



You Are Not a Stranger Here

Adam Haslett

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In his bestselling and lavishly praised first book of stories, Adam Haslett explores lives that appear shuttered by loss and discovers entire worlds hidden inside them. The impact is at once harrowing and thrilling.

An elderly inventor, burning with manic creativity, tries to reconcile with his estranged gay son. A bereaved boy draws a thuggish classmate into a relationship of escalating guilt and violence. A genteel middle-aged woman, a long-time resident of a psychiatric hospital, becomes the confidante of a lovelorn teenaged volunteer. Told with Chekhovian restraint and compassion, and conveying both the sorrow of life and the courage with which people rise to meet it, **You Are Not a Stranger Here** is a triumph of storytelling.

You Are Not a Stranger Here Details

Date : Published August 12th 2003 by Anchor (first published 2002)

ISBN : 9780385720724

Author : Adam Haslett

Format : Paperback 256 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, Lgbt

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From Reader Review You Are Not a Stranger Here for online ebook

Giedre says

To start with, I am not a fan of short stories. That is why I know I would have never picked up Haslett's collection of short stories "You are not a Stranger Here" if it was not for Laura's inspiring review, which you can read [here](#).

It's not an easy task to describe these magical sketches about the imperfect lives of imperfect people. Complicated family relationships, homosexuality, coming of age, mental disorders, loss and trauma are ingeniously mixed by Haslett's talented hand and presented to us in vivid kaleidoscopic combinations, each of them a masterly and complete work of art. Now let us use the heavy weight of past to drown our kaleidoscope in the murky waters of loneliness and we may get a little closer to the fragile beauty of Haslett's writing.

Short stories are usually too short for me to develop a deep emotional relationship with the characters, which is one of the things I seek from reading. That is one of the main reasons I prefer novels. I tend to perceive short stories as fragments and find it complicated to construct full images of their characters, and thus difficult to truly like them. Haslett proved how wrong my perception was. All of the characters in "You are not a Stranger Here" had a story to tell, all of these stories moved me and all of the characters felt real and palpable. And I couldn't fail to see a fragment of my own reflection in most of them. Even though I feel that I would have liked to spend more time with these imperfect but familiar characters, the time we had together was enough for me to love them.

Am I a convert now? Could be. And if you are afraid of short stories like I was, summon up your courage and go for it. The result may surprise you.

Leslie says

"You and all the inheritors of wealth who think life is a matter of perfected sentiment. You are wrong."
("The Volunteer" 237)

You know those books you should have just gone ahead and read because people you trust swore by them? You Are Not a Stranger Here: Stories by Adam Haslett has been sitting on our shelves since I think 2003. It is Sean's copy and he and our friend Kevin were the ones swearing. In my own defense, each were wrecked by the read (in a good way) and sad was a word oft repeated in my presence. Haslett delves further than melancholy and shoots straight for deepening aches. I didn't want to be sad then, nor did I particularly want to be sad the other day when I picked it up. But I am so glad I did.

The title is perfect even before one encounters the quote in the 5th story, "War's End," when Mrs. McLaggen tells Paul, "You're not a stranger here. [...] I recognized you somehow, not like I'd met you or such, but nonetheless" (106). If you escape without recognizing the characters in these stories somehow, then lucky you? To be fair, I do believe Haslett has the rare gift to make you care for his characters, even in their most raw states, even when you want to look away or ignore their existence. The reasons why a Reader might want to look away may be out of loathing, or painful recollection, or fear of what a character's vulnerability exposes. The critical thing is how Haslett compels the Reader to remain transfixed, to see a story

through—I'm not entirely sure how he does it, and so consistently.

I think Haslett tapped some desperate optimism in me. I wanted to see some sort of hopeful ending. Foolish Reader. And then there were, in other cases, naked fascination with his depictions of mental illness and the culturally tormented. Haslett employs the senses, slips in and out of memory, internal and external, lulling the Reader into a riveting pacing.

There are a lot of similar themes explored throughout but they exist in varying concoctions. So while there may be a pervasive sense of fear, alienation, and sorrow throughout the book, each story is its own. I know people approach short story collections differently, but I would strongly recommend at least beginning with the first and saving the last for last.

What follows are remarks upon each of the stories. I tried to keep it brief. (I used the goodreads star-rating system.)

