The Pony Club

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Owen Marshall

The Pony Club

A NEW ZEALAND BOOK COUNCIL LECTURE

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FOREWORD

Kia ora tātou

I have a new definition of fear: it is being in a car for an hour, driving between Featherston and Wellington, with Owen Marshall.

This was a couple of years ago and Owen had just finished an extraordinarily popular event at Featherston Booktown. He was the 2015 Randell Cottage Writer in Residence recipient, along with Witi Ihimaera, and I was dropping him back to the cottage in Thorndon. We'd just started driving when Owen said to me: 'Let's have a good chat about New Zealand literature.'

I froze.

Given Owen's significant mana, his extensive contribution to this country's literary canon and his comprehensive knowledge of New Zealand writers and writing, I felt considerably intimidated. However,

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Owen is, above all, a true gentleman – polite, respectful and modest – which meant that he generously overlooked my fumbling opinions and gently encouraged a stimulating and inspiring conversation.

Owen's name should be familiar to all New Zealanders: his short stories are studied at secondary schools and universities throughout the country, he won the Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement in 2013 and he was shortlisted for the Acorn Foundation fiction prize at this year's Ockham New Zealand Book Awards. Owen's deep literary expertise, his enduring success as a writer and admirable integrity are why we are proud that he is delivering the 2017 New Zealand Book Council Lecture.

Now in its fourth year, the New Zealand Book Council Lecture continues to reaffirm itself as a prominent event on Aotearoa New Zealand's literary calendar. The lecture provides the opportunity for one of our country's leading writers to discuss a literary topic close to their heart. It also inspires discussion about the role reading plays in Kiwis' lives and, in doing so, may pose more questions than it answers.

In 2015, Witi Ihimaera challenged us with the question, 'Where is New Zealand literature heading?' Selina Tusitala Marsh answered in her 2016 lecture by exploring the inextricable relationship between the

tales we tell and what they tell about us. Though what about the medium by which these tales are told? Given the recent rise in popularity of short form writing – whether that be an essay, blog post or a series of tweets – one may ponder why the short story does not have greater prominence in this literary zeitgeist.

By confronting the perception that short story writers are viewed as less than the novelist, Owen seeks to defend the honourable tradition of the short story in order that this question may be answered.

Welcome to the 2017 New Zealand Book Council Lecture.

Ngā mihi nui

Peter Biggs CNZM
Chair
New Zealand Book Council

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We live in an age of reduced attention spans, of sound bites and ten-second news items: a browsing age with an itch for novelty. People are pressed for time, we're told, with all manner of stimuli competing for their attention. Surely an age for the short story, yet doorstop novels are as popular as ever. On occasion, I have pondered on the reasons for this disjunction. Perhaps part of the explanation is that once the world of the novel is entered and has become familiar, it can be left and re-joined without further demand, whereas each story in a collection requires a fresh intellectual effort to come to terms with its characters, intentions and mood.

Indisputably, short fiction in general is less commercially successful than long narratives, and no doubt publishers sigh when the unsolicited collections continue to arrive. In other respects too, the short

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story is seen by some as the lesser creation, as being the apprentice work for aspiring novices before they can move on to the serious task of writing novels, and indeed for many writers it has been a natural progression from the former to the latter. Those authors who have remained focused on the short story may well feel at times that they are members of the Pony Club, while novelists enjoy the status of the Equestrian Society.

However, in my opinion those attitudes are more prevalent among casual readers and observers than among writers themselves. A novel requires a greater commitment of time, but is no more technically challenging than a short story. Indeed, there are those who see the short story as the preserve of the literary purist and the Grail of the most knowledgeable aficionados and discerning readers. The story is short, but its range in intention and mode is wide: from the remorseless poignancy of Anton Chekhov's *The Lady with the Dog* and Katherine Mansfield's *The Doll's House*, to the bleak humour of Bette Pesetsky's *The Hobbyist*. From the stripped and throbbing dialogue of *Hills Like White Elephants* by Ernest Hemingway, to the brilliant, postmodernist effrontery of Donald Barthelme's *Rebecca*.

Novelist JG Ballard, who began as a writer of short stories, became pessimistic about their future. In the

Literary Review in 2001 he said, 'the short story seems, sadly, to be heading for extinction'.[1] Such predictions have been made for most literary genres, often with cogent supporting evidence, but somehow the literatures themselves will not so readily give up the ghost. The short story is resilient and continues to reach out to discerning readers, receive recognition and provide challenge for writers.

