

# Songs for the New Depression

*Kergan Edwards-Stout*

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**Songs for the New Depression** Kergan Edwards-Stout

Winner - INDIE BOOK AWARD - LGBTQ Category

Shortlist - INDIE LIT AWARD - LGBTQ Category

Gabriel Travers knows he's dying; he just can't prove it. Despite his doctor's proclamations to the contrary and rumors of a promising new HIV drug cocktail, all it takes is one glance into the mirror to tell Gabe everything he needs to know. His ass, once the talk of West Hollywood, now looks suspiciously like a Shar-Pei, prompting even more talk around town.

Back in his 20's, life had been so easy. Caught up in the 1980's world of LOVE! MONEY! SEX!, Gabe thought he'd have it all. But every effort to better himself ended in self-sabotage, and every attempt at love left him with only a fake number, scrawled on a realtor's notepad.

The only happiness he could remember was in high school, where he'd met Keith, his first love. Only Keith had recognized the goodness within, and knew of the brutal attack Gabe had faced, the effects of which still rule his life today.

Now almost 40, and with the clock ticking, Gabe begins to finally peel back the layers and tackle his demons - with a little help from the music of the Divine Miss M and his mom's new wife, a country music-loving priest.

## Songs for the New Depression Details


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Author : Kergan Edwards-Stout

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# **From Reader Review Songs for the New Depression for online ebook**

## **Ulysses Dietz says**

Kergan Edwards-Stout's first novel, "Songs for the New Depression" is the kind of book we need more of in the world of modern gay literature. For a man of my generation, reading about AIDS is difficult, because we lived through the epidemic as it first began to emerge on our collective radar, before we understood the horrific toll it would take on our lives and our community. There were a lot of these books in the 1990s, but we have begun to turn away from those dark topics in our literature, and I'm pretty sure that's not a good thing. Edwards-Stout's book seems to affirm my doubt. It is a beautiful book, and, I think, an important one.

Edwards-Stout is a gifted writer; the unusual reverse-linear structure of the book and the author's ability to use words is central to the pleasure of reading what is a sometimes harrowing, sometimes merely heartbreaking story. But the great surprise, and perhaps the author's greatest gift to the reader, is the laugh-out loud humor, most of which is in the voice of the central protagonist, Gabriel. Gabe is a deeply flawed person; but the reader has no problem seeing the potential there. This is a character you can imagine having as your difficult best friend - someone you love, but can never quite reach.

Edwards-Stout draws from personal experience here, and thus he presents us with a story that is both heartfelt and authentic. It may be a work of fiction, but it is also a work of great truth; emotionally, historically, and psychologically. The NY Times ought to be reviewing "Songs for the New Depression," not the likes of me.

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## **Nancy Silk says**

This is a story that I shall never forget; the first part made me laugh, cry, and then sob in public. The second and third parts gripped me and traveled into my heart and mind. It's a reminder of the 80's and the horrible disease of AIDS. For so many trapped in this disease, they could see no future. Everyone needs to love and be loved, yet politics and bigotry make obscene jokes of those who are different. They are NOT different. Kergan Edwards-Stout is an amazing man, father, and author. His writing style expresses honesty, openness, humor, and tenderness. I'm glad I read his novel and it only spurs my endeavors to seek equality for all, where others only seek to alienate themselves from those whom they judge to be unworthy. NO ONE is unworthy of love.

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## **L.E.Olteano says**

Yes, that's right! One of those rare Bomy Award of Excellence read, standing tall and proud, but most of all, ridiculously good, and waving its freaking fabulous flag in all its glory. I think you can tell I'm running on high levels of excitement and general fangirlism, this novel was that good.

