



The Easter Parade

Richard Yates

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In *The Easter Parade*, first published in 1976, we meet sisters Sarah and Emily Grimes when they are still the children of divorced parents. We observe the sisters over four decades, watching them grow into two very different women. Sarah is stable and stalwart, settling into an unhappy marriage. Emily is precocious and independent, struggling with one unsatisfactory love affair after another. Richard Yates's classic novel is about how both women struggle to overcome their tarnished family's past, and how both finally reach for some semblance of renewal.

The Easter Parade Details

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From Reader Review The Easter Parade for online ebook

piperitapitta says

Senza pelle

Letto a cavallo tra il pomeriggio e la serata di oggi, tutto d'un fiato.

Le parole di Richard Yates scorrono come l'acqua di un fiume in piena e trascinano a fondo, portando con sé malinconia, inadeguatezza, disagio profondo, rassegnazione, che aumentano progressivamente con l'aumentare delle pagine sul lato sinistro del libro.

L'altra faccia del sogno americano è il correttore di bozze anziché il giornalista di successo, la donna sola anziché libera ed emancipata, la famiglia che è sempre più annullamento delle proprie aspirazioni e dei propri sogni anziché condivisione e realizzazione.

Anche in questo romanzo la scrittura di Yates, come già in Revolutionary Road (secondo me comunque il suo migliore tra quelli letti, un gradino più su rispetto agli altri) e in Disturbo della quiete pubblica, è talmente pulita e diretta da far credere ad una stesura "in presa diretta": sembra quasi che i fatti stiano avvenendo nell'esatto momento in cui li si stia leggendo; Yates non usa frasi né parole inutili, è tutto talmente funzionale ed essenziale al fine delle sue storie da far credere che tutto quello che racconta sia già successo e che lui l'abbia solo fissato fotograficamente.

Anche se le sue, e questa è la sua grandezza, sono foto dell'anima.

Gli americani - diceva Yates - hanno sempre dato per scontato, nel loro subconscio, che tutte le storie abbiano un lieto fine.

E allora, durante i cinquant'anni in cui ci descrive le vite di Pookie e delle sue figlie, Sarah ed Emily, nonostante ci porti continuamente sull'orlo del precipizio, nonostante continui a mostrarcici il baratro delle loro esistenze, nonostante continui a spingerci "sempre avanti" e contemporaneamente a mostrarcici quello che era e che non è stato, come si fa, nonostante tutto, a non voler bene ad Emily e a non sperare fino alla fine nella sua felicità?

In fondo la sua, sarebbe anche un po' la nostra.

s.penkevich says

Oh look! Here comes the Easter Parade! With plenty of **floats!**

Oh, the floats!

Mark says

Only Johnny Got His Gun can stand toe to toe with *The Easter Parade* in the unsettling, horrific way it takes one person's life (and in the case of *Parade*, several other people besides) and makes you ask yourself, *Why the hell are we even here?*

With the case Yates brings to the table, you can't refute him. You can't even begin. You can stick your fingers in your ears and close your eyes and babble *I can't hear you, I can't hear you* but this perfectly crafted novel will be waiting. It has time. It can. It won't be a dramatic thing, either. It will quietly slip up on you and tap you on the shoulder and take your hand and in a quiet voice say, *Come along now.* And you will, because you have no other choice.

Sometimes I found I was holding my breath.

No, no, don't. They're nice people. Don't. Come on.

Or.

No, no. Don't do that, so-and-so. You know that's the wrong choice. You know it is!

But with a casual swipe, fate/life or the characters' own decisions would send their lives violently askew. Again and again. And you couldn't argue with the character. Not really. Because when you weighed their decisions, it was the choice they were *going* to make.

Yates never cheats. He doesn't cajole his characters to make the wrong decision. He simply portrays life as it really is, and wham: life hits each character right between the eyes.

This is fine-tuned tragedy of the highest order. If you feel that life is a cruel mistress seeking your personal destruction, you'll find commiseration here. If you feel you're adrift on a sea of meaninglessness, this is your dinghy (full of holes, prepared to sink). If you're a nihilist, this is your argument against life, written out for you plainly and simply.

Even if you have a happy go lucky view of the world, Yates has the power to make you see the dark side.

I'm gonna go listen to Katrina and the Waves.

Mary says

"I'm almost fifty years old and I've never understood anything in my whole life."

Are we all destined to go insane? Are we all doomed by the damage our parents unwittingly inflicted on us? Do we never ever learn a damn thing at all? Many of us go through life not realizing until the final hour that history does indeed repeat itself, and our parents -- our well meaning but ill equipped and broken parents -- ruined us.

