

American Shorts



Wrant Good, "American Shorts" (2023)
[AI-generated on Bing, short prompt by B. Palmeirim]

An international conference of the Society for the Study of the American Short Story @ University of Lisbon, Portugal, October 29-31, 2026

"I don't write long forms because I'm not interested in artificial deceleration. As soon as I see the glimmer of a consequence, I pull the trigger." (Sarah Manguso, 300 Arguments. 2017)

"The phonograph presented its own technological constraints to which composers likewise had to adapt. Thus when Stravinsky wrote his Serenade in A for piano (1925), he made sure that each movement fit the three-minute maximum of a disc turning at the then-standard rate of 78 revolutions per minute, just as rock bands in the 1950s and 1960s would tailor their songs to the length of the 45-rpm single and today's pop stars keep in mind the 10- to 30-second duration of successful ringtones." (Joseph Auner, Music in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries. 2013)

"What is the sound of one hand clapping?" (Zen koan)

The contemporary American short story lives in a context where 'short' has tended towards the increasingly economic. Alongside a renewed interest in flash fiction, the 21st century has witnessed an explosion in literary terse forms extending within the web of the digital age, such as twitterature and nano-fiction. Beyond the written form, YouTube launched its "Shorts" in response to the success of TikTok, and the New York Times its "NYT Shorts" series. In our new attention economy, brief forms thrive.

This trend towards pithiness may be symptomatic of a fast-paced technological era, where our attention spans and the contents designed to match are compressed by busier times and competing space. And yet, aphorisms, fables, philosophical fragments, haikus, riddles, jokes and an assortment of other textual short forms predate the digital by centuries. How different were these from our contemporary correlatives? Do they mark historical differences; what is the nature of those? Can a compact narrative do things a longer one cannot, i.e. what are their *affordances* (C. Levine)? Do we necessarily read brief forms faster? What are the specific conditions, effects and affects promoted by reading such forms? Do they require and/or activate specific uses of attention? Under what conditions does 'short' mean 'simple' (Jolles) versus 'fragment' (Adorno; Barthes)?

More concisely, how has US brief fiction integrated and contended with, reacted to and against different forms of condensed narrative? Open to traditional approaches and close readings, the "American Shorts" symposium will also strive to rethink the specificities of American brief fiction within the broader theoretical, material and historical contexts of 'short forms', a term which has garnered increasing interest from academics. This conference will also welcome affiliated societies that have been working on similar interests (the [European Network for Short Fiction Research](#) and the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships [Short Forms Beyond Borders](#) project; the [Centre for Attention Studies](#) (a collaboration between UEdinburgh & King's College London)) and others willing to join from around the globe. We are eager to discuss, in a setting amiable to researchers, independent scholars, students and professionals, how the American short story has been morphing, or can be revisited, through the burgeoning umbrella term of the 'short form'.

Confirmed Keynote: Dr. Michael Collins (King's College, London), Chair of the British Association for American Studies, co-editor of *The Cambridge Companion to the American Short Story* (2023).

We (non-exclusively) accept perspectives on:

Broadly understood:

- Critical new readings on American short stories and flash fiction
- The American short story in its relation to other compact forms (e.g. micro-essays, anecdotes, maxims, song lyrics, poems, aphorisms, spoken word music, jokes, video clips in social media and digital platforms, fragments, video games, graphic adaptations, comics, riddles, multimedia, etc.)

More specific relations (always on American short narrative):

- Historical comparisons between past and recent American short stories and short forms
- New voices and incursions in American short forms
 - Hybrid forms (e.g. spoken-word songs), liminal forms

- Emerging short story authors
 - Experimental and conceptual art
- Attention studies
 - attention to short forms; short forms in the attention economy; theories of attention, interest, curiosity, fascination applied to short forms
- Reception/Reader Response
 - Theories of reading (postcritique, close reading, surface reading, distance reading)
- (Neo-)Formalist approaches to short forms (from Jolles to Caroline Levine)
- New aesthetic categories (Sianne Ngai)
- Praxeological approaches (Florian Fuchs)
- The digital age and its impact on the short story/form:
 - post-literature
 - plagiarism
 - digital publishing
 - digital capitalism
 - social media
 - fandoms
 - generative AI
 - video game narratives
- Medial spaces between fictional/biographic/historical/memoir
- Genres
- Materiality of short forms
- Translatability and multilinguism of short forms
- Time and space in short-form narratives
 - Volatility and portability
 - Spatial circulation, publication, transmissibility, dissemination
- Anthologizing and editing short forms
- Adaptation
- Seriality; short story cycles
- Erasure, absence and silence as negative forms of compression
- Rhetorical effects and stylistics of brevity
- Political uses of short forms
- Narrative short forms in religion
- Short forms in medical humanities and narrative medicine
- Mobility, hyphenation, hybridization
- Affect studies
- Gender studies
- Ethnic studies
- Class studies
- Labor studies

We welcome proposals for individual submissions, round-table discussions or thematically aligned panels of speakers (20-minute presentations).

Abstracts (max. 250 words) and brief biographical note (max. 150 words) should be submitted by no later than 10 June 2026. We will respond to applications by the end of 10 July 2026.

Please consult the conference website for application, payment, and other instructions. The website will be updated as we approach the conference date.

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