

COLUMBIA JOURNAL OF LITERARY CRITICISM • ISSUE XXX 2023

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Q J L O

2023

ISSUE XXX

“MEMORY”

REVIEWS OF:

- WITCHES
- BLEED RED
- MA AND ME
- YESTERDAY
- CIVILIZATIONS
- THE EMPLOYEES
- NEGATIVE SPACE
- LE JEUNE HOMME
- DREAMING OF YOU
- THE WHITE MOSQUE
- LET THERE BE LIGHT
- WILLFUL DISREGARD
- DEMON COPPERHEAD
- THREE DAYS OF HAPPINESS
- BEASTS AT EVERY THRESHOLD
- PARIS IS A PARTY, PARIS IS A GHOST
- A SUMMER DAY IN THE COMPANY OF GHOSTS

6/20

6/15

6/12

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6/4

The background of the cover is a dark, almost black, surface with a complex, wavy, metallic texture. This texture resembles the surface of a liquid metal or a highly polished, curved metal plate, with numerous highlights and shadows that create a sense of depth and movement. A prominent vertical stripe of a vibrant blue color runs down the right side of the image, partially overlapping the text. The overall aesthetic is modern and sophisticated.

ISSUE XXX • 2023

COLUMBIA  
JOURNAL OF  
LITERARY  
CRITICISM



# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR:

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The pieces published in our inaugural Reviews issue are a testament to the artistry and verve of our current editorial cohort. It was the first time in the journal's history that we attempted to publish an anthology of our writer's pieces: the idea was intimidating in its idealism and unsettled logistical concerns. Moreover, the arrival of new members meant untested club dynamics; the trust nurtured in previous semesters of CJLC had to be reestablished, a daunting undertaking.

We recalled these concerns fondly when compiling the reviews for this issue: despite the challenges that the semester undoubtedly posed, the members put a lot of love into working through these changes as a team.

Perhaps it was fitting, ultimately, for this issue's theme to be Memory. "Remembrance of things past is not necessarily the remembrance of things as they were," Marcel Proust wrote in his magnum opus, *In Search of Lost Time*. The unifying theme of this seven-volume collection is the failure of memory as a tool to reconstruct our past. In this anthology, our writers echo and develop this argument in their reviews: in her review of Melissa Lozada-Oliva's poetry collection *Dreaming of You*, Paulina Rodriguez connects the skewed public memory of the cultural icon Selena Quintanilla to the writer's attempt to preserve Quintanilla's humanity while also using her as a plot device in her poems. When pondering the structure of David Hoon Kim's *Paris is a Party, Paris is a Ghost*, Jiwoo Moon observes that the main character Henrik uses the memory of his deceased girlfriend Fumiko as an organizing principle in his life: the book is divided into the parts "Fumiko," "Before Fumiko," and "After Fumiko," demonstrating that his psyche is at the complete mercy of her memory.

Memory is also used creatively in B.R. Yaeger's *Negative Space*, with Gina Brown noting that the book diverged from traditional young-adult fiction through its disorienting use of perspective. "It becomes unclear whose memories are being relayed to the reader," Gina writes. "...Whose perspective can we trust?" Venturing into cultural memory, Rose Clubok extends the issue's theme to encompass cultural memory, arguing that historical imagination does little to impinge on current societal ills in her review of Lauren Binet's *Civilization*.

We are excited to bring you this first issue of our Reviews series, which also marks the twentieth anniversary of our journal. Thank you to our editors Aristotle X and Corinna Akari Singer for their outstanding layout of this issue, and thank you to our members for the thoughtful and intelligent pieces that they produced this semester. This journal has changed a lot in the past couple of years, but its future has never looked brighter.

Sincerely,

*Annelie Hyatt*

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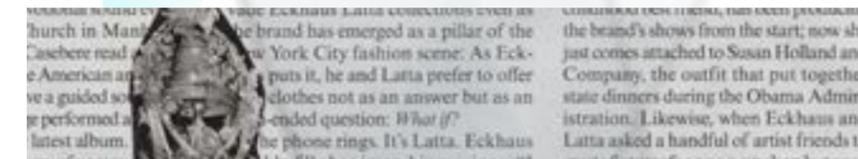
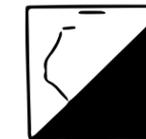
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# Le jeune homme

by Annie Ernaux

Annie Ernaux returns to the themes of passion, memory, and writing in *Le jeune homme*, which translates to “The Young Man” in English. In under 40 pages, Ernaux recounts her relationship with a young man 30 years her junior. She takes a frank look at this relationship, interweaving a personal story with an impersonal writing style. The man to whom the title of the book refers is a university student studying in Rouen, living across from the Hotel Dieu which Ernaux had frequented following her illegal abortion in the sixties. She tells how they return to her college-day haunts together, how she feels young again with him. But she also talks about a disgusted, even disdainful eye that is cast upon them when they are in public. If the roles were reversed, Ernaux writes, these looks would be different. If it is acceptable for an older man to have a relationship with a woman younger than him, this is not the case for the inverse. Indeed, as the back cover explains, the relationship turns her back into the “scandalous girl” that she was in her youth—paradoxically through the fact of her older age.

“He tore me from my generation, but I didn’t belong to his,” writes Ernaux. The relationship seems to create a space in which she is neither her partner’s age nor her own. But while this man’s youth brings out her seniority, he is also a mirror in which Ernaux sees a reflection of herself in her younger days. With him she is able to traverse all the ages of life, her lover as the “bearer of the

memory” of her “first world.” Through their relationship, she travels across time, reliving the memories of a youth that has already run out.

Thus Ernaux sets up a game of mirrors between author, memory, and the young man himself. Is the youth that is embodied in her lover something that can be resuscitated or re-activated? Or is the relationship simply a means for the author to imagine herself young again, not a revival but an exhuming of memories that ought to be left in their time? Whatever one reads the answer to be, Ernaux represents a struggle we all must come to face: that one must admit to oneself that one does not want to grow old.

Emerging with clarity from the text, then, is the issue of writing, and our tendency to try to capture with it youth or of time itself. “If I don’t write them down, things don’t go all the way, they have only been lived,” she announces in the epigraph of the text. In the first pages again, she touches on this problem of writing, recounting the violent wait for sexual climax as a confirmation that in fact the most superior climax is that of writing a book. Maybe it was this desire for literary climax, she considers, which made her partake in the relationship in the first place. By the end of the short book, she confirms this notion. As incarnated in the book itself, writing is, for Ernaux, ultimately the most long-lasting—and perhaps the only enduring—pleasure.

And yet the exercise of writing appears

futile before the impossibly ephemeral nature of her subject matter—memory. Between these mirrors each lover sees in the other is the protagonist of the story hiding in plain sight: that of memory, the memory Ernaux tries to chase down. A master of narrative, Ernaux must become the Pygmalion of both the love story and of her memory itself in order to recount these events.

Perhaps this might explain why the book is so short, from certain perspectives even scandalously so. I read it in a few hours and wondered if what I initially felt was a sense of incompleteness to the text, that something was missing. Ernaux is laconic, her pages sparse. But therein may lie the very truth of the text. The brevity of the text

“BETWEEN THESE  
MIRRORS EACH LOVER  
SEES IN THE OTHER IS  
THE PROTAGONIST OF  
THE STORY HIDING IN  
PLAIN SIGHT...”

almost seems to mirror the ephemeral nature of memory itself. Her succinct prose does not seek to draw out time but to let it pass. Her recollection of the passion, candid with its suffering of the manipulations and lacunas of memory, is as brief and as dazzling as a sudden flash of light. Ernaux capitulates before the impossibility of preserving memory, writing a text that is beautiful in its honesty.

Lulu Fleming-Benite



POSTCARD FROM THE  
SUNKEN FOLK  
BY DIEGO ANTONIO PLAZA  
HOMISTON

# A Summer Day in the Company of Ghosts

by Wang Yin

Published by New York Review Books' Poets series in August 2022, *A Summer Day in the Company of Ghosts* is a new bilingual collection of Shanghai poet Wang Yin (王寅)'s poetry from 1980s to recent years, the original Chinese text accompanied by Andrea Lingenfelter's English translation.

"A summer day in the company of ghosts / My wildly beating heart fills with anguish." From the very first glance, Wang Yin's poetry is rife with contradictions and oppositions, juxtaposing the hot and the cold, the passionate and the painful. Looking at poetry as a site where contradictions experienced in life are best understood by their subtleties is key to reading Wang Yin's writing, who excels in assembling imageries that don't seem to fit, verbalizing ambiguous feelings and emotions:

*There's sunlight in this voice  
There's a song in these bones  
There's a transparent gap in this lamplight  
There's rain in this red dress  
and blood in this dance*

This is the first stanza of the poem "灰光灯" ("Limelight/Greylight"), which also lends the title to a collection of Wang's poetry published in China in 2015. In the Translator's Note, Andrea Lingenfelter mentions the Chinese word which means "limelight" is a compound word that contains "grayness" and "light", hence the

"greylight" in the title to keep this meaning. She writes, "Wang Yin was captivated by the paradoxical ambiguity embodied by this image as a source of both light and shadow—a light that contains darkness."

The paradoxical ambiguity that Lingenfelter describes preserves contradictions as an essential part of the human experience. This is manifested through the poet's unique poetic style of both proximity and distance: in Wang Yin's poetry, compassion is conveyed through a restrained voice, as he distances himself from the immediate site of happenings, while still engaging with them through his poetic language: "After peeling an apple / I heard a distant apple tree / topple with a crash." In three simple lines, Wang manages to connect the quotidian, trivial event of the peeling of an apple, to the metaphorical, distant toppling of an apple tree. Carried out with an elegant, calm, and detached voice, the poem leaves a lingering aftertaste of feelings hard to decipher.

This sense of distance in his voice brings out another central theme in Wang's poetry: "untimeliness"—the contradiction of time, and in particular the poet's incompatibility with the present. "You tell me you miss those / slow-paced days of the past / the equally leisurely pace of bicycles / and leaky wristwatches." In his poetry, especially the more recent poems, Wang writes frequently about the past or the faraway, regarding himself as untimely or



out-of-place with his present here-and-now: "We're both out of step with the times."

Oftentimes, these feelings culminate in both frustration as well as a determination to still go back to what's unretrievable now: "The headless fish and seashells flung / to the shore can never return to the sea." His mind constantly flies from the present to a time in history, or a place in a distant land, spaces and times that he left behind but can't stop looking back to: "like past events you don't remember / until someone mentions them, like bullets / piercing the body of a gazelle."

In a poem titled "The Task of the Poet, Written in Vermont After Robert Bly," he expresses his vision of poetry as a task to resist delving into the immediate local, but instead write about what's years and miles away:

*I shouldn't write the poems I haven't gotten around to writing yet  
Or poems about this place  
Instead, I should open my ears and listen  
To the cracking of iron  
Thousands of miles away*

This situates Wang Yin, who is commonly classified as a post-Misty poet, in the Chinese poetic tradition that seems to always go back to the idea of "looking back," or a sentimentality of nostalgia. Although written in various foreign cities, influenced by and referring to foreign literatures and cultures, writing always seems to take him

back to somewhere that he was familiar with, where he can settle both his responsibilities as a (Chinese) poet and his personal nostalgia. His poetry maybe should be read as "just an untimely pause / a drop of rain inside a raindrop," through which he approaches the past, feelings, and memories, without fully mastering them or getting there.

