Part 1

A Brief History of the British and Irish Short Story

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It is a widely accepted argument – and one that students of literature should, therefore, beware of – that the modern British short story, and even the British short story *tout court*, dates from around 1880. For example, Clare Hanson writes of her important study of short fiction: "The year 1880 has been chosen as a convenient opening date for this study because it marks a point when the short story began to flower in England" (1985: 8). Valerie Shaw also sees the last two decades of the nineteenth century as being crucial for the development of the short story in Britain. "Only towards the end of the nineteenth century," she writes, "when in fact all branches of literature and the arts were becoming acutely self-conscious, did people begin to acknowledge that short fiction might be shaped according to its own principles" (Shaw 1983: 3). The classic statement of this position is that of Dean Baldwin in his influential essay "The Tardy Evolution of the British Short Story" (1993). He puts it thus:

> One of the more curious anomalies of literary history is why the short story was so late to blossom in Britain. By the 1840s the genre was already established in America, and within two decades it had taken root in Germany, Russia, and France . . . [The] modern short story did not achieve prominence in Britain till the 1880s, even though Britain would appear especially likely to develop the genre, since during the period of the story's "invention" . . . Britain was world leader in the writing and dissemination of fiction.
>
> (Baldwin 1993: 23)

The British and Irish Short Story Handbook, First Edition. David Malcolm.
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In his essay, Baldwin argues that a late development of short fiction in Britain can be attributed largely to "literary economics" (23). He points to the mass production of newspapers and magazines in nineteenth-century Britain. By the 1830s, there were titles with large circulations catering for a wide range of readerships. These journals would seem to offer perfect outlets for short fiction. However, Baldwin insists that the short story brought little "financial gain or public fame" to authors in this period (27). The novel's prestige within the literary system of nineteenth-century England meant that it was the form of choice (or of demand) for writers of fiction. The short story had little status (it was a type of fiction associated, if anything, with cheap publications for the semi-educated), and, indeed, made little money for writers. Baldwin contrasts this situation with that of American writers for whom the short story was profitable. There were outlets for short stories in the USA, and such was the standing of the British novel in the US market, that American writers were forced to turn to the shorter form. The 1870s were a watershed in Britain. Influences from the USA, including the personal influence of Henry James and American theorizing about short fiction (Brander Matthews's developments, in the 1880s, of Poe's ideas about the short story), changed the literary interests of a generation of British writers. Baldwin's argument is a powerful one.

Yet there had been short fictional narratives in British literature for centuries before the 1880s. Barbara Korte sets out a full history of early-modern and eighteenth-century short prose narratives. These include jest books, rogue literature, essays and character sketches, oriental tales, sentimental stories, and moral treatises. Authors of note range from Robert Greene, William Painter, Aphra Behn, and Daniel Defoe, to Richard Steele, Thomas Addison, and Samuel Johnson (Korte 2003: 35–62). In the nineteenth century, before the1880s, many important writers tried their hands at short fiction. Ivan Reid describes the short story as *the* Romantic form (Reid 1977: 28), and the Gothic tale is a central Romantic prose genre that lasts throughout the nineteenth century. A role call of nineteenth-century British authors who wrote short stories is impressive: John Galt, Elizabeth Gaskell, Thackeray, Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Trollope, and George Eliot (Fowler 1987: 302–310). But, finally, the short story does not appear to have been very important for them. Harold Orel's study of the Victorian short story is a particularly interesting and nuanced discussion of pre-1880 British short fiction. His argument is set out clearly in the introduction to his book.

> The Victorian Age, a richly productive literary period, is notable for (among other things) its nurturing of the short story. The genre had been ill-defined in earlier centuries, and for much of the nineteenth century attracted little critical attention as a new and increasingly popular reading diversion. Many Victorian

> authors regarded it with suspicion, as a diversion from more profitable novels and plays; even when prospering periodicals paid them decent wages for short stories that pleased readers, authors usually neglected to collect them and reprint them in hard covers.
>
> (Orel 1986: ix)

In detailed discussions of pre-1880 writers of short stories, Orel points to the low place those texts occupied and occupy in their *œuvre*. For example, with regard to Dickens, he writes: "His short stories . . . were evidently by-products, and on occasions only filler materials" (64). Of Trollope, he notes: "Trollope, like Dickens, earned his bread and butter from his novels, and thought his short stories commercially viable, but on the whole marginal material for the making of a reputation" (79). An essay in *Fraser's Magazine* from 1856 summed up the situation thus: "The English . . . will have nothing to do with a story unless it is in three volumes" (qtd. in Harris 1979: 91).

All this changed in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Many factors were involved. There was a relatively large urban literate population eager for inexpensive literate entertainment. Journals and magazines were set up to cater to this market (Newnes's *Tit-Bits* and *The Strand Magazine*, for example). In addition, avant-garde magazines like *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy* were aimed at a higher-class, bohemian audience. The three-decker novel, for literary and economic reasons, had run out of steam and become *passé*. Writers simply wanted to do something new. The *fin-de-siècle* was a period of expanding intellectual, aesthetic, political and moral horizons. A new form substantially untainted by the past could flourish then, especially among writers who, like Stevenson and Crackanthorpe, had read their short-fiction-writing American or French predecessors and contemporaries. (For fuller discussions of these issues, see: Böker 2005: 32–34; Hunter 2007: 6–7; Orel 1986: 184–192.) At the end of the nineteenth century, H. G. Wells remarked, "short stories broke out everywhere" (qtd. in Hanson 1985: 34), and became, according to Henry James, "an object of almost extravagant dissertation" (qtd. in Shaw 1983: 3). That interest is scarcely surprising, given the number and quality of the writers working in the form: Stevenson, Kipling, Conrad, James, Gissing, Wells, Conan Doyle, M. R. James, Ernest Dowson, Hubert Crackanthorpe, Ella D'Arcy, George Egerton, and Wilde. Writers also reflected on what they were doing with short fiction, in a way that no earlier British writer did. James (an American, but working very substantially within a British literary world) is particularly important in this respect (Hunter 2007: 2, 7).

The rapid development of the short story in Britain in the space of a decade can be illustrated by the sophistication, complexity, and sheer vivid bravura

of a text by Rudyard Kipling, "The Mark of the Beast" (published first in Britain in *Life's Handicap: Being Stories of Mine Own People* [1891]). A chilling supernatural story, and a complex story of imperial adventure (both major genres of the period), its action is laid in North India "[s]ome years" prior to the time of narration. On New Year's Eve, British soldiers, planters, and other official and civilian representatives of the Empire, all men, gather at the "club," for a riotous drunken evening of racial and male solidarity. One of their number, a planter called Fleete, on his way home with the narrator, and Strickland, a policeman, desecrates the temple of the Monkey-god Hanuman. The outraged crowd that gathers lets the British go, but only after a leper has touched Fleete on the chest. As the rest of the day progresses, it becomes clear that Fleete has been bewitched by the leper and is turning into a beast. The narrator and Strickland capture the leper and, it is implied, torture him into releasing Fleete from the curse.

The narrator of the text is a figure who recurs in many Kipling stories of this period, a knowledgeable and experienced European, who has excellent connections within the world of British India. The principal character is Strickland, a figure who also recurs in Kipling short stories, a shrewd and also very knowledgeable British colonial police officer. The characters are divided clearly into certain groups. The most obvious division is racial. The men at the club (servants are not mentioned) are all British; they are surrounded by a world of Indians. Indeed, the reader is informed that for many of the British characters, the New Year's Eve festivities are so important because of the racial isolation of the rest of their lives. Characters are also divided into those who know and do not know (a very common division in Kipling's fiction). Strickland "knows as much of natives of India as is good for any man"; the narrator, too, knows a great deal, both about the British in India, and about the wider world, of Hanuman, of lepers, and of horses. Fleete knows nothing of India. He ends up knowing nothing of the plight he has fallen into and from which Strickland and the narrator have saved him. The characters are further divided into the civilized and the not civilized. The leper from the Indian world is scarcely human; he has no face and makes a "noise exactly like the mewing of an otter"; he turns Fleete into an animal that grubs in Strickland's garden and howls like a wolf; he circles the policeman's house, an embodiment of subhuman terror. Against that is set, largely by implication, a British world of doctors, policemen, soldiers, and tea-planters – the inside of Strickland's house. The division is, indeed, clearly marked by spatial contrast: the club and Strickland's house as opposed to the city, the temple, and even Strickland's garden; relative safety as opposed to danger for the unwary or unlucky. But the division of civilized and uncivilized is far from clear by the end of the text. Fleete pollutes Hanuman's temple; one of the priests speaks

perfect English; Strickland and the narrator behave with disturbing cruelty to the leper (the narrative's elision here draws attention to their violence).

"The Mark of the Beast" is a skillfully organized tale of supernatural horror. The leper is a truly frightening figure, an emanation from a sinister orientalist nightmare. The text is also a complex story of imperial adventure, both embodying the genre's conventions and querying them. The life of the British in India and the Indian city that surrounds them is captured in economical flashes of detail. Racial lines are clearly drawn, and simultaneously blurred, for the story is, further, a reflection (like other texts in *Life's Handicap*) on the dangers for the British of coming too close to India. The motif of racial and cultural fear, however, is balanced by a complexity, whereby Fleete does behave abominably and his saviors behave worse, and know that they do. It is in part a revisionist recension of the genre to which it partly belongs.

