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Simon Mawer

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Rob and Jamie are great friends from childhood. They have grown up together and become top climbers, but have since become estranged. Rob is nevertheless grief-stricken when he hears of Jamie's death after a fall on a relatively easy Welsh rockface. The past, though, hides the secret clues behind the tragedy.

The Fall Details

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From Reader Review The Fall for online ebook

Lauren says

Literary fiction about rock climbers... I am poised to like this, but 20% of the way through it, I'm not sure if it lives up to the amazing Amazon reviews.

...

I stopped reading this. It just didn't seem like a great book, which mystifies me.

...

Okay, I just read some reviews. Maybe I need to pick this up again. I mean The Guardian, The Economist, and The Observer are way more sophisticated than I am...

...

Okay! I'm done, and I STAND by my original assessment. This book is crap! Sure, there is a love story at the heart of it, and everyone can cheer when the good girl gets the guy. Sure, the climbing scenes are... interesting and harrowing, although I would much rather read a well-written account of a real-life adventure (i.e. "Into Thin Air" by Jon Krakauer"). And actually the writing is good -- I like Mawer's language, his prose. BUT what I missed in this book was an insightful exploration of human emotion and relationships. I have come to realize that THAT is what compels me to read a book... It's all about the characters... not how much I like them, not about their experiences specifically, but about probing their minds, understanding their relationships. And I felt that this was missing entirely from this book. The characters were largely types, and I never felt like I got under their surfaces in any meaningful way.

And the ending KILLED me with (a) its predictability and (b) it's cheesy twist. I mean, COME ON, can the big mystery secret really be revealed on literally the last page in a letter found on a dead man???

Sorry, Economist, but I respectfully disagree (with passion!) on this one.

Stephanie says

A few weeks ago, I heard a story on the radio about a man who deliberately killed himself by climbing to the top of his favorite New England peak, sitting down, and letting himself die of hypothermia. This radio story was always at the back of my mind during my reading of The Fall, by Simon Mawer. Two significant supporting characters in Mr. Mawer's book also died while mountain-climbing, in circumstances that made me question -- throughout the entire fairly suspenseful book, up until the very last page -- whether they, too, had decided to allow gravity or the elements to end their lives, just as surely as if they had chosen to shoot themselves with a gun.

Mr. Mawer's book is very good, and I loved reading it. The significant supporting characters (besides the two mentioned above, there are at least four more) are as interesting and complex as the main character, a man named Robert Dewar. The plot -- told mostly in a series of flashbacks, concerning different sets of characters

at different points in time -- while initially confusing, eventually twines itself round into an orderly history of Robert's life. There are parallel couplings and uncouplings and moments where history repeats itself. Hanging over it all is the title, "The Fall," with its biblical meaning assuming as great an importance in the story as several characters' physical falls off mountainsides.

And the question of the significant supporting characters' possible suicides is resolved, on the last page, in a fashion that finally completes Mr. Mawer's portrait not just of Robert, but of all his characters. Very well done.

lixysays

An excellent novel that I picked up because I've enjoyed this author's books before; it turns out it's quite a bit about climbing. It centers around the complex and emotional relationship between climbing partners, and the precipitating events in the novel involve climbing. The plot will certainly be involving for non-climber readers, as well. Apparently the author used to climb quite seriously, and this book has some good descriptions of the some of the craziness and obsession that I've noticed among men who climb (as well as vivid descriptions of the Eiger Nordwand and other real climbs). For me, the book was unputdownable: I started it last night, read til 3:30am, slept for a few hours, woke up and picked it up again, finishing by noon the next day.

Lars Jerlach says

Exceptionally wise and well crafted, this beautiful and sorrow filled story of personal as well as physical struggles on the ever present mountain slopes, tracks two generations of intermingled love affairs. The novel begins with the dramatic event of its title, with a famed and accomplished middle-aged mountain climber, falling from a Welsh cliff. (A route he should have never been climbing by himself). He leaves behind a widow, a former, now estranged best friend and the baffling question of why he would be climbing such challenging route without ropes.

