



Centuries of June

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Centuries of June is a bold departure, a work of dazzling breadth and technical virtuosity.

Set in the bathroom of an old house just before dawn on a night in June, *Centuries of June* is a black comedy about a man who is attempting to tell the story of how he ended up on the floor with a hole in his head. But he keeps getting interrupted by a series of suspects—eight women lying in the bedroom just down the hall. Each woman tells a story drawn from five centuries of American myth and legend in a wild medley of styles and voices.

Centuries of June is a romp through history, a madcap murder mystery, an existential ghost story, and a stunning tour de force at once ingenious, sexy, inspiring, and ultimately deeply moving.

Centuries of June Details

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From Reader Review Centuries of June for online ebook

drey says

Keith Donohue is a new-to-me author, though I have *The Stolen Child* sitting on my shelves (and it's been sitting there for a while now). But I couldn't turn down the opportunity to check out his latest, *Centuries of June*. I mean, the blurb had me at "black comedy about a man who is attempting to tell the story of how he ended up on the floor with a hole in his head" ... How do you turn down something like that?

I will admit to reading this slowly at first. Really slowly... In fact, it probably took me a good 3-4 days to get through the first two stories, which is unheard of in my reading. And here I will state that while I thought those two stories were entertaining, I didn't quite get the whole picture then. In fact, I didn't even get a glimpse of what might be the whole picture. The parts involving the guy-with-the-hole-in-the-head were hazy and confusing enough, and then all these other characters showed up.

Then I picked it up again--because, hey, I had to read it and review it--and started really getting into the stories. Which is where Donohue shines, because the women and their stories were something I really enjoyed. Each character was interesting, each story had a different style about it, and it all wrapped up nicely at the end... And now that it's done, I think reading each story and savoring it slowly is the way to go here. But don't take my word for it, enter the giveaway to win your own copy. *grin*

Wendy Hines says

This has got to be one of the strangest books I have ever read. Nonetheless, it is very addictive. It opens with "Jack" watching his blood flow onto the bathroom tiles. He's hit his head with half of his naked body in the bathroom and half in the hallway. He momentarily thinks how regretful he would be if someone found him in his current situation. His pain ebbs and that is when his departed father appears sitting on the edge of the bathtub.

Jack immediately feels better and is able to stand. He puts on a robe and goes to fetch his dad a shot of whiskey. But on his return to the bathroom, with the whiskey, he pauses at his bedroom and peeks in. Eight naked women are sleeping in his bed. But then one of the women appear behind him in the bathroom, and proceeds to tell him her life story. And the stories continue as each woman appears in the bathroom. Each woman is from a different point in time and some of them are mythical. But what of Jack? Will he wake up? Who hit him on the head? Why?

Centuries of June is a unique tale that will keep the reader entranced. Crude language and sexual situations are intermixed sporadically, but humor outshines it. The talking cat, Harpo, lightens any situation the protagonist finds himself in. The character building is unique and I can honestly say that Keith Donohue has one powerful imagination. The worlds he builds for each woman is detailed and easily imagined. A compelling novel sure to entertain!

Lauren says

Reading this book was like dissecting a Dali - surreal, fantastic, with small bits of recognizable traits from "real life" but otherwise, a dreamscape when time and space don't abide by the same rules. The book is a dying man's look back on history - through the eyes of eight women and a male "guide" that morphs from his late father to Samuel Beckett, to his living brother...

The man falls on his way to the bathroom in the middle of the night... as he lays on the bathroom tile, people join him in the bathroom - sitting in the tub, on the toilet, on the sink counter - and tell their stories of times past, and love lost. The women's stories have a common thread of the men who have wronged them in life - through betrayal, negligence, etc. Yet the stories are very entertaining and the true highlight of the book. They span the American landscape and history.

A novel idea for a story - and unlike anything else I have read. If you can suspend reality and just go with it, I think you will be rewarded in the end, as I was.

Lee Razer says

Having read all of two novels by Donohue now, with a third about to be teed up, I can say I really like this author. He's a smart cookie who has also got imagination and a sense of humor, and as a novelist at least he lives in a spirit filled world. He mixes absurdist whimsy with realist melancholy in a way that really appeals to me though I readily imagine not to everyone. Would it be absurd to compare his novels to the music of The Smiths here? Well, I won't yet, but an analogy is tickling the back of my mind.

In this novel the central character is really just a maypole, there to stand in the center while the action and colors swirl all around. Having just received a nasty skull fracture and passed into an uncertain realm outside of normal time, he is confronted in turns by seven women from throughout several centuries of American history with whom he apparently had meaningful and fraught relationships. Nonsensically, since we are clearly not in normal physical and temporal space here, each woman begins her story with an attempt to kill him, which provides some good fun. Their stories make up the majority of the novel... the realist melancholy married to the framework of absurd whimsy, the combination I so enjoy.

