



# Enormous Changes at the Last Minute

*Grace Paley*

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## **Enormous Changes at the Last Minute** Grace Paley

Seventeen stories written over the past fifteen years reveal the author's vision of human love and tragedy.

## **Enormous Changes at the Last Minute Details**

Date : Published September 1st 1985 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux (first published 1974)

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Author : Grace Paley

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# From Reader Review Enormous Changes at the Last Minute for online ebook

## Karen says

Reading this paired well with viewing Chagall's paintings for and about Jewish theater, illustrations for Yiddish poetry, and pieces inspired by klezmer music, at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. (I'm listening to klezmer music as I write this!) The art exhibit was wide-ranging, but it centered around Chagall's connection to music.

Paley's ambivalence about her Russian Jewish heritage, just the culture and time Chagall meant to capture, is fascinating. Paley's work has a musicality in the language that is so specifically Jewish, even as she grapples with how much of the past to delve into while focusing on exploring and capturing the lives of her Jewish-American contemporaries and their neighbors.

The interplay between the Chagall exhibit and Paley's stories fleshed out some the history of Jewish identity in the century from roughly 1880 to 1980. Developing a new understanding of this period after the "post-war era," that I hadn't really learned much about before, through the art and literature of the time, had me captivated.

"Paley was a writer whose characters were mostly of a piece: middle-class New York Jews. They are enmeshed in their domestic spheres, their squabbles and their failures reflective of the changes—social, political, intellectual—taking place in the wider society. Paley was also unashamedly Jewish in her choice of material. “My first two stories were specifically Jewish,” Paley remembered in a Paris Review interview. “When I took a class at the New School this teacher said to me, ‘You’ve got to get off that Jewish dime, Grace, they’re wonderful stories, but . . .’ ” (1)

In the second story in this book, *Debts*, she talks about a lady who asked her to write about the old Yiddish theater. Paley responds with: "I said I had learned everything I knew about the Yiddish theater to write one story." She is reluctant to dive deeper into history, even recent history, but her friend reminds her "It [would be] a pity to lose all this inheritance." As Paley reflects on her obligations, she comes to the conclusion that it is not her role to preserve the past, but it is vital for her to preserve, for history, the present reality of her community, "Actually I owed nothing to the lady who'd called. It was possible that I did owe something to my own family and the families of my friends. That is, to tell their stories as simply as possible, in order, you might say, to save a few lives."

In an interview in 1990 she said, "I certainly feel related to my family's past. I certainly think about it a lot. I mean, I think about their lives in Russia and I think about the lives of Jews." (2) She tell the interviewer that she doesn't speak Russian or Yiddish, "But even you know, all those languages, languages that are in your ear, if you go to the places where they're spoken all the time you suddenly realize you know them or you know the tune of the language, and that is the most important thing." (2)

In the exhibit catalog for the Montreal Museum of fine arts, the curators posit that "all of Chagall's work, from his paintings, works on paper, costumes, sculptures, ceramics, stained glass and tapestries to his creations for the stage and his large-scale decorative and architectural projects, were imbued with musicality." (3) The musicality the museum is referring to was primarily that of Russian klezmer music and the Yiddish language.

While Paley is not particularly willing to go back and write about the Russian Jewish experience, Paley carries on the "the tune of the language." Despite the "enormous changes" of the book's title, the musicality of Chagall's painting *Introduction to the Jewish Theatre*, in all its beauty and vulgarity (a gentle fiddler with a dove on his shoulder is pictured right next to a man pissing on a pig), is carried on in Paley's *Gloomy Tune*, a lyrical vignette about a family that, despite the sweet kindness of their teachers, is wonderfully and irrepressibly mean, fresh, bad, bold, and hopeless. The characters in that story go to a Catholic school and don't seem to be Jewish, but Chagall also often painted crucifixions. In these cases what puts the pieces in a Jewish context is the artist's identity. The world around them is seen through their eyes, and filtered through their voice.

In the story *Faith in the Afternoon* Paley writes "The leaflet cried out in Yiddish: 'Parents! A little child's voice calls to you, 'Papa, Mama, what does it mean to be a Jew in the world today?' " This is a question both Chagall and Paley were reckoning with that paints a compelling picture of how the Jewish experience evolved over a turbulent century.

