



Created in Darkness by Troubled Americans: The Best of McSweeney's Humor Category

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Now more than ever, Americans are troubled by questions. As sweaty modernity thrusts itself upon us, the veil of ignorance that cloaked our nation hangs in tatters, tattered tatters. Our "funny bones" are neither fun nor bony. Glum is the new giddy, and the old giddy wasn't too giddy to begin with.

What can be done to stop this relentless march of drabbery? Nothing. But perhaps this book can be used to dull the pain. Included herein:

The Ten Worst Films of All Time, as Reviewed by Ezra Pound over Italian Radio

Unused Audio Commentary by Howard Zinn and Noam Chomsky, Recorded Summer 2002, for *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring* DVD (Platinum Series Extended Edition), Part One.

How Important Moments in My Life Would Have Been Different If I Was Shot in the Stomach

My Beard, Reviewed

Circumstances under Which I Would Have Sex with Some of My Fellow Jurors

Words That Would Make Nice Names for Babies, If It Weren't for Their Unsuitable Meanings

As a Porn Movie Titler, I May Lack Promise

Ineffective Ways to Subdue a Jaguar

Eleven Lunch Meats I Have Invented

Four Things I Would Have Said to Sylvia Plath if I Had Been Her Boyfriend

And much, much more, including 20 brilliant new lists . . .

Created in Darkness by Troubled Americans: The Best of McSweeney's Humor Category Details

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McSweeney's Humor Category Dave Eggers (Editor) , Kevin Shay (Editor) , Lee Epstein (Editor) ,
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From Reader Review Created in Darkness by Troubled Americans: The Best of McSweeney's Humor Category for online ebook

Amar Pai says

5 stars for ON THE IMPLAUSIBILITY OF THE DEATH STAR'S TRASH COMPACTOR

Classic

I LOL'd rereading it

He makes some good points. Closed septic systems FTW

Laine says

Can you give 0 stars? How about negative stars? This book was probably the least funny book of humor I've ever read, and yes, I got it. I understood WHY most of this stuff was supposed to be funny, but I certainly didn't agree. I actually couldn't get to sleep for a few extra minutes last night, because I was so pissed at myself for wasting two hours on this book.

This type of humor just seems so pleased with itself, no, almost enraptured with itself. Some stories take a relatively amusing premise and stretch it out for three pages. Others take a not-so-amusing premise and belabor it for 50 (Was the Howard Zinn/Noam Chomsky bit at least that? Because it felt more like 200, if we're being honest. It's like societal critics take on J.R.R. Tolkien! So they're acting like the Lord of the Rings trilogy was reality, and adjusting their criticisms accordingly! I'm familiar with both of these men, and I get it. I get what the author was trying to do. But it wasn't funny. Just...not at all.) I wonder how many people loved this book because they were supposed to love it since it's the great and powerful McSweeney's publishing it. Or maybe since it's clearly such "highbrow" humor, they're embarrassed that they didn't think it's funny. The world may never know.

Here's an idea! Let's write a list of bad wrestler names! Now here's two more lists just like it! I did have to wonder occasionally how much effort was being put into the stories; the lists, I knew. Zero effort. I wonder how much the authors got paid.

Humor like this? It insists upon itself, Lois. It insists upon itself.

Sira says

Humor writing that is not so funny from a bunch of 2nd rate Dave Eggers copycats. :P

Biff Nightingale says

Silly in some parts, dull in others and hilarious in small doses. Definitely read it, but don't expect to be blown

away.

Gavin says

This is a collection of 'humourous' stories that appeared in McSweeney's online and in print. I use the term 'humourous' loosely. Most of it is pretentious junk in which the writer seems to believe he/she is unbearably clever, or simply could not have given less of a shit about what they were writing. There are a few funny exceptions, such as the Supreme Court Justices making all landmark case decisions on the basketball court, and Noam Chomsky/Howard Zinn giving a commentary for 'The Return of the King'. Other than that, one or two clever remarks aside, this is horrible.

Let it be noted, no actual writing from Dave Eggers appears, save for the preface. I've read other stuff that has appeared in McSweeney's and enjoyed it, so this was extremely disappointing. Best avoided unless you find actual laughter to low-brow for you.

Susie says

So there are two ways to look at this book:

1. As a book: the Star Wars chapter had me in stitches. I really liked this one, too. (Become a sucker MC!) and it was great to see my goodreads pal Jim Ruland among the authors! (Hi Jim!)

