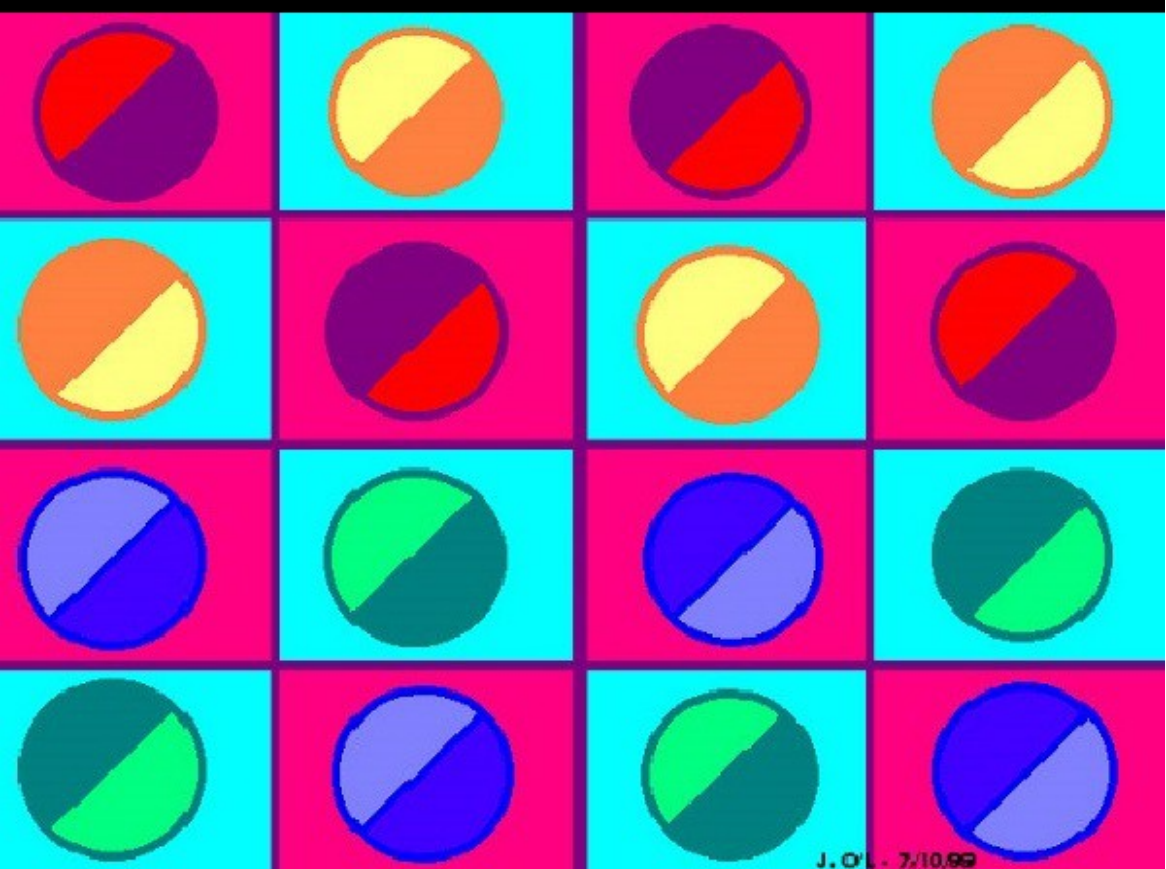


# *Collected Short Prose*



**JOHN O'LOUGHLIN**

# *COLLECTED SHORT PROSE*

By

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CDM Prose

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# CONTENTS

## PREFACE

*The Weekly Lesson*  
*The Weekly Confession*  
*The Aesthetica*  
*Hanley's Concept*  
*A Literary Trinity*  
*A Visit to Hell*  
*The Reckoning*  
*Occupational Species*  
*The Christian Compromise*  
*An Extraordinary Rumour*  
*The Turning-Point*  
*Caught Unawares*  
*From the Devil to God*  
*An Unexpected Crisis*  
*To the Millennium and Beyond*  
*Perfection Our Goal*  
*Nolan's Investigations*  
*Living in the City*

