

The Short Story in the UK

Overview of the current state and exploration
of opportunities for new initiatives

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for

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Scottish Arts Council
New Writing North

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Foreword and acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge the help they have received during the research process: over seventy people have been interviewed, and we are grateful to the writers, agents, publishers, booksellers, event organisers, editors and others who gave up their time to give their views about the current state of the short story.

We also wish to acknowledge the help and guidance of the steering group: Claire Malcolm of New Writing North, Kate Griffin and Mark Robinson at Arts Council England, North East, Jenny Attala at the Scottish Arts Council, and Lucy Hutton of Arts Council England Research Department.

Acknowledgement is due also to those who attended the Summit on the Short Story in October 2002 – Jackie Kay (chair), Nicholas Royle, Penny Smith, Nic Blincoe, Claire Malcolm, Matt Thorne, Anna Summerford, Mark Robinson, Celia Bryce, Lee Brackstone, and Kate Griffin.

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Executive Summary

Introduction and background

This report presents the key findings of a study carried out by Jenny Brown Associates and Book Marketing Limited for Arts Council England and Scottish Arts Council. The aim of the research was to establish the current state of the short story in the UK, and to explore opportunities for new initiatives.

It includes the findings of the research by Book Marketing Limited into publishing, sales and lending figures for short stories, as well as publishing outlets. As part of a larger literature research project, BML is also looking into reading and buying patterns across the country.

Methodology

Book Marketing Limited undertook two pieces of research looking at the short story sector. The first was desk research into the book and periodical publication of short stories, and their purchasing, public library borrowing patterns.

The second study undertaken by BML was original consumer research on readership of short stories.

The research carried out by Jenny Brown Associates comprised two elements: interviews with those involved in the writing, publishing, selling and promotion of stories, and a comparison of four collections of short stories, exploring how they were commissioned, published, marketed, promoted, reviewed and sold. The study was carried out in the period July –November 2003.

Key Findings

Publication

- Short story writers increasingly have to turn to independent publishers to get published.
- The number of collections published by mainstream publishers has fallen significantly, but the number of collections published by the independents (including self-publishing) has increased.

- The most common reasons cited for buying short fiction were 'saw in shop' or 'discounted price', reflecting the prompts for purchase of general fiction titles.
- The vast majority of short story books were paperbacks.
- Short story books and anthologies represented 1.1% of issues of adult fiction in public libraries in 2000/2001. This compares with a figure of 2.5% of all adult fiction purchased.
- Over half of short story book purchases were made by consumers aged 45 or older, in line with general fiction purchasing. Over half of purchases of short stories were made by women, a higher proportion than for general fiction.
- The most popular two-month period for the consumer purchasing of short stories was November/December. The second largest peak was in the summer months of July/August when one fifth of purchases were made.
- Despite the fact that over half of all short story titles published were by independents, virtually all of the top 100 short story bestsellers for 2002 were from mainstream publishers, and most were written by novelists.
- The bestselling short story book of 2002 was *The Veteran* by Frederick Forsyth followed by *The Simple Soul and Other Stories* by Catherine Cookson (48,555 copies). These two books were almost the most frequently borrowed short story books from public libraries.

Readership

- Just over half of all light and medium readers say they do sometimes read books of short stories, with women and medium readers more likely to than men or light readers.
- Two thirds of those who do not read books of short stories say this is more by accident than design. One in four non-readers say short stories do not cover their preferred genres (especially men with non-fiction), with one in five saying they just prefer longer stories: one in six say short stories are harder to read than their usual books.
- Approximately half of those who do not read books of short stories say they do read short stories in magazines, with women (82%) more likely to say this than men (35%).

- The most common reason given for reading short stories in magazines but not books, is that it was accidental rather than deliberate – they read the stories because they are there.
- Other reasons given for reading stories in magazines rather than books are that readers are happy to read one story, but not several; that magazines have easier stories, or else have stories aimed specifically at the magazine's readers, ie people like themselves
- When prompted about one in four think short stories are harder to read than longer ones, while fewer than one in ten think they are easier.
- While four out of five light/medium readers say they would like to read more, and 55% say that lack of time is an important factor in this, only 15% think that short stories are a possible solution or aid to the problem. This is the same proportion as feel short books and/or short chapters might help in this area.

Getting Accepted

- Quality of work is the most important factor in whether writing is accepted by an agent or publisher – but mainstream publishers find it very difficult to launch a new writer with a collection.
- Mainstream and independent publishers are likely to buy a writer's short stories in order to secure a novel. The implication is that, without a novel, short story writers will find it very difficult to be published by a mainstream or independent publisher.
- Collections by first-time writers are more likely to be accepted by independent or small presses.
- Many writers are receiving advice from agents and publishers to write novels or themed collections, rather than short stories.
- The name or reputation of the writer is of great importance to the success of a collection.

Themed collections

- Most agents, and half the publishers interviewed believed that themed collections are more likely to be accepted than non-

themed ones. Sales and marketing professionals believe that themed collections are easier to sell than non-themed collections.

- There is a growing tendency for publishers to market linked story collections as novels to increase their chances of success.

Commercial

- Advances for short story collections from mainstream or independent publishers are significantly lower than for a novel. Sales are likely to be one-third or one-quarter of the sales expected for a novel by the same writer.
- Small presses experience more success comparatively with short story collections, and collections are often amongst their bestselling titles.

Marketing and selling

- Marketing of short stories is seen by writers, agents and publishers as not as strong as for novels by the same writer. Independent publishers often considered better at marketing stories than mainstream presses.
- Booksellers consider the marketing of story collections as poor, and sometimes sense negativity on behalf of publishers towards stories.
- Some booksellers think that publishers try to disguise collections as novels in publicity material.
- There are very limited opportunities for selling subsidiary rights to short story collections.
- Price promotions, such as '3 for 2' are likely to result in significant sales, with the customer 'taking a chance on the third book'.
- Since most short story collections are bought on impulse, visibility within bookshops is very important. Shelving policies, both in bookshops and libraries, have an impact : sales and issues are likely to be higher if collections are included in promotions, tables, and in general fiction stock, than in short story sections.

- Given that a significant proportion of short story volumes are sold in the lead-up to Christmas and in the summer, there may be further opportunities to promote short story collections at these times.
- Given that around a quarter of short story volumes are bought as gifts, there may also be further opportunities to market certain titles in this way.
- Many believe there is a need to think more imaginatively about the packaging of story collections and anthology, eg strong design, strong theme or identity, inclusion of well-known authors. Labelling anthologies with a date was seen as limiting.
- Event and festival organisers are strong supporters of the short story, and there are opportunities for more publishers to market short story collections to them. This group is sympathetic towards showcasing work of emergent writers, and actively engaged in other ways to promote short story form

Outlets

- Literary magazines, anthologies and competitions are seen as important platforms for showcasing the work of short story writers by writers, but cited less often by agents and publishers as a place to identify talented writers.
- Stories in newspapers and non-literary magazines are viewed as a good way to showcase new short fiction by the book trade, both to promote and to reach those readers who prefer to read stories singly rather than in collections.
- The need for a range of outlets for publishing short stories was identified, and the situation in UK was frequently compared unfavourably with US. A significant number of interviewees mentioned the need for a magazine with same stamp of authority as *New Yorker*.

Reading

- BML research suggests that there is no stigma against the short story amongst readers, but that the reason they are not more widely read is a matter of exposure.

- A sizable proportion of readers are more likely to respond to a single story in a magazine, rather than to a collection of stories
- Readership development projects were seen as a desirable way to engage readers with the short story form.
- Need to develop a reading culture for short stories was identified – and this should start in schools.
- Readers of literary fiction and readers' groups may be more likely to respond to the form if they are marketed not for their brevity (and therefore likely to fit into their lives), but on basis that they are 'provocative, meaty, satisfying'.

Future

- Strong agreement that the best way of raising the profile and prestige of the short story is by the establishment of a high profile prize.
- Need to develop readership projects focused on the short story – these could be linked to the establishment of a prize
- Need to develop bibliographic information about short story collections as a resource for readers' groups, libraries, booksellers and for education
- An annual anthology of best UK short stories was also thought a good way to raise profile, although there very mixed views about how such an anthology should be edited, published and marketed.
- Need to rebrand the short story, and to explore ways of engaging readers in new ways. Recognise that some readers are more likely to respond to the form if they read single stories in magazines or newspapers, rather than collections. Focussing on brevity of the story is unlikely to be key.
- Advocacy for the short story, in the shape of the campaign, has been demonstrably effective in raising awareness of the form, and there is a need for a continuing focus otherwise momentum may be lost

Opportunities

Book Prize

- Establish a new high-profile prize for short story collections, or, preferably, piggyback on an established book prize to create a new short story category.
- ACE/SAC may consider entering a partnership on a pilot basis with an established book prize to create such a category.
- It is important to create a category for short story collections, rather than including them with novels, particularly if publishers are limited in the number of submissions made – it is felt that publishers would tend to submit novels over story collections.
- The number of entries may be low in the first years, but have a good possibility of increasing if the prize is effective and promoted well in bookshops, libraries and in the press.
- It may be worth considering offering the prize on a biennial basis in the first years.
- It would be worth considering giving a long lead-time between the announcement of any new category/prize, and the submission date, to encourage more publication of story collections.
- The impact of any such prize should be monitored.