The short story has been with us a long time: the biblical fables, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, Boccaccio's *Decameron* and the stories of *The Arabian Nights*. Yet what a slippery customer it is to define and contain, to assign a distinct role. Academic criticism has struggled to provide any attribute, except length, which decisively sets it apart from the novella and novel. Though even shortness is an unreliable property, being gauged only relative to something else.

So, what is a short story? Most editors are too circumspect, or shrewd, to attempt an answer. They press on briskly to methods of selection, social context, delineation of literary trends and discussion of individual stories. But the question is a good one and, even if not answered convincingly, by wrestling with it we enlarge our appreciation of the form and of individual stories. In the end, we are likely to favour definitions

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that agree with our own responses for, as Proust said, we read only what is within ourselves.

John Hadfield, in his introduction to *Modern Short Stories*, was dismissively pragmatic and unhelpful:

> A short story is a story that is not long; that would seem to be a sufficient, if inexact, rule of thumb by which to work.[2]

But how long is a piece of string? Robert Louis Stevenson and his contemporaries often wrote stories of 30 or 40 pages, while many competitions and publications today have limits of 5,000 words, or less. Present day trends are not in agreement: on the one hand the increasing popularity of very short pieces known as flash fiction, on the other something of a revival of the longer story in the hands of those such as Annie Proulx. Edgar Allan Poe, as part of his definition of the short story, said it should be able to be read 'at one sitting',[3] but even that is unsatisfactory in its vagueness.

And besides, surely prescriptive length is a distraction, and there is something unique in the short story; some characteristic or sum of characteristics that, quite apart from word count, makes it a species within literature. But if so, what is the gene that determines the genre?

What a difficult question that has proved to be. This is partly because, as soon as we move from an individual story to generalisations about literary form, there is a lack of precision. The genre falls to pieces in our hands: yarn, fantasy, fable, metafiction, romance, psychological realism – the short story, like the molecule, breaks down into smaller and smaller entities when under pressure.

Many qualities apart from brevity are put forward in attempts to define the short story. They are varied, often contradictory, and in all cases we can think of short fictions that will not fit the prescription, and often long works that do. The difference between the short story and the novel seems to be one not of kind, but of degree. In terms of what may be conveniently and clumsily termed the literary short story, however, there are views expressed that are both stimulating and helpful, and I would like to briefly mention two acclaimed practitioners – HE Bates and Frank O'Connor. Bates wrote:

> The short story is to fiction what the lyric is to poetry. In its finest mould the short story is, in fact, a prose poem.[4]

American writer William Gass agreed, saying: 'It is a poem grafted on to sturdier stock.'[5] It does seem that

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the economy of the short story inclines its practitioners to use poetic techniques of compression and figurative association. Think of such leading writers of short fiction as Anton Chekhov, James Joyce, John Cheever, Grace Paley and Katherine Mansfield.

O'Connor, in his book *The Lonely Voice*, identifies an ideological difference between the short story and the novel. For him, the short story arises from 'an attitude of mind that is attracted by submerged population groups',[6] by which he means those disenfranchised within their societies. It is easy to make a case that the short story has operated in this way within New Zealand fiction: we need look no further than Frank Sargeson and Janet Frame. The notion is intellectually beguiling, but again in the genre as a whole there are many exceptions, and among novels many that fit the bill. Yet I was interested to see in his introduction to the collected stories of Alistair MacLeod, that John McGahern supports O'Connor's view:

> I think of the novel as the most social of all the art forms, the most closely linked to an idea of society, a shared leisure, and a system of manners. The short story does not generally flourish in such a society but comes into its own like song or prayer or superstition in poorer more

> fragmented communities where individualism and tradition and family and localities and chance or luck are dominant.[7]

Poetry and disenfranchisement; perhaps in such ideas we see something of the characteristic nature of the literary short story. However, the art is a living, changing one and there will be as varied a range of successful stories as there are writers of unique consciousness. I think also that the essential skills of fiction writing are the same for both short stories and novels, just adapted to the form selected and the specific intention of the task at hand.

So, my brief consideration of the nature of the short story ends as inconclusively as it began, but fortunately we do not need agreement about form to enjoy individual stories, or to appreciate the significance of short fiction in literature. Now, I will move on to sketch my own journey with the short story and praise my own heroes, while remaining aware of the subjective and selective nature of my views.