1]—"Notes to My Biographer" (1-23). >5 stars< This first-person narrative follows the fractured mind and estranged life of an aging inventor who would reconcile with the only child of his three who would see him. "He has a good mind, my son, always has, and somewhere the temerity to use it, to spear mediocrity in the eye, but in a world that encourages nothing of the sort, the curious boy becomes the anxious man. He must suffer his people's regard for appearances. Sad" (9). Apart from sexual preferences, we learn that father and son have a lot in common, but the two have different strategies for getting along; coming from different perspectives and ages.

Reconciliation is only for a father and son, but to witness a man reconciling his own beliefs and actions. We see this in how Franklin makes mental notes to his Biographer so as to get particular details correct and in his explanations for his manic behavior. Franklin's inner landscape is fascinating; but at what cost does he pay to maintain it? The externalized consequences give us some clue.

2]—"The Good Doctor" (24-47) >3 ½ stars< (3rd person). Having always been strongly affected by the hurting, Frank turns it into a vocation. Fresh out of school, he practices psychiatric medicine for the underserved feeling this is where he can be freer to engage in patients' lives and therapies. He encounters a young educated mother who challenges his "goodness." Is he more dependent upon them, then they upon him? When he medicates, that rare moment when we meet him, what is he medicating against? How does this compare to what the woman has and is suffering? What is escapable, and what is not? [expectations: for self/other, sex/gender, roots] External forces and failures and our means of coping; and what empathy truly means.

3]—"The Beginnings of Grief" (48-64) >5 stars< (1st person). This one was hard after the last, but even alone, it would have been difficult. It was the most difficult of all the stories because of the violence the unnamed protagonist draws upon himself. Just where is his sexual attraction to Gramm, his "thuggish classmate," founded. It is good to have the early stages of grief in mind while reading about this orphaned teenaged male. The language is raw and holy hell but I hurt for the unnamed boy—and even Gramm.

4]—"Devotion" (65-88) >5 stars< "Being replaced. That was the fear" (85). Devotion is the story of aging siblings who have sort of ended up remaining in the house together. The story is aptly named as the two share mutual affections and come to grips with the sacrifices such devotion takes. There is melancholy, but there is something other and quite beautiful; it is found in the absence of abandonment; those that remain when other ties are severed.

5]—"War's End" (89-117) >4 stars< Paul is depressed and dealing with the effects of his condition and medication on his wife and their marriage. Finding lucidity on a trip abroad (made for both their sakes), he contemplates a "weighing of needs" (105). He knows he is a burden to the woman he loves, but he is also afraid of what the medication and depression is doing to him, "the idea that so much of him was a pure and blinded waste" (94). This is a fear pervasive in the story. There is the slow decay, a wearing away and wearing down of selves, relationships, lives... There are so many courageous individuals in this story, and incredible love and devotion. It is both very moving and very sad.

6]—"Reunion" (118-137) >3 ½ stars< James moves from order into chaos; from an image of normalcy into the ravages of his illness; and ever in pursuit of his father to whom he writes letters. The third person narrative holds the focus and cleanly frames the story. James and his relationships are touched upon, inferred, take place in dark parks, in memories, in routine, and are reflected in his and Patrick's unfulfilled flirtation. James has his reasons for withdrawal, but the loneliness and disintegration are heart-breaking. He is focused and determined, and in a way I can't help view as self-flagellating. He would look different from how he actually he is. He lives among the shamed, the used, in the margins. And he seems surrounded, as if the margins are quite crowded actually. It is remarkable how Haslett keeps a pitiable character from being so. How he gifts James some dignity.

7]—"Divination" (138-164) >5 stars< "You're a perfectly normal boy" (157), his father insists rather violently. There is a fear of the abnormal and its various implications. And there is a reason to fear as the implications of Samuel's newly discovered "gift" comes to haunt. The dread and portent are so deftly rendered in this one. I was trembling with it as I read of Samuel's resignation that he would now live in "the quiet place, beyond the walls of the crowded dwelling" (164). The paralleling of him and his father, what they gain and lose in their respective acknowledgement and denial, is a familiar something I think we all consider more than a few times in our own parent/child relationships.

