



Nog

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Originally published by Random House in 1969, *Nog* became a universally revered cult novel and a symbol of the countercultural movement.

In Rudolph Wurlitzer's signature hypnotic and haunting voice, *Nog* tells the tale of a man adrift in the American West, armed with nothing more than his own three pencil-thin memories and an octopus in a bathysphere.

This edition of *Nog* features a new introduction from noted critic and writer Erik Davis (*TechGnosis*).

Yesterday afternoon a girl walked by the window and stopped for sea shells. I was wrenched out of two months of calm. Nothing more than that, certainly, nothing ecstatic or even interesting, but very silent and even, as those periods have become for me.

Nog Details

Date : Published April 15th 1997 by Serpent's Tail (first published 1968)

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Author : Rudolph Wurlitzer

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Tait says

If I had to choose two novels as character studies of the '60s counterculture, one would be Kotzwinkle's *The Fan Man*, a playful romp through drug-addled New York. The second and much darker of the two would be Wurlitzer's *Nog*. Set across the beaches, backwoods, crashpads, and communes of California, this tentative story follows the moment to moment desperations of a Manson-like wanderer, who either stole his identity or is trying to not remember it and his previous crimes as he bums around the scene, inevitably getting into some heavy trouble.

Many reviews claim this novel is a challenging stream-of-conscious, but that's not actually the case, as the style does not follow *Nog's* internal thoughts as much as his obsessive awareness of the need for and impossibility of external actions, similar in style to Beckett's prose. In fact, this novel reads like a contemporary adaptation of Beckett's *Murphy*, what with the character's obsessive list making, inability to keep moving, etc (even down to some of Beckett's key lines). But Wurlitzer pulls this off, in a manner that is actually much more readable, though still very tragi-comic and certainly a cult classic.

Jay Gertzman says

There was this man, see, who wants new sensations to erase the memories he has. He buys an octopus from a man named *Nog*.

It wasn't a real octopus, but it looked like one. He was a great fabricator, *Nog* was. Made some dough by exhibiting the Octopus at side-shows in the West. But he would not lie when anyone asked if the thing was real. He was what Griel Marcus would call an "old, weird American." He would never "remake" himself to fulfill an "American dream" no matter how much easier it would have been to manufacture and "identity" people could "trust."

The man who narrates the novel travels around the Western U S for most of the story. He needs memories, like I said, so after the Octopus pulls in his tentacles and fades out, the narrator replaces it with visions of *Nog*, who lurks around every rock, providing lots of possible memories. The narrator is empty of them. He wants to live free. He is open to whatever happens as he wanders, existence in the present being the only reality.

There is no essence or absolute in sight, except maybe the 18 cans of food he carries, and sometimes builds wall with so he can sleep behind them . *Nog* at some point merges with, or becomes, the narrator. Usually, if a man meets his double, he can lose his own identity. That doesn't seem to bother the narrator. He has no identity. He meets a fellow wanderer and his girlfriend; they are compatible, especially the young woman. They accept him as a fellow free spirit, one of them. Impossible. If he doesn't have a self, how can he be one of any group?

IMO, the key episode is when *Nog* (for I guess it is he now) meets and helps Bench, an injured hunter "with an unorganized face" who complains about his son who he wants to be a professional placekicker. Bench is like Willy Lowman ("I got to give that boy something"). Then *Nog* becomes part of Bench's plan to kill people who have taken over a nearby ghost town (a few buildings and outlying teepees, like in the Western classic *Butcher's Crossing*). In the saloon, the squatters pass around a pipe and are dressed in bright, unmanly clothes. "You got to fight back.... I know what it took to discover and hold this country...If a man doesn't

defend his claims he's hardly a man.... This piece of country and this town is ours."

Bench confuses Nog with his son at this point. It's time for the snap from center. He promises Nog he will carry him out of the stadium when it's over and buy him a steak dinner. They embrace. Nog has fallen into a rock-solid Western memory, as cruelly self-reliant and judgmental as it gets. Nog isn't really in the game. The phrase "I can't go on. I'll go on" comes to his mind. He sails around Cape Horn, and flies to New York. Nog is gon[e] [spelled backward.] I wonder what he'll make of Times Square, the wild East in 1968. There were a lot of resistance to manufactured identities there, and everything solid melted into air. Maybe Nog would be at home there, and so would the missing octopus.

