The Best American Short Stories 2008 gathers an array of inventive and unforgettable stories. Favorite and newcomer writers explore contemporary topics such as cloning, literary envy, cults, and teenage sex, as well as timeless subjects: love, sibling rivalry, immigration, and religion.

In Kevin Brockmeier’s stunning “The Year of Silence,” an unnamed city must face the absence of all sound, followed by an excess of noise. Katie Chase’s bold and unsettling story, “Man and Wife,” her first one published, brings to life an arranged marriage between a nine-year-old and a grown man. In A. M. Homes’s “May We Be Forgiven,” two brothers’ rivalry undoes their marriages and eventually their lives. Nicole Krauss writes of an inherited desk that comes to represent the burden of memory for a poet in her beautiful story, “From the Desk of Daniel Varsky.” And Stephen Millhauser’s ingenious “The Wizard of West Orange” imagines Edison and his colleagues inventing machines dedicated to the sense of touch.

In his introduction, Salman Rushdie writes, “Some of these stories are immense, the so-called ‘grand narratives’ of nation, race, and faith, and others are small: family stories, and stories of elective affinities, of the friends we choose, the places we know, and the people we love; but we all live in and with and by stories, every day, whoever and wherever we are.” The cultural relevance and intellectual potential of the short story are on display in this year’s volume of the best-selling collection.

My Personal Review:
I’ve been reading this series on and off since 1992 when a friend gave me a copy of the 1991 edition. Some years I’ve loved it, some years not, and I think that’s part of what’s great about the collection - because the editors are different, when your taste aligns with them you’re really in for a special treat.
As an example, I dont align with Stephen King at all. Last years collection was difficult for me to get through. Some good writing but the overall tone was irritating.

Not so for this year. There is something about each story that is exciting. Unexpected but undeniably true events or actions or insights into human nature that to me, truly elevate the stories in this collection to qualify for the best.

Addressing some of the other reviews -

- Fabulist - I'd agree, but I personally like stories that detail realities that are like ours but not quite but really, aren't most peoples perceptions of reality different, and doesn't that make a good basis for a story?

- stylistically trendy - if stories that don't have exactly the same 1990s-style semi-detached perspective, describing somewhat depressed people making somewhat bad choices and then reacting to the results with some equivalent of oh. OK. are trendy then alright, this is trendy. Thankfully. Joy, excitement, horror, desperation for redemption, what set these stories apart for me from that style is that the characters have arcs. Think Somerset Maugham. Or just think, because that's what a lot of these characters do.

- approval of pedophilia - I guess stupidity follows Mr. Rushdie around like a hungry puppy. If you're looking for all your writing to include moral condemnation then stick to Ann Coulter. There's nothing in this book that promotes pedophilia.

I hope next years editor chooses as well.

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