The sense of contradiction and ambiguity in his poetry can then perhaps be seen as a part of Wang's poetic project to refuse the elucidating of things and resist certainty and rigidity of utterances. A great part of this effect owes to the obscurity of language itself, as a line goes—"you've started to love obscure words." This obscurity is achieved through the Chinese language's unique potential of staying obscure and inviting multiple interpretations... [cont. next page]



“THE OBSCURITY RETAINED BY THE CHINESE LANGUAGE  
TURNS THE POEMS INTO AN OPEN, UNDEFINED SPACE,  
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NEVER TO BE FULLY GRASPED.”

A line as simple as “秋天凋落的头发” can be interpreted as “autumn’s withered hair,” “withered hair in autumn,” or “hair that withers in autumn.” The obscurity retained by the Chinese language turns the poems into an open, undefined space, filled with only sentiments floating in the air, never to be fully grasped. This indeterminacy embedded in the Chinese language is unavoidably hindered slightly when translated into English—not even taking into consideration the several instances where mistranslation happens. This means that for readers who can’t read Chinese, the experience of experiencing Wang Yin’s poetry will have to be compromised to a certain extent.

Nonetheless, while taking it into consideration, this should not discourage you from reading this collection: despite what’s lost in translation, the overflowing sentiments in Wang’s poetry still manage to shine through in English. As contemporary Chinese poetry doesn’t get translated and published internationally so often, this is an opportunity to enter the realm of contemporary Chinese poetry that you should not miss.

Lucia Cao



**UNTITLED**  
**BY LUCIA SANTOS**

# Beasts at Every Threshold

by Natalie Wee

*Beasts at Every Threshold*, Natalie Wee's sophomore collection, is overflowing with myth and magic against a backdrop of pop-culture-meets-folklore. With careful control, Wee blurs the borders between beast and human with her hybrid form that draws from prose and poetry alike, combining to explore survival and hope in spaces where both seem lost. By the end of her collection, Wee breathes new meaning and perspective into the interconnection of diaspora and queerness.

Wee's collection has two sections: "Thresh" and "Hold" both experiment with the white space of the page to destabilize a linear narrative. Wee's line breaks, indents, and even flow charts call attention to what takes up space amid what is left unsaid. Poems from the first section "Thresh" feature playful allusions to pop culture, such as "Self-Portrait as Monster Dating Sim." The poem is demarcated as a dating simulator to inject new meaning to familiar questions. The choose-your-own-adventure style offers readers branching paths. A style which necessitates a second reading to explore the paths left unchosen. The last line asks: "And how long have you been lonely?" before echoing Wee's first answer: "Long enough to split the first echo." In the second section "Hold," Wee includes a similar experiment in self-portraiture: "Self-Portrait as Beast Index." Formatted as a two-page crossword, the poem lists monsters and beasts ranging from the hulijing to the crane. Clues like,

"yes, we are woodwind whittled through with life" ("dragon") and "how each cry, barely audible, escapes the insect that made it" ("banshee") invite the reader to play, dwelling on the ways Wee breathes new life into each creature's histories.

Pop culture becomes folklore as Wee draws from the worlds of *Avatar: Legend of Korra*, Phoebe Bridgers, Wong Kar-Wai, and others. Wee's playing with tenets of pop culture ask us to consider conviviality seriously – that the act of play might also be an act of archival, of queering the ways we remember ourselves, and injecting counternarratives into some of the most memorable gems that we grew up with. Wee emphasizes her focus on pop culture in "Self-Portrait as Pop Culture Reference," which traces her upbringing, from her birth, against a backdrop of movie stars and past lovers. She writes, "The first man I loved named me after a dead American & crushed childhood into a flock of apologies." Wee describes the violence of forgetting embedded in queer memory, and confronts her memory in a beautiful whirlwind-investigation of ideology. "En Route to the Sixth Station, Chihiro Counts the Clouds" draws from the Studio Ghibli film *Spirited Away*, directed by Hayao Miyazaki, to transport readers through childhood movies and their cultural impact amid details of "Y2K pink & baby blue"—her attention to detail never feels overwhelming. Instead, she challenges our pre-existing conceptions of pop culture as



pure superficiality.

Wee's writing is full of hope with an unflinching confrontation of violence and power. Wee showcases her masterful use of rhythm in "Phoning Home to Tell My Grandmother I Survived a Hate Crime." As dialogue and timelines blur together, carefully-inserted slashes form an image that is always changing, controlled in her momentum, but relentless in her assertion of identity, one that resists the assimilating call of citizenship from the nation-state: "I am not / a citizen / crossed all that water / just to live like a dog." Even in the spaces where Wee does not write anything, her negative space speaks volumes. In "After the Atlanta Spa Shootings, We Sat in a Field," Wee reckons with the empty silence between each of her lines, white space bridging hurt, rage, and an unceasing demand for joy from ourselves. Towards the end of her poem, she leaves a crucial reminder of joy's inseparable role in survival to her readers:

"If there's anything

that still surprises me

it's the fact joy too has weight."

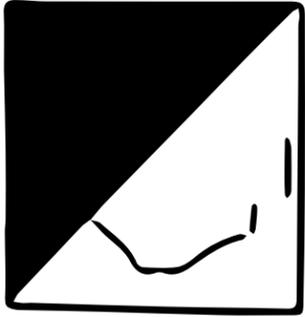
Wee's collection moves worlds and breaks borders, sculpting new landscapes from the rubble of the old. In a genealogical weaving of myth and history, she forms images of beastliness from identities

relegated as "other." While reading *Beasts at Every Threshold*, subjects become fluid, emptiness forms demands, and any semblance of static ontology is transformed into something new and full of hope. Wee points us inward to reckon with everything we've lost, and asks us to find survival. With her words as a guide, I find joy and beauty in the beast.

“WEE BLURS THE  
BORDERS BETWEEN  
BEAST AND HUMAN WITH  
HER HYBRID FORM THAT  
DRAWS FROM PROSE  
AND POETRY ALIKE,  
COMBINING TO EXPLORE  
SURVIVAL AND HOPE IN  
SPACES WHERE BOTH  
SEEM LOST.”

Aristotle X





# Witches

by Brenda Lozano  
translated by Heather Cleary

## TW: Death, Rape, Violence

“All women are born with a bit of *bruja* in them, for protection,” Brenda Lozano asserts in her new fictional memoir *Witches*, a story of gender-based violence, sisterhood, and solidarity. *Witches* renews the experimental style and fragmented form of Lozano’s previous novel, *Loop*, as Lozano recounts the lives of Zoe and Feliciana, two Mexican women from vastly different worlds. Zoe, a young urban journalist, and Feliciana, an old *curandera* (healer) from a remote village, lead extremely dissimilar lives. However, as Zoe interviews Feliciana about a recent murder, she finds that they share a similar experience of womanhood. Through their contrasts, *Witches* accentuates womanhood as a powerful force capable of bridging the differences between women. Like Zoe states, “you can’t really know another woman until you know yourself,” *Witches* encourages vulnerable self-introspection and communication with fellow women as an act of solidarity.

In a twist to the memoir genre, Lozano provides us not one, but two memoirs in one as the chapters of *Witches* alternate without warning between the perspectives of Zoe and Feliciana. The chapters containing Zoe’s perspective exhibit traditional and clean writing while Feliciana’s takes on a repetitive and run-on form that deviates from syntactic conventions and lacks dialogue.

During the interview, Feliciana chronologically recalls memories from her

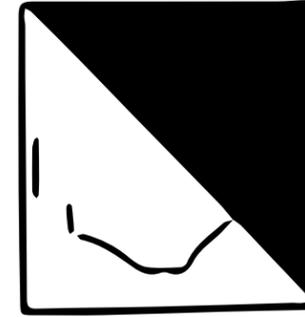
life. Her memories recreate rural Mexico and extrapolate on the general condition of women under poverty and patriarchy. Feliciana’s life is filled with tragedy, from the death of her parents to the adultery and bloody murder of her husband. Although Feliciana grows in a constraining environment that prohibits idleness, these constraints make her into a strong matriarch who goes on to lead a primarily female household. Most importantly, Feliciana becomes a cornerstone of her community when she begins pursuing her path as a *curandera* and conducts healing ceremonies with the tools of her ancestors: the Language, the Book, and the mountain’s psychedelic mushrooms. The psilocybin mushrooms that grow on the mountain are crucial to Feliciana’s healing ceremonies. These mushrooms first introduce Feliciana to her long but dying lineage of *curanderos*, in which healing abilities were for men only. As the first female *curandera* in her family, Feliciana struggles to be taken seriously.

Paloma, Feliciana’s cousin and the only other *curandera* teaches Feliciana how to use herbs and mushrooms to heal emotional wounds. Paloma’s subsequent murder drives the plot as the interview slowly reveals the circumstances of her death. Paloma was a Muxe, a third-gender identity recognized in Oaxaca for women who were assigned male at birth. Due to her gender deviance, Paloma frequently entered into self-destructive relationships with men. When one of Paloma’s amorous encounters goes wrong,

she is murdered. Through Paloma’s murder and Feliciana’s recollection of memories, Lozano articulates the consequences of male violence and unchecked toxic masculinity.

When the chapters turn into Zoe’s perspective, we find that urban and progressive cities are no better for women than the traditional Mexican values of rural areas. Zoe’s life is equally tumultuous as she deals with her father’s death, a semi-psychic mother, a troublemaker sister, and many terrible boyfriends. Despite her introverted nature, Zoe thrives as a smart woman, graduates college, and forms a family. Lozano characterizes Zoe as a direct byproduct of the relationships she has with other women, mainly her mother, sister, and finally, Feliciana. Lozano shows how the bonds between women do not form automatically but are slowly cultivated as women empathize and help each other. Above all, Zoe’s story drives home how bonds form between women amidst the strains of gender norms and violence.

In *Witches*, a large majority of male characters partake in some form of violence against women. At worst, it inflicts physical wounds and psychological distress, and at best, it simmers within men as anger that threatens to explode at any given time. Lozano does not shy away from the dark reality that women and gender-conforming people face everyday at the hands of men. She recounts the financial and emotional abuses of Feliciana’s husband who turns



alcoholic and later cheats with a younger woman whom he plans to run away with, much like Zoe’s boyfriend who flees when Zoe becomes pregnant. Feliciana’s career as a *curandera* is also not safe as she faces the same form of male anger from One Eyed Tadeo, who shoots her with a rifle out of jealousy. As a whole, *Witches* is a recollection and reminder of the many forms that violence against women can take. Sometimes gender-based violence is subtle and acceptable, hidden under the guise of traditional gender norms. Other times it manifests blatantly as rape and femicide. Lozano’s story shows how all forms of violence against women, subtle and obvious, are inherently linked under the patriarchy.

