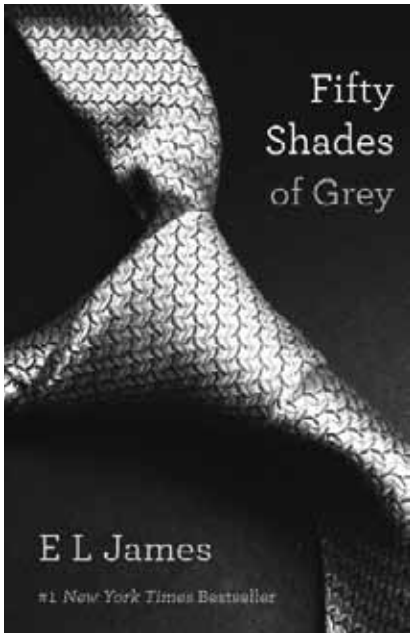


Fade to Black

Fucked by *Fifty Shades of Grey*



In the age of the quick fix and pop-up porn, you gotta hand it to E.L. James for hoodwinking the hoi polloi into dicking around with something as atavistic and temperate as on-the-page erotica. *Fifty Shades of Grey* – the first installment in a trilogy of erotic novels that started online as *Twilight* fanfiction – sold more than 10 million copies in six weeks in the U.S. alone. This, despite repeated assaults by high-brow literary critics as well as pop sexpert Dr. Drew Pinsky, who found the book's themes of violence and domination “disturbing” and “the fulfillment of a pathological fantasy.”

The fact that James, a British woman who is now very, very wealthy, can't write her way out of a paper bag appears to be irrelevant to the hordes of readers willing to indulge her tumescent prose (the first book clocks in at more than 500 pages). *Fifty Shades of Grey* focuses on the insular, exotic, bondage-happy relationship (sic) that blossoms like a hothouse lily between Anastasia Steele, a recent college grad and virginal naïf, and Seattle-based billionaire Christian Grey, a gorgeously wounded mancake whose temperament is a cross between Brontë's Rochester and Patrick Bateman in *American*

Psycho. The book has been dubbed “mommy porn,” most likely as a convenient marketing tool.

There is good bad writing, bad good writing, bad books by great authors, great books by mediocre authors – the possibilities go on and on, stretched along an artistic spectrum that, in its very diversity, pays tribute to the difficult nature of writing itself. *Fifty Shades*, however, falls nowhere along that vast gamut of quality, because James is not a writer, and *Fifty Shades* does not qualify as art. It is a bonanza of wretched prose and inept editing. Heads are always being “cocked,” lips are incessantly “quirked” into smiles, eyebrows are constantly arching, gazes are routinely hooded and eyes ineluctably darken. Nipples regularly get “tugged”; heads move “fractionally.”

It just goes on and on. The sex scenes are limp, chatty and tortuous. Ana and Christian meet in the most unlikely manner, and it's not until page 70 or so that he finally splits her infinitive with his dangling participle. But, oh boy, is it worth the wait:

“Come for me, Ana,” he whispers breathlessly, and I unravel at his words, exploding around him as I climax and splinter into a million pieces underneath him. And as he comes, he calls out my name, thrusting hard, then stalling as he empties himself into me.”

Technically, he empties himself into the condom he “pulls onto his considerable length,” but who's sweating the details here?

Fifty Shades of Grey leaves absolutely nothing to the imagination: No doorknob is left unturned, no twitch is left unremarked, no walk across the floor is unmentioned; every gesture, breath, heartbeat, smile, glance, grimace, smirk, sneer, twitch, hitch, snit, fit and flirt is transcribed, causing the pages to pile up to twice, thrice the necessary amount; a mediocre editor would hack this book to one-fifth its current length and improve it exponentially ... or rather, fractionally.

So the question remains: Why read this book? It is neither sexy, nor fun, nor accurate, not even grammatically correct. Like all fads, you read *Fifty Shades of Grey* simply because everybody else is reading it, and you want to join in the conversation. If you want to cheat, and join the conversation without actually enduring the book, just wrap your medulla oblongata around this lovely mixed metaphor capped by an outright lie:

“Two orgasms ... coming apart at the seams, like the spin cycle on a washing machine, wow ... the pleasure was indescribable.”

Got it? Holy crap! You're good to go. – Rick Levin

Like your granny's sex diary

Well-written literary junk food is a fantastic palate cleanser for people whose job it is to read a lot of nonfiction. When you throw sex into the mix – especially forbidden sex – you've got entertainment plus the antidote to becoming a snob who wants to look down on whatever is trendy in popular literature.

Unfortunately, *Fifty Shades of Grey* isn't a book that can do that for a lot of people. Ana's inner monologue bogs down the story so badly that she quickly becomes detestable, and an erotic novel with a rather pathetic narcissist for a heroine just isn't worth the opportunity cost of reading it. And for a lot of people – maybe a lot of people in their 20s like me – it will feel a little bit creepy, as if they're reading their grandma's sex diary. The dialogue doesn't sound like the recent college grad Ana is supposed to be.

So why has the book gotten so popular? Well, there are a lot of good, patient people out there, and they're horny. If you're able to suspend judgment of the awful writing and glacial pace, the plot has the bare bones of an excellent dirty, sexy story – so much potential spoiled by terrible writing! If you gave the outline to a decent student of creative writing and asked her to rewrite it, it could end up solid masturbatory material for all. – Shannon Finnell

Send us your smut

EW is having a Smutt-Off, a contest to see what sort of dirty, erotic stories are lurking in the minds of Eugeneans. Send us a 500-word story that captures everything *Fifty Shades* doesn't, and we'll publish the winner in print, plus runners up on our website.

You have until June 28. May the best dirty, depraved soul win.

Send entries to shannon@eugeneweekly.com

This photo has nothing to do with Hotels.



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