

BOOK THOUGHTS

BATCH 14



BY **LINDSAY** WINCHERAUK

BOOK THOUGHTS: BATCH 14

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BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL

BLACK = FICTION

DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL

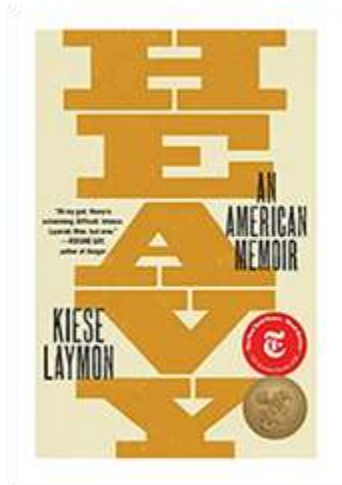
PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES

ORANGE = POETRY

BOOK THOUGHTS: BATCH 14

HEAVY

KIESE LAYMON



"HEAVY" resonated with me, the most of any book I've read.

How did the book make me feel/think?

I'm white. Writing thoughts on books on anything but the white experience can be daunting.

The day after my twenty-fifth birthday, my father died. Then, just before Christmas, two years later, my mother died less.

Sixteen years later, I discovered the people I watched die were not my real birth parents.

Then, in October 2016, I met my mother for the first time as my mother, alongside her death bed. One week later, my mother died for a second time.

I am not capable of getting past the threads of my life story. They will haunt me forever, triggered by certain days + holidays.

"HEAVY" resonated with me the most of any book I've read.

I realize that I'm white no matter how extreme my life events have been. I have never had to face the realities of trying to be anything other than what I am, to succeed.

That's what a 400-year advantage gives us white folk.

One afternoon, at a local watering hole, when race came up, *some of my friends claimed race issues are not an issue in Canada (they are).*

When I react with disgust at their statements, I've been met with, *"You need to stop reading books about the plights of others."*

I won't back down. Instead, our responsibility is to stamp out attitudes by having uncomfortable discourse – even if it ends friendships.

"HEAVY" shines a powerful light on the disparities of centuries of oppression and the unearned advantages of white marginality. It delicately touches on the difference between black + white wealth.

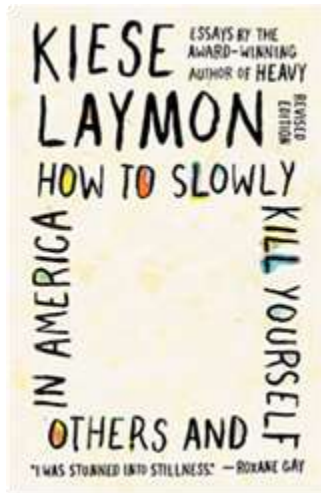
I'm white. I don't think I'd have survived my life events – if dropped on me – after being held down for 400-years.

That's how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: March 6, 2021

HOW TO SLOWLY KILL YOURSELF AND OTHERS IN AMERICA

KIESE LAYMON



I don't want to be racist.

How did the book make me feel/think?

I don't want to be racist.

How can I not be racist?

I grew up surrounded by people, mostly looking like me. We sucked. They had conditioned us from birth, and we'd come from generation after generation of whites, being told there will always be someone below you—if you listen to us—watch what we create for you; read what we tell you—learn what we teach you—pay attention—we're giving you the advantage.

We had a Siamese cat named Guy. My brother nicknamed it Guy blank-blank, blank, blank-blank, blank-face. When I was eight, I'd stand on our porch and call out Guy's nickname, signalling Guy to come home.

One of my aunts, after visiting Jamaica, stated her opinions on Jamaican fathers. It wasn't glowing.

When I was twenty-three, my girlfriend's parents told her he wished she behaved more like the polite Japanese volleyball girls they had tasked him with driving around, during a tournament.

We'd get floor-licking drunk. That was okay because we were not Indigenous.

The police have pulled me over for traffic offences occasionally; one time, I swore at the police officer—without repercussion—without fearing repercussion.

Police stopped a friend and me while pushing our car home drunk—no repercussions.

A few days ago, I saw two non-white guys looking down at a causeway; my first thought, I'd never say aloud, shamed me. Why was the ignorant 'first thought' on the ready?

I want to share with the few black people I know, announce I've read this book. I'm not sure if that's okay. I think it would reveal how much of an ass I can be.

