he has gained access to more of the correspondence, and that it consists of several shorter letters. This half of the story differs from the book version, though there is no essential change in the outcome of events. Wedmore rather

13. 'To Nancy', Savoy, 1 (January 1896), pp.31—41; 'The Deterioration of Nancy', Savoy, 2 (April 1896), pp.99—108.

overstates his case when he remarks in his preface to Orgeas and Miradou that 'I have so essentially re-worked ['To Nancy'] that I can scarcely with fairness associate it with the periodical in which it first appeared'.

The opening of 'To Nancy' (pp.41—96) shows that Ashton is deeply concerned with Nancy's history, and he adopts an avuncular attitude to the girl. He writes 'straight and full, the record of my impression: concealing nothing, though written to yourself: a letter absolutely frank, looking all facts in the face'. (p.41) We learn from the correspondence that the bachelor Ashton has been attracted to Nancy, a young dancer on the Music Hall stage. His words form a tribute to, and a documentary of, her career at a turning point, when she is about to work in London. The letter ends on a note of qualified hope for Nancy's future. Ashton doubts that Nancy will last in the competitive world of theatre. We can deduce his genuine affection for his young friend, though we feel as well that his appeal and prognostication for her future are of little relevance.

We read the short story to learn about Ashton's character as much as to discover what he thinks about his friend. When he asks 'have you ever lain awake, in the great, long darkness, and watched in the darkness a procession—the people of your Past and all your Future?' (p.65), we are likely to think that her answer would be simply 'no', and we might surmise that Ashton has certainly had nightmares on her behalf. But our reading involves no more than conjecture, and the second half of the story, which includes Nancy's replies, helps us to a more satisfactory estimation of character.

Wedmore prefaces the continuation of the correspondence in such a way as to mark his distance from the text. He appears as an editor,

and he explains that he has taken an editor's liberty to scrutinize his material. The author has become the critic, and by doing so he adds a new and unexpected dimension to his short story:

I have obtained access to a remaining portion of the Correspondence between this distinguished member of the Royal Academy and Miss Nancy Nanson of the Variety Stage. I see that the young lady's are the more numerous and the shorter letters; and in them, as they proceed, I seem to discern some change of tone—a rather quick transition or development (call it what you will), which, if it is really there, is unlikely to have escaped the eye of her correspondent, and may perhaps have prepared him, in a certain measure, for an incident which, nevertheless, disturbed him seriously. That at least is my own reading of the letters in the round hand of Miss Nanson. But I am possibly wrong. (pp.67—68)

This prepares us for what we are about to read, and we have been invited to pitch our reading skills against those of the editor, whose role is merely to guarantee the 'real' existence of the letters. Wedmore disclaims responsibility of the story, and asks the reader to accept the objective truth of the letters. By doing so, he alerts the reader to work attentively whilst reading the story. We have to discover Nancy and Ashton through the words they write, and our reading demands care and responsibility.

Nancy's first reply is indeed short. We deduce that she is a young and naive girl, and begin to feel that Ashton has taken both himself and his friend too seriously. Our reading begins to develop perspective and authority where it could only be conjectural in the first letter. In fact we do no more than approach the 'truth' by the end

of the story, when the incident which Wedmore referred to is discussed. Nancy's final note simply says 'you were always kind to me. I want to see you. Mother is wild. And you, you will never forgive me'. (p.86) Ashton's fears for Nancy's future have been confirmed, although we do not learn the exact cause of the disaster. Only Ashton can assume that Nancy knows her 'crime'. The letters are essentially private after all, and Ashton writes as if he wants to push the harsh truth away by referring to the 'escapade of Wednesday—something or other (and I won't know what) with the man who helped you to your new engagement'. (p.88) Ashton puts his hand in front of his eyes, and we can only infer that the trouble is sexual. The letters remain private, despite their public appearance in print.

The periodical version of the story differs from the book version in this respect. In the periodical text Ashton hints far more at the sexual element, and speaks of Nancy's fall from grace with more frankness. He does not want to know 'with definiteness' the details of the affair, though he talks 'brutally' of the 'valuation set by me on mere physical chastity' being 'in question'. ('The Deterioration of Nancy', p.105) Physical chastity obviously is in question, and it makes Ashton's response far more emotional than the reticent reply made in the book version.

'The Poet on the Wolds' (pp.99—124) is similarly reticent. Wedmore again comments on the story as if it were someone else's property, on this occasion, that of the poet who left us 'The New "Marienbad-Elegy" '. The new story 'must certainly be almost the last little writings of my friend which I shall be permitted to see'. 'The Poet on the Wolds' consists of a formless accumulation of random jottings. Wedmore is still concerned that we should pay attention to the

'personality' of the words, rather than concentrate on the pleasures of plot and action. He remarks in his introduction that the story is made up simply of 'short and in some cases scarcely connected Notes'. (p.99)

The poet merely describes colours and landscapes, scribbling down his feelings about the people he has met, from the postman onwards. He makes no pronouncements, and is content to observe life. He seems to have no close relationships, and takes on the role of a lonely and impassive sage, who writes serene and untroubled prose. He does not criticise people, and enjoys the happiness of his acquaintances, without wishing to be involved in their success. He does not intrude on the privacy of others; and is content to notice, whether in London, on the village street or on the paths of the Wolds, 'two people, husband and wife, it may be; lover and sweetheart; father and daughter, perhaps—linked together happily'. (p.123) This poet is content with his own company, though Wedmore, who might well be referring ironically to himself here, asks us to remember that the poet is 'unaccustomed to wear his heart upon his sleeve' and may not have been 'credited with the depth of emotion that was really his'. (p.101)

'The Poet on the Wolds' is written as if by a living person, and Wedmore assumes his customary role of editor. But Wedmore uses this position ironically, and is describing himself, even as he describes his fictional poet. Wedmore uses this story to announce the death of the poet, and supplies a biography, refers to obituaries and the execution of a bust by a Mr Onslow Ford. In effect he uses art to describe his own withdrawal from the practise of writing short fiction; for Orgas and Miradou is Wedmore's last volume of short stories. Fiction and reality have become one, and 'The Poet on the Wolds' is Wedmore's valediction.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### RUDYARD KIPLING

"Who will show us some new thing?" is the constant demand of criticism. As James grew tired of beef and mutton, and wished that some new animal was invented, so the professional student of contemporary fiction wearies, ungratefully, of the regular wholesome old joints—of the worthy veteran novelists . . . We know pretty well what the eminent old hands can do, they seldom surprise us agreeably.<sup>1</sup>

Rudyard Kipling's 'new thing' happened to be the short story, and he did not so much surprise, as astonish, the weary professional student and the ordinary reader. Kipling, along with Henry James, led the genre into the 1890s with pioneering confidence. Kipling in particular gave the short story an undreamed of variety and scope, and his influence on the short story of the 1890s was so profound as to be taken, by readers and authors alike, completely for granted. Kipling was the most widely read author in the 1890s, with a vast reading public. 'In his heyday', we are told, 'he had an almost hypnotic hold over his public'.<sup>2</sup> Kipling's immense confidence in the form was directly responsible for the triumphant emergence of the genre in the 1890s. Kipling was, simply, a pleasure to read, and with thirteen volumes of short stories produced between 1890 and 1899, mostly collected from original publication in magazines, his art was never

1. Andrew Lang, unsigned review of Plain Tales from the Hills, Daily News, 2 November 1889; in Kipling: The Critical Heritage, The Critical Heritage Series, edited by Roger Lancelyn Green (1971), p.47.
2. W.W. Robson, Modern English Literature (1970), p.12.



removed from the public eye.

Despite the fact that Kipling writes for a mass public audience, his stories offer each reader an intensely private experience. That is the secret of his great success, and helps to explain why his talent as a technical innovator in the short story went unheeded by critics of the genre. He was too 'simple' a writer for artistic complexity to be noticeable. A Kipling story takes the reader into a private and self-contained world, and that experience of reading is uniquely satisfying; we feel no need to analyse the tale at its conclusion. Reading Kipling moves us in the way we were moved when we read or were read to as children, when our criterion of a good story seemed undemanding. We rediscover the pure joy and excitement of narrative as we read a Kipling story, and find it difficult to leave his fictional worlds. The story is enough, and it seems too important to be touched by clumsy comment.

