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These 17 short stories represent the best of Brodkey's work over three decades.

Stories in an Almost Classical Mode Details

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robert says

the stars are only for the amazing story Verona: a young girl speaks. "innocence" was fascinating. the title story is interesting, boys on their bikes less so, and ceil was outright lousy. frankly, based only on the five stories i read, i do not recommend this acclaimed book. the egotism seems less fun than norman mailer's. it's like reading proust without the saving grace of genius.

Peter says

19.03.2016 Diese lange Erzählung (Novelle?) ist harter Tobak. Brodkey erzählt die Kindheitsgeschichte eines Adoptivlings. Die Geschichte enthält viele autobiographische Momente und ist von seltener psychologischer Grausamkeit. Das Kind wird nach dem Tod der leiblichen Mutter vom Vater verkauft. Beide Adoptiveltern erkranken schwer, der Adoptivvater geht in ein Veteranenspital (kostenlose Behandlung) und die Adoptivmutter verbleibt mit dem Kind in der Wohnung. Das Drama spielt sich zwischen der kranken, gekränkten, zornigen Adoptivmutter und dem kleinen Jungen ab: "...das Gleichgewicht von Schmerzen und Morphinum in ihr; manchmal jammerte sie dann laut. Wenn ich zu ihr hinging, schrie sie: "Geh weg, faß mich nicht an du tust mir weh!" Es war wie irgendwo zu stehen und zuzuschauen, während jemand von wilden Hunden gefressen wird." Hart aber genial erzählt. Tolles Büchlein.

Glenn Russell says

Harold Brodkey (1930 – 1996) is a major twentieth-century American writer of highly polished, highly poetic fiction first published in The New Yorker, Esquire and other magazines over a thirty years span, 1960s through the 1990s. Published as part of the 1980s Vintage Contemporaries series, this magnificent collection contains 18 stories, some short, some long, 5 pages to 50 pages, but all of these stories speak to the feeling tone of memory and are expressed in such lyrical, elegant language, they are enough to take your breath away. Rather than making general statements about a number of stories, as a way of sharing some Harold Brodkey splendor, I will focus on one shorter piece that will remain with me always:

Verona: A Young Woman Speak

The Power of Memory: I know a lot! I know about happiness! So proclaims a young woman describing for us a day and a night when she was a seven-year-old girl traveling in Italy with her mother and father.

Sidebar: Personally, I love when a male author tells a tale from the point of view of a first-person woman narrator. Thank you, Harold Brodkey!

Invisible Cities/Visible Cities: Reliving her time as a little girl, the narrator recounts how her joy bubbles over: "It was absurd, but we were all three drunk with this; it was very strange; we woke every morning in a strange hotel, in a strange city." All the sights and sounds so alive, so vivid and beautiful, it is as if our little girl is traveling in Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities made visible.

Sparkling Self-Identity: “I was dizzy with shopping and new possessions: I hardly knew who I was, I owned so many new things my reflection in any mirror or shopwindow as resplendently fresh and new, disguised even, glittering I thought.” What little girl wouldn’t love to be given such a chance to shop and wear all new cloths? As the narrator recounts ‘only the simplest and most light-filled words and images can suggest what I thought we were then.’

Princess: When in Verona the faces of the men and women were stern, sad, unlaughing faces but when they looked at our little girl their faces would lighten and they would smile at her splendor. She knew she decorated life. “I liked myself very much; and almost everywhere, almost every day, there was someone new to love me, briefly, while we traveled. I understood I was special.” As adults, being told we are special can sound so saccharine, but as a youngster being treated as special and understanding our specialness is an affirmation of a truism.

Cornucopia – Our little girl says Daddy was a fountain of money and their vacation and travel was one unending spending spree. “We were at play; we were at our joys.” Life as abundance; life an overflowing; life as a swirl of joy.

