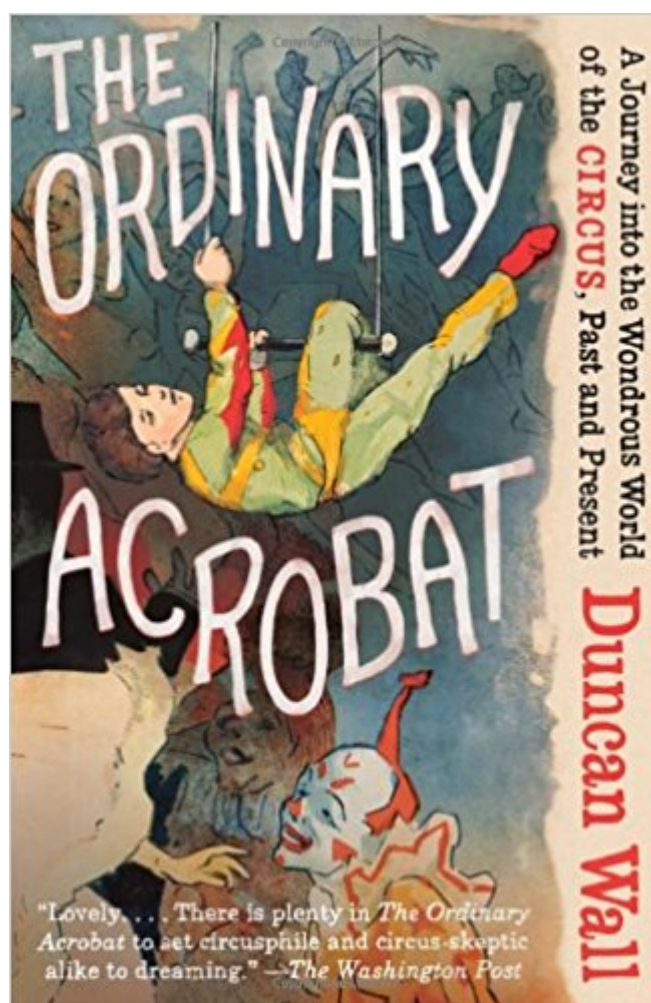


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# The Ordinary Acrobat: A Journey Into The Wondrous World Of Circus, Past And Present



## Synopsis

A Kirkus Reviews Best Nonfiction Book of the Year When Duncan Wall visited his first nouveau cirque as a college student in Paris, everything about it—the monochromatic costumes, the acrobats singing Simon and Garfunkel, the juggler reciting Proust—hooked him. Soon he was attending circuses two or three nights a week, and soon after that, he entered the intensively competitive training program at France's École Nationale des Arts du Cirque. The Ordinary Acrobat is a magical, funny, sometimes scary story of what happens when one average American joins a host of gifted and flexible international students in a rigorous regimen of tumbling, trapeze, juggling, and clowning. Brimming with surprises, outsized personalities, and plenty of charm, this personal history of how the circus evolved into the thrilling experience it is today delivers all the excitement and pleasure of the circus ring itself.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Wall had the great fortune of realizing the archetypal childhood dream of running away to join the circus when he secured a Fulbright fellowship to do just that. After visiting the nouveau cirque as a college student in Paris, Wall was intrigued by the high cultural regard the French held for the circus as performance art. Wall spent a year in the intensive Ecole Nationale des Arts du Cirque, learning the skills of juggling, tumbling, and clowning. He also researched the origins of the disparate circus arts, from ancient Chinese culture through the Romans until 1798, when a British cavalier pulled together the circus of human and animal feats. The appeal of traditional circus had been on the wane until Cirque du Soleil dropped the animal acts and focused on choreography and human

