



The Best British Short Stories 2012

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The second in a brand-new series of annual anthologies, The Best British Short Stories 2012 reprints the cream of short fiction, by British writers, first published in 2011. These stories first appeared in magazines from Ambit to Granta, in anthologies across various genres from publishers big and small, and in authors' own short story collections. They were broadcast on radio and delivered by mobile phone app. They appeared online at Metazen and Paraxis.

The Best British Short Stories 2012 Details

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Alan says

My mate (and in my writer's group) Joel Lane has a story within..

Another very fine collection selected by Mr Royle. I'd already read four – Jon McGregor's (not his greatest, the second person pov always puts me off, but good), and Stuart Evers's (a sad little piece) from their respective collections This Isn't the Sort of Thing That happens to Someone Like You and Ten Stories about Smoking; also Will Self's (a very clever story about someone developing an iPad psychosis) and Socrates Adams's (a weird tale of children growing old, having kids and dying by adolescence) on line. But I hadn't read Joel's – he hadn't brought it to the group - so naturally I began with that. It singed my soul it was so strong, a terrifically nasty and funny piece about revenge, death and Oldbury (West Midlands) by night. Then by chance I read next what turned out to be four of the best stories – Ramsay Campbell's twisted and tense 'The Room Beyond' set in a hotel you'd never want to visit; Michael Marshall Smith's strange, subtle, horrific but accepting 'Sad, Dark Thing'; Neil Campbell's 'Sun on Prospect Street' which was a perfect evocation of a boyhood summer, spent by the canal or playing football; and Alison McLeod's 'The Heart of Denis Noble' which imagines the love life and heart transplant of a real pioneer of 'Systems Biology' in a moving but precise and wonderfully modulated account. There were other great stories here, particularly Dan Powell's 'Half-Mown Lawn' about the death of a spouse which made me catch my breath, and Jo Lloyd's 'Tarnished Sorry Open' about modern loneliness and technology. I wasn't keen on everything, for example H P Tinker's 'Alice in Time and Space and Various Major Cities' which was funny and full of wackiness, oh alright I did like it, but it had that over-clever postmodern-ness to it which sometimes grates and did, just a little bit. Similarly Robert Shearman's very daft re-imagining of Genesis got a bit ridiculous but was fun. There were two stories set in libraries which begin and end the book and of course I loved those, being a librarian. All in all another fabulous collection and the series is looking good. Long may it continue.

William says

This collection contains 20 stories. What I was mainly looking for when I began to read it was stories that were contemporary in style, structure and subject matter, but still with the classical features of narrative arc, inciting incident, characterisation, dialogue, sub-text, and all the old fashioned virtues.

"I Arrive First", by Emma Jane Unsworth is possibly the best story in the book. It is a subverted love story which shows a very good eye for detail. This is an excellent example of what I was looking for.

"The Dark Space in the House in the House in the Garden at the Centre of the World", by Robert Shearman is another exercise in subverting genres, the genres in question this time being pulp fiction and the Old Testament. This is an excellent example of what I was not looking for.

"What's in Swindon?", by Stuart Evers appears to have been titled with reference to Raymond Carver's, "What's in Alaska?", though the stories don't resemble each other. It is about an attempt to re-kindle a past relationship and is well-crafted and compelling.

"Alice in Time & Space and Various Major Cities", by HP Tinker, is another in the deliberately overblown,

pulp fiction genre. It read a bit like "We" by Yevgeny Zamyatin. It lacks proper characterisation and, again, was not what I was looking for.

"The Visit", by Jaki McCarrick is a story about an encounter with a past acquaintance. It read like a contribution to a tribute to Joyce's "Dubliners".

"Half Mown Lawn", by Dan Powell is a story about bereavement. It is not at all how I would write about that subject, but it was well-handled and full of engaging details.

"I'm the Guy Who Wrote the Wild Bunch", of all the whimsical and unconventional stories in the book, is the one I enjoyed most. It is written "from the inside" in the form of an account of a magazine interview. I found the apparent literary joke underlying the end of the story difficult to follow (you'll have to read it to see what I mean) but it was very compelling and I sympathised greatly with the person relating the events.

"Those Who Remember", by Joel Lane, is a chilling and well-crafted story about the influence of the past on the present.

"To Brixton Beach", by Stella Duffy, is an unconventional story in which a location is the protagonist.

"Wide and Deep", by Socrates Adams, is a very short story about growing old.

"Tarnished Sorry Open", by Jo Lloyd, is one I read with the utmost care and attention, because it is about a withdrawn narrator of the kind that I often write about.

"Aperitifs with Mr Hemingway", by Jonathan Trigell, is a well-crafted story about growing old. The protagonist is well-characterised and engaging, and the story draws out the subject matter with controlled pathos rather than being tragic or depressing.

"Sun on Prospect Street", by Neil Campbell, is a very Raymond Carver-style, understated story about childhood and things that are left unsaid.

"The Room Beyond", by Ramsey Campbell, is an expertly-controlled, subverted ghost story.

