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FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

MAY 16, 2017

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(World)



THE INVENTED PART

RODRIGO FRESÁN

Trans. from the Spanish by Will Vanderhyden

An aging writer, disillusioned with the state of literary culture, attempts to disappear in the most cosmically dramatic manner: traveling to the Hadron Collider, merging with the God particle, and transforming into an omnipresent deity—a meta-writer—capable of rewriting reality.

With biting humor and a propulsive, contagious style, amid the accelerated particles of his characteristic obsessions—the writing of F. Scott Fitzgerald, the music of Pink Floyd and The Kinks, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the links between great art and the lives of the artists who create it—Fresán takes us on a whirlwind tour of writers and muses, madness and genius, friendships, broken families, and alternate realities, exploring themes of childhood, loss, memory, aging, and death.

Drawing inspiration from the scope of modern classics and the structural pyrotechnics of the postmodern masters, the Argentine once referred to as “a pop Borges” delivers a powerful defense of great literature, a celebration of reading and writing, of the invented parts—the stories we tell ourselves to give shape to our world.

“A kaleidoscopic, open-hearted, shamelessly polymathic storyteller, the kind who brings a blast of oxygen into the room.”

—Jonathan Lethem

“Rodrigo Fresán is a marvelous writer, a direct descendent of Adolfo Bioy Casares and Jorge Luis Borges, but with his own voice and of his own time.”

—John Banville

Rodrigo Fresán is the author of nine novels, including *Kensington Gardens*, *Mantra*, and *The Bottom of the Sky*. His works incorporate many elements from science-fiction (Philip K. Dick in particular) alongside pop culture and literary references.

Will Vanderhyden received an MA in Literary Translation from the University of Rochester. He has translated fiction by Carlos Labbé, Edgardo Cozarinsky, Alfredo Bryce Echenique, Juan Marsé, Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, Rodrigo Fresán, and Elvio Gandolfo.

FROM THE INVENTED PART RODRIGO FRESÁN



In the same way, the same pathology, the imminence of the diagnosis is translated into a torrent of ideas that he writes down in his notebook, in a delirious fever out of which bursts the possibly last but revealing words of a dying man. In storylines closer to something—a kind of oriental and exotic writing—he read once called *biji* than to the western and exceedingly played-out short story. Contained yet open plot capsules that, for once, more closely resemble Chekov and Munro than his typical hurricane stories, blowing from all directions at once, as if everyone in them were talking at the same time and not raising their hand to ask permission first.

In “Loss,” a father fights against the death of his son. And, of course, he loses. Now that father—suddenly an ex-father—knows how to respond when people ask him what’s the worst thing that’s happened to you in your life. Now, in addition, he knows how to respond when people ask what’s the worst thing that will happen to you in your life—because it already happened. There’s nothing more horrible than having all the answers, there’s nothing worse than knowing nobody has the answer to his question and that that question is “why?” It’s not fair to have to live through the death of a child. His son won’t see him grow old and he won’t see the beginning of his son’s old age. Suddenly, everything is going against the natural order of things. The natural order that determines that, when

a father dies, his son—beyond the pain he might end up feeling—also feels somewhat liberated, knowing that his father is no longer thinking of him. On the other hand, when the son is the one dying, the fact that he no longer thinks of him is, for the father, a biblical punishment, a private plague. And his son has died even before his grandparents, the father’s own parents, whom, presumably, he will also see die. And nobody will see his death. Nobody, yes, will live to tell it. Nobody will survive to tell him about it. Now, that man is outside all logic of time and space, the normal course of the story has been altered. So, he decides, anything is possible, anything can happen. Because the worst thing that can happen to someone has already happened to him. Which means that now nothing can happen to him but the expansive wave of what keeps on happening, what expands, what occupies more space all the time inside and outside of him and what will soon contain and devour everything, down to the last beam of light, until everything is void and black and hole. Last rights pronounced, the first displays of affection from acquaintances, and that’s it, the father decides that the only way he’ll be able to overcome the pain will be to eliminate all traces of his son. Delete. Erase him as if he’d never existed to the point where he’d even forget that he’d erased him.

