



The Namesake

Steven Parlato

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Gifted artist? Standout student?

All his teachers are sure certain that Evan Galloway can be the graduate who brings glory to small, ordinary St. Sebastian's School.

As for Evan, however, he can't be bothered anymore.

Since the shock of his young father's suicide last spring, Evan no longer cares about the future. In fact, he believes that he spent the first fifteen years of his life living a lie. Despite his mother's encouragement and the steadfast companionship of his best friend, Alexis, Evan is mired in rage and bitterness. Good memories seem ludicrous when the present holds no hope.

Then Evan's grandmother hands him the key--literally, a key--to a locked trunk that his father hid when he was the same age as Evan is now. Digging into the trunk and the small-town secrets it uncovers, Evan can begin to face who his father really was, and why even the love of his son could not save him.

In a voice that resonates with the authenticity of grief, Steven Parlato tells a different kind of coming-of-age story, about a boy thrust into adulthood too soon, through the corridor of shame, disbelief, and finally...compassion.

The Namesake Details

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From Reader Review The Namesake for online ebook

Bookphile says

I went back and forth a lot with this book. I don't think it's a bad book, and at times I was pretty spellbound by it, but there were things with which I just couldn't connect. More complete review to come.

Full review:

I've been chewing over this book for days, trying to figure out how I felt about it. It was a strange mixture of strong, poignant moments that were so well-written I could feel them in my gut, and a list of annoyances that seemed to compound more as the story progressed, ultimately making me dislike it for long stretches. Some spoilers ahead.

First off, I think it's important to know that this is a book that deals with child sexual abuse, which means it needs a big trigger warning. While I never felt that any of the details of the abuse were gratuitous, they are graphic in the sense that I had a very visceral reaction to them. Parlato does a good job of writing about how tormented Evan's father is in the wake of his abuse, and I could feel every one of those excruciating passages deep in my bones, which is a testament to Parlato's writing skills. It wasn't easy to read this book, but I don't see how anyone could try to put themselves in the mind of a victim like this and not be affected.

Unfortunately, these strong bits of writing just weren't enough to save the novel for me. I think it might have been possible for Parlato to salvage had this book been written about an adult protagonist. As it was, I could not buy Evan or Lex as teenagers. Some of their interactions are so lengthy, filled with puns, and full of cultural references that I have a hard time believing a pair of 15-year-olds would get, that it took me right out of the novel. I liked the complexity of Lex and Evan's relationship, and I was interested in it and rooting for them to work things out, but, as strange as this sounds, I didn't much like reading about either of them because they did not feel like the teenagers they were meant to be.

I also did not like the Albertis and the passages dealing with Evan's job in their restaurant. Their presence in the story felt like overkill, like just another twisty element to throw into the narrative, particularly when it came to the question of Theresa. I also didn't like Angie's abrupt switch from one personality type to another, as I could not understand her bitterness with Evan. If it was due to her anger with his father, it felt strange that she initially seemed so protective of Evan, and then suddenly couldn't stand the sight of him.

This book delves a lot into faith, the Catholic faith in particular. If you're a member of the Church, I could see where this might have special resonance. It's not that only Catholics can understand it, but having a Catholic background provides a lot of insight into the ways the faith works. I think Parlato did a good job of showing how various characters questioned their faith in the wake of Evan's father's awful abuse, but I also thought he fell a little short. I didn't think anyone had what felt like a real crisis of faith, and the way Evan's father deals with things later in life felt a little too pat for me. I also wasn't a fan of the supernatural elements introduced into what is a contemporary story, though I did understand how they fit into the religious and spiritual framework of the novel. Still, for as much as Evan dealt with the personal repercussions of the revelations about his dad, I never felt like there was any real, in-depth examination of the Church's involvement, especially in light of what's revealed during Evan's encounter.

Characterization was also a little on the weak side. Evan was okay, and I felt some of his behavior jibed with his being a teenaged boy, but there were times when I didn't much care for him, and at no point did I feel like

I really identified with him. Of all the characters, his father was the one who struck me as the most sympathetic. The sisters were weakly drawn, and the grandparents frankly made me very mad at times, as did Evan's mother. Lex was also a disappointment, and for a good chunk of the novel I felt she acted in ways that were very out of character for her.