Jason says

Rudy Wurlitzer is often compared to Samuel Beckett, and the comparison is unmistakably apt. If his second novel, *Flats*, seemed consciously to pay homage to Beckett's plays, his first novel is more indebted to the actual novels (especially *Molloy*). Wurlitzer, like Beckett (the novelist), is here focused on consciousness. Bent, damaged, imperiled consciousness; consciousness too frantic and weakened to make much headway w/ what it confronts in the world unfurling before it, often at great speed (especially noteworthy here is a stunning passage in which the bewildered narrator is ferried in a racing automobile). It is hard not to think of the way *Molloy's* mind races and he traverses the hilly landscape with his wretched, fastidious gait. Wurlitzer is especially notable as a novelist of the American counterculture because he was tuned in earlier than most to the epochal dread and psychospiritual dis-ease percolating in the collective unconscious of the flower children and drop-outs. His third novel, *Quake*, is all-out apocalyptic, and stands as one of my favorite American novels of the 20th century. The literary games Wurlitzer is up to here also have some notable French antecedents. It is hard to read *Nog* without thinking of Raymond Queneau and Alain Robbe-Grillet. This is ultimately a novel about madness. However, the catch is that what might at first seem like a singular and pretty rarefied set of symptomatology is in fact a collective unwellness etched not only in the people, but within the landscape and the very aether.

Steve says

For a story of such creepy events, it's eerie and maybe even refreshing how deadpan the narrator is. This could have been told in overblown, psychedelic style, but stripping away that artifice pares the story down to essentials of action and inaction, and resists making particular meanings out of events or images. That's also what kept me from being completely engaged, though: as much as I liked the wide-open landscape the story drifts through, and the way every character is as hard-edged and grim as cowboys in a western, the deadpan voice keeps the story from feeling like much is at stake - even the big dramatic blowout, if it counts as one, happens at such a narrative distance that it never feels dangerous. So as much as I was compelled by *Nog's* inert drive to prevent himself from having any real memories or attachments, I guess I would have liked to see that desire challenged more overtly or dramatically along the way.

Javier Avilés says

La edición de Underwood con traducción de Rubén Martín Giraldez

La verdad es que me siento muy identificado con la forma de escribir de Wurlitzer, muy cercano a sus métodos. Si tengo que ser sincero hay mucho de Wurlitzer en mis novelas, aunque nunca lo había leído. Al igual que ocurrió con La hora del lobo de Bergman, debo reconocer la influencia fantasma de Nog en Constatación brutal del presente.

¿Cómo es posible que me influyan obras que no he leído ni visto?

Volviendo a Nog (y teniendo en cuenta las anteriores consideraciones) recomiendo mucho la lectura de esta rareza.

La reseña en el blog:

Nog, de Rudolph Wurlitzer

Rand says

A quick data search through the current books added to my goodreads account yields the following:

[Wurlitzer, Rudolph] (obviously)

Fannie + Freddie The Sentimentality of Post-9 11 Pornography

Beaver Street A History of Modern Pornography

Direct Action An Ethnography

Donoghue, Emma: The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits Stories & Kissing the Witch Old Tales in New Skins

Fiction International 22 Pornography and Censorship

Memoirs of a Shy Pornographer

Given that those titles are a cromulent summary of what this novel is all about, Nog can stop reading Rand now.

Shan says

<https://youtu.be/Uopmr4sBNM4>

'Welcome then, all the influx of vigor and real tenderness. And, in the dawn, armed with an ardent patience, we shall enter magnificent cities.'

