



We Live in Water

Jess Walter

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We Live in Water is a darkly comic, moving collection of short stories that veer from comic tales of love to social satire to suspenseful crime fiction, from hip Portland to once-hip Seattle to never-hip Spokane, from a condemned casino in Las Vegas to a bottomless lake in the dark woods of Idaho. This is a world of lost fathers and redemptive con men, of meth tweakers on desperate odysseys and men committing suicide by fishing.

In "Thief," an aluminum worker turns unlikely detective to solve the mystery of which of his kids is stealing from the family vacation fund. In "We Live in Water," a lawyer returns to a corrupt North Idaho town to find the father who disappeared thirty years earlier. In "Anything Helps," a homeless man has to "go to cardboard" to raise enough money to buy his son the new *Harry Potter* book. In "Virgo," a local newspaper editor tries to get back at his superstitious ex-girlfriend by screwing with her horoscope. Also included are the stories "Don't Eat Cat" and "Statistical Abstract of My Hometown, Spokane, Washington," both of which achieved a cult following after publication online.

We Live in Water Details

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From Reader Review We Live in Water for online ebook

Dustin says

So for my review of Jess Walter's first collection of short stories, I thought I'd try a different route.

Courtesy of the author's official Facebook fan page, may I present my very personal, heartfelt words?

I just thought I'd post a brief message here, in hopes that you'd see it, so here goes: I'd been reading *We Live in Water*, and I've got to say, this is one of the best collections I've read in a very long time. Each tale has something for everyone, I think, and they're not stories merely for the sake of entertainment. You're actually saying something profound, with more heart and soul than a lot of writers out there! Thank you for sharing your brilliant work, I consider you a friend, for sure! I loved it! A solid 4 stars for me!!

Admittedly, there were a few that perhaps could have been developed further, not only characteristically (though I did get a vague sense of most of them,) but stylistically as well. Some additional answers would have been nice, too, but I can't complain too much.

If I had one critique, it would have to be that this collection isn't long enough; not by a long shot. It is only 177 pages, after all..

And the final offering, which isn't a story at all (not in the traditional sense, anyway,) *Statistical Abstract for My Hometown of Spokane, Washington*, could be the foundation of an entire book, IMO. Walter's love/hate relationship with his hometown was so moving and fascinating, and utterly profound that I simply didn't want it to end. The interesting-and need I say staggering-- statistics left me wanting more. I'd willingly and passionately read a novel-length book on the subject.. if written by Jess Walter!

This and the two page tale, *Please* are without a doubt my Top 2.

I sincerely hope that while this was his short story debut, it most certainly won't be his last. **Let us hope!**

Lydia Presley says

If you asked me to name my top three male, contemporary authors Jess Walter would top the list. *We Live in Water* is the third book written by Walter that I have read and, frankly, his previous novel, *Beautiful Ruins*, is the one that won me over. But *We Live in Water* shows just how masterful Walter's writing is and how adept he is at taking one single, pivotal moment and magnifying it in such great detail that it is impossible to not get the message he is trying to get across.

In this series of short stories Walter examines the lives of people from the future and the past; he examines those without homes and those who want to escape their homes. Young and old are subject to the scrutiny and the only thing each of these stories has in common is that, much like a fish in a fish tank, it's placed before our wondering eyes and we pause for just a touch of time to watch the subjects swim in their lives before moving on to the next thing.

My love for short stories is a fairly recent thing. I never could understand the fascination with reading a short story - having always loved my stories to be fully developed with world and characters. I thought that in order for my emotions to get wrapped up in a character's life it would require at least 300 pages of solid reading about that character. Oh, if only I'd been handed something like this book sooner. Some of these short stories are a mere two pages long, yet they pack the same punch (or more so) than books that are 300+ pages long.

If you haven't experienced Jess Walter and want a sample of what this man is capable of then go to a bookstore and read just one of these short stories. I guarantee you will find yourself not only buying the book but looking at his previous work, just as I have done. In fact, I think I'm going to be reading *Beautiful Ruins* again very soon.

Will Byrnes says

Now...you know what we know." Her voice went even lower. That nobody *chooses*. That we're all sick. We're all here."