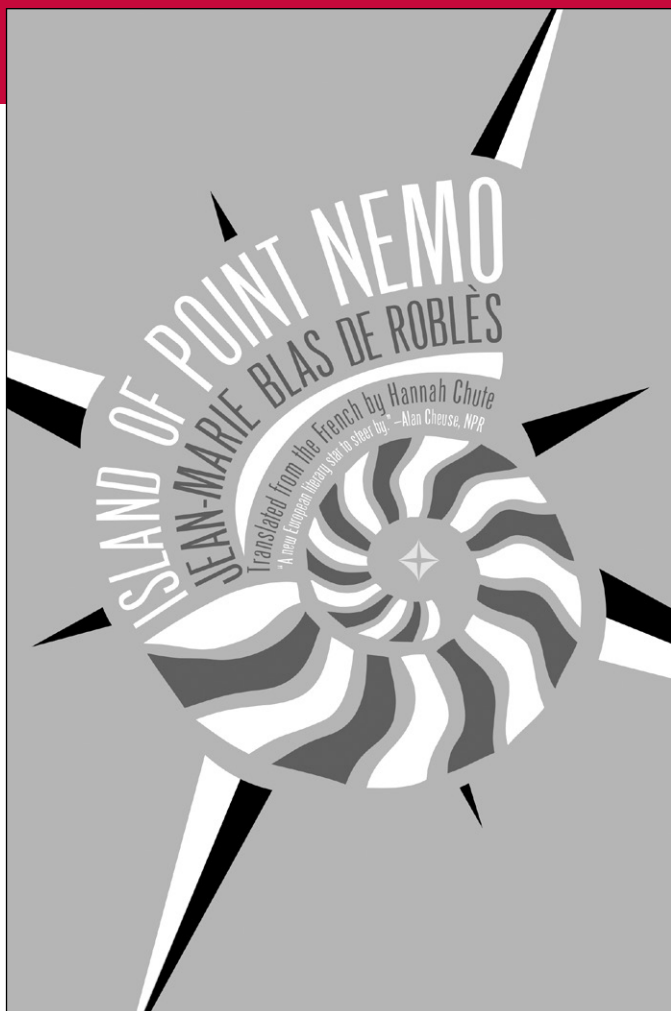
Demolish from his memory the shared palace of his son’s memory. So, first, the father burns all his drawings, gives away the tiny clothes, puts toys in bags and takes them to hospitals and orphanages, calls a charity organization to have them come take away his son’s rocket-shaped bed. But soon he discovers that it’s not working, that it’s not enough: the pain is still there, he can’t forget him, his son is more present than ever in the increasingly full void he’s left behind. The next step, it’s clear, is to end things with his wife, with the mother—because it all began with her, it was her he entered so his son would come out. He cuts her into pieces, buries her in the garden; but the relief doesn’t last long. Just passing in front of his son’s school; or approaching that cinema where they went to see *Toy Story*, all three of them, for the first of many times; or the place where they ate their favorite hamburgers; or . . . What follows is a hurricane of death and destruction transmitted live and direct from helicopter-mounted cameras. Flames, explosions, screams. Neither the police nor the army are able to stop him; and the father feels he’s the chosen one, invulnerable, an unstoppable force of nature, a Shiva dancing her last dance. At sunrise, almost nothing remains of the small city and our hero—a man on a mission—departs for the rest of the planet; because his son loved geography and knew so much about other countries and told him that, when he grew up, he wanted to be “the person who chooses the colors of the countries on maps.”

[. . .]

In “And That’s When the Trouble Started,” an adolescent boy tells his father again the same thing he’s been telling him all his life: that when he grows up—not long now—he’s going to be what he already is even though he hasn’t published anything yet: a writer. His father tells him that it’d be better to pursue a career where he could make a living from writing. Writing ad copy, for example. And, since the boy ignores him, the father tells him he’ll send his stories to a writer friend of his who runs a magazine, to put him in his place. So he does, and the writer friend invites the son to write for the magazine. And the son does that for a living while writing his first book, which doesn’t go at all badly for him. From that point on, the father never stops asking and forbidding him to “put him in one of his little stories” but always wishing he would.

At the end of “Correction,” a mother asks her daughter—while at the same time she answers herself; because it’s one of those questions that are actually a statement with just a solitary and final word catching the question mark—“You don’t have any reason to resent me, right?” To which the daughter responds: “I resent you for nothing; which is not the same thing.”

