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The short story anthology: shaping the canon

Lynda Prescott

One of the ways in which short stories are like poems (rather than like novels) is that they lend themselves to being collected for publication in anthologies. According to the Oxford English Dictionary the original meaning of 'anthology', in ancient Greek, was 'a collection of the flowers of verse, i.e. small choice poems, esp. epigrams, by various authors'. In fact, 'flowers' and 'choice' are appropriate terms for the first literary anthologies in Britain that appeared during the publishing boom of the second quarter of the nineteenth century: these were gift-books, containing a mix of poetry and prose that would be suitable for young women readers. Annuals such as *The Keepsake* were designed as elegant, illustrated gift-books, published each autumn in time for Christmas and New Year present-giving. *The Keepsake*, which ran from 1828 to 1857, enjoyed enormous sales figures and included in its roster of contributors some of the best-known writers of the day, including Walter Scott, Harrison Ainsworth and Mary Shelley (most of Shelley's short fiction was first published in this way). The concept of annual short story anthologies has remained an important one in the development of the genre: sifting and circulating stories in yearly compilations helps to maintain the genre's visibility in the literary marketplace as a form of writing which is 'of the moment'. But there are numerous cross-currents in the tide of anthologies that regularly wash the shorelines of bookshops, classrooms or the virtual fringes of the internet, and more specialised collections range across named periods, places, themes or sub-genres. Although the majority of short story anthologies are commercially-oriented, often featuring specific genres such as fantasy or ghost stories, literary anthologies can occupy influential spaces in terms of helping to shape tradition. They can not only build and perpetuate the reputations of particular writers and particular short stories, but they can also influence the formation of canons.

The routes by which individual stories find their way into anthologies are various. The 'standard route' would probably begin with the short story being published in a magazine, then, if the writer is sufficiently successful, it might be gathered with other stories in a single-authored collection; from here an anthologist might single it out for reprinting amongst a number of stories by other writers. For example, V.S.Pritchett's 'A Family Man' first appeared in the *New Yorker* in 1977, then two years later was published with eight more of Pritchett's recent stories in *On the Edge of the Cliff*, then in 1987 Malcolm Bradbury selected it for *The Penguin Book of Modern British Short Stories*. The first stage, magazine publication, is easier to achieve than the second, a single-authored collection: unless a writer has already built a reputation, usually as a novelist (though Pritchett would be an exception here), the market for single-authored short story collections is uncertain. So adventurous anthologists might go back to magazines, or perhaps short story compilations associated with a specific prize or project, to find less well-known writers and stories. Such 'prize or project' volumes could themselves be viewed as anthologies, sometimes bringing contemporary stories into print for the first time. However, the canon-forming function of anthologies is most clearly evident when there is a longer historical perspective on the selection.

There are two ways in which short story anthologies can employ such historical perspectives: general anthologies are often organised chronologically, whilst more specialised collections carve up the history of the genre into periods. At the 'origins' end of the historical sweep, anthologists of English

short stories are arguably dealing with a less clearly-delineated field than compilers of American short stories. This is not simply because studies of American literature have traditionally paid considerable attention to the evolution of nineteenth-century tales and short stories but also because in the US the nature of the genre was debated in formal terms from an early date, beginning with Edgar Allan Poe's 1842 review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*. In contrast, the English short story in the nineteenth-century was less well-defined and, although commercially successful, was paid less attention than the realist novel. Dickens's work is a case in point. Although a story such as 'The Signalman' can often be found in short story anthologies, the editor of his *Selected Short Fiction* noted in 1976 that 'many of the assorted stories and sketches which Dickens produced throughout his career defy conventional categorization and now lie buried in remote corners of his collected works.'¹ 'The Signalman' was a comparatively late story which Dickens produced for the Christmas number of his weekly magazine *All the Year Round* in 1866. *All the Year Round* and its predecessor, *Household Words*, were amongst the few English middle-range magazines catering to the kind of readership equivalent to the popular US *Harper's Monthly* (another key difference in the way the short story developed on opposite sides of the Atlantic). For the most part, the British short story market was divided along serious versus popular lines, and it is the stories published in upmarket periodicals such as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *The Monthly Magazine*, and later, titles such as *Belgravia* and *The Strand Magazine* that have found their way into anthologies of nineteenth-century short stories.

