



The Afternoon of a Writer

Peter Handke

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A visit to the city's outskirts, a stolen newspaper, narrow alleyways, and an open field are the elements of a writer's afternoon. As the nameless writer confronts his fears, he goes on with his life in one of the most original and provocative works from a contemporary writer.

The Afternoon of a Writer Details

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From Reader Review The Afternoon of a Writer for online ebook

Patrick Robitaille says

**

My first book read in 2014 makes me feel like I am hung over, even though I didn't drink much on New Year's Eve. It describes a writer, afflicted for months with the proverbial block, who goes out meandering about town, dealing with all sorts of people, stopping at a pub, meeting with a translator friend, then going home to rest and realizing that he exists. Throughout this short novel, things are described as if seen through the eyes of a writer (that should have fixed his block!), which generates a lot of tedious digressions, providing an uneasy read and a feeling of staggering around, as drunk. I was definitely expecting better from somebody who co-scripted that wonderful Wim Wenders movie, *The Wings of Desire*.

Donald says

Even better than *Absence*. Very short and similarly cinematic. I think now I will probably read everything Handke has ever written.

Jen says

The best thing about this book is it's length. It is barely longer than one of my toddler's books. Here's a plot summery:

A writer finishes working for the day and decides to take a walk around an unnamed European city. He drinks some wine, some people watch him, an old man yells something about the "city of ruins," he helps an old lady who has fallen over, he gets a lecture from a drunk at a bar, has a few philosophical musings about his career and live, has one appointment, goes home, the end.

One of the most boring books I've ever read. Nothing happens (really, nothing). This book would be like if I decided to go for a walk and then spend an hour describing all the minutia of the walk (every leaf, the glance of a passerby, etc) to one of my friends. While the walk may be beautiful for me as I experience it, the hour long description would likely leave me without any friends.

On the plus side, some sentences are beautiful and the descriptions are vivid. But descriptions without plot is like watching paint dry.

Ben Winch says

I'm not a big fan of Peter Handke. Normally, I find his scientific/objective outlook too cold, his careful prose

too dour, his virtually-plotless narratives too cryptic. Nor do I find the comparisons to Beckett convincing - sure, he's a master of language (or appears to be, courtesy of his translators), but where's the humour? And in fact, humour is thin on the ground in this book too, but something rescues it from the brittleness of his other works. As always, he's intense. A shaft of light seems to flood whatever he describes; the details are lucid, hyper-real, otherworldly. But where so often I find his seemingly-random cacophony of images meaningless, here, thanks to the device of the writer-within-the-work, he achieves something like harmony. Added to this, the extreme focus on the writer and his work creates a mirrors-within-mirrors effect, something I always appreciate if it's done well. For a work so full of apparent mundanities to achieve this magic is unusual, perhaps unique. And for once, Handke's habit of paring everything to the bone does not result in something too lean or austere. There is warmth here! And insight. And inspiration.

Michael says

"Ein Werk, so dachte er, war etwas, bei dem das Material fast nichts war, das Gefüge fast alles; etwas, das im Stillstand, ohne besonderes Schwungrad, in Bewegung war; bei dem alle Elemente einander in Schwebe hielten; das offen war, jedermann zugänglich, durch Gebrauch nicht abnutzbar."

Schreibend leben ist Handke die einzig mögliche Seinsform, zugleich aber ein Tabubruch, der zur Trennung von der Welt führt.

Travelling Sunny says

Plotless narrative of a lonely, semi-famous writer suffering from what I'm guessing is some form of anxiety-ridden agoraphobia with possible low self-esteem issues and a penchant for taking afternoon walks as part of his near-ritualistic, obsessive need to establish and follow routines.

Also, I found it boring.

Initially NO says

This is a very short novella, can't be more than 5000 words or so. You need less an hour to read it.

The narrative drifts around the subject of complacency, displaced people, and disgruntlement.

Page 41 sparked my interest. It is about the fears writers who challenge the mainstream have, that the same fears that anyone who thinks outside the propaganda has, 'they really were ready to leap, to go for his throat, as he stood for everything they detested: daydreams, hand-made writing, dissent, and ultimately art. Just wait until I get you in front of my mudguards on the open road; till I get you in front of my ticket window; till I get you in the dock at my courthouse; till you lie chained to your hospital bed and I, at last, get the job of

giving you your daily injections.'