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Although *Witches* contains many heavy topics, Lozano depicts them realistically and empathically, always prioritizing the the woman’s perspective. For example, sexual harassment and rape are fairly common amongst all female characters, including Zoe’s sister and Feliciana’s sister who are

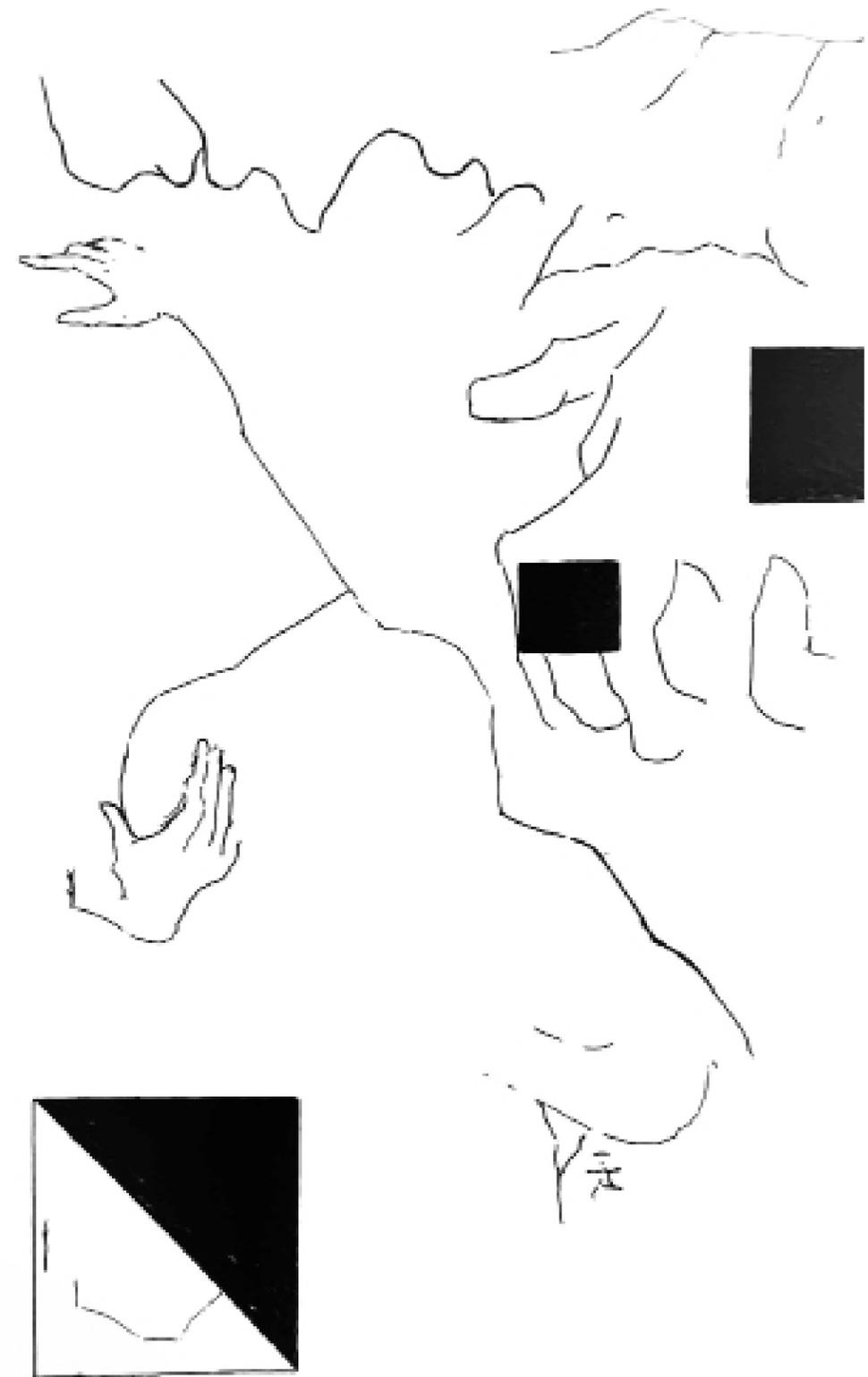
both raped at a young age. When Feliciana's sister is raped, Feliciana recalls that "that wretch who was telling her in her ear...that she was going to remember him on her wedding night, that she was going to remember how big he was...he told her many times that she would always remember him." Lozano's writing reveals the nuances of the effects of violence against women—rape is not an isolated and tragic occurrence, but a life-changing event that has repercussions on women's mental health and lives. Such effects of male violence might seem obvious, but Lozano reminds us of the specific ways it manifests and how prominent they are among women. Ultimately, no matter how different Feliciana and Zoe are, or how different women are, male violence permeates into every sphere of their lives: domestic, financial, professional, and even into their mind and memories.

*Witches* is an ironic book, fragmented yet insisting on the unity of everything; it treats time as a single entity and women as a collective. Parallels and opposites exist everywhere: urban and rural, magic and reality, past and present, male and female. Although Lozano writes each woman's voice differently and separates their stories in alternating chapters, she does not label the speaker, leaving it to the reader to decipher each woman's voice.

This structure can be confusing at first, but it is a first-hand demonstration of the differences between women and their simultaneous unity. This kind of feminist unity ties the book's ending under a call for solidarity among women. Ultimately, *Witches* encourages women to unveil their memories, speak their stories, realize their similarities, and appreciate their differences. However, it is not enough to simply acknowledge other women. Women must acknowledge the cause of their perils: the patriarchy and male violence. By recounting Feliciana and Zoe's life story, *Witches* is an

example of the first steps women can take against male violence—speak out and let others hear.

Eli Andrade



**LEARNING TO LOVE FAILURE  
IN IMITATION  
BY DIEGO ANTONIO PLAZA  
HOMISTON**

# Dreaming of You

by Melissa Lozada-Olivia

## “MELISSA KNOWS THE STORY, BUT SHE’S CHANGING THE STORY.”

So explains the narrative chorus in *Dreaming of You*, poet Melissa Lozada-Olivia’s debut novel in verse. The novel follows Melissa—a fictionalized version of the author—on a supernatural, and at times absurd, journey: she magically resurrects singer and cultural icon Selena Quintanilla to serve as a sidekick and spiritual guide on her last-ditch quest to make sense of her own identity as a woman, a Latina, and an artist. In the process, Lozada-Olivia poses compelling questions about identity and the nature of celebrity. Because our collective memory of Selena has existed longer than she was ever a person, is that memory really of Selena, or rather of a fiction molded to fit each fan’s projection? Does her legacy leave room for her humanity?

On one hand, *Dreaming of You* is a deeply intimate narrative. Within many of the novel’s more than 65 poems, Lozada-Olivia’s verse feels both deeply personal and universal. There is no denying that she beautifully articulates complex reflections on writing, the self, and her own Latinidad as the American child of Guatemalan and

Colombian immigrants. On the other hand, unfortunately, Lozada-Olivia seems to believe she must claim ownership of another woman’s life and story in order to tell her own.

Many of the novel’s most poignant moments come when Lozada-Olivia seems to rip open the fictional Melissa, exposing her most vulnerable truths and giving readers a dramatic display of the hyper-self-aware, often isolated, and ever-evolving woman inside. “I’m Not A Virgin But,” which appears early in the collection, peels back Melissa’s layers through the lens of clever, hyperspecific cultural metaphors surrounding the Virgin Mary to reveal a fundamental, driving loneliness. Beyond this isolation, Melissa’s self-awareness and her deep-held concern with how she is perceived by others emerge as recurring themes throughout *Dreaming of You*, often leading to some of her most remarkable moments of introspection. In “I Try to Go On with My Life,” Lozada-Olivia writes, “My biggest fear is getting raped and murdered / and then getting ripped to shreds on the internet,” revealing at once an obsession with public image and a profound awareness of the messiness lying underneath her confession. Indeed, Lozada-Olivia does not shy away from writing a messy protagonist.

Lozada-Olivia also makes the striking choice to disrupt the main narrative structure of Melissa’s internal monologue with interludes from an expert, albeit

hypercritical chorus. This form guides the reader as they attempt to navigate the story of a sometimes unreliable and often morally-gray protagonist. Reminiscent of the titular “Mothers” in Brit Bennett’s debut novel, these collective narrators in *Dreaming of You* anchor the story with *chisme* (or gossip), making us as constantly aware of Melissa’s image as she is. It’s one of several inventive structural choices that gives the novel the potential to stand in a category of its own.

*Dreaming of You* adds Lozada-Olivia’s voice to an interesting established artistic conversation, one about the humanity we deny to public figures, particularly dead, tormented celebrity women. Certainly, there are moments throughout the novel where Lozada-Olivia approaches a compelling thesis, interrogating our collective sense of entitlement to the lives and legacies of celebrities we’ll never meet. The poem “Will We Ever Stop Crying About the Dead Star” is as much cultural criticism as poetry, a self-aware acknowledgment that, as Lozada writes, “We say we miss them but we don’t mean them / We mean the autumn we discovered them.” The famous dead, no longer around to speak for themselves, cease to be remembered for the people they actually were, remembered only for the service they provided in facilitating our own story.

In this regard, one of *Dreaming of You*’s strongest moments comes in “The Future is Lodged in the Female.” Lozada-Olivia’s tongue-in-cheek ode to celebrity worship blends satire with reflections on womanhood; she jokes, “honestly so sad that she’s dead but like, what if she lived

long enough to like a tweet from a pro-life organization idk?” In short, Lozada-Olivia knows the nature of celebrity is fucked.

To some extent, *Dreaming of You* is in on the joke—Lozada-Olivia seems to know that based on premise alone, she has set herself and the novel up for an impossible task. Often, she winks at the ridiculous expectation for deeply personal stories of marginalized authors to serve as larger reflections on their identities or communities as a whole. She knows *Dreaming of You* does not have to offer any profound answers to questions about gender, sexuality, Latinidad, or even writing, as long as it tells Melissa’s story authentically.

It comes as a disappointing surprise, then, when *Dreaming of You* ultimately falls into the very pattern it critiques: allowing Melissa to claim ownership of Selena’s story in order to tell her own. Most distressing, it stops short of allowing this fictionalized version of Selena the full extent of her humanity. Instead, Lozada-Olivia spends the length of the novel not quite sure whether her “Selena” is real or imagined. She dances around Quintanilla’s status as a cultural icon without extending a hand to the woman behind the curtain. Lozada-Olivia urges her readers to recognize Selena as a young woman—openhearted, exploited, and human—but spends most of the book treating her like a commodity, valuable only in terms of how she can facilitate Melissa’s own journey. Melissa walks up to Kim Kardashian in Marilyn Monroe’s dress and looks her right in the eye, then cuts off a lock of hair to keep in a museum of her own.

One could certainly argue that *Dreaming of You* does effectively critique the practice of simultaneously deifying and

dehumanizing our celebrities—that the use of the trope is meant to highlight the harm it causes; perhaps, even that the novel’s final act subverts the trope by effectively setting Selena free from this cycle. This optimism, however, grates against Lozada-Oliva’s self-insert protagonist, Melissa. If forcefully resurrecting Selena, who spent her life and death in the public eye, in order to serve one’s own interests ultimately serves only to replicate Selena’s exploitation, Lozada-Oliva seems uninterested in confronting that notion. Instead, Melissa gradually begins to adopt the violence of the author’s gaze, carrying out increasingly abusive acts against Selena as she becomes the focus of attention that Melissa believes should belong to her. For most of *Dreaming of You*, Lozada-Oliva — as Melissa, but perhaps more jarringly as the author — struggles to see anything beyond what’s going on in her own head, even when Selena herself is right under her nose.

