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Short Stories

Out of Time
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University of North Texas Press
978-1-57441-319-9
(October 31, 2011)

Winner of the Katherine Anne Porter Award for Short Fiction, the stories in *Out of Time*, are tethered to complicated relationships and losses, often swaying in and out of reality.

"Tangle Apple Flesh" begins as "Cooper sat naked on the porch swing of his mother's house, cross legged, peeling an apple with a hunting knife he bought in Korea. The skin of the apple curled down into his lap like the sheddings of snakes. After the entire skin lay tangled in his groin he kept peeling, the hard white fruit flying into the air like wood chips, sticking to his chest, his face, his feet, his thighs." It's a concrete image in a dream-like story involving a possible witch and the boundaries of brotherhood.

The Cantwell brothers show up in several stories, as does their mother, a survivor of three husbands and the kind of woman who had "lived through so many teeth-grinding, nail-bloodying, hair-rending, bodice-ripping tragedies that she just would not live through one more." That one being a "new story erupting between her sons."

Keith Richards and Barack Obama smoke their last cigarettes as does a captive squirrel monkey in "The Last Cigarette," a multi-perspective narrative of the world ending. "You know your last cigarette's out there, a countable number of heartbeats in the future. Fewer than you think. Your abrupt end hovers ahead."

The eight short shorts that needle their way between the seven longer stories, are snapshots of one particular life. Over the course of the collection a boy becomes a young man, then a father himself. But his place is set in time by the lament from his own grandfather in "Chapter One:" "Then in English, in a thick German accent, speaking to the boy but also to the boy's father, the old man says, *Don't you even speak the language?*"

The short-shorts mirror the entire collection—people living day in and day out, surviving their secret and not-so-secret pains, waiting as Hawthorne Cantwell does in the very last story, “The Age of Being,” “for the next moment, and the next, and the next.”

Geoff Schmidt lives in Edwardsville, Illinois, and is the author of the novel, *Write Your Heart Out: Advice from the Moon Winx Motel*.

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