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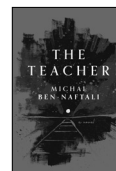
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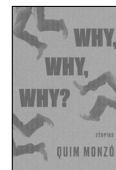
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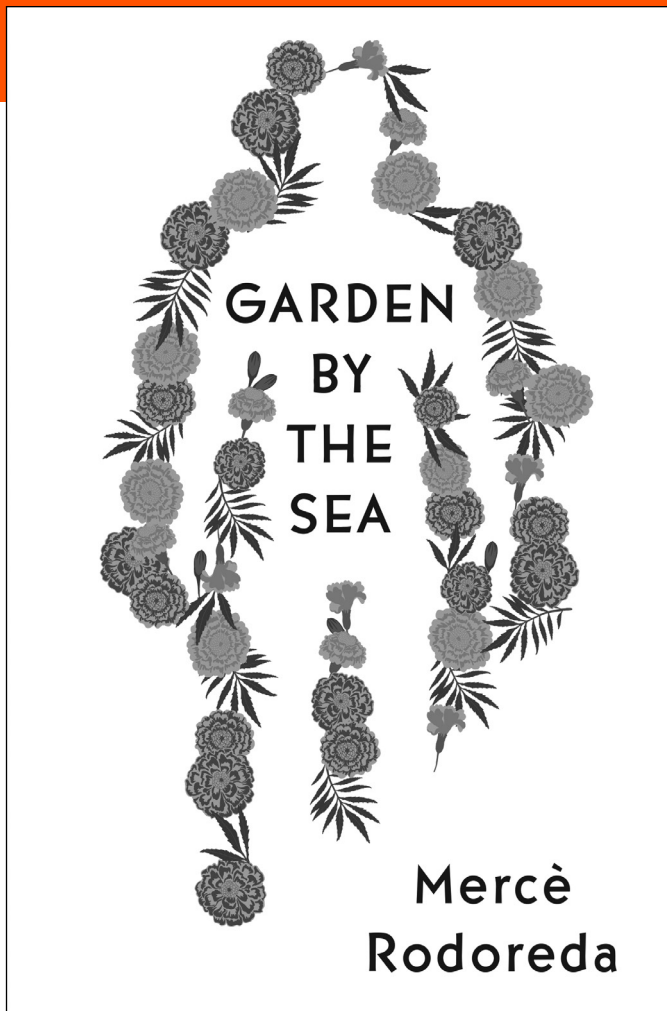
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GARDEN BY THE SEA

MERCÈ RODOREDÀ

Trans. from the Catalan by Maruxa Relaño and Martha Tennent

The novel that defined Mercè Rodoreda's most prolific period is finally available in English for the first time. Set in 1920s Spain, *Garden by the Sea* takes place over six summers at a villa by the sea inhabited by a young couple and their beautiful, rich, joyous friends. They swim, drink, tease each other, and fully enjoy themselves. All the while, the guests are observed by the villa's gardener, a widower who's been tending the garden for several decades. As the true protagonist of the novel, we get to see the dissolution of these magical summers through his eyes, as a sense of darkness and ending creeps in, precipitated by the construction of a new, larger, more glamorous villa next door.

Considered by many to be one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century, Rodoreda has captivated readers for decades with her exacting descriptions of life—and nature—in post-war Spain, and this novel will further her reputation and fill in an important piece of oeuvre.

"When you read *Death in Spring*, read it for its beauty, for the way it will surprise and subvert your desires, and as a testament to the human spirit in the face of brutality and willful inhumanity."

—Jesmyn Ward, NPR

"It is a total mystery to me why [Rodoreda] isn't widely worshipped. . . . She's on my list of authors whose works I intend to have read all of before I die."

—John Darnielle, *The Mountain Goats*

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Mercè Rodoreda is widely regarded as the most important Catalan writer of the twentieth century. Exiled in France and Switzerland following the Spanish Civil War, Rodoreda began writing the novels and short stories that would eventually make her internationally famous, while at the same time earning a living as a seamstress.

The mother and daughter translation team of Martha Tennent and Maruxa Relaño has translated a number of works from Spanish and Catalan into English, including *War, So Much War* by Mercè Rodoreda. Tennent also received a NEA fellowship for her translation of *The Selected Stories of Mercè Rodoreda*.

FROM GARDEN BY THE SEA MERCÈ RODOREDÀ



I've always liked knowing what happens to people. It's not because I'm garrulous but because I like people, and I was fond of the owners of this house. But all of this happened so long ago that I can no longer recall many of the details. I'm too old, and sometimes my mind becomes muddled.

There was no need to go to the Excelsior to watch films during those summers when they came with their friends. There was this one fellow who liked to paint the sea, Feliu Roca he was called. His work had been shown in exhibitions in Paris, and I believe he's known in Barcelona and made a pile of money with his swathes of blue. He had painted the sea in all of its incarnations: calm, wild, tall waves, low waves. Green, the color of fear. Grey, the color of clouds. Seascapes. He said he did seascapes, and his friends encouraged him to dapple the canvas because that's what Americans like. They made fun of him, and would say too many painters had painted the sea already; and then the young man, a good-looking fellow with ash blond hair and sleepy blue eyes . . . He stuttered sometimes. Such as when the colors didn't come out the way he wanted them. I'm referring to the paint mixture. And he would say to me: it's more difficult to paint this beast of blue than to tend flowers. And I would answer: you're right, yes you are. Flowers grow all by themselves. Maybe that's why there's so little merit in being a gardener. I said it just to make

him happy, and he said that when he finished painting the sea in every possible state of seanness, he would paint me, sitting in the sun. I didn't believe him. No. Every summer, when he came up, I was glad to see him again and I think he was glad to see me too. Six summers . . . all told, six summers and one terrible winter.

