THE POE-MATTHEWS THEORY OF
THE AMERICAN SHORT STORY

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Alfred H. Marks
Preface

I am fortunate to have been a student on the honors program at Ball State Teachers College during my four years as an undergraduate. As a senior in the honors program I have worked on an independent research project in the area of the American short story. I know that the lessons I have learned as a result of having done this research will be invaluable to me when I do my graduate work.

I believe this thesis would be no more complete without a dedication than a majestic ocean liner would be complete without an official christening. I am dedicating this senior thesis, therefore, to Professor Alfred H. Marks, without whose patient guidance and scholarly advice on technical matters I could not have completed my study of the short story.

The Author
My central objective in this paper is to describe one theory of the development of the short story in America. I shall call this theory the Poe-Matthews theory, because it is dependent upon Edgar Allan Poe's criticism of Nathaniel Hawthorne's tales and seemingly upon Professor Brander Matthews' belief that the "short-story" for which Poe defined the laws is categorically different from other classes of tales.

Many people have called Poe the father of the American short story. Those who make this statement do so on the basis of several unstated assumptions, some of which they often incorporate into their major contentions. These people imply 1) that the American short story is peculiar, distinct from European tales, 2) that Poe's stories are essentially different from those of Irving and Hawthorne, and 3) that a type of literature has no right to exist until its rules have been defined. As I develop the history of this theory by turning to critics and literary historians who have advanced it, I will also refer from time to time to critics who do not adhere to the Poe-Matthews position. This second group of critics cannot be easily categorized as accepting a number of principles in common; these critics seem to be in unanimous agreement only in accepting the tenet that short stories and tales may be classed together because they are all pieces of short prose fiction. The chief difference between this position and the theory to be studied in this paper is that Poe, Matthews, and their followers have established criteria to distinguish between short stories and other types of short prose narratives.
The format of this thesis will be a chronological study of criticism of the American short story, and particularly of that area of criticism which shows evidence of the direct or indirect influence of Poe and Matthews. Before examining the Poe-Matthews theory, however, I would like to point out some of the early usages of the term short story.

The earliest writers and critics of the short prose narrative in America used the term tale to describe it. Washington Irving was perhaps the first American to discuss a philosophy of short story structure. In a letter to Henry Brevoort, dated December 11, 1824, Irving wrote:

For my part I consider a story merely as a frame on which to stretch my materials. It is the play of thought, and sentiment and language; the weaving in of characters, lightly yet expressively delineated; and the half concealed vein of humour that is often playing throughout the whole--these are among what I aim at, and upon which I felicitate myself in proportion as I think I succeed.1

We note that Irving does call it a story rather than a tale, but he says nothing which makes us believe he had in mind a new or distinct literary genre. He certainly does not indicate that a story should provide a unified central effect.

A statement distinguishing the novel from the tale appeared in Bryant's New York Review in 1825 in a review of National Tales. As he contrasted these two forms of literature, the writer said that "tales...do not call for as much development of character and fullness of description and dialogue, but they do require greater vivacity of

narration, and more point and polish of style." We do not find the writer of this review using the term short story, but he does seem to realize what today seems obvious--a short piece of fiction requires more compression than a long work.

Edgar Allan Poe, whose short stories and critical writings about tales will concern us more exclusively later in this paper, recognized a distinction between the novel and the tale as early as 1836. When Poe, as editor of the Messenger, reviewed some short sketches of Dickens, he said that "unity of effect" is indispensable to the "brief article", although a novel need not have a unified effect. 3

As we will show later in this paper, many people have called Poe the originator of the American short story. Yet Poe never used the term short story. When he wrote his review of Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales, a study first published in Graham's Magazine in 1842, he talked about "tales" and "short prose narratives". Fred Lewis Pattee has remarked:

The terms persisted almost to our own times. Scribner's Monthly, for instance, in the early 'seventies, reviewed Mrs. Skagg's Husbands, as 'lively sketches', Coupon Bonds and Other Stories, as 'clever sketches', and Marjorie Daw and Other People, as distinctive 'short prose tales'. Howells reviewed 'Marjorie Daw', as a 'Sketch'. 4

According to these critics the short story has no special designation. Essential to our study of the Poe-Matthews theory will be the resolution of any semantic difficulties which arise from the use of the term short story.

4 Ibid., p. 291.
Pattee remarks that Rufus W. Griswold's *The Prose Writers of America* (1847) must be counted as containing the first formal recognition of the tale as a unique literary evolution in America, and the first attempt—short and fragmentary, it is true—toward the history of the form.5

Those who regard the tale as categorically different from the short story may not accept Pattee's statement about Griswold's contribution, but this study should at least be noted as a milestone in the development of short fiction in America.