This book was a letdown because it had glimmers that never really made it into sparks for me.

Kym Brunner says

Loved so many things about this book (and it's NOT b/c he's a fellow Merit Press author). The voice was amazing and the story kept me guessing. The characters felt authentic and I enjoyed getting to know them. Being Catholic myself and having gone to Catholic grade school and high school, there were so many quiet nuances that resonated so well with me.

Excellent job, Steve!

Gina (My Precious Blog) says

Initial Thoughts:

Evan is angry, really angry at his father for taking his own life. He doesn't understand why the guy would do something that drastic and not even leave a note explaining why? Evan is sure his father must not have cared much about him because if he did why would he leave him in such a horrific way. So, Evan vows to go on a quest for answers. He just MUST know the motives behind his father's suicide. Along the way he is warned by many "there are worse things than not knowing", but Evan is determined and he's not going to give up until he finds out his father's dark secrets - all of them!

Evan is a likable character, I couldn't help but feel his deep, gnawing pain. His pent up rage and feelings of abandonment were ever present. I enjoyed his sarcasm, his wit and his gritty determination. His quest for answers quickly leads him into the land of the sick and twisted, but it doesn't deter our powerfully strong MC, he doesn't give up, instead pressing forward with a vengeance.

Alexis, Evan's best friend and newly developing love interest is exactly what he needs to push through his difficult discovery quest. I appreciated her strength and ability to support without being too invasive. She's very snarky, sarcastic and quite a prankster. I did get irritated by her near the end of the story when she sort of pushes Evan away. I thought she was a little harsh, but in the very end she redeems herself, well at least in my eyes.

Father Fran, the villain was a sick bastard. He is the definition of evil. I didn't find anything at all about this man redeeming. The author was able to create a character so grotesque that I wished nothing more than for him to rot in hell.

Pacing I felt was a little bumpy for most of the book. I found myself rushing right through it in a good way. I'm as curious as Evan to find out the reason why his dad killed himself. Once he found the journal, I

just wanted him to read it from start to finish. He kept stopping and this tried my patience a little because I knew the journal might hold all the answers. Evan gets it early on in the story, too. I just wanted him to keep reading!!!!

This is a very serious book, extremely deep, moving but also difficult and sickening read. The author doesn't spare the reader any details and quite frankly, some of the journal entries are challenging to read. Its a powerful book, evoking strong emotions: I felt angry, betrayed and disgusted along side of Evan as he discovers the horrific truth as to why his father committed suicide. I would recommend this to contemporary readers who can tolerate reading horrific plot lines. This book covers sensitive topics like suicide and child abuse. Its not an easy read, but its moving and emotional, I felt it was totally worth my time.

The ending isn't perfect. Though it end up being more realistic as a result. Not everything ends up being rectified. I still am left wondering why is it that so many people knew, but no one wanted to step up and help? How much can one man/boy endure? I was also left unsure if I'm the best reader for this story. Its certainly didn't help my already deeply rooted dislike/distrust of most, but not all, religious figures. What I did like though is the author does offer hope. The reader gets the impression the characters will preserve despite their sorrow, grief and loss. Without that, I don't think this would have been worth reading.

C. McKenzie says

Nothing is as devastating as the loss of a parent, but when a parent takes his own life, that devastation is multiplied to unendurable. For Evan Galloway, his father's suicide plunges him into sorrow, anger and confusion, and then ultimately forces him to seek answers to questions that appear just about everywhere. Follow a modern Holden Caulfield on his quest as he rummages through family secrets, old friendships and betrayals, into the darkest secrets of a church and its failure to protect the innocents in its charge.

It's a difficult book to read because of the topics, but it's a well-crafted and riveting book that tackles realistic, life-changing events and does it so well. The bittersweetness of the multi-layered story, the brilliant supporting character of Lex, the bully who gives Evan the final push over the edge. All carefully interwoven with fresh prose and authentic dialog.

