

# Journal of the Short Story in English

Les Cahiers de la nouvelle

Calls for papers or articles - Open

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## Call for Papers: “Defiance in 21st-century South African short stories”

Special Issue of *The Journal of the Short Story in English* 89 (Autumn 2027)

Extended deadline for abstract submissions: 1 September 2026

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### Guest Editors

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### Presentation

From its roots in the oral tradition, the short story genre has continually adapted to societal and cultural factors. Although undergoing mutations which have fuelled the vitality of critical debate and research, “the short story, with its usual focus on a single event or single effect, has remained close to the primacy of the myth according to which myth expresses the inner meaning of things by telling a story” (Chapman xi). Thus, as myths provide “not just meaning, but also significance, and . . . [do] so by placing events in a more or less coherent plot” (Bottici 115), the short story may offer a way of making sense of the discrepancies between discourses and realities, between national narratives and people’s lives.

The short story is “the genre of short fiction that South African literature has most consistently excelled,” according to Craig MacKenzie (176). In the wake of the country’s industrialisation and urbanisation, induced by the late nineteenth-century mineral discoveries, it lost its “close relationship to oral lore, legend, and small-town gossip” to become city-based and increasingly fragmented (178). In response to the institutionalisation of apartheid (racial separation) in 1948, it engaged in social “realism of the kind that valorised witness and protest: art was subjugated to life” (Driver 387). It experienced a literary “renaissance” (MacKenzie 181) in the transition from apartheid to a non-racial South Africa. However, Corinne Sandwith (16) contends that “while earlier short story collections and anthologies marked the hopeful vision of democratic multiplicity of the early 1990s, post-2000 short stories are characterised by increasing generic diversification as well as a range of aesthetic practices, including oral forms, social realism, ‘true fiction,’ temporal disjuncture, fragmentation and liminality, all of which become symptomatic of the thwarted promises of the country’s political transition.”

Indeed, mixed feelings are pervading post-apartheid South Africa. The country faces serious challenges – e.g. high cost of living, unemployment and poverty- and remains one of the most unequal societies in the world as measured by its Gini Index. The 2016 Afrobarometer study showed a decline in people’s support for democracy, from 72% of the respondents in 2011 to 64% of them in 2015, concomitantly to a breakthrough of the authoritarian preference (“sometimes non-democratic is preferable”) rising from 15% to 17% (Lekalake 3). Disturbingly, 6 of 10 South Africans (61%) say “they are willing to forego elections in favour of a non-elected government or leader that could impose law and order, and deliver houses and jobs” (4). More recently, the South African Reconciliation Barometer 2023 revealed that 33% expressed confidence in parliament, 32% in the national government and 33% in the legal system, and that “less than a third of people believe that there have been improvements in key areas including job creation, personal safety and inequality since the transition to democracy” (Lefko-Everett 14, 41).



As Graham K. Riach stresses, “there is a growing body of criticism on the short story as a form usually dealing with American or European texts, yet there are few book-length studies available on the African short story, and fewer still on the short story in South Africa” (11-12)—particularly in the post- 2000s (Sandwith 2).

This special issue of the *Journal of the Short Story in English (JSSE)* will examine the 21st-century South African short story genre through the prism of defiance. According to Nancy Nyquist Potter:

Defiance belongs with a cluster of attitudes and actions that include (but are not identical to) dissent, political (as contrasted with psychoanalytic) resistance, rebellion, and civil disobedience. A defiant action can be an “in your face” one; a defiant attitude usually comes across as openly and deliberately disrespectful (whether or not it means to be). In a refusal to bow to authority, the defiant person has the passion of anger (or indignation or contempt) behind her. Defiance has less force and more limited scope than rebellion, but does not imply the “civilised” quality that dissent, resistance, and civil disobedience do. Those latter forms of protest typically are organised and pre-planned. (32)

How is defiance re-imagined in post-2000 South African writing? Is there a new poetics of defiance emerging in contemporary short stories? How do the shades of defiance, in form and substance, reflect and address the complexities of the country’s cultural, social and political realities?

## Works Cited

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- Driver, Dorothy. ‘The Fabulous Fifties: Short Fiction in English’, Attwell, David, and Derek Attridge, eds. *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. Print.
- Fasselt, Rebecca, and Corinne Sandwith, eds. *The Short Story in South Africa: Contemporary Trends and Perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 2022. Print.
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- Potter, Nancy Nyquist. *The Virtue of Defiance and Psychiatric Engagement*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2016. Print.
- Riach, Graham K. *The Short Story After Apartheid: Thinking with Form in South African Literature*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2023.

## Expected Proposals

This special issue of the *Journal of the Short Story in English* proposes to examine the 21st-century South African short genre through the prism of defiance. We are looking for research papers in the form of essays (not exceeding 48,000 signs) and notes (not exceeding 12,000 signs). Topics contributors might discuss include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Defiance and the short form
- Contemporary representations and realities of defiance
- Defiance and imagination
- The aesthetics of defiance
- The linguistics of defiance
- The geographies of defiance
- Defiance and identities
- Censorship and defiance
- Defiance and religion/spirituality
- Deviance and defiance

## Practical Details

The editors invite abstracts of 300 to 500 words (in English) on relevant topics. Please email your abstract with a short biographical note (100 words max) to [DefianceJSSE2027@protonmail.com](mailto:DefianceJSSE2027@protonmail.com) by **1 September 2026**. Notification of provisional acceptance will be given by **14 September 2026**. The completed papers will be due by **1 March 2027**. They will be peer-reviewed. The style sheet and guidelines for authors are available on the *JSSE* website: <https://journals.openedition.org/jsse/234>.