



The Black House

Patricia Highsmith

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Horrific tragedy becomes disturbingly ordinary in *The Black House*, a masterful collection of short stories, written during a particularly dark time in Patricia Highsmith's life. As readers will discover, the work eerily evokes the warm familiarities of suburban life: the manicured lawns, the white picket fences, and the local pubs, each providing the backbone for her chilling portraits. Seemingly small indiscretions and infidelities—along with love affairs and murder—consume the characters that commit them. Cycles of destructive jealousy overwhelm the cheating protagonists of "Blow It" and "When In Rome," and the title story explores small-town male camaraderie and the destructive secret it masks. This enthralling collection of eleven stories presents Highsmith at her finest: melancholy, suspenseful, and sizzling with a powerful awareness of human emotion.

The Black House Details

Date : Published December 17th 2004 by W. W. Norton Company (first published 1981)

ISBN : 9780393326314

Author : Patricia Highsmith

Format : Paperback 272 pages

Genre : Fiction, Short Stories, Mystery, Crime, Noir

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From Reader Review The Black House for online ebook

Maria João Fernandes says

"A Casa Negra" reúne um conjunto de contos que deixam muito a desejar, tendo em conta a autora e todo o seu trabalho. Como já li quase todos os romances e contos da Patricia Highsmith, foi com alguma dificuldade que aceitei estas histórias como suas. Por um lado, alguns contos parecem rascunhos inacabados e pouco trabalhados. Por outro lado, temos histórias que dão ares de serem uma preparação para um dos seus romances, com finais repentinos, como se Highsmith tive-se decidido que não valia a pena continuar, por falta de paciência ou interesse.

Como sempre, a sua escrita é intelectual, fria e sem rodeios, privilegiando sempre o lado psicológico das personagens, em vez do emocional. Desta forma é muito mais complicado deixar-nos envolver em contos desinteressantes, já que ela não nos engana com palavras bonitas. Agrada-me muito não haver a ilusão provocada pela linguagem, que esconde uma história feia, só não esperava alguma dia encontrar a Patricia Highsmith nesta fraqueza. O que não quer dizer que não a continue a ter como uma das melhores escritoras que alguma vez li.

Entre as histórias mais enfadonhas temos um homem que debate entre duas mulheres, acabando por ficar sozinho; um casal que me vez de adoptar uma criança, adopta um casal de idosos; um gato que encontra dedos humanos e que o dono não comunica à policia e um grupo de marinheiros que encontra uma jovem no mar e que, literalmente, se matam para ter a sua atenção.

O conto mais estranho e também o mais interessante deste livro, fala-nos sobre uma mulher que fica perturbada e mesmo assustada quando descobre que consegue consertar um cesto com muita facilidade e sem preparação prévia na actividade. Um pequeno feito torna a mulher sensível ao mundo que a rodeia, levando-a a pensar se não será superior ao presente, uma evolução da raça humana. Confusa e quase alienada da sociedade, queima o cesto para voltar a ser capaz de viver a sua vida.

Nestes contos as pessoas morrem, claro que sim, mas sem expor o crime e a mente do criminoso a Patricia Highsmith não é a mesma.

Mike says

One moderately entertaining story, a couple mediocre ones, the rest just plain bad. Really disappointing since I enjoyed her collection Eleven so much.

Jason says

I've never read anyone as disturbing as her... except for Stephen King

David K. Lemons says

Most of these stories appear to have been revised treatments for film ideas or drafts of short stories that she

had shelved and come back to. There were a few good ones that appealed personally: "Not One of Us", "Under a Dark Angel's Eye", "Blow It" and ranked after them-- "The Terrors of Basket-Weaving", "I Despise Your Life", and the titular story "The Black House".

I would not recommend Black House to newcomers to Highsmith--rather, later on after several of her novels, or you might be led to think that the rest of her work is not worth the trouble. This notion led me to check out "The Talented Miss Highsmith: the Secret Life and Serious Art of Patricia Highsmith" by Joan Schenkar.

And, I trust PH's novels more than I do her short stories.

Laura says

Devoured this book in one day. My favourite stories, which I still think about every once in a while, were "Not One of Us," "The Terrors of Basket-Weaving," and "Old Folks at Home." Mostly I appreciated how alien such a social circle as the one in the first story is to me, identified with the creepy feeling of knowing something you didn't think you knew in the second, and got to feel self-righteous about not having kids in the last. I hadn't read any Highsmith before (just seen the Hitchcock movies, pretty much all of which, contrary to my nature, I saw before reading the book), but I will seek out her more famous works for sure.

