



2015

FALL  
WINTER

**OPEN  
LETTER**

The image features a dark blue background with several white and light blue geometric shapes. A large white rectangle is positioned in the upper center, with the text '2015' in white. To its right is a light blue rectangle. Below the white rectangle is another white rectangle containing the text 'FALL' and 'WINTER' in white. To the right of this is a white shape that resembles an open book or a folded page. Below these is a wide, light blue horizontal bar. At the bottom left, the text 'OPEN' and 'LETTER' is written in white. To the right of this text is a white rectangle. At the very bottom, there is a light blue horizontal bar on the left and a white rectangle on the right.

2015

FALL  
WINTER

OPEN  
LETTER

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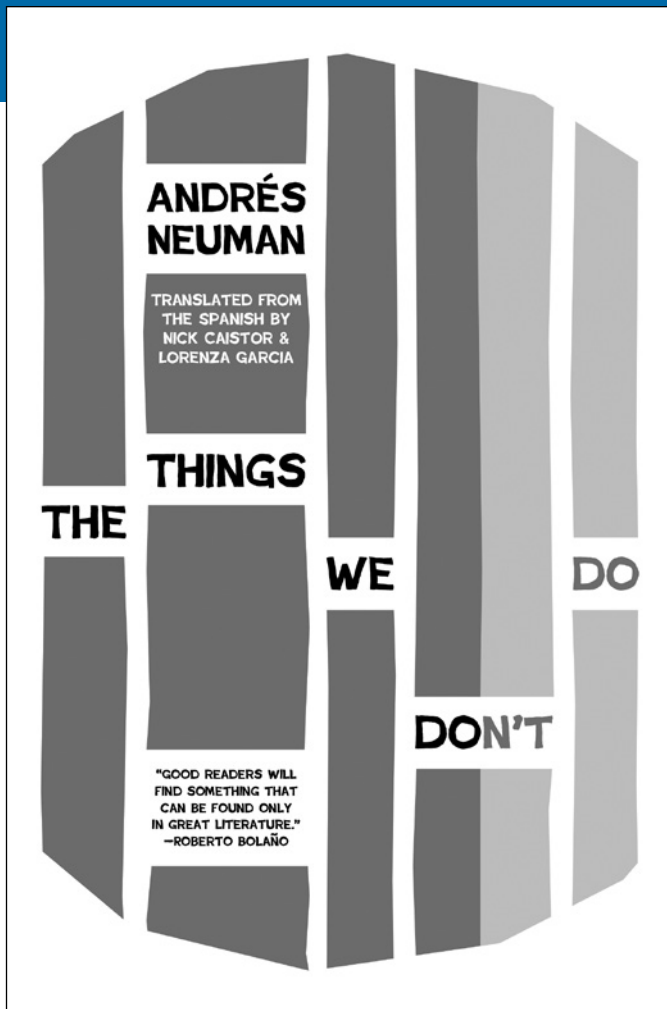
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FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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(North America)



## THE THINGS WE DON'T DO

ANDRÉS NEUMAN

Trans. from the Spanish by Nick Caistor & Lorenza García

Playful, philosophizing, and gloriously unpredictable, Andrés Neuman's short stories consider love, lechery, history, mortality, family secrets, therapy, Borges, mysterious underwear, translators, and storytelling itself.

Here a relationship turns on a line drawn in the sand; an analyst treats a patient who believes *he's* the real analyst; a discovery in a secondhand shop takes on a cruel significance; a man decides to go to work naked one day. In these small scenes and brief moments, Neuman confounds our expectations with dazzling sleight of hand.

With a variety of forms and styles, Neuman opens up the possibilities for fiction, calling to mind other greats of Latin American letters, such as Cortázar, Bolaño, and Bioy Casares. Intellectually stimulating and told with a voice that is wry, questioning, sometimes mordantly funny, yet always generously humane, *The Things We Don't Do* confirms Neuman's place as one of the most dynamic authors writing today.

"Good readers will find something that can be found only in great literature. . . . The literature of the twenty-first century will belong to Neuman and a few of his blood brothers."

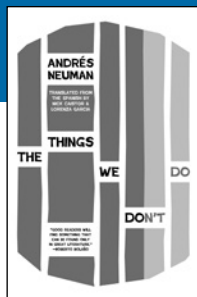
—Roberto Bolaño

"Andrés Neuman is destined to be one of the essential writers of our time."

—Teju Cole

Andrés Neuman was born in Buenos Aires, and grew up and lives in Spain. He is the author of almost twenty works, two of which—*Traveler of the Century* and *Talking to Ourselves*—have been translated into English. *Traveler of the Century* won the Alfaguara Prize and the National Critics Prize, and was longlisted for the 2013 Best Translated Book Award, among others.

Nick Caistor is a prolific British translator and journalist. He is a past winner of the Valle-Inclán Prize for translation and is a regular contributor to BBC Radio 4, *Times Literary Supplement*, and the *Guardian*. Lorenza García has lived for extended periods in Spain, France, and Iceland. Since 2007, she has translated over a dozen works.



from "JUAN, JOSÉ"

4. José

Monday 14 May. The sessions continue to take place in the following way. Juan arrives at my consulting room, and, in order to be able to allude to, or possibly to elude his grief, he behaves as if he were the therapist. For my part, I try to devise as many questions and observations my role as make-believe patient permits. This dynamic has remained unchanged since the patient's last acute crisis. If at that time I went along with this symbolic role reversal (naturally revealing nothing of a truly intimate nature, and always maintaining the distance my profession and common sense prescribe), it was because the patient soon began to talk about himself with an ease and frankness hitherto unimaginable. Although I still harbor a few misgivings about this strategy, going over my files I realize that, by comparison, the conclusions drawn from my sessions with Juan do not differ wildly from those of other patients receiving orthodox therapy. Depending on his progression over the next few weeks, I will consider whether to prolong the special treatment for a while, or return the sessions to their proper place and put the patient back on his previous medication (see prescriptions17.doc).

