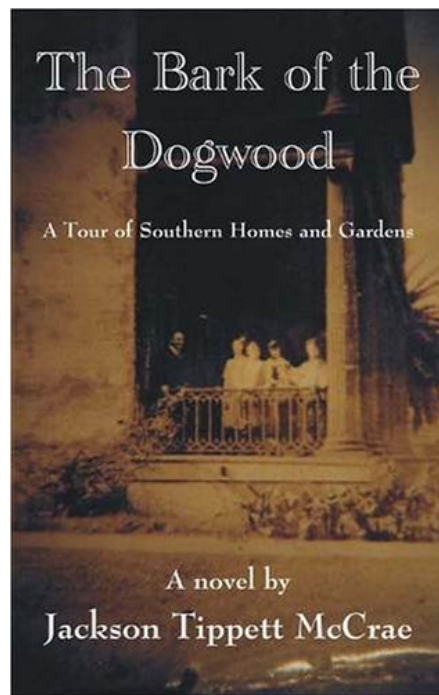




The Bark Of The Dogwood: A Tour Of Southern Homes And Gardens

Jackson Tippet McCrae

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Asked to write a series of articles on Southern Homes and Gardens for a New York Magazine, Strekfus Beltzenschmidt (the main character in The Bark of the Dogwood) chooses not only some of the plantations and historic residences the South is known for, but places of his youth, including the home he grew up in and those of his relatives that he visited as a child. The intended articles become in essence, short stories, which then grow into the main character's memoirs about his turbulent and sometimes humorous childhood. The result is not only an ongoing battle with his boss over the magazine's content and direction, but a painful journey into remembering the people and places of his past.

The opening statement of his first story, "When I was six years old I became locked inside the home of Helen Keller," is a clue into this insightful book's revelations about how we are all in some way, deaf, dumb, or blind, if not literally, then at least spiritually or emotionally. The stories serve as chapters themselves in the novel, expertly intertwined with the modern day world of publishing in New York--each chapter commenting on the other and linked in ways that only become obvious as the reader digs deeper into the novel.

The Bark of the Dogwood is a dazzling display of virtuosity, combining rollicking humor and insights into human nature with a tale of horror and family secrets surpassing even the most Gothic Southern novel. The end result is a massive undertaking that works on several levels-so many, that it is up to the reader to decide just how deep he wants to delve into the colorful cast of characters whose lives are inextricably intertwined.

The Bark Of The Dogwood: A Tour Of Southern Homes And Gardens Details

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From Reader Review The Bark Of The Dogwood: A Tour Of Southern Homes And Gardens for online ebook

Danielle says

I could have done without the last scene with the dad, but overall, I liked the book. I vacillated between a 3 and 4. I thought he was very insight oriented and psychologically minded, which made me like the book. Good read, but not for the faint hearted.

Paul Thurman says

I've never come across anything as badly written or as badly in need of an editor in my life. I finished it, but I don't know why. After that, I threw it into the trash. I didn't feel it necessary to pass along to any of my friends who like to read as I didn't want to waste their time.

Joy Marini says

I enjoyed the quirkiness of this story, and parts of it certainly made me chuckle. The author's overuse of adjectives was sometimes tiresome, and it's too bad his editor didn't strike the majority of them. I've always loved southern fiction and tales of dysfunctional families, and this book certainly delivered.

The author's style of writing was unusual, and, along with the symbolism, the Capote connections were an interesting touch.

Mandy says

This book was different and some work, but like a classic novel, it finished well making it one of those you won't soon forget. You won't find it in the bookstore unless they can locate it from a used book dealer. I believe it's out of print !!

Paul Barton says

A middle-aged man finally comes to terms with his abusive childhood. But that hardly does justice to this tour de force of writing. Strekfus writes for a magazine about Southern Homes and Gardens but begins using his assignments as an excuse to explore his Southern childhood haunts. The author, Jackson Tippet McCrae, has pieced together a tale with stunning precision. There are two stories running simultaneously. One is a series of beautifully crafted flashbacks in which the storyteller and main character, Strekfus, writes about his childhood and youth in the first person. The second is third person narration about Strekfus in present day

New York, as he makes sense of his past and finally comes to understand why he is the person he is. Look closely and you will find a myriad of anagrams acting as clues and hints. This is a

fully polished gem with every word carefully chosen.

