

François: A Memoir

Kyle Thomas Smith

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Kyle Thomas Smith's thoughtful memoir about coming to terms with one's desires and ambitions, François covers an early and influential love affair.

Kyle Thomas Smith's reflective memoir *François* is about a life-changing, clandestine romantic encounter with a dazzling filmmaker.

Raised in a large, conservative Irish household, Smith faced abuse and torment at the hands of his parents and siblings due to his sexual orientation and perceived emotional weakness. He struggled in school and was often underestimated by his teachers and belittled by his peers. Still, he developed a passion for writing, becoming a connoisseur of literature and culture. Even while working in a law office, he read and wrote each night, dreaming of becoming an author.

Then, on a night out with his former French teacher, Smith met François, an alluring documentary filmmaker who was charmed by his knowledge of French film and literature. The two shared an intimate moment before François left on a whirlwind trip around the world. Smith had only François's Paris address, written on a bar napkin, to hold him over. He wrote François letters over the coming years and visited him in Paris. Guided by fanciful self-help books that promoted unrealistic positivity, though, he idealized his lover too much; in time, he realized that his picture of François did not align with reality.

A keen story about maturation and accepting life as it is, this is a lesson-filled memoir by a thoughtful writer and meditation instructor. Its prose is direct but passionate, echoing the letters once sent to François. It captures moments from the past well, including Smith's youthful ideas about God. And its style is conversational and immersive, going into great detail to explain how Smith's early experiences affected his growth as a writer and an individual.

Some details prove extraneous to the central narrative and thematic concerns of the book, though, causing a few sections to drag, as with the pages devoted to describing interactions with people who did not play a central role in Smith's growth. The book's extensive footnotes are also distracting, and their style is inconsistent: some French passages are accompanied by footnote translations; others are left untranslated.

A testament to living in the moment and investing in consequential experiences, *François* is a touching memoir that reflects upon fate, memory, and the passage of time.

BELLA MOSES (April 29, 2024)

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