This is certainly the case for Emily and Sarah, two sisters from a broken home whose mostly absent father and unstable and alcoholic mother set up the blueprint for a lifetime of bad decisions and misery. Yates is a master of painting the picture of the struggling and flawed character and he never cops out with a happy ending tied up in a pretty bow. The opening line smacks you in the face with that promise, lest you think

you're about to embark on a sunny journey "*Neither of the Grimes sisters would have a happy life, and looking back it always seemed that the trouble began with their parents' divorce.*"

Life for his characters is a series of disappointments and despair and Emily and Sarah spend their lives over four decades swimming against the tide and ultimately disintegrating. Though it wasn't my favorite Yates book, all the ingredients I adore about his work were there - the denial, the loneliness, the sorrow.

Evi * says

Romanzo autobiografico come tutti gli scritti di Richard Yates che girano e rigirano sempre attorno agli stessi temi: rapporti familiari difficili, la solitudine, l'alcool come soluzione ai problemi.

Yates ci racconta, nell'arco di un cinquantennio, le vite di Emily e Sally le due sorelle protagoniste di *Easter Parade*, le loro sono vite vissute in superficie, dolori, drammi, falle, imperfezioni dell'esistenza descritti come se fossero in fondo sopportabili, mi piego ma non mi spezzo, come se si potesse convivere con tutto e nonostante tutto, senza mai soffrire troppo.

Non ho trovato in Yates tutto il dolore che pensavo, è un libro sulla ricerca della felicità, lo è? Non credo è come se la felicità fosse una ambizione troppo elevata, allora si ricalibrano le prospettive verso il basso e diventa un libro sull'accettazione e sulla rassegnazione, senza troppi traumi, di ciò che la vita offre: non sempre puoi avere quello che desideri devi solo prendere quello che ti viene dato e fartelo bastare (che morale discutibile).

I sentimenti di Emily e Sally diventano come diluiti, rimangono sempre sulla cresta dell'onda senza mai scendere in profondità, io invece avrei voluto scendere giù verso il basso e sprofondarmi nei fondali dell'esistenza per vedere le creature degli abissi che vivono nella più completa oscurità. Yates non lo ha permesso. Yates suggerisce, mostra ma non dice.

Gattalucy says

Niente è come sembra

Dopo *Revolutionary road* in cui aspetti per tutto il libro che una pentola a pressione scoppi da un momento all'altro e tiri il fiato quando finalmente questo avviene, in *Easter Parade* tutto sembra già predestinato per le sorelle Grimes, nate sotto una cattiva stella e cresciute da una madre vacua e irresponsabile. Ma qui, fino all'ultimo, speri che almeno Emmy si salvi, che ce la faccia, perché da una famiglia disfunzionale si può anche uscire riscattandosi, no? Magari con l'istruzione, o con la ferma ricerca della propria libertà. Speri che ce la faccia perché Emmy, e Sara, rappresentano noi, le nostre amiche, quelle che la vita prende e sbatacchia in malo modo, che abbiano cercato la salvezza nel matrimonio, o nella carriera, nei figli o nella libertà di costumi.

E gli uomini sembrano sempre qualcos'altro: il padre giornalista è solo un correttore di bozze, il cognato che sembra Laurence Olivier si rivelerà un violento, gli uomini di Emmy carte false che il vento si porta via l'uno dopo l'altro. È il sogno americano infranto: una vetrina lucida per nascondere il fango e la disperazione. Un libro che, se ami Yates, non puoi fare a meno di leggere.

Nei suoi libri si parla sempre di famiglia. "Cosa c'è d'altro?" avrebbe risposto a questa affermazione l'autore stesso.

Che cavallo di razza questo Yates.

Mosco says

Quasi 5 stelle

Che tristezza, che spreco! Buttare via così la vita nell'ignavia e nell'insoddisfazione, nell'alcool e nelle illusioni. Difficile scordarsi le 2 sorelle.

E quanto autobiografico è questo romanzo. Yates è di un pessimismo cosmico, non c'è speranza, si nasce soli e si muore da soli. Nel frattempo ci si raccontano balle, ben sapendo che sono balle.

Mi era piaciuto di più RR, ma caspita, anche questo che bel libro!

Roberto says

Madri e figlie

“Né l’una né l’altra delle sorelle Grimes avrebbe avuto una vita felice, e a ripensarci si aveva sempre l’impressione che i guai fossero cominciati con il divorzio dei loro genitori”

Yates avverte fin dall'incipit: questa è una storia di infelicità. Non c'è scampo.

