

BOOK THOUGHTS

BATCH 11
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BY **LINDSAY** WINCHERAUK
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BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL

BLACK = FICTION

DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL

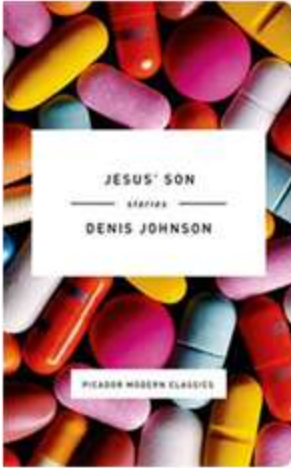
PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES

ORANGE = POETRY

BOOK THOUGHTS: BATCH 11

JESUS' SON

DENIS JOHNSON



...poetic verses drip off the pages...

How did the book make me feel/think?

EMPATHETIC

The only difference between a narcissistic politician using all means available to hold on to power and a junkie hunting for their next fix is the junkie can't lie about who they are.

JESUS' SON is almost perfect. The poetic verses drip off the pages, pooling together only to burst forth in perfect harmony – words you can hear, see, feel, and almost taste.

"The Savoy Hotel was an awful place. The reality of it gave out as it rose higher above First Avenue so that the upper floors dribbled away into space. Monsters were dragging themselves up the stairs."

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Johnson's prose is sublime, humanizing addiction, something most of us would like to deny, looking the other way, making those who are gripped by the demon's talons invisible.

JESUS' SON does not demonize or offer judgment or solutions to those trapped in the cycles of addiction – what it does is highlight how people who've fallen through the cracks have dreams and desires and how they survive the daily grind of living. Unfortunately, those suffering do not differ from money barons of Wall Street: one chases wealth, often breaking those below, who, much like them, crave love and belonging. The money barons don't understand; they are one wrong decision and only a heartbeat away from despair themselves.

No child dreams of becoming a broken addict.

Johnson's deft humanizing of lost souls dosed me with compassion. I may still find those on society's fringes somewhat vile. Yet, after reading this breathtaking novel, I realize the persons lying in desperation on the streets of our cities frequently have heart-wrenching stories lost in pain.

If you write and this book doesn't inspire you to hone your craft, quit writing.

This might be my favourite book.

Thank You, Mr. Johnson, RIP.

REAL LIFE

BRANDON TAYLOR



A heart-wrenchingly beautiful + essential tale. It destroyed me.

How did the book make me feel/think?

Real Life destroyed me.

It destroyed me because I don't want to be another white guy spinning banalities about living in different coloured skin. We can't keep pretending we know – or continue, in silence, when racism is being served in front of our minds.

“... but she won't say anything either, can't bring herself to. No one does. No one ever does. Silence is their way of getting by because if they are silent long enough, then this moment of minor discomfort will pass for them, will fold down into the landscape of the evening as if it never happened.”

It destroyed me because it made me realize my limitations in accepting unconditional love.

“He puts his hand on Wallace's stomach, which makes Wallace feel uncomfortable.”

It destroyed me because it made me realize my past is always on the attack, and I must stomp it down.

“There comes a time when you have to stop being who you were when you have to let the past stay where it is, frozen and impossible.”

It destroyed me because I didn't want to be weak.

“Get even sounds like the rallying cry of weak people who have no other way to bargain with the world.”

And it destroyed me because it made me realize to grow, I must accept who I am.

“He wants to be not himself.

He wants to be not depressed.

He wants to be not anxious.

He wants to be well.

He wants to be good.”

Taylor's writing is an eloquent master class, swallowing us effortlessly in the environment, breathing all around us. Everything is essential to the story. Taylor nimbly deposits each of us on the page, making us vital to the moving pieces of this heart-wrenchingly beautiful tale.

That's how this book made me feel.

WEATHER

JENNY OFFILL



ORIGINAL TIMES 7

How did the book make me feel/think?

This is the second Offill book I've read. And original, original, original, original. I was looking for synonyms for original, and the best I could come up with is ORIGINAL in ALL CAPS.

Weather is mystifying, much like **Dept. of Speculation** → I dove in, my mind raced, what the heck am I reading?

Is this real life?

Fiction?

A combination?

A fantasy?

Weather is delightfully hilarious, a guffaw waiting on most pages, and a tug at the heartstrings often follows closely behind.

