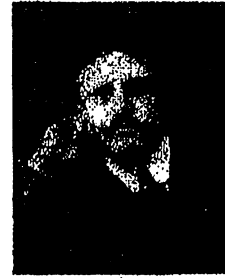


William S. Porter: "O. Henry" (1862-1910)



Born William Sidney Porter, this master of short stories is much better known under his pen name "O. Henry." He was born September 11, 1862 in North Carolina, where he spent his childhood. His only formal education was received at the school of his Aunt Lina, where he developed a lifelong love of books. In his uncle's pharmacy, he became a licensed pharmacist and was also known for his sketches and cartoons of the townspeople of Greensboro.

At the age of twenty, Porter came to Texas primarily for health reasons, and worked on a sheep ranch and lived with the family of Richard M. Hall, whose family had close ties with the Porter family back in North Carolina. It was here that Porter gained a knowledge for ranch life that he later described in many of his short stories.

In 1884, Porter moved to Austin. For the next three years, where he roomed in the home of the Joseph Harrell family and held several jobs. It was during this time that Porter first used his pen name, O. Henry, said to be derived from his frequent calling of "Oh, 'Henry'" the family cat.

By 1887, Porter began working as a draftsman in the General Land Office, then headed by his old family friend, Richard Hall. In 1891 at the end of Hall's term at the Land Office, Porter resigned and became a teller with the First National Bank in Austin. After a few years, however, he left the bank and founded the *Rolling Stone*, an unsuccessful humor weekly. Starting in 1895 he wrote a column for the *Houston Daily Post*.

Meanwhile, Porter was accused of embezzling funds dating back to his employment at the First National Bank. Leaving his wife and young daughter in Austin, Porter fled to New Orleans, then to Honduras, but soon returned due to his wife's deteriorating health. She died soon afterward, and in early 1898 Porter was found guilty of the banking charges and sentenced to five years in an Ohio prison.

From this low point in Porter's life, he began a remarkable comeback. Three years and about a dozen short stories later, he emerged from prison as "O. Henry" to help shield his true identity. He moved to New York City, where over the next ten years before his death in 1910, he published over 300 stories and gained worldwide acclaim as America's favorite short story writer.

O. Henry wrote with realistic detail based on his first hand experiences both in Texas and in New York City. In 1907, he published many of his Texas stories in *The Heart of the West*, a volume that includes "The Reformation of Calliope," "The Caballero's Way," and "The Hiding of Black Bill." Another highly acclaimed Texas writer, J. Frank Dobie, later referred to O. Henry's "Last of the Troubadours" as "the best range story in American fiction."

Porter died on June 5, 1910 in New York City at the age of forty seven. An alcoholic, he died virtually penniless.