



**G.**

*John Berger*

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# G.

*John Berger*

## G. John Berger

In this luminous novel — winner of Britain's prestigious Booker Prize — John Berger relates the story of "G.," a young man forging an energetic sexual career in Europe during the early years of this century. With profound compassion, Berger explores the hearts and minds of both men and women, and what happens during sex, to reveal the conditions of the Don Juan's success: his essential loneliness, the quiet cumulation in each of his sexual experiences of all of those that precede it, the tenderness that infuses even the briefest of his encounters, and the way women experience their own extraordinariness through their moments with him. All of this Berger sets against the turbulent backdrop of Garibaldi and the failed revolution of Milanese workers in 1898, the Boer War, and the first flight across the Alps, making G. a brilliant novel about the search for intimacy in history's private moments.

## G. Details

Date : Published January 8th 1992 by Vintage (first published 1972)

ISBN : 9780679736547

Author : John Berger

Format : Paperback 336 pages

Genre : Fiction

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# From Reader Review G. for online ebook

## David M says

The other day I was modeling for a figure drawing class, and brought G. along to read during my breaks. The instructor of the class asked what book I had. I said G., a novel by Jon Berger. A slightly confused look on his face. Oh, he said, he was familiar with Berger's art criticism but didn't realize the man wrote novels.

Perhaps this reaction exemplifies the state of Berger's reputation. He hasn't exactly fallen into obscurity; his work as a critic and journalist is still well-known, but his achievement as a writer isn't fully appreciated. G., which may be his masterpiece, doesn't seem to be very widely read.

A book published in the '70's whose principal themes are sex and revolution. The author was - is! - a Marxist. The structure seems to owe a lot to film montage. The style is highly digressive, at times making it as much a collection of essays as a novel. On winning the Booker, the author used the occasion to denounce western imperialism and donate half the prize money to the Black Panthers.

All this might scream radical chic to some. Indeed the book's relative fall into oblivion becomes easy to understand. On the face of it it's a sitting duck for reactionary, neo-liberal ideology. Worth keeping in mind, and yet I don't think G. should stand or fall based on one's politics or ideology. I wouldn't want to defend it simply as an accurate, successful piece of Marxist agitprop.

Not mentioning any names (\*cough\*Godard), but I do think that many of the other books and movies from that time come off as terribly dated today. Often it's hard to avoid the sense of an author chasing trends. In my view, Berger is able to avoid this by the sheer depth of his commitments, his fidelity to what he sees and understands in the world.

This book is often labeled "postmodern," and not totally without reason given its style; still Berger's preoccupation are more properly seen as modernist. You can find this elsewhere in his masterful essays on Picasso and cubism, his focus on modernism as an unfulfilled promise. G. is set in the early years of the twentieth century. In part it tells the quintessential story of the collapse of the bourgeois world order. The political specter haunting these pages isn't so much Mao as October. In his inimitable way Berger weaves together considerations on art, history, love, sex, war, and oppression. If in the end he doesn't impose any grand unifying theory on his material, I think this is very much to his credit.

While certainly an intellectual, Berger is the opposite of a pedant. His writing is often so sensual and beautiful as to escape the lures of any program or orthodoxy. Here is a boy discovering pleasures in his body for the first time

The mystery which inflames him and at night in bed stiffens his penis leads the boy to ask a number of questions. But the questions are asked in a mixed language of half-words, images, movements of the hands and gestural diagrams which he makes with his own body... Thus, the following are the crudest translations. Why do I stop at my skin? How do I get nearer to the pleasure I am feeling?... In what I am - what is this thing in the middle of which I have found myself and which I can't get out of? - pp 39

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## Marina Sofia says

It's never going to be a popular or an easy read, but it was surprisingly enjoyable. Although at first blush it looks extremely European, there are links to a British tradition (Tom Jones, Tristram Shandy, Samuel Pepys).

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## Declan says

My review is somewhere in the comments below!

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## Orsodimondo says

### CRONACA DI UNA DELUSIONE NON ANNUNCIATA

*Il mio interesse per lei è appena inferiore a quello che provo per G.* , scrive John Berger a pagina 186.

Ma così non è: di G. gli interessa poco.

Lo usa più che altro come *trait d'union*, il romanzo sembra soprattutto parlare d'altro.

### John Berger fotografato nel 1966, sei anni prima che pubblicasse questo romanzo.

D'altronde, G. non è particolarmente interessante.

