

*Agni Magazine*

All three stories excellent (one, a Rick Moody), A++ stories. Nature. Ecology. Political. But ever so subtle.

*Arts and Letters* (Georgia College and State University)

Four stories. One quite good. Radel Kadish's "Sunday"

Banks, Russell - *Success Stories*

"Sarah Cole: A Type of Love Story" is my favorite (recommended by PH). He uses two POVs. Alternates between first and third—third person to distance narrator from the awful way he treats Sarah, first person to express his sorrow, his shame. Excellent.

Bloom, Amy - *Love Invents Us*

Part I - First person from POV of a teen-age girl

Part II - Third person, to follow POV or inner thoughts of several characters plus letter

Part III - First person, back to Liz as an adult.

In some ways a dissatisfying structure. The most vital part of the novel is Part I, the most honest. Too bad Bloom couldn't find a way to keep it all in the first person, or to ascribe that same vitality to the other sections.

Carver, Raymond - *Cathedral*

My favorites: "A Small Good Thing," "Fever," (great but simple language), "The Bridle." Symbolism of the bridle is subtle yet weighty enough to come crashing around your head by the end of the story.

Cunningham, Michael - *Land's End: A Walk Through Provincetown*

As always, the hallmark of a Michael C. book is his flawless prose. The right word at the right place with the proper weight, the finest nuance. And more important, not as if it were a jewel of its own to be admired but as part of everything else he has to say. I would like to apply for one of the P-Town Fellowships he talks about, based entirely on what he had to say, the history, the geography, the quiet of beautiful winters. [I won't share what happened upon applying two or three years in succession.]

Doctorow, E.L. - *Sweet Land Stories*

Best two stories are “Baby Wilson” and “House on the Plains.” The last three are questionable from several standpoints.

Freed, Lynn - *Curse of the Inappropriate Man: Stories*

Excellent. I've never read anyone who tells such completely satisfying stories in such short spaces—“Ma: A Woman”—especially. The story reduces a deathbed and subsequent mourning to its barest features without losing power in the manner of more lengthy stories covering the same material.

*Gettysburg Review* - Summer 2005

Four stories. Only one grabbed me. Shows just how subjective the selection process is.

Goldberg, Natalie - *Thunder and Lightning*

A book about writing longer works of fiction.

- 1) What's really important to you?
- 2) What are the subjects that really pull at you?
- 3) What are you willing to be witness to in order to stay in there and carry on for a long time?
- 4) What are you most afraid to write about?
- 5) Whom do you write for?

Structure: go where the mind goes. A chapter is an act of discovery, not an act of manipulation.

Houston, Pam - *Sight Hound*

As usual, I love her writing. Courageous. Risk-taking. The guy who commits suicide says earlier of people who jumped from the World Trade Center: “What no one will ever say about those people is that they were cowards. What no one will ever say about those people is that they died of shame” (212). Wow. The character, of course, is talking about himself. Her book is great, but in some places there is more sentiment than I can handle, and perhaps that is her message to people like me. Do I need a Dante (Irish wolfhound) to teach me to love?

I never realized just how autobiographical Pam's work really is. I had heard her tell at least three of these vignettes in person. Some were more exciting in person (story about therapist). Interesting that she selected Tae to be a playwright.

Johnson, Denis - *The Resuscitation of a Hanged Man*

Read it over the last month of Dad's life—kept it in my briefcase to read while at the hospital or doctor's office. Even so, it held together amid all the interruptions.

Held me in its grasp. Johnson is one of those writers so in control of his material and yet so out-of-control (or giving up control) that you ache from his honesty.

Kidd, Sue Monk - *The Secret Life of Bees*

Excellent but felt it was a tad sentimental. Is that bad? To write a novel that *feels* sentimental? Perhaps not. It's just heartfelt.

Lardner, Kate - *Shut Up He Explained*

Poor writing and poor editing. What could have been enlightening and touching was scattered and uninteresting. Lardner keeps an emotional distance throughout that is not very pleasant.

Moore, Lorrie - *Who Will Run the Frog Hospital?*

Good, as usual. Funny. Deft. Back and forth between past and present. Seems like all one time, which is admirable. [Check out her collection, *Birds of America*.]

Nafisi, Azar - *Reading Lolita in Tehran*

(Read this while visiting our friend in Massachusetts. Left the copy for J as per BS's directive to pass it on. Bought a replacement copy later.)

