

Christine Perkins-Hazuka, Tom Hazuka, and Mark Budman
(eds), *Sudden Flash Youth: 65 Short-Short Stories* (New
York: Persea, 2011). 211 pp. ISBN 978-0-89255-371-6

The editors of this great anthology say that flash fiction has long been popular, but that this is the first to focus on youth, exploring ‘the myriad experiences of growing up’ in America.

There are flashes from well-known names such as Richard Bausch, Richard Brautigan, Ron Carlson, Stuart Dybek, Dave Eggers, Alice Walker, and Katharine Weber. Walker’s ‘Flowers’ – a girl going for a walk discovers something that pivots her out of innocence – is unforgettable. Weber’s ‘Sleeping’ is delicate yet direct, mapping the gulf between child and adult in the story of what is at first glance a simple evening’s babysitting. Eggers’s clever ‘Accident’ is one of the few pieces with an adult protagonist, and also one of a few in second person. Dybek’s ‘Confession’, with its alcoholic priest listening through a hangover to a boy’s misdemeanours, provides a necessary flash of comedy, neatly observed.

It is hard to single out other stories from a consistently strong collection, but I particularly liked Lex Williford’s ‘The Coat’, Samantha Davis’s ‘Disorder’, Kelly Cherry’s ‘Saturday’s Child’, Bryan Shawn Wang’s ‘Alone’, and Matt Krampitz’s ‘Half Sleep’. These last two, by relative ‘newbies’, are particularly good; Wang and Krampitz are writers to watch.

Overwhelmingly, the pieces are written in first person. Many of the voices sound rather similar, and, of course, all the stories deal one way or another with issues of growing up: first love, first betrayal, discovering that parents or siblings are flawed, first death, first car, first car accident, the realization of adult responsibilities.

Speaking as one of the target audience – the young at heart – I would have liked a little more lightness in the mix, but enjoyed it all anyway.

This would make an excellent collection to use when teaching creative writing to students who are the same age as the protagonists. I tried it, using various stories as springboards to encourage second-year undergraduates to explore their own moments of epiphany, with some amazing results. It was as if the authors were speaking directly to the students, giving them permission. Magic!

Vanessa Gebbie

Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine, 5.1 (April 2012), 77–78.