



The Realist Short Story of the Powerful Glimpse: Chekhov to Carver

Kerry McSweeney

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Taking a distinctively aesthetic approach to the genre of realist short fiction, Kerry McSweeney clusters the work of five masters - Anton Chekhov, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, Flannery O'Connor, and Raymond Carver - to offer a poetics of the form for students and scholars. At the center of this argument is the notion that the realist short story is a glimpse - powerful and tightly focused - into a world that the writer must precisely craft and in which the reader must fully invest. Selecting writers from different generational, national, and cultural backgrounds, McSweeney chooses writers based on their commitment to the realist representation of experience and their shared belief in the importance and efficacy of the short story form. By considering their efforts in tandem, he develops a means to assess the strategies and claims of realist short fiction. McSweeney demonstrates that when the comments these writers have made about their work are assembled and critically scrutinized, the result is an aesthetic critical model - as opposed to more interpretative models that focus attention on the determination (or indetermination) of meanings. He suggests that a fully adequate reading of a realist short story involves the integration of three components: the enjoyment and contemplation of the story in and of itself; affective receptivity, or a response to the story's emotional content; and cognitive activity, or the reflective consideration of the story's conceptual implications. In individual chapters on Chekov, Joyce, Hemingway, O'Connor, and Carver, this presentational model is applied to widely known and often anthologized readings from each writer. McSweeney brings into sharp focus the distinctive features of each piece, makes qualitative discriminations, and assesses the profitability of other critical models. He concludes with an invitation to test the mettle of his approach in reading other realist short story writers.

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