Come non lo sono suo padre e sua madre: personaggi abbastanza ordinari che niente hanno da spartire con i protagonisti presenti nelle altre opere narrative di Berger, epici e sovrumani, pur se inseriti negli ultimi gradini della scala sociale.

Il passaggio dalla prima alla terza persona è uno stile già presente altrove in Berger: qui assume però caratteristiche diverse, perché l'io è proprio il narratore, lo scrittore John Berger, non il protagonista - si tratta di un parlare in prima persona verboso e prolisso, che si spinge finanche a indirizzarsi direttamente al lettore.

Probabilmente perché dietro quest'opera c'è una precisa tesi filosofico-politica da dimostrare, che Berger non riesce proprio a camuffare, e forse neppure ci prova.

G. non ha una visione della vita, al contrario del suo vigoroso creatore: se ne va per il mondo, sfiorando momenti storici di notevole importanza, presente sul posto, ma mai partecipe.

Anzi, dimostra un notevole disinteresse per quello che gli succede intorno.

La sua molla è il desiderio sessuale, l'attrazione per l'altro sesso.

Ma anche nel corso delle sue avventure amoroso-erotiche, Berger è così poco stimolato dal suo personaggio centrale, da immergersi piuttosto nell'anima delle donne 'conquistate' e assumerne il punto di vista, siano esse l'indimenticabile Beatrice, la zia che inizia il giovane nipote (il sogno di tutti noi maschietti?), la cameriera Leonie, Mathilde, Madame Camille Hennequin...

In pratica, la storia di questo novello Don Giovanni viene raccontata dal punto di vista delle persone sedotte,

invece che del seduttore.

Non perché Berger veda nelle sedotte delle vittime, fortunatamente, non ci sono né vittime né eroi negli incontri a due di questo romanzo.

### **John Berger insieme al subcomandante Marcos, 12 maggio 1995.**

La mia impressione è che questo romanzo, peraltro il più fortunato nella carriera letteraria di John Berger, premiato col prestigioso Booker Prize, sia più vicino alla sua produzione saggistica che narrativa: se non altro tutte le volte che l'autore sale in cattedra, sceglie di spiegare e di motivare, di insegnare. Il che in un saggio è comprensibilissimo, nella narrativa invece...

Quanto mi sono mancate le geografie aperte, sognate, reinventate che ho finora trovato nei libri di Berger, quanto mi è mancato il suo asciutto lirismo...

Se mi fossi avvicinato a Berger attraverso questo libro, lo avrei abbandonato e perso per sempre la meraviglia del mondo bergeriano.

Fortunatamente, per me, prima sono venuti capolavori come "Da A a X", "Festa di nozze", splendidi libri come "Lillà e Bandiera", "Qui, dove ci incontriamo", "E i nostri volti, amore mio, leggeri come foto".

Ah, che brutta delusione, signor Berger!

Più che possibile che io non l'abbia capita questa volta, che il limite sia tutto mio.

Ma le assicuro che la pesantezza e fatica della lettura e la totale mancanza di interesse sono dati concreti.

Il fatto che quest'opera anticipi di parecchio le sue altre da me molto amate credo voglia dire qualcosa.

### **John Berger insieme alla regista catalana Isabel Coixet.**

PS

Continuo a riflettere su questo libro, la delusione brucia parecchio, ero convinto mi sarebbe piaciuto moltissimo, ho fatto di tutto per farmelo piacere. E invece...

Lo definiscono il romanzo più sperimentale di Berger: magari lo è pure, ma dovrebbero aggiungere anche che è il più datato. Sembra un po' di trovarsi davanti a una messa in scena del Living Theatre, a quell'epoca sconvolgenti.

Appunto: a quell'epoca. "G" mi ha fatto l'effetto di alcuni film di Godard, di tutti quelli da una certa data in poi (sicuramente, almeno dagli anni Ottanta in poi): datati, prolissi, cervellotici, cattedratici.

Dimenticavo: complimenti a John Berger per come conosce la storia d'Italia. Mirabile davvero.

