



Going For a Beer: Selected Short Fictions

Robert Coover , T. Coraghessan Boyle (Introduction)

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Robert Coover has been playing by his own rules for more than half a century, earning the 1987 Rea Award for the Short Story as "a writer who has managed, willfully and even perversely, to remain his own man while offering his generous vision and versions of America." Coover finds inspiration in everything from painting, cinema, theater, and dance to slapstick, magic acts, puzzles, and riddles.

His 1969 story "The Babysitter" has alone inspired generations of innovative young writers. Here, in this selection of his best stories, spanning more than half a century, you will find an invisible man tragically obsessed by an invisible woman; a cartoon man in a cartoon car who runs over a real man who is arrested by a real policeman with cartoon eyes; a stick man who reinvents the universe.

While invading the dreams and nightmares of others, long dead, disrupting them from within, Coover cuts to the core of how realism works. He uses metafiction as a means of "interrogating the fiction making process," at least insofar as that process, when unexamined, has a way of entrapping us in false and destructive stories, myths, and belief systems. These stories are riven with paradox, ambivalence, strangeness, unrealized ambitions and desires, uncertainty, complexity, always seeking the potential for insight, for comedy.

Through their celebration of the improbable and unexpected, and their distinctive but complementary grammars of text and film, Coover's selected short fictions entertain by engaging with the tribal myths that surround us—religious, patriotic, literary, erotic, popular—often satirizing the mindsets that, out of some obscure primitive need, perpetuate them. The thirty stories in *Going for a Beer* confirm Coover's reputation as "one of America's greatest literary geniuses" (Alan Moore).

Going For a Beer: Selected Short Fictions Details

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From Reader Review Going For a Beer: Selected Short Fictions for online ebook

Mark Hebwood says

Just read it over lunch. Great story - the narrative has a brilliant feel to it, it develops in jumps and starts, then briefly pauses, before jumping again. It feels right that this story is very short - this in itself heightens the impression of being whisked across time, of being hastened towards the end. But "hastened" is the wrong word, isn't it? It's more like all the meaningless episodes in the protagonist's life are simply skipped, and the narrator briefly dwells on those where something is actually happening. The result is a life compressed into the 10 minutes of actual time it took me to read this, and then it's curtains and I go back to my lunch.

Hadrian says

A collection of thirty stories written from 1962-2016.

The first concerns a bystander at Noah's arc and is an impassioned stream-of-consciousness. Quote: "'Goddamn you' I cry out at the top of my lungs and half sobbin and sick and then feelin too beat out to do anythin more I turn around and head back for home." The one right after that is an office worker who might be fantasizing about his co-workers or dealing with flatulence in the elevator. We don't know, as Coover tends to insert fantasy and idealization among the basic narratives, where they might or might not exist.

Coover tends to myths and fairy tales. He rewrites the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears into an area and a set of thirty variations, and then ties it to J. S. Bach. Another story is Hansel and Gretel in the woods. His source material is public knowledge. Some of Coover's work is fairly obscure, where others are more commonly known - his "Babysitter" is a mainstay of creative writing classes and has likely spawned hundreds of copycats.

You find favorite habits, things he returns to - his playfulness with form and his ribbing of myths and anything supposed to be sacred. His novel, *The Public Burning* lampooned the false religiosity and blood-spangled patriotism of the Nixon administration, no doubt he's studied more material over the past forty years. Of course he does more than mock, as he stretches out or compresses his prose style to fit his needs. He can go between unpunctuated rambling and short, terse declarations. He plays with words.

An well-curated collection, and should be appreciated by Coover's fans and new readers.

Brian says

He finds himself sitting in the neighborhood library reading a Coover novel at about the same time that he began to think about going there to look for one. In fact, he has just finished *The Public Burning*. Perhaps he'll read a second one, he thinks, a Coover light, as he finishes *Briar Rose*. There is a young woman sitting not far from him who is not exactly good-looking but good-looking enough, and probably good with the Dewey Decimal system, as indeed she is. Did he finish *Spanking the Maid*? Can't remember. What really matters is: Did he enjoy *Ghost Town*? Or even read it? "I'm looking for a Coover-light," he tells the comely

woman who is also quite homely. "You've come to the right place," she says as she pulls the beer tap handle and fills his glass. "One Silver Bullet, on the house." He finds himself trying to explain the error when the werewolf to his left points to the glass. "What exactly did you have in mind with that?" He tries to explain. "I'm here for a Coover-light." The werewolf hands him *Gerald's Party* which he has read. "Lighter," he says. "Why didn't you say so?" asks the werewolf. His meaty, hairy hands paw through a New Yorker to this page. "*Going for a beer* is what you're looking for." He reads it, has read it. "Would you like another?" asks the werewolf. "No thanks, this one's gone to my head," he says as he drives past the neighborhood library and thinks about stopping in, for old time's sake, to discuss again *The Origin of the Brunists* with the lovely librarian who is also quite hirsute. So he finishes *Noir* right as the library is shutting down and he is in his car looking at the full moon through the windshield and he howls out the words to *Pinocchio in Venice* just as the beautifully monstrous librarian taps on his window and says, "I finally found your Coover-light." He rolls down the window and she hands him *The Colonel's Daughter*. "All this Coover really works up a thirst," he says. "You've come to the right place," she says as she pulls the beer tap handle and fills his glass.

