



## **It's Fine By Me**

*Per Petterson , Don Bartlett (Translation)*

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Fans of Per Petterson's other books in English will be delighted by this opportunity to observe Arvid Jansen in his youth from a fresh perspective. In *It's Fine By Me*, Arvid befriends a boy named Audun. On Audun's first day of school he refuses to talk or take off his sunglasses; there are stories he would prefer to keep to himself. Audun lives with his mother in a working-class district of Oslo. He delivers newspapers and talks for hours about Jack London and Ernest Hemingway with Arvid. But he's not sure that school is the right path for him and feels that his life holds other possibilities. Sometimes tender, sometimes brutal, *It's Fine By Me* is a brilliant novel from the acclaimed author of *Out Stealing Horses* and *I Curse the River of Time*.

## **It's Fine By Me Details**

Date : Published October 2nd 2012 by Graywolf Press (first published 1992)

ISBN : 9781555976262

Author : Per Petterson , Don Bartlett (Translation)

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## From Reader Review It's Fine By Me for online ebook

### Jill says

If you use Ernest Hemingway's criteria – “all you have to do is write one true sentence”, Per Petterson is profoundly gifted. I've marveled at the authenticity of his other books, particularly *Out Stealing Horses* and *To Siberia*. This one is newly translated and actually precedes the others; it was written in 1992.

It's a melancholy coming of age story and it helps to know that two years before he wrote it, Petterson's parents and brother were killed in a Norwegian ferry tragedy. Likely, the author is channeling the sadness and alienation and he does it very well.

As in other Petterson books, the story runs forward and back in time. We meet the 13-year-old narrator Auden Stetten on his first day in a new school. Despite the headmaster's urging, he refuses to remove his sunglasses, claiming he does not want to show his scars. In that one simple scene, the reader learns a lot about Auden: that he is self-protective and secretive and that he may carry scars that make it impossible for him to reveal himself to others. Put another way, he's sort of a “shady character.”

Nothing all that much happens; this is not a book for fans of linear plots and action stories. Instead, it's a deep look into the mind and heart of a boy growing up in Norway and as in previous books, the cold and sometimes unforgiving landscape is very much part of the story.

The writing style goes from sparse to lyrical and back again as the story runs through some familiar Petterson themes: the yearning and rejection of connection, the need to make it on one's own terms, the tough emotional road to growing up. Behind it all is the terror of an abusive father and the true scars that abuse leaves behind. Combined with the wrenching home scenes are poignant ones: at one point, Auden runs away and is taken in by a gentle farmer named Leif where he experiences tenderness. As readers, we know Auden can't stay there forever but it's an unsettling contrast about what could have been...and what is.

For fans of Per Petterson, it's worth mentioning that Arvid – who appears in later books – is cast here in a supporting role as Auden's one true friend. For those who enjoy intricate portraits of characters who are evolving into maturity, this is a very worthwhile read.

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### Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

What was it like to be a teenager in Oslo in 1970? For Audun Sletten, it's not a particularly pleasant life. He's a sullen young man, prone to drunkenness and apathy, and already quite defeated for one so young. We learn some of what made him that way as he alternates between present and past tense, telling stories from his 13th year in 1965 and his 18th year in 1970.

I have very much enjoyed some of Per Petterson's other novels, but I had to force myself to finish this one. The prose is up to Petterson's usual standards and the translation is excellent, but *IT'S FINE BY ME* is essentially plotless. The 1970 Audun drinks a lot, gets in fights, wanders the city aimlessly, and plays at radical politics. He goes to school, then drops out to take a dead-end job where he can't seem to stay out of trouble. He grieves for a lost brother, and lives in fear of the return of his abusive, alcoholic father. Audun's stories from 1965 give us more insight into the family dynamics that made him the way he is. I enjoyed the

stories from his younger self a little more because he hadn't yet given up on the world and himself. He was still participating and trying to enjoy life.

If you've read *IN THE WAKE* and *I CURSE THE RIVER OF TIME*, you'll enjoy seeing Arvid Jansen as a youngster in this book. He's Audun's only friend, and he was the one bright spot in the story for me. Arvid sees Audun for what he truly is. He tells him, "Do you know something, Audun. Nothing's fine by you. Absolutely nothing." And he's right. We can only hope Audun will overcome some of his anger and stop keeping the world at bay. Otherwise he's doomed to remain miserable and directionless.