The question of whether the veteran climber has indeed orchestrated his ultimate fall is a question that carries through most of the narrative.

Mawer's portrayal of the complex intricacies between the main characters overflow with unbelievable despair but also with a tremendous amount of exhilaration. Although there are moments where the novel is decelerated by the characters apparent indolence, Mawer manages to deliver a novel that is both energized and vertiginous and though some might find the mountain-climbing descriptions to occasionally overwhelm the narrative, I believe they generally help strengthen and push the novel to its inevitable conclusion.

Kelly says

I came across this book searching for WWII fiction and was immediately attracted because of the reviews. I don't like to get carried away with book reviews but will say that if I've truly enjoyed a book, I miss the story and its characters once I've finished, and that is the case with this one. It's a curious mix of perspectives, jumps in time, fascinating mountain climbing detail, and love story -- and it's beautifully written. The

descriptive passages of the countryside in Wales, the ruined streets of London during The Blitz, and the faces of mountains climbed are remarkable. I hadn't heard of Simon Mawer before this, but expect to read another of his books soon.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

The story begins as 52-year-old Jamie Matthewson falls to his death on a solo climb better suited to a younger man. Rob Dewar, a long-ago friend and climbing partner, hears of the death and returns to Wales to offer condolences to Jamie's wife and mother. The death stirs up memories for Rob, and he begins telling the story of their boyhood and young adult friendship and climbing adventures. This story is interspersed with the story of their parents during World War II and how they all met and married. This book has everything in perfect measure---love, betrayal, death, humor, excitement, and perfectly timed secret revelations.

There's a line in the book where Rob is describing the essence of mountain climbing:

"You deliberately put yourself in an idiotic position, and then you work as fast and as efficiently as possible to get yourself out of it. You taunt danger and step aside."

When I ran across that line late in the book, I thought it perfectly described not just climbing, but the behavior of all the characters in the book as they do their little relationship dances and try to avoid being hurt or being found out.

This story is pieced together like a fine mosaic. You don't appreciate the true craftsmanship of the author until you've finished the book and can stand back and look at the completed picture and marvel at the way it was put together. So much care and subtlety went into its creation. I love the way Simon Mawer assumes intelligence and deep thought on the part of the reader. He tells you enough to make a great story without spelling out every detail. Some things you are left to ponder and draw your own conclusions. How much did Jamie know, and how much of his behavior over the years was influenced by that knowledge? And what would have happened if...?

Catsalive says

<http://www.bookcrossing.com/journal/1...>

I enjoyed this book about falling & climbing & love. It is well-written, indeed quite beautifully in places, & also remarkably easy to read - I read most of it in one sitting. I do feel so sad for Jamie, & all those lives lived at crossed purposes. I had a very good idea throughout the book what was humming along under all these relationships, so I wasn't surprised, more pleased to have been on the right track, which enhanced my enjoyment of the tale more than anything.

Tony says

Mawer, Simon. THE FALL. (2003). *****. Can this man ever write! The author drew on his experiences as a mountain climber when he was younger to weave this tale of climbing and the confusion of love and lust. It

starts out slowly, but soon has you in its grip as the story of Rob Dewar and his friend Jamie Mathewson unfolds. I have to admit that I read this novel in one sitting, it was that gripping. It all starts out as Dewar was driving home one day and he learns that his old friend Jamie has fallen to his death on a daring, even reckless, solo climb. Instead of going home to his wife, he turns around and heads for Wales to console Jamie's widow, Ruth. This trip takes him back to his younger days when he and Jamie were obsessive climbers, starting out on the low hills of Wales and ultimately moving to challenging mountains in the Alps. He also recalls the tangled love affairs that both he and Jamie had during those times and how inter-related they were. We learn of a series of love triangles that both draw Rob and Jamie closer but, ultimately, causes their alienation from each other. The story is set alternatively in wartime London and in the present day, following the histories of many of the characters whose lives were formed in the former, but rued in the latter. This is a novel of great insight into lives of coincidence followed by lives of regret. This is the second book by this author that I have read (see my earlier blurb of "Mendel's Dwarf") and I will continue to seek out his works. Highly recommended.

