



Devotion

Howard Norman

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Fans of Howard Norman, the internationally acclaimed author of *The Hunting of L* and *The Bird Artist* and a two-time National Book Award finalist, will find in his latest novel -- an intense and intriguingly unconventional love story -- all the hallmarks of this masterly writer: sparkling yet spare language, a totally compelling air of mystery spread over our workaday world, and ability to capture the metaphorical heartbeat at the center of our lives.

Like many of Howard Norman's celebrated novels, *Devotion* begins with an announcement of a crime: on August 19, 1985, David Kozol and his father-in-law engaged in "assault by mutual affray." Norman sets out to explore a great mystery: why seemingly quiet, contained people lose control. David and Maggie's story seemed straightforward enough; they met in a hotel lobby in London. For David, the simple fact was love at first sight. For Maggie, the attraction was similarly sudden and unprecedented in intensity. Their love affair, "A fugue state of amorous devotion," turned into a whirlwind romance and marriage. So what could possibly enrage David enough that he would strike at the father of his new bride? Why would William, a gentle man who looks after an estate -- and its flock of swans -- in Nova Scotia, be so angry at the man who has just married his beloved only child, Maggie? And what would lead Maggie to believe that David has been unfaithful to her? In his signature style -- haunting and evocative -- Norman lays bare the inventive stupidities people are capable of when wounded and confused.

At its core, *Devotion* is an elegantly constructed, never sentimental examination of love: romantic love (and its flip side, hate), filial love at its most tender, and, of course, love for the vast open spaces of Nova Scotia.

Devotion Details

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From Reader Review Devotion for online ebook

itpdx says

I liked it, but I am having a difficult time formulating why. It is a quiet story in spite of the two main characters ending up hospitalized after fights. I like the theme of devotion--expressed in so many different relationships. Norman doesn't seem to know how to write realistic dialogue and fortunately steers clear of it most of the time. I am flummoxed by some of the characters' motivations but then again so is David whose story it is.

Laura says

Well written and easy to read, but based on lack of communication and assumptions in a marriage that I found hard to believe. The book did make me think about the importance of constant talk between partners and how quickly a marriage can sour when views and concerns aren't expressed in a timely fashion.

Lynne-marie says

Begining with what the author calls "an affray" brtwee the protagonist and his father-in-law, the story then laps back into the past and works forward toward th altercation. Set at the metaphorical heart of the story and perhap the universe are the mute swans that the two men tend. I finished this in one day. I quite simply could not put it down.

Stephanie says

Howard Norman gives us a trio of unconventional, self-contained characters capable of momentary flights of passion: an amateur photographer, the publicist for a traveling chamber orchestra and her father, the swan keeper on an estate in Nova Scotia. The story is set, primarily, on the estate near Truro, where David is taking care of his convalescing father-in-law William, estranged from his recently-wed wife, Maggie. The characters are as mysterious as the swans they care for and David, the chief protagonist of this slim tale, as emotionally opaque as his avian friends.

Deon Stonehouse says

Devotion by Howard Norman is an unconventional romance. David Kozol has an ordered life in London when he sees Maggie across a room and is smitten. He pursues her, turning his life upside down to be with her. After they return from their honeymoon, David gets into a horrible fight with Maggie's father resulting in grievous injury. What could cause newly married, mild mannered David to get into an altercation with his father-in-law? Why is Maggie so willing to believe the worst of David. We each carry forward into life the filter of our past, our opinions shaped by events from long ago. Sometimes the cost of being right can be too

dear.

Shylashree Chikkamuniyappa says

Dull boring read. Story happens in Novo Scotia, Halifax, London and Prague. Characters are dull. Maggie and David, a photographer meet accidentally and marry impulsively. David breaks off from a 4 year friendship with Novak from Prague. Story moves to an quarrel between David and his FIL, who has an accident and David comes to Novo Scotia to help him recover and make amends while Maggie is travelling with her work ensemble and is pregnant. Story ends on a positive note with Maggie 'trying to forgive' and making a new beginning. I just couldn't relate to the characters.

Rebecca says

I was trying to find a book to borrow from the local library, with my 8 month old in tow. She started fussing, and before I could find any from my recommended list, I grabbed the closest book, which turned out to be this one.

I'm not sure if it was tiredness from said 8 month old, or some ambiguity in the narrative, but I often got mixed up between David and William. This made it quite difficult for me to truly get into this book.

I didn't warm to any of the characters. I found the character of David to be annoying and gutless. He lets everyone assume that he slept with Katrine and seems incapable of trying to repair the damage to his marriage.

I persevered with the book because I kept thinking that something would happen soon. But nothing ever did. Then it just ended.

I think this will be the last time I choose a random book from the library.

Jeri says

This is my second Howard Norman book and I was a tad disappointed. Devotion begins with an announcement of a crime: on August 19, 1985, David Kozol and his father-in-law engaged in "assault by mutual affray." The story of a young couple who meet, fall in love, get married and then...at the end of their honeymoon the young man is found in a compromising (though innocent) situation by the girl's father. They fight, the father is gravely injured and the young man is charged with his care -- back in Nova Scotia, where the father is the caretaker of an estate - and a flock of swans. The father is furious with the young man and the girl, in the beginning, refuses to forgive him - even after she finds that she's pregnant. I love Norman's writing and there were some good moments of examination of the different loves we know -- but there was just something missing. Will try him one more time, however, as I really liked his first book.

Katherine says

“David...followed a line of nineteen swans with clipped wings up from the spring-fed pond. He wondered if there was such a word as ‘swanherd’” (2).