Now, while reading it, I felt that it would rank in my top 10 best reads of the year. After finishing it, I'm more inclined to say top 5. If we're talking area of subject and impact it had on me, the really relevant reference I can give you was one of my top 10 reads of 2011, Caregiver by Rick R. Reed. Since back then in

2011 I didn't have the Excellence mention worked out, Caregiver doesn't show up under it, but for me it's definitely a work of excellence. And this baby right here is right up there with it, I won't compare them but if you read one and like it, I think you should also give the other a try. But you really should read them both, asap if you haven't already. Just saying.

The first striking thing about *Songs for the New Depression* was the writing; upfront and poignant, it just hit me from the first few words. I was like, "mayday, mayday, bring a mountain of tissues, I foresee hysterical crying somewhere down this line". The main character, Gabriel Travers, has one of the most colorful, personal and ridiculously charming voices I can think of right now, though Jon was very strong as well and I enjoyed the voices of other characters in the novel, I won't lie, Gabe was by far my most loved.

All scenes were very vibrant and they had this way of wrapping themselves around me as I read, instant teleportation into the story, I felt with Gabe, loved with him, hurt with him, got my heart severely broken with him...and one other thing, that I won't tell you for fear of ruining your read. Sufficient to say it involved a lot sniffing, many, many tear-soaked tissues and a headache.

This is one of the very few books I've read where the backwards through time direction not only worked for me, but felt brilliant. The natural sense of time, the chronological order of events not flowing in the natural direction of past, present, future is one of my pet peeves and I often complain about it whenever we meet. But this time, it was just natural somehow, like I was remembering Gabe's life and living those memories, those moments with him.

One of my guiltiest literary pleasures is character focus, and in this novel I was delighted. First off, Gabe must be the funniest and most wickedly charming character I can think of right off the top of my head. I can never resist funny characters, and he had a sense of humor that just won me over like five seconds into the book. He was bold, smart, incredibly charismatic and despite his doubts on the matter, incredibly easy to love. Not the good guy, not the bad guy, a real person with deep and unadulterated feelings raging all over the spectrum from pure and beautiful love to carelessness and courage bordering on insanity. It's really hard for me to keep from spoiling the whole thing, but I'll just say this: I cried like a maniac when we left the Eiffel tower, I cried and couldn't quite reconcile the beauty of the moment and feeling in the Sacre Coeur moment with what it led to in retrospect - I just started crying again now writing this just remembering that. I'm not spoiling your read, but the Sacre Coeur moment and the leaving of the Eiffel tower were just...impossibly intense moments. Heartbreaking, beautiful yet devastating, I just can't truly put it into words, it was that exquisite and yet terrifying.

Jon was really lovely, I won't say he wasn't, and he had his moments when I just thought, ok, if these guys are for sale anywhere in the world, I want one, he just had that kind of selfless capacity to truly, deeply love someone, particularly my favorite character Gabe, it just floored me. It floored me to contemplate the devastation going rampant in the story, Jon's, Gabe's, and who knows how many other people's who went through something similar.

The story was very intriguing, especially since there were these events that you just felt it in your bones were incredibly relevant that you only got a clear picture on when reaching the end. It had the perfect pace of events for me, though in this case I'd rather talk about the pace of feelings. This is a literary work, so we're focusing on character, not agitated action (thank God!), and for me it was simply the perfect recipe to tell a story. I am going to be clear on this, this is not a happily ever after story. You might have noticed the ones I really, really love tend to have something of an unhappy if not devastating ending, right? This is not a happy ending book, it's not a doll-ified version of a love story. This, my friends, is a brutally clear and honest glimpse into a real life, with its moments of pure grace, with its devastation, with its unfair and frustrating ending - because I was boiling up inside, wanting to just scream "This is not fair!". Since that's my general reaction to life by large, I'll tell you that this story is one of those impossibly real, brutally real ones that will haunt you a long time after you've read them. And it should have the impact it will surely have on you, you

shouldn't try to evade but embrace it. Because that's what we have to do with life, too, don't we? Despite its moments of complete horror and pain, despite its flagrant and blatant unfairness in places, regardless of those moments of pure unadulterated happiness and grace, for it all, we should open ourselves up and just accept and embrace it.

