



The Dog of the Marriage: Stories

Amy Hempel

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Amy Hempel's compassion, intensity, and illuminating observations have made her one of the most distinctive and admired modern writers. In three stunning books of stories, she has established a voice as unique and recognizable as the photographs of Cindy Sherman or the brushstrokes of Robert Motherwell. *The Dog of the Marriage*, Hempel's fourth collection, is about sexual obsession, relationships gone awry, and the unsatisfied longings of everyday life.

In "Offertory," a modern-day Scheherazade entertains and manipulates her lover with stories of her sexual encounters with a married couple as a very young woman. In "Reference # 388475848-5," a letter contesting a parking ticket becomes a beautiful and unnerving statement of faith. In "Jesus Is Waiting," a woman driving to New York sends a series of cryptically honest postcards to an old lover. And the title story is a heartbreaking tale about the objects and animals and unmet desires that are left behind after death or divorce.

These nine stories teem with wisdom, emotion, and surprising wit. Hempel explores the intricate psychology of people falling in and out of love, trying to locate something or someone elusive or lost. Her sentences are as lean, original, and startling as any in contemporary fiction.

The Dog of the Marriage: Stories Details


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From Reader Review *The Dog of the Marriage*: Stories for online ebook

Paquita Maria Sanchez says

Some people can't really get down with the short story format. I can appreciate the sentiment, since they can sort of feel like casual acquaintances when compared to the lifelong loves to be found in certain novels. Short stories generally poke rather than punch, which is just an inevitable downside of being under-endowed. I could probably list on my hands the number of short stories that have really, really stuck with me over the years for whatever reason. *The Masque of the Red Death*, a few of the Kafkas I've read, *The Lottery*, a Murakami, *The Most Dangerous Game*, *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*, Flannery O'Connor in general, *Bartleby*. Okay, I apparently have freakish hands. There are some real gems out there, but usually I read short stories with the complete expectation of fleeting feelings and temporary, snooze-button entertainment. This is part of the reason that over the last few years, I have increasingly lacked interest in movies and have transitioned to the long-form found in television serials. Well, that and the fact that they are getting way better all the time. Teenage me would be so pissed at adult me for how much adult me watches the teevees. Though I do read short stories sometimes, I generally prefer a slow burn, time for ties to tangle, all that stuff that comes with engaging with material for a very long time. Anyway, I often forget too much of what I experienced through short stories within about a week of reading them, if I'm being generous. And I read this like three weeks ago. Oh dear.

I can say with some degree of authority that these are sparse, stinging shorts, all centering on the themes of intimacy, distance, and languid longing. Hempel is really something special when it comes to guts-slashy curtness, added to which she can be darkly hilarious in her blunt, clear-eyed observations about how much people often totally suck ass to each other as soon as they bumpeth the uglies. It just so happened that I didn't have my stickies in my pocket while reading this, so I can't give you all the quotes this book deserves to have out there representing itself, but I'm here to tell you they would make really kickass Chinese food fortunes. Cryptic Fortune Cookies: Patent Pending. Let everything eat.

Eggp says

Mostly annoying
one whining voice, walking dogs
I'd divorce them all.

Alan says

2006 notebook: really like the cryptic, short, packed stories. Sometimes I think they should be more cryptic, compact and less wiseguy-ey. But excellent, all, nonetheless. 'Beach Town', the opening story, about an eavesdropper, a woman viewing her licentious neighbour's behaviour, is very well put together.

Eugene says

eroticism as flower arranging ...said with great great respect to flower arranging. or, i guess, metaphorically: flower arrangement as eroticism. some confluence of care and courage and winging-it, bold lechery and a gourmet's rarefied lust. from it: "Renoir told Matisse he would pick flowers in the fields and arrange them in a vase, and then he would paint the side he had not arranged." an awesomely patient artist, waiting for the detail, sifting through life for the sentence. a convincing poet. and spectacularly gutsy. i liked it much more than i expected it too... funny and clever--though i kinda expected that; deep and beautiful--and i expected that less.