Those with a low tolerance for foul language may want to steer clear of this novel. The cursing is not excessive, but it's realistically regular throughout the book.

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## Larissa says

Review published on *Three Percent*, October 16, 2012: <http://www.rochester.edu/College/tran...>

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On an early morning in Oslo in 1970, Arvid Jansen shimmies up his high school flagpole and replaces his nation's flag with that of the Viet Cong. Confronted by the headmaster in front of his classmates, Arvid takes the opportunity to expound on the evils of the U.S. occupation of Vietnam and Norway's complicit foreign policy, all the time being observed from a far corner by his good friend Audun Sletten. "I guess it's all very important," Audun shrugs, "but I am up to my neck in my own troubles, and it almost makes me want to throw up."

Frequent readers of Per Petterson have by now come to know Arvid Jansen rather well. In typical Petterson fashion, Arvid's life has been examined in alternating atemporal versions set forth in *In the Wake* and, most recently, in the masterful *I Curse the River of Time*. Arvid is often the vehicle through which the author explores and recasts episodes of his own past—"[h]e's not my alter ego, he's my stunt man," Petterson stated in a 2009 interview with *The Guardian*. Vulnerable, self-absorbed, and made miserable by hindsight, Arvid is an incredibly sympathetic character. If for no other reason than this, then, English readers should be delighted to now have access to one of Petterson's early novels (first published in Norway in 1992): *It's Fine By Me*.

Arvid is a prominent character in the novel, but it isn't his story. Rather, it's that of his troubled friend Audun, a young man who, with his "real problems"—a violent and drunken father who is, luckily, often absent; a beloved but drug-addicted younger brother, killed in a car accident; a lonely single mother struggling to support her children; and numbing jobs with long hours and little respect—is the actual embodiment of the working class hero that Arvid has so frequently wished to be. But as seen through Audun's eyes, there's nothing in the least romantic about his situation in life.

"It's fine by me," (reminiscent of Elliot Gould's own cynical chorus of "It's okay with me," in Robert Altman's 1973 adaptation of *The Long Goodbye*) is Audun's go-to retort, forced in its apathy when pretty much everything that he remarks on is anything but. In fact, Audun cares a great deal about what happens around him—cares about his sister who he thinks may be in an abusive relationship, cares about a neighbor whose brother is getting into drugs, cares about Arvid and his family, cares about doing well in school, and literature, and Jimi Hendrix, and woodsy hideouts where he felt safe as a child. But isolating himself and not caring—or at least giving the appearance of not caring—is far easier and exposes him less.

Although there actually is quite a lot in the way of plot happenings, *It's Fine By Me* is a rather familiar, somewhat anticlimactic coming-of-age narrative where the 'what' matters far less than the 'how.' This is by no means Petterson's strongest novel, nor should it really be expected to be—it was, after all, one of his first. But although the flashbacks and overlapping memories fold together less seamlessly than in other Petterson novels, although the emotional pitch is generally less subtle (lots of capital letter exclamations when people are angry), and the visual metaphors more overdetermined (a beautiful runaway horse, turning just before it knocks over young Audun and Arvid), the novel is still compelling, and sometimes even quite funny. (A scene in which Audun and Arvid have to figure out how to put gas in Arvid's father's car is particularly delightful.) Petterson's characterizations are always both sharp and empathetic, his prose measured, poetic, and visual. One feels connected to Audun—truly concerned for him—and yet, due entirely to Petterson's writerly sleights of hand, the reader can distinguish between what has become entirely compressed and unified in Audun's mind: run-of-the-mill teenage angst and real, emotional (and physical) trauma.

Through it all, Petterson allows for a quiet hopefulness, the possibility a better future for Audun. There is resonance in the clichéd assurances of a sympathetic neighbor: "You're not eighteen all your life," he tells Audun. "That may not be much of a consolation, but take a hint from someone who's outside looking in: you'll get through this."