The monothematic nature of our exchanges presents no significant variations. When, in my role as an alleged patient showing the classic curiosity toward his or her therapist, I question him about his own personal life,

Juan refers to his daily routine, taking for granted that his parents are still living. He even describes to me trivial everyday incidents in startling detail. Notwithstanding his pathology, Juan's observations on marriage, relationships or the smugness of children are surprisingly deep and incisive. Despite my reservations, I can't help secretly approving of many of his remarks.

To give an example, in today's session he declared that people born in the '70s are orphans through excess. That is to say, a generation that feels unprotected due to its parents' overprotectiveness. Juan and I belong more or less to the same generation, and I, too, am an only child. This fact occasionally contributes to my being momentarily distracted from his case and referring back to my own experience, which further complicates the difficult balancing act our game of role reversal forces me to maintain. I mention these small interferences in my communication with my patient in order to be aware of them.

5. Juan

At times, José shows signs of worsening, or at least I think I detect in him symptoms of an imminent relapse. During the last few sessions he has only been collaborating when our roles are acted out according to strict rules. Until recently I was able to steer our dialogue into a buffer zone, where, despite the premise of the game, I was able to move

with relative ease and coax him into expressing himself, provided our implicit roles (he is eager to ask, I don't mind responding) were not explicitly challenged.

Now, however, the routine is becoming complicated because José scarcely engages in digressions of a personal nature, and is inclined to resist when I pose any intimate questions. Consequently, I am limited to projecting his own anxieties in my increasingly lengthy monologues, and must be content to catch his brief remarks on the fly and swiftly analyze them. My replies are an attempt to inject the patient with a measure of reality, aware that my words produce a mirror effect in him. [. . .]

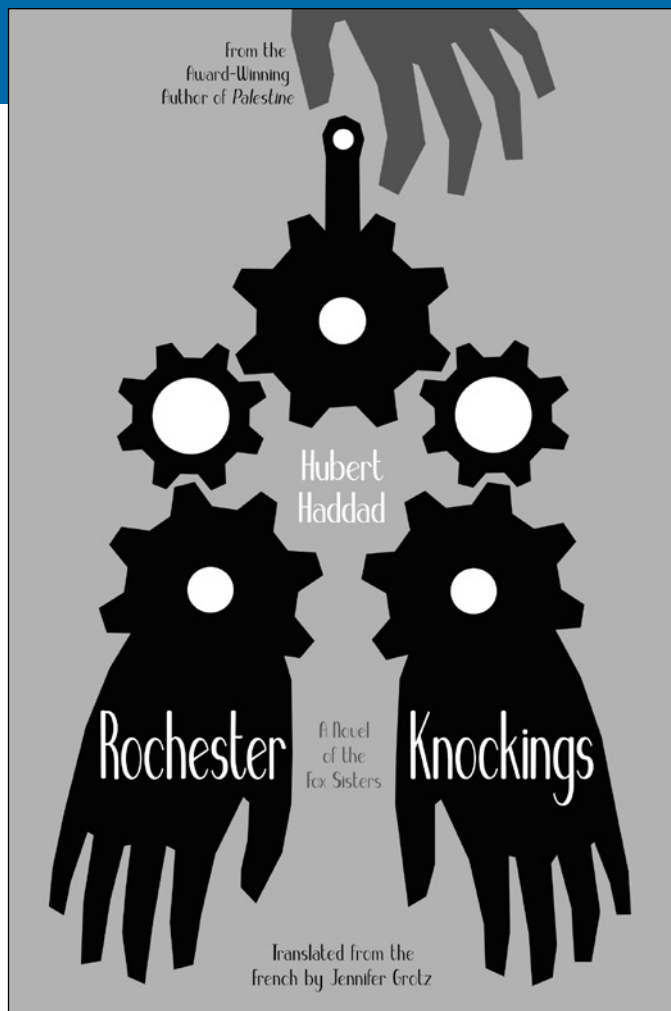
Having reached this point, and when I read over my reports on our latest sessions, I begin to doubt whether playing along with José's game was the correct thing to do. To confuse things further still, in spite of his increasing refusal to talk, the patient shows a self-possession he did not have before, and his expressions (voice, gestures, motor coordination) have become considerably calmer. I mentioned at the beginning, as the roleplay progressed, my suspicion that the patient might have deteriorated. However, from a strictly behavioral point of view, he seems to have improved. With regard to this apparent contradiction, I fear my limited professional experience is playing a dirty trick on me, even though I can see that this experiment is directly enhancing it. I am convinced that this audacious praxis will help me attain my father's level more quickly, equaling if not

surpassing his clinical achievements. In the meantime I still haven't mentioned this case to him. I don't think it is advisable. This is something I must resolve on my own.

6. José

Monday 28 May. Encouragingly, Juan seems to have accepted my frequent questions as a given, and he dutifully submits to answering them. The fictitious confidences I have been forced to share with him have been reduced to a minimum, and for the most part I limit myself to listening and, rather ironically, to exercising my true role. That is to say, to pretending I am a patient who prefers to listen to the confidences of his garrulous therapist.

I am not unaware that Juan's progress has a complexity and subtlety that never cease to surprise me. Not only does the patient pretend that it is he who in theory is treating me, he now makes as if he is grudgingly tolerating my questions. He regularly expresses in no uncertain terms his displeasure and unease during these interrogations. In other words, Juan appears to be on the way to overcoming part of his previous conflict, but only at the cost of starting a fresh one between us. I trust it will be provisional, a sort of pain-scaffolding. In the meantime, the patient speaks less about his parents' objective presence in the house and evokes their image instead, focusing on the emotional meaning they had for him. As I say, these symptoms are positive. ■



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OCTOBER 13, 2015

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(World)



## ROCHESTER KNOCKINGS: A NOVEL OF THE FOX SISTERS

HUBERT HADDAD

Trans. from the French by Jennifer Grotz

The Fox Sisters grew up outside of Rochester, NY, in a house with a reputation for being haunted, due to a series of strange “knockings” that plagued its inhabitants. Fed up with the sounds, the youngest of the sisters (aged twelve) challenged their ghost and ended up communicating with a spirit who had been murdered in the house and buried in the cellar.

