



Buddha Da

Anne Donovan

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Anne Marie's dad, a Glaswegian painter and decorator, has always been game for a laugh. So when he first takes up meditation at the Buddhist Center, no one takes him seriously. But as Jimmy becomes more involved in a search for the spiritual, his beliefs start to come into conflict with the needs of his wife, Liz. Cracks appear in their apparently happy family life, and the ensuing events change the lives of each family member.

Buddha Da Details

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From Reader Review Buddha Da for online ebook

Juliet Wilson says

This book is an engaging story of a family whose lives are changed when Jimmy, the father decides he wants to become a Buddhist. He just hadn't thought how his search for personal enlightenment might hurt the people close to him. The story is narrated by each member of the family in turn, and it is funny and moving, with a quiet but incomplete resolution at the end. Well worth reading.

PJ Swanwick says

Glasgow dialect, Buddhist theme make literary novel 'dead beezer'

Shortlisted for the Orange Prize and Whitbread First Novel Award, "Buddha Da" chronicles the changes in an ordinary Glasgow family when the father decides to become a Buddhist. Anne Donovan's formidable writing skills make this novel a stunning read.

Spiritual/metaphysical content: Medium. Jimmy plunges deep into his Buddhist teachings, eventually leaving his middle-class family to live at the temple. He tries to explain his incomprehensible actions to his incredulous family: "Most people think Buddhism's about meditating, but it's really about how you live your whole life." The Buddhist monks employ simple yet effective analogies to walk Jimmy (and the reader) through simple meditation styles.

My take: One of the charms--and challenges--of "Buddha Da" is Anne Donovan's language choice. The story is told entirely in first person by three different family members in their own voices--which means entirely in Glesga dialect and vernacular. This novel forces the non-English reader to slow down and parse each sentence for meaning. The effect is two-fold: You begin to appreciate the rhythms and subtleties of the dialect, and you also decode and internalize more of the spiritual content than you might have with more conventional spiritual literature. For example, this is how Jimmy describes meditation to his daughter:

"Well you sit doon quiet and you try tae empty yer mind, well no exactly empty, mair quiet it doon so aw the thoughts that go fleein aboot in yer heid kinda slow doon and don't annoy ye." And during a retreat he is able to settle into a deep altered state: "And it wis like the rain wis alive, know, and everythin in the prayer room seemed tae disappear, ah couldnae hear anybuddy or see anythin; it wis just me and the rain."

Donovan tackles difficult issues. Is spiritual work selfish? Is it acceptable to hurt the people you love in order to follow your path? What do you owe to the people you leave behind? Buddha Da offers no easy answers, only different perspectives.

Along with language and theme, Donovan's writing style adds great power to the novel. In addition to the plain language used to vividly illustrate difficult concepts, she employs stark, unvarnished images that cut to the bone. The smell of Liz' dead mother's clothes put me square in the middle of my own grandmother's closet: "Why would somebody smell different because they were auld? ... Ah imagined the dry skin flakin aff ma mammy, powderin and workin itself intae the folds of the claes. These claes hangin up here infused wi the skin of ma mammy, mouldering away inside this wardrobe." Disturbing, but so precisely right.

At heart, "Buddha Da" is a novel of a family broken and changed by one man's dreams. Donovan writes with uncanny insight about the challenges of parenthood and relationships. The novel is thoroughly enjoyable and a rewarding read; however, I felt let down by the theme: Jimmy's Buddhist path is not reflected in the conclusion. The family has changed, perhaps irrevocably, but not by the Buddhist dharma (teachings) that Jimmy experiences. No one learns or grows based on those influences. The novel, while brilliant, feels one calley short of the Berry's.

For more reviews of spiritual/metaphysical novels, see Fiction For A New Age.

Alicia Lemar says

I have one very important piece of advice about this novel - read it out loud. It is written in dialect, and it is hard to make sense of the words when only reading them with your eyes. As you read it out loud, you start to get a feel for the words in your mouth and you can actually begin to hear the dialogue much clearer. This is a really neat way to read, I discovered, and I almost wish more authors would write this way.

Now to begin the review. Jimmy is a Glasgow painter, father and husband. He lives a nice, quiet life, but begins to yearn for something more. He begins to delve into the world of Buddhism, going to meditation and hanging out with the 'lamas.' He spends so much time at the local Buddhist center that his family life beings to unravel and he is forced in to a crossroads.

Anne Donovan shares with us the pleasures of small town life through beautiful dialogue and colorful characters. An excellent novel.

Algernon says

[7/10] This is a re-read for me, confirming the good impressions from the first visit, but also showing why I considered it well written but not all that memorable (I've forgotten a lot of details). There's also the Glaswegian brogue in which the text is rendered, prompting me to give a warning to readers who are turned off by such deviations from standard English. Personally I found a lot of the charm and authenticity of this book is due to this local flavor.