As we move ahead in our chronological study of short story criticism in America, we will now study Poe's theory of the short story. His theory is embodied largely in the critique of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*, published in *Graham's* in two of its 1842 issues. Poe's revision of his Hawthorne essay, in which he altered his earlier opinion about Hawthorne's being original, was first published in *Godey's* for November, 1847. Poe stated in this revised essay:

> The tale proper, in my opinion, affords unquestionably the fairest field for the exercise of the loftiest talent, which can be afforded by the wide domains of mere prose.... I need only here say...that, in almost all classes of composition, the unity of effect or impression is a point of the greatest importance. It is clear, moreover, that this unity cannot be thoroughly preserved in productions whose perusal cannot be completed in one sitting.6

Two aspects of Poe's theory are made clear in this passage: a tale must be unified and it must be brief. Poe may have been the first American to make the written statement that a tale must be brief, but the truth of the statement is so obvious that Poe cannot be said to

have founded a school of literature on the strength of having stated that what is short must be short. Again, he may have been the first writer to call attention to unity as a *sine qua non* for short fiction, but we need turn no further than to Hawthorne's *Young Goodman Brown* to realize a short story may be unified without having its unity explicitly declared.

Many critics say Poe was the first writer to demand that stories have a preconceived effect. Poe stated this principle in the following passage from the Hawthorne essay:

> A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents—he then combines such events as may best aid him—establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design.

Many American writers produced short prose narratives between the time Poe wrote his Hawthorne essay and 1885, but no one during that period seems to have made a special effort to follow the principles of Poe's criticism.

Poe believed that truth is often the aim of the tale. It is unfortunate that he did not specify exactly what he meant when he used the abstract term "truth". I doubt that by this he meant the use of a moral in a tale, for he rejected the didacticism he found in some of Hawthorne's work. Unless we do know what meaning he intended truth to have, however, we cannot discover whether he used the prin-

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7 Ibid., p. 117.
8 Ibid., p. 117.
Poe's final position in the development of the American short story has never been conclusively established. If Poe was really the father of the American short story, it seems likely that he would have claimed some credit for himself. Yet Poe recognized Hawthorne's ability in the creation of tales. In his essay about the Twice-Told Tales, Poe remarked, "'Dr. Heidegger's Experiment' is exceedingly well imagined, and executed with surpassing ability. The artist breathes in every line of it." This passage does not prove, of course, that Poe did not originate the American short story, but it at least raises a question about Hawthorne's comparable position in the development of this form.

Poe continues, in the same essay, that in Hawthorne's "The Hollow of the Three Hills": "Not only is all done that should be done, but (what perhaps is an end with more difficulty attained) there is nothing done which should not be. Every word tells, and there is not a word which does not tell." This is a significant statement in the history of the short story, for it reveals that Poe was aware that Hawthorne's work possessed unified effect, a quality which Poe—and many other critics from Brander Matthews onward—consider essential to the short prose narrative. Some who give Poe credit for having created the first modern short story call attention to his conscious ability to achieve unity of effect. We can see, however, that Poe explicitly claimed no such distinction for himself. He recognized this quality in the work of his contemporary, Hawthorne.

9 Ibid., p. 121.
10 Ibid., p. 121.
Poe explained another aspect of his theory in "The Philosophy of Composition," in which he wrote:

Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its dénouement before anything be attempted with the pen. It is only with the dénouement constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention.11

We will discover that this principle was used by later critics when they alligned themselves to Poe's theory.

A possible explanation for the critics being reluctant to adopt Poe's theory is that Poe did not acquire a favorable reputation as a writer and critic of short stories until he had been dead for several years. Rufus W. Griswold, to whom we have already referred, was the executor of Poe's will and an early biographer. He started some of the legends which made Poe appear almost amoral. Many early readers and critics, unable to separate the man—even legends of the man—from the work, did not think Poe had greatly influenced the course of American literature.

Perhaps the earliest written use of the term short story appeared in The Edinburgh Review for April, 1858, in an article about Poe. I have found the following statement in that article: "We had marked, as worthy of extract, a short story, entitled 'The Cask of Amontillado'; but we are obliged to content ourselves with merely recommending it to the reader's notice."12 I have no evidence, however, that the writer...

12 "Edgar Allan Poe," The Edinburgh Review (April, 1858), p. 22h.
of the article intended to use the term in any generic sense. It is more likely that the writer meant to designate Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" as a story which is short rather than as a special and distinct type of fiction.

A collection of tales published in 1861 was called \textit{Short Stories for Leisure Hours}. This is the earliest collection I have discovered in which the term \textit{short stories} has been incorporated into the title. A collection entitled \textit{Short Stories for Spare Moments} was published in 1869. These stories had been selected from \textit{Lippincott's Magazine}. The second series was published later that year, and the third series was published in 1870.