Other parts of the book were tedious and, more often than not, had the disconnected feeling of internet content forced into becoming a book.

2. As a medium: The book is internet content forced into becoming a book. There is something so completely backwards about this that I love. Taking the impermanent, impulsive content of the fickle internet and turning it into bound and printed matter...you people are crazy. Content-wise, it's like if all the contacts in your smartphone were forced to be at the same party. Like, yes, they have this one thing in common (you) and they each have their assets, but mashed together it's just weird. And so much of this book is just lists, lists and more lists!

So, something so completely reassuring to recognize that a novel only exists because the author sat down, wrote something, and decided NOT to put it on the internet. Decided to make it a singular work. Decided to flesh it out beyond a list of ideas.

As long as we have people who think that way, we will have novels. Something about that is beautiful to me.

Pascale says

There is not much humor in this pointless compilation of artless works by a bunch of writers who must think they are hilariously funny. This book is like a bad trip into the self-absorbed minds of people who seem to enjoy gazing at their belly buttons with utmost fascination. To be fair about it, one story made me chuckle. Once. It was "The Spirit of Christmas" by Kurt Lucks, about 4 pages long. Also of note, "On the Implausibility of the Death Star's Trash Compactor" by J.M. Tyree, 4 pages long, "Fire, the Next Sharp

Stick” by John Hodgman, about 10 pages, and “Unused Audio Commentary by Howard Zinn and Noam Chomsky, Recorded Summer 2002 for The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring DVD (platinum Series Extended Edition), Part One” by Jeff Alexander and Tom Bissell, about 17 pages. That’s 35 pages out of 239 that were less tedious than the rest. Out of these 35 pages, I would say that the “Lord of the Rings” one was the best written, but still, I chuckled ONCE (that “Spirit of Christmas” thing). So actually 21 pages out of 239 wear actually of interest. The only “funny” story in the end is the Christmas letter one, and I qualify it with reservation, since it is also very predictable, so only 4 pages were humorous enough to get me to chuckle (not even laugh) once. Out of 239 pages of crap written by a gang of literary high-brow types. I hate wasting my time, but I did on this one.

Craig says

This book marks the point at which McSweeney's (who I love) really was too much in love with itself. Some good stories, mostly meh.

Adalira Morningstar says

Let me begin by saying that I'm a big fan of McSweeney's lists and monologues but I rarely take the time to read much else of their work. However, I was surprised to find this book at my small Mississippi library and I checked it out on the hopes that one day they'll notice some people want to read books that aren't about vampires or decorative floral arrangements.

I found it to be pretty hit or miss - some of the entries made me laugh, some weren't funny and a few were even a bit tedious to get through. It was a decent read, but if I'd paid money for it I'd probably want to punch something in annoyance.

Max says

OK anthology of humor from the magazine/website.

Brenna says

Amazingly, *McSweeney's* has invented yet another hipster trend – that of the genre being “humourous without being funny.”

No, the magazine itself was not the first to tackle such an element. For years prior to its death, the *National Lampoon* featured any number of deadpan articles which were essentially born dead, whether the result of a poor concept, inept writing, faulty comic timing, or just plain comedic bombing. But the difference between *Nat. Lamp.* and *McSweeney's* is that the latter seems to revel in its presentation of unfunny humour writing. *The Lampoon* took its criticisms to heart, and expired. *McSweeney's* acts like it achieved its intended goal.

Enter *Created in Darkness by Troubled Americans*. The book reads like a snarky remark that lingers too long, as if intended to be read while slouching against a wall with hands in pockets. It isn't funny. It isn't

even *trying* to be - witty, yes, but funny, absolutely not. It is, simply, humour writing without the humour. It's been removed, as if by design. Even the perennially amusing Neal Pollack has had his funny bone ground into a fine pulp and smeared across the pages of this "Best Of" compilation in the guise of a "funny" article which lacks all mirth.

