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*J.G. Farrell , John Banville (Introduction)*

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**Troubles** J.G. Farrell , John Banville (Introduction)

Winner of the Lost Man Booker Prize

1919: After surviving the Great War, Major Brendan Archer makes his way to Ireland, hoping to discover whether he is indeed betrothed to Angela Spencer, whose Anglo-Irish family owns the once-aptly-named Majestic Hotel in Kilnalough. But his fiancée is strangely altered and her family's fortunes have suffered a spectacular decline. The hotel's hundreds of rooms are disintegrating on a grand scale; its few remaining guests thrive on rumors and games of whist; herds of cats have taken over the Imperial Bar and the upper stories; bamboo shoots threaten the foundations; and piglets frolic in the squash court. Meanwhile, the Major is captivated by the beautiful and bitter Sarah Devlin. As housekeeping disasters force him from room to room, outside the order of the British Empire also totters: there is unrest in the East, and in Ireland itself the mounting violence of "the troubles."

Troubles is a hilarious and heartbreaking work by a modern master of the historical novel.

## Troubles Details

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Author : J.G. Farrell , John Banville (Introduction)

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# From Reader Review Troubles for online ebook

**J. says**

Three and a half stars, really.

Came to this, and its title, thinking that it would be a lot more political than it is. That the era(s) of conflict in Ireland, now euphemized by all parties as 'The Troubles'-- pointed toward that direction. Fact is, what we have is a nearly sentimental account of the characters and atmosphere in a very select little locale that happens to find itself in the south of Ireland on the seacoast. During the expansion of the Troubles in the early twenties.

What author Farrell is after here doesn't quite reduce to the standard "Staunch Outpost Of Old Britannia Under Threat As Empire Wanes" kind of thing, but, well, pretty close.

*"The Major only glanced at the newspaper these days, tired of trying to comprehend a situation which defied comprehension, a war without battles or trenches. Why should one bother with the details: the raids for arms, the shootings of policemen, the intimidations? What could one learn from the details of chaos? Every now and then, however, he would become aware with a feeling of shock that, for all its lack of pattern, the situation was different and always a little worse."*

Our drama will transpire largely in the crumbling ballrooms, palm courts and corridors of a formally grand hotel, called the Majestic. Farrell does a nice job of bringing life and interest to the old dowager, even as her carpets conceal rotted flooring, cats & rats rule the upper, rainsoaked stories, and the masonry goes flying off the roof.

Entropy is hard to portray, though. And the author has set himself a kind of double balancing act here. It is necessary to all plot points that the Hotel still functions with more-or-less regularity at the same time as it is disintegrating. And the challenge isn't really taken on. If we're to be jolted by falling facades and leaping, feral cats in the drawing rooms, we needed to be previously lulled by routine, some solid sense of regular hotelliery happening, as the framework decays and vanishes -- but it doesn't quite work out.

A ball at Christmas ? New guests "checking in" at the front desk ? Hard to picture, hard to integrate with the giant letters of the enormous Majestic sign crashing down off the roof, or rats scuttling around the Tearoom. Farrell needed to do a much more synchronized account of how all this can be happening at the same time, how it somehow escapes the notice of the guests.

While we are on the bumps in the road (of an otherwise really well structured novel), there are real issues with treating the Irish situation as though it were any other Colonial Problem, like staving off the Bantu at the gate or another rising in the Punjab. Part of Farrell's narrative wants desperately to examine that difference, but the other part wants to just get on with the plot.

In the end this is a complicated story even with Farrell's simplifications, and the modern reader will find lots of worthy period detail woven into the compelling storyline & atmosphere.

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This particular edition contains a really annoying "Introduction" by John Banville that manages to spoil at least TWO major plot points. In the Introduction, John ? Couldn't quite work your way around those revelations ? Knowing that the reader was just about to begin the book right there and then ? Weak.