So, all in all, this book is a work of art. It won't be a hit and run, it won't fleet away after you've galloped through it, it won't leave you the way you were when you started the read. I was touched, moved, impressed and sort of shaken after reading this, and I'm still recovering now, 24 hours later, and you know what? That's what a book should be able to do for you. That's what art should be able to do for you, alter your soul once you've been touched by its magnificence. I'm altered.

Butterfly-o-Meter Books

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### **Alan says**

This story compiles three snapshots in the life of Gabe, a gay man with a troubled soul, biting wit, and razor sharp tongue. Each snapshot—near death, middle age, young teen—focuses on his relationship with his love interest during that fragment of his life.

Gabe is a man who, because of a sexual-bullying incident during his early years, has built up strong, thick walls around his heart, and uses his cutting wit to keep people at a distance, even though he craves love and affection. Completely self-absorbed, he is also a man that during the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, was changing sexual partners as often as he was changing his socks.

This is not really what I consider an AIDS story, yet the virus plays a major role in the interplay between Gabe and his love interests. This is a sad story brushed onto the canvas with insightful, dark humor and touching flourishes.

Gabe is not a likable character, yet the author skillfully presents his protagonist in such a way that the reader understands why Gabe chooses to push people away, even people he loves. Also, the three snapshots are told in reverse-chronological order, so the reader builds up sympathy for the character while he struggles with AIDS, and then in the end, reveals the sexual incident that derailed Gabe's life, to finally bring understanding. Reversing the order was a stroke of genius.

The author presents a story that is heartfelt and authentic, and told with great skill.

If you are looking for a gushing mm romance with a happy ending, keep looking. If you are looking, however, for a well-written, intelligent, bittersweet tale of love and overcoming a troubled past, then I can highly recommend this gem of a book.

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### **C.M. Barrett says**

This book had me hooked from the first page. The writing quality was so strong that I had to look again to remind myself that this is a debut novel.

The writing is more than excellent; it's in places laugh-out-loud funny. It's my view that if one is going to write about serious and often heart-breaking subject, the relief of humor is essential. Otherwise, people will put down your book and go watch *Modern Family*.

I wasn't at first sure that the reverse-chronology storytelling method worked. Only towards the end of the book did I recognize this as a brilliant strategy for unraveling the psyche of a challenging protagonist.

Gabriel, like many people I've known, isn't easy to love. My friends in this category could be immensely entertaining, they often cooked well, and they made ideal partners on a dance floor. Like Gabriel, they failed *Intimacy 101*.

Through going back in time, the reader can understand what makes Gabriel who he is. With the defining moment of his high-school years, the author makes the powerful point that bullying and other forms of targeted oppression can mould damaged individuals whose defense against the world that always threatens to do it again is a façade that seems impermeable, a mask that shuts out both hatred and love.

The author handles this theme with considerable deftness, and I hope that he is currently working on something new. I look forward to reading it.

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## **David Hallman says**

### **The Duality of Time**

Philosophers, physicists, and poets have drawn on a wide variety of metaphors to capture the essence of time, some of which are more successful than others.

At the personal level, we all have our own interpretations of the significance of the passage of time for us as individuals and as communities.

Two seemingly contradictory conclusions emerge – on the one hand, time seems to change everything, and yet on the other hand, immutable consistencies remain.

Kergan Edwards-Stout's novel "Songs for the New Depression" captures this duality.

In beautiful description and compelling dialogue, the principal character Gabriel Travers narrates twenty dramatic years of his life, and he does so with poignancy and humour. As readers taken along on the bumpy ride of Gabe's struggles, we have front row seats to witness the highs and the lows, the ecstasy and the despair, and, it should be noted, lots and lots of sex.

Through it all, Gabe experiences that persistent duality of time. Somethings that he hopes will change, don't. Somethings that he wishes would remain forever unaltered, vanish.

