



Necessary Errors

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An exquisite debut novel that brilliantly captures the lives and romances of young expatriates in newly democratic Prague

It's October 1990. Jacob Putnam is young and full of ideas. He's arrived a year too late to witness Czechoslovakia's revolution, but he still hopes to find its spirit, somehow. He discovers a country at a crossroads between communism and capitalism, and a picturesque city overflowing with a vibrant, searching sense of possibility. As the men and women Jacob meets begin to fall in love with one another, no one turns out to be quite the same as the idea Jacob has of them—including Jacob himself.

Necessary Errors is the long-awaited first novel from literary critic and journalist Caleb Crain. Shimmering and expansive, Crain's prose richly captures the turbulent feelings and discoveries of youth as it stretches toward adulthood—the chance encounters that grow into lasting, unforgettable experiences and the surprises of our first ventures into a foreign world—and the treasure of living in Prague during an era of historic change.

Necessary Errors Details

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From Reader Review Necessary Errors for online ebook

Julie Ehlers says

I loved this novel. One of the blurbs on the back cover describes this as "both transitory and indelible," and I agree. It was both timeless and of a particular moment, an old-fashioned novel but distinctly contemporary at the same time. I loved being immersed in 1990s Prague, because that's what this was--an immersion in the lives of Jacob, his friends, and the people who pass in and out of their lives. This was not the typical video-game-style novel that everyone seems so enamored of these days (*Night Film* comes to mind), where the plot jumps quickly from one thing to the next, and you're reasonably entertained but left with nothing at the end. *Necessary Errors* does have a destination, but it progresses toward it in a measured, day-to-day fashion, so the reader feels that she's living it along with Jacob. And the reader is left with quite a bit at the end--Caleb Crain tries to express some intangible things about what it's like to be searching, and I think he succeeds. I'm going to be honest, readers who are easily distracted probably won't like this book. It's not a video game disguised as a novel. This is a novel.

I won this book through Goodreads' First Reads program.

Sara Haasis says

Admittedly, I didn't finish this book so keep that in mind with this review. I really tried but eventually it felt like too much of a chore to open it and I gave up at about 300 pages. I feel like I just didn't get it. It gave the impression it has a lot to say about capitalism, culture clashes, and being an American abroad; maybe someone more familiar with philosophy and history would have found something to sink their teeth into. Mostly, I was bored. It was impossible to read more than 20 pages at a time. I had no problems with the prose style and sometimes Crain paints a charming scene, it was just a tedious story. There's no urgency, intensity, or weight to the protagonist's situation. Jacob floats from scene to scene without appearing to feel much or care about anything and I was not at all invested in him or his friends. The book is a long string of self-contained scenes: Jacob buys a hamster, Jacob gets a boyfriend, Jacob goes to Berlin, Jacob tutors some Czech children, and so on- you could just cut most of them up and put them in any order without changing the story's impact. Some of the snapshots do sparkle with real tension or tenderness but most of them seem inane if pleasantly written, with no bearing on each other or the greater arc of the story.

One thing I can say is that I liked the dreamy, almost fantasy-like portrait of Prague. In an interview, Crain quoted another author as saying "Every writer needs a fairyland" – not a Middle Earth or Hogwarts exactly, but some setting that is almost but not quite like the real world. To me and probably to a lot of Americans, Crane's Prague is certainly that, with its unpredictable food shortages and numerous linguistic quirks. It just wasn't enough to outweigh the carefully-maintained detachment that colors every character.

An Te Chu says

Really resonated with where I am in life. Prose took a little getting used to but became very comfortable.

Karen says

This is when it's sweet to be a nanny, when the baby is asleep and all the morning stuff is done. I'm drinking nettle tea for no good reason and I found a French classical station so the station breaks aren't so irritating.

Necessary Errors is the book I should write. I picked it out at the airport bookstore because the cover has a satisfying texture and the pages have deckled edges, indicating that although it is new, and a paperback, the publishers consider it fairly literary, and it should be read in that spirit. It also has book flaps as if the cover were a dust jacket, which is a pleasing if a little pretentious idiosyncrasy. When it first dawned on me that this was the book I should write I peeked at the bio on the back flap and the author, Crain, is a graduate of fancy schools and lives in Brooklyn, so that was deflating. I was secretly hoping he washed dishes in Toronto or something so we could stay analogous. Oh well, this is still the book I should write.

