



Death in Midsummer and Other Stories

*Yukio Mishima , Donald Keene (Translator) , Ivan Morris (Translator) , Geoffrey Sargent (Translator) ,
Edward G. Seidensticker (Translator)*

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Recognized throughout the world for his brilliance as a novelist and playwright, Yukio Mishima is also noted as a master of the short story in his native Japan, where the form is practiced as a major art. Nine of his finest stories were selected by Mishima himself for translation in this book; they represent his extraordinary ability to depict, with deftness and penetration, a wide variety of human beings in moments of significance. Often his characters are sophisticated modern Japanese who turn out to be not so liberated from the past as they had thought.

In the title story, "Death in Midsummer," which is set at a beach resort, a triple tragedy becomes a cloud of doom that requires exorcising. In another, "Patriotism," a young army officer and his wife choose a way of vindicating their belief in ancient values that is as violent as it is traditional; it prefigured his own death by *seppuku* in November 1970. There is a story in which the sad truth of the relationship between a businessman and his former mistress is revealed through a suggestion of the unknown, and another in which a working-class couple, touching in their simple love for each other, pursue financial security by rather shocking means.

Also included is one of Mishima's "modern N? plays," remarkable for the impact which its brevity and uncanny intensity achieve. The English versions have been done by four outstanding translators: Donald Keene, Ivan Morris, Geoffrey Sargent, and Edward Seidensticker.

Photograph on back cover by T. Kamiya; cover design by David Ford

Death in Midsummer and Other Stories Details

Date : Published September 15th 2015 by New Directions (first published 1966)

ISBN :

Author : Yukio Mishima , Donald Keene (Translator) , Ivan Morris (Translator) , Geoffrey Sargent (Translator) , Edward G. Seidensticker (Translator)

Format : Paperback 192 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, Cultural, Japan, Asian Literature, Japanese Literature

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From Reader Review Death in Midsummer and Other Stories for online ebook

Sinem A. says

Mishima, kendi ifadesiyle "saydam bir kristal" bence.

Sanki ço?u insan?n fark?na bile varamad??? duygular? yakalay?p zaman? durduruyor. Onu okurken dünyay? gizleyen perdeler aralan?yor sanki.

Beki says

horribly visceral and terrible at times, each of these stories subtly keeps us in the characters' present, often mundane moments. mishima covers the quiet death of children on a beach outside of tokyo, awfully repressed homosexuality in a kabuki theater, and the passing lives of former lovers in japan as they try to reconnect unexpectedly in downtown San Francisco. at once fantastic and reserved, the book is wonderfully moving reading- but the sort of moving that keeps you still. good shit.

????? ??? says

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Nelson Zagalo says

Gostei de ler Mishima, embora sinta uma espécie de amor-ódio pela sua escrita, por um lado a rigidez formal confere-lhe um controlo sumptuoso da escrita, nomeadamente do ritmo e consequente envolvência do leitor, por outro lado, essa mesma rigidez contamina o ideário com um conservadorismo que me afasta pela atrocidade humanista que comporta.

Morte em Pleno Verão: 4.8

Três Milhões de Ienes: 3

Garrafas-Termos: 3.5

O Sacerdote do Templo de Shiga e o Seu Amor: 4.5

As Sete Pontes: 3

Patriotismo: 5

Onnagata: 3

Uma nota final. Até agora não gostava de ler livros de contos por não darem espaço suficiente ao desenvolvimento dos personagens, que é aquilo que mais prezo na literatura. Na leitura deste livro identifiquei outro problema. Quando os contos são intensos, capazes de abalar a nossa estrutura emocional,

terminar o texto e ter logo outro a apresentar-se com um novo mundo, novos sentimentos, retira uma certa "graça" à experiência da leitura. Quando termino algo deste calibre, gosto de virar a página e fechar o livro, e não ficar com a ideia que ainda não terminou, mas ainda sabendo que aquilo que falta não tem nada que ver com o que acabei de ler.

Ana says

Esta edição reúne um conjunto de dez contos, um dos quais (Dojoji) em forma de peça de teatro. São contos relativamente breves, escolhidos pelo próprio autor para comporem esta colectânea, fortemente imbuídos da cultura japonesa do pós-guerra, e maioritariamente com finais abertos ou enigmáticos. Os temas são diversos bem como os sentimentos que deles procedem, desde a melancolia do conto que dá título ao livro, ao lirismo de *O Sacerdote do Templo de Shiga e o seu amor*, à intensidade do dramatismo operático de *Patriotismo* (um dos melhores contos que já li), à ambiguidade de *Onnagata* e à comicidade de *A Pérola* (creio que foi a primeira vez que este autor me fez rir). Um excelente conjunto, com todos os contos a merecerem uma nota manifestamente positiva e alguns mesmo excepcionais. Já era fã do Mishima romancista, fiquei a admirar também a sua arte para a narrativa breve.

