

BOOK THOUGHTS

BATCH 12



BY **LINDSAY** WINCHERAUK

BOOK THOUGHTS: BATCH 12

BOOK THOUGHTS

BATCH 12



2

1. THE TOWN – SHAUN PRESCOTT
2. AGATHA – ANNE CATHRINE BOMANN
3. THE MYSTERY OF HENRI PICK – DAVID FOENKINOS
4. THE SECRET LIFE OF GROCERIES – BENJAMIN LORR
5. FLEISHMAN IS IN TROUBLE – TAFFY BRODESSER-ANKER
6. THE TOPEKA SCHOOL – BEN LERNER
7. VESPER FLIGHTS – HELEN MACDONALD
8. PEOPLE ALWAYS ASK ME? – ROBERT CONFIAINT
9. SEAWEEED – MIEK ZWAMBORN
10. ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE – GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ

BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL

BLACK = FICTION

DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL

PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES

ORANGE = POETRY

BOOK THOUGHTS: BATCH 12

THE TOWN

SHAUN PRESCOTT



Is this as good as it gets?

How did the book make me feel/think?

I scratch my head. What am I reading?

Is this a book about nothing? Everything?

I'm confused; the prose courses through me.

I like it.

I don't know why?

The characters are dullards—to the point of being profoundly, confoundedly, fascinating.

I laugh.

Is this book about gentrification, xenophobia, sameness, misguided fear?

Towns are disappearing. Why do they exist, to begin with?

Nothing happens.

Everything happens.

Corporations infest the outskirts, dumbing us all down.

Making our experiences painfully tedious, breaking those swallowed by their promises of more.

Can we escape?

The town disappears rapidly.

A hole appears on the page.

I slide into it and arrive at a different page.

The characters grow into who something trapped them at being.

Gaps are spread between the vanilla-ness of the slapdash mess of perceived wealth.

Tentacles full suburbia, town centers collapse.

The broken can't escape.

They die within the town.

"The holes were spreading quickly, doubling overnight, and it would come as no surprise if they started appearing inside of people too. This possibility of holes appearing inside people had never occurred to me until I said it. Now I wondered if the holes had been

appearing inside people for years. What if the librarian had a hole inside him? What if I did?"

I laugh again. I don't know why?

The destruction of souls engulfs us all.

Another hole appears on the page.

I slide into it, searching for more – for the city's depth.

I escape the town to become more – I will grow – the city will be my saviour.

In reality, the city is a collection of connected non-descript towns, a strip mall appears, and addiction and despair add colour to living.

I retreat to the mirror.

I snicker.

Am I breaking?

The city disappears as we race toward the...?

Is this as good as it gets?

WRITTEN: September 28, 2020

AGATHA

ANNE CATHRINE BOMANN



Wondrous, evocative, a poignant look at the beauty of vulnerability.

How did the book make me feel/think?

KNOCK. KNOCK.

Welcome, take a seat; what brings you here today?

Well, several things, I feel lost, confused, overwhelmed.

My childhood keeps repeating on a continuous loop. My parents pushed and pushed. They said they encouraged me for my own good, but really, I don't think it was for me.

"I hated the piano, and I hated hearing them talk about me. It was all about showing other people what exemplary parents they were. It had nothing to do with me."

My parents thirst for me to be more — I've carried it with me for my whole life. It crippled my thoughts, haunting me to this day.

"I'm angry because I have accomplished nothing. I should have been someone, and I'm nothing."

My interactions with others have paid a heavy price. I'm often lost for words when silent empathy may be the best course. Once, while facing death, all I could muster was.

"'Thomas is a good man,' I said, struck once again by how inadequate words can be."

I cry. Talking with you resonates loudly with me. You touch on life's vulnerabilities. We can't grow without the beauty of vulnerability being stripped down to its essence.

I worry about you. You're 72, alone. I fear love is missing from your life equation. You drink in everyone else's pain every day.

"You can end up a tiny creature if nobody cares about you. Sometimes I wonder whether such a creature is even a person at all."

Promise me you'll allow yourself to be vulnerable; promise me you will let yourself be loved.

You've spoken volumes to me, and I will leave you with this.

"Her face was a lifeless mask, and not until I squinted did, I see the tears fall like drops of ink onto the fabric of the blouse."

Enjoyment Factor: I think it may find a place in my Top 3.

THE MYSTERY OF HENRI PICK

DAVID FOENKINOS



Amelie meets Knives Out.