E' la storia di tre donne. Una madre superficiale e inadeguata e di due figlie, Sarah e Emily, che ripercorrono lo stesso cammino fallimentare della madre.

Il libro parla della mancanza di coraggio e di obiettivi nella vita delle persone. Le due figlie vivono sognando un futuro improbabile, mentono a sé stesse, si costruiscono alibi. Sarah accetta una vita finta, annulla se stessa in un matrimonio violento, si rintana nei sogni, è sopraffatta dalla paura del cambiamento. E' immobile e le sue fughe sono solo apparenti.

Emily ha il coraggio, di scegliere e di prendere in mano la propria vita, ma fallisce miseramente. Lo fa perché vive fuggendo senza un progetto. Fugge dalla madre, dalla superficialità, dalla solitudine, dalla dipendenza. Continua ad evidenziare cose che non vuole, ma non ha progetti, non si chiede quale cosa voglia esattamente. Giudica continuamente degli altri, analizza i comportamenti che non sopporta ma non ha la forza di scommettere sul futuro e di provare a cambiare quello che non le piace. E alla fine getta la spugna e rimane drammaticamente triste e sola.

Nel libro aleggia la domanda se sia meglio un matrimonio e la famiglia oppure una vita indipendente con relazioni poco impegnative. Ma Yates indica chiaramente che nessuna delle due strade porta alla felicità. Il risultato degli sforzi per costruire una relazione, per mostrare le proprie capacità e le proprie aspirazioni è il fallimento, la frustrazione.

Tutto il romanzo, scritto in modo lucido e perfetto, è pervaso da una sensazione di angoscia dovuta non tanto all'infelicità delle tre donne, quanto al fatto che non c'è via di fuga. Non ci rimane che accettare che comunque agiamo abbiamo un triste destino di solitudine. Easter Parade non lascia speranza alcuna.

arcobaleno says

Né l'una né l'altra avrebbe avuto una vita felice...

Richard Yates scrive, con incredibile sensibilità femminile, di due donne, due sorelle, due esistenze, due modi di vivere, di reagire; parla dei loro rapporti con gli uomini nella società americana che, dagli anni Trenta, scorre per altri quaranta, senza cambiamenti sostanziali; in quell'ambiente borghese intriso di superficialità, di convenzioni ipocrite e apparenze da salvare. Ma sopra tutto R.Y. descrive la famiglia, attraverso due paradigmi estremi e ancora, per tanti versi, attuali; la descrive senza sdolcinate, con estrema semplicità e con un senso realistico e crudo che ho apprezzato via via; con parole dosate e attraverso pochi cenni lascia il lettore libero di coinvolgersi in una visione ampia e completa. Nick Laird, nella prefazione, definisce la chiusa da "maestro dell'ironia"; io la giudicherei da maestro dell'argutezza, con cui, d'altra parte, la buona ironia si misura, unita a quella dose di amaro che ti rimane dentro. Un romanzo di costume, dunque, ma prima di tutto dell'animo umano e delle sue debolezze; di dolore e disperazione. *La normalità dell'orrore quotidiano, insomma. Perché una quotidianità "normale" può essere orribile...* (come si legge nel commento anobiano di Gildelcelce, riportato anche da Ginny). E' un bel romanzo perché, come ha detto l'Autore stesso in una intervista: *quando uno scrittore tenace e onesto riesce a guardare in faccia tutti gli orrori del mondo, ad affrontare la realtà e alla fine, malgrado tutto, è ancora in grado di tirar fuori un sofferto, gioioso inno alla vita, il risultato può essere una cosa stupenda.*

Jenn(ifer) says

If you are a girl and your parents get divorced when you are very young, you will either become promiscuous and incapable of real intimacy OR you will marry some abusive asshat and live your life quietly drinking yourself to death.

All right so maybe that's not the take home message Yates was going for. After all, Yates himself came from a broken home; his parents divorced when he was just three years old. And he was twice divorced himself, so I guess you could say the man knows a thing or two about the topic.

Despite the bleak subject matter, I found myself loving this book. It's a simple, unsentimental story that follows the lives of two sisters over the course of 4 decades. Emily and Sarah have a rough go of it – their father is an alcoholic, their mother seems a status hungry twit with alcohol issues of her own. Sarah decides to marry the first man who comes along while Emily goes from partner to partner and is more in line with the typical "career girl." Yet neither girl is content with the choices she has made and each seems to envy the other in some "grass is a little greener" sort of way. No one really comes out on top here.

