

Chapter 1 : Articles ~ Melanie Thernstrom ~ Author

Published January in The Secret Currency of Love The Lost Lexus. Lexus, Lexi: I wanted the Lexus. For Christmas, my husband had given me a card on which he had written Hybrid€"a replacement for my ancient Toyota RAV4.

Over pages, the subject matter became a bit oppressive, but I enjoyed the book and identified with many of the feelings and concerns. Many online critics of this book complain that the stories are too similar. I agreed and considered this critique. Below are summaries of each of those stories. If all of the stories are so different, why do they feel similar? They all have a "magazine writer" feel. And This was a nice undemanding book to read at home occasionally. Maybe the most common American story, maybe the human condition. As you can see, the stories are different. I read some and thought, "Wow. This person is a writer. They all had some merit. Partially envies her SAHM. Rescue Mission - Sheri Holman - Author has a romance with a charming crack addict. A Tale of Two Bank Accounts - Ann Hood - After enduring a relationship where every expense was split to the penny, author and her new husband decide to keep separate bank accounts. Tool Belts, Not Taxes - Abby Ellin - Single year-old author wants to marry wealthy banker, but is attracted to men who work with their hands. His thrift is more cultural than out of necessity. Author works with and spends time with the birth parents. Count the Ways - Kathryn Harrison - Author remembers conflicted relationship with spendthrift mother. The Cheapskate - Amy Sohn - Author recalls being raised by diabolically cheap father. Planned Parenthood - Lori Gottlieb - Author, a single mother via donor sperm and intrauterine inseminations, contemplates the financial pressures of having a second child using the same expensive methods. Give me a break! A Change of Fortune: She thinks making her son write an essay to get an iPod connotes he somehow earned it. Keeping Up Appearances - J. Disco, Motherhood, and the Art of Survival - Veronica Chambers - Author remembers abusive childhood and the trying labor and delivery of her daughter. My So-Called Financial Life - Rebecca Traister - Author, who is the best, recalls her history with money and earning her way as a writer. Quite a few trust-fund types become freelancers, it seems. There are a handful of truly standout essays, and had I been editing I might have culled from the book about half -- choosing those that provided the widest geographical and topical feel. I give a hesitant 3 stars, rather than 2, because there are some stirring and thought-provoking pieces, and for the novelty of the topic itself.

Chapter 2 : The Blotter Â» Picking Out Of A Line-Up: Well-Worn Paperbacks

The Lost Lexus in The Secret Currency of Love, published January (at B&N; at Amazon) It was the eve of our first wedding anniversary, and I was still trying to understand my husband's financial philosophy and the extent to which it was a philosophy.