It is for this paragraph that this novella, was meaningful. It spoke of a successful writer, afraid to drift and be subjected to white-coats, so instead curbs his words, mistakenly cutting up his cat's food into little bite sized pieces (when a cat would rather the meat to be whole.)

Natural paranoia – the impropriety of others muscling to use an author for their means – the Chekhovian idea of 'hatred of landscape painters', that is respecting 'only those who contributed directly and tangibly to social progress', is also expressed on p 41. The book hides the truth and only allows for glimpses, as does the protagonist, for his own perceived safety. And that is to forget your author, your authentic self.

Robert says

Although I did not mind Handke's 'The Afternoon of a Writer' I couldn't help thinking that I would find this book dragging if it went on for four hundred pages or so. Luckily it is a breezy 86 so I found it quite enjoyable.

This novella is about a writer who crafts one sentence and decides to treat himself to a walk and lunch. As he is doing this he questions why he is a writer and if it is worth being one. In the meantime he is also soaking up his surroundings. By the end of the novel he is back to square one.

Afternoon.. is a descriptive novel, and the questions it poses about the authenticity of writing are interesting and in this small dose it works and is pretty evocative.

Pretty good but not WOW

Catherine Corman says

I saw my inner world as a reliable sequence of images, which I had only to observe and describe one after another. But as time went on, the outlines lost their clarity.

-Peter Handke, Afternoon of a Writer

Maurizio Manco says

"Lontananza, la mia materia." (p. 20)

"Un'opera, pensava, era qualcosa in cui la materia non era quasi nulla e la struttura quasi tutto. Qualcosa che da fermo, senza bilanciare, era anche in movimento; in cui tutti gli elementi si tenevano in equilibrio; che era aperto, accessibile a tutti, che non si consumava con l'uso." (p. 25)

Jeff says

I know that the larger point here is the writer's anonymity and detachment from the very society he writes about. But an 80 rambling description of an afternoon walk through a nameless town just isn't doing it for me.

Lisa says

Handke's narrator suffers from a writer's block and takes a walk around town. This would be an entirely sufficient summary of the short novel, and it contains major plot spoilers.

But as I am suffering from a reader's block, and need to get rid of it by taking a walk around in Handke's mind, I will add some reflections, in the same way the writer in the story lets his thoughts flow randomly while he spends his afternoon doing nothing. While writer's block is a quite well-known phenomenon (which doesn't prevent writers from spitting out new books almost on a yearly basis), reader's block is a complicated condition and hugely neglected in research. In my case, it was triggered by a string of emotionally difficult, but highly rewarding reading experiences, such as Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* or Heinrich Böll's *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum*. Finishing those books, I felt drained, and couldn't find my way back into my regular reading habits. Everything seemed meaningless, flat, boring.

But just like Handke's writer forced himself to write a couple of sentences to get going again, I forced myself to read some purposely plot-free books, like *The Diary of a Nobody*. Constituting an exercise quite similar to doing swim motions in the air while still being reluctant to jump into the cold water, I regained my equanimity by reading unimportant, lightweight literature. Handke's writer describes the road, or the river, or an acquaintance to get back into the habit of writing descriptions.

To finish my reader's block therapy, I read Handke himself, and found my way back into literary language and subtle reflections. When the narrator reaches the point of recognising the huge gap between his existence as a writer, observing life from the outside, and as a regular person, trying to live it, I feel ready to be a real reader again. For that is the root of my reader's block as well. When books get too close, impose their presence on my dreams and actions, I can't let go, and I feel that I suffer from not being able to separate the diametrically opposed ideas of living life versus reading life.

Small details of everyday business, written down or read, help a writer or reader to find a way back to balance. That is what this story is about, and what it did to me.

I guess I am ready for Kafka and Dostoyevsky again!

Jonfaith says

Why was it only when alone that he was able to participate fully?

My sleep has been eroded for months now, first a deprivation of carbohydrates and now the new work responsibilities have left me precarious. I am thus aggressively self-aware during the wee hours. Peter Handke has successfully distilled such levels of examination and rendered it as literature. The protagonist is

an author who finishes up his day's work, cleans around his flat and then goes for a constitutional, stops at a pub, goes to meet a translator and finally returns home. Full stop. I recommend this for all who find the day starting at 3 am.

