



Journal of the Short Story in English

Les Cahiers de la nouvelle

54 | Spring 2010
General issue

Shortness as shape in John Gould's *Kilter: 55 fictions*

Neta Gordon



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/1048>

ISSN: 1969-6108

Publisher

Presses universitaires d'Angers

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 June 2010

ISBN: 0294-0442

ISSN: 0294-04442

Electronic reference

Neta Gordon, « Shortness as shape in John Gould's *Kilter: 55 fictions* », *Journal of the Short Story in English* [Online], 54 | Spring 2010, Online since 01 December 2010, connection on 01 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/1048>

This text was automatically generated on 1 May 2019.

© All rights reserved

Shortness as shape in John Gould's *Kilter: 55 fictions*

Neta Gordon

- 1 Short story theorists Robert M. Luscher, who focuses on American short fiction, and Gerald Lynch, whose book, *The One and the Many: English-Canadian Short Stories*, is one of the only sustained studies of English-Canadian short stories, examine the significance of the short story collection's shape, both of them pointing out the tension between looseness and structure characterizing the genre. Luscher prefers the name *short story sequence* to identify the pre-eminent variety of the genre, and his description of how the reader responds to the genre privileges the effects of linear accumulation. He posits the short story sequence as the ideal "midpoint" (164) of a continuum between miscellany and novel whereby the cumulative effect of reading stories in sequence produces a decisive unifying feature, which is the sense of "the continuous narrative" (165). Lynch, following Forrest L. Ingram, prefers to privilege the *short story cycle*, asserting that Ingram's notion of "the tension between the one and the many" (18) is well-suited to describe not only the sense of fragmented unity in structure produced by important Canadian short story collections, but also a thematic core of these works.¹ On this basis, Lynch puts forward the short story cycle as "a distinctively Canadian genre," especially in its capacity to explore why "for reasons of physical and political environment, for historical reasons – Canadians, unlike Americans, have been more willing to sacrifice the gratifications of individualism for the securities of community" (19). Like Luscher, Lynch is keen to distinguish the particular type of collection in spatial terms, arguing that in order to subvert a totalizing vision that might be accumulated via sequence, cycles will "return to their origins, or their elusive centres, without ever quite closing the circle," resulting in a spiral that is unified, paradoxically, because it remains "discontinuous" (30).
- 2 Differences and preferences aside, both Luscher and Lynch use spatial terms to suggest the distinctive unity of certain types of short story collections. Further, the sorts of potentially unifying literary features they identify are similar, though whereas Luscher lists "setting, theme, motifs, characters, and narrators . . . which the reader should clearly

perceive as developing in a sequential fashion" (164), Lynch insists that the only "major" characteristics that can unify short story cycles are place and character (20). What is interesting to note here is that while both Luscher and Lynch employ spatial models to describe what gives short story collections a sense of unity, neither theorist is willing to allow that formal consistency among the parts might provide the whole collection with shape. In her article, "The Short Story: The Long and the Short of It," Mary Louise Pratt notes the defensive posture much short story theory adopts in response to the matter of form, particularly the matter of the short story's "'mere' fact of shortness"; Pratt asserts: "The problem with shortness, of course, arises from a sense that literary genres ought to be characterized by esthetic properties, and shortness seems altogether too quantitative, too material a feature to be given top billing" (179). For Canadian author John Gould, whose recent collection *Kilter: 55 fictions*, shortlisted for the Giller in 2003, is comprised of stories no more than three pages in length, the "material" feature of each story's marked shortness ultimately provides a sense of unifying shape to the collection. This shape is both like a sequence, depending on the reader's recognition of "the potential for a dynamic sequential unity" (Luscher, 164), and like a cycle, employing the convention of the return. Gould's play between sequence and cycle is achieved via the acute shortness of each of the stories in *Kilter*: on the one hand, the stories accrete relatively quickly because - to what might have been Poe's consternation - one can "peruse" a whole group of them in "one sitting" (Poe 1532); on the other hand, the intratextual strategies for readerly decoding offered in the succeeding narratives tend to emphasize doubling back.