dexterity with spectacle worthy of Las Vegas. Wall chronicles his year of discovery of the history and future of the circus as well as the dramatic personalities and grueling physical training in this behind-the-scenes look at the evolving art of the circus. --Vanessa Bush --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“Lovely. . . . There is plenty in *The Ordinary Acrobat* to set circusphile and circus-skeptic alike to dreaming.” • *The Washington Post* “Meticulously researched, intensely reported and brightly written. . . . An entertaining, artistic several-hour act that leaves indelible impressions.” • *The Minneapolis Star Tribune* “A fascinating, funny, effervescent story told with great affection. *The Ordinary Acrobat* is an incandescent odyssey • personally and historically • into the captivating transnational world of the circus.” • Janet M. Davis, author of *Circus Age: Culture and Society Under the American Big Top* “Lively and wide-ranging. . . . Wall’s eye for anecdote, in both past and present, is sharp.” • *The Seattle Times* “Wall’s technical descriptions of what happens on a trapeze, or even of how a somersault is turned, make you look afresh at what had previously seemed obvious. And that may be the greatest trick of all.” • *The Wall Street Journal* “Wall is a charming guide. . . . His appreciation of the circus is deepened by his understanding of its long and distinct history.” • *The New Republic* “Blending cultural history with biography, memoir and travelogue, Wall’s carefully balanced book is, in itself, a successful tightrope traverse.” • *Kirkus Reviews* “If ever you have the urge to run away and join the circus, you can save yourself the trip and still have the thrill of it all by reading *The Ordinary Acrobat*. Duncan Wall’s adventures as a novice in a Parisian circus school are wonderfully entertaining. A beautifully written account of life past and present under the big top.” • Eric Lax, author of *Woody Allen: A Biography* “Wall [does] an admirable job of pursuing the circus’s road-show mysteries and endlessly winding paths. . . . It isn’t a conventional memoir, but the circus isn’t a conventional subject, either.” • *NPR* “An exquisite exposition. . . . Proving himself even more adroit verbally than physically, Wall offers a revelatory love letter to the simultaneously ancient and contemporary art of acrobatics, the circus, and its denizens.” • *Library Journal* “In this enchanting memoir sprinkled with historical anecdotes, Wall pulls the reader into the world of circus, past and present. . . . His captivating journey of discovery may lead others to consider running away to join one.” • *Publishers Weekly* “Wall is intoxicated

and obsessed with the circus. . . . It's infectious. •Biographile

Why do I love this book? Why have I sent copies to 7 different young people I know who are professional circus artists? Because of PERSPECTIVE. This book details the fascinating history, traditions and evolution of the circus arts in an interesting, highly-readable and ultimately inspiring narrative by a writer who has lived his story. Modern circus is well known to millions around the world largely through familiarity with Cirque du Soleil performances, but few know the story behind the highly refined disciplines we watch with awe inside the tent or theatre. Reading this book gives valuable insight into the past, present and future of circus, and opens a window for spectator and performer alike to appreciate these demanding arts which continue to fascinate and inspire. Highly recommended!

Absolutely adored this book! I highly recommend it to both circus and non-circus lovers alike, or anyone who likes to read. I found the mixture of memoir and history kept the book spinning and always interesting. An over all illumination of circus arts. Many thanks to the author!

What an entertaining read! Well written, fascinating history, first person experiences - the chapter on being on the trapeze is worth the price of the whole book, lots of circus lore and just plain fun to read! Great memories for those who have been to a circus, and for those who haven't, it will make you want to go.

Duncan Wall knows the circus from the inside out. His perspective on the history and the potential of the art form is meticulously examined using both current and historical references. Well worth the time for both serious historians and casual readers.

I really liked this book. The author manages to blend history, anecdote and a charming self deprecation into a really easy read.

The Ordinary Acrobat is a great book that made me discover how the "New Circus" is nothing new. Duncan Wall has both an impressive erudition and a physical experience of the circus which make the history very lively.

Wall's book is a fine mix of slice of life and history, showing how the circus is and how it was. A nice

sourcebook for learning to love the circus... IT'S ALL ON THE INSIDE!

I found this book very well written. It reads more like an historical novel than a non fiction. Highly recommend.

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