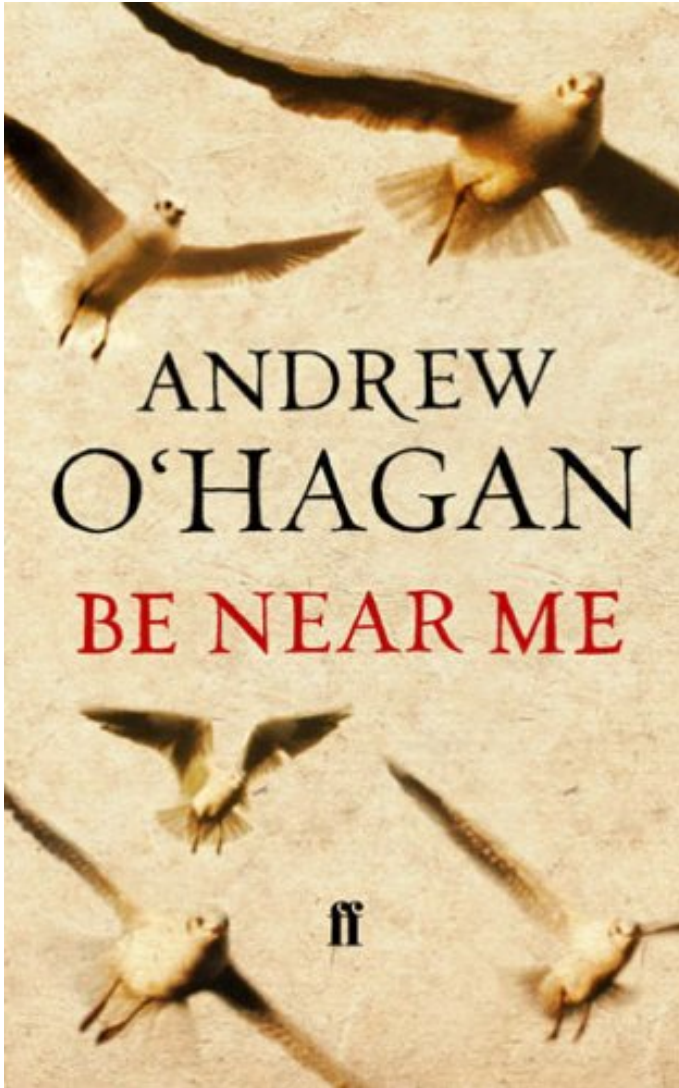

Andrew O'Hagan

Be Near Me



Title: Be Near Me

Author: Andrew O'Hagan

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Description

The Canadian debut of the Booker Prize-shortlisted author of *Our Fathers*.

In a small Scottish parish in a post-industrial town by the sea, an English priest with secrets in his own past becomes stalked by the fear of scandal, class hatred, and lost ideals.

When Father David Anderton takes over a Scottish parish, not everyone is ready to accept him. Over the spring and summer of 2003, Father David befriends two young, troubled students, Mark and Lisa. Their natural energy and response to the world bring out his own feelings of protectiveness, as well as longings for parts of himself — and his past — that he has come to lose. This relationship and the way it develops leads to the book's climax, as Father David finds himself facing accusations of abuse.

Told from the point of view of Father David, we feel, beneath his need for order and emotional distance, the passionate undercurrents that have brought him to where he is. In this riveting novel, where every word counts, Andrew O'Hagan's brilliant writing leads us into a story of art and politics, love and faith. *Be Near Me* possesses a depth of feeling and a literary artistry that render it O'Hagan's masterpiece.

From the Hardcover edition.

Insightful reviews

Karlan: This novel takes place in Scotland with flashbacks to a priest's days at Oxford. Although born in Scotland, he sounds English and encounters prejudice against both priests and the English in his small parish. The plot surprised me and kept me reading as I learned more about the lonely priest, his past love, his family and why he behaved so strangely with his teenage friends.

Jennifer (aka EM): This is one of the weirdest experiences I've ever had with a priest.

I think O'Hagan has pulled off something truly extraordinary here, but even as I write that, I'm not really sure. I'm not feeling on particularly solid ground when it comes to my interpretation of this character or this novel overall. That is to say, I could have it totally wrong.

Wrong or not, I found Father David to be one of the most opaque, annoying, morally vacant, insufferably snotty, self-delusional, lazy-thinking, accountability-denying central characters I've ever met.

And so is his damn mother.

