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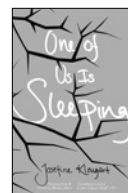
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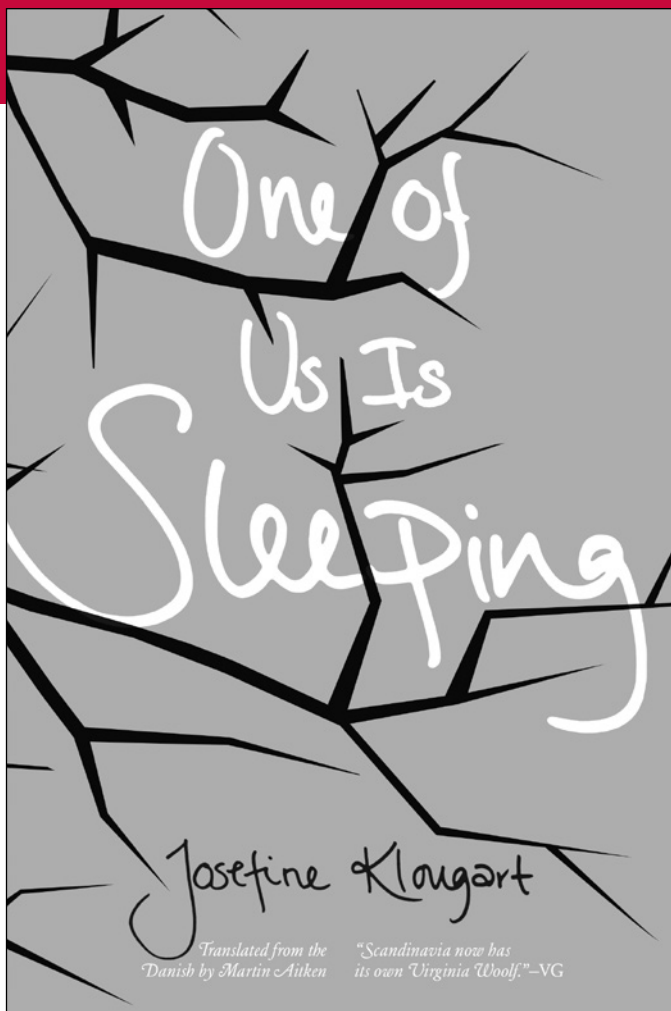
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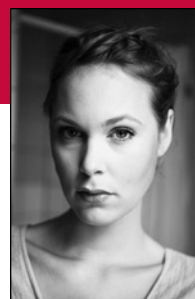
FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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(World)



ONE OF US IS SLEEPING

JOSEFINE KLOUGART

Trans. from the Danish by Martin Aitken

The English-language debut from one of Denmark's most exciting, celebrated young writers, *One of Us Is Sleeping* is a haunting novel about loss in all its forms.

As she returns home to visit her mother who is dying of cancer, the narrator recounts a brief, intense love affair, as well as the grief and disillusionment that follow its end. The book's striking imagery and magnificent prose underpin its principal theme: the jarring contrast between the recollection of stability—your parents, your childhood home, your love—and the continual endings that we experience throughout our lives.

A true-to-life, deeply poetic novel that works in the same vein as Anne Carson, *One of Us Is Sleeping* has won Klougart countless accolades and award nominations—including the Readers' Book Award—securing her place as a major new voice in world literature.

"Scandinavia now has its own Virginia Woolf. Few get as close to the human mind as Klougart"

—Mari Nymoene Nilsen, VG

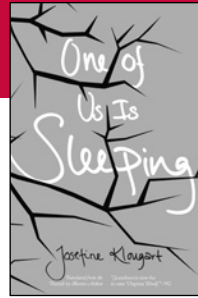
"Call them prose poems, call them flash fictions, call them lyric shorts—these pieces shine beyond categorization."

—Christopher McCormick, *The Review Review*

Josefine Klougart has been hailed as one of Denmark's greatest contemporary writers. She is the first Danish author ever to have two of her first three books nominated for the Nordic Council Literature Prize, and has been compared to Joan Didion, Anne Carson, and Virginia Woolf.

Martin Aitken has translated dozens of books from the Danish, including works by Dorthe Nors, Jussi Adler-Olsen, Peter Høeg, and Kim Leine.

FROM ONE OF US IS SLEEPING JOSEFINE KLOUGART



The light comes creeping in over the ploughed fields. Slabs of dark clay soil thrust up in disorder, bull calves fighting in the stalls, the thud of too much body in a space too small. And the snow, so gently it lies now, upon the ridges; upon the landscape, everything living and everything dead. A coat of cold, a deep, reassuring voice. The landscape, naked, unsentimental. Here is the feeling of missing you, though no one to miss.

A landscape of lace that is frost.

The landscape is the same, and yet the landscape is never the same. Where have I been, I ask myself. My lower lip has burst like the skin of a ripe plum. Falling on the patio, knees and the taste of iron; lying on the concrete behind the rectory, waiting for the tractor to return home with the first load; if we're not up and gone we'll be in trouble. The way they come driving; hunch-backed trailers. One afternoon we're friends enough to play; we leap among the stacked bales. Fall down in between and you'll die of starvation. Like the cat we find, but that's not until autumn. So it hadn't abandoned its litter at all.

