

by [Jesus Angel Garcia](#) (Goodreads Author)



[Agnes Mack](#)'s review
Jul 13, 11



bookshelves: [first-reads](#)
Read from June 26 to 28, 2011

I received *badbadbad* through the Goodreads First Reads program and after reading the praise on the inside cover I was excited to get started. The writing of Jesus Angel Garcia was compared to Philip Roth, Kurt Vonnegut and Flannery O'Connor. Be still my beating heart! Unfortunately, it fell far short of my expectations.

On the plus side, the author's voice is definitely a dynamic one. His prose has a unique cadence and energy to it that initially drew me in. He's also quite talented at descriptions. For example:

"Her face was dull, faintly splotched, creased like a touring band's road map. Her lips were paper-thin, crayoned with a neon crimson that stuck to her front teeth. Her eyes were emeralds, pink-striped, framed by centipedes. I would stare at her like an anthropologist, unsure where to fix my gaze without making her uncomfortable. The pint of Everclear she carried around took the edge off."

The plot is quite original and the storyline did work for me – initially. Eventually though I began to realize a few things. First, I absolutely hated the protagonist. He was full of himself, annoying, really, really stupid and just generally an asshole. For example, he gets stood up at one point of the book and reacts thusly:

"What the fuck, bitch?!" I hollered at her voicemail. "What's your fucking problem? Who do you think you are? I hope you crashed your fucking car and your head is through the windshield. You best be in the ER or I'll make you fucking wish you were. You think I'm playing? Call me back, bitch. Stupid fucking whore."

He does a lot of internet dating on a site called 'fallenangels' and after getting rejected many times, he eventually tells us the 'secret' to people's self-descriptions on internet dating sites – though it's really just a list of really easy, obvious 'jokes' and some eye-rolling inaccuracies:

“voluptuous= sow shaped; thin=anorexic; petite=midget; young at heart = old peculiar; active = ADHD; well-to-do = pompous; thinning hair = bald; kinky = abused and/or abusive; bi-curious = faggot; generous = sugar daddy; partygirl = tweaker; former rocker = yuppie; rockstar = poser; good Christian = hypocrite; open-minded = relativist”

The protagonist, oh so cleverly named Jesus Angel Garcia, is supposed to be in his 20s and the book is supposed to take place fairly recently (the characters apparently use MySpace, which either means the book was written ~4 years ago or the author is just super out of touch) but based on the vernacular, it reads more like some guy in his 30s or 40s trying to write like he's young and hip. He constantly uses the word 'beeyatch', which, ouch! I mean, seriously, this happens:

“Your pictures are the bomb! Are you a pro photographer?”

There are also pages and pages of chat logs, which are super boring and also cringe worthy. Example:

“jesusangel: God created you

jesusangel: to show the whole wide world

jesusangel: what

jesusangel: beauty

jesusangel: is

dream2live4evR: i wish you could see my face

dream2live4evR: thank you, that means a lot

jesusangel: I'm just truthtelling, darlin

dream2live4evR: people don't usually say such nice things”

I refuse to believe that works on anyone.

I think my least favorite part was the 5 or 6 pages of descriptions of pictures. First of all, he usually calls pictures, photos, etc, “.jpegs”, which... no one says, dude. Second of all, I don't care about your boring pictures. It was like someone I don't know getting drunk and making me sit down and look at

picture after picture of people I don't know and then telling me dull stories about said boring people I don't know – except I didn't even get to see the pictures. I'm not sure what the point of that was.

In summation, I would not recommend this book to a friend. I think there was a solid story in there and I think Jesus Angel Garcia does a few things right but overall I don't think this book achieved what he was hoping for.

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message 1: by [Jesus](#) (last edited Jul 09, 2011 01:06pm) - [rated it 5 stars](#)
[Jul 09, 2011 01:02pm](#)



I wasn't going to respond to this. I realize author responses to negative "reviews" are generally perceived as "bad form." But Goodreads is a social network designed for lit dialogue, as I understand it, and a few of your points above beg for clarification -- not justification or defensive posturing -- just clarification of the facts so any subsequent discussion is grounded.

I'm happy to discuss anything you like, if you like. Though it may take me a while to follow-up. I'm currently on a massive book tour and don't always have an Internet connect or free time.

Re: JAG's blow-up after being stood up - This comes after pages and pages and pages of frantic downward spiral. He's not just being an "asshole," as you put it. He's cracking up. That passage indicates a serious psychic break. In the preceding chapters, he never talks or acts like that.

Same goes for the list of descriptions on the dating site. Before this, he's all about non-judgment, and struggling to be non-judgmental. That li'l list is anything but non-judgmental.

