



Die, My Love

Ariana Harwicz , Sarah Moses (Translator) , Carolina Orloff (Translator)

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In a forgotten patch of French countryside, a woman is battling her demons embracing exclusion yet wanting to belong, craving freedom whilst feeling trapped, yearning for family life but at the same time wanting to burn the entire house down. Given surprising leeway by her family for her increasingly erratic behaviour, she nevertheless feels ever more stifled and repressed. Motherhood, womanhood, the banality of love, the terrors of desire, the inexplicable brutality of another person carrying your heart forever *Die, My Love* faces all this with a raw intensity. It is not a question of if a breaking point will be reached, but rather when and how violent a form will it take?

Die, My Love Details

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From Reader Review Die, My Love for online ebook

Maca Mamone says

Me lo imaginaba diferente, pero igual me gustó bastante. Está narrado de una forma bastante particular, casi teatral, a veces fragmentada y confusa, pero una vez que te acostumbras la historia avanza muy rápido. Y es una historia fuerte, dura, que muestra un punto de vista diferente del matrimonio y la maternidad, un punto de vista muy marginado y silenciado, pero que seguro toda mujer puede entender. Muy recomendable, a seguir leyendo más de esta autora que promete.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

I couldn't stop thinking about this book. It is so dark, some of it is unsettling because I couldn't tell what was fantasy and what was really happening, but even more unsettling because it puts you inside the headspace of a woman who was already isolated in a country that is not her own, and then she has children. She is trapped, she could kill her son, she could kill herself, she could hurt herself, it never goes away. It is a suffocating narrative and it took me a while to decide what to think. Surely it takes an author's writing ability to put me there. But also - I did not want to be there. So it was quite the reading quandry. It's lucky the book is so short, it would have been harder to be in that space much longer. But it is also good to show the exacting inner turmoil of motherhood and all of the weight of the expectations that comes with it. How your identity shifts, how you are forever seen as a mother, sometimes first, sometimes only. She conveys it well.

Not only the cover blurb makes me think so, but there is something similar here to the tone and bewilderment of reading experience with *Fever Dream*, from another female author in the same country.

This was on the longlist for the Man Booker International Prize 2018 but not the shortlist.

Gustavo Lozano says

Intensa, brutal, salvaje, cargada de erotismo. Se lee con la respiración entrecortada, como corriendo detrás de la narradora.

Neil says

RE-READ AFTER ITS INCLUSION ON THE REPUBLIC OF CONSCIOUSNESS LONG LIST

Die, My Love is published by Charco Press. On its website, Charco Press says:

Charco Press focuses on finding outstanding contemporary Latin American literature and bringing it to new readers in the English-speaking world. We aim to act as a cultural and linguistic bridge for you to be able to access a brand new world of fiction that has, until now, been missing from your reading list.

Furthermore:

Charco Press was born from a desire to do something a little out of the ordinary. To bring you, the reader, books from a different part of the world. Outstanding books. Books you want to read. Maybe even books you need to read.

Charco Press is ambitious. We aim to change the current literary scene and make room for a kind of literature that has been overlooked. We want to be that bridge between a world of talented contemporary writers and yourself.

We select authors whose works feed the imagination, challenge perspective and spark debate. Authors that are shining lights in the world of contemporary literature. Authors whose works have won awards and received critical acclaim. Bestselling authors. Yet authors you perhaps have never heard of. Because none of them have been published in English.

Until now.

Die, My Love is new to English language readers, but was originally published in Spanish (*Matate, Amor*) in 2012. It tells the story of a woman struggling with depression before and after the birth of her child. In the very first chapter, we get a feeling for how this is affecting her view of herself:

So many healthy and beautiful women in the area, and he ended up falling for me. A nutcase. A foreigner. Someone beyond repair. Muggy out today, isn't it? Seems it'll last a while, he says. I take long swigs from the bottle, breathing through my nose and wishing, quite simply, that I were dead.

Reading about someone suffering from depression is never going to be a pleasurable experience. And there is something heart-wrenching about the language used in this book that pulls you into the dark world of the narrator (no one is named in the book - we have the narrator, her son, her man, her parents, his parents etc., but no names). Approaching a glass door, we read

I always toy with the idea of going right through the glass and cutting every inch of my body, always aiming to pass through my own shadow.

Looking at her son, the narrator says

I hope the first word my son says is a beautiful one. That matters more to me than his health insurance. And if it isn't, I'd rather he didn't speak at all. I want him to say magnolia, to say compassion, not Mum or Dad, not water. I want him to say dalliance.

This isn't about emotions, but I found it an incredibly moving sentence to read.

It's a story about a woman struggling to be a mother and about a man struggling with a wife suffering from depression that leads her to a very unstable approach to life. It's about trying to live with that instability and that darkness in your life and in your relationships.

