



## The Stories of Breece D'J Pancake

*Breece D'J Pancake , James Alan McPherson (Forward) , Andre Dubus III (New Afterword)*

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Breece D'J Pancake cut short a remarkably promising career when he took his own life in 1979 at the age of 26. In 1983 Little, Brown and Company's posthumous publication of this book electrified the literary world with a force that still resounds across two decades. A collection of stories that depict the world of Pancake's native rural West Virginia with astonishing power and grace, *The Stories of Breece D'J Pancake* has remained continuously in print and is a perennial favorite among aspiring writers, participants in creative writing programs, and students of contemporary American fiction. "Trilobites", the first of Pancake's stories to be published in The Atlantic, elicited an extraordinary immediate response from readers and continues to be widely anthologized.

## The Stories of Breece D'J Pancake Details

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## From Reader Review The Stories of Breece D'J Pancake for online ebook

Μαρ?α Γεωργ?δου says

Απ? τα βιβλ?α που διαβ?ζοντ?ς τα καταλαβα?νω ?τι (πρ?πει να) ε?ναι πολ? καλ? αλλ? εμ?να δεν με τραβ?νε ιδια?τερα λ?γω ε?τε θεματολογ?ας ε?τε ?φους. Στη συγκεκριμ?νη περ?πτωση το ?φος μου ?ρεσε πολ?, αλλ? δεν με προσ?λκυσε το θ?μα. Δυτικ? Βιρτζ?νια, αγρ?τες και εργ?τες σε ορυχε?α, δ?σκολη ζω? που σκληραγ?γησε και σκλ?ρυνε τους ανθρ?πους, ατμ?σφαιρα βγαλμ?νη απ? country μουσικ? ? και απ? καουμπ?ικη ταιν?α και κ?τι απ? τον κ?σμο του Μπουκ?φσκι. Η μετ?φραση εξαιρετικ?, ειδικ? αν λ?βει κανε?ς υπ?ψη του τη δυσκολ?α του εγχειρ?ματος λ?γω της συχν?ς χρ?σης τοπικ?ν ιδιωματισμ?ν.

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**Bridget Hoida says**

Ever buy a book for the poem on the first, unnumbered, page because the poem is so spot on you can hardly stand it? And you didn't have a pen or a big enough scrap of paper or the time to kneel in the aisle of the store and scribble the first line and maybe perhaps the author? And although Professor Dane taught you well and with certainty how to lift a page from any book, including those in fancy temperature controlled archival rooms--like the Huntington and the Bancroft and the Getty--you resist and buy the whole damn thing, in hardcover, even though you are fairly sure no one is watching, and even if they were with some spit and a string you could lift it anyhow. So you buy it outright and tote it through the city. Even though your walk is long and the Santa Anas are blowing hot and your bag is already bursting with books you haven't yet read, and are supposed to, and most likely will not get to. You buy it and forget about it. You buy it and shelve it with the others. And then one day, when the very same winds are blowing hot and nasty you recall the poem and search out the book only the poem isn't in there anymore. Someone tore it out. Without class. Without style or skill. With jagged edges. So you flip through the book hoping it's folded in half and tucked neatly inside and that's when the words start and draw you in and you realize the poem was a piece of crap written by a two bit hack, but this book...

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**Cosimo says**

**Gli scorpioni non ritornano**

“Mi alzo. Passerò la notte a casa. Devo chiudere gli occhi nel Michigan, forse anche in Germania o in Cina, non lo so ancora, cammino ma non ho paura. Sento che la mia paura si allontana in cerchi concentrici attraverso il tempo, per un milione di anni”.

