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the British and Irish Short Story

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A COMPANION TO

THE BRITISH AND IRISH SHORT STORY

EDITED BY

CHERYL ALEXANDER MALCOLM

AND DAVID MALCOLM

WILEY-BLACKWELL

A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2008

Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

Registered Office
John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

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350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A companion to the British and Irish short story / edited by Cheryl Alexander Malcolm and David Malcolm.

p. cm.—(Blackwell companions to literature and culture)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-4051-4537-4 (hardcover : alk. paper) 1. Short stories, English—History and criticism. 2. English fiction—Irish authors—History and criticism. 3. Short stories, English—Themes, motives. I. Malcolm, Cheryl Alexander. II. Malcolm, David, 1952–

PR829.C64 2008
823′.0109—dc22

2008008104

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Set in 11/13 pt Garamond 3 by SNP Best-set Typesetter Ltd., Hong Kong
Printed and bound in Singapore by Utopia Press Pte Ltd

1 2008

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Preface

This volume is aimed at a wide readership – students, teachers and scholars, and whoever is interested in the serious discussion of the British and Irish short story. The volume is divided into two parts. Part I covers the period 1880 to 1945, Part II that of 1945 to the present. The decision to start the coverage of the development of the short story in Britain and Ireland after 1880 is based on the scholarly consensus that, while early nineteenth-century and high-Victorian authors wrote short fiction, they neither took it very seriously nor thought about it in any focused manner. There seems to have been little consciousness in mid-Victorian Britain or Ireland (as opposed to the situation in the USA) of the short story as a discrete kind of text with substantial artistic potential. The fluid social and cultural climate of the late nineteenth century, however, provided fertile ground for an explosion in short-story production and thinking about the short story in Britain and Ireland. The starting point of 1945 for Part II also immediately suggested itself. World War II is a major watershed in British history; at its end Elizabeth Bowen (wrongly, as it turned out) foresaw a glowing new future for short fiction in the post-war world; political, economic, and cultural developments beginning in the late 1940s have created a context for British and Irish writers in the early twenty-first century that is radically different from that of the first half of the twentieth century. However, the division between pre- and post-1945 is sometimes misleading. Elizabeth Bowen, Jean Rhys, and Julian Maclaren Ross, for example, could figure in either section.

Each part of this volume is organized in a similar fashion. Both aim to move from a general to a more particular focus. Each starts with an introduction, which attempts to chart the evolution of short fiction in the period, and to give a sense of the social and literary context relevant to the short story. Then follow essays on specific topics and genres, such as the development of the short story in Ireland from 1880 to 1945, women's writing in both periods, the detective story to 1945, or the science fiction and fantasy short story in Britain after World War II. The third section of each part is made up of discussions of the work of particular short-story writers, or even in some cases of particular short stories, for example of Hardy's *Wessex Tales* or O'Brien's "A Rose in the Heart of New York."

Authors have been encouraged to select the texts they thought most relevant to the overall scheme of the book. They have also been allowed to follow their own approaches to the topic, genre, author, or text under discussion. Thus, some essays are contextual, placing short fiction within its political and social circumstances; others are more biographical in their focus; others still concentrate on technical aspects such as narration or setting. This seems to us desirable. Within limits, the humanities are a matter of dialog. Neither formalist nor historicist has the answer to all questions. It is to be hoped that these essays and the collection as a whole have a dynamism precisely because there is not a uniformity in vision or voice. Further, it should be noted that many essays refer to the subjects of other essays. Several discuss the same authors or texts, although differently. Others imply cross references to essays that precede or follow them. This is surely desirable, and is part of the internal dialog that we wished this book to have. All essays are, however, distinguished by the fact that they are interested in the specifics of specific concrete texts.