The story is told in poetic language with a lot of imagery rather than simple narration. Some of it seems to be more about capturing the feeling of living with depression rather than making "sense". And it is this that eventually won me over: I think I've said a few times before that atmosphere is more important than plot for me when reading a book. This has both, sort of, but the plot is secondary and that's my preferred way round (as long as it's done well, of course). If you've read *Fever Dream* you will have a feel for the kind of atmosphere created in this book. I've read several books recently with unlikeable female narrators and this is the first one I have really enjoyed reading.

I'm hovering between 3 and 4 stars.

My thanks to Charco Press for a review copy.

Hugh says

My third book from the excellent Republic of Consciousness prize shortlist.

This book has also been longlisted for the Man Booker International Prize

This is a raw, visceral and intensely personal novella, the dark interior monologue of a young woman on the verge of madness who wants to break free of the expectations created by being a mother of a small child, struggling to contain destructive urges. This is not always easy to follow and is often a little uncomfortable to read, but it is very impressive and quite beautiful in places.

Rebecca says

This intense Argentinian novella, originally published in 2012 and nominated for this year's Republic of Consciousness and Man Booker International Prizes, is an inside look at postpartum depression as it shades into what looks like full-blown psychosis. We never learn the name of our narrator, just that she's a foreigner living in France (like Harwicz herself) and has a husband and young son. The stream-of-consciousness chapters are each composed of a single paragraph that stretches over two or more pages. From the first page onwards, we get the sense that this character is on the edge: as she's hanging laundry outside, she imagines a sun shaft as a knife in her hand. But for now she's still in control. "I wasn't going to kill them. I dropped the knife and went to hang out the washing like nothing had happened."

Not a lot happens over the course of the book; what's more important is to be immersed in this character's bitter and perhaps suicidal or sadistic outlook. But there are a handful of concrete events. Her father-in-law has recently died, so she tells of his funeral and what she perceives as his sad little life. Her husband brings home a stray dog that comes to a bad end. Their son attends a children's party and they take along a box of pastries that melt in the heat.

The only escape from this woman's mind is a chapter from the point of view of a neighbor, a married radiologist with a disabled daughter who passes her each day on his motorcycle and desires her. With such an unreliable narrator, though, it's hard to know whether the relationship they strike up is real. This woman is racked by sexual fantasies, but doesn't seem to be having much sex; when she does, it's described in disturbing terms: "He opened my legs. He poked around with his calloused hands. Desire is the last thing there is in my cries."

The language is jolting and in-your-face, but often very imaginative as well. Harwicz has achieved the remarkable feat of showing a mind in the process of cracking up. It's all very strange and unnerving, and I found that the reading experience required steady concentration. But if you find the passages below intriguing, you'll want to seek out this top-class translation from new Edinburgh-based publisher Charco Press. It's the first book in what Harwicz calls "an involuntary trilogy" and has earned her comparisons to Virginia Woolf.

"My mind is somewhere else, like I've been startled awake by a nightmare. I want to drive down the road and not stop when I reach the irrigation ditch."

"I take off my sleep costume, my poisonous skin. I recover my sense of smell and my eyelashes, go back to pronouncing words and swallowing. I look at myself in the mirror and

see a different person to yesterday. I'm not a mother."

"The look I'm going for is Zelda Fitzgerald en route to Switzerland, and not for the chocolate or watches, either."

Originally published on my blog, Bookish Beck.

Jill says

A beautiful yet brutal book about a woman on the verge of madness. It is written from her perspective, so it can be difficult at times to determine what is real vs internal. This is why I read though - to occasionally come across that truly original book. It's certainly not a G rated book but I found it fascinating!

Doug says

"I'm barely listening. I don't understand his metaphors. It must be that I don't have the brains for it. My mind is somewhere else, like I've been startled awake by a nightmare." p. 82

Nice of the author to provide me with a review of her own work within its pages! :-)

My main problems with this book were three-fold:

1. The book is basically one long rant by a woman undergoing post-partum psychosis, with little in the way of plot or character development... there was nothing really in the final 118 pages that I didn't already 'get' from the first 5.
 2. Although some of the language is poetical, with some striking imagery (even in translation), a large portion of the book is written in an intentionally surreal screed, that I would go back over and over several times before giving up on any tangible meaning ... and moving on.
 3. I have a very low threshold for animal abuse of any kind, and the unnecessary killing of a dog halfway through almost caused me to abandon the book. I could take the whack job ignoring her poor husband and child ... and masturbating incessantly.... but don't shoot a poor defenseless creature, you bitch!
-

Robin says

I've been needing the loo since lunch but it's impossible to do anything other than be a mother. Enough already with the crying. He cries, and cries and cries. I'm going to lose my mind. I'm a mother, full stop. And I regret it but I can't even say that. Who would I say it to?