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### **Julie Mestdagh says**

Het boek "twee wegen" van Per Petterson zindert nog steeds na in mijn lijf, ook al las ik het ruim 7 maanden geleden. Een briljant verhaal van een briljant auteur, een andere uitleg is er niet. Toen ik dan ook vorige week "ik vind het best" van diezelfde Per Petterson in de rekken zag liggen twijfelde ik geen moment: karretje in en lezen die handel! Verwachtte ik te veel en is het daarom tegen gevallen? Zou kunnen. Het boek is op zich zeker niet slecht, opnieuw een aangrijpend verhaal en zeker een verzameling aan "gouden zinnen" (geef toe, als je "koffiekamerapartheid" kan verzinnen heb je stijl), maar toch greep het boek me niet zo bij de keel als Twee Wegen.

In "Ik vind het best" volgen we de Noorse Audun, een jongen uit een gebroken gezin, van de leeftijd van 13 tot 18 jaar. Het zijn moeilijke jaren voor de jongen; jaren van geweld door de vaak dronken vader, gevolgd door een plots vertrek van die laatste. Het gezin verhuist naar een nieuw dorp om er een nieuw leven op te bouwen, maar de littekens van Audun blijven. Op zijn nieuwe school leert hij een nieuwe vriend kennen, Arvid, die hij langzaam maar zeker in vertrouwen neemt. Hoewel ook die vriendschap niet altijd even sterk is. Zo is het Audun's grote droom om schrijver te worden. Net als zijn grote voorbeeld Hemingway loopt hij rond met een notaboekje om zinnen en ideeën in op te schrijven. Wanneer vriend Arvid dit als "roze proza" omschrijft spat Audun's pijn gewoon uit het boek. Uiteindelijk verlaat Audun vlak voor zijn afstuderen de school en gaat in de drukkerij werken, opnieuw een wereld waar het er vrij hard aan toe gaat en hij zijn mannetje moet staan. Telkens opnieuw wordt Audun duidelijk geconfronteerd met zijn pijnlijk verleden, dat hij toch gaandeweg probeert af te schudden. Het wordt er niet makkelijker op wanneer Audun's vader plots in zijn dorp opduikt....

Een mooi, aangrijpend verhaal maar niet met dezelfde indruk als "twee wegen".

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### **Myriam says**

Meester in het onbenoemde....

In Pettersons tweede (?) roman met de laconieke titel 'Ik vind het best', hanteert hij al met veel vakmanschap

de bedrieglijk eenvoudige stijl die hem zo groot maakt. Geen grein sentiment en toch slaagt hij erin je diep te ontroeren of in enkele zinnen een zo raak beeld te schetsen dat het je adem beneemt. Citeren buiten de context heeft geen zin, dat het geheel meer is dan de som der onderdelen is een cliché dat nooit zo waar kan zijn als in een roman van Petterson. Zijn personages zijn zodanig van vlees en bloed, vertwijfeling en hoop, woede en mededogen gemaakt dat ze een diepe herkenning meebrengen - ook al is hun verhaal verre van het jouwe.

In 'Ik vind het best' worstelt de jonge Audun met zijn plaats in de wereld, een strijd die niet alleen moeilijk is voor iedere adolescent maar hem des te zwaarder valt omdat hij uit een gebroken gezin komt. Hij houdt zich recht aan vriendschap en literatuur...

'Audun speelt met brille de rol van outsider. Zijn droom is het om schrijver te worden (...). Auduns literaire helden zijn Jack London en Hemingway. Hij zou net zo willen schrijven en precies zo willen leven: rauw en poëtisch tegelijk, met een innige band met de natuur. Wat Audun ook overkomt, hij behoudt een emotionele koelheid die hem intrigerend maakt. Geleidelijk komt, rond zijn zeventiende, de schrijver in hem naar voren. Zijn levenshouding 'ik vind het best' maakt hem onaanraakbaar, maar er is meer: hij vindt zijn toon en stem in een schrijfstijl die ogenschijnlijk koel is aan de oppervlakte maar daaronder een en al lyriek en emotie uitstraalt.' (NRC Handelsblad)

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## Lisa says

*It's Fine by Me* (1992) is an early novel – only just translated into English in 2011 – by the author of the superb *Out Stealing Horses*, which in 2007 won the IMPAC and the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize. (It was also shortlisted in 2008 for the Best Translated Book Award but this one is translated by Don Bartlett, not by Ann Born, who died in 2011).

