

of a seemingly well-known moment of twentieth-century history. Along with the Anschluss itself, Vuillard's book describes the 1933 meeting between twenty-four heads of major German companies, who agreed to provide financing to the Nazi Party. The steel magnate Gustav Krupp, one of the participants in that meeting, became one of the beneficiaries of the Reich's massive use of slave labor, the ghostly evocation of which constitutes the book's concluding section. Also described in farcical detail is the lavish reception held by British prime minister Neville Chamberlain for the departing German ambassador Joachim von Ribbentrop—on the day German troops were entering Austria.

In Vuillard's tightly constructed narrative, the worst tragedies of the century are preceded or accompanied by the ludicrous activities of mediocre individuals. The apparently trivial anecdotes in fact shed light on the enormous destruction of people and civilization. Vuillard has become adept at this type of historical investigation, which generally alternates between a somberly gripping narration and a more sardonic retelling of relatively minor events. In *Conquistadors* (2009), he depicted the end of the Inca Empire. *Congo* (2012) was an examination of one of the worst cases of the colonial "scramble for Africa." *14 juillet* (2016) provided an original account of the most famous episode of the 1789 French Revolution.

Vuillard is also a screenwriter and has directed two films. His approach to literary narrative does seem to be influenced by the practice of cinematic montage, of condensing time and space through the use of short, carefully edited segments of information.

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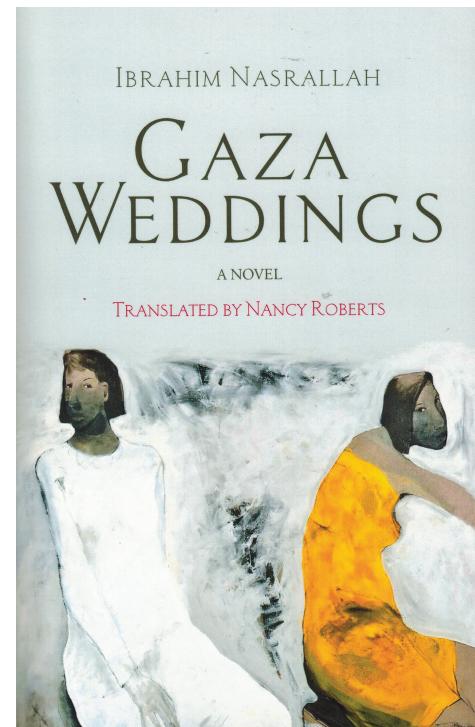
### Ibrahim Nasrallah *Gaza Weddings*

Trans. Nancy Roberts. Cairo. Hoopoe / American University in Cairo Press. 2017. 155 pages.

In the poignant and humorous prose of *Gaza Weddings*, Palestinian poet, novelist, critic, painter, and photographer Ibrahim Nasrallah portrays a contemporary Gaza neighborhood in occupied Palestine. It's the spare, latest volume to be translated into English in *The Palestinian Comedy*, an ongoing epic series of novels based on Balzac's *Comédie humaine*, which includes *Time of White Horses* and *The Lanterns of the King of Galilee*. The action centers on a friendship between Amna, a worker in the children's trauma unit at Al-Shifa Hospital, and Randa, an aspiring young journalist whose twin sister, Lamis, is in a courtship with Amna's son, Saleh. Theatrical and cinematic, the tale wields a subtle but powerful dramatic irony, undermining the characters' struggles as they construct a new reality for themselves while also safeguarding the dignity of each personage amidst a reign of barbarism.

Their conditions deteriorating under brutal Israeli rule, the bond between the two women strengthens as they help prepare for a wedding that will never happen. Amna's private moments take the form of one-sided conversations with her martyred brother, and we learn that her husband, also martyred, married her in the hospital after being bayoneted while crossing a checkpoint hidden in a coffin.

Randa asks permission to write down everyone's stories, as when she looks on while two girls among the mourners of an unidentified man, all of whom claim to be his wife, come back to the grave day after



day until only one other lady is left, the real widow, at which point they leave, telling the would-be reporter that no matter who turned out to be the bereaved one, they had not wanted to leave her alone.

