

Dance of the Happy Shades

Alice Munro

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Alice Munro's territory is the farms and semi-rural towns of south-western Ontario. In these dazzling stories she deals with the self-discovery of adolescence, the joys and pains of love and the despair and guilt of those caught in a narrow existence. And in sensitively exploring the lives of ordinary men and women, she makes us aware of the universal nature of their fears, sorrows and aspirations.

Dance of the Happy Shades Details


Date : Published March 2nd 2000 by Vintage (first published 1968)

ISBN : 9780099273776

Author : Alice Munro

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Frabe says

Cathy says

This is the second collection of short stories by Alice Munro I've read. The first, *Runaway*, I described as 'bleak'. But having read this collection, which was actually the first she ever published, I think I was too harsh. Instead, I think I should have said 'unflinching in her observation'. I'm going to pick out three stories that I think illustrate both Munro's gift for observation and her ability to reveal the petty snobberies of small town life.

‘Then my father and I walk gradually down a long shabby, sort of street, with Silverwoods Ice Cream signs standing on the sidewalk, outside tiny, lighted stores...The street is shaded, in some places, by maple trees whose roots have cracked and heaved the sidewalk and spread out like crocodiles into the bare yards. People are sitting out, men in shirt-sleeves and undershirts and women in aprons – not people we know but if anybody looks ready to nod and say, “Warm night”, my father will nod too and say something the same.’

occupant of an old house who they believe is bringing down the value of their homes. Munro describes how the male residents of the new houses work on their properties at the weekends.

‘They worked with competitive violence and energy, all this being new to them; they were not men who made their livings by physical work. All day Saturday and Sunday they worked like this, so that in a year or two there should be green terraces, rock walls, shapely flower beds and ornamental shrubs.’

Don’t you just love that phrase ‘competitive violence’ to describe the sort of one-upmanship of neighbours?

In ‘Time of Death’, a tragic accident causes the other women of the community to rally round to support, Leona, the grieving mother.

‘Leona drew up her knees under the quilt and rocked herself back and forth as she wept, and threw her head down and then back (showing, as some of them noticed with a feeling of shame, the dirty lines on her neck).’

That detail of the woman’s dirty neck is what I meant by the unflinching nature of Munro’s observation. And, there is a further sting in the tail because it becomes clear their support is only temporary for a woman they consider of a lower class.

‘In the dark overheated kitchen the women felt the dignity of this sorrow in their maternal flesh, they were humble before this unwashed, unliked and desolate Leona.’

I really enjoyed these stories with their acute observation, dark humour and brilliant evocation of time and place. I hope if I’d read them when they were first published I’d have been adept enough to recognise Alice Munro as the huge literary talent she has since become.

Tim says

I chose this book for an independent reading project in my high school fiction class. My teacher suggested Munro because he thought I could identify with her particular writing style. This collection kept me enraptured with plot, characters, and the numerous nuggets of unexpected beauty dispersed throughout. Alice Munro is a brilliant writer, a fact I believe can be affirmed by the end of the titular story, *Dance of the Happy Shades*. Her stories and the characters within them have the uncanny ability to demand and hold your attention. I found (most prominently with the last story) that these stories are capable of manipulating one’s consciousness as a reader; I think Munro, aside from her superb style, knows the mind of the reader inside-out--and she capitalizes expertly on that understanding.

Konstantin says

[rating = A-]

One of my: Best Books of the Year (for 2017)

Alice Munro is the best short story writer because she can take the most basic of lives and expose the subtle and underlying factors of it, making it interesting and at once realistic (very much like Anne Tyler at her best). I love how Munro hints at or furthers another story in the collection, yet at the same time keeping it

individual and independent. She surprises you with the delicacy and veracity of her psychology and human behavior; she dazzles with the unexpected mundane; and she discovers her characters as she writes the story, not just revealing them to the reader but awakening them to their own fictional existence. Although *Runaway* is my favorite collection, *The Dance of the Happy Shades* showcases her early prowess at writing, and she is even adventurous in her narrative style and technique, which is a treat, for her latter work is usually told in the same format. A great collection of hate and power, love and injustice, guilt and ignorance, aging and living. Simply fantastic.

