



## The O. Henry Prize Stories 2018

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## **The O. Henry Prize Stories 2018** Laura Furman (Editor)

*The O. Henry Prize Stories 2018* contains twenty prize-winning stories chosen from thousands published in literary magazines over the previous year. The winning stories come from a mix of established writers and emerging voices, and are uniformly breathtaking. They are accompanied by essays from the eminent jurors on their favorites, observations from the winning writers on what inspired their stories, and an extensive resource list of magazines that publish short fiction.

"The Tomb of Wrestling," Jo Ann Beard, *Tin House*

"Counterblast," Marjorie Celona, *The Southern Review*

"Nayla," Youmna Chlala, *Prairie Schooner*

"Lucky Dragon," Viet Dinh, *Ploughshares*

"Stop 'n' Go," Michael Parker, *New England Review*

"Past Perfect Continuous," Dounia Choukri, *Chicago Quarterly Review*

"Inversion of Marcia," Thomas Bolt, *n+1*

"Nights in Logar," Jamil Jan Kochai, *A Public Space*

"How We Eat," Mark Jude Poirier, *Epoch*

"Deaf and Blind," Lara Vapnyar, *The New Yorker*

"Why Were They Throwing Bricks?," Jenny Zhang, *n+1*

"An Amount of Discretion," Lauren Alwan, *The Southern Review*

"Queen Elizabeth," Brad Felver, *One Story*

"The Stamp Collector," Dave King, *Fence*

"More or Less Like a Man," Michael Powers, *The Threepenny Review*

"The Earth, Thy Great Exchequer, Ready Lies," Jo Lloyd, *Zoetrope*

"Up Here," Tristan Hughes, *Ploughshares*

"The Houses That Are Left Behind," Brenda Walker, *The Kenyon Review*

"We Keep Them Anyway," Stephanie A. Vega, *The Threepenny Review*

"Solstice," Anne Enright, *The New Yorker*

Prize Jury for 2018: Fiona McFarlane, Ottessa Moshfegh, Elizabeth Tallent

## **The O. Henry Prize Stories 2018 Details**

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## From Reader Review The O. Henry Prize Stories 2018 for online ebook

### Luke Moy says

I love short story collections, and this one does not disappoint. The strengths of this particular anthology lie in most of the stories' authors having a mastery over narrative voice and the capture of the real world in surreal ways. Laura Furman and the O Henry readers have done a great job in curating a tonally unified set of narratives that remain diverse in story, scope, and theme. While some collections can feel repetitive a few stories in, each of the short stories here, even the ones that didn't grab me, remain unique and individualized while contributing to the collection's demonstration of how the hell to write character-driven pieces. Reading through this over nine days was a real treat.

Thomas Bolt's "Inversions of Marcia" does this very well, getting into the mind of a teenager that feels outside herself and her world, exposed to things she doesn't yet have language for. "Queen Elizabeth" by Brad Felver is likewise masterful in its scope; even in third person, the couple here leap off the page and their love and subsequent grief is intense and fully developed. Dave King's "The Stamp Collector" is also quite good, moving us through a man's psyche in dealing with his ex-boyfriend and that boyfriend's now-dead mother. "Up Here," "How We Eat," and "Counterblast" are all standouts as well, emotionally rich and characterful in their prose; the authors are clearly having a great time on the page and do not shy away from it at all.

As with any collection of diverse stories, not every one is going to click with you. To this book's credit, this only happened to me twice: Jenny Zhang's "Why Were They Throwing Bricks?" just had a bit too much going on without as firm a grasp on events as I would have preferred, and Brenda Walker's "The Houses That Are Left Behind" felt unfocussed and lacked the punch that many of the other stories in here had.

All that said, though, *The O. Henry Prize Stories 2018* is a great example of how a diverse set of authors and their unique voices can be harnessed into a collection that retains those stories' individuality while constructing an overarching unity in tone and character. Very well done here!

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### Kirsty says

Ordinarily, I love varied short story collections like this, where I have the ability to discover new authors, and read incredibly different tales. Sadly, however, I found these stories to be largely disappointing. I read the first few pages of each, and not a single one grabbed me. Not at all what I expected, if I'm honest.

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### Donna Davis says

This collection is guaranteed to be good, and I was thrilled when I received a review copy, thanks to Net Galley and Doubleday. Those that enjoy strong fiction should buy it and read it, even if you have to pay full jacket price. This year's edition holds 20 prize winning stories along with a bit of judging commentary at the end. This book is now for sale.

