



The Granta Book of the American Short Story

Richard Ford (Editor), Bernard Malamud (Contributor), Donald Barthelme (Contributor), Jane Bowles (Contributor), William H. Gass (Contributor), James Alan McPherson (Contributor), Robert Coover (Contributor), Leonard Michaels (Contributor), more... Gayl Jones (Contributor), Raymond Carver (Contributor), Joy Williams (Contributor), William Kotzwick (Contributor), Flannery O'Connor (Contributor), John Updike (Contributor), Paul Bowles (Contributor), Barry Hannah (Contributor), Ann Beattie (Contributor), Jayne Anne Phillips (Contributor), Richard Yeats (Contributor), Jamaica Kincaid (Contributor), David Leavitt (Contributor), Max Apple (Contributor), Grace Paley (Contributor), T. Coraghessan Boyle (Contributor), Tobias Wolff (Contributor), James Salter (Contributor), Robert Penn Warren (Contributor), Amy Tan (Contributor), Richard Bausch (Contributor), Stuart Dybek (Contributor), Lorrie Moore (Contributor), Tim O'Brien (Contributor), John Cheever (Contributor), Shirley Jackson (Contributor), Wallace Stegner (Contributor), Eudora Welty (Contributor), Harold Brodkey (Contributor), Peter Taylor (Contributor), Kurt Vonnegut (Contributor), Jean Stafford (Contributor), Stanley Elkin (Contributor), Joyce Carol Oates (Contributor), Mary Robison (Contributor), James Baldwin (Contributor) ...less

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The Granta Book of the American Short Story is a selection of the best works of American short fiction published in the last 50 years. Stories featured here include “A Day in the Open” by Jane Bowles; “Blackberry Winter” by Robert Penn Warren; “O City of Broken Dreams” by John Cheever; “The Magic Barrel” by Bernard Malamud; “In Time Which Made a Monkey of Us All” by Grace Paley; “Sonny’s Blues” by James Baldwin; “Are These Actual Miles?” by Raymond Carver; and “You’re Ugly, Too” by Lorrie Moore. “Ford’s choice of stories is exemplary ... there’s wonderful reading here.” — The Washington Post

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From Reader Review *The Granta Book of the American Short Story* for online ebook

Steven says

Ford has selected 43 wonderful and diverse stories, far too many to comment on, except to note that he should have included one of his own, so I will instead comment on his fabulous introduction, which, like his introduction to the Chekov collection he edited, is full of wisdom about what good stories are or should be; and it is written in a penetrating, yet wandering Fordian style, with lots of long complex sentences which I am trying to imitate with this one. For example, literature is “frequently about things that aren’t clear but that need clearing up so that we can lead morally responsible or even pleasurable lives—things we may not want to do because they’re difficult” (xiii). And, “We come to literature...for, among other things, a view of morality in action, one of morality’s main tenets being how we assess those human choices made as a consequence of no choice being clearly the right one” (xiii). And how about this gem: “it will contain what a nation in its heart of hearts and represented by its writers feels should be paid attention to more closely but for reasons of difficulty or obscurity or human frailty or simple inaccessibility is in danger of being lost” (xiv). Ford’s essay ranges over questions about the possibility of defining a national literature, of defining the short-story form, before pausing to take up questions about what literature is and why short stories get written (“Short stories indeed feel as though they arise out of some fierce schism which they by their very existence mean to reconcile” (xix). !! yes, !!), and then lays out what his standards were for selecting the stories in this collection. What the essay finally accomplishes is a statement of Ford’s aesthetic.

Nicholas Armstrong says

I generally get the feeling that I'm wrong in all of my opinions of literature and story-telling because it just is not copacetic with what smart guys like Ford say. Did that sound sarcastic? Man, even without inflection I sound like a jackass.

But really, most American authors have a propensity towards the modern or post-modern form of writing - slice of life or stream of consciousness if you like, since these are often the same. Richard Ford, who I do respect as an author and a writer very much, is no different in this regard. Which is to say, I liked this about as much as most of the American story collections I've read, which is not very much.

