



The Collected Stories

Richard Yates, Richard Russo (Introduction)

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Richard Yates was acclaimed as one of the most powerful, compassionate and accomplished writers of America's post-war generation. Whether addressing the smothered desire of suburban housewives, the white-collar despair of Manhattan office workers or the heartbreak of a single mother with artistic pretensions, Yates ruthlessly examines the hopes and disappointments of ordinary people with empathy and humour.

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The Collected Stories Details

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From Reader Review The Collected Stories for online ebook

kwmichael02 goes AWOL says

An amazing and great book. A collection of stories that are simply extraordinary, sometimes with a volatile plot and a lot of complex ones.

Philippe Malzieu says

I did not know Richard Yates before finding this book in a bookseller in Provence. This short novels are a true happiness. Mad Men atmosphere with frigid blonde women and neurotic men.

It is perfectly written. For a lover of American literature it is the missing link between Tennessee William and Raymond Carver. A true discovery.

Angela Meyer says

*Adapted from a 2010 review on my blog <http://literaryminded.com.au>

When a man is fired from his job in the story ‘A Glutton for Punishment’, he realises he has enjoyed the failures in his life. The character in this – like many of the other characters in Richard Yates’ Collected Stories – runs over a conversation in his head, with his wife, before the actual conversation takes place. Reading this book is having a conversation with failure – your own projected shortcomings (gone over in your head), the misfires of your past, and the failures of everybody around you (including those who fail to perceive said failures).

Yates is often called a ‘depressing’ writer, but most of these stories are as equally humorous as they are sad. ‘The Best of Everything’ is about a couple on the day before they wed. Revealed to the reader are their niggling doubts – all the things we know will become stalwart issues in their marriage, itches turning to reddened sores – such as the way the man says ‘terlet’ for toilet; the way he needs his mates; and the way he doesn’t notice her new negligee. It’s humorous because anyone who has been in any kind of romantic relationship will recognise the compromises, and will smile at their depiction. It’s sad for much the same reason – because these unfortunate perceptions ring true.

Another joy of these stories is Yates’ charming, unencumbered (very American) prose. Unlike a work like The Catcher in the Rye, the language doesn’t feel dated, here, but drags you back a few decades while simultaneously making you realise how much is the same (in intimate human relationships). Even Yates’ later stories (none are actually dated here, which is a tad annoying) have this element of ‘politeness’ – a façade of ‘getting along’ when there is oh so much bubbling beneath the surface. Many of the characters do seem resolved to their fates, despite moments of piercing aloneness, such as the characters in the tuberculosis ward in ‘No Pain Whatsoever’; or Ken, in ‘A Really Good Jazz Piano’ – who accepts the fact he is perpetually over-eager and physically awkward.

There are a couple of stories set in the TB ward. Yates himself spent time in one after the war. Other settings

include domestic spaces, offices, military training facilities and war zones (though combat is not explored). The stories are set mainly in the state of New York – the city and its affluent suburbs; London; and LA. The LA story ‘Saying Goodbye to Sally’ is another one of my favourites, and all because of this:

‘By the time Jack had taken to drinking heavily and not writing much – not even doing much of the anonymous, badly paid hackwork that had provided his income for years, though he still managed to do enough of that to meet alimony payments – and he had begun to see himself, not without a certain literary satisfaction, as a tragic figure.

‘His two small daughters frequently came in from the country to spend weekends with him, always wearing fresh, bright clothes that were quick to wilt and get dirty in the damp and grime of his terrible home, and one day the younger girl announced in tears that she wouldn’t take showers there anymore because of the cockroaches in the shower stall. At last, after he’d swatted and flushed away every cockroach in sight, and after a lot of coaxing, she said she guessed it would be okay if she kept her eyes shut – and the thought of her standing blind in there behind the mildewed plastic curtain, hurrying, trying not to shift her feet near the treacherously swarming drain as she soaped and rinsed herself, made him weak with remorse.’

Some of the stories are from the point of view of children, such as ‘Doctor Jack-O-Lantern’, where a disadvantaged, lonely new kid, Vinny, both seeks and pushes away the care his teacher bestows upon him. Her caring is so alien and difficult for him it causes him to act out. It’s incredibly moving (as most of them are) and so skillfully rendered – you’re right there in the microcosm of this classroom with its smells, strange intimacies and dangers.

