



## We Always Treat Women Too Well

*Raymond Queneau, Barbara Wright (Translator), John Updike (Introduction)*

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**We Always Treat Women Too Well** Raymond Queneau , Barbara Wright (Translator) , John Updike (Introduction)

*We Always Treat Women Too Well* was first published as a purported work of pulp fiction by one Sally Mara, but this novel by Raymond Queneau is a further manifestation of his sly, provocative, wonderfully wayward genius. Set in Dublin during the 1916 Easter rebellion, it tells of a nubile beauty who finds herself trapped in the central post office when it is seized by a group of rebels. But Gertie Girdle is no common pushover, and she quickly devises a coolly lascivious strategy by which, in very short order, she saves the day for king and country. Queneau's wickedly funny send-up of cheap smut—his response to a popular bodice-ripper of the 1940s—exposes the link between sexual fantasy and actual domination, while celebrating the imagination's power to transmute crude sensationalism into pleasure pure and simple.

## We Always Treat Women Too Well Details

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## From Reader Review We Always Treat Women Too Well for online ebook

### Andrew says

Perhaps it is wrong to judge a book written seventy years ago by our own modern moral expectations however as I read this book I found the casual treatment of sexual assaults in a humorous fashion as distasteful. I read the introduction of this classic explaining that this book is a satire of the American pot boilers of the forties and fifties with its casual mistreatment of women and that Gertie is an ironic heroine however for me it didn't work and it simply felt exploitative. I don't even think I'm prudish as the humour for example of Tom Sharpe is sexual but its irony and satire pokes fun at the institutions it seeks to undermine, in this book it is simply sexual assaults apparently made acceptable because the heroine enjoys the experience!!

The plot, well bizarrely in 1916 Dublin a fictionalized post office is taken over by rebels, gertie is locked in the toilet but emerges to cause sexual havoc amongst the revolutionaries. Not even the final scene where she pulls her tongue out at the surviving Rebels as they meet their final fate rescues it. It's only saving grace is that it was so short.

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### Frank says

Mai prima di questo avevo letto un libro di Raymond Queneau, dunque non sapevo cosa aspettarmi da questo autore, anche perché le uniche mie conoscenze facevano riferimento ad Esercizi di stile che con questo Troppo buoni con le donne non c'entra nulla.

Da buon appassionato di storia irlandese sono rimasto stregato dall'ambientazione e dalle primissime pagine che proiettano il lettore nel pieno dell'insurrezione repubblicana del 1916 nell'ufficio postale di Dublino.

Con il procedere degli eventi ci si trova però ben presto di fronte a situazioni non propriamente realistiche, con gli indipendentisti che vengono presentati come un ammasso di paesani analfabeti e creduloni che si esprimono attraverso un linguaggio più che terra-terra, cosa che potrebbe anche essere verosimile per gli inizi del secolo scorso; tuttavia sono le situazioni che si vengono a creare all'interno delle mura del piccolo ufficio postale che fanno pensare a qualcosa di inventato e non proprio realistico.

Ecco allora che una breve verifica su altri testi di storia fuga i dubbi e porta a tornare sulle pagine di questo libro con occhi diversi: non si è più in attesa di scoprire come andranno le cose da un punto di vista storico e politico, ma semplicemente siamo alle prese con un romanzo breve di altre caratteristiche.

La lettura procede allora secondo aspettative più serene e la vicenda assume tratti che vanno dal grottesco, quando un po' per volta i singoli rivoltosi cadono vittime dei raggiri dell'ostaggio femminile, al drammatico, quando tra un colpo di fucile e un cannoneggiamento qualcuno ci lascia le penne.

Bello e curioso per gli usi e i costumi che vengono ben riportati, ma forse troppo schematico nel contenuto e ad un certo punto fin troppo prevedibile.

Comunque sia una lettura gradevole seppur senza troppe pretese.

Tempo di lettura: 2h 45m

<http://ferdori.wordpress.com>

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### **Glyven says**

Though it's undoubtedly less outrageous today than it would have been in 1947, Queneau's funny and subversive satire is perhaps easier to appreciate in a time when things like ambiguity of sexual consent, genital mutilation, and mid-coital bodily rending might provide fodder for dark humor in films and television. What distinguishes Queneau's treatment of such material is his amusingly discreet approach; a more passive reader might not even catch his description of, say, an act of fellatio, which lurks beneath the surrounding action. One might say that Queneau cleverly writes with the "correctitude" that preoccupies the novel's male characters.