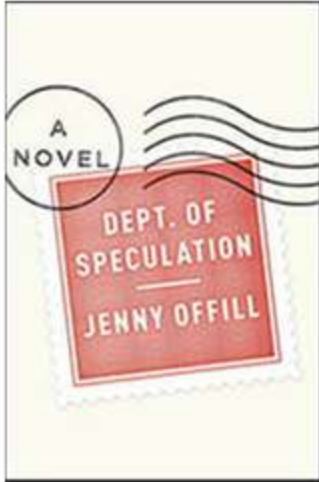
"A few days later, I yelled at him for losing his lunch box, and he turned and said to me, Are you sure you're my actual mother? Sometimes you don't seem like a good enough person."

Suddenly, it hit me, an epiphany of sorts. Weather is original fiction (for those scoring at home, NUMBER OF ORIGINALS IN THIS REVIEW = 7) mirroring real life. It is scattered choppy, much like life. It is confusing, but as the pages flip by, it is cobbled together, and again, much like life hidden within the insatiable wit, darkness lurks.

Offill is a master at deftly pulling life fragments together, mixing them into bite-sized morsels, and in the end, making us all crave another word.

DEPT. OF SPECULATION

JENNY OFFILL



I am confident I've read something like nothing else.

How did the book make me feel/think?

I dove in. Pages began flipping; I'm not sure if I was flipping them. I started laughing. There is nothing like this. A little girl makes me laugh; she's adorable. The little girl makes me ponder. She's more intelligent than most.

What is this book?

Is this a memoir?

I should check the cover, the jacket. Nah... I can't stop reading.

This is the author's life; it can't be, it must be.

I reach the halfway mark; laughter turns into a cringe, darkness arrives, a perfect life unravels. Life has a way of depositing us there when we least expect it.

I want the author to be okay.

Is she okay?

Will she survive?

Where has the little girl's zest for life gone?

I still laugh – but now I'm worried.

I need to stop reading.

I can't.

I need to know the outcome.

Can the family come together again fall in love once more?

Does it need to be blown up to start over again? It sounds a bit like America.

Cover-to-cover in one sitting. I'm spent. There is nothing like this.

Is it her life?

It must be.

The book is fiction; I doubt that.

I'm finished. I'm spent. I am confident I've read something like nothing else.

I'm positive I've read the musings of a lyrical genius.

I want more pages!

NOBODY EVER TALKS ABOUT ANYTHING BUT THE END

LIZ LEVINE



... a beautiful, amazing, darkly hilarious, gem ...

How did the book make me feel/think?

Connected. Less Alone.

In 1985, the day after my birthday, I watched my father die.

In late 1987, I watched my mother die just before Christmas.

Fast-forward to 2003, after a two-month period where my relationship ended, and four people close to me died, I discovered my parents I watched die were not my actual parents (long story – for another time).

“They” say there are 5-7 stages of grief, depending on whom you ask?

I find these stages don’t follow a formula. We are told they do, but from my experience, one stage will demand full attention, and at others, all seven bombard you, leaving you reeling. Often alone. As compassionate as others can be, they can also suck and drop their judgement on how long grief should be on the docket.

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It doesn’t bleeping work that way.

During my struggle, **Nobody Ever Talks About Anything But The End** would have been a godsend. This book is the most honest, visceral, voyeuristic. Did I say? Honest (?) conversation with a friend about coming to terms with layers of trauma, including suicide + cancer.

Liz Levine paints a rich, in-depth, enlightening picture of what it is like to be attacked by “what ifs” and “I could have, should have, done....”

On one page, tears blasted from my eyes. On the next, I cringed while laughing uncontrollably at the healing morbidity of comedy in the darkest moments.

Nobody Ever Talks About Anything But The End is a must-read for anyone who thirsts for captivating life stories. It is a fabulous read for everyone. But if you’ve suffered devastating losses in your life, this book will help you realize you’re not alone. Whatever you are feeling + going through uniquely belongs to you – don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.

One last note: **Nobody Ever Talks About Anything But The End** is a beautiful, unique, darkly hilarious gem that might help those suffering place their grief in a compartment quicker. A place where it is no longer all-consuming. Because when it is finally placed somewhere manageable, which is something Levine deftly shares with unflinching courage, you will eventually arrive at a new BEGINNING.

DRIVE YOUR PLOW OVER THE BONES OF THE DEAD

OLGA TOKAROZUK



A murder mystery, chock-full of mind-blowing twists.

How did the book make me feel/think?

REPORTER

I'm here with the delightfully quirky. Some would say a tad off, Mrs. Janina Duszejko, the main character in Olga Tokarczuk's tantalizingly mind-bending novel **"Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead."**

Could you tell me in a nutshell what this captivating story is about?

