



The Spot

David Means

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The Spot is an old blacksmith shed in which three men tweeze apart the intricacies of a botched bank robbery.

The Spot is a park on the Hudson River, where two lovers sense their affair is about to come to an end.

The Spot is at the bottom of Niagara Falls, where the body of a young girl floats as if caught in the currents of her own tragic story.

The Spot is in the ear of a Manhattan madman plagued by a noisy upstairs neighbor .

The Spot is a suburban hospital room in which a young father confronts his son's potentially devastating diagnosis.

The Spot is a dusty encampment in Nebraska where a gang of inept radicals plot a revolution.

The Spot draws thirteen new stories together into a masterful collection that shows David Means at his finest: at once comically detached and wrenchingly affecting, expansive and concise, wildly inventive and firmly rooted in tradition. Means's work has earned him comparisons to Flannery O'Connor (*London Review of Books*), Alice Munro, Bob Dylan, Jack Kerouac (*Newsday*), Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson (*Chicago Tribune/NPR*), Denis Johnson (*Entertainment Weekly*), Poe, Chekhov, and Carver (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*), but the spot he has staked out in the American literary landscape is fully and originally his own.

The Spot Details

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Timothy says

I enjoyed this book much less than The Secret Goldfish and Assorted Fire Events. The reason would be that the stories felt less human, less warm and more verbose. Instead of getting into the character's heads, it stories seemed to get into the author's words, often brilliant but functioning in a less plot or character driven way.

Héctor Genta says

“E così adesso l'universo è un cazzo di casino. Non c’è un cazzo di niente che possiamo fare.”

Tra gli scrittori di racconti statunitensi contemporanei, David Means è uno dei due o tre che considero imprescindibili. Lui, Saunders e D’Ambrosio (ci sarebbero anche Mary Robison e Amy Hampel, ma di loro ho letto troppo poco). Poi vengono Aimee Bender, Canty, Adrian, Lipsyte... ma dopo.

Means è Means: scrittura non particolarmente scorrevole e di impatto non immediato per racconti straniati e duri, sia per gli argomenti trattati ma soprattutto per il vuoto interiore dei personaggi descritti. Un vuoto doloroso, soprattutto emotivo, che li spinge a muoversi come anime perse nella nebbia. A guidarne i comportamenti non c’è più la luce della ragione, la morale è diventata una parola svuotata da ogni significato e loro sono simulacri che vagano nel buio di esistenze vuote, cercando di afferrare qualcosa usando l’istinto come unica guida. Quello che balugina nella loro notte sono solo brandelli di sentimenti, qualche emozione, luci sempre più fioche, sempre più rade.

I racconti de *Il punto* ci parlano di furti, violenze, rapine, omicidi, di momenti di svolta che non rappresentano però delle epifanie, ma solo istanti durante i quali è cambiato o avrebbe potuto cambiare il corso degli eventi. Sono racconti costruiti con perizia e mestiere: spesso Means ci introduce nella narrazione come se conoscessimo già i fatti, altre volte omette particolari e frequentemente la trama si sviluppa su un doppio binario, da un lato quello che accade e dall’altro quello che i protagonisti pensano. Ecco, mi sembra che uno dei tratti comuni ai racconti di questa raccolta sia proprio la necessità da parte dei personaggi di raccontarsi storie per provare a tenere insieme una realtà che sembra andare alla deriva.

Paquita Maria Sanchez says

And now I must read everything by him.

Beth says

I can’t give this book a fair rating. Not because I didn’t finish it (I did, mostly), but because it just wouldn’t seem right. My gut instinct wants to give it only one star. But that would be knee jerk reaction to the fact that I found the characters to be mostly despicable doing deplorable things – rape, murder, adultery, child abuse, robbery, prostitution. I think Means pretty much covers most of the worst acts humanly possible.

Don't get me wrong, many of the best books out there delve into these acts and manage to be first rate. Carver comes to mind in terms of portraying awful people, and I love him. But these stories had more of a Flannery O'Conner feel to them (not a fan), which I don't think is coincidental. One of the stories makes reference to the movie The Misfits - an oblique reference to The Misfit in A Good Man is Hard to Find – and reminded me a lot of that story.

