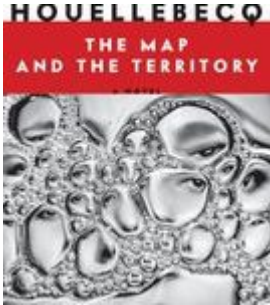


# Chapte31 Book Reviews “Map and the Territory” and “Little Red Chairs”



Houellenbecq's  
Map and the  
Territory and  
O'Brien's Little  
Red Chairs

## **The Map and the Territory** by *Michel Houellebecq*

If you, like myself, are intrigued by the genius, politics and drama in the world of art you won't want to miss this novel. Set in contemporary French society the novel first appears as a coming of age story of the young artist Jed Martin until Houellebecq arrives on the scene to write the notes for Jed's upcoming exhibition wherein it becomes a brilliant conversation on art, death, and society.

It is said novelists who place themselves in their work rarely come out alive, but when Houellebecq, who is at times both comic, depressed, acerbic and/or inebriated, agrees to let Jed to paint his portrait, the ensuing dialogue made up of controversial observations and reflections about art and life educate and engage the reader while giving credence as to why Houellenbecq is looked upon as a "tour de force" novelist.



## **"The Little Red Chairs"** by *Edna O'Brien*

"The Little Red Chairs" refers to the six hundred and forty three small red chairs set out on streets of Sarajevo, for the commemoration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1,425 day siege of Sarajevo by Bosnian Serbs. These chairs

were meant to represent children killed by snipers and artillery fire.

In this her first novel in ten years, author Edna O'Brien challenges us to explore the capacity human beings have for evil and asks if love, however innocent, can be tolerated.

O'Brien's novel, however, is not set in Sarajevo but in Ireland, a place O'Brien says is "a land of shame, of murder, of sacrificed women." O'Brien's heroine, Fidelma McBride, is a woman unfulfilled. When she falls under the spell of a mysterious charismatic stranger, giving in to his charms and her own desire. When the truth about the stranger is revealed she is left disgraced and isolated. Her life is shattered. Thus begins her odyssey in search of redemption.

In a NYT Review Joyce Carol Oates explores how O'Brien idealization of a life of service has enriched her fiction, from "Country Girl" to "Little Red Chairs". They may differ in time and place but they remain true to O'Brien's central theme. Thus the odyssey ends when Fidelma gives herself up to the service of others finding her redemption in choosing "not to look at the prison wall of life, but to look up at the sky."

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## Chapter 30 "Imagine Me Gone"-a can't put down read



Imagine Me Gone

**"Imagine Me Gone" by Adam Haslett** is a novel about love, loss and the power mental illness has over every aspect of family life. It is poignant, terrifying and sometimes strangely funny. Within moments of closing this book I was in tears remembering life with my brother, a man who couldn't think

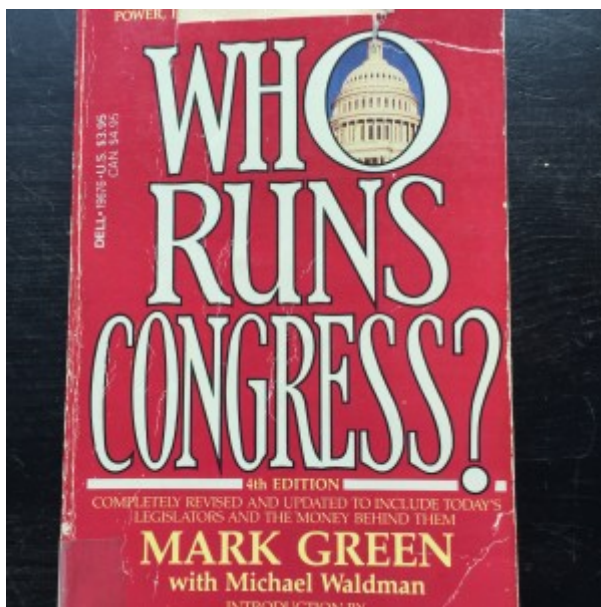
straight.

