wiggle into noses and blow heads apart as she grew inside a skull, often emerging fully formed like Athena from Zeus.

“The Girl in the Clock” begins small — two girls discussing something bizarre in a classroom — and ends in a huge and mythic space that feels both right and impossible to predict.

At the heart of this collection is the question of the violence and the oppression of women carried out by men — and, occasionally, the ways women, out of self-doubt, out of a feeling of powerlessness, out of politeness, collaborate in this violence. In “Girl in Doubt,” the narrator can’t decide whether she’s being kidnapped or whether she’s on a date, a situation that highlights the lack of agency in either: “I can’t choose my own adventure because I’m not writing this story,” the narrator says — a line which seems to purposefully call attention to the fact that this story is being written, and being written by female authors. At the end of the story, the narrator reveals her potential abductor/date with a “smile so wide my lips crack and bleed,” literally woundling herself in her efforts to appear polite and docile.

Many of these stories — perhaps a third of the collection — take the form of a main narrative with copious footnotes. I found myself assuming (without any way to know for sure) that one author was responsible for the main text and the other for the notes. In some cases, we are presented with a text that would “naturally” have footnotes — a medical or legal text, for example — but mostly the footnotes are attached to what would otherwise be complete and coherent stories without them. The footnotes tend to be mocking, arch, sarcastic. Often the voice seems explicitly gendered male, speaking with an authoritative “we”: “one of our girls escaped from the Girl Zoo… To protect our agenda, surveillance and damage control are needed.”

Rather than an integral part of the story, the footnotes feel like the interruptions of a compulsive, performative, collaborative work that Parkison and Guess are up to here: the danger that a story might not succeed makes it all the more thrilling when so many do.

The strongest stories in this collection wear their collaborative nature on their sleeve in other ways. “Girl in Trouble,” just over a page and a half, is a series of fragments, each formatted as its own paragraph, each ending in a conjunction or some other incomplete syntactical unit:

It was all words, but
Off-reading, you could
A lot of trails back there became

Sometimes the next phrase seems to continue the syntax or thought of the previous phrase, sometimes not. The result is a long, fragmented, ultimately incomplete, jitty sentence, reflecting the anxiety and lack of resolution following an assault: “They say there’s nothing they can do because.”

There are moments in Girl Zoo where the collaboration doesn’t quite click, where one can feel a story struggling with itself, not quite becoming one thing or another. But the best of the stories here have an ability to shape-shift thrillingly from sentence to paragraph and to paragraph: what appeared to be a third-person story turns out to be told by a previously unspoken I; what seemed to be a real life encounter is, in fact, a movie titled Night in Harpy Hotel. There’s a breathlessness and wonder to the prose, a sense of two minds building on each other. Girl Zoo can be uneven in places, but, that to my reading, is in the nature of the performative, collaborative work that Parkison and Guess are up to here: the danger that a story might not succeed makes it all the more thrilling when so many do.

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two thirds of the book – Prabasi’s last four chapters, titled “New York,” “Becoming American,” “Shadows,” and “Coffeehouse Resistance” — are filled with activism and politics fueled by good coffee. The struggle for her family to get jobs is intense. Sarina barely notes her work life: consulting for one nonprofit, then a full-time job with benefits at another nonprofit, and at some point becoming CEO of an international nonprofit water corporation. Elias’s coffee business is key. As he researches everything from buying coffee in Ethiopia to roasting and sales, he knows he needs a difficult-to-attain business visa, or he could be deported. At an earlier spot in the memoir, we learn that Kaldi, an Ethiopian coffee farmer, discovered coffee berries when he noted that they energized his goats. One day the couple finds a vacant shoe store which could be converted into a neighborhood coffee spot. As they brainstorm a name for their nascent coffee company, Sarina coins the word Buunni, after the Amharic words buuni and buunna, which respectively mean brown and coffee. Fast forward: the family celebrates their one-year anniversary in New York by moving into a two-bedroom apartment. Café Buunni is ready to open. Prabasi narrates an incident in front of the store — a passerby addresses their seventeen-year-old Barnard intern as the owner even though Elias and Sarina, older but with darker

The Coffeehouse Resistance signals a new type of memoir with a limited time period and focus.

skins, are present. Prabasi does not mention skin color or race in her narration of this incident, but she conveys the point that racist incidents happen daily even in the darker-skinned neighborhoods of New York.