Art: “There was a picture in Verona Daddy wanted to see: a painting; I remember the painter because the name Pisanello reminded me I had to go to the bathroom when we were in the museum. . . . I also remember the painting because it showed the hind end of the horse, and I thought that was not nice and rather funny.” In an entire trip of sweet memories it isn’t at all surprising she has this sweet memory of art since there is magic when a great painter applies paint to canvas. And you have to love linking her bodily needs with the artist’s name and her eye going to the horse’s rump.

The Piazza - One: “We went to a square, a piazza – the Sealigera, I think; I don’t remember – and just as we got there, the snowing began to bellow and then subside, to fall heavily and then sparsely, and then it stopped; and it was very cold, and there were pigeons everywhere in the piazza, on every cornice and roof, and all over the snow on the ground, leaving little tracks as they walked, while the air trembled in its just-after-snow and just-before-snow weight and thickness and gray seriousness of purpose.” Ah, to enter a piazza and be welcomed by the beauty of a snowfall, all those pigeons and a sense of the seriousness of purpose in it all.

The Piazza – Two: She describes herself as half mad with pleasure and then her Daddy poured corn in her hands and tells her to hold out her hands. “Then the pigeons came. On heavy wings. Clumsy pigeon bodies. And red, unreal birds’ feet. They flew at me, slowing at the last minute; they lit on my arm and fed from my hand. I wanted to flinch, but I didn’t. I closed my eyes and held my arm stiffly; and felt them peck and eat – from my hand, these free creatures, these flying things.” Even as an adult, such an encounter with winged wildlife can be intense; with a child, this intensity is exponential. Again and again, more corn, more birds. “I become brilliant, gleaming, soft; an angel, a great bird-child of laughter.”

On the Train: The great bird-child’s blissful dream continues, through dinner at a restaurant and then sitting next to her Momma on a train traveling through mountains under the moon. “We looked at mountains until dawn, and then when dawn came, it was too pretty for me – there was pink and blue and gold in the sky, and on icy place, brilliant pink and gold flashes, and the snow was colored, too, and I said, “Oh,” and sighed; and each moment was more beautiful than the one before; and I said, “I love you, Momma.” Then I fell asleep in her arms.” Oh, to have such memories of such a day and night as a child. Such a gift.

Orsodimondo says

RACCONTA UN SACCO DI BUGIE SE VUOI AVERE UNA VITA FELICE

Ho letto che Brodkey è considerato il Proust americano – poi ho letto che è l’anello mancante tra Proust e David Foster Wallace.

Adesso mi aspetto di leggere che lo si ama o lo si odia, tanto per restare nei commenti che non significano nulla, e niente aggiungono o spiegano.

Anche questa volta Brodkey sceglie un titolo bello e perfetto: storie in modo quasi classico, dopo primo amore e altri affanni. Che meraviglia.

In queste pagine, ci sono bambini che trovano illuminazioni.

Ci sono ragazzini di undici, dodici, tredici anni che cominciano a diventare uomini, alla soglia dell’adolescenza, nel rito di perdita dell’innocenza, nell’età in cui si è *con la mente più acuta degli angeli*.

C’è tanto sesso: oltre il famoso racconto con la lunghissima descrizione di un cunnilingus (‘Innocenza’), che non dura tutto il racconto come qualcuno mitizza, ma fa parte di una lunga scopata piena di tutto, amore incluso, splendido racconto – oltre questo, c’è una masturbazione di gruppo (scout), c’è la scoperta del piacere sessuale col proprio sesso.

Ci sono *frammenti di luce alla deriva, come ombre di foglie, dettagli della giornata, ugualmente transitori*.

C’è grande capacità di maneggiare le sensazioni e le emozioni, e il ricordo in modo magistrale.

Ci sono persone che hanno la schiena trafitta *da un pesante abbozzo d’ali*, che si trasformano, crescono, diventano, vivono.

Ci sono pochi fatti, poche cose che succedono, e non se ne sente la mancanza: Brodkey racconta la vita, che è quello che conta, chi ha bisogno dei fatti?