Her voice on the page is ageless; never that of a young writer precisely, it is even now not the voice of senescence. The strong tendency of her career has been to resist the received idea -- to unpack that idea, disprove it, and remind the reader whose interests the false account serves. After the Tall Timber implicitly argues for a particular view of Adler as a writer, the bomb thrower-aesthete. But as the title of her collection, *Toward A Radical Middle*, suggests, Adler is a bomb thrower of a curious sort, a Jean-Pau Marat figure in the service of what can seem distinctly like ancien regime values: Herewith follow some observations on one of the more unusual careers in American journalism. She Is a Cautionary Tale Adler has spent much of her career ridiculing her fellow journalists, and she has generally aimed high, repeatedly attacking *The New York Times* for what she views as its complacency and self-regard, lamenting the decline of *The New Yorker* following its sale to the Newhouse family, and suing *Vanity Fair* for libel. Adler is a celebrity journalist who has decried celebrity and careerism as the dominant impulses of her peers. She has also walked the walk, consistently biting the editorial hand that feeds, frustrating the commercial motives of her publishers by producing uncategorizable work ranging across genres, and taking several years away from journalism at the height of her fame to earn a Yale J. Adler has written to please herself, and for posterity; and everyone else be damned. This has periodically left her unpublishable, or nearly so. These days, a journalist can want her autonomy, or she can want health insurance, but she had better not want both. Adler had by then worked for *The New Yorker* for 35 years and was strongly identified with the magazine, though she had published elsewhere and had even left for 14 months to be *The Times* film critic. It is also marred by a disconnect between its high-minded tone and a good deal of what amounts to score-settling with colleagues at the magazine with whom Adler had clashed either personally or in the internecine fights for editorial favor for which *The New Yorker* is famous. *The New Yorker*, at the moment she was writing, seemed to be badly adrift. Adler argued that the magazine under Brown and her predecessor, Gottlieb, had changed from being one that created its own audience through the integrity of its editorial product to one that sought a kind of commercial mean driven by a finger-to-the-breeze sense of what was hot or trending in the culture. As *Gone* went to print, David Remnick had just taken over from Brown as editor. How could Adler have predicted that *The New Yorker* under Remnick would become the consistently excellent publication that it is today -- a *New Yorker* to rival the *A*. In her writings on the law, as elsewhere, it can be difficult to tell whether Adler is a cynic or a scandalized idealist. The six-volume Report by Kenneth W. Starr to the U. House of Representatives -- which consists, so far, of the single-volume Referral and five volumes of Appendices and Supplemental Materials -- is, in many ways, an utterly preposterous document: What it is textually is a voluminous work of demented pornography, with many fascinating characters and several largely hidden story lines. What it is politically is an attempt, through its own limitless preoccupation with sexual material, to set aside, even obliterate, the relatively dull requirement of real evidence and constitutional procedure. Adler never practiced law, and she seems to have developed a hearty dislike for lawyers, for their self-importance, their ingrained relativism, and their combination of grandiloquence and syntactic clumsiness. It is easy to imagine, however, Adler having become a very powerful First Amendment lawyer in the Floyd Abrams mold -- if only she could have behaved herself, even by the modest standards of contemporary law practice. And how much does the world need another corporate lawyer, anyway? One note of reservation. She argues, not entirely implausibly, that the articles presented against Richard Nixon were legally deficient, but also, startlingly, that Nixon should have been impeached for an entirely different crime: This is the sort of thing that should not be written in a magazine like *The Atlantic* where the story was published, in December without substantial evidence, and the evidence, in my view, is not there. It is not that one is reluctant to believe the charge; at this point, one imagines the Nixon White House capable of almost anything. But Nixon, as Adler herself points out