How did the book make me feel/think?

A madcap caper with a literary bent: Amelie meets Knives Out. Deception on every page.

A gaggle of colourful characters traipsing through life, searching for light amongst shadowy darkness.

A twist.

A turn.

Luscious comedy – nuanced in mystery. I laugh.

Whodunit – I mean: Whowroteit.

I write.

The Mystery of Henri Pick captures most writers' dream to live in obscurity while being revered and well-read.

"As if recognition consisted of being understood. Nobody is ever understood, and certainly not writers. They wander through kingdoms of strange emotions and, most of the time, do not even understand themselves."

Enjoyment factor for me: I think it may find a place in my Top 25.

WRITTEN: October 8, 2020

THE SECRET LIFE OF GROCERIES

BENJAMIN LORR



A gripping dash of memoir with a colossal sprinkling of investigative journalism + a delightful mix of shredded wit.

How did the book make me feel/think?

I'm sitting on a picnic bench in beautiful Stanley Park in Vancouver, enjoying my favourite Korean chicken sandwich. The smoke has temporarily cleared from the wildfires of 2020. I dive into the book—a book that reads like a gripping dash of memoir with a colossal sprinkling of investigative journalism + a delightful mix of shredded wit to lighten the taste. Fortunately, I finish my lunch before I get to an early part of the book, expounding how chickens go from animal to product before returning to our tables as food.

That night, during dinner, my throat closed. I can't eat, and I violently bring up the few bites of dinner I try to eat.

DID THE BOOK DO THIS TO ME?

The next day I had emergency life-saving surgery to remove a growth from my esophagus. Once again: the book?

While at the hospital, as I wait for my invasive, excruciating surgery, I devour most of this book. The pages keep turning.

I ponder: Where do I fit in, in the food chain?

I learn there are two kinds of groceries:

1. Stores where they overwhelm us with every product imaginable—in massive stores—competing on price point only.
2. Stores where yoga-pant wearing educated, but maybe not intelligent persons, roam the aisles purchasing products they can barely afford because they believe they are saving the planet. Puke.

A light went on: Groceries don't sell food; they sell experiences + Store 2 doesn't really exist. If it did, the poorer members of society wouldn't be ladled with the guilt of purchasing on price point alone to feed themselves and their families. Nutrition shouldn't be a luxury.

I dabbled in the industry for a short period. I chased the dangling carrot of \$\$\$ by racing

around a colossal distribution warehouse. Risking injury on a 3,000-pound-pallet jack—timed, picking orders requiring an Olympian effort. Only to be let go before the \$\$ \$'s and benefits kicked in, like 99.999% of the other workers, predominantly immigrants, were let go as well, for failing.

TRUCKING SURELY MUST BE BETTER?

No. It is peppered with addiction, violence, sexual abuse, and indebtedness because the carrot comes with a truck + a 112% turnover rate.

HOW ABOUT WORKING IN A STORE?

Sure, but personality isn't a requirement; the staffing algorithm only sees numbers. And besides, it's heart-wrenching not being able to afford the foods you stock on the shelves.

HOW ABOUT INSPECTING FOOD?

The FDA doesn't protect us. Lawyers dangling lawsuits like shredded cheese over the producers' do. The industry is ripe with corruption as privatized auditors, working ungodly hours, are bought off to protect bottom lines.

BECOMING A FOOD ENTREPRENEUR SOUNDS NOBLE?

It is, but it requires luck and deep pockets, not only to produce a product but to pay to get it on the shelves and pay to get it off the shelf if it doesn't sell, as you grind your way to obscurity.

Let's travel to Thailand for shrimp. Immigrants from poor neighbouring countries are captured and enslaved to work. Working in beyond horrid conditions. Stripping oceans of all living matter. Enslaved people who are not paid and have no recourse against unscrupulous fisheries. As they chase the dream of a better life. However, they are treated like they are criminals. Bringing disease, bringing... but willing to do the work the people of Thailand are no longer willing to do. Yet, they are forced underground and are treated as illegal aliens. Sound familiar?

The Secret Life of Groceries is a captivating book that opened my eyes. As much as the machine seems out of control, by opening our eyes, changes are slowly being made + media exposure, at times, is laser-focused on the horrendous fishing practices + unfair labour practices.

They geared everything in the grocery chain toward bringing US cheap products with little regard for the toll upon the people doing the work.