In “With Childish Handwriting,” only a few words are written: “Daddy Dearest: for your information, starting today, I’ll be sleeping with a big knife under my pillow. Your daughter, M.” ■



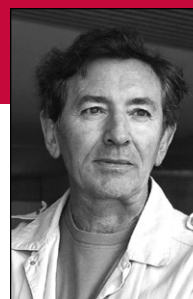
FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

AUGUST 15, 2017

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(World)



ISLAND OF POINT NEMO

JEAN-MARIE BLAS DE ROBLÈS

Trans. from the French by Hannah Chute

A stolen diamond and three right feet, wearing shoes of a non-existent brand, that wash ashore in Scotland set into motion the first plot of *Island of Point Nemo*, a rollicking Jules Verne-like adventure narrative that crosses continents and oceans, involves multilingual codes, a world-famous villain, and three eccentrically loopy detectives.

Running parallel is the story of B@bil Books, an e-reader factory in France filled with its own set of colorful characters, including the impotent Dieumercie and his randy wife, who will stop at nothing—including a suspect ritual involving bees—to fix his “problem,” and their abusive boss Wang-li Wong, obsessed with carrier pigeons and spying on his employees.

With the humor of a Jasper Fforde novel, and the structure of a Haruki Murakami one, *Island of Point Nemo* is a literary puzzle and grand testament to the power of storytelling—even in our digital age.

“Those of you who stay with Blas de Roblès’s ultimately quite satisfying novel will find yourselves with a new European literary star to steer by.”

—Alan Cheuse, NPR

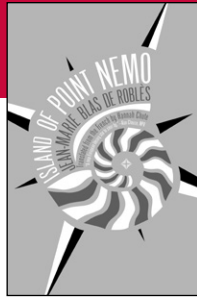
“Psychodrama meets history meets mystery—vintage Umberto Eco territory, as practiced by French philosophy professor turned novelist Blas de Roblès.”

—Kirkus Reviews

Born in Algeria, **Jean-Marie Blas de Roblès** is a truly international writer, having spent significant time in Brazil, France, Taiwan, and Libya. His novel *Where Tigers Are at Home* won the Fnac, Giono, and Médicis Prizes. *Island of Point Nemo* is his ninth novel.

Hannah Chute has an MA in Literary Translation from the University of Rochester. In 2015, she received the Banff Centre Scholarship to work on *Island of Point Nemo*, her first full-length translation.

FROM ISLAND OF POINT NEMO JEAN-MARIE BLAS DE ROBLÈS



Martial Canterel was forty-five. Imagine a thin face, hair pulled back and sticking up in all directions . . . big green eyes with lashes so thick that one would have thought him naturally made-up, a nice nose, and—between a French mustache and a tuft of hairs forming a fan on his lower lip—a fleshy little mouth with a disconcerting pout. His mustache was no less bizarre: very thick beneath the nose, it undulated out horizontally, stretching to an uncommon length before rising up, and then fading into tawny whiskers. Canterel maintained it obsessively. Add to this a braided frock coat over a waistcoat of quilted silk, a white collared shirt with a double bow tie the color of a Périgord truffle, cashmere trousers, and grey beaver boots, and you will understand that the figure whom we are examining cultivated the appearance of a dandy.

Canterel inspected his attire in the mirror. He was adjusting his collar when Holmes entered, followed by a black man whom he did not know.

"Hello, my friend!" he said, stepping forward with his arms outstretched. "Just what are you playing at, Martial, leaving me waiting at your door like some common delivery man?"

[. . .]

"Allow me to introduce Grimod, my butler," said Holmes.

"Delighted," said Canterel, eagerly shaking his hand. "Grimod?"

"Grimod de la Reynière," continued Holmes, noticeably embarrassed. "It's a long story, I'll tell it to you one of these days. But I am here regarding a more important matter. Would it be possible to discuss it while not standing on one foot?"

"Forgive me," said Canterel. "I will find us a more suitable place. Miss Sherrington," he said, guiding them toward an adjoining room, "tea for me, and a Longmorn 72 for our guests, please." He turned to Grimod. "I know Shylock's tastes, but you may also have tea, if you prefer . . ."

"Fear not, the Longmorn will be perfectly fine," said Grimod with the smile of a connoisseur.

[. . .]

"Have you read this weekend's New Herald?" asked Holmes, pulling a notebook from his jacket pocket.

"You know very well that I never read the papers . . ."

