

Do You Remember Being Born?

Sean Michaels

Astra House (Sep 5, 2023)

Hardcover \$27.00 (296pp)

978-1-66260-232-0

In Sean Michaels's prescient and fascinating novel *Do You Remember Being Born?*, a famous poet is asked to co-write a poem with an AI.

At seventy-five years old, Marian—who wears capes, a tricorn hat, and bikinis—is well-established in her career. Her poems have been anthologized; she has a collection of door stops that she used to bar her child from her workspace. When her adult son, Courtney, asks for help with buying his first home, Marian sees it as an opportunity for largesse. She thus accepts a commission from a technology corporation that's asked her to work with Charlotte, its AI. She is given a week to complete the poem, as well as use of a small yellow room and a driver. Charlotte, for its part, reads thousands of lines of poetry in preparation.

Marian's time in San Francisco leads to personal expansions that she never expected, awakening her creativity and connection. In many ways, the book is about motherhood and art-making: what makes art-making possible and when; and how much is owed to children and from whom. Marian shares reflections on her past, including on her relationships with her mother, her child's father, her child, and her work. Styled after poet Marianne Moore, she struggles to find her footing with limitless Charlotte. The strengths and weaknesses of the AI are juxtaposed with Marian's limited frame of reference (also positioned as both a strength and a weakness). And while art might change the way that humans think and interact, changes may also be coming to the world of art-making due to AI.

Rich and innovative, *Do You Remember Being Born?* is a novel about the uneasy relationship between art, artmakers, and AI.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (September / October 2023)

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