“Diane felt that she had lost herself. Since repairing that basked, she wasn’t any longer Diane Clarke, not completely, anyway. Neither was she anybody else, of course. It wasn’t that she felt she had assumed the identity, even partially, of some remote ancestor. How remote, anyway? No. She felt rather that she was living with a great many people from the past, that they were in her brain or mind (Diane did not believe in a soul, and found the idea of a collective unconscious too vague to be of importance), and that people from human antecedents were bound up with her, influencing her, controlling her every bit as much as, up to now, she had been controlling herself.” (From “The Terrors of Basket-Weaving”)

Ubik 2.0 says

Il talento di Miss Highsmith

Da una data lontana possedevo questo libro, recante il prezzo sull’ultima di copertina ancora espresso in Lire (L.8.500) visibile attraverso il cellophane trasparente che rivestiva da talmente tanto tempo il volumetto che quasi mi dispiaceva sconfezionarlo!

Quando pochi giorni fa mi sono deciso ad aprirlo ho provato delusione perché ignoravo che fosse una collection di racconti e ritengo il formato-racconto poco adatto al giallo/poliziesco che necessita (ma forse è un mio pregiudizio) di un respiro più ampio per avvolgere il lettore con una trama di sufficiente complessità, intrigo, mistero, eventi...

D'altronde si trattava qui di una scrittrice notevole, che ho adorato e divorato in almeno una quindicina di romanzi, e quindi ho respinto l’impulso di accantonare il libro per un altro quarto di secolo.

Per venire al dunque, il match è finito in parità: da un lato il talento di Miss Highsmith, in grado di generare anche in poche pagine la suspense e il disagio, l’imbarazzo e la curiosità per cui il suo stile è giustamente

noto; dall'altro come temevo almeno alcuni racconti, compreso quello che dà il titolo alla raccolta, lasciano una sensazione tipo "embé?", la sensazione che il significato e il nucleo della narrazione dovessero ancora manifestarsi, prima dell'improvvisa e frustrante parola "fine".

Javier Jiménez says

El último contacto que tuve con Patricia Highsmith fue Crímenes Bestiales, el cual también es un libro de cuentos. Sin embargo, la diferencia entre esa lectura y esta es considerable. En estos relatos no hay un tema en común, sin embargo la constante es el estilo lleno de minuciosidad y misterio que crean un ambiente de suspenso que no percibí en ninguno de los cuentos de Crímenes Bestiales.

En algunos de los cuentos tenía mucha ansiedad por saber qué era lo que pasaría en la siguiente página, pero esta sensación se debía más por la forma en la que están escritos los cuentos que por la historia misma. He leído muy pocos autores con esa gran habilidad.

Pero no todo es perfecto, como en muchos libros de cuentos, te puedes encontrar con relatos que te dejan fascinado pero también con otros que te aburren a más no poder.

Los cuentos que más me gustaron (3 estrellas) fueron "Lo que trajo el gato", "Los terrores de la cestería" y "Bajo la mirada de un ángel oscuro". Me encantó (4 estrellas) "Ancianos en casa", me pareció escalofriante.

Pero mi favorito (5 estrellas) está ambientado en Italia, al igual que el fantástico relato "La rata más valiente de Venecia" que aparece en Crímenes Bestiales. Me refiero a "Donde fueres", un cuento narrado con magistral técnica, una historia interesante y de paso con una crítica hacia la sociedad italiana. Sencillamente es el relato que más recuerdo del libro.

El resto de los cuentos para mi pasan desapercibidos, en especial el que le da el nombre al libro y "Emma C". En cuanto a este último, no sé por qué nunca me han atraído las historias que están ambientadas en un barco en general en el mar. En fin, ha sido una lectura agradable, ahora lo que sigue de Highsmith es Ripley.

Fernando Delfim says

"A esquizofrenia, tinha ouvido dizer, era um saco sem fundo onde cabia toda a espécie de perturbações que não eram diagnosticadas."

Laura says

One of my favorite collections of short stories, easily the best I've read in the past year--and that's saying a lot considering I also just read a collection of Angela Carter stories (and she may well be the one of my favorite long reigning queens of the short story).

The key to enjoying a Highsmith story is to have a sense of humor at all moments, because she will not be

serious when another writer will be serious, and she will be humorless when another writer would attempt humor--in part, I think, because she liked to poke fun at her reader's expectations. As usual, there is here an honest cruelty in the world of Highsmith's fiction, and her characters navigate this reality without complaint. In fact, they each seem to expect and accept that the nature of reality is cruelty whether amongst house companions, or between a father and a son. And yet--and yet--these stories are not characterized by despair or darkness at all; there is dark humor, moments reminiscent of Carson McCullers, even.

My favorite story is the first in the collection, about a hand dragged into a house by a small cat, and the drama that ensues.

