IN THE MARGINS

"Highly anticipated new fiction by Amor Towles and TJ Klune!"

"An LGBTQ+ retelling of Pride and Prejudice!"

"Heart-rending memoirs and hilarious personal essays!"

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Beautiful World, Where are... the Complex Female Characters?

by Hattie Rogovin

Beautiful Word, Where Are You is the third novel from 30 year old Irish author, Sally Rooney, that has seemingly placed an entire generation of readers in a chokehold. The hallmark of Rooney's work is her painstakingly careful attention to detail; she will often spend upwards of a page describing, for example, the exact way in which two hands touch. She is calculating in her choice of language, allowing the reader to feel as though they are sitting right next to the characters, bathing in every aspect of their world. I fell victim to Rooney's devastating detail over the summer when I finally got around to reading *Normal People,* after everyone and their mother convinced me it would be life changing. I was told I would come away from the experience a *better* person, but found instead that I came away as a *bitter* person. I found the romantic plot points to be trite, and the language to be nothing more than a collection of cliches that made me—not to sound like a cartoon villain—root against the protagonists and their love story.

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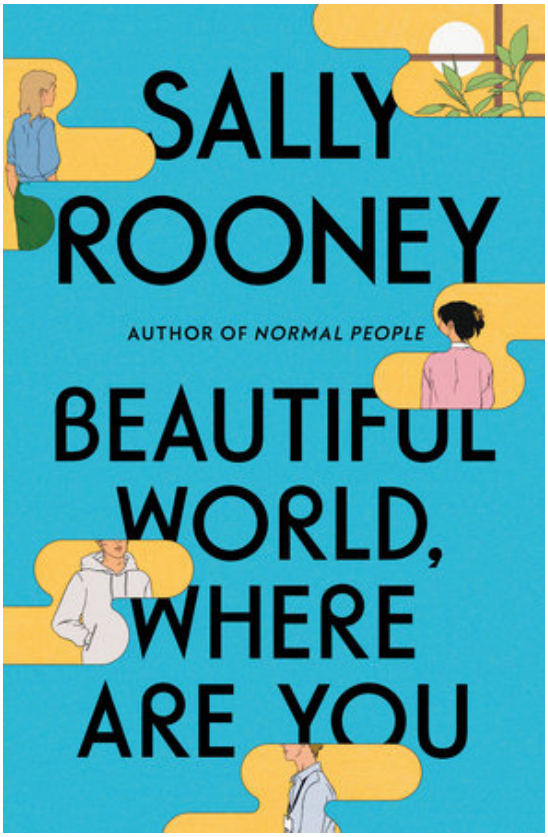
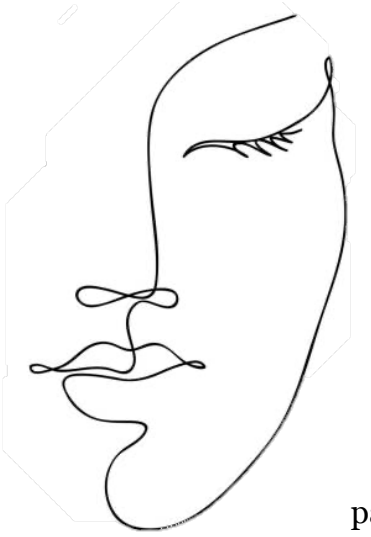
Beautiful World, Where Are You follows the four intertwined lives of Alice, a successful novelist, her best friend Eileen, a literary magazine editor, Simon, the man Eileen has been hopelessly in love with since childhood, and Felix, Alice's Tinder date gone wrong, whom she impulsively invites to Rome on a book tour. The structure of the novel exists within the framework of two romantic relationships, and it is through this that Rooney explores deeper topics. Eileen and Simon, childhood friends, are trying to navigate their on-again off-again feelings for each other, but their timing is almost comically poor; when Eileen is pining for Simon, he is in a committed relationship, and when Simon is pursuing his own unrequited love, Eileen is wrapped up in a romantic relationship of her own. Alice and Felix, on the other hand, have just met and embark on an exploration of moments from awkward encounters to passionate emotions. When the story opens, Alice has recently returned from being hospitalized due to a psychotic break resulting from the many pressures of her life, and Eileen is grappling with where she is in her life, as her older sister Lola is about to get married. The initial qualms of each woman existing outside of her relationship with a man is promising, but this is soon disrupted by male-centered issues when Felix enters Alice's life, and Simon re-enters Eileen's life. Sprinkled throughout the novel––arguably tying it together––are emails exchanged back and forth between Alice and Eileen. They offer an inside look into the deep and beautiful nature of female friendship, attempting to ground the novel in this relationship. Each one is teeming with commentary on what I believe to be the question central to Rooney's novel: how do we go about living life to the fullest extent possible in our current political and social climate. Eileen and Alice discuss crises of faith, familial dynamics, politics, female sexual desire, and searching for beauty in the world around them.



Although I often found myself drowning in a pretentious and uninteresting conversation between Eileen and Alice, the emails exist as a space for Rooney to develop her two female characters. This allows for multi-dimensional conversations that remove Eileen and Alice from their respective romantic relationships. This structure allows for a deeper reflection on the nuanced nature of female friendships; it creates a depth around this relationship, which has historically been rendered surface level and unimportant due to its lack of a male presence. One of the most important aspects of my social life is the presence of my female friendships, filled with nuance and a complete lack of the male gaze. It becomes frustrating to continuously read literature that obliterates this nuance, and solely regards the relationship between two women as framed through a man. It was refreshing to see Rooney place a female friendship at the center of her novel—a far cry from the devastating romantic relationship at the core of her other critically acclaimed novel, *Normal People*.

However, outside of these email exchanges—each only a page or two long—Rooney seems incapable of constructing a complex female character who can exist freely without strong ties to a man in her life. Both the lives of Eileen and Alice strictly revolve around their respective romantic relationships. This seems to be a problem that Rooney grapples with each time she puts pen to paper; I felt the same longing deeper exploration into the female protagonist of *Normal People,* and just as disappointed when every point of nuance for this character revolved around her feelings for the male protagonist, framed through the male gaze. Each woman has her own job, yet little is said about work life for a woman. The novel takes place in 2019 and concludes directly following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic; to eliminate any discussion of the work lives of Alice and Eileen—aside from often complaints from the two—is a huge oversight on Rooney's part. She had the chance to construct two driven working women, and completely dropped the ball. This ultimately further prohibits the viewer from seeing these women as anything other than the partners of the men in their lives. Once again, we are left with a female character, or two, who is surface level at best. Rooney's treatment of a modern day woman was hugely disappointing and I closed the book feeling betrayed by the author as a fellow woman living in 2021.



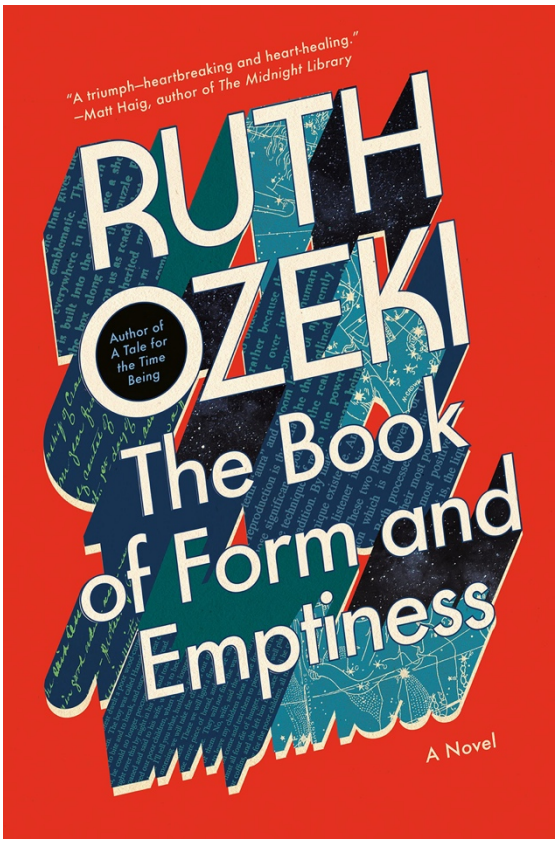
Completely failing her female audience, Rooney perpetuates the hermetic trope of a damsel in distress, ultimately framing every moment of *Beautiful World, Where Are You* around men. The characters of Eileen and Alice are incredibly underwhelming and frustrating, even in their moments of nuanced conversation. There is not much reflection on their own privilege and how this colors the lens of their perspective on the world. The two are white, thin, financially stable, college educated women; yet they seem to ignore this. Aside from the inclusion of a female friendship that exists outside of the grasp of the male gaze, many of the emails between Eileen and Alice fall flat for this reason. Once again, in an attempt for Rooney's female characters to read as nuanced, they end up translating into insufferable pretentiousness and ignorance. Perhaps she needs to take a step outside of her restricted perspective and reframe her characters as conscious of their own privilege and stance in society. Until that happens, you won't find me in line for the release of her next––undoubtedly disappointing––novel. *Normal People's* simplistic structure around a romantic relationship––framing yet another female within the context of a male––gave readers a look into Rooney's difficulty in crafting a complex female character. I decided to give her another shot in *Beautiful World, Where Are You,* perhaps because a small part of me enjoys the pretentious discussions of concepts the characters don't seem to fully understand themselves, perhaps because I enjoy disappointment. But as the old adage goes...happens once, shame on Rooney, happens twice? Shame on me.

"Completely failing her female audience, Rooney perpetuates the hermetic trope of a damsel in distress, ultimately framing every moment of Beautiful World, Where Are You around men

Holding On and Letting Go: Absence, Space, and Speech in Ozeki's *The Book of Form and Emptiness*

by Lia Jung

Emptiness takes form in the absence of a father, taken away by a tragic accident, leaving an irreversible gap in the life of Benny Oh, the main protagonist of Ruth Ozeki's new novel, *The Book of Form and Emptiness*. In the aftermath of his father's death, young Benny—who has just turned twelve—is left with his mother, Annabelle, to cope with this sudden event. As if to compensate, Annabelle "start(s) putting on weight." Yet, it is not just her body that expands; she starts to compulsively hoard items, from fridge magnets to snow globes, anything that could potentially fill the void left by the missing family member. The mindless purchases, gradually accumulating in their house, is overbearing. You can feel both the weight and hollowness of their grief in this clustered space. The book itself becomes an antithetical space of the material (form) and metaphysical (emptiness) that come together, as Ozeki presents us with a dense narrative voice that



can oftentimes feel as clustered as Annabelle's home, but one that essentially speaks of the seeming meaninglessness to material.

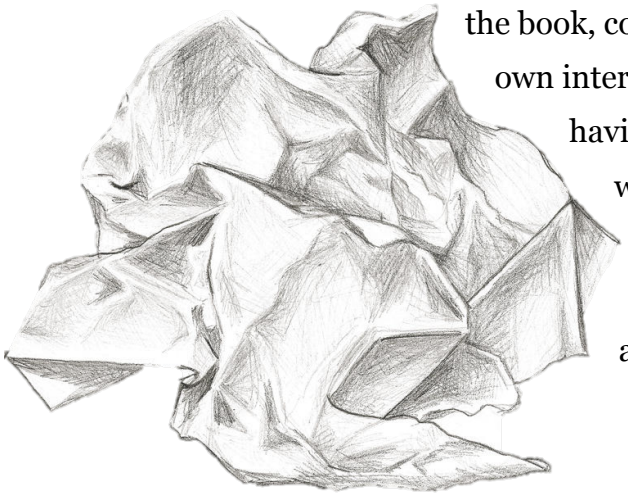
If form is emptiness, what remains? Speech, apparently. "Shh...Listen!" says Benny, at the beginning of the novel. "That's my Book, and it's talking to you." And it is not just this Book that talks—coffee beans, window seals, fluorescence lights and paper cups—all of these inanimate objects have a voice in Benny's world. When objects start talking to Benny, it is the inanimate that is given life, replacing his father, who was once alive, and now dead: perhaps a part of Benny wants to believe that the dead, the unliving can still talk to him, a wishful thinking that would sustain for Ben, a possibility for a communion with his departed father. What Benny discovers through these strange and magical conversations with things is the chaos, the disaster and mayhem experienced by still-life things, that underneath the appearance of these indifferent material objects are rife tension, friction and frustration. When Benny hears "the chatter of cash registers filled with all those arrogant metal coins that think they're actually worth something", it is Ozeki who is lamenting on our consumerist culture. The windowpane of Benny's classroom crying because a bird has hit it emphasizes the author's condemning reflection of today's world that is now overcrowded with objects, that collide with life and ominously, becomes the reason for death, as seen in Benny's father who was run over by a truck. Ironically, the preoccupation with these material possessions robs people of having a lived experience, not just in the example of Benny's father, but also for Annabelle, whose obsessive shopping spree arrests her in the perpetual state of mourning and missing for what has passed, forbidding her to live her life.