"The avowal reminded him of people he knew from school with high but vague ambitions, who after graduation had moved to bad neighborhoods and taken jobs supposedly beneath them, in order not to be reminded of the larger competition they hadn't wished to enter."

I've often desperately wondered if I should pick a really great shtick or gimmick or painstakingly develop an "original voice" and commit to it fully and write a book like that, just a relentlessly odd book that people might feel comfortable calling 'distinctive.' Some of my peers have gone that route with the arts and it seems to have worked out well, finding a niche, like the woman who carves sculptures out of crayons. I'm not saying she's my peer, but I am saying she's found her niche. To me, that's essentially a marketing decision, but who says I'd be capable of either extreme originality or extreme commitment? Denigrating those things or the authenticity of successful artists is dangerous mental territory and a deflection.

Plus I hate reading books like that, much less trying to write one. But what kind of book would I actually like to write? A pretty good novel, I think, with normal grammar and a normal structure-- Sentences, paragraphs, scenes, dialogue, chapters-- with a plot where not much happens, but it's all kind of bittersweet and closely observed. A decent book with a lot of specifics and a lot of musing. I love reading Kundera and Steinbeck, for example. They would be the ultimate. But their elegant structures and epic metaphors are not what I'd be shooting for.

I was editing a book of poetry that had Spanish on one page and the English translation on the opposing one. As we were struggling with connotations in both languages, the man I was writing it with explained he wanted it to be like Neruda, lyrical in both languages, but meaning the exact same thing in both, too. And I was just flabbergasted at his audacity... Oh, just like that, huh? Now that it's clear... and I was like, "but you know he's *Neruda*, right?" This book is on the outside edge of what I could hope to shoot for, and just even thinking that in some corner of my mind seems like a bold move to me, but I might have to be willing to be a little bold, if only in my imagination, if I'm ever going to undertake anything.

First I was intimidated by how Crain manages to describe, for example, the way the reflected light from a ceiling lamp ripples down a lacquered oak table as he walks alongside it across a boardroom to meet someone. That's just the kind of thing I'd like to reference in the paragraphs in my book. If I started with the meeting, I'd never be able to add that detail. But it is a "debut" novel, so I was reassured to realize that perhaps Crain had a lifetime of journals with just such details in them, and he might not have begun with the meeting; he may have hung everything around all the things he's meant to put in a book since the beginning. They say that happens with first novels, why they're so hard to follow. Well, in my 4th grade time capsule I wrote under goals that "I'd like to write *just one* good book" so that would be ok.

Crain captures not only physical details, but specific feelings marvelously, with a grace that can only be born out of a kind of exquisite conscientiousness.

"It was late morning when they settled into their train compartment, and they collapsed at once in the pleasant, premature fatigue that follows a successful morning departure, especially one achieved with only minutes to spare--by the time they had reached the train station, they had been cheerfully shouting at each other to hurry--and that serves as a kind of blanket to protect the traveler from the strangeness and emptiness that follow."

I can feel the kind of labor behind this paragraph that I can imagine putting in. Each of his sentences has that evident labor in it, as if every word was carefully considered, hesitated over, but ultimately it all turned out kind of beautiful.

Another reason why I should write this book: Throughout the book the main character sees the joy in each moment, each conversation, each relationship, as necessarily born out of its future loss. This is not so much 'living in the moment,' but something borne out of a future self, already observing with lonely nostalgia. It is the constant theme of every scene from page one to the last and I think the same way, so I was grateful because many of the carefully described feelings that made me go 'exactly!' were subtle variations on that sensation, that tone.

"What it felt like, practically speaking, was that one looked forward in the morning to the events of the day for themselves--to riding the rickety, musical tram, or drinking a beer with friends. One did not think about getting through the day, or about winning anything with the use of it--there was no idea of losing the day as if in trade for something else. It was lost innocently, for nothing. But this quality of loss would have to be lost, in turn."

