



My Sister's Hand in Mine: The Collected Works of Jane Bowles

Jane Bowles , Truman Capote (Introduction) , Joy Williams (Preface by)

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Though she wrote only one novella, one short play, and fewer than a dozen short stories over a roughly twenty-year span from the early 1940s to the mid-1960s, Jane Bowles has long been regarded by critics as one of the premier stylists of her generation. Enlivened at unexpected moments by sexual exploration, mysticism, and flashes of wit alternately dry and hilarious, her prose is spare and honed, her stories filled with subtly sly characterizations of men and, mostly, women, dissatisfied not so much with the downward spiral of their fortunes as with the hollowness of their neat little lives. Whether focused on the separate emergences of Miss Goering and Mrs. Copperfield from their affluent, airless lives in New York and Panama into a less defined but intense sexual and social maelstrom in the novella *Two Serious Ladies*, or on the doomed efforts of the neighbors Mr. Drake and Mrs. Perry to form a connection out of their very different loneliness in "Plain Pleasures," or on the bittersweet cultural collision of an American wife and a peasant woman in Morocco in "Everything Is Nice," Jane Bowles creates whole worlds out of the unexpressed longings of individuals, adrift in their own lives, whether residing in their childhood homes or in faraway lands that are somehow both stranger and more familiar than what they left behind.

My Sister's Hand in Mine: The Collected Works of Jane Bowles Details

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Tobias says

"Two Serious Ladies" and "Camp Cataract" are pretty stunning, and the whole thing falls into the "like nothing I've read before" category.

Walter says

Her original sin was being a singular voice. As she commits the biggest sin you can as an artist: she treats the "immoral" in regards to social convention as being normal; which it is, was, and always will be; and writes about life and people, their heart, their mind, and their dreams, as it is, but as it can't be; but not with the eye of cynic, but with the eye of a poet that has a brain. People say they like writers who "don't judge". People say lots of things that are nonsense. As by their presentation, still to this day, "immoral" things are treated and presented as being "edgy" or illicit; thus by the presentation passing judgment, at least, emotionally.

She saw people as human, maybe... that is the biggest sin of all.

Go Jane!

Ryan says

Joy Williams writes the intro to this collection, and I can see why she reveres Bowles. The biting humor is similar, the sense of alienation, the way weird shit just happens to the protagonists. Both authors' plots are compilations of madcap episodes which, if they do add up, do so in a way that I sure as hell can't fully comprehend.

I only read Two Serious Ladies so far (which is why I bought the collected works in the first place), and I admire the risks Bowles took, but I got antsy two thirds of the way through. I wanted a sense of something happening, and I never got it, though I reckon that if Jane Bowles were alive to give a shit, she probably wouldn't. But still.

Brett says

Well, I like her husband's writing much better than hers. The quote from Tennessee Williams on the back about being the "formost" woman in American Letters is a slam on so many other gifted writers I can't even count them all...clearly he drank. Her short stories were better than that first thing attempt at a Novella or whatever it was good grief I had no idea what was going on there. Bunch of American losers stumbling around the caribbean and central america with a bunch of their losers doing basically zero of use to anyone.

complete waste of paper.

Robert Vaughan says

Jane Bowles is one of the most entertaining writers in the American canon. And she was the wife of Paul Bowles, who shot to fame with *The Sheltering Sky*. Still, her own short stories, plays, and strange pieces have so much merit. They also lived as ex-pats in Morocco, and both had relationships outside of their marriage with same sexes. Okay, maybe that is too much information? But how much of our outside life informs our writing? In this case, Jane shines through much of her confirming illnesses, and all the rest. I adore this collection, and re-reading it for the third time this summer made me giddy, and still underlining phrases, dialogue that does not exist anymore, and so much else. I also recommend reading *A Little Original Sin*, the biography of Jane Bowles by Millicent Dillon. What a life! What a writer.

Nathanimal says

I love this book so much I'm starting over with a pencil.

Paul says

Jane Bowles' work is so complex, and so enjoyable to me. Especially since I read in her biography how she struggled with every single word she wrote. It was nice to revisit this book.

Alika Yarnell says

I appreciate Jane Bowles taking risks and going off the beaten path with her wacky characters. To be fair, I only read the novel "Two Serious Ladies" and the story "Camp Cataract" from this collection. Both are similar in style (very dialog-heavy with little internal reflections) and subject matter (peculiar women who don't particularly like men and attach themselves to other women/strangers in odd ways). With the novel, it occurred to me that perhaps Bowles decided to write a book where the characters say and do the opposite of what "normal" or conventional women of that time would do. That is, approach and befriend many strangers who possess traits usually seen as undesirable (a stout man living with his parents, a prostitute, a deadbeat guy with no job or passion, a man who ignores her completely). There are a lot of cases when the characters say "yes" when you expect them to say "no way in hell!" which I find interesting. I like reading fiction that is on the strange side, but after awhile, I got a little tired of these unsympathetic characters and in the case of the novel, I didn't see much of a story arc. The short story felt a bit more well-rounded and complete to me and definitely had an ending. Perhaps, over time, this book will grow on me and I'll go back and read the rest of her work.

