

LOIS-ANN YAMANAKA

Behold the Many ★★★★★

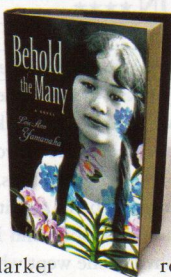
[FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX]

Surf's up in this novel set in paradise—a surf of suffering

Lois-Ann Yamanaka's novel is set in Hawaii, but not the one tourists see. In this Japanese American writer's fictional world, Hawaii is a place of poverty and ethnic mistrust, alcoholism and family dysfunction.

Yamanaka's unflinching depictions of Paradise's darker side have earned her praise—and condemnation. In 1998, the Association for Asian American Studies rescinded an award given for her novel, *Blu's Hanging*, after the Filipino community angrily complained that her portrayal of a Filipino character as a sexual predator perpetuated a racial stereotype.

But this incident didn't change the way Yamanaka approaches her art.



Behold the Many, set in the early 1900s, is the story of Anah, Aki and Leah, three young daughters of a Portuguese father and Japanese mother. The sisters are sent to a Catholic orphanage to be treated for tuberculosis and never see their parents again. Anah survives, only to be haunted—and physically tortured—by the bitter ghosts of her dead sisters. Jealous of Anah's earthly life and terrified of losing her, Aki and Leah resort to any means of preventing their sister from leaving the orphanage.

Behold the Many is not an easy read. Much dialogue is in pidgin English sprinkled with Japanese and Portuguese words. Still, it's well worth the effort. Yamanaka delivers a powerful, three-dimensional portrait of an unfamiliar culture, and she creates a memorable heroine Dickens would've envied. *Don O'Briant*



Lois-Ann Yamanaka



Pearl Cleage

PEARL CLEAGE ★★★★★

Baby Brother's Blues

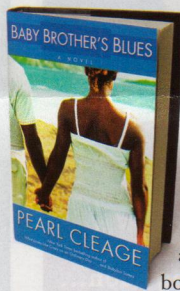
[ONE WORLD/BALLANTINE]

Atlanta haunts these characters as much as they haunt their city

It's tempting to identify an author as "regional" when place figures prominently in her work. Pearl Cleage's latest novel brims with references to Atlanta, her home for more than 30 years, and the city is both an urban and mythical backdrop.

Baby Brother's Blues might easily have come off as a novel about Atlanta—about place. But this is most arrestingly a work of beautifully complex characters. Cleage offers Blue, for example, a former emperor reincarnated to rule his West End neighborhood with a firm hand that sometimes wields gangster justice. General mistakes a stripper's heart-shaped birthmark for a sign from the departed love of his life. Baby Brother is a lost child without a family, and also a hardened army deserter and blackmailer who has sex with men for money. These characters represent Cleage at her best—they're never one "type," and never wholly what you expect.

But the novel has its discontinuities. Cleage renders innermost meditations with such poetic beauty that when characters speak it hardly seems possible that the words come from the same person. Despite the



bumps, it's easy to find an attachment. *Jessica Bremner*

DOMINIC SMITH ★★★

The Mercury Visions of Louis Daguerre [ATRIA BOOKS]

Smith develops an imaginative first novel about Europe and the birth of photography

Dominic Smith's first novel is like the initial photography efforts it portrays: an intriguing if imperfect image of Louis Daguerre, the Parisian theatrical-set painter turned photographer.

This imagined life story of the real Daguerre plays out against an exciting diorama. Set in the mid 1800s, Europe's sclerotic monarchies are clinging to power against a rising class of entrepreneurs and scientists. Daguerre is a bit of both, and he stands in the middle of this class struggle, embodying a great irony of innovation and change—his photographic process revolutionizes art and science, but it also slowly poisons him. Like Daguerre, few of us escape progress unscathed.

Smith wonderfully depicts the messy, lethal process of marshalling sunlight to fix images with mercury vapor. But his storytelling is sloppy at times—the plot predictable, and the book plagued with inconsistencies. I see little clear evidence of an editor here. It's too bad—Smith deserves better. A lens with clearer focus would've sharpened the image of this first novel. *Charles Haddad*

