



Scenes from Village Life

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"Informed by everything, weighed down by nothing, this is an exquisite work of art"*The Scotsman*

Strange things are happening in Tel Ilan, a century-old pioneer village. A disgruntled retired politician complains to his daughter that he hears the sound of digging at night. Could it be their tenant, that young Arab? But then the young Arab hears the digging sounds too. Where has the mayor's wife gone, vanished without trace, her note saying "Don't worry about me"? Around the village, the veneer of new wealth--gourmet restaurants, art galleries, a winery--barely conceals the scars of war and of past generations: disused air raid shelters, rusting farm tools, and trucks left wherever they stopped. *Scenes from Village Life* is a memorable novel-in-stories by the inimitable Amos Oz: a brilliant, unsettling glimpse of what goes on beneath the surface of everyday life.

Translated from the Hebrew by Nicholas de Lange

Scenes from Village Life Details

Date : Published October 18th 2011 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (first published 2009)

ISBN : 9780547483368

Author : Amos Oz , Nicholas de Lange (Translator)

Format : Hardcover 182 pages

Genre : Fiction, Short Stories, Cultural, Israel

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From Reader Review Scenes from Village Life for online ebook

Resh (The Book Satchel) says

Scenes from Village Life is a collection of short stories set in a fictional village in Israel named Tel Ilan. Each story is a stand alone with the characters making a short appearance in other stories.

My favourite story is Lost. A man wants to buy a particular house and demolish it for business profits. the granddaughter in the house offers to lead him on a tour of the place. As they go deeper into the house the lifeless structure seems to come alive with the memories and stories of the people who lived there.

If you like quiet, descriptive prose, you will adore this read. I loved Amos Oz's eye for details. In spite of the scenic cover of the book and serene setting, most stories leave you with a certain uneasiness.

You can read the full review at <http://www.thebooksatchel.com/book-re...>

Ravi Gangwani says

"I need a piece of chocolate every now and then, to bring some sweetness into my dark life. I need chocolate because my body has stopped producing sweetness of its own."

'You are a happy person. Despair is alien to you.'

So Amos Oz is my new love. I don't know why I picked this book. Just because its name was similar to JM Coetzee's Scenes from Provincial life (that I have read multiple times by now). This was my second Amos Oz's book after Judas and my next book is definitely going to be his Tale of Love and Darkness.

A very beautiful book showcasing normal lives of normal people of Tel Ilan village of Israel. A man living with his 90 years old mother, a couple whose son has shot down himself with the bullet under the bed, a lonely lady waiting for her nephew, an old mayor who is looking for his wife who one day suddenly went somewhere handling him a letter saying 'Don't worry about me', a senile old man who is suspicious of somebody digging the floor beneath where he is staying and a 17 year old man is infatuation with 37 year old lady.

What makes this book as a winner and a very big refreshing mood changing experience for me is its simplicity.

So I am definitely purchasing Amos OZ's other books after reading this.

Tadzio Koelb says

From my review in the Times Literary Supplement:

"Such strange moments invite a sharp awareness of the author and his choices. Stories which break with traditional realism – especially if they are open-ended – tend to ambiguity, meaning readers will be especially receptive to any perceived subtextual clues. Given the book's setting, those they find will easily be understood as relating to the on-going crisis of the Middle East, although Oz, a vocal and energetic essayist who is not shy about voicing his opinions, has been emphatic in interviews that his fiction is never political, arguing that only the circumstance of writing in a "trouble spot" encourages political interpretation.

Considering *Scenes from Village Life*, however, such claims appear disingenuous: the text is full of details suggesting a clear intention to invoke difficult issues, as well as blanks the reader will feel entitled to fill. Nicholas de Lange, Oz's prize-winning translator, has been working with the author (who himself speaks impeccable English) since the 1970s, so we can be confident that there is no misrepresentation. "Lost" is easily interpreted as a message about Israel's changing relationship to the Holocaust and the "pioneer" past. When, in "Waiting", Mayor Benny Avni is unable to accept the Dear John letter he receives, he searches unsuccessfully for his wife in "Founders' Street and Tribes of Israel Street, ... the Memorial Garden", places in "a pioneer village" named for the national founding myths. Oz cannot be unaware of having linked these in the reader's mind to Avni's personal circumstances, just as he cannot be unaware of the temptation to see a political parable in "Digging". Pesach Kedem, an old man retired from the Knesset, is convinced there is a sound of someone tunnelling under his house. His daughter thinks he's making it up. Only Adel, the Arab tenant – whom Kedem distrusts on racial grounds – hears the noises which suggest the disused farm where they live is literally being undermined by hidden forces.