"How to Slowly Kill..." and other books about those who do not look like me are salves to heal my conditioning. **They call out to white people:** look inward and continue growing. We are not unique; we all bleed red.

I'll never truly comprehend the unwavering advantage whiteness has given me + the unforgivable truths we've inflicted on those who don't look like us, just because they have conditioned us to believe the festering lies of entitlement.

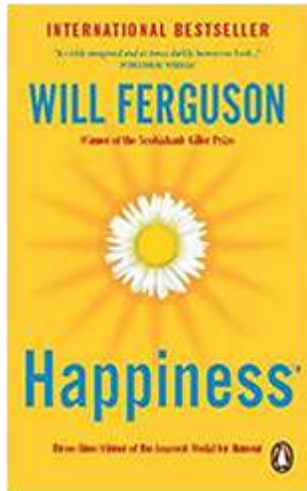
I don't want to be racist.

So, I'll read more.

WRITTEN: January 22, 2021

HAPPINESS™

WILL FERGUSON



I laughed until I could laugh no more. Then, I peed myself.

How did the book make me feel/think?

I'm currently struggling with a bout of depression, like most people in the current state of the world. Most of us are facing undaunting uncertainty as COVID-19 blasts around the earth. My struggle stems from losing my career. I'm sixty – WTF is next (?) derides me daily. I know I'm not alone – not alone isn't comforting. I don't want to discount depression; perhaps, I'm just sad.

Stop. Think. What is your perfect weather day?

Is it 25 degrees Celsius and sunny (77 Fahrenheit), allowing you to bask in the warmth?

Or is it 0 degrees (32 Fahrenheit) with fresh powder to carve up on the slopes?

Now imagine every day was that day: Would that bring you delight?

If everyone lived their perfect day every day, wouldn't life be dull, pointless, droning on and on and on, dour, with humour stripped away from our souls?

Wouldn't it?

"HAPPINESS" tickles our funny bones by exorcizing the insanity of happiness fulfilled. The humour is brilliantly nuanced and, for this reader, relating to the nuance, helped relieve my bout of depression/sadness, if only for a moment, as I guffawed wholeheartedly while realizing what makes life sweet is the struggle. Without struggle, the happiness we derive from life would be nothing more than cult-like sameness if happiness were a given.

Vices may be bad for us, but without question, vices allow us to fail, climb, rejoice, celebrate, and become who we are.

If you need a break from the day-to-day challenges, I unstintingly prescribe a dose of Will Ferguson's "Happiness."

In my Top 25!

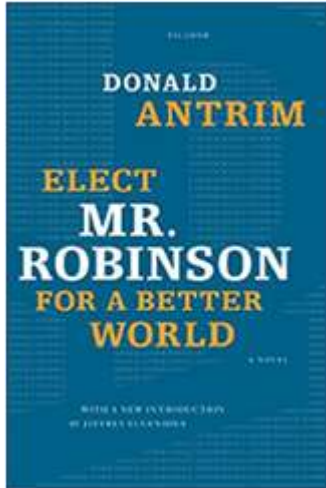
"Sober men don't dance. We need our vices. We need our cotton-candy fluff because life is sad and short and over far too soon."

That's how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: March 29, 2021

ELECT MR. ROBINSON FOR A BETTER WORLD

DAVID ANTRIM



I laughed until I could laugh no more, then I cringed.

How did the book make me feel/think?

Come with me over here. Hello.

In the early 80s, I used to be the top mixed-tape DJ at my University.

Two tape decks and a microphone!

Fast forward to the here and now. Clickbait clicked: 'TOP 500 ALL-TIME ALBUMS.'

Scroll. Scroll. Scroll.

How could I have missed several truckloads of ear-pleasing gems?

I did.

There is soooo much glorious music.

Read. Read. Read.

'Elect Mr. Robinson...' — why did I select?

I don't know. I'm glad I did; it has made it into my TOP 10 ALL TIME.

The book is a mess. It takes us along on a disturbing ride through a dystopian world. A world where the mayor of the city in this gruesome story launches springer missiles into a reflective pool — massacring innocent people — for no reason.

His punishment: being drawn and quartered by vehicles, not horses. His last wish (to Mr. Robinson): give my body parts a proper burial.

The city falls into a dark quagmire where the citizenry dips into a pool of paranoia, building moats (violent) around their homes. Those who've lost loved ones fall into poverty, are ostracized, and begin living as survivors in a city park. Mr. Robinson's wife identifies as a prehistoric fish. Mr. Robinson wants to teach the city children about the horrors of humanity. I laughed until I could laugh no more, then I cringed.