> ***"Ozeki prompts us to reconsider our relationship to things as one not characterized by physical ownership, but a spiritual connection.***

After an episode at his school, Benny's secret that he can hear objects talk to him gets revealed, and he winds up in a pediatric psychiatry ward. There, he meets a girl who goes by the name The Aleph, whose protestations against the hospital's rules and regulations through slips of white paper with subversive writings provoke the fellow patients initially intrigues Benny. After he's discharged, Benny discovers a note from The Aleph in his pocket that reads, "Come to the Library." Following the instruction,

Benny meets a homeless man at the library, who was once “a super famous poetry back in Slovenia,” and it is here where our protagonist reaches his moment of epiphany, of a life that is free of form and its burdens, that allows Benny to finally realize his own agency.

Paper is the tangible form that becomes the main conduit for connection, communication, but also transgression, pulling us both out of time and space, forcing us to inspect reality from a distance. The Book, who interacts with Benny as co-narrator of the book, collaboratively drives the story, and reminds us of our own interdependence with the things around us. Rather than having forms control us, or trying to possess objects without attaching significance to them, Ozeki prompts us to reconsider our relationship to things as one not characterized by physical ownership, but a spiritual connection.

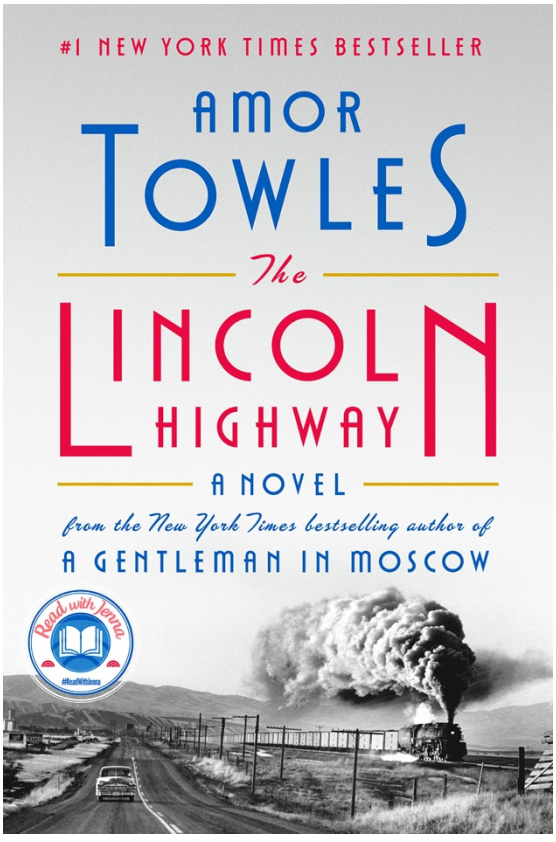


Indeterminate Destinations: Amor Towles' *The Lincoln Highway*

by Regan Mies

Amor Towles' captivating literary arc has taken him from the era of 1930s flappers and speakeasies to the political turmoil of early 20th-century Russia, and most recently, to the American Midwest and glittering New York City skyline of 1954. He explores this new landscape in his widely anticipated new release: *The Lincoln Highway*, which is at once a nostalgic road trip, a daring heist, a Homeric epic, and a richly layered bildungsroman.

I had been awaiting Towles' newest release since the moment I finished reading *A Gentleman in Moscow* in 2016. Towles' second book ambitiously traverses three decades of Russian history through the eyes of Count Alexander Rostov, a former nobleman on political house arrest in the famed Metropol Hotel. The novel was a critical and commercial success, quickly becoming one of my favorite books. Its final chapters are the sort that—even five years later—drift to mind as I'm falling asleep.



Towles published his first novel in 2011 while working full-time as an investment professional. He gave himself exactly one year to write the story he had been meticulously outlining, and at the end of the year, the book was finished. The *Gatsby*-esque *Rules of Civility* sold in a bidding war between publishing houses for a six-figure sum, and Towles quit his job in finance, dedicating himself wholly to his second novel. Reading about his discipline and precision—and, I'll admit, his wild success—elevated Towles to a

near-mythic level in my eyes. What aspiring writer wouldn't admire his straightforward, capable approach? What's stopping the rest of us from sitting down, dedicating two weeks to every chapter, and jotting down a best-seller by the end of the year?

When Towles' third book was first announced—a brand new era, brand new setting—I imagined that, to decide on each new novel's premise, Towles must roll a die to determine the decade and spin a globe to see where his finger lands. En route from Nebraska to the Big Apple, *The Lincoln Highway* journeys through circuses and brothels, orphanages and nunneries, Harlem townhouses and a fifty-fifth floor office of the Empire State Building, echoing the likes of Doctorow and Steinbeck and Twain; it invites us across the country in railroad boxcars and a baby blue Studebaker until we finally arrive under the gleaming lights of Times Square. Although the story's rhythm might have its lulls and its characters can be frustratingly archetypal good-guy or bad-guy, I was captivated by the novel's golden tone and elaborately woven narrative.

Eighteen-year-old Emmett Watson's fifteen-month sentence at a work farm for involuntary manslaughter has just ended, and after the camp warden drives him home to small-town Nebraska, he must face his father's recent death, the foreclosure of their farm, and caretaking responsibilities for his keenly observant and charmingly curious eight-year-old brother, Billy. Emmett plans for a fresh start somewhere with a booming population, and Billy is convinced their mother—absent since he was a baby—is living in California. The brothers make plans to leave for the West Coast by way of the Lincoln Highway—the United States' first transcontinental route—but Emmett soon finds that two of his fellow campmates hitched an early ride out of Salina in the warden's trunk. Duchess, smug, performative, excitable, and impassioned, grew up with a traveling showman for a father; a persuasive orator with a Puckish grin and sleeve of tricks, he has no intention of turning himself back in. Woolly, dreamy and sensitive,

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generous and wide-eyed, is reliant on and subdued by his "medicine," the diminishing supply of which is presided over by Duchess.

Through a series of Duchess' deceptions and wily maneuvers, the four boys are set on a course toward New York—*not* California––seeking Woolly's $150,000 inheritance, which Duchess insists they'll evenly split. Along the way, Emmett, Duchess, and Woolly encounter unexpected friends, settle long-held scores, and encounter myriad obstacles as each of their complex, difficult, and oft-violent pasts slowly unfold before the others.

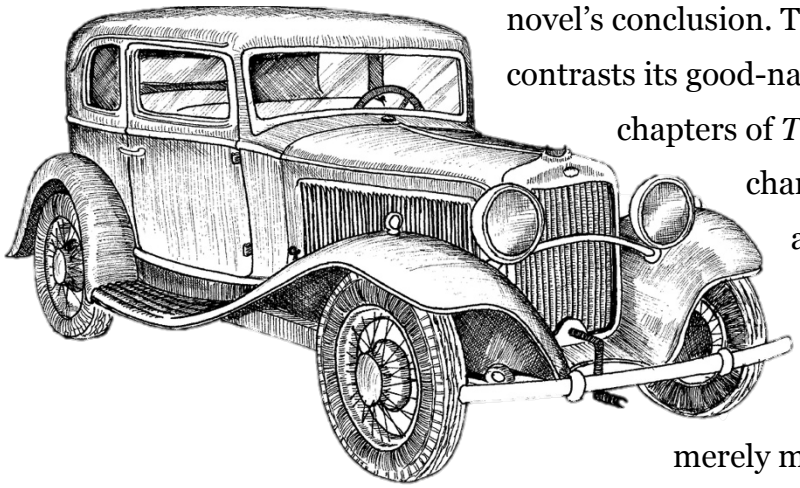
While *A Gentleman in Moscow* spans thirty years, *The Lincoln Highway*, at nearly 600 pages to *Moscow*'s approximately 500, captures the events of just ten days. Towles exercises impressive structural deftness in writing through alternating narrative perspectives. Emmett's and Woolly's chapters are told in third person, and Duchess' take place in a colloquial first, thick with personality—but an expansive cast of supporting characters also have their moments in the limelight. Diabolical Pastor John narrates two chapters of ill-intentioned interactions with Emmett and Billy. Readers are immersed into the points of view of weary, train-hopping traveler Ulysses and sheltered Professor Abacus Abernathe—whose insights and perspectives on life and love and longing resound long after their brief chapters have concluded. Sally, the brothers' close friend from home, speaks in a responsible and lively first-person in her handful of designated chapters—though, besides being the novel's only narrating woman, her role seems disappointingly peripheral.

> ***"Each character is bright and vividly painted, possessing their individual voices and affectionate turns of phrase, and I found myself empathizing with each of them. While I was captivated by watching their personalities unfold, I began to feel uncertain about whether I had watched any of them truly grow by the time I reached the novel's conclusion.***

By devoting time to each of the character's perspectives, Towles develops and showcases each of their distinct moral codes. Throughout the novel, Billy is infatuated with his well-worn copy of *Professor Abacus Abernathe's Compendium of Heroes, Adventurers, and Other Intrepid Travelers*, which he has proudly read twenty-four

times. The anthology tells of mythic figures like Achilles and Jason but also of Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Edison, all of them labeled heroes. Towles' characters, too, seem sometimes to reside under strict labels of hero or villain or troublemaker––or at least under their own unwavering codes of conduct. Emmett: the stern and stoic (and repetitively one-dimensional) do-gooder who prefers to "go it alone" when faced with challenge, who can always discern right from wrong. Duchess: the wild card, motivated only by his notion of "balancing the scales," whether their balancing requires that he enact violence or receive it. Woolly: a drifter who seeks the elusive, nostalgic "one-of-a-kind" day, blinded to the consequences and repercussions of his actions. Eight-year-old Billy: the curious observer and naive know-it-all who strives for connection and discovery over all. Each character is bright and vividly painted, possessing their individual voices and affectionate turns of phrase, and I found myself empathizing with each of them.

While I was captivated by watching their personalities unfold, I began to feel uncertain about whether I had watched any of them truly grow by the time I reached the novel's conclusion. Tainted by a looming darkness that contrasts its good-natured, adventure-story tone, the final chapters of *The Lincoln Highway* suggest that the characters might not be exactly who we've always thought them to be—Emmett especially. Still, this deviation is so sudden and the novel's conclusion so abrupt that I felt as though Towles merely mentioned rather than committed to what could have been one of the most interesting and unexpected beats of his otherwise relatively familiar book.



The novel's compact ten-day duration and alternating narrators contribute to a discernible push-pull of narrative momentum. The plot is undeniably action-packed, seeming even part thriller at times, with nearly every chapter landing on a cliffhanger: a blow is delivered to the back of the head, an envelope thick with cash has disappeared, a door is deviously locked. But then, as a cliffhanger lingers, a new chapter will begin and the narrative will jump a few hours back in time to "catch up" another character's story

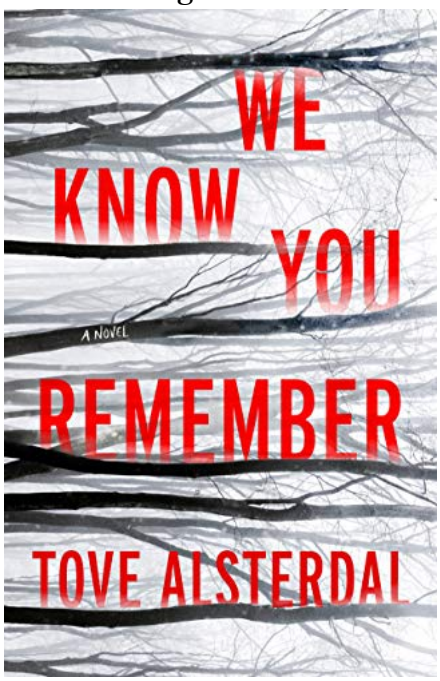
to the present moment when the dramatic moment can finally be resolved. Although it occasionally builds tension, the mechanism becomes noticeably routine and instead slows things down; it forced me to tap my foot impatiently through anecdotes, reflections, or recollections I may have otherwise wholly enjoyed. As characters digress into their memories and recount events long past, Towles establishes a story-within-a-story structure. This structure parallels the tales Billy reads aloud from his compendium and also reflects the greater motif of storytelling present in Towles' work, which, along with the character's overt morality, leads the novel to read almost parabolically at times—for better or worse.

Still, Towles manages to craft a compassionate story about family and friendship. Though I wasn't astonished by the inventiveness or originality of *The Lincoln Highway*'s plot or characters, I was nonetheless moved by the music, emotion, and observant specificity with which Towles writes. There is an undeniable magic in adventure stories, collective histories, Fourth of July fireworks, and watching Times Square light up just after sunset; there's magic in the way that people become stories and stories become people, all to be retold under the stars or in rattling train cars or on road trips with indeterminate destinations. 

