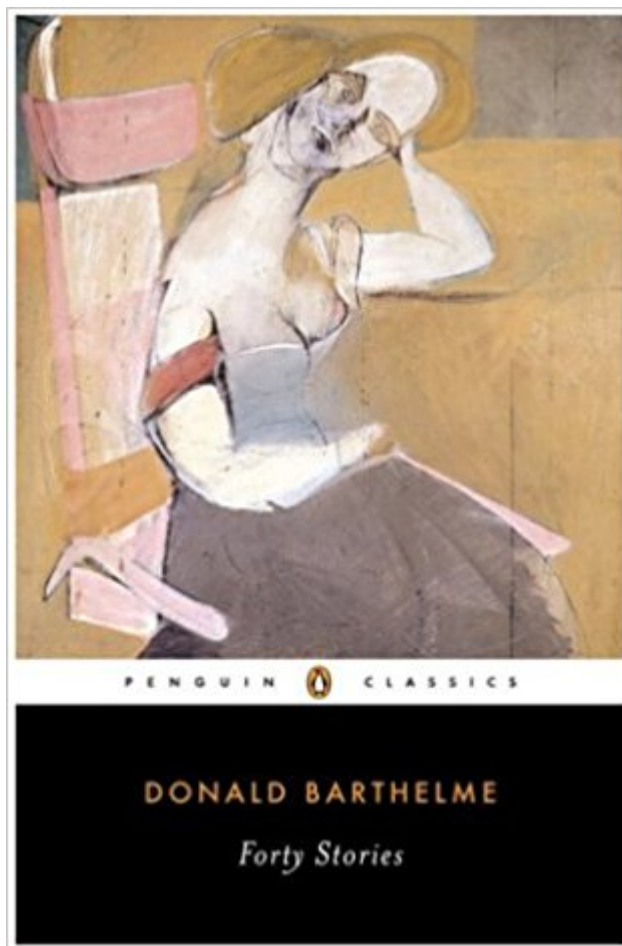


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# Forty Stories (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

William H. Gass has written of Donald Barthelme that "he has permanently enlarged our perception of the possibilities open to short fiction." In *Forty Stories*, the companion volume to *Sixty Stories*, we encounter a dazzling array of subjects: Paul Klee, Goethe, Captain Blood, modern courtship, marriage and divorce, armadillos, and other unique Barthelmean flights of fancy. These pithy, brilliantly acerbic pieces tangle with the ludicrous, pose questions that remain unresolved, and challenge familiar bits of language heretofore unexamined. *Forty Stories* demonstrates Barthelme's unrivaled ability to surprise, to stimulate, and to explore. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Like the title says, here are 40 short works culled from across Barthelme's career. Along with the similarly titled *60 Stories*, this book provides one of the best samplings currently in print of Barthelme's unrivaled humor, his melancholy, the poetry of his line, and his considerable intellect. It includes pieces such as the famous "Sentence," (a single, several-page-long, unfinished sentence),

"The Flight of Pigeons From the Palace," one of the writer's illustrated stories, and "Overnight To Many Distant Cities." --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This collection of pithy, brilliantly acerbic pieces is a companion to *Sixty Stories*, Barthelme's earlier retrospective volume. Barthelme spotlights the idiosyncratic, haughty, sometimes downright ludicrous behavior of human beings, but it is style rather than content which takes precedence. He plunges into each situation without preamble, then utilizes sinewy, staccato prose to snare our attention. In "The Genius," a man of extraordinary intellect receives endless accolades and homage, but privately, he is just an eccentric inebriate who loathes children and totes important papers in a green Sears, Roebuck tool box. "Concerning the Bodyguard" is a fusillade of typically gossip questions about those who shield the famous and mighty: "How much does pleasing matter?" "Is the bodyguard sufficiently well-paid?" "Is there a pension?" In "Conversations with Goethe," Barthelme dethrones the renowned German author, who here spouts comical aphorisms such as "Art is the four percent interest on the municipal bond of life," and "Actors are the Scotch weevils in the salt port of honest effort." As demonstrated throughout this volume, Barthelme's manner of expression is strikingly unique, and his insights are consistently on target. Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The great thing about this book is that it contains forty stories (hence the title), but those stories can take only a few minutes to read. Many of them stick with you long after you've read them. I know I came across the story about Paul Klee (painter and also, apparently, drafted German soldier during WWI) in a literature anthology in high school, and that was my introduction to Donald Barthelme. It's in this collection, as is "At The Tolstoy Museum" and meanderings with Goethe, a precocious baby who rips pages out of books, and countless other memorable characters and scenarios. As Dave Eggers says in the intro, you'll be reading these stories and have to stop because they inspire you to try your hand at Barthelme's post-modern fiction. But Barthelme is the master, and a tough act to follow. You might want to keep your imitations and knockoffs in a separate file on your computer, lest you run across the rare creature known as the "Barthelme expert" who can destroy your confidence in your work simply by looking at it. Or maybe you've written something that Barthelme himself would like, who knows? The fact is, this is a must-read if you want to know why twentieth-century American literature is just so odd and weird.

My personal favorite collection of short stories from Barthelme. If you have never read him before,

this is hands down the collection to begin with: Barthelme at his most Barthelmesque.

Utter nonsense or great literature? You ask yourself this while reading. It's like when someone glues a bottle cap to a wall and says it's art and charges \$200,000.00 for it. In THIS case, it IS great art and I have found myself reading this book over and over and over through the years.

I find Barthelme to be funny, witty, and surprising which to me equals entertainment. Be warned, though, this is that beyond post-modern almost gonzo fiction stuff that some may find confusing or downright ridiculous. You either dig it or you don't, so read a sample first.

Fascinating writing, often unexpected.

All I can bear is to listen to Erik Satie in the early afternoon. Bartheleme has ruined everything. Best read "Rock Springs" by Richard Ford.

Wonderful book. Very funny!

While very challenging and insightful, I found many of the stories to be superficially "cute" and a little self-indulgent. Not as satisfying as I thought it would be.

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