



Puffball

Fay Weldon

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When Richard and Liffey buy their dream cottage in the country, they little know what Nature has in store for them. While Richard sows wild oats in London, pregnant Liffey has to face alone the mysterious workings of her body — and the terrifying, primitive malevolence of her witch-neighbour, Mabs.

Puffball Details

Date :

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Author : Fay Weldon

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From Reader Review Puffball for online ebook

Isabelle Sidonie says

Beautiful visually explicit writing style, whilst still being an easy read. Had me gripped from the beginning as layers of tension, betrayal and witchcraft are uncovered.

Brooke says

I picked this book up in a nook of an art center that has great importance to me. The book stood out because it was old and quite used. The pages were brittle. It broke into two blocks, or morsels, I'd rather say, while I was reading it. I ate this book up and took my time doing so. I won't offer any spoilers of any kind but I will say that I can't wait to read another by Fay Weldon.

Filippa says

A very Fay Weldon-ish action, but I'm not very fond of the writing, it's very slow in this book... Not as well written as some of her books... But the last few chapters were very exiting, I have to say.

Vivianne says

Slightly unexpected good novel about the place of women in regular family life. Loved it!

Dereka says

This was probably the first Fay Weldon I ever read (years and years ago) and a recent listen to the audio version was a great pleasure. Reminded me why I love Fay Weldon.

Hazel Tree says

Love how this talks about the growing baby

Guy says

With its emphasis on fertility, infidelity, bad parenting and the ancient magical pull of Glastonbury Tor, Fay Weldon's novel **Puffball** illustrates the human capacity for creating turmoil. The drama begins when Liffey and Richard, childless Londoners who've been married for seven years stumble upon Honeycomb Cottage during a weekend in the country.

Many people dream of country cottages. Liffey dreamed for many years, and saw the dream come true one hot Sunday afternoon, in Somerset, in September. Bees droned, sky glazed, flowers glowed, and the name carved above the lintel, half hidden by rich red roses, was Honeycomb Cottage and Liffey knew that she must have it. A trap closed around her.

And so all the trouble begins. At first Richard, the breadwinner, insists that they can't leave London, but Liffey, an office temp and the possessor of a small inheritance, argues that at last she'll be able to write that novel. Eventually a deal is struck between Liffey and Richard; they'll buy the cottage if she'll have a baby, and he'll stay in London and return on the weekends. The rational reader knows, of course, that this is a recipe of disaster, but since this is a Fay Weldon novel, we also know that we're in for some fun as the characters scramble around and make a mess of their lives.

On the day Liffey and Richard discover the seemingly idyllic cottage, they romp around in the grass for a quickie. Little do they realize that they've attracted the attention of the neighbours Mab and Tucker.

"Isn't she skinny," said Mabs, watching through field glasses from the bedroom of Cadbury Farm. Her husband Tucker took the glasses.

"They grow them like that in the city," he said. They both spoke in the gentle, caressing drawl of the West Country, mocking the universe, defying its harshness. "You don't know they're from the city," Mabs objected. "They're not from round here," said Tucker. "No one round here does it in public."

Liffey, eager to begin her new life in the country decides to rent the London flat, a wedding present from Richard's parents, Mr & Mrs Lee-Fox to a couple she's known for a short time. Liffey, already established as an impractical character with little sense of finances, imagines that the rent (which she immediately discounts) from the flat will cover the cost of rent for the cottage and that there'll be a profit besides. Fat chance of that happening....

Mory and Helen moved in a couple of hours after Richard and Liffey had left. With them came Helen's pregnant sister and her unemployed boyfriend, both of whom now had the required permanent address from which to claim Social Security benefits.

With Liffey stashed in the country in the life of her dreams, everything begins to go to hell. Richard, resentful and on the loose in London, begins a period of sexual experimentation. Liffey, pregnant and stranded, relies on the help of her neighbours Mabs and Tucker. Mabs, at Cadbury Farm, is the daughter of Mrs Tree, a herbalist, and whereas Mrs Tree's concoctions are supposed to heal various ailments, Mabs, who has more than a streak of malevolence, fancies herself as a bit of a witch. Mabs sees Liffey as a "candy on the shelf of a high-class confectioner's shop. Mabs would have her down and take her in and chew her up and suck her through, and when she had extracted every possible kind of nourishment, would spit her out, carelessly." With her husband and gaggle of half-starved, neglected children in her thrall, Mabs, who "seemed to have a hot line to the future," dominates the farm and tends to get her way. Liffey and Richard's friends Bella and Ray who "wrote cookery columns and cookery books" in the throes of mid-life crises have marriage problems of their own, and while they actively encourage the move to the country, behind Liffey's back they ridicule country life.