Questi racconti vivono di un'arida aderenza con le cose, con la materia e con la natura; sono cantati da un'anima fertile e ribelle, ripudiata nella razionalità e nel senso, composti in una prosa irrevocabile e stilisticamente autentica. La sostanza cosciente dei personaggi è formata da malinconie, sogni defunti, lutti, ansie, paure e frustrazioni, in un groviglio polveroso e inutile che diventa parola fossile, ossa e ferita, carbone, maledizione e preghiera. Pancake attraversa le strade, con i camion e la ruggine, il vento secco e le miniere e abita le stanze, le fattorie e i paesaggi, con uomini e donne in una desolazione selvaggia, fatta di

campi, monti, boschi, i bar, le roulotte e i porti, e poi scoiattoli, serpenti, volpi, vespe, cavalli, lupi, paludi, laghi, notti e famiglie; la sua voce convive con questi elementi dentro una tragedia immotivata, una morte compresente e infinita, nella sua rumorosa angoscia. Lo scrittore ha un'intonazione biblica ed è soggetto ad una introspezione dolorosa e sorda, fino all'isolamento; le sue storie sono generate dall'incontro tra violenza cieca, atemporale e immobile e fuga poetica nella grazia e nel ricordo, nella silenziosa e mistica solitudine della natura, in un orizzonte di fraterna misericordia e di rassegnata incomunicabilità. Figlio di un minatore e di una bibliotecaria, insegnante di lettere in un'accademia militare, cacciatore e pescatore, fu travolto da una vita di sofferenza e lutto, arrendendosi al tramonto dell'amore possibile, alla depressione, al perfezionismo formale, all'infelicità. I racconti di Trilobiti eleggono rabbia e disperazione a inconsapevoli fondamenti e ineludibili compagni e discendono i fiumi dei grandi narratori americani, Hemingway e Flannery O'Connor, consegnando ballate tristi e sconsolate, di aperta rinuncia al vivere, di inesorabile decadenza: un universo rurale e infelice immaginato e narrato da un dio assente, da un padre demente o folle, da un fratello morto da eroe. Unici interlocutori, scomparsi e per sempre inaccessibili.

“Il cielo è blu scuro e la nebbia è un fumo freddo che rimane basso sul terreno. In questa prima traccia di buio le mie mani sembrano azzurre, ma non fredde; cose così diventano fredde prima o poi, ma per ora la mia mano è calda”.

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## **Ian says**

I'm normally a fast reader, and the first story in this collection straight away got my attention and caused me to read on quickly. On reaching the end, I had the distinct feeling I had missed something, and I went back and read it again, taking my time a bit more. That's one of the features of this collection. The stories really have to be read slowly to be properly appreciated. Even at that, I'm not sure I fully understood them, but for what they're worth my impressions are below.

Breece Pancake was born in 1952, committed suicide in 1979, and was a native of West Virginia. The context of time and place is important to these stories, almost all of which feature male characters from rural West Virginia in the 60s and 70s. Panacke's characters work as farmers, miners, mechanics, truck drivers, etc. They go hunting and fishing, and they fight. In "First Day of Winter", an old man asks his son to go hunting with the admonition "Won't be Thansksgiving without wild game." In "The Scrapper", a bar and street brawler seems to almost consciously struggle against the affectionate feelings he is starting to develop towards his girlfriend. Meanwhile the story "Time and Again", packs a punch of the metaphorical kind.

I would have to describe this collection as one of the bleakest I have come across. Entrapment seems to be a common theme across a number of stories, especially in "A Room Forever", "The Salvation of Me", and "First Day of Winter". The title story "Trilobites" has a slightly different feel, but to say more would introduce spoilers. That story incorporates a search for fossils, and that touches on another common theme. Throughout the stories the main characters uncover bones and artefacts – mice skeletons; deer skeletons, human skulls from Indian burial grounds, and Indian arrowheads, underlining the connections that the lead characters feel for the land. A powerful set of stories, but each was written separately and I think they might work better read that way, rather than as a collection.

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## Kirk Smith says

My Thanks must go first to Melanie for suggesting this amazing book. Thank you for sharing this! The image of a fox on the cover was very misleading as I might have expected peaceful nature stories. A poor assumption, these stories are dark, violent, challenging, hopeful, tragic and just so damned good that I can't explain except to say these stories satisfy absolutely. There is buzzing energy as you hold the book, hot young blood pulses through it, its...Shit- Grit- and Mother Wit. I don't know what it is but in my hand it is some of the most powerful writing I have come across. The forward itself is wonderful and helps one see how important Breece's legacy is. He captures so much from the decade it was from and of his West Virginia homeland. The stories are so finely crafted, edited to perfection, bristling with sensations. I can not say enough about how he concludes his stories with just enough wiggle room that readers can twist it in their own way. One of his friends, John Casey says that in his writing there is "a bending of violence into gentleness." Perfect pitch.

