



In the Fold

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As a college student Michael visited Egypt Hill, the curiously named estate of his roommate+s family, for a garden party, and in one afternoon met a host of eccentric characters who have stayed with him ever since. Years later he decides a return to Egypt Hill would be an ideal sojourn-a place where he can escape the chaos at home that is destroying his marriage, his fashionably old townhouse, and possibly his worrisomely taciturn young son, Hamish. But now nothing in Egypt Hill is as it was, or at least how it once seemed. With Hamish in tow, Michael discovers the house teeming with age-old deceptions, broken confidences, and sordid alliances. At the heart of the turmoil is a lie so shameful, every Hanbury is responsible for its concealment. With his marriage crumbling in a series of telephone calls and his son growing more peculiar by the day, Michael is witness to the spectacular unraveling of a family-until a violent accident draws him, inexorably, into the fold.

In the Fold Details

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From Reader Review In the Fold for online ebook

Sam Gilbert says

If only the author possessed greater discipline, this book would not be so awash in similes, bloated reflections, tiresome characterizations of houses and rooms. But the biggest of these problems is Cusk's unfortunate impulse to append a clause beginning with "as though" to every third paragraph. It's as though she's being paid by the metaphor.

Lukerik says

A few years ago I went to the pub with a friend of mine, Jamie, and a friend of his, Gerard. After listening to Gerard speak without pause for half an hour I excused myself and went to the loo. A few seconds later, Jamie followed me in.

"I had to have a break." I said. "He's just so boring."

"I know." said Jamie. "I'm so sorry."

We hugged and went back to the table. Gerard repeated the last word he had said before I left and then carried on with the sentence.

Reading this novel reminded me of that day. It's such a shame, because the writing is pretty good. She's got the skills but not the soul.

She's fond of her similes and some are hit but most are miss. I'm not sure if she's going for an elevated tone or showing off or what, she's definitely putting the effort in, but she gives these outlandish similes to describe such boring things they just seem out of place.

Her dialogue is really good. She may use it to have her characters say incredibly uninteresting things, but it sounds real and she made me laugh three or four times.

Katherine says

"There were perhaps a hundred houses there, all like Adam's. In spite of the exertions of the tarmac, which wound and circled graciously amid the properties as though to give the impression that each was distinct and difficult to find, the development had a somewhat regimental appearance. When you glimpsed it from the town, its roofs and top-floor windows resembled the impassive heads of an invading army coming over the hill. Once there, however, a pleasant, almost dreamlike atmosphere prevailed. It was an atmosphere that arose from the expectation that absolutely nothing untoward was going to occur" (94).

"The bottles and jars of every conceivable size and shape suggested a world suspended partway between medicine and magic. I caught a glimpse of something called 'breast-firming cream.' I tried to imagine the orgy of self-improvement that routinely occurred here" (97).

"She smiled rather rakishly, with one side of her mouth. The other side remained downturned, as though half of her were perpetually reminding the other half of occasions on which an optimistic approach to things had not paid off" (121).

"Half a mile down the road, a man was driving a mud-splattered four-wheel motorbike along the verge with

two scrappy dogs twisting around him, one on either side, like a pair of apostrophes" (134).

Chris Waterford says

This book started well--the first chapter was quite good---but then it lost it's way. There was trouble with continuity, and by using too many big, descriptive words in one sentence, the narrative became very heavy and in the end I didn't care about the characters.

Paul Wilner says

Lots of negative reviews here, I see. That's what makes horse races. I thought it was excellent, smart and sharp as an exploration of the limits of bohemia, the confines of marriage and friendship, class and conflict. Reading it in reverse order - her more recent work is more celebrated, but certainly well worth the effort.

Nicole Schum says

I could give it 3.5 stars. It contained some fantastic bits, some amazing sentences, it was very smart and funny. But at times it was confusing and I lost track of who was who as the characters never seemed to get introduced. - Just a lot of names. ... The middle rambled. The end came together well.