I really liked the way Fay Weldon sets up the story of a seemingly happily married couple whose lives are derailed by Liffey's desire to move to the country. This decision creates a fissure in the marriage, and then most of the other characters exploit the situation in one way or another. There's the sense that the universe is somehow out of balance, but all throughout the marital mayhem, the presence of Glastonbury Tor in the distance seems to provide a positive influence, and when Liffey is tuned in to her unborn child, a healthy almost supernatural force comes into play.

One of Fay Weldon's favourite themes is the viciousness of women towards each other, while men, little more than troubling nuisances who philander their way in and out of women's lives, are the prizes women battle over. That theme is dominant here too with Mabs feeling threatened by Liffey, and Liffey's friends Bella and Helen ripping Liffey's life to shreds behind her back. It's as if Fay Weldon tells us that if women would only cease squabbling over male spoils, then the world would be a much more productive, albeit less interesting place.

Another theme here is fertility seen through Liffey's pregnancy which is recorded in almost excruciating gynecological detail. You could definitely hand this book to someone as a 101 on pregnancy. Nature, in the world around us, is seen to be an unstoppable force, but there's also human nature with its powerful sex drive, and the desire to nest and raise a family. By the time the novel concludes, there's the sense that much of our behaviour is defined by powerful hormonal drives.

This is the second reading of **Puffball** for this die-hard Weldon fan. The first time I was busy laughing at the way these characters almost insanely wreck their lives (the sub-plot which follows the renters/squatters in Liffey's old flat is hilarious). This time I paid more attention to the various examples of parenting in the book. Liffey's mother, Madge, a "*lean, hard-drinking prematurely white-haired teacher of chemistry in a girls' school in East Anglia,*" is a 'hands-off' parent. She's sees motherhood as a type of trap, an obligation, and agrees to visit her daughter reluctantly "*I suppose it is the kind of thing a mother is expected to do. Once you're given a label you never escape it.*"

Richard's mother is a bundle of "*nervous energy,*" and the news of an impending grandchild spurs her to action, "*as if some trouble, pacing for years behind at a steady distance, had suddenly broken into a jog and overtaken her. She started knitting at once, but there was a tenseness in her hands, and the nylon wool cut into her fingers.*"

Continuing on the spectrum, Bella and Ray are benignly neglectful parents. If they can fob their children off on other people, they're happy. The presence of an au pair releases them to pursue their self-indulgent affairs, and their children appear to grow up in spite of their parents—although their diet deteriorates drastically when the au pair leaves. Mabs and Tucker have differing views on parenting. He thinks it's ok to kick the poorly-fed dog whereas she'd rather whack her poorly fed children. Of course all these examples of less-than-perfect parenting (another favourite theme from this author) makes you wonder why people have children in the first place, but they are the natural fall-out of the confused coupling of the adults. In spite of the fact that this is a comic look at marriage and parenthood, the book is full of Fay Weldon's wise, cryptic humour. She boldly rips the shallowness of female friendships, the inauthenticity yet convenience of the office affair, the results of a parent who fails to love a child, and so often in a Fay Weldon novel, chaos must be endured before any sort of rationality can be achieved.

Janice Chandler says

I absolutely adore this book. I could read it again and again. A gem!!!

Edith says

Puffball is Fay Weldon's seventh novel and was published in 1980. It's the story of the Londoners Liffey and Richard who have been married for seven years. Dreaming of a country home and life, girlish-naïve Liffey proposes Richard a bargain: she will go off the pill and have a baby, if Richard agrees to move to a country cottage. Richard believes that his wife only bluffs and will want to stay in town after all, but he soon realizes that she had been serious. Eventually, the two rent Honeycomb Cottage in Somerset and lend their London flat to friends. Since Liffey has made a mistake checking train connections, Richard is forced to change plans and instead of commuting between Somerset and his job in London every day he stays in town alone from Monday to Friday. Honeycomb Cottage is a lonely place with the farmers Mabs and Tucker as only neighbours. Mabs doesn't like the trustful and carefree Liffey, but pretends to be her friend with the motive of teaching the girl a life lesson. Then Liffey finally becomes pregnant. Mabs, who already has five children and yearns for another pregnancy, sneaks abortive herbal brews into Liffey's wine and food to induce a miscarriage and tries other means of black magic to drive the baby out of the wrong womb. While Liffey feels tired, unwell and at the mercy of hormonal changes, Richard succumbs to the temptations of living alone in London and begins an affair. After some more complications Liffey's and Richard's son is born.

For the full review please visit my blog Edith's Miscellany at [http://edith-lagraziana.blogspot.co.a... !](http://edith-lagraziana.blogspot.co.a...)

olaszka says

i honestly can't see the point of this novel. it is a good commentary on relationships for which i am giving it two stars but otherwise it is appallingly pointless and aspiring to postmodernism, which only makes things worse. it's not that i didn't enjoy this book but i wouldn't read it if i didn't have to.