Quando ero piccolo ogni tanto riuscivo a mettere le mani su un barattolo di latte condensato: facevo due buchi, uno per fare entrare l’aria e l’altro per bere – e comunque, dovevo succhiare forte, perché il latte era davvero condensato, difficile da estrarre. Se ero vorace, se mi lasciavo prendere dall’ingordigia, finivo un po’ stomacato dal troppo zucchero, dall’eccesso di sapore forte e intenso. Invece, se ero ragionevole, il piacere era assicurato.

Molto spesso leggere questi racconti mi ha riportato a galla questo ricordo.

Non sono tutti alla stessa altezza, qualcuno fatica ad andare giù: forse perché il protagonista quando diventa adulto fa di professione il regista, e Brodkey dipinge una caricatura del metteur en scene, finta e banale; forse

perché in un altro racconto, lo scrittore e professore Hofstedt è davvero antipatico e somiglia troppo a certi personaggi di Philip Roth.

Qua e là, mi aspettavo un personaggio esprimersi con una battuta del tipo 'Mi fanno male i capelli', e certo non in memoria di Amelia Rosselli. Però non è successo, è stato piuttosto Brodkey a esprimersi con un *mani da prete azteco* che mi ha lasciato perplesso.

In queste zone del libro, Brodkey secca invece di asciugare, recide invece di sciogliere, esaspera invece di ammorbidire, insiste invece di sfumare.

Ma la sensazione vincente e dominante è quella del piacere, del dolce denso e corposo di un latte condensato. *Mi piace il salto rapido di un buon racconto, l'emozione che spesso comincia già nella prima frase...*

PS

Gordon Lish è stato editor di Brodkey e di Carver: due pesi e due misure, il minimo che si può commentare.

Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

"A Note on the Type

"The text of this book was set in a digitized version of Janson, a typeface long thought to have been made by the Dutchman Anton Janson, who was a practicing type founder in Leipzig during the years 1668-1687. However, it has been conclusively demonstrated that these types are actually the work of Nicholas Kis (1650-1702), a Hungarian, who most probably learned his trade from the master Dutch type founder Dirk Voskens. The type is an excellent example of the influential and sturdy Dutch types that prevailed in England up to the time William Caslon developed his own incomparable designs from them.

"Composed by The Haddon Craftsmen, Inc., Allentown, Pennsylvania. Printed and bound by The Murray Printing Company, Westford, Massachusetts.
Designed by Peter A. Andersen"

I know nothing. But McElroy has name dropped him at one point for which we herewith linketh:

<http://bibliomaniac.com/2012/10/01/jos...>

Also, this:

http://www.bookforum.com/archive/feb_...

Anne Sanow says

One of my favorite stories of all time is the brief "Verona: A Young Woman Speaks," which is kind of just tucked in here amongst the longer and more autobiographically-based Brodkey stuff. Some of those get a bit blowhardy (you've got to be in the mood), even if they are good. Yes, Brodkey is a narcissist, but he is damn brilliant, too.

Lauren Albert says

I gave this 4 stars remembering how I love it when I read it in the 80s. I can see a glimmer of what I liked about it at the beginning. By the time I got to the eponymous story at almost 300 pages, I was skimming. Then I was skipping. It seemed self-indulgent, pretentious. In those first few stories I could sense what I originally liked but it's lost its flavor for me.

First read 1989

SCARABOOKS says

In questo periodo mi capita spesso di incontrare recensori che scovano scrittori neo-"proustiani". Checchè ne scrivano, non lo è, Brodkey. Anche se i ricordi, la memoria li maneggia con una capacità di ricostruire emozioni e flussi mentali veramente sorprendente.

La sua però, rispetto al tempo perduto, non è una ricerca. E' un dolorosissimo esorcismo. Il racconto sulla madre è splendido proprio perché è infarcito di una sofferenza asciutta, senza sbavature, che non cerca consolazione per se, nè commozione per il lettore. La figura paterna in un altro racconto, notevole anche quello, ha un'altra tonalità, ma neppure lì ho trovato niente di "proustiano". L'elegia del tempo perduto è quanto di più lontano.

