



The 50 Funniest American Writers: According to Andy Borowitz

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Ever wondered who makes a very funny person laugh? Wonder no more. Brought together in this Library of America collection are America's fifty funniest writers—according to acclaimed writer and comedian Andy Borowitz. Reaching back to Mark Twain and forward to contemporary masters such as David Sedaris, Nora Ephron, Roy Blount Jr., Ian Frazier, Bernie Mac, Wanda Sykes, and George Saunders, *The 50 Funniest American Writers** is an exclusive Who's Who of the very best American comic writing. Here are Thurber and Perelman, Lenny Bruce and Bruce Jay Friedman, Garrison Keillor, Dave Barry, and Veronica Geng, plus hilarious lesser-known pieces from *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *The Atlantic*, *National Lampoon*, and *The Onion*. Who does "one of the funniest people in America" (*CBS Sunday Morning*) read when he needs a laugh?

Contents:

A presidential candidate by Mark Twain
The lecture tickets that were bought but never used by George Ade
The ransom of Red Chief by O. Henry
From Babbitt by Sinclair Lewis
From Gentlemen prefer blondes by Anita Loos
On conversation by Ring Lardner
Imperial purple by H.L. Mencken
More alarms at night by James Thurber
The waltz by Dorothy Parker
Farewell, my lovely appetizer by S.J. Perelman
Simple prays a prayer by Langston Hughes
The night the old nostalgia burned down by Frank Sullivan
Across the street and into the grill by E.B. White
The house of mirth by Peter De Vries
From The magic Christian by Terry Southern
From How to talk dirty and influence people by Lenny Bruce
The secret vice by Tom Wolfe
The counterfeit secret circle member gets the message, or The asp strikes again by Jean Shepherd
The Kentucky Derby is decadent and depraved by Hunter S. Thompson
A look at organized crime by Woody Allen
The tax man by Bruce Jay Friedman
Letters to Einstein by Philip Roth
A few words about breasts by Nora Ephron
Our white heritage by Henry Beard, Michael O'Donoghue, George W.S. Trow
Better read than dead : a revised opinion by Fran Lebowitz
Your action line by Charles Portis
In the morning post by Donald Barthleme
Curb Carter policy discord effort threat by Veronica Geng
Vacation '58 by John Hughes
The laws of cartoon motion by Mark O'Donnell

The Tip-Top Club by Garrison Keillor
Rolled in rare Bohemian onyx, then vulcanized by hand by Bruce McCall
Tough as bob war and other stuff by Molly Ivins
Corrections by Calvin Trillin
Tips for women : how to have a relationships with a guy by Dave Barry
Clinton deploys vowels to Bosnia by The Onion
Shiftless little loafers by Susan Orlean
Gothic baseball by Roy Blount Jr.
If I were in charge of the networks by George Carlin
Laws concerning food and drink ; Household principles ; Lamentations of the father by Ian Frazier
The writer's life by David Rakoff
From I ain't scared of you by Bernie Mac
Buddy, can you spare a tie? by David Sedaris
It's so hard by Wanda Sykes
What I'd say to the Martians by Jack Handey
Your three wishes : F.A.Q. by David Owen
Ask the optimist! by George Saunders
Awake by Jenny Allen
The pony problem by Sloane Crosley
If not an apology, at least a "my bad" by Larry Wilmore

The 50 Funniest American Writers: According to Andy Borowitz Details

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Shellstress says

I'm generally fairly scattershot when it comes to the manner in which I approach a typical anthology: I'll thumb through, choose selections at reckless random, set it aside for months, perhaps pick it up later, and likely completely forget about the 44% I never managed to get to. Dust ultimately collects, as dust is wont to do.

I've long been deeply amused by damn near EVERYTHING that Mr. Borowitz has to say (whether it be in The New Yorker, via Twitter, or on his masterfully produced satirical website (BorowitzReport.com)), and I was intrigued by the notion of perusing the work of writers that HE considers to rank among the country's most amusing, past and present. I decided, what the hell, worst-case scenario? One more anthology, one more potential dust-collector...

This book will NOT be receiving the 56%-read solution, just to be cast aside like so much stultifying yard-sale fodder. As a matter of fact, my original copy is currently in the hands of a third grateful reader. And I'm maintaining a bit of a wait-list.

THIS book is one of the most well-considered, thoughtfully-ordered, skillfully-constructed collections I can recall chancing into. In addition, as I read it cover-to-cover in the order Mr. Borowitz plainly intended (well played, Andy!), I laughed aloud often enough to leave my eyes significantly tear-swollen, and hard enough to prompt a fair ache in my sides.