The path leading off behind the rectory fields peters out at the boundary that cuts through the conservation area, the croplands, acreage lying fallow. So much depends on it. Order. There's always a man gathering up stones in the field; new ones

always appearing, the earth gives birth to them and the piles grow large.

Here and there, bigger rocks lie waiting to be collected by the tractor. When the time comes. Perhaps one of the boys will do it. Or perhaps the job is too big for them. The sun goes down behind the dolmen, which is older than the pyramids. So they say. How old is that, one wonders. Brothers have no age beyond the years that divide them. My sisters and I, one age; we become no older than we were.

The glacial landscape, the kettle holes where the ice forced the land into different positions.

I'm not sure. It felt like I was living out of sync, in every way imaginable. I've just fallen and already I'm on my feet, brushing the dirt from my sleeves, smiling to someone passing by, or to nature. It's only when I think back on something that I gain access to all that ought to be mine. You, for example.

I have returned. Something that was lies spread out across the landscape. A carpet of needles at the foot of the trees. A cape of snow, a forest of fingers, and a sky. Antlers of the red deer, Trehøje Hill, the last ten fir trees on its slopes, hollowed to the bone by wind, forlorn. This is what we're dealing with.

Oil on troubled waters.

An odd summer dress underneath a sweater and overalls.

It's snowing again. I think: when will I be able to leave, the roads are blocked and I'm stuck here. I lean forward in the windowsill, towards the pane. The marble of the sill is cold; the winter is. One afternoon in summer I put my cheek to the sill. My lips feel too big, my hands. I push aside a potted plant, I remember that. Climbing up into the windowsill, leaning my back against the sun and the window. The marble is cold; even though the sun has been shining in for hours, the marble sills are cold. Sticky thighs in the heat. Body longing for cold.

Or body longing for warmth.

My hands become, how should I describe it, violet; in the winter, my feet too. A colour that can remind me of something like: blue. This afternoon the snowplough went by every hour; with a weariness that had to do with something other than snow or no snow, it ploughed through the village, which parted obligingly. Two lengths of white. Black asphalt shining through a thin layer of broken snow. I thought of broken snow, the saddest thing I can think of. And now I think again: when will I be able to leave.

I'm saving up.

Something beautiful from which to depart, something beautiful to sacrifice. It remains

nonetheless, left like a shadow, a heaviness in the images. What could have been. Love annulled.

Are we snowed in, I ask.

My mother is doing accounts, some receipts. Number forty-nine, she says, tying an end and looking up at me.

We look out of the window, our eyes coming to a dead end, like railway tracks in a landscape reaching the point where the workers went home and the job is left for some other time, tomorrow or never. There's a sense of: dead end. The railway tracks lying there pointing, turning the landscape into a basin or a picture you can: see.

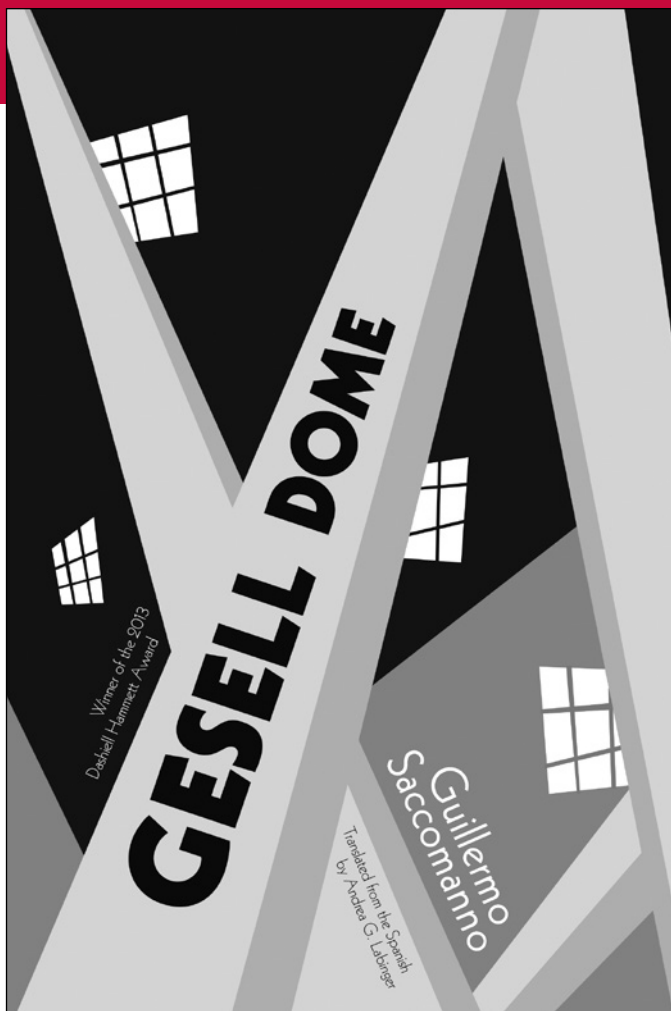
She contemplates. I understand, that those kinds of thoughts exist. What exactly do I want, where am going, am I able; and she asks me if it's a problem. If I can't get away, if I have to stay here, is it – a problem.

