

Short Story Theories

1. Edgar Allan Poe

Aus "[Second Review of:]Twice-Told Tales. By Nathaniel Hawthorne ..."

We need only here say, upon this topic, that, in almost all classes of composition, the unity of effect or impression is a point of the greatest importance. It is clear, moreover, that this unity cannot be thoroughly preserved in productions whose perusal cannot be completed at one sitting. We may continue the reading of a prose composition, from the very nature of prose itself, much longer than we can persevere, to any good purpose, in the perusal of a poem. This latter, if truly fulfilling the demands of the poetic sentiment, induces an exaltation of the soul which cannot be long sustained. All high excitements are necessarily transient. Thus a long poem is a paradox. And, without unity of impression, the deepest effects cannot be brought about. Epics were the offspring of an imperfect sense of Art, and their reign is no more. A poem too brief may produce a vivid, but never an intense or enduring impression. Without a certain continuity of effort - without a certain duration or repetition of purpose - the soul is never deeply moved ... Extreme brevity will degenerate into epigrammatism; but the sin of extreme length is even more unpardonable.

2. H. E. Bates

Aus "The Modern Short Story. A Critical Survey" (London, 1941).

In its various stages of development the short story has frequently been compared with some other literary form, sometimes with some artistic form outside literature. It is thus declared to have affinities with the drama; with the narrative ballad; with the lyric and the sonnet. In the last thirty years it has shown itself, as in fact much other writing has, to be pictorial rather than dramatic, to be more closely allied to painting and the cinema than to the stage. Mr A. E. Coppard has long cherished the theory that short story and film are expressions of the same art, the art of telling a story by a series of subtly implied gestures, swift shots, moments of suggestion, an art in which elaboration and above all explanation are superfluous and tedious. ...

3. Brander Matthews

Aus "The Philosophy of the Short-Story" (London, 1888).

A true short story is something other and something more than a mere story which is short.... In a far more exact and precise use of the word, a short story has unity as a novel cannot have it. Often, it may be noted by the way, the short story fulfils the three false unities of the French classic drama: it shows one action in one place on one day. A short story deals with a single character, a single event, a single emotion, or the series of emotions called forth by a single situation. Poe's paradox that a poem cannot greatly exceed a hundred lines in length under penalty of ceasing to be one poem and breaking into a string of poems, may serve to suggest the precise difference between the short story and the novel. The short story is the single effect, complete and self-contained, while the novel is of necessity broken into a series of episodes. Thus the short story has, what the novel cannot have, the effect of "totality," as Poe called it, the unity of impression. The short story is not only not a chapter out of a novel, or an incident or an episode extracted from a longer tale, but at its best it impresses the reader with the belief that it would be spoiled if it were made larger or if it were incorporated into a more elaborate work. The difference in spirit and in form between the lyric and the epic is scarcely greater than the difference between the short story and the novel ...

As a short story need not be a love story, it is of no consequence at all whether they marry or die; but a short story in which nothing happens is at all an absolute impossibility.

- **What are characteristic aspects of the short story as stated in these theories?**
- **What is the difference between the short story and other literary genres?**
- **Which other genre is compared to short stories? Can you imagine why?**