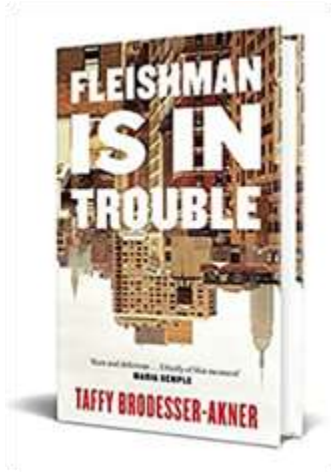
I must run. It's lunchtime. The smoke from the wildfires has returned. I have lost my appetite for food, so I think I will consume smokey air today.

When I can eat again, I'll smile at the staff the next time I'm in my local grocery.

WRITTEN: October 2, 2020

FLEISHMAN IS IN TROUBLE

TAFFY BRODESSER-ANKER



A fascinatingly upsetting look into the dichotomy of marriage + relationships.

How did the book make me feel/think?

Love comes, marriage follows; forever has arrived.

But has it?

Life is hard; symbiotic is not defined. It cracks. Fragility burdens the male ego.

A man only has to be childish for most of his life, hard-done-by when his needs are not paramount.

A woman's journey is unique.

Can a woman be driven and emotional at the same time?

A man might find drive intoxicating – as long as it doesn't come with emotions – we fill life with emotion.

A woman becomes a working mother.

A descriptor laced in disdain.

A man picks up the children from school: we dubbed him a hero.

He drinks it in, basking in the admiration.

His wife makes ten-times his income.

His ego fractures.

He stops listening.

He never truly did.

The fragility of manliness needs to blame.

He lives voyeuristically through a non-committed friend.

At the beginning of this page-turner, his marriage ruptures, his wife leaves as he trips upward to heaven, heaven he determines to be 'meaningless conquests' found on dating sites. She drops into the despair of hell, trying to satisfy an unquenchable thirst to be seen, be relevant, and understood.

He never truly listened. He came from privilege. His wife crawled and clawed her way from obscurity, rising toward fame + fortune. She succeeds. But at what cost?

The frailty of his mind kept looking to blame, and his wife needed to be heard.

“He had parents—a mother whom he damned for his terrible self-image, never once taking into consideration that the person he was talking to about this would have killed to have a mother to blame for everything.”

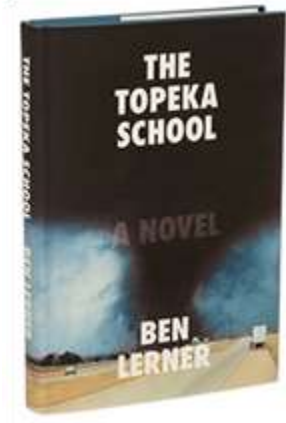
“Fleishman is in Trouble” is a fascinatingly upsetting look into the dichotomy of marriage + relationships, deftly leaving readers examining if what they are reading is something they see in themselves. Something that might make them whole.

Enjoyment Factor: I think it may find a place in my Top 25.

WRITTEN: October 23, 2020

THE TOPEKA SCHOOL

BEN LERNER



A story suggesting white identity might be nothing but a stunted metaphor.

How did the book make me feel/think?

This is tough to write my thoughts on.

Did I love it?

Hate it?

Understand it?

Somewhere in between?

How do we live life to its fullest when continually struggling to belong, define, and be more?

I grew up in insular Saskatchewan.

Why is that relevant?

Saskatchewan shares threads with Kansas. Cultural non-diversity creates a world of cultural misappropriation. We want what we can't have; we want to be who we are not while condemning the various things we so desire.

White entitled, sheltered kids, lost souls, all growing up in the same houses, filled with identical bedrooms, kitchens, garages, lives, often lashing out at what they don't understand, lacking the travels to grasp how deficient in thought they really are. They strike out at those they reckon weaker. They shout out racist hymns while spreading rap lyrics at a furious pace while their pants hang down. An identity crisis brews; it is stirred by the generations before, trapped in the identical spinning vortices and in the death throes of dying marriages. Their lakes are artificial, their lives are shaded but translucent.

They need to feel superior.

They're not.

They don't comprehend they need to struggle to grow; they need to look outside of their own needs — their growth becomes a stunted metaphor.