Donalee says

The novel moves between two stories -- one, the story of two women and their friendship during WW@, the other the story of their sons' decades long friendship as mountain climbers. As the story begins, one of the men in present time has fallen while climbing in Wales. The other hears the news on the radio and immediately is drawn into memories. Eventually, we learn the reasons for their fast friendship and the coolness of their mothers toward each other and the other's son. This is a novel of the obstacles of climbing that parallel the obstacles of relationships. A good read with lots of interesting info about mountain climbing and London in the War, beautiful descriptions of Wales and Scotland, and insight into human failings and frailties.

Roger Brunyate says

Peak Experience

Magnificent! I got to know Simon Mawer's work through his 2009 Man Booker nomination, *The Glass Room*, which slightly disappointed me. But this 2003 novel is a different matter altogether, succeeding simultaneously as a romance, a war novel, an intergenerational saga, and quite the best book about mountain climbing that I have ever read.

The novel opens with a climber falling from an exposed face in Snowdonia, North Wales. It grabbed me immediately, for a personal reason. Virtually every mountain in Britain or the Alps that Mawer describes I have either climbed on or hiked around; there is a situation halfway through the book where one climber freezes on a difficult pitch and his second has to take over the lead; I have been in precisely the same situation, on what may well be the very same climb. My associations are of course irrelevant to the average reader, but they convince me that Mawer knows his stuff. Because I recognize the meticulous detail with which he describes the act of climbing itself, because I once knew the mixture of exhilaration and terror that he conjures as the lure of this dangerous sport, I trust him totally when he goes places where I would never dare. For example, the terrifying off-season ascent of the North Wall of the Eiger which forms the high point of the book (yet without any of the melodramatic excess found, say, in a book like the once-popular *Eiger Sanction* by Trevanian). I am also convinced that Mawer can draw non-climbing readers just as effectively

into his spell; good writers who have true knowledge of their material can captivate anyone.

The falling climber is Jim Matthewson, by then almost a household name in Britain. Robert Dewar, his former climbing partner, long since retired, drives to Wales to offer condolences to Matthewson's widow and his mother. From there, we are drawn backwards into two sets of relationships: one concerns Jim and Robert as young men, and their friendships with the women they eventually marry; the other focuses on their respective mothers, both of whom knew Jim's father, Guy, another famous mountaineer in his day. The mothers' story takes us back to 1940, and the chapters set in the London Blitz are as fine as Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch*, another magnificent romance that unfolds backwards in time. Mawer's gift for capturing the flavor of those wartime passions and his understanding of how the actions of one generation can affect the lives of the next put me in mind of another favorite author, Penelope Lively, in such books as *Moon Tiger* and *Consequences*. I intend these comparisons as high praise.

The Glass Room traced the history of a major icon of European architecture through some of the most tumultuous decades of the last century, but it suffered from too much reliance on sex as punctuation for the unfolding story. For a while, I feared that Mawer might do this here too. But then I realized that, with the emphasis on mountaineering, he doesn't need to; the various climbs take their place as the perfect articulating moments in the drama—intense, visceral things that (unlike sex) can be described objectively without losing the deep emotional connections that run through them. Physical love plays a part in this story too, but it is always central to the development of the characters, and never a titillation. *The Fall* is a tighter, more controlled novel than *The Glass Room*; by setting his sights on a lower peak, Mawer succeeds in climbing even higher.

Laura says

This is just the type of book I love- powerfully written historical/literary fiction with complex characters, depth, and powerful themes. I loved reading this book, but at times it made me deeply sad. I can't remember the last time I felt as sorry for a character as I do Jamie, so it was a difficult read.

Julie Christine says

The novel begins with a death that takes the narrator, Rob Dewar, back through time to uncover the enigma who was his friend and climbing partner, Jamie. It also cleverly weaves in the stories of Rob's and Jamie's mothers during WWII.

