



Cloudbursts: Collected and New Stories

Thomas McGuane

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From one of our most acclaimed writers, a sumptuous gathering of his singular work in the short form, including six new stories--nothing short of a literary event.

For more than four decades, Thomas McGuane has been heralded as an unrivaled master of the short story. Now the arc of that achievement appears in one definitive volume: thirty-eight stories drawn from his much-lauded previous collections, and another six entirely new pieces appearing for the first time in book form. Set in the seedy corners of Key West, the remote shore towns of the Bahamas, and McGuane's hallmark Big Sky country, with its vast and unforgiving landscape, these are stories of people on the fringes of society, whose twisted pasts meddle with their chances for companionship. Moving from the hilarious to the tragic and back again, McGuane writes about familial dysfunction, emotional failure, and American loneliness, celebrating the human ability to persist through life's absurdities.

Cloudbursts: Collected and New Stories Details

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From Reader Review Cloudbursts: Collected and New Stories for online ebook

Kit says

Wonderful!

Patrick Ewing says

Wonderful.

Adam says

Well-written stories of ranchers, sailors, lawyers, philanderers, and businessmen. All but one protagonist is male; few rise above the level of mediocrity to achieve success, and a couple are outright failures. Each story manages to have some level of increasing tension.

Jeffrey says

McGuane is a master of the short story. This book is mostly a collection of his short stories that can be found elsewhere with a few new ones thrown in. Decent nonetheless. Derelicts, cons, misfits, philanderers, bird hunters, anglers, dogs, etc.

Robert says

He's one of our best. This is the definitive collection. Wished it would never end. Been working at making my own stories more "McGuanish."

Brian Beatty says

I simply prefer McGuane's novels where he has room to roam, particularly the early novels with their manic prose. He still knows how to tell a story, Lord knows. But you don't need me to tell you that.

Bob Peru says

one of our greatest american writers. his novels are very very good and the short stories are simply great. like chekhov, mcguane is a master of humor and irony marked by concision. so good.

David Curry says

I had previously known Thomas McGuane's work only through individual stories in magazines. I had a high time making his fuller acquaintance through *Cloudbursts: Collected and New Stories*, a hefty but not overweight gathering (at 556 pages) that should surely at least be nominated for all the major literary awards.

McGuane certainly knows how to get a narrative going and motivate a reader into the questioning mode right off the bat. The longest story in the collection, "The Refugee," which calls to mind Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, begins with this: "Errol Healy was going sailing to evade custody in one of the several institutions recommended for his care."

McGuane also knows how to quickly introduce a character's personality. In "The Millionaire," Betty, "a handsome blonde in her middle forties wearing a green linen Chanel suit," is entering a summer rental cottage with her unmarried, pregnant 15-year-old daughter:

"Mom, where's the thermostat? I'm getting goose bumps."

"Find it, Iris. It will be on the wall."

So, just like that, we have a first, defining utterance like "A little more than kin and less than kind."

McGuane's stories whose narrators speak in dialect are particularly engaging. In "Cowboy," we get this: "The old feller had several peculiarities to him, most of which I've forgot. He was one of the few fellers I ever saw who would actually jump up and down on his hat if he got mad enough. You can't imagine what his hat looked like." (By the time you're acclimated to the dialect, you know not to give "peculiarities" the dictionary pronunciation, without McGuane's lapsing into the constant awkward phonetics that often burden writing in dialect. Reading aloud, I would go with *pee-culiarities*.)

A little later in that same story: "The old lady died sittin down, went in there and there she was, sittin down, and she was dead."

McGuane is known as an outdoorsman, and his knowledge of the natural world and the tools and methods of those who work outdoors informs some of his strongest stories. You trust his details.

From "Stars":

"In the gathering dark and the swirling snow, she began to imagine voices and distantly wondered if she could still see the trail. She stopped to listen more closely, hoping to hear something new through the wind. A pure singing note rose, high and sustained, then another, in a kind of courtly diction."

"Wolves."

Irresistible humor abounds in McGuane's work. In "North Country," a father doesn't comprehend that his daughter and her partner are heroin addicts: "The old guy was off making plywood like the automaton he

was and thought Austin and Ruth just ‘kept getting the flu.’”

Here’s a run of dialog from that same story:

“Well. Come in and set, then. If you get hungry, Dulcie’d cook something up.”

“I don’t eat anything with a central nervous system.”

“You what?”

That’s immediately followed by: “Mr. Jones twisted the front doorknob and kneed the door over its high spot as they went indoors.” (That verb “kneed” has the characteristic pepper of McGuane’s narrative gift.)

From “The House On Sand Creek”: “Ole Bob was a bubble and a half off plumb, even back then.”

From “Prairie Girl”: “Since it was a small town and functioned reliably as a Greek chorus ...”

Just wait until you come to the codger in “The Motherlode” who takes pride in balancing a peanut on his nose while playing a 45 rpm recording of the Sons of the Pioneers singing “Cool, Clear Water.”

Even in the few stories that don’t finally succeed for me, McGuane pulls me in and keeps me reading until the end. Here’s the opening paragraph of “The Miracle,” by no means an example of an unsuccessful story and arguably one of this master’s finest:

“We always went back to my mother’s hometown when someone was about to die. We missed Uncle Kevin because the doctors misdiagnosed his ruptured appendix, owing to referred pain in his shoulder. Septicemia killed him before they sorted it out with a victorious air we never forgave. The liverless baby was well before our time — it would have been older than my mother had it lived — but my grandfather’s departure arrived ideally for scheduling purposes in the late stages of diabetes; we drove instead of taking the train and en route were able to stay over for an extra day at the Algonquin Inn in western New York, taking advantage of a Wiener Schnitzel Night, and still make it in time for the various obsequies while reducing prolonged visits by priests. (My father was an agnostic and fought sponging clergy with vigor, remarking that he had ‘fronted his last snockered prelate’ and adding ‘Amazing how often it’s Crown Royal.’”)

I believe it says something essential about McGuane that I have written about him and quoted from him this much with no hint of the grim circumstances in so many of his stories. (I remember, years ago, being startled to come to the thought that Eudora Welty’s vision was probably tragic — but that this is almost hidden, given Welty’s endless pleasure in how people conduct themselves and especially how they talk.)

I would enjoy a salty conversation between McGuane and Annie Proulx, I would.

For what it’s worth: I do wish designers of book jackets and other graphic projects would abandon the tendency of the last 15-20 years to apply what resembles strips of tape to present titles and other verbal information. This tendency was inartistic and unsightly from the start and has grown unendurably tiresome. On the jacket of McGuane’s book, two of the three strips have the jarring ugliness of electrical tape. We’ve learned to live with the ubiquitous, god-awful bar code. Spare us additional eyesores.

David C Ward says

With the death of Jim Harrison, McGuane is maybe the last great American writer not only of the west (and other frontiers) but of a certain type of masculinity that is both competent (especially with tasks like shooting, fishing or sailing) yet also vulnerable and fractured. Like the Hemingway of the short stories in other words but as if Nick Adams grew up and became a divorced car dealer or rancher somewhere out in small town Montana. He's also good on losers and misfits. Several of the new stories focus on being a boy growing up and being afraid and lost. Some of these stories are set in the late 50s and early 60s. I remember the vogue for civil war caps that comes up a couple of times.
