

# The Little Black Book of Grisélidis Réal: Days and Nights of an Anarchist Whore

*Jean-Luc Hennig , Ariana Reines (Translator)*

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They have to come back to us, because we know every detail of their orgasms, their little caprices, their little weaknesses and strengths. We know all of them. I mean, where do you expect them to go? They'll be disappointed anywhere else. Except for with us, because we know them like the back of our hand. As soon as they get in the door, it's like we'd made them ourselves. We know all the right things to say, all the gestures, there're no surprises.--from The Little Black Book of Gris'lidis R'al

The Little Black Book of Gris'lidis R'al is the portrait of a true humanist who made a career out of compassion. Hailed as a virtuoso writer and a "revolutionary whore," Grisélidis Réal (1929--2005) chanced into prostitution at thirty-one after an upper-class upbringing in Switzerland. Serving clients from all walks of life, R'al applied the anarcho-Marxist dictum "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs" to her profession, charging sliding-scale fees determined by her client's incomes and complexity of their sexual tastes.

Réal went on to become a militant champion of sexual freedom and prostitutes' rights. She has described prostitution as "an art, and a humanist science," noting that "the only authentic prostitution is that mastered by great technical artists...who practice this form of native craft with intelligence, respect, imagination, heart..."

This volume includes lengthy dialogues from 1979--1981 with Réal conducted by journalist and author Jean-Luc Hennig, in which she eloquently discusses the theoretical implications of sex-positive whoring and relates her experiences both inside and outside the profession: from her lengthy love affair with the "Berber" to such "psychological" and "special" clients as the "moldy rhinoceros."

The "Little Black Book" that rounds out this book is drawn from the logs in which Réal kept track of her many clients, from "Pedro, hilarious fat Spaniard, devoted, simple, honest, fat peasant face, 70F" to "Pierre 8 (from Basel), blue eyes, fifties, slightly balding, cultivated, sweet-violent...licks my finger after I remove it from his anus...100--400F." It is a journal that not only chronicles Réal's working life, but offers a clinically direct, investigative sociological analysis of the sexual subcultures of her time.

## **The Little Black Book of Grisélidis Réal: Days and Nights of an Anarchist Whore Details**

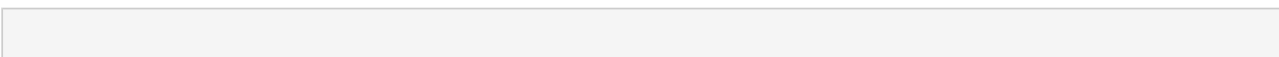
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## **From Reader Review The Little Black Book of Grisélidis Réal: Days and Nights of an Anarchist Whore for online ebook**

### **Mina says**

Le témoignage d'une femme prostituée et militante. Très drôle, très dur, très loin de ma vie mais justement. Finalement rien de tel que la parole d'une prostituée qui nous parle de sa vérité, de son métier, plutôt que les leçons de morale ou de liberté de personnes qui ne connaissent rien de cette vie. Tout aussi abrasif et révolutionnaire je conseille le blog Mélange-Instable...

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### **Danica says**

So many Pierre's and Clement's! Book and protagonist are a bit problematic. Title somewhat misleading, as the politics of anarchist whoring are not elaborated upon outside of references to pamphlet printing and "dressing for oneself" (instead of for a husband or other societal authorities, I would guess). The worst part is the undercurrent of unhappiness, unfulfilled dreams, miseducation and lack of opportunity steaming through Grisélidis's charm and humor (and leopard print short shorts!) The best is her joie de vivre and her candid insight into all of the societal forces that influence the ways people, mostly men, get off.

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### **Chris says**

I am not really sure how I feel about this book. The title section, found at the end, is really just a laundry list of men and their preferences. While this provides an interesting reference point to the interview portion of the book, by itself it would seem at least a little silly. The interviews, which make up the largest part of the book, are quite interesting. Real comes across as an indefinable person, a positive soul that keeps attempting suicide, a believer in love that feels nothing for the people she is with, an anarchist who talks proudly about paying her taxes and how much money she needs to live on. Really, I think I had expected more from the anarchist end to appear in the book, but it was only present in a couple of short anecdotes. Also, somehow I never thought about how close to France Switzerland is. Weird.

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### **Miranda says**

Grisélidis Real has a lot to say about the world's oldest profession. Not the most enlightening or nuanced discussion on the politics of sex work, but a good addition to the library.

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### **Catherine says**

I wish I could give a few extra stars to Grisélidis Real's little black book. This version mostly consists of long interviews between Real and Jean-Luc Hennig, with a few excerpts from her own writing and then her black book published in full at the end. Sample entry:

CHARLIE fat bearded guy tiny red beard, big dark yellow car, finger in the ass--nice, business in Frankfurt 80F.

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### **Laura says**

griselidis's voice is so charming and honest. i tried to resist her charm, but got swept up in the wave.

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### **Audacia Ray says**

Grisélidis Réal is an eminently problematic but enigmatically likable character. As I've muddled through the stress of dealing with the news cycle around the Long Island serial killer, I've really enjoyed immersing myself in the lengthy interview with Grisélidis and her notes on clients. She's laugh out loud funny, with her descriptions of clients and the (unsurprising to me, but somehow surprising to the interviewer) reveal that she tries to get them in and out (so to speak) as quickly as possible.

She tells longer stories too, but some of the interactions look like this:

Q: Did he pay?

