THE SHORT STORY IN AMERICAN
WOMEN'S MAGAZINES:
AN ANALYSIS

THESIS

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Fulfillment of the Requirements

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MASTER OF ARTS

By

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This paper documents the decrease of short stories in three women's magazines from 1940 to 1970 and concludes that the decline results from readers turning to other sources for escape from housework. Chapter II describes patterns in plots, themes, characters, settings, and other elements of these stories. Chapter III shows the lack of influence which changes in writers, editors, and social and political developments in America have had on these short stories. The conclusion is reached that the magazine article is replacing magazine short stories.
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CHAPTER I

THE QUANTITATIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SHORT STORIES AND WOMEN'S MAGAZINES IN THE PAST AND PRESENT

William Peterfield Trent observed in 1931 that "short stories, which have proved so important a part of American literature during the last fifty years, have almost invariably made their appearance in magazines" (9, p. 300). Throughout the twentieth century, magazines published for virtually every interest and age group have contained short stories. Early in this century, magazines such as the North American Review printed fiction for the educated reader who was not merely literate, but "at home in all ages and all lands" (5, p. 145). At about the same time, the pulp magazines, which Theodore Peterson identifies as "publishers of cheap fiction" (5, p. 306), became popular with less educated readers who were eager to escape into adventure, love, detective, or Western stories that were "usually of low quality and always surcharged with emotion" (5, p. 307). Later, fiction of similar quality appeared in confession magazines like True Story; it also generally appealed to "persons
with little education and little purchasing power" (5, p. 296). Throughout the century intellectual readers could find short stories "uncramped by conventional forms and formulas" (5, p. 414) in the little magazines. Sophisticated metropolitan readers have been entertained by the stories in the New Yorker since 1925 (5, p. 248), and in the fifties "'a select group of urbane fellows'" (5, p. 316) began reading the fiction in Playboy.

Women's magazines, too, have a history as an important medium for the dissemination of short stories. As early as the nineteenth century "in the women's magazines, . . . the short story was already a staple" (8, p. 40). At the end of that century, The Delineator established "the form of the woman's magazine . . . for decades to come--a mixture of . . . fiction, fashion, and articles and departments covering every home activity" (8, p. 146). Throughout those decades, the efficacy of women's magazines in reaching large numbers of readers with large numbers of short stories has been indisputable.

Because of this historical involvement with the short story, women's magazines provide a reasonable starting point for the examination of developments in at least one branch of the short story in America during the twentieth century. This study of the short story
in twentieth century American women's magazines deals with three representative magazines of this sort. 

*Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, and Redbook,* along with four other publications, in 1968 were classified by Cynthia Leslie White as service-type women's periodicals (10, p. 327). All originally were intended "to help the reader manage her household; and since they relied on the same general formula of fashion, foods, family, and fiction, there was little to distinguish one magazine from the others" (5, p. 165). Since presumably girls younger than seventeen or eighteen did not have households of their own to manage and women older than thirty-five or forty were completely familiar with the tricks of the trade, all of these magazines were intended chiefly for female readers between approximately eighteen and forty. Although "[the magazines] made the home their world until the mid-thirties" (5, p. 165), all have since begun to deal with the problems of society as they relate to the homemaker.

*Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, and Redbook* were selected for this study not only because of their similarity in these areas, but also because the content of each, in both the past and the present, has consisted in large part of fiction.

For instance, Otis L. Wiese, who became the editor of *McCall's* in 1928, restructured the magazine in 1932
into separate sections for "news and fiction," "home-making," and "style and beauty." This format was utilized throughout the forties, with each section receiving approximately equal emphasis, and fiction comprising about a sixth of the editorial content of the magazine. In 1967 fiction still occupied 12.7 per cent of the editorial content of McCall's (10, p. 247).

Similarly, according to Trent, "many of the million readers which [Ladies' Home Journal] long boasted firmly believed it to be a literary magazine" (9, p. 315). Even in 1967, when the magazine was well established as a service publication for women, 13.4 per cent of its editorial content was fiction (10, p. 247).

From 1929 to 1949 editor Edwin Balmer of Redbook "made it a general interest monthly with a heavy load of light fiction for men and women" (5, p. 205). In fact, since its origin in 1903 when it was a short story magazine, Redbook has particularly emphasized fiction. Even recently, since it has been recognized as a women's service publication, Redbook contained large quantities of fiction, as in 1967, when its editorial content was made up of 40.1 per cent fiction (10, p. 247).

Additionally, these three magazines were selected as primary material for this study because all now have and for many years have had large circulations. Many readers and writers have been exposed to the fiction in
these magazines; consequently, the magazines are likely to have been influential in establishing ideas about what the short story is and can be. Even as early as the turn of the century "writers were trained to write and readers to read, by periodicals" (7, p. 519), and by 1968 Redbook was influencing nearly 4,500,000 readers; Ladies' Home Journal almost 7,000,000; and McCall's 8,500,000 (10, p. 327).

Therefore, a sampling of these three similar magazines—Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, and Redbook—over a specified period of time can be expected to reveal whether changes occurred during that period in either the number of short stories that were published or in the forms in which they appeared. A study of this kind is important in that it not only delineates the past of the short story but also aids in the formulation of theories about its future.

