



PENGUIN CLASSICS

JOHN O'HARA

*The New York Stories*

Foreword by E.L. DOCTOROW  
Edited with an Introduction by STEVEN GOLDLEAF

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**The New York Stories** John O'Hara , Steven Goldleaf (Editor) , E.L. Doctorow (Foreword)

**Collected for the first time, the New York stories of John O'Hara, "among the greatest short story writers in English, or in any other language" (Brendan Gill, *Here at The New Yorker*)**

Collected for the first time, here are the New York stories of one of the twentieth century's definitive chroniclers of the city—the speakeasies and highballs, social climbers and cinema stars, mistresses and powerbrokers, unsparingly observed by a popular American master of realism. Spanning his four-decade career, these more than thirty refreshingly frank, sparely written stories are among John O'Hara's finest work, exploring the materialist aspirations and sexual exploits of flawed, prodigally human characters and showcasing the snappy dialogue, telling details and ironic narrative twists that made him the most-published short story writer in the history of the *New Yorker*.

## The New York Stories Details

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Author : John O'Hara , Steven Goldleaf (Editor) , E.L. Doctorow (Foreword)

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## From Reader Review The New York Stories for online ebook

### Marlene says

Despite the fact that most of these stories appeared in the *New Yorker* magazine, I've come to the realization that O'Hara was a better novelist than a short story writer. Perhaps one should read these stories one at a time with breaks in between (might be true for many short story collections), otherwise they run together and you're left with the feeling that you're reading the same story over and over again.

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### Edward Newman says

I'm not the first to say that O'Hara was a grittier Fitzgerald. The best stories here are the stories of barflies and bartenders, down at their heel actors ("Encounter:1943" "It's Mental Work" "Can I Stay Here?") O'Hara was fascinated by American speech, American striving, American failure and the American class system. His greatest stories are those from the 1960's, when he can look back at the 1930's and '40's and those who came through them, with a clear eye and unyielding pen. His stories of high society, while good tales, and well-written, are not of the same calibre.

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### Joyce says

this is really 3.5--excellent narrators read these exceptional stories. I'm not certain it's fair to call them dated, but they're mostly set in the 30s-50s, and they reflect that time period, its jargon and mores. I'm not a fan of short stories, but these are really excellently narrated by multiple narrators whose names are given but they are not linked to the stories each reads (always frustrating!) O'Hara writes about "class, character, and manners" in NYC. The pace is unhurried, and these are engrossing, character-driven stories featuring a cast of diverse, but equally flawed, characters. The dialog is really splendid--witty and smart, revealing class in cadence and jargon. For fans of fine short stories these are not to be missed.

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### Captain Sir Roddy, R.N. (Ret.) says

This collection of John O'Hara's short stories, most of them appearing in the *The New Yorker* magazine between the 1930s and 1960s, are all quite good. These stories cross-walk across the lives of the people who live in New York City and local environs, and typically are about the people of my parents' generation. Some of these stories are quite short (2-3 pages), and others are much, much longer; but they are all insightful and incisive. The plots tend to revolve people's cares, their hopes, their desires, their loves; in other words, the full range of human life and emotion. O'Hara uses his words carefully and makes the characters come alive on the page.

Some of my favorite stories include "We're Friends Again," "Sportsmanship," and "Pleasure," but quite frankly they were all very good.

This is a great edition to my short stories collection. A solid 4.5 stars of 5 for me.

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**Jan says**

Cynical, lonely characters on a backdrop of New York before and after ww2

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**Don says**

I don't generally like short stories, but I thoroughly enjoyed these, in part because they provide a glimpse into a long-since passed world of New York City--high society, low society, Broadway denizens, etc.

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**Steve says**

John O'Hara was a master at documenting social relationships and had an uncanny linguist's ear for capturing American speech of the mid-20th century. His stories often pair faded Hollywood celebrities or business executives past their prime with members of lower classes...bartenders, car drivers, second-level crime thugs, Irish maids. This is a pretty well-rounded assortment of O'Hara's stories.