What I love about the story is the focus on ordinary people and day to day problems like coping with children growing up, marriages getting stale, aging relatives, midlife identity crises, religion in the modern world, immigration so on ... After reading a lot of heroic fantasy in which nothing less than the total destruction of the world is acceptable as the main plot, it is refreshing to recognize characters that I could meet on the street tonight, the kind of people I visit on weekends or I hang out with in the evenings.

Jimmy is a freelance construction worker doing mostly paint jobs, with a beautiful wife, a smart 12 y.o. daughter and a bit of a wild streak that is great at parties (he's a former punk rocker). And he has just discovered Buddhism. The opening chapter is one of the funniest I've read from a Scottish author, with Jimmy coming out of the closet in his conversion from heathen to believer, and going on a quest to discover the reincarnation of Dalai Lama in Carmunnrock.

The novel does a good job transitioning from the funny side of life to the actual problems induced by

Jimmy's spiritual journey. Anne Marie and Liz parts of the story are sometimes even more interesting than the ones narrated by Jimmy. And the ending was as good as the first chapter for me.

Chiara says

This book is written in Scottish, so when I first realised it I thought I wouldn't be able to read it, considering that English is not my first language. However I could read it easily and I enjoyed it! The book follows the story from the points of view of Jimmy, his wife Liz and his daughter Anne Marie. Each character is interesting and realistic and evolves through the story. I recommend it!

Aine says

Jimmy is a happy-go-lucky type of fella. Devoted dad and husband, he works hard with his brother in their own business and enjoys a few scoops in the local of an evening. But one of his painting-decorating jobs at a local Buddhist Centre draws Jimmy toward to relaxation of meditating. So once a week, instead of heading to the pub, he goes to the Buddhist Centre instead. And then he starts to make some other changes... Buddha Da is the great story of a man in his late 30s seeking a bit of a change. And the impact those little differences have on his life and the lives of the people he loves most. Narrated by Jimmy, his wife Liz and their daughter AnnMarie, it feels like a familiar tale that you might hear about the neighbours over a cuppa and some hobnobs. It is warm and charming, frustrating and heartbreaking. Laugh out loud funny and painstakingly real. A proper gem of a book.

Lucy says

This was a lovely little book which tackled extremely difficult issues in a very warm and accessible read.

Written in 'Glaswegian' it explores the story of Glasgow couple Jimmy and Liz and their daughter Anne-Marie, as Jimmy decides to become a buddhist.

The characters are all confused but kindhearted and have a reality about them that is instantly recognisable.

It wasn't a difficult read (despite the issues addressed) and I finished it over a weekend. What a completely enjoyable weekend it was.

Sibyl says

This was actually the third time I had read this book. It's a novel which is strong and stylish and original enough to stand up to re-reading.

One of the things I like about 'Buddha Da' is that it is incredibly hard to (try and) write about the experience of meditating without being boringly pretentious and/or self-indulgent. But Annie Donovan does a

wonderfully neat job, evoking what the quest for Enlightenment can do to the inside your head - and just how annoying this may be to others.

Although some of the novel's critics reckon the author is better at creating female characters, I find Jimmy a believable hero. He's a decent, infuriating man - who never stops loving his wife and daughter, but is also drawn to explore something well outside his daily life and work. His wife Liz is pained at just how far he wants to move away from the Catholic culture that she grew up in.

While the twelve year-old Anne Marie calmly finds her own way of mixing East and West, for the adults Jimmy's attempts at finding inner clarity seem to create more and more confusion. Yet at heart the novel is a comedy. By the end the husband and wife are starting to move - tentatively - back together.

Deborah Pickstone says

Easily 5.5 or 6 stars

Absolutely shot straight into my lifetime favourites list! I normally find prize-listed books disappointing but not this one. Each family member has their very own voice and, in places, this book achieves the Holy Grail of stream-of-consciousness that so many writers have attempted to write, mainly unsuccessfully. The characterisation is wonderful - the character observation is acute, meaningful and entertaining. Jimmy is one of the most lovable characters I have come across on a long time and a heck of a lot of books.....

Written directly in each characters distinct version of the Glaswegian accent, after about 3 chapters this ceased to be a (pleasant) distraction - who can't like any Scots accent? - and simply became the voice I was listening to - and I could hear that voice! How I miss the accents of the UK.....

At the same time the story gives an authentic account of *anyone* trying to make large changes and reach for something 'more' in life. This is an altogether charming novel with depth to it as well as humour.

Elizabeth Moffat says

As a proud Scotswoman this novel appealed to me not only because it was short-listed for the Orange Prize (now the Woman's Prize for Fiction), but because it was written in the Glaswegian dialect in the same manner as Irvine Welsh's novels. It is the story of a family, consisting of Jimmy, Liz and their young daughter Anne-Marie, and how their lives are turned upside down when Jimmy decides to explore his spiritual side by becoming a Buddhist. Each chapter is written from the point of view of the three main characters which I found to be very effective, and added to the charm of the whole story as a whole. When Jimmy starts to spend more time away from home in the Buddhist Centre and changes his way of life - no alcohol, meat etc, his relationship with Liz begins to fall apart, and it was interesting to read how the outcome of this affected each character.

