



Good Bones

Margaret Atwood

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In Good Bones, first published in 1992, Margaret Atwood has fashioned an enthralling collection of parable, monologue, mini-romance and minibiography, speculative fiction, prose lyric, outrageous recipe and reconfigured fairy tale, demonstrating yet again the play of an unerring wit overseen by a panoramic intelligence. Good Bones is a cornucopia of good things -- precise, witty, wise, and sometimes offbeat Atwood writing, with the funny and the sidelong view of the world which her readers recognize at once.

Good Bones Details

Date : Published 1992 by Coach House Press

ISBN : 9780889104426

Author : Margaret Atwood

Format : Hardcover 153 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, Poetry, Cultural, Canada, Feminism

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Virginia says

Some pieces were excellent and others were forgettable. It's very clever, and very amusing for the most part. But I expected more than simply clever and amusing from Margaret Atwood.

This part did give me chills:

“By now you know: I come from another planet. But I will never say to you, "Take me to your leaders." Even I--unused to your ways though I am--would never make that mistake. We ourselves have such beings among us, made of cogs, pieces of paper, small disks of shiny metal, scraps of coloured cloth. I do not need to encounter more of them.

Instead I will say, "Take me to your trees. Take me to your breakfasts, your sunsets, your bad dreams, your shoes, your nouns. Take me to your fingers; take me to your deaths."

These are worth it. These are what I have come for.”

Pam Baddeley says

A collection of short pieces which are dry, ironic, strange. Various topics, including Queen Gertrude in Hamlet addressing her son, or the viewpoint of the little red hen, which seems to be from a children's story I'm not familiar with, but all have a common thread of examining misogyny and the roles played by women and men. Well-written and clever, sad, dark in places.

Katrina Southern says

So I'm just going to come out and say it - before this book, I had NEVER read anything by Margaret Atwood. Please don't throw things at me. But, being a Feminist and hearing so many great things about Atwood's style as well as her strong writing on gender roles, I really thought I ought to try her work out. I have been eyeing up her short story collections for a while, a good as place as any to start in order to get a feel for her work, and I have to say I was thoroughly impressed for the most part. Atwood's writing is like poetry but with a purpose, relatable in many ways and carrying a strong message in it's imagery. Atwood certainly seems to be fond of taking well known stories and character archetypes and turning them on their head, something I love to read! She provides a different perspective in a very straight forward, thought-provoking way.

There are so many great stories and pieces of poetry to delve into, and this would definitely be a great book for the casual reader that likes to pick something short up to ponder on every so often. I'm fond of Fairy Tales, Classic literature and of course Shakespeare so stories like 'The Little Red Hen Tells All' (from the perspective of a very disgruntled hen telling her version of the classic children's tale), 'Gertrude Talks Back' (Hamlet's Mother telling her spoilt son to get off his high horse), 'There Was Once' (a modern, thoughtful way of dissecting a fairy tale), and 'Unpopular Gals' (the Ugly Step Sister, Wicked Witch and Evil Step

Mother have something to say) were just a few of these great re-imaginings of the original stories we hear so often in our lives. I loved the stories that looked at everyday things in our society and analysed them to the point where they seemed bizarre and almost alien, 'Alien Territory', 'Cold-Blooded' and 'Homelanding' were great examples of this. Atwood dealt with so many different, interesting topics that looked at the bare bones of humanity, gender, war, biology, and class.

There were some stories that didn't appeal to me so much - 'An Angel', 'In Love With Raymond Chandler', 'Dance With The Lepers' and 'Bad News' were a few of them. They dealt with their themes appropriately but I just didn't connect with them in the same way that I connected with other stories in the book. I often found myself completely hooked on one story, then skimming over the next, and that's probably due to the varied topics in this collection. I liked it overall, because of Atwood's writing skill, the detailed character profiles and the chosen presentation of a short story collection with a dash of poetry. The mix of good and uninteresting was a little bizarre at times, but there is certainly a story in here for everyone. I'll definitely be revisiting Atwood's work, particularly to read more of these collections!

Annebelle says

This was a book I didn't find particularly remarkable, sadly. While there were some stories that I found interesting, most I ended up skimming because it didn't interest me at all. Most of these stories are shorter than a few pages, which might be the reason I was unable to get attached to them. While I love Atwood's writing this was not my thing and put me off her short story collections for now. Her novels, however, are still on my list.

Buddy says

There are some good pieces and some underwhelming pieces in here. I feel like I would have appreciated it more as a younger, less jaded feminist. Atwood's poetic voice is strong enough that I don't mind this collection not really lighting any fires for me. Torn between 2 and 3 stars, I err on the side of generosity.

Stela says

Whenever you are overwhelmed by world's bleakness, try laughing. It will fade, eventually, your laugh, but for a while it would give you strength to keep going. This is basically what *Good Bones* is about, from the image of the angel of misfortune who "When you're feeling bad (...) scratches at your window" in the first story (*Bad News*), to the image of the bones as a symbol not only of our ephemerality but also of our inner (literally!) strength, in the last one (*Good Bones*).