**Paul Cézanne: Il Pendolo Nero (1869-70).** Di Cézanne Berger scrisse: *Partiamo dal nero che si trova in molte delle sue prime opere, quando aveva tra i venti e i trent' anni. È un nero come non ce ne sono altri nella storia della pittura. Ha una tale presenza, una tale sostanza. Vi predomina qualcosa di simile all'oscurità degli ultimi lavori di Rembrandt, ma questo nero è infinitamente più tangibile. Somiglia al nero di una scatola che contiene virtualmente tutto quel che esiste nel mondo solido. All'incirca dieci anni dopo, Cézanne comincia a estrarre i colori dalla scatola nera: non colori primari, dato che sono astrazioni, bensì colori sostanziosi, complessi, e cerca di trovare loro una sistemazione in quel che osserva con tanta intensità.*

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## Vit Babenco says

*G.* is an extravagant postmodernistic rendering of *Don Juan* myth – the stone guest included – set before and at the beginning of the Great War.

Falling in love at five or six, although rare, is the same as falling in love at fifty. One may interpret one's feelings differently, the outcome may be different, but the state of feeling and of being is the same.

A pre-condition is necessary for a five-year-old boy to fall in love. He must have lost his parents or, at least, lost any close contact with them, and no foster-parents should have taken their place. Similarly, he must have no close friends or brothers or sisters. Then he is eligible. Being in love is an elaborate state of anticipation for the continual exchanging of certain kinds of gifts. The gifts can range from a glance to the offering of the entire self. But the gifts must be gifts: they cannot be claimed. One has no rights as a lover – except the right to anticipate what the other wishes to give.

The novel is written in the very unusual manner so it had taken quite a while before I began to surmise that the story is a rather subtle black comedy. The further it goes the more grotesque it turns.

The state of being in love was usually short-lived – except in unhappy cases of unrequited love. Far shorter lived than the nineteenth-century romantic emphasis on the condition would lead us to believe. Sexual passion may have varied little throughout recorded history. But the account one renders to oneself about being in love is always informed and modified by the specific culture and social relations of the time.

With every new amorous victory one loses another tiny part of oneself until in the end one's ego sinks in the abysmal emotional vacuum.

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## Courtney H. says

Ah, my first non-5-star (I'm incredibly lazy with rankings). *G.* isn't quite so far down my list of enjoyable books as to be a 1-star, but I really did not like this book. Which is a shame, because I actually really love John Berger; I love *Pig Earth* and *Once in Europa*. But *G.* was vastly different and vastly inferior. Perhaps I'm just a stick-in-the-mud and couldn't grasp/appreciate the experimental style of *G.* But mostly I think that it was less experimental and more . . . not good.

First, it is really sexist. Now, I was expecting sexism; this prize started in England in the 1970s, so I wasn't exactly expecting cutting-edge equality on that front. I figured there would be a lot of great male characters and a lot of not-so-great female characters for the first 10-20 years of that prize, at least. But while it is true that most of the Bookers are about men until you get to *Hotel du Lac* (don't make me count *Heat and Dust*, please), *G.* was really the first one that seemed straight-up sexist. I suppose that's part of the book's narrator, a wealthy vagabond who starts having his eyes opened by class consciousness. But *G.* really sees women as things to sleep with without consequence, and when that gets shoved down your throat repeatedly enough you start to forget that it is just supposed to be the narrator and not see it seeping into the worldview of the book itself. So that gets dull.

And honestly, the path of the story, the awakening of a member of the upperclass (and the consequences of

that awakening), is an interesting. Berger is clearly a gifted writer. Some parts of the novel still stick with me (his treatment of the airplane trip), which reflects that even in a book I did not like, his gift and his ability to twist political thought into actual literature (as opposed to being a pamphlet dressed up as fiction -- not that there's anything wrong with that). His writing can be humorous too, and the end of G. in particular is darkly comic. But I think the so-called experimental style gets in the way of the novel's purpose. Sometimes, a straight-up sentence accomplishes more than a fractured one.

Maybe one day I'll read this again with more patience and be more equipped to roll my eyes at the 1972 method of dealing with gender. Til then, I won't recommend that you not read G., but I'll give you about 100 other books to read first. Not least of which is his Into Their Labors trilogy (honestly, how did G. win but those did not?).

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## **Lisa says**

The curiously-named G. by John Berger won the Booker Prize in 1972 as well as the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. Wikipedia has very little to say about the book so although there is a bit of chat about it here on GoodReads I presume that it isn't widely read and nobody feels confident about writing the definitive entry about it for Wikipedia.

