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After publication of the first *Flash Fiction* anthology over a decade ago, “flash” became part of the creative writing lexicon for readers, writers, students, and teachers. In this follow-up collection, the editors once again tackle the question: “How short can a story be and truly be a story?” Determined to find the best flashes from America in the twenty-first century, James Thomas and Robert Shapard searched everywhere for stories that were not merely good but memorable. Moving, and certainly unforgettable, this collection includes stories from the best and most popular fiction writers of our time, including Ron Carlson, Robert Coover, Steve Almond, Amy Hempel, A. M. Homes, Grace Paley, and Paul Theroux. In addition, Rick Moody properly defines armoire, Lydia Davis delves into a world of cats, and Dave Eggers explores narrow escapes. Over and over, these stories prove that often less is more.

Flash Fiction Forward: 80 Very Short Stories Details

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Whitney Atkinson says

This was such a fun read! I wasn't aware that flash fiction/short-short fiction was a thing, so when my creative writing teacher put this in our hands and we began discussing it for class, I fell in love! All of the stories are 4 pages or less, which I thought gave it a lot of potential to be very fascinating. It made the book go by quickly, but each story (or, most of them) still packed its own distinct punch. It's hard to rate this as a whole because I would give some stories a million stars but others maybe only 3, so I think 4 is an overall representation meaning that I enjoyed probably about 75% of these stories.

My favorite out of this collection are:

- Stories by John Edgar Wideman (read here: [http://www.conjunctions.com/archives/...](http://www.conjunctions.com/archives/))
- Baker's Helper by Cynthia Anderson ***AMAZING (read here: <http://cbanderson.net/bakers-helper/>)
- Sleeping by Katharine Weber (read here: <http://www.vestalreview.net/sleeping.htm>)
- Currents by Hannah Bottomy (read here: <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by...>)
- The Great Open Mouth Anti-Sadness by Ron Carlson (read here: [http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by...](#))
- Things You Should Know by A.M. Homes
- Rose by John Biguenet
- The Voices in my Head by Jack Handey (read here: <http://thejazzy.tripod.com/voices.html>)
- Bullhead by Leigh Allison Wilson
- The Wallet by Andrew McCuaig (read here: <http://brookwood.edu/sites/brookwood...>)
- How To End Up by Jennifer A. Howard
- The Doctor by Ann Hood
- Crazy Glue by Etgar Keret (read here: <http://www.pulp.net/fiction/stories/0...>)
- The Paperboy by Sherrie Flick
- Test by G.A. Ingersoll (read here: <https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&am...>)
- Diagnostic Drift by Michael Martone (read here: http://www.webdelsol.com/Other_Voices...)

This is definitely a great place to start with flash fiction if you've never heard of it and want to try some! I thought it was a lot of fun and this had a balance of humorous and meaningful pieces.

Samuel Snoek-Brown says

I have mixed feelings about the short-short (or flash fiction, or micro-fiction, or whatever it is we want to call it these days). On the one hand, it's a powerful form, as close to the compression and deceptive complexity of poetry as fiction can get (my friend Beth Ann Fennelly, who is one of my favorite poets, insists there is no difference between the short-short and the prose poem, and I can't find any good reason to disagree with her). But because the short-short is so, well, short, writers deceive themselves into thinking it's an easy genre, and to be honest, most of what I read turns out to be silly at best: they're often sketches in the guise of a story, or scenes that belong in a longer story, or poems having an identity crisis. Sometimes they're not anything at all--a writing exercise gone bad, or just foolishness made out of words. And, to be fair, some of the stories in this book are like that, inglorious examples of all of the above. (Why, for instance, did the editors insist on including humor bits from the New Yorker's "Shouts and Murmurs" section? I'm as big a fan of Jack Handey as any New Yorker reader can be, but really, is this genuine fiction?)

But some of these stories are surprisingly effective, even when they start out reading like disasters. John Edgar Wideman's "Stories," for example, reads for all the world like a list of story ideas generated by a writing exercise, but if you stick with it, it provides a surprising and almost poetic turn at the end that keeps me rereading the piece again and again. Tom Hazuka's "I Didn't Do That" is a haunting, disturbing little piece, barely a page long but heavy on the mind. Kit Coyne Irwin's "Parrot Talk" and Eva Marie Ginsburg's "The Kettle" ought to read like silly puns or cute cocktail-party jokes, but they bring such human emotion and clever wordplay into these tiny stories that I read each of them out loud to my wife, just for the excuse to read them a second time.

I could go on, because while some of these stories are disappointing, the bulk of them are delightful, and a surprising number are true gems, tiny but radiant examples of what Italo Calvino calls the quality of "quickness" at work in only the best literature. It's not a perfect book, but it's certainly worth reading and, if you're a writer, worth keeping on your bookshelf.

