



# CLOSE-UP:



---

Glimmer Train Close-ups are single-topic, e-doc publications specifically for writers, from the editors of *Glimmer Train Stories* and *Writers Ask*.

---

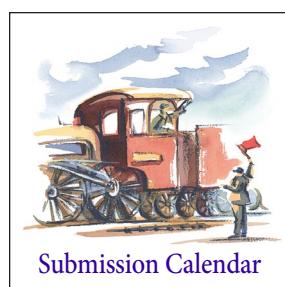
## ROXANA ROBINSON:

All the fiction I write arises from the same sort of impulse: it's a feeling of discomfort, a kind of unspecified anxiety, a need to uncover something that troubles and disturbs me. I write toward that feeling. I try to explain it to myself in order to disarm it, to rob it of its potency. I don't know how this explanation will happen. I don't know how the disarmament will take place, or what else will happen in the process.

What I do know is what form it will take: I always know whether a subject should be explored in a short form or the long form, that is, as a story or as a novel. For me, these two forms are very different, right from the start.

**When I write a short story, I start out with a particular moment that I find troubling, or compelling, or devastating.**

Sometimes it's a moment that I've been part of; sometimes it's something that I've watched happen; sometimes it's something I've heard about. That moment itself is always drawn from life; it's always a moment that I find deeply disturbing. If it's powerful enough, then I need to write about it.



[Submission Calendar](#)

My task then is to write a narrative that will make that moment become as powerful for you, the reader, as it was for me, the writer. I must describe a landscape, introduce characters, and create the action as it unfolds, but all of this is directed toward the creation of that last vivid moment—difficult and breathtaking—that I found so compelling.

Writing a short story is, I imagine, sort of like driving a team of horses—stylish, high-stepping Hackneys, say, with polished harnesses and an immaculate carriage. My task here is to control the energies and the spectacle, to restrain the faster horses and urge the slower ones, so that all of them pull in concert, so the story will reach the finish line with all the parts of it—the plunging narrative drive, the hidden emotional baggage, the formal vehicle that contains it—moving in unison, and so that everything will arrive together.

A novel, on the other hand, is entirely different, and the process is entirely different. I start a novel when I’m interested—and troubled—by the idea of a conflict that connects and divides a group of people. That conflict and those people are the driving force of the book. I get to know the characters very well. I often write brief biographies of them. **I come to know their backgrounds, what sort of lives they came from, who their parents were, where they went to school, and so I come to know how they will react to things. I come to feel sympathy for them, and compassion. Then I begin the novel.**

In this, the long form, the characters and the conflict create the story. When I start to write a novel, I have no idea of what will happen at the end of it. I have no outline, no story line, no synopsis. It’s the characters who will create the narrative; it’s they who will create the final conclusion, the ending. My job is to discover the characters, learn their settings, and then to harness them all to the conflict. It’s their combined energy that will carry me forward, and this process seems to me a bit like driving a dog team—wild, exciting, and a bit risky.

Once I’ve gotten to know all these dogs, and have gotten them hitched together onto the sled, there’s very little question of control. All I can do is stand behind them on the runners, holding tight to the handlebars, squinting into the distance to see where we’re headed. I can shout out directional orders, I can keep us away from bad ice, or keep us heading north, but you can’t tell a dog team to stop—did you know that? There is no “halt” command for huskies.

So as they start to move across the snow I jump onto the sled and we set off, hurtling through an unknown landscape, toward a destination I've never seen. ■

**MAILE MELOY, interviewed by Joshua Bodwell:**

*You have published two novels between your two story collections. Do you think your work as a novelist has affected your short-story writing?*

Having written two novels might be the reason the stories are a little longer now. But I think that writing short stories has affected the novels more: both novels have slightly story-like chapters, and I think writing short stories trains you to a kind of efficiency, because everything needs to count. ■

**NAM LE, interviewed by  
Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalaïs:**

*Who were some of the short-story writers, and what were some of the stories, that excited you in graduate school?*

Before I arrived at Iowa, I thought the gamut of American short fiction essentially ran from Hemingway to Fitzgerald. I'm ashamed to say that I hadn't even read writers like John Cheever! In America, there's an infrastructure around the short story—one based around the hundreds of MFA programs and all the teachers and journals that come out of them—and so a lot of people read and write and talk about short stories. Coming from Australia, where the short story is much less prevalent, this was a great surprise. When I first arrived in Iowa, there were so many names—some of which I'd heard but never read, many of which I'd never heard at all—that I had to separate in my own head how much of my ignorance was general and how much of it was because I wasn't American. At first, I thought it was partly a form of American jingoism, championing all of the American story writers, whereas, of course, there were great Australian story writers as well. But America seems to be where short stories are thriving the most, where most people are writing them, and where there are the most outlets to publish and read them.



Photo: Dave Tacon/Polaris

*What has surprised you most about the response to The Boat?*

The shocking thing about any collection of short stories is getting it published in the first place! Once that happens, the expectations are so low that everything that happens afterward is just gravy. I guess I was most surprised by the fact that there was a response at all. That in America, for example, where the book first came out, short stories could be taken so seriously. I remember when Deborah Eisenberg's *Twilight of the Superheroes* came out. People talked about her writing without any sort of allowance, without implying, This is a great short-story collection; now we can't wait to see what she does in a "real" piece of literature. ■

### **JOSH WEIL:**

Room to breathe is the whole reason I turned to novellas. The first one I ever wrote, "Ridge Weather," I intended to write as a short story. But everything about it depends on a sense of lonely isolation as the character moves through a world that makes him feel small: I needed the space to make that world big, and I needed the time to bury the character in it. Could I have told the plot in five thousand words instead of five times that? Probably. Would it have had the power that I hope the story has? If so, I couldn't see how.

Before I wrote *The New Valley*, I wrote a novel. It didn't work. So I gave myself a challenge: write the whole book in a short story, instead. And you know what? The novel turned out to be a whole lot of room with a little breath rattling around inside. Still, when I had finished the story, it didn't resonate quite the way I knew it could. So I added a final section. I stretched the end out a little bit. And it was like I could hear the story expand its lungs at last, breathe in long and deep and full. ■

### **FREDERICK REIKEN, interviewed by Eric Wasserman:**

*I saw Salman Rushdie speak a few years back, and he said he was reading a lot of Czeslaw Milosz's poetry during the process of writing his novel Shalimar the Clown. I know that you too admire Milosz and have a particular attachment to his poem "Faith." What can fiction writers gain from reading poetry—how can it serve their own work?*

I could read that Milosz poem a thousand times and never stop feeling the ineffable thing that it taps into. Some poems are like prayers and some

poems are like transporting devices, and while fiction has the capacity to be these things as well, it's often much more potent within the discourse of poetry. Rilke, for instance, manages in the twelve lines of his poem "Evening" (translated by Stephen Mitchell) to sum up half of what I'm trying to get at with my new book. John Berger wrote that the labor of poetry is that it reassembles what has been scattered. He also says that poetry can restore no loss but that it defies the space of separation. **I am always shooting for that in my fiction, and while fiction has other aims, such as characters that the reader can inhabit within a logically flowing story line, I think that my understanding of poetry is ultimately what enables me to locate the deep matter of any story I may write.** ■

**BRET ANTHONY JOHNSTON, interviewed by Margo Williams:**

*How do you perceive the future of the short story? What have you noticed as trends in the art form?*

I think rumors of the form's death will always be greatly exaggerated. As for trends, I don't really know. For a while, the story was marooned in irony and cleverness, but I think we've worked that out of our system for the time being. Certainly we're seeing more stories now that deal with Iraq—Ben Percy's "Refresh, Refresh" is a fantastic example and fantastic story—but I wouldn't necessarily call that a trend so much as a much-needed and warranted response to what's happening in the world. Finally, though, the trends are less interesting than a well-made story that leaves you gasping at the end.

Stories require so much of the reader, so much more than longer fiction, so they're always at a commercial disadvantage. **Unlike novels, which readers engage more passively, short stories demand deep and sustained concentration from the reader, and most people would rather not exert themselves in that way.** Another undeniable facet of this is the barrage of information that we're enduring from electronic media and how that all but rewires and short-circuits our attention spans and narrative expectations. ■

**ANTONYA NELSON, interviewed by Andrew Scott:**

*I've always thought short stories should be more popular—they're short. We live in this busy culture, people are at the gym, running around. Shouldn't short stories be more popular?*

It reminds me of the introduction I wrote for the *Ploughshares* issue I edited a couple years ago. That was very much the premise I began with: Given the limited attention span of our culture, why aren't stories more popular? They're just difficult to read in the way contemporary art is difficult for people to apprehend. The story has evolved over time. It's a relatively new form, artistically speaking. I don't think people are very comfortable with poetry, either, for its lack of closure. Why is this the end line? Why is this the beginning line? What happens if I don't get it? I think the story is a more modern art form, an edgier art form.

And when a story conforms to that old-fashioned, O. Henry format—here's the irony, and everything tidily sewn up with a lopped-off head of hair and an old watch—everybody feels more comfortable. That's the story. I recognize that. It's tidy in the way of a joke. Contemporary writers aren't going to be comfortable with that because it becomes predictable and tiresome. It's a form, in a lot of ways, for artists. It's a writer's form, not necessarily a reader's form. My students come to my workshops without having read literary stories, and there aren't particularly big anthologies of genre stories. There are big libraries full of genre novels, but it's very hard to find genre stories. They're not that popular. ■

**EHUD HAVAZELET, interviewed by Eric Wasserman:**

*You hold an MFA degree from the prestigious University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. Many writing programs tend to emphasize the short story. Faulkner said that the short story was the closest thing to poetry.*

Faulkner said he wanted to be a poet but it was too hard. So he wrote stories and they were almost as hard. Then he wrote novels.

*But the short story is definitely emphasized over the novel at the majority of writing programs. You've written two very impressive collections. Are you attempting to make the transition to a longer work right now?*

I am, as a matter of fact. I'm going to try, anyway. I've been taking notes for a longer piece for a couple of years. I'm just starting to clear out the space in my head to start working on it. I hope I will. [*Bearing the Body* has since been released.] About the emphasis, there's no simple right answer. I think for many people it makes sense to start off with stories. They're manageable; you write one, you learn what you need to about point of view or about scene construction, about irony. And then you move on to something else.

Whereas if you're going to write a three-hundred-page book that's going to take you a year to draft, only then can you really start addressing what you've learned. I think it makes sense in the same way you look at a sculpture. Michelangelo wouldn't immediately start on David. He'd make a bust, work on something smaller. When you look at an artist's sketchbook, they're always doing hands and fingers and noses. They don't immediately start with everything at once. As you're learning, you want to take something that you can analyze. You can say, "I've done this; what do I have? What can I learn from it? How can I bring it to the next level?" For me, that's the valid reason for emphasizing stories. Some people are born novelists. And when students of mine are determined to write novels, if I think they're learning from it that's fine. The landscape, the canvas—it's just bigger for some people. It's harder to learn, it's harder to workshop, it's harder to discuss among a group of people. It's a much longer process. Still, if that's the way they want to do it, it's not my role or desire to tell them not to.

