



Short Shorts

Irving Howe (Editor) , Ilana W. Howe (Editor) , Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa (Contributor) , Katherine Anne Porter (Contributor) , Leo Tolstoy (Contributor) , Isaac Babel (Contributor) , Mikhail Zoschenko (Contributor) , William Carlos Williams (Contributor) , more... Yukio Mishima (Contributor) , James Thurber (Contributor) , Doris Lessing (Contributor) , Jorge Luis Borges (Contributor) , Sholom Aleichem (Contributor) , Varlam Shalamov (Contributor) , Octavio Paz (Contributor) , Jerome Weidman (Contributor) , Heinrich von Kleist (Contributor) , Grace Paley (Contributor) , Gabriel García Márquez (Contributor) , Augusto Monterroso (Contributor) , Heinrich Böll (Contributor) , Paula Fox (Contributor) , Maria Luise Kaschnitz (Contributor) , I.L. Peretz (Contributor) , Luisa Valenzuela (Contributor) , Gottfried Keller (Contributor) , Anton Chekhov (Contributor) , Giovanni Verga (Contributor) , Stephen Crane (Contributor) , Guy de Maupassant (Contributor) , João Guimarães Rosa (Contributor) , James Joyce (Contributor) , D.H. Lawrence (Contributor) , Luigi Pirandello (Contributor) , Franz Kafka (Contributor) , Sherwood Anderson (Contributor) , Ernest Hemingway (Contributor) ...less

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Short Shorts is a delightful anthology of miniature masterpieces. Here are thirty-eight brief, brilliant flashes of fiction, both classic and contemporary. Each work is superb, intense, and speaks to the human condition in a profound, often provocative way—a truly outstanding collection by some of the worlds greatest authors.

Short Shorts Details

Date : Published 1982 by Bantam

ISBN : 9780553274400

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Format : Hardcover 262 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, Anthologies, Literature, Short Story Collection

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From Reader Review Short Shorts for online ebook

Shawn says

This is a fine collection of what Howe here, in the 80s, dubs "Short Short Fiction" and which was called "Microfiction" in the 90s and which we now call "Flash Fiction". I feel it's a useful collection for editors, like me, who are trying to get a handle on what constitutes valid standards for successful flash fiction (through offering the attempts of literary greats) - modified for genre in my case - and also for modern writers of flash who may also wonder just what they can and can't consider to be in their box of tricks. Howe's introduction serves as a fine examination of these very questions (barring genre considerations) and I've excerpted the salient sections into the quotes.

And the stories - oh, the stories. I have to read a lot of short genre fiction both in my professional role and as well by choice and sometimes I get burned out on horror fiction and it is always a joy to return to short lit fiction and remind myself of just how wide open the field can be, how expressive, how far ranging, how inventive.

Given the great names here and the brief nature of the stories (some of which would be ruined in the synopsis) it wouldn't really make sense to do a full, story-by-story review. So I'm just going to note some of my personal favorites.

I.L. Peretz's "If Not Higher" has a rabbi who absents himself during penitential prayers and the eventual discovery of his engaging in mysterious, and then not so mysterious, actions. A very nice tale of the true meaning of the religious impulse.

"Eveline" by James Joyce is about a woman, trapped in her life of caring for her abusive, drunken father, making plans for escape... but she can only escape so far. Excellent story with a powerful ending.

Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa tells a simple story of a downtrodden working man and the prize he wins at work, which he hopes to present to his family, in "Joy And The Law". As it turns out, fate and social custom have other plans...

"The Use Of Force" by William Carlos Williams is a story I read way back in college and have been looking for ever since as I couldn't remember the name or the author. A doctor makes a house call and finds himself in a pitched battle with a little girl who will just NOT open up and say ahhh!

A sensitive, well-off woman is haunted by the image of her maid's unexpected newborn wrapped in bloody newspapers in "Swaddling Clothes" by Yukio Mishima. This image eventually drives her to an atypical action, a walk in the park at night, which leads to a confrontation and an ambiguous but powerful ending.

Doris Lessing's "Homage For Isaac Babel" is a charming story about attempting to inform young people's worldviews through great literature.

"The Dead Man" by Jorge Luis Borges has the author playing with form, as always, retelling us a fable-like story of the rise and fall of a criminal figure, all to explain a strange incident at a bar.