In order to complete this study, the stories in sixteen issues of each magazine were examined. These issues, from the even-numbered years between 1940 and 1970, with two exceptions, were those published in April. The month and years were selected arbitrarily, for convenience in limiting the scope of the project and for their apparent sufficiency in indicating trends in the development of the short story. The exceptions, the
November, 1942 Redbook which was substituted for the April issue that should logically have fallen in the established sequence and the March, 1946 McCall's, substituted for the April, 1946 issue, were necessary because of the limited availability of specific issues of these magazines. Too, an examination of the short stories in the exceptions and six other issues of the magazines from other months and years which were chosen at random (McCall's, June, 1943; Redbook, January, 1949; Ladies' Home Journal, August, 1953; Redbook, October, 1957; McCall's, December, 1965; Ladies' Home Journal, May, 1969), indicated that the results of the study generally present an accurate view of the short stories published during the thirty-year period and that these results are not distorted by the limitation of the study to issues published in one particular month. A total of 189 stories were examined.

While the study of these particular issues of Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, and Redbook indicates that the number of short stories in each periodical steadily declined from the middle and late forties to 1970, in the last years of the nineteenth century when these magazines were becoming established, short stories were an important part of each. Frank Luther Mott observes in his History of American Magazines that "one of the three chief changes in the content of American magazines in the quarter-century
1872-1897 . . . is in the increase of short fiction. By 1882, the **Ladies' Home Companion** was observing editorially: "That magazine is liked best which has the best short stories . . ." (4, p. 113). Almost a century later, in 1970, it may be observed of women's magazines that "That magazine is liked best which has the least short stories." By that year **McCall's** and **Ladies' Home Journal**, with circulations of 8,500,000 and nearly 7,000,000, included only one short story each in typical issues, while **Redbook**, with a circulation 2,500,000 below that of the **Journal**, published four. By 1976 Eileen Jensen comments that "**Woman's Day** often has no fiction at all. There's a chilling thought for tomorrow and a definite trend" (2, p. 22). Although **Ladies' Home Journal**, **McCall's**, and **Redbook** today still include some fiction, if the trend developed between 1940 and 1970 continues, soon Jensen's prediction may be reality.

In the forties, however, there was no reason to suspect that writers of short stories would ever have to cope with the declining popularity of their art. As Table I shows, in 1940 a typical issue of **McCall's** carried three short stories; **Ladies' Home Journal** ran four; and **Redbook** contained seven. Even later in the decade, one area in which shortages were not seen during World War II was in the supply of short stories that women's magazines provided their readers.
TABLE I

QUANTITIES OF SHORT STORIES IN THREE WOMEN'S MAGAZINES DURING A THIRTY-YEAR PERIOD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Ladies' Home Journal</th>
<th>Redbook</th>
<th>McCall's</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>*6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>**6</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>1948</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>1950</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>1952</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>April</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>1956</td>
<td>April</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>April</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>April</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
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*November.

**March.

By the fifties, though, the trend toward fewer short stories was becoming apparent. Between 1948 and 1950 the total number in the Journal, McCall's, and Redbook dropped sharply, although it remained steady throughout the rest of the decade. In the early sixties the readers of these magazines found that the number of short stories in them briefly, and ultimately insignificantly, increased. A steady decline in the number of short stories occurred in the latter part of the decade, however, and by 1970 only six were included in the April issue of all three magazines.
Although the trend toward fewer short stories is evident in all three magazines, Table I reveals that it is most obvious in the Ladies' Home Journal, which averaged five stories an issue in the forties, less than three in the fifties, two in the sixties, and only one in the seventies. The magazine that Frank Luther Mott identifies in the 1890's as "publishing most of the best American writers" (4, p. 544) and that James Playstead Wood says in 1956 had as its "most outstanding feature" its "consistent performance in publishing bestseller fiction" (11, p. 121) has virtually eliminated this kind of writing from its editorial content.

McCall's, while in the forties relying less on fiction than the Journal, in the fifties and sixties contained slightly more short stories. Even in this periodical, however, the trend toward decreasing quantities is observable. In spite of the fluctuations shown by Table I, evidence indicates that McCall's, which did not publish its first fiction until 1897 (5, p. 202) after the magazine had been in existence for twenty-four years, is reverting to its original pattern.

A similar decrease in the quantity of short stories takes place in Redbook, but perhaps because it was a short story magazine when it began publication in 1903 and only later became divided "equally between service, 'general interest' and fiction" (10, p. 253), the decrease takes
place more slowly and less dramatically than in the other two magazines. The drop from the greatest quantity of short stories in *Redbook* in one issue, which is seven in April, 1946, to the fewest, four in April, 1968, and April, 1970, is not sizeable compared to that in the *Ladies' Home Journal* and *McCall's*, but it is, nevertheless, indicative of the general trend toward fewer short stories in women's magazines.

In his explanation of why this trend came about, Howard Mumford Jones writes, "Basic changes in the concept of literary art, in the nature and costs of American magazines, and in the interests and caliber of the reading public affected the short story . . ." (3, p. 222). Certainly there are relationships between these elements which could have logically resulted in the demise of the short story as an important part of women's magazines.

Perhaps as the cost of publishing a magazine increased, as it did in the mid-twentieth century, editors became more pressed to examine closely the preferences of the readers of their magazines in order to insure high circulation and appeal to advertisers, which helped to meet the rising costs.

