

## Varamo Cesar Aira

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Educated Youth Europa Editions Incorporated

A middle-class, directionless ox of a young man who helps the trash pickers of Buenos Aires's shantytown attracts the attention of a corrupt policeman who would use anyone including innocent kids to break a drug ring he believes is operating in the slum. By the author of *An Episode in the Life of a Landscape Painter*. Original.

**Tattoo** New Directions Publishing

"Mis novelas parten de una idea, de algún tipo de juego intelectual, de algo que me parece prometedor y desafiante", admitió César Aira alguna vez. Ideas que, como es sabido, a menudo lindan con el disparate o lo inaudito. "Entre lo bueno y lo nuevo, mil veces lo nuevo", es uno de sus lemas. No sorprende, así, que su obra celebre la invención y eche mano, como punto de partida, a casos o incidentes singulares, a veces nimios, otras veces decididamente inverosímiles. Bastan las primeras páginas de Varamo para entender de qué se trata este caso en particular: en 1923 un funcionario oscuro y casi kafkiano escribe en diez o doce horas un poema; el hecho es una prodigiosa "burbuja en su biografía" porque nunca antes había escrito ni se le había ocurrido un solo verso y tampoco ocurrirá después. El poema en cuestión es la obra maestra de la poesía moderna centroamericana: "El Canto del Niño Virgen". En un gesto muy digno de Aira, Varamo no corrige ni retoca su poema, que se publica en forma de libro días después. Lo que sigue es el "despliegue": el estudio de los hechos ocurridos desde el momento en que Varamo cobró su menudo sueldo, embolsó los billetes y notó que estos eran falsos hasta el momento en que puso punto final a su célebre poema. En otras palabras: "¿qué relación puede haber entre un par de billetes falsos y una obra maestra literaria?" Entre mentira y verdad, la acción de Varamo transcurre en un Panamá-fantasma. Emulando a Alfred Jarry, podría argüirse que Varamo "se sitúa en Panamá, o sea en Ninguna Parte". O decirse Todas Partes, con esa especie de universalidad que hay en todo fabulista y que, según se advierte aquí, también puede resultar más que propicia para un antifabulista irónico. Eduardo Berti

Pushkin Press

Short fiction about a doctor who has a gift for making miracles and who is not deterred by his archenemy, Dr. Actyn, who is constantly trying to prove he is a charlatan.

Dinner New Directions Publishing

Two completely different stories by the inimitable César Aira. The Little Buddhist Monk is a story of Asian invention gone wild, as a diminutive Korean Buddhist monk acts as a tour guide to an increasingly distraught French couple on a working vacation in the Far East. Proof brings us quickly back to the West, where two punks, plus a new recruit ("Wannafuck?" is the opening line as the two punk lesbians accost the chubby and shy Marcia on a quiet street in Buenos Aires), take control of a local supermarket with dire consequences for the hostages. These two Aira works are as different as night and day. Nevertheless, sex, identity, and modern day economics figure deeply in both of these fast-paced, edgy fictions.

The Proof New Directions Publishing

Darío Ezcurra is one of the thousands of Argentinians unlucky enough to be 'disappeared' by the military government—murdered by the local chief of police with the complicity of his friends and neighbours. Twenty years later, Fefe returns to the town where Darío met his fate and attempts to discover how the community let such a crime happen. Lies, excuses and evasion ensue—desperate attempts to deny the guilty secret of which the whole community, even Fefe himself, is afraid.

The Dark Wet Macmillan

Alejandro Zambra's *Ways of Going Home* begins with an

earthquake, seen through the eyes of an unnamed nine-year-old boy who lives in an undistinguished middleclass housing development in a suburb of Santiago, Chile. When the neighbors camp out overnight, the protagonist gets his first glimpse of Claudia, an older girl who asks him to spy on her uncle Raúl. In the second section, the protagonist is the writer of the story begun in the first section. His father is a man of few words who claims to be apolitical but who quietly sympathized—to what degree, the author isn't sure—with the Pinochet regime. His reflections on the progress of the novel and on his own life—which is strikingly similar to the life of his novel's protagonist—expose the raw suture of fiction and reality. *Ways of Going Home* switches between author and character, past and present, reflecting with melancholy and rage on the history of a nation and on a generation born too late—the generation which, as the author-narrator puts it, learned to read and write while their parents became accomplices or victims. It is the most personal novel to date from Zambra, the most important Chilean author since Roberto Bolaño.

On Contemporary Art New Directions Publishing

Narrative of childhood experience bristles with dramatic humor at each stage of growing up: a first ice cream, school, reading, games, friendship. The novel begins in Aira's hometown, Coronel Pringles. As self-awareness grows, the story rushes forward in a torrent of anecdotes which transform a world of uneventful happiness into something else: the anecdote becomes adventure, and adventure, fable, and then legend.

