



Ink

Angela Woodward

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In Angela Woodward's ruminative surrealist novel *Ink*, everyday life is juxtaposed with testimonies related to war crimes.

The skill most appreciated in a typist is accuracy. All Marina and Sylvia know about their new job is that they need to type what has been recorded on tape, they need to use typewriters, and they can't talk about what they hear. For weeks, as their necks ache and their backs grow stiff, they listen to the classified testimonies of the inmates of Abu Ghraib, recited in the monotone voice of a translator and accurately typing every word they hear. Juxtaposed to these horrors are the mundane events of Marina and Sylvia's everyday lives: single motherhood, a marriage on the rocks, and office bureaucracy.

Inspired by French essayist and poet Francis Ponge, *Ink* is thoughtful and meandering, but also precise and sharp. Observations about the existential meaning of everyday objects, such as the mechanics of a typewriter and the production of ink, are woven into the narrator's alter ego as she struggles with the craft of writing and with the story of Marina, Sylvia, and the tapes. Cutting in and out of the text are excerpts from the testimonies of the victims of Abu Ghraib. Though brief, the excerpts are shocking in their straightforwardness, appearing as glimpses of a reality Marina and Sylvia can exit and enter at their choosing.

Based on the real events and testimonies of Abu Ghraib, *Ink* is at times fragmented to the point where its purpose seems to be lost. But this layered narrative still turns its subject inside out, wrapping ordinariness into acts of violence.

Brutal and surreal, *Ink* juxtaposes extreme and mundane events in its story of two women hired to transcribe horrors.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (January / February 2023)

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