

5 + 20 Female Short Story Writers You Should Be Reading RIGHT NOW

written by Guest Contributor | September 16, 2015



(Not All At Once Though, Because That's Not Realistic, But One after the Other, Or at the Most Two at a Time, But No More Than That)

They say, if you don't like someone's list, make your own. Well, it's not at all that I didn't like [LitReactor's "5 Female Short Story Writers You Should Be Reading RIGHT NOW!"](#) In fact, the authors mentioned – Amelia Gray, Bonnie Jo Campbell, Julia Elliot, Laura van den Berg, and Lindsay Hunter – are superb choices, and the descriptions Keith Rawson wrote for each were pretty perfect. What I have here – a list of twenty more female authors – is not a challenge to LitReactor's list, but an addendum; and if I left any off that should be included – and I'm positive I did – then hopefully someone else will contribute to this list. It should also be noted that these are my personal choices, and not necessarily representative of Entropy as a whole.

I just want to mention, quickly, that I'm somewhat uncomfortable *listing* female authors. The literary community doesn't do this for male authors (unless subdividing them into race or sexual orientation or age). Likewise, because there are so many incredible females writing short stories, it seems almost condescending to relegate them to a list. So, here it's worth reminding that my main point is to expand the 'list of 5' in hopes of giving attention to others.

Instead of a description of each author, I've decided to let her prose speak for itself; therefore, I've excerpted a story that I believe best represents her style and awesomeness, along with a link to the story/collection and her website. This way, you can explore the author on your own.

xTx

Today I am a summer field. Put yourself inside me. Watch what I do when the wind blows. Thread through the stems that stream me. Feel my skin from the sun. Put your face against mine. Let them melt-stick together. Let them become one giant face. A four-eyed, two-mouthed, mass of wrong. An outside

reflecting my in but at least that means we're forever together.

– “Today I Am a Summer Field,” [Today I Am a Book](#)

Author website: www.notimetosayit.com

Amber Sparks

They are raised by wolves or they are raised by apes or they are raised by gazelle or donkeys or dolphins, by dogs or goats or cats or birds or bears or even bees. They suckle at teats when tiny, but later they chew grass, lettuce, kelp, slurp pollen and search for the softest, sweetest apples littering the ground, or else learn to tear open carcasses with tiny baby teeth, to catch small fish with pudgy hands, to stalk prey on silent wobbly baby legs, baby noses sniffing out the tangy copper trail of blood.

– “Feral Children: A Collective,” [May We Shed These Human Bodies](#)

Website: <http://ambernoellesparks.com/>

Roxane Gay

Candy, her best friend at work, took one look at Sarah on her first day and told Sarah to dance to black girl booty shaking music because guys love to see white girls with juicy asses shake their stuff. Sarah blushed, and pivoted to get a better look at her ass. She said, “My ass is juicy?”

Candy laughed and grabbed a handful of Sarah's ass, but Sarah already knew she had a juicy ass and where it came from. Her mother is black and her father is white but for years people have assumed she's a white girl because she has green eyes and straight blonde hair. She's not ashamed of who she is but in Baltimore it's easier to be a white girl with a black girl's ass than to be a black girl who looks white or any other kind of black girl for that matter.

– “La Negra Blanca,” [The Collagist](#)

Website: www.roxanegay.com

Paula Bomer

From that day on she felt inside herself with fascination. The lights off, the house asleep, she lay on her back, her legs spread eagle, groping underneath her pink, flannel nightie, past her round belly into herself. She put a finger and then two inside. She turned herself over, squatting on her knees, quietly, hunched up underneath her covers, her head and shoulders pressing against her pillow. She put two then three then four fingers inside.

Afterward, in those moments before sleep takes over, her breath slowing down and steadying, she put her fingers to her face and smelled her earthy smell and licked her hand. I'm big, she thought. I'm big like a woman who's had three children.