The fin-de-siècle also brought a kind of short story that was to become very important in the twentieth century, the scientific romance that evolved into science fiction by the 1930s. H. G. Wells is most associated with this genre, and "The Star" is a representative example (first published in *Graphic* in 1897, and published in book form in *Tales of Space and Time* [1899]). It is an apocalyptic story. A "vast mass of matter . . . bulky, heavy, rushing without warning out of the black mystery of the sky into the radiance of the sun" collides with the planet Neptune. The two "locked in a fiery embrace" draw nearer and nearer the earth, causing cataclysmic earthquakes, floods, tidal waves, the melting of snows and ice, bringing terrible destruction and loss of life. After some days, the new body passes by the earth, and, cautiously, after the catastrophe a new life starts. The story is made credible by traditional verisimilitude devices: the mention of authorities, the figure of the scientist and mathematician, the initially detailed time line.

The story offers different perspectives on the new "star": that of scientists and astronomers, people in the street, women in a dancehall, a schoolboy, tramps, African lovers, a great mathematician, the crowds and masses of the endangered and dying. The story concludes with the point of view of Martian astronomers, for whom the cataclysm is, in fact, minor. It offers its readers the thrill and horror of the apocalypse, stressing the fragility and triviality of human life and civilization in the vast indifference of space and the almost equally vast indifference of another species. Suddenly, our world is seen from a fresh perspective and the old is swept away by a brilliant and deadly new phenomenon. However, the text also draws attention to its own fictive and textual status in a sophisticated manner. The perspective of the Martians is quite unexplained. How does the narrator obtain their point of view? Thus, the story advertises its own imaginative quality. This is augmented

by the highly self-advertising syntax of the whole piece. Biblical sentences and lists make it apparent that the story is a rhetorical performance, an elaborate and creative game. For a moment, the reader is to imagine a new world made by art.

The range of fin-de-siècle short fiction was considerable. By the late 1890s, the reader could also encounter a short story like Ella D'Arcy's "The Villa Lucienne" (published in *The Yellow Book* in 1896, and in the collection *Modern Instances* in 1898).

This framed story (written in, by contemporary standards, an informal and accessible English) is mostly an account by Madame Koetlegon of a visit to an abandoned villa on the French Riviera. The frame paragraph, written by an unnamed narrator, recounts the skill with which Madame Koetlegon told her story, so that the audience can share her experience, but, really, the narrator points out, "as you will see, in reality there is no story at all." A group of ladies visits the Villa Lucienne because one of them, presumably the recently widowed Cécile, is considering renting it. They pass from the garden of a nearby villa, the Villa Soleil, through a dark and damp trellised passage to the dilapidated villa in the middle of a garden run wild. A surly caretaker shows them over the house; the ladies become frightened, convinced that something sinister has happened in the past; the child in their company is sure that she saw an old lady watching her. The text achieves its effect through contrasting settings. It is a beautiful day in December; olives are being harvested; the garden of the Villa Soleil is rich and lovely; the view from the villa's balcony is entrancing. These settings are set against the vile passage through which the group passes to the Villa Lucienne, the disorder of its garden, the shabby dilapidation of the once beautiful home, its malevolent guardian and its sinister atmosphere. The story deploys Gothic conventions in a sophisticated way. It is marked as a story from the beginning; it only hints at the horrors of the supernatural. Indeed, it is almost lacking traditional/conventional story materials. But the elisions in the narrative are telling. The reader knows nothing of the past occupants of the Villa Lucienne, but much is hinted at, in, for example, the "long ragged fragment of lace" caught on "the girandole of a pier-glass," torn off from a dress as someone passed by in haste. The elision with regard to the party of ladies is even more marked and more revealing. Cécile's husband Guy has recently died. His absence is made prominent by the presence of his beloved dog, and by Madame Koetlegon's sense that only he could have captured or expressed (how is ambiguous) the experience of the sinister villa. The story finally becomes an evocation of the ladies' sense of loss and their experience of the sadness of things and time.

"The Villa Lucienne" is a subtle, accomplished and powerful story, and a self-conscious one. It, Kipling's "The Mark of the Beast," and Wells's "The

Star" embody the ambition and skill of the British short story by the mid-1880s, and that in the work of both canonical authors, and of a now relatively uncanonical one. Each well represents the two major categories of turn-of-the-century short story noted by Clare Hanson, "stories with a strong plot and 'plotless' short fiction" (Hanson 1985: 6). But the kind of story represented in "The Villa Lucienne," an elliptical, atmospheric, highly organized (and self-advertisingly organized) study of psychology, proved to be extraordinarily fruitful and resilient in the decades following the 1890s. That the movement from the *fin-de-siècle* to literary modernism is very blurred is nowhere more evident than in short fiction (Hanson 1985: 58). The dynamic form of the 1890s is one of the favored genres of the literary avant-garde in the first three decades of the twentieth century. The modernists – if it makes any sense to call them that, for the affiliations and interrelations of the early twentieth-century literary world were very complex and much richer than is usually acknowledged – tackled the short form with gusto. Conrad, James, Joyce, Woolf, Lawrence, and Mansfield all produced major short fiction, and short fiction was a major part of their output. It was most amenable to their desire to capture elusive, shifting psychological movements, and to produce evidently artistic products. It offered yet another way to distance themselves from the Victorian novel and its Edwardian and Georgian imitators (Head 1992: 15–16).

Jean Rhys's "Illusion" was first published in 1927 in her collection *The Left Bank and Other Stories*, with a laudatory preface by the great modernist and modernist patron Ford Madox Ford. It well represents the modernist short story by a writer somewhat outside the central canonical grouping of the avant-garde. The narrator is an unnamed English woman living in Paris. One of her acquaintances is a Miss Bruce, independently wealthy, but living, for seven years now, as an artist in Paris. Sensibly dressed, slightly mannish, Miss Bruce seems to exist at a remove from the hectic, sensual life around her. However, when she falls ill, the narrator, who has been asked to bring her nightdresses to the hospital, on opening a dark solid wardrobe, discovers an array of the most beautiful, colorful dresses, enormously glamorous, extremely expensive. The narrator tries to imagine why she might have bought them. She thinks that after buying one on impulse, Miss Bruce is compelled to seek more such dresses. "Then must have begun the search for *the* dress, the perfect Dress, beautiful, beautifying, possible to be worn. And lastly, the search for illusion – a craving, almost a vice, the stolen waters and the bread eaten in secret of Miss Bruce's life." Once she has recovered, Miss Bruce claims to the narrator that she simply collects "frocks," dresses she will never wear.

Plotless in a traditional sense, "Illusion" aims to capture two psychologies, that of Miss Bruce and that of the narrator. Miss Bruce, with her mannish

good sense, nonetheless keeps an armoire full of the riotous color of expensive dresses. The narrator, of whom the reader knows little, imagines her way into Miss Bruce's mind, but simultaneously reveals something about herself as well. The text is notable for implications such as the above. Does the narrator, too, share Miss Bruce's longings? The reader also is prompted to ask about Miss Bruce's interest in pretty women. Her name is male, as is the size of her body parts, while the story's final sentence has her noting the appearance of a girl "in her gentlemanly manner." At the center of the story is the striking motif of the wardrobe full of dresses, the glorious illusion of Miss Bruce's (and the narrator's) life, a metaphor rich in implication. Lawrence, Woolf, Mansfield, and Kipling wrote similar stories. (See, for example, Lawrence's "Odour of Chrysanthemums" [1911/1914], Woolf's "Kew Gardens" [1919/1921], Mansfield's "The Garden Party" [1922], and Kipling's "The Wish House" [1926].)

In 1933, the OED Supplement included for the first time the term "short story" to designate "a particular kind of literary product" (Reid 1977: 1). In 1937, *The Faber Book of Modern Stories* was published, edited and with an introduction by Elizabeth Bowen. Bowen's collection includes work by herself, A. E. Coppard, E. M. Forster, Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, Walter de la Mare, Somerset Maugham, Frank O'Connor, Seán O'Faoláin, Liam O'Flaherty, and others. She omits Katherine Mansfield because "a story was not available," and Kipling and Wells because their work does not need "further prominence" (17). Bowen's introduction is a celebration of the achievement and possibility of short fiction. "The short story is a young art," she insists, "as we now know it, it is the child of this century" (7). It is modern, like the cinema, unbound by tradition – "both are, accordingly, free" (7). It is a rejection of the length, the dead conventions, the *longueurs* of the novel. It can be fragmentary, inconclusive, allusive. Its weapons are "oblique narration, cutting (as in the cinema), the unlikely placing of emphasis, or symbolism (the telling use of the object both for its own sake and as an image)" (8). It "may thus more nearly than the novel approach aesthetic and moral truth" (15). Bowen herself expresses a fondness for stories with compression, tautness and vital clarity (15). The achievement of short fiction is remarkable. "In this country, within the last fifteen years, the non-commercial or free short story – that is to say, the story unsuitable, not meant to be suitable, for the popular, well-paying magazines, and free, therefore, not to conform with so-called popular taste – has found a wider opening: it has come to have an eclectic vogue" (13). The short story has a future. "The present state of the short story is, on the whole, healthy: its prospects are good" (18).