This kind of examination led the editors of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, for example, to identify what Jones calls the "caliber" of its readers as "the widest possible constituency of fairly intelligent readers" (9, p. 301).
White says that, beginning in the early sixties "the Ladies' Home Journal saw itself as catering to an attitude group, and . . . widened its scope accordingly" (10, p. 251). She quotes the editor at that time, Curtiss Anderson: "'An integral part of our editorial concept is to achieve a still higher level of editing that will attract those alert young women who do not now have strong allegiance to any women's magazine'" (10, p. 251).

Perhaps the editors of these magazines found that the "fairly intelligent readers" and "alert young women" read women's service periodicals in part, as Robert Stein of McCall's says, to learn "the fundamentals of caring for a home and raising a family" (10, p. 250), but also in part as an escape from the drudgery of this job. That readers use these short stories to escape from usually unexciting, seldom exhilarating housework is established by Leonhard Dowty, book editor at Good Housekeeping: "Stories written for this magazine should be of high emotional content and reassuring because downbeat stories don't fare well with our readers" (2, p. 23). This idea is also supported by John William Tebbel, who says that the Ladies' Home Journal has, throughout its history, been dependent on the "argument that women might have interests other than their homes" (8, p. 208). Editors, realizing that the reassurance the short story provided was an important part
of the magazine to its readers, simultaneously recognized the greater relevance to their lives of the non-fiction portion of the editorial content, especially as television became more available to provide escape (8, p. 249). This realization, then, may have led to the near-elimination of short stories from the *Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's*, and *Redbook*.

This realization of the necessity of creating an appeal to a reader who relied on magazines to fulfill changing needs led editors of these magazines to an increased dependence on the magazine article, on non-fiction rather than fiction. Herbert R. Mayes, the editor of *McCall's* in 1958, "threw out $400,000 worth of manuscripts on file and went after features he thought his readers would prefer . . ." (5, p. 205). These large-scale changes in this and other magazines resulted in an alteration of the nature of the magazine itself. White elaborates on this alteration: " . . . editors . . . have already managed to create a brand of journalism far removed from the gossipy, inconsequential productions of earlier years, and one that is gradually moving towards new importance and integrity" (10, p. 256). Harry Shaw contributes the following explanation of the developments which occurred as editors moved toward this new "integrity." "The magazine article has come of age, technically and stylistically. Non-fiction writers have outstripped the
field in the race for the coveted, limited space available in periodicals because story technique has tended to remain static, standardized, whereas article writing has reached new levels" (6, p. 104).

Apparently, though, readers will not be satisfied with the total elimination of short stories from women's magazines. Shana Alexander, in her editor's column in the April, 1970, issue of McCall's, writes that "the loudest wails of all from readers concern the disappearance of short stories from our pages. In fact, we have been searching for better ones . . ." (1, p. 6). Perhaps Alexander is flattering the intelligence of her readers here since the one short story in the issue carrying this column differs little from its predecessors in 1940, 1950, and 1960. Perhaps it is not the quality of the short story that concerns the readers of the Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, and Redbook, but the presence of some fiction which prevents the magazines from assuming the tone of an employer's instructions to the maid.

In any event, between the years 1940 and 1970 readers did find a typical kind of short story in these three magazines.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER II

PATTERNS IN THE SHORT STORY

That there has been for at least thirty years a short story typical of women's magazines is evident from an examination of those published in the Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, and Redbook between 1940 and 1970. The comparison of several elements of the short story--plot, theme, characterization, setting, and dialogue--as they are found in this group of stories reveals the similarities in the group. It also illustrates the fact that the typical story in these magazines was so predictable and so soothing in its predictability that readers could, indeed, have come to enjoy it primarily for its value as escape literature.

Between 1940 and 1970 whether a woman read McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, or Redbook made as little difference in the kind of short story she was likely to read as whether she was reading during World War II or the war in Vietnam. Although there are a few alternatives, statistically the story she turned to was most often about love and marriage. In his story the main character, usually a female between the ages of seventeen and twenty-nine, who is likely to be living in her parents' home, meets a man, also in his
twenties, and after overcoming a terrible obstacle, becomes engaged to him. As J. D. Salinger writes, it would be "one of those stories with a lot of . . . lean-jawed guys named David in it, and a lot of . . . girls named Linda or Marcia that are always lighting all the goddam Davids' pipes for them" (32, p. 70). The point that the author of this typical story would be trying to impress on his reader is that if love is true, usually unselfish, it cannot fail to bring great happiness to the lovers.

Peterson observes that "in [magazine] fiction . . ., as the [twentieth] century progressed, magazines became increasingly concerned with formula rather than form . . . ." (30, p. 448). Not only in this one most typical pattern is this true, but also in several other frequently occurring plots, themes, characters, and settings.

Stories in McCall's, the Ladies' Home Journal, and Redbook during these years generally have one of four primary, recurring plots. Most popular is the one discussed above, found in all four decades studied and used in a total of eighty of the 189 stories read for this paper. Usually the woman gets engaged in these "girl meets boy, loses boy, wins boy" stories, as in "Take It Away, Mr. McTavish" in which Holly Grinell and Mr. McTavish overcome the obstacle of her prior engagement and find
love together (27), but sometimes she is found at the end of the story, not engaged, but secure in the knowledge, after her love has survived disaster, that she is particularly attractive to a certain man. "Touch and Go," in which Mary Elizabeth Denny finds that boyfriends Chuck and Ron actually consider her to be more attractive after she unfemininely wins the crucial game for her touch football team (16), is an example of this development in these many love stories which end happily.

