



Divorcer

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Fiction. DIVORCER is a collection of seven harrowing and hyperprecise short stories about ruinous relationships and their aftershocks.

Divorcer Details

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Author : Gary Lutz

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From Reader Review Divorcer for online ebook

Tobias says

The expected precise & surreal prose, accompanied here by a bit more surrealism than had turned up in Lutz's previous work. Excellent stuff.

Ramon says

lutz' best, most human work.

Craig says

His best of those I've read, which is all of them, except the hard-to-get one.

Gadi says

Ahhh was this book hard to read. Style just takes Content and beats him up like it's nobody's business. Slashes his face like the Mob. Plot-blood splatters newly-printed pages in a million little red continents.

I enjoyed the writing of the short stories, but the stories themselves? I would give them a 1/5. Lutz just doesn't give a shit about linking all of his little gems into some kind of coherent jewel. I disliked so many of the things he did that made his plots seem dishonest and artificial and so damn unrealistic. Uch, I was so frustrated so much of the time, more than I was stunned (the writing is wondrous, a frontier-pusher, but still!)

For my fiction class, I guess the book looks like it could be a good teacher of good writing, but bad fiction.

Robb Todd says

Master of the oddwise adverbjective.

Owen says

Gary Lutz comes up often as one of the most important "new" writers out there, pushing the boundaries of what we expect fiction to do, etc. etc. Specifically, he's praised for his sentences, which absolutely *never* take the turns you expect. So I had to find out for myself.

And it's true: The story "Middleton" begins: "For one reason or another my wife, a baby-talking, all but

uninterpreted woman only a couple of years older than I, died in one of those commuter-plane crashes that reporters were never sure what to do about. It happened on a day when the third of three famous people in a row had finally died, in this case some moody entertainer, and no one aboard the plane could have been anything other than worn out and morbid to begin with, and anyway my wife was not even a commuter: she had been flying across state to visit a stepsister, somebody more sturdy, who had taken sick after some apparently recreational uncertainty about a newly glued upper tooth."

What's going on here? The rules of grammar are more or less followed, but this is more than a fine-tuned plunge into Markov chains. There's a narrative, a character, a voice. Lutz extracts the unspoken-but-more-accurate adjective from the tip of his character's tongue, but he (the author-function Lutz, or the narrator?) is also playing with sound (the sturdy stepsister, the newly glued tooth). The cultural context (plane crashes, celebrity deaths) is subject to disbelief, but a kind of participatory disbelief, an attached irony: you *cannot* touch that dial. A big part of the story this voice is telling is the voice that is telling the story.

But is it really a story? The seven pieces in *Divorcer* are all about failed relationships, all told in the first person (though some as a woman, some as a man, some straight, some gay), all in the literary past tense. I don't think there are seven distinct characters or voices, though. In the middle of "I Have to Feel Halved" we get the sentence: "He was laid up the while I knew him, but his symptoms lacked a guiding disease." Again it's the too-accurately-deployed *lumpen* speech, again it's the cable-channel POV. I forget what gender made that sentence, and the sentence won't tell me.

Words near the end of "Womanesque" disclose Lutz's sidelong explanation: "These days, I launder anything before I say it. I make sure there's something still sudsing between the words." The book's title might suggest it will help a reader understand how human relationships end, but these characters and their relationships are simply material for laundering, occasions for sentences. Things stick together or bubble up unexpectedly in life as in language, and divorces are as good a situation as any and better than most for making that point. But the point is mostly about the language, not the life.

Steve Owen says

Either an unconscious parody of modernism, or an intentional satire of it.

Carl says

too much like ashbery while doggedly attempting (some semblance of?) narrative sense. a noble but failed experiment.

Matt says

As a sentence-lover, I found this book to be some kind of painstaking utopia. There is no less suffering in the lives of the characters than there is in the reader sorting through these stunning accomplishments in what seems like "word salad" but is most definitely a word feast. More writing should challenge and enthrall like Lutz's does. This one is a boggler and a triumph.

Charles Cohen says

My god, the sentences, THE SENTENCES. A book about divorce should feel like breaking; it should feel like tiny apocalypses. Gary Lutz makes his words spiky, his sentences painful, and full of anger, betrayal. A little bit of these people's shared lives dies in awful, mundane ways, and he captures how every little death looks, and how it feels.

Kevin says

The story "To Whom Might I Have Concerned" is a prime example of the classic Lutz style (sample sentence: "After college: an unenduring, stopgap marriage {he was overhumanized, always prompt in returning any reasonable farewell crackle of affection}, then employment, and co-workers, mostly women my own life-poisoning age, mostly Kristens or Kirstens or Kirsties: the shouts of violet in their eyeshadow, their moody maneuverings between men."). It's like Lutz has turned the volume on his style up to 11 in this collection. The whole book is like guitar amps catching on fire, like stereo speakers getting blown out, over and over. The sentences are so carefully crazed, so acrobatic, I can almost see Lutz, crouched over his keyboard, revising and revising, with a devilish grin (if you can imagine this shy author smiling at all).

The result is a suite of narratives that are as refreshingly funny as they are emotionally eviscerating. Linked by themes of broken relationships and mistrustful lovers, Lutz's newest stories are full of descriptions and observations so bitter and dark that they're hilariously charred.