- 3 *Kilter's* status as a Canadian short story collection is also important to consider in terms of the way the text corresponds with Lynch's argument that the short story cycle is "a distinctively Canadian genre" (19). Lynch points out that since the late nineteenth-century and throughout much of the twentieth-century, the short story cycle has been "well suited to the concerns of Canadian writers intent on portraying a particular region or community, its history, its characters, its communal concerns" (16); in particular, the "new kind of unity in disunity" of the genre proves useful for Canadian writers seeking to "portray the struggles of small communities for coherence and survival under contrary pressures from metropolitanism and modernity" (23). Gould's fictions, however, question how the very category of "community" has altered and how the concepts of "coherence and survival" emerge and signify distinctly in the twenty-first century. Whereas, as Lynch asserts, it is the small, regional community that is most often examined by Canadian writers, from Duncan Campbell Scott and Stephen Leacock to Alice Munro and Thomas King, Gould's community, paradoxically, coheres as urban, mass, and Canadian in so far as Canadians are unspecific with respect to regionalism and global citizenship. Also, whereas in such foundational Canadian short story cycles as Scott's *In the Village of Viger and Other Stories* (1896) and Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912) the unsettling impact of modernity on conceptions of community is confronted (23), in *Kilter*, an explicitly post 9/11, turn-of-the-millennium timeframe is the crucial context. The formal feature of shortness in *Kilter* functions as a unifying "outer dynamic" (Lynch 23) for an exploration of the new community that does not cohere spatially and for which the nostalgia related to being at the end of history has been replaced by a confusion about the meaning of beginnings. The shortness of Gould's stories gives shape to *Kilter's* exploration of how the present age produces various kinds of doubt and fear: doubt about the possibility of metaphysical and/or epistemological resolution; fear associated with problems of misinterpretation or miscommunication; and a sense of loss regarding the failure of explanatory models, such as systems of justice or faith.

- 4 In her essay "A Cognitive Approach to Storyness," Susan Lohafer reports on the results of a study she made of how stories are processed cognitively, a study which focused on what she terms the "preclosure choices" (303) available in American short stories from different historical periods. Lohafer's goal was to determine what conclusions might be arrived at with regards to our "sense of storyness" (310) by examining "the staging of closure" (304) as it shifts over time. While Lohafer makes note of "preclosure points," including the points of "anterior closure", "penultimate closure", and "final closure" (303-04), an inverted version of Lohafer's study might productively be made of Gould's collection, though with an emphasis on *inaugural* points, or *the staging of beginning*. Because Gould's stories are so short, the reader's ability to "perce[ive] . . . storyness" (Lohafer, 302) is necessarily restricted, as he or she is provided with drastically reduced information to process. The pressure to find what I will call the *successive inaugural* point - the point after the actual beginning of the narrative at which the reader is provided with enough information to begin to make sense of the story - is almost unnervingly insistent. This cognitive challenge to comprehending Gould's stories relates to the unique turn-of-the-millennium *gestalt* his collection seeks to interrogate, whereby the difficulty of understanding, or perhaps even locating, the beginning of where it all went wrong - with culture, with family, with faith, with love - is only mitigated by seizing upon the *transformative inaugural* point, or the point at which the concern for what came before dissipates in favour of an astonishing apprehension of the immediate.
- 5 In "What You're Ready For," Gould offers a searing critique of the ways in which our media-saturated and consumerist culture has commodified the force of the immediate. In front of a live, devoted audience, "Edgar O. Laird, esteemed author, therapist and guru" (185) is required to re-tape a portion of a lecture because "one of the cameras went kaput" (186); the crux of this section of Dr. Laird's lecture is that " 'This moment, this now' - he effects a scooping motion with his hands, gathering in the instant like a great pile of poker chips - 'this *present* is a *gift*'" (186). The irony that Dr. Laird's expostulations regarding "This moment, this now" are being taped for the second time in front of an audience that is "enjoying the shtick even more now that [they're] in on it" (186) is redoubled at the story's *transformative inaugural* point, when Dr. Laird is shot, and "After an instant of stunned silence - a moment of presence in the purest sense - people leap to their feet, start scrabbling and clawing their way towards the exits" (187). In this story, the *transformative inaugural* point comes quite late, a mere paragraph before the story ends and only a few sentences before the point of anterior closure, "the preclosure point nearest the beginning of the story" (Lohafer 303-04). In the final paragraph, the narrator - the shooter - provides concise allusions to the back-story of this moment, acknowledging "It's not that he deserved it, that's not what it's about. Tanya would have left me anyway . . . If it hadn't been Laird it would have been some other smarmy son of a bitch" (187). Thus, the structure of this story reflects Gould's critique of our attempts to commodify "presence," to treat the search for metaphysical wisdom as enjoyable "shtick." The beginning of "What You're Ready For" is staged as an accumulation of patter which is transformed into some sort of "storyness" through a seemingly empty, violent plot twist; only when the narrative hastily starts to shut down is the reader thrust backwards into a story that is processed as an unfortunate cliché: cuckolded lover kills contemptible rival male.
- 6 In the story "Crunch," however, Gould provides both structural support and an intratextual clue to what might be thought of as his ideal sense of how to recognize the