I shrug. I suppose not, I say. But both of us know it is; that it really is a problem.

Cooped up in here.

The winter shuts you in or shuts you out, that's how it feels, a sense of not being able to *get anywhere*. It's inside us both. No way forward and no way back. She wants to know if I can find peace here. You can't really find peace here. That's how she asks. There's a pause. Neither of us breathes. Again I shrug.

I can, I say. ■



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AUGUST 9, 2016

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(World)



GESELL DOME

GUILLERMO SACCOMANNO

Trans. from the Spanish by Andrea G. Labinger

Winner of the 2013 Dashiell Hammett Award

Like *True Detective* through the lenses of William Faulker and John Dos Passos, *Gesell Dome* is a mosaic of misery, a page-turner that will keep you enthralled until its shocking conclusion.

This incisive, unflinching exposé of the inequities of contemporary life weaves its way through dozens of sordid storylines and characters, including an elementary school abuse scandal, a dark Nazi past, corrupt politicians, and shady real-estate moguls. An exquisitely crafted novel by Argentina's foremost noir writer, *Gesell Dome* reveals the seedy underbelly of a popular resort town tensely awaiting the return of tourist season.

"A choral, savage, and ruthless work, considered to be the great Argentine social novel."

—Europa Press

"Through a skillful weaving of characters and plotlines, coming together like a completed puzzle, Saccomanno has crafted a monumental novel where individual stories unnerve us while building to the unexpected and explosive finale."

—El Mundo

Guillermo Saccomanno is the author of numerous novels and story collections, including *El buen dolor*. He is the winner of the Premio Nacional de Literatura and a two-time Dashiell Hammett Prize recipient for *77* and *Gesell Dome*. He also received Seix Barral's Premio Biblioteca Breve de Novela for *El oficinista*, and his book *Un maestro* won the Rodolfo Walsh Prize for nonfiction.

Andrea G. Labinger has translated over a dozen works from the Spanish, including books by Ana María Shua, Liliana Heker, Luisa Valenzuela, and Alicia Steimberg.

FROM GESELL DOME GUILLERMO SACCOMANNO



Tonight, *hypocrite reader, my double*, as you're about to start reading this book, novel, stories, chronicles, or whatever you prefer to call these bits of prose, pieces of nothing, on this freezing night, with the sea so close and so alien, right here in this Villa, May, June, July, August, September, what difference does it make, in any of the off-season months, here, in his chalet in Pinar del Norte, a center-left surveyor is fucking his kid, someone, a mechanic, in a tin-roofed house in La Virgencita is beating his girlfriend, someone, a drunken laborer in a vacant lot, tries to break another drunken laborer's neck during a game of *truco*, someone at the Terminal, a night watchman in canvas espadrilles, after the last bus has gone, drinks *mate*, the steak of the poor, someone, an AIDS victim, hangs himself in a shanty in the south, someone, a foreman at the cement plant, is burying his girlfriend's body at a construction site, someone, a young officer, is applying an electric cattle prod to a juvie thug at the police station, someone, a loser wrapped in cardboard, dies of cold in the doorway of a building near the docks, someone, a radio-taxi driver, balls his sister-in-law while his brother works as a security guard in a warehouse, someone, a little thug, runs through the poplar groves with a police car in pursuit, someone, a city councilman, does a line of coke while the poker game drags on, someone, a frightened old woman,

lets her dogs out at night, someone, an FM operator, plays Pink Floyd and rolls a joint, someone, behind a temple, an evangelist in a mystical trance, splits his sinful fiancée's skull open with an ax, someone, a cashier from Provincia Bank, emerges from bingo having lost not only his salary, but also a sum he won't be able to justify, someone, the rotisserie owner from the next block, takes off his belt and walks into his son's room, projecting his shadow, someone, your neighbor the builder, jerks off watching a porn flick, someone, one of the gunmen from El Monte, is selling crack to a bunch of kids, and those boys and girls, dressed in hoodies, have just finished poisoning your Rottweiler and in a minute will be pointing a gun at you, forcing your wife to suck them off, fucking your daughter, and you'd better tell them where you keep your dough because you don't know what they're capable of doing with that iron you won with supermarket bonus points, the iron they've plugged in and which is starting to heat up.

[. . .]