– “Inside Madeleine,” [Inside Madeleine](#)

Website: <http://www.paulabomer.com/>

Alissa Nutting

Leo is physically smaller than I am. What's sad is, I can tell that he thinks he really dressed up for this audition. He's a disaster of buttons. Every single button on his shirt is closed and there appears to be an unnatural number of buttons – auxiliary buttons and safety buttons to backup the back up buttons, vestigial buttons that hang at the tops of his sleeves as though, many centuries ago, a pocket may have been there. His hair is too long for his face and it makes him look extra-gaunt. I hear the executives mumble he should be given a second HIV test, *just to be sure, he doesn't look too good*, and they're right. When I glance at Leo, it's like seeing a lemon the color of tooth enamel.

– “Porn Star,” [Unclean Jobs for Women and Girls](#)

Website: <http://www.alissanutting.com/>

Jen Conley

When she heard another muffled shout from Brian, she decided it was time, window light or no light. She leapt off the overhang, landing on the ground hard, her ankle turning – pain shooting through her leg. Sucking in her breath, she quickly pulled herself up, scurried across the grass and into the woods, but made no headway because her body became trapped in a tangle of sticker bushes. They stabbed her face and arms fiercely, but she did not cry out. She plucked herself from the trap and turned towards the house again, moving a few paces before stepping behind a slim tree, finding herself on the side of the house, thinking she needed to run towards the highway.

A gunshot went off.

– “Escape,” [Shotgun Honey Presents: Both Barrels](#)

Website: <http://jen-conley.blogspot.com/>

Heather Foster

I told you to keep quiet, and you did, turning your back and pissing in the

grass behind the truck. You were trying to use your manners to get out of a tough spot. I understood. You thought you could good-boy-voice me till I gave in. But it wasn't that. I hope you know it wasn't that that did it. It was – and I didn't want to admit it till now – I was lonesome. Jesus! A girl like me, lonesome. But I was. For the first time, I'd picked one that didn't remind me of him, at least not in the light, and I should have known but I thought maybe. Maybe just a few days, just to pass the time, and then I'd move on. So I let you climb in the cab with me and you puked bile onto the floorboard and blacked out.

– “The Armadillo,” [Exigencies Anthology](#)

Website: www.heatherfoster.org

H.L. Nelson

Dirtman is dried up, but not like most folks around here are dried up. They're like Mama's jerky after I leave it out for a few days. Drier than dry. Daddy goes to Stafford Farm and picks out a cow to be killed, then comes back with a whole side that Mama cuts up and jerkies. She always freezes the rest. I've had nightmares about half a cow chasing me through the tumbleweeds and mesquite, thorny branches clawing at my clothes and skin. I've woken up drenched, then remembered Mama cut up that half a cow and it was cooling in the deep freeze, frosting over with a fine ice. I'd still look at the meat sidelong when Mama pulled it out. Didn't trust it until it was in my belly.

– “Dirtman,” [Nightmare Magazine](#)

Website: www.hlnelson.com

Steph Post

He looked behind him for the door that he had just come through, but there was only the dark wall. Light shone from his own hotel room. He heard the voice call his name again, and he ran. This time, he stopped in front of the glass office door and looked out. There was no neon sign, no parking lot, no white truck, no Oldsmobile. He looked through the glass and saw only the hotel hallway. Like a mirror. Except that he didn't see the hotel office reflected back at him, he saw the other end of the hallway. Where his room was. He frantically looked around the office, half expecting the little man to pop out of nowhere like he did before. But David was alone. And the voice was getting louder. He opened the office door and stepped through it again. He was back at the end of the hall. He started to go back into his room, to sit on the bed and think. To get away from the awful voice, but he stopped in his tracks. The horse heads were back.

– “The Blue Diamond,” [Stephen King's Contemporary Classics: Reflections on the Modern Master of Horror](#)

Website: <http://stephpostauthor.blogspot.com/>

Amanda Gowin

He locks a hand around her upper arm and ducks into the alley to their right, heart in his throat, dragging her with him. Her bone twists beneath the flesh, he presses her against the wall. Dirty wall. Rougher than sandpaper, more interesting in its variability. Broken glass under their feet, recognizable by the teeth-grinding scrape it makes on the asphalt. Thumb and forefinger working into her grimace, he drags the slimy wad of strawberry-stinking gum from between her teeth and flattens it onto the wall.