At this time no one had given credit to Poe's essay on Hawthorne as being the foundation of short story criticism in America, but in the 1860's some people who studied Poe's works began to break away from the Griswold tradition which placed great emphasis upon Poe's tragic personal life. James Russell Lowell gave Poe's writing some restrained praise, but John Pendleton Kennedy, the Baltimore novelist, was apparently one of the first Americans to recognize Poe's literary excellence. In a letter dated April 13, 1869, and addressed to G. W. Fahnestock, who had sent him a daguerreotype of Poe, Kennedy said: "In his special department of thought, our country has produced no poet or prose writer superior to him—indeed, I think, none equal to him."

This is effusive, uncritical praise which does not give any hint that Poe somehow originated the short story.

Frederick B. Perkins used the term twice in his 1877 volume,

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\end{quote}
Devil-Puzzlers. Perkins remarked,

I think highly of the art of writing short stories. My idea is that a good short story possesses all the merits of a long one, and others of its own besides.\textsuperscript{14}

This excerpt from Perkins's book does not indicate that the writer had been influenced by Poe. Because his usage of the term short story involves its comparison to long stories, Perkins probably used the sole criterion of length, rather than other considerations, when he called his tales "short stories".

The term short story had gained currency by 1880. But Pattee has pointed out that according to some critics of this period the short story form was not looked at as a high form of literary production. Pattee wrote:

As late as 1880 Scribner's Monthly could say of one of Bret Harte's creations: 'Short story though it be, it is an honor to American literature,' and seven years later the editor of The Critic could make the generalization, 'As a rule the short story is produced in youth, while the novel is a product of experience.'\textsuperscript{15}

George E. Woodberry is considered by many critics to be the best nineteenth-century biographer of Poe. Yet in his 1885 biography Woodberry referred to Poe's short prose narratives as "tales". Perhaps Woodberry did not realize that in some literary circles the term short story was gaining currency.\textsuperscript{16}

Baudelaire translated Poe's writings into French, and indeed he made Poe a greater literary figure in France than in his native country. But I have found no indication that Baudelaire or any of his French contemporaries gave Poe credit for originating the American short story.

\textsuperscript{14} Pattee, The Development of the American Short Story, p. 292.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 292.
\textsuperscript{16} George E. Woodberry. Edgar Allan Poe (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1885).
It was Professor Brander Matthews, an American, who seems to have first called attention to the significance of Poe's theory. The following passage is an excerpt from an essay entitled "The Philosophy of the Short-story," written by Matthews, and printed originally in Lippincott's Magazine for October, 1885:

A short-story deals with a single character, a single event, a single emotion, or the series of emotions called forth by a single situation.... The short-story is the single effect, complete and self-contained, while the novel is of necessity broken into a series of episodes. Thus the short-story has, what the novel cannot have, the effect of 'totality', as Poe called it, 'the unity of impression'.

We will soon discover that Matthews' essay influenced later American critics to try to differentiate between short stories and tales which merely happen to be extended to volume length.

The effect of Matthews' essay was not immediately noticeable. G. T. Bettany made the following statement in the preface to Tales of Adventure, Mystery and Imagination (London, 1890): as a short story writer Poe had "originality, ingenuity, invention, imagination, power over the emotions, graphic characterization, analytic and constructive skill." Bettany's praise is certainly generous, but it does not seem to spring from the ideas which Matthews had advanced five years earlier. Poole's Index, incidentally, did not include a separate entry for "short stories" until its 1892-1896 volume.

the short story when she wrote, in 1898:

The latest development in the story-teller's art is the artistic short story. It was one of our own countrymen, Edgar Allan Poe, who founded the school of the artistic short story. The French were the first to discover this and to apply Poe's rules as laid down in his essay, 'The Philosophy of Composition'.

Miss Dye embraces, at least in part, the theory that Matthews had begun to develop in 1885. It is in the Hawthorne essay, of course, and not in "The Philosophy of Composition", that most of the points of Poe's critical doctrine of the short story may be found.

Albert H. Tolman may have been the first critic to demonstrate the direct influence of Matthews. In his article "Was Poe Accurate?" which was first printed in The Dial for March 16, 1899, Tolman said that in many areas of literature, including "the short-story of atmosphere", Poe was "the first that ever burst/Into that silent sea."

Tolman's use of the term "short-story" indicates that he was very likely aware of Matthews' criticism of the genre, because no one before Matthews had apparently hyphenated the term. Tolman seems to believe that Poe was the originator, if not of the entire short story genre, at least of the short story of atmosphere; no one earlier had made so imposing a statement.