immediate. The beginning of this story is staged more efficiently than "What You're Ready For" in that the successive inaugural point appears fairly close to the actual start of the story: within the first two paragraphs, the narrator clarifies that he and his stepson, Barry, are in the midst of some before-bed homework, doing an Internet search on "the origins of the universe," while his wife finishes off some work in her downstairs office (94). As the narrator describes his attempts to explain the idea of infinity to Barry, references are made to the complexity of the relationship between the two characters: Barry is playfully kicking his stepfather, who asks himself, "Should I be doing something about this?" (95); the narrator is aware that the child is "Ambitious . . . [like] his mom" and a "Little scholar" (94), like his dad, though the father is rarely around: "Maybe a weekend a month, maybe not" (95). The subtext to these references is the narrator's love for Barry and his anxiety about his place in his stepson's life. The transformative inaugural point occurs when the narrator begins to wonder about "The Big Crunch," the period when the universe starts to collapse; as the narrator explains, "What interests me is the point smack dab in the middle. What interests me is the moment at which the whole thing quits expanding but hasn't yet begun to contract. The moment of stillness . . . Will we feel it? Will we know?" (95). Significantly, this passage also constitutes the anterior preclosure point of the story, so that Gould's narrative contemplation of "the moment of stillness" is replicated in his story's structure, which finishes beginning and starts to end at the same point. Gould thus urges the reader to seek out such "moments of stillness" even within the rush of his short short fictions, as such moments provide the framework of possibility for insight, for transformation. The final paragraph also depends on a return to the "crunch" moment of the story, as Barry, tucked in bed between his stepfather and mother, "who make a Barry sandwich of him," tries to prolong "the moment of stillness" by asking these loving parental figures to "Stay forever" (96).

- 7 Gould's examination of how members of this human community negotiate the cultural and emotional noise that impedes discovery of the moment of stillness runs throughout the collection, accumulating in rapid sequence. *Kilter's* first three stories offer distinct illustrations of how the moment of stillness in which the struggle toward joy might manifest remains elusive. The three narratives, "Two Things Together," "Leather," and "Stump," do, ultimately, intimate that acts which project ethical self-consciousness might remove impediments to productive transformation. In "Two Things Together," the narrator laments that he no longer understands his son, who, at seventeen, has given up an apparently welcome "gangsta" identity, "the white boy's black dream" (3), in favour of seriously pursuing Hindu meditation. After making a brief attempt to decipher his son's explanation of "the *Anahata Sabda* . . . the sound that comes without the striking of any two things together" (4), the narrator loses confidence: "I couldn't think of anything else to ask him, so I asked if he wanted a sandwich" (5).² The anterior preclosure point of this story occurs after the narrator leaves his son's room, once the offer of a sandwich has been politely refused, and is followed closely by the penultimate preclosure point, "the preclosure point closest to the end of the story" (Lohafer, 304), in which the narrator sits with a scotch, "pondering things by [the television's] flickering blue light" (5). Significantly, the transformative inaugural point occurs after these points, during the final paragraph when the narrator begins to focus his meditative attention on "Why . . . the light from a television set is always blue" (5); the narrator's contemplation of this paradox of light parallels his son's meditation on a paradox of sound, as each character attempts to find a moment of stillness in mutual isolation. The structure of this narrative, however, in which the story begins to conclude before its beginning is fully staged,

reflects the crisis of anxiety experienced by this single parent who cannot identify with his child, who has become overwhelmed by a barrage of cultural clutter, from rap music and “Xena, Warrior Princess” (4) to news footage of “survivors picking through a bombed-out building” (5), as well as by his own emotional turmoil, which he tries to numb with scotch.

