The Short Stories Are for Everyone

A novel in short stories has its disadvantages. The plot can be confusing. The action is often interrupted. Some characters may not be fully developed. Yet, for all of these downsides, Elizabeth Strout chose to write her novel *Olive Kitteridge* in short story format. Is it true what Strout says, that the short stories are used because she thought “the reader might need a little break from [Olive] at times” (Strout 276)? Or is there more functionality to this form? Few scholarly writings on *Olive Kitteridge* exist, but interviews with Strout and insightful reviews can give readers a thought about its form. The short story method in *Olive Kitteridge* is used to reveal the rampant gossip and secrets that run through the town; it also gives a vast amount of characters for readers to identify with, allowing readers to find empathizers in their suffering and rays of light for hope.

All works of Elizabeth Strout share the component of small-town Maine. Reviewer Thomas Louisa explains, “Strout's previous novels, ‘Abide With Me’ and ‘Amy and Isabelle,’ were also set in New England and explored similar themes: family dynamics, small-town gossip, grief” (1). One of the functions of this short story structure is to reveal the gossip that takes place in small towns like Crosby, Maine. The characters in the novel are constantly making comments about each other. One such occurrence comes in Harmon’s musing about Olive in “Starving”: “Harmon knew—as most people in town did—that she didn’t like her son’s new wife, but, then, Harmon didn’t think Olive would like any wife of her son” (Strout 95).