

GENRE FEATURES OF THE SHORT STORY AND THE NOVELLA

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Abstract: The article examines the genre-specific features of the short story and the novella as closely related yet distinct forms of short prose. It analyzes structural and compositional differences between these genres, focusing on plot construction, the role of the protagonist, narrative dynamics, and the conclusion. Special attention is paid to the historical and literary development of each genre, as well as the influence of cultural and national traditions on their formation. The study identifies characteristic traits that help distinguish the short story and the novella as independent genre forms despite their close relationship. This work may be of interest to philology students, literature instructors, and researchers involved in genre theory.

Keywords: short story, novella, short prose, genre characteristics, plot, composition, literary studies, genre typology, artistic form, ending.

In modern literary studies, the genres of short prose occupy a special place due to their compactness and concentrated artistic expression. The short story and the novella, as two of the most widespread forms of short prose, share both common features and significant differences. Despite their apparent similarities, these genres have unique structural and thematic characteristics that affect the reader's perception and the artistic impact of the work.

The aim of this article is to identify and systematize the genre features of the short story and the novella, as well as to analyze their similarities and differences in the context of literary tradition. The short story and the novella are genres of short prose with a rich history of development, rooted in different cultural traditions.

The novella is a genre that originated in 14th-century Italian literature, especially through the works of Giovanni Boccaccio (*The Decameron*). Initially, the novella was a short narrative form, often built around an unexpected plot twist or a moral lesson. In Europe, the novella developed as a genre inclined toward brevity, clear composition, and a significant ending—often with elements of paradox and irony.

The short story as a genre emerged later and gained wide popularity in Russian and European literature of the 19th century. The short story is characterized by greater freedom in composition and theme, and it is aimed at portraying everyday situations, characters, and the psychological states of the protagonists. In Russian literature, the stories of Anton Chekhov became classics of the genre, paying special attention to the inner world of characters and the subtle nuances of human relationships.

A short story is a form of short prose that is usually marked by compactness, focus on one main event or episode, and a relatively simple compositional structure. The main goal of the short story is to convey a specific impression, mood, or characteristic life episode.

Psychological depth and detailed depiction of the protagonist's inner experiences are essential in the short story. Most often, the story focuses on one or several characters, revealing their personality through dialogues, actions, and observations. The themes of short stories are diverse — from everyday situations to social and philosophical issues.

Key features of the short story include:

- A linear, sequential plot development
- Absence of complex plotlines and a strong emphasis on details
- Possibility of an open ending, leaving room for the reader’s interpretation
- Emphasis on realism and life-like authenticity

In Russian literature of the 19th and early 20th centuries, short stories often served as a means to explore human psychology and social phenomena, as seen in the works of A.P. Chekhov, I.A. Bunin, and L.N. Tolstoy.

The novella is a genre of short prose characterized by a clear, closed structure and is often centered around one vivid, unusual event or plot twist. The primary goal of the novella is to create a strong emotional or intellectual impact on the reader through an unexpected development or ending.

Key features of the novella include:

- Compact and rigid compositional structure
- A clearly constructed plot with a climax and a completed ending
- Frequent use of an unexpected twist or the "element of surprise"
- Characters may be symbolic or allegorical
- The theme is often limited to a single idea or problem, intensifying the meaning

The novella is traditionally associated with the European literary tradition, especially with the works of Guy de Maupassant, Edgar Allan Poe, and Anton Chekhov (who, in some of his works, combined features of both the short story and the novella).

To better understand the genre differences, let us consider examples:

- **Short story:** “*Fat and Thin*” by Anton Chekhov. This story presents a domestic situation with subtle psychological insight and irony. The plot develops sequentially, and the ending leaves room for reflection.
- **Novella:** “*The Necklace*” by Guy de Maupassant. This novella is structured around an unexpected plot twist and features a clear narrative arc with a strong climax and conclusion that delivers a powerful emotional effect.