I like to think that the raw and savage power in these stories came from Breece Pancake's desire to consume himself by attacking life with such passion and ferocity that he could not survive. A premonition. Enough for him to know to leave these perfect stories. Such a beautiful gift. God bless you for what you left us.

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## somuchreading says

Λοιπ'ν ?κου να δεις τ'ρα, αυτ? δεν το περ?μενα. Ναι μεν ιδια?τερη η περ?πτωση του Π?νκε?κ, ?λλωστε κ?θε προσωπικ?τητα της τ?χνης που πεθα?νει πριν της ?ρας της μας συναρπ?ζει, αλλ? δε μπορ? να πω πως η θεματολογ?α των διηγημ?των του ?ταν κ?τι που μου κ?ντρισε το ενδιαφ?ρον πριν ανο?ξω το βιβλ?ο.

?μως ο συγγραφ?ας μ?λλον δ?καια θεωρε?ται ?να μεγ?λο χαμ?νο ταλ?ντο. Τα διηγ?ματ? του ε?ναι απλ?, δεν κουρ?ζουν, αφηγ?νται ολοκληρωμ?νες, δυνατ?ς ιστορ?ες γ?ρω απ? τους χαρακτ?ρες τους. Χαρακτ?ρες που αδυνατο?ν να ξεφ?γουν απ? τη μοναξι? και τη μο?ρα τους, και που νι?θουν τα λεπτ?, παγωμ?να δ?χτυλα της απελπισ?ας π?νω τους. Που ψ?χνουν συνεχ?ς να βρουν απολιθ?ματα μ?σα στην αποστεωμ?νη τους καθημεριν?τητα.

Το?το δω δεν ε?ναι ?να χαρο?μενο βιβλ?ο. Η Δυτικ? Βιρτζ?νια, η αγροτι? της, το κυν?γι, ?νθρωποι που εργ?ζονται ?λη τους τη ζω? σε χειρονακτικ?ς εργασ?ες, που π?νουν, που σκοτ?νουν, που κυκλοφορο?ν στις ερημι?ς των περιγραφ?ν του Π?νκε?κ και στη μικρ? π?λη που επιν?ησε, το Ροκ Καμπ [που μου θ?μισε λιγ?κι τη μαυρ?λα του Καστλ Ροκ του Στ?βεν Κινγκ], αυτ? ε?ναι μερικ? απ? τα στοιχε?α των 12 διηγημ?των που απαρτ?ζουν τους Τριλοβ?τες.

Με τα Εν τω ξηρ? και Το κυν?γι της αλεπο?ς να ξεχωρ?ζουν, οι μικρ?ς ιστορ?ες του βιβλ?ου μεταδ?δουν ?μεσα κ?θε α?σθηση του κειμ?νου. Η μυρωδι? του καφ?, ο ?χος του φορτηγο? σε ?ναν αγροτικ? δρ?μο, η επαφ? εν?ς χεριο? με μια φωτογραφ?α, ?λα ξεπετ?γονται απ? το χαρτ?, η ?κφραση του Αμερικανο? συγγραφ?α μοι?ζει να ζωντανε?ει τις λεπτομ?ρειες του κειμ?νου και τα ?δια τα Αππαλ?χια στα οπο?α εκτυλ?σσονται τα διηγ?ματα.

Δ?καια τα 4\*/5 που θα του β?λω, ?σοι αγαπ?νε τις συλλογ?ς διηγημ?των νομ?ζω πως δε θα λαθ?ψουν αν δοκιμ?σουν τους Τριλοβ?τες.

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## Teresa says

I'm struggling with this review, just as I struggled with these stories -- not because they're difficult, despite the instances of jargon that aren't always clear from the context and that I came to feel were too inclusive -- but because most of the stories left me lukewarm. The descriptive language and some observations shine, but right now the only character I can bring to mind (even though I finished the book last night) is the first-person unreliable narrator of "Time and Again," which I read twice. It's the only one I wanted to read again, even though it's probably the simplest, most straightforward of the bunch.

