



## The Coast of Chicago

*Stuart Dybek*

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## **The Coast of Chicago** Stuart Dybek

The stolid landscape of Chicago suddenly turns dreamlike and otherworldly in Stuart Dybek's classic story collection.

A child's collection of bottle caps becomes the tombstones of a graveyard. A lowly rightfielder's inexplicable death turns him into a martyr to baseball. Strains of Chopin floating down the tenement airshaft are transformed into a mysterious anthem of loss.

Combining homely detail and heartbreakingly familiar voices with grand leaps of imagination, *The Coast of Chicago* is a masterpiece from one of America's most highly regarded writers.

## **The Coast of Chicago Details**

Date : Published April 3rd 2004 by Picador USA (first published 1990)

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Author : Stuart Dybek

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## From Reader Review The Coast of Chicago for online ebook

### Simon A. Smith says

I finally read this one. I know a lot of Chicago writers point to this as the definitive collection of stories about Chicago and the vibrant characters that inhabit it. I liked it. I really did, but I didn't love it like I wanted to. The thing that kept me from truly loving it was that while Dybek is a very lyrical, poetic writer, his stories sometimes lack focus and momentum. Many of his stories are ABOUT characters and ABOUT places and ABOUT tragedies without actually diving full-in and allowing the drama or action unfold in the moment. There's a lot more description than there is dialog, and I always like stories with good dialog.

Some of the stories are fantastic, though. I wish all of the stories would have been more like "Blight." No question, Dybek is a terrific writer, but I get the feeling that he may make a better poet than writer.

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### Jason Pettus says

[Earlier this year, I had the honor of being asked to join the staff of the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame, specifically to help choose the honoree each year of the organization's Fuller Award for Lifetime Achievement. 2018's recipient was Stuart Dybek, and I was asked to write a critical overview of his work for the accompanying program. I'm reprinting it in full below.]

It's been a fascinating thing this month to read through the entire prose oeuvre of Stuart Dybek in chronological order for the first time, as we here on the staff of the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame have been making plans for tonight's ceremony, and have been gathering in the effusive praise from his friends and colleagues you're reading in this program. Like many, I had read his most famous book, 1990's *The Coast of Chicago*, in my twenties soon after it had come out; like many, it was at the urging of a woman I was trying to make into my latest romantic partner, a slam poet and former student of his who told me that "everything I needed to know about her" could be gleaned from the book; and like many, once I did read the book, Dybek's unforgettable prose took on a life of its own with me, apart from the six bittersweet weeks said woman and I ended up together. (And strangely, like Dybek's story "Córdoba," said woman just happened to live at the corner of Buena Avenue and Marine Drive, which made me feel like one of the sweet but hapless male heroes of his pieces when coming across this fact last week.)

But still, I had never explored the rest of his fictional work before this month, so I decided to start with his first, 1980's *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods*. Even 38 years later, it's easy to see with this book why Dybek started gaining a feverish cult following from his very start, because the writing on display is startlingly unique; the magical realism of Gabriel García Márquez, the gritty urbanism of Nelson Algren, the sweet nostalgia of the *Saturday Evening Post*, but with the naughty subversion of the Countercultural era. (Also, what an astounding historical record of a Chicago that no longer exists, as best typified by the very first story of the book, "The Palatski Man," in which alley-going knife sharpeners on horse-drawn carriages still live in a wild rural wonderland, right in the middle of the city.)

Next came *The Coast of Chicago*, deservedly now known as a modern classic, one of those magical moments in literary history when everything came together perfectly. An expansion of Dybek's look back at his childhood as a Polish-American in the Little Village neighborhood (in a post-war time when the area was undergoing a transition into a mostly Mexican neighborhood), it's also a thoroughly contemporary collection

of pieces about masculinity, sexuality, and experience-hungry youth, containing many of the most indelible and heartbreaking stories of his career, such as the aching "Chopin in Winter" where we watch the twin fates of a dying immigrant grandfather and an illegitimately pregnant teenage neighbor. (Also, for those keeping score, this is the book that contains the notorious "Pet Milk," mentioned over and over by his admirers in this program.)

