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# Don't Come Back (21st Century Essays)



## Synopsis

In this collection of linked lyrical and narrative essays, experimental translations, and reinterpreted myths, Lina Maria Ferreira Cabeza-Vanegas launches into an exploration of home and identity, family history and belonging, continually examining what it means to feel familiarity but never really feel at home. *Don't Come Back* intermixes translations of Spanish adages and adaptations of major Colombian myths with personal essays about growing up amidst violence, magic, and an unyielding Andean sun. Home is place and time and people and language and history, and none of these are ever set in stone. Attempting to reconcile the irreconcilable and translate the untranslatable—move smoothly and cohesively between culture, language, and place—Ferreira Cabeza-Vanegas is torn between spaces, between the aunt who begs her to return to Colombia and the mother who tells her, “There is nothing here for you, Lina. Don't come back.” *Don't Come Back* is an exploration of home and identity that constantly asks, “If you really could go back, would you?”

## Book Information

Series: 21st Century Essays

Paperback: 253 pages

Publisher: Mad River Books; 1 edition (January 20, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0814253954

ISBN-13: 978-0814253953

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.7 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars (5 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #138,796 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #42 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Hispanic & Latino #67 in Books > Literature & Fiction > World Literature > Caribbean & Latin American #78 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Latin America

## Customer Reviews

“In *Don't Come Back*, Lina Marí Ferreira Cabeza-Vanegas chronicles the immigrant's ever-present tug of family and the familiar—what is left behind—and the equally strong pull of the new land with its lure of

stability and security. Told in a lyrical and well-crafted style, Lina's story asks readers to venture into the migrant heart's dilemma — to go back or to stay in the new country. Norma E. Cantf "Lina Ferreira is a shape-shifter of an essayist, never predictable. The worlds she inhabits are as big as legend and as small as a family in Colombia navigating the large and small cruelties of life. To try to define this book would be to kill it — the essays leap over formal boundaries in prose (by turns, moving, hilarious, and brutal) that can only ignite and inspire the imagination and intellect of the sympathetic reader. Robin Hemley, author of *Nola: Memoir of Faith, Art, and Madness* "Don't Come Back" is a gathering of images, memories, history, and myths that encircle the present in an attempt to make sense of a fragmented inheritance. Only Ferreira could make a dying cat, a torn and hanging lip, or a dissected lover beautiful. This book wounds and soothes in turn, disturbs and seduces at once. Angela Pelster-Wiebe, author of *Limber* (winner of the GLCA New Writers Award in Nonfiction) "An extraordinary, shockingly good collection from a brilliant young writer, it perfectly fuses the carnal and the spectral, tenderness and unflinching grit, wry humor and recovered sorrow. This book exemplifies the role of imagination in nonfiction. Lina Ferreira's sophisticated prose will surprise, delight, disconcert, entertain, dazzle, and move you." Phillip Lopate

Lina Marf a Ferreira Cabeza-Vanegas is the winner of the 2016 Rona Jaffe Foundation Writers Award, author of *Drown/Sever/Sing*, and Visiting Assistant Professor at The Ohio State University. Â

I bought this for a gift for my husband's birthday. it was a great read and he didn't want to put it down. It was written in a very interesting way.

Don't Come Back is a raw, honest, emotional story, and I absolutely loved it! The stories told here are touching, tragic, and sure to show a perspective few people in the States are willing to look at. In fact, some of the most beautiful sections are the points where the author rewrites stories from Colombia itself. Characters like Nequemteba and Huitaca will follow you long after you have finished. I was pleasantly surprised by the light narrative I found tying the personal essays together as well. The essays themselves jump all around her life, and I expected the book as a whole to do the same, but when I finished I found a satisfying end to what I

hadn't quite realized was a story. Little details and characters will come up when you least expect them, and it was always a happy little surprise. Of course, this book pulls at your heartstrings as well. This is going to make you think, and think hard, about some of your assumptions about other cultures. The author is almost brutally honest about her experiences growing up in Colombia, and at times I wanted to cry. However, if you allow those emotions and experiences, through the author's eyes, to change the way you think, you'll find at the end a sense of peace and catharsis you won't expect. I would absolutely recommend this to anyone who enjoys a good story, and anyone who likes to learn about other cultures. Thank you for a fantastic read.

