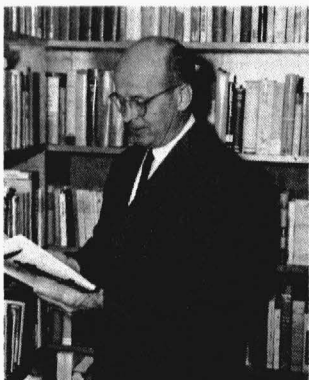


Dr. William
Peden



Peden on the short story

THE AMERICAN SHORT STORY, Front Line in the National Defense of Literature, William Peden, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1964. 202 pp.

It is such a surprising thing to find a book of criticism, and sound critical writing too, that does not gabble esoterically as much criticism does, that we can recommend this book on the short story to anyone interested in the short story from high school on up. College students used to the gobbledy gook and dullness of texts in English courses will be amazed that they can actually enjoy this book. It is written in a way that does not require the frequent use of a dictionary in order to understand what the author is trying to say.

It may well be suspect to all teachers of American literature who believe that the study should end with Edgar Allan Poe. Peden's book will certainly become the definitive study of the period of the short story which it covers.

He is perhaps the first writer to go as far as to state, that more and more American fiction writers of the last twenty-five years have found the short story to be "the most exciting, challenging, and congenial of all contemporary literary forms." He says further that the short story in America has been a thing of individuality, freedom and variety, and that the "short story writer is creating the dominant and characteristic literary form of post-War I years." The *slick* story, of course, which he discusses at some length, he does not include in this but consigns it to the pot boilers where it belongs.

Of "so-called 'Writers' Conferences'" he says: "Today some universities sponsor so-called 'Writers' Conferences', which have little more to do with writing than a homecoming football weekend has to do with higher education." We found this to be true after hopefully attending one.

Of the current trends he writes, "In brief, American short fiction around 1949 has tended to come of age emotionally and intellectually, as well as artistically and technically. If he could not believe that tomorrow would be better, the writer was able, in many cases reluctantly, to find a kind of solace in the hope that perhaps tomorrow might not be much worse."

His classification of the short stories of this period

is: (1) The Jane Austens of Metropolis and Suburbia; (2) Sick in Body and Mind Both; (3) Of War and Peace and Other Matters." The Jane Austens include John Cheever, with a shrewd analysis of his "sad modern comedies;" Hortense Calisher with her "excursions into the past, warmhearted without being sentimentalized, simple without ever lapsing into the trivial;" John O' Hara, "whose skeptical analysis of contemporary life is Thackerayan in its delineation of individual, group and society stupidity;" and many other well known writers.

In the Sick group he discusses writers who deal in mental and physical illness, including the abnormal. Here he takes up stories of James Purdy, Jean Stafford, John Cheever, Daniel Fusch, Tennessee Williams, and others, whose stories he believes are the expression of their time. He relates them, also, back to Poe, Hawthorne, and Bierce.

In his discussion of War stories, he says the best of them are among the best fiction of the last two decades; here he includes Robert Lowry, James Michener, Irving Shaw, and others.

This book, of course, will be widely used as a text in narration and creative writing classes; it will stand on the shelves of most public libraries; and all those who are interested in studying and writing short stories ought to buy and study it, if nothing else for its complete list of good stories of this period. Then for the writer of good short stories who is discouraged (as which of them is not), he explains the scarcity of markets, but offers hope for eventual acceptance if the stories are good enough, though he speaks without undue optimism.

William Peden is a professor of English at the University of Missouri, where he teaches courses in short story writing. His own distinguished short stories have been published, and his other writings are extensive, including book reviews for the *Saturday Review*. The book that we have reviewed was started when he was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1961-62.

MARY PAXTON KEELEY

Professorship honors Heinkel

The Missouri Farmers Association Foundation has established an endowment trust fund to provide support for a distinguished professorship in agriculture at the University for at least a ten-year period.

Chancellor John W. Schwada said the professorship is established to honor Fred V. Heinkel, president of the MFA and a former member of the Board of Curators of the University, for "his unique contribution to Missouri progress and education."

The University has received an initial contribution of \$3,750 from the MFA Foundation with an agreement the Foundation will continue to provide at least \$3,500 annually through 1975. The fund will be open to additional contributions from the Foundation from time to time and to contributions from other sources.