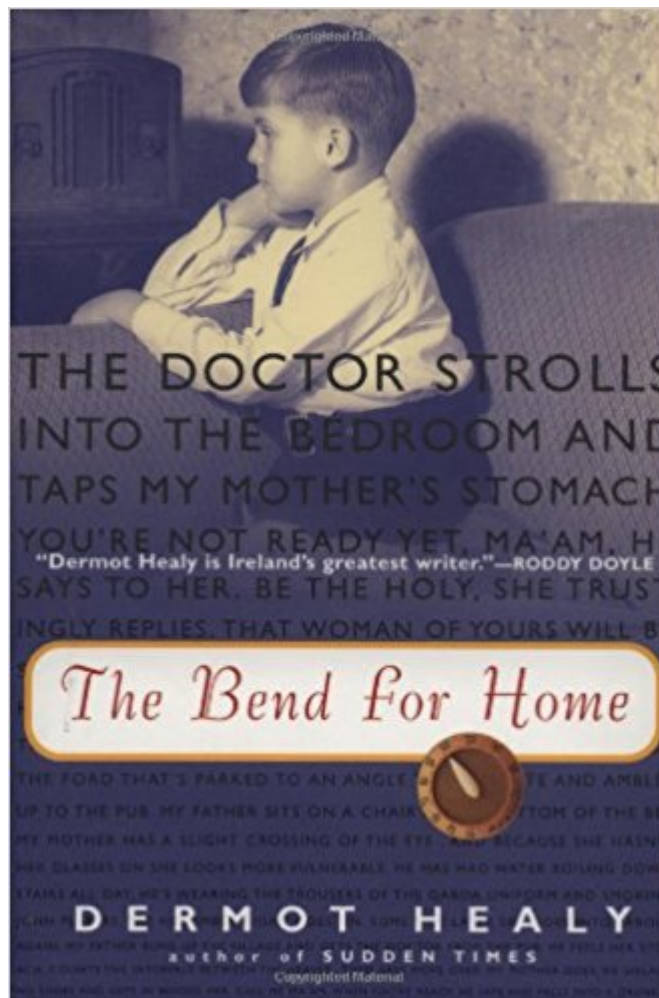


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The Bend For Home



Synopsis

One day, years after he's moved away from his childhood home in rural Ireland, Dermot Healy returns to care for his ailing mother. Out of the blue she hands him the forgotten diary he had kept as a fifteen-year-old. He is amazed to find the makings of the writer he has become, as well as taken aback at the changes his memory has wrought upon the events of the past. Here is the seed of his story-the vision of the boy meets the memory of the man-which creates a stunning, illusory effect. The strange silhouettes who have haunted his past come back to inhabit these pages: his father, a kind policeman who guides him back to bed when he stumbles down the stairs sleepwalking; his mother, whose stories young Dermot has heard so often that he believes they are his own; or Aunt Masie, whose early disappointment in love has left her both dreamy and cynical. In this billowing and expansive series of recollections, Healy has traced the very shape of human memory.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Novelist and poet Healy has produced not a memoir, as claimed, but an episodic novel in the form of a memoir. Writers, he contends, "not only make up things, but get things wrong as well.

Language, to be memorable, dispenses with accuracy." That explains Healy's strategy, which includes confessions later dismissed as inventions. Still, improvements on his memories of life in Irish villages in the 1950s and 1960s do make for a sprightlier book. "It annoys me to remember those days," he writes, while relentlessly remembering them in his fashion. Healy's lengthy dialogues are clearly novelistic, and his accounts, sometimes explicit, of randy teenagers, lascivious

priests and ill and dying elderly villagers, although cliches of Irish autobiography, are given freshness here. The slender narrative thread is the slow disintegration of Healy's father, a policeman retired for failing health. A long epilogue evokes the equally miserable death of the author's mother when Healy is already acquiring a reputation as a writer. The usual suspects are rounded up?poverty, hypocrisy, loneliness, failure, nostalgia, laughter, dreams, drink, death. As Healy owns up, "Those who had been there told all that happened to those who had not. And we exaggerated all we'd seen. As I am doing here, and not for the first time." (Mar.) FYI: Healy's novel *A Goat's Song* will be published simultaneously in paperback by Harvest. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A charming memoir from Irish poet and fiction writer Healy. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Really loved it. I knew the author and Cavan town so it was like going home reading about characters that I knew.

Great read.

Great memoir of set in my home town

Excellent service with goods arriving well before due date. Condition of purchase, 2nd hand book, better than expected for a second hand book. Billy S

In this bittersweet memoir about growing up and growing old, Dermot Healy explores the quality of memory, of tales told and heard and told again, of times half-remembered. Highly stylistic prose reflects the stream of human consciousness, where sometimes a leaf floats past and we think we recognize it as a leaf that floated past a year before. Dermot Healy's "Bend for Home" is part "Portrait of the Artist" and part "Angela's Ashes," combining the ambient grey of Irish poverty with characteristic Irish humor. Healy has been criticized for betraying his mother's memory in the book's sometimes hilarious, sometimes wrenching last chapter. But it is one of the most touching accounts of a son and mother's last days together since I read Mark Spragg's "Where Rivers Change Direction." What would make his mother proud is knowing that Healy has become one of the first rank of Irish authors, and his account of her decline is a sad, beautiful piece of work. Healy should

be more widely read in America, if only because his is an original voice in a new key, Irish accent or not.

