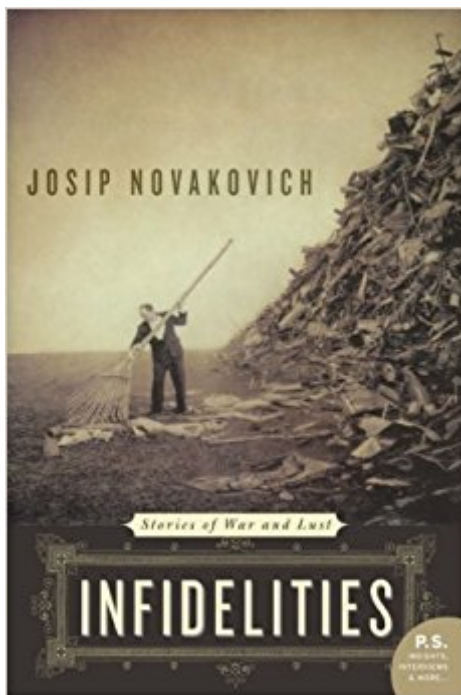


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Infidelities: Stories Of War And Lust



Synopsis

Tragicomedy of the highest order, this stellar collection is Croatian writer Novakovich's best ever. Hailed as one of the best short story writers of the 1990s, Josip Novakovich was praised by the New York Times for writing fiction that has "the crackle of authenticity, like the bite of breaking glass." In his new collection, he explores a war-torn Balkan world in which a schoolchild's innocence evaporates in a puff of cannon smoke, lust replaces love, and the joy of survival overrides all other pleasures. As Serb, Croat, and Bosnian Muslim armies clash in the cities and countryside of the former Yugoslavia, it's hard to tell the front lines from the home front. The characters in *Infidelities*—soldiers and civilians alike—are caught in the ridiculous, often cruelly whimsical contradictions of war and the paranoia and folly of those who conduct it. In "Ribs," a Croatian woman whose husband has already been taken by the war will go to any length to keep her son out of the army, including sleeping with the draft officer, a tryst that leads to an unexpected, and disturbing, spiritual vision. A Buddhist soldier in the Bosnian Muslim military is

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Customer Reviews

The stories in *Infidelities* entwine the themes of war and lust, showing how people cope with the reality of tragedy by seeking out relationships, however fleeting, passionate or even destructive. Novakovich illustrates this predominantly through the wars dividing the Balkans, as well as through the refugees, Serbs, Croats, and Muslims, coming together in immigrant neighborhoods in the States. One of the most poignant stories in the collection is "59th Parallel," about a man riding the

New York City subway in the aftermath of 9/11. Whether the theme be war or merely the tragedy of growing old, each story reins chaos to get to the deepest, lowest, moment of the characters' desiring, wanting to do what's right and failing to, flailing for reason, losing all sense of it, and maybe for just a moment feeling that there's a reason for being. In the story "Tchaikovsky's Bust," a married man is distraught over not pursuing a beautiful woman's advances and discovers contentment in his three-year-old daughter's passion for life. Novakovich infuses each story with new and startling perception and the urgency of lost time, staying true to life when life is marked by transformation which needs to be shared with other people if for no other reason than to look back and laugh. Many of the characters in *Infidelities* want the unattainable; they want to be free of pain, or worse, painful memories, to feel new, or at least whole again. A heart transplant is the subject of "A Purple Story," in which a man who's low on time tries to bribe his way to the front of a long waiting list. In "Snow Powder," a young boy who becomes chummy with a camp of soldiers is given the chance to get revenge on the kids who tease him.

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