Limits of space (even in a volume of a quarter of a million words) have entailed cruel choices. No separate essays on Walter de la Mare, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Mary Lavin, or Graham Swift. No A.E. Coppard, no H.E. Bates, no Naomi Mitchison, no Kate Roberts, no Graham Greene. And so on. Further, there proved to be no space for discussion of the Welsh-language, the Scottish Gaelic, and the Irish-language traditions in short fiction. But a volume like this cannot be comprehensive, and perhaps no volume should be. There are omissions of individual authors that are unfortunate, but in compensation there are general essays on women's short fiction, for example, or gay and lesbian short fiction, or post-war fantasy short stories that open up new perspectives on the short story in Britain and Ireland.

Although the short story is not quite the despised stepchild of scholarship that some commentators suggest it is, short fiction in Britain has never enjoyed the sustained scholarly attention that the novel has. In addition, in Britain, although not in Ireland (and one of the aims of this volume is to emphasize the difference of the development of the short story on the two sides of the Irish Sea), the recurrent disdain of publishers for short fiction is a commonplace, but nonetheless true. The few times in which this has been different – the *fin de siècle*, the period of early twentieth-century modernist experimentation, the paper-strapped early 1940s – do not make up for decades of discouragement and neglect. We hope that this collection of essays may do something to right the balance. The history of the short story in Britain and Ireland is a rich and complex one. There are very many canonical and non-canonical writers of short fiction whose work needs to be looked at carefully. The short story itself, by canonical and non-canonical hands alike, is a form of great achievement and possibilities. This collection of essays aims to point out those things, and to encourage further work on British and Irish short fiction, both in its moments of glory, and in its more neglected times.

Cheryl Alexander Malcolm
David Malcolm

Part I
1880–1945

Introduction

1
The British and Irish Short Story to 1945

Cheryl Alexander Malcolm and David Malcolm

1

It is a commonplace of literary studies that the British short story (although not the Irish variety) has been largely neglected by scholarship. "[E]ven now it seldom receives serious critical attention commensurate with [its] importance," Ivan Reid wrote in 1977 (Reid 1977: 1). "For a complex of reasons the short story has been largely excluded from the arena of contemporary critical debate," Clare Hanson suggested in 1989 (Hanson 1989: 1). In the same year Mary Eagleton stressed the short story's non-canonical status (qtd in Hanson 1989: 62). In 1993, Birgit Moosmüller described the British short story as "auch heute noch ein Stiefkind der Forschung" (even today a step-child of scholarship) (Moosmüller 1993: 11). Thomas H. Gullason entitled his influential essay from 1964 "The Short Story: An Underrated Art" (Gullason 1964: 13), and in an interview in 1976 V.S. Pritchett declared that "The short story is a subject that has been entirely neglected" (Pritchett 1976: 425).

However, although there has been scholarly neglect of the British short story (and it must be stressed again that this is less true of Irish short fiction), this neglect has been relative rather than absolute, and, indeed, in the last decade there has emerged a substantial body of commentary on British short fiction. The scholars quoted above, Reid, Hanson, Moosmüller and Gullason, have themselves done much to efface the neglect of which they write. In addition, T.O. Beachcroft (1968), Walter Allen (1981), Joseph M. Flora (1985), Dennis Vannatta (1985), Valerie Shaw (1983), and Dominic Head (1992) have edited or written important and widely read books about British short fiction. Several volumes of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* have been devoted to British and Irish short-story writers (the most recent was published in 2006). Barbara Korte's excellent *The Short Story in Britain* was published in 2003, Arno Löffler's and Eberhard Späth's thorough collection of essays, *Geschichte der englischen Kurzgeschichte* appeared in 2005, and Andrew Maunder's comprehensive *The Facts on File Companion to the British Short Story* came out in 2007. Further, the pages