One wonders how many times the author misspelled the title. I guess the stories do not live in Walter any longer but are out there for us to enjoy, although I am not sure that is the right word. Appreciate, maybe. There are various forms of sickness in Jess Walter's baker's-dozen collection of bleak stories. Alcoholism, drug addiction, obsession, greed, dishonesty, some zombification, or the most incurable of all, being born poor. The megafauna all glooped up in La Brea had as much of a chance to escape their situation as the characters in these tales, although some of Walter's people do make an effort. The setting is mostly Spokane (or in this case Spo-can't) with a few outings to Seattle and Portland, and even a road trip to Vegas.

The town, btw, is named for the Native American tribe, whose name means "children of the sun." No sun children here. I am not sure the sun ever breaks through the overcast, but when it does, it is quickly clouded over. Or it might indicate the eye of something unpleasant wandering by.

The first story, *Anything Helps* simply knocked me on my ass. Wayne Bittinger, aka Bit, is homeless, reliant on the Jesus beds for an occasional mattress, descending to cardboard when he must, an experienced beggar, a fellow with alcohol issues, and with a son who has been taken in by some religious sorts. He needs

permission from the state to see his own kid. The light in his world used to be reading Harry Potter books to his child, but now he has to scrounge nickels and dimes to buy a single book, and then has to break some laws just to get it to his son. Bit may have brought some of his misery onto himself. Choices had clearly been made, bad ones, but were all his problems of his own doing? His rough go pounded on some of my fears. I, too, loved reading Harry to my progeny. And while I have never had to live on the street, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that in today's compassion-free America I might someday get to have the experience. No substance issues for me, yet, at least not since I stopped smoking in 2002, but I related like a brother to Bit, and sobbed on reading this story, big, heaving, wailing tears, fuh real.

I was reminded of Baskin Robbins while reading this book. Thirty one flavors, it seemed, but of pain, despair and failure. Walter offers a portrait of the underclass, looking at people who have made bad choices, people who have been cast in dark dramas by a hostile director, and relationships that seem likely to be noted on page one headlines of the wrong sort. One saving grace lies in some of the parent-child connections. Bit's love for his child is palpable, even if his ability to express it is limited. Other fathers attempt to protect their young. But there is an undercurrent. While outcomes are often the result of bad decisions, the environment as a whole seems designed to keep people in their places. This enclosure may not be as concrete as Stephen King's dome, but it contains its residents quite well anyway. In fact, the core image is one of being trapped. I won't give away the specifics of it, but let's just say that the people here might as well have checked into the Hotel California. Hell, most of 'em were born there.

There are the odd bright spots. One decent guy prevents his boss from screwing a customer. One convict truly wants to do some good in the world. The oft-mentioned Bit really, really does love his kid. A convict on temporary release finds a golden moment on the outside. A father relates his own childhood to that of his kids, in a warm and useful way.

Walter's characters are significantly flawed, more often than not. You may not feel quite the connection I did to Bit, but there are likely to be at least some folks on these pages who ring your bells, tug at your heart, and maybe lift your wallet.

Along with the dark content, considerable skill is on display here from the author of *Beautiful Ruins* and *The Zero. We Live in Water* may offer up a polluted lake, but it is still worth diving in, just to see what else is swimming around.

=====The Stories

Anything Helps - see above

We Live in Water - a low level crook finds that screwing the boss's wife and stealing his money is not a good career move. The son he loved and tried to protect, comes back many years later to find out what happened to dad.

Thief - when dad sets out to find who has been nicking change from the vacation savings jar, he must confront his own childhood behavior.

Can a Corn – a con on a medical leave chooses a form of freedom usually denied him. Some powerful imagery in this one.

Ken reeled in a dull catfish, yellow-eyed and spiny. No fight in it. Almost like it didn't mind.

Virgo - An obsessed and rejected lover uses his position at a local newspaper to make life difficult for his ex, resulting in collateral damage.

Helpless Little Things - Every short story collection, it seems, needs an O Henry entry. In this one, a latter day Fagin meets his match.

