

Greg Johnson

an excerpt of

*Novellas for the New Millennium*\*

The novella, though Henry James called it “the beautiful and blessed *nouvelle*,” might well be termed the ugly duckling of literature.

Major New York book publishers scorn the genre: novellas are usually too brief for individual publication, though authors occasionally slip them into collections of short stories. Magazine editors likewise can rarely make room for novellas in their pages, and readers are hardly lining up at bookstores to find “the latest novella,” even by a well-known author. Despite all this, the form continues to thrive, and some of world literature’s greatest works of fiction fall within that awkward province of 50–150 pages. Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, James’s *The Turn of the Screw*, and Wharton’s *Ethan Frome* are only some of the more famous examples, and such celebrated contemporary writers as Philip Roth, Ian McEwan, and Joyce Carol Oates have all assayed the form at some point in their careers.

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\*An essay-review of

TWO MARRIAGES. By Phillip Lopate. New York: Other Press, 2008. 264 pp. \$24.95.

A MARTYR FOR SUZY KOSASOVICH. By Patrick Michael Finn. Cleveland, OH: Cleveland State University Poetry Center, 2008. 87 pp. \$15.95, paper.

CARTESIAN SONATA AND OTHER NOVELLAS. By William H. Gass. Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2009. 274 pp. \$13.95, paper.