If Oz is using this intimation of the political as a tactic to build tension, it is effective: the book develops a feeling of dread that might have been less forceful without it. "Singing", the last story set in Tel Ilan, brings together some of the characters and many of the themes and images from the preceding stories, and puts them to good use, while advancing the impression of an ambiguous allegory of contemporary Israel."

Susan says

When I started Oz's latest, I thought, I would be so content to live in a small village in the north of Israel. Yet in these scenes everyone is unhappy, unhappy, but deeply aware of their connection to others, whether family members or acquaintances. A son will not leave his old mother, nor will a daughter leave her volcanic old father; a veterinarian makes unbidden house calls; a librarian weeps for not having been more sympathetic to an adolescent boy; an aunt waits for her beloved nephew. In the end as they all join together in communal singing a mysterious narrator seeks to attach himself to his hosts' sorrow. The style is oral, with frequent repetitions of epithets or facts known by the community, and, often, a ghostly sense that something important cannot be explained. The dystopic epilogue of people living mindlessly in a swamp tells us what we already know, that to be fully conscious is to bear our sorrows and the sorrows of others. Yes, I would be content to live in a small Israeli village in the north of Israel.

lanius_minor says

Přiznávám se dobrovolně, Amosi Ozovi straním, takže možná jsou Scény z venkovského života na třešně zdičky, ale já jednu přidávám z úřadské sympatie k autorovi. Povídka Kopání mě dostala. Žekáte rozuzlení a - no, však si ji přečtete, má jen třicet stran. A to je v celé sbírce osmi povídek nejdelší. Naopak nejkratší je poslední, Kdesi daleko v jiné době. Ta je skoro jako z jiné knihy a z jiné vesnice, tak jiné je to daleko a ta jiná doba. Ale všechny ostatní povídky jsou zasazeny na totéž místo a do stejného času, jen možná v jinou hodinu, jiný den. A tak se postava, jíž je věnována jedna povídka, objeví i v jiné/jiných, už bez podstatné role, jen jako stín, bez kterého by ale obrazem z Tel Ilanu chyběla hloubka a ostrost.

Mark Staniforth says

It is for others with a surer grasp of the subject to decide the extent to which 'Scenes From Village Life' by

Amos Oz is an allegory for the parlous, fragile state of modern Israel.

Certainly, there are broad hints in that direction: the characters who people the majority of Oz's eight stories live tentative, uncertain lives; Tel Ilan, their rural village in question, itself seems to exist in a state of perpetual unease.

Yet conflict of the political kind is only once overtly addressed, in 'Singing', in which the story's narrator expresses his ambivalence over the latest bombing raid, and the roar of fighter planes overhead is drowned out by a resolute and gutsy community choir.

Oz, it seems, is determined to illustrate the afflictions of his nation by much more delicate means.

'Scenes From Village Life' is a strange book in every respect, oozing general unease, sprinkled with imponderables and actions devoid of answers. If, early in the book, it is so nuanced as to not so much miss a beat, as lack percussion entirely, it soon lures you in, like taking a walk in a new neighborhood which appears entirely unremarkable until you begin to scratch at its surface.

Many of Oz's characters are gently propelled by the allure of abandonment: most comfortable curled up in abandoned water towers, left alone in dark cellars or drawn to dim, empty bedrooms with the stale scent of long-gone tragedy.

Their wider motives are left unexplained: the mysterious stranger who turns up on an old man's porch and proceeds not only to cajole him into selling half his house, but to climb into bed with him and his ancient mother; the scratching, digging sounds from the cellar which torment a teacher and her ageing father; a wife's unexplained departure; a tour of an old house's subterranean passageways.

Oz's prose is simple and achingly poetic. The sixth story, 'Strangers', starts: 'It was evening. A bird called twice. What it meant there was no way of telling.'