At some points, Lozada-Oliva seems to treat the resurrected “Selena” as no more than a figment of Melissa’s imagination. Early on, her physical appearance is described as seeming closer to a hologram than a human being, and her voice at first comes out only in previously-recorded lines. However, *Dreaming of You* ensures we know this “Selena” is not actually imaginary, but a living, semi-autonomous being. She’s (almost) the same human who left this Earth in 1995, seen by her family and then by the rest of the world, and as a result, her resurrection makes her an even more explosive sensation than her original career. In a bizarre choice, Lozada-Oliva even concludes the novel by stepping away from Melissa’s narrative and into a number of alternate endings in which she imagines this Selena continuing her life, growing older, even raising children—albeit,

often ineptly. She cheats on her (real-life) husband with Johnny Depp, her (imagined) daughter struggles with addiction under the paparazzi’s watchful eye, she dies slowly and painfully of breast cancer, not necessarily old, but older. Perhaps an attempt on Lozada-Oliva’s part to humanize the woman she has treated as a commodity, this epilogue instead blurs the line between critical fabulation and self-insert fan-fiction and winds up in a muddy in-between. In that sense, perhaps it’s a fitting end to a novel that so brazenly lays claim to another woman’s life and story.

I’m reminded of Abraham Quintanilla, Selena’s father, and his recent decision to allow her teenage voice to be digitally aged to produce an album of new releases under the illusion that she is still alive to have recorded them. I wonder if *Dreaming of You* really accomplishes anything different. The novel’s “Selena” is no more real than the artificial voice on the record. She is not allowed her own feelings about her nonconsensual resurrection, nor her immediate return to the public eye. She seems to be alive and individual, but is so intimately linked to

Melissa’s personal journey that the attention she attracts quite literally strips Melissa of her body; the two women cannot exist at once. This “Selena,” who belongs entirely to Melissa, is the product of the muddled thesis at the heart of *Dreaming of You*, a novel not quite sure if it wants to offer up the singer’s legacy in a new light or exploit it all over again. *Dreaming of You* wants us to see that there are more sides to the woman everyone thinks they know—just as long as our eyes never leave Melissa.

Paulina Rodriguez



UNTITLED  
BY GINA BROWN



# The White Mosque

by Sofia Samatar

At the end of the nineteenth century, a flock of Mennonites embarked on an exodus from their settlement in Russia to Central Asia. Their preacher, Claas Epp Jr., worked tirelessly to evangelize his own prophecy, drawn from the Book of Daniel: Christ was to return on March 9, 1889, and he would arrive in the East. In their black clothes like crows, in covered wagons drawn by horses, the “Bride Community” plunged into the desert to await their Bridegroom. They ended up settling near Khiva, in present day Uzbekistan, where their village—Ak Metchet, “white mosque,” named for its whitewashed church—would outlast their foretold apocalypse by decades, remaining for 50 years.

Sofia Samatar remarks early on in her piercing new memoir, *The White Mosque*, that implausibility drew her to the story of the Great Trek—the ecstatic failure of the prophecy; the random juxtaposition of two sets of images that appear opposite to each other (Mennonites! in 1880s Uzbekistan!). It garners disbelief, amusement. Samatar, too, has implausible origins: her mother a Swiss Mennonite from North Dakota, teaching English while on mission; her father, a Muslim animal herder from the Somali desert, teaching Somali to the missionaries. It is the kind of story that requires explanation, that becomes by default a sort of party trick. To have your very existence provoke such a reaction is exhausting. But it also builds an affinity for strangeness, confusion, the

unlikely outcomes. “Beautiful error, radiant mistake!” So Samatar, suitcase stuffed with notes, joins a tour group, retracing the Mennonites’ journey, this time by bus.

“IF HOME-ACHE IS  
UNIVERSAL, HYBRIDITY  
MAKES IT VISIBLE.”

The tour is the throughline, our grounding path of linear chronology, and the chapters are organized by location. But these numbered segments are then shattered into vignettes that flit, freeform, across space and time with the alacrity of thought, branching outward. Afloat on Samtar’s prose, which has all the sensory pleasure of an illuminated manuscript, we visit the diaries of the Mennonite travelers; the cavalier travelogues of Swiss athlete-photographer Ella Maillart, who visited Ak Metchet in 1932; the work of Khudaybergen Divanov, father of Uzbek photography and cinema, taught as a child by a Mennonite photographer; the trip taken by Langston Hughes to Soviet Central Asia; the career of Irene Worth, American actress, diva, and descendant of the Bride Community Mennonites; episodes from *Martyrs Mirror*, the seventeenth-century

# "HOW DO WE ENTER THE STORIES OF OTHERS?"

crown piece of Mennonite literary canon; Samatar’s own girlhood in the 1980s at a Mennonite high school in Pennsylvania. At one point, describing her intersecting and contradictory identities, Samatar says she is “not so much a hybrid as a Rubik’s cube.” *The White Mosque* is a Rubik’s cube of a book—a memoir but also an intricately researched cultural history and a work of theory—a treatise on the question: “How do we enter the stories of others?” Can we, without violence? And afterward, how do we remember the violence and remember, too, the kindness and wonder present in the exchange, if only by accident?

The Mennonites are a people in continuous exile, fleeing persecution for their radical refusal to aid and abet war. Simultaneously, they are ambassadors of empire, bulwarks of exceptionalism, delivering the Bible, sewing machines, farming techniques, and good German hygiene to humble dwellers of the rugged steppes. In Somalia, in the 20th century, they sowed martyrdom in their hasty wake—Samatar describes her own origins as “apocalyptic.” What to make of a religion, a people, that mythologizes and missionizes its whiteness even as its very missionary efforts have fundamentally transformed its demographics? What to make of the sojourn East, of *the White Mosque*, precarious and fleeting in history? What kind of neighbors were the Mennonites, in the nebulous zone between refugee and settler-colonist? “I want

to rescue the story of the Great Trek,” says Samatar, listening to the tour guide lecture about the good fortune the Mennonites meant to Khiva, “but not at any cost.” Claas Epp Jr. drew inspiration from *Das Heimweh*, a novel by a German doctor named Heinrich Jung-Stilling, which Samatar reads on the bus. *Heimweh* translates to something like homesickness or nostalgia—literally “home-ache.” The young protagonist, witnessing an injustice, is struck by *Heimweh* in his childhood home, as one is struck for the first time by love. In search of “the house of the Father,” he finds refuge near Samarkand, in an invented valley called Oostenheim, the Home in the East. The book factored into Claas Epp Jr.’s calculations, which placed the Bride Community’s Oostenheim in the city of Shakhrisabz.

*The White Mosque* is possessed with home-ache. At first it presents a problem. But Samatar forges it into a theory. To be mixed-race sometimes feels like having the permanence of diasporic exile written across your face—thus the indignant rallying cry: “I’m not half anything!;” the embarrassing, desperate hunger to belong and to be whole. Near the start of the book, Samatar talks about her “magpie condition”—a piecemeal approach to life, an instinctive aversion to wholeness. Later, she quotes Theodor Adorno: “It is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home.” Through this lens, the magpie condition is a gift. If home-ache is universal, hybridity makes it visible.

It is only in the Bride Community's failures that Samatar finds relief from the totalizing narrative of missionary graciousness. They never made it to Shakhrisabz, the city they intended to reach. Ak Metchet, where they ended up instead, becomes "home as the site of transit, not ownership, a zone shot through with innumerable rays."

From another diaspora, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha writes, "Our destination is fixed on the perpetual motion of search" (Dictee, 1982). In a careful, circular manner, the book develops a magpie approach towards cultural exchange. How do we enter the story of others? Helplessly, Samatar suggests, in exile, brought to our knees by our own strangeness. The epigraph of *The White Mosque* is a quote from Mennonite historian John L. Ruth: "The story has become luminous." Samatar cracks the story open, a mosaic and a lantern. In between its shards comes the light.

Franziska Lee

“ T H E  
M A G P I E  
C O N D I T I O N I S A G I F T . ”



UNTITLED  
BY LUCIA SANTOS

# Paris is a Party, Paris is a Ghost

by David Hoon Kim

For Henrik Blatand in *Paris is a Party, Paris is a Ghost*, memory manifests physically. In this debut novel by David Hoon Kim, Henrik begins to see, sometimes converse with phantoms of his dead girlfriend, Fumiko. Henrik fumbles with guilt over her suicide and senses her presence throughout Paris—she has become his ghost. While the first section of the novel—originally published as “Sweetheart Sorrow” in *The New Yorker* in 2007—seems to establish Fumiko as the pivot of Henrik’s memory, she ceases to appear again until the novel’s final moments.

Fumiko essentially becomes a ghost for the reader, too. As the novel travels into Henrik’s past and future, she is referenced only through section titles that divide the story into three novella-esque portions: “Fumiko,” “Before Fumiko,” and “After Fumiko.” Fumiko establishes the structural bounds for not only Henrik’s life, but also for the reader’s physical experience of the novel. Even when Fumiko, the character, is absent within the plot, she acts as an ever-present overseer whose name manifests a material force; the mere utterance—or more appropriately, mere printing—of her name invokes the memories of the novel’s first section as well as the awareness of Henrik’s unaddressed trauma.

So, what’s in a name? And more broadly, what’s in language? For both Henrik and Kim, language is crucial. Henrik begins the novel as an aspiring translator

and eventually attends translation school to work between French and English, rather than his native Danish. Kim also studied in France at the Sorbonne and writes fiction in both French and English. Both writers are also Asian—Henrik is Japanese and adopted by Danes while Kim is Korean-born—and neither work professionally in their ancestral languages.

Henrik and Kim have made a choice in language, for to intentionally study and immerse yourself in a foreign language is to radically alter your identity. In an interview with *The New York Review*, Kim speaks of his experience studying in France as an outsider and notes influence from Akira Mizubayashi (a Japanese author who writes in French): “a language is something that exists outside of national borders: you can come and go as you please, without answering to any higher power or authority.” Essentially, language can be both a means of autonomy and secrecy—language can make you a ghost.

Language can also create escape. For Kim, French and English act as “mask[s]” for covering up English and Korean, respectively. Henrik notes similarly to Kim that “an unforeseeable side effect of communicating in a [foreign language] was that it allowed [him] to forget... to rename the world and everything in it.” He also describes the appeal of translation as “not having to churn out anything in the way of original thought,” as translation presents “the prospect of... temporarily escaping” his



own thoughts. Therefore, while it is true that language allows for escape—for ghosts, for abstraction—it is also true that it is a force to escape because of its relation to exhausting ‘original thought’ and its ability to bring you back to memory with a single word or name.

Henrik and Kim delight in the cover of language while sometimes shirking its relation to memory—though a foreign language might allow you to create new memories that are untouched by the past, the language you escape will, inevitably, bring you back. “Fumiko,” for example, acts as the defining landmark around which Henrik’s life expands. Language establishes something like a physical monument, but, of course, is neither permanent nor tangible. Thus, *Paris is a Party, Paris is a Ghost* is a novel in which language and memory are inextricably linked with relationship between the physical and metaphysical.

Henrik’s memory functions between the abstract and concrete throughout the novel. His experiences border on the supernatural as he witnesses specters of his dead girlfriend, the vanishing of restaurants, mind reading, missing thesis advisors, a group of intelligent crows, and the potential reincarnation of a French revolutionary. It is unsurprising that many deem the novel

a psychological thriller, given how these incidents feel inexplicable. But considering the speaker and author’s experiences as ghosts through language and memory, these moments lose their supernatural spark. Henrik and Kim have moved through life with no place to truly settle—they have been physical outsiders in their adopted homes of Paris (regardless of their proficiency in French) and have been distanced from their so-called motherlands. The novel, then, observes how existing constantly between language, between escape and inhabit, between abstract and concrete—existing as ghosts—can cause the paranormal to figure normalcy.

“LANGUAGE CAN  
MAKE YOU A GHOST.  
LANGUAGE CAN ALSO  
CREATE ESCAPE.”