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## **Ted says**

[This Man Booker award was decided by a public vote from a list of six novels published in 1970. The 1970 books had never qualified for a Man Booker award because of a rules change instituted in 1971. Prior to that year the short listed

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## **Cphe says**

Many reviews already written of this fine novel set during the time of "The Troubles" in Ireland. Events play out at the Majestic Hotel owned by the delightfully eccentric Spencer family. Major Brendan Archer a casualty of the Great War finds himself unwittingly involved in the inhabitants of the Majestic and it's guests.

I found this initially a difficult book to get into but have to admit that the plot and characters did grow on me and I ended up thoroughly enjoying it. There are pockets of humor interspersed with the pathos. A gently moving novel that does have an impact long after completing. I enjoyed the style and delivery. Well worth the read.

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## **Hugh says**

This was the winner of the retrospective "Lost Booker", and the first part of Farrell's empire trilogy, which also includes The Siege of Krishnapur and The Singapore Grip. It is set in Ireland during the upheavals of independence and is a very funny satire set in a decaying mansion. Like all of Farrell's later books it is perceptive and sardonic - if you like this one I would strongly recommend reading The Singapore Grip.

Note that this is not a book I have read recently - I have just been adding a few notes to some of the books in my Booker winners folder.

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## **Tony says**

As far as I could tell, no horses were injured or killed in the telling of this tale of colonial Ireland just after the First World War. The same can not be said for the hundreds of cats who gave their lives: in one singular marmalade-colored instance, a retributive throttling for assaulting an old woman's hat; dozens more somehow unable to outwit some very bad slapstick shooting; and perhaps the remainder in a final conflagration, although, who knows, maybe they landed on their paws from a three-story leap. The cats, in a more natural process, dispatched their own share of rats. Euthanasia did in Ol' Rover, if not prettily; at least the taxidermist was called off. A bunch of piglets, which no one should kill a bunch of piglets however worthy the cause. A peacock was killed too; but much worse was the sight of the peahen, jumbling around, lost without him.

Ah, humans were killed too. Mostly off-stage. Till one young man disregarded the POSTED notice not to

blow up the statue of Queen Victoria. Perhaps, we are told, the shooter did not see Sinn Feiners as people at all, but as "a species of game that one could only shoot according to a very brief and complicated season . . ."

The tragic and *complicated* nature of colonial Ireland, with its added religious squabble, was well-told here. And with humor. Before Rover's sad demise there was this:

*"My dogs," Edward said with simplicity. "Aren't they beauties? Mind where you walk."*

There was a kind of love story entwined with the larger historical fiction. Some things don't work out. Even, as here, when the reader wants them to. Perhaps that too was allegorical, like the decaying hotel, and the just-dead lad, who needed a book under his head so his mouth would stay closed.

I think I'll go try to find that peahen; to tell her at least she had that, at least she had that.

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## **Douglas Dalrymple says**

Thoroughly satisfying. Better, I'm tempted to say, than *The Siege of Krishnapur*, but that's a hard call to make. Farrell's strengths are well represented: wonderfully appealing characters, flawless and delightful prose, the crisp drawing of comic scenarios and violent eruptions. It has a few awkward points. One – possibly – is the treatment of the Major's waffling loyalties. His apparent fickle-mindedness towards the 'Shinner' and Unionist causes is appropriate for his character and situation, but given to us in surprising turns of dialogue unsupported by much in the way of internal exploration. When so much of the Major's mind is explored on other subjects, it's a puzzling elision. And then there's Sarah, the Major's love interest, a beautiful crippled firebrand of a Catholic girl who makes a slow recovery throughout the novel while tempting and tormenting the Major's affections. She's a substantial presence in the first half of the novel but later fades too obviously into symbolism – the incarnation of 'troubled' Ireland herself.

