



Kleinzeit

Russell Hoban

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Kleinzeit, Russell Hoban's second novel, is probably the funniest of his books. It's a stylized, completely unpredictable story about a man in search of reality, armed only with a Glockenspiel and a copy of Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War*. The story opens as our hero, Kleinzeit, experiences a mysterious flash of pain in his hypotenuse. That morning he gets sacked from his job as a copywriter and is checked into hospital by his doctor. Hospital has been waiting for Kleinzeit; so has Sister, the kindly nurse who is about to become his link to sanity as he is existentially heckled by the voracious, sadistically witty institution known as Hospital, as well as the nonsensical doctors and ailments who put him there.

Kleinzeit Details

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Author : Russell Hoban

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From Reader Review Kleinzeit for online ebook

Rachel Kowal says

Well this was a surprise. Weird and wonderful, reminiscent of Nabokov. First morning reading this on the train, I was laughing so much that the little girl sitting in front of me said, "What's so funny?"

Molly says

Funny, surreal and entertaining. I'll admit I flagged a little in the middle and I have this nagging feeling - as I always do with Hoban's books - that I'm missing out on some central point due to my lack of education in areas mythological and Latinate but this was nevertheless a good read.

Suzanne says

I liked some aspects of this book, particularly the personification of things, but I sort of felt like I was missing something and that maybe, for example, if I had dropped some acid the day before reading this, that it would have made a lot more sense and I may have totally "gotten" it.

Dan says

It would be interesting to know how a Lacanian psychoanalyst would interpret the fictional world in which this retelling of a classical myth is set, and in which signifiers are in disorder. The protagonist, for instance, learns that he has trouble with his hypotenuse when he experiences a pain traveling from A to B; in the hospital, he meets a patient who is suffering from a condition that worsens into hendiadys. Perhaps Hoban is suggesting that in a postmodern world of alienated labor and advertising saturation, the classic trivium and quadrivium have been marginalized, and that, in a "return of the repressed," these traditional disciplines are re-emerging in neurotic forms, as linguistic distortions. This may be part of the reason that Kleinzeit, who reads Thucydides in his spare time, begins learning to play the glockenspiel and to write poems.

Adam Stevenson says

The first of his books I have ever read. There was a moment when a character finds music lingering in the air and goes to it with his penny whistle to liberate it - that was when I realised this book was more than authorial tricks and actually had a genuinely interesting point of view to substantiate the oddness.

K.A. Laity says

I am dog-earing so many pages... this is one of the most wonderful books about the struggles involved in the writing process but without whining. Hoban's *RIDDLEY WALKER* is one of my all time favourite books and this one is every bit a delight.

Drmorton says

This was an interesting quick read, Hoban offers some interesting ideas on the creative processes of writers and the relation between them and their muse, though in a very abstract way. The only downside is how esoteric the book is at times.

Rod says

Let's say $\star\star\star\frac{1}{2}$. Enjoyable and funny, but I never felt that connected to it. Maybe a little too much absurdity-for-absurdity's-sake for my taste. This was Hoban's second novel, though, and he was still finding his voice as a writer. Maybe I'll dig it more on a re-read.

James says

I'm a Russell Hoban bias for sure, but *Kleinzeit* is one of my favorites and one of the more accessible of his bizarre narratives. Here Hoban tells the tale of the protagonist *Kleinzeit*, a middle-aged going nowhere advertisement agent whose ideas are obsolete and whose health is dwindling into a sharp pain from A to B. Fired, *Kleinzeit* journeys to the Hospital, where, for the first time in his life he can be a hero. *Kleinzeit* finds himself and his purpose in the Sister who falls madly in love with him, the fellow patients who know he is the chosen one, and the *Glockenspiel* that beckons to him. What ensues is a double life in which *Kleinzeit* battles the riddles of Hospital by day and conquers the tasks of Underground by night. No less characters than Sister, *Kleinzeit*, Redbeard, or Doctor Krishna are *Kleinzeit*'s bed that will do anything to seduce him, the yellow paper that weeps whenever *Kleinzeit* is away, *Kleinzeit*'s young and ambitious jogging outfit, and the vehicular shoes sister wears that will walk her wherever she needs to go as long as she telepathically relays the information to her feet. God is there to help, but doesn't understand most of our problems because he isn't human, and Death is always right around the corner, black and hairy with dirty grey finger nails and wishing he had a more exciting job like Action's, all while Action is sitting in prison smoking cigarettes and wishing he had the job security of Death.

Hoban does little to compensate his ideas for an easier read, but checking out any of his books is a guarantee to see something you haven't seen before. He is a difficult one and attention needs to be paid to every sentence, but he is always astounding, and *Kleinzeit* is also flooded with outright hilarity.