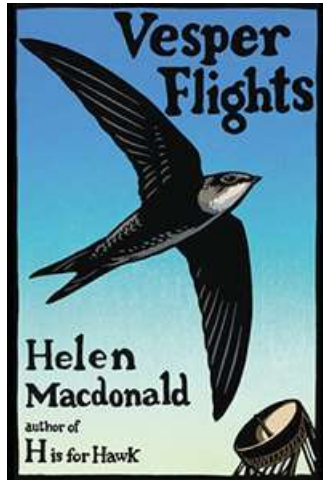
I moved away from insular Saskatchewan (a beautiful place). I discovered I'm not the only one who matters. I'm not entitled; familial darkness blew apart my identity. I'm trying to grow. I want to grow.

That's how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: November 8, 2020

VESPER FLIGHTS

HELEN MACDONALD



Animals are magnificent feeling + thinking creatures...

How did the book make me feel/think?

ANIMALS. HUMANS.

Animals are magnificent feeling + thinking creatures crucial to our health and the planet's health. Rarely do we humans take a moment to consider what they want + need. For most of us, they represent a mystery we like to look at in zoos and in the wilderness, believing they are there for nothing more than our viewing pleasure. And disgustingly, to hunt, or to feast on—I do not apologize for using disgustingly.

Humans are mass murders. We rarely care about the well beings of the animals that share the planet with us. Most of us definitely do not watch when we invade their habitats, forcing them into extinction, turning what once was wondrous, bio-diverse eco-systems into new communities only sustainable for our own consumptive urges. Another sub-division—thousands of deaths. Do you want to come over to a barbeque and a swim?

Wildfires rage—plumes of smoke rise and impact communities thousands of miles away. My home city of Vancouver has the worst air quality in the world for a few days. They advised people to stay indoors. The news flashes scenes of humans barely escaping the onslaught. “We’re losing everything. OMG. We’ll have to start over.” Cry. Cry. Cry.

In the meantime, new developments are nearing completion; thousands of acres are felled. Not once was an animal interviewed about the impact on them.

Imagine an animal, “We’re losing everything. OMG. I guess we’ll perish.” Silence.

Displaced refugees from the wildfires move into the new subdivision and repeat the cycle.

Plumes of smoke continue to rise.

Animals can’t go indoors.

Birds’ flight paths are skewed.

We don’t care.

We build a new subdivision. We fell thousand of acres of trees. So is our turn to perish next?

That’s how this book made me feel.

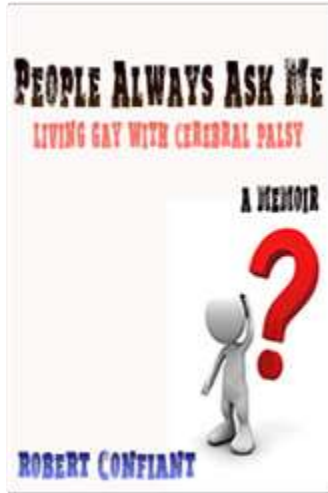
Oh yeah, I almost forgot. I gained a different perspective on the movie “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest.”

And – I care – animals think, feel, and need.

“Later, she points out that the Earth itself is in no danger. ‘It will survive whatever we throw at it. What is in danger is the environment that made us possible. We are cutting the branch we are sitting on. So, either we understand that quickly, or life will go on – but a different one.’”

PEOPLE ALWAYS ASK ME

ROBERT CONFIAINT



A story about perseverance + overcoming the most formidable odds.

How did the book make me feel/think?

In *“People Always Ask Me,”* Robert Confiant swings the door wide open into his life, a life rife with challenges because being gay with a disability – could be nothing more than flush.

What makes this a fascinating gem is Confiant’s sparsity in language usage. Reading it flowed from page-page without being bogged down with fluff or a need to overdramatize his realities. Life can be challenging. Toss gay into the mix, and the difficulty quotient increases tenfold or more. Mix in a debilitating disability, how could any of us articulate what we feel or find the empathy to understand the daunting hurdles anyone with that mix of characteristics would have to endure?

We may not be able to walk a mile (for Confiant walking is a challenge) in Robert’s shoes – but what we can do is listen (read).

Confiant deftly uses his ease of language in sharing his struggles, without whining about the cards he’s been dealt—how?—with an unflinching dose of courage—it’s all he knew—but courage.

A difficult upbringing.

A thirst for belonging.

A struggle to thrive. Gay.

And yet, Robert falls, gets up, trips into depression and avoidance, but somehow, gets up again, moves on, and keeps clawing upward, forward.