Beginning with Mark Twain's 'A Presidential Candidate' (stunning in its latter-day prescience) and finishing with Larry Wilmore's 'If Not an Apology, at Least a "My Bad"' (a drolly hysterical examination of ways "white guilt" might be more effectively expiated), the collection presents some of my favorite writers (Davids Rakoff & Sedaris, Dorothy Parker, Calvin Trillin...) along with a few that were less familiar to me (as if I'm unsophisticated enough to list them - ha!). The progression from story to story, as aforementioned, feels adroitly manicured without coming off as affected, and neither satire-fatigue nor comic-habituatation ever threaten to set in. It's rare that I feel "approaching-the-book's-end-remorse" when tearing through a digest such as this, but as I neared the final four pieces, I discovered that I'd slowed my pace as if to somehow extend the book by just a few pages more... High praise, indeed, for a compilatory effort, in my opinion.

Bottom line: This book is consistently hilarious, brilliantly constructed and worth every moment invested in enjoying it. I'd normally hesitate in waxing so trite, but THIS one is an absolute must-read.

Neil says

It's a tough crowd here rating this book so lowly, but that only goes to prove the subjectivity of humor. And it's not a proposition of like it or feel neutral: people who don't find something funny often react with outright hostility. Look at the scores for any book on this site that has been touted as highly funny. They're never high, and the scores are all over the map.

Borowitz takes on a tough task, narrowing a huge field of humorists to 50, and then finding representative work when he's under an obvious page-count restriction (you do the math: 50 writers in 438 pages.) Given those challenges, I think he does an excellent job. Are these the 50 funniest writers? Probably not. Is the piece selected always the writer's funniest? No. But for me, his success percentage was pretty good. I laughed a lot, and when I wasn't so amused, the next piece was always coming up in just a few pages.

My favorites included H. L. Mencken's vitriolic "Imperial Purple," James Thurber's "More Alarms at Night," S. J. Perleman's hilarious noir spoof "Farewell, My Lovely Appetizer," e.b. white's Hemingway spoof "Across the Street and into the Grill," Peter De Vries' "House of Mirth," Lenny Bruce's "How to Talk Dirty and Influence People," Woody Allen's "A Look at Organized Crime," a three writer effort called "Our White Heritage," some of Charles Portis's old "Your Action Line" columns, Veronica Geng's newspeak masterpiece "Curb Carter Policy Discord Effort Threat," the John Hughes story (that I didn't realize he wrote) which originated Vacation (and is much raunchier than the film), Bruce McCall's spoof of mail ads, Calvin Trillin's spiteful "Corrections," Dave Barry's relationship tips, Susan Orlean's baby-hating "Shiftless Little Loafers," Ian Frazier's application of biblical language to "Laws Concerning Food and Drink," David Sedaris's "Buddy Can You Spare a Tie?," Jack Handey on "What I'd Say to the Martians," and George Saunders' "Ask the Optimist." But those are just my choices. Yours will be different.

The cool thing ultimately is that all of these writers have a big load of other work which is synopsized in little bibliographic annotations at the end of the book. So for every tiny nugget you find here, you've got a wealth of good reading to follow.

Steve says

Surprisingly excellent. Anthologies of this sort rarely live up to their claims, but the selections here are a great representation of American humor from the last 100 years (plus the requisite piece from Twain).

Jack Goodstein says

Mixed bag of humor running from parody and satire to observational humor--49 of which are from the 20th century and into the 21st.

Realini says

The 50 Funniest American Writers according to Andy Borowitz

This is such an enjoyable, indeed, funny book, that I have already written, if not fifty, at least twenty notes on it.

The short humorous accounts that I have loved have each been separated and enjoyed again when I wrote about them here: <http://realini.blogspot.ro/>

On the issue of apology for slavery I have written the last few words, because this is the flash story that ends the book.

And in the era of Trump, a man with so much to ask forgiveness for and yet so little inclination that his

narcissistic personality becomes ever more obnoxious, the subject of apology and discrimination has seen a recurrence.

The Pony Problem by Sloane Crosely is another lovely tale included in this compilation...would you like anything else...water, a cookie, maybe a pony? „And it feels in a way like a pony ride for a child, even if I have seen adults riding ponies and that is not good.

Ask the Optimist! By George Saunders raises the question of optimism, but the perception is used for jocular purposes here...when faced with a convertible that the husband has bought, and with a liking for bonnets, one needs to buy a whole lot of them...

Your Three Wishes by David Owen were funny in the details, terms and conditions under which they apply and for reminding me of a joke that has the three wishes: I want to live in America, I want to be rich and finally, not work a day in my life again- the trouble being that with the last wish, the poor man is send back to his original place- where “they love work, they can watch people work for hours”.

