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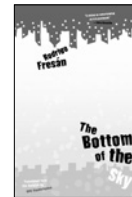
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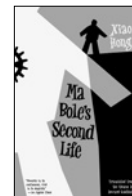
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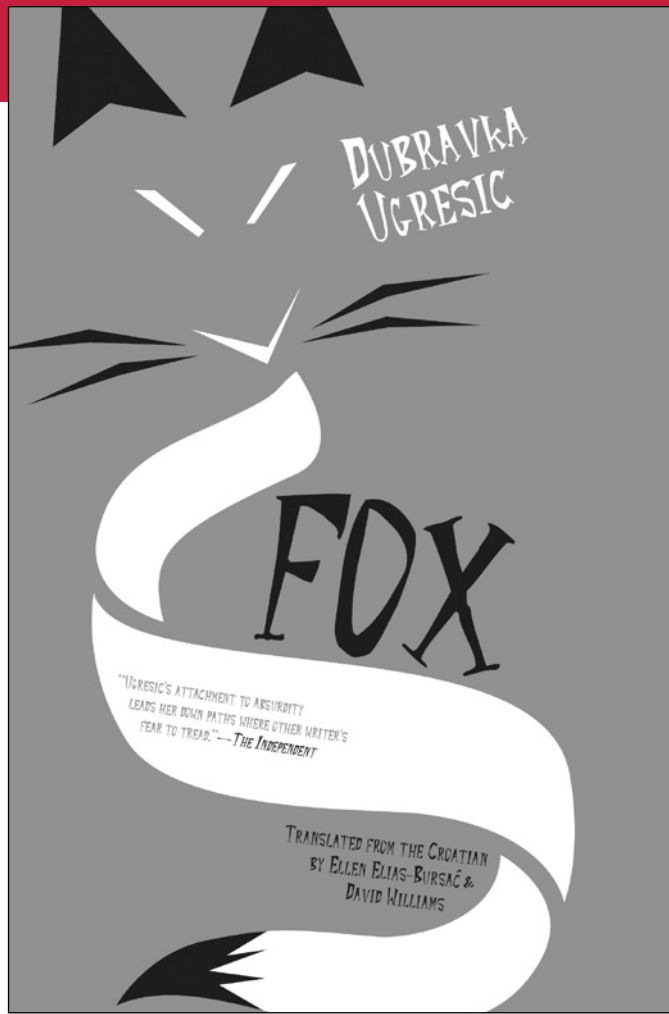
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FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

APRIL 17, 2018

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FOX
DUBRAVKA UGRESIC

Trans. from the Croatian by Ellen Elias-Bursac & David Williams

Winner of the 2016 Neustadt International Prize for Literature

With characteristic wit and narrative force, *Fox* takes us from Russia to Japan, through Balkan minefields and American road trips, and from the 1920s to the present, as it explores the power of storytelling and literary invention, notions of betrayal, and the randomness of human lives and biographies.

Using the duplicitous and shape-shifting fox of Eastern folklore as a motif, Ugresic constructs a novel that reinvents itself over and over, blending nuggets of literary trivia (like how Nabokov named the *Neonympha dorothea dorothea* butterfly after the woman who drove him cross-country) with the timeless story of a woman trying to escape her hometown and find love to magical effect.

Propelled by literary footnotes and "minor" characters, *Fox* is vintage Ugresic, recovering the voices of those on the margins with a verve that's impassioned, learned, and hilarious.

"Like Nabokov, Ugresic affirms our ability to remember as a source for saving our moral and compassionate identity."

—John Balaban, *Washington Post*

"Ugresic's wit is bound by no preconceived purposes, and once the story takes off, a wild freedom of association and adventurous discernment is set in motion. . . . Ugresic dissects the social world."

—*World Literature Today*

Dubravka Ugresic is the author of six works of fiction, and as many collections of essays, including the NBCC award finalist, *Karaoke Culture*. Exiled from Croatia, she currently lives in the Netherlands. In 2016, she was awarded the Neustadt International Prize for Literature for her body of work.

Ellen Elias-Bursac is a translator of more than a dozen works, including several by David Albahari and Dubravka Ugresic.

David Williams is the author of *Writing Postcommunism*, and translated Ugresic's *Europe in Sepia* and *Karaoke Culture*.