I liked it, and I liked it a lot. It's unashamedly postmodern, but it's picaresque which makes it a reading experience somewhat different to other postmodern books I have read.

The central character is the English-Italian G, and if Berger explained why he doesn't have a proper name, I missed it. At first I thought it might be an allusion to Giuseppe Garibaldi, the Italian hero who led the movement to unify Italy, because G (via British Foreign Office machinations) gets mixed up in the irredentist position of Trieste, an Italian seaport that was under the control of Austria at the outbreak of World War I and not formally annexed to Italy until 1920. Following this line of thought I remembered that Giuseppe is an Italian variant of the Hebrew name Joseph (Son of Jacob, the one with the many-coloured coat) because the name means 'one who enlarges' – but it all seems a bit tenuous because G is more of a Don Juan than a proper spy. If he was a spy at all. So now I think he's called G because Berger just wanted him to be enigmatic.

Scholars, I expect, might have a grand old time reading and re-reading this book to unpick its treasures, but general readers are best advised just to 'go with the flow' and just read it as it comes. The plot (such as it is) will gradually emerge, and with it will come the sense that the affairs of men which seem of such importance to the people involved are insignificant beside the grand events in history which form a backdrop. While G is philandering with an assortment of other men's wives, provoking melodramatic revenge by one outraged husband or masterful resignation by another, the aviator Jorge Chavez was redefining the possibilities of flight and the geo-political map of Europe was being redrawn.

To read the rest of this review (and use the links to various historical events) please visit <http://anzlitlovers.wordpress.com/201...>

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## **Alex Rendall says**

I find it very difficult to adequately summarise John Berger's G. This may partially be due to the difficulty in

categorising John Berger, who can at once be described as a painter, art critic, novelist, essayist and sociologist. Berger has contributed much to a number of varied fields and his knowledge of multiple subject areas imbues his work. *G.* is a sweeping novel that spans genres and at times appears to blur the lines between fiction and fact.

The novel begins in Italy in 1898 and follows the life of the eponymous *G.* across Europe, as he loves then leaves a succession of women. Written in the picaresque genre (by definition a novel which follows a rakish character in his or her exploits, such as *Don Juan* or Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*), the narrative at times backs away from *G.* to focus on the historical or political situation in Europe at the time. Berger also sometimes breaks from the story completely to discuss abstract concepts with the reader, such as the appreciation of the female form or the expression of love. At times he uses 'I' to break down the barrier between himself and the reader and bring himself into the tale, rather than being a purely incidental third person narrator. I confess that I found these forays into Berger's philosophy to be quite distracting from the development of the narrative. Whether Berger intended for this to be the effect is unclear, but I feel that rather than adding an extra layer of meaning to the work this comes across as baffling in its pretentiousness.

This is an accusation that I would level at the novel as a whole. The lack of coherence between these breaks and the central tale render the narrative disjointed and unfocussed. Perhaps if I knew more about artistic theory I might appreciate some of these abstract meditations, but they are incomprehensible to the layman and make the novel seem opaque and inaccessible.

Other elements of Berger's story are disappointing. *G.*'s tale unfolds at unerringly different paces; Berger at times spends pages describing a single afternoon, building up a truly beautiful descriptive picture of a scene, but then spoils it by rushing crucial elements of the story (*G.*'s death in particular feels like an after-thought that was hurried along in order to meet a publisher's deadline). The sweeping historical viewpoint, while at times interesting, has a didactic air about it which gives Berger the feel of a lecturer attempting to impose his views on his readers rather than independently presenting the narrative. At times I felt that Berger was attempting to tell me how to think, to convince me that only his world view was the correct one. I didn't understand elements of what he was trying to say but I am not the type of person who enjoys having views imposed upon me!

*G.* is not an unsatisfying read. If one ignores the frequent deviations from the plot and takes the story at face value, it is fairly entertaining. I doubt however that this is all that Berger intended for his work and, given the number of awards that it won, I suspect I may have missed something important that critics with greater knowledge than I were able to interpret. I think that it has all the charm of an epic blockbuster movie; it may be massive in scope and may have won lots of plaudits, but I found it impossible to warm to in the same way as other novels. *G.* is not the kind of book that one can curl up with and enjoy; it sees itself as being far too grand for that.

