



Short Story Guidelines

Our goal is to publish short stories that both capture the imagination and are infused with the presence of God and faith—subtly, symbolically, or deliberately. We seek good writing and great stories with a Catholic perspective.

The inspiration for Tuscany Press and for authors can be found in the dedication of the *Letter to Artists* by John Paul II: "To all who are passionately dedicated to the search for new "epiphanies" of beauty, so that through their creative work as artists, they may offer these as gifts to the world . . ."

A short story may be truly short—a handful of pages—or up to 9,000 words. As Flannery O'Connor, the Catholic Southern master of the short story, writes, "Being short does not mean being slight. A short story should be long in depth and should give us an experience of meaning."^[i]

She continues "A story is a complete dramatic action—and in good stories, the characters are shown through the action and the action is controlled through the characters, and the result of this is meaning that derives from the whole presented experience."^[ii]

John Gardner characterizes a short story by quoting Joyce ". . . the



short story moves to an 'epiphany,' as Joyce said—in other words to a climatic moment of recognition or understanding on the part of the central character or, at least, the reader—achieving its effect by fully justifying, through authenticating background, its climatic event or moment. . . ." [iii] Some say that the best short story is really the story with the surprise ending, but we would call it—in the tradition of Joyce and Gardner—the epiphany.

O'Connor continues her description of a story: "I myself prefer to say that a story is a dramatic event that involves a person—that is, because he [or she] shares in the general human condition and in some specific human situation. A story always involves, in a dramatic way, the mystery of personality." [iv]

So what is a Catholic short story? First, let us define moral fiction. As Gardner says, fiction should be moral—not in the sense of religious or cultural morality. Rather, fiction—and Catholic fiction—should aspire to discover those human values that are universally sustaining. "Great art celebrates life's potential, offering a vision unmistakably and unsentimentally rooted in love." [v]

As you write, it's also important to remember these words of Flannery O'Connor: "Your beliefs will be the light by which you see, but they will not be what you see and they will not be a substitute for seeing. . . . The first and most obvious characteristic of fiction [and this is true as well of the novel and young adult fiction] is that it deals with reality through what can be seen, heard, smelt, tasted, and touched." [vi]

PETER J. MONGEAU

Founder & Publisher

781·424·9321

publisher@tuscanypress.com



At Tuscan Press, we believe the Catholic literary revival is upon us and we invite you to be a part of it.

Guidelines for the Catholic short story, then, include:

- Greater than 1,000 words; less than 9,000 words.
- It has a distinct beginning, middle, and end.
- "Set-up", the first two paragraphs, must have tension/conflict to drive the reader forward.
- Protagonist has development or growth in character.
- Scene Descriptions: (Five senses, motion) visual detail to see in the mind's eye, and includes one or two other senses: sound, smell, taste and touch. Motion in every scene to bring it alive - see *Making Scenes Come Alive*.
- Its dialogue is authentic—and its dialogue furthers the plot (rather than being dialogue merely for speaking's sake).
- It is moral fiction (not preachy or didactic) that points to sustaining values.
- The short story represents Catholicism in the broad sense of John Paul II and Flannery O'Connor, not a limited sense (e.g., characters that simply pray or say the Rosary).
- The story's central character or protagonist and/or reader has an epiphany at the story's end.
- The story ends on Christian hope.
- It captures the reader's imagination.

In addition, in the back of the Viking Critical Edition of James Joyce's short story collection *The Dubliners* is an essay by



Professor C.C. Loomis, Jr. named *Structure and Sympathy in Joyce's "The Dead"*. Please read *The Dead* first, then the essay. It is a must read for anyone wanting to know how to structure a short story and portray a protagonist. Please read this critical essay for your own benefit.

For more information, please see the Tuscany Press website, the Writers Resources tab on the menu bar: *Required Reading for Writers of Catholic Fiction*. We strongly recommend you read Pope John Paul II's Letter to Artists and the recommended books.

Also, the best way to know what we are looking for in a short story is to read our collection. [See here](#)

[i] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969).

[ii] Ibid.

[iii] John Gardner, *The Art of Fiction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984).

[iv] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969).

[v] John Gardner, *On Moral Fiction* (New York: Basic Books, 1978)

[vi] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969).