



Such Is My Beloved

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One of the great novels of the 1930s, Such Is My Beloved recounts the tragic story of two down-and-out prostitutes and the young priest who aspires to redeem their lives. The novel is at once a compassionate portrait of innocence and idealism, and an emphatic condemnation of a society where the lines between good and evil are essentially blurred.

Such Is My Beloved is widely considered to be Morley Callaghan's finest novel.

From the Paperback edition.

Such Is My Beloved Details

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Author : Morley Callaghan

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Brittany says

This book is actually a re-read for me. I first read it when I was around 12 and it sort of just stuck with me, but it's been so long I couldn't exactly remember why. This book is fantastic. There is a scene midway through the book that follows and outline something like this: 'The priest would read anything father Dowling recommended and then come back in a few days and say "My, isn't that author carnal? Do you really like him?" and Father Dowling would be forced to defend a carnality in Tolstoy that didn't exist.' This is a pretty large theme in the book. Everything the people of the parish see they look down upon, seeing the worst in everyone and everything but themselves and looking at their own lives with smug satisfaction. They judge everything, including Father Dowling's intentions, because they don't think that pure, innocent love is possible, the same pure, innocent love that they prescribe to as Catholics. This book really approaches the appearance of faith vs. actual faith. The faithful can see beauty and innocence in women who sell their bodies while those who appear faithful are frightened off by sin because they are scared of what they'll look like if they stay. Just because there is a clear line between right and wrong doesn't mean you aren't on the wrong side of the line just the same as everyone else you have been looking down on.

Liam Faucher says

I enjoyed the last chapter more than I enjoyed the rest of the book.

Thistle says

I appreciate the human vocation Morley Callaghan has manifested in this story. That vocation is this: should that which is precious, that which ignites within the individual purpose and integrity be defended and nourished relentlessly, regardless of publicly held opinion of devotion to this precious treasure? For Father Dowling, this treasure is his love for two prostitutes. Father Dowling feels the goodness and integrity of such a love; yet, as this love is rare, societal skepticism attacks the young priest and he is threatened by scandal. His choice becomes: should he persist in his devotion to helping the girls condemned by their society and even if unable to help, persist in his love for them, in recognition that even this love in its purity preserved is alone of benefit, or accept that for the approval of his parish, he must abandon his involvement with these girls? The conflict exists not because those around Father Dowling condemn this love but because they have no faith that such a love has the potential to exist within the priest. I realize that some readers themselves will also question the nature of Father Dowling's feelings and perhaps this was Callaghan's intention, to leave readers in the role of Father Dowling's peers, also in the position to decide whether the priest was right in his unwavering faith in his love and consequent actions. Reading this short novel, I could not help but think that Father Dowling's predicament is embodied by Dostoyevsky's quote from *The Brothers Karamazov*:

"Sometimes even if he has to do it alone, and his conduct seems to be crazy, a man must set an example, and so draw men's souls out of their solitude, and spur them to some act of brotherly love, that the great idea may not die."

Harperac says

When I reached the middle of this book, around page 70 out of this 143 page novel, I was ready to put it down and never pick it up again. The reasons to do it were overwhelming. After the first ten pages or so, which set the plot into motion, the story devolves into a series of bland set-pieces and wooden interactions. Father Dowling's interest in the two prostitutes is not displayed with any of the subtlety that, say, Mavis Gallant would have given it - it is pretty unambiguously an expression of his sublimated desires, sexual and romantic. Every time they interact, this is all we are given from it. Pages and pages of basically nothing but them reaffirming their flat, uninteresting character dynamic.

However, I slogged it out, and after page 100 it became very rewarding. Suddenly, the scope of the novel enlarged to take account of everyone's intentions - the judiciary and the Catholic power structure, as the biggest examples. Furthermore, what drives the plot is no longer Father Dowling's tiresome obsession with Midge and Ronnie, but the world around him moving to deal with his actions. I really doubted, halfway through, that the 'hypocrisy' of society would look so bad after seeing how transparently neurotic his interest in the girls was, but it really does look bad in the end, because even if Dowling is out of order, the world that deals with him is way more so. With that in mind, this would have made a much better 60 page novella, with pages 10-99 condensed into ten pages.

