



In the Stacks: Short Stories about Libraries and Librarians

Michael Cart (Editor)

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Here, in one volume, noted author and librarian Michael Cart has assembled a fascinating collection of twentieth century short fiction about libraries and librarians: from such classics as Borges's "The Library of Babel" and Isaac Babel's "The Public Lib

In the Stacks: Short Stories about Libraries and Librarians Details

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From Reader Review In the Stacks: Short Stories about Libraries and Librarians for online ebook

Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says

I was expecting a cute book with a cute gimmick, a book with stories about librarians. What librarian wouldn't buy that? I was surprised to find lots of good stories, stories that would have been good whether the main character was a librarian or a garbage collector. Favorites were stories by John Cheever, Saki, and Walter R. Brooks.

Gwen says

I thought I would try reading some short stories, and now I remember that they just don't really work for me. I need something more massive. I really liked a few of these, especially one which hinged on deciphering an LC call number. Otherwise, just meh.

Kristi says

a book edited by a librarian about libraries and/or librarians?!? my partner saw this on my nightstand and laughed, remarking "this book is like you finding a unicorn on a hike through the forest." this, among many other reasons, is why i love her.

what a lovely collection of stories that all center around books or people who love books!! I didn't want it to end.

Kitty Jay says

This anthology ranges from American to Italian to Russian to British writers, older works to contemporary, and from the mundane to the fantastic. Each supposedly revolves around librarians or libraries, but some of them are a bit of a stretch. The works that do, however, show no small amount of reverence toward those hallowed bastions of knowledge, and librarians or those who love them should find some delight in the stories.

It is hard to critique anthologies, particularly ones as diverse as this, but among the gems in this collection were "The Exchange" by Ray Bradbury, which puts to words what readers can only experience, "Gloss on a Decision of the Council of Nicaea" by Joanne Greenberg, who mixes a young librarian's passion for reading into a passion for civil rights, and "A General in the Library" by Italo Calvino, which gives a wry nod and a sly wink to the subtle power of reading.

Others fall a bit flat - I have never been a big fan of Ursula K. Le Guin, and her short story "The Phoenix" failed to win me over. Lorrie Moore, who I had never heard of before, similarly did not impress me. Others

were mediocre and almost forgettable.

However, the ones that did impress were lasting. Several of the authors I had never picked up before, despite having familiarity with their names, but after reading them, I immediately checked out more of their work from - where else? - my local library.

This is well-worth a read for librarians or their patrons, as even though all of the stories fail to hit their mark, the ones that do capture the spirit of libraries completely.

Jerry Delaney says

People sneaked looks at the title of this book as I rode the El, and then looked up at me with pity in their eyes. Clearly I was the most boring man they had ever encountered on the train. Well, the hell with them. I really enjoyed the book.

The authors range widely: Italo Calvino, Ursula LeGuin, Isaac Babel, John Cheever, Ray Bradbury. And Alice Munro, of course. The law requires any short story collection to include at least one by Munro. Or it should. As with any such collection of authors, appeal varies. While they are all good writers there are simply styles I prefer over others. Should I admit that I didn't know Lisa Koger? Was everyone else familiar with her? Well, I'm familiar now and hope to read more of her soon. The same kind of quiet insights and exquisite description that you see in the best writers.

Erin says

I really enjoyed the first few stories in this book, but they dropped into the mediocre soon after-- possibly because they all began to feature glum lady librarians who were unsatisfied with their lives. Still, I probably would have given it another star if it weren't for all the typos. They got really, really distracting.

Favorites:

Italo Calvino, "A General in the Library"

Ursula K. LeGuin, "The Phoenix"

Joanne Greenberg, "Gloss on a Decision of the Council of Nicaea"

Gina Berriault, "Who is it Can Tell Me Who I Am?"

Anthony Boucher, "QL 696.C9"

M. R. James, "The Tractate Middoth"

Althea Ann says

"Short Stories About Libraries and Librarians" - How could I pass that up?

Well, I didn't!

However, overall, I have to say this collection was good, but not awe-inspiring. Too many of the stories merely featured libraries or librarians, rather than having something to say *about* them. The collection as a whole didn't give me any particular sense of cohesiveness.

A general in the library /Italo Calvino

A very short story, well-crafted, about the unintended effect a library has on the soldiers assigned to censor its holdings.

The phoenix /Ursula K. LeGuin

A re-read; this appeared in LeGuin's collection: *The Compass Rose*. A nice companion to the Calvino piece; it also takes place in a country at war. A woman risks her life to save the librarian across the street. But his views are frustratingly ambiguous. Lovely and thought-provoking, like all of LeGuin's work.

Gloss on a decision of the Council of Nicaea /Joanne Greenberg

A librarian joins a protest about African-Americans not being allowed to use the public library due to segregation; and ends up in a jail cell with several black women, one of whom is particularly hostile to her. A deft commentary on the complexity of race relations.

Miss Vincent /Maria Dabrowska

A completely incompetent librarian needs to be fired - but the woman in charge finds it harder to accomplish than it ought to be.

Who is it can tell me who I am? /Gina Berriault

A homeless man asks if he can sleep in the library, and the librarian, unsurprisingly, tells him he cannot. Add some philosophy. I didn't find this one very memorable.

The public library /Isaac Babel

More of a vignette than a story, describing a library in Russia.

Community life /Lorrie Moore

Although a library is in the story, this is a story about a horrible relationship, and the woman who feels trapped in it, partially because of her status as an immigrant. I didn't enjoy it.

The cobweb /Zona Gale

Again, although one of the sisters in this story runs a library of sorts, the story is about the relationship between the two sisters, not about the library. Again, didn't love it.