"The short but extremely fertile period between the two world wars remains the high point of the British short story," notes John H. Rogers

(1996: xv), and certainly the list of its practitioners in this period is impressive. Kipling produced his late and often difficult work in this period. Maugham was prolific, writing *inter alia* the very influential Ashenden espionage stories (1928), and reworking the conventions of stories of colonial adventure (in "Footprints in the Jungle" (1927), for example). It was the golden age of the detective short story (G. K. Chesterton, Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Margery Allingham). Women writers such as Mansfield, Rhys, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Frances Bellerby turned to the short story as a form congenial towards the specifically female experience they wished to recount (Coelsch-Foisner 2008 a: 96–113). The Second World War, too, was a good time for the short story. Bowen put it thus in May 1945:

> The short storyist shares – or should share to an extent – the faculties of the poet: he can render the significance of the small event. He can take for the theme of his story a face glimpsed in the street, an unexplained incident, a snatch of talk overheard on bus or train . . . . Wartime London, blitzed, cosmopolitan, electric with expectation now teems, I feel, with untold but tellable stories, glitters with scenes that cry aloud for the pen.
>
> (qtd. in Beachcroft 1968: 212)

Bernard Bergonzi describes the short story as "the preferred form for new fiction writers" during the 1939–1945 War (Bergonzi 1993: 40). Some might have their work published in *Penguin New Writing* or *Horizon*, but there were other outlets too. Bergonzi points to the irony that in the paper-strapped 1940s, short story writers had more publications in which to place their work than fifty years later (40). Certainly, the conflict inspired some major short fiction: Bowen's own ("Mysterious Kôr" [1944] and "The Demon Lover" [1945], for example), and that of Alun Lewis, Julian Maclaren-Ross, Rose Macaulay, and Mollie Panter-Downes. (The last two writers found an audience and market for their work in the U.S.A.)

Panter-Downes's short stories are some of the most memorable of the 1939–1945 conflict. Her "Good Evening, Mrs. Craven" was first published in 1942. Like all her war-time short fiction, it came out in the United States, in *The New Yorker*. The title is ironic, for the protagonist and central consciousness of the text is Mr. Craven's unnamed mistress, not his wife, her anonymity embodying both her final neglect by her lover and her final irrelevance or non-existence to his family and officialdom. The brief story is divided into four sections, the first setting out the course of the affair before the war, the second sketching the lovers' last meal together before his departure for active service in Libya, the third depicting the mistress's sense of loss as she ceases to receive any letters from Craven and her attempt to have news of him by calling his wife (the real Mrs. Craven), and the fourth

presenting the protagonist's utter despair, cut off hopelessly from the man she has loved. The story is elliptical to a high degree. The reader learns the details of the protagonist's and Craven's meeting every Thursday evening in an old-fashioned London restaurant. How she and her lover met is not mentioned; their love-making after their meal is only hinted at by the detail of Mr. Craven's tying his tie as he speaks to her. The protagonist's job before and during the war is never mentioned, nor are details given of her background, education, or even her appearance. Clothes are indicated and one piece of jewelry, but that is all. The focus is firmly on her feelings about her relationship, its stasis (for it scarcely develops) and her vertiginous sadness as she loses touch with Craven. The reader observes her pleasure in meeting her lover every Thursday evening, her joy in being called "Mrs. Craven" by the old waiters, and her consciousness of the compromises she must make to keep this affair (she must not fuss, she must not want too much). The limits of the relationship are, however, clearly signaled in the setting of the restaurant in which the lovers meet. Frozen in time, with ancient waiters, pictures of actors from the past, a bust of Mrs. Siddons above the lovers' favorite table, the "whole place looked as though it had been soaked in Madeira." It is a place of illusion, usually charming, but ultimately fake; on occasions when acquaintances of Mr. Craven are present, they must pretend to be employer and secretary; but here, usually, if only temporarily, she can be Mrs. Craven. The limits of her lover, too, are also evident. He has a most comfortable situation: a successful married life, children he can boast of, and an acquiescent mistress who never cries or demands or causes bother. The war cuts her off and out. There is, as she notes, no War Office procedure for informing mistresses of their lovers' fates. The story's power comes in making the reader know and feel for her; clinging to illusions, her alienated, unacknowledgeable intimacy with Craven's family, and her dizzying lapse into despair at the story's end. It is typical of Panter-Downes's ability to render a wide variety of women's experience of war in complex and moving detail.

Like Bowen in 1937, H. E. Bates in *The Modern Short Story* in 1941 saw the short story as modern, free from the encumbrances of the novel and its conventions. He also, again like Bowen, predicted a great future for short fiction. In 1962, he summed up his view then: "I prophesied . . . that the inevitable distrust and dislocation of war's aftermath would lead new writers to find in the short story the essential medium for what they had to say" (qtd. in Beachcroft 1968: 212). However, in 1972, looking back at his statement in 1941, he noted gloomily that "my prophecy as to the probability of a new golden age of the short story, such as we had on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1920s and 1930s was . . . dismally unfulfilled" (qtd. in Moosmüller 1993: 109). For the British short story, the post-1945 period has been a difficult

time. There are two main reasons for this. First, the publishing outlets – journals and magazines – for short fiction disappeared substantially, progressively, and relentlessly after 1945. Second, British publishers became, and still are, very hostile to short stories, arguing that they do not make money (Baldwin 1985: 35; Pickering 1985: 75; Malcolm and Malcolm 2006: xvi). V. S. Pritchett summed up the situation in 1986: "It is very difficult to find anyone to publish a short story" (Pritchett 1986: 36). Anthologies of short fiction were published in post-war Britain; there did exist journals that took short stories. But these were few. The fact that the U.S. magazine *The New Yorker* plays an important role in publishing the work of many important British short story writers in the post-war years is telling. Barry Menikoff mentions, in this respect, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Elizabeth Taylor, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Muriel Spark, and V. S. Pritchett (Menikoff 1987: 138). (See also LeStage 1999: 191–203, and Bloom 2006: 65–91.)

British publishers' distaste for short fiction is well documented. Graham Swift records that his collection of short stories *Learning to Swim* was only considered for publication after he had published two successful novels (Moosmüller 1993: 113). There is no evidence that this has changed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Debbie Taylor wrote in the writers' journal *Mislexia* in 2003 of the short story as an "Endangered Species" (Taylor 2003: 9). Announcing a short story competition, Alexander Linklater wrote in 2005 in *Prospect* of an anti-short story "herd mentality among magazines and publishers." "At some point during the last twenty years, the short story came to viewed in Britain as culturally redundant and economically unviable" (Linklater 2005: 24). One would only take issue with Linklater's time limitation. The recent site "The Short Story Website," while admirable, has to some degree the tone of a cause that knows it is fighting a hard battle (www.theshortstory.org.uk).

Disparagement and neglect of the short story is not just commercial, but scholarly as well. Authorities are unanimous that over the last sixty years critics and scholars have not taken the form very seriously. Reid noted in 1977 that "even now it seldom receives serious critical attention commensurate with [its] importance" (Reid 1977: 1). In 1964, Alan Coren exclaimed: "What overtones of dilettantism, of superfluous also-running that title [of short story writer] carries in England" (qtd. in Beachcroft 1968: 213–214). Even Bergonzi turns his nose up at the short story, accusing it of "slightness and slickness" and of being marked by "stereotypes, mannerisms, gimmickry and the like" (qtd. in Reid 1977: 1–2). However, neglect is relative rather than absolute, and the last forty years have brought a substantial body of serious studies of the British short story. The work of T. O. Beachcroft (1968), Walter Allen (1981), Joseph M. Flora (1985), Dennis Vannatta (1985), Valerie Shaw

(1983), and Dominic Head (1992) is important. Nineteenth-century British short fiction has been thoroughly discussed by Harold Orel (1986), while Alastair Fowler dedicates considerable parts of his 1987 *A History of English Literature* to the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century short story and its Romantic and Victorian predecessors (Fowler 1987: 302–310; 335–342). Birgit Moosmüller's *Die experimentelle englische Kurzgeschichte der Gegenwart* (1993) is a major piece of scholarship. Barbara Korte's *The Short Story in Britain* (2003) is an outstanding study of the form, while Arno Löffler's and Eberhard Späth's collection of insightful essays, *Geschichte der englischen Kurzgeschichte* (2005), and Andrew Maunder's comprehensive *The Facts on File Companion to the British Short Story* (2007) also help to shatter the tale of critical neglect. Renate Brosch's *Short Story: Textsorte und Leseerfahrung* (2007) is an extension and expansion of the theoretical approaches to short fiction (including British short fiction) in the work of Charles E. May (1976; 1984; 1994; 1995). Adrian Hunter's excellent *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* (2007) is also well worthy of note. In collaboration with Cheryl Alexander Malcolm, my own work has addressed the British short story with an attempt at seriousness (Malcolm and Malcolm 2006; 2008). Günther Jarfe has just published a fine introduction to British short fiction in *Die moderne britische Short Story: Eine Einführung* (2010). *Studies in Short Fiction* and the *Journal of the Short Story in English* contain substantial essays on British short fiction.