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## **Joselito Honestly and Brilliantly says**

Like what I said in my review of Zamyatin's "*We*," I believe I've found a fair explanation of why the books included in the 1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die made it on the list, and this I found in another listing, the 1001 Paintings You Must See Before You Die where the Introduction explained the choices by these justifications:

1. the painting (book) is interesting because of its subject matter;



2. the painting (book) is interesting because of the way it is written; and
3. the painting (book) is important because of its relation with other paintings (books).

Most readers look for stories so it is no wonder that many of the 5-star ratings here are given to those books falling under No. 1. Some, however, are connoisseurs of style, or admirers of the grotesque or the adventurous, and they would give high ratings to those falling under No. 2. Others are more attune to literary history ("this author is one of the pioneers of modernist writing of which his novel \_\_\_\_\_ is a perfect example"), or lovers of nostalgia ("this novel was the very first of its genre") and would lend more sympathetic ear to those falling under No. 3.

I say that those falling under No. 2 are often the most difficult to appreciate; those under No. 3, often the most insipid and boring; and those under No. 1 often the most easy to read and give the most satisfaction (unless the reader hates the subject matter).

These categories may explain why a book can get 1 star from one reader yet get an ecstatic 5 stars from another. A reader, for example, who is always expecting books to be under No. 1 will definitely hate those he reads which reveal themselves in the end to be either under No. 2 or No. 3.

This novel, for me, is a definite No. 2. It has a plot: the principal protagonist "G." is a Don Juan, a seducer of women, son of a rich Italian father by his English mistress. He discovered the joys of sex at an early age, under the tutelage of a much older woman. This is told behind the backdrop of pre-world war 1 Europe (Italy, in particular). But it is not the plot which makes this an interesting read. Inserted between the lines of the main plot are amusing, and often brilliant, sidebars and digressions like crude drawings of cunts and penises (one penis is even smiling), meditations, mini-essays, aphorisms and observations about varied topics like love, sex, literature, women, history, heroism, madness, revolutions, and so on. Here, for example, is one about blackberries (the fruit, not the phone) and sexual experience--

"Why does writing about sexual experience reveal so strikingly what may be a general limitation of literature in relation to aspects of all experience?

"In sex, a quality of 'firstness' is felt as continually re-creatable. There is an element in every occasion of sexual excitement which seizes the imagination as though for the first time.

"What is this quality of 'firstness'? How, usually, do first experiences differ from later ones?

"Take the example of a seasonal fruit: blackberries. The advantage of this example is that one's first experience each year of eating blackberries has in it an element of artificial firstness which may prompt one's memory of the original, first occasion. The first time, a handful of blackberries represented all blackberries. Later, a handful of blackberries is a handful of ripe/unripe/over-ripe/sweet/acid, etc., etc., blackberries. Discrimination develops with experience. But the development is not only quantitative. The qualitative change is to be found in the relation between the particular and the general. You lose the symbolically complete nature of whatever is in hand. First experience is protected by a sense of enormous power; it wields magic.

"The distinction between first and repeated experience is that one represents all: but two, three, four, five, six, seven ad infinitum cannot. First experiences are discoveries of original meaning which the language of later experience lacks the power to express.

"The strength of human sexual desire can be explained in terms of natural sexual impulse. But the strength of

a desire can be measured by the single-mindedness it produces. Extreme single-mindedness accompanies sexual desire. The single-mindedness takes the form of the conviction that what is desired is the most desirable possible. An erection is the beginning of a process of total idealization.

"At a given moment sexual desire becomes inextinguishable. The threat of death itself will be ignored. What is desired is now exclusively desired; it is not possible to desire anything else.

"At its briefest, the moment of total desire lasts as long as the moment of orgasm. It lasts longer when passion increases and extends desire. Yet, even at its briefest, the experience should not be treated as only a physical/nervous reflex. The stuff of imagination (memory, language, dreams) is being deployed. Because the other who is palpable and unique between one's arms is--at least for a few instants--exclusively desired, she or he represents, without qualification or discrimination, life itself. The experience = I + life.

"But how to write about this? This equation is inexpressible in the third person and in narrative form. The third person and the narrative form are clauses in a contract agreed between writer and reader, on the basis that the two of them can understand the third person more fully than he can understand himself; and this destroys the very terms of the equation.

