



Paradise and Elsewhere

Kathy Page

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“Moody, shape-shifting, provocative and always as compelling as a strong light at the end of a road you hesitate to walk down...but will.”—**Amy Bloom**

The rubble of an ancient civilization. A village in a valley from which no one comes or goes. A forest of mother-trees, whispering to each other through their roots; a lakeside lighthouse where a girl slips into human skin as lightly as an otter into water; a desert settlement where there was no conflict, before she came; or the town of Wantwick, ruled by a soothsayer, where tourists lose everything they have. These are the places where things begin.

New from the author of *The Story of My Face*, *Paradise & Elsewhere* is a collection of dark fables at once familiar and entirely strange: join the Orange Prize-nominated Kathy Page as she notches a new path through the wild, lush, half-fantastic and half-real terrain of fairy tale and myth.

Praise for *Paradise & Elsewhere*

“This vibrant, startlingly imaginative collection reminded me—as few collections have done in recent years—of both where stories come from, and why we need to tell them. Kathy Page is a massive talent: wise, smart, very funny and very humane.”—**Barbara Gowdy**

Paradise and Elsewhere Details

Date : Published June 10th 2014 by Biblioasis (first published March 17th 2014)

ISBN : 9781927428597

Author : Kathy Page

Format : Paperback 128 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fantasy, Fiction, Magical Realism, Cultural, Canada

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From Reader Review Paradise and Elsewhere for online ebook

Chris May says

Weird and wonderful. This little book has a bit of everything. Page can pack a lot into a short story and take you down winding paths before bringing you to a stunning conclusion.

Kimbofo says

Kathy Page's extraordinary short story collection *Paradise & Elsewhere* has been long listed for this year's Giller Prize. I say "extraordinary" because it's the best word I could come up with to describe the book in its entirety. Each of the 14 stories within it are magical little portholes into other worlds, or, as the author puts it herself (in the Acknowledgements), "explorations into the hinterland between realism and myth".

Indeed, reading many of these stories is a slightly dislocating experience. That's because the places in which Page sets them feel real and recognisable — deserts, rural communities, suburbia, to name but a few — and yet somewhere at the mid-way point of each story, or near the end, she drops in a little detail that makes you realise these are not places you've ever been — or are likely to want to visit.

Some are set now, others in the future after an unexplained and presumably catastrophic event has changed civilisation in subtle but oh-so important ways.

To read the rest of my review, please visit my blog.

Krista says

I feel how in these last hot days and years the world is full of parables, prefiguration and correspondence. Even half-truths or outright lies hide lessons and examples, and somewhere, beneath one of these dry stones, curled like a bug, is hope.

I had read that the stories in Kathy Page's Paradise and Elsewhere are strange and fable-like, but other than fictional settings (that could actually fit in on Earth somewhere) or a plausible near-future, the first few stories in this collection didn't really feel *fantastic*: G'Ming could happen in any remote village and Lak-ha, while it has a quirk in it, fits into our world. The Ancient Siddanese, even though it takes place in a slightly dystopic near future, is a visit to an archeological site not unfamiliar to us today, and later, similarly, My Beautiful Wife and Clients take place in recognisable (if unhappy) near-futures. Yet, for most of Of Paradise, I was totally misdirected, believing that it was set in any desert oasis in any time frame, but when it ended and I realised that my preconceived notions had prevented me from understanding what I was clearly reading -- that's when I realised something special was happening. So while the first few stories don't really represent the whole of this collection, they did provide an easy introduction to an inventive author and her world-building.

Low Tide certainly did feel mythical, beginning with a woman who emerges naked from the ocean, claiming to have transformed from a sea creature.

(B)y the boat stood a man, watching me through binoculars. Did his watching change me that first time? Or did I, wet-dreaming until I caught fire, invent him, then split my pelt with longing and climb out of it? Maybe it was both of these things; in any case, at the beginning neither of us cared.

So much is eventually revealed -- the man lost his unbalanced wife to the sea, so is this her returned, as he believes? But if so, why doesn't the wife's clothes fit her? Can she really transform herself? Or is this the unbalanced mind and she's an unreliable narrator? -- and all of these facts keep the reader off balance and distracted from what's actually happening: a power struggle about physical and sexual exploitation, and from beginning to end, this is probably my favourite story in the book.