Critical study is deserved; for the list of British writers since 1945 who have attempted the shorter form is impressive, and their achievements in short fiction are equally so. Dennis Vannatta's "Selected Bibliography of Short Stories, 1945–1980" includes work by writers of the stature of Stan Barstow, H. E. Bates (ten volumes of short fiction between 1946 and 1968), Christine Brooke-Rose, Elaine Feinstein, Penelope Gilliat, James Hanley, Wilson Harris, L. P. Hartley, Susan Hill, B. S. Johnson, Francis King, Rosamond Lehmann, Wolf Mankowitz, Olivia Manning, Nicholas Mosely, Bill Naughton, William Samson (ten volumes between 1946 and 1963), Paul Scott, Elizabeth Taylor, Henry Treece, Alexander Trocci, Frank Tuohy, John Wain, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Evelyn Waugh. Major post-war novelists – Graham Greene and Muriel Spark – also have a substantial output of short fiction. A supplementary list of writers of short stories since the early 1980s would include (among others): J. G. Ballard, John Berger, A. S. Byatt, Angela Carter, Patricia Duncker, Michel Faber, Neil Gaiman, Alasdair Gray, Dan Jacobson, Gabriel Josipovici, James Kelman, Doris Lessing, Toby Litt, E. A. Markham, Adam Mars-Jones, Ian McEwan, Julian Maclaren Ross, Michael Moorcock, Ben Okri, Dylis Rose, Salman Rushdie, Iain Crichton Smith, Graham Swift, Fay Weldon, and Arnold Wesker. Not all have written large

numbers of short stories, but all have given the form at some point in their careers a serious attention that has produced substantial work.

The writer who devoted himself most closely to the short story in the post-war period was V. S. Pritchett. His *œuvre* is large, complex, and extremely good. Yet little critical attention has been paid to his work. (There are exceptions; see Jeremy Treglown's critical biography [2005], Jonathan Bloom's study [2006], and Andrzej Gąsiorek's essay in Malcolm and Malcolm [2008]: 423–430.) "The Camberwell Beauty," published in the collection of the same name from 1974, shows the strengths of his work.

The story is one of obsession. The narrator, an unnamed failed antique dealer, tells of his fellow dealers and their secret lusts for particular pieces. He also tells of his and other characters' desires for a young woman, Isabel. The narrator first meets her as a child, an orphan, in August's antique shop while he is searching for a rare piece of china. He meets her again briefly, from time to time, over a period of several years. She eventually leaves her adoptive home to marry an elderly antique dealer called Pliny, who keeps her as a semi-willing prisoner in his shop. The narrator comes to desire her and eventually makes contact with her again, even being admitted to Pliny's shop on two occasions. On the second, he appeals to Isabel to leave with him; they are interrupted by Pliny; there is violence; and Isabel dismisses the narrator.

This is the skeleton of the story material, although it only becomes apparent on close reading of the text. The narrative is digressive. The narrator speaks of antique dealers' secrets, the appearance of their shops, their bar-room gossip, what goes on at auctions, various kinds of antique, and his own failed career. The framework only appears through these digressions: August sexually abuses Isabel as a child; she fascinates the elderly Pliny; the narrator becomes increasingly drawn to, and finally obsessed by the girl. The story is, centrally, one of lust. The narrator uses the word frequently for the secret passions of antique dealers, the desire and longing that drive them, the fever of dealing and finding, however dishonestly, a bargain. Each of the central figures in the text is urged on by a lust to possess something or someone: a piece of Meissen china, Isabel. The characters are damaged or disappointed. Antiques offer them dreams and illusions; Isabel is a consolation for an impoverished life. Pliny makes her his prisoner, undresses her although he has no intercourse with her, worships her. Isabel herself, the narrator notes, writes "I S A B" on a dusty shelf in Pliny's antique store – "half a name, written by a living finger in dust." She herself is afraid to leave the back of Pliny's shop.

The story's settings are desolate: lower middle-class shops, South London streets, provincial towns to the north of the capital, and, above all, shabby

antique shops, full of unsold items. When the narrator finally persuades Isabel to let him into Pliny's shop, the place is one of "empty hopelessness."

> At night the cold white-washed store-room was silent under the light of its single bulb and the place was mostly in shadow, only the tops of stacked furniture stood out in the yellow light, some of them like buildings . . . . We walked down alleys between the stacks. It was like walking through a dead, silent city, abandoned by everyone who once lived there. There was a sour smell of upholstery . . . .

"The Camberwell Beauty" depicts a wretched, empty world of shabby unglamorous people and places, but also shows the people in it obeying the promptings of lust and passion. The story's language with its short sentences and neutral lexis and syntax, neither elevated nor picturesque dialect, stands at a similar slant to its subject matter, as do some of the characters' names. Names like August and Pliny hardly belong to this milieu. But all impulses of desire lead to half-pleasures at best: a collector does find the piece of Staffordshire he has been searching for; Pliny possesses Isabel in some measure; Isabel is worshipped and secure, queen of junk. But, like others, the narrator fails. His cocky knowledgeableness at the story's start is shown as hollow. He did not understand his feelings till quite late, and in the end he is rejected by Isabel. "That was the end. I found myself walking in the street. How unreal people looked in the sodium light." "The Camberwell Beauty" is an extraordinary story – of passion among tawdriness, of a seedy lower middle-class inferno of destructive lusts and deviance – a masterpiece of indirect narration.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the dominant conventions in the British short story are those of realism. There is, however, a strong non-realist tendency. This takes two principal forms: metafictional stories and stories that draw on the conventions of non-realist genres, supernatural fiction, gothic fiction, and, above all, science fiction. Metfictional short fiction is represented by work by Christine Brooke-Rose, B. S. Johnson, and Gabriel Josipovici, who write texts that draw attention to themselves as texts, that scrutinize and question the conventions of traditional realist fiction, and focus on problems connected with writing fiction. The influence of the Franco-Irish writer Samuel Beckett is particularly important and evident in Brooke-Rose's, Johnson's, and Josipovici's short fiction. One of Josipovici's most celebrated stories is "Mobius the Stripper" (1974), its pages divided in two, one narrative in the top half, a second in the lower half, the narrator/writer of one half oppressed by the literature of the past and uncertain what to write. (See the Key Works chapter of this book for a full discussion of Josipovici's text.)

More important, however, certainly in terms of numbers of readers, are short stories that operate within the conventions of fantasy and science fiction. In post-war Britain, Sylvia Townsend Warner wrote many short stories, full of changelings, elves, human eunuchs, and cruel supernatural queens, collected in her *Kingdoms of Elfin* (1977). From the 1960s, Michael Moorcock produced a vast number of short stories featuring heroic fantasy figures such as Elric of Melniboné and Earl Aubec. Underrated or ignored by scholarship, these are an important part of the short-story landscape of the late twentieth century. The work of J. G. Ballard has, however, always drawn some serious literary criticism. Like Moorcock's work, it impresses by the sheer dizzying fertility of imagination involved, by its psychological and social suggestiveness, and by its intelligent reworking of literary motifs. One of Ballard's earliest short stories, "Prima Belladonna" (1956) shows his non-realist work in its full colors. The story is set in a non-documented time, "the Recess," a period of inertia and stagnation, before the government "started up all the clocks" again; and in non-documented places, such as Vermilion Sands. The narrator runs a "Choro-Flora" shop that sells musical plants. He offers little explanation of the social, political, and genetic background to his tale. The reader is simply plunged into a different and intriguing universe. The story material is centered on the narrator's relationship with a beautiful, golden-skinned, musical, part-mutant woman who is fascinated by the rarest and most powerful of his stock of plants. In the climax of the text, the woman and the plant appear to have species-transgressing sexual intercourse, after which the gorgeous Jane Ciracylides passes out of the narrator's life. The story mesmerizes the reader with a created world that is close to the empirical one, yet radically different, wildly colorful and absorbing. Its literary credentials are embodied both in its focus on the intoxication of difference and perversion, and in its intelligent reworking of motifs from Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844). Ballard's science fiction, like Moorcock's fantasy, is clearly writing with ambitions to be taken seriously. It harks back to Wells's and de la Mare's work, and it is echoed in, for example, Angela Carter's highly regarded collection of revisionings of folk tales and fairy tales, *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), and in the work of a younger generation of short-story writers, such as Michel Faber, China Miéville, and Neil Gaiman.

The strength in depth of the realist British short story can be illustrated by a writer like Hugh Fleetwood. Although he is the author of sixteen novels and four collections of short stories, all critically well received, his work is little known. But a story like "The Last Lesson" from the collection *The Beast* (1978) is, by any standards, an accomplished piece of work.