Please - A father seeks to remove his son from the mother's meth-lab home

Don't Eat Cat - a zombie tale, that says more about how people can become undead (underclass) than it does about their behavior once turned, and how the uppers view of the unders (reminiscent of the UK telly series *In the Flesh*, which is highly recommended, btw))

The New Frontier - nothing JFK-ish here – a Vegas trip with a pseudo friend looking to save someone who may or may not need saving

The Brakes - a mechanic does a bit of good for an undeserving recipient

The Wolf and the Wild - a white collar criminal doing community service aims to make a better life for himself and those he is assigned to

Wheelbarrow Kings - a couple of down-and-outs scrounging to make a buck and contending with their lack of knowledge

Statistical Abstract for My Hometown of Spokane, Washington - like it says, a portrait of despair, by the numbers, and telling the narrators tale, in numbered paragraphs, mixing stats and personal info

8. I was born in Spokane in 1965. Beginning in about 1978, when was thirteen, I wanted to leave.

9. I'm still here.

Posted July 15, 2013

Published February 12, 2013

Tom LA says

Three stories in, and already mesmerized: how does he do that? How can he breath so much life into everything he creates, and how can he make me care so much about anything he writes?

Well, I'm done now. What can I say? I love this guy. He's about 50 years old, so I'll have at least another 20-25 of his books to read in the future. And that is a very good thing.

Seriously though, I've asked myself, what makes me prefer Jess Walter over legends like Ian McEwan,

Cormac McCarthy, Jonathan Franzen, or other big names in contemporary fiction?

Very simply, I think it's his heart. He's got a lot of it. Too many writers, especially the ones who get the most halleluhias from the critics, are wonderful wordsmiths but they don't have much heart and soul. I understand, it's also personal chemistry. But read "The road" or "Saturday" or "Enduring Love", or the highly acclaimed "Freedom", and you'll know what I'm talking about: I don't care about phenomenal style and structure if your story feels cold, and it has has the heart of an investment banker.

Also, a note about the last story, the one about Spokane, with numbered paragraphs like a list. Did you notice how there is a perfectly balanced narrative arch in that story, too? With the main topic being Walter's relationship with his town? Brilliant.

So, once again: congratulations, Mr Walter. I loved this book, like I loved your other books. Thank you for being out there and please keep doing what you're doing.

Melody says

Five stars. With a bullet. And a syringe. And some helpless, hopeless wailing.

I met Walter at ALA and he signed his book for me. To tell the stark truth, I was wandering around, saw him signing books in the Harper Collins booth and thought, "Hey, that's a short line...", and even though I'd never heard of him, I bellied up to the free book bar. By such small cusps one's life may change.

As Donne said, comparisons are odious. But there was a name that kept ringing in my head as I read these stories. Walter puts me in mind of Raymond Carver in all the ways that matter. His people are my people, the ones I grew up with, the ones I ran away from, the ones I turned into. There are no winners here, no rescuers, no happy endings. There's only today, and tomorrow, which will be like today only maybe worse. The same, if you're lucky. A lot worse, more likely.

There's humor here, smoky and reeling, but still funny as hell. I can't recommend these stories highly enough. I want to read every word this man has ever written, but I can't do it all at once because I'm pretty sure if I did I'd crawl in my coat closet and huddle there till I died.

Lynn G. says

An unexpectedly positive reading experience and so hard to classify. A collection of short stories that have a common current running through them. They are sometimes humorous (but mostly not), sometimes poignant, often uncomfortable, very gritty, and too real. It is difficult not to have a gut reaction to the characters, their circumstances, and the ties that bind them.

The author, Jess Walter, brings it all together with his Statistical Abstract for My Hometown of Spokane, Washington which is exactly what it sounds like; it's not a final short story but a short education for the

reader that casts light on what has gone before.

Nancy says

Posted at Shelf Inflicted

Brilliant!

It usually takes me forever to get through short story collections. If a story doesn't grab my interest, I'll put the book down and read something else. Often, so much time has passed that I end up returning the collection to the shelf and forgetting about it.

Not so with Jess Walter's first collection of short fiction. I inhaled these stories in just two sittings and by the end I wasn't sure whether I wanted to:

- a. empty my wallet every time someone asks for spare change.
- b. take weight-loss pills that keep me up all night having wild monkey sex, but have the unpleasant side effect of turning me into a zombie completely unsuitable for nearly any type of employment.
- c. grab some Greenpeace brochures, some young helpers, and create a scam to relieve rich liberals of their hard-earned dollars.

The prose is spare and powerful, making me forget I was reading a book and feeling at one with these characters who struggle through life, make poor choices, and suffer terrible injustices. Though there is bleakness and hardship here, there is just enough humor to make me laugh out loud a few times and keep the stories from being painfully depressing. The author writes from the heart and has a deep sense of empathy for his characters. It was hard for me to let them go.