Kim’s debut novel investigates memory as medium through a very specific and fixed perspective. While Henrik’s background and identity may initially feel unrelatable and isolated, I urge any reader to interrogate their own relationship with settlement or simply enjoy the precision of Kim’s sentences when experiencing the book. As a fellow ghost, I found this read not only entertaining but gratifying, and I look forward to reading more of Kim’s work.

Jiwoo Moon

# Civilizations: a Novel

by Laurent Binet



In Laurent Binet's *Civilizations: A Novel*, "The world was slipping off its axis." *Civilizations* tells the story of the world if the international power dynamics were shifted. What if the Vikings had come into contact with South American peoples earlier, immunizing them to the diseases that ultimately contributed to the decimation of their population? What if native people had captured Christopher Columbus before he could colonize them? What if the Incas had conquered Europe?

Binet interrogates how we think about empire, power, and historical memory. The main section of the book, which tells the story of the rise and fall of the Incan King Atahualpa's empire, is narrated from the Incan perspective. While in Western history books native peoples have often been characterized as "savage," this retelling portrays Christians as the savage ones—after all, the Christians whom the Inca came into contact with burned people at the stake and allowed serfs to starve. The book also brings to mind critical race theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings' argument about the universality of Western ideas. She writes that in the legal field, "some legal scholars might contend that the tort of fraud has always existed and that it is a component belonging to the universal system of right and wrong. This world-view tends to discount anything that is nontranscendent (historical), or contextual (socially constructed), or nonuniversal (specific) with the unscholarly labels of

"emotional,' 'literary,' 'personal,' or false.'" *Civilizations* similarly rejects the premise that everything Western is universal, and that there is only one way that power can be used. Atahualpa certainly uses violence and war in building his empire, but he also provides a welfare system that reallocates wealth. Binet contextualizes events and tactfully points out the contradictions between the conventional narratives of history and how it could be told if a different group had the chance to write it.

“WHY IS IT THAT IN A  
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The book also raises questions about style: How do we think about storytelling, about novels, and about the inevitability

of history? The first section of the book is written in a style that feels similar to mythology or the Bible, while the main section is written more like a historical account. The main characters are often idolized by the narrator, and major events are told one after another, without the filler characteristic of novels. In fact, although the title includes the word "novel," *Civilizations* reads more like an epic poem or a history textbook, depending on the section. There also isn't much description of everyday life, which is another basic characteristic of novels. The lack of explanation of the details of everyday life makes the large-scale events seem random rather than destined. It seems as if anything could happen at any point. When analyzing historical events, it can be tempting to ascribe motivation or cause retroactively, but *Civilizations* is careful to portray the danger of attributing order to the past.

Although Binet tries to picture a different world and succeeds in the particulars, the overall arc of history is ultimately the same. Why is it that in a fictional retelling of history, there still must be empire, conquest, and subscription to Machiavellian principles? Even the positive changes, such as religious freedom coming to Europe centuries early, still follow this pattern of cultural domination: religious freedom is instituted, what's different is when and by whom. Why are these phenomena considered inevitable? Could it be that Binet

is so ingrained in his culture that he is limited in his ability to imagine other possibilities, indeed believing that certain things are historically universal? Perhaps Binet is only trying to make history recognizable to readers and maintains the basic structure of history so that the novel maintains a degree of "realism." While *Civilizations* does prompt readers to think critically about how we tell history, the ultimate lesson is that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Rose Clubok

# Ma and Me

by Putsata Reang



“There’s always hope, even if it’s just a little,” Putsata Reang concludes in her *New York Times Modern Love* column from 2016. She’s talking about her relationship with her Ma, newly fraught after Reang moved in with her girlfriend, April. Eight years later, Reang’s memoir *Ma and Me* charts the story that led to that fallout and has continued since, culminating in her and April’s marriage. Revealing insight into her Ma’s own upbringing, *Ma and Me* paints a portrait of generational trauma as sedimentary. In this story, the shadows of genocide and displacement build upon each other just as Ma is chiasmic to Me. “Trauma had been accruing inside me,” Reang writes, “some passed from Ma and Pa, and now [...] I was weighed down by the trauma I had collected on my own.”

Reang’s Ma fled the Khmer Rouge in 1975 with her husband, children, and extended family. On the boat leaving Cambodia, Reang was an infant and so sick she appeared dead. Resisting the captain’s orders to throw her off the boat to avoid spreading disease, Reang’s Ma pleaded that she was a Buddhist and had to bury her child on land. It was a miracle that Reang survived. Her and her family settled in the U.S. with the sponsorship of two local churches, such an anomaly in white Corvallis, Oregon that their arrival made front-page news. Reang grew up working class and became a journalist, successful enough to buy a house and send her parents on vacations. But as

she grew up she suffered with mental illness, struggled to meet her parents’ expectations, and ultimately came to a crossroads between living truthfully and her duties as a daughter. What could easily fall into a tragic American dream narrative and a vilification of refugee parents, Reang turns into a nuanced study of home, filial piety, and parenthood as a passage of both wounds and salves.

Reang’s Ma fled the Khmer Rouge in 1975 with her husband, children, and extended family. On the boat leaving Cambodia, Reang was an infant and so sick she appeared dead. Resisting the captain’s orders to throw her off the boat to avoid spreading disease, Reang’s Ma pleaded that she was a Buddhist and had to bury her child on land. It was a miracle that Reang survived. Her and her family settled in the U.S. with the sponsorship of two local churches, such an anomaly in white Corvallis, Oregon that their arrival made front-page news. Reang grew up working class and became a journalist, successful enough to buy a house and send her parents on vacations. But as she grew up she suffered with mental illness, struggled to meet her parents’ expectations, and ultimately came to a crossroads between living truthfully and her duties as a daughter. What could easily fall into a tragic American dream narrative and a vilification of refugee parents, Reang turns into a nuanced study of home, filial piety, and parenthood as a passage of both wounds and salves.

Reang writes that the trauma inflicted

upon her parents by the Cambodian genocide is “a constant shadow” cast across the lives of her and her siblings. It is also a constant shadow cast across the memoir, and yet Reang carves out moments for light. She recounts the exaggerated reflex for fleeing danger she inherited from her parents and how it chased her through cities, countries, and relationships. She explains how her Ma married a man to fulfill her duties to her own mother, and how Reang is now expected to do the same.

But she also talks about the foods her Ma taught her to make — salt-roasted, fileted, and pan-fried fish, pounded nuc mam, meat loaf, lasagna, spaghetti — and how they helped her cope when her Ma stopped calling. Reang’s Ma, or the imprint she left, serves to heal even when she herself is the offender. Trauma and tradition do not stratify in separate planes.

As its title suggests, this memoir is not simply about Reang grappling with her Ma’s rejection; it is about them both. *Ma and Me* refuses to isolate Reang’s experiences from her Ma’s, or her Ma’s from Reang’s. It opens with an author’s note in which Reang discloses that her Ma’s stories, which especially inform “Part I: Cambodia,” were recorded following her Pa’s heart attack in 2010. Reang writes that her Pa’s brush with death ignited in her Ma, “...a need to empty herself of the many stories and secrets she had kept inside.” She also notes that she has transcribed and translated her Ma’s words from Khmer into English, immediately establishing their stories as intertwined. When we read, from the perspective of Reang’s Ma, “You want to know about my marriage?”, we read Reang’s interpretation of her Ma’s words; a conversation between mother and daughter.

When it comes to the memoir’s

consideration of queerness, it is not so much a study of contemporary lesbian culture as it is a portrait of a woman growing into her identity. And more than both these things, it is about finding home in people. We follow Reang as she spends her twenties and thirties moving sporadically for journalism jobs, from Oregon to Cambodia to Washington to Afghanistan to Thailand. While she moves she also grapples with her sexuality, meeting other queer people who help her understand who she is and what she wants out of life. Meeting April teaches Reang that home is not a place, but a person, a lesson which complicates the memoir’s assertions about migration and family. Reang does not reject her family in favor of a chosen family, as happens in many queer narratives. Rather, she is stuck in something more realistic and complex—a contention, a constant push and pull between acceptance and rejection on both sides.

“...A NUANCED STUDY  
OF HOME, FILIAL PIETY,  
AND PARENTHOOD AS  
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Reang’s career in journalism is the vehicle for Reang’s travels, but the driver is an itch for movement and exploration. Her home in Washington, where she has settled down with her wife April, is near an airport, just like her childhood home in Corvallis. Reang

**WEEDING BELLES,  
BY JULIA TOLDA**



explains that this soothes her because she knows she can fly somewhere else whenever she needs. It is in this resistance to stagnation that we see further gaps between the generations: where Reang craves movement, her migrant parents seek stability and fear excessive travel. They fear queerness for similar reasons, desiring acceptance in their community and validation that they have parented well. One of Reang's great strengths is her ability to render these details: her friends and family with full dimensionality, as people thoroughly informed by their experiences and (often)

motivated by hope. *Ma and Me* does not end on quite the same hopeful note as Reang's essay from 2016, though it does offer its own modes of hopefulness. One leaves this memoir with heartache for all parties; by the end we understand Reang's Ma's distaste for queerness almost as well as we understand Reang's anguish. Reang invites us to see her Ma's rejection as a mechanism of her own grief, a reaction to losing her own dreams and failing to meet her own expectations. This, the memoir seems to contend, does not



degrade the significance of Reang's grief. The Khmer saying that inspires *Ma and Me*'s cover—"Joh duc, kapeur; laurng loue, klah" (Go in the water, there's the crocodile. Come up on land, there's the tiger)—echoes both the affliction of existing between crises and Reang's resistance to good versus bad. While didactic in nature, the adage of the crocodile

and the tiger provides something less prescriptive: an observation of generational connection and disconnection, of something with both a past and a future.

Meg Young



# Yesterday

by Juan Emar  
translated by Megan McDowell

Despite being born into a well-connected family, Álvaro Yáñez Bianchi failed to secure a large foothold in the literary world during his time as a writer and critic, never quite amassing any sort of notable following. Still, many fellow critics knew him well, though primarily due to his vocal contempt for said critics: he would often harass them for their choice in career path, doing so in his own pieces of art criticism. And he seemed to dream of the notion of “writing without being a writer,” seeking “refuge” in not publishing, intending to have thousands upon thousands of pages published only after his death. From an outsider’s perspective at least, he seemed a critic and writer who was over with the worlds of critiquing and writing. Bianchi was, fittingly, better known as Juan Emar—fitting only because he derived this pen name from the French, “J’en ai marre:” “I’m fed up.”

“Neruda pretty haphazardly compares Emar to Kafka, thus generating an instant blurb that is a little unfair, because Emar was not the Chilean Kafka, just as Neruda himself wasn’t the Chilean Whitman,” argues Alejandro Zambra—the Chilean Paul Auster—in his foreword to Megan McDowell’s translation of *Yesterday* by Juan Emar. Originally published in 1935 and only now available to English-speaking audiences, *Yesterday* feels stuck out of time: it seems too modern, as if it is clearly critiquing the state of society today. One

will have to remind themselves frequently that this book, in fact, cannot possibly be making reference to anything after 1935. But it is also hard to imagine a world where the book is any more relevant: the way it handles politics, its thinly-veiled criticism of Chilean society, it all seems too perfect for contemporary Santiago. A reader today is left feeling dumbfounded and, at a deeper level, somewhat lost—as if they missed out on what this book could have meant, if only they read it in 1935 instead. It feels at once necessary and impossible to remove it from a modern Chilean context.

