



# Akin

Written by Emma Donoghue

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Akin

# Akin

By Emma Donoghue

## Akinator

A retired New York professor's life is thrown into chaos when he takes a young great-nephew to the French Riviera, in hopes of uncovering his own mother's wartime secrets in the next masterpiece from New York Times bestselling author Emma Donoghue.

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## Akintunde Ahmad

Noah Selvaggio is a retired chemistry professor and widower living on the Upper West Side, but born in the South of France. He is days away from his first visit back to Nice since he was a child, bringing with him a handful of puzzling photos he's discovered from his mother's wartime years. But he receives a call from social services: Noah is the closest available relative of an eleven-year-old great-nephew he's never met, who urgently needs someone to look after him. Out of a feeling of obligation, Noah agrees to take Michael along on his trip.

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## Akin To

Much has changed in this famously charming seaside mecca, still haunted by memories of the Nazi occupation. The unlikely duo, suffering from jet lag and culture shock, bicker about everything from steak frites to screen time. But Noah gradually comes to appreciate the boy's truculent wit, and Michael's ease with tech and sharp eye help Noah unearth troubling details about their family's past. Both come to grasp the risks people in all eras have run for their loved ones, and find they are more akin than they knew.

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## Akinfenwa

Written with all the tenderness and psychological intensity that made *Room* an international bestseller, *Akin* is a funny, heart-wrenching tale of an old man and a boy, born two generations apart, who unpick their painful story and start to write a new one together.

I've enjoyed everything by Emma Donoghue that I've read, so there was no doubting I was going to miss out on this. With the frequency of grandparents taking care of grandkids because the parents are dead or incarcerated, it's just a slight stretch that a great uncle would get the call.

Noah, a 79 year old professor, gets just that request right before he's due to visit Nice, his place of birth and a place he hasn't seen since leaving when he was four. As someone who's not a natural with kids, I've enjoyed everything by Emma Donoghue that I've read, so there was no doubting I was going to miss out on this. With the frequency of grandparents taking care of grandkids because the parents are dead or incarcerated, it's just a slight stretch that a great uncle would get the call.

Noah, a 79 year old professor, gets just that request right before he's due to visit Nice, his place of birth and a place he hasn't seen since leaving when he was four. As someone who's not a natural with kids, I immediately bonded with Noah. Donoghue totally gets that fight to keep some level of communication going and what a struggle it is, especially when things we take for granted (grammar, history) are total unknowns to the youngster. Noah's efforts to explain an adverb vs. an adjective could have been lifted from my life! And the generational divide overrides every socio-economic difference, especially when it comes to an addiction to electronics.

The kid was looking at his phone again.

“Ah, back to the screen.”

“You talk a lot dude,” Michael murmured without looking up.

There's a mystery to solve as well. Noah has snapshots his mother took during the war. But they're such odd photos, he's not sure what/where/who they involve. While in Nice, he attempts to solve the puzzle.

I loved this book. Between the characters, the mystery and the beautiful writing, I was entranced. I loved how even throw away lines rang so true. “They climbed the steps, Noah's hip speaking to him. Tourism was such an odd mixture of the tiring and the hedonistic.” And how photography was a constant theme throughout the book.

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My thanks to netgalley and Little, Brown for an advance copy of this book. ...more

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## Akinesia

Emma Donoghue is a mesmerizing writer who is not afraid to take chances. When reading her previous books – Room, for example, or The Wonder – I did not come up for air.

So my first reaction on her latest book was a bit of disappointment. – A retired New York professor’s life is thrown into chaos when he takes a young grand-nephew to France in hopes of uncovering his own mother’s secrets from World War II. – Really? Hadn’t I read the old man/young boy (– child is father to the man – ) story many times – Emma Donoghue is a mesmerizing writer who is not afraid to take chances. When reading her previous books – Room, for example, or The Wonder – I did not come up for air.