ZahRaa Kyl says

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Jenny Napolitano says

A lot of good stuff, a lot of okay stuff. Raises a lot of questions in my mind about the gimmicky nature of flash and makes me nervous, but overall I still love the genre.

My favorite stories from this collection are: "Stories" by John Edgar Wideman, "Sleeping" by Katharine Weber, "Currents" by Hannah Bottomy, "Consuming the View" by Luigi Malerba, "Things You Should Know" by A.M. Homes, "Blind Fish" by Melanie Rae Thon, "Why You Shouldn't Have Gone in the First Place" by Samantha Schoech, "All Girl Band" by Utahna Faith, "Words," by John A. McCaffrey, "21" by Jim Crace, "To Reduce Your Likelihood of Murder" by Ander Monson, "Oliver's Evolution" by John Updike, "Crazy Glue" by Edgar Keret, "Pledge Drive" by Patricia Marx, and "Test" by G.A. Ingersoll.

Yes, I had 15 favorites. But that's out of 80 stories.

Vincent Scarpa says

Some real gems in here, mixed in with some rather forgettable stories, too. Reading eighty takes on flash fiction is interesting in a lot of different ways, and sort of confirmed my suspicion that, when done right, flash achieves something longer form simply can't. But, a lot of the rest of the time, flash ends up being a gimmick more than anything else. [Like the several stories included here that are, for all intents and purposes, punchline stories.] Stories that I just loved:

"Baker's Helper"- Cynthia Anderson

"Rumors of Myself"- Steve Almond
"Sleeping"- Katharine Weber
"1951"- Richard Bausch
"Things You Should Know"- A.M. Homes
"Rose"- John Biguenet
"Level"- Keith Scribner
"Bullhead"- Leigh Allison Wilson
"Justice—A Beginning"- Grace Paley
"What Were the White Things?"- Amy Hempel
"Parrot Talk"- Kit Coyne Irwin
"I Didn't Do That"- Tom Hazuka
"Crazy Glue"- Etgar Keret

Jim says

As with any collection of short stories, whether by a single author or anthology, there will be selections that often range widely and will appeal to different people, but overall I thought this group enjoyable and entertaining, often clever and humorous, with an occasional spot of melancholy. They often made you think. I marveled. And the best part is if you got caught up in one that didn't really catch your interest, you just had to turn a page. Some of the authors are somewhat well known to me, but I was rewarded with a couple of names I plan to pursue. A worthwhile read that I recommend. in fact, I just passed it along to a friend.

Dana Jerman says

Anthologies are always hit and miss (or "almost hit"). Which makes this one especially great because the stories are short, they have to be supercharged to hit their mark (the intro says it all, and the first story is rad). Enjoyable!

Faezeh says

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Clare Carter says

3.5 stars

I had to read this for class and I thought it was really cool just because I've never read this many stories this short before. There were some that were REAL weird but here are my top 5 favorites in the 80 stories! (In no particular order)

1. Currents by Hannah Bottomy
2. The Wallet by Andrew McCuaig
3. To Reduce Your Likelihood of Murder by Ander Monson
4. Oliver's Evolution by John Updike
5. Test by G. A. Ingersoll

I really liked about 10 more or so (maybe a little less). It was a very quick read, luckily! If you're a busy person looking for just a tiny bit to read before bed, these type of stories are for you.

May says

I've been binge-reading a lot of flash fiction lately, which is a pretty easy and wonderful thing to do anytime and anywhere. Riding the MTR, waiting for mom to finish her errands at the bank, sitting on the toilet ... you name it.

As the title of the anthology suggests, the stories in Flash Fiction Forward are each over in a flash, and the authors only have so many pages that they can use to surprise or move us.

Sometimes, the stories end too soon and expectations are not met. Most times, however, the pieces in this collection show me the magic of short form.

Many of the writers use the brevity of their stories to experiment with style: "Currents" is told backwards, "To Reduce Your Likelihood of Murder" is a list of orders ("Do not go outside. Do not go outside, on dates, or to the store..."), "Test" is a four-part 'exam' that makes you rethink your life (with Extra Credit, "Fully explain the ways in which you are wrong").

A lot of the stories also use their endings to effectively reverse the impressions that we formed at the beginning, meaning that our initial assumptions still linger in our heads by the time a story is over (after all, each one is so short) and make us wonder about what on earth just happened. In "Accident," a car accident that could have gone terribly wrong turns into an opportunity for the protagonist to potentially make new friends and come to terms with his loneliness; in "The Handbag," a crime devolves into an unusual and low-key romance story. In "The Good Life," a woman who seemingly has it all going for her turns out to be stuck in a rather dark place.