To a Chilean today—and this is certainly the case for writers like Alejandro Zambra—the military men in the streets and the extrajudicial proceedings at the beginning of this novel bring reminders of Chile under Pinochet. But that time is not the time Emar writes in. It is almost impossible not to think of Pinochet’s legacy when reading the sections critiquing Chilean conservatism even as it would have been impossible for Juan Emar—a man who died nine years before Pinochet took power—to have been making any sort of direct invocation to the leader. The novel has been transformed by its own future.

The opening scene depicts the public execution of one Rudecindo Malleco. There is an eeriness to the general public’s nonchalance surrounding a modern-day public execution and a bizarreness to the court proceedings themselves, wherein the

actual law seems to be an irrelevant aspect of the case. It is all delivered with a sort of matter-of-fact silliness. But the protagonist also distances himself from the crowd in a figurative sense: he conveys the idea that he is not quite enjoying this whole process from court case to execution the same way the rest of the city has been, though he is guilty of enjoying it at least enough to go watch for fun. He is, at his core, not much better than the rest of the residents of San Agustín de Tango, even if he might be a little bit more aware of how unjust the whole situation was.

Ultimately, this all makes it clear that Emar is trying to make fun of Santiaguinos of his day—this opening scene is another one of Emar’s condemnations of his contemporaries. And, today, the protagonist reminds us of the kind of people who are deeply performative in their politics—the kind of person who might post infographics lambasting fast fashion but shop at H&M, who condemns war but votes for a larger defense budget, who is at once woke and their own political enemy. Reading this scene and reflecting on Emar’s growing popularity today makes one start to think about how and why we might see a little bit of our own society today in the Santiago of 1935.

And, ultimately, this feels fitting: the novel’s ending in particular concerns itself with questions of time and coming unstuck in it, at least in a somewhat Vonnegutian sense. Though from here emerges another problem surrounding *Yesterday* and context: maybe others in the future will also look back and think “how could this book not be talking about the modern day?”

Alejandro Zambra ends his foreword by considering that, “maybe we are not his intended readers.” He reflects on the “beautifully ‘quantum’ ending of

## “WHERE THE NONSENICAL MAKES SENSE”



*Yesterday* and says, “Juan Emar, ahead of his time, was no doubt writing for readers of the future, and it’s as arrogant as it is exciting to suppose that those readers of the future are us, those who were born fifteen or twenty years after his death, in a world very different from and in many ways worse than the one he knew. [...] Yes, we can read and enjoy him and think we understand, but deep down we know his books will be read and enjoyed and understood better by readers in a time yet to come.” Though we might not understand Emar’s writing to the same degree as some future audience, *Yesterday* remains outstanding. It is grotesque at times, but never not beautiful. We are, in an early scene, introduced to a painter named Rubén de Loa, who, “for twenty-four years, [...] had been painting nonstop.” This is the kind of story where you almost believe a sentence like this and want to take it at face value. It starts to feel more probable that this was not said figuratively at all—that he really has painted nonstop, without breaks, for twenty-four years. Emar builds a world where the nonsensical makes sense.

The artist himself is introduced alongside his green-themed studio. It is so full of green, the protagonist expects to hear the cry of a



macaw, thinking himself stuck in the middle of a jungle. But, as he doesn't hear such a thing, the green doesn't feel right at all. The character is guided, much like the reader, by expectations and the crushing of those expectations. It is impossible to tell when the book will choose to introduce the most sublime surrealism in place of utter realism.

The artist's green studio is so green, in fact, that he gains a mastery over the colour. His paintings contain every possible green. They contain the green of the jungle, the green of every leaf on Earth, God's green, your green. Everything has some green in it and it seems the artist has perfectly captured at least part of the essence of all things as a result. Though some things aren't green at all, the artist explains this away by introducing a sort of theory of complements: for every bit of green, there is an equal amount of red put into the world, and vice versa. There are imperceptible greens in this world because

of this very balance. Red is an implied green, at least insofar as it implies a lack thereof. The protagonist at one point describes walking down an avenue and seeing beautiful women all dressed in red. He watches them in awe at their looks. He experiences sexuality, that is red, and which burns within him. He feels an unease. He wondered for ages what that unease was, but now he places it: it was from an imbalance caused by a failure to perceive the "corresponding greens that would calm them." He doesn't know where the corresponding greens are, but he knows they exist at least, and this quiets the uneasiness. This seems to be a general message in the novel: we ought to seek out balance and, at the very least, have faith that it is somewhere out there for us to find. Here emerges an interpretation of the book that says it is thematically about balance: by being outrageously strange and impossible at times, it urges us to seek the mundane and the possible in real life.

And this seems yet again deeply modern. It is the perfect call-to-arms for a society obsessed with status and grandeur, with moments and experiences. Whether seeking to post about it all or not, society at large seems obsessed with the Spectacle. Emar does not negate the beauty of the remarkable—he, in fact, seems obsessed with it himself. *Yesterday* is full of unique scenes that could never in a million years be described as mundane, yet our enjoyment of them emerges from the very fact that they are so weird. No lion in the Bronx Zoo will ever be eaten by an ostrich whole, only to



pass through the bird without a scratch on its body. But because this is the case, we can read about it and guffaw at how gross and silly the idea of it is: we can laugh at the book only because life is mundane, this is far from a bad thing.

To even describe any of these moments or sweeping themes feels almost ridiculous. The whole theory of complements seems designed to make one feel silly and childlike when thinking or writing about it. The eccentricity of the novel bleeds through into the very attempts to explore it. It is intoxicating and inescapable, but rarely is it clear. What point is it actually trying to make? Or does the novel simply urge the reader to contemplate and reflect on the very experience of feeling silly?

Even the other sections of the novel are concerned with matters of relation and how one thing relates to another ontologically. They are concerned with the relation people have to each other, and even bleeds into a critique of consumerism.

The characters also always seem to be on the move, with each scene ending in some variation of "Let's go! Let's go!" As a result, the novel feels a bit like a collection of stories rather than one large novel, as if the reader is just rushing from one unrelated story to the next. It makes these stories digestible

and also keeps the reader reading more and more furiously as they advance through each scene, eager to find the connection.

This is certainly a weakness in the story as, until the very end, the novel feels not quite whole—it isn't immediately clear what any of these scenes have to do with one another. Though the payoff might just make up for it. The ending is certainly the pinnacle of Emar's surrealism. It is ridiculous, vulgar, and hypnotic. It is at once a celebration of mundanity and the everyday—a call to arms to fall in love with one's own life and the cycles we live in—and a tale of obsession and the dangers of nostalgia, infinity, and not moving on. A double life emerges in the main character as he grapples with living in the moment and remembering the whimsical day he's just had. Likewise, the reader is left living their own amazing double life, stuck physically in their seat with book in hand as well as stuck mentally in San Agustín de Tango, grappling with questions about flies, ostriches, and urine.

Diego Plaza Homiston

# The Employees

by Olga Ravn

How do objects in a recreation room incite the transformation of people, who would observe them and take care of them? Olga Ravn's novel *The Employees* joins in the literary expedition of revealing the "thingness" of inanimate objects, which is embedded in the form of discontinuous



UNTITLED  
BY ELI ANDRADE

interviews of crewmembers on a spaceship.

Ravn's book marks an intricate collaboration between the author and the artist Lea Gulddite Hestelund, who asks the author to provide a fiction based on her exhibition in 2018. It's fascinating to see how a book about objects in the recreation room awakening the reflections of crewmembers stems from an exhibition with several aberrant objects separately displayed in the museum space. Ravn describes that the evocative sights and smells of objects, some of which grow tentacles or lay eggs, intrigues the members on a personal level. One commonality of their observations is that the workers begin to think about their own living experiences, as well as how the objects could be animated and consider their experience of being watched and touched. The author successfully showcases how one could become nostalgic about memories and dreams evoked by particular objects, which crack down one's preoccupation with daily jobs, and force them to rethink about the value of humanity in an estranged setting.

In a way, Ravn's touch on how objects raise the feelings of workers reminds me of Ursula K. Le Guin's story, "The One Who Walk Away From Omelas," in which the children from a kingdom learn to cherish happiness through acknowledging that there exists a child locked in a basement room somewhere, being rarely looked after. How people's understanding is aroused by the caged child in the story reveals the



violence of the human gaze and hypocritical compassion; but, in Ravn's exploration of late-capitalist corporations, humans are much without control of their observations. A profound example could be how one of the interviewees keeps the pieces of cloth that are used to clean an object, and "lie with one" (37) in the same way as the object would, because it "helps" them inexplicably. The crewmember's wish to possess the intermediary, the cloth which touches the object, shows how they could be attached to the external sensations that are independent of human awareness. Thus, the objects and humans are put to an equal footing, and the objects don't need to be reimagined or transfigured to achieve democracy.

“...IN RAVN’S  
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Yet, the latter part of the novel becomes more committed to the identity crisis and violence of humanoids, and the anxiety that crewmembers have about their positions in work, deviating from the exquisite touch on interactions with ambiguous objects in the first half of the book. The personal transformations of characters reflected in the interviews disintegrate into a mundane presentation of the general irritation under an anthropocentric perspective. In fact, it seems that the author is attached to a simple repetitive pattern of humans grasping past memories and affections, while humanoids develop more conscience until the end of the book, where the author unfolds how all the animate crewmembers are exterminated. While Ravn has attempted to depict the progression of subjectivity and autonomy within all the different agents (objects, humanoids, and humans), the outer space mission of the novel may have been too ambitious about encompassing every aspect.

Lucia Tian

# Demon Copperhead

by Barbara Kingsolver

Barbara Kingsolver's *Demon Copperhead*, eponymous hero of her latest novel, is born in the mountains of southwestern Virginia to a young mother broken by the foster care system. His childhood cut short by the arrival of an abusive stepfather and his mother's overdose, Demon is catapulted into that same system, where he learns early how to fend for himself in a world where few adults care enough even to take advantage of him. Demon bounces from foster home to foster home, sometimes picking tobacco for the farm-owner Crickson, sometimes staying with Mr. McCobb, who sinks not only Demon's foster care stipend but his weekly paychecks into doomed business ventures. Through it all, Demon holds on to his love for the ocean, which he has never seen, and the knowledge that, because he was born with a caul, he will never drown, no matter what other misfortunes may befall him.

If this story seems familiar, it's because Kingsolver takes inspiration from a classic; her novel *Demon Copperhead* is a modern adaptation of Dickens' *David Copperfield*. Kingsolver uproots the English novel in order to replant it in the soil of Southern Appalachia, a country ravaged first by the coal mining industry, then by the opioid epidemic. Demon's pseudo-father, Mr. Peggot, carries the scars of a long-ago mining accident. Vester Spencer, father of Demon's girlfriend Dori, dies of cancer caused by the asbestos deposits in the

Appalachian mines.

*Demon Copperhead* raises important questions about how and why we should update classic novels for modern audiences, and how we carry these books' legacy into the twenty-first century. Although I am a lifelong lover of Dickens, I had read *David Copperfield* with new eyes earlier this year, and I wondered, as I opened Kingsolver's novel for the first time, if the world really needed another white, masculine narrator – supreme in his first-personhood – to sublimate the lives of his acquaintances, including a mother and two wives, to his own narrative. How too, I wondered, would this particular time and place – southwestern Virginia in the 90s – stretch to fit the sizable cast of characters which populate Dickens' sprawling novel?