Jennie says

I'm not really sure what to make of this book. It's a coming of age story of sorts... but not the usual teenager to young adult. This transition is from immature adult to mature adult. There is a lot of excess, debauchery, lies, deception, and stereotypes. This is the first book in a long time where I didn't relate to or like any of the characters. The main characters are people I would never want to be friends with. The lessor/secondary characters are people I didn't really care about.

There are chapters in between the actual story that are more science dissertation on anatomy than the "inside" story. It was distracting and I didn't enjoy it. Still, I suppose I was sucked in enough that I kept reading. I did want to know how it ended. I really hope for the human race that this book is not an example of art imitating life. If this is what people experience in their lives then I count my lucky stars to live in such a sheltered way. Maybe that's why I don't have many friends?

Carolina Mac says

One of my alltime favourite books. Freaky and scary. Definitely worth a re-read.

Lyle says

I've enjoyed a lot of Weldon's work and I really expected to enjoy this one. I was drawn to the theme of science vs magic and the Rosemary's Baby-ish tale of forces fighting for control over a woman's body while leaving the woman little say. Unfortunately, plot-wise this one fell a bit flat for me and the plot isn't as engaging as Weldon's later work.

Larissa says

My whole experience with this book was driven by entirely spontaneous circumstances, and I have to say that I am glad for it. The book is such a flurry--of plotting, of perspectives, of energy and tone--and the story (characterized to me as Nancy Mitford writes *Rosemary's Baby*, which I think is rather accurate) is both ironic and deadly serious, funny and actually quite frightening. So I probably would not have been successful in finishing this if I had originally sat down with the intention of reading it. Because (for me) there just isn't a really ideal frame of mind in which to read the "naive city woman moves to the country and must unknowingly endure the malefic attentions of her witch neighbor" story. But it is totally worth it.

This book is (put on your best frat boy voice) *crrrraazy*. But Weldon is a deliberate and incisive and observant and funny (she's got a cruel sense of humor at times, but nevertheless) and unrelenting storyteller and prose stylist and by my third day reading *Puff Ball* I had not only been completely sucked in, I knew that I had to just sit down and read the last half of it in one go.

The novel starts with a London couple finding a cottage and debating whether or not to give the country life a try. Liffey is a pampered innocent, an adult who despite (or maybe because of) growing up with an uncaring, aggressive mother, prefers to float through life with childlike innocence. Her husband, Richard, is an up-and-coming executive who has generally wanted to provide for his wife--refusing to dip into her inheritance for anything other than small pleasures, for instance--but not actually a man who can really handle responsibility. Liffey and Richard stand in the cottage garden, debating commuting distances, the possibility of raising a child in the country, thatch roofs, and "real" country people. They have sex in the grass behind the house. They are observed in all of this (with field glasses) by the nearest neighbors: Mabs, a bona fide witch, and Tucker, her husband.

Mabs develops an instant dislike to Liffey, a dislike more akin to hatred, really. For that matter, nearly every character in the novel--from Mabs and Liffey's mother, to Liffey's friends, to Richard's secretary--violently dislikes Liffey and actively wishes her harm. This level of venom is strange because while Liffey can certainly be irritating or ineffectual or spoiled or naive, she really is no worse for these sins than anyone else in the novel. And, while she has her own moral missteps, she is really the only character who is not constantly working to make other people suffer.

Part of what makes the novel's plotting feel so frenetic, what gives the whole story its sense of urgency and pending dread, is the way in which Weldon swings between perspectives so frequently. In the space of one page, you'll have two or three different voices, all seeing and interpreting the same event, all relaying their own conflicting intentions. It is rather masterful, and stress-inducing, and physically involving in a way that I don't think I've experienced when reading a book before. The first few days I was reading *Puff Ball* I had to actually stop and take a break after reading a few chapters (which are short, too). It felt overwhelming being inside all those minds. And yet, I didn't want to stop reading.

When the chorus of voices becomes even more granular, and Liffey's biological processes are described in acute, objective detail, it becomes even more intense. At its core, *Puff Ball* is a novel about mothers and women, and, most dramatically, about the simultaneous horror and magnificence of the biological mechanisms and flukes involved in a woman becoming pregnant and bringing a child to life. I'm not sure

that if you parsed out all the logic and plot twists related to Liffey's eventual pregnancy that you would get a real capital-F Feminist message, but somehow, it is more successful for its ambiguity in this regard.

If this doesn't read as a resounding endorsement of the novel, I'm not sure it is. But reading this book might legitimately qualify as having been a "dazzling" or "exhilarating" experience for me. I will definitely seek out more Fay Weldon in the future--I've been lead to believe that many of her other novels could qualify as "frothy," which would certainly be a change of pace.