Anne Donovan's story seems to flow off the page so effortlessly and I was completely drawn into the story, and found myself engrossed and caring for each character as an individual. I think she has captured the ups and downs of relationships, and the troubles we all face with daily life so easily, that it was a real pleasure to read. The dialect, as I mentioned earlier, was a big attraction for me, and it was wonderful to read small

words like “oxter,” and “boking,” that transported me right back to my childhood (and the periods of my adult life, whenever I am around my Scottish parents!). A worthy short-lister for the Orange Prize, I recommend this book to anyone with an interest in spirituality, family dynamics, and great story-telling.

Please see my full review at <http://www.bibliobeth.wordpress.com>

Marie says

I enjoyed this book to a point. Gently amusing. Heartfelt in places. Relationship between the girls perfectly pitched. In fact, I felt that all the central female characters were very well drawn and fully realised.

Jimmy, the da, wasn't.

It was an interesting premise: Jimmy develops a growing interest in Buddhism - alienating his family- while he floats on seemingly oblivious to real life around him. The problem I had with this was that Jimmy and Liz, and Jimmy and Annmarie had previously enjoyed very strong relationships and he seemed to throw all of that away without a second thought. Surely the point of any faith is to love others? Seemed to me he only thought of himself throughout his whole dalliance with Buddhism.

Admittedly this is a more interesting concept than the usual 'other woman' setup, but his continued blinkered behaviour just didn't ring true with the relationship as portrayed earlier in the novel.

Good summer read, but ultimately somewhat disappointing.

Larry says

The world is about the same size, but we are definitely all closer to other cultures than we have ever been before.

What happens when part of one culture fits an individual better than his own culture?

"Ma Da's a nutter...He'd dae anthin for a laugh so he wid...but that wis daft stuff compared tae whit he's went and done noo. He's turnt intae a Buddhist.

At first Ma thought it was anther wanny his jokes."

And life for Jimmy gets a tad more complicated after that.

This is one of those stories with no villains. It is just that life is complicated enough just as it is.

Sebastian Adams says

Charming tale

Intriguing story about the tension between spirituality, individualism and family life. The characters are believable and the context a lovely balance of the extraordinary and the commonplace.

Kirsty says

I chose to read *Buddha Da* for my Reading Scotland 2017 project. It is set in Glasgow, the city in which I now live, and written entirely in dialect. Whilst this proved marginally difficult to get into at first, it soon seemed an incredibly natural way to read, and I was soon invested within the story. The three narrative voices used are distinctive, and the emotional depth included within the volume has been well-evoked. I did find some elements of the plot a touch predictable, but there was undoubtedly a sense of realism to the whole for the most part. The structure was effective, and I'd certainly like to read more of Donovan's work in the near future.

Andrea says

"This was the first novel I read this year, after a long break from reading for pleasure (I don't consider reading about programming to be in that category :-)) I actually started the book around a year ago, and although immediately found myself laughing out loud, once I closed it, it was hard for me to pick it up again - more to do with my lifestyle than anything lacking in the book.

I'm so glad I got round to it again, and soon found it difficult to put down. I found myself engrossed in the characters, and being from a working class Glaswegian background, I love when books are written in Glaswegian dialect. I read somebody else's review here that criticised the dialect for not being gritty enough, in his words:

"I was hoping would be full of colour and slang. However, it's a bit more educated Edinburgh than than working class Glasgow, I wasn't surprised to discover that Anne Donovan lives in Edinburgh."

Well with a name like 'Ernest Hummingburp', I wasn't surprised the reviewer lives in London ;-)

The characters were very typical Glaswegian working class, you know the ordinary kind of people that aren't sensationalised with drugs and violence. They were very real, intelligent, talented, hardworking, family orientated folk who were presented with the challenge of navigating one of life's corners.

I really don't know what it would be like for someone not familiar with the dialect to read. For me, the dialect is what enables you to see into the souls of the characters. Certainly there are reviewers here that it presented no problem for.

I would say that it is a very funny and very moving tale. Below is an extract which at the time I found very amusing, so don't read here if you intend to read the book itself. The da (Jimmy) has just experienced what he feels is some level of enlightenment following an uncharacteristic hogmanay spent meditating in the Buddhist centre In his enlightened state he is taking a walk through (Kelvingrove?) park on his way to Maryhill, his family home:

"Ah'd brung a bag a nuts fur the squirrels....They're that tame they come right up tae ye. They'll sit oan yer haund and take the nuts wi their wee claws. Beautiful, so they are, wi their wee eyes and soft feathery tails flecked wi white.

So there am ur, daein ma st Francis a Maryhill act, convinced ah'm noo an enlightened bein. And a wee

squirrel hops ower the path, runs up my leg oantae ma airm and afore ah can say Rinpoche, the wee bastard looks me straight in the face, bites me in the finger and runs aff. The blood's pourin ooty me, ah feel as if ah've been savaged by a bloody wolf, no a fuckin squirrel. Ah cannae believe it. It wis the way he just looked at me, just looked, as if tae say, 'up yours, pal'."
