



The Complete Short Stories of James Purdy

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The publication of *The Complete Short Stories of James Purdy* is a literary event that marks the first time all of James Purdy's short stories—fifty-six in number, including seven drawn from his unpublished archives—have been collected in a single volume. As prolific as he was unclassifiable, James Purdy was considered one of the greatest—and most underappreciated—writers in America in the latter half of the twentieth century. Championed by writers as diverse as Dame Edith Sitwell, Gore Vidal, Paul Bowles, Tennessee Williams, Carl Van Vechten, John Cowper Powys, and Dorothy Parker, Purdy's vast body of work has heretofore been relegated to the avant-garde fringes of the American literary mainstream. His unique form and variety of style made the Ohio-born Purdy impossible to categorize in standard terms, though his unique, mercurial talent garnered him a following of loyal readers and made him—in the words of Susan Sontag—"one of the half dozen or so living American writers worth taking seriously." Purdy's journey to recognition came with as much outrage and condemnation as it did lavish praise and lasting admiration. Some early assessments even dismissed his work as that of a disturbed mind, while others acclaimed the very same work as healing and transformative. Purdy's fiction was considered so uniquely unsettling that his first book, *Don't Call Me by My Right Name*, a collection of short stories all reprinted in this edition, had to be printed privately in the United States in 1956, after first being published in England.

Best known for his novels *Malcolm*, *Cabot Wright Begins*, *Jeremy's Version*, and *Eustace Chisholm and the Works*, Purdy captured an America that was at once highly realistic and deeply symbolic, a landscape filled with social outcasts living in crisis and longing for love, characterized by his dark sense of humor and unflinching eye. Love, disillusionment, the collapse of the family, ecstatic longing, sharp inner pain, and shocking eruptions of violence pervade the lives of his characters in stories that anticipate both "David Lynch and *Desperate Housewives*" (*Guardian*). In "Color of Darkness," for example, a lonely child attempts to swallow his father's wedding ring; in "Eventide," the anguish of two sisters over the loss of their sons is deeply felt in the summer heat; and in the gothic horror of "Mr. Evening," a young man is hypnotized and imprisoned by a predatory old woman. These stories and many others, both haunting and hilarious, form a canvas of deep desperation and immanent sympathy, as Purdy narrates "the inexorable progress toward disaster in such a way that it's as satisfying and somehow life-affirming as progress toward a happy ending" (Jonathan Franzen).

It may have taken over fifty years, but American culture is finally in sync with James Purdy. As John Waters writes in his introduction, Purdy, far from the fringe, has "been dead center in the black little hearts of provocateur-hungry readers like myself right from the beginning."

The Complete Short Stories of James Purdy Details

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From Reader Review The Complete Short Stories of James Purdy for online ebook

Gila Gila says

John Waters' introduction to Purdy's anthology is perfection - 'a ten pound box of chocolates that you keep by your bed'. I'd read most of these stories before but it's satisfying to have them all in one place, and there are a few I'd never come across. Everything Waters says is dead (he'd leave it at that) on, especially "you can imagine a copy editor getting nervous", referring to Purdy's bizarre 1950something gothic southern gentleman language, and the acknowledgement of a thread of ugly misogyny that threads its way through many of these pieces. Just putting that unfortunate truth out there, right in front, eases the way. Yes, he was a master teller of tales, and yes, he had a sniping, vicious little pen when aimed at some of his female characters, particularly matronly/maternal women. But his voice is singular, and for those of us with a taste for dark medicine, his writing not to be missed. I can't help but think of Withnail's "We are indeed drifting into the arena of the unwell." (If you're going to try a Purdy novel, I'd suggest starting with *In a Shallow Grave*. That, at least, was where I first fell in).

Khaleed Ouafi-Zimmermann says

Literally spellbinding, a must-read book by an emblematic american author.

Richard says

Some dark. Some twisted. Some mundane. Some totally nuts. Pie sex! Creepy sex! Sexy creepiness! So much here, I knew it was impossible to love it all, but I did love some of it quite a bit, especially the moments when the stories veered slightly off the track and into the unreal.

Mel says

I am so glad I found Purdy. What a revelation. Why had I not heard of this author? Even if I only gave this 4 stars it still made my best reads list. Such weird stories but so delightful in their unique vocabulary and descriptions. The characters are not what you would expect. The outcomes are not what you expect at all. Of course not all were winners (why it only got 4 stars) but who cares. This was a huge collection and you can't love 'em all. This also has a bonus introduction by John Waters which was hilarious and worth reading.

