



# Out of the Ashes

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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It was interesting to read this book after the two Steinbeck re-releases (see page 25). Morpurgo also deals with harsh realities of bucolic life in his depiction of how the recent foot and mouth epidemic affects a fictional farming family. Presented as the diary of Becky Morley, a horse-and-dad-bedazzled farmer's daughter, it begins with a cheerful evocation of a hearty New Year celebration in a traditional English village, with Farmer Morley leading the bell-ringing, boozing and song. In late February, when Becky is rearing a pet lamb, the impending catastrophe is broached. The epidemic reaches the farm in March, when Becky is already sickened by the slaughter on neighbouring farms. By April, the Morleys' life work is in ruins. The book ends, as its title suggests, on an optimistic note. It is a short novel, powerfully told, but I couldn't help thinking that it simplifies some of the issues arising from the crisis. The farming community are depicted as hapless victims of fate, and there is no mention of agribusiness, subsidies and market forces to balance the relentless cries of 'what have we done to deserve this?'. Not that you would expect them in a farmer's daughter's diary of course. The pre-plague farming life is presented as an idyll of bloodless husbandry, with no hint that the majority of the animals that are slaughtered when the epidemic reaches them were destined anyway to end their lives 'screaming at the block' as Orwell put it in **Animal Farm**. If you intend to introduce this book to your class, you might consider using **Animal Farm** or **The Red Pony** alongside as counter-weights to what seems to me to be a somewhat romanticised vision of farming.

Running Order:

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