A decade later saw Dybek's so-far only novel, 2003's *I Sailed with Magellan*, although this technically comes with an asterisk for being a "novel in stories," the literary length that he's destined to be mostly remembered for. A non-linear look at the life of the sometimes infuriating, always engaging Perry Katzek, this is Dybek doing a deep dive into his checkered youth within a rough-and-tumble, pre-gentrification Chicago -- a world of mobsters and viaducts, dead disabled boys turned into Catholic martyrs, broke but striving social workers living in rundown northside SROs, and as always the women beside them who propelled them along, messy mistakes and all. To me, it was my favorite of all his books, and one I know I'll be coming back to again and again for the rest of my life.

And finally, a decade after that, Dybek gave the world the remarkable gift of 59 new stories in a single year, with the twinned 2014 publications of *Ecstatic Cahoots* and *Paper Lantern*. A reflection of Dybek's years of honing his craft in the academic world, as both a beloved professor and working artist, these pieces are mostly tiny little diamonds from a now master of his craft, fiction that often approaches flash-fiction but that packs all the wallop of stories ten times the size. Split between general stories (*Cahoots*) and specific love stories (*Lantern*), these books see Dybek at the absolute top of his game, a crowning achievement to a busy and award-packed career that is about to celebrate its half-century anniversary.

With all the wonderful anecdotes in this program from long-time friends who are intimately acquainted with his work, I'm proud to be one of the few to say that it's perfectly all right if you're not familiar yet with all of Stuart Dybek's books. It is in fact a perfect time to become so, with all of his titles still in print and with a brand-new greatest-hits collection that was just recently published by Jonathan Cape/Vintage. Still as relevant as ever, still as powerful as ever, he is truly one of America's greatest living authors, and a bright star in the annals of Chicago's literary history.

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### **Yücel says**

"K?? mevsiminde Chopin", "Felaket Bölgesi" ve "Gümü? Perde" öyküleri çok iyi. Di?er öyküler için ayn? ?eyi söyleyemeyece?im. Ama bu üç öykü gerçekten iyiydi.

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### **Matthew says**

Those were the days when the Belsen Street Pollacks came down the stairwells with their pockets filled with broken glass, an old Jew shouting out of the window, little Skip Kowalcyk reaching up to grab his fill of undergarments from the laundry lines - old Trouthead Mulvaney was on the mound for the Cubs, the smell of simmering beef heart and boiled tar in the air, Mayor Daley tapping the ash from his cigar as he rode by in his grand Buick, like some kind of pristine ocean liner, outfitted in brass....

BLEH BLEH BLEH IF YOU LIKE THAT KIND OF SHIT UP THERE THIS IS THE BOOK FOR YOU.

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## Zinta says

I've experienced that rare pleasure of hearing Stuart Dybek read his work—in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where he is a sometime adjunct professor at Western Michigan University, and so sometimes, not at all often, has read to a large and hungry Kalamazoo audience, myself among them. That was poetry. Good stuff. Really good stuff. And so picking up this collection of stories about my favorite city, Chicago, and Dybek's hometown, too, I knew I would be in for a street wise treat. Oh yeah.

Fourteen stories, and if you know anything about Dybek at all, you will know he is surrounded by awards and an otherwise impressive publishing history, so no need to go there. He's proven goods. I'll offer simply my personal perspective and experience on reading this collection. And so, indeed, it resonated with me. Dybek, like me, comes from a richly ethnic background. In his case, he is a second-generation Polish-American, growing up in Chicago neighborhoods, southern side of that great city. Whereas I have a father who is a visual artist, so influencing me to be visual in my own writing, Dybek's second art love is music—jazz, specifically—and so for him, that second art comes through in obvious and less obvious ways. Here, too. Quite a few of these stories intertwine music. Music becomes something of a character itself (“Chopin in Winter”), or else it serves as background, or it is fabric of the words, adding a jazzy rhythm to his sentence structure, a bop and a bounce to his choice of expression. Nice.

