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By **Anderson Tepper** Tuesday, Mar 1 2005

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There's a growing number of Colombian writers—Jorge Franco, [Laura Restrepo](#), [Fernando Vallejo](#) among them—chronicling that country's violent drug wars. [Nuria Amat](#), however, isn't one of them—and perhaps that's what gives her book its extra edge. Though clearly familiar with the territory, the [Barcelona](#)-based Catalan author brings an alien sensibility and lush, invented language to *Queen Cocaine*, set in [Colombia's](#) war-ravaged countryside.

Amat sketches out the plot in the barest terms: A Spanish woman named Mona, nicknamed Rat, has followed her journalist lover, [Wilson Cervantes](#), to his ancestral village, [Bahía Negra](#). There, the two "lost, forgotten castaways" hide out—on the run from civilization, but also from the dangerous enemies Wilson has crossed in his articles. He drinks, drifts, and waits for the worst, scribbling away unsuccessfully at a novel. Meanwhile Rat withdraws into silence, becoming ever more bewitched by the mysteries of the forest that encloses them: its spirits and spells, the hidden cocaine facilities buried deep within, and the competing camps—narcotraffickers, guerrillas, paramilitary soldiers—in a war that threatens them all. Her mind begins to bend with fatigue and foreboding; her identity is stripped to its essence. "I saw my face in my words," Rat shudders. "Words of a nobody."

Details

Queen Cocaine

By [Nuria Amat](#), translated from the Spanish by Peter Bush
City Lights, 250 pp., \$13.95
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And yet, as the terror draws nearer to their doorstep, Rat is held in thrall by the embattled lives of the villagers around her, the "damned and displaced" of Colombia's violent backlands. Amat's book is a paranoid fever dream of a peasant novel—heir to those of Rulfo and Fanon, but also [Lispector](#)—filtered through the gaze of her doomed outsider. Just listen to Amat's enigmatic language, and feel the explosive tension of this world: "At night the forest has its own light that can be glimpsed in brief flashes. The forest is like a blind woman with memories."

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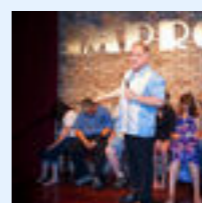
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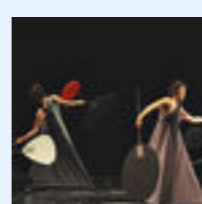


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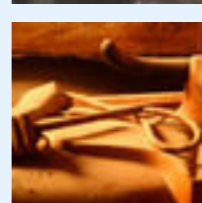
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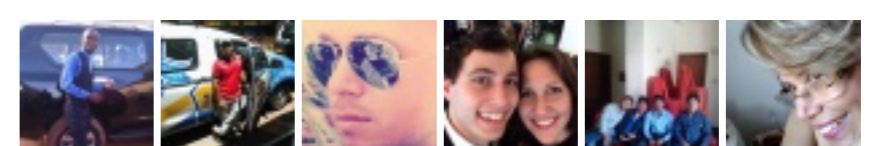
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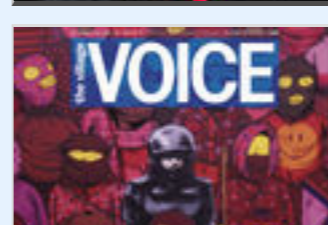
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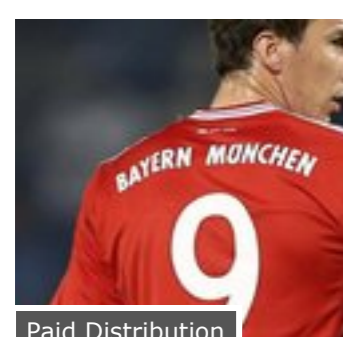
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