When I first began reading *It's Fine by Me*, its adolescent narrator immediately put me in mind of Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*, but no, this pensive bildungsroman is more of a sobering meditation than a novel of existential teenage angst. Holden Caulfield rejects the world he lives in, rebelling from not much more than its 'phony' values but Audun Sletton in Per Petterson's novel has in his short life suffered real tragedy, the loss of his brother and the ongoing threat of an abusive father. While both novels explore teenage alienation, rebellion and identity, the disaffected youth in *It's Fine by Me* has a genuinely melancholy past and present.

To read the rest of my review please visit <http://anzlitlovers.com/2012/03/11/it...>

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## Ken says

OK, so I love this book and yet hold back a star. Tough love, call it. And logic, really, considering that Petterson's *OUT STEALING HORSES* took me by storm. This book came before that one. In fact, Graywolf Press will be publishing four from his backlist: two novels, one short-story collection, and one essay collection. So, yeah, I love this book, but realize it does not quite reach the peaks that *HORSES* did.

That said, I genuinely admire the autobiographical character here. Audun Sletter's hardscrabble life is covered from preschool to age 18. He lives at home with his mom, older sister, and doomed younger brother. His Dad, no stranger to the bottle, visits when he's in the mood to punch a few easy marks. A lone wolf, Audun has but one good friend whom he sees only seldom: Arvid Jansen. The two of them have this way about them, this subterranean understanding that Petterson captures through dialogue. It's no small feat.

In her note to the reader at the start, Graywolf publisher Fiona McCrae writes, "[*It's Fine By Me*] has a strong, suspenseful plot, memorable teenage characters, and a moody, Norwegian setting." Check and check on numbers two and three, but not so much on number one, unless "episodic" is a qualifier you'd use for strong and suspenseful plots. It's really more of an Impressionistic work, with points of Audun's life drawn in brief, deft strokes. Back up a bit and you get the picture.

Though there are no hard and fast rules when it comes to genders and reading (especially considering how much more flexible women are compared to men), I'd say this is more of a man's book. Add a layer to that if you're a man who once dreamed of being a writer (and I assume that includes many, many men who love to read).

Through his many heartbreaks, fist fights, and rolled cigarettes, Audun has one constant -- books. He's especially drawn to books about writing and writers. MARTIN EDEN, for instance, the lesser-known Jack London work that every wannabe writer reads as a teenager (if you're late for this bus, it still stops for the hungry). And A MOVEABLE FEAST, Hemingway's non-accent-on-fictional account of his writing days in Paris during the 20s ("Hunger is good discipline," and all that). Audun also puts you on to Norwegian authors you've never heard of (unless you've been listening carefully), like Helge Ingstad, author of *The Apache Indians*, a book in Audun's hand on the last page. Given all this book love, you'll be Audun's bud before you know it.

*It's Fine By Me* does not have the sweep and descriptive flourishes of *Out Stealing Horses*, but its spare, direct writing and character-rich details will take its prisoners. Audun is one for feigned indifference, and you'll think you are, too -- until you reach the last page. Really. Decent endings are so hard to write, even for the very best like Tolstoy (who sucked at endings). Petterson nails it here. A perfect convergence of plot (such as it is) and character (Audun's sphinx-like one).

Yep. By the end, you'll feel like you're bidding farewell to an old friend, a kid just like you once were, a kid who might've understood you like no one else had you been lucky enough to know him. That's the feeling that carries the day with this book. Maybe it'll carry you, too.

*This review is from an ARC. Actual release date: Oct. 2, 2012.*

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## Cynthia says

### Nature and Literature

"It's Fine by Me" is a coming of age story. Audun, the growing boy, has had a tough Norwegian upbringing. His dad is a violent alcoholic who mistreats him, his brother and sister and their mom. The book begins when Audun is thirteen in 1965 just as society is undergoing seismic shifts. Audun is lucky he has one true friend in Arvid. They talk about books and Audun borrows classics from Arvid's father's bookshelves. Arvid's dad also becomes a little of a substitute role model for Audun. The story unfolds slowly with lots of literature references featuring Hemingway and Jack London. Audun is an odd mix of a heavy reader yet a ready scrapper when challenged by local lads. He has the scars and bruises to prove it.