Bliss Perry was the first critic to admit the influence of the Matthews theory. In his 1902 book, A Study of Prose Fiction, Perry wrote:

Professor Matthews is surely right in holding that there is a difference between the short story and other forms of the tale. It is safer to trace it, however, not in the

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characteristics of this modern work, every feature of which can easily be paralleled in prehistoric myths, but rather in the attitude of the contemporary short story writer toward his material, and in his conscious effort to achieve under certain conditions a certain effect. And no one has defined this conscious attitude and aim so clearly as Edgar Allan Poe.

Perry reveals that he has been influenced by Matthews when he calls attention to the importance of central effect in Poe's stories, an attribute apparently so significant that its existence separates Poe's stories from earlier tales. Perry expands upon the Matthews theory by indicating that the attitude of modern writers differs from that of their predecessors.

When Richard Burton wrote *Literary Leaders of America* in 1903, he said that in some ways Poe was the creator of the modern short story. It would not be true to say that Poe founded the short story, for Washington Irving...and Dickens wrote them before him; but Poe set his seal upon certain categories of the tale, and he has never been surpassed, indeed, has never been equaled, within his particular preserves. His position therefore in the history of the general evolution of the fiction of our tongue is an important one.

If Burton is intending to emphasize the word "modern", then perhaps he is offering a basis for distinction between Poe's short stories and Irving's tales. Although Burton does attempt to differentiate between Poe's "modern" stories and the tales of Irving and Dickens, he is not clearly under the critical influence of Brander Matthews.

Clayton Hamilton's philosophy of the American short story was apparently influenced by Matthews. In his study of the short story,

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printed first in Bookman for February, 1904, and later published in Reader for February, 1906, Hamilton wrote, "The aim of a short-story is to produce a single narrative effect with the greatest economy of means that is consistent with the utmost emphasis." 23 We note that Hamilton writes the term "short-story". This may be evidence of the effect of Professor Matthews on literary criticism of the early twentieth century, though it is also possible that Hamilton wrote "short-story" arbitrarily without wishing to give any special designation to the hyphenated term. Hamilton's definition of the aim of a short story is really a paraphrase of Poe. Since he does not say he is talking about one kind of short story rather than about the entire field of the short story form, we may assume that he is prescribing the "single narrative effect" as a requirement of all short stories. Hamilton's definition would possibly exclude some of Irving's tales from the field of the short story.

Brander Matthews made another statement about Poe's relation to the short story when he wrote, in 1907: "It was Poe who first pointed out that the short-story has a right to exist, and that it is essentially different in its aim from the tale which merely chances not to be prolonged." 24

Matthews explained the development of the short story in the following way:

It is in France and in the United States...that we first find the true short-story; and we do not find it


until the second quarter of the nineteenth century....
In the United States, Hawthorne and Poe had a prede­
cessor in Irving, whose delightful tales lack only a
more vigorous restraint to be accepted as the earliest
models of the short-story. In fact, it is only when we
draw up a narrowly rigid definition of the form that we
are forced to exclude Irving from the list of its origin­
ators.25

Matthews does not lack a basic understanding of the history of short
prose fiction. He admits that he must use a specialized definition
of short story to exclude Irving from the list of early writers in the
form. It is in their specificity in defining the rules of the short
story that Matthews' statements about short prose fiction can be said
to comprise a theory, and not just a set of haphazard beliefs.

W. D. Howells wrote in the "Editor's Study" of Harper's Monthly
Magazine for January, 1909:

It was in America that the short prose story, as we
understand it, was first developed, a little before the
middle of the nineteenth century, when we had very little
to show in the field of imaginative literature....Irving's
work is hardly to be reckoned in any treatment of the
short story; it consists rather of sketches. It is to
Poe and Hawthorne that we must look for representative
examples.26

Howells dismisses Irving without any explanation other than the state­
ment that Irving's prose works are "sketches". Even Matthews admits
that only a rigid definition of short story permits the exclusion of
some of Irving's tales from the province of short stories. Whereas
Matthews was aware of nineteenth-century literary activity in France,
Howells demonstrates no such awareness. If he had in mind some narrow
definition which would exclude the work of such French writers as

25 Ibid., pp. 22-23.
26 "Editor's Study", Harper's Monthly Magazine, CXVIII (January,
Balzac and Mérimée, he did not present such a definition. Howells's belief that Hawthorne and Poe wrote the first short stories may have developed from the influence of Matthews' philosophy of the "short-story."

Howells continued, "Poe did not invent the American short story, but only a kind of it which was worthy of consideration." He does not specify the "kind" of story he has in mind. If he is referring to the detective story, a good deal of critical opinion will support him.

