



My Son, My Son

Howard Spring

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The story of William Essex, who rose from humble beginnings to become a successful dramatist and novelist, and his friend Dermot O'Riordon, a fervent Irish patriot and founder of a great London furnishing house; and their sons, Oliver Essex and Rory O'Riordon. Plus some other assorted characters, from old Mr Moscrop and his daughter Nellie, and Maeve O'Riordon. Those boys grow up in friendship, but the passing years create circumstances that divide them as their fathers learn the hard way that sons do not always develop the way a parent might wish.

My Son, My Son Details

Date : Published April 1960 by Collins (first published January 1st 1938)

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Author : Howard Spring

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From Reader Review My Son, My Son for online ebook

Barbara says

I read this for the first time when I was a teenager, and have re-read it several times since. I am now on a project of reading all of Howard Spring's novels in chronological order, and this was his third - and it is a masterpiece, a leap above the first two. The writing is impeccable and the settings and characters leap out of the page under his treatment. It is - as always - written with love and compassion for the people he is writing about, and with wisdom and sorrow for the inevitable dashing of their foolish hopes.

Zoey Hardy says

My son gave me this book he found at a used bookstore. He knew I'd love it because it had an inscription written in it. It was dated Christmas, 1939. He knows I collect books like that. They fascinate me. But I'd never read anything by Howard Spring, and had no idea what it was about. I was hooked from the beginning. And just like someone else on here said, good or bad, you are the product of how you were raised. Great book that everyone should read. I'd have loved it as a teenager, and wish I'd known about it then. I'd like to know what I thought about it then, compared to now, reading it as an adult.

Zoika Blat says

read this when I was REALLY young, found it in my grandma's house, and though i cannot recall much stuff from it, i still remember the excitement while reading it. i guess it's worth a revision.

Nick Duretta says

Melodramatic tale of a successful British novelist and playwright whose errant son causes him a lifetime of anguish, all told against the backdrop of war--specifically, the Irish rebellion of the early 20th century. Heavy on coincidences to underscore the book's themes, and I'm not certain if the first-person protagonist novelist is supposed to be sympathetic, but he's not; he marries a woman he doesn't love just to get her father's money, and ignores the love of his life although she's right under his nose panting most of the time.

Clare says

Wonderful evocation of time and place. One of the most engrossing novels I have read.

Evgenia Dimitriou says

Επικεντρώνεται στο πώς μποροῦν να απήχουν οι προσδοκῆς ενῆς γονιοῦ για το παιδὶ του απὶ την

πορε?α που θα χαρ?ξει το ?διο το παιδ? για τον εαυτ? του και το π?ς η αγ?πη του γονιο? για το παιδ? μπορε? να παραμε?νει ακλ?νητη, ακ?μη και ?στερα απ? αποτρ?παιες πρ?ξεις του δε?τερου. Το μοτ?βο του "?σωτου Υιο?" στο αποκορ?φωμ? του και η συγκινητικ? συγγ?ρεση του παιδιο? απ? τον πατ?ρα. Η πρ?τη φορ? που ?κλαψα διαβ?ζοντας ?να βιβλ?ο.

Helena R-D says

I bought it due to the book design catching my eye and then by the blurb on the back. I had this book sitting on my shelf for a while until I finally picked it up, intending to just read a chunk of it and save the rest for later.

I read it all in one sitting, so enthralled I was by the straight forward and somewhat soapy saga of two friends who end up raising two sons that for better or for worse end up twisting their father's legacies for them.

It can get melodramatic at places and the ending, despite being expected, was still a kicker. I'm glad that I came across the Apollo imprint, because I wouldn't have known this book existed. Well written and quietly emotional. Loved it.

Sally says

An absolute blockbuster of a novel, narrated by author William Essex. Recalling his childhood as the unwanted son of a Manchester washerwoman, he remembers too his early – and lifelong – burning ambition to become rich.

While in lodgings he becomes friends with Dermot, a gifted carpenter with strong patriotic feelings for the Irish, suffering under English rule. And as the narrative follows the personal and professional lives of the two men, Essex describes a conversation they have on the birth of their respective sons on the same day: Dermot resolves that his son shall achieve what he has not – “I shall never be satisfied with the position of Ireland under the muddy feet of your bloody country. My son shall not be satisfied with it. He shall go to Ireland, he shall learn to be an Irishman as I am not ... now you know what I want most passionately in this world for my son.” Essex also wants to realise in his son what he has missed himself: “I’ve been poor in a way that even you have never known ... I just want him to have everything. I’ll work my fingers to the bone to give him every damn thing he asks for.”

The two families are always close, but the results of the different input from the fathers into their sons’ upbringing makes for a riveting read, nail-biting to the last. Not, perhaps, great literature, but Howard Spring writes with style and keeps the reader enthralled from the first sentence. I loved his memory – prophetic of things to come - of swimming on a Cornish holiday just before the First World War “The sight of all others most fascinating in those waters: a horde of tiny silver fish, swimming in a long thin procession, ten or a dozen abreast, like a small marine army on the move. Endlessly they went by, never changing their formation, wheeling now to the right, now to the left, but always precise, regimented, moving as by a common will. A small cloud drifted before the sun and the water, still pellucid, turned grey. And the silver fish turned grey. I could still see them: a grey endless army, moving to some unknown encounter across the grey floor of the sea.”