Retrieving short fictional texts from the earlier part of the nineteenth century is more problematic than selecting from the abundance of stories published in the century's later decades. One compilation that manages century-long coverage is the Routledge Anthology, *Nineteenth-Century Short Stories by Women* (1998), with original publication dates ranging from 1804 to 1898. Women's writing has been a productive field for anthologists. As Susan Hill, the editor of the *Penguin Book of Modern Women's Short Stories* (1991) pointed out, over half the short stories written during the twentieth century were written by women, but this was not a new development. Writing stories for magazines and annuals was a steady source of income for significant numbers of nineteenth-century women writers. The Routledge Anthology includes 28 stories, some by writers well-known as novelists, such as Maria Edgeworth (with a story 'The Limerick Gloves' from her *Popular Tales* of 1804), Elizabeth Gaskell (represented by one of her *Household Words* stories, 'A Manchester Marriage', 1858) and Margaret Oliphant (whose 'A Story of a Wedding Tour' appeared in *Blackwood's* in 1898). Over half of the stories in this anthology are from the 1890s, reflecting the rise of 'little magazines' such as the *Yellow Book* which, though short-lived (1894-1897), proved an influential outlet for women's fiction.

Several of the writers represented in the Routledge Anthology also appear in *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Short Stories* (2004), though for the most part different stories are selected. One of the exceptions is the Mary Shelley *Keepsake* story of 1833, 'The Mortal Immortal', which not only appears in both these modern anthologies but was already a favourite in nineteenth-century collections. The novelist Charles Gibbon reprinted it in his two-volume anthology *The Casquet of Literature, being a Selection of Prose and Poetry from the Works of the Most Admired Authors* (1873-4) and during the 1890s it appeared in further English and American collections. As a story of 'the supernatural' with thematic links to Shelley's earlier novel, *Frankenstein*, it has featured in several genre-based anthologies, including Sam Moskowitz's *Masterpieces of Science Fiction* (1966). Another story that appears in both the Routledge anthology of women's short stories and the

Broadview *Victorian Short Stories* is Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 'Eveline's Visitant' (1862). This, too, has been appropriated for genre-based anthologies, including the 2005 *Wordsworth Book of Horror Stories*.

Routledge's *Nineteenth-Century Short Stories by Women* can be seen as part of the later twentieth-century's recovery of women's literature that was stimulated by works of feminist criticism such as Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (1976) and Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own* (1977). At the same time, new feminist publishers, notably Virago (founded 1973) and the Women's Press (founded 1978), promoted both fictional and nonfictional writing, including some anthologies. Again, sub-genres can be seen to flourish, as in the Women's Press wittily-titled collections of crime stories, *Reader, I Murdered Him* (edited by Jen Green, 1989) and *Reader, I Murdered, Him, Too* (edited by Helen Widrath, 1995). Although many of the authors in these collections are American, UK-based contributors include the prominent Scottish crime-writer Val McDermid. Back in the mainstream of literary short stories, Virago published in 1986 one of the best-known anthologies of twentieth-century women's short stories, *Wayward Girls and Wicked Women*, sub-titled *An Anthology of Subversive Stories*, edited by Angela Carter. Again, only a minority of the 18 authors represented are English, but Carter sets the tone with her own story of a dominatrix marionette, 'The Loves of Lady Purple'. *Wayward Girls and Wicked Women* was re-published by Penguin Books in 1989 with a back-cover blurb declaring that 'They are discontented, bad mannered and won't play by the rules', a more sensationalist claim than Carter's comment in her introduction that the women in the anthology's stories 'at least contrive to evade the victim's role by the judicious use of their wits.'² The thematic nature of the collection aside, *Wayward Girls and Wicked Women* indicates how an anthology can be shaped by the its editor's affiliations or individual traits, in this case, Carter's adventurous and politicized approach to fiction-writing.

Thematic or period-based anthologies are clearly a boon to college or university teachers compiling booklists, since they enable breadth of reading without making undue demands in terms of length. Like other titles from this publisher of academic texts and editions, *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Short Stories* is designed for the classroom, and it comes with an introduction by the editor, Dennis Denisoff, outlining the literary and social historical context for the collection, short introductions to each of the authors represented, footnotes to the stories themselves, and five substantial appendices. At secondary school level, too, short story anthologies have provided breadth and variety within a single set of covers for English teachers seeking to extend their pupils' reading range. The English Association, which was founded in 1906 primarily to develop English Studies in schools, published its own short story anthologies under the title *English Short Stories of Today*, the first of which appeared in 1939. The selection of stories was designed to showcase the work of eminent authors, including two best-known as short story writers, M. R. James and Saki (Hector Hugh Munro), alongside major figures such as H. G. Wells and the 1932 Nobel Laureate John Galsworthy. Although the stories were selected as being suitable for schoolchildren, this did not preclude some adventurous choices, notably Evelyn Waugh's 'Mr Loveday's Little Outing', Mr Loveday being a psychopath and his 'little outing' being for the purpose of committing another murder. A second series of *English Short Stories of Today* appeared in 1958 and Oxford University Press took over the publication with further volumes in 1965 and 1976. By the time of the fourth series in 1976 the list of authors included what would then have been called 'Commonwealth writers', such as Chinua Achebe, V. S. Naipaul and R. K. Narayan: here we can see the inclusive

potential of short story anthologies aiding new developments in canon-formation as postcolonial writers came to the fore.

