



Hugs and Cuddles

João Gilberto Noll

Edgar Garbelotto, Translator

Two Lines Press (Oct 18, 2022)

Softcover \$14.95 (240pp)

978-1-949641-38-7

Childhood friends reunite, setting off an exploration into the depths of personhood in João Gilberto Noll's explicit novel *Hugs and Cuddles*.

A man boards a submarine with a friend whom he calls "the engineer." On it, German men are watching a snuff film. Though he excuses himself, the man wakes later with hazy memories of touching and being touched. Back home, he continues to dwell on this encounter, as well as affairs from his past (real and imagined) and affairs he imagines having in the future.

The book is a challenge to the idea of a distinct, linear internal monologue. The unnamed narrator's thoughts weave themselves into a tangled web of connections, leapfrogging from subject to subject, yet always returning to the body and its physicality. Without paragraph breaks or chapter breaks, there's no reprieve from the continuous swirl of thoughts, emotions, and encounters in which the narrator engages. He is singular in his pursuit of satisfaction.

The seamless, lyrical translation from Portuguese does not leave room to misunderstand the narrator's wants or needs. It does not gloss over his earthy, raunchy, licentious actions. It revels in revealing and lingering on secrets that dare not be spoken aloud.

As the book probes the limits of language, reality and potentials flow around and through each other. Erotic and emotional, it does not fan the flames of prurient desire, but makes visceral the knowing of one's own body and the feeling of learning another body, however briefly, in relation. This investigation does not stop at bodies and sex, but goes deeper into the nature of relationships and intimacy, of making and unmaking and remaking the self.

Hugs and Cuddles is a taut fever dream of a novel wherein the body and the sensations it experiences are all that's real.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (November / December 2022)

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