


Slow Chocolate Autopsy

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Norton, the hero, travels through London's underbelly trapped in space but not in time. He is present to witness dark deeds from Deptford at the time of Marlowe's death and in the East End during the sixties watching the murder of Jack the Hat McVitie. Bizarre and phantasmagoric, the book draws on images of the city from the Renaissance to the decay of Thatcher's London.

Slow Chocolate Autopsy Details

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Author : Iain Sinclair , Dave McKean (Illustrator)

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Althea Ann says

I picked this up for the Dave McKean illustrations - I'd never heard of the author. Well, I read through page 50 (the first three stories), and looked at all the illustrations. This just isn't my kind of thing. I guess I'd call it 'British Weird' or something of the sort. The writing seems deliberately unanchored and incoherent, with themes of seedy underworlds and violence running through it. The stories are linked by having a character named 'Norton,' but that seems like a post-hoc device to tie them together.

Maybe it just isn't suiting my mood at the moment, but what I read didn't catch my attention, and from flipping ahead, the rest looks like more of the same. I don't feel like slogging through the remaining 140 pages...

Leonardo says

I was drawn to Iain Sinclair's book from the appearance of its main character (although I suspect Sinclair would like his readers to believe that Norton isn't a character at all) in Century: 1910 volume of The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen. Norton and his "predicament" seemed interesting enough and, when our friend came to visit us from London, I asked her to get me that book... and now that I've finally finished it (for the first time... I have a feeling that I'll return to in the future) I'm not quite sure if it's a true masterpiece of literary psychogeography or pretentious postmodern rubbish. I suspect that the truth lies somewhere in between, but I'm also certain that my knowledge of London's geography and history is not deep enough to fully grasp the whole context, subtext, metatext, and "anyother-text" of the book and Norton's ramblings/recreations across the city, throughout its history. Nevertheless, this collection of short stories (plus several "graphic short stories" created in collaboration with Dave McKean) and two stories that work as introduction and conclusion to Norton's story create a very coherent work, and some of them are actually remarkable: I'll never be able to watch/perceive football (soccer) in the same way after reading the eerie tale of "Hardball" or perceive rivers in paintings in the same way after reading "Careful the Horse's Bite". I will certainly return to "Slow Chocolate Autopsy" in the future, when I'll be perhaps ready to grasp its full meaning. Despite my misgivings, I can certainly recommend this book as a powerful literary challenge. And fans of Dave McKean's work with Neil Gaiman and other less "underground" writers will certainly enjoy his black and white illustrations, an interesting departure from his usual work.

Phil Rigby says

It's a ghost story. Norton drifts through the book, sometimes in full view and other times like a whisper. It achieves the atmosphere of London and I think this is essentially its primary aim. I didn't enjoy it though (apart from the football chapter which is excellent) for two main reasons - some of which the author himself recognises at the end of the book.

The first is that the prose, after a while, just became too heavy. It's dense and at times beautifully poetic but unfortunately I don't think Sinclair ever changes gears. I found that quite tiring.

Secondly, and this was a bigger problem for me, if you're going to use offensive language then it's either the author or the character. The majority of these characters didn't come across to me like they would use the descriptions that are used in the text...as such, one is left musing the real reason for some of the more grim and offensive language.

But it's psychogeography, it's art, it's got a comic artist involved...meh.

So apart from the aforementioned chapter (and the comic sections which should definitely receive praise) I wasn't impressed with this.

Petabyte says

Some books are weird and fascinating. Other books are weird and cool. Still, some books are fascinating and cool. And weird. This book is too weird to be fascinating or cool. It being weird did not serve any aesthetic rationale nor fulfill any artistic purpose. It was weird for weirdness' sake - but it doesn't even succeed at that. Boredom (even for the totally hip beyond hip, or uber-cool crowd ...and by cool I mean *patient lover of books*) sets in within seconds of reading the first few lines on the first page, and the reader is cautioned against "Oh I'll keep at it" and giving this rubbish any more of a chance, unless the reader is already mad or supra-nihilistic. Recommended use: Seek a used copy and send to someone you loathe as a present. Yes. Do it. Do it now.