The Fox Sisters became instantly famous for talking to the dead, launching the Spiritualist Movement. After taking Rochester by storm, they moved to New York where they were the most famous mediums of the time, performing séances for hundreds of people—until it all fell apart. Yet, even today, the Fox Sisters are still considered to be the founders of one of the most popular religious movements in recent centuries (just consider the success of Long Island Medium . . .).

Rich in historical detail, *Rochester Knockings* novelizes the rise and fall of these most infamous of mediums, and sheds a unique light on the impressionability and fragility of nineteenth-century America.

“Hats off to one of the most inventive writers of French literature. . . . Hubert Haddad concocts a colorful novel, funny and inventive, as clever as the Fox sisters themselves.”

—Jean-François Delapré, Saint Christophe Bookstore

Hubert Haddad was born in Tunisia, and is the author of dozens of works, including the novels *Palestine* (winner of the Prix des Cinq Continents de la Francophonie), *Tango chinois*, and *La Condition magique* (winner of the Grand Prix du Roman de la Société des Gens de Lettres).

Jennifer Grotz is a poet and translator from French and Polish, as well as the editor of Open Letter’s poetry series. She is a professor of English, creative writing, and translation at the University of Rochester, and is also director of the Bread Loaf Translators’ Conference.



### I. The Song of the Iroquois

The sun at dusk lit the staircase through the upstairs window. Seated on a step of unfinished wood, Kate studied the dust motes. They floated inside a shaft of light, one of the many suspended throughout the house. Fascinated, she held her breath. Each particle seemed to follow its own trajectory in the dancing company of its tiny neighbors, of which there were thousands, millions, more than the stars fixed or spinning through the moonless nights. Motionless, so as not to stir the air, Kate tried hard to distinguish a single mote among them with the idea of not losing sight of its capricious flight; the instant after it was no longer the same one, she had lost it forever and the archangelic spear of sunlight crossed painfully over her face, as if to ignite the pollen lining the bottom of her eyelids. She had gathered so many wildflowers that autumn morning to decorate the grave of her dog, Irondequoit, that nausea had clenched her throat and her whole body was still burning from it. And yet Mother had warned her.

There's a creak of the staircase behind her and suddenly it's dark: two freezing hands cover her eyes.

"Leave me alone," said Kate. "I saw you . . ."

"So now you've got eyes in the back of your head?" Margaret sat on a step just above her younger sister. Her torso blocked the ray of sun and its galactic swirls.

"You're bothering me," said Kate. "I was thinking of Irondequoit . . ."

"Oh, Irondequoit, poor old thing! Don't you worry, she's gamboling through Dog Heaven. There's no hell for animals, you know."

"Hell? Do you really believe in that? Why would God exhaust himself by making the dead roast for all eternity? It would be enough to bury and forget them in the ground just the once."

"Don't you see, Katie, that's completely impossible, even for God. Souls are immortal!"

The evening dwelled at length over Hydesville. First tinted blue like the pond's surface in broad daylight, then almost black and wine-dark, shadows spread down to the bottom of the staircase and across the silhouette of the adolescent it slowly obscured. Already Kate couldn't make out her sister's face. Mica-like glimmers flickered between her teeth and on her pupils, giving her the look of a bear cub bewigged with thick black tresses. Straining to fix her attention on where her sister was sitting, Kate thought she was seeing a cruel mask lit from within and in an abrupt jump let out a small cry.

"What's there?" sounded a frightened Margaret, half-turning back toward upstairs.

"Nothing, nothing, it's just the darkness . . ."

"You just made me weirdly afraid, as if

you'd seen the devil in the exact spot where I'm sitting."

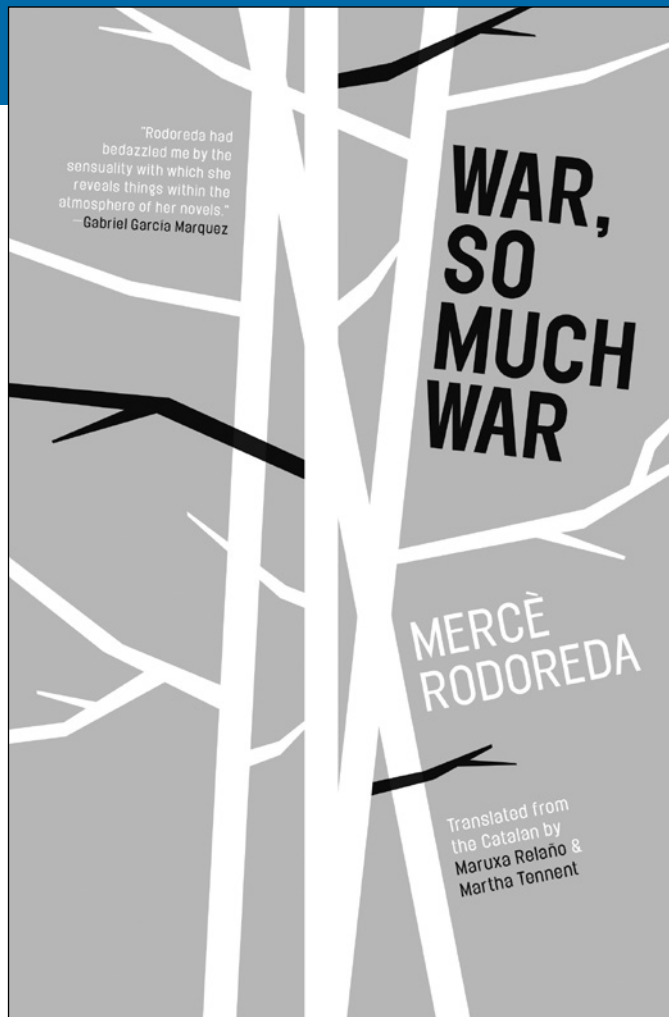
Margaret considered her younger sister with perplexed irritation. She liked her well enough, her little Katie, she was so pretty and sometimes quite comical, but a compartment or two was missing somewhere in her brain. Kate certainly had brains to spare; even Leah, their older sister who had gone to live in Rochester, agreed; whatever her sustained distractions and funny airs might be, when she focused her cat's eye into space, it betrayed something more than absent-mindedness, something entirely different, as if a part of her was dreaming while wide awake. At eleven years of age, not yet a woman, Katie had the look of an angel, one of "those gracious birds with a human face who populated in myriad the resplendent spheres," as the Reverend Henry Gascoigne described them one day in a Sunday sermon.