Readership Development

- Further exploration should be undertaken of readership development projects focused on the short story. Such development could be tied in with the establishment of a prize.
- Different approaches would need to be developed for different groups, eg readers' groups likely to respond to angle of short stories being 'substantial', while average reader looking for ways to find short stories 'easier' to read.
- Consideration could be given to how libraries shelve short story collections – including them in promotions and general fiction sections rather than short story sections are likely to result in increased borrowing.

Anthology

- Consider the establishment of an annual UK Best Short Story anthology.
- Care would have to be given to the selection, editing, publishing, packaging and marketing of such an anthology.
- An annual anthology should not be labelled with a date

Education

- Talk to DFES and education professionals to see how short stories can feature more in the curriculum

Support to Publishers

- ACE and SAC consider prioritising support to independent publishers for short story volumes
- ACE and SAC consider prioritising support to magazines publishing short stories

Ongoing focus on the short story

- Explore ways of continuing focus on the short story after the end of the present campaign – this may involve specific funding to an existing organisation to take on this role, or the creation of a new organisation (cf The Poetry Society).
- ACE and SAC consider prioritising support to short story initiatives at literary festivals and other live literature events.

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1 Introduction and background

This report presents the key findings of a study carried out by Jenny Brown Associates for Arts Council England and Scottish Arts Council. The aim of the research was to establish the current state of the short story in the UK, and to explore opportunities for new initiatives.

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The study follows a summit on the survival of the short story in the UK, chaired by the writer Jackie Kay and held in October 2002. The aim of the summit was to bring together a group of short story writers and editors to launch a campaign to combat perceived discrimination against the art form, aiming for recognition of the importance and high quality of short stories produced in the UK today.

A statement was produced after the summit, calling for four outcomes:

- Increase the number and visibility of high quality outlets for short fiction
- Give the short story form more prestige and a higher profile
- Enable writers to specialise in the short story form
- Encourage and promote exciting short fiction

A campaign team was set up with the following members :Claire Malcolm of New Writing North, Kate Griffin and Mark Robinson at Arts Council England, North East, Jenny Attala and Sophy Dale at the Scottish Arts Council, and Penny Smith and Margaret Wilkinson at University of Northumbria.

A campaign website was launched, www.saveourshortstory.org.uk. In addition to carrying information about the research, the website also offers the following:

- **Endangered Species online anthology, edited by Val McDermid** – subscribers receive two stories a month over a twelve-month period, by well-known and newer writers. The aim is to build up as large a subscription base as possible, thereby demonstrating that there is an audience for the short story.
- **Raising the profile** : increasing the visibility of the short story form. Articles and mentions have been achieved in media such as Mslexia, Arts Professional, Prospect magazine, Time Out,

the Scotsman, the Times, Radio 4's Open Book programme, the Telegraph and the TLS diary.

- **Sharing experience** : information provision about other short story initiatives across the country (and the world), including campaign updates, research findings, information and links to other short story initiatives, and a noticeboard for campaign supporters.

As of November 2003, 1800 people had signed up to the website, two-thirds from the UK, and a third from overseas.

Context

Since the launch of the campaign, there have been a number of developments, some directly due to its influence:

- **Prospect** magazine : From the January 2004 issue - in collaboration with Arts Council England - **Prospect** magazine will begin running a short story in every issue.
- Inspired by the online anthology, independent publisher Serpent's Tail is supporting the campaign by launching its own anthology available online.
- The Scotsman Orange Short Story Award – in November 2003 the paper announced the biggest short story competition in the UK, with a prize of £7,500 for the winning story.
- The Davy Byrnes Irish Writing Award, presented by the James Joyce Centre in association with The Irish Times, is a major new literary award for 2004 Bloomsday Centenary. The first prize is €20,000 and a total prize fund of €25,000.

There have been other developments which have been less welcome, notably the announcement by the *Mail on Sunday's You* and the *Express S* magazines that they were dropping their short fiction slots.

The campaign has pointed to the lack of bibliographic information on short story collections, and a bibliography is being commissioned in partnership with the British Council, to be made available to libraries, reading groups, universities, schools and others.

The campaign is time-limited, and is likely to come to a close in summer 2004. It is not yet clear how the work will continue, for,

unlike poetry, there is no one organisation which is solely devoted to the support of the short story form.

2 Research Methodology

Book Marketing Limited (BML) undertook two aspects of research looking at the short story sector. The first was desk research, and a full account of the methodology is available in the separate Appendix containing BML's research findings.

The second research undertaken by BML was within a larger depth interview study undertaken on expanding the market. The study was carried out by means of face to face interviews with 200 adults in the UK. This was a qualitative study.

The research carried out by Jenny Brown Associates was qualitative. The research comprised two elements: interviews with those involved in the writing, publishing, selling and promotion of stories, and a comparison of four collections of short stories, exploring how they were commissioned, published, marketed, promoted, reviewed and sold. The study was carried out in the period July – October 2003 by three consultants : Jenny Brown, Moira Forsyth and Philippa Johnston.

Face-to-face and telephone interviews were carried out with writers, agents, publishers, event organisers, editors and booksellers to discover attitudes to short stories and short story collections. Interviews lasted approximately 20-30 minutes.

The sample of interviewees was drawn from across the UK. Potential interviewees were approached in writing, and sent a questionnaire in advance of the interview. The requests for interview on the whole met with positive responses, but it proved not to be possible to secure a number of interviews – with a major newspaper, a major bookselling chain, and two mainstream publishers. Sample questionnaires are included in the Appendix.

The 19 writers interviewed included those who started by writing short stories and have gone on to write novels. Others were chosen having written short story collections only when established as novelists. Others were selected having only written short stories.

The sample of agents included those from large agencies, and sole agents. Also included was a specialist in translation rights.

The sample of publishers included editors of mainstream houses in London and small independent presses based in and outside London. A sample of sales and marketing managers from publishers was also included.

The sample of event organisers included directors of literary festivals and those responsible for programming writers' events and tours.

Interviews took place with booksellers and buyers from large chains, and from small independent shops.

A number of interviews took place with those responsible for commissioning or showcasing short fiction, in the press and on radio.

3 Key findings and analysis - desk research report

Book Marketing Limited's research demonstrated that short story writers increasingly have to turn to the independents to get published. In 2002 53.5% of short story books and anthologies published were from independent publishers, while 39.5% were from mainstream publishers. The trend in title output over the last three years has steadily turned towards independent publishers.

The number of short fiction anthologies over the past three years, by both mainstream and independent publishers, has risen. However, a couple of large initiatives account for the greater proportion of this increase.

Single author short story collections have fared less well. The number of collections published by mainstream publishers has fallen from 215 in 2000 to 135 in 2002. By contrast, the number of collections published by the independents (including self-publishing) has increased from 203 in 2000 to 287 in 2002.

This has implications for short story writers, who are likely to receive smaller advances, less exposure and less high street distribution.

Purchasing short fiction

The most common reasons cited for buying short fiction were 'saw in shop' or 'discounted price', reflecting the prompts for purchase of general fiction titles. 23% of books were bought as a gift.

26% of short story volumes were purchased at large chain booksellers. The second largest source was stores selling books and stationery with 19% of volumes and 11% at independent shops.

The general public bought an estimated three million short story and anthology books in 2001. This was lower than the 3.5 million bought in 2000, but still higher than the levels shown in 1997-1999. The 3 million short stories and anthologies bought in 2001 compares to an estimated 37 m general fiction titles purchased.

The vast majority of short story books were paperbacks (79% by volume), 19% were in hardback, and 2% were audiobooks.

Short story books and anthologies represented 1.1% of issues of adult fiction in public libraries in 2000/2001. They represented 2.5% of all adult fiction purchased.

Age and sex of buyer

In line with general adult fiction, 57% of short story book purchases were made by consumers aged 45 or older. 60 % of purchases were made by women.

Time of year purchased

The most popular two-month period for the consumer purchasing of short stories over the period 1997-2001 was November/December. This period accounted for 25% of purchases by volume. The second largest peak was in the summer months of July/August when one fifth of purchases were made. This pattern is proportionately higher for short story purchase than for general fiction.

Bestselling short fiction

Despite the fact that over half of all short story titles published were by independents, virtually all of the top 100 short story bestsellers for 2002 were from mainstream publishers, and most were written by novelists.

The bestselling short story book of 2002 was *The Veteran* by Frederick Forsyth (116,310 copies), followed by *The Simple Soul and Other Stories* by Catherine Cookson (48,555 copies). Both are published by Corgi. These two books were also the most frequently borrowed short story books from public libraries.