Morte no Verão - 5

Três Milhões de Ienes - 3

Garrafas-termo - 4

O Sacerdote do Templo Shiga e seu Amor - 5

As Sete Pontes - 3

Patriotismo - 5 +++++

Dojoji - 4

Onnagata - 4

A Pérola - 4

Cueiros - 3

Scoobs says

its summer time in los angeles. so i know we are all thinking about suicide. if only i was a samurai. if only i had a blade. it would truly cut down on my bus ride from culver city to west hollywood. would booksoup miss me at all?

tosh would. he introduced me to mishima. to his videos on youtube and to shrader on dvd.

no worries, i'll be in for the tommy chong event tomorrow, but.....

Hadrian says

Even more intense and beautiful than I remember, especially Patriotism.

Mariel says

Have you seen Yukio Mishima? He's a really buff Japanese guy. He might be carrying a big ass sword. He's probably wearing tighty whiteys because he was wearing little white underpants in every photo I've ever seen of him. How many really buff Japanese guys with swords in little white underwear can there be? SOMEONE must have seen him. Will you tell him that I changed my mind about thinking he was kinda good but not really favorite material? That maybe he was kinda too melodramatic for someone as down to earth as me? I've run all over town checking for editions of his books just so I could apologize to a photo of him (in white underwear. Fruit of the loom is really good underwear! It seldom rides up when running through town frantically to apologize for being an asshole yet again). I looked for his face next to Jesus in the burger sign. My alphabet soup spelled Yuk. Shit! I scrounged toy stores for ouija boards. Anything! I was wrong! How can I eat my words? My alphabet soup won't spell I'm sorry. You are a-w-e-s-o-m-e.

He's in everything I watch. The spirit of nippon. He's the gay samurai on my youtube (that came on by itself!). He's in the advertisement on vimeo for something I didn't actually pay attention to. He's my drug dealer with really big lips. He's not Robert Smith because Yukio was really buff, like I said. But other than that! I can't watch anything from the '80s at all. [If you don't want to click on those links here are some descriptions: 1. Yukio Mishima. 2. It's a video of Vince Clarke from Erasure pretending to be a Samurai so he can make it with the model who was probably dating one of the guys from Color Me Badd at the time. The one who liked to wear orange. The seasons change and he flies around rain or shine. His stunt double, Hank Azaria, performs cart wheels and rides on the wire thingies that don't ever really look like anyone is doing anything other than being lifted on wire thingies. Hank Azaria risked his life on dangerous wire thingies so that Vince Clarke could have no chemistry with a starving model! 3. It's an advertisement. It didn't make me buy anything. Actually, that should be #2. 4. A man in ugly clothes wishes he had drugs because only drug dealers or pimps get away with wearing such ugly 1970s looking clothes. Faces are not good movie theatres. My forehead is not actually four feet tall. That was just the mean nickname my brother's friends gave me in high school ("four foot forehead"). Stop showing these stupid '80s videos on my forehead!)

Riiiiing. Riiiiing. Okay, I'm lying. My ringtone is REO Speedwagon's Keep on loving you. I'm gonna keep on looooooving yooooooou. (5. REO Speedwagon are gonna keep on loving you.)

Hello? He forgives me! We're best buddies now and I'm going to read more of his books. It turns out we like all of the same stuff! Girlfriend, I'm coming over! Yukio is wearing his tightey whiteys. I've got one of those white t-shirts (is it a wife beater if you are a girl?) on with mine because I don't have a six pack like Yukio does. We're picking out a cute prison boyfriend for Yukio and I'm lamenting that I'll never, ever be with Morrissey. I pick out a cute prison boyfriend for Morrissey too. My shirtsleeve has a cigarette pack rolled up in it because I'm going to start smoking to cut down on my life to be like deathwish Yukio. Then like all slumber parties it gets late and we are sick on eating too many noodles and I get to being depressed and shit. Yukio totally gets me. He's not melodramatic at all! Like not at all! It's midnight and the tightey whiteys are too tight. That gets us to talking about having kids and responsibility and shit. What if there will never be any more kids? They've got me by the balls. I say something like how come the tight pants from the '70s didn't prevent me from ever being born? So unfair.

