



Event Factory

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Fiction. A "linguist-traveler" arrives by plane to Ravicka, a city of yellow air in which an undefined crisis is causing the inhabitants to flee. Although fluent in the native language, she quickly finds herself on the outside of every experience. Things happen to her, events transpire, but it is as if the city itself, the performance of life there, eludes her. Setting out to uncover the source of the city's erosion, she is beset by this other crisis—an ontological crisis—as she struggles to retain a sense of what is happening. EVENT FACTORY is the first in a trilogy of novels Renee Gladman is writing about the invented city-state of Ravicka, a foreign "other" place fraught with the crises of American urban experience, not least the fundamental problem of how to move through the world at all.

Event Factory Details

Date : Published November 1st 2010 by Dorothy, a publishing project

ISBN : 9780984469307

Author : Renee Gladman

Format : Paperback 126 pages

Genre : Fiction, Poetry, Novels, Literature

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From Reader Review Event Factory for online ebook

Tony says

someone called her "more kafka than kafka" and if that isn't a life goal then what is

Eugene says

like a static sculpture that also seems constantly in motion or a dance momentarily evoking an architectural shape, renee gladman's excellently strange new work EVENT FACTORY is a deliberate and skilfully sustained act of contradiction. gladman steadily is at play in moving the work forward, in its development — while committed to a flat, still affect. this commitment also gives the work a sense of unwavering integrity and moral purpose (as this affect perhaps the costume worn only by the true philosopher and/or depressive).

the story is of a visit to Ravicka, an odd place continuously evoking crisis and yet eerily absent of rage or tears or other emotional drama, except perhaps loneliness. this city-state seems on the verge of collapse (or at least utter transformation) but among its residents there's an oddly muted reaction, a constant disassociation.

the rowdy, sage hitchhikers of the greater vehicle believe most of all in two ideas which for them are synonymous: emptiness and never-ending flux. so too in gladman's new world, where the tender refrain, spoken by a prescriptive salsa dancer, goes: "It has to be done with movement" — but the 'it' has a necessarily obscure or inscrutable antecedent. a book also about the brittle and insufficient possibilities of communication, the uncanny EVENT FACTORY indeed is one, where the modular fabrications thus created are put together to move a reader from end to end, yet underscoring our locked, fixed positions within language.

Yet, what words besides "old" and "extraordinary" can I use to describe life there? And were I to write the description in the language of these hidden people what symbol would I use to represent air? You would want to listen to this language. I am sure of this, because to hear a person speak in gaps and air — you watch him standing in front of you, using the recognizable gestures — opening the mouth, smiling, pushing up the eyebrows, shrugging the shoulders — and your mind becomes blank as you try to match this with the sounds you hear. An instinct says tune it out, but something deep within fastens your attention. Your mouth falls open. You taste the strangeness; you try to make the sound with your mouth. That is speech. Now, how do you do this in writing? (61-62)

Patrik Sampler says

Event Factory by Renee Gladman is a bravely strange, unnatural novel. In it, a tourist arrives in the fictitious nation of Ravicka. She has studied the national language, but perhaps insufficiently: Ravicka seems to be in a state of social unrest, but it is difficult to assess exactly what is going on; perhaps this is because the protagonist is not fully adept with the language, or because locals avoid direct discussions. The protagonist is

unable to break the surface, and the same can be said for the experience of the reader. As a narrative, Event Factory is all surface, spare and strangely disquieting. And because the setting is somewhat similar to that of a North American city, it is hard not to read this novel as a statement on the sterility of urban planning in the continent. Whatever the case, Event Factory is an impactful, even if not exactly “pleasurable” reading experience.

RedL. says

I should probably read *Event Factory* a couple more times before even attempting to review it in any form. I am still thinking about it and I'm not sure if I'm gaining more insight or if it's slipping away from my conscious mind the more I try to remember it, to keep it with me. And that's exactly the same feeling sneaking throughout this novel: a fading sense of reality, the crumbling of any literal and logical understanding.

There is no real plot, no linearity. The narrator is a traveller-linguist landed in Ravicka, an imaginary city/state whose inhabitants are fleeing due to some undisclosed crisis. Details will indicate the narrator to be a 'she' and we never get to know her name. There seems to be no purpose to her presence in Ravicka, she is merely there because the plane she was on had landed there and not yet taken off (p.18). The city itself is a juxtaposition of colours, moods, mazes, self-denying buildings. Green, yellow, orange, golden, brown, tender....Ravicka seems the mirage of something solid, which the narrator will desperately try to map, conquer, explain. She's always searching, always meeting and losing people, aching for something, company, guidance, comprehension above all, seemingly never arriving where she wants or needs to be. Locals fear her knowledge, appear to mislead her.

