



Multitudes

Lucy Caldwell

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From Belfast to London and back again the eleven stories that comprise Caldwell's first collection explore the many facets of growing up - the pain and the heartache, the tenderness and the joy, the fleeting and the formative - or 'the drunkenness of things being various'. Stories of longing and belonging, they culminate with the heart-wrenching and unforgettable title story.

Multitudes Details

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From Reader Review Multitudes for online ebook

Paula Dennan says

A gorgeous collection of short stories set in Belfast about growing up, falling in love, queerness, motherhood and figuring out who you are. Caldwell's writing is evocative and full of nuance.

Stand out stories – Poison, Through the Wardrobe and Here We Are.

Christine Clark says

Brilliant, just brilliant. Maybe it's because she writes about the East Belfast and West London that I know so very well. Or the capturing of the Elusive Northern Irish spirit so perfectly, The writing is just so damn good that I feel like I know and walk through the stories with the characters, and will be still thinking about them for a long time to come. Beautiful

Ruth says

This collection of shorts starts with a story written in the second person - my heart sank. I can't stand an author saying 'you did this and you did that' - it drives me mad. Anyway, it gets better. I think Lucy Caldwell writes really well from a teenage perspective and these were my favourites. I especially liked 'Thirteen' and 'Poison', though they brought a dreadful feeling of recognition (how awful to be young!).

Ylenia says

Faves: Multitudes, Killing Time, Poison.

Rebecca Green says

Something I was not expecting when I started this book, was to identify with it as much as I did. At points I felt as though I could be the narrator, it struck me so closely, reminding me of those painful feelings in adolescence that I thought I had forgotten. I actually felt uncomfortable reading some of the stories, to the extent that I couldn't finish Poison at all, for reasons I'm not even sure I can explain to myself. Despite these negative feelings, I really enjoyed the book and the writing, precisely because it was so evocative for me and very nostalgic too.

It's nice to read work from writers of my generation as I feel it holds a certain familiarity and comfort for me and I thought the range of topics within this book were well chosen and socially current. I would definitely recommend for a quick and engaging read.

Erica Mangin says

What a short story collection! Lucy Caldwell has a way with words - the beautifully written stories evoke with each one the exact emotion I imagine she is trying to get from the reader: the awkwardness; the excitement; the guilt; the fear. Reading this collection, was for me, like eating a packet of chocolate biscuits, you devour one, but then convince your self that you'll have just one more, and then suddenly when you look up you've devoured the whole lot. You may have the slight guilt afterwards for having consumed them all in one go and not savoured each one more slowly.

Anne says

I read quite a few short story collections, but very few make it on to Random Things, for various reasons. I've often found that short stories have left me feeling unfulfilled as a reader, that I've not really understood what the author is trying to say. Sometimes a collection will feature one or two excellent stories whilst the others feel like they've been added as an afterthought, or to pad out the book.

I have had none of these feelings whilst reading, or after I've finished Multitudes. This is a collection of eleven quite beautifully constructed stories that have held me spellbound. Lucy Caldwell takes her reader to Belfast for the majority of her tales and the setting is so realistic, the flavour of the city, pre the Good Friday agreement is startling and so very very well done.

Multitudes is a sort of coming-of-age collection. Each story has its own lead character, they are not linked in any way except for their setting. The stories are arranged by age, with The Ally Ally O starting, right through to the quite mesmerising final tale, Multitudes.

Lucy Caldwell touches on so many difficult issues experienced by young girls as they grow up. The devastation of broken friendships, the yearning of secret crushes and the sometimes terrible decisions that are made because of these. She explores sexuality and differences, and incorporates a theme of determination and survival throughout the book.

Multitudes is gripping and very raw. The stories are often tragic, always smart, they are poignant and captivating.

<http://randomthingsthroughmyletterbox...>

Jackie Law says

Multitudes, by Lucy Caldwell, is a collection of eleven short stories set in Belfast. As a native of the city and a fan of the short story form I approached this book with high expectations. I was not disappointed.

