February 2009

Booklover -- Blindness

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Recommended Citation

Jacobs, Donna (2009) "Booklover -- Blindness," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 21: Iss. 1, Article 35.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2518>

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ATG: Why should libraries be interested in Impelsys and iPublishCentral?

SS: With iPublishCentral removing the cost barriers for transitioning content online, publishers of all sizes are now able to market and promote online content. Libraries can take advantage of this by being able to discover content which was not easy or available earlier. Using publisher book widgets, libraries can promote readership on certain titles and subject matters.

ATG: This is a powerful and innovative technology. Can you tell us how you plan to develop it in the future? What are your plans for 2009 and the rest of the decade?

SS: We have a 24-month roadmap to further develop iPublishCentral, wherein we are planning to add features that will help publishers leverage their core asset, content, to deliver both on online and mobile platforms. We also plan to give them the ability to maximize the returns on their content by allowing them to sell in a flexible manner — by bundles, by chapter, by subject matter sets, as complete databases, and offer individual and institutional access, backed with different pricing models. 🌿

against the grain people profile

Sameer Shariff

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BORN & LIVED: India, Middle East, Singapore, USA.

EARLY LIFE: Always dreamt about turning ideas into businesses that create wealth, and in the end turned some of these dreams into realities.

FAMILY: Married with three kids.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Went to Wharton Business School, studied entrepreneurial management. Started first company Medsite after college, built it successfully and sold it to WebMD. I am currently working on my second venture — Impelsys.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE: I spend time with family and enjoy outdoor sports including golf and running. I ran the New York Marathon and plan to run the Paris Marathon.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

PHILOSOPHY: We are all privileged with unique attributes, which we should leverage to make a difference and create a better world.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Transforming an idea that was conceived on a piece of paper to seeing it today into a successful organization, which now employs hundreds of people and leads the industry in its niche.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: To be the leader in providing content delivery infrastructure to publishers through a SaaS model, and helping them build a direct relationship with their end customers. 🌿

Booklover — Blindness

Column Editor: **Donna Jacobs** (Research Specialist, Transgenic Mouse Care Facility, MUSC, Charleston, SC) <jacobsdf@musc.edu>

First, *The Joy Report*. Joy is my Caribbean bibliophile friend and email correspondent introduced in my last column. Currently the temperature in Eleuthera is in the mid 70s with sky and ocean competing for the finest palettes of blue. At the Glass Window Bridge in North Eleuthera you can assess both the Caribbean and the Atlantic blues simultaneously. The season is in full swing, but Joy still finds the time to send me book recommendations from her notebook. She has a chronological list of every book she has ever read and can find any individual entry with the speed and accuracy of a computerized library catalogue. Her most recent book recommendation is “*Infidel*” by **Ayaan Hirsi Ali**.

Soon I’m on Upper King Street in downtown Charleston. I’m on a crusade to scour the Middle East Section of **Blue Bicycle Books** for any sign of “*Infidel*.” It’s not a case of my being unaware of the convenience and certainty of ordering books on the Internet. *Amazon.com* and *Alibris.com* are wonderful Websites and easy to navigate. It just seems a poor substitute for actually feeling the texture of the paper, luxuriating in the cozy environment of a good bookstore and most of all, enjoying the adventure of the hunt. And at **Blue Bicycle Books** you always have to stop and pet the store cat. True to the

historical tradition of crusades, mine is in vain but the hunt is not unrewarded. “*Hypocrite in a pouffy white dress: Tales of growing up groovy and clueless*” by **Susan Jane Gilman** is my delightful, if somewhat unlikely consolation. The title suggests a starkly contradictory theme to “*Infidel*.” However, the humorous approach to humanity and its realities was a refreshing breath of fresh air from the more ponderous world of my most recent “Nobel” read “*Blindness*” by **Jose Saramago**.

A few years ago I embarked on what will probably be a life long project to find and read at least one book by each Nobel laureate in Literature. I’m not even sure if all the authors have books available in translation but with over 100 recipients to choose from, it will be some time before this is a limiting factor.

