



Bark: Stories

Lorrie Moore

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In these eight masterful stories, Lorrie Moore, in a perfect blend of craft and bewitched spirit, explores the passage of time, and summons up its inevitable sorrows and hilarious pitfalls to reveal her own exquisite, singular wisdom.

In "Debarking," a newly divorced man tries to keep his wits about him as the United States prepares to invade Iraq, and against this ominous moment, we see-in all its irresistible hilarity and darkness-the perils of divorce and what can follow in its wake...In "Foes," a political argument goes grotesquely awry as the events of 9/11 unexpectedly manifest at a fund-raising dinner in Georgetown...In "The Juniper Tree," a teacher, visited by the ghost of her recently deceased friend, is forced to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" in a kind of nightmare reunion...And in "Wings," we watch the unraveling of two once-hopeful musicians who neither held fast to their dreams nor struck out along other paths as Moore deftly depicts the intricacies of dead ends and the workings of regret...

Gimlet-eyed social observation, the public and private absurdities of American life, dramatic irony, and enduring half-cracked love wend their way through each of these narratives in a heartrending mash-up of the tragic and the laugh-out-loud-the hallmark of Lorrie Moore-land.

Bark: Stories Details

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From Reader Review Bark: Stories for online ebook

Glenn Sumi says

Lorrie Moore has achieved short-story sainthood in books like *Self-Help, Like Life* and her 1998 masterpiece, *Birds Of America*. But even her greatest devotees will find her latest collection, her first in over 15 years, woefully uneven.

Moore, with her poet's eye and playful use of language, has always been able to find a savage, dark humour in pain and heartbreak. And there are glimpses of that in these eight stories, in which people, in the shadow of 9/11, confront divorce, illness and death with wisecracks.

This time around, though, a lot of those laughs seem forced, and too many of her characters – a male poet here, a hipster singer there, a single mom attending her child's former nanny's second wedding – sound the same.

Moore still creates images of startling power. In "Wings," an intriguing but rather aimless take on Henry James's *The Wings Of The Dove*, a character says a dying spider plant "looks like Bob Marley on chemo."

And in "Paper Losses," Kit, who's on a pre-booked Caribbean family vacation even though her husband's announced he's leaving her, breaks down on a massage table and describes her nose as a little drainpipe for crying. Exquisite. But Moore's images frequently pile up clumsily, and the puns emerge awkwardly from characters' mouths.

Two or three stories feel like drafts or exercises. The war on terror forms a backdrop for many, but to no purpose.

Still, there are a few gems. "The Juniper Tree" is a haunting fable about guilt, competition and the death of a friend. "Debarking" finds a Jewish divorcé dating a WASP pediatrician who's got an unnatural attachment to her own teenage son.

And in "Referential," a modern reworking of Vladimir Nabokov's classic tale "Signs And Symbols," a disintegrating couple deal with the woman's mentally unbalanced son.

The writing here is clear and suggestive, the emotional undercurrents deeply felt, suggesting Moore doesn't always need to fall back on jokes to write memorable fiction.

<https://www.nowtoronto.com/books/stor...>

Ayelet Waldman says

When I want to remind myself how to write, I turn to Lorrie Moore.

Banushka says

gece ilk öyküyü -40 küsur sayfa- 1 saatten uzun bir sürede okudum. çünkü çevirisi çok rahatsız ediciydi. sonra yattım. dedim ki "ikinci öyküye şans versem mi?"

ve verdim. ama maalesef aynı kötü çeviri ve sığ editoryal çalınma. bunu nereden anlıyoruz, iki kere tekrar edilmiş sözcüklerden mesela, çevirmen bir kez çevirip yollamış yayınevine, kimse de bakmamış.

yazarın özel bir yabancılaşma efekti yoksa -ki araştırmalarında öyle bir şeyden bahseden yok- hakikaten zor okunan, zor anlaşılabilir, anlatım bozukluğuyla dolu bir çeviri.

ayda 20 kitap çıkarılınca böyle olması normal tabii. ama arada iyi yazarlar kayıyor. ona üzülmüyor insan.