It's that sort of realism that I appreciated most reading Yates. I had previously seen the film version of *Revolutionary Road*, but other than that, this was my first exposure to his writing. It's one of those engaging little novels that can be gobbled up in one sitting if you have the time... a perfect summer reading-type book.

Lee says

God this ends well, by which I mean it ends with the steady rock of the book shattered in a way I didn't see coming. All through it she's so even-keeled and proto-liberated but then comes the crackup once alone. The dictionary definition of four stars? Loved it with reservations, so accessible and readable, the characters so well-drawn, the dialogue evocative of time and place and person, so much suggested about an insidious preoccupation with semblances, the importance of courage/strength/endurance, family, time, self, society, and even a suggestion of spirituality/hope/goodness toward the end. The language flows, transparent and attentive. Formally conservative but Yates makes its solidity and elegance feel classic. Four stars because the conflicts seemed obvious (opposing personality-type sisters), Pookie the mother seemed obvious (sociable alkie keeping up appearances), Emily's lovers often seemed stereotypical or expected: the bisexual seafaring super-lover like Michelangelo's David, the neurotic chubby academic in need of some 21st century Cialis, the drunk poet (loved when they went to Iowa City), the perfect man in love with someone else. Sometimes seemed a bit like what Franzen gets derided for -- the same sort of so-called "unlikeable" characters, the same sort of family suggestive of larger societal trends. Basically, if the Grimes family didn't drink so much, they'd've better dealt with the hand dealt them -- alas. Forty-something years handled so deftly in 220+ pages in such a way it didn't feel rushed or smeared or scattered. Effortless balance of summarized sections and scenes, I felt. Loved so many perfectly phrased, affecting phrases. Found the end destabilizing while watching the novel's primary focus lose her shit -- that is, lose her self-sufficiency. About how much people need other people, the scourge of divorce, first the breakdown of the family and then the breakdown of society -- beautifully done for the most part, despite a sense that the conflicts seemed to me a bit contrived, as were a few recurring catchphrases ("I see") that made me think things felt a little too neat. Like the poet John Flanders annoyed at the younger experimental poet at Iowa who throws around the word "audacity," four stars seems like the best a book like this can do, in part because it doesn't deal in audacious magic, per the Bolano equation "supply + demand + magic" -- I don't mean magical realism, I mean something in the art of it that feels supernatural, even if just uniqueness or exaggeration of an effect/approach? And I'm not sure I wholly trust art that seems designed to "shatter" a reader along with its central character, even if it suggests historical societal fragmentation? There should maybe be more to it than trying to break your heart, right? And there is: all those vivid images that give it life: Emily on the beach in Europe in a bikini, the little carbuncular knobs near the neck of the hot-bodied seaman, the sky outside Iowa City "as close and white as the snow itself" in winter, the poet guy smiling on the phone in his office. Anyway, a great book -- will read more Yates soon.

Sandra says

Se leggere un libro può essere paragonato a fare un viaggio verso mete ideali, leggere questo libro è stato per me un viaggio nella steppa caucasica. Luoghi monotematicamente deserti, disabitati, aridi, senza vegetazione se non arbusti e qualche pianta grassa, spinosa. Non ci sono case, non ci sono paesi, non c'è acqua. Tutto è secco, arido e ci vivono solo animali abituati alla lotta per la sopravvivenza, ratti o serpenti. In questo libro Yates affonda il bisturi, come un bravo chirurgo, nelle meschinità e nell'egoismo dell'animo umano, in particolare nella illusorietà dei legami della famiglia che appare essere la culla degli affetti, in realtà è la negazione del sentimento e la culla della solitudine. Fin dalle prime righe si capisce che nella storia che andremo a leggere c'era stata una famiglia, ma ora c'erano solo tre individui, una madre vagabonda che trascina con sé due povere bambine, sradicate ogni volta dal luogo in cui vivono per trasferirsi da un'altra parte. E queste due giovani donne, ognuna immersa nella propria infinita solitudine, crescono e vivono alla ricerca assurda di felicità, o almeno di stabilità, nell'incapacità di arrivarvi,

incappando in fallimenti e delusioni, evidenziando quanto di più meschino ed arido vi è nell'animo umano: non v'è legame di sangue che tenga, non v'è nulla che leghi quelle donne, se non la loro inettitudine ad affrontare la vita.

Più procedevo con la lettura più sentivo un desiderio di chiudere il libro, di scaraventarlo via, ma al contempo non potevo smettere di chiedermi :”cosa accadrà ora d'altro?” e così proseguire a leggere la limpida e meravigliosa scrittura di Yates.