Death in Midsummer- I've seen those films like In the Bedroom about parents grieving over a dead kid and blaming each other and I'd suspect maybe I was some kind of an asshole for thinking none of the people revelations were anything revealing. Like, I got all of this in the first moments and now it looks like crying to keep yourself going. Ahem, crying to get awards for feeling more than the other guy feels. ("I'd like to thank

my parents ...") And maybe I was egotistical thinking I knew how someone else felt and now can't I please feel something new. My previous feeling about Yukio Mishima was that he was cynical about people in the way that I felt watching something like *In the Bedroom*. Like maybe he was that way himself.

My new bff agrees! *Death in Midsummer* is great. Tomoko loses two of her three kids when her sister-in-law watches their kids on a seaside vacation. Is it guilt, sorrow, shame, life is unfair and this should have happened to someone else, why isn't this easier? It's reminding yourself to feel the old when the you that's you if nothing ever happened forgets and wants to be happy again. The part that's really not about faith in humanity but faith in yourself and going on being the selfish you when the worst of life has already happened and that time healing shit starts to kick in. But that sucks! What kind of a person would do that?! That's the feeling I have, what gives me pause and want it all to end. How do you live with yourself? The "We're only human" stuff people say "We're only human" about and feeling like a criminal about it. Really, who has felt better about "We're only human"? That's what happens to Tomoko. I felt this without being told in an Oscar worthy fit of tears. That meant a lot to me in my telling me something kinda way. My previous problem with Mishima the novelist was that his writing tells a whole hell of a lot. The telling deprives me of sensing something I didn't already know. I live for the sensing. That comes from living, right? The time kicking in and healing when you don't really want it too. Something that feels HUMAN in a way that isn't "We're only human" and I already knew that, you know? It's not a cynical kinda thing. I mean, I KNOW that humans distract themselves to go on and then the reminder to feel bad kicks you in the teeth when you need it to the least. But we're not only human! We're us! It's special to be able to say that and not freaking cry about it.

Crying makes me feel yucky. When I was a kid I'd look forward to going home and watching the *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* 'cause it'd make me forget about something disturbingly real life our elementary school teacher tried to confront us with (probably how important middle school would be! Yeah, right). Oooh entertain me and distract me. I still like that. I like the distraction and then the wise speech that Will Smith's fat uncle gives to him and sweater clad Carlton. Tough love but, yeah, love! Um, this isn't that. I was reading not for some lesson and then it was meaningful like something that happens to you you'll actually remember.

Three Million Yen -

Kiyoko and Kenzo are really freaking cheap. They horde every penny and enjoy saving money more than anything they could possibly get with that money. They probably wake up in the middle of the night suffering from cold sweats out of regret for money they spent on a pack of crackers. They are the poor republicans who want to have tax cuts for the stinky rich every year because in a day far, far off from this one they could be rich too. They shouldn't have bought those crackers! They'll make you thirsty. It is all a scam to trick you into purchasing a green tea. Don't fall for it! Alas, they fell for the American (er, Japanese) dream of neon lights and sleeping your way to the top. It'll happen over night, before you know it, y'know? Their pimp is an evil old cow who orders a delicious parfait on their dime when they had misered more than any old man in a Dickens story has ever misered before for that dime (er, yen). So unfair! But make no mistake, they look down on me for wearing converse sneakers and renting at my age! I'm not where they are gonna be. No siree. Sighs. It's depressing that the dream is rotten. Life is not a parfait. It's a stinky onion with layers of more stink. I dug the signs pointing the way to paying for the present dream with the future's present nightmare. The watching people for the signs of how they live. He's wearing cheap shoes. They have been walking around all day and not buying anything. Killing time. I'd have liked to sat in a crowded place and watched people with Mishima. We'd tell each other stories about what people might be doing because that's what bff's do.

Thermos Bottles -

There's a voice in my head saying something about how Mishima was known to disapprove of the old Japan turning into another Japan. The lady of the story, Asaka, has taken to Western culture like a goldfish in a tiny

bowl who wants to look good for the sake of a minature castle and fingers reaching in the bowl for a feeding now and then. That's probably in there but I didn't think it was that important. I've read about that before and I've also read about the egotistical married Japanese man who is briefly infatuated and then briefly infatuated again with a geisha. There's what do you want from ME (he dumps her when she tells him that her child is his) when I'm paying for what I clearly want from you (take me out of me when I want to be taken out of me) blah blah blah (it's wrong to sell when someone else is buying. She's got a new buyer who knows what he wants to buy). What won me over was the thermos bottle. Asaka's child is afraid of thermos bottles. Kawase wants what he wants when he goes home and oh no it's not what it was all dreamed out to be. His son is afraid of thermos bottles. He is afraid of thermos bottles. What he knew all along and what he knew because he wanted to know it... Damn, that was good.

