



Collected Stories and Later Writings

Paul Bowles, Daniel Halpern (Editor)

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Paul Bowles had already established himself as an important composer when at age 39 he published *The Sheltering Sky* and became recognized as one of the most powerful writers of the postwar period. From his base in Tangier he produced globally ranging novels, stories, and travel writings that set exquisite surfaces over violent undercurrents. His elegantly spare novels chart the unpredictable collisions between "civilized" exiles and a Morocco they never grasp, achieving effects of extreme horror and dislocation. This Library of America Bowles set, the first annotated edition, offers the full range of his achievement: the portrait of an outsider who was one of the essential American writers of the last century. In addition to his novels -- *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), *Let It Come Down* (1952), *The Spider's House* (1955), *Up Above the World* (1966) -- and his collected stories -- including such classics as "A Distant Episode" and "Pages from Cold Point" -- they contain his masterpiece of travel writing, *Their Heads Are Green and Their Hands Are Blue* (1963). Throughout, Bowles shows himself a master of gothic terror and a diabolically funny observer of manners as well as a prescient guide to everything from the roots of Islamist politics to the world of Maghrebi music. With a hallucinatory clarity as dry and unforgiving as the desert air, Bowles sends his characters toward encounters with unknown and terrifying forces both outside them and within them.

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Matt says

Paul Bowles is unsympathetic to his characters. He pricks them, burns them, cuts them, and leaves for dead, usually offering no explanation why. Perhaps it's because man is sometimes mostly animal.

Deliciously deviant.

Kurt says

Every story is a piece of art in its own right, but there are a few that make this collection invaluable - The Delicate Prey; A Distant Episode; In the Red Room; Monologue, Tangier 1975; Monologue, Massachusetts 1932; Too Far From Home. Not only do you feel the mysteriousness of Morocco or Sri Lanka, and of the places in between, but also the solitude and desolateness of the human soul.

Linda says

Extraordinary collection of stories -- all are wonderful and terrible -- but the story Allal stands out as one of the most masterful descriptions in the English language of altered consciousness -- when the mind of a human being enters the body of a snake -- and vice versa -- by mistake under the effects of kif. A must read for anyone interested in modernist fiction techniques.

Ben Ostrander says

Paul Bowles wrote some fantastic short stories, travelogues, and a creepy short novel, UP ABOVE THE WORLD (all included here). No writer I have read does more about the cruelty of man than Bowles. The Library of America deserve a big 'thank you' for making this superb volume available.

Ben says

Immediately when you arrive in the Sahara, for the first or the tenth time, you notice the stillness. An incredible, absolute silence prevails outside the towns; and within, even in busy places like the markets, there is a hushed quality in the air, as if the quiet were a conscious force which, resenting the intrusion of sound, minimizes and disperses sound straightway. Then there is the sky, compared to which all other skies seem faint-hearted efforts. Solid and luminous, it is always the focal point of the landscape. At sunset, the precise, curved shadow of the earth rises into it swiftly from the horizon, cutting it into light section and dark section. When all daylight is gone, and the space is thick with stars, it is still of an intense and burning blue, darkest directly overhead and paling toward the earth, so that the night never really grows dark.

You leave the gate of the fort or the town behind, pass the camels lying outside, go up into the dunes, or out onto the hard, stony plain and stand awhile, alone. Presently, you will either shiver and hurry back inside the walls, or you will go on standing there and let something very peculiar happen to you, something that everyone who lives there has undergone and which the French call *le baptême de la solitude*. It is a unique sensation, and it has nothing to do with loneliness, for loneliness presupposes memory. Here, in this wholly mineral landscape lighted by stars like flares, even memory disappears; nothing is left but your own breathing and the sound of your heart beating. A strange, and by no means pleasant, process of reintegration begins inside you, and you have the choice of fighting against it, and insisting on remaining the person you have always been, or letting it take its course. For no one who has stayed in the Sahara for a while is quite the same as when he came.

Alex Gleason says

Awesome.

Christopher Sutch says

See my reviews of the individual volumes included in this compilation. Note that *_One Hundred Camels in the Courtyard_* was a limited edition collection published by City Lights, and was later incorporated into the American publication of *_Time of Friendship_*; my review of *_Camels_* is included, generally, in the review for that book.

A note on the uncollected later stories: These are quite impressive and Bowles's best work, in my opinion. He was experimenting with formal elements of fiction as well as putting an ironic reflection of himself as a character in certain of the stories (particularly the epistolary stories). I consider "Too Far from Home" to be his best story.

Andrew says

Simply reading Bowles' biography at the end of this collection is enough to leave one awestruck. World traveler, composer, novelist, travel essayist, translator, musicologist all the time hobnobbing with the who's who of culture and arts from the 20th century. A rich life, well led.

As for this collection, everything would rate from good to very good to excellent. He's a very straightforward storyteller. Some of the stories are quite dark and a few are borderline profane for the times they were written. There are too many that I truly loved to list. There are only a handful of stories (and the included novel) where maybe he didn't quite get all he wanted, or maybe left an abrupt ending. The endnotes suggest that he did some, but not much editing. Nothing in this collection would rate poorly by any stretch. Less committed readers could read the collections separately.

I especially liked his travel essay of when he was field recording traditional Moroccan music in the late 1950s. The music is available on cd.

One of our great cultural icons, and don't forget his masterpiece *The Sheltering Sky*.

metaphor says

Once more after finishing "Let It Come Down" by Paul Bowles I have become aware that some people are doomed to self-destruction and they rush there from their unhappiness and loneliness, from inability to adapt the surrounding reality, from consuming inside emptiness which tells them keep going from there. There is no escape from this horror of existence " a certain day, at a certain moment, the house would crumble and nothing would be left but dust and rubble, indistinguishable from the talus of gravel that lay below the cliffs. It would be absolutely silent, the falling of the house, like a film that goes on running after the sound apparatus has broken." Together with us the time will slowly dissolve falling to pieces and nobody would care that once " there were places in time to be visited, faces to forget, words to understand, silences to be studied", only the inhuman night will remain.

I am not horrified with the end of the novel, I knew I was reading Paul Bowles, I am not disgusted with the protagonist Dyer, I only feel pity for him and experience an immense fear of a fragile human soul that may break any moment searching for its place, "a definite status, a precise relationship with the rest of men" in a hostile world that we are responsible for creating ourselves.

I am amazed how through all the novel, the rain deciphers the coming events: it pours, rains heavily or calmly, it can rain indifferently or dip in a desultory fashion, it rains lightly bringing hope with a soft sound of falling, it offers watery sky, wet gray colorless twilight and in the end of the novel it produces the dead flat sound spreading around. The same is with the wind which blows from all the directions changing from a sweet breeze to a wind which carries the paralyzing promise of winter or a strong malevolent evil clattering the door.

I think I have learnt one simple truth from Paul Bowles: the dreamers can't be happy, you must have simple daily achievable goals to feel content just to be alive on a fine sunny morning, however, one thing is to realize it, quite another to try to turn your thoughts off.

Eric Steere says

"A Delicate Prey" and "A Distant Episodes" are superb, but they are hardly the exception. THese stories (which take place in Latin America, or alternatively North Africa are dark and cynical. The prose is razor precise, the underlying philosophy of these works extend the Heidegger metaphysical ontology and speak of the follies and repercussions of cultural misunderstanding. In "A Distant Episode", the reader should pay careful attention to the theme of language in light of a Professor's ill-fated (aren't they all!?) "understanding" of the people of the Maghreb. Additionally, "A Delicate Prey", a story set in Latin America, leaves so much to the reader that i've read it three times with different conclusions! Love this guy!