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## **Tom says**

Imagine Henry James collaborating with the macabre cartoonist Charles Addams, with a droller version of Joseph Heller serving as war consultant, and you begin to get an idea of the tone of this captivating novel. Through the first 100 pgs or so it can seem like nothing more than a well-written novel of manners covering familiar territory of upperclass, "the quality," holding on to pretense of gentility(though the discovery of a rotting sheep's head in nightstand drawer early on is a pretty good tip of what's to come), but stay with it because Farrell uses this potentially well-worn setting brilliantly to develop a bizarre but moving story that covers everything from unrequited love to political assassination to existentialism, all with a lyrical prose and bewitching tone that never raises its voice above that of bemused and befuddled exasperation. Farrell creates menace the old-fashioned way, by leaving much of it offstage, described after the fact or reported 2nd and 3rd hand, including newspaper clippings, a la Dos Passos, in the USA Trilogy, or by having it creep up on you unexpectedly like a cold draft from one of the many cracks and darkened, musty corners of the Majestic Hotel, where the ghosts are still alive but unable, or unwilling, to comprehend that the world as they knew it is inexorably disappearing one roof shingle, floor board, and beloved pet at a time. Farrell is masterful at lulling you into a false sense of security with a patient detailing of the minutiae of domestic life in the hotel -- the petty jealousies among the ancient "guests" (who really have no where else to go); the dedication to dull routine and tradition to fill up empty hours -- before reminding you with a stealthy jerk just

when you're about to doze off after tea time that violence laps at the gates and untended gardens of the Majestic as inevitably as the ocean tides some of the resentful locals use for revenge against those who oppose their rebellion. For all the vivid eccentricity of the other characters, it is Major Brendan Archer, British gentleman of wealth and traumatized WWI veteran (though Farrell, again, skillfully reminds of his war experiences only when you least expect it), who best reveals the confusion and frustration of attempting to reclaim a former world gone corrupt and obsolete, and move into a new world without sacrificing the values and codes that once served him so well. That is his dilemma, and it is part of Farrell's brilliance that he never offers his main character, or his audience, any pat answers. Instead, Archer stumbles his way through this chaotic, crumbling life with an outdated sense of honor and duty he knows has become futile but can't figure out how to replace. If all this sounds a bit heavy, fear not, for if you like your humor on the dark side, this book is filled with marvelous moments, including a gala ballroom scene that would make Flaubert applaud. (And you'll never look at your cat the same way after reading the conflagration scene!) My only criticism is that the political views of some characters tend to sound, at times, not always, like set speeches intended to provide audience with summaries of Irish nationalism and British imperialism in the 20s, but that may be only because I've read much of this history elsewhere, and so it sounded a bit canned. For readers unfamiliar with the period, however, this dialogue may prove helpful, (and keep in mind that Farrell wrote this novel some 50 years after the events, when most American readers would not have such knowledge). Near the end of the novel, one character, when all seems to be falling apart, observes, "All this fuss, it's all fuss about nothing. We're here for awhile and then we're gone. People are insubstantial. They never last at all." While this morose thought may sum up one of Farrell's themes, rest assured that his characters are anything but "insubstantial" and that this superb novel should last a long time, even longer than it takes for the Majestic Hotel to fall apart.

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### **Phillip Edwards says**

I expected to find Troubles hard-going, after all it is an old historical novel and they bore me, but it wore down my defences by being relentlessly amusing. A wry depiction of the bizarre lifestyle of the eccentric residents of a disintegrating hotel in a disintegrating corner of a disintegrating empire, there are echoes of both Cold Comfort Farm and Catch-22, and if you are looking for a missing link between Gormenghast and Fawlty Towers then this is it. Felinophiles be warned though: some cats will be harmed during the reading of this book.

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### **Paul Bryant says**

A light, mordantly mournful comedy of Anglo-Irish manners lazily dawdling from 1919 to 1921 at the pace of an ancient laden donkey featuring a tepid, sad non-romance of pallid mooning and more annoying old ladies than you can shake a zimmer frame at may not sound like your version of a good time. It didn't sound like mine. I had it in mind to read the first 100 pages and sling it. Just to get it off my shelf. Because really, it's nearly 500 pages and it has no plot, if by plot you refer to something more enliveningly interconnected than the daily round of encounters by the same cast of eccentrics (some of them, it must be said, from Central Casting) during the final three years of the vast, crumbling, 300 room hotel in rural Ireland called The Majestic.

