



The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction: 50 North American Stories Since 1970 (Touchstone Books (Paperback))

From Williford, Lex (EDT)/ Martone, Michael (EDT)

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Fifty remarkable short stories from a range of contemporary fiction authors including Junot Diaz, Amy Tan, Jamaica Kincaid, Jhumpa Lahiri, and more, selected from a survey of more than five hundred English professors, short story writers, and novelists.

Contributors include Russell Banks, Donald Barthelme, Rick Bass, Richard Bausch, Charles Baxter, Amy Bloom, T.C. Boyle, Kevin Brockmeier, Robert Olen Butler, Sandra Cisneros, Peter Ho Davies, Janet Desaulniers, Junot Diaz, Anthony Doerr, Stuart Dybek, Deborah Eisenberg, Richard Ford, Mary Gaitskill, Dagoberto Gilb, Ron Hansen, A.M. Homes, Mary Hood, Denis Johnson, Edward P. Jones, Thom Jones, Jamaica Kincaid, Jhumpa Lahiri, David Leavitt, Kelly Link, Reginald McKnight, David Means, Susan Minot, Rick Moody, Bharati Mukherjee, Antonya Nelson, Joyce Carol Oates, Tim O'Brien, Daniel Orozco, Julie Orringer, ZZ Packer, Annie Proulx, Stacey Richter, George Saunders, Joan Silber, Leslie Marmon Silko, Susan Sontag, Amy Tan, Melanie Rae Thon, Alice Walker, and Steve Yarbrough.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Lex Williford teaches in the bilingual writing program at the University of Texas, El Paso. He previously taught in the writing programs at Southern Illinois University and the University of Alabama. His collection of stories, *Macauley's Thumb*, was co-winner of the 1993 Iowa School of Letters Award for Short Fiction. He lives with his wife in El Paso, Texas.

Michael Martone has taught at Iowa State University, Harvard University, and Syracuse University. He is currently teaching at the University of Alabama, where he has directed the MFA Program in Creative Writing. *Double-wide: Collected Fiction* is his eighth book of stories. *Racing in Place*, his third book of nonfiction, will be published in 2008. He has edited six other volumes of prose including the Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction with Lex Williford. He lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

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Introduction

I don't like to think of myself as doctrinaire about anything but certain ethical matters and perhaps the superiority of dark to milk chocolate. But I realize that I do have one unalterable rule that I wish I could also demand of others: When I teach a writing workshop, we must read published work on the grounds that, no matter how accomplished we may think ourselves to be, we need better writers in the room than even the best of us.

This anthology and the previous edition (only a few of whose stories are repeated here -- it's well worth having as a companion volume) present perfect examples of occasions for teaching and learning. Of course this collection will gratify even the casual reader, one who, like most moviegoers or opera aficionados, appreciates exceptional accomplishment without particularly caring how its effects are achieved. It is not a textbook. But its genesis as a response to the question put to hundreds of writers/teachers who also instruct by enthusiasm and example -- *Which stories do you assign, return to, find especially effective as models, stimuli, provocations?* -- makes it unusually useful for students in search of both inspiration and on-the-ground technical instruction.

After all, as I insist to my students, they will not always have teachers to guide them in that long future that awaits them after they've paid off their loans. Yes, assuming they continue to write, their work will be read, appreciated, and criticized by friends and -- let's hope -- by editors and a world of readers. But before that, when they sit down to evaluate their own fiction, they need to be able, themselves, to interrogate and probe and poke and be skeptical, and so -- back a step, before that -- in the generative and then the writing stage, it would be hugely useful to be able to do the same to a body of the most celebrated work being published today. And not just to read critically: to read practically. To assemble a tool kit, or amass a set of skeleton keys that will open just about any door.

One of the more successful of the low-residency graduate writing programs even demands of its students that they make what are called "annotations" as they move through their studies; that is, they must choose a technical question they'd like to pursue and search in their reading for a variety of possible solutions. I still

find myself doing exactly that, and I can't imagine I'll ever stop: Quite consciously, I'll anatomize some aspect of a story or a novel, not to imitate it (although that's a fine way to imbibe a given piece's style and structure) I am talking about taking stories apart like watches, studying the kinds and sizes of the parts they contain, and the way those parts move and affect one another.

So, to mix metaphors (sample question: Can one do that?), what are the kinds of things an attentive reader might ask, either to follow a road or to break away from it and pave a new one? (All right: too many metaphors. Find your own.)

Everyone agrees that any story can be told in dozens of ways, though each makes it a different story. But for many student writers, first thought is assumed to be best thought. It usually isn't. I begin again and again and again because my first thoughts are usually banal and verbally slack. What can we learn, then, by studying opening paragraphs word by word? The reader starts with no more of a preconception of what's to come than the title might provide. If we think of ourselves as sleuths amassing clues -- not yet about the large thematic questions, at the macro level, but, rather, at the micro level, where we are being led -- we can learn what we need to by parsing who is speaking, and when, at what distance in time and space, in what kind of language and in what tone, on what occasion or for what reason at this particular time, before the significant action or after it...on and on and on. Often it turns out that the important dynamics of the story are all there already. So much is evident before a single page is turned that I have sometimes filled whole classroom hours talking, more fruitfully than one might guess, about the first hundred or so words. It takes patience to squeeze out of every syllable the effect it is intended to have on the innocent reader, but it is not an idle exercise. Try it (and also ask what would be different if the opening were constructed otherwise):

"We didn't in the light; we didn't in darkness. We didn't in the fresh-cut summer grass or in the mounds of autumn leaves or on the snow where moonlight threw down our shadows."