Garima says

Life in 37 inebriated takes.

Nandakishore Varma says

I had promised myself that I would not review any more books on Goodreads. But since this story is available for free on the internet, "The corporate bookselling entity that shall not be named" will not be able to use my review anyway, in their nefarious money-making schemes. So here is my review, for what it's worth...

This magical little tale reminded me of the play Long Christmas Dinner by Thornton Wilder. In that, Wilder constructs the life of the few generations of a family around a Christmas dinner: the characters speak the same daily inanities, love, hate, quarrel, are born and die around the dinner table. It is a dramatic prop which gives us a feeling of the continuity and brevity of life at the same time. Robert Coover uses the same gimmick, although in a more hilarious way, to construct this story.

The metaphor here is the act of going for a beer, and casually meeting a woman at the pub: which leads to sex and other things. However, there is a purposeful lack of continuity in the narrative, as the unnamed protagonist keeps on forgetting events and wanders in a daze throughout the tale - it reads like the memory of an evening after a few quick ones at the bar with friends. He only remembers with any clarity the Kewpie dolls present in great number at his first (?) girlfriend (wife)'s flat - he thinks they must mean something, but cannot imagine exactly what. The evening with the beer, the meeting with a woman, sex at her apartment and the forgotten orgasm are repeated *ad nauseum*, while the protagonist fathers children, marries, divorces, grows old and dies.

This story is perfect raw material for a script for a short movie, shot with a series of dissolves; it encapsulates time into a short capsule while at the same time reminding us of eternity.

Brilliant!

Jim says

I'm not sure what to make of this. I probably approached it with too literal a frame of mind, but it's very much an alcoholic's nightmare - a life measured by beers in a bar with short bursts of barely remembered ecstasy & pain on the side. Real life is totally missing.

This is free here:

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/20...>

Warwick says

It's nice to see that I can still get excited about narrative tricksiness from time to time. This was wonderful. Who would have thought such an elliptical prose style could conceal such comic potential? Funny, clever and moving...Coover has been on my radar since I started reading Rikki Ducornet (who seems to be his biggest fan) but this makes me determined to track him down properly.

Clear fifteen minutes in your day, pour yourself a beer, and read it here, unless you've already done so, it's hard to tell.

Algernon says

too short a story to write a big review about it:

Guy walks into a bar ...

Life flashes before his eyes ...

What a sorry joke!

Lovely dolls (never owned a Kelpie myself, but I'll buy one if I ever see them in a toystore, now)

watch out for more from Robert Coover.

Glenn Russell says

If there ever was a short-short story portraying life as a cycle of mindless activities, this is it. An alternate title: *Kill the Depth*. Life devoid of tenderness and warmth, not to mention love and compassion; life devoid of literature and the arts; life devoid of spiritual transformation. Life as a round of numbness and the tawdry leading to the last scene where you are on your deathbed and your son stops in for a quick visit to tell you, in so many words, your passing is probably for the best since you will no longer stand between him and his glass of beer.

Did Robert Coover write this story as a warning? Did Robert Coover write this story as a challenge for our age? Does Robert Coover own a collection of Kewpie dolls? This work of fiction might set the Goodreads record for the greatest number of creative reviews for such a short piece. Thank you Ian, Praj, Rakhi, Brian, Warwick, Hadrian, Algernon, Garima, Gautam, Nandaksihore, Rand, MJ, Zrena, Lit and especially Nathan, who brought this Coover zinger to light for many, including myself.

UPDATE: Goodreads friend Mark just did post a short review of this Coover gem. Really worth checking out: <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

Can be read in less than ten minutes courtesy of *The New Yorker*:
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/201...>

Robert Coover, American author par excellence

Julio Genao says

the short form at its best.

crazy ideas, fearless devices... short enough to keep from bashing your head open, and long enough to make the point. i loved it.

Rakhi Dalal says

How the hell am I going to sneak that glass after the “**Happy Hour**” has been announced closed? I wait for the diligent bartender to turn his back, my eyes following his hands as he gets busy with a sudden rush of people coming in to have a glass of beer. Seems like every one wants to have....**well...you know...a life**. Meandering, the eyes settle on a brawny (brainy?) dude with a glass of beer in one hand and in another a copy of Coover. The bartender’s eyes catch my ocular digression and for whatever reason, he slips a glass for free before me. *Yay! Oops!!* Does he notice my sudden exclamation? I mean the brawny dude? Perhaps. For he does ask me out or doesn’t he? His leave, from my room, the next morning comes with a dull ache in the heart. I think about the Kewpi doll cast in gold that we decided to gift N.R. while sitting in the bar; we, the friends, joining in the party to celebrate Coover. Let us have another round, says Kalliope. Hmmm....how many kewpi dolls will make a life? My head spins, but I move on to join Praj for the beer. Who else is coming?