8]—"My Father's Business" (165-193) >3 ½ stars< Daniel is bipolar. He is also a young man interested in Philosophy, like his father who has a PhD. Daniel looks back at his medical file with correspondence between different treating doctors as well as the transcripts of tapes he recorded while conducting his research: "Anecdotal Sociology of the Philosophical Urge in Young Men." Haslett captures Daniel's mental health condition in the swinging moods illustrated in the interactions recorded in various interviews. He also captures so much more in the interviews asking after where the urge toward philosophy began. For Daniel, he finds his origins for so many of his present-day conditions in his father. There are notable similarities between this story and the first one, "Notes to My Biographer." And yet they do differ and it is nice to find this one late in the book for some distance. Its late placement allows for some revelation about *You Are Not a Stranger Here* as a whole as well.

"People whose best hope for a connection to other human beings lay in elaborating for themselves an elegiac mode of relatedness, as if everyone's life were already over. [...] This idea of living your life as an elegy, inoculating yourself against the present. So much easier if you can see people though they were just characters from a book. You can still spend time with them. But you have nothing to do with their fate. It's all been decided. The present doesn't really matter, it's just the time you happen to be reading about them. Which makes everything easier. Other people's pain for instance." (184-5)

The father suggests that Philosophers contribute to "keeping things at a remove" (185). And it is telling what Daniel does after his journey, once he gets off the train. It is significant that he sees the man with his young sons getting off the train before him. There is a lot of weight, but some humor in this one as well, and a really nice ending.

9]—"The Volunteer" (194-237) >5 stars< Elizabeth had always been fragile mentally, but she experienced a

major break at one point and was institutionalized in a Home. When off her meds, she is visited by a 17th century ancestress, Hester. She is also visited by a volunteer from a local High School, Ted. She becomes, in a way, a strange surrogate (grand)mother to the boy whose lost his and could really use a woman's advice—He has a raging infatuation for a girl at school. The echoes among the women, young, middle-aged, old, and ancient are of interest, but so is Ted who is thrown in the middle of it all, a male image that is on the brink of his predecessors (the males that pair with the women). While generalizations can be made in critique, the story is as intimate as all the others. There are conversations about façade versus the raw underneath. There are the ideas of particular moments, their scenarios that come into conflict with an actuality, the pain and the mess and the potential disappointment. “You and all the inheritors of wealth who think life is a matter of perfected sentiment. You are wrong” (237).

L @ omphaloskepsis

<http://contemplatrix.wordpress.com/20...>

Julie Ehlers says

For me, *You Are Not a Stranger Here* is in some ways defined by what it isn't. It doesn't abide by any of the trends we've seen in short stories in recent years: There's no magical realism. No confessional diary-like stuff. No stories where very little happens and then the whole thing is redeemed by an epiphany, or that end just as they seem to be getting started.

Instead, what we have here is actual short stories. There's intriguing action and dialogue all the way through. There are some lovely characters, some not so lovely, all memorable. There are vivid settings, some humor, and a lot of sadness and regret. Every story is perfectly constructed, but in a way that doesn't call attention to itself—you're just aware that what you're reading is the real thing, true and very satisfying. If you like short stories, you should read these. This is how it's done.

Lena♥Ribka says

3,5 stars.

I really have to start to read blurbs. As always, I picked up a book, knowing nothing about its content. I had no idea that *You Are Not a Stranger Here* was a collection of short stories. After the *first chapter* I knew for sure that I was enjoying the writing but trying to figure out where the story was going on and how the figures from the *first chapter* were connected to the figures in the *second chapter*(?!). The moment I started the *third chapter*- or actually the third story in this collection-I realized that it was an anthology.(WTF?) To tell the truth, I'm not a big fans of short stories collections.

But it is not only because of my preferences that I found difficult to review *You Are Not a Stranger Here*. Adam Haslett can write and his fiction debut is a clear proof for it. But the subject of this anthology - mental illnesses and disorders, vanished hopes, unrealized dreams, suicide as the last resort and death as the best solution - is not something you pick up voluntarily.

In one word-DEPRESSING. (*Maybe it was not that bad that I unknowingly skipped the blurb*).

I know that a lot of readers avoid such kind of books, considering that our real life is hard enough to be busy with a heavy stuff in our spare time. But *You Are Not a Stranger Here* is literary fiction and HEA doesn't belong to one of the integral parts of the genre, in contrast to MM-romance. I even make bold to say, that it is an unwritten law that the majority of literary fiction works are mostly without any HEA. Normally I can handle it: there are no WRONGFUL feelings or USELESS emotions. How could we experience LUCK if we had no idea what SORROW means? How could we show sincere compassion if we had no idea about losses? How could we distinguish between BAD and GOOD feelings knowing only GOOD or BAD ones? We need ALL of them.