In fact, one of Yates’ biggest strengths is the way he gets you in so close to the characters – so close you can hear their thoughts and plans and see their hearts ticking – yet simultaneously at a distance so that you may see how they are perceived by others. Yates suggests both compassion and pity through this kind of writing – and not just for the characters on the page, but for the person sitting next to you, and even for your own stupid, small (and often joyous) existence.

I love this book. I have talked about it to everyone as I’ve been reading it. I found all my friends in it. I found myself, uncomfortably, romantically, sadly, truthfully, in it.

Sally says to Jack in ‘Saying Goodbye to Sally’: ‘Why don’t you just come over here so we can sort of fall all over each other.’

It’s a book to sort of fall all over... again and again.

Tim says

There is some fantastic writing here, complex stories, subtle touches, and very intelligent writing. But it can be a bit of a slog at times – not due to poor quality, but because of the sad, painful nature of most of Yates’s stories. The author was a bipolar alcoholic who smoked 5 packs a day, yet somehow managed to live to around 70. He was twice divorced, and he probably was deeply familiar with the emotional dislocation and personal struggles that he writes about in his stories. A sour brew at times, but a good one, even if it leaves the reader without a sense of renewed faith.

The losers he wrote about were primarily middle class New York men, men who were fighting losing battles

in the workplace and on the home front, caught in failing relationships, and looking to the bottle and some improbable dreams to carry them thru. There are also a couple of stories that focus on lonely boys (such as the superb "Doctor Jack-o-Lantern", about a young Brooklynite sent to live with his aunt and uncle in the suburbs). Although the women in these stories often come across as bitchy and capricious, they also appear full and complex. "Evening on the Cote d'Azur" is a painfully believable tale of a lonely, adulterous wife and her arrogant prick of a seducer, and is practically a work of feminism.

Yates took a hard look at people on the margins of respectability – such as floundering artists. In "Joseph, I'm So Tired" a boy deals with his mother's flaky, artistic way of life, and in "Builders" a deluded cab driver spends his hard-earned pay hiring a young, cynical writer to help him write some corny stories focusing on a tough but warm-hearted cabbie. In "A Really Good Jazz Piano" a couple of rich young (white) wastrels, drinking their way thru Europe, come across an Afro-American jazzman and humiliate him because he has the gall to try and promote his career. That one really had some teeth. Several stories focus on life in a tuberculosis ward – Yates apparently had a bout with TB but came thru all right – and these can be both moving and depressing, as grown men fight to have a little fun and maintain a little respectability as they deal with the formerly deadly disease.

There are stories from two books here: all of *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness*, an excellent collection, seven from *Liars in Love* (not as impressive) and nine uncollected pieces. Here are a few more that I liked: "The Best of Everything", about a young working class couple who are about to get married, yet neither of them has any real maturity – the guy still wants to hang out with his buddies, and the girl has silly, romantic ideals. "Jody Rolled the Bones" centering on a tough, cold, but ultimately decent drill sergeant. His devotion to duty ultimately intimidates the lieutenant above him, who sends him packing. "Regards at Home" is about a young guy who is struggling with his wife and with general dissatisfaction. He comes across a friend who, as it turns out, is far more unhappy than he is, and admires him a great deal.

Yates was an artist who saw the weaknesses in our relationships and workplaces and hearts, saw the loneliness and unhappiness, and built these observations into some interesting stories. While I enjoyed reading them, it would be with a little trepidation that I would pick up a Yates book again (although I do want to read *Revolution Road*) because I know I would step into a sad world that very closely resembles our own. If these are not cautionary tales, and they do not appear to be, then Yates is primarily a brilliant pessimist, pointing out the irreparable flaws of life in this world. Nonetheless, his best stories are honest and moving.

Jen says

Second time around, and I've changed my rating from four to five stars. I adore Richard Yates (and am crazy-late to the Yates party). Like some others, I think he is to the 1950s what F. Scott Fitzgerald was to the 1920s, and in a similar style of realism. Awesome stuff. If you, too, are new to Yates, I recommend starting with *Revolutionary Road*.

I decided to read only the stories from the book *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness*, so I'd have something wonderful to return to and to experience one complete book as it was originally published. I read each story in order,

one kind of loneliness per evening. While I prefer his novels, I generally—though not without exception—prefer novels to short stories to sink my teeth into. Compared to other authors, this is a four or five star book; compared to Yates's novels, it only comes in at 3.5 stars. While this is an unfair ranking due to his sheer superiority as an author, the stories lack the depth of characters he gives us elsewhere.

