



The Wonders Of The Invisible World

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The author of the highly acclaimed novels **Jernigan** (Pulitzer Prize Finalist) and **Preston Falls** (National Book Critics Circle Award Finalist) offers up a mordantly funny collection of short stories about the faulty bargains we make with ourselves to continue the high-wire act of living meaningful lives in late twentieth-century America.

Populated by highly educated men and women in combat with one another, with substance abuse, and above all with their own relentless self-awareness, the stories in **The Wonders of the Invisible World** take place in and around New York City, and put urbanism into uneasy conflict with a fleeting dream of rural happiness. Written with style and ferocious black humor, they confirm David Gates as one of the best-and funniest-writers of our time.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

The Wonders Of The Invisible World Details

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Author : David Gates

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From Reader Review The Wonders Of The Invisible World for online ebook

Jamie says

I'm not even sure why I disliked this, except it tapped into what I like to call the *Mad Men* paradox: intellectually excellent, but no joy, no bristling dark energy to capture the imagination.

(Also, for what it's worth, I first read the story "The Bad Thing" in Jeffrey Eugenide's collection *My Mistress's Sparrow is Dead*, and it stood out as one of the better. I had this book on my shelf before I read that one, but didn't realize until reading it now that it opened with that same story. Again, it was one of the better ones. So... yeah.)

Megan says

I am not typically a fan of short stories, especially when the story ends while leaving me wanting more or at least a resolution. I especially don't like short stories about unlikeable people, and that's what this collection is. It's just not for me. The writing was ok, particularly with the realistic conversations, but just not enough to redeem them for me. 2 stars

Mark Walker says

A good set of short stories. They do what great short stories should do, which is to immediately take the reader into the lives of others. There are recurrent themes throughout the stories, and the angry dissolute characters seem a little too similar. They also feel like the main protagonists of his novels, Jernigan and Preston Falls. But a number of the stories are written from different perspectives - a woman, and old man for example - and this helps to provide variety. David Gates is a good writer, though I accept that his recurrent themes will be to everyone's tastes.

Philip says

I read a couple of the stories from this collection and enjoyed them a while back but the book definitely reads well as a collection.

Definitely very New York, even though some of the stories take place elsewhere.

Greg says

I want to like this book. The quality of Gates's writing is fantastic. These stories are very short, and the length of them is just about perfect. Gates builds characters swiftly, and the reader feels intimately aware

immediately of what is happening. If you have read Raymond Carver and loved it, you will love David Gates. They write along similar lines and with the same attitude. They write about broken, everyday people, perhaps with slightly above-average intelligence and suspicious morals. The stories get into the grit of their neurotic and often wrecked lives. I don't love the stories because they just seem to be absent of any hope. Those looking for redemption aren't likely to find much here. In my opinion, there are 4 standout stories in the collection.

The Bad Thing — This story was difficult for me to read. A pregnant woman decides to drink heavily, and then has a crisis of conscience hoping that her unborn baby will be unaffected while simultaneously covering her tracks so that her husband will not discover her. One gets the feeling this won't be the only time the child needs a bit of luck. Her husband loses his temper, and smashes his fist into the cupboard and calls her a whore. She thinks to herself, "Why was he confusing the drinking with the other? Then I got it. Obvious. It was all mixed up for him, all the same thing: the drinking, the other, anything that could make a woman free." Whoa.

The title story - a lonely school administrator rides a subway to meet a woman...not his wife in Connecticut. He has had multiple affairs that have separated him from his wife and his daughter, the latter he regrets. He gets involved with a married grad student who becomes pregnant and has an abortion. He is a sad man, who does not form lasting relationships with women, and loses children.

The Intruder – A documentary maker (or maybe someone who claims to be but never really finishes his work) studies gay porn with the intent that he will make a documentary about producers of such material. His younger partner doesn't seem to have much in common with them and there is seething animosity between them. He is an older intellectual, and the younger man is just not. Finally, he finds a movie that includes his partner and is shocked.

The Mail Lady – Like Gregor Samsa in the Metamorphosis, we occupy the thoughts of a man no one can hear. The man is a born-again Christian who has suffered a debilitating stroke. His thoughts are fairly clear, but he cannot verbalize them. His wife patronizes or ignores him and seems bent on finding her life after he is gone. His life is absurd. I think this is the best story in the collection.

See my other reviews [here!](#)

Margit says

Wonderful glimpse inside the character's heads. Raw emotion. Lots of internal monologue in a stream-of-consciousness style at times. It's amazing to me how well Gates can develop a character in such a short time through language choice in use of dialogue, a lot of internal monologue, and descriptive beats. He paints an incredibly clear picture of who these characters are as people in only a few pages. I've never read anything like it. A must-read if you're a writer.

The stories are not happy, although some of them have happy endings (most don't, and some are seriously depressing). But the writing is excellent and powerful. The characters are so strong that Gates is able to provoke strong emotions in me and put me in a very pensive mood.

The most biting, emotional, hurtful (powerful) dialogue I have ever read (especially the last line of "The Intruder"), although in my first novel I strive to achieve a similar feel woven through one POV in the first ~half. (This is only one element of the novel, and it's something for the character to grow from, so I hope it doesn't put people off too much. Reading this collection of stories is kind of depressing, because Gates doesn't show much of an upside.)

All of the stories have really poignant endings, most of which leave you a bit stunned. Of the 10, only 1 ends in action; the rest end in either dialogue or inner monologue (mostly the latter). I think I should keep that in mind for my own writing...

