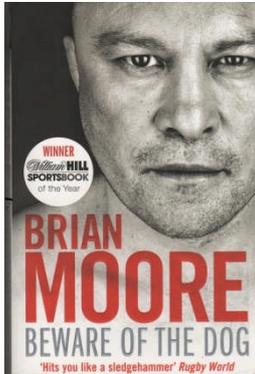


the one page book review



Title: Beware of the dog
Author: Brian Moore
Publisher: Simon & Schuster
Price: £7.99

One cannot fail to be moved by the opening chapter of this autobiography, in which England Rugby legend, Brian Moore describes his early childhood, which includes his accounts of adoption and child abuse. His descriptions are frank, open and largely described in a way which leaves the reader to make their own sense of them. This chapter not only sets the backdrop for his life but also the style of the remaining chapters. Moore talks throughout the book about his inner demon (which he calls Gollum) the inner voice that constantly criticises and demeans the self. It's a reminder that people who achieve super-human things are still only human; they have the same irrational fears and beliefs as the rest of us. At times the critical voice has led Moore to take challenge head-on, to compete and to spur him on to greatness, at other times, it has had a debilitating effect with more self-destructive consequences, ultimately leading to regrets and missed opportunities.

One gets the impression that 'compromise' is not a word that features heavily in Moore's vocabulary. His style is open, honest and full. He forms opinions, (some of which, particularly about other people) are unequivocal and tough. If sometimes he might be accused of making an equivalence between truth, fact and opinion, what you get with Moore is a simple honesty. It's a 'publish and be damned' approach which says, 'This is me, take it or leave it'. It's also very refreshing and he does it in the full knowledge that he will be judged by others and that some of his comments may hurt people that he cares about. That is not to say that Moore is somehow stuck in a particular 'world view'. One of the themes that run through the book is his continuing re-interpretation of his history. On many occasions he compares his conclusions of events in life with previous accounts written in a previous biography. History is constantly renegotiated and affects who we are today.

The middle chapters of the book are unsurprisingly, mainly about rugby and his rise to elite status, despite the inner voice telling him that he will never be worthy of such a position. These chapters show in graphic detail the emotions and pressures experienced by elite sportsmen and women. They have jobs that most of us dream about, but that doesn't mean that they are without a downside. One example is how he describes the infighting, disagreements and political manoeuvrings that accompany high-level sport. One shouldn't be surprised as these things go on in all organisations, but somehow there is an assumption that when facing a challenge as compelling as winning a World Cup there would be automatic alignment behind such a goal. Moore shows how all these things still have to be worked through and how the extreme physical demands are not the only work to be done, a great deal of effort also has to go into forging a team from talented individuals. Games are described in a way which captures the emotional and physical demands, plus an insight into some of the finer technical points of forward play, often with typical rugby-humour. Without doubt he shows the brutality of top-class rugby – no place to show weakness, where any soft point will be mercilessly exploited by the opposition.

It is in the closing chapters that there is a return to understanding the man. His retirement from sport, and post-career experiences are explored with the same openness and he re-assesses what sport has meant to him over the years. He takes time to reflect on how sport and his personal identity have been inextricably linked, how it has affected relationships (good and bad) and the sheer emotional impact of sport. It is in these chapters (which include an account of searching for his birth mother) that show the ongoing process of reflection, re-interpretation and re-invention. For someone who had a reputation for 'fronting up', of relishing the fight and never backing down, this book shows a man with enormous insight and sensitivity, and above all the strength to show his vulnerability. An absolutely fascinating read.