Gladman's writing is unfussed and poetic, suggestive and opaque, symbolic and very physical at the same time, even reticent. A relaxed, quiet sexual undertone is to be found in many scenes, where intense acts are touched upon capriciously in dreamlike scenes with non-sequitur beginnings and endings. Nothing, absolutely nothing seems permanent in this book. Not the writing, not the series of events it tries to narrate. The city is eroding, the Ravickians are scattered or sick, the narrator is often unsure of her own purpose and reality. Ravicka could not be seen from the sky yet it exists, and it can't be grasped from within, not even after entering its underground bowels and hidden population, yet from a certain altitude what appeared erosion and decay shows signs of regrowth. As a reader you then start trying to pull back from the words, the yellow light and the descriptions to form some sort of stable idea, a personal topography...I can only see myself still trying to make sense of all that's unsaid and unexplained.

More than anything I feel *Event Factory* deals with the impossibility of communication. The architecture of the city is confusing and hard to read, almost inhospitable, the local languages are a mix of colloquial and formal levels, physical gestures, singing, air expulsions. Everything is context and subtext, procedure, lists, movement; no matter how proficient in languages the narrator is, she's constantly incurring in misunderstandings, excruciating moments of total loss for words and meanings. It's the real isolation, a constant struggle to penetrate a jungle of possible interpretations, to give someone a moment with its significance/emotion intact.

At the end of the book we still don't know what, if something is really going on with Ravicka. The event factory could have been just the narrator inner search, her stunted intuitions, the almost immediate loss of certain memories. Whether we are '*doubly incapable of arrival, always waiting*' or suffering the '*luxuriating torture of departure*' life seems to be made of words we cannot conceive, utter, reproduce or share. A

constant tension and occasional, perhaps wrong epiphanies.

Goatboy says

What a thoroughly strange and beguiling book! The writing clear but poetic, although clear may be the wrong word. Simple sentences so perfectly drawn that they manage to imply sense without ever providing it. Much like the main character in this story experiences as she explores the country (city?) of Ravicka. Crystalline obtuseness seems an oxymoron, yet that is what I keep coming back to. A "simple" story that passes like a yellow mist too close to your eyes - you experience it but then as soon as it is passed you realize you have no hold or comprehension of what you just witnessed. Quite beautiful.

Nate D says

A deconstructed linguistic ethnography of a deeply foreign city in an undefined state of crisis, where words, gestures, and architecture take on new meanings. At times the scenes and description becomes so thin as to nearly escape definition into abstraction, but threads of mystery and threads of character serve to coil the story tightly about the reader until the finish. I've been meaning to read this for ages and it was completely worth it.

Sean says

Having finished the first volume in Renee Gladman's Ravicka cycle, I'm alternating between thinking it was written out all at once from within a fugue state or it was painstakingly crafted word by word over a long period of time. Perhaps a combination of the two? At times the absurdity and level of specificity in detail feels pleasantly random, though it could just as easily have been carefully plotted. This is one of those short and dense yet paradoxically open texts that begs for rereadings as one picks up words and phrases to peer at what lurks beneath them. A visitor to the troubled city of Ravicka, an outside linguist who speaks the native language, yearns to approach the heart of the place, its culture, its people in order to hold onto some *thing* to bring back with her, even a memory, to show where she has been and perhaps to figure out just what exactly has gone wrong. Grappling with language and its attendant gestural formalities, she fumbles through communication barriers, sometimes connecting, sometimes not. As in Samuel Delany's brilliant novel Dhalgren, the city inhabits the text, looming as large as a character in and of itself and largely defying the narrator's attempts to perceive its heart. By book's end it's unclear how much she has absorbed and of that what will be lost in her wake as she leaves, but what is clear is that Ravicka and its inhabitants have at least left faint traces of themselves on her, and she in turn has at least *begun* to know them.

Keith says

There is often a weird thing that happens when you reread books, especially when those rereads are only hours or days from one another. What this "weird thing" is varies greatly from book to book; perhaps most often in fiction a first read will create a sensation of rushing and accumulation, a quick processing of plot and

character points in order to find out that age-old age-old, "what happens next." The second read represents a slowness, a clarity, an assembly of all sorts of information -- an exploration not only of the author's original intent, but of *several possible* intents, of differing interpretations of the work at hand co-existing, interacting, exchanging parts of themselves between one another.

Arguably, *Event Factory* is the kind of book that demands rereading simply to continue the processing-of-information that's still going on after a first read -- with a tone that flips from tense to satirical on a turn of phrase, and a title whose underlying meaning remains an unfolding question from start to finish.