elsewhere, has the same right as anyone else to be convicted on the basis of evidence rather than innuendo. There are only so many plots. There are insights, prose flights, rhythms, felicities. But only so many plots. Maybe there are stories, even, like solitaire or canasta, they are shuffled and dealt then they do or they do not come out. Or the deck falls flat on the floor. Stein, Paris Review blog. Critics like David Shields, who cites Speedboat approvingly in his manifesto, Reality Hunger, regard the imposition of order upon experience that has been the basic genre-work of the novel for years as suspect, a dead letter, a mannerist exercise, in light of the way we live now. I will admit to being a bit impatient with this claim, though not necessarily with the claimants. It is certainly true that one might find the order imposed by a given novel unsatisfying. More fundamentally, one might reject the entire Western enterprise of self-construction through narrative, preferring radical acceptance, or religious submission -- some form of permitting the flow of experience to sluice over and around oneself rather than damming it up in the service of order; in this view, narrative is almost a form of technology, another wrongheaded Western means of taming nature. And I do understand the frustration of readers with the synaptic familiarity of novelistic plot, the patting down of loose ends that so often makes the last third of a novel so much duller than what preceded it. And yet I think the smart money is on the novel to survive in the age of Twitter and beyond. Jonathan Gottschall has argued *The Storytelling Animal*, to my mind persuasively, that narrative has an essential evolutionary function. Making meaning is as endemic to our nature as our biological functions. The revanchist argument for the traditional novel is deeply unfashionable just now; one risks being cast as stodgy, middlebrow Arnold Bennett to the brilliant, gossamer-like Virginia Woolf -- and we know how that fight turned out. Still, we should not mistake the aesthetic exhaustion of a few writers, even very gifted ones like Adler, for the exhaustion of a genre as a whole. The novel has been a remarkably flexible and capacious form, adapting easily to the most jarring shifts in the social order, taking in Western and non-Western, advanced and relatively primitive societies. The fact that Adler published only two short, episodic novels in a long career she told *The Believer* in that she had completed the manuscript of a third novel, but no announcement has since appeared suggests that, for her at least, what seemed like a new pathway ended in an infernal grove. This is not to deny the elegance and conviction of *Speedboat* and *Pitch Dark*, which have, perhaps, a small place in the history of the American novel. When I say that Adler is an exemplary modern novelist, I mean simply that she has any aesthetic agenda -- that her work is self-conscious, the product of thought, as so many novels are not. That I have yoked her into service in an argument over the future of the realist novel is perhaps even a little unfair. Fitting, then, to conclude with a reminder of how well Adler the novelist actually wrote. From *Speedboat*, the toxic party we have all attended: Some people, in a frenzy of antipathy and boredom, were drinking themselves into extreme approximations of longing to be together. She has been accused of shrillness, vindictiveness, excessive self-regard -- qualities that would not necessarily be disqualifying in a male journalist. She has refused to be ghettoized, which can be read either as a feminist position or as a rebuke of the feminine sphere, or both. This is one fight she never chose. Her *Work Was Made to Last* Most journalism is written quickly and is meant to be digested in the same way. One is reminded of the old Jay Leno joke about his being informed while flying that he could take the in-flight magazine with him when he landed: She aspires to write not just the first draft of history, but the last. She is justly praised as a stylist, but her work reminds us that elegance of style cannot be separated from elegance of thought. To defend this belief it will go very far. The search, the grail, the motivating principle for individual reporters has become, not the uninflected reporting of news, but something by now almost entirely unrelated: In the interim, some other prize will do. But once won, the Pulitzer turns into both a shield and a weapon -- a shield in defense of otherwise indefensible pieces by Pulitzer Prize winning reporters, a weapon in the struggle for advancement within the hierarchy of the Times. The paper still has some fine editors and reporters, with highly honorable concerns. But a five-year moratorium on the awarding of Pulitzer Prizes to journalists at powerful publications might be the greatest service to journalism the Pulitzer Committee could now perform. In the puncturing of pretensions, this paragraph does double duty, letting some air out of *The Times* and the Pulitzers both. I suspect that I think more highly of *The Times* than does Adler; in a media age in which mere talk truly is cheaper than ever before, *The Times* is still slugging away in Aden and Caracas and Nairobi, trying to do honorable work on beats most journalistic organizations have long abandoned. The fact that a

Times staffer may be reporting virtually alone in these places is, however, cause for more editorial vigilance rather than less. Like any other institution at heightened risk of dangerous self-regard, The Times needs critics like Adler, even if it cannot be expected to appreciate them. Renata Adler has not been clubbable. She has picked fights. She has generally been eager both to take offense and to give it. And once the battle has been joined, she has always had to have the last word. For this, and for the great embarrassment of her irrepressible talent, she has not been forgiven.

Chapter 3 : The Millions: Reality Hunger: A Manifesto (Vintage) by David Shields

THE DEAD GIRL is a testament to the magnetic power of her death, and Thernstrom's exceptional sensitivity qualifies her as an ideal guide through the darkness" --Daniel Max, The New Republic "An astonishingly delicate and sensitive memorial to a lost friend the struggle of two privileged young women trying to find a place in the.