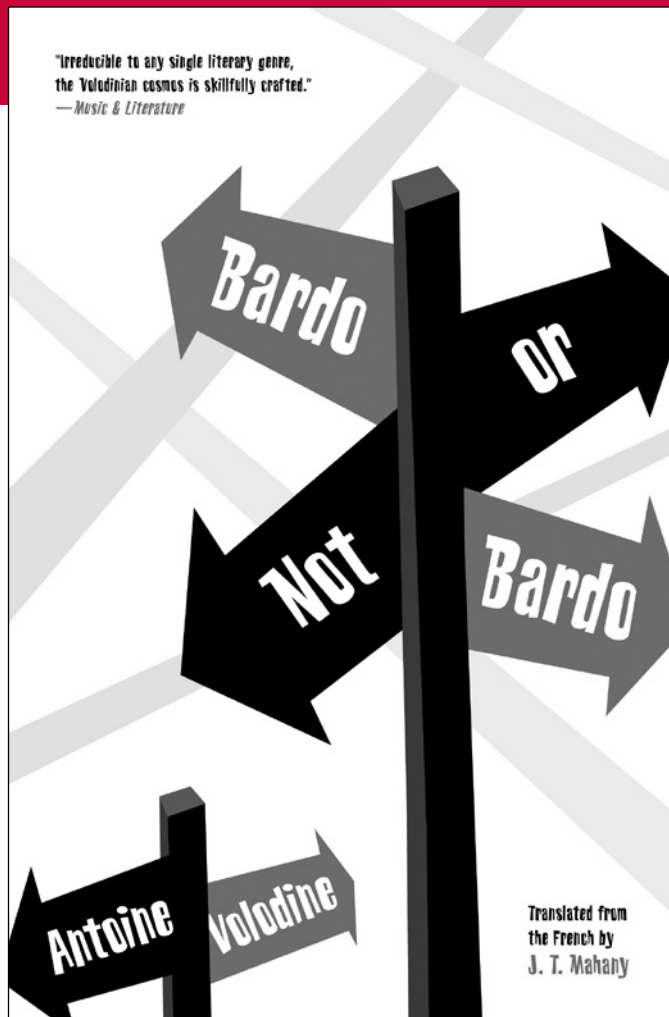
The scandal at Nuestra Señora del Mar, the eleven, because now there were eleven

abused kindergartners, exploded the following Tuesday at noon. By Wednesday there were sixteen. On Thursday, nineteen. The pediatrician found irritation in one girl's little vagina. As I anticipated, diminutives and euphemisms formed part of the rumor that spread throughout the entire Villa: heiny, weenie. And just as the diminutives helped emphasize the victims' drama with manipulative tenderness, it also seemed to reduce the crime to a lesser category. But the capital letters pushed to the forefront in the flyer that the parents wrote; indignation was spelled out, just like in the title: THE RAPE OF INNOCENCE, all caps. There are no fewer than eleven physically abused little kids in the four-year-olds' room and the two-year-olds' room, as verified by professional psychologists and doctors, plus ten other little ones who may have witnessed the abuse and exhibitionism.

And so the abuse oscillated between diminutives and capitals. Dante noticed this detail. But it was no time for semiotics. Besides, the article left a great deal to be desired: exhibitionism is spelled with an "h," observed Anita López de Campas, language teacher at Nuestra Señora as well as at the Middle School. Spelling is the least of our worries right now, a father bristled. A committee was formed and everyone took their 4-wheel drives over to the TV station. But the station owners, Salvatore of Hogarmar

Appliances, Barbeito of Soles Department Store, and Rinaldi, the supermarket impresario, refused to broadcast the news that ignited the Villa's fury. It's not just that this incident will be bad for tourism, Salvatore said. It's also a matter of the little boys and girls, Martínez explained. And Renaldi, in a sensible tone: We have to act cautiously while the police investigate. By late afternoon the national media were also expected to get on board. In total, between the eleven original children and the other ten mentioned in the flyer, there were now twenty-one victims. At first rumors centered on the school's kiosk owner. Then on a friend of his. Both of them had disappeared: the kiosk guy and his friend, vanished. By curfew two kindergarten teachers were also under suspicion. By nighttime the news was on every channel. On top of all this, in addition to the DA who was sent from Dolores to intervene, a priest had now been dispatched to the Villa by the Archbishopric to mediate. It was said: Father Fragassi, our parish priest, the principal of the school, had a history. Two years before, he had made advances at the kid who was filling his tank at the Shell station. If the rumor was false, that was yet to be proved. But there must have been some reason that this particular rumor, and no other, had spread. Where there's smoke, there's fire.

And what if our dear little priest is innocent, asked Carbone. ■



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(World)

Also Available:

Post-Exoticism in Ten Lessons, Lesson Eleven.

\$12.95 (pb), novel, 978-1-940953-11-3; \$9.99 (ebook) 978-1-940953-12-0



BARDO OR NOT BARDO

ANTOINE VOLODINE

Trans. from the French by J. T. Mahany

One of Volodine's funniest books, *Bardo or Not Bardo* takes place in his universe of failed revolutions, radical shamanism, and off-kilter nomenclature.

In each of these seven vignettes, someone dies and has to make his way through the Tibetan afterlife, also known as the Bardo, where souls wander for forty-nine days before being reborn with the help of the *Book of the Dead*.

Unfortunately, Volodine's characters bungle their chances at enlightenment: the newly dead end up choosing to waste away their afterlife sleeping or to be reborn as an insignificant spider. The living aren't much better off and make a mess of things in their own way, to the point of mistaking a Tibetan cookbook for the holy book.

Once again, Volodine has demonstrated his range and ambition, crafting a moving, hysterical work about transformations and the power of the book.

"Irreducible to any single literary genre, the Volodinian cosmos is skillfully crafted, fusing elements of science fiction with magical realism and political commentary."

—Nicholas Hauck, *Music & Literature*

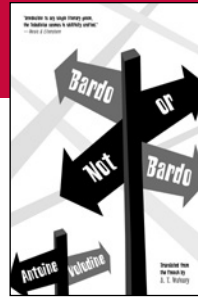
"His quirky and eccentric narrative achieves quite staggering and electric effects. . . . Dazzling in its epic proportions and imaginative scope."