A familiar old cliché - the white man captured by savages who plans to use his superior astronomical knowledge to save his life - is overturned in Augusto Monterroso's sharp little tale of "The Eclipse".

"The Laughter" by Heinrich Böll is a compact character study of a man who laughs as his source of income,

and how this affects his demeanor.

There's beautiful writing by Paula Fox in "News From The World", a tight little story that revolves around a married woman's infatuation with an older man, contrasted against life in a remote village.

"Going To Jerusalem" features a town beset by a mysterious illness and a stranger who tells a story in a crowded waiting room - interesting stuff from Maria Luise Kaschnitz.

Luisa Valenzuela gives us a blackly comic fable about how trying to beat them by joining them doesn't always work in "The Censors".

Finally, the really amazing find for me was Octavio Paz's wonderfully sinister "The Blue Bouquet", a very creepy story about the dangers of going for a walk late at night.

This was, all told, a great collection and might make a nice way to introduce a young person or non-lit-reader to the art of the short story.

Stephen Fielder says

I've always been fascinated with the short story form. Long ago, I even attempted to write a few. This anthology was especially attractive because the short stories are all "short shorts." What is the smallest possible story that still holds up as an engaging piece of fiction? Well, the editors here have a basket full of answers to that. I read this book decades ago, and a couple of the short shorts here have hung on in my mind for all those years. "The Three Hermits" by Leo Tolstoy and "If Not Higher" by I.L.Peretz. Those two stand out for me.

This is a remarkable collection of short stories. I recommend it.

Amanda says

Really interesting pieces by a bunch of great authors...Babel, Chekhov, Kafka, Hemingway, Joyce...a great train/plane/waiting room book, because when the title says "short shorts," it's not kidding; most of the stories are about 3 -4 pages, and all pack a lotta punch.

Ali says

This is a collection of the shortest of short stories by some of the best and most familiar authors and some lesser known authors. Some of the works are only two or three pages long. I was able to finish stories in a few short minutes, off and on throughout the day whenever I nursed the baby. I am in awe of this craft of short story writing. The authors are able to establish setting, develop characters and draw you through an intensely emotional journey in so few words. What a gift!

Jana says

Actually I found very few stories in this collection that really excited me. I want to publish an anthology of short (flash) fiction for this very reason. I can't find one on the market that I really like and I think America's classrooms could use a good resource. I'm going to flip through this one and see if there is even one story I'd like to get permission to publish-but none of them haunt me the way some of my student's short pieces have!

Deniz says

Deniz Yard?mc? L9 – 10

With a diverse palette of writing selected by Irving Howe and Ilana W. Howe, differing from Kafka to Hemingway, the first anthology ever to be written about short stories, *Short Shorts*, seems to amaze readers by the quality of the clear and concise writing. Although this book is mostly for high-English-leveled readers, there are stories that are for lower-English leveled readers, too. These are either the stories from authors who use a simpler language like Hemingway or the ones translated from Russian, German or Japanese which its language got simplified from the original. The subjects of the various stories are love, poverty, freedom etc. The times and places differ, too. Each short story has a completely different setting than the one before: one of them might be in a Russian village during the Cold War or a haunted house in Transylvania. With these settings and fast-paced plots, it is really comfortable to read in on a plane, on the bus or at home. That is how I got to know the book; actually. I was at the airport looking for a good read then I got across *Short Shorts* because of its beautiful cover and because it consists of short stories. If you have an interest for international authors, this is the best book to get to know the best international authors, both old and contemporary.

Kevin Gallan says

i loved itsome very good stories by very good writers

Macarena Guerrero says

This is probably one of the best gifts I have ever received. This is a book full of great worldwide shorts stories that are funny, sad, emotional, intriguing, unexpected, etc etc. you can re read every single one of this shorts stories and never get bored. Its a great compilation. It's great if you are not familiar with international authors, this is a good way of learning some new names.

Christine says

Although I liked the concept of the book, I now understand why short story compilations typically contain stories of various lengths or stories with a common author, era, etc. Individually, many of the stories were phenomenal. Collectively, the stories were disjointed and rough. Many of the stories are very painful reads which, all together, give the reader little rest.

Jim says

Some wonderfully crafted very short stories by some of the world's best writers.

