

BOOK THOUGHTS

BATCH 21



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BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL

BLACK = FICTION

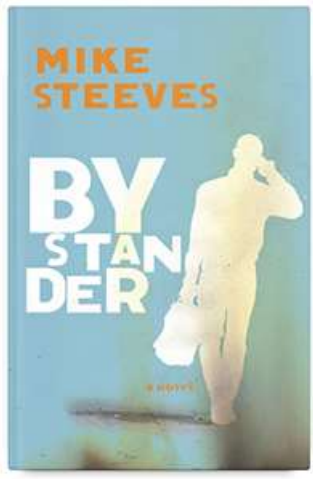
DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL

PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES

ORANGE = POETRY

BYSTANDER

MIKE STEEVES



This Might be the Best Read of the Year!

How did the book make me feel/think?

I crack the book open.

Page 1: A smile breaks on my face.

It won't leave me. I haven't felt this joyful in a long time.

Peter Simon is a mess, beyond the messiest of messes. He wants to be a hero, → thinking he'd be more than worthy if the right crisis moment presented.

But in reality, his mind is rioting in disarray. Peter wants to be the star in his life story as his stream-of-consciousness flows, no, blasts through his mind in tsunami after tsunami of what he really is → milquetoast to the nth degree. Plus 1.

We're all conflicted.

On the one hand, we want to get off life's sidelines and make a difference.

On the other, we realize we're not the main character in our own lives, but instead, we have bit parts.

Loners constantly update their Social Media + read long-form articles as they desperately work at nothing but blending in. Gentrification attacks us all, hyperbolic on steroids. Unfortunately, there is no place to hide.

Our minds race.

Why am I laughing at a breaking mind? I'm lonely. Every page I read is about someone I know, or about me, my dreams, hopes, fears, and wondering who wants to sleep with me?

Is city life about hiding?

This might be the best read of the year.

Page 253: I'm still smiling.

I close the book, I'm spent, in a good way!

We all want to be heroes → but why bother?

Tomorrow brings a new day.

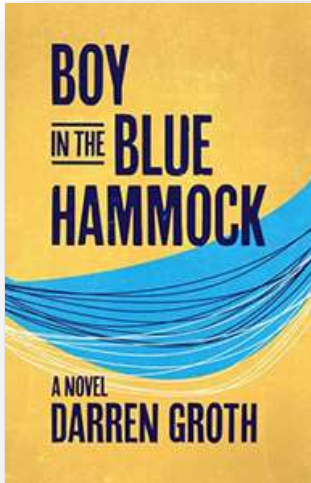
WRITTEN: 19 April 2022

BOY | IN THE | BLUE HAMMOCK

DARREN GROTH

Boy | in the | Blue Hammock is worthy of classic status.

How did the book make me feel/think?



The classic book **The Road (Cormac McCarthy)** is one of my favourite books. A boy and father navigate a dystopian landscape. Survival is the only goal.

Switch out the father for Tao (Dog) → and Groth takes us on a heart-wrenching ride through a fracturing world. A world where a failed service dog and an autistic teenager face a gauntlet of division and hatred.

Slide over The Road; *there is a new book nudging past you on my favourite list. Groth's writing is extraordinary, heart-eviscerating, and gripping.* Tao Dog + Boy (Kasper), fights for survival, after Tao (Dog), discovers Man, Woman, and Girl, had been gruesomely murdered. Kasper is the only human family survivor, hiding in the security of his blue hammock, when Tao finds him.

Boy | in the | Blue Hammock *is worthy of classic status; every page yanked at my emotions → my tears blending with the chills racing through my veins.*

We are all judged. The entitled and privileged, walking amongst us, label us, as they tread in the shallow end of life. *Hindered by denial.* All to make them feel more, by tagging others as less. The judgement is flawed. Groth blasts bright lights on the flaws. Tao and Kasper share the beauty of vulnerability, compassion, and empathy. Along the way through their struggles to be, they share the unlimited powers of unconditional.

Backing up to the entitled, in the grand scheme of things, they are lacking because, for many, they cannot understand equal is not something to strive for. If they only opened their hearts, they could learn valuable lessons about being human from Boy and Dog.

I was born in a place where women deemed unfit by society were sent to be fixed. If their children survived, they were sold or adopted out, never to be spoken of again. I have carried the crushing weight of the unwanted label and the darkness of stigma attached to it throughout life. I am not comparing my journey to an autistic child. But I understand vulnerability and the piercing eyes of those often looking down on me.

A friend of mine believes homeless people are lazy. My heart cringes. I know life isn't always easy. Especially if people are holding you down.

I'm lucky. Why?

Somehow, I avoided bitterness; instead, finding compassion + empathy and an understanding each person is capable of unconditional if only given a chance. And despite being deemed expendable, I'm still here.

