



A History Maker

Alasdair Gray

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A tale of border warfare, military and erotic, set in the twenty-third century, where the women rule the kingdom and the men play war games. This is the fictional memoir of Wat Dryhope - edited, annotated and commented upon. History has come to an end, war is regulated as if it's all a game. But Wat, the "History Maker" himself, does not play entirely by the rules, and when a woman, Delilah Puddock, joins the fray, this 'utopian' history is further enlivened. Alasdair Gray cleverly plays with the notion and writing of history, as well as perennial modern debates on war, sexism and society - entertaining and thought-provoking, this is a delightful satire illustrated throughout by the author.

A History Maker Details

Date : Published 2005 by Canongate Books (first published 1994)

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Author : Alasdair Gray

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From Reader Review A History Maker for online ebook

Heather says

Why is this guy so good? His use of words is amazing!

MJ Nicholls says

An unusual serving of speculative fiction with socialist undertones, topped off with mild wit, cleverness, and a ludicrous amount of explanatory notes.

It isn't remarkably well-written by Gray's standards, but followers should be mildly entertained.

The artwork is impeccable as always: almost more impressive than the book itself.

Cryssilda says

Abandon. Trop SF, pas du tout pour moi.

Vanessa says

It seems I have a tumultuous relationship with Alasdair Gray's writing. I very much enjoyed *Poor Things*, the first book I ever read by him for university, but when I read *Lanark* (his magnum opus as it were), I had really difficulty enjoying the majority of it.

This is quite a short book in comparison to *Lanark*, the actual story itself only being five chapters long. For the most part, I was enjoying the story. It told the tale of Wat Dryhope, the son of the chief of the Ettrick clan, who is not a fan of his clan's violent lifestyle. However, his attitudes begin to change when he is seduced by a mysterious woman named Delilah Puddock.

The story is set during the twenty-third century, and the description of society at that time was quite interesting at points, particularly with the use of power plants to obtain almost any material good they wanted (everything from food to books). The clan warfare was almost reminiscent of *Battle Royale* and *The Hunger Games* - those these were obviously published after this book - in that they were televised and the participants were made heroes in the eyes of their adoring public.

Unfortunately though there was not enough meat to the story to get me really involved, and it seemed to break down a little towards the end. I also strongly disliked the extensive, rambling notes section after the main story had ended, and I felt very close to skipping it at points. I would have preferred the notes to be written more concisely and included perhaps as footnotes to the main text so I could have read them alongside the story. The Postscript at the end was fairly interesting, and gained a little bit of my attention

back, but overall I was disappointed by this novel.

Part of me wishes that Alasdair Gray did not tend to lead towards the pretentious side of writing with his inclusion of details such as note sections and afterwards and things (see *Lanark* if you want to understand more what I'm talking about), and maybe just put more meat into his stories. Maybe some people like it but I just find it to be an exercise in 'intellect' as opposed to concentrating on entertaining the reader.

Benjamin says

Two things give this science fiction a Scottish accent: (1) set in one of those places one normally doesn't think of as forward-looking, progressive or otherwise futuristic, in this case Ettrick Forest and (2) it is actually written with more than a smattering of Scots English and dialect. I can get past 'cannae,' 'bairns,' and 'wheen,' but there were some other words that had me flipping to the back of the book for explanation.

In the not-too-distant future, the world has achieved an anarchistic, matriarchal utopia, largely because the problem of scarcity has been eliminated. People who find utopia boring can travel to outer-space colonies, or join the gangrels who are like the Travelers, Roma or Tinkers. Meanwhile, a large portion of the men kill each other in well-organized war games. That bit bugged me. It is kind of like traditional horticultural societies, like say the Zulus before Shaka. The women do all the work, and the men have goofy little wars. So is Gray saying, if don't give the men enough to do, they'll make dumb wars, and if you actually let them run the show, they'll make big dumb wars? Then there is the plot, which seems to ask some hurtful questions about territorial imperatives and other nonsense that imperialists attribute to human nature.

