**SHORT STORY**

When it comes to classification, this one is one of the most elusive forms. It is doubtful, anyway, if classification is helpful. (Cuddon et al., *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 815)

How long is SHORT?

Predecessors: myth, legend, parable, fairy tale, fable, anecdote, essay, character study, even the ballad.

Alternative terms: tale, sketch, yarn (French *conte/nouvelle*, German *Novelle/Kurzgeschichte*, Russian *skaz*)

Some of the first examples – Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and Boccaccio’s *Decameron* – are in prose & verse.

Cervantes published his *Novelas ejemplares* in 1613

England – second half of the 18th c. – the tradition of the short story established, based on the popularity of oriental tales and Gothic novel –> gothic short stories

By the 19th c. SS is popular all over Europe and the US

* ghost stories, elements of the supernatural (E. T. A. Hoffman, H. von Kleist, Walter Scott, Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne)
* E. A. Poe – the above and one of the founders of the detective story

– In Poe’s definition, SS always concentrates on a unique or single effect.

* The realist SS also developed during the 19th c.   
  – Russia: Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Chekov (everyday things and events and ordinary people)   
  – France: Balzac, de Vigny, de Maupassant– USA: Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Bret Harte, O. Henry, Jack London, Sherwood Anderson

**Ricardo Piglia**

**Theses on the Short Story**(*New Left Review* 70, 2011, 63–6)

**THESIS I: Short story always tells two stories**

1. E.g.: Chekov’s diary – outline of a story: Man goes to Monte Carlo – wins a million – goes home – commits suicide

This is the chronological story [sequence of events] of a possible future narrative.

* In this story the classic short story form is condensed: the predictable storyline (bet – losing – suicide) is presented as paradox
* In subverting the logic of predictable development, **we get two separate storylines**: A. that of the bet and winning; B. that of the suicide

2. **Classical story** (e.g.: E. A. Poe)

* Has the PRIMARY STORY (the bet) in the foreground
* The SECONDARY STORY (the suicide) is skillfully interwoven into its seams – told elliptically – Piglia calls it THE SECRET STORY
* Sometimes the conclusion of the SECONDARY STORY appears on the surface –> surprise

3. **The two stories are told differently**

* The events in the narrative are shown in different light within the logic of the two storylines
* The points where they intersect are the main building blocks of the short story

4. **Incongruent Details**

* Details which might seem incongruent in the storyworld of one storyline are essential for the understanding and logic of the second

**THESIS II: The SECRET STORY is the key to the short-story form.**

5. **Modern short story** (Chekov, Sherwood Anderson, Kathrine Mansfield, James Joyce etc.)

* Does away with the surprising conclusion and the closed structure
* Instead, it keeps the tension between the two storylines (the PRIMARY and the SECONDARY/SECRET one)
* The two stories are told as if they were one

6. **Hemingway’s ICEBERG THEORY**

* The most important elements of the story are hidden under the surface – not told
* The secret story is built on what is not told – based on implications, allusions

7**. Kafka**

* tells the SECRET STORY openly, simply.
* tells the PRIMARY STORY obscurely/ cryptically
* this inversion is the basis of the KAFKAESQUE ATMOSPHERE

**CONCLUSION**

Short story is designed so that it would ingeniously disclose something that has been/ or would otherwise remain hidden. It is meant to let us glimpse the hidden truth under the dark and muddled surface of life.