But Kergan Edwards-Stout isn't content to tell us the story of Gabe's life in a straight-forward narrative.

Exhibiting the creativity and courage that has made him the fine writer he is, he employs a fascinating literary device—he tells the story backwards.

“Songs for the New Depression” is an engrossing and exhilarating read.

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### **Ian says**

There are so many ways you could consider this book gratifying. It is abundant in one mans struggle to live a life that from the beginning was doomed to sadness. Although the overall theme of the 250 plus page work by Kergan Edwards-Stout is about facing your own mortality it is the fleshed out protagonist of Gabe / Gabey that lends it's support the books reverse structure. This book is about story, character and internal dialogue, it's also about time and place and all play a modern anachronistic parable of the life that we all live. There is humor in mortality of the three ages of Gabe and self reflective nuance as the paradigm of Gabe's belief system shifts from one attitude to the next, one disease to the next, one man to the next. It is both a morality tale and realistic account of how the lingering need of both sex and love are never outweighed but nearly always out sized. A few tropes of penis size and bodily fluids are evident, reminding readers, to be accurate in writing queer fiction you must be willing to accept the full ramifications (excuse the pun) of the queer lifestyle. Though Edwards-Stout never lets Gabe be without his inner demons, his acid wit, his spiteful tongue but, ultimately, he does allow Gabe to be human. Gabe is not as perfect as Jon or Keith, as tender as Clare and Gloria, as compassionate as Pastor Sally and Roberta and as loving as Lenny but he gives Gabe one solid gift at the end, and that is of regret. Specifically, Edwards-Stout suggests regret is fundamental to our own understanding of who and what we are as gay men. As painful as that truth is, it is one that we all need to remember.

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### **PaperMoon says**

I liken this book to a regressive dinner – a wonderful experience in three parts, enjoyed in a reverse sequence or order. I found the start of the tale somewhat disorientating, the flow of thought disconnected and fragmentary / random (there is a reason for this of course) ... but it took the introduction of the character of Jon before I was able to ‘click’ into the metier of the story. Jon appears in the final chapter / course of Gabriel’s life ... the mid-90’s and the whilst the shadow of AIDS hangs as a backdrop all the while, the author gives Gabriel a feisty, sassy, slightly cutting ‘voice’ when relating events and describing people ... and thereby preventing the overall tone/mood from sinking into a sombre depressive hole. I know there are some who are ‘so over’ MCs bravely fighting AIDS ... but really, given the passing of the generation who had to endure the massive horror and losses of that era and the seemingly casual outlook of a younger generation immunised by the temporary life-extending marvels of drug breakthroughs, I’m thinking there should be more (not less) books like this and Look Away Silence.

For the remaining two parts of the book, each subsequently takes place approximately a decade earlier in time. It’s as if the author is slowly unveiling the ‘original’ Gabriel, aged 17 in his youthful hopeful glory before the inevitable imprints and over-layering of his life choices. There are ideas or motifs that repeat in each stage of Gabriel’s tale ... these serve to highlight and link these important pivotal moments / experiences that shape his life. Important characters (and one event) are hinted/alluded to in the first part of

the book ... which at the time of mention, seem insignificant until much further on in the reading.

Given the regressive story-telling approach, a brutal and life-changing event is only provided near the end of the book – the characters involved and how they impacted Gabriel; a whole lot of pieces fall into place with this event - the far-reaching damaging impact on his psyche and relational capacity. By the time I finished the epilogue in an emotionally heightened state, I had to go back and re-read the prologue as well as a significant portion of the first section of the book; I experienced a strange need to do this for reassurance and for closure.