Adam Haslett is a talented writer but I got tired toward the end of the book, having being overdosed with hurt, sorrow, despair, pain and trauma. It was just too much of one kind of emotions. I'm sure I would have loved this book more if he gave me at least ONCE a dim light at the end of the tunnel. In a single story. Just one. I'd have been happier, I swear.

The writing- 5 stars. The content...it is a subjective feeling, I'm still not sure how to judge it.

But I'm looking forward to reading more of Adam Haslett.

Brian says

Man oh man he's good!

Dominic says

This is a solid menagerie of stories, and a great reminder of just how much I appreciate a well-curated short story collection. Most of the stories bring to life characters who are suffering from some form of mental illness, and I felt a tremendous pathos and humanity while I made my way through the book. My favourite stories by far were "The Beginnings of Grief" and "Reunion." I'm now extra-excited to read *Imagine Me Gone*.

Maya says

This idea of living your life as an elegy, inoculating yourself against the present. So much

*easier if you can see people as though they were just characters from a book. You can still spend time with them. But you have nothing to do with their fate. It's all been decided. The present doesn't really matter, it's just the time you happen to be reading about them. Which makes everything easier.**

To say that I was overwhelmed reading this anthology would be an understatement. It's not an easy read since themes of mental illness and terminal illness are largely concerned. However, my resolve to pace my reading to two stories a day crumbled down after the fourth story.

It contains nine short stories linked by the common theme of pain – both the pain (emotional and/or physical) of the people directly suffering and the pain of those around them who were helpless in their attempts to lessen it.

And yes, people – it's hard for me to refer to them as characters. Because all stories - although brutally honest to the point where I couldn't not accept the storyteller's decision that their death was the only possible outcome for them - are written with so much compassion and understanding and tenderness that I felt like an insider, like one of the desperate partners or parents or siblings torn between holding on or letting go of their loved ones.

Of course, some stories affected me more than others but that is not to say that there were weak stories in the anthology.

Unforgettable book!

*quote taken from *My Father's Business*.

BR with Carol and Sofia - Sep 14, 2015.

Laura says

I'm going to try to be coherent here, but to be honest I am still mentally reeling and staggering about from this one. I don't read short story collections very often, because as a rule I prefer the character development and emotional attachment that comes with getting lost in a long novel, but I hereby vow to read every single thing Adam Haslett ever writes- short story collection, novel, book of haikus, whatever. Because Haslett is the kind of author who can give me chills, make me tear up, make my hand tremble while turning a page, and this collection of stories is absolutely sublime. He captures so much in so few pages, and the characters are so piercingly authentic and nuanced and *developed* that they came more vividly alive for me than those of most full-length novels.

It has been a while since I found a new author who made me feel such awe, such simple respect for brilliance at the craft of writing and the art of story telling. There is so much depth and power in this collection, so much loneliness, empathy, pain and beauty, so much *humanity*. Highly, highly recommended.

Sofia says

Encounters with Death & Illness

Yes, you must be wondering what I found so wonderful in that that I gave it all the stars. It's the writing, the people in it that made me eager to read rather than sad. In fact I had to make myself slow down and read only two a day so that I could savour them properly as they should be.

The people Adam Haslett wrote are the kind I want to wrap in cotton wool and keep safe but nah that would be numbing, I have to let them go, set them free, to breathe, live and see the colours.

a totally great BR with Carol and Maya

Patrick Faller says

This was not one of my favorite books, but it does stand as one of the more interesting, challenging collections I've read, mostly because Haslett's fiction delves into highly charged issues without sacrificing narrative integrity but also because Haslett's prose is so perplexing, at once seeming carefully composed and ostentatiously extravagant in its use of detail.

Haslett explores mental illness and homosexuality as sources of societal stigma, following his characters as they struggle with family and loved ones to find ways to coexist. "Reunion" recounts, with a detachment that occasionally borders on ambivalence, the actions a lonely young man takes to extricate himself from his life after learning he's contracted AIDS. "War's End" follows a suicidal ex-high school history teacher and his wife, a scholar studying women's lives on the home front during the second World War, to Scotland, where they hope to heal their ailing marriage. The collection's strongest piece, "The Volunteer," explores the relationship that develops between an older woman suffering from delusions in which she's visited by a long dead relative and a heartsick young man whose own family is disintegrating in the wake of his mother's mental illness.