Tevya says

Centuries of June is set in the bathroom of Jack's home. Jack finds himself dying on his bathroom floor and is visited by a trail of women who all have tales to weave for him. These tales take place over a course of time spanning from pre-Colombian times to present, including stories from the Salem witch trials, Southern Gothic, and Native American folklore and mythology. Jack begins inserting himself into the stories, and he finds that the women seem to be familiar to him. While the stories themselves seem to be unrelated, they are tied together in the end.

I was intrigued by the concept of Centuries of June from reading the synopsis. I am new to Keith Donohue's work, and that also drew me to the book as I am challenging myself to branch out and read new authors this year. While his writing is definitely not my usual style, I found Centuries of June to be well written and darkly humorous. The plot felt confusing at times, and although I found the stories told by the women to be

entertaining, I found myself bored and distracted while reading. Personally, I would have preferred to read the women's stories as short stand-alone novellas. However, I am impressed by the creativity it took to weave the stories together in this manner. I did enjoy elements of the book, and if I'm 100% honest with myself, I'll admit that I most probably would have enjoyed Centuries of June more had I not been staring down a stack of must-read sequels to some of my most favorite books.

As a lover of books, I have to comment on how beautiful the book itself is. The cover is mysterious and alluring, the book feels good in the hand, and the pages are wonderful. They are thick, with roughened, uneven natural edges. (Yeah, I know - I'm a total geek, but I was so impressed with the look and feel of the actual book, I couldn't not comment on it! It's rare that I find a book that makes me want to open it just because of the beauty and feel of the pages.) You're laughing - I can tell. But seriously, it's a beautiful book!

Ryan says

When Jack falls, naked, in his bathroom, he cracks his head open and starts to bleed to death. When he comes to, he isn't quite sure what's going on, other than the fact there are eight naked women lying in his bed. Confused and disoriented he goes back to the bathroom and meets an old man, who he thinks is his deceased father. Over the course of an untold amount of time, though the clock never changes from 4:52 am, Jack is visited by seven of those women while he is still in the bathroom. All seven of them try to kill him, only to fail and start narrating a story that somehow makes Jack think he is in some way involved. Only once the last story is told, does Jack start to realize what has happened.

I don't even know where to begin on this one, but a few adjectives do come to mind. Quirky, strange, fantastical, beautiful, and brilliant are a few of them that rise to the surface of my brain. Thankfully, I'm not bleeding out on the bathroom floor, otherwise this review would never get done. This book, and those like it, are the reason I love to read. Having the privilege to read a story that is so well crafted and articulated is one of the great pleasures in life.

Jack and the women are all intriguing characters, when they have your attention, they never let it go. The women span five hundred years of American history and through a twist of fate, they all have ties to Jack. Their stories are tragic and full of heartache and death, but they all have an unique feel to them that makes them standout from each other. The stories range from the mythical to the femme fatale, all of them are captivating and original. There is a lyrical quality to them, so much so, that at times I felt as if I was sitting by a campfire, listening to a bard tell the history of my people. I felt for all of them and the men in their lives, the men Jack used to be.

This was a beautiful story that mixed reincarnation, rebirth, second chances, and the everlasting struggle between love and hate. It's the tale of the past, present, and future all colliding into one man's life and where it goes from here.

Sheri says

I picked this up because I liked the cover and really had no idea what I was going to find. Essentially it is a collection of short stories linked together by the main character Jack. In general I don't like short stories, but something about this collection worked well for me. It has a bit of Dicken's Christmas Carol in that the

reader (or at least this reader) is unsure if Jack is dreaming or hallucinating and wondering what kind of lesson he will have learned when he wakes in the morning.

Of course, unlike Scrooge, Jack does not get his second chance; he will not wake in the morning and by the time he is reborn he will have forgotten all of these previous eight lives. Although, the irony is in the wondering of whether he will become the cat in his ninth (talking Harpo is one of my favorite characters).

Each of the women that we meet through the night represent one of Jack's former lives and take the reader through a series of historical incidents from early Native American tribal life to 1950s scotch drinking and gun weilding Bunny. The stories are all rather stereotypical and emblematic of their era; some are more entertaining than others, but they are all fairly well done.

For some reason the bathroom scenes reminded me of the book/movie Jumanji. I kept half expecting them to roll a die to determine what kind of weapon the next girl was going to bring in. Donohue himself made two dramaturgical references that I could appreciate: Beckett's Waiting for Godot (which I find absolutely excruciating and not funny in the least bit even when I saw it performed in London by Ben Kingsley) and Checkov's adage about the gun shown in Act I being shot in Act III.