"Anyone can change, even you. But let's continue. That means you did not come across this astonishing bit of news. I'll read it to you: 'Last Monday, a hiker on a beach on the Isle of Skye, in Scotland, was surprised to discover a human foot cut off at mid-calf;

mummified by the salt, this appendage was still shod in a sneaker. Two days later, thirty kilometers to the east, at the source of the loch at Glen Shiel, the sea washed up a second, quite similar foot. And, yesterday, to the south of Kyle of Lochalsh—that is, at the tip of an equilateral triangle formed by the two previous points—Mrs. Glenfidich's dog brought his mistress a third foot, hewn off in a similar manner and also wearing the same kind of shoe. These gruesome discoveries are rare in a county where there are neither sharks nor crocodiles; moreover, the police have not had report of a single disappearance in two years.'" Holmes paused for a moment and lifted one finger, drawing Canterel's attention to the end of the story: "The plot thickens: regarding what the locals are already calling the "mystery of the three feet," it should be noted that these are three right feet of different sizes, but shod in the same type of shoe."

"What is the make?" Canterel demanded.

"Ananke . . ."

"I hope you haven't come all this way just to tell me that?"

He placed a ladyfinger in the cookie-dunking device that Miss Sherrington had left near his cup and used it to soak the cookie in his tea for several seconds.

"Ananke, you say?" he resumed, bringing the moistened cookie to his lips.

"Yes," said Holmes. "'Destiny,' the Greeks' unalterable 'necessity' . . ."

"Except that this make does not exist," continued Grimod, sniffing his glass of scotch.

"However," added Holmes, "it is the name of the jewel that was stolen this week from the heart of that same triangle, Eilean Donan Castle . . ."

"To the point, Shylock, get to the point!" exclaimed Canterel.

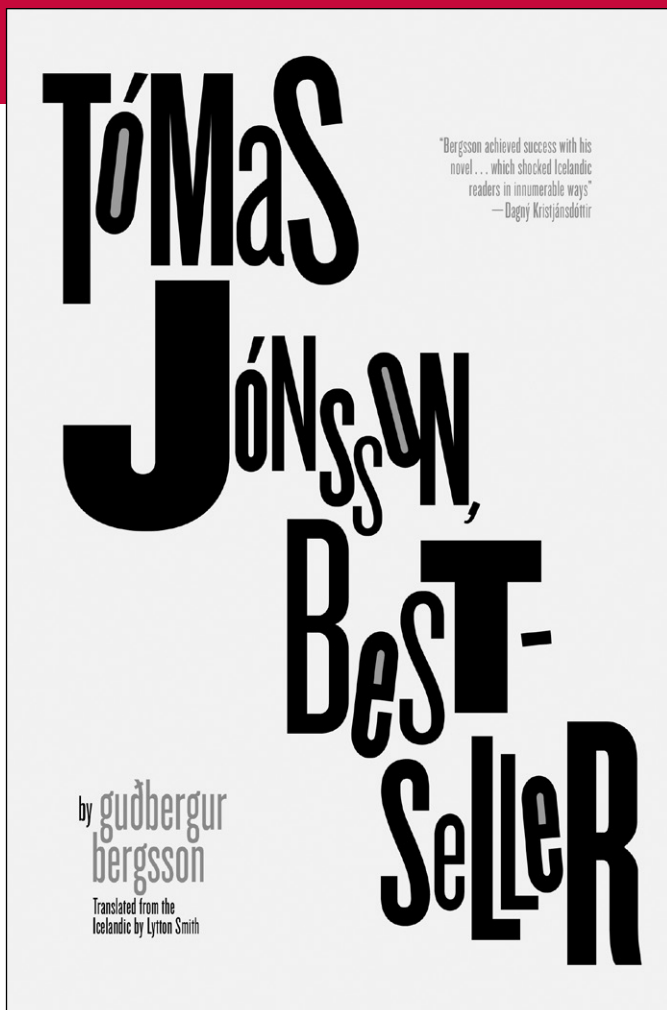
"The Ananke," Holmes continued without losing his composure, "is the largest diamond ever excavated from an earthly mine: eight hundred carats once cut, appraised at over fifteen million florins! This marvel belonged to Lady MacRae, widow of Lord Duncan MacRae of Kintail, in other words a certain Madame Chauchat who should not have been completely erased from your memory, if I'm not mistaken."

"Chauchat, Clawdia Chauchat?" Canterel murmured.