Varamo Emecé Argentina

Lerena Dost is a dominant and successful woman until she and her psychoanalyst Suano Botilecue cross an ethical boundary and are disgraced, after their sexual relationship is made known. Both lose everything. Then, a chance encounter with a mysterious woman in an elevator plants a number in Lerena's mind, which she plays in the lottery and wins. She decides that she will not touch her new fortune until she can reward her benefactor, who turns out to be none other than Dona Munava, the famed leader of a spiritual cult hidden away in the countryside far from the city. Lerena and Suano set out on.

The last September New Directions Publishing

Proof brings us quickly back to the West, where two punks, plus a new recruit ("Wannafuck?" is the opening line as the two punk lesbians accost the chubby and shy Marcia on a quiet street in Buenos Aires), take control of a local supermarket with dire consequences for the hostages.

Artforum New Directions Publishing

The surprising, magnificent story of a Panamanian government employee who, one day, after a series of troubles, writes the celebrated masterwork of modern Central American poetry. Unmistakably the work of César Aira, Varamo is about the day in the life of a hapless government employee who, after wandering around all night after being paid by the Ministry in counterfeit money, eventually writes the most celebrated masterwork of modern Central American poetry, *The Song of the Virgin Boy*. What is odd is that, at fifty years old, Varamo "hadn't previously written one sole verse, nor had it ever occurred to him to write one." Among other things, this novella is an ironic allegory of the poet's vocation and inspiration, the subtlety of artistic genius, and our need to give literature an historic, national, psychological, and aesthetic context. But Aira goes further still—converting the ironic allegory into a formidable parody of the expectations that all narrative texts generate—by laying out the pathos of a man who between one night and the following morning is touched by genius. Once again Aira surprises us with his unclassifiable fiction: original and enjoyable, worthy of many a thoughtful chuckle, Varamo invites the reader to become an accomplice in the author's irresistible game.

Ghosts New Directions Publishing

An astounding novel from Argentina that is a meditation on the beautiful and the grotesque in nature, the art of landscape painting, and one experience in a man's life that became a lightning rod for inspiration. *An Episode in the Life of a Landscape Painter* is the story of a moment in the life of the German artist Johan Moritz Rugendas (1802-1858). Greatly admired as a master landscape painter, he was advised by Alexander von Humboldt to travel West from Europe to record the spectacular landscapes of Chile, Argentina, and Mexico. Rugendas did in fact become one of the best of the nineteenth-century European painters to venture into Latin America. However this is not a biography of Rugendas. This work of fiction weaves an almost surreal history around the secret

objective behind Rugendas' trips to America: to visit Argentina in order to achieve in art the "physiognomic totality" of von Humboldt's scientific vision of the whole. Rugendas is convinced that only in the mysterious vastness of the immense plains will he find true inspiration. A brief and dramatic visit to Mendoza gives him the chance to fulfill his dream. From there he travels straight out onto the pampas, praying for that impossible moment, which would come only at an immense price—an almost monstrously exorbitant price that would ultimately challenge his drawing and force him to create a new way of making art. A strange episode that he could not avoid absorbing savagely into his own body interrupts the trip and irreversibly and explosively marks him for life.

Varamo Varamo

Translated into English for the first time, *On Contemporary Art*, a speech by the renowned novelist César Aira, was delivered at a 2010 colloquium in Madrid dedicated to bridging the gap between writing and the visual arts. On Aira's dizzying and dazzling path, everything comes under question—from reproducibility of artworks to the value of the written word itself. In the end, Aira leaves us stranded on the bridge between writing and art that he set out to construct in the first place, flailing as we try to make sense of where we stand. Aira's *On Contemporary Art* exemplifies what the ekphrasis series is dedicated to doing—exploring the space in which words give meaning to objects, and objects shape our words. Like the great writers Walter Benjamin and Hermann Broch before him, Aira operates in the space between fiction and essay writing, art and analysis. Pursuing questions about reproducibility, art making, and limits of language, Aira's unique voice adds new insights to the essential conversations that continue to inform our understanding of art.

Melodrome Giramondo Publishing

Varamo is the story of how, on an ordinary day in 1923, a middle-aged Panamanian public servant is paid his salary in counterfeit notes, and by the next morning has written a great avant-garde poem. Consumed by anxiety about how to dispose of the notes, Varamo ricochets from one encounter to another: with a chauffeur suspected of leading a black uprising and a madman demanding repayment of an imaginary debt, a paranoid mother and a comatose cabinet minister whose car has been overturned, two genteel golf-club-smuggling sisters, an obliging maid called 'the last woman' and three pirate publishers who finally push him to write 'that celebrated masterpiece of modern Central American poetry, *The Song of the Virgin Child*.' It is a comic vision of life, surreal and logical at the same time, with impossible complications leading to a triumphant resolution.