One of my favorite moments in the book comes (in the title story) when a tax man starts saying things like, "Do you always talk like you have a shade drawn down over your voice?" and "So, Mister Man, what would be a very nice last straw?" Some readers might raise a red flag and say you're not supposed to make your characters speak in the same refined style of the narration, but to me it felt more like a magic trick than a pretension. I laughed out loud, surprised and aghast.

*some of this review was used as the intro for my mini-interview with Lutz at the Rumpus. Read that here: <http://therumpus.net/2011/09/the-rump...>

Mark says

prose that is squelchy, squishy, and warm with musty humanity like a recently vacated leather easy chair. narratives of privates unhappinesses, blundered relationships and general misuse. these stories would be unbearable to live, but they are quite wonderful to read.

Michael says

Lutz prose is a sort of off-balancing act which you find, upon reading for the first time, utterly nourishing - like eating a new food that provides you with some long deficient mineral. The turning is at one pause funny,

like the term, "keepsake pornography"; at another wise, as in, "You get tired of always wondering anew why life has to take the place of youth."; and at others sublimely pregnant, as when the female narrator of one story says, "What had shaped me was the discovery, at thirteen, that I could send my arm around my back and then make out, at my side, the fingers of a hand doing its damnedest to reach me." Recommended for those with an untapped penchant for a little misconstruing.

Ron Matty says

Comparing notes.

Drew says

80% of the time: "Wow, I've never read someone describe things in such idiosyncratic fashion, fuck yeah!"
20% of the time: "Wow, I've never read someone describe things in such idiosyncratic fashion, fuck this!"

Andy says

Lutz's stories are always really just a scaffolding upon which to lay his amazingly thorny, totally unpredictable and irony soaked sentences. A deeply witty and amusing satirist, Lutz is utterly unique and *Divorcer* puts his talents on full display.

Taylor Nawrocki says

There is certainly potential in the writing of this author, but he insists on trying to sound too intelligent and "deep", totally ruining what talent he has.

I couldn't tell if these were separated short stories or connected, because the voice is the exact same throughout. The "show don't tell" rule is totally lost on all of these. Oftentimes the vignettes within the story don't do it for me, and often the more or less irrelevant characters that make an appearance for a moment would be a great short story on their own, far better than these characters. Also, the story in the pov of a woman I just don't believe--not that all women have the same voice, not that I believe in a gender binary, but it feels utterly false.

I have dog eared a number of pages for their shear silliness so that I can read them aloud later.

Julia Brown says

When I read Gary Lutz I feel like someone is hacking away minute slices of my brain with a cold, stainless steel chisel.

The stories in *Divorcer* are longer than the ones in *Stories in the Worst Way*. I found myself taking frequent breaks from section to section. Lutz doesn't give a shit about the canon, clearly, which is refreshing. He just swings through the dense jungle of his stories on his sentence ropes. He's entirely unexpected. And quite rude, in an admirable way.

Reading him changes me, and that's what good fiction is supposed to do.

J.A. says

"Gary Lutz's books know what it is like to see parents split. His first collection *Stories in the Worst Way* was originally released from Knopf in 1996, later adopted by 3rd Bed, and then when they went quiet, Derek White of Calamari Press picked it up for a 2009 re-issue. Lutz's second collection *I Looked Alive* saw the same tumult: published first by Four Walls Eight Windows and then re-issued just this past year by Black Square Editions. Even the tiny Future Tense chapbook of rare and early Lutz stories *A Partial List of People to Bleach* was a combination of reprints and work previously available in *The Quarterly*. But what is unique about *divorcer*, the fourth collection from one of the most touted indie press short story writers, is that it pushes a thematic connection throughout the entire book, something not done in any of the previous collections, and one would hope that this, in addition to all the other merits of *divorcer*, will keep it from being one more book-child example of Lutz's literary-separations."

Read the full review in The Rumpus: <http://therumpus.net/2011/11/irreconc...>

Peter Landau says

Gary Lutz can become a problem. His sentences are legendary, even in Hell, and they can take possession of you. Before you know it, you're dropping clunkers where he paved hot asphalt. Or something like that. *DIVORCER* is a collection of stories about marriage and its end. But with Lutz the real story is at the sentence level, where he labors over each odd word until it clicks like a superglued Lego piece. It was a bit bothersome at first for me, the odd word choices, the strange syntax and complexity for seemingly no reason other than being different. Then come the jokes, dark but funny little phrases or ideas or throw-offs. For a depressing topic there's a lot of humor here, in that making someone laugh is usually the result of tilting the perspective, at which Lutz is a master. These stories are obviously not driven by plot or characters, though they're seasoned with both, but rather by sentences, one after the other, which build another kind of story. It's not the kind they teach you in school, but it's the kind the mind creates with language, which makes these off-center tales more realistic than realism, which is not real. Lutz is a standup comic, who might be a poet, erecting worlds as strange as any science-fiction fantasy while remaining familiar. I'm reminded of nightmares I had that scared me, but when I relate them to others after I wake up, they laugh in hysterics. That's could be a metaphor for life or Lutz.