- 8 In the following story, “Leather,” Gould suggests how the isolation represented in the ironically titled “Two Things Together” might be dispelled: Jan slips into what she believes is her dead brother’s leather jacket, “hugs herself, presses her face into the jacket’s lining” (8). In this way, she attempts to relieve her sense of loss and remoteness from him by stepping into his skin. Like father and son in “Two Things Together,” Jan and her brother Lance live separate lives, but as even the detective investigating Lance’s murder can ascertain, “[Jan] obviously knew him really well” (9), accepting his homosexuality, his work as a performer of abortions and assisted suicides, his radical environmentalism. While the characters in “Two Things Together” haphazardly attempt to communicate by means of a series of interpolated masks, Jan searches for “evidence of her brother’s distinctive presence, his essence” (8).
- 9 In the final paragraph of “Leather,” however, Jan’s construal of the leather jacket as “classic Lance” (8) proves a misinterpretation: after having asked Jan out on a date, Detective Hayashi “lifts the jacket from the back of the door, slings it over his shoulder” (10). While this point of penultimate preclosure might be said to ironically recollect the “false” transformative inaugural point, in which Jan communes with what she mistakenly believes is her brother’s “essence,” the final closure of the narrative directs the reader forward once again, as Detective Hayashi is “opening the door, waiting for her to step through” (10). Thus, what is idealized in “Crunch” as a “moment of stillness” and has been represented as a symbolic communion with another’s skin in the short sequence of the first two stories is intimated beyond the borders of “Leather,” as Jan must decide whether or not she will allow things to “get messy” (10).
- 10 The succeeding story, “Stump,” rides the momentum signalled by the proposition of “step [ping] through” an “[open] door” as, in the first sentence, the narrator describes how his daughter “springs the question” on him (11). Teasingly, however, Gould extends the gap between the narrative’s successive inaugural point and the transformative inaugural point, occurring just past the narrative’s midpoint. We learn at the successive inaugural point from the narrator’s retrospective description that he and his daughter, Patty, have been shopping downtown, “in search of the perfect pair of sneakers” (11); after having been solicited for change by a man with a missing arm, the narrator closes the retrospection by repeating “Patty springs her question” (12). Thus, the sense of momentum implicated by the repeated notion of “spring[ing] a question” amounts to little more than narrative loitering, especially when the narrator clarifies that “Actually, what she does is she goes quiet – the question’s there in the way she doesn’t ask it” (12). The narrator, however, does not take advantage of the moment of stillness offered by his daughter’s quiet and, like the narrator in “Two Things Together,” allows his own sense of incapacity to confront pain overwhelm him. What follows the squandered moment is a resumption of panicked momentum manifesting as a torrent of questions the narrator imagines his daughter asking: “Why did he call you ‘chief’? What happened to his arm? Why couldn’t they put it back on? Why did you say you were sorry? Didn’t you used to have a pair of blue pants like that? What would happen if my arm came off? Can you die from having your arm come off? What happens when you die? How does he tie up his shoes?” and so on (12-13).

Implicit behind the torrent is the continued “steer[ing]” (13) of Patty through the shopping expedition, as the two characters also hurtle forward through space and the deadening momentum of consumerism just so the narrator can avoid being “stumped.” When the sought-after sneakers are finally found, the narrator sardonically describes them as “a miracle, a message from God, as perfect and perfectly devoid of meaning as any other” (13), once more failing to experience a potential miracle, which is communion with his child. His psychic distance from her is demonstrated by the narrative’s final closure, when Patty finally does ask a question: “What did I do?” (13).