I almost started off this review by apologizing to the book because it arrived from the library at an unusually busy time for me. I read most of the stories late at night when I might've been too tired, but I read that way quite a bit and if a story fires my imagination or captures my attention, when and how I read it is not usually an issue.

Perhaps I needed to read this with my short-story friend, Mikki, who recommended this book to me and gave it five stars. I'm sure she would've pointed out things I've missed -- though the symbolism in "The Mark" seems almost too obvious and "The Salvation of Me" seems autobiographical, adding interest to a story I might've otherwise found boring. Perhaps the overall style and content is not for me. Pancake has been compared to Hemingway and I struggle with him too.

The most interesting fact I read about the author *after* I finished this book is that he converted to Catholicism not long before his death, which was either suicide or accidental, at age 26. (He took the name "John" after his conversion, thus the initial J.) That left me wondering if any of his Catholicism might've crept into his later stories, though I can't recall anything that would lead me to that conclusion.

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## Nikos Tsentemeidis says

Ποτ' δεν μου ρεσαν ιδιαιτ'ρως τα διηγ'ματα. Αυτ' η περ'πτωση μ'ως ?ταν τελε'ως διαφορετικ?. Καθ'να απ' τα 12 διηγ'ματα ?ταν πλο'σιο σαν ?να μυθιστ'ρημα. Εξαιρετικ' ταλαντο'χος ο συγγραφ'ας, ο οπο'ος απ' την πρ'τη λ'ξη με ?βαζε στο κλ'μα της ιστορ'ας.

Μου θ'μισε σε αρκετ' σημει'α John Steinbeck. Κρ'μα που δεν ?ζησε περισσ'τερο, θα μπορο'σε να αφ'σει εποχ?. Αντιπροσωπευτικ' δε'γμα καλ'ς αμερικ'νικης λογοτεχν'ας, με την οπο'α αν και δεν ε'μαι ιδια'τερα εξοικειωμ'νος, ωστ'σο με συναρπ'ζει.

Πολ' προσεγμ'νη δουλει' απ' τις εκδ'σεις Μετα'χμιο. Για πρ'τη φορ' εντυπωσι'στηκα απ' τις σημει'σεις στο π'σω μ'ρος εν'ς βιβλ'ου - πλ'ρως κατατοπιστικ'ς και ενδιαφ'ρουσες. Θεωρ', τ'λος, ?τι η μετ'φραση ?ταν ?ριστη, αν και ?χοντας να κ'νει με ντ'πιους ιδιωματατισμο'ς.

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## Gabriele says

*Mi sono detto che B.D. Pancake sarebbe stato un grande scrittore nordeuropeo, se solo non fosse nato nel West Virginia. C'è così tanta desolazione nei suoi scritti, tanto senso di attaccamento alla natura che lo*

*circonda, tanto straniamento verso l'uomo e le relazioni che cerca di intessere, che Pancake, su in Islanda, avrebbe forse trovato la sua strada giusta.*

Pancake muore a 26 anni, suicida. Ci lascia 12 racconti, forse qualcosa in più nei suoi appunti. Cosa si può capire di un ragazzo che non è ancora un uomo formato leggendo solo questi 12 racconti? È facile cadere in un semplice elogio, in lodi anche sperticate - lo stesso editore mette un sottotitolo, *"I dodici racconti di un grande scrittore"*, e una pagina intera di recensioni positive per "avvertire" il lettore su cosa ha fra le mani -, e mi dico che probabilmente Breece Pancake l'avrebbe trovata la cosa peggiore da fare per una sua raccolta di racconti. C'è bisogno di un simile avvertimento, quando basta leggere le prime due pagine di *"Trilobiti"* per capire il valore di questi racconti? C'è bisogno di rimarcare la triste vita del suo autore, quando ogni singola pagina di questa raccolta descrive in maniera tanto reale tutto il suo vivere e il suo pensare?

