

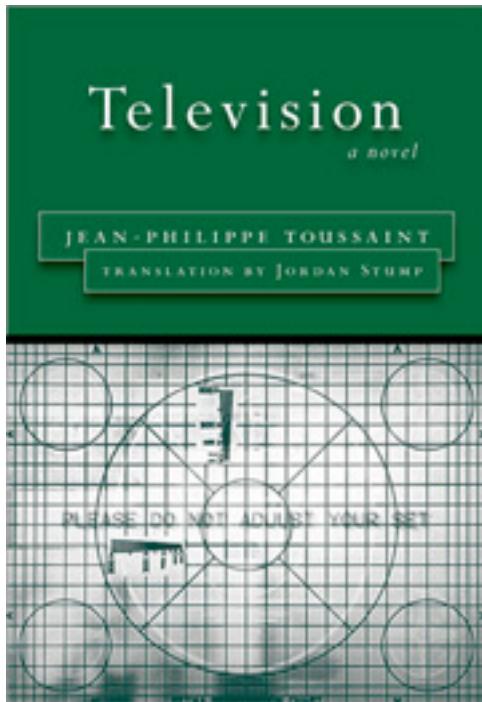


RENEE'S BOOK OF THE DAY A LIFE IN BOOKS

<http://www.reneesbookoftheday.com/2007/04/television-by-jean-philippe-toussaint.html>

Tuesday, April 10, 2007

Television by Jean-Philippe Toussaint



I feel like it's been so long since I read real literature. (Translations are automatically considered real literature, right?) I think I've forgotten how. I read *Television* by Jean-Philippe Toussaint with a pencil in hand, trying to figure out how to decide what was worth underlining. I also tried pretending I was back in college and had to write a paper about the book in the next six hours—what would I focus on?

It really wasn't that bad. *Television* was a very enjoyable read with a lot of very obvious themes to work with. The main character, at the beginning of the novel, announces that he has stopped watching television. He is simply too busy doing "nothing," as he calls his work, hobbies, and outings, to watch TV. However, this plan, as well as his work, hobbies, and outings, turns out to be a study in self-delusion. Not only does he sneak in quite a bit of television viewing (if you're at someone else's house, it doesn't count), but

by the end of the book he has purchased a second television for his household. And still has not written more than fifteen sentences of his monograph.

This fatally flawed main character pained me throughout the book. Everything he did was so awkward and misguided, yet perfectly justified in his own mind. I cringed constantly at his mishaps. But every once in a while, he would spout out some gem of insight that I had to dig my pencil out for. Toussaint brilliantly created a character that encompassed all of human nature's greatest failings and triumphs simultaneously.

Luckily for me, the book included an afterword that briefly examined the themes and connections in Toussaint's works. I'm always amazed by professional literary analysis, and how professors and critics can see things that seem so obvious after they have been pointed out, but I didn't catch when I read them. I suppose this skill can be acquired from practice. Maybe if I didn't spend so much time blogging, I could work on it. Hmm. More on that later.

[Television](#) by Jean-Philippe Toussaint