"The same," said Holmes, pulling a cigar from his waistcoat pocket. "It is she—and the insurance company that offers my services at an exorbitant price—who have recruited me to retrieve this magnificent stone."

Canterel's face had darkened suddenly.

"Obviously, this changes everything," he said, massaging his temples with two fingers. "Miss Sherrington, I beg you, I am going to need some of my medication . . ." ■



FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

JULY 11, 2017

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(World)



TÓMAS JÓNSSON, BESTSELLER GUÐBERGUR BERGSSON

Trans. from the Icelandic by Lytton Smith

A retired, senile bank clerk confined to his basement apartment, Tómas Jónsson decides that, since memoirs are all the rage, he's going to write his own—a sure bestseller—that will also right the wrongs of contemporary Icelandic society. Egoistic, cranky, and digressive, Tómas blasts away while relating pick-up techniques, meditations on chamber pot use, ways to assign monetary value to noise pollution, and much more. His rants parody and subvert the idea of the memoir—something that's as relevant today in our memoir-obsessed society as it was when the novel was first published.

Considered by many to be the "Icelandic *Ulysses*" for its wordplay, neologisms, structural upheaval, and reinvention of what's possible in Icelandic writing, *Tómas Jónsson, Bestseller* was a bestseller, heralding a new age of Icelandic literature.

"Guðbergur Bergsson achieved success with his novel *Tómas Jónsson, Bestseller*, which shocked Icelandic readers in innumerable ways."

—Dagný Kristjánsdóttir

"Bergsson is known in his homeland for his translations of Gabriel García Márquez, and the debt to García Márquez is clear in this sparsely sensual, idyllic fable of country matters."

—Publishers Weekly

Guðbergur Bergsson is the author of twenty-one books, from novels to children's literature, and a translator from Spanish into Icelandic. He has received the Icelandic Literary Prize and the Nordic Prize.

Lytton Smith is the author of *The All-Purpose Magical Tent*, and has translated works from Bragi Ólafsson, Jón Gnarr, and Kristín Ómarsdóttir, among others.



A Memoir

I am descended from the bravest, bluest-eyed Vikings. I am related to court poets and victorious kings. I am an Icelander. My name is Tómas Jónsson. I am an ancient

no, no

First Volume

to my mind, it seems easiest to begin this way, First Volume, and as a result I can move right away to the main kernel of the material: In the first years of the Second World War, I took into my apartment some lodgers, Svein and Katrína, a married couple with five children: Stína, who died; Dóri, their son, a male childling, and a small cat named Títa, at this moment, he's napping soft and warm against me and has returned along with Anna and Magnus and Dóra so that I reckon he's all grown up and, what's more, there's a new addition to the group, Herman, I hear them call him, cursed be always the day when they returned, and the musician, who rented the small bedroom on the other side of the partition, i.e. of the bedroom where I myself presently live, but his playing carries into this bedroom, which is very much smaller in size. His rental terms were

the very same I set myself. I considered them to be decent and unquestionable, such that the property owner could enjoy the benefit of some privileges in his own home, the musician agreed to the rental stipulations, what's more he got a written document off me stating that he could practice his electric guitar every day between four and five o'clock in the afternoon, equivalent in value to one square meter of apartment, since my bedroom was larger by a floor-braid according to the blueprint. He accepted this not because he was legally keen to pay an equal amount of rent, but as I clearly stated in the rental agreement: A state of complete silence pertaining in a bedroom that is one square meter smaller than the other in the same apartment, the person in question can pay an unequal, lesser amount of rent. But if unusual, private noise carries from the smaller room then the tenant in question, who is responsible for the sounds, is obligated to pay the same rent in respect to the tenant who lives beside him. Two hours a day for guitar practice, I therefore reason, according to my own opinion and to the best of my knowledge, is equivalent to one square meter (1m²). *You old financial fox*, I sometimes tell myself in a humorous tone, you clearly ought to make the same payment for lodging as

the others. I am inclined to the opinion that the value of a property increases in this way, at least in the eyes of anyone paying installments on a house at fixed intervals. Such selflessness and self-sacrifice is my mode of thinking, what concerns me and myself only. I strive to improve my discipline, and control the back-sliding oscillations of my disposition with an increasing severity of external arguments. yes shouted that oppressive spirituality

