



Solip

Ken Baumann

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Every sentence of *Solip* is a brazen little puzzle of heavy mystery, which when welded together as an object form the most compact and mask-faced take on the encyclopedic novel I can think of. In the ballroom with Sukenick and Lispector, it's one that continues to unfold, query, conflate, revealing slick black floors where you thought walls were.

-Blake Butler

Confession time: Ken Baumann's debut *Solip* isn't a novel. Think of how it feels to watch an engrossing film; now imagine *becoming* that film, your vision little more than a flickering image, your body just a burst of white vinyl. Baumann's non-novel, a vast detonation of language, not only captures that feeling, but also challenges you *not* to be held in its thrall. Indebted to Samuel Beckett and Gaspar No  , *Solip* asks the reader to give up all human prejudice and surrender to life's new texture, the flesh become word: a code all Baumann's own, which bludgeons language as much as it opens prose fiction up to the highest horizon. *Solip* is a world for those who already dwell in the sentence, an anarchic hell that sounds something like heaven, by one of America's most promising young writers.

Solip Details

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Author : Ken Baumann

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From Reader Review Solip for online ebook

Tom Lin says

I'm sure this book will be considered genius by certain readers, but it just wasn't for me. It might have been too out there, it might have been too incoherent. I do like filling in the blank on things that aren't on the page, but for the whole experience to consist mainly of that makes me wonder if the author put any efforts at all into the book.

Ben Winch says

I haven't read more than a few pages of *Solip* and I don't know if I will, but I appreciate the gesture. This is writing that doesn't care if it's read or not – or (since that may be impossible) that doesn't worry overmuch about it. True, I felt ripped off when I saw the book design (at \$15, underwhelming), but the ruse of no author's name on spine, front- or back-cover won me over. Could be it's Beckett-lite, or it doesn't give up its mysteries easily. Either way, power to Baumann for doing it himself. Maybe one day I'll read the thing.

Mel Bosworth says

In Baumann's otherworldly textual performance/debut novel, the curtain and spotlight of the stage are traded in for the paper and glue of the perfect-bound book. So too is a standard narrative tossed aside, presenting the reader with what can best be described as an exploratory dreamscape—sometimes lucid and sometimes convoluted—spotted with questions (“Can we ever?”), commands (“Hymn for me.”), and declarations (“Eternity is the combustion engine.”) which feel as permanent as they are transient, a tattoo on boiling water. Baumann sews together disparate fabrics of stage direction, monologue, and guided meditation/nightmare to create less a book and more a quilt depicting textual evolution. But with pages teeming with assonance, wordplay, and lines that often set the reader's eyes to prancing (“Mourning in days in which in ways in which I would not mourn, should not, as I could not mourn to full.”), one soon begins to wonder whether this work, despite its wraithlike narrative form, has any kind of emotional claim. A further divorce from the physical body is suggested in the work's subtle thematic through-line in which the “difficulties” of human senses like “smell” and “hearing” are treated as obstacles that must be overcome. So instead, what's learned is it's the reader who must play the role of passenger at the center of this dream-flight, with Baumann acting as pilot executing an infinite series of touch-and-go landings. Whether readers will want to assume this role of emotional core is the question, though it's not a question this book is meant to answer. The material here is excessively ethereal, which is exactly its point and overriding success: it never breaks character, and in the end it's about our unlimited potential in how we express ourselves. Readers who enjoy letting go, and who can resist their natural urge to assign meaning to foreign shapes and shadows, will be easily lured in by this book's music.

Ken Baumann says

When I reread *Solip*, I'm not disappointed.

Derek says

blogged some about it here: http://www.5cense.com/13/river_corpse...

Jeff Jackson says

Although it stands apart from them, fans of Samuel Beckett's *HOW IT IS* and Robert Pinget's *FABLE* should find some kinship with Ken Baumann's slim anti-novel *SOLIP*. It's continually surprising from page-to-page and often line-to-line. I kept visualizing the various parts of the book as subatomic particles coalescing, dispersing, and then packing tight into unbreakable units. A friend was asking me about it and I opened my mouth to give my impressions and nothing came out for a good few seconds. Which rarely happens. *SOLIP* totally defeated my language abilities.

* * *

I'm docking this a star for the arbitrary reason that Ken's upcoming novel *SAY, CUT, MAP* is even better. Another singular book and a must-read.

Jen says

Well.....what can you say about this one?

I'm not sure how to describe it. But pick it up. Read it. It's not long, and so worth the small bit of time it takes to get through it. See if you can make sense of it. As a whole...I did not get it. And yet, every line was magic. Every line was magic.

J.A. says

Solip is a wallop of a book. A slam of existential bait we are poetically lured to gobble. Plus it fits perfectly in the hand, and the cover is stark (like being naked). This book is probably not for everyone, like Blake Butler and Jesse Ball and James Chapman are not for everyone, but I'm a fan of Baumann, and this is another deep notch in his literary belt.

Michael Seidlinger says

Where a voice chooses not to speak is where the events/non-events of this cataclysmic little novel take place. The suffering and the satisfaction and the steam coming from the hate, the hurt, the harm in these words is quite frankly unlike nothing I've encountered.

Something is alive, resting in wait as you turn page after page.
Careful, I give you a clear warning:

Ken Baumann channeled a presence and "it" waits, rearranging line after line, for you to listen. Easy to overlook and say that you won't listen, won't be reading, but give this book a few lines and you'll recognize that you haven't a choice at all. Never did.

You were destined to read this just like you are destined to die.

[review forthcoming]

Ipsith says

Over the course of 149 pages, Solip cobbles together a mesmerizing string of tones, following a Beckett-ian narrator who by turns sounds drugged up, prophetic, furious, wistful, demanding, and pissed. It's full of plagues and horses and strange winds—the kind of book you read in a sitting, then read again to find out what you just put in your body, and then read again to try to find the map of where you are now. Quicker said: it's fucked.

Brooks says

"All-night telethons on grain-fed televisions. Speaking in reverse."

Ryan Bradford says

As some people have mentioned in reviews, Solip is a difficult book. Part prose, part poetry, part stream of consciousness, this is a work that will probably take a couple reads to fully understand. There's a narrator, there's darkness, there's a lot of pain and grotesqueries, there are brief reprieves of enlightenment (which are thoroughly rewarding).

Even if the narration's difficult to decipher, the beauty of Solip comes from Baumann's language. Linguistic acrobatic, this guy. I often found myself reading a couple passages from the book before my own writing to make my brain a little more maleable and my prose more liquid.

Read something challenging. Read this.