As in any good satire about the battle of the sexes, both genders fare pretty badly--this may be an implicitly pro-feminist novel, but only in the sense that the central female humiliates the men through her sexuality alone. She's also the least likeable of the characters, and that's counting a man who masturbates to the sight of a dead woman. The reader, perhaps as intended, doesn't come away with a particularly positive impression of human beings in general.

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### **ΠανωςΚ says**

Ο Ρε?μ?ν (υπαρξιακ?) Κεν? σπ?ει χοντρ? -?ως και χοντροκομμ?νη, ?ως και κακ?γουστη- πλ?κα σε αντ? το βιβλ?ο. Διασκεδαστικ?τατο «σ?γουρα», που λεν κι οι κλωτσοσκουφιστα?, αναρωτι?σαι ?μως αν θα τ?γχανε της ?διας αποδοχ?ς ε?ν ?ταν γραμμ?νο απ? κ?ποιον Φο?φουτο συγγραφ?α? αν -?στω- εξακολουθο?σε να φ?ρει την ψευδ?νυμη υπογραφ? Σ?λι (Σ?ρα Σαχλα) Μ?ρα και το Κακ? Συναπ?ντημα, ?πως ?ταν πρωτοκυκλοφ?ρησε.

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### **Jim says**

This satirical French novel about the Irish Rebellion is a bit too oddball to be taken seriously, but it is rather fun to read. A number of Irish rebels take over the (fictitious) post office at Eden Quay, killing several of the employees in the process. Before long, they start striking attitudes as brave and highly principled rebels, when suddenly it is discovered that one of the female employees has locked herself in the loo. In no time at all, she is dragged out. Although she is supposedly virginal, she practically rapes all the rebels in turn. As one of the rebels remarks, "If it hadn't been for you we'd have been dead without any trouble, but, just because you went to have a pee at the precise moment of our insurrection, our glory may well be tarnished by vile gossip and filthy slander."

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### **Amaranta says**

Dublino 1916: un gruppo di giovani fanatici Repubblicani assalta l'ufficio postale di Eden Quai per mettere (

secondo loro) il regime in difficoltà. Sette uomini scalcinati, dal grilletto facile, beoni e curiosi, lanciano una resistenza armata contro le truppe britanniche. Sono pronti a dare la vita, fra una ceretta, un mal di pancia e spogliarelli improvvisati ma non hanno fatto i conti con...

Un romanzo divertente, dissacrante, che sottolinea la differenza fra uomini e donne, giocandoci, rendendola palese e grottesca in un crescendo di simpatia e humor.

Un quasi primo Queneau per me dopo piccoli frammenti degli “esercizi di stile”, piacevolissimo. Troppo buoni con le donne? Naaa, MAI!

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### **aloveiz says**

Could anything this well named be bad? Of course not. I heard about this by way of somebody's very distraught ex secret boyfriend who related to the title rather personally. The form here is unique. The characters are undescribed and undeveloped -they are just names that things happen to. They have little in common outside of their decision to collectively wage a war against their oppressors. This only makes the story more exemplary.

I am fascinated by the fact that Queneau originally published this book under the pseudonym Sally Mara because this piece is so intricately masculine -even misogynistic when it can manage to be. The story is terse and tragic and a very valid literary creation. Recommended for anyone who thinks surrealism is normal.

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### **Jacob says**

"Yes, my girl, it means that you've got to keep quiet."

"About what? Why?"

"We're heroes, and not swine. Got it?"

"Perhaps."

"Of course you've got it. If it hadn't been for you we'd have been dead without any trouble, but, just because you went to have a pee at the precise moment of our insurrection, our glory may well be tarnished by vile gossip and filthy slander."

(We Always Treat Women Too Well, p. 163)

Funny how going to the loo at the wrong time can ruin everyone's day. It's 1916, the Easter Rising, and seven Irish rebels have just seized a Dublin post office. Their goal: to win independence, or die gloriously trying. But they didn't count on Gertie Girdle--pure, virginal Gertie Girdle--who, despite being engaged (to Commodore Cartwright, whose ship has orders to bombard the post office and the rebels inside) manages to outsmart, and out-sex, the hapless rebels who have taken her (or has she taken them?) prisoner. For King and country, of course. Of course.

