

Simon Mawer

Author



Agents

Charles Walker
cwalker@unitedagents.co.uk
+44 (0) 20 3214 0874

Associate Agent
Olivia Martin
omartin@unitedagents.co.uk
+44 (0) 20 3214 0778

Publications

Fiction

Publication Details	Notes
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ANCESTRY Shortlisted for the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction 2023
2022 'Utterly absorbing, cleverly constructed and beautifully written' - The Times
Little, Brown 'Moving and exhilarating' - Spectator
Book Group 'Evokes the messiness and fragility of everyday life in the nineteenth century' - Daily Mail

The past is another country and we are all its exiles. Banished forever, we look back in fascination and wonder at this mysterious land. Who were the people who populated it?

Almost two hundred years ago, Abraham, an illiterate urchin, scavenges on a Suffolk beach and dreams of running away to sea... Naomi, a seventeen-year-old seamstress, sits primly in a second class carriage on the train from Sussex to London and imagines a new life in the big city... George, a private soldier of the 50th Regiment of Foot, marries his Irish bride, Annie, in the cathedral in Manchester and together they face married life under arms. Now these people exist only in the bare bones of registers and census lists but they were once real enough. They lived, loved, felt joy and fear, and ultimately died. But who were they? And what indissoluble thread binds them together?

Simon Mawer's compelling and original novel puts flesh on our ancestors' bones to bring them to life and give them voice. He has created stories that are gripping and heart-breaking, from the squalor and vitality of Dickensian London to the excitement of seafaring in the last days of sail and the horror of the trenches of the Crimea. There is birth and death; there is love, both open and legal but also hidden and illicit. Yet the thread that connects these disparate figures is something that they cannot have known - the unbreakable bond of family.

PRAGUE SPRING It's the summer of 1968, the year of love and hate, of Prague Spring and Cold War winter. Two English students, Ellie and James, set off to hitch-hike across Europe with no particular aim in mind but a continent, and themselves, to discover.
2018 Somewhere in southern Germany they decide, on a whim, to visit Czechoslovakia where Alexander Dubček's "socialism with a human face" is smiling on the world.
Little Brown Meanwhile, Sam Wareham, a first secretary at the British embassy in Prague, is observing developments in the country with a mixture of diplomatic cynicism and a young man's passion. In the company of Czech student, Lenka Konečková he finds a way into the world of Czechoslovak youth, its hopes and its ideas. It seems that, for the first time, nothing is off limits behind the Iron Curtain.

Yet the wheels of politics are grinding in the background. The Soviet Leader, Leonid Brezhnev is making demands of Dubček and the Red Army is massed on the borders. How will the looming disaster affect those fragile lives caught up in the invasion?

TIGHTROPE Returned to an England she barely knows and a post-war world she doesn't understand Marian searches for something on which to ground the rest of her life.
2015 Family and friends surround her and a young RAF officer attempts to bring her the normalities of love and affection but she is haunted by her experiences and by the guilt of knowing that her contribution to the war effort helped lead to the development of the Atom Bomb. Where, in the complexities of peacetime, does her loyalty lie? When a mysterious Russian diplomat emerges from the shadows to draw her into the ambiguities and uncertainties of the Cold War she sees a way to make amends for the past and to renew the excitement of her double life.
Little, Brown

