



Classic American Short Stories

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Barnes and Nobles Description :

Classic American Short Stories celebrates the perfection of the short story as a popular storytelling form in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century America. This volume features the work of twenty-seven authors regarded as some of the most distinguished names in American belles lettres, among them Louisa May Alcott, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edith Wharton, Henry James, Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, and H.P.

Lovecraft. The fifty classic tales it collects include:

The Fall of the House of Usher--Edgar Allan Poe

Bartleby the Scrivener--Herman Melville

The Yellow Wall-Paper--Charlotte Perkins Gilman

The Gift of the Magi--O. Henry

A White Heron--Sarah Orne Jewett

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow--Washington Irving

Paul's Case--Willa Cather

Bernice Bobs Her Hair--F. Scott Fitzgerald

and many more

Classic American Short Stories Details

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Author : Michael Kelahan (Compiler)

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Skjam! says

This book is more or less exactly what it says in the title, a compilation of short(ish) stories written by American authors, most of which are acknowledged as classics by American Lit professors. The stories are arranged by author in roughly chronological order from the early Nineteenth Century to the 1920s to stay safely in the public domain.

The fifty-one stories included begin with Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle", a tall tale about a henpecked husband who drinks ghostly beer and sleeps for twenty years, right through the American Revolution. The book ends with "Winter Dreams" by F. Scott Fitzgerald. A young man from Minnesota finds great success in the laundry business, but heartache when the woman he loves cannot settle for just him. In between are ones that are very familiar to me, like "The Telltale Heart" by Edgar Allen Poe (a murderer confesses his crime in an effort to prove his sanity) and stories that were new to me, like "The Revolt of 'Mother'" by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman (a New England woman, tired of an unkept promise, takes matters into her own hands.)

There's a wide variety of genres represented, from "realistic" slice of life stories through mystery and fantasy to outright horror. The chronological order highlights the changing social attitudes depicted in the stories, particularly the two Edith Wharton stories about divorce. Women are reasonably well-represented, and there are a couple of writers of color as well.

Of course, just because a story is "classic" does not mean it will appeal to everyone. I found Henry James' novella "The Aspern Papers" (literary buff infiltrates the household of a famous poet's ex-lover in an effort to gain any memorabilia she might have of him) tedious and predictable. I am not alone in this, but many other readers have found it fascinating.

Content issues: Many of these stories have elements of period racism, sexism and classism; sometimes it's dealt with within the story itself, but other times it pops up as a nasty surprise. "Paul's Case" by Willa Cather, about a boy who wants the finer things in life without the tedium of putting in decades of hard labor to get them, deals with suicide.

This is a Barnes & Noble collector's edition, and is quite handsome and sturdy, with a leather binding, gilt-edged pages and a silk bookmark for a reasonable price. However, the fact that it has a "compiler" rather than an editor is telling. There are scattered typos; I do not know if they were caused by errors in transcription, or if the sources were not scrutinized carefully enough. The author bios at the end are not quite in alphabetical order, and miss out Washington Irving altogether.

Overall, most of these stories are worth reading at least once, and many are worth rereading over the years. Highly recommended to people who don't already have their favorites from this collection in a physical book, or are curious about the stories they haven't read yet. It'd also make a nice gift for your bookworm friend or relative.

P.S. Winn says

Great book to read and get a sample of the writing by various authors. Writing a short story is a great talent and different than writing a novel, grab this book to get a peek at the authors who do it best!

Anna Hackbarth says

Some of the stories were just incredible like The Lady, or the Tiger? and The Yellow Wallpaper. Others were rather boring.
