



The Mineral Palace

Heidi Julavits

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The Mineral Palace explores the healing and destructive powers of love, family and motherhood, while telling the Depression-era story of Bena Jonssen, wife of a philandering physician and mother of a seven week-old son, who moves with her family from St. Paul, Minnesota, to the dusty, railroad town of Pueblo, Colorado. Bena takes a job as the society reporter for the Pueblo *Chieftain*, but quickly tires of the activities of the women's civic service organizations. She turns her attention to the city's brothels, and, befriending a pregnant prostitute, attempts to uncover the baby's paternity. Surrounded by the secrets and decay of the town, Bena begins a love affair with Red Withers, a rancher and social outcast, as she exposes the truths about a prominent Pueblo family, and the truths about her own life.

The Mineral Palace Details

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Author : Heidi Julavits

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From Reader Review The Mineral Palace for online ebook

Emily Olivas says

Very boring. I thought it lacked depth. The characters were flat.

Melissa says

Wow, that took a turn. Solid historical novel with some opaque characterization... and then everything went downhill real fast.

Elke says

This novel was a very spontaneous purchase I made after reading the summary. Unfortunately, it did not work out quite well for me, as I couldn't take to the main character of the story, which mostly left me unaffected.

The only parts where I could sympathize were the motherly moments where Bena tended to her little son and later found out about his tragic disease. Otherwise, it turned out to be a case of "let's get over with it", which was not entirely unpleasant, but not very entertaining either.

However, this feels a very personal and subjective experience, so I will neither advise against nor recommend this book.

Dani Peloquin says

It is hard to believe that The Mineral Palace is the first book that Heidi Julavits has ever written. Though the reviews on Amazon.com are not that favorable (but who reads that nonsense anyway!), I found the book to be everything that I look for in a novel.

The story is set in Colorado in the 1930s during the dust bowl. I was a bit hesitant to read this novel at first because I tend to shy away from novels set during the Depression, but I am so glad that I took a chance on this. Though the dust bowl is present, Julavits uses it as an atmospheric device as opposed to a historical period. The action in the book is dark and the characters are fatally flawed and then the dust clouds roll in and blanket the town in grim. It is perfectly fitting! The plot is uncomplex, a woman follows her husband from the north into the undeveloped state of Colorado in the south. They bring with them their child and marriage that is hanging on by a thread. Once in Colorado, her husband gets a job at a clinic and she decides to write for the local newspaper. The story is really about the people that she meets in this town and the emotional rollercoaster that they bring her own. There are the wealthy and snobbish well to do, as well as the poor and down on their luck prostitutes and drunkards. In the middle of this destitution, the woman's baby falls ill and no one believes her. This is a heartbreakingly told tale from all aspects.

Though the plot is simple, the characters are extremely complex and beautifully developed. As the novel is

progressing, the reader knows that it is barreling towards some horrible conclusion. However, it is still a surprise even once it arrives. What I found most interesting was that even once I had finished the book, I still felt haunted by the characters. I still often think about them and the choices that they made and I feel as if the book hasn't truly finished for me because I am still trying to understand their characters. This is not a weakness of the book, but instead a strength. It is very rare that I find a book that continues to haunt me after I return it to the library.

I recommend this book to anyone who enjoyed Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* or Michael Lesy's *Wisconsin Death Trip*. Basically, if you enjoy reading about the trials and tribulations in small-town America...this is the book for you!

www.iamliteraryaddicted.blogspot.com

KJ Grow says

Wow. What a strange, devastating novel. Five stars for me because I think this is so under-rated and a surprising discovery. Atmospheric, dark, nuanced, and with sparkling prose - a book that pays homage in ways to classic gothic literature, but in the dusty, desolate setting of the boom and bust American West. I'm looking forward to reading more Heidi Julavits.

M. Sarki says

<https://msarki.tumblr.com/post/153814...>

...The truth was that she's come to see her husband's infidelities as a relief. She and Ted had created a comfortable life inside of which they could hide from themselves and each other. The distance he maintained from her in order to protect his philandering meant that she could rightly be unknowable to him, and he to her.

A novel, disappointing in its unriveting action, provides at times a concept worth considering. But why Julavits persisted in having this rather weak work published feels almost desperate in her obsession, perhaps at any cost, to be seen, and considered, a novelist. Her nonfiction, or for argument a contrivance we might name creative nonfiction, is so vastly superior to a "made-up" fiction relying on dehydrated tools called plot that reading this first novel was a monumental struggle. The problem wasn't only my previous encounter with *The Folded Clock: A Diary* and how much I loved it, but the often held feeling I was now wasting my time reading this too-conventional first novel. But Julavits is smart and uses her personal studies to further enrich her fiction if the reader chooses to invest the time needed to discover hidden gems she plants in clear sight.

Julavits, in interviews, mentions the psychoanalyst Adam Phillips as a writer she reads. As relates to *The Mineral Palace* he writes in his book *Monogamy* that:

The best hideout—the cosiest one—is the one in which you can forget what you are hiding from; or that you are hiding at all. The secret the couple have to keep—mostly from each other—is what they are hiding from

and that they are hiding. The belief they have to sustain is that their fears are the same.

We have couples because it is impossible to hide alone.