Benjamin A. Heydrick, a high school teacher, was possibly a disciple of Matthews, for he wrote in 1913:

In the literary history of the last half of the nineteenth century, one of the most significant facts is the development of the short story. This does not mean that there were no short stories before that date...But towards the middle of the nineteenth century the prose short story appears as a definite, recognized type...2

If this statement falls into a pattern with many other explanations of the short story's development, Heydrick must have reference to Poe's essay on the Twice-Told Tales, for that is the only major American criticism of the short story written in the first half of the nineteenth century. An important aspect of Heydrick's statement is that he does grant the existence of short stories before the form was defined.

Henry S. Canby stated in 1913 that Poe's type of short story "was really new only in technique." Canby believed that this technique was involved with Poe's ability to utilize effectively an old principle

27 Ibid., p. 322.
of the prose narrative, suspense. Canby's explanation of Poe's contribution to the American short story does not exhibit the direct influence of Brander Matthews.

James Cooper Lawrence, writing the article entitled "A Theory of the Short Story" in the North American Review for February, 1917, expressed the belief that modern stories differ only verbally from medieval tales. He wrote:

The only development that can be traced is not an improvement in any distinctive essential of the art of story-telling, but is merely a general development in the knowledge of words and the ability to use them, which affects the framing of wills and the formulation of official documents much more than it does the telling of tales.30

In an effort to verify his claim that the short story was not first invented in the nineteenth century, Lawrence also listed and discussed several so-called short stories for "effect" which were written before Poe began his career. The story which Bürger used in his ballad of Lenore, for example, is found in many of the countries of Western Europe. Other examples of early stories for effect include tales made popular by Boccaccio and his imitators, the Germanic ballad of Tannhäuser, and the old English ballad of Lord Randall.31

J. Berg Esenwein, editor of Lippincott's Monthly Magazine, revealed his possible indebtedness to Matthews when he wrote in 1918:

Though more or less perfect short-stories had been produced at intervals for many centuries, Poe's keen criticism incited many to follow Irving, Hawthorne, and the critic himself, thus originating a distinctive type of

31 Ibid., p. 284.
American short-story.\textsuperscript{32}

Esenwein differs from Howells by including Irving among the early developers of the short story in America. But Esenwein does not indicate exactly what kind of short story Poe originated, unless we are willing to grant that his stories were different from those of other countries simply because they were written in America. Esenwein has adopted the Matthews convention of writing "short-story".

Robert L. Ramsay made the following explanation of the genesis of the short story in his \textit{Short Stories of America} (1921):

\begin{quote}
The American short story, although something very like it was invented independently in France at about the same time, was borrowed from nowhere. It was Poe, the most genuinely original of American writers, who took the leisurely old tale, unregulated and unrestrained, that had been handed down from time immemorial, and gave it unity, the definition, and the concentration that turned it into the modern short story.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

Ramsay did not use the Matthews convention of writing "short-story", but his statement of the requirements of modern short stories reveals his alliance with Matthews' philosophy.

William J. Long stated, in a high school American literature text written in 1923:

\begin{quote}
Certain critics regard the Short-story (written with capital and hyphen) as a distinct, modern type of literature, differing in structure and essentials from a short romance or a short novel. Its chief characteristics are 'ingenuity, originality and compression.' Most of these critics regard Poe, rather than Irving, as the discoverer of this type.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

I have not been able to discover who was the first critic to write

\textsuperscript{34} William J. Long. \textit{American Literature} (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1923), p. 235.
"Short-story". Although Long does not say he agrees with the "certain critics", he does indicate his awareness of the Poe-Matthews theory.

It appears that Fred Pattee did not hold the Matthews philosophy of the short story, for he wrote at the outset of his 1923 study, "The American short story began in 1819 with Washington Irving." Pattee made a clear statement of his attitude toward the theory that Poe originated the short story when he wrote, again in the 1923 text:

It has been asserted often that Poe invented the American short story, that deliberately he manufactured a new genre and presented to the world for the first time a unique literary form. The assertion is wrong. The short story of the modern type had been evolving with definite ness for two decades. Irving had elaborated the legendary sketch and the tale of romantic incident; the Western group had brought prominently forth the romantic historical episode and at times had touched it with realism; Hawthorne had presented tales of intense moral situations and had added a symbolism all of his own; and Poe had added impressionism and 'unity and totality of effect'.

This statement, taking as its initial premise the evolution rather than the sudden invention of the short story form, emphasizes the contributions that each writer had made to a form that had already existed. Pattee differed from Matthews in his treatment of Poe's contribution. Whereas Matthews had recognized in Poe's theory and literary production a new form of fiction, Pattee granted Poe his achievements but contended that Poe was building on a foundation already laid, rather than laying his own foundation.