One of his female friends—there were two of them and they always came—was named Eulàlia. The other was Maragda. This Maragda was a seamstress and had been Senyoreta Rosamaria's boss when Rosamaria had worked for her as a young girl; that's how they became friends. When they returned from their morning swim, I always tried to busy myself with the nearby flowerbeds, the one that's full of marigolds in particular, so I could hear them talk. Such gaiety and youth, so much money . . . so much of everything . . . and two wrecked lives. I once saw a bird that let itself die. It must have been a desperate bird, desperate like Eugeni.

The first time I met the masters, the Senyorets, was in early spring, shortly after they were married. I knew the gentleman from before. I had seen him twice, once when he visited the estate with the intention of buying it, the other when he came to oversee the progress of the renovations. That second time he said

he would like to keep me on, I suited him fine as a gardener. They were to honeymoon abroad and were only stopping here for a short visit. Lots of strolls and time spent on the belvedere gazing at the ebb and flow of the waves, at the sky and all the movement within it, standing close to one another, sometimes holding each other. If ever I approached them during the day, I always coughed to make my presence known; it's no sin for a married couple to embrace, and yet I thought they wouldn't want to be seen. Quima, the cook, was already there that year. And then they started hiring her every summer because the cook they had in Barcelona went home to her family. Quima made me tell her everything they did in the garden, and she told me everything that happened around the house. She got a lot of it from one of the maids, Miranda, a Brazilian girl. This Miranda wore a black dress, so form fitting on her snake-thin body that she would have been better off not wearing anything at all. And an apron of lace no larger than your hand. She thought she was something special. But there wasn't much for Quima to report because nothing much happened. Sometimes Senyoret Francesc would slip an olive into Senyoreta Rosamaria's mouth and she would take it with her little teeth. Apparently he was crazy about her. Quima said that when Miranda was telling her about this, she, Miranda that is, who was the color of licorice, went pale. With

envy, Quima said. These girls from Brazil are like that, it seems. One day they went out for a ride in the car and Quima took me upstairs. I was afraid they would come back and catch us. She said: "You'll see the jewelry she has! Senyoret Francesc is one of the wealthiest men in Barcelona!" And she showed me lots of baubles, all diamonds she said, and a necklace with a teardrop pendant dangling in the middle. Rich folks, they were, really rich. And trusting. Through the slats in the blinds we looked out at the garden. The grounds that came with the villa, and the adjacent lands, were fields of grass and weeds back then, teeming with lizards.

They left, saying they would be back in June with some friends. They handed us the keys and left me in charge of the house, which I was to air out from time to time. When I received the letter announcing their return, I was very pleased. And just as they had instructed, I hired Quima for the summer, and her face flushed with delight because Senyoret Francesc mentioned in his letter that he especially liked her oven-baked sole. Miranda arrived with her huge suitcases two or three days before the rest of the family, and never opened her mouth. I headed outside to my plants. She, to the dust indoors. They came by sea. Three days later we heard the boat horn and I caught sight of it right away, coming in slowly, and when it was close enough they lowered the motorboat. ■



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NOVEMBER 12, 2019

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THE DREAMED PART
RODRIGO FRESÁN

Trans. from the Spanish by Will Vanderhyden

Following his failure to break into the Hadron Collider and merge with the so-called “God particle,” The Writer from *The Invented Part* can no longer write or sleep. Instead, he lies awake, imagining and reimagining key moments of his life, spinning out a series of insomniac visions every bit as thought-provoking as they are dreamlike. A mysterious foundation dedicated to preserving dreams, suddenly invaluable in the wake of the dream-eradicating White Plague; a psycho-lyrical-photophobic terrorist; three lunatic sisters (and an eclipsed brother) who write from the darkest side of the most wuthering lunar heights; a genius addicted to butterflies and an FBI agent addicted to that genius; a loony and lysergic uncle and parents who model but are not model parents; a revolutionary staging of Shakespeare for the children of chic guerrillas; a city of sleepless bookshops; and a writer who might be 100 years old. Or not.

With characteristic wit, careening style, and array of cultural references—from Shakespeare, the Brontë sisters, and Vladimir Nabokov to Talking Heads, superhero movies, and Rick and Morty—the second volume of Fresán’s trilogy is one of the most ambitious, unique, and entertaining novels of our time.

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

—Jonathan Lethem

“Rodrigo Fresán is the new star of Latin American literature. . . . There is darkness in him, but it harbors light within it because his prose—aimed at bygone readers—is brilliant.”

—Enrique Vila-Matas

Rodrigo Fresán is the author of ten works of fiction, including *Kensington Gardens*, *Mantra*, and *The Invented Part*, winner of the 2018 Best Translated Book Award. In 2017, he received the Prix Roger Caillois, awarded by PEN Club France every year to both a French and a Latin American writer.

Will Vanderhyden has translated fiction by Carlos Labbé, Edgardo Cozarinsky, Juan Marsé, and Elvio Gandolfo. He received NEA and Lannan fellowships to translate another of Fresán’s novels, *The Invented Part*.