Sarah says

10 short stories. i like short stories. i liked this book well enough, but it was wanting. i wanted more from the characters i guess. all the reviews compare the author to chandler. i wasn't so fond of chandler. the stories weren't uplifting. they were realistic and a little depressing.

one of the characters in the last story said something like, "i am more important than my pleasures." actual quote to come when i get home. he was saying it about his bacon and egg breakfast. it was one of his pleasures, and he'd had it every day for 40 years. but that type of food was bad for him now, and he needed to realize his life was more important than that small pleasure. i need to realize that and embrace it. so if nothing else, i got that quote to think about.

Graham says

"The Mail Lady" is one of my favorite short stories ever written. The rest is merely good, a couple of really excellent pieces making up for a couple of below-average ones and the rest just solidly sitting there.

Marie Chow says

4.5 out of 5 stars

Cut to the Chase:

Gates creates a host of characters who are ordinary, extraordinary, tragic, and believable: they are steeped in both cynicism and hope, they both loathe and love the environments around them, they talk to themselves, saying, "enough with the similes and sentimentalities!" yet often taking us there anyway. They're meta — really meta — at times, always self-deprecating, make a host of mistakes and justifications (adultery, drugs, escape from the city to suburbia), and find small relief in their daily routines. The dialogue is quick, sparse, and effective, and the struggles are familiar and easy to empathize with... overall, this is one of the strongest short story collections I've read.

Greater Detail:

As always, with a short story collection, I prefer to do mini-synopses and let that speak for itself:

The Mail Lady — one of my favorites, we have here a born-again Christian who's suffered a debilitating stroke trying to live within the confines of his new world: he struggles to communicate with those around him, and lives almost completely within his head, constantly misunderstood by his wife, finding both the irony and the absurdity in all that is around him.

The Bad Thing — a pregnant woman who drinks too much one night is torn between trying to justify to herself that things will be okay, while trying to figure out how to fill up the liquor bottle so her husband won't find out what she's done.

Star Baby — Billy leaves the city and his lover to live in his family home. He finds himself sleeping in his parent's bed, trying to deal with being gay in a smaller community, and watching his young nephew while his sister deals with her drug addiction.

Beating — a Jewish wife tries to come to terms with her extreme Leftist husband, a man who reads Pound and whose anger over the injustices rules him, while she quietly rents children's movies and tries to come to terms with who they've both become.

Saturn — they've just bought a big house, and everyone seems to be visiting, things should be going so well — yet the young woman finds herself smoking dope, growing more anxious and promising herself: this is the last time, she hates this feeling...

Many of these characters make realizations which we almost blush to be made aware of — Uncle Billy in "Star Baby" is relieved when he finds he is not attracted to his young nephew — yet can't help but think, yes, that is just the type of normal yet perverted thought we would probably think, at the most inappropriate moments. In "Saturn," a young woman justifies her affair by noting that she separates herself from her lover with both a condom and a diaphragm, which must mean she's given more of herself, been closer with, her husband. Still, they feel like thoroughly believable people; you empathize with them despite their sometimes awful choices and actions.

Comparisons to Other Authors:

Some of the over-thinkers remind me of characters from Haslett's *You are Not a Stranger Here* or more meta/intense versions of Nick Hornby's immature males (these are the grown-up versions here). "The Mail Lady" in particular reminds me of Julian Barnes's collection *The Lemon Table*, though there's a sparsity of language here (like all things Raymond Carver) mixed with sardonic humor that keeps the action constantly moving forward.

Margaux Lashbrook says

I stumbled across this book, withdrawn from the local library.

I'm not a fan of short stories, I want more when reading, I need to discover the characters and places, however, these stories have sucked me in from the opening sentences, each one unusual and yet including the ordinary rituals of life.

Simon A. Smith says

Mr. Gates is a good read. I definitely could be projecting, but I feel like Gates and I would be chums. Judging from the stories/characters he appears to enjoy liquor, jazz music, academia and agnosticism (if not full blown atheism) and progressive politics, which I can totally appreciate. But it's that same love of intellectual pursuits and ivory tower type thinking, that trips me up at times slightly. The language is stilted at places, and a bit highfalutin, but overall I seemed to understand the sensibility of his narrators (which are mostly maladjusted malcontents written in the first person point of view with a propensity for infidelity - which is the one aspect I do not share). All in all, a quality acerbic, cathartic read, flush with charm and wit.

Insert irony (regarding the pretentious language - hehe) here.

Chris says

David Gates wrote two quirky, critically acclaimed novels ("Jernigan" and "Preston Falls") in the 90's that I liked well enough to read twice each (and maybe will again). I wasn't aware of this short story collection published as a book in 1999 until recently. As with most short story collections, I enjoyed some more than others, but mostly more over less. All in all, darkly funny, poignant, smart character-driven stories that illustrate how human lives are messy and how we contribute to that mess in spite of ourselves.

Jodi says

When I think about just how much I enjoyed reading David Gates' The Wonders of the Invisible World, I have to laugh. I got the book completely by mistake. I mooched it thinking it was a collection by David Schickler who wrote Kissing in Manhattan, another book I loved.

I find it difficult to write about books that I liked. It's hard because I often come up, "I liked it because it was good" which is just about the lamest most unhelpful thing to say. It also doesn't help that I recently read Salon's bunch of bullshit about the death of literary criticism.

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Debbie says

i didn't finish it due to lack of interest. the stories were mellow and uninteresting. i was reading it just to get over it and decided against better judgement, that i shouldn't give the book that kind of treatment. so i put it down.

Woody Lewis says

I've been savoring this collection over the past few months, finally finished it. David's work intrigued me before I met him at Bennington. I "The Wronged Husband" in Ploughshares before I started the MFA

program. That's included in this collection, and "The Mail Lady," the last piece, is an incredible story. Every one is fresh, a bit caustic, and so like the author...:)
