

MY STRUGGLE: BOOK 1 BY KARL OVE KNAUSGAARD



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"A living hero who landed on greatness by abandoning every typical literary feint, an emperor whose nakedness surpasses royal finery." — JONATHAN LETHEM, *THE GUARDIAN*

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Review

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“Knausgaard's thinking is magnificently unbridled.” ?Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (germany)

“Between Proust and the woods . . . Like granite, precise and forceful. More real than reality.” ?La Repubblica (Italy)

“I can't stop, I want to stop, I can't stop, just one more page, then I will cook dinner, just one more page . . .” ?Västerbottens-kuriren (Sweden)

About the Author

Karl Ove Knausgaard was born in Norway in 1968. My Struggle has won countless international literary awards and has been translated into more than fifteen languages. Knausgaard lives in Sweden with his wife and three children.

Don Bartlett has translated dozens of books of various genres, including several novels and short story collections by Jo Nesbø and It's Fine by Me by Per Petterson. He lives in Norfolk, England.

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point, where it will collect in a small pool, visible from outside as a dark, soft patch on ever whitening skin, as the temperature sinks, the limbs stiffen and the intestines drain. These changes in the first hours occur so slowly and take place with such inexorability that there is something almost ritualistic about them...

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MY STRUGGLE: BOOK 1 BY KARL OVE KNAUSGAARD PDF

My Struggle: Book One introduces American readers to the audacious, addictive, and profoundly surprising international literary sensation that is the provocative and brilliant six-volume autobiographical novel by Karl Ove Knausgaard. It has already been anointed a Proustian masterpiece and is the rare work of dazzling literary originality that is intensely, irresistibly readable. Unafraid of the big issues?death, love, art, fear?and yet committed to the intimate details of life as it is lived, My Struggle is an essential work of contemporary literature.

- Sales Rank: #6832 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Farrar, Straus and Giroux
- Published on: 2013-05-28
- Released on: 2013-05-28
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.16" h x 1.20" w x 5.48" l, .86 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 448 pages

Features

- Used Book in Good Condition

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262 of 272 people found the following review helpful.

Fantastic and it's only the first volume

By Just Wondering

Knausgård's first volume in his 6 volume *My Struggle* has finally been published in English. This is one of the most successful books ever published in Norway and deserves a wider audience. Book One introduces us to Knausgård's life with his recollections of his earliest memories through his teenage years. The second half, focused on arranging his father's funeral while finishing his first novel, deals with his complicated relationship and feelings about his very strange and pathetic father.

The series itself is a strange venture. On one level it is simply a memoir by a 40 year old writer who has achieved great acclaim in Norway (but is almost unknown outside the Scandinavian countries). On a more lurid level, it is a "reality show" in book form, its essence being a brutally honest intrusion into the author's life, and more notably, the lives of everyone around him. But the value and genius of this book is that Knausgård has an extraordinary ability to articulate the feelings and perceptions of ordinary people as they live their ordinary lives, make choices, and deal with the consequences of those choices. His self-awareness is refreshing and hilarious. Poetry in prose.

The book was released this morning. I intended to read a few pages this morning, but was unable to put it down. It is that good.

I read a lot of Norwegian literature in translation and Don Bartlett, the translator, is one of the best. He has always impressed me with his focus on retaining the feel of the original language and did a great job with *My Struggle*.

Here's hoping Book Two is published soon.

148 of 154 people found the following review helpful.

The Days of His Life

By Taylor McNeil

Novels are often autobiographical, and memoirs usually have as much fiction as fact. So what is Norwegian writer Karl Ove Knausgaard's *My Struggle*? It's clearly his personal story, told in a hyper-realistic manner. When I saw him in conversation with James Wood in September 2012 at Porter Square Books in Cambridge, he said yes, of course this is a novel, not a memoir: he uses the techniques of a novelist. But it's something simpler than that: it's an extremely effective piece of storytelling, the elemental kind that is how we make

sense of our lives.

Why should readers care about the story of Karl Ove's life? It's not that it's in any way remarkable, though it certainly has its personal dramas. No, it's the almost guileless realism that drew me in--all the small details that make up our everyday lives that rarely get acknowledged in books, but which completely resonates at some deep inner level. And while there are passages where the writing is plain--no other word for it--often Knausgaard is employing the careful wordcraft of a skilled writer more concerned with telling his story than showing off his chops. In doing so, he gets to the heart of being in all its everyday ordinariness.