THE GIRL WHO FELL FROM THE SKY	Marian Sutro half French, half British, naive yet too clever by half is recruited to go undercover in wartime France. Trained in sabotage and how to kill, her destination is Paris where she must seek out family friend Clément Pelletier, once the focus of her adolescent desires. A nuclear physicist engaged in the race for a new and terrifying weapon, he is of urgent significance to her superiors. As she struggles through the strange, lethal landscape of the Occupation towards this reunion, what completes her training is the understanding that war changes everything, and neither love nor fatherland may be trusted.
2012 Little Brown	
THE GLASS ROOM	High on a Czechoslovak hill, the Landauer House shines as a wonder of steel and glass and onyx built specially for newlyweds Viktor and Liesel Landauer, a Jew married to a gentile. But the radiant honesty of 1930 that the house, with its unique Glass Room, seems to engender quickly tarnishes as the storm clouds of WW2 gather, and eventually the family must flee, accompanied by Viktor's lover and her child. Yet the house's story is far from over, and as it passes from hand to hand, from Czech to Russian, both the best and the worst of the history of Eastern Europe becomes somehow embodied and perhaps emboldened within the beautiful and austere surfaces and planes so carefully designed, until events become full-circle.
2009 Little Brown	
SWIMMING TO ITHACA	You never really know the past, not even your own. Such thoughts have always played on Thomas Denham's mind, but following his mother's death they come to the fore as he picks his way through her papers and photos in an attempt to discover her story. As a 10-year-old boy, when his family was posted to Cyprus in the days of EOKA bombs and killings; Thomas' adult perception of these events is very different from his childhood memories. Which is closest to the truth - or are all such reminiscences a kind of fiction? "This is a gripping read." (The Sunday Times)
2006 Time Warner	
THE FALL	This tale of struggles on personal and physical slopes ranges from present-day Wales to blitz-era London, tracking two generations of tangled love affairs. * Boardman Tasker Award for mountain literature 2003
2003 Little, Brown	
THE GOSPEL OF JUDAS	A story of love and betrayal set in Rome - a Roman Catholic priest, already beset by doubts, finds himself editing a papyrus scroll that has been discovered in an archeological dig in Israel. The scroll is the account of the death of Jesus, apparently written by the betrayer of Jesus, Judas Iscariot. Combining with the priest's own loss of faith and his illicit love for the wife of a British diplomat, this stunning revelation leads to a horrific denouement.
2000 Time Warner	
MENDEL'S DWARF	Dr Ben Lambert, an acclaimed British geneticist, is a dwarf. Ben's aim is to decode our genetic make-up, in particular the gene that causes dwarfism. When he meets Jean he hopes for normal love but as rejection looms, Ben is tempted to use science to seek revenge.
1997 Transworld	

A JEALOUS GOD 1996 Andre Deutsch	Bored by her marriage with Eric, ambivalent about her children and ridden with guilt about her aged mother, Helen Harding has reached that period in her life when memory begins its slow and pernicious invasion of the present. Unexpectedly she meets up with her estranged stepbrother Michael, and finds herself precipitated back into a past that has long been shut away - a childhood haunted by the mythic figure of her father who died in the bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem in 1946, and a womanhood dominated by her conflicting love for Michael and for her father's brutal, disturbing friend Dennis Killin. Who is the father of Helen's daughter? What was her own mother's relationship with Killin? And above all, what really happened to her father in those tormented days when the British Mandate in Palestine drew to its bloody close? Helen's quest for the jealous god of the past is set against a shifting backdrop of England, Cyprus and Israel.
THE BITTER CROSS 1992 Sinclair Stevenson	A novel of the Mediterranean in the sixteenth century, when the Knights of Saint John confronted the onslaught of Islam and the heresy of Protestantism. This is the story of one of the last of the English knights as he looks back over his life from retirement in the Grand priory of Rome. He contemplates the Sicilian woman whom he loved, and the young boy he rescued from Islam, and the God he has betrayed. The novel might be set in the past but it tackles themes with which the present has to contend - exile and belonging, belief and doubt, love and betrayal, fanaticism and profanity.
CHIMERA 1989 Hamish Hamilton	The fabulous Chimera - mythic monster, part lion, partgoat, part serpent - is more than just an Etruscan bronze discovered by archaeologist David Hewison. It lurks in the background of this novel as a symbol of the man himself: part Italian, part English, an explorer of the past who is haunted by his own past when he parachuted into wartime Italy as an SOE agent. Yet this is not just a war story. It is within the present, in the complex little world of an archaeological dig in central Italy, that the past is seen to work - the old conflicts of the Hewison family and the tragedies of wartime Italy surfacing in the present to precipitate a disturbing climax. My first novel, and now sadly out of print.

Non-Fiction

Publication Details	Notes
A PLACE IN ITALY 1992 Sinclair Stevenson	All right, I suppose it was an attempt to climb onto a bandwagon set in motion by A Year in Provence, but this account of our first two years living in an Italian village has the merit of being a real reflection of a way of life that still survives in a country where the landscape has not yet been tamed. And it's fun. And maybe it should go into "biographical details", because it's also true.