

Bryan Hurt: The Next Ambassador to France



Bryan Hurt, Author of *Everyone Wants to Be Ambassador to France*. Image Copyright Emma Powell

In a literary culture full of “[McPoems](#)” and [hand-wringing](#) over the homogenization of literature because of a supposed surplus of MFA programs, Bryan Hurt breaks the mold. He’s as educated as any creative writer out there, having studied under such luminaries as T.C. Boyle and Aimee Bender in the University of Southern California’s [PhD program](#) in Creative Writing. He has also done his fair share of instructing in the MFA world.

Despite—or perhaps because of—Hurt’s background in formal creative writing programs, his stories are utterly unique. The stories in [Everyone Wants to be Ambassador to France](#) hold all the quirk and hopeful humanity of George Saunders’s best work while somehow capturing the inner sadness of works by Raymond Carver, who is no stranger to young MFA students learning the form. Except in Bryan Hurt’s narrative in which a sad and lonely man puts all his belongings on the lawn priced to sell, no one dances on that lawn for the man; instead they beat him up. Even in light of the comparisons and allusions, Hurt’s stories are uniquely his own. I’m certainly not the only one who thinks so, as Hurt’s collection was awarded the [Starcherone](#) Prize for Innovative Fiction.

Hurt refuses to shy away from impactful and relevant issues, but he does it with humor, aplomb, and no small amount of grace. Take the story "[Contract](#)." The story's form takes that of an actual legal contract with all its enumerated points and subpoints. The protagonist is a CEO condemned to sacrifice everyone he loves—as in, actual blood sacrifice—to appease the shareholders who make his job possible. Bryan Hurt simultaneously creates a contract with the reader through deft metafictional analyses (e.g., "9.4... [T]he story has made certain promises to its readers...10.10...There was only ever one way this story was going to end...") and eviscerates the upward-mobility-at-all-costs mindset of corporate America, all while making astute readers laugh out loud at word-play and absurdities that—coming from Hurt—don't seem so much absurd as they seem like an insightful look at what makes us all tick.

Bryan Hurt masters the [art of subtext](#) in both form and content. In the opening story, Hurt packs an entire analysis of ages-old patriarchal influence in love and marriage into fewer than four pages. "The Beast of Marriage" affirms what Jack Kerouac wrote approximately sixty years ago: "Boys and girls in America have such a sad time together..." But in Hurt's collection, it's not just boys and girls in America. It's boys and girls on their honeymoon in France. It's also a lonely boy missing a girl from his basement, where he builds his own dwarf star and mini-universe and becomes something of a god in his own right. It's also a lonely astronaut missing his father while he walks on the moon. It's also illicit lovers riding in a car that drives itself.

Both hilarious and heartbreaking, Bryan



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Hurt's stories ask the big questions. In "Panic Attack," Hurt's narrator muses, "What's going to be okay? Are we going to make more money? Be less stuck? Be less tired?" But with the entire collection, Hurt implicitly asks bigger questions like, will everything get better? Are we doomed? Hurt won't explicitly tell you the answer to those questions, but his narrator does tell us what kind of story he wants, which—as a gift to us—is exactly the kind of story that Bryan Hurt writes: "I want a story that answers yes to all of these questions. A story that's definitely not a real story because it tells me that things will get better."

And in an age like this—with fear and terror dominating the media—who even wants real stories anymore? Or put another way, who doesn't want stories that tell us things will get better? Plus, as Bryan Hurt writes with his tongue planted firmly in his cheek, "Berets are cute...French is cute. There's nothing more American than being cute."

Matthew J. Hefti holds a BA in English, an MFA in Creative

Writing, and he is currently pursuing his JD at the University of Wisconsin Law School. He is a military veteran, having served two combat tours in Iraq and two combat tours in Afghanistan as an explosive ordnance disposal technician. Among other publications, his words have been seen in *Pennsylvania English; War, Literature and the Arts; Vol. 1 Brooklyn*, and Chad Harbach's *MFA v. NYC*. His debut novel, [*A Hard and Heavy Thing*](#) (Tyrus / F+W) is now available where books are sold.