And this is difficult for me. I'm fond of American's, or the idea of them anyway. And I'm very fond of stories, so there should be some place these two intersect where I'm very happy, in theory anyway.

I think there must be something to the American spirit, or at least the *creative* American spirit, which finds some sense of camaraderie with something which is rambling, often pointless, and fiercely insistent on its importance.

Wait, I think it makes sense now, nevermind.

Maria del Pilar says

To learn to write short stories, analyzing the way the writer grabs the readers' attention.

Jane says

"A Distant Episode" by Paul Bowles was absolutely haunting.

Christian Kiefer says

Took me a while but I read every story in this excellent collection. Amazing breadth of stories here. Starting the second volume soon enough...

Karima says

I got this book (1992 edition) because I wanted to read James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" (1957) and confess that I only read one other story in the collection. (Can't remember the title, but the author was Wm. Kotzwick of E.T. fame)

This book is worth revisiting, again and again. It has short works by some of my favorites, Jamaica Kincaid, Eudora Welty, Wallace Stegner, Lorrie Moore and John Cheever, to name just a few.

I'm sure I will return to it, as well as the more recent Granta collections.

James says

Well, took me an age, but I guess the joy of a short story collection is to pick up and put down at will.

Overall a quality selection of short stories. You're never going to love every one, but again, the joy is that if you don't like this one, you're only a few pages from the next. An interesting choice to compile them straightforwardly in date order, rather than try and balance them thematically or group them - but that gives you more room to take each one at face value. Definitely introduced me to some writers I'll look into more, and it's good to make the adjustment to fiction in short bursts. A very positive reading experience.

Tracey says

REQ'd 7/22 - found in card catalog while looking for Shirley Jackson. Checked out 27 Jul; started 4 Aug 2008; took back to lib 19 Aug.

Skimmed thru the intro essay - jumped around/skipped thru this gigantic tome - took it back to the library after getting about 2/3 of the way through it. Some really good stuff (whose titles I have failed to recall), but too much all at once, especially combined with a Shirley Jackson short story collection.

Raul says

Fairly comprehensive look at post-war American fiction.

Chris Gager says

Borrowed from my sister Tracy in Worcester over the weekend. I'll read this alongside "Lust For Life". This edition is blue and hardcover. Edited/curated by Richard Ford. 7/9... I finished another mediocre Joyce Carol Oates novel. I've read some of her s.stories and I think I like those better. There's one in here. Starting tonight...

I finally did get started Saturday night and read the first two stories. Are the two Bowles related? The story by Paul is a shocker and very strange. Seems like I might have read it a long time ago. More tonight... I can't be writing something about every story and author. There are too many. I'll try to stick with the highest lights. Last night that was "Blackberry Winter" by Robert Penn Warren. Very similar to Eudora Welty I thought. Tennessee instead of Mississippi. The natural world/human world interface well described.

Now much further in with many stories read but many more to go. I've encountered various kinds of experimental prose from three different female authors: Eudora Welty, Grace Paley and Flannery O'Connor. All interesting... The realtive duds: Kurt Vonnegut(a story I read years ago in Playboy), and "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson which I also may have read already. The highlights: Bernard Malamud and James Baldwin. JB might not be that great a writer but the emotional content was very affecting.

Last night... only one story read but it was a great one: "In the Zoo" by Jean Stafford. Takes place in a fictionalized Ft. Collins in the 30's and 40's(I think) and reminded me of "Housekeeping" and "Tree of Smoke"(an odd combo). I always wonder if the "reminded of" writers, if later in time, had read what I'd just read and subconsciously used it. Like Grace Paley's story, this was an epic in miniature. A story of misery, suffering and death revolving around two connected moments of brutality and revenge. There's an amazing connection between these two stories and "Tree of Smoke" as well but I won't be a spoiler.

Tuesday night and two more read including another in experimental/ poetic/modern mode by Stanley Elkin. Then an insane bit of chaos from Joyce Carol Oates. Kind of like the one from Paul Bowles. Weird...

