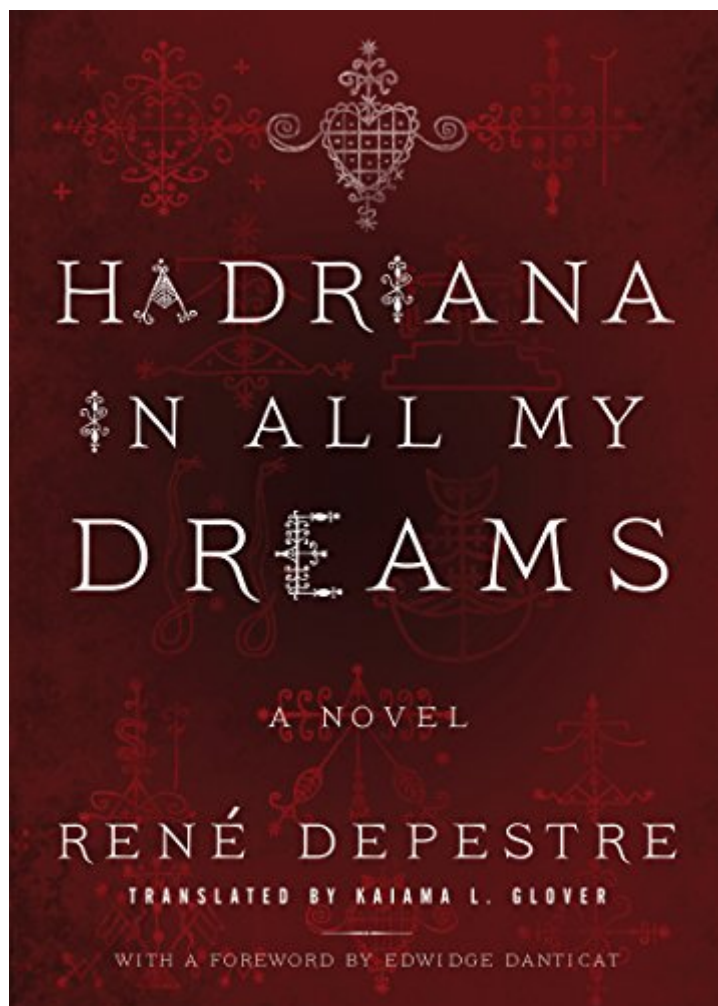


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# Hadriana In All My Dreams



## Synopsis

Included in "10 Best New Books to Read This May," Chicago Review of Books. "Originally published in 1988 and written by one of Haiti's seminal authors, still with us at age 90, this vibrant, erotically charged work shows how humans counter fear—particularly the fear of death—in varied more or less magical ways, even as it paints a fresh and enticing picture of Haitian culture. . . . Luscious and affirmative reading, this is work both the serious-minded and the lighthearted can enjoy." —Library Journal, Starred review "Depestre presents a rich and nuanced exploration of large and significant themes expertly couched in one fantastical, expertly translated tale." —Booklist, Starred review "One-of-a-kind...[A] ribald, free-wheeling magical-realist novel, first published in 1988 and newly, engagingly translated by Glover. . . . An icon of Haitian literature serves up a hotblooded, rib-ticking, warmhearted mélange of ghost story, cultural inquiry, folk art, and vifritable l'amour." —Kirkus Reviews, Starred review "The sights and sounds of Haiti's vibrant carnival season invigorate this tale of vodou and Haitian culture. . . . The truth of Hadriana's fate proves more poignant than horrifying, but in Depestre's hands, this incident is a touchstone of a culture in which distinctions between the empirical and spiritual are obscured, and whose traditional celebrations and beliefs introduce an element of the mythic into the everyday. Eroticism and humor course through his narrative. Depestre's intimacy with his subject matter and his familiarity with the people he portrays—the story is set in his hometown, at the time when he was 12 years old—give readers an insider's look at Jacmelian culture." —Publishers Weekly "For the first time, this slim and beguiling novel about the mysterious death and possible zombification of a young woman on her wedding day has been translated into English...With its lyrical commentary on the origins of myth, this mesmeric and frequently erotic work transcends its focus on a young woman to address the complexities of race, class and religion." —Shelf Awareness for Readers, Starred Review With a foreword by Edwidge Danticat. Translated from the French by Kaiama L. Glover. *Hadriana in All My Dreams*, winner of the prestigious Prix Renaudot, takes place primarily during Carnival in 1938 in the Haitian village of Jacmel. A beautiful young French woman, Hadriana, is about to marry a Haitian boy from a prominent family. But on the morning of the wedding, Hadriana drinks a mysterious potion and collapses at the altar. Transformed into a zombie, her wedding becomes her funeral. She is buried by the town, revived by an evil sorcerer, and then disappears into popular legend. Set against a backdrop of magic and eroticism, and recounted with delirious humor, the novel raises universal questions about race and sexuality. The reader comes away enchanted by the marvelous reality of Haiti's Vodou culture and