The Priest of Shiga Temple and His Love -

Okay, I didn't get into this one much. A priest is horny but he wants to get into some heaven like place that has food you can't eat. You need to get to heaven to do that? Or go to a temple to look at porn pictures of some hot person you can't really have sex with? Who knew? Actually, this one was kinda like the previous Mishima I wasn't that impressed with. A lot of this is how it is and this is how we do it kinda stuff. Too much beautiful bodies and beauty that don't mean anything to me. I don't want to be told there's beauty. I'd rather find it for myself. Shit, I should've waited to do this one until after Yukio was done with my makeup. I'm gonna have clown face!

It's not a bridge it's a segway! Like the little motor cart thing that you stand on and moves at the speed of walking. **Seven Bridges** -

I'm not just saying that this is good because I'm a yes-girl. I liked this story a lot. It reminded me of one of those concubine films like Raise the Red Lantern. Something with Gong Li that's not Memoirs of a Geisha. My friend thought RTRL was cliche but I dug the way that it showed how the "good" one beat up on her maid like the bitch other concubines shit on her. Like shit would really travel down hill and not stop on you. Not in the "Yeah, that's shitty human nature" kinda smug way of being cynical (I don't do that! My buddy Yukio doesn't either) that avoids reasons of why it happens because it's hiding behind cynicism. Masako has pretty lame wishes. She wants to be picked by R. She wants to have sex with him, and more than anything else, get picked over other girls. She feels special by being more special than someone else. Yeah, we've all seen Mean Girls. Masako pays so little attention to anyone else that it is the the wonder she wonders about what her graceless (if I had a better vocabulary I'd say it was a word that means putting-on-airs-less) maid, Mina, would wish for over the silent journey of the seven bridges. I have an idea what Mina wished for (and good for her!). It might be human nature to kick what is lower than you so you can feel higher. I've actually been told this bullshit many times in my life that the misfortunes of others makes someone feel better about what they have. But it doesn't! It can't, not all of the time. It's the silent journey over the seven bridges! The wishing and the wishing and looking over to notice that someone, below or high, is doing the same and what they might be wishing for. Masako is afraid because the realization that something goes on without HER is frightening. How can you be above when everyone is travelling side by side? That was good! Way better than Mean Girls.

Patriotism - I didn't remember which story this was by the title. I might be a dummy because I didn't get anything of patriotism from this. Unless it was patriotism for one's own marriage like it was some place to live and identify. Maybe. A husband and wife kill themselves together.

Donald Richie wrote that Mishima was better as a short story writer than as a novelist. He compared him to Ernest Hemingway in this in that their style flowed (this isn't his words. I don't remember his words. They had to be way better than mine) like living unfolding and not the concious making and forcing in a novel of all those pages to build character. I agree with Richie. Mishima was not a fan of Hemingway. Richie thought it was because of their similarities. I haven't read any of Hemingway's novels in many, many years. I wasn't a

fan of the novels because of the alcoholism (past sore point). I read his short stories for college and those I liked. I'm getting to the point where I don't consider my young readings to "count" as much anymore. I've changed too much. Anyway, Mishima became interested in Hemingway because he killed himself. Mishima killed himself.

Is this a story that is of interest as a suicide? You know what? I take it back. It is patriotism. It's killing yourself as a statement. They decide to do it and get wrapped up in the statement of it without thinking too much about it. I'm not interested in the statement. I'm interested in why someone would find it hard to keep on living, being more afraid of life than in death. I can find death comforting. No one lives forever. It's not suicidal to accept what will eventually happen. Now what you would be prepared to leave? That's something. This story wasn't about what they were leaving (if they were in love!). They would have gotten married instead if they weren't already married. I'm unsure what Mishima felt here. I felt that something welling up inside and they were at a loss for a bigger gesture to say it with. Raise the flags.

Dojoji - Last night I watched that creepy Beastly movie. I know! I have questionable taste. I didn't like it, for what it's worth. It's sorta Beauty and the Beast for teens. Teens from several years ago. The soundtrack is borderline indie music (read: on a studio label but used to be indie) that's out of fashion again. The kids were probably confused. "This is out of date!" I was wishing I was reading this short story instead. A young woman (duh duh! or is she?) talks to these dudes who are all interested in dating her because she's young and beautiful. She wants the wardrobe on auction (read: maudlin ties) and they all want her (sentimental reasons of a beautiful girl on the arm. Enough to bring tears to one's eye). The policeman, the dealer, etc. etc. What is the use of being young and beautiful if the only man you wanted wanted someone else? Is she really all that young and beautiful after all? The men see what they want to see. She sees and hears what she wants all the same. It's like if they were all the Beast before his magical transformation to learn a lesson. The girl the most beastly of them all. What's the use of having a face at all? Without the love and beauty. That's damn beastly. This is a play of Mishima's. Maybe they made it into a movie.

