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AMBLING ALONG THE AQUEDUCT

CONVERSATION ABOUT ALL THINGS AQUEDUCTIAN

SUNDAY, APRIL 12, 2009

Ana Clavel's Shipwrecked Body

Carrie Devall has sent AATA a review of a speculative gender-bender by Mexican writer Ana Clavel. Sounds like something many Aqueductistas will want to read.

Shipwrecked Body (Cuerpo náufrago), by Ana Clavel, translated by Jay Miskowiec, translation edited by Juan Arciniega, Aliform Publishing, Minneapolis and Oaxaca, 2008.

Review by Carrie Devall, April 2009

When I went to the library the other day, the New Books shelf happened to be filled with Mexican and Brazilian novels about ghosts and shape shifters, novels one or two steps over from speculative fiction - basically magical realism in contemporary urban settings. Having read reviews in *Rain Taxi*, I took out two novels by Ana Clavel, a writer born in Mexico City in 1961 and one of "Mexico's new literary pack" according to the book-cover blurbs. Her earlier novel *Desire and Its Shadow* (*Los deseos y su sombra*) and *Shipwrecked Body* were both translated and published by the same people. The earlier one is more dense, and I'm not finding it as interesting, so I haven't finished it; but *Shipwrecked Body* is a wickedly funny, insightful, fast-moving riff on gender, identity, and sexuality that might appeal to readers of feminist speculative fiction.

Antonia, a young heterosexual woman in Mexico City, wakes up one morning to find that she has turned into a man. She quickly realizes that women react to her differently, and with the help of a gay friend, Francisco, and some other men that he recruits, she explores the world of men and homosociality that was previously inaccessible to her. She gets involved with several women and a man and makes discoveries about sex, love, and identity.

The prose, as translated into English, is lush but not dense, and full of witty turns of phrase, wordplay, questioning of various psychological theories, and literary and mythological allusions. I found the analysis of gender and sexuality to be fresh, with a good balance of light,



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THE AQUEDUCT

Welcome! This blog is a forum for discussing all things Aqueductian. Conversation, of course, is one of our themes, derived from the notion of feminist sf as a conversation, as explored in "For a Genealogy of Feminist SF: Reflections on Women, Feminism, and Science Fiction, 1818-1960" (reprinted in *The Grand Conversation*, Vol. 1 of the Conversation Pieces series and available online as an essay titled "[That Only A Feminist](#)"). So please do comment freely and often, and if you're interested in making a guest post, write to conversation@aqueductpress.com.

---Timmi Duchamp, Editor,
Aqueduct Press

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playful observations and deeper, more troubling insights about how they play out in everyday life on the personal level. Nothing is hugely problematized and dissected, but I didn't think the analysis was simplistic either; maybe I didn't care because I found the protagonist really likeable and her adventures entertaining.

The one aspect of the book that readers are either going to love or hate is the photos of urinals on the cover and throughout the book. Antonia and a male photographer become obsessed with the design of urinals, with how they are shaped like a voluptuous woman's hips or like wombs. I thought this ongoing discussion was intriguing and amusing, but it may not be everybody's cup of tea. However, if you're looking for something that reads like speculative fiction (it reminded me a lot of Geoff Ryman's *Lust* in terms of style and content) from a contemporary non-U.S. writer, I'd recommend giving this book a try.

POSTED BY TIMMI DUCHAMP AT 4:17 PM 
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