In terms of Means' writing style, I'd have to rate him a 4.5. He really is an incredible writer. It's no wonder that he was the critics' darling of 2010. So there's my conundrum. Though I think he's a brilliant writer, I just couldn't get past his characters. That may have something to do with the fact that these are short stories that don't have a chance to flesh the characters out beyond their hateful acts. But, again, if I can like Carver, that doesn't quite explain it.

Ahmad Al Tukhaifi says

I was so excited for this book, but after reading a couple of stories I was disappointed. The stories dragged forever and I ended up hate reading it cause I bought it and didn't want that to be a waste. Hate reading it had a benefit though, I came up on 3 stories that I liked, A River in Egypt, Reading Chekhov and The Botch. Those were good. But the whole book consists of about 14 short stories and only 3 of them that I've enjoyed. So.. not much fun.

Brian says

What to say about a book that took me nearly half a year to finish? Means has been compared to Flannery O'Connor, Alice Munro, Bob Dylan (?), Jack Kerouac, Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson, Denis Johnson, Poe, Chekhov, and Carver. That right there should have told me that this was a writer that couldn't be pinned down. And his stories would probably be bits and pieces of this and that. Well... I found his stories to be just that... bits and pieces of this and that. The short stories are mostly about losers, downbeats, junkies, or just plain neurotic people doing what losers, downbeats, junkies and plain neurotic people do. I was disappointed that none of the stories seemed to have a resolution. People just did things and then the next story started with people doing things. Shit... I can sit on the side of the road and see half these stories.

I did kind of like the short story 'The Gulch'. A story about a bunch of screwed up teenagers making a cross and crucifying a friend to save the world fascinated me. But in the end the investigating officer ends up thinking about fly fishing... WTF?

I'm kind of disappointed and pissed off because either I didn't 'get' it or the writer didn't 'get' it. Give me O'Connor, Munro, Dylan, Kerouac, Hemingway, Anderson, Johnson, Poe, Chekhov or Carver any day. Just leave out Means.

I gave it 2 stars instead of 1 because I liked the cover and I liked the kids that crucified their friend. That's 2 things.

Coryl says

Decent. Nothing mind-blowing.

Lee says

The Cormac McCarthy of the Midwest and Hudson River? Seriously written serious stories, harsh manly humorless stuff, usually interestingly structured. I'd reckon there're two 5* stories in this collection -- the title story and the one about spontaneous human combustion -- and a 6* paragraph in one story where a father imagines how many seconds his son would pay attention to the sight of a walrus, a boat, a boat on fire, a boat on fire with passengers jumping into the water etc. With each sensational progression the kid would pay a few more seconds of attention. Which is interesting in an attentively written book involving a good deal of violent sensationalism? Attentively written up the wazoo -- so attentive the sentence ani seem a bit constricted/retentive. Thus, stains left by the stool of these stories in the bowl of this reader's imagination don't quite smell that much? I admire the talent and time that produce such writing but would have liked more space, more humor, more delight? (Means seems to revel but not *delight* in the language?) Existence of worlds herein I didn't wholly trust, maybe because the language dial too often seemed cranked to "Serious Literary Tone (Harper's Quality)" -- that is, I think I'd've liked these stories more if Means "dialed back" the tone toward the conversational and if, thematically, there was a little more light? Generally, sometimes I was willing to co-create these stories. Sometimes the sentence sphincter seemed so tight, access was impossible, so I proceeded with a story no more. Also, importantly, I rarely believed the characters' names -- manly surnames like Gunner, Collard, Cavanaugh -- except for Meg. Still, I ordered the first two collections -- and look forward to finding the 5* stories in them.

soulAdmitted says

Primizie di desolazione direttamente dai luoghi in cui le croci domestiche non metaforiche si tengono insieme con il filo per il bucato, il bucato si tiene insieme con i fili delle collane rubate, le collane rubate si tengono insieme con capelli lunghissimi strappati, a pagamento, in albergo, e gli alberghi si terranno probabilmente insieme finché non esplodono. Come gli uomini e le donne non metaforici e come quasi tutto il resto. (Santa Flannery, consola Means...).

Elizabeth says

I'm more than three-quarters of the page into reading one of David Means' short stories when I come to realize that I have been reading one long, complicatedly intricate sentence. Means stories are full of those beautifully expanded sentence that he manages so well. Means is an American writer who has had stories published in many publications. His stories are typically set in the American Midwest, where originally from. His first short story collection, *A Quick Kiss of Redemption*, was published in 1991 and almost twenty years later his latest, and fourth, short story collection *The Spot* was published. The Spot has 13 short stories, each with completely different narrators ranging from a worried father to a detective investigating a teenager's crucifixion to a hobo begging for food. Means touches on the complicatedness of human relationships and the human instinct to survive, among other things, in his stories.