Due to their brevity, the stories also have the space to capture single symbols very wholesomely and memorably. In "Parrot Talk," our protagonist - like the parrot she talks about - has also "adapted to a hostile environment" and flourishes in it. In "Toasters," the image of two slices of bread popping out simultaneously

(plus the heat/suspense/force that comes with it) echoes the double domestic fights happening in the story.

Short and daring, some stories also just simply throw you something bizarre and let you absorb it for a spell. "My Date with Neanderthal Woman" transfixes you from start to finish in all its brilliant strangeness and unconventionality, the ending of "Crazy Glue" feels like a dream, and "The Orange" is about a fruit that ruled the world (until it was eaten).

The last piece in the collection is called "Death of the Short Story," but the imagination and gusto of the stories in this anthology prove that the short-short story is more alive than ever. Even the ending of that last piece, which reveals how everyone started making up "lies about the Story," demonstrates the immortality of fiction. As writers and readers, we are indeed always waiting for "a sliver of light" to "break loose from the oblong, suspended momentarily like a musical note on fire before streaking recklessly into the surrounding night," inspiring our writing and illuminating our lives with a literal flash of fiction.

Mary says

With 80 short-short stories by 80 different authors, you can argue that there is something here for everyone, provided that whoever happens to open the book is interested in flash fiction in the first place. Having recently tried to write a story in 1000 or fewer words, I have a new appreciation for what many of these writers were able to accomplish in two or three pages. As is often the case with collections, some stories didn't appeal to me, but more were good: entertaining and imaginative, tightly written fiction in neat little packages.

I especially liked these stories:

"Stories" by John Edgar Wideman
"Baker's Helper" by Cynthia Anderson
"Sleeping" by Katharine Weber
"Currents" by Hannah Bottomy
"Things You Should Know" by A.M. Homes
"Words" by John A. McCaffrey
"That Could Have Been You" by Jim Heynen
"How To End Up" by Jennifer A. Howard
"To Reduce Your Likelihood of Murder" by Ander Monson
"Pledge Drive" by Patricia Marx
"Drawer" by Rick Moody
"Toasters" by Pamela Painter
"The Death of the Short Story" by j. David Stevens

I highly recommend watching Chris Bauer read "Drawer" by Rick Moody.

Matt Sautman says

As a flash fiction collection, this anthology is a nice blend of humor and stark observation. Although I prefer both Hint Fiction and Varieties of Disturbance over this collection, there are certainly incredibly vivid

moments within this anthology that makes it worth reading. From a living sushi-table and a ceaseless tug-o-war between a thief and an old woman to a person whose job is to talk down suicidal jumpers, there are a wealth of perspectives to be found here, even if one doesn't necessarily want to read this book in its entirety.

Fayette says

This is the first time I've consciously read Flash Fiction and I liked it very much. These very short and pithy stories, generally 750 words or less, are perfect literary adaptations for an increasingly busy and short-attentioned world. I can easily see keeping a book of flash fiction in my car or purse to pull out and read during moments of lull. I am also interested in experimenting with the writing style myself.

Amy Nicole says

So this was my first time reading flash fiction -- short short stories no longer than 2 pages each -- and I really enjoyed it. I made a list of the stories in this anthology that really struck me. Then the list kept getting longer and longer and wound up being about half of the book, so I had to condense it to just the very very best. I've found a few new authors I need to stalk and read more of. I would definitely recommend reading this if you like modern stories, literary stories, weird stories, somewhat funny stories. I was pleased with the collection.

A list of my noted favorites:

Before the Bath by Ismail Kadare (translated from the Albanian by Peter Constantine)

Sleeping by Katharine Weber

1951 by Richard Bausch

The Voices in My Head by Jack Handey

Reviving Pater by John Goulet

My Date with Neanderthal Woman by David Galef

The Orange by Benjamin Rosenbaum

To Reduce Your Likelihood of Murder by Ander Monson

What Were the White Things? by Amy Hempel

Test by G.A. Ingersoll

00:02:36:58 by Bayard Godsave

Mr. Nikos Nikou by Ersi Sotiropoulos (translated from the Greek by Stratis Haviaras)

Toasters by Pamela Painter

Oh, and this line from the story *The Black City* by Leonardo Alishan:

"every day that she spends with you is spent in sorrow for the day and in despair for tomorrow; thus, I, her yesterday, grow happier and more radiant in her memory. How wrong you are, on the other side, to think the past cannot be changed."

C.J. J Richardson says

I found this quite a mixed bag and couldn't always see 'the point' but the one that has stuck in my mind more

than any other is 'WORDS' by John A. McCaffrey. One or two others made me think, particularly 'The Black City' by Leonardo Alishan and I laughed out loud reading 'My date with Neanderthal Woman' by David Galef.