Unfortunately, this book is already written. And I was clearly drawn to it too, because the main character is a writer who doesn't write. But writers who don't write are only interesting, in fact only exist, when writers who do write write about them. That's from my journal. Oops the baby is up. I've muted the monitor, but the green lights are still jutting toward the right and turning orange to scream at me. This'll have to do, as is, for writing today.

Chrissy says

I really want to rate this book higher but can't pretend that it didn't fall flat for me, no matter how talented and incredibly smart I find this author. Having come of age during the fall of communism, I loved the setting in 1990 Prague and how Prague became a character itself in the novel. By using young ex-pats who spend a lot of time drinking and bonding in a foreign land, he was able to include a bunch of philosophical commentary on the good and bad of capitalism, and evoked well the transitional in-between (including well-drawn character studies of the type of people attracted to the in between stage!).

That said, there didn't seem to be enough of a plot line pulling it forward and a lot of passages/scenes seemed only to reinforce what Prague was like, but didn't develop the plot or serve character development.

In the end, it's one of those books I'm glad I read but wouldn't necessarily recommend to another.

Andy Bird says

This book was trying in parts, the author can turn out wonderful lines & paragraphs, but went on too long.

There is some strong writing about living abroad, being alone, coming out, falling in with a group of friends. Still, it would have had much more impact, I think, if considerable chunks were cut. They interminable, multiple, ESL classes have the reader too much time to recover from the emotional bits.

Still, worth a read for the strong parts!

Edit: I was sick with a bad cold while I read the 2nd 1/2 & he sure captured lying sick on the couch accurately!

Paul says

Pretty much a supreme disappointment. I fell in love with (er, really liked, anyway) Crain's writing after reading his novella "Sweet Grafton" in *n+1* five years ago, and was crazy excited to learn a year or so ago that he had a novel coming out. Needless to say, my expectations were high. And boy did this book fail to live up. In a word, this novel is: Boring. A bunch of expats hanging out in Prague after the Velvet Revolution. Doing what? Oh, nothing much. Hanging out in bars, coffee shops, apartments. Talking. (Have we not learned yet that the whole dorm-room philosophizing thing isn't interesting? Teju Cole does it right; this is certainly no *Open City*) The decision to have these characters do nothing is definitely conscious; one character says of Prague, "being here is what you're doing, when you're here." And that's pretty much it. A bunch of people being in Prague. Again, much later (it's a long book), a character asks, "What are you going to do today?" His companion responds, "Be in Prague." And we're supposed to sit through 474 pages of a bunch of people just *being* in Prague? The historical setting of the novel is significant, but it doesn't inform the book at all, really, nor manifest itself in any significant way. For the first hundred or so pages the writing seems to concern itself with little more than which language a character is speaking, and how the translation comes across, what is lost, and so on. Thankfully that subsides, but it gives way to nothing more than a bunch of expats just being in Prague. About 90% of the way through the novel, a section opens with "Since his first day in Prague, Jacob had been going into bookstores." Okay. So why haven't we seen this? Not that we should, but this is exactly the way Crain choses to tell his story, with these "Oh, by the way. Not that you'd care or should care, but," sort of anecdotes. A paragraph later, we get "Now he began to go into bookstores more often." All due respect to a writer who I do have respect for, this is mind-numbingly dull stuff.

And what about these expats. They're nice, I suppose. In fact all they are is nice. Jacob, the narrator, is *seriously* nice, to the point where the most heated he ever gets over the course of these 474 meandering pages produces only a slight hint of annoyance in his tone. That's all! These characters are certainly real, though only inasmuch as they're boring. You'd get the same effect if you followed any given group of strangers around Prague (or anywhere) for a few months, watching them brush their teeth, drink tea, do laundry. There's no conflict aside from the quotidian—Jacob's boyfriend stands him up, Jacob is supposedly a writer but he has trouble actually writing, etc. etc. etc. The book's main conflict concerns a young man unsure about what he wants to do with himself and his life, but obviously that alone doesn't make for an interesting novel (again, especially one this long). Anyway so, so much is left out about these characters and their lives. Who are they, really? I come away from the novel having seen a snapshot of each of them. Annie in Prague. Jacob in Prague. X,Y,Z in Prague. But I don't know any of them.

