

★ **Blue Futures, Break Open****Zoë Gadegbeku**

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Zoë Gadegbeku's lyrical hybrid novel *Blue Futures, Break Open* draws on colonialism in the Americas and Africa in addition to the history of the African diaspora to create a slant mythological response to some of the greatest injustices in human history.

The novel takes place primarily in a mythological bardo or purgatory called the Blue Basin, where the souls of enslaved people find refuge "outside of time" even as the fate of the world "inside time" presses upon the Blue Basin's denizens. The bulk of the action comes through the interactions of several divine feminine spirits who navigate detestable male partners, childbirth, abuse, and the mysteries of existence. Much of the novel focuses on Lucille, a spirit who embodies vengeance and who, with each vengeful act, realizes the limits of her powers. Lucille navigates pregnancy and fights for her close friend, Ma-Reine.

Blue Basin characters arrive in quick succession with little backstory; a glossary and character list appear at the book's outset to help. These beings seem to exist between human embodiment and deified spirit, reflecting the uncertain terrain of the purgatory. Bookending and interspersed within the chapters are italicized refrains that offer glimpses "inside of time," alluding to world events and ports of the African slave trade. A recurring and haunting refrain ("Can you hear us? Entendez-vous? E mía nkɔ̃sem ǎ) calls upon anyone who will listen. Meanwhile, outside of time, the drama of the Blue Basin unfolds, with the dialogue transitioning without pause between Haitian Creole, Ewe, and English.

Blue Futures, Break Open is a challenging, dazzling novel, combining elements of allegory, poetry, history, and folktales. It levitates as it decenters, gesturing toward and embodying unquantifiable resilience and loss.

MIKE GOOD (January / February 2025)

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