

Indeed, I find it somewhat insulting when an author assumes that I am unwilling, or incapable, of undertaking the task of interpretation.

Take away the incessant reminders of significance. Take away the cultural specifics that make this work's content unique. What remains? We are left with the age-old story of one's emergence into adulthood: the desperate need for independence, the desire to forge one's own revolution, the formation of "the self"—certainly a story that we have all read, many times before. What sets this book apart from the others is Santana's control of the English language. Santana has the ability to make the dreadfully mundane extraordinary. Yolanda recalls the sounds of Dolores' Singer sewing machine: "[T]he rat-tat-tat of the machine's humming as my mother expertly slipped a fuchsia-colored palazzo pant through the machine's needle plate, then the click of the presser foot lifter, then the scissor snip of thread indicating she was done sewing that portion of the garment." I have been sewing for as long as I can remember—I am well acquainted with the sounds of sewing. The careful attention to the auditory in this short segment is astounding. The rat-tat-tats and snips and clicks transform the somewhat pedestrian act of constructing a pair of pants into a far more magical experience—this intimacy with language permeates the work.

My main complaint with this work simply betrays one of my greatest "pet peeves" with literature. Nevertheless, this novel was an enjoyable read. Yolanda's struggle is one we can relate to with enough specifics to make the story unique. More importantly, though, the language propels the action beautifully.

— Laura Wilson
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Long Time Ago Good: Sunset Dreams from Austin and Beyond

by Lowell Mick White.

College Station: Slough Press, 2008. 178 pp. \$14.95 paperback.

Those who remember old Austin, know new Austin, or have experienced any variant in between will recognize their city in Lowell Mick White's first collection of stories, *Long Time Ago Good: Sunset Dreams from Austin and Beyond*. White is a former winner of the prestigious Dobie-Paisano Fellowship from the University of Texas at Austin and the Texas Institute of Letters, and this book shows that the fellowship committee made a wonderful choice.

This short story collection takes a look at the changing city in its many incarnations. White chronicles its move from high to low tech as well as its transmogrification from a quaint, "everything's local" mentality to the strip-malled, suburban city it has become. In the collection's first story, "Brindled

Pit Bull,” a Californian who has relocated for a tech job at “Nntych,” finds her expectations foiled as both the job and the Texas she expected aren’t so easy to hold onto. She’s downsized, and the myth she came for isn’t the myth she gets: “Texas was the old frontier, where stupid white guys in

pickup trucks would drive around and drink beer and brag about barbeque or football or something equally vulgar.” Instead, she gets Sixth Street sushi bars.

The story “Guts ☺” follows. The Texas, the Austin, that the narrator of the previous story finds so elusive, is just as tricky for this new story’s main character, newspaper columnist Wes Leonard. As the longtime local color columnist for the paper, he has no problem finding the beer and the barbeque, but they are not authentic beer and barbeque. He’s written so many columns about “Budafest, the Wurstfest, the New Highway Fest, the International Barbecue Fest, the Aquafest, the Cedar Chopper Fest, the Sorghumfest, the

Pecanfest, the Cotton Pickin’ Fest, the Very Best Fest, the Locust Fest, the Big Ol’ Bull Fest, the Chiggerfest, and the Crappiefest,” he’s burned-out on the kitsch of keeping the old traditions fresh for new generations. White does a great job with this in the story as Leonard is pegged to judge a Chitlins Cookoff that combines a celebration of the vittles with a healthy fun run, and by the end of the story, his narrator just can’t take it anymore.

The collection circles the city and lets the reader drop in on civil servants, cab drivers, grad students, and nature enthusiasts. My favorite story in the book, “Reliction” follows the story of Bonnie, a “middle-aged white woman, hippie-ish and graying now but still fit and slender, sitting in the shade of an umbrella” who sells fossil jewelry at “an open-air craft market across the street from the university in Austin.” In her story, she rejects one “would-be boyfriend, a would-be boyfriend she was already tiring of,” in part because “he liked the way Austin was getting bigger and bigger. He didn’t mind traffic jams or shopping at Wal-Mart or eating at chain restaurants.” Bonnie, stuck in a life she doesn’t like, chooses by the story’s end to take a chance on a younger man in an attempt to make her life something more than simply keeping her head above water.

Long Time Ago Good, with its poignant individual stories and theme-building arrangement, is one of those initial works by a writer that makes the reader want to read the next one, and soon.

— Chad Hammett
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Long Time Ago Good



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Lowell Mick White