"Applied to the central moment of sex, all written nouns denote their objects in such a way that they reject the meaning of the experience to which they are meant to apply. Words like cunt, quim, motte, trou, bilderbuch, vagina, prick, cock, rod, pego, spatz, penis, bique--and so on, for all the other parts and places of sexual pleasure--remain intractably foreign in all languages, when applied directly to sexual action. It is as though the words around them, and the gathering meaning of the passage in which they occur, put such nouns into italics. They are foreign, not because they are unfamiliar to reader or writer, but precisely because they are third-person nouns.

"The same words written in reported speech--either swearing or describing--acquire a different character and lose their italics, because they then refer to the speaker speaking and not directly to acts of sex. Significantly, sexual verbs (fuck, frig, kiss, etc., etc.) remain less foreign than the nouns. The quality of firstness relates not to the acts performed, but to the relation between subject and object. At the centre of sexual experience, the object--because it is exclusively desired--is transformed and becomes universal. Nothing is left exterior to it, and thus becomes nameless."

The next paragraph after this quote has crude drawings of a penis pointed at a vagina.

Now lest you get the impression that this is but a member of an avant-garde collection of sex books with scholarly pretensions, I will assure you it is not. For example, this paragraph reminds me of our National Hero, Dr. Jose Rizal:

"At a time when national independence has become or is becoming a conscious issue, one may find in an undeveloped and colonized society, within one family and even within one generation, extraordinary differences of knowledge and sophistication; yet such differences do not necessarily constitute a barrier. The one who has received a higher education at the hands of the imperial power (for there is no other education available) is aware of how consistently his own people's history and culture have been denied, and he values in his own family the vestiges of the traditions which have been suppressed; at the same time the other members of the family may see in him a leader against their foreign oppressors whom until now they have only been able to fear and hate dumbly. Educated and ignorant share the same ideals. The difference between them becomes a proof of the injustice they have suffered together and of the rightness of those ideals. Ideas become inseparable from aspirations."

As a No. 2 book this is amazing. Read as No. 1, I could give it 3 stars, although (or even if?) it does not have a happy ending. I do not know if it is an "important" novel under No.3, but I confess this was the first novel I've read which is written in this manner.

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### **Jenny (Reading Envy) says**

This was one of the easier Booker prize winners to read, despite (or maybe because of) its disjointed style. The protagonist is interesting but I almost feel like the author connects the reader to him much better when he is a child than when he is an adult. There are interesting statements made on relationships, some silly and unnecessary drawings, and set before WWI in Europe.

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### **Burak Uzun says**

Berger'den her ?ey dahil ya da ortaya kar???k diyebilece?imiz türde bir roman. A?k, tutku, siyaset, tarih, çokça al?nt?... hepsi bir arada. Bu durum, hikâyenin önüne geçmi?. Ama ben sevdim. Çünkü hikâye basit ama metin keyifli.

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### **Liviu says**

G is a very interesting but somewhat strange novel; well deserving of the Booker it won for beautiful prose and some great paragraphs about relationships - among the best introspective descriptions of people in a romantic and erotic context and not only I've read.

The structure in paragraphs linked in a whole as well as the authorial insertion about this or that works well despite the seeming scattering in the beginning.

G the main hero is a mystery almost to the end and he is reflected through women and violent events he is mostly a bystander until they engulf him

Highly recommended

FBC Rv:

INTRODUCTION: Sometime ago I stumbled by chance upon a remark that "G" by John Berger is the strangest book to have won the Man Booker prize (in 1972), not to speak of the author's acceptance speech that became notorious. I was curious and after I checked and liked the excerpt from "Amazon read inside" above, I finally got the book.

"Winner of Britain's prestigious Booker Prize, John Berger's "G". relates the story of a young man forging an energetic sexual career in Europe during the early years of this century. Berger sets his novel against the turbulent backdrop of Garibaldi and the failed revolution of Milanese workers in 1898, the Boer War, and the first flight across the Alps, making "G". a brilliant novel about the search for intimacy in history's private moments."

ANALYSIS: As storyline goes, G is a modern interpretation of the classical Don Juan story but from the perspective of several of the women involved. G. himself - the illegitimate son of a rich but strange English girl and a conventional Italian businessman - is seen through the eyes of the women, the narrator who inserts his comments here and there and only sometimes directly, this last especially in the midst of violent events at which he is essentially a bystander until they engulf him.

Hypnotic and quite un-intelligible either by the men in his circle who mostly dislike and even hate him, or by the women who are mostly fascinated despite themselves, G remains a mystery to the end with his actions confounding everyone expectations. The book is worth reading for this unexpected moments, though of course it has more strengths. The prose is just beautiful and on many occasions mesmerizing and the introspective descriptions of people in a romantic and erotic context are among the best I've ever read.

