



## Content Provider: Selected Short Prose Pieces, 2011–2016

*Stewart Lee*

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## From Reader Review Content Provider: Selected Short Prose Pieces, 2011–2016 for online ebook

### Derek Bridge says

A little Lee goes a long way. And this is rather a lot of Lee. True, these pieces contain some moments of brilliance. But, even for a Stewart Lee fan (which I am) and even when dipped into occasionally (which is how I read it), this tome was somewhat wearying.

The problem is perhaps that these newspaper column pieces are an unhappy marriage between Lee's audacious comic persona as groom and topical satire as bride. (Oooh-errr.) Lee's stand-up is the better place for the former and Mark Steel's newspaper columns are a better example of the latter.

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### Patrick Sherriff says

Part of me wants to entirely miss the points this finite number of monkeys (one) at a typewriter who wrote the articles was making, just so my scathing review could be posted under one of Mr Lee's stories, or better yet on the front cover like the Daily Telegraph that opined: "Stewart Lee is not funny and has nothing to say." But, I couldn't because he is funny to me and does have a lot to say. Granted, I had to skip a handful of the 50 or so articles in the collection, not because they weren't brilliantly written and probably very funny if you could get all the cultural references, but I've been living in Japan since 2007 and some of the articles focussing on lesser Conservative politicians and other Brit-only TV folk Mr Lee was presumably lampooning, left me out in the cold. But that's not Mr Lee's fault. Probably. He's still my comedy hero, and I think he's my writing hero too now that I've moved on from PJ O'Rourke but find I'm still not smart enough to enjoy proper authors.

Download my (not as good but bigger than Mr Lee's) starter library for free here - <http://eepurl.com/bFkt0X> (less)

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### Ryan Williams says

Plenty of good work - the first piece raises facetiousness to an art form. Some hit and miss pieces and perhaps more filler made the final cut than should have done.

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### Richard says

Stewart Lee is one of my favourite comedians, his stand up shows can have you crying with laughter one minute while making you feel uncomfortable the next as he questions why you're laughing at what he just said. His comedy won't be to everyone's taste but then Stewart Lee doesn't care as is shown by the quote he uses on the front of this book from The Daily Telegraph; "Stewart Lee is not funny and has nothing to say". This book is a collection of articles he wrote for The Observer and Guardian between 2011-2016. All articles are based upon socio-political stories that were in the news during this time. Obviously this is the downside of the book as the later you read it, the vaguer the news stories will be to you. However, I still felt a lot of

this was very relevant, well written and very funny satirical takes on many stories from recent memory. He even includes the negative comments he received online at the end of his articles which makes them even funnier.

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### Joyce says

what lee (to me) has above his peers (in stand up and newspaper columning) is his depth of thought and his heart, his searching probing at the form of what he's doing and exposure of this. this is honesty in a way, as he says here and in his other books he's not pretending this is an ordinary outpouring of daytoday thought. lee's passionate leftism and humanity mean his work has more long term life in it than say charlie brooker, whose columns (which i was an ardent reader of) i can't imagine revisiting now, so clogged are they with minor things which just don't matter. but what matters to lee (the defence of the environment, the arts, the bbc as a public service) will always matter, and will always need a passionate defence. it is all the more impressive this defence can be offered touchingly in his conceited pathetic persona.

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### Richard Vernon says

A collection of comedic columns done for UK newspapers by an overweight middle aged white man that has been bound together into a book, a bit like Jeremy Clarkson you might ask? Well, no. Let's start at polar opposite and go from there.

In the spirit of openness I'm a fan of Stewart Lee so am clearly going to be pre-disposed to liking this, and for the most part I did.

There are one or two articles that I didn't get on with, mainly due to something like an analogy that I found a bit jarring (dead cat / Olympics for example), but in the main it was good Stewart Lee fare but in writing rather than stand up - and if you've spent a lot of time watching his stand up like I have it is an interesting angle.

Most columns have a short introduction and some having comments made online appended - and whilst cherry picked for their value they do provide a good source of fun as people can be fairly ludicrous when they want to be.

