

To: "Peter K. Westen" <pkw@umich.edu>
From: Chris Brooks Whitman <cwhitman@umich.edu>
Subject: Re: visit
Cc:
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Attached:

I read "The Hours" simultaneously with a re-read of "Mrs. Dalloway" -- which vastly increased my pleasure because there were so many ways in which Cunningham referred to or speculated on the earlier book. For me, that earlier book was the prior history. I'm not as hung up as you are on fidelity to fact in a work like this, at least where I think the living person is not unfairly portrayed. But the sources Cunningham listed for his portrayal of Woolf were extensive, so he at least took the obligation seriously. And he made me see how Woolf talks about the appeal of suicide in "Mrs. Dalloway" in a way that makes her choice more understandable than it had been (to me) before. He also put into "The Hours" things about Woolf that we know from her letters and diary that SHE couldn't put so baldly into HER book -- particularly things involving her relationships with women and gay men.

Oh, dear about Monster's Ball. I have both felt that I SHOULD see it and have resisted because the material sounds so depressing. I'm afraid that you've pushed me over the edge, and now I won't see it. Mulholland Drive just sounded like a mess. I want more good movies!

Why are they so hard to make?

AND I'd been looking forward to "The Connections" too -- though, here too, it didn't SOUND like it could be much fun to read.

"Monsoon Wedding" has one character who is far too broadly drawn, and its plot is pretty stock. But somehow everyone grows on you in the course of the movie, so you end up caring about them. And the scenes of India city life are fascinating.

Both the books on the Mandate (the one I've finished and the one I'm now reading) start with the capture of Jerusalem by the British, so they don't spend much time on the Ottoman Empire. The first ("One Palestine, Complete" by an Israeli journalist by Segev) was picked by the NY Times as one of the best of the year, and it tells the story in an elliptical fashion, circling around different people, both Arabs and Jews. Very anecdotal, which could drive you nuts. The other, which Brian Simpson gave me and I've just started, is more straightforward. It's called "Ploughing Sand" by Naomi Shepherd. They both argue that the British committed themselves to an Israeli state early in the 20th century because the British believed in a powerful, world-wide Jewish cabal, which could help or hurt British interests. So, ironically, anti-Semitism is responsible for the birth of Israel! I also read "What Went Wrong" by Bernard Lewis -- it's really a set of lectures, and wasn't as good as I expected it to be.

I'm interested, in part for exactly the same reason you are. There was a thoughtful essay in the most recent NY Review of Books, arguing that Israel will simply have to think of themselves as "special" -- more innocent, more victimized, more righteous, more vulnerable. Unfortunately, the suicide bombers give them further excuse to continue in that sense of victimization. I think it's time that the US started pushing Israel HARD to read an accord with the Palestinians, and I'm frightened by the consequences to us if we do not. Both sides have inflicted unforgivable injuries on the other -- and have been doing so for almost a century. So no one is going to win the "greater victim" argument.

Peter Hammer will be around the law school for another year. He's looking for a job in the area, because it would be tough for him to move his partner's extended family. I think he hoped to work something out with another department at the U, but the provost told us that he would have refused to give Peter tenure even if the law school had voted affirmatively -- so I doubt that will work. Another possibility is Wayne State, and I know people are talking to Wayne on Peter's behalf. I hope we don't have another one of these for a LONG time.