

S.F. author's short, short stories are long on emotion

BY [LAURA PAULL](#) | NOVEMBER 27, 2018

The cover of this book, a slim collection of very short stories by San Francisco writer Mark Russell Gelade, reflects a minor publication by a small art press. But while it is indeed his debut book, the author has been building his reputation for some time, publishing some of these stories previously in prestige literary magazines such as *Southeast Review*, *Narrative Magazine*, *Fiction Attic* and several e-zines.

In 2004, his 458-word “[The Bridge Is Down](#)” was named the “World’s Best Short, Short Story” in a contest sponsored by Florida State University and judged by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Robert Olen Butler. Last year, he earned an honorable mention in a very short fiction competition run by *Glimmer Train*, a short story literary journal. He also has completed a collection of poems, “Another Life.”



Short short fiction is a specialty in the literary world; it is also called micro fiction, postcard fiction, flash fiction or sudden fiction. Writers who can do it well earn automatic respect from other writers.

“The successful short, short, in my opinion, must have a couple of core elements,” the England-born Gelade opines on [his website](#). “First, a concentration of language, and second, a true character arc. Within their compressed confines, these miniatures must offer a beginning, a middle, and an end. But most of all, they must portray characters that readers will care about.”

The 24 stories in this collection, most only a page or two long, offer brief glimpses into the lives of strangers that swiftly achieve a certain intimacy. Written as first-person narratives, in both male and female voices, the stories touch on contemporary issues that all genders face: desire, divorce, connection, loss. Some of the stories interface with other stories, providing a sketch of narrative continuity.

Nobody is saying that short fiction necessarily takes less time to write. But Gelade does have other expressive outlets that absorb him: He plays bass guitar and has performed with several Bay Area blues bands. And he’s got a day job in government administration managing web properties for the judicial branch of California. So perfecting these little jewels of fiction may well be what’s manageable for him — or they may just be his chosen genre.

Gelade was born in London and raised in Montreal, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in English and creative writing from Concordia University. He moved to San

Francisco about 30 years ago and earned a master's degree in poetics and humanities from New College of California. He lives in San Francisco with his wife, the writer Colette Lafia.

While Gelade is Jewish, his stories are not explicitly so, though he cites some great Jewish writers, especially Saul Bellow, among his influences. "In Bellow's novella 'Mr. Sammler's Planet,' the beleaguered Mr. Sammler channels the famous quip 'Short views, for God's sake, short views!'" Gelade wrote in an email to J. "[A]nd for some reason, that seems to be my north star."

Commenting that he is in an interfaith marriage, he wrote, "My exposure to faith traditions is a little more supple; though at the end of the day, it is the humanity of the characters that interests me most, and their sense of fragility, and self-examination."

"Navigating by Stars: 24 Very Short Stories of Love & Longing" book launch and author reading. 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 29 at Green Apple Books, 1231 Ninth Ave., S.F. Free.