The first story in any short story collection is bound to be good, and so I knew that Joanne Beard's *Tin House* would be strong, and it is, in a dark, surreal way. I wouldn't read it at bedtime lest it enter my dreams, but it's memorable, original, and gritty. I also enjoy Brad Felver's *Queen Elizabeth*, and *Past Perfect Continuous*, by Dounia Choukri. My favorite of all of them, the one that made me laugh out loud, is *Why Were They Throwing Bricks*, by Jenny Zhang, a story that features a cagey, manipulative Chinese grandmother and the grandchildren whose lives she enters, leaves and reenters. Zhang appears to have mostly published poetry up to this point, but I hope she writes more fiction, because I want to read it.

The only aspect of any short story that I don't enjoy is the open-ended sort that conclude with no real resolution. This screamingly frustrating inclination is minimal here, showing at the ends of a just a couple of the featured stories.

Short stories are terrific to leave, once you've finished them, in your guest room, because people that stay with you briefly can read a story or more without the frustration of having to either leave an incomplete novel behind or beg to borrow it, not knowing when they can return it. If you need an excuse to get this excellent collection for yourself, there it is.

Highly recommended.

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### **Literary Soirée says**

"The O. Henry Prize Stories 2018" edited by Laura Furman features 20 prize-winning stories selected from thousands that appeared in literary magazines over the past year. Winners reflect a breathtaking mix of established and new voices. This anthology also includes juror essays, feedback from winners on what inspired their stories, and a detailed list of magazines that publish short fiction. Highly recommended!

Prize Jury for 2018: Fiona McFarlane, Ottessa Moshfegh, Elizabeth Tallent

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Thanks to Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group and NetGalley for the review copy. Opinions are fully mine.

#TheO.HenryPrizeStories2018 #NetGalley

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### **Jeff says**

A very strong selection. Two of the three judges chose the first story as their favorite, Jo Ann Beard's "The Tomb of Wrestling," as their favorite, and it certainly was strange, stunning, and ingenious. My other favorites included:

"Inversion of Marcia" by Thomas Bolt  
"Why Were They Throwing Bricks" by Jenny Zhang  
"Queen Elizabeth" by Brad Felver

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### **Eileen says**

It's always hard to give a star rating to a book like this because there is so much variety. Some I liked more than others, but I enjoyed most of these stories. My personal favorites were Queen Elizabeth and The Stamp Collector.

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### **John Barrie says**

An outstanding collection, only two of the stories weren't hits for me, and there were many I'll return to, especially "How We Eat" and "The Inversion of Marcia."

Kudos to the editors for their keen eye.

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### **John says**

A very solid collection of stories. Very serious stories, which fits the times.

The Tomb of Wrestling - Jo Ann Beard - 3: There is some good writing here, and this feels like a 2018 story. But it didn't rise above for me.

Counterblast - Marjorie Celona - 4: Beautiful. Simple, yet so much is just underneath the surface. It felt like real life.

Nayla - Youmna Chlala - 2.5: Didn't quite come together for me.

Lucky Dragon - Viet Dinh - 3: Very poetic.

Stop 'n' Go - Michael Parker - 4: Very solid and flushed out for such a short story.

Past Perfect Continuous - Dounia Choukri - 3: Felt close to being much better.

Inversion of Marcia - Thomas Bolt - 4.5: I liked how this was told, the broken narration. Mary is so sure she is ready for life, only to discover she is still naive and knows so little.

Nights in Logar - Jamil Jan Kochai - 3: I liked the prose, but the story felt like it was missing an ingredient.

How We Eat - Mark Jude Poirier - 4: Very visual. I felt like I was there.

Deaf and Blind - Lara Vapnyar - 4: Very well told. The parts come together nicely.

Why Were They Throwing Bricks? - Jenny Zhang - 4.5: The story covers lots of ground in 20 pages. It is a wonderful narrative of how growing up changes how we see people.

An Amount of Discretion - Lauren Alwan - 3.5: Enjoyable

Queen Elizabeth - Brad Felver - 4: Rich and rewarding.

The Stamp Collector - Dave King - 4: Deep and rich, love the characters.

More or Less Like a Man - Michael Powers - 3

The Earth, The Great Exchequer, Ready Lies - Jo Lloyd - 2.5: Didn't really work for me.

Up Here - Tristan Hughes - 3.5: Moving and sad.

The Houses That Are Left Behind - Brenda Walker - 2: I felt like I was missing the primer to understand the story.

We keep Them Anyway - Stephanie A Vega - 4: Masquerades as a fun story, but shines light on a dark past.

Solstice - Anne Enright - 4.5: A perfect story to end the book. Too bad 2017 stuffed out any idea of optimism that it would be better than 2016.