Hemingway, Faulkner, Twain. Personalmente aggiungerei anche Carver, forse Yates, ma solo per le sensazioni suscitate. C'è una sottile linea che unisce la grande letteratura americana al modo di raccontare di Pancake, un modo che se da una parte è tipicamente americano (il West Virginia si respira in ogni pagina, Pancake non fa niente per allontanarsi dai luoghi in cui è cresciuto) dall'altro è più nordeuropeo, proprio nel momento in cui sono i grandi spazi, e la natura in generale, a reggere tutti i suoi racconti. Ogni qualvolta un personaggio compie un'azione, è verso le colline o i campi che spinge il suo sguardo. Ci si perde in mezzo a questi luoghi: Pancake sembra cercare e trovare tutte le risposte per i suoi protagonisti nella natura. Gli fa respirare la polvere, li fa immergere in campi coltivati a tabacco e grano, li spinge in boschi in cui scoiattoli e volpi non mancano, li fa approdare lungo fiumi e lungo ponti. Ed è da queste scene di contemplazione che nasce tutta la ricchezza dei racconti, una ricchezza che permette a chi ascolta di trovarsi fra le valli del West Virginia anche se il West Virginia non sa neanche come è fatto. E c'è un continuo senso di immobilità in *"Trilobiti"*: non ci sono grandi avvenimenti, tutto quello che doveva accadere è già stato, e se qualcosa deve accadere durante il racconto allora Pancake ne allude sottilmente - ora c'è solo il protagonista e i suoi pensieri, immersi nella natura, ed è di questo che vuole raccontarci. È una ricchezza fatta di frasi brevi, semplici nella costruzione, ma mai didascalica: Pancake riesce a inserire tutti i dettagli necessari alla narrazione, ma lo fa con una tale semplicità che non te ne accorgi quasi (*"Mi restano solo il letto del torrente e gli animali di pietra che colleziono. Sbatto le palpebre e respiro. Mio padre è una nuvola color kaki tra i cespugli di canne e Ginny nient'altro che un odore amaro tra i rovi di more su per il crinale"*). E c'è tanta desolazione: nessuno dei protagonisti di questi racconti arriva da un passato facile, sono tutti piegati dalla fatica di una vita vissuta con grandi sacrifici. E così come sembrano essere tutti figli dello stesso passato, allo stesso modo c'è un continuo ripetersi di situazioni e personaggi fra un racconto e l'altro, come se fosse una sola grande storia quella che Pancake ci vuole raccontare. Scorrono così le vite di giovani che hanno perso uno o entrambi i genitori, di uomini che vagano alla ricerca di un senso e sperano di trovarlo nella compagnia di una ragazza occasionale, ragazzi che vengono "svezzati" alla maniera degli adulti, vecchi che sperano di trovare il proprio figlio perduto, amici che si separano in gioventù e non si riconoscono nella maturità. In ognuno dei protagonisti sembra di leggere la delusione di chi si aspettava un riconoscimento da parte della vita ma che invece vi ha trovato solo più dolore, forse quello stesso che Pancake ha trovato fin troppo presto. Ma c'è anche la voglia di costruirsi una vita, la ricerca di un futuro a propria immagine: sono diverse le storie in cui alla fine il protagonista ha davanti a sé una possibile strada da percorrere. Ma a Pancake quella strada non interessa, e così come le sue storie iniziano dopo che tutto è già accaduto, allo stesso modo si interrompono quando il più sembra ancora non essere arrivato. Rimangono solamente queste scene di transizione, una transizione che non sempre coincide con l'arrivo della maturità del protagonista, ma che è sempre il punto di svolta della sua vita.

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"Una a una, raccoglie le foglie cadute che gli stanno più vicino, le raduna intorno a sé come ha fatto con gli anni vissuti nell'inquietudine. Sentendo i bordi crespi di una foglia secca, vede attraverso la penombra i colori che chiazzano ancora la sua superficie. Tutto è così lontano, così sepolto, e lui sa che c'è voluto più del teschio di un capriolo per far cambiare il loro atteggiamento verso di lui". -p.173

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### **Katerina Charisi says**