Kipling made the short story fashionable in the 1890s, and helped to secure its strength and identity as an independent genre in English fiction. He made unceasing experiments with the form, and offered the most distinguished creative example for his fellow practitioners in the art of writing short fiction. He gave the simple tale a whole new range of possibilities, and his judgement of the short story's potential was unique. Kipling always explored, and though he was praised as one 'superlative in the art (which he has brought so strongly into fashion) of the short story',<sup>3</sup> he never rested on his literary laurels. The short stories of the 1890s demonstrate this creative vitality and

3. Unsigned review of Life's Handicap, Blackwoods', 150 (November 1891), 735.

variety. Kipling's range is vast, and includes anecdotes; long adventure stories; children's stories; tales of the supernatural; horror stories; ironic comedies; grim farces; brittle society sketches; stories of great human endeavour; allegories and fables. Kipling touched every form, and no author who wrote short fiction in the 1890s could do anything other than owe an unspoken allegiance to the master.

The critical reaction to Kipling's books was one of spontaneous enthusiasm. His stories were hailed with unmitigated excitement. The promise of hope for his greatness was sensed even in the earliest sketches in Plain Tales. The critics concentrated on Kipling's achievement as 'a born story-teller'.<sup>4</sup> Kipling made readers aware of the profound and simple need for story. His stories always have at least one personal narrative voice, and impart a sense of the pure present which makes reading them a compelling experience. The narrator seems to be sitting before us relating the events; we are being talked to by the printed word. Kipling's stories live, in the sense that real experience is a part of the texture of the words. Kipling believes in his imaginative worlds; like his narrators, he takes part in his stories. The most far-fetched supernatural story has not only happened, but is happening again as the story is repeated. There is excitement in the very attitude to writing; Kipling is never tied down by theory, and his stories have a freshness which makes our reading compulsive. Contemporary critics responded to this excitement, and discarded the usual bookish prose in favour of a more extrovert vocabulary, when discussing Kipling's fiction. A reviewer in the Scots Observer remarked that 'you are made to feel with all your strength that here is

4. Unsigned review of Plain Tales, Saturday Review, 65 (June 1888), 697.

such a promise as has not been perceived in English letters since young Mr Dickens broke in suddenly upon the precincts of immortality as the creator of Pickwick and the Wellers'.<sup>5</sup>

Kipling's great talent is to do the complex thing simply. He has the confidence and the natural facility to experiment constantly with new forms and techniques. He is never satisfied, and never lets art stand still. Charles Carrington tells how Kipling felt that he had written enough jungle stories after two volumes, and despite their immense success, wanted to move on to new creative areas: 'the impulse to write more was switched off as water is turned off at a tap'. Kipling has seen enough of his characters and wants a new narrative challenge. "'That ends up Mowgli'" he writes, "'and there is not going to be any more of him. After that, I expect to try my hand at a series of engineers' tales—about marine engines and such like"'.<sup>6</sup> This spontaneous approach gives the stories their rare sense of conviction. A Kipling story has to be told, and each narrator could not conceive that his story was anything less than "'The Finest Story in the World"'.<sup>7</sup> We are spell-bound while the story lasts, for it offers us much more than the conventional linear sequence: it offers a self-contained experience of life; life with palpable presence. As Gobind says to Kipling in the preface to Life's Handicap, "'a tale that is told is a true tale as long as the telling lasts"'. (p.x)

The first English edition of Kipling's earliest collection of

5. Unsigned review of Soldiers Three, Plain Tales and Departmental Ditties, Scots Observer, 3 (May 1890), 663.
6. Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work, (1955), p.210.
7. The title of a story in Many Inventions.

short stories, Plain Tales from the Hills, was published in 1890.<sup>8</sup> Kipling had written these tales under the intense pressure of meeting deadlines for an under-staffed daily paper in India. The stories had to fill an exact space, and had to be ready by an exact time. Kipling recalls the difficulties in his autobiography, Something of Myself, remembering 'how rigorously newspaper spaces limited my canvases and, for the reader's sake, prescribed that within these limits must be some sort of beginning, middle, and end'.<sup>9</sup> Kipling turns the statutory requirements of conventional narrative into a challenge, rather than accepting their restraint. His stories might have to be short (around two thousand words) but they gain pace and vivacity as a result. They have to be easy and entertaining to read, and they have to cater for a specific audience—the professional middle classes who administered India. Kipling turns this into a narrative brief for sharp and pertinent commentary; his conventional task of providing lightweight fiction for an indiscriminating public attending to his stories over the breakfast table does not compromise artistic standards. He is always ready to experiment, and the brief sketches in Plain Tales are exercises in freedom of narrative expression.

Each story in Plain Tales is told in the way most appropriate to the theme or subject matter. Kipling is always in charge of his stories, ready with an aside, an ironic quip or a qualification, which

8. Plain Tales from the Hills, third edition (1890). Unless a particular edition is mentioned in the footnotes, I have used the first English edition for quotation.
9. Something of Myself: For my Friends Known and Unknown (1937), p.205.

shows his proximity to his subjects. He wants us to realise that he understands not so much a particular character trait as human psychology in general; not so much a narrative technique as the art of fiction. He is already at home with his great talent in these little tales. Kipling never questions his own authority, and he expects his readers to heed his judgements. The stories are never left open-ended; they are written with the inclusion of their answers inside the text. As Henry James remarked, in his preface to the American edition of Mine Own People, the effect is that of an old head on young shoulders:

On the whole, he presents himself as a strangely clever youth who has stolen the formidable mask of maturity and rushes about making people jump with the deep sounds, the sportive exaggerations of tone, that issue from its painted lips.<sup>10</sup>

'Lispeth' (pp.1—7), the first story in Plain Tales, is full of people jumping at such 'sportive exaggerations'. James understands that Kipling's 'wisdom' is often tongue in cheek, and that he is alert to the ironies which develop in his stories and can smile behind the seriousness of his characters and the formality of his diction. Lispeth is a hill-girl who finds an Englishman unconscious on the roadside. She carries him home to the chaplain's house where she lives as housekeeper. The theme of the story is the uneasy relationship between characters belonging to different cultures. These characters astonish each other by their attitudes to the young man. Lispeth is as adamant as her guardians:

10. Preface to Mine Own People (Philadelphia, [1891]), p.ix.

She explained to the Chaplain that this was the man she meant to marry; and the Chaplain and his wife lectured her severely on the impropriety of her conduct. LISPETH listened quietly, and repeated her first proposition. It takes a great deal of Christianity to wipe out uncivilised Eastern instincts, such as falling in love at first sight.  
(p.3)

The short space means that Kipling must organise his tale tightly, and allow the movement of the story to be unhindered. 'LISPETH' gains strength from its form. It is self-contained because the story moves through one central episode literally back to where it came from. LISPETH appears as a hill-girl, living with her people in poverty and hardship. When she realises that the English have cheated her by saying that the boy will return to marry her, when he has no intention of doing so, LISPETH returns to her people. She marries, and her husband beats her.

Kipling does not have to moralise on the inevitable return of kind to kind because the story does it for him. The theme confirms what Kipling's audience believes—it states their unspoken attitudes and, in a way, comforts their prejudice. Kipling's authority in the story seems quite in line with class dogma, expressed in the opinion that the Natives will never change. But his irony cuts into the single-minded attitudes of the English ruling class, and Kipling is angered by the complacent way the chaplain and his wife expect their Christianity to remodel patterns of thought at the moment of baptism. Kipling uses his story both to reveal how the English behave, and to suggest that such behaviour can be cruel and insensitive. His narrative position is already ambivalent and ironic, and the 'truth' of the

story is not contained in a single inflexible view-point.

Kipling assesses the requirements of each story in Plain Tales; if he can best achieve an effect by commenting on events from the outside (as he does in 'Lispeth') he maintains that distance from the text. If the story demands a narrator who is active in events (for example when we are being led up to a crisis and want to be kept in suspense, which would be difficult with a narrator writing with fore-knowledge), then either Kipling himself, or an 'I' close to Kipling's character, tells the story. Kipling's natural artistry reveals itself in the way each story is served by an appropriate narrative voice. His facility seems almost instinctive, because Kipling believes in what he writes. He believes that his fiction records actual fact.