Another characteristic of this kind of story is that "everything is of the moment . . . there is no tomorrow" (25), p. 22). In "Hired Mother" Miss Hinkley and her boss become engaged less than a day after they meet and are married only a few days later (23). In spite of the fact that her sister's divorce has made her cautious about love, Sally, in "Lean Down, Stars," falls in love with Joe on their first date, although she does not accept his proposal of marriage until their second meeting (4). Perhaps some of this swiftness could be attributed to hasty marriages associated with World War II, except that it happens in all the years of study. For instance, in "Two Who Deserved Each Other," published in 1970, Sandra and Andrew are happily single strangers who are introduced at a party and before they leave contemplate marriage to each other (10).
The second most popular formula in plot construction, used in forty-three of the 189 stories, concerns a marriage which is endangered, usually by the "other man" or the "other woman." This type of story is also found evenly distributed throughout all the decades of the study. The plot of this group of stories may be described as one in which the woman marries a man, almost loses him, and then regains his love. About equally common is the husband who faces the loss of his wife, as in "The Rainbow." Jeannie MacCloud plans to leave her husband for Mr. Lobet until she realizes that Lobet will not permit her to bring her six-year-old daughter with her (35).

Both of these plot formulas concern the triumph of love. Together they account for 123 of the stories in the study, and support the idea that in most women's magazine stories matrimonial success is the goal of life and "the fruits of that success are7 a mate and a home equipped with all the gadgets advertised on the surrounding pages" (30, p. 446).

The third group of stories, with a less-rigidly prescribed plot structure, was as popular in 1960 and 1970 as in 1940 and 1950, and all the stories in it—thirty-eight—deal with the best way to rear children. This is a common formula, particularly in Redbook, accounting for twenty of the eighty-four stories in that magazine. In all three magazines the family usually faces
a crisis in the rearing of the children, which the children themselves help to resolve; in "The Innocent" young Wolfe Koenig's actions show his mother that she would be making a mistake to insist that he be held back a grade in school so that he can stay in his sister's class (33).

The fourteen stories about romance not ending in bliss share a fourth kind of plot typical in these magazines through the years of study. They usually conform to a pattern of one lover's selfishness destroying the relationship. In the representative "Nice Girls Don't Run Away" Sara Van Campen and Fritz Branton call off their engagement because she does not care enough about him to defend his lack of sophistication to her rich friends (28). Similarly, in "Anne Has Everything" Mona Marston's marriage ends when her husband realizes that she has tried to break up her best friend's marriage in order to get her house (8).

Perhaps it is to be expected that all but fourteen stories in magazines which are written and edited for women from eighteen to thirty-five will be primarily concerned with engagement, marriage, and children. However, there is a slight tendency in the later years of this study for stories with plots that do not fit into one of these patterns to appear in the magazines. Half of these non-formula stories occur in issues of the magazines published
later than 1960. Three of them were published during the fifties and four during the forties. This group includes some of the most interesting stories in the study. "Miss Hattie's Lawn Party," for example, concerns the unique revenge an old maid takes on her sister for inflicting years of misery on her (9). "Visitors from Town" does not rely on either a typical happy ending or a moralistic unhappy ending in its realistic description of the jealousy Betty Lou and her grandmother harbor for their wealthy cousins' way of life (20). In spite of their differences from more predictable stories, however, these qualify no less than the others as escape literature, as they provide readers with a change of pace from actually doing household chores even while keeping readers' thoughts focused on the abstract idea of home.

Because the themes of these short stories generally correspond to their plot type, it is virtually impossible to suggest that the themes underwent any changes between 1940 and 1970. The idea that "for the most part this fiction tended to glorify the traditional virtues and goals and to sanction the conventional virtues" (30, p. 445) is true of the majority of stories in all three magazines in all years. For example, nearly all the stories that concern love and marriage, regardless of their date of publication, have as their theme only slight variations
of the idea that happiness in love is proportionate to one's unselfishness. In "No Longer the Need for Tears" Mac and Frederica Gates decide to remarry only after she has convinced him that she has learned that they can be happy together only as long as she does not try to make him abandon his dangerous but vitally important job as an airplane pilot (31). Carol, in "Portrait of the Artist's Wife," also realizes that her happiness in love depends on her unselfish acceptance of both the pleasant and unpleasant aspects of her husband's career as an artist (26). "Lopsided Triangle" concerns widow Holly MacInnes' difficulty in choosing between two suitors. She makes the best choice after realizing that she must consider not only her own feelings, but also those of her twin sons (6).

This theme is found in stories which end unhappily as well as those that lead their characters to the altar. Peter's selfish insistence upon Laura's supporting him damages both their love and Laura's health in "Recovery" (14). In "Grounds for Divorce" Marjorie disregards her husband's code of ethics in order to save money, with the result that Buddy divorces her (34). Still another example of the integral but seemingly simple relationship between love and unselfishness in this group of short stories is found in "First Love, the Second Time" in which Mary Lou Leander insists on buying a house which she and
her husband cannot afford, with the result that she has
to take a job and ends up losing both her husband and
the house (18).

