

The Short Story

Saki's The Open Window

SECOND CLASSES

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**DEFINITION, ANTIQUITY AND
UNIVERSALITY OF THE SHORT**

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Syllabus of the Short Story

1. Definition of the Short Story.
2. Antiquity of the Short Story.
3. Universality of the Short Story.
4. Characteristics of the Short Story.
5. Kinds of the Short Story.
6. Saki's the Open Window as an example of the short story which includes.
 - 6.1 Saki's Life and Works.
 - 6.2 Analysis and Comments on "The Open Window".
 - 6.3 Important Questions and Discussion on "The Open Window"

Definition

A short story is a kind of prose fiction which has grown up besides the novel. It may require from half an hour to one hour for its perusal. In other words, brevity is the keynote of a short story. It is a story which can be physically possible to read at one sitting. But it must not be supposed that the short story is a novel. It has a definite technique of its own.

Antiquity

Though immensely popular in modern times, the short story is not a modern product. It has been popular in every age and in every country. From times immemorial, people, old and young have always liked to be entertained and the short has been their most popular entertainment. Short-form storytelling can be traced back to ancient times in legends, mythology, folklore, and fables found in communities all over the world. The earliest forms of the short story were the tales of adventure, dealing

with the deeds of valor or of chivalry of some popular hero. Some of these stories existed in written form, but many were passed down to generations through oral traditions.

Early examples of short stories ranged from the Middle Eastern folk tales like One Thousand and One Nights (collected by multiple authors between the 8th and 14th centuries, later known in English as Arabian Nights), the English collection of Canterbury Tales written by Geoffrey Chaucer in the 14th century and the Indian collection of tales told in the Ramayana. But these tales of adventure and moral tales of the past have no resemblance with the modern short story until the early 19th century that short story collections by individual authors appeared more constantly in print.

The short story began to flourish in several parts of the world at about the same time — the 19th century. The United States had great practitioners of the form, like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mark Twain and Edgar Allan Poe (who wrote an essay about short fiction called "The Philosophy of Composition"); France had prolific and excellent story writers such as Guy de Maupassant and Alphonse Daudet; in Germany the brothers Grimm published their retold fairytales; and in England, writers like Thomas Hardy, HG Wells and Arthur Conan Doyle put out not just literary stories but some of the first modern detective stories and science fiction tales.

The single greatest leap forward in the evolution of the short story in the 19th century is attributed to the Russian writer, the father of the modern short story, Anton Chekhov. Chekhov's precursors themselves were among the best modern writers of fiction the world has ever seen. Chekhov saw and understood that life is godless, random and absurd, and he made his stories appear agonizingly, almost unbearably lifelike.

Universality

Short stories gained popularity in the second half of the 19th century, with the growth of print magazines and journals. Newspaper and magazine editors began publishing stories as commercial entertainment. That golden era of publishing gave rise to the short story as we know it today—a real literary art form.

The decades after World War II (post-1945) saw a surge of literary short stories being written and circulated, but contemporary authors never saw the same level of profits from publishing individual stories. Today, some literary magazines pay a small rate, but most short stories are printed without compensating authors.

Related Questions:

What is the short story?

Trace the development of the short story?

The Essential Characteristics of the Short Story

1. The primary aim of a short story is to entertain.
2. A short story is a story that can be read at a single sitting.
3. Every subject between heaven and earth is fit for the short story.
4. A short story must be complete without any suggestion of overcrowding.
5. Owing to the exigencies of space, a short-story writer cannot portray a character in full.
6. A short-story writer cannot introduce a dozen or even half-a-dozen characters in the story.
7. The dialogues in a short story should be brief and to the point.
8. A consistent atmosphere is necessary for a short story.

The Five Important Elements of the Short Story

1. Setting: The time, location, weather condition, social condition, and mood in which a story takes place is called the setting.

2. Plot: The planned and logical series of events is called the plot.

There are five essential parts of plot:

- a) Introduction
- b) Rising Action
- c) Climax
- d) Falling Action
- e) Resolution or Denouement

3. Conflict: Any form of opposition that faces the main character is called conflict.

There are two types of conflict:

- a. External – A struggle with a force outside man’s self.
- b. Internal – A struggle within man’s self.

4. Characters: Persons in a work of fiction are called characters_ protagonist and antagonist.

5.Theme: The theme in a piece of fiction is its controlling idea.