Knausgaard spares no one in his family in this portrayal, least of all himself. We see family scenes from his childhood, a long section from his teenage years that's blissfully free of moralizing or wallowing in self pity: it's simply life itself.

But ultimately the book is about death, and what that means for the living. *My Struggle* opens with a meditation on life's end, and the heart of the book recounts Karl Ove's week after learning of his father's death, most of it spent at his grandmother's fetid home in Kristiansand, a town on the southern coast of Norway. It was here that his father spent the last years of his life, slowly drinking himself to death. Karl Ove and his brother Yngve slowly clean out the stinking house, tossing reeking clothes and furniture, scrubbing for hours on end, and trying to understand their grandmother, who found their dead father, her dead son.

It doesn't sound like promising material, and should by rights be downright depressing, but it's not. Every detail is described with care; the story is more like a painting of an old Dutch master, rich in intricate and mundane detail, sparing nothing, engrossing us, leaving us wanting more.

Why does this book work so well? Why did I look forward to reading another 20 pages every evening? I think somehow Knausgaard has managed to make his struggle universal through all the small details that accumulate into the larger whole. That includes his own follies and failures, his self doubt and fears, and yet also a confidence that he will make it through to the next day, the ultimate struggle for all of us.

Each little moment he describes is a moment of awareness of the present. Perhaps that's why it captivated me: all too often, we go through our days unaware of the moments that make up our lives, lost in thought, focused on the future or the past. Knausgaard describes a relentless present, something that we mostly forget in our own daily struggles.

This definitely isn't a book for everyone; if you want plot development and action, look elsewhere. But for me it was rich, rewarding, thought-provoking, and ultimately moving.

104 of 112 people found the following review helpful.
Norwegian Seinfeld (a book about nothing, sans humor)
By C. Hobbs

This series starts off gripping the reader: I was enthralled for the same reasons most other reviewers seem to indicate. As the pages flew by my interest started to wane slightly. I became mildly self-conscious. Am I a stereotypical American in need of constant neurotransmitter candy, clearly defined endings, a return to the tonic at every chapter's end? I loved Bolano and a handful of other 1000 page doorstops and prolix jeremiads. I soldiered on, and on, and on. Banal. Solipsistic. Ennui. The criticisms from other reviewer come to mind and echo my sentiments somewhere around the three-quarters point in the first book.

The writing is good, clever at times. Knausgaard can no doubt throw a yarn. The voice is honest - with the caveat that it is a first person narrative - and vulnerable at times. He's going to invite criticism: from people

whose private moments are laid bare, from readers that have invested so much time and feel cheated, from readers that think his life is trivial, his problems typical, and his achievements modest. There is a fluidity to his writing that dupes the reader into persevering. Had there been technical halts in the writing, discontinuities (e.g. numerous chapters), visual hiccups (e.g. footnotes a la DFW), and other assorted non-linearity, I believe the growth in popularity would have stunted. The title was also a brilliant marketing tool. It forces a self-deprecating writing style lest the author is perceived as pompous. *My Struggle* isn't some auto-hagiography. Knausgaard avoids this with his honesty and introspection albeit as days turn into weeks turn into months.

In Information Theory there are ideas related to compression, complexity, and entropy that in simple terms say that the amount of order contained in something determines how much you can reduce it into something smaller and simpler. So, for instance, the simplest representation of a perfectly random string of characters may be the string itself. Conversely another string of the same length with non-random repeating elements may be able to be represented as a fraction of the length while preserving all of the original information. My feeling with the 3600 pages of *My Struggle* is that if we stuffed it into a black hole and let it try to chomp all the bits of information down until it was pure information we'd still be left with 3600 pages. However, if we tried the same experiment on the ideas contained in the novel we'd be left with a page. This is a microcosm of what the NSA must deal with everyday: the curse of dimensionality. Wanton context free information. The human brain has evolved over the millennia to parse and weed out information that isn't germane to survival. Writing has the difficult task of adding some of this mundane information back in to create plausible, colorful, dense, and engaging stories. Some writers are masters at talking about the color of a plant (cf Nabokov). When the sink is thrown in it might as well be what is sometimes called "f-you literature". Franzen's first rule is "The reader is a friend, not an adversary, not a spectator." Pynchon and Joyce can get away with throwing ciphers at the reader, making them feel stupid. In a similar way Knausgaard achieves the same alienation of the reader but via a totally different method: tedium.

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