*A Canine Crime*  
*An Evening with Paul Kelly*  
*Prospect of a Change*  
*Extracts from a Journal*  
*Dream Compromise*  
*Millennial Projections*  
*Musical Evolution*  
*Concerning Black Holes*  
*A Very Civilized Man*  
*The Two Literatures*  
*Wisdom*  
*A Public Writer*  
*Understanding Sex*  
*Space Philosophy*  
*Universal Language*  
*A Private Introduction*  
*Space Journal*  
*The Spell*  
*Concerning a Tree*  
*Musical Theories*  
*Two-Way Switch*  
*A Selfish Man*  
*Sex in the Head*  
*Visual Experiences*

Class Distinctions  
Worlds within Worlds  
Spiritual Leaders  
Two Kinds of Strength  
Between Two Extremes  
Relativity  
Revolutionary Revelations  
Polar Attractions  
Understanding Bureaucracy  
A Thinker at Large  
Relative Distinctions  
Doing It Alone  
Twelve Thinkers  
Free-Electron Sexuality  
A Vertical Integrity  
Creative Extremes  
For Truth  
Leader's Transcendentalism  
A True Extremism  
A Permanent Cross  
More Plastic  
Supernatural Upgrading  
Centric Sexuality  
Writerly Print

*Supernatural Travel*  
*Six Thinkers ...*  
*Five Speeches ...*  
*Thus Speaks the Social Transcendentalist*

BIOGRAPHICAL FOOTNOTE

## PREFACE

Having already published short stories or, as I (with my philosophical bias) prefer to call them, 'short prose' in two volumes of 'collected short prose', viz. *Two Sides of the Same Coin & Tales Side Up*, the former of which included, as per custom back then, an aphoristic appendix, I have decided to republish them in one volume (minus the aphorisms) for convenience's sake, in the interests, one might say, of structural and thematic continuity together with a certain prosy purism that sets definite bounds to the scope and style of the contents, dovetailed, as they are, into a somewhat voluminous but nonetheless highly accessible project whose material spans the period 1976–84, during which virtually all of my fictional writings, including several novels, or works of 'long prose', were composed.

Thereafter matters became increasingly philosophic and hence, to my mind, ever more metaphysical, with what I would regard as philosophical truth effectively eclipsing the narrative bias of fiction and, indeed, of prose in general. But that would not have transpired without both the short prose (as here) and the long prose (or novels), together, as noted, with some early aphoristic material that at least had the merit, so far as I am concerned, of anchoring me in a more genuinely purist approach to philosophy than could ever be found in works often of a

largely philosophical nature diluted, as here, by prose and, hence, by a discursive want of both logic and system unworthy, in my estimation, of any claims to being genuinely philosophical, or primarily concerned, in other words, with the pursuit of truth and the rejection, in consequence, of beauty, as of any fictional concessions to it.

Nonetheless, the reader will be aware that prose of a philosophical nature is still distinct from literary prose, or general fiction, and all the more so when, as in this volume and various others akin to it, the material has been centred, the better to intimate of a sort of metaphysical aloofness from the pediment-slaving world which customarily fights shy, in the angularity of its untransvaluated realism, of anything resembling, no matter how metaphorically, the curvilinear subjectivity of a dome, particularly when such a dome intimates, in true religious vein, of transcendental possibility, a possibility very much part of the best – as opposed to worst – of the prose pieces included in this one-volume presentation, which gathers transcendental momentum, so to speak, the further it progresses.

John O’Loughlin, London 2021 (Revised 2022)



## *The Weekly Lesson*

I had just removed her brassiere and was in the preliminary stages of fondling her quite copious breasts when, to my profound consternation, the damn telephone rang. "Now who-the-devil can that be?" I asked myself as, reluctantly extricating myself from Sharla's grip, I hurried out into the hall, snatched up the receiver, and straightaway heard a gruff voice asking: "Hello, is my daughter there?"

"She is indeed!" I impulsively replied.

"Ah, could I speak to her a moment?"

"Er, certainly. Just a sec." I turned towards the piano room, the door to which was still slightly ajar. "Sharla!" I called.

"Yes?"

"Your, er, father wants to speak to you."

"Oh, damn him!" she groaned, automatically putting on her vest. "What-on-earth can he want?"

It wasn't a question I could answer there and then, so I patiently held the receiver to my chest until, arriving

breathlessly in the hall, she was able to take it from me and say: "Hi dad!"