At an early age, unbeknownst to me, he was diagnosed as a sociopath, a person without a conscience. He was handsome, charming, smart and funny. He married, had a child, and lived with our Mother. When she died I inherited him and discovered she had used her life's savings to keep him out of jail. And then it began: he involved our family in a mind bending fraudulent scheme. When he realized the game was up he signed himself into a hospital swearing he was suicidal. Ten days later he was discharged into the arms of detectives waiting next to his stolen car in the hospital lot. He did time in jail. On his release he went to a men's shelter. When he called I offered to pay first and last month's rent for an apartment but said he was never to contact any of us again. He assured me I would hear about him but not from him. A few days later he committed suicide.

Reading this beautifully written novel of how a family survives the turmoil when a member has a broken mind speaks to the universal family experience of having illness in the family and how we cope. To quote Tony Kushner: "It is a magnificent work of art that overwhelmed me and broke my heart".

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## Chapter 28 "Who Runs Congress"- an Awakening to Activism



**An Awakening to  
Activism**

## The Wonder of Discovery

It was 1973 when I applied to Northeastern University as part of a pilot program for women returning to school. At home were three kids, the youngest in kindergarden.

When the thin white envelope holding my acceptance arrived in my mailbox I cried. I was amazed they accepted me as I had left school six years before, and relieved I could escape the world of a suburban housewife which bored me to distraction. Now my curious nature had the freedom to explore the world.

Although I had previously been a Journalism major, this time around I opted to major in Political Science. My first class required reading *"Who Runs Congress"* by Mark Green. It was an eye opener introducing me to the issues of PAC's, PAC MEN, Power, Perks, Congress vs. the President, the Crimes of Lawmakers, and finally the Resistance:" *It doesn't have to go on like this. Here's what you can do to create change."*

This book became the basis for my becoming an activist. However, over the years my activism has been replaced by dismay with Washington politics. These last eight years have seen the toxic flowering of a Congress largely influenced by private wealth but whose seeds have been germinating a long time, a Congress increasingly paralyzed by its own self-interests, and thus, not governing for its constituents.

Mark Green warns "He who has the gold, rules". This rule now appears to be on steroids.

## The Case for Activism

Somewhere it is written those who do not read history are doomed to repeat it. As I reread this book I confess I am among the guilty who has stood by while the "gold" infiltrated our governing body. Thus, in reparation, I offer this book as a means to better understand the "gold" that endangers the democracy we hold so dear, and perhaps begin a conversation to reclaim Congress, our country and our lives.

## Let's talk.

*Who Runs Congress* is available, used, through Amazon and other used book outlets .

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# Chapter 27 Sex After Menopause..Who Knew?

## *Sex After Menopause*



### *Who Knew?*

Sex after menopause is often a case of the spirit and heart are willing but the body, not so much. If it isn't one thing it's another, be it vaginal dryness, arthritis, sciatica and more. When I found certain physical discomforts prevented me from fully enjoying what had been one of my favorite pastimes, I thought, what's a girl to do?



Yes, yes I know, there is now a little pink pill promising women similar assistance as the men's little blue pill. However, as many of us do not have a libido problem, the risks outlined by the FDA question whether this pill is a safe for long term use. Thus I decided it was time to investigate other options. After exhaustive research, no I 'm kidding, but it did take me some research and trial and error time to be able to say, ladies there is help on the way!

To begin there are infinite varieties of chemical and electro-mechanical options available for all tastes and appetites plus a number of sexual positions promising to help lessen physical discomfort during sex. All this led me to believe an educated woman can design her own blueprint for success in the bedroom!

**Lubricants** ~ While there are many sexual lubricants on the market, most do not live up to their promise for the post menopausal woman. When I visited my savvy GYN she suggested I try Liquid Silk\*\* which offers the "luxury of a non-tacky water-based lubricant or Luvena\*\* "a probiotic, silky smooth, never sticky, gliding solution for sensual pleasure". Yes, they are more expensive but, in my experience, far superior for getting the job done.

***Electro Mechanical Support~*** If you don't already use a hand held device ( I don't mean a television remote) invest in an EMS, a vibrator. They are available in an infinite variety of shapes, sizes, colors and textures at your local sex/adult store or on Amazon.com or other such online services.