- 11 In this first sequence of “Two Things Together,” “Leather,” and “Stump,” Gould depicts various acts that might dispel the impediment to transformative human communion accessible via moments of stillness, from “mute[ing] the tube” (4), and allowing silence to break through the distractions of cultural noise, to braving anxiety and embracing the paradox of miracle. The shortness of these stories, and of the rest in the collection, provokes a rapid impetus to shape-making, and Gould makes explicit that the links among stories are not only sequentially accreted, but also perceived via a cognitive doubling back. “Stump,” for example, includes an allusion to the definition of *Anahata Sabda* as “the sound that comes without the striking of any two things together.” In a bathetic inversion, the narrator of “Stump” acknowledges the joke he might make to his wife if she were present when he and Patty encounter the man with the missing arm: “‘Sound of one hand,’ I’d murmur” (12). Within the context of a twenty-first century community in which stable conceptions regarding an institution like the family have been battered, in which discussion of the material inequities among members of society is strenuously avoided, Gould’s stories insist that one must be prepared to remain stumped, especially with regards to the transformative potential of empathy and love.
- 12 Lynch concludes his introduction to *The One and the Many* by examining the characteristic features of what he refers to as “return stories,” which, as the concluding stories of short story cycles, play a fundamental part in defining the genre. He asserts that the typical Canadian return story depicts provisional possibilities respecting the recuperation of community for its displaced former and current inhabitants and the tentative presence of a sense of self and identity that is intimately connected to place as home. But those possibilities must remain provisional both within these concluding return stories and in the preceding stories of the cycle, preceding stories which the cumulative function of the return story then asks the reader to reconsider. As much as return stories tempt with hints of comfortable closure, they often also destabilize, resisting closure. (31)
- 13 The concluding story in *Kilter* is called “New Story,” the title itself gesturing toward such concepts as “possibility” and “the resistance of closure” which Lynch determines are crucial to comprehending the Canadian short story cycle as unified by disunity (Lynch, 18). The word “new,” rather sheepishly one might suggest, also reinforces the sequential aspect of the collection’s shape, as “new” operates as a synonym for “another,” drawing attention to the quite extravagant accumulation of stories realized by the collection’s end. With respect to the collection’s consistent thematic focus on the fears and doubts of a community that has somehow muddled through “The End of the World,” (which is the title of the collection’s penultimate story), the return story’s title seems implicitly to ask: do we really need another “new story”? After all that has come before, is there anything new that is worthwhile to say? The word “story” calls to mind the collection’s self-consciousness about what Lohafer calls “the sense of storyness” (310), with its myriad clues regarding how to apprehend the staging of beginning and how to read the “Crunch”

structure as ideal, whereby a narrative's transformative inaugural point maps precisely onto the anterior preclosure point. As the doubling back in the collection reveals, however, even with such tightly packed, insistently immediate narratives, the borders of story are always porous and their centre always elusive. Thus, in his choice of concluding story, Gould reaffirms his collection as more than a miscellany, as something that is shaped by the collision of form with theme.

- 14 As a return story, "New Story" demonstrates the merit of Lynch's assessment that Canadian short story cycles emphasize such themes as "the recuperation of community." However, whereas the corpus Lynch investigates typically examines how individuals negotiate their obligations to small, rural Canadian communities, the two characters in "New Story" refer to, on the one hand, a non-situated, rather generically portrayed community made up of family and friends and, on the other hand, a community comprising all of humanity. From outside the bathroom door, a man tries variously, and unsuccessfully, to ascertain what event or comment has precipitated his wife, Helen's, bout of weeping in the tub: "What did I say? . . . Was it something I did tonight? . . . When Jennifer and Tom were here? . . . [Wa]s it something I did on the weekend? At my parents' place maybe?" (203-04). Meanwhile, Helen rages that, "*We used to live in the water*. For ten million years we lived in the water, in the ocean, by the shore. That's why we got up on our hind legs in the first place, to keep our heads above the surface . . . All of us, men and women. Our first tools weren't for cracking skulls, they were for cracking shells" (204). The vast continuum of types of human communities that Gould presents indicates his concern for how every sort of community has managed, or must manage, to survive, how it must come to a sense of a proper, functioning identity. In her despair, Helen maintains, "In the old story we moved onto the plains so the men could hunt . . . In the new story . . . we slipped into the ocean and became fishers" (204). The references to hunting and "cracking skulls" reveal the disquiet registered in this story with the history of human violence, as Helen tries to soothe herself by imagining a contrasting past for her ancestors. However, her use of the term "fishers" is significant, as Gould highlights in the fact that the narrator doesn't quite catch the word at first:

"Became what, honey?"