The collection is an interesting mix of traditional sandwiched with flash fiction. The flash pieces reminded me of Dybek's poetry. Poetry in prose, nearly. Because Dybek's style (see note above on musical influence) is very lyrical. There's something improvisational about his writing, yet carefully so. A great jazz artist doesn't really improvise at all; he or she dips into that vastness of musical experience and freely lifts from it and into light. What is surprise to others is old blood to the maestro.

“A kiss crosses the city. It rides a glass streetcar that showers blue, electric sparks along the ghost of a track—a track paved over in childhood—the line that she and her mother used to take downtown.

“A kiss crosses the city, revolves through a lobby door into a rainy night, catches a cab along a boulevard of black glass, and, running red lights, dissolves behind the open fans of wiper blades.

“Rain spirals colorlessly out of the dark, darkens all it touches and makes it gleam.

“Her kiss crosses the city, enters a subway tunnel that descends at this deserted hour like a channel through an underground world. It's timeless there, always night, as if the planet doesn't turn below the street. At the mouth of the station stands a kid who's gone AWOL and now has nowhere to go, a young conga drummer, a congacero, wearing a fatigue jacket and beating his drum. He has the pigeons up past their bedtime doing the mambo.” (page 105)

These are stories that put you into the unprettified ethnic neighborhoods that were, are, Chicago. The smells are here, the tastes, the mix of languages, the music, the blend of humanity. Here the city kids and the first generation immigrants, the junkies and winos and ex-cons and their corrupt cops. Here, too, are stories about nothing, just the sense of being there, and so, stories about everything you need to know to share the experience.

Dybek is a master of language, whatever medium he chooses—poetry or prose. He blends his arts, as all art

should be a blend, all from the same fountainhead. He is visual artist, too, with one paint stroke:

“The blue, absorbing shadow would deepen to azure, and a fiery orange sun would dip behind the glittering buildings. The crowded beach would gradually empty, and a pitted moon would hover over sand scalloped with a million footprints. It would be time to go.” (page 45)

Just don’t go before acquainting yourself fully with the work of Stuart Dybek, and this collection is an excellent starting point.

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## Solistas says

Λ?γω του George Saunders βρ?θηκα με αυτ? το βιβλ?ο στα χ?ρια, ο οπο?ος ?χει κ?νει δι?φορες βαρ?γδουπες δηλ?σεις για τη συγκεκριμ?νη συλλογ? διηγημ?των. Η αλ?θεια ε?ναι ?τι δεν εμπιστε?ομαι καθ?λου τις προτ?σεις των συγγραφ?ων (λ?νε περισσ?τερα πρ?γματα για τα ενδιαφ?ροντα τους κι ?σα ζηλε?ουν στους συναδ?λφους τους παρ? για την ποι?τητα των βιβλ?ων που προτε?νουν -το ?διο ισχ?ει για τους μουσικο?ς κοκ.) μου ?ρεσε ?μως πολ? η Δεκ?τη Δεκεμβρ?ου για να προσπερ?σω το βιβλ?ο μ?λις το ε?δα μπροστ? μου, π?σο μ?λλον ?ταν διαδραματ?ζεται στο Σικ?γο των 60s κ 70s που ε?ναι το μ?ρος που γενν?θηκα κ που οι γονε?ς μου ?ζησαν για 15 χρ?νια.