Thursday night/Wed. AM... I finished William Gass' story this morning after starting yesterday. I recently came across his name with some reference to him being some kind of American literary holy man. If I'd ever heard of him I'd forgotten but that doesn't mean much. That's true of a lot of great writers. So... I was really looking forward to reading "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country". And then dismayed to find that it's pretty much poetry masquerading as prose. Each of the various parts is like mini essay. Not really fiction. But then my mind adjusted and I was enthralled. Notes and quotes:

- "Mud presently."... a great sentence. Could be the title of a poem.
- "it's better to live in the country... than in any city, in any stinking fog human beings, in any blooming orchard of machines."
- Reminds me of Plath and Eliot at times.
- Beddoes? Holsclaw? Rilke?(actually I have HEARD of Rilke...)
- "It isn't necessary to suppose our cows have feelings; our neighbor hasn't as many as he used to have either;"(cows or feelings?)
- Thomas Lovell Beddoes was an English 19th century poet. Committed suicide. Don't they all? Still no luck with Holsclaw.

This story was preceded by more crazy-experimental stuff by Donald Barthelme. Not poetry but sort of

stream of conscience. We probably have Faulkner and Joyce to thank for it. I'm hoping for more conventional choices from here on out - halfway through now. But...

Slow going this weekend due to my two-job busy-ness. I did read J. A. MacPherson's railroad story. My mother, younger sister and I rode on the Broadway Limited from NYC to Chicago and then the Zephyr to Oakland in the summer of 1962. Right around the time of the end of the story. I rode the current Zephyr out to Cali a few years ago. All those jobs for black men are pretty scarce now but there were/are still waiters and stewards and such(all black men) on those trains from Chicago west.

Slow going... I'm working two jobs and today's the first day off for me in almost two weeks. It sucks but I need the \$\$\$\$. I've managed to read only one more story in days, that being "The Babysitter" by Robert Coover, the author of that fantasy baseball book I read years ago. This is yet another exercise in experimental writing. Another approach. Can't say that I like it particularly but it was sort of interesting.

Next day... even more progress as I read a few more stories: The Ray Carver I'd read before of course - wonderful as always(the blind TV detective is "Longstreet"/James Franciscus(?)). Also more post-modernist craziness in "City Boy" and Gayl Jones vivid slice of ghetto life.

I got back to it last(Friday) evening with two more stories. A bit more conventional slice of life from a kid's perspective from Joy Williams and "Fugue in A-Minor", a jazzy tale reminiscent of a Lord Buckley "soliloquy"... all good.

I've found a bit more reading time lately and have read a few more. The "end" is sort of in sight. "Here Come the Maples", "Pretty Ice" and "Greenwich Time" are New Yorker ballads of Waspy unhappiness. All skillfully wrought by Updike, Mary Robison, and Ann Beattie. "Testimony of Pilot" is another mini-epic and very moving. One of my favorites so far...

Only one last night but it was devastating. A prose-poetic stream of consciousness visit to the darkest side of our culture. People do live there... kids too. "Lechery" by Jayne Anne Phillips.

I'm still plugging away as I find the time. Three more finished": "Liars in Love" by R. Yates is another devastating portrait of an gutless, equivocating American middle class Momma's boy a la' Frank in "R. Road". As with that book the outcome for the reader is compromised by Yates' awkward prose style, which harkens back to the earlier 20th century of Wilder, Steinbeck, Lewis etc. Sounds "square", man. Jamaica Kincaid's story is reasonably effective but too mild in it's evocation of coming of age separation, rejection and bitterness. "Territory"(David Leavitt) stands out for it's theme of a young gay man finding his emotional and social place in the world. Different...

I wonder if I'll have room to finish this review? Seven more to go. Last night I read "Bridging" by Max Apple. Kind the same vein as "The Circling Hand" but from the parent's perspective. Touching... Then "Greasy Lake" by T.C. Boyle where teenage wanna-be hoodlums meet some adult badness and slink away. A la' "Superbad"'s brilliant party scene. I just read another Boyle story in the latest N. Yorker. Another dissection of young male cluelessness. Boyle's a master of those stories.

