

I, No Other: Narrations & Exaltations

Yarrow Paisley

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The surprising, alluring short stories of I, No Other subvert conventional expectations in both subject matter and narrative format.

Innovative and provocative, Yarrow Paisley's *I, No Other*, is a collection of unconventional short stories linked by transgressive sexuality and absurdist violence.

The ten stories range across diverse situations and characters. In one, a two-year-old is initiated into the adult world by a philosophical stranger with a hard-luck tale and an intriguing cigar. Another centers the mind of a man in a coma. Elsewhere, an entity designed as a virtual simulation becomes embodied—with erotic implications. These stories operate in a universe outside the bounds of reality and proceed not by way of cause and effect but via anecdotes and recurrences.

In "Flâneurism," a narrator moves through a series of outlandish and disjointed incidents. He removes his testicles for safekeeping, then joins a crowd begging for a drink from a magical crystal cup, then encounters a window washer who gives him some coins in exchange for a map to the box with the testicles. Later, he watches himself being carried into the sky by a large number of finches. "Diplomat in Ebony," about an antihero intent on violating a woman, Juliet, devotes an extended section to a dreamlike sequence where the man wanders along a beach picking up dismembered body parts—some Juliet's, and some from a larger-than-life figure—to reassemble into an omnipotent automaton with which to confront his enemies.

The book's lack of emphasis on logistical connections makes it demanding, as does its preponderance of events. It contains longer-than-usual considerations of the mundane, too, as in "*Lynx*: A Chronicle," which is made up of eight parts, each detailing an ordinary aspect of cat care. Characters are not developed in the traditional sense. The real name of the aforementioned antihero is never given, nor a psychological explanation for his brutality. His motivation is formulated as a one-liner: "*my pleasure is to infiltrate.*" And the other characters in the story are types: a femme fatale, a jealous father, and a corrupt rich man. Still, the collection rewards intellectual engagement. "Diplomat" is not concerned with character individuality but rather with diplomacy at large, suggesting that there is something brutal inherent in the kind of infiltration carried out by governments.

The experimental challenges are also offset by the stories' originality. "*Lynx*" features a running joke about a ridiculous cat care manual that admonishes owners to go above and beyond for their pets, which are referred to as "your precious." When the narrator pets his kitten without first making sure that his nails are trimmed, its head pops off. And "Pipe" rambles in its middle section but offers a most cheeky solution to the problem of annoying neighbors: The narrator constructs an ingenious system of pipes in his apartment that lets each neighbor hear what they want to (the straight men on the one side hear mating calls from the spinsters' place, and the older women hear fun gay best-friends-to-be from the young guys' apartment).

Indeed, the short stories of *I, No Other* are successful in subverting conventional expectations in both subject matter

and narrative format. The prose remains assured across the book's multiple forms, carrying off the style of the adventure tale in "Flâneurism," the first-person confessional of "The Revised Minutes," and the juxtaposed points of view—someone who's been unconscious for twenty years and the woman who's responsible for deciding whether or not to end life support—in "Spirit and *Corpus*."

CAROLYN WILSON-SCOTT (January 27, 2025)

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