Το Σικ?γο λοιπ?ν ε?ναι ο πρωταγωνιστ?ς του βιβλ?ου, η κ?ρια σταθερ? που συνδ?ει τις 22 ιστορ?ες που βρ?σκει κανε?ς εδ?. Το βιβλ?ο διαβ?ζεται με ενια?ο τρ?πο, σαν επεισ?δια που εστι?ζουν σε διαφορετικ?ς ?ρωες της ?διας ?μως γειτονι?ς. Ο Dybek ε?ναι χωρ?ς αμφιβολ?α ?νας χαρισματικ?ς γραφ?ς, περισσ?τερο ποιητ?ς παρ? storyteller ? τουλ?χιστον εκε? ?γερνε η ζυγαρι? το 1990 που κυκλοφ?ρησε η συλλογ??. Το περ?εργο ε?ναι ?τι οι καλ?τερες του στιγμ?ς ?ρχονται στα πιο μακροσκελ? κε?μενα, ?σως γιατ? εκε? χαλιναγωγ? τη εκφραστικ? του δειν?τητα κ το πλο?σιο λεξιλ?γιο του κ επιτρ?πει στους αναγν?στες που δεν ?χουν ζ?σει αν?μεσα στις εθνοτικ?ς ομ?δες της ν?τιας πλευρ?ς της π?λης να καταλ?βουν την καθημεριν?τητα των πρωταγωνιστ?ν χωρ?ς να πρ?πει να σπ?σουν το κεφ?λι τους για να αποκρυπτογραφ?σουν το συμβολισμ?.

Διαβ?ζοντας τη συλλογ? π?ρασα απ? τελε?ως διαφορετικ? στ?δια αναγνωστικ?ς ευχαρ?στησης. Στο πρ?το μισ? ?μουν μαγεμ?νος. Ο Dybek περιφερ?ταν στη γειτονι? που προφαν?ς ξ?ρει καλ? με υπ?ροχο τρ?πο περιγρ?φοντας απ? ιστορ?α σε ιστορ?α καθημεριν?ς σκην?ς κ ενδ?μυχες, ειλικριν?ς σκ?ψεις που ε?χαν οι ?ρωες του μ?σα σε ?να ονειρικ? πλα?σιο που ε?ναι το δε?τερο χαρακτηριστικ? μετ? την π?λη που διαπερν?ει ?λες τις σελ?δες του βιβλ?ου. Η αγ?πη του για τη μουσικ? ?χει περ?σει στη γραφ? του κ υπ?ρχαν φορ?ς που δι?βαζα χωρ?ς να "διαβ?ζω" στα αλ?θεια, παρασυρμ?νος απ?την πρ?ζα του.

Στο εξαιρετικ? "Chopin in Winter" για παρ?δειγμα, μια νεαρ? μουσικ?ς μ?νει ?γκυος απ? ?ναν μα?ρο, γεγον?ς που θεωρε?ται στ?γμα στην κλειστ? κοιν?τητα των Πολων?ν μεταναστ?ν. Κλεισμ?νη στο σπ?τι της πα?ζει ?λα τα ?ργα του Σοπ?v και στο απ? κ?τω διαμ?ρισμα ?νας νεαρ?ς μαθα?νει τι ακο?ει απ?τον λιγομ?λητο παππο? του που τον εκπαιδε?ει να ξεχωρ?ζει τα κομμ?τια που πα?ζει η δυστυχισμ?νη Marcy. ?ταν η τελευτα?α δραπετε?ει απ?το σπ?τι για να ζ?σει με τον πατ?ρα του παιδιο? της ο μικρ?ς ανακαλ?πτει τη δ?ναμη της μουσικ?ς:

"...when the music finally disappeared, its channels remained, conveying silence. Not an ordinary silence of absence and emptiness, but a pure silence beyond daydream and memory, as intense as the music it replaced, which, like music, had the power to change whoever listened..."

