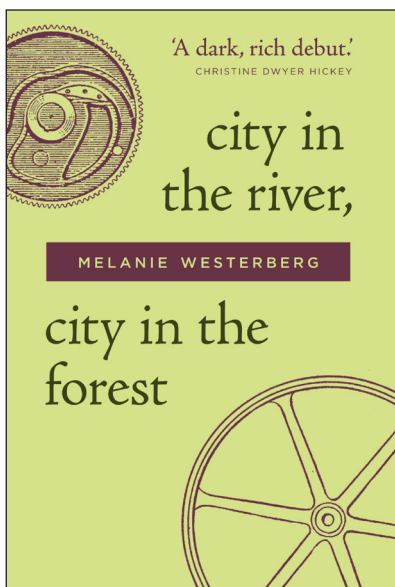


## PRESS RELEASE

# *City in the River, City in the Forest*

Melanie Westerberg

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In a country she chose for 'its landscapes and lax visa-extension policies', Mary is a tour guide at a remote lodge in the Amazon. There she meets Héctor, who sneaks into her hammock late at night and leaves tiny gifts at her door, tempting her to stay longer than she'd planned. But then she begins to see fires on uninhabited land, hear gunshots, cross suspicious strangers in the dead of night. She doesn't know if it's the start of another undeclared civil war or simply retribution on the lodge owner, whose husband had fought with the rebels before disappearing for a decade. When he reappears, Mary is forced to confront the reality of her situation and decide where her loyalties lie.

In this stunning debut work, we are swept up in an exotic world, its familiar cruelty saturated with beauty. Finally, we are left only with a lingering taste of the moments in our own lives when we were forced to choose between joy and restraint, myth and logic.

'A dark, rich debut. Melanie Westerberg is a writer to watch.'

—Christine Dwyer Hickey, author of *Tatty*

'Melanie Westerberg has written a wondrous first book. The writing is unique and brave, and the story is as engaging as it is harrowing. It's the sort of rare, completely original book I am always looking for and never finding.'

—Peter Orner, author of *The Second Coming of Mavala Shikongo*

**MELANIE WESTERBERG** was born in Iowa in 1978. She began submitting her short stories to literary journals while still in school but, fortunately, none were published until much later. She was the first person in her family to pursue university education, and earned a BA in English from the University of Iowa while working a series of jobs, her favourite of which was in the university library.



In 1999, she spent the summer in Dublin studying creative writing and Irish literature at Trinity College. The weekends she spent travelling around Ireland by herself, and a week spent alone in Scotland at the end of the program set in motion an obsession with independent travel that continues to this day. Since then, she has spent time in Argentina, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Peru, and Turkey, as well as Canada and much of the US.

A year after graduating, she and her partner moved to San Francisco, California. She worked as a ticket-seller for a satirical musical revue and helped organise the visual arts component of Ladyfest Bay Area, a four-day festival showcasing women's involvement in political activism and the arts. Later, she found a job selling tickets at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, a gallery, cinema, and theatre.

She attended California College of the Arts in San Francisco and in 2004 received her master's degree in writing. Between her writing courses, she also learned letterpress printing, bookmaking, and hand-weaving, all of which she continues to write about.

Melanie and her partner moved to Austin, Texas, in 2006. She finally stopped selling tickets and now works as a legal editor for a nonpartisan state agency serving the Texas Legislature, a job that nurtures her fascination with politics and affords her more time to write, travel, and knit than she could have hoped for.

She credits her trip to Peru in 2007, and most notably to the Peruvian Amazon, as early inspiration for *City in the River*, *City in the Forest*, as much for that country's landscapes and people as for the Latin American history, sociology, and literature she has continued to study since then. In 2008, she was awarded a writer's residency at Arctcroft in rural Kentucky, where she began work on her novella.

Melanie Westerberg's short stories have appeared in *Mid-American Review*, *Third Coast*, *Torpedo*, and the *Best New American Voices 2006* anthology, edited by Jane Smiley. Her work has been translated into Czech for *RozRazil Revue*, and she was twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize. *City in the River*, *City in the Forest* is her first longer work.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**, or to arrange an interview with the author, please contact Marsha Swan at [info@hagsheadpress.com](mailto:info@hagsheadpress.com) or 087 6591491.

Author photographs and the cover are available to download as high-resolution jpegs at:

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