The limited scope of each sketch demands that the life of the narrative is brief but vivid. Each tale, however cursory, lives next to apocalypse. The stories in Plain Tales present brief, instantaneous realities, turning a small confined area into a self-contained world of experience. The options which the characters face are necessarily intense: a boy has to commit suicide when his Colonel tells him off. Men have to give up their lives and souls to their women. Religious convictions have to be so seriously held that they unbalance minds. The sun has to bake the ground rock hard. The emotions are always in peril, and the 'grimly comic scenes' contain hard jokes.<sup>11</sup> In 'A Friend's Friend' (pp.248—54) Kipling uses narrative to help his active revenge, in order to get an acquaintance black-balled at his club, divorced, dismissed the service and thrown into prison.

It is funny that the snobbish Lieutenant Golightly gets his

11. 'Thrown Away', Plain Tales, p.21.

come-uppance by being arrested; it is funny that twenty-six naked soldiers take the village of Lungtungpen by storm. It is taken for granted that women cause men too much trouble; taken for granted that wise and seasoned Indian campaigners will always look on to see the enthusiastic young men ('the colts') gradually ground down under the deadly routine of work. Yet Kipling knows that his art should do more than mirror the reality of his audience's experiences. He can entertain that audience with stories of the world they see and participate in, and confirm the attitudes which stem from the coteries and clubs. But Kipling knows too that life is fragile for the English who take authority in a country which at times they cannot or will not understand. Kipling gives voice to his reader's anxiety, beyond that safe narrative response where the reader can nod wisely at each pertinent tale and say "yes, that is exactly what I believe". He takes them beyond their experience of the Mrs Hauksbees, the Colonels and the young men who are so useful at the Simla tennis parties.

But when Kipling is about to reveal that there is a 'new' India which is nonetheless before the eyes of his readers, he pauses, unsure of himself. He retires behind the mask, and becomes ironic and dismissive. He suddenly remembers that he is, after all, a very young man who still has to make his way in this strange world of Empire. He has to remember his place, because being an artist has unpleasant consequences for the tactless. Kipling tells us that he was 'almost nightly responsible for my output to visible and often brutally voluble critics at the club. They were not concerned with my dreams'.  
(Something of Myself, p.205)

This threat to his writing accounts, as well, for the hardness and the ferocity of the Plain Tales. The stories never give quarter,



and they have an immediacy which results from the direct involvement of the first-person narrators. For example, in 'Thrown Away' (pp.14—24) the tragic story is told of a boy who comes to India and takes everything too seriously, and is so upset by his Colonel's criticism that he commits suicide. The narrator and the Major, sensing that something is wrong when the boy disappears for a few days, go out to find him, and come across his mutilated body. They write consolingly to the boy's parents saying that he has died of cholera. The opening paragraphs of the story introduce the idea which its activity will seek to confirm. The art supports itself, with this brash didacticism:

To rear a boy under what parents call the "sheltered life system" is, if the boy must go into the world and fend for himself, not wise. Unless he be one in a thousand he has certainly to pass through many unnecessary troubles; and may, possibly, come to extreme grief simply from ignorance of the proper proportions of things. (p.14)

The narrator precedes the actual story with the truth which events will prove. The story moves from theory to the proof of action. The tale is organised like a moral fable; Kipling himself cannot resist the temptation to tell us (through the narrator) exactly why he is relating this story. The narrative method presumes his omniscience, and its tone is suitably that of the 'old hand' who has patently been through 'unnecessary troubles', winning the right to express truths about the 'proportions of things'. Already Kipling is framing his stories. The relationship between the story and the external comment which frames it is crude as yet, and not helped by Kipling's patronising manner. The frame, in fact, means that the

story seems less than spontaneous. All that is left for the reader at the end of the introduction is the particularity of the 'extreme grief'. Kipling is too eager to demand that we are aware of his moral maturity, and seems loath to let his story go. Kipling wants to take the effort out of reading by supplying the text complete with its answers.

In 'On the Strength of a Likeness' (pp.279—86) there is a similar inflexibility in the narrative. Kipling's writing is too tense as yet to tolerate any alternative to the proven wisdom of his stories. This story almost arrogantly sets out truth. Again, the general theory precedes the specific action, and the proof of the story is not learned within itself. Kipling parades before his text, his words representing the morality of the group. He wants to be seen saying the right thing, so he makes his narrative preach: 'next to a requited attachment, one of the most convenient things that a young man can carry about with him at the beginning of his career, is an unrequited attachment'. (p.279)

'In the House of Suddhoo' (pp.133—43) takes Kipling away from English morality into the customs of the Indian world. The story is concerned with magic, blackmail and the unfamiliar habits of a motley Indian household. A rich seal-cutter is extorting money out of Suddhoo by white magic. The blackmailer cannot be stopped, even though the people around him are perfectly aware of his deceit, because in the complicated hierarchy of the house, everybody depends on everybody else. The narrator of the tale is English, and though he is in the privileged position of reporting firsthand, the only practical thing he can do to expose the blackmail is to write the story. The narrator's passive involvement suggests that the story is a fable of

the ambiguity of British 'rule' in India; the ordered legislation of one society simply cannot be imposed on a different culture.

The stories in Plain Tales demand approval from within the clan of audience and narrator, yet the self-congratulation is checked by Kipling's desire to put himself beyond the normal limits of an Englishman's experience in India. Stories like 'In the House of Suddhoo', 'The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows' or 'Beyond the Pale' take us to an India where Kipling wants us to applaud his wider experience. He wants us to know that he has been to places which we have no knowledge of; he is one of his class, and yet outside it at the same time. Kipling tries to pack as much experience as possible into these breathless, energetic tales. As Kipling said in Something of Myself, he writes when his 'young head was in a ferment of new things seen and realised at every turn'. (p.205)

The emphasis on the oral transmission of the stories concentrates the necessity of the narrative. No other writer of short fiction in the 1890s displays the degree of relaxed concentration which begins to emerge in Kipling's work after Plain Tales. The later stories are no longer tense about their beginnings. They develop from a lazy conversation between friends, or pick out details from an introductory preamble; the narratives now have low-key starts. The stories are credited with inevitability, and their telling is often meant to be specifically 'oral'. Kipling wants us to feel that we are sitting by the side of the narrator listening to the story: the atmosphere is private to each tale. Many Kipling stories are told by narrators who themselves listen to other people's tales, but do not actively participate in the events described: Kipling wants the sense of the written word to disappear. In Something of Myself he recalls William

Morris entering Burne-Jone's house (where he was on holiday at the time), and calling for the adults in a frenzy of excitement. Finding that they were all out, and that only the children were present in the house, Morris sat down before them so that he could tell the story which he had just made up. Kipling looks back and understands how much Morris needed to tell and share that story. His own tales have a similar excitement and immediacy; he wants us all to hear what he has to say:

Long afterwards, when I was old enough to know a maker's pains, it dawned on me that we must have heard the Saga of Burnt Njal, which was then interesting him. In default of grown-ups, and pressed by need to pass the story between his teeth and clarify it, he had used us. (pp.14—15)

In Soldiers Three (1890)<sup>12</sup> Kipling is less inclined to use his public quite so openly as a workshop. The narratives are, however, prepared through an audience. They are never simply forced into the page, or made to start as if beginning were no more than contingent. Kipling showed the short story writers of the 1890s that there was time to be had in their narratives. He leads up to the story 'proper' and makes the narrative relaxed and spontaneous: it grows out of the situation in which the characters find themselves. Kipling makes each of his stories individual, and he wants to show why they deserve to be told. Kipling sees telling stories as a joyful commonplace, the prerogative of every man. That is what happens in Soldiers Three, as the famous trio of privates, Learoyd, Ortheris and Mulvaney, join their confidant and friend the narrator. In 'The Solid Muldoon'

12. Soldiers Three: A Collection of Stories, sixth edition, (1890).

(pp.40—49) the natural thing for the men to do after an exhausting dog-fight under the hot Indian sun is to sit down and talk. 'Tale provoked tale, and each tale more beer'. (p.40) After Learoyd's long history Mulvaney retorts that he has only fought with men "'but I've stud up to a ghost, an' that was not an ivry-day expayrience". "No?" said Ortheris, throwing a cork at him. "You git up an' address the 'ouse—you an' yer expayriences"'. (p.41)

Mulvaney needs no further bidding and the story proper begins. It tells of his attempted seduction of Annie Bragin and the appearance of the ghost of Flahy of the Tyrone regiment, who rudely interrupts the courtship. This story develops naturally from the introductory framework, and it does not depend formally on the introduction. In 'With the Main Guard' (pp.50—64) the function of the story is more dramatic. This time, talk is not simply for the sake of relaxation; it has become a very real means of salvation, for 'when the grief of the soul is too heavy for endurance it may be a little eased by speech'.<sup>13</sup>

Kipling never underestimates the effect which story telling can have. He has faith enough in his art to show how it can be morally uplifting in times of crisis. There is active strength in this narrative. Learoyd is 'half mad with the fear of death presaged in the swelling veins of his neck', (p.52) and the narrator, in desperation, implores Mulvaney to talk him out of his grief. Words act as catharsis; the story is at risk because it is all that a man has to keep him from insanity. Mulvaney's story of the Black Tyrones is narrative in action, and it keeps Learoyd from despair. But at what cost, Kipling asks of the exhausted Irish soldier:

13. 'Dra Wara Dee', In Black and White, eighth edition (Allahabad and London, 1893), p.9.