Onnagata - Have you ever written love letters and began to feel that you had to try to find more of yourself to give as you wrote more and more? Maybe you still felt the same and that's all there is to say. Letting it be. I love about short stories that they are the true first touching without having to search for more. There's something to be said for really living in something, yeah. If you don't trust the answer that's had time to put itself together in a drama you can play in and be outside yourself in. Onnagata is a great love story of that kind. I compare romance with kabuki a lot. This is that! Damn, he IS my kind of writer. The kind of love that has to be written and performed. It comes out of a real place that's desire for love and then it becomes less real because it takes so much to feed it. Lots of makeup and stage lights and rehearsals. Oh, the rehearsals. Killing.

The Pearl - Writing goodreads reviews can suck 'cause I feel self concious about writing about being depressed so often. I do that despite being ashamed when someone notices and asks me what's wrong. It's all of the time. It's lying to look for something new to say just because it's new. I wish the new didn't have to come from me. Maybe there's a new way of living? Feel enough of the pulse and the tired one (parts of me) will wanna keep up (to the better parts that keep going). I don't have anything to say about this story. This isn't a carrying on for the better part moment. I'd go to sleep and hope to get really into a favorite song and feel better the next day. I'm not going to force myself to say anything about it now. I was kinda uncomfortable about the friendship and fighting over a pearl. Then suddenly they forget anything ever happened after some tears. It's like knowing "some people" are shallow and not wanting to think about it too much. I've dropped friends because I decided they didn't like me now because I remembered something vaguely bitchy they said one time and then decided some look that may have had nothing at all to do with me was some judgemental look over something stupid like me not having money when they did. Some woman getting bitchy over a pearl in a story. Next story!

Swaddling Clothes - I looked up reviews of this to see what other people made of it. Nah, I didn't get anything about Westernization in this either. It's a melodramatic (um, did I say Mishima wasn't melodramatic? I lied. My pants are on fire!) fantasy of a woman about what will happen to an abandoned baby she finds. She gets really into imagining what will happen to this kid. Not in an understanding or connected way like walking in other people's shoes, a day in the life and I heard the news today oh boy (he's found in bloodied newspapers). But kinda enjoying the oh so melodramaticness of the TRAGEDY. I like that maybe twenty years really did go by of her wallowing in her blissful misery of this infant. I can forget where I am in day dreams. I've imagined some pretty awful stuff happening. I'm totally from the 100 Acre Wood in a past life. I was probably Rabbit. Or Eeyore. Anyway, bad shit happened to me and they were all SORRY! This that kind of story. It wasn't really my favorite.

João Moura says

Ler Mishima pode ser ao mesmo tempo a melhor das aventuras e o pior dos tédios...Neste conjunto de contos ficam apenas três na retina, um sobre mortes de familiares na distração da praia, um sobre um monge que se apaixona pela mais bela das mulheres e outro visceral onde um casal se suicida à velha maneira japonesa...

Jale says

Mi?ima ölmeden önce "?nsan ya?am? k?sa, ama ben hep ya?ayaca??m" notunu b?rakm??. Dört arkada??yla bir generali esir ald?ktan sonra, seppuku (harakiri) yaparak kendini öldürmeye çal??m?? ve yak?n arkada?lar?ndan birisinin k?l?çla ba??n? kesmesi sonucu hayata veda etmi?. Sigara (Tabako) öyküsü, kendisi kadar yaln?z ve meczup Baudelaire'in "her yere dü?erken güne? ???klar?, tükendi gençli?im zifiri karanl?k f?rt?nalarda." sözleriyle ba?l?yor. 'Ölüm' merkezli öyküler ve ya?am? için fazlas?yla umutlu yazd?klar?.

Carolina Paiva says

Comecei lançada, ansiosa para descobrir a escrita deste autor. Este livro reúne 7 contos, no primeiro (que partilha o nome com o livro) fiquei desiludida, a situação pareceu-me demasiado explicada, não fui afectada pela tristeza da história.

Foi só no quarto conto que o autor me pareceu revelar um pouco da sua magia: suave e delicada. Continuei envolvida até ao penúltimo conto, "Patriotismo", na minha opinião o melhor de todo o livro. A história é devastadora, a forma de a contar alternando o doce com o brutal é curiosa, senti que finalmente entendia o fascínio pela escrita do autor. Mas fiquei por aqui, apenas este conto me revelou aquilo de que o autor seria capaz.