Fearing that my presence beside her wouldn't help any, I ambled back into the piano room, where her bag, coat, shoes, miniskirt and underclothes lay strewn across the floor, and her perfume permeated the air with its delightfully sweet scent. Indeed, everything about her was delightfully sweet. Even the room itself, ordinarily so drab and formal, seemed to have taken on a romantic dimension which lent the furniture a mysterious poignancy, as though it had acquired the semblance of life and was now a silent witness to this evening's amorous events. Fortunately for me, however, Sharla's high intelligence permitted her the equivalent of two lessons in the space of one, so I never had to fear that her musical education would lag behind or be seriously undermined in consequence of my weekly devotions to her sexuality. In my view she was potentially a distinction candidate, the next and final examination grade almost bound to lead her to studying piano at one of the country's principal music colleges.

"Okay," her voice came from the hall, "but I won't be late home in any case. Yes, thanks for letting me know. Okay, bye then." She replaced the receiver with a peremptory slam and swiftly tiptoed back to where I lay, ruminating on the couch.

"Well, is anything amiss?" I tersely asked while fixing her with a searching look.

"He wanted to know if everything's okay," she drawled, still a little under the influence of our bottle of medium-sweet wine.

"What a silly question!" I asseverated, my hands instinctively groping under her vest for the milk-laden globes which were now generously advancing towards me, compliments of Sharla's graceful return to the couch. "What did he really say?"

Her long spidery fingers crawled nimbly over my stomach and up my chest. "A friend of the family has invited my parents over to dinner at the last moment, so they'll be out when I get back. Which means that my father has hidden the front-door key in one of the two small lanterns affixed to the wall either side of our front door."

"But don't you have a key of your own?" I asked, astounded.

"They still won't entrust me with one," she sighed.

"How silly!" I exclaimed. "Why, you're almost eighteen."

"And old enough to be my piano teacher's favourite pupil," she enthused.

I smiled impulsively, as much from relief as from

genuine amusement. "Yes, but at least I'm a private teacher and not a schoolmaster."

"What difference does *that* make?" she cried.

"Less scandalous, of course."

"The hell it is!"

I had to smile in spite of my attempt at seriousness. "Look, this is a perfectly natural state-of-affairs actually. Let's just say that both of us are pupils in the art of making love."

"But you're always teaching me," Sharla protested, clearly no easy girl to convince.

I sighed faintly and said: "Not as much as you may imagine, sweetie."

"Well, that's not the impression *I* get," she smilingly retorted.

"Frankly, you're a very precocious young lady who knows, as well as anybody, that the recently-perfected transition from the keyboard to the couch considerably enhances your enjoyment of these piano lessons," I averred, "particularly when you can spend part of your fees on the quiet and boast to various classmates at school of having intimate connections with a handsome music teacher nearly ten years your senior."

"I don't boast!" Sharla retorted incredulously. "Whoever told you that?"

"Now, now, don't blush, baby!"

"I'm not b-blushing," she stammered. "I never tell other girls anything about you."

"Ah, but they tell me," I smiled, teasing her.

"What d'you mean?" she exclaimed. "No other girls ..."

"Alright, I was only joking," I admitted, the back of my hand caressing her cheek in a pacificatory manner. "But you do tell a few friends."

She lowered her large plum-like eyes in apparent shame.

"Okay, only my closest friends," she confessed blushing.

I smiled but said nothing as we lay motionless together on the couch, basking in the gentle warmth of each other's bodies. I ran a hand through her black wiry hair and then ever so tenderly kissed her on the lips a few times. Eventually she responded in kind and our kissing became more intense.

"The time always goes too quickly when I come here," she at length sighed, coming-up for air.

"Indeed it does," I agreed sympathetically. "It's a pity you don't come here more often."

"Humph! I might be able to if you weren't always so busy giving piano lessons to other girls every night," she complained. "Don't you ever take an evening off?"

"I don't teach at the weekend," I replied obliquely.

"Then why can't we arrange to see each other on Saturdays or Sundays as well?" she asked a touch petulantly.

"That might be possible," I conceded.

Smiling, she drew herself up closer to my face and brought her big dark eyes directly into focus with mine, or so it appeared from the way I saw her pupils contract so rapidly. "Do you have other girls like me?" she asked with a directness that momentarily embarrassed me.

"Unfortunately not, Sharla," I confessed in what was probably an overly frank sort of way. "The others are mostly too young, too plain, or too thin. Besides, I couldn't afford to let that many people keep a part of their piano fees in recompense, since I'm not exactly rolling in money, you know."

"But you do have a girlfriend besides me, don't you?" she asked in a tone of voice and with a facial expression which suggested she already knew the answer. So, to

save myself extra complications, I gently replied in the affirmative. "And you see her at the weekends?" she went on. Again I replied in the affirmative. "Humph! That explains it," she solemnly concluded.