*Then the short story is simply more conducive in the classroom environment?*

Absolutely. It's much easier to talk about. You can read the beginning, the middle, and the end. If you bring in chapter six from your novel, we don't know what happened in the first five chapters, we don't know what happens in chapter twenty-five, and it's a lot harder for you, as a writer, to hear what you need to hear, because you're aware of things that you're trying elsewhere. If we tell you that the point of view seems to wobble over here, you might say to yourself, "Well, I need that for what happens later." What may be most valuable for you and your process is not necessarily what we can even approach talking about. Countering that, often what has been implied by the story approach is that the short story is an apprentice form, that the novel is what grown-up writers do and that short stories are what you learn on the way. People like Carver have reversed that. **My favorite writers, most of them, are story writers. It's not an apprentice form, it's a distinct form that is the equal of novels. I try to emphasize that. The short-story form may be easier to study, but it is distinct.** Once you're making the choice of what you want to write, that should be an option.

Some of our greatest story writers—I don't have the right to say this, but I feel if Malamud, Flannery O'Connor, Cheever, certainly Carver, who spent years on a novel he never finished—if they had been freed, perhaps, of the societal expectation that they grow up and write these other things, and also from the monetary pressure—you can make more money from a novel—we would have had how many more Flannery O'Connor stories,

how many more Raymond Carver stories? To me, Malamud is a wonderful novelist, but his genius is in the stories. Nobody will ever write stories like he did. That's his crowning glory. ■

**CHARLES BAXTER,**

*interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

*Why do you think many American readers prefer the novel?*

As a friend of mine once said, “When I buy a book, I want a long-term relationship. I don’t want a one-night stand.” But I would rather read a book of stories than a novel. I enjoy the concentration that stories require. I like to pick up characters and then drop them after twenty or twenty-five pages.

Frank O’Connor says that the genius of American writing is the short story. We have a good tradition in this country of short stories—Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Katherine Anne Porter, Richard Wright, Flannery O’Connor, and J.F. Powers—a lot of absolutely wonderful stories that can stand up against anybody’s. **Americans are particularly good at short stories because the form tends to emphasize impulsive behavior. American culture has been impulsive, and the short story, at its best, often shows that.** ■

**LEE SMITH,** *interviewed by Susan McInnis:*

*Do you have a preference for form—the short story or novel—or does it depend on the story you’re trying to tell?*

I used to love short stories best by far. But now that I’m so old, I find myself liking the novel more. I think the older you get, the more you see things happening through time. You become more interested in the long haul. In *Me and My Baby View the Eclipse* there are two stories that are almost novels. I couldn’t make them stories.

My students so often write absolutely brilliant short stories, and I’m coming to think that the short story is the province of the young person. It’s like a lyric poem. There’s such great intensity of feeling and vision, like a condensation of novelistic thought and prose.

*You wouldn’t say the short story, like a poem, is challenging precisely because it is so condensed? Because you’ve got to put so much into such a small space?*

That's true. And one ought to think that the more you've done something, the easier it would be. But for me the longer I write, the more possibilities I see. I think of one thing and then I think, "Well, on the other hand..." People's lives just seem infinitely more complex to me now than they did when I was younger. It takes a novel to get it all in. ■

**TOBIAS WOLFF, interviewed by Travis Holland:**

*Why do you think you've stuck primarily with the short story? I mean, you've written novels, memoirs, novellas. I remember reading your novella *The Barracks Thief*—that was your first novel published?*

No, I actually had a novel published back in '75, that I hate so much that I don't even list it. But then I had a collection of short stories, *In the Garden of the North American Martyrs*, published in 1981. And *The Barracks Thief* was in '84.

*And then, as novels go, *Old School* came out five and a half years ago. Was that something you'd been working on for a while?*

I had been working on it for a long time. Let's see—it came out in the fall of 2003, and I'd been working on it since the fall of '97. So it was a long time coming. And, well, I wrote some short stories in that period, too.

*Why do you think you've stuck with the short story? [Laughs.] It's kind of a dumb question, I know.*

No, it's not. I mean, it's a question I would ask. But I don't know the answer to it. I'm working on a novel now, but I don't imagine it as a vast arc of narrative. I'm thinking of it as having a limited time frame and a limited cast and limited circumstances, with a single point of view. And so, as I imagine a novel, in structure and concept it probably resembles—structurally, the containment of time, *dramatis personae*—a story. Take Robert Stone, for example, a novelist whose work I love, take his novel *A Flag For Sunrise* or Denis Johnson's *Tree of Smoke*: these are vast undertakings, and they have many characters, many points of view. They cover a great reach of time. But my imagination doesn't work in that way. It's more tightly focused. And for that reason it leaves out a lot that I love to read in others.

But we each after a while have to become reconciled to what it is that our talents and appetites lead us to. **For some reason I've always been attracted to the incisiveness, velocity, exactitude, precision of a short**

**story**, rather than the long journey of those kinds of novels that we've inherited from the 18th and 19th century, with all that great robustness and confidence.

Some of my favorite novels are really short. I don't think they're better because they're short, but I do have a particular fondness for novels like *All Quiet on the Western Front*, or William Maxwell's *So Long, See You Tomorrow*. There's Marguerite Duras's wonderful short novel *The Lover*. Or Jeannette Haien's book *The All of It*. And Phillip Roth's *The Ghost Writer*—a masterpiece. An absolute masterpiece, I think. I don't think it's a better novel than *American Pastoral*—in fact, *American Pastoral* is probably one of the three or four best novels I've read in the last ten years. But *The Ghost Writer* is right up there for me. And of course Roth was an extraordinary writer of short stories—*Goodbye, Columbus...*

*That's an exquisite collection.*

It is. It's a great collection. Obviously his imagination has led him in different directions over the years. I bet he'd be hard pressed to say why. I think forms have a way of choosing us, and that, as we start writing, something about our natural appetites—maybe it has something to do with the size of the subject—will lead us toward one particular form or another.

*And that's why I felt hesitant to even ask why you write short stories. Because you write short stories, ultimately, simply because you write short stories.*

Yes, but I think it's fair to try to give some account of why a writer works more in one form than another. And some interesting answer should be possible. In the end—well, there's a line in one of Gerald Manley Hopkins's poems that says, "What I do is me: for that I came." And there's something mysterious about that, isn't there?

*I think of writers like Chekhov or Babel, or Munro, who stick primarily with the short story...*

Carver.

*Absolutely. And I think they just write what they write, as you said, because the form chose them.*

In some odd way it does. God knows we're not doing it for money. ■

**MYLA GOLDBERG**, *interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

*What are you working on now?*

I'm working on not writing a novel. I want to write short stories. I might try my hand at a movie, a play, a children's book. I want to play around with other forms, and then get back to a novel when I'm good and ready. I'm a novelist first and foremost, but that doesn't exclude the idea of working in other forms as well. ■

**ANTONYA NELSON,**

*interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

*You have written several stories about one group of people, the Link family, including "Bare Knees," "The Control Group," and the novella "Family Terrorists." Is there an advantage to using the same characters for stories rather than writing a novel about them?*

Well, it gives me the opportunity to bail out pretty quickly. If I write one or two stories, they can claim their place, but it doesn't commit me to the kind of insecurity that a novel does for two, three, or four years. I think story cycles in general are enticing. They also may be more difficult than most people who start out writing them would imagine. You don't want to repeat yourself, and you don't want to have the movement of each new story replicate too closely the movement of the last story. You don't want the stories dependent on each other when you're sending them out for publication, nor do you want them to be mirror images when they're sitting next to each other in a book. I guess, for me, writing a few connected stories seemed to be a nice bridge between writing stories and writing novels. It also works well because you can present one story in the point of view of one character in a family, then another story from somebody else's point of view. This gives you a position as a writer of wandering through the house and observing everybody's relationships, how they influence, harm, and help each other. **It makes sense to me that people write connected stories that have to do with families before they write a novel. It's a more manageable form, even if it's actually more difficult to pull off.** ■

**VALERIE MARTIN**, *interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

*Do you prefer writing novels or stories?*

I love to write short stories, but they take longer for me. It takes me twice as long to write a thirty-page short story as it would take me to write thirty pages of a novel. In some ways, I prefer to work on a novel because I feel I'm getting more for my time investment. In other ways, I wish I could have a few years to do nothing but work on stories. When I complete a story, it has that nice, compact feeling, as if you can put it in your wallet and carry it around with you. They are jewel-like, whereas novels are sprawling creatures. ■

**MAILE MELOY, interviewed by Joshua Bodwell:**

*In 2007, Granta named you as one of twenty-one authors on their list “Best of Young American Novelists.” You followed this honor with the publication of a collection of short stories—a collection of stories that landed on the cover of the New York Times Book Review, no less. How do you feel about the seemingly endless debate about the state of the short story in America?*

I love short stories—writing them and reading them—and so many wonderful writers are writing so many good ones. It's true there's a vastly shrunken marketplace, but that doesn't stop everyone.

The funny thing is that the *Granta* list of novelists is the reason I have this story collection now. I was working on a novel when they called and told me about the list, and that they needed a short story within a month. I didn't have any stories, so I got out the five or six that I'd abandoned for some reason, and started working on them. I finished one of them for *Granta*, but I'd gotten interested in the others. Time had passed, and I saw ways to fix them. I stopped writing the novel, and got used to the short-story pace again, and wrote some new stories, and then I realized I might have a book. ■

**ANDREA COHEN:**

The best feeling I know is when the writing is going well: when a poem drops down into my notebook or characters from a story go to the five-and-dime with me and tell me what they're thinking. And what they plan to do with that box of nails that's on sale.

Regarding the different genres, I write poetry because I've pretty much always written poetry. My mind



tends to organize ideas and seek meaning according to line, metaphor, and, one hopes, music. I started writing fiction years back because I love characters and dialogue, and because I had this idea that you couldn't be funny in poems. Of course, I was wrong about that. And I write nonfiction because I enjoy shelter and galoshes and the odd night out at Denny's. ■

**COLUM McCANN**, interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:

*You've said that you're no longer comfortable with the terms fiction and non-fiction. At what point did your relationship to those forms change?*

I remember giving an interview to the *Atlantic* magazine, and I said that writing about real people and real events and putting them in a fictional guise shows a lack of imagination. About six months later, I got coralled by this idea about Rudolf Nureyev. There's an old Irish adage, "Whatever you say, say nothing," maybe because in the end you're going to contradict yourself.

In many ways, I like John Berger's notion that we're storytellers, and that's all it is. I've come to think, to a large extent, that the terms *fiction* and *nonfiction* are there for convenience and to reassure ourselves, but I think if we're truly honest about it all we would say that we're all storytellers. It's a matter of how we tell the story and how the words are placed on the page. It comes down to language.

*When did you become "coralled" by the idea for Dancer?*

I stumbled upon the story through a friend of mine, Jimmy, who lived in a really poor suburb of Dublin in the early 1970s. His father used to beat him up all the time. One day, his father came home with a television set and plugged it in, but there was no reception. That night, Jimmy got the worst beating of his life. But later, when Jimmy took the extension cord and carried the TV out onto the balcony of the flat, there, all of the sudden on the screen, was a picture of Nureyev dancing. There was this seven-year-old boy, carrying one of the world's great dancers in his arms. When Jimmy told that story to me, I knew there was something in it. I didn't know quite what it was, but I went the very next day and bought a biography on Nureyev. The story about Jimmy would never make it into a book like that. Those anonymous corners never make it into our bigger, more official histories.

