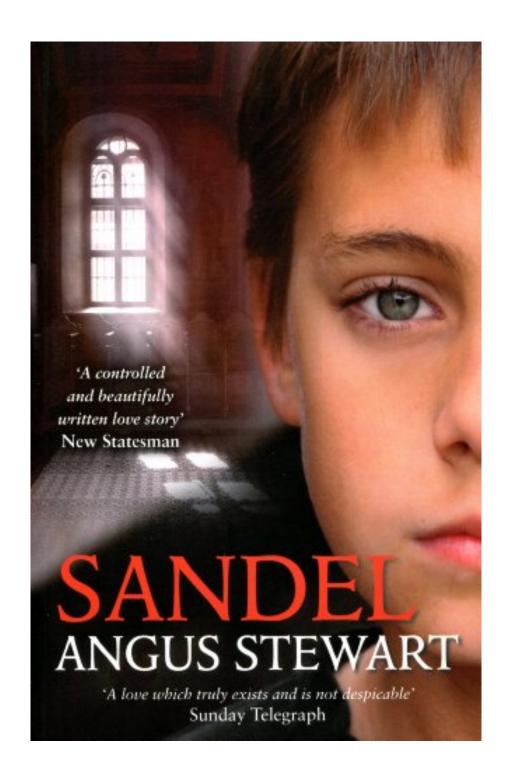


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Set in the 1960s in an Oxford college, when being gay was still an offence punishable by imprisonment, 'Sandel' tells the story of a love affair between an undergraduate (David Rogers), and a cathedral choir boy (Antony Sandel).

Tony - beautiful, provocative, mischievous, sensitive and sometimes overwhelmed by the intensity of his own feelings - bewitches Rogers. Both are talented musicians, and Sandel's astonishing voice, which Rogers explores as his accompanist at the transient moment of glory which precedes it breaking, is soon central to the relationship.

Sensual, profound, often funny and never sentimental, Stewart provides a definitive analysis of same-sex love in the context of a relationship that puts sex in its place and reveals love as the one agent of the human condition that can set us free.

The setting of the novel in an Oxford college (actually Christ Church, which the author attended) and the well-observed description of life in an English choir-school - short trousers, boats on the river, afternoon tea and cricket before Evensong - along with the stylistic quality of the writing, places 'Sandel' in a tradition made famous by Evelyn Waugh ('Decline and Fall' and 'Brideshead Revisited'). There are echoes too of 'Maurice', the novel by E M Forster published after his death in 1970.

On both sides of the Atlantic, 'Sandel' became formative reading for a generation of boys growing up in the 1970s who knew their feelings fell outside the heterosexual male stereotype, and it remains a gay cult novel today, with prices on Amazon reaching thousands of dollars a copy.

But its fundamental message holds good for all people in all eras whatever their sexual persuasion, and is delivered with great subtlety and skill by a master craftsman.

AUTHOR

Angus Stewart was born in 1936, the son of John Innes Mackintosh Stewart, the novelist and Oxford academic who wrote bestselling crime fiction as Michael Innes. He was educated at Bryanston School in Dorset, and later at Christ Church Oxford. Stewart's first published work was 'The Stile' (1965), which won the Richard Hillary Memorial Prize. His first novel, 'Sandel', which is in many respects autobiographical, came in 1968 and is now a cult classic, recently commanding very high prices on the internet. Before and after its publication, Stewart lived for long periods in Morocco. In 2016 his personal memoir, 'Tangier' (1977), was reissued in a new edition, including photographs by the author. His experiences there explain a great deal about the author of 'Sandel', and his exposure to Tangier's legendary artistic community, which included Paul Bowles, Tennessee Williams, Francis Bacon, Alan Sillitoe, Ruth Fainlight, Rupert Croft-Cooke, Alec Waugh, William Burroughs, Gavin Maxwell, Francis Bacon, Joe Orton and others, prepared the way for his second novel, 'Snow in Harvest' (1969). 'Sense and Inconsequence: Satirical Verses' followed in 1972, with a Foreword by W H Auden. A third novel, 'The Wind Cries All Ways', which includes a startling description of the author's incarceration in a Tangier mental asylum, has yet to be published.

After his mother's death in 1979 Stewart returned to live in England, and died in Oxfordshire twenty years later.

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Most helpful customer reviews

23 of 23 people found the following review helpful.

An emotional tour-de-force.

By A Customer

Angus Stewart's novel "Sandel" was first published in 1968. I found the paperback edition in 1971, in a standard Australian bookshop. Strangely enough, at that time, I was the same age (19) as David Rogers - one of the main characters; but it's the protaganist: Anthony Sandel, who's the real star-player in this extraordinary novel. Mr Stewart's ability to create such vivid images in the reader's mind is truly astonishing, and at the book's end, most readers will surely come to think of Anthony and David as almost real people.

When the book was originally published, a London newspaper made this comment: "Mr Stewart has really succeeded with this young character, and in depicting a love which truly exists and is not despicable." How true that statement is. However, Bruce Lang, one of the minor players in the story, is also an interesting character. Even though he's a legitimate friend of David Rogers, he finds it impossible to come to terms with the fact that David could love a 13-year-old choir boy.

Would this book be too controversial for the repressive '90s? I doubt it; it was a success in the late 1960s and early '70s. Surely it's time for a reissue, so that this magnificent novel can be enjoyed by a whole new audience.

Even though "Sandel" is very suitable for general audiences, it's a must-read for anyone who understands the underlying philosophy behind famous English public schools.

16 of 16 people found the following review helpful.

Choir-school classic

By Robert Coates

Of the comparitively few novels based in an English choir school, this is certainly one of the best. Head choirboy Antony Sandel's voice is at its peak; a possessive and highly emotional friendship develops between him and David Rogers, a university undergraduate. Their relationship flourishes as the voice develops; Rogers takes on work as a master in the school - which bears certain characteristics reminiscent of that in Evelyn Waugh's "Decline and Fall".

The book is a period piece with much authentic detail from the sixties in Oxford University, the College Chapel (called "The Temple" - a sort of amalgam of the cathedral and the other choral foundations in Oxford), and the Cotswolds. It's delightfully evocative of time and place, and of prep-school life - short trousers, boats on the river, afternoon tea and cricket before Evensong. With the book's Forster-like ambience, understated passion and Morse/Harry Potter-like setting, this book is more than ripe for being made into a film. I hope somebody will do so in due course

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

Now due to be re-issued, surely??

By ch0pper

This book, which I first read in 1969, and found in an ordinary bookshop(!) must surely be due for a reprint, now that we live in more tolerant times.

It is a gentle, romantic, sensitive and realistic portrayal of first love and the dilemmas facing the teachers or

pubescent boys, growing aware of their sexual power. A wonderful read.

See all 27 customer reviews...

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