

## ★ **Walter Benjamin Stares at the Sea**

**C. D. Rose**

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C. D. Rose's *Walter Benjamin Stares at the Sea* is a collection of short stories about how storytelling can help to face the terrors of the passage of time.

Scenes of creative inspiration mingle with violence, tension, and grief: "The Disappearer" compares the mysterious vanishing of an inventor to a revolutionary film, "Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man" explores the morbid last piece a photographer leaves behind, and "Everything Is Subject to Motion, and Everything Is Motion's Subject" features a camera shaped like a gun. Even characters who do not make art use it to orient themselves, as with the narrator of "I'm in Love with a German Film Star" tracking a relationship through a lifetime's worth of songs.

The writing is dark and dreamlike, filled with philosophical tangents, evocative metaphors, black comedy, and sly metatextual references (in "A Brief History of the Short Story," characters from different literary traditions read about and react to each other). Locations and time periods are seldom established; there is a surrealism reminiscent of fairy tales ("The Neva Star" features three marooned sailors all named Sergei).

Ambiguity and anxiety abound as characters experience existential dread, suffer grave lapses in communication, and are alienated by sudden, senseless loss. Experimental forms heighten the uncanniness, emphasizing disorientation and ineffability: "Ognosia" whips through different points of view midparagraph, "To Athens" alternates between a series of eclectic anecdotes and a run-on sentence, and "What Remains of Claire Blanck" is told through annotations of an unseen text. But there are glimpses of hopefulness amid the bleakness too: emboldened by the works they create or consume, characters yearn for more fulfilling futures.

The stories in *Walter Benjamin Stares at the Sea* position art as an antidote to the ravages of time, with a subtle sense of imagination suggesting that, even through the grimmest moods, nothing is impossible.

JENNA LEFKOWITZ (January / February 2024)

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