



New Sudden Fiction: Short-Short Stories from America and Beyond

Robert Shapard (Editor)

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Responding to America's love affair with the short-short, editors Robert Shapard and James Thomas searched thousands of books and magazines to select these sixty stories—each under 2,000 words, each with its own element of surprise, whether traditional, experimental, humorous, moving, or magical. In the process they discovered both new talents and a wealth of celebrated writers, such as Jorge Luis Arzola, Aimee Bender, Teolinda Gersão, Romulus Linney, Yann Martel, Sam Shepard, and Tobias Wolff. Zdravka Evitmova conjures blood drops that cure any disease. Ian Frazier writes public relations for crows. Juan José Milás leads an amnesiac husband to an affair in the candlelit darkness of a cathedral with his wife. These tales told quickly offer pleasures long past their telling.

New Sudden Fiction: Short-Short Stories from America and Beyond Details

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From Reader Review New Sudden Fiction: Short-Short Stories from America and Beyond for online ebook

Liosliath says

Probably one of the best collections of short stories I've ever read.

Alex Johnson says

Tough to rate this book. As a collection of 60-ish super short stories, it was very hit or miss. But damn, some of them really hit. A great book to kill time since each story is less than 2,000 words. A great mix of comedy, experimental, and dramatic. Worth checking out, especially the first two stories I would say.

Lotte says

Not a bad collection but the stories are a bit long to qualify as sudden fiction. As usual, there is a mix of more powerful stories with less memorable ones.

Shane says

The stories in this book are amazing. They're short, precise, funny, serious, curious, and above all fun. They are direct, starting you off in the action so there's no need for some long intro, and then after you read one story you think, "There's no way this next story will be as good as the last one," but guess what? It is!

Dylan says

"Don't smile. Just because I'm smiling, don't assume I couldn't kill you right now."

This was a book of a ton of short short stories. It is amazing that a complete story can be told in such a small number of words. We really do need less than we think to get our point across.

My favorite stories from the collection are:

A History of Everything, Including You

Loving the Dead

Tomorrow's Bird

Blood

Pompeii

In Reference to Your Recent Communications

Consumed

Why Men Quit: An Intellectual Inquiry

Swimming for Shore
Feelers
The Gold Lunch

Philip says

Sudden Fiction = Short-Short Stories. With authors like David Foster Wallace, Chuck Palahniuk, Joyce Carol Oates, Elizabeth Berg, and Yann Martel how can you go wrong? Well, you really can't.* Most all of these stories were pretty fantastic. I keep going back to several, most notably Robin Hemley's "Reply All," which is told in the email format... I know I've hit "reply all" with disastrous results before... This collection is pretty much all gold. And if you come across a story you don't like, it's guaranteed to be under 2000 words. Score.

*Here's how you *can* go wrong: getting this book for a class of 7th graders. It's catalogued under "Y" in our library. I'm guessing Y=young adult between 18-25 instead of 13-18... As I'm sure you've gathered from the list of authors at the top, many of these have adult themes. Great stories, fun to read, but not what I was looking for to push on my class.

(And to think I got a little bent out of shape over Neil Gaiman's *M is for Magic*.

Jim Elkins says

A book of 'short-short stories,' which the editor defines as stories under 2,000 words. The central question here is whether or not this is a genre. Some of the stories seem artificially compressed, as if their authors had to telegraph their thoughts to fit the word limit. Others, among the most successful, read like excerpts from longer stories or fragments of novels. (Joyce Carol Oates's is an example.) Quite a few use surrealist juxtaposition as a principal reductive strategy. Others are attempts at parables or allegories, but they tend to be awkward, ill-conceived, or randomly associative, or campy. Very few seem to be fully realized and optimal at their present length. So the collection is strained, and even aside from questions of quality, the 'short-short story' does not work as a new kind of fiction. Unless fourth-generation North American surrealism or belated revivals of absurdism are sufficient organizational strategies, and unless aphorisms, epigrams, and prose poems are allowed into the category of 'short-short stores,' then almost none of these work as independent forms.[return][return]And then there's the question of quality. Very few are good. Among the best: contributions by Peter Orner, Sam Shepard, Oates, Frederick Adolf Paola, Larissa Amir, Elizabeth Berg, Hon McNally, David Foster Wallace, and Donald Frame. Most of the rest are artificially compressed, arcane, pointlessly or aimlessly whimsical, raw and indigestible, or just trite.

Laurie says

I read this and *Children Standing Before a Statue of Hercules* at the same time. I'd rate this one at a slightly lower awesomeness-per-page average, but still had many great stories that introduced me to new authors.

Also, the short-short is the perfect length for the typical window I have for pleasure reading each day, in the morning between breakfast and shower, if you know what I'm talking about.

Denis says

I'm changing my rating to 5 stars, from 4. My interest in the Sudden Fiction series is mostly to learn how to write short-shorts and I look to the Sudden Fiction series for inspiration, and to see how it's done. And they're also great bedside reading as you can read many full morsels before drifting off.

I wasn't excited with the original, Sudden Fiction, American Short-Short Stories, published in 1986. But I went back through this collection to tag those that evoked something in me, those worth rereading, and the book ended up with many, many sticky notes. So 5 it must be!