What's most impressive about the book is the degree to which Haslett resists sensationalizing his highly charged material. These stories put me in mind of Chekhov's argument that a storyteller's purpose is not to provide solutions but to demonstrate, as clearly and accurately as s/he is able, the full scope of the problem.

Oriana says

Here are some of the things this book is about: fathers and sons, ailing relatives, madness and its inheritability, homosexuality and its consequences, the slippery boundaries between sanity and in-

It's sad and lonely and full of longing and ache. Many of the stories end with a twist—not like the twist of a road under your wheels, but the twist of a metaphorical knife in a metaphorical back, making an already sorrowful and unfortunate tale even sadder. Everything is overlain with melancholy, with hurt, with the loneliness of marginalia. It's beautiful but so so so heartbreaking.

Thomas says

4.5 stars

The first four short stories in this collection ripped my heart to shreds. I have never felt so moved by short fiction; Adam Haslett has this stunning, almost scary ability to make you care so goddamn much about his characters even when they inhabit 30 pages or less. His stories focus on grief, mental illness, and sexuality. Some of my favorites include: "Notes to My Biographer," in which a mentally ill father visits his son for the first time in years; "The Beginnings of Grief," about a boy who forms an abusive relationship with a classmate to cope with his parents' deaths; and "Devotion," in which two siblings both wait for the arrival of an old friend.

I have developed a serious author crush on Adam Haslett after reading both *Imagine Me Gone* and *You Are Not a Stranger Here*. His writing exhibits remarkable restraint and communicates so much emotion without resorting to dramatics. His empathy and compassion for his characters literally made me put this book down twice to go on a walk, just so I could continue to appreciate his care-filled prose with a clear head. And as an aspiring psychologist, I love his portrayals of characters with mental illnesses and their family members. He captures their immense pain, resilience, and bittersweet joy that comes with learning how to live in the dark.

Back to why I have a huge crush on Mr. Haslett: he has three degrees (a B.A., an M.F.A., and a J.D.), he writes about challenging topics I care a lot about, and we are only 25 years apart, so I think I have a fighting chance. Though I guess I would feel content just reading more of his wonderful writing. Either way, I give *You Are Not a Stranger Here* 4.5 stars because even though a few of the stories feel less complete or compelling than the first four and the last one, the stories that succeed in this collection impacted me just as much as some of my favorite full-length novels. Check this book out if you want your heart punctured, if you want your literary reminder that you have feelings, that you are, indeed, human.

Doug says

Of the nine stories in this debut collection, at least six are definite 5 star gems...the rest, although equally well-written, I was less enthusiastic about, but I decided the collection as a whole did merit five stars. As in his most recent book, *Imagine Me Gone* (my favorite book of the past year, hence impelling me to read Haslett's backlist), the emphasis here is on both mental illness (usually depression or bipolar disease) and the effects of such on family dynamics. Only two of them exhibit the humor that made *Imagine* so enjoyable and unusual, and the lack is definitely noticed, although not entirely appropriate for these more dour examples.

Orsodimondo says

LA GIUSTA DISTANZA

Domanda: qual è la “giusta distanza”?

Risposta: quella che adotta Adam Haslett.

Domanda: Come si misura?

Risposta: né troppo vicino né troppo lontano: alla giusta distanza, appunto.

Empatia senza indulgere al compiacimento.

Il regista Carlo Mazzacurati con la protagonista Valentina Lodovini sul set de “La giusta distanza”, un film del 2007.

Sicuramente Haslett si muove a suo agio fra le storie, i personaggi, e le ambientazioni della sua raccolta, perfettamente inserito, per nulla estraneo (il titolo originale è *You are not a stranger here*, che fa a gara in bellezza con quello italiano).

E anch’io mi sono sentito subito a casa, sin dalla prima pagina.

A casa.

Non mi pare che si tenti di svelare il principio del dolore in questi racconti.

Tanto meno la fine del dolore, a meno che non coincida con la fine della vita, che comunque si lascia dietro in vita una scia di altro dolore.

