



'The One and the Many': The Short Story and the Short Story Composite

*3 creds.,
1st semester*

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Aims and Objectives

The aim of this module is to introduce students to the complexities and pleasures of a genre that has experienced great proliferation since 1900, the short story composite (alternately termed short story cycle, short story sequence, etc.). The short story composite consists of a series of discrete, juxtaposed short stories unified by aesthetic strategies used to render the fragmentation and subjectivity of the modern experience. This relationship between part and whole has profound implications for the short story composite, since it foregrounds an inherent tension between “the simultaneous independence and interdependence” of its constituent stories, between unity (closure) and multiplicity, fusion and fragmentation, that distinguish this mode of writing.

While the course will chiefly be concerned with a poetics of the short story composite, it will also focus on the cultural uses of the form to articulate the concerns of “the one and the many” in a multicultural society such as the United States (the genre also forms an extensive literary archive in Canada, Australia and Latin America).

By the end of this course, students will have achieved the following objectives:

- Become familiar with the works of major practitioners in the field of short story cycles in the United States.
- Sharpen critical faculties with regard to the analysis and appreciation of the short story and the short story cycle.
- Have a sound understanding of the central aspects of contemporary short fiction theory.
- Analyze the distinctive features of the short story cycle, the collection of stories and the segmented novel.
- Deepen their understanding of American short story cycles while exploring related literary and cultural issues.
- Develop an awareness of the specificity of the genre of the short story and the short story cycle and their importance in American literary culture.
- Be able to inter-relate theoretical debate with close textual analysis.
- Write a publishable critical essay (or a master’s thesis) and present an oral defense.

Course Program

A selection of short story composites will be specified at the beginning of the course for class discussion on designated dates. Texts will be read alongside relevant literary and cultural theory, although emphasis will be placed on the poetics of the form. The syllabus texts represent more advanced stages in the development of the short story composite, as each exploits the fragmentation and lack of cohesion of the genre (the inherent tension between “the one and the many”) in order to analyze the complex interaction between the individual and the community, and depict the opposite impulses in any society towards unity and diversity or integration and alienation. Students will be encouraged to develop an understanding of and ability to analyze particular texts, and also to relate them to the wider discussion of the social and theoretical issues.

Methodology

The aim of each seminar will be to discuss the literary value of short story composites by representative authors that have used this mode of writing to explore notions of identity, history and place. The class will proceed mostly through discussion, and hence participation (which assumes attendance) will affect the students’ final grade. They are expected to read all required texts and come to class prepared to discuss the assigned material.

- Individual oral presentation. Each student will present a critical and personal reflection on a short story cycle related to their research paper. They will be judged on the quality of their works as well as on the delivery of the information.
- Web-based assignments. These individual assignments will consist of integrative questions, asking the student to critically comment on one or two scholarly articles related to a short story composite.
- Long essay (or Master’s thesis). Students are expected to submit one academic essay of approximately four thousand words on a topic agreed with the tutor, or using the essay titles that will be distributed in class. This analytical paper will be graded on content, organisation and style (MLA format).

Assessment

Evaluation will be based on effective class discussion, interpretation and critical analyses of texts, class presentations, a fully documented research paper/project, and homework assignments. Students will be called upon to give an oral presentation on an assigned topic, and to write a seminar essay of 10 standard pages. The essay is the basis for assessment, and may form the basis for the writing of the Master's thesis later on.

The module will be assessed by one essay of 4,000-5,000 words, submitted at the end of the semester. The teacher will circulate a list of suggested topics for essays, but students will also be encouraged to suggest their own. To prepare for the writing of the essay, students will discuss their proposals with their supervisor, who will, if necessary, suggest further lines of research and argument.

The **course grade** will be determined on the basis of these four components:

- Seminar preparation, class participation, and attendance: 15%
- Oral presentation: 25%
- Web-based assignments: 10%
- Essay (or Master's thesis): 50%

Bibliography and Resources

- Brown, Julie and William Cain, eds. *Ethnicity and the American Short Story*. New York: Garland Pub., 1997.
- _____, ed. *American Women Short Story Writers: A Collection of Critical Essays*. New York: Garland Pub., 2000.
- Davis, Rocío G. *Transcultural Reinventions: Asian American and Asian Canadian Short Story Cycles*. Toronto: TSAR, 2001.
- Dunn, Maggie and Ann Morris. *The Composite Novel: The Short Story Cycle in Transition*. New York: Twayne, 1995.
- Gelfant, Blanche H., ed. *The Columbia Companion to the Twentieth Century American Short Story*. New York: Columbia UP, 2000.
- Gerlach, John. *Toward the End: Closure and Structure in the American Short Story*. Alabama: U of Alabama P, 1985.
- Hanson, Clare. *Short Stories and Short Fictions 1880-1980*. London: Macmillan, 1985.
- _____, ed. *Re-Reading the Short Story*. London: Macmillan, 1989.
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- Ingram, Forrest L. *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century*. The Hague: Mouton, 1971.
- Kennedy, J. Gerald, ed. *Modern American Short Story Sequences*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1995.
- Levy, Andrew. *The Culture and Commerce of the American Short Story*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.
- Lohafer, Susan. *Coming to Terms with the Short Story*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1983.
- _____. *Reading for Storyness: Preclosure Theory, Empirical Poetics, and Culture in the Short Story*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003.
- Lohafer, Susan and J.E. Clarey, eds. *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989.
- Lounsbury, Barbara, et al. *The Tales We Tell: Perspectives on the Short Story*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood P, 1998.
- Lundén, Rolf. *The United Stories of America*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999.
- Luscher, Robert M. "The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book." *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*. Ed. Jo Ellyn Clarey and Susan Lohafer. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989. 148-167.
- Mann, Susan G. *The Short Story Cycle: A Genre Companion & Reference Guide*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood P, 1988.
- May, Charles. *The Short Story. The Reality of Artifice*. New York: Twayne, 1995.
- _____, ed. *The New Short Story Theories*. Athens, OH.: Ohio UP, 1994.

Nagel, James. *The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle: The Ethnic Resonance of the Genre*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2001.

Resources

The Short Story Library – American Literature (Short stories listed by title)

<http://www.americanliterature.com/sstitleindex.html>

Bibliomania: Short Stories

<http://www.bibliomania.com/0/5/frameset.html>

American Literature on the Web (Alphabetical listing of American authors)

http://www.nagasaki-gaigo.ac.jp/ishikawa/amlit/authorlist/f_list.htm

Internet Public Library Online Literary Criticism Collection

<http://ipl.org/div/litcrit/>

The Voice of the Shuttle (Alan Liu's collection of electronic resources for the Humanities)

<http://vos.ucsb.edu/>

Perspectives in American Literature - A Research and Reference Guide

<http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/table.html>

The Online Books Page

<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/books/>

Annotated Author Links

<http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/litlinks/Pages/Main.aspx>