

TEACHING GUIDE

SOME BEHEADINGS BY ADITI MACHADO

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Poetry / Poetry - Women Authors /

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Dear Aditi, I did receive “Route Marienbad”. Read it. Had the feeling I was discovering a real poet. A wonderful feeling. I hope you keep this “innocence,” this directness, this genuineness. Bonne chance, —**Etel Adnan**

One way to think of these crystalline (brilliant, light-filled, prismatic, latticed) poems is as interlocking gears in a jeweled surrealist watch that has been put to bed in a transparent glass case and yet, day after day, it refuses to sleep. The parts can be seen continually moving, although at variable speeds: as soon as one goes faster, another carefully slows its pace. Each element is mesmerizing in its elegance. To attempt to deconstruct these poems would be to blow them apart. That said, what can be said is—They are utterly contemporary. They are deeply intimate. They are the lashes of a forest of thought.—**Mary Jo Bang**



Recommended Classes:

- Poetry
- Creative Writing / English
- Ecopoetics, Landscape Writing
- Lyric Sequence
- Post-Colonial/South Asian Literatures
- Transnational/Migration Studies
- Poetry of Philosophy
- Prosody

Invite Aditi Machado to:

- Skype into classes in which *Some Beheadings* is being taught
- Read from *Some Beheadings*
- Give a craft talk

To invite Aditi Machado to your campus, email aditimachado@gmail.com

Bio: Aditi Machado is an Indian poet whose previous works include the chapbooks *Route: Marienbad* (2016) and *The Robbing of the Bride* (2013), and a translation of Farid Tali’s *Prosopopoeia* (2016). Her writing has also appeared in *Western Humanities Review*, *Jacket2*, *Volt*, and *The Chicago Review*, among other journals. She is the Poetry Editor for *Asymptote* and lives in Denver, Colorado.

PRASE FOR SOME BEHEADINGS

“Some Beheadings shakes the gravity of beheadings with the offhandedness of some, telling you instantly that the ground ahead will be uneven and arresting.”—**Sarah Blake**, *Chicago Review of Books*

“Maybe a writer is someone who describes the world while a poet defines it. Aditi Machado has a profound gift for giving new shape to familiar concepts: “When a body desires / its continuance / that is need. / When it desires / its dissipation / that is want.” Her poems are reminiscent of Rae Armantrout’s for their subversive, cerebral quality; she plants an image in the mind, then no sooner erases it. “The whole village was there, minus its people.” The title of her collection, *Some Beheadings*, stretches a dark shadow over these lyrics. Unrest is always close at hand: “A mirror / brightens the fascist / in me.” And yet, even as things appear grim, the poet finds sensory pleasure in word-play: “How long before / I walk into the sea remembering / what the kelp felt like: like felt.” Machado not only elegizes the dying ocean but renders her own words water-like; it’s as if that phrase (“felt like: like felt”) is itself a reflection off the sea’s surface. It’s thrilling to read a language poet of such powers. Machado offers a fresh encounter with a world we thought we knew. “Every day I wake I see sun, / it’s blue.”—**Ben Purkert**, *Guernica*

“It’s hard for me to describe how excited I am about this book. Machado’s work is searing in its search and interrogation of the self, of faith, and of how these things relate to the world. Her poetry burrows within the mind and the soul and breaks open into the expansiveness of the worlds contained within. This is an important book; reading it will undoubtedly remove your head.”—**Andrew Wessels**, *Tarpaulin Sky*

Machado’s steadfast and rigorous debut exists at the intersection of language and place, where thinking takes the shape of a tree or a thicket of “florid logic” that grows and branches in multiple directions at once. “I describe my day to myself as if I were perambulating through infinite foliage,” she writes. The images take readers across time and space: to fields dotted with grazing ruminants; deserts whose “labial dunes” double as runes; and, in an oblique reference to the film *Last Year at Marienbad*, a Marienbad where a “single baroque animal/ opens a pomegranate” and “ancient civilizations spill out as red beads.” Though the focus of the text meanders, the first-person perspective offers a sense of immediacy; in other words, however disembodied the thinking, and however omnidirectional the thought, the speaker grounds ideas with notions of physicality: “Can you wake up/ from a sentence like/ you wake up on the porch?” Machado’s luscious descriptions—themselves “a mild decadence, an explicit/ industry as that of bees”—exude a palpable strangeness, and the speaker welcomes constant change and movement without requiring a resolution. The result is a labyrinthine sensorium where thinking about thinking generates ever more pleasures. (Oct.)—*Publisher’s Weekly*

SOME BEHEADINGS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS, CREATIVE WRITING EXERCISES, & TEACHING TIPS

Read an interview about picking titles for books:

<https://chireviewofbooks.com/2017/10/18/how-do-poets-choose-a-title-for-their-books/>

Watch some video poems based on Some Beheadings:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChRzc-hSKkBbQ1DtNaTkReQ/featured?view_as=subscriber

General Discussion Questions:

- Who gets beheaded in this book? (Multiple answers possible.) And, to the extent the speaker is one among the beheaded, what are the effects of her decapitation?
- How do form and subjectivity shift across the various landscapes explored in the book?
- Identify a word or phrase that repeats (if in slightly different forms) throughout, or in a section of, the book. What does this suggest about the nature of meditation or desire?
- Describe ways in which grammar might be existential.
- What are some different kinds of speech that happen in the book?
- If “[t]here are six minds employed here,” where in the body do they reside? Where do your own mind(s) reside as you think and feel your way through the world?

Writing Prompts:

- (Site-Specific; after “Route: Western Ghats”) Compose yourself for travel to a landscape relatively undisturbed by humankind. Make a diagram of your dimensions in relation to the dimensions of the nonhuman beings around you. How big or small are you? In silence, collect the sounds of these beings. Write your first draft in this space.
- (Ambulatory) Go for a walk, alone or with fellow writers. Imagine that your mind lives in your feet or other equipment for motion (wheelchair, etc.): write those thoughts. Imagine that your eyes live in some other part of your body (I tend to pick my hands): write those images. Make a poem of these notes.
- Watch a movie in which someone takes a trip. Turn off the sound and/or subtitles as you watch. Attend carefully to the route. You’re still, but are you also moving? Write this journey.
- Find the longest sentence you ever wrote (it doesn’t have to be from a poem). Rewrite it on a piece of paper. Make a diagram of it. Cut it up. Move the various elements of the sentence around. Replace some words with other words of the same grammatical category (a noun by a noun, etc.). What does your new, torqued, sentence look like?
- (Time-Based; after “Prospekt”) Decide on a particular chunk of time (as little as ten minutes, no longer than an hour) for writing every day for a week or longer. Decide also on the same interior space you will occupy. Write some observations during each chunk of time, in the same space. You may choose to consider different things to write about or focus on the same object (the sun, a piece of furniture, a bowl of fruit, etc.) every time. At the end of this exercise, gather your impressions into a single text.