

realism, and if some have perceived *Dublinesque* as autobiographical payback to a publisher he famously left, Vila-Matas admits such elements are present, “although transformed to the point they are unrecognizable.”

Dublinesque, Vila-Matas’s best and most engaging novel to date, is full of warmth and compassionate speculation about what it means to go on with one’s life.

Will H. Corral
San Francisco

Alejandro Zambra. **Formas de volver a casa.** Barcelona. Anagrama. 2011. ISBN 9788433972279

Formas de volver a casa, Alejandro Zambra’s third novel, is the logical continuation of his two previous works: *Bonsái* (2006) and *La vida privada de los árboles* (2007), in which Zambra explored the intimate narrative. The master of a focused and refined style, Zambra attains in this latest novel perhaps his most personal voice, one crafted in simple, unadorned language.

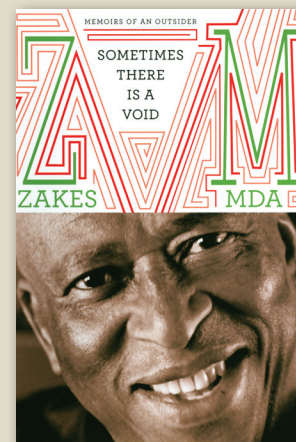
Even so, it is surprising to encounter a Chilean author such as Zambra (b. 1974), who after the great narrative projects of the Boom authors of Latin America has found a way to unite the political with the personal in such an unusual way. *Formas de volver a casa* constitutes a daring new look at the insipid side of military dictatorship: the story of the children of those parents who lived under the dictatorship; people who were nonpolitical; people for whom the Pinochet government was the nightmare of others, never for themselves.

The novel tells the story of an author who returns to the family

home and to his former childhood neighborhood. There he finds Claudia, a former neighbor with whom he had been in love many years before. The reunion with Claudia explains many events from the protagonist’s past and how some of these have shaped his life in the present. The novel begins when the author as a child becomes lost and his parents are unable to find him. Getting lost and returning home become a recurring metaphor throughout Zambra’s novel: Who are the ones who get lost? Who are the ones who can or know how to return? To what place does one return? “Once, I got lost. I was six or seven years old. I was walking along, distracted. Suddenly, I couldn’t see my parents anywhere. I was frightened, but soon I found my way and arrived home before them—they were still looking for me, frantically. That afternoon I thought that they were the ones who had gotten lost. That I knew the way back and that they did not.”

Formas de volver a casa is in a sense the story of children, or more precisely about children settling a score with the past and with their own families. However, the journey to the past is unrewarding and difficult. It reveals the least heroic aspects of the protagonist’s life: he was not a victim of the dictatorship, and his parents most likely supported Pinochet. The past, which had previously seemed inoffensive, even trivial, becomes a threatening cloud under which the protagonist has to accept the futility of his present life, the absence of heroism, and the disenchantment of belonging to a middle-class Chilean family that did nothing more than survive in the dictatorship.

Nota Bene

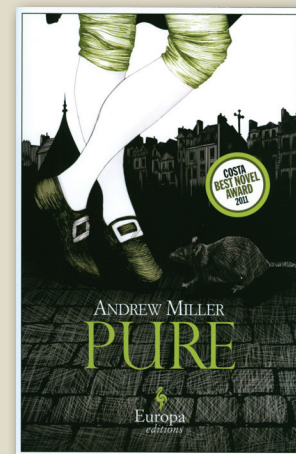


Zakes Mda

Sometimes There Is a Void

Farrar, Straus & Giroux

Acclaimed South African novelist and activist Mda was exiled from his country when he was only fifteen. This spellbinding new memoir is an invitation to follow him through sixty-three years of fascinating human experience.



Andrew Miller

Pure

Europa Editions

Jean-Baptiste Baratte is charged with clearing an overflowing Paris cemetery. As unrest against the court of Louis XVI brews about him, the task’s significance far exceeds that of the exhumation of the corpses the cemetery contains. Miller’s simply elegant prose is evocative of both a man and a nation on the cusp of revolution.

