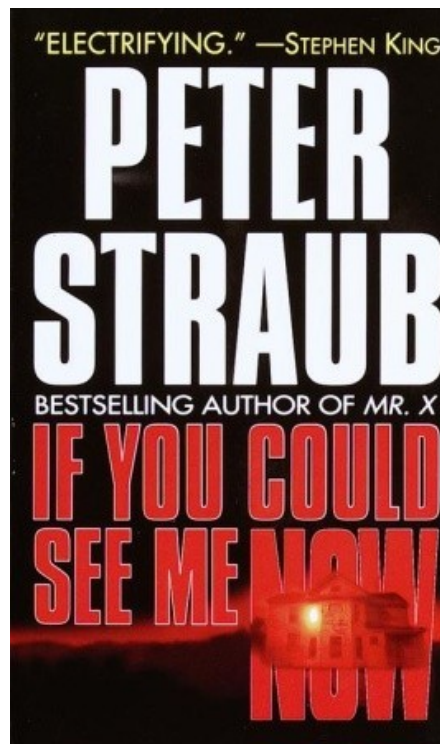




If You Could See Me Now

Peter Straub

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One summer night, a boy and his beautiful cousin plunge naked into the moonlit waters of a rural quarry. Twenty years later, the boy, now grown, flees the wreckage of his life and returns to Arden, Wisconsin, in search of everything he has lost.

But for Miles Teagarden, the landscape he had known so well has turned eerie and threatening. And the love he shared has become very, very deadly . . .

If You Could See Me Now Details

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From Reader Review If You Could See Me Now for online ebook

Linda says

Peter Straub wrote *If You Could See Me Now* early in his career, spinning out an eerie, haunting tale of obsession and vengeance. The book opens with a vignette describing an erotic encounter between thirteen year old Miles Teagarden and his provocative cousin Alison, who seduces him into skinny dipping in a disused quarry. Twenty years later, college professor Miles convinces himself that he's returning to his boyhood home in the midwest to write a book in a quiet, peaceful place. That bit of self delusion begins to break down the moment he sets foot in town. Someone has been abducting, battering, and murdering young girls, and it takes Miles a few days to realize that his former buddies consider him a likely suspect. Now he must come to grips with his past, and with the memories that he's buried for so long.

With the mastery for which he's now renowned, Straub intersperses the supernatural with the mundane, transforming the merely threatening with the terrifying and inescapable. Some of the choices that Miles makes are more than questionable, unless you accept the idea that he's fated to behave exactly as he does. It's easy to become immersed in the dreamlike ambience of this novel, and just when you and Miles are certain about who's committing the murders, you're yanked in another direction entirely. In *If You Could See Me Now*, it seems you can go home again, but you'll wish you hadn't.

Audra (ouija.doodle.reads) says

Hey, if they'll publish it more than once, it's gotta be good, right? This 1977 book was just re-released and I was sufficiently intrigued by the premise, Mr. King's quote, and the wildly variant reviews on Goodreads to give it a try.

First, I'd like to take a look at the re-designed cover. Not that this has any bearing on the content of the book itself, but I do think it's interesting to see how changing audiences and reception of certain genres affects the way a book looks. Cuz I definitely judge books by their covers—ain't nobody got time to read the synopses of EVERYTHING that's coming out—and designers know their audience. If you like (or dislike) a certain kind of book, it can become easy to instantly form an opinion about a book based on its design elements. I don't think I'd be wrong to say that the colors, typefaces, images, and design are definitely influential in your snap decision on whether to pick up this book or that book in the store.

It's definitely more modern, with a cool, dark green background and that mysterious girl facing away from us in some body of water. It's got that large, elongated, sans-serif font that identifies it at once as a thriller. Most of the other older editions have all-type treatments, or something close to it, but those all feel a lot more masculine to me. Besides the first edition cover(s if you're including the technically-more-first British edition) which are just too 70s for me to understand who they are trying to be marketed to, there is the mass market which ties to the Ghost Story mass (and a couple other Straub books too, I think), and then there is a reprint from 2000, which has a very manly cover that is dark and blunt and red. Especially when compared side by side, the 2015 cover really feels geared towards women who enjoy reading thriller/mystery books. And hey, in today's market, that is definitely the audience that will be interested in this book.

