

Resonance is missing Glamorizing dullish baths

THE SHORT story is alive and kicking, getting stronger every year, proving once again that class wins. Quality will out.

There was time, not so long ago, when mentioning the words "short story" was like shouting "liberal Democrat" in Houston. It was thumbs down all the way. Short stories, gasp and gasp! Not in this regime — not in this lifetime.

I say blame The New Yorker, but that's just me. The New Yorker, the supposed vanguard of literary fiction, gave up clarity and coherence for awhile there and went with bits and pieces, lumpy language games and "poor me" ennui instead.

I SAY BLAME THE women's magazines for giving up quality commercial fiction and going instead for the mindless, giddy, cliché-ridden romance stories. What an insult to women everywhere. Give us back Ruymer Godden, Phyllis Whitney and Mary Augusta Rogers (who, by the way, lives in Birmingham). I was stunned when I found that out a few years ago. I had read her stories for years and decided that nobody that good could be earthbound and live a life like everyone else.

I say blame Gordon Lish and his ally Columbia School of "write like me and you'll be a star if I let you." But that may be giving Lish too much credit. Even he isn't capable of creating an entire literary movement — is he?

Still, I want to blame someone. Somebody had to publish all the stupid stories we were forced to endure for so long — stories where wired-with-it people (young) sit around in their underwear and while away a couple of hours snorting cocaine, detesting their rich and drunken parents and having the most boring conversations in the world about what they did or didn't do, should or shouldn't have done. Write it in present tense, throw in a few brand names ("Adrian spends long minutes carefully tearing back the wrapper of the Hershey with Almonds."

... "A Lish trademark: Don't just tell us what it is — tell us what it's, don't forget the drugs and you have the classic short story of the '80s."

But I'm getting needlessly cranky. As I said before, things change. Already "liberal Democrat" has lost its nerdy edge and we L.D.s have been invited — even encouraged — to come out of the swamps and get back to the business at hand. Namely, changing things.

And what does that have to do with short stories? Not a thing. So let's go on.

A lot of us were growing up when some of the greatest short story writers ever to grace this planet were still alive and plugging away at their craft: Hemingway, Faulkner, the O'Connors — Flannery and Frank — Steinbeck, Thurber, Dorothy Parker, Somerset Maugham, Katherine Anne Porter, E. B. White.

Their works were exquisite, wicked, joyous, cautionary — and as dazzling clear as a mountain river. Some of the best are still with us: Eudora Welty, Peter Taylor, Joyce Carol Oates. And some of the currently good are only getting better: Bobby Ann Mason, Ellen Gilchrist, Louis Erdrich, Max Apple, Mona Simpson — and our own Michigan writers, Chant Baxter, Stuart Dybek, Janet Kauffman and Gloria Whelan.

A former Detroit, Gloria Whelan now writes at her home in the north woods east of Grand



book break

Mona Grigg

'I say blame the women's magazines for giving up quality commercial fiction and going instead for the mindless, giddy, cliché-ridden romance stories.'

Traverse Bay. Some of her best stories reflect that setting, while others take place in far away, exotic locales. Her characters might be considered pretty ordinary but for the way they reckon with the world around them. Fourteen of her stories, including the O. Henry award-winning "The Dogs in Renoir's Garden," appear in "Playing with Shadows" (hardbound, \$11.95), a collection recently published by the Illinois University Press.

In a recent discussion with other writers, Whelan told about Keats viewing a huge, historical tableau painted by the American painter Benjamin West. Keats looked at it for a long time, then remarked, "It's very good, it's very well done, but there nothing in it to be intense about."

The intensity is there in all of Whelan's stories. She draws us in and keeps us there by giving us something to care about. A dull, self-centered man believes his middle-aged, overweight wife has taken a lover. He follows her, spies on her and discovers the pathetic reason for the new sparkle in her eye — she has become a shoplifter.

A woman walking near her home in the woods spots a passenger pigeon, a breed thought to be 70 years extinct. She recognizes, with great sadness, that this is a secret she must keep from her biologist husband, who spends his days gathering and killing creatures for study.

A former neighbor takes a lonely woman in a nursing home out to lunch at her country club restaurant. It is a disaster from the start, escalating from bad to worse when the woman somehow acquires, then drinks, several double martinis.

"In a good short story," Whelan says, "there is the feeling that down underneath there is a resonance, a reverberation that stays with us long after the story is ended."

It's the resonance that good story writers strive for. "No tricks," Raymond Carver said. The trick stories are mind candy — fun while they last, but forgotten when they're gone. And if there is a short story resurgence, let it be because there are stories to be told — and worth telling well.

If you've visited any model homes, you've probably noticed how glamorous bathrooms have become. Then you return home and wish yours was more appealing.

If you don't want to invest in wallpaper, posters or pictures can be a fine substitute. A towel filled with colored soaps and towels and some live plants can achieve a 'look.'

When shopping for wallpaper, select one with a matching fabric. If you have a shower and tub, use the matching fabric for tied-back draperies. A window should be dressed with the same fabric as wall.

When the bathroom or powder room is small, use mirrors. These are areas where the use of mirrors is limitless. I have mirrored the ceiling in powder rooms for greater dimension.

When redecorating an old bathroom, existing tile can be a problem. Removing tile is costly so the best way to handle it is with color. The combination of jade green and black tile often found in older homes looks wonderful with walls done in a softer or deeper green. A black tile floor would look sensational with these combinations. Mica cabinets in matte finish or lacquer in bone or almond complete the look. Orchid tiles were favorites in older homes. Mauve and celery make orchid tiles a plus.

'Cleopatra' slide show set

Both Julius Caesar and the dashing Mark Antony found her irresistible.

But she was far too high-spirited, well educated and clever for the rest of the Romans. When she died, they thanked their gods and danced.

She was Cleopatra, queen of Egypt.

The Schoolcraft College Committee to Promote the Arts is hosting "Cleopatra's Egypt," a slide presentation by William Peck, curator of Ancient Art at the Detroit Institute of Arts, at 1:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 23, in the Liberal Arts Theater.

PECK'S PRESENTATION is being held in conjunction with "Cleopatra's Egypt: Age of the Ptolemies," an exhibit at the DIA from Feb. 15 to May 1. Peck, a specialist in Egyptian art, played a key role in organizing the exhibition, which opened in New York and will travel from Detroit to Munich.

One of the most famous women in history, Cleopatra has captivated artists, composers and writers for 2,000 years. Michelangelo drew her, Berlioz composed a work for voice and orchestra on her dramatic death and Shakespeare wrote a play about her, giving her the largest female role in his repertoire.

The program is open to the public and is free of charge. Schoolcraft College is at 18600 Haggerty Road, between Six and Seven Mile, in Livonia. For more information, call 482-4435.



designing ways

Eve Garvin

If you have a free standing sink in your bath and need more space, surround it with a countertop. If your commode is on the same wall, extend your top to go over it.

Bathrooms demand good lighting — not only for vision and safety, but also for decorative enhancement. In new construction, an inexpensive way to supply good lighting is to have a soffit over the vanity and use high wattage fluorescent bulbs.

A popular innovation in bathroom lighting is theatrical lighting — framing the mirror on two, three or four sides with 25 watt incandescent bulbs. I like good lighting, but not the amount of heat thrown off by all those bulbs.

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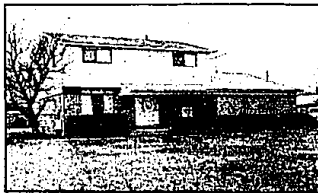
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