



The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder

Henry Miller

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First published in 1959, this touching fable tells of Auguste, a famous clown who could make people laugh but who sought to impart to his audiences a lasting joy. Originally inspired by a series of circus and clown drawings by the cubist painter Fernand Léger, Miller eventually used his own decorations to accompany the text in their stead. "Undoubtedly," he says in his explanatory epilogue, "it is the strangest story I have yet written. . . . No, more even than all the stories which I based on fact and experience is this one the truth. My whole aim in writing has been to tell the truth, as I know it. Heretofore all my characters have been real, taken from life, my own life. Auguste is unique in that he came from the blue. But what is this blue which surrounds and envelopes us if not reality itself? . . . We have only to open our eyes and hearts, to become one with that which is."

The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder Details

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Author : Henry Miller

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Lynne King says

Henry Miller has for me always been a veritable, serendipitous surprise. Some of his books have rather shocked me despite their literary excellence, nevertheless I grew to love his travel books and letters and so when I was recommended this very short fable, I knew in my heart that I would love it and I was indeed proved right in my thoughts and expectations.

Miller always admitted that his books were based on “fact and experience”. But when he came to this book about the life of a clown, Auguste, he openly stated:

“My whole aim in writing has been to tell the truth, as I know it. Heretofore all my characters have been real, taken from my life, my own life. Auguste is unique in that he came from the blue. But what is the blue which surrounds and envelopes us if not reality itself. We invent nothing, truly. We borrow and recreate. We uncover and discover. All has been given as the mystics say. We have only to open our eyes and hearts, to become one with that which is.”

What a gem of a book this has turned out to be. It's very short, only forty-nine pages but it's poetic; full of love and sheer artistry and I was enamoured with it. Miller always associated himself with the life of the clown and I applaud him. Bravo for the pleasure that he gives to mere individuals such as myself.

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Ahmad Sharabiani says

Das lachein am fusse der leiter = The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder, Henry Miller

First published in 1959, this touching fable tells of Auguste, a famous clown who could make people laugh but who sought to impart to his audiences a lasting joy. Originally inspired by a series of circus and clown drawings by the cubist painter Fernand Léger, Miller eventually used his own decorations to accompany the text in their stead. "Undoubtedly," he says in his explanatory epilogue, 'it is the strangest story I have yet written. ... No, more even than all the stories which I based on fact and experience is this one the truth. My whole aim in writing has been to tell the truth, as I know it. Heretofore all my characters have been real, taken from life, my own life. Auguste is unique in that he came from the blue. But what is this blue which surrounds and envelopes us if not reality itself? ... We have only to open our eyes and hearts, to become one with that which is."

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Ipsis says

Uma história simpática e que entretém!

"A vida é feita de pequenos fingimentos de que não podemos desperdiçar."

Eu não quero ser ninguém senão eu mesmo."

"A alegria é como um rio: corre continuamente."

"Seremos nós próprios, unicamente nós próprios, é algo extraordinário."

"Nada há no mundo que não tenha a sua importância."

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האם אתה חושב שיש לך משהו להוסיף? , אולי אתה חושב שיש לך משהו להוסיף? !
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Henry Martin says

Amidst the millions of words of autobiographical writing, stands this lonely book, or rather a novella, *The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder*, Miller's one and only composition that drew inspiration "from the blue", as Miller himself put it. However, do not be mistaken...this novella shines with brilliance. Apart from the exceptional writing Miller's readers are accustomed to, this story is far more complicated than any other novella I had read, ever.

Auguste, the centerpiece in this intricate work, is the embodiment of human suffering, a man who carries out his duty until the last breath. His duty being to bring a lasting joy to his audiences. For Auguste, there is nothing easier than to make his audience smile, for he is a clown, but the brief moment when he is on stage is not what he is after. His aim is far superior - Auguste's desire is to unite people with endless joy, the kind that comes only through God himself. But this task, this task bigger than any one human, was a difficult one.