Hendra Harris says

Found this book a bit of a struggle to complete but I did, although not sure I've got an awful lot out of doing so. It never really gripped me into wanting to know what happens and I often found my thoughts wandering off as I was reading it.

Bookmarks Magazine says

Cusk's fifth novel was long listed for the Booker Prize, an honor that somehow belies its good, but unspectacular, reviews. A work that wordsmiths will love for its dialogue, *In the Fold* speaks of youth, privilege, and disillusionment__but, unlike Gatsby in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* or Charles in Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, Michael understands the deception of appearances. Praised for her limning of psychic and emotional complexity, Cusk establishes convincing stereotypes of wealth, just to tear them down and cast a revelatory light on the treachery of it all. A few critics, however, saw Michael as a "sneering" narrator who infuses the book with meanness (*Spectator*); others thought too little happened to too many people. In sum, the novel is depressing, to be sure, but it's a playful, biting comment on human relationships.

This is an excerpt from a review published in Bookmarks magazine.

Trish says

This book, like so many of those by Cusk, interrogates the nature of ‘artist’ and ‘art,’ but also the nature of marriage and personal fulfillment, of love and desire. Unlike any of Cusk’s novels, the main character is a man, which complicates the interpretation for so many who draw a straight line from narrator to author. This work, which might seem a puff piece by anyone else, is difficult, thorny, a nervous system of connections that raises questions about how we should live.

What does the title mean? Does it mean in the arms [fold] of the family, in the fold of female genitalia as in birth, or in the fold of a letter, opened, to discover something dreadful has come to pass? For each of these suggestions there is some support in the book.

Our narrator, Michael, and Adam Hanbury lived next door to one another at school. Adam’s sister Caris invites Michael to her eighteenth birthday party at the family pile—a farm overlooking the sea—called Egypt. The family is large and constantly in motion. Someone is always saying or doing something to provoke another.

Michael is accepted and admired by the family, drawing him in. The moment catches in his imagination as though in a photograph, illuminating the potential in family relationships. He is experiencing a stumble in his own marriage some years later, but when he once again visits the Hanburys in Egypt, he does not feel the love.

I love watching Cusk navigate the male imagination. She is restrained: she tries not to step outside the lines into “that *definitely* wouldn’t be so” territory. But perhaps even more fascinating is her look at the female imagination. Michael’s wife Rebecca recently had a child. She is struggling with her ‘art’...she is a painter who paints very little indeed. She instead takes a job in an art gallery and seems to find her niche. She is confident, smooth, successful. Except that she is unhappy with her faithful husband, new child, lovely home, fulfilling job.

Throughout the novel are seeded mentions of gruesome murders of one spouse by another that happened in history. The houses of Rebecca’s parents are a factor in how Michael perceived them...he has an allergic reaction to their moral ambivalence: not only did they have no interest in being virtuous, “they concerned themselves with domineering feats of patronage and ostentatious magnanimity.”

Rebecca is trying to escape her parents’ life but is their daughter, after all. She wanted a child, but that child Hamish would become Michael’s responsibility

“like the pets people buy their tender, clamorous children; children who then harden, as though the giving, the giving in, were proof in itself that in order to survive and succeed in the world, you must be more callous and changeable than those who were so easily talked into accessing to your desires.”

This novel, as a novel, has some difficulties, but Cusk’s perceptions and humor are intriguing enough to carry us over any rough spots. In fact, it may be her very perceptions that make this ride bumpy. We spend lots of time reconciling her vision of who these people are and almost miss the car crash of a marriage breakup unfolding in slow motion before our eyes.

So what is this book about? It involves what people do to one another, even while professing love. We have to make sure to “ask questions” of our partners, of ourselves, to get to the heart of our feelings. The book is about family, how damaging it can be while appearing to provide succor, and how difficult, if not impossible, to break free. Always, the self-examination, the questions we ask ourselves, are key to some degree of autonomy.