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**Jillian Fischer says**

I love the writing of John O'Hara, & some of these stories are wonderful. Others seem unfinished, like maybe they're actually a fragment of a larger piece that O'Hara never got around to completing. It certainly could be that I just don't "get" the point of some of the stories. But whatever the case, some of them left me unsatisfied.

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**David says**

Continuing my current love affair with Mr. O'Hara. One HELL of a writer!

O'Hara wrote hundreds of short stories. Ultimately, they found their way into collections, of course. The one I read recently - Library of America's 'John O'Hara: Stories' - pulled from his entire short story output. But this volume is limited in scope; it only covers stories set in New York. (O'Hara also wrote groups of stories set in Hollywood and 'Gibbsville', a stand-in for his hometown.)

Since the LOA edition had more freedom, its editor was able to select what he considered to be the best of everything. 'The New York Stories' is slightly less fortunate - but only slightly. By that I mean I find the subject matter of a handful of the stories less interesting. However...even the less-interesting stories are still very well-written as stories. (I'd say that's a particular talent and accomplishment.)

A few of the stories here are also included in the LOA edition - but, upon recognition, I didn't skip over them, I just read and enjoyed them again.

O'Hara's breadth of research/knowledge is staggering. Though sharp character portraits are always front-and-center, O'Hara always did his homework to make character background powerfully believable. (When it comes to covering the milieu of certain characters in particularly impressive detail, I just don't know how the guy did it.)

Most of these 32 stories are on the very short side. Some run to 10 pages. But none of them feel insignificant in terms of the territory they cover; you feel you're told just what you need to know for basic but complete satisfaction, and nothing more.

But, near the end of this volume, there is a 50+-page tale - long for a short story but too short for a novella: 'We're Friends Again'. It's probably my favorite in this collection, as it illuminates what happens between a pair of married couples (as well as some others on the periphery of their lives). In almost-snapshot-fashion, the story covers several decades and includes surprising storyline shifts (i.e., participation in Resistance efforts during WWII). This story showcases some of O'Hara's most layered character analysis...and it's simply marvelous.

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### **Carolyn Wood says**

I'm not sure what rating to give this. If you love short stories, pretend I gave this a 4. Maybe even a 5. I've finally come to the conclusion that I just don't, for a variety of reasons. O'Hara wrote many short stories, but only the ones that take place in New York City are included in this book. I listened to the Audible version and I have to say that the group of actors (Dylan Baker, Becky Baker, Bobby Cannavale, and to a lesser extent, Richard Kind, Jon Hamm, Gretchen Mol, etc.) does an incredible job. It's really a joy to listen to these experienced actors make each story come alive. The stories take place in the thirties and forties, I suppose, and they are peopled by small-time gangsters, bar owners, faded stars, and ordinary people full of yearnings and pretense and disappointment. But, I found a certain sameness to the dialog, the people, the rhythm of the stories, the abruptness of the endings, and ultimately was glad to have it over with. I have no idea how to rate something that was performed so well but left me cold. There are some stories early on that I would have given a 5, but eventually the glow wore off. If the collection had been half as long, I would have rated it much higher. But, if you love short stories, give this one a try. There really isn't a false note in the entire book. Okay, maybe I should give it a four right now, so I don't lead anyone astray.

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### **Jennifer Murphy says**

O'Hara's short stories read like gritty, slice-of-life snapshots with undercurrents of failure and missed opportunity. On the positive side, the audiobook performances are some of the best I've heard, and O'Hara has a knack for life-like character development. On the negative side, I prefer a stronger plot in short stories, and reading/hearing all of these stories back-to-back highlighted a lack of variation. So...a mixed review from me.

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### **Alta says**

The New York Stories by John O'Hara (Penguin Classics, 2013)

Most of O'Hara's stories have been published in *The New Yorker*, giving birth to a certain type of story that we now associate with the magazine. Though I am not a fan of this type of story, I find O'Hara's stories among the most entertaining I've ever read.