Sara Nelson says

There's a reason Lorrie Moore is so beloved by her baby boomer brethren: she's smart, she's funny, her eye is even sharper than her tongue. In *Bark*, her latest collection of stories, all those qualities are well on display. "He had never been involved with the mentally ill before," she writes of her mid-life anti-hero in the (sort-of) title story, "Debarking." "[B]ut he now felt more than ever that there should be strong international laws against them being too good looking." Acerbic? Check. Knowing? Check. Says out loud on the page what we less talented, less observant mere mortals wish we could form so well in thought? Check. Check. Check. The only reason not to read these seven stories is that, perhaps, they're just too accurate and perceptive about the way we live now--but then, why would you ever want to read stories that were anything else?

Nicole D. says

This is a super short book of short stories, that felt more than anything like a hard drive dump. It's like the publisher said "How many have you got?" and Moore said "8 or so, but some of them are pretty old" and the publisher said, "I can work with that, send them over" and thus we have a book.

That's not to say there aren't nuggets of pure Moore brilliance in this book. There are many. She's a great writer and she can hit the nail squarely on the head! *How could someone have come so close to death, so unfairly, so painfully and heroically, and how could he still want to strangle them?*" on a cocktail party conversation.

This book is categorized as "literary humor" and there are some laugh out loud moments, but I wouldn't call this a humorous book. Nor would I purchase this book for any more than \$1.99. It's about 2 hours reading at the most, and while I'm sure the stories were work at the time they were written (an Oliver North reference? Pre-Iraq War, Post 9/11) it just doesn't feel like much effort was put in the overall collection.

"You're supposed to give things up for Lent. Last year we gave up our faith and reason; this year we are giving up our democratic voice, our hope."

Stefania says

Muy buena colección de relatos cortos.

Moore es dueña de un crudo sentido del humor que me hizo reír en voz alta más de una vez, a pesar del trasfondo sombrío de sus cuentos, en general protagonizados por personajes solitarios y profundamente heridos.

El abandono en todas sus formas es uno de los temas recurrentes en la mayoría de las historias que componen este volumen, aunque la autora también alude a la culpa, la resignación y la desesperanza. A pesar de la seriedad de estos tópicos, y contrario a lo que se podría imaginar, el libro resulta asombrosamente fácil de leer ya que Moore demuestra un excelente *timing* para introducir observaciones inteligentes y cómicas a la vez.

Sin dudas se trata de una autora que volveré a leer.

Diana says

Did something bad happen to Lorrie Moore? I don't need to read things that are uplifting. I am not set on having characters that are likable. But this collection was so dark, it left me feeling kind of horrible. This is a collection of stories that looked into the crawl space to find what was rotting there (figuratively, and in one story in this book, literally. I might suggest that if you read this collection, you should consider skipping the half-page after the flashlight is presented and the crawl space opened. I'm afraid it might give me nightmares).

Concern with America's current wars runs through these stories, and I guess that might be what happened to Moore. Late in the book, there's a discussion about Abu Ghraib, and that's as horrifying as the thing found in the crawl space. And there's definitely an ongoing look at marriage, how men and women can fail each other and be cruel.

It just seems that the dark and light are more balanced in her other works. This is bleak. I vowed to stop reading Joyce Carol Oates years ago, because while she's a magnificent writer, her books always left me feeling the way this one does, right on the edge between depressed and sickened.

That said, the language of this book continually amazed me. "The air was filled with the "old-silver-jewelry smell of rain." And then pleasing wry humor like this: "Marriage is one long conversation," wrote Robert Louis Stevenson. Of course, he died when he was forty-four, so he had no idea how long the conversation could really get.'

Federico Sosa Machó says

Mi impresión acerca del libro fue cambiando a medida que transcurría la lectura. Los primeros no me gustaron demasiado en una primera instancia, aunque la relectura me permitió descubrir lo más interesante: cómo por debajo de diálogos o situaciones aparentemente intrascendentes se escondía una historia apenas esbozada. Todo ello a través de una prosa irónica y humorística que tensaba el sentido de los cuentos, donde

personajes en el entorno de la cincuentena pugnaban por encontrarles un rumbo a sus vidas. Y lo mejor había quedado para el final, en los cuentos largos, *Muda y Alas*, donde creo que estamos cerca de la excelencia: al primero es notable. Dejo para el final Referencial, un cuento breve y diferente a los demás, donde el drama expulsa al registro burlón, y redondea una también excelente historia "a lo Carver". Parece que las anteriores colecciones de relatos tuvieron mejor recepción que esta, por lo que pronto habrá que volver a Lorrie Moore.