Birthday New Directions Publishing

Was it a nightmare—the result of a bad case of indigestion—or did something truly scary happen after dinner in the Argentine town of Coronel Pringles? One Saturday night a bankrupt bachelor in his sixties and his mother dine with a wealthy friend. They discuss their endlessly connected neighbors. They talk about a mysterious pit that opened up one day, and the old bricklayer who sometimes walked to the cemetery to cheer himself up. Anxious to show off his valuable antiques, the host shows his guests old windup toys and takes them to admire an enormous doll. Back at home, the bachelor decides to watch some late night TV before retiring. The news quickly takes a turn for the worse as, horrified, the newscaster finds herself reporting about the dead rising from their graves, leaving the cemetery, and sucking the blood of the living—all somehow, disturbingly reminiscent of the dinner party.

An Open Secret Farrar, Straus and Giroux

*The Dark Wet* is the first collection of short stories by Jess Huon. Rich, lyrical and deeply felt, it explores the struggle towards a sense of self and belonging, expressed in three sequences of stories: that of Jed Harp, his lover Danny Hess, and his poet sister Alexandra; of Bell and Oliver, a couple moving between Melbourne and San Francisco; and of a young woman confronting religion and sex in a Christian community in India. Drawing on a rich range of settings, from the lush Top End of Australia, to the mountains of India, and vibrant urban centres, *The Dark Wet* is a brutally honest portrayal of lives grasping at fluidity and transgression, and the possibility of redemption and change.

Tequila Blue Giramondo Publishing

During the Cultural Revolution over 14 million Chinese high school graduates were sent from the cities to live and work in the countryside. They

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were known as zhiqing – ‘ educated youth ’ . They fell in love, married, had children. In the late 1970s the policy changed and they were allowed to return, but not their families. Many jumped at the opportunity, leaving spouses and children behind. Ten years later the children, now teenagers, began to turn up in the cities, looking for their parents. Educated Youth follows five such children, who have travelled across China from a province in the south west to Shanghai in the east, only to discover that their mothers and fathers have remarried, and have new families, in which there is no room for them. Their reappearance brings out the worst in the parents – their duplicity, greed and self-interest – and the best too, as they struggle to come to terms with their sense of love and duty.

[An Episode in the Life of a Landscape Painter](#) Giramondo Publishing

One sultry October morning in Darwin, hemp-wearing army wife Amy Silva grips a trembling fist around two pink lines on a plastic stick. Struggling to come to terms with her rampant fertility, disillusioned with a haughty obstetrician, and infuriated by an inordinate amount of peeing, Amy finds solace in a decision to homebirth. After all, it worked for the cavewomen, right? But as a tropical cyclone threatens to whip down the main street, Amy finds herself facing more than biology. Peace, Love & Khaki Socks explores what it is to be a woman, an expectant mother, a lover and a friend in a patriarchy. Sometimes horrifying, sometimes hilarious and always honest, this unforgettable story is one woman ' s struggle to turn the ordinary into something extraordinary.

[Varamo](#) Bitter Lemon Press

Depicts buildings from twenty-two ranches in Argentina.

[The Lime Tree](#) Melville House

"Ghosts revolves around an immigrant worker's family squatting on the haunted construction site of a luxury condominium building. All of the workmen and their wives and children see the ghosts, who literally hang around the place, but one teenage girl becomes the most curious. Her questions about the ghosts get so intense that her mother in a chilling splitsecond realizes her daughter's life hangs in the balance

The Retrospective David Zwirner Books

An ageing film director, Yair Moses, has been invited to the Spanish pilgrimage city of Santiago de Compostela to attend a retrospective of his early work. As he and Ruth, his leading actress and former muse, settle into their room at the parador, Moses notices a painting depicting the classical story of an elderly prisoner nursing at the breast of a young woman. For the first time in decades, Moses recalls a similar scene from one of his early films, which led to his dramatic estrangement from his screenwriter, Trigano. Trigano's spirit haunts the retrospective, as the director and actress re-live each film. They question artistic decisions and are surprised at how differently each remembers the past, slowly revealing to each other past reasons for decisions taken at the time. A troubled Moses decides to seek out the elusive Trigano to settle their differences, and to propose a new collaboration. But the reluctant screenwriter demands an outrageous price for this reconciliation: Moses must commit to a deeply disturbing act of atonement. Ultimately, reality and the sublime mingle when Moses has an epiphany, as he nears the end of his quest and the source of his imagination. Searching, witty and trenchant, this work by an internationally respected and original writer is a meditation on the roots of artistic inspiration, the limits and the truth of memory, and the struggle for artistic creation.