*Her Body and Other Parties*, review by Areli Alvarez

by Carmen Maria Machado

Graywolf

Carmen Maria Machado is the author of *Her Body and Other Parties*, a collection of stories that intertwines fantasy with commentary on the moral and social injustices that women have suffered throughout time. Machado’s debut, *Her Body and Other Parties* was a finalist for the 2017 National Book Award for fiction.

Whether it’s a plague to end all of humanity, doppelgängers, fading women, women who are held together by a ribbon or even women who can hear the thoughts of porn stars; all these stories have one thing in common, how women are viewed by others.

In “Eight Bites,” the main character is judged by herself, her family, and her neighboring community because of the way she looks. She doesn’t fit in because she has a couple of extra pounds. This mirrors the way women in society are perceived today: if not skinny and fit, they are not “perfect,” but instead are viewed as imperfect and undesirable. The main character does not look like the women around her, more specifically her physically “perfect” sisters; therefore, she is demoralized and outcasted. She solves her problem surgically, just as everyone else has, and herself becomes perfect. The story doesn’t stop there: Machado’s character’s lost weight becomes a ghost, literally, and her other half hovers over her, seeking revenge, enraged that she was killed.

The keen but frustrating desire to like everybody else is a reoccurring issue in the stories, one Machado successfully addresses in the form of folklore. In “Especially Heinous,” the doppelgängers in the story illustrate the unflawed versions of the main characters and are held in praise by society. But something seems off about them: like robots, there are no emotions or originality to them: “Benson is holding her gun in her hand. She unloads three bullets into each of them, not expecting much. They keep moving as if nothing were happening.”

In “Real Women have Bodies,” women throughout the world begin to fade away, slowly at first and then all at once, as if they were never there. The main character has a brief interaction with two men, and the men say that a fading woman is a tainted woman. If a woman has no body, after all, what else can she be good for? Although this conversation is brief, the dialogue underscores the deep satire that Machado uses throughout the collection.

A delicate thing, a woman’s body: both a gift and a burden, just like the ribbons shared by the women in the startling story “The Husband Stitch.” The main character, like all the other women in the story, has a ribbon she is born with, not to be touched or taken off. But curiosity and temptation gets the best of her (entitled) husband, forever changing the bond they’ve shared. Again, Machado understands and empathizes with issues women have faced and are still facing, and she presents them through her exceptionally bizarre stories.

*Her Body and Other Parties* is a thrilling collection, a page-turner all the way. Women who pick up this book will feel a sense of empowerment., as these stories addressing far-too age-old issues in a way that is new, strange, and wonderful.