"Oh Terence!" I said, dropping into Mulvaney's speech, when we were alone, "it's you that have the Tongue!"

He looked at me wearily; his eyes were sunk in his head, and his face was drawn and white.

"Eyah!" said he, "I've blandandered thim through the night some how, but can thim that helps others help themselves? Answer me that, Sorr!" (p.64)

Both Soldiers Three and In Black and White show how Kipling responds intuitively to the potential of the short story form. He is aware that it can perform a wide range of narrative tasks with natural ease. In the Indian stories included in the book In Black and White<sup>14</sup> he explores and discovers within that range. In 'Dray Wara Yow Dee' (pp.7—16) Kipling abandons linear narrative used for its own sake. The story is a monologue spoken by an Indian who meets and talks to an English acquaintance. Kipling's first preoccupation is to explore the Indian's character, and he does so in the inconsequential ramble of the monologue. The Indian implores, sulks, begs, becomes emotional and philosophises wisely in turns. He is simply there being himself, and that is enough for Kipling in this story. Kipling has no wish to explain 'the Indian character' by setting an episode in a narrative framework to prove some specific point; that would be too artificial. His narrator speaks for himself, and Kipling has enough trust in his character to hold the reader's attention to the story. It is enough that the Indian and his friend 'have spoken together with naked hearts before this'. (p.9)

Kipling's fiction is already mature enough to find narrative a challenge rather than a problem. There is a refreshing openness about

14. In Black and White, eighth edition (Allahabad and London, 1893)

the approach to art which is outlined in the preface to Life's Handicap (1891). The preface consists of a dialogue between the Indian Gobind and Kipling himself. Kipling, when asked about his craft, replies in a disarmingly simple way. His is a trade like any other, and it has its own clearly defined regulations:

"I write of Life and Death, and men and women, and Love and Fate according to the measure of my ability, telling the tale through the mouths of one, two, or more people. Then by the favour of God the tales are sold and money accrues to me that I may keep alive". (p.ix)

As Gobind retorts, that amounts to no more than "the work of the bazaar story-teller; but he speaks straight to men and women and does not write anything at all". (p.ix) Kipling's aim is to speak to his audience without prevarication, with an implicit trust in the value of fiction. He knows, as does Gobind, the human need for story: "it is in my heart that grown men are but as little children in the matter of tales, and the oldest tale is the most beloved". (pp.ix—x)

The actual transmission of the stories is by this stage more complicated. Kipling does not write at such a furious pace. In 'The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney' (pp.1—32) he explores in full the way that a story can be transmitted from several viewpoints while it is in progress. There is no reliance on a single narrator who can claim authority for the text, as the narrators in Plain Tales automatically did. The telling in Life's Handicap and the other volumes of the 1890s is more flexible and spontaneous. We now have constantly altering perspectives in the story, and can use these standpoints to judge one narrator's contribution against the next. We see things also in the knowledge of each narrator's character. A story is what is told, but it is

also, and crucially, the way it is told.

This makes Kipling's later stories much freer in form. There is no straightforward rush at time, and, indeed, no 'one' story. The story comes at us from all directions, and it maintains the air of oral transmission as a result. If we hear a story from several sources it has a kind of authenticity which could not be provided by the straightforward linear narrative. We 'hear' Kipling's stories over long periods of time and from differing sources. Events are reported by onlookers or participants who can come to the story fresh in the enthusiasm of having taken part in it, or at the distance of critical observation. The telling might savour the past or be in the peril of climax. A narrative might be very sure of its direction, but it can also surprise: it is essentially ironic.

The construction of 'The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney' shows Kipling shifting his narrative voices to cater for the tone of each episode in the story. The story begins with Kipling the author introducing the three soldiers to his English public, in case any reader has missed their first appearance in Plain Tales. His opening is impersonal and low-key. We are told briefly about army life in India, and about the individual characters of the three men. This episode gives way to a preamble leading to Mulvaney's meeting with the English swindler Dearsley. Mulvaney goes on an illegal shooting tour to hunt peacock. The narrative voice alters to the narrator, who knows the three soldiers, and who is actively involved in the story: the narrative becomes more personal as a result. Mulvaney returns to goad Learoyd into fighting Dearsley: their fellow soldiers are amazed to see the inseparable friends apparently arguing fiercely, and we do not know immediately why Mulvaney is acting out of character. This confusion draws us forward



in the narrative, and keeps us alert for the explanation. Mulvaney simply wants Learoyd to be aware of the great rewards which might be theirs if they fight Dearsley, but there is no longer the instantaneous explanation of motive which was a current and staple feature of the adventure story in the 1890s.

The tone of the narrative is personal, and consists mainly of present tense dialogue between the soldiers. The narrator balances this with his own analysis, so giving space to, and commentary on, the text. This distant perspective is needed to relay the full meaning of the disagreement, for the three men would be too close to the action to be able to comment on the shock of apparent disarray.

The story advances with Mulvaney's monologue which explains his adventure during the peacock shooting trip. It is reported by the narrator, with his own interjections, so that a dual perspective is maintained. Mulvaney's tale takes us in an unexpected direction, and the story as a whole is unrestrained by any obvious causal sequence. Mulvaney's narrative prepares us for the following sequence as well as describing the past events: a story is told within a story. Mulvaney came across an Englishman raffling a palanquin (a covered litter for one) to his coolie workmen: the money was extracted from the wages of the workers, and the winner of the palanquin always returned it because its size made it useless. Mulvaney sees to the bottom of this swindle and challenges Dearsley to fight for the ownership of the palanquin—he releases the coolies from their oppression and makes some money for himself if he wins.

The next narrative voice is particularly unexpected, and demonstrates Kipling's alertness to the variety of ways in which his story can be told. The narrator tells us that he has compounded several coolie

reports of the great fight into one coolie narrative. Now we see the English through Indian eyes, and can appreciate the fight the more because it is seen through the perceptions of uncomprehending observers. Our perspective allows us to enjoy the Indians' confusion at the strange English ritual, as well as laugh at the description for its own sake. The formal and carefully poised Indian account is more ironic because behind the poise is complete mystification: Kipling is aware of the potential of a scene almost instinctively. We see the ritual through Indian eyes, just as at the end of the story Mulvaney describes an Indian religious festival from his own uncomprehending cultural viewpoint. The coolie cannot interpret the Queensberry rules:

"The small man in the red coat [Ortheris] had possessed himself of Dearsley Sahib's watch. No, he did not steal that watch. He held it in his hand, and at certain seasons made outcry, and the twain ceased their combat, which was like the combat of young bulls in spring". (p.12)

The story continues with the narrator's acceptance of the palanquin which the soldiers have won by virtue of Learoyd's victory—and preparation is made for Mulvaney's next escapade. The direct speech of the men contrasts with a passage of highly ornamental descriptive prose about the palanquin. The story is held up for the purpose of verbal display. It continues by showing Mulvaney hoping to use his prize to gain great profit. Kipling has an unaffected joy as he listens to someone as locquacious as Mulvaney relishing the adventure of life. There is an air of enthusiastic suspense about the narrative. "'An' besides, will I let that sedan-chair rot on our hands?

