

★ **Virtuoso****Yelena Moskvich**

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Haunted and haunting, Yelena Moskvich's *Virtuoso* shifts through gradients of the past and the present, capturing the tumult and change of the 1990s and early 2000s in Czechoslovakia, the US, and France. Told through multiple unique, compelling voices, the book's time and action are layered, with possibilities and paths forming rhythmic, syncopated interludes that emphasize that history is now.

Jana, Zorka, and Aimée are the novel's three main conductors. As each of these cusp millennials goes from a pre-internet world to worldwide connection, awareness of the effect of technology and globalization on relationships and social networks creeps in. Whether through chatroom transcripts wherein queer women find and flirt with each other, or through passages that are separated and strung together by asterisks, the book straddles a divide; everything is both dependent and an aside.

Context becomes everything and nothing as *Virtuoso* dismantles ideas of childhood, home, linearity, and the physical and emotional locations of relationships. These ideas are intertwined, as sinuous as are hearts and bodies. Characters are both symbols and signifiers in the drama, shifting from the background to the foreground across the story's arcs. Laconic riffs go to unexpected places, creating a hypnotic landscape where love between women results in its own timeline. The world becomes a web where loss is foundational, but nothing and no one is ever truly gone.

Even as it employs dream logic to assemble its narratives, there's hyperreality to *Virtuoso*'s emotional beats. The novel unfolds in a blue haze where we're "betrayed by language...people are just people, and we let them come and go." Each person's escape velocity forces reader attention to orbit that which connects people to each other and to their moments in time.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (January / February 2020)

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