

# Draining the Sea

*Draining the Sea* is a striking literary exploration of the effects of the Armenian Genocide of 1915, the Guatemalan civil conflict of the 1980s, and present-day Los Angeles.

Marcom sifts through the incongruities of history and memory as the story unfurls inside the mind of a man who spends his days driving the streets of Los Angeles, racked by visions of the Guatemalan civil war and, in particular, of a beautiful young woman who died violently in it. He was in love with her but, it seems, may have played a role in her death. He also is very aware of the United States' complicity in the horrors of that conflict, further twisting his anguish. And in his mind, her fate resonates with his own childhood as the grandson of survivors of the Armenian Genocide.

Micheline Aharonian Marcom, herself descended from Armenian Genocide survivors, has always been haunted by the long-term effects of atrocity. Now, in *Draining the Sea*, Marcom's work culminates in a darkly lyrical novel that offers a powerful testament about the far-reaching effects of political brutality.

## Reviews

"A florid stream of consciousness...Marcom weaves references and imagery from religion, mythology and Guatemalan, Armenian and American history, and indicts the powers-that-be for turning a blind eye toward the slaughter of indigenous people. The novel's evocative imagery and explicit prose can move as well as chill."—***Publisher's Weekly***

"She is among a growing number of contemporary novelists writing about the inhumane landscape of genocide...*Draining the Sea* is a noble effort."—***Los Angeles Times***

"Intensely felt."—***The Seattle Times***

"Marcom's language is always fervent, whether gorgeous or foul."—***Kirkus Reviews***

"Marcom's powerful prose and the parallels she draws between genocide all across the world—be it the Armenian genocide or the Guatemalan civil war—are shocking and will hopefully, have readers sit up and take notice. Marcom has admitted that while literature might not be able to redeem suffering, it can at least “make something beautiful out of something awful and atrocious.”—***Mostly Fiction Book Reviews***

"In her distinctive voice that brilliantly represents the bleak and hallucinatory world of her characters, the story unfolds through the “unhistories” of humanity, reaching us as though from

an underworld of torture. Stylistically Marcom's prose reenacts trauma through non-linearity, compulsive repetition and negation. Language is deliberately broken down....The essaying of such sordid things is difficult, yet Marcom's book is articulate and relentless in its search for optimism and beauty." ***–Review of Contemporary Fiction***

## Excerpt

He is a soldier and he is made to carry a dog on his back from the metropolis up into the mountains of your nation and mine and into pity and the places without roads or pity carries the dog on his back like a good soldier and the young bitch, he loves her, and the dog does not cry, she is a bitch who understands that the nation is not a whim or a man's desire to kill but, rather, it is the tooth we live by like the god's eye that is printed on the dollar and all-seeing—(*I am coming as I write this, Marta—my semen spills onto the page; this my American history of the dead half-deads the half-lived you and me*). I am this soldier boy as he walks up the mountain paths; he is an Indian in a book I am reading (*The Bernal Díaz Chronicles*) of conquest and in another book his name is . His mother discards him at six and his father discards him after his semen ejaculates into the mother's cunt. His father's ecstasy cannot, however, be denied and perhaps it is the best thing about the boy; it is, darling, what I love about him, what I refuse to deny for any newspaper-man or politician's academic pleasures. He climbs the miles into the Cuchumatán Mountains from Guatemala City with his bitch on his shoulders; she is young, no more than a year perhaps, pied and four-legged; at the tip of each ear there is a patch of white as if a sign from god he thinks: God, he thinks, has given him this trial. He has joined the Kaibiles to save the patria: (*from?*): from the communists the atheists the dogs unbelievers and killers; those who would destroy the beautiful fatherland; because he is hungry; shoeless and cold in the streets of the capital; and because: the army takes him by force from the streets on a cold morning in January, 1979. He walks and he is beaten with sticks and clubs as he walks up these mountain paths—move it mother-fuckers pussy-fuckers faggot fuckers Indian-dogs and fuckers: move!: (and yes, darling, he is your killer coming up the mountain side—your brother's killer, he'll rape the young girls and her friends; he'll unlive what you love, your childhood will burn in him, by him, the village desecrated and decimated in fire—and is his story blinded then? should we sacrifice him to the gods of the Army? to amoral and a moral character? *continue*:) he is walking and they are not allowed to drink the water and the dog begins her moaning, she cries to him and her bound legs and she is suffering and he shoves his fingers inside her mouth, her sex, and he thinks that she will be his domestic pet, his companion in the mountains, and so he whispers to her as they make their way up the mountains—that he will love her, that he can care for her, that his mother did not love him, that his father's ecstasy was not enough for the boy who did not own shoes until taken into the Army at fifteen, and that now his boots pinch his feet but that he is proud of the pinching, the blistered heels and crippled toes—he loves them like he could have loved a mother and an ecstatic father—and he walks higher and higher into the mountains, up to the tierra fría, and into the Ixil Area—your killer comes to you Marta; he approaches your village, although he is years from you still, still untrained, not-blooded, he would like to love the dog on his back and tells her more and more of his history and he is a hungry man and he is angry that he has been hungry for this lifetime and a filled belly is not familiar to him, like shod feet and his toes are stones in these boots and warmth and sugary sweets at the hours of the day and at nights and without payment of any kind—he walks, climbs, and he is sweating, pays in exertion for this heat and the bitch is quieter now, she mourns moans, she knows what awaits them at the apogee, but he insists that

