

Book review:

A review of: *We the Animals* by Justin Torres

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We The Animals by Justin Torres explores the lives of three young brothers as they come of age in New York in the 1980s. The novel generally succeeds in finding innovative methods of interacting with this theme of *Coming of Age* through an array of recurring motifs and detailed character studies.

Primarily Torres does effectively address the theme of *Coming of Age* through the detailed study of the unnamed narrator through his adolescent years, as the first person perspective allows for deeper levels of empathy between the reader and the character, as well as an insight into his internal psychological processes. The reader is shown the perspective of the main character at different stages of his life presented through the episodic structure the novella employs. This medium is effective on multiple narrative levels as it both explores the reality of a personal interpretation of *Coming of Age*, as the narrator toils with emotions regarding sexuality and familial relationships and presents how key flashpoints effect the maturation process of the protagonist and his brothers in a subjective manner. Torres successfully expands on this throughout the novel linking this character study to the recurring motif of fantastical imaginary worlds that the characters secludes himself in an effort to shield himself from harsh realities he is abruptly forced to accept as he matures.

The novel does struggle to completely connect with the theme in regards to the depiction of unrealistic events that solely serve to portray a rigid image of a broken family as opposed to a complicated dynamic, one instance of this is Pap's unexplained dig in the garden after an argument with Ma, that Torres compares to a 'trench' to artificially construct a metaphor of 'war' between the two. Another area that fails to innovatively address *Coming of Age* as a key theme is the author's choice to employ a stereotypical dysfunctional parental relationship that ultimately does little to provide a compelling observation of parental aspect of growing up. However, this is largely rectified through the detailed intricacies of the relationships between the three brothers, as Torres' focus on these sibling relationships grounds the novel in reality and delivers the crucial emotional outcome at the end of the novel as the narrator is revealed to have been institutionalised by his family due to his sexuality.

The novel does find merit in its effectiveness at utilising both narrative and structural techniques to present the theme of *Coming of Age*, with the symbiosis of these aspects of the book adding great depth to the overall storyline of the novel through the development of the protagonist and how the reader comes to view him and his arc by the conclusion of the novel. Despite the clear lack of a deeper exploration of parental relationships, the novel ultimately corrects this, instead choosing to highlight the key role of sibling relationships in an individual's *Coming of Age* experience. In total, the novel does address the theme through engaging methods to great effect and successfully tying together the narrator's character arc.