I actually enjoyed this more than the other Straub books I've read. Weirdly, although this is one of his older books and the bulk of the book is set in the mid-1950s, it felt very modern, as though it could be set in a small Midwestern town in 2015. The one detail that threw me was that main character Miles had to hire an older lady to come cook and clean for him every day—that is a very 50s detail.

This book really sits deep in the wedge of the uncanny. I spent a lot of the book trying to decide whether or not something supernatural was occurring; Miles is certainly a case study for unreliable narrators. I couldn't quite trust him throughout the book because his memories were so different from everyone else's and he definitely goes a bit crazy about the past, but Straub navigates that uncertainty well. It was sort of like seeing the whole story through one of those funhouse mirrors. You are seeing everything that is there, it just might be distorted and unrecognizable depending on where it is in the mirror. You have to move around to remind yourself what your body is supposed to look like.

The writing also feels more raw and untamed than Straub's later works. It may not be as polished, but I think there is a truthfulness to the uneven quality of the writing and there are many truly beautiful passages and lines throughout. I enjoyed it, and it really feels like a book that could have a good sized audience this time around.

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Sloane says

One of my absolute favorite books!! This book was so chilling that when I finished it around 3am (because I couldn't put it down!) I had to leave the lights on to fall asleep.

Horace Derwent says

like sk's carrie, it's a milestone of american horror letters

like a weird poetry from a weirder omnibus from his mind

Mcf1nder_sk says

I just finished my second book in June, as I slowly but surely take out my TBR list. This book had an interesting premise, as Miles Teagarden returns to his hometown to fulfill a twenty-year-old vow. The book seemed a bit sluggish at points, and then there would be another twist to get your heart racing again. The finale of the book was about what I expected, so I can't say there was a surprise ending. I wasn't sure how to rate this book. A highly-respected bookstagrammer (IMO) brought up the point that the five star scale does not start at three stars, and three is a respectable rating. This book would have to get 3/5. If it seems slow to you, keep going; it picks up later.

Nigel says

Peter Straub's second foray into the horror genre, and i find it odd that I haven't read it, being such a big fan of his stuff when I was a teenager. Nowadays I prefer his later books, the Blue Rose trilogy and The Hellfire Club, big, chunky literate and literary thrillers with no supernatural element. Oddly enough, this book anticipates the move from horror to thriller in a few different ways, and even retains a certain amount of ambiguity about the ghost story element, up to a particular point. The blurb of my copy of the book manages to drop three spoilers in the space of two sentences, and then reiterates one of the spoilers just in case I was slow on the uptake. I shall endeavor to avoid doing something similar. Though I think the Goodreads blurb is similar so I don't know why I bother.

Miles Teagarden returns to his family's old home, ostensibly to write his thesis on DH Lawrence, but more likely to keep a childhood promise. Right off the bat, things go poorly for him. A girl has been murdered and strangers are greeted with suspicion, and Miles himself didn't have the best reputation when he left. Miles exacerbates the situation by being generally clueless, clumsy, rude, and not a little bit cracked in the head. Soon he is surrounded by hostile neighbours, including his cousin Duane. His only allies are an old great-aunt and Duane's teenage daughter. Another girl goes missing, suspicion and resentment turn into violence and rage, and one or two ugly secrets from the past, as is often the case in books like these, come back to haunt the guilty and the innocent alike.

Miles is an academic, so the book is mostly written in a rather purple, prolix style, which, in fairness, Straub pulls off very well, and it does heighten Miles' sense of alienation from the farmers and shopkeepers and housewives he collides with. As a character, you do want to reach into the book and slap a bit of sense into him, but it's clear that the style also conceals just how unhinged he has become. As a murder mystery it's a compelling read; as a ghost story, it's strange and chilling spooky. He just about manages to merge the two by the end, but this isn't his strongest book by any means, which isn't to say that it isn't worth a look.

Jeremy says

A strange mix of mystery and American gothic that I found hard to continue to read. It is very much of its time which was not all bad but the protagonist did not grab me enough to keep me interested. The first chapter was gripping but I found it hard to slog the rest of the way through.