Nos contos são visíveis as diferenças que temos do povo japonês nos costumes, comportamentos e no papel de homem e mulher na sociedade. É interessante observar isso na escrita do autor e nas histórias apresentadas.

Terminei o último conto a muito custo e aborrecida com as descrições exaustivas que não me traziam nenhum esclarecimento, a força brutal do penúltimo conto cinge-se a ele e é o único que espero guardar na memória como verdadeiro reflexo deste autor. Nele é descrito um ritual normalmente desempenhado pelos samurais, o *seppuku*, que demonstra o "amor à pátria" e acompanha o fiel amor de uma esposa pelo seu marido.

"...o pensamento de que era a última vez fazia bater mais intensamente os seus corações e dilatava-lhes o peito. Dir-se-ia que as palavras "a última vez" se tinham inscrito, em pinceladas invisíveis, em todos os recantos dos seus corpos."

[P] says

Throughout my life I have written hundreds of short stories; some stretching to thousands of words, and some only a paragraph or two. It's strange that someone who admits to avoiding short fiction, for the most part, would be so drawn to writing it himself. Although I guess it sums up my personality. In any case, it isn't that I don't like short stories but, rather, that I think most of them are poor [including my own, most likely]. The masters of the form – Carver, Chekhov et al – show that at its best it is capable of capturing something of the true, and often banal, profundity of human existence in a way that nothing else can. In my writing, I'm somewhat obsessed with the idea of snapshots or moments, of dropping in on someone's life for only a few minutes or hours, because when I think about my own life that is how I see it: in moments, not as some detailed, linear narrative; when I picture myself I see my father pulling me out of a river by my hair; I see myself holding a pencil out of a window of a top-floor flat, and I remember how that was one of the scariest things I have ever done.

To the list of 'masters of the form' I now want to add Yukio Mishima. I've long been an admirer of his writing, but had, until now, never sampled his short fiction. It seems impossible to discuss Mishima without referencing his strange personal life and beliefs [I have done so in all my previous reviews of his work]. I do not want to go over all that again in detail, except to say that on the basis of the title, *Death in Midsummer*, some other reviews I have come across, and the author's biography, I found myself surprised by how normal, how free of perversity, and shock value these stories are. They are, in the main, domestic, focusing on relationships, specifically marriage, and children. It is a reminder that no matter how odd certain aspects of someone's life is or was, it does not account for the whole person; Mishima may have been a fanatic, a fascist, a crazy man, but there was clearly a tender and empathetic side to him, involving a deep understanding of ordinary people, otherwise he would never have been able to write these stories.

Having said all that, the most well-known story in the collection, *Patriotism*, is one of the most unnerving things I have ever read. It features a couple, a lieutenant in the army and his wife, who commit ritual suicide, one by disembowelling himself, and the other by stabbing herself in the throat. For the husband his death is about honour. He does not want to attack a group of rebels, whose cause he believes in, and yet he has been asked to do just that. And so instead of following orders he takes his own life. There is something, for me, undeniably attractive about this kind of action, this utter, fatal commitment to one's principles. When I look around me, I get the impression that honour and integrity are in short supply, that most people these days are only really concerned with themselves and what benefits them, and so while I do not want anyone to meet a gruesome death, I admire Lieutenant Shinji Takeyama nevertheless.

[From *Patriotism*, a short film directed by Mishima, which is based on the story of the same name]

For any sensitive readers, it is necessary to point out that Mishima does not flinch. In the story, the man's wife is asked to watch, to bear witness, to the event, and we, as the reader, are put in the same position. So we stay with the lieutenant as he slowly slices open his stomach, as his insides fall out, as he breathes his last breath. It is brilliantly written, but is, still, incredibly unpleasant. Knowing what we know about Mishima [he too committed seppuku], it would be tempting to view Patriotism [especially considering that title] as a form of propaganda, as a kind of love letter to nationalism and ritual suicide. It is undeniably the case that he writes about seppuku in glowing terms. For example, according to Mishima, Shinji "contemplated death with severe brows and firmly closed lips" and "revealed what was perhaps masculine beauty at its most superb."

However, it is interesting that, while as a standalone story it might be viewed in that way, and considered distasteful, as part of the Death in Midsummer collection it struck me as being primarily about marriage and intimacy, rather than suicide. The two characters have a strong and loving relationship, this is seen not only in the wife agreeing to follow her husband into death [she dies for her husband, not for a cause or principle], but in the way that he asks her to witness his own [which is unusual]. Furthermore, in doing so he trusts that she will follow him, and that she will not attempt to save him once he has commenced the act. In fact, the decision to die provokes even greater intimacy and love between them, and they actually have sex before performing the ritual. If you forget about seppuku for a moment, one can understand the story as an investigation into the idea that mortality gives fresh impetus to life; that they are about to die makes the couple love and cherish and appreciate each other even more.

