

Adua

Igiaba Scego

New Vessel Press (Jun 13, 2017)

Softcover \$16.95 (185pp)

978-1-939931-45-0

Adua is a memorable, affecting tale of postcolonial Africa.

Igiaba Scego's spare *Adua* brings the decolonialization of Africa to life through the stories of Zoppe and his estranged daughter, Adua.

In the 1930s, Somali native Zoppe is hired to work in Italy as a translator. He is disrespected by his employer, resented by strangers, and brutally beaten by Mussolini's thugs. Decades later, his daughter, Adua, who fled Somalia as a young woman and also ended up in Rome, reflects on her long residency there, and on a life lived in a country that has never felt like home.

The structure of the book allows for both stories to unfold simultaneously. Adua's story is told as first-person reverie, recounting her brief and relatively happy childhood, its abrupt end, and her naïve joy over being "discovered" by an Italian director and coaxed to Italy with promises of becoming an international film star.

Loneliness echoes through every aspect of Adua's life, and her story is all the more affecting for being told without sentimentality or self-pity. Zoppe's story, told from an omniscient point of view, is equally affecting; he ends up living in undeserved isolation.

Zoppe's and Adua's stories are joined together by brief sections with conversations and instructions from Zoppe to Adua, allowing for a deeper and more complete understanding of both characters than either has of the other. This is the book's standout achievement and the heart of story's tragedy.

Both father and daughter feel they have failed each other: Adua for disappointing her father's hopes for her, Zoppe for failing to equip his daughter with the wariness and skepticism she needed to survive Western culture. Neither guesses that the other harbors such regrets, and both imagine only rejection and contempt coming from the other.

Their stories are told in fragments, with events out of order and questions left unanswered, accurately reflecting the fractured nature and abrupt shifts in the characters' lives.

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SUSAN WAGGONER (May/June 2017)

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