Edward Lorn says

[I have no idea how they beat Alison Greening. I have no idea why fire was able to... what? Put her ghost back to sleep? What the fuck did all Miles's olfactory hallucinations have to do with anything? If Alison ne

Debra says

Stephen King recommended author and book.

Book noted as "important to the genre we have been discussing" from *Danse Macabre*, published in 1981. Author discussed in chapter 9.

Quill says

The Basics

Miles hasn't been back to the family farm in Arden, Wisconsin in twenty years. He left behind a reputation as a troublemaker, but he feels Arden is the place to be no matter how the locals hate him. Because he has to keep a promise he made all those years ago.

My Thoughts

Let's start with Miles. He is the main focus and our narrator, and he shapes everything we see. To the point that I wonder if he is even remotely reliable. There's a moment around the halfway point that will have you questioning him, and throughout the entire, wild ride, Miles will seem iffy after that, if he wasn't already to begin with. To me, this is proof positive that Straub knew what he was doing. He knew the story he wanted to tell, one in which even the audience will start to wonder if the angry, hateful locals don't have a point about Miles.

It's a wonderful ride to take for that reason. Everyone seems guilty, untrustworthy, and yet so is the very person telling the tale. It lends the story an air of the truly mysterious and suspicious. Straub, I'm learning as I read his work, is a master of tone. And not just with the mystery he puts forth in this novel, but with the way he sets up Miles as this haughty know-it-all faced with a town of plebeians that plague him. The point isn't who we, the reader, should side with but rather wanting only to see how this butting of heads will go, knowing all the while that it will be explosive.

My one nitpick would be that the book doesn't really end. It just stops. Like Straub decided he was done writing. That was all he had, so that was it. While the line it ends on is fairly symbolic of Miles's journey and has a touch of dark comedy to it, it felt kind of cheap after all we just went through.

Straub brings class to horror unlike anyone I've ever read. He has literary tricks up his sleeve that will keep sophisticated readers happy throughout. I'm extra happy he's chosen horror as his go-to genre.

Final Rating

4.5/5

Kevin Lucia says

A pleasure, as always. Straub's stories never fail to be psychologically intricate, tense, disquieting, and yet satisfying at the same time.

Bandit says

Good, very good, dangerously close to great. This was by far the best Straub book I've read. For some reason when a lot of the popular genre authors started out back in the 70s, they had the ability to tell a coherent

compelling story in 300 to 400 pages easily. With years came verbosity, which isn't always welcome, at least for me. I appreciate concision and compactness, I think it may even take a greater skill to execute. Anyway...back to the book. Originally written in 1977 (the nice trade paperback edition I read reissued recently) this is a notably undated story about a haunting, structured so cleverly that not until the very end will you know if this is psychological or physical in nature. It's also a murder mystery, a thriller, a love story/a tale of obsession and a family drama, all to a various degree. Exceptionally well written, this was an absolutely riveting read, even in spite of the minor detractors. Such as...the main character, Miles, isn't particularly likeable and somewhat too incestuous for one's liking at that. The local yokel theme was laid on a tad too thickly at times, although the small town mentality was most likely an accurate representation and a timeless one at that, the classic case study on an ingroup bias, the narrow minded distrust of anyone/thing different, the burning hatred of any sort of demonstrable intelligence/education and urban residents in general, etc. The dynamics are fairly stereotypical, but here rendered so well that they perfectly convey the claustrophobic disquieting gloomy atmosphere. Had this been a movie, the ideal tag line would read You can't go home again. Literally. But Miles is going home, because the date he's set twenty years ago with the love of his life (his cousin, see...incestuous) is coming up and the fact that she's been dead all this time will stop neither of them. Absolutely riveting read, the suspense is taut and maintained throughout, the descriptions are vivid and expressive, this one is tough to put down and easy to recommend. Very entertaining read.

B.W. Ginsburg says

This is the first book I ever read by Peter Straub and let me tell you that I was impressed! From start to finish, the story keeps you on edge, wondering why everyone acts the way they do.

The characters in this book are easy to both fall in love with and hate. The book goes beyond examining the spiritual and strange, and shows just how truly interesting humanity can be. Not only does Straub talk about topics such as death and suspicion, but also about the human condition, the minds of criminals, secrets amongst humanity, and much more.