Re: beeyatch - Saying this word is used "constantly" is a gross misrepresentation. The term appears 6 times in a 70,000-word text. Who says it in the real world? Well, in my experience, I hear people from teens to 40-year-olds say it for fun, as a joke, or to be stoopid, which is usually how the characters use it in the book, except the one time Cyrus turns his goof personality into something meaner and another time when the trashy ticktockclock character, who's an old-school hip-hop freak, is shit-talking about Amy Grant. JAG *never* says that word.

Re: Myspace - I went back and forth pre-publication w/ first readers, fellow writers and my publisher about that Myspace reference. It was in the first draft written a few years back. The consensus was to keep it in for the sonic quality of the passage, for the kind of nostalgic reference, for the skeezy rep Myspace now has, and either to set the timeline around, say, 2008, or to illustrate JAG's out-of-the-loopness in 2011. Sorry it didn't work for you. I still don't know if it 100% works for me, but I tend to

err on the side of sound. It's the poetry background. Here's the complete statement JAG makes, drunkenly pontificating on "the definitive epitaph for our generation" (please note: all the my's and "kewl" in this excerpt get italics):

"Picture the OVA pitch." I flapped my wings. "Generation YouBeMe: if you wanna be kewl like me, you need to listen to my music, play my video games, watch my DVDs, wear my designer threads, know the song and artist on my ringtone. See me on Myspace. Maybe I'll friend you back."

Funny, your reaction to the chat logs.

Funny, too, your reaction to the jpeg section. Sorry you didn't like the narrative shift and couldn't see the pictures from the descriptions. I like the idea of seeing that part of the story through a slide show. I feel like that's how one would tell a friend about a combo of KKK/Gay Pride demonstrations and the afterparties -- by showing them the pics and talking about them.

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message 2: by [Agnes](#) - [rated it 2 stars](#)
[Jul 13, 2011 02:11pm](#)



Regardless of your intentions, your comment reeks of defensive posturing and justification – and a little condescension. Starting out by referring to my review as a 'review' was perhaps not the wisest move if you're making an honest attempt to simply 'beg clarification.'

I went back and forth about whether or not to respond to you because, quite frankly, this is not a workshop. You wrote a book. It's been published. Now, hopefully, people are going to read it and those people are going to have opinions about it. Are you planning to follow everyone around and explain to them why their opinions of your book are incorrect?

You seem to think that I got facts wrong but I see only examples of your opinion differing from mine. For example, whether or not the protagonist is an asshole is not a fact that is to be debated – it's an opinion. Yes, the passages I quoted came after pages and pages of downward spiraling. But in my opinion that does not excuse leaving a voice mail wherein he calls that woman a 'stupid fucking whore.' Assholes are not typically assholes all the time. Their true nature tends to come out when they've been dealing with stress. Under stress, this guy acted like an asshole. Because, in my opinion, he is an asshole.

Saying the word beeyatch was used 'constantly' was an exaggeration, yes. Great job picking up on that. However, the point stands. I believe that numerous characters using an outdated word 6 times in 70,000 words is a lot. It was enough that it stuck out to me. If you got yourself a time machine back to 1995 I'm sure you'd find many people using the word "for fun, as a joke, or to be stoopid." I do not believe that so many people still use the word that it should be used 6 times in 70,000 contemporary words. Again, this is my opinion.

Thanks for explaining your thought process behind using MySpace, I guess. Once again, as a reader I'm not really that interested in what you were trying to do. It didn't work for me and your intentions unfortunately don't factor in to it.

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message 3: by [Jesus](#) - [rated it 5 stars](#)
[Jul 13, 2011 05:15pm](#)



Hi Agnes,

Thanks for engaging in this dialogue. I appreciate it. It's important, I think.

I hear you on MySpace.

Re: beeyatch... as I said, I know people who use that word. It's crazy, trying to communicate... through words, no less. It's complicated. Very few individuals use the same words in the same way. Of course, your opinion is yours to have. The "constantly" just felt unfair b/c it was inaccurate.

I like your explanation of why you think JAG's an "asshole." But I disagree. Not about JAG, necessarily. Well, I dunno. OK, I don't think he's an asshole as much as he is dangerously delusional. I mean, he's on a zealous mission, right? And his intentions are pure -- Antonia Crane said in *The Rumpus* that the book could be read as "a manual for how to love and serve women" (an asshole wouldn't bother) -- but he's also misguided (seeing the world through a dirty lens), and he's a hypocrite, unbeknownst to himself. Put all that together and I think you get a more complex character than simply an "asshole." That said, I totally see how you might see him like that. Me? Not so much. Here's another reason why: I don't believe people's true nature comes out when they're under stress. I think their stressed nature comes out. And Mr. JAG was beyond stressed at that point in the narrative. He was not living in "reality," i.e., seeing "what is."