Nearing the end now. Read "American Express" last night. A lyrical, disturbing, complex and fascinating story of how two men find a way to be intimate that works for them. Might not work for you and me though... This was preceded by a forlorn Tobias Wolff updating of the Cain and Abel story.

Just read "The Joy Luck Club" which of course have since been upgraded to a novel and a movie. Very moving story. Almost done now but I just discovered that there's a further, more contemporary collection too. I'll put it on my "to read" list.

Read another one last night. Three more to go... "The Fireman's Wife": A pungent depiction of a mismatched young wife's desperation. Pressured by "outsiders" to ignore her unhappiness. I also read last week's story in "The New Yorker". A typically abrupt, funny and rueful tale of Modern Montana from Thomas McGuane.

Hoo Rah... finally finished with the last three stories:

"Hot Ice" by Stuart Dybek - a lyrical mini-epic visit with some Chicano Chicago losers. The ending is beautiful but heavy with symbol. I have no idea what it means.

"You're Ugly Too" by Lorrie Moore (a New Yorker fave) - another look inside a routinely troubled life. Very funny...

"The Things They Carried" - included for its cultural relevance I assume. Seems like I might have read it before. Kind of flat/trite to me but maybe it was my mood. Maybe I've just had enough of the Vietnam thing (I was there) after "Tree of Smoke" and all the rest.

Kevin Gallan says

11/710

Paul Bryant says

Best ones in this collection are :

The Babysitter by Robert Coover

Well, Coover wrote metafiction with a very high boredom content most of the time (see Pricksongs and Descants for my rant) but this story is a total delight. A teenage girl is babysitting and some lads are going to break in to the house where they know she is. So, the situation is one of menace and dread, and a standard one in most slasher flicks. Coover writes the whole story, with some alternative scenes, then slices everything up into chunks of two to four paras, throws all the sections in the air and sticks them back together any old how. By this method he achieves a considerable intensification of the suspense and horror.

Bridging by Max Apple

If there is a typical post WW2 American story it's like this one. A single parent looking after his withdrawn baseball-fan daughter, and worrying. That's all. Wonderful stuff.

The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan

A great heartbreaking short story which I thought didn't work at all when she expanded it into a novel, but you can't blame her for trying.

The Fireman's Wife by Richard Bausch

This young, handsome fireman, he's a great guy, he's even something of a hero, but his wife realises, as the day winds on, that she's still going to leave him. Seems that the stories I like the best are the sad, wistful ones. Could be.

Sam says

There are two Granta American short fiction collections, both of which were selected by Richard Ford, roughly fifteen years apart, and they reflect a development in the American short story, as well as in Richard Ford becoming a monumental asshole. As a result, the first collection is a marginally better selection of stories, and contains a much, much better introduction. Ford seems to have really tried to reconcile the classic American short story - with a straightforward plot and characters, that thrived in mainstream magazines - with the more experimental metafiction elements that emerged in the sixties and seventies. Even if you don't like Robert Coover - and I don't, really - you have to admit that "The Babysitter" is an important piece of understanding what the hell happened to the short story in the sixties, Likewise, even if you don't like Raymond Carver, he belongs close to Coover as the experiment in anti-experiment that characterized the eighties minimalists. There's a good balance, here, as well as some surprising and excellent additions - Joy Williams is here, which is good for everybody. Some people are missed - Denis Johnson, Deborah Eisenberg, Amy Hempel - but the arc is there, and that's what matters to me in an anthology like this. Plus, no Hemingway, because the dumb bastard already gets enough press. (In reality, he's an odd absence, but like I said, he's got enough exposure.)

Too bad Ford became a dick and had to edit another collection! As if writing Independence Day weren't bad enough!

Neil says

I used this book as an introduction to new/unfamiliar writers and as such was not disappointed.