We, the Trees serves as a warning against an impending and unhappy future (but didn't really work for me) and at least one story maybe went too far with the fantastic -- I Like to Look -- and a couple of stories felt a bit pointless (Woodsmoke and My Fees), but many stories were intriguing and thought-provoking. Lambing was another standout, and although it had the feeling of a Grimm's fairytale, I absolutely believed that it could happen in our world and it touched me. So too was I affected by The Kissing Disease (imagine a world where adolescents have been raised to fear kissing and the strange disease that it unleashes; would never kissing be inhuman?). And Saving Grace -- another slightly unhappy near-future -- was a fascinating trip away from civilisation (and is therefore the opposite journey to many of the stories here).

If Page has a recognisable format, it's to conjure a barely different world, and just when the reader is comfortable in it, she adds a few more details that turn things around. And this generally doesn't feel like a gotcha or an O. Henry-type twist, but just a resolution of an out-of-focus picture; a lifting of the dry stones to reveal what lies beneath, curled like a bug. And so very much of it is simply finely written:

She left, I stayed put. She has a story to tell; I sit and stare, look and see. While she was away I saw some sights. I saw our mother shrink. Her skin grew yellow, a damp envelope. I saw the snowdrops each spring. I saw a last breath, and the skin grow luminously pale. I pulled back the sheet and looked upon our mother's bones, seemingly wrapped in bleached and shrunken cloth. I saw our brother, taller than any of us and fitter too, trying to catch sparrows in his useless hands. I looked at rainbows in soapsuds stretching and bursting, at a tangle of earthworms, wet, glistening; saw the scars where their ends had grown back. I saw the yellow stone of our house obscured by ivy, how the small dry roots pushed themselves into its pores and cracks. I looked at myself in the mirror and felt that it would break; I looked longer and the feeling went away.

Overall, these stories seem really simple while reading them and improve upon reflection. While I did love a few of the stories, I can't say I loved the whole collection, and it's really more of a 3.5 stars, with a conflicted rounding down.

Daniel Kukwa says

I'm afraid this one isn't for me. I found it rather hard going, and apart from a couple of stories buried at the heart of the book, none of the tales spoke to me in any way. There's simply something in this collection that sails right over my head.

Alice Lippart says

Got off to a bit of a slow start, but some of the stories in the middle are excellent. The collection has a great atmosphere and myth-like quality to it, but some stories feel purposeless and without direction.

Mary Lowery says

A book that brought me back for a second read.

How exciting and refreshing to read a set of stories that broadens our horizons, not of the geographical world as we know it, but of how we might be, free of our familiar preconceptions--all underscored in the surprise endings. It is a world still instinctual and dangerous, still ultimately unknowable and intriguing, and so requiring our attention, the luxury of slow reading, and the permeating pleasure of a second read.

Heather Vinson says

I loved that we were able to Skype with the author and know more about the process of short story writing. I have more appreciation for the process of writing and selecting what makes a book's final edit.

Jaaron says

Review originally posted on Worn Pages and Ink.

I've said it before that I am not a fan of short stories, but Kathy Page has made me love short stories with this wonderful, visceral, and sometimes disturbing collection. I've highlighted more passages and dogeared more pages in this book than in anything I've read since graduating from university. I discovered this book through Quill & Quire's Cover to Cover feature the development of the cover of this unique set. The stories are surreal and strange, with a strong undercurrent of human emotion coursing through it and the cover captures this feeling so completely. The writing is elegant, reflected in the careful typeface, but often fills you with disbelief, much like the cover image. The book, as a whole, is a work of art.

I was shocked by the story *We, the Trees*. A young man takes a course with a teacher known for her open-mindedness, however he never shows up to class. He promises a final project unlike anything she's ever seen. With his perpetual absence, she's pushed to fail him, but holds off in anticipation of the anticipated final assignment. I won't reveal to you how the story ends, but it's brutally shocking and disturbing, but moving and utterly powerful. The conclusion took my breath away. I found many of the stories in this book

had this effect.

