



Dahlia Season: Stories and a Novella

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Chicana. Goth. Dykling. Desiree Garcia knows she's weird and a weirdo magnet. To extinguish her strangeness, her parents ship her to Saint Michael's Catholic High School, then to Mexico, but neurology can't be snuffed out so easily: Screwed brain chemistry holds the key to Desiree's madness. As fellow crazies sense a kinship with her, Desiree attracts a coterie of both wanted and unwanted admirers, including a pair of racist deathrock sisters, a pretty Hispanic girl who did time in California's most infamous mental asylum, and a transnational stalker with a pronounced limp.

As high school graduation nears, Desiree's weirdness turns from charming to alarming. Plagued by increasingly bizarre thoughts and urges, Desiree convinces herself she's schizophrenic, despite assurance otherwise. In college, she finds Rae, an ex-carnie trannyboi, who becomes the June Carter to her Johnny Cash. With Rae's help, Desiree answers the riddle of her insanity and names her disease.

Combining the spark of Michelle Tea, the comic angst of Augusten Burroughs, and the warmth of Sandra Cisneros, Mexican American author Myriam Gurba has created a territory all her own. *Dahlia Season* not only contains the title novella, but also several of Gurba's acclaimed stories.

Myriam Gurba is a high school teacher who lives in Long Beach, California, home of Snoop Dogg and the Queen Mary. She graduated from UC Berkeley, and her writing has appeared in anthologies like *The Best American Erotica* (St. Martin's Press), *Bottom's Up* (Soft Skull Press), *Secrets and Confidences* (Seal Press), and *Tough Girls* (Black Books).

Dahlia Season: Stories and a Novella Details

Date : Published May 1st 2007 by Manic D Press, Inc.

ISBN : 9781933149165

Author : Myriam Gurba

Format : Paperback 224 pages

Genre : Fiction, Short Stories, Gblt, Queer, Lgbt, Dark Fantasy, Goth

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From Reader Review Dahlia Season: Stories and a Novella for online ebook

Lindy Loo says

I was expecting more, alas. The novella I thought was lovely. That I'd give 4-stars too. Was fascinating. Kept my interest. Had more depth to it. The short stories seemed a bit more flat to me. They didn't seem to give you enough time to sink into the diverse variety of characters narrating them. By the time I'd finally gotten a sense of them as people, the story was already over with. I appreciated the in-your-face abrasiveness of the storytelling. And I appreciated seeing lesbians and genderqueer folk represented without timidity. But most of the short stories didn't speak to me quite so much as I would've liked. Lesle: If you're reading this, however, I think you might dig this (at least the novella).

Lesbianfunworld Online says

Started to read this but put it down and I will not pick up again. I have struggled through other books for the sake of saying I've read it, but this just doesn't even seem worth another minute of my time. Maybe I gave up too early but what's so lesbian about dressing up as a guy and cruising gay guys? Just not for me.

Cheryl Klein says

Myriam Gurba's voice is fresh, funny and honest. I especially like how the protagonist's OCD and Tourette's operate at a low pulse throughout the title novella, neither totally normalizing nor fetishizing these conditions. The book celebrates weirdness without getting all, "Hey, look at my crazy punk rock life!" It's a great handbook for navigating a mundane world in which twitching on the bus and pretending to date Dracula are highly underrated.

Whitney says

This book is good and helps you view how other people view their lives too but it is inappropriate and don't really recommend it for anyone below 18. It talks about how these lesbian girls and gay guys do bad stuff when their parents are away. they cut themselves, and abort the babies themselves which isn't the right way to do it. It is fictional but can influence the way you think about things wrongly. But i kind of liked it though

Andrea Quinlan says

Dahlia Season is unlike any novel I have read before! So unique and brilliant. I am in love with Gurba's writing.