4 Key findings and analysis - depth interviews

- Just over half of all light and medium readers say they do sometimes read books of short stories, with women and medium readers more likely to than men or light readers.
- Most of those who read such books say they only do so a few times a year or less – less than one in four of these say they read books of short stories fairly/very often.
- The majority of those who do ever read short stories read them on the same sorts of occasions as they read other books.
- Those few who say they read them on different occasions most often say they do so when they know they have time to complete a story without interruption.
- Two thirds of those who do not read books of short stories say this is more by accident than design. One in four non-readers say short stories do not cover their preferred genres (especially men with non-fiction), with one in five saying they just prefer longer stories: one in six say short stories are harder to read than their usual books.
- Approximately half of those who do not read books of short stories say they do read short stories in magazines, with women (82%) more likely to say this than men (35%).
- Half of those reading short stories in magazines but not books say there is no real difference in the two, while others feel that magazines have easier stories, or more romance, or else have stories aimed specifically at the magazine's readers ie people like themselves.
- These differences are some of the reasons given for reading short stories in magazines but not books, but the most common reason given is that it was accidental rather than deliberate – they read the stories because they are there.
- Another answer is that people are happy to read one but do not want to read several short stories.
- Apart from comments about genres, and stating the obvious facts that short stories are shorter and therefore quicker to read than longer ones, many feel unable to say what the real differences between short and longer stories are.

- When prompted about one in four think short stories are harder to read than longer ones, while fewer than one in ten think they are easier.
- Also, only 4 of the 102 respondents think it is easier to dip in and out of a book of short stories than of a longer book, while nearly one in the three think it is harder: most think it makes little difference overall.
- While four out of five light/medium readers say they would like to read more, and 55% say that lack of time is an important factor in this, only 15% think that short stories are a possible solution or aid to the problem. This is the same proportion as feel short books and/or short chapters might help in this area.

4.1 Authors

The sample

19 authors were interviewed. They were drawn from a range of backgrounds and experience – writers who specialise in short fiction, those who write both stories and novels, and one who write genre short fiction. Established and new writers were interviewed, and the sample was drawn from those published by mainstream, independent and small presses (definition of small presses are those listed as such in *The Writer's Handbook*, 2004, Macmillan)

No.	Gender	Publisher	Stories only	Both	Genre	New	Established
8	F	main		*			*
3	M	ind		*			*
1	F	main		*	*		*
1	M	small	*			*	
1	F	small	*			*	
1	F	ind		*		*	
1	M	main		*			*
1	F	ind		*		*	
1	F	small		*			*
1	M	small		*			*

Table 1 Gender and publication history of short story writers interviewed

Summary

Four of the authors thought of themselves as primarily writers of short stories. Two said they thought of themselves as novelists, and 13 responded that they thought of themselves as writers of both stories and novels, or both plus poetry/drama. Of these 13, two

stated that, given the freedom, they would prefer to write short stories.

Twelve of the respondents had first found publication with stories in magazines or anthologies. Three had first published a novel, and three had first published poetry.

Three-quarters of those interviewed were represented by agents. Four were unrepresented. Several writers had changed agents in the course of their career.

All but one of the agents handled short stories as well as novels. One writer stated that their agent handled short stories reluctantly. Another said that their agent only handled collections, not individual stories.

Most of the writers had come under external pressure to write novels rather than stories – six from their agent, six from a publisher. Several writers said they had no direct pressure, but there was an ‘understanding’ or ‘received wisdom’ that it was better to write novels.

Publishers will always prefer a novel, but if your books sell well, they'll let you write what you like.

One writer made the point that novel publication is often tied in with other media, such as film, TV, soundtracks:

the fact that this is happening means other parts of our culture are being ‘squeezed out’. Other voices, other work, are not being heard. It seems that to be published and reviewed widely, you have to be sensational

A quarter of the short story collections had been commissioned or solicited by publishers, a quarter were submitted by the author to agents, and just over a quarter had been submitted direct by the authors to publishers. Others had been published as a result of contracts for two book deals, one of which was a collection of stories.

The main reason cited for the acceptance by the publisher or agent of the collection is that they liked the work, and thought it would sell. Other factors cited were the known track record of the writer, or the award of a major prize.

On the whole, a few of individual stories in a collection were likely to have been published elsewhere previously. In two cases, all of the stories had previously been published. Three writers said that none of the stories in their collections had previously been published.

All but two of the writers had received an advance for their collections. Most received under £8,000, although one had received a six-figure sum. The majority of writers said that the advance for their collection compared unfavourably with the advance for any novel they had written. Where the advance for stories was greater, it was where the novel had been much earlier, or the writer's reputation was greater by the time the collection was published.

Half of the collections had not earned out their advance. A quarter of the writers said their collections had earned out the advance, and another quarter stated that it was too soon to know whether they would. One writer cited the ending of the Net Book Agreement as a factor which had not helped writers, or independent booksellers.

A few writers felt that the marketing of their story collections by publishers was better than the marketing of their novels. Slightly more felt that the marketing was not so good, but a significant number felt that the marketing for collection and novel had been about the same.

Most writers considered that the same marketing tools as for novels were the most effective to promote short story collections. Other commonly mentioned tools were readings, and newspaper publication of individual stories.

My publishers did not want the words 'short story' to appear anywhere on the cover. They wanted to get the book into people's hands, and felt this was more likely if they were not obviously branded as short story collections.

Writers' work was most widely reviewed in novel form. Six considered that their collections and novels had received equal attention, and two thought their collections had been most widely reviewed. Most writers stated that hardbacks continued to receive bigger and more reviews.

Few writers had sold overseas rights to their collections, far fewer than for novels.

Over half the writers had had stories broadcast on the radio. One fifth had won awards for stories, two had stories published in newspapers. One had sold a film right to a story.

All but one of the writers interviewed considered there are inadequate publication outlets for short stories. The best outlets which support and promote the short story were radio broadcast, literary magazines, and annual or themed anthologies with open

submission. Non-literary magazines were also cited by half the respondents.

The BBC use of short fiction is still limping along – someone should persuade them to stop playing safe, as far as the time slot goes and to vary the length of slot and the possible content.

When asked what would best improve the prestige and profile of the short story, over three-quarters of the writers stated the establishment of a high profile sponsored prize for the short story.

It would have to be substantial, and with wide publicity – like the Booker.

Two thirds thought a high profile Best UK Short Stories anthology would be effective: *Good anthologies can be very, very helpful.*

An international short story festival or tour was also felt desirable. Half the writers felt reader development projects focused on the short story would improve the prestige and profile.

Most readers prefer novels, partly because they can become 'lost' in the world of the novel, but partly because they are 'afraid' to tackle a short story, feel they won't 'get it', and need to be reassured that it's not such a difficult form, and they can learn to appreciate it.

Short story magazine support was also identified, but there were caveats from some writers: *Good magazines are money pits and rarely survive or manage to attract good editorial support*

Of less significance were profile-raising events such as a World Short Story Day, or an international conference on short fiction.

But the best way of all to support the prestige and profile of the short story would be to assist writers to write them. Make it worth their while and encourage quality and diversity. There's no point marketing something that isn't there. Public funding has to make decisions about quality and has to commit to the form.

Conclusions

- Magazines and competitions remain important platforms for showcasing the work of new short story writers.

- Most writers experience some kind of external pressure to write novels rather than stories.
- There are clear economic reasons for writing novels rather than story collections – stories attract significantly lower advances, half do not earn out their advances, and few overseas rights to story collections are sold.
- Radio is an important medium for stories.
- Writers are in support of the establishment of a high profile prize for the short story, and an annual Best of UK short stories anthology as ways to raise the prestige and profile of the form.

4.2 Agents

Six agents took part in the research. Three were from large London-based agencies, two from small agencies, and one from an agency which specialises in translation rights.

Summary

Most agents accept writers of short stories as clients – one said that they represented short story writers only if they were existing clients. One commented that they had tried and failed to sell two collections by new writers – one writer left the agency, and the other is now at work on a novel.

The main reason in representing a writer of short stories was if the agent liked the work – one stressed that the work had to be outstanding. One made the point that they saw more poor quality stories than they did poor quality novels.

Stories in anthologies, literary magazines and story magazines were all felt to be reasonably good fora for identifying talented writers. One agent mentioned that few outlets in the UK had the same stamp of authority as US magazines such as *The New Yorker*. Another mentioned websites as being a useful way of attracting attention to stories.

None of the agents interviewed felt it was straightforward to sell a short story collection by a new writer compared to a novel by a new writer. One said it was ‘almost impossible’. Another said that the problem was not in getting short stories published, but in getting good writing published.

Selling a collection by an established writer was considered easier (or, in one case, 'much easier'), but one commented that 'the money's rubbish, and there's a sense of some kind of favour done. There are exceptions though – the really good publishers encourage collections from writers who are between novels.' Another commented that the situation in regard to collections is in line with the 'squeezing of the midlist in general in publishing'.

Two agents give no advice to writers of short stories, two advise clients to write themed collections, and another advises writing novels.

Most agents interviewed thought that themed collections were much more likely to be accepted by publishers than non-themed ones. One stated that they thought themed collections could seem contrived.

