



The Art of Failing

Anthony McGowan

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HAUNTED! By endless tiny humiliations.

STRUGGLING! To resurrect the corpse of his literary career.

ENSNARED! In a loving yet perplexing marriage.

Anthony McGowan is a man at odds with the universe. Stumbling from one improbable fiasco to the next, patrolling the mean streets of West Hampstead like some unholy cross between Columbo, J. Alfred Prufrock and a common tramp, he ponders the very stuff of life itself. For McGowan that's holed socks, unsatisfactory packed lunches, athlete's foot powder, Kierkegaard, the eccentricities of the British Library, liver salts, Morrissey and disapproving ladies on trains... Relentlessly honest, exquisitely funny, *The Art of Failing* is a paean to the glory and desperation of everyday existence.

The Art of Failing Details

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Author : Anthony McGowan

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From Reader Review The Art of Failing for online ebook

Allison Anderson says

McGowan never fails to make me laugh, cringe, and cheer him on in his bumbling approach to life. The pathos is tempered with true feeling and nerves of steel in facing children, the publishing world, and the non-author-worshipping public. I confess that I also appreciate him because he spurred my son to read when there were few other authors who could - his irreverence and humor were so appealing that I would sneak into my son's room and borrow the book to read after he had gone to sleep.

Amber-Leigh says

I'm going to be brutally honest here: I did not like this book. At all. I mean I finished it, which is more than I can say for some books, so I guess there's that... But it was a real slog, pretty much from start to finish. I think the tone was supposed to be one of self-deprecating humour, but what I got was a mixture of desperation and barely suppressed depression. I'll admit a few moments made me smile, but on the whole I found the book dry, dull, and sometimes outright nonsensical. Not to mention pointless - if someone were to ask me, I don't think I'd be able to tell them what 'The Art of Failing' was actually about.

I don't know. Maybe it might have helped if I'd read some of the author's other works first. Or maybe not. But hey, it did teach me the value of reading multiple books at once - it was nice to have other options when I needed a break from this one.

SALLY WHITE says

Thank you Goodreads for sending me this book. I have not come across this author before. I thoroughly enjoyed the read and read it over a couple of days, whilst sat in the garden. It is a look at everyday life through the eyes of the author and it is very funny in places (I would imagine the neighbours were wondering what I was laughing at!). It is a book that you can dip in and out of, and only read a few pages at a time if you wish, as each individual story or memoir is short and succinct.

Brian says

My partner stole my copy of this to read on the plane to Italy. Then she kept laughing so much I was obliged to read it over her shoulder. A string of very funny incidents in the life of a writer recounted with wit and a certain degree of poetic licence but also at times with disarming honesty. Like literary biscuits of a rather superior quality

Betsy says

Very funny

Erin says

I received a review copy of this book, and quite enjoyed it. Although I have probably shelved some of McGowan's other books while working in public libraries, I never read any of them before. The title and premise of this humorous memoir intrigued me, however, and I'm glad I took the time for this easy read. Some of the jokes fell slightly flat unfortunately, but the writing was good enough to make me truly homesick for the everyday discomforts of London and to make me chuckle out loud while reading some sections.

Ally says

THE ART OF FAILING is a humorous glance into daily life in West Hampstead, London, with the author, Anthony McGowan. Structured as a diary and organized by season, there are daily-ish entries outlining something humorous/bizarre/unexpected that happened to the author that day, or at least a noteworthy observation. Sometimes it's a mundane activity where the author has an awkward encounter, other times it's something monumental. It's the author's employment of sarcastic and neurotic internal monologue mixed with his dry wit that makes THE ART OF FAILING highly entertaining to read.

In one entry, dated September 6th, the author is working on a writing project in a reading room of the British Library. Possible titles for his new book are "The Constituents of Glass, The Deaf and Dumb Sex Machine, Handlebar, Nigel's Adventures in Nymphland" so you can tell he's got the beginnings of a winning story. The library has a strict no-food policy, but McGowan sneaks a banana in with him for a snack. He talks about his banana-neutral feelings up until that point, but it became a symbol of the progress he was making in his writing, even if that progress was just coming up with more book titles. It was a well-deserved break, and he now relished that banana. He also relished the act of writing on the banana with a ballpoint pen, because of how the pressure allows the pen to sink into the peel in a satisfying way.

On this particular day, he was in the reading room as normal when he felt an oncoming sneeze. In a hurry to empty his pockets, to locate his handkerchief, he absentmindedly set the banana on the table near to the man seated beside him, working. Just as he located the handkerchief, his urge to sneeze subsided. The man next to McGowan gave him a strange look, "an extreme wariness bordering on hostility", and that's when the author looked down at the banana on the table between them. That day, he had written "I love you" on its peel, because that piece of fruit had become a central figure in his daily work life. However, the stranger beside him assumed that the message on the banana was for him, and reacted as you might react if a strange man put a "banana love bomb" in your general direction. At this embarrassment, McGowan packed up his things and resolved to work in a different reading room for the foreseeable future.