The last story is *Statistical Abstract For My Hometown, Spokane, Washington*. It is much more than facts and numbers. Walters provides an intimate glimpse of his life and his conflicting feelings about his hometown.

Very highly recommended.

Britany says

I tend to steer away from Short Stories. I just find that while I like the premise of a short story collection, they always seem to fall flat for me, and usually none of the stories impact me long enough to remember it after I finish the collection. I couldn't have chosen a better book to change my opinion of short stories.

Jess Walter does a brilliant job of creating characters so sharp you could slice yourself on their edges. Each and every story had grit, and made me feel something for each of the protagonists. The story that hit me the

most, was *Virgo*, something about the vulnerability, compassion, and desperation really brought this story to life for me, and the ending will be one I will never forget.

Bravo!

Candiss says

This thought-provoking, funny, dark, sweet, tragic, engaging, heartbreaking collection set in (and by an author from) Washington state hit home for me on so many levels (in addition to being installed in the same state as I am.) All the stories were good - some were straight-up GREAT. (My favorite was probably "Don't Eat Cat," because it was like a smorgasbord of wonderful things all in one story - dystopia, impending apocalypse, humor, social & economic satire, a story of love lost, of sadness and personal tragedy, of regret and finally of redemption and forgiveness of a sort. I have the urge to foist this story on most everyone I know.)

I listened to the audio during my commute over several days, and the narrator was wonderful. The final story - which I had read before - was read by the author himself, which was a treat and felt perfect for the story, due to its examination of Walter's home town.

I highly recommend this one to fans of great short stories, from Carver and Alexie - a friend of Walter's - to weirder (yet deeply poignant) stuff by Saunders and Bender. Jess Walter is a multi-faceted virtuoso of a writer.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

Thirteen short stories, almost all of them edgy and riveting. Jess Walter's narrative skill is a rare find. He balances the horrid, the heartfelt, and the humorous within each story. Sometimes it's the story that holds me spellbound, and other times it's the writing itself, independent of the story. Fiction writing is such a slippery craft. To those of us who can't do it, it sometimes seems like a magic trick.

Robert says

Upon completion of this book of short stories, I feel like I've taken multiple personality disorder to a whole new level. First, I panhandled on the street corner watching the BMWs and the Mercedes and the Lincolns drive by; then I slept with a married woman and stole money from my bookie; then I hid in a closet behind my coveralls with the lights off, staking out my kids on my day off from Kaiser Aluminum with a six-pack next to me; next I fished with another man on the lake instead of taking my dialysis treatments; then I decided to stalk my ex-girlfriend, to the point that she went back to her no good ex-boyfriend who had cheated on her with another woman because he was a good listener; then I conned kids into passing out Greenpeace brochures in the middle of a Portland mall; next I was divorced and worried about my son staying with his mother and her druggie boyfriend; then I found myself in the middle of Starbucks-Financial on the verge of the apocalypse witnessing a zombie attack; next I hightailed it to Las Vegas to kill the shithead who turned my sister into a whore; then I had to deal with a senile, racist older woman who liked to use the term nigger like she was at a bridge club meeting and we were back in the stone age; then I picked up

trash on the side of the highway with a guy named Ricky who compared futures to black holes; next my mouth watered at the thought of cinnamon rolls and chili and scones and Hot Pockets and pretzels and sandwiches and oat bars and muffins and Sun Chips and pepperoni sticks and I planned to wash it all down with a Dr. Pepper; and last, I sat up in the middle of the night with a flashlight and a shotgun to guard my bike because I'd broken the lock and failed to acquire a new one in a timely fashion.

Instead of having a particular story or two that stood out in this collection, all of the stories in *WE LIVE IN WATER: STORIES* captured my attention. Each one seemed like the perfect length to tell the tale, the characters coming alive in bursts as short as 2 pages or as long as 24, the staccato rhythm more powerful than machine gun fire, with dark times and dark characters hovering around me like a swarm of bees.