We Know You Remember: Tove Alsterdal's Sensational American Debut

by Sarah Closser

Set in a rural Swedish town, Tove Alsterdal's *We Know You Remember*, like any good mystery, wastes no time introducing its first victims. Scarcely seven pages go by before an exiled son, Olaf Hagström, stumbles across the dead body of the father he hasn't spoken to in years. The detective officer called in to handle the case, the dedicated Eira Sjödin, was only nine when Olaf, then fourteen, was found guilty of the rape and murder of a girl in the community. Spared a sentence, Olaf was instead sent away and excommunicated by his family; but the crime never faded from Eira's, or the town's collective memory. These two murders, set twenty years apart, slowly unravel under Eira's relentless investigation, and suspense builds as Eira realizes just how personal the truth might become. The obvious grows less so, as guilt and memory intertwine to rewrite a narrative that scarred an entire town and destroyed many of its lives.



We Know You Remember is one of those books whose characters you don't entirely want to root for, but from whom you can't quite walk away. Their lives are messy, complicated, and marked by the negatives in life. Everyone has something to hide, and as Eira increasingly discovers, each character's history plays a role in filling the gaps in her investigation. Alsterdal masterfully blends the past and present, infusing violence and fear into the backdrop of an otherwise peaceful town. What begins as a relatively one-dimensional group develops into a rich character study on what makes us all human.

Alsterdal's writing style is unassuming yet descriptive, and her reluctance to share more than the essential leaves room for the mystery to take center stage. The novel is structured a bit like a Russian doll, positioning the reader as the detective rather than an omniscient observer. Each time the facts threaten to line up, Alsterdal throws a new wrench in the works, uprooting the whole case but keeping her readers perpetually invested in the final outcome. *We Know You Remember* isn't a book done justice by a quick read, or skipping to the end, because its appeal comes from the building anticipation of the journey. No conversation, hunting knife, or cardigan is unimportant, and what results is a disturbing portrait of how much people will risk, and excuse, to protect those they love. Readers will soon find themselves ensnared in the perfect formula of nordic noir, yet one which continually subverts expectations.

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Alsterdal weaves in pertinent social commentary on police, the treatment of minors, and the dangers of social media, all while building a world of characters that feels incredibly genuine. In the spirit of Halloween season, anyone in the market for a mystery should consider this novel required reading. Or for anyone new to the genre, the winner of Swedish Crime Novel of the Year is a great place to start. *We Know You Remember* will shock you, and make you question what you do remember, and all that you don't.

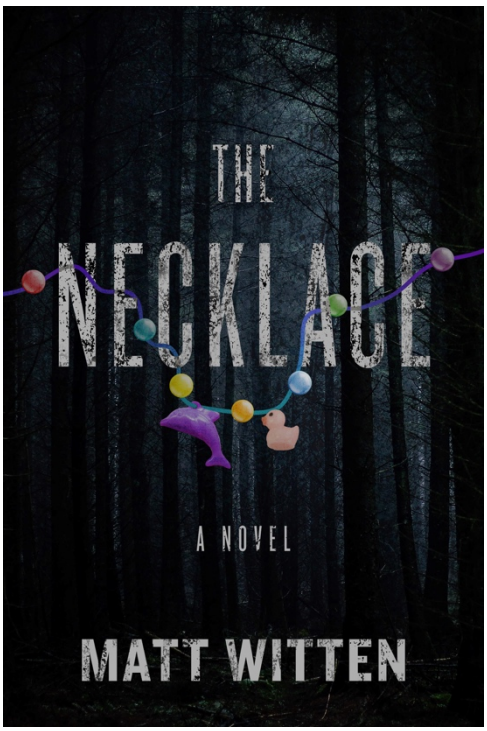
Review of *The Necklace*

by James Yiu

How do you deal with the loss of a child? Or with seeing justice served 20 years too late?

The Necklace by Matt Witten follows the journey of Susan Lentigo, the mother of a young girl named Amy who was killed and raped. Twenty years later, Susan finally ventures out of her small town in New York to attend the execution of Amy's killer, hoping that she might finally break free from the guilt and trauma that has haunted her for so long.

However, it is Susan's same lack of closure that hints that there may be something more to Amy's death. On her journey to witness the execution, Susan makes discoveries that suggest the prosecutors might have gotten the killer wrong all these years.



The Necklace is a tightly-crafted and well-paced novel that certainly makes for a gripping and entertaining read. The use of Susan's journey to the execution as the backbone of the narrative was clever, since it tied the story together and gave us a clear picture of Susan's strong and likeable character. The alternating perspective between present-day events and the day of Amy's murder added just the right amount of suspense to the novel. Nevertheless, there are three main flaws with the plot.

First, some key elements of the story were quickly introduced without being sufficiently backed up or "prepped for." For example, there is an insinuation very early on that rape was involved and the suspect would be male, based on the fact that Amy reported being uncomfortable around her grandmother's boyfriends. But the timing of

this information is just too early. The story had not yet reached the point where forensic evidence was introduced, making this a difficult logical jump to make. The author's attempt to push the story in a given direction is at times too obvious.

The story could have benefited from having more secondary characters to obscure the killer's true identity. As it is, the possible suspects became narrowed down very early on. What the novel does well is it keeps us guessing who—between the two main suspects—is truly guilty.

“The Necklace is an intriguing and logically sound mystery murder novel, and we are rewarded with satisfaction when the truth is finally revealed. However, from a narrative perspective, certain weaknesses keep it from living up to what the best of the genre has to offer.

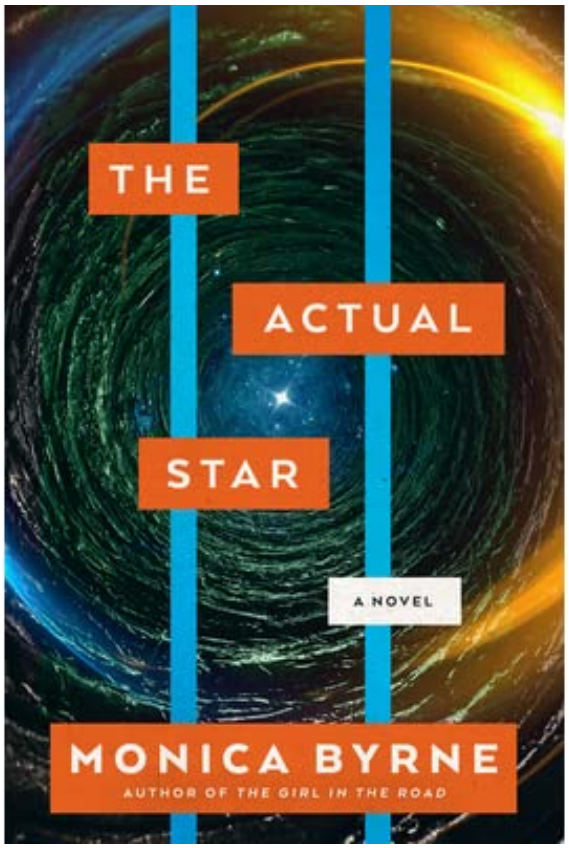
And when the true killer is finally found, his motive for killing Amy is not adequately explored. Clues are laid down to expose shortcomings in the his character, but it is never explained how these shortcomings wouldn’t simply manifest in some other manner, and why in the end they materialized as the desire to murder Amy.

The Necklace is an intriguing and logically sound mystery murder novel, and we are rewarded with satisfaction when the truth is finally revealed. However, from a narrative perspective, certain weaknesses keep it from living up to what the best of the genre has to offer.

An Actual Review of *The Actual Star*

by Lilienne Shore Kilgore-Brown

If you pick up *The Actual Star*, open it to the middle, and read it for 10 minutes, you might not realize that the storyline and character you are currently following is just one piece of a much more complex puzzle, that the scope of what is Monica Byrne's second novel stretches far beyond any one moment or person. This novel is ambitious in this way, following three storylines from three moments in time (set in the years 1012, 2012, and 3012) while giving full attention to each and fleshing out every detail.



In 1012, twins and lovers Ajul and Ixul prepare to ascend the throne one year after their parents' death, which has left them and their younger sister Ket the only remaining members of the royal family. In 2012, 19-year-old Leah Oliveri buys a plane ticket to Belize in an effort to connect with her Mayan heritage, as she is fascinated by the spiritual realm of Xibalba. In 3012, the last of the world's ice has melted, and Niloux DeCayo writes a controversial letter asserting her usurpation of the global society's values. What unites each of these timelines, however, is their orientation around one single Belizean cave.

Leah's story serves as the heart of this novel—her journey is largely shaped by the past actions of Ixul, Ajul, and Ket, and her life is the foundation on which Niloux's future time exists. From the first page, Leah's eventual fate serves as a point of mystery, as Niloux reveals in her future time that Leah had "disappeared" in the Great Cave on December 21st, 2012, and that she (Niloux) believes, with searching, they would "find her bones alongside the others". This immediate cliffhanger serves as the launching-off point of the book. The fate of her life and her disappearance becomes the central point of interest, and the how, why, and what it has to do with twins from one thousand years ago brings each timeline together, creating a compelling story.

Classifying this novel within only one genre would be neglecting the great many strides Byrne makes in crafting such a complete world in *The Actual Star*. It's historical, contemporary, and yet science fiction all at once. The sci-fi element, namely the futuristic society of 3012, presents the biggest challenge in terms of familiarity. Byrne doesn't hold the reader's hand. She makes immediate use of unfamiliar and entirely new words without explicitly describing their meaning, often neglecting to confirm definitions until many pages or chapters later (if ever). The reader must learn to adapt and catch on as they go.

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With language, too, Byrne is unafraid, writing exchanges in formal Spanish and even whole conversations in Kriol. The latter is comprehensible to an English speaker only with intense concentration, forcing the reader to slow down and sound words out. Spanish is used in the novel as a spiritual and religious language; there's great meaning embedded in how and when it's used, what words are chosen, and to whom the character is speaking. That's not to say the book is impossible to read without a grasp of Spanish—it's actually made better for it. Just as the central cave unexpectedly acts upon each character, the book unexpectedly acts upon the reader, forcing them to mumble the language to themselves, parse out the etymology of exquisitely fabricated words, and find the hidden connections between each narrative string.

Religion, and the exploration of it, is Byrne's great masterpiece in this text. In the 3012 timeline, a character describes "braiding," defined in the glossary as "a method of reconciling multiple streams of information to discuss an issue and arrive at a resolution." In the story, this involves complex scientific and technological developments; the book itself forces the reader to braid, using religion and spirituality as a key. Through the characters' various and many-faceted faiths, three discordant narratives come together, discuss an issue, and arrive at a resolution.

For being such a spiritual story, Byrne's narration can be shockingly frank. *The Actual Star*'s plot and themes cultivate an otherworldly aura, but the language doesn't mirror that with flowery words or loping descriptions. Instead, Byrne writes plainly, navigating the tricky discussions of human bodies in relation to sex, incest, and self-harm. Truthfully, the descriptions of sexual encounters between characters are almost uncomfortable to read, yet never pornographic. *The Actual Star* only ever takes you from your own present moment, but it never forgets itself and removes you from the moment of the story. It's graphic, but not sensational; honest, but not distracting. Its voice is noticeably different from other books of similar genres, which is off-putting at first, but Byrne doesn't write this way unintentionally—rather, the style of the narrative highlights the depth of the overarching story.

"The Actual Star only ever takes you from your own present moment, but it never forgets itself and removes you from the moment of the story. It's graphic, but not sensational; honest, but not distracting.

Because *The Actual Star* operates on the principle of immersion as opposed to careful explanation, it doesn't immediately whisk the reader away into some new, easily accessible adventure they can't tear themselves away from. It's disorienting at first and even frustrating to read as one tries to figure out what everything means and how these stories are connected. But every single thread, of which there are many, comes together in a beautiful, calculated climax as the story reaches its end. This novel would greatly reward a second read—even as I flipped through the chapters to write this review, I was

stunned by the parallels of events, phrases, and imagery established in the first chapter that were included and referenced all the way through to the final page.

"It was real this time, not play, never again play," Byrne writes from Ket's perspective in the first pages. *The Actual Star* isn't casual play- it's powerfully constructed theater, tugging at your wonder, curiosity, and confusion up until the very last word. 

Review of *Under the Whispering Door*

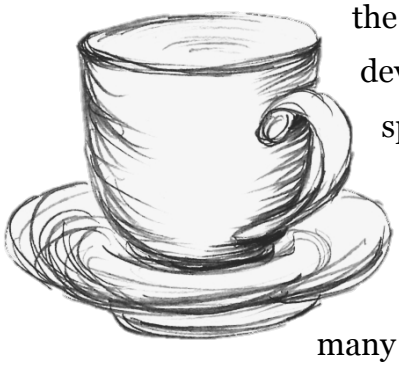
by Tatiana Gnuva

T.J. Klune, the author of *The House on the Cerulean Sea*, once again outdoes himself with his latest published work, titled *The Whispering Door*. The journey begins with the death of its main character, Wallace, a lawyer and an undoubtedly selfish individual. He is described as having been hostile and antipathetic to his employees and relatives during his relatively short lifetime, his funeral only attended by his bitter ex-wife and his compassionless business partners. It is revealed that Wallace refuses to cross-over to the afterlife and remains trapped at a tea shop, which serves as a half-way point for souls crossing over to the hereafter. Throughout his stay at the shop, stuck between two worlds, that of the living and that of the "next," he discovers both himself and his humanity with the help of a ferryman named Hugo.