The stories are quick to read and well written, with some of Highsmith's writerly idiosyncrasies where she mixes a sentence swirl of the surreal with the punch of the hardboiled detective novel, held together with splashes of domestic fiction writing.

Highly recommended.

Sara Habein says

Finally, a break from the constant murderin'. Oh sure, people still die, but *The Black House* features fewer sudden blows to the head. Most of the time, the characters act with good intentions, only to have their situation spin out of control.

Unlike some of her other short story collections, *The Black House* is likely the one that's most appealing to a wider audience — entirely compelling and complex, in an easy bite-size form.

(Full review can be found at [Glorified Love Letters](#))

Fernando says

Es un gran libro, de una autora que ve el terror en situaciones cotidianas, que nos hace pensar en la gran posibilidad que tenemos de encontrarnos frente a frente con estos emocionantes momentos.

Su estilo de escritura es ameno, con una velocidad perfecta a la hora de desarrollar la historia, te atrapa con las problemáticas tan descabelladas que viven unos personajes, construidos de forma muy simple, pero que ayudan a darle más importancia a sus vivencias.

un libro recomendado para ver la aburrida cotidianidad de una manera terrorífica e impactante y que te deja con muchas ganas de seguir incursionando en el mundo literario de Patricia Highsmith.

Maureen says

in keeping with how creepy patricia highsmith is, i could've sworn i'd already written a review of this book, and yet i can find nothing now to indicate that i had. well, i'll copy this into a word file, and if it disappears again, i'll imagine highsmith'll have sent her slugs to expunge my words, because even dead, i think highsmith is capable of doing such a creepy thing. i think it is true that while she was living, through her

writing, she constantly held up a mirror to the face of humanity that showed all its ugliness, and the most effective of her stories underscore how bloodless and blind, how very selfish humanity can be.

in this collection, i think excellent expressions of the baseness of human experience Highsmith observed are found in "something the cat dragged in", "not one of us", "under a dark angel's eye", and especially "the dream of the *emma c*" which made me yearn for the impossible to explain the cruelty of humanity at its most mundane. stories that also communicated some empathy are "i despise your life" and "the kite" which almost seems in bleak answer to Salinger's "teddy".

Highsmith never fails to shock me with her talent for humanity, of shaking it out, and reminding us that our finer instincts are touted because they are so rare, that empathy isn't always intrinsic in every human heart, and that we cannot rely on kindness in this life.

Sharon says

I agree with the reviewer who uses these stories to demonstrate that Highsmith was a misanthrope. Highsmith's *Tremor of Forgery* is one of my favorite books so I'm hard-pressed to say why this collection missed the mark with me. It could be the third person that makes the story walls so thin. There's something empty about them. They are decidedly creepy and mean. The characters are soulless rather than motivated by passion or profit. I prefer the obsession of *Price of Salt* to these tales that are well-crafted but lacking a dimension I can't quite name.

That said, the tales linger in the imagination. They are surreal exercises that Highsmith might have chuckled over, enjoying the satire clothed in creepiness. I can imagine her taking her propensity for obsessive love and weaving it into *The Terror of Basket-Weaving*, her desire for family approval and casting it as *I Despise Your Life*, her experience as a lesbian during a repressive time and discharging it in *Not One of Us*. Looking through works for disguised reflections of a writer's life is routinely discouraged by the literary community, but my mind goes there as impulsively as her characters punch or kill.

Sophie Carsenat says

So crisply bleak, I want to neatly and stylishly slit my wrists.
You certainly don't read PH for sympathetic characters.

David says

It's probably natural, when approaching a short story collection, to have a different attitude than you might have toward a novel. With each story you enter, you're not sure of what you'll get next. That's certainly true of 'The Black House'.

Here, Highsmith covers a lot of territory in the scope of story settings, which alone is admirable. A reader expecting ground similar to the Ripley novels or 'The Price of Salt' is in for thwarted expectations, though vague echoes of those works appear intermittently.

There are 11 stories, the strongest coming at the beginning and at the end. Three stories midway - though still well-observed - are particularly atypical and a bit sluggish, and the last of those, 'Old Folks at Home', even comes off like Highsmith's own take on slapstick (the story is about a man and woman who decide to 'adopt' an elderly couple).

Though I did find 'When in Rome' ultimately bizarrely and entertainingly comical (the only story that had that effect on me), my 3 favorites were: 'Something the Cat Dragged In' (which has a refreshing kind of Agatha Christie tone to it), 'Under a Dark Angel's Eye' (which carries a remarkably strong twist) and the collection title story at the end (very gripping).

Highsmith's writing style remains breezy throughout this collection, which reveals departures (some welcome, some less so) that I could not have anticipated.
