I'm not a robot

How I Read as Quickly as Possible Through My Back Issues of the TLS, by Lydia Davis, from a collection of stories to be published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in April. Daviss The Two Davises and the Rug appeared in the September 2013 issue of Harpers Magazine.I do not want to read about the life of Jerry Lewis.I do want to read about mammalian carnivores.I do not want to read about a portrait of a castrato.I do not want to read this poem:(...and so I stood/at the waters edge among electrolytes...)I do want to read about the history of the Inca khipu.I do not want to read about:the history of the panda in Chinaa dictionary of women in ShakespeareDo want to read about:sow bugsbumblebeesDo not want to read about Ronald Reagan.Do not want to read this poem:(Whats the point of sitting on a bus/and fuming?)Do want to read about the creation of the musical South Pacific:(This study will contribute greatly to the still under-written history of the Broadway musical)Not interested in:The Oxford Companion to Canadian Military HistoryNot interested in (at least not today):HitlerLondon theater productionsInterested in:the psychology of lyingAnne Carson on the death of her brotherFrench writers admired by Proustthe poems of Catullustranslations from the SerbianNot interested in:the creation of the Statue of LibertyInterested in:beerEast Prussia after World War IIphilosemitismNot interested in:the Archbishop of CanterburyNot interested in this poem:(Light dazzles from the grass/over the carnal dune...)Not interested in:the Anglo-Portuguese establishmentheraldic leopardsInterested in:the lectures of BorgesRaymond Queneaus Exercises in Styledust jackets in the history of bibliography:(For the first time, the dust jacket has been given its due status...)Not interested in:the friendship of Elgar and Schenkerthe work of Alexander PopeT.S. Eliots fountain penNot interested in:the Audit CommissionInterested in:the social value of altruismthe building of the Pont Neufthe history of daguerreotypesNot interested in:a cultural history of the British Census(It is salutary to see, from this learned book, that, mutatis mutandis, such controversies have plagued the census since its inception...)Not interested in:a cultural history of the accordion in America(Squeeze This)Interested in:the Southport Lawnmower MuseumNot interested in:a history of British television criticismfashion at the Academy Awards:(how Oscars dress etiquette has changed since the ceremonys inception in 1928)Not interested in:Anacaona: The Amazing Adventures of Cubas First All-Girl Dance BandAlways (or almost always) interested in:JCs NB and the doings of the Basement LabyrinthNot interested in or, well, yes, maybe interested in:the history of diplomacyLaura Bushs autobiography Jump to ratings and reviewsHere is a new collection of short stories from the writer Rick Moody has called the best prose stylist in America.Her stories may be literal one-liners: the entirety of Bloomington reads, Now that I have been here for a little while, I can say with confidence that I have never been here before. Or they may be lengthier investigations of the havoc wreaked by the most mundane disruptionsto routine: in A Small Story About a Small Box of Chocolates, a professor receives a gift of thirty-two small chocolates and is paralyzed by the multitude of options she imagines for their consumption. The stories may appear in the form of letters of complaint; they may be extracted from Flauberts correspondence; or they may be inspired by the authors own dreams, or the dreams of friends.What does not vary throughout Cant and Wont, Lydia Daviss fifth collection of stories, is the power of her finely honed prose. Davis is sharply observant; she is wry or witty or poignant. Above all, she is refreshing. Davis writes with bracing candor and sly humor about the quotidian, revealing the mysterious, the foreign, the alienating, and the pleasurablewithin the predictable patterns of daily life. 444 people are currently reading10349 people want to readLydia Davis, acclaimed fiction writer and translator, is famous in literary circles for her extremely brief and brilliantly inventive short stories. In fall 2003 she received one of 25 MacArthur Foundation Genius awards. In granting the award the MacArthur Foundation praised Daviss work for showing how language itself can entertain, how all that what one word says, and leaves unsaid, can hold a readers interest. . . . Davis grants readers a glimpse of lifes previously invisible details, revealing new sources of philosophical insights and beauty. In 2013 She was the winner of the Man Booker International prize.Daviss recent collection, Varieties of Disturbance (May 2007), was featured on the front cover of the Los Angeles Times Book Review and garnered a starred review from Publishers Weekly. Her Samuel Johnson Is Indignant (2001) was praised by Elle magazine for its Highly intelligent, wildly entertaining stories, bound by visionary, philosophical, comic prosepart Gertrude Stein, part Simone Weil, and pure Lydia Davis.Davis is also a celebrated translator of French literature into English. The French government named her a Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters for her fiction and her distinguished translations of works by Maurice Blanchot, Pierre Jean Jouve, Michel Butor and others.Davis recently published a new translation (the first in more than 80 years) of Marcel Prousts masterpiece, Swanns Way (2003), the first volume of Prousts In Search of Lost Time. A story of childhood and sexual jealousy set in fin de siecle France, Swanns Way is widely regarded as one of the most important literary works of the 20th century.The Sunday Telegraph (London) called the new translation A triumph [that] will bring