Praj says

I find myself gaping at the Kewpie dolls thinking about the devilish grin in those angelic eyes. Eight! Perfect circles of heaven. I count them twice before lining them like a bunch of soldiers. Was it that friendly man from the street who gave me these little drops of heaven? Does it really matter? Perry Como keeps calling those dolls like a lost child, *“Kew Kew Kewpie dolls...She’s the cutest one of them all!!”* Did I already put one of the soldiers in a grave between my teeth? Or were they two? Do I remember their deathly orgasm? The yellow stain transforms into a fluorescent rainbow through the green spout of the bottle thrust in between my lips. I can't remember the mustard on my shirt. It's proof exposed on my shirt, the howl of the wounded dog echoing the cry of a baby for a warm bottle of milk. He hates the bar food, the taste festers a stale vomit. I serve him a turkey on rye with mustard, every time he walks in that bar. Did he eventually fuck that lady who keeps the Kewpie dolls lined like soldiers in her apartment? The smell of stale urine pervade the foggy streets, I need eight more of my soldiers. I need to drown them in a tippie chasm. Those Kewpies they follow me everywhere. In the arms of the child, on the hospital beds ,in the womb of a woman as she walks down the aisle. One more drink. A punch in the face. A celebratory drink. A child is born. Life passes by. Death lurks. Perry Como sways to a bunch of dancing puppets. I stagger on the streets with a dart stuck in my neck. Did he really fuck those women? Doesn't he remember those orgasms after the crazy carnival wins? The man at the bar. The one who remembers my mustard stain. The stench of my dried blood. The man at the bar. I don't know, maybe he'll have another one. *“Well...you know...life”* ; I'm going for a beer. Are you?

Gautam says

Ah! What? I'm groggy.. Doesn't matter. What matters is: Am I still in my bed reading this short story(or a novel perhaps!) or am I drinking a beer at the nearby pub now? Anyways, I, confused, decided to be in bed as I downed my last beer (second one may be fourth perhaps, I'm not sure!).

Well... you know....life..

Brilliant.

4 stars on 5!

-gautam

David Schaafsma says

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/20...>

is the link, thanks to Melki, to a short experimental and funny and insightful and even touching story about a guy who went out for a beer and another and then his life flashed before him, not his past but his future, things tumbling over themselves to get to the end. In part a parody of narrative chronology by narrative scholar and postmodernist Coover. Way fun.

Lit Bug says

New Review

Lit Bug finds herself sitting on the chair with GR at the same time she was thinking of logging in. In fact, she was done with it. Perhaps she would take a second look, maybe a third too. There is a review sitting not far from her, from someone she came across only recently, which is not exactly good-looking but good-looking enough, and probably the link for the story is good to read, as indeed it is.

Did she already read this? Can't remember. Did she enjoy her readorgasm? Or even have one? She wonders this as she meanders through other reviews of the story, GR bottle in hand, when she notices kewpie doll- "likes" all around the reviews! She wins one too, for her tiny review, but some others seem to have won more. So she goes out once more and wins one more after an hour. On her third date with GR, Bug wins a comment! But a group of brawny/brainy reviewers begin to harass others' reviews with a deluge of likes and (lewd? Nah!) comments (But they were lolling their tongues in praise!).

She intervenes and ends up in a hospital with GR turning up to meet her with one more like – she logs in again, and at their wedding, the brawny-brainy reviewers apologize to her and bring them a gift coupon for two Amazon ebooks by Coover and a pair of white satin ribbons for her injured reviews.

With added responsibilities, she leaves GR and has a brief affair with another site, and by the time she returns, she finds all the kewpie likes and comments scattered around and GR has left a note saying he better not find her logged in by the time she returns. One of the reviews is crying, so she goes to edit it again, smooth it out, rambles about GR and decides it is best to leave. Out in the matrix again, she wonders if she saved the editing she had done on the review and if she had even edited it at all.

On her way she sees others like her beckoning her to another wonderful site, where they congratulate each other on being freed from terrible spouses – they write a few more reviews and get more readorgasms. Then one of her old GR reviews (the one on Going for a Beer) turns up at her deathbed and, apologizing for arriving too late (s/he had gone for a beer and things happened), says s/he's going to miss her but it's probably for the best. For the best what? she asks, but her review is gone, if s/he was ever there in the first place. Well . . . you know . . . life, she says to the nurse who has come to pull the sheet over her face and wheel her away.

I wouldn't know how to review this, but this has been one of the most memorable stories I've ever read. If ever anyone asks me what postmodernism (p-mod) is, I'll now direct them to this, instead of the Wiki guru. It is simply p-mod in action, in fiction.

You won't know what actually happened - all versions seem true enough - but is there any one truth? Or are all of them facets of truth? Or are any of them the truth? I'm not so sure, and neither should *you* be.

If you want to forget something, don't go for a beer - go for a Coover.

Read the story here - Going for a Beer