So what's official, and what's not official? What becomes fiction, and what becomes nonfiction? I started thinking that there is invention in these people's memories, that when those who knew Nureyev spoke to the biographer Diane Solway, they were really telling her stories about themselves. Memory is three-quarters imagination. I started wondering who has the right to tell those stories. Jimmy's story seemed to say as much about Rudolf Nureyev as any other story I read. Why would Nureyev stories belong only to people who danced with him, or to critics, or to people studying politics of the time? I started to play around with what was right to tell, what was real, what was unreal, and I started to doubt the word *fiction*.

I'll go back to the experience of reading something like *Ulysses*. ***Ulysses* takes place during one day in which Leopold Bloom walks the streets of Dublin. June 16, 1904. Now my great-grandfather, who was real, of course, walked the streets of Dublin on that very day. But for me now, one hundred years later, Leopold Bloom is a more real character than my great-grandfather, whom I never met.** It seems to me that some of the characters we create in our imagination are as real, if not more real, than the six and a half billion people in the world we have not met. That's the beauty of fiction. It outlasts the real.

*How do you see biographical fiction as different from biography?*

Ingmar Bergman said something along the lines that, "Sometimes I must console myself with the notion that he who tells a lie loves the truth." In a strange way, you're not talking about the absolute facts of somebody's life, but you're talking more about the texture and feel of somebody's life. I think the biographies are great, and I have nothing against them. It's just a different technology in the way you create stories on the page. In *Dancer*, I wanted to give the feeling that the reader was actually there, on the street with the person. Whether consciously or unconsciously, I tend to think that that is a political reaction to where we happen to be right now. A number of writers, including, say, Michael Cunningham and Colm Tóibín, are taking characters who were real in history and recreating them, saying, "**The facts don't just belong to you, politicians or critics; they belong to all of us.**" I think a lot of writers are now going in and questioning the facts. ■

**CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI,**  
*interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

*Having written both short stories and novels, do you prefer one form more than the other?*

I don't prefer one form. The joys and the challenges of each are different. I'm very glad that I work in both because the novel is like a tapestry. It's a long and painstaking process, and I have to work on the detail and create an alternative world, and it has to be as full and rich as I can make it. A short story is like painting a watercolor—the challenge is to have a lightness of touch. What I'm working with is nuance and subtlety and ellipsis—what I'm leaving out is as important as what I'm putting in. I have to work with the power of suggestion and I love the form because of this. ■

**DAN CHAON, interviewed by Misha Angrist:**

*It seems to me that the short story is the perfect form for this subject of loss: intimate and self-contained. O'Connor talks about how the short story is really about loneliness, which I think is also at the heart of your book. Had you considered a novel, linked stories, or some other form for *Among the Missing*? Were you conscious of the short story as the right medium for what you were doing?*

Yes, I was very conscious of it. I didn't ever really consider a novel or even linked stories. I knew that the stories were *thematically* linked and I knew that there would be mysterious events that popped up in each of them, but I didn't want, say, a town full of mysterious events, in which case you get [Stephen King's] *Needful Things* or something. ■

**IAN McEWAN, interviewed by David Lynn:**

*What contemporary authors do you read for pleasure or with admiration?*

Well, in nonfiction, I'm reading and re-reading now the great American biologist E.O. Wilson. I think he is a superb writer, as well as a great scientist. I'm just reading his book called *Creation*, in which he pleads with Christian fundamentalists. At the beginning of each chapter he says, "Pastor, may I now bring your attention to...," although he knows he can never get an agreement between one who thinks the world was created and one like himself who is a secular humanist, who believes firmly that evolution-

ary theory is beyond doubt. At the same time, what he's arguing is that since science and religion are the two most powerful forces in the world today, they have a joint mutual interest in saving its environment, the environment of the earth. So it's an elegant plea, probably a hopeless one, because I can't imagine any pastor wanting to read E.O. Wilson. They'll just want to re-read those familiar verses, from those same old Apostles and bearded prophets. But it's a bold attempt to put a hand out across the divide. I've admired his work for a long time. I like the roll of his prose. As a stylist alone, even if he wasn't a scientist, I think he would have made a colossal impact in the literary culture.

I'm interested too in the way certain scientists, and I include Voltaire for example in this, write so well. When they're forced, when people are forced to actually describe their best summary of the thing as it actually is, I think that's quite a strict discipline for the prose. I'm a great admirer, for example, of the letters Voltaire wrote when he visited England. He wrote some letters back. They're called "Philosophical Letters on the English." He describes witnessing Newton's funeral and then just gives a couple of long letters to the theory of optics. Some of the best explanatory writing for the layman on science that I've ever seen. There are great moments in Darwin, too.

**So I think there's a hidden literature which really needs to be brought, molded, talked into a canon that lives alongside our literary canon. And I hope one day a publisher will make a science library that is about the literature, the poetry of science writing, because it's certainly there and is a marvelous tradition. ■**

### VIKRAM CHANDRA,

*interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

*What are you writing now?*

I'm working on a novel now. After finishing *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, I consciously turned to a shorter form, partly out of relief of having finished a long project, and partly out of wanting to work on something I could finish every few months instead of every few years. **I also felt I wanted to stretch a different set of muscles. Always, for me, it's much harder to write shorter than to write longer.** Poetry would be hard for me to write. So once I'd tested myself against the discipline of the short story, I was ready for another long haul. ■

**ANTONYA NELSON**, interviewed by Andrew Scott:

*It's interesting that you've published more story collections than novels, especially when young writers today are told that story collections don't sell. Do you have a preference for the short-story form?*

I have a preference for the story form, and New York prefers the novel. There are several explanations for my having had a few story collections and then three novels. Some of it is about my own preferences. And, I think, the MFA workshop's ability to handle the short story as a subject to talk about writing—at least when I was in graduate school. We just got a lot more distance on the story than we did on the novel. But my sensibility is more inclined in that direction. I'm more comfortable dwelling in the moment and in the vignette, and in exploring more lyrical moments than narrative moments, which I think the short-story form accommodates much better than the novel.

Also, when I was writing the novels, my kids were safely out of toddlerhood, and it was this era between them being dangerously little and vulnerable, and then being teenagers and being large and extremely vulnerable. I think novel writing, for me, became something I could do by having an extended attention span during the years from the time my son was probably four until my daughter was about fourteen, about a seven-year period where I could dwell in longer worlds of fiction without having to be distracted by emotional turmoil in the household. I have a really active imagination that led my thoughts to disaster for my family. I imagined such things all the time when my kids were both little. Now that they're teenagers, it's again easier for me to write a short story to occupy brief fictional moments than it is to write long fictional narratives. ■

**EDWARD P. JONES**, interviewed by Robert Birnbaum:

*What stopped any of these stories [in All Aunt Hagar's Children] from being novels?*

There just didn't seem to be enough there to make them into novels. I did want to make stories that when the reader was done it felt like it had been a novel. And then with several of them, quite a few of them, I managed to do that—

*When we talked about The Known World, you mentioned that early on readers had been, I don't know if it was critical, but there were suggestions*

*that the beginning of the book was not easy—that once you got through the first hundred pages, it was much easier. I have skimmed a couple of reviews of the new stories and they are almost apologetic, though effusively praising the collection and extolling your talent—in fact, are you aware of any bad reviews?*

No, it's just little things in the reviews [that are vexing].

*So the general response has been great—but what comes through is that these stories are hard. And, in fact, one may have to re-read them.*

*Are you being done a service by that suggestion? [Laughs.] I take your position that there wasn't enough for a novel, but had you written more might the stories have been more accessible? In one story, "Spanish in the Morning," you have the little girl in school looking at her mates who have become girlfriend and boyfriend, and then you have her father asking her mother if he is still her boyfriend. And then you switch back—which seems to suggest more than a short story.*

Someone else would have to do whatever it is that is more. The girl is there and essentially it's this moment in her life when things change. She has gone further from her home, only a few blocks, than she has ordinarily—she is out there in the world and she is about to see things that are a part of that world. And her life at home is nice and cozy, and her mother and father consider themselves boyfriend and girlfriend, even though they have been married for several years. Out there are these kids her age and they are calling each other boyfriend and girlfriend, and there is this disconnect, it seems. And it's part of this world out there—it is a place of disconnections. That moment she realizes that she has a choice of going across the street to a school that is closer.

#### *Meaning the public school?*

Yeah, it's just an extension of her front yard. Or venturing out into the world [by attending a Catholic school].

#### *Was it her choice?*

They give her that choice—the grandfather says—so the moment of this is not, I felt, a moment a novel could hold.

*Seeing this as a novel was more about the way you weave and transition between moments and locations. It's not what I am used to in short stories. I started to think about what was left unsaid or unexpressed.*

In my mind, the way the story works out, there was no more than that. ■

### MELANIE RAE THON,

*interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

*How did you know your cycle of stories about Nadine (“Nobody’s Daughters”) wasn’t another novel?*

I couldn’t find any way out of Nadine’s sorrow. I feel that there is a vision of redemption in her stories because of Nadine’s faith, because of her capacity to love her sister and her friend Emile, because of her desire to live a decent life and to experience tenderness. But I don’t feel hopeful about what will happen to her on the streets. Some savior might appear. She could be that lucky kid who finds a job and a place to live, who gets a stranger’s help. **But those solutions felt artificial, and I didn’t want to impose them on the story. I wanted to see her experience honestly, yet I didn’t want to inflict that ultimate grief upon the reader. So her story stayed short, as I think her life is short.** ■

### DEBRA SPARK, *interviewed by Andrew Scott:*

*Do you feel pressure from the publishing world to write novels instead of short stories?*

I feel the pressure I suppose all writers do, since short-story collections are supposedly so rarely published these days, but I also think that I’m, more naturally, a novelist, since I write long. That said, my impulse, having just finished my third novel, is to write short stories, so I don’t know.

*Is that impulse because you’re tired from the long work of writing a novel, or because you want to try something that isn’t as natural for you?*

I think it is because I want to be in a whole bunch of different worlds, rather than immersed in one world. At least this is what I want for now. I kept on coming up with half-ideas for stories as I worked on the novel. Plus, I love to read short stories. I never get why they don’t sell as well as novels, since they are so much fun to read.

And, of course, it is a myth that short-story collections aren’t published, or that readers don’t buy them. So many good short-story writers have released popular collections as their first books—Adam Haslett, Jhumpa Lahiri, Nell Freudenberger, David Schickler, and many others. In some

cases, the short-story collections have sold more copies than the debut novels that followed. ■

**HA JIN, interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalaïs:**

*Was it essential for you to work on shorter forms before attempting a novel?*

Writing stories taught me a lot. Through that process, I became more skilled and in control of many aspects of fiction writing. It's good to start with short pieces. It doesn't have to be a short story, but just a short piece. This way you gradually build yourself up and train yourself to become a more capable writer. **That doesn't mean that I will now write novels only and forget other forms. For me, short fiction and poetry are essential and important. I think one of the most ambitious achievements a writer can aim for is to write one great story.** For instance, Shirley Jackson's work basically rests on the achievement of a single story ["The Lottery"]. One story is sometimes enough.

*What effect have your prose and verse had on each other?*

Writing poetry can teach you to be more careful with words, their nuances and sounds, and the rhythms of language. But poetry and prose are different. Poetry depends on your ability to condense. Anything that is not essential must be let go. In prose, you try to bring out the abundance of the experience and make it as rich as possible. These forms work on different principles. The way they affect each other isn't always positive. For instance, if you write a lot of fiction, you may tend to be dramatic with your poetry. Sometimes poetry doesn't need much drama. It needs lyrical intensity. If you become a good lyric poet, your prose language often becomes purple. That's not good for prose because it needs harshness and concrete tangibility.