Over half the agents had sold a book of stories to a publisher who was keen to secure the writer's novel. One commented that 'the big story collections deal this year had a section of novel attached to it, and all the bidders were really bidding on the novel synopsis'.

All the agents agreed that advances for collections were worse or much worse than advances for novels by the same writer. One said it would be one third of the advance.

Sales were also agreed as being worse, again by a factor of one-third.

The marketing of short stories was thought to be not as good as that for novels. One agent commented that mainstream publishers are often unimaginative at marketing stories, and this is better done by Independents.

Most agents thought that the number and extent of reviews of short stories was about the same as for novels – but one cautioned that this did not necessarily translate into sales. One felt that the reviewing of stories compared unfavourably.

All agreed that selling subsidiary rights is difficult. One agent commented that foreign publishers usually want two book deals if buying stories, to secure the writer's novel.

Literary magazines and annual or themed commissioned anthologies were considered the best outlets to support and promote the short story. Newspapers were also considered good outlets. It was pointed out that anthologies need authority to work, like the O'Henry or Norton annual volumes in US. The editors should command respect: 'readers need to feel in good hands'.

Surprising that we don't have annual best of UK short stories volume. But problem would be who would edit and publish it – would it be a crusading volume, a loss making venture – but we do need some kind of flagship

Most of the agents interviewed felt that the best way to improve the prestige and profile of the short story would be a high profile prize. One agent commented that everything else would flow from this, and writers; incomes would improve. They cited Caine Prize in Africa which is for single short story – ‘as a result of it, more African writers cutting their teeth on stories and some now going on to write novels’. An annual anthology, reader development initiatives and short story magazine support were also cited.

Conclusions

- Strength of writing is the most important factor in whether an agent accepts a short story writer.
- Agents are likely to advise clients either to write themed collections, or to write novels. Themed collections are more likely to be accepted by publishers.
- Most agents find it very difficult to sell a collection of short stories by a new writer. It is becoming increasingly the norm for a publisher to buy short stories as a two book deal, in order to secure a writer's novel.
- Agents feel that the best way of improving the prestige and profile of the short story would be a high profile prize.

4.3 Publishers - editors

12 editors from publishing houses were interviewed. Six were editors in large mainstream companies; two from independent companies (one based in Scotland, one in London), and four small presses (three regionally based). Some published single-author collections, anthologies and novels, while others published two of the three.

number	Type	Base	Collections	Anthologies	Novels
3	mainstream	London	*	*	*
3	mainstream	London	*		*
1	independent	Scotland	*	*	*
1	independent	London	*	*	*
1	Small press	London	*	*	
2	Small press	Region & Wales	*		*
1	Small press	region		*	*

Table 2 Type, location and fiction publications of editors interviewed.

Summary

All the editors interviewed publish writers of short stories. Two made the point that they 'buy the writer, whether they write short or long fiction'. A quarter volunteered that they see relatively few collections of short stories from British writers. They ascribed this to UK agents cautioning writers against submission of stories.

The most important factor in persuading an editor to publish a writer of short stories is that they liked the work; 'the sine qua non', as one put it, 'the writing has to be remarkable' another commented. It was recognised that other factors are also important, such as track record, or recommendation by other writers (put forward by an editor from an independent publisher). One small press said they were able to publish a collection by a well-known writer after his publisher had rejected them, preferring only to do his novels.

Literary magazines were the most frequently cited forum for identifying new writers (by a quarter of respondents). Anthologies and competitions were also mentioned. A significant number of editors expressed the view that there are not enough showcases for short stories in the UK, and compared the situation unfavourably to the US.

'No let up in number of short story collections coming from US – lot fundamentally unexciting – there never was a flood of UK stories. Probably due to more creative writing students getting agents, and too many agents all trying to compete. What you don't see is second collections of stories.'

All but one of the respondents said it was very difficult to publish a short story collection by a new writer, compared to a novel. An independent publisher commented that it is difficult to publish into 'a void'. A small regional publisher thought there was no difference.

Publishing a collection by an established writer compared to a novel by the same writer was thought to be relatively straightforward by most interviewees. One commented 'everyone goes into the publication aware- and expectations are borne out'.

Publishers were divided in the advice they give to writers – some give no advice, one advises writers to write novels instead, one advises trying themed collections. Small presses often give detailed advice – one explained that they encourage writers to think about a collection as an album – not necessarily themed, but it should have 'coherence'.

Editors were equally divided as to whether themed collections are more likely to be accepted than non-themed ones. One small press editor made the following point 'as a reader, you orient yourself in a new world, and your brain has to work very hard until you're into it. You have to do that work all over again with each short story, but with linked stories you already have the context.' They added 'readers are getting lazy'.

'Themed collections do help – it's fascinating how many books are being described to trade as novels rather than short story collections....giving some kind of unifying costume does have more chance of making its mark.'

Mainstream and independent publishers were likely to have bought a book of short stories in order to secure the writer's novel. It was stated that this is very common practice in the US. 'It's the orthodox way of launching career- buy short story collection complete and the novel is only seen as chunk'.

Advances for short stories were 'worse' or 'much worse' than for a novel by the same writer, according to mainstream or independent publishers. Small press editors stated that the advance tended to be on a similar level.

Sales of short stories were worse than for a novel by the same author, according to mainstream or independent publishers. Two said they would be one-third or one-quarter of sales for the novel. The picture varies with small press editors, who stated that sales were either the same or better as for a novel. Two small presses said that short stories were amongst their bestselling titles.

We're insulated from the viciousness of short story publishing in London – we're in our own market here. It's a self fulfilling prophecy that short stories don't sell.

It was recognised by all editors that the marketing of short stories was not as good as that of novels.

Short story collections are never given marketing budget in large publishing houses -marketing done somewhat apologetically. But money is spent on publicity – authors at literary festivals, or read on Radio 4. Publicity depts operate democratically whereas marketing depts are hierarchical, working like bankers – more they spend, the more they want back.

Editors were divided in opinion as to how the number and extent of reviews of short stories compared with the reviewing of novels. Half thought the reviewing was about the same, and the point was made that reviewers could dip into a collection and read just two or three stories, rather than having to read the whole novel.

All agreed that they had difficulty in selling subsidiary rights to short story collections; 'bloody hard for translation rights'. 'Hostility to stories in European culture greater than it is here.' A number of publishers cited US magazines as a good place for individual stories.

Literary magazines, and anthologies, either commissioned or with open submission, were viewed as equally important outlets for the support and of the short story.

We need more infrastructure support at magazine level. As a writer starting up all you can do is write stories, get agent and try at book length collection. Can't place three or four stories in magazines beforehand. UK too small to have panoply of literature quarterlies

'Anthologies can work if they hit right moment. They never work in hardback'

Anthologies do best if they have young edgy writers, and are cutting edge. The nastier ones do well – best are the erotic collections. Middle of the road collections do less well

Most editors interviewed, from small presses, independents and mainstream publishers, agreed that the single best way of improving the prestige and profile of the short story would be by establishing a high profile prize.

A quarter of interviewees also cited the establishment of a high profile annual anthology, and support for a short story magazine.

Prize like Whitbread would make a huge difference. From this would come media and bookshop partners.

Conclusions

- Quality is the most important factor in deciding whether to publish a collection, but other factors such as track record also important.
- There are insufficient showcases for short stories in UK publications compared to US.
- Editors are divided in opinion as to whether themed collections are more likely to be accepted than non-themed ones. There is an identified trend that some short story collections are being marketed as novels.
- Mainstream and independent publishers are likely to buy short story collections as part of a two-book deal in order to secure the writer's novel. The implication is that without the promise of a novel, some short story collections might not be published.
- Advances for short story collections are worse or much worse than advances for novels from mainstream and independent publishers. Sales tend to be one-third or one-quarter of sales for a novel by the same writer.
- Small presses tend to offer similar advances for short story collections and novels, and sales of collections can be amongst the bestselling titles for this group.
- Most publishers agreed that a high profile prize would be the best way of raising profile and prestige for short story. There was also interest in an annual anthology, and support for a short story magazine.

4.4 Publishers : Marketing and Sales Directors

Three sales or marketing directors were interviewed – one from a multinational publisher, one from a large London-based independent publisher, and one freelance publicist with experience of marketing short story collections for two publishers.

Summary

Respondents were asked the most effective marketing tools for short story collections. A combination of media was thought to be most effective – bookseller promotion, especially 3 for 2 (mentioned by all respondents), and genre specific promotions. One respondent cited literary festivals as a good platform. Broadsheet coverage and broadcast stories were also mentioned. There were mixed views about the effectiveness of samplers – one interviewee thought they worked quite well, and another warned against them.

UK booksellers are having a terrible time and so are very cautious – they aren't interested in anything innovative. It helps massively if you can get in a 3 for 2 promotion. If you're not in one in Waterstone's, it's hopeless.