What I'd Say to the Martians by Jack Handey uses satire in mocking the human race, with its excessive violence- the fool in the white House keeps talking about the Little Rocket Man, the calm before the storm and destroying North Korea...there are some leaders that we have the ability to elect that would make Martians think we are so stupid.

In I Ain't Scared of You Bernie Mac deals with the theme of death, approached with jocularly, but this departure is of course still a subject worth exploring and coming to terms with:

- “Layin’ up there in the fuckin’ coffin, and we gotta go see this motherfucker, and he dead for three days.”

If I Were in Charge of the Networks by George Carlin elucidates the meaning of a few words that we –and more importantly those working with the Networks- use in the wrong way: prodigal, sour grapes, celibate, chastity, alternative, option, light year and acronyms among others are explained, with the adage: “I say fuck popular usage”.

Oh, and an eggplant or another vegetable or fruit for that matter cannot be healthy, unless it does pushups...it is healthful.

Tips for Women... by Dave Barry presents some scenes which are familiar, if I would not go as far as to say that all men are like that.

Elaine thinks about the six months she has been going out with Roger and talks about it, with Roger worrying about the car, the mechanics that did not do a proper job, the need to tell them a thing or two.

Psychology research establishes that there are huge differences between male and female preoccupation with various subjects, like sex for instance, which is on the mind of a woman many fewer times less than on the mind of a man.

Vacation '58 by John Hughes has been the basis for a comedy and it has many hilarious scenes within, even if or when an older aunt dies, with a car jumping off the end of the road, attacks by the Native Americans, Walt Disney being shot, Dad sleeping at the wheel of the car, having to pay all the money he has for the changing of a tire, then robbing a place to get some dollars, being chased by the police, forgetting aunt's dog tied to the car and then dragging him to death on the road and I have surely forgotten quite a few other incidents...

The 50 Funniest American Writers is part of a group of works that I have found so enticing that I placed them aside, to enjoy later, much later.

One of the passages is written by Lenny Bruce, a name familiar from the movie Lenny, with Dustin Hoffman

in the leading role...

Lenny talks about other comedians and my best guess is that he is teasing them or even worse, mocking them.

He writes about Jerry Lewis and his impersonations of Japanese people with strange teeth and weird glasses, which appear grotesque, not funny.

The comedian moves on to his tour of some of the conservative parts of America, where the man who introduces him tries to minimize the impact of the jokes and people walk out on him, never mind Lenny Bruce.

In some of these small towns there is nothing to do and hard to find anything noteworthy happening, with the local taxi driver asking the guests where to get laid...

- What do you do when someone shows you their house is a good question
- Lenny says the obvious- yes, that is a nice cabinet there
- Have you seen a cleaner toilet?
- No

Some issues are serious, like the use of certain words that are dirty at one historical moment and then others fill that role

- Would you come to my hotel- this is dirty
- Come over to my trailer- trailer was not dirty then
- Will you have a cup of coffee? - But having a cup of coffee would become a dirty expression later on

Whitney says

The early 1900s and the early 2000s were not very funny.

But in 1946 a kooky fella named Frank Sullivan wrote "The Night the Old Nostalgia Burned Down." What a knee-slapper!

On Saturdays we used to go with Great-Aunt Tib to the Eden Musee to see the wax figure of Lillian Russell. There was a woman! They don't build girls like her nowadays. You can't get the material, and even if you could, the contractors and the plumbers would gyp you and substitute shoddy.

I was six when the riots occurred. No, I was thirty-six. I remember because it was the year of the famous Horace Greeley hoax, and I used to hear my parents laughing about it. It was commonly believed that Mark Twain was the perpetrator of the hoax, although Charles A. Dana insisted to his dying day that it was Lawrence Godkin.

It's a darn shame that no one writes comedy like that anymore! Darn shame.

Jenna says

Honestly, I thought it would be funnier. I follow Andy Borowitz on Twitter...his many tweets per day are worth at least a couple of guffaws. With this book he's basically giving a history of American humor writers starting with Mark Twain. Many selections are quite good, but some are just boring. I found myself skimming a lot of the middle section.

Preeti says

The only reason I picked up this book was because Andy Borowitz compiled the stories. Overall, I was mixed on the stories - some were funny, the others were not my cup of tea. I ended up skipping a couple stories or I would never have finished. It was a wide variety of humor as well. I wouldn't recommend this for most people, unless you are really into comedy.

I give it 2.5 stars.

Katie says

Count on the Borowitz name like a Good Housekeeping seal of approval. Every daily dose of satire in the Borowitz Report unfailingly delivers.

That kind of reliability makes the fantastic flop, "The 50 Funniest American Writers According to Andy Borowitz" all the more puzzling.