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### MJ Nicholls says

For non-Britons unfamiliar with Lee, he is the stand-up mash-up of David Foster Wallace and Flann O'Brien. His prose evokes the latter writer's sense of form-breaking impishness per his *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns: the skill to write with insightful ease on a serious subject, and have fun skewering the process of paid opinion-making. These *Guardian* pieces can be read as meta-columns (never *mere* columns) or outright prose fictions, as the author seems to prefer (subheader 'Selected Short Prose'), and tend to take a topical

event as the springboard for a surreal mocking amplification of the sort of ludicrous hyperbole common in the right-wing media, flights of indulgent satirical fancy crammed with esoteric references, and some sincere-seeming commentary (readers seeking Lee's actual opinion might find these frustrating—Lee writes as a 'character' version of himself, a man who wants to be sacked from the paper each week). From the online *Guardian* website, below-the-line comments are included: a howling catalogue of readers missing the point in the most toe-curling manner possible, a patchwork of droll trollyery. Newcomers to Lee should watch online stand-up clips. For fans, this is as entertaining as his annotated stand-up book, *How I Escaped my Certain Fate*.

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### **Russio says**

Ok, so it is variable. At times this doesn't work and comes across as too absurd and unstructured. At other times, though, especially in his later writing, this hits the nail right on the head. Stewart Lee is best when taking a serious subject and then illuminating it with absurdity. He is also very good at baiting the kinds of readers he dislikes, who repeatedly fail to see through his (probably) faux egotism and deliberate attempts to lure them out. And with some of their comments included, the evidence of his effect is made even funnier.

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### **Barry Bridges says**

When I first saw the benevolent face of the Stewart Lee smiling at me from the cover of this book I knew it would be just the image to relax me whilst doing the morning twos. Then, one day, as I tore another page from the inside to maintain human hygiene I happened to notice an amusing phrase, a funny passage (not a reflection of my own) and was absorbed for a few selfish minutes in the world of political satire. One thing led to another and over the course of a lot of mornings (and many twos) I digested the full content provided. Not only are the short prose pieces funny of themselves but I think what really brings the book to life are the comments from Observer / Guardian readers who clearly don't get it! The Stewart Lee - great for stand up and for sitting down....

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### **Matthew says**

"Stewart Lee's insider's take on William and Kate", which opens this collection, should be read alongside Hilary Mantel's "Royal Bodies", published two years later in the London Review of Books.

Lee writes of the moment of the Royal Wedding ("... like some giant illuminated penis flying over the rooftops of suburban homes and frothing at random passing women, William has pointed himself at Kate Middleton, the Susan Boyle of social mobility ..."), while Mantel places the commoner bride in her historical role (" ... a jointed doll on which certain rags are hung .... Once she gets over being sick, the press will find that she is radiant.").

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### **Michael Legge says**

Shame he dies in the end.

## James Smith says

The important thing with this book is that you have to love Stewart Lee, either his stand up work, particularly Comedy Vehicle, or his articles in the Guardian and the Observer. If you don't, you'll hate this, if you do, well, you'll love it. I love the way his writing is so dry that you're never quite sure of his personal stance, but more importantly, under many of the articles are comments left under the online articles by clueless sociopaths. The book is almost worth reading just for those.

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## W says

A pretty fun read, if nothing new or revelatory. Only about 10 out of 300 pages are not from Lee's Observer column, all of which is on the Guardian website. The book's innovation is to set varying selected quantities of that website's dreadful comments section underneath the articles, and it is a zinger. The Lee pieces establish his hyperbolically satirical tone, which is then suddenly supplied to the reader comments, against their intentions. So the (generally livid) responses gain an unearned feeling of clever irony, suggesting that real outrage is ultimately the funniest thing. I suppose that's the point of the book.

Problem is these columns are intended to be read within the context of more serious news and media developments, and reading them all together you lose that startling and soothing effect.

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## Helen says

I adore Stewart Lee. He is one of my favourite comedians, and I have followed him for many years. I really loved him when he was part of a comedy duo in the 90's called Lee and Herring, with Richard Herring, and during his recent BBC Comedy Vehicle series. He is the very rare comedian who can make me laugh out loud, even when I am watching his work from an iPad, with headphones on, alone in the middle of the night.

There's something about him which has always resonated with me, and that I can identify with. Do you know when you see famous people on TV and think that if only you could meet, you just know that you would hit it off and be great friends?! You don't do that fantasy? Course you do!