David Gallin-Parisi says

Puzzling, stories about serious characters. Serious, meaning the characters' enjoyment flows from some place, some wish, or some spiritual-searching that I cannot locate. Deeply interested and involved, addressing grave and earnest states, the women in these stories choose paths toward uncertainty and unpredictable desires. Nomadic is another descriptor for Bowles' writing, never staying in one place too long. I want to give this a lower rating, but feel compelled to go back to Bowles' writing when she so finely captures a feeling of maladjustment, focused boredom, and hope for something, anything to happen differently. The atmosphere reminds me of contemporary social networks, wandering aimlessly, hoping for a sort of completeness by making connections with people. Then emptiness. I started Two Serious Ladies and felt baffled. I read the short stories Plain Pleasures, Everything is Nice, and Camp Cataract. I may come back to this later.

Jimmy says

"The moment when they might have felt tenderness had passed, and secretly they both rejoiced"

A novel, a play, and a handful of short stories. So funny, so sad. I really loved her novel, which I reviewed separately on here. Her stories were good too. I really liked "Going to Massachusetts" and "A Stick of Green Candy". I wasn't crazy about the play, though it was pretty good.

I just read some of the other reviews on here and this description made me laugh: 'There are a lot of cases when the characters say "yes" when you expect them to say "no way in hell!"'

Sketchbook says

Stylized off-tilt comedy. Makes you feel - cx, makes *me* feel - uncomfortable. Like sitting next to a beautiful crazy on a train or plane :

"Want some candy ?"

"No, thank you."

"I don't have any candy, but I will take my clothes off."

You can't move away becos there are no other seats.

Jane Bowles is lauded x Pinter, Ten Williams, Capote. And there's excess wonderfulnessy. What I find interesting is how she influenced Messrs. Edwards Albee and Gorey.

Jane and Libby Holman were great friends. Libby funded her cuckoo play, "In the Summer House" (1953), about mother love, domination, jealousy.

Don't let any cumm job by John Ashbery intimidate you. One knows she's good without Ashbery. Pub 1943, "Two Serious Ladies," now a cult fav, got lackluster revs. It's a pervo's absurdist dream. Annoying and funny.

I believe her Moroccan maid-lover poisoned her, but then, this is all part of the Jane Bowles legend.

Emilie Vangilder says

This collection left me nonplussed. I found it completely impenetrable. I understood nothing of the motivation of any of the characters or anything that was said or done by them. I think the author might have been shooting for sly social commentary in an unconventional manner, but I am not at all clear about even that! I very much admire the work of the author's husband, Paul Bowles, and I guess I expected something based on that, which is wrong and unworthy of me. But I really didn't like this book. Can't believe I actually finished it.

Simon A. says

This fell just short of 5 stars for me. It was a supremely enjoyable read. I tend to love writers who bring a lot of buoyancy and playfulness to their prose. The fact that Bowles took herself very seriously, makes these stories all the more sincere and inspired. "Two Serious Ladies" carries this collection, but there are definitely some hidden gems and you'd do well to pick this one up and give it a shot. If you are at all familiar with Joy Williams, she writes the introduction and states her respect for Jane, and it is obvious in her writing. So if you like Williams, you will probably enjoy this whimsical book also.

Meg Tuite says

If you haven't read Jane Bowles, especially "Two Serious Ladies," than you are missing out on some of the best dialogue EVER! It's hilarious and I've read it a few times and it never loses its power! I hope anyone who reads this would consider buying a copy of her collection which is exceptional!

Chaserrrr says

Discovering Jane Bowles is one of the best things to happen to me as a reader. I first read "Two Serious Ladies" after John Waters glowing recommendation in his book "Role Models" and finding out that Tennessee Williams considered it his favourite novel for a time. I devoured it in one sitting and for awhile every book I read after seemed so simply structured and the characters within were such predictable bores. I needed more!! But what to do? "Two Serious Ladies" was her only novel.

I eventually became aware of this collection of her works and was thoroughly pleased with it's contents. It

includes "Two Serious Ladies", as well as her only play "In The Summerhouse"; which almost out Tennessee Tennessee Williams and, although it seems like it would be hell to try and stage, is a great read full of rich and fascinating female leads. It also includes 7 short stories that are little treats so good you can't help but go back and savour their sparse yet wonderous flavors. My personal favorites are "Everything Is Nice", "Camp Cataract", and "A Little Stick of Green Candy". The rest of the collection consists of passages of stories that were never completed taken from her notebooks. This is one of my most beloved and cherished collections. Highly recommended for fans of Joy Williams and Miranda July.
