



Forgetting the Alamo, Or, Blood Memory

Emma Pérez

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Runner-up, Best Historical Fiction in English, Latino Book Awards Competition, 2010

This literary adventure takes place in nineteenth-century Texas and follows the story of a Tejana lesbian cowgirl after the fall of the Alamo. Micaela Campos, the central character, witnesses the violence against Mexicans, African Americans, and indigenous peoples after the infamous battles of the Alamo and of San Jacinto, both in 1836. Resisting an easy opposition between good versus evil and brown versus white characters, the novel also features Micaela's Mexican-Anglo cousin who assists and hinders her progress. Micaela's travels give us a new portrayal of the American West, populated by people of mixed races who are vexed by the collision of cultures and politics. Ultimately, Micaela's journey and her romance with a black/American Indian woman teach her that there are no easy solutions to the injustices that birthed the Texas Republic.

This novel is an intervention in queer history and fiction with its love story between two women of color in mid-nineteenth-century Texas. Perez also shows how a colonial past still haunts our nation's imagination. The battles of the Alamo and San Jacinto offered freedom and liberty to Texans, but what is often erased from the story is that common people who were Mexican, Indian, and Black did not necessarily benefit from the influx of so many Anglo immigrants to Texas. The social themes and identity issues that Perez explores--political climate, debates over immigration, and historical revision of the American West--are current today.

Forgetting the Alamo, Or, Blood Memory Details

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Lexi says

Well. I did not enjoy this, essentially, at all. The protagonist annoyed me more than I thought I could ever be irritated by a fictional character. Also, there was this weird thing where the author would try to end the chapters with foreshadowing, but it was really just a statement that the main character was too naive to know that something dramatic would happen later on in the story. There was also an immense amount of side characters who got introduced in the same manner over and over again, becoming nearly impossible to distinguish. The only redeeming quality that I could find in this book was the unique way it dealt with identity in terms of gender and sexuality, but I couldn't glean any more from it than that.

Lily says

This was a good story, but the writing wasn't the best. Still very much appreciate all the research/historical facts that went into the making of the book, tells a side of Texas/American history that doesn't get acknowledged/retold nearly often enough.

D'Argo Agathon says

Kind of a strange, rambling little story... but not a bad one. Interesting but meandering plot, great dialogue but weird (non)use of commas throughout the narrative, fun but fairly one-dimensional characters...

Gabriela Caballero says

I really liked the plot of the book. I think re-imagining protagonists in history that would today read as queer is incredibly important work. Also as a native to South Texas, I must say it's incredibly refreshing to read a story that explores how the new white groups who were the catalyst of the Republic of Texas were colonizing forces and not heroes. However, the writing style was difficult to read. While I can admire the text for it's academic merits, the art of how it was related needs some work.

Ab says

This book was great. I usually don't go for historical novels, but there was something about this book that just grabs you once you start reading, and you just have to keep reading. The writing is fantastic, which helps a ton, of course. The style of the book is sort of a picaresque novel, like The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, only much better. The main character is a strong, flawed, "wild west" woman, and she's riding her horse all over "Tejas" and into New Orleans to get revenge for the murders of her siblings and her father. It

reminds me of Huck Finn in the way that each chapter is a sort of new "stop" along her travels, and there is the almost unreal quality of continually running into the same people, even though she's traveling all over Texas! Micaela travels dressed as a man for her own protection against marauders and rampant, rapist men; she stops in saloons to gamble in poker; she drinks whiskey like a drunk, needing that sip in the morning to make it through her day; she falls in love with Clara and experiences jealous rages, brief moments of togetherness before going separate ways. The great thing about this book is the perspective from the Mexicans & Native Americans, who live in what is now Texas before it is part of the United States. The American white man is the villain in almost everything, and the battles such as San Jacinto, Santa Anna, the Alamo, are all told in real-life ways, rather than decreeing every white U.S. general or whatever, a super great patriotic hero. Truth is, they were terrible people, scalping Native Americans to extinction, treating Mexicans with the same racist disregard and nonsensical massacres, and being all-around terrible. Sure, we have the United States now, but don't you wonder why they don't teach us this stuff in history class in school, and why these battles are always glorified?

Kiddrah says

Read this for my graduate Multicultural Lit course.

Perez has created a great story that all readers can relate to in terms of memory and repression. The theme of running either to something or away from something is prevalent and can be realized in all the characters. The story provides a history of Mexico, before and after the border was moved to its present location. As well, more profoundly Perez tells the truth behind the Alamo (Mexican's were also slaughtered), which is something that is not always made clear.

Heather Montes Ireland says

How I loved this book!

Em?ls Sieti?š says

I had to read this book for my WGS course and I really enjoyed it.