1. "Anything Helps" – If I stood on the street corner long enough, not my usual spot but my second choice, with my hand held out and a pitiful expression painted on my face, I might end up with enough coins and bills in my pocket to buy my son the latest *Harry Potter* book.
2. "We Live In Water" – If I could just find out what happened to my father and that no good whore who caused him to stray from the chicken coop, when he needed a few bills back in the day and managed to get a little something else on the side, I might set my conscience in the right spot.
3. "Thief" – If I sat in my closet long enough, the air hanging over me like a fog, the clothes shoved against my cheeks, huddled in the back like a squirrel with a mouthful of nuts, the cans of beer getting warm at my side, I might know whether it was little, middle, or the girl who needed a few extra quarters.
4. "Can A Corn" – If I cast my line just right, the air slapping against my face, my friend yapping away at my side, I might actually forget about my fucking dialysis treatments.
5. "Virgo" – If the pissant ex-boyfriend, Mark Aikens, the one who cheated on Tanya because he couldn't keep it in his pants, ever got wind of my stalker tendencies and my level of intensity, he might renege on the no-contact order and actually move to Mars or Jupiter, and I could get my life back, before I resorted to tweaking horoscopes.
6. "Helpless Little Things" – If I had known I could have Greenpeace and save the whales and keep the scam going until I was a happy man, I might have done a few things differently.
7. "Please" – If I didn't have an ex-wife who chose loser boyfriends with choppy attitudes and who just happened to be maladjusted members of society, I wouldn't have had to worry about my son.
8. "Don't Eat Cat" – If I hadn't witnessed a zombie attack two years earlier at Starbucks-Financial and been turned down by the government for an operation, I might not have chased after the one that got away.
9. "The New Frontier" – If my best friend Bobby hadn't chased after his sister Lisa like some half-crazed loon, collecting nudie cards from snappers like they were government handouts, visiting every strip club within a ten-mile radius until "my balls feel like they're going to explode" and I lose "my sense of chivalry, having a constant erection," I might have enjoyed myself a bit more in Las Vegas.
10. "The Brakes" – If the old bitty had developed just a bit more sense and my fellow mechanics had seen a bit of integrity instead of dollar signs, I might have been able to shield my son from the ensuing madness.
11. "The Wolf And The Wild" – If I hadn't been forced to volunteer for sophomores and second-graders

with names like Megan and Drew and J'mar and Tania and DeAndre and Macro, I might not have realized the shitty state of our educational system.

12. "Wheelbarrow Kings" – If I hadn't been forced to wheel a TV that was five feet by five feet by three feet, in a wheelbarrow with a bum wheel with a friend that had arms the size of pool sticks on a muggy day, I might not have scored my latest bump and some Sun Chips.

13. "Statistical Abstract For My Hometown Of Spokane, Washington" – If I had left Spokane, Washington in a timely fashion, like the 2,632 illegal aliens that had been deported, I might not have had my bike stolen twice, been stalked by some crazy-assed man that liked to punch himself for fun and not been surprised by a bad neighborhood every three blocks.

But, then, I might not have discovered and enjoyed this book.

Cross-posted at Robert's Reads

Zak says

A collection of really good short stories. Highly enjoyable. Will definitely seek out more of Jess Walter's work.

Jill says

The world isn't kind to the characters in Jess Walter's collection of 13 short stories. Each of them is a loser, living in a "frontier of stale and unfulfilled dreams": careless fathers, scam artists, ex-cons, gamblers, incestuous brothers, drug abusers.

These aren't people you'd want as your neighbors or your friends. They are, however, people you want to spend some hours with – and it's all because of Jess Walter's great skill as a words craftman and his incisive ability to create a wave of emotions with a few well-placed descriptions.

The short-shorts – and there are a few in this collection – didn't work for this reader half as well as some of the longer stories, which pack a wallop. A few of these stories are true stand-outs.

Take the Wolf and the Wild, which begins this way: "They fanned out in the brown grass along Highway 2 like geese in a loose V, eight men in white coveralls and orange vests picking up trash." One of these men, Wade, is in prison for white-collar theft; when he emerges, he is assigned to a pilot program tutoring elementary schoolers. One of the little ones, Drew, requests the same book every time until Wade brings along a sequel. The last five pages contain no words and these are the pages Drew likes the best. This poignant scene – a young boy snuggled into the lap of a stranger, feeling safe through the power of storytelling, is beautifully rendered.

Another, Helpless Little Things, is a page-turning story of a scammer and drug dealer with a small network of teens whom he uses to solicit funds through fake Greenpeace offerings. But who is really the scammer and the helpless thing? This "turn-about is fair play" story is another winner.