But suddenly everything was so peaceful. One could hear the faint and metallic sounds from the kitchen where their mother, barely recovered from an awful cold, bustled to prepare dinner. Outside, the cows were mooing in the meadows; the tethered horses fidgeted at the sound of an iron-wheeled stagecoach that passed by without even slowing on Long Road leading to Rochester. When the calm soon returned, the frequent bleating of the sheep and goats announced the return of Pequot, the nickname given to the idiot shepherd with his bright red face who terrified the girls of Hydesville with his

postures and antics. Their father, also on his way back from the fields and pastures, was putting his tools back in the stable where he had just unsaddled Old Billy, as he did every night.

[ . . . ]

Margaret grew quiet, thinking of their former life in another village in Monroe County. Even at fifteen years of age, when one is still dependent on them, adults nevertheless seem about as important as furniture. Maggie had had two precious friends there, soul mates, and even a pretend fiancé, the handsome Lee who frightened all the girls his own age—and then overnight, without warning, they'd decided to empty the house from basement to attic with the help of neighboring farmers, pile an entirety of memories into a big wagon, and that was the end of beautiful friendships and loves, despite promises to see each other again on the occasion of a parish festival or a rodeo. "Three moves equals a fire," was a line from Benjamin Franklin that she had read in an old issue of *Poor Richard's Almanac* dating back to her grandmother. There was a stack of them underneath the armoire in her parents' bedroom. One move, at the age of fifteen, is as bad as all the griefs of love. Katie, on the other hand, seemed to have only a single regret, as violent as remorse: that they had abandoned their little brother there in his grave. Otherwise she appeared perfectly blasé, or else was hiding something in a virtuosic game of concealment. ■



## FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

NOVEMBER 10, 2015

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\$9.99 (ebook)  
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(World)

Also Available:

*Death in Spring*. 13.95 (pb), novel, 978-1-940953-28-1; \$9.99 (ebook) 978-1-934824-45-0  
*Selected Stories*. 15.95 (pb), stories, 978-1-934824-31-3; \$9.99 (ebook) 978-1-934824-53-5



## WAR, SO MUCH WAR

MERCÈ RODOREDA

Trans. from the Catalan by Maruxa Relajo & Martha Tennent

Despite its title, there is little of war and much of the fantastic in this coming-of-age story, which was the last novel Mercè Rodoreda published during her lifetime.

We first meet its young protagonist, Adrià Guinart, as he is leaving Barcelona out of boredom and a thirst for freedom, embarking on a long journey through the backwaters of a rural land, accompanied by the interminable, distant rumblings of an indefinable war. In vignette-like chapters and a narrative style imbued with the fantastic, Guinart meets with numerous adventures and peculiar characters who offer him a surrealistic view of an impoverished, war-ravaged society and shape his perception of his place in the world.

Like Rodoreda's *Death in Spring*, nature and death play a fundamental role in this phantasmagoric narrative that seems to be a meditation on moral degradation and the often inescapable presence of evil.

"Rodoreda had bedazzled me by the sensuality with which she reveals things within the atmosphere of her novels."

—Gabriel García Marquez

"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. Tremendous, tremendous writer."

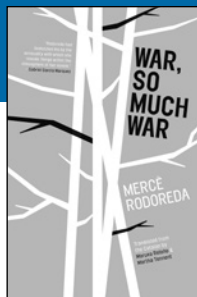
—John Darnielle, *The Mountain Goats*

**Mercè Rodoreda** (1908–1983) is widely regarded as the most important Catalan writer of the twentieth century. While exiled in France and Switzerland following the Spanish Civil War, Rodoreda began writing the novels and short stories—*Twenty-Two Short Stories*, *The Times of the Doves*, *Camellia Street*—that would make her internationally famous. In the mid-1960s, she returned to Catalonia, where she continued to write.

**Maruxa Relajo** has worked as a translator for the *Wall Street Journal* and as a writer for NY1 and the *New York Daily News*, among others. **Martha Tennent** served as founding dean of the School of Translation and Interpreting at the University of Vic. She received an NEA Translation Fellowship for her work on Rodoreda.



## FROM WAR, SO MUCH WAR MERCÈ RODOREDA



### I. Midnight

When I was three, everyone mistook me for a girl because Mother had never cut my hair and it fell in ringlets down the sides of my neck. The day Mother took me to see Father Sebastià to have me admitted to school, Father Sebastià gave me a sad look and said: We don't accept girls. Mother lapsed into all manner of explanations. It pained her to cut such beautiful hair; I was too little and would be cold with my hair all chopped off. And while she was explaining, I, who already knew how to write my name, strode to the blackboard, and grasping a piece of chalk, white on black, scribbled in large, crooked letters: Adrià Guinart. Father Sebastià noticed at once and, clasping his hands together, exclaimed, "A veritable archangel!"