Sarah Coleman says

When I was studying for my MFA in Creative Writing (which is longer ago than I want to remember), Lorrie Moore was the golden goddess whose prose and sensibility almost every fiction grad student wanted to emulate. We prostrated ourselves before her devastating humor, her effortless wordplay, her skewering of every late 20th-century pretension. Once when I met her at a reading, I think I freaked her out by being too adoring. Most writers would have been thrilled, but Moore is not most writers.

A couple of decades on, my impression is that Moore's writing has not grown as much as it could have. Maybe that's because she's devoted a lot of energy to teaching other writers: it's hard to be a really dedicated teacher AND top-of-your-game practitioner. 'Bark,' her new collection of stories, has some of her trademark brilliance but overall feels a little flat, as did her 2009 novel 'A Gate at the Stairs.'

Like all of Moore's work, 'Bark' is situated at the nexus of social satire and existential despair. The characters here are mostly middle aged, and dealing with the dead weight of disappointment. Loved ones have died, romances have fizzled into acrimony, careers have not soared in the imagined way. Death is constantly waiting in the wings. As the narrator in the final story, 'Thank You for Having Me,' remarks (while attending a wedding, no less), "I had seen a soccer mom become a rhododendron with a plaque, next to the soccer field parking lot, as if it had been all those matches that had killed her. I had seen a brilliant young student become a creative writing contest...I had seen a public defender become a justice fund."

At its best, 'Bark' is vintage Moore. One can pull any number of individual lines that sparkle--as, for example, this exchange between middle-aged Ira and his eight-year-old daughter Bekka on the subject of her mother's new boyfriend moving in, in the opening story, 'Debarking':

"Bekka shrugged and chewed. 'Whatever,' she said, her new word for 'You're welcome,' 'Hello,' 'Goodbye,' and 'I'm only eight.' 'I really just don't want all his stuff there. Already his car blocks our car in the driveway.'

'Bummer,' said Ira, his new word for 'I must remain as neutral as possible,' and 'Your mother's a whore.'"

My favorite story here is 'Wings,' based on Henry James' 'Wings of the Dove,' in which a failed female singer named KC befriends a dying man, Milt. Their relationship has a real sweetness, although it's continually threatened by the financial desperation felt by KC and her hapless boyfriend Dench, who suggests that Milt might write KC into his will. The ambiguity here — that KC can genuinely care for Milt while also considering Dench's suggestion — is something Moore handles perfectly. And there are some weirdly great lines, like, "God is off in some cybercafe, so tired from all those biblical escapades that now he just wants to sit back and Google himself all day."

Other stories, like 'Referential' and 'Subject to Search' are so short that they feel like sketches for a story rather than the real thing. And even 'Wings' falls short at the end, tacking on a coda that feels unsatisfying. While I don't agree with everything Michiko Kakutani said in her snarky review (she didn't like 'Wings,' for

example), I'd have to agree with her that "There are some deeply affecting moments here — mostly involving children — but they remain just that: moments, islands in stories that, for the most part, are heavy-handed and forced." Sorry, Lorrie.

LeAnne says

Holy smokes, Lorrie Moore is brilliant and sharp and as cutting as broken glass! I do not like short stories, one bit, but darned if I didn't love these ones. In fact, I enjoyed the audio (narrated by Moore, herself) so much that I'm going to buy a hard copy to go back over and enjoy.

This collection is about various characters in their middle age, with each having a date or spouse or significant other in the story with them. There is a sadness and disappointment in some of them, but not all, but there are so many goofy little plays on words, that I found myself smiling throughout. She writes scenes of despondency and hilarity with equal skill - bikers who are hired to break up a wedding end up going to the wrong nuptials, and a man leaves his woman friend after 8 years because he cannot handle her schizophrenic son, despite the boy viewing him as his only father.

