

The Scent of Buenos Aires

Hebe Uhart

Maureen Shaughnessy, Translator

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There's something a little mysterious at work in Hebe Uhart's *The Scent of Buenos Aires*, but it's the ordinary mystery of other people. These thirty-eight short stories function like a panopticon, each dipping into one person's purview and leaving after capturing the briefest impression. Poised somewhere between narrative and sense memory, Uhart's lens looks into sundry lives and renders the act of surveillance both venal and holy.

Much like the people the collection is concerned with, these stories occupy an intermediary space. They are completely fulfilled in their individual arcs and interstitial within the greater picture they create. They don't offer answers or even questions so much as momentary glimpses of the incidents that provoke both.

There's a fascination with people in limbo: those who are outsiders and insiders all at once and those who are at a point of transition, whether it's the large, wandering family in "Mister Ludo," the man drawn into the orbit of another passenger on the bus in "The Old Man," the student newly arrived in the city in "Boy in a Boarding House," or the visiting scholars who are shepherded by a cynical university employee in "Events Organization."

Shaughnessy's translation is seamless as it transfers Uhart's material into colloquial English, making it easy to fall into the rhythms of the characters' lives and the coded emotions that idioms encapsulate.

The Scent of Buenos Aires is concerned with the social and communal, but with a wink and a nudge toward the ridiculous habits of people. Uhart suspects, loves, and laughs at each of her characters in equal measure because she knows that, when it comes to the array of human emotion and motivation, "one person's freedom ends where another's begins."

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (September / October 2019)

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