Στο ενδι?μεσο περεμβ?λλονται μικρ?ς ιστορ?ες που ενδυναμ?νουν τη συνοχ? του βιβλ?ου: τα παιδι? που φων?ζουν στους οδηγο?ς που ξ?χασαν τα φ?τα του αυτοκιν?του τους σβηστ?, ο μικρ?ς που μαζε?ει καπ?κια μπ?ρας, η κυρ?α που ζει με δεκ?δες κατοικ?δια κοκ. ?ταν δε φθ?νεις στο "Blight" με τους τρεις ?φηβους (το απ?λυτο highlight της συλλογ?) ο αναγν?στης δεν μπορε? παρ? να θαυμ?σει τη αφηγηματικ? δειν?τητα του συγγραφ?α που καταφ?ρνει να πει τ?σα πολλ? σε τ?σες λ?γες σελ?δες (λιγ?τερες απ? 40). Ε?κολα θα γιν?ταν ?να υπ?ροχο μυθιστ?ρημα που παρακολουθε? τις ζω?ς του Ziggy, του David κ του Pepper κ κυρ?ως τις β?λτες τους με το αμ?ξι στις διαφορετικ?ς περιοχ?ς της π?λης.

Στην συν?χεια ?μως, ο συνεκτικ?ς ?στος του βιβλ?ου χ?νεται. Ο Dybek μου μοι?ζει σα να παρασ?ρθηκε απ? τις γν?σεις του κ αναλ?νεται σε over the top συμβολισμο?ς που ε?ναι σχεδ?ν αδ?νατο να τους διαπερ?σει ο αναγν?στης κ θυσι?ζει το μουντο, ονειρικ? κλ?μα που ε?χε φτι?ζει μ?χρι το Blight για χ?ρη μια σειρ?ς ατελε?ωτων παρομοι?σεων κ μεταφορ?ν που θα τα?ριαζαν σε ?γουρο συγγραφ?α κ ?χι σε ?ναν τ?σο ταλαντο?χο γραφι? ?πως αυτ?ς. Υπ?ρχουν σκ?ρπιες κ?ποιες καλ?ς στιγμ?ς ?πως το Nighthawks που μπλ?κει κ τον υπ?ροχο, ομ?νυμο πινακα του Hopper ? το Insomnia που περιγρ?φει τη ζω? των μοναχικ?ν ξεν?χτηδων που περνο?ν τις ν?χτες τους στο 24?ρο diner της περιοχ?ς αλλ? σε γενικ?ς γραμμ?ς ?νιωσα πως πρ?πει ξαφνικ? να προσπαθ?σω για να μην το αφ?σω στο κομοδ?νο για μ?νες.

Εντυχ?ς στο τελευτα?ο τ?ταρτο του βιβλ?ου επιστρ?φει στις ιστορ?ες που του ταιρι?ζουν, τις απλ?ς καθημεριν?ς ιστορ?ες ?πως αυτ? για το ?μορφο κορ?τσι με το μπλε-πρ?σινο φ?ρεμα που πολ? συχν? λιποθυμ?ει απ?τη ζ?στη κατ? τη δι?ρκεια της κυριακ?τικης λειτουργ?ας ? ?πως το συγκινητικ? Pet Milk με το ζευγ?ρι που φιλι?ται σε ?να τρ?νο που περν?ει χωρ?ς να σταματ?ει σε σταθμο?ς.

Το τελικ? πρ?σημο ε?ναι σ?γουρα θετικ?. Οι προσδοκ?ες που γενν?θηκαν στην αρχ? μπορε? να κατ?ρρευσαν στην πορε?α αλλ? δεν πειρ?ζει. ?σα δι?βαζα εδ? οδ?γησαν σε μερικ?ς ?μορφες συζητ?σεις με τον πατ?ρα μου που επιβεβα?ωσε πολλ? απ?αυτ? που περιγρ?φει ο Dybek, το σκοτ?δι σε αυτ?ς τις γειτονι?ς, ο ρατσισμ?ς μεταξ? των μειονοτ?ων, η θλιβερ? βροχ? αλλ? κ οι ?μορφες β?λτες στο π?ρκο, η φανταχτερ? διαφορετικ?τητα στο περιθ?ριο μιας εκ των πιο ιδια?τερων π?λεων της Αμερικ?ς κ φυσικ? η μουσικ? που ?βγαινε δυνατ? απ?τα ανοιχτ? παρ?θυρα των φτωχ?ν συνοικ?ων (πολ? Καζαντζ?δης ?πεφτε λ?ει ο φ?δερ). Θα επαν?λθω στον Dybek κ ελπ?ζω την επ?μενη φορ? να ε?μαι πιο περιεκτικ?ς. Σεντ?νι βγ?κε π?λι.