This book is the antithesis of one of those nauseating Anne Geddes photos, of an eternally adorable, sleeping infant, nestled inexplicably in a costume so that they look like a pea in a pod. Urg... pardon me as I retch.

Where was I? Oh yes, the opposite of Anne Geddes. Because Anne Geddes is the biggest liar out there.

About motherhood, about babies, about what I want to look at, framed on the wall. Ariana Harwicz, on the other hand, tells the searing, brutal truths of the dark, inner, mostly unuttered experiences mothers have, none of which are socially acceptable. Who ever says "I regret having my baby"? Who can admit aloud that they wish physical harm on a defenceless toddler? Who dares confess they have felt that way, even in a difficult and fleeting moment?

Harwicz' story is like a big, horrific reveal. Ta-da! The infant you're carrying is going to carry off YOU... your freedom, your body, your relationship, your identity... and you have to love it! Every minute of the day! Stifling any feelings to the contrary. Photographs with smiling faces hiding the inner madness.

This book gives voice to a mother's secret protests. I was almost afraid to turn the page at times. What is going to happen NEXT? The protagonist is on the razor's edge of insanity, full of contradictions. She is trapped and clingy at the same time. It's unclear sometimes what is real and what is imagined, but the effect is a claustrophobic fury, of claws scratching against splintered wood, of agony and alienation. But in that, Harwicz unleashes a freedom by uttering the totally unacceptable, in telling a story without sanitising one single word.

There's something of Sylvia Plath here, of *The Yellow Wallpaper*, of *Surfacing*, of every mother who has felt the desperate loss of *self*. The writing is powerful and dense, so I took my time reading this, treating each short chapter as I would a poem. It's not for the faint of heart (thank goodness it's only 123 pages) but it gives permission to acknowledge these dangerous yet universal feelings, and I think that can only have healing consequences.

Viv JM says

"Die, My Love" is a short book about a new mother battling with post natal depression/psychosis, written in the first person. The narrator is never named, and she does not name her husband or baby son either, which adds to the sense of unreality and detachment. It is difficult to tell which events are real and which are the product of her deeply disturbed mind. It is a very dark and unsettling book, but also very poetic and beautifully written/translated.

This is the first book I have read published by Charco Press, and I am impressed with the quality of the translation but also the beautiful design of the book itself.

Paul Fulcher says

Now deservedly part of the outstanding shortlist for the 2017 Republic of Consciousness Prize for 'gorgeous prose and hardcore literary fiction' from small, independent presses - and recognised by the Man Booker International longlist (book 4/13) for me

People here prepare for winter like animals. Nothing distinguishes us from them. Take me, an educated woman, a university graduate – I'm more of an animal than those half-dead foxes, their faces stained red, sticks propping their mouths wide open.

Los hombres acá preparan el invierno como las bestias. Nada nos distingue a unos de otros. Yo misma,

letrada y graduada universitaria, soy más bestia que esos zorros desahuciados con la cara teñida de rojo y un palo atravesándoles la boca de par en par.

My 2017 reading year has focused on the UK's small independent press scene, source of the most exciting literary fiction. Many were already familiar to me (Fitzcarraldo, Tramp Press, Peirene, Galley Beggar, And Other Stories) but Charco Press is new, not just to me, but to the publishing scene generally. Their name is taken from the colloquial expression 'cruzar el charco' meaning 'crossing the puddle', a way of referring to when someone is going overseas, or travelling between continents, and their mission is to bring exciting Latin American literature, via translation, to the UK. Their mission statement is worth quoting in full:

Charco Press was born from a desire to do something a little out of the ordinary. To bring you, the reader, books from a different part of the world. Outstanding books. Books you want to read. Maybe even books you need to read.

Charco Press is ambitious. We aim to change the current literary scene and make room for a kind of literature that has been overlooked. We want to be that bridge between a world of talented contemporary writers and yourself.

We select authors whose works feed the imagination, challenge perspective and spark debate. Authors that are shining lights in the world of contemporary literature. Authors whose works have won awards and received critical acclaim. Bestselling authors. Yet authors you perhaps have never heard of. Because none of them have been published in English.

Until now.

Die, My Love by Ariana Harwicz was one of their two launch books this Summer and tells the story of an unnamed new mother and her - strikingly also unnamed in her narration - husband and first born child, six months old as the novel opens. It is a visceral and haunting story of post-partum depression which begins, strikingly:

I lay back in the grass among fallen trees and the sun on my palm felt like a knife I could use to bleed myself dry with one swift cut to the jugular. Behind me, against the backdrop of a house somewhere between dilapidated and homely, I could hear the voices of my son and my husband. Both of them naked. Both of them splashing around in the blue paddling pool, the water thirty-five degrees. It was the Sunday before a bank holiday. I was a few steps away, hidden in the underbrush. Spying on them. How could a weak, perverse woman like me, someone who dreams of a knife in her hand, be the mother and wife of those two individuals?