And as much as I appreciate the work of Adam Phillips, and am grateful for Julavits and my introduction to him, *The Mineral Palace* fails to sustain me any longer. The writing is simply not good enough to continue on with reading further than page 132. The failure of Julavits to keep me engaged unfortunately rests in her allegiance to literary convention. It is my hope that successive fiction coming from the pen of Heidi Julavits proves to be one-of-a-kind, unique in its example, and demanding of my time. She is too talented a writer to pretend to be a mainstream novelist.

Lisa Sophocleous says

Such a depressing, captivating couldn't put down read. By the time I was finished I felt utterly depressed and melancholic. Was that the authors intention? I have to say she did manage then to impart the utter hopelessness felt by many during the depression. An ending I wasn't expecting. Well written but left me a bit empty, maybe it was the authors intention!

Stephanie Robinson says

Meh. It looked better than it really was. This had potential and could have gone many different avenues, but no.

Kara says

Set against the Dust Bowl and Great Depression, Heidi Julavits's debut novel *The Mineral Palace* is as heavy and despondent as the story's backdrop. While the novel may not be a light summer pick-me-up, there is much to appreciate in Julavits's well-crafted narrative and fine writing. Her prose is as polished as her pedigree indicates: an MFA from Columbia and an acknowledgments page crowded with shout-outs to literary heavyweights like Maureen Howard and Dave Eggers. Her protagonist is a reporter, trained to observe and witness from a cold, non-participatory distance, and so the reader is treated to stunning details of the dry, lifeless landscape in Colorado and the dry, lifeless people-scape in the stunted town of Pueblo.

Bena Duse Jonssen lives her daily existence much like a reporter—she is detached, questioning, amoralistic but quick to judge. She is a new mother in her mid-twenties, toting around a half-dead baby that seems to symbolize the hopelessness of America's future, straining uselessly for life under oppressive economic and environmental conditions. It's a bleak setting and a bleak story, bloated with deaths—dead animals, dead babies, dead souls. Julavits ponders the burden of living surrounded by so much death and a dead, dried up earth. "What is the point?" Bena asks twice in the novel. Most of the characters—and readers—would prefer not to think about the question, but it is inescapable in the hot, dusty surroundings, where the earth offers up no possibility for a renewal. Bena moves through her days curious about the lives and stories of other people, while seeing herself as smarter and wiser than everyone else, but also passive and listless in her unhappiness.

Like many women before her, Bena is dragged westward by her husband's past mistakes and hopes for new

prospects, and so Julavits tackles the ways that women's happiness is bound up in the fortunes of their husbands. Very little seems to separate the wealthy woman, the maid, or the prostitute, when all are subject to the power, whim, and violence of male desire. And it generally doesn't seem to end well for anyone in Julavits's world. The unforgiving landscape that sweeps humans and animals into dust is matched by the depraved, deformed people of Pueblo who wound each other and themselves—missing limbs, bruises, blood, stitches, and twisted behaviors populate this novel in overwhelming abundance. Julavits seems to compress the world's misery into one 6-month time frame, one single Southwest town. A tough read in that sense, but for the reader who can stomach the story, the writing is masterful.

Sarah Rigg says

I understand why this is more of a 3-star book for most people, but I'm always interested in portrayals of small-town journalists, and that bumped it up a notch for me. Grim but well-written.

Nicole says

I just don't know what to make of Heidi Julavits! Where does she come up with this stuff?

A beautifully dark novel, set in the 1930s Depression Era, in a small Colorado town. Meticulous writing, intriguing setting, multi-dimensional characters. Julavits is especially good at crafting complicated relationships between characters. You know, the sort of relationships where most things go unspoken (intentionally). Think Revolutionary Road set amid dust storms and prostitution rings.

Some of the plots and characters were predictable (____'s death and Red is only attracted to broken women) but there were more than enough complications to keep me engaged until the last page.

Eims says

A strange, dark and churning story. I didn't enjoy it as such but it did captivate me, I had to finish it. It's a strange creature with a touch of Murakami to it while remaining very distinct in its own right. An unsettling, slightly disturbing read.

Jeannie says

I can't remember the last time I was this disappointed in a book. It was dark, hopeless and depressing. I know... dust bowl, depression era, what did I expect? I expected at least a sliver of hope or light. I'm not saying the writing wasn't good; it was. The story was just too heavy.

Rachel says

Life and love are complicated and sad. Everyone knows it, yet almost no one can say it convincingly. Julavits can and does.

Richard Good says

This book was mentioned in Donald Maass' "The Fire in Fiction", a book on writing fiction, and it was used to illustrate techniques in his chapter on "Transforming Low-Tension Traps", such as using weather as a story opener. I picked up this novel as part of a project I have started, using the examples in Donald Maass' book as a reading list. In fact, at a BookBuyers store in Monterey, I found "The Mineral Palace" on a shelf with Heidi Julavits' subsequent novels, "The Uses of Enchantment" and "The Effect of Living Backwards". I couldn't resist taking home the entire trio.

The "Mineral Palace" was, as most other reviews mention, very depressing. Every character had some collection of secrets and flaws that made them blend into the dismal and dry backdrop. My parents literally came from Oklahoma during the Dust Bowl, so I found a special connection to this book. But reading it from a critical standpoint, the storytelling method really was amazing. Julavits does a wonderful job of describing conditions and circumstances that existed decades before she was born. The characters were so distinctive and well-portrayed, I could not only see them, I could hear them and sometimes smell them. Yes, the entire story was bleak, but it made you want to be there, suffer with the people in that grimy town, and find out what happened to them. This one will stay with me for a while.

And now, on to "The Effects of Living Backwards".
