

Short Takes

Review of *Best American Short Stories 2009*

By Joseph Peschel
Special Correspondent

Short stories

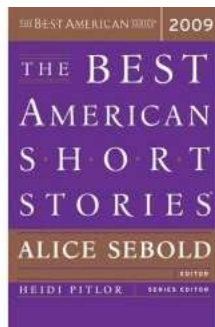
The Best American Short Stories 2009

Alice Sebold, guest editor, Houghton Mifflin, 368 pages, \$14.

In her introduction to this year's 20-story collection, Alice Sebold writes, "Every story in the final selection deserves to be read. Deserves, in the case of some newer or lesser-known authors, to help lift those authors out of the slush pile when they submit again, and to help these authors find a larger audience in the world."

While that's commendable, absent are superior stories by T.C. Boyle and Alice Munro that are better than half of this collection. And Charles Baxter's brilliant "Royal Blue" and John Updike's sublime "Outage" are

not even included in the appendix's list of "100 Other Distinguished Stories."



The stories of a couple of old hands, Richard Powers and Annie Proulx, are included. Sebold selected Proulx's "Them Old Cowboy Songs."

The best story, though, is by Rebecca Makkai. In "The Briefcase,"

Makkai tells the tale of a chef who, captured and chained with other men as another political prisoner, escapes and assumes the identity of a seized professor. Still, life gets harder for the chef/professor, his universe turned inside out.

All of these stories deserve, as Sebold says, to be read, and the collection is worth purchasing. Maybe the selections by next year's guest editor, Pulitzer Prize-winner Richard Russo, will be more impressive.

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