



Wonderful Town: New York Stories from The New Yorker

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New York City is not only The "New Yorker" magazine's place of origin and its sensibility's lifeblood, it is the heart of American literary culture. Wonderful Town, an anthology of superb short fiction by many of the magazine's most accomplished contributors, celebrates the seventy-five-year marriage between a preeminent publication and its preeminent context with this collection of forty-four of its best stories from (so to speak) home.

East Side? Philip Roth's chronically tormented alter ego Nathan Zuckerman has just moved there, in "Smart Money." West Side? Isaac Bashevis Singer's narrator mingles with the customers in "The Cafeteria" (who debate politics and culture in four or five different languages) and becomes embroiled in an obsessional romance. And downtown, John Updike's Maples have begun their courtship of marital disaster, in "Snowing in Greenwich Village." John Cheever, John O'Hara, Lorrie Moore, Irwin Shaw, Woody Allen, Laurie Colwin, Saul Bellow, J. D. Salinger, Jean Stafford, Vladimir Nabokov--they and many other stellar literary guides to the city will be found in these pages.

Wonderful Town touches on some of the city's famous places and stops at some of its more obscure corners, but the real guidebook in and between its lines is to the hearts and the minds of those who populate the metropolis built by its pages. Like all good fiction, these stories take particular places, particular people, and particular events and turn them into dramas of universal enlightenment and emotional impact. The five boroughs are the five continents. New York is every great and ordinary place. Each life in it, and each life in Wonderful Town, is the life of us all.

Wonderful Town: New York Stories from The New Yorker Details

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Larry says

I found this for just \$2.00 and am glad i don't pay more for it. Its interesting but the theme of New York becomes a bit repetitious and frankly in most cases it could be any city as a backdrop. I love The New Yorker for its variety and would have preferred if this collection had taken that approach with a broader scope.

Jane Gregg says

Loved it. Like a bag of licorice allsorts, you get a taste of every mood, every morsel of the city of NY. Some particularly great pieces included by some bloody fab writers. The Woody Allen will have you choking on your peanuts. The Nabakov, a well-known one, is always so sad. Moods of the city.

Tim says

I got this at an estate sale, and as you can tell, I've been reading this tome for a year and a quarter. This is one of those books that I use to "clear my palate" between longer works (OK, Dean Koontz, Stephen King, S-F, Patricia Cornwell, Lee Child, fun stuff). This is a tour de force of excellent short stories from about 1927 to about 1999. This is a thoroughly enjoyable compendium of stories about New York, and represents a literary Who's Who, from Woody Allen (His "The Whore of Mensa" gives an entirely new meaning to "Talk Dirty to me") to John Cheever to Saul Bellow to E.B. White, John Updike, Irwin Shaw, Vladimir Nabokov, and a host of others whose names I had hitherto not known (Thank You, Wikipedia!). I HIGHLY recommend this collection, although the pages are crammed with words and it'll take you awhile. Witnessing the turning of a phrase on every page is a very salubrious intellectual experience. Read it!

And -- Happy Groundhog Day! Seems somehow apropos...

Robin says

Fun short stories from many well-known writers, all set in New York. From "The Whore of Mensa"(Woody Allen) to "The CatBird Seat" (James Thurber), apocalyptic, humorous, and everything in between. These stories were fun to read and evening more entertaining to listen to. Now if I could just find something similar about LA....

Tiny Pants says

I was surprised how well I liked this collection. I'd bought it not actually realizing it was going to be short

fiction -- I thought it would be a compendium of some of the *New Yorker's* endless stream of profiles and "aww gee, only in New York!" 'Talk of the Town' pieces. But in actuality, it's short fiction first published in the *New Yorker* which is set in New York.

Given my aversion to my former home -- I've had a rough go of it lately, and as a friend reminded me recently, "Remember that no matter how bad it gets, at least you don't live in New York" -- it's not a bad collection at all. Why? Well, I mean think about it -- the *New Yorker* publishes quite a bit of very good short fiction (bad stuff too, but we'll get to that in the minute).