The plotline progresses slowly and does not feature much action or any dramatic events. The book is, however, incredibly rich emotionally, particularly in terms of the author's descriptions of each characters' mental reflections. There is a lot of focus on the characters' identities and their relationships, which rapidly grow stronger

and evolve over time at the tea shop. I really appreciated the characters' loyalty to one another, and the reader cannot help but become attached them. Klune does, however, guide and direct readers into forming specific opinions about multiple characters featured in the book; for example, just as the reader quickly comes to love most of the residents of the tea shop, Klune further guides them into immediately disliking certain individuals who visit Hugo, including the inspector and the fortune teller.

I really enjoyed witnessing Wallace's character development. The writing offers a glimpse at Wallace's inner thoughts and a front row seat to the character's emotional growth. There is a striking contrast between the Wallace portrayed in the beginning of the book and the Wallace that progressively emerges. As we learn more about the character, he becomes more complex, more human. As one of the character's aptly tells Wallace, "It took you dying to find your humanity" (p. 265). Klune tracks the individual's moral and ethical progression, identifying the relationships and realizations that transform the character's mindset. The plot becomes particularly interesting when the narrative hits a turning point: Wallace's character development and journey to find himself are forced into hyper-speed as a higher divine being called "the Manager" gives him an ultimatum of seven days to cross over. Wallace has a week to correct and repair his legacy on earth, and he uses those last few moments to help others by bringing closure to as many individuals as he can. Through this resolution, the author offers a reflection on morality and the need to respect others in life.



If you are an emotional reader, beware. This book tells a story of heartbreak, love, and tragedy. Klune explores death and grief throughout his writing and even said in an interview that writing the novel was cathartic in terms of dealing with several of his own personal experiences involving mourning. I would say that this could be equally true for the reader, and the novel can be insightful in understanding grief. The author presents emotions that the reader can identify with, and Klune enables us to see the world through his characters' eyes. *Under the Whispering Door* is very well written in the way that one can completely experience the characters' personal turmoil. The characters are confronted with intense emotional events, and the author manages to make these experiences come to life right on the page. The text additionally details different types of

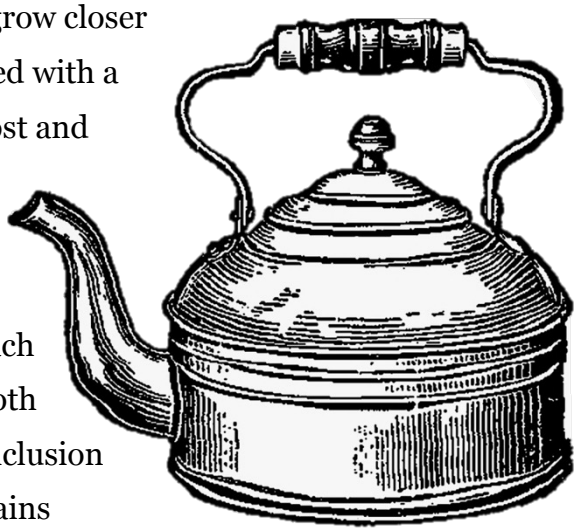
grief and the reactions to it. Klune perfectly expresses Wallace's anguish at being a ghost alongside his increasing awareness of his own death. Similarly, he also completely captures Wallace's relief as he settles into his new environment, where he is comforted by Hugo and the other characters.

Some passages are profoundly sentimental. For instance, one person refuses to move on to the afterlife in fear that their loved one will not be waiting for them on the other side. Hugo's own grandfather, Nelson, will not cross over to the next world until he feels that his grandson has found peace and can safely be left behind in the realm of the living. This writing is tragic, yet it can also be comical and joyful. The characters at the tea shop live in harmony, and their lighthearted spats and teasing are a refreshing and humorous addition to the otherwise emotionally heavy text. The author manages to insert a cheerful tone even when dealing with incredibly grave and somber themes. However, this aspect of the writing can be confusing, and it is very difficult to pinpoint the type of audience that Klune is attempting to reach with his story, as some parts are relatively serious and dark whereas other parts are cheerful and almost childish. The author deals with some hard subject matter overall, so if you are seeking a purely lighthearted, carefree reading, I am not sure I would recommend this novel.

> ***"If you are an emotional reader, beware. This book tells a story of heartbreak, love, and tragedy.***

The author also brings up important philosophical questions which I thought were a pleasant addition to the novel. The story, using Wallace's example as a jarring warning, serves as a lesson and reminder to live life to the fullest. The character gets so caught up in insignificant and secondary concerns, such as his profession and work, that he loses sight of the importance of kindness, meaningful interactions with others, and social relationships. I enjoyed the novel's optimistic stance towards the afterlife as well. Wallace gets another opportunity to live in death and ultimately thrives in the purgatory that is the tea shop, finding the love and friendship he did not have the chance to experience during his time on earth. Wallace has regrets regarding the life he lived, but still, he is given the possibility to correct them.

My favorite part was the immediate bond between Hugo and Wallace and observing this relationship flourish throughout the story. A complex romantic relationship unfolds between the two, and I loved seeing the characters grow closer throughout the book. Both individuals are confronted with a star-crossed lover type situation, as Wallace is a ghost and Hugo is mostly still part of the living and cannot touch the dead, which includes Wallace. For that reason, the relationship was particularly interesting to witness because the characters fell in love with each other despite this physical barrier. The longing of both characters culminates in a relatively predictable conclusion that unfolds in a *deus ex machina* type way yet remains satisfying considering that both Hugo and Wallace ultimately get the happy ending they deserve. Overall, I would recommend this relatively short novel to anyone unafraid to shed a few tears as they follow along Wallace's emotional quest to find love and humanity.

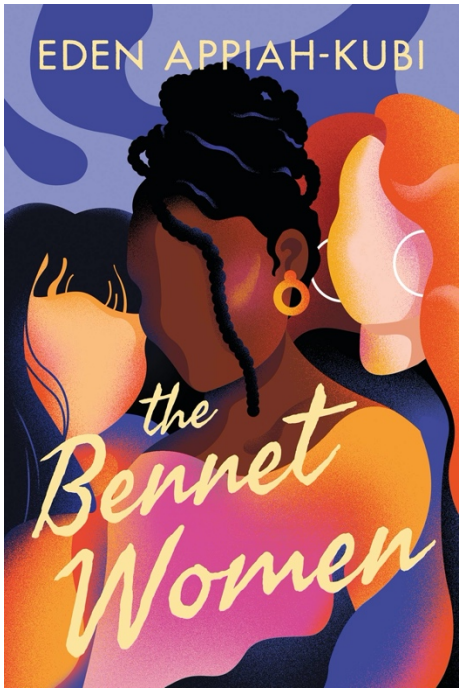


The Modern Adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* I wish I could have written

by Sadia Haque

I was the girl reading Bronte in the fifth grade, crying over Dickens in middle school, and ranting passionately about Homer in high school English. But nothing could ever compare to Austen, and—cliche as it sounds—*Pride and Prejudice* has always had my heart. I first picked it up in elementary school and have read it countless times since.

That said, when one is a fan of classic literature, you can't really ignore the mass market of modern adaptations. Most fall flat, some are good, but very few are great. I myself have read and watched any and all possible adaptations of this tale of two quarrelsome lovers, and so I was both wary and curious about how Eden Appiah-Kubi would reimagine *Pride and Prejudice* on a modern college campus in *The Bennet Women*.



The story focuses on EJ, a former ballerina and current engineering student, who is figuring out her post-grad plans; her best friend Jaime, who has just recently transitioned and is coming to terms with her new gender identity; and Will Pak, whose life in Hollywood, derailed by a bad breakup, led him to finish his B.A. at Longbourn. Tessa, EJ and Jaime's level-headed best friend Katerina, Will's loyal and protective manager, and Carrie, the uber-famous ex-girlfriend that broke Will's heart and trust also add in their two cents. Switching between these perspectives, the novel

tells the story of how Will and EJ fall in love. Starting from their bumpy first meeting at the Fall Formal to the eventual romantic relationship they embark on, Appiah-Kubi incorporates integral moments from the original Pride and Prejudice, while also creating her own original story.

Sorry, purists—it's by no means the most faithful adaptation. Set in the 21st century on an American college campus, Appiah-Kubi took many liberties in the way she transformed many of Austen's famous characters. Elizabeth became EJ; Jane became Jaime; Darcy became Will; Bingley became Lee. Other characters like Colonel Fitzwilliam, Mr. Collins, George Wickham, and Catherine DeBourgh were also altered to fit more into the 21st century and overall feel of the novel, either by switching genders, changing motivations, or melding together different roles.

"What I loved most about this remake is that it was so unapologetic about who it was written for. This adaptation is for all the people who don't fit into beauty standards of a white, cis, straight society—those who had to learn to love themselves in a world built to tear them down, who deserve to find romance in a world that refuses to cast them as the lead.

But the essence of Austen—her wit, social commentary, and ability to give a voice to the voiceless—remains. What I loved most about this remake is that it was so unapologetic about who it was written for. This adaptation is for all the people who don't fit into beauty standards of a white, cis, straight society—those who had to learn to love themselves in a world built to tear them down, who deserve to find romance in a world that refuses to cast them as the lead. Appiah-Kubi transforms Elizabeth into a proud Black woman, trying to make it in a field that often devalues her. Jane, the character in the original novel depicted as the pinnacle of womanly perfection, is placed into the role of a newly-out trans-woman figuring out her identity. And Darcy becomes an Asian-American actor trying to break free of the stereotypes forced on him. For all those people out there, this Pride and Prejudice adaptation is for you.

And, my god, did I feel seen in this novel. When EJ had a reckoning with her parents about the sacrifices they have made for her, I couldn't help but think of my own

complicated relationship with my parents as I have gone off to college. Her fierce protectiveness of her fellow Longbourn women, resonated with me, especially as an older sister and mentor to Barnard underclassmen. And maybe because Longbourn College reminded me so much of Barnard and Columbia, or maybe because I felt for EJ as she was figuring out whether she wanted to be more practical or idealistic about her postgrad plans—whatever it might be—this might be the most relatable modern adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* I've ever consumed.

EJ, Will, and Jaime will never truly take the place of Elizabeth, Darcy, and Jane, but they've crawled their way into my heart. I always loved Elizabeth as a character, someone headstrong and stubborn, but it wasn't until EJ that I saw myself in her role. It wasn't just her struggle for self-acceptance within a college populated by people who didn't look like her or live like her, it was in her relationship with her parents, her friendships with the women in her dorm that made me feel like Appiah-Kubi was reaching into my heart and speaking to my soul.

"Though the commentary feels real, at times Appiah-Kubi is less than subtle about her reproaches against modern society.

Regardless of my love for this adaption, there are moments where certain topics being brought up do feel somewhat contrived, like Jaime offhandedly mentioning how she and Lee use "I" statements when arguing because of their years spent in therapy, or how often different waves of feminism are brought up in casual conversation. Though the commentary feels real, at times Appiah-Kubi is less than subtle about her reproaches against modern society.

Appiah-Kubi addresses race, too. Maybe other readers—ahem, white readers—might feel it makes the novel awkward when Will talks about being forced into nerdy sidekick roles as an Asian-American, or EJ getting tense when someone comments on her majoring in civil engineering as a Black woman. But I felt a kinship towards these struggles—struggles my friends and I face everyday.

This novel is a love story between EJ and Will, but it's so much more than that. It's about sisterhood, acceptance, loving yourself and choosing to open your heart to others.

And isn't that the point of *Pride and Prejudice*? It isn't just a love story; it's a family drama, it's comedy, it's social commentary.

I like to think that if Austen was a 21st-century woman, she'd want people reading and writing about her books to take risks, be bold, poke fun at popular ideas and themselves. This is a woman who focused on her writing career and died a spinster when everyone else was getting married and having children. Maybe I'm being idealistic, hoping that a white woman from the 19th century would support Appiah-Kubi in the choices she made, but Austen was a standout in her own time—why couldn't she be one today? And why shouldn't writers adapting her novels be as bold as her? The topics for social commentary have changed, money might still make the world go round, but issues of race, sex, and gender are just as prevalent. Comedy and family issues are far more different and complicated than they were in the 19th century and marriage is not everyone's idea of a happy ending or secure future. Faithfulness to Austen doesn't mean being stuck in 19th century England; it means adapting the storytelling choices Austen made in the 19th century to the 21st.