Not I. 'Tis not every day a piece av pure joolry comes into the market. There's not a king widin these forty miles . . . wud not be glad to buy ut"''. (p.15)

Ortheris and the narrator continue the tale with their description of Mulvaney's disappearance. The story is settling into its stride, and anticipating Mulvaney's narrative with some zest. However, the story takes a surprising new turn away from that ultimate goal. The Colonel and adjutant discuss where Mulvaney might be, and seriously consider his effect on the army. The Colonel laughs at his roguery, but has nothing except praise for Mulvaney's skilful way with the recruits. The officers anticipate the end of the narrative by wondering what 'stupendous devilment' (p.19) the Irishman has got involved in. Otheris and the narrator are wondering too what has become of their friend, and they despondently walk the countryside to shoot porcupine.

They see Mulvaney appear before them dressed improbably in the inside lining of the palanquin, and joyfully reunite. Mulvaney is keen to tell the story of his adventure, and it is at this point that we finally reach 'the' story anticipated in the title. Mulvaney's monologue refers to events which are still fresh in the memory, and this suits the climax of the tale. Mulvaney wants to cherish every outrageous detail, and the roguish spirit is perfectly captured by the oral transmission. Mulvaney tells us how he returned to Dearsley, drunk, in the captured palanquin, to goad him further. Dearsley has his revenge by putting the stupefied soldier on to a train which takes him to the distant town of Benares. Here Mulvaney is proudly transported to the Temple of Prithi-Devi, where the astonished Indians think that he is the reincarnated Krishna. The actual story, when

we finally reach it, is no more than a boyish prank, and on its own would make a satisfactory 'Plain Tale'. But because the narrative is open to so many perspectives and interpretations it has a depth unrivalled in English short fiction in the 1890s. The tale which is told because of an embedded tale is one of Kipling's narrative trademarks. The frame to the story proper precedes and inspires it; but the narrative has to be earned before it can be told. Kipling is never content to let the story be told in a vacuum. Even in the most perfunctory of the Plain Tales he needed to introduce his story and thereby to prove it. The relationship between the frame and the story in his maturer work is inevitably more complex, and Kipling shows how he can write with control and a sure grasp of the perspectives offered by his narratives.

'On Greenhow Hill' (Life's Handicap, pp.62—83) needs its frame to be told to all. The reticent and melancholic soldier Learoyd has to be inspired by a special combination of circumstances before he will trust himself to narrative. The story could only happen once. Like all Kipling's best work, the tale carries with it that rare, self-contained inevitability. The narrative is precious because it depends on circumstance and coincidence in order to be told at all. After reading we are left somehow drained and lost because the story has left us, and we cannot recapture the reality of its telling. Our reading is attentive, and in itself, pathetic. Kipling never takes our involvement for granted, and he does not 'give away' his stories at the first moment of their telling. He wants us to feel that the story has its own special history.

'On Greenhow Hill' is told by Learoyd because a series of events remind him so deeply of home and a tragic love affair, that he has to

let words, and not just thoughts, express his experience. For all Mulvaney's jesting astonishment at Learoyd's impending narrative, there is unspoken respect for the catharsis which the Yorkshireman's narrative affords. It grants some peace to his soul, at least for the duration of the story. Story is as profound and as ephemeral a comfort as that. Mulvaney is alert to the novelty of his friend's unwarranted words. He asks Learoyd to "'bellow melojus to the moon. It takes an earthquake or a bullet graze to fetch aught out av you"'.  
(p.67)

The circumstance which makes the story possible (for it needs to be provoked) is ordinary enough. Kipling's art is sufficiently mature not to be motivated by crisis alone, in the way of so many short stories in the 1890s. A deserter is shooting at the English camp, disturbing the soldiers' sleep. The three soldiers, prompted by a subaltern's chance remark that if they want to get rid of the nuisance they ought to go and shoot the offender, leave early in the morning. They find a secluded spot on the hills where they wait for the deserter, and the chance for a clean shot at him. The countryside reminds Learoyd of his home, and in particular, Greenhow Hill. He is inspired by the memory of his beloved Yorkshire moors to tell the story of the girl he loved, and her tragic early death. At the end of his narrative the deserter appears, and Ortheris shoots him.

The frame has a firm but understated relationship with the story. The Indian hills provide the geographical stimulus for the story of Learoyd's girl 'Liza. The long wait for the deserter needs to be filled in with conversation to stop the soldiers from becoming bored, so both the time and the place are right. Learoyd is alone in feeling sympathy for the deserter. He has joined the army to forget 'Liza,

but the pain of her death is still with him. He feels for the Indian who may be going through the same anguish and expressing it by his cowardice: "'happen there was a lass tewed up wi' him too'". (p.83) Learoyd ends his own tragic story sympathising with the Indian, and even wishing for the peace of death. Learoyd has only his story to exorcise his grief, and he knows that it will always be with him. He has no real peace—he tells us that he has been forgetting 'Liza for every waking moment. The story articulates his pain, but it cannot dismiss or help the anguish: that is the pathos of its telling. Only the rifle-shot which rings out across the hill-side could end his misery.

A great many of the short stories written in the 1890s pay particular attention to the comfort of the reader. Unlike Kipling's, the conventional linear narrative constantly offers explanation—of plot, character or motive—to the reader. It must present a bare and lucid surface to the reader, avoid confusing complexity and advance to a satisfactory crisis. The author writes his story as if it were a well mapped-out plan: he knows exactly where the narrative is going, and he never dares to confuse the reader beyond the most inevitable surprise. This fiction is protective. Kipling has a more daring approach to his short fiction. He wants his art to live, to be in peril, and to develop from within itself: he wants us to read stories as if they were in the process of happening. Each story must be in doubt of its ending. We cannot read Kipling comfortably.

In Many Inventions (1893) we experience further discomfort because of Kipling's uncompromising themes and subjects. As the poem by Miriam Cohen, which introduced 'The Disturber of Traffic' (pp.1—21) intimates, our options are at risk, as they are for the characters in

the story:

A veil 'twixt us and Thee,  
 dread Lord,  
 A veil 'twixt us and Thee:  
 Lest we should hear too clear,  
 too clear,  
 And unto madness see! (p.1)

The poem takes the place of the narrator's commentary on the text; it alludes to, rather than firmly outlines, the forthcoming story. In fact the 'explanation' suggested in the poem compliments the reader on his careful scrutiny of the story. It offers a quiet belief in his intelligent participation, and reading skill. The relationship between the narrator of 'The Disturber of Traffic' and the lighthouse keeper who tells him the story is a metaphor for the relationship between Kipling and his readers. The two have, literally, to find out about each other and to grow in confidence so that the story might be told.

The narrator looks at Fenwick, the lighthouse keeper, with some circumspection. They have to spend the night in conversation, and at first approach this problem without much hope, 'each gauging the other's capacities for boring and being bored'. When Fenwick finds out that his companion is not a layman, and can be trusted with tales of the sea, he treats him with respect, and starts talking over the narrator's head, 'and became so amazingly technical that I was forced to beg him to explain every other sentence'. (p.4) The narrative has to find its own level before it can be told, and can only be trusted to the right and sympathetic audience. Kipling cannot write a story, or show how a story comes to be written, without taking it absolutely for granted that the story matters greatly.

Renwick's tale is about a man called Dowse, 'once an intimate friend of Fenwick, now a waterman at Portsmouth, believing that the

guilt of blood is on his head'. (p.5) The monologue keeps the sense of oral spontaneity which is confirmed by the change of the first narrator from teller to listener. As readers, we are now doing what the first narrator does by listening to the amazing events, prompting Fenwick with eager questions, and being involved in the story, however vicariously.

'The Disturber of Traffic' is told to us by several different narrative voices, each with a specific contribution to the multiplicity of the text. The primary source consists of Dowse's own reported words. Fenwick assures us of the fidelity of the narrative he has been trusted with: "he told me what I've told you, sir"'. (p.20) Fenwick's own grammar and diction give the narrative life and credibility outside the story which it tells. This narrative (Fenwick's report of Dowse's tale) is necessary to the full relay of the story, because it can incorporate that story whole: much of it is outside Dowse's comprehension. Dowse cannot take care of his story because of his madness; he can only be a part of it.