"Reiko had not kept a diary and was now denied the pleasure of assiduously rereading her record of the happiness of the past few months and consigning each page to the fire as she did so."

While Patriotism may be the most [in]famous story in this collection – and I did enjoy it, as much as that is possible – it is certainly not the best. That accolade I would give to the title story, which also happens to be the longest. Death in Midsummer begins at the beach, one that is "still unspoiled for sea bathing" and where the sand is "rich and white." Three children are present with their aunt, while their mother takes a nap back at the hotel. Initially, all seems idyllic, but there is something ominous in the air. First of all, the mother is described as 'girl-like,' almost suggesting that she ought not to have children yet, a suggestion that is given extra weight by the fact that she is not with them, that she has let them go off with someone else. Even more worrying is the line "it was height of summer and there was anger in the rays of the sun." Where or at what or who is this anger directed?

You may never get a straightforward answer to that question, but before too long the significance of the title becomes apparent. The aunt and two of the three children die. From this point onwards, Death in Midsummer becomes an investigation into the nature of grief, one that is as honest, as moving, and as beautiful as Tolstoy's masterpiece *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. As one would expect, the mother blames herself somewhat, especially as the aunt is not alive to shoulder the burden of blame herself; indeed, she likens telling her husband [who did not go on holiday with the rest of the family] about the accident to having to stand before a judge. I found this entirely believable, regardless of whether anyone is actually to blame [and one could argue that they are not in this instance] it is not unusual to feel as though you are guilty of something when a terrible thing happens near you or around you. There is guilt in living, in avoiding trouble or death. Mishima also touches upon the guilt felt by those who survive a tragedy when they notice that they are moving on, as though such a thing ought to not be possible if you really care. Again, the mother thinks in terms of criminals, and compares herself, in getting on with her life, to someone getting away with a crime.

There are almost too many psychological insights and highlights; every paragraph, every sentence almost, contains some touching observation. Such as when the husband receives the news, and he likens it to having been dismissed from his job. Or when he asks for the news to be repeated, even though he knows it will not change the second time around. Or when the wife admits to feeling as though sorrow ought to come with special privileges. Or when Mishima notes that death is an administrative affair, involving certain expected responses and a lot of organising and planning. Or, finally, when he highlights the poverty of human emotions, whereby one's response is the same, regardless of whether one person dies or ten. I could indulge myself and write a paragraph about each of these things, but I won't. What I will say is that, as with Patriotism, in less capable and sensitive hands Death in Midsummer could have been melodramatic, even exploitative. It is to the author's credit that the heart of the tale is not dead children, but that of a grieving couple surviving, staying together.

There are, of course, other stories, but I will not linger over those. I do, however, want to briefly touch upon Mishima's subtlety as a writer. At the very beginning of this review I mentioned Raymond Carver. His collection *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* is one of my favourites, and what I most like about it, and the author, is how light his touch was. I sometimes get so tired of reading things where everything is spelled out for you, where the how's and why's and what's are raked over in great detail. Carver didn't do that, and nor did Mishima here. Indeed, there are two stories that perplexed me until I had put the book down and given them some thought, where what had actually happened wasn't immediately clear, was ambiguous. I loved having to work a little bit, to engage my mind, to interpret gestures and responses for myself. For example, in *Thermos Bottles*, Mishima does not outright tell you that the wife had been unfaithful, and yet one thinks that she was because of the way the 'other man' talks about the couple's child, with authority, as though he knows it in a way that he ought not to. I thought that was handled brilliantly, and the same could be said of *Three Million Yen*. The only one that did not grab my attention was *Onnagata*, but that perhaps says more about the company it finds itself in than the quality of the story itself.

My other Mishima reviews:

Spring Snow <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>

Runaway Horses <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>

João Barradas says

Aliceçardo na sociedade contida do Japão, Yukio Mishima escalpeliza nesta antologia de contos várias facetas da paixão e a sua relação pouco ortodoxa com outros sentimentos e desígnios da vida.

