



Big World

Mary Miller

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Fiction. Mary Miller's BIG WORLD is the second book and first work of fiction to come out of Short Flight/Long Drive Books, a publishing arm of the independent literary journal *Hobart*. The characters in Mary Miller's debut short story collection BIG WORLD are at once autonomous and lonesome, possessing both a longing to connect with those around them and a cynicism regarding their ability to do so, whether they're holed up in a motel room in Pigeon Forge with an air gun shooting boyfriend as in "Fast Trains" or navigating the rooms of their house with their dad after their mother's death as in "Leak." Mary Miller's writing is unapologetically honest and efficient and the gut-wrenching directness of her prose is reminiscent of Mary Gaitskill and Courtney Eldridge, if Gaitskill's and Eldridge's stories were set in the south and reeked of spilt beer and cigarette smoke.

Big World Details

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Author : Mary Miller

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From Reader Review Big World for online ebook

Carolina says

Grim and decadent, funny and dirty. I love it.

Lori says

review to come

Katie says

Tropic of Cancer and Big World, this month's two book club books. It's funny how neither really appealed to me initially. Henry Miller's book began aggressively with semen and spit splashed across each page. At the book's end, however, you could tell he had grown older. He had matured, but not in the conventional sense. Miller became reflective and a bit morose, which appealed to me more than the flippant discourse related to whores and prostitutes.

Big World struck me in a different way. I enjoyed the first few stories but then felt that each one felt a bit too similar to the last. Could Mary Miller write anything other than this, could she delve into any other theme? I couldn't help comparing this short story collection to that which I had recently read by Ray Bradbury, whose stories each felt original and unique. But I felt that comparison to be unfair so I returned to Mary Miller determined to be more observant. That helped a bit. Forcing myself to look beyond the similarities, I sought the unique. By the end, I had rectified my first reaction to Big World with a feeling of contentment.

Mary Miller's collection was nice in one other respect: I now feel inclined to write some short stories of my own. Sure, people need to read more about the North East.

Edward Goetz says

Much like 'Always Happy Hour,' I thoroughly enjoyed this group of stories. Although thematically the two books are the same, it never feels redundant or the theme overused. I think that is because each story stands on its own, and feels 'authentic' and original.

The thing I noticed in this book (and loved) was the way each story ended (which I'm sure is the same as 'Always Happy Hour'). In particular, when you look at the title story and 'Not all who wander are lost,' the final sentence drives home the story so well. They are a synthesis and make the story, in my opinion, more powerful.

Highly recommended.

David says

hobart's short flight/long drive books is producing enduring important works. they could shutter tomorrow and their first two works would be passed down from generation to generation through dusty used bookstores or from clicks on the internet, a paypal payment, and an addressed bubblewrap mailer. the tininess of this book compared to the modern paperback makes it stand out while quietly evoking the old dell mapback paperbacks with it's colored endpapers. you run your hand over the thing and turn it over. and then you open it up and let it destroy you.

i want to read these stories slowly but i can't stop turning the page. i have to know that these characters are going to be okay. these are some beautiful girls in this book, even the women. they move through the big grown up world of cheap motels and alcohol and t-shirts with homer simpson. They look out windows at a boarded up, dilapidated america. It is a beautiful sight miller sees, this heaviness and feeling of being lost while acting like you know exactly where you are going. these are my people. people who state "it's something about an easy job that makes it hard." i'm reminded of buffalo, new york. all faded glory but continuing on.

in story after story, there is this huge overtone, almost, to the book that says this big world wasn't supposed to be like this but this is what it is. this is what it is. i don't know but the underlying feeling is of little girls sitting on hardwood floors watching dust in a sliver of sunlight through a dirty window feeling safe and somehow in a moment that ended and they have become the caretakers to the boys who populate their lives. at the end of the story, temp, miller writes "i put him in the bathtub and kneel beside it like he's a child." characters are putting their heads in each others laps, and stroking their lovers hair like the missing parents should have been doing to these characters. these girls. they carry on. strong and confident even when deep inside their confidence is gone and they wander the house at night. waiting. you can almost make out what they are thinking. they are thinking about dust in shafts of light. or why there were never pancakes on plates, put there by a mother who loves them and wondering why their life never comes out like a movie.