—*The Nation*

Antoine Volodine is the primary pseudonym of a French writer who has published twenty books under this name, several of which are available in English translation, including *Minor Angels* and *Writers*. He also publishes under the names Lutz Bassmann and Manuela Draeger.

J. T. Mahany is a graduate of the Masters of Arts in Literary Translation Studies program at the University of Rochester and is currently studying for his MFA at the University of Arkansas. He has previously translated Volodine's *Post-Exoticism in Ten Lessons, Lesson Eleven*, also available from Open Letter.

FROM BARDO OR NOT BARDO ANTOINE VOLODINE



The day was splendid.

For several seconds, the situation remained unchanged, then an old monk closed a door behind him somewhere in a corridor, came out through the back of the library, crossed through a patch of beans, and hurried toward the scene of the crime.

He was a hoary religious man, in a faded indigo robe. His body was wizened in its twilight years. He jogged toward the henhouse, as quick as his breath and his skinny nonagenarian legs would let him. Confined to the lavatory due to intestinal troubles, he wasn't able to make it to the ceremony. He had heard the detonations, hastily wiped and dressed himself, foreseeing some mishap, and now he was running.

As he often did, he was talking aloud, to both himself and hypothetical coreligionists.

"Hey!" he shouted. "There's bandits behind the library! Armed thugs! Come quick! They're shooting everywhere! They've hit someone!"

He went past the rows of beans, peas. Beyond that, the henhouse showed all the signs of irreversible disarray. The perches were knocked down. The sagging fence had given up the ghost. There were rents pointing toward the sky, half-pieces of slats, the top of the door. Everything swayed and creaked at the slightest movement. He had to get past a square meter of metal lace to see who was lying on the ground.

"Holy doggone!" the old man swore. "I know him! Kominform! They shot Kominform!"

He knelt down. Kominform's body was moaning in the scrapheap's grating noises. He let himself be manipulated, scrutinized. While he examined the holes, the old monk gritted his remaining teeth. He kept his prognosis to himself.

His name was Drumbog.

Around Drumbog and Kominform, the hens were clucking, without a care in the world.

"Hey!" Drumbog shouted. "Get over here! The killers butchered Kominform!"

Nobody was coming.

"Everyone's over that way, for the Five Perfumes," said Drumbog. "The monastery's deserted. Nobody's in the library right now either . . . If I hadn't . . . If I hadn't had to hole up in the bathroom . . . It's always that fermented milk . . . I can't digest it anymore, and I drink too much of it . . . How are you with fermented milk? Homemade Mongolian yogurt? Goddamn it causes some bad diarrhea!"

Kominform shifted.

"That you, Drumbog?" he asked without opening his eyes.

His dislocated voice didn't vibrate beyond his mouth. He couldn't be understood. He had a hiccup.

"He shot me in the stomach, the swine," he said.

"He's spitting up hemoglobin," said Drumbog, having neither noticed nor deciphered Kominform's mumbling. "It'd take a miracle for him to pull through."

"In the lungs," Kominform continued. "I'm going to die . . ."

"Kominform, can you hear me?" said Drumbog. "Can you hear me, little brother? Are you conscious?"

"I'm hurt," said Kominform. "They got me . . . Old colleagues of mine . . . Converts . . . They work for the mafia now, for the billionaires in power . . . Social democrats and the nouveau riche and the like . . . There's nothing worse than converts . . ."

The end of an iron wire had snagged the right sleeve of his coat and, whenever he tensed up a little to stammer, the fence started to creak. It was like someone writhing on a bad box-spring.

"Don't wear yourself out, little brother," suggested Drumbog. "Open your mouth. You have to let air find a passage through the blood."

"That you, Drumbog?" asked Kominform.

"Yes, little brother, it's me. I was on my way to the ceremony, the Five Precious Perfumed Oils, right? And all of a sudden I heard machine guns . . ."

"Don't worry about me," said Kominform. "Go. Don't miss the benediction. Go on. Leave me here."

His chest rose weakly.

He vomited blood.

The fence creaked.

"Anyway, I don't have long," he continued. "I'm done for."

He clenched his jaws and went quiet. He hadn't been an adherent to communism to show off, he hadn't defended its principles

to one-up prisoners. This was not the kind of man to weep in the face of death.

At that moment, the shells of dry vegetables cracked on the trail, the grass hissed. A hen fled, shouting in its avian dialect, put out from just almost being kicked. Someone was approaching.

"Holy cow!" Drumbog swore. "The killers are coming back! They've got to liquidate any troublesome witnesses. Anyone would do the same in their place . . . It's my turn next, you'll see, I'm not going to cut it!"

His breath was short. A hint of sudden dread clutched his throat. The shrubs and folds in the fence hid the indignant hen from him, as well as the foot that had provoked its vehemence.

"In the past," he continued, "if an astrologer had told me that my fate was to end up full of bullet holes while up against a henhouse, with a revolutionary communist by my side, I would've laughed right in his face . . . But everything's connected . . . Cold yogurt, intestines . . . The blessing of the Five Oils . . . It was written . . ."