How liberation is so tied in with place and people. I think of all the literature I taught at LHS, even in elementary school. I think of all the student reactions, student discussion, the essays. I think of my colleagues and their help and their discussions with me. How those shaped my thoughts and feeling toward the books. I can think of nothing I do now that is equal to that experience (except for Poetry Nite and Story Group Nite).

Nelson, Antonya - *Female Trouble: Stories*

Excellent collection. Born in 1961 in Wichita. Made stories of place interesting because I had been there. In "Incognito," she references Happiness Plaza, a shopping center I helped to build as a summer job in 1968 when I was twenty years old. RFK was shot June 2 that summer. My finger crumpled up from tying rebar. At summer's end when I woke, my fingers would be curved into gnarly scary hands like a monster's. I thought I might never play organ again (basis for my own story, "Po-seurs").

*Other Voices* - Fall/Winter 2004 Vol. 17, #41

Enjoyed nearly every story and Pam Houston's interview with Toni Morrison.

Pollan, Michael - *The Botany of Desire*

Wasn't crazy about it as K, but there are some highlights:

“Tulip-o-mania was a frenzy of financial speculation” (105).

“Apollo—clarity, order, linear, left brain (six petals, six stamens). The tulip is Apollonian; the rose is Dionysian.” (97).

Prager, Dennis - *Happiness is a Serious Problem*

Read this upon recommendation of my ophthalmologist.

Most revealing (yet I knew) parts were: “Equating Happiness with Success,” “Equating Happiness with Fun.” None of these books ever addresses the gay person. Prager has one chapter on The Opposite Sex. Another on Marriage. I guess we must write our own Happiness books or read his and extrapolate.

Roth, Philip - *The Plot Against America*

Like Sinclair Lewis’s *It Can’t Happen Here*, somewhat contrived, but it is designed to make the reader think. It could happen with just the right combination of events and machinations. That’s why Bush is so frightening. Anarchy seems possible.

Smiley, Jane - *The Age of Grief*

Love the title novella. Other stories . . . ah? Not as memorable.

Szpilman, Wladyslaw - *The Pianist*

Journal upon which the film is written. R. Polanski took the very best from the journal in directing his film. Journals are no less breathtaking, but the film puts them in a satisfying and dramatic narrative order.

Stegner, Wallace - *On Teaching Writing and Fiction*

[See annotations in margins.] Many good reminders for the experienced writer.

Thiel, Diane - *Writing Your Rhythm: Using Nature, Culture, Form and Myth*

This is a great text for teaching creative writing, both to people who’ve never studied it before and also to the experienced writer who wishes for some prompts, some sparks of ideas to start moving again. Thiel is a very unique thinker.

Wharton, Edith - *House of Mirth*

Read this book because we visited the house on the Hudson River (Miller/Livingston) where some of the novel is supposedly set (although it is a short segment at the large house). Screenwriter of the film seems to follow the novel (including dialogue) very closely except for the end, going instead for a more commercial ending. (In the book Lily does place the incriminating letters that would both

set her free via blackmail but would bring down Selden, but he does not “discover” them half-singed and near to her death bed.) The ending is a kind of weakness. Very “talky,” but then so is the entire novel, which is so nineteenth century in character (in spite of its date, 1905). I can see why male writers dubbed Wharton a “female” writer at the time, but she is really quite sound in every respect and ahead of her time with the freedom of women at the heart of her writing.

Weil, Andrew - *Healthy Aging*

Especially liked the anti-inflammatory diet. Heavily annotated. Gonna try it. [Never did.]

Woolf, Virginia - *The Voyage Out*

Read about ¾ of it. Feel bad when I lose interest in an important book by an important author. What does it say about me? [Don't answer that.]

Welty, Eudora - *The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays & Reviews*

Read most of the essays related to writing. Quite fine. [See annotations.]

Wright, Stephen - *Meditations in Green* (©1983)

A novel about Vietnam. Green is indeed the motif here. Green is everywhere, and not just the lush jungle vegetation. If it had been my copy I would have underlined the word “green” probably 100s of times throughout the book. Great alternation of first person POV with third person during the war. Wright goes Small. Large. The scene in which soldiers run to a shot-down helicopter to put U.S. soldiers in body bags and recover official business (which has already disappeared) is both graphic and ephemeral. He uses the word “deliquescence” (my first and only time to see it in print) in such an apt spot-on manner, like Fitzgerald always does in his novels. May be the best novel about Vietnam in existence.