

*wow, no thank you.* by Samantha Irby book review

Written May 2020 by Niki Fakhoori

“When is the last time an actual human interaction made you laugh more than a meme did?” is something I frequently ponder but dread to admit out of fear of ostracization from the handful of people still willing to put up with me. Thank goodness for Samantha Irby, whose charming wit and humble brashness allow her to say what we all have been thinking or thought at some point without it coming across as embarrassing self-deprecation or juvenile seventh-grader-trapped-in-a-Gen-X’s-body angst. Thank goodness for *wow, no thank you.*, Irby’s latest collection of essays that I’ll absolutely be referring to with its stylized title, whose lowercased entirety and blunt period encapsulate all the absence of enthusiasm that comes with the familiar phrase, writing mechanics be damned.

And yes, I did say “humble brashness.” All 18 of Irby’s massive essays are crammed with attitude, but not the snobby kind. Light dashes of humility garnish the fun and keep her writing grounded. When answering an older couple’s question about how to ask their younger friends “to put their smartphones away,” we love reading Irby’s response that “everything’s boring,” including the couple who asked the question, because she expertly follows up with “I’m boring, too! This is something I have had to come to terms with as I am now starting middle age.” Irby’s wisdom is tinged with humor and never lays blame entirely on others. Irby recognizes she’s just as flawed as everyone else, and she knows just when to bring that fact up and just how much banter she should marinate it with so she never comes across as preachy—or worse, angsty. For those who fear death at the hands of secondhand embarrassment, *wow, no thank you.* poses no threat.

Thanks to her masterful control over her subjects, Irby's personal disclosures are welcomingly relatable rather than concerningly crass. When describing her daily routine, Irby unabashedly admits that "yoga, meditations, and calming morning rituals are for people who actually wake up in the morning," and "breakfast was over four hours ago, so I start with lunch." Be honest here: this is something we can all connect with on some level, and Irby's writing delivers the message in a way that is sharp enough to elicit audible chuckles yet gentle enough to not remind us of just how much of a problem it may be. Would it be nice to have a normal sleep schedule and be able to eat breakfast? Absolutely! But Irby makes it through the day with some levels of productivity all the same—*wow, no thank you*. is her third published book, after all—so really, what's the harm? Even the most dedicated morning-time-yoga buffs have no reason not to laugh along as she notices that the local middle schoolers "are already on their way home, for fuck's sake" just as she's waking up. Even though life is, in Irby's words, "an impossibly long and unyielding march to the grave, peppered along the way with myriad disappointments and misfortunes," she's still trucking through, which makes it all the easier for readers to consume her confessions and just admit that dang, I'm the exact same way.

Irby's realistically conversational writing also helps acclimate readers to what she has to say without terrifying them with the subject matter. Irby has entirely mastered the art of the run-on, and trust me, this is no small feat. When Irby discusses unrealistic partner standards, she graces us with this gem: "Maybe this is the upside of being ugly, but when men throw shit at you and scream lewd shit at you from passing cars on the street when you're just trying to get to the bus stop after school, the idea of there being one in a bespoke suit descending from a carriage to escort you to a fancy party doesn't seem like a thing that could happen in real life." This one sentence is 71 words long, and the only response to it I can muster is "girl, you're so right." This

is real conversation—word after word flowing effortlessly together into something completely cohesive, and offset by shorter, more brash declarations when necessary—this lovable behemoth in particular is followed by the quip, “Hollywood won’t sell me that dream!”—that reflect precisely how one would actually speak. Not that it’s surprising, considering that the delightfully stylized title embodies this art, too. I don’t want to say anything too cheesy like how it feels like I can just reach into the book and speak face-to-face with the author, but maybe I just did.

And as if mastering the run-on wasn’t enough, Irby has also conquered the stream-of-consciousness. Appropriately-related tangents continue showcasing her control over conversation, as they are sprinkled throughout and give the book an extra bit of crunchy texture as you chomp through it (and if you try to say you haven’t gotten sidetracked in a friendly chat before, then I really know you’re lying). Case-in-point: in “Hysterical!” Irby deftly goes from describing a flight to the resulting literal hotel bloodbath (of her own blood). This naturally leads into how anxiety-inducing packing for trips can be for her—because of course you’re going to talk about how you pack for trips when describing your trip that ended up with all your packed clothes completely and irreversibly ruined. She seamlessly returns to her blood-flooded hotel room when she’s done, then effortlessly transitions out of the hotel and into the hospital where she happily gets a hysterectomy. Isn’t this just how dialog happens? Flowing from one subject to the next, just as too much blood flowed on that one unfortunate day? And since everything works out in the end, Irby again grounds what would otherwise be a more concerning subject.

Thank goodness for Samantha Irby and thank goodness for *wow, no thank you*. If there is anyone who can combine wit and wisdom and words and personal warmth in such a way that can make you feel like everything will be alright—regardless of how messed up your sleep schedule is—it’s Irby, alright.