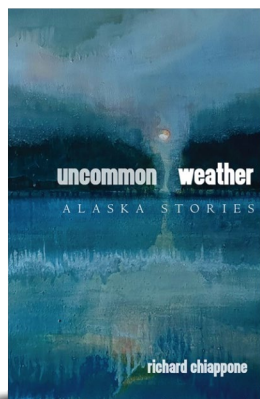


SHORT STORIES



Uncommon Weather

Alaska Stories

Richard Chiappone, University of Alaska Press (SEP 16) Softcover \$19.95 (166pp) 978-1-64642-636-2

In Richard Chiappone's dark and humorous short story collection *Uncommon Weather*, people battle isolation, boredom, and existential anxiety.

These twelve intricate stories are set in Alaska's small towns and vast wildernesses and explore deep isolation. There are empathetic characters who are flawed and just shy of irredeemable; there are people with fresh wounds whose futures seem dismal. Climate change and infidelity cause existential insecurity too.

In the haunting story "Little Wing," a bush doctor misses her flight out of Anchorage and is left to sit at a restaurant watching the wait-staff try to feed a fallen nestling; thousands of miles away, her daughter's funeral takes place in Buffalo. In "Time on the Water," a man moves into his cabin on the Kenai Peninsula to fish his remaining years away in the wake of an amicable divorce and a terminal cancer diagnosis. There, he develops an unexpected appetite for outlaw life. In "Uncommon Weather," an environmental conservationist, disillusioned after years of dedication without impact, gives herself permission to have an extramarital affair unhindered by shame.

The stories' twists are a vicious combination of unforeseeable and inevitable. Herein, even formidable senses of humor come up short in the face of brutal tragedies and harrowing discoveries. Still, most of the endings skew hopeful, if lonely, with weighted optimism. This configuration is to a large extent shaped by the distance, jobs, and wilderness recreation that's unique to Alaska's geography, where relationships take on new stresses and significance.

Marked by alienation and a dark sense of humor, *Uncommon Weather* is a haunting collection of short stories about human burdens in a far corner of the world.

BEN LINDER

THRILLER



Gaslight

Miles Joris-Peyrafitte, Sara Shepard
Blackstone Publishing (SEP 17) Hardcover \$26.99 (340pp), 979-821218922-4

In Miles Joris-Peyrafitte and Sara Shepard's thriller *Gaslight*, a power-seeking cult exploits its members.

Having escaped her controlled past, Rebecca lives a quiet life with her husband and two children in Nevada. This changes when her old friend, Danny, shows up unannounced, bringing with her reminders of earlier years. Rebecca tries her best to help Danny, but she soon realizes that Danny is under the influence of the Infinite Spiritual Being community, a cult whose members are forbidden contact with the outside world. Rebecca wonders about Danny's true intentions and tries to keep those she loves out of harm's way.

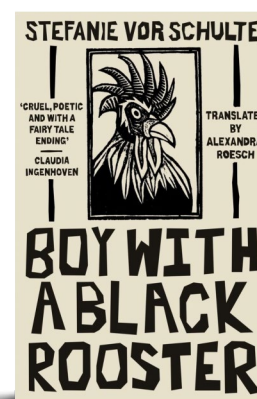
Members of the ISB are manipulated by the cult's leader, Ben, who assures them that they "deserve to be happy." The novel's resultant unnerving tone mimics Danny and Rebecca's inner feelings. Herein, everyone has a secret; as the story continues, questions are answered. Certain plot points start to lose their enigma as they're repeated, though, as with the secret that Rebecca keeps from her husband regarding how she and Danny know each other.

However, other elements of the story that seem drawn out or discursive are revealed not to be so: a flashback to a conversation regarding cookies between Rebecca and another person proves pivotal, revealing characteristics like humility and self-awareness. And as different perspectives and stories are incorporated, stark contrasts are drawn between the cult members' once-normal lives and their existences once they are reshaped by the cult. Further, rapid timeline shifts are used to deepen understanding of the cult and the extent of its power over its victims.

Gaslight is a gripping thriller in which a woman once controlled by fear confronts her past.

DANICA MORRIS

TRANSLATIONS



Boy with a Black Rooster

Stefanie vor Schulte, Alexandra Roesch (Translator), The Indigo Press (SEP 10) Softcover \$17.99 (192pp) 978-1-911648-77-2

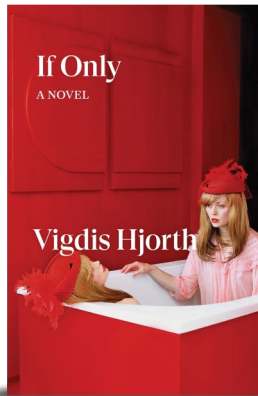
A fairy tale with an edge, Stefanie vor Schulte's *Boy with a Black Rooster* explores a vast land afflicted by cruelty and ill fortune.