Faith Hough says

Much has been said already about the depth of Steven Parlato's character development and the strength of his writing—I second it all. But as a Catholic, I'd like to approach this review from a different angle. If you haven't read the other reviews, I'll let you know upfront that *The Namesake* is a book which deals with sexual abuse of a child by a Catholic priest, and is what I call a very "gritty" book. There is a good bit of language, a steady stream of mature issues (on top of more than one case of abuse, there's suicide, death of a child, and more...), and some graphic images—I can say that I would not have been ready to read this book when I was a teen, but I am very glad I have read it as an adult. (I had to think of Flannery O'Connor's statement that a writer must be "hotly in pursuit of the real," as hard as it was to read even now.) Obviously sexual abuse is a devastating, but too common occurrence, both in the church and in the world in general. But it pains me to see how many people take the jump to completely writing off the church, and even God—not to mention anyone who professes Catholicism—as a result. On the opposite end of the spectrum, it

sickens me to hear Catholics try to downplay the seriousness of the sin. I felt that *The Namesake* struck the perfect balance for the first time in my experience. The priest's actions are portrayed as evil—completely evil. Yet what ultimately gives the main character strength is his faith in God, his ability to forgive, and the prayerful support of his family. I admit that I sobbed more than once while reading...but never more so than during the moments where a truly super-human forgiveness is practiced.

On a less serious note, I loved the authenticity of the family relationships and the family's faith. It's so easy to stereotype...but it made me laugh as well as nod my head in recognition to see all the different characters, all "ringing true".

Dayla says

Article first published as Book Review: *The Namesake* by Steven Parlato on Blogcritics.

Review also appeared on my blog: Book Addict 24-7

I received a copy in exchange for an honest review

Steven Parlato's *The Namesake* is an emotionally stimulating young adult novel that delves into the powerful topic of abuse. Using dry wit, incredible similes and metaphors, and a very thought-provoking storyline, Parlato introduces the reader to an original and unforgiving exploration of the teenage psyche.

Parlato lulls the reader into a false sense of security, making him/her think the story is cliched and predictable. But then, Parlato surprises the reader, leaving him/her as lonely, desperate, and confused as the protagonist himself.

The Namesake starts off slowly, introducing the reader to Evan, the protagonist. At first, Parlato shows what Evan's life is like after his father's suicide, just before his world takes on the roller-coaster quality that makes the novel unforgettable.

Evan is a genius, though at times the reader may question his intelligence. Then again, the emotional traumas his father's secrets create are more than enough of a hindrance. As soon as Evan enters his father's distraught world, the pacing of the book picks up and the writing style turns from quirky and at times sad, to mysterious and very scary.

Religion plays a major role in Parlato's novel. Evan does not blindly follow his religion once he begins to learn the truth, but he does not lose his faith either. Instead, he does what any young, confused teenager may do: he questions and challenges it.

The character growth in *The Namesake* is tinted by the dark tone of the novel. Instead of Evan learning to accept the loss of his father, he is plagued by the depression that lived within his father's heart. He grows as a character, but at a price. Evan faces judgment because of his differences, and even cringe-worthy embarrassment for his past.

Parlato explores the reality of suicide and the after-effects. Evan is confused, as anybody would be, but he is determined to find the truth, even if it ends up causing him more pain.?

Parlato shows the reader that Evan's obsession with finding out the truth is not the only important feature of

the story, but that perhaps it is how Evan's actions affect those around him. This point is made more poignant by Evan's metaphorical suicide, which mimics his father's actual suicide.

The Namesake is a novel full of chain-reactions caused by the lust for truth. Heartbreakingly real, and a harsh wake-up call, Parlato's novel reminds the reader that everything on the surface may appear fine, but people are made of layers upon layers of life experience.

Parlato's novel is a stimulating book for readers who enjoy contemporary fiction that touches on risky topics. The dark humor of *The Namesake* may appeal to others, as well.

The conclusion of *The Namesake* is jolting. The reader will think s/he has everything figured out by the concluding chapter, but yet again Parlato will blind him/her with the reality of Evan's world.?

Stacey says

I loved this book and I think the author deserves a lot of credit for addressing the topics he did, and doing so with calculation, direction and without judgement.