The lead-off story, *Anything Helps*, focusing on a panhandling dad named Bit who goes to great lengths to buy his son the latest Harry Potter book and the eponymous story *We Live In Water* – about an adult son who attempts to learn what happened to his down-and-out father – are also noteworthy. In the latter, Mr. Walter writes, “The fish just swam in its circles, as if he believed that, one of these times, the glass wouldn’t be there and he could just sail off, into the open.”

No one can sail off, of course; most of these characters are, indeed, swimming in circles, no matter how hard these men strive for acceptance or redemption. And, for this reader, a couple of the stories didn’t work; *Wheelbarrow Kings*, for example, strives too hard for “attitude” and lost me along the way. A possibly personal story – *Statistical Abstract for My Hometown, Spokane, Washington* – may well be the factually-based key to a couple of the stories. This isn’t an upbeat collection – it’s not meant to be – but it does reconfirm Jess Walter’s abundant talents.

Lori says

Brilliant! Harsh, but brilliant!

Julie Christine says

The thing about failure is that it’s never really over. Even after shuffling off this mortal coil, your failures reverberate like ripples in a pond, carry into lives left behind. Jess Walter, in his exquisite collection *We Live In Water* presents twelve men, Disciples of Failure, whose stories we read after their choices have been made, their lives already in a state of deliquescence.

Walter takes the snapshots we make every day in our mind’s eye and crafts the stories behind the moment. The men sitting with cardboard signs at freeway on-ramps: *Anything Helps*; the convicts picking up trash on the side of the highway: *The Wolf and the Wild*; the young people harassing you for a moment to talk about Greenpeace or Save the Children on your way into the grocery store: *Helpless Little Things*; the women behind those stripper cards handed out in seedy Las Vegas: *The New Frontier*. We wonder “Who are these people? How did they fall so low?” What we turn away from, what we are afraid to imagine, Walter follows through, coloring in the empty space of our imagination.

Children, young boys – are often the focus of Walter’s many touches of grace. These boys represent the potential of goodness, perhaps what these men were like before the world ground their faces in a mud puddle or before greed, anger or addiction became their motivating forces. In *The Wolf and the Wild* a little boy aches to curl in the lap of a convict, to read the same picture book over and over. There is no point in taking a chance on something new – the familiar is the best comfort a lost little boy can hope for. The son in *Anything Helps* rejects his father’s gift, but with such compassion you know you are seeing the act of a youth who is becoming a man before his time. In the collection’s title story, a single moment - the blue glow of an aquarium - releases a man’s childhood memory of his father’s disappearance.

Walter also takes us where no man has gone before: the future. In one of the most imaginative stories, *Don’t Eat Cat*, set in Seattle’s Fremont district just a few years hence, an epidemic of zombies is taking over the city. But within the futuristic oddity runs a current of reality. These zombies have a disease, a horrific effect

of the addiction to an anti-depressant. Owen, who loses his cool in a Starbucks after a zombie messes up his order, points out “But is this the Apocalypse? Fuck you. It’s always the Apocalypse. The world hasn’t gone to shit. The world *is* shit. All I’d asked was that it be better managed.” Yep. Get that.

Walter wields a deft hand with black comedy. *Virgo* is devious, written in first-person by a stalker who plots revenge on his ex-girlfriend by sabotaging her daily horoscope. *The New Frontier*, has the making of a bromance buddy caper: two guys travel to Las Vegas to save the sister of one her life as a hooker in Las Vegas. The brother is a goob. His buddy, who recounts their mission, is, well...

Jess Walter closes with a thirteenth piece. Less a story than an ode, an explanation, a litany, *Statistical Abstract for My Hometown, Spokane, Washington* is a bullet-point list of the failures of a tired-but-trying city and the reasons why Walter chooses to remain.

I don’t mean to make the short stories seem like complete downers. There are no happy endings here; in many cases there are no endings – these are moments, suspended in the time it takes to read the few pages you get. But Walter has this way of imbuing his stories with a gentle caress of humanity and not a little humor that saves his characters’ voices from becoming maudlin. At the same time, we are spared the soft focus of sentimentality because the edges are raw with grief or pointed with violence. I applaud him for giving the Pacific Northwest a dimension of character that overrides the clichéd image of rugged landscapes and frontier spirits.

After reading this collection, it’s a done deal: in my book, Jess Walter is one of the greatest of contemporary American fiction writers.