Re: opinions -- Nope, I'm not going to follow everyone around and comment on their opinions. I was just talking about this last night with an author and small press publisher. He said I shouldn't have responded to you. He argued that I was being an asshole by doing so b/c I know this book intimately, and me "correcting" other people's takes on it is wrong b/c I'm in an unfair position of authority, or something like that. I countered with what bothers me about so-called reviews (and why I said "reviews" at the outset). I've worked as a freelance journalist/critic for more than 20 years. I've worked under hardcore editors at dozens of newspapers and magazines. Here's what's been burned into my brain: 1) clarity is king; 2) fact-checking is a must; 3) try to experience a work on its own terms (Milan Kundera talks about letting the book teach you how to read it, i.e., no expectations/judgments); 4) seek to understand a work, then try to explain it so others can understand it. To me, that's criticism. That's valuable cultural dialogue. And if you want to add in your opinion after digesting the big picture, then go for it. What bothers me, and what I see way too much -- not always, not even often, but too often -- in reviews, especially non-professional blogs or web sites or whatever is 1) circle jerking where friends talk about each other's work with hollow praise; 2) reviewers writing from a position of "I expected so and so, and well... this didn't meet my expectations"; 3) a lot of attitude and opinion and very little big-picture exploration or understanding. Call me an asshole, if you must. But I'm just gunning for clarity and multiple perspectives.

Lastly, I realize this isn't a workshop. But it is a "social network." You decided to write a review. I don't know why, but I do know you want people to read it b/c everyone who writes wants to be read. By posting it in a forum that encourages comments, you're inviting dialogue. By posting it on Goodreads, you knew I would read it. Because I felt like you were basing your opinions on a misrepresentation of the facts and arguably a misunderstanding of the story, I responded. Now we're having a discussion to clarify both what you wrote and what I did. I believe doing so is far more valuable than not.

So thank you again for engaging in this exchange of ideas. And please, come on out to the Nerves of Steel show on 8/2 if you'd like to give the project a second chance and experience it live.

Peace,
Jesus Angel Garcia

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message 4: by [Melanie](#)
[Jul 13, 2011 06:35pm](#)



This conversation is eating at the back of my brain.

As a newbie to reviews (both blog and published), I worry about author/publisher attacks. I always try to back up what I say with quotes, which the original post did. On the other hand, sometimes I love a book and I don't articulate that correctly either. I just try to explain the emotions I processed, point to a passage, then explain why.

A lot of times I chew over a book for weeks because I don't like it at all but worry that I'm just being shallow or didn't "get it" for some reason or another. The whole fluxus attitude that art can be anything and we should appreciate because it is.

The response to this woman's post makes me afraid to dislike a book, no matter how well I explain it. She didn't write "It just wasn't for me." While a review on Goodreads wouldn't sway me either way as to whether or not I want to read a book, I think JAG's small press publisher friend was probably right, because now the whole thing seems blown up, bloated, out of proportion. I'm not siding with either person, but trying to explain why the whole process of reviewing books is scary, and both people (author and blogger) are putting themselves out there to be criticized.

--Confused/Afraid!

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message 5: by [Jessica](#)
[Jul 13, 2011 08:00pm](#)



But...I agree with Agnes. This is not a workshop. The book's been published, she read it and had a reaction to it. It's wrong for the author to come in and defend/explain each point.

Let it be.

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message 6: by [Agnes](#) (last edited Jul 13, 2011 11:24pm) - [rated it 2 stars](#)
[Jul 13, 2011 08:15pm](#)



Jesus,

The only reason I reviewed this book is because I received it through Good Reads First Reads

program and we are asked to review these books. If I had picked this up at a bookstore I likely would not have taken the time to review it.

Yes, this is a social site and I have engaged in many thought provoking discussions with other readers about books I've hated and books I've loved. However, there is a huge difference between engaging in a conversation with another reader versus an author coming in to try and explain to the reader that their 'review' didn't meet their personal qualifications for being considered a review, or, as you put it, 'valuable cultural dialogue'. When the author comes in and tries to explain how a reader should have felt about their protagonist, well, it's kind of gross.

You should stop doing that.

Second of all, I think JAG is an asshole not just because of those two excerpts I posted. I added them to my review to serve as examples - not to sum up 100% of the problem. I found him to be an asshole. You can disagree but, like your author / small press publisher pal was trying to explain to you, you're not in a position to judge how others will view the guy. He lies to everyone throughout the entire book and he is completely full of himself. I thought it was annoying. I found him to be annoying. I didn't like him. And, yes, I also thought he was an asshole. You can argue with me all you want about the various reasons that you don't think he's an asshole but each reader is going to take their own feelings away from your work. You don't get to control how others read your words, you don't get to control how others feel about your work and you don't get to control all conversations that people have about your work. It really is gross to see you try.