The questions about the limits of Utopias are big and maybe unanswerable but the book itself is small and easy to read. I expected the opposite, because I've been intimidated by what I've read about *Lanark*. Also, Gray's illustrations and quirky, idiosyncratic politics and philosophy remind me of William Blake.

Another fun thing about the book is that it isn't laid out like a 'normal' novel. There is a preface by one character, then the bit that seems like the 'real' novel, written by the main character but in the third person, and then the end notes and an epilogue. Since there aren't cues of when to turn to the notes, it is easy to just read the novel bit of the novel and then read the notes as a kind of parallel, alternative version of the same story. The notes also contain a lot of ranting about history, in other words, our pre-utopian world, and are probably best approached with a glass of single malt in the hand.

So now I've broken my Alasdair Gray cherry, I can maybe get the nerve up to tackle the heavier stuff.

Margaret McDowall says

A future Scotland.

Nick says

Alasdair Gray's all-too-short account of matriarchal utopia and its discontents has further solidified his place

in my heart.

Gabriela says

In the beginning it's hard to follow, but worth it to keep going. One of the most interesting utopias I've read about.

Fort says

Quite good, and not as hard to penetrate as some of Gray's novels.

Steve Gillway says

A medieval science fiction novel set in the far future. Gray conjures up a future world to examine warfare and communal living within a warm Scottish vernacular. For such a slim volume there is a lot of philosophical musings of an experienced mind, which gets the grey matter swirling.

Leif says

A relatively quick read, but - despite its breezy disdain for lingering on any subject for too long - a story with depth and heft to it. Essentially, Gray's narrative tells of how a dubious utopia is exchanged for the possibility of a violent dystopia. But then, as a comedy must (avert your eyes if you are spoiler-averse), the ending turns happily to a marriage (of a kind) and a more true utopia emerges. In this, if in little else, Gray exposes his dialectical leanings.

There are also the characters (bizarre, drawn in cartoonish stylizations), the plot (seemingly lethargic, it nevertheless bounds through each chapter), the footnotes (hardly notes, but unavoidably narrative), and the beautifully-drawn images that pepper the text. So what I'm trying to say is that there is lots to take your eyes off the societal critiques given body and get lost in the messy details, if that's your fancy.

This was my first Gray but it won't be my last. His kind of spidery, laughing yet dour voice is rare and precious.

Ian "Marvin" Graye says

Let's Pretend This Lengthy Sentence is Pronounced with a Scottish Accent and Whisky Breath

This modest tale by a legendary "fat old asthmatic Glaswegian" named Gray (neither of us, despite resemblances in nomenclature, age, appearance, style and subject matter, claims any relationship of consanguinity or affinity with the other) purports to record woad warrior Wat Dryhope's apologia for his

short botched life in a lively concoction or cornucopia of economica, politica, utopia, heroica and erotica that aspires to a state of fusion but inspires mainly confusion, though it may be excused primarily because it strives only for the comic rather than the tragic mode and secondarily because it is accompanied by stylish hand-drawn illustrations of women's breasts that would appeal to wee young men or boys not intimately acquainted with this or any other private part of the female anatomy, (view spoiler).

Chadwick says

Slim, light utopian SF, but written in the glorious Alisdair Grey style.

!Tæmbu?u says

KOBOBOOKS

Rhys says

Totally wonderful!

Alasdair Gray is absolutely one of my favourite fiction writers.

I have been reading Rodge Glass's biography of Gray recently and he has nothing good to say about this particular novel, but to be honest his criticisms baffle me. Glass declares that *A History Maker* is hastily written, ends too abruptly (and that the loose ends are tied up by a cheat), that the characters are thinly drawn, that the novel is mostly a political rant with no momentum of its own, and that it's clear Gray's heart wasn't really in it. He even contends that he has never met a Gray fan who rates this novel highly.

Well, I am a massive Gray devotee and I rate this novel very highly indeed...

It's science fiction but also historical, philosophical and political fiction. It's a novel of ideas but there's action too. It's sombre, tragic but also amusing. The characters live in my mind strongly, however briefly they are introduced on the page.

I consider this to be yet another magnificent book from a writer who is unquestionably *the best living author in Britain today*. Just my view.
