

Comet Fox

Peter Quinones

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The fractured storytelling of Comet Fox revolves around a complicated woman.

The vignettes that make up Peter Quinones's experimental novel *Comet Fox* focus on the escapades of a bisexual economist.

With her contentious divorce behind her, Banja de Banja moves through the chapters of her life ever seeking new people and vibrant experiences. These wide-ranging experiences include a potential hymenoplasty and multiple love affairs with people of both genders. Banja's fragmented narratives are connected by her overarching need to distance herself from her past, connect with people, and experience life.

Written in memoir style, the text begins after Banja's divorce without revealing much about her life before it. She's middle-aged and "aggressively bisexual," but her defining characteristic isn't her age, sexuality, or socioeconomic status; rather, it's her unwavering curiosity. Less a cohesive narrative than one threaded by Banja's interests, several sections of the book reduce her to a passive bystander or listener in on someone else's life story. This unusual storytelling technique results in subtle and clever insights into who Banja is.

When facets of Banja's personality appear, they thunder on the page. She's a bundle of contradictions: she cold-shoulders a date after one night, citing that it's impossible for him to know her in such a short period; she tries to make amends with her estranged son, but blocks his number. In sections where she isn't in focus but is present in the background or in commentary, glimmers of her true self come through, and she is built into an intelligent, broken person who's trying to solve her problems with distractions.

A colorful and eclectic cast of secondary characters command more of the spotlight than Banja. They include an overbearing theater director and a trio of hymenoplasty mentors; they represent myriad viewpoints. Characters often feel so distinct and disparate from Banja that they could populate novels of their own, but they always connect back to Banja in engaging ways—be it through romance or something more tenuous.

Textual oddities include characters using elaborate versions of common slang, as if by mistranslation, though they speak fluently the rest of the time. Some word choices are grandiose, and are also surprising from characters who are usually more casual in their speech.

In Banja's story—which is more about experiences, rather than a clear destination—no one changes or evolves. Each section of the novel is episodic, and few elements build upon each other. The result is a singular series of snapshots. This experimentation has some satisfying elements, but there's no overarching sense of completion.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (August 29, 2019)

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