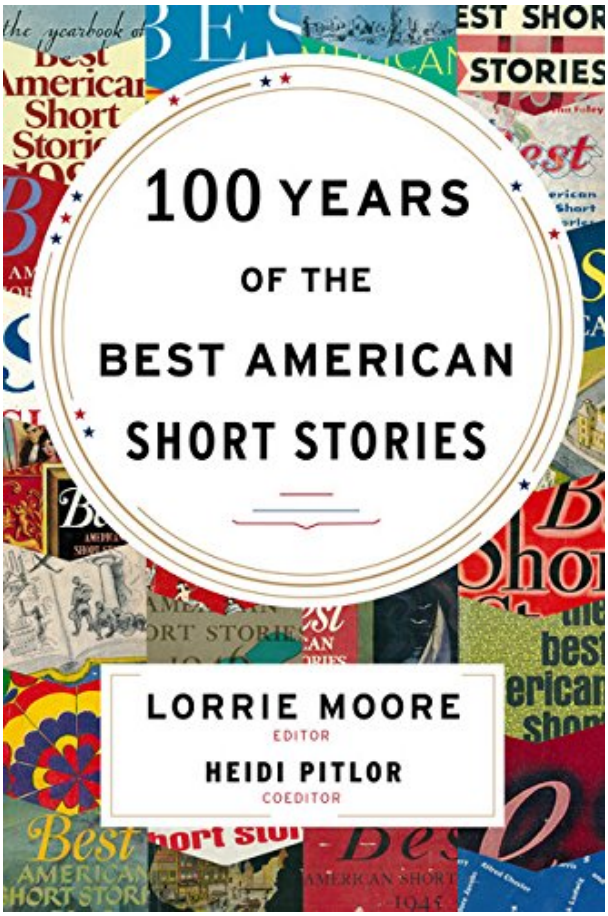
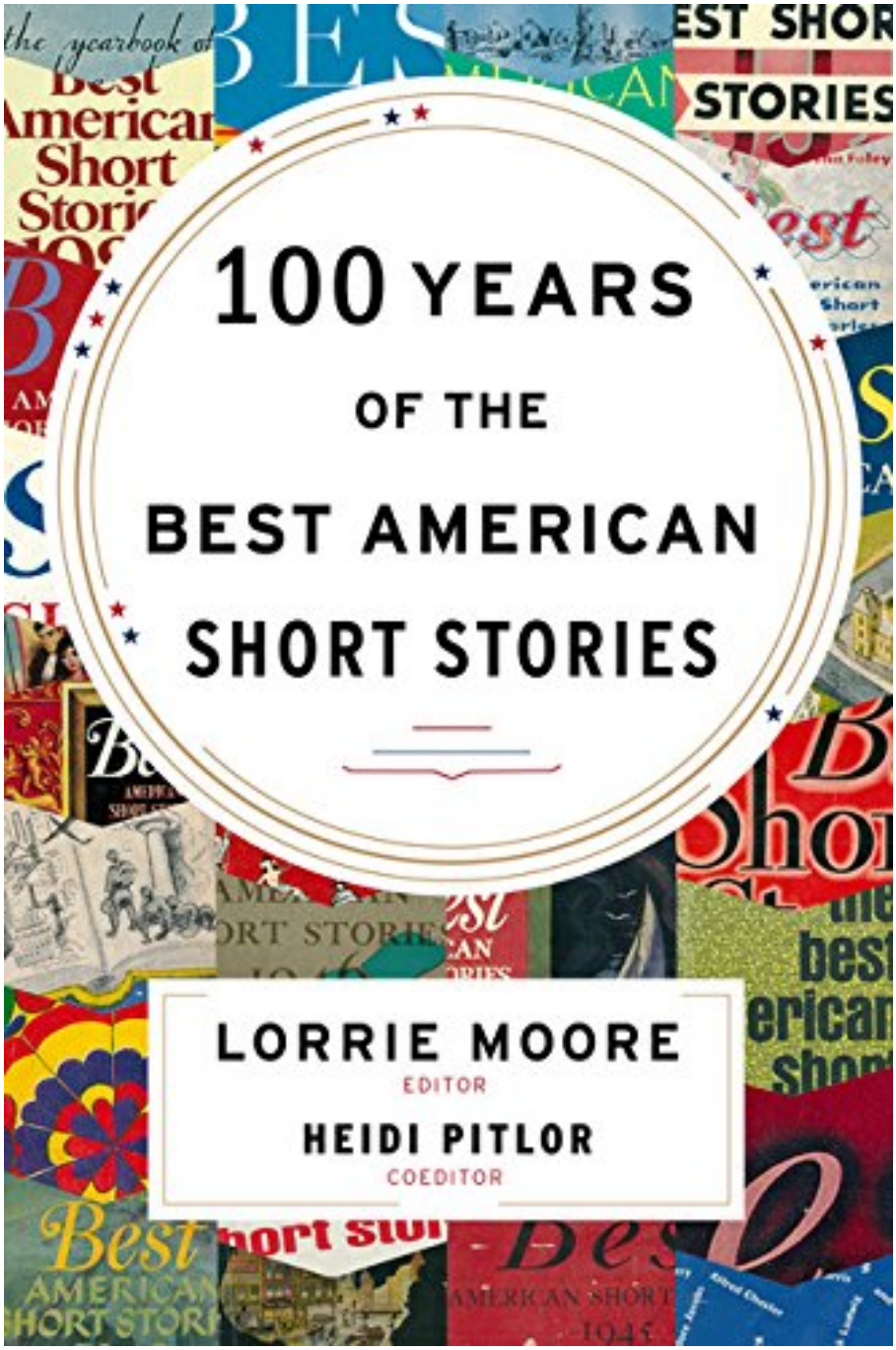
100 YEARS OF THE BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES BY LORRIE MOORE, HEIDI PITLOR