Fenwick's narrative emphasises both the events and the very personal manner of delivery. The metaphors and the adjectives are his. He understands why Dowse has gone mad, distressed by the streaks of water caused by the wakes of ships passing through the Flores strait, where Dowse is in charge of a small lighthouse. Fenwick looks at situations through Dowse's eyes, which marks his respect for his friend's narrative, and gives the fiction active responsibility. Fenwick's narrative is above all responsible to its source: it attends to the story and tries to find the perfect and sympathetic words. When Fenwick describes Dowse's arrival on the British survey ship which has come to clear the straits of Dowse's wreck-buoys, floated to keep



traffic away from the Wurlee light, he does so with a compassionate understanding of his companion's madness:

He says to the captain very slowly, "I be damned if I am mad", but all the time his eye was held like by the coils of rope on the belaying pins, and he followed those ropes up and up with his eye till he was quite lost and comfortable among the rigging, which ran criss-cross, and slope-ways, and up and down, and any way but straight along under his feet north and south. The deck-seams, they ran that way, and Dowse dare-sn't look at them. They was the same as the streaks of the water under the plank-ing of the lighthouse.(p.18)

Many Inventions (1893) includes many stories which reveal Kipling still <sup>S</sup><sub>L</sub>fascinated by the question of narrative responsibility, and of the genesis and character of narrative. "'The Finest Story in the World'" (pp.90—128) specifically approaches the problem of isolating the causes for, and the transmission of narrative. The narrator in "'The Finest Story in the World'" researches the cause of a particular tale. As with Kipling's best fiction, this is a story about a story.

Charlie Mears, a young London clerk, wants to be a literary man. He is friendly with the narrator, an established artist, who patiently listens to Charlie's aspirations and his poetical trial runs. One evening Charlie announces with great enthusiasm that he is going to write the finest story in the world. He has a notion "'that would make the most splendid story that was ever written'". The narrator listens to the story and remarks (though only to the understanding reader) that 'it was wondrous bad'. The narrator has confidence in

his young friend, however, and gets him to repeat the story, not as it is written down (for that would be 'art') but simply as a narrative "as it lies in your head":

Charlie told, and in the telling there was everything that his ignorance had so carefully prevented from escaping into the written word. I looked at him, wondering whether it were possible that he did not know the originality, the power of the notion that had come in his way? It was distinctly a Notion among notions. (p.92—93)

Here indeed is Kipling's perfect story: ironically enough, "The Finest Story in the World" does not reveal the themes or scope of that story. The fiction keeps the narrative prize from our grasp. We are left with a secondhand story, and feel dissatisfied in the same way as Charlie's mentor who realises that Charlie's own words have nothing to do with his wonderful idea: 'I heard him out to the end. It would be folly to allow his thought to remain in his own inept hands, when I could do so much with it. Not all that could be done indeed; but, oh so much!'. (p.93)

The respect and care of narrative—which is fundamental to Kipling's own art—is given ironic treatment in this story. Charlie sells his great idea to the narrator for five pounds so that he can buy volumes of poetry to stimulate his artistic development, whilst the narrator can tend to the special needs of Charlie's notion. It transpires that Charlie's ideas are not in fact his own; they are re-incarnated. Charlie talks about arcane matters with a degree of authority that would be considered remarkable in wiser and older men.

Charlie feels that he has the best of the bargain with the narrator, and spends his money on volumes of poetry which fill his head

with enchanting ideas. He is prone to quoting the blander lines of Longfellow, which annoys the narrator since it holds up the telling of the finest story in the world. The narrative has enough 'life' of its own to come to a halt at this point. No other author of short fiction in the 1890s has the imaginative audacity to reject the need for constant advance of plot and the regular dissemination of information: here is a story which will not yield so readily to the inquiry of the reader, or, for that matter, of the impatient narrator. When the tale is as special as Charlie's, this delay is infuriating. Eventually he tells the story of a Greek galley slave, since, in a previous incarnation, that had been Charlie's lot. His story recounts ancient deeds in modern vocabulary: the fiction is genuine and remarkable fact, and describes things 'where never man had been permitted to look with full knowledge since Time began'. (p.100) Kipling's final, ironic, point, is that Charlie's story can never be written except at second or third hand. We have to depend on the narrator's account of the precious and ancient tale, and his ability to make the most of the story. The responsibility of the short-story author is a heavy one, and we can only be satisfied with an abstract account of the genesis of the finest story in the world.

Kipling's stories for children are written with seemingly less attention to the theory of fiction and the art of constructing the narrative. The simple pleasure involved in telling an entertaining narrative is enough. The Jungle Book (1894) and The Second Jungle Book (1895) demonstrate how Kipling can write with unaffected confidence. He is at his best when he creates an imaginative world with special rules and characters, and writes stories relating to the unique fictional environment. The stories about the three soldiers had that

kind of highly localised world. Stalky & Co. (1899) does the same for three boys in the regimented world of the boarding school. The Mowgli stories in the Jungle Books provide a lusher and more dramatic setting, but there is still a clear sense of self-contained environment with its own strict Jungle Law. The clear identity which is at work in each of Kipling's 'world-groups' derives from the sense or order which exists between the characters. Each person or animal knows his place: the privates respect the officers, the school boys their Headmaster, the jungle creatures Mowgli.

Kipling always relished the chance in his stories of the 1890s to construct fictional environments with individual codes and characters. To that extent his stories are fantasies, even though their settings—regimental quarters, school studies, a wolves' lair—are down to earth and so obviously realistic. Kipling describes environments with such clarity that we feel we could walk straight into each setting. In the Jungle Books we learn about the geographical and moral terrain of the jungle over a long series of stories: our education proceeds along with Mowgli's, without undue haste. For Kipling always has stories to tell, and we must be content at times simply to 'guess at all the wonderful life that Mowgli led among the wolves, because if it were written out it would fill ever so many books'.<sup>15</sup>

The Jungle Books may not seem on the surface to be much concerned with advancing narrative technique. Kipling is far from careless with his art, however. The principal aims to entertain the reader and to tell a good story are as close to Kipling's heart as to any other author of popular short fiction in the 1890s. These aims

15. 'Mowgli's Brothers', The Jungle Book (London and New York, 1894), p.15.

do not make Kipling write out of allegiance to narrative habit. There is great artistic authority beneath the surface of his stories, and the art never intrudes on the narrative. 'The King's Ankus' (The Second Jungle Book, pp.117—39), like other Kipling adventure stories, carries its explanation very clearly on the surface. The text does not demand painstaking attention to its meaning. The story moves at an exciting pace, as the characters search for answers to solve the mystery of the power of the Ankus. We find this search compelling, and the drive and energy of the plot is deeply satisfying. But there is considered planning behind the breathtaking speed, and the story has a well organised structure. 'The King's Ankus' divides into three clear sections, each with its own subject-matter and characters. Mowgli provides continuity and the focus of the tale by being present throughout.

The beginning of the story is quiet and peaceful. Mowgli visits Kaa, the snake, and congratulates him on his new skin. There is no sense of contingency about the start of the tale, and the setting, a jungle lakeside, is in itself soothing. The adventure does not confront the reader in the traditional manner: it is found rather than sought. Kaa and Mowgli have a friendly wrestling match, which Kaa wins, as he always does. This scene prepares us for the snake fight in the second section, which is in real earnest, and so the middle part of the story is linked to the first: structure does not impede our reading, it informs it. The scenes have continuity beyond the alteration of mood and action.

The middle section is set mainly in a dark vault underneath the deserted city of Cold Lairs. The atmosphere is one of danger and threatening uncertainty. Kaa, who has told Mowgli about the treasure

of the Cold Lairs, joins his companion in the underground vault which they find guarded by a huge ancient cobra. Mowgli finds an elephant's ankus, and wants to keep it; the cobra says that no man has ever escaped with treasure from the vault, and challenges Mowgli to fight. Kaa and Mowgli have no difficulty in overcoming the cobra, whose poison glands have dried up. The cobra cannot offer a physical threat, but he can pose a more subtle theoretical one. He warns of the power of the ankus, which is unseen but deadly. The threat provides the motivation for the third and final section of the story, which shows Mowgli coming to terms with this confusing riddle:

"There is enough in that thing  
to kill the men of all my city.  
Not long wilt thou hold it, Jungle  
Man, nor he who takes it from  
thee. They will kill, and kill,  
and kill for its sake! My strength  
is dried up, but the ankus  
will do my work. It is Death!  
It is Death! It is Death!  
(p.131)

The warning proves all too correct. Mowgli and Kaa leave with the ankus. But the boy tires of its weight and throws it away. It is discovered by a passing man. Mowgli and Bagheera follow his trail and discover his murdered body; six men are to die before the ankus is recovered and returned to the cobra. The jungle setting, with Mowgli and Bagheera following the trail, shows them in their natural element, where it is only fitting for them to learn the power of the ankus. They are able to educate themselves by careful observation and understand the cobra's riddle. When the meaning is clear Mowgli has the narrative right to return the ankus to the cobra. Each part of the story has grown naturally from its predecessor.