In short a really good read.

Susanne McCarthy says

One of my all-time favourite books. William Essex, the narrator and central figure of the story, is not a particularly sympathetic character, but you can't help but feel for him as he drags himself up by his bootstraps, achieves everything he thought he wanted, only to see it all crumble to dust - there's something of the inevitability of a Greek tragedy in it.

The closing sentence (I won't quote it, as it's a spoiler) must be one of the most poignant in literature

Keith says

I cannot speak too highly of this wonderful novel, and I would urge any of my friends who have not discovered it to seek it out. This and *Fame Is The Spur* are Howard Spring's best two novels. I first read *My Son, My Son* when I was about 13 or 14, and the impact it made was such that I could not wait to track down all the other Spring novels then available. His books are very readable, and they capture the life and times of a particular generation so well. It was a different world, then, and we need to be able to understand the way it was for self-made men like the hero William Essex, and, for that matter, Howard Spring.

Dorcas says

If I was to sum this book up in one sentence it would be, **To a large extent, for good or bad, we are a product of our upbringing.**

William and Dermont are two close friends who plan and plot and ultimately live their lives through their two sons, Oliver and Rory.

William is a man who lived a hardscrabble life but pulled himself up by his bootstraps to become a successful novelist. He determines to never let his son lack a thing. He must have everything money can buy and become an even greater man than his father.

Dermont is a frustrated Irish radical but with marriage, a growing family, and a booming carpentry business tying his hands, he must pass his political fervor onto the next generation. His son will right the wrongs he himself could only dream about ..

Well, be careful what you wish for.

"My Son, My Son" is a saga spanning about 35 years. WW1 will arrive when the two sons become of age, with consequences that rock both families to the core. And brooding for decades, the Irish rebellion finally reaches a crescendo with Bloody Sunday and catapults Ireland into confusion, mayhem and terror.

This is my first Howard Spring book and I found him immensely readable. I would compare his style as a cross between Diane Pearson and Warwick Deeping. The male protagonist here is not particularly likeable but at the same time is very human and so its hard to look away. The last 100 pages are unputdownable.

Recommended for adult readers who like chunky family sagas from the turn of the century.

CONTENT:

SEX: One steamy scene which eventually fades to black but takes a while in doing so (two pages).

Surprising for a book written in the 1930s

VIOLENCE: Some wartime fighting. Nothing very graphic but people do die.

PROFANITY: Fairly liberal sprinkling of D's, B's and religious cussing.

This would have been 5 stars for me except for 1) some unlikable people were main characters and 2) major foreshadowing in the narrative that amounted to spoilers. I really dislike that.

But it is so completely engrossing that 4 stars seems almost stingy...

Margaret says

I read it around my sixteen years. I adored it back then. And the thing is that thirty five years after my first reading, I still remember it. But I want to reread it! I wonder how I am going to evaluate it now

Susanne says

One of my all-time favourite books. William Essex, the narrator and central figure of the story, is not a particularly sympathetic character, but you can't help but feel for him as he drags himself up by his bootstraps, achieves everything he thought he wanted, only to see it all crumble to dust - there's something of the inevitability of a Greek tragedy in it.

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Peter says

I became obsessed with books popular during the Great Depression after I heard a story on NPR about books from then. I found this at the local library from the first edition.

I made my way through the yellowed pages that were falling off the binding. The book was just amazing! From the writing perspective I got lost in the time periods that the book covered. Howard Springs writings made me feel as if I was there, in England during WWI; made me feel as if I had lived before electric; made me feel as if I had earned a fortune and owned a home in the south; made me feel as if I recently took up 'motoring'.

This book was great. I hope to read it again some day.

Cathy McGough says

Beautifully written. I couldn't put it down. If you like Howard Spring, then you'll love this one. His characters are very rich, and make sure you read it with a box of tissues handy!

Rebecca Foster says

(4.5) This is the second gem I've read from the new Apollo reprint series, after Josephine Johnson's *Now in November*. It opens in working-class Manchester in the 1870s and stretches through the aftermath of World War I. Like a Dickensian urchin, William Essex escapes his humble situation thanks to a kind benefactor and becomes a writer. His best friend is Dermot O'Riorden, a fervid Irish Republican. William's and Dermot's are roughly parallel tracks. Their sons' lives, however, are a different matter. Oliver Essex and Rory O'Riorden are born on the same day, and it's clear at once that both fathers intend to live vicariously through their sons.

My Son, My Son struck me as an unusual window onto World War I, a subject I've otherwise wearied of in fiction. A straight line could be drawn between *Great Expectations*, Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*, *My Son, My Son*, and *The Goldfinch*: all four feature a simultaneously sympathetic and enraging protagonist who overcomes family difficulties to dream of fame and fortune. No mere period or local interest piece, this is a book for the ages.

Note: When first published in 1938, this was entitled *O Absalom!* However, considering Faulkner's similar title, *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), it was renamed.

See my full review at [Shiny New Books](#).