(1) Austerlitz, Saul. "Grace Paley, 1922-2007." *Jewish Socialism Influenced Grace Paley's Life and Literature*. My Jewish Learning, 2 Jan. 2003. Web. 06 Mar. 2017.

(2) Aarons, Victoria. "'The Tune of the Language': An Interview With Grace Paley." *Studies in American Jewish Literature The Changing Mosaic: From Cahan to Malamud, Roth and Ozick* 12 (1993): 50-61.

(3) "Chagall: Colour and Music." The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 Mar. 2017.

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## Carmen says

I wanted to like this more than I did. An original voice, ahead of its time, sometimes raw and startling, but ultimately the prose held no rhythm for me and I didn't care about the characters whatsoever at all. I found it all a bit emotionally inaccessible and politically obscure, but perhaps I wasn't trying hard enough to connect.

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## Nancy says

I tried...I really tried.

Not one short story appealed to me, not one!

Stories were gritty, raw, hard to follow and many times just pointless! Bah.

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## Aubrey says

*But he does not know where the money for **all** of life will come.*

This book is a city and wears me out as such. Nowhere is there the opportunistic grace of *Let the Great World Spin*, easier on the eyes and less real to the senses if I think back on my three-and-a-half year stint in LA. The second day of reading this shock shock shock of too slow and you'll miss it wit left me with a

migraine, no less, and so I put this back and plunged into the lengthier things I'm more akin to. *War and Peace* has that, if nothing else, an else that includes real woman to an extent that eventually chased me back to finishing this one up. Single mother of Jewish extract in the city I may never have been, but women and men in close quarters and closer dialogue vary little over the years and circumstances, and if I could dig McElroy, I can do this.

*"Mrs. Finn," I scream in order to be heard, for she's some distance away and doesn't pay attention the way I do, "what's so terrible about fresh. EVIL is bad. WICKED is bad. ROBBING, MURDER, and PUTTING HEROIN IN YOUR BLOOD is bad."*

Paley's a proponent of the modern times and all its lack of unearned respect. I am as well, but not as much: whether due to the sprawl of wooded creek posing as my backyard or long hours spent with the biggest tomes I could drag down from shelves, I have no head for voices or liking for Angela Carter's declaration of "...Paley's work mak[ing] the novel as a form seem virtually redundant." Sit me down in the busiest intersection of passing folk and not two minutes will pass before my hand is itching towards something to mull over. I do take pleasure in the potential for rapid communication, the interchange of diversity day in day out, the blood bone gristle of infrastructure melded with the brain nerve pulse point of people, I do, I do! I just need some great periods of silent introspection (little afforded by urban living) on a regular basis, else I get cranky.

*He had once killed a farm boy made crazy by crowds in the city. The boy had run all day in terror round and round Central Park. People thought he was a runner because he wore an undershirt, but he had finally entered the park, and with a kitchen knife he had killed one baby and wounded two or three others. "Too many people," he screamed when he killed.*

Paley's a planter of tinier seeds. In less couched terms, Paley doesn't fuck around, what with her style narrowing into the heart of things without the comfort of all enclosing barriers, making us multitask in paying attention *and* plying imagination at tenfold plus the pace of the usual prose (spoonfeeding us ideologies and cringing back from every accidental increase of force in expectation of the spit). She'd shake her head at me, speedy reader that I am, but I *did* realize the sloppiness of my first effort and subsequently went back for a more serious combing, so I'm hoping she wouldn't be too put out.

*"Well, you just have to let the story lie around till some agreement can be reached between you and the stubborn hero."*

I grinned in chagrin at that. To be fair, fiction's usually extemporaneous in the details rather than the fibrous mess of -isms, and when the reverse is the case I'm all set for inevitable polemic, but if Paley has a cause, it's a breed of Legion. I'd say she'd like Tumblr, but as there's none of the grimier evidence of human contact in multifarious infinitude of a geography that likes to think itself logical, she might think it too facile. Say what you will about the 'net and words words words, but no one's been horrifically murdered in them *yet*.

