

Ramifications

Daniel Saldaña Paris

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In Daniel Saldaña París's resonant novel *Ramifications*, an eventful summer has ripple effects that last decades.

A thirty-two-year-old man who's lain in bed for the greater part of two years records memories from the summer of 1994, when, at the age of ten, he watched his mother walk out of their Mexico City house to join the Zapatista uprising. He was left with a distant father and a preoccupied older sister, forced to manage everyday problems and comprehend his loss alone.

Moving back and forth between the past and present, the narrator charts his emotional state both as an adult and as a child, turning *Ramifications* into an investigation of memory and feeling. Sensitive and cerebral, the narrator as a ten-year-old turns to origami to calm himself and to exert control over a world that has fallen apart. He hides in a closet—what he calls his “Zero Luminosity Capsule”—to manage his fear and scours Choose Your Own Adventure novels for clues on how to locate his mother. He nurses paradoxical desires: to disappear, but also to be a heroic figure who finds his mother.

Within the small cast, each person is rendered with precision, from the narrator's hapless, self-involved father to his sister, who's on a teenage quest to establish her identity. Her boyfriend, Rat, looms as a dangerous, rebellious figure who opens new worlds to the narrator. The narrator's mother haunts the novel with her brooding unhappiness.

The narrator's personal traumas are shaped by larger social forces, including the political upheaval of Mexico in the 1990s and the gender dynamics that entrap his mother, showing how the world impinges on even the most enclosed, private spaces. *Ramifications* is a rich, smart, and satisfying rendering of abandonment and loss, whose effects reverberate through time.

REBECCA HUSSEY (September / October 2020)

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