this inexhaustible artwork to new audiences throughout the English-speaking world. Writing for the Irish Times, Frank Wynne said, What soars in this new version is the simplicity of language and fidelity to the cambers of Prousts prose Davis translation is magnificent, precise.Daviss previous works include Almost No Memory (stories, 1997), The End of the Story (novel, 1995), Break It Down (stories, 1986), Story and Other Stories (1983), and The Thirteenth Woman (stories, 1976).Grace Paley wrote of Almost No Memory that Lydia Davis is the kind of writer who makes you say, Oh, at last!brains, language, energy, a playfulness with form, and what appears to be a generous nature. The collection was chosen as one of the 25 Favorite Books of 1997 by the Voice Literary Supplement and one of the 100 Best Books of 1997 by the Los Angeles Times.Davis first received serious critical attention for her collection of stories, Break It Down, which was selected as a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award. The books positive critical reception helped Davis win a prestigious Whiting Writers Award in 1988.She is the daughter of Robert Gorham Davis and Hope Hale Davis. From 1974 to 1978 Davis was married to Paul Auster, with whom she has a son, Daniel Auster. Davis is currently married to painter Alan Cote, with whom she has a son, Theo Cote. She is a professor of creative writing at University at Albany, SUNY.Davis is considered hugely influential by a generation of writers including Jonathan Franzen, David Foster Wallace and Dave Eggers, who once wrote that she "blows the roof off of so many of our assumptions about what constitutes short fiction."Displaying 1 - 30 of 744 reviewsMarch 23, 2015A story is much more than a plot, and the marvelous Lydia Davis is a master at examining the pliability of the concept of story. Cant and Wont, the most recent collection by Davis, takes a slightly more somber atmosphere than previous collections while exquisitely elevating everyday occurrences to extract the literary elements that exist all around us. These stories range from a mere dozen words or a dozen sentences to a dozen pages, each packed with equal amounts of power and insight. Many of the stories involved are seemingly casual events or observations, such as a woman watching another woman fill out crosswords, mistaking a thank-you as directed at you instead of another person or the humorous grammatical mistakes in a note from the paperboy, simple single events that manage to deliver a story without needing a progression of plot or character growth. Davis orchestrates deceptively simple stories that work like a thought-prompt, delivering an idea shorn of context that the readers brain cant help but take and run with to examine the story that must be at hand; like a coloring book, Davis stories are the outlines that our imagination cant wait to fill with creative color.She knows she is in Chicago.But she does not yet realize that she is in Illinois.Davis stories invite the reader to participate, to find the story that shouts in silence from each page. Consider the above story about Chicago. I cant help but imagine a woman on the Amtrak trainthe method of transportation I tend to take into Chicago several times a yearbeing so excited to look up from her book and see the Chicago skyline for the first time. Moments later, perhaps when breaching the street level from the station and seeing cars whizzing by, she sees the license plates and the different features of a commonly seen object makes her realize this isnt Michigan, this is Illinois. This is the magic Davis works: my mind has created a story, even if mundane, in which her words are a scene, as if our minds waltzed together across the stage of her pages. One story is a list of single-line obituaries and the mind cant help but wonder what sort of people they were to have the entirety of their lives summed up as so, while another is the scribbling of someone onto a notepad while bored on the phone. Another aspect of her genius is that it takes mundane scenes in their immediacy and views them as if they are the climactic moments of a great novel. In her words, we are all literary characters in the novel of Life, and her style makes us always living in the moment, always highlighted in immediacy as if it were a spotlight.Under all this dirtthe floor is really very clean.Davis takes literary theory and form and plays with them like children's toys. A particular favorite, Reversible Story, involves taking an expository paragraph and reversing the order of descriptions. It the first, moving from a concrete mixer for the neighbors wine cellar to the last line their taste in clothes and furniture is strictly lower middle class, the neighbors seem wealthy through the emphasis on their wine tastes and collection, their low class clothing seeming tacked on. When the order is reversed, the neighbors seem like poor and tacky, senselessly adding a wine cellar to their house. Davis examines how easily an author can toy with our perceptions to extract the most from a scene or character. Another story is a list of things the narrator would or would not read from their back-list of magazines, creating a wonderfully abstract angle into the characters intellect through a listing of their reaction to various articles. Davis finds fun and unique ways of telling a story, from complaint letters to mash-ups of letters from Flaubert (during Davis time researching him and translating Madame Bovary) or even dream sequences told to Davis by friends (one of my favorite lines in the book comes from a dream sequence: The sun is very low in the sky now. Its light must be filling the caves by the sea.) I find the sections labeled dreams interesting. I almost wish she hadnt labeled them as such as I was instantly