I started school with my hair cropped, distressed by the change but wiser than the other boys. Father Sebastià had me sit beside him when he taught Sacred History; my gaze troubled him if I sat on the bench: too much like an owl, he said. We had a thick folder full of large holy pictures that was kept locked in the cupboard where we stored notebooks, pencils, and chalk. While he spoke, I—it was always I—was supposed to wield a wooden stick to point to the things

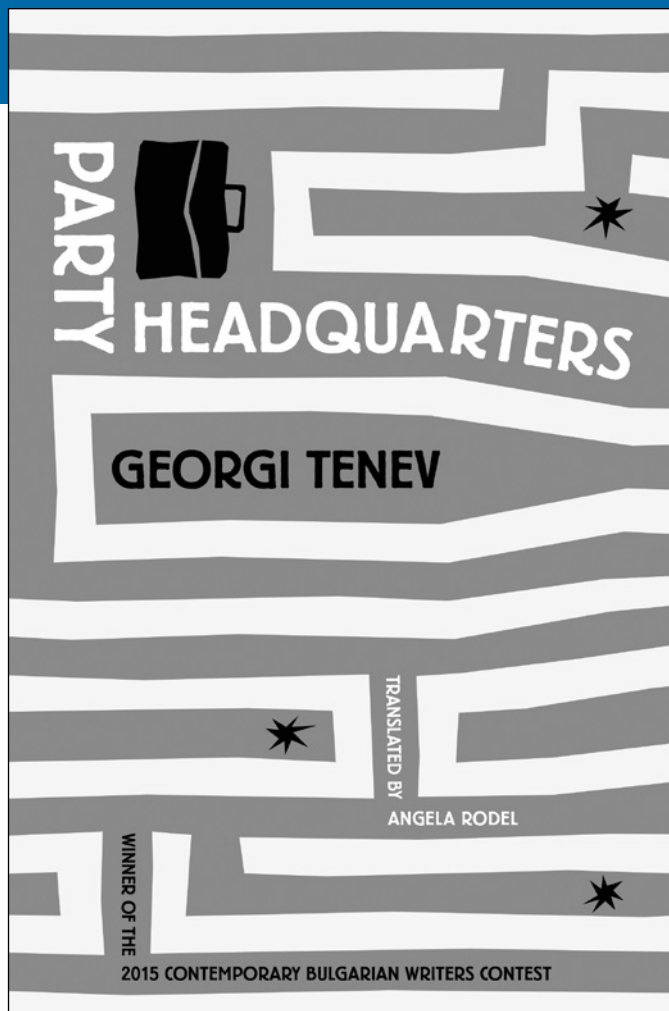
he mentioned: the Dead Sea, the Staff of Moses, the Tables of the Law, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam and Eve wearing fig leaves. Now point to Solomon. I was always mortified when I had to point to the fellow who lost his strength when they cut his hair. Point to the herald angel. Blond, with ringlets like I had before starting school, the blooming lily in his hand, and feathery wings—a blue stripe, a red stripe—the angel hovered in mid-air before Mary. When it was time for the image of the Great Flood, all the boys in the class, even the sleepest, most distracted, perked up. As I followed the arching rainbow of colors with the pointer, I could feel myself floating between the green and the purple, the yellow and the pink . . . Hadn't Father Sebastià called me an archangel? Archangels flew. Cain and Abel. I held my breath. Abel was grazing his sheep. Cain was sweating and plowing. I was dreaming Sacred History, dreaming angels, dreaming saints, dreaming of myself living Sacred History, crossing deserts and making water flow from springs. On the days when the Crucifixion print was shown, as soon as I reached the field of carnations, I would race from one end to the other, and stand

on tiptoes, reaching up as far as I could to hear the stars whispering, poor thing, poor thing, he doesn't have wings . . .

[ . . . ]

My father died when I was eleven. He was a train driver. He had a mustache and large, tranquil eyes. When I was little, to get me to sleep he would sit me on his lap and sing me the song about the wheels that go round and round, round and round. He said there was a fiery moon the first time the man appeared on the tracks. A thick fog lay asleep above the trees to the right. And a man was walking right down the middle of the tracks toward the train. As soon as my father saw him, he blew the whistle. The man, who was small at first but started getting bigger, walked on as though there were no train bearing down on him. He got so close my father could see the clothes he was wearing: light-colored trousers and a yellow-and-black striped shirt. My father braked. There was screaming in the compartments. My father got off the train, followed by a group of passengers. They found no one on the tracks. Father had to give the company an account of what had happened to explain why the train was late. Everything would have ended with that if a year later, in the same spot but on a pitch-black night with snowflakes falling calmly from the sky, the man walking

along the tracks had not appeared again, in the same attire: pale trousers and a yellow and black shirt. The train was moving at full speed, the wheels singing that song about wheels that go round and round. The minute my father spotted him, he blew the whistle several times, but the stubborn man kept getting closer. Until, finally, his heart pounding, my father was forced to brake. Frightened screams came from the passenger cars. My father got off the train. There was no one on the tracks. Together with some passengers, they scoured the surrounding area. Nothing turned up. My father sensed that the people didn't believe him, that they were eyeing him as though he were crazy. Again, he had to notify the company. If they ever came to suspect that the train driver was seeing visions . . . And on a moonlit night, an expanse of silvery fields on either side of the track, the man in pale trousers and striped shirt again appeared in the distance, as he had on the two previous occasions. My father said he closed his eyes . . . and did not brake. And with every one of his senses he felt the sound of bones being crushed. The company did not fire him, but he was moved to another line. He operated a dilapidated old train that was as subdued as a turtle and only made short hauls. Plunged into the well of that mystery, he died of a heart attack shortly thereafter. Mother did not weep for him. ■



## FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

FEBRUARY 9, 2016

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(World)



## PARTY HEADQUARTERS

GEORGI TENEV

Trans. from the Bulgarian by Angela Rodel

Winner of the Vick Foundation Novel of the Year Award in 2007, *Party Headquarters* takes place in the '80s and '90s, during Bulgaria's transition from communist rule to democracy. The book—which is a love story, a parody, and a thriller

about a political hoax—opens with the main character visiting his father-in-law, an old communist party boss who is dying, and being tasked with delivering a suitcase filled with one-and-a-half million euros.