Finally I gave up on all the rental stipulations, deciding the apartment had to stop being a pigsty and a twisted den of debauchery; I lived alone for a short time. It's a great benefit for a person to live totally alone, all by themselves—O, wondrous days of solitude—dependent of everything except his own whims and eccentricities, which I tell myself as praise, are long won and hard-fought. I have become like the world around me. I live all alone within my own four walls, and I had put to the test by fiddling and patching variously the things that had gone amuck the while I rented out the apartment. I forgot myself in the time while passed living on the earlier rents, lost in myself, and incomprehensibly I stopped taking rent from Anna and Magnus, and on top of everything the blindness which the doctors had managed to keep at bay until now worsened. I suffered from congenital blindness. (Both blindness

and baldness run in my family.) Clouds cover both my eyes, never drawing away from "the edge of the sun" but instead shielding the sun the whole day, until the day wraps itself in civil twilight. Yet I have always been, and still am, capable of distinguishing night from day and, peculiar as it may sound, I can tell red from white, so I write in red ink formerly I put the income from my subletting in a particular savings account book, and preserved it there until receiving the envelope (brown) labeled with a pretty signature, about which Sigurdur one let words fall, how it resembled copperplate—Sigmundur promised him, probably, the teacher—in all likelihood I was then twelve years old. (For amusement's sake, as an aside, I want to note duly, that I received an official acknowledgment from the King of Iceland and Denmark, who provided schoolchildren with recognition for their pretty handwriting. Not to this day has anyone had such recognition as I received.) On the very middle of the envelope was recorded in red ink: The rental income of Tómas Jónsson. Fine digits swimming on blue waves. In every wave-trough and under the wave-crests there was a little period. The far end of the signature rose a rocky coastline with a tall lighthouse shining over the sea. I considered it finished, and the lighthouse was an icon—my very own icon. ■



FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

JUNE 13, 2017

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978-1-940953-59-5

(World)



SALKI WOJCIECH NOWICKI

Trans. from the Polish by Jan Pytalski

Lying in bed in Gotland after a writer's conference, thinking about this compulsive desire to travel—and the uncomfortable tensions this desire creates—the narrator of *Salki* starts recounting tragic stories of his family's past, detailing their lives, struggles, and fears in twentieth-century Eastern Europe. In these pieces, he investigates various "salkis"—attic rooms where memories and memorabilia are stored—real and metaphorical, investigating old documents to better understand the violence of recent times.

Winner of the prestigious Gdynia Literary Award for Essay, *Salki* is in the tradition of the works of W. G. Sebald and Ryszard Kapuściński, utilizing techniques of Polish reportage in creating a landscape of memory that is moving and historically powerful.

"It all blends here unexpectedly: that past and memory with the present and space. . . . At times, your skin will crawl with pleasure from reading."

—Andrzej Stasiuk

"A masterful tribute to Georges Perec. . . . There is no future or past, but rather chains of ideas and associations that complement each other. In that sense, Nowicki's book reminds one of *The Rings of Saturn* by Sebald."

—Polityka

Wojciech Nowicki is a Polish essayist, journalist, critic, photographer, and even writes a culinary column. He is also the co-founder of the Imago Mundi Foundation devoted to promoting photography. *Salki* is his first book to be translated into English.

Jan Pytalski is a graduate of the American Studies Center at the University of Warsaw, and has an MA in Literary Translation from the University of Rochester.

FROM SALKI WOJCIECH NOWICKI



My aunt would come from far away. The Christmas tree was in the corner, and after midnight there was carp in jelly and vodka in small glasses. “Zdrowie,” my grandfather would say, and they would clink glasses ceremoniously. All the ladies would gasp loudly to let everyone know how unused to drinking vodka they were, and Grandmother would even close her eyes and make faces. They would drink vodka and explain it helps digestion; my aunt would drink sitting all stiff in her chair. She barely swallowed and the story would begin and everyone knew that this is how it would be because it’s how it always had been. She had only one story: it was in Gaje Wielkie, the troops of Stepan Bandera came into the house and murdered the entire family. “I was laying in bed, Mom was there, Father was there” she would talk about the rest of the family and I can’t remember exactly what, and why there were so many people in the house. Maybe someone came to visit, like it happens in the countryside, like when there’s a war? “When they came, I jumped behind the bed and lay quietly on the floor, quiet as a mouse, and they kept shooting at Mommy, at Daddy, soon they’d murdered them all. Six people, six, all in front of me. And they kept killing our people all through the night. In the morning they dragged everyone out and buried them in a mass grave by the Orthodox Church.” “Only my family,” she