I know nothing of climbing, so the detailed descriptions of hanging off ledges and scrambling across rock faces to avoid becoming so much scree were fascinating. Mawer kept the technical jargon to a minimum and conveyed the addicting nature of defying death to excellent effect. You know from the very start who lives and who dies, yet somehow you are caught up in the white-knuckled grip of a climber's fear and passion.

Here's the thing that fell flat for me (if you'll pardon the pun)- and you may want to stop reading here if you fear a SPOILER: I wanted to know more about Jamie and Rob- there was a critical element of their relationship that went missing when Ruth entered the picture. The love triangle muddled what was developing between the two of them. I thought it would have been far more interesting and revelatory if the plot had remained centered on the two men and their climbing. The climbing was enough of a character -

enough of a passion- it WAS the third element. No need for a human love interest. Ruth just got in the way.

I thought the sections taking the reader back to WWII and the development of the world that Rob and Jamie entered years later was brilliantly and believably played.

All in all this was such an original and well-crafted story. I will definitely seek out more Mawer!

I really enjoyed this, but as per usual, it's going to take me a couple of days to reflect before I write. I can't decide if it's 3.5 stars (a demotion from 4 for the bits that annoyed) or to leave it at 4 for originality, great storytelling and the desire to make Wales my next vacation destination...

Sasa Petrasova says

Simon Mawer zas raz nesklamal. Krásne napísaná a skvele preložená kniha, ktorá funguje na mnohých rovinách.

Prvou je samozrejme láska, v tomto prípade ťúbostný trojuholník, o ktorom ale nie všetci zú?astnení vedia, že je trojuholníkom; dve kamarátky, ktoré sa za?úbia do toho istého muža, ale vlastne nie sú sokyne a obdivná láska mladého muža k staršej žene. It's complicated.

Na to, ko?ko málo je v knihe postáv, je tu neuveriteľné množstvo vz?ahov - priateľských, rodičovských, mileneckých, súperských, nenaplnených, premeškaných. Je to príbeh, ktorý sa od prvých stránok ponúka na film, svojou dramatickou zápletkou, ale aj krásnou scenériou hôr a horoloezectva, ktoré je váš?ou a poslaním hlavných postáv.

Mawer rovnako napínať opisuje dramatický výstup na Eiger ako bombardovanie Londýna počas druhej svetovej vojny a stálym striedaním ťasových rovín medzi dvoma generáciami vytvára úžasné napätie v deji.

Robert says

I find books of this quality all too rare. Usually there are many good ideas and well presented ideas but then a denouement that leaves me flat. The Fall has an intriguing story, likable characters in interesting situations, and a fine ending twist (that isn't totally unexpected, though).

If it seems all too convenient how characters meet in the past, I would bear in mind that there is truly no other way: Wherever you are is where and when you meet people. Your future grows out of that.

I highly recommend this book!

Mark says

" Many relationships survive sewn together with tacit complicity and mutual deception. It's the cold light of discovery that is so dangerous so it's better to live with the lies " And so they do. We learn that "Ruth has always liked a bit more than she is entitled to," and so we follow our characters through their formative murky sexual awakenings into the confusion of adulthood trysts, romance and betrayal.

A fascinating story that keeps the reader engaged throughout. An intricately drawn weave of attraction and

intimacy leaves relationships vulnerable and the main characters insecure and behaving spitefully and deceitfully, as they cross boundaries in their personal journeys being true to themselves, and trying to assert control over one another.

I am particularly drawn to the author's ability to transport his readers to the bombed streets of East London scrabbling through the rubble alongside firemen nurses and doctors in the Blitz, or the north face of the Eiger hiding precipitously in a narrow gully as an avalanche descends, or the White Horse on Theobalds Road where fellow climbers gather to spin yarns and shoot the breeze.

After 'Trapeze' and now 'The Fall' I have enjoyed discovering Simon Mawer and will certainly be reading more of his 'back catalogue.