DUSZEJKO

Hmm. In a nutshell. The book is about the never-ending struggle between good and evil, right, and wrong, + the continuous struggle to eradicate misogynistic attacks. The story takes place in Poland's eerily dark cottage area, where cottage owners escape harsh winters, leaving behind a few odd souls to mind the fort. My task is to maintain a series of cottages. Only two others brave the elements: Oddball + Big Foot. And, right from the get-go, they reduced the numbers to only two.

REPORTER

Yes, in the first pages, we come across the corpse of Big Foot. His death scene is disconcerting: he choked on the bones of a deer he had poached. The deer's severed head lying nearby. Immediately after that, you uncover greed, evil, and corruption. Your character instantaneously starts evolving. How did you land the leading role?

DUSZEJKO

I slipped myself into Olga's dreams nightly. I was unrelenting. Every time she'd drift off, I'd be there. I'd speak of my two missing dogs. I'm irresistible. So, she started writing to me. The townsfolk labelled me a crackpot because I fought for the animals. Hunters and poachers were slaughtering innocent living beings for nothing more than the horrendous sport of it. They'd set up feeding stations and sit in their pulpits and kill them. It was like inviting someone to dinner and murdering them.

REPORTER

This book is a murder mystery, chock-full of mind-blowing twists. Are you happy with your character + tell me a little about the murders?

DUSZEJKO

The town is diseased, corrupt, patriarchal. Big Foot was an act of revenge manifested by the animal he slaughtered and choked on its bones. There are three more murders: the Police Commandant, a Fox Farmer, and the Town Pastor. Each of them was complicit in the torturous deaths of animals + perhaps my dogs. This novel explores the possibility of animals seeking revenge. As for my character, I'm ecstatic. I may have been written as a crackpot old dame, but in reality, layer after layer of depth is added to who I am, and I must say, I turned out delightful with unbending fortitude. My role is to clean out evil. Along the way, I encounter a litter of colourful characters. If I say so myself, I'm sort of an old crackpot superhero. Revenge comes with an animalistic twist.

REPORTER

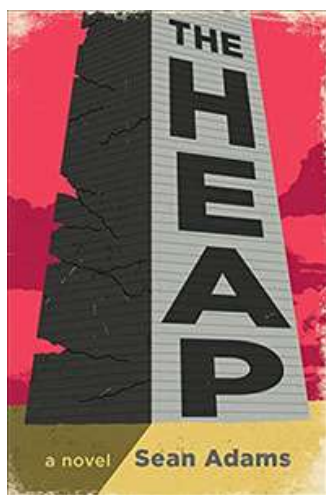
Thanks for your time.

"Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead."

What happens when animals seek revenge with the help of a determined, quirky, often hilarious, loveable, and vengeful crackpot?

THE HEAP

SEAN ADAMS



A profound look into the loneliness often consuming each of us.

How did the book make me feel/think?

A massive tower, nearly five hundred stories tall, a city within, collapses – a heap of rubble remains.

A digging team looks for survivors.

A radio station broadcasts from inside the wreckage.

On the dig team is the brother of the broadcaster. They connect. Their connection becomes a voyeuristically visceral smash hit. One catch is they aren't emotionally close and awkwardly use their link to develop a relationship. Is it possible?

Mix in the developer's greed + the disparity between the *haves* and *have nots* who lived inside the mega-tower. Toss in corruption + a need to bombard the world with 24/7 marketing of product after product – and what do you have?

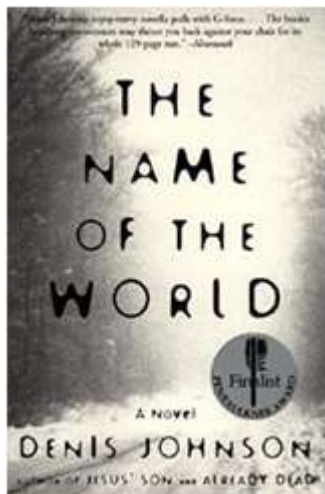
Adams left you with an exciting romp delving deeply into the ills of society today + a profound look into the loneliness often consuming each of us as we meander through a world bursting with scorn.

That's how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: September 15, 2020

THE NAME OF THE WORLD

DENIS JOHNSON



Pain emanates from every page.

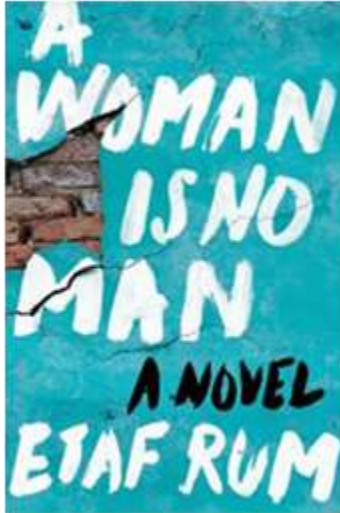
How did the book make me feel/think?

