

★ **The Age of Goodbyes****Li Zi Shu****YZ Chin, Translator**

The Feminist Press (Nov 8, 2022)

Softcover \$17.95 (376pp)

978-1-952177-69-9

Zig-zagging back and forth across time, Li Zi Shu's *The Age of Goodbyes* is a kaleidoscopic family drama presented through multiple perspectives.

The novel's central focus is a book also titled *The Age of Goodbyes*; it follows the life of Du Li An, a headstrong woman of modest origins who marries a good-for-nothing gangster and opens a successful café. As the story of Du and her extended family unfolds, an unnamed man reads the same book, tying its happenings to his own background as one of Du's descendants. In yet a third narrative, an unnamed critic wrestles with the enigmas surrounding the author of the book, who may be Du Li An herself.

The novel rides a line between self-parody, intimacy, and comedy with aplomb. The earthy, sensuous prose evokes the sights, sounds, and smells of Malaysia as it undergoes rapid change from the sixties through the present day, even as narratives overlap with each other. Colorful characters abound, including Du's hapless husband, a handsome rival who ends up in a twisted love triangle with Du and her stepdaughter, and a famous literary critic known only as "The Fourth Person" who pooh-poohs Du's story as the work of a rank amateur. But even as the lines between subject and reader blur, the story finds room for pathos and cathartic moments, as with an indelible episode in which lovers come together across each of the book's competing narratives.

*The Age of Goodbyes* is shared in medias res (the book itself begins on page 513), emphasizing the never-ending flow of time as responsibilities, obligations, and storytelling are passed from one generation to the next. Loaded with vibrant cultural details, wry anecdotes, and literary conundrums, it's a challenging and often downright mystifying tale, but never less than absorbing.

HO LIN (November / December 2022)

*Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.*