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### **John says**

What fun. I had experienced many fun, exciting moments in the lifetimes set upon the pages of all these wonderful authors, I felt so good about the quality of this years entrees, well done! From being a part of a group of men looking to make a killing in the 'new world' with ores like silver and copper to being lost looking for one's car in Dublin and not having a clue where to look, I enjoyed each word of each story this year.

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### **Al Kratz says**

By far my favorite of this series since I've been reading it every year since 2013.

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### **Christopher McQuain says**

With stories ranging from \*\*\* to \*\*\*\*\*, so I averaged it.

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### **Kathy Duffy says**

This collection contains a wide variety of stories, my personal favorites were "why were they throwing bricks" and "Queen Elizabeth". However the first story "The tomb of Wrestling" is one that fascinated and whose images are impossible to put aside.

I consider this series — the O. Henry Prize Stories, to be one of the highest quality of short stories consistently. Well worth the time and highly recommended.

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### **Bonnie Brody says**

I have been reading collection of O'Henry stories for years. As in past years, Laura Furman is the editor. For the 2018 edition, Fiona McFarlane, Otssa Moshfegh, an Elizabeth Tallent served as jurors and each submitted an essay on their favorite story.

Two of the jurors selected 'The Tomb of Wrestling' by Jo Ann Beard as their favorite story and I found it one of the best as well. The first line of the story is "She struck her attacker in the head with a shovel a small one that she normally kept in the trunk of her car for moving things off the highway." Despite this sentence portending violence, the story is primarily about the protagonist's life and how it has evolved to the present. The reader gets to know about her marriages, her pets, and her inner life.

'Counterblast' by Marjorie Celona was selected by the third juror as her favorite. In this story, Edie is consumed by her overwhelming love for her baby despite being married to Barry, narcissistic man. Edie loves to nurse her baby and I was struck with one scene where she and her husband go to his father's funeral and the Edie is embarrassed to let her sister-in-law know she is still nursing her two year old. As the marriage dissolves, the Edie tells her Barry that she is sorry that she loves their child so intensely. Barry tells her that it feels like she is having an affair and she doesn't deny it.

'Lucky Dragon' by Viet Dinh explores the horrific impact of nuclear fall-out on the sailors of a Japanese ship. Each deals with the effects on their emotional and physical selves in a different manner.

I was impressed by 'How We Eat' by Mark Jude Poirier. Brenda is a mother to two girls and she forbids them calling her 'mom'. Brenda takes her daughters from one thrift store to another and has them go through pockets for change so they will have enough money to eat. Sadly, money isn't the only thing they find in pockets.

Other stories I enjoyed deal with the havoc wreaked by grief, and the difficult dynamics that step-families face.

The difficulty I have with the O'Henry series is that each author, as well as Ms. Furman, provide interpretations of the stories. This is in addition to the essays written by the jurors about their favorite story in the collection. I would prefer to make my own interpretations and not be led by someone else's. Every year I have the same problem. If you can leave this issue aside, this is a very good collection of short stories.

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### **Jennifer says**

2.5 stars. These stories were very hit or miss for me. I've definitely liked past O'Henry collections better.

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### **Bull Durham says**

I love the short story form, so I'm a bit prejudiced about any collection. This one, in a word, is marvelous.

Now, I'm trying to decide which story is my favorite. All are worthy. They were so different from each other, too. Three are in the running.

One - The Inversion of Marcia - centers around a family vacation in Italy seen through the eyes of a keenly observant pre-teen girl. I'm an old man but was impressed by how well the author drew his narrator. At least, she seemed authentic to me.

Another - Why Were They Throwing Bricks - is a story told by a grown grandchild reflecting on her Chinese grandmother's impact on the family. The story is developed so well that what would have been a surprise at the beginning ends on an inevitably sad note. Powerful stuff.

The last - The Tomb of Wrestling - starts with "She struck her attacker in the head with a shovel, a small one that she normally kept in the truck of her car for moving things off the highway." The story was the hands-

down favorite of the jurors as well. Normally, this kind of story wouldn't appeal to me. In fact, I would avoid it, but this one's structure, rhythm, and obvious central question -- asked but not answered -- is so unique.

There are a couple more that really got to me as well ... a couple torn apart by the death of a child, another one where a city-bred man promises to shoot his country-rustic girlfriend's sick old dog. That last one still has me wondering what was meant as a metaphor and what was not. Of course, all stories are metaphors, right?

I'm going to keep the book a few months before I donate it to my local library's resell shop. It deserves a second reading to absorb such wonderfully delicious writing. I'm betting that it gets even better on the second read.

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