The nice thing about the New York Review of Books is that it keeps introducing me to writers I never would've found, much less read, on my own: see John Williams; see J. F. Powers. But I've noticed an unusual consequence (Quirk? Downside?) of that: while NYRB publishes little-known (to me, at least)

writers, it often publishes little-known (to me, at least) books by better-known writers, too. Evan S. Connell had his Mrs. and Mr. Bridge novels, so why would I start off with *The Diary of a Rapist*? Surely Christopher Priest has more accessible (and less confusing) novels than *The Inverted World*. And who chooses to read *Brigadier Gerard* over *Sherlock Holmes*? This guy, that's who.

See also: Raymond Queneau. The writer of *Exercises in Style* is hardly known for writing We Always Treat Women Too Well--in fact, it was ignored by "serious" Queneau fans/scholars for twenty years after its publication--and yet this is where I decided to start. And it's a funny little novel. Queneau wrote it as a parody (satire? send-up?) of trashy '40s-era pulp fiction, with all the smut and filth intact. Sex and violence occur in droves, often simultaneously (including, in one case, a mid-coital decapitation via well-placed cannon shell), the line between rape and consent is blurred, and swearing abounds. It's less shocking now than (I imagine) it was then, and it's funnier than it has a right to be (Queneau is a great writer; Barbara Wright is a great translator), and it's still a strange book to start with if one wants to read Raymond Queneau. But if the rest of his work is as clever (and strange, and amusing) as this smutty parody of cheap smut, then I'll definitely have to add the rest of his work (especially Exercises in Style, right?) to my reading list.

And maybe Ulysses too, just to get all the Joyce jokes peppered throughout...but let's not get ahead of ourselves just yet.

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### **MJ Nicholls says**

This novel parodies cheap *noir* novels being sold by the shovel in the 1940s. Holed up in a Dublin post office, a group of Irish rebels hold hostage the canny temptress Gertie Girdle, and one by one, as the English crush their insurgency, fall sway to her peculiar charms. Dismissed as a crude failure upon publication, Queneau's pseudonymous novel certainly lards more sex and swearing into the action than in his screwball comedies, but the parody is clearly delineated from the ludicrous dialogue and the nods to Joyce. Despite the filth this is unmistakably a Queneau novel—zippy chapters, perfect comedic descriptions, broader backdrops of cantankerous protest against trends. A hoot, a veritable hoot! (Though several theses could be written on its sexual politics—don't probe too deeply). See also Boris Vian's *I Spit on Your Graves*.

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### **Chuck LoPresti says**

If a coherent Alfred Jarry wrote *Dog Day Afternoon* after reading Joyce you would end up something like this. This is a dirty little book that is a one-sit read for most. Reading the description you might think there's better use of your time than literary smut but you'd be doing yourself a disservice to miss this. Not quite as depraved as Bataille's *Story of the Eye* and not as cheap as *Pulp Fiction* the pleasure in this book derives from Queneau's ability to handle a plot with his ever-present wit. At no time is the reader led astray into simple arousal or easy identification. Q keeps his aim firmly locked on making fun of such literature but never really stooping to simple parody. Much is made about the Joyce-influenced character names and locations but to best understand this work I think Rabelais is the true parent of most of Q's work. Imperfect characters booze it up and spread some seed with anything but joy but the true measure of their manhood is best defined by their will to control their self-image. Do what thou whilst - but call a duck a duck, the Thelemic code, is on full display here. Like Jarry - Q's questionable characterization of women is often less than flattering. It's the uncontrollable sexual impulses of a woman that enables the inevitable fall from grace

that wasn't supposed to accompany the likely death of these bachelors that leave her stripped bare and sodomized. But - why should a book that parodies crap try to do better than that? The men are painted with the same brush. If, like me, you watched Pulp Fiction and felt dumber for having sat throughout the experience - you'll probably appreciate this mock black humor. Q is never anything less than a great writer in my experience and it's his subtlety in panning such crap that makes it all work. This is funny, smart and insidious in its destruction of tawdry noir pulp. So if you can snicker at a severed penis and chuckle at chilly sensuality of an Irish terrorist and gladly wash it all down with a pint of Guinness - you'll enjoy this as I have.

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### **Cphe says**

An offering from the New York Review Books Classic list, which has introduced this reader to a lot of gems, interesting books and vastly different authors.

It was the quirky title that piqued my interest because I'd certainly never come across the author's name before. There is already a substantive synopsis on offer so no point in my rehashing.

I know that many readers have rated this shorter novel far higher but it didn't quite "gel" with me even though I love books set in Ireland and I love the period of history that the novel was set in. The very dark humor, and references to James Joyce sailed over my head as I've never read Joyce I'm afraid. The novel itself is written at a cracking pace, and the chapters are short which gave the story a 'static feel'.

I realize that the novel was meant to be a parody but it just didn't resonate, parts that were meant to be humorous weren't to me. The characters themselves were strangely unsympathetic and lacked an emotional connection from the captive femme fatale Gertie to the Irish Rebels. Just not my cup of tea I'm afraid.....

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### **Pe?ivo says**

Na ženský je ?lov?k krátkej, je Queneaova (zde op?t po n?jaké dob? sklo?ovací syndrom kanadského branká?e Patrika Royeho) krátká próza o tom, že je ?lov?k na ženský krátkej. Mám rád tyhle knihy, kdy p?íb?h rovnou obsahuje pointu knihy, tak jako t?eba Jak se plave ke dnu od Jirky Pomejeho.

Tento p?íb?h se odehrává b?hem první sv?tovy války, chvíli p?ed vznikem Irský republiky. Irský rebelové spolejhaj na to, že britský flotily maj na práci drancovat n?koho jinýho a tak v Dublinu za?nou obsazovat britský ú?ady. Queneau se soust?edí na jeden poštovní ú?ad, kterej obsadí n?kolik rebel? a co ?ert necht?l, nevyhodí z ú?adu všechny zam?stnance. Zapomenou totiž na záchod? jednu poštovní ú?ednici. No a tady je kámen úrazu - jak už to na poštách chodí, jen co se zav?ou dve?e, ú?ednice za?ne ou?adovat a kalhotky za chvíli letí komínem. A revoluce taky.

Já tomu dávám 8/10, protože nerad chodím na poštu.

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### **Fred says**

queneau parodies bad writing in every conceivable aspect, taking the overt form of a ludlumesque action

thriller - the evil twin brother of "exercises in style"

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### **Dan Keating says**

Raymond Queneau's satirical work of pulp fiction is a subtle study in minimalism; it's easy to miss the satire if you're not paying close attention, at least not until about halfway through the story.

The story's cheerful amorality will definitely bother some, as it is a story of a girl who decides to use her sexuality as a subtle weapon against her enemies and who is, in turn, raped multiple times. Despite these violent acts being visited upon her, Gertie Girdle (yes, that's really her name) continuously gives the impression that she's not overwhelmed, that she is in control of both herself and the situation, and even if things aren't going exactly according to some carefully-laid-out master plan, things are at least going her way even as they appear to not be at all.

The story also manages to lampoon the sense of nationalistic pride felt by its characters, making them all seem a little ridiculous for the strong feelings they have for the institutions of their countries, which drive them to say and do things they clearly don't fully understand.

In the end, "We Always Treat Women Too Well" is a well-executed satire - it at first doesn't appear to be satire at all; then it starts to vaguely become clear that everything is not as it "ought" to be in a sincerely-written story regarding this subject matter; then the absurd rears its head; and by the end, all the institutions of the subjects being satirized have been turned completely on their heads. The book satirizes sexy, quasi-erotic bodice rippers by being more explicit in many ways without being sexy; it satirizes staunchly nationalistic stories as ridiculous on an individual level; and it satirizes morality tales by giving a heroine who manages to "save the day," so to speak, through a combination of sex and subterfuge.

At the same time, the book is not without its flaws. The extremely short "chapters" are occasionally a bit annoying, and the almost utter interchangeability of the Irish Republican characters makes telling who's talking (and caring) a bit difficult at times. Still, worth a read.

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### **Yogodot says**

I read this book nearly 30 years ago and absurd images from it still haunt me. I'm the first to agree that Queneau was a genius, for *Elements of Style*, *The Bark Tree*, and *The Last Days*, and I have nothing against parody or satire as such, but this story doesn't connect with any of his other works. The effect is juvenile in the extreme, a quality which Queneau shares with Alfred Jarry, but really it's the title and the attitude it pronounces upon the subject which makes it reckless and belligerent. Any comic effect is quickly overwhelmed by disgust.

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