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LORRIE MOORE, after many years as a professor of creative writing at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, is now the Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of English at Vanderbilt University. Moore has received honors for her work, among them the Irish Times International Fiction Prize and a Lannan Foundation fellowship, as well as the PEN/Malamud Award and the Rea Award for her achievement in the short story. Her most recent novel, A Gate at the Stairs, was short-listed for the 2010 Orange Prize for Fiction and for the PEN/Faulkner Award, and her most recent story collection, Bark, was short-listed for the Story Prize and the Frank O’Connor Award.

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Most helpful customer reviews

39 of 41 people found the following review helpful.
"She remembers that everything she remembers is not necessarily true."
By Fairbanks Reader - Bonnie Brody
This collection of short stories proclaims to be the best American short stories of the past 100 years. It takes a lot of hubris to cull and choose stories published over a century and state, with surety, that these surpass all others in quality and attributes, The book is edited by Lorrie Moore, whose short stories I sometimes gravitate towards and sometimes don't connect with. The co-editor is Heidi Pitlor who edits an annual short story collection. On the whole, the stories selected for this collection are good, some are superb, and others left me shaking my head in puzzlement as to why they were included. It's easy to pull things apart but, for this review, I will focus on those stories I loved, some of which I may have read previously and others that are new to me but I will never forget.

The collection is arranged chronologically and there is a short description of each time period with a focus on the types of stories that were prominent during that era. I found this helpful and learned a lot about what was published and who might have been influenced by whom. There are a total of 39 stories, the first published in 1917 and the last published in 2014. Of the 39, seven stand out high above the rest. A few of these are old friends and some of them I have never read before.

Edna Ferber's story, 'The Day Old Dog', published in 1917, is very different from other stories of hers that

I've read. It tells about a man's deathbed promise to his mother and, because of this promise - to take care of his sisters until they marry, he loses his own chance to marry and have a family. He continue to have dreams of the the life he may have led but they dissipate as time forces him head to head with reality.

Nancy Hale published 'Those Are As Brothers' in 1942. I had never heard of her before reading this story. Written in the aftermath of World War II, the concept of shared terror is explored, along with the power of strength and connection.

James Baldwin published 'Sonny's Blues' in 1958. It is about two African-American brothers who grow up in Harlem and appear to go in very separate directions after World War II. What touched me most in this story is its examination of the connections made without words - some through music, some through the collective unconscious, and some through inner promises we make to ourselves.

Mona Simpson published 'Lawns' in 1986. It is a brilliant exploration of the impact of sexual abuse on an adolescent girl. As a clinical social worker, I have not read anything that comes close to examining the inner world of a child/woman trying to make sense of an irrational life.

In 1995, Jamaica Kincaid published a story called 'Xuela'. In it, the birth date of an infant from Dominica corresponds to the day of her mother's death. The child spends her life wondering what her mother might have been like, what is the true essence of her father, and what comprises her own sense of self.

'What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank' is one of my favorite short stories. Published in 2012 by Nathan Englander, it addresses a 'ritual game' that exists in many jewish families. In this game, the family discusses who would be entrusted with their care and the care of their children if the Nazi's ever came to power again. In this story, two couples get together and the game leads to a startling realization for one of them.

'Diem Perdidi' by Julie Otsuka, published in 2012 is another one of my favorite stories. 'Diem Perdidi' means 'I lost the day' in Latin. This story is the most poignant and poetic in the collection. Narrated in first person, the reader is privy to the losses and gifts of dementia.

The stories in this book cover a variety of themes and topics. There does not appear to be a political bent, which I appreciate, and the 'political correctness' which is present in so much of today's collections does not appear to be present. For this, too, I am also thankful. It is obvious that the editors spent much time and thought choosing these stories and there are some gems in this collection.