The given description of the novel is straightforward so the reader has a good idea of what might be in this book before reading. The premise is that Evan is trying to piece together what terrible event or events in his father's life caused him to commit suicide despite having a family and loved ones. It is mainly Evan's task to uncover these mysteries although he receives help along the way. The other characters in the book may be secondary but are essential and complimentary because everyone and everything is connected. You'll have to read to find out!!!

I enjoyed all of the characters and I think the author made them very realistic and relatable. I especially liked Evan and Lex's witty sense of humor that always seemed to come at the right moments, and in general the darker parts were balanced by the author's use of humor. Despite his nickname "Junior", Evan had both stark contrasts to his father and similarities. His father was popular and athletic while Evan has brains, a small build and no interest in sports. Both were gifted in art and both were so affected by events around them that they gained apathy towards those gifts. For Evan, his father's death made everything else seem unimportant. Both also learn how powerful the act of forgiveness can truly be.

The Namesake surfaced now, but I see ties to the scandals a few years ago that shook the very foundation of the Catholic church, just as revelations shook Evan's faith in religion and personal beliefs. His best friend, a girl, was there for him but considering Evan's personality and the other content of the book, a heated romance would have been so inappropriate. Although dark (some said "graphic") moments occur, this is absolutely a young adult novel. The main character and his best friend are high schoolers dealing with everyday life in addition to coping with very real issues that young adults their age could face. The reader has likely seen or heard worse in movies or the news. It is a work of fiction, but perhaps this book will grant readers some insight into actual situations like these that do occur. This book is powerful, suspenseful and compassionate. Don't pass it up!

Christine says

Spoiler: I knew this book addressed the issue of molestation by a priest at a Catholic school. I was afraid it would ruin the book, but it didn't. I'm not going to give any other spoilers in this review and I want to address only two issues: 1. violence and 2. the Christian religion and church.

1. First let me tell you something about me as a reader. I'm extremely visual and cannot read anything graphic in violence or sex. As a writer I'm of the old school that believes sex and violence in children's books should be off-page/off-stage. (This is a YA-crossover market book -- teens through adults.)

So, knowing that about me as a reader and writer, let me assure you that Parlato's story begins a generation after the molestation took place so it is off-page/stage. There was only one scene from a journal that was graphic enough that I have to try not to think about because the image bothered me. (Other readers may not be as sensitive as I am.) Otherwise Parlato did an excellent job only hinting at the type and extent of abuse.

What the author did that was brilliant to move this story along, yet give the reader psychic distance, is that he wrote this as a mystery, suspense, and coming-of-age story as a boy tries to understand why his father committed suicide.

2. I have been studying how religion, in particular the Christian religion and church, is portrayed in YA literature. *THE NAMESAKE* is one of the best books I have read where it covers an evil--even a priest in the book calls it evil--within the priesthood, yet does not stereo-type or demonize all priests or the church (Catholic Church). Even to the extent that despite the truth coming out, the extended family did not leave the Catholic Church and the protagonist continued going to a Catholic school. Throughout Parlato wrote realistic characters and a balance of showing the best and worst and in-between of life as a devout Catholic family--blood-related and parish.

Steven Parlato is bold and unflinching in hitting a tough subject head-on in *THE NAMESAKE*. Yet he treats his characters with mercy and grace that leaves the reader with a promise of hope for healing.

[Disclosure: I am a Merit Press author. However, I bought *THE NAMESAKE* at B&N and was not paid nor influenced to write this review.]

PinkAmy loves books, cats and naps says

GRADE: A-

Several months ago Evan's father, Evan Sr., committed suicide. Lost and confused Junior's grandmother gives him a key to a chest of his father's childhood things which hold the secrets to his life and death.

Secrets and lies. *THE NAMESAKES* is a story about family, what we know wish we knew, what we know and pretend not to know. Some families confront difficulties head on, others never speak of horrible events. Most are somewhere in between. *THE NAMESAKE* is one of those books that starts off pretty good, and just keeps getting better and better. At times I felt like I was reading a thriller, turning page after page.

