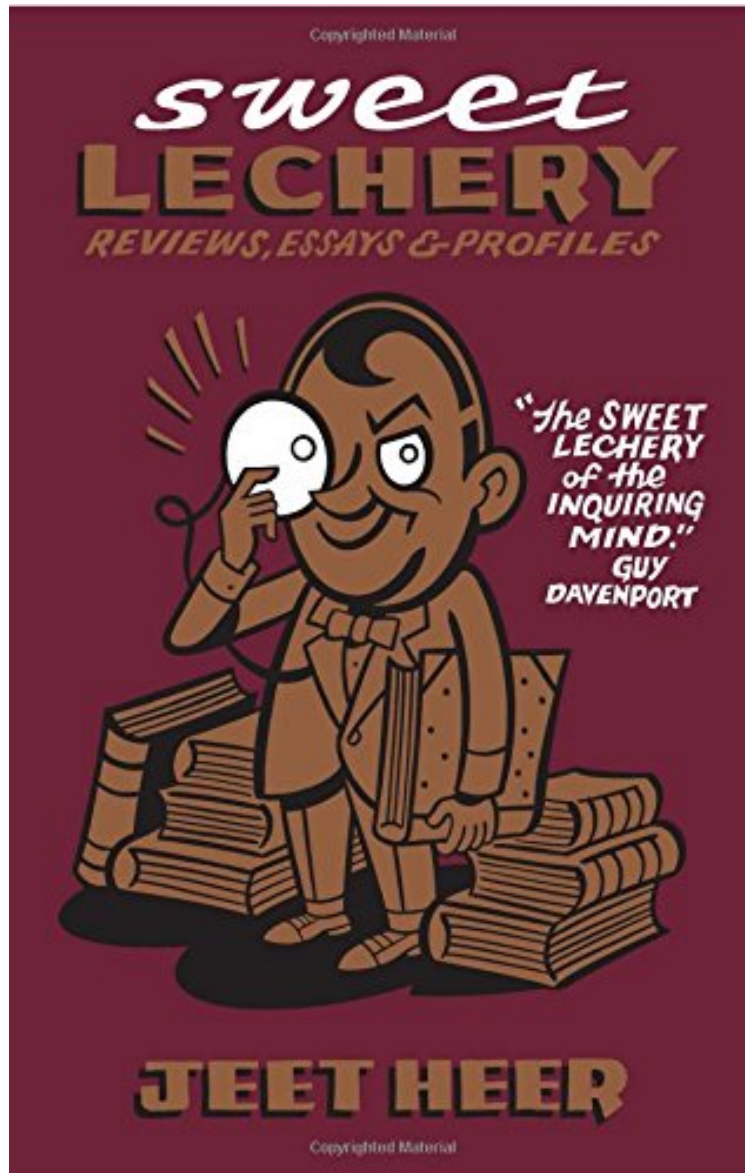


Sweet Lechery: Reviews, Essays Profiles

Jeet Heer

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#2331273 in Books 2014-12-01 2014-12-01 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.75 x .75 x 5.561, .0 #File Name: 0889843783240 pages | File size: 52.Mb

Jeet Heer : Sweet Lechery: Reviews, Essays Profiles before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Sweet Lechery: Reviews, Essays Profiles:

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Jeet Heer is a treasure By Harold A. Pollack Jeet Heer's unbelievable erudition and range shine through many of these essays, on topics ranging from science fiction to comic art to media criticism. An outstanding book.

Sweet Lechery is Jeet Heer's wide-ranging collection of literary criticism, served with a twist of social commentary.

