



Mayflies by Andrew O'Hagan

Review by Phaedra Ritchie

Rivington and Blackrod High School

Key Stage 4 Highly Commended Portico Sadie Massey Awards Key Stage 4
Reading Winner 2022

One word to describe this reminiscent story would be nostalgia. *Mayflies* by Andrew O'Hagan is an unforgettable and life-enhancing tale that reflects on the euphoria and heart of youth. All the while providing the reader with a gut-wrenching hurt in the second half of the novel. The characters and story are so well thought out as they emit this striking energy that highlights the strong bonds between the friendships of the men.

The narrator, Jimmy, recounts his story and his experience with his male companion in a way that allows the reader to indulge within the friendships and joins the boys on the journey to the music festival. My favourite character is Jimmy's best friend, Tully. He has this unique presence about him as he's the life and soul of the party. Fully displaying his masculine and boisterous nature. All the while he's unafraid to soften when around those he's closest to. For example, the moment where Tully and Jimmy are near the canal in Salford. The two share a heart-warming and intimate conversation about their futures. Tully is trying his best to avoid the date his heedless father endured. As they take in the modest sights of Salford in the 1980s. Tully makes the readily decision to change his life for the better. "We can go at life differently." The author was showing how ambitions and determination for a greater existence was absorbing itself into Tully. The scene is wonderfully optimistic and heartfelt, Jimmy and Tully have and always will be there for each other no matter what.

Andrew O'Hagan used pop culture to show how intense the bond of the young men truly was. He incorporates many references to classic movies, especially with how Tully is always quoting one film or another. Music is the stronghold force that unites all the characters. The first half of the book criticises the dire circumstances the working class were forced into during the mid 1980s, due to the rudimentary prime minister at the time, Margaret Thatcher. The characters envelop themselves into music using it as an escape goat and proving them with a sense of freedom. The focus of the first half of the story revolves around the G-Mex musical festival in Manchester. The moments at the festival unify everyone. "Only we could hear those songs rolling from the stage to irrigate our lives." Here we see the strength of music as it connects every person, giving them a moment of tranquillity that's free from any injustice or hurt.

The second half of the book has a drastic shift in tone and narrative as we learn that 30 years after the festival, Tully now suffers from cancer. After everything us as readers have been through with Tully, to now be forced with the harsh realities of the fatal disease inflicts a forlorn and solemn mood for the characters and the readers. Tully's final wish is to end his life in an honourable was as he refuses to die at the hands of the disease and let death win. This creates a parallel to his strong willed a resolute personality from his twenties. Tully enlists the help of Jimmy to set his desires into motion, all the while spending his last days on earth living life to its fullest, as his stubborn nature refuses to lose. However, we see Tully's mistake as he fails to tell his wife Anna his intentions until the very last moment. This created a tense and abrupt atmosphere as Anna wanted to keep Tully alive for as long as possible. Despite that, in the end things are rectified. Jimmy his wife, Iona, and Anna all accompany Tully to Switzerland. Staying with him until his very last breath.

Overall, I'd recommend this book to anyone seeking a sentimental and profound tribute to modern masculinity. The story will enthrall you, helping you to define your own narrative. Not to mention providing you with a killer supply of music.