But after page 30 I knew I had found something good. Something funny, something slow, something kind, something cruel.

The Majestic is the star of this show, the Gormenghast of hotels (Actually, the hotel is called **The Ajestic** for most of the story as the M falls off and nearly brains the owner's favourite dog).

*The laundry was a vast, desolate cellar, a continuation of the kitchen's; ranks of Gothic arches fled into the dim, greenish distance, each arch made of thickly whitewashed stones. Tubs, basins, a gigantic mangle with rollers as fat as pillarboxes, a few trays of shrivelled apples from some summer of long ago, pieces of greasy machinery carefully spread out on oilskin but long since abandoned*

The hotel develops a cat problem. Not to beat around the bush, the cats are completely out of control.

*He remembered Edward's brainwave : "Bring the dogs in from the yard and quarter them in the upper storeys... that'll get rid of the bloody cats!" Well, they had tried this, of course,. But it had been a complete failure. The dogs had stood about uncomfortably in little groups, making little effort to chase the cats but defecating enormously on the carpets. At night they had howled like lost souls, keeping everyone awake. In the end, the dogs had been returned to the yard, their tails wagging with relief. It was not their sort of thing at all.*

The soundtrack of *Troubles* is the Irish War of Independence, a guerrilla war, and the Majestic serves as a mournful symbol of the crumbling imperial regime. Gradually the background static from Sinn Fein and the IRA begins to drive Edward Spenser, old Tory owner of the Majestic, round the twist. He insists that a revolver is laid out with the cutlery at each meal. The politics of the story are embroidered into every scene but only very rarely become political with a capital P, as in this uncharacteristic outburst from our wan feeble hero Brendan Archer. The scene is the last ever Spring Ball at the Majestic, at which various members of the gentry make their appearance, such as Sir Joshua and his daughters with their long horse-like faces.)

*And this horse face – these equine features – were repeated again and again all the way down the glittering ballroom. This was the face of Anglo-Ireland, the inbred Protestant aristocracy, the face, progressively refining itself into a separate, luxurious species, which had ruled Ireland for almost five hundred years : the wispy fair hair, the eyes too close together, the long nose and the protruding teeth.*

Well, that's telling 'em.

The length of this novel allows it to meander into surprising byways – the cross-dressing Padraig, the beautifully sexy teenage twins, the apples, the dogs, the feral cats, the sea, the poetry of decay and neglect, the half-lived lives and the great echoes of the war just finished. At the conclusion you are left with the wistful tang of real lives continuing – what did happen to Faith and Charity? – and a revived sense of what novels can do so beautifully.

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## Vit Babenco says

What is any hotel? It is a temporal harbour for a tired wayfarer and traveler along the roads of life. But

creative mind can turn an hotel into a much greater allegorical thing.

Not far away the two massive, weatherworn gateposts of the Majestic rose out of the impenetrable foliage that lined the sea side of the road. As they passed between them (the gates themselves had vanished, leaving only the skeletons of the enormous iron hinges that had once held them) the Major took a closer look: each one was surmounted by a great stone ball on which a rain-polished stone crown was perched slightly askew, lending the gateposts a drunken, ridiculous air, like solemn men in paper hats. To the right of the drive stood what had once no doubt been a porter's lodge, now so thickly bearded in ivy that only the two dark oblongs of smashed windows revealed that this leafy mass was hollow. The thick congregation of deciduous trees, behind which one could hear the sea slapping faintly, thinned progressively into pines as they made their way over the narrowest part of the peninsula and then returned again as they reached the park over which loomed the dark mass of the hotel. The size of the place astonished the Major. As they approached he looked up at the great turreted wall hanging over them and tried to count the balconies and windows.

The mighty hotel stands as a metaphor for the Empire – it is far past the days of its prime; it is in the state of bleak decline and severe disrepair. And the life of its residents is an allegory of the nation. Deterioration rules but no one really cares.

The novel is laden with the brilliant and sharp, even if somewhat blackish, humour all the way through. Empires should be buried in mirth and not in tears.