Several of the stories are told from the point of view of a child and the author has captured both the voice and the conflict of feelings at each age perfectly. It is easy to forget how torrid growing up can be: the desperate loneliness, being unable to articulate feelings, the fear of rejection by peers, of disappointing parents. These stories encompass the pain and pleasure of childhood social success and the damage this can cause.

My favourite story in the collection was 'Through the Wardrobe', a moving account of a young child uncomfortable in their own skin:

"You are sad. You're only six years old but you feel sad a lot of the time, a tightness in your chest that you don't have words for. Your mum says you're a sensitive child [...] she'll stay till you fall asleep, you're safe and nothing can hurt you. But it's not outside you're scared of. It's something inside, and you can't explain it"

Relationships are explored throughout: the pain of parenthood, the pain of being thirteen and friendless is a world that demands all fit in, the conflict when desire clashes with parental expectations.

In 'Poison' a pupil is attracted to her teacher with all the intensity that being fifteen entails. In 'Here We Are' two pupils find a love that will not be tolerated in a church lead community.

The writing is breathtaking, taut and rich in imagery. Each character demands empathy, even those imprisoned by their upbringing and beliefs.

I urge you to seek out this book. It is a fabulous work, fulfilling and rewarding to read.

My copy of this book was provided gratis by the publisher, Faber and Faber.

Kasa Cotugno says

Another great book of the month from the Irish Times. This collection focuses primarily on young women in contemporary Belfast, all with varying degrees of difficulty that are immediately recognizable, situations that are as prevalent globally thanks to the presence of the Internet. The Good Son presented life in Belfast as experienced possibly by the previous generation, during the Troubles. These young people are facing life challenges without the overt violence in the streets of that earlier time. There is some beautiful writing here too, and each story is strong, memorable.

Barbara says

The 11 stories in this collection were written over several years. What is surprising is that they form such a coherent series. Caldwell is a young (born 1981), Belfast-born writer. All of these stories are set in Belfast, specifically in East Belfast. East Belfast is staunchly Protestant, in this city which continues to be segregated by religion. Younger residents shun sectarianism, but housing patterns, bitter histories, and old habits don't change quickly. East Belfast gave us C.S. Lewis and Van Morrison (my absolutely favorite album of all time is Astral Weeks).

There are several stories that knocked me through a loop and will stay with me for a very long time. The first of these was *Poison* which Caldwell wrote for the 2014 collection *Belfast Noir*. A group of 15-year-old girls stalk their Spanish teacher, whose dark looks feed their teenage fantasies. One of the girls carries this obsession too far leading to a disastrous outcome. In the story *Through the Wardrobe* a bow to *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, a six-year-old boy yearns for a Belle dress (as in *Beauty and the Beast*). As he becomes a victim of bullying and beatings, his parents look for help. The saddest line in the story, which is told in the first person by the now grown boy, is "The GP (family doctor) who will insist that

there is no service anywhere in Northern Ireland that can help you". For me, the most poignant story was *Here We Are*. It is about two teenage girls from East Belfast, one the daughter of a fundamentalist Baptist widower, who fall in love. It included a beautiful and unforgettable description of walking the streets of the city. The final paragraph of the story for me is the second most memorable story closing only after the closing of James Joyce's story *The Dead* <http://drmstream.com/2010/03/snow-was...>

"That night, I walked the streets of East Belfast again in my dreams. Waking the dream seemed to linger far more than a mere dream. *These streets are ours*. I was jittery all day, a restless, nauseous, over-caffeinated feeling. I could email her, I thought, through the website. I wouldn't bother with pleasantries or preliminaries, I'd just say, 'There we were. Do you remember?' "

One of the members of my book group, a woman from Belfast, said this was her book of the year. This is a book for readers who love short stories, are interested in contemporary writing from Ireland and Northern Ireland, and especially for those who know and love the city of Belfast.

MisterHobgoblin says

Multitudes is a rather superior story collection set mostly in East Belfast.

For those who don't know it, Northern Ireland is a rather conservative place with a high degree of social compliance. It tends not to deal well with diversity. Just to exemplify this, it is a place where the weekend TV continuity announcer in the 1990s, Julian Simmonds, was an unmarried man in late middle age, with bleached blond hair, a range of pastel coloured jackets, a camp accent and a day job working for an airline. And people were shocked when it was revealed that he was gay.

