

2002

Best New American Voices (Charles Baxter, Ed.)

“Beheadings” by Kira Salak is great.

“The Mean” by Matthew Pitt is also quite fine.

DeMarinis, Rick - *The Art and Craft of the Short Story*

Also very helpful in its own way. Marked pages especially: Rewrite the same story six ways! (170). [Something, he says dryly, I have yet to do.]

Franzen, Jonathan - *How To Be Alone*

Some really right-on-the-target essays. Such a fine writer, one who crosses between fiction and nonfiction quite easily. Admire his work. So logical, detailed, sardonic, funny. Honest.

Franzen, Jonathan - *The Twenty-Seventh City*

Having read *Corrections* and essays first, I didn't enjoy this one as much. The end seemed hurried and jerky, as first novels often seem to be badly edited (like Hamilton's *Book of Ruth*), as if the editor has said you only have XX pages left, hurry up. But Franzen's intelligence, his love-hate relationship with St. Louis are quite well articulated in a way most people couldn't possibly do with regard to their home town.

Gilb, Dagoberto - *Woodcuts of Women*

Short stories. Highly recommended, touted, but because of the raging heterosexuality, I didn't enjoy it. [May be instructive for my writing. I can't afford to be too ragingly homosexual if I expect to be read widely.]

Keillor, Garrison - *Lake Wobegon*

Amusing but not much substance. [The point, perhaps?]

Monette, Paul - *Taking Care of Mrs. Carroll*

Early novel, 1978. Light, easy read. Felt like a kid again. Yet Monette's skills as a writer far outweigh the subject of this novel. Promise of better things to come, which he, of course, delivers.

Oates, Joyce Carol - *Blonde*

Oates is quite slick—like someone who has been writing a long time could wind up. Not too many surprises left in her approach, yet interesting. But we're not to believe that these scenes are “the truth”? Hm. JFK sees that Marilyn Monroe is killed by having someone inject her with a barbiturate using a six-inch needle. Absorbing.

Catches MM's voice. Oates differentiates between Norma Jean as a personality and MM as a character NJ played, and then third personalities she played in movies: Lorelei, etc. Was it worth the time to read? Yeah, I guess. Was it literary in nature? Nope.

Ondaatje, Michael - *Anil's Ghost*

Not as "good" as *English Patient* but very fine in its own right.

The PEN/O. Henry Prize Stories 2001

Loved some/Liked others. The list of publishers in the back is probably the best feature of this book.

Poirier, Mark Jude - *The Unsung Heroes of American Industry*

Had read two of these stories in journals. "Pageantry" and "A Note on the Type" are my favorites. Sexual and perverse and real—like life.

Rorem, Ned - *Lies*

The last journal? Probably not. Dreary in places, but look at what he's experiencing: death of both parents, his lover's parents, his lover, countless friends and colleagues. I always think of him as being well off because he has been such a successful composer, but because of his lover's illness, they almost lose their apartment. They scrape by like artists often do. I find that I still agree with many of his opinions. I'm not always acquainted with the musical or literary works he alludes to. It is sad how listless he becomes as an older artist. He doesn't really wish to work, nor does he do much by his own account. Yet he must. He has several large commissions that I believe he finishes. He and JH are so unhealthy. To work would be a sacrifice or an impossibility. [Mentions my friend SA, mezzo soprano of Lubbock. She and companion spend the night in Rorem's NY apt. while they're in Nantucket.] He's so critical of others' grammar in French and English, yet he is so unable, in places, to state something he wishes to say. Even I could have translated his French at times. Made me wonder about his use of syntax, the depth of his knowledge in French [which is probably considerable]. Pompous old man? Endearing artist?

Rubin, Theodore Isaac - *The Angry Book*

Quite revealing. Helped me to rediscover some things I had learned in therapy almost 30 years ago, namely that burying anger causes depression, self-loathing, etc. Yet he reiterates it in ways that are different. Anger = anxiety = depression or heart palpitations.

Saunders, George - *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline: Stories and a Novella*

I don't get most of the stories. Like them better than the ones in *Pastoralia*, but still

quite an emotional distance. [Help me out, L & J, help me out, here.]

The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction: Fifty North American Stories Since 1970 (Lex Williford and Michael Martone, eds.)

Excellent, mostly, though a few leave me cold. [See Table of Contents for annotations.]

White, Edmund - *Caracole*

Have trouble following fantasy. My mind has nothing to hang it all on.

White, Edmund - *The Married Man*

More like his stronger work. Great control of the language. Hope I'm not sorry I spent so much money on the upcoming workshop in Key West. [I wasn't. It was a great experience to be in workshop with EW and others.]

Wolfe, Donald H. - *The Last Days of Marilyn Monroe*

Seems to be well researched and objective. All but says **RFK** was responsible for **MM**'s death. Very compelling argument. And it is now obvious why. [Sad but it is probably fair to say that the **K** brothers got what was coming to them (**K**arma-wise), not just for **MM**'s death but for an entire panoply of arrogant misdeeds (and yet I loved them). Ultimately, there is no reason for any of them to have died.]