He may, in fact, have identified the top 50 writers. He did not, however, pick the 50 funniest stories. He barely picked five stories I found funny at all.

Others suggest that the oldest stories need context for the contemporary reader to fully understand, and they might be on to something. But who picks up a humor book to forcibly dissect it like a high school student? Not me.

For all the glowing Goodreads reviewers praising Mark Twain and The Onion (and the rest of the book), we know you only read the cover.

Enjoy some classic Sedaris and relive "National Lampoon's Vacation" in John Hughes' "Vacation '58." Then just set it down. No, first read through the list of writers, and maybe their mini-bios at the end. Then put it down. Really, you won't miss a thing.

Emily says

This seemed more like a historical anthology of humour writers than a collection of actual humour. While these may possibly be some of the funniest American writers, if these were their funniest efforts then I can only say I do not share a sense of humour with Andy Borowitz. Some stories were amusing but it was very hit-and-miss, and not a single one got a real laugh out loud. So, perhaps interesting as a historical collection, but if you just want a good laugh I'd look elsewhere.

Lisa says

This was a really good way to get the mind to unwind. I would say that this writing is a mix of humor and funny, as there were at least several that were more humorous than funny. For funny, I am so glad for the entry by Bernie Mac because he made me laugh out loud more than anyone in this book.

I thought the entries made in chronological order were an interesting way to organize the book and ended up taking us on a little historical journey through American humor. It is interesting how something written 100 years ago or more can still seem relevant and make you smile. Thank you to Mark Twain and Sinclair Lewis, among others.

The selections were quite good for some of the authors. I never enjoyed reading Hunter S. Thompson as much as I did in this selection and the same is true for Dave Barry. Roy Blout, Jr., and Molly Ivins both provide good regional color to the book. Nora Ephrons's take on breasts was interesting but not really funny. Actually kind of sad. David Sedaris and Woody Allen made me laugh, as well, and George Carlin's entry was very witty - as witty as one can be with the liberal use of fuck in all its manifestations - but he has been funnier.

Good escape book. Here's how S.J. Perelman ends the evening: "Then I treated my tonsils to five fingers of firewater, jammed on my hat, and made for the anteroom." And as he enters his office and Birdie asks, "Mike would - would you tell me something?" "As long as it isn't clean" I flipped to conceal my bitterness. "What's an eight-letter word meaning 'sentimental'?" "Flatfoot, darling," I said, and went out into the rain." 1944, my friends.

The Goon says

I didn't particularly enjoy this book. I found the selections of the anthology to be pretty random.

Furthermore, very few of the writing selected was actually funny, which was confusing since the title says it's got writing from "The 50 Funniest American Writers."

I guess, thinking about it, the title doesn't say that it's the funniest writing of the funniest American writers, but just pieces that happen to have been written by those funny writers.

Just because you are a funny writer does not mean that all you write will be funny. I must have been confused when I picked out the book based on its title alone. I think I just assumed it would be a book filled with funny stories. Shame on me.

I don't understand how Andy Borowitz went about choosing what to put in his collection, unless the choices were made at random. That's actually what I believe. I believe that Andy Borowitz had his 'people' select some writing and put it together in a collection. I don't think his 'people' even read all of the selections either. After reading this anthology, I really believe that it is a totally random selection based on nothing but wanting to fill pages. And it sucked.

S.D. says

Declaring these writers the “funniest” is a bit of stretch. Technical skill is the main feature of this anthology: these writers know the tricks of the humor trade and they ply them well. 50 people reading these selections on a subway car would not experience a widespread outbreak of laughter; but a clever turn of phrase, a metaphoric counterpoint, or carefully chose word will likely cause a few chuckles. Highlights are where you might expect them: Lenny Bruce exposing the hypocrisy of popular taste; Hunter S. Thompson at the Kentucky Derby; Norah Ephron, offering “A Few Words About Breasts”; John Hughes on vacation; George Carlin on English grammar & usage; and a lesson from David Sedaris in misspent consumer gratification.

Spence says

I enjoyed it, but many of the stories required context which the book did not provide. I appreciate the gesture, the assumption that I would be familiar with every author, their history, and the time period and socio-cultural environment that existed at the time the various articles were written, however the reality was multiple trips to wikipedia in order to get the history and perspective of the many very funny authors included in Borowitz's book. The wikipedia research is really important if one is going to fully appreciate all the humor included in the book. I realize English Graduate students may not find the need to research the authors as extensively as I needed to...it sure is nice to have the ol' english degree come in handy from time to time. No one wants to feel like they wasted 6 years of their lives for nothing.

Abby Aldrich says

Nobody new to me in here. I didn't realize that was what I was looking for so that's probably why I wasn't very excited about it.
