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My Struggle: Book 1



Synopsis

My Struggle: Book One introduces American readers to the audacious, addictive, and profoundly surprising international literary sensation that is the provocative and brilliant six-volume autobiographical novel by Karl Ove Knausgaard. It has already been anointed a Proustian masterpiece and is the rare work of dazzling literary originality that is intensely, irresistibly readable. Unafraid of the big issues—death, love, art, fear—and yet committed to the intimate details of life as it is lived, *My Struggle* is an essential work of contemporary literature.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Novels are often autobiographical, and memoirs usually have as much fiction as fact. So what is Norwegian writer Karl Ove Knausgaard's *My Struggle*? It's clearly his personal story, told in a hyper-realistic manner. When I saw him in conversation with James Wood in September 2012 at Porter Square Books in Cambridge, he said yes, of course this is a novel, not a memoir: he uses the techniques of a novelist. But it's something simpler than that: it's an extremely effective piece of storytelling, the elemental kind that is how we make sense of our lives. Why should readers care about the story of Karl Ove's life? It's not that it's in any way remarkable, though it certainly has its personal dramas. No, it's the almost guileless realism that drew me in—all the small details that make up our everyday lives that rarely get acknowledged in books, but which completely resonates at some deep inner level. And while there are passages where the writing is plain—no other word for it—often Knausgaard is employing the careful wordcraft of a skilled writer more concerned with telling his story than showing off his chops. In doing so, he gets to the heart of being in all its

everyday ordinariness. Knausgaard spares no one in his family in this portrayal, least of all himself. We see family scenes from his childhood, a long section from his teenage years that's blissfully free of moralizing or wallowing in self pity: it's simply life itself. But ultimately the book is about death, and what that means for the living. *My Struggle* opens with a meditation on life's end, and the heart of the book recounts Karl Ove's week after learning of his father's death, most of it spent at his grandmother's fetid home in Kristiansand, a town on the southern coast of Norway.

This series starts off gripping the reader: I was enthralled for the same reasons most other reviewers seem to indicate. As the pages flew by my interest started to wane slightly. I became mildly self-conscious. Am I a stereotypical American in need of constant neurotransmitter candy, clearly defined endings, a return to the tonic at every chapter's end? I loved Bolano and a handful of other 1000 page doorstops and prolix jeremiads. I soldiered on, and on, and on. Banal. Solipsistic. Ennui. The criticisms from other reviewer come to mind and echo my sentiments somewhere around the three-quarters point in the first book. The writing is good, clever at times. Knausgaard can no doubt throw a yarn. The voice is honest - with the caveat that it is a first person narrative - and vulnerable at times. He's going to invite criticism: from people whose private moments are laid bare, from readers that have invested so much time and feel cheated, from readers that think his life is trivial, his problems typical, and his achievements modest. There is a fluidity to his writing that dupes the reader into persevering. Had there been technical halts in the writing, discontinuities (e.g. numerous chapters), visual hiccups (e.g. footnotes a la DFW), and other assorted non-linearity, I believe the growth in popularity would have stunted. The title was also a brilliant marketing tool. It forces a self-deprecating writing style lest the author is perceived as pompous. *My Struggle* isn't some auto-hagiography. Knausgaard avoids this with his honesty and introspection albeit as days turn into weeks turn into months.

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