*Do you feel more comfortable in one form?*

I'm more comfortable as a short-story writer. Short fiction is close to poetry in terms of impulse. I can stretch a story into a novella, then a novel, but I feel more at home in the form of short fiction. Other forms—the novel and poetry—are more challenging because I'm not as capable in them. I always want to do something I can't do. **As long as I have good ideas—as long as I'm bothered by something—I can figure out a pattern of experience and make a story.** Of course, this takes time and a lot of energy. I think this is somehow related to my work. When I teach, short

stories are something that I can pick up, work on, then put down. I can't do that with a novel. I have to be in the novel a long time and think about it—sometimes I have to live in it—and that involves too much time while I'm teaching. I need a lot of leisure for it, and I don't have that often. With a short story, that's possible. In the case of poetry, it depends on luck. When I finish one poem, I don't know whether I will write another one. It's absolutely uncertain. With short fiction, I can will a story into existence. ■

**CARYL PHILLIPS**, *interviewed by Kevin Rabalais:*

*Are there any writers who have surprised or shaken you lately?*

I think that W.G. Sebald is the last author who surprised me. He surprised me because he articulated something that I feel increasingly not just in my own writing, but as a reflection of where I think we're drifting as readers and writers in the early twenty-first century. This is the collapse of the difference between fiction and nonfiction. Sebald seemed to articulate that confusion around fiction and nonfiction and find a form that synthesized the two. The writers that I tended to look at who influenced me when I was beginning and, to a certain extent, still do now, are people like Baldwin, Naipaul, Bellow, Mailer, and Graham Greene, writers whose careers exist in fiction and in nonfiction. These are writers who seem to place an equal weight upon their nonfiction and fiction. In some cases, like Baldwin, they will probably be best remembered for their nonfiction. But Sebald surprised me because here was someone whose career you couldn't really divide between fiction and nonfiction. J.M. Coetzee's work is also like that, to a certain extent. I think his autobiographical trilogy is a pretty carefully calibrated piece of nonfiction by a fiction writer. In some sense, I think that Coetzee is probably the last writer of pure fiction who surprised me with how he positions himself as a writer and how he negotiates that issue of fiction and nonfiction. ■



Photo credit: Laurent Delimat

**MICHAEL PARKER**, *interviewed by Andrew Scott:*

There was a time—an embarrassingly long time—when I thought I was done with short stories. I read somewhere that they were more suited to youthfulness, which is an odd idea, easily contradicted by the likes of William Trevor

and Alice Munro and a host of other story writers still going strong well past the flowering of youth. Though it sort of made sense to me, in a way, that the world and its conundrums might seem more suited to shorter forms when you are young, and that, as you age and you have more varied experiences, the longer forms with their leisurely pacing, their orbicular rhythms, might appear to be the more appropriate form for the stories you needed to tell. I thought that then; I don't think that now. The problem with writing fiction is that we have all these experiences to fit into a very limited number of forms: short shorts, short stories, long stories, novellas, novels. **I believe very much in a line from an essay by Frank O'Connor: every novel or story worth its weight establishes a rhythm, and this is the rhythm of life itself.** Finding the appropriate rhythm might be problematic, but it forces you to work with form, with narrative rhythm, and therefore what seems a problem becomes a blessing, because form is what distinguishes story—it *is* story—and what happens is far less important to me than “the music of what happened,” as William Goyen referred to the most important aspect of fiction making. ■

**MARY GAITSKILL, interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:**

*You've written short stories, novels, nonfiction articles, and essays. Do you feel more comfortable in one form or another? Rick Moody said that when he writes nonfiction he can then go back to writing fiction and feel refreshed.*

There was a period of time when I really enjoyed writing essays. I haven't been interested in them lately. Something that really annoys me is when people try to interpret my fiction through what I've said in my essays, because they come from totally different places. Someone with the very strange name of Wide-Even very laboriously tried to unravel my fiction using things I'd said in disparate essays on a variety of subjects. At one point he said that I insist, through my fiction, on a fully sexualized society. I certainly don't need to insist on any such thing. We're already there, regardless of what I say about it.

An essay is a much more rational medium. I can say much more directly what I mean, and hope that there's a minimum of misinterpretation. Usually people can understand essays better than they can fiction because it's a more direct expression of rational opinion. The relative simplicity of that is sometimes a relief. Also, I think it develops your skills even though it's a different form. **Any kind of writing that you do is in some way developing your skills. You have to express yourself clearly in an essay just as you do in fiction, though the clarity takes a different form.** ■

**RUTH OZEKI, interviewed by Kyoko Amano:**

*Were your experiences as a filmmaker helpful in writing your first novel?*

**Very often, when I was writing, I would enter a location imaginatively. I would imaginatively enter a room with my characters, and then, very much like a cameraman, I would look around in the room, see what was available in the room to film, or to write, in this case.** And then I would set my mental tripod and choose my frame, decide whether I was going to start with a wide shot, a description of the room as a whole, or a very narrow shot, maybe inside the character's head, or say, one person's point of view. After I would make these kinds of framing decisions, I would start to write, based on what I was seeing at that moment, and very often, as I was writing, there was also simultaneously a little bit of an editorial process going on as the sentences, as the paragraphs, as the pages got generated. So, yes, the process of filmmaking and that of writing a novel are very different, but my experiences in filmmaking, I think, were helpful. ■



Photo credit: Marion Ettlinger

**PERRI KLASS, interviewed by Charlotte Templin:**

One thing about fiction versus nonfiction involving medicine and doctors is that you have control—I wouldn't want to say complete control, because things happen in your fiction that you don't plan to have happen, but certainly you have more ability to decide who is going to live, who is going to die. Are the treatments going to succeed? Is there going to be a happy ending? Is that schmuck doctor going to learn his lesson? You have control in fiction that you don't have in journalism. ■

**EDWIDGE DANTICAT, interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:**

*You've written two novels and two collections of stories. Do you feel more comfortable with one form over another?*

I love doing the short stories. They end faster. The novels are harder. *The Farming of Bones* is the only book that I started with the idea of writing a novel. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* was a short story that got longer. It's the rare person who writes short stories thinking that they are writing a collection.

I'm not one of those. The stories start to form sometimes at their own pace. They become something else when they're together, and that's an interesting process. I like writing both novels and stories equally, but with the stories you get the satisfaction of finishing much more quickly. Someone said that short stories are like dates and novels are like marriage. Hopefully there will be some dates in the marriage.

*How long passed from when you first wrote the stories until you finalized the book manuscript in The Dew Breaker, for example?*

I wrote the first story in the collection, "The Book of the Dead," in 1999, and the book was published this year. So over the years, there were many drafts and many layers, a lot of changes. And when all the stories came together, I made even more changes as I tried to make them coexist. Some of the stories come out almost as they are, and others are like vessels that you can fill up and take things out of and fill up again. It's harder to do that with a novel. Stories are like smaller chunks of clay. ■

**ANTONYA NELSON, interviewed by Andrew Scott:**

*Do you, even as an accomplished story writer, still feel a lot of pressure from editors to write novels, or to only write novels? Has that been a normal experience for you?*

I think people are more interested in the novel because it tends to be a more optimistic form. Again and again, I finish a novel and feel an uplift rather than the truncated feeling of despair that I think stories often leave you with. I have pondered that and written about it and talked about it before, but I do think the novel is a more optimistic form because it privileges a social group in a society, rather than an individual. A society's trajectory, in general, is to sustain itself, even if it lives as individuals. And an individual's trajectory is to die, even if the society continues.

I just think the story form taps into mortality more often in the individual, and sustenance more often with the community. Those are both facts. That's neither cynicism nor optimism. They're simply facts in my mind.

In general, I think that we are not particularly comfortable with the short-story form because it's a little more depressing. My students will always say that: Why are these stories all so depressing? They don't say that about the novels. They read to the end, and they can be moved or saddened by an event, but at the end, they say, That was very satisfying. Even the saddest

of novels, in the end, are satisfying because novelists, to generalize, tend toward optimistic closure. It's a weird sensation. You might evaluate your own reaction to the last novel you read and the last short story you read to see if your response matches my impression. ■

**JAMES LASDUN, interviewed by  
Robert Birnbaum:**

*Has there been a straight-ahead progression to writing novels? It seems, from your biography, that you started with poetry and then wrote some short stories and the last two published works have been novels. With some screenplays woven in.*

It looks more straightforward than it was. I started off wanting to write novels. And I spent ten years while I was writing poetry and writing short stories trying to write a novel. Or trying to write two novels, neither of which I was able to finish. I had pretty much given up and got sidetracked into film, though I still wrote poetry.

*Sidetracked meaning that wasn't your intention?*

No, that was a complete accident. A happy accident.

*Bertolucci chose your story—*

It was before that. The Bertolucci thing I didn't have much to do with. *Beseiged* was based on my story but I wasn't involved in writing the screenplay. But before that, I met a director at a party and for the next five years I was working with him as a screenwriter. We made two movies. But the effect was that it was hard for me to do my own writing for quite a while.

*Screenwriting is not your own writing?*

Well, it is and it isn't. You are not writing something that is a) totally yours or b) exists to be read. It's something that is part of the process of a film being made. It's fascinating and I enjoyed it very much, but I was beginning to feel, by the end of it, a real desire to get back to my own work.

*Was there anything about it that was helpful in your writing?*

It had a huge impact on me. When I finished working in film, I started writing a novel, and I found that I was writing it in a quite different way.



Photo credit: Robert Birnbaum

I was much less tolerant of digression, of anything that slowed the speed down. For me. Other people might find what I wrote still slow. But for me it sped up enormously, and that was from having worked in film. And having had the experience of knowing that every page—well, in film every page costs money. So it's a kind of peculiar pressure to keep things economical, keep things tight. I couldn't go back to writing dialogue in fiction the same way. Or writing descriptive passages in quite the same way that I used to. And I was pleased with it. I felt I had learned something that was useful to me.

*Do you look at writing hierarchically?*

You mean one form is higher than another? No.

*Even though your aspiration has always been to write novels? My impression is that everyone sees novels as the great accomplishment.*

I don't know. There is something about writing a novel that calls upon such a breadth of experiences—it's such a big commitment. You enter a novel and you are not going to be at the other end of it for at least several months and probably several years. Start writing a poem, you have to be out of it by the end of the week if not the afternoon. Although in my experience it's a pretty lengthy process even to do that. Writing a novel was just a way of enabling me to test myself to the limit, to do things I was interested in doing. But I don't think it's a higher form. If anything, there is perhaps greater artistry involved in writing a really good poem, or a really good story.

*On one level, it seems to be more difficult—or is claimed to be more difficult—to write a novel, but on the other hand it seems to be harder to write a really good short story or really excellent poem.*

I think it is. I also think more people have a novel in them—a novel or two, than have a poem or a short story. Short stories are phenomenally hard to do—

*Novels are more forgiving?*

Yeah, they are. That's exactly the word. You can go off on digressions—it doesn't have to be perfect, in a way. A really good short story doesn't have much tolerance for imperfection. And a really good poem has none. ■

**PERRI KLASS**, interviewed by Charlotte Templin:

*When do you find time to write in your busy life?*

Not nearly enough—around the edges, not in a systematic way, weekends. It works much better for short things—or essays, short stories.

*You have managed to write some novels as well.*

It takes me a long time.