less inclined to examine them thinking oh this is just a dream to explain away any nuance. This is likely my fault as a reader and brings up a discussion on how labels can be damning. Possibly. This is only a minor complaint.The Language of the Telephone CompanyThe trouble you reported recently is now working properly.The stories in Cant and Wont transcend form and labels to create unique and perfectly polished gems of fiction and sheer creativity. Everyday life is elevated to the impression of high action and epic proportions and even the most acute of observations and minute details bear the weight of endless literary investigation. Davis has struck gold once again in her inimitable style and the result is breathless brilliance.4.5/5This dull, difficult novel I have brought with me on my tripI keep trying to read it. I have gone back to it so many times, each time dreading it and each time finding it no better than the last time, that by now it has become something of an old friend. My old friend the bad novel.short-story too_cool_for_schoolOctober 12, 2014ANSWER: "Can't and Won't"QUESTION: Will I read another book of "stories" by Lydia Davis?May 28, 20163 stars. My first LD didn't really leave the best impression. It's the kind of book that gets published on the strength of a writer's already solid reputation.A mixed bag lots of meh, some pretty impressive stories, esp. those translated/expanded upon from Flaubert.Her prose is sharp & shines in stories like The Dog Hair, & the Reversible Story, but the voice that comes across in Eating Fish Alone, & The dreadful Mucamas, is highly annoying, almost anal...What passes here for *Stories* are basically writing exercises, observations, mood pieces, prose haiku kind of thing. Most of the stories seem to be coming from her own life, for example, Letter to a Frozen Peas Manufacturer, forms part of a correspondence that Davis had with the company of Green Giant brand of frozen products, hence those readers, who care about the authorial voice, will be very put off by the uptight, at times whiny voice alternating with the supercilious "look at me, ain't I a genius," kind of vibe here.A typical example of both writerly excellence & readerly bafflement would be the story The Cows: now, in Mr. Palomar, Italo Calvino describes the underside of a gecko as seen from the room of the titular character's upper window & in a couple of brisk paragraphs, makes it seem like the amazing mystery of Creation. Here, Ms. Davis, is clearly delighting in the writerly process but it seems like a challenge set for creative writing students Here, you have to write on a couple of donkeys doing the things donkeys usually do- now give it your best shot! Something like that.Here's a sample: The CowsEach new day, when they come out from the far side of the barn, it is like the next act, or the start of an entirely new play.They amble into view from the far side of the barn with their rhythmic, graceful walk, and it is an occasion, like the start of a parade.Sometimes the second and third come out in stately procession after the first has stopped and stands still, staring.They come from behind the barn as though something is going to happen, and then nothing happens.Or we pull back the curtain in the morning and they are already there, in the early sunlight.They are a deep, inky black. It is a black that swallows light.Their bodies are entirely black, but they have white on their faces. On the faces of two of them, there are large patches of white, like a mask. On the face of the third, there is only a small patch on the forehead, the size of a silver dollar.They are motionless until they move again, one foot and then another fore, hind, fore, hindand stop in another place, motionless again.So often they are standing completely still. Yet when I look up again a few minutes later, they are in another place, again standing completely still.When they all three stand bunched together in a far corner of the field by the woods, they form one dark irregular mass, with twelve legs.They are often crowded together in the large field. But sometimes they lie down far apart from one another, evenly spaced over the grass.Today, two appear halfway out from behind the barn, standing still. Ten minutes go by. Now they are all the way out, standing still. Another ten minutes go by. Now the third is out and they are all three in a line, standing still.The third comes out into the field from behind the barn when the other two have already chosen their spots, quite far apart. She can choose to join either one. She goes deliberately to the one in the far corner. Does she prefer the company of that cow, or does she prefer that corner, or is it more complicatedthat that corner seems more appealing because of the presence of that cow?Their attention is complete, as they look across the road: They are still, and face us.Just because they are so still, their attitude seems philosophical.I see them most often out the kitchen window over the top of a hedge. My view of them is bounded on either side by leafy trees. I am surprised that the cows are so often visible, because the portion of the hedge over which I see them is only about three feet long, and, even more puzzling, if I hold my arm straight out in front of me, the field of my vision in which they are grazing is only the length of half a finger. Yet that field of vision contains a part of their grazing field that is hundreds of square feet in area.That ones legs are moving, but because she is facing us directly she seems to be staying in one place. Yet she is getting bigger, so she must be coming this way.One of them is in the foreground and two are farther back, in the middle ground between her and the woods. In my field of vision, they occupy together in the middle ground