"At six Mr. Frendt comes on the P.A. and shouts 'Welcome to Joysticks!' "

"Those are the offices and these are the cubicles. That's my cubicle there, and this is your cubicle."

These opening sentences are fraught with overtones and undertones; they are not doors to be sped through but, implicitly, plans for the entire building.

And the questions proliferate: What can we learn by studying the pace at which a story unfolds? How fast does it move? Is the speed of its deployment of detail consistent or does it contract and expand, rush forward, slow down, opening up from time to time like a climber coming to a level place and resting? How does the language hurry us along or slow us down? Does the plot seem to be taking place before our eyes or in retrospect, or in unreal -- purely literary -- time? What creates its intensity (if indeed it is intense)? The jam of words? ["Boys enter the house, boys enter the house. Boys, and with them the ideas of boys (ideas leaden, reductive, inflexible), enter the house."] The elision of connectives? (Ditto.) The absence of detail or explication? ("At first he was just losing weight, he felt only a little ill, Max said to Ellen, and he didn't call for an appointment with his doctor, according to Greg, because he was managing to keep on working at more or less the same rhythm, but he did stop smoking...") a single sentence that ends far down the page, and while you're there, consider the generality of the title.

A measured, deliberate opening can yield to great passion and mystery but so can an apparently casual one. ("Well, we had all these children out planting trees, see, because we figured

that...that was part of their education" ...and "Never marry a Mexican, my ma said once and always.") How does the transition to something far less off hand take place? In stories as mad as George Saunders's "Sea Oak" or Robert Olen Butler's "Jealous Husband Returns in Form of Parrot," how does the author fracture the conventional surface? Is there a refrain that returns and returns? (Melanie Rae Thon's "I'm your worst fear" or Jamaica Kincaid's "this is how...this is how...this is how...")

The questions, the contrasts -- the possibilities -- are almost infinite, but to read as a writer is to investigate them with an urgency different from that of the reader who might (or might not) take notice of an effect and move on. These are functional methods, available for us to pick up, turn over in our hands, weigh, and use.

And, finally, the bigger question and the most difficult: What makes almost every story here unique? What has all this technical expertise to do with the unreplicable intensity of stories -- experiences -- that are one of a kind? They are, after all, not clocks or watches, not simply cunningly calibrated machines. The only way I know how to say it is that, whatever they have chosen to be, they are consummately that. They are extreme. They proceed with the conviction that their means and ends are inseparable, and they take chances; they exaggerate, they make vivid their choices; they dominate us. To quote from my introduction to the first edition (yes, you can steal from yourself; I recommend it): "Where is the force of personality in (your story)? Do you convince us that this is the way it *must* be? You are an actor now: Inhabit your role. Fiction is not for the faint of heart."

-- Rosellen Brown

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FOREWORD

Rarely has the world changed so much from the first edition of an anthology to the second, one published at the end of a millennium and the next beginning the new. In 1999, when the first edition of *The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction* was published, no one had ever heard of Osama bin Laden or *Brokeback Mountain*. Almost a decade later, both inhabit the everyday vernacular. The idea that two Wyoming cowboys could fall in love or that two great towers could fall seemed impossible then, but what began as a somewhat obscure story in *The New Yorker*, published in the first edition of the *Scribner Anthology*, and later written for the film by Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana, has won three Academy Awards, and people in line to fly across the country think nothing at all of x-raying their shoes.

Like democracy, when it works, the most compelling fiction often responds to the deeper implications of world events slowly, sometimes taking years to articulate the incomprehensible, the unsaid -- perhaps even the unsayable at any given moment in history -- until writers with distinctive voices and stories find a way to bring to consciousness what people were thinking about all along but were too afraid to say aloud. For this reason, it would be an exaggeration to say that this, the second edition of *The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction*, has changed as much as the world it comes into. But it has changed significantly.

This anthology contains more than a dozen contemporary stories from the original first edition, stories that continue to haunt us and our students long after we've been teaching them for years, stories that hold up to many readings, stories that refuse to offer easy answers and still seem to

ask all the right questions. And it contains many new voices and stories that have just begun to articulate the new questions arising from the first decade of this new millennium.

Thoug...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Harold Walsh:

Here thing why that The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction: 50 North American Stories Since 1970 (Touchstone Books (Paperback)) are different and reputable to be yours. First of all reading through a book is good but it really depends in the content of computer which is the content is as tasty as food or not. The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction: 50 North American Stories Since 1970 (Touchstone Books (Paperback)) giving you information deeper since different ways, you can find any reserve out there but there is no e-book that similar with The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction: 50 North American Stories Since 1970 (Touchstone Books (Paperback)). It gives you thrill looking at journey, its open up your own eyes about the thing that will happened in the world which is maybe can be happened around you. It is possible to bring everywhere like in area, café, or even in your approach home by train. If you are having difficulties in bringing the printed book maybe the form of The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction: 50 North American Stories Since 1970 (Touchstone Books (Paperback)) in e-book can be your substitute.

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Carminé Caulfield:

A lot of publication has printed but it takes a different approach. You can get it by online on social media. You can choose the most beneficial book for you, science, comic, novel, or whatever by simply searching from it. It is called of book The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction: 50 North American Stories Since 1970 (Touchstone Books (Paperback)). Contain your knowledge by it. Without departing the printed book, it could add your knowledge and make anyone happier to read. It is most critical that, you must aware about book. It can bring you from one destination to other place.

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