La qualità migliore della scrittura sta negli aggettivi: si alzano come traccianti coloratissimi, nel panorama volutamente piatto o volutamente frammentato della narrazione; oppure nel buio di senso. Una aggettivazione ricchissima che in certi casi è una mitragliata di aggettivi. E sono aggettivi che per quanto inconsueti e spiazzanti sembrano "naturali", perfetti. Emozionano e bloccano il pensiero attorno ad un'immagine, una suggestione: un bellissimo effetto. C'è da dire che in certi racconti esagera, con gli spari. Ed in certi altri invece si affaccia anche un po' di noia, ma in una raccolta così vasta, ci sta.

Il racconto migliore una volta tanto è il più famoso e si chiama Innocenza. Il titolo calza benissimo nonostante venti pagine e più siano dedicate alla moviola mentale parallela ad un rapporto orale, vissuto come un dono d'amore di un uomo ad una donna, malata della sua straordinaria bellezza. Uno dei racconti sull'amore dei corpi più autentici (e pedagogici) che abbia mai letto. Da corso di (ri)educazione, sessuale e non solo (soprattutto per i maschietti).

Una gran bella raccolta di racconti insomma. Grazie infinite a chi mi ha consentito di scoprirli.

Bruce Crown says

Some of the stories are 4 and 5 stars but some lack that extra oomph. Given the volume and output of the

work it's not far-fetched to think the style is consistent and the themes are left to simmer in Brodkeyan fashion. Any fan or reader of short story would do well to venture into Brodkey's Classical Mode.

Albert says

I sampled ten stories from this collection and found them all to follow the same general motif: working through issues of childhood and adolescence in the present or retrospectively. An uneven collection that skews somewhat unrealistically towards the melancholy...at his best, Brodkey is illuminating, at his worst, his characters come across as mokey. All of the stories are about the emotional psychology of the characters. There is very little sense or place or historical context.

Ross says

Wow, what a writer.

His Son, in His Arms, in Light, Aloft may be the single most beautiful short story I've read. And I do loathe hyperbole. Brodkey's writing succeeds in making me feel the weight, responsibility and intimacy of experiences I've never even had and didn't necessarily realise I wanted.

Besides that story, this collection is filled with witty tales, tales about the elusive nature of other people's thoughts, and many of them unfold in strange, completely unexpected ways.

Brodkey can also write a 50-page story about one sex scene (Innocence), or a 30-page one about two boys riding their bikes (The Boys On Their Bikes) up and then down a hill -- neither become dull, and the former never becomes lewd or cheap, only increasingly sensuous and with compelling, soul-scraping honesty.

Geoff Wyss says

I loved this book, though I'm not sure I would recommend it to most readers. The pieces that seem to be Brodkey at his most essential aren't really stories (or so I think would be the common complaint). "A Story in an Almost Classical Mode," for example, is really a 50-page character sketch (transparently fictionalized) of his step-mother--brilliant stuff, but no plot to speak of. (Perhaps the most amazing thing is that the story was originally published in the *New Yorker*, which tells you how conservative that magazine's fictional tastes have become since 1973.) "The Boys on Their Bikes" is similarly unconcerned with plot: in 32 pages, the boys of the title ride their bikes up one side of a small hill and down the other--no flashbacks, no back story, a few lines of traded dialogue. Even the more traditionally structured stories (for example, "Hofstedt and

Jean--and Others," one of my favorites) are way, way more talky and ruminative than most contemporary fiction. Other favorites: "The Abundant Dreamer," "On the Waves," "Puberty," "Largely an Oral History of My Mother," "Ceil."

Thanks to Christine Schutt for this recommendation.

Carrie says

So far I have read "His Son, in His Arms, in Light, Aloft"

Patricia says

I gave this a chance and plodded through half, but can't manage another 300 pages of this man's life stories. Reviews on the cover, written by men, praised the work, one comparing him to Freud. Enough said. Of all the wonderful books of stories I've read, this is not one of them.

Liedzeit says

Nicht klassisch aber klasse.
