

Joyful Reunion

Last Friday was a very special night. I drew the shades, lit a few candles and poured some wine. The mood set, I curled up in my favorite chair with the new Michael Ondaatje novel. It's a reunion that happens only every seven years or so; as such, *Divisadero* warrants ceremony, and reverence.

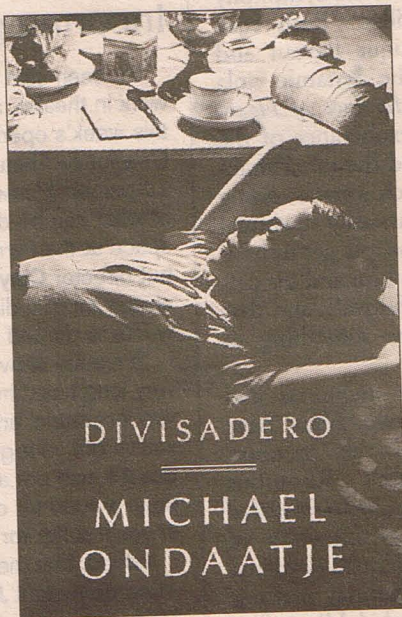
In northern California in the early 1970s, a farmer has forged a makeshift family out of children abandoned by violence: his neighbour's son, Coop, left alone after a vicious murder, and two girls, Anna and Claire, whose birth caused their mothers' death. The four manage a quiet co-existence until a moment of unthinkable rage tears them apart forever.

From that small moment on that small farm we are taken into the private card games of Tahoe, the law offices of San Francisco and the quiet countryside of Dému as the farmers' children are flung into the world with only the memory of extreme violence to guide them.

Divisadero explores how one event, one converging of passions in a storm, can unveil the darkest elements of our characters. How it can push us to actions inconceivable up to that exact moment. How those moments change us, scare us and ultimately shape our lives as we try to hide from them—or re-invent ourselves because of them.

Ondaatje's characters are fragile, broken and mended with their cracks a visible and now-defining part of their personalities. He puts his characters in extreme circumstances, bends them, breaks them, then takes them out and observes while they try to heal. But he still manages to be gentle with them, treating them with care and respecting their journeys into understanding their own pain.

Divisadero is a heartbreaking novel that is beautifully sculpted. But I want more. Chapters and chapters on Dorn and Ruth, Coop's hippie cardsharp friends. On adult Anna and her gypsy lover. On hustlers Bridget and Gil and their cronies. But we only get small slices. They drift into the story, and drift out again, leaving us altered by their visit. The only full story we get is that of Lucien Segura, a French writer whose history Anna immerses herself in. By turning his life into a story she attempts to find a context to her own life that she can accept.



Divisadero

By Michael Ondaatje
McClelland & Stewart,
288 pages, \$34.99

Michael Ondaatje returns with *Divisadero*, a new novel that's been well worth the wait

I emerged from the text sometime Saturday morning still lost in the poetry of his language, and confused by my own world. It was too quiet, like some guests had abruptly left and I hadn't adjusted to the stillness yet. I'm sure anyone who met me on that day thought I was high. And I was, slowly coming down after a concentrated dose of Ondaatje.

Divisadero is Ondaatje's fifth novel, and while I love them all and hate to rank them, this one stands at the top of the list right along with *Coming Through Slaughter*. It may be another seven years before Ondaatje graces us with another work—but, as always, my rare literary lover, you are well worth the wait.

—Sarah Gignac

Michael Ondaatje
7 pm Saturday, May 5
Alix Goolden Hall,
907 Pandora
Tickets \$8 • 386-6121