Thanks, Boy, thanks, Dog, you make the world a better place.

WRITTEN: 23 April 2022

UNREST

EMMA Côté



Côté's mordant sense of humour is heartwarming.

How did the book make me feel/think?

I feared this book. It's about a woman (mortician) embarking on a trip to find herself and an understanding of her and her mother's frayed relationship → lost in the complexities of living.

How can a small book pack such a powerful punch?

Côté's delicious humour is sprinkled throughout the pages, softening the blow it would deliver to many readers.

I was born in a religion sanctioned home for women deemed wayward, and feeble-minded. If the mothers and babies survived (many didn't—do residential schools spring to mind?), the babies were usually ripped out of their mother's arms and adopted out to farm families or sold to wealthy couples → never to be spoken of again. A shame to family, community, and religion. I was one of those babies. The night they were coming to take me away (1963), while alongside my mother's deathbed (2016), she confessed she had begged her mother (my mother) to keep me. I was never supposed to know the truth. Confusing? I lived this.

Until I accidentally found out, I watched "my mother" take her last breath, only to find out 16 years later. My life started out as a lie → Hence meeting my real birth mother alongside her deathbed.

The week before her mother died, I had to drive "her mother" to the hospital; we stopped on the steps of our home, and "her mother" looked at me through tear-stained eyes and said, "I'm never going to be home again, am I?"

I lied.

In October 2016, as I walked out of my mother's hospital room, she looked at me through tear-stained eyes and said, "I'm never going to see you again, am I?"

What does any of this have to do with **Unrest**?

Unrest, as much as it is a quirky read, it is eons more; it connected profoundly with me, comforted my heart, helping me let go of some of the disdain I have been carrying throughout life toward those who took part in the lie of who I am?

Côté's mordant sense of humour is heartwarming, making this hundred-page book a masterpiece much larger than the page count suggests.

WRITTEN: 30 April 2022

THIS BRIGHT FUTURE

BOBBY HALL



Bobby Hall is an exceptional human being who is an exception.

How did the book make me feel/think?

A boy walks through his dangerous neighbourhood, asking people if they have children he can play with. I feel a tug at my heartstrings.

I used to hide in a closet in a make-believe world to remain safe and calm.

“Donna was super-cool except that she was a chain-smoker and a hard-core drug addict and alcoholic. She loved ginger ale, too, but let’s not hold that against her.”

How does any child survive in a world where they need to salvage their soul?

I’ve read two Bobby Hall books → and loved them both. Supermarket is an all-time favourite. The world is better because Bobby found the courage and strength to share his fractured childhood. Hall has an unbelievable capacity for empathy and compassion, somehow understanding the unrelenting weight of mental health problems and addiction. He lived it. Every day. There is no reason for his survival. His greatness. His lyricism. It makes little sense he is still with us. He gets that. We’re lucky.

In *This Future is Bright*, every word comes from the heart. Not blaming. Page after page, Hall searches to forgive the unforgiving nature of his childhood, inflicted upon him by those supposed to care for him but couldn’t escape their selfishness delivered through the destructive disease they’ve been cursed with.

Equality does not exist in a world where we are constantly being attacked, labelled, and divided.

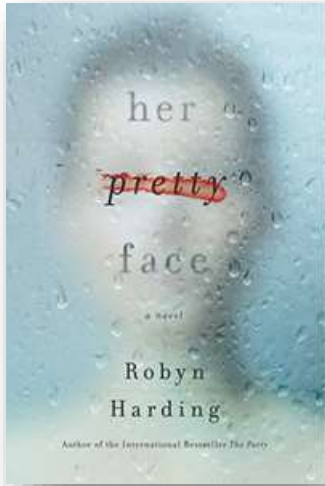
I’ve read two Bobby Hall books → just before typing my thoughts on this one; I listened to my first Logic track (track? did I just date myself?): 1-800-273-8255 (a song about mental health). Tears welled in my eyes. I’m almost 62.

We are lucky; Bobby Hall is an exceptional human being who is an exception. He had no business surviving his upbringing. But despite all the damage it has wreaked upon him, Hall doesn’t blame → instead, he simply tries to understand!

WRITTEN: 25 April 2022

HER PRETTY FACE

ROBYN HARDING



Harding is an uncanny storyteller who has this insane ability to draw you in word one.

How did the book make me feel/think?

This is the second Robyn Harding book I read in the last month. I loved them both. I didn't know what to expect → I thought they both would be light romps suitable for becoming Netflix Productions. They are, but that sells them short.

Harding is an uncanny storyteller who has this insane ability to draw you in word one and keep you engaged until the last word.

It felt like I was driving around the city picking up strangers, and for a block or two, they would share their side of an unravelling story. Then, when one character would get out, another would immediately hop in → layering and layering this tale to the point where what could easily be fluff morphed it into something far more profound with each page turned.