Why isn't it funny? Because "The Newest from Jokeland" is comprised of cliched jokes, sans punchline – deliberately. Because "El Wusso" is provided along with "The Bulimic Cheerleader" as potential Bad Names for Professional Wrestlers. Because "I Know What You Did Two Moons Ago" is a spoof on detective fiction inexplicably interbred with stereotypical Native American tomfoolery. Because "Unused Audio Commentary by Howard Zinn and Noam Chomsky, Recorded Summer 2002, for *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* DVD (Platinum Series Extended Edition), Part One" is an 18-page meandering tribute to writers Jeff Alexander and Tom Bissell's familiarity with Zinn and Chomsky *and* the *Lord of the Rings* movie franchise – and nothing more. Because "Candle Party" is narrated by a person hosting a dull candle party, and "Reviews of my Daydreams" is an inside joke that only the writer really gets, and "It's Not Actually A Small World" is the same joke over and over and over and over and over again – that it's not actually a small world because people rarely meet up with specific people from their pasts.

The book's not funny. Well, no – that is not entirely true. It is funny *in very specific places*, but these places are so few and far between that the reader actually feels retroactively ashamed of himself for snickering at such an unfunny – such an unabashedly *forced* - book as this. Because it truly is not funny. It's not really clever, either. Though you can tell that it tries very hard to be. It's essentially the "witty" guy at a party who is slyly relying upon a rehearsed "spontaneous" monologue, which would be devastated should it allow any verbal input from an outside observer - the guy you'd feel embarrassed for if only he weren't so goddamned smarmy, so goddamned *smug* about how clever he thinks he's being. This book is trying so hard to be hip, to be young and filled with verve, that it is a shameless poseur. And it's embarrassing to read, although to the rest of the world the reader probably looks like a hipster who *gets* it. The book is, in essence, a hipster prop.

But what the book *isn't*, once again, is funny. It simply isn't. It's dry, and monotonous, and stilted, and would have been much better off as a small forest of living, breathing, oxygen-producing, habitat-providing *trees* instead of the unfunny pile of paper taking up space on a dusty bookshelf. The former of which, I might remind potential readers, this book *once was*, but is no more. Now it's a bound sheaf of dead trees, bringing as much mirth as a silent, lips-moving, finger-following reading of Ecclesiastes.

McSweeney's winds up – once again – with Eggers on its face. But the book does unequivocally succeed in being humorous without actively being funny. If this was, indeed, its dubious original intent.

Sarah says

today as i was waiting at the bus stop i was reading the lists at the end of this book and laughing, quite loudly, to myself. unfortunately, i didn't know there was someone behind me also waiting for the bus who probably thought i was a bit of a weirdo. but the book was just too funny to contain my joy. i especially loved the lists at the end, and the essay entitled "on the implausibility of the death star's trash compactor." a few of the essays were too long and not-so-funny, and sometimes i didn't feel so culturally literate - maybe the essay on the lord of the rings would have been more funny had i cared about lord of the rings. who knows. but this is a great book to have lying around and to be able to pick up in short spurts for a quick laugh.

Ensiform says

A collection of brief humor pieces from the literary magazine and website, written mostly by unknowns and showcasing its erudite, absurdist slant. As with any florilegium such as this, it's a hit and miss collection. The relatively lengthy piece explaining that the Supreme Court's decisions are actually arrived at through basketball games played by the justices is far too overblown and tedious; I found Neal Pollack's nonsensical "Trinity" to be the least funny thing that ever attempted to be funny. Mostly the value in this collection is in the ultra-short, dry pieces that approach pop culture straight-faced, as if it were academia, such as "Pop Quiz," in which the narrator cluelessly answers song titles that are questions ("Why Do Fools Fall In Love?" – "they have lower standards"), or the interviews with Goofus and Gallant's friends and co-workers to explain what "pushed Gallant over the edge." Fun, quick reading, non-essential but worth dipping into.

Marty says

A collection of extremely short items, mostly no more than four pages. I found some of them mildly amusing, but many were just confusing. I did like the lists section at the end of the book. I got this from the library when I saw a review of a later McSweeney's book in the paper, but now I doubt if I'll bother with that one.

Christy says

Meh. And again I say - meh. And can I just say that I don't LIKE McSweeney's? Okay? I live in McSweeney's-land, I feel as if San Francisco is some sort of theme park of the mind for McSweeney's, and it just flat out leaves me cold. This collection is like David Letterman in prose -- lots of silly lists, lots of snarky pastiches of easy pop culture targets, sometimes with a meta level thrown in to please the grad students. I did laugh at the bad baby names, but don't waste my time calling this literature, okay? Go back and read James Thurber, and be amazed, amazed, at the command of prose style the man has in his best work, and the amount of literary reading you have to have done to fully enjoy what he's offering. You'll laugh, but it won't be hollow laughter.