of *Studies in Short Fiction* and the *Journal of the Short Story in English* contain many essays on British short fiction. The history of British and Irish short fiction has been closely examined by Korte (2003) and by Harold Orel (1986), while Alastair Fowler dedicates considerable parts of his 1987 *A History of English Literature* to the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century short story and its Romantic and Victorian predecessors (Fowler 1987: 302–10; 335–42). Theoretical aspects of short fiction (its distinctive features, its relation to time, to human psychology, and to the social world) have also been dealt with, for example, by Reid (1977) and, notably, by Charles E. May (1976, 1984, 1994, 1995). But even if there have been elements of neglect in scholars' approach to British short fiction, this is not the case with regard to its Irish equivalent. In twentieth-century anglophone literary studies, the Irish short story has long enjoyed canonical status, and general studies such as those of Patrick Rafroidi and Terence Brown (1979) and James F. Kilroy (1984) are supplemented by an extensive scholarly literature on, for example, the work of James Joyce, Seán O'Faoláin, Mary Beckett, Edna O'Brien, John McGahern, William Trevor, Bernard MacLaverty, and Eilis Ní Duibhne. The short story in Britain, and certainly in Ireland, is not quite the stepchild of scholarship that Moosmüller writes of, and, as Maunder observes, "The acknowledgement of the short story's place in Britain's literary history is one of the most striking developments of recent years" (Maunder 2007: v).

However, there are surprising complexities within studies in short fiction, many to do with the defining features of the short story and its status as a genre. Reid entitles the first chapter of his monograph on the short story "Problems of Definition" (1977: 1), and Valerie Shaw judges that "It seems reasonable to say that a firm definition of the short story is impossible. No single theory can encompass the multifarious nature of a genre in which the only constant feature seems to be the achievement of a narrative purpose in a comparatively short space" (Shaw 1983: 21). A sense that the short story is difficult to define is widespread among its critics, who worry about how long or short a short story can be, whether the story materials of short stories are distinctive in any way, or whether short stories tend to focus on particular kinds of characters and experiences. There is, however, a considerable amount of helpful theoretical discussion of the short story (the work of Charles E. May is a notable example). Most short stories, one can conclude, are clearly considerably shorter than most novels (although there are cases open to doubt, for example, Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" or Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden*). Anthony Burgess's suggestion that prose fictional texts can be best understood as existing on a cline from the simplest and briefest anecdote to the longest *roman fleuve* is useful (qtd in Monod 1984: 31). The short story's shortness influences the story material it can contain and the depth in which it can explore its characters. As we argue elsewhere: "Story material must be less complex and extensive than that of the novel; characters can not be developed as they can in novels" (Malcolm and Malcolm 2006: xv). Various commentators (from Poe onwards) have also pointed to the way in which the short story often patterns events to build a highly integrated whole, reminiscent of the lyric poem. They have also argued that the brevity of the short story does not prevent it functioning as a

type of synecdoche or metaphor, suggesting that it is part of or illustrates a character's life, a community, or a society. Indeed, many commentators point out that an elliptical suggestiveness is characteristic of most short stories. In addition, a number of theorists of the short story have argued (taking their cue from Frank O'Connor) that the fragmentariness of the short story means that it is particularly good at embodying the voices and the fragmentary experiences of those who are outside the mainstream, the authoritative and comprehensive discourses, the dominant power structures, of their worlds – the poor, the humble, the alienated, the provincial, the colonized, the psychologically disturbed, children, adolescents, or women. Once again, this last (the bodying forth of the marginal voice, the fragment of experience) suggests a connection between the short story and the lyric poem (a connection indicated by writers as diverse as Elizabeth Bowen, Muriel Spark, and John Wain) (Bowen 1937: 7; Spark 1989: 12; Monod 1984: 51).