Dorothy Leuthold became an essential footnote to the history of modern literature through no effort of her own. She had no qualifications for it (Can somebody actually qualify to be a footnote? Oh, yes!), nor did she have the inclination to be anything of the kind. Leuthold is, nevertheless, a footnote appended to the great cultural text known as "Vladimir Nabokov." And while this is a cultural text that expands daily, Leuthold remains the same miserly and mysterious footnote she was at the outset, and this—in our day and age, when the number of footnotes and their size often threaten to engulf the text—is a genuine rarity.

Dorothy G. (Gretchen) Leuthold was born on April 8, 1897, in the little town of Waseca, Minnesota. Her parents, Charles and Josephine Cinthold, were of German extraction as was, indeed, half of Waseca. Apparently she never married, so why Dorothy changed her name from Cinthold to Leuthold is not clear. Her entire life is a blank except for a single detail that has propelled her from total anonymity to the literary cocktail party whose guests are condemned to revel on forever. True, at the party Leuthold would be a wallflower, a see-through figure, a person few would ever notice, the woman in the corner who'd be taken for a maid-servant and prompted with a gesture to fill the glasses for the guests. Yet her name is right

there on the guest list. Chance may have put Leuthold on the list, but she was no party crasher.

Dorothy Leuthold arrived in New York from Waseca in 1930. She found an apartment on Manhattan's Upper West Side and a job at one of the branches of the celebrated New York Public Library; apparently she also attended classes at Columbia University.

Andrew Field, an early biographer of Nabokov's, was one of the first to write of Dorothy Leuthold. Having arrived in the United States in 1940, Russian writer Vladimir Nabokov, an impassioned lepidopterist, planned to spend the summer of 1941 collecting butterflies with his wife Véra and son Dmitri, although to do so would be a struggle. Véra had been suffering from back pain that whole winter and they weren't sure she'd be able to undertake the trip, and besides they had no vehicle, no car of their own.

"They did go, and on their first trip across America the Nabokovs were fortunate enough to have a driver. Her name was Dorothy Leuthold, and she was the last of Nabokov's private language pupils, an unmarried American woman who had worked for years in the New York Public Library system. Nabokov had met her quite by chance, and she had expressed a desire

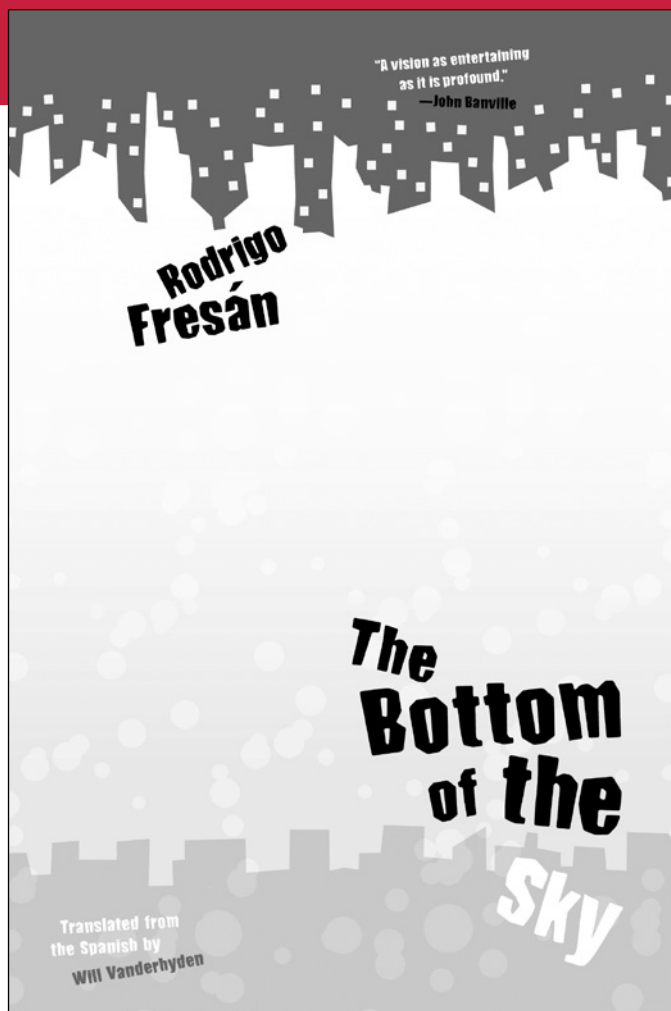
to supplement her knowledge of Russian, which was very limited but included, for reasons Nabokov could never fathom, all the swear words, the meanings of which she evidently did not properly grasp. Then, when the Nabokovs told her that they were going to California, she offered them her car, a brand-new Pontiac that she had just bought. But neither Nabokov nor his wife had any more occasion to know how to drive a car than to understand a bank statement—both were simple enough matters abstractly, but neither had obtruded upon their lives in the course of two decades. Their friend and pupil, when she learned that, said, 'Oh, I'll drive you.' Not only did she drive them, she also planned their itinerary, which took a southerly course and included a particularly memorable stop in Arizona, for it was there, on the south rim of the Grand Canyon on a very cold day in June (they had departed on May 26), that Nabokov walked down a path into the gorge and captured a new butterfly, which he gallantly named after their chauffeur, who had made the trip just to follow her whim and improve her Russian and be kind to some newly arrived immigrants."

