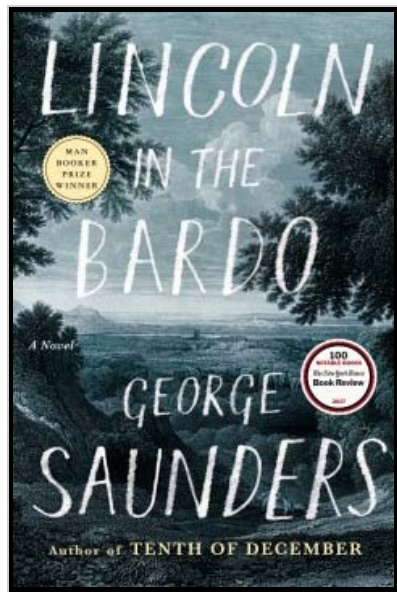


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Lincoln in the Bardo

by George Saunders

Price: \$28.00(Hardcover)

Published: February 14, 2017

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Rating: 0.0/5 (0 votes cast)

From the Publisher: In his long-awaited first novel, American literary master George Saunders delivers his most original, transcendent, and moving work yet. Unfolding in a graveyard over the course of a single night, narrated by a dazzling chorus of voices, *Lincoln in the Bardo* is an experience unlike any other—for no one but Saunders could conceive it. February 1862. The Civil War is less than one year old. The fighting has begun in earnest, and the nation has begun to realize it is in for a long, bloody struggle. Meanwhile, President Lincoln's beloved eleven-year-old son, Willie, lies upstairs in the White House, gravely ill. In a matter of days, despite predictions of a recovery, Willie dies and is laid to rest in a Georgetown cemetery. "My poor boy, he was too good for this earth," the president says at the time. "God has called him home." Newspapers report that a grief-stricken...

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About The Author

George Saunders

George Saunders is the author of eight books, including the story collections *Pastoralia* and *Tenth of December*, which was a finalist for the National Book Award. He has received fellowships from the Lannan Foundation, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Guggenheim Foundation....

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What We Say

I've admired writer George Saunders, but for some reason haven't felt drawn to him. I was apparently the only person on Earth who wasn't gobsmacked by his most recent short story collection "Tenth Of December." I appreciated the Barthelme-like cleverness but "appreciate" is where I stopped. Wisely, I imagined the problem was with me and planned to return to it someday soon with an open mind. Now here comes his first novel and gobsmacked is the least of it. It's the most formally daring novel I can think of since David Mitchell's "Cloud Atlas." And here that obvious intellect of Saunders is married to warmth and beauty and an all-encompassing vision of this life and the next. "Bardo" is a Tibetan word that hints at the

Buddhist concept of an intermediate state. It usually means that moment when your essence is flitting between one existence and the next, the period when your previous life has ended but the next one hasn't quite incarnated yet. Being in the bardo is an opportunity for wisdom and insight, but also a danger. More broadly, it means anyone in a state of flux, perhaps due to an illness or a dramatic change in their life. President Lincoln enters the bardo upon the death of his beloved son Willie. History tells us that Lincoln rather poignantly returned again and again to the cemetery on the day of Willie's burial, just to gaze upon and even hold his son one last time. From that shred of fact, Saunders has spun out a remarkable tale. It begins strictly with quotations from the historical record. Using passages from diaries and letters and biographies and the like -- just one quote after another, each one indicating its source -- Saunders sets the scene. The President and his wife hold a party while their son Willie is feverish upstairs. Unexpectedly, the boy takes a turn for the worse and dies. Naturally, Lincoln is broken by this and the country holds its breath, wondering if the President will shake off his grief and again shoulder the burden of the Civil War. Aha, I thought, Saunders is going to write an entire novel by piecing together found quotations! But no, suddenly at the cemetery other voices intrude, the voices of the dead. In an echo of the play "Our Town," we hear from the spirits still hovering nearby, the people who have some desperate unfinished business or simply retreat instinctively from the unknown afterlife to come. These voices include Willie himself, a Reverend who fears he is damned but doesn't know why, a gay man who killed himself after being rejected by his lover, an enslaved woman who was raped to death, a drunken couple who are ferociously determined swearers, little girls, old men and on and on -- each of them with a story they want, indeed must tell and a reason for not moving on. When Lincoln returns to visit Willie, the other spirits are astonished at such compassion. People don't return, not to touch certainly, not to actually hold. Yet it's not good to tarry, especially for children. And so a struggle ensues. The spirits want to remain but avoid admitting the obvious fact that they are dead. Willie wants to remain so he can see his father again, yet remain is precisely what he shouldn't do. We see the possible fate that awaits people (terrible, frightening, glorious). We see the bitterness of lives half-lived. And we see Lincoln in the bardo, consumed with grief and yet offered new insight and purpose to fight and win and give a higher meaning to the bloody war, thanks to his communion with the spirits. It's a funny, vulgar, sad, fantastical, profane and philosophical novel that reaffirms what everyone else has been saying: George Saunders is a hell of a writer. -- Michael Giltz

What Others Say

Praise for George Saunders

"No one writes more powerfully than George Saunders about the lost, the unlucky, the disenfranchised."—
Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

"Saunders makes you feel as though you are reading fiction for the first time."—Khaled Hosseini

"Few people cut as hard or deep as Saunders does."—Junot Díaz

"George Saunders is a complete original. There is no one better, no one more essential to our national sense of self and sanity."—Dave Eggers

"Not since Twain has America produced a satirist this funny."—Zadie Smith

"There is no one like him. He is an original—but everyone knows that."—Lorrie Moore

"George Saunders makes the all-but-impossible look effortless. We're lucky to have him."—Jonathan Franzen

"An astoundingly tuned voice—graceful, dark, authentic, and funny—telling just the kinds of stories we need to get us through these times."—Thomas Pynchon

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