



Why the Devil Chose New England for His Work: Stories

Jason Brown

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“Everything Natalie said seemed, to herself, to have been said better by him. He was less fond of speaking, however, than he was of hitting people in the face, which seemed a more likely source of her love to those of us who knew him,” begins Jason Brown’s linked collection of beautifully haunted, violent, and wry stories set in the densely forested lands of northern New England. In these tales of forbidden love, runaway children, patrimony, alcohol, class, inheritance, and survival, Brown’s elegant prose emits both quiet despair and a poignant sense of hope and redemption. These vivid accounts of troubled lives combine the powerful family drama of Andre Dubus and Russell Banks, the dark wit of Denis Johnson, the lost souls of Charles D’Ambrosio, and the New England gothic of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Jason Brown’s exquisitely crafted second collection will establish him as one of the most important voices in American short fiction.

Why the Devil Chose New England for His Work: Stories Details

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From Reader Review Why the Devil Chose New England for His Work: Stories for online ebook

Brett Starr says

Afternoon of the Sassanoa.....

As a passionate reader of short stories, I'm always looking for that next great collection to read. I read reviews, recommendations and alot of "best of" lists. Their are always those few story collections that pop up over and over again, "Why the Devil Chose New England for His Work" is one of those!

Jason Brown's writing is highly regarded and his short story collections well known for quality.

This collection includes eleven stories, ranging from 25-30 pages in length. The recurring theme is the outdoors (lakes, rivers, trees & forests), with a dark tone to the majority of the stories.

The first two stories "She" and "Trees" left me wondering whether or not this book was right for me, but the third story "The Plains of Abraham" was proof that it was definitely was.

GOOD:

"The Plains of Abraham"

"Why the Devil Chose New England for His Work"

"Dark Room"

"River Runner"

GREAT (highly recommended):

"The Lake"

"A Fair Chance"

"Life During Peacetime"

"North"

"Afternoon of the Sassanoa"

These stories are as good as anything you'll find, I highly recommended them to any short story fan.

Other short story collections definitely worth reading are - Driving the Heart and Other Stories by Jason Brown, Poachers: Stories by Tom Franklin, Controlled Burn: Stories by Scott Wolven, Refresh, Refresh: Stories by Benjamin Percy & Tunneling to the Center of the Earth: Stories by Kevin Wilson!

Enjoy~

Bruno says

I dare you to beat this title. A 'nice' collection of stories set in the fictional town of Vaughn, New England.

Very sad, depressing and hopeless, just like my love life.

Sam says

And here we have it, the answer to what's GOOD about linked collections. Most of these stories appeared in magazines before appearing in this collection, suggesting to me that the theme of the book - goings on in a small Maine town - appeared organically in the author's imagination. The perspective shifts for each story, and there isn't a sense of a fixed cast of characters; the shifting consciousness of a small town, of the organic surveillance watchful communities practice on their members, comes over you slowly, story by story, reinforced by the characters' actions yet somehow beyond them as well, coming out of a believable fictional atmosphere. "She", the opening story, is the real whiz-banger of the collection, but the other stories act as linked fireworks, slowly building upon one another. The tone is very dark, but a certain black humor slips out between the cracks, and by the end of the book you'd be hard pressed to argue that Brown's pessimism isn't anything worse than simple honesty. A must read.

Erin says

I read more than half of the stories in this collection. There was one that I thought was really good but for the most part, I felt that they were all very dark and I was always waiting for some tragedy to happen. I was always very tense and after a while I just couldn't handle the tension so I stopped reading about 4 stories short of the end.

Becky says

I'm usually stingy with my 5-star reviews, but with this one I figured what the hell. It's really because I'm not usually into short stories, so when a collection wows me, I give it extra credit. This collection of stories is just phenomenal. They all take place in a fictional small town in Maine, where everybody has secrets and is haunted by their past in one way or another. All of the stories are so atmospheric, and the environment of the woods, the lake, the river, the train tracks, the village steeples jutting into the sky -- it's all very vivid. I loved the tension that runs through practically every word. It's all dark, tragic, and at many points, utterly heartbreaking. This is the kind of book I would buy extra copies of to give to my friends as gifts.

Casey says

Thematically, the 11 stories in Jason Brown's second collection pick up where his first left off. We're introduced to characters who are haunted by their pasts, be it their blood, or addiction, or lost loved ones, though this time, the stories are all set in the small northern New England town of Vaughn. There are several first person narrators, but they don't dominate this collection as they did his first.

Like the stories in *Driving the Heart*, many of these are long stories that sometimes seem to meander, but they always deliver. Many times Brown will introduce a strong image/theme early in a story, only to seemingly abandon it, but everytime this happens, the reader is rewarded when the image/theme comes

back--stronger and more meaningful--at the end.

My four favorite stories in the collection, "Trees," "Why the Devil Chose New England for His Work," "A Fair Chance," and "Afternoon of the Sassanoa" are relatively linear stories, and each has a strong sense of place, action, and both interior and exterior conflict. The characters in these stories struggle with and against themselves and their world and many times it seems they don't understand their problems and how to deal with them. Or if they do, they cannot articulate it. To me, that makes for great fiction.

On a personal note, Jason Brown is going to be the visiting writer at the MFA program where I attend, so I'm looking forward to meeting and working with him. If he's half as good a teacher as he is a writer, we should be in good hands.

Jessy says

I found the book boring and hard to get through.

Adam says

I'm pretty sure that these are what short stories are meant to be.