Katharine Fullerton Gerould, in her study of the American short story published in Yale Review for July, 1924, went back historically even beyond the European legends and tales which James Cooper Lawrence

36 Ibid., p. III.
had mentioned, when she said The Bible may be a source of short stories:

Technically speaking, some of the earliest and greatest narratives we possess—I mean the narratives of the Old Testament—are short stories, in every subtle detail of form and scope. The last verses of the ninth chapter of II Kings compose into a great short story. The fifth chapter of Daniel...is a great short story. So is the fourth chapter of Judges, and so is the thirty-seventh chapter of Genesis.37

Her approach to describing what may be a short story does not show any evidence of influence by Matthews.

Joseph Wood Krutch, aware that Poe had been given credit for originating the short story, tried to establish the reason that some people have perpetuated that claim. He said in his 1926 study that most of the people who acclaim Poe are

those who have taken a childish delight in his ingenious melodrama and have been patriotically eager to advance him as an American claimant to international literary honors....[These people] have pretended that he would have liked to claim credit for the mechanical formula of the contemporary short story.38

Perhaps someone could profit from writing a paper on the influence of nationalism on the legend that Poe originated the short story form.

We have already observed that Poe recognized Hawthorne as having written short narratives in the manner he believed to be best. He would probably be embarrassed, and certainly surprised, to find that later Americans had given him credit for creating a type of literature which he realized one of his contemporaries had also written.

Fred Pattee wrote, in a 1927 essay, "Only one fundamental rule for the short story is actually imperative: it must be short. All the rest--

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unity, momentum, immediateness, and the like—are simply the inevitable accompaniments of shortness." This statement is clearly a departure from the Poe-Matthews theory.

Pattee continues his essay by attempting to explain the development of the short story in America. He says that this development has not been a gradual evolution. He does not, however, go to the other extreme by saying that one man suddenly invented the form. He says the development of the short story in America has been a haphazard result of unique American conditions. It has resulted from international copyright conditions and from the attendant multiplication of magazines; it has come out of the peculiar conditions of the puritanical contempt for fiction, of the rough conditions of the frontier with its unique materials for narrative, and of the American headlong temperament that writes in short dashes more characteristically than in long-drawn-out narratives patiently evolved.

Pattee's discussion of the American temperament is possibly a unique explanation of the genesis of the American short story. At least it does not incorporate the criteria of short stories which Matthews demanded in his analysis of the form.

Clayton Hamilton, differing from those critics who claim that the short story may have had a sudden birth, admitted in 1928 that the "short-story" has always existed. He cited tales in The Bible which may properly be called short stories. He made this additional comment, however:

But the critical consciousness of the short-story as a species of fiction distinct in purpose and method from the novel dates only from the nineteenth century. It was


40 Ibid., pp. 414-415.
Edgar Allan Poe who first designated and realized the short-story as a distinct form of literary art.\textsuperscript{41}

Hamilton's reference to "critical consciousness" may indicate that he was influenced by Bliss Perry who, as the reader will recall, talked about Poe's "consciously effort" to achieve a central effect in his stories. His use of the convention of the term "short-story" may indicate that Hamilton's indebtedness can be traced to Matthews, for Perry wrote "short story".

Lucy Lockwood Hazard wrote in 1930:

Americans sometimes claim the credit of having in Poe invented the short story as a type. Perhaps better substantiated is the more modest claim that in Bret Harte we localized the short story, invented the type of short story which depends on local color.\textsuperscript{42}

Although Miss Hazard does not attempt to refute the claim some critics have made for Poe, she does indicate the difficulty inherent in proving that Poe invented the short story. Her comment about Harte is consistent with the belief advanced by many critics that all short prose narratives may be called short stories.

The authors of American Writers, a 1931 high school text, said that Poe "showed the world how to write both the modern short-story in general and the detective story in particular."\textsuperscript{43} The authors of this book seem to have come under the influence of Matthews for two reasons: first, because they use the convention "short-story"; and second, because they imply that the "modern short-story" is a distinct and recently developed form of fiction. Their statement may mean simply that Poe

\textsuperscript{41} Hamilton, A Manual of the Art of Fiction, p. 174.


\textsuperscript{43} Tom Peete Cross, Reed Smith, and Elmer C. Stauffer. American Writers (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1931), p. 549.
defined the rules of the short story (as he certainly did for one type of short story in the Hawthorne essay), but the phraseology of the statement carries the implication that Poe showed other authors the way to write a form of fiction which had never before been explored.

E. A. Cross supplied an answer for critics who have given Poe credit for discovering the principle of central effect, for Cross said in 1934 that at least seven stories which had a single narrative effect were written in English before Hawthorne and Poe began writing. These stories include Defoe's "The Apparition of Mrs. Veal" (1706), Addison's "The Vision of Mirza" (1711), Hogg's "The Mysterious Bride" (1820), Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" (1819) and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1819), Scott's "Wandering Willie's Tale" (1824), and Austin's "Peter Rugg, the Missing Man" (1824). It is obvious that Cross did not make a distinction between short stories and tales, as Matthews had done.

