

The Translation of Dr. Apelles

★★★★★

By David Treuer. Graywolf, \$23.

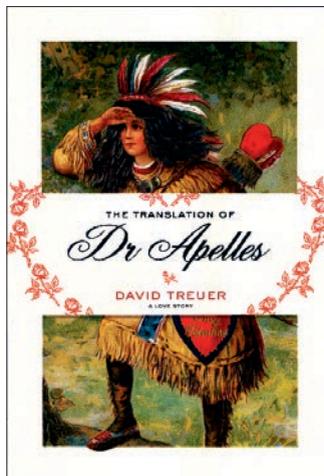
We imagine that Treuer's novel could be a Rorschach test for readers. Is it a "reimagining of the Native American novel," as Graywolf claims, or is it a "love story," as the subtitle contends?

We'd like to stake a third position: It's a rich and contemplative novel that says more about memory than love, though the interaction between the two is the novel's driving force.

Dr. Apelles is a middle-aged Native American and a translator of native texts in his spare time. His day job is as a librarian at RECAP—a warehouse for books that have never been read—toiling beside, but rarely speaking to, the enchanting Campaspe. While at a local archive, he discovers a text that only he can translate. Having found a document for which only he is the exact match throws into relief the loneliness of his own existence. There is no perfect complement for him.

The story alternates between Dr. Apelles's and the one in which he's enmeshed, a fable of two beautiful Indians, both orphaned to wild animals. The boy and girl grow up side by side, and though both poor and subject to numerous disasters, their love for each other trumps their bad luck. As the love between the two Indians in the story grows, so it does between Apelles and Campaspe.

But the "love story" tag on this book is a red herring. In prose that bloats to ostentatious when necessary, and shrinks to a beautifully unadorned specificity otherwise, Treuer is most curious about how our memories shape us, and what it means for those memories to be shared. The pretext for this exploration is Apelles's reluctance to share his past with Campaspe as they



groped their way into love. But as Native Americans, both Treuer and Apelles want to know how to tell a story—how to share memories—without being defined by past myths and caricatures. The love story allows Treuer to explore his concern for a culture that, more than any on this soil, is most reliant on memory, but whose memories have also been plundered by faux folktales. Bits of polemic arise now and again throughout, Treuer is clearly scornful of those who try to prove their "Indianness" by appealing to hackneyed mythologies. His best argument is the book as a whole; a completely new and lovely artifact.

It's a novel that is so intellectually rigorous and emotionally stirring, we've already told everyone who will listen to read it. And now, we're telling you.—Jonathan Messinger

Treuer reads Sunday 24 and Monday 25. See listings.

Creatures of Accident

★★★★★

By Wallace Arthur. FSG, \$25.

Wallace Arthur is a man with some serious inner demons. An affable writer and a scientist with populist urgings, one can almost hear the battle that must have waged in his own head as he wrote his new book on evolution. On the one hand, he wants to write a tome that appeals to the everyman, particularly those who want another arrow in their quiver when it comes to the intelligent-design debate.

And yet, as a professor of zoology at the National University of Ireland in Galway, he knows he must address the arguments of his colleagues. It forces him to get bogged down in a complicated and extended debate before he can really get rolling. Which is a shame, because Arthur's argument is convincing, even when it

lacks velocity. Intelligent-design proponents have long argued that people are too complex—rich in genetic idiosyncrasies and "obvious" sophistications lacking in other species—for humans to have simply evolved by chance. But Arthur lays out a sharp analysis for deprogramming the ID crowd. Complexity in species, he argues, is not the linear evolution as is commonly thought, but something that occurs both vertically (single-cell organisms being "simpler" than those with multiple cells) and horizontally (species adapt to their environs and achieve various levels of complexity within their own line). His model allows Arthur to explain how complexity can happen to creatures "by accident," without guidance from a benevolent geneticist in the sky.—JM

Alligator

★★★★★

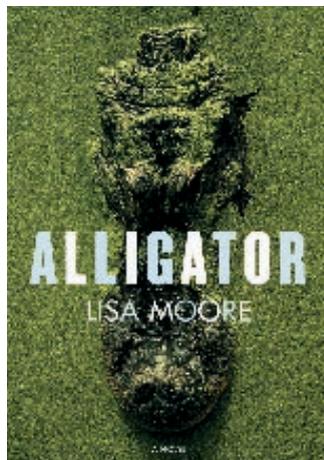
By Lisa Moore. Black Cat, \$12.

Alligators are only incidental to Lisa Moore's novel, but the symbolism of a deceptively slow-moving monster is apt in this tale. *Alligator's* plot creeps along more quickly and desperately than apparent, and there are a lot of murky happenings taking place beneath the surface.