Charles Dee Mitchell says

Sinclair's subtitle is *Incidents from the Notorious Career of Norton, Prisoner of London*. "Incidents" is the apt word. The book has twelve sections, four of them graphic narratives illustrated by Dave McKean, the remarkable graphic artist who works frequently with Neal Gaiman. All twelve sections could be called stories, given how loose that category has become, but they are clearly not chapters in a novel, no matter how loosely that category might be defined. There is murder, ghosts, miserable day labor, a mysterious nighttime soccer match, and a evening with the British mid-20th century crime scene. Norton is there, whether the time is the present day or the 16th century, sometimes as a central character, at other time a more peripheral presence. Once he is glimpsed only as a laborer who leaves for lunch and never returns. So yes, each section is an incident, chronologically unhinged but firmly based in a London that is both world and prison for Sinclair's characters.

Phantasmagoria were popular Victorian entertainments where magic lantern technology allowed presenters to send images of ghosts and demons careening about a dark interior. *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* is a type of phantasmagoria. I found I was alternately lost and exhilarated. It's best to let the images wash over you and enjoy the ride. Although it wouldn't seem possible, the final pages takes the work to a whole new level of unexpected strangeness.

Highly recommended for those whose favorite J.G. Ballard work is *The Atrocity Exhibition*.

Ted Child says

This book is twelve dense and lyrical stories whose only connection is the city of London and the character that is trapped there. The interesting premise is never really achieved, however, as Norton sometimes seems to be absent-mindedly, or maybe as an afterthought, placed into the stories and there is no real overall story arc. I was expecting something a little bit more like "If on a winter's night a traveler", which although metafictional, surreal, and poetic, also had a strong story, characters and better utilized its strong fantastic premise.

Sinclair is an excellent writer but these stories read like modified poetry, more as impressions or poetic sentiments than narrative prose. Sinclair's repeated use of endless sentence fragments, even for different viewpoint characters, feels very 90's. Indeed, the entire book reads like a good period piece but something you have to be in the mood for. Also being a bit forgiving might help.

Artur Coelho says

Tenham cautela, leitores: se se aproximam das narrativas aventureiras de Norton, prisioneiro da cidade condenado a vaguear por uma Londres que se dissolve na arquitectura e na história, à espera de imagens claras de acontecimentos empolgantes e imprevistos, este livro não é para vós. Escrito pelo poeta e psicogeógrafo Iain Sinclair, esta obra atinge-nos com o poder literário da divagação verbal, da colagem descritiva de imagens captada pelos sentidos em alerta estimulados por um imenso vaguear pelas ruas da cidade. Este é um daqueles livros em que cada frase é uma barragem de imagens, cada parágrafo uma colagem complexa de diferentes sentidos que dá ao leitor a liberdade de criar a sua imagem mental do que leu. Misturando narrativa e banda desenhada pelo punho de Dave McKean, *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* é um hino à experiência da cidade, às sensações despertadas pelo acto de vaguear pelas ruas e o sentir do pulso do espaço urbano.

Chip Howell says

I wanted to like this book as much as I liked the cover and the title, and I think my first mistake was in expecting it to be a more traditional sort of prose-based narrative. Instead, what I got was...well...*Slow Chocolate Autopsy*. I didn't enjoy the experience of reading it as much as I thought I would. I did enjoy a few sentences, and a few paragraphs, but nothing held together, aside from one or two stories. "The Articulate Head" and "The Apotheosis of Lea Bride Road" were probably the strongest stories for me. "Careful the Horses Bite" wasn't bad, but the overall problem I had with the book was the monotonous narrative structure: each story seems fragmentary in exactly the same way. There's a poetic cadence to the manner in which Sinclair writes, but it ultimately undermines the stories he's attempting to tell--or not tell, as the case may be: for me, at least. I think this is a problem with structure more than anything else. It was a bit like playing music with a metronome: at some point, you stop playing music and simply listen to the tick-tock of the metronome. That happened to me. By about page 75, I stopped *reading* the book and simply started measuring the full-sentence to sentence-fragment ratio. For prose, even experimental prose, this doesn't work for me...as it means that once you know the cadence of the writing, you can tap it out on a table-top as an interesting finger-drumming exercise, or you can set your watch to it. Reading it becomes unnecessary and

nearly-unpleasant.