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## Albert says

Well, I was surprised by this one. I love short stories. Somewhere, somehow I heard about Grace Paley. That she was a special teller of short stories. I obtained a copy of this collection with great expectations. The GR rating of 4+ added to those expectations. Unfortunately, it didn't work out as expelcted. Yes, Grace Paley is a unique teller of short stories. Some of her stories are so short that they are over before you have gotten to

know a character or what the story might be about. I simply couldn't find much to enjoy. The one aspect of her stories I did like was the repeat appearance of the character Faith across multiple stories. Unfortunately, except for Faith, I didn't feel like I got to know anyone. When the writer is also an artist, the art can accentuate the story. But sometimes there is just the art, and it has nothing to do with the story. That is Grace Paley for me, at least in this collection. I can recognize the art for what it is. I can even appreciate the art to some degree. The art, however, did not help the stories.

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## **Northpapers says**

I feel kind of like a sucker, giving Paley's second collection five stars.

I don't want to be this easily pleased. I made an effort. A few stories in, I was building a case for four or maybe even three stars.

Her customary political undertones were still there, along with her musical sentences, pitch-perfect dialogue, and wit. But I felt like the stories themselves, and the worldview that shaped them, had gotten heavier with time, more self-absorbed. I missed a certain lightness of touch that seemed to ring through *The Little Disturbances of Man*.

That lightness was certainly scarce. These are stories loaded with heavier concerns, but they more than bear it, and from "Faith in the Afternoon" on through to the final story, I was rapt. Paley is much wiser, disillusioned, and measured in this collection, but her humor rings clear, and her experiments with form and handling of detail all force a change in rhythm when I read them.

Characters from the early stories recur. Dottie Wasserman gets a mention. Faith, presumably Paley's stand-in, narrates numerous stories, and her sons and husbands and boyfriends drift in and out of conversation, although only her son Richard makes his presence feel concrete.

I feel like these stories are really part of a big novel, or they add up to a novel, or they're better than a novel. They're something bigger than each one, each collection. They're a world, a place of substance and grace and weight.

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## **Tania says**

This collection contains one of my all time favourite stories - Wants. It's effectively a flash, about 800 words, but reads so richly you don't notice Paley's economy. Also a very funny story in places (especially if you resonate with a narrator who can never check off everything on her To Do list.)

Accused by her ex-husband of having no wants, no desires, the narrator realizes that although she just fumbled along, raising children, living life day by day, she did indeed have wants. But her aspirations, although supposedly more domestic concerns, are about contributing to a better world for everyone, a wider benefit over personal interests. Meanwhile her husband's aspirations are for making a better world for himself. Just give him a fancy boat and he'll be happy and believe he's living a good life.

There are many great stories in this collection, although I didn't connect emotionally to some as strongly as others. Grace was a 10 star writer though, with a strong sense of style and the confidence to defy conventions in her art, just as she did in her life. The writing itself is deceptively simple. The language is conversational, chatting intimately in your ear. But within that she takes breathtaking leaps of logic, creates terrific images, conveys human absurdity, and every sentence is power-packed. It's an excellent collection for anyone who wants to get to know her work. The title alone is stellar.

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## Jessica says

I am here to tell you that I have never read Chekov, and I don't think I've ever read Grace Paley either. Hot damn.

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Okay, so now I've read some Grace Paley (and a little Chekov too, actually), and I'm not sure what I'd expected, but this wasn't it. I think what surprised me about these stories was that they were so *cool*. I don't mean measured and even and emotionally restrained, I mean *cool*, they were cool, they were COOL stories! I mean yeah, of course they're dated I guess, being as they were written in the sixties or whatever, but they're still pretty -- well, edgy, I'd say. Edgy, stylish -- not fancy stylish, but like, thrift-store dress that's unexpectedly tight in all the right places kind of stylish. Cool. I thought a lot of these stories were kind of sexy, in this weird way. I really liked the way she wrote about female sexuality, even though the context was inevitably depressing. These stories are pretty much all about poor single mothers, which I guess isn't much of a pitch, but they were very cool, fresh, weirdly fun stories. I'm sort of surprised I somehow hadn't read them before, since there's so much about them that's exactly the kind of thing that I like. They all take place in New York neighborhoods that I know well (in much later, less cool incarnations, of course), and at least one of them is about a social worker, and another one is about a long-distance runner! Weird, right?! I related really personally to some of the material, and appreciated the stories more than someone who didn't feel that probably would. Still, this is a good book of highly readable, cool short stories, and I'd recommend it to pretty much anyone.

I also have this Thing. That I want to say. Though I doubt most people I need to hear this will actually read it.

