



The Complete Short Stories

Saki

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Saki is perhaps the most graceful spokesman for England's 'Golden Afternoon' - the slow and peaceful years before the First World War. Although, like so many of his generation, he died tragically young, in action on the Western Front, his reputation as a writer continued to grow long after his death. The stories are humorous, satiric, supernatural, and macabre, highly individual, full of eccentric wit and unconventional situations. With his great gift as a social satirist of his contemporary upper-class Edwardian world, Saki is one of the few undisputed English masters of the short story.

The Complete Short Stories Details

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From Reader Review The Complete Short Stories for online ebook

Monty Milne says

I love Saki and it was a huge pleasure (and relief) to sink into these stories during a time when real life has been intruding unpleasantly and stressfully on my love of reading. Saki was, of course, cruel, snobbish, right wing, and homosexual, so hardly a poster child for our times. But I love the way his beautifully polished prose can amuse and entertain in perfectly constructed little tales which often run to scarcely more than two or three pages. His artistry is brilliant. My favourites are possibly Gabriel Ernest and The Unrest Cure. In the first, a small child is eaten by a teenage werewolf, and in the second the local Anglican bishop is alleged to be conducting a pogrom against the Jews. You may ask what is so funny about a small child being eaten or the planning of a religiously inspired massacre, in which case you should read the tales and see if you laugh. I know I did.

I think Saki is funnier than P G Wodehouse because he is darker, and I think he is better than Evelyn Waugh because he is not such a shit. Beneath the snobbery and the cruelty there is something deeper and more enigmatic. What caused Saki to volunteer in the first world war for an almost inevitable death, when he was well beyond the age at which this was expected or required? Quixotic self sacrifice? A homo-erotic attachment for fellow suffering soldiers? A feeling that life is full of pain and sorrow so we may as well embrace it? I don't know...but I find Saki more sympathetic – and funnier – than Waugh. Both of them were social poseurs, and both but it seems to me that Saki was somewhat less fraudulent than Waugh. And - like me – he was an Old Bedfordian, so all the more reason why I feel him to be a kindred spirit.

Steven says

The was a very enjoyable read. I really liked the writing, the form, and the characters - especially Clovis, he's basically the turn-of-the-last-century Sheldon (from Big Bang Theory).

What I did not like as much were the novellas and the repetitiveness of the story structures - the 'turns' at the end became predictable, and there was often little differentiation in the types of characters he made fun of. Definitely of the same literary line as Thackery and Wilde though.

jamjarfeels says

Rapier wit gone amok. Some bits have aged poorly (pogroms, lol). Note to self, selections exist for a reason.

Thorlakur says

A brilliant collection of short stories, where Britain reigned supreme, the different classes knew their place, and women did not have the vote. The good humour and coziness disguises some of the social injustices that the author was in favour of.

Gloria says

Saki's stories become predictable quite early on, they are still delightful to read though. It gave me the giggles a few times, the Suffragetae's presence in the 'Unrecorded episode in Roman history' for instance. Some of the humour was lost on me since there are plenty of topical references, but that's my fault not Saki's. Unless you're a completist, it might be worth going for a curated collection of stories before diving into the complete set.

Isabel (kittiwake) says

"Tell me a story," said the Baroness, staring out despairingly at the rain; it was that light, apologetic sort of rain that looks as if it was going to leave off every minute and goes on for the greater part of the afternoon.

"What sort of story?" asked Clovis, giving his croquet mallet a valedictory shove into retirement.

"One just true enough to be interesting and not true enough to be tiresome," said the Baroness.

Clovis rearranged several cushions to his personal solace and satisfaction; he knew that the Baroness liked her guests to be comfortable, and he thought it right to respect her wishes in that particular.

"Have I ever told you the story of St. Vespuluus?" he asked.

"You've told me stories about grand-dukes and lion-tamers and financiers' widows and a postmaster in Herzegovina," said the Baroness, "and about an Italian jockey and an amateur governess who went to Warsaw, and several about your mother, but certainly never anything about a saint."

I just love Saki. My parents had a copy of his stories so I read them when I was quite young and bought my own copy when I moved out.

