Sample annotated Bibliography


Aarons examines how Paley, a "master of the construction of dialogue in the short-story form," uses narratives and conversation as a way to create a "community of shared belief and experience" for the characters in her stories. Aarons also stresses that "storytelling" is a "life-affirming force" in Paley's work because it places her characters "in the context of a wider human history."


Budick argues that Paley, McCullers, O'Connor, and Morrison are four twentieth-century women writers who "have inherited and adapted the classical tradition of American romance fiction." In a separate chapter on Paley, Budick shows how Paley combines "romantic skepticism" with her "feminist" desire to "defend and revile the society of White, male domination." From her own distinctive (female, Jewish) position.


In this interview, Paley explains why she made the switch from writing poems to writing short stories. She also answers some questions concerning the theme of "A Conversation with My Father."


in this critical essay, de Koven praises two aspects of Paley's "innovative form": 1) her ability to use "structural open-endedness" to make her fiction "true-to-life" and 2) her ability to use "startling, compy-bizarre language and imagery to make a profound literary moment which we experience simultaneously as a unity beyond paths and language and also as a concatenation of the two separate elements."


In this article, Greiner examines why Paley reverses the chronological order of "A Subject of Childhood" and "The Dead-Boy Balasie," the two narratives within "Two Short Bad stories from a Long and Happy Life." In his discussion of possible explanations, he notes the importance of Diaspora, the "historical frustration of Jewish desire for a stable home and homeland," in both narratives and concludes that the chronological reversal "emphasizes the historical antecedents of the main character, Falch.


This article provides a list of both primary and secondary sources from 1959 to 1988. In addition to print materials, it provides a list of audio-visual materials and mentions one adaptation of one of her short stories. Halfmann and Gerlach also include French and German translations of Paley's work as well as French and German "items of critical importance."


After stating that "subject matter has been declared nonexistent" by deconstructive philosophy, Klinkovitz examines how Paley and other contemporary fiction writers deal with the problem of writing. He states, "Structuring is a generative force" that sustains the structure of her narratives.

Barnes sees Mason as the contemporary inheritor of Flannery O'Connor's mantle, "keeping alive" (137) the tradition of the Southern grotesque in fiction. Comparing Mason's Shiloh and Other Stories (1987) to O'Connor's works, Barnes notes that, like O'Connor, Mason's grotesque "has an instructional purpose... reflects the tenor of the times, and is often quite comic" (137). As Mason's Southern characters confront "incongruities resulting from... approaching modern life" (138), they do what they must to survive. "Mason's ultimate message," writes Barnes, "is 'Do the best you can.'" (139).


Bates, who declares that for many writers the essential Vietnam War story... (146) a story of emasculation" (36), uses Mason's In Country to launch an analysis of the effect of the Vietnam War on sexual roles. While acknowledging that In Country "declines the easy solution" (29) of a sentimental romantic ending, Bates also believes that Mason's choice of a teenage female protagonist limits the novel: "Mason... cannot realistically venture a more mature critique of the War or sexual roles" (29); therefore, "In Country's chief strength, its convincing representation of a particular character's point of view, remains its chief weakness" (30).

In this interview, Paley reveals the close connection between her life and her "storytelling art." She also discusses writers who have influenced her work and comments on several contemporary women writers.


Meyer begins this critical essay by examining how Paley questions her own political beliefs on racism and civil rights through the "fictional persona of Faith Darvis Assbury, a recurring personality" in such stories as "Faith in a Tree," "Long-Distance Runner," and "Zagowsky Tells." However, he concludes this essay with an analysis of "Zagowsky Tells" that praises Zagowsky's ability "to challenge [Paley's] political assumptions."

Tracing "symbols, motifs, and narrative structures of the grail legend" (99) throughout In Country, Booth presents a convincing analysis of the novel in terms of waste land mythology. Although Booth sees "social criticism . . . and prophetic warning" throughout the text, he spies hope of redemption in Mason’s spunky female protagonist, Sam: "If Mason’s waste land is the ordinariness and uniformity of American culture, then Sam’s heroic gift is her relentless curiosity . . . (and her) breathtakingly fertile, restless mind" (102).


Durham’s essay contrasts the narrative strategy of Mason’s In Country with Larry Heinemann’s Paco’s Story and Philip Caputo’s Indian Country. Analyzing Mason’s focal character, Durham writes: "Living in Sam’s mind allows us to participate in her learning process and forces us to recognize our own difficulties in sorting out Vietnam . . . Her move toward insight replicates our own epistemological journey" (102).


Krasteva reads In Country as a deliberate reversal and rejection of the traditional American literary myth of the West. Sam’s attempt to close the gap between her present and her past is simultaneously
"a female rite of initiation" (45), a "search for identity and community" (82), and an "ironic reversal" (79) of the typical "journey undertaken by [male] heroes in American fiction—the "pursuit of individual freedom and flight from social responsibility" (78). Kristeva supports this thesis in an essay both illuminating and provocative.


Introducing their selection of essays on contemporary short fiction, Logsdon and Mayer locate Mason in the tradition of American female writers who made their mark in the short story. Describing Mason as "significantly influenced by Flannery O'Connor" (7), they place her with "new writers whose major works are perhaps yet to be written" (8), yet whose existing oeuvre already merits "serious scholarly treatment" (8).


Russian critic Muliarchik, surveying alternative literary responses to the neoconservative ethos of the Reagan-Bush years, praises Mason's In Country for its "realistic social criticism" (267) and its humane outlook. Although Muliarchik sees Sam's reflective nature and determination to recover her history as inspiring, he writes that Mason's "lack of writing experience and the sharply didactic quality of the book's central thesis prevent the author from creating a full, psychologically convincing portrait of her heroine" (268).

Pollack builds a surprising case for consideration of Mason as primarily a historical novelist whose "deep interest in the historical has been... obscured by her use of the contemporary" (96). Citing Mason's "abiding interest... in periods of cultural/historical change" (97), Pollack sketches similarities between Mason and Hawthorne, Mason and Sarah Orne Jewett, and particularly Mason and Edith Wharton. Both women, Pollack says, write "fiction that captures a specific culture... evoking the details, habits, conflicts, and anxieties of a historical moment" (95).


Ryan's article does little more than describe Mason's early stories by means of plot summaries and abundant quotations. She does note that Mason's characters struggle to cope with "rapid and frightening changes in their lives" (294) which elicit "contradictory impulses, the temptation to withdraw into the security of home and the past... [or to take] to the road in search of something better" (294).

Calling Mason "the most striking writer of her generation" (277) and one who "quickly found her own theme and style" (277), Zmeev takes issue with critics who label Mason a minimalist. Her "lyrical intonation" (278), rejection of "the passive mood" (278) and creation of characters who "strive for... genuine freedom" (278), all defy the minimalist style. Rather, because of Mason's ability to convey both "the sense of everyday life" (280) and "the attitude toward life most typical of mass consciousness" (280), Zmeev reads in her work "a continuation of the lessons of Henry James" (280).