There is witty commentary about the placement of a billboard advertising hospice services next to a traffic sign: "*HOSPICE CARE: IT'S NEVER TOO SOON TO CALL* read a billboard near the coffee shop in what constituted the neighborhood's commercial roar. Next to it a traffic sign read *PASS WITH CARE*. Surrealism could not be made up. It was the very electricity of the real."

She describes somebody's wide, open laugh like this: "*She could see the creamy yellow of his teeth, his molars with their mercury eyes.*"

I loved her novel, *A Gate at the Stairs*, and was impressed by *Who Will Run the Frog Hospital?*, but suddenly I'm a lover of short stories. Am off to go purchase anything I can get my hands on because her phrasing is something to go back and enjoy again.

She brings in a good bit of political commentary, and while I am not a liberal and don't agree with her views, it was beautifully done. She does some of this with great flair - one character has a sinus infection and he is described as waterboarding himself in the bathroom with a Neti Pot. His partner knocks on the door and asks if he'll confess yet.

This is also the only book I've ever read that compelled me to Google the term "rat king." Oh. My. God.
FIVE STARS

Paul says

First I'll just voice my irritation upon leaving the bookstore and learning I'd just shelled out \$30 for a sub-200-page book. That's okay, though, it's got a nice Carol Devine Carson jacket and it's a new Lorrie Moore collection, so it's definitely worth the money. Until, of course, I discovered that the first four (of a total eight) stories had *already been published* in her *Collected Stories* collection, which I already own and have read. So in essence I've just paid \$30 for half of a 200-page book. Yeah, we've waited fifteen years for this, as everyone has been chirping—and so shouldn't we get more than four new stories? Sure, sure, sure, these

have all been published previously in magazines, but still. I mean, really.

I remember not having loved those four previously published stories when I read them in her last book, and again I found them good but not fantastic. At her worst, Moore's witticisms read like non-sequiturs that take you out of the narrative; they read like Moore trying to be funny. Whether or not this is actually the case is beside the point—I have to believe that Character X would actually say witticism Y, and considering they sort of all sound just like Moore, that can oftentimes be difficult to fully buy. Anyway, once past the first four *previously published* stories, things got some kind of wonderful. The first of the second four is considerably longer (as is the first of the first four), and it's a great story with a nice balance of humor and pathos. It's a fairly quick sprint to the end thereafter; the final three stories take up maybe 40 pages, but they get better as they go along (making this whole sad tale worse is the fact that I'd read one of the new-new stories in Harper's recently, so really only *three* of these stories were new to me). Things take a bonkers turn in the final story when a biker gang shows up at a wedding, but Moore pulls it off in classic Moore fashion.

While I think she's considered by a lot of people to be "a funny writer," Moore can also be super dark, and I find these darker stories most successful—the ones that balance the quirky witty humor with some real human suffering. This comes to a head in "Referential," possibly my favorite story here. Echoes of Canonical Babbling, a little bit. Overall, a nice collection to have and have read, with some good stories and some great ones, but you can't not be disappointed by a 15-years-in-the-waiting collection that offers only four unpublished stories.

Sandy *The world could end while I was reading and I would never notice* says

I recently read a quote by Stephen King on the art of writing the short story. From memory it went something like this..."short stories are harder to write than a novel. You have to take the direct route, no side streets, no stopping to chat." And he is right.

I am ambivalent about these stories, a few seemed to me to have little or no point to them. Others I enjoyed immensely.

Broadly these stories are about human relationships and idiosyncrasies. How the things we love in a person can, over time, become irritating (as in familiarity breeds contempt); how we can think we are in accord with another person, but are actually at opposite ends of the spectrum; about the things we will do to "fit in" or to try and revive a relationship in it's death throes. Lorrie Moore is not afraid to bring to light our little insecurities and absurdities.

I can't say this is my favourite collection of short stories, but there were a couple that I listened to twice. And I will probably go back and listen to this collection again at some point, and maybe then will adjust my review rating.

Rebecca Foster says

From what I've heard from other critics (e.g. Philip Hensher's somewhat harsh *Guardian* review), this really wasn't the best place for me to be introduced to Moore's short stories. My only prior experience with Moore's writing was one story in an anthology about libraries (*In the Stacks*) and the decent novel *A Gate at*

the Stairs – probably her least representative book.

