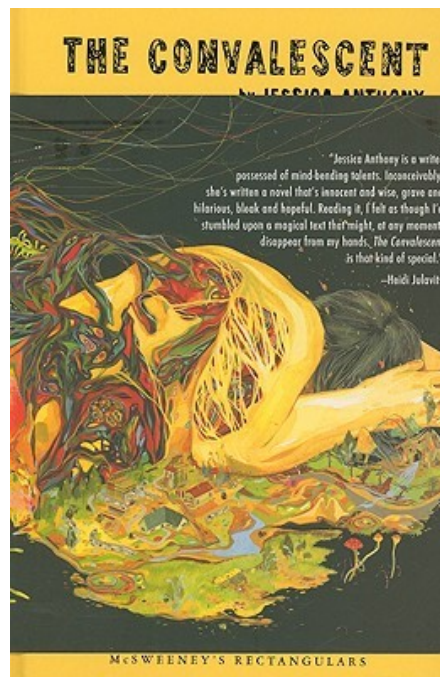




The Convalescent

Jessica Anthony

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The Convalescent is the story of a small, bearded man selling meat out of a bus parked next to a stream in suburban Virginia...and also, somehow, the story of ten thousand years of Hungarian history. Jessica Anthony, the inaugural winner of the Amanda Davis Highwire Fiction Award, makes an unforgettable debut with an unforgettable hero: Rovar Ákos Pfliegmand--unlikely bandit, unloved lover, and historian of the unimportant.

The Convalescent Details

Date : Published June 1st 2009 by McSweeney's

ISBN : 9781934781104

Author : Jessica Anthony

Format : Hardcover 240 pages

Genre : Fiction, Novels, European Literature, Hungarian Literature

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From Reader Review The Convalescent for online ebook

Stacia says

I like reading bizarre books & this one certainly fits the bill.

It's at times touching, imaginative, funny, gross, & fascinating. However, by a third of the way in, I already had an inkling to the ending & I wasn't far off in my guess. I'm not sure if it was that blatantly obvious or if I've just read too many odd books, but I felt a little let-down at already knowing the direction the book was going. Still, it was a quick & mostly entertaining story.

A worthwhile read for fans of bizarro fiction.

Jamie says

On the one hand, fantastic. In the literal and lateral definitions of the word. Mythmaking on a Vonnegut scale, meaning squirrely and capricious and where the bizarre alt-history of the world actually seems a heap more likely than the histories we're given. On the other hand, the ending lost me completely. Had it stuck the landing and not just written Kafka on post-it notes, I'd be singing more praises right now. 3.675 stars.

Sessily says

I can't decide how I feel about The Convalescent. It's 90% perfect: a darkly comic, quasi-surreal joy-to-read that left me sitting on the couch sad that I had finished it and had no more to read. But there's that other 10%, wiggling around in my mind and hiding behind the 90% when I try and get a good look at it.

I think my minor concerns are clear: at times, Jessica Anthony falls back on cleverness and some of the heart is lost, especially in the "historic" sections. I am a tad allergic to novels featuring family histories, especially those that go back to Europe and some semi-mythical old country painted in broad strokes (Middlesex, I'm looking at you), but I mostly liked the historical sections in The Convalescent. (Note that historical here does not mean that those sections resemble anything that could be called "historical fiction." The descriptions and events make it clear that this is more of a mythological history than a real history.) What guided me into them, I think, is that both the way in which they are told and what happens within the historical sections is very clearly and directly linked to what is happening to the main character, Rovar. He is the one describing/inventing these events, as a method of communicating himself to Dr. Monica, the only person with whom he feels any sort of connection. In that sense, those sections are more psychological than they are historical, and Rovar's biases show through. Still, I was impatient at times, wanting to get back to Rovar in Dr. Monica's waiting room with the Sick or Diseased children, or in the bus with Mrs. Kipner, the beetle. (I would have gladly read 200 pages of alternating descriptions between Rovar in the waiting room and Rovar in the bus.)

The larger part of that 10% of dissatisfaction comes from the bits and pieces that aren't quite connected throughout the story. The beginning and the end are related to each other, but there isn't enough in the middle related to either one. Which is really too bad, because I love the ending and I can see some of the ways in which it connects throughout the story, but the connections aren't pulled tight enough for it to be as glorious as it could be. As it is now, it feels almost like it was brought in from a separate story.