Erin says

This book started out more hopeful than I was expecting, after having read another book by Handke. But then it just became overwhelming, such as when the first 2 bites of a rich dish are so good but then it becomes too much and it's not enjoyable anymore, and you are just trying to finish it as quickly as possible without becoming sick. The book was almost egotistical, just over the top.

Thank goodness it was so short.

Troy says

I finished this book in my bookstore. The A/C is broken, it's the 4th of July and it feels as if everyone is at some palatial summer estate, leaving the city abandoned to the heat, the rats, and the roaches. This book is a short travelogue- hell, the title of the book is the plot of the book. We follow a writer, taking a break, wandering through the city from the mountain which he works. He watches snow; muses on the futility of writing; contemplates the self-imposed loneliness of his existence; watches strange people drink in a bar; meets a translator who tells him he's happy now that he's no longer writing; and generally meanders and mulls. I remember my old mentor once told me all of Proust can't hold up, quantitatively, to one moment in one quotidian day eating some schlock meal at Denny's. The pure quantities of information are simply too overwhelming to ever get down - impossible to transcribe in their infinite complexity. This book looks to get around that by spending such a small sliver of time with our author, our storyteller, but in effect, our author and storyteller exists primarily in his own head (as he himself observes, over and over) so in the end it's a futile gesture, but a beautiful one, more about the solipsism of a writer and how the written word can never truly capture that quotidian moment.

Ashley Taglieri says

"Criticism has been crowded out by machination."

A super quick novelette that explores the ideas of isolation, and the whole presumptuous nature of writing. I highly recommend this to anyone who has ever wanted to be a writer or for those of you, who like me, may only see one or two people on a given day.

The ending is a little weak, but the rest of it is standout.

Ernesto Pérez-castro says

Un breve texto que entrega literalmente lo que ofrece su título: la descripción de la tarde de un escritor. Un

libro interesante para quienes se interesan por lo que hay dentro y detrás del proceso que lleva a un escritor a ser tal. Un texto que, a falta de un conflicto (un 'plot') puesto en acciones, no alcanza a ser narrativo en sentido estricto, quedando más cerca de una especie de poesía en prosa. Es mi primer acercamiento a Handke fuera de su colaboración con Wim Wenders en *Las Alas del Deseo* / *Der Himmel über Berlin*.

Ian says

It could be convincingly argued that much of what Peter Handke has written is actually about the process of writing, of finding words to describe what is, in many cases, indescribable. Most of his characters are searching for something that they are unable or can't be bothered to define. The search takes them from one place to another, on a random or circular journey that mirrors or mimics a process of discovery. *The Afternoon of a Writer* is another of these works, with the significant difference that the protagonist is a writer, and what's more, a character we are invited to take to be Handke himself. His journey begins with the recollection of a time when he thought he had "lost contact with language," when he had been unable to work and thus had lost his purpose in being alive. From his suburban house, where he is living contentedly with his cat, he roams into the (unnamed European) city, spends time at a cafe, where he encounters a drunk, who lectures him in an incomprehensible vernacular, and finally to a meeting with his translator, whose cheery disposition derives from no longer being a writer. This is Handke at his challenging and enigmatic best. *The Afternoon of a Writer* is the product of a restless and fertile mind that refuses to let anything go unquestioned.

David Antonelli says

I absolutely adore this book and read it many times (along with Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* and Kerouac's *Subterraneans*) as I was finishing my new novel *The Black Tide*, about a love triangle dealing with a DJ and electronic music producer, in an effort to create that perfect equilibrium between the inner and outer. What is so amazing is the balancing act he pulls off with the prose, by focussing on precise and vivid details of the surroundings with long rhythmical sentences, he somehow manages to build the psychology of the writer on his walk. It seems almost Zen-like to me, the idea that "the outer is the inner" or the world is consciousness. Thus the feelings are revealed as a mirror of the world and the subtle and often strange details become almost cubist distortions of the world giving hints as to the inner feelings of the writer. I like his description of "The Gin Mill" and the man who says he has accomplished everything in life who touches the writer's wrist in a way that that only a man on the brink of despair would do (sic).

I also admire *Across, and Absence*, as well as his shorter fiction like *A Moment of True Feeling* or *Short Letter Long Farewell* and also his contributions to Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire*, which always leave shivers down my spine.

Peter Handke, Gustave Flaubert, Richard Ford, and Jack Kerouac all taught me how to write, and I will keep going back to them to my deathbed!

Corey says

Does being a writer connect you to or disconnect you from the world?

