



The Best Small Fictions 2017

Amy Hempel (Guest Editor), Tara Lynn Masih (Series Editor), Maria Calabretta Cancio-Bella (Contributor), Jesse Goolsby (Contributor), W. Todd Kaneko (Contributor), Jen Knox (Contributor), Na'amien Gobert Tilahun (Contributor), Tara Laskowski (Contributor), more... Christopher DeWan (Contributor) ...less

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The Best Small Fictions 2017 offers readers 55 exceptional small fictions by 53 authors. This acclaimed new annual series, hailed as a “milestone for the short story,” continues to honor contemporary masters and emerging writers of short-short and hybrid forms from across the globe. Guest editor Amy Hempel chose the winners from a pool of 105 finalists: “They conjure and seduce, they startle and haunt, they are funny and searing, short and shorter.” The 2017 volume includes Pamela Painter, Brian Doyle, Ian Seed, Frankie McMillan, Karen Brennan, Stuart Dybek, and W. Todd Kaneko, and spotlights Joy Williams and SmokeLong Quarterly.

Featuring Small Fictions by: Nick Admussen ~ Nick Almeida ~ Lydia Armstrong ~ Matthew Baker ~ Amy Sayre Baptista ~ Karen Brennan ~ Larry Brown ~ Randall Brown ~ Erin Calabria ~ Marci Calabretta Cancio-Bello ~ Carrie Cooperider ~ Emily Corwin ~ Christopher DeWan ~ Brian Doyle ~ Stuart Dybek ~ Kathy Fish ~ Sherrie Flick ~ Scott Garson ~ Jesse Goolsby ~ Michael Hammerle ~ Hannah Harlow ~ Allegra Hyde ~ W. Todd Kaneko ~ Joy Katz ~ Jen Knox ~ Len Kuntz ~ Tara Laskowski ~ Oscar Mancinas ~ Ras Mashramani ~ Frankie McMillan ~ Heather McQuillan ~ Cole Meyer ~ Eugenie Montague ~ Pamela Painter ~ Alvin Park ~ Kimberly King Parsons ~ Gen Del Raye ~ Mona Leigh Rose ~ Na'amen Gobert Tilahun ~ Cameron Quincy Todd ~ Matt Sailor ~ Rebecca Schiff ~ Robert Scotellaro ~ Ian Seed ~ Alex Simand ~ Julia Slavin ~ Michael C. Smith ~ Phillip Sterling ~ Anne Valente ~ Harriot West ~ Joy Williams ~ Keith Woodruff ~ William Woolfitt

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From Reader Review The Best Small Fictions 2017 for online ebook

Rebecca says

(3.75) Now in its third year, this anthology collects the year's best short stories under 1,000 words. Starting with a zinger of a first line is one strategy for making a short-short story stand out, and there are certainly some excellent opening sentences here. Symbols and similes are also crucial to conveying shorthand meaning. Two stand-outs are "States of Matter," Tara Laskowski's deliciously creepy story of revenge aided by a gravedigger; and Matthew Baker's "The President's Doubles," in which an island nation becomes so protective of its imperiled leader that he ends up a prisoner. They've saved the best for last in this collection, though: Brian Doyle's "My Devils," in which an Irish-American boy learns how to interpret the adult world by deciphering what people say versus what they mean. It's remarkable how concisely a coming of age and loss of blind faith are conveyed. Although there are fewer overall highlights than in the first volume, this is an excellent snapshot of contemporary super-short story writing, recommended for story lovers and newbies alike.

See my full review on the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* website.

Kenny Chaffin says

Review of The Best Small Fictions 2017

I was so excited to get the opportunity to review an early release of The Best Small Fictions 2017 edited by Amy Hempel (One of my favorite sentence makers! Get her Collected Stories right now!) and Tara L. Masih. And thanks to Braddock Avenue Books for taking the reins to publish this third volume of the anthology which I've been loving since before the first one. I LOVE Flash and Microfiction and was very very pleased to find several wonderful pieces of Microfiction in this edition!

In fact I'll stick my neck right out and say that my choice for the **best story in the book is What Remains by Robert Scotellaro**. My god what an amazing piece of work that captures all our lives, right here, right now; our fears, our hopes, our delights in a perfect little 100 word gem. Amazing!