But those problems simply keep it from becoming one of my favorite novels. As it is, it's still a supremely enjoyable book: a first novel that makes me excited to see what she might write next, as well as a novel that I plan on re-reading in the future.

Corinna Bechko says

It seems like this book would be right up my alley, full of surreal jaunts into the personal and family history of the unreliable narrator at its core. And I did enjoy it as I was reading it for the most part. The narration becomes a bit repetitive at times though, and occasionally I wished that this filthy little man selling meat out of a bus would do something the least bit unexpected. Alas, he did not. The ending was "odd", but quite what I thought it might be, just as I assumed that his personal history would come around to explain everything else. And indeed it did. If you're a fan of quirky characters, by all means give this book a shot. Just don't expect it to give you much more than that.

Debbie says

Violated my own rule, which is if the book is not at least average, why finish it? I wanted this one to rise above, but it failed me finally. The author took a pretty good premise, that we fail to take proper notice of the "small things," the marginal among us, etc ... and just beat it to death! As much as I like the idea of a mute lame Hungarian-American midget as the protagonist, I couldn't hang with him. I did finish the book out of stubbornness, but it was a hard slog between the clever sections.

Linda Tuplin says

This book left me in awe, breathless and confused. So many forces combine to make us who we are. The main character reminds me of a homeless person I knew briefly, years ago, who roamed the streets coated in motor oil and feces, his protection. I wonder if anyone was able to care or connect long enough to discover--protection from what? I admire Rovar. He was a survivor of extraordinary measure, who loved fiercely.

Found even more gems on this second reading.

Terry says

This is one quirky, bizarre, almost disturbing book. I found the Hungarian history more readable than the main plot. In an odd way I liked the book, but wish that I hadn't read it.

Laura M. says

This is one of the most surprising reads in years. It's the story about a "near-midget" Rovar Ákos Pfliegman who "sells" meat out of a bus in Virginia. He is sick with all sorts of strange illnesses, so he goes to see a pediatrician Dr. Monica, who asks him to "write how he feels." This is the essence of the novel. Since his

parents died in a car accident, he has not only buried his voice but his emotions. We are not allowed to relate to Rovar in the same way that Rovar cannot relate with us--yet by the end, his transformation into the "real" again is so spectacular it literally caught my breath. This novel is like a long poem which challenges all of us to question what is truth and myth. Highly Recommended.

Shawn Towner says

A wonderful book about a non-verbal Hungarian midget named Rovar who sells meat out of a school bus in Virginia. The novel is structured in a fashion that reminds me of *Everything is Illuminated*: chapters in the present alternating with chapters in the past. The chapters dealing with the past in *The Convalescent* focus on the lost, forgotten, and neglected 11th tribe of Hungary. This 11th tribe is a clan of deformed butchers and a giant monk who revolutionizes mounted combat archery.

Like *Everything is Illuminated*, the sections taking place in the past are filled with elements of magical realism, which eventually spills over into the present-day plot. As much as I enjoy the magical realism, the one problem I had with the novel was the Kafkaesque ending. I was fine with Rovar's hallucinatory visions of Speedo-clad water polo captains and Carly Simon, but I didn't care for the magical absurdity of the last few pages of the novel.

McSweeney's did a great job choosing author Jessica Anthony as the first winner of the Amanda Davis Highwire Fiction Award. *The Convalescent* is a great book and I highly recommend it to anyone who likes stories about non-verbal midget meatmongers.

Angie says

the plot is summarized elsewhere, and i will leave it there. what i want to say is that i think jessica anthony has done something even more amazing than i realize with this book. i couldn't see the ending coming together until about thirty pages from it, and even after it arrived it was still somehow in the future, mine to hope for and daydream about, like a perfect gift that includes a card promising a forthcoming gift that will somehow be even better. i don't mean anthony's next book--i have read too many next books to keep that naive flame burning. i mean the rest of this book, which will never arrive but absolutely exists, like the stigma of an infinitely petaled flower that is perpetually unfolding. it is the best sort of literary present, i think, and one that few authors seem brave enough to offer.

but when i say i think i've missed something, i mean that i'm fairly certain there was a trail of crumbs leading right to that ending i couldn't foresee, hints disguised as throwaway trivia, written for us to glance at and look away from, written for a character who is telling and not telling, endlessly narrating and never speaking. this is an exceptionally careful and thoughtful practicing of the craft. most of me wants to go back to the beginning right now and read it again just to mark these crumbs, because i think anthony is more talented than i can give her credit for after just one pass, and i want to be able to give her her full due. well, her or her editor. somebody is superhumanly brilliant here.