"G" focuses on several key moments: Garibaldi's Italian saga and the early years of the modern Italian state are interlinked with G's conception and childhood, The Boer War coincides with G's sexual awakening, a 1910 aviation first with some of G's conquests as a young man and the Great War with G's apotheosis so to speak... G himself looks for the strange, in women and events, so for example one of his "conquests" is interesting for him only as long as her husband is threatening to shoot him...

The novel has an unusual structure with paragraphs linked in a whole as well as authorial insertions about this or that; overall the structure works well despite the seeming scattering in places, though it requires constant attention to detail. The combination of personal and historical, story and authorial musings give the novel its "interesting-ness" flavor that I appreciate a lot and I am highly recommending it for a very rewarding and entertaining reading experience.

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## **Megan Baxter says**

This has been a hard review to get started on. And I wrote that sentence only to pause and wonder what else to write. Maybe going to get some coffee will help.

And now it's the next day. This review is really stymying me. (Of course, that could be because I'm trying to write my thesis conclusion and that's being difficult as well. All writing is feeling a little difficult this week.) I'll press on, though, to at least get this done and out.

Note: The rest of this review has been withheld due to the changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision [here](#).

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at [Smorgasbook](#)

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## **G says**

This book is the EPITOME of why I gave up on finishing all the Booker Prize winners; holy wow. (But I will not be daunted!! I'm gonna do it!)

Back to my rant: so many of the 1970s winners are trash. Just boring and self-indulgent, shoddy attempts at postmodernism, or whatever book by an established and successful author happened to come out in a year

when the Booker committee wanted to give that person the prize and consolidate his or her career. *G.* isn't the worst of the lot, but it distinguishes itself by being virulently misogynist, pretentious, and overwritten; the whole book feels like Berger making a bunch of super confident, random assertions about things he seems to know nothing about, and in that, it is a stunning example of white male literature / why the 70s literary scene sucked. OH MY GOD I HATED THIS BOOK.

For example, take the random section on the Boer War. There's a lot of rambling about Afrikaners and their particular cultural identity; having lived in South Africa and researched what Berger's talking about, none of what he says is accurate!! It's his RANDOM OPINION but he goes on and on and ON about it like it's established fact. Ditto the constitution of women's identities (newsflash, ladies, we exist only in relation to men). Ditto EVERYTHING. It's also weirdly repetitive? A whole lot of stuff about us humans only existing in relation to others' idea of us, which is classic 1970s PoMo nonsense, but Berger puts his own unique spin on it by drawing penises and inserting those into the text?

Only reason I didn't give this one star is that I do think Berger is a good writer, and there were flashes of interesting insight into imperial identity formation / I liked the ending section, in Trieste, right before WWI, less the INCREDIBLY boring and out-of-nowhere ending, which was only good inasmuch as it meant this trash book was over. The 1970s Bookers are gonna kill me.

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### **Cem Aykaç says**

Cinsellik, siyaset ve en çok da gençlik yan?lg?lar? üstüne çok iyi bir roman.

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### **T.J. Beitelman says**

So I sent somebody, a writer (a better writer than me, in fact), an email not too long ago about how I was loving this book by John Berger called *G.* And she wrote back and asked me what I loved about it. So I responded, but this same email also included an attachment of some of my own work, and I felt like I needed to preface *my* work with, you know, my doubts about whether or not it cohered, arrived, whatever.

Anyway: this was the prefatory stuff, about *my* work:

I do think it does \*something\* (and that's maybe the best way to say it) -- I'll let you decide if you can figure out what you think that \*something\* is.

I say all that to set up this, the bulleted list I sent to said better-writer-than-me regarding John Berger's stunning book, *G.*:

#### **Things I Love About *G.* --**

...It's (Berger's) very willing to not define what its \*something\* is.

...Gorgeous language.

...The collage of dreamlike cinematic images (dream of cinema, cinema of dreams).

...Its form is so intuitive and inclusive.

...Ventriloquism: he uses the voice of the poet, the critic, the historian, the storyteller, the diarist. Etc.  
...All that said, ultimately it's a novel written by a painter, literally and figuratively.

And those are still (and always) the things I love about it.