This third volume is again chock full of great stories. Having just re-read them all to prepare this review I can see many that I did not choose to mention could just as easily have a spot here. I don't think there is a 'bad' story in the bunch. Wonderful stuff and I do hope this series continues for many many years under the new leadership and publisher. Thank you Tara for your wonderful work on these! I'll be looking forward to the Sherrie Flick release next year. I love her writing (Oklahoma Men! OMG!! I've read and re-read and studied and re-read and all but memorized it :)) but for now, on with the show.

My top selections in no particular order are:

What the Beach Tree Knows by William Woolfitt – a surreal and mesmerizing tale of empathy and loss.

Sisters by Heather McQuillan a perfect little Microfiction (92 words) of a wonderfully deranged family.

Don't Walk by Joy Katz a completely bizarre tale of a traffic accident... I think...

Killerman by Michael Hammerle a totally knot in the stomach thriller of sorts in less than 1000 words. Read it! You'll love it!

We are all Relatively Safe Here by Cameron Quincy Todd a creepy tale of sisters, bunnies and getting to know one's neighbors.

tree rot by Alvin Park – what would you do for one your loved with all your heart?

Summer by Keith Woodruff a story of childhood summers and the changing of the light.

Nightstands by Cole Meyer if I had to choose a runner up for my top choice this would be it. Another microfiction that captures an entire life, love and loss in 148 words.

The Last Fragile Thing by Erin Calabria another story of loss somewhat unstated but burning like a fire, always but gentle as a bird. (which reminds me there are quite a few bird stories in the volume :)).

In Our Circle by Kimberly King Parsons a quite interesting perspective on keeping an iron grip on one's sanity whatever it takes.

Others I truly enjoyed were:

Registry by Phillip Sterling an interesting take on wedded bliss.

What a Beautiful Dream by Randall Brown – a somewhat bizarre tale of a lost daughter and a doll made to replace her.

Sea Air by Matt Sailor a tale of the future, rising waters, and fear that comes in at under 250 words.

The Atheist of Dekalb Street by Christopher DeWan – An interesting take of religion and society.

Writer by Scott Garson – something like a meta story but....

The Things We Lose by Frankie McMillan the ultimate story of loss, keys, marbles, and more.

The Truth about Distance by Gen Del Raye a story of horseshoes, hand-grenades, touching and the distance between us.

Bildungsroman by Emily Corwin a fairytale story of what can happen.

Metalhead's Pledge by W. Todd Kaneko a coming of age realization.

Waste Deep at Hapuna by Jesse Goolsby a story of rebellion, parenting, life.

The Farmers Market by Hannah Harlow what it is to be a parent. I remember this one vividly from my first reading in SLQ so was very glad to see it here as well.

So there you are my twenty-two selections not quite half ... of the fifty-five wonderful stories in this volume. I'm hoping for many more years of wonderful stories like these!

Buy it! Read it! I bet you'll Love it as much as me!

Tara says

As a contributor to this year's BSF, I am thrilled to be among so many lovely stories in this book. I particularly enjoyed "Election Cycle" by Alex Simand, "Summer" by Keith Woodruff, and "Killerman" by Michael Hammerle. But honestly, just pick it up and open to any page and you will be delighted.

Joseph says

"There's something about [an extremely short poem] that calls for attention. Surrounded by white space, it stands out, glowing like an island inviting us to land. It asks for only a moment of our time, and offers the hope of instant reward."

X. J. Kennedy

The Best Small Fictions 2017 is guest edited by Amy Hempel. Hempel is a former student of Gordon Lish, in whose workshop she wrote several of her first stories. She has produced three other collections: *At the Gates of the Animal Kingdom* (1990), which includes the story "The Harvest"; *Tumble Home* (1997); and *The Dog of the Marriage* (2005). *The Collected Stories of Amy Hempel* (2006) gathers all the stories from the four earlier books. Tara Masih, the series editor, has won multiple book awards as editor of *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Fiction*, and *The Chalk Circle: Intercultural Prizewinning Essays*. She is the author of *Where the Dog Star Never Glows: Stories* and has published fiction, poetry, and essays in numerous anthologies and literary magazines. Masih also provided the quote at the top of the page in her introduction.

This is the third year that I have been asked to review *Best Small Fictions*. The opportunity to review this year's edition is courtesy of Braddock Avenue Books. Although I have usually reviewed poetry, I found there is a good deal of commonality with small fiction. Early Eastern poetry strived for brevity, but delivered an image far greater than the characters used. Yosa Buson (1716-1784), for example, wrote a complete poem that translates into eleven English words:

*Coolness--
the sound of the bell
as it leaves the bell*

Small fictions strive to complete the same result. They create complete experiences with a minimal amount of words.

