



Rhombus and Oval

Jessica Squeira

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Jessica Sequeira's *Rhombus and Oval* enchants with short stories that examine mysteries. From pure wonderment to reflections on a virtual, automated world, these fabular forays speak to human longing. Accidents, uncommon events, improbabilities, and eccentric wisdom draw interior landscapes that endure despite the cruelty of daily existence.

Stories are mostly set in an imaginary version of Buenos Aires. Ruled by an ominous leader in a time when all texts are digitized and surveillance is normal, the city forms a dark, atmospheric backdrop that feels both historic and futuristic.

The stories themselves form a quiet protest against the coldness of a monitored life. With few exceptions, they delight in discovering that the world “precedes human perception, and there is so much to notice.” An emphasis on paying attention to strange phenomena and subtle human behaviors threads the book, suggesting freedom, if not solace, in wandering.

Sequeira draws environments with precise minimalism that allows each detail to flourish. That her narrators are often solitary, nameless figures enhances the work; the handful of facts that are given about them come to define them.

Their occupations include a translator, book critic, graduate student, and confirmer (whose job is to visit landmarks and verify that their online versions are represented accurately), so their keen observations as well as intellectual musings turn second nature. Thoughts, whether their own or prompted by encounters with strangers, coalesce into fascinating explorations.

Unusual images—such as a tank driving through a bar window, figures in a perfume ad that move each day, and a glass globe carried across centuries—amplify the sense that the unexpected underpins the everyday.

Each story spans only a few pages yet skillfully contains worlds. Noteworthy stories include “Rhombus and Oval,” in which shapes appear in the sky and prompt humans to capture them; “Golden Triangle,” which brings a naturalist back to a childhood pastime; and “Enchanted Boat,” an idyllic respite that still retains an element of danger. Careful shifts between reality and fleeting escapes highlight the power of each to magnify the other.

Rhombus and Oval braids graceful language with brilliant idiosyncrasies. It's a satisfying experiment with a vital message for troubled times.

KAREN RIGBY (September/October 2017)

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