When Auguste takes his "trick" to a new level, the audience, as humans tend to do when faced with something they do not comprehend, went up against him. Auguste abandoned the circus and took to wandering. Nevertheless, a man can escape his surroundings, but a man cannot escape himself. For Auguste, his shadow was always with him, in him, unsatisfied, longing. And so, after a nightmare where Auguste was faced with end of his life, he stumbles upon a circus at the edge of town. His past, his shadow, catches up with him, and Auguste is given a new chance to fulfill his task when one of the clowns falls ill and the circus needs a replacement.

Auguste agrees, partly because he wants to relive his old life, partly because he wants to kill his old life off by making his "persona" more famous than he ever was as himself.

With great success, Auguste is back in his element, until the clown whom he replaced suddenly dies. It is then, that Auguste discovers reality. The reality of himself, the world, the humankind. The reality that joy is much more than the limited experience he allows his audiences within the boundaries of the circus. Auguste dives deep into himself, into the darkness of the world, and he finds the light he was searching for all his life, becoming one with it.

The intricacy of this story, the world in which we live, filled with suffering and joy, the two primary contradicting emotions, is so wonderfully portrayed here. Auguste, complicated like life itself...a man, strong and weak, but above all, vulnerable for he is too human. One of the most fascinating books ever written. Do not be fooled by its size...it will sneak up on you from nowhere, without warning. One of the best works by Miller.

Alborz Baghipour says

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Teresa Proença says

Em 1947, o pintor Fernand Léger pediu a Henry Miller que escrevesse um texto para acompanhar uma série de 40 ilustrações sobre palhaços e o circo. Saiu esta pequena maravilha, que foi rejeitada por ser imprópria (mas não por ter algo que se assemelhe a *Sexus*).

O sorriso aos pés da escada é uma história terna e comovente sobre um palhaço, Augusto, que tem a ambição, não de fazer rir, mas de dotar de alegria os espectadores. Até ao dia em que se apercebe que não conhece a felicidade.

*"Seremos nós próprios, unicamente nós próprios, é algo de extraordinário. Mas como chegar a isso, como alcançá-lo? Ah!, eis o truque mais difícil de todos. Difícil, exactamente, porque não envolve esforço. Tentas não ser isto nem aquilo, nem grande nem pequeno, nem hábil nem desajeitado... estás a perceber? Fazes o que te vem à mão. De boa vontade. Porque não há nada que não tenha a sua importância. Nada. Em vez de risos e aplausos recibes sorrisos — e é tudo. Mas é justamente o próprio **tudo**... mais do que alguém pode pedir."*

(Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Clown*)

zahra haji says

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Luís C. says

Book composed of two medium-quality novels. One much more than the other.

The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder

Henry Miller, a self-taught American author whose avant-garde writings, satirical or autobiographical works, have marked their seals in the twentieth century, committed, in a completely different genre, **A Smile at the Foot of the Ladder**, a fairy tale with some Philosophical approach that addresses images and appearances, authenticity, the search for the true self and thus happiness through the theme of the clown.

A simple story, that of the August clown whose talent and the development of a number at the bottom of a "scale stretched towards the moon" make him famous until the intolerable demands of the public make him give up pleasing. The replacement of Antoine, an ordinary clown, will put him face to face with a cruel choice and his own reality.

"The clown is the poet in action," says Henry Miller, "he is the story he plays", "between the world and him laughs", "a laugh, silent, without gaiety" self-deprecating laughter "born of tears".

Moloch

Moloch lives in America in the 1930s, marked by the arrival of thousands of Jews, who seemed to guess the Second World War. And it is without false moralism that Moloch (behind him, Miller?) assumes that in America the Jews were not welcome. He calls them "pigs" and says that this is the main reason to dislike them.

But who really likes Moloch? And who does like him? Moloch will find out if he wants to save. As the clown Augustus will also discover the smile that will bring his life back. Or, perhaps, immortality.

3 1/2 Stars

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