Dorothy Leuthold would bring the Nabokovs to Palo Alto and then drive the car back to the East Coast. At Stanford that summer,

*Andrew Field, VN, *The Life and Art of Vladimir Nabokov*. New York 1986, pp. 207-208.

Nabokov would offer a course on creative writing, called "The Art of Writing," as well as a course on Russian literature.

Although Dorothy Leuthold is mentioned by many authors, notably Brian Boyd, another of Nabokov's biographers, Nabokov himself, and Robert Michael Pyle in his article "Between Climb and Cloud: Nabokov among the Lepidopterists," the itinerary they followed on their trip from the East Coast to the West Coast—which Leuthold planned and pursued with a martial rigor—has stirred more interest than has the actual person of Dorothy Leuthold. The trip, which began on May 26 and lasted precisely nineteen days, was, among other things, an excellent introduction to the America of motels that Nabokov would later describe in his masterpiece, *Lolita*. The very names suggest the Nabokovs stayed in cheap roadside lodgings (Motor Court Lee-Mead, Cumberland Motor Court, Wonderland Motor Courts, Motor Hotel), while other names of equally cheap lodgings tend to push the reader toward the symbolism of the "memorable experience" (the hotel, for instance, where they stayed at the Grand Canyon and where Nabokov made the big "find" of his butterfly was called Bright Angel Lodge!). ■



FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

MAY 29, 2018

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THE BOTTOM OF THE SKY

RODRIGO FRESÁN

Trans. from the Spanish by Will Vanderhyden

An homage to American science-fiction films and novels, *The Bottom of the Sky* is the story of two boys, a disturbingly beautiful girl, and their joint love for other planets. Their friendship is formed during the heyday of sci-fi writing, a time defined by almost cult-like literary groups and pulp covers awash in gaudy alien landscapes.

But time has passed, and the three members of The Faraways have drifted apart. The future they once dreamed of is now happening, but interstellar travel to Urkh 24 has been replaced with 9/11, the Gulf War, and a mysterious "incident" at the center of it all.

A Kurt Vonnegut novel told by David Lynch, filtered through the madness of Philip K. Dick, *The Bottom of the Sky* is a triumph of style, or, as Fresán says in the afterword, "a clump of simultaneously broadcast messages, like a storyline that only wants to be a succession of marvelous moments seen all at the same time."

"Fresán is a wonderful writer, he is heir to Adolfo Bioy Casares and Jorge Luis Borges, but has his own voice in his own time."

—John Banville

"It's the book of the future, the book that begins to write itself when everything has ended. . . . Between Bioy Casares and Philip K. Dick, but with a voice all its own, it is both powerful and artistic."

—Enrique Vila-Matas

Rodrigo Fresán is the author of ten novels, including *The Invented Part*, *The Dreamed Part*, and *Mantra*. A self-professed "referential maniac," his works incorporate dozens of pop culture references alongside high literary ideas.

Will Vanderhyden received an MA in Literary Translation Studies from the University of Rochester and has translated fiction by Carlos Labbé, Juan Marsé, Elvio Gandolfo, and more.

FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE SKY RODRIGO FRESÁN



And so, there we are again. Ezra and I. And there we'll stay.

