

★ **You Are Here**

Cynthia Flood

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Cynthia Flood's short story collection *You Are Here* seethes with political menace that's seen through focused personal dramas.

These stories defy categorization; they are wonderful, layered, powerful, and imbued with clear senses of their often-Canadian settings and eras, which range from the post-war period into contemporary times. Their style is minimalist and staccato, making ready use of colons. And they infuse bursts of joy into their cadences and descriptions of people's literal and mental landscapes.

In "The Animals in Their Elements," a man finds joy in bird watching; this is juxtaposed with his mental decline to devastating effect. In the prize-winning entry "My Father Took A Cake to France," 1950s war-rehabilitated England is viewed through the bedazzled interiority of a Canadian farm boy who buys a cake for his betrothed. Elsewhere, women's complex psyches are explored in feminist terms: "Red Girl Rat Boy" shows how threatening "objective beauty standards" are for young girls. In "Religious Knowledge"—part of a cluster of atmospheric stories set in a cloistered English boarding school, St. Mildred's—subversive girls explore their bodies in the post-war period.

Other stories take intrepid experimental approaches, as with "Miss Pringle's Hour," which is made up of a year's worth of diarist's notes from St Mildred's headmistress. "A Young Girl-Typist Ran To Smolny" is cinematic, following a door-to-door saleswoman who touts a political magazine. Elsewhere, sapphic friendships take center stage, as in "Twoscore and Five," where a woman pines after her friend for years, taking care of her during her illness. And in "The Usual Accomplishments," the different lives of twin sisters are juxtaposed with a play-by-play of doing a crossword.

You Are Here is a rich and beautiful short story collection via which the voice of an era can be savored.

ELAINE CHIEW (November / December 2022)

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