Sofia says

By a truly colossal margin the single greatest short story collection I've ever read.

TK421 says

This collection of stories was a solid 5 stars before the last story, "Offertory." I just did not feel as if Hempel was the person to write this particular story. Perhaps I am wrong. Regardless, this collection of nine stories epitomizes the power a short story can attain and reflect back upon the reader.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Jim says

Despite the high rating and laudatory blurbs, I really didn't like this collection that much. The writing was okay, but it was like looking at an abstract painting or listening to free verse, both of which I am not too keen on. Yes, occasionally you will get something beautiful anyway, and enjoy it, but overall I want my stories to be more story. I don't want to feel that the writer (or artist) was slumming, conning the readers that they had produced something great. I liked the title story and "The Afterlife." Some parts touched me and I thought, "Exactly." But overall, it really wasn't my bag.

Donna says

The Dog of the Marriage, Amy Hempel. New York: Scribner, 2005. Hardcover, \$20.00 ISBN 0-7432-6451-7

I finished Amy Hempel's latest short story collection, "The Dog of the Marriage," on a visit to the Georgia O'Keefe museum in Santa Fe. During this particular visit the museum hosted an exhibit, "Moments in Modernism: Georgia O'Keefe and Andy Warhol, Flowers of Distinction" and on the wall for this exhibit were quotes by both authors. One by O'Keefe made me think immediately of Hempel's work and certainly of "The Dog of the Marriage."

“Nobody sees a flower, really, it is so small. It takes time—we haven’t time—and to see takes time, like having a friend takes time”.—O’Keefe

Like O’Keefe, Hempel is a microscopic visionary highlighting what others don’t take the time to see. Not content to paint pretty reality to scale, they both expose the insides, everything that would remain hidden at first glance, pistil, stamen, fleshy petals, longing, instability, desperation, vulnerability, stasis, recovery.

Hempel’s narrative voice in “The Dog of the Marriage” is at once detached and achingly intimate. In the title story, Hempel’s narrator experiences the loss of a relationship and marriage, and is caught in a moment of reflection.

“Did I invite this? Is it like sitting in prayers at school when the headmistress says, “Who dropped the lunch bags on the hockey field?” and although you went home for lunch, you think, I did, I did.”

Hempel turns her microscopic lens on humanity with stripped to the bone sentences that lend power to her work. In a story reminiscent of Virginia Woolf’s “Three Guineas,” Hempel’s “Reference # 388475848-5” is the narrator’s written response to a parking citation. The tale twists through a long explanation of the events leading to the ticket ending in a plea for justice.

In her finally story, “Offertory,” a narrator is coaxed by her lover to divulge details of a past romantic encounter with a couple, the result is a sexual Scheherazade. In addition to the narrator’s storytelling, there are moments of delicate and telling reflection.

“It is possible to imagine a person so entirely that the image resists attempts to dislodge it.”

Dogs that appear throughout the narrative are harbingers of what’s missing for the narrators: stability, loyalty and love. They are created as characters, not simply symbols of what’s missing. The narrators also experience what they lack in their human connections in their relationships to canine companions.

Works by both Hempel and O’Keefe invite us to pause, take an extra beat, then two, then three as we witness the everyday, a flower or a failed marriage, from the inside out. We are to enjoy every subtle color change, each dip and fold, the way they look when they fade and fall.

Jason says

When Hempel is good, she's really good. The sentences of her stories are laced with humor and meaning and pathos with the minimum of words. Her writing is spare in that way that will be labeled minimalism, but her ideas and situations explode from their bare framework. As with other great minimalists--Carver, Denis Johnson, etc.--what's left off the page is just as important and can be inferred from what is there. I liked this collection a lot. In fact, some of the most poignant stories are the shortest, particularly "The Afterlife," a story about a female protagonist's father's failed love exploits. I couldn't help but turn the pages of all these stories. The one story that didn't grab my attention as well as I had hoped was the title story. I imagine if I went back and read it--which I'm sure I will one day--I'd change my mind and decide that in fact this collection needs a shiny five stars. But for now, I'll leave my thoughts as such. I now plan to read all of her stuff.