Martin is a kindhearted orphan whose father went insane and killed the rest of his family. Looked upon as a bringer of bad luck by the locals, Martin, with his steadfast companion, a rooster he can communicate with, seeks his fortune outside their village, joining up with a traveling painter. What follows is a succession of dreamlike and nightmarish episodes in which Martin, his rooster, and the painter roam from village to village, seeking a local girl who was abducted by mysterious horsemen. Their quest takes them through skull-filled ravines, forests populated by werewolves, a town in which the dead are posed for family portraits, and to a kingdom ruled by a deranged princess who sacrifices children.

Boy with a Black Rooster's fabulistic incidents are relayed in a gritty tone that also accommodates humorous touches, including a local jester and hangman who is ordered to execute himself. Martin's quest is the focus, but the story's true tension comes from the duel between his innocence and the evil in the land that threatens to stain his soul. For every dark act, as with the princess barricading her kingdom and starving its inhabitants, there's a counterbalancing act of compassion, as when Martin helps one of the princess's subjects give birth during hard times.

Culminating in a tense showdown that takes place during a grueling "sleep game," the narrative circles back to Martin's home to answer lingering questions about his origins. *Boy with a Black Rooster* ventures to some terrifying places, but in true fairy-tale fashion, it also reassures and inspires thanks to its hero's humility and valor.

HO LIN



If Only

Vigdis Hjorth, Charlotte Barslund (Translator), Verso Books (SEP 3) Softcover \$19.95 (352pp), 978-1-83976-888-0

In Vigdis Hjorth's powerful novel *If Only*, a playwright develops an obsession with an older professor that spirals into an all-consuming love affair.

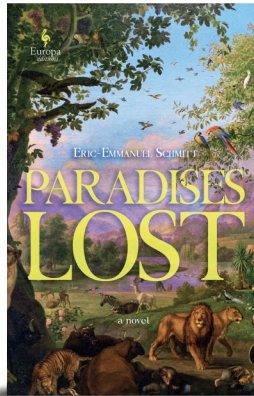
At thirty years old, Ida is married with two children. She has a successful career as a writer of radio plays. Yet she feels unfulfilled, waiting “for the heartbreak that will turn her into her true self.” At a seminar, she meets Arnold, an older professor. The two share a night together before returning home to their respective spouses. Later, Ida receives a series of postcards from Arnold and is surprised by the depth of feeling they stir in her.

Soon, thoughts of the professor consume her days and her marriage dissolves. Month after month, Ida attempts to draw her lover to her through letters and phone calls. But Arnold is reluctant to return her adoration, offering her only enough crumbs of affection to sustain her bottomless love. For years, they meet at conferences alone. Ida becomes paranoid and frantic, driving away even her closest friends and family. Still, she remains confident that the day will come when Arnold will realize his true feelings for her. After three long years, he does, and the two travel from city to city, embroiled in a disastrous relationship that leaves them both scarred.

The narrative makes sparing, effective use of jumps in time to give a sense of the larger trajectory of Ida's life. This device lends the novel perspective: Ida's feelings shift, and she begins to envision a life beyond the endless circles of infatuation and abuse.

Feverish and intoxicating, *If Only* is a novel about the depths of a life-altering devotion and the connections between love, creativity, and self-making.

BELLA MOSES



Paradises Lost

Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt; Steven Rendall, Addie Leak (Translators), Europa Editions (OCT 8) Hardcover \$30 (480pp) 978-1-60945-849-2

The first tome in an epic series set to cover the span of human history, Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt's riveting novel *Paradises Lost* introduces an immortal who's grown weary of human foibles, but who still recognizes the wondrous potential in community.

Known in multiple mythologies as the man who survived a world-consuming flood, Noam achieved immortality by accident. Before that, he was the son of a respected chief, living in an idyllic community beside a worshiped lake. But his childhood respect for his father's innovations gave way to disillusionment when his father claimed Noura, whom Noam loved, as his own. He retreated to the wilds, where his uncle, Barak—a gentle giant—taught him the benefits of depending on nature. Challenging his father for the chief's spot, he envisioned a new, more equitable future for his people.

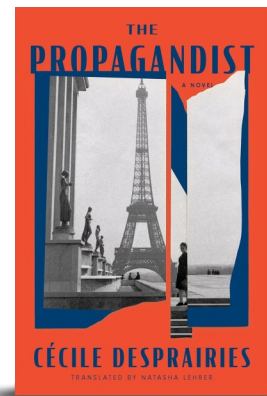
But then the flood came.