This is not a mother who is sentimental for her child or the mystery of birth:

If I'd closed my legs and grabbed his dick, I wouldn't have to go to the bakery for cream cake or chocolate cake and candles, half a year already. The moment other women give birth they usually say, I can't imagine my life without him now, it's as though he's always been here. I'm coming, baby! I want to scream, but I sink deeper into the cracked earth.

University educated and from urban surrounds, the French countryside where she lives also depresses her:

These people are going to make me lose it. I wish I had Egon Schiele, Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon for neighbours; then my son could grow up and develop intellectually by learning that there's more to the world I brought him into than opening old skylights you can't see out of anyway. As soon as all the others had escaped to their rooms to digest their meals, I heard my father-in-law cutting the grass beneath the snow with his new green tractor and thought that if I could lynch my whole family to be alone for one minute with

Glenn Gould, I'd do it.

Harwicz wrote the book listening 'obsessively' to Beethoven's Piano Sonata n. 13 in E flat major, Op. 27 n. 1 and Glenn Gould's rendition of part of the Sonata captures the book's mood
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sN7WI...>

As the novel progresses, in a stream of fevered thoughts, it is not always clear what actually takes place and what - notably an affair with another parent in the locality - is imagined:

My baby was practically asleep on his feet but he still went on stumbling through the house, holding onto the curtains and the century-old coffee tables and throwing whatever he found to the floor. Ashtrays, cutlery. Maybe he was staying awake to make sure I didn't spend the night in another man's arms. It was a long time before I was finally able to put him in the cot, stop his crying, turn the pages of one of his books about astronauts or sea captains and convince him that the best thing you can do at night is sleep. Mummy's telling lies.

<...>

As soon I stepped outside, I saw him and forgot about everything that had come before, about the smouldering house, about my little soldier sleeping with his eyes open like a rabbit, about all those days of anguished anticipation. And I devoured him. Because that, my dear son, is what the night is for.

But her relationship with her, even in her account, remarkably patient, husband is characterised by an extreme form of love-hate:

We're one of those couples who mechanise the word 'love', who use it even when they despise each other. I never want to see you again, my love.

(and some years later at her son's birthday party)

Something made me rush inside and shut myself in my bedroom, slamming the door behind me. I hope you all die, every last one of you. As usual, he came knocking on my door. Darling, honey, sugar, sweetheart, my bunny rabbit, my love, I can't remember all the names he called me. And I said nothing. Are you okay? And I still said nothing. Come out, all the guests are leaving, don't ruin this. Where are the party bags? And I said, Why don't you leave me the hell alone and die. Just die, my love.

The contemporary translation by Sarah Moses (Asymptote's Editor-at-Large for Argentina) and Carolina Orioff (Editor and Co-Director of Charco Press) adds to the power of the work.

It has, as other reviewers have noted, a flavour of *Fever Dream* meets *Sorry to Disrupt the Peace*, and while it doesn't quite hit the heights of either, neither does anything else I have read (given they are my two favourite books of 2017). Overall a striking novel and I was immediately prompted to subscribe to Charco Press's forthcoming releases.

Lark Benobi says

Whether you love this book or feel assaulted by it depends on where you situate yourself as a witness to this female narrator's harrowing account of perfectly normal and privileged life in the French countryside. If the definition of 'a perfectly normal and privileged life' has ever felt like a horrifying nightmare to you--if you have ever looked around you and thought, however fleetingly, 'wow, these people, my family, actually think they are behaving rationally, when really they are trapped in a nightmare inside their own skulls, and are living a script in which they never question their values or beliefs, and I'm trapped along with them'-- then you'll experience your own alienation, and recognize your own thoughts, while reading this brief testimony of a woman who refuses to look away. If instead you situate yourself, as a reader, outside of her experience,

then you'll read this novel as a chronicle of madness, and it will be far less interesting to you.

In an early scene the narrator's husband urges her to look at the stars--he wants her to feel the wonder of them, he insists that she feels what he feels. Her resistance felt so familiar to me. It's the moment when you realize how much of your life is governed by long-held expectations of culture and history and family. Who does not love the stars? Aren't we all supposed to love stars? And yet this woman permits herself to acknowledge, in secret only, that she feels indifferent to stars, and oppressed by her husband's dogmatic enthusiasm for them. From that point in the story, it's almost as if her inability to feel excited about stars is a deadly insight that prevents her from feeling anything else, just because she is supposed to feel it. Instead of auto-love for her baby, for example, she is absorbed by and obsessed by the lamprey-like truth of being pregnant, of nursing.