Attrazione e repulsione, queste le emozioni che mi hanno accompagnato. E alla fine, riconosco che anche un viaggio nella steppa caucasica ha il suo fascino, soprattutto se si ha una guida eccezionalmente preparata come Richard Yates.

João Carlos says

Liron Kroll - Composed photographs inspired by Richard Yates Novel The Easter Parade

(<http://www.lironkroll.com/The-Easter-...>)

“**O Desfile de Primavera**” do escritor norte-americano **Richard Yates** (1926 – 1992) conta a história de duas irmãs, Sarah e Emily Grimes.

Liron Kroll - Composed photographs inspired by Richard Yates Novel The Easter Parade

Logo na primeira frase do livro o sentido da história fica definido – “**Nenhuma das irmãs Grimes estava destinada a ser feliz, e olhando para o passado sempre houve a sensação de que os problemas começaram com o divórcio de seus pais.**”

Yates escreve de uma forma brilhante e concisa as vivências emocionais e temporais de duas irmãs, numa narrativa inquietante repleta de tristeza e solidão.

Filhas de pais separados, com a mãe Pookie sempre presente, assistimos sem contemplações ao deambular por diferentes cenários das diversas personagens que nos vão sendo apresentadas e integradas nas várias histórias, com recurso a descrições minuciosas e melancólicas.

Todas as personagens apresentam uma enorme heterogeneidade emocional, delimitada pela dura realidade da vida e de relações fraternais complexas, mas onde o amor mútuo permite um vislumbre ilusório de estabilidade sentimental.

“**O Desfile de Primavera**” aborda de uma forma admirável algumas das temáticas mais sensíveis dos nossos dias – o casamento, o divórcio, relações conflituosas e violentas entre homem/marido e mulher, autonomia e dependência física e financeira, a miséria moral e os vícios, a solidão, a inveja, a intolerância, o arrependimento, a renúncia, a feminilidade, o alcoolismo, etc. – transmitindo visões opostas numa narrativa cruel e sentimental.

A solidão final de Emily é atroz, próxima da loucura, desesperada pelo contacto físico e emocional, mas com uma réstia de esperança.

“**O Desfile de Primavera**” é um excelente livro que evidencia uma escrita impecável mas sombria.

Rafa says

¡Es magnífico! Como una mezcla de Philip Roth y Margaret Atwood (con perdón por las comparaciones).

Dolceluna says

Dopo il bellissimo Revolutionary Road, Richard Yates mi ha inebriata con un'altra storia di autodistruzione e fallimento. Una storia tutta al femminile, stavolta. Le protagoniste sono infatti due sorelle, le sorelle Grimes, che, cresciute in una famiglia disgregata e spinte da una madre vacua ed eccentrica, falliscono miseramente nei loro obiettivi di vita: Sarah, la maggiore, tradizionalista e tranquilla, insegue il sogno di una vita matrimoniale serena, e sposa un uomo d'affari apparentemente per bene, per poi morire trascurata e alcolizzata, in un modo che il lettore non fatica ad immaginare; Emily, la minore, più moderna e indipendente, aspira alla carriera professionale e al grande amore, ma passa da un lavoro all'altro e da un uomo all'altro per poi finire sola, infelice ed umiliata. Sullo sfondo la società americana degli anni 40-80 pronta ad inseguire un sogno (simboleggiato dalla scena della parata pasquale richiamata dal titolo) che poi si scontra con la realtà e si infrange. Perchè il mondo di Yates è esattamente questo: un sogno infranto, una bolla di sapone svanita, un castello di sabbia crollato. Basta con le impeccabili famiglie della Mulino Bianco, con amori impossibili e poi magicamente realizzati, con coppie perfette sempre più introvabili nella realtà, con happy end patetici capaci di risolvere il marcio della vita come un deus ex machina! Yates dà un calcio a tutto questo e ci mostra la realtà nuda e cruda, quello che potrebbe essere e che tante volte, purtroppo E', senza concessioni al sentimentale smielato, senza false illusioni, senza riscatti né resurrezioni. Con uno stile asciutto e cinico ma non privo di ironia e partecipazione egli abbatte quel velo di apparente appagamento col quale ci mascheriamo e ci propone l'amara verità. Ed è per questo che fa male. Ed è per questo che io l'adoro. Inutile far finta di non credere che Sarah ed Emily possano rispecchiare, purtroppo, tante donne di quegli anni e anche dei nostri, inutile pensare che la felicità sia per tutti, inutile pensare che ognuno sia destinato a trovare ciò che cerca nella vita, indipendentemente dalle sue scelte e dalle sue azioni. Possiamo essere destinati a seguire le orme di Sarah e Emily oppure no. C'è solo da sperarlo.