Angela says

I bought this book based on its reviews here and the fact that it came up as a recommendation based on my love of Shirley Jackson and Mary Gaitskill. But it's nothing like them, except for maybe parts of the tale White Girl (the best part of this book.) I hate saying this, but I suspect a lot of the reviews here are friends or family of the writer.

If you don't mind A LOT of pop culture references and the lack of a real plot, you might enjoy this book. The lesbian themes were interesting but not quite as explored as I would've liked. The novella made a huge leap (for no apparent reason) cutting out the character's college life. It basically read like an over-indulgent memoir with bad grammar throughout. I expected it to be a little more self-deprecating since it was written in the first person.

However, I couldn't put it down. I read it straight through. So many times you'll be sick of how "sexy, cool and unique" the characters are (it's basically all the same girl throughout) but it still has a wonderful flow. It's not literature, but it's a great young adult read. The constant pop culture references really turned me off - it's too dated. It kept bringing up awful Hot Topic images.

Still, I read it entirely which I NEVER do with books I dislike. So I liked it, but I probably wouldn't recommend it to friends. The story White Girl is really lovely. The book needed a better editor though - a lot of paragraphs need to be reconstructed and bad grammar never works unless in dialogue.

I'd like to see what else this writer does. This really felt like a first book but she's got a lot of potential! I'd definitely pick up anything I see her name on in the future and hope to see a little more growth and exploration.

Sarah says

This was okay. The short stories seemed like they were channeling The IHOP Papers and Michelle Tea. I know Michelle Tea's all hot right now and Ali Liebgott is like, from sister spit and all hip and everything, but let me be clear that I'm not using this comparison in that complimentary way you see on the fronts of book jackets. I really can't stand Michelle Tea and her cadre of we're-so-tortured-because-we're-gay-and-therefore-we-are-so-postmodern-and-so-much-more-avant-garde-and-radical-than-you tagalongs. So yeah, I wasn't into the short stories.

However, the novella seemed much better. It had more depth and therefore didn't have that feeling of being gratuitously shocking for no reason. Sadly, I didn't have time to finish all of it before the reading group and wasn't invested enough in it to finish it, so unfortunately I can't really dig it out from under the slamming I did in the first paragraph of this review. I'm sure it deserves better than the review I'm giving it though.

In any case, why is there so much gratuitous shock-value imagery in queer lit?

Deez says

pretty much i am neglecting the book club read for this book which is awesome. a bunch of short stories and a novella. i once heard the author read from the novella and was loving the subject matter of the southern

californian weirdo goth. now i am reading the short stories and i love them. i just read a gritty one about a boy whose girlfriend is preggo and trying to give herself an herbal abortion in high school. there was also one where the girl cross dresses to cruise gay boys. she is an awesome writer and i feel totally engaged and engrossed in her stories.....i did end up disengaging at this one story and then skipped to the novella which was good.

Faith Reidenbach says

I differ from many previous commentators in that I thought the novella was underdeveloped and the short stories were well done. I can't recommend the stories to all my friends, though, because two of them feature a knife or gun used as a sex toy. They put the edge in "edgy."

All of the stories and the novella are about young adults/coming of age. Most are from a Chicana lesbian point of view, which is why I read the book and the main reason I enjoyed it. I think it's safe to say that I've never met a Chicana lesbian with OCD and Tourette's who grew up goth, so this book expanded my horizons.

My favorite story was "White Girl," in which the teenaged Chicana narrator describes her mother's reaction to her white butch lover. In the timeframe of the story there doesn't appear to be any conversation between mother and daughter on the subject, so the daughter's reflections break a convention of fiction writing, and to me this was the most interesting part of the story.

Bethany says

"Dahlia Season" is brutally honest and raw. The book contains both the title novella, as well as a collection of the author's short stories...each and every one of them forced me to step outside of my stereotypical white girl world, and into the cultural chaos of these characters.