Whoever was walking down the path and stepping on beanstalks was now visible.

The surrounding atmosphere wasn't dramatic at all: the exhalations of summer, vegetables yellowing in the sun, gallinaceans enjoying themselves, pecking at the dust, grasshoppers, gong echoes.

"They're coming," the old man mumbled. "They're going to do me in . . . There's two of them, a man and a woman . . ."

There were two of them, indeed. ■



FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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L'Amour. \$12.95 (pb), novel, 978-1-934824-79-5
The Sailor from Gibraltar. \$12.95 (pb), novel, 978-1-934824-04-7



ABAHN SABANA DAVID

MARGUERITE DURAS

Trans. from the French by Kazim Ali

Available for the first time in English, *Abahn Sabana David* is a late-career masterpiece from one of France's top writers.

Late one evening, David and Sabana, communists, arrive at a country house where they meet Abahn, the man they've been sent to guard and ultimately kill for his perceived transgressions. A fourth man arrives (also named Abahn), and throughout the night these four characters discuss understanding, capitalism, violence, revolution, and dogs. A gun in the house disquiets the scene.

Suspenseful and thought-provoking, Duras's novel is evocative of Samuel Beckett as it explores human existence and suffering in the confusing contemporary world.

"Duras's language and writing shine like crystals."

—*New Yorker*

"A spectacular success. . . . Duras is at the height of her powers."

—Edmund White

Marguerite Duras wrote dozens of plays, screenplays, and novels, including *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, *The Sea Wall*, and *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*. She is best known for *The Lover*, which received the Goncourt prize in 1984 and was made into a film in 1992. This is her third book to be published by Open Letter.

Kazim Ali is a poet, essayist, and novelist, and has published a translation of *Water's Footfall* by Sohrab Sepehri in addition to co-translating Duras's *L'Amour*. He teaches at Oberlin College and the University of Southern Maine.

FROM **ABAHN SABANA DAVID**
MARGUERITE DURAS



It's Sabana who takes off her coat first. She puts it down near the door. She helps David take his coat off.

Tucked into David's belt there is a gun.

They sit. Sabana pushes a chair toward David. She sits back in her chair.

The Jew is silent.

She sits up straight, looks around. She looks out at the road, the park, the cold. Everything is bathed in the same intense light, inside, outside. Nothing else is so lit. She looks over at the one sitting next to the table.

"We wait for the dawn," he says.

Sabana's eyes are blue, dark and somber.

"You are Sabana."

"Yes."

The dogs howl in the dark park.

David listens for the dogs.

The howling dies down.

David the mason reclines his head on the back of the chair, his hands draped along the armrests. He looks over at the base of the other chair. He speaks.

"There is someone else in the house."

"It's just me," says the Jew.

"He's here alone," she says.

"The Jew," says David.

"Yes. Don't be afraid." She is still looking around. She is perched on the edge of her seat, still alert. Looking around. "David has to work tomorrow morning. He is going to sleep a little. If you try to save yourself I'll cry

out and he'll wake up."

"Let him sleep.

You guard me. And

I'll stay where I am, over here."

Slumber settles on David. He looks over at the Jew.

She says, "He's falling asleep now."

The Jew doesn't answer.

Sabana says, "The merchants' police aren't out tonight. Gringo made a deal with the merchants. They told him, 'If you let us deal with the Greeks then we'll give you Abahn the Jew. Gringo accepted. The police sleep tonight. The town is Gringo's."

The Jew doesn't answer, doesn't move.

"Are you going to try to save yourself?"

"No."

The fatigue seems to grow over him.

"Why not?"

"I have no desire to save myself."

They sit quietly for a moment. Sabana, alert, turns toward the frost covered road. David has closed his eyes.

"Why did you come to Staatd?"

The Jew shrugs his shoulders.

"To kill Gringo?"

"No."

"In Staatd Gringo is strong. He runs the show with the merchants. He runs the government offices. He has his own police, army, guns. He's been making the merchants afraid for a long time now. You understand?"

"The merchants of Staatd aren't afraid of Gringo," says the Jew.

"Since when?"

"For a long time. The merchants are afraid of the Jews."

"And who is Gringo afraid of?"

"Gringo is afraid of the Jews."

"Like the merchants?"

"You know that."

"Yes." Sabana looks at him.

"You don't know what to do with yourself anymore, do you? So you came here?"

"Maybe at first. But then I found Staatd."

"Like any other place?"

"No."

They fall silent. David sleeps.

Sabana gestures at him, says to the Jew, "They all sleep."

They both look at him. Still silent. She waits.

He asks, "Who are you?"

She hesitates. She looks at David.

"There's nothing here," he says. "I am not part of Gringo's party."

She is perched on the edge of the chair, waiting.

"Are you are enemy then?" she asks.

"Yes."

"What do you want?"

"I don't know what I want anymore." They look at each other in silence for a long moment. "Who are you?" he asks again.

He waits. Her eyes narrow, searching.

Her face is unreadable. She opens her eyes and says, "I don't know."

The Jew slumps forward over the table. His rests his head in his arms. He stays like that without moving.

"You don't want more?" she asks.

"I want everything. I want nothing."