An air of tragedy pervades this book-length sequence of monologues, and the briskness of Nasrallah's sentences bears it across to us lightly: "Inside each of us there's a poet," Randa observes, "who comes out when we really come face to face with ourselves. When that happens, we start to glow, and we might say things nobody would ever have heard come out of our mouths otherwise."

Born and raised in the Wihdat refugee camp in Jordan and currently living in Amman, Ibrahim Nasrallah worked first as a teacher while writing his books, then as a journalist for eighteen years. Because of his writings he has faced travel restrictions, book bans, and accusations of blasphemy. In Nancy Roberts's excellent translation of *Gaza Weddings*, however, anglophone audiences can read his text, as Nasrallah writes in a recent *Culture + Conflict* article,



“not only because they are sympathetic to my cause, but because the work they are paying for deserves reading.”

Erik Noonan  
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*Kraljica Lir i njena deca:  
najbolje priče savremenih  
srpskih spisateljica*

Ed. Ljubica Arsić. Belgrade. Laguna. 2017.  
239 pages.

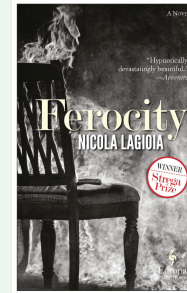
Renowned, awarded, and translated Serbian writer Ljubica Arsić (b. 1955) often promotes domestic and foreign women authors from past and present times. This time she has assembled a book of short stories *Kraljica Lir i njena deca: najbolje priče savremenih srpskih spisateljica* (Queen Lear and her children: The best stories by contemporary Serbian women writers) that is a wonderful example of the creative power of women in the Serbian writing tradition. Despite the fact that most of the authors included have received reputable domestic

and sometimes European literary awards, women writers in Serbia have not been widely visible. Their writings have received very little critical attention. Selected editions of their works are rarely published, and, as authors, they almost do not exist in schoolbooks, nor are they valued in public debates as opinion-making intellectuals. As in the previous publisher’s anthologies of short stories based on a central theme, the introductory story is a stage-setting tale. A brilliantly chosen story, “Queen Lear,” by one of contemporary Russia’s most distinctive writers, Ludmila Petrushevskaya, underlines the intensity of women’s transformative roles and the specificity of their contemplation.

The anthology presents selections from seventeen authors of different generations and writing styles. In the generational scope of the book (1930–80), from Svetlana Velmar-Janković to Ana Vučković, writers born in the mid-twentieth century dominate. In the time of the great humanities debate over the relationship between ethics and critical thinking, it is very important to read again once popular, later politically persecuted, and today almost forgotten authors like Elvira Rajković.

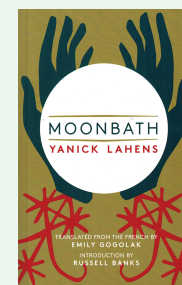
A good number of the stories describe recent turbulent political times and consequences of the Yugoslav wars (Šalgo, Rajković, Dimovska, Đuričić, Novaković). While some writers were inspired by the history of Ottoman times (Velmar-Janković, Mitrović), others used Kafka’s metamorphosis and science fiction (Blagojević and Lengold) or offered a deconstruction of *Cinderella* (Vučković). Serbian women writers depict political and social relationships, often revealing different types of violence, illusions, and lies. As underlined in Pavlović’s story, women look for small things, but it always turns out they are big and unachievable.

The reader would benefit from more bibliographic details of the publishing years and translated works in each author’s short



Nicola Lagioia  
**Ferocity**  
Trans. Antony Shugaar  
Europa Editions

When the daughter of one of the foremost real estate families in the region is found dead, her death is ruled a suicide but her brother is skeptical. He begins his own investigation into her death and, in the process, uncovers his own family’s dark history. Italian author Nicola Lagioia’s novel is filled with suspense and intense dedication to the psychological states of the characters.



Yanick Lahens  
**Moonbath**  
Trans. Emily Gogolak  
Deep Vellum

Haitian author Yanick Lahens’s novel *Moonbath* is a family saga that spans four generations of feuds, hardship, and political turmoil, all traced back by Cétoute to explain how she was discovered injured and washed ashore. At once grand and intensely personal in scope, *Moonbath* is the history of a country told through Cétoute’s family.