This year's edition features fifty-three writers with two returning contributors Kathy Fish and Robert Scotellaro. Last year's guest editor, Stuart Dybek, and roving editor, Tara Laskowski, each contribute to this year's fictions. Also featured is an interview with Joy Williams, who contributes two works and an interview with the managing editor of *SmokeLong Quarterly*, Christopher Allen. This year also features a wide variety of contributing publications from *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, *The Baltimore Review*, *Steel Toe*

Review, and many others. Some I also know well from my other readings such as *Unknown Press*, *University of Iowa Press*, and *Tahoma Literary Review*.

The writings are sorted well through the collection so the reader does not feel trapped in a genre. After each fiction, there is a mini biography of each writer that includes published works, education, and awards. The biographies tend to be as diverse as the writing. Christopher DeWan writes about the discovery of faith and belief. Allegra Hyde places a brother and sister into a surreal adventure. Anne Valente combines science and an arsonist's thinking. Some fictions even contain some interesting facts and advice. Jen Knox includes:

You said talking to plants gives them life, not because they hear you but because they feed on your breath. It doesn't matter why a thing works, so long as it does.

Some writings make me feel old. Ras Mashramani writes of a video game that I had to look up. Others write of a youth that was far different than my own, which was set firmly in the last century. Nick Admussen does deliver some relief with a rotary phone and a healthy dose of discovery. Missing in this anthology is the "Tweet" sized fictions. It seems that the writing has gotten longer in this edition. Fictions like Mona Leigh Rose's take up three full pages, but are very well worth reading and have no wasted words. Matthew Baker also contributes a longer fiction that will bring a smile to the face of a political scientist.

The stories presented, or the most memorable ones, seem to have a touch of the bizarre associated with them. Alex Simand's "Election Cycle" brings the vivid imagery of a nightmarish circus scenario that many people have experienced. There is a thread of shared experience, either real, dreamed, or imagined, that make small fictions enjoyable and triggers part of the mind that can expand the handful of words into an experience. Most people have or had an uncomfortable feeling about clowns, be it last year's clown sightings around the country, a childhood fear of creepy circus clowns, or Stephen King's Pennywise. It just takes a few words to bring it back into our active memory and mentally expand on it.

The art of fiction is the relationship between the reader and the text. When the text is short more needs to be pulled from shared experiences or ideas. Opening that shared experience is the art. Not everything is a circus, clowns, or dark, but those were the strongest triggers for me. Other stories surprise with an unexpected twist. But all the fictions have one thing in common. They are complete and greater than the sum of their words.

Gene Brode, Jr. says

This. Collection. Wow.

I reviewed BSF 2016 and came away impressed by about half of the stories. I got a review copy of this book from Tara Masih this summer. After finishing this collection tonight I came away loving so many of them. Those I didn't love I still really liked or appreciated. BSF 2017 has a great range to it, full of so many styles and voices and effects.

These stories evoke laughter, pain, and a variety of emotions. Among my favorites were Joy Williams' Dearest, and her Polyurethane, Larry Brown's Triangle (one of my top 5 favorites), Alex Simand's Election Cycle, Len Kuntz's Summer Scalping: Scarecrows (a top 5), Ian Seed's Filer à l'anglaise, William Woolfitt's What the Beech Tree Knows, Matt Sailor's Sea Air, Christopher DeWan's The Atheist of Dekalb Street (which touches on the theme of judging others with different world views), Frankie McMillan's The things we lose, Michael Hammerle's Killerman, Cameron Quincy Todd's We Are All Relatively Safe Here, Mona

Leigh Rose's The Crossing, Emily Corwin's Bildungsroman, Matthew Baker's The President's Doubles, Alvin Park's tree rot, Oscar Mancinas' Tourista, Lydia Armstrong's The November We Are Fifteen, Michael C. Smith's Bass Weather (one of my top 5 favorites), Sherrie Flick's Boiled Clear, Brian Doyle's My Devils.

See, that's half the book maybe. Now I've got some new authors to check out and get lost reading their work. Thanks to everyone involved in bringing this collection together.

Sue says

This is an excellent collection of small fictions, short fictions. I have come to appreciate this form so much since I was first introduced to it by Tara Lynn Masih a few years ago. To have the skill to tell a story, convey emotions so fully in such a short space and to have it be complete, complex, a full experience, is amazing.