After telling me the interplanetary whereabouts of my unfortunate father and pointing to the sky of his—suddenly our—room, Ezra sat down on one of the beds, rolled up his pants and showed me, with a fiercely proud smile, two abnormally skinny legs wrapped in harnesses of metal and leather, he stood and said something in a strange accent, punctuating one of the two words with little pants. At first I think Ezra has a speech problem, a disability or, perhaps, another metal apparatus wrapped around his teeth. Or asthma. Or tuberculosis. But then I realize what he's trying to do: Ezra wants to sound like a foreigner from somewhere very far away. Ezra—the imperfect youngest child arriving on the heels six perfect sisters who are constantly plotting with their mother to undermine a father who never put up a fight—needed to think of himself as alien to all of that. A spy, an infiltrator in the controlled and toxic atmosphere of planet Leventhal. An extraterrestrial who speaks perfect English but can't ever—or doesn't really want to—entirely forget the accent of his own planet.

"SCIENCE FICTION!" was what Ezra exclaimed.

And I, of course, knew something of the celestial vicissitudes of gods and mortals in ancient religions. I'd stumbled across the odd crackpot satires of philosophers and patriots. I'd also read novels with heroes who enjoyed traveling to the center and the bottom and the highest places of the world as well as

other self-styled "scientific romances," with wise laboratory men driven mad by their own messianic genius. Or with creators of immortality potions. Or with adventurers discovering lost continents inhabited by dinosaurs. Or with warriors battling invaders from an exotic ocean Empire. And all of them, always, written by men who'd traveled nowhere, for whom just standing up from their desks was a struggle. Men who invented perpetual-motion adventures for little readers who also struggled to escape from the orbits of their homes and parents. [. . .] So—those invisible men and human animals and bellicose tourists from the red planet and flying rockets and voyages into the future via Victorian apparatuses or hypnotic trances—they were, actually, instruction manuals barely hidden inside novels and stories. Instruction manuals to set the future in motion.

"SCIENCE FICTION!" Ezra repeated.

And it was then, for the first time, that I heard, tied together by the umbilical cord of a hyphen (each nourished on the letters and significance of the other) those two words that at first, to me, seemed impossible to bring together in the same environment. *Science* and *Fiction* struck me as irreconcilable and contradictory terms, like polar opposites.

Two of the greatest novels in the history of literature (two novels not considered part of any genre, instead, each of them a genre that began and ended in itself; the same

would occur years later with the polemical *Damitax*, which follows, throughout the cosmos, the amorous obsession of an old astronautics professor with a manipulative Venusian adolescent who he clones over and over again hoping that one of the versions will, finally, love him) were, indeed, fantastical and spatial. But they were, above all, classics. *Krakhma-Zarr*, Ezra's favorite, narrates the madness of a captain pursuing a mythical cosmic creature from star to star. And *Times Without Time*, my favorite, was the obsessive tale of the last Martian Mars-El: a traveler who, after ingesting a strange drink distilled from the dust suspended in the melancholic rings of Saturn, returns to the confines of his childhood and, from there, passes through his entire life all over again as if contemplating it from outside, as if he were reading it, as if it were a book composed of many books.

In a way (titles that now I can't find anywhere on my bookshelves and that seem not to appear in the card catalogues of any library) we were defined by one or the other novel, and by dividing us they made us perfectly complimentary: Ezra was a man of action and I a man of reaction.

Or something like that.

And my reaction to those two magic words—*Science* and *Fiction*, suddenly turned into one word with two heads and a single brain—was instantaneous and perfect.

It was as if Ezra were a magician—someone who'd just finished announcing that "For the next trick I'll need a volunteer"—and

I, a more than willing spectator, ready to climb up on the stage and submit myself to anything: to be cut in half, to be the body stuck full of swords, to disappear in a cloud of colorful smoke or inside a magic cabinet decorated with oriental characters and dragons with almond eyes, to float and ascend and lose myself forever in the rafters of a vaudeville theater.