Nice language might otherwise carry a reader through this sort of novel, but here Crain's prose is straightforward almost to the point of being dry. It's not bad; he's clearly a gifted writer, but readers hoping for interesting or poetic sentences will be disappointed. In all, we've got no plot, little setting, uninteresting and overly polite characters, no conflict, and prosaic writing. What about this novel is supposed to make it interesting or worth reading? I seriously couldn't figure it out.

Oriana says

From Flavorwire's "10 Best Debut Novels of 2013" list:

Crain is the rare debut novelist who writes with the sort of confidence we'd expect from an author who has already penned books upon books. And, in fact, Crain is no novice; he has been writing about, studying, and translating literature for years now. That's probably why Crain's novel, following the life of Jacob Putnam, a gay man in post-Velvet Revolution Prague, feels more like a fourth or fifth novel. His control of pace and affect, and his descriptions of the city and people, make us feel like we're right there. This book wasn't simply written—it was crafted.

Hank Stuever says

Some of the other reviews (here at Goodreads and in the press) have pointed out that Caleb Crain's "Necessary Errors" is too long and that not enough happens, and I worry that those comments are easily dismissed as impatient or unsophisticated. It's certainly the case that "TOO LONG!" is often more of an excuse for the narrowing cultural attention span than a valid, careful criticism.

So hear me out when I say that "Necessary Errors" is too self-indulgent and much, much, much too long – by at least 100 pages if not 200. Even when you take into account the literary realism that the author is going for (glasnost-era Henry James), even when you factor in that there is frequently a beautiful sentence or image – not on every page, but at least every fourth or fifth page – the overall result is still too much and too inconsequential, which detracts from what's really here to admire. I think Aaron Hamburger's review in The New York Times summed up the main issue well enough:

"The book is rich in anecdote but impoverished in its overall purpose — or what is known in less literary circles as plot. A series of charming vignettes might have worked better in a shorter book, but the aimlessness becomes wearying over nearly 500 pages. More crucially, as a main character, Jacob isn't quite dynamic enough to hold the reader's attention."

"Necessary Errors" is a beguiling ruin. I'm a year younger than Caleb Crain and although I haven't "been-to-Prague" (what movie was that from? One of the reviews that I read made reference to it), I definitely remember the fever for it, in 1990, when my generation was getting out of college and the smarter, more confident kids all journeyed behind the former Iron Curtain to hone their intellectual sense of selves in a revolutionary climate, teach English, bum around, write, or start up their own alt-weekly newspapers.

I came to this novel really wanting to get a feel for that time and those people – and those remaining years before the Internet and email, wrapped in that Euro sense of dark coolness and a juxtaposition of modern freedom and communist decrepitude. And a reader does sort of get some of it, but in a far too subtle way. I'm let down that the narrator, Jacob, leads such an insular life, hanging out with a small circle of friends who never become fully realized characters, but sure do talk a lot. (At times I was reminded, in a good way, of the how the early Richard Linklater movies are filled with post-collegiate intellectual and philosophical digressions.) You'll read this book for days and days and still get the feeling that you had to be there in order

to understand. After 472 pages you are still left out. You *still* had to be there.

This leads me to another sub-criticism, about literary cliques, into which you'll have to factor some of my fatigue with New York writers and my tiniest pinch of bitterness. The back cover and inside page include quotes from other writers who (of course) overpraise the book. Exuberant blurbs are nothing new, but here, they form a telling little social study if you put together the names of the authors doing the praising. Some of the reviews in major publications have also felt a little clubby, Brooklyn-ish, Ivy-ish, n+1-ish, friends of friends of friends. I wonder if any of these friends and admirers handed Crain back his manuscript with lots and lots of pages penciled through in red. If enough of them had done that, I think this could have been a much better book.

Joe Salas says

I read this book whilst I was away for two weeks in Seattle. I fell asleep every night reading this book in bed. I read until my eyes were tired and I couldn't keep them open anymore. Some parts of the book, I'd lose track of what was going on, and had to re-read passages a second or third time sometimes. And I still couldn't figure out what was going on. Though I couldn't tell whether this might be because I was often reading in bed, at the end of a long day, usually after having lots of cocktails and beer with dinner.