The fact that Oxford University Press reprinted collections originally published by the English Association indicates that the grey area between ‘academic’ and ‘trade’ books can be quite wide where short story anthologies are concerned. But some anthologies compiled for educational use declare their intended readership very clearly in their titles. The poet, novelist and educationist David Holbrook edited three volumes for Cambridge University Press under the title *People and Diamonds: An Anthology of Modern Short Stories for Use in Secondary Schools*, a two-volume publication in 1962 followed by a third (confusingly numbered ‘volume 2’) in 1965. Holbrook does not restrict himself purely to English writers – for example, the 1965 volume opens with F. Scott Fitzgerald’s ‘The Diamond as Big as the Ritz’ – but the other four stories in this anthology include what might be considered ‘classic’ English stories. ‘The Odour of Chrysanthemums’, probably the most famous of D.H. Lawrence’s short stories, is here, along with ‘The Machine Stops’, which is equally prominent amongst E.M. Forster’s short story output. Like so many anthologists, Holbrook also turns to Joyce’s *Dubliners*, in this case selecting ‘The Boarding House’, to follow ‘Odour of Chrysanthemums’ – the stylistic contrasts all the more striking across the stories’ largely domestic settings. The only story in this volume not still widely read is T. F. Powys’s ‘Lie Thee Down, Oddity!’ Powys’s idiosyncratic stories were reprinted fairly regularly in anthologies from the mid-twentieth century, such as Faber’s 1964 *Modern Short Stories*, edited by Jim Hunter, where again ‘Lie Thee Down Oddity!’ appears in the company of stories by Lawrence and Fitzgerald. During the later part of the twentieth century Powys’s work tended to fade from view, but the 2011 re-issue by Faber of his short story collection *God’s Eyes A-Twinkle* (along with several of his novels) suggests that his stories have not slipped out of the canon entirely; if so, his frequent inclusion in anthologies might have helped to shore up his reputation.

The middle decades of the twentieth century were gala years for anthologies of ‘modern’ and/or English short stories. John Hadfield’s collection of 20 *Modern Short Stories*, which included American as well as English writers, was first published by Dent in 1939 and was still in print, under the title *Modern Short Stories to 1940*, in 1984. Also in 1939 Oxford University press brought out, in their World’s Classics series, *Modern English Short Stories* edited by Phyllis M. Jones, spanning the years 1888-1937. This was followed up in 1956 by a second series, *Modern English Short Stories 1930-1955* edited by Derek Hudson, who concluded his introduction with: ‘This much is certain – that these stories do not derive from a dying art. Among them perhaps one or two will live to speak, fifty years hence, for English literature.’³ The idea of one or two short stories speaking ‘for English literature’ was always going to be a rather suspect proposition, and from a twenty-first-century vantage-point it looks as though a good proportion of Hudson’s authors, let alone the stories through which they are represented, are either neglected or forgotten. Who now reads the stories of Frances Towers (1885-1948), John Moore (1907-1967), Christopher Sykes (1907-1986) or Nigel Kneale (1922-2006), even if the latter’s BBC Quatermass serials are remembered enthusiastically? Amongst the still-firmly-canonical writers in the anthology, the stories selected have not proved to be the most enduring: Virginia Woolf’s late story ‘The Duchess and the Jeweller’ and Elizabeth Bowen’s ‘Maria’ are not now considered as high points of their authors’ art, although Hudson does better with Rosamond Lehmann, whose ‘A Dream of Winter’ continues to appear in more recent anthologies.

In fact, despite the great number of English/Modern short story anthologies that appeared in the middle of the twentieth century a sense of uncertainty seemed to hover around the short story's status and achievements. Part of this uncertainty centred on the challenges of narrative experimentation and modernist innovation. As Derek Hudson rather quaintly describes it in the introduction to his 1956 anthology,

The modern short-story writer has had to steer between the Scylla of popular journalism and the Charybdis of preciosity. It has seemed, at times during the past twenty-five years, that some of our distinguished writers were bent on establishing an era of plotlessness which might drive the intellectual short story out of the reach even of a 'general reader' sympathetically disposed to experiment. (p. xiii)

Hudson was not the first anthologist to draw attention to such problems. In 1937, Elizabeth Bowen discussed some of the formal features of new short stories in her introduction to the *Faber Book of Modern Short Stories*, which T. S. Eliot asked her to edit. Here she coined the term 'free story' to describe an approach to narrative and characterisation that deployed cinematic techniques, 'oblique narration, cutting, the unlikely placing of emphasis.'⁴ But behind the scenes Bowen was expressing a different kind of uncertainty about the contemporary short story: the following extract from a letter written in 1936 from her home in Ireland to her friend William Plomer (whose work was included in the Faber anthology) may simply reflect the trials and tribulations of anthologists at any time, but it may also point to a gulf between, on the one hand, the kind of early twentieth-century short stories that have achieved longevity through the later accretion of literary analysis and criticism, and, on the other hand, the mass of stories being published at the time:

Yes indeed I am doing those abominable short stories (the collection I mean). As far as I ever do read here, I read nothing else. 4/5 of what I try out shows a level of absolute mediocrity; arty, they are, and mawkishly tender-hearted. Quite a large number of short stories are told, do you notice, by hikers. 'As I crossed the horizon' they so often begin, and the heroine is generally just called 'the woman.'⁵

However, in her introduction to the anthology Bowen expresses her judgements on the contemporary short story largely through a distinction between 'commercial' short stories that are suitable for popular magazines and 'the free story' that, whilst it may be non-commercial, is often dissatisfying. Her eventual choices for the anthology included stories by A. E. Coppard, Stephen Spender, the Irish writers Frank O'Connor and Sean O'Faoláin (whose 1932 collection *Midsummer Night Madness* she particularly admired) along with her own story 'The Disinherited'. Like Virginia Woolf in her 1924 essay 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', Bowen opted for the year of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition as a cultural and artistic turning-point, and invited readers of the anthology to 'study the development of the short story in English since, roughly, 1910, to notice its variations and watch its trends.'⁶

Bowen's stated aims of tracing changes and demonstrating variety are shared by the editor of two of the most reprinted English short story anthologies of the twentieth century, Christopher Dolley. Whilst some anthologies explicitly foreground the evaluative nature of their selection – Christopher Isherwood's *Great English Short Stories*, which he edited in 1957 from New York, is refreshingly direct on this score – Dolley announces several different motivations for assembling his collections. His editorial foreword to the *Penguin Book of English Short Stories*, first published in 1967, begins

with a word about the publisher's list. This is no surprise, since Dolley, unlike most of the anthologists mentioned so far, was neither a writer nor a teacher but the manager of Penguin's Education division. In 1969 he became chairman and Managing Director of Penguin Books, following Allan Lane's retirement, but found time to edit a *Second Penguin Book of English Short Stories* in 1972. His foreword to the first collection begins: 'This volume of English short stories is the first in the series to be published by Penguins [sic]. Other volumes will include Modern Short Stories and American Short Stories.' The plan to focus on modern short stories perhaps reflects the recognition, increasingly clear by the 1960s, that modernism as a literary movement had elevated the generic status of short stories; the planned publication of a volume devoted to American short stories is equally telling, as it registers, again, the achievements of American writers but at the same time establishes a separate space for the English short story. Dolley's foreword continues:

The aim of this collection is to appeal to the reader at large. No attempt has been made to conduct a historical survey of the English short story, and the collection starts in the mid nineteenth century, from which date the short story developed as a recognizable genre.

[...]The short story still flourishes, and the aim of this collection is to give some idea of the variety and individuality which the genre has developed over the last hundred years.⁷

As with Hudson's defensive 'these stories do not derive from a dying art' a decade earlier, Dolley's assertion that 'the short story still flourishes' hints at some continuing anxiety about the genre's health. The very fact that this anthology was reprinted so frequently, sometimes twice a year, most recently in 2011, and is still available as an e-book, indicates that such anxieties were unnecessary. No doubt the anthology's educational uses contributed to its popularity: during the later 1960s and 1970s, as adult education expanded, the *Penguin Book of English Short Stories* could be found in many a WEA book-box and on the shelves of university extra-mural department libraries, providing a compact introductory text for part-time students of literature courses.

Dolley's editorial foreword to the *Second Penguin Book of English Short Stories* in 1972 began with a note about Penguin's advances in the short story field, now that anthologies of French, Italian and American short stories were available as companion volumes to the first *Penguin Book of English Short Stories*, but again the anxious note creeps in: 'Their publication has demonstrated that, far from continuing its supposed decline, the short story is enjoying a revival all the more encouraging when viewed against the gloom surrounding the future of the literary novel.' Although Dolley had disclaimed, in his foreword to the first volume, any intention of conducting an historical survey of the English short story, his retrospective view in the second foreword takes a different line:

The first *Penguin Book of English Short Stories* set out to survey the history of the genre in its present form and inevitably the need for compression made the choice difficult. I am grateful therefore that this volume allows me to widen the range of authors representative of the best English short story writing and at the same time to bring the selection forward in time so that it includes writers who are still at the height of their powers.⁸

In fact, two-thirds of the writers included in the second volume were there in the first. Although Dickens has been dropped, some later nineteenth-century stories from Hardy and Kipling are again included. Joyce Cary, whose stock was higher in the third quarter of the twentieth century than it is now, appears in both volumes, but Conrad, Wells, Maugham, Huxley and Waugh make way for T. F.