I want to share a passage with you from one of my favourite stories, *Of Paradise*: “she was just a little different, not enough to make her completely other. We had recognized her as human from the start. Differentness was not the point, some said. It led both ways. Rather, the issue was that she had come from elsewhere and so we did not know her story or her intention” (31). This observation for me was the perfect description of what it is to be human, to recognize that others are similar to us, but there is always this sense of “otherness” that we struggle with because we do not understand where others come from or the stories they are living. In the same sense, we can always relate because the human experience is always the same; we all feel happiness, sadness, anger, elation. It’s beautiful.

Short story lovers, this one’s for you. I promise you’ll enjoy it!

Tricia Dower says

I read this collection when it first came out and just gave it a second read because it's easy to miss the subtlety and brilliance in this slim, intense volume. Page creates whole worlds and moods in concise and lyrical language. Most of the landscapes in these stories are foreign but she embeds them with intimacy through the use of first person singular or plural narrators in all but two stories. These tales have a myth-like quality, moving between close observation and anthropological distance. Each story is unusual and unsettling yet, ultimately, compassionate. Page writes in one her stories, "A careless or malicious guide can ruin a trip like this, can leave you with nightmares and a very bitter taste in your mouth." Page's writing is neither careless nor malicious.

Magdelanye says

such lush writing seemed to emphasize the utter creepiness of these stories.

Kell says

Kathy Page is a magnificent writer, her sentences crisp, ideas vast, and characters intriguing and finely carved. She ignites trepidation, wonder, anger and understanding, and an ongoing fascination with places and tales that grow to be real as they unfold. I want very much for more people to be reading this book - Page deserves acknowledgement of her skill, deserves a larger population within her created lands - and readers deserve to see and know and be altered in the knowing.

I had the privilege of being taught a creative writing class by Page 3 or 4 years ago, which is how I encountered her work. I read three of the stories then but wasn't able to take them in - however, I recalled "On Paradise" strongly enough to return, and this time, I relished the experience. Below are my ratings of individual stories (only the best included):

G'Ming (3.5) - an ingenious main plot, but I'm not totally on board with the ending or how the story feels

Of Paradise (5) - half-revealed, but beautifully so. I'm left with a sense of being gifted something great. One

of my most-loved story ideas

The Ancient Siddanese (5) - a wondrous place and people to believe in

Low Tide (3.5) - would have liked a touch more, but what was there was vibrantly alive

My Beautiful Wife (4.5) - subtle, but emotional in tone and a colourful world

We, the Trees (3) - not for me. I felt it gave too little, then too much, and ended with too little addressed

Clients (4) - another original concept, well-spun. A good length, opened and cut off at strong points

Woodsmoke (4) - leaves a sense of missing something, but the memory and the missing are good, are enough

The Kissing Disease (3.5) - strange in some ways, but lovely and warm in others. I like how Page revokes masculinity for a moment (an undercurrent of feminist turns throughout, which carries the pages well).

Kathryn says

Odd... It got off to a slow start, the first few stories were not to my liking and then it started to get better... I really liked 3 or 4 of the stories, so it was worth the read.

Michael says

Kathy Page's collection of short stories are certainly different and unpredictable. Perhaps a few are disturbing. Some stories didn't seem to have a direction, and upon reflection, I believe that was the intent of the author. The jacket refers to the stories as being of fairy tale and myth. That probably describes it best.

Kassandra says

I was about to give up on this book, after finding the first 4 stories to be mostly uninteresting (but odd enough so that I did read them -- plus, they're very short). However, "Low Tide", the 5th story, was so good that I resolved to keep the book immediately after reading it. And the rest of the book was also so good, so strange, so poetic and so unusual compared to other short story collections that now I'm glad I read it. It's too bad that the stories were arranged in such a way that I felt the weakest ones were first, but I'm glad I stuck with this little book, a jewel box with odd bits piled in it, sparkling here and there. Very interesting, original stories which won't remind you of anyone else. Some of them are so good I read them twice in a row. Which is a lesson not to give up on a book that doesn't capture you right away!

Hannah Givens says

"The Ancient Siddanese," and perhaps one or two others ("We, the Trees"), would be worth reading on their

own because they're amazing, but the book really works best as a collection. Page and her editors have given a lot of thought to the order of the stories and how they move you from mood to mood. *Paradise & Elsewhere* isn't a long book, but it's an experience worth having, especially if you're interested in that space between fantasy and realism, feeling like you've really been somewhere just a little beyond our daily life. Highly recommended!

Full review: <https://hannahgivens.wordpress.com/20...>
