



Plays Well with Others

Allan Gurganus

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With great narrative inventiveness and emotional amplitude, Allan Gurganus gives us artistic Manhattan in the wild 1980s, where young artists--refugees from the middle class--hurl themselves into playful work and serious fun. Our guide is Hartley Mims Jr., a Southerner whose native knack for happiness might thwart his literary ambitions. Through his eyes we encounter the composer Robert Christian Gustafson, an Iowa preacher's son whose good looks constitute both a mythic draw and a major limitation, and Angelina "Alabama" Byrnes, a failed deb, five feet tall but bristling with outsized talent. These friends shelter each other, promote each other's work, and compete erotically. When tragedy strikes, this circle grows up fast, somehow finding, at the worst of times, the truest sort of family.

Funny and heartbreakng, as eventful as Dickens and as atmospheric as one of Fitzgerald's parties, **Plays Well with Others** combines a fable's high-noon energy with an elegy's evening grace. Allan Gurganus's celebrated new novel is a lovesong to imperishable friendship, a hymn to a brilliant and now-vanished world.

Plays Well with Others Details

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Author : Allan Gurganus

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From Reader Review Plays Well with Others for online ebook

Seaghda says

If you want a very sarcastic endearing and altogether inappropriate novel, this is the one for you. It's very telling of the 1980's AIDS epidemic and really goes into detail the nihilistic attitude of those involved. It has some sad moments that really give a realistic remorse, but overall it's absolutely hilarious. I picked this book up on a whim not even know what it was about, and I was pleasantly surprised by how absolutely genius this is. Would without a doubt recommend this to everyone!

Gary Brecht says

You know you've read a good book when at its conclusion you feel as though you lived another life. Alan Gurganus brings us to the Manhattan of the late seventies, early eighties, and introduces us to a coterie of aspiring artists. Arriving to New York from the hinterlands, these young novices live, in some cases, on the fringes of poverty. And yet they are wholly dedicated to hone their various crafts until they obtain public acknowledgement of their worth as artists. To these young guns the big city is an exciting playground where they not only work but play hard as well. Unfortunately the events described take place at the beginning of the Aids crises and most of the main characters are homosexual. The narrator is himself gay, but as survivor of the worst of the epidemic, he remains to tell the tale; a story both humorous and tragic. The cutting down of a young and gifted generation in their prime...in some cases before they achieve the recognition they so earnestly desire, is poignantly told without sentimentality. The author's narrative style is reminiscent of "stream of consciousness" in that the pattern is often very much like halting conversation as one thought intrudes upon another. At the end, I felt as if I'd been there and I was grateful for the experience.

Denise says

I struggled through this book. Gurganus' style of writing, with choppy sentences, was difficult for me and I found myself skipping paragraphs just to find something to grasp on to. I think the story of the AIDS epidemic is a good one but the presentation fell flat for me.

I haven't read Confederate Widow yet so maybe that will be more to my liking. I'm trying to read Gurganus' works since my husband has become an acquaintance of his at the small village post office where he now resides. I recognized Hartley's NC home, with U-shaped porch overlooking a graveyard, a church with a spire and a volunteer fire department just blocks away, being Gurganus' actual home.

Timothy Juhl says

Unlike his previous efforts in 'Oldest Confederate Widow' and 'White People', Gurganus falls flat in this messy AIDS-era novel.

The characters never seem fully fleshed out, the story misses a cohesiveness or direction.

The promise of the opening pages, a very funny scene on the public transit system involving a grocery bag of sex toys seems to be the only memorable bit of prose Gurganus could offer in this missed attempt to define the AIDS crisis.

Linda Robinson says

A eulogy for the NY West Village creative community decimated in the 80s, told by a gifted storyteller. Gurganus is gregarious in style, unrelenting in sharing the ego, bonhomie and tragedy of the decade. He lets us sit at the special green marble round table at Ossorio's under the statue of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and live vicariously the heady personal art world of the young and fabulous, transplanted from the inherited world of golf courses, debutantes, family farms to a bright fast-burning destiny in the Big Apple. Sparkling highs and terrible loss written with heart and precision. A great read.

Kkraemer says

I love Gurganus' writing and have missed him these last many years when only the occasional short story appeared. I was delighted to find this book.

He says that the book is fiction. I suspect it is, to some degree, but it is obviously based on a truth that could only be understood by one who has lived it. He writes of young, smart, artistic, amazing people flocking to New York to live in poverty and urbanity for their art. He is a writer. A friend is a painter. Another friend is composing a symphony. Others are photographers, artists, waiters...all are so very alive.

And he is the one left. He has buried more than 30 of his friends, a result of the 1980's plague among the young, the gifted, the gorgeous, and the artistic. 30 talented friends gone, and he's been their caretaker.

The loss is overwhelming, both to the narrator and to the reader. He loved those people. He loved them completely. He loved their work, saw them breaking into renown, watched them die. He's left behind.