Ήσως να ῥχισα να γ?νομαι παρ?ξενη, ἀλλ? με κ?τι τ?σο πολυσυζητημ?νο περ?μενα το κ?τι παραπ?νω. Το μπακστ?ρι (η αυτοκτον?α, το μυστ?ριο) δ?νουν π?ντους προκαταβολικ?, δεν ῥταν κακ?ς ιστορ?ες β?βαια ἀλλ? ῥχι και κ?τι σο?περ ου?ου. Π?ει αρκετ?ς καιρ?ς που το δι?βασα και δε θυμ?μαι τ?ποτα πια. Οπωςδ?ποτε ῥνα συν στην ῥκδοση και τη μετ?φραση που τη λες και ῥθλο - π?ντα φαντ?ζομαι τους μεταφραστ?ς σε βιβλ?α με ντοπιολαλι?ς και δι?φορους ιδιωματατισμο?ς να τραβο?ν τα μαλλι? τους απελπισμ?νοι (δε θα ῥελα να κ?νω αυτ? τη δουλει? με τ?τοια βιβλ?α), κατ? τα ῥλλα οκ.

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### **James Barker says**

\*April 2016 update- had to raise this from 4.5 to 5 as the feeling I got from reading the work is so raw, it's really hanging around.

This impressive debut collection is perhaps given more weight by the fact that the writer killed himself in his mid twenties, making this his one and only published work. Mr Pancake's shotgun ending helps to confirm the similarity with Hemingway- although I actually thought these stories were better than the Hemingway shorts I have come across in my time. These are seriously impressive examples of outsider writing.

Set in a rural and semi-rural world of West Virginia rife with poverty, this is a grim, one-note compilation (the complete opposite of Michel Faber's compendium of 16 stories, 'The Farenheit Twins,' that could have been written by 16 different writers) and yet that seems to enhance its power. Each story spotlights some continuation of misery, although generally there is the sense of characters looking back on a life that maybe once held a tenuous string of hope. This is a land of industry on its last legs, alcoholism, spousal abuse, cockfighting, fox-hunting, the intense violence of the dispossessed. It is, in some sense, a masculinised, grittier version of Annie Proulx's 'Heart Songs' (bar the different locale) and is extremely important, offering as it does takes on a white, working-class America that is not represented enough in literature. Such is Breece Pancake's writing skill, I felt as if I was walking alongside his broken characters. What immense power these stories have.

Like another reviewer has mentioned, I expected this collection to be surreal- I think because of the writer's unusual name and the majestic cover art. But in fact it is hyperreal, steeped in what feels like genuine, broken humanity, with Pancake's uncanny ear for dialogue and bleak descriptions of a land and a people of the margins, where life and death walk hand in hand. I will come back to this collection again, always with a sense of wonder: what would the writer have achieved had he allowed himself to live beyond 26?

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## Anders says

The stories of Breece D'J Pancake (real name) look unflinchingly at the gritty realities of the impoverished Appalachian region-- its difficulties, tragedies, and impossibilities, and the strength that people pull together which is somehow never quite enough. Pancake grew up in the hills of West Virginia and took his own life with in 1979 at the age of 27, just as his literary career was beginning to gain a little momentum. While alive, The Atlantic accepted a few of his stories for publication, but this posthumous collection brings together the work he was doing in the University of Virginia's creative writing program just before his death. This collection isn't for the weak of heart, and should be avoided when already feeling down. I basically had to put the book down after each story to catch my breath and collect myself. They're heavy, pounding stuff that'll get caught in your head.

In his work, it is evident that Pancake was weighted down by the psychological ramifications of the decaying South's extreme poverty. This collection is packed with frustration-- young girls taking to prostitution, beloved dogs being murdered by best friends, serial killers, heavy drinkers, waitresses, cockfights. Pretty much every story features a character whose life had been charted out since they were conceived, born into a household ripped apart and forced upon a path not of their own choosing. In this light, it's tempting to read Pancake's own biography as just another story in his collection. James Alan MacPherson, a professor who took Pancake under his wing at U of VA and encouraged him to send his work out for publication does just that. A writer in his own right, MacPherson's introduction manages to do just that. I would recommend the introduction on its own, it's that good. Most importantly, the introduction captures the deep respect MacPherson had for Pancake and inspires the reader to feel the same way after understanding Pancake's own battles. It shows that the dark, crushing powers which Pancake shows ripping his characters apart inside acted on him as well.