The unnumbered chapter that begins on p. 13, of a Christmas dinner with in-laws, is so searing and insightful and scary that I wish I could quote the whole chapter, but here is a little of it:

As soon as all the other had escaped to their rooms to digest their meals, I heard my father-in-law cutting the grass beneath the snow with his new green tractor and thought that if I could lynch my whole family to be alone for one minute with Glenn Gould, I'd do it. Later on I saw him sitting at his desk, going over last month's supermarket receipts. He read the price of each product and then checked the total with a calculator. By the time he'd finished recording the sums in his log of monthly expenses, the desk lamp was no longer giving off enough light. We at dinner, all of us together again, and I can still remember the tired, backlit image of an average man who thinks he's exceptional.

Sidharth Vardhan says

longlisted for international booker 2018

"I'm fed up with the fact that it's not okay to bad-mouth your own baby or walk around firing a gun."

I know, right? As somebody of other said human beings are born free, but everywhere they are in chain. Chains of different types - social, religious, national etc. In this case, they are of family. The chains of expectations as to how mother should talk, behave, feel. I mean we all know that everyone can not be a cook, but we do always expect everyone to be a good parent. Specially mothers.

If you think about it, all freedoms boil down to just one freedom - the freedom to be oneself. And being a parent (again, specially mothers in a traditional patriarchal families) must take a heavy toll on one's freedom - for you are no longer doing what you want to do, but are struck looking after those stupid, smelling, needy little creatures that won't even thank you for the trouble (okay, why are people bothered with those children, again?) The protagonist of this somewhat autobiographical novel is a woman passionate about literature - in fact, so passionate, that literature is only thing that is beautiful to her - literature and sex (okay that is true for me too); and she doesn't get much of either struck in her present roles of mother, wife and daughter-in-law.

But one's family stands by one in times of need. But what if they are not good at it?

"I can't remember having done anything in particular to reveal how desperate I was feeling. For some time I'd been containing everything, or so I thought, in a swaying motion that was

subtle though intensifying, when, suddenly, I was offered a seat and something cool to drink. Since when did sitting down and having some water get rid of the desire to die? Thanks, Grandma. I'm fine though. But they sat me down and brought me the glass of cool water anyway. These people are going to make me lose it. I wish I had Egon Schiele, Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon for neighbours; then my son could grow up and develop intellectually by learning that there's more to the world I brought him into than opening old skylights you can't see out of anyway."

I know that when he slides open the door I'll turn into a black swan, and when he starts shouting I'll be a castrated duck. Okay, I'm going in. I'll stop trying to draw blood from a stone. I'll contain my madness, I'll use the bathroom. I'll put my baby to sleep, jerk off my man and postpone my rebellion in favour of a better life. Me, a woman who didn't want to register her son. Who wanted a son with no record, no identity. A stateless son, with no date of birth or last name or social status. A wandering son. A son born not in a delivery room but in the darkest corner of the woods. A son who's not silenced with dummies but rocked to sleep by animal cries. What saves me tonight, and every other night, has nothing to do with my husband's love or my son's. What saves me is the stag's golden eye, still staring at me.

I love it when prose mirrors the feelings of narrator with such intensity - and in my reading, the women authors seem to do it more frequently (Woolf, Plath, Lispector and now this one).

Jonathan Pool says

This is a book about 'post-natal depression; it's about the baby? Right?

Maybe not.

I'm no expert in the cause and manifestations of depression, a hugely complex, intensely personal subject. I have known, and do know, sufferers of depression.

With that in mind as I read *Die, My Love*, the presence of a young baby, pointed in the direction of 'post-natal' depression. As I read more I was increasingly conscious that there was much more going on in our narrator's mind than depression consequent to childbirth, though motherhood undeniably acted as another trigger for extreme thoughts and behaviour.

Mummy was happy before the baby came (77)

Being a mother is so very unexciting (78)

As the book develops the baby is not particularly at the centre of the story. Few anxieties either reflect in the child or emanate from him.

The baby does fine; integrates well in company.

The baby pointed excitedly towards the sea. A good sign.

There were lots of toddlers. Mine threw himself in with the clan and in no time they became a pack of wild babies" (107)

I thought I detected deeper, complex behaviour patterns.

I'm straying into territory that is not easily discussed in layman's terms. I'm not a qualified medical practitioner, and I apologise if, in my attempts to understand a book of 'fiction', I cross into territory that could cause offence by giving the impression that I have "answers".

