



## Prairie, Dresses, Art, Other

**Danielle Dutton**

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Writing ignites “a politics of attention” in Danielle Dutton’s literary, unconventional essay collection *Prairie, Dresses, Art, Other*, whose entries are bound by energy, sharp awareness of the world’s dangers, family relationships, and the topic of writing itself.

Including third-person forays that straddle the lines between fiction and memoir, a cento-evocative linked consideration of dresses across literature, and a one-act play, these diverse selections expand ideas about what constitutes the essay’s form. Beyond this outward eclecticism, they share similar methods: dreamlike leaps, self-conscious turns, dense images, and a penchant for brooding endings that ripple with possibilities. Their tones are often bristling, hinting at underlying threats: strange men encroach on public and personal spaces, assuming too much familiarity; a son’s concerns are laced with unspoken anxieties. And more general foreboding accrues through glimpses of environmental change.

Mixing veiled vulnerability (as with passing mentions of an increasingly distant husband) with cerebral weighings of terms (ekphrastic poetry, for instance, is tied to writing fiction), the book achieves a mysterious ambiance. Line by line, it speaks to aspects of a writing life too. There are memories of a dinner celebrating a visiting Chinese poet; there are thoughts on bohemian poet and painter Mina Loy. References to Agnes Martin, Thomas De Quincey, and Agnès Varda play in, and passages from Dutton’s previous work are used as examples too. There are fanciful inventions as well, as with an imagined scenario in which a writer kills another writer.

Representing an erudite palette of influences, the ranging, observational essay collection *Prairie, Dresses, Art, Other* reveals a mind honed by literature and the arts.

KAREN RIGBY (March / April 2024)

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