Stylistically, the real strength of the prose is that it's as clear as possible. It lets the actions of the characters show through, and when the action is rolling it serves great. It's not evocative, usually, although the last chapter is very much so. At times it's really clumsy, especially with communicating feelings - lots of "she looked sad" kind of thing. His grasp of dialogue is really "old Hollywood", which I found delightful, but might come off for others as overwrought.

I'm glad it ended up being good, because my wide reading in CanLit criticism had me believe this was, if not a great book, at least a worthwhile book. Based on my supposition, I'd bought not only this book, but also two books of his short stories (don't worry, for like a buck each). My pride and money was riding on this being a good book. All things considered, it probably is the best Canadian novel of the 1930's, and worth reading.

Lastly, I'd just like to suggest that this could make a great black and white, old Hollywood style movie. I nominate Barbara Stanwyck to play Midge, and Lauren Bacall in a blonde wig to play Veronica. Some great acting could turn the wooden characters to solid gold, as far as I'm concerned.

Mrsgaskell says

This is the second novel I've read by Morley Callaghan and I enjoyed it much more than *A Passion in Rome*. Father Stephen Dowling is a young and somewhat naïve priest who encounters two young prostitutes one evening. His original impulse is to pass them by, but then, ashamed and feeling some responsibility for these residents of his parish, he turns back, determined to help them. Unable to find them respectable jobs because of the Depression, he gives Ronnie and Midge money and buys them food and clothing. He becomes increasingly involved with them, visiting them frequently in their hotel room, or looking for them on the streets. When Father Dowling appeals to Mr. Robison, a wealthy and charitable parishioner for help, Mrs. Robison finds out and due to her strong disapproval, Mr. Robison informs the Bishop of this potentially scandalous, although innocent relationship. The girls are arrested and sent away. Father Dowling exemplifies

Christian love, the Robisons and the Bishop are hypocrites who place Christian beliefs second to worldly considerations. Father Dowling's close friend, Charles Stewart, an atheist and communist, sees prostitution simply as a social and economic problem. Only Father Dowling sees these girls as individuals worthy of love. Ultimately Father Dowling loses his sanity but in a moment of clarity he offers it as a sacrifice for the souls of Ronnie and Midge.

Elliot A says

I was on the fence about this story before I began reading it, since I assumed it would mostly focus on the priest and his church duties, a topic which always makes me a bit nervous. But as the saying goes, do not judge a book by its cover, so must a reader not judge the book too much on the little synopsis provided. The character of the priest was an intriguing representation of human nature and the duties we adopt in our lifetime. The secondary characters challenge and enrich the the main character's personality and internal conflict, while at the same time bringing forth their own struggles and sense of loss.

The plot progresses very nicely, without any unnecessary details or attempts to sound poetic, taking away from the story's message.

The writing is absolutely superb. The author has an ease and control over the words he chose to express the characters and plot that the reading experience became one of a kind.

Even though this story was rather short, the impact it had on the reader is tremendous. The representation of human nature, inner conflict and the ideals of duty, religion and right versus wrong have the reader question and contemplate that which we see and experience every day. It was a great read, which can be finished in one sitting and I recommend it to anyone.

Liv says

It was ok. At the beginning, it really flowed and really captured me. The charming story of a young priest who finds two young prostitutes and tries to help them change their ways. It was really interesting, you saw what others thought and what little joys made the girls happy. But after a while it got a bit repetitive but I guess that was needed to show the desperation. Yet, I think what it was is that there were some unanswered questions at the end. You don't know what truly happens to the girls and that bothered me. Sad what happens to the priest though. Sad sad. Sad. This got to me I guess. The raw emotions and how if someone tries to do something right, their action doesn't always get recognized and respected.