Michael Hagan says

It's been a few years since I've read "The Easter Parade," by Richard Yates. I read it first in college many years ago, then in my late 20s, and now in my mid-40s. This book simply gets better and better. Not only is the writing flawlessly rendered, the inevitable circumstances of sisters Emily and Sarah are presented with honesty, empathy and tremendous sensitivity by a master realist who knows exactly how alcoholic families live out their lives. What the TV show "Mad Men" reveals about our culture and ourselves Yates revealed decades ago. This novel is so good on so many levels: I love his brevity and movement within a scene, his pitch perfect dialogue, and the flow of every sentence. Yates is like Haydn at his best, clear, concise, and musically unforgettable. Emily is a brilliant character. Her total meltdown in the final scene may be a little too raw and unhinged for my taste (and perhaps too similar to Andrew's vicious, over-the-top meltdown at the end of Part One), but I do appreciate just how insane and lost Yates's characters ultimately find themselves after all their dreams have been hopelessly dismissed. There may not be another writer who captured the trappings of the American dream more brutally than Richard Yates. I can see why he admired Fitzgerald so much. They're writing about the same thing.

Steven Godin says

Had someone passed me a copy of *The Easter Parade* without me knowing who wrote it, I would have come to two conclusions after finishing. It was either written by a depressed female writer, or if not, then Richard Yates, in fact the very first sentence of "Neither of the Grimes sisters would have a happy life", basically gave the game away. I can imagine him sat there, with alcohol running through his veins, ready to inflict more downheartedness upon the literary world. And if there is one thing with Yates, he never strays away from his themes of misery, abandonment and the stark evocation of the middle class living unfulfilled lives.

This was my forth novel from Mr Yates, and although it didn't hit the heights of either "Revolutionary Road" or the short-story collection "Eleven Kinds of Loneliness" (I believe to be his masterpiece), any fan would find this most readable. And yes, it is a painfully sad piece of writing, that gives you hope one minute, only to drag you down into the depths of despair the next. But that's what he does, and does so well, as with the old saying "If it ain't broke, don't fix it. I only wish it was read predominantly during a torrential downpour, rather than an early warm summers day.

Much of the story is told with Yates's simple, matter-of-fact style, he relates to the characters in a no-thrills way, and nails people with just a few words spoken. Two sisters, Emily & Sarah Grimes are the leading ladies and both are looked at over the years, from youth to middle age, but not in a 'under the microscope' kind of way, because with Yates, he skims over the joys of motherhood, Aunthood, love, and friendship that punctuate life, and goes full tilt at the nasty stuff, wife-beaters, psychiatric hospitals, drunkenness, and heartbreak. Only rarely does he seem to have taken a happy pill, but generally it's gloom, dreams flutter and die.

Set in his usual stomping ground of New York City and Long Island, sisters Emily and Sarah would have a bittersweet childhood, giddy with the promise that life holds, but learn all too soon that things are no bed of roses, that the world does indeed contain physically and emotionally cruel people, both yearn for affection, success but also escape. Bleak as it is, hats off to Yates, as he manages to make the novel not only readable but also enthralling, and is a solid testament to his capacity as a great storyteller. And less does mean more, his pared-down style and conscious absence of literary complexities results in story-telling that is simultaneously easy to digest, with each page flowing like a river out to sea, even if it does lead to stormy waters.

Growing up with their flighty, deluded mother (who they call Pookie), both girls would suffer in the absence of their father, Sarah embraces conventionality and settles down early for what she hopes is an idyllic life, Emily seems distant but more independant; she gets the sex before marriage and decides she rather likes it, so casual relationships are her thing, at least to begin with. But long-term happiness is elusive for both sisters. they keep in touch, but slowly drift apart, and their sisterly stature is as complex as siblings can be, both are in there own way partly jealous of each the other. Sarah would have three boys with her thuggish husband Tony, while with Emily it appears to be just one failure after another, men would come and go, and leave her burdening loneliness.

Huge moments in life are covered, but touched ever so lightly, this works well though, as we are not spoon-fed all the necessities, leaving the reader to contemplate, with Yates's refusal to give into sentimentality undoubtedly his greatest skill. *The Easter Parade* is a miserable read, no denying that, but is also very moving in places, the middle of Sarah's Sons is a ray of light through the darkness, and reaches out to Emily in a time of need towards the end.

I felt deeply for both the Grimes sisters, and rooted for each of them at different times during their difficult lives, whilst also being reminded that nothing changes the misery without our own desire to make the changes happen.