There are so many stories I enjoyed or was moved by. One of the most powerful was "Don't Walk" by Joy Katz. Initially I was confused and then I was there with the writer, the action and Wow! Harriet West's "Picking Sunflowers for Van Gogh" offered me another way to think of that man's world. In Eugenie Montague's "Breakfast" there is a tired young mother desperate to save face. "The Atheist of Dekalb Street" by Christopher DeWan is one of several works that bring together old and young in unexpected ways. Emily Corwin's "Bildungsroman" is a nervous twist of fairy tale. "Bass Weather" by Michael C. Smith has my favorite line from the book (and one I wish I had thought up): "We had entered the valley of monosyllabic utterances..." (p 144). Last, but not least, I was happy to read a work by Brian Doyle, "My Devils", a story of family, communication and love unspoken. I join so many others in missing him.

This really is a very good collection that I recommend to anyone who enjoys this form and also to those who would like an introduction.

A copy of this book was provided by the publisher, Braddock Avenue Books in return for an honest review.

Larry Brown says

So much story in so few words!

jana says

It is amazing to me how big a story can come from such very small fictions . A perfect book to bring to work to read during my 15 minute break . I especially liked , What the Beach Tree Knows by William Woolfitt , The Farmers Market by Hannah Harlow and My Devils by Brian Doyle .
This was a goodreads giveaway , thank you Goodreads :)

Short Story Girl says

Again, another year of great small fictions collected.

As I read, I started a list of all the great stories and the separate reasons they're great. I kept reading and the list kept growing and, by the time I finished the book, my list with its reasons seemed longer than the book.

Read the book. It's that good.

J. Bradley says

The TL:DR version: skip this year's edition. Read Wigleaf's Top 50 Very Short Fictions instead for exciting flash fiction.

This year's edition of Best Small Fictions is incredibly disappointing. It doesn't have the same crackling energy as last year's addition and I wonder if that's because it's the same flash fiction gatekeepers imposing what they feel is truly the best flash fiction, which seemed to be shorter versions of Raymond Carver stories more so than anything else. I would challenge the series editor to pick someone who is not entrenched in the modern flash fiction canon to manage the 2019 series, someone with a fresh perspective, someone who doesn't give a damn about the literary canon that seems to be more toxic to writing than anything else. A much better Best of collection is Wigleaf's 2017 Top 50 Very Short Fictions, which you can find over here: <http://wigleaf.com/2017top501.htm>

Standouts from this year's collection

Kathy Fish - "Strong Tongue"

W. Todd Kaneko - "Metalhead's Pledge"

Jesse Goolsby - "Waist Deep at Hapuna"

Cole Meyer - "Nightstands"

Sheldon Compton says

My general thoughts about the Best Small Fictions series are probably no secret. I've called both BSF 2015 and BSF 2016 the most important books published in their respective years.

This year is no different.

The most important book published this year is now and will prove to be Best Small Fictions 2017.

Now that's we've established that once again, I will say this year has been a particularly good year for flash fiction. The New Yorker has decided to publish flash stories throughout the summer (though some of those stories beg the question as to whether The New Yorker and those of us writing flash fiction actually agree on what constitutes the form). This year, BSF series editor Tara L. Masih worked with a writer who is arguably one of the best ever at this beautiful and supremely difficult form, the astonishing Amy Hempel. Hempel herself has said this of the series: "[T]his striking new series...has quickly become essential reading."

Yes, it has, Amy.

This year the selections are as strong as ever. The usual cast is present with veteran flash fiction authors such as Scott Garson, Jen Knox, Randall Brown, and Sherrie Flick, among others, while also peppering in some iconic short-short form writers like Joy Williams, Stuart Dybek, and Robert Scopellaro. But don't let these big names and longtime flash writers lead you too far afield from the others included in BSF this year. The talent is spread around.

Marci Calabretta Cancio-Bello's story "The Sea Urchin" was the first story to stop me in my tracks this year. First published at Paper Darts, Cancio-Bello takes what could be a basic memory from childhood and creates a picture perfect example of flash fiction, employing nearly all the usual techniques in the most delightful ways, beginning with that always important first line: "Grandmother kept a diver's knife strapped to her thigh."

She continues the story and gives the reader a marriage of the beautiful and practical, along with strange tradition and other-worldliness.