The retirement party /Lisa Koger

A librarian with no desire to ever have been a librarian, after 20 years in the same position, is attending the retirement of her superior. No one realizes how trapped she feels, and how little of life she has experienced. people praise her for caring for her ailing father, not realizing how it has destroyed her life. Eh. I had no sympathy for the woman.

Summer librarian /Sue Kaufman

Again, although the protagonist is a part-time librarian, the story is about a relationship... she is pursued by a boy she thinks is too young for her, but he's awfully persistent... and awfully handsome. I thought it was really sweet.

QL 696.C9 /Anthony Boucher

This library murder mystery would probably be found to be more clever by people who are not actually familiar with cataloging systems.

Ed has his mind improved /Walter R. Brooks

You know, I never knew that the talking horse, Mr. Ed, was a literary figure before he starred in his own TV show. Well, he was, and this is one of the stories, in which the horse develops a passion for reading Westerns. Funny, and historically interesting.

The tractate middoth /M.R. James

A most excellent and spooky classic horror story. I love pretty much anything with a cursed manuscript, and this one really delivered. Good fun.

The story of St. Vespaluus /Saki

A peer tells his friend, a Baroness, the story of the fictitious St. Vespaluus, a hypocritical heir. Very good. You can read it here: <http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-sto...>

The trouble of Marcie Flint /John Cheever

A woman with a really crappy husband, who lives in a town with no library, has an affair with a man who argues (in vain) in favor of opening a library. Again, the focus is on the relationship, not the library (or the potential thereof.)

Rubber life /Francine Prose

A librarian develops a crush on a patron, and starts reading all of the books he checks out. An affair begins... but a ghost unexpectedly interferes... A little odd, but not bad.

Hard-luck stories /Alice Munro

Some old friends get together for lunch and gossip about affairs and such. Annoying people. Not my kind of thing.

Exchange /Ray Bradbury

An excessively sentimental, but extremely effective story. A soldier comes home on leave, but none of his friends are there to greet him. But he visits the public library, where the librarian remembers him from boyhood, and they take a trip down memory lane together, with the help of the books...

The library of Babel /Jorge Luis Borges.

A re-read. Classic speculative piece about a Universe that is also a library.

Denaë says

Not bad as far as themed short story collections go. I was unable to read all of the book before having to return it to the library, but enjoyed what I did read. I particularly liked "The Phoenix" by Ursula K. LeGuin, and, for entirely different reasons, "Ed Has His Mind Improved." Overall, interesting book.

Julie Davis says

I can't remember where I saw this mentioned. Possibly by Jenny from Reading Envy? At any rate, it has been some time since I've been grabbed by the throat by a short story collection. Granted, I've only read the first three, but I just couldn't put the book down - to the point where I was washing salad greens and trying to turn the page with my elbow. Perhaps it is the fact that the stories are about that thing I find most fascinating, the

way that Story influences us ... and where better to find stories about that than those focusing on libraries and librarians?

FINAL

I liked the stories at the beginning and end the best, probably because they edged into science fiction and being about the books' influence upon readers. There were a few in the middle that were enjoyable, such as the murder mystery and one of the Mr. Ed stories. However, mostly those middle stories suddenly took a turn toward being about girlie relationships (with mothers, lovers, the places one grew up) and ugh. I hate those sorts of stories. Wrap the same thing in a better wrapper, people ... like mystery, sf, or something interesting. The book is wide-ranging obviously so it is definitely worth checking out.

Heather says

I am a library dork. I eat, sleep & work library, so of course, I had to read this book of short stories about libraries and librarians. So many good stories but my favorite was "Exchange" by Ray Bradbury. It gave me such a sweet sadness; it is a beautiful story. After I read that story I had to just close the book & let the feelings wash over me. It's a rare author that can make you feel precisely what he wants you to. Ohhhh....Ray Bradbury has become one of my favorite authors.

Many other wonderful authors included in this are Ursula K. LeGuin; Francine Prose; Alice Munro; Saki & many others I didn't know. This book is varied in authors, who vary in nationality & era. Another good thing is that each story is different genre. Some are mysteries, some are political commentary, some are romantic, some are romanesque. "QL 696.C9" by Anthony Boucher is a memorable little murder mystery.

Kathleen says

Impossible to rate the whole book. As collection of short stories some are gems, and some didn't touch me. I loved Italo Calvino's "A General in the Library" and Ray Bradbury's "Exchange" particularly.

Bob Kaufman says

Some of the stories were good, others only so-so.

Mellen says

Fun book. A few of the stories were a bit boring and gloomy. But most were worth reading. I read the book for a class, looking for stereotypes of librarians. Otherwise I don't think I would have noticed how the stereotype of the middle-aged, white, spinster librarian is used in several of the stories to represent the institution of the library; I also thought that male librarians represented some broad idea of knowledge.

Erin says

:) The librarian's mindset is very obvious in the selections made for this book - striving to capture a diversity of genres, countries, and time periods, and letting readers form their own conclusions, rather than trying to present a coherent narrative. It was an interesting lens to view the variety of ways that libraries and librarians are perceived. I was especially interested to see the very different ways that male and female librarians were portrayed.

I'll confess the first half was a bit dull, but I loved the last half. I should also mention that the copyediting was pretty bad on this one.

3.5 stars. I think this one is more appealing to librarians than library lovers, although the Ray Bradbury story is sentimental in all the right ways for those of us that consider the library an important part of our development.

Terry says

If you love libraries and have a genuine fondness for the hard-working, knowledgeable folks who keep libraries accessible and exciting, you should avoid this book. For the record, I do not care for the short-story genre, but these seemed particularly distasteful with their stereotyping and dismissive attitudes. Boucher and Bradbury and, perhaps, Greenberg rescued the collection from a one-star rating.