So my first reaction on her latest book was a bit of disappointment. – A retired New York professor’s life is thrown into chaos when he takes a young grand-nephew to France in hopes of uncovering his own mother’s secrets from World War II. – Really? Hadn’t I read the old man/young boy (– child is father to the man – ) story many times already – Domenico Starnone’s Ties, to name just one? And World War II – isn’t that inevitably going to mean another book about Nazi collaborators?

Well, I needn’t have worried. This is, after all, Emma Donoghue. And even though it’s not quite as ambitious as her previous work, it’s a fascinating, page-turning, turn-the-formula-on-its-head sort of read.

Why is it so good? For one thing, Noah, the chemistry professor on the cusp of his 80th birthday and Michael, the 11-year-old boy whose father is dead and whose mother is incarcerated, are about as authentic as it gets. All the jargon, all the innocence combined with – pretend – disinterest and jadedness, all the wheedling and foul mouth bravado, it’s all here in Michael, who can, in turn, be defiant, endearing, and downright exhausting. Noah’s attempts to bridge the communication gap and try to earn a bit of the boy’s respects are also touching. But Emma Donoghue never resorts to manipulative sentimentality or tired tropes. Noah and Michael can step off the pages.

Also, a third important character in the book is the French city of Nice. The author spent a few years there with her wife and children and her familiarity with Nice shows. The Carnival, the museums, the food (Michael’s reactions to unfamiliar French food is hilariously real), the back history – all of it adds another dimension to his already intriguing tale.

I haven’t said much about the plot because that’s for readers to discover for themselves. Suffice to say that it hinges on some mystifying photos that Noah’s vanished mother took during the war years. His logical powers of deduction clash and eventually merge with Michael’s more imaginative mind as answers begin to reveal themselves. All in all, a very satisfying book. 4.5 stars. Thanks to @LittleBrown for an advance copy of one of my favorite writer’s work in exchange for an honest review.

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#EmmaDonoghue #Akin

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What a gem of a book. I just love that it centers around an older person (Noah is turning 80) who is still functioning with all his creaks in his body and quirks in his mind (he talks to his dead wife for instance). There is just not enough literature about older people and we have been blessed by Olive Kitteridge and now Noah Selvaggio, a former chemistry professor.

Through a series of circumstances, Noah becomes the temporary guardian of his 11 year old great nephew, Michael. This is quite fr What a gem of a book. I just love that it centers around an older person (Noah is turning 80) who is still functioning with all his creaks in his body and quirks in his mind (he talks to his dead wife for instance). There is just not enough literature about older people and we have been blessed by Olive Kitteridge and now Noah Selvaggio, a former chemistry professor.

Through a series of circumstances, Noah becomes the temporary guardian of his 11 year old great nephew, Michael. This is quite frustrating for a number of reasons. Noah is ready to leave on a trip to his hometown of Nice, France, where he has not been since he was a young child. He has never met Michael and, frankly, is not sure he's ready to take on a young boy. But Michael has nowhere else to go so Noah makes the leap and decides to take Michael with him on the trip.

Michael certainly spices things up as you can imagine. Meanwhile Noah is on the quest to discover the secret of his mother's past. She was the daughter of a very famous photographer who had her own secret life. She sent her son and his father to America at the beginning of WWII and remained at her father's side in France. Noah wants to know why and what she did during that time.

This is a moving book about relationships and the discovery of self. I found it so different from her earlier works including Room and The Wonder but every bit as touching. She is such a skilled author to write such varied works. This was a pleasure from beginning to end.

Thanks to NetGalley for a copy of this book in exchange for a fair review. ...more

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## Akins Auto

I was really excited to read Donoghue's new book Akin, but I'm kind of disappointed.

Noah is a 79 year old retired scientist, who's about to visit Nice, his birth place after so many years. Suddenly, he learns that he's next of kin for Michael (11 years old), who's his great nephew. His father died, and mother is in jail with noone to take care of him. So, they have to start a forced relationship and travel to Nice together. Michael isn't a child friendly person with no child of his own, and Michael is kind of a rebel boy. In many ways, it reminded me of 'About A Boy.'