The Bend For Home - A Memoir by Dermot Healy

Memoirs fall into two types - those which delineate extraordinary lives or those which are so well written that the ordinary is transformed. *The Bend For Home* is of the second category. With a volume of poetry and a few novels to his credit, notably *A Goat's Song*, Dermot Healy has decided to turn his clear-sighted gaze upon himself. Of course, it is the self which is the source of all writing, but autobiography - though it may draw from the same well as fiction - is different. It demands bravery. As Healy says, fiction can be a "receptacle for those truths we would rather not allow into our tales of the self." One of the central themes of this autobiography is how we remember; how not just fiction, but all art, relies on artifice. As illustration he quotes the song *Come Back Paddy Reilly to Ballyjamesduff*, by Percy French, the road engineer. One of the lines goes: "Just turn to the left at the bridge of Finea." But, Healy points out, you cannot turn left at the bridge of Finea. "Even road engineers," he concludes, "are capable of giving wrong directions in order to get a couplet true... Language, to be memorable, dispenses with accuracy." So how accurate can a memoir be? In this work, Healy strives for the truth about his life and what he perceives as its meaning. At one point he writes of how "nostalgia steals material from the same source as fiction and then leaves the reality wanting." The reality is never wanting in *The Bend For Home*, and through his story of bereavement, rebellion, drink, drugs, love, decay and death, nostalgia - and its sickly cousin, sentimentality - are scrupulously avoided. But is that enough? What is truth anyway, and how is it revealed? Healy recounts one cringe-inducing memory of his to reveal the interconnectedness of truth and lies in our lives, especially remembered lives. He returns from London to Cavan for a wedding and lies to the editor of the *Anglo-Celt*, telling him that a play of his is to be broadcast by ITV. Back in Piccadilly, having forgotten all about the play he's never written, a Cavan friend shows him the front page of the *Anglo-Celt*, which carries his picture under the headline: "Cavan Author Finds Fame." His friends show it to everybody they know and as they set him questions, he is drawn further in. "The more of the story I invented, the more real it became." Eventually, he extricates himself with another untruth about production difficulties. Had he not lied about being a writer, however, he believes he may never have become one: "The truth is the lie you once told returning to haunt you." It is typical of Healy's writing that, apart from one reference to how he would "wake out of a dream terror-stricken by my duplicity," he does not tell us how he felt throughout this time. As for his friends we are told only that "the date for the broadcast came and went [and] no one mentioned it." We are left to imagine the whisperings, the pity of those who

believed him, the contempt of the sceptical. In this leaving of gaps for the imagination to fill, as in his lyrical descriptions of Leitrim landscape and life, he resembles that other novelist of this part of the world, John McGahern. And, as with McGahern, it is sometimes difficult to see how Healy gets his effects. Often all he does is relate bald events, but the impact on the reader goes far beyond this, in the end into an emotional struggle with the meaning of life and death. Yes, the biggest of big themes are explored in this book, and explored with lyricism, wit, passion and tenderness. *The Bend For Home* is a stunning achievement. It takes Dermot Healy's ordinary Irish life, and gives it shape, bends it if you like, into somethings that takes home the truth.

I first found Healy in an indirect fashion, which often turns out to be the best way. While searching for information on an upcoming RTE documentary on the Irish in NY, I noticed a reference to the filmmaker's previous work "The Writing in the Sky", which is about Dermot Healy. I found the film online ([...]) and watched a portion of the program. That evening I picked up a copy of Healy's *The Bend for Home* and ended up carrying it with me until I finished it. I found it an evocative combination of memory and place and it was an interesting journey. As someone who experienced the loss of my father when I was quite young, Healy's description of his father and their relationship was quite touching. The same goes for his depiction of caring for his mother at the end of her life - I saw another reviewer mentioned that Healy was criticized for that part of the memoir and I cannot see how one would feel that was a problem. Her story at that point in her life seems to me presented as a contrast to the personality he writes of in her earlier life; how those traits remained in later life and how the loss of his mother could be tracked by the changes in her abilities in relation to her fastidious temperament. My only complaint was some difficulty in navigating through the center portion of the memoir, as he jumped into the more diarist format and wrote of his adolescent and often self-destructive behavior. However, after sticking with him during that section I see there exists an optimism there as he sometimes tries to temper his wide swath of troublesome activity and shows some insight into the deeper thoughts of identity his young self was having. Overall, I would highly recommend this book for those looking for a memoir of time and place told from an honest perspective. There is pain, but there is humor and beauty too. I am now going back to watch *The Writing in the Sky* again. I'm interested on how it plays to me now with a little more knowledge of Dermot Healy himself.

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