The book begins abruptly, assembles its plot almost arbitrarily, and is suddenly over -- as the journey of an unnamed narrator through the fictional world/land/city/kingdom of Ravicka, there is a certain anxiousness, a restlessness, as if someone who thinks and talks very fast has suddenly decided to engage us in conversation, and assumes we will have certain understandings of their thoughts, and the ability to follow their intuitive leaps through a very long and detailed description of their travels to a place we have never been.

The story of the narrator's journey seems at times to be fraught with the sort of peril one feels at attempting to write down a dream upon waking, even with the realization that the memory is fading in the attempt to find a pen. The narrator's central need seems to be to understand Ravicka and its inhabitants; time and again we are witness to her struggle to communicate in languages that involve equal parts speech, body movements and expressive breathing, as well as the self-admonishments she delivers each time she misspeaks. There is also an urgency, as she meets new friends along her journey, to keep track of them; always, always she is searching for someone she has met and lost. Sometimes her anxiety is matched by those she meets, and sometimes it isn't -- a feeling of unease that Ravicka is somehow disappearing, that some crucial quality of it is being eroded, is often at the forefront of the narrative just long enough for another character to minimize the concern completely.

On first reading, *Event Factory* seems to be an allegory for geographic travel, for the pitfalls and displacement common to those who throw themselves into the breach of foreign vacationing, international study, or even European roadtripping. But a second reading shifts this focus -- we are more aware of the peculiarity of the narrator, of the obsessive need for lists, order, detail. It becomes less the story of a strange land, and more of the stranger that has come to it. This is the careful dissection of communication itself -- of the context clues of expression, tone and demeanor that, when combined, can create a web of confusion even when we all speak the same language. Like a discussion of autism or an anxiety order turned inside out, *Event Factory* explores the ways in which the basic components of interaction that many of us take for granted can be distorted, or even obliterated -- and the perilous, fragile isolation that can result.

Drew says

A stranger book than I anticipated, and yet exactly as strange as I'd hoped. It's impressive when a novel questions the very veracity/power of the words on the page, the fundamental underlying *language* of it all - and Gladman deploys a dream-logic narrative flow to help further undermine the reader's stability in the world she has created. But instead of being off-putting or disruptive, this is engaging and compelling and some bits of sense start to arrive... just in time for the book to end. Luckily, there are three more Ravicka novels. Let us into them, quickly.

musa b-n says

I really really loved this book. The style was incredibly refreshing and I thought it was just really interesting.

Ryan says

A post-modern, distilled, re-enactment of Delaney's "Dhalgren?"

A book less written than implied - narration clear yet empty. A world richly imagined but barely described. Intimacy and claustrophobia, surveillance and solitude, miscommunication and misdirection, and the limits of language and translation are explored (or at least, encountered). At some point there is dancing about architecture, which I suppose is what one does, lacking the concept of adverbs.

A work of gesture or a gesture towards a work?

John Madera says

Event Factory might be considered the field notes of a polylinguist, one conversant in at least seven languages, and many dialects within them; an estranged stranger in a stranger land, that is, Ravicka, an invisible city, a city wavering between indivisibility and its opposite; all rendered by Gladman, a connoisseur of the sentence, in pellucid prose reminiscent of Italo Calvino's cosmic comedies, in service to a refractive narrative sometimes mirroring the disjunctive absurdities of Ben Marcus's fiction, sharing Marcus's interest in how language alters reality, how inquiries into internal identity and external reality, and their converse, lead to investigations of borders and their trespass. As with any city, seedy or not, and especially with a dystopic city, Ravicka has a dark side, an underbelly, where the consequence of language misuse is sometimes violence, where you can even lose a limb for failing to do as the Ravickians do; it's a city where a "conspiracy of growths" may or may not be subsuming streets with new streets, or something else entirely, where one is required to perform bizarre rituals, like entering a new place sideways in order to show that it's your first time entering it, like having to express a particular kind of apology with "three minutes of deep-knee bends." The novella, the first in a trilogy (in keeping with its project to both undermine and pay homage to fabulist tropes) is as much a reverie on the city, of its malleability, its indecipherability, its irreducibility, as it is an inquiry into the limits of language, while also reflecting on the mutability of the self, how the self is changed by its surroundings, by the objects it engages with. More "travel-logos" than mere diary, *Event Factory* is a profound study of the architecture of being, knowledge, memory, and desire.

[This review originally appeared in *The Review for Contemporary Fiction*.]

Reema says

Movement, language, and decay. These are the key signs and struggles of the narrator in Ravicka. The book is like an evocative puzzle in which the narrator and reader try to piece together these resonant moments/paragraphs/events, and figure out where we are. And why what we see is going on. Renee Gladman does all this with clean language that has an unfussy poetics, and a structure that is composed of mysterious

events that challenge and complicate the (perhaps false) meaning gathered from linear narrative.

