

Recovering Your Story: Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner, Morrison

Arnold Weinstein



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"Great art discovers for us who we are," writes eminent literature professor and critic Arnold Weinstein in this magisterial new book about how we can better uncover and understand our own stories by reading five major modern writers. Professor Weinstein, author of the highly acclaimed A Scream Goes Through the House, has spent a lifetime guiding students through the work of great writers, and in a volume that crowns his career, Weinstein invites us to discover ourselves–our perceptions, our dreams, our own elusive, deepest stories–in the masterpieces of modernist fiction.

Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner: the very names sound intimidating. Yet as Weinstein argues with wit and passion, the works of these authors, and of their contemporary heir Toni Morrison, are in fact shimmering mirrors of our own inner world and most intimate thoughts. Novels such as Remembrance of Things Past, Ulysses, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, The Sound and the Fury, Absalom, Absalom!, and Beloved allow us to explore the inner worlds of human feeling and bring us faceto-face with our own deepest selves and desires. Weinstein decodes these great novels, and he shows how to read them to understand human beings-the way our minds and hearts actually work. This is what Weinstein means by "recovering your story."

Weinstein illuminates the complex pleasures woven into these peerless narratives. Beneath the slow, sensual cadences of Proust he finds an edgy erotic tension as well as a remarkably crisp depiction of the timeless world inside the self. Joyce's Ulysses, in Weinstein's brilliantly original reading, is a protean linguistic experiment that forces us to view both our bodies and our minds in a radically new–and hilariously funny–light. His analysis of Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse circles back again and again on Woolf's depiction of the importance of relationships in knowing the self. Faulkner, argues Weinstein, is at once our greatest tragedian and our darkest comedian, a novelist who captures both the agony and absurdity of consciousness in a time of social and moral disintegration. Finally, in Toni Morrison's Beloved, Weinstein explores the legacy of modernism in a contemporary novel, as Morrison brings the body into the literary picture, confronting how the body affects not only our fundamental concept of self, but also consciousness itself.

In this magnificent work of literary appreciation and exploration, Weinstein makes the astonishing discovery of the self as a part of the joy of reading great modernist fiction, even as he makes these powerful works understandable, accessible, indeed imperative for all adventurous readers.

From the Hardcover edition.

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