Powys, E. M. Forster and a new trio of writers 'still at the height of their powers': Robert Graves (who actually by 1972 was nearing the end of his working life), Muriel Spark and Kingsley Amis. The three living writers represented in the 1967 volume, V. S. Pritchett, Graham Greene and Angus Wilson, have further stories in the 1972 volume; in fact, it seems that no anthology of English short stories would be complete without V. S. Pritchett, 'widely regarded as the finest English short story writer of the twentieth century' according to the Royal Society of Literature who now fund a prize in his name for the best unpublished story of the year. Graham Greene and Angus Wilson are better remembered as novelists, but their short stories continue to be read, perhaps partly because of their visibility in anthologies. In some cases, a writer's second story in the 1972 volume is from the same original collection. This is inevitable with Joyce, and as Dolley had chosen the final, acclaimed *Dubliners* story 'The Dead', for the first anthology, he falls back on 'Ivy Day in the Committee Room' for the second. The two stories by D. H. Lawrence, 'Fanny and Annie' in 1967 and 'The Horse Dealer's Daughter' in 1972, are both from Lawrence's 1922 collection, *England, my England*. All in all, the *Second Penguin Book of English Short Stories* capitalised on a good marketing opportunity but did not break much new literary ground.

Meanwhile, Penguin Books were building their list of short story anthologies by identifying separate traditions within as well as outside the British Isles. *The Penguin Book of Scottish Short Stories* appeared in 1970, compiled by J. F. Hendry whose introduction speaks of bringing together writers who will provide 'a composite picture of the various facets of Scottish writing today'. So this is a twentieth-century collection including stories by George Mackay Brown, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, two stories by Ian Hamilton Finlay and several by women writers: Elspeth Davie, Margaret Hamilton, Dorothy K. Haynes, Naomi Mitchison and Muriel Spark. A number of these authors re-appear in the *New Penguin Book of Scottish Short Stories* (1983) edited by Ian Murray, and, despite the 'New' claim in the anthology's title, they are sometimes represented by the same story, in Spark's case 'The House of the Famous Poet', and in Edward Gaitens' 'A Wee Nip'. But where the 1983 volume does differ significantly from the earlier anthology is in its appeal to a Scottish tradition of short story writing by including nineteenth- as well as twentieth-century writers, notably Walter Scott, James Hogg, Margaret Oliphant and Robert Louis Stevenson. Stevenson is represented by 'The Beach of Falesá', one of his stories of the South Pacific which had been for many years out of print until it was included in the Penguin version of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* edited by Jenni Calder in 1979. Following its appearance in Murray's anthology, and subsequent collections of Stevenson's *South Sea Tales*, 'The Beach of Falesá' has become an increasingly prominent item in Stevenson's output during the canon-shift associated with the rise of postcolonial studies.

Welsh short stories also featured on Penguin's lists. A collection edited by Gwyn Jones and titled simply *Welsh Short Stories*, had been published by Allen Lane in 1941, and it reappeared in expanded form as a World Classic from Oxford University Press in 1956. A new OUP edition was published in 1971, then Penguin took up the baton again in 1976 when Alun Richards edited the *Penguin Book of Welsh Short Stories*, to be followed in 1993 by the *New Penguin Book of Welsh Short Stories*, also edited by Richards. These five anthologies shaped by Gwyn Jones and Alun Richards effectively established a canon of Welsh twentieth-century short story writers including E. Tega Davies, Caradoc Evans, Rhys Davies, Kate Roberts, Dylan Thomas and D. J. Williams. The 1976 anthology was especially influential, being adopted as a school and college textbook. A third of its 24 stories are translated, reflecting the parallel development of Welsh-language and Anglo-Welsh literature, with the short story a prominent genre for both. Welsh publishing houses have also promoted short story

anthologies, for example, *Across the Valley: Short Stories by Women from Wales, c.1850-1950*, edited by Jane Aaron, was published by Honno, an independent co-operative press dedicated to Welsh women's writing, in 2005. More recently, Parthian Books published two volumes of the Library of Wales' *Story* anthologies (2014), edited by Dai Smith, with 80 stories spanning the twentieth century.

During the Second World War Penguin also brought out their first Irish short story anthology: *Modern Irish Short Stories*, a slim volume edited by Alan Steele and Joan Hancock, appeared in 1943, the first of several collections with the same title from different publishers. There were also numerous anthologies published under the briefer title *Irish Short Stories*, beginning with a Faber collection in 1932 edited by George A. Birmingham. However, the best-known of these compilations is the *Modern Irish Short Stories* edited by Frank O'Connor for Oxford University Press in 1957 and reprinted ten times before being re-issued as *Classic Irish Short Stories* in 1985. O'Connor announces in his introduction:

I believe that the Irish short story is a distinct art form: that is, by shedding the limitations of its popular origin it has become susceptible to development in the same way as German song, and in its attitudes it can be distinguished from Russian and American stories which have developed in the same way. The English novel, for instance, is very obviously an art form while the English short story is not.⁹

O'Connor goes on to develop his point with reference to several of the stories in the anthology, notably George Moore's 'Home Sickness' from his 1903 collection, *The Untilled Field*, which he judges to be 'a masterpiece'. Joyce's 'The Dead' also appears in this anthology, along with Elizabeth Bowen's 'Summer Night' – Bowen, he concedes, 'has her place in English literature, but she also has her corner in Irish.'