The Norwegian landscape and farmland play a wonderful role in this book. Audun uses them as a restorative when life becomes too difficult. There are as many people who help him as there are those who hinder or attempt to hinder him. He goes his own way. He knows his own mind at a young age. Always determined to be a writer he makes the odd decision to leave school a few months before graduating. 'School' continues in rough manual labor and in books. He goes out in nature when things feel overwhelming. He looks rescues

himself by rescuing loved ones.

Though this is my first Petterson so it's hard to judge I don't think this would be the best place to start. In places it feels disjointed though perhaps Petterson is inviting the reader to reach your own conclusions. Since the book is loosely autobiographical we know there's a positive outcome but Audun has a singularly tough route to adulthood.

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## **Bettie? says**

Translated from the Norwegian by Don Bartlett

This must be a back number as the copyright is 1992. No dedication or front quote, just straight into the opening:

**I was thirteen years old and about to start the seventh class at Veitvet School. My mother said she would go with me on the first day - we were new to the area, and anyway she had no job - but I didn't want her to.**

An early work that didn't work for me. The writing is good but the subject matter left me cold even though I could relate to being just a little younger at that time. Catcher in the Rye, Nordic style.

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## **Bonnie Brody says**

The setting of this novel is working class Oslo, Norway and the story, in its broad description is a coming-of-age tale of two boys, Audun and Arvid, who meet on Audun's first day of school. Audun has a tough persona, one he may not even be totally aware of cultivating. On the very first day of school he refuses to take off his sun glasses, telling the principal that he has scars around his eyes.

The book opens in 1965 and is primarily about the years of 1965 through 1970, though not in sequential order. The boys like the Beatles, Bob Dylan, Aretha Franklin. They have the names of their favorite rock stars engraved on their boots. Audun is a loner and befriending Arvid is a big change in his life.

Audun comes from a very violent and dysfunctional family. His younger brother drowned two years ago when the car he was driving drove into the water. Audun's mother has recently left their alcoholic father who has been cruel and violent to everyone in the family. She now has a friend who comes over on Sundays to listen to opera with her. Audun's sister is involved with an abusive boyfriend.

This is not a book where a lot happens externally. It is a series of thoughts, feelings and inner experiences. Both of the boys read a lot and are interested in the socialist movement of the time. Ironically, Audun wants to be a writer while he is also contemplating dropping out of school. He loves Hemingway, Tolstoy, Gorky and Jack London. As he argues to himself, not all of them finished school.

The writing is poetic and strong. Speaking tangentially about his father Audun says, "If you're an alcoholic you're out of control. If you have no control, you are finished. Then you spend the rest of your days walking

through the valley of the shadow of death. You are the problem no one wants to solve."

The book has some great humor in it. I loved the part about Henrik, a student who is failing at French but has a teacher that is too hard of hearing to recognize that Henrik is babbling rather than speaking French.

There is quite a bit about the political situation in Vietnam and the civil rights movement in the U.S. As Audun says, "I am not an idiot, I know about the napalm in Vietnam, I know about Wounded Knee and the Ku Klux Klan; for as long as I have lived I have seen the race riots on TV. They shot Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. I have read Eldridge Cleaver's Soul on Ice and felt the flames of his hatred. But there is something about these people. They are for real. They step out of the shadows and set out on journeys never to return."

Though non-linear, primarily devoid of action, and mostly inner-directed, this is a very interesting book. It appears to be partially auto-biographical with Arvid representing the author. I recommend this book to those who enjoy character-driven novels with frank and heavy prose. At times, there is a lightness to the writing and humor in the story, but by and large, this is a heavy novel, one that looks at the darker side of the human spirit.

Comment

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### **M. Sarki says**

Basically I was wrong about thinking this an inferior work by Per Petterson. It was simply not what I like to read, but it was very well-written and well worth my time. There is much to like about this book and anything I might have to say about it would ruin the experience for somebody else so inclined to read it. But whatever anyone decides to do is fine by me.

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### **Russell George says**

Do you know that feeling when you really like a particular author, no matter what s/he writes? That there's something about their style that makes reading them somehow more personal, more meaningful, than other writers? Well, it's pretty rare, but that's how I feel about Per Petterson. I think it's the way he uses the present tense to create just the right amount of tension, alongside the very ordinariness of his stories. This was about a troubled teenager from the home of a physically abusive father. The writing is deceptively simple, and for all I know it may lose something in translation from the Norwegian, but Petterson also skilfully moves back in time to fill in the gaps that the main narrative only hints at. More than this, Petterson does youthful alienation to perfection, his heroes so genuine and well-observed.