In 'Lost', the narrator, a property prospector, takes a circuitous twilight walk towards a bleak old house for which he hopes to put in an offer:

'A smallish package wrapped in brown paper and tied up with black cord was lying on a shady bench at the end of Tarpat Street. I paused and bent over to see what was written on it. There was nothing written on it. I picked it up cautiously and turned it over but the brown paper was smooth and unmarked. After a moment's hesitation I decided not to open the package, but felt I ought to let someone know I had found it. I didn't know whom I should tell. I held it in both my hands and it seemed heavier than its size would have suggested, heavier than a packet of books, as if it contained stones or metal. Now the object aroused my suspicion, and so I replaced it gently on the bench. I ought to have reported the discovery of a suspicious package to the police, but my mobile phone was on my desk at the office because I had only gone out for a short walk and didn't want to be interrupted by my office business.'

The package is never mentioned again. And in this mildly ghostly world, there are other, unexplained apparitions. It is a world of sad hearts, in which 'the distance from pity to love was like the distance from the moon reflected in a puddle to the moon itself.' Yet the community which Oz chronicles in these intriguing overlapping stories appears eerily content.

Only the last story shatters the soporific atmosphere: 'In a Faraway Place at Another Time' is a brief orgy of depravity set in a stinking, fetid swamp: is it what Tel Ilan has been, or will become? Like the rest of Oz's fascinating collection, it poses plenty more questions than answers.

Mobyskine says

Been visiting Tel Ilan in this reading journey and experiencing various life from people living in a community-- how it was related at certain point making me curious at every bits. I love the story telling structure, segregation of each characters and how each sometimes popped up in other stories. It was relating to various narratives-- each on their own survival kits and stories. Quite melancholy and realistic, sometimes leaving me with this curious and uncertain feeling.

It gripped me at a point, but few stories ended so unexplained, but in a good way. That unfinished feeling--enthralling but interesting. Had few as my favorite-- 'Waiting' especially, 'Digging', 'Stranger' and 'Singing' (that mysterious narrator and the story of that dying son though quite disturbing still, I think it was great).

This was my first from Amos Oz and it was not that bad after all. Gonna read his other books as well.

Dagio_maya says

Quando un titolo non tradisce le premesse.

Israele.

Nel centenario villaggio di Tel Ilan – fondato dai primi coloni- si alternano sulla scena differenti protagonisti di storie dominate da un forte senso di incompiutezza.

Non si tratta solo dei finali aperti che caratterizzano ogni racconto ma anche di una palpabile atmosfera misteriosa che lascia tutto in sospeso.

Serpeggia un persistente richiamo ad un passato che rassicura mentre ci si trova in un "qui e ora" disturbante: un villaggio dove aleggia un silenzioso malessere che mette in dubbio ogni certezza.

"Non aveva idea di quel che si dicevano, nemmeno gli interessava saperlo. Adesso se lo chiese, senza trovare risposta. Aveva l'impressione di dover prendere una decisione, ma nonostante fosse abituato a farlo più volte al giorno, questa volta era in preda ai dubbi, e in fondo non sapeva nemmeno che cosa gli fosse richiesto "

"In quel momento ebbi l'impressione che qualcosa stesse accadendo chissà dove, ma che mi riguardasse, mi coinvolgesse. Però non avevo la minima idea di che cosa

Chris Yarsawich says

This was my first book by Oz and definitely won't be my last. What I enjoyed most was the point in each story where the ordinary and fully believable melted away, revealing a bizarre and grotesque alternative reality underneath. The prose is squeaky clean, tight and clear as a winter night. His eye for detail is one of the best I've had the pleasure to see through in a long while. The unresolved tension and strange morphings are, on my first reading anyway, delightfully, chest-poundingly caught up in the final story, the shortest and most surreal of them all. I couldn't help thinking that I was reading a Jewish James Joyce writing a Dubliners for small town Israel. I look forward to checking in on his Tel Ilan again in the future to see what undiscovered treasures it has retained and how well it's denizens age in this uniquely realistic imaginary world.

Kecia says

Maybe I need to be more familiar with life in Israel to understand these stories. Each one really grabbed my attention, but then left me flat. Hanging. These stories with no resolution made me frustrated.