Despite belonging to the broader category of short prose and sharing some common traits, the short story and the novella possess a number of significant differences that help distinguish the two genres.

Parameter	Short Story	Novella
Structure	Linear, sequential plot development	Clearly structured, closed, with climax and unexpected twist
Length	Generally shorter	Sometimes slightly longer, yet still compact
Plot	Often based on a single event or episode	Focused on a striking event with a surprising ending
Characters	Often realistic, with psychological depth	May be symbolic or allegorical
Ending	Can be open or ambiguous	Usually closed, with an element of surprise
Theme	Broad — from domestic to philosophical issues	Usually focused on a single problem or idea

Parameter Short Story

Novella

Purpose	To convey mood, psychological insight	To provoke a strong emotional or intellectual response
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In literature, these two genres frequently intersect: some short stories exhibit elements of the novella and vice versa. However, distinguishing them allows for a deeper understanding of each genre's unique qualities and artistic potential.

The short story and the novella are important forms of short prose, each with distinct traits that influence their reception and artistic effect. The short story is oriented toward psychological depth, realism, and openness to interpretation, while the novella relies on a tightly structured plot and an unexpected conclusion that heightens emotional impact.

Understanding these genre characteristics enhances the analysis of literary works and enriches the theoretical foundation of literary studies. This is important both for teaching literature and for the development of genre typology in modern literary scholarship.

The short story and the novella, though often grouped under the broader category of short prose, serve different artistic functions and reflect diverse narrative strategies. A detailed examination of their genre-specific characteristics reveals how these forms shape readers' expectations, emotional responses, and interpretive frameworks.

The **short story** is particularly effective in exploring psychological depth and capturing fleeting yet profound moments in human life. Its compact nature allows for a concentrated focus on a single character, mood, or situation. Russian literature, especially the works of Anton Chekhov, has demonstrated how a seemingly ordinary event can be transformed into a powerful reflection on the human condition. Chekhov's minimalist style and subtle irony create stories where much remains unsaid, inviting the reader to actively interpret and emotionally engage with the narrative. This open-endedness is one of the defining features of the short story, allowing it to mirror the ambiguities and complexities of real life.

In contrast, the **novella** is more structured and purposeful in its narrative trajectory. It usually revolves around a central conflict or event that unfolds in a carefully organized manner, often culminating in an unexpected or ironic twist. This genre's strength lies in its ability to deliver a powerful and concise narrative punch. The works of Guy de Maupassant and Edgar Allan Poe illustrate the novella's potential to combine brevity with intensity. These narratives often focus on moral dilemmas, existential questions, or dramatic revelations, employing a strong sense of unity and finality. The novella's structured composition and clear resolution make it an effective vehicle for conveying a singular idea or theme with maximum impact.

While both genres emphasize **economy of language** and **narrative focus**, their differences in plot development, character portrayal, and thematic depth distinguish them from each other. The short story allows more room for emotional nuance and character introspection, whereas the novella emphasizes a complete, often climactic narrative arc.

Furthermore, the **cultural and historical context** of each genre also influences their development and reception. The novella has roots in the European Renaissance, shaped by oral storytelling traditions and often infused with symbolic or allegorical meaning. In contrast, the short story matured as a literary form in the 19th century, particularly in Russia and America, where it responded to the growing interest in realism, psychological analysis, and social critique.

In modern literature, the **boundaries between genres** have become increasingly fluid. Many

contemporary works blend elements of the short story and the novella, creating hybrid forms that challenge traditional classifications. Nonetheless, understanding the classical distinctions remains essential for literary analysis, genre studies, and pedagogy.

Ultimately, both genres offer unique artistic possibilities. The short story excels in portraying introspective and momentary experiences, while the novella delivers concentrated narratives with dramatic and often thought-provoking outcomes. Their comparative study enhances our appreciation of literary form and enriches our engagement with prose fiction.

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