Percy H. Boynton called attention in 1936 to the origin of the belief that Poe invented the short story. Boynton wrote:

By an accident of emphasis one of the first expounders of the short story, or Short Story, or Short-story, made him the Aristotle of this genre and was quoted by scores of successors who quoted the same passage or two with the same unbalance of discrimination. But in point of the magnitude of the man or the magnitude of his achievement, Poe subsides to his proper level on a moment's comparison with such of his neglected contemporaries as Whitman or Melville. His technical proficiency endures the test, but his substance dwindles to gauds and baubles. Boynton neglects to identify the man who originated the legend about Poe, and he does not say what passage he may be citing. Boynton may ...

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have in mind Brander Matthews, for we noted when we examined his philosophy of the short story that he was the first American critic after Poe who believed the "short-story" is significantly different from the general class of tales. At any rate, I think Boynton's allusion explains the source which the early critic used when he called Poe "the Aristotle of this genre." Aristotle was noted, of course, not for writing great tragedies, but for laying down the laws for tragedy in his "Poetics". Poe is apparently not recognized as the founder of the short story, according to Boynton, by virtue of having written the first stories. He has been acclaimed, by one critic, at least, as the originator of the short story because he put forth the laws which he thought writers in the short story form should follow. If Boynton is referring to a specific document, it is probably Poe's essay on Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales.

In regard to this essay, the writers of the 1936 text Adventures in American Literature mentioned that the review of the Twice-Told Tales had earned for Poe "the somewhat undeserved title, 'creator of the short story'. Hawthorne and Irving wrote the first American short stories. These writers do not adhere to the Matthews philosophy, for they have chosen not to use a theory of the short story which would exclude Irving from the list of its originators.

Robbins and Coleman perpetuated the Poe-Matthews theory in 1938, although they made some changes of terminology and interpretation. They wrote:

In 1835...Edgar Allen Poe wrote his short-stories, 'Bere-

nice' and 'The Assignation', in which he approximated more closely than had ever been done before the modern conception of what constitutes a short-story. Probably Balzac and Mérimée in France are Poe's closest competitors in this connection; indeed, it would be possible on the basis of the fictional productions of these writers to maintain with some degree of truth that the formula for the modern short-story was actually developed in France. On the other hand, a careful and unbiased study of the matter would force one to admit that to Poe should be given the credit for introducing the short-story as it is practiced today.47

These authors do not specify what characteristics the modern short story has which somehow make it different from earlier work, yet they assert that Poe introduced the form. While we still have the problem of determining whether a new genre can suddenly appear, at least Robbins and Coleman do not claim that Poe invented a new form. They merely state that an "unbiased study" would reveal Poe's right to be called the first writer of modern short stories; they leave to future critics the task of showing evidence that Poe deserves the designation. The use of the term "short-story" indicates that the authors of this text may have been aware of the Matthews philosophy of the short story.

Clayton Hamilton retained as late as 1939 his acceptance of the Poe-Matthews theory, for he wrote during that year the same statement of the aim of short stories that he had written in Bookman for February, 1904: "The aim of a short-story is to produce a single narrative effect with the greatest economy of means that is consistent with the utmost emphasis."48

Cynthia Ann Pugh, in a 1941 collection of short stories, implied that Poe is the father of the modern short story. This is her reason-

If Hawthorne had added to his other achievements that of perfect structure, he could truly be called the father of the modern short story.

But another writer, Edgar Allan Poe, was at hand to prepare the beautifully constructed story. In fact Poe made perfect structure his chief object.49

This explanation of the origin of the American short story may owe incidental credit to Brander Matthews, though in Miss Pugh's analysis perfect structure has taken the place of primary importance, whereas unity of effect is more significant in Matthews' theory.

We find that in 1941 Arthur Hobson Quinn referred to Irving in passing as "the founder of the American Short Story."50 Quinn is another twentieth-century critic who does not appear to hold to the Matthews position.

We discover a modern statement of the Matthews philosophy when we turn to Exploring Literary Trails. In this book, a high school text which was written in 1942, we find the statement that Poe "originated the modern short story."51 The writers of this text give no source for their comment, but they do recognize a distinction between the tale and the "modern" short story.

The writers of Adventures in American Literature, a high school text published in its third edition in 1943, made this comment: "Poe, along with Hawthorne, was the real creator of the American short story."52 This brief comment gives us little information, but it does indicate

that Matthews possibly influenced the writers.