I know this is the kind of Thing people get really defensive about, so if you really feel like this doesn't apply to you, rest assured that you're probably not who I mean here. But some of you guys (mostly GUYS) need to take a hard, cold, sobering look at the first names on your bookshelves, and think seriously about why you read so few women writers. Chances are, you probably haven't really noticed this, but if you consider the issue, and you notice that it's true, I really do want you to stop and think about why that is.

There is no valid reason not to read women writers, but if you've been avoiding them unconsciously, don't beat yourself up about it. Lots of really intelligent people have this problem, and there's a deep prejudice against lady authors which even a lot of us ladies hold. I think this is the reason why Grace Paley's stories surprised me -- I was expecting something else, something less cool, because she's a Woman Writer with two capital Ws, and we're all scared those books are going to be like *Little Women* or something. Okay, I shouldn't say that, because I actually haven't read *Little Women*.... *Little Women* might be really fucking cool

and raw and smart and, uh, I don't know, robust? Virile? I don't know exactly what the stereotypes of women writers are, but they're too unacknowledged and extremely powerful, and it sucks. I mean, it really sucks. It's bad for women writers, and it's bad for all the readers who are ignorantly depriving themselves of really prime cut, top-shelf, unmissable literature.

Like, I am not judging you. I get it. But I am asking you to change. I remember when this guy I used to hang out with read Toni Morrison for the first time, and he was just shocked because her writing was nothing like how he'd expected. I bet this is a very common reaction to her. Toni Morrison's books are brutal and nasty and super intense and insane and frightening. But that's not what people who haven't read her are imagining, because her name is Toni-with-an-i and because she's BFFs with Oprah's Book Club.

But similarly, Oprah's Book Club isn't what a lot of people are imagining. Oprah made all those ladies read *The Road*. You might not relate to most of the material on her show (I don't), but Oprah is a serious person, and she's into real literature. Hey, and newsflash: women write real literature, and they don't just write stuff you need to be female to appreciate.

I think a lot of otherwise intelligent, thoughtful men -- and also many women -- have this unexamined impression that they wouldn't like most books by women. Where does this idea come from? I think it comes mostly from some profoundly misogynistic beliefs that pervade our culture. Maybe it's partly because women writers are more likely to write about women, and traditionally female concerns, and a lot of people (men and women alike) believe on some level that this is a less interesting and important than books that are primarily about men and traditionally male spheres. I think it's also because a lot of us (I speak for myself here, and I used to be more like this), hold very negative ideas about what women's writing is like. Maybe we are afraid that it will be weak prose, or that it will be boring, and probably the reason we think that is that because on some level we believe that women are weak and boring. But women are not like that -- okay, some are, I guess; but most of us are not, and when we are, it's not because we're women. And such is also the case with women writers.

HEY, has anyone else noticed that the profiles on here note the users' gender? I remember some guy in a feedback group a couple years ago saying he wanted to be able to sort users by gender, presumably so that he wouldn't have to be troubled by hysterical Jane Austen reviews. Did the site take him up on it? Because that is so awesome! It makes me love people!!!

But I digress. Dude. Seriously. Please confront your issues, and go read some girls.

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## **Marvin says**

Stories mostly about socialist-y wives and/or mothers in the NYC area that were kind of hit and miss for me but totally crush it when all cylinders are firing.

Highlights: a woman's view of love and infidelity as her son ages in "Distance"; crime and family and relationships in "Come On, Ye Sons Of Art"; a mother's reflections at a gathering of women and their children at a public park in "Faith in a Tree"; tragedy witnessed while watching boys play on the train in "Samuel"; discontent and infidelity and violence as a man forms a relationship with his neighbor in "The Burdened Man"; family born-into and family made in the title story; the brutally violent and unflinching collision of young men and a younger girl in "The Little Girl"; and storytelling and family and inevitability as a woman composes a story for her sick parent in "A Conversation With My Father."



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## Melanie says

What a strange collection of stories. This wasn't at all what I expected, although I'd always heard about Grace Paley in conjunction with others of my favorite writers (esp. Donald Barthelme). I don't know why I picked up this book today--I think it was a mention of her name in a *Bookforum* article that I read while I ate lunch and watched the snowstorm--but it was just right. I've been thinking about writing lately and about all of the not-writing I've been doing, and maybe this is just the kick in the ass I've needed. These stories make me feel like writing and storytelling are *important*, which is something I occasionally need to be reminded of.