This book is a delightfully (d)ucked up mess; dark — beyond dark; I laughed more.

The ending stretches squeamishness to such an intense level — I'm not sure what my love of this book says about me?

Newsflash: We're living in a dystopian world, NOW.

Read. Read. Read.

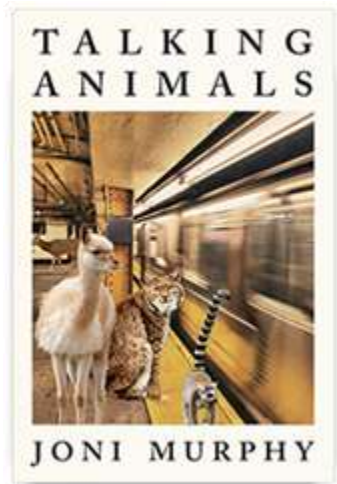
I don't want you to miss (this) or any literary gem.

That's how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: March 5, 2021

TALKING ANIMALS

JONI MURPHY



I laughed. Pondered. Cringed. Became aware. And then, frightened.

How did the book make me feel/think?

TALKING ANIMALS, this should be a cute, light-spirited read about our lives from the point-of-view of the animals, primarily an adorable alpaca who'd emigrated from South America to NYC.

It is both hilarious and cute, but it is so much more.

I flip a page, and I'm immediately drawn into the destructiveness of us, the humans, inflict upon everything living, everything we need to survive—for our health and well-being, for our very existence.

I laughed. Pondered. Cringed. Became aware. And then, frightened.

It is not like I don't know what the animals in this poignant tale are trying to convey to. Still, much like the inhabitants of the sea and greed's persistent lack of care for anything but hoarding wealth, well, if it is not glaring in your face, all of us are complicit in the consumption of everything, which ultimately is leading toward an inevitable ending.

"What's destroying us is this slow carcinogenic drip. It comes from everywhere. What you can't see is more dangerous than what you can."

A friend who used to be a friend (a willing participant in the hoarding of wealth) travelled to the Java Sea—there is no seafood to be found. Imagine that.

We are floundering in capitalism and are distracted by life and shiny things.

What Joni Murphy adroitly does in this entertaining, somewhat dystopian romp is she brings to the forefront, through the eyes of a delightful alpaca: what power, greed, racism, corruption, and the many forces we humans must come to terms with together. Then, battle through by dropping our opportunities to allow those who come after us to have a future.

We're all in this collective, and hopefully, we will open our eyes and realize the land needs

"The pig was blaming the world's problems on fish, when fish were getting poisoned and eaten, and eaten and poisoned, by all the creatures on land who'd built their industries on sea exploitation."

"I learned the rich are weak, twisted creatures. I learned to hate them while serving them smoked-salmon canapés."

That's how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: January 12, 2021

ON SUCH A FULL SEA

CHANG-RAE LEE



An enthralling, captivating, gripping, dystopian (?) read.

How did the book make me feel/think?

I've read a few dystopian-themed books lately. What I've discovered: there might not be such a thing as a dystopian world. We've arrived. We're living it. Open your eyes + ears. We often accept the truth as the words of those with the loudest talking sticks. But the thing is, it's not the truth.

They dealt the cards. If you're lucky, they have dealt you a decent hand. Or if you are fortunate (?) your generational cards have given you an unearned upper hand.

We're tossed into our lots in life. Climbing out, is insurmountable. They dropped us into set categories. Some of us must make the best of menial in an angry world. Some of those dealt strong non-generational hands forget where they've come from. They're small people, often with

ginormous trucks. A silver spoon drops out of one of their mouths; they don't realize they are being used as well. It doesn't matter. A safety net is in place; they will never fall far.

As for the rest of us, we must fight and claw, often over each other, as we desperately try to make our way through the impossible. Struggle usually replaces kindness.

We are all sick. Nobody is immune, except for one man, who may be the cure for all – the entitled want to use him, to harvest the cure.

Eyes constantly darting, never connecting. Money comes before humanity. Business is heartless. We're the product: Humans. Damaged. Flawed. Barely holding on. We shamelessly hide behind a shaded false mask of direction when used up. When used up, tell the broken: This is no longer for you. Each time, your soul dies a little more. You don't care; you drive a big truck.