"The Last Lesson" does what so many short stories do supremely well: it presents a mind; it poses an enigma. Like much of Fleetwood's work, it has a

foreign setting. Antonietta Misseri, unattractive, reclusive, spinsterish, on the day of her thirtieth birthday goes to her last English lesson. She lives with her father in Ostia, outside Rome, in a pine forest with a view of the beach and its sybaritic goings-on. It is a view that she never enjoys, for over the years she has ceased to have much contact with the world outside her home. She increasingly feels it to be unreal. The sense of unreality spreads to her home and herself, and only a chance encounter with a foreign language persuades herself that there is something real, somewhere. Consequently she starts to study English, largely at home, although once a week she attends an hour-long tutorial in a suburb of Rome. Three days previously, she has seen what appears to be the first stages of a brutal, sexually perverse murder. An English hitchhiker is picked up by a man in a flame-colored car. Antonietta has, however, told the police nothing. It transpires that she is sure that the car belongs to the gentlemanly English teacher, Mr. Ball, whom she likes best at the language school. She has asked to have her last lesson with him. She reveals that she knows he is the murderer, and then asks for a ride home.

The story is a third-person point-of-view narration that slowly exposes Antonietta's thoughts and feelings in the present and in the past. A world and a mind are vividly presented; Antonietta's psychological disturbance is patiently, carefully, sympathetically unfolded. Her arbitrary leap into a foreign language course is interestingly motivated, and the language school, its overworked and intermittently malign teachers, and its methods reek of authenticity. Antonietta is also not alone. Mr. Ball, too, is perhaps in flight from realities that no longer seem real: England, his everyday life, his work as a tired English teacher. If he is the murderer, he shares Antonietta's madness. The story is deeply enigmatic. Did Antonietta actually see the flame-colored car pick up the murdered tourist? Was it, indeed, Mr. Ball's car? Was he the gallant driver? Why might someone like him savagely sexually assault and murder someone? Why does Antonietta want to be driven and murdered, and in such a fashion? What is to happen next?

In the early twenty-first century, writers continue to address the shorter form. James Lasdun's most recent collection of short stories (his fourth), *It's Beginning to Hurt* was published to acclaim in 2009. The stories range widely in setting and character, although several (with echoes of the work of Henry James) involve English encounters with the U.S.A. One of the most memorable stories in *It's Beginning to Hurt* is "Annals of the Honorary Secretary," a story all the more striking for its allusiveness to a long tradition of British supernatural tales.

The narrator is the anonymous honorary secretary of a spiritualist, mystic group dedicated to discussing and experiencing psychic, supernatural, paranormal phenomena (communication with the dead, hypnotism, thought

transference). A new member, Lucille Thomas, an unexceptional young woman, offers after some time to give a "performance." In her case, it is a practical "demonstration" of psychic power. She communicates to her audience unease, despair, "an overwhelming feeling of desolation." In later demonstrations, she makes small objects disappear, once again filling the audience with a deep sense of physical and ethical discomfort. At the group's New Year celebration (held in spring, out of respect for the traditions of older and wiser civilizations), Lucille performs a demonstration that imparts a terrible sense of corruption, decay, and death to all present. The guests flee; Lucille disappears; but her legend endures in the society.

The story is at once humorous and frightening. The narrator's English is formal and mannered. He articulately and carefully presents his and others' experience of Lucille Thomas's gift, meticulously differentiating responses. He wraps the supernatural tale in credibility – his is the voice of authority and good sense – and also adds a strange element of discordant humor to the text. The details he offers of the sites of the society's meetings, the people involved, and the traditions of the society, give an additional layer of credibility (and humor) to the story. The text is a powerful supernatural story, in a long tradition, cast in a contemporary mold. However, it also has grander ambitions, suggested briefly in the text through meanings attached to Lucille, in a manner reminiscent of Hawthorne's short fiction. She is a performer, a kind of artist, with a terrifying gift, a gift that the narrator describes in artistic terms as "lyric rather than epic." He also identifies her as a kind of messiah figure (an inverted one, offering disquiet rather than salvation): her remarks now belong to "apocrypha"; "the critical exegesis" of Lucille's figure, performances, and gifts "has only just begun."

In *The Lonely Voice* (1962), Frank O'Connor wrote that the short story appeared a particularly suitable form for the marginal and excluded voices of the world (O'Connor 1965: 18–19). Angela Carter and Hermione Lee have also argued something similar (Lee 1985: viii; Carter 1986: xii). Although one can have reservations about terms such as "marginal" and "excluded," it is the case that groups and individuals who feel themselves at a slant to mainstream literary and social traditions have found the short story a congenial vehicle for their voices. This is true of women writers such as Doris Lessing and Angela Carter. Lesbian short fiction – Anna Livia's *Saccharin Cyanide* (1989), J. E. Hardy's *Stranger Than Fish* (1989), and Cherry Pott's *Mosaic of Air* (1992) – is published not just in individual author collections, but in a host of anthologies and in many small journals (Grubisic 2008: 368). Following a tradition laid down by Oscar Wilde, E. M. Forster, Angus Wilson, and Noël Coward, gay writers, too, have produced major work in the short story. Anthologies of short stories play an important role in

offering an outlet for gay short fiction, although Adam Mars-Jones, Tom Wakefield, Simon Burt, and Joseph Mills have also published individual collections (Grubisic 2008: 369). Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, Ben Okri, E. A. Markham, and Barbara Burford have also written substantial short fiction that aims to capture the experience of Black and Asian British citizens negotiating the complexities of discordant worlds and cultures. The short fiction of Dan Jacobson, Clive Sinclair, and Ruth Fainlight, among others, has spoken of a specifically Anglo-Jewish experience, while Scottish writers – Iain Crichton Smith, George Mackay Brown, Alan Spence, Alasdair Gray, and James Kelman – have given a Scottish inflection to the short story.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the British short story is in an ambiguous situation. Major publishers and literary agents still express distaste for short fiction. Major short-story writers from the past, like Pritchett, are non-canonical. The major literary prizes are still given for novels. But there are other counter-signals – besides the high quality of short stories written and published. In 2005, the National Short Story Prize was announced at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. The first prize is £15,000. Originally sponsored by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, it was supported by BBC Radio 4 and *Prospect* magazine. The BBC is now the sponsor and since 2008 the prize has been called the BBC National Short Story Award. The web site www.shortstory.org.uk, supported by the Arts Council England and the Scottish Book Trust, among other organizations, aims to promote the short story in the U.K., and is part of the campaign "Story," the goal of which is to reverse decades of neglect of short fiction. Collections of short stories, partly aimed at younger readers, for example Neil Gaiman's *Smoke and Mirrors* (1999), can have very good sales.

In addition, other recent literary phenomena show an interesting relationship with the short story. There is a tendency for some recent novels to approach the dimensions of long short fiction (Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* [2007], Alan Judd's *Dancing with Eva* [2007]), although this is not a new phenomenon; well-known novelists have produced linked collections of short narratives (Iain Sinclair's *Downriver* [1991], David Mitchell's *Ghostwritten* [1999], Kazuo Ishiguro's *Nocturnes* [2009]). Further, the graphic short story has emerged as a recognizable and recognized form. In *Looking for Jake and Other Stories* (2005), the highly regarded contemporary science-fiction writer China Miéville incorporates one graphic short story, "On the Way to the Front" (visuals by Liam Sharp). The graphic short texts contained in *It's Dark in London* (1996), edited by Oscar Zarate, are serious and powerful pieces of work. Random House, Jonathan Cape, Comica and the Observer Group has offered a Graphic Short Story Prize since 2007.

The 2009 edition of the competition had a first prize of £1000. The graphic narrative, with the demand that it exist within the relatively short scope of a single issue, bears a similarity to the short story, and individual issues can build up into something reminiscent of a short-story cycle. Gaiman's *Sandman* series (1988–1996) is a good example of such graphic fiction. Perhaps the graphic short story will prove an important variant of short fiction in Britain in the future.

The history and the development of short fiction in Ireland have followed substantially different paths from those of the British short story. First, there is the question of status. In 1979, Declan Kiberd wrote that "For the past eighty years in Ireland, the short story has been the most popular of all literary forms with readers. It has also been the form most widely exploited by writers" (Kiberd 1979: 14). For most of the twentieth century, the short story was the preferred form for many Irish writers, and those writers have usually had little difficulty in publishing their work. Second, the context of the Irish short story has always been different from that of its British equivalent. Ireland's experience has for centuries been closer to that of a colonized country – with all its complexities of affiliation and rejection – than that of any part of mainland Britain. In addition, while Britain in the twentieth century experienced social, economic, military and political disruptions enough, they were certainly different and perhaps less convulsive than those in Ireland – vigorous nationalist agitation, rebellion, military occupation and guerilla warfare, partition, ethnic cleansing, civil war, the attainment of a difficult independence in the south and the creation of a bitterly divided, neo-colonial society in the north.

One of the difficulties of talking about the Irish short story, a difficulty acknowledged by many commentators, is that until the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922, Irish writers were closely involved in the British literary system, publishing in mainland Britain and writing for British audiences. Indeed, even after independence this situation has not completely altered. Many Irish writers have lived extensively out of Ireland, publishing in London rather than in Dublin. Further, the complex affiliations of a colonial society, such as was pre-1922 Ireland, meant that many Irish writers did not identify themselves closely with their fellow Irish for reasons of class or religion. Anthony Trollope, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, Edith Somerville and Violet Martin ("Somerville and Ross") are cases in point. (For a fuller discussion of this period and the development of the Irish short story up to 1945, see Lonergan 2008: 51–64).