"Became *fishers*. Fishers." (204)

- 15 The repetition of this word conjures up the homonym *fissures*, in another of Gould's frequent deployments of punning (for example, as in "Stump", or as in Dr. Laird's self-satisfied punning of "present" and "gift"). No amount of effort on Helen's part can ensure that humanity might establish a stable sense of itself, as the fissures in our identities are questions that remain at the heart of the human condition. Helen's own inability to make her anxiety understood to her husband operates as another sort of fissure that requires healing, perhaps in a transformative moment of stillness.
- 16 As with the other stories in this collection, the structural analysis of how, in "New Story," the staging of beginning operates in tension with the staging of closure reveals an edgy propensity toward structural imbalance. Somewhat like in "Stump" the structure of "New Story" delivers a sense of false momentum and, as with "Stump," the sense of momentum is instigated in the previous story, demonstrating the unique dynamic of sequence produced in the way the shortness of each story permits grouping. The final line of "The End of the World," a story about a really great blind date, is: "and this was just the beginning" (201). The promise of this compellingly open closure, however, seems at risk as "New Story" opens with the image of a man, "his forehead against the bathroom door"

(203), as this character, unlike Jan in "Leather", must negotiate a closed door that separates him from his wife; as the short section between the first and successive inaugural points indicate, things have gotten exceedingly "messy." What we realize at the successive inaugural point is that the woman on the other side of the bathroom door is very upset and will not tell her husband why. After this relatively efficient, though gloomy, opening, the driving pace of the narrative picks up as the man continues to pelt his wife with question after question before asking, "Can I just come in?", then advising, "I'm coming in, okay," then declaring, "Here I come" (204-05). This increased pace, however, does not alleviate this stifling scene, as the man's incessant questions seem to have little to do with Helen's somewhat bizarre tirade about living in the sea, "putting on fat, like hippopotamuses . . . [growing] long hair on our heads for our babies to hang on" (204). The man finally opens the door toward the end of the story which quickly shuts down in two short paragraphs, the anterior preclosure and penultimate preclosure points following in rapid succession. The first of these preclosure points simultaneously occurs with the transformative inaugural point — the image of Helen, "stretched out almost full length. Her breasts bob above the water, as does the startling swell of her belly, taut, tawny. Her long dark hair is spread like kelp across the surface" (205). In this moment, Helen's declarations transform, both because of the way her body seems meaningfully articulated by the water in her tub, and because her pregnant state makes clear the urgency of her anxiety and despair. However, while the striking, revelatory image Gould provides of Helen might bring about a change for the reader, Helen's husband appears to miss the potentially transformative moment of stillness: his response to his wife's desolation, her salty tears, is another question: "It was that thing about your mother last week, wasn't it?" (205). Unlike "Stump," however, this story does not end with a sense of missed opportunity, as the final line asserts "he has the feeling he's going to have to go back even further" (205). Like his wife, the man begins to have an inkling about the work he will need to do looking backward in order to help his wife move forward.