I'm riding with a psychopath, a sociopath, am I (?)

Her best friend hops in, ghosts from her past are chasing her. Her sociopathic friend protects her. They find a love for each other.

Another stop, another character. We are all flawed + damaged. I can relate. Who isn't damaged? I like every character, even the sociopathic psychopath (?)

But that's the thing. Who isn't drawn to madness? A page turns and Harding has us guessing what's next? On every page → *I know what's next?* I'm wrong. I think I know over and over again. Wrong. Wrong. And wrong.

The last word is shared.

The passengers move on.

We're left with deep questions.

Is it okay to be friends with a psychopath? When are debts to society fully paid? Is it our place to judge madness?

Harding is an exceptional storyteller. I read two of her books in a month without being aware she's a friend's sister.

I'm not sure if two Harding books in a month are enough.

WRITTEN: 6 May 2022

THE PERFECT FAMILY

ROBYN HARDING



Lies + Secrets rock families to the core.

How did the book make me feel/think?

Let's get this out of the way → definitely a favourite!

Twists, turns, terrifying, delightful → pages flipping.

The two things destroying families the most are:

What to eat?

Financial woes?

Wrong.

Lies. Secrets.

This book hit me hard → my entire life.

A father (?) caring too much about image and the thoughts of others, inflicting pain on the family.

A mother (?) burdened by having to shade emotions to not rock the boat.

The pressure to be more → to make the family proud crushes the children. Fuelling them with resentment as the son can't live up to carrying the family torch, and the daughter desperately needs to be loved and noticed. The pain of family deception turns them into outsiders, often walking alone, suffering in individuality. Their every move is watched.

The secrets create division, paranoia → stifling growth.

Do the right thing?

Nobody dares to stand up, and the world is out to get them, violently.

Can you possibly survive? Unite? Overcome?

I cheer for them.

Perfection is nothing more than a fantasy when the world is against you.

Truth be told, do they get a second chance?

THE ENDING

Brilliant!

As for my family's secret (me), I'm okay, I think? → But our family is forever fractured.

WRITTEN: 8 April 2022

REMNANTS

Céline HUGHYBAERT



A compelling journey through grief, emphasizing the importance of protecting our fragile souls.

How did the book make me feel/think?

When I was born, my father was 56. Mum was 46. My friend Tony's mother was 26 years younger than mine. I spent most of my time at Tony's house or Chris's house or →

Dad was an old hard man. He drank + smoked despite suffering a collapsed lung, which turned me into the neighbourhood's anti-smoking advocate in my early teens.

In 1978, Cancer (dad) paid our family a visit. The Big C took our family on a seven-year roller coaster ride with a revolving door between the hospital and home. I watched dad die the day after turning 25 (1985), with a brother and my mother at my side.

When dad was in the hospital, I visited him at least 1200 times. I don't remember a single visit or conversation. I don't recall many conversations with my father at all.

In 2003, I discovered he wasn't my birth father. I was born in a place of shame. I met my birth father in 2006 over lunch. Two weeks later, I had to inform him he wasn't my birth father, and my father died (figuratively) a second time.

It doesn't matter how I rearrange my photo albums; I can't find a comforting narrative. I hate that reality.

REMNANTS is a compelling journey through grief, emphasizing the importance of protecting our fragile souls, bringing an understanding that no matter what we've gone through → it is humbling and human to understand life is complex. The people who were tasked with nurturing us are only humans themselves.

"There were happy times, but maybe not enough to make up for the unhappy ones. And I understand him better, as I get older. Life is hard."

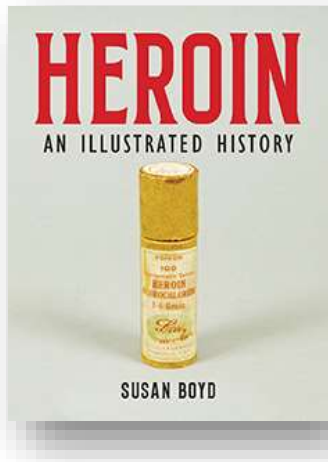
Remnants is a story about forgiveness and framing memories in the best fashion to continue living and hopefully thriving.

I forgive you dad → I just wish I knew who you are?

WRITTEN: 2 May 2022

HEROIN (AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY)

SUSAN BOYD



As long as politicians and “moral” leaders can use suffering for their gain...

How did the book make me feel/think?

HEROIN (AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY) is a gorgeous book.

Susan Boyd is exemplary in tamping down the stigma afflicting not only the usage of Heroin but also all (illegal) substances. This is a vitally important book.