Another eminent short-story writer claimed by both English and Irish literary traditions is William Trevor. In 1989 Trevor edited the monumental *Oxford Book of Irish Short Stories*, which was re-issued in 2010 and looks set to remain an influential collection. The anthology begins with seven folk tales translated from Irish before moving on to Oliver Goldsmith ('Adventures of a Strolling Player') and Maria Edgeworth ('The Limerick Gloves' again). Trevor's choice from Joyce's *Dubliners* is, unsurprisingly, 'The Dead', and he includes two stories each from Sean O'Faoláin and Frank O'Connor. The anthology moves forward to the present day with stories by John McGahern, Bernard MacLaverty and Desmond Hogan. Trevor's own story, 'Death in Jerusalem' features Irish characters, as does Elizabeth Bowen's 'Her Table Spread', the two Anglo-Irish writers claiming their Irish corners.

Just as period-based anthologies can carve up the literary field into fairly specialised areas, so can those based on geography. Sitting alongside the multiple anthologies exploring and establishing national traditions within the British Isles, there are further collections devoted to specific locales, especially cities. For example, the Edinburgh-based Mainstream Publishing produced two short story anthologies in the 1980s consisting wholly of stories set in Glasgow or written by Glasgow writers, *Streets of Stone* (1985) and *Streets of Gold* (1989), both edited by Moira Burgess and Hamish Whyte. London has, of course, had its share of dedicated anthologies, some arising from short story competitions, for example, the 1993 *Smoke Signals* sponsored by the London Arts Board, and some building on earlier magazine publication, such as the *London Magazine* collections, again with the evocative title *Signals*. It is not only literary magazines that have contributed to this kind of

anthologising: in 1993 Julie Burchill was commissioned to compile an anthology of stories set in or about London and published by Penguin to celebrate *Time Out's* twenty-fifth anniversary. For volume 2 of the 'Time Out' *Book of London Short Stories* (2000) the editor was a writer, Nicholas Royle, who had already edited *Time Out* books of New York and Paris short stories, and has gone on to be a prolific anthologist. In Birmingham, while the locally-based Tindal Street Press was enjoying funding from Arts Council England between 1998 and 2012, it published several short story anthologies focused on the city and its people. *Birmingham Noir*, edited by Joel Lane and Steve Bishop in 2002, was a collection of 23 crime stories, and its sister anthology *Birmingham Nouveau*, edited by Alan Mahar the same year, brought together short stories from a *Birmingham Post* competition interspersed with photographic sketches from the newspaper's staff. Another Tindal Street publication from this period arose out of writing workshops that were held at community venues across the city as part of a millennium project: *Whispers in the Walls*, edited by Leone Ross and Yvonne Brissett is sub-titled *New Black and Asian Voices from Birmingham* and for most of the authors this was the first time any of their work had been published.

Another twenty-first-century anthology that grounds itself in specific places is *England Calling: 24 Stories for the 21st Century* (2001), edited by Julia Bell and Jackie Gay. Each story is identified by author, title and place-name. Most of the place-names refer to English cities – Newcastle, Coventry, Bath, London (twice) – but some denote counties or less specific areas – Cheshire, Cornwall, Black Country, Off the M4. The stories are previously unpublished, but the authors include some well-known literary names such as David Almond and Peter Ho Davies, alongside the comedian Alexei Sayle and journalist Julie Burchill. The editors' introduction launches straight into the issue of what Englishness means at the start of the twenty-first century in a country that is 'restless, uneasy, questioning and devolving.' English fiction has often been firmly grounded in a sense of place, but the story-writers represented in this anthology, the editors say, 'are not only telling stories of the landscapes of England, but peeling back the layers of Englishness in the process – Englishness as it is now: multicultural, messy, survivalist.'¹⁰ Bell and Gay are quite explicit in their call for fiction to articulate, or at least explore, national identity and culture at a time when Scottish and Welsh devolution are raising new questions about that identity. *England Calling*, like the city-based collections mentioned above (amongst numerous other examples), operates with a dual rationale: to showcase new short stories and to foster a sense of community. Whether or not such anthologies turn out to be influential in shaping literary canons will depend not only on the quality of the short stories themselves but also on the way that literary studies evolve, and, where educational curricula are concerned, the extent to which devolutionary currents impinge on the map of English writing.