FROM THE DREAMED PART RODRIGO FRESÁN



Now it's one of those first afternoons of autumn when it seems the whole world is a half-finished drama or a comedy, and everything has the look and feel of an intermission between one act and the next. And when, as the actors return to their places, it will become apparent—with little surprise—that it's a different show now, that what's happening now has nothing of the look and sound of everything that came before.

In the first moments of bygone autumns, people dreamed more because their dreams were changing wardrobe. And, in the mornings, when the sun no longer rises so early and so quickly, when everyone emerges onto the streets bleary and fresh out of bed, he can still see the remnants of dreams wrapped around their necks like scarves, covering their mouths, refusing to release their possessed masters.

The beginning of autumn is his favorite time of year and, also, the season when he feels best in bookstores, the perfect climate for spending hours standing around, there, inside.

He enters the bookstore.

One of those bookstores that used to be just a bookstore but that recently has been mutating and, like the mythic creatures from ancient bestiaries, combining the features of various species * (if there's something more interesting than a lion it's a lion

with wings and the face of a woman and questions in its mouth and delusions of divine grandeur) and this one is a bookstore-café-record store.

He pretends to look for something: *Todavía Estamos Aquí*, the latest album from Los Dinosaurios Inextinguibles, for example. Or some edition of *The Glass Key* by Dashiell Hammett, so he can read again that soothing ending—after so much betrayal and death and revelation—where a girl recounts a dream. One of the endings and one of the dreams that he likes best in the history of literature, in a detective novel that, along with Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*, can be read like a daydreamed variation of *The Great Gatsby*, that almost-detective novel and . . . Ah, the things he thinks about in bookstores in general and that one in particular to keep from thinking about Ella.

The bookstore belongs to a man named Homero.

No, he's not blind and, yes, he is Ella's father.

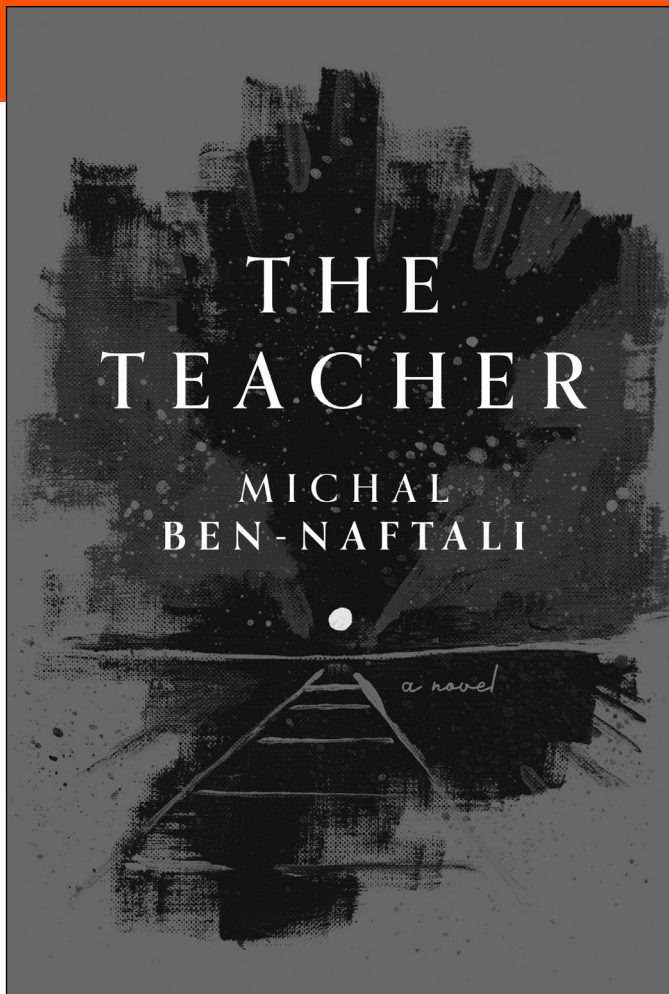
And one night, to his immense displeasure, he dreamed that Homero was his own lost father, who had once driven a car blindfolded, and he woke up with a smile of relief: no, she was not his sister.

He opens and closes books. He reads random words that, always, refer to the

same thing: "Writing is nothing more than a guided dream," "Dreams are the genus; nightmares the species," "Dreams are an aesthetic work, perhaps the earliest aesthetic expression," "We have these two ideas: the belief that dreams are part of waking, and the other, the splendid one, the belief of the poets: that all waking is a dream," "If we think of the dream as a work of fiction—I think it is—it may be that we continue to spin tales when we wake and later when we recount them," "We don't know exactly what happens in dreams" * (Jorge Luis Borges; he still remembers that name, luckily; who knows how much longer he will, how many nights he has left before that prison he writes in fills with sand that, grain by grain, covers him and chokes him and buries him and erases him).