Types of The Short Story

1) **Anecdote:** An anecdote is a short, amusing or interesting account of a real person or incident.

2) **Drabble:** A drabble is a short piece of fiction, usually of exactly 100 words in length – not including the title. The purpose of a drabble is to

test an author's skill at expressing himself/herself meaningfully and interestingly in a very confined space.

- 3) **Fable:** A fable is a succinct story featuring anthropomorphic creatures usually animals, but also mythical creatures, plants, inanimate objects, or forces of nature to tell a story with a moral.
- 4) **Mini-Saga:** A mini-saga is a short story told in exactly 50 words.
- 5) **Flash Fiction:** Flash fiction refers to an extremely short piece of literature. It may be under 1000 words.
- 6) **Frame Story:** A frame story is also known as a frame tale or a nested narrative
- 7) **Story Sequence:** A story sequence is a group of short stories that work together to form a longer piece.
- 8) **Sketch Story:** A sketch story is a description of a character or a location.
- 9) **Vignette:** A vignette is a short, impressionistic piece that focuses on a single scene, character, idea, setting, or object.
- 10) **parable:** A parable is a story having religious base and a moral lesson.
- 11) **Fairy Tale:** A fairy tale is a children's story about magical and imaginary beings and lands.

The Open Window

By Saki (H.H. Munro)

"My aunt will be down presently, Mr. Nuttel," said a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen; "in the meantime you must try and put up with me." Framton Nuttel endeavored to say the correct something which should duly flatter the niece of the moment without unduly discounting the aunt that was to come.

Privately he doubted more than ever whether these formal visits on a succession of total strangers would do much towards helping the nerve cure which he was supposed to be undergoing. "I know how it will be," his sister had said when he was preparing to migrate to this rural retreat; "you will bury yourself down there and not speak to a living soul, and your nerves will be worse than ever from moping.

I shall just give you letters of introduction to all the people I know there. Some of them, as far as I can remember, were quite nice." Framton wondered whether Mrs. Sappleton, the lady to whom he was presenting one of the letters of introduction came into the nice division. "Do you know many of the people round here?" asked the niece, when she judged that they had had sufficient silent communion. "Hardly a soul," said Framton. "My sister was staying here, at the rectory, you know, some four years ago, and she gave me letters of introduction to some of the people here.

"He made the last statement in a tone of distinct regret. "Then you know practically nothing about my aunt?" pursued the self-possessed young lady. "Only her name and address," admitted the caller. He was wondering whether Mrs. Sappleton was in the married or widowed state. An indefinable something about the room seemed to suggest masculine habitation.

"Her great tragedy happened just three years ago," said the child; "that would be since your sister's time. "Her tragedy?" asked Framton; somehow in this restful country spot tragedies seemed out of place. "You may wonder why we keep that window wide open on an October afternoon," said the niece, indicating a large French window that opened on to a lawn.

"It is quite warm for the time of the year," said Framton; "but has that window got anything to do with the tragedy? "Out through that window, three years ago to a day, her husband and her two young brothers went off for their day's shooting. They never came back. In crossing the moor to their favorite snipe-shooting ground they were all three engulfed in a treacherous piece of bog. It had been that dreadful wet summer, you know, and places that were safe in other years gave way suddenly without warning.

Their bodies were never recovered. That was the dreadful part of it." Here the child's voice lost its self-possessed note and became falteringly human. "Poor aunt always thinks that they will come back someday, they and the little brown spaniel that was lost with them, and walk in at that window just as they used to do. That is why the window is kept open every evening till it is quite dusk. Poor dear aunt, she has often told me how they went out, her husband with his white waterproof coat over his arm, and Ronnie, her youngest brother, singing 'Bertie, why do you bound?' as he always did to tease her, because she said it got on her nerves.

Do you know, sometimes on still, quiet evenings like this, I almost get a creepy feeling that they will all walk in through that window--" She broke off with a little shudder. It was a relief to Framton when the aunt bustled into the room with a whirl of apologies for being late in making her appearance. "I hope Vera has been amusing you?" she said. "She has

been very interesting," said Framton. "I hope you don't mind the open window," said Mrs. Sappleton briskly; "my husband and brothers will be home directly from shooting, and they always come in this way. They've been out for snipe in the marshes today, so they'll make a fine mess over my poor carpets. So like you menfolk, isn't it?" She rattled on cheerfully about the shooting and the scarcity of birds, and the prospects for duck in the winter.