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## **Julie says**

6.5/10

So meh that I can barely summon a meh-ness rating for it, and no desire to write a review.

Maybe the satire just isn't hitting me right now, but to use Farrell's own words, "I plunged the depths of boredom" while trying to read this. To be fair, I skimmed most of it after the first 100 pages, looking for connection. Couldn't find one. To add another element of fairness: it's very rare that satire works for me. Unless it's exceptional, like Swift, it's wasted on me.

Booker-or-bust: mostly on the bust side for me.

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## **Michael says**

This is one of the funniest and saddest books I've ever read. After World War I, Major Brendan Archer heads to Ireland to see a young woman he might or might not be engaged to, based on a series of letters they wrote to each other. But it turns out she's not quite the woman he was expecting. Still he stays there, in an old run-down hotel, and his interactions with the other inhabitants, including another woman he becomes enamored with, are worth the price of admission alone. All this is set against the political backdrop of rising violence, which gives the novel added heft. Farrell was also a master stylist--I can't think of a non-beautiful sentence



in the entire book.

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## •Karen• says

### *Fawlty Towers meets The Shadow of a Gunman*

Recently I mentioned to a bibliophile friend that I liked books that trouble me. So you would think that anything entitled *Troubles* would be made to measure, the perfect fit. But what I meant was trouble in the sense of disquiet, something that sets up a mild irritation of the spirit and questions complacent assumptions. A niggle, a nagging doubt that my world view might be too narrow, harnessed to the commonplace and too jaded to buck free. That's what good literature is for.

What I didn't mean was vexatious and oppressive.

This novel won the so-called 'Lost Booker Prize', which came into being when the qualifying rules about the year of publication were changed from those books published in the previous year, to those published in the same year as the award. It was a public vote that decided the winner from the shortlist, and furthermore, discussion with the book group whose May selection this was brought home to me the troubling insight that my views on this, umm, great novel diverge radically from general opinion. Not that that worries me in itself. After all, there's more than one bestseller out there whose popularity is a mystery to me. But what defeats me is the appeal of this particular highly acclaimed one: what is supposed to be so good about it?

It starts off well. The potential is there, in the concept of a dilapidated Irish hotel (The Majestic! ha!) as a cipher for the crumbling British Empire, still kept vaguely in service as a refuge for some old ladies (I'm beginning to feel lots of generalised sympathy for old ladies) by a self-indulgent, amateurish Anglo-Protestant aristocrat, quietly losing his marbles as the world around him is overrun by cats and turns into a guerilla war zone. Major Archer comes for a visit, half convinced that he is engaged to the invisible daughter, although no longer convinced that he wishes to be. And to begin with, the comedy is not merely a potential, but a reality. However in part two, the various plot lines that were jogging along on good firm ground suddenly hit soft sand. They stagger. The characters seem to be affected by frustrating paralysis. There's no reason for the Major to stay, but stay he does. Anyway, it has to end somehow (badly, of course. This is the War of Irish Independence, it's not going to be pretty), so the motor gets put into overdrive, there is a huge crashing of the gears and we move into history as farce. Oh, I know it is satire, I know it is farcical, not to be taken seriously, I know the atmosphere is meant to be nightmarish, a ludicrous situation that can only be resolved by violent means. But, but. It becomes histrionic, overwrought. Not funny. Nor should it be, for goodness' sake, this was a war of tit for tat atrocities. And as the weeks go by since I read this, what remains are troubling images of unprotected young girls, too drunk to realize they are being raped, however ineptly; exploding cats; and the Major buried upright to his neck on the shore. Ineptitude again, he was buried above the high tide mark (!) so has to be dug out and re-buried further down. Don't worry though, the little old ladies come through. Farce, yes. Funny, no.

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## Bill Kerwin says

I read *Troubles* because it is an esteemed historical novel, known for its richness of comic incident and irony, a novel which treats a place and period I find fascinating (Ireland during the "War of Independence"), but I ended up loving it for very different reasons: I found it to be--in spite of (or because of?) its dark humor--one of the finest romantic Gothics I have encountered. It is redolent with ironies, of course, but they are ironies

darkened by tragic waste.