Café Buunni opens to lines wrapped around the block and begins to clear a profit six months later. The couple creatively addresses issues from coffee bean suppliers to holiday markets in Bryant Park to expanding their retail stores and mail order business.

In the chapter “Becoming American,” Prabasi reports some of the many sacrifices she’s made to become a US citizen and the importance of voting. Elias’s own arrest, and the man following him. Sarina gets a deportation order, and the man shadowing Elias. Even Prabasi’s account suggesting that a national diplomat friend to call off the man shadowing Elias. Deported. The author worries that despite “New York’s” invasive,－prying government, the busyness of life: consulting for one nonprofit, then a full-time job with benefits at another nonprofit, and at some point becoming CEO of an international nonprofit water corporation. Elias’s coffee business is key. As he researches everything from buying coffee in Ethiopia to roasting and sales, he knows he needs a difficult-to-attain business visa, or he could be deported. At an earlier spot in the memoir, we learn that Kaldi, an Ethiopian coffee farmer, discovered coffee berries when he noted that they energized his goats. One day the couple finds a vacant shoe store which could be converted into a neighborhood coffee spot. As they brainstorm a name for their nascent coffee company, Sarina coins the word Buunni, after the Amharic words buuni and buunna, which respectively mean brown and coffee. Fast forward: the family celebrates their one-year anniversary in New York by moving into a two-bedroom apartment. Café Buunni is ready to open. Prabasi narrates an incident in front of the store — a passerby addresses their seventeen-year-old Barnard intern as the owner even though Elias and Sarina, older but with darker

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The Coffeehouse Resistance signals a new type of memoir with a limited time period and focus. It addresses both the challenges of becoming an American and the necessity of being an activist for human rights. Green Writers Press, based in Vermont, publishes books on environmental activism and making “the world a better place.” They use soy-based inks, plant on demand (POD), and use only FSC-certified papers, and donate a percentage of profits to protect the environment.

Prabasi’s website, blog, publisher, and Buunni Coffee all promote her book. Yet this is a small grass roots effort in comparison to larger forces that fuel racism. As I write this, Donald Trump has been tweeting that the four new Democratic congresswomen, three of whom were born in the United States, should “go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came,” as detailed in the New York Times article “Trump Tells Freshman Congresswomen to ‘Go Back’ to the Countries They Came From” by Katie Rogers and Nicholas Fandos, published on July 14, 2019. This is all over the morning radio and TV news, more so than a six-hour electricity blackout affecting over 70,000. This reinforces Prabasi’s point that Trump’s comments regularly receive huge amounts of free publicity. Her book discusses the hurdles that immigrants face, including “skyrocketing rents” which she claims are “partly due to the nefarious dealings between politicians, landlords, and the real-estate industry.”

I’m sure self-conscious that this year I’ve read books by Ece Temelkuran (sixteen plus books, journalist exiled from Turkey), Jennifer Clement (four plus novels, based in Mexico, President of Pen International), and Maaza Mengiste (author of The Shadow King [2019], and Beneath the Lion’s Gaze [2010]) that demonstrate what forceful, brilliant writers women can be — and that few readers have heard of these writers or will ever read their work. Their “fictions” about women living under brutal or oppressive conditions teach readers things they need to know. For example, Jennifer Clement’s novels Gun Love (2018) and Prayers for the Stolen (2012) spell out, using actual, dangerous research, how easily US guns cross into Mexico, and how easily Mexican girls can be kidnapped or stolen. I’m convinced that the networks these women writers build are the beginnings of new ways to help us better understand and organize to change the dangerous world in which we live. Sarina Prabasi’s memoir brings this message home.