One passage highlights how far humanity has come. Yet, I found it upsetting and shining a burning light on how far we still need to go – Confiant finds love. He moves with his husband to the judgment of the Bible Belt in British Columbia (Abbotsford). Yet, *“I believe our not being so out, and in your face, about being gay has helped us integrate within the community so effortlessly.”*

It’s a shame that with all Confiant has had to overcome throughout this captivating journey through his life, he still feels *“not being so out”* is something he must do to fit in.

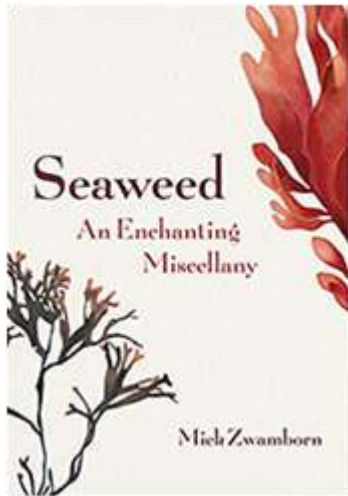
Confiant has had to withstand more than most people would have to in several lifetimes. His story is an essential read and a testament to his strength of character.

It is a must-read for anyone, gay, disabled, straight: offering a glimmer of hope that with the strength of will and perseverance, you can overcome, thrive, and look at the bright side of life regardless of the shade continually. Being thrown your way!

WRITTEN: October 28, 2020

SEAWEED

MIEK ZWAMBORN



A gorgeously illustrated, fascinating look into an alien planet.

How did the book make me feel/think?

Thanks to Greystone Books + Miek Zwamborn, I dove into the gorgeously illustrated, fascinating look into an alien planet that occupies about 70% on top of this glorious world we inhabit.

Land. Water.

Advantage, well, actually neither.

Why?

Because there is a parasite roaming the land, most of us are unknowingly willing to destroy the water world paramount

for most species' survival.

Seaweed: An Enchanting Miscellany is a captivating look into a near-mythical, richly varied water plant that has inspired artists, musicians, photographers, and sea goers from the dawn of time.

Little did I know of the spiritual + healthy + world-saving nature of this diverse foliage of the sea.

Little did I know we could not breathe without seaweed.

Little did I know if grandpa added seaweed to his diet, he might reduce his flatulence by upward of 60%.

"... the addition of just a small amount of *Asparagopsis taxiformis* macroalgae (less than 1% of the total feed) reduced methane emissions in sheep by 50-75%."

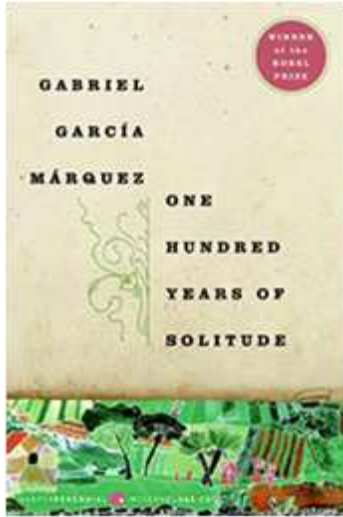
I've now read a book about seaweed. I am still a neophyte on the subject — but I have a better understanding of why we all get to stay alive, as well as a sense of what we need to do to save the planet.

I Gotta run. I have a craving for Fish in a Seaweed Coat, with a squeeze of lemon.

WRITTEN: October 7, 2020

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE

GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ



A little gold, goldfish swims by, someone discovers ice, someone levitates...

How did the book make me feel/think?

I once worked with an editor who compared my writing to Marquez.

The cover says Nobel Prize Winner. This sounds promising!

The chapters are all-around twenty pages.

Some paragraphs run for five.

I tried to read a few paragraphs aloud in one take → I became breathless.

For an English-speaking Canadian, the Spanish names became jumbled.

A little gold goldfish swims by.

Someone discovers ice.

Someone levitates.

Endless wars are threatening a mythical make-believe town—I think?

Outsiders from a banana company bring a mix of wealth and despair—I think?

The town's fabric is torn, threatened to be ripped to shreds.

Some people have sex, sometimes with the underaged, maybe with animals. I'm not sure?

People age.

Someone eats the earth.

Someone is beautiful.

Someone is not.

A hundred years pass, give or take a hundred years. I'm confused. Seriously.

The words leave the page entering my cranium, but before they lay down to ruminate, they POOF!—are gone.

Everything flows in a conundrum of descriptions—am I high?—no, just reading.

What?

For heaven's sake: I don't know.

An editor I worked with compared my writing to Marquez → I must ask myself what I have just read because it most certainly beats me.

WRITTEN: November 8, 2020