Parallels of Pancake's work can be noticed in early Palace Brothers albums, specifically "Days in the Wake," or the work of director David Gordon Green ("George Washington," "All the Real Girls"), both of whom may well have been inspired by Pancake's work. These artists similarly capture a certain feeling of modern post-industrial Southern intellectualism and sensitivity which, rather than allowing an escape from the poverty of opportunity plaguing them, instead gives their protagonists a vivid and profound awareness of what they're losing and missing. These stories are rich with regional detail-- the characters use Southern syntax so deep that it can be indeterminate what they're talking about, but this doesn't detract from the stories. The detail Pancake infuses into the stories lends them a magical feeling, shrouds them in a bit of mystery that serves to cut through what I think is a natural predilection on the part of Northerners to condescend to the people of the South. The people of Pancake's stories are experts in their own right, can hunt, skin, brine, and eat a squirrel without too much thought, and are aware of and ripped apart by obligation, family, lust, and impossibility.

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## Nat K says

A solid 3.5★s for me.

Stark. There is nothing uplifting about these stories. Reading them had me feeling raw. The characters aren't particularly likeable. Whether they're trying to escape where they live, or end up returning, there is an overall sense of dissatisfaction among them.

But oh, the writing! It draws you in and you feel the same desolation, and breathe in the same air...

Haunting, aching, sad. The pictures painted here will stay with you. The crispness of the writing shows a depth of understanding of both the people and the natural landscape where it's set.

It saddens me to think that this little collection is all we have of Breece Pancake's work. There is so much promise contained in these pages. It seems that he was a troubled soul, and this is what we have of those thoughts.

I have to admit that a few of the stories I simply did not understand at all. The dialect threw me. But the ones which I did had a deep impact.

Not any easy read by any means, but worth the time.

*Many thanks to GR friend Ian, whose review piqued my interest in reading this book. It's always a joy to discover a new Writer.*

*Ian's review can be found at <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>*

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## **Jacob says**

February 2009

This was a difficult one to review objectively. After all, to read Breece D'J Pancake is to know Breece D'J Pancake, and to know about him is to know about his death. A self-inflicted shotgun blast to the head at age 26, and these twelve stories the only works he left; how can you ignore that?

This collection has an almost mythical aura to it, the kind that seems to surround the works of all artists who died long before their time. This is all he wrote--this is all we have. And with that realization, there's almost a need to elevate the work, no matter the quality, to greatness. You want to join the cult. I know I do.

Thing is, Breece D'J Pancake deserves all that. He deserves the accolades, he deserves the praise, and he certainly deserves to be read. Mind you, these stories aren't polished; they're rough around the edges, jagged in places. Breece Pancake wasn't trying to be neat here. There is absolutely no pretension: these are not the stories of a self-aware literary figure who exploits fiction rather than telling it. Pancake's stories are honest--brutally so, at times--and he does not embellish. It's as if he is familiar with the people and places of his stories (and he is, you'll learn--he really is), and, perhaps most importantly, he respects them, too.

It is difficult to separate Pancake's stories from Pancake's life (and death), and it's almost painful to imagine what other stories he would have given us if he had lived longer. But there's no use crying over such an old loss. He left us these twelve stories--and we should read them.

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## **Shawn Mooney says**

Breece D’J Pancake killed himself in 1979, aged 26, mere days before this, his debut collection of short stories was published.

These stories roil with the secret histories, fossils, Indian bones, and of course coal embedded in West Virginia. Not to mention memories, anger, and desire: everything bursting, erupting. Secrets of the body—in ‘Trilobites,’ a man is finally, suddenly killed by a shrapnel fragment embedded in his brain years before.

All these seismic disturbances compel utterly.

Pancake has a small cult of admirers but these stories have not received the attention they deserve. I think I know why. They evoke the barren melancholy of the working poor of his native West Virginia (his own family was decidedly middle class), yes. The prose is jaw-droppingly good, oh my god yes. But Pancake's narratives are marred by the whore-madonna simplification of his female characters, and by animal cruelty—bizarrely violent incidents involving animals in pretty much every story.