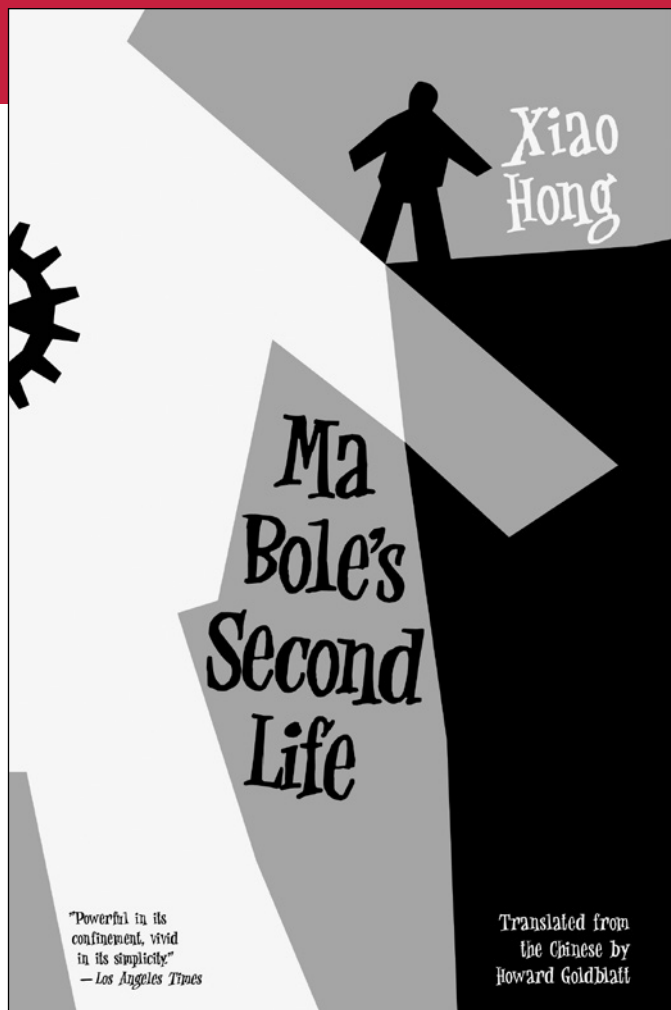
I was—I knew then—someone who'd waited for years to succumb to this illusion that soon came to seem truer and solidier and stronger than everything I'd experienced previously.

It's easy for others—I have no command of that language—to write, and even write well, about the highs and lows of the tides of love. Much more difficult to pinpoint are the ripples on that apparently placid lake that is friendship, at whose center, every now and then, circular and secret storms explode, just for pleasure of, in turn, being eclipsed by a sudden blue sky.

Of one thing I'm certain: with arrival of Ezra in my life (and until his recent and possibly final departure, just a few days ago, again, *The Incident*) everything seemed to accelerate.

And, looking back on it, everything I've said up until now (all my false starts, all my repetitions, all my clumsy statements about the genre, and all the absurd attempts to translate the elusive texture of time and space into letters) changes sign and language.

Because with Ezra's entrance into my life I have arrived, at last, to another planet. ■



FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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(World)



MA BOLE'S SECOND LIFE

XIAO HONG

Trans. from the Chinese by Howard Goldblatt

Ma Bole's Second Life is a humorous-yet-stark depiction of the despair of ordinary Chinese people confronted with the sudden onslaught of war and Westernization. It follows the eponymous cowardly layabout as he escapes his unhappy family life by going on the run to avoid the coming Japanese invasion. Just a step ahead of the destruction, bumbling his way from one poorly thought out situation to the next, Ma Bole's comic journey mirrors that of China as a whole during this chaotic period of history.

Incredibly well respected during her short, difficult lifetime, Xiao Hong's final novel is an undiscovered masterpiece, a philosophical comedy in the vein of *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, finally available to English readers in Howard Goldblatt's inventive rendering.

"The book is powerful in its confinement, vivid in its simplicity. The prose, at once imagistic, spare and haunting, recalls at moments the melancholy timbre of Jean Rhys."

—*Los Angeles Times*

"Hsiao Hung [Xiao Hong] created a legacy of eleven books . . . that easily qualify her as one of the major Chinese literary figures of the century. Like Isaac Babel, Hsiao Hung makes no comment, and she doesn't flinch at such unimaginable cruelty and violence; she makes it seem what it is to the villagers—part of everyday life. The effect is powerful."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

XIAO Hong (1911-1942) was one of the most important Chinese novelists of the twentieth century. With a literary output covering less than ten years, her impact is still felt today with such novels as *The Field of Life and Death*, *Memories of Mr. Lu Xun*, and *Tales of Hulan River*. She is the subject of the 2014 biopic, *The Golden Era*.

Over the course of his career, **Howard Goldblatt** has translated more than sixty works of Chinese literature—including the works of Nobel Prize-winner Mo Yan and Chu T'ien-wen—has won the National Translation Award, and received a Guggenheim Fellowship.