This sense of narrative flow, where the story follows its own course, is alive throughout The Day's Work (1898). Kipling incor-

porates far more material than is customary for the conventional short story in the 1890s. The story does not have to cling to plot. A mature Kipling story of the 1890s like 'The Bridge-Builders' (pp. 1—44) has no restraining limitation of length; it is not self-consciously brief. Kipling is confident enough in his art to introduce minor characters, to relish description for its own sake or to allow sub-plots to feature in the story. 'The Bridge-Builders' has a plot dedicated to crisis and urgency in the most traditional manner, but Kipling's technique allows for a much greater breadth and perspective.

The story is mainly concerned with the work of the engineer Findlayson, who is building the Kashi Bridge over the Ganges: it is his greatest work, and the project is nearing completion. The river floods long before expected, and nearly destroys the bridge. Findlayson takes opium at the moment of highest tension, and his stimulated senses enable him to see, but not to remember, a conference of the animal gods. The gods discuss man's place on earth, and his audacity in trying to curb the forces of nature (for which they are responsible) by machinery. Findlayson comes out of his trance to find that the bridge has survived the flood.

The short story obviously has to carry far more information than usual. Even a single sentence is involved in an astonishing array of emotions and events. The builders have to work long and hard before the Kashi Bridge even nears completion:

It was a long, long reverie,  
and it covered storm, sudden  
freshets, death in every manner  
and shape, violent and awful  
rage against red tape half  
frenzying a mind that knows  
it should be busy on other  
things; drought, sanitation,  
finance; birth, wedding, burial,

and riot in the village  
of twenty warring castes;  
argument, expostulation,  
persuasion, and the blank  
despair that a man goes to  
bed upon, thankful that his  
rifle is all in pieces in  
the gun-case. (p.5)

Kipling's interest in dream and fable gives variety to this story. Gods see humans in 'The Bridge-Builders', and in one imaginative leap the life of the story is observed in an entirely new and unexpected perspective. We can look at events from the 'outside': the story is clearly aware of all perspectives, and does not serve a single narrative point. The story thrives on the stock issues of conflict and peril, but for Kipling these alone are never enough. There is more than can be said even in an adventure story which works to the conventional narrative ploy of a race against time.

At precisely the right psychological moment in the narrative, when all seems lost, Kipling changes the tone completely, and has the confidence to introduce the debate of the gods. Our reading, carried forward like the rush of the floodwater, has to pause abruptly. We are kept in suspense, still unsure of the bridge's fate. The story has then enough time to stop, so that stock can be taken of the human toil. Activity alone is insufficient for the story as it is for the gods, who complain that man's glorification of his toil keeps him from observing their role in events.

Many of Kipling's stories in the late 1890s find the correspondence between the worlds of dream and reality indispensable. The commentary which dream makes on the real matters as much to the characters in the tales as it does to Kipling. His fiction increasingly calls for privacy. Kipling's stories present highly-organised worlds, which are precious and self-contained. The sense of self-sufficiency in



each story is emphasised by the major theme of education which dominates the tales of the late 1890s. 'The Ship that Found Herself' (The Day's Work, pp.73—95) for example, is a fable about the thousands of parts of a ship learning to work together in harmony. The world of this story is specialised to the point of being recondite, with its highly technical terms and manoeuvres. Whatever the frustration caused by such scientific bravado, a sense of privacy in the story persists. One voice in the story—the steam—understands and guides the technical procedures so that the ship's parts learn to work in unison. Theory and practise learn to become unified as the component parts are educated to the general truth that give and take, rather than individual rigidity over actions, are the best ways to achieve harmonious working order. Thus the fable reaches beyond its plot (the story of a ship crossing the Atlantic) and becomes an allegory of Socialism, demonstrating the organisation of effort for the common good.

Kipling was himself aware of the profound comfort of story from an early age. He wants us to feel safe as we read, and he wants us to lose ourselves in the intensely private worlds of each narrative. There is something defensive about this attitude, for all the strength and purpose of the writing. But then, Kipling grew up with the conditioning attitude that fiction had a primary protective role. As a child in Southend, his guardian and her son made life miserable for him. Kipling's defence was in fiction: 'I have known a certain amount of bullying, but this was calculated torture—religious as well as scientific. Yet it made me give attention to the lies I soon found it necessary to tell: and this, I presume, is the foundation of literary effort'. (Something of Myself, p.6)

'The Brushwood Boy' (The Day's Work, pp.338 —81) cherishes its own private world. The story is highly sentimental. Georgie lives a safe and cossetted upper-middle-class life. He is adored at home, can do no wrong at boarding school, where he is head-boy and a personal friend of the Head. He wins universal praise for his courage at Sandhurst and in India with his regiment, and he gains the loyalty and love of his men. He returns home for a year's leave as the youngest Major in the army, and re-enters the idyllic family setting. But there is a dark side to Georgie's life. Throughout his childhood and in adult life Georgie has been troubled and confused by his dreams. These invariably start at the Brushwood pile. The dreams are topographically realistic, with well known and documented landscapes, and they concern either ecstatic meetings with the Brushwood girl, or nightmare encounters during 'Policeman Day'. In waking life, Georgie is introduced to a girl at home who sings a song which Georgie has heard in his dreams. She is the Brushwood girl; they have been waiting for each other all their lives.

Dream and reality finally become one. Georgie's dreamworld has always seemed more 'real' to him than his life at school and in the army. He has never been aware of how perfect that life has seemed to other people, and earthly success seems hollow by comparison with the dream world. Kipling narrates the story in the third-person so that we can readily perceive the perspective of the outsider's view. The narration affords insights into general circumstances, and takes in reactions from other people which we could not have if the story were told by Georgie himself.

The story searches for a perfect conclusion: happiness is only confirmed by the union of dream and reality. There is a feeling of

inevitability about the meeting of Georgie and the Brushwood girl. There is no doubt in the narrative; the impossible and the unthinkable are perfectly possible. Moreover, it seems quite natural that Georgie should find the girl even though he does not realise how much he has needed her. We lose ourselves in this perfect and satisfying narrative, in the way that Georgie loses, and finds himself, in his dream world.

Fiction is reality for the space of our reading. The world of imagination is also that of tangible reality. That is why it is so difficult to leave a Kipling story. We do not want to leave this real fantasy. We do not want Mowgli to return to the human world, even though we know that he must. We do not want the three soldiers to stop their tale-provoking tales. We do not want the Brushwood boy to escape at that perfect moment when dream and reality become one. But then, Kipling asks, what does art matter, and what do we lack, that makes fiction so important? What does story mean that it is so profoundly important? As Leo modestly remarks in the fable 'The Children of the Zodiac' (Many Inventions, pp.342—63) all that matters is that our stories keep on getting told. They will keep us, for a moment, from life. That is the joy and the despair of the artist:

"What does it matter", Leo would say, "so long as the songs make them a little happier?" And they would go down the road and begin again on the old old refrain: that whatever came or did not come the children of men must not be afraid. (p.356)

## CONCLUSION

Lionel Johnson's sensitive and enthusiastic reviews of books by new short story authors such as Crackanthorpe and Kipling helped many readers to notice the considerable progress made by the genre in the early years of the decade. Johnson perceived that short fiction could make an immediate but lasting effect by its controlled brevity. His maxim 'life is short, so stuff it full: art is long, so cut it short', held much appeal for new authors in the 1890s.<sup>1</sup> These authors commonly held that traditional short fiction, printed in well-established periodicals, no longer made a significant literary impact. They intended to prove that short fiction could be both imaginatively alive and morally stimulating. New short stories of the 1890s thrive, as a result, by virtue of the continual and wide-ranging challenge they offer to accepted formulas of writing.