Megan Fahey says

So good, especially if you like books about dwarves who steal meat and live in vans mixed with Hungarian

mythos.

Jessica Stephenson says

...the fuck did I just read?

Lisa says

(Just minor spoilers follow... I don't give away anything important!)

Fascinating! Well, it definitely doesn't remind me of anything else I've ever read, that's for sure. I really enjoyed this book so much. Jessica Anthony's writing is fabulously creative and strange, and I love it. I laughed out loud at a couple parts of this book, and cringed during others. The protagonist is very different than most... I *think* I sympathized with him...? Actually, that ambiguity, that "do I really care about *that* thing?" feeling is exactly what you're supposed to feel, I think, because that's what the story is about. The forgotten, unnoticed, different people that we don't always notice or care about.

I doubt I will ever read another story about a small Hungarian mute who sells meat out of a broken down school bus and has a large beetle, Mrs. Klipner, for a friend. Just that basic premise alone is enough to pique my creative interest; but then throw in the history of the Pfliegman clan and the way the truth slowly, slowly, s-l-o-w-l-y is revealed, and it becomes a must-read book. If you appreciate great writing... you have to check it out!

And the ending... WOW. I closed the book and just sat and thought about it for a long, long time. I wish I could say I completely "got" it, but I'm not sure I did. I'm still trying to figure it out. I don't know what the imaginary characters (the Indian, Charles Darwin, Carly Simon) had to do with transformation and Rovar's condition; and I am still trying to figure out the stuff with water/rivers in this book. I know there is some heavy meaning there, and maybe it's clear to everyone else who reads it, but I'd be lying if I said I understood and appreciated all of the subtle metaphors sprinkled through the book. I'm just not that intelligent. :)

But Jessica Anthony is, and I can't wait to read whatever else she writes. She's found a way to tell a story in a completely unconventional manner, with incredible description and a powerful confidence in her voice. It's a beautiful book (not to mention the cover painting is amazing!) and I have to say, it's worth reading just for the Hungarian "history" (?) chapters. Fantastic stuff.

(4 out of 5 stars only because of my own comprehension problems; if I thought I had it all figured out, I'd give it a 5.)

Tara Lynn says

This is the most inventive novel by a female writer that I have ever read. Huge kudos to Anthony for breaking the mold on what a woman should write about. Here, we have the story of the Hungarian small person Rovar Pfliegman, an outcast that lives in a bus along a highway in Virginia, selling meat. Woven into his sad story is the sardonic history of the Pfliegman's, from just after the death of Christ. Add an unlikely attraction, the impending cresting of the river Rovar lives next to, the certain doom that hangs over him, a pet

beetle? cockroach? and blade of grass, and the diverse voices of Darwin, Carly Simon, and Isaac Asimov in the background; if you are not completely frustrated with this novel, you will fall in love with it, as I did. Despite some rather Rabelaisian details, a Kafkaesque ending that seemed rushed, I still give this a 5. I don't know any other writer who could have pulled this all off. Still in awe...reminded me a bit of the character in Pam Erens's Understory, another brilliant (much shorter) novel.

Adam says

An amazing book I picked up because at some point after it came out, Chuck Palahniuk recommended it on his page/blog or in an article or something somewhere. It certainly calls to mind the writing style of Palahniuk but it's content spans between engaging history, and unlikely protagonist who is a ball of pity while still incredibly interesting and undertones and passages reminiscent of Kafka; specifically Metamorphosis.

Lolly K Dandeneau says

What we have here is a strange twisted dwarf-like man who does not speak and sells meat outside of his bus. Being a full blooded Hungarian myself, I admit that regardless of my biased opinion, this is really an interesting story. We get an eccentric history of his family origins, a tribe of foul, savage, Hungarian outcasts. A little cannibalism and a lot of failure, this novel makes you a tad twitchy with disgust for Rovar and all his medical maladies. The strange thing is, you warm to the little cretin. The history of Rovar's family is hilarious and equally disgusting. I have to say, this was a hell of a quirky little read. I loved it, even the things about Rovar that made my skin crawl. Novel is not for everyone, it isn't a light read and the ending merges with the bizarre but for me, that is what gave it charm.