The introduction of course is all "you'll argue about what's in this collection, 'cause we all know New Yorkers love to argue!" (yuk yuk), but my only real arguments here were with the pieces that were excerpts from *Catcher in the Rye* and *The Corrections*. Sorry no, but that's not short fiction. That's a book excerpt. And in the case of the Franzen, a clumsy one that served mainly to remind me of how much I hated *The Corrections* (that used copy of *Freedom* I bought will no doubt be gathering dust for some time yet). There are some pieces as well that are, dare I say, over-anthologized -- "The Way We Live Now" and "You're Ugly, Too," timeless though they are, I practically have memorized.

In all though, I found more to like than to dislike (though my other dislikes were "A Sentimental Journey" and authors I'm just never as into -- Bellow, Malamud, Singer). "Baster" (Eugenides) was strong, though I worry it gave rise to the mediocre Jennifer Aniston/Jason Bateman sperm switch movie. I loved "Farewell, My Lovely Appetizer" (S.J. Perelman) -- seriously laughed out loud. "The Smoker" (David Schickler) I had read in an amazing class in college and forgotten about, but was thrilled to rediscover. My absolute favorite, which I'd never encountered before, was "Another Marvellous Thing" by an author I'd never heard before, Laurie Colwin. I can't say why I liked it, because that would give it away, but if you read any of my other reviews of literary fiction you can probably guess.

Hannah says

3.5 Stars - Good book

As you might expect with a short-story collection, some are winners and some are losers. The winners were fantastic, and the losers... well, they're they made the reading experience less enjoyable. The rating is an average of the ratings of every individual story and then divided by the number of stories in the book - 44 to be exact.

My favorite story in the collection is one quite early-on and one of the shorter one's in the book - *Sailor off the Bremen* by Irwin Shaw. The story was originally published in The New Yorker on February 25, 1939. This one tells the story of Ernest, who received a brutal beating from a pro-Nazi aboard the Bremen after a Communist demonstration. Ernest's brother and sister-in-law take revenge into their own hands after hearing his story. This one is my favorite because it is beautifully and simply written. Shaw effectively tells the story that Fascism, Nazism, is disgusting on an individual scale. He also was able to humanize the villain, which not every writer can successfully do. I also appreciate how Shaw didn't portray the Communist's as perfect or the ideal opposition to Fascism. From my understanding, Shaw was left-leaning but I thought this particular story was more centrist - perhaps slightly left leaning.

My least favorite story is *The Whore of Mensa* by Woody Allen. I mean, he's despicable. Do I need to say more?

My runner-up for favorite is *A Sentimental Journey* by Peter Taylor.

Do I recommend this? Probably yeah. I'd advise to at least skim through it to see if any stories or authors peak your interest.

Sheri-lee says

Stories including:

The Five-Forty-Eight by John Cheever
Distant Music by Ann Beattie
Sailor off the Bremen by Irwin Shaw
Physics by Tama Janowitz
The Whore of Mensa by Woody Allen
What It Was Like, Seeing Chris by Deborah Eisenberg
Drawing Room B by John O'Hara
A Sentimental Journey by Peter Taylor
The Balloon by Donald Barthelme
Smart Money by Philip Roth
Another Marvellous Thing by Laurie Colwin
The Failure by Jonathan Franzen
Apartment Hotel by Sally Benson
Midair by Frank Conroy
The Catbird Seat by James Thurber
Snowing in Greenwich Village by John Updike
I See You, Bianca by Maeve Brennan
You're Ugly, Too by Lorriw Moore
Symbols and Signs by Vladimir Nabokov
Poor Visitor by Jamaica Kincaid
In Greenwich, There Are Many Gravelled Walks by Hortense Calisher
Some Nights When Nothing Happens Are the Best Nights in This Place by John McNulty
Slight Rebellion off Madison by J.D.Salinger
Brownstone by Renata Adler
The Cafeteria by Isaac Bashevis Singer
Partners by Veronica Geng
The Evolution of Knowledge by Niccolo Tucci
The Way We Live Now by Susan Sontag
Do the Windows Open? by Julie Hecht
The Mentocrats by Edward Newhouse
The Treatment by Daniel Menaker
Arrangement in Black and White by Dorothy Parker
Carlyle Tries Polygamy by William Melvin Kelley
Children Are Bored on Sunday by Jean Stafford
Notes from a Bottle by James Stevenson
Man in the Middle of the Ocean by Daniel Fuchs
Mespoulets of the Splendide by Ludwig Bemelmans
Over by the River by William Maxwell
Baster by Jeffrey Eugenides

The Second Tree from the Corner by E.B.White
Rembrandt's Hat by Bernard Malamud
Shot: A New York Story by Elizabeth Hardwick
A Father-To-Be by Saul Bellow
Farewell, My Lovely Appetizer by S.J.Perelman

Funny story on this book.