It's one of Bulgaria's most popular myths: As the communist party fell apart, officials squirreled away bags of the country's wealth, and these bags are still circulating, waiting to be delivered to conspirators. But this is just the beginning of the corruption and inequality . . . While immersing himself in pornography and prostitution, our hero reflects back on his life and the emblematic events that took place—the anticommunist protests, the arson attack on the Communist Party Headquarters, and, most crucially, the Chernobyl disaster.

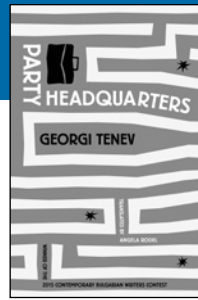
Beautiful and tragic, *Party Headquarters* is an engrossing testament to the struggles after the fall of the Soviet Union, many of which continue to resonate today.

*"Party Headquarters interprets a deeply personal story where the private, the intimate, is publicly exposed."*—Maria Popova, *Politics*

*"Black irony, the use of lexicon format, the documentary reminders—all this makes Party Headquarters one of the most influential books of recent times."*—Amelia Licheva, *Capital Light*

**Georgi Tenev**, before penning the Vick Prize-winning novel *Party Headquarters*, had already published four books, founded the Triumviratus Art Group, hosted *The Library* television program about books, and written plays that have been performed in Germany, France, and Russia. He is also a screenwriter for film and TV.

**Angela Rodel** earned an MA in linguistics from UCLA and received a Fulbright Fellowship to study Bulgarian. In 2010, she won a PEN Translation Fund Grant for Georgi Tenev's short story collection. She is one of the most prolific translators of Bulgarian literature working today.



## Chapter 1: His Daughter

The strangest part is when I see she's starting to cry. With us, tears often lead to unexpected consequences.

Even without the tears I still want to hit her, painfully hard. But when she cries it just gets out of control. The victim's magnetic attraction inflames the perpetrator. I'm driven to tears myself—out of frustration that I can't force myself to finish it off, to do absolutely everything I want to her. In exactly the order I would like.

If anyone were to see us at this moment, bawling, locked in this torture chamber at opposite ends of the bed—in the middle the bloody sheets are stained with wet spots, but not from blood, lymph, vaginal secretions, sperm or who knows what else—could it be that some other beings are copulating here with us?—at that moment the shocked outside observer would think we are crying for each other, for ourselves.

Wrong. An incorrect judgment, a faulty interpretation of ambiguous facts. I'm not sorry. What can I say? Regret is most certainly far beyond the boundaries within which I would torment her. Tears are just one more weapon in this battle, nothing more. I must be very careful now; tears, like all water, temper freshly forged metal. Her blue zirconium glare blazes out twice as pliant, resilient, like eyes on a rifle sight, eyes like bullet tips—and I am the bull's-eye.

On the very first day, or afternoon, rather, when we met, on that fatally happy day of

our acquaintance, she explained to me that she didn't have a father. She stubbornly insisted that her father did not exist. He was alive, you see, but as soon as she spoke his name and sharply declared it's as if I don't have a father—then I understood, it was all clear.

His name is K-shev.

I never imagined that I would get mixed up with the daughter of one of them. But fatal meetings are always marked by signs from the very beginning. I'm talking about fleeting clues. But no one tells you "watch out!" you don't hear any voice yelling "stop!" And the fact that at that very moment the angels fall silent most likely means they're egging you on. That the meeting is divinely inspired; the meeting is the beginning of the collision of love.

>>>

So his name is K-shev.

Everyone remembers their names, they're strange. And they get that way because of the people they belong to, and not the other way around. Yet it somehow seems like fate also chooses them by the sounds of their names.

Who is this person, completely anonymous behind his name? Later I began to understand, things started to become clear. But by then it was too late to save myself, I was already caught in the trap. So why

bother trying to go back now to fix things? There's no point. I can only return as an observer, as remote and nonchalant as if I'm watching a stranger and not myself.

>>>

You are the reason words exist—I want to pause on this thought. That is, I want to pause precisely here to make this absolutely clear. It's doubtful I'll succeed in getting any relief or satisfaction, as much as I would like to. Perhaps I suspect there is some higher purpose or calling in pornography, when you watch and somebody shows you everything.

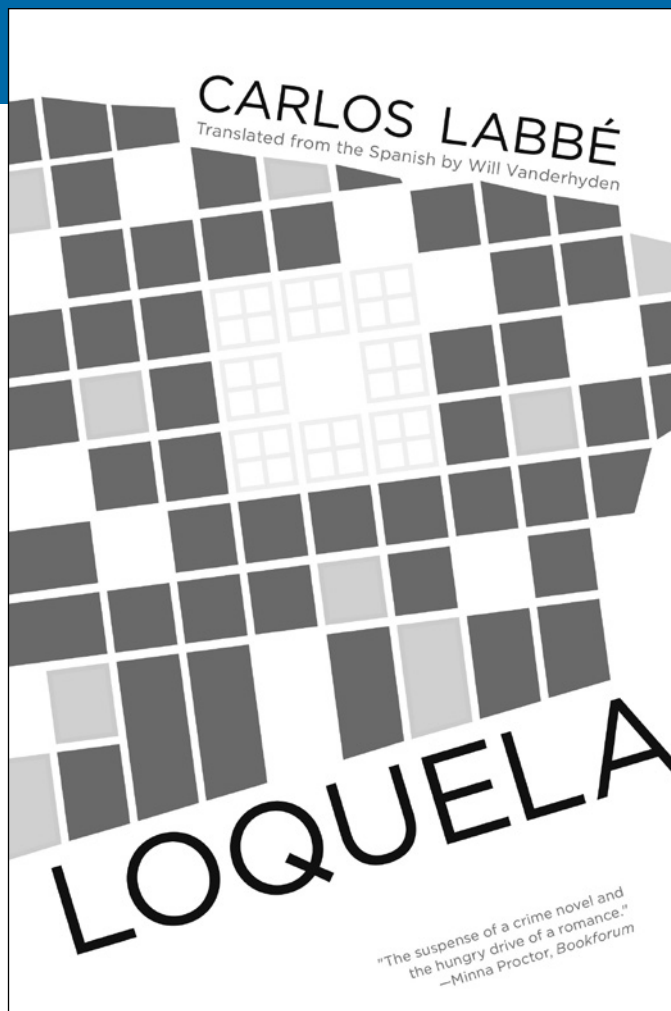
The moment I took my eyes from the screen, the last thing lingering in my pupils was the image of naked bodies. Everything about it screams scam, despite the originality of the moans and the excitement in the voice of the nude, sweat-drenched woman. It's a scam because of the presumed viewer, because of my gaze. This is also the source of the shame.