When asked about the factors for a bestselling volume of stories, one respondent differentiated between literary and mass-market collections. A literary collection was helped if the author was a big name and had won prizes. For a mass market collection, the important factors were well-known names, a great theme, presented as an attractive package. Another cited the following factors: strong writer, good jacket design, strong author personal stories, word of mouth promotion:

booksellers play a key role here through recommending a book to others within the trade and to the public.

There was agreement that the name and reputation of the writer were very important when marketing collections.

There was a general feeling that themed collections and anthologies are easier to market than single author collections. One interviewee said that single author collections are sometimes perceived as poor value by customers. Marketing multi-authored collections could be difficult unless there was a well-known editor. It was also pointed out that it was more difficult to use authors as much when marketing anthologies.

Interviewees were asked how easy it was to sell collections to booksellers and to event organisers. All agreed that it was very difficult to sell to booksellers, because there is an expectation that the collections won't sell. Quantities ordered are small. One interviewee described the process:

As well as the reps selling 3 months in advance, we do direct mailings to the bookshops, send them copies of the books,

review coverage etc. 3 for 2 promotions, staff recommendations, are very important. It gets the book into the front of the store where people tend to browse – many won't look through the A-Z collection. People will often take a risk on the third book – it's an impulse buy.

Event organisers were seen as very receptive to multi-author and themed anthologies which work well at events as they offer a variety of voices.

Festivals were seen as harder for multi-author collections, because they are looking for big names.

Interviewees thought that non-literary magazines were the best platform for short stories – one responded that she would like more stories in the media generally, especially in women's magazines.

It's a real win - having short stories in non-literature magazines. They should be a calling card for people who don't read or go into bookshops much – a taster. It's a huge opportunity which is not exploited.

Another said that literary magazines were good for publishing and reviewing short stories but not for promoting readership or sales. Anthologies thought good outlets if they attract established as well as new writers – 'you need the former to lend authority to the collection'. It's easier to do this in commissioned anthologies. The quality of the writing is key. Radio is a very important outlet.

There was agreement that the best way to raise the prestige of the short story would be by a high profile prize – 'A big glitzy prize like the Booker would make a difference'. Annual Best UK short story anthologies were also thought to be a good idea, but with significant caveats – would need to feature established as well as emerging writers, care would have to be taken that they didn't go out of date quickly and 'if Arts Council of England/British Council-supported, not going to be seen as hip'. There was no support for the idea of a conference

what we really need is to get a conversation going with the industry.

Reader development projects were thought important as well, especially those which were organised in collaboration with libraries.

It's hard to get readers groups to read short stories – especially library-based ones as they tend to use library stock. Libraries are very unsupportive of the short story. They think

that readers don't like reading short stories but is this because they don't promote them enough?

I do think that editing is key. There's a tendency for collections to be named after the best story which is often at the front, suggesting that the rest are not so good. The novel, on the other hand, drives the reader to the end. Readers want to enter a world where they can engage with characters over a long period of time and there is a plot – this is all part of the pleasure. The experience of reading a short story collection can be a bit 'staccato'. There is a need to encourage readers to enjoy the experience of reading the whole collection.

Any initiative to support the short story needs to be concerned with sustainability – not quick wins.

I meet resistance to the short story all the way - in-house, from the retailer, reviewer, reader –so a large consumer spend would be wasted. I have similar conversations with people about poetry – it should be really popular given current lifestyles but the public appetite is for lengthy novels – biographies, sagas. It's the 'busy life syndrome – if someone sits down to read, they want to read something 'proper' – it's aspirational. They feel they should get involved with the real McCoy – the short story is viewed as 'apprentice work'. There used to be real interest among publishers in raising the profile of the short story but I haven't heard much talk about it recently. There's a sense of bewilderment in the trade – it doesn't make sense that short stories don't sell better.

Conclusions

- Most effective ways of marketing short stories is through combination of media, but 3 for 2 and other promotion in bookshops is key, also feature/review coverage/proofs. Mixed views about effectiveness of samplers for marketing short stories
- Themed anthologies are easier to market to libraries and bookshops
- Literary festivals are considered a good way to promote single author collections
- Name or reputation of writers are very important, both in single author collections, and to help sell multi-authored anthologies
- Stories in magazines seen as good way to promote

- Establishment of high profile prize is thought the best way to raise profile in future by this group

4.5 Booksellers and Buyers

The sample of booksellers interviewed included the marketing and range manager for a bookshop chain, two bookshops managers from large retail chains, three managers in independent stores in cities, and the manager of a small rural bookshop.

Type/Location	Buying policy	Criteria for fiction buying
Large chain city	Central buying for large volume. Some manager discretion	Track record of author Suitability for customer base
Large chain City	Central buying – local branch discretion for local publications	Wide range new fiction Jacket design Publisher reputation
Large chain, city	Central buying for large volume, otherwise branches have degree of autonomy	Depend heavily on publishers reps Intranet Own experience
Large chain, city	Decentralised, apart from specially-negotiated titles	Intranet for staff support Staff recommendation Spring new fiction focus
Chain, Eire & I Ireland with wholesale division	Central buying - local branch discretion for local publications	Buyers' experience Publishers' backing Discount
Independent, London	Dictated by reviews/publisher attention	Literary fiction
Independent, London	Reflect interest of associated magazine	Author track record Subject matter Trade buzz
Independent, town	Reviews/customer	Irish fiction Publisher reputation
Independent, rural	Reviews/reflection of ethos of shop	Scottish fiction Suitability for customer base

Table 3 Matrix showing type and location of interviewee, and responses about buying policy, and criteria for stocking fiction

Summary

Respondents were asked how publishers market short stories to booksellers, and the extent to which booksellers are influenced by publishers' recommendations. A third said there was little marketing spend on short story collections. A number considered that more collections are being marketed or linked '*they often keep quiet in their publicity material about a book being a short story collection rather than a novel. They certainly don't highlight the fact – even on the cover*'. Two said the marketing of short story collections by publishers was poor, with little information provided about the book or why the bookseller should stock it 'There is a 'certain negativity' about short story collections on the part of publishers. They don't expect them to sell so well'.

The influence of publishers' recommendations was divided – independent booksellers said that they were influenced, especially when it came to books by new writers. Four of the five chain booksellers interviewed said that they were little influenced, and that publishers tended to hype everything: 'all their recommendations are 'swathed in optimism'

We prefer publishers to be honest! Twice yearly there are rounds of publishers visits, and they feel that everything is being 'hyped' at the same pitch – publishers are also very keen to jump on bandwagons – e.g. the 'new Life of Pi' - whatever has most recently been successful.

Interviewees were asked the criteria used to decide whether to stock single story collections and multi-authored anthologies. Two-thirds said that the reputation of the author was a very important factor, and a third cited the advice of the publisher, or how heavily the publisher was promoting the title. With multi-authored collections, the reputation of authors and editor was also cited by four interviewees. Two mentioned the theme as an important factor. One interviewee said they tended not to buy multi-authored collections as they don't sell.

Four of the five chain booksellers featured short stories in 3 for 2 promotions, and all said these had met with good or dramatic results – one said it had resulted in a 45% sell through, and another said it worked as customers take a chance on the third item. In general, single story collections are shelved in general fiction, and anthologies in a separate section. If popular, collections would be placed on tables. For all but one of the chain booksellers and for two independent shops, the average shelf life of a story collection is three months before it is returned. Chains tend to have a monthly turnaround for books displayed on open tables, but a book in a 3 for 2 promotion would remain in stock for three months. Two

respondents said they would remain in stock as long as they were selling.

Two-thirds of the interviewees stocked literary magazines as well as books.

Respondents were asked which developments might influence them to stock short story collections in the future. All thought a high profile prize would help. There was support also for an annual anthology (seven respondents), reader development projects (four).

Publishers often seem unnecessarily embarrassed by the concept of a short story collection. They don't promote books under the banner of the short story. They always have an eye to the next award -whenver they publish a book they are thinking about which long list it might make. This definitely mitigates against short story collections.

Booksellers were asked if they or their staff ever recommended short story collections to customers. Four replied that they did, two said they did occasionally, and two said that they did not 'on the whole'.

Conclusions

- Some booksellers pick up a degree of negativity from publishers towards short story collections, and some sense publishers try to disguise stories as novels
- Publishers' recommendations more likely to influence independent booksellers; chains tend to be critical of way in which publishers 'hype' books
- Author's reputation most important factor in decision whether to stock a title, and for multi-authored anthologies
- Most shops shelve single author collections in fiction section, and anthologies shelved separately
- Clear evidence that inclusion in promotions helps increase sales of short story collections
- Establishment of high profile prize, annual anthology and readership projects may help influence booksellers' decisions to stock more short story collections in the future

4.6 Event Organisers

A range of people involved in the promotion of literature through festivals, reading series and writers' tours were interviewed.

Summary

All feature short story writers in their programming – four of the five said that they had a strong presence.

We think in terms of fiction/non-fiction and poetry rather than the short story. Short stories can also come up in other events eg the journalist Martha Gellhorn also wrote short stories. It's a rather arbitrary categorisation. Writers can't be categorised as easily as publishers would like, and the reader is more prepared to think out of the box in terms of form and length of work than publishers give them credit for.