I enjoyed the way Oz set the scene for each story. I read the opening paragraphs several times because I liked them so much. I enjoyed seeing the same characters in each of the stories. By the end of the book I felt like I

knew this village. Still I was frustrated that the stories had no endings. What was that digging sound??? Ack! Perhaps this village only exists in the twilight zone. I don't know but it made me crazy.

Quick easy read but ultimately, sad to say, forgettable.

Postscript to review: Perhaps Oz was trying to say that Israelis live in a state of anxiety...because certain situations there are never resolved. Maybe. I don't know but writing this p.s. means I was wrong when I said this collection of stories is forgettable because I've been mulling them over for a few days now.

Darryl says

This collection of short stories by Amos Oz is set in an apparently fictional historical village in Israel that has been populated by Jews for roughly a century. The characters in the first seven stories all know each other, and those who are the center of one story will often appear in a minor role in one or more other ones. The stories are about the lives of the characters within their families and community, and focus on the loneliness and barely hidden frustration and despair that plague each of them. Each character is in a search for something, often without knowing what it is they are looking for or why, and the stories are dreamlike, haunting, and often mildly uncomfortable and menacing.

In the longest story, "Digging", a middle-aged widow lives with her cantakerous and difficult elderly widowed father, along with a shy and introspective Arab university student who lives in a shed on their land in exchange for performing household chores. The elderly man is awakened each night by the sound of digging underneath the house, yet no one else seems to hear it. Other stories feature a single doctor who expectantly waits for her ill nephew; a divorced woman pursued by a lovestruck and lonely teenager; an older man who lives in peace with his infirm mother at the edge of the village, until an intrusive stranger who claims to be a relative urges him to sell his mother's property; and the town's mayor, who receives a mysterious note from his wife. Oz does not provide the reader or his characters with straightforward resolutions to their dilemmas or searches, which made the stories that much more memorable and powerful.

The last story is quite unlike the others, as it is set in a different place at another time (past? present?), in a town whose structures are decaying and whose citizens are dying despite the best efforts of the official who is charged with their welfare.

The stories are wonderfully written, with simple yet evocative language, and I slowly savored each passage, such as this one from the elderly man in "Digging", as the Arab student plays a haunting Russian melody on his harmonica on one summer evening:

'That's a lovely tune,' the old man said. 'Heart-rending. It reminds us of a time when there was still some fleeting affection between people. There's no point in playing tunes like that today: they are an anachronism, because nobody cares any more. That's all over. Now our hearts are blocked. All feelings are dead. Nobody turns to anyone else except from self-interested motives. What is left? Maybe only this melancholy tune, as a kind of reminder of the destruction of our hearts.'

Scenes from Village Life is an unforgettable book, which is one of my favorite reads of the year, and one I look forward to returning to in the near future.

Jessica says

Just as the title states, *Scenes from Village Life*, is neither a collection of stories nor a novel but eight stories which together make a portrait of the life of the century-old village, Tel Ilan. Oz's characters, whether male or female, adolescent, middle-aged or elderly, are so very real, nothing generic about them. His writing is always engaging, often surprising in its apt description and turn of phrase:

Her shoes grated on the gravel path as though they had picked up some tiny creature that was letting out truncated shrieks. (26)

He would go down to the old farmyard, his head thrust forward almost at a right angle, which gave him the look of an inverted hoe, frantically searching for some pamphlet or letter in the abandoned incubator, the fertilizer store, the toolshed, then forgetting what he had come for, picking up a discarded hoe with both hands and starting to dig an unnecessary channel between two beds, cursing himself for his own stupidity, cursing the Arab student who hadn't cleared the piles of dead leaves, dropping the hoe and reentering the house by the kitchen door. (46-7)

I love how nothing is resolved in these stories, the characters continue with the absorbingly familiar and unfamiliar puzzle of their lives. At least two of the stories are really stunning: "Waiting" and "Strangers." But all of them are riveting.

I had thought I'd recommend this book to my mother for her book group, but I'm afraid she'll find it depressing. I suspect the lack of resolution together with the sometimes darker place the stories take us and leave us might make her (and others) find it so. But it's beautiful in its mysterious sadness.