There were a few good quotes on human nature:

"We must be shown evidence of our pain in order to feel the concomitant sorrow, but our joy comes and goes as it pleases." and

"What are we but the sum of our desires?" and

"seemed more concerned with what he had lost than with what was still in hand, and he struck me in the moment as somewhat emblematic of the human condition, not to read too much into basic greed and regret."

Overall it was a nice blend of fairy tale and myth.

Kelly says

It's been a few weeks and I still cannot fully express how much I loved this book and why. It's like asking a 2 year old to explain dark matter...impossible. Irrespective of being a grown ass woman who knows how to use her words, I just can't put together a bunch in such a way that you want to buy this book. It could also be the lack of serotonin and an abundance of chocolate. Either way, do me a favor, just buy the damn book. And if my vulgar demand isn't enough, just read this small excerpt from the Washington Post's review of the book...

"It's here that Donohue, whose prior novels "The Stolen Child" and "Angels of Destruction" concern the intersection of reality and dreams, starts telling nine entirely different stories: the stories of eight women from various periods in American history, intermingled with the framing device of our narrator's bathroom fall. Donohue puts a wide range of voices and methods to work, some of which succeed better than others. But what lies beneath is his delight in exploring the interplay of reality and fantasy, of things temporal and eternal..."

Matt Fitz says

A mixture of folklore, myth, surrealism, magical realism, and American history as a man wakes up laying on the floor with a hole in the back of his head with unknown origin. As he tries to assess both the cause of his pain and the mess he has to clean up he is confronted by a series of 8 women who may wish him harm and a man who looks like his dad or a famous writer. Not a good book for people who need literal fiction. If you'd like to "read" a Dali painting then this may be the book for you. Fantastic journey and narration and ends in an interesting fashion. Was not disappointed. Can't say too much more than that without spoilers.

El says

Ever read a book that takes almost entirely inside a bathroom? I can't say I ever had. But now I have! Inside the bathroom is a young man who wakes up naked and bleeding on the bathroom tile, an old man in a bathrobe sitting on the tub, coughing feathers, and one by one a series of women come from the bedroom to tell their stories. If that's not bizarre enough, each of the women comes from a different century. There's a victim of the Salem witch trials, a slave in New Orleans, a woman who was present for the World Series in 1903 when the Pirates actually did something cool, etc. All of their stories are similar in one way - they've been betrayed, spurned, hurt. And they want their stories heard *now*.

Like Donohue's first and second books (The Stolen Child and Angels of Destruction), there is an element of the fantastical in this story. Donohue writes literary fiction but with a touch of fantasy that almost makes complete sense, like it could be pretty realistic. A cat named Harpo who talks some smack? Sure, why not. It works.

In a sense, this book is also a mystery. Why is the main character lying naked on the floor of his bathroom at the start of the novel? Why is he bleeding? Will he ever be able to tell *his* story? And, really, what's with the creepy guy sitting on the bathtub? The mystery itself slowly unravels, and by slowly I mean it unravels before your eyes across many centuries. All the pieces start to fall into place, you start to get it. It's a fun story.

I think it could have been even better, however. Less choppy in parts. I had a chance to go to Donohue's reading and book signing when this book came out and if I remember correctly he talked briefly about wanting to give these women voices, which he did. But he also did the same thing a lot of male writers do when writing women - he oversexualized them. I feel the book could have done with a lot less of that. Women can have voices, even angry voices, that don't just have to do with sex.

But I continue to read Donohue because I like when Pittsburgh people go on to do real things. He might not be in Pittsburgh anymore, but it makes its way into his writing, so I think this is still his home. I see he has a new book coming out, or it is out, or something. I look forward to reading it just as much as I've looked forward to these first three. I just keep hoping he'll write one I love as much as I loved The Stolen Child.

Kevin Farrell says

This book is packed with stories, each told by a woman from a different era in history. The audience is a young man who has apparently just died a violent death. That is all I am going to tell you. None of it makes sense until the end. Was it worth the trip? Not to me.

I can recommend this book for wonderful writing, interesting characters and great stories. What it lacked for me was some understanding of how they were supposed to fit together. This is not a fault of how it is written. This is just the purpose of this novel. It raises many questions in your mind as you read and answers very few.

Read some other reviews and give it a go if you like the sound of it.

Chris says

I was so sad as I read this. I LOVE Donohue's use of language and writing style in general. He makes me angry how talented he is; however, this book is nowhere near as good as THE STOLEN CHILD--it's not even as good as ANGEL OF DESTRUCTION. Much as I love his writing, his novels are on a downward slope. I really, REALLY hope his next one is on the incline, or I'm going to have to stop telling people he's one of my favorite authors.... Sad day.

This one might not have bothered me as much if it had simply been a collection of short stories. While similar to Chuck Palahniuk's HAUNTED--in terms of structure--I cared even less about the "intertwining" story. Some of the women's tales were quite interesting--some I quite liked on their own--but I didn't feel like it worked as a novel. Perhaps this is just me. As I hinted at above, this is a gorgeously written novel, but the lack of coherency and an enjoyable protagonist made this one hard to read.

