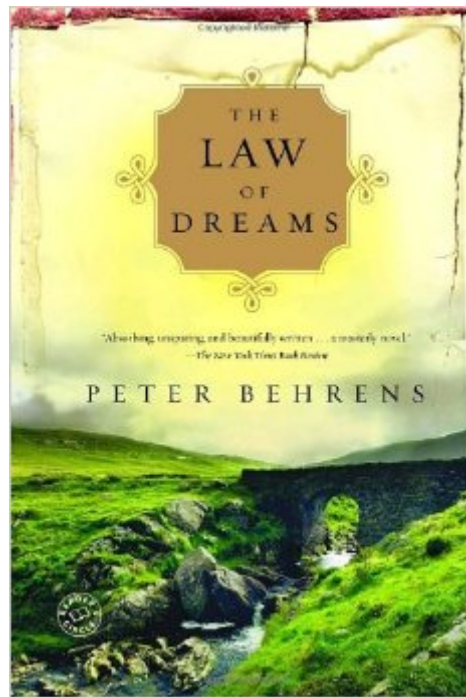


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# The Law Of Dreams: A Novel



## Synopsis

Driven from the only home he has known during Ireland's Great Hunger of 1847, Fergus O'Brien makes the harrowing journey from County Clare to America, traveling with bold girls, pearl boys, navvies, and highwaymen. Along the way, Fergus meets his three passionate loves—Phoebe, Luke, and Molly—vivid, unforgettable characters, fresh and willful. Based on Peter Behrens' own family history, *The Law of Dreams* is lyrical, emotional, and thoroughly extraordinary—a searing tale of ardent struggle and ultimate perseverance.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

History and biography are already stories, so why bother with historical fiction and additional layers of make-believe? In *The Law of Dreams*, Peter Behrens shows why. The book centers on a young 19th-century Irishman, Fergus O'Brien, who is driven by circumstance, some imposed and some of his own making, first to England and then America. In James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus sees history as a nightmare from which he is trying to awaken; half a century earlier, the hero of Behrens' odyssey lives the Irish nightmare of famine and exploitation. Fergus can't escape from history; the best he, or indeed anyone, can do is to follow the "law of dreams": keep moving, in the hope of creating space for possibility and further dreams. Life teaches Fergus all too well that dreams can turn into nightmares, but its hard lessons never extinguish the spirit that drives him forward, or at least onward. Behrens shows, through language that is sometimes brutally poetic and a narrative drive that is always strongly focused, how the forces of history intersect with the contingencies of everyday life to forge our selves and our destinies. A history that is both remotely

of the past and ever-present in the products of that past is brought to life through events and characters that are deeply imagined and richly described. My sole disappointment is that this is Behrens' first novel, so I'll be denied the pleasure of paging through his backlist. At least I have the consolation of having discovered a major writer and realizing that historical fiction can treat significant areas of human experience in ways that its more academic relatives aren't equipped to approach.

I read this book at a gallop. The language is spare, brisk, and sometimes achingly beautiful. The world that Peter Behrens evokes is a brutal place, full of accident and malice, loss and longing, and endlessly surprising. To what lengths will human beings go in order to survive? Can interpersonal relationships be trusted, or is each person essentially alone? What do we lose or gain when we try to leave the past behind? What combination of information and sheer desire allows -- even impels -- us to look to the future with hope? These are some of the questions that the novel raises as Fergus, its central protagonist, struggles to save not only his physical life but also the life of his soul -- his integrity and his capacity for kindness. There is only one thing that bothered me about *The Law of Dreams*: now that I've finished it, I don't know what to read next. Most other novels seem limp by comparison. Thank you, Peter Behrens, for a fabulous book.

This is one of the most extraordinary books I've read in years. I'd never heard of him until recently: he has a new novel and it sounded good, so I decided to read this one first. Wow. I've never read anything that conveyed the sense of "the past" as brilliantly, or as richly, and "realistically" as this novel. The plot itself is worth the price of admission, but his prose is lush and rich and, as important, reflects the effort he made to be historically accurate. HIGHLY recommended.

*The Law of Dreams* is an astonishing excavation of both human vulnerability and resilience. Whether you give a rotten potato for historical fiction, or Irish history, or not, Fergus's story will compel you to keep on with it. The genius of it lies in the author's gift for blending traditional, familiar storytelling with a starker more modern but no less lyrical voice you've never heard before. His characters speak like no others and though a muscular novel, it moves inexorably towards its finish with the lean telling of a short story. Indeed, Peter Behrens is able to bring together seemingly disparate styles of storytelling -- ancient and modern, language-drunk and spare -- and the final effect is one of enduring beauty and relevance. The book tells an archetypal and epic story but perhaps its best bits lie in the dark corners that Behrens illuminates with his particular gift for

immediate, sensory detail. While the story is loaded with cinematic action and peopled with a huge cast of characters, private, interior moments of melancholy are equally recognized within the great scope of the author's abilities.

The book seems to start in the middle of the story, ramble along in odd directions, and then end abruptly. The writing style was interesting and unique - sort of "artsy" and "pretty", but also confusing. I found myself re-reading passages to try and understand the point. I enjoyed the historical aspect immensely, but overall the book was just mediocre.

I read this book for a book club. I almost deleted it from Kindle after reading the brutal, detailed events at the beginning of the book. My grandparents all came from Ireland, and never spoke about their families' experiences there during the potato famine; they never went back to visit, either. I am glad I continued to read. While I described the book to a friend as reminiscent of Angela's Ashes, the Road, and Jersey K's The Painted Bird "without the laughs." I got caught up in the story. Everything moves - Fergus, the settings, the connections and disconnects with characters. This is a very powerful, beautifully-written book. Some lines are pure poetry. It evokes so many strong emotions, and pulls you along with Fergus as he experiences the world outside his destroyed mountain home.

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