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Growing up on the Scottish Isle of Bute, Maria Tambini is a young girl with dreams of escape from her Italian immigrant family. When her amazing singing voice wins her a talent show at the tender age of thirteen, she is whisked off to London and instant stardom.

But even as Maria is celebrating her greatest success, she is waging a hidden battle against her own body, and becoming in the process a living exhibit in the modern drama of celebrity. Can she be saved by love? Or will she be consumed by an obsessive celebrity culture, family lies, and by her number-one fan?

This stunning novel is a rich portrait of an immigrant community and a tragic tale of the hidden costs of celebrity.

Personality Details

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Author : Andrew O'Hagan

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From Reader Review Personality for online ebook

Matt says

This is a pretty amazing book, the first I've read from O'Hagan, but it was hard not to be struck and impressed by the lapidary quality of it, all the little parts where the isle of Bute as a whole, and especially the Tambini family all seem to be so richly developed. The handle on dialect, period detail from the seventies as well as the period around world war two that plays such a role. The sentences are crisp and often beautiful as well.

So what's my beef? I don't really understand how it all fit together-- the individual stories, esp that of Lucia Tambini's tragedy, were very well realized, but I'm not really sure how they all fit together, or that they did. I'm likewise unsure about the gal at the center of the story, Maria. This might've been intentional, I don't know, but especially during her "productive" years, I felt like she was more object of observation than a seeing subject, and I missed that.... by the time I felt like I had access to her inner life to parallel that I felt I had of other characters, she'd already crossed into the weird alternate mindspace of anorexia nervosa, and that was another something that kept me apart from her.... Really, I do at least partly believe this distance is intentional, I'm just not sure I understand why.

A really complex, wonderful, sparkly piece of writing that part of me believes is less than the sum of its wonderful parts.

Sandra says

Hugely disappointing, the more so because Andrew O'Hagan's writing can be so exciting, but this felt like being drowned in sheet after sheet of "character description" exercises, none of whom I found in any way likeable.

This isn't the first I've read where someone has taken a true story and used it as the basis for a novel; only Colm Toibin's, about Rudolph Nureyev, really worked for me.

Vikki says

Love his non-fiction but this wasn't so good.

Emily says

A little bit hard to get into in the beginning, but worth it. Part coming of age story, part mystery, part meditation on celebrity, Personality is a satisfying and interesting read.

Julie Christine says

O'Hagan shows a unique slice of Scottish contemporary history- the Italian community that has both integrated into and been held apart from Scotland's cultural identity. He wraps this into a story of a budding celebrity in the 1970s. The voices are a bit distant, but there is enough wry and loving humor to make the characters sympathetic and the story an engaging read.

Catriona says

Andrew O'Hagan is so good at writing books that are quietly disturbing. I finished this book 2 days ago and I haven't been able to stop thinking about it since then. It is a really powerful book about an outwardly lightweight subject, the child star and the national obsession with celebrity. The strand about Scottish Italians is very interesting, and the darkness running through the whole story is compelling.

Sydney says

I loved the dialogue and insight in this story, as well as the Scottish experience, but because of the cliched plot points, I gave it just three stars.

Craig Smillie says

Hearing what the subject of the book was had put me off reading it for several years - however I was totally wrong. I found the novel to be a really sensitive examination of celebrity culture and eating disorder. The multi-vocal approach to narration allowing us to hear the thoughts of many characters about their lives on a small Scottish island put me in mind of MacKay Brown's "Greenvoe" - as did the lyricism of the prose. Even the reverie of Hughie Greene as a young Canadian pilot humanised that annoying little plonker. All in all, quite a beautiful read - and culminating in one of the most tender yet at the same time erotic love scenes that you will find anywhere.

Ryan Williams says

Plainer and more documentary in style than O'Hagan's first novel, this was where his fiction grew its wings. It owes much to the plain, unfussy style of his essays and many of their concerns - celebrity, national identity, a vocation and its corruption.

I recommend it heartily and the essays collected in his other book The Atlantic Ocean. (Especially the masterful 'The End of British Farming.')

Lisa Van zyl-jones says

Tried to read this book off and on for months. Just. Couldn't. Too. Dull.

Gail says

A man dies to the sound of laughter escaping from Blankety Blank. A nurse loses her temper with a bunch of flowers too cumbersome for their vase. A woman goes up in the lift to see the mother she has never met. Porters smoke on the stairwell and remember the worst and the best of Friday night. A Pakistani gentleman says prayers to himself, too old to wait, and ignores the football commentary coming from an adjacent radio. A doctor checks a chart and remembers his wife's birthday, and out in the corridor a confectionary machine jams and keeps the money. A bone is set, and a lady who grew up in Cornwall remembers the long walk to school.

There will always be the words to other people's songs, but Michael is here now, and I am here, and the fresh air my God you wouldn't believe it. When I look up I think of all the miles the air has come to reach us, I think of it passing stars and planets, falling through clouds, and blowing over the English Channel, our mouths open to catch the air and to say what we want to say, to speak now, to speak out loud, and before long the land begins to appear over there, another coast. The day is beautiful, we are far from home, and the boat moves like a prayer over the water.

(160; 327)

Rebecca says

This book took me forever to read and I totally didn't care at all. I took it for free at a hostel I stayed at and it blew. Thank god I returned it at the used bookstore in town and got some money to get it out of my hands.

Girl with Italian roots grows up in the middle-of-nowhere-Scotland and has a great singing voice and becomes super successful. The story kept flash-backing to stories with the girls' families' past, but I couldn't keep anything straight. I am not really a fan when books do that because it totally confuses me. TV, totally love it (see LOST), but in books, I know it's lame, but I get confused easily. Whatever.

Grade: N/A

Christy says

A young Scottish girl gets her big break on a reality TV show and is whisked off to London where she becomes a star, and realizes the immense struggles that ultimately accompany her new rise to fame. Interesting story, but felt a bit disorganized.

Bookread2day says

I am very angry with the list of who Andrew thanked at the back of Personality. He thanks Hughie Green, Opportunity Knock. But Hughie Green died 3rd May 1997. This book would not have been published in 2004 if it wasn't for my friend Late singing star Lena Zavaroni. But Andrew O'Hagan has failed to thank any of Lena's family, or her managers. Apart from that with Lena's name changed to Maria Tambini I really enjoyed reading Personality. Maria seems to have a bit wild side to her in the way she speaks and some of the things she does. Naturally a character has to be made larger than life or the character would not become interesting to read about. Lena was not like that she was very quietly spoken. We wrote to each other and we was always chatting and laughing together. I must say though that as I enjoyed reading Personality so much that I will be reading more of Andrew O'Hagans books. I do highly recommend reading Personality.

Review by ireadnovels.wordpress.com