Gabriel's musings and 'inner voice' pose significant existential questions (ones which all humans should consider at some stage of their life really) ... why do I act the way I do, can I change, would life be different if I had not taken this road or made that choice, am I truly loved or accepted, who can absolve or forgive my wrongs. I found the narrative framework which allow for such ponderings powerfully moving. Unlike, Patterson's Look Away Silence ... I was not reduced to an uncontrollable sobbing mess by the end of that heart-breaking love story, but Songs for the New Depression did provide a couple of moments where quiet tears did spring forth e.g. where uninvited strong and silent enveloping arms provide the needed answer to Gabriel's cry for absolution and grace.

I loved almost all the secondary characters ... Jon (of course), Gloria and Lenny - Gabriel's parents, Clare his long-time best friend, Keith – the first true love, Pastor Sally. And despite Gabriel's acerbic assessments of these significant others (his jaded and faulty evaluation of these people's impact and love for him), readers are afforded a more objective outsider's view with retrospective understanding on just how much Gabriel was truly loved and accepted. Of course Gabe does not see this and thereby goes about doing life in a self-sabotaging manner.

Gabriel is a wonderful complex MC - needy, insecure, brave, with tremendous capacity to love, proud and impetuous, creative yet destructive ... in short an example of broken humanity. And this is his tale of love and redemption.

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## **Steven says**

Once I got used to the fact that the main character in this was not easy to like or feel much sympathy for, it was a pretty cool read. The most tragic figure in the book was not himself or his parents; it was his psychotherapist. Where she would even start with a guy like this, I'm not sure. As presented, this character was constantly craving love, yet gave new meaning to the term "high maintenance." He also seemed awfully closed minded and "old", even at his youngest in the book. I found it a little odd that a young gay man would be so critical of another young gay man's taste in music nor know who Frank Zappa or Bette Midler was. Much as he hated his parents, he seemed nearly as uncool and old as them in some ways. He seemed to suffer a dual diagnosis of both HIV and a self-torturing, nonstop diarrhea of the brain. As gay male train wrecks go he is one of the most memorable I've ever encountered in gay fiction.

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## **Gregory Allen says**

This was an incredible World AIDS Day for me as I finished Kergan Edwards-Stout's moving debut novel that tackled the AIDS epidemic head-on by giving his readers a person to attach to this disease. Where



Edwards-Stout excels so brilliantly is not turning his protagonist into a martyr. He has written a complex, flawed man (with a book peppered with enough humor to cut through the inevitable) that readers can identify with and not place on a pedestal to simply admire and revere. The book is told in such a unique way as we travel through points in Gabriel Travers' life to see crucial defining moments. It tackles themes of love, searching for acceptance, and the all important question of why gay men can be so 'cutting' and 'nasty' as they respond to people and situations. I found myself comparing each of Gabe's decades to my own life and questioning choices I have made - and isn't that what a good book should do? Songs for the New Depression will stay in your mind after you close the page the same way the Divine Miss M's music lingers in your ears when the record stops playing.

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## **Jodi says**

This is an incredibly important book. I was raked over the coals with the raw emotion that Kergan Edwards-Stout creates in the telling of this story. You can feel the anguish of someone wanting, needing to be loved; and the pain one wishes to inflict, at their failure to find what they are looking for.

Kergan Edwards-Stout writes his debut novel 'Songs for the New Depression' with the experience of someone who has lost a partner to AIDS. Given his knowledge, his readers will come away shaken by the painful and often graphic memoir of Gabriel Travers; a fictional character, as he reflects on his life.

From his deathbed, Gabe tells his story broken down into three decades; 1995, as he comes to terms with his choices in life, the 1980s, when sex was his way of looking for love and AIDS became an ugly result of free love, back to his tumultuous youth in 1976, when he begins his journey with reckless abandon, through the gay scene after experiencing a broken heart.

Given that the book deals with such a difficult topic, Edwards-Stout manages to lighten the mood of what could be an oppressive book, by injecting humor and light-hearted moments. Regaling us with stories of Gabe's relationships with his unlikely friend Clare; one of his only friends high school, his mother Grace, who is exploring her new found freedom and finally the man who becomes his partner guiding him through the final journey of his life.