The way that Peter Straub writes this story is wonderful. He uses imagery well and while some images are disturbing, it evokes just how cruel some individuals can be. Also, as in many ghost stories, movies, and shows, the book studies the idea of the smallest towns being the ones with the citizens that hold the biggest, deepest, and darkest secrets.

While there may not be action in every single page, the good writing and the thrilling topics in this story such as humanity, suspicion, and paranormal activity, keep the reader more than interested. This is a good solid read!

Maciek says

This is quite an improvement from *Julia*, which was Straub's first novel of the supernatural. For my taste, *Julia* relied too much on gothic tropes and was uncannily similar to *Rosemary's Baby* to truly stand on its own merit. In *If You Could See Me Now* Straub has improved his style and found a voice of his own, with which he establishes atmosphere of subtle dread and a creepy, eerie mood.

At heart, it's a simple tale. At the age of 13, Miles Teagarden made a pact with his cousin, Alison Greening. They promised each other to meet again in 20 years, in the same place. The promised twenty years have passed, and Miles escaped his crumbling life and returns to the small rural town of Arden, Wisconsin, only to find that he is not at all welcome by its inhabitants, and that something is very, very wrong...

To say more would spoil the plot. The small town setting works splendidly; characters are deftly drawn, easily identifiable and memorable. Fear is subtle and builds slowly, but steadily; the only thing that doesn't fully work are the police procedurals, a trope which Straub will adopt in his later works, such as *The Hellfire Club* and his *Blue Rose Trilogy*. If it was up to me, I'd slim them down and focus on the drama of the townsfolk; but for whatever might bore the reader and slow the novel down, Straub more than makes up in the cloncluding sequences, which are beautifully written, dramatic and tense, and leave the reader with a sense of satisfaction. Straub provides enough twists and turns to maintain the suspense and mounts the emotions and terror accordingly; *If You Could See Me Now* is a novel worth finishing.

Nathan says

I struggled with character motivation through the whole thing. Everyone seems kind of nuts, but no one is satisfying as a madman. Everyone seems pretty bad, but no one is satisfying as a bad guy.

Minnie says

Deze houd ik maar voor bekeken. Ik zit zo'n 75 pagina's ver en het verhaal doet me nog steeds niets, geen spanning, geen voeling met de personages. Ik hoef hier niet te weten hoe het verder gaat. Jammer, maar genoeg andere boeken die me wel interesseren denk ik maar.

David Jordan says

Picked up a 30-year-old paperback copy of this ghost story at a library used-book sale and read most of it during a three-day trip to Los Angeles. It's that kind of book. Straub managed huge sales and a movie adaptation with his next novel, "Ghost Story," but he must have improved as a writer by then, as "If You Could See Me" suffers from stereotyped characters, mangled metaphysics and prose varying from choppy to purple. The Wisconsin setting initially intrigued me because I once lived in Madison, but Straub's treatment of the state degenerates into hackneyed ridicule of small-town attitudes.

Karo'Line says

This was very difficult to get through. From the moment I started reading it, I found it akin to walking through mud. Very thick, sticky mud. With heavy shoes and thick socks, all covered and stinking with mud. Not a pleasant experience. My problem isn't so much with the *way* it is written - Peter Straub is actually quite a good writer, in terms of style. He does know something about *putting* a story together - it is just the actual plot of the story itself, and the characters that I couldn't handle. The animosity the local town folk have for the main character grated on me all the way through. His pompous arrogant attitude towards them grated on me even more. The cave-man attitude towards rape floored me.

I'm giving the book two stars, simply for the fact that Straub really isn't a bad writer, but perhaps books in this kind of genre aren't something that I will be seeking to read again. Which is a shame, as I used to love Stephen King novels as a high school kid. Maybe I just outgrew the supernatural, or it simply outgrew me.

Timo says

Ei ensimmäinen lukemani Straubini enkä muistakaan miehen kirjoista ole pitänyt mutta ajattelin vieläkin antaa mahdollisuuden. Parempi mieli olisi ollut, jos en olisi antanut. Toisaalta, silloin olisi ollut näivertävä mieli, että pitäisikö antaa toinen mahdollisuus.

Sekava ja tylsä ja junnaava. Ei tästä mitään hyvää sanottavaa ole.