the same amount of space she occupies alone in the foreground.Because there are three, one of them can watch what the other two are doing together.Or, because there are three, two can worry about the third, for instance the one lying down. They worry about her even though she often lies down, even though they all often lie down. Now the two worried ones stand at angles to the other, with their noses down against her, until at last she gets up.They are nearly the same size, and yet one is the largest, one the middle-sized, and one the smallest.One thinks there is a reason to walk briskly to the far corner of the field, but another thinks there is no reason, and stands still where she is.At first she stands still where she is, while the first walks away briskly, but then she changes her mind and follows.And it just goes on! After this, I don't want to read about cows anymore.But mercifully most of the stories here are two lines, one paragraph affairs so can easily be finished.I got a couple of her other books & as I'm an open-minded reader; I'll give her a second chance.Still, this book has one redeeming quality it'll give hope to all those students scribbling their life away in all those creative writing courses that, they can write on & abt anything & everything the quotidian has never been captured in all its yawn-inducing variety as done here.Don't wait for grand, heroic themes guys; anything goes!female-writer interesting-crazy-weird short-storiesSeptember 29, 2023I cannot decide how to rate this collection of short "stories". I should remove the quotation marks. Even those that are two lines long are supposed to be stories. On the cover it is clearly stated, underneath the title. The authors name is in larger font than the title. Flash fiction is her domain. Flash fiction is all about compression, observation, suggestion. Examples:Ph.DAll these years I thought I had a Ph.D. But I do not have a Ph.D.Not all stories are so short. Some are a few lines long. The titled story is one of them: Cant and Wont I was recently denied a writing prize because, they said, I was lazy. What they meant by lazy was that I used too many contractions: for instance, I would not write out in full the words cannot and will not, but instead contracted them to cant and wont.And some are a paragraph long:WritingLife is too serious for me to go on writing. Life used to be easier, and often pleasant, and then writing was pleasant, though it also seemed serious. Now life is not easy, it has gotten very serious, and by comparison, writing seems a little silly. Writing is often not about real things, and then, when it is about real things, it is often at the same time taking the place of some real things. Writing is too often about people who cant manage. Now I have become one of those people. I am one of those people. What I should do, instead of writing about people who cant manage, is just quit writing and learn to manage. And pay more attention to life itself. The only way I will get smarter is by not writing anymore. There are other things I should be doing instead. Some of the stories are a couple of pages long, yet others are a little longer, and very few are close to 15 pages. The longer one is 25 pages. I didnt understand them all. When I grasped right away what the author was getting at, I was pleased and liked the book. When I didnt, I was frustrated and detested it. I returned to some of those I didnt understand, and I got them the second time around. But that didnt happen with all of them.I started the book on the 27th of September last year and finished it on the same day a year later. That was not intentional and I was happy with the symmetry. I mostly went at it during trips: on plane, boat and train rides. It couldnt keep my attention for long when I was home, but it did while away. When travelling I was in a state of heightened awareness that kept me in focus. The stories were bathed in a whole new light then. They also served well on sleepless nights. This is not how I usually write. Its an attempt to imitate Lydia Daviss style. I tend to use plenty of exclamation marks, question marks and suspension points, but there were none of those in the book. Most of it was in present tense. The stories felt like dispatches. Daviss work exudes an extreme sense of control that I genuinely appreciated. (Remove the adverb, keep the adjective.)I dont know if I managed to suggest a story about anything. She did. The flatness of the imitated tone intrigued me, although it seems unlikely that it will become mine.I will give it a 4.May 27, 2014You know how sometimes you come on here, and look at the reviews other readers have left, and thought, "Well, okay, I guess I'll keep going"? Then you finish and find yourself wondering how the book has so many 4 and 5 star reviews. That's where I am right now. I don't mind the occasional super-short short story; that's fine. In fact, my favorite of this entire book was just that; entitled "Housekeeping Observation", the entire story is this, "Under all this dirt/the floor is really very clean." Which, frankly, anyone who's ever had to clean has probably had a thought like that. And that's the only reason this book is getting two stars, because I was feeling generous due to that above sentence. But there were some stories that were just lists. Some of which, sadly, were more interesting than the longer stories. fiction short-stories wouldn-t-read-againSeptember 5, 2014I'm calling a case of the Emperor has no clothes. I am amazed at the number of 4 and 5 star reviews of this, people calling it "brilliant"?! 20-something pages of descriptions of cows walking and standing. 