One other kind of story frequently utilizes the theme
that unselfish love overcomes all difficulties. Five
stories about rearing children, such as "Johnny with the
Spindly Legs," which describes warm-hearted housekeeper
Almie Peal's success in coping with three troubled
children (7), develop this idea, but five more are
concerned with the point that it is wrong to shelter
children. Other themes that occur less frequently in
child-oriented stories concern the unfairness of life,
the importance of friends, and the necessity of learning
how to earn a living. The important similarity among all
the themes connected with plots involving children is they
are conventional ideas, unlikely either to startle the
readers with their novelty or, because they are so
simplistic, to help them with problems that actually occur
in family life.

Not surprisingly, stories constructed around plots
that are difficult to categorize also have themes that
do not fall readily into groups. Even in these stories,
though, theme most often does not reveal original thought
on the part of the writers, another indication of the lack
of innovation in these stories as a group during the years
of this study. For example, the theme of "A Small Voice Tells Me So" is that life cannot be faced unless one has great courage (22). "Night Fight" has as its theme the idea that the journey is of greater value than the destination (15). The importance of doing every job well is emphasized by "Oh Lord, Remember Me" (24). Obviously, none of these ideas is the product of original thought on the part of the authors.

Just as there are discernible formulas in the plots of these 189 stories, as well as a uniformity in theme, so are there stereotypical characters who are encountered in all thirty years of the study. Between 1940 and 1970 writers for the Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, and Redbook preferred that the main character in their stories be female, as women characters outnumber men by more than two to one. This, of course, is a logical preference in stories meant to appeal to a predominantly female audience. Because many stories have more than one main character, the figures in Appendix I do not total 189.

Also understandable is why these main characters, both male and female, are most often from seventeen to twenty-nine years old—an age range similar to that of the readers of these magazines. Thirty-nine of the sixty-six main male characters and eighty-eight of the total 157 main female characters fall into this age group because they fit
naturally, almost indispensibly, into the kinds of plots most often recurring in these magazines—plots which deal with love, marriage, and young families. Helen Woodward tells this story about the formula characters who fit into these formula plots:

A friend of mine, Claudia Cranston, who sold a great many stories to Good Housekeeping in the 1920's and 30's, told me that it had been necessary to work out a formula. . . . She says, 'In your mind you consider the heroine about forty years old, give her all kinds of experience, sexual and otherwise, have her break all the social rules—and then you describe her as eighteen and pure!' (37, p. 7).

This description is no less true of the characters found in the Journal, McCall's, and Redbook between 1940 and 1970. The young women who typically play the major roles in these stories share other characteristics as well. The authors who created them seem to have paid close attention to Maren Ellwood's advice to aspiring writers: "The name chosen should be in keeping with the dominant character-trait, dominant emotion, age, race, general background, and occupation or profession of the person" (11, p. 32). There is no evidence that these writers were affected by the fads in names that produced many little Elizabeths and Marys during the forties (36, p. 7) and a "flood tide of Debbies in the Fifties" (1, p. 3). Instead, as Appendix II reveals, they chose names in keeping with the rest of the formula used to create these characters. The
names are appropriate for youthful, middle class, white characters who reflect the characteristics of the readers of these magazines; in all years, variations of Elizabeth, Ann, and Mary are most common. Writers for Redbook and the Ladies' Home Journal tended to prefer more common names than did those for McCall's. Nevertheless, McCall's young women characters' names are still appropriate labels for the formula character who fits this pattern. Throughout the thirty years of this study, these preferences remained the same.

The settings in which these standard characters play their formulaic roles are not specifically named locations in almost half of the stories under consideration. In the others, cities have been the most popular setting over the years, with New York City the definite favorite. Forty-two stories are set in cities identified by name; in thirty-two of these, the city is New York. Among the rest of the stories, forty-two take place in small towns and nineteen in the country on resorts or farms. There is no evidence of a significant population shift either to urban areas, the suburbs, small towns, or the country as the years of the study passed.

Neither third nor first person point of view is used so often in these stories that a pattern is established, but whatever the point of view, the style of the majority of these 189 stories is generally straightforward, generally
uncomplicated. It almost invariably suggests that an average eighteen to thirty-five year old has written the story, and as a result, an average eighteen to thirty-five year old should have no difficulty reading or understanding any of these stories. In two notable instances, however, the style of the story does depart from this pattern. "Through Express" contains many passages similar in style to this elaborate, "poetic" example:

There had been so many like her, penny debutantes, swarming out of their dingy crevices and corners, begging for emotional alms from shoddy stag-lines, who went to summer resorts to restore their moth-eaten egos in the bargain-sale hysteria of life-starved girls looking for love (19, p. 53).

"Dreams Are for the Night" relies on a similarly contrived style:

... added to all these was the sharp disappointment at her own spiritual sterility... it seemed to her that the years rose like salt water to her very lips and threatened to sweep her away from all she had known and been (17, p. 14).

Just as the prose style of these stories is most often quite simple, so is the order in which events are related; nearly all the stories are told chronologically. An exception to this pattern is found in "Love If for a Lifetime" (12), told in a series of complex flashbacks which result in a story that is quite garbled and, consequently, difficult to understand.