Does O'Hagan intend that I should feel sorry for him? I don't know. I know I don't.

Father David is a very bad priest. ([view spoiler](#)). He's a bad priest from several different angles - most particularly, because he lacks any strong moral centre or conviction (I suppose that means "true calling") that enables him to counsel and console, spiritually, effectively, with humility and authenticity and genuine connection, his flock.

He is arrogant; he is consumed with worldly things (fine wines, classical music, etc); he lacks the ability to engage beyond the most superficial interaction (the latter which Mrs. Poole repeatedly calls him out on. She is a fabulous character.)

And he's a bad priest who finally admits - in a moment of uncharacteristically accurate self-reflection - that he had used the priesthood as a place to hide out since he couldn't, didn't, never does get his personal act together.

He never *chooses*, he just *goes along with*. He has so few strongly-held convictions, not political, not spiritual, not even sexual, that he can easily be led down whatever path looks the most attractive based on the flimsiest incentives. He can't say no - not even, or rather especially not, to himself. He is a child, with no ability to delay gratification or exert self-control -- another fact that he acknowledges, eventually; such acknowledgement as empty and devoid of meaning as every other bit of self-knowledge or feeling he learns or experiences.

He mourns and romanticizes his past, yet even when reflecting that that mourning and romanticism is misplaced (or at least, self-destructive), and that he has been both ignorant and hurtful, he never learns from it.

And here is where my own Scots-based puritanism comes to a full boil. He never, never, never takes accountability for his actions. ([view spoiler](#))([view spoiler](#))

The central event that in most novels would either cause the formerly-obtuse to see the light, or justice to be served or denied in some plot-pivoting way, causes this insufferable fool of a priest (and his mother) to go to the opera to forget about it.

I mean, I wanted to strangle him. I was as one with the crowds of haggis- and profanity-spitting blue-collar Scots in his parish crying for his head on a stick.

SO: **some** authors would play up that dynamic - because the haggis- and profanity-spitting Scots of the small town (racist, violent, xenophobic) were also behaving pretty reprehensibly, weren't they? Many authors would be using the character and his personal crisis as a way to make the reader take a side and then see it through to its logical conclusion. But deftly, O'Hagan makes it not about Father David or the central event, but about how morally relative everything suddenly is.

What positions do you hold, and how do you know that you're not any more a hypocrite than he/she/them? O'Hagan is interested in that question very much, and that he gets at it through this character and this event is really clever and quite a feat (the danger of not sticking with this novel long enough to see where it was going is high, I think--there's a good 160 pages of character-building and back-plotting before the event and the true character of this priest

and Oxford-educated set him even extra apart. The writing is gorgeous, if a bit obtuse at times, and the most personality is deeply flawed, yet somehow nonetheless appealing, if no longer consistently sympathetic. hugely recommended.

Celly: i used to be afraid that i wouldn't enjoy the publication end result of the particularly lengthy descriptions from a primary individual narrative, and in addition as a result of environment that used to be a piece overseas to me. Let me speedily admit that I DID take pleasure in "Bear close to Me." The well-written descriptions acquired me connected to the narrator Father David. I additionally preferred studying what might be lifestyles for a clergyman and what sacrifices a clergyman needs to make. It was once fascinating too to appreciate how simply an occasion will be misinterpreted or how what it is considered a pleasant gesture may have destroying consequences. the connection among Fater David and the several characters was once of extreme significance and it mirrored how an expert the writer Andrew O'Hagan turns out to be. Stick to the ebook until eventually the end. it really is worthwhile.

Jeanne: Father David Anderton is an outsider. The Catholic priest from England has simply all started at a parish in Scotland, and issues are already tough for him. The tiny, insular city despises outsiders, relatively these from England. suffering to slot in, he befriends a few scholars from the neighborhood excessive school, and this can be the place the difficulty begins. . . Lisa and Mark should not nice students. Additionally, they aren't nice citizens. They drink, they do drugs, they steal, they vandalize--why in the world might David be concerned with them? Loneliness. David is very, very lonely. In a vulnerable moment, he acts in an beside the point approach with Mark, and, of course, difficulty ensues. it's only after he's accused of incorrect habit that we study David's story. it's a tale of love, loss, and loneliness. A colleague instructed this novel, and it quite sounded solid from her description. Alas! This novel is just too gradual for me. The protagonist is unlikable and frustrating, and that i by no means felt invested in any element of the novel.

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