

## **Precarity and the gendered migrant body in Nina Bunjevac's Heartless**

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Nina Bunjevac's (2012) first book, published by Conundrum Press, is a collection of illustrations and short comics stories of varying length. The themes, crucial to its coherence, are: the thwarted pursuit of love; marginal subjectivities (Pearson 2014); the representation of a migrant experience that is resolutely embodied and gendered (Precup 2014).

Family memories, cultural specificities and the past 'as a continuing pole of attraction and identification' (Cohen 2010: 71), or indeed query, tend to be prevalent features of migrant and diaspora narratives. In *Heartless*, despite a couple of exceptions (including 'August 1977' that presages Bunjevac's subsequent memoir *Fatherland*), they are conspicuously absent. For Bunjevac's characters, their immediate challenges and struggles in the present seem to override all else. Yet, interestingly, her story-telling maintains strong associations with the past and is richly encoded with cultural memory.

In this paper, I argue that *Heartless* constructs a migrant experience that eschews the diaspora paradigm, and instead draws on a more generic configuration of migrant subjectivity. Such an approach is not without risk. For instance, Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (2006) has faced criticisms for its exclusively male point of view, romanticised depiction of family life and 'ideal immigrant narrative, one in which the main character determinedly overcomes all obstacles to become a self-made man' (Boatright 2010: 271). However, as *Heartless* counters the heteronormative gender myopia of *The Arrival*, it also offers a corrective to the rose-tinted lens of the former.

### **Kurzbiographie**

Nina is Lecturer in Contextual Studies (University of the Arts London) and the author of *Documentary Comics: graphic truth-telling in a skeptical age* (Palgrave Macmillan 2015). Beyond non-fiction comics, her research interests include the formation of social identities, transnational cultural networks, and the politics of collective remembering, representational practices and categorisation.