Attempts are made by commentators to link the nineteenth-century Irish short story with a traditional oral Gaelic narrative tradition (Kiberd 1979: 13–25; Maunder 2007: 207), but these must be speculative. However, it is

clear that in nineteenth-century Ireland there was a substantial body of short fiction published in a wide range of journals. Harris writes of a "great flood of fiction portraying Irish life and character," as well as that recounting Irish legends, from the beginning to the end of the nineteenth century (Harris 1979: 39–47). John and Michael Banim's *Tales of the O'Hara Family* (1825), and the work of William Carleton in the 1820s and 1830s are usually mentioned as examples of early nineteenth-century Irish short fiction. Certainly, the contemporary Irish publishing world offered numerous outlets for short fiction. Kilroy lists an impressive range of magazines willing to publish short stories: *Dublin University Magazine* (1833–1877) (edited by Le Fanu from 1861 to 1867), *Comet* (1831–1833), *Dublin Penny Journal* (1832–1836), *Irish Penny Journal* (1840–1841), *Cork Magazine* (1847–1848), *Nation* (1842–1892), *Irish Homestead* (1895–1923) (edited by Æ and the first publisher of Joyce's short stories), and others (Kilroy 1984: 10–12).

A writer whose work illustrates the complexities and strengths of Irish short fiction in the mid-nineteenth century is Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, who published short stories between the 1830s and 1870s. One of his most interesting is "The Familiar," published in London in 1872 in the collection *In a Glass Darkly*. Like other stories in the collection, "The Familiar" has a complex frame. The unnamed overall editor is a disciple of the German physician-philosopher Dr. Martin Hesselius. "The Familiar" is one of Hesselius's "about two hundred and thirty cases," one selected by the editor. It is in manuscript form with a handwritten note in Hesselius's writing attached to it. Hesselius praises the narrator of the manuscript and places the case it reports, that of Mr. Barton, in a pseudo-scientific context. The editor reveals that the narrator of Mr. Barton's story is "the Reverend Thomas Herbert," a character who does not appear in the subsequent story. In the peculiar manner of all such framing devices (which are part of the tradition of the supernatural story from the time of Defoe's "A Relation of the Apparition of Mrs. Veal" [1705]), this technique in "The Familiar" both makes the account of supernatural events that follows verisimilar (after all, it is textually and scientifically authenticated), and questions its veracity (the reader is distant from the actual events, and why is the account of the Reverend Mr. Herbert to be given any credibility anyway?).

The story told is one of the "strange persecution" and ultimate destruction of Sir James Barton in Dublin and Clontarf by a malevolent supernatural figure. The haunting first takes the form of footsteps that follow Barton in lonely parts of Dublin. Later, letters arrive warning the victim that he is under the eye of "The Watcher." Subsequently, a small, foreign-looking figure, which terrifies the otherwise resolute captain, appears both to Barton and those in his company; however, the figure can never be detained, but always vanishes when pursued. At one point, a shot is fired at the unhappy gentleman

by an unknown would-be assassin, as he is walking home alone at night in Dublin. The apparition appears to be recognized by Barton and to recall an episode from his past that he does not wish to divulge to anyone. This small malevolent man (in an account of his sighting by a servant girl, he is described as "a singularly ill-looking little man, whose countenance bore the stamp of menace and malignity") drives Barton to despair; he attempts to flee to the Continent, but in vain; even strict seclusion in a country house outside Dublin does not save him. Barton meets a macabre end, seemingly terrified to death by a supernatural incursion, probably of this familiar figure, into his bedroom. A postscript to the Reverend Herbert's account suggests that the small persecutor may be the ghost of a man that Barton persecuted and indirectly killed, in retaliation for his (the apparition's) brutal treatment of a woman whom Barton had loved.

"The Familiar" has all the powerful machinery of the supernatural story – isolated settings, malevolent persecution, a guilty conscience, inexplicable occurrences that intrude into a recognizable and daylight world, extreme emotions, a macabre and mysterious death. The reader might ask in what sense it can be counted a distinctively Irish story. The settings are certainly largely Irish, and specific and concrete Dublin locales are given. The characters, however, belong almost entirely to the Anglo-Irish ruling class, and, at one level, the story might as well be set in Bath or London. Nonetheless, as in many of Le Fanu's stories, one is tempted to see an Irish resonance in details of the story material. Barton returns to Ireland "[s]omewhere about the year 1794," thus in a period of a major challenge to British rule in Ireland, culminating in the French attempted invasion of Ireland in 1798. In addition, the persecution of Barton takes the form of political violence – scary stalking in dark places, threatening letters, attempted assassination. It is surely important that the small malevolent figure (a sub-human threat from the colonial dark) eventually breaches the defenses of the Irish country house (a symbol of Anglo-Irish power), in which Barton has taken refuge. The tensions of a deeply divided Irish colonial society are present indirectly but intrusively in the supernatural story.

The Irish Literary Revival, which scholars and contemporaries have noted in the years from the mid-1890s through the end of the Irish Civil War in the mid-1920s, produced two main kinds of short fiction: stories based on the subjects and techniques of myth, legend, and folklore, and those (drawing inspiration from the work of Turgenev and Chekhov) focusing on a relatively unvarnished presentation of the *realia* of Irish rural and urban life. The former category contains work by Lady Augusta Gregory, Lady Jane Wilde ("Speranza," Oscar Wilde's mother), James Stephens, and Padraic Colum. It also embraces important parts of Oscar Wilde's output of short stories.

Wilde himself is a peculiarly Irish author, even when he seems least so. His cosmopolitanism, his taking the literary world of London by storm, is typical of the physical displacement of many Irish writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In addition, his work, while drawing on Irish motifs, transcends national boundaries (Lonergan 2008: 57). Wilde's collection of short stories for children, *The Happy Prince and Other Stories*, was first published in London in 1888. The title story is one of the most memorable. It is a story of love and sacrifice, rich and yet austere at the same time, funny (the Swallow is delightfully self-important on occasion) yet very sad, profoundly satisfying in its morals, yet deeply, and consciously, unsatisfying in its politics. The Happy Prince sacrifices himself to alleviate the sufferings of the poor; the Swallow sacrifices himself too, out of his "good heart" and his love of the Prince. Yet neither changes the world, except temporarily, and individually. It is clear that the whole unjust system grinds on as before, despite their sacrifice. Their only reward is in Heaven. Yet their gestures are grand and moving, and are reflected and invested in a linguistic glamour: in the Prince's "Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow . . . will you not stay with me one night longer?"; and in the Swallow's own evocations of a far land ("I am waited for in Egypt").

Less widely discussed, and yet equally complex and intriguing, and indirectly Irish, is Wilde's "The Portrait of Mr. W.H.," first published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1889. The anonymous narrator recounts the story of an obsession, shared at various times by three men, Cyril Graham, Erskine, and himself, that the dedicatee of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* is a handsome young actor, Willie Hughes. Part of the story is a narration within the text. The narrator gives the reader Erskine's account of his beautiful friend Cyril Graham's conviction that he has found the true identity of the young man to whom so many of Shakespeare's sonnets are addressed. His explanation and analysis of the texts convince Erskine too, up to the point when he demands objective evidence of the existence of the boy actor. Graham forges such evidence in the form of a gorgeous miniature of the figure. Erskine, however, discovers that the piece is a forgery, and upbraids his friend, who shoots himself to prove his utter commitment to the truth of his theory. Despite Erskine's warnings, the narrator is seized by Graham's interpretation, and spends three weeks attempting to confirm and develop it. He produces an elaborate and substantial life out of textual analysis and speculation, which he embodies in a passionate letter to Erskine, discovering that once he has written out his fancies, he becomes strangely indifferent to them. Erskine, however, is again inflamed by Graham's theory, and pledges himself to substantiate it. Two years later, the narrator receives a letter from Erskine in France in which he claims that he, too, will commit suicide "for Willie Hughes's sake." The narrator, on traveling to Cannes discovers that Erskine is

indeed dead, but of consumption, not by his own hand. He inherits the forged, but beautiful, miniature.

This humorous story has a very serious side to it. It shows three characters who convince themselves of the rightness of a theory, on the basis of a mass of textual evidence. The ultimate lack of key empirical data does not finally shake their commitment to their cause, even in Graham's case to the point of death. The reader shares in their conviction, led on by the plausibility of the three men's arguments. Yet, at the heart of their convictions are lies: the forged portrait, Erskine's faked death. (Or is his death, indeed, by consumption? At that stage of the story, one wonders.) The Willie Hughes theory itself is an important part of the story. It is one of a series of norm-breaking and transgressive motifs. The story starts with a discussion of forgeries; Cyril Graham is so beautiful as to be sexually ambiguous; the Willie Hughes theory is a rejection of conventional wisdom, and also a social offence, for Shakespeare's muse is not an aristocrat, but an inconstant actor; and Wilde's fondness for paradox, an overt transgression of traditional linguistic and cultural expectations, is apparent, especially in Erskine's comments. And, then, there is Ireland. The narrator and Erskine start the story discussing "Macpherson, Ireland and Chatterton." What Ireland is doing between that pair of noted forgers is not immediately clear. Yet the inflammation of young men with an idea, the norm-breaking force of the dedication to the lowly Willie Hughes, and the power of martyrdom ("Cyril Graham sacrificed his life to a great idea," declares the narrator to Erskine, "and if you will not tell of his martyrdom, tell at least of his faith"), all assume a political and national resonance in an Irish context. "The Portrait of Mr. W.H." turns out to be a rather Irish story in the end, a questioning examination of the force of idealistic commitment.