Though its scope is grand, this series opener rests most in the Neolithic period, introducing Noam's origins and hinting at adventures to come. Footnotes suggest grandiose future encounters with historical greats, some of whom Noam credits himself with influencing, including Jean-Jacques Rousseau. There are peeks at his present in the climate-changed world and hints at future confrontations with terrorists too.

Still, herein, the formation and maturation of Noam's worldview—cultivated and weathered over “millennia [spent] witnessing technological, biological, and medical progress”—is the primary concern. He “does not idealize the ancients' teaching and harbors no nostalgia.” Forced to persist in state of “human emptiness,” he thinks most of Noura, who was “infinite women, one day submissive, another tyrannical, lascivious, morose, excited”—and, to him, irreplaceable.

Ambitious and engrossing, *Paradises Lost* is a magnificent series opener that introduces the man and the myth behind the story of Noah and the flood.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER



The Propagandist

Cécile Desprairies, Natasha Lehrer (Translator), New Vessel Press (OCT 8) Softcover \$17.95 (208pp) 978-1-954404-26-7

In Cécile Desprairies's disquieting historical novel *The Propagandist*, a woman reflects on her mother's experiences as a World War II collaborator.

Coline, Lucie's youngest daughter, contrasts her mother's duplicitous past with her later life as a discontented “bourgeois housewife.” For beautiful and intelligent Lucie, the German occupation of Paris was like a “fairy-tale,” filled with embassy parties and excitement. Lucie, her friends, and her family cooperated with the Nazis, celebrating the roundup of France's “domineering” Jewish population.

Lucie married Friedrich, a German medical student whose interest in genetic research mirrored Hitler's racial obsessions. While Lucie studied law and biology, she also worked as a Vichy government propagandist, producing posters and other materials that linked French sentiments with Nazi dogma. But after the Allies liberated Paris, numerous collaborators were imprisoned and even executed. When Friedrich died under suspicious circumstances, Lucie was overwhelmed with grief.

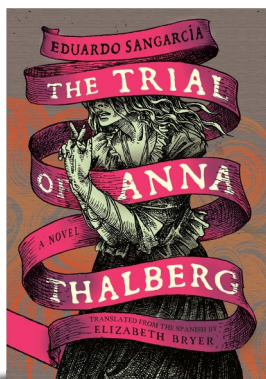
Coline discusses her mother with ironic detachment. Rather than outright condemning her, she invites broader judgment through the meticulous arrangement of facts. She details how Friedrich regarded Jews as akin to “laboratory mice” or invasive “tubercular bacilli,” and how even after Lucie's marriage to Coline's father, Lucie still yearned for Friedrich and their fascist dreams. As an expert at personal transformation, Lucie also reworked her own image while helping her “clan” of collaborators assume new postwar identities.

The novel has a serpentine tension, with adaptable yet controlling Lucie as its most pernicious and fascinating character. Extending from the 1940s to the early 2000s, the story implies that the actions of some French wartime collaborators were obfuscated, ignored, or dismissed.

The chilling novel *The Propagandist* reveals a twisted legacy of wartime rationalization and collusion.

MEG NOLA

TRANSLATIONS



★ **The Trial of Anna Thalberg**

Eduardo Sanguaricia, Elizabeth Bryer (Translator), Restless Books (SEP 10) Hardcover \$22 (176pp) 978-1-63206-373-1

Misogyny and religious conviction are vicious bedfellows in Eduardo Sanguaricia's horrifying, humbling literary novel *The Trial of Anna Thalberg*, based on the Würzburg witch trials that tore through poor populations with their insatiable accusations.

A few years after being brought to a strange village by her husband, Klaus, beautiful Anna is condemned as a witch by a jealous neighbor who sees danger in her honey-colored eyes. Other neighbors rush to add their false testimonies, too. Only the priest is willing to assist Klaus in protesting Anna's innocence to those who would rather make martyrs than mistakes.

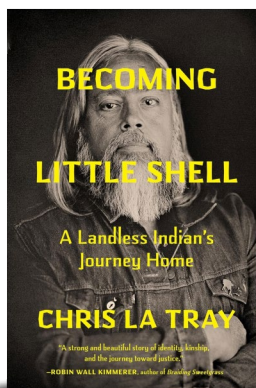
In the jail and torture chamber, time stretches, compresses, and curls back on itself for Anna, who only speaks the truth. These terrifying periods are represented in alternating columns of questions and answers that appear in fevered disarray. The confessors so want to find evil in the story of Anna's simple, honest life that they interpret her childhood loneliness as an invitation to the devil, her befriending squirrels and birds as letting evil in, and her parents' deaths as a punishment.