Many of the problems of definition with respect to the short story apply equally to the novel. However, they do seem to frustrate commentators on the short story more than those who theorize about the novel. Indeed, also like the novel, the short story can only with difficulty be classed as a genre, although the usage is widespread in English-language scholarship. The short story is too capacious a kind of text for that, including as it does texts of widely differing length, subject matter, and conventions. If the sonnet and science fiction are genres, the short story cannot be, but must be denominated differently. It is surely no more, and no less, than an amorphous category or kind of prose fictional text, marked by relative brevity, that embodies concise examples of the well-established genres of literary history and the literary present – *inter alia*, science fiction, the detective story, social-psychological fiction, the beast fable, the supernatural (or horror) story, historical fiction, gothic fiction, the parable, or the legend. Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of Silver Blaze," Rudyard Kipling's "They," V.S. Pritchett's "When My Girl Comes Home," J.G. Ballard's "Thirteen to Centaurus," Michael Moorcock's "Sojan the Swordsman," Maeve Binchy's "The Ten Snaps of Christmas," and Angela Carter's "The Courtship of Mr Lyon" are all short stories, but they belong to different genres and operate with quite different literary conventions.

The history of the short story in English (in Britain and Ireland) is now quite well understood. Short fictional prose narratives are a very old type of text, and pieces of short fiction have existed in Europe since classical times. (In the medieval period, many short narratives were written in verse, but they are still seen by scholars as part of the history of the short story.) R.C. Feddersen notes that:

> After the fall of Rome in the fifth century A.D., many classical tales (including those of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) were submerged or Christianized, but short didactic tales thrived in medieval times (often transmitted orally) and encouraged religious devotion. The *contes dévots*, believed to have originated with the early Christians, were pious tales in French verse meant to succor the lagging spirit. Later, *exempla* (short narratives used to illustrate sermons) became latter-day parables for the clergy. In the thirteenth and

> fourteenth centuries, *exempla* were compiled into volumes and indexed. (Feddersen 2001: xvi)

Korte provides a discussion of some of the main landmarks in the early development of short fiction in the British Isles: the *Hundred Merry Tales* (1526), cony-catching pamphlets (Elizabethan crime fiction), stories set within the proto-bourgeoisie of the late sixteenth century, short narratives from the Restoration, essays with narrative elements, and character sketches (Korte 2003: 35–47). Korte also writes in detail of the development of short narratives in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She points out the importance of periodicals of varying kinds in providing an outlet for short fiction. Daniel Defoe, Samuel Johnson, Joseph Addison, Oliver Goldsmith, Leigh Hunt, the Lambs, Mary Wollstonecraft, and a host of lesser-known writers produced short prose narratives in this period, and various kinds of clearly defined short narrative emerged: the character sketch, the short didactic anecdote, socially critical stories, stories of sentiment and education, the gothic tale, and tales of provincial life (Korte 2003: 47–72). This picture is confirmed by John R. Greenfield (Greenfield 1996: xii).

The fullest discussion of the development of "abbreviated fiction" (Orel 1986: 1) in the nineteenth century is given by Harold Orel in his authoritative *The Victorian Short Story: Development and Triumph of a Genre*. He insists that "short stories matured as a genre during the Victorian period" (1), and in separate chapters deals with the work of William Carleton, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, Thomas Hardy, Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, and H.G. Wells. Orel's discussion of the presence of short fiction in early and mid-nineteenth-century periodicals is of great interest (8–11). Orel's work and that of Greenfield and Korte make it clear how widespread the writing of short fiction was among mid-nineteenth-century authors. Major writers wrote short narratives, although they did not make substantial sums of money by doing so (Baldwin 1993: 29–31). Early and high Victorian short fiction, like the novel, takes the form of social-psychological texts, gothic and sensational fiction, crime stories, and stories of colonial adventure. Many of its practitioners were women (Korte 2003: 72–89; Greenfield 1996: xiii–xv). The short story was a prominent and important kind of text for the first eighty years of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Orel makes a strong case for the quality of these pieces of short fiction (1986: 4).