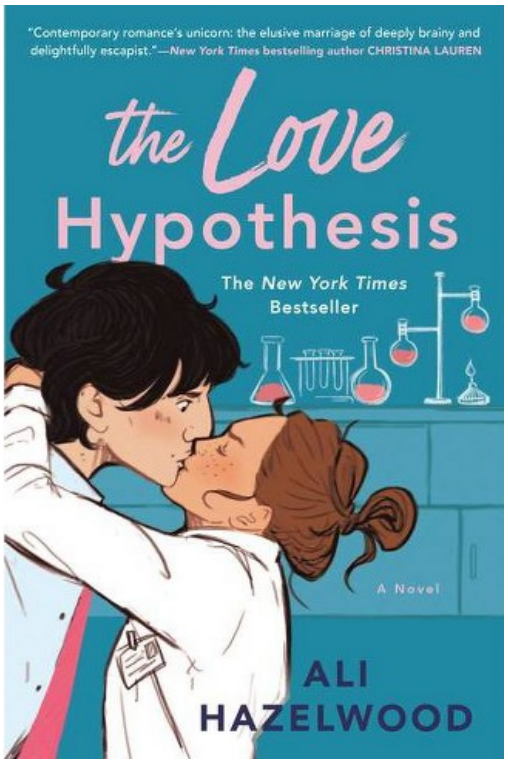
So for all the lovers of Austen, casual or fanatic—hey, even those indifferent to Austen—I highly recommend this book. Maybe you'll finally come to enjoy *Pride and Prejudice*, or, like me, you'll fall even more in love with the story. Whatever your feelings might be, *The Bennet Women* is a book worth reading. So, pick it up and give it a whirl. Let yourself be seen.

Review of *The Love Hypothesis*

by Ruby Zeidman

Ali Hazelwood's debut book, *The Love Hypothesis*, has pretty much taken the romance world by storm. Although it might not have racked up a ton of written reviews, it's become extremely popular in online communities. With its use of well-known romance tropes and steamy scenes, it's caught booklovers' attention. Just go on BookTok, and you will find a slew of videos praising the book as one of their all-time favorites.

The book centers around Olive Smith, a student in Stanford's biology Ph.D. program. She is smart, hardworking, and passionate about her research on pancreatic cancer, as well as a selfless and dedicated friend. But her life is thrown into chaos when a convoluted rumor about her kissing Dr. Adam Carlsen, a young and brilliant professor, spreads like wildfire throughout the entire grad program. As the novel progresses, she finds herself creating a fake dating scheme to get around the rumor. Little does she know that, among all the fake dates, she will be drawn to Adam, despite a reputation for being cold, cruel, and even heinous.



The book is fun and a real treat for any avid romance reader. Hazelwood's detailed plot rife with multiple beloved and popular romance

tropes shows that she is clearly an avid romance reader. She uses the fake relationship trope, grumpy/sunshine dynamic, forced proximity, and even the workplace romance trope. Although these have all been used before, Hazelwood breathes new life into these popular tropes by using them in an academic setting. Hazelwood even makes outright references to the fact that she is using tropes. When Olive asks Adam to fake-date her, he asks how many times she has done this, to which she replies, never but that she is familiar enough with the trope.

Hazelwood touches on the cutthroat world of academia, illustrating the imposter syndrome that comes with pursuing a Ph.D. She calls attention to the double standards, lack of representation, and sexual harassment that women and people of color face in STEM. We see, for instance, Olive's friend Anh, a woman of color, try to assemble a community for BIPOC in STEM. Yet, while I appreciated the representation, I wish Hazelwood had focused on this more, allowing the book to take on a more realistic feel.

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Another interesting development arises as Olive pursues a research opportunity working with Dr. Tom Benton, a well-respected and well-funded researcher whose lab offers her the room to expand upon her research. When Tom offers Olive a position, she is ecstatic. However, when they are alone at a conference, he comes onto her and tells her that the only reason he offered her a position in his lab was to sleep with her. His words make Olive feel powerless as she questions her place, highlighting the intersection between gender and power imbalances in academia.

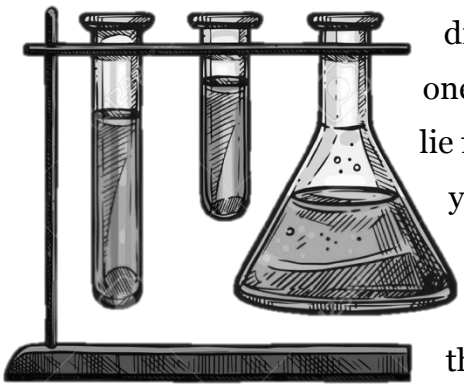
While I appreciated that Hazelwood covered such a real issue, I think she could have gone further. When Olive asks Tom why he treats her this way, he answers that it is because he wants what Adam has. I did not like that in all of this sexual harassment, Adam—not Olive—was at the center. I also wanted to ask: Had Tom done this to other

people? How does he treat others working in his lab? Has anyone ever called him out on it? Hazelwood ignores all these questions.

The pacing of the book also failed to strike a balance, either slogging on or going too quickly. The book moves very slowly in the first half and then rushes through the ending. Hazelwood initially describes two characters who know little about one another and have hardly ever interacted; then, all of a sudden, in the second half of the book, Adam and Olive are confessing their love to each other. As a reader, I found these transitions a bit jarring. I wish she had spent more time on developing their fake dates and thrown them together more without others around.

Moreover, as an avid romance reader, I found that the happy ending with Olive and Adam finally getting together was not a surprise, nor were the tropes or plot. The draw of books like this is that they offer a fun world in which readers can lose themselves in the novel's fantasy; however, for me, this did not come through as much as it could have in *The Love Hypothesis*.

Hazelwood generates a lot of questions and storylines, but many of them fail to come together in the end. Anh, for example, is a horrible friend to Olive throughout the story. She, even if unknowingly, puts Olive in increasingly uncomfortable situations with Adam such as pressuring Olive to sit on Adam's lap at a conference. Hazelwood even draws readers' attention to their friendship when Malcolm, one of Olive's friends, points out that she shouldn't have to lie for Anh. He says, "Especially not so that your friend and your boyfriend can get together guilt-free. That's not how friendship works, last I checked." Despite raising this question, in the end, Hazelwood does not really resolve this weird dynamic between them. Even in the end, other than lightly touching on it, Olive never acknowledges that she went through all this trouble for Anh or how the fake dating scheme reflects a larger issue in their relationship.



Another possibly compelling but ultimately disappointing storyline is Olive's focus on pancreatic cancer and her relationship with her mother. In the beginning, we learn that Olive is Canadian. When Adam asks her why she chose to study in America, Olive tells him she got a full ride. Then she thinks, "It was true. If not the whole truth" (80).

At the same time, Olive continuously alludes to always feeling alone and how this is why she is willing to do whatever to maintain her friendship with Anh. However, this is not revisited. Although Tom asks Olive about why she studies pancreatic cancer, she does not really explain beyond the fact that her mother died of pancreatic cancer. While this partially answers the question, it does little else to further explore Olive's background. How did Olive feel when her mother died? How does this affect her now? By not diving into these questions and storylines, Olive falls flat.

While the idea of a novel set at Stanford amid the stress of a Ph.D. program is fascinating, Hazelwood does not explore this as much as she could. The book lacks rich description both in terms of setting and characters. Instead of diving into the descriptive, the book succumbs to the excessive narration which can take away from the actual story development. Hazelwood offers a whole paragraph of narration as Olive contemplates texting Adam. She writes, "Maybe he was a weird modern-day hippie and hated technology. Maybe he'd given her his office landline number, and that's why he'd told her to call him." and continues this way for the rest of the paragraph, not even getting to what exactly Olive texts him. It feels incredibly monotonous and redundant while offering nothing to move the story along. Although Hazelwood offers a lot of compelling writing, there is also a lot of detail that could be cut down.

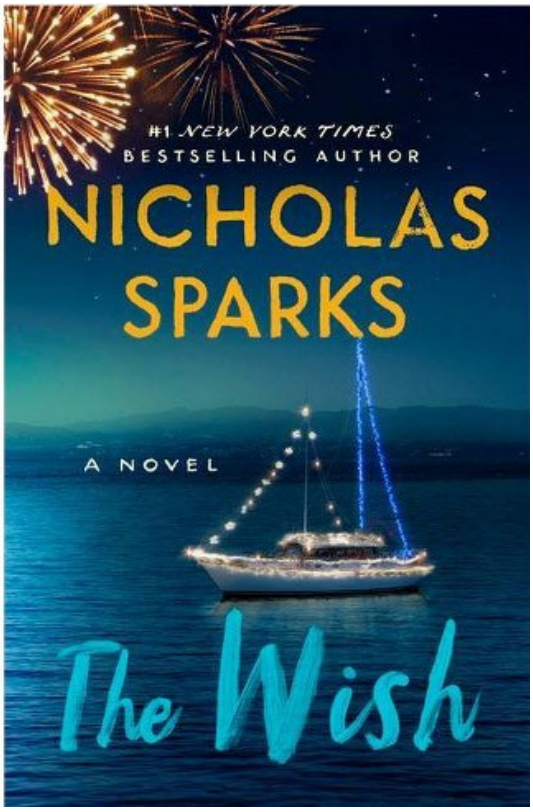
> ***"The pacing of the book also failed to strike a balance, either slogging on or going too quickly. The book moves very slowly in the first half and then rushes through the ending.***

Still, this is only Hazelwood's first book, and she has another one forthcoming and set to be released in 2022 called *Love on the Brain*. In *The Love Hypothesis,* Hazelwood proves that she can create different threads and storylines, but she does not tie them all together and many are left up in the air. Still, her writing focuses on women in STEM, Hazelwood is offering a unique and often underwritten perspective in the romance genre.

Review of *The Wish*

by Anna Eggers

Life moves in a fluid motion. We constantly march forward, leaving memories, people, and who we once were to the past, sometimes never to be seen again. When faced with her last Christmas following a cancer diagnosis, in *The Wish* by Nicholas Sparks we follow the story of Maggie Dawes, a woman blogging about her journey with cancer as she helps run a gallery which displays her photography in Manhattan. As we switch back and forth between her childhood and adulthood, the flow of time makes us question if anything ever truly gets left behind.



We encounter Maggie as she recounts a time of her life lightyears away from her final months. At sixteen, she is pregnant after her first time with a boy who cared too little for her; at age 39, in 2019, her face is shallowed, skin taut, as she continues to lose weight due to her chemotherapy. We cycle between the feeling of truly living for the first time and the present day, a mortal reminder that everything eventually comes to an end.

Our hearts tingle as we watch young Maggie fall in love with the endearing and charming Bryce after moving to her aunt's small town to hide her pregnancy. Yet, more profoundly, we also feel a deeper love that flows through the pages—familial love. From Maggie's aunt who understands Maggie in a quiet manner that often doesn't even require words, to the unequivocal connection between Bryce's entire family and the love they spread to Maggie, Maggie's journey proves that even through the biggest hardships, family is there to take care of us.

Throughout the shifting between major stages of Maggie's life, her pregnancy and illness, we start to understand why she became a photographer. While she has an eye naturally geared to capturing the right moment, she never intended on photography becoming such a big part of her identity growing up. It was her relationship with Bryce that ignited the passion in her, and the memory of their time together that kept her career moving forward. Thus we understand: what we least expect often ends up hitting us square in the back without any warning, and, suddenly, puzzle pieces fit together that once seemed impossible to connect.

Although a very late plot twist can very easily seem unfounded or unearned, *The Wish* escapes this cliche—completely wrecking your emotions in the final fifty pages. Its bittersweet ending, although evident by the terminal understanding of Maggie's life throughout the book, still comes as a shock. Tears will flow. With this sadness comes also a need to introspect: because of x that happens in the book, you come to question where you're at in your life and the direction you're going. Be prepared to cry and contemplate.

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The two stages of Maggie's life center around Christmas. However, since the book is filled with plenty of small town jolly moments as well as big city ones, anyone will recognize their own form of celebration within the pages. As the daughter of two Catholic parents, sent to live with her Aunt who was once a nun, the religious aspect of this book is very present. They go to church on Sundays and another main character constantly brings up his journey towards becoming a priest, but luckily it doesn't overwhelm the story or pass judgement.

If you're searching for a book to read coming up to winter break that will fill you with joy and those warm feelings that everyone searches for during the holiday season when trying to get away from the harsh realities of life, this might not be the book for you. However, if you want a book that will make you reminisce about your first love

that was never meant to work out, reconsider what you cherish about your relationships with your family, and leave you with an appreciation for the expanse of time ahead of you to find your path, this book will be just right. 