The relationship between these two is interesting to read, it's well written and all. Also, a mystery is introduced to the story in Nice from related to WW2 times. Probably, the biggest reason I feel this book didn't work is, it's very unoriginal. This concept has been handled several times. I'm really surprised that Emma Donoghue, the writer of many original concepts would choose to go for a simple story like this with a quite dull plot.

The feeling I had when I was reading this book was 'been there, done that'. So, it wasn't for me.

But, if you like war mysteries, or the relationship between Michael and Noah is something that attracts you, it might be for you. ...more

What appeared at first to be a story of an old man and a young boy foisted upon each other for a trip abroad for a week, finding they had things to learn from each other in the way of such stories, turned out to be so much more. This element is certainly there and the two characters are spot on, their interaction plays out realistically and I enjoyed their banter, but the author also introduces a little mystery as Noah seeks answers to his mother's war years in France. The city of Nice is an essential player in this as we come to understand its history during the occupation of the 1940s. Noah's mother's experience echoes down the ages to his grand-nephew's fractured family in 21st century New York. Written with sensitivity and insight, their stories melded in a way that had me hoping for a happy outcome for all concerned. A really satisfying read, I have no hesitation recommending it.

With thanks to Pan Macmillan/Picador via NetGalley for the opportunity to read an ARC. ...more

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## Akinetic Mutism

Akin:

adjective

- 1) of kin; related by blood
- 2) allied by nature; having the same properties
- 3) having or showing an affinity; kindred

Emma Donoghue has quite the writer's chops. She can do a stylistic, tragicomic period piece, like *FROG MUSIC*, or a boldly dramatic story, such as *ROOM*. You can't fit her into a niche. And whatever she writes, her characters are fully formed and could leap magnificently off the pages. *AKIN* is no different in that way, a witty but poignant contemporary story with an old

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Donoghue plays with the different definitions of the eponymous title, but with levity and nuance. Yes, this is a tender, warm, affectionate and sometimes brutal narrative about the bonds of kin (and some chemical bonds, too), as well as how history inches ever close to the present, and time rolls forward as it reaches back. "The future was more urgent than the past, even if the two were entangled."

Noah Selvaggio, an (almost) eighty-year-old retired chemistry professor and childless widow, is about to embark on a weeklong trip to Nice, France, his birthplace. He left when he was four, delivered from his mother to his father in NYC; he's never been back, and has made this city his home. His memories of early childhood on the French Riviera are foggy. This was the time when Germany had already invaded France. He has nine old photos from that era, saved by his now dead sister. His grandfather, Pierre Sonne, was a celebrated French photographer, and Margot, Noah's mother, was the famous photographer's primary assistant. But these photos were slipshod, unframed, and didn't bear Sonne's stamp. How to put them into context?

In the meantime, Noah is entrusted with the care of his eleven-year-old great-nephew, Michael, who he's never met before. Michael's father (Noah's nephew) had died of a drug overdose, and his mother, Amber, was serving a few years in prison. Child Services had found Noah, and asked him to

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care for Michael for a few weeks until another relative came through to take Michael in. If Noah didn't agree to care for Michael, he would be sent to foster care.

Michael would have to accompany Noah to Nice, in lieu of canceling the trip. He was a wily, obstreperous boy, frequently disrespectful but observant, who had lived his life with few advantages. The two of them were like a fraught chemical reaction, or oil and water, but Noah understood that Michael had suffered trauma, and agreed to his short-term care. After all, what's a few weeks with a snarly, surly, screen-addicted, impulsive kid? He could at least try to teach him some manners. "Weren't all of us bridges for another, one way or another?"