Here is the opening: "From the sky there was no sign of Ravicka. Yet, I arrived; I met many people. The city was large, yellow, and tender." (1) Isn't this how it feels to arrive somewhere/when momentous? Isn't it also the feeling of coming back to a place that has meant something to you, but is largely unmapped? For me, growing up in the Bronx, having parents who come from Assam, I translated that opening with the feeling I have whenever I go back to those two places.

Another key line: "In my room I recalled the salsa dancer. She had something that I had forgotten until now: 'You can't do this without movement,' and at the time I believe she was coaching me. Our bodies were very close right then. But now I wonder if she was referring to life in this city." (31) Arguably the quintessential city-dweller's declaration. Ravicka could so easily be my NYC in this sense, having walked and trained through all different corners. Half my memories of my city are embedded in some kind of movement.

Though this novel uses the cues of science fiction, there is so much that is like a detective novel. Mainly, the narrator understanding that this city is dying, and trying to figure out why. Why is it so difficult for people to communicate? Why is the air this strange yellow-brown color? Why are so many buildings abandoned, so many other structures falling apart? And what can people do to save their city and themselves? This is the existential question at the heart of this empathetic novel; and one it answers with the equally generous reassurance that even dying cities somehow survive. A margin-city-lover's book, this one.

"I am saying that things happened that have not been reported, and it is in virtue of those missing things that I was here. Had I spoken of them, at this point in the story, I would be elsewhere." (82)

Sechavar says

Gladman's language can best be described as patient.

While her main character's story itself moves along quickly, Gladman's language slowly reveals what exactly is going on. And even that takes a slow path. In the book, an unnamed female linguist narrates her arrival and journey through Ravicka apparently to help the with a problem: something is wrong in the country and no one is saying or doing anything about it.

As our linguist begins her search, easily travelling deeper into the country and learning things her hosts appear to have wanted to keep her from, we learn about the quiet yet highly communicative world of Ravicka.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of this book is the Ravickian language. With a blend of Spanish sounding words, beautiful character names, and a robust dose of body language, Ravickian provides a useful vocabulary even if it isn't always understood by the narrator or reader. I didn't find it off putting, Gladman translates for the reader parts of the language that, while not always essential to the plot, do illuminate parts of this new culture. We learn that Ravickians speak not only with their mouths but with their bodies, and as a reader I began to realize that this is not a foreign concept at all, but a formalization of human social behavior we already conduct. When we are somewhere new, we may be nervous or looking for help and direction. What if there was an accepted way of saying that so that people could easily pick up on it and come to our rescue? When we are in public or semi-public spaces, like a shop or restaurant, how do we let people know we're there? Or that it's our first time there so please excuse our excitement? Well, Ravickians have "words" for these situations, some spoken and some performed with the body.

While somewhat off topic, it reminds me of how the English language compared to others, particularly those of East and Southeast Asia, doesn't have specific words for certain relations. Instead we have a long list of

descriptions. "My brother-in-law's cousin's daughter." I feel as though Ravickian does its best to include language for all situations, however, that doesn't keep it from being difficult to understand.

As we follow the linguist we are taken to a sparsely populated and vast downtown, an older, perhaps even ancient section of the city where the people live completely underground, and up to mountain top where the linguist decides that she simply doesn't know enough Ravickian to understand "The Problem" plaguing the city. The end of the book let's us know that the linguist is attempting to meet an author, someone with great control over the Ravickian language, and someone she believes can help her decipher the mystery of the yellow air descending over the city, a simple segue-way into the next book, that I believe is enough to make the reader want to make that next purchase, but possibly belies the importance or the linguist's mission. And that brings me to the only thing I found amiss in Gladman's writing.

While patient, and masterfully so as it keeps me the reader patient, this story, even by the end of the book, hasn't helped me understand exactly what's at stake here. Is the yellow air swallowing the city? Infecting or killing people? What exactly is so malignant about it that people are leaving the country? What are the stakes here? The narrative, much like Ravicka's inhabitants, isn't giving it up, but having become so patient while reading it, I admit I'm not exactly chomping at the bit to find out. My drive to read the next book is more out of curiosity than obsession I felt reading Del Toro and Hogan's latest vampire series, or the fantasy series of Jacqueline Carrey. But if the linguist can get more information for me in the next book, if I can learn the dangers of the yellow air and why the mystery must be solved, I'm confident I'll go along for the ride in the third book.

Paul Dembina says

These observations of strange rituals and behaviours by an unjudgmental observer reminded me slightly of the graphic novels of Yuichi Yokoyama.

Meaning wriggles out of one's grasp.

I'm intrigued enough to try the rest of the series.