Magazine convention, for example, held that stories had to be of a standard length: against this, James created a new 'long short story' with its own aesthetic principles; other authors went to the opposite extreme of writing very brief, impressionistic studies. The 'old theory of narration' with its stress on regular linear flow was challenged consistently too.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the first move of many new short story authors was to reject logical plot. Dowson, Wedmore and many others expressed psychological drama in fragmentary, sometimes unconnected paragraphs, suggesting that the wanderings of the human mind could never be explained by mere causal sequence.

According to tradition, stories were meant to be complete in themselves—Poe had decreed that there should be 'totality' in all

1. Review of Life's Handicap by Rudyard Kipling, Academy, 40 (October 1891), 328.
2. James Ashcroft Noble, review of Episodes by G.S. Street, Academy, 47 (March 1895), 212.

short fiction. Wedmore countered this belief by considering the volume of stories as a whole, and not as a series of discrete tales. James's tales of literary life in the 1890s may be read as a 'story-sequence', and Egerton's feminist works similarly express different aspects of one, central dominating issue. Short stories could, in this way, rely on the collective impact of an argument or theme, and not depend entirely on the unique 'proof' of any one story. The increasingly popular practise of publishing volumes of short stories in the 1890s therefore made a distinctive artistic contribution. A volume of stories by one of these new authors was intended to be read for its cumulative effect. The whole book, rather than the individual story, reached a point of crisis and intense debate, forcing the reader to new insights, and, perhaps, new moral decisions. Wedmore's presentation of the volume of interdependent tales was one of the most exciting achievements of short story writing in the 1890s; his deliberate disregard of narrative convention was in itself an appropriate means of stimulating the reader's inquiry and interest in short fiction. Many new authors realised the potential of this kind of literary 'advertising', and adopted extreme, even outrageous, methods and dictions to highlight the genre. The precious beauty of an aesthetic story, or the blunt objectivity of a realistic tale share a general purpose.

New means of expression were particularly important to these authors who certainly found the traditional subject-matter of nineteenth-century short fiction inadequate. They did not repeat the staple adventure-romance format, or the popular humorous tale, though it must be remembered that both types of fiction were still published in large quantities in established magazines throughout the 1890s. The new story was mainly dependent on the host of short-lived avant-garde periodicals

which brought the best new work to a small sympathetic audience. New authors believed that by challenging accepted ideas they could best develop the range of the genre, and give it both authority and self-respect. Adventure stories of the old school, stressing external effort and physical courage and displaying clearly defined moral motives were rejected in favour of tales highlighting mental crisis, with complicated and confused motives.

Realistic subject-matter in short fiction made the most dramatic contribution to the new story. Never before, in English short fiction, had there been so much concentration on misery and want. Close scrutiny on the lives of the very poor and oppressed led authors to excite the compassion of their readers. They did this by concentrating on a new, objective prose style; ironic diction was used to activate the comic stories of the 1890s. New authors preferred a variety of brittle wit, and stories by authors like Ella D'Arcy, Vernon Lee and M<sup>é</sup>nie Muriel Dowie, which detailed the comedy of middle-class manners, were especially popular. Here, irony was used to displace the methods of caricature and farce, which were dominating influences in the traditional comic story.

So far it might be thought that new authors only experimented with the genre using this fundamental motive of challenging and opposing all accepted ideas. Yet it is clear that radical changes were made in the knowledge and use of traditional methods. The 'new' short fiction of the 1890s works most successfully when there is a fusion of old and avant-garde writing styles. As we have seen, studies of neurotic mental tension, which would have shocked the short story reader of the 1880s (and which did shock many in the 1890s) have an affinity with the old melodramas. Egerton's radical themes use conventional plots to

achieve their effect, so that the reader coming to feminist arguments for the first time would not be alienated by uncompromising method. Many of Crackanthorpe's stories have a simple linear scheme, and a crisis in the conventional manner, yet his themes and settings were quite new to short fiction in England. The best new authors set out to experiment but not for the sake of novelty. If there was to be any literary impact then they must not risk losing readers; a philistine public, which might at least be educated, was better than no public at all.

Challenge, compromise, and a certain arrogance, then, mark the work of the best short story authors in the 1890s. Theoretical ideas make a significant impact only when the role of the reader is being discussed. Here, both authors and critics (who were often one and the same people), agreed that a 'new' reader had to be found in order to appreciate fully the new story. James, Wedmore, Crackanthorpe and Harland all wrote persuasively about the effects of traditional short fiction. They believed that fiction which pandered to the reader's taste could never rise above a poor standard, because the reader's imagination was not fully engaged. The reader took it for granted that crises would be resolved, and order happily restored.

New authors rejected these attitudes, often angrily. Their rejection led to discussion of the special relationship between author, text and reader. New authors demanded that readers pay scrupulous attention to their short fiction. If a reader worked hard at the story, he could arrive at a profound new understanding of art and personal relationships. Short story authors stressed the excitement and profit to be gained by such mutual responsibility. Barry Pain, author of many popular comic stories in the decade, summarised the arguments for the

creation of an intelligent reading group:

Every work of every kind of art is a collaboration between the one who can create and the others who can appreciate. Most intensely does the writer of the short story, if he is indeed an artist, need a collaborator of more than ordinary merit. Otherwise his fineness will be lost and his strength will be spent vainly . . . The artist of the short story needs a reader who is impressible, emotional, swiftly intelligent; to such a reader he will be for ever in debt. 3

The best short fiction in the 1890s is literature of the highest possible quality. The efforts of new authors to raise the standard of the genre by developing its scope and style were fully justified; a literary heritage of significant, if still neglected works of art, is available to the modern reader. Indeed, twentieth-century short fiction owes much to the skill, foresight and concentration of a relatively small number of authors, even though the impact made by these new authors seems to be short-lived. The demise of the Yellow Book in 1897 meant that there was little to challenge the stories appearing in traditional magazines: the work here was relatively untouched by avant-garde developments. Crackanthorpe's death, Wedmore's characteristic, if disappointing, decision not to write any more short stories after Orgeas and Miradou, and Egerton's sad decline—she carried on writing stories which were no more than poor imitations of Olive Schreiner's allegories—meant that three of the most important innovative authors made no further significant contribution in the twentieth century.

The two authors who consistently wrote great short stories carried

3. The Short Story, The Art and Craft of Letters [1916], p.16.



on doing so well into the new century. James's stories of the 1890s have always been highly regarded. Even if they have not been specifically studied in the context of the decade, their impact will always be profound, for their sheer literary power is self-evident. The impact of 'The Turn of the Screw', the greatest story of all, is strongest if it is read as the ultimate attack on a whole tradition of reading and writing short fiction in the decade. So many of James's stories deal with the basic issues of these creative activities that 'The Turn of the Screw' achieves almost symbolic contextual meaning. It is the finest story of complaint, and suggests the difficulties faced by all new writers as they set out to develop short fiction.

Kipling's achievement is, in a sense, diametrically opposed to James's. Where James perceives crisis and difficulty, Kipling sees a clear way. His writing is confident, utterly untouched by theoretical concerns, and invariably entertaining rather than polemical. Other authors experiment self-consciously in the 1890s: Kipling does so because that is his natural method of writing. He refuses to write in any one style, or about any one group of characters. Invention came naturally to Kipling, and the sheer quality of his fertile imagination led to the production of a dauntingly large number of fine short stories.

The reputation of the English short story in the 1890s rests, today, on the work of a handful of authors. Their stories are generally noted because they represent an example of a 'school' of writing, such as realism; or because they express contemporary social and historical ideas such as feminism. From this survey of short fiction in the 1890s it emerges that authors only worked in very loose collaboration, and had no concept of a single group or 'movement'. What united them was the aim to invest moral authority and literary quality

into what they considered to be a neglected and abused genre. The all too brief resurgence of interest in short fiction during the 1890s helped many authors, readers and critics to revalue the genre, and actively to develop its potential.

Our task today is also one of revaluation. Current notice of the short fiction of this period can, and must, be firmly based on appreciation of literary skill and effort, and acknowledgement should be made to the high literary standards achieved during these creative years. There can be no more valuable reward than the pleasure of reading great works of literature. The English short story of the 1890s, at its best, offers such a profound experience.

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