Perhaps even more than Dickens, Kingsolver writes about community. We watch Demon struggle with the media bias which belittles his mountain home, calling its inhabitants hicks, hillbillies, idiots and addicts. As he grows older, we experience alongside him the revelation that this media censure is only part of a much larger apparatus of social control, an enormous, ongoing coverup which allows for the continued exploitation of places like Lee County and boys like Demon. As Kingsolver divulges the true history of the region pejoratively referred to as "flyover country," from the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794 to the Battle of Blair Mountain, an

uprising of coal miners against union-busting mine operators, she insists over and over again on the resiliency of the Appalachian people.

“PERHAPS EVEN  
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Although both *Demon Copperhead* and *David Copperfield* weave complex webs of interclass relations, Kingsolver positions her hero as belonging directly to the community of people with which he associates. Dickens' David is the son of a gentleman, and his narrative arc encompasses not only his fall into poverty but the eventual reclamation of his social legacy. His second mother, Mrs. Peggotty, is his servant, and he all but ceases association with her and her family as his fortune improves. Demon, on the other hand, knows no such class separation from his neighbors. In his community, he is not only the exception but the rule: a victim of the abuses of the foster care system and subject to the cycle of addiction which took his mother's life. The heroes of Demon's story are nurses and middle-school teachers,



like June Peggot, who saves his life by paying for his rehab, and Mr. Armstrong, who believes in his academic potential despite his stymied educational career. Instead of the standard hero narrative, Kingsolver describes a community which works together to lift its children out of poverty and addiction, and which envisions a better life for itself, down to its most vulnerable members.

Rosa McCann

# Wilfull Disregard

by Lena Andersson  
translated by Sarah Death

Lena Andersson's *Willful Disregard* offers witty satire in her self-proclaimed "novel about love." Written in 2013 and translated in 2015 from its original Swedish by the acclaimed Sarah Death, *Willful Disregard* follows essayist Ester Nilsson, who falls for the older activist-intellectual-artist Hugo Rask. With a strong, independent female-lead bored by her safe relationship, a male-lead around just enough to keep the former miserable but hopeful, and a sensible "girlfriend chorus" of friends, Andersson dryly mocks all of us who have been consumed by love. Not one to pull punches, the droll of leftist socialites, supplied by Hugo's posse, renders uncritical intellectualism a stale social currency.

The narration is clean. Dialogue is rarely obfuscated, and if it is, Ester and the narrator lay out possible readings as well as what the speaker actually meant. For instance, mocking Ester's hope after Hugo's promise to "maybe speak when you're back," the narrator quips: "Like anyone in love, Ester Nilsson laid too much emphasis on the content of the words and their literal meaning and too little on the plausibility and her overall judgment." In these meditations on meaning, Ester's inability to accept that her love is one-sided unfurls into paragraph-length sentences. Dialogue often punctures the smooth veneer: "An inadequacy that had ossified into an abstract loathing of women for their eternal amorous demands on a person like him, with bigger things

to think about, their prattle and possessive impositions tossed out like lassos, always excused in their view by their tenderly throbbing hearts. / 'It was passion'." Despite the novel's grounding in the romance genre, Ester's character arc is determined by her ability to break free from dogmatic, masculine coded political ideology. Ester is often told to "educate" herself: As Ester's conformity to Hugo's politics breaks down, so too does the paragraph form. Using contrasting sentence lengths and paragraph structures that recall the organization of brief poetic stanzas, the rhythm of the novel shifts with Ester's character.

Andersson's writing is fundamental to her novel; Death's translation does it justice. Death's translation accentuates Andersson's directness while still allowing the cascades of thoughts to flow. Compared to the heavier translation of the sequel, *Acts of Infidelity*, Death's translation allows for the minimal plot and (almost) pedantic conversations to be enjoyable. Even when Andersson's commitment to exploring intellectualism feels repetitive, the translation highlights the rigor of the content. As a thinker, Andersson should not be underestimated; she succeeds in elevating the romance novel above easy tropes of duality. Better halves and characters symbolic of the private or public have no place in her novel. Rather than subverting the romance genre, Andersson utilizes its history exploring the feminine experience and broadens its horizons.

## WEEDING BELLES BY JULIA TOLDA

Andersson foregrounds the inconsistent mind, rather than an imagining of fated sexuality. Ester's issues with her memories of Hugo are ones of embodiment: while she "knows" that the "girlfriend chorus" is right that Hugo does not love her, as her mood changes, so does her memory of Hugo. Ester does not "misremember," but she also does not operate in the realm of "truth".

### "...SHE SUCCEEDS IN ELEVATING THE ROMANCE NOVEL ABOVE EASY TROPES..."

The brain-fog that envelopes the majority of the novel finally gives way to exacting clarity. As the end of the novel nears, Ester is faced with a servile biopic on Hugo and his work. The film prompts defamiliarization allowing Ester to see Hugo in the same light as the "girlfriend chorus." Ester is sharp and poised, an image she had tried to affect for Hugo's attention the entire novel. However, the ending of the novel goes beyond the expected resurrection of Ester's self. Without ruining the ending, in a cruel showcase of sensitivity, Andersson reminds the reader that her work truly is "a novel about love."

Corinna Singer



# Blood Red

by Gabriela Ponce Padilla  
translated by Sarah Booker

*Blood Red*, by Ecuadorian writer Gabriela Ponce Padilla and translated from Spanish by Sarah Booker, follows a woman in her late thirties after she separates from her husband, recounting her subsequent torrid sexual affairs with many also unnamed men and her eventual pregnancy. The story is delivered as a stream of conscious narrative; literal events of the woman's life is mangled with poetic assertions and vivid imagery. The narrator's trypophobia haunts her consciousness as much as her husband's departure, and the narration is saturated with blood: leaking from the walls, from bite wounds, from the woman's own body. The resulting story is erotic, visceral, and inventive.

The unnamed narrator at the center of the story is the point of most intrigue in the text. She is a mysterious figure by virtue of the novel's style. She lingers on what she is feeling, smelling, tasting. It is a visual novel, lush with description and sensation, Padilla's grasp on imagery intensely poetic. But as such, the novel provides little exposition; the only moments we glimpse into her past are the echoes of memory—of her husband, her aborted child, her brother. The reader is thus a participant in the narrator's trypophobia, our discomfort is with the holes in her life we are unaware of, and of the things that might fill them.

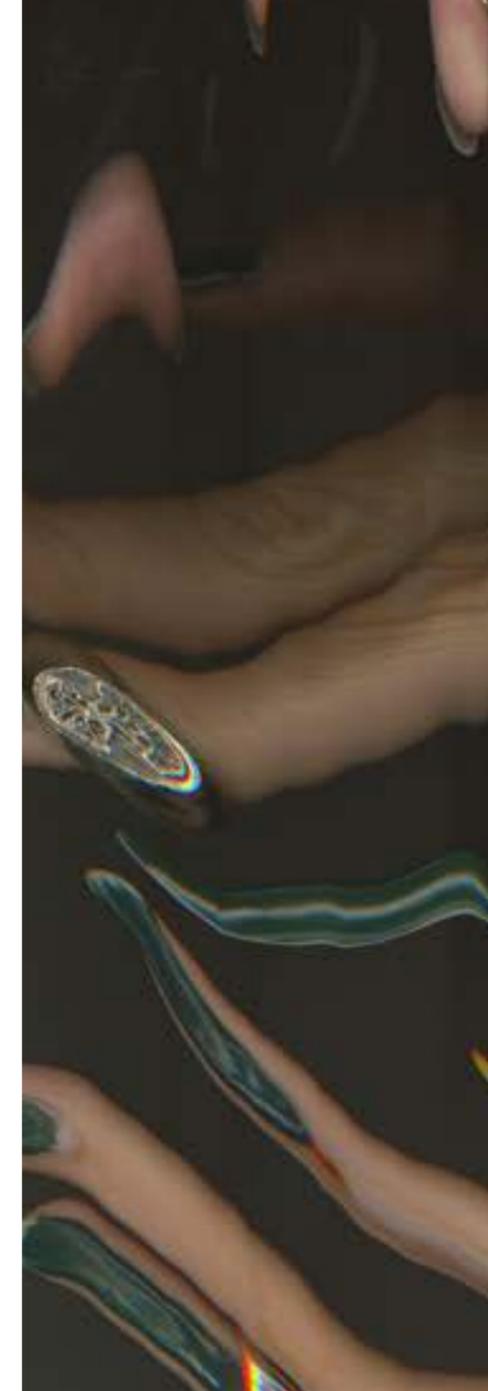
One of the few things we do learn about the narrator is her age. She is a woman in her late thirties, which feels, in the contemporary literary era of the disaffected young twenty-

something, practically radical. The story places her frequently in grotesquely erotic situations, with a viscerality frequently reserved for the idealized young woman. It is neither exploitative or pornographic, but instead an act of reclaiming the oftentimes messily sexual feminine for women who are in anything but their early twenties.

The story itself is abstract and non-literal. The man who flits in and out of the narrator's life in the first half of the book lives in a cave—a gaping hole in the earth—with mossy floors and wet rock walls accessible through a front door. Memory and present entwine and interweave. The narrator is always somewhere else when she is doing something. Padilla captures the nature of memory in her stream of conscious narrative; everything is happening constantly, and one is always haunted by this.

“THE RESULTING STORY  
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AND INVENTIVE.”

That said, stream of consciousness is a difficult balancing act. Although many aspects of its utilization served the story, it significantly slowed the pace of what should have been a much snappier novel. The lack of paragraph breaks and multiple page chapters



HANDS HANDS  
HANDS  
BY J XIANG AND  
SHERRY YE

left no breathing room, no breaks to absorb anything; the novel is an inundation of text and imagery that can quickly tire a reader. This choice of style aligns with the themes and content of the book; Padilla does not want us to flinch away from her depictions of the grotesque realities of womanhood, but it regardless makes for a less enjoyable reading experience.

*Blood Red* is complicated. It is difficult. It is an undeniably beautiful work

by a talented artist that asks everything much of its readers and returns little of it back intact, and yet this is not a negative. The text begs to be experienced but not considered too literally; it aims to fill a hole, but not to answer questions. The drudgery may even be part of it, despite its unpleasantness. It is a ride you undoubtedly should jump on, and stay upon until the bitter end.

Frankie DeGiorgio

# Three Days of Happiness

by Sugaru Miaki  
illustrated by Shoichi Taguchi

After beginning with musings of the value of human life, the central plot of *Three Days of Happiness* begins when a poor college student named Kusunoki decides to sell thirty years of his lifespan, leaving him only three months to live. The shop that he sells his lifespan at figures in considerations of fame, social contributions, and wealth to determine the value an individual receives for selling their life, which makes it all the more difficult for Kusunoki to stomach the startling low sum he receives for his life. This supernaturally-based business deal comes with the caveat that Kusunoki must agree to be observed by a human monitor, a girl named Miyagi, for his remaining time. After having pursued past relationships and remaining unfulfilled, however, Miyagi and Kusunoki fall in love in a surprising turn of events in the novel. After selling her own remaining lifespan to live the final three days of their lives together uninhibited by the restrictions of her role as a monitor, the final three days referenced in the title of the novel go undescribed. This leaves the reader knowing that the protagonist has chosen to live the remainder of his time without considerations of posterity or writing down the occurrences in his life. Thus, though initially seeming like a work centered on musings of the value of human life, this book is, above all else, a love story between a formerly hopeless young man and an invisible girl.

