

The Short story and its uses

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Abstract: As technology is developing, communication is evolving towards uncharted lands. Words replaced by pictures or videos and the restrictive 160 character social media platform. This progression has taken its toll on our attention span and our language in general. In such a world, finding the relevance of short stories, to not only amuse but also to ameliorate one's attention and many other such conclusive effects are studied by this paper. It focuses on one of the most famous raconteurs of the genre, O. Henry, the language found and the use of various elements of narration, all to better understand how a story shifts the focus away from easy to misinterpret and ambiguous conversations to thought provoking and language augmenting dialogue in quotidian life.

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1. THE SHORT STORY AND HISTORY

Stories have existed maybe as long as mankind has and have evolved through the passage of time from cave paintings to songs and ballads and many oral traditions to the jotting down of events for posterity on scrolls and tablets. Before the 19th century the short story was not regarded as a distinct genre yet existed for almost as long as language itself. It was found in various forms like: jests, anecdotes, fairy tales and short myths. They do not define a short story but are components and the basis of a modern short . Previously, there existed sketches and tales while one was journalistic in nature, the other was a narrative by a story teller, conveying the desires of a people wanting make a mark. Tales mostly used symbols and fantasy. The short story mitigates the fantasy of a tale and liberates a sketch from strict factuality (Hansen, 2016).

Both the telling and listening of them has been an inherent activity and thus exists even today but in a form portraying stark difference when compared to the ages gone by. Technology has advance at such a rapid pace in this century than it ever has before, it is inevitable that the way we communicate would change as well. How do we communicate? Through twitter, within 140 characters, In Instagram through pictures and snap chat through short snaps or videos that last just for a day. The vocabulary of a regular pop song usually has the vocabulary of the fifth grade. With such unexpected effects of social media and shift in communication, language and reading has unfortunately taken a back seat. With students not reading anything apart from course work, the reader is on the path of becoming a dying breed.

Communication and the story:

The Shannon weaver communication model talks about information being sent from the encoder via a channel to a receiver while having distortion and sending feed back as well (Shannon and Weaver, 1949). Reading is often seen a passive form of communication but feedback comes into picture once the reader is invited to make inferences on the theme and symbols which make up the story, the most prominent form being reviews. When this invitation is lost on people due to lack of a formal introduction, distortion occurs and the aim of a communication model is remove or greatly diminish the distortion present.

How does fiction, which seemingly deviates from our subjects help us? It is obvious one augments one's vocabulary, how does a short story help? When broken down a riveting story has a plot, well developed characters and such elements we use to try and encourage a generation with an attention span quite close to that of a goldfish(Microsoft, 2015). Short stories present themselves as a plausible way to induce and cultivate the habit of reading. This takes us away from abbreviations and curt replies to that of a fulfilling conversation by not only taking time away from the screen to relax but also to enrich one's own language. With busy schedules a short story is the perfect companion.

The story and its ingredients:

It is a wrong assumption to think that short stories are just simplified or summaries of novels. They liberate the writer while constraining them at the same time. Literary greats like O. Henry, Jack London are the

best examples of the efficacy of the short story. The genres range from horror as depicted by Edgar Allan Poe to that of humor, characteristic of P.G Wodehouse.

Language aids but is not the main standard of judging a good short story. Questions to be asked when trying to determine are: whether a particular story is enjoyable and does it give insight. As, imaginary events can still deliver real truth and be a source of enjoyment that brings an increase in understanding.

A story generally consists of: plot, character, theme, irony and symbol. Conflict (internal or external) is an element used often and is an important part of a good plot. It is more than a collection of incidents. In short story, plot consists mostly of what a character does. They must be consistent in their actions, to be dramatized well; as the force of action of characters has greater impact than just words. The theme is the controlling idea and if one is able to discover the theme, it shows a great understanding of the story. Character and plot help state theme. Another important element is irony, it is the discrepancy between appearance and reality. There also exist symbols which usually is something that means more than itself. The difference between a story and a short is not just the length. Short stories follow the same paradigm but some parts are implied rather than spelt out. The paper concerns itself with one of the most famous short story tellers, O.Henry. He has thrived despite the medium's seemingly restrictive nature. We have stories like "The last leaf", "The gift of the Magi" both different but definitely riveting. The language used and the emotions captured are part of what makes him such a good raconteur.

The Story And The Proletariat:

According to a study people's brain waves were measured before during and after reading novels. During the week while the participants read, it showed an increase in connectivity within the brain but what was interesting were the results after completion. The connectivity showed a sustained increase even after the end of the experiment period (Berns et al. 2013). This specific pattern of mapping of brain activity shows us not only the present but also future benefits of reading.

The Main Advantages Of Reading Are:

Language acquisition: For first time language learners a story is good way to see complex structures in action. While abbreviation and keeping it short are the norm, vocabulary augmentation happens while reading which not only aids one's knowledge of words but also the application both in day to day activities and tests as well. Improving brain activity: Reading keeps the brain active while causing less strain to the eyes unlike that caused by bright moving images. Thus helps increase ever diminishing attention span in people which can better aid in concentration. Communication: The context and usage of words aids our communication in various ways. Helps convey thoughts coherently.

The focus is being placed on short stories as many people complain of lack of time or even patience to complete a full novel. There are many notable short story writers who use this small canvas very well like Guy De Maupassant, P.G Wodehouse, Saki and closer home Ruskin Bond but cannot be given full justice in so short an analysis, which is why an author who has produced in various genres from romance to satire has been chosen and also for vivid imagery and symbolism. Take "The last leaf", a tiny leaf painted on a frozen window became a painter's master piece and a dying girl's reason to live. In "The gift of the Magi", both the husband and the wife sacrifice things valuable to receive from each other things which no longer hold utility to them and yet are treasured (Henry. O).

His stories are an ideal subject of discussion as, in a short paragraph, he can paint the background and through a few pages enable us to view intimate moments of that fictional character's life which others would not know otherwise. This is a way of connecting with an audience within such a short time span, leaving them with an attachment to those ephemeral beings. Surprise is an element O.Henry uses in all his stories, and has mostly open ended stories leaving the reader with numerous possibilities. In contrast to another well known author Edgar Allan Poe, who has a finality in his endings. He focuses on the effect whereas Henry focuses on the plot. Though different as they are each focuses on different narrative techniques, they know the value of each word that is being used and thus do not have the liberty of using words callously. Therefore, the language is rich with a vast vocabulary and yet does not obstruct the enjoyment of the reader. This helps in removing the reasons people give for being unable to read, like less time or disinterest in a particular genre. O.Henry sometimes makes a mélange of various genres so that one can find whatever one desires, right from cliff hangers and suspense to happily ever-after endings. Though not a Charles Dickens, his imagination delivers real truths, not intending to be didactic but encourages the reader to thus glean meaning from the inconspicuous.

A la fin:

Unless there is passion in the writing, the reader will leave unconvinced of even the most worthy cause. As he himself once said, "I'll give you the whole secret to short story writing. Here it is. Rule 1: Write stories that please yourself. There is no Rule 2." In the end this will be a substantial step in the right direction. This harmless hobby if cultivated into a habit can be very beneficial. Though a mere two-three page narrative, the

short story is not to be scorned, as it may well be the key that turns the tide and brings to life more intentional communication; it teaches without sounding prosaic and thus nurtures a new generation of readers.

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