This collection is not for everyone. There are some very strange stories in here and some include sexual situations and sexual tension between unlikely partners. Some have a bit of man/man or man/boy love. The man/boy love seemed to me to be very romantic, poetic and beautiful. It had an almost innocent quality to it. It did not strike me as perverted in any way. Many of the stories are beautifully written but very sad and tragic.

A great collection but probably not for those easily offended.

This is the first Purdy I have ever read and I will be seeking out more.

Anima says

Eventide

"She walked over to the chair where Plumy was and laid her hand on her. Somehow the idea of George Watson's being dead so long and yet still being a baby a mother could love had a kind of perfect quality that she liked. She thought then, quietly and without shame, how nice it would be if Teeboy could also be perfect in death, so that he would belong to her in the same perfect way as George Watson belonged to Plumy. There was comfort in tending the grave of a dead son, whether he was killed in war or peace, and it was so difficult to tend the memory of a son who just went away and never came back. Yet somehow she knew as she looked at Plumy, somehow she would go on with the memory of Teeboy Jordan even though he still lived in the world.

As she stood there considering the lives of the two sons Teeboy Jordan and George Watson Jackson, the evening which had for some time been moving slowly into the house entered now as if in one great wave, bringing the small parlor into the heavy summer night until you would have believed daylight would never enter there again, the night was so black and secure."

Vit Babenco says

The book is a peculiar set of stories full of peculiar relationships: family life, lovers, loners, widows, grass widows, parents and children, siblings and a lot of strangers... And any simple life situation may suddenly seem to be weird...

She picked up a large palm straw fan from the table and fanned with angry movements the large patches of sweat and talcum powder on her immense meaty body. As Lafe watched her move the fan, he thought how much money had gone to keep her in food these seven peculiar years.

And so many characters may unexpectedly seem to be pitiful monsters and there are so many of those who are just sheep astray...

I have talked here tonight in the hope you would not hear, because if you didn't you might not so thoroughly disgust yourselves, and therefore me. But you have sat in exactly the rapport or lack of it which I expect from the human tadpole. You have been infinitely repulsive to me, and for that I thank you, because by being infinitely repulsive you have continued continuity and what more could any speaker ask.

One prefers to live one's own life, however strange it may seem to others.

Larry Bassett says

Think of *The Complete Stories of James Purdy* as a ten-pound box of poison chocolates you keep beside your bed – fairy tales for you twisted mind that should never be described to the innocent. Randomly select a perfectly perverted Purdy story and read it before you go to sleep and savor the hilarious moral damage and beautiful decay that will certainly follow in your dreams. James Purdy writes gracefully disquieting stories for the wicked and here they *all* are at last. Every single damned one of them!

So John Walker writes in the Introduction to this book. And so I begin it with serious second thoughts. I am attracted because this purports to be ALL of this author's short stories. Read this book and you have read them all. Since I have never read James Purdy, that seems just the way I would want it to be. I want to be swallowed up by this new (but dead) author. I anticipate based on several other books of short stories that I have read recently – Nine Stories by J.D. Salinger, The Dead Fish Museum by Charles D'Ambrosio and Where Are You Going Where Have You Been by Joyce Carol Oates – that I may be drawn into this collection. But I also hope that if I am devastated or disappointed, I will be able to draw up the courage to set aside the book temporarily or permanently. I am trying to cultivate a skill at putting down books I do not like unfinished. This is mostly in opposition to my prior history of feeling obligated to finish every book I start. We can change, right? I hope so.

This book is over 700 pages long. Pray for me! The Serenity Prayer would be just fine. “Higher power, grant me the serenity ...”

James Purdy died in 2009 at the age of 94. Since he is a new author for me, I first want to know at least a little about him, thinking that will help me understand his writing. I am not sure why I continue to think there is a connection between life and work but I do hang onto the notion even without much proof. Here is his NY Times obituary: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/14/boo...>

Mr. Purdy, whose view of American culture was not optimistic, seemed to regard rejection as a badge of honor. “I don’t think I’d like it if people liked me,” he told one interviewer. “I’d think that something had gone wrong.”

Seems like my kind of guy! The collection of short stories deserves to be called a Tome and, as such, may never be completely read from cover to cover. It is an impressive book that has challenged me to learn more about the evidently gay author and his work. I like that he challenges me in a way that makes me understand that I am in good company.

Given Purdy’s throwing of the gauntlet (“if people liked me”), I dare not respond with five stars. But I must hope that four is acceptable should I ever actually conclude this large heavy book on a serious subject. How do I love thee, James Purdy? Let me count the ways you discombobulate me!

