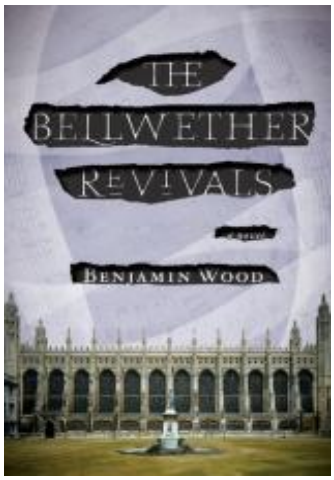
The Bellwether Revivals

by Benjamin Wood



About the Book

Bright, bookish Oscar Lowe has escaped the squalid urban neighborhood where he was raised and made a new life for himself amid the colleges and spires of Cambridge. He has grown to love the quiet routine of his life as a care assistant at a local nursing home, where he has forged a close friendship with its most ill-tempered resident, Dr. Paulsen.

All that changes one fateful day when Oscar, while wandering the bucolic grounds of Cambridge, is lured into the chapel at Kings College by the otherworldly sound of an organ. It is here that he meets and falls in love with Iris Bellwether, a beautiful and enigmatic medical student. Drawn into the world of scholarship and privilege, Oscar soon becomes embroiled in the strange machinations of Iris?s older brother, Eden.

A charismatic but troubled musical prodigy, Eden convinces his sister and their close-knit circle of friends to participate in a series of disturbing experiments. Eden believe that music?with his expert genius to guide it?can cure people. As the line between genius and madness begins to blur, however, Oscar fears that it is danger and not healing that awaits them all?but it might be too late. . . .

Discussion Guide

1. What is the effect of the prelude to THE BELLWETHER REVIVALS by beginning at the end of the book? What expectations are created by this projection into the future?

2. What makes Oscar such a likable character --- both to the other characters in the novel and to us as readers? Why is he accepted into the ?flock? despite its differences in class, education, and background? In what ways is Oscar the book?s moral center?

3. What enables Oscar to fit into a social group that he had considered forever beyond his reach? Why does Oscar and Iris?s relationship work despite their differences in class and education?

4. Why does the organ music pull Oscar into the church, even though he is an atheist? Does his meeting Iris there seem

purely accidental or in some way fated? Is Eden right to suggest that he is responsible for Oscar and Iris?s romance?

5. Eden Bellwether is a complex and fascinating character. How sympathetic or unsympathetic were you toward Eden at the beginning of the novel? At the end? When did your view of him begin to change?

6. Oscar tells a Mrs. Bellwether, who wonders if her son is exceptional or abnormal: ?I?m not sure it?s possible to be exceptional without being a bit abnormal too. Goes with the territory? [p. 309]. What does the novel contribute to the long?standing debate about the relation between genius and madness? Are the two necessarily inseparable?

7. Benjamin Wood has a gift for particularly vivid metaphors. When Oscar listens to Eden at the organ, ?It was music like gushing water, like frantic animals being herded on a hillside, like all the conversations in the world being spoken at once, like an ocean prising itself apart, like two great armies converging on each other? [p. 230]. What makes these metaphors so evocative? How do these metaphors, and many others like them throughout the novel, make the reading experience more imaginatively engaging?

8. Do you agree with Dr. Crest that hope can be a dangerous delusion? Why does Crest himself arrive at that conclusion? How different do you think his revised book would have been from the earlier, pre?Eden edition that was published?

9. What stops Oscar during his physical struggle with Eden? Does he make the right decision?

10.Oscar tries not to think too much about how he might have prevented the deaths at the end of the novel. Who is most responsible for not stopping Eden before he went completely mad? What might Oscar, Iris, and Dr. Crest have done differently? Should Eden?s father, Theo, have intervened? Or was some kind of tragedy inevitable?

Author Bio

Benjamin Wood was born in 1981 and grew up in northwest England. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia, Canada, which he attended with the support of a Commonwealth Scholarship.

Whilst studying in Canada, he was appointed as Fiction Editor of the literary journal *PRISM International*. The stories he selected and edited during his tenure included a finalist and winner of the Journey Prize.

In 2012, Benjamin's first novel THE BELLWETHER REVIVALS was published by Simon & Schuster (UK), Viking Penguin (USA), and Random House (Canada). It was shortlisted for the Costa First Novel Award and the Commonwealth Book Prize. Film rights to the novel have been sold to NOHO Film & Television in a collaboration with BBC Films, with the adaptation being scripted by celebrated playwright David Eldridge.

Its French translation LE COMPLEXE D'EDEN BELLWETHER (Editions Zulma, 2014) won one of France's foremost literary awards, le Prix du Roman Fnac, and has gone on to become a bestseller.

In 2013, Benjamin served as the British Council's Writer in Residence in Istanbul, Turkey, where he began researching

and writing his second novel, THE ECLIPTIC. It will be published by Scribner (UK) in July this year, and by The Penguin Press (USA) in May 2016.

Benjamin is currently a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at Birkbeck, University of London, where he teaches fiction and directs the undergraduate writing programme. He lives with his wife in London.

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