-Arthur Rimbaud

“Rudy Wurlitzer,” his mama must have shouted, “you stay away from those big blue mushrooms down by the jukeyard!” He mustn’t have heard because his novel Nog is one helluva trip. Strange one, this Rudy Wurlitzer, descended from a long line of music machine magicians, of Rudolph Wurlitzer Company fame, young Rudy a wanderer with Eastern interests, a peacenik beatnik beachnik boho bum blues aficionado with hopes of writing apocalyptic psychedelic Westerns for the once sepiasilver by then rainbowsmeared Big Screen. Only the Screen turned into his Mind. By the time Rudy was a sprout the Wurlitzer fortune had long dwindled, so he set off, bloodwarmwaves in eager veins, like so many in his day seeking some transcendental phantom republic out there in the deserts, in the cities and towns tucked tidy in their deepest longings for a

birth of joyful exuberant existence. And all Rudy seemed to think about was frontier apocalypse and how everyday was starting to feel like Altamont. A starry wandering vegetable existence. Cults in the desert. An octopus in the trailer. What a nightmare. Have you seen a Wurlitzer jukebox or piano? Those things must have turned his head inside out. I imagine Rudy Wurlitzer's wasteland, after the trip wore off, filled with pianos and jukes, stacked in the sand like pyramids, or a whole junkyard as far as the eye will let in. Rudy standing high in the twisted ruined wastes with the sun dropping its final rays around him, illuminating the silver wood guts of the world, looking up beyond the gnarled heaps with hope in his heart and the cities now gleaming in his mind, thinking maybe this time there would be transcendence.

Chris Shaffer says

Although lacking plot and a strong sense of cohesiveness, Nog is the kind of story that manages to do what very few books I have ever read are able to do. While reading you are at once confused and clear sighted, yet this is the effect the book is supposed to have--an effect that eventually becomes hallucinatory and painfully real.

I think what Wurlitzer is doing here is trying to capture the anxieties, the existential hangups, and the general atmosphere of what it was like to be alive in the late 60's and early 70's. Obviously it wasn't like this for everyone, but there is a general feeling of people trying to "live in the now." This is especially true of the first third of the book where we find Nog taking temporary residence in a communal beach house. The narrator may be an extreme case, but he is representative of an entire generation of people seeking, just as the beats had, the pure experience.

In Nog's case, as much as he wants to attain the zen like state, his memories are simply too powerful, spurred on by the most incidental things, and before he(or you as the reader) knows it, he's in another time and place. There's something all too familiar about that blending of experience and memory...like being inside your own head.

A wild LSD trip? Not exactly. It actually reads like a story of a zen monk struggling with his past, trying to live as "presently" as possible. However he's a monk with some nagging memories, and what bizarre memories they are...the octopus is one hell of a striking image.

There's a blurb on the jacket that reads: "the novel of bullshit is dead." There is no bullshit here. What at first seems superfluous, gimmicky, or even besides the point is all part of a real experience. You just have to give yourself up to it.

Mike says

I would recommend this book to everyone who knows they think way different than everyone else. And to people that can understand that one thing can BE different than what it IS. It's difficult to read and most the time you're thinking in your head "What the hell is this guy ON?".

My favorite character is the crazy old man Nog meets in the beginning. He's a very brief character and all you know about him is that he's a crazy old war veteran. Idk why I like him so much, but I do.

My least favorite character is the guy that takes Nog pretty much hostage and uses him to get royal like hospitality from this hippy villiage. His name its lockett, and he makes me mad through out the entire parts

of the book that he's in. He's controlling, manipulative, and MEAN.

I think the author wrote this book to indirectly show how humanity lives in the present and hangs on to the past. It was definitely a philosophical read and Rudolph probably wrote it for his own pleasure.

The part of the book that hooked me is how jumbled and confused the thoughts and feelings were. This guy was obviously on some sort of acid trip, but I relate to him well. My thought process is precise, but jumbled. If that makes sense.

What kept me reading was how this stuff was going to even end. I didn't see how such a ridiculously insane trip could end well, and I was halfway right.

The ending was good, but sadly disappointing because I thought it should have been better.

I wasn't able to predict the ending, but it was lame.

If this book was made into a movie, it wouldn't matter who the characters were because only people with creative mindsets or people who do drugs would watch it and enjoy it enough to care about the acting skills.