Allison says

Seems pretty progressive for the 1930s. I have trouble not being continually jolted by the writing style, where people's expressions and emotions change quite abruptly, and a lot of people 'smile coldly'. The young priest's relationship with the two prostitutes is quite beautiful. A few passages in the book really highlight how, with all the changes that have happened, the problems people have today are essentially the same problems people had seventy years ago - jobs, money, social status, relationships, whether the less fortunate should be assisted by society at large or not, and whether it is insane even to try.

Samu says

I have been too busy to read anything but ya-lit and thesis related material lately. I had completely forgotten what reading a book that wasn't about zombies or the apocalypse but instead about the characters is like. This book is such a character study. Incredibly refreshing read. It takes more energy to read than the ya-books I've mostly been reading but the reward is that much more. Warmly recommend.

Lindsay says

If I could give this book one fifth of a star, I would.

I slogged through it for a book club and after finishing it, swearing to my husband about how much I still disliked it, I still am grumpy. Yes, yes, it's good to read books in other genres that you're not used to reading. It's good to branch out to new authors. But still, this is just crap!

I'm understanding more and more now that there's good fiction, and then there's literature. This was lit. I don't like lit I guess. I have an urgency to read so many books as soon as possible as I don't know where life will take me next. Somehow, I feel that wasting my time on this was taking me away from something else that would have been much more enjoyable to me.

Oh well, lots of other people liked it. Maybe read their reviews over mine. Or not, and save yourself some time.

uh8myzen says

Morley Callaghan hit it on the head with this novel, and not a thing has changed since the time of the novel.

I have worked for a few organizations whose function it was to help those in society that are cast off and ignored and as such, I no longer believe in the "good nature" of mankind. So many are caught in a poverty trap with criminal enterprise being the only part of society that extends a hand, and we wonder why some areas have more crime than others. The most painful thing of all and the final straw was having the vaunted and holy United Way pull funding because it was not a "popular" cause to help the poor and youth at risk.

Beyond my own life lessons however (and yes I'm bitter!) Morley Callahan is a hell of a writer and I remember being drawn to this book when I was still a naive Lit student in University. His language is beautiful and his stories interesting, and he was man of courage.

An awesome read.

Emily says

I really can't tell if I liked this one or not! The writing style felt so detached that it was hard to be emotionally involved, and I could never tell if I really liked or agreed with any of the characters. I cared about what

happened to Ronnie and Midge, and maybe also Father Dowling by the end, though.

Nancy Gillies says

What a glum little story. I gave the book three stars only because I was intrigued to find out what would happen to the priest who devoted so much of his time with two prostitutes - not to mention the gifts and money he regularly gave them. His behaviour seemed foolish and perhaps a bit arrogant, despite his good intentions. While it was easy to appreciate how difficult life was for many of the characters, especially as they were facing the harsh times of the Great Depression, there really wasn't a single sympathetic character in the book. If this is viewed as Callaghan's best work, I think it will be a while before I read another.

Esthy says

The calm, simple and eloquent cadence of the writing is in itself worth while. In the style of Margaret Laurence and other Canadian greats, the craft alone is praiseworthy. The plot involves a young, idealistic priest's attempt to rehabilitate two prostitutes, Ronnie and Midge. With a mixture of admiration and slight revulsion we watch as Father Dowling becomes increasingly enmeshed in the lives of the two young streetwalkers. On one hand, he is advocating much needed social reform of the Catholic Church. He is in fact the enacting true Christian virtue by extending compassion, concern and charity whilst withholding judgment. On the other hand, he is fooling himself: He enjoys their company probably for reasons he cannot even admit to himself and makes a fool of himself over it. As he later admits in conversation with the Bishop he has grown to "love them fore themselves" rather than from the distant, spiritual vantage of being concerned with the welfare their souls.

Sheila Heuvel-Collins says

Callaghan is my mother's favourite author; for many years, we've argued about his worth. I decided to give him a try again, thinking that perhaps age would have opened a few doors. I was wrong. The POV changes three times in the first few pages. The sentence structure is repetitive. The plot is predictable. Perhaps the subject matter was sufficiently scandalous to be intriguing when the book was first published, but now it just seems the author dipped his foot into the topic and found it too cold to immerse himself fully.
