

Powell's Books

Television

by [Jean-Philippe Toussaint](#)



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Review-a-Day

"Some small part of you may recoil at the idea of a fictional critique of television by a French author. After all, TV is a very American medium, and we more or less know what the French think of us. But Jean-Philippe Toussaint's *Television* is not that kind of book at all....*Television* is a delicacy of a book, observed in minute, almost prurient detail, and it casts a sad but loving eye on modern life." *Anna Godbersen, Esquire* ([read the entire Esquire review](#))

Synopses & Reviews

Publisher Comments:

The amusingly odd protagonist and narrator of Jean-Philippe Toussaint's novel is an academic on sabbatical in Berlin to work on his book about Titian. With his research completed, all he has left to do is sit down and write. Unfortunately, he can't decide how to refer to his subject, so instead he starts watching TV continuously, until one day he decides to renounce the most addictive of twentieth-century inventions. As he spends his summer still not writing his book, he is haunted by TV, from the video surveillance screens in a museum to a moment when it seems everyone in Berlin is tuned in to *Baywatch*. One of Toussaint's funniest antiheroes, the protagonist of *Television* turns daily occurrences into an entertaining reflection on society and the influence of television on our lives.

Review:

"I quit watching television.' Thus begins this amusing, absurdist seventh novel by Toussaint ([The Bathroom](#); [Monsieur](#)), in which an academic on sabbatical in Berlin

struggles to shut off his set, only to become hyper-attuned to the medium's pervasiveness. With his pregnant girlfriend and son off to Italy on vacation, the unnamed narrator is free to devote himself to his monograph on Titian. Or so he believes, but he is distracted by doing nothing ('Doing nothing, contrary to what people rather simplistically imagine, is a thing that requires method and discipline') and exhausted by watching the French Open ('I was no longer physically up to five sets of tennis'), finally realizing that he must give up television. This doesn't help him make much progress on his monograph, but it does give him time to muse on his nonviewing: he reads the television listings, watches himself in the reflection of the darkened screen and realizes that Titian's initials are T.V. To read Toussaint's episodic, curiously mesmerizing tale is like channel surfing, as the narrator moves from precise descriptions of the 'lacquered pedestal' on which the television sits to slapstick scenes of everyday life. Like a good producer, Toussaint knows when to roll the credits, and his short novel integrates sharp insight with gentle humor. *Agent, Georges Borchardt*. (Nov. 16) *Forecast: This surprisingly accessible little book has the potential to become a bookseller favorite, and even a Christmas stocking stuffer if enthusiastically hand-sold.* *Publishers Weekly* (Copyright 2004 Reed Business Information, Inc.)

Review:

"[A] highly original commentary on modern society....This inventive tale is recommended." *Library Journal*

Review:

"Ever so slightly redundant and attenuated, but most readers will be charmed nonetheless. Very entertaining indeed." *Kirkus Reviews*

Review:

"Toussaint is an original and significant writer, whose fiction can be as engaging as it is surprising." *Times Literary Supplement (U.K)*

About the Author

Jean-Philippe Toussaint is the author of seven novels, including [The Bathroom](#) and [Monsieur](#), both of which have been published in English translation. His work has been compared to that of Samuel Beckett, Jacques Tati, Ivan Oblomov, and the films of Jim Jarmusch.

Product Details

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