Marc Kozak says

I had this book under my arm during a job interview this week, catching the eye of the HR manager, who casually asked what I was reading. I hesitated. It's pretty hard to explain in a way that doesn't make you sound insane. The story bounces between two narratives, one being the adventures of a sad sack, hairy, mute dwarf who sells meat out of a bus. The other covers the origins of a disgusting ancient Hungarian tribe who sacrifices people for no reason, of which our meat-selling hero is the last remaining member. Yeah. After stumbling through a version of that explanation, the HR lady really had no choice but to stare back at me blankly. I had no choice but to continue. "Have you read any McSweeney's books? Or David Eggers?" A spark of hope. She had. "It's similar in style to that. Very clever and funny and charming, almost to a fault." I was saved. We talked about David Eggers. Yes, he is cool. He has a new book, have you heard? Crisis averted. At any rate, it'd be interesting to see a line graph of the probability of me getting that job before and after the book was brought up. If I get the job, I will remember this book forever. If not, it gets punted across the room.

This is second only to the time I had to try and explain The Hearing Trumpet to a guy on the train (An elderly woman in a nursing home has a hearing aid device that transports everyone to a magic world with gnostic...fuck it, I give up, just shuffle away quietly.)

Moving on, It's hard not to feel let down by this book, for a few reasons really. The first two pages contain

one of the finest openings to a work of fiction that I can remember - a sprawling synchronicity across time and space introduces our main character in such a way that you have absolutely no idea what to expect next. The rest of the book isn't even bad (it's quite good, actually) but there was no way it could ever live up to those first two pages.

The narrative keeps the pages turning, is paced well, and skirts whimsy and tragedy at an expert level. Anthony has at least one sentence per page that will make you stop and take notice of its lovely prose. Rovar, our sickly bus dweller, is pathetically charming, and it's hard not to end up rooting for him in the end. The tactic of connecting a modern character with traits and travails of his ancient ancestors isn't spectacularly original, but it is well done, and honestly quite fun.

However, you are denied the magic of Rovar's character change due to an out-of-left-field ending that is just....bad. I can't say much without spoiling it, but the blurb on the back compares the writing to Kafka's, which isn't at all apparent until the ending, and then it is SUPER apparent. Disappointing.

At any rate, this is an immensely entertaining, quick, and mostly well written first novel from an author who I will be keeping an eye on. Depending on how this job thing goes, it's sheer oddness could reach legendary status for me personally.

Simon Sylvester says

I've said four stars here, but it could have been anything from two to five at different points in the book. Even now, I'm not totally convinced by the emotional centre of *The Convalescent*. But the ideas are brilliant, the prose is absolutely sparkling, and Anthony's confidence soars through the two strands of the plot.

Angela says

an attempt at a Middlesex-type narrative, but full of really repulsive and repetitive descriptions of physical decay. a bit boring and full of forced weirdness.

Lindsey says

So, it appears that Jessica Anthony was having so much fun writing her first novel, a zany tale about a sickly Hungarian midget who sells meat out of a bus in field, that she forgot that she would eventually have to end it. And when she realized the 200-plus-page error of her rambling ways, she said to herself "Yeah... I guess I'm just going to have to make it real weird." And apparently, she'd been reading Kafka.

The initial description of the character seems kitschy with a pretentious bent, meant mainly for cover blurbs and write-ups. However, Anthony does a decent job of lending a unique voice to him and fleshes the character out in an entertaining study. But the sudden leap to magical realism in the last chapter was disjointed enough to put me off to the rest of the novel.

I can't really go into the things that bothered me about this book without spoiling its conclusion. While the last chapter might have worked beautifully as a prose poem, I'm not sure what the point was of the oft-repetitive build-up. And why root the entire plot structure in a folk-tale history of Hungary that never quite

links up to the modern-day narrative? There is certainly a story here somewhere. It begs, if not a happy ending, at least one that makes sense in the context of the rest of the novel. This should not have been an impossible feat, and it's a wonder why no one listed in the acknowledgements mentioned that to the writer.