The vividly drawn characters include eccentric, aging filmmaker Madeleine, recently widowed Beverly, teenage ecovandalist Colleen, Russian thug Valentin and disastrously unlucky lonely guy Frank. They're all oddballs: Colleen ritually watches beheadings on the Internet so that the victim is not alone; Madeline is crazed with finishing a film about "everything" before she dies; and Frank is a desperately hardworking hot-dog vendor. Though the plot is nonlinear, with constantly shifting perspectives, Moore inhabits the disparate worlds of her characters elegantly. The challenging structure adeptly builds tension as simultaneous events move the plot along, and there is the building sense that all are heading toward strangely connected climactic events.

Moore's prose is tight, tough and stunningly original; when an ex-lover booty-calls, he craves a "languid tussle." Midway through, we were invested enough in the characters to enter the throes of page-turning headiness, even though we still weren't sure how they were connected.

A prizewinning short-story writer, Moore makes her first turn as a novelist with this book and she succeeds magnificently for the most part. Our only beef came at the end: We were engaged and waiting for the kind of emotional wrap-up that someone like Eugenides delivers, but the last five pages fell flat. We just wish she hadn't taken us nearly to the finish line only to stop short and meander off the track.—Gretchen Kalwinski



Listings

If you want to be listed

Submit information by mail, e-mail (books@timeoutchicago.com) or fax (312-924-9350) to **Jonathan Messinger**. Include details, dates, times, address of venue with cross streets, nearest El station or bus routes, contact information and admission price, if any. **Deadline is 10am on Monday, ten days before publication date.** Incomplete submissions will not be included, and listings information will not be accepted over the phone. Listings are free but, as space is limited, inclusion is not guaranteed.

* Recommended or notable

Thursday 21

* **FREE Amy Guth** *Qumby's*, 1854 W North Ave at Wolcott Ave (773-342-0910). El: Blue to Damen. Bus: 50, 56, 72, 8pm. Guth's new novel, *Three Fallen Women*, concerns just that, three women all on the verge or in the throes of tragedy.

FREE George R.R. Martin *Borders Books & Music*, 830 N Michigan Ave at Pearson St (312-573-0564). El: Red to Chicago. Bus: 66 (24 hrs), 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 151 (24 hrs). 7pm. Tonight's a release party for Martin's *The Ice Dragon*, the fourth installment in his popular fantasy saga, *Song of Ice and Fire*. We don't know much about it, but we know there's a group of warriors called the Faceless Men of Braavos, which is pretty cool.

FREE Sarah Mlynowski *Barnes & Noble*, 1441 W Webster Ave at Clybourn Ave (773-871-3610). El: Red, Brown to Fullerton. Bus: 37 Sedgwick/Ogden, 74 Fullerton. 7:30pm. For some reason, chick-lit seems to divide friends and family as readily as politics. What's the big deal? Some women write some light books sometimes and some people read them. The world keeps spinning. Regardless, Mlynowski will talk about *See Jane Write*, her new guide to writing in the genre.

FREE Powell's North Reading Series *Powell's Bookstore*, 2850 N Lincoln Ave at Diversey Blvd (773-525-8822). El: Brown, Purple (rush hrs) to Diversey. Bus: 11 Lincoln, 76 Diversey. 7pm. Author Peter Markus is the featured guest tonight. Markus is a writer of lyrical short shorts, including the fantastic *Still Lives with Whisky Bottle*. He'll be joined by local writers Lindsay Hunter and Mary Hamilton.

FREE Robert Remini *The Book Stall*, 811 Elm St, Winnetka (847-446-8880). Metra: Union Pacific N to Winnetka. 7pm. UIC professor emeritus and official House of Representatives historian (not to mention National Book Award recipient) Remini returns with *The House*, a mammoth retrospective on our country's wildest legislative body.

* **FREE William Rhoden** *Barnes & Noble*, 1 E Jackson Blvd at State St (312-362-5754). El: Blue, Red to Jackson; Orange, Green, Brown, Pink, Purple (rush hrs) to Adams. 12:30pm. *New York Times* sportswriter Rhoden pulls no punches in his assessment of the modern sports era—replete with white owners and black athletes—in his new book, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*.

* **FREE Ron Rosenbaum** *Newberry Library*, 60 W Walton St between Dearborn and Clark Sts (312-943-9090). El: Red to Chicago. Bus: 22 Clark (24 hrs), 70 Division. 6pm. Cultural critic célèbre Rosenbaum's new book, *The Shakespeare Wars*, isn't what you think. Rather than a rehashing of the old identity donnybrook, Rosenbaum talks to various literary scholars about the Bard, framing a new debate about how Shakespeare is to be read.

Wait, Wait... Don't Tell Me! *Chase Auditorium*, 10 S Dearborn St at Madison St (for tickets, call 312-893-2956 or visit www.waitwaitdonttellme.com).