A: I wouldn't have done a thing if he hadn't paid. No, come on, what did you expect! I'm not the Salvation Army here.

This book is a fantastic document, though I wish there was more about Grisélidis' activism and not just her sex work. She did, after all, participate in the 1975 weeklong occupation of the St Nizier Church in Lyon, France - plus generally make activist trouble. There's probably more about that work in her other books, which haven't yet been translated into English.

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### **LunaSanguine says**

Last year I saw a documentary about her on German/French TV channel arte and was instantly fascinated by her.

I enjoyed reading the book but as others said before: I would have loved to learn more about her political activism and general life.

If anybody knows any good books/sources on her in German or English please recommend them to me.

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### **Jodi Sh. says**

Not really a memoir, this interview with sexworker/activist Griselidis Real is interesting. It may have lost some nuance in translation, because not everything translates easily, but what you get it is a full and honest picture of a working, aging prostitute in her own words.

Particularly good read for those who think a) sex work is not real work, b) only addicts and last chancers would do it, c) all sex work is trafficking, d) whores hate their clients, or e) any other thing you assume having never actually met or spoken with a working whore.

I loved it, and will look to purchase a copy. This should be considered part of the canon of sexwork history.

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### **Imogen says**

I have complicated feelings about this book. I mean, look, I am not going to say anything bad about Grisélidis Réal: obviously, she is this awesome activist, sex worker, genius and hero, right? I know that looks like I'm saying it ironically, but I'm being serious. She is awesome; I'd never heard of her til Semiotext(e) sent me this to review, so if you haven't either: she started doing sex work I think in the fifties, and started doing activism around it- and coalitioning with other causes, mostly socialist, I think- in like the seventies? Maybe sooner.

So while it's not like she invented doing activism around sex work the way it's done nowadays (not to generalize or anything), she was just ahead of the curve.

I think?

I mean, here is the thing: I want to read her life story, and have her work put into a larger context, and learn about what exactly she did. Instead, this is a few interviews from like 1979 and 1981 (with the titular little black book of tricks' sexual preferences appended to the end). As far as I can tell- prove me wrong, children, prove me wrong!- this is all we've got about her in English. Which means, y'know, I'm left wanting a lot more.

Um, especially given how much of the interviews is basically her generalizing about clients' races/ethnic backgrounds, and how much is her fetishizing black men. Like I said- obviously, Ms. Réal is awesome, and it was a different time thirty years ago, and further, the French are notorious for a certain kind of... I guess they'd call it frankness? But I'm not certain whether I can characterize it that way, when, in 2009, to me, it reads as racism. Y'know? I'm sorry, I hate to say it, but I'd hate not to say it, too.

So four stars for giving us a book about Grisélidis Réal, Semiotext(e), but I wish it were... I don't know, more.

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### **Elevate Difference says**

Writing a review for a book like *The Little Black Book* of Grisélidis Réal is not a simple task by any means. On the one hand, I want to be as straightforward as possible and simply give my impressions of this one particular piece of writing without going into the issue of prostitution and whether or not it degrades women. On the other hand, it seems impossible not to when taking into account the fact that Réal was a world-famous and revolutionary “whore” and writer who argued that prostitution was not only a choice, but a free-will decision. In my opinion, all sweeping generalizations ever do is discount legions of women whose experiences don't fall in line with a particular argument; it's as if they're being told they don't exist. So I stay out of it the best I can, though I am supportive of sex workers—no matter the circumstances or choices

that led them to their line of work.

For such a fascinating title, *The Little Black Book* doesn't pack much of a punch. The book is basically a series of interviews between Réal and journalist Jean-Luc Hennig, as translated by Ariana Reines. Réal's "whoring" is discussed in great detail, though none of her anarchist activities are. She mentions writing papers and being politically active quite casually several times, though it's usually only in reference to one of her clients asking about papers she has posted on her bedroom walls. The last portion of the book is quite literally Réal's little black book, in which she's written down the names of all her customers, what they're into sexually, what they look like, and how much they pay her.

Nothing that Réal says in the interviews is politically charged in any way; there are no arguments about prostitution, no defending of her life's work. For the most part, it's just account after account of client after client. Did you know that many men secretly like getting a finger up their ass when receiving oral sex? Did you know that men need to be pampered and mothered and showed affection when seeing a prostitute? Yes, no? Don't care? Me either. I was hoping to get a feel for this woman, the famous Grisélidis Réal who was a survivor and took to prostitution in order to support her children; who earned her living on her back until she was in her sixties.

But you never really get a sense of her; just hints of her personality. I would have liked to learn more about her opinions on her work and her life and less about her depressing decades long relationship with a severely abusive man and the boring sex she endured for years with men who Réal believed simply needed to fulfill their sexual desires—because apparently sex with a woman is a God-given right, and men will be damned if they go without.

In several interviews, Réal contends that the men that come to see her have something wrong with them; that normal men do not go to see prostitutes. She says that prostitution is lonely, heartbreaking work. She says that "fundamentally what [men:] want isn't to hurt you or kill you or bore you; what they want is for you to be nice" so in turn the women "must be totally amorphous, emptied of their substance, emptied of all their strength..." I don't know why a woman would defend and even champion a line of work and lifestyle that requires that of women, but then, prostitution is a complicated issue. After reading *The Little Black Book of Grisélidis Réal*, I can say—mysterious anarchism aside—that Réal was a complicated woman.

Review by Tina Vasquez

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