In fact, in only one element of these short stories is there any evidence of changing structure between 1940
and 1970. The only stories in which dialogue or first person speeches from the narrator to the reader were crudely handled or overemphasized were published in the forties, as in the following examples:

"... if you was to take a million bucks and dress it up in clothes, it couldn't look more movvelous than the way she looked. Boy, what a set of threads she had on! And Furs! And her fingers, Artie--just spacklin' with dimints!" (21, p. 41).

"How can it be? It is very difficult. I am Pole, and I speak not much English" (3, p. 24).

"I wonder if we haff to go to that ol' dancing class for the whole rest of our lifes?" (29, p. 27).

If this observation of change in this area is accurate, however, it apparently was not sufficient to prevent the decline in the market for short stories which took place shortly thereafter. Perhaps this evidence of increasing technical skill—the ability of authors to identify a character by means of his speech pattern without allowing that speech to dominate story—did not make up for the lack of innovation on the part of the authors in other elements of the short story.

Most of the stories examined for this paper are indeed very much alike in many ways. In spite of these similarities, though, some are better than others. Almost invariably, it is the stories containing innovation of some kind that belong to this group. "Mr. Dilworth's Coffee Break" has the most typical plot—man and woman
fall in love, overcome an obstacle, and marry—but
Mr. Dilworth is sixty years old and the woman with whom he
is in love is in her fifties (5). The story is appealing
not only because the ages of the characters are not typical,
but also because the story realistically presents love
that grows slowly, as well as a female character who is
concerned with more than romance. This realistic
orientation sets this story apart from the others.
"Grounds for Divorce" also uses a standard plot—husband
and wife divorce because of the wife's selfishness—that
is given an unexpected twist. Marjorie and Buddy end their
marriage not because her selfishness drives him to another
woman, but because it alienates him from another man (34).
Additionally, the author of this story uses flashbacks, a
device often badly handled in these stories, effectively.
"Miss Hattie's Lawn Party" (9) and "Down Under the Thames"
(13) are also better than most of the other stories examined,
both because of the effective use of a surprise ending.
Although nearly all the stories attempt to elicit a
strong emotional response from readers, few are successful.
They play too blatantly on the innocence of childhood,
the pathos of old age, the romance of first love, or the
tenderness of love regained. The subtlety of the authors
of the two stories mentioned above in dealing with old age
and childhood is also commendable.
The failure of other writers to vary the elements of the short story significantly over a thirty-year period is perhaps responsible for the near-elimination of short stories from these magazines. Falcon O. Baker supports this position in his comment that "the phenomenal and continual rise in the general education level of the American public . . . now makes possible a mass audience for serious short stories. But the pleading notes from editors . . . indicates a dearth of such stories" (2, p. 130).

More likely, though, writers are not solely to blame for the monotony in the short stories that were published in these magazines during this time. The following chapter concerns the idea that because not only writers but also editors and social and political conditions failed to change the previously discussed elements of the short story, the conclusion must be drawn that the readers of these women's magazines were demanding and receiving a steady stream of seldom-varying short stories.
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CHAPTER III

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REALITY
AND THE SHORT STORY

Between 1940 and 1970 a new generation of American writers grew up. Few editors of the magazines for which these authors wrote held the same position on the same magazine for the entire thirty-year period. In addition, America itself underwent significant alterations during this time. In spite of these developments the short stories in the Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, and Redbook changed superficially, if at all. Most likely this is because they were written for a group of readers whose preferences regarding the kind of fiction they read remained the same, even though these readers gradually were realizing that non-fiction answered the purpose for which they read these magazines—help in managing the home—better than fiction did.

There is no evidence from the 189 stories under consideration that the similarity in the stories during this period could be the result of only two or three writers producing their own unique kinds of stories for all three magazines during the entire thirty years.
author is represented in this survey in more than two decades. Only three writers, Mona Williams and Paul Ernst, both of whom wrote in the forties and fifties, and Kaatje Hurlbut, who wrote in the fifties and sixties, had stories published in as many as two decades. Florence Jane Soman wrote for all three magazines, but her stories were found only during the fifties. The authors associated with the *Journal, McCall's, and Redbook* did change between 1940 and 1970; even so, the stories that were written seldom varied from the formulas discussed in the preceding chapter.

Perhaps this lack of variation in the stories regardless of the different authors can be attributed to the editors of the magazines. Perhaps they realized that the formula stories that readers had undoubtedly come to expect sold more magazines than innovative stories or the names of well-known writers would. Support for this rationale can be found in the fact that stories of even the few well-known contributors published in these periodicals during this time conform to the magazines' patterns, even if their other work does not. Shirley Jackson, for example, known for "The Lottery," a short story to which none of the previously discussed patterns applies, and many novels, including *The Bird's Nest*, the story of a schizophrenic, in "One Last Chance" writes of a
young wife who is afraid that her husband will find his visiting ex-girlfriend still attractive but whose marriage emerges from the ordeal stronger than ever before (13). If Joyce Carol Oates' reputation as short story writer and novelist rests on stories like "What Herbert Breuer and I Did to Each Other," (18), then such a reputation may be undeserved because this story is essentially no different from the others in the magazines. The work of A. E. Hotchner also illustrates this phenomenon. He has not only practiced law, but also dramatized many of Ernest Hemingway's novels and stories, of whom he writes in his memoir, Papa Hemingway; all of these activities presumably supplied Hotchner with the knowledge that marriage is often more complicated than the plot of his story "Till Death Do Us Part" indicates. It is about a couple considering divorce until Peter, the husband, told inaccurately that his wife has died in an airplane crash, realizes he cannot live without her (12).