Kimberly Faith says

I identify so deeply with the writing of Richard Yates and am ashamed to just now read his collected stories. Sure, I've read many of them in anthologies and of course Easter Parade and Revolutionary Road. To read the stories is to admit that Yates drew the bulk of his material from his life experience: World War II, tuberculosis, Hollywood screenwriting, failed marriages, and a dash of current events.

"Oh, Joseph, I'm So Tired" remains one of my favorite stories of all time with its frustrated sculptor mother whose pride causes her to say hateful things and embarrass her children who hold fast to their sense of imagination for hope.

"Saying Goodbye to Sally" is an homage to Yates time in Hollywood. He compares his adventures to those of F. Scott Fitzgerald (fun for Fitzgerald nuts like me). From his salty-hut of a writing studio by Malibu beach to the drama of Beverly Hills and the glamour of expensive hotel-bar cocktails after a day of work, he makes me miss LA only I know that it is his LA and not a shade close to the one I had.

The collection has a wonderful introduction by Richard Russo, a writer clearly inspired by Yates. In the introduction, Russo recalls that his former student at the Iowa Writer's Workshop, John McNally, collected used copies of Yates books so that he could hand them to anyone who hadn't discovered what a terrific writer he was yet. I find this charming and funny as Yates is brilliant but certainly not for everyone. His greatest gifts are his keen observation and his ability to humiliate his characters. He will not look away from a character's worst suffering. And, the suffering is almost always sourced from loneliness and the variant directions of trouble that one feeling can push us towards.

And little did I know until now, that Yates died not too far from me in Alabama when I was ten-years-old. He'd been teaching while in poor health at the University of Alabama - Tuscaloosa. I like to imagine that all those childhood trips to see Bama games in Tuscaloosa also held the sight of an aged Richard Yates passing me by. I doubt it but it's a nice thought. One last anecdote before quotes is that in college my mom took an active interest in what I was reading. She put down her pot boilers and was floored by books like The Bell Jar and stories by Harold Brodkey. Sylvia Plath considered her book a pot boiler and while it may be overly modified for my now MFA-critic self, it still holds a dear place for me. I doubt my mom admitted her new favorite reading to her P.T.A friends (she was the President) but it's remarkable how many women of her time looked for mystery novels less out of their craving for the macabre but their fear of how nuanced realism would make them feel. I have friends to this day that I'm sure my writing and others writing depresses. I can't imagine not being able to witness. I didn't realize until a bit after the time of my mom's reading my library that she wasn't just trying to be a friend to me but she was truly marveling over what she had missed by denying her own curiosities for fear of being defined by them.

Below are favorite quotes culled from "The Collected Stories" but there are so many more I would have shared were it not for space and not boring you:

"She never seemed to lose her temper, but it would almost have been better if she did, for it was the flat, dry,

passionless redundancies of her scolding that got everybody down."

From "Fun with a Stranger"

I love his sense of self depreciation here -

"Writers who write about writers can easily bring on the worst kind of literary miscarriage; everybody knows that. Start a story off with "Craig crushed out his cigarette and lunged for the typewriter," and there isn't an editor in the United States who'll feel like reading your next sentence. So don't worry: this is going to be a straight, no-nonsense piece of fiction about a cabdriver, a movie star, and an eminent child psychologist, and that's a promise. But you'll have to be patient for a minute, because there's going to be a writer in it too. I won't call him "Craig," and I can guarantee that he won't get away with being the only Sensitive Person among the characters, but we're going to be stuck with him right along and you'd better count on his being as awkward and obtrusive as writers nearly always are, in fiction or in life."

From "Builders"

Edith talking about the sound of NYC -

"I don't mean just the loud noises," she said, "like the siren going by just now, or those car doors slamming, or all the laughing and shouting down the street; that's just close-up stuff. I'm talking about something else. Because you see there are millions and millions of people in New York--more people than you can possibly imagine, ever--and most of them are doing something that makes sound. Maybe talking, or playing the radio, maybe closing doors, maybe putting their forks down on their plates if they're having dinner, or dropping their shoes if they're going to bed--and because there are so many of them, all those little sounds add up and come together in a kind of hum. But it's so faint--so very, very faint--that you can't hear it unless you listen very carefully for a long time."

