

SOLI  
Kirkus  
6/15/18

## THE REMOVES IS A MEMORABLE TAKE ON A LEGENDARY BATTLE OF THE AMERICAN WEST

ON A HOT EARLY SUMMER DAY 142 years ago, a column of soldiers led by a daring cavalry officer known to his friends and family as Autie filed into a Montana coulee. None of them emerged, felled to a man by a confederation of Cheyenne and Sioux warriors. The column's Native American scouts had foreseen the slaughter, saying that the medicine against the whites was too strong. "Ridiculous," Custer said, but he knew the opposite."

So writes Tatjana Soli toward the end of her new novel, *The Removes* (June 12), a reimagining of life on a violent frontier as led by very different characters. At the heart of the story is George Armstrong Custer, whose name, all these years later, remains a byword for arrogant foolhardiness. Other characters included Custer's wife, Libby, who lived out a long life in the shadow of his death, as



Tatjana Soli

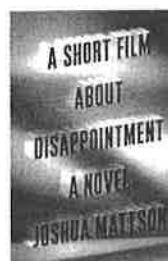


Author of the best-selling novel *The Yellow Earth*

well as a young white woman called Anne, taken captive by the Cheyenne and later "rescued from the heathen inferno," as an insistently pious preacher puts it. All come together on the vast canvas of the prairie, where death and travail await them under the burning sun.

"When I write about history," Soli says, "I often think about things that are going on today. We see many of the same things happening today as were happening in Custer's time, war and racism and violence, a huge divide that doesn't seem to be healing. You can see the roots of other tragedies in Custer's story, which come from our insistence on riding roughshod over other people with our ideas of what should be." For that reason, she says, she sees Custer not as that byword or as a symbol but "as an actual human being." She adds, "Was he a great guy? No. He was a flawed and vain man but not a monster." —G.M.

*Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor. The Removes was reviewed in the April 1, 2018, issue.*



### A SHORT FILM ABOUT DISAPPOINTMENT

Mattson, Joshua  
Penguin Press (288 pp.)  
\$25.00 | Aug. 7, 2018  
978-0-525-52284-3

A film critic in a dystopian future ruminates on life and death in pages of his movie reviews.

This eccentric debut by Mattson offers a deviant take on the novel by couching its sad tale of regret in the pages of reviews. Our esteemed author is professional nobleman Body, one of two film critics for a content aggregator called the *Central Hub Slave*, a publication with so few readers that Body treats his column as a kind of personal soapbox session. Body's world is kind of a mess after some blight locals call "the crisis," with neighborhoods divided into safe zones and places like "Mini Aleppo," where Body's neighbors are "chipped" with GPS trackers; and travel taking the form of suborbital "slingshot" capsules. The ghost that haunts Body's story is his ex-wife, Isabel, who has recently run off with his best friend, James Oswald, a clerk and amateur filmmaker whose death Body imagines with glee. "Isabel who was my best friend," says Body. "I don't see her well anymore. Her face is like a coin. The mold deforms as years of minting pass. On the domestic front, Body romances his therapist, Dr. Lisa, who that Oswald has possessed his body, and plots the next complex period film called *Altarpiece* set in the Renaissance, backed by fellow critic Harris V. Jonson. The book's main plot often wry, but subplots involving Jonson's cheating and a thuggish vending machine tycoon trying to horn in on the film are far less engaging than his aberrant rivalry with Body. The gimmick of the novel, the 80 phantasmagoric pages of movie reviews Body critiques, is dryly funny, but readers may tire of the deadpan, aristocratic wit despite his outlandish surroundings.

A potentially hilarious cogitation on art and life that fails to fully exploit its comic potential.

Bernice L. McFadden



PRAISE SONG  
for the  
BUTTERFLIES

### PRAISE SONG FOR THE BUTTERFLIES

McFadden, Bernice L.  
Akashic (224 pp.)  
\$27.95 | Aug. 28, 2018  
978-1-61775-575-0

A child's shocking experience of spiritual servitude.

Young Abeo lives in an urban neighborhood in the African nation of Ukemby. He has a loving home, loving parents, and a baby brother. Abeo is leading a happy and secure childhood. She has an enchanting Aunt Serafine, who visits from the U.S. and introduces her to worldly delights like Big Mac sandwiches.

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