Silence.

"And tonight?"

"Everything. Nothing."

"Still?"

"Yes."

His face was buried in his arms.

"One day you came to David's workshop. You waited until the workday was finished. It was David who saw you. He asked you, 'Are you Abahn?' You said yes. He asked you, 'What do you want?' You said you wanted to talk to someone. He said, 'Who?' You didn't answer. You just looked at him. He said, 'Are you looking for David? That's me.' You said yes. He asked, 'Why?' You said, 'Because you addressed me.'

The Jew is silent.

"Do you remember?"

"Yes."

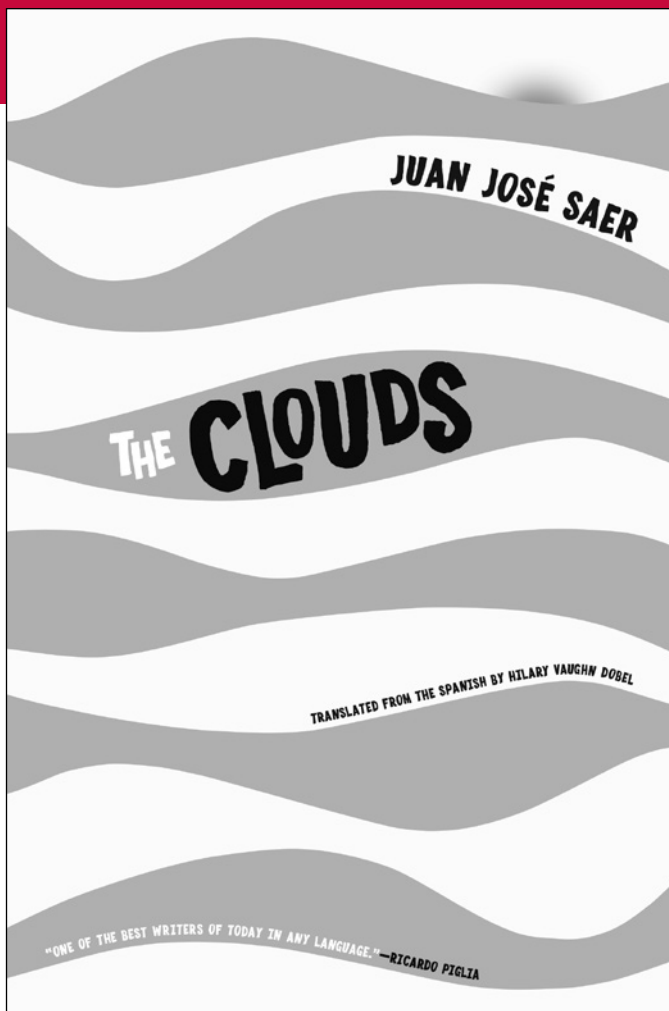
"That's when all this started."

He doesn't say a word, doesn't move.

"I told you, I explained it to you, weren't you listening?"

He wasn't listening.

Sabana, at full attention, her eyes fixed on him. ■



FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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THE CLOUDS

JUAN JOSÉ SAER

Trans. from the Spanish by Hilary Vaughn Dobel

In present-day Paris, Pinchón Garay receives a computer disk containing a manuscript—which might be fictional, or could be a memoir—by Doctor Real, a nineteenth-century physician tasked with leading five mental patients on a trip to a recently constructed asylum. This ragtag team, which includes a delusional narcissist and a nymphomaniac nun who tricks the other patients into sleeping with her, ploughs full steam ahead on a tragicomic trip that ends in disaster and fire.

Fascinating as a faux historical novel and written in Saer's typically gorgeous, Proustian style, *The Clouds* can be read as a metaphor for exile—a major theme for Saer and Argentine writers in general—or as an examination of madness.

"Saer is one of the best writers of today in any language."

—Ricardo Piglia

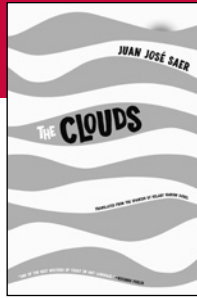
"What Saer presents marvelously is the experience of reality, and the characters' attempts to write their own narratives within its excess."

—Bookforum

Juan José Saer was the leading Argentine writer of the post-Borges generation. The author of numerous novels and short-story collections (including *Scars* and *La Grande*), Saer was awarded Spain's prestigious Nadal Prize in 1987 for *The Event*. Five of his novels are available from Open Letter Books.

Hilary Vaughn Dobel has an MFA in poetry and translation from Columbia University. She is the author of two manuscripts and, in addition to Juan José Saer, has translated work by Carlos Pintado.