The prose-based stories are all the same general length. For something experimental, it was oddly rigid and surprisingly *uninventive*; for a work based on the kind of "psycho-geography" of London, it was opaque and inaccessible for someone not born in London, and yet it held an endless, though somewhat turgid appeal for me. I won't deny that I missed something here, but I think that this is also one of the few failings of the book: as someone not born in London and as someone who doesn't live there, I couldn't find a way into the interconnected/disjointed narratives here: as mood pieces they were great, but I've already gotten wildly inventive, giddy, and intoxicating, emotionally-complex versions of that mood from China Miéville and more disturbing, nauseating, emotionally-engaging takes on the theme by M. John Harrison.

In *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* the prose is beautiful, and that's one of the drawbacks as the book as a whole feels more like an ornate, decorative earring without a person wearing it. The rhythm of the admittedly beautiful (though monotonous prose) seems to render this piece into a kind of percussive, abstract music, as--for me, at least--Sinclair's sentence structures maps out a really interesting drum-beat. If that was the intent of this "novel" then he succeeded, but in terms of the "Norton" stuff, I got *no* sense of a character residing in a place, but *not* in any particular time. I felt a profound sense of London, but not a London somehow decoupled from or transcendent to our expectations of how time flows. Cities have been described as eternal, but the impression I got from this book is of a London that is somewhat petrified, vaguely anachronistic, and infinitely grimy.

Jesse says

Oh, Christ on a crutch! This was a conundrum. This book was like a compound riddle, wherein you need to solve enigmas to get clues to solve bigger ones to solve bigger ones. I was forced to make a choice:

1) Do I work harder to get all of the references? If I really dig down deep, will the plot become clear?

or

2) Do I accept that the clear picture I am looking for isn't there, and take the thing at face value, which still requires a hell of a lot of digging...?

I ultimately chose option 2, reading the book almost as poetry. Characters disappear, change aspect, become shadows... It's like late Kerouac. Actually, it's a little more fun, because Kerouac never offered that choice. With him, you just accepted that it was poetry. It was kind of fun, if totally frustrating, to force myself to really commit to trying to eliminate the possibility that there was a skeleton key to the narrative somewhere.

Two stars if read as a novel, but I upgraded it to three because it has much more merit, I think, when read as poetry.

It would be a tragedy to spend years chasing down every reference, and doing all of the research, only to realize that this is just neo-beat stream-of-consciousness. If that was the author's intent, he made it too difficult for me, and I am not a casual reader...

PS It kind of reminded me of some of the Moorcock Jerry Cornelius stories...

Bryan Lee Peterson says

Sinclair is a verbal genius, maybe a verbal overachieving genius, which makes *The Slow Chocolate Autopsy* an interesting read. The problem I have is for all of the 180 or so pages, all I can tell actually happened in the notorious career of Norton, the title character, is that he destroyed a wall in a disused asylum (20ish pages), blustered about in the art scene looking for a painting of a river, and had a hit called on him before the book broke down into a meta level confusion. If rambling stream of consciousness is your thing, you'll find this worthwhile, but if you need something to happen, look elsewhere.

Esther says

Hey, hey, you! Pay no mind to the dismissive pooh-poohing of these other reviews. Disgruntled Neil Gaiman fans I'm willing to bet, but give them no heed. This book is absolute gold.