?EmanMarhoon says

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Ellen says

Alice Munro has written many collections of short stories, and her writing has fascinated me for years. This collection doesn't disappoint, and I'd recommend it for those of you who enjoy short stories that, although understated, evoke emotions in the reader and make you think. Wonderful stories!

Jenn(ifer) says

Intro (this piece inspired the title story): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BN7TG...>

Does anyone remember Steve's review of Lydia Davis's "Collected Stories" when he said "Lydia Davis shits out tiny nuggets of pure golden prose and says 'oh, this old thing'"? I didn't exactly agree with him on the Lydia Davis front, but I would love to steal that quote and use it in reference to Alice Munro.

Alice Munro is a master story teller. No, she didn't twist my brain into knots and exasperate me. No, she didn't leave me tingling from titillating tales. She didn't make my soul sink into some dark place. She simply tells great stories.

I had been unfamiliar with Alice Munro prior to my Summer of Women read-a-thon. *Dance of the Happy*

Shades is her first collection of short stories (Goodreads, it is NOT her 8th collection) and is the winner of the Governor General's Award (a big deal up there in Canada). Alice Munro has been touted as the greatest living short story writer.

If not for the words containing a superfluous 'u' here and there (colourful, flavourful), I would have been convinced Munro was writing about the American south. In fact, her writing reminded me a bit of Flannery O'Connor as she expertly explored the life of the "every (wo)man."

This is such a heartfelt collection and I'm so happy to have stumbled upon it. It was one of those serendipitous moments: days before I saw it in the two dollar bin at the book store, Steve recommended I try some Alice Munro. Don't you love those happy little coincidences?

"She sat with her legs folded under her looking out at the road where she might walk now in any direction she liked, and the world which lay flat and accessible and full of silence in front of her." (from *A Trip To the Coast*)

Outro: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djiuAT...>

Simona says

Con la Munro ritrovi un po' di te stessa, parti di te che credevi di avere perso, ma che improvvisamente emergono.

Nelle pagine di questa raccolta di racconti, la prima scritta dall'autrice e uscita nel 1968, vi sono immagini, sentimenti, luoghi e situazioni che fanno parte del corollario della Munro.

Sono racconti che parlano di noi, al nostro io, alla parte più intima e vera di ciascuno di noi, al nostro profondo svelandosi e svelandoci.

Ciò che sorprende dello stile di questa autrice è la semplicità, la straordinaria capacità di parlare, di raccontare e raccontarsi in modo chiaro, diretto, lineare arrivando diritto al cuore.

L'ultimo racconto "Danza delle ombre felici" che dà il titolo alla raccolta lascia amarezza, ma anche bellezza in chi si accinge a leggere queste pagine dense e piene di significato che raccontano chi siamo sotto ogni punto di vista.

Nadaalaali says

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Ebtihal Abuali says

1. **התאמה:** המסמך מתאים לפרק 10, סעיף 10א(ב) לחוק, לפיו חייב המנהל להעביר את המסמך לרשות המוסמכת להחליט על אישור או דחיית המסמך.

2. **החלטת המנהל:** המנהל החליט לאשר את המסמך, כפי שהוגש, ללא תנאים או הגבלות.

3. **הערה:** המסמך יישלח לרשות המוסמכת להחליט על אישור או דחיית המסמך, תוך 14 יום ממועד אישורו.

•Karen• says

Like the children in fairy stories who have seen their parents make pacts with terrifying strangers, who have discovered that our fears are based on nothing but the truth, but who come back fresh from marvellous escapes and take up their knives and forks, with humility and good manners, prepared to live happily ever after-like them, dazed and powerful with secrets, I never said a word. (Images)

Thankfully Munro stores up those childhood secrets and works them with a strange alchemy into gold. This was her first collection of stories, written over a period of fifteen years or so and published in 1968 when she was in her mid thirties. They draw much on her childhood and youth, growing up in a hard-scrabble kind of poverty in rural Ontario, in rooms with a square of linoleum and views of sun-blasted fields outside the window.