FROM THE CLOUDS JUAN JOSÉ SAER



Around 7:00, a little dazed from the heat and his overly long nap, [Pinchón] leaves to do some shopping in the neighborhood, but after dallying in a wine shop, selecting bottles of white for the coming days, he finds himself feeling refreshed, clean, and perfectly content, passing back through the blue evening air down stifling, deserted streets, and returns to his empty house. As soon as he enters, he goes to shower, dries himself gently, patting the towel over his skin, as one dabs blotting paper over lines of fresh ink, never rubbing; then he puts on only a clean pair of shorts. He has a light dinner—a slice of ham, a few tomatoes, a nugget of cheese, and mineral water—but when he sits down at the computer, starting it up and inserting the *disket* to read out its contents on the screen, he thinks the better of it and makes his way to the refrigerator. He returns with a big, white crockery mug of cherries, sets it on his desk within reach of his left hand, amid the mess of pens, pencils, lighters, and cigarette packs, and an ashtray of heavy, dark green glass. He begins to read the text marching down the screen, and though he lifts the cherries to his mouth, one by one, without looking, the taste, at once sweet and tart, conjures vivid little red globes in his mind as if the flavor and feeling they're about to produce on his tongue make a detour through his eyes, or through memory,

before arriving in his brain. Large, meaty, cold, gloriously firm and red, by chance the first he's gotten, the reality is that although they've been flourishing, the month of July is flying by, and, as much as he hopes otherwise, they are the last cherries of summer. And nothing reassures Pichón that once this black, interminable summer has passed, they'll return again with that same capricious grace, emerging from nothing into the light of day.

•

Rivers swollen to excess, an unexpected summer, and that most-peculiar cargo: With the perspective of time and distance, it could be summed up thusly to explain the paradoxical difficulty of crossing the plain, our hundred leagues of troubles.

That arduous, protracted voyage took place, as if I could forget, in the August of 1804. On the first of that month, we set out for Buenos Aires during a terrible freeze, horseshoes cracking at blades of hoarfrost, a blue-tinged pink in the dawn, but within a few short days we found ourselves embroiled in a summer as squalid as it was cruel.

We made progress ten times faster on the trek from Buenos Aires to the city, Santa

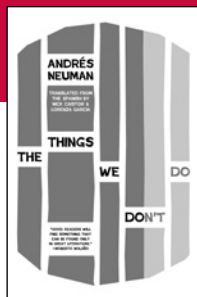
Fé, than we did on the return journey, though there were just four of us on horseback that time, and despite countless obstacles, the cold always tormenting us even in full sunlight. And so this sudden onset of sweltering heat was doubly confounding, both for its great intensity and for its unseasonable arrival, contradicting the laws of nature and the order of the seasons. How little nature takes our plans into account; she proved insolent, opposing the laws that contain her, with that strange heat in the depths of one of the bleakest winters the region, according to numerous testimonials, had suffered. That unwholesome "summer," which blossomed into a sham spring only to be obliterated a few days later, unleashed an anomalous chain of seasons marching in hurried disarray, all in the space of a month. But Osuna, the man who guided us to the city and who led us, in a large convoy this time, back to Buenos Aires, kept saying that once in a while a mid-August dry spell like this would set in, anticipating the Santa Rosa storms on the thirtieth. Suffice it to say, he was right as always, and precisely on the thirtieth, some days before we reached our destination, the predicted storm descended to crown our parade of hardships—though it also helped to extricate us from a most precarious situation.

But I am getting ahead of the facts and,

perhaps, out of consideration for the possible reader, decades from now, into whose hands this memoir might someday fall, it would behoove me to introduce myself: I am Dr. Real, specialist of those afflictions not of the body, but of the mind and soul. A native of Bajada Grande del Paraná, I was born and raised in those treacherous northern hills where the great river's ceaseless red current has its source. I learned my letters under the Franciscans, but when I reached the age for a young man to delve into his studies, my parents thought Madrid preferable to anywhere else as the capital of knowledge; this can be accounted for by the fact that they were Castilian, and hoped the tumult dividing France—a commotion which had shaken Europe for the past six or seven years—would not reach the Universidad de Alcalá de Henares. Unlike my parents, I was drawn to that tumult, and, given my growing interest in diseases of the mind, when I caught wind that Salpêtrière Hospital was loosing its madmen, I resolved to continue my studies amid the frays of Paris rather than the sleepy cloisters of Alcalá. As happens so often throughout history, the last decade of the previous century had been tumultuous; like all parents, mine sought to educate me at the margins of that tumult, and, like all young people, I sensed that it was in that very tumult where my life was to begin. ■

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 ANDRÉS NEUMAN

Trans. from the Spanish by
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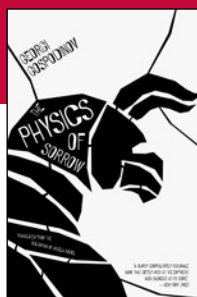
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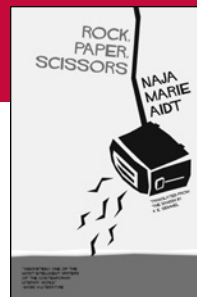
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"There are very few novels that appear to a seasoned reader as utterly original: *The Physics of Sorrow* is one of these rare books."

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 NAJA MARIE AIDT

Trans. from the Danish by K. E. Semmel



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Trans. from the Spanish by Will Vanderhyden



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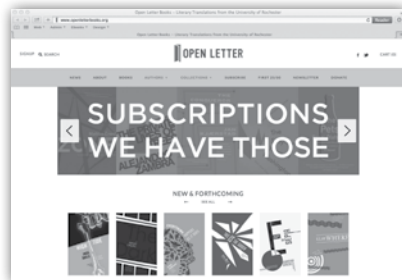
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