Miles and Pooley added a new dimension to the Poe-Matthews theory when they wrote Literature and Life in America, a high school text for grade eleven, in 1943. They wrote that Poe, by a careful construction of prose narratives,

came consciously and independently to create a new form of fiction, the American short story, just as Hawthorne had created the same form unconsciously by pondering over dramatic situations. But it was Poe's definition of the new form and his brilliant examples of it which spread this type of brief narrative to foreign countries and in the end to the wide world.53

Here the important factor seems to be Poe's consciousness of what he was doing, a factor developed by Perry early in the twentieth century and further developed by Hamilton in 1928.

James Dow McCallum carried on the Poe-Matthews tradition as modified by Miles and Pooley, when he wrote in 1948:

There had been...short stories before Poe's time, but they can only be called accidents, since the short story did not consciously exist as a literary form until Poe defined and limited it.54

The aspect of critical consciousness, whereby the short story exists only when it has been defined, seems to have become more prevalent in recent years than it was in Perry's productive period.

The writers of Dominant Types in British and American Literature, which was published in 1949, say the short story is probably the oldest of all literary types. They cite such influences on its development as the medieval Gesta Romanorum, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, Boccaccio's

The Decameron, and Cervantes' Don Quixote. The writers of this text change the emphasis of their historical approach, however, when they continue:

From these precursors of the short story has evolved a definite type of literature, a type really founded by Edgar Allan Poe. When Poe discarded the leisurely narrative methods of earlier writers, Washington Irving among them, and began to construct narratives notable for unity and compression, the modern short story was born. It should be remembered, however, that Poe did not 'invent' the short story. His contribution was the shaping and arranging of materials and elements known and used for centuries.55

The authors of this text thus demonstrate their belief that Poe's work differed so greatly from Irving's tales that when Poe began writing his stories "the modern short story was born". This statement contains the spirit of the Poe-Matthews theory.

Harold T. Eaton showed that he had possibly been influenced by Matthews when he wrote in 1951: "It was Edgar Allan Poe who first recognized the short story as a new literary type and set forth the fundamental rules for writing it."56 Since Eaton does not write the term "short-story", as Matthews had written it, his statement may be based on a knowledge of Poe's essay on Hawthorne rather than on an awareness of Matthews' 1885 Lippincott article. It is quite possible, on the other hand, that Eaton has retained the tenets of Matthews' theory without keeping the earlier critic's convention of writing the term "short-story".

The Reader's Companion to World Literature, a survey which was


published in 1956, includes this statement: A short story is "a prose narrative of limited length."\textsuperscript{57} This recent definition does not seem to have been influenced by Matthews and his followers.

Robert E. Spiller noted in 1957 that "Rip Van Winkle" is "perhaps the first short story in the modern manner."\textsuperscript{58} Spiller's point of view is similar to Arthur H. Quinn's, as we observed it in a quotation from a 1941 text. Neither of these critics seems to adhere to Matthews' position.

W. Somerset Maugham said, in his 1959 volume \textit{Points of View}, that "some persons, unacquainted with the history of literature, have claimed that the short story was an American invention. That, of course, is not so."\textsuperscript{59} Maugham does admit that the art of the short story has been highly cultivated in the United States, but he is not willing to grant America credit for having invented the form. His position is thus a departure from that of Matthews.

In his 1959 survey of American literature from Irving to Whitman, Professor Henry S. Canby referred to Poe in passing as "the originator of the American short story."\textsuperscript{60} This statement is significant because it shows that a contemporary scholar has accepted the Poe-Matthews theory--though Canby writes "short story", not "short-story"--and has even published it. This is the most recent statement I have been able to find which adheres to the Matthews philosophy.

The writers of *A Handbook to Literature*, a 1960 publication, wrote: "A short story is a relatively brief fictional narrative in prose." This general definition of the form does not have any of the distinctive characteristics of the Poe-Matthews theory.

Professor Henry A. Pochmann of the University of Wisconsin, who is perhaps America's leading Irving scholar, answered my inquiry about early sources which referred to Poe as the father of the American short story, in a letter postmarked January 29, 1963:

I never heard Poe referred to as "Father of the American Short Story." That title properly belongs to Washington Irving. Even Hawthorne would antedate Poe, though of course Poe carried the technique of the short story far beyond anything Irving or Hawthorne had done or were doing.

Pochmann is willing to give Poe credit for having made improvements in the short story form, but he does not accept the Poe-Matthews theory.

Now that we have examined the statements of many critics of the American short story, we can readily see that some critics determine whether a piece of fiction is a short story or not solely on the basis of its length. Many other critics, however, believe the short story is a special form of fiction, different from the tale, a form whose rules were established by Edgar Allan Poe, and whose theory was further announced and expanded by Professor Brander Matthews. The principles found in this latter school of criticism are so specific that we are justified in calling the group of principles the Poe-Matthews theory of the development of the American short story.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