It begins in 1919, when British Major Brendan Archer, still a bit shell-shocked from the war, travels to the fictional east coast town of Kilnalough to visit a woman he is *almost* sure he is engaged to (although he has no memory of proposing). This woman, Angela Spencer, resides in her father's seaside hotel near Kilnalough, and the historical interest of the book comes from the Major's observations—on and off, during the next two years—of the changes in the atmosphere of the hotel and the town as the Irish desire for independence intensifies, particularly as it affects the decaying Anglo-Irish Protestant gentry, like the Spencer family itself.

Just as interesting as the history, however, is the ghost of the gothic which envelops the book. In my gothic interpretation, the sex of the protagonist is reversed, with Major Archer in the role of Jane Eyre or the second Mrs. de Winter: he is intelligent, capable, but a bit damaged, and rather unsure of his position in this unfamiliar world.. Angela, who greets her “fiancee” ambiguously and then disappears somewhere into the upper rooms, suggests the crazy lady in the Rochester attic or the ghost of Rebecca de Winter: could she--and her cryptic letters--hold the key to the secrets of the old Majestic Hotel?

The Majestic Hotel! Just like the Rochester mansion or Manderley itself, this old, decrepit three-hundred room hotel is full of gothic terror and delight. Its very structure defeats the explorer, for it is filled with corridors that end inconclusively, stairs that don't connect where they should. Besides, it is long past its heyday, and—as its future grows perilous and the staff neglectful, the building itself goes to seed. Tropical foliage overruns the “The Palm Court,” thick branches bulge and break through the sitting room walls, and dry rot bores holes in the floor. Odd smells and strange objects may be discovered in the individual apartments (a sheep's head in a chamber pot, for example), and, throughout the upper reaches of the hotel, and even downstairs, in the old “Imperial Bar,” an army of feral cats—orange, with green eyes, like an Irish flag—are taking over.

Yes, the decaying hotel is a metaphor for the dying British Empire itself. And Farrell's book is continually, sardonically amusing as it reveals its eccentric Anglo-Irish characters continually besieged by unavoidable entropy and casual hostility: the book's aging, half-mad Rochester, hotel owner Edward Spencer; his vague, mysterious elder daughter Angela; his selfish, idle son Ripon; his teenage daughters, the malevolent and beautiful twins Faith and Charity; the dozen superannuated maiden lady hotel guests; and an old blind grandmother who packs a revolver.

Farrell is a very fine writer. Here is a passage I love: it is an account of the declining days of Edward's favorite dog Rover, which manages to be darkly funny, genuinely poignant, and richly symbolic of the Anglo-Irish situation—all in brisk, straightforward prose:

*Like the Major, Rover had always enjoyed trotting from one room to another, prowling the corridors on this floor or that. But now, whenever he ventured upstairs to nose around the upper stories, as likely as not he would be set upon by a horde of cats and chased up and down the corridors to the brink of exhaustion. More than once the Major found him, wheezing and spent, tumbling in terror down a flight of stairs from some shadowy menace on the landing above. Soon he got into the habit of growling whenever he saw a shadow...then, as the shadows gathered with his progressively failing sight, he would rouse himself and bark fiercely even in the broadest of daylight, gripped by remorseless nightmares. Day by day, no matter how wide he opened his eyes, the cat-filled darkness continued to creep a little closer.*

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## **Laura says**

This book is one of those that I was actually embarrassed to read on the subway because in at least one passage I started laughing so hard that I started annoying the lady next to me, and had to get up out of my seat. A really wonderful book full of brilliant prose.

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## **Lawrence Windrush says**

This is my first review and what better way to start than James Farrells Troubles.

I was lucky to come across a 1970 first edition of this in a charity shop for a few pounds, it's worth more than £400 now.