Meanwhile, the showcasing of new writing gathers pace elsewhere in various kinds of anthologies. Some are directly linked to international literary prizes, for example, the Bristol Short Story Prize, which has generated anthologies of the winning and short-listed stories since 2008. The Manchester Writing Competition, linked to the Creative Writing school at Manchester Metropolitan University, includes a short story section, and the finalists' work appears in an archive that functions as a virtual anthology. Although competitions like those based in Bristol and Manchester attract large numbers of submissions, their rules admit only previously unpublished work, so unlike traditional anthologies the finalists' collections have been through a single 'sifting' process rather than several. For many years there has been no UK equivalent of the annual *Best American Short Stories* series, which selects around 20 stories published in US and Canadian magazines each calendar year. The American series, established in 1915, has a distinguished history, and for numerous now-famous short story

writers having their work appear in *Best American Short Stories* has been an important step in confirming their literary reputations. The annual anthology, which regularly makes the best-seller lists for fiction, includes a mix of established writers and relative newcomers: the 2013 volume, for example, features a fair number of university teachers of Creative Writing alongside writers with long-established reputations, including Lorrie Moore and Alice Munro, whose featured story, 'Train', was published in *Harper's Magazine* around the same time that she received the Nobel Prize for Literature. During the 1920s there was a short-lived American enterprise to publish an annual anthology of *Best British Short Stories*, organised by the now-defunct Boston publishing house of Small, Maynard & Company. The idea of an annual anthology was revived in the UK by Penguin Books with their *Firebird* anthologies in the early 1980s, though this series, too, proved to be short-lived. However, a twenty-first-century version of the annual anthology was launched in 2011 by the Norfolk firm, Salt Publishing, with Nicholas Royle as editor, and the *Best British Short Stories* series, with four issues to date, is establishing itself as a significant outlet for good new writing. Only a small minority of the stories have previously appeared in single-authored collections, and in some cases the anthology brings stories into print for the first time, their initial publication having been online. Although the *Best British* anthologies have not yet featured any Nobel Laureates, they do include some well-known names, such as, in the 2014 volume, the award-winning poet and fiction-writer David Constantine. His story 'Ashton and Elaine' is reprinted from a collection titled *Red Room: New Short Stories Inspired by the Brontës* – another reminder of the sheer variety of sources trawled by twenty-first-century short story anthologists.

Whilst annual anthologies of new writing re-assert the short story's contemporary relevance and vitality, it is the longer sweep of anthologies connecting older writing with more recent work that makes them, in the end, the more influential shapers of tradition. This chapter concludes by looking at two major late-twentieth-century anthologies from publishers who have dominated this field, *The Penguin Book of Modern British Short Stories* (1987) edited by Malcolm Bradbury, and *The Oxford Book of English Short Stories* (1998) edited by A.S. Byatt.

Bradbury's anthology is restricted chronologically from 1945 to the mid-80s, but is not confined to English writers. He includes a significant number of Irish authors (Samuel Beckett and Edna O'Brien as well as Elizabeth Bowen and William Trevor), Dylan Thomas from Wales, and Muriel Spark from Scotland. The category 'British writer' had begun, by the 1980s, to include a larger proportion of authors born outside Britain, so Jean Rhys and Doris Lessing are joined by younger writers, Salman Rushdie and Kazuo Ishiguro. Ishiguro is just one of the successful graduates of the University of East Anglia's Creative Writing programme, founded in 1970 by Malcolm Bradbury and Angus Wilson, to be included in this anthology: others are Clive Sinclair, Rose Tremain and Ian McEwan. These four, along with another clutch of Bradbury's contributors, Martin Amis, Julian Barnes, Adam Mars-Jones, Salman Rushdie and Graham Swift, had also featured in *Granta* magazine's 'Best of Young British Novelists' list in 1983. So, as far as the younger generation of writers is concerned, there are strong connections in Bradbury's anthology with *Granta*, one of the most prestigious literary magazines in the UK, and the pioneering UEA Creative Writing programme. Bradbury contributes one of his own short stories along with 'More Friend Than Lodger' by his UEA colleague, Angus Wilson, and a very recent magazine story from his former University of Birmingham colleague, David Lodge. An academic flavour pervades the collection in other ways, too, with stories that include Beckett's 'Ping', through to the experimentalist B. S. Johnson's 'A Few Selected Sentences' and the anthology's final story, Adam Mars-Jones's 'Structural Anthropology.' Another marked feature of this

anthology is that its list of contributors, featuring many of the major names in post-war fiction-writing, includes so many writers who are known primarily as novelists. Bradbury acknowledges this much in his introduction, arguing that in the period covered by the anthology novels and short stories have shared 'new kinds of self-questioning and a fresh enquiry into the nature and the proper conditions of a fiction.'¹¹ However, he also includes several writers whose reputations have been built on their achievements as short story writers, principally V. S. Pritchett and William Trevor, but perhaps Alan Sillitoe, whose stories are as highly-regarded as his novels and poems, belongs in this category, too.