"On my birthday, she brought me a ball of spines in a bucket, lifted its bit of ocean into my cupped hands. The creature's round mouth explored the cracks of my palm, tasting the salt on my skin, recoiling. An offering like the pincushions I often brought my mother, every needle threaded with a different color. Grandmother boiled garlic, soybeans, salt into broth, ladled the seaweed soup into a white bowl. She turned the urchin and broke it open, scooped out the ocher roe with a spoon, dropped it in among the kelp."

Another story as deserving for inclusion in this year's edition is the flash piece "Silent Hill" by Ras Mashramani, originally published in Pank. Mashramani takes a Playstation game from the late 1990s and creates a flashback world to when the character lost herself in the game while escaping a world in which her father was dying.

"There was a first generation Playstation video game about a young father who lost his child in a town where it snowed ash. Together you stumbled through foggy whiteness in the creature infested streets looking for her. Some early mornings you passed out in front of the living room TV screen watching hidden monsters behind your eyelids, ash in your hair, a fire burning forever underground. For so long it had been you and your father just like in the game running from stuccoed apartment to stuccoed apartment."

We are firmly placed in this world of father and daughter, both in the context of the video game and also the reality of the story. And when we find later on that the character finds herself allowing a boy much older than her named Marquise to live out a young lapgirl fantasy while she loses herself in the game, it's both a revealing and a supremely sad moment. But more than that it's a brilliant technique and wholly original, even for a form that is innately original in nearly any and all concepts of fiction. When a story stands out in such a way, it's no surprise to find it between the covers of BSF.

"You did this on the point of Marquise's knee, engrossed in game play, addicted to the focused labored attention of a teenaged boy with sexual behavior issues and the fear of the screen, the fear of touch, wanting the fear, flattening all the affect and focusing it into this character, the Father, and his quest for his kid in this ghost town, and it was hard to disentangle Silent Hill from Paramount, California, and the neglected section 8 pool and automatic gates that made up the Sierra Gardens apartment complex."

This year's edition of BSF is a clear indication that the series is nowhere near a slowing down point, but is, instead, gaining momentum and prestige throughout the world of literature. When the history of flash fiction

as a vital form is told, Best Small Fictions and Masih will be in the opening chapter. Of this there should be no doubt.

Teresa says

Just yesterday I read an online article that listed the writer's favorite "very short" fiction pieces. She also mused on the idea that flash fiction was perhaps out of fashion. Through the years I've heard the same of any-length short stories, but that's never been my experience. This series is proof that--to paraphrase Mark Twain--**the report of the death of small fiction is an exaggeration.**

As with the earlier two volumes, though quality is consistent, the works are satisfactorily varied. Just to list several that stick out in my mind, though there's plenty more I loved: the sick absurdity of Alex Simand's "Election Cycle" and Matthew Baker's "The President's Doubles"; the matter-of-fact spirituality of Stuart Dybek's "Ascent"; the one-moment-can-change-a-person of W. Todd Kaneko's "Metalhead's Pledge"; the pointing-out-that-racism-is-everywhere of Oscar Mancinas' "Tourista"; the powerful poignancy of Cole Meyer's "Nightstands" and Hannah Harlow's "The Farmers' Market"; and the final piece, probably my favorite, by Brian Doyle, "My Devil", capturing in two pages how it is to be a young child in a big family, negotiating what is said (but likely means something different) and what is unsaid but becomes known—which I just realized describes all of the best small fictions.

I received an ARC of this book from the editor. This has not affected my review.

For further perusal:

My review of BSF 2015

My review of BSF 2016

CT D'Alessandro says

If you logon to Duotrope and conduct a search for publications which feature flash fiction, you will find over 1000 listings featuring every genre, audience and market imaginable. The list is daunting and inspiring at the same time. This speaks to the increasing popularity of short fiction in an age where attention spans have shortened and technology has rendered it possible for a reader to carry hundreds of books on e-readers that can be slipped inside of purses and bags (continue reading at <http://ctdalessandro.com/review-best-...>)

Tara says

A lot of work goes into this series. And we love the writing that we get to give a special nod to. This is my last year as series editor. It's been quite an experience setting this up, designing it twice, and bringing it out into the world for you readers. Thanks to all of you who helped make it a small press bestseller. As one of our reviewers says, each story is a "mini-masterwork." Hope you will check it out and judge for yourself.

Börkur Sigurbjörnsson says

A splendid and varied collection of flash-fiction. Despite having published my own collection in the genre, I did not know much about it before.
