



## Off the Tracks: A Meditation on Train Journeys in a Time of No Travel

**Pamela Mulloy**

ECW Press (Apr 30, 2024)

Softcover \$18.95 (192pp)

978-1-77041-729-8

Written during COVID-19 lockdowns, *Off the Tracks* is an enchanting, lyrical reflection on memory, travel, and passenger trains.

In her engaging travel book, Pamela Mulloy describes COVID-19 as a time when we “all had to learn what does or does not matter”—a period of forced isolation that caused her to realize aspects of herself that had not been tested before. She spent the “great pause” mining her memories and recreating trips she’d taken to Nuremberg, Warsaw, Montreal, and French wine country in her twenties and her return to Paris years later with her daughter.

Mulloy writes that she prefers to travel by train because of the pace (“The steady clacking...like a metronome”) and its authenticity (“The entrance to a city by train” is true and messy, like the “tangle of shoes at the back door.”). A ritual traveler, she crafts gorgeous passages on the power of memory: “If we remember the smell of leather from a childhood car... [the] sound of a mournful train whistle from a Midwestern town, we remember who we were in that moment. “

Intertwined with these memories are insightful musings on other travelers, including Mary Shelley, who described her “interior journey” through France and Switzerland in the early 1800s; Ernest Hemingway, who was inspired by mosaic-tiled Valencia; Sarah Bernhardt, who was stranded in a blizzard in a luxurious railcar on Christmas in 1880; and Katherine Hepburn in *Summertime*, whose passion for Venice reflected “her own sense of being, brimming with life in this city.” Mulloy contrasts her love for travel with the isolation of Julian of Norwich, the fourteenth-century mystic who spent years walled up in a small enclosure.

With pensive, evocative accounts of trains and travel, *Off the Tracks* is a lovely, immersive book about how our physical and mental journeys shape us.

KRISTEN RABE (May / June 2024)

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