“...A POOR COLLEGE  
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As Kusunoki was academically gifted as a child, he had always imagined that he would be well-known and wealthy as an adult. Thus, the low price he receives for his remaining thirty years brings up the critical theme of the value of a human life and how it could be measured. In the beginning of the story, this seems to be the central question underlying the plot; however, Kusunoki learns near the end of the story that, given the happiness he felt around Miyagi and the inspiration he drew from her to pick up his passion for art, the value of his remaining three months increased enormously. With these small changes in one's relationships or passions, the value of life can greatly fluctuate

in the story. Thus, the author seemingly does not intend to give any account of what the value of human life itself is, instead using Kusunoki's sale of his lifespan as a literary tactic to express his deep unhappiness and resignation with the world. Instead, the more pressing theme of the story seems to focus much more on the relationship between misery and one's proximity to death. As discussed in the author's afterword to the novel, quite often people waste years hoping aimlessly for something good to happen or pitying themselves for their misfortune, creating and reinforcing their own misfortune through self pity. However, knowledge of being close to death alleviates the pressure to live any particular kind of life, leaving a person free for perhaps the first time in their lives. In this state, the end of one's life becomes the most blissful and freeing part. In Miaki's own words, the novel discusses how “the moment they finally learn to love the world is the moment they know they are soon to leave it.”

This phenomenon is seen quite well in Kusunoki, who has had plenty of opportunities to find love, friendship, and meaning in his life. However, he fails to pursue any form of happiness, sulking in his own self-pity until he finally falls in love with Miyagi, feeling happiness and life most fully when he has only three days of it remaining. This does, in many ways, connect back to what seems to be the initial theme of the

“THE MOMENT THEY  
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value of human life. Rather than attempting to ascribe any sort of worth to life, however, Miaki emphasizes that value is created and felt through the active pursuit of that which brings happiness. Thus, while the topics that Miaki explores do feature questions of the value of human life, the overarching theme of the story focuses on the notion that value from human life is created and felt by the individual once they cease to feel constrained by whatever rigid expectations that they had set for themselves.

Melody Hubbard



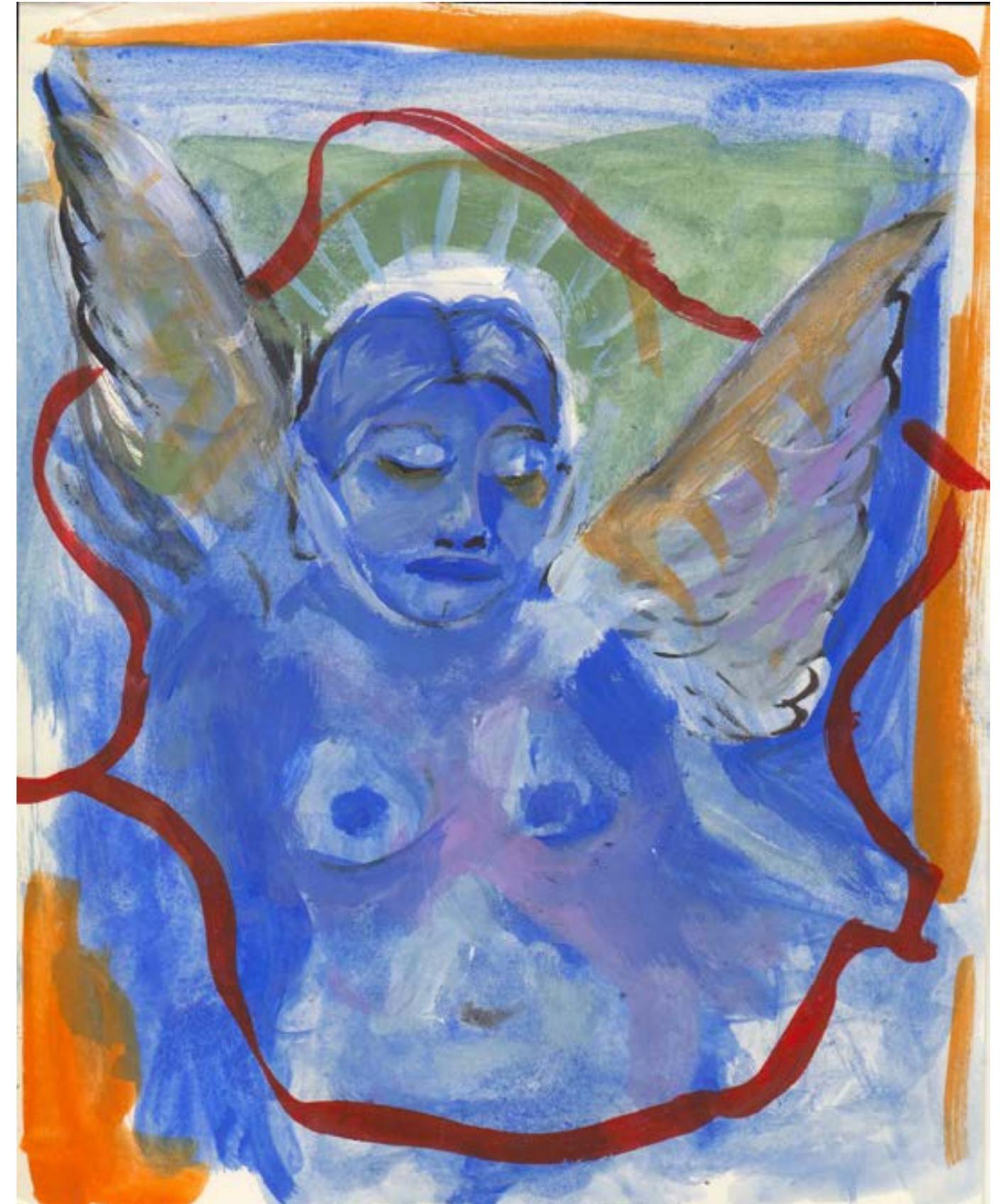
him. Joseph wakes up confused as to who she was, as since the time Adam mistook God for an old man with a beard, God has been portrayed as a man. Whereas in the original story, Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery, this story imagines that his brothers push him into a well because they are jealous that their father knitted him a coat. This well scene is my favorite of the graphic novel, as this futuristic take on religion is fascinating. Within this underground world where all humans become mermaids and mermen, Joseph becomes the great leader Zaphenath-Paneah. He spreads God's message and eventually reconnects with his brothers who bring him his beloved father. Joseph even solves global food scarcity in this portrayal of the future.

Surprisingly, the graphic novel ends with a return to the story of Adam and Eve. In the epilogue, Finck explores women's quest for likeability: God lays on a cloud in the night, and Finck reflects, "We twist ourselves into knots in our desire to be liked by men. We hollow ourselves out—Erase ourselves. When they don't respond the way we hope they will—We descend into sadness—fly into rage—Blame ourselves. Vow to do better. Inevitably, though, the fever will pass—leaving room for other thoughts." This section highlights the range of God's emotions and facial expressions. As a man walks away from God, she reacts with intense sadness, anger, and guilt. During this guilt, her crown leaves her head as she lays on her pillow of clouds, representing the disembodied feeling of this rejection. As a response to this acceptance, God does the unthinkable: she zaps Lilith, the primordial she-devil, from the form of the serpent back to her original

form. Thus, Linck successfully rectifies the negative interpretations of Genesis, as she restores power to this feminine devil. In the Author's Note, she notes the hidden messages of the Torah: "Eve eats the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and that's why a woman must always serve her husband." Throughout this graphic novel, Finck rectifies the misogynistic interpretations of the Torah, reclaiming them for a feminist audience. Surely, this book reminds us that God, or gods, can be created in our own image.

Tara Skaggs McTague

**ANGEL**  
**BY LUCIA SANTOS**



# Negative Space

by B.R. Yeager

“I wasn’t there but I can see it in my mind. I know what it was like. I know it like a dream. In that way, it’s still happening, and always will be.” Echoing, contradicting prose like this haunts every crevice of B.R. Yeager’s 2020 horror novel *Negative Space*. Published on March 1st, 2020, the epidemic of teen suicides in the small fictional town of Kinsfield, New Hampshire directly mirrors the pandemic in which the real world would soon find itself. *Negative Space* blurs the lines between different realities and timelines. Through the daze of a new illicit hallucinogen, cryptic 4chan posts, and the general musings of chronically online teenagers, memories transcend the traditional boundaries of bodies to a shared identity amongst the residents of Kinsfield, NH.

Suicides are nothing new in Kinsfield, but the frequency at which they occur definitely isn’t. From morbid fascination to desensitized disconnection, the teenagers cope with their fellow classmates’ deaths over school lunch or various 4chan boards. It’s more important to keep up with their steady drug use than face the anguish of the world around them. One character, Jill, pops Ativan all day long. Two others, Tyler and Ahmir, pack a bowl during school lunch. All of them partake in WHORL, a new drug on the scene. It’s something different than your traditional hallucinogen: while high on it, users seem to reach a new level of consciousness. It’s called the “scrying drug”

for a good reason, and teens Tyler, Jill, Lu, and Ahmir are some of its newest addicts.

*Negative Space* is told from three(ish) different first person perspectives: Jill, Lu and Ahmir. Each are eccentric outcasts, linked together through their self-destructive mutual friend Tyler. Bold headings indicate who’s talking, but as the story progresses, it becomes unclear whose memories are really being relayed to the reader. It’s hard to piece through the disturbing yet strangely alluring imagery to figure out what’s truly going on. Whose perspective can we trust? Tyler is the first one to go. Not in the traditional sense of a suicide like the ones so commonplace in the novel, but the first to change. The first to become involved with a world that is not our own. It starts slowly at first, little things out of the ordinary, but nothing too worrying until Tyler shows up at Jill’s family’s Thanksgiving, bleeding all out from multiple cuts. It’s hard to escape whatever evil Tyler has reawoken into the world through his occult rituals. And there are these strings, both literally and figuratively, that connect them all.

*Negative Space* found me at just the right time; disillusioned from traditional YA literature, yet not feeling represented in adult fiction, this book perfectly embodied the isolation I felt rotting inside my bedroom, eyes glued to my computer to keep the outside world at bay. Once you put it down, it doesn’t leave your mind. “Suicides go on forever,” Jill muses towards the beginning of

the book. B.R. Yeager has taken traditional horror to the next level; *Negative Space* has some of the best horror prose I’ve ever read. But what sticks out the most is how Yeager perfectly encapsulates “Gen Z Culture,” throwing in references to sites like Discord and even using modern slang correctly. I couldn’t help but feel like this book understood me. Perhaps because Yeager’s from Massachusetts like me, or we’re both Twitter addicts, but for a millennial writing about teenagers today, he’s done a fantastic job. Yeager once said in an interview a good horror book will “fuck [him] up. [He] want[s] to be ruined by it.” I think he’s done just that through *Negative Space*. I haven’t read anything like this before and I doubt I ever will for quite some time.

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COMMUNION WITH  
ENTITIES WE CANNOT  
BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND,

IN MANNERS WE  
CANNOT BEGIN TO  
UNDERSTAND. WE FLOAT  
ON THE SURFACE OF  
AN UNFATHOMABLE  
OCEAN, AND THOUGH  
WE MAY STICK OUR  
HANDS, OUR FEET, OUR  
FACES BENEATH, WE  
CAN NEVER GO MUCH  
FARTHER WITHOUT  
DROWNING.”

- B.R. YEAGER

Gina Brown



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