The main reason for inclusion was that the event organisers liked their work, closely followed by the reputation or track record of the writer. Three organisers wanted to include new writers on the programme. 'There's no resistance to the short stories overseas'.

They were asked if publishers marketed short story collections to them, and the influence of publishers' recommendations. One said that they worked closely with certain publishers, and another said they worked with local publishers. Two said publishers did not market story collections to them. Two were influenced by publishers' recommendations.

We're influenced by certain publishers more than others. It depends if we trust their brand and know that we can work with them – if there are certain individuals there that we trust.

All respondents considered there were audiences for short story events, and all sold books after short story events. All respondents also sold literary magazines at the events.

There is an audience for the short story event but the writers need to be writers who have defined themselves as short story writers, not just novelists who also write short stories. For instance, if you had Alice Munro, the audience would only want to know about her short stories. It's important to get really high calibre short story writers – writers who can attain the same epic reach as with the novel.

Respondents were also active in promoting the short story in other ways. One supports an annual short story competition in a glossy magazine, and is embarking on a publishing venture for novellas and

short stories. Another organises a biennial competition, and one publishes an annual volume of new writing, including stories. One used to run annual short story competition – discontinued through lack of funding. One is planning an international festival of short story writing in 2004.

Opinion was divided in this group as to the outlets which best support and promoter the short story – three felt literary magazines were very important (albeit that they have ‘tiny, captive audiences’), and three believed non-literary magazines were the way to introduce new audiences. Anthologies were mentioned by all five respondents – one said every Arts Council of England regional office should publish one. Another warned that the quality in anthologies could be very uneven.

The establishment of a high profile prize and readership development projects were seen by all five as good ways to raise the profile and prestige of the short story. Three felt a tour or festival of short story writers would help (one event organiser already planning this for 2004, and another offered to initiate an international tour). Two felt an annual anthology would be helpful, and short story magazine support was mentioned three times – one felt the internet offered potential for this.

Other comments

Publishers tend to lean on the writer of short stories – they want to manipulate them. If there were more literary magazine outlets for the short story, such as the old Transatlantic Review and the Transcontinental, more prizes, then writers would be more prepared to stand up to the publisher. At the moment, they have no option but to do what the publisher says.

I feel that there’s also a need to promote short non-fiction eg essays. I do feel that there is a readership for the short story – it has lost its niche rather than its public. There’s a need for more marketing and for more magazine outlets. Where is the short story in schools, the university? We need some high profile ambassadors.

It’s a different cultural position in Wales to England. There’s a strong Welsh language tradition of short story writing – the short story is very short, usually under 1000 words compared with those in English which are usually 1500-2000 words. This is paralleled in English writing in Wales. Literature has a stronger place in the culture in Wales than in England and per capita, there is a slightly higher number of people interested in

attending literary events, so we can sell more books. We also have a very supportive broadcast media – BBC Radio commission stories – although there are very few short stories in the Welsh broadsheets.

Conclusions

- Short story writers feature prominently in programming by this group
- Commitment to showcasing the work of new as well as established writers
- Event organisers actively support the form in other ways, such as competitions, publication initiatives, tours
- Evidence that most publishers could do more to market story collections to this group
- Mixed views about effectiveness of literary magazines and non-literary magazines in supporting the form
- Strong support for high profile prize and reader development projects as best ways to raise prestige and profile of short stories in the future
- Recognition that there needs to be better education about the form, starting in schools
- Interest in marketing the form in different ways – rebranding, using shortness of form as selling point, exploration of micro-fiction ‘slams’,

4.7 Editors and broadcasters

A sample number of newspaper and periodical editors and broadcasters who showcase short fiction were selected for interview.

	Regularity	Number of short fiction slots	Submission procedure
Newspaper editor	12/year	1-2 per issue	Open. Bias towards UK writers, but interest too in European writers
Periodical editor	4/year	3-4 per issue	Open (1-2 from slush pile per year) Bias towards short story rather than other novel which will have other outlets
Magazine editor	12/year	Aiming for 1-2 per issue	Selection from emerging writers of narrative literary fiction, mostly UK but aiming to have 1-2 in translation per year. Length 2500-7000 words
Radio Producers	Radio 4 : 260+ /year Radio 3 : short series	1 x 15 min slot	New commissioning process – producer-led ideas, commissioning stories from established/new writers. Length constraint usually 2000 words

Table 4 Editors and Broadcasters showing regularity of publication/broadcast, number of slots available for short stories, and commissioning process

Print Editors : Summary

There was consensus amongst the print editors that there is a problem with showcases for short stories in the UK which compares unfavourably with the U.S. In the States, there are commercial and artistic reasons to write short stories because there are prestigious outlets and prizes. It was felt there was a dearth of influential small magazines in this country which publish short stories.

One editor said that his magazine received stories and pieces from all over the world, but in particular from US, and he ascribed the major reason for this being the encouragement of the many creative writing schools in the States. His hunch is that they receive fewer from UK, but this will change with growth of creative writing courses at UK universities: 'Short story is a difficult form to get right, but brevity means it's good to teach on the courses'.

One editor said he thought the quality of short stories submitted were as high as it's always been, but increasingly the submissions were

from writers under 30: 'There is a slight cottage industry feel to this – young writers have been taught how to craft short stories by the creative writing courses'.

The British short story has always had an uncertain career – especially the English short story.

One editor made the point that both historically and by their very nature, short stories are meant to be read as stand alone pieces, rather than in collections. 'When a magazine commissions a short story, it has to stand up on its own and speak to the audience'. He believed that collections only existed because there were insufficient magazine outlets, and there was a danger in collections that the stories have a habit of melding. In a magazine, by sharing space with essays, importance can be lent to the short story.

Editors were asked what measures could be taken to improve the prestige and profile of the short story in the UK. There was general agreement that stories needed more outlets in publications, like newspapers. A prize was also felt to be a priority:

If stories could be smuggled into existing book prize like Whitbread or Orange – there may be thin pickings in first year, but then the field would improve.

Radio Producers: Summary

Radio 4 has gradually changed its approach to short stories over the last five years in an attempt to improve the short story slot – 'we needed to raise the bar', said an editor. The audience for Radio 4 is very well read, and buys three times more books than average. In the past, Radio 4 had a very strong commitment to new writers, especially in the afternoon slot, and it was felt that the quality was not always sufficiently high. Another change which affected broadcast short stories was the alteration to the Woman's Hour reading – this is usually a dramatised serial.

Almost everything goes out in five or 10 parts – occasionally there will be space for two stories at the end of an eight-part serial.

A greater emphasis has been put on commissioning – producers coming up with an idea, and then inviting writers to write stories. Radio 4 has been very pleased with the result. A number of novelists have been encouraged to write short stories for the first time. For a theme for a week, a typical ratio would be to commission three established writers, and two less well-known writers. Commissioning stories from newer writers can be a good way of

working with people whose work they admire, but aren't yet ready for the *Book At Bedtime* slot.

Parameters are given to commissioned writers: to work well on radio there generally needs to be a central character and little dialogue. Usually stories should be around 2000 words to fit the 15 minute slot.

There are a lot of good US and Canadian short story writers– but they tend to write longer stories so they're not as useful from Radio 4 point of view.

Occasionally stories will be taken from an extant anthology – stories were recorded for Radio 4 from the recent Magic anthology, and from a few titles published by Persephone Press.

Radio 4 sometimes records short stories before live audiences, particularly at literature festivals.

It was the view of the radio producers that a prize would help to bring attention to the short story form.

It needs something to focus on the short story as an exciting artform – it almost needs a festival on its own. Too often it's the poor relation.

4.8 Prizes

The administrators of a number of literary prizes were interviewed.

The Asham Award

The Asham Award is a biennial competition open to women writers who have not yet had a novel or collection of short stories published. Publication of winning entries is published by Bloomsbury (previously Serpents Tail), along with specially commissioned stories from established writers. There is an entry fee, and the first prize is £1,000.

Around 900 entries are submitted.

There has been pressure to include male writers, but this has been resisted.

The Asham Trust is also active in the development of short story writers. It offers a critique service for the shortlisted writers (77 this year). The Trust is applying for funding to start a summer school to help writers with their careers. It also hopes to work in partnership with the Charleston Festival on an annual short story festival which

will invite contemporary writers to focus on short story writers of the past.

Commonwealth Fiction Prize and Mail on Sunday John Llewellyn Rhys Prize (both administered by Book Trust)

Both competitions are open to writers of short stories as well as to novelists.

The Commonwealth Fiction Prize has featured story collections amongst its regional winners – Alice Munro’s collection was a winner in her region, but didn’t go on to win the overall prize. A quarter to a third of all submissions are story collections – this probably reflects the strength of the short story in commonwealth countries.