But, as critics point out, in Britain for much of the nineteenth century short fiction was undervalued and scarcely reflected on by its practitioners and readers. Reid is wrong when he says of major Victorian writers that "their output of short fiction during the nineteenth century was virtually negligible" (1977: 28–9), but for the Victorian writer and publisher (even of a periodical), the novel or the serial novel was the preferred type of fictional text (Korte 2003: 74). Before 1880, one can observe, above all, a lack of interest in short fiction among authors, even when they write it. Of short-fiction writers between 1800 and 1880, Greenfield declares that they "made

unique contributions to the short-fiction form, even though none of them probably would have identified himself or herself as primarily a writer of short fiction" (1996: xiii). Of Dickens's relation to short fiction, Orel notes that he "worked without a clear definition of the genre" (1986: 64), and "His short stories . . . were evidently by-products and on occasion only filler materials" (1986: 64). "Trollope," Orel observes, "like Dickens earned his bread and butter from his novels, and thought his short stories commercially viable, but on the whole marginal material for the making of a reputation" (1986: 79). Writers in Britain appear not to have reflected on the nature of the short story at all, and had little sense of it as a discrete kind of fiction. In an influential essay, entitled "The Tardy Evolution of the British Short Story," Dean Baldwin argues that "One of the more curious anomalies of literary history is why the short story was so late to blossom in Britain" (1993: 23). He contrasts the interest from the mid-nineteenth century in short fiction in the USA and in continental Europe with the disregard or relative ignoring of it in Britain. In the 1840s Edgar Allan Poe was already reflecting on the nature and aims of short fiction (although he used the terms "tale" and "sketch" to discuss it (Reid 1977: 25)), and, even in the 1880s, the American Brander Matthews developed Poe's ideas in influential articles (Baldwin 1993: 31). Commentators relate the importance of short fiction within the US literary world to the domination of British novels within the fiction market; the relative neglect of short fiction in Britain has a similar cause – the prestige of the long novel, and the economics of the publishing world which made such novels profitable. Most scholars agree that, in the 1880s, technological change, changes in periodical publishing, the development of a much larger reading public as a result of education reform, and the exhaustion and automatization of the traditional three-volume novel, produced circumstances in which the short story could become widely written, published and (at least more than earlier) discussed. Even Orel, who thinks highly of pre-1880 Victorian short fiction, and who sees the roots of much of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century short story in that short fiction, endorses the scholarly consensus as "substantially correct" (1986: 11). After 1880 (approximately) it makes sense to talk about the short story in Britain as a discrete type of text which is taken seriously and, to a degree, thought about by writers and critics (Hanson 1985: 8).

The last two decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth were certainly a time of considerable political, social, intellectual, and artistic ferment, conducive to a revision of literary hierarchies. "Disaffection is indeed a key term in reviewing the climate of the closing years of the century in which the short story flourished," notes Clare Hanson (1985: 12). The reconsideration in the 1880s and 1890s of Victorian values in art and social conduct, and the contemporary challenges to the status quo from organized labor, women, and nationalism among colonized peoples have been thoroughly documented by literary historians. Bernard Bergonzi has written particularly clearly on the complex tensions of *fin-de-siècle* and pre-1914 Britain and Ireland (1965: 30–1). This is a period which sees an explosion of production of and interest in short fiction, and a clear idea of the short story as a discrete

kind of fictional text. The term itself began to be widely used in the early twentieth century (Korte 2003: 115–18; Reid 1977: 1).

As the essays in the first part of this volume demonstrate, the short story in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries took several forms. Very rapidly it continued developments in the high Victorian period and diversified over a wide genre spectrum – psychological studies, social criticism and commentary, detective fiction, supernatural tales, proto science fiction, and stories of imperial adventure. In addition, the modernist writers Joseph Conrad and Virginia Woolf offered radical experiments in narration, narrative, and language use in their short fiction (Head 1992: 36, 205; Hanson 1985: 55–81). The role of women writers in this period was particularly marked. The Irish short story followed its own line of development, although this interwove with that of mainland Britain (Rafroidi 1979: 27–38; Norris 1979: 39–62).