Tim says

This was a fine collection of short-shorts compiled before the vogue that the form experienced in the 1990s. I had not heard of this book until I saw it being offered by a street peddler, but perhaps it had something to do with that increase in popularity, which does not seem to have really stuck around. But maybe it had its impact, since stories (and attention spans) seem to have grown shorter over the years.

This collection covers a large territory, from the late 1700s to the 1970s. The first fictions are from German writers von Kleist and Gottfried Keller from around 1800 (I wonder if this is when the form was first employed). There are familiar names like Tolstoy, Chekhov, de Maupassant, Anderson, Kafka, Hemingway, Porter, Mishima, Thurber, Borges, and Garcia Marquez. But there were also new faces that made a fine first impression on me: Grace Paley, Giuseppe di Lampedusa, Paula Fox, and Joao Guimares Rosa. There were several interesting Jewish writers with whom I am not familiar, like Isaac Babel, Sholom Aleichem, and I.L. Peretz. Not everything was great, but this presented no difficulty; a weak story soon gave way to another, better one.

Among my favorites were: "My Father Sits in the Dark" by Jerome Weidman, about which the title says all; Paley's vignette about a woman's thoughts on a chance meeting with her ex-husband; Chekhov's piece on a girl's romantic shenanigans; Pirandello's meditation on the indignities of old age; and Heinrich Boll's comic depiction of a man who laughs for a living. A very worthy collection which illustrates that the short-short has been with us for a while.

Jean Carlton says

It has taken me a long long time to finish this slim book of short short stories. Partly because I've learned that reading a book of stories as if it is a novel is unsettling; one needs to pause and reflect between each story. The introduction was crucial to my understanding of the genre and I referred back to it many times to better understand the 'goal' of such short work. Word count for the "short short" is between 1500-2500 words. With such limited 'time', situation necessarily replaces character...a single incident or anecdote "forms the spine" of this genre, gives the "impression of an idea of life. We see "human figures in a fleeting profile." Time span must be brief—approaching the "condition of a fable."

Many of the stories are translations. Overall I saw them as 'odd or weird'-- though many were interesting/thought provoking. I think it would be difficult to 'say' something in such little space. Who said, (paraphrased) 'I apologize for the long letter. I would have made it shorter if I had more time? That's the case here. It seems it is much easier to ramble on, as I am doing in this review, than say something meaningful in few words.

(My favorite: The Third Bank of the River)

Mark says

A few clunkers, but on the whole an excellent read! 38 stories, most no longer than 5 pages and some real classics as well!

Jim says

This is an excellent collection of very short stories, few if any exceeding 9,000 words. Tolstoy, Hemingway, Marquez, and dozens of other great writers are represented. If there's a caveat, it's that most of the stories avoid twist endings and, indeed, a majority seem to end without obvious or concrete resolutions. It is perhaps no coincidence that my two favorites did, in fact, come to very firm conclusions.

Ben Loory says

it's silly to give this collection only 3 stars, as it includes some of my all-time favorite stories, like tolstoy's "the three hermits," joao guimaraes rosa's "the third bank of the river," kafka's "first sorrow," and two, count 'em two, sherwood anderson stories (god DAMN but sherwood anderson was great, huh?), but as for the rest, there's nothing too earthshaking. and the only real discovery (for me) was grace paley. this story of hers, "wants"??? do you know this story? do you know grace paley???? holy shit!

I saw my ex-husband in the street. I was sitting on the steps of the new library.

Hello, my life, I said. We had once been married for twenty-seven years, so I felt justified.

He said, What? What life? No life of mine.

I said, O.K. I don't argue when there's real disagreement. I got up and went into the library to see how much I owed them.

The librarian said \$32 even and you've owed it for eighteen years. I didn't deny anything. Because I don't understand how time passes. I have had those books. I have often thought of them. The library is only two blocks away.

My ex-husband followed me to the Books Returned desk. He interrupted the librarian, who had more to tell.

In many ways, he said, as I look back, I attribute the dissolution of our marriage to the fact that you never invited the Bertrams to dinner.

all right, well... it's hard to give a selection... it kind of needs to go the length of the story. which is only three pages.

but anyway. grace paley. yeah. good stuff. heinrich von kleist, on the other hand... who gives a crap.