Whether in your hands or your partner's, use it for getting to, or close to, orgasm before coitus. That's the trick, ladies, getting to or near to orgasm before coitus. This loosens our vaginal grip, and when coupled with one of the lovely aforementioned lubricants, offers that sought after magical moment, in ways the tried and true foreplay of yesterday perhaps no longer provides.

***Position is Everything~*** In Preventions Magazine\* February 16<sup>th</sup> edition, an article, " More Ooh, and Less Ouch"\* promises to turn the "moans of discomfort back into moans of pleasure" achieved using the positions seen below. Along with steps one and two, I tried two of the positions and that's when I decided to write this post!



# More Ooh, Less Ouch

Sometimes one of life's annoying aches creates concerns about unsafe sex (in which the moans are of pain, not pleasure). Here are pain pros' go-to tips.



## **PAIN: PELVIS**

### **TRY: Sex on all fours**

Keep your pelvis neutral to avoid sacroiliac joint pain around the base of your spine and the large bones that make up your pelvis, explains Isa Herrera, owner of Renew Physical Therapy in New York City.



## **PAIN: SCIATICA**

### **TRY: From behind with arm support**

Keep a bit of back arch to take the pressure off the sciatic nerve, says Natalie Sidorkewicz, a doctoral researcher at Canada's University of Waterloo, who published a 2014 study on the topic.



## **PAIN: ARTHRITIS**

### **TRY: Missionary**

It alleviates pressure on knees and hips, says NYC physical therapist Lynn Berman. If back pain worsens when you move, Sidorkewicz recommends a rolled-up towel for lower-back support.



## **PAIN: DRYNESS**

### **TRY: Sitting**

Facing your partner, perch on his lap to ease into things. When you control the movement, you stay comfy despite the dryness caused by menopause's notorious drop in estrogen.

RYAN TODD, PILLOWS; JESSICA KUSUMA

**\*\*Trademarked names and the Feb 2016 Prevention magazine article: [Health-Bedroom Hacks Prevention.com](http://Health-Bedroom Hacks Prevention.com)**

**Comments always welcome~ If you don't want to miss the next post sign up at**

*the bottom of this post and have it delivered to you via email!*

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## Chapter 25 Literary Passions



Favorite Reads

*January's literary passions range from reimagining a Camus' classic to stories of almost famous women, plus two thought provoking tales on the havoc politics wreaks on the lives of a Russian, and finally, that of a Parisian. I didn't want any of these books to be over when I hit the last page. I promise you won't be bored!*

[Almost Famous Women](#) by Megan Mayhew Bergman, elegant stories about women, whom history often has cast aside, but remain "almost famous" because of their creative impulses, fierce independence, and often reckless decisions, Among them are Beryl Markham, Standard Oil heiress Joe Cartairs, Lord Byron's daughter Allegra, James Joyce's troubled daughter Lucia. These stories, and the women that inhabit them will linger long after the last page is turned.



[The Tsar of Love and Techno, by Anthony Marra](#), writer of prizewinning A Constellation of Vital Phenomena, these interlinked stories told in poetic language, begin in the tunnels beneath Leningrad and end at the edge of the solar system. Covering several generations of a family who are tied together by one man's defiant act to keep his brother's image alive, it is, to quote the Washington Post "A flash in the heavens that makes you look up and believe in miracles.."

[Submission by Michel Houellebecq](#), set in Paris, 2022, its narrator a professor at the Sorbonne who finds himself disenchanted with himself and his life, and finds unexpected salvation when the Muslim brotherhood party is elected to run France, altering the world as it is then known. This novel is a quite possible brilliant conceit written by one of France's most "celebrated controversialists" and writers. Adam Shatz of The London Review of Books calls this "a melancholy tribute to the pleasure of surrender".

[The Meursault Investigation by Kamel Daoud](#) – Reimagines Camus' novel, The Stranger, from the point of view of the unheard Arab victims of Camus' tale. Daoud's writing is spellbinding as are the experiences of his characters. I suggest if you have not read The Stranger, or cannot remember it, you read a Sparknote summary so to be familiar with the story Daoud has so finely resurrected giving this reader much to think about.

Comments or discussions about these books very welcome!