Perhaps since Hotchner also is a former editor of Cosmopolitan, he might have realized that there is a sizeable market for this kind of story, a fact that may explain why editors have apparently refused to buy other than these standard kinds of stories. The result, of course, is that even well-known authors could not afford not to
conform. At any rate, they are just as likely as those no longer remembered to follow these patterns.

Another reason why short stories in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, *McCall's*, and *Redbook* failed to change as new authors replaced old may be that many of the writers generally unknown to the readers of these magazines wrote as a career exclusively for this kind of magazine and were more interested in a regular paycheck than artistic expression or fame. If this kind of novice realized that formula stories sold, she, too, not surprisingly, would be uninterested in varying the formulas. This would tend to keep the writer unknown to readers, as most of the authors of the 189 stories were.

Just as the authors whose stories are found in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, *McCall's*, and *Redbook* changed regularly, so did the editors of these publications. Each magazine underwent a change in executive editor at least four times during the thirty-year period, but the editorial preferences of each brought no variation in the short stories published. It is unlikely that the influence of these editors failed to extend to the fiction departments of their publications; it is also unlikely that fiction editors received only stories written in the customary pattern. Perhaps these editors consistently relied on the same kinds of stories because of a keen awareness of the
audience toward which the magazines were directed and a realization that this audience remained fairly constant as new housewives began subscribing and older ones let their subscriptions lapse.

Change on a larger scale also took place between 1940 and 1970--change in America and, consequently, change in the environment in which these writers and editors worked. In each of the decades of this study the country was at war in conflicts of widely varying popularity. Also during this time the black population in America won new rights in a series of events which met with the indifference of neither blacks nor whites. The country was also shaken when American women began abandoning their traditional roles with ever-increasing success. From the evidence supplied by the sample stories in the Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, and Redbook, though, it appears that at least some Americans remained oblivious to these changes.

At least nineteen of the 189 stories read for this paper mention war; eighteen of these concern World War II. In these same eighteen stories, though, war is incidental to the plot; these are not war stories. The role that the war fills in each could be, and is in stories written in other decades, played by any of a number of other difficulties or obstacles. Waite Stevard returns to his
farm at the end of World War II in "Every Day More Dear" to find his sister morose after her fiancé's death in the war (10). Waite could just as readily have returned to the farm from a vacation abroad following a bountiful harvest to find his sister morose because her fiancé was run over by a truck. The plot of this story is the familiar one of a girl finding a husband after overcoming tremendous difficulties, and the war changes it not at all. The same plot is brushed with a similarly superficial mention of war in "Kiss the Girls Good-by" (21). Henry is upset because his girlfriend likes men who wear uniforms, and he is classified 4-F. By the end of the story Judy has decided that she prefers civilian Henry to a visiting soldier. If this story had been written ten years later, Judy would have liked doctors, and Henry would have been a drop-out. Again war is mentioned so that the story will be timely while having no inherent relationship to its plot. Child-oriented plots illustrate the same phenomenon. Christine takes her small son to Cape Cod in an attempt to protect him from knowledge about World War II in "I Did Not Ask for This" (8). With equal realism she could desire to protect her son from learning about a kidnapping or a terrible earthquake; war is incidental in this case, too, to plot and theme.
The Korean War began and ended with no mention in any of the stories read in the issues of the Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, and Redbook, and the war in Vietnam is acknowledged in only one. The plot of "The Young Men" does not fit into the usual categories; it is a war story. When a group of World War II veterans attempt to console Susan about the death of her boyfriend in Vietnam, she learns that war is not the glorious adventure she has been taught to believe it is (9). This story, in spite of its difference, is no better than the stories that merely mention war. It is also not sufficient evidence that short stories were influenced between 1940 and 1970 by the wars in which America was involved. In most cases the stories fail to reflect any awareness of these forces.

So, too, is there no evidence that racial integration and the changes in the relationship of black Americans to a predominantly white culture affected short stories in women's magazines. Black characters are important in only two stories in the sample. "Johnny with the Spindly Legs" was published in 1946, too early to have been the product of the movement for black equality, and in any event, black main character Almie Peal is a stereotypical housekeeper whose success in dealing with her employer's children (7) identifies her with a mammy-type stock character not usually associated with the equality of
the races. "Oh Lord, Remember Me" was published in 1966, a year that suggests the story might result from the trend toward racial equality, but Ephraim, a black hired boy, is so receptive to the condescending instruction of his employer (15) that this influence seems unlikely.

The short stories in this study thus reveal no significant influence by two major forces in America. More surprisingly, there is no evidence either that the increasing independence of women during this thirty-year period affected the stories.