But I have nowhere else to go. Life has ravaged me. You are draining the last droplets of my plasma.

Go. It's not working anymore.

Please. I have another drop, you futilely plead.

A week later: Hey, did you hear, So-and-so died?

We pretend to care. So-and-so had nowhere else to go. We took what we could. There is no time to mourn; another soul barely holding on is waiting to take So-and-so(s)' place.

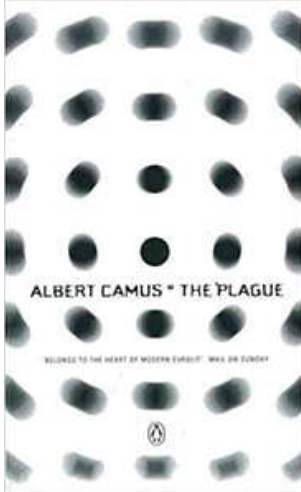
ON SUCH A FULL SEA is enthralling. It's a dystopian read where we might, if we don't take a moment to pause and realize, as Chang-Rae Lee weaves in this breathtaking futuristic tale of where we might head – in reality, we may already have arrived – now our challenge is to have the dealer deal fairer hands.

That's how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: March 19, 2021

THE PLAGUE

ALBERT CAMUS



Humanity is living through a social experiment.

How did the book make me feel/think?

The Plague was written in 1947—as I read; it felt like I was reading the here and now. Seriously, my arm hairs stood on end.

The authorities debate whether to alert its citizenry; every second is vital. It becomes inevitable—they must put measures in place—or we'll all perish. More denial (not) corrupts those responsible for the greater good—they think primarily about their power—how to maintain it. We all become expendable. There is no escaping until it becomes apparent; bodies pile up—the suffering and fear become unbearable.

Many deny. They believe there is a massive conspiracy... to

bleeping what?

What's the possible endgame?

Controlling us?

Tracking us?

I look at my phone. We're already controlled, tracked... idiots.

Some use the Plague to enrich themselves. Those trapped in uncertainty; fear whether they will ever be okay again. Others keep fighting the selfish battle not giving a damn about the rest of us suffering.

The Plague and Covid-19 are social experiments. It is a test of humanity—can we come together and look outward past our selfishness and understand we must all rise and do whatever we can to take care of each other?

They are tests on the strength of our capacity to empathize with others who face the same invisible demons by understanding the outcome for you might not be the same as mine.

The Plague, written in 1947, is a profound reminder that man is a small idea that needs to recapture the capacity for love for all. Regardless of societal, economic, or demographic differences, and return us, or maybe deliver us, for the first time, to a kinder world where discrimination is levelled off or eradicated.

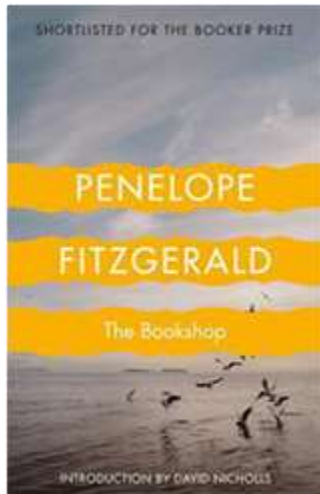
We're all in this together. Be kind. Wear a mask. Don't let selfishness eliminate an understanding that your thoughts are not always right.

That's how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: February 17, 2021

THE BOOKSHOP

PENELOPE FITZGERALD



A story about an underdog battling the evil of 'have.'

How did the book make me feel/think?

Florence Green is a lost widow, floundering in a small town, trying to matter.

She's vulnerable.

She's trying to cope.

To dig herself out of the doldrums, Florence opens a bookshop to bring hopes + dreams to a town left in the past, filled with simple people living simple lives. Anytown. Anywhere.

'It is a good book, and therefore you should try to sell it to the inhabitants of Hardborough. They won't understand it, but that is all good. Understanding makes the mind lazy.'

Those who yield the power keep simple – simple – for no reason other than they can.

The definition of evil?

These exterminators of hope have no shame.

Florence Green is a lost widow who finds a generational soulmate in a voracious reader – waiting for his inevitable end. He sees passion in Florence's soul and tries to protect her from the exterminators.

The Bookshop is a flowing tragedy, where sadly, 'haves' exterminate 'have-nots.'