Annoyed, he closes the book that—as everyone knows happens in dreams, this is one of the quickest and most efficient ways to know you are dreaming—changes title and subject and genre because dreams are not attentive readers and their capacity for concentration is minimal. The speed of dreams is greater than the speed of sight. And so, putting the book down to one side, he nullifies his desire to have it in his dreams, and slips—without losing sight of Ella, behind the counter—into territories that he senses are safer. He takes the long way around to avoid getting anywhere near the

esotericism section * (where there abound those absurd dictionaries of oneiric interpretation and all of that) and shudders a little as he passes the self-help section (and wonders the same thing as always: how are there people desperate and deluded enough to believe in the efficacy of those manuals; how is it that those people who can't help anyone can think they can help themselves by following the instructions of something written by people they don't know, whom they know little or nothing about, and who don't know them and who are, inevitably, as in-need of help as they are, and who can't help themselves except by writing these books). So he stops in the comics section. * (Do those DC-variety comics still exist that, when he was a kid, produced in him a combination of fascination and disdain? The ones that announced themselves as belonging to those "imaginary adventures" that toyed with impossibilities like Superman dying or Batman retiring—with things that ended up really happening so many years later—that at the time could only be understood as waking dreams?). He'll be safe there and, also, have a good view of her. ||



FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

JANUARY 21, 2019

\$14.95 (pb) | Novel
220 pgs. | 5.5" x 8.5"
978-1-948830-07-2

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978-1-940953-93-9

(World)



THE TEACHER

MICHAL BEN-NAFTALI

Trans. from the Hebrew by Daniella Zamir

Winner of the 2016 Sapir Prize

When Elsa Weiss killed herself by jumping off the roof of her apartment building, her students were stunned. Who was Elsa Weiss? She had always come across as an aloof, distant woman, never seen outside of school hours, and not one to befriend her students. Obviously there must be something in her past to cause her to commit suicide—but what?

This question sets in motion Michal Ben-Naftali's probing novel, which reconstructs the personal history of a Hungarian Jew who escapes the Holocaust as part of the infamous Kastner Train—a monetary arrangement between Rudolf Kastner and Adolf Eichmann to save 1,600 Jews. As the narrator of *The Teacher* finds out, Elsa Weiss was one of the lucky Hungarian Jews to escape the Holocaust, but, as a result, spent the rest of her life wracked by survivor's guilt.

"This is not a classical Holocaust novel, but rather one that actually tries to shed light on the marginal corners of the period. An important and interesting novel that dares to take on subjects that are liable to be forgotten."

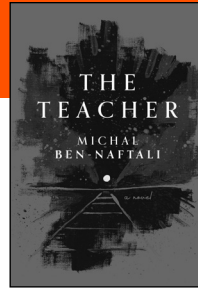
—Hadar Azran, *Arutz 7*

"Those who follow her path can grasp the immensity of the task she has undertaken and the miracle of its implementation. . . . Writing, from Ben-Naftali's point of view, is a gradual act of redeeming the other."

—Hanna Herzig, *Haaretz*

Michal Ben-Naftali was born in Tel Aviv in 1963. She has published collections of essays, a novella, a memoir, and a novel, as well as many articles on literature, philosophy, and art, in Israel and abroad. Her translations from French to Hebrew include works by Jacques Derrida, André Breton, Julia Kristeva, and Annie Ernaux. Her novel, *The Teacher*, won the 2016 Sapir Prize.

Daniella Zamir lives in Tel-Aviv, where she works as a literary translator. She obtained her bachelor's degree in literature from Tel Aviv University, and her master's degree in creative writing from City University in London.



1. The sidewalk was cleansed of the blood. Rivers of rain, water hoses and street sweepers joined forces to scrub the surface after the last remnant was removed. Submissive, the street continued to absorb convoys of people, scraps of paper and cigarette butts hurled absentmindedly in its direction, strollers and bicycles crowding its narrow path. Children played, stumbled and fell, animals evacuated their bowels, garbage cans were tossed back emptied. Every so often ambulances rushed by. The fallen leaves piled up and were swept away. Who could remember that stormy night, thirty years ago, when a woman jumped to her death from her rooftop apartment in one of the few still intact buildings? Of sound mind, with the same parsimonious strictness she used to do everything—pay bills, swim in the pool or teach, with the same icy ruthlessness she used to drag her long fingernails across the blackboard to force her students to stop making noise, the teacher took her life.

2. No one knew the story of Elsa Weiss's life. Few called her by name. Most addressed her as one would a general or a sheriff, an authority figure or a role that she herself created out of thin air and performed with a devotion owed to no one, neither to her superiors nor to those under her supervision, but to something greater and obscure, which she herself perhaps did not fully understand. She was called as one summons the

goddess of wrath, a Gorgon-teacher, a Fury, subjecting her students to a torrent of tasks, to see if they could take it, if they had the stamina, if she could count on them to hang on, as if she wanted to destroy them to ultimately gain their trust.