Having worked as a journalist, the skills accumulated while reporting real facts have served him well and have helped him create punchy, fact-based stories often inspired by overheard conversations. An O'Hara story is often like a play, in that the setting is circumscribed, the period of time in which the events take place is very short (a day or even a few hours), and it sometimes starts and/or ends with dialogue. O'Hara's characters are from all the walks of life—bartenders, showgirls, cops, doctors, widows (more or less wealthy), drunks, actors—and one can tell that he has a deep knowledge of all the American class structures. But the most idiosyncratic characteristic of his stories is that his characters are defined by/through their voices and way of speaking. His dialogues are so vivid and life-like, that even when you don't know almost anything about his characters, you can see them. Some of the stories in this collection are nothing more than dialogues between a husband and a wife, or a man and a woman who have just met—but they draw you in from the first line. One of O'Hara's techniques is to start a story in the middle of an ongoing dialogue, which makes the reader curious to find out the missing piece of information. Another technique is an intriguing, mysterious ending.

Some examples of O'Hara beginnings: "The alarm clock went off and she did not remember setting it." ("The Assistant"); "The famous actress went to the window and gazed down at the snow-covered park." ("Can I Stay Here?"); "Miller was putting his key in the lock." ("Good-Bye, Herman"); and some endings: "She knew it [her lawyer's phone number] by heart." ("The Assistant"); "'That's right,' he said. 'Me'." ("It's Mental Work").

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## **Marilyn Gets says**

An audio book to savor. The stories are tightly written and wonderfully presented in this audio collection. In 2017 the stories bring you back to a different time and a whole cast of 1930s to 1950s characters. It's full of bars, cocktail parties, old dames, society women, lawyers, thugs, and clubs that no longer exist. I loved going through the doors and peeking in, even when things weren't pretty. It's a world that I'm glad no longer exists, but good to remember the way John O'Hara presented it at the time, without the filters of current day nostalgia. I can see the fedoras, the whiskey, the table full of reporters and the wiseguys at the the bar.

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## **KarmA1966 says**

4.5\*

On the cover of John O'Hara's collection, *The New York Stories*, a bosomy shadow stands beside a windowsill and an empty glass of booze, the ice cubes stuck together, melting in the glass. Outside the window is the Manhattan skyline that carries an orange glow as if the city is aflame.

Depending on your point of view, the bosomy shadow could either be seen as protected from the flames outside or separated from the bright lights of the big city.

Either way, the bosomy shadow and the characters in these stories have barriers that keep them from their

desired dreams.

While New York might be the center of the universe, these people are not, though many of them wouldn't mind moving up on their ladders of career and romance. Many of them are actors. Some of them have rented their bodies in efforts to inch their way to the top. Others have long ago sold out, willing to take crummy parts to keep their name in lights. All of them, actors or not, are working the angles, whether in their careers or in their relationships.

Most of the 42 stories are brief (5-10 pages) but they pack a wallop and O'Hara wastes no time getting them going. They begin in the thick of it. Usually two people talking, offering strong opinions, not mincing words, often using those words as weapons as in the story "First Day in Town."

"I think you're horrible! And I mean that," she said. "You're detestable."

"Sure. But you're all right. The one life you have to live, and what are you doing with it? Saving your virginity for him. You may be a peasant, but you're a virgin peasant."

Or in "The Encounter," where two former lovers have a chance meeting and decide to have a drink.

"Don't you want me to stay for another? We aren't fighting now."

"No, but maybe in two minutes we would be."

In so many of these stories O'Hara immediately jumps into the deep end of whatever conflict exists. Like the native New Yorkers who walk the morning sidewalks with purpose, bumping against bumpkin tourists who clog their path in goggle-eyed awe, the characters here hurtle forward at twice the rate of normal humans, but what they'll do when they reach their destination remains a mystery.

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### **Allison says**

I confess I didn't actually finish because I left it on the plane about 1/3 through. I adore John O'Hara but don't think this book does him any service. All the stories feel too much the same -- man yabout has been theater people unable to accept their current lack of status -- and though they are very good I didn't need a whole tome full. It's ok that I left it.

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