Bradbury's anthology, like Dolley's *Penguin Book of English Short Stories*, lends itself well to academic use, but the final collection to be considered here is clearly addressed to the 'general reader' as well as students and scholars. Like Trevor's *Oxford Book of Irish Short Stories*, A.S. Byatt's *The Oxford Book of English Short Stories* has a monumental feel. Whereas Bradbury's anthology was constrained by period though not nationality, Byatt's collection ranges from the mid-nineteenth-century to the present, but she confines herself to English writers. However, she says in her introduction that in making her selection 'I was very carefully *not* looking for stories that would give images of England, or of the Empire; I very carefully tried to have no preconceptions of any 'English' styles or subject-matter.'¹² The stories are arranged chronologically, and from the outset it is clear that Byatt is not merely perpetuating existing canons. Her nineteenth-century stories include 'The Sacristan of St. Botolph' by William Gilbert, father of the more famous dramatist, and 'Little Brother' by Mary Mann, Thomas Hardy's contemporary whose subject-matter was drawn from rural communities in East Anglia. Hardy is there, too, along with Dickens and Trollope, but Byatt's table of contents continues to surprise, her twentieth-century stories including 'Landlord of the Crystal Fountain' by Malachi Whitaker (actually Marjorie Olive Whitaker), known in her day as the 'Bradford Chekhov', and 'My Flannel Knickers' by Leonora Carrington. The stories she selects by better-known short story writers also reveal some original choices. A. E. Coppard's 'Some Talk of Alexander' is much less well-known than, say, 'A Field of Mustard' or 'Dusky Ruth', and similarly with Saki she opts for the less-anthologised 'The Toys of Peace.' Byatt's comments on Saki suggest another perspective on the value of anthologies: 'Saki's tales should not be read in bulk, for their idiosyncratic shockingness is diminished by proximity to other idiosyncratic shocks of rather the same kind, and his talent begins to look like a limited series of tricks' (p. xxi). There is no dominant mode in the collection of 37 stories, and Byatt's introduction refers to social realism, fantasy, ghost stories, 'stories of sensibility' (Hardy, Elizabeth Taylor, H.E. Bates and D.H. Lawrence) and 'rollicking stories of insensibility, Saki and Waugh, Wodehouse and Firbank' (p. xvii). Several of Bradbury's younger generation of short story writers appear in Byatt's anthology, too, but her final story is the (then) very recent 'Dead Languages' by Philip Hensher.

The impact of *The Oxford Book of English Short Stories* on the reputation of the short story as a genre remains to be seen. At the level of the individual writers featured in the anthology, Byatt's selection adds yet more status to some already well-known stories, such as Graham Greene's 'The Destroyers' and J.G. Ballard's 'Dream Cargoes', but it also brings semi-forgotten texts back into the limelight and speculates on the potential of some contemporary stories to endure. First published in 1998, it has already been reprinted several times in the US as well as the UK, but unlike Dolley's best-selling Penguin anthologies of English short stories a generation earlier, Byatt's collection breaks some new ground. However, whilst women writers are fairly well-represented, the selection

of authors from later decades does not include any Asian or Black British writers: Byatt's canon, unlike Bradbury's, remains firmly white.

¹ Charles Dickens, *Selected Short Fiction*, ed. Deborah A. Thomas (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985), p.11.

² Angela Carter (ed.), *Wayward Girls and Wicked Women* (London, Virago, 1986), p.xii.

³ Derek Hudson (ed.), *Modern English Short Stories 1930-1955* (London, Oxford University Press, 1956), p.xiv.

⁴ Elizabeth Bowen (ed.), *The Faber Book of Modern Short Stories* (London, Faber and Faber, 1937), p.8

⁵ Victoria Glendinning, *Elizabeth Bowen: Portrait of a Writer* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977), p.118.

⁶ Bowen, p.7

⁷ Christopher Dolley (ed.), *The Penguin Book of English Short Stories* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967), p.5

⁸ Christopher Dolley (ed.), *The Second Penguin Book of English Short Stories* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972), p.7

⁹ Frank O'Connor (ed.), *Classic Irish Short Stories* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985 [1957]), p.ix.

¹⁰ Julia Bell and Jackie Gay (eds.), *England Calling* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001), pp. ix-xi.

¹¹ Malcolm Bradbury (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Modern British Short Stories* (London, Viking, 1987), p.13.

¹² A.S. Byatt (ed.), *The Oxford Book of English Short Stories* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), p.xv.

Further Reading

Anne Enright (ed.), *The Granta Book of the Irish Short Story* (London, Granta, 2010)

Lynda Prescott (ed.), *A World of Difference: An anthology of short stories from five continents* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

Short Stories volume 1: English and Irish authors read their own work (audio CD) (London, The British Library, 2011)

Alan Yentob (ed.), *BBC National Short Story Award 2014* (Manchester, Comma Press, 2014)