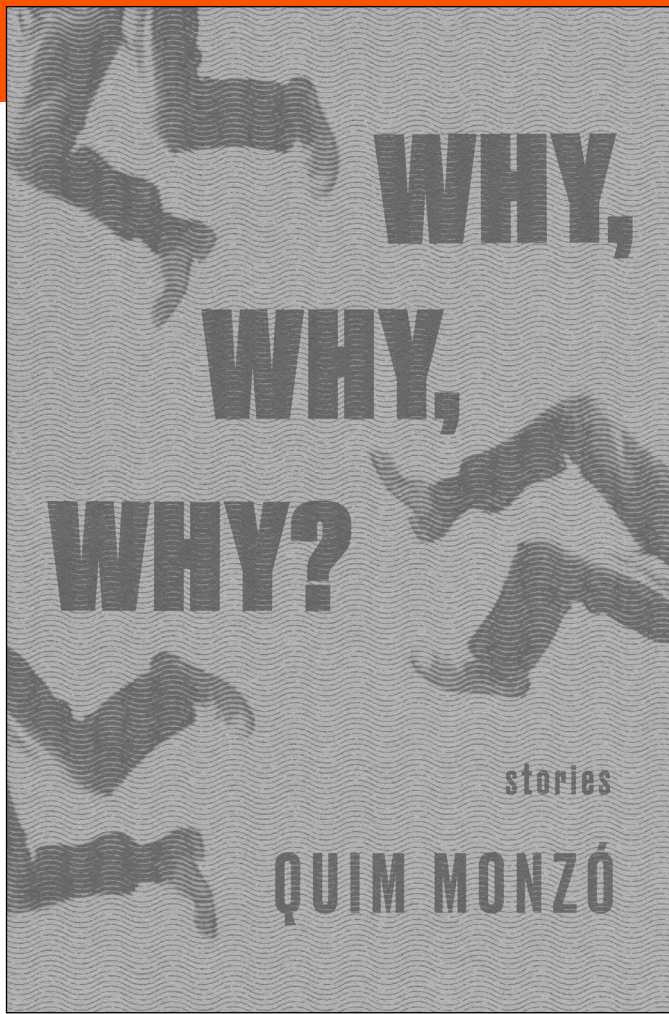
Elsa Weiss left no testimony behind. She refused to talk about herself, in fact, refused to discuss anything, to lecture or preach in the classroom. The sphere in which she operated did not expand to infringe on our preferences, influence our fate, shape our moral compass or consciousness. She never relayed to us a cohesive philosophical or political theory that could reveal something of her deep beliefs about knowledge, truth or faith. Perhaps we could have made assumptions. We could have assumed she was not a woman of faith, that she didn't keep kosher or observe the Shabbat. Her anger wasn't that of a person of faith. Or perhaps the opposite was true, despite every fiber of her being shouting defiance. If there was anything religious about her, it manifested in the zeal and extreme fervor with which she performed her tasks, in the ardent belief that accompanied her actions. We could have said that she gave her heart and soul, but what she really gave was something else.

A single photograph, capturing her portrait more or less in her fifties – a rare passport photo taken about two decades

after her arrival in Israel – traveled through all the yearbooks, as if it too carried the same consuming quality that seeks to make room for something else, something that isn't a message or a vision, something that lends this word, teacher, its very meaning. Her face was a mirror of her life. It bore the pride and severity of someone who rarely talks to another soul, the crushing, tormented face of a Madonna and priestess, once seething with existential angst but now dulled into a blank expression, a mask that made you avert your gaze. It was impossible to linger on her face without feeling unsettled.

3. Elsa Weiss made her way to school each morning with swift, efficient strides, without pausing. She probably walked down Dizengoff Street, turning onto Ibn Gabirol up to Sprinzak. Or perhaps she chose the narrower streets, Huberman or Marmorek. And yet, no one actually saw her. No one chanced upon her outside of school hours—in the cafes, the theater, Meir Park, the Beit Ariela public library, where she sat and read for hours on end, in the pool where she swam—no one saw her coming or going. She entered the classroom as if materializing out of thin air, seeking to be left alone, to be seen when she wanted to be seen, invisible when she didn't. And in any event, no one could keep up with her brisk and confident pace, which discouraged accompaniment.

She was about sixty when she was our teacher. Her small, wrinkled face, which could be cupped in one hand, seemed to have been shaped by a sudden blow of old age. The locks of her hair were coiled neatly and meticulously, as if on a potter's wheel, and stacked high into a regal pyramid, elongating her already solemn expression. Had it been released from the dark pin that clasped it, her hair would have reached her waist and created the false impression that it had never been cut or shaved. The bun, towering above a very thin and narrow, flat-looking frame clad in cotton blouses and wool calf-length skirts, lent her a lofty height. Her eyes were a faded green-gray, their color diluted by filmy liquid, but the blue eye shadow she applied enlarged them, brightening her pupils like burning coal. Her fleshy, almost swollen lips—as if bitten too many times—were painted umber, not to say I am pretty, or even I am present, but to express strength and indignation. The heavy makeup, provoking the very idea of beauty and in complete contrast to the distinguished gray of her clothes, did not seek by way of deliberate embellishment to powder her face into a young and prettier image. It made a different statement: stay away, or better yet: keep your distance. As if attempting to conceal herself within an alienated body, which greedily gauged her age. However, she did not disguise herself as a teacher. ■



WHY, WHY, WHY? QUIM MONZÓ

Trans. from the Catalan by Peter Bush

A man tries to teach a stone to speak through sheer force of will. An engaged couple makes a pact to never lie, and their union dissolves immediately. Over the course of a phone call, a man learns that his girlfriend died months ago, and that he's been unknowingly dating her twin sister. Prince Charming marries Cinderella, but then has an affair with the evil stepsisters. A psychopath's liver explodes after a night of heavy drinking, but instead of killing him, it allows him to be a better drinker.

These, and many more, strange and twisted characters populate the pages of *Why, Why, Why?*, a delectable brew of dark humor and biting satire on human relationships. In these stories, the characters don't start falling until they know they're off the cliff. By then, rock bottom isn't a long way off. Another stunning entry from Catalan's greatest contemporary writer, Monzó's stories dust themselves off and speed on to their next catastrophe.