- 17 In Gould's collection, the shortness of the stories signifies as more than merely an arbitrary stylistic choice, but rather as a necessary matrix for his exploration of theme. The "outer dynamic" (Lynch, 23) of the collection's shape, with its pressurized sequencing and destabilizing returns, thus imparts a sense of unity. The individual mechanisms associated with Gould's form, in particular his structural play with opening and closure, are intimately linked with *Kilter's* overarching thematic exploration of community set adrift by the exigencies of the metaphysically unhinged moment. As in many of the other stories in *Kilter*, "New Story" includes an image that represents the collection's abiding concern with how to come to terms with the meaning of our relationship to the concept of the infinite, especially as this concern relates to our status as spiritually disoriented, emotionally flawed, politically complicit, global citizens. Instances of Gould's representation of this concern include the son's attempt to confront "Dissolution . . . Undoing the world" via Hindu meditation in "Two Things Together" (5); Jan's anguished contemplation of what small circumstance might have been enough to "knock the cosmos off kilter, nudge it onto an alternate course, a future in which the bullet would have passed right through [her brother] without puncturing his lung" (8), and the consideration by Barry's stepfather of the point "when the world stops being born and starts dying" (95). In "New Story," Gould offers the less explicitly cosmic image of the couple's cat, "Tet – short for Bastet, after the Divine Egyptian puss . . . execut[ing] a couple of brisk figure eights around [the man's] shins" (204). In Egyptian mythology, the goddess Bastet was said to preside over both the home and pregnant women, making her

appearance in this story particularly appropriate; her alternate designation as “The Lady of the East,” as opposed to the war-like Sekhmet, known as “The Lady of the West,” further demonstrates the hope for new beginnings Gould alludes to here. That the cat, symbolically associated with comfort, birth, and the continuity of the sun’s rising, creates the mathematical sign for infinity in her affectionate nuzzle indicates that contemplations of the infinite must productively resolve in immediate performances of love. Both Helen and her husband must come to realize that it is fear, misapprehension, and an anguished lament for humanity’s defects that produces the separation between them.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Gould, John. *Kilter: 55 fictions*. Winnipeg, AB: Turnstone Press, 2003.
- Ingram, Forrest L. *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century: Studies in a Literary Genre*. Paris: Mouton, 1971.
- Leacock, Stephen. *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*. 1912. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart (New Canadian Library Edition), 1989.
- Lohafer, Susan. “A Cognitive Approach to Storyness.” In *The New Short Story Theories*, edited by Charles May, 301-311. Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1994.
- Luscher, Robert M. “The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book.” In *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*, edited by Susan Lohafer & Jo Ellyn Clarey, 146-167. Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1989.
- Lynch, Gerald. *The One and the Many: English-Canadian Short Story Cycles*. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2001.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Importance of the Single Effect in a Prose Tale.” In *The Short Story and its Writer*, edited by Ann Charters, 5th edition, 1531-1533. Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1999.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. “The Short Story: The Long and the Short of it.” *Poetics* 10 (1981): 175-194.
- Scott, Duncan Campbell. *In the Village of Viger and Other Stories*. 1896. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2008.
- Vauthier, Simone. *Reverberations: Explorations in the Canadian Short Story*. Concord, ON: Anansi, 1993.

NOTES

1. One other full-length study of the English-Canadian short story is Simone Vauthier’s *Reverberations: Explorations in the Canadian Short Story*, published in 1993. Vauthier’s work, though a fascinating narratological study of how certain stories “somehow must offer . . . an image of Canada” (8), is of less interest to me than Lynch’s work on the short story cycle as Vauthier’s focus is on individual stories.

2. It might be suggested that this offer of a “sandwich” foreshadows the image of the “Barry sandwich” in “Crunch,” retrospectively showing that the narrator of “Two Things Together” somehow intuitively exactly how he and his son must become two things together.

ABSTRACTS

L'affirmation de Gerald Lynch selon laquelle le cycle de nouvelles fonctionne comme un genre typiquement canadien éclaire l'analyse du recueil de brèves nouvelles *Kilter : 55 Fictions* de John Gould, écrivain nommé pour le Prix Giller. Alors que, ainsi que le déclare Lynch, les écrivains canadiens s'intéressent le plus souvent à la petite société rurale, Gould, lui, se penche sur une société urbaine de masse. S'appuyant sur la théorie de la clôture et de la pré-clôture de Susan Lohafer, cet article examine le défi cognitif qu'implique la brièveté des nouvelles de Gould dans son rapport avec cette forme particulière du tournant du millénaire que le recueil se propose d'interroger.

AUTHORS

NETA GORDON

Neta Gordon is an Associate Professor at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, where she teaches courses in Canadian Literature and Literary Theory. She has published on such authors as Joseph Boyden, Jane Urquhart, Barbara Gowdy and SKY Lee.