

had to go, though you yourself have no idea where that is.”

There may not be a whole lot of action in *The Game for Real*, but the absurd is front and center. That absurdity is often a statement on the human condition, which no doubt is at play here. Doubles and doppelgängers may act as foils of our true selves that we suppress, or perhaps our bachelor fellow is undergoing a slow meltdown—a splintering in identity? Interlaced throughout his musings are anxieties and thoughts that rattle along in long paragraphic chunks, and just when we think we can’t take much more of these paranoid cogitations, Weiner hits us out of the blue with a plainly worded, spot-on insight: “We always drive like a runaway train into what we dread—through the barrier of premonition.”

Throughout the second part of the novel, themes of reality and truthfulness come to the fore as our fellow gets accused of a crime he may or may not have committed. The reader ultimately gets to decide. Reality and truth are up for grabs.

The ruminations of an agitated mind continue all through *The Game for Real* (not for nothing was Richard Weiner dubbed “the Poet of Anxiety”). The latter third of the story devolves into Kafkaesque phantasmagoria as the story’s characters morph into other characters and then morph back.

It can take effort to read through the long blocks of angst and psychedelia in Weiner’s novel, but it’s well worth the effort. The sudden blunt insights blindside us and make us question our own values and realities anew. Perhaps it could also be a metaphor for life: slog through the drudgery of daily life and occasionally get rewarded with an insight.

Hats off to veteran translator Benjamin Paloff for a work that must certainly have been a challenge to translate.

Virginia Parobek  
Lancaster, Ohio



‘One of the finest Indian poets writing today.’  
— KEKI DARUWALLA

## Atmospheric Embroidery



Meena Alexander



### Verse

Meena Alexander. **Atmospheric Embroidery.** Gurgaon, India. Hachette India. 2015. 70 pages.

Meena Alexander is among the most visible of South Asian American poets writing in the US. She is prolific, having to her credit seven books of poetry, a memoir,

two novels, two books of academic criticism, and two volumes of essays, *The Shock of Arrival* and *Poetics of Dislocation*. The last two display Alexander at her best— weaving personal reflections and critical analysis into a seamless narrative.

As a poet, Alexander is not easy to follow and even harder to grasp because of the multiple references that go into layering her poems. Even though she paints on

small canvases, her ambitions are large; she uses wide-angle lenses, and her feet cover vast tracts of landscape, roving from sharply delineated details of objects at hand to remembrances from her childhood, stamped in her personal geographies in Sudan, England, India, and the US. In addition, she draws from Hindu, Christian, and other mythologies to offer literary and historical precedents as textual testimonies. Her favored spots are sites of carnage, violence, and death. These images are slung at readers at a velocity that makes them duck for cover. They may flinch, but she will not spare them from facing what *she* has witnessed.

*Atmospheric Embroidery* is divided into five sections, leading off with the header “Fragments in Praise of the Book,” naming what is to follow: “Book of alphabets burnt so that truth can be told.” The lyrical impulse is strong here, and I feel it should be allowed more play in her poetry. It would also counterbalance the angst-ridden world she has so assiduously cultivated in book after book. “Aesthetic Knowledge” offers another lovely example of sensory touches: “landscape becomes us . . . an interior space bristling with light”; “tears from the domes, like droplets of milk”; “gold leaf pasted on paper / Utterly fragile.”

The reference in the title poem is to Alighiero Boetti’s artwork *The Thousand Longest Rivers*, but the connections among “Wads of ice-cream glisten on Route 6,” “fissures in magma,” and “Season of snipers in the heartland” remain unclear. Obscurities cloud “Children of the House” even as “Ars Poetica” and “Tarawood” create magic and beauty. A fine example of how an authentic political poem ought to be written is “Moksha II,” about the Delhi woman raped by six men in a moving bus.

Alexander reworks old material in new contexts. The Indian Ocean blues and Darfur poems revisit her crossings of the Indian Ocean since the age of five. The poems in

the Darfur section were inspired by drawings by children who lived in the refugee camps. Scattered pieces of life are crystallized in univocity.

Alexander has also remained faithful to her signature technique and style: the language and syntax in the symbolic space of the poems mirrors the fractured, torn, wounded, and disjointed reality of the world and our shared life, and the poems serve as devices to force the reader to confront this world.

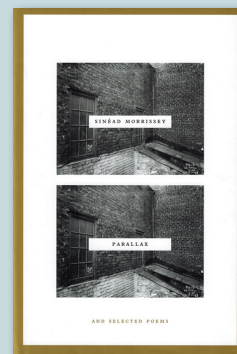
Saleem Peeradina  
Siena Heights University

Aleš Debeljak. *Smugglers*. Brian Henry, tr. Rochester, New York. BOA Editions. 2015. 108 pages.

Slovenian poet Aleš Debeljak’s new bilingual volume, *Smugglers*, contains five cycles and four nonrhymed quatrains. Each of the individual poems pulses with emotional intensity inspired by various streets and squares of the poet’s hometown of Ljubljana—its bars, cinemas, or cemeteries—with dedications to close friends and writers from the former Yugoslavia.

In the map of *Smugglers*, intertextual references function as explicit quotes. The unique tone of the collection approaches prose diction, with lightning-like associative leaps characteristic of Debeljak’s use of poetic images. These quotes and dedications appear as markers with which the reader gets back to an old private or political story of the urban chronicle of Ljubljana or any other city. The lyrical voice intuitively summons it as a witness of the moments that link the poet’s childhood, adolescence, and adulthood to the present era: “I was there; if you want, / call it a place of private memory, if you want, the end of the road.” Nostalgia for a former life thus turns into nostalgia for all such persons, places, and situations that shaped the poet’s personal identity but also the anguish and

## Nota Bene



Sinéad Morrissey  
**Parallax**  
Farrar, Straus & Giroux

The unique metaphors around which Sinéad Morrissey constructs many of her poems also contain a classic character that remind one of metaphysical poets such as Donne when she examines how her hands are the only remaining representation of the union of her parents. She experiments with form and style, ranging from the highly lyrical to the prosaic, to tell stories and depict moments of life, often commenting on the poetic form itself.



Ali al-Muqri  
**Hurma**  
T. M. Aplin, tr.  
Darf

Hurma, meaning sanctity in Arabic, serves as the female protagonist of this novel, indicating immediately the paradoxical position of women in Yemen, where they are seen as sacred objects and as inferior beings. While discussing this controversial topic, Ali al-Muqri creates a real and psychologically complex character who defies the limitations of her name.