So this is the society that Lucy Caldwell puts under the microscope. She breaks every taboo. We have race (and mixed race at that), loneliness, emigration, death, homosexuality, transsexualism, and mental illness. Other reviewers have spotted that the lead characters in each story are progressively older, going from early years through to end of life. It's subtle, but I'm afraid I missed it.

What I did get, though, was the enormous depth of compassion in each story. The lead characters really come alive, flourishing briefly but brightly in vivid colours. There is an insight into the soul of a community that does its best to hide it. The language is clear, there is no hint of the ambiguous endings that can make some short story collections feel like a slog. And nor does the reader get any sense of ennui from a parade of similar stories. Whilst the stories may collectively address diversity, they are each diverse enough in themselves to stand up individually.

Highly recommended.

Regan says

After reading Eimear McBride and now Lucy Caldwell's collection of interwoven short stories *Multitudes*, I feel quite affirmed in my belief that there is something in the water Irish women writers drink that enables them to capture the thrum and buzz of adolescence with such clarity.

ElenaSquareEyes says

A collection of eleven short stories of childhood, adolescence and motherhood.

I've read a few short story collections for my Read the World Project (I find them to be a good way to gain an insight into a writer's country and its people, and they're also usual a quick read) but I've never had as much of a visceral reaction to a short story collection as I did with Lucy Caldwell's *Multitudes*.

Each story ranges from 10 – 25 pages, some are in second person but most of them are in first person, and each story is about a female character. Each story is about a young girl, or a teenager, or a mother, and they're each like a little snapshot in a moment of their lives. I think my favourites were "Thirteen", "Through the Wardrobe" and "Inextinguishable". In "Thirteen" a young teenager has to deal with her best friend moving to London, how they first of all write multiple letters to one another each week but slowly the letters stop being written. "Through the Wardrobe" is about a young trans girl figuring out why she feels sick when her older sisters are given Disney princess dresses for Christmas while she's given a Peter Pan outfit. "Inextinguishable" is about a mother grieving for her daughter and finding some form of release in the music her daughter loved.

There are stories that feel very true to life. One story has a teenage girl being sexually harassed without really knowing what was happening, another story is about a teenager fantasizing about her teacher, or another feeling hollow and helpless.

Each story is powerful and compelling in its own way. They are stories about first loves, sexual desire and romance, but they are also about friendship, growing up and family. Some stories are sad, some are hopeful, while others are almost nostalgic and melancholy.

Caldwell really captured the mindset of young children, the pain of adolescence, and (I presume) the terrifying reality of being a parent. While I might not have been in some of the exact situations as the female characters in these stories, I remember idolising a baby sitter, losing touch with friends, and having a whole lot of feelings inside that I didn't know what to do with. Each of the female characters felt so honest, true and relatable and that was down to the brilliant writing *Multitudes* is fantastic short story collection and I can't recommend it enough.

Alison Hardtmann says

There's little less satisfying than a short story that doesn't get it quite right. And it's a hard medium to master; every element that a novel allows chapters to communicate, must be evident in a handful of paragraphs. Fully rounded characters must spring from a half dozen lines and the theme and plot must be pared down until each sentence serves a specific purpose. But when a short story works, it's like a shot of whiskey or a kick in the head, everything is there, all at once.

Lucy Caldwell's book of short stories is a rare case of a collection in which each of the eleven stories works. Centered on the city of Belfast, the collection tells of ordinary people, usually children or teenagers, figuring out life. Often the protagonists feel like outsiders, or are dissatisfied in ways that can't always be communicated to their friends or family. Belfast, its weather, houses, roads and schools, is evocatively described. This is a lovely collection of stories, each of which stands ably on its own. I'll be looking for more by this author.

Allan says

I enjoyed this short story collection, which I had actually bought at its launch but hadn't read until now, without being blown away by it. Caldwell, as far as I know, doesn't live in Belfast anymore, and a few of the stories were so chock full of references, both physical and cultural, that it began to feel that she was trying too hard to show her local 'cred'. Just a personal gripe. Saying that, these were seven issue driven stories which represented a very different side to the city than one often reads about in local fiction.