"Today's best known writer in Catalan. He is also, no exaggeration, one of the world's great short-story writers."

—*The Independent*

"A gifted writer, he draws well on the rich tradition of Spanish surrealism . . . to sustain the lyrical, visionary quality of his imagination."

—*New York Times*

"Monzó delivers drollery on nearly every page, in observations that are incisive and hilarious and horrifying, often all at once."

—*Publishers Weekly*

FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

OCTOBER 15, 2019

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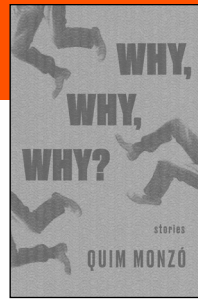
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A Thousand Morons. \$12.95 (pb), stories, 978-1-934824-41-2

Quim Monzó was born in Barcelona in 1952. He has been awarded the National Award, the City of Barcelona Award, the Prudenci Bertrana Award, the El Temps Award, the Lletra d'Or Prize for the best book of the year, and the Catalan Writers' Award, and he has been awarded *Serra d'Or* magazine's prestigious Critics' Award four times. He has also translated numerous authors into Catalan, including Truman Capote, J. D. Salinger, and Ernest Hemingway.

Peter Bush is an award-winning translator who lives in Oxford. His translations include Juan Goytisolo's *Nijar Country*, Teresa Solana's *A Shortcut to Paradise*, Alain Badiou's *In Praise of Love*, and Josep Pla's *The Gray Notebook*.



Strength of Will

The stubborn man knows that it's only a matter of having (and sustaining for whatever time is necessary) the firmness of will to achieve his goal. There are no other factors or unknown quantities. He kneels down, lowers his torso until his face is a few inches from the stone (a rather elongated, smoothly rounded, gray stone), and vocalizes clearly: "Pa."

He stares at the stone for a while, focusing his eyes on every irregularity, trying to take it all in, to establish total communication, until the stone becomes an extension of himself, a few inches away. It's high noon; the breeze makes up for the sun's brightness. He re-opens his lips sparingly: "Pa."

He chose "pa" because he'd always been told that it's the first thing children say, the burst of sound that surprises parents, the easiest syllable with which to start speaking. "Pa."

The stone is still silent. The stubborn man smiles. He doesn't yield easily to adversity. He decided to teach the stone to speak knowing it would be no easy task. He knows that, over the centuries, humanity has thought little of the verbal potential of the mineral kingdom, which means that, perhaps for the first time in many a year, a sober man is cheek by jowl with a stone, trying to make it speak. If we add to that the traditional idleness of learners, the difficulty

of the enterprise is self-evident.

"Pa," persists the stubborn man.

The stone is quiet. The man throws his head back for a moment, then immediately brings his face in close, some five inches from the stone: "Pa pa pa pa pa pa. Pa!"

No response. The man smiles again, strokes his chin, straightens his torso, stands up, takes a cigarette packet from his pocket, extracts a cigarette, and lights it. He smokes while he contemplates the rock. How can he establish contact? How can he communicate with it? He uses his fingers to flick the cigarette against a tree, and (like a wrestler to his opponent) sways over the stone shouting: "PAAA!"

The stone's apparent indifference endears him. He caresses it with his fingertips. Now he tries to speak seductively: "Stone. Hello, stone. Stone? Sto-one. S t o n e. Stone . . ."

He caresses it nonstop. First slowly, then quickly. First gently, then frantically.

"Come on, say it: pa."

The stone says nothing. The stubborn man gives it a kiss.

"I know you can, I don't know if you're listening, but I know you understand. Do you understand? Do you get me? I know you can say it. I know you can say 'pa.' I know you can speak, if only a very little. I also know you find it difficult, because maybe nobody has ever spoken to you or asked you to speak to them, and these things are an effort,

initially, if you're not accustomed. I'm aware of all that. That's why I'm understanding; I'm not asking you to do anything you can't do by making a minimal effort. Now I'll repeat it again. And, you, right away, will repeat it with me. Agreed? Hey, come on. It isn't easy, but it's not impossible either. Come on, say it: pa. Pa. Pa."

