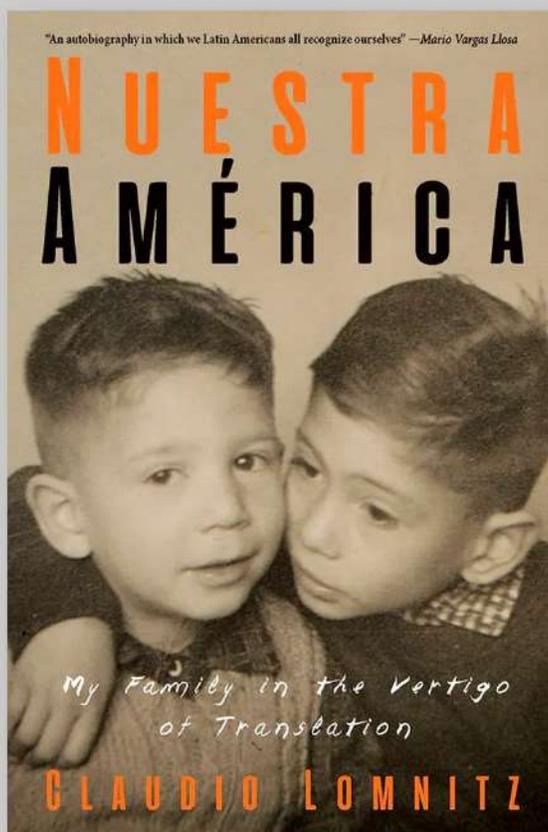


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## BRIEFLY NOTED

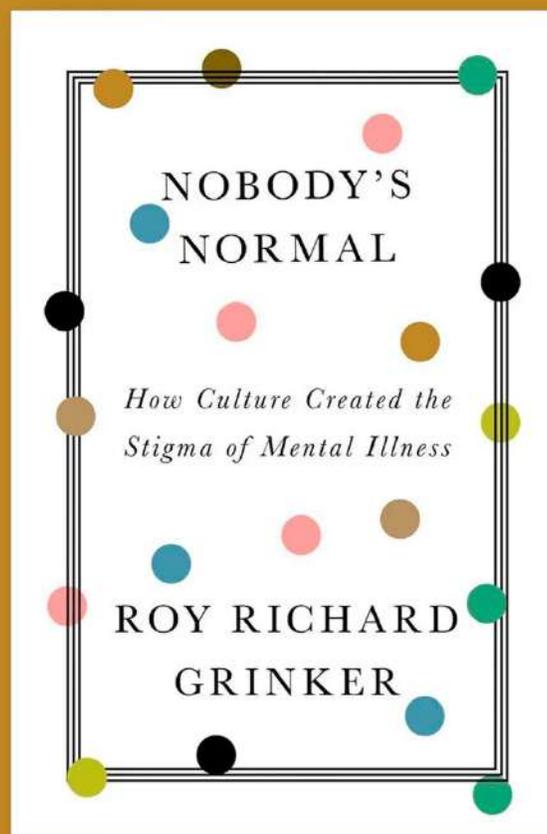
*“Nuestra América,” “Nobody’s Normal,” “Bina,” and “Popular Longing.”*

February 22, 2021



**Nuestra América**, by Claudio Lomnitz (Other Press). In the early nineteen-twenties, Lomnitz’s grandparents fled Eastern Europe for South America, seeking refuge from anti-Semitism. In the next

half century, his family moved among Peru, Colombia, France, Romania, Israel, Chile, and Mexico. In Peru, Lomnitz's grandparents became part of the Marxist-Jewish vanguard; returning to Romania in the nineteen-thirties, they spent two years trying to persuade Jews to leave. In the wake of mass displacement, a family history like this one, Lomnitz writes, "is no longer an aristocratic incantation of the glories of a lineage." It is a means of confronting and redefining the concepts of homeland, belonging, and history.



**Nobody's Normal**, by Roy Richard Grinker (Norton). This study, by a cultural anthropologist who comes from a long line of accomplished psychiatrists, traces the relationship between mental illness and stigma. In the sixties, the author's father and grandfather worked together to critique the conformity-obsessed pursuit of "normality," which they believed to be detrimental to mental health. The author's own research both challenges and complements their ideas. He celebrates neurodiversity, a movement that acknowledges cognitive differences as natural, and he takes on modern

medicalization, which attempts to explain “previously nonmedical problems” scientifically. Even if we look to biology to explain mental phenomena, he writes, “the meanings of those conditions will still be of our making.”



***Bina***, by *Anakana Schofield* (*New York Review Books*). This forceful novel is narrated by the title character, a seventy-four-year-old woman who lives in the Irish countryside. She contends with the lingering presence of an abusive partner, the death of her closest friend, and her growing involvement with a clandestine group that helps people to die by suicide. At once acerbic and compassionate, she offers readers a litany of admonitions based on experience, such as “Don’t make a decision if the tea does not taste right.” As her elliptical narrative winds through footnotes, redacted names, and lyrical paragraphs resembling prose poetry, her ornery recollections coalesce into a powerful chorus, exhorting readers to “Sit down / Shut up / And if the woman is talking, listen.”



**Popular Longing**, by *Natalie Shapero (Copper Canyon)*. The intersections and disjunctions of art and money, war and desire, labor and pleasure, animate this incisive poetry collection. With a deadpan, surrealistic posture, Shapero investigates the juxtapositions and banalities that define contemporary existence. She considers the notion of transcendence in a world driven by consumerism. In a sonnet sequence, she muses over the value of art and the implications of its destruction. By examining the lenses of nostalgia, appraisal, and surveillance, these poems also interrogate the power dynamics of looking. “We would like to / confirm that everyone is recognized in death,” Shapero writes. “Unseen as we are in this life, it’s all we have.”

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