



Spectator (Agha Shahid Ali Prize in Poetry)

Kara Candito

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Although it ends with a marriage, Kara Candito's second poetry collection is anything but a comedy. At the book's center is the struggle of a U.S. citizen and a Mexican citizen to find a common space and language in their relationship while navigating the U.S. immigration system, a process that sometimes requires magical thinking just to endure. By employing a kind of documentary poetics that views the application process through different angles and perspectives, Candito crafts discourses around xenophobia, otherness, and national and ethnic identity.

"In the waiting room of the third government office, / you will invent your own religion," writes Candito in "Ars Amatoria: So You Want to Marry a Foreign National," a tragicomic sequence written in Roman-numeric fragments reminiscent of an official document's formatting. Interspersed with moments of lyric urgency ("I am here to suffer more beautifully") and disconcerting cinematic observation ("One wore an assault rifle across his back, // another pointed a video camera at our faces."), *Spectator* charts the plural self's course through a world of airplane travel, drug wars, and customs forms.

From Italy to Boston, Lorca's Granada to New York, and the dusty streets of Mexico City to the snowy parking lots of the Midwest, the speakers of *Spectator* probe the jagged boundaries between past and present, observer and observed, and political and personal. As such, the book is an homage to anyone who's been displaced or redefined by bureaucratic systems of power.

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