During World War II more women began to work outside the home, and they continued to do so in all the years of this study. In most of the stories under consideration, however, women characters worked only in the homes of their parents or their husbands. Female characters employed in other jobs, in all the years of this study, rarely were other than office workers, maids, or teachers. In "Weather or Not," though, Elinor Wareham takes a job as a weathergirl, but only in order to trick Andy Miller into marriage. As soon as her scheme succeeds, Elinor quits her job to become a housewife (11). Monica, in "Streets along the Way," is a sculptor, but when her husband becomes a successful painter, she realizes that she is not a talented artist and becomes a housewife, too (1). Only two women in all the stories are dedicated professionals; Dr. Anne Riley in "Cupid Plays a Tenor Sax" is a physician.
(6), and Ellen Ferguson in "Mr. Dilworth's Coffee Break" is a professor (5). However, by the end of each story each woman has accepted a proposal of marriage although she simultaneously declines to abandon her career. The publication dates--1946 and 1962--of these stories do not indicate a trend has been established toward female characters who have a career outside the home.

Just as women began to be employed in increasing numbers after World War II, so, too, did they begin to dissolve unsatisfactory marriages at a growing pace. This change is not paralleled by the marriages of major characters in the short stories read for this study. Divorce is not common among the characters in these stories, and although many couples in them have failing marriages, most often the husband and wife solve their problems in the course of the story. Only nine of the 189 stories do contain divorced characters; however, most of these characters are really only mentioned, as in "Lean Down, Stars," in which the heroine's divorced sister is referred to but never seen (3). The divorce is not essential to the plot or theme of the story, as in "A Suit for My Brother," in which Bill, who happens to be divorced, learns that he should not have tried to shelter his younger brother from the realities of life (17). These nine stories do suggest the influence of
the actual divorce rate in America, which rose sharply after World War II, dropped in the fifties, and began rising again in the sixties (4). Since six of them were published in the forties, one in the early fifties, and two in the sixties, and because the stories are not primarily about divorce, it would not be correct to theorize that the divorce rate had a major impact on them.

Interestingly, in six of these stories the divorced person is scheming and, if not actually evil, at least disreputable, a circumstance that surely does not mirror reality. Perhaps it is reasonable, though, that publications dependent for their existence on happily married housewives would depict the divorced unfavorably.

Linked with increasing freedom for women during the middle part of the twentieth century is the greater degree of sexual explicitness in the arts and in their own lives to which women could be acceptably exposed. None of these 189 stories is sexually graphic; in "A Day in Town with the Girls," a married couple's actual lovemaking is indicated by the coy expression "the percolator bubbled on and on" (19, p. 94). Two stories, both written in the fifties, are somewhat, but not exceedingly, provocative, especially in view of their light, flippant tone. Suzanne Stacey in "Papá Said No" lures a photographer into marriage by posing for him in
black lace underwear (22), and Mary Jo Reese in "You Don't Send Me, Dear!" wins her husband when her rival hypnotizes her so that she begins to remove her clothes at a party, inspiring protective feelings in Bob, the future husband (14). In six stories lovers have a sexual relationship outside of marriage. In one, "The Secret by the Pond," an unmarried woman has a baby (2), but these events are mentioned only in general terms rather than in a very descriptive way. It may be significant that just as society became more permissive in the sixties and seventies so are four of these stories from issues of the three magazines published in the sixties and seventies. The two, however, which appear in the early fifties, and a seventh story, "Make-Believe Mother," about a little girl whose never-married mother has a constant stream of visiting boyfriends (16), published in 1946, cast doubt on the theory that short stories in women's magazines followed society in becoming more open about sex.

The group of women--the young housewives and mothers--for whom these stories were written seems to have been primarily, although indirectly, responsible for the failure of these short stories to change in response to the changes in America. That there was at this time a market for women's service periodicals indicates that there was a sizeable group of readers
who did not care to read hard news exclusively, who chose to escape regularly into "an illusory never-never land of incredible slickness and glamour, inhabited only by impossibly beautiful girls and incredibly handsome men" (23, p. 126) where they rarely encountered an unhappy ending in either fiction or non-fiction. If the editors of these magazines realized, as they apparently did, that their readers preferred in short stories to escape rather than confront the changes in America, it is logical that these stories do not reflect those changes.

It may seem contradictory that editors are gradually eliminating short stories from their magazines in spite of the fact that readers enjoy, even demand, the escape that this part of the editorial content of the magazines provides. The contradiction is resolved, however, by Harry Shaw's explanation of the situation: "More and more editors and authors are learning that truth is not only stranger than fiction but that it can be made more entertaining" (20, p. 105). Perhaps editors and writers are learning to manipulate news so that it not only resembles the short stories that readers require but also so that it supplies readers with the accurate information about managing a home that is, after all, the element that has kept these magazines alive for nearly a century. If this is the case, the difference
between fiction and fact, between short story and news story, is likely to become increasingly less distinct in the remaining years of this century.
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APPENDIX I

RATIO OF MALE TO FEMALE MAIN CHARACTERS IN THREE WOMEN'S MAGAZINES IN SELECTED ISSUES 1940-1970

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# APPENDIX II

**NAMES OF FEMALE MAIN CHARACTERS IN 189 SHORT STORIES FROM THREE DECADES OF SELECTED ISSUES OF THREE WOMEN'S MAGAZINES**

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## APPENDIX III

**AUTHORS WHO WROTE MORE THAN ONE SHORT STORY IN SELECTED ISSUES OF THREE WOMEN'S MAGAZINES BETWEEN 1940-1970**

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*McCall's.*

**Ladies' Home Journal.**

***Redbook.*
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