I leave the colorful barn, its booths with their blue doors and neon lights. The dark room and the screen overhead reflected in the mirror. Next to the armchair are buttons to select the channel, a box of Kleenex, a wastebasket with a plastic liner. The silver slit that swallows coins, black speakers that spit out sound.

>>>

I go outside. It would be frightening if it weren't night. But now there's no light, just electric sparks from the street. I light a cigarette to dull the arousal. I don't want it to stay with me, I have to separate it from myself, from my body. If I had come inside like I wanted to, I most likely would've failed all the same. But I didn't make the move, I froze up, I couldn't do it. A naked woman—pretty, by the way. And another one, looking very much the same. Nice full breasts, one with long fake fingernails, the other with girlish almost infantile fingers, navel rings. I shouldn't feel bad about it, yet there was some kind of anxious beauty in that shot of frantically jumping bodies. That's exactly what should've relaxed me—the precision and obvious professionalism of the action. Even to the point of seeming to give them pleasure—paid for in advance by me or someone like me. These two golden-skinned bodies impatiently jostling on top of each other, with no man in between, of course—precisely because I wouldn't be able to stand anyone else besides myself here.

I got up and left before the final minutes, leaving behind a part of myself, my hotly beating pulse—I didn't run, but somehow, despite the tension, casually and masterfully made my way to the exit. With the professional gait of a smoker waiting for intermission to give himself over to an older and more acceptable vice, one that can be shared on the street. █



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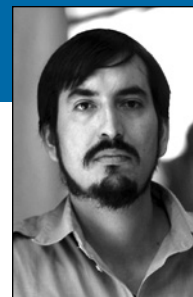
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## LOQUELA

CARLOS LABBÉ

Trans. from the Spanish by Will Vanderhyden

*Loquela*, Carlos Labbé's fourth novel and second to be translated into English, is a narrative chameleon, a shape-shifting exploration of fiction's possibilities.

At a basic level, this is a distorted detective novel mixed with a love story and a radical statement about narrative art. Beyond the silence that unites and separates Carlos and Elisa, beyond the game that keeps the albino girls, Alicia and Violeta, from pleasant summer evenings, beyond the destiny of Neutria—a city that disappears with childhood—and beyond a Chilean literary movement that could be the last vanguard while at the same time being the greatest falsehood, questions arise concerning who truly writes for whom in a novel—the author or the reader.

Through an array of voices, overlapping storylines, a kaleidoscope of literary references, and a delirious, precise prose, Labbé carves out a space for himself among such great form-defying Latin American writers as Juan Carlos Onetti and Jorge Luis Borges.

"Begins to fuck with your head from its very first word."

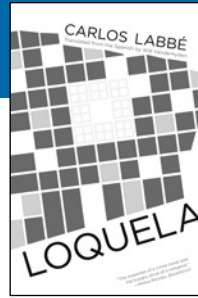
—Toby Litt

"With ample imagination and commanding style, *Navidad & Matanza* certainly marks Labbé as a young author from whom we ought to anticipate great, fascinating things to come."

—Jeremy Garber, Powell's Books

Carlos Labbé, one of *Granta's* "Best Young Spanish-Language Novelists," was born in Chile and is the author of a collection of short stories and six novels, one of which, *Navidad & Matanza*, is already available in English from Open Letter. In addition to his writings, he is a musician and has released four albums.

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, and Elvio Gandolfo.



### The Novel

Carlos looked at his notebook and re-read the last page: anticipating that the killer—whoever it was—would defend himself, the man had retrieved the gun. His head pounded and his knees were shaking. There's a dead girl lying inside, he thought. He'd never fired a gun. His vision clouded over, his whole body pulsed as the door opened slowly from inside. He decided to fire first. And he did. The albino girl let out a soft cry and fell at his feet. He was the killer.

This was not the ending Carlos had planned. But as he was writing it, he'd lost sight of the pages delineating the plot structure. It's like a weight's been lifted, he said to himself. Like escaping the body. Guided by the pen, in a sort of feverish state, he'd turned the man into the killer; and now the carefully constructed plot was a complete mess. His own ineptitude infuriated him: four months figuring out a way for the stalker to remain unseen while simultaneously leaving behind clear indications of his intentions; innumerable nights of the man following the albino girl, up all night reading chapters from the detective story she'd scrawled in that notebook. The man's interpretations of the woman's story, the walks tracing those absurd maps she'd invented, and the characters with names that obviously concealed the