The period after the Great War of 1914–18 remained one of some vitality in the short story. The disruptions of Irish history and the developments of Irish society during the war against the British, the Civil War, and the period of national reflection that followed proved particularly stimulating for the short story. In Britain, Korte notes substantive commentary on the short story in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1925 and 1936, and also comments on the space given over to short fiction in avant-garde publications in the 1920s and 1930s. Further, anthologies of short stories were common in this period and the short story found a welcome in a wide range of journals (Korte 2003: 115–18). H. Gustav Klaus discusses the presence of working-class short fiction in the 1920s (1986: 29–42), and the role of fiction magazines in the 1930s in promoting short fiction is documented by Peter Martin (1979: 233–40). Elizabeth Bowen's influential collection of short stories, *The Faber Book of Modern Stories*, was published in 1937. In her introduction, Bowen sees the short story as a modern form, a fiction of and for the fragmented, disturbed and disturbing twentieth century. She concludes by insisting that "The present state of the short story is, on the whole, healthy: its prospects are good" (Bowen 1937: 18).

This prediction was almost immediately borne out. World War II was good for the short story in Britain. Bergonzi presents the situation thus:

> During the war the preferred form for new fiction writers was the short story, or the prose sketch that draws directly on experience but may lightly fictionalize it. If they were lucky they might get published in *Penguin New Writing* or even in *Horizon*, which published fewer stories and was more choosy but also came out more often, monthly rather than three or four times a year. But for those who could not make it in these prestigious publications there were many other outlets in magazines that survived from before the war, or in the irregularly appearing literary miscellanies that were launched subsequently. It is a sobering thought that in the midst of war despite the effects of bombing and an acute shortage of paper as well as other commodities, there were far more publications where a new writer could hope to place serious short stories than is the case fifty years later. (Bergonzi 1993: 40)

Bergonzi notes the main varieties of short fiction during World War II: accounts of army life, texts dealing with the violence of the bombing of British cities, and stories by women about their experiences during the war (1993: 40–5). In 1945 Bowen herself saw wartime London as an especially fruitful site and source for short stories (qtd in Beachcroft 1968: 212). H.E. Bates had gone even further in 1941 when he predicted that the short story would be "the essential medium" for writing about the post-war world (qtd in Beachcroft 1968: 212). How right or wrong he was will be seen in the second half of this volume.

The period 1880–1945 is particularly rich in short stories. Major writers gave their attention to short fiction; some made their reputation through it. The essays that follow aim to indicate this richness and discuss some of the central short stories of the period. However, it is particularly striking how many largely non-canonical writers also produced short fiction of considerable merit in these years. In the remainder of this essay we will analyze work by two partially forgotten, certainly underrated and underdiscussed, short-story writers – Hubert Crackanthorpe and Alun Lewis – each from a different end of the period under discussion. The commentary that follows on their texts should suggest the riches of the non-canonical short story between 1880 and 1945, and provide stimulus for further research.

2

"Of the lesser-known fiction writers of the nineties . . . the most talented, the most important and the most undervalued is Hubert Crackanthorpe," declares William Peden (Peden 1977: vii). In his short life (1870–96), Crackanthorpe published three volumes of short stories, *Wreckage: Seven Studies* (1893), *Sentimental Studies and a Set of Village Tales* (1895), and *Vignettes* (1896). One volume, *Last Studies*, was published posthumously (with a laudatory preface by Henry James). He was also closely involved with avant-garde literary periodicals of the 1890s, *The Yellow Book* and *Albemarle*. The reception of his work was and has been mixed, but he is certainly seen as a significant short-story writer of the 1890s, and his work has been compared to that of Maupassant, James, and Lawrence (Fisher 1994: 61; Peden 1977: ix–x). His work in the short story is very much part of the 1890s, a decade in which, as Crackanthorpe himself wrote, "Books are published, stories are printed . . . which would never have been tolerated a few years ago" (qtd in Frierson 1942: 43).

