



Dingley Falls

Michael Malone

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In the sleepy town of Dingley Falls, Connecticut, something funny is going on. Strange forces are pulling together the oddest of couples: a mild-mannered matron and a lascivious avant-garde poet; a sleek headmaster and a shy young curate; a hippie librarian and the wayward daughter of a local tycoon. What's more, mailboxes are being stuffed with shockingly violent hate letters, even as a mysterious ailment takes the lives of perfectly healthy people. Not to mention the strange lights flashing in the depths of the forest? With a sparkling range of characters who hurtle through an intricate and often hilarious journey, Michael Malone offers a sublime joyride in his classic novel.

Dingley Falls Details

Date : Published November 1st 2002 by Sourcebooks Landmark (first published 1980)

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Author : Michael Malone

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From Reader Review Dingley Falls for online ebook

Beth says

Long, rambling, disjointed. Leaves plot lines hanging in the wind. Detailed descriptions of characters who are then essentially dropped from the rest of the book. Ending flat and dangling like many of the plot lines. I am so tired of this book that I cannot work up the energy to write anything else about it.

Kristi says

I had high hopes for this. First, I got this book from an unknown neighbor, a product of our neighborhood's "free little library" where people both drop off and check out books at a major intersection of the hood. what a lovely thing for a neighborhood to have!

So, the kiddos and I walked to the library with donations and I saw this novel. Impressed by the great reviews on the inside cover and the synopsis which seemed russo- ish, we took it home with us.

What a waste of paper. I made it to 300 pages and had to stop because it is absolute rubbish.

Susan says

Terribly unfair of me to review a book midstream, but after the first 200 pages or so, I felt myself asking the question "Is this book adding to my quality of life?" Not a good sign. Mind you, I have only one issue with Malone's writing style; the long list of characters which become more and more confusing as the book progresses (if only the "cast list" in the beginning scared me away then). Also, not a good sign. The premise (character-based, small town, everybody knows each other, gossip, sex, scandal...) is reminiscent of As The World Turns. Overall, I found the story bland. What kept me plowing forward (aside from the pure guilt for not giving a book a full run through) was the occasional hint that something big was going to happen. It made me anxious and frustrated that I still hadn't gotten to the point at which it, whatever "it" is, became the narrative's driving force. Instead, apathy got the best of me.

Rosary says

I love Malone's writing, and have read most all of his other works. However, I find that this book feels dated to me, and I cannot get interested in it. I do see the roots of his soap opera writing career here, but alas, I just had to give up on Dingley Falls.

Jim Leckband says

"Dingley Falls" is Michael Malone's expansive tribute to Matthew Arnold's poem, "Dover Beach" (Dover Beach and Other Poems).

Well, that, and a wacky soap opera of a novel concerning: biological warfare, thwarted and forbidden love, vengeance and forgiveness, corrupt and psychopathic government, childhood and the loss of innocence, social immobility and immigrant striving, public facades and private turmoil - in short, this novel published in 1980, is a wonderful, prescient, awing prelude to the crimes of the Reagan administration and the society that enabled it.

The Connecticut town of Dingley Falls is a microcosm of "The Way We Live Now." Little action takes place outside of it and the only nod to the outside world that makes any real presence is the fact that the action takes place during the Bicentennial year of 1976. That year gives us a clue that this little hamlet of Dingley Falls might be standing in for territories higher than its present pay grade.

I can't give a summary of what takes place in this eventful week in June, 1976, because it would take as long as the novel to do it justice. The cast of characters takes three pages and there is a detailed map of Dingley Falls and environs which took a lot of use. There are several main "souls" of the book. Judith Haig is probably the one dearest to Malone's heart. An orphan, like Pip in Great Expectations (also the source of the book's epigraph), she epitomizes innocence and "good government" - she's the postmaster of Dingley Falls. There is also a Miss Havisham character (Ramona Dingley) who is the "soul" of Dingley Falls. As you can tell, there is a lot of intentional Dickensalia in this book.

But back to "Dover Beach". The similarities of the names are not accidental - "Dingley - Dover", "Falls - Beach". In fact, Malone drops a few stanzas near the end to hammer the point home. And what is the point? Why bring up "Dover Beach"? The poem (among many things!) is a melancholy look at the loss of faith in the midst of the modern world ("The Sea of Faith..."), nostalgic to when faith/religion was paramount, but now is declining. This can be compared to our Founding myth that the Bicentennial in "Dingley Falls" is celebrating and trying to revive.

Another corollary is the famous line "Ah, love, let us be true to one another!" The relationships that are ended in "Dingley Falls" are the ones that are not "true" or really a sham - Beanie and Winslow Abernathy, Judith and Hawk Haig. While the ones that start are because the people finally stop lying to themselves - Walter Saar and Jonathan Fields, Beanie and Richard Rage.

