

head, hummed and sang their songs, songs too fast for any human ear to hear, songs that came to her like sharp kisses in the wind."

The author's note begins: "Teresa Urrea was a real person." Urrea's great grandfather was Tomás's first cousin. Teresa's sermons are based on notes taken by the journalist Lauro Aguirre and saved on microfilm, available "if you know a helpful librarian." Urrea writes that the book took more than 20 years "of fieldwork, research, travel and interviews." He is the author of *The Devil's Highway* (2004 Lannan Literary Award winner for nonfiction), a poet, novelist and the winner of numerous awards. If *Hummingbird* is your introduction to this gifted writer, be glad you've found him.

— Lois Wadsworth

SOULFUL HOUSE

Set This House in Order: A Romance of Souls by Matt Ruff. HarperCollins, 2003. Paperback, \$14.95. A New York Times Notable Book, 2003.

Matt Ruff is a self-described obsessive-personality. His novel is an intricately constructed tale of Andy Gage, a man with multiple personalities. *Set This House In Order* carries the reader through Andy's medicated fogs, alternating between sudden periods of "lost time," semi-stability and his valiant attempt to bring order to his multiple selves.

The story is set in a dreary Washington town where Andy has built an odd but controlled life for himself. Andy works for a virtual reality software company, and ultimately he discovers his own life to be in a permanent state of virtual reality.

With a little help, Andy has kept his mind (or house) running relatively smoothly. The personalities who share control of his body may be women or men, an artist or a black belt, a hormone-driven teenager or a young child. Each personality understands that the mental health of the body depends on their collective cooperation. At first this idea made my head spin, but by the end of the novel

Ruff has persuaded me of this technique for treating multiple personality disorder is effective.

All is well until Andy's boss convinces him to help another person with MPD sort through and organize her own house. In the process of understanding Penny's many souls, Andy's carefully built construction crumbles, exposing unknown facets of his disorder. I appreciate the novel's exploration of the unique purposes of the many personalities of Andy and Penny's bodies.

In this third novel, Ruff entertains and educates by deconstructing painful childhoods and exploring several theories about MPD. The characters' challenges to be normal left me more compassionate and understanding for people often simply labeled "mentally disturbed." — Danica Stiles

crime fiction

VAMPIRE KILLER

Hellsing by Kohta Hirano. Dark Horse Manga. Paperback, \$13.95

Manga — Japanese comic books, right? Family: Art. Genus: Manga. Species: Sundry.

Some say it's not Art. Disregard this sphincter-constricted viewpoint. Manga, in its native habitat, is sought by all — young and old, cops, salarymen and housewives. Yes, verified adults read manga. While in America manga's not embraced at that level, it has nonetheless achieved a place in our culture. Walk into any mainstream corporate

book vendor. Behold the wall, the section, and the pack of mangaphiles circling rows of slim volumes dressed endlessly pleasing by its hardworking artists. No genre or subject goes untouched.

To introduce the creature, take *Hellsing*, Kohta Hirano's serialized tale of a clandestine English organization that defends Queen and country from the undead freaks of the world.

The Hellsing organization's chief weapon against the undead came up from the basement in the form of barely tamed, supremely enhanced vampire Alucard. This vampire derives joy of employment in boring .454 Cassul rounds through freak flesh. Dark, bloody and, oh, just a tweege gothy, *Hellsing* dances along razor edges with witty dialogue, black humor, bold artwork and a supporting cast of characters every bit as quirked as Alucard. — Jenn Bazurto



QUIRKY CHARACTERS

With No One as Witness by Elizabeth George. HarperCollins, 2005. Hardcover, \$26.95.

Prepare for a marathon reading weekend when you start Elizabeth George's latest crime story. That's what I did, even though sometimes I am reluctant to take on a thriller because they disturb me too much. Believe me, this one is disturbing.

The great thing about George's storytelling is the quirkiness of her characters. They are frustrating, irritating and lonely. Rarely does anyone appear entirely happy; just like real life. And like real life, they muddle through their life choices, even though those choices may not be so great.

George leads us through a number of layers, each interacting with the other. Set in London, the novel chronicles New Scotland Yard's search for a serial killer of 12- and 13-year-old boys. Done in a ritualistic manner, the killings fall under the jurisdiction of both Scotland Yard and the city's homicide department, and bumbling politics involve all. The NSY team includes Barbara, the titled supervisor; Detective Lynley; and Winston Nkaka, a token black man the big honchos trot out after publicity of the first three murders, which involved black or mixed-race boys, is largely swept under the rug. But when a white boy is killed, racism rears its ugly head and the PR people begin to panic.

The big wigs want a quick solution and decide to allow the press access to the crime team. Terrible consequences arise from that decision. George's descriptions of the London shops, neighborhoods, parks and vicinity put the reader smack in the middle of the scene. In the end, the characters are very human. — Geneva Miller

NASHVILLE

Blood of Angels by Reed Arvin. HarperCollins, 2005. Hardcover, \$16.95.

As I review this novel that delves into racial tension in Nashville, Tennessee, across the Atlantic, France is on fire. Art and life imitate each other, often with lethal realities.

Blood of Angels, a tale of an assistant district attorney challenged by a different version of the past and edgy about a disquieting future, is a timely example.

Those who avoid legal-beagle fiction by John Grisham and Portland's Philip Margolin or dodge the second half of TV's "Law and Order" when it shifts from the gritty streets to an overheated courtroom are now thinking: "I'll pass."

But I'd like to plead that this well-crafted, action-packed thriller spends little time in

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