I enjoyed immersing in the story of an American in Prague, a gay man exploring both a new city and a new identity at once. It seemed fitting as I explored Seattle concurrently. Though I must have been pretty lonely in Seattle as I was on OkCupid quite a bit. I met one guy from OkCupid for coffee. He was nice, though slightly balding (and younger than me), and not exactly my ideal man. His face appeared crestfallen when I revealed that I didn't actually live in Seattle. This made me sad too, as I observed him quickly wrapping up our coffee date, and driving away in his Honda Civic. The Honda Civic's name was Ana.

There was another fellow I liked on OkCupid. He had tattoos on his arms, and a picture of himself riding a horse and smiling. He lived rather far south in Tukwila or something. But I never met the guy, as he stopped messaging me after I sent him a link to my Facebook profile. This made me pretty sad as well.

I was very sad leaving Seattle, though I didn't cry. I gazed sorrowfully my last morning at the pretty mountainscapes surrounding the city, the heavy clouds that perpetually hung over their peaks like thick, brooding eyebrows. I had to admit it was quite breathtaking, and I wondered if I would ever see such beautiful scenery again. I finished Necessary Errors on the plane ride back. I suppose I'd gotten rather attached to the characters: Jacob, Luboš, that Irish girl Annie, etc. I read the last page as the plane made its final descent into muggy JFK. I sighed as I closed the book shut, and removed my seatbelt. Not quite ready to return to real life and NYC.

Aharon says

You know how every time after the game the dumb sports reporter asks the dumb baseball player who got the key hit what he was thinking? And how he always says, "I was just trying to see the ball well, not trying to do too much with it, and I was fortunately able to put it in play and get something going"? Well, in this scenario, the player is Crain, the ball is 1990s Prague, and there is no interviewer. Go Yanks!

p.s. Pretty much all the native English speakers in the book talk like the douchey blond villain in a 1980s

college rom-com about, say, competing water polo teams, but you get used to it.

Joseph says

I was a recipient of an advanced readers copy of *Necessary Errors* from Goodreads and, in general, really enjoyed Crain's writing. For a first novel (although Crain is an experienced writer), this is a very self-assured debut. He writes with grace and insight about a group of expatriates living in Prague around the time Vaclav Havel became President of Czechoslovakia and the country's transition from socialism to capitalism and the eventual dissolution of the country. Unfortunately, what remains the novel's greatest weakness is that although the reader gets a general sense of the architecture and the geography of Prague, there is a wide dichotomy between the readers' understanding of the characters' work, lives, loves and thoughts and the native inhabitants of the country at this particular moment in time. Crain could have put these groups of characters in any location, and although the reader would have enjoyed the sensuous prose and confident authorial insights, I don't think the setting would have marked a profound revelation to the development of the characters' lives. And yet the setting almost begs of transformation--the transition from a planned to a more free-wheeling economy, young expatriates just starting their professional lives, the emerging acceptance that one does not need to cloister one's sexuality, etc., and yet, at the end of the novel, the reader isn't convinced that these characters have been transformed in any great way from the experience. This is a shame because early in the novel there is almost a hint of this potential for transformation ("At his age it was in his power to start over as often as he liked, and he wouldn't have that power forever.") However, near the end of the novel he writes, "He was unabashed now. It was what he had learned from Carl and Melinda, he felt, and he thought of himself as carrying the lesson with him under his shirt, in the form of Carl's pendant." What prompted this revelation?... the protagonist's discovery of cornflakes and his subsequent gluttony by eating boxes of cornflakes over a few days.

And yet, despite this insularity, there is some languid, gorgeous prose with aphoristic qualities intertwined with discussions of philosophy, art, love, politics, language, etc.) And although it seems paradoxical, I felt a little disappointed in the novel because of the profound talent Crain obviously has and the lingering feeling that he wasn't able to connect the profound cultural transformation occurring in Prague at the time these characters were on the cusp of their own personal transformation.