It's one of the most original novels I have ever read. It's very elusive and subtle, at first it's a humorous social political historical novel but then it morphs into something completely darker and surreal. It charts Major Brendon Archer's supposed engagement to Angela Spencer, the daughter of an Anglo Irish Protestant landowner and hotel owner, set against the imperial decline of Ireland and its brutal descent into a War of independence against England.

It has elements of a myth and a fairy tale as the Major an English gentleman, hopelessly out of his depth in Ireland succumbs to the soporific labyrinth of Angela's fathers hotel The Majestic. The hotels in an advanced state of decay mirroring English rule, I'm not going to give plot details away.

This wonderful novel has a cool ironic chatty style, the whole story has a half real and a half dreamlike state. It has the hallucinatory clarity of a dream in a confusing surrealistic world.

Until recently the novel was unjustly neglected and remained a hidden gem. Last year it won the The Lost Booker for 1970.

I first read the novel in 1989 and have reread it every year since, I envy anyone reading this for the first time, to embrace its adsurdist view of life and its cynical dry, enjoy treasure and savour this incredible masterpiece.

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## **Sue says**

"Troubles" is the story of Ireland 1919 to 1921, the Irish and the Anglo-Irish and the British, and how they ultimately can't all live together under the terms of the past. It is seen through the eyes of a shell-shocked British veteran, the Major, come to the Majestic Hotel in County Wexford to disabuse a young woman of the notion they may be affianced. He doesn't recall more than polite conversations during leave.

From there the alternately comic and tragic story moves with the "troubles" that began shortly after the war, in 1919, as the Irish moved to eject the British and work for home rule. The Majestic itself is a stand-in for the dying British Empire, as it slowly is over run with feral cats, tree roots burst through floors, pieces fall off the building. It can't maintain itself--either the facade or the inner workings. Something is going to give,

and badly. And it's inhabitants are seemingly either ancient, slightly mad (or worse) or totally obtuse. Gentry without the means.

The humor is sometimes subtle and sometimes outright. Sometimes the sadness and terror of peoples' lives is horrible. The story becomes darker as time progresses and the Republicans make more daring raids on British interests and people.

All in all a very interesting book from a perspective I haven't read before. I think I will give the other books in the trilogy a try also.

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### **Cynthia says**

I know that in order to attempt to appear intelligent I should pretend to love this book but I didn't. It was well written, well researched, and an important topic. In my opinion it was so heavy laden with symbolism that the people seemed stilted. At about 500 pages it seemed over long especially considering how horribly sad the characters and circumstances were though I suppose it was true to life at that time.

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### **Justin Evans says**

This took a long time to get going- the first third or so lacks much direction, and the direction it has is disappointingly heavy handed: so there's this hotel in Ireland? During the troubles? And it's owned by Anglo-Irish Unionists? And the hotel's falling apart. Um... subtle. Also, flabby.

But once the characters are set and the background's been filled in, it becomes quite enjoyable, and even the symbolism is palatable. The NYRB cover is very misleading, though- like Bowen's 'The Last September,' this is a country house novel that happens to take place in the middle of a bloody uprising/oppression, rather than a novel about said uprising/oppression- emphasis on the \*country house.\* The best parts have almost nothing to do with the Troubles; there are tremendous set-pieces, particularly the hotel's final ball. But the setting certainly adds poignancy and gravitas to the fun and suspense of the love story; the revelation of the 'iron bed' literally took my breath away. I can easily see myself re-reading this in a few years.

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### **Teresa says**

Through much of my reading of this, especially as the story progresses and gets darker, the refrain of Fun Boy Three's "The Lunatics (Have Taken Over the Asylum)" ran through my head. In the novel, though, the lunatics haven't taken over the 'asylum,' 'they' have always run it, the craziness of the main so-called caretaker becoming more and more apparent as the 'troubles' increase. The ending is inevitable.

This is sharp satire, an overarching analogy within a reality. It's a bit long-winded and a bit repetitive at times, but I never wanted to stop reading it: the prose is that good and the imagery is always vivid, almost to excess. It's not as tight as *The Siege of Krishnapur*, which I found perfect.

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