Steven Parlato gave Evan a realistic voice. I felt like I was reading a teenage boy's accounting of a story. Evan was a complicated character, realistic character. A LOT of coincidences detracted from the realism of a story that could have actually happened. What's up with survivors of the dead always finding secret diaries of their loved ones, accounts that explain almost everything? Also, the slight foray into the paranormal felt unnecessary.

THEMES: suicide, death, grief, friendship, family, bullying, sexual abuse, catholic priests

THE NAMESAKE is an engrossing account of a young man's quest for answers after his father's suicide.

Alexis says

Namesake is one of the finest work, i'd recently came across. It delves into powerful topic like "abuse". One thing that I would like to commend here is that the after effects and the realism with which suicide takes place was absolutely shattering and emotional. It left Evan devastated and confused. In search of the truth, how far Evan goes and eventually where he ended up, just like his father.

Steven's novel is a stimulating book for readers who love contemporary fiction that touches on risky topics. The dark humor of The Namesake may appeal to others, as well.

Charlie says

This coming-of-age tale pulls no punches when it comes to spearing heavy topics. Suicide, religion, sexual abuse, loss, bullying and grief are just some of the issues faced in *The Namesake*. Certainly, Parlato isn't the first author to tackle sensitive coming-of-age topics, but what makes this novel so unique is the voice of the main character, Evan. From the very first paragraph there is an authentic, genuine and remarkably reliable voice established. It takes hold of the story and owns it to the last word. As I read, a consistent narrator camped out in my brain. Parlato superbly conveys the various events and emotional stages of not only what Evan is going through, but each character and the role they play. Specifically, Lex's explanation in her dear john letter to Evan. Her words resonate and are spot on in explaining the fall-out of her own exploitation.

Thematically, the author doesn't hold back on challenging a plot. At first glance, the entangled issues seem a bit ambitious, but are carefully tied together without losing the seriousness or attention. Nothing is overplayed or underplayed, which still amazes me. Despite the enormous task, the author maintains a thematic balance between good and evil by revealing the gray in between and ultimately, forgiveness and acceptance.

How does an author deal with such topics and not alienate the reader? Lets face it, this book is jammed full of emotionally charged, hot topic stuff that many of us rather not escape to. Comedic relief, that's how. This is accomplished not by making light or fun, but by carefully timing when humor is a.) needed or b.) appropriate. It works as an excellent tool for tension. I had several laugh-out-loud moments while reading, which given the synopsis, is hard to imagine. The writing is witty, clever and full of personality, which humanizes the characters even more and also, individualizes them. They become relateable, likable and sympathetic. This is necessary when trying to get an audience to care about what is on the page. It becomes

almost impossible to detach from the story. There is no doubt that the reader takes this journey with the character and goes through all the stages of discovery.

Chris says

Parlato approaches these delicate (and also taboo) subjects with ease, care and grace and seamlessly weaves the story of teenaged Evan in pursuit of his knowledge for the truth behind his father's suicide. This tale uncovers several emotional aspects for various characters throughout the storyline and exposes vulnerabilities and ultimately, truth and understanding of self and the world around them. Carefully created, this story is not an "easy" read to escape the sometimes harsh realities of the world in which we reside, however, offers a quiet reminder that no matter how well you think you know someone, gently reminds you that we each bear our own crosses. A wonderfully crafted literary experience, handled with dignity, grace and a quiet understanding.

Michael Araujo says

Easter morning. Evan Galloway and his mother spend time in church for the holy day. Thoughts of happiness and the feeling of being blessed surrounds the room in a shroud of light. Not far from the church, at Evans grandparent's house, his father hangs off a rope from the attic beams. Evan is in his third year at St. Sebastian's Catholic High School, and not only does he need to worry about graduating at sixteen and choosing a college to attend, he's troubled by the thoughts and questions of why his father left him behind. Questions that he would later find out that he'd rather leave them unanswered.

The novel spends the majority of its time with Evan finding bits and pieces of his fathers past life, along with finding the hidden secrets his parents kept from him his whole entire life. Side-by-side with some normal high school subplots, the novel shapes up to be one of the best contemporary reads I have ever read.

