



The Woman Who Lost Her Soul

By Bob Shacochis

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Renowned through four award-winning books for his gritty and revelatory visions of the Caribbean, Bob Shacochis returns to occupied Haiti in *The Woman Who Lost Her Soul* before sweeping across time and continents to unravel tangled knots of romance, espionage, and vengeance. In riveting prose, Shacochis builds a complex and disturbing story about the coming of age of America in a pre-9/11 world.

When humanitarian lawyer Tom Harrington travels to Haiti to investigate the murder of a beautiful and seductive photojournalist, he is confronted with a dangerous landscape riddled with poverty, corruption, and voodoo. It's the late 1990s, a time of brutal guerrilla warfare and civilian kidnappings, and everyone has secrets. The journalist, whom he knew years before as Jackie Scott, had a bigger investment in Haiti than it seemed, and to make sense of her death, Tom must plunge back into a thorny past and his complicated ties to both Jackie and Eville Burnette, a member of Special Forces who has been assigned to protect her.

From the violent, bandit-dominated terrain of World War II Dubrovnik to the exquisitely rendered Istanbul in the 1980s, Shacochis brandishes Jackie's shadowy family history with daring agility. Caught between her first love and the unsavory attentions of her father—an elite spy and quintessential Cold War warrior pressuring his daughter to follow in his footsteps—seventeen-year-old Jackie hatches a desperate escape plan that puts her on course to becoming the soulless woman Tom equally feared and desired.

Set over fifty years and in four countries backdropped by different wars, *The Woman Who Lost Her Soul* is a magnum opus that brings to life, through the mystique and allure of history, an intricate portrait of catastrophic events that led up to the war on terror and the America we are today.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

An Amazon Best Book of the Month, September 2013: In this breathtakingly ambitious work, spanning the globe and many decades, Shacochis has crafted a (mostly) fictional backstory to 9/11, tracing the ancient hatreds that continue to infect history. At the story's core is Jackie Smith (aka Renee Gardner, aka Dottie Chambers), posing as a photojournalist in late-1990s Haiti, a feral and dangerous place--where Jackie fits right in. Beautiful, heedless, and damaged, Jackie/Renee/Dottie is a man-eater: "Hers would be a slavish cult of eager youth and wicked men." Among those who fall under her spell are the earnest humanitarian lawyer Tom Harrington and the malleable gung-ho Special Forces operative Eville Burnette, not to mention her Croatian-turned-America father, whose inappropriate attentions add a creepy touch. Lording above all is a group of golf buddies, shadowy puppet masters from the "acronymic spawn" of military and intelligence agencies, whom Shacochis hilariously calls "phalocrats"--"little guys with big d**ks, or at least big d**k syndrome." From Haitian voodoo dances to World War II Croatia to the first inklings of a group of Arab extremists known as "The Base," this is a spy thriller engorged into a brilliant reflection on "the cult of millennial revenge." Inevitably, there will be Graham Greene and Joseph Conrad comparisons. I'd add two Davids to the mix: Lynch and Cronenberg. And though it's a brick of a book, it rarely slows: transfixing and magical; sexy and lurid; propulsive and unpredictable and quite troubling. Some of the set pieces are unceasingly good, and every line is crafted with obsessive care--no small feat in a 700-page book. Awards judges? Take notice. --*Neal Thompson*

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. In Shacochis's powerful novel of sex, lies, and American foreign policy, 1990s Haiti, Nazi-occupied Croatia, and Cold War-era Istanbul are shown as places where people are pulled into a vortex of personal and political destruction. After leaving Haiti's Truth Commission, lawyer Tom Harrington returns to Florida and family routine until a private investigator asks him to help a client accused of murdering his wife, Renee Gardner, whom Harrington knew in Haiti as Jackie Scott. Harrington once took Jackie to a voodoo priest so she could ask him to restore her soul, and in flashbacks we discover why. First, Shacochis shows Jackie's father, Stjepan, as an eight-year-old Croatian boy during the German occupation who witnesses his father's beheading and his mother's torture. Forty years later, a teenage Jackie, then called Dorothy Chambers, learns the meaning of secret service from her father, who's serving as an American diplomat in Turkey. A brutal American-style le Carré, Shacochis details how espionage not only reflects a nation's character but can also endanger its soul. Gritty characters find themselves in grueling situations against a moral and physical landscape depicted in rich language as war-torn, resilient, angry, evil, and hopeful. Agent: Gail Hochman, Brandt & Hochman. (Sept.)

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review National Book Award winner Shacochis (*Easy in the Islands*, 1985) delivers a beautifully written, Norman Mailer-like (see Harlot's Ghost, 1991) treatise on international politics, secret wars, espionage, and terrorism. The woman is Jacqueline Scott, aka Renee Gardner, aka Dorothy Chambers née Dorothy Kovacevic. Jacqueline is in Haiti (which Shacochis reported on in 1999, with *The Immaculate Invasion*), ostensibly as an uncredentialed photojournalist, but what she says to her guide, Tom Harrington, a humanitarian lawyer, is that she has lost her soul and seeks to find it through voodoo. She befuddles—and frustrates—poor Tom, who later returns to the island in the company of a (CIA?) spook to unravel the mystery of Jackie's death. Turns out that behind her several identities is her father, an über-spy who, as a child in Croatia, witnessed the beheading of his freedom-fighter father and the rape of his mother at the end of WWII. These awful events inspire Steven Chambers' lifelong crusade against communism and then

against Islamic terrorism, with various schemes in various wars, from Vietnam through Bosnia. Often with weird, incestuous overtones, Chambers recruits his daughter to bring down enemies in elaborate sting operations, so that wars against narcotrafficking and terror become a family saga. The good guys of Chambers' powerful elite are all super-Christian, suggesting that at base we aren't any better than our enemies. The exception may be Eville Burnette, a Special Forces operative and an honorable, if conflicted, man. He and sad Dorothy fall in love and together find their souls. More or less. A brilliant book, likely to win prizes, with echoes of Joseph Conrad, Graham Greene, and John le Carré. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: Shacochis' first novel in 20 years is a major literary event and will attract attention across the book world. Fortunately, the novel proves well worth the wait and justifies the attention. --John Mort

Users Review

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