Peripartum depression is caused primarily by hormonal changes. After birth, there is a significant drop in

oestrogen, which in turn can trigger changes in a woman's brain that can lead to peripartum depression. Peripartum depression is more debilitating and long lasting than 'baby blues' and the general description 'post-natal' depression is at risk of attributing the gestation and arrival of the baby as the cause of the depression.

By contrast, **Postpartum psychosis** is different, more debilitating, than peripartum depression. Our narrator, in *Die, My love*, exhibits, in my opinion, deep rooted anxiety, paranoia, fearfulness, repetitive thoughts; all of which are major causes of mental depression;. There is evidence of delusion and of hallucination.

I see zombie spiders marching along in single file (68)

there won't be any snakes coming out of the taps (76)

Our narrator isn't blind to this: *The look I'm going for is Zelda Fitzgerald en route to Switzerland (97).*

Interviewed, Ariana Harwicz speaks about her personal experiences as the inspiration for *Die, My Love*. The rural, "bucolic" countryside in France where she has lived for twelve years, is old fashioned, backward, and one which she is a part of.

Three themes stood out, for me

The Stag The central place of the Stag in the book is evident from page 50 onwards. Harwicz confirms this in her discussion at Shakespeare & co in Paris, in Feb 22, 2018

The closest I'd come to "levitating" "what saves me tonight has nothing to do with my husband's love, or my sons. What saves me is the stags golden eye, still staring at me (51)

The stag stops in his tracks. He's the man of my life, the one who can see into my infinite sadness. The others are just men. What good are men when they speak a language that falls short? My real man isn't human, I know.

If I burn with desire I'm a stag walking into a wood (56)

The stag appears, also in the distance. If only I knew what he was trying to tell me (87)

Oh stag of mine, darling stag, my one and only, I hope you're out there (118)

The message of the Stag is one of freedom. A Stag is strong and yet graceful. Stags take us to places we could never reach ourselves, allowing us to free ourselves from our own binding.

The importance of the natural world, even with attendant death and decay, underpins much of the story.

I don't know what these animals are up to. They're forming a circle around me and watching me. If a local were to pass by now they're think this was some kind of pagan ritual (57)

Even the baby is described in nature's terminology *Good morning child of the forest (49)*

Some studies of depression have found those who are high in anxiety have more animal imagery.

Music It's no coincidence that music also has a central part in *Die, My Love* (acknowledged by Harwicz). Glen Gould, an inspiration and calming presence.

This is music that the narrator feels, deep in her body. This is vibrational therapy. Some of the minor key pieces can make her cry; She experiences the emotion, a thing that she's always trying to recapture, something that went south along the way to depression.

Sex

I don't understand the hidden workings of passion but it carries me away nonetheless (56)

In one feline motion I turn over and climb on top of him (60)

All I can think of is satiating my body (63)

I offer myself to him. Take me. Have me. Taste me. "

Sigmund Freud regarded libido as the source of all motivation. Freudian theory fits the descriptions of our narrator. Consciousness of sexuality is preserved as well as readiness for sexual activity and sexual adventurism.

Listening to Ariana Harwicz is enlightening. She specifically discusses gender role reversal, and the inversion of the typical sexual norms in woman abandon their traditionally passive role in sex.

Die, My Love is an intensely personal book. Trying to understand depression is extremely difficult, and tiring. This is an exhausting book, but one well worth reading slowly and deliberately. Congratulations to Charco Press for publishing, and to the Republic of Consciousness prize for bringing this to my attention.

One last thing to say is that the translation by Sarah Moses & Carolina Orloff is absolutely exquisite. The punctuation, the rhythm, absolutely first class.

(I stumbled across a site written by Dr Evrard in the USA. Her ideas on "Some Horse Sense Comes My Way" gave me a better understanding of the Stag, and the music importance in relation to depression)
<http://www.worddifference.com/tag/equi...>

Gumble's Yard says

NOW LONGLISTED FOR THE MAN BOOKED INTERNATIONAL FOLLOWING ITS
SHORTLISTING FOR THE REPUBLIC OF CONSCIOUSNESS PRIZE

Charco Press is a newly established small UK publisher which “focuses on finding outstanding contemporary Latin American literature and bringing it to new readers in the English-speaking world”

Ariana Harwicz was born in Argentina and Lives in France. She studied screenwriting and drama in Argentina, and earned a first degree in Performing Arts from the University of Paris VII as well as a Master’s degree in comparative literature from the Sorbonne.

“Die My Love” was published in 2012 as “Matate, amor” and has been jointly and wonderfully translated by Sarah Moses and Caroline Orloff (joint founder of Charco Press).