It's true, the laugh, big in the first stories will dissolve gradually into sadness, as the narrative voice gives up ludic for parodic, sarcastic, grave, resigned, alien, in order to denounce stereotypes, turn upside down myths and literary figures, whilst dealing with themes in the semantic field of misfortune, such as:

- Misunderstanding of the drama clarified by the prosaic point of view of Hamlet's mother who reduces the tragedy to some domestic discord and finally explains her presumed pathetic gesture: "I am not wringing my hands. I am drying my nails" (*Gertrude Talks Back*).

- Mistreatment (by the reader) of the ugly sister who proudly understands her narrative importance: “You can wipe your feet on me, twist my motives around all you like, you can dump millstones on my head and drown me in the river, but you can’t get me out of the story. I’m the plot, babe, and don’t ever forget it.” (*Unpopular Gals*)

- Misogyny and misandry: if woman is often reduced to a Barbie doll image, the man can also be viewed only as a useful object around the house, that “When worn out, (...) can be re-covered and used as doorstops.” (*The Female Body; Making a Man*)

- Miscalculation of the adversary: the alienation is double viewed in a sort of dystopia where intelligent insect-like beings study the ugliness and deficiencies of humans whereas the humans, aliens in turn on another planet, try to explain (and understand) their own humanity (*Cold-Blooded; Homelanding*).

Of course, there are also themes (other than the ‘mis’-words I enjoyed playing with) like alienation, loneliness, war, death, etc. that are put in various forms: monologues, essays, journalistic articles, mixing genres and styles, in a hallucinating merry-go-round of auctorial voices burst out from a wide-open Pandora’s box.

It seems that the only salvation from that disquieting scratch at our window is once again the refuge in art, the Aristotle’s mimetic but cathartic art, which teaches you to cope, that is, to die:

“Ah lepers. If you can dance, even you, why not the rest of us?”

Philip says

It’s not often that a book review of any kind threatens to be longer than the original work. Any review of Margaret Atwood’s *Good Bones*, however, risks such ignominy. *Good Bones*, which might also have been successfully entitled *Bare Bones*, is not just succinct: it is short. Ostensibly, it’s a collection of short stories, but cover to cover there is only enough material to keep a determined reader happy for an hour or so, if the object is merely to cover the ground. If the object is to savour the material and follow its concentrated lead, then there might even be a lifetime of involvement within these few pages.

The tales feature characters from fiction, from Classical myth, from folk tales and fairy stories, as well as other, more disparate sources. Margaret Atwood herself seems to figure here and there as well. In every case, we see something familiar from an unusual perspective, points of view that in every case take the reader by surprise.

But there is something much more arresting and surprising than the subject matter, and that is the various forms in which these pieces are presented. They are all different, but none addresses its subject matter via mere prose. And strangely, these are not poems either. They are poetic, and they feel like they ought to be prose. They are like sketches or verbal doodles and, as such, regularly flit from one unexpected turn to another, equally unpredicted.

If these short pieces were pictures, they would remind us of smaller canvases by Paul Klee, with their schematised line drawings, cartoon witticisms and the occasional joke tinged with nightmare. Throughout they would speak of big ideas that seem to underpin the content, and this is communicated in concentrated form, despite their small scale, emerging via suggestion. And it is surely their biting irony that

simultaneously arrests and entertains.

In some ways, these short stories by Margaret Atwood, these prose poems-cum-doodles almost constitute a new literary form, perhaps doing for prose what haikus do for poetry. Each one could have become a novel, if Margaret Atwood had been lucky enough to have had the luxury of multiple lives to afford the time to construct them. Read them quickly and the revisit them individually with more time to spare. Their stature is small, but their rewards are great.

Fauve says

These were both super sassy and kind of dark at the same time, which is exactly why I love Atwood so much.

Chantal says

By turns hilarious, clever and completely surreal.

If you like Angela Carter these little snippets of Atwood will appeal.

(I really didn't mean that to rhyme.)

Cheyenne Blue says

While I enjoyed this collection of super-short-short stories and essays by Margaret Atwood, it paled in comparison to her later volume "The Tent". The formula is the same, but Atwood's writing reached a pinnacle in the tiny tales in "The Tent". Like George Clooney, Atwood gets better as she ages. "Good Bones" is an enjoyable read but it doesn't have the barbs, the insight, the succinctness that "The Tent" does. My attention wandered in some of the stories in "Good Bones", which isn't a good thing when the story is only 3 pages long.

Standouts were "Theology", "An Angel" and "Good Bones".

Milka says

What caught my attention in the library was that wonderful cover! That women looks like a badass and I LOVE IT. I have been meaning to read something by Margaret Atwood for such a long time, and since I was in the lookout for short books and collections of short stories, it didn't take me long to decide that this is a title that needs to leave the library with me. I guess I can pat myself in the back for an awesome decision, because once I started reading this one, I couldn't put it down and ended up reading the whole thing on one sitting.

