



Wet Land. By Lucas de Lima. (Action Books, 2014)

We learn on the prefatory page of Lucas De Lima's book that his close friend Ana Maria was killed in an alligator attack in the Florida everglades in 2006. Whoa, cringe-worthy information. And pretty quickly we arrive on the inside of De Lima's mythic fantasia—not your ordinary elegy. Its daring outlandishness recalls the Carnavalesque (in Bakhtin's sense of profaning accepted truths). *Wet Land* extravagantly enacts a ritual between species in which various bodies and corpses co-mingle and morph into one another: animal/human, (M)other/lover, killer/savior. "We fall into upper case letters like rows of teeth," De Lima tells us at the outset of the book, and the scale of the font confronts the reader with a barker-like stance as he laments, lovingly and lustfully:

O, GATOR I KNOW THERE IS A HOLE INSIDE YOU SO MUCH LARGER
THAN THE
LACERATIONS YOU LEFT ON ANA MARIA

I KEEP CONFUSING THE BODIES.

(“SOBEK”)

Narrating as a predatory bird (evolutionary kin to the reptilian alligator) De Lima participates whole-heartedly in the spectacle. In intermittent untitled poems (printed a lighter shade), we hear whispering asides from Ana Maria: “YOU DON’T FEEL THE NEED TO TELL ME EVERYTHING, RIGHT?” His bird-self descends into an underworld where specters, infidels, and the gator dwell. We readers become participants and often feel disoriented, dismembered, as if we too had lost a unified identity and our own: “MUTEWINGS TALK AFTER SOMEONE CUTS THEM OFF.” As the book progresses, the ceremony’s compost heap oozes scum, blood, and cum. The raptor’s dance becomes rapturous, culminating in images of resurrection. I, for one, love the wild and bumpy ride, and “where else is he willing to go?” we might ask. Fueled by the alchemy of elegiac burlesque, mourning *and* celebration take place simultaneously:

WE TWIRL IN THE CENTER OF THE SWAMP, A ROSE IN THE GATOR MAN’S
JAWS, STEM ROUGED WITH LIPSTICK.

(“FLAMING CREATURES”)

Bodies in fluid motion ingest stuff, penetrate things, and give birth, acting out an orgiastic rite with “STYLISH DECAY,” reminiscent of ultra-vibrant images of manga (the Japanese comic book form). And in a biopolitical climax, the female entity emerges as a force that confronts physiological and environmental crises:

SHE WHO BLISTERS THROUGH ANY SHELL
WRESTED FROM THE MIRROR OF ACID RAINWATER ANA MARIA
UNKNOTS THE GATOR MAN’S TONGUE &

ENTERS OUR VEINS

(“THE BOOK IS A CRACK (A CLOACAL KISS)”)

Reading this fabulous work, you will find your heart in your throat (quite literally). With its shades of Baudelaire, Lorca, Alice Notley, and experimental filmmaker Jack Smith, the book prevails over its own falterings: “BOOK THAT BREAKS & MENDS ITSELF IN FLIGHT,” rising out of the ashes and wet land with its spine and wings: a living corpse—exquisite indeed.

—Molly Bendall