*Can you say something about the difference between writing novels and writing short stories? Are the two forms equally comfortable for you?*

I love to read novels, so of course I dream of writing novels—big, long, complicated, hypnotic, compulsively readable novels. But I love writing short stories. **There have been times in my life when there were so many ideas for short stories, so many varied stories to write, that I couldn't write them all—and I still yearn after some of the ones that got away.** ■

**MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM**, interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:

*How did you go about studying the novella to prepare for writing these three pieces, and how did you decide to place three different genres in one book [Specimen Days]?*

I've been a huge fan of the novella since I first read Henry James—"The Aspern Papers," "The Beast in the Jungle," and "The Turn of the Screw," among others, are some of my favorite works of art of any kind. I suspect that the novella has fallen by the wayside largely for commercial reasons—they're too hard to sell. But there are any number of narratives that really want to be told in that form. They're too big and rangy to fit within the unforgiving confines of the short story, but too succinct to be stretched out into novels. ■

**MARY YUKARI WATERS**, interviewed by Sherry Ellis:

*Can you compare your experience of writing short stories to writing the novel you're currently working on?*

I'm actually enjoying the novel process. I can delve into issues so much more deeply. The novel gives me more latitude to link together scenes and time periods on a much larger canvas, and I'm conscious of having to jug-

gle more balls than I did with my short stories. I feel like I'm able to create something much more layered and complex than I could with the short-story form. It's nice having to come up with just one general idea, instead of inventing a brand new topic every few months. The bad thing is that novels take so long to write, and I miss the feeling that I used to have with short stories, that sense of accomplishment whenever I finished a story, or even a draft of one. With short stories, something is always happening: it's being shopped around, maybe rejected, but at least someone's reading it and responding to it. With novels the gestation period is far longer, and you're in a time warp where the final result is delayed for a really long time. Also, the difference in investment is huge. With a short story, you know fairly soon if it's going to work or not. This lets you abandon it without wasting too much time. But with a novel, it takes years to even know whether it'll work or not. I'm nervous about that. But I'm enjoying this process of being able to linger with the characters, to enter their lives and live with them for a while.

*Have you written any short stories as a means of taking a break from your novel?*

I've written one short story, and it's actually helped me with the novel. In the early stages of my novel, my head was whirling with all the ideas I had. I felt utterly overwhelmed, like I'd bitten off too much material to chew. Actually, this is normal for me, even with short stories. It's a good sign because **if I'm not overwhelmed at the beginning, it usually means I don't have enough to work with. Things always come together if you sit with them long enough.** Anyway, it occurred to me that if I took a small, manageable part of that material and made a short story out of it, I'd feel less overwhelmed. The process of writing the story helped me to solidify some ideas, and I found that I was able to understand my novel better when I returned to it. ■

**GEORGE SAUNDERS**, *interviewed by Robert Birnbaum:*

If I could just keep working on stories for another X number of years, that would be very satisfying. Sometimes I think a novel would be fun, but I have a feeling it will tell me when it's time. I can't do it as of now. ■

## **MYLA GOLDBERG, interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:**

*You've written short stories but seem primarily drawn to the form of the novel. What does the novel offer you that the short story does not?*

Immersion would be my first answer to that. As a child I was a very avid reader. The longer the book was, the better, because I wanted to get in there and not get out for a while. I write what's fun for me to read. I love the escapist experience that reading novels provides in a way that a short story can't because you're in and then you're out. **In a novel you get to be born and get married and die. A short story is like a really good first date.**

*Does the short-story form offer opportunities that the novel does not?*

Yes. I'm interested in writing a lot more stories now that I'm done with *Wickett's*. Short stories can function as wonderful laboratories that allow you to try things that a novel might not support because it's very weird or very specific. You can be more uninhibited with a short story because you don't have to worry about how you're going to make something work for three hundred pages. You can experiment and have fun and try something strange.

There are so many things that are short-story worthy that wouldn't work for a novel. With a short story, if you're just captivated by a voice that pops into your head, you can follow that voice for a while and that might be your short story. If you see someone who walks in a funny way down the street, that could give you a short story, or you could put it in a notebook and maybe that person would show up later in a novel. It allows you to indulge in a smaller, wackier thing that grabs your eye, and you can just have fun with it.

*What's an example of a story of yours that came out of an experiment?*

My first story that got published was a short story called "Comprehension Test," which I structured like a reading comprehension test. There were passages you would read that were followed by multiple-choice questions. This structure was used to tell a story about a neighborhood, and a man who was killed in the neighborhood, and how it affected the neighborhood. No way could that be a novel. For me the laboratory going on in a short story has to do with the laboratory of form, narrative structure, and playing with how to use that.

*Can it be language or is it always about playing with form?*

It can be language. I am attracted to form. I have a short story told in an intense voice of a child who is twelve. **First person, in general, is more rewarding in a short story, because while first person is intense, it has its limitations, and in a short story those limitations are not as in your face as they can be in the extended narrative of a novel.** In terms of language that's so intense, like the language of Angela Carter, which explodes in your mouth, it works so well in short stories, but it would give you burn-out in a novel. When she did write novels they tended to be short. ■

**JULIA ALVAREZ, interviewed by Robert Birnbaum:**

*So this is the first novel in five or six years—you have published how many novels?*

Adult novels, four.

*And a book of essays? And the book on coffee—*

A Cafecito Story. I call that one a green fable. And some children's books. Poetry.

*I don't know your poetry.*

I began as a poet. That's my first love.

*Why did you give it up? Or have you given it up?*

I came out with book of poems, *The Woman I Kept to Myself*, in 2004.

*I don't know why, I lost interest in keeping up with poetry.*

Yeah, part of it is that it is not out there in the market.

*I was glad to see Camille Paglia's book—it started me thinking again about poems.*

When I go to Breadloaf, I like to go to the poetry lectures. I am much more interested in what the poets have to say. They are the ones at the cutting edge where language meets the ineffable, the silence. Seamus Heaney gave a reading a few years back at Middlebury and he said poetry is about... [She opens her mouth as if to say something.] He just stood there, his mouth hanging open, as if dumbfounded, like he couldn't find the words.

His point, I think, was that poetry tries to put into words what can't be put into words! That is what poets do. I think of them as the hot lava pushing

out. They are the scouts, traveling out into the unknown where language has not gone before. They are doing interesting things with language, thinking about ways of using syntax. They talk about line breaks, about the breath as opposed to the visual cutting off of language. Storytellers, we're the settlers, we come in later, we need schools and a post office and homes and daycare centers—but I am more interested in poets. I learn more from them. I don't know why. ■

**SANDRA CISNEROS, interviewed by Robert Birnbaum:**

*Considering that you have been quoted as saying writing Caramelo nearly killed you, what is the prospect of you writing another novel?*

It'd be like if you had a four-day childbirth and people saying, "Are you going to have another kid?" [Laughs.] Well, not soon. I don't know that I'd want to or that I could. I could never write one like this again. Everything that I write comes when it wants to, out of its own need, and it dictates its form. I don't say, "I am going to write a novel." I didn't know this was going to be a novel. I thought it was a short story. I never know what something is going to be until it emerges from the womb and you see the crown of its head and then you see it pushing its way up. So in my life, if another book wants to be born, it's not for me to choose. ■

**AMY BLOOM, interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:**

*In the section "Lionel and Julia" of A Blind Man Can See How Much I Love You, you pick up the thread on the lives of two characters introduced in the story "Sleepwalking" in Come to Me. Again, what inspired you to continue with these characters? Why have you chosen the linked short stories over a novel?*

I have two more stories coming about this family. Things start to look up for Lionel; finally, he gets a break. But I think I work in stories here because I have to live my life and the characters have to develop and things have to happen for me to see what the next stories will be. I could've done it as a novel, I suppose, but I'm very happy with it being linked short stories. I hope that five years from now when the stories are done, and I have five or six stories from the same family, I can put them in one book. ■

**LEE SMITH, interviewed by Susan McInnis:**

*Early on, during and after college, you were writing fiction at the same time you were writing for newspapers. Could you work in both forms at the same time?*

Well, no. In fact it was getting to be serious because I was making up quotes. But really the newspaper work was messing up my fiction because I found myself writing choppy sentences in order of descending importance. I realized if I wanted to go ahead doing both, I would have to make a delineation in my mind, and what I did was kind of crazy, but I still do it. I started writing all my fiction in longhand, and writing nonfiction straight onto a keyboard.

*In other ways, does one craft inform the other? Do you learn from writing nonfiction ways to approach fiction?*

It's of inestimable value for any young would-be fiction writer to work on a newspaper for a couple of years for several reasons. You stop thinking of words that you put down on the paper as a "big deal." You get used to having an editor slash through them, to seeing seven inches cut off the end of a story, to going over to your friend's apartment where your piece has been put down for the cat. You begin to think of it as a profession or craft, and stop thinking of yourself as some neat *artiste* in a black turtleneck. And this can only be good for you. You begin to think of the whole notion of writing in a much more reasonable way.

**There's nothing better than being a reporter, because that profession gives you entree into people's lives and into worlds where you cannot go on your own. You can go right into people's homes and ask them personal questions when you're writing features and news stories. You have an excuse, a reason to be there. And since a fiction writer really is a voyeur, working as a journalist gives you the window to peep through.** We are so circumscribed by the circumstances of our lives, by the people we know. Newspaper work puts you out into whole other circles, in touch with people whose lives you could not have imagined. ■

**EDWIDGE DANTICAT, interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:**

*You wrote a Haitian travel book based on the annual carnival, After the Dance: A Walk Through Carnival in Jacmel. How did your experiences writing fiction inform your ability to write a nonfiction book? Were there ways in*

*which it hindered you at all?*

In some ways nonfiction is a less fragile process because the information is already there. You just have to find it and come up with ways to connect it. The biggest challenge was organizing it. I had done the research, and it was a lot of information so it was less intimidating. Fiction is like jumping into a complete void. You dive in and hope it works out. But with the nonfiction I knew that the information was there. There was however the obstacle of knowing that you can't make things up. I was glad to have the chance to do this book, though, because I got to learn a whole other process, a whole other way of working. ■

**ROBERT OLEN BUTLER**, *interviewed by Linda B. Swanson-Davies:*

Graham Greene once said, and I'm paraphrasing because I can't remember the quote, that all good novelists have bad memories. He says what you remember comes out as journalism. What you forget goes into the compost of the imagination. You know, there are writers in the world who are quite wonderful; in person they tell wonderful anecdotes, one after another, and you can sit all night and listen to them talk. They're brilliant people and you wonder why they never wrote even better books than they have, and I think the answer is that they've never forgotten anything. Their literal memories are so strong—they are terrific anecdoteists, but their unconscious has never been fully stocked with the deeper essences of all the stories that they carry around with them. ■

**DAN CHAON**, *interviewed by Misha Angrist:*

"The Prodigal" began as an essay destined for AWP or somewhere like that, but became fictionalized because I found that I could make up better examples than I could give from my real life. So I began to play with the form and the first-person voice. It was then that I started to see it as a story.