I found the story 'Gabriel-Ernest' incredibly scary when I first read it as a child, even though nothing much actually happens. It's all down to the atmosphere and what is implied. The other one that really scared me, was 'The Music on the Hill' where Sylvia goes to live in the country and unfortunately manages to upset the Great God Pan.

Most of the stories however, are humorous, and are set in the upper class world of Britain before the Great War, with a lot of them featuring quite cruel practical jokes. Saki had a dark sense of humour and a hatred of Aunts, due to being brought up by two of his aunts while his father was serving in the East.

This book included some very funny tales that hadn't made it into the 'best of' collections that I have read in the past, as well as a few duds.

Elaine says

Safe to say this isn't my cup of Darjeeling, but I'm glad to say I've read Saki now. It's easy to picture *Downton Abbey* or the pre-war part of *Atonement*: very pampered Englishfolk gathered in the parlor of some countryside manor, making unwitting witticisms to each other.

The description of this collection says, "Saki is a social satirist of his contemporary upper-class Edwardian world. [He is] perhaps the most graceful spokesman for England's 'Golden Afternoon' - the slow and peaceful years before the First World War." Yes, this is spot-on.

But it goes on to say, "The stories are humorous, satiric, supernatural, and macabre, highly individual, full of eccentric wit and unconventional situations." This is giving too much credit.

Courtney says

- 1) Reginald
- 2) Reginald on Christmas Presents
- 3) Reginald on the Academy
- 4) Reginald at the Theatre
- 5) Reginald's Peace Poem
- 6) Reginald's Choir Treat
- 7) Reginald on Worries
- 8) Reginald on House-Parties
- 9) Reginald at the Carlton
- 10) Reginald on Besetting Sins
- 11) Reginald's Drama
- 12) Reginald on Tariffs
- 13) Reginald's Christmas Revel
- 14) Reginald's Rubaiyat
- 15) The Innocence of Reginald
- 16) Reginald in Russia
- 17) The Reticence of Lady Anne
- 18) The Lost Sanjak
- 19) The Sex that Doesn't Shop
- 20) The Blood-Feud of Toad-Water
- 21) A Young Turkish Catastrophe
- 22) Judkin of the Parcels
- 23) Gabriel-Ernest
- 24) The Saint and the Goblin
- 25) The Soul of Laploshka
- 26) The Bag
- 27) The Strategist
- 28) Cross Currents
- 29) The Baker's Dozen
- 30) The Mouse
- 31) Esme

- 32) The Match-Maker
- 33) Tobermory
- 34) Mrs. Packletide's Tiger
- 35) The Stamping of Lady Bastable
- 36) The Background
- 37) Hermann the Irascible--A Story of the Great Weep
- 38) The Unrest-Cure
- 39) The Jest of Arlington Stringham
- 40) Sredni Vashtar
- 41) Adrian
- 42) The Chaplet
- 43) The Quest
- 44) Wratislav
- 45) The Easter Egg
- 46) Filboid Studge, the Story of a Mouse that Helped
- 47) The Music on the Hill
- 48) The Story of St. Vespallus
- 49) The Way to the Dairy
- 50) The Peace Offering
- 51) The Peace of Mowsle Barton
- 52) The Talking-Out of Tarrington
- 53) The Hounds of Fate
- 54) The Recessional
- 55) A Matter of Sentiment
- 56) The Secret Sin of Septimus Brope
- 57) 'Ministers of Grace'
- 58) The Remoulding of Groby Lington
- 59) The She-Wold
- 60) Laura
- 61) The Boar-Pig
- 62) The Brogue
- 63) The Hen
- 64) The Open Window
- 65) The Treasure-Ship
- 66) The Cobweb
- 67) The Lull
- 68) The Unkindest Blow
- 69) The Romancers
- 70) The Schartz-Metterklume Method
- 71) The Seventh Pullet
- 72) The Blind Spot
- 73) Dusk
- 74) A Touch of Realism
- 75) Cousin Teresa
- 76) The Yarkand Manner
- 77) The Byzantine Omelette
- 78) The Feast of Nemesis
- 79) The Dreamer
- 80) The Quince Tree

