

Wonder boys by
michael chabon
essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

It is, quite honestly, one of the best-written books I have ever read, ever. I think it took me such a long time to read because the first few pages or so didn't really attract me, in terms of plot, but Chabon's sentences, my goodness. His sentences are flawless. I want to marry his sentences. Or, in the words of Tracy Jordan, I love his sentences so much, I want to take them behind the middle school and get them pregnant.

Chabon manages to craft a character completely the opposite of me—middle-aged, etc.—and still have me feel as though I related to him completely. He begins by talking about the “midnight disease,” described as such: “The midnight disease is a kind of emotional insomnia; at every conscious moment its victim—even if he or she writes at dawn, or in the middle of the afternoon—feels like a person lying in a sweltering bedroom, with the window thrown open, looking up at a sky filled with stars and airplanes, listening to the narrative of a rattling blind, an ambulance, a fly trapped in a Coke bottle, while all around him the neighbors soundly sleep.” He begins by talking about the midnight disease, and lays out one of the biggest conflicts in the story, that Grady Tripp does not know how to write anymore. Yes, he manages a 2, 611-page manuscript in seven years, but the “unknowing” he is facing, I feel, is the unknowing how to write well, how to write with a point, with a meaning, with a purpose. I think most of the book also deals with these issues, although not really applied to writing, but to the rest of the rickety life Grady Tripp lives.

It deals with the many complicated layers that are attached to issues of family and love. Of making difficult choices, of sticking by the decisions that you do choose to make in the end. The novel progresses in only a handful of

days, but I think that the reader will have traveled across many deep realizations about and confrontations with himself, along with the characters and their own experience of “ knowing.”

While the book itself and the events that transpired aren't in themselves sad (in a way that eats you up inside for days, wondering why did this have to happen to them?), I have fallen into a depressive slump. One, because, like I said, I felt strangely like Grady Tripp, except I have nothing to write about. Whereas his misfortune was—spoiler alert—having seven years of his life blown away, out of a moving vehicle, my misfortune lies in the fact that for the past seven years, I have been saying that I wanted to be a writer, and I have nothing to show for it. At least, Grady had 2, 600+ pages to his name, even though the pages got eaten up by a violent wind.—end spoiler.

Second reason for my pseudo-depression is the fact that this is a really frakking excellent book. It is perfect, almost. The way Chabon describes things and people, the way he describes events, the way he tells the whole story, the way he just writes everything to fit together. These things, this book, has shot me into some sort of state of paralysis where it seems that I cannot write anything that I can be happy about or proud of. I know that that's probably not true, but it certainly feels this way right now. I don't know how it is possible that I could ever write anything even half as brilliant as “ Wonder Boys,” and this is a worrying, crippling fact to me. This was written in 1995; no doubt, he got even better since then.

That thought, that fear really keeps me up at night. Like a middle school bully, it just keeps on taunting me, Well, what have you been doing, exactly?

It's your fault you are a stagnant writer. What exactly do you feel like you deserve for slacking off?, et cetera, et cetera.

And the third reason why I am depressed is that the imaginary bully in my head is right. It is my fault that I haven't been writing anything excellent, if only for the sole fact that I haven't been writing any fiction at all.

How to recover from this book? I'm not exactly sure. And while it does end on a mostly positive note for stuck writers everywhere, I can't help but feel even more helpless and, well, stuck, after reading this brilliant piece of literature. (See, I have even reached the point where I use generic polysyllabic words to convey whatever simple point, whatever simple feelings I have.) Despite it being almost encouraging, I still feel like it has hurled me into a pit of quicksand, and maybe, just maybe, if I stop moving, if I stop struggling, I can get out of there alive, with a not-so-damaged reputation as a writer.

I don't quite know how to recover from this, exactly. All I know is that this is a terrific book, mirroring so very accurately the fears of someone who is lost in more ways than one. Writer or no, everyone should read it. In the words of my Tumblr friend, Alayna, "in a perfect world, this book would never end."

This is in my opinion why writers—like insomniacs—are so accident-prone, so obsessed with the calculus of bad luck and missed opportunities, so liable to rumination and a concomitant inability to let go of a subject, even when urged repeatedly to do so.