Crackanthorpe's short fiction is marked by complexity and innovation, both in terms of narrational and narrative technique and of subject matter. A representative and substantial story is "Profiles" from Crackanthorpe's first collection *Wreckage*. "Profiles" starts a sequence of stories in *Wreckage* that deal in powerful tensions between male and female characters. Several involve the destruction of one or more of the central figures. "A Conflict of Egoisms" ends in despair and suicide. "The Struggle for Life" involves violence and forced prostitution, "Dissolving View" extramarital pregnancy and death, and "A Dead Woman" adultery and jealousy. In "When

Greek Meets Greek" two of the protagonists overcome the tensions between them, although a third is disgraced and ruined; and in "Embers," despite its depiction of the cynical exploitation, almost to the point of ruination, of one character by another, the end is not entirely negative. Over half the stories are set in low and sordid milieus.

"Profiles" is, similarly, a story of passion, violence, and betrayal, in which the innocent Lilly, after beating her abusive aunt senseless, runs off to London, where she abandons her betrothed, Maurice, for the saturnine charms of another lover. Cast off by the latter, she rejects Maurice and, despairing, descends into casual prostitution in London. This lurid subject matter is presented with a great deal of technical skill and complexity. The material for a Victorian three-decker is condensed into fifty-three pages.

The narrator's language is appropriate to the story's brevity: paragraphs are frequently short, sentence fragments abound, and sentences are often simple or compound. There are very few examples of a high style (the inverted "Quite pale was her skin . . ." is unusual (Crackanthorpe 1969: 2)). Lexis is relatively informal or neutral, especially in the extensive passages of dialog. Narrative strategy is also consistent with abbreviation: the story is full of ellipses, in which action is omitted (this frequently occurs between the numbered sections of the story). The narrator runs a gamut of observation, analysis, and summary, but never directly comments on the characters' actions. There is no condemnation of Maurice, Lilly, or Safford for their behavior. Frierson sees this narrational neutrality as part of Crackanthorpe's inheritance from French naturalism (1925: 269). In keeping with the narrator's non-intervention in the text, the story includes long passages of almost narrator-free dialog, and substantial sections in which the narrator adopts the principal characters' points of view, and even at times moves into free indirect speech. The narrator does, however, often describe settings in brief but striking detail, and, at times, the text seems the verbal representation of a painting. See, for example, the story's opening scene (1–2), or the description of Safford's and Lilly's rooms (30, 47).

The story's subtle and innovative narration is matched by a frank and complex treatment of character. This is particularly true in the case of Lilly. The protagonists are driven by passion. Lilly loathes her aunt and does violence to her in anger (6, 11). Maurice reflects that she has become a "slave" to her "passions" (19). In her last conversation with Maurice, she speaks "bitterly" and "almost fiercely," and her voice is "hard and reckless" with "a savageness" (51). Further, the story makes no attempt to disguise the sexual nature of the characters' relations. Maurice and Lilly kiss passionately (8) and have sex in London (17–18). Lily, indeed, develops "a desperate sensuality" that frightens Maurice, and she is drawn to Safford's bull-like charms (24). But characters are not simple; they are marked rather by a dynamic instability. Maurice feels "an annoyance, vague but real" on learning of Lilly's beating of her aunt (18), and the woman's "sensuality" disturbs him (19). Lilly is both irritated by Maurice and inclined to laugh at him when he reveals his emotions to her before returning to Guildford (25). Lilly's mental state is, at times, confused and complex (26), and her

feelings about Maurice, once she has told him about her relationship with Safford, are a mixture of dislike, contempt and some affection (40–2). Maurice's own attitude to the fallen Lilly similarly has conflicting elements (45, 47).

"Profiles," in its brevity, its narrational sophistication, and its open and complex treatment of sexual relations, represents Crackanthorpe's short fiction at its best. His is a body of work that embodies the strengths of British short fiction in its first period of flowering, and it deserves to be much better known.