Review of *Please Don't Sit on My Bed in Your Outside Clothes*

By Liana Eisler

Hilarious, reflective, and authentic, *New York Times* bestselling author Phoebe Robinson's *Please Don't Sit on My Bed in Your Outside Clothes* brings an unmatched vibrancy to current events that otherwise may have felt discouraging and inescapable. Robinson's essays remind readers that despite the tendency for societal obstacles to polarize and divide us, we have more shared experiences than we think. Upon thoughtful introspection, Robinson brings readers together through comedic discourse and relatable experiences.

Whether we like to admit it or not, talking about the pandemic has become almost everyone's favorite pastime. Fortunately for us, Robinson's essays are anything but monotonous, integrating humor and elegance to engage readers and stimulate a more hopeful discussion. It is no easy feat to address the elephant in the room, the pandemic, in an optimistic and understanding manner, but Robinson makes it her mission to do just that.

Each essay launches the reader on an enthralling adventure, one that is simultaneously playful and thoughtful. The first essay draws attention to important health equity considerations of the pandemic. Addressing important themes of social and racial injustices in the United States, Robinson offers her personal experience as a woman of color. Robinson shares moments of discomfort and discrimination in an effort to raise awareness and provide a

space to speak openly about the evident prejudices many Americans face on a daily basis. Both relatable and authentic, Robinson provides an optimistic perspective in what can feel like dark and unsettling times. She acknowledges how easy it is to see the glass half empty, writing about how at one point or another, we have all considered losing "faith and question whether we should've had it in the first place" (Robinson, 16). As the mountain of death rates due to the pandemic, racial and sexual acts of violence, and other societal tragedies continues to loom over us, it can become painfully easy to be overwhelmed, cynical, and downhearted. However, Robinson energetically finds silver linings in various moments of feeling isolated, whether that be due to physical quarantine or more internal and emotional feelings of being an outsider. Robinson encourages readers to take agency in their role in society, as well as society's role in their individual lives. Granting more power and energy to hope and optimism rather than discomfort and despair elevates Robinson's perspective and ultimately affirms her ability to reach readers. With each page, Robinson is equally dedicated to raising awareness, as well as spirits.

"Robinson energetically finds silver linings in various moments of feeling isolated, whether that be due to physical quarantine or more internal and emotional feelings of being an outsider.

Robinson draws from elements of her personal life to provide insight on a variety of sensitive, yet prevalent issues. Specifically, she illustrates her experience of being in a biracial relationship, as well as her contra-status-quo desire to not have kids. Through the lens of being misjudged and categorized by society, her initially unique and personal experiences transform into experiences many readers can sympathize with and relate to. Even if you're not currently struggling with gender and/or racial injustices or confronting the lack of desire to have kids in a society where women are praised for becoming mothers in heteronormative, cisgender marriages, Robinson effectively evokes a wealth of emotions that surely all readers will resonate with. In doing so, Robinson strategically addresses inescapable societal issues and tensions regarding racial, socioeconomic, and gender gaps.

Robinson's essays offer a unique, and perhaps unconventional, way of raising awareness by highlighting ways in which relationships are often impacted, whether positively or negatively, by prevalent issues in today's society. Robinson brings vibrancy and life to recent current events as opposed to allowing readers to merely dismiss them as another headline on our phones. She finds clever and effective ways to engage readers while also providing important insight into how many aspects of society require improvement. Not only that, but she raises awareness and provides a comfortable and inclusive space in order to encourage the readers to be involved in improving the way society functions.

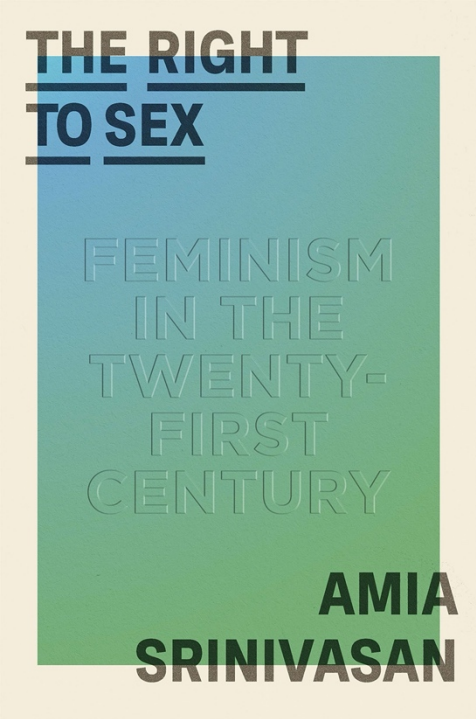
On a more serious note, Robinson eloquently brings attention to the issue of mental health in the United States. As a hardworking female business owner, she has seen first-hand how tense and overwhelming life becomes due to the difficult balance of one's career, relationships, and everyday tasks. Her hopeful outlook never ceases to prevail, inspiring the reader to keep her head up, and aspire to grow and learn when taking on a new, challenging obstacle. Tying together the overall themes of each essay, Robinson strongly encourages readers to demand and fight for change. Robinson's essays truly serve as a loudspeaker, allowing her to project her voice to anyone who will listen—or read—that is.

This humorous, heartwarming, and thoughtful collection of essays will provoke laughs, spark meaningful conversations, and hopefully instill a strong desire for change. For any reader who is looking to learn more pop culture references, prevalent current events, and laugh along the way, I think you just found your next book!

Review of *The Right to Sex*

by Phoebe Lu

The moment I began to define myself as a feminist was after attending the 2017 women's march. I had been interested in feminist ideas before the march, but it was after walking for three hours—holding a bright pink poster that said "on Wednesdays we smash the patriarchy"— that I really felt like I solidified it as a true facet of my personality. The following year, I watched a livestream of Christine Blasey-Ford testifying against Brett Kavanaugh. As a feminist, I felt that I was called to action, that I needed to contribute to some sort of solution. In high school, I had no idea what that meant. Then, I found the hashtag #BelieveWomen that began trending on social media following this hearing and saw power in this movement fueled by vast social media influence.



The phrase 'Believe Women' is one of the first topics Amia Srinivasan broaches in her essay collection "The Right to Sex: Feminism in the Twenty-First Century." In this collection, Srinivasan sets out to explore "the politics and ethics of sex" in a way that embraces "discomfort and ambivalence." The sense of ambivalence is immediately visible in her opening essay, "The Conspiracy Against Men," where she criticizes the unequivocal stance of 'Believe Women,' calling it a "blunt tool." Srinivasan writes the following:

> But this zero-sum logic – she's telling the truth, he's lying – presumes that nothing but sex difference is at work in the assessment of rape allegations. Especially when factors other than gender – race, class, religion, immigration status, sexuality – come into play, it is far from clear to whom we owe a gesture of epistemic solidarity.

Srinvasan raises an example: at Colgate, a liberal arts college with a 4.2% Black population during 2013-2014, 50% of the rape allegations were against Black students in the same time period. In a case like this, it is hard to justify standing behind a simple phrase with little concrete action—especially given the historic hypersexualization of Black bodies that likely had contributed to this racist discrepancy of rape accusations. Short slogans like #BelieveWomen are easy to champion. Just include it on a quick Instagram story. And boom! You are fighting the patriarchy. Yet, this simplicity is also its weakness as slogans like #BelieveWomen give no room or time for nuance, offering a generic feminist mantra that cannot possibly cover the complex dynamics at play in sexual assault allegations.

The analysis of "Believe Women" exemplifies much of Srinivasan's work throughout the book, for Srinivasan takes examples of contemporary feminist activism and complicates them. Overall, I enjoyed the essay collection greatly, especially how it delved into provocative new perspectives not usually visible in the mainstream feminism I was familiar with. However, it's worth mentioning that the opposite opinion also exists: on Goodreads, many reviewers mentioned that Srinivasan's claims didn't necessarily strike them as novel given their previous experience with feminist discourse. Therefore, I think "The Right to Sex" is better suited for readers like me whose feminism has been more defined by popular culture than by theory as it serves as an excellent introduction to deeper feminist thought.

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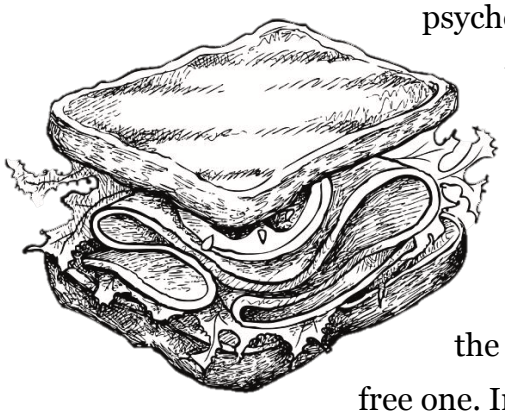
When she warned of "discomfort" in the preface, I expected to contend with tragic or shocking facts that would illuminate the subjugation of marginalized bodies. However, reading her work introduced a new kind of discomfort. She helped me realize that many of the structures I had leaned on to *feel* like a feminist in fact rarely encapsulated—and hardly ever did anything to solve—the problem.

Consent is another example of a popular topic that Srinivasan explores. As awareness for sexual assault grows, discussions over consent are taking an increasingly important role in the American educational system: most of my friends and I recall being shown the "Tea and Consent" video, where a man with a British accent compares asking for tea to asking for consent to help high schoolers understand what kind of sex is okay and what kind isn't; Columbia too emphasizes consent in its Sexual Respect Module required of all new students, where videos compare consent to a baseball, a pizza, a sandwich.

But sex is far more than a sandwich. Throughout the book, Srinivasan interrogates the idea that obtaining consent is enough to render a sexual encounter unproblematic. She raises the possibility that "the problem is something deeper, to do with the psychosocial structures that make men want to have sex with women who don't really want it," arguing that the emphasis on consent alone cannot take away the patriarchal structures that encourage the domination over a female body. Even while consensual, there are many underlying power dynamics at play in sex that beg the question of whether one's choice to have sex is truly a free one. In "On Not Sleeping With Your Students," Srinivasan mentions how a student may choose to sleep with a professor out of fear for "a bad grade, a lackluster recommendation." Everyone is consenting- but does that render these encounters unproblematic?



Srinivasan explicitly references the sex-as-a-sandwich analogy in the titular essay "The Right to Sex." The seemingly simple idea that "you don't get to share someone's sandwich unless they want to share their sandwich with you" is much more nuanced in dating apps like Tinder and Grindr, where certain identities often have a much more difficult time finding matches. Srinivasan cites a video released where an Asian guy switches his Grindr profile with a white guy, instantly getting many more admirers, while the white guy using the Asian profile receives little attention. The users of Grindr have no obligation to consent to a romantic or sexual encounter (sharing their sandwich) with Asian men, yet the situation is still uncomfortable. Srinivasan points out

that often, the guise of "personal preference" allows "racism, ableism, transphobia and every other oppressive system" to propagate.

Through her discussion of these nuanced dimensions of 'Believe Women' and of consent, Srinivasan shows that few of the ideas championed in contemporary feminism can be considered the cure-all we may have hoped for them to be. Near the end of each essay, Srinivasan usually shifts from criticism to ideology, positing potential solutions to these problems in abstract terms. Yet these abstractions are potentially at odds with the problems Srinivasan points out—problematic hashtags, rape allegation statistics, dating app preferences—that are specific, concrete examples. In response to the limitations of 'Believe Women,' Srinivasan emphasizes the importance of the theoretical framework of intersectionality, stating "a feminism that deals only with 'pure' cases of patriarchal oppression – cases that are 'uncomplicated' by factors of caste, race or class – will end up serving the needs of rich white or high-caste women." After arguing that consensual sex can still be oppressive, Srinivasan asks feminists to shift away from the sole emphasis on consent education or consent-enforcing laws as the solution. Rather, feminists should become emphatically "imaginative." Both Srinivasan's discussion of intersectionality and her beckoning for imagination are conceptual nudges rather than concrete solutions, advocating for us to think rather than to immediately act. She does not provide guidelines for how these broad ideas should address practical issues like how to treat rape allegations that may be influenced by other biases, or how to educate young adults to work towards more equitable power dynamics in sex.

> ***"I don't think it was Srinivasan's mission to provide any exact solution to the problems she presents. To do so would risk conforming to the same phenomenon she criticizes—delineating complex situations into clean-cut, one-size-fits-all answers.***

Srinivasan is slightly more specific as she hints at a solution after explicating the blurring of personal preference and discrimination on dating apps. She asks her audience to reconsider their sexual preferences, to no longer regard it as immutable or an innate part of their nature but instead to see these preferences as also affected by conventional norms that marginalize select identities. I like this suggestion; still, I

wonder if the people who write “NO ARABS, NO RICE NO SPICE” on their dating profiles will really be the ones reading Srinivasan. I also wonder whether just thinking about these issues is enough. And if it isn’t, is there anything we can do about it?