In un racconto si accenna ai cinque gradi del dolore, uno in meno di quelli della separazione, ma direi che i gradi del dolore sono nove quanti sono i racconti, o uno solo, il dolore è dolore.

Haslett non prova neppure a indagare se il dolore è utile alla vita, se fa bene in qualche modo a qualche cosa: il dolore è dolore, esiste, c’è.

Wolf Erlbruch.

Sono racconti bellissimi, uno più dell’altro: scritti come si faceva un tempo e in modo moderno, in modo semplice e sapiente, piano e ricco, intenso e leggero.

Mai sentito nominare Haslett prima di queste pagine, che hanno già dieci anni, e che mi pare segnino la nascita di un nuovo grande scrittore.

La gara è accesa fino all’ultima pagina: vincerà il dolore o la bellezza della scrittura?

Ho come l’impressione che se ne vadano via insieme, allontanandosi a braccetto, come Bogart e Rains nel finale di Casablanca: la conferma di un grande sodalizio, che non è iniziato qui, e qui neppure si concluderà.

Humphrey Bogart e Claude Rains nell’indimenticabile finale del legendario “Casablanca”, di Michael Curtiz, 1942.

Amy says

Really powerful series of short stories mostly focused on mental illness. I'm not typically a fan of the short story as I prefer having more time for character and story development. However, this collection is one of the

best I've read. It's poignant and nuanced handling of mental health is outstanding. As someone who knows quite a bit about the subject, each of these stories felt real and raw and true. I highly recommend it, particularly if you'd like more insight into the mentally ill. So great!

Kelli says

This collection may have ruined me for all the short story collections I haven't read yet. Subtle perfection.
4.5 stars

blakeR says

Wow, this is one of the best books of short stories I've ever read. Top 5 for sure. I loved four of them -- "Notes to My Biographer," "The Beginnings of Grief," "Devotion," and "Divination" -- and the rest were merely very good.

"Biographer" is actually in the running for my favorite short story ever. It starts the book off with such a bang, a man who you only realize two pages in is on a manic bender, this searing, frenetic freight train screaming toward a collapsed bridge. I was amazed and enthralled.

"The Good Doctor" applies the brakes somewhat -- the worst of the bunch IMO, the most apparently *crafted* -- but "Grief" picks up almost where "Biographer" left off. I don't think it's a coincidence that two of Haslett's best stories, maybe *the* two best, are written in 1st person; he clearly has a gift for writing twisted, damaged characters in this voice.

But I would actually call "Divination" my second favorite. It is totally heart-wrenching and unexpected, the tale of a boy who may or may not be able to sense deaths before they happen. In fact, it best displays what I most like about these stories in that you have no idea where it's headed. "Divination" could have ended in one of at least three different ways and been equally effective. I don't often get chills reading, but the ends of both this and "Biographer" did it for me. Astonishing.

So what makes these stories so good? Haslett has an incredible command of his characters and his plotting. The writing is natural yet impeccable, and both characters and situation feel absolutely authentic. He respects his audience by not hand-feeding important details and plot points. He is deeply in touch with human pain and suffering, yet he conveys them through his stories as gently as possible. And behind the despair is usually a note of redemption which provides the perfect dash of sweetness to his otherwise bitter fruit. It's jaw-droppingly beautiful is what I'm trying to say.

One of my favorite things about this collection is that despite a common theme throughout the book of suffering and despair, each story is so radically different from the others. This is a feat in itself, to distinguish each of your creations so exactly, not only in character and plot but also in voice. It's in stark contrast to other collections including the last one I read, Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, where the stories quickly began to blend together (see my review).

Ironically, I came into this book wanting to dislike it, just because I've become keenly aware of the lack of female representation on my bookshelves and I have been really trying not only to read more female authors

but also to better see through the male authors' machinations. I was a little dismayed after falling head over heels for the first story: "Damn it, I don't want to find more white male authors to like, I need to get some females up in here, or at least some GD color!"

But I couldn't help it, it's just so good. And I was realizing while reading that what really gets me about writing like this (especially in the 1st and 3rd stories) is its audacity and boldness, its *edge*. Why can I not find more females who write this way? Jhumpa Lahiri, one of the most respected female writers of our generation, is as sterile as a counter-spray in comparison. In fact the boldest female authors I can think of are either sci-fi (Atwood, Le Guin), black (Morrison, Hurston, Walker), or both (Octavia E. Butler). What am I missing here?