## Jessica says

I really enjoyed this collection of short stories even though I'm not sure that I understand a few of the endings since Dybek writes poetically. My favorite is Lights because I had totally forgotten about this childhood activity..."Lights! Your lights! Hey, lights!" Makes me smile every time I think about it. I also like the lines from Strays..."I never give any of them names. We don't know an animal's name. A name's what we use instead of smelling." Have no fear...I'll continue to name my pets lest I mortify my family.

I think Dybek really captures the essence of the near South side of Chicago. The Coast of Chicago reminded

me of Sandra Cisneros' *The House of Mango Street*...another author/poet who writes about her hometown of Chicago.

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### **Ionut says**

This is a great book. I lived in Chicago for a number of years and I am a catholic born in Eastern Europe so I can definitely relate to parts of what Dybek describes in this book. Stuart Dybek grew up in the South Side of Chicago. At the time, his neighborhood was an ethnic neighborhood full of poles, ukrainians, czechs, etc. Most of the characters in the book still have customs coming from the old country, inherited prejudices, church going rituals, love for music, etc.

Most of the stories have a life of their own yet some of the smaller ones are introduced just to create themes or suggest feelings that will trigger in other stories. For example baseball is a recurring theme in this book, from the neighborhood teams, to watching games, to the White Sox winning the '59 AL pennant. It is a great experience to live in a town that wins a pennant and one of the short stories describes how the Go Go Sox of '59 won the AL pennant on Gerry Staley's sinker and Aparicio and Big Klu's 6-3 double play. The whole town was affected by the air-raid sirens that were sounded to celebrate but so were the characters in one of the short stories.

The same neighborhoods have later changed. One of the characters returns after a while and finds the same bars with the same names only that his neighborhood is Mexican now with many of the store names in Spanish and even the church bells don't seem to agree on the right time.

There is no experience that compares to making the journey from the numbered streets of the South Side to the North Side of Chicago. This journey is described multiple times in the book (driving on Lake Shore Drive, riding the El train, switching buses). In the last short story in the book, the author describes such a journey made by two lovers riding the El train. The experience is surreal but one understands that living in Chicago and riding the El, you only need to glance outside the window to get a sense of where you are. The experience transcends time, "it was as if I were standing on that platform, with my schoolbooks and a smoke, on one of those endlessly accumulated afternoons after school when I stood almost outside of time simply waiting for a train, and I thought how much I'd have loved seeing someone like us streaming by".

Stuart Dybek also eventually made this journey in his career, he was born in the South Side of Chicago and is now the distinguished writer in residence at Northwestern University.

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### **Adam Dalva says**

A good collection - especially for Chicagoans. It's extremely front loaded, with the first two long stories really standing out (in the 4.3-4.7 range). All the short vignettes are great, and the last piece is good, but the book is dragged down, I think, by Nighthawks, a long story suite that feels a bit forced around the theme of the Nighthawks diner.

Dybek is also a poet, and the book is beautiful on the line-level, but it works best when he takes on tangible reality, especially from the perspective of a child, in the close 3rd. Nitehawks is a more roving voice, as is Hot Ice, and there, despite the language being great, I lost my connection with linearity and with any sort of

rooting interest. Give me simplicity with this style.

It is also less of a linked collection than the cover would claim. Definitely worth reading for the great ones.

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### **Vit Babenco says**

The stories "Chopin in Winter" and "Blight" are magnificent and they reminded me of Jack Kerouac "There seemed to be some unspoken relationship between being nameless and being a loser. Watching the guys from Korea after their ball games as they hung around under the buzzing neon signs of their taverns, guzzling beers and flipping the softball, I got the strange feeling that they had actually chosen anonymity and the loserhood that went with it. It was something they looked for in one another, that held them together." "Hot Ice" written more or less in Charles Bukowski's mode is excellent as well. The rest is pretty good.