Jae says

I loved the beginning of this book as much as any book I've ever read: A man remembering himself as a young boy, treating in the worst possible way the one who loved him most ; the victim doing nothing, allowing the boy to remember and regret that moment forever--and teaching him a lesson. That moment sets the tone for Bark of the Dogwood.

McCrae tells the story of an eccentric boy, Strekfus, growing up in the South with some messed up parents and a wonderful housekeeper, and creates some hilarious laugh-out-loud moments. That boy grows up to be a writer for a magazine that allows him to explore the events of his childhood and family history that had the most impact on him, many of them not so funny. Bark of the Dogwood is really two stories that could be read independently. One story (told as a series of magazine articles) takes place in the past; the other in the present, each told in distinctly different styles.

At times, it feels like a story about child abuse and neglect, but, for me, in the end it was a story about a very strong, loving woman who took great risks to protect and care for someone she loved.

One caveat: Bark contains one of the most graphic and disturbing scenes of infanticide that could ever be described. I would even rank it above the Dead-Baby Tree in Blood Meridian. McCrae goes too far.

If you liked Behind the Scenes at the Museum, you will probably like this book. My recommendation: Read this book while wearing your mother's evening gown and high heels and standing on a stool in the kitchen.

Shari says

Asked to write a series of articles on Southern Homes and Gardens for a New York Magazine, Strekfus Beltzenschmidt--yes that is his name! (the main character in The Bark of the Dogwood) chooses not only some of the plantations and historic residences the South is known for, but places of his youth, including the home he grew up in and those of his relatives that he visited as a child. The intended articles become in essence, short stories, which then grow into the main character's memoirs about his turbulent and sometimes humorous childhood. The result is not only an ongoing battle with his boss over the magazine's content and direction, but a painful journey into remembering the people and places of his past. this was one of the stranger books i have read in my time but somehow rather strangely fascinating.

Kate says

One of the best books I've ever read-and I just stumbled across it. FABULOUS southern fiction. Multilayered story. A true find. Can't say enough about it. Hilarious and somewhat dark. Harper Lee meets

Sedaris.

Holly says

This is a beautifully written book which touches on racism, child abuse, and homophobia. As another reviewer said, it's both one of the funniest books you'll ever read and one of the most disturbing.

Katie says

I would describe this book with one word: "underwhelming". I was looking for quirky southern, a la Confederacy of Dunces, but this was not it. The author tended to build situations up as if they were going to be really exciting, but it never delivered for me.

Karolyn says

My son bought me this book for Christmas one year (tradition to buy each other books). What a great surprise. Rich with characters and southern traditions. I then went on to read McCrae's Katzenjammer. Wow what a book. love, love this author

Balika says

I just couldn't handle it- I can't read books where the child protagonist is given an adult voice. To me, it makes the entire premise unreliable. And annoying. There were snippets of excellent writing in this memoir, but overall FAR too much detail about every step taken. Does every step need to narrated? I read only to chapter 5.

Sibby says

Could not really get into it - - it was a book club book. I know there were several of us who just had a hard time mucking our way through this book. At the meeting, it was revealed that there is a scene later in the book which contains something so dark and (previously to my mind) unimaginable... I am happy I did not continue on with this book.

For those of you who have read the book, you'll know what event I mean. For those of you who have not read the book, I will not mention it here. While I do not pander to censorship, I cannot imagine why this event needed to be explored at all, in any work of fiction.

Janice says

I'm going to write a bit about this later today

Margaret Gillespie says

Good book, but could have been edited better. There was too much information and it often distracted you from the main plot. Overall, glad I read the book and would recommend it--made my family seem normal!