A lesser author would have made me groan. I figured out much of the general arc fairly quickly, but it was the relationship between Noah and Michael that lifted this novel to a resonant pitch. What does an old, highly educated, and mournful man and a damaged, underprivileged young boy have in common? The more Noah tries to bond, the deeper Michael's disinterest. With a handful of antique photos and their wobbly, separate grief—the final death of hope—can the bond between them find a pathway to mutual regard? He and this boy were quite alien to each other! Yet, in an odd way, akin.

Donoghue took what could have been a derivative, ham-handed story and turned it into a charismatic, organic, and robust tale of memories, time, and the chemistry of alien relations. It is a genuine winner, surpassing my initial cynicism (and Michael's)! I walked those steps in Nice with them, watched the Carnival and the circus, and explored the meaning of those photos. Moreover, I pondered Michael's plight, his parents' past, and what's to come in the future.

4.5 rounded up

Thank you to LittleBrown for this ARC in exchange for an honest review.

#EmmaDonoghue

#Akin ...more

Noah, a retired professor who is about to turn 80, is planning a trip to Nice, France, where he lived as a young child during the war. Right before his departure, he's contacted by a social worker who says he's the only living relative who can take charge of Michael, his late nephew's son. (Michael's mother is in prison and his grandmother has recently died.) Noah winds up taking the boy to France with him, and the kid is so incredibly obnoxious sometimes it was hard to keep reading. But Donoghue Noah, a retired professor who is about to turn 80, is planning a trip to Nice, France, where he lived as a young child during the war. Right before his departure, he's contacted by a social worker who says he's the only living relative who can take charge of Michael, his late nephew's son. (Michael's mother is in prison and his grandmother has recently died.) Noah winds up taking the boy to France with him, and the kid is so incredibly obnoxious sometimes it was hard to keep reading. But Donoghue is an excellent writer, and she pulls the reader in with Noah's speculation of what his mother was doing in Nice during the war--was she a collaborator or working with the Resistance? ...more

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## Akin Meaning

For those of us that have read ROOM, there is no doubt that Donoghue can write beautifully about the relationship between a mother and child, but this book takes her writing to a new and beautiful level, exploring the relationship between an elderly man and his great nephew. The two are thrown together when a desperate social worker searches for someone to serve as a guardian for the 11 year old rather than placing him in the foster care system.

Noah, a lonely, childless widower has been looking For those of us that have read ROOM, there is no doubt that Donoghue can write beautifully about the relationship between a mother and child, but this book takes her writing to a new and beautiful level, exploring the relationship between an elderly man and his great nephew. The two are thrown together when a desperate social worker searches for someone to serve as a guardian for the 11 year old rather than placing him in the foster care system.

Noah, a lonely, childless widower has been looking forward to spending his 80th birthday in Nice, where he was born, and trying to understand his own history. Despite his doubts, he rises admirably to the challenge and takes Michael with him on his journey.

This remarkable pair don't find. It easy to travel together, since they essentially are connected only by Michael's dead father, the troubled son of Noah's sister. The writing is so vivid that I felt as if I knew the two, and chuckled as they made their way around Nice and each other.

Within their story is Noah's search for the truth about his mother, some mysterious photos and her role in WW II. Despite their difference in age, background and culture, they are a delightful team of sleuths.

Their struggles during this trip are fine fodder for a remarkable and beautiful love story. As the grandmother of a child Michael's age, I felt that Donoghue captured this difficult and eccentric pre-adolescent period very well.

I am so thankful that I had the opportunity to delight in this book and urge all my book clubs to read it. It is also an excellent book for my students who are going into teaching.. it is a rich and warm story, which reminds us of the role of older adults in the lives of children. ...more

Akin, by Emma Donoghue

I have decided that Emma Donoghue is a writer I will always read. I love this book so much...the main character is Noah, a childless widower, who is turning 80 in a week. After the recent death of his sister, Noah has decided to spend his sisters' bequest by his visiting his birthplace, Nice, France. Right before he is to leave on his trip, he is approached by Child Services to take in his deceased nephews' eleven year old son. The boys mother is in prison, his maternal gra Akin, by Emma Donoghue

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## Akin Definition

This woman's WRITING. Full stop. DELIGHTFUL.