Slow Chocolate Autopsy tells the tale of Norton, a man who, like Billy Pilgrim, has come unstuck in time, but finds himself confined within the constantly shifting perimeters of London City, from the coarse antiquity of Marlowe to the grim austerity of 'present day' Thatcherite Britain. Because of this, Norton is doomed to wander the haunted avenues of his memories and the memories of other infamous London visionaries, trying to stay alive and retain his dwindling sanity. Sinclair's use of poetic language and imagery is beautiful, unorthodox and hypnotic, designed to reflect the mind of a man who has lost grip of reality and self, clinging only onto the ever changing and utterly squalid present, unsure what to remember and even whether his memories can be trusted. He draws invisible connections, divines for some sacred meaning in every haggard face, pigeon dropping and cup of tea, trying to make sense of the great beast that is London, but knowing that in his heart of hearts it is as unfixed and impenetrable as a dream, or by extension; himself.

McKeans' comics function as interludes, in a way. The book is constructed out of vignettes, snatches and fragments from Nortons life and the lives of those around him and the comix act almost as dream sequences. Much stranger than the rest of the book, given the new visual opportunities, but as surreal as they are, they do make an odd sense and fit into the ethereal, grimy meta-narrative of the story. As always McKeans drawings and collages are beautiful and Sinclair uses his talents to construct a Burroughs-esque style of filmic story telling that almost comes close to the visual richness of his prose.

Sinclair has a proclivity for weird geo-centric storytelling, in particular stories about London. But this book is more about the people who inhabit it. All the freaks, fools and fugitives who have slipped through the cracks. The immigrants in the football stadiums, the vagrants in the doorways and the mad artists in their darkened lofts. This book is about the hopeless and endless stories that have poured through London. This book is for anyone who has turned down a dark alleyway by mistake and felt inexplicably compelled to remain, and wonder at its history. The stories and people that have passed through its shadows and puddles, unsung and forgotten in time.

Wreade1872 says

Sinclair, known quantity. Past work. Non-fiction, stories of the city. Mundane mysticism. Magic of the

wasteground. Beauty in poverty. Nostalgia for dog turds.

Style? Broken mirror. Reflections, ugly or beautiful depending on angle. Interesting patterns.

Start small. Minor inconveniences. Sexism, racism, homophobia. Casual or intended? Who knows.

Single work or multiple source? Behind dresser, under sofa, recovered fragments repackaged as new? Who cares.

Fraud? hipster bait, tilted urinal, paint spackle as magic eye picture? Maybe not.

Private function, members only, password please, no Homers? Maybe so.

Whats the story, morning glory? Story is the story, narrative as narrative.

If Narrative = Narrative, then Narrative = Anything.

Anything >= Bollocks then Narrative = Bollocks.

Selling point?. Make something up. 'Norton... Trapped in space - within the city limits of London - but not in time'. Sounds like a blurb. True? no, fiction. False? no, fiction. Its all fiction, why not the blurb too.

The above review is written in lingua-bollocks. If you speak lingua-bollocks then you might well enjoy this book :).

Courtney says

I only read this book due to Alan Moore's incorporation of the Norton character into the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen books. Moore does a better job of explaining what's going on than Sinclair. This book is intentionally difficult to read. It's too abstract, too vague, too meta, too much too. I don't want my books to hold my hand, but I also don't want to feel like I'm sitting in an artist bar listening to people make up new uses for words.

Anthony says

A collection of bizzaro short stories in complete free form. The hook of the character Norton as "a time traveler trapped in the confines of London" means almost nothing in the context of the stories so anyone looking for a good time travel story should look elsewhere. Fans of such books as "Naked Lunch" by William Burroughs and "The Filth" by Grant Morrison might want to check it out for the pure weirdness of it, but it's purely all flash and no substance so anyone else should probably skip it.

Dan Impossible says

It took me 4 attempts to read this book. The sheer strangeness of it beat me every time except for the last where I simply ploughed through it and hoped for the best. And I'm glad I did, it's a very odd book with a very odd style and it has the amazing ability to make you smile whilst giving you a migraine at the same time. This sounds worse than it is, most children possess this ability also. They also share a way of speaking with this book in that it's disjointed, non-linear and occasionally nonsensical. This book uses bigger words though and makes more of a point.

I'd have to say I prefer this book to most children. Unless there are children out there writing better books of course.