I never thought I would become a neophyte on this controversial subject. But Boyd’s words caused my mind to rattle awake and form thoughts on Heroin, drugs, a racialized legal system, white supremacy, and not to be left out of the mix, the toxicity seeping into the halls of the

morally vapid portions of Christianity. Drug policy is frankly a war on, and against, the poor. From the beginning of time, politicians and religious leaders needed targets to demonize to control their shrinking flocks. An easy target is those suffering in the grips of poverty and not born into birthright. Drug users are not lesser. Life is bleeping hard. All drugs aren’t the same, nor do they affect every user the same way. There is no broad brush.

As long as politicians and religious leaders believe it is a tool in their toolbox to solicit votes of those amongst us on high horses → humanizing those who fall through society’s cracks, don’t have much of a chance.

HEROIN (AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY) has made me hypersensitive to the hypocritical judgement of people I know. People riding through life on high horses, believing somehow, they are immune to life struggles, believing anyone battling addiction did it to themselves and, therefore, deserves no compassion. That sickens me.

As long as politicians and “moral” leaders can use suffering for their gain, how will we ever be able to stamp out racism, white supremacy, poverty, and the rot of misguided religion?

Page 61 could have been taken right out of the RIGHT-WING POLITICAL PLAYBOOK, sorry about the ALLCAPS.

That’s how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: 10 May 2022

GOOD MOM ON PAPER

A COLLABORATION

Without our courageous, incredible mothers, I'm not sure we'd be here today.

How did the book make me feel/think?

We live in a patriarchal world.

Women have *been dealt an unfair hand* from the beginning of time.

A man and a woman sit down at the card table.

We deal men two cards, 1) be a man; and 2) do whatever you want.

Of course, I am cut a little slack because I'm a man named Lindsay.

We deal women a laundry list of cards, emphasis on, laundry.

GOOD MOM ON PAPER is a vital read for any man, man enough to step up and acknowledge the disparity between their worlds and those of women.

Heck, **WORKING MOTHER**, is a label. WTF.



In **GOOD MOM ON PAPER**, we learn about moms. Moms are tasked with an endless list of full-time work: nurturing, child-rearing, cleaning, cooking, working, and on and on and on and on and maybe finding time for writing, all while being forced to hide the fact, they have children. Motherhood is the equivalent of umpteen full-time gigs. Male writers have one task: write, maybe two, get messed up on substances to stoke the creative juices. After all, they say writing comes from suffering.

But I'm suffering.

Keep it down and get back in the kitchen.

Harsh? Yes. Reality? Mostly.

I met my mother alongside her deathbed, 29 years after I thought I had watched my mother die (a long story).

I have carried anger at the women tasked with raising me throughout my life.

I thought they had failed.

My anger was misdirected.

GOOD MOM ON PAPER, makes it abundantly clear, we live in a patriarchal world, and helped me realize the women in my life did the best they could while facing the daunting realities of a patriarchal world.

Without our incredible, courageous mothers, I'm not sure we'd be here today.

Thank you. Keep writing. We need you. I wish you could be dealt fewer cards.

WRITTEN: 4 May 2022

LOU WHO?

LOUISE JOHNSON



I learnt Elton John can never have enough flowers.

How did the book make me feel/think?

There is a 50/50 chance those in the dating pool are dancing with the damaged product of divorce. It's likely more like 57.4/42.6.

Most of us are broken and dragging with us a crushing amount of lifetime baggage. *Life is so bleeping fast now.*

Swipe right. Judge. Swipe left. Ewe. Judge. Judge. Judge. It's a battlefield.

I hop into a time machine, transporting me back to a locker room. The alpha commands the stage. We listen in awe. Misogyny rules. His conquests are all perfect physical specimens; each is given a pet name. He is the best lover in the world. We listen in awe.

Flash forward. Regardless of gender, → it becomes increasingly acceptable (and the right thing) for women to own their sexuality. The labels attached to being sexually active are becoming gender non-specific. *Not quickly enough?*

Back in the locker room, the one commanding the stage loses interest because 'perfect physicality' and 'great in bed' are → the top of the mountain. Down is the only option afterward.

When did dating become so much work? When did the aftermath of 'perfect' and 'great' become: *Let's map out the rest of our lives together?* Can any potential relationship survive the weight of being in your *twenties*, and the person who is supposed to bring comfort → adds nothing but pressure?

How can someone claim not to be confident and continually say everyone they meet is perfect, and the sex is → when they are the common denominator?

Lou Who? Reads like a locker room chat with a friend where misogyny isn't being shunned, but it is embraced, only with the shoe on the other foot.

Lou Who? Reads like a projection of *will* without understanding the pinnacle—once reached, it's easier to run downhill instead of trying to align values, hopes, and dreams. For example, 57.4% of marriages end in divorce → *if the burden to be* is too significant (in one's twenties); there is only one way for that number to go.

And why, when claiming cultural awareness, would a line about eyebrows, "*at least not a straight guy,*" be in the book? *A cheap laugh? A sweeping generalization?*

WRITTEN: 12 April 2022