I'm not sure whether they're original, or critically acclaimed – though any book translated into English must have done well – but I'll go back to Petterson's book one day. They have everything I want in a novel. Warm, compelling, well-paced. It's a very quiet genius.

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### **notgettingenough says**

Do brutal climate and harsh environs inevitably lead to such stories? Auden is a survivor. The question is

whether he will escape as well as survive. This is a grim story of abuse, alcoholism, dead-end jobs, petty town mentalities. But above it is a level of joy for the reader in the lovely prose, the simple, minimal way in which Petterson does his work. And surely the one will transcend the other by the end leading to something like a happy future. Auden's a reader and in his heart he's a writer. Could the author really leave the hopes of this young man and the reader dashed?

Maybe. I'm not going to give that away. Suffice to say I read this with my heart in my mouth, during the course of today. It's short and very difficult to put down.

Petterson's on two out of two with me.

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## **Eyüp Aygün Tay?ir says**

Türkçeye çevrilmedi henüz; umar?m çevirisi yap?l?r. Ba?l??a ne diyecek çevirmen onu da merak ediyorum. "Bana Uyar", "S?k?nt? Yok" ???

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## **Rick says**

If Hemingway has a successor, it wasn't Mailer or Raymond Carver. Nor is it Tom McGuane, though there are points superficial and substantial to be considered for McGuane, but it is Per Petterson. The Norwegian novelist is spare, unsentimental, precise, vividly descriptive without being florid or sentimental, and blessed with the gift of voice so his dialogue is authentic, unique, and natural. Like Hemingway, Petterson imbues his characters with a stubborn heroism that lives in understatement.

The protagonist of this story is a teenage student. He and his family, minus their violent father, have moved to a new town. The boy, Audun, aspires to write. He lives in an interior world that he shares with a friend but no one else. With everyone else he shares his sense of disaffection, his being in but not of their world. He wears sunglasses when he enters the town's school and makes up stories about why he needs to. The stories are obviously not true but in his desperate need to separate himself it doesn't matter that they are untrue: go ahead call my bluff says the dark shimmer of his glasses. Audun wants out into the wider world of adventure he finds in the stories of Jack London. He delivers newspapers. He quits school and gets a factory job. The chip on his shoulder is worn for himself and selected others. There are verbal rows and physical conflicts. Audun can take his lumps, taught to do so by his father, whose shadow hangs like the long stripe of an evergreen on the edge of an open field.

Petterson succeeds in making Audun credible, intriguing, and a figure of admiration, as he makes the out-sized decisions of the prematurely adult. A randomly selected description: "I walked out into the sunshine with my dark glasses on. I couldn't see Leif anywhere, but there was an old man in overalls standing in the yard. He was thin as a rake and tall, the overalls hung off his shoulders like a flabby tent, and he was holding his hands against the small of his back, gazing up in the air, so I too looked up, but there was nothing there, just air. Then he was aware of me, and he turned on his heel, and we stood up straight staring at each other, and he shook his head and stroked his chin and made a friendly gesture. I did the same, and when he smiled his face split in two, and he was off across the yard and behind the barn."

Calling *It's Fine By Me* a coming of age story is to unfairly pigeon-hole it. It's that and more. It is a compelling story of longing, of finding one's way, of the complex interior worlds of those who are lost to themselves and so to others but only just so. In a conversation with his friend early in the novel, Audun

admits that his father is not dead, which his friend assumed because Audun never mentioned him. “So now I’ve said it. I shouldn’t have, because then I may have to tell him more. Arvid is my friend, and now he looks at me, and my mind goes dim, and all around me it’s getting dark, it’s late in the day and no longer possible to see between the trees. It’s all shadows. I turn my back, but that doesn’t make it better, a chill runs up my spine, and I can’t stand still. I start to move down the rock, jumping from boulder to boulder as fast as I can, and Arvid is behind me. ‘Hey, you, wait, for Christ’s sake.’ But I don’t.”

Petterson knows that people like Audun carry a worldly wise sensitivity and understanding that gets them into the narrow space between despair and hope, between peace and conflict, between caring and not caring, between, really, life and death. Brilliant.

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