"Explains what, Sharla?"

"Why you won't see me then."

"Not entirely," I responded half-smilingly.

"Then what?" – She seemed on the verge of tears.

"Don't upset yourself," I gently chided her and, sliding my hands down her back and over her rump, proceeded to comfort her as best I could.

"What time is it?" she at length wanted to know, looking a trifle concerned.

"My goodness, it's nearly 8.50!" I exclaimed, glancing at the watch and scrambling to my feet. "I've another pupil at nine."

"What a drag," she drawled.

"What, having another pupil?"

"No, getting dressed!"

I smiled as, reaching for our respective clothes, the pair

of us sought to cover our nakedness as quickly as possible.

That done, we briefly returned to the piano and to the Schumann piece which still stood, as though to attention, on the stand where it had been abandoned some time before. If it had presented her with a few minor problems it was mainly because her legato technique was still insufficiently pianistic, depending too much on the sustain pedal. I therefore suggested that she spend some of the following week practising scales in order to make her fingers work harder, since they were still rather too lazy and stiff for comfort (in marked contrast, I reflected, to the way they behaved on the couch). "In actual fact it would be better if, for the time being, you ignored the pedal markings altogether," I continued, growing in confidence. "For the pedal is fast becoming a crutch, and not exactly the most helpful one either!"

Thus after a few amendments to her Schumann technique, a brief display of scales, and a couple of aural tests, I set her free, saying: "And don't be late next week!" as a final piece of advice which, however innocently intended, was bound to sound ironic to Sharla.

"Oh, don't you worry about that!" she smilingly retorted and, much to my delight, planted a firm farewell kiss on my lips before regretfully taking her leave of me.



## *The Weekly Confession*

When she arrived at the church there was nobody to be seen. The building was almost deserted. Apart from some barely audible mumbling from the confessional, there was nobody to be heard either. It was all very quiet.

Glancing down at her wristwatch, she saw that it was exactly 2.30pm, the time she was usually expected. The priest would be quite disappointed with her if she arrived late, as experience had recently shown, and might even decline to absolve her. It was one thing to arrive a sinner, but to depart the church an even bigger one was quite another! She so hated to repeat her confessions.

Sharon Conroy had just turned eighteen. With a shapely figure, a pretty face, a pleasant manner, good taste, and a few additional charms besides, she possessed virtually all the personal advantages for which a young woman of moderate means could reasonably hope. From a very early stage in her church-going career she had built up a considerable trust in Father James' confidence, in his congenially unpretentious manner of first absorbing and then absolving sins. Now that she had blossomed into a highly attractive not to say intelligent person, this confidence seemed even more important to her than previously, and notably as a means of securing his

profoundest concern for her sexual welfare. It was he, after all, who had one day assured her that he always took her interests directly to heart.

She sat down on the end of the pew nearest the confessional and, bowing her head, respectfully closed her eyes. It was so still in the church that, excited as she was, she could hear her heart beating. The slightest movement on her part would have seemed like a sudden violence. A few tiny beads of sweat rolled slowly down her back and were absorbed by her underclothes. The deathly coolness of the place was so apparent on warm days like today ... it was a wonder to her that she didn't catch a chill, as she had often feared doing, from these sudden violent changes of temperature. Father James could at least have taken the trouble to warm the place up a bit!

Slowly opening her eyes she glanced towards the confessional, from whence the steady mumbling, now more audible than before, behind its thick curtain indicated that the priest was engaged in absolving an old man, probably the old fellow who had been there at a similar time the previous week; though what it was, exactly, that such an elderly person could be held guilty of ... she didn't have the foggiest idea! Perhaps he gambled or drank immoderately, assuming he had the money? Well, whatever he did, he was evidently a sinner and, as such, Father James would know how to deal with him, to keep him on reasonably good terms with the Almighty. One had to admit that it didn't pay to

underestimate the power of redemption, especially where such an experienced emissary of God as this erudite priest was concerned!

After a few minutes had elapsed, the curtain behind which the elderly sinner had been hiding was carefully drawn back by a shrivelled hand, and a stooped figure, scarcely recognizable in the semi-darkness, slowly emerged from his part of the confessional with what may well have been a relieved expression on his ugly face, and straightaway shuffled off down the aisle, seemingly well on his way to eternity. The confessional would probably reek of pipe tobacco and spirits, but what matter! Father James was awaiting, whether in