She seems to have arrived in the world as a fully-fledged writer: it is the deceptive simplicity of her writing that betrays an incomparable talent. It's the kind of writing that seems effortless, and can only appear so by much hard work. She has an amazing way of getting a character up and running with a few pertinent lines of description, or revealing a whole mood in one image. In *Sunday Afternoon* Alva is working as a maid for the Gannetts for the summer. She is free after she's done the lunch dishes, but what is she to do? "Her room was over the garage, and very hot. Sitting on the bed rumpled her uniform, and she did not have another ironed. She could take it off and sit in her slip, but Mrs Gannett might call her, and want her at once." Sunday afternoon encapsulated.

Free and yet not free, cold and gentle, bizarre and domestic: Munro is fond of the apparently paradoxical pairing. These stories are, perhaps, a little straighter, a little less subtle than her later work, but her flinty wisdom transforms the mundane world of knives and forks, and turns the everyday into the wonder of a moment of revelation, and the soaring power that can come with understanding.

Zaynāb Book Minimalist says

5 fucking stars my God. What a fantastic collection of stories.

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Carloesse says

Era da quando avevo letto “La vista da Castle Rock” (allora uscito da poco) che non leggevo racconti di Alice Munro. Eppure mi erano piaciuti molto, e fin da allora mi ripromettevo di leggerne altre raccolte. Promessa rinnovata con maggiore convinzione anche dopo il Nobel. Solo adesso riesco a farlo e proprio con questo suo libro di esordio. Che conferma tutto il bene che potevo dire già da allora e la mia convinzione che la Munro è una grandissima maestra nell’arte del racconto (sicuramente tra il meglio che ci possano offrire gli scrittori viventi). E che lo era già quando cominciò a scrivere e pubblicare.

Neal Adolph says

Many words far better than the ones which I can put together into a sentence have been said about Alice Munro’s extraordinary talent. Many of those words have been directed at this book, her first collection of stories, and how remarkable it is for being a first collection of stories. Having read it one wonders why there haven’t been more words devoted to it or its author, why she, unfortunately, remains hidden away from most readers for no reason other than her chosen form. Alice Munro is a wonder, a treasure, the best living writer in the English language.

I read her books slowly, as I do with most short story collections, picking up stories and then putting the book down for a week or maybe longer at a time, and so I often spend four or five or six months reading the same collection. With other authors this doesn’t work, it seems, breathing so much between the stories, but with Munro it is the only way I can steal away enough determination to make it through her work. One doesn’t steal away determination for Munro because they are unpleasurable - in fact, I often want to read many of her stories back to back and force myself to put her work down, because you don’t rush your way through Munro anymore than you would rush your way through Beckett - but because they require attention. Not an inordinate amount, the magic of Munro being that the stuff happens and develops without the reader knowing it, but enough that you can’t half-ass your way through her stories.

But everything you give to Munro she gives back to you many times over. I read several of the stories in this collection many times, and with each reading I acquired a new and deeper understanding of her art, her characters, the fine, precise shaping of their humanity and surroundings. I would start stories, put them down feeling I couldn’t handle the tension, pick them up and in the first paragraphs discover some new sorcery, and both the first reading and the second would be startled by the end result of the story. And I would be quite unexpectedly weakened by that end results at times. The Office, for example, left me wandering the streets of Colombia for a few days with some inexplicable weariness, almost crying for a moment or two

without realizing that I was almost crying for a moment or two. The Peace of Urtecht made me wonder at the borders of independence of servitude in family life. Images and Walker Brothers Cowboy made me wonder at the unknown and unknowable aspects of the world around us. Boy and Girls, have you read Boy and Girls?, because Boys and Girls is perhaps the greatest short story I have ever read about a young person confronting reality - which is, I suppose her central theme, the human spirit confronting and contorting their self to the demands of a unrelenting and unforgiving reality.