Still, Anna keeps speaking the truth. She is told that the Bible says she should not speak—more “proof” of her deal with the devil. She refuses to make a false confession to end her pain. Those in charge, though, view “woman [as] a cathedral constructed over a cesspool, a palace whose gardens and fountains all lead to the same hell,” so her refusal is an admission, too. Protest is futile, all is in vain. But the powerful are unwitting: when Anna, bodily broken but spiritually unbreakable, is taken to the pyre to satisfy their fears, they condemn themselves with her.

The Trial of Anna Thalberg is an inferno of a historical novel, burning through the lies told about defiant women across the centuries.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR



★ **Becoming Little Shell: A Landless Indian's Journey Home**

Chris La Tray, Milkweed Editions (AUG 20) Hardcover \$28 (256pp), 978-1-57131-398-0

Métis storyteller Chris La Tray's expansive memoir *Becoming Little Shell* began as a compassionate inquiry into his father's rejection of the family's Native American heritage. Haunted by questions of identity after his father's death, La Tray took small steps to learn about his Métis and Little Shell ancestors. He interviewed the living, studied the work of scholars, and interrogated primary sources. Joining the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians and their tenacious campaign for federal recognition, he came to an understanding of how his father's communities had been tormented by people, policies, and governments bent on his culture's annihilation.

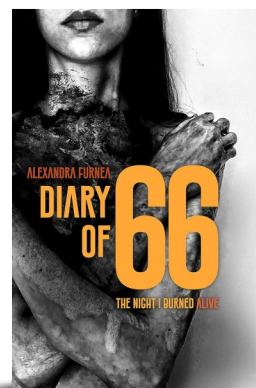
Conversational and recursive, the book's emotional tone ranges from sorrow for La Tray's relatives' suffering to anger at the US government's greed and duplicity. La Tray expresses the thrill of discovering an ancestor's rejection of a one-sided treaty and the glow of pride in his father's survival. His family and people covered, uncovered, and recovered a past that is both traumatic and triumphant.

La Tray takes careful steps over and around linear time too. The book's singular achievement is in the throughlines drawn between past and present diverse communities who suffered under extractive policies. Connections are made, for example, between three separate events: the eighteenth-century Métis moving camp when the people were forced from their settlements; the Little Shell people being unenrolled from the Chippewa and made landless after La Tray's ancestor didn't sign onto a revised treaty; and the unhomed people setting up camps in contemporary Missoula.

Heartbreaking, infuriating, and remarkable, *Becoming Little Shell* is a memoir that's packed with historical details, transcending and amplifying a personal quest to understand a family's past.

MICHELE SHARPE

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR



Diary of 66: The Night I Burned Alive

Alexandra Furnea, Gaudium Publishing (OCT 15) Softcover \$19.99 (240pp) 978-1-59211-436-8

Alexandra Furnea links the nightmarish suffering of burn victims to the pervasive impacts of statewide corruption in *Diary of 66*, her memoir about surviving the 2015 Colectiv Club fire.

Widespread bribery throughout Romania meant that building codes and safety regulations went unenforced everywhere. Furnea, a music journalist, was covering a concert at Colectiv in Bucharest when a spark from pyrotechnics ignited flammable soundproofing material. The venue was packed, and people panicked, stampeding toward the club's single narrow exit. Sixty-four people were killed; Furnea and over 100 others who survived sustained mutilating burns. And Furnea was one of many who faced further ravages in Romanian hospitals where medical care itself was influenced by malignant corruption.

The prose is lyrical and compelling, even when describing horrific injuries in unflinching, disturbing detail. Before the fire, Furnea's generation already felt cornered, living in a corrupt state “so overwhelmed by evil, yet filled with what is most intimately ours” that escape was impossible. Such political issues are linked to the agony of people trapped and burned at the Colectiv Club, and then trapped again by devastating injuries and a punitive, incompetent medical system.

Furnea's voice is both urgent and elegiac as she recalls the friends who perished at the site of the fire, who didn't survive hospitalization, or who survived with scars: “The sensation of flames on naked skin never leaves us, it's nestled there, in our wounds.” As the death toll mounted in the weeks after the fire, she imagined “drawing bloody cross after bloody cross in the calendar of our souls, to mark the dates for mourning. The fire keeps engulfing us even after it was extinguished.”

Diary of 66 is a powerful memoir about a catastrophic fire that connects the personal suffering of the victims and their families to political malfeasance.

MICHELE SHARPE