So yeah, in conclusion: read this book, it's a work of art and will most likely leave you awe-struck. I can't wait to read more of him. Oh, and please someone tell me which female authors approach this level of exceptionality so that I can read them too! I swear I'm trying, I'm really trying!

Not Bad Reviews

@blakerosser1

Nick Pageant says

Please read Lena's wonderful review [here](#).

Heartbreaking, liberating, inspiring. This is by far one of the most accomplished pieces of writing that I've ever read. I read it when it first came out and then again over Christmas. Adam Haslett is a genius. You will savor each and every sentence.

James says

If you are a fan of mental disorders rendered honestly in a modern world, here you go!

Chad says

I find it difficult to write objectively about Adam Haslett's fiction. After reading (over and over, studying, underlining words, sentences, sometimes entire paragraphs) *You Are Not a Stranger Here*, Haslett's first book, a collection of stories that was a finalist for both the Pulitzer Prize and The National Book Award, I wanted to write a few paragraphs analyzing the theme of mental illness, a subject that occurs in almost half the collection's stories. As I try to compose my ideas, find my own words to adequately convey the beauty and complexity with which Haslett constructs his narratives and characters, I am left with this sentiment: *You Are Not a Stranger Here* is the strongest collection of short stories by one author I've ever read. One of the fascinating ways Haslett explores mental illness is by showing its effects on those closest to the afflicted person. This is clearly shown in "War's End." Paul and his wife Ellen travel to England because

Ellen is researching correspondence written by women on the World War II home front. Paul is clinically depressed, and Haslett launches readers into Paul's mindset. Readers see the world as Paul does, and the sensory images are so visceral that readers come to understand Paul's pain. Haslett conveys the extreme effort it requires for Paul to perform simple tasks like responding to Ellen's questions. Paul is acutely aware of how his illness affects Ellen, and he plans to throw himself off a cliff so he will no longer burden her. This is when Mrs. McLaggan, a stranger Paul locks eyes with in a restaurant, intervenes and introduces Paul to Albert, her young grandson who's dying of psoriasis. Mrs. McLaggan tells Paul, " 'In the restaurant the other night...I recognized you somehow, not like I'd met you or such, but nonetheless.'" Haslett's gift lies in examining the intimate effects strangers can have on our lives, and Paul provides comfort for Albert by reading him stories about kings. The connection between these two characters, one dying from the body, the other, the mind, is intelligent and subtle, as are the effects these illnesses have on the two people closest to Paul and Albert: Ellen and Mrs. McLaggan.

In "The Volunteer" Elizabeth Maynard is a woman who has battled schizophrenia her entire life. Institutionalized at a young age, Elizabeth nonetheless attracts the attention of Will, a man who marries her. After Elizabeth's first child arrives stillborn, her schizophrenia becomes unmanageable. She hears the voice and has visions of a woman named Hester, a seventeenth-century ancestor who died giving birth in Elizabeth's house. Elizabeth now lives in Plymouth Brewster Structured Living Facility, Will having long ago abandoned her and remarried, and she is heavily medicated on Primidone, which, apparently, tempers Hester's presence. Ted, a high-school volunteer, comes once a week to sit with Elizabeth, and as Haslett states, "The boy has reminded her of what there is to miss." Ted awakens feelings of youthfulness and love in Elizabeth. She stops taking the Primidone, and her senses heighten. "She'd been on the drugs so long she's forgotten many ordinary satisfactions. What cold water feels like in a parched mouth. The pleasure concentration on a single thought can yield." Without the medication, Hester is constantly present, and "The Volunteer" examines with tenderness and introspection the sacrifices we make to feel fully alive. Unlike Elizabeth's family, Ted does not abandon her. Ted's mother suffers from severe depression, so Ted is able to understand Elizabeth's condition. He believes that Hester, for Elizabeth at least, is a real presence. Ted in turn reminds Elizabeth of her son who died at birth, and the story leads to a conclusion that unites Ted and Elizabeth in a bond of painful understanding.

Haslett writes his characters with deep respect and admiration for those who are suffering. In a lesser writer's hands, characters like Paul and Elizabeth might read as victims, but this is never the case in *You Are Not a Stranger Here*. On the contrary, Haslett's stories show how beautiful "this world can be if you aren't actually in it."
