taxes—providing information that writers might not be fully aware of in terms of their craft or would have to spend hours tracking down elsewhere. All in all, Writer's Market is the number one reference resource for writers. Its reputation as the best resource any writer could have is well deserved, and this year's version is an even more polished and sophisticated version of an admired and widely used classic.

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Flash Fiction is true to its subtitle of "very short stories." No story in this volume is more than 750 words, yet each demonstrates remarkable brilliance of style and of form. The editors say that they are raising the question of how short can a story be and still truly be a story, and they answer with stories that show the potentials of minimalism and of the dynamics of a complete narrative presented within a small structure. The editors comment on these stories that, "like all fiction that matters, their success depends not on their length but on their depth, their clarity of vision, their human significance—the extent to which the reader is able to recognize in them the real stuff of real life" (12). Later, they write,

These stories are not tricks, or trills on a flute; rather they are very short stage presentations or musical pieces that play to the full range of human sensibilities—some evoke mood while others provoke the intellect, some introduce us to people we're interested to meet, while others tell us of unusual but understandable phenomena in this world, and some of them do several or all of these things, the things good fiction of any length does. (12)

What is apparent from the editors' introduction is their great love of this fictional form and their appreciation of the craft involved in creating its distinctive effects. For example, they talk of how the stories "ascend, to gain altitude" and of each story's "minimal and rapid trajectory" (13). They also place an appreciation for this art form within a historical context.
by noting that “public taste for brevity in fiction has fluctuated over the years. Fifty years ago very short stories could be found in such magazines as Liberty, but fifteen years ago it was most unusual to come across a story of under five pages in the respected magazines and literary journals of this country” (13). Then writers like Raymond Carver and Joyce Carol Oates started producing very short stories and literary magazines like The North American Review started printing them, and a revival of interest was underway.

All the stories in this collection are interesting for the insight they reveal into the dynamics of this minimalist form. Many are outstanding for the quality of their style and characterization. The collection combines the work of established writers like Raymond Carver, Richard Brautigan, Jamaica Kincaid, John Updike, Heinrich Böll, Joyce Carol Oates, and Margaret Atwood with lesser known writers who nevertheless exhibit an equally high level of skill as their more famous colleagues. What is most intriguing about the entire collection is the range of experiences it offers to the reader. Many of the stories are deeply somber and affecting for their melancholy, or muted violence, or ongoing despair. Others are comic in delightful and eccentric ways, while still others are poetic in their use of imagery to create moods and visualizations that stay in the reader’s mind like paintings in words.

The most memorable story is the opening one, “Brilliant Silence,” by Spencer Holst. Barely a page long, it tells of the escape of two Alaskan Kodiak bears from a small circus and their migration to the wilderness of the southernmost isles of Tierra del Fuego. There the bears mate and, after a number of generations, populate the seven adjacent islands. When scientists find and study the bears seventy years later, they discover that all the bears are performing splendid circus tricks. The beauty and power of this story reside in its last two paragraphs, an imaginistic and alluring description of the bears dancing in the moonlight and a speculation on how they must feel and to what distant, remembered music they are dancing. The imagery and exceptional style of these last two paragraphs make this story haunting and memorable, with an energy and a “brilliant silence” all its own.

“True Love” by Don Shea is the best example of the humorous stories within this volume. Two entomologists meet at a convention; each is familiar with the other’s work. The woman realizes that the research the man has done could save her six months in her own work; the man realizes he has information the woman wants but that he can barter for a sexual encounter. What ensues as the two face each other naked in the woman’s hotel room is a seduction scene spoken in terms of insect mating habits that reveal the power of lust, the danger of betrayal, and the fear of engulfment and death. Narrated in this context, with the scientifically
precise language of a conference paper, the story becomes a highly amusing commentary on all relationships and all mating habits.

This collection is engrossing and will hold a reader's attention throughout. It is true to the concept of a book one can't put down because reading these stories becomes addictive. Entertained by one short piece, one finds it is easy to go on to the next, and the next, until, magically and sadly, one has finished the whole volume. In addition to being interesting reading in its own right, Flash Fiction should also prove an excellent text for a creative writing or contemporary fiction course. It certainly reflects the range of current fictional styles and themes. Students should find the stories in Flash Fiction both interesting and inspiring, and teachers will find them a delight to teach.

That's What I Like (About the South) is an equally memorable and impressive collection of contemporary stories. The editors endorse the premise that "Southern fiction is alive and kicking and going off in all kinds of directions as this old century staggers to an end." The thirty-one stories assembled here represent the best of contemporary Southern fiction and bring together themes that underscore what being Southern is all about—the retelling of the past, the uncertainty of the future, the haunting presence of racial guilt, the inescapable influence of family, and the tragedy and humor of Southern life. Those who might feel the Southern short story died with Flannery O'Connor will be delighted by the diversity and quality of the stories in this collection. Especially memorable are "Weeds" by Bobbie Ann Mason, "Dogs" by Mary Lee Settle, "Billboard" by Richard Bausch, and "That's What I Like (About the South)" by R. H. W. Dillard.

An excellent introduction by Fred Chappell contextualizes these stories within both Southern history and the Southern literary tradition. If earlier Southern writers, like Faulkner, Welty, and even O'Connor, mourned a lost Southern past and painted striking pictures of the modern decadence, the writers in this collection find humor and pathos in the emptiness of postmodern life in which ideals have been replaced by advertising slogans and relationships are as complicated as they are hollow. Madison Smartt Bell, an accomplished contemporary writer, concludes the collection with an afterword on "Time and Tide in the Southern Short Story"—an exceptionally insightful assessment of how the Southern short story has changed since mid-century and what further changes might lie ahead. Both Chappell's and Bell's essays would be valuable reading for courses on Southern culture and/or contemporary fiction. Add to their fine work the quality of the stories contained in this collection, and one has an exceptional anthology for literature, history, and creative writing classes.

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