This book describes the heady wonderfulness of the early years, the dawning awakening to death, the sound of death in his friends' breathing. He reflects, too...over his love, his need, his guilt, his loneliness, and, perhaps, his selfishness at always always being the caretaker, leaving his own life behind for daily visits and cleanings and flowers and meds and errands.

Such a loss. I hope though, that even though this book came out 6 years ago, he is finding a way to write. Truly: the first chapter of this book is one of the funniest I have ever read, a trait that made Confederate Widow so enticing. Gurganus is a wonderful writer.

Lauri Royall says

I had such high hopes for this book and they were never realized. It started out well enough with Robert in the hospital and his dear friend collecting dildos and kiddie porn from his apartment before his parents arrived. I expected the characters to develop and the story to grow. For me, that did not happen. The characters fell flat when they had the potential to be so much more in a city, in a time that was bigger than

life. Sadly I gave this two stars when my expectation was that it would live up to its 5 star recommendation. Sorely disappointed.

Deana Munoz says

It's crazy to think that the AIDS epidemic was at its peak around the time that I was born, and that so many lives were lost before we learned how to keep its symptoms in check. That being said, a book about something so moving should have moved me, but I barely shed a tear as the inevitable decline of Hartley's circle takes its toll. Hard to get through...maybe it was the style, or maybe Hartley's narrative. Kept with it because it was a decent enough story.

Rob says

Micro review: Gurganus has a great, somewhat lyrical style that propels the tapestry of vignettes that comprise this novel; that said, he tips his narrative hand in the first 30 pages and you spend the next 450 pages playing a sort of emotional defense.

A few miscellaneous points:

- (1) RE: "vignettes" (v.s.): it took me a while to see how the different scenes fit together into a novelistic arc. It isn't that the vignettes are unrelated or disconnected (*viz.* they're unified by narrator and (for the most part) by place) just that a few feel like non-sequiturs.
- (2) RE: "emotional defense" (v.s.): spending the first section relating to us the final comic catastrophe of one beloved friend dying of HIV means one (and only one thing) when followed by a deep flashback: it means you're going to spend hundreds of pages telling us in fine-grained detail the life stories that might otherwise be relayed in a hundred. And you drag it out and fill it with detail because you want me to get emotionally invested in this motley group that we already know is going to die, one by one.

- (3) But Gurganus does have a good style, and it comes across here pretty strongly.

Lisa says

Overall, this was a decent read about the AIDS epidemic, but it was rather slow-paced. It might have been better had it been 100 pages shorter.

Susan says

If you ever find yourself in the Marriott in Coralville, IA, check out their little library room. Since Iowa City is the home of the Iowa Writer's Workshop, they have a library filled with books from authors who have attended the workshop in years past. I found this book, read a quarter of it on my last night in Coralville, then promptly downloaded it to my Kindle to finish it.

In 1984, I was living in Janesville, WI, and I was in 4th grade. The AIDS epidemic had blown up enough that even folks in the flyover states were aware of it, and it scared them silly. My aunt and uncle, being ultra-conservative, were scared silly and did something about it by sending my parents a box of "literature" to help us to understand the scourge of The Gays and how AIDS was going to kill us all. I loved books and reading material like nothing else, even at that young of an age, so getting an entire box of books in the mail was like Christmas in July. Except...these books were hateful, horrible, dreadful things. Even my parents, who are still very conservative, were discomfited by the hate dripping off every page, and all that literature went right into the trash.

I kept thinking while reading this book, that if only this book had somehow been published ahead of the AIDS crisis, somehow, some way. If only the love and the understanding and the portraying of the art culture and the gay culture in NYC in the early 80s that is present in this book were somehow spread to the good people of the Midwest, and the unsure everywhere, then perhaps some of the fear-mongering and treatment of gay people and people with AIDS would have been lessened. Wishful thinking, I know.

But, reading this book took away some of the bad taste in my mouth from that long-ago trashed box of garbage-words. Alan Gurganus has a way with words, and I'm looking forward to reading everything else he's ever published.

Denise says

So-so book. It was like walking into the coffee shop and meeting new friends who accept you as part of their group but you feel awkward and don't quite understand the way they talk, their inside jokes, or their relationship to each other and who likes who this week. It's the beginning of the AIDS epidemic and just as you feel you're getting to know these people they start getting sick and dying at an amazing rate, until finally only one is left.

I will say that the ending caught me off guard: even though I knew what the outcome was going to be it was still touching in a way I wasn't expecting.

I don't think New York would ever be the place for me but there was enough grit within this tale to hold my attention to the end, despite feeling like the outsider on a number of levels.

Susan says

Interesting picture of the author's life in a gay community in NYC leading up to and including the AIDS epidemic. A little long for my taste; thought it could use some editing.

Julie Paquette says

One of the best books I have ever read! Laughed out loud and cried like a baby!

Patricia Geller says

Really worked hard to like this book about NY before, during and after the AIDS crisis took out so many artistic young men. A novel, but despite the good reviews, found it a shlep and gave up after a hundred pages. Could see it as a funny movie.