identities of other people. The staged shootout. Or, to put it another way, the strange coincidence of a shootout between cops and bank robbers and the chapter dedicated to bullets, on a parallel day at a parallel location, a warning sign compelling him to take up his own investigation. All of it so the man arrived at the right address, opened the right door, and shot the albino girl, the albino girl he wanted so badly. This final image was incomplete: after the shot, the man's eyes wouldn't come to rest on her body, instead, through the door into the next room, they'd find a mirror hanging on the opposing wall, and there he'd catch a glimpse of his own face, sirens drawing ever nearer. Even though he had ignored the novel's outline, Carlos thought, it was possible that this was his favorite part. He went to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. He brought a jar of red juice to his lips and drank, asking himself how the letter the protagonist sent to the wrong address had led to him being followed by an unknown car, to a death threat in the bathroom of a dance club where he'd gone to look for the girl one Saturday night, and had suddenly found himself embroiled in a shootout in the middle of the street. He remembered his friend's comment when he'd received a popular detective novel for Christmas the previous year, that

these kinds of books were more machination and less mystery all the time. They've got no soul, Elisa would've added. She suggested the possibility that the plot of his book was the result of a sick imagination—that of the protagonist perhaps—and that the only recognizable thing in those pages was the presence of an albino girl doomed to die. Every time she offered an opinion about what he wrote, his girlfriend claimed that his characters weren't human beings. They never yawned, they didn't shower in the morning, and never woke up in a bad mood; she'd say: the author should keep in mind that during the day he had to use the bathroom, laugh every now and then, and sleep a little after lunch. This would prevent his characters from forgetting their own bodies every time they jumped, or ran, or shot somebody.

Carlos looked out the window again and saw the organ grinder walking away, his instrument on his back. A little girl was pulling her dog's leash, trying to get it to stop barking at the poor old man. There were no bullets out there, no persecutions, no deaths, he thought. Of course, the organ grinder was afraid that the dog might bite him, or that someone might assault him while passing through certain neighborhoods. He tried to remember being in a similar situation: the novel's protagonist felt fear, seeing his own deformed reflection on that wall, gun in hand, the face of a killer. He picked the pen

up off the floor. He'd been mistaken, he said to himself, as he sat back down at the desk: he didn't want to write a detective novel; he wanted to write a mystery.

He'd decided to take a break from the novel, he told Elisa. They were lying together on his bed. His notebook was still open on the desk, the uncapped pen, the jar with what remained of the powdered juice. She was staring at a white canvas that hung on one wall, her back to her boyfriend, who was holding her. I need to take a step back from the plot so I can figure out who the characters are, he said; you'll finally find out whether they're flesh and bone or paper, she murmured. You were right, he added. That it'd be good to get to know the man, find someone who looks like the albino girl, talk to both of them. Elisa closed her eyes and took hold of Carlos's elusive hand. They lay there in silence. From a neighbor's house they heard the shouts of children playing. She looks like Violeta, Elisa said. Who?, he asked; the albino, the albino girl looks like your cousin's friend whose name is Violeta, but Carlos had never seen her. Elisa got up, went out into the living room, and came back to the bed, holding a photograph between her fingers. She sat down next to Carlos and pointed out a figure dancing on the edge of the dance floor, near some tables. The girl was albino. ■

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MERCÈ RODOREDÀ

Trans. from the Catalan by Martha Tennent

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**D***death in Spring* is one of Rodoredà's most complex and beautifully constructed works. The novel tells the story of the bizarre and destructive customs of a nameless town—like burying the dead in trees after filling their mouths with cement to prevent their soul from escaping—through the eyes of a fourteen-year-old boy who must come to terms with the rhyme and reason of this ritual violence, and with his wild, childlike, and teenaged stepmother, who becomes his playmate. The horrific rituals, however, stand in stark contrast to the novel's stunningly poetic language and lush descriptions. Musical and rhythmic, this is truly the work of a writer at the height of her powers.

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**Mercè Rodoredà** (1908–1983) is widely regarded as the most important Catalan writer of the twentieth century. In exile following the Spanish Civil War, Rodoredà began writing the works that would make her internationally famous.

**Martha Tennent** served as founding dean of the School of Translation and Interpreting at the University of Vic. She translates from Spanish and Catalan, and received an NEA Translation Fellowship for her work on Rodoredà.

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BRAGI ÓLAFSSON

Trans. from the Icelandic by Janice Balfour

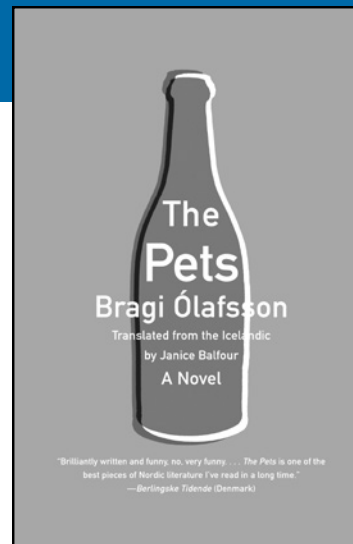
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**B**ack in Reykjavik after a vacation, Emil is waiting for a call from a beautiful girl he met on the plane ride home. He's just put on a pot of coffee when Havard—an unsavory man from his past—knocks on the door. Emil dives under his bed, hoping this frightful nuisance will simply go away, but Havard decides to make himself at home, drinking Emil's booze and entertaining Emil's friends. An alternately dark and hilarious story of cowardice, comeuppance, and assumed identity, the breezy and straightforward style of *The Pets* belies its narrative depth, and disguises a complexity that grows with every page.

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**Bragi Ólafsson**, well known for playing in The Sugarcubes, is the author of numerous novels, plays, and several books of poetry. His works have been finalists for the Icelandic Literature Prize and Nordic Literature Prize, and he has received the Icelandic Bookseller's Award.

**Janice Balfour** studied literature and Italian at the University of Iceland. In addition to Bragi Ólafsson, she has translated Gydir Elíasson.

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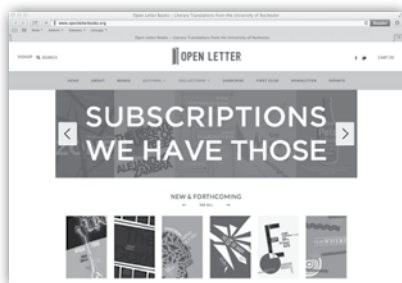
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