I bought this book after attending Lina Ferreira's reading of her piece "El Coco" from *Come Back*. I was fascinated by her ability to fuse memory, visceral imagery, and rich cultural tradition seamlessly together in "El Coco." I was hooked and I wanted to delve further into Ferreira's unique and vivid language. On this score, *Come Back* did not disappoint. In reading her essays, I was most impressed by her ability to surprise and her striking portrayal of both real and imagined characters. Ferreira is a master of the unexpected. Her essays each contain a turn, whether it be a new twist in the family saga, a deeply visceral image, or a sudden depth of meaning. This turn is enhanced by her concrete descriptions. Within each story, I was firmly planted in the scenes through her strong descriptions, only to be startlingly uprooted by a turn: the medium's eerie foretelling to her grandmother, the image of shiny beetles writhing as they are crushed by eager children, or the poignant reflection on her sister's easy exchange of her last names. These unanticipated turns provoked thought and kept me invested in her essays. *Come Back* features many unique characters, from family members to childhood classmates to Columbian devils. Family members were recurring presences across many of the essays. Progressive stories seemed to reveal more of the flaws, quirks, and strengths of these family members. Her grandmother, mother, and sisters were particularly prominent characters, and it was cool to see them in different scenes and different points in time throughout the essays. Her descriptions were unwaveringly honest, showing both the good and bad, and giving the reader authentic insight into the familial bonds that shape Ferreira (and by extension, the bonds that shape us). Ferreira is similarly effective in bringing mythical characters, such as Chiminigagua and El Coco, to life. She endows these awe-inspiring, larger-than-life characters with human-like

characteristics, making the myths more approachable and tangible for the reader. I connected with her essays largely because of these fully fleshed out characters, and her descriptions stayed with me long after I shut the book. All in all, I would highly recommend *Don't Come Back*. Ferreira is an excellent writer with a unique voice and her unexpected writing style and vivid characters are not to be missed.

I haven't read a book like this in a long time; as far as non-fiction goes, I'm not sure if I've ever read a book like this at all. The book's title comes from Ferreira's mother's words when she (Lina) leaves Columbia for the first time. Though Lina's Aunt begs her to return to visit some time, her mother looks her sternly in the eye and pleads with her: "Don't Come Back." It is this struggle, this argument, that pervades the entirety of the book, even if Ferreira doesn't ever address it directly. In "The First Jaime," Ferreira describes how her paternal grandfather doesn't respond directly to the questions she asks, but rather addresses the question she meant to ask or should have asked. "Don't Come Back" takes a similar approach in addressing its central conflict: though Ferreira never directly tells us how she feels about this internal game of tug-of-war, we see it through her essays and what she chooses to tell us. The resulting drama is visceral and engaging. On one hand, in Columbia we see runaway kids on the street, demons real and imagined, and a revolution that starts with one troubled man becoming a symbol for something much bigger. On the other, we find Ferreira reconnecting with her family, a group of imperfect but ultimately endearing characters. In the end, we're as uncertain as she is about her ultimate decision, but the journey to that point makes for an engrossing ride. Ferreira is reportedly working on a novel about demons right now. After having read this, I'm keeping an eager and watchful eye out for it.

Plane crashes, blood, water-demons, cannibalism, and creatures no one has seen before.... this book has it all! But really.... myths so beautiful you wish they were real; stories so heartbreakingly true you wish they weren't. A book of things real- not glossed over or glamorized, but full of raw human experience and the questions that come from that.

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