Johnny Depp would be a good Nog, but he's good at everything.

This book made me confused, frustrated, euphoric, upset, sympathetic, and tired. lol.

I don't remember most of the great lines out of the book. =/

Jeff Jackson says

The shadow of Samuel Beckett flits across this sui generis tour of the 1960s U.S. communes and counterculture. Rudy Wurlitzer's debut novel is a subtly hilarious and existentially bleak road trip where identities dissolve and reform quicker than the passing landscapes. As Eric Davis puts it in his fine intro, *Nog* traces "the long journey from nowhere to no-one."

Favorite line: "That's enough description."

Goatboy says

Wurlitzer's writing elides your grasp for meaning or connection. Words appear, words you know and that have previously provided information, but in Wurlitzer's sentences this information always slides away. It is a poetic style this writing. A style that parallels the thinking of his main character who works to avoid all connections and meaning built on memory and thought. It is as if his main character - who is not Nog and yet sometimes has Nog living within him - resides on the very edge of awareness. An awareness without memory to hold him down or planning to limit his experience. An awareness steadfastly (although that implies a desire much more intent than the character himself would ever own up to) living in the shifting now of experience. People and scenes and situations come and go around him without any sticking power or greater context. A room, an ankle, an octopus. But that is OK for a person with light coming out of a small hole in his chest. Or maybe that was someone else? A person trying to be Nog but not Nog. Some writing seems easy, if you only put the work in and had enough ideas. Wurlitzer's writing seems something else. A style so stripped down and distilled, colorful yet intensely minimal, perfectly faceted in each instant and yet flowing softly as a breeze you aren't quite sure you just felt...

I could try to coax meaning out of Nog's plot but that seems a disservice to its nature.

Much better to let its mood continue to wash over me as it slowly recedes from memory...

J.A. says

I kept getting caught in it, like a net of mesmerizing beauty.

Paul says

Whoa. Truly nutso in so many ways. But really, what Pynchon says is true. Ain't no bullcrap here. Just pure hallucination. But more of the honest kind than the "whoa, far out man" kind. It's like the gritty, hyper-real (non-baudrillard) mystery novels that have become so popular recently but instead of distilling anger, child molestation and waterways in Boston, it's like the things that the psyche fears the most. Including being locked in a pantry with lots of potatoes.

Nate D says

A kind of drug-haze western, *Nog* follows a man with only a few closely-guarded and regularly re-constructed memories as he wanders 60s California and the south-west with little purpose or direction. While we're privy to his inner-most thoughts, they don't amount to much, mostly a kind of aphasic babble on his own existence, linked to seemingly completely arbitrary courses of action. A lot of what is unique in the prose and construction here turns up again in Wurlitzer's next two novels, but whereas those each construct a compelling context for his prose idiosyncrasies, this has neither the urgent intensity of *Quake*, nor the terminal minimalism of *Flats*. Though this is the novel that touted by Pynchon and leaving the deepest cult mark, it feels more like a test run of tools that would only become meaningful later. Sure, there's meaning here too, I'm sure, and the introduction makes some interesting observations on deconstructed 60s identity, but with so erratic a lead character and narrator, I don't feel involved enough to try to do much more unraveling.

Charlie Zoops says

Nog is a story of a man coming in terms with his hallucinogenic consciousness roaming between uncertainty and devotion. Charged by a self-chasing pursuit, the narrative strives to de-construct the identity of characters while progressively ridding memories of their evidence. By taking on the aesthetics of a neglected western American landscape, the vivid acts of moving his body through this terrain becomes more of a process than a purpose. In an era of ambiguity and indifference, a nomad finds alternative means to justifying rationales of reality by legitimizing convictions through the invention of an artificial god, and reactively assuming impulsive rituals which will themselves to the immediacy of the present moment, rather than attaching hopes to unforeseen projections of future or a system of facts.

These anarchic journeys maintain the reader with a sense of curiosity to the characters consistent animal-like psyche, and his collapse into the moral and methodological conflicts of being a human in a time of configuration and responsibility.