Ned says

OK, it is really sad. Some say this is too dark, the characters so failed and unaccountably gloomy to be worth reading. But I enjoy these types of stories, not because they uplift, but because they seem to help me understand what is inexplicable in my own life. I feel empathy for people who are their own worst enemies, and Yates' book surely describes a number of these. It is a story of two sisters who are damaged by divorce and time spent with a deeply flawed mother, who never could figure it out. This story is set in New York city and Long Island, from the 40s to the 70s, and it feels deeply autobiographical (it was written in 1975). It is a time when women's options were limited and many were trapped by the constructs of American life of this era. Yates writes from the female point of view, and it is masterful in detail of time and place. The protagonist, Emily, the younger sister watches her mother and sister who simply cannot extricate themselves from their situations. The frustration is palpable, as they make one poor decision after another, and bury their loss in alcohol. Emily is afraid of commitment and leads a rather pathetic solitary life, using her few talents and looks to lure a string of men into her life. Ultimately she is not spared, and ends up alone with few friends, sleepwalking through life. This review is likely bringing you down, but the writing is so sharp and its authenticity will leave you caring about this girl and her struggles. Her nephew is one redeemed character, who is almost holy in his forbearance and kindness to the flawed members of his family. This story is about the fate that can await people who fail to find love and gain no comfort in religion. These flawed characters have peculiar blend of narcissism and self-loathing. The complexity of these characters make them interesting. It is, sadly, the story of many of our own kind, and Yates makes me care about those poor souls. Beauty and youth subside, as her beautiful engaged married sister on the cover of the "Easter parade" section of the newspaper tragically will learn that it is all downhill. The author in his pictures seems like these people, and I can almost smell the whiskey and stale cigarette through the picture. He is still a favorite of mine because of his unflinchingly accurate depictions of the gradual and tragic loss of hope. Here are a few examples:

p. 80: "...college had taught her that the purpose of a liberal-arts education was not to train but to free the mind. It didn't matter what you did for a living; the important thing was the kind of person you were."

p. 152, getting up the nerve to confront her abusive brother in law: "She drank- apparently he had handed her a drink and apparently she'd accepted it without thinking- and only now, with the alcohol spreading warm through her chest and down her arms, did she begin to realize how much she was enjoying herself. It was fine to be passionately in the right on so clear and issue- the scrappy kid sister as avenging angel; she wanted this exhilaration to go on and on. Glancing over at Sarah, though, she wished Sarah hadn't washed her face and covered her slip and straightened up the bedclothes to hide the blood stains; it would have made a more dramatic picture the other way."

p. 167, her lover lamenting his estrangement from his wife and revealing his own failings: "And I think that's when she started getting restless, along about the time I started boring her. God damn it, Emily, how can I make you understand how nice she was? It's a thing that can't be described. Tender, loving, and at the same time she can be tough. I don't mean 'tough' in any pejorative sense, I mean resilient, courageous; she had a wholly unsentimental way of looking at the world. Intelligent! Jesus, it was almost frightening sometimes how she'd go straight to the heart of some elusive, complicated thing with an intuitive insight.

She was funny to- she didn't sit around getting of paralyzing one liners, its just that she had a very sharp eye for the absurdity behind anything pretentious. She was a great companion. Why do I keep saying 'was'? It's not as if she were dead."

p. 208, upon happening on her own reflection: "...the medicine cabinet mirror caught her as cruelly as the window on the street that day, and there it was again: the face of a middle aged woman in hopeless and terrible need....she knew the moment she saw him...that it was over."

Eric says

I'm not sure what Yates was up to in two-thirds of *The Easter Parade*. He certainly wasn't playing to his strength—that is, the deep, layered scene: the slow death of a party; the waning of an afternoon buzz; the polite prolongation of a tense visit; lives told in gesture; and dialogue so perfect you see speakers without description. Two of the novel's three Parts flash by in what biographer Blake Bailey, I see, grandly dubs "summary narration" which, he goes on to plead, "serves the larger purpose of emphasizing the characters' helplessness, as if things were happening *to* them, suddenly, but with a terrible logic." That's *bullshit*.