Michelle H says

From www.thebookdorks.com

WEIRD. Centuries of June is just plain weird, but compellingly so. At times, it is laugh-out-loud funny and at others, it is simply surreal and hallucinatory. And I loved it.

The novel begins with our narrator landing on his bathroom floor bleeding profusely from a head wound which he acknowledges will make his floor "murder to clean." Ha! As he attempts to recount how he ended up there, he is joined by a doppelganger of his father who sneezes feathers and subsists solely on whiskey. During his brief forays out of the bathroom, he stops to have conversations with his cat (who sometimes talks back) and peek in on the eight naked women tangled in his bed a la Gustav Klimt's The Virgin. The narrator, let's call him Jack, has no recollection of how he ended up brained on the bathroom tile, why he's hosting a bevy of sleeping beauties in his bed, or just why all the clocks in his house have somehow stopped.

Each of those naked lovelies awakens and heads off with her weapon of choice to attack Jack in the tiny lavatory. Dad, or let's call him Samuel Beckett, prevents these murderous rampages by allowing each to tell her story of degradation at Jack's hands. Their ire dissipates as one by one, each of the girls — a former slave, a cave-dwelling native, a cross-dressing ship's mate, a proclaimed witch, a gold-seeking prospector, and the like — explains why she feels Jack is the cause of her ruin. Jack, with no recollection of being involved with any of these women, begins to feel some guilt for perhaps mistreating them in his past incarnations.

Centuries of June is full of subtle and not-so-subtle allusions to Waiting for Godot, Tristram Shandy, the

Marx Brothers, and the Salem Witch Trials. If my library digital loan of this weren't up tomorrow, I'd definitely begin an immediate reread because I liked it so much and rushed through it to get to the end. I did find the ending a tad anticlimactic as I'd already figured out some of the novel's twists, but I didn't feel that detracted from its beauty as a whole.

You know, the last book I read in the magical realism genre, *The Silence of Bonaventure Arrow*, was the last decent book I've read. Paired with this, I think I now have a new favorite type of literature. I was looking for something different to read and this was definitely IT.

Bill says

Really like this author, and this was a good book, but his debut novel, *The Stolen Child*, was so spectacular, and his second, *Angels of Destruction*, so close to that level, that this one pales just a bit by comparison. But just a bit! The great thing about this one, for me, was that there are so many stories included from so many different points in history. It's kind of like seven short historical novellas in one book. It begins with a man waking up on his bathroom floor, totally disoriented and with a wound on the back of his head. Upon investigation, he discovers that his bed is filled with 8 women, who proceed to visit him one by one in the bathroom, each one apparently intent upon killing him. Their histories become the short historical novellas that form most of the rest of this story, interspersed with connecting scenes taking place in the bathroom, which continues to fill up with these women from the past who provide each new arrival with encouragement and support as each one relates her own story. The stories, by the way, are all about how each woman was mistreated, disappointed, sometimes even murdered by the man in her life. Even once you've realized how they are all tied together, which doesn't take all that long, there is a bit of a surprise waiting at the end.

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

This unique novel mixes surreal lit fic and dreamy historical fiction to make a (mostly) compelling story about love, loss, responsibility, and moving on. The reader and the unnamed narrator are plunged immediately -- from the first paragraph -- into the same confusing mystery: what happened to him and who are all these people in his bathroom?

Strangely I feel ambivalent toward this novel even though it hits so many elements I like in a book: fascinating heroines, literary references, story-within-a-story, and interesting locales (including Pittsburgh!). My coolness toward this book is due to the narrator and his guide-to-the-afterlife. Both felt very artificial and joke-y to me; and while the guide can be excused, I suppose, since he's mythic and otherworldly, the narrator was very much real and yet, he felt flat, hollow, and boring.

Visited by seven women, all unlucky in love and life, the narrator is regaled with their stories, which includes a Native American who fell in love with a shapeshifting bear; a victim of the Salem witch trials; a slave saving for her freedom; a gold prospector in the mid 1800s; and a 1950s housewife eager to rid of her husband. The women and their stories were the best part of the novel, and I just loved their interludes. I had less patience for the sexualized treatment of the seven women: it felt a bit unnecessary especially since the women themselves rarely were the sexual instigators. They were the recipients of male attention -- some passive, some active -- that had an edge of violence that made me frustrated. The women were confronting the narrator but in the end, I didn't feel like they got the justice they wanted.

There's a cinematic quality to the writing which is also lovely when it works and grating when it doesn't, but I will say this novel occupied my thoughts constantly, and I rushed to finish it. This is another summer read that has some oomph for those who want more than fluff but not something too heavy; I suspect this would also make a great book club or group read.