18 of 18 people found the following review helpful.
Does More Than Recycle “The Greatest Hits”
By M. JEFFREY MCMAHON
Lorrie Moore and Heidi Pitlor who compiled this collection have undertaken a rather ambitious task: To select a representation of presumably the best stories of the last 100 years. The task becomes even more daunting when you consider the college textbook industry offers dozens of similar anthologies.
My definition of an amazing story is that in one reading it has the “weight of a novel,” the complexity, density, and texture that you might find in a 300-page book. Such stories are evident in this collection: “The Enormous Radio” by John Cheever, “The Whole World Knows” by Eudora Welty, “I Stand Here Ironing” by Tillie Olsen, “Sonny’s Blues” by Sonny Baldwin, “The Conversion of the Jews” by Philip Roth, “Everything That Rises Must Converge” by Flannery O’Conner, “Pigeon Feathers” by John Updike, “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?” by Raymond Carver, "Friend of My Youth" by Alice Munro, “Communist” by Richard Ford, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank” by Nathan Englander, “The

Semplica-Girl Diaries” by George Saunders.
There were some glaring omissions. For a collection that represents the last 100 years, I’d want to see “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Conner, “The Rich Brother” by Tobias Wolff, and “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” by Raymond Carver.
It seems the “canon” stories of some of the authors have been omitted in place of lesser-known ones, perhaps because the editors either thought their story selections were superior and/or they wanted the book to have some freshness to it and not simply recycle the “greatest hits.”
I think their strategy is successful. The collection is both fresh and contains dozens of stories that have “the weight of a novel” inside them.
Perhaps Lorrie Moore is too modest to include one of her own stories in this collection. She needs to be in here. One of those “novel” stories I defined earlier is embodied by her masterpiece “Real Estate” from her collection Birds of America. I wish that story were in this collection. In any event, this is a very successful compilation and I would consider using it for one of my college classes.

25 of 27 people found the following review helpful.
Comparison of "100 Years" and "Oxford Book of American Short Stories"
By Dame Droiture
I ordered this in order to consider it as the required text for a short story course I will be teaching at the college level in a few months. The other book I am considering is _The Oxford Book of American Short Stories_, edited by Joyce Carol Oates. I am an Americanist by discipline, so both books would seem to "fit" well with me in this respect. Admittedly, though, I am fairly new to the short story form, insofar as teaching (I usually focus on novels and novellas), so I wanted to find something that would please both me and my students in breadth and variety of theme.

Both "100 Years" and the Oxford book have a similar price-point -- between $15-$20; it seems very reasonable to request students to invest in a book costing under $25, particularly one that will be used for the entire semester. But there are two things that are tipping me over to "100 Years," as opposed to the Oxford: the first is the introduction in each volume. Whereas Joyce Carol Oates' introduction is short and perhaps a bit scholarly, Lorrie Moore's intro is, on the whole, very readable, lively, and engaging. It rings with life, reality, and importantly, a connection with what is common (as opposed to high-brow). "100 Years" is also very physically lightweight (at least the copy I received, so this may not be true of the hardcover currently offered on Amazon); this is something I *do* consider when ordering books for students, knowing that all of us need to lug the material back and forth to campus. The Oxford edition is like a brick.

I cannot compare the two much further, though, given the differing story selections: Oxford chooses from hundreds of years of work; "100 Years" is obviously much narrower in chronology. I do imagine "100 Years" to have a much more modernist flair -- this volume is missing, for example, the lesser-known stories of writers like Hawthorne, Irving, Poe, and Melville, all of whom have, if not only a gothic touch, then at least engage in a newly-industrializing nation.

"100 Years," as you can see by the table of contents reprinted on the product page, begins with Ferber, Anderson, and Hemingway. Its stories offer very different sets of concerns, and thus a very different kind of appeal from a more over-arching volume like the Oxford. (And yet I should note here that Joyce Carol Oates, in the Oxford, has deliberately chosen many lesser-known / underdog stories -- some I haven't even heard of, even though they were written by famous novelists like Hawthorne.) But as in any story edition, it's tough to pick and choose what to include out of so many possibilities.

Both editions of stories have a short (paragraph-long) introduction to the author/story before the story begins -- a useful, if not required, addition.

I think there's something to be said for each volume, and insofar as teaching them, you would have a very different course for each. In a way, the Oxford book is very traditional: it captures stories from a (relative) height of story-writing days when books were still (relatively) expensive and people got much of their literature from newspapers and weekly journals like Godey's or The Atlantic. These stories were/are popular, and read (and loved) by thousands (i.e. Melville's "Paradise/Tartarus" short). "100 Years," by contrast, is modernist, post-modernist, and contemporary. You'll likely see more engagement with issues like feminism, depression, war, and (dare I say) existential inquiry. Moving toward more recent times in "100 Years," you'll also see stories that have likely only been encountered by short-story enthusiasts. (When is the last time *you* read a short story -- online, in a magazine?)

I do think the "100 Years" timeline is artificially limiting. And whereas I expect an equal representation of each decade (a decade itself being an artificial divide), I find one story for 1915-1920, and six (!) stories for 2000-2010. (Another reviewer has also pointed this out.) For this, 4 stars instead of 5.

It's still a tough decision between the two, though, for there are treasures in both.

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