



★ Migratory Birds

Mariana Oliver

Julia Sanches, Translator

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Part memoir, part history, and part travelogue, *Migratory Birds* explores the vicissitudes of language.

Mariana Oliver touches down in various times and places, showing how people described their difficulties there and then, and revealing what changes in language arose from these events. From Normandy to Neverland, the through line of this excellent collection is movement, and the essays meander around history in an appealing way.

The book starts with a short biography of inventor Bill Lishman; most subsequent essays focus on Germany after World War II. Two of the essays focus more on Oliver's life and travels, with insights into why she focuses on travel and language elsewhere. Her work about Germany rebuilding after the war, and dealing with the Cold War, emphasizes the fringe effects of global conflicts, especially in how people talk to each other every day.

The most moving essays in this book deal with the aftermath of crises and the task of using words to describe, with accuracy, the tragic events taking place. In a piece about Cuba's Operation Peter Pan, Oliver follows the lost children of Cuba and addresses them as namesakes of the Lost Boys. Without insisting on the parallels, the text acknowledges that the best way to connect with the children is through common stories. Alternatively, the essay "Trümmerfrauen" focuses on the microchanges that occurred in the German language after the war, and how the German people rebuilt cities, brick by brick.

Evincing reverence for language, the essays of *Migratory Birds* take a fascinating tour around the world, showing how historical events affect the way we learn words.

JULIA RITTENBERG (May / June 2021)

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