Her words are perfectly chosen: light, beautiful, unexpected, and deeply moving. Not one word wasted. I loved diving into the world of 80 year old Noah and his great nephew. This is gonna be a big book. Loved every word. I was lucky enough to get a Netgalley early copy of this one. Donoghue understands adult/child relationships so well, and there is so much shine and grit bound together, it felt like reading nonfiction. If you're on the fence, lean towards picking it up and be prepared for the immersive world of

Nice, France, and the complicated, beautiful relationship between Noah and Michael.

...more

Noah Selavaggio will soon be turning 80 years old. In celebration of this milestone birthday, he's making plans to visit Nice where he was born. He discovered some old photos taken by his mother that are quite puzzling and he hopes to find some answers in Nice. However, just days before he leaves, he receives a phone call from a social worker asking that he temporarily take care of an 11-year-old boy, Michael, who is his great-nephew. Noah has never met Michael but he's the closet relative the boy has other than his mother who is in prison and his aunt whom they're having trouble reaching. Noah well remembers Michael's father, Vincent, and feels obligated to take Michael along with him to Nice.

This book is on quite a different level than the other Emma Donoghue books that I've read. There's a lot more humor in this one and I enjoyed the witty sparring between this unlikely pair. Michael is very foul-mouthed and can be quite obnoxious but knowing the life he's led, his character is very believable. I admired the patience Noah shows Michael but then again Noah also knows about loss. He still has long talks with his deceased wife. Both of these characters are brought to life with compassion and understanding. Noah's mother's photos lead them on a hunt for the truth that

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is quite a heart wrenching one and made the book quite compelling. Could it be that Noah's beloved mother was a Nazi collaborator?

Recommended.

This book was given to me by the publisher in return for an honest review. ...more

Akin

## 1

Let us begin with how awesome the integration of the photos was. They could have all been in the beginning, or a plate section, or chucked at the end, but no! Their placement is instead a plot device and that's just such a great detail. Though trying, as I definitely did go looking for them and could have cheated myself out of the reveal.

This one didn't grab me in the same way that *The Wonder* did. I suppose that might be because I find an 79-year-old man and an 11-year-old boy less relatable. Let us begin with how awesome the integration of the photos was. They could have all been in the beginning, or a plate section, or chucked at the end, but no! Their placement is instead a plot device and that's just such a great detail. Though trying, as I definitely did go looking for them and could have cheated myself out of the reveal.

This one didn't grab me in the same way that *The Wonder* did. I suppose that might be because I find an 79-year-old man and an 11-year-old boy less relatable, so fair enough. But, it was nevertheless thoughtful and engaging and I really liked the way the book wrapped up.

Noah, a retiree, ends up saddled with temporary guardianship of his great-nephew, Michael, right before he is scheduled to return to his birthplace, Nice, France, for the first time since pre-WWII. Once there, together they solve something of a family mystery or two and try not to kill each other in frustration along the way.

What the book does well is not romanticizing their relationship: these people are blood, but they are also strangers and neither are exactly easy to get on with. There are fights and snipes and Michael is an 11-year-old boy which is so annoying I could barely handle it (let alone add in his emotional baggage-backstory).

What I was less sold on were the mysteries and the deus ex machina answers that appear along the way. They weren't all that clunky, but a few were. For me, the relationship core of the story was the most compelling part of the book and it was plenty successful to make anything else forgivable.

My thanks to the author, publisher, and NetGalley for the arc to review.

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Stars script the sky in their own language,  
not to be arbitrarily pulled back a curtain,  
there is a great secret held by the celestial nether,  
so now be told, what is held in the sky,  
the death of a myth, fiction is myth.

#poem

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Chris Roberts, God Asunder