On a recent interview on Jackie Law's excellent neverimitate blog the author explained in answer to a question about her background:

<https://neverimitate.wordpress.com/au...>

I always say that I was born when I wrote Die, My Love. Before then, I was alive, in the same way that everybody is alive, yet for me that is not really being alive. I had recently had a baby, I had moved to live in the countryside next to a forest. I would watch the thunderstorms, I would go horse-riding, but that was not life for me. And then I wrote Die, My Love, immersed in that desperation between death and desire. Die, My Love comes from that. I wasn't aware I was writing a novel. I was not a writer, rather, I was saving myself, slowly lifting my head out of the swamp with each line. I always say that I was born when I wrote Die, My Love. Before then, I was alive, in the same way that everybody is alive, yet for me that is not really being alive. I had recently had a baby, I had moved to live in the countryside next to a forest. I would watch the thunderstorms, I would go horse-riding, but that was not life for me. And then I wrote Die, My Love, immersed in that desperation between death and desire. Die, My Love comes from that. I wasn't aware I was writing a novel. I was not a writer, rather, I was saving

myself, slowly lifting my head out of the swamp with each line.

The book itself is therefore strongly autobiographical. The opening paragraph immediately sets the scene and the tone for the rest of the book, narrated by the mother of a small child.

I lay back in the grass among fallen trees and the sun on my palm felt like a knife I could use to bleed myself dry with one swift cut to the jugular. Behind me, against the backdrop of a house somewhere between dilapidated and homely, I could hear the voices of my son and my husband. How could a weak, perverse woman like me, someone who dreams of a knife in her hand, be the mother and wife of those two individuals? What was I going to do

The narrator we quickly realise seems to be suffering from Post Partum Depression,

I've been needing the loo since lunch but it's impossible to do anything other than be a mother. Enough already with the crying. He cries and cries and cries. I'm going to lose my mind. I'm a mother, full stop. And I regret it, but I can't even say that Mummy was happy before the baby came. Now Mummy gets up each day wanting to run away from the baby while he just cries harder and harder. I need the loo, but his interminable clucking and grousing makes it impossible.

Or perhaps more strictly peripartum depression, since it's clear her symptoms were already severe and causing concern among her in-laws at the Christmas just before the birth.

The advice I was given by that young social worker who came to our house when my mother-in-law called, alarmed: 'If your child cries so much that you feel like you can't go on and you're about to lose control, get out of there. Leave the child with someone else and find a place where you can regain composure and calm. If you're alone and there's no one to leave him with, go somewhere else anyway. Leave the child in a safe place and take a few steps back.' But I'm thinking about pacing up and down with the baby in my arms, hour after hour of tedious choreography, from the exhaustion to screaming, screaming to exhaustion. And I think about how a child is a wild animal, about another person carrying your heart forever

The narrator is a foreigner, from a City background, well educated and with a taste for classical music, all of which causes her to be openly scornful of her country dwelling, closely knit in-laws and their decent lives and conventional tastes, which she sees as beyond mundane.

If I could lynch my whole family to be alone for one minute with Glenn Gould, I'd do it.

Later on I saw [my father in law] him sitting at his desk, going over last month's supermarket receipts. He read the price of each product and then checked the total with a calculator. By the time he'd finished recording the sums in his log of monthly expenses, the desk lamp was no

longer giving off enough light. We ate dinner, all of us together again, and I can still remember the tired, backlit image of an average man who thinks he's exceptional. After that, he cleaned his dentures and went to bed. And this is a day lived? This is a human being living a day of his life?

On rainy days in the city, people consume films, plays, restaurant meals. Out in the country they tell each other stories, thinking they can fight off the boredom that way

Here we are, one more family going out to watch the sunset. As though we had no idea that the sun came up and went down again. I mean, seriously, it does this every day

Even their concern for her, only increases her rage at their predictability – she resents the well-meaning advice of her mother in law, and says of her husband: *My better half had been listening in from behind the door – yes, the playwright of my life is that mediocre.*

What also came across to me was how the very act of motherhood, has fallen short of her hopes and expectations for it. Of her son she remarks

I hope the first word my son says is a beautiful one ... And if it isn't, I'd rather he didn't speak at all. I want him to say magnolia, to say compassion, not Mum or Dad, not water. I want him to say dalliance.

Me, a woman who didn't want to register her son. Who wanted a son with no record, no identity. A stateless son, with no date of birth or last name or social status. A wandering son. A son born not in a delivery room but in the darkest corner of the woods. A son who's not silenced with dummies but rocked to sleep by animal cries

In practice though the opposite occurs and the claustrophobia she feels from the interference of her neighbours and from the assumption of her in-laws that she will adapt to become part of their family, is only magnified as the existence of the child, in their eyes, legitimises the active intervention of nurses, social workers and locals and the advice of her family. This only drives her to further extremes of behaviour:

When my husband goes away in the middle of summer I leave a plastic doll on the back seat of the car and wait for the alarmed neighbours and state employees to come running. I love watching them react like the good citizens they are, like heroes who want to smash the window and save the little one from suffocating. It's fun to see the fire engine arrive in the village, its siren sounding. Morons, all of them.