To Framton it was all purely horrible. He made a desperate but only partially successful effort to turn the talk on to a less ghastly topic, he was conscious that his hostess was giving him only a fragment of her attention, and her eyes were constantly straying past him to the open window and the lawn beyond. It was certainly an unfortunate coincidence that he should have paid his visit on this tragic anniversary.

"The doctors agree in ordering me complete rest, an absence of mental excitement, and avoidance of anything in the nature of violent physical exercise," announced Framton, who labored under the tolerably widespread delusion that total strangers and chance acquaintances are hungry for the least detail of one's ailments and infirmities, their cause and cure. "On the matter of diet they are not so much in agreement," he continued. "No?" said Mrs.

Sappleton, in a voice which only replaced a yawn at the last moment. Then she suddenly brightened into alert attention--but not to what Framton was saying. "Here they are at last!" she cried. "Just in time for tea, and don't they look as if they were muddy up to the eyes!" Framton shivered slightly and turned towards the niece with a look intended to convey sympathetic comprehension. The child was staring out through the open window with a dazed horror in her eyes. In a chill shock of nameless fear Framton swung round in his seat and looked in the same direction.

In the deepening twilight three figures were walking across the lawn towards the window, they all carried guns under their arms, and one of them was additionally burdened with a white coat hung over his shoulders. A tired brown spaniel kept close at their heels. Noiselessly they neared the house and then a hoarse young voice chanted out of the dusk: "I said, Bertie, why do you bound?" Framton grabbed wildly at his stick and hat; the hall door, the gravel drive, and the front gate were dimly noted stages in his headlong retreat.

A cyclist coming along the road had to run into the hedge to avoid imminent collision. "Here we are, my dear," said the bearer of the white mackintosh, coming in through the window, "fairly muddy, but most of it's dry. Who was that who bolted out as we came up?" "A most extraordinary man, a Mr. Nuttel," said Mrs. Sappleton; "could only talk about his illnesses, and dashed off without a word of goodbye or apology when you arrived.

One would think he had seen a ghost." "I expect it was the spaniel," said the niece calmly; "he told me he had a horror of dogs. He was once hunted into a cemetery somewhere on the banks of the Ganges by a pack of pariah dogs, and had to spend the night in a newly dug grave with the creatures snarling and grinning and foaming just above him. Enough to make anyone lose their nerve."

Romance at short notice was her specialty.

ANALYSIS OF THE OPEN WINDOW

1) Themes

Appearance and Reality:

Vera, the fifteen years old, appears to be an innocent girl while in fact she is very playful since she makes up stories so well ,that even her own aunt falls for them. The reader also believes Vera to an extent. The window is real whereas Vera's story is imaginative through which Nuttel expected to see three ghosts coming through the window, so when he saw the men coming towards the house, he fled.

Deception:

Vera deceives Framton Nuttel with her story of her aunt's husband and brothers being lost in the marsh and never returning. She also deceives her aunt by giving a reason why Nuttel rushed out of the house after seeing the three men telling her aunt that he fears dogs.

Sanity and Insanity :

This short story measures the sanity and insanity of all the characters. Framton Nuttel is insane to believe Vera without being more observant. He thinks that Mrs. Sappleton is insane but he is insane for real.

2) Plot:

Framton Nuttel is suffering from nerve disease for this reason his doctor advised him to visit a rural area where he knows no one. His sister gives him letters of introduction so he can meet people there. He pays a visit to Mrs. Sappleton. While he waits for her, her 15-year-old niece puts up with him. When she realizes Nuttel has never met her aunt and knows nothing about her, she explains that it has been three years since Mrs.

Sappleton's "great tragedy," when her husband and brothers went hunting and never returned, apparently engulfed into a bog. Mrs. Sappleton keeps the large French window open every day, hoping for their return. When Mrs. Sappleton appears she seems careless to Nuttel, talking instead about her husband's hunting trip and how she expects him home any minute.

Then the hunters appear in the distance, and Nuttel, horrified, grabs his walking stick and exits suddenly. When the Sappleton's exclaim over his sudden, impolite departure, the niece calmly explains that he was probably frightened by the hunters' dog. She claims that Nuttel told her he was once chased into a cemetery in India by a pack of aggressive dogs.

3) Characters

Vera, Saki's playful protagonist, is indeed a dynamic, or round, character. For one thing, she is a smart young lady who is able to identify people's weaknesses and to create a convincing tale that will deceive her audience. She plays with Nuttel's feelings telling him a fabricated story and deceiving her aunt telling her that Nuttel's fled related to the fear of dogs. Certainly, Vera enjoys exploiting the weaknesses in others with her quick and clever practical jokes.

Framton Nuttel, is the nervous, unconfident type. He came to the country side to cure himself from the nerve disease but instead, he met Vera who plays with his feelings. He even worries about Mrs. Sappleton's reception of him when he is introduced, and he is uncomfortable throughout the telling of Vera's tale.

Mrs. Sappleton, is the relaxed gentlewoman, concerned only with herself and those for whom she cares. For, she takes no interest in Framton Nuttel's coming. When Nuttel mentions his condition as explanation for his visit, she responds in a voice that hardly overwhelm a yawn. After Nuttel's sudden escape, she merely remarks upon his behavior and displays no concern for his feelings, expressing a slight curiosity for his actions which Vera's cleverly calms.

Framton Nuttel's sister, once spent time in the same town to which Framton has come for relaxation. She has given him a number of letters of Introduction with which he is to make himself known to a number of people in the town.

4) Setting:

Time: October

Place: Countryside, England; Sappleton's house

5) Style:

Structure:

The construction of Saki's story "The Open Window" is remarkable. The structure is actually that of a story-within- a-story. The first story is that of Mr. Nuttel's arrival at Mrs. Sappleton's house for the purpose of introducing himself to her (real). Within this narrative frame is the second story, that told by Mrs. Sappleton's niece (imaginative).

Symbolism:

The most important symbol in "The Open Window" is the open window itself. When Vera tells Mr. Nuttel the story of the lost hunters,

the open window comes to symbolize Mrs. Sappleton's sadness and heartbreak at the loss of her husband and two younger brothers. When the truth is later revealed, the open window no longer symbolizes sadness but now it symbolizes deception.

Literary Devices and Their Significance

(i) Irony

One of the examples of irony in this short story can be seen when Vera says that a "great tragedy" has happened to her aunt, Mrs. Sappleton. It is a form of verbal irony because the story told by Vera is the opposite of the truth. As readers read on, they will find out that the "missing" Mr. Sappleton, Mrs. Sappleton's two brothers and the dog are still alive.

(ii) Personification

Personification means inserting human traits into non-living things. The phrase "a treacherous piece of bog" is one of the examples of personification. The non-living thing, bog, is given a human trait, which is treachery.

(iii) Contrast

Contrast can be seen between the characters Vera and Nuttel. Vera is "a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen" and full with confidence. She is very convincing that Nuttel and even Mrs. Sappleton believe everything she says. Nuttel is a confused character who is suffering from nerve disease. He has a weak personality since he needs his sister's help to introduce him to people.

Questions on the text of "The Open Window"

1. Where is the climax in the short story? How is this achieved?
2. Explain the setting of the short story.
3. What is the lesson that you can learned in this short story?
4. Does Vera show hospitality to Frampton Nuttel? And how?
5. What does Saki mock in this story?
6. Where does "The Open Window" take place?
7. Saki is a pen name for whom?
8. Who introduces Framton to Mrs. Sappleton?
9. According to Vera, Framton has a phobia of what?
10. For whom does Mrs. Sappleton leave the window open?
11. According to Vera, what tragedy has befallen Mrs. Sappleton?
12. Why is Framton visiting the country?
13. Who is Vera's aunt?
14. Why does Framton flee from the house?
15. How old is Vera?
16. Where did Framton's sister use to work?
17. According to Vera, how many years ago did the "great tragedy" occur?
18. According to Vera, where are the bodies of the drowned hunting party?
19. What does the hunting party hunt?
20. Who is NOT a part of the hunting party?
21. How does Ronnie tease his sister?
22. What does Mrs. Sappleton hope in the winter?
23. What kind of dog do the men bring with them?
24. Who does Framton nearly collide with as he flees the house?
25. Who does Framton speak with when he first enters the house?

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26. What is the best description for Framton's relationship with Mrs. Sappleton?
27. According to Vera, where did Framton hide from the attacking dogs?]
28. According to Vera, what season did the hunting tragedy occur?