Few short story collections are entered into the Mail on Sunday competition – from the 40 books entered, a ‘handful’ are story collections. Submission is by publisher – *it may be that publishers think prizewinning books have to be meaty, substantial works. If there was no limit on publishers’ submissions, I think more story collections would be entered.*

The level of short stories entered has remained quite steady.

Book Trust felt the establishment of a high profile prize would make a difference to profile of short stories.

There’s a massive gap for purely short story collections to be judged against each other rather than against novels.

Whitbread Award

Since 1985, the annual Whitbread awards are given in five categories (Novel, First Novel, Biography, Poetry, Children’s Novel), and an overall Book of the Year Award. Short stories are not included at present, but if the categories were to increase, short stories would be a possible contender.

Adding new categories would have practical consequences. The Awards run on a tight budget, and a new category would entail additional costs above the prize money – judges’ fees, and administration time. A new category would also add to the complications of the existing structure of the Awards, although this does seem to be well accepted now within the trade.

The process for change would come from soundings being taken from the trade, consideration of available resource, then a recommendation made to Whitbread.

A possible obstacle to the inclusion of short stories would be the size of the field – for other categories, around 120 titles are submitted. For short story volumes, the field is more likely to be in the range of 30 titles. This would make it disproportionate to other categories.

There may be ways of looking at ways of including stories in the future, eg

- announcing that Whitbread will be making a short story category in three years' time, to allow capacity building within publishers' lists – but it is unlikely that commitment of this kind into the future could be made.
- There may be ways of making a biennial award, if the evidence is there that this would make a more viable field.
- Short stories could be included in Novel and First Novel categories, allowing judges to make decisions
- Consideration of a pilot scheme, with partnership funding.

Orange Prize for Fiction

The Orange Prize for Fiction was established with the endowment of an anonymous woman donor who loved reading, and its development is overseen by The Women's Committee. The first prize was awarded in 1995, and is open to full-length novels by women written in the English language. The endowment funds the annual £30,000 prize and the trophy, an original piece of art called the Bessie. Administration is provided by the Prize's Administrator and Booktrust. Sponsorship from Orange funds publicity and marketing of the Prize.

As well as the Fiction Prize, research is undertaken each year, and also education projects which help to nurture writers and readers, and to promote the long listed titles. Recent projects have included Chatterbooks - reading groups in libraries for 4-12 year olds, and a project on reading in the workplace. A short story competition is run in association with Harpers & Queen magazine. There are also other regional projects which often feature short stories, such as the Scotsman/Orange short story competition.

At present it is thought unlikely that then Prize could do more with the short story at national level, but there would be scope for further discussion between the Women's Committee and ACE/SAC about a possible partnership over a short story category in the future. Any

discussion would have to be on the understanding that the Orange Prize is unlikely to change its emphasis from being a women only award.

4.9 Reading Agency

The Director of a leading UK reading agency was interviewed, and the following points were made :

There is a generational difference in the reading audience for short stories, and they do not necessarily overlap, eg Classic short story collections attract an older audience, Genre stories attract a different kind, and younger, newer collections tend to attract other writers

Readers of stories in magazines don't necessarily think of themselves as short story readers

Library staff believe stories don't go out – they get classified with other short story collections, so new paperbacks can get lost beside dusty 1930s collections, so they don't get borrowed. If they were shelved in the Quick Choice promotions they would.

- Needs some inventive commissioning, publishing and marketing. Writers are versatile – they'll write once shape is clear.
- Best way of improving the profile of the short story would be a high profile prize
- Reader development projects wouldn't improve prestige and profile of stories, but could offer incremental growth

Readers groups like longer reads – if you're making an investment then you want a three course meal not a snack. They're looking for bigger reading experience. Short stories need to be sold to them – but not as light, 'fits into your lifestyle' way, but as provocative, meaty, deep and loads to say about them.

Readers tend to have more prejudices about short stories beforehand than afterwards. Fear of pretentious literary short stories, particularly by men. More of a following for big female short story writers- but they still don't get taken up by readers' groups.

5 Conclusions

Getting Accepted

Strength of work is the most important factor in whether writing is accepted by an agent or publisher.

Mainstream publishers find it very difficult to launch a new writer with a collection of short stories. Mainstream and independent publishers are likely to buy a writer's short stories in order to secure a novel. Collections by first-time writers are more likely to be accepted by independent or small presses.

Many writers are receiving advice from agents and publishers to write novels or themed collections.

The name or reputation of the writer is of great importance to the success of a collection.

Commercial

Advances for short story collections from mainstream or independent publishers are lower than for a novel.

Sales are likely to be one-third or a quarter of the sales expected for a novel by the same writer.

Small presses experience more success comparatively with short story collections, and collections are often amongst their bestselling titles.

Themed collections

Most agents, and half the publishers interviewed believed that themed collections are more likely to be accepted than non-themed ones. Sales and marketing professionals believe that themed collections are easier to sell than non-themed collections.

There is a growing tendency for publishers to market linked story collections as novels to increase their chances of commercial success.

Marketing and selling

Marketing of short stories is seen by writers, agents and publishers as not as strong as for novels by the same writer. Independent

publishers are often considered better at marketing stories than mainstream presses.

Booksellers feel publishers market story collections poorly, and sometimes sense negativity on behalf of publishers towards stories.

Some booksellers think that publishers try to disguise collections as novels in publicity material.

There are very limited opportunities for selling subsidiary rights to short story collections.

Price promotions, such as '3 for 2' are likely to result in significant sales. Shelving policies, both in bookshops and libraries, have an impact: sales and issues are likely to be higher if they are included in promotions, tables, and in general fiction stock, than in short story sections.

Need to think more imaginatively about the packaging of story collections and anthology – strong design, strong theme, inclusion of well-known names.

Labelling anthologies with a date was seen as unhelpful.

Event and festival organisers are strong supporters of the short story, and there are opportunities for more publishers to market short story collections to them. This group is sympathetic towards showcasing work of emergent writers

Outlets

Literary magazines, anthologies and competitions are seen as important platforms for showcasing the work of short story writers by writers, but cited less often by agents and publishers as a place to identify talented writers. These groups were more likely to view literary magazines as 'preaching to the converted'.

Stories in newspapers and non-literary magazines seen as an important way to promote short stories by the book trade, and by newspaper and periodical editors.

Despite changes to commissioning process, radio remains an important showcase for stories, although there are constraints on the type and length of story suitable for broadcast.

The need for a range of outlets for publishing short stories was identified, and the situation in UK was compared unfavourably with

US. Need for magazine with same stamp of authority as *The New Yorker*.

Reading

Readership development projects were seen as a desirably way to engage readers with the short story form.

There is a need to explore methods of engaging readers in new ways, and to recognise that some readers are more likely to respond to the form if they read single stories in magazines or newspapers, rather than collections. Focussing on brevity of the story is unlikely to be key.

There is a need to develop a reading culture for short stories – and this should start in schools.

Readers of literary fiction and readers' groups may be more likely to respond to form if they are marketed not for their brevity (and therefore likely to fit into their lives), but on basis that they are provocative, meaty, satisfying.

Future

A number of interviewees felt that there's a need to rebrand the short story, and to explore ways of engaging readers in new ways.

There is strong agreement amongst all groups interviewed that the best way of raising the profile and prestige of the short story is by the establishment of a high profile prize.

The development of readership projects focused on the short story was also thought to be a good way to raise profile and prestige.

An annual anthology of best UK short stories was also mentioned frequently by interviewees, although there were very mixed views about how such an anthology should be edited, published and marketed.

There was some support for an international short story festival or tour, and limited support for funding short story magazines.

Most respondents felt that an international conference on short fiction in the 21st century would be of limited use.

There was almost no support for the idea of profile-raising events such as a World Short Story Day.

6 Opportunities

Book Prize

- Establish a new high-profile prize for short story collections, or, preferably, piggyback on an established book prize to create a new short story category.
- ACE/SAC may consider entering a partnership on a pilot basis with an established book prize to create such a category.
- It is important to create a category for short story collections, rather than including them with novels, particularly if publishers are limited in the number of submissions made – it is felt that publishers would tend to submit novels over story collections.
- The number of entries may be low in the first years, but have a good possibility of increasing if the prize is effective and promoted well in bookshops, libraries and in the press.
- It may be worth considering offering the prize on a biennial basis in the first years.
- It would be worth considering giving a long lead-time between the announcement of any new category/prize, and the submission date, to encourage more publication of story collections.
- The impact of any such prize should be monitored.

Anthology

- Consider the establishment of an annual UK Best Short Story anthology.
- Care would have to be given to the selection, editing, publishing, packaging and marketing of such an anthology.
- An annual anthology should not be labelled with a date

Readership Development

- Further exploration should be undertaken of readership development projects focused on the short story. Such development could be tied in with the establishment of a prize.

