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Publications of the Modern Language Association of America

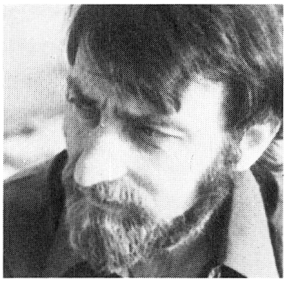
March 1980

Four new collections
in the program
William Peden has called
"one of the most significant undertakings in contemporary university publishing."

ILLINOIS SHORT FICTION 1979

Jonathan Baumbach **THE RETURN OF SERVICE**

This is the first short story collection of Baumbach, one of the founders of the Fiction Collective and co-director of the MFA program in creative writing at Brooklyn College. His novels include *A Man to Conjure With* and *Reruns*, and he has had stories included in both of the annual anthologies of best American stories. ". . . an exceptional writer, one of the best I know—inventive, controlled, witty, sensitive . . . I can think of few authors who could deliver an entire set of stories of such class as these." —Robert Coover.

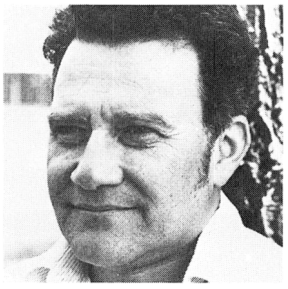


Gladys Swan **ON THE EDGE OF THE DESERT**

"Each of these fine short stories reveals ghosts from the past. Misfits, loners and wanderers in the desolate Southwest—people living at the edges of society—recall the searches and escapes that have brought them to the present." —*Publishers Weekly*. Swan's stories have appeared in *Virginia Quarterly Review, Colorado Quarterly, Maine Review, Great Lakes Review,* and *Cumberlands*. This collection was a semifinalist in the award series in short fiction of the Associated Writing Programs. Swan teaches at Franklin College in Indiana.

Barry Targan **SURVIVING ADVERSE SEASONS**

Targan's first published collection won the Iowa Award for short fiction in 1975. The title story of this second collection appeared in *Best American Short Stories, 1976.* His work has also appeared in *Sewanee Review, Esquire,* and other journals. He teaches creative writing at the State University of New York at Binghamton. "Barry Targan is, quite simply, one of the best short story writers we have. And here he is writing at the top of his form." —Robert Boyers, editor of *Salmagundi.*



Jean Thompson **THE GASOLINE WARS**

"Four talented enough stories, surrounded by six absolutely wonderful ones that are aglint with a naturalness, a humor, and an off-centered instinct for what really matters to people. . . . A sterling debut." —*Kirkus Reviews*. "With apparent facility, Thompson captures a wonderful range of characters and lifestyles. This is her first collection of stories; one hopes there are many more to come." —*Publishers Weekly*. Thompson teaches creative writing at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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Contents · March

Abstract. Franz Kafka's "Eine alltägliche Verwirrung" 'An Everyday Confusion' is a skeletal, or "poor," text in that one code of reading—the referential—dominates it, while other codes present in a classic, or "rich," text are almost absent. Using a method freely adapted from Roland Barthes's *S/Z*, my article closely examines the referentiality of Kafka's text, juxtaposing the proverbial (or common-language) response evoked by the text with the personal reactions of a single reader. Kafka's theme, the inability of common, proverbial language to make real communication possible, is allegorized in the brief tale of A and B, whose comings and goings are mirrored, and at times interfered with, by the language in which these events occur. (RVG)

Abstract. Samuel Beckett, early in his career and on James Joyce's advice, read *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* 'Contributions toward a Critique of Language,' the three-volume, 2,200-page work written between 1903 and 1923 by the Austrian philosopher of language Fritz Mauthner. Significantly influenced by the work, Beckett gave literary shape to several of Mauthner's ideas: the correlation between thinking and speaking; the denial of any certainties outside language, even certainty about the existence of self; and the impossibility of overcoming the limits of language. Both authors place language at the center of their works, subsume all knowledge under it, and then systematically deny its basic efficacy, thus using language to indict itself. (LB-Z)

Abstract. As a literary realist Twain was a practicing empiricist; as a humorist he was a practicing philosophical idealist. Often the two intellectual postures existed side by side within the same work—in *A Tramp Abroad*, for instance—but they did not enjoy a peaceful coexistence. As a consequence his career took on a pattern of great significance. In *Huckleberry Finn* he carried commonsense empiricism as far as it could go. In *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, a genuinely pivotal work, he discovered, and contended with, not only empiricism's radical limits but its inherent contradictions as well. Hence he evolved his peculiar (and perverse) form of idealism, of which *The Mysterious Stranger* is the (unfinished) consummation. (JLD)

Abstract. "Unimpersonated artistry," the idea that narrators in the *Canterbury Tales* are intermittently replaced by the voice of the poet, is a notion common

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Only members of the Association may submit articles to *PMLA*. Each article submitted will be sent to at least one consultant reader and one member of the Advisory Committee. If recommended by these readers it will then be sent to the members of the Editorial Board, who meet every three months to discuss such articles and assist the Editor in making final decisions. The name of the author of a manuscript is not made known, until after a final decision is reached, to consultant readers, members of the Advisory Committee, the Editorial Board, or the Editor.

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