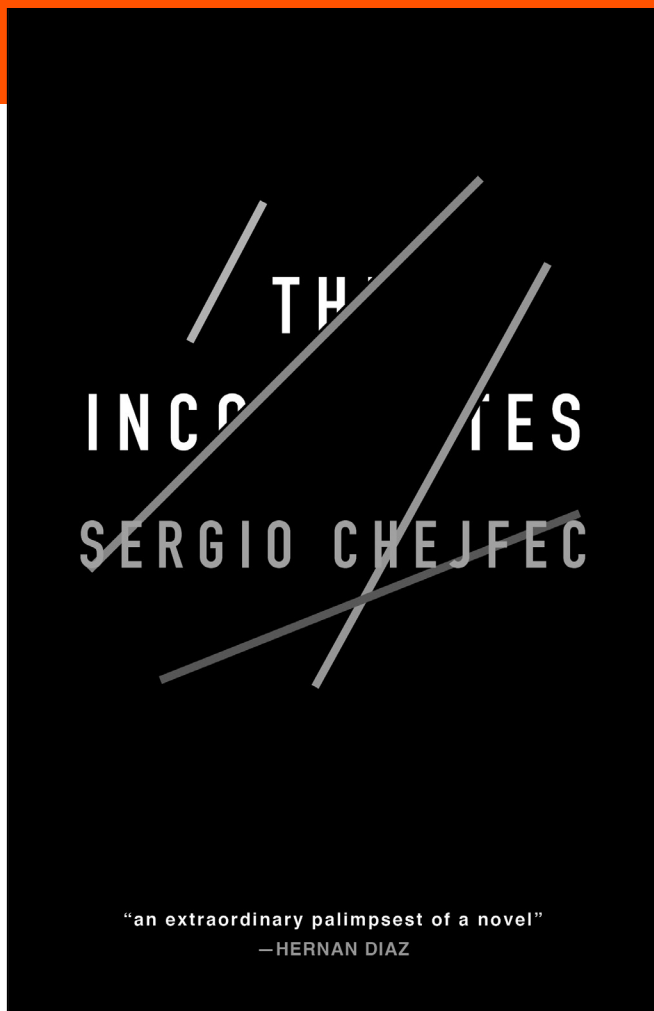
He places his ear up against the surface of the stone, to see if the efforts it is making translate into a whisper. But they don't: silence. Total silence. The stubborn man breathes in deeply and returns to the charge. He gives the stone new arguments, he tells it why it must be such an effort to speak and what it must do to succeed. When night falls, he takes it in his hands and wipes off the earth stuck underneath. He takes the stone home. He puts it on the dining-room table, ensures it's comfortable. He lets it rest the whole night. The next morning he wishes it a good day, washes it carefully, under the stream of water from the tap, with lukewarm water: not too cold, not too hot. Then takes it out on to his balcony. From the balcony you can see the whole valley, summer vacationers' chalets scattered around, one end of the lake, and, in the distance, the lights from the highway. He leaves the stone on the table and sits on a chair.

"Come on, say it: pa."

Three days later the stubborn man makes it clear that he is angry: "Very well, don't speak. Don't think I haven't registered your tacit contempt. You don't need to say

anything to make your contempt obvious. I'll only say one thing: nobody makes fun of me."

The stubborn man takes the stone in his right hand, squeezes it (so much so his face turns a bright red), and finally hurls it energetically. The stone describes an arc in the sky: over the valley, over the chalets and swimming pools of the summer holiday-makers, over the man pushing the lawn mower, over the road being repaired, over the highway with little traffic, over the industrial development area, over the soccer field where a team in green shirts and white shorts and another in yellow shirts and blue shorts are tied, over the buildings in the provincial city, until it falls right in the middle of a square, at the feet of German tourists who are so focused on photographing the cathedral they don't notice the stone fall, crash against the paving stones, and, as it breaks, emit a sharp sound quite like "pa!"



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THE INCOMPLETES

SERGIO CHEJFEC

Trans. from the Spanish by Heather Cleary

"Now I am going to tell the story of something that happened one night years ago, and the events of the morning and afternoon that followed."

The Incompletes begins with this simple promise. But to try to get at the complete meaning of the day's events, the narrator must first take us on an international tour—from the docks of Buenos Aires, to Barcelona, until we check in at Moscow's gloomy Hotel Salgado with the narrator's transient friend Felix. From scraps of information left behind on postcards and hotel stationery, the narrator hopes to reconstruct Felix's stay there. With flights of imagination, he conjures up the hotel's labyrinthine hallways, Masha, the captive hotel manager, and the city's public markets, filled with piles of broken televisions.

Each character carries within them a secret that they don't quite understand—a stash of foreign money hidden in the pages of a book, a wasteland at the edge of the city, a mysterious shaft of light in the sky. *The Incompletes* is a novel disturbed by this half-knowledge, haunted by the fact that any complete version of events is always just outside our reach.

"*The Incompletes* is, simply put, [Chejfec's] best book, a 'thriller' in a way, although the thing that gets me is how it's also an inside-out *Madame Bovary*."

—Javier Molea, McNally Jackson Books

"a masterfully nested narrative where writing—its presence on the page, its course through time, its prismatic dispersion of meaning—is the true protagonist."

—Hernan Diaz

Sergio Chejfec has published numerous works of fiction, poetry, and essays and received fellowships from the Civitella Ranieri Foundation and the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation. He currently teaches in the Creative Writing in Spanish Program at NYU.

Heather Cleary's translations include Roque Larraquy's *Comemadre*, César Rendueles's *Sociophobia*, Sergio Chejfec's *The Planets* and *The Dark*, and a selection of Oliverio Girondo's poetry for New Directions.



Now I am going to tell the story of something that happened one night, years ago, and the events of the morning and afternoon that followed. Ending a day the same as any other—nightfall, exhaustion, silence, solitude—during those final domestic acts one performs with resignation and mounting fear, wondering if that night will be the last, if the world will vanish while we sleep, or if our soul will wake to find itself forever separated from its body—from that night's protracted beginning until the moment I nodded off, my thoughts turned insistently to a friend I hadn't seen, I haven't seen, in years. When we were young, a time nearly forgotten and from which decades separate us, he decided to leave his country and survive in the world like a wandering planet, to steep himself in the languages he would pick up along the way and, among other things, to take on a vague international luster (always bearing the ambiguous yoke, both brutal and enviable, barely visible yet indelible, of being an Argentinian in flight).

