

“Brief Reviews”

Die, Lady, Die

Alejandro López

Afterword by Daniel Link

Aliform Publishing

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by Jeff Bursey

This Argentinean farce, first published in 2001, is delightfully mean in its depiction of shallow people. Its heroine, a teenager named Esperanza, is unlikeable and unsympathetic, much like every other character, and this is quite refreshing. As she goes through life as many withering flames do, one can recognize in her the terribly ruinous traits of those who become obsessed with pop idols.

While a short book (with many proofreading errors), *Die, Lady, Die* packs a lot of mayhem into its pages. Part of the suspense is ruined by the publisher giving away some of the plot on the back cover, which is a shame, as ignorance of what happens is more suited to a picaresque romp that gaily mixes makeup, soap operas, divas, fantasy, mysticism, and mediums. The book's use of brand names and homicidal behaviour call to mind Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*. The wholly unnecessary afterword invokes Flaubert, Julio Cortázar, and David Lynch, which is meant to give heft to a slender novel, a summer read, a lark. In the context of *Die, Lady, Die*, where *TV Guide* is like the Bible, Daniel Link's commodification of three artists to help sell López to English-speaking consumers is amusing for reasons he may not have considered.

Afterword aside, what one has is the tale of an irritating young woman whose great misfortune is not to be have been born before her nicer, better-looking twin sister (who gets blown up, as the back of the book reveals), and to be fat. Only after the death of her sister and father in the same gas explosion does Esperanza's own life start to gel, and her mother, a heavy drinker, finally pays attention to her, as, eventually, does Benito, her mother's boyfriend. Where can a poor girl from a damaged family turn if not to the world of makeup and make-believe? Glamour and television are her guides in life, showing her what she needs to aspire to. Her one aim is to be with Ricky Martin and bear their love child, a seemingly impossible thing to pull off. Esperanza pursues this goal when forced to leave her tiny village, best friend by her side, with Buenos Aires as her destination, and a kind of plan in mind about how to make contact with her great crush.

A great deal of meandering occurs, but Esperanza soon learns, from her god's lips, that she has to prevent him from meeting Princess Diana, who she earlier described as having an “insipid hairstyle cut the length and width of her vegetarian face.” Where this hatred comes from is perhaps not so important as what it shows of her stalker mentality. No one can get in the way. The ruthless and insane determination to become intimate with Martin had been conceived after he appeared in a show that opened Carnival de Buenos Aires. Later that night, Esperanza saved him from heat stroke. From then on their fates were sealed, for he is no match for this obsessive with an uncanny ability to bring death and injury to those she targets.

There's not much that is memorable about the novel's language, and the insights are like those one would get from long immersion in teen magazines anywhere. One can enjoy *Die, Lady, Die* for its effervescence. It could be López means his novel to be taken more seriously than that. A blurb from the Buenos Aires magazine *Tres Puntos* says: "Such is the brutal truth of this dizzying novel: no reality exists beyond that of an alienating mass media." Not that *Tres Puntos* is part of any alienating mass media, of course. As for reality, the slums of any city, death, a broken leg, wars, the GST, any number of things for that matter, comprise most people's reality. That kind of publicity claim makes this novel sound very important and cutting-edge. Shame, though, to pimp up a trifle.

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