FROM MA BOLE'S SECOND LIFE XIAO HONG



Ma Bo's return home took his wife by surprise, but she reacted indifferently to the reality that his business had failed. No arguments, no questions; it was as if the news did not register. She employed the silent treatment, avoiding direct contact by a series of sidelong glances. Sometimes she looked at him as if he were a total stranger.

When the maidservant came to call them to dinner, she picked up Jacob and walked out without her usual comments of:

"Dinnertime," or "Let's eat."

This did not affect their little daughter, as she looked back over her mother's shoulder, clapped her hands, and called out, "Daddy!"

All this brought tears to Ma Bo's eyes.

He was partial to the children, who were not aware that their daddy had returned home in disgrace. During dinner, no one at the table spoke to him, and he was not invited to join their conversations.

Father had not said a word at mealtime for a couple of days. His silver chopsticks clanged against his rice bowl as he ate. After he finished his first bowl of rice, Mama Geng came up to give him a refill. He waved her off, put down his rice bowl, rose from the table, and walked away, followed by his younger son, Ma Bo's brother and rival for their father's affections, such as they were, and inheritance.

The big family cat jumped from its perch on the windowsill onto the cushioned chair

Father had just vacated, where it crouched and purred. It was black, and very well fed. It returned Bo's stare.

The prodigal son had no choice but to get up from the table before a second bowl of rice, thus leaving the dining room neither full nor hungry. Later on, his father even refused to eat at the same table with his older son, taking his meals alone in the living room. When he finished, he rinsed his mouth so loudly that Bo felt personally threatened.

Mother's mood was dampened by her husband's obvious displeasure. The maidservant stood off to the side, not daring to say a word.

When Jacob clamored that she wanted some egg-drop soup, her father spooned some into her rice bowl. But before she could get the first spoonful to her mouth, her mother snatched the bowl away from her.

"With your bad stomach the past couple of days," she complained, "I'm not going to let you fill up with soup."

Jacob started to bawl.

"What harm can a little soup do?" Bo asked.

His wife responded by picking the child up and walking off without giving him a passing glance.

Bo's family had begun treating him the way Satan was treated in the Bible.

Now even little Jacob would no longer let him near her. So he decided it was time to move out of his wife's room and into his study. And that is what he did. He took all his trunks, in which were stored his clothes, his shoes, and his socks. Even things that had accompanied him on two sojourns to Shanghai, went along. It was as if he and his wife had negotiated a formal separation.

She took the move with equanimity—not a word or a second glance. No sign, verbal or visual, that she approved of his action, or, for that matter, opposed it. He got the message that he was free to do as he pleased, that it was no concern of hers.

On the final trip, when he came to pick up his soap dish, he gave his wife an ugly look after opening the door with a ferocious kick. He then made a show of searching the room, pretending not to notice that the soap dish was on the dressing table, keeping a furtive eye on his wife the whole time. As he rummaged through drawer after drawer, he glanced at her out of the corner of his eye to see how she was taking it. All the while she was lying on the bed playing with her daughter.

"Bloody Chinese!" It was a muted protest.

They were sad days for Ma Bo. At night he opened his window and looked outside—the moon was out, and he intoned thoughts that came to him.

"When the moon comes out, the sun disappears."

"When it rains, the streets get wet."

In the autumn, fallen leaves covered the courtyard and lined the hallways. Night winds whipped them against windows as Ma Bo tossed and turned in bed, his mind flooded with chaotic thoughts. In fact he thought so hard that his head began to ache. He felt a little better after getting up and drinking a cup of tea. Looking out the window into the dark night, he embarked upon a soliloquy:

"Without the moon there's total darkness.

"Leaves fall to the ground when autumn arrives."

This led him to a series of related musings:

"The rich look down on the poor.

"Officials look down on the common people.

"My wife looks down on me.

"When the wind dies down, the leaves stop falling.

"If I were rich, my wife would look up to me.

"If I were rich, Father would still be Father, the kids would still be my kids.

"That's what life is all about.

