

this novel, there doesn't seem to be space for this storyline to properly come to a conclusion. Some of the other plot lines seem tied up too neatly as well—for example, a photograph of Hannah skinning a bear, which could ruin her reputation, is rather convolutedly taken care of, and her husband seems unconcerned by her sexual relationship with Dan and even pays him for saving Hannah.

It is fitting that a novel entitled *Rutting Season* would concern itself with sexual relationships of all kinds. The story in large measure is about what compels animals (humans included) to mate, and the consequences of that compulsion. In the novel's opening chapter, Hannah is trying to ignore her rutting tent-mates and eventually leaves them to fetch water—only to become hopelessly lost; during his search for Hannah, we see how David is distracted by an attractive young woman. *Rutting Season* shows us how animals of all kinds can be driven by the overpowering urge to mate, and what it costs them. But it also portrays the gentler workings of such urges through Hannah and Dan's centre-stage romance, as well as Susan's budding relationship with an old friend who turns out, delightfully for Susan and for the reader, to be full of surprises.

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Missed Her. Ivan E. Coyote. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2010. 144 pages.

Reviewed by Casie E. Cameron

The cover, a Jack Frost nipped window pane peering out on a stand of sun-drenched white spruce, sets the perfect tone for Ivan E. Coyote's fifth collection of non-fiction vignettes, *Missed Her* (2010). The melting frost on the panes obscures the view, but there are streaks of partial visibility. Like the symbolic cover, Coyote's stories offer a glimpse into some experiences of queer life in the North. Each story is told with realistic detail—one person's experience of looking for love, making art, and challenging preconceived notions of performing identity.

Coyote, a storyteller and writer originally from Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, with a cult following in Canada and the United States, weaves a web of casual readability through short personal narratives in this collection. Eighteen of the thirty were written for *Xtra!* (an online magazine published in Toronto) between 2008 and 2010, and

they appear here with only slight variations and minor reworking. So many of *Missed Her's* insightful and personal autobiographical vignettes reminded me of growing up queer in the 90s. Coyote's style and themes are reminiscent of influential lesbian fiction from that time, combining the gritty echoes of Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* with the sense of place in Jeanette Winterson's hauntingly fantastic novels and short stories.

Attacks on stereotypes, anecdotal stories about queer gender and identities, the blurry lines between family and personal identity, and love, recur as central themes throughout the anthology, all recounted with courage and candour. *Missed Her* is suffused with a sense of family and nostalgia while Coyote, as narrator, is preoccupied with being oneself despite traditionally conservative surroundings.

The pieces written about family history are particularly vivid. Coyote poignantly blurs the line between themes of family and gender identities in pieces focusing more on performing butch gender identity and "how to" descriptions for life processes, such as in "Uncle Ivan's Broken Heart's Club Plan," "A Butch Roadmap," and "The Butch Version" (where Ivan deals with recovering from a breakup). These stories, identified with gender-queer terms by title, culminate in a butch call to build camaraderie between each other rather than compete: "We need to learn to stick together better. Because single is not such a bad thing to be, when you are not so alone."

Throughout the book, Coyote attacks a variety of stereotypes as, for example, in "Some of My Best Friends are Rednecks," where Coyote has a conversation with a "redneck straight white guy, to use his words" who describes a reaction garnered by reading one of Coyote's own books (90). In this instance, the author challenges dual stereotypes—that a white, bearded, blue-collar coal miner couldn't be friends with a masculine presenting "predominantly estrogen based organism," as well as "the man-hating lesbian" cliché (92). In other instances, however, Coyote reinforces categorizational prejudices and exploitative power differentials. In "Hair Today," Coyote provocatively describes playing in to misogyny when recounting a visit to a new barber who talks about Coyote's femme companion, admiring her beauty, as though she were not there. The narrator reacts by engaging this dynamic, saying: "some would call this allowing my female partner to be treated as an object, and trading on patriarchal standards of female desirability in order to garner favor in a male dominated environment. I call it getting a cheap haircut" (33).

This flippant dismissal of misogyny is harshly contrasted by “Hats Off,” an epistle “to all the beautiful, kick-ass, fierce, and full-bodied femmes out there” (81), where femmes are praised for their strength and beauty. However, Coyote ultimately subjugates femmes, who become an objectified means of self-validation, by concluding with “when seen through your eyes, I am beautiful” (85). This juxtaposition is especially disturbing and confusing because it reduces all “feminine” presenting women, or at least those worthy of praise, to a source of sexualized attention for the author. Though Coyote acknowledges the struggle of the femme lesbian, there is no satisfying connection made between butch and femme experience, or to the significance of perpetuating misogynist stereotypes within a homosexual gender binary. The resulting feeling after these two stories is at the expense of women whose identity includes wearing dresses and makeup. Any irony in cliché characterization is too subtle for this resolution to be satisfactory.

However, despite battling chauvinistic inclinations, the central conceit of Coyote’s compendium does not conform entirely to stereotypical butch features. The butch/femme dichotomy often includes butch women competing for femme partners, rather than spending time in one another’s company supporting each other and commiserating, or celebrating similar life experiences. Coyote breaks tradition by calling for brotherhood among the butch community instead of perpetuating traditional contentious interactions, touting teamwork and suggesting butches offer one another mutual support. This perspective is refreshing and one I am glad to hear even if this unification seems long past due.

The pathos of Coyote’s anecdotes, however, is obscured by distracting repetition in form. Each story’s individual impact is diminished when presented as part of a volume, even though Coyote envelopes *Missed Her* in layers of repetition. The content of “Nobody Ever,” “Cooling Down,” and “Good Old Days” all follow a circular nature, coming back to the beginning in the end: start with a current referent, introduce a memory from Coyote’s childhood (past referent) that relates or has the same moral as the story told with the current referent—thus ending at the beginning. This repeated narrative form would have been experienced quite differently as a serial column, the manner in which these vignettes were originally published, compared with how they function together as a single collection. When reading a monthly column, for example, one might appreciate

a familiar construction for recognition value from one publication to the next; reading pieces of similar length and structure back to back in a collection renders the construction predictable and unexciting. Something unfortunately seems lost in translation.

The last seven pieces in *Missed Her* were not published in *Xtra!* and introduce love as a new theme with a different tone, though love is notably integral to the volume's other central themes. The last piece, "Just a Love Story," focuses on Coyote's own love story and concludes with hope. Preceding are two love-themed vignettes, the first centred around Coyote's father's love story, "Maiden Heart," and the next on Coyote's grandmother's unrealized love in "All about Herman." The title is borrowed from Grandmother Coyote's last letter, her "latest scribblings" (130), in a long line of handwritten "old stories, confessions, and advice" faithfully mailed to Coyote throughout the years.

Overall, Coyote's narratives are engaging partly because they vividly reflect place as hinted at by the cover. Turning the collection over, the back cover reveals one final, deeply poignant insight into Coyote's attention to themes of family, identity, and love. Scrawled across the back is Coyote's grandmother's last four-page handwritten letter. Though printed palimpsest to the marketing blurb, its referential presence symbolically reinforces the connections between the themes of how families and place help to shape identities, and direct us towards a deeper understanding of Coyote's experience living queer in the North.

Works Cited

"Ivan E. Coyote." *Xtra!*, Pink Triangle Press, 2017,
www.dailyxtra.com/contributor/ivan-e-coyote

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Ivan Coyote's 11th book, *Tomboy Survival Guide*, was released in September 2016, by Arsenal Pulp Press.