My frequent treasure hunts at **Blue Bicycle Books** for the masterpieces from my Nobel literature list end in enchantment every time I discover a new book for the collection regardless of subject matter. This brings me to “*Blindness*.” Even writing this now, it is difficult to know where to begin or what perspective to use. Should I speak about the delicate and exquisite shades of gray that define us and how these are magnified and reduced so that the reader experiences the horrors of

swimming in the belly of the monster called humanity? Crisis divides the river, removes the gray hues and leaves us blind with only black and white. **Saramago** deliciously intrigues the reader with the white blindness phenomenon that is overtaking the community. Next thing you realize you are confronting the mouth of a monster. Swimming in the belly of the beast is not my idea of a good time. My first three attempts to read this book faltered, as every time I would reach the monster’s belly I would set the book aside to think. Finding almost any contemplation more pleasant than the wretched world of **Saramago’s** imagination, I would invariably fail to return to the story at all. Finally determined that the book had to be finished, I was relieved to discover that I had already tackled the worst of the story. Once finished I was glad that I had persevered. The story is beautifully written and maybe in the end one can find hope. It was but a few days later I was awaiting the feature film at the local cinema. The previews were rolling and suddenly there on the silver screen was the belly of the beast. I saw the monster — yes a movie based on this book starring **Julianne Moore**. No, I decided **Saramago’s** words were going to have to suffice. I was not anxious to revisit that particular vision played out on a giant

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merely on people and movements. Articles are also devoted to places and events, ideas and ideologies, the arts, film and music, as well as books and other publications. Even consumer products and illegal substances are covered. As such, readers will find entries on topics as diverse as Greenwich Village, the Woodstock Music and Art Fair, Abolitionism, Pseudoscience, Feminism, Freemasonry, *Easy Rider*, the Beat Generation, Gangsta Rap, Gonzo Journalism, *The Liberator*, Marijuana, Absinthe, and the Volkswagen Beetle. The length of the entries reflect the importance of the topic and the writing is straight forward, factual and accessible. There are short bibliographies for each entry and "see also" references are employed throughout. Each volume has an individual table of contents as well as a thematic index or topic finder for the whole set. The third volume also has a collection of 24 relevant documents, a cumulative bibliography, a filmography and a useful general index.

American Countercultures: an Encyclopedia of Nonconformists, Alternative Lifestyles, and Radical Ideas in U.S. History offers readers a unique reference that pulls together disparate elements of our historic nonconformity. By doing so it helps provide clarity and definition to just how deeply

countercultures are woven into the American fabric. In addition, it is one of those references that, while being useful and fact filled, is also fascinating to read and fun to browse. While most of the contributors are academics, this reference is well suited to general audiences and public libraries will want to

consider it along with undergraduate libraries. This encyclopedia is a strong compliment to another **M.E. Sharpe** reference entitled the *Encyclopedia of American Social Movements* (2003, 978-0765680457, new copies available from **Amazon** starting at \$412). 🌿

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theater screen. Even **Saramago** acknowledged when interviewed about the cinematic potential of "*Blindness*" that he had resisted "because it's a violent book about social degradation, rape, and I didn't want it to fall into the wrong hands."

At this point, the reader might well ask what exactly does all this have to do with **Joy's** recommendation? **Saramago's** lead character is a woman and ultimately the only individual unaffected by the white blindness. Thus the reader is afforded voyeur status in the atrocity as seen by a woman. In "*Infidel*" **Ayaan Hirsi Ali** tells her story of exile. In her youth, the exile was necessary because her father opposed the Somali dictatorship and actively worked to overthrow it. As a young woman her exile was self-imposed to escape an arranged marriage. She had begun to question the Muslim oppression of woman asking such questions

as "Must our husbands obey us too?" It is yet another story of the monster as seen through the eyes of a woman.

So why mention "*Hypocrite in a pouffy white dress: Tales of growing up groovy and clueless*"? There is always more than one way to present the subject matter. **Saramago** used his beautiful prose in the fictional account of humanity's inability to help itself. **Ali** told her life struggle simply and candidly. **Gilman** uses humor to reflect on her formative years. Sometimes it is the schoolyard encounter that is our cruelest. In the disparate worlds of literary fiction, self imposed religious exile and an Upper West Side Manhattan schoolyard; humanity continues to present its darkest side to us. In these three cases the encounter is served up to us from a uniquely feminine perspective; but it is no less real and horrible. 🌿

*As a final note of gratitude to my long-term friend, **Jim**, who found the words that I needed to round out this presentation. — DJ*