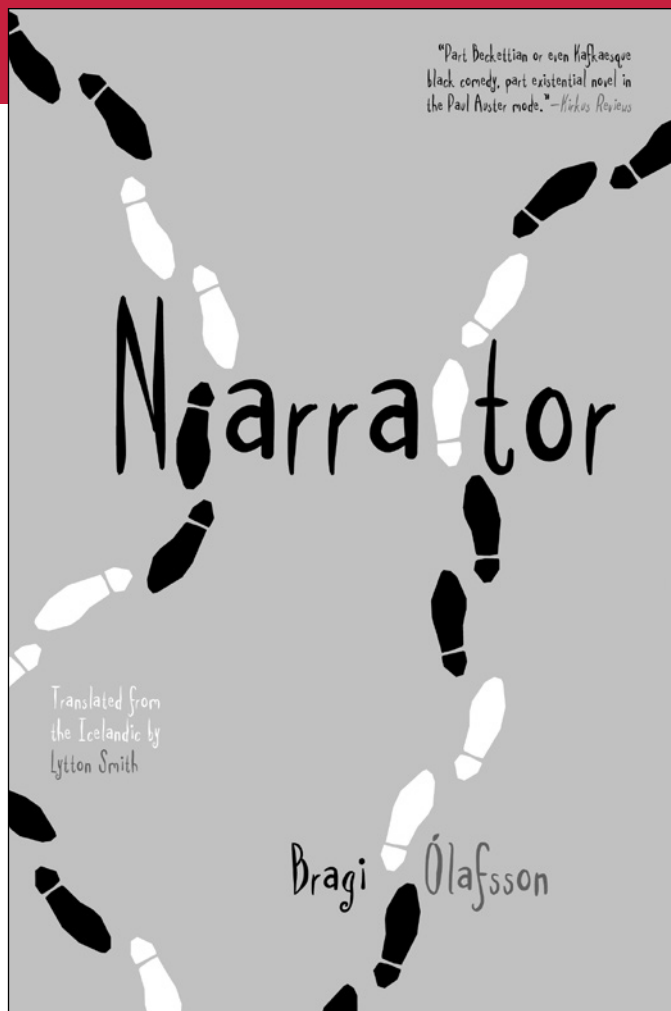
"Life is being alive.

"Death is not being alive.

"Suicide leads to death.

"When it's time to flee, you have to flee."

The thought of escape was tempting, but he knew that this was not the right moment. Bo stayed home for a long spell this time, some seven or eight months. ■



FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

AUGUST 14, 2018

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NARRATOR

BRAGI ÓLAFSSON

Trans. from the Icelandic by Lytton Smith

On a rainy day in the middle of June, on the day England and Costa Rica meet in the World Cup, G., a thirty-five-year-old aspiring writer is waiting in line at the post office to mail off a manuscript—a story about a day in the life of a thirty-five-year-old man.

That's when he notices a man he knows. Or rather knew. Sort of knew. A man who used to go out with a girl G. loved from afar. The only girl he's ever loved. All his hatred of this man comes rushing back—including his foolish wish that the man would die—and he takes off, following him throughout the streets of Reykjavik. This strange game of cat and mouse takes some dark turns though, evolving into a complex, introspective journey of a man struggling to complete the unfinished narrative of his own life.

"Ólafsson's English-language debut, *The Pets*, is part Beckettian or even Kafkaesque black comedy, part existential novel in the Paul Auster mode, and part locked-room mystery."

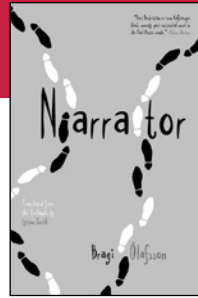
—Kirkus Reviews

"The best short novel I've read this year. . . . Small, dark, and hard to put down."

—Paul LaFarge

Bragi Ólafsson is the author of several books of poetry and short stories, along with six novels, including *The Pets* and *The Ambassador*, both of which are available from Open Letter Books. He is also a former bass player with The Sugarcubes, the internationally successful pop group that featured Björk as the lead vocalist.

Lytton Smith is a poet, professor, and translator from the Icelandic. His most recent translations include works by Kristín Ómarsdóttir, Jón Gnarr, Ófeigur Sigurðsson, and Guðbergur Bergsson.