I enjoyed the collection well enough, but some of the stories did feel rather thin, and also a bit dated – predicting Obama’s election, or reflecting on the start of the Iraq War, for instance: “Last year we gave up our faith and reason; this year we are giving up our democratic voice, our hope” (from “Debarking”). Still, I enjoyed some of Moore’s snappy, evocative turns of phrase, such as “eyes a clear, reddish hazel, like orange pekoe tea,” “the bridesmaids were in pastels: one the light peach of baby aspirin; one the seafoam green of low-dose clonazepam,” “a dried-out spider plant...like Bob Marley on chemo,” or “Why are these things called napkins rather than lapkins?” I’m struggling even now to remember each story’s plot, however, which suggests to me that they won’t have much lasting significance.

By far my favorite of the eight stories was “Wings,” even if, as Hensher hedges, it’s a tired theme: washed-up rock chick meets sweet old man and forms an unexpected friendship. I like KC as a main character, though, and the gentle tone of regret and the inevitability of aging (“She’d been given something perfect — youth! — and done imperfect things with it”) resonated with me. (I also love that the old fella starts his own Little Free Library.) Moore writes great banter-filled dialogue, especially the dinner party political debate in “Foes.”

I will certainly seek out more short stories by Lorrie Moore; you always hear about her in the same breath as Alice Munro or Anne Tyler — two more masters of wry, suburban observation. Even if this wasn’t the best collection for me to start with, I can see Moore has a keen eye for the absurdities and wonders of everyday life, and a striking way with words.

I was delighted to win a copy through a Goodreads First Reads giveaway.

Jan Rice says

The cover of the issue in which the book's title story, "Debarking," first appeared:

A while ago I read a review of Lorrie Moore's *Bark* that intrigued me: There was something about her short stories being populated with extraterrestrials. I must have thought there would be a touch of sci-fi. Maybe there is, but not in the sense that I was thinking. Some of the characters are almost reptilian, with other characters caught in their clutches. The word "extraterrestrial" actually is used twice. Well, only once, in reference to the dialogue between a parent--a divorced parent--and her single teenaged offspring. The other time, it was "space alien," and that was how a woman saw her soon-to-leave-her husband, only she didn't know that yet. I was thinking it's a good thing I was listening on audio. I was thinking this is what's wrong with short stories. They're about weird--make that *bad*--things that are observed, that just are: the ones that leave me feeling empty, wondering why did I read that?

That's not fair, though; it wasn't *that* bad! There was kindness (people who let you depend on them?), or either there wasn't, just a fact: nothing to be done about it.

Two of the stories are around 50 pages long, apparently not too long to call short stories, though, in all the reviews. For the most part they were the best. One of them was just awful, though--the subject matter, I mean; not the quality. A woman folk singer/band member who's approaching middle age and in a bad

relationship befriends an elderly man, or at least they befriend each other. The relationship is "I --it," not "I --Thou," rotten at bottom, but it's the old man who loses sight of that at the end, and she's the one who springs the trap. That one leaves me feeling slightly sick.

Many of the professional reviewers describe the author's work as both dark and comic. I wasn't seeing the latter. The stories are beautifully read by the author, and I was hearing the unfunny and painfully absurd. But within a minute of picking up the book itself and reading the next-to-last one, a funny line struck me. The protagonist is at a Paris restaurant, ordering in French and not quite sure of her pronunciation and usage:

When lamb was a food, was it a different word, the way pork and pig were? Perhaps she had ordered a living, breathing creature mewling in broth and fleece. (p. 162, "Subject to Search")

The last story, "Thank You for Having Me," was both the funniest and the best--about the absurd but not necessarily tragic.

The observations were mostly acute. You say, Yes, that's the way it is, but the insight doesn't help.

For those in the know, Lorrie Moore is said to be Nabokovian, an observation that goes over my head since only read the one and that was an era or two ago.

I am not sorry I finally read *Bark*. The stories are gems, but they are dark gems, like ice crystals. I'm not sure about letting them lodge in my heart.

Paquita Maria Sanchez says

I think I'm hopelessly in love with Lorrie Moore.