“I do,” Nathan whispers into her mouth. Sometimes the thing you love most in the world is the one thing you should avoid at all costs, because it’s bad for you, bad for others – but it still feels better than anything. So you need to be around people that understand that feeling, to know you are not alone, that every day you have to remind yourself why you don’t give in.

– “Teetotaler,” [Radium Girls](#)

Website: <https://lookatmissohio.wordpress.com/>

Rebecca Jones-Howe

“I’m sorry,” he says. He laughs, reaching out again, rubbing his thumb over the scar. “I’ve seen all those pictures of babies with cleft lips. It’s crazy that those kids can look so normal, isn’t it?”

“I guess,” I say. The scar throbs and I stare down at the floor, thinking like ants are crawling around my feet, flashbacks of my first memories: learning to speak without slurring or spewing spit, trying to explain to classmates why my mouth was so ugly, all that social withdrawal sewn up inside my restructured upper lip. It’s hard to breathe. I turn my head and take a drink. The water’s cold but it doesn’t provide the right kind of relief.

“Do you want to do something?” He leans forward, hands shaking, edging toward my leg. “Do you want to fuck?” he asks.

– “Blue Hawaii,” [Vile Men](#)

Website: <http://rebeccajoneshowe.com/>

Christy Crutchfield

There was the hint of accent on her, thoughtless vowels that sounded like rushing through the cold. New England. And, though she was quiet, I

remember thinking I saw harshness in her and her lack of thank yous. She didn't say much else, nodding, almost smiling, until 3am when she said she needed a place to stay. Even if I had known stay was exactly what she meant, looking at her gritty and sleepy and drunk, I would have said yes, of course, yes. I'll take care of you, small white thing.

A million questions banged at my skull, but there are some things you just trust.

– “Pray for Rain,” [Blip Magazine](#)

Website: www.christy-crutchfield.com

Berit Ellingsen

This is where it ends: in a concrete hall between reticent, snow-burdened mountains, under a mute sky the color of forgetfulness, snow falling like soot, and the air so frigid that every metal object tears the skin from your fingers. The lashing nettle-wind shrieks and tries every door and hollow window frame, like a burglar at night, clinking across the floor's lake of glass shards. The red-rusted ley lines with rows of disc-shaped insulators curve into the sky and sing of legacies misspent and lost, of eternal life squandered.

– “Anthropocene,” [Beneath Liquid Skin](#)

Website: [www.http://beritellingsen.com/](http://www.beritellingsen.com/)

Letitia Trent

She stopped when the lights went out. A few of the children screamed and the mothers hissed words of comfort. Krista didn't move. It seemed safer to stay where she was. No need to drag it out. No need to make things harder on everyone. Though it was dark, she could hear the rustle of someone moving toward her.

– “Wilderness,” [Exigencies Anthology](#)

Website: [www.http://letitiatrentwriter.blogspot.com/](http://letitiatrentwriter.blogspot.com/)

Mary Miller

After a few hours of this, she said she was finished and went inside and got in the shower. He got in with her and they soaped each other up and washed each other's hair. He was the only man she'd ever been with who liked to shower with her, who didn't think taking turns under the water was too much trouble.

When they were clean and dressed, their wet hair brushed back, she opened a beer and drank it while sitting in the middle of his king-sized bed, while he played Johnny Cash's "Highwayman" on the piano. It was her favorite song and she made him play it constantly—she could listen to it over and over, imagining herself a sailor and a dam builder and a single drop of rain, listening to his voice strain with feeling.

– "Cedars of Lebanon," [Big World](#)

Website: <http://maryumiller.tumblr.com/>

Jac Jemc

Say you walk to Ray's. You sneak to the bathroom. You examine your face in the mirror. You're pretty sure you don't believe in an afterlife, but in the event there is such a thing, who knows if you'll be able to see anything, much less your own face. You look at the blue-flame tinted circles beneath your eyes. You think of all the deaths you've avoided: the canoe trip in the storm, the mugging, that time your appendix jammed itself huge into the rest of you. All incongruous warnings for the decision you're making right now.