- 81) The Forbidden Buzzards
- 82) The Stake
- 83) Clovis on Parental Responsibilities
- 84) A Holiday Task
- 85) The Stalled Ox
- 86) The Story-Teller
- 87) A Defensive Diamond
- 88) The Elk
- 89) 'Down Pens'
- 90) The Name-Day
- 91) The Lumber-Room
- 92) Fur
- 93) The Philanthropist and the Happy Cat
- 94) On Approval
- 95) The Toys of Peace
- 96) Louise
- 97) Tea
- 98) The Disappearance of Crispina Umberleigh
- 99) The Wolves of Cernogratz
- 100) Louis
- 101) The Guests
- 102) The Penance
- 103) The Phantom Luncheon
- 104) A Bread and Butter Miss
- 105) Bertie's Christmas Eve
- 106) Forwarned
- 107) The Interlopers
- 108) Quail Seed
- 109) Canossa
- 110) The Threat
- 111) Excepting Mrs. Pentherby
- 112) Mark
- 113) The Hedgehog
- 114) The Mapped Life
- 115) Fate
- 116) The Bull
- 117) Morlvera
- 118) Shock Tactics
- 119) The Seven Cream Jugs
- 120) The Occasional Garden
- 121) The Sheep
- 122) The Oversight
- 123) Hyacinth
- 124) The Image of the Lost Soul
- 125) The Purple of the Balkan Kings
- 126) The Cupboard of the Yesterdays
- 127) For the Duration of the War
- 128) The Square Egg
- 129) Birds on the Western Front

- 130) The Gala Programme
 - 131) The Infernal Parliament
 - 132) The Achievement of the Cat
 - 133) The Old Town of Pskoff
 - 134) Clovis on the Alleged Romance of Business
 - 135) The Comments of Moug Ka
 - 136) The Unbearable Bassington
 - 137) When William Came
 - 138) The Westminster Alice
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5greenway says

Brilliant, glittering shards. Like 'Pink Flag' by Wire, if you don't like the one you're on, there'll be something else great along soon. Like 'Pink Flag' by Wire, though, it's pretty much all great.

Geoff Wooldridge says

This is an extensive collection of short stories, some published posthumously, covering the writing career of H H Munro, who wrote under the strange pseudonym of Saki. I didn't count them, but there must be about 100 stories in the collection.

The stories cover a period from the early years of the 20th century, from about 1904 until his death in 1916. A few of the latter stories, not originally published until 1924, relate to his war service in the trenches of France where, ultimately, he lost his life serving his country.

Many of the stories poke gentle, ironic fun at the middle and upper classes of Edwardian England, and are reminiscent of P G Wodehouse,

Saki occasionally dabbles in themes that are ore about the supernatural and related to the peasant classes, and he sets some of his stories in continental Europe and Russia.

Most of them a light and fun, occasionally very humorous, and not without some very dark humour. It seems that Munro had a particular dislike for the Suffragette movement of the times! Many of the tales have that little twist at the end that you didn't quite see coming.

It is quite fascinating to read an author's complete life work in a single volume, but it is perhaps not best to read it from end to end as I did. Doing so made it seem tedious at times, particularly as the quality of the stories varies considerably. It may have been better to read this compendium in parts over a longer period, which may have provided a better appreciation of the wit and talent of this prolific short story writer.

Thetravelingpanda says

I have to admit I only read half of the entire collection. There are really short stories, most of them are two pages long. But their ending are abrupt and for most negative. There is a conflict between the figure of the

child and the adult, one of my teachers said it was because Saki hated his aunts. What I liked was that there was a crucial place for animals that are related to children.

Lucas Sierra says

Saki es la sonrisa en medio de la tormenta, la carcajada entre explosiones. Siento supo mirar bien y escribir mejor. Su prosa, llena de humor y vitalidad, es flexible y elástica en un contexto donde todo se hacía cada vez más rígido, más tieso, más propenso a quebrarse con el menor golpe. Saki no golpea, su fuerza no depende de la violencia, sino de convertir la carne de su escritura en un espejo donde las ropas se caen: su visión desnuda, y elogia la piel colgante en los pellejos, y se ríe de nuestros conflictos y nuestros dolores y nuestros sueños heroicos.