would tell us “was buried by the house, right where the trees were planted the other day.” And she would start weeping, nothing could stop her now. She wept all the time anyway, waving her arms as if drunk, and then going back to peaceful weeping. Her eyes simply got wet, as if she suffered from chronic eye inflammation, and she delivered her story like a poorly trained actor. Bandera’s soldiers, the bed, the floor, killing, running into the night. And again, trembling as if from Parkinson’s disease, every tremble releasing an identical little cloud of history. I hated her. I begged my parents to never invite her again with her bloody story; a story that leads to madness. I didn’t care about Bandera, about the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, but no one ever explained anything, anyway. For them, Bandera was as obvious as dirt, water, or air was for me—they were convinced you don’t need to explain those things. Just like their hometown, which was an empty sound, impossible to understand, full of grief over what was long lost . . . My family used words that nobody knew, nobody used, that had nothing to do with our half of the house and garden in this post-German city. They would say: “ryskal,” “banderowcy,” “upowcy,” they would say “taskać” instead of “carry”; I started talking like them and my

brother would go berserk. “You talk like a Ukrainian!” he would shout, not sensing that, in part, he was one himself. My other family, on the Nowicki side, would speak differently too. For example: “salki”—we didn’t know this word. *Salki* are the rooms in an attic; they also used “nyże,” for places where you can store your memories and memorabilia right above your head. Just like those stories here, the *salki* of my memory, which I open for everyone. They would even call to the hens differently, “pul, pul, pul” instead of “cheep, cheep, cheep,” and even my Lithuanian grandparents differed in this regard; a difference according to which history established its own border—my grandfather came from Lithuania, my Grandmother came from Belarus. They would say “przeżęgrać,” and describe the horse as “cybaty”; when the skies were ripped open by a distant storm you could hear the silent *matanka*. It was where they lived that you could find *żagary* growing, they were the ones who would go out to get some *braha*. Their language was otherworldly, from a beautiful yet grim fairytale that they nurtured within them, even though they seemed cheerful and pleasant. They would contract the disease through foul air, spoil other’s minds, even though during the day you wanted to sit with them forever. Dividing lines went straight through the middle of the family, through the room, the table, the bed. Two brothers would face each other, one a Polish soldier, the other

a Lithuanian policeman. Their children live in different countries and know very little about each other; and it can’t be glued back together. On both sides of the border they would curse the enemy and praise the memory of their own people; it’s hardly surprising they didn’t want to remember the others. They were labeled themselves, oppressed, so they labeled and oppressed others, without even realizing that they did.

We had to calm my aunt down because she would talk about everything at once, about her dreams and those of others, about the prophecies from the dreams becoming reality. She dreamt that it was 1942 and she was walking on an asphalt road, nothing around her, only the gray ground, gray ground. She kept walking and every time she reached the horizon there was just more road. But she kept walking because she wasn’t carrying anything and it was an easy walk. She was wearing a dress, shoes, her hands were empty. And after the seventh horizon she reached a cliff: the asphalt ended and dropped into a giant canyon, a river at its bottom, and terrifying waves kept echoing, foaming in rage. On the other side was her family, and others, but she couldn’t cross because the river was as wide as the Styx. And so she kept waiting for decades, she waited for the number of the deceased in her family to match what was foretold, to match the number of those standing on the other side of that dream river. ■

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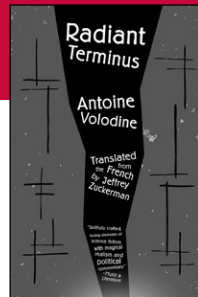
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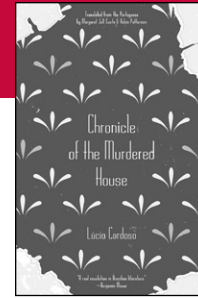
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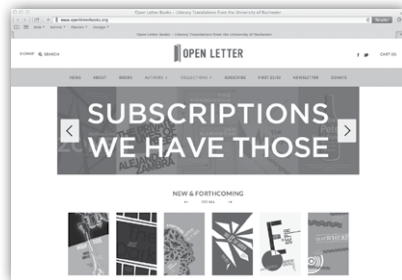
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