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### **Robert Palmer says**

I read this short story collection when it was chosen for the " one book one Chicago " in 2004. I think the reason the story's resonated so much for me was that I know the neighborhoods, the streets and the people, which it so much easier reading than Dubliners by James Joyce.

The book really had me at the section titled "Nighthawks" a young man killing time at the art institute would always end his day viewing Edward Hoppers painting named Nighthawks. Dybek then brings the paint to life. The couple at the end of the counter who could just as easily pass for strangers killing time, they have a back story. Ray the man behind the counter who is much older than he looks and nobody cares what he does during the day. The guy with his back to the window nursing his cup of coffee, maybe an out of work hit man. And finally, what about the empty water glass? It too has a story.

I know that if the Nighthawks section was all that I had read, it would have been time well spent. However I would not have liked to miss all of the others.

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### **Paul Sebik says**

Most of these stories have a narrator looking back to the time of the story from an undisclosed or unimportant future vantage point. The way the character looks back indicates the story is vital memory (to the character's existence even). Dybek's vivid flashes of past come in layer upon layer, rendering the story into not just memory, but perhaps the most important time of these characters' lives. The sense of nostalgia is thick and alive—it's hypnotic at times, but slows the read a bit, too. The short shorts are a pleasure.

So why 4 stars? Clearly in the entire book, Dybek is concerned with the world of dreams, or perhaps more particularly the limbo \*between\* waking reality and dreamscape. It kind of goes along with the characters looking back, thus they're caught between whatever their present and their vivid past. The long story "Nighthawks" in the middle of the book is fascinated with this limbo. The language Dybek uses when in dream or that limbo is incredible and poetic, and I loved that part of it. But the musing exploration of that place just wasn't for me. I realize it's just a personal preference on my part (not my kind of writing), but frankly: I was bored at times with it. Other stories besides "Nighthawks" were much more compelling reads because they had the musing in it but weren't overwhelmed by it. I don't think I'd ever read "Bijou" again

either. Human exploration through an audience's reaction(s) to a graphic documentary--for me: a "so what?" read.

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### **Andrea says**

"The Coast of Chicago" is a lyrical short story collection about growing up in Chicago in the 50's and 60's--the poverty, the wild aimlessness of boyhood, those who escape the neighborhood and those who don't. Each longer piece is followed by a short-short, which was a fun pattern. Dybek adeptly captures the mood of the city, especially at night and in the winters. My favorite story in this collection is the simply gorgeous "Chopin in Winter," which is about a boy and his grandpa who fervently listen to their upstairs neighbor playing the piano. "Nighthawks" is another gem in this collection; in it Dybek imagines the lives of the characters in Edward Hopper's similarly titled painting. The final story "Pet Milk" was also quite lovely, but I still prefer "We Didn't," which seems almost like a companion piece to it, in his most recent story collection, "I Sailed with Magellan."

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### **Andrew says**

Blight is one of the best stories I've read in a long time, and in some ways its quality dampens the rest of the book for me. As a teacher of mine once said, "Stu really packs it in." A lot of the stories in this collection feel like novels. By the end so much has been seen and experienced that there's an ache for, but a satisfaction in knowing that it Dybek did it right.

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### **Rachel says**

If you ever wanted to take a time capsule and go back in time to the Chicago South Side during the 60's and 70's, than this book will take you there. Dybek beautifully describes the loneliness and sadness of the back alleys of a working class neighborhood. I lived in the South Side, definitely during a different time, but he captured a feeling that I had while living there. You see fragments from that era on the street corners, and mixed in with the new culture that's taken over the South Side. I love this book. When I read it, I could not believe anyone could capture Chicago like he had. This is one of my favorites.

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