"Summary narration" = phoning it in. Narration so summary means thin, watery prose, a sketched outline of events rather than patient portrayal, and merely nominal protagonists. In the especially weak middle section I wondered if the dimming of Yates's reputation, from the 1960s on, wasn't, you know, *deserved*. It's that bad. But not for long. The guy can *write*. When he's at his best—and he's at his best in the psych wards and cemeteries and mildewy kitchens of Part Three—Bellow and Updike mean nothing to me. *Nothing*. I thought of Yates the other day, when a skimmed article on US-sponsored massacres of Guatemalans yielded up some Sartre: "A victory described in detail is indistinguishable from a defeat." Yates sees you at your most triumphant and glamorous and rewarded and all he notes is a jerky shamble of awkwardness, a coarse patchwork of illusions—after Sarah Grimes' wedding, her father "kept mostly to himself at the party; he stood nursing a scotch, ready to smile at Sarah whenever she smiled at him"—and oh shit, you better not let him see you gulping down screwdrivers on the couch, or witness the congress of louts that gathers to drink after your funeral. We're all doomed!

Mark says

" Neither of the Grimes sisters would have a happy life, and looking back it always seemed that the trouble began with their parents' divorce."

Thus the story began and though I wouldn't say it spiralled down from there, the opening sentence acts as a marvelously clever sword of Damocles which swings in and out of the shadows of the story in a sinister fashion to remind you every time things seem to be going well that Yates has already told us nothing good can come from what happens.

The two sisters struggle and strain through their varying lives, one chained into a marriage in which her husband beats her and drives her deeper and deeper into alcoholism and madness and the other sister trawls from one bloke to the next; some steadyng her for a few years of calm and acceptance before the sword's

shadow falls again across her ageing face and she flips over into self hatred and confusion.

There is not a great deal of joy in this story, indeed none at all. Happy events, marriages and births of the older sister, Sarah's sons' children, always occur off stage and are reported briefly and concisely after the event. There is no let up in the descent into degradation and dirt. Grimes is the surname and it signposts the overall effect of this grimy, unkempt family of two girls and a useless mother.

There is humour but it is bleak and disparaging.

'She had evidently been undecided about which of the several pieces of bright costume jewelry to wear with her cheap beige suit, and had solved the problem by wearing them all'.

or again

"Let's put it this way. To quote John Steinbeck, this is the winter of our discontent.'
'I don't think that was original with Steinbeck, baby'

There are insights but they are always uncomfortable ones which you nod over in an embarrassed 'oh-yes-i-have-done-that' acknowledgment. How many times did i do this as an innocently infatuated student, desperate to be liked and accepted;

'saying one inane or outrageous thing after another in a hopeless effort to atone for whatever inane or outrageous thing you'd said two minutes before'

His descriptions of people are clever and you immediately get a picture or image of the character but so often it is a sad and drained one. Even when it seems positive the overall pressure of the novel weighs down the positive and crushes it into the shape of bleak misery.

Even this description of Emily's feeling for her latest boyfriend, which in normal circumstances would have been lovely, 160 pages in just re-inforces the bleak hopelessness of the reader's realization of the doom waiting just around that corner.

"He was big and sturdy, with a heavy jaw and a voice that made her want to curl up and ride in his pocket like a kitten".

The tragedy of the women's failed lives is never really addressed in the sense that Yates has Emily saying towards the end of the book

'I have never understood anything in my whole life'

but this seems a ridiculously histrionic thing to say. She is a needy woman, desperate to have a relationship with her long dead father and so she flows from one unsuitable bed to another. Sometimes coming ashore as if onto a secluded beach where she nestles down until she becomes again unnerved and unsettled and wades off into the deep where she struggles to stay afloat. She nails her colours to rampantly unsuitable masts and then wonders why all has gone wrong. And yes my wildly mixed metaphors are an attempt to express the depressing confusion of the fuddled minds.

Her sister stays with a brute who beats and undermines her and who, strangely, still manages to be loved by his sons.

There is a horrible scene when Peter, the middle son who is an Episcopalian priest, defends his mother beating father.

'He's a limited man,' he said at last, speaking carefully, 'and in many ways an ignorant man, but I wouldn't call him brutal'.

Normally this might have made bells ring as to whether Emily and Sarah were trustworthy narrators of their story but we know, we have seen the evidence. Peter's rather callous defence is one of the more chilling sentences in the story I felt.

I am not 100% certain what Yates was setting out to achieve in the novel. There is no real hope here, no resolution, no sense of life blossoming for anyone. By the end of the novel only the unencountered wife of Peter has not been drained of humanity and that is because Peter has already set her up and removed her from the normality of the narrative.

'Oh, wow, is she ever. She's beautiful. I guess like most men I've always had fantasies of beautiful women, but this girl's a fantasy come to life. Wait'll you see her'

but we never do. Yates has created a world of bleak, dark shadows which exist and surround even on the brightest day. Peter's wife could not survive the darkness if seen and so she remains off stage like indeed anything which could serve to lighten the gloom or redeem the sadness.

A powerful but deeply sad narrative.