I wanted the Lexus. For Christmas, my husband had given me a card on which he had written Hybridâ€™ a replacement for my ancient Toyota RAV4. I was newly enchanted with the phrase carbon footprint and the idea of lightening mine. All I had to do was pick the hybrid. I was hoping it was more a matter of habit because one thing was plain: Both had similar reliability ratings, since, in fact, both cars are manufactured by Toyota. But the Lexus was prettier, with a comelier snout, a curvier body, and superior interior decoration. I harped on the similarity of the price andâ€™ since it is also manufactured by Toyotaâ€™ reliability rating. To be precise, Michael had six times the savings I didâ€™ but since six of not very much is still not very much, we were, to my mind, roughly in the same financial category. There was no particular reason to expect this would change. When that happened, we would become distinctly, dramatically unequal. The unhappily paired in his circle counseled him to make a prenuptial agreement. In relating his rejection their advice, I understood that Michael wanted me to feel that this money would also belong to meâ€™ that we would be financial partners. He had worked for many years to build the product and the companyâ€™ years during which he had been with other womenâ€™ and I met him just when all his efforts had come to fruition. But if there is dissent, she is my cat. This was a one-time financial windfall. Our bank balance has an extra zero! Our financial situation has improved by an order of magnitude. Did luxuries strike him as unseemly, in the face of poverty and increasing financial inequity? Or was his attitude the product of a small town New England upbringing by the kind of serious-minded academics who refinanced their house to send their children to private schools because education is importantâ€™ but who bought cars second-hand, clothes on markdown, and checked videos out of the library? I had also grown up in an academic family, but with parents who were far less thrifty. My Lexus-driving mother is, however, prone to fits of guilt about extravagancesâ€™ a problem she likes to solve by taking my father shopping with her. When I coyly suggested to Michael that something I coveted was too costly, he simply concurred. When I talked about want, he refocused the conversation on need. When we first moved in together, I thought we should become a two iPod household; he thought we should share mine. Kids in ghettos have iPods. What is it worth to you and what do you have to give up to get it? But now, Michael and I could get lots of things and give up nothing, which should make everything deliciously simple. A few days after the company acquisition was finalized, I was unloading groceries in the kitchen. But although his tone was mild as ever, I could tell the suggestion of a blithe state of mind in which price was of no concern perturbed him. I knew he wanted me to reassure him that I agreed in principle that price always matters, because frugality is a principle. He had no lapses of frugality during business travel. Arriving at an airport on an expense account, he looked for public transportation; arriving on our dime, I looked for a cab. Yet hundreds of dollars could disappear without a second thought to a random charity I never knew he cared about Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic or to one I chose, hoping he would not be interested Save the Tiger or to one that obviously needed no help from us The Association of American Rhodes Scholars. For Michael, charity is not inconsistent with frugality. I like to be careless. As a writer with no certain income, I had bought boxes of clementines whenever I wanted, even if half of them were rotted; my spending philosophy was based on the idea that one has to take care with major expenses, but little things never add up. He enjoyed entering his expenses into his Quicken program and being able to tell you how much he paid for a decaf latte on the second Tuesday in November seven years ago. I refused to keep my receiptsâ€™ I hated the idea of every purchase being on the record. As a result, his Quicken developed what he referred to as a gaping hole called Melanie. I felt those minutes were being kidnapped from my life. On my deathbed I would want them backâ€™ or I would want to have shortened my life by smoking five cigarettes instead. My fantasy of having money had been that it would render money invisible, like a return to the world of childhood, where everything is free, the clementines in the bowl like fruit on a tree. My friend Amanda has a system she calls