I signed it out from the library because I wanted to read the J.D.Salinger story and when I got it home I was leafing through it and found that someone had cut it out! Of the 44 short stories in the book, the one I was most interested in was cut out. I had to order another copy on an interlibrary loan because the Winnipeg Library only had this one copy.

There are 3 main discussions around this when I tell people:

1. Why would someone do that?
2. Wow. There are some really crazy J.D.Salinger fans.
3. The lesser discussed topic around 'hermit' fans who perhaps cut it out not to keep it for themselves, but to destroy it because of J.D.Salinger and his very clear restrictions regarding the printing of his material.

Anyway...

There are some really great short stories in here. I find an interesting trend that there is a lot of mention of therapists and mental health. I feel like everyone in New York has a therapist. The Thurber story is classic Thurber and it made me laugh. The Salinger story is also classic Salinger and left me wondering if I actually fully get everything he was going for or if I missed something. It's amazing how often he makes me feel that way. :)

Christine Rebbert says

I am so behind on my book-keeping (ha ha). But I did finish this book -- the second volume of short stories I've read this year, a genre I am not generally drawn to. But this one was stories about New York City from the New Yorker magazine over the years. A lot of authors you'd expect -- Updike, Salinger, Cheever, Thurber, Janowitz -- and a few I wasn't familiar with. Some were better than others, to me. Some seemed quite dated. Whatever the story was about, New York City was really the main character. This is a very thick book, maybe over-rich. My general impression at the end, though, was, whew! Glad that's over...

Mackenzie Ann says

this is a wonderful book for anyone who enjoys short stories. the pieces date back to the beginning of the new yorker and capture the essence of manhattan in a somewhat anecdotal fashion. of course, this isn't your sappy chicken soup for the whomever's soul. the stories are literary and classic. it's...wonderful.

Mima says

Genuinely haven't stopped thinking about 'The Evolution of Knowledge' by Niccolo Tucci since I read it. Nabokov's 'Symbols and Signs' blew me away. And it's always good when a short story collection features

works by Salinger, Maxwell and Cheever.

Diana says

A terrific collection of stories by some of the luminaries of the literary world. Nearly every one is a gem, thanks to the skillful selecting by David Remnick. I open the book at random to get in the mood for a trip to New York, and am never disappointed.

Marek says

A good number of short stories, some only a few pages long, the longest is about 30 pages long.

On average, it felt that the stories developed slowly and ended abruptly. Often, too much was left to imagination; others might like it but I didn't. I like the story told until the end. This might be a thing with all short stories, or it might be a thing with me.

When I got used to the style I enjoyed most of the stories, and some of them were downright brilliant (for example: "The smoker", "Midair", "Notes from a bottle", "Baster"). Overall, what made the book very pleasant to read was that the stories take place in New York, which I've always found one of the most interesting, powerful and magical places in the world.

Jessica says

Lots of different kinds of stories about New Yorkers. It was ok. Not great.

Mary says

What part of a collection of short stories from The New Yorker requires explanation or justification for reading it? The reputation for consistency in publishing some the best writing in the English language continues.

Patrick DiJusto says

Maybe the New Yorker fiction section is not for me. Too many of the stories were of the John Cheever Saul Bellow Philip Roth John Updike kind, in which a middle aged man puts on his raincoat and leaves his office and gets on the train to Scarsdale and reminisces about an affair he had, and then gets off the train. Maybe its good that I don't get these stories, because maybe that means I don't share their life of middle aged desperation. Maybe.

On the other hand, there's the always funny Sj Perelman.