5 pages of lines from obituaries. The interminable Letter to the Foundation. I forced myself to slog through this, thinking it had to get better or that at some point a light bulb would go on and I'd "get it", but I don't think there's anything to get. I have never read Lydia Davis before but I've heard of her and gathered that this book is meant to be Great Literature. Maybe some of her work is, and I'm willing to try something else, but I've written shopping lists more interesting than the stories in this book.July 30, 2020Kratka proza nakon koje se drukije ita. Proao sam kroz sve faze od ravnodunosti i ak blagog nerviranja do potpunog oduevljenja.Faze su bile vidljive i u neuravnoteenom toku itanja iako me je uvek udilo kako zbirke pria itam mnogo due nego romane, jasno mi je to je to tako. U velikim celinama moe da se razbakari, svet ti postepeno postaje poznat, a njegova pravila jasna. Sa kratkim priama druga je pria kao kad ode na more, pokvasi se i odmah izae. I onda se to ponavlja, a telo nikako da se navikne na sredinu. Pritom, u kratkim (i superkratkim) priama, narativna ekonomija je potpuno drugaija. Roman u svojoj rasprianosti, za razliku od kratke prie, dozvoljava prazan hod, koji, da se razuememo, zna da mi bude esto blizak. Tako oboavam meandriranja, digresije, esejizaciju, a suvo, sveznajue (i neutralno) pripovedanje nije mi privlano. Jer, kad shvatite i da u nedostatku radnje sve vrvi od dogaaja i mogunosti, radnja vam postaje kao da eerite kola. Ne mogu i neu je odgovor na sveprisutni diktat radnje i konvencija. Ali poetika Lidije Dejvis nije buntovna, avangardna i postmoderna, jo manje ruilaka ona elegantno pokazuje kako strategije pripovedanja nisu iscrpljene. Istovremeno, uspeva neto zaista neobino da u veoma kratkim formama odbrani autonomiju proze u odnosu na poeziju. Kad god se povede neka pria o kratkim proznim formama, dogodi se poreenje sa poezijom, pre svega zato to su kratke prozne forme zapravo esto neprepoznate kao samostalne. Ovo ne znai, naravno, da u prozi Lidije Dejvis ne postoji poezije, ali ona nije preovlaujua, niti treba da bude.Za razliku od kratke prie za koju je potrebna posebna volja, panja i ritam, roman esto rauna na nepanju itaoca, ak i kada se ini da nije tako. Ipak, na kraju se rauna celina doivljaja rezonantna mo dela u neijoj svesti prelivanje sveta dela u svet itaoca. Neto pretekne, neto ne dobacuje, a neto, jednostavno, izlapi. Mnogo je razgaziranih pria, a jo vie zaboravljanja.Svesna ovoga, Lidija Dejvis, kao briljantan italac i izvrstan prevodilac (Prust, Flober, Blano!) uspeva da u mnogim priama nadie domete itavih romana. I to uspeva inovativnom formom koja nikad nije sama sebi svrha, kao i zagrcnutim narativima, intrigantnim i duhovitim u svojim nagovetajima. Lidija Dejvis zapisuje trenutke iz svakodnevice, (svoje i tue) snove, zapise o prevoenju (Flober) & prevozu (avioni i vozovi), imejlove (mahom prigovarake i ispovedne), ali i najrazliitije spiskove, meu kojima su ak i nizovi umrlica, a tu su ak i prie-o-priama i jezika igra zapis nainjen na papiru tokom telefoniranja. Uspelost zbirke oslikava se u tome da je vie od skupa svojih delova celine se meusobno proimaju, a zbirka ima dobar raspored materijala. (Takoe, iako je (para)anrovska slika zbirke izuzetno bogata, teko je da moe da se nae jedna odrednica koja bi bila nesvodiva, kao flash fiction.)Knjievna graa, naravno, po sebi ne znai nita moemo imati izuzetno zanimljiv material i neuverljivo delo, ali superiornost Lidije Dejvis oito je u tome to ona uspeva da iskristalie izuzetan trenutak kao u izuzetnoj prii o kutiji okoladica, ili u prii u kojoj navodi kakve zvukove izazivaju predmeti u njenom domainstvu. Poznati pripovedni tok koji podrazumeva sukob, kulminaciju i rasplet, pobeen je. Meutim, poneki fragmenti iz ivota koji deluju potpuno efemerno, poput razmiljanja o tome koje vrste riba treba jesti, kukanja na nemarnost istaica, veterinarskog izvetaja o maki, posmatranja pokreta krava ili razmiljanja o poklonima, otvorilo mi je neto retko, neto raskono ivotno. Ne radi se tu o plemenitosti, ak ni srenom prkosu, ve o nepokolobljivosti prie, koja e se izmigoljiti svim nametnutostima, dajui jedan intenzivniji, produbljeniji, sveiji pogled na svet. Prie su svuda, a Lidija Dejvis uspeva da nas naini do-priavaocima konii njenih pria upleli su se i u moje svakodnevne, nenapisane, (mikro)narative. Domunavaju se.Prie su svuda, a ovo je previe, makar i za najkrai uvod na svetu o zaista vrednoj zbirci.Samo u rei da su interpretativne mogunosti za ovu knjigu nesvakidanje i da uopte nemamo ime za ono to Lidija Dejvis radi. Nije to ni post-postmodenizam ni tzv. nova iskrenost, ali obuhvata teme koje se pripisuju ovim konceptima. I jedan zanimljiv detalj u jednoj prii spisku, pripovedaica nabraja ta bi volela, a ta ne da ita u knjievnom asopisu. Kao jedna od stavki istie se prevodi sa srpskog jezika.Dve superkatke za kraj:ODLUKAKoliko mali treba da bude proctor da bi se u njega sabila re odluka: toliki da moe da se smesti u mozak bubamare dok ona, pred mojim oima, donosi odluku.ZAPAANJE O DOMAINSTVUIspod sve ove prljavtinepod je zapravo ist.June 6, 2014More LD equals a triple chocolate and fudge surprise minus the week-long sickness and hours straining at stool. This is another characteristic assemblage of micro-stories and longer mental peregrinations, narrated in that gentle intellectual register. Among the longer pieces: The Landing evokes the terror of turbulence on a routine passenger flight, The Dreadful Mucamas is a surreal and satirical tale of misbehaving Mexican servants, The Cows details the complex movements and behaviours of random bovines, The Seals is a deep meditation on the loss of Daviss sister and parents, and Letter to the Foundation is a matter-of-fact account of the downside to receiving Genius Grants. These longer stories are excellent except Daviss voice can be flat and less charming over five or six pages. Among the shorter pieces: Letter to a Frozen Peas Manufacturer laments the misrepresentation of peas on the packaging, The Bad Novel sums up that Stockholm effect of hated tomes, Brief Incident and Reversible Story are playful Oulipian numbers, Men reminds us there are men in the world, and The Language of the Telephone Company is hilarious: The trouble you reported recently is now working properly. Also included are dream stories and stories adapted from Flauberts letters, lending this collection a pleasant quirk alongside the LD originals. distaff merkins short-storiesMay 4, 2020Simply put, the writing is just not good, and the pieces individually and collectively are dull, bland, and without taste. This book is like a burnt biscuit for me. No amount of jam sweetened it up; in fact the more fluff, the more I felt burned. Obviously, I really hated this book. I found it wordy and tiresome. I rarely say I hate a book. However, I read A LOT so it has to happen sometimes I guess. Being a pretty fast reader, I see no reason after I buy a book to not finish it- I kind of made this a rule for myself years ago. Meaning, I buy it- I must then finish it. Usually, I thank myself for this rule because I get something (albeit sometimes a very small something) affective (or affecting) out of it. This time, I'm not so happy about my rule. Even the shorter pieces lacked beauty and originality in my opinion. So, so, so many of the longer stories were either irrelevant or should have been small vignettes or a poem. I found myself picking out two or three sentences on several pages of the longer pieces that could have stood alone without the other paragraphs. And I do not even mind a little wordiness or stream of consciousness if it is at least intriguing, but this was not. The imagery fell flat over and over again, and the diction was pathetic. I found the beginning better than the end. I just became sad though as the book progressed because her voice was somewhat witty and fun in the beginning, and then it just got heavy, but without depth. Just like wordiness, I don't mind heavy. However, heavy, long, and over-written is a hard combination, and I would NOT recommend wasting your time reading this book. So there is my opinion of Can't and Won't. Take it or leave it, fellow Goodreaders. (Sad face and a wave.)August 11, 2016Some of this reminds me of My Struggle: Book One. Sort of like Knausgaard crossed with Steven Wright. She has a better sense of humor than Karl Ove though.The stories challenge you to consider what is a story. They dont always have a beginning, a middle, and an end. They are not poetry. They are playing, playful sometimes. Some are just pithy observations. This might be overstating it in some cases. Just observations then. Waiting to take on whatever significance the reader chooses. Like the art I saw in the Tate a couple of years ago it was a simple mirror. As clever as you want it to be. Her little notebook is wrapped in an elastic band, easily retrievable from her purse. Then she can record the inside of her mind. Or her dreams. Or escape routes from the latest passage of Flaubert that she is translating.These feel like I am reading her workbook, her kernels of inspiration. Sometimes theyre not even that, theyre just a documentation stream done in the hopes that a nugget will shine through. We are held hostage by the expectation that something will show up. Lydia and Karl are holding us hostage.I had never before thought so clearly about all the scenes that took place when I wasnt there to witness them. And then, I had a stranger and less pleasant thought: not only was I not necessary to those scenes, and not necessary to those lives that continued to go on without me, but in fact, I was not necessary at all. I didnt have to exist. This is a startling observation, to be reminded again how very small and inconsequential one is. It is disquieting.She taught my daughter and me the meaning of schwa, as in Brief Incident in Short a, Long a, and Schwa. This is the whole story: Cat, gray tabby, calm, watches large, black ant. Man, rapt, stands staring at cat and ant. Ant advances along path. Ant halts, baffled. Ant back-tracks faststraight at cat. Cat, alarmed, backs away. Man, standing, staring, laughs. Ant changes path again. Cat, calm again, watches again. Every word contains the letter a, except the title. Schwa is a word. When I read out the definition of schwa, my daughter said, Aah!. I wonder if that completes some sort of transaction between writer and reader.I prefer this to the murder mystery I was reading yesterday. Because I dont know whats going to happen in this book. Every page is a surprise. Housekeeping Observation. Under all this dirt the floor is really very clean. She reads my mind.How I Read as Quickly as Possible Through my Back Issues of the TLS. She reads my mind again.The Language of Things in the House makes me wonder if I were a bowl, what would I say.I think this collection, written by an author famous for brevity, could have done with a bit more selective editing. Please spare me your imagination. Im so tired of your vivid imagination, let someone else enjoy it.The title story is the cover story. Literally. It is on the cover of some editions. I was recently denied a writing prize because, they said, I was lazy. What they meant by lazy was that I used too many contractions: for instance, I would not write out in full the words cannot and will not, but instead contracted them to cant and wont.There are not [aren't] a lot of contractions.I dont think she is lazy.america fiction library May 17, 2014After reading this collection of short stories by Lydia Davis, the only single word that comes to my mind is "perfect." Her observations on various aspects of life are extremely funny or moving - or sometimes both. A lot of people