The story “Reading Chekhov” follows the love affair between a Midwestern woman and a soon-to-be “man of cloth”. At first I wasn’t sure if I was reading it correctly, a man of the cloth having a love affair with a woman? And a married woman at that? Yes, I did read that right. This story brings the reader’s attention to how complicated this man’s relationship is with women, and then further complicates things making the reader question the man’s relationship with God. Adultery, as we all know, is a sin and a man that is studying theology would know this, no doubt. The man in “Reading Chekhov” doesn’t seem ready to commit to any relationship, certainly not where God is his one and only. He is having an affair with a married woman, which carries the implication that this is just a short term thing, maybe just taking care of his manly needs before swearing off of any carnal pleasure for life. Just how devoted can this man be if he is committing a sin in the eyes of God, even showing affection for her in church! “On top of the flat pleats of her tweed skirt, tight against her spreading thighs, their hands rested, clasped firmly.” This is certainly scandalous behavior for this man to be doing in church, in front of God. Means’ stories seem to be plucking out the idea that human relationships with God and other people is complicated, maybe even wrong sometimes.

Along with complications in relationships, there is the complicatedness of human instinct survival and what we must do to simply make it through the day. The first story in the collection is titled “The Knocking”. The title is quite fitting for the story about a man that seems to be going insane with all his thoughts on his upstairs neighbor’s knocking. As the story progresses it reveals that this man has gone through a divorce, which is deeply affecting his life. Soon the knocking becomes, in a way, a coping mechanism for the pain of the deep loss he feels for having lost his wife and kids and home. “One afternoon – as I was remembering how it felt to slide my hand along Mary’s hips... the sweeping sound began; not a knocking, but simply the sound of the man upstairs cleaning his apartment in the middle of a hot New York afternoon...” The sweeping sound, which was “not a knocking”, takes away the man’s mind from the longing he has for the feel of his ex-wife’s hips. As the passage continues, the sweeping sound becomes so persistent it “shifted to knock mode”. The knocking helps distract his thoughts and make it through his day, but also serve as a sort of metaphor for the repetitiveness of the man’s thoughts. He is constantly thinking about the family he lost and the knocking, never truly at peace with himself and living a complicated existence.

To further highlight the complicatedness of his stories, Means writes long sentences that you can lose yourself in. The sentences were truly one of the strong factors in the story, they got me hooked and kept me on the line until I reached the end. As an aspiring writer, it is things like sentence structure that I pay attention to and makes me think of questions like: “How does Means make that sentence work and not feel like a run-on?” or “How does the sentence length and complicatedness fit the story?” As I mentioned earlier, one of the stories in the collection, “The Knocking” starts off with a sentence that is almost three-quarters of a page long! One of the sentences in “The Knocking” starts off by addressing the sound of a broom, then about the act of sweeping and then how the sweeping becomes a knocking in response to the narrator’s moaning. “At some point the sweet, even anachronistic, broom swish has shifted to knock mode, not so much the actual sound – because that was simply vibrations in the air – but rather the inherent pacing and gestural qualities in the way the sound produced itself....” and the sentence continues from there.

While the sentences were amazing and made me wish I could write sentences like that as well, this could also be seen as a con of Means’ writing. The long sentences can be a bit... distracting. At times I kept on thinking “Is this sentence ever going to end?” and I would lose track of what was actually written and focus more on sentence length, which would cause me to do some re-reading.

If you are looking to do some reading (and maybe even some re-reading!) of complicated characters, complicated relationships and human survival then David Means’ *The Spot* might be just what you’re looking for. It takes you through an array of characters and situations, but essentially gets down to the day-by-day struggles of human existence. Just be ready to forget happy endings when reading *The Spot* and enjoy peeking into the lives of people that you probably won’t ever get to meet in real life.

