

The Growth and Development of Short Story

Useful for B.A. Part I English (Hons.) students

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The art of story telling is nearly as old as human civilisation. From cave paintings to oral tradition of narrating tales, the art of story telling moved a long way to reach the present form of short story. Throughout the history of literature, brief narratives found expressions in various forms such as, anecdotes, short allegorical romance, fairy tales, myths, etc.

Although they cannot be defined as short story, they did contribute to the development of the genre.

In comparison to poetry and drama, short story as a literary genre bloomed rather late. Grown out of the fairy tales and Aesop's fables, the art of writing short fiction developed further in the stories of Brothers Grimm. But it was not until the 19th century that the short story was regarded as a distinct literary form. With the publications of magazines and growing numbers of circulating libraries, popularity of the short story grew considerably.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allen Poe and Turgenev enriched the art with their classic and timeless short fiction. By the end of the 19th century one of the finest authors from Russia - Anton Chekhov - excelled and carved a niche for himself in the art of story telling.

Now one might question who exactly was the precursor of the short story? It is difficult to name any single figure or source for this particular genre because the seeds of short narratives or tales can be found in various forms of narratives such as, Aesop's Fable, the stories of The Bible, Boccaccio's Decameron or in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. There are plenty of such references who can claim to have paved the way for modern English short story.

But one may say that Walter Scott's "The Two Drovers" published in the Chronicles of Canon Gate in 1827 was the point of beginning of this new genre. Scott had also been a shaping influence for British authors such as George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe in America, Balzac in France and many more. But despite Scott's contribution to its development, the short story hardly existed in mid 19th century England.

On the contrary, in France, America and Russia this new art form got an overwhelming response from the literary world. However, back home, in the 1880s it was with Robert Louis Stevenson that the short story began emerging as a popular form of narration.

Thankyou