We tend to impose order and direction retrospectively on life's experiences, and so it is with our reading. In

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our recollection, we are prone to group those books that go naturally together, even though the reading of them was scattered over the years. Also, books that should have been read earlier tend to retreat to that appropriate place in our memory without conscious deceit. I'm aware of this, nevertheless I'm sure that the literary short story is a genre that attracted me quite early, and in which I read widely, if indiscriminately, in my late teens and in my twenties.

My interest wasn't the result of university study. I don't remember any noted short story writer being discussed in lectures at Canterbury; indeed Virginia Woolf is the only writer I can recall becoming interested in through lectures. My father's infectious enthusiasm for Arthur Conan Doyle and Rudyard Kipling was perhaps more of an influence, but the European and American writers who attracted me were not favourites of his. Mansfield and Sargeson were not where I began, though I came willingly to them in time. Also, despite the Kiwi vernacular, the comedic yarns of Barry Crump had little appeal for me.

I remember as a seventh form student, and later at university, going to libraries for the work of overseas writers – Chekhov, Hemingway, VS Pritchett, AE Coppard, Elizabeth Bowen, James Joyce, Isaac Babel,

Sherwood Anderson, Flannery O'Connor, Guy de Maupassant, William Saroyan and especially HE Bates and TF Powys. It wasn't that I was deliberately seeking out short stories: I read novels just as enthusiastically and never thought to make a distinction between the two. Nor was I consciously searching for writing that gave attention to rural and provincial settings and characters, yet looking back on my early influences there seemed to be an element of this in my choices.

I imagine few people now read Bates, and even fewer, Powys. Theodore Powys knew intimately the countryside and his rural community. Considered old fashioned even in his own time, his writing is suffused with mysticism and delineated by allegory, but there is also a hard edge of violence and almost pagan fatalism. In Powys there is a majestic contempt for any attempt by an author to ingratiate himself with readers, or follow literary fashion. His characters never completely fade, but stand as ironic spectators in the wings. Lord Bullman and clergyman Hayhoe, Mrs Moggs walking to the beautiful sea, wold Jar the tinker, in all his guises.

In Bates I felt warmth, sympathy and a determination to enjoy the hour at hand despite an awareness of life's tribulations. He was a prolific writer and didn't always

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maintain his highest standards, but his best writing is full of wonder and affection for the natural world, along with a realistic yet compassionate understanding of character. A visual writer of the highest order, unsurpassed in capturing landscape and setting, he was capable of an unforced lyricism that bore out his stated conviction that in its finest form the short story is a prose poem:

> The engine itself stood between the cow barns and five stacks of wheat and barley, belching up clouds of black smoke into the tall poplar trees over-stooping the pond. The storm was spending itself furiously, driving dark flocks of clouds low over the farm, spitting cold gusts of rain and yellowing the air with showers of poplar leaves. The stacks were ruffled like birds, and straws in thousands sailed upwards in tufts like golden feathers and were borne away into the distance with a pale mist of chaff from the drum and the black smoke writhing and sweeping over the fields.[8]

I moved on from Bates, but never completely away. Literature evolves and so do we. I came to appreciate very different modes, from Italo Calvino and Donald Barthelme to Grace Paley, Annie Proulx, Raymond Carver, David Malouf, John Irving and Bette Pesetsky.

Yet sometimes I return to Bates and, unlike is the case for much of my early reading, I'm seldom disappointed. Perhaps this reacquaintance is enhanced by a sense of my young self and the optimistic pleasure I found then in his work.

What an expansion and flowering of the literary short story there has been since my early reading, with magic realism, postmodernism, flash fiction, prose poetry, gay, ethnic and gender writing all reacting with each other and with traditional realism, fantasy and allegory to promote vigour and variety. New, powerful voices have arisen, and many established ones persist. I enjoy the adroitness, wit and intellectual sleight of hand evident in much of modern short story writing, yet if pushed to name my present favourites I find they are all realists – John Cheever, William Trevor and Alice Munro.