This book contains a lot of violence and the writing style is different from what one would imagine. The pacing of all the events happening in this book is very fast, sometime skipping over things that other books / authors would not ignore so easily. Journeys that last for days have been written in one-two sentences. Characters randomly/ magically meet throughout the book at various instances at different places which, in my opinion, was quite unrealistic.

That being said I still enjoyed the novel and the message that it had for its readers. The way how we remember history is important. The stories that survive throughout the time and that are written in our history books are not the only stories. Writing a novel from a queer latina's perspective which is set in a time which often is referred to as one of the bloodiest times of US / Tejas history is very significant. It helps us to think about an erasure that has been done to our memory - erasure that has eliminated all perspectives of history except one - the white masculine imperialist one. What happens when the same piece of history is being told

from a different perspective?

Marco says

4.5

Perez's work in Forgetting the Alamo is an important retelling of the aftermath of the Texas revolution. I think that anyone who hopes to understand anything related to the past or present of the American southwest must read this book. Of course, things today are in many ways radically different than 1836, but in many other ways the struggle of Mexicans in Texas starts here. In particular, this book reckons with the presence of Anglo U.S Americans in the lands known as Texas. From the onset, Perez characterizes their presence as an invasion, and then following their victory at the Alamo and San Jacinto details the ways that life for Mexicans was completely transformed. Whereas they once were landowners, their land is repossessed and they are forced to work as laborers. Violent murder is on every turn. Families are destroyed.

Historical relevance aside, this book also has a lot to offer in terms of literary merit. I think that the writer develops the characters in really complex ways that highlight just how fundamentally "anti-simple" (if you'll allow me to make up words) race relations and HISTORY is and always has been in the south (particularly Texas).

The story focuses on Micaela Campos, the oldest daughter to a farming/ranching family. She begins with a complete family: her father Agustin, a deeply flawed man who is unwilling to consider his only adult child his heir; her mother Octavia, a Tonkawa-Mexican woman who is weary of the world and decidedly un-nurturing; her twin siblings, too young to understand the ways of the world; and her cousin Jedidiah, the half-white son of a cruel & despicable farmhand and basically an older brother to Micaela.

When her father and cousin ride into battle during the Texas revolution, they leave Micaela behind. She rides out after them anyways, and the destruction and slaughter she finds is the beginning of the rest of her life. Overnight, everything changes: nearly all her family is killed, her land is taken, and she knows exactly who did it. That very same day, Micaela dons her father's clothes, takes his pistol, mounts her horse, and goes on a long and difficult path to avenge her people for everything that has been done to them.

The book is gruesome: do not pick this book up if you want anything clean-cut and easily digestible. Classic Westerns are clean and picturesque compared to the horrors that Micaela experiences. Genocide, massacres, scalpings, rape, and un-avenged injustice abound throughout this novel. It is honest, and it is bleak.

Micaela discovers early in her life that she is a lesbian, and a major portion of the story is dedicated to her romance with Clara. While they both are trying to make the best of their circumstances, they each make so many mistakes that hurt one another, and they are separated time and time again. Each time, they always find their way back to each other, and their love allows them to move past the hurt that everyone in their land is feeling.

This is the real revolutionary Texas. It's not white pioneers conquering an uninhabited land, kicking out what few violent natives live there. It's Mexicans suffering the backlash of a devastating war that they lost. It's black people still enslaved and enduring an ongoing trauma. It's indigenous tribes coming to terms with what must have felt like their impending doom, slaughtered and massacred in their homes. It's cutting a scar into your face like that of your uncle, and it's trying to track down the one man whose death will make it all better

all the while knowing nothing will change.

It's a quick read. Events move quickly, which is why it feels so dense and like so many things happen. Because of this, it's quite easy to zip through the whole thing because following Micaela around can be pretty easy when she's doing all the work. She is a frustrating heroine, but one can't help but sympathize with her fury.

Travis says

Wonderful idea for a novel, but not great storytelling. Even at just over 200 pages, a slow read for me. Chicana/o land ethos, queer identity, western genre tropes are the biggest themes. A melodrama, even though it doesn't want to be--it mentions that history is too complex to be two-sided, yet all whites are villains and all women are victims and/or heroes. A number of other inconsistencies or unnecessarily confusing parts or storyline (did Campos fight with or against Houston's forces?). Of academic interest because it addresses (but doesn't fill) a void in literatures of Texas, Southwest, US.

Tyler says

"I shook my head and grinned from the bottom of my soles all the way to the top of my head's crown. Someone like Clara had never walked into my life before but here she was. An apparition. Lying delicate and simple with long hair spread behind her head like she was in the air. Flying. She smiled up at me and a sharp twinge went through me."

Beautiful, brutal, a necessary and unconventional point of view of an oft explored terrain. I am humbled by and grateful for this story.