Gerhard says

This is one of the most heartbreaking, melancholic and swooningly romantic novels I have ever read. Yes, it is a 'gay' novel, and one of the best modern books about gay life. However, the last thing I want to do is pigeonhole such a wonderful book, as it deserves as wide an audience as possible.

The story is deceptively simple: 20-something American Jacob Putnam arrives in Prague a year after the Velvet Revolution, with a vague plan to teach English. While the country is at a crossroads between communism and capitalism, Jacob finds himself equally unsure as to the direction his life is going to take (and what exactly is meant by being a socially responsible and productive citizen, of whatever country one finds oneself in).

Jacob experiences Prague in a kind of disassociative, yet hyper-aware, state that any expatriate will be intensely familiar with. In addition, the social and professional interactions of a close group of expat friends and colleagues forms Jacob's emotional barometer of Czechoslovakia.

Crain's depiction of the city and its culture is exquisitely nuanced and detailed. Jacob's first affair with a

local leads to some pointed lessons about the vagaries of the human heart (not to mention international détente).

Thereafter we follow his often meandering journey towards a kind of maturity and acceptance. The end. It is easy to trivialise this incredible novel, which weaves its delicate and mesmerising spell for nearly 500 pages. Yes, not much happens. The narrative highlights include a hamster called Vaclav and Jacob's first encounter with a proto twin tub washing machine in Prague.

However, what gives this novel its particular weight and resonance is Crain's intimate understanding of the expat mentality, and how this elides with Jacob's developing sense of his own gay identity (interwoven with a complex awareness of being 'exiled' from America itself).

It took me ages to read this, as I found myself often going back to reread sections, as well as reading numerous passages out loud to myself. Superb.

Jeffrey Keeten says

"The epoch of unexpected happiness and drunkenness lasted only two short years; the madness was so excessive and so general that it would be impossible for me to give any idea of it, except by this historical and penetrating reflection: the people had been bored for a hundred years." Stendhal

The Velvet Revolution

The Velvet Revolution happened in Prague between November 17th through December 26th 1989. Crowds of protesters swelling to as many as 500,000 descended on Prague and riot police were sent to disperse them. Protesters held flowers out in the face of the police guns. On November 24th the entire top tier of communist leadership resigned. After 41 years of communist rule the Czechoslovakians were able to finally begin governing themselves. The velvet refers to the fact that the protesters achieved their means without violence. It was such a gentle revolution that even Gandhi would have been impressed. Jacob arrives in Prague soon after the end of the revolution to teach English. He wants to be a part of something happening and at the same time he wants to put off the looming responsibilities of adulthood waiting for him at home.

"In fact Jacob dreaded the burden of earning a living. To be here was something more than a holiday; it was a kind of rift in the net, so new that it was not yet clear how it would be rewoven into the systems of money and responsibility.--I want to write, Jacob added."

Writing as it turns out is just something to tell people so they will think he has some greater purpose than just trolling gay nightclubs looking for hookups and finding ways to work just enough to pay for his entertainments and his necessities. He must have had true aspirations to write at one time or at least he did when he knew his friend Meredith. Her suicide, happening back in the real world of America, is a blow bigger than just her death.

"A blank sheet sat fixed in his machine so long that the platen set a curl in it. It seemed wrong to write about Meredith and wrong not to write about her. He knew he was angry with her. She had been the poet of their generation--all her friends had thought themselves lucky to have met her in her youth--and she had thrown away her talent with her life. She had also thrown away an understanding they had shared, a little prize they had conspired to give themselves, that no one their age would have deserved: the sense not merely that they were going to give their lives to writing but that somehow they already had."

Jacob is part of a circle of friends, mostly fellow English teachers, that when he isn't busy with his "relationships" he spends his evenings drinking and talking with them. There are special moments like this when intriguing people with similar interests find themselves caught in a web of intimacy. It is doomed of course because one thing that makes intriguing people interesting is that they don't stay still for very long.

