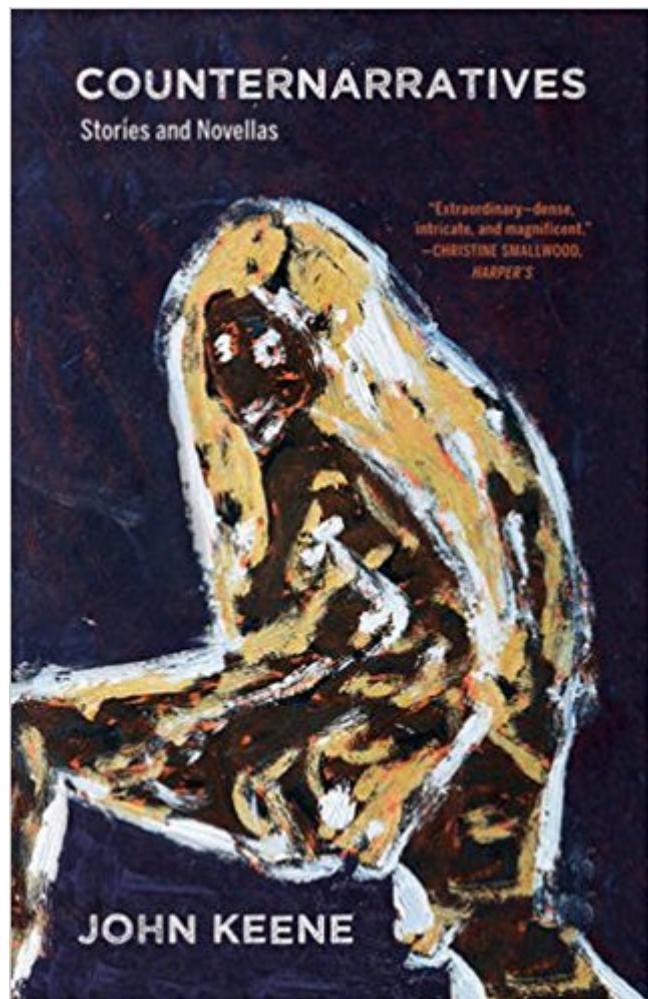


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Counternarratives



Synopsis

Now in paperback, a bewitching collection of stories and novellas that are “suspenseful, thought-provoking, mystical, and haunting” (Publishers Weekly) Ranging from the seventeenth century to the present, and crossing multiple continents, Counternarratives draws upon memoirs, newspaper accounts, detective stories, and interrogation transcripts to create new and strange perspectives on our past and present. “An Outtake” chronicles an escaped slave’s take on liberty and the American Revolution; “The Strange History of Our Lady of the Sorrows” presents a bizarre series of events that unfold in Haiti and a nineteenth-century Kentucky convent; “The Aeronauts” soars between bustling Philadelphia, still-rustic Washington, and the theater of the U. S. Civil War; “Rivers” portrays a free Jim meeting up decades later with his former raftmate Huckleberry Finn; and in “Acrobatique,” the subject of a famous Edgar Degas painting talks back.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Counternarratives is an extraordinary work of literature. John Keene is a dense, intricate, and magnificent writer.” - Christine Smallwood, Harper’s
“Of the scope of William T. Vollmann or Samuel R. Delany, but with a kaleidoscopic intuition all its own, Counternarratives is very easily one of the most vividly imagined and vitally timed books of the year. I haven’t felt so refreshed in quite a while as a reader.” - Blake Butler, Vice
“Keene exerts superb control over his stories, costuming them in the style of Jorge Luis

Borges. Yet he preserves the undercurrent of excitement and pathos that accompanies his characters—persecution and their groping toward freedom.—Sam Sacks, *The Wall Street Journal*

John Keene is a former member of the Dark Room Writers Collective, a graduate fellow of Cave Canem, and the recipient of many awards and fellowships—including a Whiting Foundation Prize for fiction. Keene teaches at Rutgers.

A fascinating exploration of history with a dazzling display of language and innovative forms. Just sorry Keene doesn't write and publish more often.

One of my favorite books of the year. Rich, complex, fascinating, and magical.

John Keene graphically documents the evil of slavery, not only the institution per se, but further in the way the institution generates cascading evil in individual acts. An evil institution provokes, enables, or reveals the evil individual potential in a self-reinforcing vicious circle. The persecuted victim is often the source of moral redemption, as with Carmel in

Gloss and Theodore in *The Aeronauts*, evoking a Christ motif, whilst never legitimising the initial evil. Keene has an amazing gift of recreating the literary style of a particular era and culture, a device which creates affinity with the reader. In *Rivers* he suggests racial prejudice in Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer character. In *Persons and Places* racial prejudice perverts Harvard. All American life is compromised. In the later stories, Keene offers streams of consciousness where prejudice remains a dominant influence. In *The Lions* he shows that evil operates within, as well as between, ethnic groups. It's a powerful, significant, but depressing read. Hopefully humanity can reflect and raise its act, but this will need a deeply spiritual purification.

While at my all-time favorite bookstore, City Lights, I told the lady working the desk I'd never purchased a book there I didn't enjoy. And that goes back decades of shopping with the store. I asked her recommendation, and she said, "If I had to pick one book to keep on a deserted island to read and re-read, it'd be *Counternarratives, Stories and Novellas* by John Keene." On that statement

I made the purchase. I've extended my read into weeks just to savor every page, line, word. Truly it's an intricate masterpiece, and the most eye-opening journey through African-American culture, portraying witchcraft to arts to politics to religion. My absolute highest recommendation, folks. This is literature!

I loved this book. The stories are cerebral & serious but also completely engaging. I was particularly moved by "Rivers," which imagines a years-later meeting between Jim, Huck Finn, & Tom Sawyer. I never quite knew what I was in for when I began each story, and was so delighted & surprised by how they all unfolded. An amazing exploration of race, history, memory, sexuality, and oppression conducted through gorgeous & muscular use of language.

This was a terrific book, beautifully written and surprising. By far the best book I read this year. It's so different from Keene's first book Annotations that it caught me off guard, but in a good way. Expansive in scope, willing to take on centuries of racism in a complex way, with the scope and reach of a 19th century novel, I can't recommend it highly enough.

John Keene has delivered a marvel. The collection puts the accepted narrative in perspective.

A reclamation of history.

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Counternarratives

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