Andrew Fairweather says

Rather than working on my schoolwork, I am reading James Purdy's 'Complete Short Stories', part gothic, part romance, part laugh out loud funny. 'You Reach for Your Hat' was a truly incredible introduction to the rest of Purdy's work, which taken as a whole demonstrates an eclectic ability. Some of the other earlier stuff like '63: Dream Palace' reminded me a little bit of O'Connor... kind of creepy stuff. Others like 'Mr. Evening' employ a macabre wit. On the bus to Philadelphia, I laughed out loud to 'Sleep Tight', where a little boy is convinced that he killed the sandman, who is actually a robber with a fatal gunshot wound.

There are definitely some recurring themes throughout his stories. Purdy is able to draw out this hazy sort of incestuous sexual drive no matter what or who he happens to be writing about (sometimes more overtly incestuous, sometimes more overtly sexual, oftentimes both...). Although many of his characters seem broken, there is a tenderness which feels shared not only by the characters themselves, but by the author with his characters—there is never a condescending moment. Rarer still, Purdy often writes about those who literary types often refer to as 'outsiders'... yet, Purdy's outsiders are not pawns to make social points or points in some childish transgressive constellation hastily woven to merely shock the reader. His characters are unresolved, and as a result, his stories and players have a depth which evades gimmick. Purdy writes with such confidence, so that no matter what he writes, there is this strange little 'Purdyness' about it, unmistakable. A recommendable book of short stories!

Jim Rayder says

This is the fourth time I've attempted to post a review. So I'll keep it short. Purdy is a singular and important writer but not for passive readers. Most of this collection demonstrates a range and insight that goes far beyond John Waters' (?) superficial intro, which plays up the freaky slant of a handful of stories. There is a smattering of pulpish gay tales and forgettable "magazine fiction", but on the whole a wide array of human problems--some unusual, some mundane--move, terrify, amuse or mystify, related with Purdy's unique vision of everyday American life as theater.

Ricky Carrigan says

These are some of the best short stories I've ever read. James Purdy employs a distinct American realism that I can only compare to George Saunders. He writes stories about people with problems, people living in the margins of society. I read James Purdy for the first time last year via a recommendation from a Jonathan Franzen essay. It (Eustace Chrisholm) was one of the 5 best books I read last year. It was an instant classic for me, and I believe an overlooked masterpiece. This complete set of his short-stories picks up right where Eustace left off. Purdy is the Greek chorus commenting on the cruelties of life, from the vantage point of a barstool. He deserves to be considered among the truly great American authors.

Phil Overeem says

Deeply, deeply weird. And probably more realistic than the average realist's work....

J.W.D. Nicolello says

If you have not yet read Purdy, do so. Otherwise, go fuck yourself. This stuff wipes the floor clean with whatever other collection you're considering slash reading at the moment. This is not the collection you buy out of obligation 'round X-Mas for a fair-weather friend - this is the stuff you share with the people you actually love. All one or two of them.

Kenny says

I stopped when he starts describing one of the Black characters (the elderly female one who takes in a Black actor who suddenly disappears one day) - as having "almond-shaped eyes." Big modern-day no-no. The stories feel repetitive, dreary, extremely claustrophobic, with a similar cast of characters - domestic characters who hold on to a lot of thinly veiled hostility, leading to some awkwardly tense confrontations that are mostly conducted through words. Nobody is really happy in these stories, and they don't make the reader feel anything except for "why am I reading this?" except to see possibly yourself in them. I was caught up in my initial enthusiasm for the anthologized "Cutting Edge," but I didn't realize that that is basically all he does over and over again, with slightly different characters in slightly different situations. The one big exception might be *Kitty Blue*, although that's because the consciousness is a cat - but again, he's housebound, and there's a lot of odd tension built around the fear of being caught by some outside menace and sold for entertainment purposes. It's all very creepy, very sketchy, very odd.

Robert says

An important collection--far more prolific than Burroughs and in many ways, creepier. It isn't the sad, closeted homosexuality that comes through as creepy, not at all; it's the recurring vignettes and scene elements--almost Kafka-esque. So glad I took on this book, what a glimpse into the difficult lives of gay men in the mid-20th century. In so many stories, there's almost a predictable archness and weird fixation on sweets, desserts and the like. There's a gossipy tone to many of the stories as well as a stilted strangeness and an obsession with shining a light on African-American culture. Purdy identified strongly with the marginalized lives of black Americans, their quiet poverty. Many were shocked to find out he was caucasian. Here is a writer largely ignored in his lifetime, but a true pioneer for social justice and unlike any writer I've come across.

Lawrence says

A few were so unique and so good...some were so depressing....