Despite his talent and ultimate success, Cheever was tormented by alcoholism, bisexuality, marriage difficulties and basic insecurity. Yet with unsentimental insight and a scrupulous language, he exposed the often trivial and empty lives of middle class Americans in graceful, unpretentious tales. Cheever said of himself, 'Such merit as my work possesses is rooted in the fact that I have been unsuccessful in my search for love'.[9]

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> He had a concession at the bowling alley. He called it the pro shop, sold equipment, and drilled and plugged bowling balls with some rented machinery. It was dark that afternoon, but you could see him in the darkness, talking into a wall telephone … He said he'd call back, hung up, and turned on a light. He was a tall, bulky man with a vast belly – proof of the fact that there is little connection between erotic sport and physical beauty. His thin hair was most neatly oiled and combed with the recognizable grooming of the lewd. On his little finger he wore a flashy diamond, flanked by two rubies. His voice was reedy, and when he turned his face into the light you saw the real thing, a prince of barroom and lunch-counter pickups, reigning over a demesne of motels, hotels, and back bedrooms – proud, stupid, and serene. His jaw was smooth, well shaven, and anointed, a piney fragrance came from his armpits, his breath smelled of chewing gum, and he had the eyes of an adder. He was the real thing.[10]

William Trevor is a subtle and elegant writer. His women characters are as finely drawn as the men, and the stories are carried by authenticity of setting as well as enduring themes. He is a master at creating characters who carry psychological injury, or susceptibility, of one sort or another. People with 'a surface held in spite of an unhappiness'.[11] He is especially

interested in the influence of memory and the past, the constraints and lessons of experience and the effects of change. I am reminded of his manner when I read the fine stories of our own Vincent O'Sullivan. Trevor identified himself as a short fiction author 'who writes novels when he can't get them into short stories'.[12]

> He did not, he said, remember the occasion of his parents' death, having been at the time only five months old. His first memory was of a black iron gate, of his own hand upon part of it, and of his uncle driving through the gateway in a Model-T Ford. These images, and that of his uncle's bespectacled face perspiring, were all in sunshine. For him, so he said to Miss Ticher, the sunlight still glimmered on the dim black paint of the motor-car: his uncle, cross and uncomfortable on hot upholstery, did not smile.[13]

How well deserved is Alice Munro's award of the Nobel Prize for Literature. She reads human nature as well as any writer has, and treats her characters with integrity, originality and a compassion free of sentimentality. Her stories are serious in the best and most engaging way. Ordinary, small town people become extraordinary as their inner hopes and fears are

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opened up, and in their vulnerability we recognise so much of ourselves:

> In the old days when there was a movie theater in every town there was one in this town, too, in Maverley, and it was called the Capital, as such theaters often were. Morgan Holly was the owner and the projectionist. He didn't like dealing with the public – he preferred to sit in his upstairs cubbyhole managing the story on the screen – so naturally he was annoyed when the girl who took the tickets told him that she was going to have to quit, because she was having a baby. He might have expected this – she had been married for half a year, and in those days you were supposed to get out of the public eye before you began to show – but he so disliked change and the idea of people having private lives that he was taken by surprise.[14]

Short stories have an especially honourable tradition in New Zealand writing. Our first internationally significant writers, Katherine Mansfield and Frank Sargeson, were both short story specialists. Short fiction continues to be written enthusiastically, given prominence by well-established national competitions, featured in school and university courses and gathered into collections. I would argue that for much of the twentieth century,

the short story was more characteristic of New Zealand fiction than the novel and more fully developed; Maurice Duggan, Maurice Gee, Maurice Shadbolt, Dan Davin, CK Stead, Fiona Kidman, Janet Frame, Witi Ihimaera, Fiona Farrell, Bill Manhire, Patricia Grace and Vincent O'Sullivan are all noted short story writers. The situation has now changed, and the New Zealand novel has come of age through the cumulative authority of Frame, and the works of such writers as Gee, Keri Hulme, Alan Duff, Elizabeth Knox, Catherine Chidgey, Lloyd Jones and Eleanor Catton. That is to be celebrated. I do not see the short story and the novel in some sort of internecine conflict, and many of our authors continue to write both.

It was not until I left university and began writing short stories myself that I read many by fellow New Zealanders. Of these, Mansfield, Sargeson and Frame made the greatest impression on me. The characteristics that attracted me most in Mansfield's stories were a sense of longing and a sense of both immediacy and transience. I suppose what we mean by 'voice' in fiction is the manifestation of personality through the writing, and her voice is brave, the sense of presence immediate. One of my favourites of her stories is *A Dill Pickle*, which well displays both

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her shimmering imagery and sensitivity to passing impression:

