



THE SHORT STORY AS A VEHICLE OF SOCIAL CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the short story as an influential literary form for social critique. Through brevity, symbolism, irony, and focused characterization, short stories expose social inequalities, challenge dominant ideologies, and encourage critical reflection. The study explores how writers use the genre to address issues such as class, gender, race, colonialism, poverty, and cultural transformation.

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INTRODUCTION

The short story occupies a unique position in literary history. Its concise form enables writers to present powerful social commentary within a limited narrative space. Throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, short story writers have addressed pressing social concerns and encouraged readers to question prevailing social structures.

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THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Literature has long been understood as a medium through which societies reflect upon themselves. Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, and cultural theories provide useful frameworks for understanding how short stories function as instruments of social critique.

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HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL CRITIQUE IN SHORT FICTION

From realism to contemporary fiction, short stories have engaged with social problems and represented marginalized voices. The genre's accessibility and intensity make it especially effective for social commentary.

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CLASS AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

Many short stories expose economic disparities and the consequences of poverty. Through ordinary characters and everyday situations, writers reveal structural inequalities within society.

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GENDER AND PATRIARCHY

Short stories frequently challenge patriarchal norms and explore women's experiences. Feminist writers use the genre to examine identity, agency, and resistance.

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RACE AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Questions of race, prejudice, and exclusion have been central themes in short fiction. Writers often reveal the complexities of discrimination and social injustice.

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POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES

Postcolonial short stories critique imperial power structures and examine cultural identity, displacement, and resistance. The genre provides a platform for marginalized voices.

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IRONY AND SATIRE AS SOCIAL CRITIQUE

Irony and satire enable writers to expose contradictions within social institutions and cultural practices. These techniques encourage readers to reconsider accepted norms.

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SYMBOLISM AND SOCIAL COMMENTARY

Symbolic elements often deepen social critique by representing broader cultural and political concerns within compact narratives.

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CASE STUDIES IN SOCIAL CRITIQUE

The works of writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Katherine Mansfield, James Joyce, Alice Munro, and Jhumpa Lahiri demonstrate the diversity of social concerns addressed through short fiction.

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CONTEMPORARY SHORT STORIES AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Contemporary writers address globalization, migration, technology, climate change, and identity politics. Their stories reflect evolving social realities.

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READER ENGAGEMENT AND ETHICAL REFLECTION

The short story's compressed form encourages active reader participation and ethical reflection. Readers often confront unresolved tensions and moral questions.

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THE CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF THE SHORT STORY

Despite changes in media and reading habits, the short story remains an important medium for social commentary and public discourse.

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CONCLUSION

The short story continues to function as a powerful vehicle of social critique. Its brevity, intensity, and flexibility allow writers to address social issues effectively and inspire critical engagement among readers.

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