I don’t think it was Srinivasan’s mission to provide any exact solution to the problems she presents. To do so would risk conforming to the same phenomenon she criticizes—delineating complex situations into clean-cut, one-size-fits-all answers. But just as I found #BelieveWomen to be comforting amidst the confusion and frustration of the Kavanaugh trial, I also hoped for a clear set of directions from Srinivasan so that I could feel like I could be active in addressing these problems. Perhaps the same sense of desire for action also motivated much of the feminist movements that Srinivasan criticizes.

In my Asian American Literature class, I learned about a quote from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari:

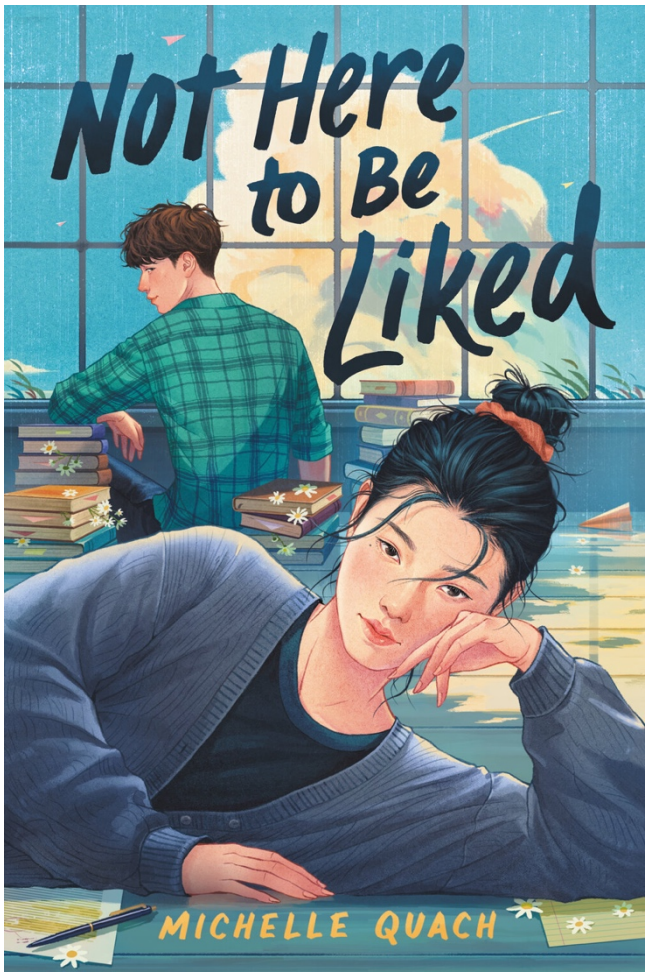
> Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are…what is real is the becoming itself, the [obstacles to] becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that whom becomes passes.

I use this quote to serve as a conceptual nudge for myself on how to deal with the ambiguities and discomfort left behind after Srinivasan deconstructs the solutions I had leaned on. I think that maybe the act of figuring out how to ensure equitable gender relations in sex, or how to ensure equitable gender relations as a whole does not have to be a process defined by its end result. Perhaps the “becoming,” the pondering of the difficult questions that Srinivasan poses, should be an okay state to exist in, not an intermediary we hurry to escape from. 

Review of *Not Here to be Liked*

by Ava Benavente

Last Monday, I sat down to read, expecting to feel that all too familiar feeling of reading a cheesy young adult love story and falling in love alongside the main characters. However, in Michelle Quach's *Not Here to be Liked*, I became more and more of a feminist with every flip of the page. Quach takes on a difficult challenge in her debut novel by discussing the way feminism looks different for every woman within the context of a young adult love story.



In the novel, we meet Eliza Quan, a young woman whose whole high school career has been focused on being appointed Editor-in-chief of her school newspaper, *The Buegal*. Up until the morning of the election, she's running unopposed, but reformed jock and newspaper newcomer Len Dimartel swoops in and beats her for the position. Ultimately, Eliza declares her loss as a result of blatant misogyny and accidentally starts a feminist revolution at her high school in Irvine, California.

The general plot is super intriguing and original but ultimately falls into the young adult trap of having Eliza fall head over heels for the face of the patriarchy, Len. The book is phenomenal in the way it captures the struggles of the modern feminist, reconciling one's personal experiences with misogyny or lack thereof with the experiences of the masses. It doesn't stray from telling a story in which most of

the women have a completely different view of themselves, their femininity, and their connection to feminism. An example of this is the side character Serena. Serena is arguably the greatest and most intense feminist in the novel, but she also slut-shames a girl who she believes "stole" her boyfriend. Serena is a likable character fighting for what's right but uses misogyny to make herself feel better about her own relationships. It's these complex relationships with feminism that make Quach's story a unique and important one.

However, it chooses to tell this story under the lens of a heterosexual love story which feels unnecessary. The choice, honestly, reinforces the misogynistic stereotype that one can only capture the attention of young female readers by incorporating a dreamy male love interest into the plot. This could have been reconciled easily by making this story include a same-sex relationship or omitting a love story altogether because it wouldn't ask the female reader to connect one's relationship with feminism to a male presence.

> ***"The book is phenomenal in the way it captures the struggles of the modern feminist, reconciling one's personal experiences with misogyny or lack thereof with the experiences of the masses.***

Despite all my problems with the principle of a love story being included within a feminist novel, I, in the long run, found the romance between Eliza and Len quite charming. Their romance is endearing and a profound example of a healthy teen romance. They're respectful towards each other and move at each other's pace, giving straight female readers a healthy example of the relationships they should strive towards.

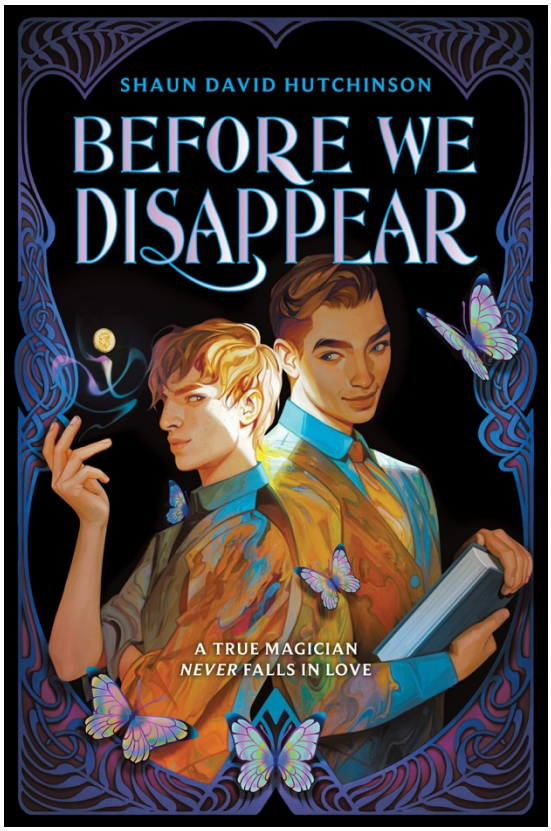
I'd highly recommend readers of any gender who love thought-provoking plotlines, humorous subtext, and cute romances to check out *Not Here To Be Liked*.

Review of *Before We Disappear*

by Frankie Degiorgio

Trigger Warnings: parental figure/guardian abuse, confinement, period-typical racism. Review contains minor spoilers.

Shaun David Hutchinson's (*We Are the Ants*, *The Apocalypse of Elena Mendoza*) newest young adult novel *Before We Disappear* is a historical fantasy set in 1909 during the Seattle Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. It follows two magicians' assistants: Jack, an orphan adopted by world-renowned illusionist the Enchantress, and Wilhelm, who is kept captive and forced to use his own magical talents by magician and thief Teddy Barnes. The two meet when their respective magicians become rivals for the stage at the Exposition, and they grow closer as Jack learns about Wilhelm's secret ability and the truth of his relationship with Teddy.



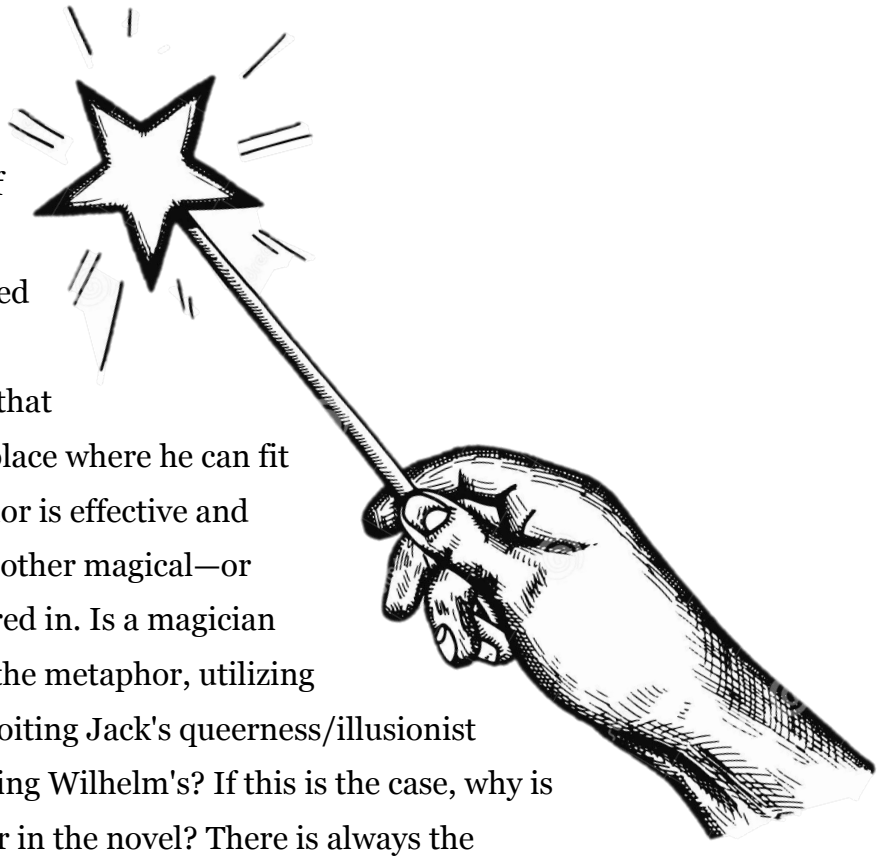
What really doomed me to finding this book mediocre were my expectations for Hutchinson. While I had never read his novels before, *We Are the Ants* has been on my to-read list for a long time, and from many reviewers and friends I had heard that Hutchinson's writing and storytelling was something extraordinary. It was why I was so excited to pick this book up this month, and why I ended up being so disappointed by the novel's mediocrity.

Mediocrity is truly the best word for it. The book is *fine*, I wish I had something stronger to feel about it, whether positive or negative, but there isn't much else there. While the setting and time period are unique and fun, the romance and characters are pretty typical across modern YA, and the writing style is nothing terribly different.

Guardian abuse is a big part of *Before We Disappear*, making much graver the otherwise light historical romp. Through the side characters Teddy Barnes and The Enchantress, Hutchinson depicts two different faces of guardian abuse. From a literary standpoint, I think the two-dimensional villainy of both characters, but especially Teddy, ultimately takes away from the gravity of Hutchinson's depictions. The Enchantress' abuse towards Jack is narcissistic in nature, she is too self-obsessed to truly care for Jack or his adopted sister Lucia, and thus she abandons them until she needs them for her own gain. On the surface she appears to be a much better guardian than Teddy, but her neglect of Jack and Lucia is still substantial. Teddy, on the other hand, is abusive in a much more obvious way. He kidnapped Wilhelm as a child, chains Wilhelm to his bed, keeps him under close surveillance, and aggressively exploits Wilhelm's powers. However, I think that the flat characterization of both of these villains undermines the impact of their abuse towards our main characters. The Enchantress' self-obsession is so over the top that it becomes a cliche, and Teddy manages to be such a horrible person it is almost comical. These characterizations are lazy and unsubtle, and, worst of all, they come across as Hutchinson talking down to his audience, suggesting that the reader might not understand that these characters are abusive if they aren't evil in the most obvious senses of the word.

> ***"I would recommend Before We Disappear for fans of LGBT+ YA looking for a novel with a unique and interesting historical setting. Despite its dark themes, it has a very fun story that centers queer happiness and celebrates diversity. For those looking for a complex, deeper read, or something driven by unique and intricate characters, I might skip this one.***

A common thread along Hutchinson's work is LGBT+ themes and characters. *Before We Disappear* is no exception. The central plot is focused on the romance between Wilhelm and Jack, with an additional romance between two female characters in the world of the Exposition. Magic throughout the novel is also used as a loose metaphor for queerness, which works in some cases and gets messy in others. In particular, Wilhelm's magic is paralleled with queerness, especially in the character of the abuse he faces at the hands of Teddy. Wilhelm is confined and exploited by his bigoted abuser for his magical ability, and it's only after meeting Jack that his magic is celebrated, and he finds a place where he can fit in. While in Wilhelm's case this metaphor is effective and clear, it starts to get muddled when the other magical—or rather, illusionist—characters are factored in. Is a magician like The Enchantress, in the context of the metaphor, utilizing queer aesthetics to succeed? Is she exploiting Jack's queerness/illusionist ability in the same way Teddy is exploiting Wilhelm's? If this is the case, why is Wilhelm the only true magical character in the novel? There is always the possibility that I'm reading too far into this, but I believe Hutchinson has something to say about queerness in this novel, and I wish it could have been said in a clearer way.



