

THE ROLE OF FOLKLORE AND ORAL TRADITION IN SHAPING MODERN SHORT STORIES

Gaybullayeva Vazira Shokirovna

Asia International University, English Chair

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Abstract: This article explores the lasting influence of folklore and oral storytelling traditions on the modern short story. While we often think of contemporary literature as a product of individual genius, the roots of how we tell stories are much older and more communal. This study shows how ancient tales have provided a treasure chest of classic plots, memorable characters, and moral lessons that writers still use today. By looking at examples from both Western and Eastern short story traditions, particularly American and Uzbek, we can see how these universal narrative tools are adapted to create stories that feel both fresh and timeless.

Keywords: Folklore, oral tradition, modern short story, cultural identity, narrative structure, archetypal themes, comparative literature, storytelling.

Introduction. The short story is a unique and powerful form of literature. It is longer than a simple anecdote but shorter and more focused than a novel. Its power lies in its ability to deliver a single, impactful experience in a brief amount of time. This desire for a compact, powerful narrative is not new. Long before people wrote stories down, they were sharing them aloud around fires, in marketplaces, and in homes. These oral traditions—including myths, legends, fables, and folk tales—were the original short stories. They entertained, yes, but they also did much more: they preserved a community's history, taught its values, and strengthened its cultural identity.

Modern short story writers, often without even realizing it, are the heirs to this ancient tradition. They take the building blocks of folklore—the clever trickster, the journey of the hero, the battle between good and evil—and rebuild them for a modern audience. This paper investigates this beautiful and ongoing relationship. We will look at how the themes, styles, and very soul of oral storytelling continue to shape the short stories we read and love today, focusing on the transmission of cultural identity and the universal human truths that connect us all.

Methods. To understand this connection between old and new, this study uses a comparative approach. We will analyze specific short stories from two different literary traditions: American and Uzbek. This comparison helps us see which influences are unique to a culture and which are universal to storytelling itself. The primary sources include short stories by: American writers: Edgar Allan Poe, known for his tales of mystery and the macabre; O. Henry, famous for his witty stories with surprise endings; and Jesse Stuart, who wrote about rural life in the American South.

Uzbek writers: Shukur Kholmiraev and Said Ahmad, who are celebrated for their stories rooted in Uzbek culture and everyday life.

The analysis is conducted through three main lenses: 1. Thematic Continuity: How do the core themes and character types from folklore (like the underdog hero or a moral lesson) appear in modern stories? 2. Stylistic Adaptation: How do writers use techniques from oral storytelling, such as vivid dialogue, repetition, or a conversational tone? 3. Cultural Identity: How do writers use local folklore, proverbs, and legends to express a unique national character and shared memory?

This qualitative method allows us to appreciate both the similarities and the rich differences in how cultures use their storytelling heritage.

Results. The findings show that folklore is not a dead art but a living foundation for modern storytelling. Its influence is clear in several key areas: Archetypal Characters and Themes: Folklore provides a cast of recognizable characters and situations that writers can use and adapt. The clever trickster who uses his wits to overcome stronger opponents appears in O. Henry's con artists, just as he does in the tales of many cultures. The innocent hero on a journey of discovery is a staple of folklore and is reimaged in many coming-of-age short stories. These archetypes work because they speak to fundamental human experiences.

Narrative Structure: the short story's need for brevity and a powerful ending is a direct echo of oral storytelling. A folk tale doesn't have time for long descriptions; it must grab the listener's attention, present a clear conflict, and resolve it in a satisfying way—often with a twist or a moral. Modern short stories, like those of Poe, master this same economy of language and plot, creating a single, strong effect on the reader.

Cultural Identity: Writers often weave the fabric of their local folklore into their stories to create a sense of place and identity. Jesse Stuart's stories are filled with the spirit and wisdom of the Appalachian people. Similarly, Uzbek writers like Shukur Kholmiraev infuse their work with Uzbek proverbs, customs, and a deep connection to the land. This act preserves cultural heritage and allows readers anywhere in the world to experience a unique way of life.

Moral and Philosophical Dimensions: Just as folktales often ended with a lesson about honesty, kindness, or courage, many modern short stories explore deep ethical and philosophical questions. They might not state the moral as plainly as a fable does, but they invite the reader to think about right and wrong, the meaning of life, or the nature of society. The haunting guilt in Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" is a deep dive into the human conscience, much like a cautionary folktale.

Intercultural Exchange: The most fascinating result is how these folklore elements travel. A theme from a Central Asian tale can be felt in a story from the American South because it touches on something all humans understand—love, loss, justice, or hope. This creates a universal language of storytelling that transcends national borders.

Discussion. The analysis makes it clear that the relationship between folklore and the modern short story is not one of simple copying, but of dynamic adaptation. Folklore provides the sturdy roots, but the modern story is a new branch growing from them.

In American literature, we see authors taking the universal characters from folklore and placing them in a new world. O. Henry's New York City is a modern jungle, and his clever characters are city-dwellers using their wits to survive, much like a trickster fox from an ancient tale. Jesse Stuart's stories are deeply rooted in the oral culture of the American South, capturing the rhythm and humor of everyday speech, transforming local tales into written art.

Uzbek literature offers a powerful example of using folklore to maintain cultural identity.

During the 20th century, Uzbek writers like Said Ahmad and Shukur Kholmiraev were working within a rapidly changing society. By incorporating traditional motifs, proverbs, and narrative styles into their short stories, they preserved a sense of Uzbek national character and cultural continuity. Their stories are a bridge between the old oral world and the new written one, ensuring that the voice of their ancestors is not forgotten.

Furthermore, this study highlights the crucial role of translation. Many of these oral traditions might have been lost if they weren't written down and translated. When a story from Uzbekistan is translated into English, it allows the folklore within it to travel the world, influencing new writers and inspiring new stories. This shows that folklore is not a relic in a museum; it is a living, breathing, and evolving part of our global culture.

Conclusion. In conclusion, the role of folklore and oral tradition in shaping the modern short story is both fundamental and transformative. From the earliest tales told by voice to the latest short story published online, the human need to share experiences through narrative remains unchanged. Folklore has given writers a timeless toolkit—filled with archetypal plots, compact structures, and deep moral resonance. Modern writers, in turn, have taken this toolkit and used it to build stories that reflect their own contemporary realities, fears, and joys. They blend the communal voice of the past with their own unique creativity. By doing so, they do more than just entertain; they preserve cultural memory, explore universal truths, and enrich our global literature with a beautiful diversity of voices.

The story of the short story is still being written. Future research could explore how digital media—like podcasts, audiobooks, and social media stories—are becoming the new campfire, creating a modern oral tradition for the 21st century. The voice of the storyteller, it seems, will never be silenced.

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