Erikaaaa says

If you pick up this collection of very-very short-shorts and you read the first story while you're still in the store, you might buy it. Well, that's because it's the best story in the book. I fell right into that trap.

This volume boasts some big names--Chuck Palahniuk, David Foster Wallace, Joyce Carol Oates, Tobias Wolff, Aimee Bender--and their stories were okay--well, actually theirs were all pretty good but I'd read some of them before--but for the most part i was just... Where are they getting these stories from?!

There is a story, seriously, about a girl who is so obsessed with Chris Cornell that she falls for a homeless man who resembles him, makes him shower, and then lives out her fantasies with him. There is a story where having lunch with your ex is an Olympic sport (it was KIND of clever). There is a story called "Stolen Chocolates" (I'm sorry but that's just too much), and one called "Reply All." These things are not unforgivable but the stories don't make up for them.

The two stories in the anthology I actually liked were the ones translated from Spanish. Suck it.

Katharine Grubb says

Some real funny stuff in this one- and some equally as disturbing...

Alissa Hattman says

This survey of stories three pages or less links a range of writing from humorous to magical, from experimental to traditional, notable authors being Tobias Wolff, Joyce Carol Oates, Robert Olen Butler, Ha Jin, David Foster Wallace and Sam Shepard. Some of these stories succeeded in capturing the essence of a moment to reveal a larger significance, while others just felt like an outline or sketch of something that could be larger and more meaningful.

Lisa Hern says

To tell a good story in so few pages is a true gift. I thoroughly enjoyed most of the stories in this volume. Sudden fiction is a true blue genre, put your seatbelt on.

4.25 Stars.

Richard says

The original Sudden Fiction anthology was something of a literary groundbreaker as well as the start of a franchise--Robert Shapard and James Thomas could be credited with giving sudden (aka flash, aka micro, aka short short) fiction a formal stage so that the genre could (and did) become acceptable in all kinds of venues where it had not been considered legitimate before. Obviously, Raymond Carver's seminal collection *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (the one edited by Gordon Lish, who of course wanted to take full credit for the form in the first Sudden Fiction anthology) may have been among the first collections to qualify the boundaries of short fiction into the realm of a page or two, but Shapard & Thomas' first Sudden Fiction anthology was possibly the first popular proof that this short form was just as competent as the longer short story form and could be tackled by writers just as competent as Carver.

From there, Shapard & Thomas sparked the Sudden Fiction anthology series and even did spots of the Flash Fiction anthology series, together or separately. This volume is the most recent installment, and it follows the method of the others--stories that tend to fall in the range of 2,000 words or lower, and familiar names (Tobias Wolff, Sam Shephard, Joyce Carol Oates, etc.) standing next to names that are not as familiar, due either to neglect in the whorls of the literary administration or to the general low quality of their work.

Of course, any anthology is going to have its hits and misses, and this one is no exception. Aimee Bender is a nice turn in the road, since all the stories before hers seem to have a definite realist tendency, and hers is the first to explore the realm of the surreal, and does so quite powerfully. Ha Jin's piece about humor and those political machines that have none is about as powerful as any Mo Yan novel, and Chuck Palahniuk is as verbose as ever, though the shorter form lets his piece resonate nicely without being swept away by its language. Sherrie Flick's "How I Left Ned" is wonderfully creepy and gothic, a story that could only be sustained in an abbreviated form, and Geoffrey Forsyth's "Mud" is an incredible musing on grief. Stacey Richter's "The Minimalist" is a spin through the world of an artistic and personal meltdown. These works show the power of the sudden fiction format--the emotions are intense, bombastic and ride prominently on the sleeve. They aren't poetic, and so don't seem appropriate to call prose poems, but instead have that kind of grounded punch that good fiction has, with events that might not be familiar but are certainly sympathetic.

Some of the misses, though, really dragged down this collection, as they showed the weaknesses this genre can exude. Toure's "I Shot the Sheriff" is a pretty redundant piece that takes a lot of obvious moves and shows a pretty weak writing hand (despite the author's arrogant bio at the back of the book). Robert Olen Butler's "Seven Pieces of Severance" is just a poor smattering of pieces from his collection *Severance*--cryptic monologues from decapitated heads. Elizabeth Berg's "The Party" is a rather typical musing on the differences between men and women--rather one-sided and cliché by the end. These are the pieces that serve as reminders that the term Sudden Fiction can sometimes be used to try to legitimize failed short stories--many of these pieces provide little of the kind of interest that sustains good short fiction, no matter how long:

a vivid glimpse into genuine human character.

The failings of this collection are a little less forgivable than they would be in previous anthologies only because Shapard & Thomas have helped define and justify this genre, so it would seem that their positions would entail and effort to further define the genre's boundaries and possibilities. While there are quite a few pieces here that show a maturation of the sudden fiction genre, it is clear that the term is also being used to try to give credence to short-minded, poorly imaginative work. Perhaps that is just the nature of the literary game, but I would have rather finished this collection with a twitter of excitement and possibility rather than a pang of some missed opportunity.

Juliet Romo says

still reading
