



The Best American Short Stories 2001

Barbara Kingsolver (Editor), Katrina Kenison (Series Editor)

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This year's Best American Short Stories is edited by the critically acclaimed and best-selling author Barbara Kingsolver, whose latest book is *Prodigal Summer*. Kingsolver's selections for *The Best American Short Stories 2001* showcase a wide variety of new voices and masters, such as Alice Munro, Rick Moody, Dorothy West, and John Updike. "Reading these stories was both a distraction from and an anchor to the complexities of my life — my pleasure, my companionship, my salvation. I hope they will be yours." — Barbara Kingsolver

The Best American Short Stories 2001 Details

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From Reader Review The Best American Short Stories 2001 for online ebook

Charlotte says

I decided to check out this book after reading Barbara Kingsolver's collection of essays, *Small Wonder*. She wonders why more time-pressed Americans don't read short stories. I decided to take the challenge and peruse these stories chosen by Kingsolver as the best of 2001. While I enjoyed them, I couldn't finish them. I really liked "Labors of the Heart." That was the only one where I really felt the writer explored (or exposed) the characters in depth. The main reason I read fiction is the emotional enjoyment of identifying with a character. There's just not enough time to get invested in short stories, which might explain why we time-pressed Americans don't read more of them.

Jami says

If you only have limited time to read, these are great short stories that are from a variety of well known authors.

Jerry says

The best of the stories here began and ended the collection: "Servants of the Map" by Andrea Barrett, and "My Baby" by Dorothy West. The latter was written in 1938, if I'm reading it correctly, but made it into this volume because the author wrote a lot, some of which is still being published; this was published in *The Connecticut Review* in 2000.

Reading the introduction after the stories, it appears they were chosen not so much for whether they were good stories as to whether and what they taught the guest editor. This may explain why the stories seemed, to me at least, as if they were more about stereotypes across the world than in other years. "The Fireman", "Think of England", and "The Raft" were the worst of these. Not being a fireman myself, nor Welsh, nor a World War II vet, it may be that they conform to stereotypes, but then, what's the point of a story that does?

Katherine Shonk's "My Mother's Garden" was another standout, not necessarily because it transcended stereotypes (of Soviet peasantry in this case) but because it is a very good story about generational gaps; a stereotype that deserves very good stories.

Marc says

I kept this book in the car for the last year. I'd read it at stop lights or when waiting to pick up carryout or any place/time I had the opportunity. Quality collection. Some of my favorites (w/ links to the ones I could find online so you can read'em yourself):

- "Servants of the Map" by Andrea Barrett
- "After Cowboy Chicken Came to Town" by Ha Jin

- "Boys" by Rick Moody
- "The Raft" by Peter Orner
- "The Secrets of Bats" by Jess Row
- "Nobody Listens When I Talk" by Annette Sanford
- "The Apple Tree" by Trevanian

Grace says

I really like the Alice Munro story (maybe my favorite so far of her annual entries in these collections) and the Nancy Reisman about the bitter and lonely lesbian working in a 1950s lawfirm. The bothers were duds for me.

Ann Douglas says

This was an exceptionally good volume of short stories. (This series if published annually.)

Highlights included

- "Boys" by Rick Moody
- "Nobody Listens When I Talk" by Annette Stanford
- "The Apple Tree" by Trevanian
- "My Baby..." by Dorothy West

Here is a wonderfully mischievous quote from "The Apple Tree":

"Short first pregnancies do not occasion criticism in our valley, for it is widely known that the good Lord often makes first pregnancies mercifully brief as His reward to the girl for having preserved her chastity until marriage. Subsequent pregnancies, however, usually run their full terms, which only makes sense, as the very fact that they are not first pregnancies means that the mother was not chaste at the moment of conception."

Brenda says

Terrific collection of short stories, with a lovely introduction by editor/author Barbara Kingsolver.

My favourite stories in this collection were:

Servants of the Map by Andrea Barrett - A British cartgrapher, mapping the Himalayas, writes to his wife of his outward travels while the reader follows his inner journey.

Rug Weaver by Barbara Klein Moss - An Iranian rug weaver muses about the magical carpet designs he wove in his head to keep him sane while a prisoner of the Revolution. His son's beautiful but very foreign wife tries to encourage him to join the living in the strangeness of California.

Post and Beam by Alice Munro - Lorna's awkward, shuttered cousin Polly comes to visit. It's hard to explain more.

The Apple Tree by Trevanian - Two women war over an old love and an apple tree that sits on the boundary between their properties. Sly & witty.

Jenifer says

Reading this excellent collection of short stories edited by Barbara Kingsolver has made me feel as if I just ate way too much. I am uncomfortably overfull with words and characters and stories. They are swimming around in my head, and I am a little afraid that I will forget them all too soon. We eat too much and wonder how we could ever eat another meal, and then all too soon, we are doing it again. I will pick up a new book soon and I'm a little sad that this one will fade away. Digested.