And referenced again in the last sentence -

"We would probably never see Bart again--or if we ever did, he would probably not want to see us. But our mother was ours: we were hers; and we lived with that knowledge as we lay listening for the faint, faint sound of millions."

From "Oh, Joseph, I'm So Tired." That last sentence will always make me gasp!

"She was a handsome woman, blond, sturdy, and still young, with a full-throated laugh for anything she found absurd, and this wasn't the life she had planned for herself at all."

From "Trying Out for the Race"

"It often seemed to Elizabeth that the best part of the day was when she was alone at last, curled up on the sofa with a drink, with her spike-heeled shoes cast off and tumbled on the carpet. Perhaps a sense of well-earned peace like this was the best part of life itself, the part that made all the rest endurable. But she had always tried to know enough not to kid herself--self-deception was an illness--and so after a couple of drinks she was willing to acknowledge the real nature of those evenings alone: she was waiting for the telephone to ring."

From "Trying Out for the Race"

"I loved the girl who'd wanted to tell me all about "the theater," and the girl who'd stood calm and shy in the thunderclap of applause that followed her scene from *Dream Girl*. I didn't much like the dependable typist at Botany Mills, or the grudging potato peeler, or the slow, tired woman who frowned over the ironing board to prove how poor we were. And I didn't want to be married to anyone, ever, who said things like, "Oh, you can take care of what?"

From "Regards at Home"

Tim says

This book kicked my ass. I was reading it while it was cold, and several of the stories use cold as part of the feeling, and I was reading it during some serious emotional turmoil, and much of the book deals with emotional turmoil, but usually subdued, quiet turmoil, boiling beneath the surface and coming out in the stupid little ways it usually does in real life. This guy knew how to capture the embarrassing feelings of futility and shame and hyper self-awareness that I'm scared of and hate feeling. But I couldn't stop. It was so good. Sometimes I could only read 5 pages at a time because it was too close to home.

Andrew says

Richard Yates was a man of my Dad's generation, a group of anxious men too young to qualify for the Greatest Generation and too old to be hippies. And damn could he write about that generation. Yates' world is full of rich, humane portraits of whole classes of people I've never met, drunk World War II vets and blue collar Jersey housewives in the '40s and Depression-era New York street kids.

And yet, unlike his contemporary Updike, Yates was never a flashy writer. His turns of phrase aren't especially witty and I don't find myself reeling at his technique. Instead, he just relied on a remarkable ear for dialogue and a deep feeling for the unexpressed desires of the people around him, a little like the sort of thing Cassavetes was doing in his films a little later.

There are a great many recurring elements in Yates' stories... not like motifs, more like just recycled ideas. You feel like he only had so many stories in him, and he had to borrow from his other stories from time to time. In a less talented writer this would be a dealbreaker, but with this man, it's just a minor annoyance.

Bojan Gacic says

The short comment only regards "The Uncollected Stories"

Returning to Yates is both pleasure and a privilege. A collection of nine stories, discovered at James Madison University, bears no novelties, but reaffirm why we enjoy the painful exactness of his prose. As the most stifled and hidden American novelist he further establishes himself as a supreme chronicler of human disappointment.

Stephen Curran says

This is the first time I've read anything by Richard Yates since I finished Blake Bailey's astonishing biography of the author, and I'm amazed anew at how such a chaotic life could produce such balanced and beautiful pieces of fiction. The first two books collected here - 'Eleven Kinds of Loneliness' and 'Liars in Love' - are perfectly crafted and get better and with each reread. The uncollected works that make up the final third are slightly less successful, ending occasionally with flourishes that seem too authorly and contrived, but they're still more compelling than the work of most other writers. What a shame that he

couldn't produce more.

Kilean says

Revisiting this and good gracious and lord have mercy help my day over the fence, man, these stories are full of sentences packing a bevy of emotion and clarity and pulse. Yates had a rhythm. Sad as hell, but he writes like someone that's alive and knows what it sounds like when people actually talk to one another. Check out The B.A.R. Man and pay close attention to the first few paragraphs and what you learn about the man in question. Algren's short stories somehow led me, back in the day, to this dude, and I'll never stop visiting this collection. I don't give a hard fart about where literature or fiction is going, there's gold here.

