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AS I PEN THIS PIECE FOR OUR WINTER ISSUE, REFLECTING ON OUR AUTUMN READS, OLD MAN WINTER IS THREATENING TO UPSET MOTHER NATURE'S MOST FABULOUS OF FALLS.

BY: SHANNON LINDEN



An arctic front is taunting us from the prairies but we've had it good. Besides, is there a better time of year to cuddle up and cozy down with a good book?

The Ladies on Literature are into our fourth season as a book club, coming together once a month to discuss literature, dine on delectables, sip sumptuous wine—and of course, laugh out loud. Visit me at shannonlinden.ca for more reviews or to join in the conversation.

ME BEFORE YOU

BY JOJO MOYES

I love the way British author, JoJo Moyes, describes her own novel: "It's a real weepy," she says—an apt description for a novel that moves most readers to tears.

Louisa Clark is an every day sort of 26-year-old girl, lacking ambition; seemingly content to live with her parents and sister in their modest home. When she loses her job at a coffee shop, she is forced to seek employment out of her comfort zone, becoming the caregiver of 35-year-old Will Traynor, a dashing handsome, successful corporate financier. Rock climbing, motorcycle riding, and traveling the world, Will passionately pursued his life and the beautiful women who adorned it, but when a freak accident leaves him a quadriplegic, Louisa is hired to be his caregiver.

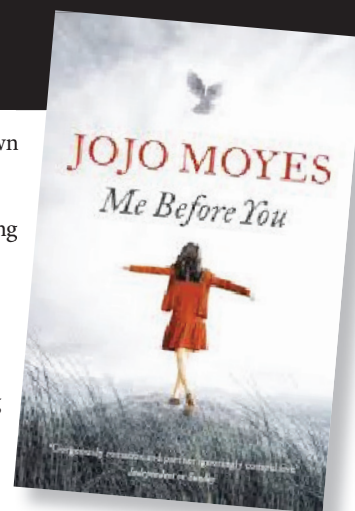
An unlikely relationship blossoms between the apathetic Louisa and the outraged Will. Bitter at what life has stolen from him and frustrated by Louisa's lack of zest for her own, Will endeavors to encourage her to live—really live—while ironically Louisa's mission is the same: to convince Will to keep living following the revelation he intends to seek euthanasia.

A scarring incident in Lou's teens have left her a shell of who she once was, but with Will's encouragement, she begins to grow, watching foreign movies, reading novels, separating herself from her smothering family and applying to college. Putting together a series of exciting outings for Will, she endeavors to prove his life is still worth living.

Jojo Moyes does an incredible job of pacing this story, encouraging readers to care about her characters and to consider what really constitutes a life and how that could be different for each of us.

Highlighting the difficulty of getting around in the world as a disabled person and illustrating the right to die is truly a personal choice, she allows the reader to ponder this deeply provocative and timely question without judgment.

★★★★ 4/5 **Cheers!**



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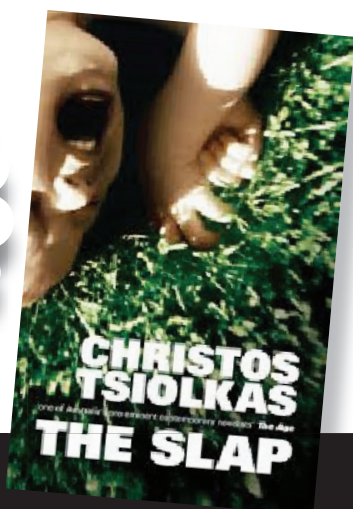
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"AS FOR ME, I COULD NOT PUT IT DOWN. IT'S DARK AND GRITTY, WITH ALMOST EVERY CHARACTER BEING SERIOUSLY FLAWED."

— SHANNON LINDEN

THE SLAP BY CHRISTOS TSIOLKAS



The provocative premise for this book is intriguing: At a suburban barbecue a man slaps a child who is not his own. The reverberations have far-reaching effect in the marriages and friendships of everyone who witnessed it.

Each chapter is told from the perspective of eight characters, four men and four women, ranging in age, every one of them coming at the situation from varying degrees of horror. Some are sickened a child was struck, insisting an adult never has the right, while others contend the severely misbehaving brat deserved to be disciplined, since his coddling parents have neglected that responsibility.

The author does an absolutely brilliant job of getting inside each of their heads evoking an explosion of emotions in the reader.

Well plotted, fast paced, and cleverly schemed, the novel moves chronologically from the opening incident to the final fall out among those involved, so that while each chapter features a new and distinct voice reliving the slap, the timeframe continues to move forward.

Tsiolkas covers a huge range of topics, beginning with the obvious issue of parenting styles in general, discipline in particular. The question of to spank or not to spank sets a course for collision but the plot thickens as the very multicultural cast bring their differing views to bear. The Greek Australian contingent is particularly well explored, given the author's own heritage. There are issues of fidelity as we learn affairs are occurring and emerging sexuality as a young character wrestles with coming out of the closet; careers and ambition, lost dreams, family ties, loyal friendships and socioeconomic status. There's no shortage of drugs and alcohol and blatantly bad language, so if you are easily offended you may not want to pick this book up.

As for me, I could not put it down. It's dark and gritty, with almost every character being seriously flawed. Still, I am stunned by the number of negative reviews from readers, particularly on the GoodReads site. Complaints such as, "A singularly miserable cast of misogynists adulterous and straight up train wreck human beings without a single redeemable character among them" does ring true, but just because we find ourselves disliking characters does not mean they are not well-crafted nor the story well told.

While I would agreed they seem like caricatures embodying negative human traits, at the same time there is something incredibly raw and real about the sad state of many spoiled and dysfunctional adults in the 21st century suburbs.

The four-year old child who is the recipient of the slap is as unlikable as the messed up adults around him. Incredibly rude and widely misbehaved, semi-erotic descriptions of him still breastfeeding will leave many readers wincing.

★★★★ 4.5/5 **Cheers!**

Have a peek!

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