Good Bones consists of fairly short stories that discuss everything from feminism and fairy tales to Shakespeare and religion. Atwood's prose is interesting and Good Bones did exactly what I hoped it would be - ignite an interest in reading more Margaret Atwood. It also further ignited my interest in reading short stories.

Though some of the stories are only four pages in length, they leave an impression. Actually, I think it was the more shorter stories in general that I enjoyed more than the longer ones. There is a story that features Gertrude's version of what happened in Hamlet that I really enjoyed, as well as one that adds a little twist to the Little Red Hen story that is just absolutely brilliant!

Though this one was an interesting and enjoyable book to read on one sitting, now that I look back I kind of hope that I would have taken a little more time with it to fully digest these stories. One day I will definitely borrow this again from the library so I can reread the stories that left the biggest impression on me.

I will definitely be curious to continue this new reading journey with Margaret Atwood. If you have any suggestions for what I should read next, please let me know!

Kathryn says

Loved this. But as others of my book club might not have finished it yet, instead of a review, I will write my word-list for this book. (After finishing a book I go through, flipping to pages at random and pointing at one word, then doing it again and find another. This generates word pairs that I put on a list, which somehow, magically perhaps, represents the feel of the work.)

My word list for GOOD BONES:

miniature bodies
man accounts
dry birds
neon waste
muse hammer
outraged plainsong
backyard cavern
primitive corpses
stepmother moths
story stuffed
girl collection
mushroom metal
swollen potatoes
marked devils
embryo behavior
wombat manhole
arduous organs
thousand scenes

Wei Lien Chin says

I once compared Margaret Atwood to what ancient philosophers understood about stars and the night sky. They believed that stars were holes in the curtain of night, letting the light of heaven to pass through. Of course, we know all of that is bullshit today, but that's how I see Margaret Atwood in some ways.

Atwood is not a god, but reading her makes me feel like a person in the medieval times, peeping at heaven through holes in the sky. I may not know exactly what I am looking at, but I know somewhere on the other side of the curtain lies brilliance.

Good Bones is a good example of that. In this collection of short fiction, Atwood goes to town with her playfulness, like a literary exercise she does from time to time to work her brain muscles. As such, while some stories are entertaining and thought provoking to say the least, others don't quite make sense. But because it is Margaret Atwood, I, as a reader, feel that it is my fault for not "getting it" rather than her. She's just on another level, even when she's just hunkering down for some fun on the page.

Not every piece of writing here worked for me, but that's just the way short fiction operates. And I'm fine with that.

Sara says

I think I made the mistake of reading this book in one go instead of piece by piece over a longer period of time. A lot of it felt like I was reading the same thing over and over again. Some of the works here reminded me a lot of Carol Ann Duffy's poetry; The Red Hen and Gertrude specifically brought to mind CAD's The World's Wife, but just seemed too overdone in the message relayed by Atwood. Reading the first half was like having spoonfuls of peanut butter shoved in your mouth without rest, I wasn't a fan. I just grew tired of the content halfway through the book, and it wasn't until the last third where there were pieces of work that really excited me. Those last pieces were darker, the imagery and language appealed more to me.

Violet says

A collection of 27 writings or works i think is the best way to describe them. They are short tales, essay type reads and sometimes others are general thoughts and musings of the author. Sometimes i felt like i was reading a immature diary or notebook,or wandering through a scrapbook of general thoughts and notions.

It is witty and in parts laugh out loud funny.. i particulary enjoyed 'The Red Hen Tells All'

" Everyone wants in on it. Everyone! Not just the cat,the pig and the dog. The horse too, the cow, the rhinoceros, the orang-outang, the horn-toad, the wombat, the duckbilled platypuss, you name it. There's no peace any more and all because of that goddamn loaf of bread. It's not easy, being a hen" I read this paragraph and i knew i was in for something different.

I also enjoyed, 'Gertrude Talks Back' 'There was Once' 'Unpopular Girls' and 'Let Us Now Praise Stupid Women'

This is clever, imaginative and really cuts to the chase and perfect to read between big tommes or just for some light hearted fun.

Christy says

Is there anything that Margaret Atwood can't write?! I like that I can read her superb character portraits in small snippets within this short story anthology. It is great if I don't have long to read and don't want to start a new full-length fiction book. I recommend it, even just for her social commentary within the stories.

Alexa says

Some of these are very, very funny, and some of these are painfully ironic, and most of them are quite deliciously pointed. Many of them are gems. However, as a collection, they all felt a bit too precious to me. Or perhaps it's just that I can only take so much silly, snarky humor at a time. This needs to be read very slowly, when one is in the humor for a small piece of irony served up with great precision.

Katie says

Loved: Bad News, Gertrude Talks Back, Unpopular Girls, The Female Body, Making a Man, Homelanding, and Good Bones. In no particular order.

KtotheC says

A little thin, like The Penelopiad - feels like she's really phoning it in.

Chris says

Worth reading for "Gertrude Talks Back". You tell that spoiled son, Gerty.