Princess Math, the gist of which is that a penny saved is a penny earned. I had tried to live in the world of Princess Math, but I was always bumping into the limits of my resources. I had wanted to be able to write checks without checking my balance, but I was afraid they would bounce. When mutual friends bestowed Michael upon me, I knew he was perfect. After two decades of relationships with men who were decidedly or subtly not quite right, I felt entirely vindicated. They say one must never congratulate a bride, but I basked in congratulations. His friends and family were happy for him, but my friends and family were thrilled. His was the kind of beautiful, beguiling mind I had always prized—the kind you can get lost in. The transatlantic phone call after our first date when he flew back to London, where he was living then, lasted six hours and still felt abbreviated. The lesson of my excessively long dating life had been that you always paid for fascination: In men, I decided, they were actually competitive, and the drive to be special usually overwhelms the drive to be giving. I dated writers, entrepreneurs, academics, physicians, and scientists for whom relationships were the area in which they least excelled. Michael was sweet, sensible, sensitive, and endlessly good-natured. For the first time ever in a relationship, I was haunted by the sense that I was the difficult one—the one prone to crankiness and self-absorption, the one who, when all was said and done—usually owed the apology. Once, when we quarreled, I declared triumphantly you are definitely not perfect. He laughed and I realized that basically, I thought he was. Now finally, with finances, I was almost pleased to identify a definite foible—an area of irrationality. Unless the irrationality was mine. But by my standards—writer standards, with the multiplications of Princess Math—we were. Rich enough for treats: Rich enough for Highlander hybrids—and now, it seemed, rich enough for Lexi. It sounded like lucky. It was akin to other appealing words like lucid, luscious, and lovely. I remember the first ads for the Lexus, where the car was shown with a tower of champagne flutes neatly balanced on its hood or parking between pyramids of them—as if the owner would momentarily step out of the car to take down a glass and toast her choice. The Toyota Highlander owner—who was she? Did she drink champagne? Clearly, the company thought she was afraid of Lowlands and would buy this big boat of a car to protect herself against vague fears, like the kind of person who voted Republican because it claimed to be the party of national security. Or perhaps she was just a sturdy suburban soccer mom who valued the fact that the back could be turned into a third row of seats for carpooling and still have room to lug stuff home from Costco. Certainly, she was not discriminating about color. The Lexus came in special shades: The first time I saw it, I thought it looked like a black pearl—not a magnet. And surely they could think of another way to describe the interior besides ash. I could no longer remember how the possessive declension worked. When I peered through its specially sound-proofed windows in my mind, the Lexus driver looked healthier because she was luckier, more immune from misfortune. She married an amazing man. The unhappy part of her life was over. The happy, married part had begun. She was exceptionally lucky. That part was true. What did the Lexus add? I love presents—giving them, receiving them, wrapping them, scattering glittering scraps of paper all over the floor—so it was startling to realize that he did not. What do you want? So there it was: I know the truth of the truism that truly precious things—true love, bravery, good genes of the sort that for the most part I received, but which were inexplicably overlooked in regard to my spine—are not for sale. But channeling desire into things that can be bought or leased or put on layaway seems to offer a certain beautifully straightforward kind of fulfillment—as long as you make sure to covet things within your means. Desire and the fulfillment of desire: Previously, the most expensive thing we had bought together was an engagement ring, about which we found ourselves in accord. Finally, it was my turn! But when we got there, it turned out the basic design of the rings was similar and their respective allure was entirely a function of price. Although the one-carat ring was expensive, it was less than half as nice as the two-carat ring and much less than a quarter as nice as the four-carat ring niceness and price increased exponentially. Who wanted a less than quarter-nice ring? The saleswoman helpfully suggested we could consider a starter ring and trade up later on—an idea more suitable, I thought, for a starter marriage. The clarity of commerce seemed to quell all the sparkle. The trays of rings began to look like platinum-mounted price tags: They were hedge-fund-manageress rings, not Dorothy-ruby-slipper rings; they contained no secret power. It was an artful, intricate creation made from an old mine-cut diamond whose price only we would know.

Chapter 4 : [Report] | The Pain Refugees, by Brian Goldstone | Harper's Magazine - Part 6

Melanie Thernstrom's The Dead Girl is the debut book every writer dreams of only it's not. Thernstrom's best friend was murdered while they were students at Harvard. Based on Thernstrom's senior thesis, The Dead Girl describes the disappearance, search for, and murder of Bibi Lee.

Chapter 5 : The Dead Girl by Melanie Thernstrom

This was a nice undemanding book to read at home occasionally. Over pages, the subject matter became a bit oppressive, but I enjoyed the book and identified with many of the feelings and concerns.

Chapter 6 : Site Suspended - This site has stepped out for a bit

Melanie Thernstrom is an author and contributing writer for the New York Times Magazine. The author of Halfway Heaven: A Diary of a Harvard Murder (Doubleday,) and The Pain Chronicle (FS&G).

Chapter 7 : The Lost Lexus ~ Melanie Thernstrom ~ Author

Melanie Thernstrom's account of a Harvard murder-suicide struggles with the personal. The crime "The morning that students were supposed to move out of their residence, Dunster House, for the summer .

Chapter 8 : Chicago Tribune - We are currently unavailable in your region

An anthology of original essays explores the complicated and powerful connection between love and money in America, in a volume that includes contributions by such writers as Kim Barnes, Lori Gottlieb, and Kathryn Harrison.

Chapter 9 : The Blotter Â» Halfway Heaven Is Halfway To A Minor Classic

The Dead Girl by Melanie Thernstrom The Dead Girl, based on Thernstrom's diary, is the retelling of intimate thoughts and emotions surrounding the murder of her childhood best friend Bibi Lee.