he will love her always and she tells him that he is blind, that a soldier must earn his pay, and he does not listen to her as they walk, he climbs and she held to his back, pisses down his spine and into time and into his trousers, down his legs, and the boots are pissed and he imagines that all good soldiers have their dogs for comfort like a shepherd will have his (and he has no flock this soldier boy; unshod, unfilled in his belly, and a mother who sold him for two pounds of maize when he was six years old to the plantation owners on the coast in Oriente and): your killer is a lonely man,—Marta; he could be lonelier than me—his hunger is like fear. And it is not for forgiveness or atonement or a confession, but simply that we can say: Yes, I know it—my killer was a lonely man; a boy whose belly was never filled-to; a boy who thought that despair was a shirt for everyday use, his only wardrobe inside a paper bag. And when the Lieutenant tells them how they must do it, they arrive at the camp in the mountains and they are tired and hungry and happy to have arrived! and each recruit takes the dog from his shoulder and rubs his aching shoulders and the sweat and dog piss has wetted his shirt through and each recruit has not had anything to drink for many hours and the cold winds in the mountains come down the mountains and the hot sweat is fast cold and they want: ‘Now you must do it, boys: do it quickly,’ the Lieutenant says to them, barks it out, like a dog. And each boy, who is becoming the good soldier, lifts the dog from the ground and each boy who is a recruit for the fatherland and each boy must prove must make himself into this defender of faith of god of roads of time’s required acts; the nation; now, the Lieutenant says to them, you must do it (or, as usual, the boy’s fate will be the dog’s). And the Lieutenant raises his pistol and knife, this Army man who has been a man for many years and (who remembers when his friends from school punched his face and he vomited and how his mother threw her shoes across the room at him, a coward, and the hands of the father holding the wide stick above his head, and he will laugh when these boys twist the necks of the girls) he orders them: with your bare hands!, and their girls look into their eyes, thanking them, offering them this blood and meat and all of the girls’ blood and viscera is placed into a bowl, as if in a church ceremony, and the boys line up like confessors and (do it or we’ll kill you He says): they drink the blood the body of their girls; they drink the vomit of the boy in front of them also. They are in line and the boy whose vomit has mixed-in with the blood and viscera is ordered to rejoin the line and in the queue he waits; he drinks again: blood is soup today, they say, and love is like soup in the Cuchumatán Mountains. The new recruits are made to drink and eat their girls, each other’s bile, until they manage to keep it inside their new bodies.