



## Natural Histories: Stories

*Guadalupe Nettel, J.T. Lichtenstein (Translation)*

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Siamese fighting fish, cockroaches, cats, a snake, and a strange fungus all serve here as mirrors that reflect the unconfessable aspects of human nature buried within us. The traits and fates of these animals illuminate such deeply natural, human experiences as the cruelty born of cohabitation, the desire to reproduce and the impulse not to, and the inexplicable connection that can bind, eerily, two beings together. Each Nettel tale creates, with tightly wound narrative tension, a space wherein her characters feel excruciatingly human, exploring how the wounds we incur in life manifest themselves within us, clandestinely, irrevocably, both unseen and overtly.

In a precise writing style that is both subtle and spellbinding, Nettel renders the ordinary unsettling, and the grotesque exquisite. *Natural Histories* is the winner of the 3rd Ribera del Duero International Award for Short Narratives, an important Spanish literature prize.

## **Natural Histories: Stories Details**

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Author : Guadalupe Nettel , J.T. Lichtenstein (Translation)

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## From Reader Review Natural Histories: Stories for online ebook

### **Kate says**

Spare and a bit gloomy: analogies drawn between the natural world and the human condition. Short story collection for literary readers.

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### **mentalexotica says**

So wonderful. Such a satisfying, compelling read. This book speaks to you as a person sitting across the table would. With sincerity, simplicity, and shared empathy. The stories are complete in themselves and do not leave you the limbo-like sensation many others of this literary style often do.

The theme of this book is deceptively simple and yet terribly fascinating. It also looks at the Natural Histories of living organisms; from cats to snakes to even fungi and draws a parallel in the lives of the characters that inhabit the pages. The writing has a thoughtless elegance that comes with a voice that knows itself well. It is sparse, and yet gently moving, introspective and insightful.

This book is one of the underdogs that I've come across this year and it would be a pity to miss it.

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### **Lizfig says**

There are not many authors who can master a short story in the way Nettel has in this collection. They are powerful, poignant stories that are over before you even realize it but perfectly concise.

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### **Alexis says**

Nettel's collection of short stories is one to ruminate on. She uses the natural world (fish, cockroaches, fungi, cats, and snakes) as a mirror to reflect on family relationships, particularly those between parent and child and husband and wife. Nettel's explanations of the parallels between the creatures she writes about and what is going on in the character's lives is a bit heavy-handed at times, but the stories are well-written, thoughtful and evocative.

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### **Storyheart says**

2.5 stars. The stories were technically well-done but struck me as flat and boring.

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## **Angelin says**

A stellar companion of a book, each story to be savoured slowly and intentionally. Every story in this collection was written in the first person narrative, and advancing from story to story, one notices Nettel's impeccable talent in that area. A truly enjoyable read.

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## **Joel says**

Natural Histories by Guadalupe Nettel is a book with 5 short stories about humans and animals. The 5 animals (fighting fishes, cockroaches, cats, fungi and snakes) are seen as a metaphorical reflection of the humans who are with them.

I surprisingly found myself liking this book a lot. What I like most is that each story has a lot of mystical symbolism yet is still rooted in reality - all of it seems quite plausible. You can tell Nettel put some thought into each story to draw the parallels between each human and animal. I especially liked the story on the cats and found it riveting.

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## **jeremy says**

named to the distinguished bogotá39 list of promising young latin american writers (in excellent company amongst the likes of junot díaz, andrés neuman, daniel alarcón, eduardo halfon, alejandro zambra, jorge volpi, and santiago roncagliolo), guadalupe nettel is a mexico city-born writer and translator. *natural histories* (originally published as *el matrimonio de los peces rojos*) is the first of her half-dozen or so works to be translated into english and was awarded the ribera del duero short fiction award last year. each of the five short stories in this slim collection features a female protagonist confronting (or recalling) a domestic drama of one kind or another - and infidelity more than once. as well, each story employs the use of a living creature (bettas, cockroaches, cats, fungi, and snakes) as metaphor.

while nettel writes well (in however resigned or morose a first-person tone), the stories within *natural histories* only approach the high praise her fiction has already garnered. nettel's thematic breadth - at least in this collection - is rather narrow, with symbolism that becomes sadly predictable. since her work has been shortlisted for, or the recipient of, a number of prizes (including the premio herralde), perhaps her stronger outings are still awaiting translation. to describe her work as "a universe where roberto bolaño's visceral poets rub shoulders with the fragile but unbreakable women of haruki murakami," as one critic has, seems exaggerated - at least based on the pieces in *natural histories*. seven stories has plans to publish her novel, *the body where i was born (el cuerpo en que nací)*, in 2015, so perhaps english readers will be afforded a more laudable example of her talents.

