# Alan Hollinghurst's new novel Our Evenings - a deep dive



Alan Hollinghurst, a luminary in contemporary literature, continues to captivate readers with his profound storytelling and meticulous attention to detail. Hollinghurst's novels, known for their substantial intervals between releases, offer richly constructed narratives that delve deeply into human emotions and social nuances. His latest work, Our Evenings, is no exception, providing a vivid exploration of life across six decades, viewed through the lens of its protagonist, Dave Win.

Set against the backdrop of Britain's ever-evolving socio-political landscape, Our Evenings is a sweeping novel that chronicles the personal and professional life of Dave Win. From his formative school years in the 1960s to the challenges and reflections during the pandemic, readers are invited to witness the pivotal moments that shape Dave’s existence.

Dave Win, a gay man of half Burmese heritage, recounts his experiences with rich intensity and introspection. His journey begins as a 13-year-old boy at Bampton School, navigating early encounters with bullying and prejudice. Dave's story intersects with that of Giles, a fellow pupil who embodies the entitled and oppressive forces Dave must continually withstand. As their paths cross intermittently over the years, Giles advances to a political career marked by high-profile positions, including a ministerial role related to Brexit.

Dave’s life is storied with significant episodes reflecting the changing tides of gay liberation, race relations, and the historical shifts in theatre and the arts. His young adulthood is highlighted by a burgeoning career in acting during the subversive 1970s, forming joyful relationships with partners, and an endearing closeness with his single mother, Avril. Avril, a white dressmaker raising Dave alone in the market town of Foxleigh, is portrayed with a deep and unwavering love that shapes much of Dave’s character and outlook.

The novel’s narrative structure is marked by Hollinghurst's signature style, weaving decades into a cohesive and emotionally resonant tapestry. Dave’s childhood explorations of music and drama, his sensual awakening, and his professional achievements are conveyed with a masterful blend of realism and lyricism. Dave’s reflections often return to memories of Woolpeck, the home of Giles’s parents who sponsored his scholarship. Despite Giles’s antagonism, Dave holds a lasting respect for these benefactors, who represent both the promise and complexity of associative connections.

One of the novel’s most compelling aspects is the portrayal of Dave's home life with Avril and Esme Croft, a well-off and self-possessed local client who becomes Avril’s partner. Their quietly radical domestic arrangement in Foxleigh offers Dave a stable foundation amid the uncertainties of the outside world. This portrayal resonates with themes of acceptance, courage, and the unspoken yet profound bonds that sustain and nurture.

Hollinghurst meticulously captures the nuances of Dave’s varied experiences, from the vibrant years of his twenties in London's artistic scenes to the poignant passages of missed opportunities and relationships, such as with Hector, a Black actor whose departure leaves a lasting, unrealised potential in Dave’s life.

The novel's passages are imbued with rich, evocative descriptions. From summer holidays on the Devon coast to triumphant theatrical performances and intimate family moments, Hollinghurst's prose gracefully transitions between grand, sweeping gestures and the minutiae of individual experiences. The sundial in Oxford gardens, the bustling life in London, and the serene conifer-shaded garden in Foxleigh create a vivid backdrop for Dave’s odyssey.

Our Evenings stands as a testament to Hollinghurst’s unparalleled ability to craft narratives that are both deeply personal and expansively universal. It is a detailed and varied composition, each chapter offering a distinct yet harmonious part of the whole. Hollinghurst’s appreciation for humanity’s inexhaustible particularities imbues the novel with a sense of authenticity and emotional depth that resonates long after the final page.

In Our Evenings, the combination of historical context, personal introspection, and artistic appreciation culminates in Hollinghurst’s finest work yet. The novel fortifies his position as a preeminent voice in contemporary literature, celebrated for his ability to articulate the complexities of human experience with precision and grace.

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