convinced of Depestre's lusty claim that all beings—even the undead ones—have a right to happiness and true love. From the introduction by Edwidge Danticat: Despestre offers us the kind of tale we rarely get in the hundreds of zombie stories featuring Haitians, stories set both inside and outside of Haiti. In *Hadriana in All My Dreams* we get both langaj—the secret language of Haitian Vodou—as well as the type of descriptive, elegiac, erotic, and satirical language, and the artistic license needed to create this most nuanced and powerful novel. Kaiama L. Glover is an associate professor of French and Africana Studies at Barnard College, Columbia University. She is the author of *Haiti Unbound: A Spiralist Challenge to the Postcolonial Canon*, coeditor of *Yale French Studies' Revisiting Marie Vieux-Chauvet: Paradoxes of Postcolonial Feminine* (issue no. 128), and translator of Frenkÿtienne's *Ready to Burst* and Marie Vieux-Chauvet's *Dance on the Volcano*. She has received awards from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Mellon...

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## Customer Reviews

I found it hard to tear myself away from this tale of love and voodoo. So glad I recommended it!

Several years ago, I was doing research on Haitian Vodou and was surprised to find so little authentic material out there. Only two sources provided glimpses into Vodou's mysterious beliefs and practices – Zora Neal Hurston's *Tell My Horse* and filmmaker Maya Deren's documentary, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*. Both Hurston and Deren spent considerable time in small Haitian communities, gaining the trust of the locals, in order to gain unprecedented access to rites and ceremonies that outsiders normally never see. I've never encountered any fiction that has done justice to this misunderstood religion; it all tends to focus on the more sensationalistic elements (e.g, ritual animal sacrifice and zombies), but Rene Depestre's amazing *Hadriana In All My Dreams* rectifies that. Briefly, it tells the story of a beautiful and much beloved young French woman who dies at the altar on her wedding day, in front of the entire Haitian village of Jacmel. But she isn't truly dead. She has been turned into a zombie by an evil sorcerer who wants her for his own. The tale unfolds through the eyes of a teenaged boy who is a confidant and secret admirer of Hadriana, as well as Hadriana herself, who recounts her horrific experience of being trapped in a seemingly lifeless body while the townsfolk and her family argue over her funeral rites. While this might all sound like the stuff of horror fiction, Depestre's novel is actually filled with ribald humor, steamy sexuality and ultimately, romance. The funeral itself, which coincides with the village's annual carnival, is chockful of glorious details of Haitian Vodou traditions and ceremony. It crackles with the fire of the genuine. It does not shy away from things that Westerners might view as primitive or naïve, while at the same time, it does not sensationalize them. If anything, the story exudes a warmth and familiarity that could only come from a native son of Haiti. I am so glad I was introduced to this little gem. I went in looking for an education and left with a love story that was by turns fanciful, comical, suspenseful and thoroughly engaging.

Translated from French, *Hadriana In All My Dreams* is a tale of zombies and romance, Voodoo and eroticism in Haiti in the late 1930's. The narrator tells the tale of Hadriana and others who come into contact with supernatural forces, and the beliefs of the Haitians in the city of Jacmel. Depestre does a good job contrasting Voodoo and Catholicism and the relation of the native islanders to Hadriana and her family, a wealthy white family from France. Eroticism plays a significant part of the tale, an aspect of Voodoo I was unaware of. Some of the language used related to the erotic details seemed a little off or forced, so it was helpful to read to interpreter's notes at the end where she says "figuring out how to translate Depestre's twenty or so terms for human genitalia indeed had me

stretching the limits of the English language" to make me forgive some of the terms used that seemed unusual and at times, laughable. The author paints a vivid picture of Haiti and the island and its culture are one the centerpieces of this novel and I feel handled very well. The story itself bogs down in the middle- there is a lack of suspense at points, I feel - without giving much away, I will only say certain outcomes seemed inevitable but a number of pages were spent where the tale didn't seem to get any closer to resolution. Overall, the descriptions of Haiti, the contrast between Voodoo and Catholicism as well as the wealthy white French family and their relations to the Haitians made this a good read and make me interested to seek out more of Depestre's work. Thanks to the publisher Akashic Books for the advance reading copy.

Depestre's novel is a beautiful depiction of Haitian culture, the likes of which I had never been exposed to. The story of Hadriana Siloe's tragic death and the following complications between her family's Catholic faith and the town of Jacmel's Vodoo traditions sets up a wonderful story of cultural melding, communal loss of a beloved child of the town, and enduring love. Patrick, the narrator and close friend of Hadriana, takes the audience through the tumultuous events leading up to Hadriana's wedding, death, and zombification while ever lamenting the loss of his beloved. The novel is riveting, inspiring, and absolutely fascinating.

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