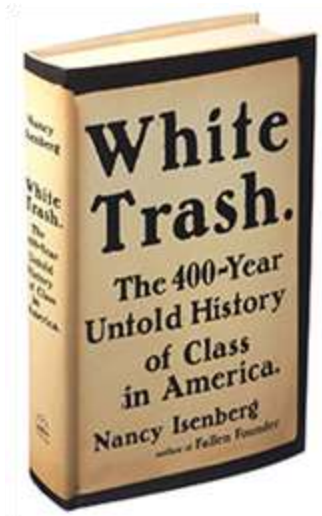
Bookshop shrewdly mirrors real life, cheering for hopeful failures while lamenting the inevitability of those holding the cards, turning life into a loss for all – for no reason other than they can.

That's how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: January 8, 2021

WHITE TRASH

NANCY ISENBERG



Vital. Important. Upsetting. Uncomfortable. Cringe-worthy. Reflective.

How did the book make me feel/think?

White Trash is a vitally important, upsetting, uncomfortable, cringe-worthy, reflective read for all of us →

White Trash tells the unvarnished truth of America.

Expel those deemed criminals, less-than-human trash, from Europe (mainly England), firing them across the pond to inhabit a new land.

Claim a classless society while dividing humanity into elite and garbage, with the elite staking claim to everything and the trash being deemed as expendable to be used and exploited to build

the wealth and power for the elites.

The Business Model for Every TA in North America

Tell a lie: “all created equal” — after centuries of conditioning a large swath of Caucasians, they are not worthy of being anything other than waste, morons, imbeciles, miscreants.

Introduce African slavery.

The waste people become valuable commodities necessary for the elites to remain at the top, but they no longer want to work. Instead, they are forced to fight wars for the elites — until realizing there is nothing in it for them, fighting.

The elites promise those who fight — slaves — after pointing at the African Americans and telling the “garbage” they’ve been exploiting — they are lower than you — nothing more than animals. An easy ruse because you’ve been told you are trash for several generations.

When that doesn’t work, give the trash worthless plots of land and a voting rights illusion.

Deny education. Segregate neighbourhoods “birds of a feather.” Promote eugenics (hmm, Germany). Breed humans like animals.

Sterilize women deemed wanton, not of good stock.

“Davenport felt the best policy was to quarantine dangerous women during their fertile years. This policy prescription that led to sterilization is rather more calculated: interested politicians and eager reformers concluded it was cheaper to operate on women than to house them in asylums for decades. Southern eugenicists, in particular, argued that sterilization helped the economy by sending poor women back into the population safely neutered but still able to work menial jobs.”

With television, use the supposed “gutter trash” as entertainment — once more keeping many of us in our place — at least letting some of us know we will never be allowed to climb.

Throw this all into the slow cooker, and what do you get?

Lindsey Graham jumps to mind.

America has come a long way.

But has it?

America may be a classless society because we are not all White Trash?

Admitting our shortcomings and the despicable advantages given upon some of us, maybe, just maybe, might spark centuries of curing an illness still plaguing many of us today.

That’s how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: February 8, 2021

HOME FIRE

KAMILA SHAMSIE



Redemption + Assimilation + Family + Love: Bottled together in a desperate broth.

How did the book make me feel/think?

HOME FIRE left me reeling. As much as I enjoyed the unrelenting twisting fiction of the story, I felt I was supposed to dive deeper into the gears turning humanity.

Kamila (author not a character) is of Indian descent, born into a patriarchal society shading womanhood in a sickness gripping many, not all, of the men. A thousand+ year struggle for equality + to find a voice—much most of us have never been exposed to, nary capable of grasping and understanding.

HOME FIRE elicited visceral emotions + a profound session of reflecting. Several questions sprinted through my mind, a reckoning of sorts—transcending borders.

- How are children supposed to bleeping assimilate in new homelands when their roots are stripped away from them, and past family digressions haunt them with every step they take?
- What is assimilation supposed to do, and who defines assimilation?
- What is assimilation supposed to do, and who defines assimilation?
- Can a radicalized person return to salvation after discovering the path we have dragged him down is clouded in deception?

Is it possible for love to prevail over faith differences, especially when money and power smother out kindness + hope?

Conflicted is the best way to describe the swallowing of my sensitivities while reading the searing realities in this captivating tale of love, family, deception, and the quest for the illusiveness of wholeness, + the overwhelming desire to belong.

As the story tumults perpetually to the confounding conclusion—mouth agape, I gasped as a single tear rolled over my left cheek.

WRITTEN: January 21, 2021