- Different approaches would need to be developed for different groups, eg readers' groups likely to respond to angle of short stories being 'substantial', while average reader looking for ways to find short stories 'easier' to read.
- Consideration could be given to how libraries shelve short story collections – including them in promotions and general fiction sections rather than short story sections are likely to result in increased borrowing.
- Need to develop bibliographic information about short story collections as a resource for readers' groups, libraries, booksellers and for education

Education

- Talk to DFES and education professionals to see how short stories can feature more in the curriculum

Support to Publishers

- ACE and SAC consider prioritising support to independent publishers for short story volumes
- ACE and SAC consider prioritising support to magazines publishing short stories

Ongoing focus on the short story

- Advocacy for the short story, in the shape of the campaign, has been demonstrably effective in raising awareness of the form. Explore ways of continuing focus on the short story after the end of the present campaign – this may involve specific funding to an existing organisation to take on this role, or the creation of a new organisation (cf The Poetry Society).
- ACE and SAC consider prioritising support to short story initiatives at literary festivals and other live literature events.

Initiative	impact	beneficiaries	time	cost	P'ship
Book Prize	high	Book trade Media readers	medium	high	yes
Anthology	low	Writers	medium	low	no
Reader projects	medium	Readers libraries	long	low	no
Education	medium	Future readers	long	medium	yes
Pub support	low	Writers publishers	medium	low	no

Matrix showing opportunities – their likely impact, beneficiaries affected, timescale to implement, relative likely cost, and the availability of possible partnership funding levered with arts council support.

Appendix One : List of Those Interviewed

Writers

- Kate Atkinson
- Anne Donovan
- Michel Faber
- Kirsty Gunn
- A L Kennedy
- Sara Maitland
- Bernard MacLaverty
- Suhayl Saadi
- Ali Smith
- Ruth Thomas
- Candia McWilliam
- Jackie Kay
- Toby Litt
- Val McDermid
- David Almond
- Margaret Wilkinson
- Shena Mackay
- Brian McCabe
- Ron Butlin

Agents

- Hannah Griffiths, Curtis Brown
- David Godwin, David Godwin Associates
- Paul Marsh, The Marsh Agency
- Isobel Dixon, Blake Friedmann Agency
- Jane Gregory, Gregory & Company
- Shirley Stewart, Shirley Stewart Literary Agency

Publishers

- Tim Binding, Scribner (Simon & Schuster)
- Carole Welch, Sceptre (Hodder)
- Christopher Maclehose, Harvill Press
- Carole Smith, Random House
- Philip Gwyn Jones, HarperCollins
- Simon Prosser, Hamish Hamilton
- Amy Prior, editor of short story volumes for Serpents Tail
- Pete Ayrton, Serpents Tail
- Jenny Boyce, Serpents Tail
- Liz Gooding, Serpents Tail

- Diana Beaumont, Transworld
- Richard Davies, Parthian Books
- Judy Moir, Canongate
- Karen McCrossan, Canongate
- Emma Hargreaves, Tindal Street Press
- Peter Lewis, Flambard
- Maggie Hamand, Maia Press
- Will Atkinson, Sales Director, Faber
- Tilly Ware, HarperCollins
- Jan Rutherford, 11:9, Polygon
- Camilla Elworthy, Picador
- Stephanie Sweeney, Picador

Others

- Caroline Raphael, Radio 4
- Di Speirs, Radio 4
- Ian Jack, Granta magazine
- Ian Irvine, Talk of the Town magazine, Independent
- Alex Linklater, Prospect magazine
- Stephanie Anderson, Arvon Foundation
- Rachel van Riel, Opening the Book
- Carole Buchan, Asham Prize
- Bud McLintock, Whitbread Prize
- Kate Mervyn Jones, Book Trust
- Becky Shaw, Orange Prize for Fiction

Event Organisers

- Peter Florence, Hay Festival
- Ruth Borthwick, South Bank Centre
- Margaret Meyer, Literature Director, and Susie Joinson, British Council
- Peter Finch, Welsh Academy
- Professor Markham, Sheffield Hallam University

Booksellers/Buyers

- Hazel Broadfoot, Dulwich Bookshops
- Andrew Stilwell, London Review of Books Bookshop
- Bob McDevitt, Ottakers Marketing Manager, Scotland
- Jane Shaw, Blackwells, Edinburgh
- Paul Rutherford, Borders, Inverness
- Avril Moyes, The Ceilidh Place, Ullapool
- Peter Whitehead, Waterstones, Manchester
- Peter Mackenzie, Bookworm, Derry

- Robin Gourlay, Easons, Eire and N Ireland

Appendix Two :Sample Questionnaires

Questions to Writers

Name:

Publications:

Title	Year of Publication	Type (novel, short story collection etc.)

1. Do you think of yourself as primarily a writer of
novels
short stories
neither

2. How did you first get published? What followed from that?
e.g. short stories published in magazines/anthologies, followed by
publication of short story anthology, followed by publication of
novel.

3. Is your work handled by an agent?

a) yes

b) no

Has that always been the case?

4. Does your agent handle short stories as well as novels?

a) yes

b) no

c) in some cases

5. Have you come under any external pressure to write novels as
opposed to short stories?

a) from an agent

b) from a publisher

c) from anyone else?

6. What was the reason given?
7. In your view, is this justified? (e.g. readers prefer to buy novels)
8. Was your short story collection
 - a) commissioned by a publisher
 - b) submitted by you to your agent
 - c) submitted by you to publishers
 - d) other (please explain)
9. What persuaded your agent/publisher to accept your short story collection?
 - a) your track record as a known writer
 - b) you had won a major prize
 - c) they liked the work and thought it would sell
 - d) other – please explain
10. Did you get an advance for your collection?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
11. In which 'band' was this advance
 - a) £0-2,500
 - b) £2,501-£4,000
 - c) £4,001-£8,000
 - d) £8,001-£15,000
 - e) over £15,000
12. How did this compare with your advance(s) for novels?
 - a) better
 - b) not so good
 - c) not applicable

Do you want to add anything to clarify this? (e.g. are there any other reasons for an advance being greater or lesser?)
13. Has your book so far earned out the advance?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
 - c) too soon to say whether it will

14. How did your publisher's marketing of your short story collection(s) compare with marketing of your novel(s)?

- a) better
- b) not so good
- c) not applicable

Please explain how your work was marketed, and add any relevant comments.

15. In which form has your work most widely been reviewed?

- a) novel
- b) short story collection
- c) both about the same

Any further comments on this – e.g. is there a difference between reviewing of hardback/paperback editions?

16. Have any subsidiary rights to your short story collection(s) been sold – e.g. translation to other languages, adapted for audio, published elsewhere?

17. Has your short story collection had publicity via other outlets – radio broadcast, winning competition/prize etc.?

18. *In your view* are there enough publication outlets for short stories?

- a) yes
- b) no

19. Which outlets do you think best support and promote the short story:

- a) literary magazines
- b) non-literary magazines
- c) annual or themed anthologies with open submission
- d) annual or themed commissioned anthologies
- e) other?

20. Of the following suggestions, which do you think would best improve the prestige and profile of the short story?

- a) Establishing an high profile annual 'Best UK Short Stories' anthology
- b) Establishing a high profile sponsored prize for the short story – collection/anthology/single story
- c) International short story festival/tour
- d) International conference on short fiction in the 21st Century
- e) Reader development projects focused on short story – libraries and readers' groups
- f) Profile-raising events such as World Short Story Day
- g) Short story magazine support

21. Do you have any other suggestions, or comments you would like to make?

Questions to Event Organisers

Event/Organisation:

Name/Role of person interviewed:

1. Do you include events featuring short story writers in your festival/tour programming? If yes, what proportion roughly?
2. What would persuade you to programme events featuring short story writers?
 - a. name/reputation
 - b. track record of appearances
 - c. won major prize
 - d. liked work
 - e. other
3. Is the name/reputation of the writer a more significant factor than it is in decisions about programming events featuring novelists or poets?
4. How actively do publishers market short story collections to you?
5. To what extent are you influenced by publishers' recommendations?
6. How actively do publishers market short story collections to you?
7. How do ticket sales for events featuring short story writers compare with those featuring novelists or poets?
8. Do you feel that there is an audience for events featuring short story writers?
9. Do you arrange for book signings after events featuring short story writers? How do book sales at these compare with those featuring novelists or poets?
10. Do you sell short story collections at your events? If yes, how do book sales compare with those of novels and poetry?
11. Do you sell literary magazines at your events? If yes, how are they displayed and promoted?
12. Do you yourself enjoy reading short stories? Do your staff?

13. Do you support/promote the short story in any other ways apart from events?
14. Which of the following outlets do you think best support and promote the short story?
- a. literary magazines
 - b. non-literary magazines
 - c. annual or themed anthologies with open submission
 - d. annual or themed commissioned anthologies
 - e. other
15. Of the following suggestions, which do you think would best improve the prestige and profile of the short story?
- a. Establishing a high profile annual 'Best UK Short Stories' anthology
 - b. Establishing a high profile sponsored prize for the short story – collection/anthology/single story
 - c. International short story festival/tour
 - d. International conference on short fiction in the 21st century
 - e. Reader development projects focused on short story – libraries and readers' groups
 - f. Profile-raising events such as World Short Story Day
 - g. Short story magazine support
16. Any other comments generally?