

Scenes from Village Life by Amos Oz.  
Chatto and Windus, 2011.

The genre of the short story is a hard one to assimilate for those who like their stories to unfold at a leisurely pace, or for every character to have a lengthy back story. Yet the master story teller is one who can tell a tale in a much shorter space, who makes something of the paucity of the genre, who grips the reader in the first few words and leaves them fully satisfied.

Scenes from Village Life, Amos Oz's latest publication, is set around the village of Tel Dan, 'a little bit of Provence in the State of Israel'; there are eight stories in the collection, Heirs, Relations, Digging, Lost, Waiting, Strangers, Singing, In a faraway place at another time, and they are connected by their locus and the fact that some of the characters in one story reappear in another.

I freely admit that the short story genre is not my favourite kind of reading, but Amos Oz's writing is habitually so transcendent that I parked my prejudices and was very glad I did. This is a deeply evocative and rich collection of tales by a peerless writer.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh