



## The Waters of Kronos

*Conrad Richter*

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From the time of its first publication in 1960, Conrad Richter's *The Waters of Kronos* sparked lively debate about the extent to which its story of a belated return to childhood scenes mirrored key events of Richter's own life. As was well known at the time, Richter had spent several years in the Southwest, where he collected the material for his first successful book, *Early Americans and Other Stories*, but by 1933, he had returned to live in his hometown, Pine Grove, Pennsylvania.

John Donner, the main protagonist in *The Waters of Kronos*, traces a similar route from west to east, although he finds that his family home and native town have been submerged under the deep waters of a lake formed by the construction of a hydroelectric dam. As Richter narrates his alter ego's efforts to salvage his past, he moves beyond "semi-autobiography" to offer what are widely recognized as his most haunting reflections upon the power of family history, the fragility of human memory, and art's role in structuring the communal ethos. David McCullough, a fellow Pulitzer Prize winner, met and befriended Richter in the 1960s and has called him "an American master," praising *The Waters of Kronos* as "his most beautiful book."

## The Waters of Kronos Details

Date : Published January 8th 2003 by Penn State University Press (first published 1960)

ISBN : 9780271022406

Author : Conrad Richter

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## From Reader Review The Waters of Kronos for online ebook

### Steven Eisenberg says

It may be nasty that I didn't give his National Book Award winner 5 stars, but nothing could be as good as the Awakening Land series.

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### Jim says

Though Richter won the National Book Award for this book, it failed to capture my fancy. Late in his life, John Donner, the protagonist, tries to return to the town where he grew up but discovers that it is now underwater as a hydro-electric dam has been created. Though the public is kept from entering the area, he manages to con his way in and the book - in entirety - is an account - as it were actually happening - of the people and places he knew much earlier in his life. It's written as if he actually sees those things though no one recognizes him and remembers ever having known him. Though the book is only 176 pages, I felt many times as I made my way through it that it could have been much, much shorter. The award probably came from his recalling in such detail the kind of life that existed there long ago.

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### Kae Cheatham says

Exquisite language and sense of place. A man searching for home comforts as he approaches death.

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### Dorcas says

This started off so promising, an old man visits the town of his youth, only it's laying at the bottom of a lake. By some means he manages to travel back in time (only he's still an old man) and see the town in its heyday as well as all the faces of old, now long since buried. However, no one recognizes him and he remains very much an outsider.

What can I say? It was disappointing.

Pages of reminiscing, very little dialog, basically an elderly man looking back at his life and his efforts to lay things to rest before he joins his ancestors. Not too exciting and ultimately unsatisfying, like a dream. One reader here on GR compared it to the feeling you get when you save your sundae's cherry to eat last and then find its a radish. I couldn't say it better.

Very different from his book "The Trees".

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### Kanta-isb says

Water of Kronos by Conrad Richter was an interesting book. It is about a man called John Doner who returned to his home town only to find that it was sunk into the water of the lake formed by building a

hydroelectric dam. He starts to reflect back his memories and recall his life with his family.

What I noticed through reading this book is its uniqueness. In this book, nothing actually happens. The protagonist reflects back and tries to figure out how his life with family was like. The feeling of the protagonist was well expressed and I liked it. However what I didn't like was that it took so long at the beginning walking around the town.

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### **Trista says**

Loved this book from the very start, beautifully written too. I've read some of the reviews and get why lots of readers were unsatisfied with the last chapter. I'm not one that has to know the ending or how it all unfolded, so my view on it is different. I believe John Donner had the intentions of going back home to die there. He needed and wanted to reunite with his family. With his old town being under water, and all his loved ones buried there, the only way was to go "back in time" to see everything as it used to be and as he remembered it. In my opinion he gained peace at the end and was able to die peacefully there with everyone he loved. At least that's how I interpreted it. To each his own...

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### **K M says**

Wavering between two and three stars. This short book should have been a very quick read, but I had to push myself to return to it and keep reading. I never felt completely drawn in by it. An old man returns to his childhood home to find it no longer exists. Yet, he somehow returns to the town as it was during his boyhood, and tries to seek out his own family. Of course no one in the tight-knit community recognizes the old man, so he is treated as an outsider....meanwhile he seems to be trying to resolve some issues, to get closure on some ineffable thing(s) that seem just beyond his reach and memory. As a reader, I feel conflicted and unsatisfied. It was well written, and at times quite beautiful, but I found I just couldn't connect with this one.

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### **Dennis Anthony says**

Beautifully written, slow, rich with detail. This is a kind of time travel, kind of fictional memoir written by a man near the end of his life trying to wrap his arms around what was. An old man seeks to return to the womb. What he finds -- what we find -- is not what either of us expected. Touching, gorgeous and real, this award-winning short novel ultimately left me unsatisfied. Like eating a rich chocolate sundae, waiting until the last minute to eat the cherry, then discovering it's actually a radish. If it wasn't so beautifully written, I'd be giving it 3 stars.

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### **Dusty Summers says**

"If the young could only know," he apologized for his uncertainty. "But then they wouldn't be young anymore"

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## Judy says

Conrad Richter was a well respected mid-century writer whose series about a midwestern pioneer family, *The Trees* (1940), *The Fields* (1946), and *The Town* (1950), were his most popular books. I read *The Town* because it won a Pulitzer Prize in 1951 and enjoyed it for the good story telling and the history of the midwest.

*The Waters of Kronos* is a whole different type of novel. I would say it was experimental for its time though not as far out there as his contemporaries Wright Morris or John Barth.

John Donner is an aging man in ill health when he goes back to his home town, seeking answers in the past. Unionville lies somewhere amongst the mountains of the northeastern United States and has been underwater for years due to a large hydroelectric dam on the River Kronos.

Donner talks his way past a guard at the gates of the fenced lake and before long finds himself in the Unionville of the past, in the years of his childhood. Richter uses a cross between time travel and symbolism as he has Donner roam the town where no one, even members of his own family, recognizes him.

Page after page of description, of memories and nostalgia, do not reveal much about Donner's childhood, except that he feared his father, adored his mother, and left home as a young man. He works through a Freudian/Jungian hatred of his father but finally still longs for the mother's love and acceptance.

Richter won the National Book Award for *The Waters of Kronos*, wrote one more novel and passed away in 1968 at the age of 78.

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## Albert says

My experience with Conrad Richter, as with a lot of folks, began with Richter's *Awakening Land* series. I absolutely fell in love with *The Trees*. I enjoyed and was similarly impressed with the other two books in the series, *The Fields* and *The Town*. *The Waters of Kronos*, my latest Richter novel, was a completely different experience. The one similarity was a mystical feel in both *The Trees* and *The Waters of Kronos*, but that mystical quality was a minor aspect of *The Trees* while it was central to *The Waters of Kronos*. I almost struggled to recognize these works as written by the same author.

Although I did not enjoy *The Waters of Kronos* nearly as much as I did the *Awakening Land* series, and that is standard #1 when I read, I did admire what Richter was trying to do, or at least what I think he was trying to do. This novel left more questions unanswered than answered. It would be great for a discussion group where there would be the opportunity to explore all of the alternative theories.

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### **Kathi says**

It was ok, the ending was poor.

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### **Dave says**

A big bite of reality.

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### **Kathy says**

This book truly intrigued me. My family homestead, was located near a small country town that was flooded for the creation of a dam. I was a child of about eight, when we visited the vacant town, just prior to flooding. It was utterly spooky. All of the buildings, back then, were wooden, and very old (early 1900's, or even earlier). You could see the church and it's spire, the dirt streets, the hitching posts and parking lots for those who had cars, which were few back then. You could see the general store, etc. It truly spooked me out!

My mom, nana, sister, and I went to watch the "spill", as they called it. OMG. I will never forget it. It was like watching Armageddon, with a wall of water destroying everything it's hateful path. I am, usually, very sentimental, and cried when we traded our old Dodge (I was 5), but this shocked me to my core! I remember standing there, above the dam, watching the water boiling, and roiling, and wondering if the hole (town) could contain all of that powerful, noisy water,...if we would be swept away with it. After the flooding, which did not take all that long, you could still see the top of the church spire, and the bell was ringing. It was creepy, to say the least.

I always wanted to contact a writer like Stephen King, to write the story of this waking nightmare, but never had the nerve. Then, I found the synopsis of this book, and had to read it.

The story line was fabulous, compelling, and a step into the unreal, which I love, but the last chapter was, in my opinion, an indulgence of the author's attempt to satisfy something related to his real life scenario experience with this same experience. It end left me cold. I could not relate to his "insights", or the cliff hanger ending. He didn't even attempt to end it in anyway that was satisfying. It's a shame really, because the premise was fabulous, and I liked it very much up until the last chapter.

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### **Christine says**

A fairly autobiographical story of Conrad Richter and his personal realizations about himself as a child and the relationships he had with his family. He admits that he couldn't get away fast enough from his father and his childhood home and all that it stood for. Later in life he travels home almost on autopilot where he comes to the realization that what he feared and loathed most about his father was that exact thing he himself was. he reminisces and is allowed to see, smell, and feel all that home used to be and just how much it truly means to him.

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