“They allowed, as Anatole France had written of an acquaintance, ‘splendid companionship: my self-inflicted torment, his stark spirit’” (3).

“She’ll wreck her room like the Rolling Stones, except all on her own and a bit more demurely” (65).

“He reeked of whiskey and swan shit. Quite the unusual combination, Naomi thought” (87).

“The rest landed and floated, covers facing up or down, like illustrated lily pads” (112).

Liviu says

Disappointing; the excerpt and idea sounded great but the demolishing NYT review is mostly on cue; the main character is a moron - to be kind - and he is even a not-really-believable one and the letter he gets towards the end from his wife shows very clearly why; sadly the book ends there and that is its best part

Alicia says

This book has a really interesting premise--a man and his father-in-law get into a fistfight just after the honeymoon, and the book tells the story of the aftermath of said fight and how and why it occurred. I liked it a lot, but there were occasions of very clumsy exposition, i.e., "Who will be your maid of honor?" "Francie So-and-so." "Ah, your best friend since you were 11." Um . . . ok. Anyway, B+.

Megan Codera says

I am often drawn to Howard Norman’s stories because of the places his characters are contained, physically as well as mentally. This was no exception - we wandered between London and Islay and Nova Scotia, carrying the weight of devotion between a new couple and her father and the places they have been, the things they have done...and the things they should have done. Do we make things more complicated than necessary for each other? Or is it sometimes necessary to make things more complicated in order to find a place together again?

Donna says

Another of Howard Norman's stories of Nova Scotia and beyond. This book was less than 200 pages and I read it cover to cover as the story unfolds of a young couple who fall in love and marry quickly. Mr. Norman winds the story forward and back again. The day after their honeymoon, the new husband, David, and the new father-in-law, William, are involved in a brawl that changes the direction of their lives and the new marriage.

Very interesting story and character! Also interesting because of the references to Prague and photography as my daughter, Joy, has some wonderful photos from a trip that she took the Prague!

Laurel Deloria says

This book looks so simple but again with Norman, my newest favorite author, (I think I've read most) this book less than 200 pages, is very complicated..Why are the characters so damn clumsy, afraid to get hurt, afraid to expose themselves, afraid to ask for what they need and want_-a question explored in many of his novels.

Reviewers : Fans of Howard Norman, the internationally acclaimed author of *The Hunting of L* and *The Bird Artist* and a two-time National Book Award finalist, will find in this novel—an intense and intriguingly unconventional love story—all the hallmarks of this masterly writer: sparkling yet spare language, a totally compelling air of mystery spread over our workaday world, and ability to capture the metaphorical heartbeat at the center of our lives.

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Kathryn says

I read *The Bird Artist* during my "read everything related to Newfoundland" series (Shipping News, etc) and I loved the book. So when I heard about this slender new novel -- I bought it first thing and I loved it. What is the nature of loyalty? What will people do when tested? Will there be a happy ending?

Anne says

I was captivated by the small world that Norman creates in this novel. David Kozol, a Canadian living in London, meets Maggie, a Canadian from Nova Scotia, in a hotel lobby in 1985. After a whirlwind courtship the two marry in Maggie's N.S. home shortly after. What happens the day after their honeymoon on Isla, Scottish Inner Hebrides, ends is the "crime" with which Norman begins his novel. The "devotion" of the title describes the lives of almost all the characters the author creates within these pages--complex, multifaceted, and, above all, deep.

I did this last year after I read Olive Kitteridge--I read one book by an author and then read every other one I could get my hands on. Funny thing, though, I read Norman's *The Bird Artist* fifteen years ago and totally forgot until I felt that *deja vu* reading *What Is Left the Daughter* for the book group last week. I love certain settings and Maine/Nova Scotia are very appealing to me. Is it the result of reading during sweltering heat waves? Maybe. But in *Devotion*, the present time is an unusually hot summer and extremely unusual hot October/November in Nova Scotia!

Ellen says

While this book was quite lyrical, and sort of whimsical, the writing style just isn't my cup of tea. It was a good story, however somewhat quirky. Not my favorite but not bad either.

Suzy says

The story of a whirlwind romance that leads to a quick marriage and a sudden unraveling, due to the unwitting antics of the husband (and to some extent, the father-in-law and the bride). This book goes hither and yon in time, making it kind of fun to piece together what you already kind of know. The book is tersely written, which befits the Nova Scotians and Canadians that populate it. It also made the book a breeze to read. It's short too, so I read it in just two days. The characters are quirky and so witty at times it makes you laugh out loud. Most of the book takes place at an estate in Nova Scotia that is home to injured swans. The father and son in law live there, the father in the main house, recovering from injuries set in motion by the son in law, who lives in the guest house and serves as caretaker to his father in law and to the estate his father-in-law can no longer care for. The wife has become estranged, and her father is constantly threatening revenge on the son in law, even as he is nursing him back to health. It'd make a good movie. I like Howard Norman's writing and story telling, so I'll definitely look for something by him again.

Christine Henneberg says

This is a quiet, simple novel about a couple whose passionate marriage seems to be over almost as soon as it begun, and a family whose heritage is built around its devotion to a gather of wounded swans. The characters are believable, though strange; the plot is slow but not tiresome. A good book for reading on a quiet winter weekend.

Kate says

This book had me almost all the way through. I was caught by the specificity of the detail, and the sense of place and of the characters, as much as by the story. The only reason I don't give it five stars is probably specious--I was enormously frustrated by the book's finish! It was intentional; it was perfect. I was gritting my teeth with frustration.

Read this book. It's almost as great as the *Bird Artist*.