Chiefdonkey Brady says

Wonderful - *Orpheus and Eurydice* on the Northern Line, death loping like an ape along the Embankment

David says

Hoban is the passion of the mother of one of my daughter's friends. She thrust this one on us, and, after overcoming my habitual aversion to metafiction, I really ended up loving it. Both funny and weirdly moving, and I even liked the style by the end.

Gaz says

Allegorical misunderstanding? The topography of a writer's life, the text as refraction of experience through the lenses of culture, and with a sense of absurd humour too. An interesting read but not very affecting.

Sarah says

Absurd and sad and metaphysical and zany and celebratory and affirming and confusing and understated. Hoban draws heavily on myth and existentialist theory as well as exuberant humour and *joie de vivre*. A thoroughly enlightening read.

MJ Nicholls says

At last I have hobbled into my second Hoban some three years late. Zinging and stinging. Capital-O Original. On the surface level a piece of delirious absurdism where God, the Hospital, the Word, and pieces of yellow paper are allowed a voice in the narrative, but in the interstices a dark exploration of—what?—the psychology of illness (is that a *thing*?), fragmented mental states as a metaphor for—what?—those old shibboleths: postmodern corporatised living or the multiple painful births that make up the creative process? The language in this slim novel is exceptional and my eyes are now wide open to the works of Hoban and here's to a Hoban revival on GR as a result of this paltry review and the enormous influence my words have over everyone on this site. You have your orders, minions!

Karen Massie says

This is one of my all time favourite books. I first read it when I had just left home aged 16 and I still love it just as much today. I realise everyone is entitled to their own opinion but I don't understand this need people have to over analyse the books they read. They seem to be so busy telling us what the author was obviously meaning ,and pointing out how deep and meaningful this is or is failing to be, that they seem to forget to just sit back and enjoy the book in all its charm and absurdity.

The way that he manages to make opposing characters of believable depth, contrast and feeling out of pretty much everything from the sublime (Sister and the Bed!) to the ridiculous (God and the Hospital!) has me smiling from beginning to end. I can't see a sheet of yellow paper without longing to just go and right something random. So on that note - " Walk in danger, walk in error,

Walk ahead in Morton Taylor. "

Terry Mark says

Most of Russell Hoban's books are pretty bonkers and this one is no exception but in amongst all that confusion there's sense and reality that shine through eventually. He is a very imaginative and unique author.

Dead John Williams says

I first read this in 1974 when I was younger. I was so taken with it that it occupied me for a long, long time.

Today I picked it up, outside the temperature was dropping, snow was imminent and I am packing up to move house. I came across this book and sat down in front of the fire and started to read it again. After a few hours I did some more packing then sat down and finished it.

As you can see I've given it 5 stars and it obviously still impresses me no end.

It is a surreal, poetic story about illness, significance, love, sex (1974 sex), mystery and meaning. It is very clever but not enough to piss you off. It is coherently clever. This is one of the books that have put me off writing forever. It introduced me to the deeper meaning of Orpheus and Eurydice and as such I have never forgotten it.

It was an uplifting, naive, experience to read this book and refreshingly so. It is as far from "Gone Girl" and its ilk as you can get. It is a work of imagination where your imagination will be required to suspend disbelief and mundanity too.

What more can I say? Thank You Mr Hoban

Mathew says

A hard book to rate. On the one hand, it's amusing and intriguing in its surrealism, and flows well. On the other hand, there's no payoff, no resolution; the mysterious recurring linguistic patterns and other recurring plot elements remain unexplained, when I was really hoping for a Grand Plot Twist that would make it all make sense, or at least interconnect. So it's entertaining and well-written, but ultimately it doesn't really go anywhere.

Fionnuala says

A smalltime copywriter faces some big time challenges when he pens some advertising copy on a sheet of yellow paper in this super creative piece of multi-layered fiction. Characters include a mysterious red bearded tramp, every man's dream nurse, a hospital bed and Death. The Peloponnesian wars and Orpheus and Eurydice also make an appearance.

Warning: don't read this novel if you've been experiencing any difficulties with the angle of your hypotenuse!

Jude says

It is my opinion, she said to God, that nobody is healthy.

Look at *you*, said God. Who could be healthier?

Oh, *women*, said Sister. I'm talking about men. One way or another they're all sick.

You really think so? said God. He rained a little harder.

What did I do wrong? How have I failed?

I can't exactly say what I mean, said Sister. It just sounds stupid. What I mean is, it isn't a matter of finding a well man, it's a matter of finding one who makes the right use of his sickness.