Mary says

Yates makes my soul weep.

Miriam says

I hope Richard Yates and Dorothy Parker got to have a good drink together.

I enjoyed these bitter little offerings. Lots of tuberculosis hospitals, war stories, and urban professionals and dissatisfied wives. The characters are well-drawn and vivid, the dialogue feels real, and I feel like I understand. These characters are horrible and human. They're petty and shallow and ambitious and sad and complicated and hurting and hopeful and messy inside. But the whole thing comes off beautifully precise. He hates people but they're all the people we're going to get. Might as well get to know them.

"The Comptroller and the Wild Wind" resonated with me right around now: grabbing a woman to reassert damaged masculinity. It's carefully written and sympathetic to her perspective. It's not OK, but that doesn't mean it doesn't happen. At least he holds up a mirror to that type of entitlement and grasping for meaning and expecting a woman to supply it. There's lots to dig through here.

Romy says

Story: This book brings together stories that were published in Eleven Kinds of Loneliness and Liars in Love, as well as several previously unpublished stories. Almost without an exception, each of these stories features one of the following: struggling writers, tuberculosis, the army, siblings, and cheating husbands and wives.

Opinion: I find it hard to say anything meaningful about Yates, because anything I do say will never live up to what this man has written. If you've read Revolutionary Road (and if you haven't, you should be right now) you know what's in store for you: sadness, stories that betray your sense of hope, characters who will break your heart.

From my plot description you probably get the impression that the settings and characters are repetitive, but that's where the magic lies. Even though several stories take place in a TB ward full of sick men, they all paint a different picture. The only thing they have in common is how incredibly depressing they are, and when a book can evoke that much emotion, it's golden.

Marcos says

“The Collected Stories of Richard Yates”—A staggering and wonderful story collection about what it means to be human in postwar 1950s suburbia and beyond. The first segment, selections from Yates’s “Eleven Kinds of Loneliness” are the highlights. His stories are cleanly written, without any pretenses, and quite honestly unflinching about the human condition’s desire to be happy; though unhappiness and misery are always going to be in existence. His characters from the “Eleven Kinds of Loneliness” selections are human, and often remind you of loveable losers or people you might have met somewhere that are often portrayed as sad sack, lonely individuals who make us look away; yet, Mr. Yates forces us to peer into their lives.

Notable selections so far include “Dr. Jack O’Lantern”, the first story, about Vinny, an inner-city orphan who is temporarily assigned to attend public school at a suburban neighborhood in Westchester County. Vinny’s attempt to mask his Brooklyn accent and social awkwardness by attempting to tell his classmates during a show and tell session that he saw a film version of “Jekyll and Hyde” by saying “Jack O’Lantern and Mr. Hyde” turns out to be a brutal session in which leads him to being bullied by two classmates who clearly do not appreciate him at their school. Their teacher, Miss Price is a reminder of teachers we once had who often looked away and ignored their social responsibilities for all students, out of their own shame and biased notions about their own prejudices. She’s not very nice. She’s quite condescending.

“Fun With A Stranger” is also about another teacher—the strict and crusty Miss Snell who is hated and feared by her students and her attempt to show them a little levity by buying them Christmas erasers as Christmas gift. Unfortunately, her students realize she has done this out of her own social awkwardness, and realize it is her own inability to relate to her kids is why she is so hated.

“A Really Good Jazz Piano” is the masterpiece of the segment. It’s about two friends, handsome Carson, and hairy and fat loser Ken. They’re both American expatriates wandering about in Italy, and Carson is a playboy: wealthy and sexy and all women are attracted to his swagger. Ken is fat, smelly, and can’t find a girlfriend. He also is studying purposely at the Sorbonne so he can stay in Europe longer to spend time with Carson. Yates explains to us that it is a matter of luck and of birth as to how some individuals are luckier than others; while some individuals in society have it more difficult than others, especially African-Americans of the time. Ken and Carson encounter their friend, Sid a jazz pianist at a cabaret. Educated and talented, Carson becomes enraged when he notices Sid attempting to get a Vegas booking with a producer by pandering to him in “black colloquialism”...however, he doesn’t realize that because of the segregated 1950s, Sid still has to pander.

If you are a fan of Updike, Oates, Cheever, Chekhov: This is a fantastic and bleak collection at the same time.
