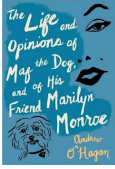


The Life and Opinions of Maf the Dog, and of His Friend Marilyn Monroe



OK, OK Andrew O'Hagan's title snookered me in, but this lovely gem of a novel has it all: dog psychology, human philosophy, Stanislavski's Method Acting, Bloomsbury, Hollywood, Vegas, anarchists in Mexico, President Kennedy, and Marilyn Monroe. Though the narrator is a tiny ball of fur, he's a true aristocrat, a fancy *bichon maltais* with the name of Mafia Honey.

What intrigued me throughout the book was the one or two degrees of separation between the precocious Maf and Hollywood stars and Bloomsbury folks. He started life in Scotland until Vanessa Bell's gardener stumbled across him and his litter mates on a farm and brought the whole caboodle of pups back to Charleston. Bell was Virginia Woolf's sister and a well-known Bloomsbury artist. Then a Mrs. Gurdin, the former Maria Stepanovna Zudilova, otherwise known as Natalie Wood's mother discovered him and brought him back for Frank Sinatra. Frank wanted to give the recently separated Marilyn Monroe a companion.

Although it sounds unlikely, dogs can understand people--both what they say and what they think. Occasionally, Maf even gives Marilyn interesting conversational tidbits, although without her knowledge. When a pack of dogs gets together and starts yapping and barking, they are actually having real conversations. One of the funnier scenes was four dogs discussing method acting by a pool on a Hollywood set. It was a lark to hearing them dis a dog actor who needed 25 takes to get the scene right.

Equally funny is when Maf weaves his way through all the shoes at a party and classifies people by their footwear. Several times, Maf finds an obnoxious actor's comment to be so unoriginal or nasty, that he can't help himself: he has to take a nip of ankle.

O'Hagan has sprinkled inventive footnotes throughout, full of animal lore, quotes from Kafka, and interesting side notes about almost anything under the sun.

I loved this book. It taught me a lot about both dogs and humans, but even more surprising, it's an amazingly heartfelt book, entertaining and uplifting.

If you want a couple more dog reads, try Garth Stein's The Art of Racing in the Rain and Virginia Woolf's classic, Flush.

Posted by Dory L. on July 13, 2011

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