comment on the length of her stories, but I think that is really not that important. She is sort of like a boxer who knows when to strike and when to walk away. Her prose writing is beautifully sculptured, and one marvel not only in her skill in putting words together to give such memorable images, but I get such a profound feeling as well. For instance, whenever she writes animals, it affects me deeply, which is odd, because normally I don't get any feelings from animal literature whatsoever. But her two stories here "The Rooster" and "Cows" is so sad, but not in that blah-blah feeling when one reads such narratives. "Can't and Won't" is one of my favorite books. iF you write, I think it is essential to pick this up, so you can study her style, her method, but also to acknowledge her originality and just to be able to enjoy a writer who is taking you to a place, that one normally doesn't go to. Also strangely enough, I much prefer this book than her Collected Stories. All the pieces here work as a unit. There is no weakness, and it moves effortlessly from one tale to another. Yeah, a great book.books-bought contemporary fiction October 5, 2014I found this book perplexing. I liked the longer stories, such as "The Seals," which I found very moving, and "The Letter to the Foundation," which I thought shed some real light on human nature. The shorter ones I had a harder time with. I definitely enjoyed some of them, such as the one where she wrote to a frozen-vegetable company to tell them the photo of frozen peas on their packages needed to be a more vibrant green, or the one where she said that she enjoyed ordering fish at restaurants and then explained some of the various issues associated with that. I found these stories relaxing--they were simply written and dealt with simple problems, but tried to impose order in a way that appealed to me. But I kept trying to imagine an MFA student turning in a letter to a frozen pea company, an explanation of their experiences ordering fish in a restaurant, or a brief account of their dream from the previous night to their professor in completion of an assignment. The professor would likely note that the writing was pretty good, but then tell them to try a little harder. So why does Lydia Davis no longer need to try a little harder? She writes well, definitely, but not that well. Is it just that she's now a well-respected writer, so anything she does is automatically deemed good? I honestly don't quite get it. If anyone can explain it to me in a way that doesn't imply I'm just an idiot for not getting it, I would appreciate it. I was genuinely entertained by this book--except for most of the recountings of dreams and the "stories from Flaubert," which I could have done without--but I may have reached my limit for this sort of thing. I understand Lydia Davis has a collected volume of short stories that's about three times the length of this one, but I cannot imagine reading that many pages of this, and I definitely can't imagine reading a novel written in her style, so this may be my first and last experience with Lydia Davis. But I'm not sure.July 13, 2016This is the first I've read of Lydia Davis. Immediately, the first microstory, "A Story of Stolen Salamis," reminded me of Thomas Bernhard's collection "The Voice Imitator," also microstories. It was a pale imitation. "Two Undertakers," one of the better stories, was also reminiscent of Bernhard. (Roland Barthes watches two undertakers have a bite to eat while on the job. Barthes' deceased mother waits outside in one of the hearses.) And it's difficult not to think of Bernhard when reading "dn von Horvth Out Walking," if only because of the setting in the Bavarian Alps.I didn't find much [from the book jacket] "bracing candor". In fact, mostly the opposite. The subject of the book seems to be Davis's literary persona, and whoever the real Davis is, she's hiding behind that. (Not that this is a legitimate complaint; after all, this is fiction.) Maybe self-deprecation was meant by candor, rather than actual truth-telling. One small, but irksome, example of a lack of candor was in the story "The Letter to the Foundation," one of two normal-length stories. Davis/the narrator has just won a large grant (presumably the MacArthur Fellows Award) and is describing, years later, what winning the award was like. Far into the story, she writes, "Soon after the new year, I met with a tax advisor, and he gave me some bad news. A large part of the grant would go to paying taxes - on the grant!" First, for anyone of adult age, living in a developed country, why would this be "news?" Does the narrator have no idea how our tax system works? Does she think the monetary award was not income? Second, why is there an exclamation point after "on the grant" - on what other thing would the taxes be levied? What's the point of this fake astonishment? (And my distaste for the weaseling in some of the stories was arrived at independently, before I read the claim that the book displayed "bracing candor.")Nor was the supposed "humor" to my taste. It was more an omnipresent archness, a narrator who is, or is pretending to be, roguish, mischievous. The complaint letters to companies whose products have let her down in some way are the best examples of this. Again I have to contrast the supposed "humor" here to Bernhard's comedy, which genuinely works. Maybe it works better because Bernhard is going for lunacy while Davis is mostly staying on the plane of the real (although there are lots of brief dreams, her own and others', interspersed here). "Men" is a story where she does achieve real comedy, probably because it is absurdist ("There are also men in the world. Sometimes we forget, and think there are only women"...).June 19, 2014I really, really loved her