Howard Parsons says

Mary Miller is one of the best writers out there right now, and Big World is all the proof needed. I read this collection four times in a row when I first bought it, and I've forced it on anyone and everyone who will listen. Not one story in Big World is anything less than remarkable.

Brian Alan Ellis says

I could say that Mary Miller's Big World is a wonderful collection, which it is, and that the stories in it remind me of how I feel when reading stories by Charles Baxter (or Bobbie Ann Mason), and they are all excellent because Baxter (and Mason) seems to ONLY write excellent stories. I could say that if I taught a writing class, which is a wildly hilarious idea (the thought of me teaching anything!), I would add stories from Big World into the curriculum because they encompass everything one should want a short story to have, which is to say they are truthful, funny and sad, and many other things also. I could say a lot about this book, really, but I won't. What I WILL say is that I recommend Big World to people who like reading strong writing about flawed (yet remarkably interesting) characters, and I recommend it highly because that's how this book rolls.

Roof Alexander says

Read this book now. Drop everything else. Miller's hopeless characters and bleak settings will make your nervously smile and crave cigarettes, whiskey, and cheap hotel rooms. The hilarious indifference of the narrator shines a light down on the darkness of the subject matter which deals a lot with death and bad/mediocre/awkward relationships. "I tried not to hold it against God. It wasn't God's fault that all the sick people in the world latched onto him." This is just one of the many brilliant lines from her collection. I'm going to start reading it again.

Jim says

I've been a fan of Mary Miller's work since an essay I wrote appeared alongside her short story "Leak" in Oxford American. That story opens Big World and introduces the reader to the funny-if-it-weren't-so-sad situations that her characters always seem to find themselves in. I wrote a short review which you can check out in

The Believer. Here's a taste of the review:

"Miller's characters tend to be introverted women whose appetite for alcohol and/or desire for sex make them extroverted, but only for a little while. They get involved with men who aren't available, emotionally or otherwise, and are invariably treated like kitchen appliances: 'convenient, yet out of the way.'"

Lara says

An outstanding collection that strikes the perfect balance between humor and hard truth. The stories in this collection are each examples of Mary Miller's acute observation of both human behavior and emotion, and the liminal void that often wells between. This lacuna is where Miller excels, beautifully capturing the ways in which our intentions so often fail to align with actions, our desires with reality. My only complaint is that thematically these stories felt redundant, though every sentence is so original I never once considered setting the collection aside—which perhaps was the problem; it might be best to take a break between stories, to fully appreciate each for the masterpiece that it is. Off to read Miller's novel.

Kevin says

A couple of these stories are phenomenal. Most of the stories in this collection involve women making bad decisions out of boredom or loneliness. A few of them were interesting for the way they relate moments that don't have typical story arcs, and yet they were still interesting and compelling. Really enjoyed Miller's style, though I did feel about half of the stories were forgettable. Still, would rank this as a very strong collection.

Justin says

A collection of short stories set mostly in the south about young women and teenage girls who are lost and trying to figure out if they even want to be found. Spare, unadorned, yet evocative prose that reads a bit like the stuff Carver wouldn't let Lish touch, but tempered with the big-eyed view of youth. In case you can't tell, I really dug it. Mary Miller can fucking write. Also I met her at a bar at AWP and she's hot and I kinda have a crush on her and uh oh I better stop writing now...

Laura says

i devoured this in one sitting, couldn't put it down. i know everyone is sick to death of ray carver comparisons, but she's the first i've read who has traces of his greatness while still doing her own amazing thing. these are dark, almost gothic tales -- don't pick it up if you want a pick-me-up. do pick it up if you want some quality short stories. the cover/format is great -- like a pulp novel and so tiny you can slip it in your pocket.

Myfanwy says

Reviewed here: <http://myfanwy.blogspot.com/2009/02/b...>

lindsay says

well this book is extremely perfect and made me cry