You look a little longer. No, you're not getting sentimental, but you want to make sure there's enough time for the sedative to dissolve in your drink. You don't want to wake too early to a gray foggy cloud of your own bright scarlet. You don't want to see the brownish tint of you as the yellow pages sop up your gore.

– "The Wrong Sister," [A Different Bed Every Time](#)

Website: www.jacjemc.com

Aubrey Hirsch

The first story came out of Paris. A bloated brunette appeared in the paper under the headline: Woman Pregnant with Unidentified Object. I read it with my sister, whose own empty uterus kept her balled up on the sofa. Six months later, the headline read: Woman Gives Birth to Diamond Watch. By then, the strange pregnancies were everywhere.

"Why We Never Talk About Sugar," [Why We Never Talk About Sugar](#)

Website: www.aubreyhirsch.com

Leesa Cross-Smith

I dyed my hair so it would look like Cherry Coke. I asked him if it worked and he said absolutely. His mouth tasted like thousand-page Russian novels

I'd never read. When he kissed me, I could hear the ocean and when he was gone I heard the sound of a flagpole chain in the wind, clink-tinkling against hollow metal. He had spent a lot of time in those beautiful far-away countries Americans only hear about when something awful happens; famines, floods, earthquakes, volcanoes, typhoons. I wrote those in alphabetical order, put the vein-blue Post-It on the closet door. I told him it was to remind him not to leave again. Look at what can happen if you are there and not here. I dreamt of wolves and snow when he held himself back from me. I dreamt he tattooed his knuckles, both hands said love. Those bare fingers wrapped around my wrists, held me down and I liked it. They tapped his knees when he got restless; jittery legs bouncing on my new couch. Sometimes I thought it was from the sugar he started adding to his coffee. I asked him if he liked it black and sweet and he said absolutely. My body healed quickly, fascinated me; a dotted-line scratch from the screen door, a black-plum bruise from opening the dishwasher too fast, my fist-sized heart repairing itself on the job because I left the latch open and let in a rambling man, a midnight rider. I made extra-spicy gin Bloody Marys and we drank them naked in bed. Opened the windows although it was so cold he had started growing out his winter beard like every other man. I used that to convince myself they weren't all that different. Absolutely, I did.

– “Absolutely,” [Every Kiss a War](#)

Website: www.leesacrosssmith.com

Kathy Fish

The girls spin and jump. The nature of their problem! They want to take the woman in the blue apron behind the doors with the sign that says “Authorized Personnel Only” and tell her everything. That their mother sits in the garage when she gets home and leaves the car running and she cranks 101.7 The Rock and closes the garage door. The girls are young, but they are not stupid. They run down the stairs and push the garage door opener. Their mother reclines in the driver's seat. She sings along with her eyes closed. She doesn't hear the garage door open. When the song is over, she opens her eyes and is annoyed. “Why are you up? Get back to bed.” But then she comes in and lets them pull off her shoes, she lets them put rainbow clips in her hair. She lets them watch Unsolved Mysteries until she falls asleep on the couch.

– “The Hollow,” [Together We Can Bury It](#)

Website: www.kathy-fish.com

Andrea Kneeland

I realize with certainty that my husband is an asshole about three years into the marriage, while I am delirious with a flu-born fever, freezing beneath cold yellow sweated through bed sheets, bones shaking like caged mice. Instead of going to the store to get me Nyquil, he forces my legs into the

harness of a strap-on, sits on top of me and fucks himself while I try not to die.

– “The Difference Between,” [How to Pose for Hustler](#)

Website: www.andreakneeland.com



Kevin

Catalano is the author of *The Word Made Flesh* (firthFORTH Books), a collection of short stories. His fiction has appeared in *PANK*, *storySouth*, *Atticus Review*, *Gargoyle Magazine*, *FRiGG*, and others. His stories have been anthologized in Press 53's *Surreal South '13*, *Fiddleblack Annuals #1* and *#2*, and in Dark House Press's *Exigencies*. In 2015, Kevin became assistant staff interviewer at *Alternating Current*. He teaches at Rutgers University, Newark, and lives in New Jersey with his wife and two children. www.kevincatalano.com