You should stop doing that.

Finally, I would like to point out that I make my living as a writer. I don't have 20 years of experience but I do work with a wide variety of private clients, editors and other writers. When someone points out something in my work that has been taken differently than I'd intended, I consider that to be a failure on my part. I don't blame the reader. I do not respond by telling people that they should have taken it another way or why their opinion is incorrect. I take a moment to think about my work and whether or not I could have done a better job getting my point across or affecting the reader in the way I'd intended. It is not the job of the reader to sit around and parse your language to try and see past what was written in order to determine what you were trying to do. You act like your intentions should have some bearing on my reading. It really is gross.

You should stop doing that.

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message 7: by [Jesus](#) (last edited Jul 14, 2011 09:24am) - [rated it 5 stars](#)
[Jul 14, 2011 01:21am](#)



I'm impressed by the word "gross." I hear what you're saying and I appreciate your position. I don't agree.

I'm not trying to influence your reaction to the story. I realize words in the world will be interpreted however they are. I'm OK with that.

I appreciate Melanie's position as well.

It's all about dialogue for me. If you're gonna talk, then talk and talk back. I'm not expecting anything. I'm just saying if you're going to say something... and then...

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message 8: by [Jesus](#) - [rated it 5 stars](#)
[Jul 14, 2011 01:25am](#)



melanie: who's attacking? what's the difference between response and attack? react?

jessica? if someone stepped up in your face and... what would you do? what if the facts were wrong?

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message 9: by [Jessica](#)
[Jul 14, 2011 03:15am](#)



If the facts were wrong, I might try to correct them.

But are we talking facts here? Are we not discussing Agnes's impressions? There is no way to correct that. It's a losing battle.

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message 10: by [Melanie](#)
[Jul 14, 2011 05:37am](#)



I think by attack I mean that you proceeded to correct someone's review and then respond by posting a compilation of favorable reviews of the book to prove how right you are.

I think Ms. Treat is right. It might be best to remove yourself from the situation and let other readers respond to Ms. Agnes's review. If you have faith in the quality of your work, have faith in your reader!

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message 11: by [Jessica](#) (last edited Jul 14, 2011 05:54am)
[Jul 14, 2011 05:45am](#)



yes, faith in the reader(s) as Melanie says, but also faith in the reviewing process. Just as with published reviews, I think readers on goodreads can tell when a reviewer has a personal bias, a personal antipathy to the work, its style or theme, and when a review is fair-minded. In other words, we're capable of making up our own minds and don't need the author there to always guide us.

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message 12: by [David](#)
[Jul 14, 2011 05:58am](#)



Congratulations, Jesus, you've made my list of "Authors whom I will never read because they've demonstrated themselves to be insecure assholes in their response to negative reviews."

Waffle, warble, and justify all you like about "social networking" and "dialog," but the fact is that you got a review you didn't like and decided to go after the reviewer.

Keep it up and you risk becoming the next author-wank story that explodes across the Internet.

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message 13: by [Jesus](#) - [rated it 5 stars](#)
[Jul 14, 2011 09:36am](#)



It's not about "going after the reviewer," but challenging the review. It's not about positive v. negative, but... I've already explained my position.

It seems like conversation about the text is of less interest than conversation about the conversation or telling me I shouldn't be engaging in it. Points taken.

I guess I just don't know why people review on Goodreads then. I've written stuff on here to tell others about a certain type of book they might like, to try to articulate what it's about to gain more insight myself, or to join a conversation about a text. Otherwise... what's the point?

I have to hit the road again now with potentially limited Internet connects. Apologies to those who were upset by this thread. I will be thinking about what you're saying about staying out of the mix.

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message 14: by [Agnes](#) - [rated it 2 stars](#)
[Jul 14, 2011 09:44am](#)



The point of this site is to discuss books with other readers. As I explained in a past comment, there is a huge difference between discussing a book with another reader, who is coming at it from the same place you are, compared to having an author come in and talk down to you.

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message 15: by [Jesus](#) - [rated it 5 stars](#)
[Jul 14, 2011 09:55am](#)



Did not mean to talk down to you, Agnes, which I why I tried to make clear my position and offered the perspectives of others.

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message 16: by [Brandon](#)
[16 hours, 14 min ago](#)



Jesus, you really need to climb down from that fucking cross. And yes, asshole I do "mean to talk down to you". Complaining in the comment section to the author because you didn't like your review deserves the exact the opposite of respect which is hopefully being conveyed to you right now. Get fucked.

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