Kergan Edwards-Stout is an award-winning director and author, whose work has appeared in a number of publications, including the Huffington Post, Bilerico Project, LGBTQ Nation, American Short Fiction and the health magazine SexVibe. He has been honored by the Human Rights Campaign as a "2011 Father of the Year", and blogs regularly at <http://kerganedwards-stout.com>. He is currently at work on a memoir.

This book, Winner-2012 Next Generation Indie Book Award - LGBTQ Shortlist - 2011 Independent Literary Award – LGBTQ, is one that everyone should read; in fact it should be mandatory. It is eye-opening to the struggles a gay person endures to be accepted in a judgemental society. The book is incredibly well-written, so much so that you can understand why Edwards-Stout has been published in many periodicals.

When you read 'Songs for the New Depression' be prepared with a box of Kleenex and a free schedule as you will be so engrossed you won't want to be disturbed; the read is that good.

Disclaimer: 'Songs for the New Depression' was given to me by the author for an honest review. Thanks Kergan. xo

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## **Books-treasureortrash says**

### Book Review: 2 Treasure Boxes

It is 1995 and Gabe has HIV, although he currently isn't showing any symptoms, he knows he is going to die soon. This is his story, starting at the end and moving backwards through time. Gabe shares with us three monumental times during his life, starting in 1995 and moving backwards to 1976.

Songs for the New Depression is the debut novel by Kergan Edwards-Stout. It is a drama and falls under the genre of literary fiction as well as gay literature. The story is told in a first person narrative with the voice and thoughts of Gabriel Travers (Gabe). The story begins and ends in the present with a prologue and epilogue.

The story was written in an interesting manner, and we know from the beginning, or should I say the end, 1995, that something horrendous happened to Gabe that irrevocably changed him. It isn't until the end, or should I say the beginning, 1976, that the reader finds out what happened. Each time period explored contains pivotal events in Gabe's life. At each point Gabe faces a huge life changing event and how he chooses to react has repercussions that affect the rest of his life. Gabe is a complex character, sometimes endearing, sometimes cruel but always interesting.

This is a standalone story about one man's journey through life. It is well written, but at times I was shocked at the explicit gay sex, although I understand that it played an important part of Gabe's life and story. This book is not just for fans of gay literature, it is a sad and thought provoking story and I recommend Songs for the New Depression as a good read.

### Favourite Quote:

"Maybe the next time you meet someone, try keeping your mouth shut and your brain in neutral. Ask questions. Find out everything you can about the other person. The more rounded they become, the less easy it will be to dismiss them."

Questions to Ponder: The decisions that Gabe made in 1976 and again in 1986 had huge repercussions on the rest of his life. Do you think he could have made different decisions at either of these times? Why do you think he choose to do what he did?

For more of my reviews go to <http://books-treasureortrash.com>

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## **Damian Serbu says**

Interesting read that captures the 1990s well. There is an intensity to these tales about a rather average life that will haunt you as a reader, lingering in your mind and making you think. It is written in "backward" chronology. So as a historian, that was sometimes confusing and frustrating, and I didn't think added all that much to the story or revelations.

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## John says

A remarkable, thoughtful book, both desperately funny and desperately sad, though ultimately it's anything but hopeless. Certainly it treats the big issues: love, innocence, joy, bitterness and death, but does so with a poignancy and (for me) an accessibility that makes this book pack quite a wallop.

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## Jeff Erno says

Gabe Travers wants to be a better person. He doesn't want to be so judgmental of others. He wants to connect with his loved ones in a meaningful way, if only he could stop being so pretentious and shallow. On the one hand, he's very proud of himself. He has culture and style, and he genuinely believes that "presentation counts." He's proud of how damned smart and quick-witted he is, and he cannot help but view others as being beneath him.