Há paixões intemporais e transcentoriais que superam a vida, levando a que o desejo pela existência acabe mesmo por cessar. Há paixões carnais, intuídas a troco de dinheiro. Há paixões amorosas, criadas no passado, cujos medos invocados geram dúvidas no futuro. Há paixões platónicas que impedem a marcha para o nirvana espiritual e nos prendem à bela realidade terrestre. Há paixões intempestivas face aos sonhos próprios contrapostas com o desprezo pelos desejos dos outros (sempre menores!). Há paixões cegas que cumprem os desígnios dos votos ceremoniais de juras de amor eterno na "saúde e na doença, até que a morte nos separe". Há paixões desafiadoras das regras arcaicamente instituídas nas sociedades, das quais brota um ciúme revitalizador pela ausência de troco ao investimento feito.

Enquanto a maioria dos contos necessita de uma leitura atenta das entre-linhas, destaca-se "Patriotismo" pela descrição nua e crua de uma prática ancestral designada seppuku, uma forma de suicídio orquestrado, tão bem conhecido pelo autor ou não tivesse ele próprio praticado esta cerimónia.

De leitura fácil mas pouco leve, os contos aproximam a cultura nipónica do ocidente, rebatendo as diferenças

conceptuais... até porque a humanidade integral supera as várias classes antropológicas que teimam em sectorizar o mundo.

Inderjit Sanghera says

As incandescent as the beams of moon-light flickering over the gently ebbing sea, the beauty of the imagery which Mishima creates and the elegance of his prose, beneath which looms the macabre spectre of death, mark Mishima out to be one of the great and most quintessential proponents of Japanese aesthetics. Although some elements of this collection fall flat-such as the homage and pastiche of Noh plays 'Dojoji', which suffers from not being performed and thereby loses the highly stylised cadence and musicality associated with Noh, some of the stories represent the best of Mishima; from the tragic 'Death in Midsummer', to the wistful and elegiacal 'The Priest of Shiga Temple and His Love', which contains echoes of Mishima's greatest novel, 'Spring Snow' in exploring the story of a doomed love to the darkly comedic 'The Pearl', within which Mishima's cynical views on human interaction come to fore.

It is more the small images which Mishima is able to create, ephemeral and effervescent which imbue these stories with beauty;

"Several children, tired of chasing dragonflies, were noisily drinking water and squirting water at one another. Now and then a spray of water traced a thin rainbow through the air."

It is these small, imperceptible moments of beauty which build pathos for the characters who inhabit the stories, each of whom is going through some sort of catharsis, whether it is Tomoko who, after two of her children drown and sister-in-law suffers a heart attack, endures a spiritual malaise whereby she is unsure as to whether her grief is as a result of her loss or from a sense of narcissism. Or Takeyama and his wife Reiko, both of whom commit suicide after Takeyama learns of the mutiny of a battalion he is a part of but who, in their final hours, experience a sexual euphoria which is heightened by their looming deaths. If nothing else the stories reflect Mishima's moribund fascination with death; in Mishima's mind beauty and decay are intertwined and inseparable, death serves to enhance beauty, to invigorate life. The story of the old priest and the concubine perhaps exemplifies this-the grand priest, detached from the world and whose chief concern is with achieving a nirvana like state following death, is shaken by the beauty of the concubine; a weird romance begins to blossom between the two, whereby they each represent something deeply symbolic to one another until the priest finally gorges himself on the concubine's beauty before reaching his nirvana via death. Otherwise Mishima's primary focus is on human relationships, and frequently on their failure to achieve their aims, on the constant misunderstandings which impact on our relationships-a deep sense of cynicism off-set by brief moments of beauty dominate Mishima's stories;

"They noticed at the end of this bleak-looking bridge in the heart of the city a willow-tree, faithfully planted in the traditional manner. A forlorn willow that they never normally would have noticed as they sped past it in a car grew from a tiny patch of earth at a break in the concrete. Its leaves, faithful to tradition, trembled in the river breeze. Late at night the noisy buildings around it died, and only this willow went on living."

Like the lonely willow, Mishima is able to paint the world to bring about details which the reader wouldn't have otherwise noticed and, like the willow, it is these moments of beauty which linger in the imagination of the reader long after the stories they are a part of disappear and are forgotten.

Hugo says

Morte em Pleno Verão - ★★★★★

Três Milhões de Ienes - ★★★

Garrafas-Termos - ★★★★

O Sacerdote do Templo de Shiga e o Seu Amor - ★★★★

As Sete Pontes - ★★★★

Patriotismo - ★★★★★ (!!!)

Onnagata - ★★★★

"«É isto, o *seppuku*?», pensou. Dir-se-ia que era o caos absoluto, como se o céu lhe tivesse desabado sobre a cabeça e o mundo, embriagado, cambaleasse (...) Pareceu-lhe inacreditável que, no meio de um tão terrível sofrimento, o que podia ser olhado pudesse ainda ser olhado e o que existia pudesse ainda existir."

(*Patriotismo*, p. 112)