Paley's writing is super-sharp and her characters are precise and real. It's jarring to discover that what she's really writing about, in this very exact, brutally clear way, is utter chaos and human messiness. Within the first five pages, I'd already put the book down twice--the second time, which I added as a GoodReads quote, in the story "Debts," with the sentence "There is a long time in me between knowing and telling," and the first time, in "Wants," because of this:

"He had had a habit throughout the twenty-seven years of making a narrow remark which, like a plumber's snake, could work its way through the ear down the throat, halfway to my heart. He would then disappear, leaving me choking with equipment. What I mean is, I sat down on the library steps and he went away."

My God, that's so simple but visceral! There are plenty of other moments like this throughout the collection, but it wasn't just the moments and turns of phrase that made it special; there's a coherent world view here that's unshakable and just heartbreaking and odd all at once. Read it, read it, read it. Seriously, read it.

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## Miryam says

this book was like meeting a stranger pal on the curb, having a heart-to-heart affirming that bastards are part of life then going about your business.

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## Kirsten says

Elizabeth bought me the old-school Virago edition of this collection published in the 60's. There's a little sticker inside the front cover that says 'From the collection of Angela Carter.' Totally awesome.

It's amazing what Paley can accomplish with such economy: absurdity, tragedy, sly comedy. She's also an amazing channeler of voices: New York comes alive as a raucous chorus. "Conversations With My Father," which I had read before, is still my favorite story in the collection, as she engages in two conversations - one with life, and one with art. Of the reoccurring characters, my favorites were Alexandra and Faith, both women who find themselves a bit at a loss in modern life, but who provide a nice counterpoint to one another in how they confront this rootlessness (or is it being too rooted?) Anyway, I don't think female writers of short, short fiction like Amy Hempel would be able to do what they do without Grace Paley.

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## Justin Jaeger says

I think it would be difficult to declare any book the "quintessential" New York book. In fact, I'm not sure I can even really fathom the number of books and stories I've read in my life that involve the city. Because of that, I think that it's best to call *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute* a splendid representative of the Big Apple. I'm an imperfect judge however. I've never visited, but it feels appropriate for me now to be able to review Grace Paley's collection of short stories as I travel to New York for the first time.

Her writing is frustrating at first. She weaves a story like an abstract poem at times. She ignores much punctuation and structure especially favoring the omission of dialogue markers. Eventually though, you warm to her style and you begin to physically hear the multi-layered voices of her characters. Her impressionistic verses then become the welcome subjective art that they are meant to be. Often reviewers will talk about an author's voice metaphorically, but when "voice" is used with Paley it is meant as a descriptor. In these stories, her exploration of New York voices is so varied and eccentric that it borders on genius.

Her work is not necessarily the kind of thing that will send me out after another one of her books, but it definitely moved me to admiration. I learned things about reading, writing, and other authors as I worked and thought my way through this. It's a difficult and sophisticated read, but worthwhile if you are a fan of the American short story.

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## Matthew says

Donald Barthelme once affectionately called her a troublemaker, but I don't know that it's strictly true.

I think she just understood that trouble was never trouble at all--trouble is just everything that actually matters (the blood and money stuff that comes with caring)--and that we could do with a lot more of it.

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## Derek says

It's not often that my enjoyment of a book flags from beginning to end as much as it did with Grace Paley's *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*. It's attributable, probably, to her unmistakable voice that tends to become a little laborious by the book's end. That is, the surprise and excitement wears away after the first few stories, and I'm left wanting a little more. They're bold, yes, but they also become a little samey.

I recognize this assessment is a little harsh, and probably unpopular. And I should note that there *were* things to enjoy in this book, namely her ability to capture the messiness of real communication - her phrasing is, at times, wonderfully idiosyncratic and poetic. But I think the extremely busy writing veered on distracting instead of profound. I also find myself only remembering her style and not so much her characters or her plots, which tend to become a little buried in the noise.

It's certainly not a bad book, but I think its successes lean a little too heavily on the stylized narrative, largely

at the cost of the other pieces required to make a successful short story.