*What an interesting and unlikely evolution for a story. Was that an epiphany? Was there a moment when you said, "I'm not writing an essay anymore"?*

Yeah, actually there was. **I was talking to a friend who's an essayist. I said, "I think I'm writing an essay where the narrator's disingenuous and none of the examples are true." And he said, "Well, then I guess you're not really writing an essay, are you?"** [Laughs.] So, suddenly I had a lot more freedom. ■

## VIKRAM CHANDRA,

*interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:*

*Some critics have labeled Love and Longing in Bombay a novel. There is a similar structure to the stories, and they are all linked by the same narrator. Did you visualize this book as a collection of stories or a novel?*

The stories in *Love and Longing in Bombay* are self-contained, even though they are told by the same narrator. They exist in the same physical landscape, and resonate with each other, but they don't depend on each other in terms of narrative logic. In *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, all the various narratives flow together and depend on each other. So it's more of a novel than *Love and Longing in Bombay*, although I must say that I'm not tremendously invested in hewing to one idea of what a "novel" should be. Or, for that matter, what a "short story" should be. I tell stories. Maybe the forms some of these stories find don't fit neatly into any category. ■

## ANDRE DUBUS III, *interviewed by John McNally:*

*Wallace Stegner called the short story "a young writer's form," and went on to say that in his own writing "the novel has tended to swallow and absorb potential stories." Do you find that true for yourself? Do you find it harder to return to the short-story form after having written novels?*

I don't agree with Stegner that the short story is a young writer's form. I tend to agree more with Faulkner who said that when we first start writing, we try our hand at poems, and when we fail at those, we try to write short stories, and when we can't do that either, we end up writing novels! I **do think, in order for a short story to be great, that there cannot be one word too few or too many, and, to quote Coleridge, they all have to be in the right order, too.** Would we look at Chekhov's body of work—or Katherine Anne Porter's? John Cheever's? Andre Dubus's, my father? Raymond Carver's? Tobias Wolff's? Alice Munro's—etc., and say these are the works of "young" writers? I doubt it. Maybe Stegner was referring to those writers whose natural form tends to be the novel in the first place. Because, yes, my first book was a collection of seven short stories that I wrote in the first six and a half years of trying to teach myself to write, and it did feel like I was first teaching myself how to build a box, then a table, then a dog house, then a deck, before I began to take on what felt like a house-building project—writing a full-scale novel. But I think I'm also more of a novelist, by nature, than a short-story writer. In other words, I don't know when to quit

and can't shut the hell up! And yes, I have seen ideas for possible short stories come to fruition in novel drafts as scenes or parts of chapters. Though, in the last four or five years, I've seen two eighteen-month attempts at novels metamorphose into two fifty-page stories that, in my opinion, could only be those lengths. You see, ultimately, I think it's the work itself that tells us what it wants to be—novel or short story, poem or haiku, essay or letter to a dead relative. And yes, I do find it harder to return to the short story after having written novels—published and shelved—because **I love the feeling of being completely absorbed and lost in a three-to-five-hundred-page narrative that takes years of my life to write.** Which is another reason I suspect I'm more of a novelist than a short-story writer. ■

**PATRICIA HENLEY**, interviewed by Andrew Scott:

*You've published books of poems and stories, and two novels. You've also written a screenplay. How has each genre helped your development as a writer?*

I started out writing poetry. I always say, half-kidding, that I wrote poems first because I couldn't sit still long enough to write fiction. That lasted until my late twenties when an illness required sitting still. I began a novel then, about life in a back-to-the-land community. I had lived in one—Tolstoy Anarchist Peace Farm in eastern Washington—in the mid-seventies. But I had no idea of structure. I was just writing. That material turned into the first stories, the stories published by Graywolf Press, *Friday Night at Silver Star*. I enjoyed writing stories and admired and learned from Alice Munro and Andre Dubus and William Trevor and Richard Ford. Writing stories felt like something I could do combined with the hard jobs I held back then. Still, my work was sometimes called “quiet.” I took that to mean that not much happened.

I loved reading novels as a child. But I did not think writing one was possible for me. I saw myself as a short-story writer who managed to incorporate poetic imagery in my work. I used the few poems I wrote as a way of seeing images and distilling what was really important to me at any given time. I went to Guatemala in 1989, casting about for some story ideas, partly. And I had followed the repression of the eighties and wanted to see for myself what had happened there. **I was there about a week when a doctor told me the story of Father Stan Rother, who had been killed during the 1980s. The Mayan villagers he served asked his family**

**if they could have his heart to bury near the church where he had been the pastor. This story electrified me.** I knew right at that moment that I needed to write about Guatemala and that it was a bigger story, a story that needed to be a novel. I had no idea what I'd taken on.

*Hummingbird House*, from the seed of an idea to publication, took ten years. ■

**DAVID MALOUF, interviewed by Kevin Rabalais:**

Another thing puzzles me about writing. Anyone writing a novel, particularly a long novel, is taking the material forward just a thousand words or a few pages each day. So where in all of that does the long arc of the book come from? You can't simply have in your mind the whole arc of the book, but what impresses us enormously about novels is the perfect arc they make. Where does it come from? How does that arc establish itself in the mind of a person who is working piecemeal, day after day? It's not as if you have this mess of a thing and then, by taking this or that out, you manage to make the arc.

*How much did your background as a poet affect the writing of your early fiction? Was moving from poetry to novel writing a logical step?*

As most poets will tell you, about eighty-five percent of any poem exists in the first draft, which you might have jotted down in ten minutes. It may take a long time to get the poem into its final shape, but you know that all the clues are in the first draft. Even the unexpected thing that might happen later, when you conclude the poem, somehow comes out of what you first wrote.

In poetry, you get used to trusting a quick first draft and being willing to spend as much time as it needs to finish. Novels, of course, work differently. You write in small patches, and somehow you have to trust that the arc that I previously spoke about is taking shape. You have to trust that its shape is leading you somewhere. In the poem, you only have to hang on to that trust for ten minutes. Novel writing asks us to maintain it for much longer.

If the work is truly organic, then the second part of the book inevitably prepares itself in whatever happens in the first. When I reached the middle of *An Imaginary Life* and didn't know what should happen next, I reread an early part of the novel. Then I realized what must happen in the sec-

ond half. I hadn't planned for it. Something inside the *work* was preparing itself. ■

**HA JIN, interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:**

*You got your PhD in literature with a focus on poetry and poetics at Brandeis University, and published two books of poetry before you published Ocean of Words—yet it seems that you've shifted your energy to fiction. What draws you to the canvas of a novel or a short story rather than poetry?*

I worked hard as a poet, teaching poetry writing at Emory, so I had to write and publish poems. My graduate work was poetry and poetics. I still write poetry, though at a slow pace now. The reason I shifted to fiction was that after I finished *Between Silences*, I realized that some of the poems in the book could be more effective if they were put into fiction. Besides, it was difficult to publish poetry, so I began to write short stories, and then step-by-step I began to work on novels. My poetry is now in the background of my other work.

*Are there aspects of poetry that influence your work as a novelist and short-story writer?*

Poetry is very close to short fiction in terms of the impulse. Both genres also work on the principal of compression. With a novel you want to make it rich and abundant, so it works very differently than poetry and short stories. Poetry helps in that it makes you a more careful writer, more aware of sounds and word choice, of connotations of words. On the other hand, poetry doesn't always depend on drama, so a poet can write good prose but without much substance. Fiction has to have drama. The two genres work in different ways.

*Did you have trouble with that sense of drama when you started writing fiction?*

Occasionally, but for me drama is usually very clear. The main problem is how to make the sentences fresh—in other words, to make the prose good without sacrificing the drama. This is very difficult. ■

**AMY BLOOM, interviewed by  
Sarah Anne Johnson:**

*We can see the beginnings of Love Invents Us in the character Susan in “Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines,” and in Max in “Semper Fidelis.” What made you want to explore these situations in the larger context of a novel?*

I don’t think that that’s what I was really conscious of doing. In the original form of the novel, that scene with the furrier, Mr. Klein, doesn’t exist.

When I finished the novel, I thought that there was a piece of her history missing. Then it became clear to me that what was missing was that story about the furrier. I put it in the middle of the book, but that didn’t work, so I put it at the beginning of the book. I didn’t realize until after it got reviewed that it would look as if I had wished for the story to be the springboard to the novel. That’s not how it was. When I wrote the novel, it began with Elizabeth and Mrs. Hill. There was no furrier. The use of Max’s name is entirely an unconscious repetition. I was clearly not finished with that story. **No matter how careful you are, you cannot control what you reveal.**

*When you originally wrote “Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines” and “Semper Fidelis” in Come to Me, you had no idea that they would lead to something larger?*

No, or not something longer, anyhow. I always feel that there should be some small group of men and women carrying pom-poms on behalf of the short story. I don’t actually see them as smaller than novels. I just see them as shorter. It’s not the difference between Mt. Everest and a large hill. It’s like scaling Everest faster. So I want to say, “They’re not smaller, they’re just shorter.” Obviously the short story is a form that I particularly like. ■



Photo credit: Beth Kelly Photography.com

**ANTONYA NELSON,  
interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:**

*You’ve published an almost equal number of novels and collections of stories. Are you more at ease with one form?*

When I began writing, I wrote stories because they seemed more manageable than novels. But I also feel that many people are encouraged to write

novels when what they have on their hands is a short story. When I made the transition from novella to novel, I was doing so because I needed to for the story. I tried to write a story, but the material wouldn't conform to the boundaries of that form. From there, it became a project that I named a novella for a while, and then when that wasn't sufficient, it became a novel. That is one of the great things about feeling confident in both forms or at least a little confident in both forms. I start with the notion that I'll write a story. My first two novels started as stories but wouldn't stay. *Nobody's Girl* was a story called "Sadness," and I really liked the character, so I blew the story up larger and larger until it was a novel. *Living to Tell* is the exception. I knew that it had to be a novel. As a result, I had a hard time starting out. The *New Yorker* excerpted one of the chapters, but I couldn't have found a contained story in that book myself. The story I'm working on now, which may become a novel, started out as nine pages long and is now twenty-four. I have a lot to insert in it, and I have a feeling that it will grow into a novel.

I'm happy to write a good story. I don't feel like everything I dream up has to be set within the novel form. I always have a few projects going on simultaneously. Whatever hits me, whatever I encounter, I can put somewhere. It's sort of like when you play bingo and have more than one card; a number is called and you see that it's not on one, but it might be on one of the others. ■

**STUART DYBEK**, interviewed by Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais:  
*What are your thoughts on the state of the American short story?*

Predictions of the demise of the short story have almost come to seem like a feature of the genre itself. It's a genre I love. Some of my favorite works of literature, some of my favorite books in world literature, are story collections or novels in stories—Joyce's *Dubliners*, Babel's *Red Cavalry* and *Odessa Stories*, Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, Kafka's stories, Borges's, Hemingway's, Welty's...