For those familiar with the story, I wonder why we only got a glimpse of Beverly, the one figure in the book who appeared autonomous.

“Beverly was the healthiest human I had ever laid eyes on. She was twenty-five or so, and she looked as I imagined people were meant to look. Her broad brown body was distinctly female and yet there was nothing slender or shiny about her. She was like a piece of oak. Her hair was light matte brown and curly and her eyes were bright, friendly lozenges of green. I didn’t think she was married, I imagined her associating with a menagerie of animals, like a girl in a children’s story.”

We cannot call Beverly a goddess, unless she is one type of goddess while the youthful Caris is another. Beverly might be the goddess of fertility while Caris is the goddess of desire. The older Caris has become disillusioned and vengeful, quite like Greek goddesses of old, and the shifting nature of the Hanbury family has something tragic in its outlines.

The dogs that terrorize Vivian in her own home might be the multi-headed dog Cerebus, who guarded the Gates of Hell to keep the dead [Vivian] from leaving. In the end, she kills the dogs and escapes.

This novel feels more a tragedy than other Cusk novels I have read. Those other novels, by some lightness of attitude, made us feel a kind of camaraderie with the human condition. We do not want camaraderie with these people. We do not want to be them. It is more a warning Cusk is giving us. Question everything.

Rachel says

What a promising storyline, an appealing cover and an interesting start. Unfortunately the writing seems to fall into being a complete load of old bollocks!

For example: 'On the contrary, Rick's gallery was constantly awash in an apparently inexhaustible fund of notoriety and success, and the more these two commodities could be observed in the infallible business of their synthesis, the clearer an impression of its elemental steadiness could be obtained.' p.30

There's lots more of that too!

The dialogue between characters is believable but then the ensuing paragraphs read as if Cusk has consulted the synonyms list for a 'better' word. It reads as being pretentious gobble-de-gook.

Simon Bate says

Michael becomes enamoured with the Hanbury family and their weirdness after being invited to a birthday party at their farm in the West Country; it is called Egypt Hill. At the time he was an impressionable uni student and now he is in a jaded relationship with Rebecca and a young son. Many years later he is invited back...how will it have changed?

I enjoy the comedy of manners that Rachel Cusk presents in her novels.

Hannah says

Hilarious and clever! Rachel exposes the bones of life in a brilliant and engaging way.

Corey says

Fiercely intelligent. For fans of Iris Murdoch and Ivy Compton-Burnett.

Max says

Abandoned; did not finish.

Jayne Charles says

This was a bit like a temperamental old car - started off a bit jerky and I wasn't at all sure I was going to be able to make the journey, but once it got up to speed, it was as smooth as anything and I fairly sped along through some great scenery. It's a good idea to keep a dictionary close at hand - any author who makes free with the word 'contemporaneous' on the very first page is serving fair warning on the reader. And there are some unbelievably long and complicated sentences lurking in the early chapters, like brambles snaking through the undergrowth ready to trip the unwary speed-reader. To read this story out loud I swear you would need an extra lung.

Once I got beyond the first thirty or so pages, it became clear that this is an author with an impressive grip on characterisation, and a lot of very astute points to make (albeit not very succinctly). It was a shame that books are expected to have a central 'message', because in trying to make its point, this book occasionally strayed away from the startlingly brilliant dialogue and character portrayal into forced psychobabble. I'm thinking particularly of Michael's encounter late on with his wife and her bitchy friend which started off excellent but degenerated.

I thought Michael came across a bit asexual, which often happens when an author chooses a first person narrator of the opposite sex to tell a story. On the other hand I thought this gave her an excellent opportunity

to point out the bizarre things some women do and say. This occurs again and again in this book and I thought the author handled it beautifully. The way the character Lisa deals with children interrupting her conversations with other adults was deserving of four stars all on its own!