One of the great merits of *Formas para volver a casa* is that it is a book that no previous Chilean author has written about the dictatorship; a necessary and beautiful story that captures the complex experience of daring to face banality, which reminds us that sometimes what we find upon returning home is something we had not wanted to see in the first place, or at least not see so close up.

Marcelo Riosco
University of Oklahoma

Verse

Andy Brown. **The Fool and the Physician.** London. Salt. 2011.
ISBN 9781844713462

From the mid-1990s, Andy Brown has emerged from the small-press scene to become an important voice in the British poetry revival. As director of Exeter University's Writing Programme and a former Arvon Centre director, he has also played a significant part in institutionalizing and promoting the growth of creative writing within the British academy.

His recent selected poems, *Fall of the Rebel Angels: Poems 1996–2006*, made available over a decade of seminal work from his formative years. Sparing and judiciously chosen, the poems show Brown's gradual movement toward the deep lyric of his collaborative book with John Burnside, *Goose Music* (2008).

His new book, *The Fool and the Physician*, continues Brown's openness to formal experiment, re-positioning and re-sounding a wide and eclectic range of traditional verse

patterns. The nineteen poems of part 1 center on the figure of the clown and are, as Luke Kennard observes, as "funny and curious" as they are "poignant and moving."

In "A Clown in the Moonlight," which draws on a quote from Lon Chaney, we're challenged: "How we feel about the clown / depends on where we see him— / a circus or party, no problem, / but ringing your doorbell at sundown?" Brown skillfully displaces our common assumptions with his own poetic clowning, which is simultaneously hilarious, serious, and disturbing in its playfulness and mocking. In "Pretending to Be Me," he blasts: "I'm two faced, a Janus, inverting truth / and illusion . . ."

But it is in the book's second part, from which the collection as a whole takes its title, that Brown's inversions practice their most potent lyric alchemy, "As when the inconceivable bursts through / the surface of our lives" (from "Jeroen van Aken"). Based on the life and work of the Flemish painter Hieronymus Bosch, the poems echo the kind of visceral fetish for bodily particulars, dark secretions, and slitherings found with frequency in their source. Fittingly, Brown is at his most formally amorphous in poems carefully crafted and shaped. And still, despite the fabulously baroque emotive force of poems like "The Garden of Earthly Delights" and "The Adoration of the Magi"—among Brown's best achievements—there is time for humor: "This painting's made as an *Imago mundi*— / where the mundane and the devil's cargo / fuse in a delicious farrago / of licentiousness *à gogo*."

It takes daring and a cool nerve to juxtapose such energetic variety

under one cover and keep it under control. *The Fool and the Physician* does that, and more.

George Messo
Al Khobar, Saudi Arabia

Édes hazám: Kortárs közéleti versek. Tibor Bárány, ed. Budapest. Magvető. 2012. ISBN 978-9631430233

Hungarian poetry is traditionally more engaged than private. Poems like Sándor Petőfi's "National Song" ushered in the March revolution of 1848, and Endre Ady became a mouthpiece of socialist ideas in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Both the interwar Horthy era and the thirty-three-year-long communist Kádár regime had its prominent social and political poet-rebels: Attila József and György Petri. When the latter emerged from samizdat in 1989 and anything could be published, it seemed that the days of political poetry were numbered, but this was an optical illusion—Hungary's problems did not cease with the change of regime, and they had to be addressed by its poets. Tibor Bárány, editor of the new anthology *Édes hazám* (My sweet homeland), chose "engaged" poems from the output of the past twenty years. Although he stresses in his afterword that this is "not a representative anthology," as the collection bears the imprint of one of the leading publishing houses in Hungary, it will surely be regarded as such. It certainly represents the taste of the editor (about whom, by the way, very little is known, since no information is given in the book).

The poems are arranged in sixteen cycles, or thematic parts. This is