I love the intimacy of the short story, the intense, chamber-music quality. ■

**ELIZABETH COX**, interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:

*"Snail Darter" and "Biology" fit in nicely with the stories in Bargains in the Real World. What made you decide to include these excerpts from Familiar*

*Ground and Night Talk? Did they already work as short stories, or did you develop them as such for this collection?*

“Snail Darter” was written for the novel, *Familiar Ground*, but it was also published as a short story in a North Carolina anthology of stories. Even in the novel, I think, this short chapter seemed to step aside, to step into the life of one character whose life and difficulties were important in understanding why a particular violence was committed. “Biology” was reworked to serve as a story, not so much for this collection, but because I thought that this incident of a young girl’s sexual awakening and regret had more to do with the fact that her father was gone, had more to do with the girl’s longing for her father. The section ends with a letter to her father. As I looked at it, I realized it could be a story. ■

**RICHARD RUSSO**, *interviewed by Robert Birnbaum:*

Antonya Nelson, who is a friend and colleague—it’s interesting because she always thought of herself as a story writer—was appalled at the notion of the novel. Among other things, she just said, “How could you start something that was going to be like that and not know for a year or two whether you had anything? I don’t ever want to do that.” But she wrote one and then another. All she had to do was one.... ■

**TOBIAS WOLFF**, *interviewed by Jim Schumock:*

*Is there a reason that you’ve stuck with the short story all these years and not ventured into a full-length novel?*

I don’t know why. It must be the way I see life. It may have something to do with the rather fragmented nature of my growing up. The longest I lived anywhere was four or five years. So, it may be just a habit of mind that’s formed by continually changing the scene and the *dramatis personae* of my life. They’re very close, though, stories, to what we do anyway. I mean, when we come home, we tell a story about what happened to us at work that day or at school. We tell stories about what happened to us with the garage mechanic. The short story is, in some ways, the most natural of forms. More than any other literary form, it imitates the way memory works. Our memories tend to organize things in terms of short narratives. Most of us don’t see our past in terms of a novel, most of our lives don’t have that kind of continuity of community, family, work. A short story, if

it's done right, can enter the mind almost as if it were an experience of one's own and become part of one's own store of memory. I remember novels with tremendous vividness and love, but I never mistake them for my own experience. But, I have read short stories that I sometimes have difficulty separating from my own experience. ■

**CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI,**  
*interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

*Having written both short stories and novels, do you prefer one form over the other?*

I don't prefer one form. The joys and the challenges of each are different. I'm very glad that I work in both because the novel is like a tapestry. It's a long and painstaking process, and I have to work on the detail and create an alternative world, and it has to be as full and rich as I can make it. A short story is like painting a watercolor—the challenge is to have a lightness of touch. What I'm working with is nuance and subtlety and ellipsis—what I'm leaving out is as important as what I'm putting in. I have to work with the power of suggestion and I love the form because of this. ■

**ANTONYA NELSON, interviewed by Susan McInnis:**

A short story is a small thing. You can work with it. There's a way of perfecting it, more than can be done with a novel. I think you have to be willing to give up quite a lot of control to write a novel. In reading or teaching, you not only give up control, but you have to forgive a novel's weak elements, and I'm relatively unforgiving when I read. This is one reason the short story has been a good form for me. I can get in and out quickly and then revise. I can lay down the idea and then come back to it and evaluate it over and over and over. Anything beyond thirty or forty pages and I start feeling like things are leaking out the sides. I can't quite hold it all together. ■

**AMY BLOOM, interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:**

I don't actually see short stories as smaller than novels. I just see them as shorter. It's not the difference between Mt. Everest and a large hill. It's like scaling Everest faster. Obviously the short story is a form that I particularly like. ■

**LYNN FREED**, *interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

*I recently enjoyed a short short you published in the Atlantic Monthly called “The Lovely, Lovely.” Could you talk about the form of the short short and what you’re trying to achieve in that small space of narrative?*

I never start out thinking “short.” I just follow the trajectory of the piece and then, suddenly, it ends. It might happen to be short, as in “The Lovely, Lovely,” or it might run on and on. This is a matter of ear, and also of something intangible—the right length for the piece at hand, which is, I suppose, the same thing. “The Lovely, Lovely” was written to that last stage of life, when the layers—past, present, future—are fused and confused into a sort of hum. Like words and memories themselves, the piece comes and goes in a few moments. A few pages. ■

**ETHAN CANIN**, *interviewed by Jim Schumock:*

*Are you more comfortable writing short stories, or is there another novel in the works for you?*

The answer to both questions is yes. I’m more comfortable actually with the kind of stories in *The Palace Thief*. They are long stories, almost short novellas. It wasn’t intentional. I just found it very comfortable writing stories about this length, which are about say eighty typed pages, which is about fifty or sixty printed pages. You can get more into that than a short story. You can get a lot more sweep. You get a chance to really become a character. Yet, at any given time, you know where you are in the arc of the whole thing. Often, you don’t in a novel, especially when you’re writing it. Writing a novel is just going out to sea and losing sight of the land behind you and realizing that you’ve taken the wrong direction somewhere. You don’t know if you’re in the Indian Ocean or the Arctic Ocean. The winds are fierce and the waves are high. It’s a real struggle, especially in the first one- to two-thirds of it before you see the first rock coming out of the sea. ■

**JAYNE ANNE PHILLIPS**, *interviewed by Sarah Anne Johnson:*

I’ve worked from short forms to longer forms. That’s been my trajectory. Short forms suited me early on because I was working with a more jagged consciousness myself. That’s where I was at the time. And since I came from a poetry form into a more sustained form, I worked almost exclusively with language. I moved into more conventionally plotted stories,

although I've never really been a conventional writer. I grew more interested in having a longer relationship with the material, and working with it for years, which is what I do with a novel. I went from writing those short pieces that were complete in one page to writing stories that worked like one piece of glass pressed against another: stories in alternating sections; stories that found their own form; monologues; and series of monologues telling the same story from different points of view. This led to a more conventional type of voice that lets me work with scary or intimidating or spiritual material inside a conventional form so that readers take it in before they realize what the book's about.

This is one of the interesting things about fiction as opposed to poetry: when you read a poem on the page, you're aware that you're reading a poem because of the shape it has. When you pick up a story, it's in paragraphs, just like the news or the directions for how to operate something, and the reader takes the voice into her mind before she has time to put up barriers against it. This is why fiction has a subversive power that's always been very attractive to me. That's true for the writer, too. Many times you're not aware of what you're working with until you get deeply into the material. ■

**DAN CHAON, interviewed by Misha Angrist:**

It began as an essay destined for the Association of Writers & Writing Programs or somewhere like that, but became fictionalized because I found that I could make up better examples than I could give from my real life. So I began to play with the form and the first-person voice. It was then that I started to see it as a story.

*What an interesting and unlikely evolution for a story. Was that an epiphany? Was there a moment when you said, "I'm not writing an essay anymore?"*

Yeah, actually there was. I was talking to a friend who's an essayist. I said, "I think I'm writing an essay where the narrator's disingenuous and none of the examples are true." And he said, "Well, then I guess you're not really writing an essay, are you?" So, suddenly I had a lot more freedom. ■

**ANNIE PROULX, interviewed by Michael Upchurch:**

*You've done all kinds of journalism and articles. Have you ever been attracted by travel writing? I notice Quoyle reads books by "Erics Newby and Hansen."*

I love reading those.

*In all your roaming around, have you thought of writing one yourself? Or what about a book just on the weather? The weather in The Shipping News is so extraordinary.*

No, everything goes into the fiction. Certainly the fiction can carry all this. It's a basket for all of these interests, and there isn't any other that can tote so many along as fiction—for me, anyway. I really haven't done any travel writing, and I don't think I will. I'll probably put everything into the fiction. I still do some magazine work from time to time, mostly for *Outside*, and I promised some things to *Gourmet*, but it's not a big part of my life. ■





# CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

[www.glimmertrain.org](http://www.glimmertrain.org)

**ALVAREZ**, Julia. Novels: *Return to Sender*, *Saving the World*, *In the Name of Salome*, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, *¡YO! In the Time of the Butterflies*. Nonfiction: *Once Upon a Quinceañera*, *Something to Declare*. Poetry: *The Woman I Kept to Myself*, *Homecoming*, *The Other Side*. Middlebury College, Vermont. [juliaalvarez.com](http://juliaalvarez.com)

**ANGRIST**, Misha. Interviewer. Published in *Tin House*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Elysian Fields Quarterly*, and elsewhere.

**BAXTER**, Charles. Novels: *The Soul Thief*, *Saul and Patsy*, *Shadow Play*, *The Feast of Love*, *First Light*. Story collections: *Gryphon*, *A Relative Stranger*, *Through the Safety Net*, *Believers*, *Harmony of the World*. Books on writing: *Burning Down the House: Essays on Fiction*, *The Art of Subtext: Beyond Plot*. [charlesbaxter.com](http://charlesbaxter.com)

**BIRNBAUM**, Robert. Interviewer. Editor-at-Large of the literary and cultural website [IdentityTheory.com](http://IdentityTheory.com)

**BLOOM**, Amy. Story collections: *Where the God of Love Hangs Out*, *Come to Me*, *A Blind Man Can See How Much I Love You*. Novels: *Away*, *Love Invents Us*. Nonfiction: *Normal*. [amybloom.com](http://amybloom.com)

**BODWELL**, Joshua. Interviewer. Work in *Threepenny Review*, *Ambit*, *Poets & Writers*, *Art New England*, *Fiction Writers Review*.

**BUTLER**, Robert Olen. Twelve novels, most recently *The Hot Country*, *Hell*, *Fair Warning*. Story collections include *Severance*, *Intercourse*, *Had a Good Time*, *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*. Florida State University. [robertolenbutler.com](http://robertolenbutler.com)

**CANIN**, Ethan. Novels: *America, America*, *Carry Me Across the Water*, *Blue River*, *For Kings and Planets*. Story collections: *The Palace Thief*, *Emperor of the Air*. [ethancanin.com](http://ethancanin.com)

**CHANDRA**, Vikram. Novels: *Sacred Games*, *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*. Story collection: *Love and Longing in Bombay*. George Washington University. [vikramchandra.com](http://vikramchandra.com)

**CHAON**, Dan. Novels: *Await Your Reply*, *You Remind Me of Me*. Story collections: *Among the Missing*, *Fitting Ends*. Oberlin College. [danchaon.com](http://danchaon.com)

**CISNEROS**, Sandra. Novels: *Have You Seen Marie?*, *Caramelo*, *The House on Mango Street*. Short-story collection: *Woman Hollering Creek*. Poetry: *My Wicked, Wicked Ways*, others. [sandracisneros.com](http://sandracisneros.com)

**CLARK**, George Makana. Story collection: *The Small Bees' Honey*. Novel: *Harmony Church*. Numerous anthologies. University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. [George Makana Clark website](http://GeorgeMakanaClarkwebsite)

**COAKE**, Christopher. Novel: *You Came Back*. Story collection: *We're in Trouble*. Work in *Best American Mystery Stories*, *Best American Noir of the Century*. University of Nevada.

**COHEN**, Andrea. Work in *Threepenny Review*, *New Yorker*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Hudson Review*. Four books of poetry. [andreacohen.org](http://andreacohen.org)

**COX**, Elizabeth. Novels: *The Slow Moon*, *Night Talk*, *The Ragged Way*, *People Fall Out of Love*, *Familiar Ground*. Story collection: *Bargains in the Real World*. Wofford College. [elizabethcox.net](http://elizabethcox.net)

**CUNNINGHAM**, Michael. Novels: *By Nightfall*, *Specimen Days*, *The Hours*, *Flesh and Blood*, *A Home at the End of the World*. Nonfiction: *Land's End*. [michaelcunninghamwriter.com](http://michaelcunninghamwriter.com)

**DANTICAT**, Edwidge. Novels: *Breath, Eyes, Memory*; *The Farming of Bones*; *The Dew Breaker*. Story collection: *Krik? Krak!* Travel: *After the Dance*. Memoir: *Brother, I'm Dying*. Two novels for young people.