Owlseyes says

This is a collection of stories of people in a small village called Tel Ilan, Israel. Stories, which stand on their own; with little interconnectedness.

As I was reading the book I got cozier and cozier, with this small village life. There was a climax, I would say, with fifty (plus) year olds gathering at a place for singing. But then the last "chapter" blew it all, because it's no more in Tel Ilan: but in another time, and in another place.

But, first some of the characters of Tel Ilan.

She was known in the village for her "glacial, intense glaring of her glasses lenses". She never married. She's been anxiously waiting for the arrival of her nephew Gideon at her place. Yet he never arrives.

Gideon, an almost-autistic child, who ran from home at 12, managed somehow to connect with Doctor Gili Steiner. It was fun when he had to prepare for 12th grade exams and he spent some days at Gili's; she never helped him getting prepared; they played checkers, instead. Gideon had to stop his military service due to a renal infection.

Arié Zelnik, a big, strong man, living with his sick 90 year-old deaf mother. Arié left his apartment in the Carmel Mountains. He wanted "total quietness"; Naama, his wife, left for San Diego, USA; he's got a daughter and a son.

Arié was once a navy commando; now he wants to "erase" all family memories; he wants to build airplanes miniatures. Until the day he receives a strange real-estate agent...

And there's Rachel, living with father Pessach: an avenge-full 88 year-old former MP in the Knesset; of a political party, which has been dissolved (the MAPAI).

Rachel is a 45 year old widow; her husband died of cardiac arrest.

Pessach has got a big white moustache; roams the house with his black beret; and, most important, has a daily routine: to insult the International Socialist and...to look for chocolates. Rachel wonders sometimes: what do I do here? Meanwhile, she allows a young intellectual Arab called Adel to live in her place,... in the back yard.

Adel talks in Arabic with the cats; he would like to write a book: about "us". The differences and similarities between Arabs and Jews, it's implied. Pessach doesn't like Adel, at all. But they manage to talk. Adel says about those differences: our (Arabs) unhappiness stems from the soul; or even the heart. Is it deeper? Yet they both agree: at night they both hear noises; someone is excavating the underground, beneath their homes.

Pessach told Rachel: we're like a shadow passing by. Pessach dislikes the man trying to date Rachel: he's a Vet with a pony tail and wearing an earring.

And other stories.

Things get cozier when some of the characters get together for singing; but after this episode, something very surrealistic (?) happens; the above mentioned "chapter": on another time and place.

It's a place plagued by mosquitoes and poverty and promiscuity....; women upon seeing a healthy man start saying: let's kill him.

This last chapter aroused in me questions: is it the Tel Ilan of the future? But, all those previous chapters had been so realistic, so historically stamped, I would say, by the real Israel's History, since its founding fathers.

Why this change?.

(Ben Gurion)

(Ben Gurion)

I thought of 4 stars, but due to this style (?) and content change I am prone to 3,... stars.

Joan says

3.5

Eldred Buck says

This compelling novel drew me in from the outset. Given the recent appalling events that are filling our

screens from Gaza, I simply wanted to read about ordinary life in Israel, a place that I have myself lived, very happily, as a student many years ago. I was not disappointed.

The book is both harrowing and powerfully empathetic, taking the form of a series of touching and acutely observed vignettes, centered on quite disparate and lonely characters that are linked together by delightfully tenuous plotlines, that are both thought provoking and allegorical.

The tale of old man Pesach Kedem, a curmudgeonly misanthrope, was particularly poignant: a young Arab student Adel, who lives in a shed at the bottom of the old man's garden, responds to a question posed by the cantankerous ex-politician. Pesach asks Adel what is he doing and why he lives and works with them?

The young Arab says he is writing a book, comparing Arabs and Israelis and goes on with his explanation. "Our unhappiness, is partly our fault, and partly your fault. But your unhappiness comes from your soul," responds Adel.

"Our soul?" Pesach asks.

"Or from your heart, it's hard to know. It comes from you. From inside. The unhappiness. It comes from deep inside you."

This seems to be the kernel of the theme that runs throughout this moving novel, exposing the dashed hopes of the Pioneers and the angst and the paradox of being that is modern day Israel.

Enlightening, informative, sadly apocalyptic and profoundly humane. It is a provocative and compelling read.
