



The Waterworks: A Novel

By E.L. Doctorow

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The Waterworks: A Novel By E.L. Doctorow

“An elegant page-turner of nineteenth-century detective fiction.”

–The Washington Post Book World

One rainy morning in 1871 in lower Manhattan, Martin Pemberton a freelance writer, sees in a passing stagecoach several elderly men, one of whom he recognizes as his supposedly dead and buried father. While trying to unravel the mystery, Pemberton disappears, sending McIlvaine, his employer, the editor of an evening paper, in pursuit of the truth behind his freelancer’s fate. Layer by layer, McIlvaine reveals a modern metropolis surging with primordial urges and sins, where the Tweed Ring operates the city for its own profit and a conspicuously self-satisfied nouveau-riche ignores the poverty and squalor that surrounds them. In E. L. Doctorow’s skilled hands, *The Waterworks* becomes, in the words of *The New York Times*, “a dark moral tale . . . an eloquently troubling evocation of our past.”

“Startling and spellbinding . . . The waters that lave the narrative all run to the great confluence, where the deepest issues of life and death are borne along on the swift, sure vessel of [Doctorow’s] poetic imagination.”

–*The New York Times Book Review*

“Hypnotic . . . a dazzling romp, an extraordinary read, given strength and grace by the telling, by the poetic voice and controlled cynical lyricism of its streetwise and world-weary narrator.”

–*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

“A gem of a novel, intimate as chamber music . . . a thriller guaranteed to leave readers with residual chills and shudders.”

–*Boston Sunday Herald*

“Enthralling . . . a story of debauchery and redemption that is spellbinding from first page to last.”

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Each novel by Doctorow is an entirely different experience, a journey of the imagination into hitherto uncharted territory. *The Waterworks*, set in the corrupt but hideously exciting New York of the decade following the Civil War, is the strangest such journey yet. The narrator, an elderly newspaperman named McIlvaine, recalls the bizarre events surrounding the disappearance of one of his paper's best freelance writers in 1871. Martin Pemberton was the son of Augustus Pemberton, a brutal, cunning man who had made a fortune as a war profiteer, then died, leaving his family mysteriously penniless. Martin was convinced he had seen his father alive, in a coach in the company of other old men; then Martin vanished. McIlvaine interests the municipal police, in the person of odd, incorruptible Captain Edmund Donne, and together they ferret out a weird scheme in which aging millionaires have paid the brilliant, cold-blooded Dr. Sartorius to preserve their lives in a state of suspended animation. The tale has the brightly lit intensity and surreality of a dream, heightened by McIlvaine's halting, amazed narration; and such is the power of Doctorow's imagination that the very city itself, its burgeoning modernity, its huge machines, its febrile citizenry, seems to become a major actor in the drama. *World's Fair* and *Billy Bathgate* were both given a human dimension by their child's-eye point of view. Here Doctorow is taking a larger risk by placing the reader at a much greater distance from the events and subduing his contemporary sensibility in favor of a wonderfully convincing 19th-century angle of vision. It is as if Edgar Allan Poe and Henry James had somehow combined their incompatible geniuses to bring this profoundly haunting fable to life.

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From School Library Journal

YA?Newspaper editor McIlvaine investigates the disappearance of freelance journalist Martin Pemberton and uncovers a macabre scientific experiment that involves Pemberton's supposedly dead father and several other wealthy old men. The narrative's digressions contain the heart of the novel: Doctorow's presentation of New York in 1871 as impacted by the Industrial Revolution and the corruption of Boss Tweed's government. Although the book is not overly long, its complexity of diction will deter all but the most erudite YAs. Those who persevere will gain insights into journalism, post-Civil War society, and political corruption while considering the implications of medical experimentation, then and now.?Arlene Bathgate, Chantilly High School, VA

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From Library Journal

Something's amiss with Martin Pemberton, renegade son of rich, unscrupulous Augustus Pemberton and favorite freelancer of the persevering editor of the *New York Telegram*, who narrates this tale. First, Martin claims to have seen his dead father on a horse-drawn omnibus, and then the son disappears. The worried editor contacts Inspector Edmund Donne—the only honest cop in 1870s New York, where the Tweed Ring holds sway—and eventually they discover that the ailing Augustus is part of an experiment by the brilliant Dr. Sartorius to prolong the lives of several old men rich enough to foot the bill. Cast as a mad scientist, Sartorius uses methods that prompt the narrator to mourn, "I was haunted...not by ghosts, but by Science....I imagined that it all might be initiatory, a kind of spiritual test in a world ruled by God after all." The twist, of course, is that Sartorius's methods are commonplace medical procedures today. Doctorow wants us to think about issues of mortality and morality, and indeed this piece works better as a philosophical treatise than a novel. The points are neatly made, the characters well etched, and the plot hums along nicely, but it doesn't quite come alive. It's not the best Doctorow, but most libraries will still want this.

--Barbara Hoffert, *"Library Journal"*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Frances Fortier:

Book is to be different per grade. Book for children until eventually adult are different content. As it is known to us that book is very important usually. The book The Waterworks: A Novel ended up being making you to know about other expertise and of course you can take more information. It is quite advantages for you. The guide The Waterworks: A Novel is not only giving you considerably more new information but also being your friend when you really feel bored. You can spend your own spend time to read your book. Try to make relationship together with the book The Waterworks: A Novel. You never truly feel lose out for everything in case you read some books.

Janet Kline:

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Maxine Whitley:

The reason? Because this The Waterworks: A Novel is an unordinary book that the inside of the publication waiting for you to snap the item but latter it will jolt you with the secret the idea inside. Reading this book next to it was fantastic author who all write the book in such wonderful way makes the content inside easier to understand, entertaining approach but still convey the meaning completely. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this any more or you going to regret it. This amazing book will give you a lot of positive aspects than the other book have such as help improving your talent and your critical thinking approach. So , still want to hesitate having that book? If I had been you I will go to the book store hurriedly.

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