**DIVAKARUNI**, Chitra Banerjee. Novels: *Queen of Dreams*, *Mistress of Spices*, *Sister of My Heart*, *Vine of Desire*. Story collections: *Arranged Marriage*, *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives*. Published in *Atlantic Monthly*, *New Yorker*. Author of three books of poetry and a children's novel. [chitravikaruni.com](http://chitravikaruni.com)

**DUBUS**, Andre III. Story collections: *Dirty Love*, *The Cage Keeper*. Novels: *The Garden of Last Days*, *Bluesman*, *House of Sand and Fog*. Memoir: *Townie*. [andredubus.com](http://andredubus.com)

**DYBEK**, Stuart. Story collections: *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods*, *The Coast of Chicago*, *I Sailed with Magellan*. Poetry: *Brass Knuckles*, *Streets in Their Own Ink*. Western Michigan University.

**ELLIS**, Sherry. Interviewer. Editor of the anthology *Write Now!* Interviews in *AGNI Online*, *Post Road*, *Writer's Chronicle*.

**FREED**, Lynn. Novels: *House of Women*, *Friends of the Family*, *The Mirror*, *The Bungalow*, *Home Ground*. Story collection: *The Curse of the Appropriate Man*. Nonfiction: *Reading, Writing, and Leaving Home*. University of California, Davis. [LynnFreed.com](http://LynnFreed.com)

**GAITSKILL**, Mary. Novels: *Veronica; Because They Wanted To*; *Two Girls, Fat and Thin*. Story collections: *Don't Cry*, *Bad Behavior*. Syracuse University. [marygaitskill.com](http://marygaitskill.com)

**GOLDBERG**, Myla. Novels: *The False Friend*, *Wickett's Remedy*, *Bee Season*. Essays: *Time's Magpie*. Stories in Harper's, McSweeney's, *failbetter*. [mylagoldberg.com](http://mylagoldberg.com)

**HAVAZELET**, Ehud. Novel: *Bearing the Body*. Story collections: *What Is It Then Between Us?* and *Like Never Before*. Oregon State University.

**HENLEY**, Patricia. Novels: *In the River Sweet*, *Hummingbird House*. Story collections: *Worship of the Common Heart: New and Selected Stories*, *Friday Night at the Silver Star*, *The Secret of Cartwheels*. Purdue University. [patriciahenley.com](http://patriciahenley.com)

**HOLLAND**, Travis. Novel: *The Archivist's Story*. Stories in *Five Points*, *Ploughshares*, *The Quarterly*.

**JIN**, Ha. Novels: *War Trash*, *Waiting*, *The Crazed*, *In the Pond*. Story collections: *Under the Red Flag*, *Ocean of Words*, *The Bridegroom*. Three books of poetry. Boston University.

**JOHNSON**, Sarah Anne. Interviewer. Editor of *Conversations with American Women Writers* and *The Art of the Author Interview*. [sarahannejohnson.com](http://sarahannejohnson.com)

**JOHNSTON**, Bret Anthony. Story collection: *Corpus Christi*. Editor of *Naming the World and Other Exercises for the Creative Writer*. Harvard University.

**JONES**, Edward P. Story collections: *All Aunt Hagar's Children*, *Lost in the City*. Novel: *The Known World*.

**KLASS**, Perri. Novels: *The Mercy Rule*, *The Mystery of Breathing*, *Recombinations*, *Other Women's Children*. Story collections: *Love and Modern Medicine*, *I Am Having an Adventure*. Nonfiction includes *Treatment Kind and Fair*, *Every Mother Is a Daughter* (co-author). [perriklass.com](http://perriklass.com)

**KOON**, David. Stories in *Crazyhorse*, *New Stories from the South*. University of Arkansas.

**LASDUN**, James. Memoir: *Give Me Everything You Have*. Novels: *Seven Lies*, *The Horned Man*. Story collections: *It's Beginning to Hurt*, *The Siege*, *Three Evenings*, *Delirium Eclipse*, *The Silver Age*. Four books of poetry.

**LE**, Nam. Story collection: *The Boat*. Fiction editor of *Harvard Review*.

**LEVASSEUR**, Jennifer. Interviewer. Editor, with Kevin Rabalais, of *Novel Voices: 17 Award-Winning Novelists on How to Write, Edit, and Get Published*.

**LYNN**, David. Interviewer. Story collections: *Year of Fire*, *Children of God*. Novel: *Wrestling with Gabriel*. Editor of the *Kenyon Review*.

**MALOUF**, David. Novels: *Ransom*, *Untold Tales*, *The Conversations at Curlow Creek*, *An Imaginary Life*, *Remembering Babylon*, *Fly Away Peter*, *Johnno*. Story collections: *The Complete Stories*, *Dream Stuff*, *Child's Play*, *Antipodes*.

**MARTIN**, Valerie. Novels: *Trespass*, *Property*, *Italian Fever*, *Mary Reilly*, *The Great Divorce*, *A Recent Martyr*, *Set in Motion*, *Alexandra*. Story collections: *The Consolation of Nature*, *Love*. Biography: *Salvation*.

**McCANN**, Colum. Novels: *TransAtlantic*, *The Soul of a City*, *Let the Great World Spin*, *Dancer*, *This Side of Brightness*, *Zoli*. Story collection: *Fishing the Sloe-Black River*, *Everything in This Country Must*. [colummccann.com](http://colummccann.com)

**McEWAN**, Ian. Novels include *Solar*, *On Chesil Beach*, *Atonement*, *Amsterdam*. Stories collected in *The Short Stories*. Several screenplays and an opera oratorio.

**MCINNIS**, Susan. Interviewer. Center for Distance Education, Fairbanks, Alaska.

**MCNALLY**, John. Novels: *America's Report Card*, *The Book of Ralph*. Story collection: *Troublemakers*. Editor of four fiction anthologies. Wake Forest University.

**MELOY**, Maile. Novels: *A Family Daughter*, *Liars and Saints*, *The Apothecary*. Story collections: *Both Ways Is the Only Way I Want It*, *Half in Love*. [mailemelyo.com](http://mailemelyo.com)

**NELSON**, Antoina. Novels: *Bound*, *Talking in Bed*, *Nobody's Girl*, *Living to Tell*. Story collections: *Nothing Right*, *Some Fun*, *Female Trouble*, *The Expendables*, *In the Land of Men*, *Family Terrorists*. University of Houston.

**OZEKI**, Ruth. Novels: *All Over Creation*, *My Year of Meats*. [ruthozeiki.com](http://ruthozeiki.com)

**PARKER**, Michael. Novels: *The Watery Part of the World*, *If You Want Me to Stay*, *Virginia Lovers*, *Towns Without Rivers*, *Hello Down There*. Story collections: *Don't Make Me Stop Now*, *The Geographical Cure*. [michaelfparker.com](http://michaelfparker.com)

**PHILLIPS**, Jayne Anne. Novels: *Quiet Dell*, *Lark & Termite*, *Shelter*, *MotherKind*, *Machine Dreams*. Story collections: *Fast Lanes*, *Black Tickets*. Work in *Granta*, *Harper's*, *DoubleTake*, *Norton Anthology of Contemporary Fiction*. Brandeis University. [jayneannephillips.com](http://jayneannephillips.com)

**PROULX**, Annie. Story collections: *Bad Dirt: Wyoming Stories 2*, *Close Range: Wyoming Stories*, *Heart Songs*. Novels: *That Old Ace in the Hole*, *Postcards*, *The Shipping News*, *Accordion Crimes*.

**RABALAIS**, Kevin. Interviewer. Editor, with Jennifer Levasseur, of *Novel Voices: 17 Award-Winning Novelists on How to Write, Edit, and Get Published*.

**REIKEN**, Frederick. Novels: *Day for Night*, *The Odd Sea*, *The Lost Legends of New Jersey*. Stories in *New Yorker*, others. Emerson College. [frederickreiken.com](http://frederickreiken.com)

**RHEINHEIMER**, Kurt. Story collection: *Little Criminals*. Stories in four volumes of *New Stories from the South*. [kurtrheinheimer.com](http://kurtrheinheimer.com)

**RÍOS**, Alberto. Story collections: *The Iguana Killer*, *The Curtain of Trees*, *Pig Cookies*. Memoir: *Capriatada*. Poetry collections include *The Dangerous Shirt*, *The Theater of Night*. Arizona State University.

**ROBINSON**, Roxana. Five novels, including *Sparta*, *Cost*. Three story collections, and the biography *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Life*. Work in *New Yorker*, *Atlantic*, *Harper's*, *Best American Short Stories*. [roxanarobinson.com](http://roxanarobinson.com)

**RUSSO**, Richard. Novels: *Bridge of Sighs*, *Empire Falls*, *Straight Man*, *Nobody's Fool*, *The Risk Pool*, *Mohawk*. Story collection: *The Whore's Child*.

**SAUNDERS**, George. Story collections: *Tenth of December*, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*, *Pastoralia*, *In Persuasion Nation*. Novella: *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil*. Essays: *The Braindead Megaphone*. Syracuse University. [georgesandersbooks.com](http://georgesandersbooks.com)

**SCHUMOCK**, Jim. Interviewer. Author of *Story Story Story: Conversations with American Authors*.

**SCOTT**, Andrew. Interviewer. Fiction: *Modern Love*. Work in *Writers Chronicle*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*. Ball State University. [Andrew Scott website](http://Andrew Scott website)

**SMITH**, Lee. Twelve novels, including *Guests on Earth*, *On Agate Hill*, *The Last Girls*. Story collections include *Darcy and the Blue Eyed Stranger*. North Carolina State University. [leesmith.com](http://leesmith.com)

**SPARK**, Debra. Novels: *Coconuts for the Saints*, *The Ghost of Bridgetown*. Nonfiction: *Curious Attractions*. Editor, *Twenty Under Thirty*. Colby College. [debraspark.com](http://debraspark.com)

**TEMPLIN**, Charlotte. Interviewer. Nonfiction: *Feminism and the Politics of Literary Reputation*. Interviews in *American Studies*, *Missouri Review*, *Boston Review*.

**THON**, Melanie Rae. Novels: *The Voice of the River*, *Sweet Hearts*, *Meteors in August*, *Iona Moon*. Story collection: *In This Light: New and Selected Stories*. University of Utah.

**UPCHURCH**, Michael. Interviewer. Novels: *Passive Intruder*, *The Flame Forest*. Book critic for *Seattle Times*.

**WASSERMAN**, Eric. Interviewer. Story collection: *The Temporary Life*. Chapbook: *Brothers*. [ericwasserman.com](http://ericwasserman.com)

**WATERS**, Mary Yukari. Story collection: *The Laws of Evening*. Stories in *Shenandoah*, *Triquarterly*, *Manoa*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Missouri Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Zoetrope*, *Best American Short Stories*, *The Pushcart Book of Short Stories*.

**WEIL**, Josh. Novella collection: *The New Valley*. Stories in *Granta*, *One Story*, *Agni*. [joshweil.com](http://joshweil.com)

**WILLIAMS**, Margo. Interviewer. Work in *Beacon Street Review* and the anthology *The Big Picture*.

**WOLFF**, Tobias. Story collections: *Our Story Begins: New and Selected Stories*, *In the Garden of the North American Martyrs*, *The Night in Question*, *Back in the World*. Novels: *Old School*, *Ugly Rumours*. Memoirs: *This Boy's Life*, *In Pharaoh's Army*. Novella: *The Barracks Thief*.

Glimmer Train Press publishes both  
[Glimmer Train Stories](#) and [Writers Ask](#).

Co-editors: Susan Burmeister-Brown  
and Linda Swanson-Davies

Typesetting and layout: Paul Morris

This publication's name and logo and the  
various titles and headings herein are  
trademarks of Glimmer Train Press, Inc.