He'd taken a number. It had been a moment before he realized he needed to in order to be in line. And as he waited for his turn, he wondered what words best describe the color of fire. Would you use yellow or red? Orange? Blue? He had clapped eyes on a postcard with a picture of a volcanic eruption on the sales stand at the door to the post office, and though it was a color photograph, he couldn't decide what colors it showed; moreover, the eruption on the postcard brought other images of fire to mind. Or other metaphors. "Thirty-five," called a sales clerk. "Thirty-six," the other clerk called. But he was not number thirty-five or six. I'm thirty-five years old, he thinks, but it's not yet my turn. "Thirty-six?" the woman called again. "No-one is number thirty-six?" A little period of silence. "Thirty-seven?" Is there no number thirty-seven? he thinks. The black woman standing behind him gives herself up. She's wearing a crisp, white, long dress, and he can imagine it will take on a different image once she goes out in the rain later; the shape will cling to the woman, making her outline clearer. From the back, he judges she is about thirty. When she turns around and beckons with her index finger, for a moment he thinks she's gesturing to him, but it soon becomes apparent that she's addressing her child, a girl he guesses

is six or seven. A young mother, he thinks. She will be forty years old when her daughter is fully grown. It must have significantly different effects on the personality of a child, he muses, to grow up with parents who are just under fifty when they give birth to a child compared, say, to growing up with people who are in their twenties. Worse, he expects, especially for an only child. To spend the first years of your life, and indeed all the years to date, as is his own case, in the home or, rather, the house of a man and a woman who are in no way prepared for having a child: that must mold the child in a rather decisive fashion. Not just must: does so, in reality. He is still thinking about himself. This young, dark-complexioned girl is not forced to listen to 19th century violin sonatas over breakfast, he thinks. But how has that affected him? It is the nature of progeny to disturb existing forms, assuming the parents have some form or pattern to which they are trying to hold. What's more, in their eyes, it takes the child too long to develop into a comprehensive image with fixed form, he thinks, never mind a frame around the picture.

I think. G. thinks. The one I call G., because his name displeases him, and always has. The one who is constantly thinking about form and shape.

•

I'm still waiting for number 41 to be called up. I've finished looking at the postcards on the stand across from the white cardboard boxes on the wall shelves to the left. They are different sizes, but together they form a very beautiful whole, a family of five boxes, each placed inside the other, the smallest into the next smallest, and so on. The dark-skinned mother and daughter have completed their errand, and leave the room. I follow them with my eyes. But when I turn back towards the clerks, I notice a man I know, or rather I know who he is. He stands a little way inside the room, near the counter, somewhat obstructed by an elderly woman. Strange to see this man here, I think. But what is so strange about it? He's my contemporary, and although he for his part has no idea who I am, or shouldn't have, I can say that I know who he is all too well. More than once, more than twice, I've wished this particular individual did not exist. Or, at least, did not exist in the same space as me, at the same time,

with the same people. Of course, this was very foolish thinking, and it was a while ago now. Back then, I even devised strategies to get this man out of the way, get him removed in some manner, although the implementation of my plans never got beyond the idea stage. But here he is, as I said. I have not seen him for a while. And I have also not been contemplating him for long in the post office when his phone rings. Apparently a busy man. The ring on his cell phone can hardly be called a ring; it is more like some kind of music, music with an obtrusive beat. As soon as he starts talking into the phone, he realizes it's his turn. As he walks up to the counter, still with the phone to his ear, I'm aware again of his peculiar gait, which I'd perpetually allowed to get on my nerves, time and again, because of the decided self-confidence it implied.

•

Perpetually. Decided. That's how G. phrases it. How he thinks. But it's unthinkable that this man, who has now surfaced here, all of a sudden, in the post office, has had such words pass through his head. Decided and perpetually. How did the line in the poem go? In my distastes above all I have elegant tastes. ■

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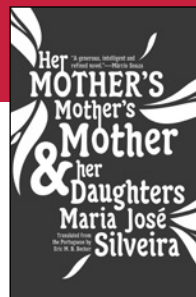
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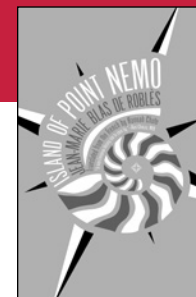
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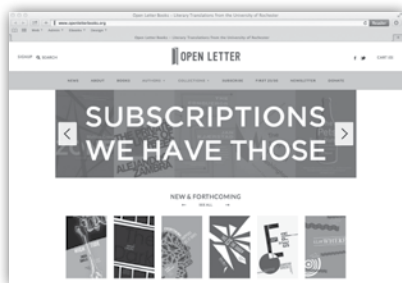
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