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## Larry Bassett says

I love the title of this book and I am finding that I am also loving the author, Grace Paley. I feel like I have known Grace for a long time even though I am just recently rereading some of her short stories. I know of Grace as a peace activist in the Vietnam era. She was active in the War Resisters League, a pacifist organization that was and is still close to my heart.

*Enormous Changes at the Last Minute* was first published in 1974. Here are some snippets of what GR reviewers thought about this book.

I thought a lot of these stories were kind of sexy, in this weird way. I really liked the way she wrote about female sexuality, even though the context was inevitably depressing. These stories are pretty much all about poor single mothers, which I guess isn't much of a pitch, but they were very cool, fresh, weirdly fun stories.

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The language is conversational, chatting intimately in your ear. But within that she takes breathtaking leaps of logic, creates terrific images, conveys human absurdity, and every sentence is power-packed. It's an excellent collection for anyone who wants to get to know her work.

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Paley captures a very quickly changing New York - and America - with her mostly unwed mothers raised in socialist households and trying to raise good citizens in a Vietnam War era (only as distant background) urban life, complete with rising concerns on over-population, pollution, crime, the downslide of American education and all that the future might become in such an atmosphere

...

Grace Paley's stories are quirky, a little odd—the way she manipulates the language is a little out there, and I will always be fond of the puzzlement that comes over me when I'm reading her—especially her shorter work (two to four pages). These in particular had the feel of parables, surreal ones. Short but they manage to be meandering.

I enjoyed picking out these little bits of reviews that say so well what I am trying to think. It is better reading the words of Grace Paley than trying to find the words that adequately describe them. These reviewers have already done my work for me, leaving me to simply settle back and enjoy the stories. It would be worth your while going into a used book store and looking in the P's. You can read a story standing in the aisle and then, smiling to yourself, take the book home to a comfortable chair.

Like her first book of short stories, *The Little Disturbances of Man*, I give this one five stars. If you are lucky you might find her book *The Collected Stories* that brings together all three of her short story collections

under one cover. That is truly a book worth owning!

**I read this collection of short stories as a part of Grace Paley's book *The Collected Stories*. I am delighted to get Paley's three short story collections all in one binding.**

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### **A.C. Collins says**

It took me a couple stories to get into Paley's style - dialogue without quotations, frank, packed sentences. This collection is so fresh and funny and sad and serious, it has made me think a little more about what I want to say in my own fiction, to look at the world a little more widely and try, *try* to see it just as it is. Paley captures a very quickly changing New York - and America - with her mostly unwed mothers raised in socialist households and trying to raise good citizens in a Vietnam War era (only as distant background) urban life, complete with rising concerns on over-population, pollution, crime, the downslide of American education and all that the future might become in such an atmosphere, though the most recurring character, Faith, can't see the future. She can see only her own actions, her own needs, right now, often to the detriment of her small (father absent) children. And isn't that just the way life is.

Thank you, Grace Paley.

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### **Lee says**

In "Conversations with My Father," the narrator's father wants her to tell a simple story about simple people, like a story by de Maupassant, and she says, "I would like to try to tell such a story, if he means the kind that begins: 'There was a woman ...' followed by a plot, the absolute line between two points which I've always despised. Not for literary reasons, but because it takes all hope away. Everyone, real or invented, deserves the open destiny of life."

I loved the open destinies of most of these stories. Some will require multiple rereading to memorize funny lines. Literary jibbogs would deride the stories as "voicey" - but they're voices coming together - as the women singing in the story "Politics" - to secure a playground in an urban, sociopoliticized community. Deep POV, so you're always so immersed you're sometimes not sure what's up, who's who, which works when you wholly trust the recklessly careful, rhythmic, angular playfulness of the language: "Old bearded men walked by, thumbs linked behind their backs, all alike, the leftover army of the Lord."

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### **Simona Moschini says**

"Qualunque personaggio, vero o inventato, si merita un destino aperto nella vita."

Tra gli innumerevoli detrattori della trama (da Forster al nouveau roman a oggi), la Paley è forse l'unica la cui posizione consideri degna di rispetto e di una riflessione profonda.

Se si legge la citazione completa (dal racconto "Conversazione con mio padre" di questa raccolta) si capisce che la sua tesi non era letteraria ma esistenziale. E' una tesi che dice molto sull'autrice: libertà, libertà, questa ossessione made in Usa in nome della quale si giustifica di tutto, ma che chiaramente la Paley, quella che

conosciamo dalle sue opere, non ha mai inteso come libertà di prevaricare, semmai di spaziare, di comunicare, di amare.