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## Ahmed says

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## Paul says

Won the Booker prize in the early 70s (not necessarily an auspicious start) and by John Berger; I really wanted to like this. It is the story of G, son of an Italian merchant and his mistress and takes place in before and during the first world war. It is a post-modern novel and its structure isn't conventional. G is essentially a hedonist, a Don Juan (or possibly Casanova) figure. Parts of this are beautifully written, especially the descriptions relating to the early aviators.

G inherits his father's wealth, is seduced by a female relative at 14 and pretty much wanders through life in an amoral way until the redemptive ending when he works for Italy in Trieste in the war. There are similarities with some stream of consciousness novels and I noted flashes of Proustian description, especially in the descriptions of blackberries and the symbolic way particular blackberries represent all blackberries. However, all the clever (and often very good) tropes and descriptive passages can't hide the fact I found the book unpleasant. The eroticism is not at all convincing; and let's take a closer look at G. He seduces women; always women in relationships with someone else. Married women, or about to be married, like the

chambermaid who is a virgin and is about to get married. They all try to resist him, but he charms them, seduces them (effectively rapes them, they may be saying no but they want it really) and usually ruins their lives. Women find him massively charming and irresistible and he can do whatever he likes with them and does. Wait a moment; this wasn't written by a bloke was it; no wish fulfilment here then!! There are also drawings and penises, some with smiley faces and vaginas; I remember those from the 1970s on the toilet walls of my school. Despite some flashes of inspiration, this was just a fantasy trip with a bit of redemption at the end. It's a shame because I enjoyed Ways of Seeing.

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## **Scoyphenson says**

The language in which this book is written is gorgeous, no question. And the philosophical flights are thought-provoking, if sometimes obscure. But the title character, G., is ... what? A sociopath? A nymphomaniac? He pursues women whom he claims to love (frequently on no stronger a basis than first sight), indifferent to the chaos he causes in their lives.

Initially, his tendency to admire in his inamoratas features that might otherwise be unattractive gave the impression that he was drawn to their inner beauties. This book begins as though it is about the attractiveness of being desired for one's true self. But as it progressed I came to realize that only the women are the objects of this realization that they are innately desirable; G. is already wholly aware of his value and ultimately (if not always immediately) desired as a result. These women are simply waiting to be awakened by his admiration for their broad foreheads, greasy hair, or bony elbows. It is a paean to his marvelous self-awareness.

Perhaps by placing the stories of G.'s love affairs cheek by jowl with the wonders and horrors of the early 20th century Berger intends to make a statement, but I fail to comprehend what it might be. There is a beautiful and insightful passage about women viewing themselves as though they are agents for the owners of their persons (the owners being father, husband and children, primarily) but the connection between those musings and the relationship to which it is supposed to relate is never established. There is a bald statement that he demands of this particular lover that she be entirely herself without reference to any other relationship in her life, but it is never demonstrated. Next thing we know, they have had their brief affair and he contemplates seducing her closest friend so there is no mistake about the longevity of their association. Baffling and incomplete.

What I find even more puzzling is G.'s transformation from a determined wanderer - he had motivation, even if it was motivation to remain a stranger - to a piece of driftwood floating in an existentialist funk to whatever end was destined for him.

I am glad to have read this book and will carry with me a number of its beautiful passages and interesting ideas, but I don't have any desire to read it again.

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## **Michael says**

This book ended up really getting on my nerves, so that I couldn't finish it. Which is too bad, because I was really getting to love Berger at his best (see my review of *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*) and he basically laid it on so thick here that now I know I'll have a harder time stomaching his style even in cases

when it's much more artfully applied. This book won the Booker Prize in '72, so I was especially disappointed. He comes off more or less as a twat with some grand theory about every little thing who has to stop the action every five seconds to say something like:

"In morality there are no mysteries. That is why there are no moral facts, only moral judgments. Moral judgments require continuity and predictability. A new, profoundly surprising fact cannot be accommodated by morality..."

That's in the middle of a scene when the protagonist and a married woman are driving off to have sex for the first time. And Berger wants to get all semantic about what morality is and isn't. There's really an interjection like this (and the one quoted above keeps going...) every couple of paragraphs. The fact that most of the book, and thus most of the theorizing, is pretty much about sex makes it even smarmier. (More smarmy?) A book about sex where 75% of the sentences are constructed around conjugations of the verb "to be."

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