

A B C D E F

Just something about Kundera

By Kathleen Flynn  
Immortality by Milan Kundera

What is it about Milan Kundera? Every sentence he writes seems to emerge from a secret corner of one's mind, as if he were the literary variant of those magicians who can pull quarters from the ears of children. He writes about the most essential, profound mysteries of human existence with disarming simplicity and never an excess word.

When I reading Kundera, I always feel as if I am on vacation... some place I've never been that is nonetheless familiar, like a landscape seen in dreams. It seems like a forgotten corner of Europe, with snowy mountains, cobblestone streets and, in the distance, lakes. There's something about his prose style that creates this atmosphere. It's the sort of writing where you must sometimes slowly reread whole paragraphs, not out of incomprehension but because they are so delightful that you want to prolong the pleasure.

Or maybe it has to do with the characters who populate his books. They are invariably cosmopolitan without being self-important. They never worry about money or their exercise regimes or their careers or mildew in the shower or the ozone layer. People in Kundera's novels are preoccupied with the important things: love, death, and the nightmare of history.

It's probably best to start with his latest book, *Immortality*. Although all of his works are excellent, the early books are more cryptic. He wrote them when he was still in Czechoslovakia, still trying to write in a way that would not offend government censors.

**The Book of Laughter and Forgetting, The Unbearable Lightness of Being Immortality**, in that order, were written since he fled to France. They are all about an East European's attempt to deal with the West, which in Kundera's view has become crassly materialistic and soulless.

Because we have all grown up in this crass atmosphere and know it well, these books are easier to appreciate. After you've read them, however, you will also understand Kundera's peculiarly Czech viewpoint and be in a much



BOOKS ARE lovely

By Alex Frew McMillan

I enjoy nothing better than browsing through bookstores or the library, looking at the selection and smelling the new pages, wondering how long it would take me to read all the books in the world.

Reading, say, the entire seventh floor of Davis may be a modest ambition, but you sure would impress folks at dinner if you could say "Yeah, I read (fill in blank of some obscure Guatemalan or Turkish author). Everything she/he has written. And I really don't think you can call yourself educated unless you have, too."

Of course, pretty soon you would probably run out of people who would have dinner with you, but the look of amazement and insecurity on the face of many a know-it-all would be worth it.

I have yet to find an answer to the problem I have with reading. I enjoy a good book, and have had many great works scheduled on my reading for many a class. But the fact that now I have to read

better position to relish *The Joke*, *Life is Elsewhere* and *The Farewell Party*.

It's difficult to summarize the plot of *Immortality*, because there are so many of them, all going on at once. There are two sisters, a professor who slashes people's tires at random in an act of ecological terrorism, a meeting of Goethe and Hemmingway in the afterworld, a runing critique of mass culture and the triviality of modern life. Kundera also appears as a character.

At first, the author seems to be digressing madly. Then you start to see how all the parts connect; at that point you are hooked, in his world and anxious never to leave.

Imagine *Immortality* as a three-ring circus, where the lion tamers are named Goethe, Beethoven, and Kafka. And high above, them, juggling flaming torches and turning cartwheels while he recites passages from Hegel, with a serious, yet modest air, the famous tightrope walker, Milan Kundera.

Abandon your television fo

By Kevin Kruse

Back before the earth-shattering inventions of the remote control and satellite cable television, there was a means of communicating ideas with the printed word on bound sheets of paper called "books." It's like *TV Guide*, but it actually tells a story in and of itself. I know, shocking.

I actually found a couple of these "book" things sitting around. Here are some I enjoyed:

1. *Middle Passage* by Charles Johnson

This is a gripping novel about a black stow-away aboard a transatlantic slave ship. An elaboration on the longstanding sea themes of American literature, the story compresses ten times the narrative, philosophy, and power of a weighty tome like *Moby Dick* into a third the length. Johnson's creation is both a compelling, engaging story and a poetic treatise on mankind. One of my all-time favorites.

2. *Sleepwalking Through History: America in the Reagan Years* by Haynes Johnson

Johnson's account of the greed and corruption of the '80s is brilliant. The work begins with Reagan's rise to power and the resultant attitude change in the country and then proceeds to stroll through the big scandals and the unabashed avarice of the Greed Decade. The book compares the outlooks of several groups in 1981 and later compares these with their feelings in 1989. The evolution is unbelievable.

Wall Street lingo normally reads like stereo instructions, but Johnson's account of the economic maneuverings of the era zips along like good drama. And if only to read about Donald Trump, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, Ollie North and the other crazed pseudo-celebrities,

this is something you should check out.

Caution conservatives: the enshrined Reagan-myth will be debunked a wee bit. The chapter on George Bush's 1988 campaign is interesting at least, damning at most. It'll make you think.

3. *Beloved* by Toni Morrison

Probably the most acclaimed of her novels, this is a haunting story of one woman's reckoning with her own sins in Reconstruction America. Morrison's usual lyric style flows

South African w

By Wendy Mitchell

Before I read Mark Mathabane's *Kaffir Boy in America: The True Story of a Black Youth's Coming of Age in Apartheid South Africa*, I viewed apartheid as morally wrong, but it was a very abstract concept and I did not understand the implications of this racial segregation.

But after completing *Kaffir Boy*, I realize that these South African blacks are truly victims of an appalling tradition. It amazed me to find out how cruel and oppressive humans can be to one another.

Author Mark Mathabane paints a vivid portrait of the first 18 years of his life in Alexandria, a notorious ghetto outside of Johannesburg. He prefaces the work by explaining the term "kaffir," of Arabic origin meaning "infidel." It is a highly derogatory address directed toward blacks, including the author, by the whites of the nation.

Mathabane's powerful narrative starts when he is a young child, awakening from his card-

Time has come for McCullers' Southern love

By Vicki Hyman

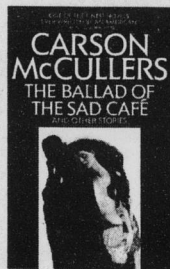
"The time has come to speak about love," Carson McCullers wrote in her novella, *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe*, a curious and cracked little story that interprets, illuminates, and even justifies that phosphorescent slippery phenomenon in a muscular 72 pages.

A tale of the grotesque, the androgynous and the bizarre, and of their search (and ours) for a love both impossible and necessary, the story centers on the aberrant triangle of Miss Amelia, Cousin Lymon and Marvin Macy in a backwater Southern town somewhere between Society City and an agnostic oblivion.

McCullers' characters are preposterous,

inconceivable, yet utterly authentic and human, and finally heartbreaking, as we see how love revives and then ransacks the soul, and irrevocably wrecks the most essential changes in personality — for good and bad.

The ballad's moral, warts and all, is simple, sacred: To love is the point.



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