

Adrift in a Vanishing City

Vincent Czyz

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Fiction. Neither a traditional collection of short stories nor a novel, ADRIFT IN A VANISHING CITY is an unguided tour through the tortured landscape of obsessive love and unreliable memory. These stories wind through the real and the imagined, linking Budapest, Berlin, Mexico City and Pittsburg, Kansas to the shadow-haunted places within the human heart. ..".A small landmark in the sedimentation of new form in fiction..."-Samuel R. Delany. "ADRIFT IN A VANISHING CITY ought to come with a warning label: Herein lie levels of meaning beyond the grasp of the blissful best-seller reader. In poetic prose that flouts conventional fictive forms, Czyz draws on classical myth, fable, folklore, Shakespearean tragedy and other genres to create a metaphor of modern alienation"--Joe Castronovo.

Adrift in a Vanishing City Details


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Author : Vincent Czyz

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From Reader Review *Adrift in a Vanishing City* for online ebook

Matt Briggs says

Formless as a tadpole egg-sack, *Adrift in a Vanishing City* by Vincent Czyz, floats untethered to any narrative foundation. Snippets of characterization, dialogue, and non-sequiturs float in the prose soup, slowly revealing the relationship of two women and a working class wanderer named Zirque, an international menege-a-trois unconfined by time or space.

The shapeless form of the book, echoes the culture chronicled in these nine sections. This is the culture of international airports where hookers work both Milan and Sea-Tac; but, regardless of their Italian phrases, the same thing is for sale fresh from some trailer park in Butte. Despite chronicling this culture, without a structural spine, the book has a heft like a fist-full of Jell-O; although there is a certain amount of substance here, it resists anyone possibly getting a grip on it. The prose dissolves. For example, "'Budapest Blue'" opens:

"I could have told you of photographs I kept locked away in a drawer of unanswered desires, black-and-whites of you though we had never met, though I had never seen you, so then 'not you -- but yes, you."

This self-nullifying statement destroys any literal meaning. I am not contending that every syllable of every sentence of every paragraph must contribute the big bang effect of the book, as if the book were a well constructed handgun (by this token Gertude Stein's 'Making of Americans could be sliced down to a single paragraph); however, the concrete quality of this writing is weak because unlike Stein's "swing sing up into an apple tree," the opening to "'Budapest Blue'" has the musicality of a quality assurance report for a multi-center public health study and so demands to be taken literally.

A book as an information object must have some form besides the arbitrary dumping of text into a sequence of pages numbered one through two hundred. The sections of *Adrift in a Vanishing City* could have be arranged in any order. However, in the second of the two prefaces of the book, the one titled as a challenge to the reader, "'Are You a Finely Tuned Reader?'" the author tells us, "To bring [the stories] into sharpest focus, it's best to read them in the order in which they appear."

To demonstrate that perhaps I am not a finely-tuned reader, as I am American and I was educated in an U.S. university, I xeroxed the book and cut it up into 158 individual sections and arbitrarily rearranged them; I prepared five copies in this manner. I left an equal number of books intact. I found ten foreign friends, all of whom had read at least one book by either James Joyce or Samuel Beckett. I gave the rearranged book to the foreign national friends with the following nationalities: a Canadian, two citizens of the UK, an Irish woman, and a naturalized American born and raised in Singapore. I then gave the five placebo copies to the following national mix: two Filipinos, a Swede, yet another British citizen, and a citizen of Mexico. With these readers, I found that there was no large difference, and maybe a slight preference for the rearranged books.

All right, I didn't actually conduct a scientific study to find finely tuned readers. Readers can't be selected scientifically, and once the book is in the world no matter how many prefaces and afterwards the author stacks onto the reader either finds meaning in the text, or he doesn't.

In a sense, this book uses protective language. Instead of hiding behind the formal structures of a codified genre (a murder mystery that must fulfill the strict dictate of body-suspect-cocktail party) this book hides its meaning in neatly turned nonsense and fractured cause-and-effect as unlikely as a lesbian love triangle in a

Harlequin romance.

When I began to piece together the text, instead of finding an original vision of the world, I found a sort of Bohemian love story featuring Zirque the tall, gorgeous world-traveler who throws away matchbook covers with the lyrics of pop songs written on them years before they hit the charts.

I also finally found myself asking some questions about the assumptions of Vincent Czyz.

1. Does the novelist do us a disservice by organizing his material?

I believe this is the largest service he does to his material. He shapes the raw material into a whole book. A pile of scrap metal is not a functional automobile.

2. Does the process of constructing a novel take away from the power of the raw material?

I am not sure why the quality of raw has positive connotations as if the process of cooking a story destroys its vital nutrients. I find raw data inaccessible. Open an image file like a JPEG in a text editor and you find a screen full of garbage, a literal translation of binary data into ASCII. We require an interpreter to construct the image from the raw data. Gertrude Stein's writing, for instance, defines its syntax in the course of the narrative. Writers like Italo Calvino and Georges Perec begin with a new interpreter (using constraint rules or new logical formulas) and then create a new text by fulfilling interpreter's rules. Both Stein and Perec cook their data. It is just that they involve the reader in what the cooking process (the syntax of the book) is doing to the raw data. Raw data is just too difficult to digest. Czyz, while admirable in his fidelity to this ideal of honest information, does not provide for syntactical control over his material. In imaginative prose the author tells the reader something they know not to be true but in such a way as to inspire belief in the story. Adrift in the Vanishing City refuses to engage language at this basic level, and so without structure all the reader has left is ink on a bundle of pages bound into a book.

note: this is a correction to the original review published in The American Book Review Jan/Feb 2000

Barry Smylie says

I like it.