> And she seemed at that moment to be sitting on the grass beside the mysterious Black Sea, black as velvet, and rippling against the banks in silent, velvet waves. She saw the carriage drawn up to one side of the road, and the little group on the grass, their faces and hands white in the moonlight. She saw the pale dress of the woman outspread and her folded parasol, lying on the grass like a huge pearl crochet hook. Apart from them, with his supper in a cloth on his knees, sat the coachman. "Have a dill pickle," said he, and although she was not certain what a dill pickle was, she saw the greenish glass jar with a red chilli like a parrot's beak glimmering through. She sucked in her cheeks; the dill pickle was terribly sour…[15]

In Frank Sargeson's work I admire the tautness, the astute eye for local character and his adaptation of Kiwi idiom for literary purposes. Sargeson proved the hard way that a writer could stay in New Zealand and succeed, using our own version of English. In a letter from 1980, he said,

> I think I slowly drifted into devoting my life to writing. And I think what eventually drove me on and on was the wish to do my part in creating what might come to be recognised as a valid kind of Enzed language for the stories I had to tell.[16]

That battle has been won so completely that we tend to forget its importance and Sargeson's role in it.

I met Sargeson only through his writing and fleetingly through correspondence, and regret that we never had the opportunity to talk. He was supportive of my work. There are many New Zealand authors who can say the same, for Frank's generosity to fellow writers is well known, and one of the many attractive aspects of his character. In 1981, I was fortunate to be Writer in Residence at the University of Canterbury, the first substantial period of time I was able to devote to writing. Sargeson had given my first collection of stories a generous review in the literary journal *Islands* and I wrote to thank him and express admiration for his own stories. I had no idea then that his health was failing rapidly. I received two notes in reply: the first is lost, the second I have framed in my study. It is badly typed, clumsily corrected, the signature is shaky and I value it greatly. He wrote of his own experiences within universities, the $50 he had been paid for a contribution to a Japanese publication, 'the horrid kind of special

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stroke'[17] he had recently suffered and ended by wishing me well. Michael King later told me it was Sargeson's last typed letter. With all he faced at the time, he could still send such a message to a little-known writer whom he had never met. How many of us would have bothered?

Although we never came face to face, I've learned since that Sargeson thought we had. In his local wine shop was a young Owen Marshall who served him Lemora wine and talked of Ronald Hugh Morrieson, and for some time Sargeson thought the salesman was me.

What I should have done, of course, was write to him much earlier and say how much I admired his work, but I had that mixture of pride and shyness common enough in the young writer.

> The Williams were grafters, everybody agreed about that. They never seemed to have any time for recreation, unless that was the name you could give to the time they put in on their flower beds and keeping the place tidy. They never went to socials or dances, they never even went to church, so nobody got to know them at all well. But they had people's respect for being such hard workers. Occasionally it would be said they were a pair of money-grubbers, living only to rake in the cash, but I think that would usually be said by

> somebody who wouldn't have minded being able to do the same thing. That is, if they were doing it. Nobody knew for certain.[18]

It is Janet Frame, however, whom I most admire among New Zealand short story writers; indeed, among all our authors. Her unerring personal sensitivity and symbolic view of the world constitute the closest thing to genius that we have in this country's writing. I met her only twice, retain only a few brief notes from her, including a birthday greeting, and attended her Dunedin funeral. Though I do have a more substantial if indirect link with her through our mutual association with the South Island town of Oamaru, that 'kingdom by the sea'.[19] She lived there as a child and young woman, I taught there for twenty years. One of the last places I visited before leaving Oamaru in 1985 was the Frame home at Willowglen. The place was derelict, with birds roosting inside and a scatter of mildewed newspapers and torn books on the floor. Everything a snarl of desolation. From a small basin in the corner of one of the rooms, I tore off a grimy plug and chain as a memento. Michael King told me jokingly that he would swap it for Sargeson's paper knife, but died before there was any chance to negotiate.

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Frame's stories often have a haunting sense of unease, even threat, despite their apparent simplicity; a sense of unknown things stirring just below the surface of life. They also possess the poetic language mentioned by Bates as typical of literary short fiction:

> In the summer days when the lizards come out and the old ewes, a rare generation, a gift of the sun, gloat at us from the television screen, and the country, skull in hand, recites To kill or not to kill, and tomatoes and grapes ripen in places unused to such lingering light and warmth, then the people of Stratford, unlike the "too happy happy tree" of the poem, do remember the "drear-nighted" winter. They order coal and firewood, they mend leaks in the spouting and roof, they plant winter savoys, swedes, a last row of parsnips.
>
> The country is not as rich as it used to be. The furniture in the furniture store spills out on the footpath and stays unsold. The seven varieties of curtain rail with their seven matching fittings stay on display, useless extras in the new education of discernment and necessity.[20]