Finally, there is the last line of "Dover Beach"

And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

One theme in "Dingley Falls" is the counterproductive use of force. Vietnam, of course, looms large in this - there is a Vietnam Vet who propels many of the plots. The secret base north of Dingley Falls has been killing the people of the town for over ten years, totally unbeknownst to the town who see the deaths as unfortunate illnesses. In fact the base has been deliberately and accidentally killing the townspeople for the "higher" good of national defense. This is where Malone really gets dark and I wasn't expecting this deep of stuff. "Ignorant armies" indeed.

The shootings that ended the lives of two characters were a perfect illustration of the "confused alarms of struggle and fight". The three men involved were confused at what they were shooting at, the motives for why they were shooting were not correct and in the end the town never really knows what happened - just like the secret base vanished in a government-lit forest fire with no-one the wiser.

One thing that you won't have gleaned from the review so far (if anyone at all has made it this far), is how hilarious it is! Malone is in the Dickens and Shakespeare camp who takes all of human folly as fair game for unabashed ridicule or gentle poking of fun. If you have a stick up your butt for religion, patriotism, conservatism, liberalism, modern poetry and art, the military or spy agencies or any other mass fallacy then "Dingley Falls" is not the book for you as there is a lot of fun to be had at those sacred bovines.

However, if you are on the side of those two lovers looking at Dover Beach, who can see the world as a land of dreams so various, beautiful and new, but also can realize that this land also contains ignorant armies clashing by night, and if you can hold both these things in opposition, then this book will as much of a joy to read and think about as it was for me.

Ashley says

I stumbled upon Dingley Falls completely by chance, and within the first chapter or two, it was already pretty high up on my list of favourite books. Every character (and there are many) is more interesting than the last. The author jumps around as he follows the daily life of these suburbanites - some while they engage in affairs, some while they don Nazi uniforms behind closed doors, some while they venture to uncover the mystery of a secret government base on the outskirts of town... There is never a dull moment in Dingley Falls. I was captivated the entire time, and while it may sound somewhat like a vulgar, trashy novel, it is not at all presented that way. I love Malone's writing style, which is both sophisticated and pensive, but also provocative and surprising, and it's made me want to read more of his novels. Dingley Falls is hilarious and heartbreakingly sad. I was actually sad when I finished it, and will probably read it again in the very near future.

She'Davia Williams says

This book is not worth reading. I couldn't even get through the first 150 pages. There were about one or two good parts but besides those the rest was boring, awkwardly phrased, and just a waste of time to read.

Heather says

This is an awful book. Presented as a light hearted, whimsical tale of the whacky goings on in a small town. What the book contains is a government sanctified mass murder of citizens of the town, a look at some very unhappy marriages and the brutal rape of a quiet withdrawn woman. The end of the story is inexplicable, I cannot for the life of me explain the glowing reviews of major publications like The New York Times. Don't waste your time on this book.

Raquel Samson says

The poor guy who wrote this probably thought he created a master piece but what a flop. It is sort of a soap opera and takes about 400 pages to get into it - way too many characters and some of the initial main characters don't even show up again after page 200...so you have worked to get to know these initial characters and then you have to refocus SPOILER - the post mistress is the main character.

Andrea says

I read another book of his and just loved it. I bought this a few years ago and tried to read it and just put it back on my shelf. I tried picking it up again over the past several days and just could not get into it. I didn't like the way it was written. There were too many characters to remember and I only made it through 17 pages. This book will be donated.

Jan says

Did not care for this at all.

Beth says

Don't bother!!

Barbara says

Some books are so bad, I have to force myself through them; this is one of those. Dingley Falls is almost 600 pages of drivel, nearly a complete waste of time. I am chagrined that the book received glowing reviews from several newspapers I thought would be honest (Atlanta Journal-Constitution, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and Chicago Tribune). Don't waste your time; don't believe the hype. The characters are caricatures, the author uses stream of consciousness to excess, and loves long lists punctuated by commas. Ick. I can only recommend one chapter: 28! I enjoyed reading those 6 pages (out of 588!).

Unfortunately, I purchased three Michael Malone books at my favorite used book store in Grand Haven, Booked For The Season. I will force myself to read the others as well. I find hope in two things: the author may improve his style over time (Dingley Falls, pub. 1980) and the other books are shorter. Stay tuned for those reviews!

Rod says

I much admire genuinely humorous writing--those books that make you laugh out loud with a clear-eyed yet

affectionate look at "the way we are." This book has that. I think it suffers a little toward the end when it becomes plot-driven rather than character-driven (and some of the characters become less believable because of that), but there is some fine writing here, expertly drawn characters, and even some profound musings. My recommendation for a summer vacation: ahead and visit Dingley Falls.

Bunny says

Dingley Falls, which I've been assured by one who knows is a truthful version of a small New England town, is full of gossip, scandal, affairs, homosexual ministers, the rich and the poor and the government covertly experimenting with all of their bodies to the townsfolks detriment, not to mention a secretly psycho letter writer who finally goes off his rocker.

Really, really good (and amusing) - might even be profound but the writing is so clear and to the point that the reader doesn't notice how good it is.