While the short stories are incredible, the main focus of the book is the novella, "Dahlia Season." The main character, Desiree Garcia is a Mexican American mess...she knows she is different, and as a result she is basically fly paper for freaks. Desiree is a goth, a lesbian, and harbors some pretty unnerving thoughts. In attempt to right her thinking, her parents send her to a Catholic high school--when that doesn't work, they ship her off to Mexico to stay with relatives. While each of these experiences teaches Desiree some valuable life lessons, they also reconfirm her notions of who she truly is. Throughout the novella we are introduced to several just as bizarre characters; Desiree's friends make up a portion of the "freak" circle, and each are intriguing and entertaining in their own rights.

Gurba's writing is brutal and sometimes painful. Filled with the confusion that is the teenage experience. On top of just being a teenager, Desiree is a lesbian, and we later find out, mentally ill. She suffers from a plethora of symptoms, most real, some exaggerated...and all making her daily life an adventure.

I couldn't put the book down...I felt like I was right there with Desiree and her friends and family. The writing is accurate and real, and will force you to reexamine your own world..

Sabina says

weird and hilarious and at times excruciating and fucked-up. full of Chicana dykes, goths, nerds and obsessive freaks. captures all those poignant feelings (and smells) about high school. and also summer vacations visiting your fam in Mexico. makes me really really really want/need to be in California. so good.

Amy P. says

It's so nice to find good fiction with queer characters of color. Gurba has a true gift with character development. The characters and details in the writing make these fictional stories captivating and makes for a beautiful read.

Andrea says

I'd been meaning to read this book for a long time and I'm so glad I finally did--it made me happy. Can't wait to read more Myriam Gurba.

Tim says

There was a lot to like in the three short stories and novella that make up this book. The stories are primarily set in southern California's conurbations and specifically in the Mexican-American community living there. Much of the gay literature I read is from a middle/upper class, white American or European point of view. The narrative perspective felt fresh if only because it took me inside what it's like to be queer when you're not growing up white in middle America's suburbs. The writing is excellent – snappy, unapologetic and unsentimental.

The primary characters in each story are either lesbian or gender variant, and their sexual orientation can sometimes be fluid. In the novella, for example, the main character Desiree is a hardcore, teen-age femme dyke who develops a short-lived infatuation with a distant, male cousin. The stories don't center around queer identity, on self-discovery or on coming out, but their queerness is part of the characters' lives as teens finding their way into adulthood. The end of the novella got a little bogged down at the end dealing with Desiree's OCD issues but all in all, this was a refreshing read.

Richard Jaspers says

When I investigated the possibility of sending my story collection to Manic D Press, their policy stated that they wouldn't even consider your manuscript unless you "read one of our books and consider whether your submission is appropriate for our company. In your cover letter, please tell us which book you have read and what you thought about it. Be specific." Since I included a "correction" sheet of all the typos I found in this book with my own submission, I'll probably never hear from the editors, but I couldn't help myself. I had to

be honest.

Okay. Since it looked like Manic D is a LGBT press (though they don't seem to state so anywhere), I selected this book because it is a collection of short stories. Sort of. Gurba includes four plus the novella—all totaling one hundred ninety pages. The pieces are engaging enough. They're all written from the first-person POV of a young lesbian (not the same lesbian, though it seems like it). The stories seem like throat-clearing for the novella, which may contain the most substance. In "Dahlia Season," a young woman finally figures out that she (might) have Tourette's Syndrome. (One is never sure. Is it just a device for the character to gain attention and learn what people think of her?)

I admire Gurba's courage for writing from a sexually active point of view. Sex ought to be considered a sixth sense, something a character experiences as fully as seeing and smelling, yet, particularly in literary fiction, it is often shunned by editors and publishers. Gurba gives honest but not cheap details, particularly in the narrator's scene with Gabriella in "White Girls." The narrator's sexuality is tied to other kinds of sensuality; it's not written to be titillating (no pun intended). The novella, of course, works rather like a coda, which has introduced all of Gurba's images and themes: young misunderstood lesbians and how they cope with life.