Not all my favourite New Zealand stories are written by the best known of our authors. I think of Norman Bilbrough's splendid *Dogman*, *Busman* with its strangely

alienated characters, Christine Johnston's intriguing narrative technique in *They* and the confiding, colloquial engagement of Frankie McMillan's *Truthful Lies*. I experience pleasure in seeing younger writers taking up the banner of the short story and producing exciting examples of the form: Carl Nixon, Sue Orr, Gemma Bowker-Wright, Craig Cliff, Tracey Slaughter, Amy Head, Emily Perkins, Sarah Quigley, Courtney Sina Meredith, Sarah Laing and Charlotte Grimshaw among others.

While the ley lines of Mansfield and Sargeson are still discernible in our short fiction, all manner of new magnetism has been at work, and the effect of Pacific writing, feminist writing, post modernism and gay writing is obvious. Has this development resulted in a body of work that is more than superficially distinctive of New Zealand? Perhaps an overseas commentator is best placed to answer that question, but we would expect the response to be yes, and in my opinion it is. Our stories are shaped not only by individual psyches but by the creative tension between those forces that tend to create a uniquely local form and those that promote wider commonality. Among the former are a more assured sense of national identity, the acceptance, indeed validation, of a New Zealand

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vernacular, tertiary writing courses and the growing influence of Māori and Pacific writers such as Patricia Grace, Albert Wendt, Witi Ihimaera and Paula Morris. Among the latter forces are our embrace of international communications, our susceptibility to dominant cultures, our enduring Pākeha links to a literature that originated in Europe, the expansion of an arts festival scene that regularly brings us influential overseas writers and a brash, global hi-tech youth culture. Many of our best stories profit from a meeting of New Zealand and overseas influences, and are, as WH Auden hoped for his poetry, 'like some valley cheese, local, but prized elsewhere'.[21]

I have had thirteen collections/selections of my short fiction published, as well as novels and poetry. As is obvious from my comments, I am naturally drawn to the challenges and artistic rewards of the short story form, but there is another significant reason, a practical one, for my concentration on short fiction for so much of my writing career. It suited my lifestyle at the time. Until the early 1990s I had a full-time job and a family: writing had to be fitted around those priorities. After one unsuccessful attempt, I didn't have sufficient confidence that years spent on a novel would result in something worthy of publication. Since becoming

a professional writer I have had the blocks of time necessary for writing novels and the encouragement of publishers to do so. My love of the short story is abiding, but I also welcome the test and variety of writing full length prose and poetry. Who would wish to restrict themselves to one genre as reader, or writer, when there is so much of value in literature as a whole? I consider the short story and the novel to be of equal value, each with its characteristic strengths and challenges. Size isn't everything, and surely quality is more important as both a measure and a goal.

I think the Pony Club is alive and kicking, both here and overseas, and I hope all of you are members. Trot out a story with pride; garland it if you can.

I finish with the final paragraph from James Joyce's famous story, *The Dead*; the title certainly not an indication of the state of the genre in which it's written:

> A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly

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upon the Bog of Allen and, further westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.[22]

ENDNOTES

1. Interview with JG Ballard, 'Pure imagination, the most potent hallucinogen of them all: JG Ballard Talks With Sebastian Shakespeare', transcribed by Mike Holliday, *The Literary Review*, http://jgballard.ca/media/2001_literary_review.html, 2001 (accessed 2 August 2017).

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5. Chris Power, 'Survival of the smallest: the contested history of the English short story' in *The New Statesman*, 27 June 2017, http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2017/06/survival-smallest-contested-history-english-short-story (accessed 16 August 2017).

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8. HE Bates, *HE Bates,* edited by Alan Cattell (London: Harrap, 1975), 113.

9. John Cheever, *The Journals of John Cheever* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1991), vii.

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BIOGRAPHY

Owen Marshall is a celebrated novelist and short fiction writer. He worked as a teacher for many years before retiring to write full-time. He has often been labelled one of New Zealand's finest writers and has received numerous honours, awards and fellowships for his work. Marshall graduated with an MA (Hons) from the University of Canterbury, which in 2002 awarded him the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters, and in 2005 appointed him an adjunct professor. In 2000, he became an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM) for services to literature and in 2012 became a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (CNZM). In 2013, Marshall was awarded the Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement.

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