Moe (from Springfield) says

Okay, we have convos painted in abstract expressionism.... diaries screamed out in streams of consciousness ... umm, if everybody Kerouac knew could actually speak (to you) or narrate their stories (oh sweet Tristessa). I mean, do you want to be told an ordinary story about characters oscillating through their busy and lethargic days; or do you want to hear characters lament a narrative, soliloquize a song in beautiful, authentic prose poems - feel their ruminations, eavesdrop on their suffering?

Adrift in a Vanishing City is not sad, as I may have just implied. It's fun writing - you can tell the author is having fun and wants you to feel the same way. This is warm prose. This is narration that captures speech, executed in a fashion to make Faulkner proud (without his famous ten-dollar-words). Czyz has a lot of

lighthearted moments, too many really to mention, but people forget that the jokes are there to make you laugh (a pet peeve: readers sometimes forget that the narrator is personally telling you a story of something she/he is going through, and she gets to point where she makes little jokes - free associating- don't forget to laugh. Max Angst anyone?).

I came across *Adrift in a Vanishing City* after I really got into Kerouac's works (about 2010), and I'm not sure if someone commented that *Desolation Angels* reminded them of modern- day author Vincent Cxyz ... or if Amazon recommended the book automatically, and I just copped it. And that's the thing (it's all a blur), I didn't read too much about the book ... and I ordered it along with some other books but hadn't really planned on reading it. But, when it came in, the artwork pulled me in, coupled with the poetic title, which I go mush for. So I opened it up and was BLOWN away. I did not make it past page one when I started doing all the things you normally do prior to getting a book worth getting. That is, all the oxymoronic rituals such as: going back online and reading Amazon quack boxes (I have a thing for bad reviews, I just love to read them - that's how I know that I'm really going to like a book, by gauging a theme that runs in the bad reviews, i.e. self-indulgent, highfalutin, erudite ... yada yada [all the signs of bashing an author b/c I'm really mad they did something I've never thought about, and this writer reminds me of people who made fun of me in school, or why is this writer so much smarter than me, or simply, I need a therapist]).

After reading all the extra-textual stuff, I got into the book, and ever since, have kept it around me. My love for the book, and it should go without saying, comes from the style. The style is also welcoming (it really pulls you in). I mean, anyone who thinks *Adrift in a Vanishing City* is difficult will change their mind after reading D.F. Wallace's stuff (his writing seems to hate you for even trying to read it - it's cold. I still love Wallace though for what he does, I think there is a service in his writing. But you get my point.)

Now, I have a feeling that some people who are stars now (I'm looking at you [-sorry I can't say-]), probably came across this very book, and just field stripped it and learned how to do what people now think is daring.

The beauty of *Adrift* is in its technical authenticity - rooted in the zeitgeist- presciently written for our ADD culture. There are Easter eggs one can Google and go wow. Technical Authenticity in the form of an author who respects how much more informed we are on pop culture; understands that we have tools in our palms to retrieve information in seconds; knows that one must really be astute in the art of storytelling in order to get our attention from, say, that Youtube cat that does super cool backflips.

"Oh Nameless father who arte in Australia, hallowed be thy namelessness." -*Adrift in a Vanishing City* (p 91).

This quote came to mind b/c Vincent Cxyz has a new collection on stories soon to be bounded and published, of which I read *The Nameless Saint* and *Gypsy Charm*. I can't wait for the complete offering.
<http://www.obscurajournal.com/Nameles...>

Matt says

My take, once again at the Arts Fuse: <http://artsfuse.org/130650/fuse-book-...>

Correna says

Absolutely brilliant. Beautiful. I couldn't put it down. It carried me away.

Christine says

I enjoyed reading the book. I believe it tries to make some lofty ideas and mythical storylines more accessible, more reflective of the imperfect way people live their lives. The critics will probably find the work haughty, the fans will find the work playful but noble in its pursuit. The critics will find the writing dense, the fans will find the writing- lush and lyrical.

Probably how much one likes or dislikes the book hangs on how idealistic or jaded they are about investing the time --to take your time and slowly read and explore. The book isn't a quick fix for a happy ending.

I enjoyed the read, because the book contains symbolism, history, science, mythology and intermingles what seems very irrelevant items together around a common focus of influence - What influences us? . And if one takes the time to look and see the connections one will discover how tightly knit the storylines are -- even when chronological lines are not followed.

A 30 second sound-bite of writing this is not. For those who think the quick fix statements of Twitter and Facebook and instant messaging, seems positively Neanderthal --- this is a book that takes it time. And with anything good...it is not something served in a shot glass but in a carafe to be poured out over time.
