



Barack Obama is as fine a writer as they come. It is not merely that this book avoids being ponderous, as might be expected, even forgiven, of a hefty memoir, but that it is nearly always pleasurable to read, sentence by sentence, the prose gorgeous in places, the detail granular and vivid ... His focus is more political than personal, but when he does write about his family it is with a beauty close to nostalgia ... There is a romanticism, a current of almost-melancholy in his literary vision ... Obama's thoughtfulness is obvious to anyone who has observed his political career, but in this book he lays himself open to self-questioning. And what savage self-questioning ... It is fair to say this: not for Barack Obama the unexamined life. But how much of this is a defensive crouch, a bid to put himself down before others can? ... The rare moment when he does take credit, arguing that his recovery act made the American financial system bounce back faster than any nation's in history with a similar substantial shock, has a dissonant echo for being so unusual ...

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