I couldn't really get past that. A novelist I greatly admire, Samantha Hunt, could, or at least does her best to contextualize it - I urge readers to check out her fascinating essay on Pancake.

But one of the tragedies here is that this gifted young writer didn't live enough, long enough, to burst free of such cultural gunk.

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## **Banushka says**

27 ya??nda (evet o u?ursuz ya?) intihar etmi? bir yazar?n kitab?.  
amerika'n?n güney'ine, edebiyat?na bay?l?r?m. pancake de o güney goti?i denen tarz?n ustalar?ndan.  
asl?nda öyküleri okuyunca intihardan ba?ka yol bulamam?? yazar? anlamak mümkün.  
batm?? çiftlikler, rezalet madenler, hiçbir hayalini gerçekle?tirememi? kaybolan gençler... kimi oto tamircisi  
kimi benzincide pompac? kimi 5 kuru?a dövülen boksör... hiçbir ç?k?? yolu yok, despot ana babalar, ölmü?  
ana babalar, kaybolmu? arkada?lar... yitip giden hayaller...  
minimum betimleme, gerçek cümleler. çok ustaca. co?rafiyan?n yönetti?i kader. ve keder.

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## **Diane Barnes says**

Just 3.5 stars rounded up to 4. The writing was brilliant, and I have a sense that there was a part of Pancake in every one of these stories, he knows his people and his territory well. He committed suicide at the age of 26, and his depressive personality is on view in all of these stories. Not a one of them has anything in it of hope or escape from the bleak landscape that was his part of West Virginia.

I was in WV once, in Harper's Ferry, which I thought was a pretty little town nestled in the hills above the Potomac River. Breece Pancake's WV is clearly not the same place, and his characters are not people I would feel comfortable with at all. It's really too bad that these 12 stories are all we'll ever have of him; as I said, the writing was brilliant and a wicked sense of humor was on display in some of them.

Favorite story: (because of the humor) "The Salvation of Me"

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## George Georgiadis says

Οι ιστορίες που εκτυλίσσονται σε αυτή τη συλλογή διηγημάτων περιστρέφονται γύρω από τη ζωή απλόν, συνηθισμένων ανθρώπων του μέχθου, που εκτελούν χειρωνακτικές εργασίες, ασχολούνται με τη γη, δουλεύουν σε συνεργεία και ανθρακωρυχεία, έχουν για χόμπι τους το κυνήγι, βρσκουν καταφύγιο στο ποτά.

Η γλώσσα που χρησιμοποιεί ο Πάνκεκ είναι λιτή, τραχιά και μονότονη, όπως ακριβώς και οι ζωές των ανθρώπων που πρωταγωνιστούν στις ιστορίες αυτές. Μόνο κατά τη γλαφυρή περιγραφή του αγροτικού και επαρχιακού τοπίου διακρίνεται ένας κάποιος λυρισμός.

Εξαιρετικές τα περισσότερα διηγήματα της συλλογής, με τα "Έν τω ξηρό", "Τιμή στους πεσόντες", "Ένα μένιμο δώματιο" και "Η σωτηρία μου" να είναι αυτές που απλάυσα περισσότερο, χωρίς τα υπόλοιπα να υστερούν ιδιαίτερώς.

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## Melanie says

These 12 stories silenced the general clamour I carry around with me.

Few experiences can render me peaceable & sated, but with Breece D'J Pancake, this guy just surrenders everything, he is authentic, and as John Casey mentions, Breece absorbs, learns & ages everything he welcomes. (While he lived). Receiving that honest and embracing nature of his is a nourishing and often bracing experience.

The stories offer you a bruising. The characters are deeply connected to nature, they are earnest when they choose to dream, they fill up on wild meat and whatever emptiness disguises itself as.

The prose is just his. It is exciting, vigorous, tarred & feathered.

'Trilobites' is a known favorite, it has the high polish, but the raw gold is mined from 'A Room Forever' 'Fox Hunters' & 'In the Dry'. All 12 are a master class.

If you haven't had the pleasure yet, you are in for a treat.

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## William1.2 says

Staggeringly brilliant stories on a level of achievement with Raymond Carver.

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