Denis Johnson's writing has a way to pull you in, embrace you—with each word orchestrated in luminous poetic harmony with pain emanating from every page. Johnson finds solace in the anguish of living—misery only a few can escape.

I don't want his world to be accurate. It isn't. But in a gloriously decadently dark rapture, it might be?

A WOMAN IS NO MAN

ETAF RUM



Until the shackles of shame are removed, we are all complicit in the oppression of women.

How did the book make me feel/think?

BREATHLESS. MOVED.

A WOMAN IS NO MAN is a powerful work of “fiction” deserving of mandatory reading by every man and woman. It is a formidable look at a vile, and diseased part of a culture often disparaged for political gain and racist superiority.

The writing is exquisite, gripping, heart-rending. I often squirmed reading about the stereotyping the Arab culture as monstrously sick, almost less-than-human, evil, less than worthy of understanding.

Then: A strange thing happened as the pages slipped by; I understood the plight of women is often debilitating, limiting, controlled, regardless of ethnicity.

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As a white man, it is easy to be coerced into the trap of perceived superiority |I’m not| by drinking a Kool-Aid laced with fear and misunderstanding—often for political gain. No Caucasian can grasp what it is to be anything other than white—we often fall victim to thinking we are immune to oppression. We are often sold that white is a birthright to be revered, and we cannot see the disgusting acts portrayed within the pages. We are. And we do.

Being white limits my understanding, but it doesn’t limit my desire to learn from others’ words. Another page and I retreated from my belief all Arabs are misogynistic terrorists.

“Heaven lies under a mother’s feet.”

Etaf, by sharing that powerful verse from the Qur’an, erased many of my misconceptions. I understand that a despicable sickness infesting part of the Arab culture needs to be eradicated. But it is not the whole. So, I thought of other books I’ve read. The subject of these books is heart-wrenching. The words shared highlight women continuously are forced to struggle for a sense of equality, to be taken as more than subservient, regardless of culture, from the beginning of time.

“EDUCATED” by Tara Westover sheds light on many of the atrocities in the Mormon world (white).

“KNOW MY NAME” by Chanel Miller encapsulated the struggles of being raped by a privileged white assaulter.

PAUSE FOR A PERSONAL MOMENT

I was a secret baby, born in a secret place—the shame of community, religion, family. I was supposed to take a secret to my grave until I found out by accident the truth.

WHAT THESE CAPTIVATING STORIES HAVE IN COMMON

A perceived shame created by unwell men’s needs fuels them. They share common threads.

They blast forth the realities of the illness of limiting opportunity for control.

They bring to the forefront the need to continually evolve and engage in dialogue to change the fact for the better.

The need for control is a plague. If we are honest with ourselves, sure, Western Culture may be ahead in exterminating the sickness.

11 *But really, are we?*

These truths have all occurred during my lifetime.

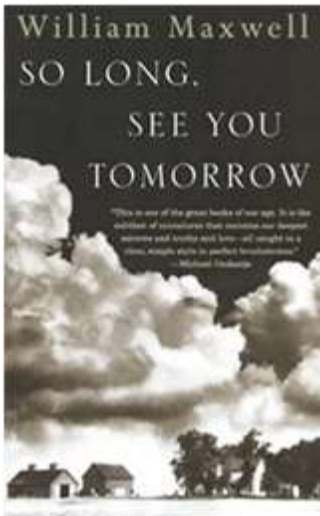
Each of us needs to look inward in order to change and make the world a kinder place.

As upsetting as **A WOMAN IS NO MAN** is, I am grateful Etaf Rum had the strength + courage to share her voice.

Until the shackles of shame are removed, we are all complicit in the oppression of women.

SO LONG, SEE YOU TOMORROW

WILLIAM MAXWELL



Heartache in the 1920s is no different than grief in 2020 ...

How did the book make me feel/think?

Two kids. One was privileged. One an outcast. An unlikely friendship. The outcast's father commits murder. The friendship + many lives are torn apart.

This radiant little book transported me to a time long before I walked on this earth and helped me realize humanity's challenges, regardless of the times, share similar threads. Heartache in the 1920s does not differ from grief in 2020.

So Long, See You Tomorrow, tugged at my heartstrings and is filled with heartrending sorrow. One section in particular left me shattered: Maxwell writes part of the book from a dog's perspective after it turned its world upside down because of his best friend's loss.

Love + Friendship + Deception + A Quest for Understanding burst forth from every page. That's how this book made me feel.