To conclude, I want to mention Hutchinson's author's note in the back of the book about the time period of the novel and the presence of queer characters in the early 20th century. Hutchinson addresses the somewhat historically inaccurate acceptance of queerness and queer characters throughout the novel, noting that his goal with this book was to explore queer joy in a setting and time that interested him. He also emphasized the fact that LGBT+ people have been around for much longer than modern misconceptions might assume. As both a queer person and a student of history, I admired Hutchinson for this acknowledgment of the ahistorical elements of his novel, and his insistence upon centering his story around queer joy despite the realities of queer existence at the time (which were, by the way, not as terrible as we might assume

now). As a reader, I found this suited well the overall light tone of the novel, and allowed me to be invested in the queer relationships and the external factors in the narrative keeping them apart without the insertion of the larger, overarching factor of homophobia. Hutchinson's prioritization of diversity and joyful storylines is commendable, especially in the context of the ongoing discussion in the literary community about diversity in fantasy novels, particularly ones based on or in earlier time periods. While there is a substantial number of authors that don't include diverse characters in their fantasy novels under the guise of "realism" (despite their stories being full of magic), Hutchinson makes purposeful steps in *Before We Disappear* to resist this narrative.

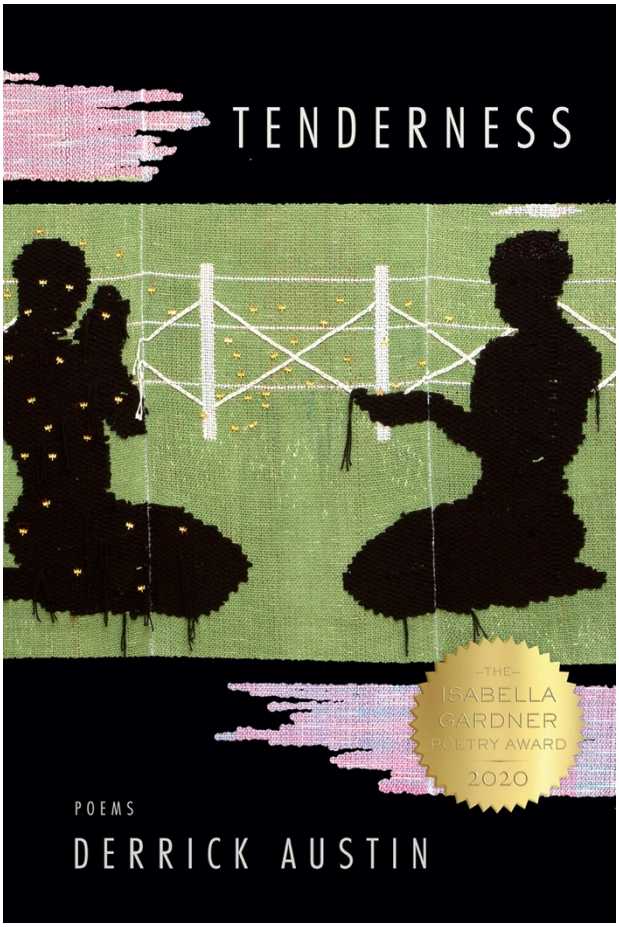
I would recommend *Before We Disappear* for fans of LGBT+ YA looking for a novel with a unique and interesting historical setting. Despite its dark themes, it has a very fun story that centers queer happiness and celebrates diversity. For those looking for a complex, deeper read, or something driven by unique and intricate characters, I might skip this one. 

Review of *Tenderness*

by Henry Zhu

A mother gleams in happiness as her child babbles "ma-ma" for the first time. A father prides in his child when he finally learns how to ride a bicycle, after falling and grazing his knees, blood still oozing from the wounds. Two parents begin to experience a midlife crisis as their son's shadow vanishes through the gates of college.

These images are perhaps traditional ideals of "tenderness": a feeling of deep affection toward others, regardless of distance, which connects us all as humans. Derrick Austin certainly explores these concepts in *Tenderness*, his most recent poetry collection. For those who may not be familiar with Austin, he was born and raised in Florida, has written various books (*Trouble the Water, Chapbook)* and leads creative writing workshops at universities across the country.



As a poetry collection about tenderness, there is an unsurprising multitude of poems that address the nature of love. One piece that stood out to me was *Epithalamium,* which describes a wedding in Florida. This is clearly an homage to the Sunshine State he loves, and in the story, the couple "cast [their] names into the boundless Gulf." The poem is not only a love letter to Florida, but also to love itself: their romance is forever embedded in the waters, and by being a part of the grandeur of nature, it will stand the test of time. This theme of

love being ‘eternal’ and cemented in nature is Austin’s way of elucidating *tenderness* as an enduring force.

Yet another heartwarming poem was *Son Jarocho,* a prose-like narrative that recounts the narrator's adventures with his friends in Mexico which takes up nearly a dozen pages. The language is lively and raw, fully depicting the intimacy and the companionship of the friends, while characters ruminate on their identities. Ultimately, the collective journey taken together by friends is an affectionate story that preaches to readers to fully celebrate, appreciate, and live in the moments of our lives. If traveling on a cross-country road trip is on your bucket list, reading this poem will easily give you a glimpse of the excitement and vigor of this journey.

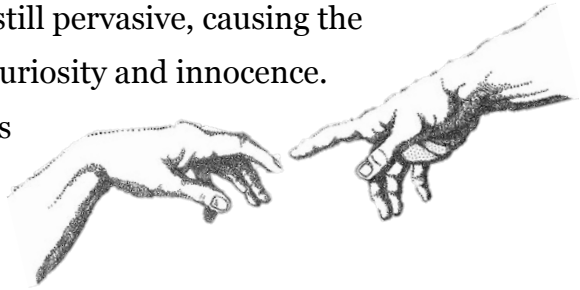
However, to say that *Tenderness* only explores love is a gross mischaracterization of the poetry collection. In fact, what stands out is perhaps the lack of 'tenderness' in these poems, as Austin tackles many somber societal issues. Specifically, a plethora of his poems seek to understand "the Black experience" and what it means to be Black in yesterday's and today's America.

> ***“Austin is redefining our understanding of tenderness, where love cannot possibly exist without hate. There is a fraught and fragile relationship between these two opposing forces, and perhaps this precarious balance is what tenderness is.***

These poems naturally enter dark but unchartered territories: Compared to other Black authors who may write lengths detailing the distressing lives of characters, Austin rarely tackles these issues in the foreground of his poems, even when he makes allusions to historical and present events. In *Late Summer,* he establishes the context of the savage murder of Philando Castile in front of his wife’s and daughter’s eyes by a cop in 2016. Yet, this does not become the focus of the poem. Instead, he transitions to narrating a summer fling, reminiscing on unrequited love. The only thin thread connecting these ideas is the grief felt by the speaker during this doomed relationship and the larger community that expressed outrage over police brutality. Austin’s poetic structure seems to imply that these problems permeate society, but they may only be in the background of our minds. His messaging is timely, with the ever increasing use of

social media as a tool for awareness. We have the power to have our voices heard, but to what extent do we care about such important issues? Does reposting a black screen or engaging with trendy hashtags suffice? Are we truly *tender* and *affectionate* toward others when we see a life lost? What does it mean to be *tender*?

These pernicious effects then shift to the core of these poems, suggesting the universality of pain among marginalized communities. In reference to the past, he speaks of the brutal and savage nature of American history. A substantially heartbreaking poem is *The Witching Hour*, where he personalizes trees not only as physical beings of nature but trees that have seen (and taken) the lives of Black and Brown people. In this case then, it appears violent death is an inevitable aspect of nature, a direct juxtaposition to what was described earlier regarding love in nature. Yet another memorable poem is *My Education*, which is structured in a circular manner so that it can be read in chronological and reverse order. The poem accentuates the speaker's desire to be white and comments on the segregation of education. More than fifty years after *Brown v. Board*, this segregation is still pervasive, causing the speaker (and Black students) to lose their childlike curiosity and innocence. These sociological, historical, and institutional issues then bind space and time together and plague humanity, and it seems Austin is imploring us to address them more than ever today.



So after all, why does Austin name his collection "Tenderness" if so many of his poems are antithetical to that idea, exploring apathy and hate instead? To me, Austin is *redefining* our understanding of tenderness, where love cannot possibly exist without hate. There is a fraught and fragile relationship between these two opposing forces, and perhaps this precarious balance is what tenderness is. Hate seems to be hurled at anyone in America whose skin is not white and whose sexuality is not heterosexual. At the same time, humans have the capacity to choose who and what they love. We can be unconsciously primed to abhor something that is unlike us, but we can also choose to consciously embrace people who are different from us. This power of love is vital and after introspection, we will find that the bonds from our similarities that hold us are much stronger than those from our differences that pull us away.

With this in mind, I think Derrick Austin's *Tenderness* is definitely worth checking out. There are many other interesting and fun poems that I would describe as "hip," with references to Drake, Jackie Kennedy, Emily Bronte, and Romanticism. *Tenderness* is a light and enjoyable read for those just starting out on poetry, but it is still thought-provoking: beneath the surface of these poems, there are tacit subjects that should disturb and appall us. If the goal of literature is to raise awareness of our collective surroundings, then Austin has done more than enough to warrant a read for *Tenderness*. 

Review of *Earthly Delights*

by Eris Sker

I made two mistakes before beginning my reading of Troy Jollimore's collection of poems *Earthly Delights*. The first was my aim to read it over the course of a single afternoon, perched on some campus bench or lawn where I could feel the earth below me and delight. The second was planning to only read through it once.

This is not a collection you finish in a single sitting, nor can its poems be fully experienced with a single read by which I mean, it is turtles all the way down; cinematic and ruminative, packed with references and atmospheres that escape definition. It opens with an invocation to a muse, calling not for a story of rage or of a complicated man, but one of performance—"wear me like clothing"—of singing and of leaving—"you will sing and then you will sing / then you will go / then I will sing / then I will sing / and then go." Already, in this beginning, the collection anticipates its ending: a poem on Odysseus' departure from Ithaca, where, one glance backwards having been allowed, Odysseus and the reader "marched down that as yet untranslated road." This, the last of the moments in a series of poems on unmakings and losses, marks only a new beginning of further creation and retranslation, a road not yet (re)told.

> ***"This is not a collection you finish in a single sitting, nor can its poems be fully experienced with a single read by which I mean, it is turtles all the way down; cinematic and ruminative, packed with references and atmospheres that escape definition.***

Jollimore's collection is a world where each poem is a new song, a new mundanity imbued with meaning. A world which is every version of that glance backwards, every step on the untranslated road. It is filled with themes of political insanity and confusion; philosophical ideas on beauty, life, and capitalism; allusions to classical art—most notably in the title poem, reflecting on Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*—and meditations on the process of artistic creation. In the poem *Marvelous*

Things Without Number, the reader is pulled into an eternal summer that is always liminal, always repeated, already lived, yet always in flux, saying "you can do it again / (whatever *it* is) but you can't do it over." A few pages further in, *Free Huey P. Newton With Every Purchase* plays with the irony of capitalism, punching you in the chest the same way Bo Burnham's *That Funny Feeling* does. Or a bit earlier, *At Limantour* sings to the beauty of living: of knowing your own infinitesimal existence can still contain joys. Peppered throughout the collection, the *Screenshots* series draws inspiration from popular films, destabilizing the meanings of the surrounding poems through a shorter format, humorous ideas, and political ire. Other poems are flooded with ellipses, contradictions, multiple voices speaking in the same line as they do in *Fire*: "And what is it in me (*do not move* / that prefers to think *(do not let the gods speak* / that to make people feel *(let the winds forgive* / is the task *(i have tried* / of the poet?" Some poems soccer punch your emotional solar plexus, others make you chuckle lightheartedly at Schrodinger and his cat then make you whimper on the reread.

Jollimore navigates elegantly through this seemingly chaotic assemblage, taking delight in delving into the Western history of making and unmaking—of memories or objects lost to the passing of time. His collection is rich, lexically and semantically, in intertextual poems tinged with a profound sadness even at their most joyful, examining the possibility of the human being and, indeed, of poetry as palimpsest, as a made and unmade, an unresolved and restless creature. But you—you, dear reader, and me—Jollimore pushes into a world so proximate to reality that we lose ourselves within it. By the end of *Earthly Delights* we are left scrambling for meanings, revelling in the not-knowing, asking more and more questions which the poet refuses to, or perhaps cannot answer.

see you in the margins again next month!

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