"iAnna", by Will Self, is a story about the iPad generation. While the story was contemporary in subject matter, I find Self's style too Baroque and over-written for my liking. There is no serious attempt at characterisation or the generation of any empathy. The dialogue lacks sub-text. There is a meta-fictional self-reference to the narrative, which is clumsy and unwarranted, and there is no ending - the story simply runs out of text. I admit that I read every sentence, right to the end, just to see where it would go.

"The Heart of Denis Noble", by Alison McLeod, is a very well-crafted and engaging story indeed about a scientist, his work, and the relation his work has to his life. But it is not a short story: it is a very, very short novel.

"We Wave and Call", by Jon McGregor, is the only one I did not get at all. Outwardly, it may look like another, under-stated, Carver-style story, but I found the point of the narrative to be not so much under-stated as non-existent. The whole thing seemed to rest on a small piece of structural sleight-of-hand which failed to grab me.

"All I Know About Gertrude Stein", by Jeanette Winterson, is an unconventional piece which combines a

kind of narrative with some biographical information about writers and artists in Paris in the first half of the 20th century, and a literary essay about the nature of love. Again, I kept reading, but it was not what I was looking for.

"Sad, Dark, Thing", by Michael Marshall Smith, again made me wonder if the title was a pastiche of Raymond Carver's "A Small, Good Thing". It is a roman a clef.

"The Last Library", by AK Benedict, is a mild apocalyptic which, published in this particular manner, is open to accusations of trying to preach to the converted.

Do not be put off by my criticism of the few stories I did not like. One reads a collection of 20 stories by different authors to find out more about what one doesn't like, as well as what one likes. This is a refreshingly varied collection. I will certainly be re-reading some of the stories many more times. Any-one who wants to enjoy or participate in the current rejuvenation of short fiction in English needs this book.

Tas says

An enjoyable set of short stories. Some were beautifully written and had you wanting to know more, and obviously there were a few that weren't to my taste.

Some of my favourites from the collection included:

- *'I Arrive First' by Emma Jane Unsworth. It was incredibly cute and made my heart flutter.*
- *'To Brixton Beach' by Stella Duffy. There was something so relatable about this short story.*
- *'Wide and Deep' by Socrates Adams. It was unique and puzzling, there was a rather disturbing element to it which I liked.*
- *'iAnna' by Will Self. The modern twist of the story and its quirkiness was fun to read.*
- *'We Wave and Call' by Jon McGregor. I couldn't stop thinking about this short story after reading it, the writing style of it was extremely hooking.*
- *'All I Know About Gertrude Stein' by Jeanette Winterson. I loved this, the whole discussion of love kept me thinking and reading.*
- *'The Last Library' by Ak Benedict. This was the last short story and it was definitely the perfect way to end!*

I would recommend you pick up this collection of short stories, there are bound to be a few you'll love like crazy.

Lilanthi says

Such wonderful creations! -I'de love to re-read them all over again!

These were my favorites:-

#The dark space in the House in the House in the Garden at the Centre of the World-Robert Sherman

#Half-mown Lawn - Dan Powell

#I'm the guy who wrote The Wild Bunch- Julian Gough

#Aparatifs with Mr. Hemingway - Jonathan Trigell

#The Heart of Denis Noble - Alison MacLeod

#We wave and call - Jon McGregor

#Sad, Dark Thing - Michael Marshall Smith

#The last Library - AK Benedict

Of these again....."The Half-mown Lawn" and "The Heart of Denis Noble" were simply the best!

A few quotes that I found interesting.....

From Alice in time & space and various major cities – HP Tinker

“I realized that I was part of a conspiracy that nobody understood except me!”

“I wonder if this strange meeting of ours might not be more than just a mere chance. I mean, unexpected things do happen – all the time – for a variety of hugely improbable metaphysical reasons nobody actually understands.”

“The struggle to achieve some kind of resolution is potentially pointless. Dissatisfaction often comes when a long –strived for ideal is attained and reality realized.”

From- The Visit – Jaki McCarrick

“Whilst he wasn’t looking, he had entered the tapestry of this place after all!”

From All I know about Gertrude Stein –Jeanette Winterson-

“Cupid is blind. Freud called love an ‘overestimation of the object’...but I would swing through the ringing world for you.”;

Stephen Barker says

Lucid observation, clever prose, wit and intrigue aplenty. Actual storytelling seems to have taken a back seat. Jon McGregor's 'We Wave and Call' stood out.

Steve says

Refreshing new writing from an interesting publisher.

Vicki Jarrett says

Great collection put together by Nicholas Royle. A fantastic selection to dip in and out of. Lots of different styles and concerns but all high quality accomplished short stories. Personal favourites was Dan Powell's Half Mown Lawn. This was a deceptively simple story, no pyrotechnics, or self-conscious styling - simple, honest and devastating. I'll be looking out for more from Powell - not to mention next year's Best British Short Stories 2013.

Pippa Kay says

I loved all but one of the stories in this book. I was surprised that many could be called science fiction or horror, or even ghost stories (which I don't usually enjoy), but what I loved was the originality, and that most of them maintained the traditional short story structure. My favourite I think was *The Heart of Denis Noble* by Alison MacLeod. The one I didn't like was written in the second person, which I always find difficult. Why do people write in the second person? It never works, in my opinion, but there's usually at least one story in every anthology.