One senses also that the reality of the countryside has also fallen short of her own fantasies of it – or perhaps more accurately that the banality of life there does not match her own more dramatic, and artistically and sexually charged views of the growth, reproduction and decay at the heart of nature.

And then I saw the air saturated with invisible sexual tension. Rembrandt. The acorns fell and fell and fell so lazily, so heavily between the treetops and the earth that they seemed to be

asleep in the air. To be cutting the air with golden rays. Caravaggio. That spell, that somnolence that comes over you as you watch leaves twirl once, twice, a third time before reaching the ground. One leaf falls, then another and another. An atmosphere that leaves you open-mouthed, that turns your saliva into fresh water. Farewell to mould and darkness. The death of summer turned the woods into silence and sighs

And, once a writer and it seems literature student, she is bought up with a jolt listening to a radio critic discussing literature in words she has not heard for years, and contrasting it with the banality of her own life.

I wonder what I'd make of this very woodland, this rustic setting, the half-built house, the man nailing down planks of wood, if a critic said my writing dealt with 'the interconnectivity of human existence

The narrator is frustrated at her partner's apparent low libido; however it's clear a large part of that is caused by his fears over her mental state and that the narrator herself is perhaps more interested in being sexually provocative and explicit in her speech than in sex itself.

I like thinking about sex, not having it. I was always good at the theory and a failure at the practical bit, that's why I don't know how to drive even though I've learnt the traffic laws by heart.

The second part of this quote again gets to some of the heart of the breach between the narrator and her in-laws; her husband convinced that if she simply put some practical effort into learning to drive and so gained some increased freedom and mobility that in itself would go a long way to improving her mood, she railing at his inability to understand her much deeper frustrations and furies.

In the neverimitate interview, Ariana Harwicz calls the book not just a novel, but *also a mournful poem, a song, a sonata by Schubert or Rachmaninov mixed with 'Stronger than me' by Amy Winehouse* - Winehouse's debut single and one described at the time in a Guardian review as a "bold assault on New Man and his values".

Her views on sex however, do not prevent her from fantasising about a married neighbour (to the extent she starts imagining him fantasising about her), and then it seems (albeit with the instability and unreliability of our narrator distinguishing fact from fantasy can be as hard for us as it seems to be for her) having a brief affair with him, which later disintegrates into stalking on her side and into the climax of the book.

Finally one element of this book is that none of the family characters are named (although three of the neighbours and a bit at a party are). This is not done in a way to draw attention (as occurs in books where only one character is not named, or where characters are labelled as Mr. A etc.) but is a clear part of the book – with characters simply described as my son, my husband, my father-in-law etc.

The implication of this to me, is that identity (particularly within the family which the narrator has joined) is defined by status and role – something that others seem contended to embrace but which the narrator pushed back against, rejecting the traditional concepts of mother or wife.

I was recently able to discuss this aspect with the co-translator of the book (also co-owner of Charco Press). Incidentally it is a great advantage of small presses that you can directly engage with them. Her views:

None of the main characters in Ariana's three novels have names. And this is due to several reasons, I think. On one hand, they tend to be antisocial, a-social rather, they are pariahs. They are not protected by legality. They are on the margins, and not just in terms of their class –although that too- but mostly in philosophical terms. Secondly, their namelessness has to do with the theatrical dimension of her prose. They are mere characters, pawns of the story, theatre elements. They are characters that respond to roles, not to names, because they are not people, they have not been born per se. Thus, they respond to mother, husband, father-in-law, lover, and not to names. Through this, Ariana shows the artificiality of the roles imposed by society (like Becket does with these characters 'A', 'B', 'C'), the artificiality that lies inherently in every love relationship, in every family relationship, and so forth. Finally, it is also an aesthetic choice. This is part of her aesthetics, of her style, something that defines her prose.

I found the book a compelling portrait of peripartum depression, the first clinical diagnosis of which I found seemed a great summary of the narrators situation *Peripartum depression should be distinguished from the baby blues, which is characterized by short duration, mild symptoms, and minimal impact on functioning. Women with peripartum depression should be evaluated for bipolar disorder, postpartum psychosis, and suicidal risk.*

It also summarises our concern as readers, that a book which starts with such violent imagery can only end in harm for the narrator, her husband, her baby or perhaps all of them and so the menace which lays at the heart of this book as the narrator's mental state disintegrates and her family "*gradually succumbs to the radiation of infidelity.*

Overall a vivid, powerful and disturbing read.

My thanks to Charco Press for a review copy.