Saki es un hurón blanco bebiendo agua en el arroyo, es una gallina anabaptista, es un toro ejemplar en medio de una habitación, y un niño, y una manada de lobos, y un gato capaz del lenguaje humano, y, sobre todo, un cuentista. Un cuentista capaz de emocionar al niño destructor acunado dentro de cada uno de nosotros, y hacerse su cómplice desde el secreto compartido: en el fondo, sobre todas las capas de civilidad del mundo, yace ese primitivo espíritu cuyo único interés es bailar al rededor de la fogata y escuchar historias mientras mira las estrellas en el firmamento infinito.

Saki es la voz de esas historias. Antigua, nueva, latiente.

Spiderorchid says

I gave up after five months and didn't finish it (just for comparison: it usually takes me a week to finish a book).

The style is witty and amusing, the author definitely was a fan of Oscar Wilde and at times the little stories or vignettes reminded me of Arthur Schnitzler's "Anatol" stories (highly recommended, by the way). But sadly, Saki's efforts are missing the dynamic and poignancy of those works, his writing is oddly lifeless, regardless of how many funny situations and sly double-entendres he puts into them.

He tried, but it wasn't enough to hold my attention for 362 pages of small print.

Warwick says

Reading Saki made me feel like a palaeontologist uncovering some critical part of the fossil record. Here it is! The missing link between Kipling and Wodehouse, in that very dry, deadpan and distinctly *English* tradition of narrative wit. It's a humour that comes not from comical misunderstandings or elaborate set-pieces, but rather that inheres purely in the absolute precision of the descriptions, the deadly irony of conversational rejoinders. A wife giving her husband the silent treatment, for instance, gets described like this:

As a rule Lady Anne's displeasure became articulate and markedly voluble after four minutes

of introductory muteness.

At other times the *bons mots* are given to characters from among Saki's cast of Edwardian caricatures.

‘Thank you for your sympathy all the same. I daresay it was well meant. Impertinence often is.’

Or again, to more obviously Wildean effect:

‘When one is sixteen,’ said Mrs. Bebberly Cumble severely, ‘one talks of things being impossible which are merely uncongenial.’

Sometimes too there are admirable flourishes of simile, as when someone consults a restaurant wine list ‘with the blank embarrassment of a schoolboy suddenly called on to locate a Minor Prophet in the tangled hinterland of the Old Testament’.

These stories were published in the first couple of decades of the twentieth century, and Saki's heroes are young, rich, bored, brilliant men, who lounge in Edwardian drawing-rooms, mixing with baronesses and Gräfinnen, and making it a point of honour never to get emotionally invested in anything. They would be distinctly unlikeable if they weren't so funny.

What I was not expecting, though, was that alongside the drawing-room wit runs a parallel theme of almost Gothic unease related to the wildness at large outside civilised society. ‘Gabriel-Ernest’, for instance, is a creepy early werewolf story; in ‘Sredni Vashtar’, a 10-year-old boy invents a new religion devoted to a wild polecat; while ‘The Music on the Hill’ imagines the Greek god Pan roaming through the forests around an English country estate, and in the process endows these comfortable places with fantastic menace. This is the necessary counterpart to the witty banter, the other side of the coin – the strand of English paganism that crops up in so many writers. Other tales again range beyond England – dark parables about hunted men and night in the Carpathians.

Saki can be very macabre, very unsettling – an effect that his humour only accentuates. He reminds me of Pinter's famous phrase about ‘the weasel under the cocktail cabinet’. These are brilliant sketches of people swapping witty remarks in sparkling dining rooms: but outside the windows, the night is very dark, and when the laughter dies down you can hear noises coming from the woods....

Matthew White says

I'm going to have to dissuade anyone from actually reading this gargantuan compendium front to back. While it's well written, it's incredibly repetitive and the stories bleed into each other to create a dense and sludgy tread through Edwardian society as seen by a cynic. Recommended for completists and masochists only; casual readers may wish to opt for a Best Of selection instead.