Written in first-person, The Namesake was my first novel by Steven Parlato, which made me a bit excited to discover what this author was all about. The further I got into the book, the more I became convinced that this man was a genius with his writing. The man knows how to write! He gave me a character that I was instantly able to connect with on account of some similarities and he gave me a story that touched my heart and words that made me feel as if it were all real. To say that he made me believe and feel for the character is an understatement because he made me live as Evan and not many people have enough talent to do that.

The characters were all perfectly laid out. I was able to connect with each and every one of them but Evan was a part of me that I completely forgot about. There were times when I felt like we were the same person as he thought and went through things that I myself have gone through. The supporting characters were amazingly written as well. None of them were fully sculpted from the first page and you learned more and more about them as the novel advanced.

Now the story itself, I can't exactly speak much of without spoiling, so I might be a bit of a tease here. Evan's father, also Evan Galloway, committed suicide and with a reason that we find out towards the end. Through-out the entire novel we still have him around in the form of art, letters and recorded tapes. He tells his story of things that went on when he was younger and Evan found it and plays them little by little. While people might get frustrated that he didn't just go through the whole thing, I found it ultimately realistic at the

fact that he could not face the pain of listening to his father.

The story is something that does happen a lot and we do hear about it on the news once in a while. Something that is both scandalous and heart-breaking and I think that it was handled extremely well in the novel because not only do you see the taboo side, you get to experience the pain and suffering of the family. I think Parlato is a talented author and I can't wait to see more of his work.

Paula from Reading Lark says

This review is challenging to write, since my thoughts on this book are at war with themselves. There are bits that I really enjoyed, yet several things that bothered me.

There were times when reading this book felt like a bit of a wild goose chase. Some choices made by the author seemed to lack purpose; for example, the hero is in the Talented and Gifted program, and is set to graduate at age 16, yet I was not able to find a particular reason that this was necessary for either plot or character development. Evan is supposed to be a great artist, yet we see very little of him actually creating art. Even at a point in the book where he is supposed to be painting, he gets little work done. There are characters that may have been better combined for the purpose of streamlining (Evan's aunts, for example). For this to work as YA, the whole body of work could use some tightening and streamlining.

I was frustrated by the promise of a relationship unfulfilled. Not only is there no romance, but Lexi, who is Evan's best friend, is absent for the majority of the book. Evan is effectively isolated in his quest for answers. It's kind of a bummer that such a great character was so under-used. She is interesting and unique, with a back story that we only get samples of. I think I'd really enjoy reading her story.

There is a scene late in the book that is shocking. In the name of avoiding spoilers, I won't reveal what happens- but I will say that I think that if the author feels strongly that it should be there, then the novel should be marketed as an adult book. I am a believer in bibliocounseling, but this scene would cause me to avoid recommending the book to a kid dealing with similar issues as Evan. Because I know that teens identify closely with characters in the books they read, I think this plot choice is a bad idea for a YA read.

The good points of the book are equally strong. The plot line that deals with the school bully is both an important topic and perfectly realistic for a character like Evan. I thought that the author was right on target when choosing to make this character operate in the background, rather than making the easy choice to have him aggressively confront Evan on a regular basis. This makes the relationship between them both more realistic and more interesting to read.

There is a device, which leads to a whole plot thread, that explains the reason Evan is called Junior by his family. That part of the story is engaging, original and evokes strong empathy for the characters involved. It makes for excellent discovery, and readers will enjoy the surprise.

I think the best part of this book is the theme of finally learning who our parents are as people, apart from being parents. Every kid goes through a stage of coming to terms with the idea that their parents are people with their own thoughts and feelings that have nothing to do with their children. Evan gets to know several of the adults in his life on a whole new level, discovering layers to their personalities that he hadn't previously considered. It's the doorway that leads away from the me-centered world of a teen, toward a more mature viewpoint.

Overall, while I think there are parts of this book that are interesting and worthwhile, I think most of our regular readers would find this read a little frustrating. If you choose to pick it up, I'd love to hear your thoughts.

Terry Laslo says

The Namesake is a powerful book - especially since the protagonist, Evan, is a teenager, who is dealing with suicide of a parent, sexual abuse, bullying, first loves, family, faith, and forgiveness. Not always easy to read but impossible to put down.