*parasites - i understand this now - we are unsatisfied beings by nature. neither the nourishment nor the attention we receive will ever be enough. the secrecy that ensures our survival often frustrates us. we live in a state of constant sadness. they say that to the brain, the smell of dampness and the smell of depression are very similar. i do not doubt it's true.*

\*translated from the spanish by j.t. lichtenstein

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### **A says**

I wish that more of Guadalupe Nettel's books were translated into English. Or maybe I should try to learn Spanish and/or French? Her writing is simple, yet there is depth to the stories. In addition to interaction between characters, there are parallel interactions with animals, insects, fish, snakes... are woven into stories like you've never read before.

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### **Yaritza says**

Captivating short stories that unravel human and animal instincts as one in the same. Each short story had something for us to all learn. We are humans and our instincts can be compared to animals and insects. We live, love and move on to the next best thing. We grow frustrated, exhausted, tired but when that feeling or person leaves we either move on or we drown in our sorrows. Let's love and find time and togetherness.

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### **Christie Bane says**

This book ended up on my Mexico to-read list, but actually only one of the stories was set in Mexico. The rest were in Paris. But the setting didn't play a major role in any of the stories, and they didn't sound like Mexico, even though the author is Mexican and lives in Mexico City.

The stories themselves are well-written with satisfying endings. I definitely was more disappointed with the fact that the book didn't feel "Mexican" than I was with the actual writing. Nevertheless, I've already forgotten most of the stories. All I have left is a recollection that they were about troubled human relationships that were all symbolized by animals in the stories. Easy to read but didn't stick with me.

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### **James (JD) Dittes says**

The idea behind every story in this collection is the nature of love--with an emphasis on the word, "nature."

Men and women fall in love, they make love, their relationships fall apart. Naturally.

As evidence, Nettel includes in each story an animal (and in one a fungus, which, I guess, could be an animal of sorts--it certainly isn't a vegetable or mineral) which endures a similar plight to the protagonist: a betta fish must be separated from her mate or face assault; a kitten becomes pregnant, then has to leave home; a venereal fungus...ew, I just don't want to describe that one.

Sometimes the connections between the protagonists and the nature around them are heavy-handed, but there are moments of true insight as well, which make the book worth reading to the very end.

Guadalupe Nettel's book will leave readers thinking of their own relationships--and more observant to connections they share with the fauna they share their lives with.

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## **Camila says**

a wonderful collection of short stories. makes me think about the animals in my life and how they may or may not shape it.

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## **Jordan Hoxsie says**

*Note: I must give thanks to Amy for choosing me as a winner for the Goodreads First Reads giveaway and going through the trouble of mailing me an advanced copy of the book and a typed message. Hopefully this review made it worth it.*

### **The Marriage of the Red Fish**

The opening story to this considerably short collection of stories is arguably the best one. The relationships that form between the humans and nature are intriguing and worthy of analysis, as are numerous other details mentioned throughout. Though they at first appear to be trivial or simply put in to create immersion, portions of text discussing matters such as weather and food connect to the status of certain character relationships and emotions being felt. Minor typos aside, this story has become a personal favorite of mine.

**Score: 9.6/10**

### **War in the Trash Cans**

This story is also excellent, though the animal in which the human characters encounter is not characterized as imaginatively as others in the collection. Nonetheless, it is a great story to read with themes that make it an exceptional one to study in a high school classroom. It also has one of the best endings in the collection as well. The story's only other fault is that it has to follow the fantastic "The Marriage of the Red Fish", which makes it seem a tad diminutive in comparison.

**Score: 9/10**

### **Felina**

In my opinion this is the worst of the five stories, mostly due to the ambiguous ending. I understand that it is supposed to reflect one of the themes of the story, free will, but all it really does is leave a bit of a bad taste in my mouth. Thankfully the rest of the story is creative and enthralling enough to make reading it far from being lackluster as a whole.

**Score: 7.9/10**

### **Fungus**

This is evidence that Nettel took her time to make her stories engaging and thought-provoking, and her characters to be, well, a little bit insane. It proves that the use of imagination among writers is clearly not

dead.

**Score: 9.4/10**

### **The Snake from Beijing**

If "The Marriage of the Red Fish" was a razor sharp blade, then this closing entry to *Natural Histories: Stories* is what remains when that same blade runs dull. This is not to say that the story is dull. The emotional intensity is still there, though above all this story allows the wounded lovers of literature to heal and reflect on what they experienced. Such a rest is well needed, as delving into Nettel's world of beautiful, and sometimes beautifully frank, word choice and unique scenarios leave a scar on the minds of readers that will last for months, perhaps even years.

**Score 8.8/10**

**Total: 44.7/50; 4.47/5 Stars**

This book deserves to have a large readership and all the praise it has received and will receive in the future.

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### **enricocioni says**

Worth reading for The War in the Trash Cans (where a family figures out an unconventional way of getting rid of household pests) and, especially, Fungus (where a woman develops an unconventional relationship with a bodily parasite). As a cat owner, I find the relationships and parallels between animals and humans super-interesting, but I thought these stories could have explored them with greater subtlety. But those two stories are very good, maybe because the creatures they focus on are pretty gross, allowing the Nettel to explore some excitingly disturbing places.

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