E tuttavia, non mi convince. Credo, cioè, che la Paley confonda volontariamente la libertà dei suoi personaggi con la sua libertà di narratore di usare una voce e uno stile adatti al suo tempo e al suo luogo. E la sua voce è il correlativo letterario del dripping pittorico di Pollock. Secondo me.

Dico questo perché gli argomenti narratologici mi appassionano da anni e perché prima di farmi un'idea mia ho letto di tutto, per anni, su certe questioni (la trama in primis), scartando argomentazioni, altre sperimentandole, altre trovandole deboli.

Io sono e resto fermamente aristotelica, e questo lo devo non a letture del liceo (anche se, certo, il liceo, la scuola italiana e, in generale, la logica occidentale tutta sono modellate su Aristotele), ma più semplicemente a uno sceneggiatore italiano, Fabio Bonifacci, che nel suo blog ha teorizzato nel modo per me più convincente come chiunque voglia scrivere narrativa o sceneggiature sia obbligato a restare nell'ambito della poetica aristotelica. Poi può anche decidere di non farlo, chiaro. Così come può sperimentare all'infinito. Ma i due grandi mali che Bonifacci vede nel cinema e nella narrativa italiane attuali (le Non Storie e le Iperstorie) hanno molto a che fare con l'assenza totale di consapevolezza degli autori di cosa sia l'intreccio, e per sapere come costruire un intreccio bisogna sapere cosa sono la catarsi, il conflitto (interiore o esteriore poco importa).

In questo modello, il modello di Bonifacci, all'inizio di una storia la libertà dei personaggi è totale, tendente all'infinito. Poi però, se si vuole che la storia stia in piedi da sola e che i personaggi abbiano più consistenza di un budino, essi devono fare delle scelte. Giuste, sbagliate, aberranti, stupide. Fanno scelte, agiscono, si scontrano con altri personaggi. E' solo così che la storia va avanti e acquista credibilità.

Quali scelte? Quali azioni? Non tutte. Molte sono insignificanti, così come molti dialoghi che noi umani facciamo tutti i giorni ma che, riportati in una fiction, farebbero solo sbadigliare.

Il personaggio è interessante solo se fa scelte cruciali; scelte che mettono in crisi proprio lui, e non altri, scelte che lo avvicinano alla sua zona di pericolo e lo allontanano dalla sua zona di comfort. Ed ecco che, per via di queste scelte, la sua libertà si restringe. Non perché lo abbia deciso lo scrittore calcolatore o sadico. Perché la vita è fatta così, e l'arte per essere credibile deve imitare la vita, o meglio falsificarla per farla sembrare più vera del vero. Per cui, nel tempo T-10 del finale, non solo il personaggio deve avere subito qualche modifica (per colpa sua, delle sue scelte, del suo essere in vita e quindi soggetto alla scelta e all'errore), ma la sua libertà non è più la stessa dell'inizio T-0. Ha fatto scelte, dalle quali derivano conseguenze.

Ecco perché sentiamo a pelle quando un finale è buono: quando non è altro che la logica conseguenza obbligata delle scelte progressive dei personaggi (ovviamente anche Dio, il diavolo e la società possono essere personaggi, dipende da cosa decide lo scrittore).

Ed ecco perché le storie senza finale, a finale aperto o con un finale posticcio (lieto o tragico, fa lo stesso) appiccicato lì senza necessità, ci lasciano interdetti, e ci diciamo: "Embé?". Tipo quando per la fretta mangi il tofu da solo, senza né verdure saltate sale né pepe né salsa di soia e alla fine ti chiedi perché hai speso tutti quei soldi per mangiare una roba che non sapeva di niente.

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## Lucrezia says

"C'è un lungo spazio, in me, fra il sapere e il raccontare."

Dice la protagonista di Debiti, il secondo racconto presente nella raccolta, e mi pare che talvolta questo

spazio si espanda talmente che i significati vadano persi...

Mi spiace Grace incipit bellissimi in alcuni racconti, frasi che colpiscono e affondano, sagace humor ebraico non possono bastare, bisogna anche saperli miscelare bene, le basi ci sono ma c'è qualcosa che non quadra... Spero vada meglio la prossima volta :)

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