But he feels guilty, especially when he sees the goodness and sincerity within other people. Why can't he be more like them? Why does he always judge people, think negatively of them? Why does he have to be so selfish and egotistical? He can't seem to help himself, and throughout his posthumous autobiography, he contradicts himself repeatedly.

Throughout this story, I became frustrated with Gabe. I loved and hated him. He represented all the mean, pretentious people I'd ever met, and yet I connected with his struggle for self-improvement. I empathized with his feelings of self-loathing, his battle to conquer the demons associated with child sexual abuse, and his efforts to embrace his authenticity. In the end, I just felt sad.

Certainly the writing is superb. The wordsmithing is brilliant, and the vocabulary that the author uses makes it abundantly clear to readers that he's a pretty educated guy. It seemed befitting the character for whom he was narrating. The problem I have with the book, though, is that although I have a great deal of compassion for Gabe, I just don't like him very much.

The plot is presented in a non-linear format, beginning at the end and ending at the beginning. It is divided into three sections, the first being the last, and the last being the first. I wonder if I'd been able to read the story in chronological order, if I'd have been able to tolerate Gabe a little more. Perhaps this is the point. When we meet someone, we see them as they are with no thought of how they became the person they are. Once we see the big picture, it is easier to understand why an individual behaves the way they do.

It's difficult to judge this story without delving into a psycho-analytical deconstruction of the main character...and even the secondary characters. Gabe's parents, though they did the best they could, were in my view terribly misguided. His mother instilled within him the importance of image and presentation, and she's perhaps the single force that established within him the core belief that self-worth is linked to refinement. This was a hard pill for me to swallow, being that my own core belief is that such attitudes are equivalent to snobbery.

Gabe tries to challenge these beliefs himself on multiple occasions. The most noteworthy of these is when he meets Pastor Sally, one of the story's few endearing characters. Initially he regards her as a hick, someone

beneath him, but then later feels guilty for judging her so quickly. He does the same with Jon, initially proud of the fact that he's so much more worldly and intelligent than this common person. Eventually they fall in love, and Gabe realizes that Jon possesses every bit of the authenticity that Gabe has yearned to find within himself.

Yet in spite of all these self-revelations, Gabe never connects the dots. He never realizes that he's spent his entire life trying to put others down in order to elevate himself. All he ever does is blame. He blames his parents for making mistakes that scarred him. He blames the kids who bullied him for making him into a whore. He blames Keith for rejecting him. He blames his therapist for being a fat, overpriced shyster who has milked him for money and provided no real benefit. And ultimately the only solace he ever finds to assuage the waves of self-loathing and guilt is his own materialism.

I am not sure if the author's intent is to use subtlety to convey a larger, more altruistic message or if he is actually placing a stamp of approval on Gabe's hedonistic view of life. Perhaps he is merely trying to show us that we all are flawed. After all, what I wanted most was for Gabe to just start loving himself. He really was intelligent. He really did have a good sense of humor. He really did have compassion for others and the ability to love unselfishly. Yet he was his own worst enemy. Because he couldn't be perfect...and because "presentation counts"...he went to his grave believing himself to be an utter failure.

My biggest shortcoming as a reader (and literary critic) is that I want my happily-ever-after. I never found that in Gabe's story. Although the writing pulled at my heartstrings and allowed me to feel those bitter-sweet emotions I so cherish, there was no resolution. There was nothing formulaic about this novel, and perhaps that is what has left me feeling so cheated. I acknowledge my own weakness in this regard. I have no doubt that this award-winning novel is worthy the praise that has been heaped upon it, but it is definitely not a feel-good read.

To be blunt, I feel emotionally as if I've been bludgeoned, and I wish my heart would stop breaking for this character who remains a little-too-real for my comfort level. In a word, I'd say the book was "haunting". I guess it will have to be up to the individual reader to decide for themselves if this is a good thing or bad. It has certainly had an impact upon me.

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