The Irish focus of George Moore's short fiction collected in *The Untilled Field* (1903) cannot be missed. These stories were modeled on Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches/Sketches from a Hunter's Album* (published in Russian in 1852, and published in English as early as 1855), and aimed to redeem the cosmopolitan Moore's status within Irish nationalist circles (Cave 2000: xii–xiii). "The Window" is a representative story from the collection, focused on the details of Irish rural life, and yet also echoing not just Turgenev, but Flaubert's "Un cœur simple" (1877). It tells the story of the elderly, crippled Biddy M'Hale's obsession to sponsor the installation of a window in her local church. Father Maguire, the harassed but authoritarian and interfering parish priest, is constantly annoyed by her stubborn insistence on paying for a window rather than the rebuilding of the church itself. Biddy has once been young and vigorous, but an accident has made her hunchbacked. The story is organized around a tension of the everyday and material (for example,

Biddy's handicap) with the visionary. Maguire is occupied with raising money for the new church (trips to the U.S.A., letters to the bishop, sales of scapulars); Biddy has inherited money and has made money by raising chickens, her Buff Orpingtons, and is cannily aware of her financial status; it is a German traveler for a firm of stained glass manufacturers who allows her to realize her vision. On the other hand, Biddy moves from making a vow after her accident that she will do something for God with her chickens, to visualizing clearly the colors and figures in her window, and then to actual visions of the divine in church during mass and when staring at her window. She eventually steps out of everyday social life, freed from her physical deformity, abandoning her chickens, dressing eccentrically, living only for her translation to another world of spiritual ecstasy and trance, of heavenly visitors, and mystic music. She becomes a burden, a boon (she draws publicity), and a mystery to the worldly Father Maguire. The narration is balanced and objective: the reader understands Biddy and enters her obsessive, practical and mystical world, but also sympathizes with the priest. Biddy's visions are moving, yet also deranged.

Almost contemporary with *The Untilled Field* (in terms of composition, if not of publication), the stories in James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), with their sober detailing of the *accidie* of the lives of the denizens of the early twentieth-century provincial imperial capital, are also resolutely Irish in their focus, and, along with Joyce's other longer fiction, have done much to make Dublin one of *the* literary *loci* in Europe. These stories have been so extensively written on that further commentary here is redundant (although Joyce's "An Encounter" is discussed in Part 5 Key Works).

Irish society was transformed and disrupted in the early twentieth century by the Easter Rising (1916), the Anglo-Irish War (1919–1922), the partition of the island (1922), and the Irish Civil War (1922–1923). "All changed, changed utterly," Yeats declares in "Easter 1916." The political and military upheavals of these years find a response in the work of several Irish short-story writers, although there is a not entirely surprising avoidance of the Civil War. One of the most famous of such texts, presenting an incident in the Anglo-Irish War, is Frank O'Connor's "Guests of the Nation" (1931). It is O'Connor's first published work of short fiction, appearing first in the American *Atlantic Monthly*, later in the *Irish Statesman*, and in a collection published in Britain by Macmillan.

Narrated by an anonymous and young Irish guerrilla fighter, in an informal, convincingly authentic oral language (for example, shifting at times from past to present tenses), the story recounts the circumstances surrounding the shooting of hostages in reprisal for the British authorities' execution of prisoners. The hostages are two English soldiers, known only by their

surnames, Belcher and Hawkins. One short and talkative, the other tall and laconic, they form a traditional comic duo, a motif that contributes toward the dark absurdity of the story. The two English hostages have no intention of escaping; they feel very much at home with their captors and in the Irish countryside. While held by another I.R.A. battalion, they have danced with local girls, and in their present captivity, they become "chums" with their guards, and with the old lady in whose house they are held. When orders come to shoot the soldiers, both the narrator and his companion, ironically called Noble, are very reluctant to carry them out. However, they assist their superior, Jeremiah Donovan, to carry out the execution. The execution itself, performed in the lonely darkness of a bog, is absurd. Hawkins cannot believe he is to be shot by his new friends; he even offers to join them ("I don't believe in your stuff, but it's no worse than mine"). Belcher achieves a kind of dignity, tying on his own blindfold, caring about Hawkins to the last, refusing to say a prayer, and closing with the austere "I never could make out what duty was myself . . . . I think you're all good lads, if that's what you mean. I'm not complaining." The story concludes with the consequences of the execution for some of those involved. Noble and the old lady who made such friends with Belcher fall to prayer, but the narrator goes out alone into the empty and desolate night, feeling "very small and very lost and lonely," making it clear that his life has been forever tarnished by the incident. This justly celebrated story shows the war against the British in a profoundly unheroic light, the cause of Irish freedom substantially compromised. A small incident, narrated from one character's point of view, without substantial apportioning of blame, brings the sadness and absurdity of this kind of war powerfully before the reader. Published only nine years after the end of hostilities with the British, it is a brave story.

Equally brave in their exposure of a post-independence *misère*, and one frequently seen from a woman's perspective, are the early short stories of Mary Lavin. *Tales from Bective Bridge*, her first collection, was published in Boston in 1942 and in London in 1943. In 1931, Daniel Corkery had published his influential *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, in which he set out what an authentic Irish literature should concern itself with – land, nationalism and religion – a recipe for an introverted, rural realism endorsing the pieties (literal and metaphorical) of the post-independence Irish Free State, and rejecting cosmopolitanism and a pre-independence literature written, Corkery argued, for foreign consumption. This strident and, in the context of the post-1922 settlement, understandable position neither reflected Corkery's own writing, nor the practice of the writers of the Free State or, indeed, the early years of the Irish Republic after 1947. Corkery's puritanism was contested constantly, in theory and in practice, by O'Connor

and by Seán O'Faoláin (the latter especially in the journal *The Bell*, which he edited from 1940 to 1946), and Liam O'Flaherty. These writers published widely in Ireland, but also in the U.S.A. and Britain. *The New Yorker* was an important source of income and status for O'Connor especially, and also offered an outlet free from the censors of the Irish Republic. Along with these writers, Lavin's work, especially *Tales of Bective Bridge*, presents Ireland in a complex fashion. Indeed, the whole collection moves, at times, beyond Ireland ("Miss Holland"), and aims at a universality, grounded, indeed, in Irish *realia*, but achieving a potent timelessness. "At Sallygap" is rightly famous as a treatment of almost Beckettian inertia (for a discussion of this story, see the Key Works chapter of this book), but the volume also contains the bleak and poetic story "The Green Grave and the Black Grave," and in "Brother Boniface" a luminous presentation of an escape from petty worldliness.

Lavin's "Love Is for Lovers" shows a debt to Joyce's *Dubliners*, but also points toward the psychological quirkiness and humor of William Trevor. The central character is Matthew Simmins, a forty-four-year-old manager of a general store. The glamorous widow Mrs. Cooligan sets her sights on him, constantly throwing herself in his way and asking his help, eventually bringing him to her house. Over several weeks, Mrs. Cooligan feeds him fine meals ("delectable dishes"), and he begins to think of marriage with her. One "exceptionally hot" Saturday afternoon in July, as they are taking tea in Mrs. Cooligan's back garden, he becomes aware of her as a disturbing and offensive figure: her dress is fiercely orange, she has unrealistic desires (she wants to go to America with him), she is coarsely suggestive, pushy, and, above all, she has a large and fat dog which she cuddles, pets, talks to, makes much off and which she allows to lick her face. Mr Simmins finds the beast nauseating, and flees the widow's house for the shadowy side of the street outside, for the coolness of a new handkerchief, for the cold air of his own house, for his own dreams of "a fragrant life where love was no warmer than winter sunlight," for his "chill, white bed."

"Love Is for Lovers" is a comic story, its principal (and stock) characters the bosomy widow and the small shop manager. It is, however, a powerful evocation of Simmins's psychology (and much of the story is presented from his point of view and through free indirect speech/thought): the insignificant invisible man who has let middle age creep up on him. He is, however, a man of dreams: he sees himself as really the major "partner" in a shop he does not own; he has entertained desires for the beautiful girls on advertisements. He allows himself, fully conscious of what is happening, to be finagled into a relationship with the lurid and blowsy Mrs. Cooligan, only, in the end, to be repelled by her vivid and forceful personality. The text partly hinges on an

opposition between her, her orange furnishings and dress, on one hand, and Mr. Simmins's longing for cool transcendence. The story is both even-handed and quirkily comic: Mrs. Cooligan is a grotesque but rather splendid figure (little Mr. Simmins sees her as a bosomy swan); finally, the reader is meant to see Mr. Simmins's escape as a fortunate one (even dreams of the cool peace of death are preferable to Mrs. Cooligan's dog). It is only Irish by suggestion (the small town, the general store, the characters' names), and aims for and achieves a universality in its depiction of two radically opposed temperaments.