There are some astonishing classics here, as there are in any book by Munro, but here, as they often are with Munro, the stories are relentless in their consistent quality, hence why I needed space between them to recuperate and breathe. Red Dress-1946, Postcard, Sunday Afternoon, Dance of the Happy Shades, The Shining Houses. You could name nearly every single story in this collection and recommend it as a stellar example in the art of crafting and shaping literature.

Unfortunately, Munro has retired from writing, and so I don't anticipate receiving any more of her wisdom in the coming years, and I wonder if she will allow her family to release the unreleased after she passes. Fortunately, I have enough books by her to keep me thrilled to read for years to come. Damn near too many, perhaps. I float in a sea of riches, or I drown in them; either way I am, with Munro, in a rare state of admiration and euphoria. Read this book, or any of her books, especially if you don't like short stories, and especially if you like short stories.

Anatoly says

excellent writing and usually with interesting plots and eventual outcomes. The main downside for me is that I was never able to really identify with any of the different characters or feel something for them. I felt a little bit remote.

Laima says

Dance of the Happy Shades by Alice Munro

I really liked this book.

I liked it a LOT.

Ok... I loved it!

I've been meaning to read work by Alice Munro for a while so when I found a second hand copy of Dance of the Happy Shades for a few dollars, I picked it up.

This book is a Governor General's Award winning collection of short stories.

The following quote by Hugh Garner in the forward to this book, pretty much, in my opinion, describes the quality and essence of Ms. Munro's writing.

"The second-rate writers, the writers manques, the professional-commerical writers, find it impossible to

write about ordinary people in ordinary situations, living ordinary lives, and make the people, their lives and their situations not only plausible and pleasurable but artistically alive. Hence their reliance on the grotesque, the far-out theme, the “different” or snob character, and the exotic or non-existent locale. The literary artist, on the other hand, uses people we all know, situations which are familiar to us and places we know or remember.”

In this collection, Alice Munro does an amazing job of telling stories of ordinary people in ordinary situations who seem very real and often remind you of someone you know - family, friends, even yourself. Many of the stories are sad, some make you angry, others will have you nodding your head, “yup... I know someone like that”. What they all have in common is beautifully detailed descriptions that paint visual images in your mind.

In **The Shining Houses** a new subdivision is being built in an old area of town creating a divide between the old and the new. New homes filled with young families and perfect lawns sit across the road from very old, original farmhouses, dilapidated yet still occupied. I see this situation a lot where I live because home construction is booming and spreading to the countryside. These young, upscale suburbanites do not appreciate the view from their front windows and agree to try enforcing laws to have the old farmhouses bulldozed by the town.

In **The Office** a married woman with children rents office space above a store where she can write her novel in peace and quiet, away from the normal bustle of her home. Unfortunately, the landlord constantly pesters her creating more frustration and annoyance than she would have experienced at home.

An Ounce of Cure is a story about a young babysitter who is left in charge of sleeping children while the parents and their friends go out for the night. Helen is from a family which doesn't drink alcohol so when she sees bottles sitting on the counter, she becomes curious and experiments with mixing drinks. Disaster results.

The time of Death is a very, very sad story. A poor family loses their youngest child due to an unfortunate accident. There is kindness shown by friends and neighbours towards the mother while the reaction of the eldest daughter, who was responsible for the incident, is strangely inappropriate.

Dance of the Happy Shades is my favourite story. The piano teacher reminds me exactly of my husband's piano teacher. She is quite elderly and continues to teach and hold recitals that nobody really wants to attend. But... she is a wonderful lady who is kind to everyone. Parents of children she teaches, sadly, don't see her that way and are frustrated having to attend the recitals. When developmentally challenged children attend the latest recital, mothers in attendance are shocked that she would invite these kids to play. Play they do... very beautifully, leaving those in attendance mesmerized by the music.

Alice Munroe had this book published in 1968 and continues to write today. I look forward to reading more of her stories.