"The connection was going to outlast the time that they were going to share, and somehow they felt the afterlife of it now, while they were still together, almost as a physical thing, casting a retrospective aura, which they felt prospectively. And it was terribly sad, as it turned out, and something else, too--exhilarating, somehow, maybe because they hadn't lost one another quite yet--and he wouldn't even be trying to talk about it if he weren't drunk. They had become the world to one another, both those who had fallen in love and those who hadn't."

**That it will never come again
Is what makes life so sweet.
Believing what we don't believe
Does not exhilarate.**

**That if it be, it be at best
An ablative estate --
This instigates an appetite
Precisely opposite.
That it Will Never Come Again
Emily Dickinson**

The arrival of Carl (a straight man that Jacob had a crush on in the States) to the group is really the beginning of the end. If he had been a part of the group from the beginning things might have continued to spin for a while longer. He is taken with Melinda.

"She was wearing a black velvet gown, which showed her off--an English beauty with black hair, slender features, bad posture, and a classic complexion, three drops of red wine in a glass of whole milk."

Melinda is one of those rare people that are intelligent, beautiful, witty, and one feels if she can be possessed that she can make you capable of achieving anything. Everyone male, female, straight, and gay are a little in love with her. She has been with Rafe since before the group was formed and by the unspoken rules of such a group there are no serious attempts to pry her away from him.

"Rafe had the excitement of a boy looking forward to a math test that has scared all the other boys, not because he's better at math but because he's better at thinking while scared."

Rafe is a serious lad. Carl is more of a rogue. *Sigh*, but we know how women like their rogues.

Rafe is busier than the rest of the group. He is almost a spy of some sort, but really just an analyst who could be mistaken for a spy. He might be taking his English Rose for granted and she is at an age where it is easy to be impulsive. The pain is less acute, because she may not yet have fallen in love with the person she is when she is with that person...which to me...is when love transcends infatuation.

"The question of how to know whether one is choosing or whether one is giving in to something one hasn't understood. I wonder if the answer is that a choice always feels a little supplementary, a little unnatural--"

because it's unforced it also feels unnecessary--as if one had figured out a way to get away with something for a while."

A picture I snapped while in Prague. It will give you some idea of just how beautiful the city is.

Annie will be very disappointed that I haven't mentioned her. She is the wallflower of the group; and yet, of course the most sensible maybe too sensible for this time in her life. She is the first of the group that Jacob confides in about his sexual orientation. She is good with confidences, but not very good at having things to confide. Jacob is at times a surrogate boyfriend for her. They do things together that would have been more fun with someone they were in love with. She is a complicated piece of the puzzle, like the spring that must be sprung at the proper moment for the watch to work.

This group of friends are still lingering with me. I know their names and their quirks as if they were my actual friends, as if, for a few months I were part of that group. I had a similar situation with coworkers in the bookstore business. It lasted for about three months before people began to get on with their lives, but those three months were a time when every day I could feel my mind expanding exponentially. This book shimmers with a vision of Prague in transition. It is a chance to spend time with some people that you will wish you had known when you were at that magical age before life seduced you with a good paying job, a mortgage, and respectability. I suggest you let this book and these characters become a part of your memories.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Paul Buttenwieser says

I was tremendously moved by Necessary Errors. It's a hard book to rate, because of some disparities in formal qualities. Line by line the writing is exquisitely fine, often witty, and without pretentiousness. However, reading one exquisite sentence after another can become tedious at times, and not every scene needs a detailed physical description, not every gesture or movement a simile. All in all, it does go on, especially since there's essentially no plot except for the unfolding of a momentous year in the life of the protagonist. But the protagonist -- Jacob -- is a compellingly sympathetic and absorbing young man with a Jamesian sensibility, and the setting of a group of ex-pats in Prague works very well. I started out thinking I would recommend this book to all my serious reader friends, but now the list is smaller, including only those with patience. I felt enormously rewarded by sticking it out to the end, since the payoff is rich in emotional power. Ultimately, this is a story of an outsider who yearns to find a circle of friends in which he is admired and loved. I love this kind of character, celebrated in *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Line of Beauty*. Gayness is perhaps too easy a premise for the outsider role, but that doesn't make it any the less poignant. I loved Jacob and I resonated with his wish to achieve something important in his life as well as his quest for admiration, acceptance, and deep friendship.