Other entries involve encounters with possible-transsexuals at paint counters, musing on quantum physics via holey socks, and reading student reviews of his teaching courses. There's a lot of diversity in the topics that he selects, so it never feels like you're reading about the same things over and over and over. The strength of this book is its language; it's really the way that the author selects and employs his phrasing that makes the writing so good.

The narration has a strong neurotic and self-conscious vein, putting the author in good company with the characters on the TV show SEINFELD. That was known as the Show About Nothing, and I would argue that

THE ART OF FAILING could be a Book About Nothing. McGowan's plentiful dry humor lends itself to close comparisons to David Sedaris' writing. I suspect that, like Sedaris, the work would be lifted to a whole new level by listening it in audio...if it's narrated by the author. There's something about humor authors that just enhance the whole experience, like taking a giggle to a belly-laugh.

Overall, I really enjoyed spending time with Anthony McGowan and his West Hampstead escapades and awkward encounters. His humor and self-consciousness play well within each story, and his wide variety of story topics keep the reading experience fresh. Because many of the diary entries are a full page or less in length, it's an easy book to pick up and put down at will. In fact, it would be great to keep by your bedside to read before nodding off to sleep, or when waking up. If you're a fan of the author David Sedaris, the TV show SEINFELD, or just humorous outlooks on life in general, you should check out THE ART OF FAILING by Anthony McGowan.

Tom Kiefer says

This was a rather unusual read.

First of all, my copy of The Art of Failing is an "advance uncorrected proof", so the final publication might be slightly different, although I don't expect large or significant differences. That said...

I didn't realize when I first saw this oddly-covered book (that banana does show up, BTW) that it would be in the form of a sort of daily diary of occurrences, presumably logged by the author as he went about his life over the course of a year, focusing on a wide assortment of odd and often embarrassing moments. One thing that would have helped enormously, IMO, is a brief forward giving some context for what I was about to read and why. Stepping right into diary mode on page one without explanation was a little disorienting; not seriously so, but a little preamble would have been helpful.

The dailyish stories themselves ranged anywhere from a paragraph to a few pages in length, and were quite eclectic, ranging from everyday sightings and happenings while walking his dog, to author publicity events, etc. The author either has a fantastic talent for thrusting himself into embarrassing situations or an artistic license that loves to embellish toward the humiliating, but either way, he does have a talent for depicting himself stumbling into all sorts of odds oopses large and small, like some sort of erratic sit-com series of one-acts, and for doing so with great tongue-in-cheek flourish.

The various stories vary in success, some of them quite entertaining, others much less so. In fact, I often felt as though each story was a bit of a dice roll, with random results along the lines of:

- 1: LMAO!!
- 2: Heh. That's some real crazy. Chuckle.
- 3: Surprise poignant moment. (Awww.)
- 4: Meh.
- 5: Euw.
- 6: What the heck did I just read?

Thus my middle-of-the-road overall rating. (YMMV.) In short, I did find it a reasonably entertaining read overall, with some real LOL moments.

Oddly, given the nature of many of the embarrassments depicted, this might be a particularly interesting reading experience for sufferers of significant social anxieties, although I'm unsure whether the experience would be more akin to a dark comedy vs. a personal horror vs. a voyeuristic sort of immersion therapy.

Maybe all three.

Gordon Slack says

Amusing diary of a failed writer; his somewhat sad observations and reflections on life are often cringeworthy although in some cases uncomfortably familiar. Worth a read.

Reyiel Ananke says

I won this book participating in the Goodreads giveaways.

You won't believe the number of time I had to kill down a laugh reading this book in the underground.

If you are as awkward, nerdy, strange and good at looking at life through a kaleidoscope, this book is for you. I recognised myself in a lot of things in this book.

With a lot of witty humour, silly jokes and self depreciation, the author made us participate in his day to day life as a father, an author, teacher, husband. You cannot be bored with his way of finding always something funny, out of the way in the day to day things of the life.

Each anecdote is short, not much more than a page for the biggest ones, so you don't have to worry to be caught stopping in the middle of the good thing. Perfect for the commute or light reading before heading to bed.

There is no massive plot, twits, just very enjoyable little stories, life lessons...much like a blog.

Alex says

This is a very entertaining memoir, delivered in bite-size journal entries that make it ideal to dip into or read straight through chronologically. It is by turns thought-provoking, funny and odd. These bemused, laconic sometimes embittered observations of everyday life are very readable and it's easy to empathise with the rather world-weary tone of them. Overall the effect is surprisingly charming and poignant.