Collected Stories, when they came out a few years back, but this one ... meh. Not sure whether she's just not on her A-game here, or it's me that's changed. Have I lost my appetite for super-arty literature? (And if so, is that a good or bad thing?) Or, was she being waaaayyyy too self-indulgent & self-involved here? I mean, 30% of the "stories" (as they were) in this book are essentially straight from her dream journal (literally, annotated "dream"). And is it not a truth as old as time that NO ONE CARES about anyone else's dreams?At any rate, credit is credit is due: I love this woman's translations. But if you're a Lydia Davis newbie, and thinking of checking her out, definitely start with the collected stories. June 24, 2014As Lydia Davis wrote;The Bad NovelThis dull, difficult novel I have brought with me on my trip - I keep trying to read it. I have gone back to it so many times, each time dreading it and each time finding it no better than the last time, that by now it has become something of an old friend. My old friend the bad novel. ORThe Old Vacuum Cleaner Keeps Dying on HerThe old vacuum cleaner keeps dying on herover and overuntil at last the cleaning womanscares it by yelling:"Motherfucker!" ORThe Husband-SeekersFlocks of women attempt to land on an island, seeking husbands from a tribe of very beautiful young men. They blow across the sea like cotton buds or seeding wild plants, and when rejected they pile up offshore in a floating bank of woolly white. I write, Can't and won't read this - painful and stumped on how this won the 2013 Man Booker International Prize? These short stories are so short I'm missing the point - obviously.And just to recap;How I Know What I Like(Six Versions)She likes it. She is like me. Therefore, I might like it.She is like me. She likes the things I like. So I might like it.I like it. I show it to her. She likes it. She is like me. Therefore, I might really like it.I think I like it. I show it to her. She likes it. She is like me. Therefore, I might really like it.I think I like it. I show it to her. (She is like me. She likes the things I like.) She likes it. So I might really like it.I like it. I show it to her. She likes it. (She says the other one is "just plain awful.") She is like me. She likes the things I like. So I might really like it.Which proves that Lydia Davis and I are not alike, as I didn't much care for this, though plenty of people would disagree with me.....October 7, 2020Stekao sam dojam da je Lydia jedna jaako naporna ena, a opet tako draga i mila.Takve su i ove prie. Ima tu svega! Ba kao i ivotu. Suma summarum petica ko kua.May 12, 2014"Oh, we writers may think we invent too much but reality is worse every time!"LYDIA DAVIS! She could not be more perfect. This collection is weird and brilliant and funny and surprising. It utterly delighted me in every way; her style got embedded in my brain. Upon finishing this collection, I felt like I was actually thinking and reasoning and observing my daily activities in a Lydia Davis-esque way. Which I am more than OK with. Highly recommended to anyone with eyes.american-lit fiction short-storiesJanuary 9, 2022Look. Lydia Davis is, without a doubt, a masterful writer and storyteller. Her collaboration with the reader with perhaps just a gentle nudgehanding us the blueprints to, in turn, conceptualize a meaningful story; providing us with the deliverance from masses of language and structure with terse simplicityis as sly as it is clever. However, a great deal of the longer stories that were included in the collection lost their luster within a few pages and just grew tedious, sometimes nearing an almost unbearable degree. In my eyes, her skill lies in the artfully uninvolved creator and the reader assembling and perhaps even altering her puzzle with a cognizance that combs through the ingredients of rather (intentionally) flat language. I liked this quite a bit when it was separated into short bits; but when it was drawn out, the flatness gorged itself on content and bloated into more of a burden than it was a liberating and fascinating force. Otherwise, this was great, but the longer stories were dull to me.January 4, 2018 yldz ve drt yldz arasnda kaldm nk baz ykler be yldzlkken bazlar daha ktyd. ama unu anladm ki ok sevdiim bir tarz deil ksa ksa yk. bazlar ok iirsel, evet, ne gzel ama her aklna geldiini yazm gibi duran ykler de var oka, belki de ben anlamyorumdur o kadar, bilemedim.kitapta en ok beendiklerim yine 3-5 sayfalk uzun ykler oldu ki benim edebiyat konusunda hafif tutucu bir tarafm var, yeniye ok alamyorum. yeni yk tarzndan miranda july bana daha ok hitap etmiti mesela.ama baz yklerde hakikaten her szc zenle, yerli yerinde, dnerek yazdn hissediyorsunuz davis'in. birok ykde ayrntlar gz alc. kitapta gnde 5-10 yk okunuyor, sonra ara vermek gerekiyor ama bu kez de btnl bozuluyor nk kitapta tekrarlayan motiflerin olduu ykler var, yani aslnda araya baka bir ey sokmadan bitirmek lazm. ikayet mektuplarndaki mizaha bayldm ama dediim gibi benim tarzm deil pek.November 28, 2015Lydia Davis is as brilliant as always. I can't figure out what she does. It starts out seeming simplistic but it gains power as you keep reading. Now I can't get the stories out of my head (even one that is literally 3 lines long). She's an addiction (like her heroine in "A Small Story about a Small Box of Chocolates"-one of my favorite). I have to go start re-reading.2014indchalnge favorites fiction December 3, 2016So here's the deal: Lydia Davis writes stories where nothing fucking happens, right? People complain about shades of green on food packaging, hear words in the noises their appliances make (I love that story because that happens to me all the goddamn time, and sometimes my mind hears passages of instrumental music as repeated words, m