No other Irish writer represents better than Samuel Beckett a profoundly cosmopolitan and experimental tendency within Irish short fiction in the twentieth century. Beckett wrote short fiction throughout his career. After the mid-1940s, however, he did so in French, himself usually, translating his work into English at a later date. Thus, Beckett texts exist from the start in a complex and very cosmopolitan state; they are both French and English texts, neither of which can really take precedence over the other. Beckett himself is a complex figure too: both part of the French and Irish literary worlds. Beckett's early short prose, even the macaronic "Sedendo et Quiescendo" (1932), can be relatively easily assimilated into the conventions of reading European fiction. Even the stories in *Stories and Texts for Nothing* (written in French in 1945, and published in French in 1958; published in English between 1962 and 1967), "The Expelled," "The Calmative," and "The End," have, albeit exiguous and deformed, narrative elements. The "Texts for Nothing" (written between 1950 and 1952, and published at various times in English), however, offer signal challenges to readers.

The thirteen texts are simply given numbers. The overall title is ambiguous. Texts that have no point? Texts offered to nothing? Texts that cost nothing? Texts in praise of nothing? Number 1 is typical of the sequence. Traditional story material is almost entirely absent. The reader encounters a voice that talks about its present situation, elements in its past, and its relationship with some other figures. The situation is one of stasis. "I couldn't any more, I couldn't go on." The voice appears to belong to a character lying face-down on the wet earth in a hole. How long he (or she – even the sex is unclear) has been there, and what brought him there, are unclear. He waits for a change in the weather (which seems poor), and for night to fall. He has lost his hat, perhaps swept away by the wind. He recalls his father's telling him a story when he was a child. At the text's end, it is apparent that the narrator is, in fact, telling himself the story the reader has just overheard. The lack of inciting moment, climax, denouement, and all the other traditional conventions of prose narrative is trumpeted.

Settings are unclear. The landscape in which the narrator/voice finds himself is bleak and isolated. Parts of it are hidden from view. Night is

falling. Are there other characters? The narrator hears voices and refers to others standing above him. Yet, these may be parts of his own complex individuality rather than separate entities. Curlews call. The narrator's father told him a story once, about the heroic and active Joe Breem, or Breen. The narrator himself seems to be principally in dialog with himself. He contradicts himself right at the beginning: "Suddenly, no, at last." "I'll describe the place, that's unimportant," he remarks later. The narrator's language is highly self-referential. He speaks to himself in run-on sentences; there are numerous repetitions and examples of syntactic parallelism.

> And how long have I been here, what a question, I've often wondered. And often I could answer, An hour, a month, a year, a century, depending on what I mean by here, and me, and being, and there I never went looking for extravagant meanings, there I never much varied, only the here would sometimes seem to vary.

Other passages are also marked by phonological orchestration. Note the recurrent /t/ and /l/ sounds that mark the story's concluding lines: "Sleep now, as under that ancient lamp, all twined together, tired out with so much talking, so much listening, so much toil and play."

What is the point of all this? Answers are many. Clearly Beckett is pushing at the limits of what readers will find acceptable as story. The text breaks conventions to offer something fresh and demanding, something rather different from the story of the noble Joe Breem. The reader has to work. Further, the story questions the status of the conventions: the lack of traditional setting and character makes us wonder about those often unchallenged devices of narrative. The voice, too, coming from nowhere, restlessly going over certain concerns, questioning itself, is surely not untrue, not unreal (one knows this from nightmare, conversations overheard on trains and planes, the confused jumble of one's own thoughts). Finally, the image of the human being trapped, exhausted, unable to go on or stay, surrounded by voices whose status is unclear, recalling – with night coming on – the consolations of a simpler past, somehow consoling himself with a story of sorts – that image is not unpersuasive. Beckett's short prose may be hard, but it has its rationale and rewards.

It is, also, not without influence in Irish short fiction. The great short-story writer of post-war Ireland, John McGahern, both distances himself from and yet cannily assimilates Beckett's work in his own fiction. In terms of career, McGahern, too, illustrates recurring complexities in Irish fiction. Driven into a brief, but bitter, exile in 1965 by the scandal surrounding his second novel *The Dark*, McGahern never had an Irish publisher, but brought out all his

work in London and in the U.S.A. His short fiction illustrates the range, depth and strength of the Irish short story in the last fifty years better than that of any other writer.

"Swallows" from *Getting Through* (1978) is set in a terrain and a time that McGahern and many other twentieth-century Irish short story writers made *the* setting of Irish short fiction: rural Ireland sometime in the mid-century. The drab constraints of time and place are emphasized, in a way that harks back to Joyce's paralyzed Dubliners and Beckett's inert voices, as the rural setting derives ultimately from Moore. The discontents of the muted, occluded lives of the post-independence dispensation are this text's subject, as they are of a multitude of Irish short stories. The protagonists of "Swallows" are unnamed, known only by their jobs, a *Garda* sergeant and a State Surveyor. One is older, the other is younger. The Sergeant was once a talented fiddle-player, vital, attractive to a beautiful girl at local dances. Now he lives in middle age, embittered by the inequities of his society, savage about the tawdry banalities of his world, with a deaf and mentally simple housekeeper, his fiddle case covered with dust, and the instrument itself unplayable. The younger man, too, has opted for the safety of a state job, but he at least keeps his dream of music alive. He owns an old and beautiful instrument; he plays it with the talented proprietor of a Galway hotel. The story is a study in loneliness and failure. The swallows of the title refer to the summer birds in distant, glorious Avignon where the young surveyor buys his lovely violin, a dream and a space of hope and light that is set against the grim weather and the rural inanity and stagnation of the Sergeant's world. They are also a metaphor of passing time and of the summer when the weather will change and the Sergeant can go roach fishing on the lake. As in stories by McGahern's predecessors, Lavin and O'Faoláin, for example, and in many of those by his contemporary William Trevor, there is a desperate sadness about characters' lives, trapped in a limited world that is impoverished materially and mentally. The power of a story like "Swallows" lies in the careful, sympathetic, yet clear-sighted evocation of such a world. In McGahern's case, such power is augmented by a language that drifts towards poetry on several occasions through phonological orchestration and syntactic parallelism, a language that – once noticed – becomes as self-referential as Beckett's prose.

"The Beginning of an Idea" (also from *Getting Through*) moves beyond rural Ireland. The protagonist is Eva Lindberg, a Finnish woman writer – it is never stated explicitly that the opening setting is Finland, but this is indicated by characters' names. Fascinated by an account of one element in Chekhov's death (the fact that his body was transported to Moscow in a wagon that had the word "Oysters" chalked on it) and by Chekhov's story "Oysters," Lindberg decides to leave her director's job in the theatre to travel to Spain

and to write about the Russian author. She is also getting away from an unsatisfying love affair with a married man. Her journey to Spain and the initial period there are rewarding. However, she finds it difficult to write and falls into work that takes her away from what she wants to do. Also – for this is Franco's Spain – she is entrapped by corrupt *Guardia Civil* officers, who force her to have sex with them. The story's end is inconclusive. The protagonist is traveling again, but, apart from her immediate destination, it is not clear where she is going.

"The Beginning of an Idea" strikingly presents the experience of a woman and a writer in worlds far from Ireland – a never-explicitly named wintry Helsinki, and a bakingly hot southern Spain. Eva's responses to her Finnish lover and to her abuse at the hands of the *Guardia Civil* officers are rendered powerfully, as is her writer's block. The story demonstrates some of the cosmopolitan ambitions of Irish short fiction, and finds a resonance in the work of a younger generation of Irish short-story writers, such as Mary Dorcey, Neil Jordan, and Hugo Hamilton. McGahern's contemporary, William Trevor, too, casts the net of his fiction beyond Ireland and the Irish, his output including both "The Ballroom of Romance" with its rural Irish setting (from *The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories* [1972]) and, in the same collection, stories without Irish characters and set far from Ireland, such as "Going Home" or "The Mark-2 Wife." McGahern's choice of a woman's point of view, which he adopts also in his first novel *The Barracks* (1963), reflects that in Edna O'Brien's short fiction, for example the stories in *The Love Object* (1968), and also that in Maeve Binchy's very successful short story collections, such as *The Return Journey and Other Stories* (1998). McGahern's short fiction can be seen as representative, too, of the predominant realist tendency within the Irish short story. Beckett's deviations from the protocols of realism are unusual. The self-referentiality and other metafictional elements that are undeniably present in McGahern's writing are always modestly hidden beneath a traditional surface.

The list of Irish writers, from both the north and south of the island, who have produced substantial work in short fiction over the past fifty years is impressive. It includes (besides those mentioned above): Mary Beckett, Evelyn Conlon, Brian Friel, Jack Harte, Desmond Hogan, Benedict Kiely, Bernard MacLaverty, Bryan MacMahon, and Éilís Ní Dhuibhne. The conventions of realism dominate; the focus is usually on a specifically Irish life and *realia*; however, this is not always the case, and Irish fiction casts its net wide these days, as, indeed, it has always done. One assumes that in the twenty-first century the form will continue to be a favored one for Irish writers.