Not only do I firmly believe we could be pals, I also harbour a secret fantasy that he could be my brother, born out of sheer wishful thinking, rather than from any concrete evidence or rational explanation. Over the last twenty five years, I have fantasised about Stewart being the elder brother I so desperately wanted and needed, imagining whimsical scenarios of me going to his house for tea, having a good laugh with him out and about in the pub, getting on with his wife (my sister-in-law!), giving each other advice and support and being each other's shoulder to cry on, sharing a camaraderie and close sibling connection, and having an ally to join forces with me to stand against our abrasive, mean and dysfunctional family. Nothing weird, nothing pervy, just a straightforward, salt of the earth, big brother.

So it was not without huge joy and excitement that I had the opportunity to go and see him live in October 2017. As my husband isn't really into Stewart Lee, and my daughter was too young to be able to see him, and as we don't really leave our daughter with babysitters, he took my daughter out for a real treat on that same night: a currie in a swanky Indian restaurant in Chester. It was win win, as I am severely allergic/intolerant to

Indian food (most food actually, but that is a long, boring story I will spare you), my husband and daughter adore Indian food, but won't go out to eat without me, because they are so lovely and feel guilty (although they needn't!) leaving me home alone with scrambled egg and boiled rice. So, we were all very excited indeed about the night Stewart Lee, my pretend big brother, came to Chester.

My husband, Chris, and our daughter dropped me off at the theatre, and arranged to meet me there afterwards. I remember talking to Chris on the drive there, who was very familiar with my brotherly fantasy, and I was excitedly musing as to whether or not I might be lucky enough to meet him after the show. He said that would be great if I could, but to try not to be too weird and tell him about my sibling delusions, as that would just be creepy. As if, I replied. No one is that stupid to reveal something so odd.

The gig was excellent. I laughed so much I had an asthma attack. Stewart was his usual hilarious, outrageous, wicked, acerbic, scathing, wonderful self.

To my sheer delight, after the gig, Stewart set up a table in the auditorium to sign merchandise/tickets/ have photos taken with him. Unfortunately my husband had the beginnings of a bad cold, and had just started to feel really rough by the time we met up, so he grabbed one of the sofas close by, urged me to go and meet my "brother", and crashed out. My daughter joined me in the very long queue. I was beside myself with giddy anticipation, as my daughter and I happily chatted to each other about what a fabulous night we had both had. She kept telling to reveal my "secret". Go on, Mum, she encouraged me. He's a comedian, he'll see the funny side and love it!

So it was with exhilaration I came face to face with my hero, my beloved pretend brother. My mischievous daughter goading me to tell him I imagined him to be my brother and how much he'd love to hear this, and my voice-of-reason and bringer-back-to-earth husband almost asleep on a sofa too far away. I was like a rabbit caught in headlights. I was soooo nervous, so excited, so overwhelmed... that I just blurted it out in a rabid, crazed moment of madness. Stewart stared back at me, and I waited, with bated breath to see if he could feel our connection, to agree with me wholeheartedly that, yes, we had a strangely, undeniable, spiritual bond. But nah, he just smiled politely and the pr woman asked what I'd like written in the book I'd brought to be signed. That should have been it, I should have left it at that, but I continued the crazy and asked him, all red faced and giggly and slightly hysterical (with a small voice inside screaming loudly, stop it, for god's sake, just stop it) to sign it , "To my fictional sister, Helen, of 25 years". Which he duly did. Then bravely, kindly and patiently allowed me to gurn next to him for a photo.

And so it is, reading this magnificent, beautifully written book, which is a collection of newspaper columns he wrote for various British broadsheets between 2011–2016, full of political snark and contempt, satire and grandiose piss taking, and whilst loving every part of it, I am also simultaneously remembering and cringing at what a complete dick I was when I met my hero, my brother from another mother, the glorious Stewart Lee.

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## Gavin says

*I thought I should go [to the British Comedy Awards], as it's hard to make the stake back in a world where the public expect to steal all content for nothing.*

*Besides which, I have become the sort of person who declines attending events on principle, but where my absence is not noticed anyway. When I won two British comedy awards in 2011, it wasn't mentioned in any newspapers. And my 2012 BAFTA acceptance speech was cut from TV, perhaps because I told the presenter, Kate Thornton, that acclaim was a random*

*phenomenon, like cloud patterns, into which you read significance at your peril.*

Like Francis Wheen or Clive James' collections, a useful critical record of the dumb minutiae Britain obsessed over, over the last ten years. Good prose and there's usually one laugh every 6 or 7 pages to boot.

He uses "comedian" as an honorific, but "TV comedian" as an insult.

God bless some smug wankers.

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