3

"The most talented of the writers whose stories arose directly out of military life was, I believe, Alun Lewis. He is better remembered as a poet, but in my view his major gift was for fiction," declares Bergonzi (1993: 41). Lewis (1915–44) published two volumes of poetry during his life, and one posthumously. His volume of short stories, *The Last Inspection*, appeared in 1942. The types of stories in this collection are varied. It is divided into three sections. Part One is made up of stories of army life, but these are different in purpose and in subject matter. (In their presentation of the shabby and unheroic side of army life, they recall Julian Maclaren-Ross's tales of military inertia and incompetence.) "The Last Inspection" and "Private Jones" are critical of the officer class and its attitude to the war and the working-class ordinary soldiers. "It's a Long Way to Go" is a detailed account of a soldier's return home on leave. "Lance-Jack" consists of musings about army life and the psychology of soldiers waiting to go abroad. Part Two comprises stories of civilian life, often involving child characters. In Part Three the stories are all about military life and involve complex and usually unhappy relations between men and women. In "Acting Captain," for example, the eponymous Captain Cochrane treats a young woman very badly; the private Curly treats her much better, but to no avail; Private Thomas returns to Swansea to see his mortally ill wife, who then dies in an air raid. In "Ballerina" a working-class Welsh private meets an upper-class English girl; he sings for her; she dances for him; and they part.

"They Came" (which Bergonzi describes as "one of the strongest" of the texts in *The Last Inspection* (1993: 41)) tells the story of an unnamed Welsh soldier's return to his unit after some days of leave. About a third of the way through the text, the reader learns that his wife has been killed in an air raid during his leave. The story details the milieu of the army billet and some of the other soldiers. Towards the end, the protagonist gives an account of his wife's death to his friend Nobby. The story is an extremely moving one, in which terrible events and a distraught psychological state are recounted without sentimentality. "They Came" is also a rich combination of social observation, psychological detail, eyewitness testimony, and lyric prose.

The story covers a few hours of the protagonist's life, although he recalls the events of a few nights previously when his wife died. Its focus on the mundane actions of the soldier's return make the enormity of his grief even more apparent. The characters

are a range of working-class soldiers, most of whom are unsavoury and unglamorous, pettily nasty non-commissioned officers, and older soldiers, one of whom is clearly deranged. The only positive characters are the young Welsh soldier and his working-class London friend, Nobby, to whom he tells the story of his wife's death, and who has the words of comfort that allow him to go on. Narrational technique, which has the text focus on the young soldier's experiences, through point of view and direct speech, underlines the separation of the protagonist from most of what surrounds him. Settings are similarly opposed. Much of the text is set in the army billet, and this is drab and sordid. However, large sections of the story are set in a much more attractive nature: on the lane down which the soldier walks, and on the "flat upland ridge" with its "dead-white grass" (Lewis 1942: 236, 241) where he talks to Nobby and where he has some kind of epiphany.

The story is rich in psychological detail, especially in its presentation of the grief-stricken protagonist, but also in the incidental portraits of the other soldiers, especially that of the insane Fred. In addition, the text functions as a piece of social observation – of social discrimination against private soldiers, of the vulgar décor of a wartime hotel, and of the sycophantic behavior of a socially-mobile sergeant. Further, the protagonist's account of his wife's death is absorbing, disturbing and moving, and surely captures some of the horror of the home front in World War II. The text's richness is completed by passages, at the beginning and end of the story, in which the prose takes on aspects of poetry and the mode is lyric, rather than narrative. Lexical and syntactic parallelisms, orchestration of sound, and a density of metaphor make these powerful passages, suggesting the possibility of beauty, recovery and transcendence in a drab and horror-filled world. The stories of *The Last Inspection*, like those of Crackanthorpe's volumes, show the deep strength of the British short story in the years between 1880 and 1945, and suggest that there is much scope for further scholarship in this area.

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