Simon Sylvester says

This is an astonishing book - a class apart. *The Dog Of The Marriage* gathers Amy Hempel's four short story collections into a single volume, and they are consistently superb. There isn't a single wrong note across dozens of stories. Hempel's work is voiced through emotionally damaged or stunted narrators, trapped or somehow left behind in their lives, caught between stasis and decay. The stories are not without hope, though, and Hempel writes with unceasing, unfailing humanity. Her sentences and structure are scintillating. I cannot recommend this highly enough. This is the sort of book I buy two copies of, expecting to have one out on loan.

Colin McKay Miller says

Two stars. Barely:

Collected Stories review:

Amy Hempel's *Collected Stories* starts with my favorite short story collection ever, *Reasons to Live*, and then proceeds to highlight the author's decline to mediocrity.

Don't get me wrong; ask me who the best short story writer is and I'll still say Amy Hempel, but sometimes you have to be honest, even about the people you admire most. Like many who got into Hempel prior to the rabid Chuck Palahniuk endorsement, I was hooked by the widely anthologized "In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson is Buried," and it's still in my top-five short stories along with "The Man in Bogota." Both are from *Reasons to Live*, and if giving a top-ten list, there's a good chance that a couple more stories from that collection would crowd it out. It's one of the rare books that I've given five stars to for a reason (pun unintended).

At the Gates of the Animal Kingdom is still excellent. A four-star run. The fact that it's out of print—and harder to find than *Reasons to Live*--is another checkmark to picking up the nicely priced and complete *Collected Stories*, but alas the decline continues: *Tumble Home* is uneven, but still clocks in at a recommendable three-star level. It's *The Dog of the Marriage* that puts the final decline point on the chart, barely crossing the two-star mark. That's where I was left missing the Amy Hempel who used to make me not what to think after reading her stories—letting the feeling of what she put into me stay for just a little longer—and I wonder if she might have put all that she could into the first collection around and was simply mimicking the success.

I still recommend *Collected Stories*, but I never know where to tell people to pull the bookmark. There are other writers out there—writers who are going up, not coming down—but for a while there, Amy Hempel was all I needed. The desert island choice. I know these expectations aren't fair, but the feeling is there regardless. Three stars, but reaching higher.

Cynthia Paschen says

I guess if I had to use one word to describe Amy Hempel's stories, it would be spare. She does not over-describe emotions, setting, or characters. It is all laid out cleanly and precisely. She uses the bare minimum of words to get her story across; probably less.

The story that spoke to me the most was "The Uninvited." A woman who volunteers at a rape-crisis hotline is attacked and worries that she might be pregnant. She is better at dealing with crisis in other victims than she is at dealing with her own headaches. Sounds familiar.

Ioanna says

I love Amy Hempel's prose. My favorite story from this book is Jesus is Waiting--there's a video of a reading of it by Julianna Margulies at <http://www.flypmedia.com/content/spre...>

Jennifer says

Amy Hempel's stories are extraordinary for what they leave out. Her incredible economy makes me want to reread and reread.

Teresa says

I checked this out from the library because I was thinking of taking a master class with Hempel next month. Her focus will be on language and what she calls the "acoustics of a sentence," and I am very interested in that.

As usual, I continue to struggle with and sometimes be frustrated by some aspects of spare short-short fiction, though there's been some I've absolutely loved, e.g. Black Tickets by Jayne Anne Phillips, the ones included in Where the Dog Star Never Glows by Tara L. Masih and just about everything by Grace Paley.

I liked the longer of these short stories the most and while I could appreciate certain aspects of the other much shorter ones, many times I ended up feeling like the woman who asks "What Were the White Things?" in the story of the same name.

And, yes, I am taking the master class. I signed up for it before I finished the book.