It took me awhile to get used to the fact that sometimes short stories are a glimpse; a moment, and that they don't always end satisfactorily. I found myself wishing sometimes, not for a happy ending, but just some sort of wrap-up. It seems that I got over that. As I reviewed each story one more time before putting this book away, I realized that each one had somehow gotten under my skin. Each one had some exemplary and remarkable thing that I came to admire about it.

A few of my favorites;

Labors of the Heart - Claire Davis

Rug Weaver - Barbara Klein Moss

The Apple Tree - Trevanian

Nerd Note; Five stars for the forward by Katrina Kennison and the Introduction by Barbara Kingsolver. Read those twice. Nuggets of goodness in there.

Mary says

Some wonderful short stories In this collection but some that aren't.

Ryan says

Taken as a whole, this was the very definition of a typical BASS collection—one or two great stories, several good, several mediocre, and one or two clunkers. However, reading it story by story, it felt somewhat lopsided, with only Updike really managing to impress me as I made my way through the back half. The perils of sticking with alphabetical order, I guess.

My favorites, in rough order of preference:

- * Peter Ho Davies - "Think of England"
- * Elizabeth Graver - "The Mourning Door"
- * Ha Jin - "After Cowboy Chicken Came to Town"

- * Andrea Barrett - "Servants of the Map"
- * Alice Munro - "Post and Beam"
- * John Updike - "Personal Archaeology"

And an honorable mention:
* Claire Davis - "Labors of the Heart"

Erin says

I was delighted to see a shelf of these at the library and zeroed in on the Kingsolver edition. Short stories feel so new to me that the idea of seeing how people of literary merit judge them is incredibly appealing. The author section in the back that tells the inspiration for the story is also great.

I'm embarrassed to be rating this one star. I feel like *I* must be the problem here, not the stories chosen. And I don't know if perhaps I don't like the style of stories these were culled from or Kingsolver's taste! I feel like a lot of these heavily showcased a character's "inner life" when a lot of what I savor about a short story is how little interactions between people can signal volumes, and the way an author communicates that.

The first few stories seemed off to me. Enjoyable to a degree, but lacked a certain finish. I was excited to read Ha Jin's *Cowboy Chicken*. The clash of Eastern and Western cultures it espoused sounded right up my alley, but I couldn't finish it. I thought many of the stories went on for much longer than they really needed to. Halfway through the book I utterly dreaded the start of a new one. This book sucked the story-loving life out of me!

I loved *My Mother's Garden* by Katherine Schonk.

I feel like I don't have enough experience with short stories that I can say "don't read this." Obviously these were considered to be good stories by a number of people, who am I to disagree with that? I'd recommend one read this and come to their own conclusion.

Ben Siems says

Like most lovers of literature, I have some discomfort with the title of this series. Literature and rankings seem rather incompatible, after all.

But whether the stories in *Best American Short Stories* are indeed the best of that year is of no great consequence. They are certainly very good. I have, over the years, grabbed three different editions from this series (1988, 1991, and 2001) at used bookstores, and I must say, I enjoy them immensely. I would highly recommend to everyone to track down at least one *Best American Short Stories* at some point. The books offer a great opportunity to read a truly diverse collection of excellent writing all in one handy volume. Definitely great to have along when traveling.

I think of the three I've read, I'd list 2001 as my favorite, in that I found myself genuinely taken in by almost every story in the collection. That being said, I don't think any single story-reading experience will ever match the afternoon a few years ago when I read the story *Inn Essence* in the 1988 edition. I truly had never

imagined any work of writing could ever make me laugh that long or hard. It's an experience not to be missed.

Math Yoda says

I liked Boys by Rick Moody, The raft by Peter Orner, Nobody listens when I talk by Annette Sanford, The Apple Tree by Trevanian, My Baby by Dorothy West but most of all: My Mother's Garden by Katherine Shonk.

What I didn't like were mostly the long ones (They were super dragging for me):

Servants of the Map

Post and Beam and

Betty Hutton (I did not really understand the story because I think this was the longest and I read it in separate days because I was busy, In the last pages of this story, I LITERALLY JUST SCANNED IT. I did not understand how it ended, just how it started.

Harley says

Maybe I finished all these stories a year or two before, but I re-read several over the last few days. Some of the stories in this collection are on my all-time favorites list, if I were going to edit a volume called The Best of The Best American Short Stories. "The Secrets of Bats" by Jess Row, "Labors of the Heart" by Claire Davis. Then there are others that are favorites in this book: "Nobody Listens When I Talk" by Annette Sanford, "The Apple Tree" by Trevanian -- which is a hysterically funny story about a feud between two widows in a Basque village. I think they were almost all fascinating, though Updike's New England ways are boring and a couple others caused me to nod off. On to the next collection!

Ruth Conrad says

I really liked the story by Alice Munro.