Cosimo says

"Spesso la confessione più sincera e realistica di un crimine era fornita proprio dalla persona più innocente. Spesso chi aveva tutto da perdere si lanciava con audacia, come quelli che si tuffano dalle scogliere, o come i cercatori di perle. Quei ragazzi indigeni che trovavano il coraggio di entrare nell'acqua scura, le gambe che battevano piano, sforbiciando verso la luce, le braccia tese a stringere e a afferrare. Era un po' quello che doveva fare un investigatore in quelle situazioni: immergersi il più possibile in profondità, con l'aria che brucia i polmoni e le braccia tese in avanti nella speranza di riportare in superficie una perla".

Una prima descrizione per questi racconti, che sono ombre in agguato o trasparenze nella sabbia: sublimi, incantevoli, misteriosi, corporei, in una parola meravigliosi. Davvero, viene voglia di piangere sentendo quanta bellezza la pagina porta con sé. E poi subentra l'inquietudine, sotto forma di domanda. Prima una sola, poi molte, e non c'è altro da fare che tuffarsi nel testo in cerca di luce, di respiro, di contatto, di una voce che dica io, portandoti in fondo alla strada, restituendoti un momentaneo silenzio. In un crescendo di inimitabile stile e travolcente necessità, c'è un mondo di esperienze e narrazioni, di azioni e trasformazioni, di magie e di metamorfosi. E tu leggendo ti trovi sempre al centro di tutto, al limite di un abisso che confina con il cielo, dove natura e paesaggio si fondono formando un teatro di osessione e solitudine. Come può accadere che quella donna così inconsapevole sia la causa del male? C'è davvero un posto così buio dove l'oblio scatena un passato che ci fa desiderare il dolore? Il tuo coltello, il fiume, il treno, possono essere lasciati a questo disordine? Il nostro tradimento resterà un detrito privo di senso? Le cose andranno esattamente secondo il piano? Qualcuno li accoglierà o resteranno sepolti nell'inganno? Sembra che l'autore non abbia risposte se non nella continuità del raccontare, nella sottigliezza dell'indagine, nella raffinatezza del tratto, nel gioco del linguaggio e nella molteplicità della voce. C'è semplicemente da dire che questo libro ha dimestichezza con il destino. Con il destino di tutti noi.

Mircalla64 says

il punto è che il postmoderno ha abolito i punti

13 racconti, ciascuno con la sua bella, sottile ambientazione, un po' Carver e un altro po' Faulkner, cattivi, asciutti, come è solo la vita vera, osservata da uno che ha gli occhi più acuti che si possano immaginare, si certo non è DFW e non vuole nemmeno esserlo, è uno che vede bene e quel che vede non lo commenta, nè lo interpreta, solo lo descrive, coi toni da spaccato così tanto comuni nel postmoderno da far sembrare il tutto come un film che intravedi al volo per aver acceso tardi la tv di notte e senza avere la guida tv sotto mano, una cosa che fotografa un momento, ma quel momento è tutto quel che conta...il resto lo puoi comodamente immaginare tu

SCARABOOKS says

In certe storie lette, viste, sentite o vissute, esiste un punto in cui il corso delle cose vira. Vira nel senso che la storia cambia colore o qualità o direzione . E si avvia al suo esito. A volte con un movimento lento, quasi impercettibile. Oppure con un'improvvisa accelerazione.

Di quel punto parlano quasi tutti questi racconti.

Un punto. Una cosa piccola. Che accade in un attimo. Che magari non c'entra niente, ma che però sta o misteriosamente riecheggia in una qualche profondità. Di sguardi. Di burroni. Di ricordi. Di laghi. Di

convizioni. Di provincia americana. Di disperazione o di noia.

Un punto, che è come un buco nero, in cui tutto viene attratto da una forza irresistibile e si condensa. Dove il rumore è così forte che non senti più nulla e il tempo rallenta fin quasi a fermarsi.

Lì, esattamente in quel punto, Means costruisce i suoi racconti.

Secchi. Duri. Bellissimi. “Pasticcio” su tutti.

Ryan Madman Reads & Rocks says

Unique and haunting. Not a scary kind of haunting. A haunting that keeps one intrigued and wanting to reread every single word. David Means' prose is definitely not for everyone.

PietjePuk says

Loved the style, tailored to describe the intersection of time and place with insane precision. Would be curious to see if Means writes differently when the goals of the writing change. Also appreciated the fact that the stories deal with marginal figures, who all depend heavily on the stories they tell themselves. The characters feel a little like stock characters, but that actually adds to the stories in this case. The book as a whole explores perhaps more the edges of a specific spot, than the spot itself.