Renee says

These stories are like mica -- pretty, delicate, dark, yet sharp on the edges. I like this book, but it's not for those seeking an action-packed plot, since most of the stories worked well as character studies.

They seemed like abstract snapshots of somebody's mental insides, odd insides at that. Characters had twisted logic, jumping to odd conclusions about other characters and/or interacting in odd ways with other characters; nearly every character, including the children, seemed weighted and somewhat hopeless about life --perpetuating my perception of a rocky, flinty experience with the book; and nearly all character had some brush with tragedy, or a thread of tragedy in their family.

That perhaps makes it seem too dark, and for many it may be, but it was written with a very well-done sense of *place*. It's a small, coastal town that is evoked almost as a character in the novel itself. I felt it was better done than Olive Kitteride, which is set in a superficially similar place. Water, wind, trees, and light play prominently in most stories, setting certain tone that made me feel simultaneously wistful for a small-town coastal experience, and glad that I'd escaped just that sort of life.

It made me want to write a companion piece to this one that features the scorching, more robust city of the Southwest, where people have similar problems but with a more organic tone than mica.

Laurel says

Yes, I know, I know, I have most everything packed, okay??

Anyway, I couldn't sleep last night (combination of headcold, late-afternoon coffee run, and I dunno, stress perhaps?) but I stayed up reading these stories, each one hitting me in different, intense ways.

The loneliness and isolation of growing up in small-town Maine was captured here in a way that made me uncomfortable. Try as you may to escape those feelings of freezing cold, poverty, and obsession with people, yourself, and getting out, this book made me realize that those things are still inside of me somewhere. Many people write about adolescence well, but something about Jason Brown's prose and the specificity of the setting made these stories ring truer to me than most.

There is always something fucked up and secretive going on in these rural places. People go crazy from the cold longness of the winters, and they have trouble talking to each other--I think most of these stories are inner-monologues, not so much dialog, which was very appropriate, I felt. In my town, every few years someone's dad would suddenly kill his entire family, himself, and burn the house down. This happened at least twice during the time I lived there. Maine is a dark dark place for those people who live there year-round, and not on those pretty properties overlooking the ocean. I know I spent much of my childhood obsessing on how to get out of there, and Jason Brown's stories are so good, they make me feel proud of those experiences and less lonely (rather than bile-filled).

Jessica says

This is what incredible short fiction looks like. The first story in here is one of the best I think I've ever read, and does things with point of view and with the retrieving and crystallizing of that youth's perspective that has been utterly lost to most of us, that the story just made me.... out of breath. Seriously. It took away my air. None of the other stories physically traumatized me with their brilliance to quite that extent, but they all were good, not a single dud and no dialing-in here.

Brown's stories struck me as incredibly complicated in the best way, like how a leaf is complex when you look at it under a microscope, yet still beautiful and perfect even if you don't. They're all set in a small fictional town in Maine, and almost all are from the perspective of kids and young adults. I feel like Brown's really helping to address the whole carbon emissions crisis here, by allowing people to visit rural Maine without actually traveling there. I now feel totally qualified to comment on the time I spent in Vaughn, since I'm so familiar with its trees, and know what it's like to grow up there.

The only reason I can think of why this hasn't gotten more attention is that Jason Brown needs to come up with a more exciting pen name. "Jason Brown" is just too ordinary for stories this memorable, and I think he should hire a publicist to come up with something a bit flashier along the lines of "Wells Tower" or "Miranda July." I mean, the guy might be attached to his name or whatever, but these stories deserve to be read, by whatever desperate means necessary! I'd be happy to help him come up with some options, though given his obvious skills -- isn't this title one of the best you've ever seen? -- I'm sure he could do it himself.

Aeron says

This is an exquisitely crafted book of short stories. The first half of the book, I wanted to give it five stars, but I have to say that I grew bored of the fictional community and all the awful things happening by the end

of the book. There is something about the "literary" short story that requires it to be dark, I realize, but at some point I just lost all glimmers of hope for the community described in these pages, and thus I lost all interest.

Jane says

I'm not from Maine, and I don't know if I have a dark inner life, but this book was incredible. I have a half-formed thought where in crowded, populated, urban places like cities, other people serve to buffer one another (somewhat like human straightjackets, but maybe more like those stakes they use to keep sapling from falling over) from their own predilections towards insanity/odd behavior/etc. It's kind of why spatial emptiness is so terrifying. The spaces in this book are very empty.

Marianne says

I came across this book while picking up a copy of Dan Brown's book. I really enjoyed Jason Brown's short stories and was always completely taken into the story as if I were there and part of them.

Glee says

I had a really hard time with this book. The writing is truly amazing, from a literary/craftsman point of view. But reading it was a very unpleasant experience. If Stephen King's descriptions of Maine don't keep you away, try this book. I don't mean to compare the two authors because they couldn't be more different, not just in terms of skill, but King is so ham-handed and brutal, and Brown is so elegant, spare and haunting. And yet. Truly a hatchet job on Maine. Or any other cold and harsh environments, populated by people in poverty (of spirit as much as of money) and hard luck. What's that old joke -- if it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all?

The horrors in this book are about quiet desperate lives being lived on the margins of nowhere. No hope. And glimmers of hope are crushed, making you sorry you ever had the temerity to hope. Kids falling through the ice in winter and drowning. Lissome teenagers implying unwanted sexual attention from adults, who are then shunned or killed. And it is never clear what is real and what is not.

I have a similar complaint about Joan Didion -- exquisite prose squandered on bleakness.