I should say "I haven't forgotten," rather than invoke memory. Of the morning when he left, I haven't forgotten the empty port, a little blue stall with a white roof, trees scattered as if by chance across the surrounding area, and, above all, the piers and the repetitive backdrop of nautical equipment (cranes, jetties, tracks, and moorings) at the ready, though they seemed gratuitous in the absence of more people or other ships. I

got there early and waited. (It seems to me now that time was more complex in my youth: I was waiting for someone who was about to leave, as if waiting had asserted itself in advance as a cause—this was why the days passed so slowly; maddeningly drawn out, they sometimes even seemed to grind to a halt and the whole idea of reality, along with the idea of nature concealed within it, presented itself as distressingly multiple and unpredictable.) The pier was just a damp promenade; drops of dew fell from the roof of the little stall, and the slowly dissolving night still hid the water's surface like an immense, uninhabited depression. The wait seemed to suit the occasion—even if you understood time as an unstoppable thing set in motion, its languor, or rather its apathy, was still surprising: the morning's lack of urgency to arrive.

A long time passed like that, I think. Distant lights slowed their flickering in the sky; just as they threatened to go out altogether, I saw a car approach slowly and what might be described as shakily, probably because of the cobblestones. It was the taxi that had brought Felix. The car rolled forward for what I considered a theatrically long time. And then nothing happened. Felix remained inside for no reason at all, like a stage actor delaying his entrance, though I had no way of knowing that. After a while he opened

the door and started removing his luggage. I thought he'd never finish—at first glance, it seemed impossible that the suitcases and packages piled beside the car could have fit inside. (It reminded me of those comedic scenes of trunks or vans spouting endless streams of objects.) Then the taxi drove off and Felix was left standing in the middle of the street, flanked by two sizeable heaps. Suddenly alone, he had trouble getting his bearings. I could tell he was paralyzed, probably completely overwhelmed to find himself out in the open and even more so by the task ahead of him; I don't mean just the ordeal of moving his luggage, but rather the act of recognizing it for the first time as a surrogate of himself: silent and necessary additions, an extension of his body bound to follow him for a long time to come . . . That was when he saw me, almost hidden in the half-light of dawn, and I in turn saw his surprise at my being there early.

The characteristic scent of Buenos Aires, a mix of aquatic plants and the local soil, which—as many have told me and I've managed to read—still filters through the streets on the breeze, was an incipient aroma slowly rising off the river to form waves of disparate and paradoxically incomplete smells that morning, probably due to the hour. Here, the memory skips to the next scene: we take a few indecisive steps toward a warehouse's loading dock, where—with nothing better to do as we wait for the still-empty pier to spring into

action and fill with people—we begin to talk. I've forgotten the essential parts of that conversation; I retain most vividly the image of a few very large, very yellow kernels of corn that had fallen between the paving stones, at which I stared intently the entire time. They stood out as a glimmer of life protected deep in the rock, in crevices that pigeons would later try to rob of their prize, rarely with any success. ||



SONNETS TO ORPHEUS

RAINER MARIA RILKE

Trans. from the German by Christiane Marks

Rainer Maria Rilke's fifty-five *Sonnets to Orpheus* were written over a few days in an astonishing burst of inspiration.

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Christiane Marks came to the U.S. from Germany as a child and holds a BA in Comparative Literature from Earlham College and an MA in German from the University of Cincinnati. A member of the American Translators' Association, Marks has translated historical letters, numerous articles, and two books.

FROM SONNETS TO ORPHEUS
RAINER MARIA RILKE



1:11

Scan the heavens. Where's the constellation
that's called "horseman"? Strangely we're imprinted
with this pride of earth. And there's another,
urging, checking it, and carried by it.

Isn't our own nature's sinewy being
just like this—first whipped and then reined in?
Trail and turning. Pressure does the guiding.
New expanses. And the two are one.

Are they really, though? Are both committed
to the road they're traveling together?
Table, pasture—gulfs apart already.

Star connections also prove deceptive.
So just let us for awhile enjoy
our belief in them. That is enough.

2:29

Silent friend of far-off places, feel
how your breathing still increases space.
From among the gloomy belfries' beams
let yourself ring out. What feeds on you,

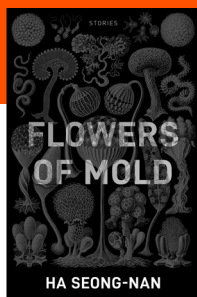
it grows stronger from this sustenance.
Freely enter, freely leave this transformation.
What experience brought you greatest sorrow?
Drinking wine? Then wine you must become.

Be this night devoted to excesses,
magic at the crossroads of your senses;
be the meaning of their strange encounter.

And when earthly things forget you,
to the still earth say, "I'm flowing."
To the rushing water say, "I am."

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 HA SEONG-NAN

Trans. from the the Korean by Janet Hong



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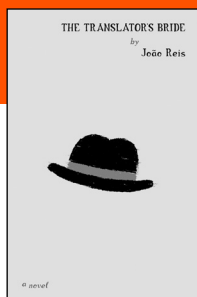
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Trans. from the Portuguese by the author

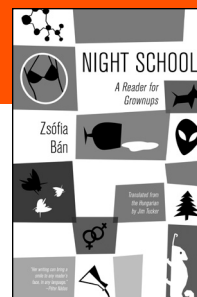


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"Reading Zsófia Bán is simply good. It's pleasurable. That's the first thing that comes to mind when I think of her. . . . her writing can bring a smile to any reader's face, in any language."—Péter Nádas

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Trans. from the Spanish by Andrea G. Labinger



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