

Sweet Lechery: Reviews, Essays, and Profiles

Jeet Heer

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Jeet Heer displays the leisurely wit and wisdom of a polymath, writing about everything from Canadian culture and politics at large, to comics and science fiction, in his collection *Sweet Lechery*.

Heer is a cultural journalist whose publications include work for *Slate*, the *National Post*, the *Boston Globe*, and others. He has also edited or coedited several books, and received a Fulbright Scholarship.

Though Heer's tastes and expertise are wide-ranging, he's always authoritatively knowledgeable about his subjects: as a Canadian writer, his insights into that country's literature and politics are pointed and revealing. Having edited or coedited several comic strip collections, he's uniquely suited to write about underappreciated early twentieth-century cartoonists like Winsor McCay, as well as modern masters of the art like Chris Ware and Ben Katchor. His intimate familiarity with the work of science fiction writers Robert Heinlein, Stanislaw Lem, and Philip K. Dick similarly offers a solid foundation for comparisons and discussion. There's never a moment in Heer's writing where he seems in over his head.

Many of the pieces in this collection are ostensibly reviews—of a Heinlein biography, Yann Martel's latest novel, and many other recently published books. But the topics raised by these reviews usually serve as jumping-off points for Heer to educate the audience with his own observations or relevant facts; thus, the reviews become much more than typical appraisals.

The tone in Heer's writing is scholarly but not high-handed, as exemplified by his discussion of Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, in which he describes humanity, as portrayed in the series, in terms of Wile E. Coyote:

It's not just Wile E. Coyote's invariable failures that make him funny but also his resilience. Every near-death scrape is followed by a come-back. Part of the comedy of MaddAddam is that humanity, despite the best laid plans of the lunatic Crake, displays a cartoon character's ability to bounce back.

One of the best things about essay collections as varied as *Sweet Lechery* is that they serve as a sampler of a wider spectrum of culture than most books, and often introduce new writers, artists, and other figures in the process. It's easy to skip sections that aren't of interest, but Heer has a knack for making anything interesting, which might be the best praise a writer can garner.

PETER DABBENE (February 24, 2015)

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