Heer has a knack for making anything interesting, which might be the best praise a writer can garner. 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 Foreword s) Heer has a plenty of charm in his way of talking his way around those [authors in the collection]. He has the quality that every good host has; he speaks with intelligence, yet never weighs his subjects down with bloviating.... I suspect you'll find that his enthusiasm, like that of any good party host, is completely infectious.' (Michelle Dean *National Post*) Among critics, Heer is unusually well-suited to having his reviews collected in book form. The daily churn of the newspaper world means that most reviews disappear within 24 hours; yet, Heer takes pleasure in doing more research than is required, and adding careful context that most readers will never even notice, all in the name of a sturdier piece of prose. That's even clearer in his magazine writing: When Heer is given room to really follow his nose on a topic, be it the surprisingly robust tradition of cannibalism in *CanLit* or the glut of neocon novelists hiding in plain sight within the administration of George W. Bush, readers will come away equal parts delighted and informed. And because each piece is centred on a subject that is not Heer himself, it takes a collection like this to really get an overall sense of him as a reader and critic. ' (Michael Hingston *The Globe and Mail*) Currently one of Canada's most interesting and sought-after cultural commentators, as the popularity of his Twitter essays attests, Heer is many things: a journalist, an academic, an immigrant, a proud but non-nationalist Canadian citizen, a "social democrat living in a conservative era." Recently made a senior editor at *The New Republic*, Heer is positioned to become a public intellectual of the magnitude he revels in profiling in *Sweet Lechery*. With a solid sense of the critic's ideally non-partisan role, gestured at in a few places in the book and largely adhered to by the author, Heer is convinced that the critic's job is to be empathetic, to attempt to understand another's point of view, even while censuring it. Furthermore, "the critic should help readers gain a better understanding of the writer but not eclipse literature with flashy and irrelevant displays of intellectual pyrotechnics." If truth be told, intellectual pyrotechnics abound in this collection as Heer dazzles the reader with his knowledge, research and ease in forging meaningful and elegant connections between ideas and their progenitors, happily rarely to the detriment of the subjects under discussion.' (Dana Hansen *Literary of Canada*) About the Author Jeet Heer is a cultural journalist and academic whose work has appeared in such publications as the *National Post*, *Slate.com*, the *Boston Globe*, *The Walrus*, *The American Prospect* and *The Guardian*. He has co-edited eight books and been a contributing editor to another eight volumes. Heer co-edited *A Cultural Studies Reader* (University of Mississippi Press, 2008) and is the recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship. With Chris Ware, Jeet continues to edit the *Walt and Skeezix* series from *Drawn and Quarterly*, which is now entering its fifth volume. Heer divides his time between Toronto and Regina. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Introduction Books are work, essays are play: as I toyed with this formulation, I realized this is a generalization even the most incompetent hunter could easily shoot full of holes. The world is full of playful books (everything from *Tristram Shandy* to *Pale Fire*) as well as laborious essays (written by the likes of Samuel Johnson and Susan Sontag). Yet if the dichotomy doesn't work as a universal law, it still rings true as a credo: for me, personally, essays are play. I don't see essays as having the deadly finality of scholarly monographs, where hefty authority sometimes smothers the subject. Rather, the job of an essay is to survey a topic and return with a quick and entertaining report. The essays in this book deal with a wide array of topics including the economics of John Maynard Keynes (and its possible relationship to his sexuality), the political philosophy of Leo

Strauss, the cartooning of John Updike, the literary theories of the Central Intelligence Agency, the entrepreneurial acumen of Alice Munro, and Philip K. Dick's attempt to become an FBI informant. What unites the book is not the topics covered but the approach: the goal in each case has been to open up a new line of attack, to paint familiar scenes from hitherto unused perspectives, to find connective links that might previously have been unseen. In sum, the agenda is to keep the spirit of intellectual play alive during the course of an investigation. My title is taken from the first story in Guy Davenport's first story collection *Tatlin!*: "We must shatter the glass wall that Socrates and Aristotle placed between nature and the sweet lechery of an inquiring mind." Davenport, that playful polymath, is a presiding spirit in these essays. To even claim him as a model is presumptuous. I possess only a minuscule fraction of his learning and a shade of his talent. Yet his ebullience and free-spiritedness can perhaps be emulated. To be playful is not the same as being frivolous, nor does it mean we have to deny the reality of suffering. These essays take up some weighty political and social issues—the legacies of war and oppression, the damage done by bigotry, our responsibility to the natural world. In dealing with these sombre matters, freshness of voice might allow us to confront realities that we otherwise shut our ears to. To give some order to this fugitive round-up, the essays are gathered together in some rough and ready categories dealing with general cultural politics, Canadian culture, the politics of conservatism, science fiction, and comics. These groupings are only approximate. Many essays could easily overstep the boundaries I've set. Margaret Atwood shows up as a Canadian writer but the essay on her could easily be moved to the section on science fiction. Hugh Kenner is also carded as a Canadian, although he wouldn't be out of place with conservative intellectuals like Leo Strauss and Hilton Kramer. Guy Davenport and John Updike are placed with the general cultural essays although both could fit snugly into the company of cartoonists. One of the most significant events of my life was a border crossing. As a child I immigrated to Canada with my family. Perhaps that's why I'm fascinated by intellectual borders, the closely guarded zones where competing values are staked out. I keep returning to the contested territory where politics and culture meet. For me, culture always has political implications just as politics always has a cultural resonance. To be completely apolitical and only live for culture is to risk becoming a fey dandy. To disdain culture and care only for politics is to become mired in soulless earnestness. Balancing the claims of culture and politics is a difficult task but a necessary one. As a political radical living in a conservative era, I've tried to understand the ideas of those I most disagree with. In exploring right-wing thinkers such as Leo Strauss, Hugh Kenner, and Hilton Kramer, I've had to deal with another type of balance: the equipoise and empathy required to both understand an alien worldview while criticizing it. The essays on Canadian culture in this book are very much the notes of a non-native son. I'm a proud citizen of this country but not a nationalist. While Canada is my home, having the dual consciousness of an immigrant makes me look at many of the things with the bemused eyes of an outsider. One border that has thankfully collapsed in recent years is the divide between high and low culture. A playful attitude is not amiss when writing about science fiction or comics. The essays on comics selected here are only a sample of my writing about this form. A fuller gathering might be in order in the future, but for now I wanted to register the importance comics have for me as a vital contemporary art form. These essays were written for many venues over the course of more than a decade. In giving them a more permanent form here, I've made gentle revisions here and there. Re-reading these essays I was struck anew by the fun I had in writing them, pleasure which I hope readers will also share.