

to domestic comic books featuring much lower production values.

Though many creators worked and continue to work in the album form, few mastered it so gracefully and to such entertaining effect as Jacques Tardi. This recent release from Fantagraphics, entitled *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adele Blanc-Sec*, collects the first two of Tardi's *Adele* adventures into something that could easily be mistaken for a graphic novel. In this popular storyline, Tardi explores fin-de-siècle Paris with a mixture of gothic imagery and ludicrous plot twists, propelled by a droll heroine with a penchant for entangling her elaborate schemes with the ineptitude of buffoons.

First published in the 1970s, Tardi's work here is truly timeless, rendering his characters in Herge's *ligne claire* style but embedding the background with a virtuoso's attention to detail. This is important because the story draws so heavily upon the setting—Paris in the late nineteenth century—to give it a depth that allows the work to transcend its often ridiculous plot devices. In the first story, "Pteror Over Paris," Adele's quest to recover stolen goods (for her own gain) becomes bound up in the unlikely appearance of a pterodactyl that begins assaulting the citizens of Paris.

While the fundamental elements of the pterodactyl storyline are brought to a close by the album's end, Adele's own interests continue on into the next story, "The Eiffel Tower Demon." This establishes a precedent by which the reader is able to gain a sense of closure from each individual story while being invited to follow the larger story concerns on into the next. There is something silly about the way Tardi

weaves petty crime and supernatural hoo-ha to create these stories, and yet his delivery makes the reader feel like he or she is in on the joke, rather than the butt of it.

It is tempting, from this distance in time and place, to hope that Tardi's work here is representative of the general quality of French BD from this period. Tardi was then and remains today one of the great masters of his art form. Very little of the non-Tardi *bande dessinée* contemporary to the Adele Blanc-Sec stories holds up with the same poise, both to his credit and our disappointment. Readers interested in some of the best of what French BD has to offer should seize this opportunity to make this and other Tardi books now available in English part of their library.

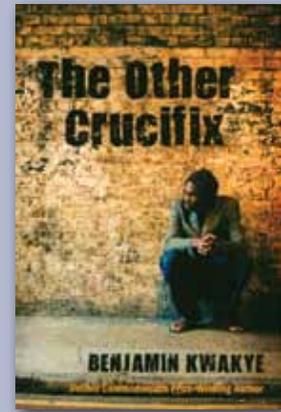
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H Nigel Thomas. **Lives: Whole and Otherwise.** Toronto. TSAR. 2010. 146 pages. Can\$20.95. ISBN 978-1-894770-61-3

In his new collection of stories, *Lives: Whole and Otherwise*, H Nigel Thomas (author of *Spirits in the Dark* and *Return to Arcadia*) continues his exploration of the lives of Caribbean immigrants living in Montréal. Already known for his Caribbean-Canadian chronicling, Thomas's characters struggle to live in a hyphenated state between multiple worlds—prostitute, outsider, agenda pusher, homosexual. It's to his credit that Thomas is able to write skillfully about such complicated lives.

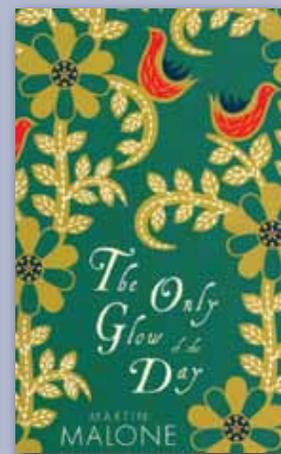
In "Maude," Thomas takes aim at multiple powers—the Catholic Church, the Canadian government—as a powerful prostitute outlines her proposed memoir. Aging

Nota Bene



Benjamin Kwakye
The Other Crucifix
Ayebia

The third novel of Benjamin Kwakye, *The Other Crucifix* chronicles the life of protagonist Jojo Badu, a Ghanaian native studying in an elite liberal arts college in America. The novel raises important questions about identity and belonging as it discusses both Badu's individual struggles and the more generalized experience of the modern African man.



Martin Malone
The Only Glow of the Day
New Island

Based on *Rosanna Night Walker*, a radio play by Malone, this novel details the difficult situation of "wren woman" Rosanna Doyle, who lived in the harsh Curragh grasslands during the winter of 1863, hoping to reunite with her lover. The historical events were documented by journalist Richard Tone, who was commissioned by Charles Dickens.

yet cunning, she lists key figures in order to influence political power to her favor. A young, biracial woman at the center of “Shaky at the Knees” wrestles to find inner strength after growing up in an unstable household where her white mother and black father constantly flung racial insults at each other. In “Graduations,” an immigrant mother and her stern employer constantly fight with the immigrant’s adolescent son; but when he finally receives his graduation certificate, both are surprised to find out the true results of their battle. In one of the strongest stories of the collection, “Percy’s Illness,” a woman recounts her friendship with a troubled young immigrant, beginning with their shared sexual miscue and progressing to his serious mental illness stemming from an identity crisis.

If there’s one complaint about the collection, it’s that the stories tend to be too short. This is meant to be a compliment: one wishes Thomas would spend more time exploring the fascinating lives he’s created. Years filled with rich emotions and events are often abbreviated into short paragraphs. Where writers such as Edward P. Jones and Deborah Eisenberg will spend pages exploring pivotal moments in a character’s life, Thomas tends to compress. As a result, his stories leave emotional surface dents where they might have left craters. But these are minor complaints. *Lives: Whole and Otherwise* does an admirable job of investigating lives lived in secrets and honesty, complication and simplicity.

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David Foster Wallace. **The Pale King.** New York. Little, Brown. 2011. x + 548 pages. \$27.99. ISBN 978-0-316-07423-0

Late in David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* (1996), seventeen-year-old Hal Incandenza contemplates a Sisphyean future: walking down his dormitory hallway again and again, eating and excreting “day after day after day.” Day-after-day-after-day became the stuff of Wallace’s 2005 Kenyon College commencement address, which spoke of making a meaningful life in the face of working-world routine. That address, we can now see, has a strong relation to this unfinished novel: routine, its discontents and rewards, defines the lives of the tax examiners of *The Pale King*, who work in an Internal Revenue Service regional examination center in Peoria, Illinois, in the mid-1980s. “The thing here,” explains one examiner, “is that the returns never stop.”

The Pale King purports to be “basically a nonfiction memoir” by former REC employee David Foster Wallace, “with additional elements of reconstructive journalism,

organizational psychology, elementary civics and tax theory, etc.” The “additional elements” also include “relevant backstories,” often of characters’ childhoods, which range from farcically sad to brutally traumatic. Each character has been drawn to (or has fallen into) the work of the IRS, which, like Alcoholics Anonymous in *Infinite Jest*, constitutes “a parallel world” with its own traditions, lore, and language. New employees are reborn into the service, receiving new Social Security numbers and service monikers. There are suggestions of monastic life in these details, as in a glimpse of an “Immersives Room,” with 150 men and women silently poring over returns.

The Pale King as we have it is an assemblage by Little, Brown’s Michael Pietsch from thousands of manuscript pages. The more sustained sections of the work are stunning in their variety and invention: a Steinbeckian evocation of landscape, a saga of an insufferable do-gooder, a happy-hour conversation about mental illness and love, a stuck-elevator conversation about freedom

