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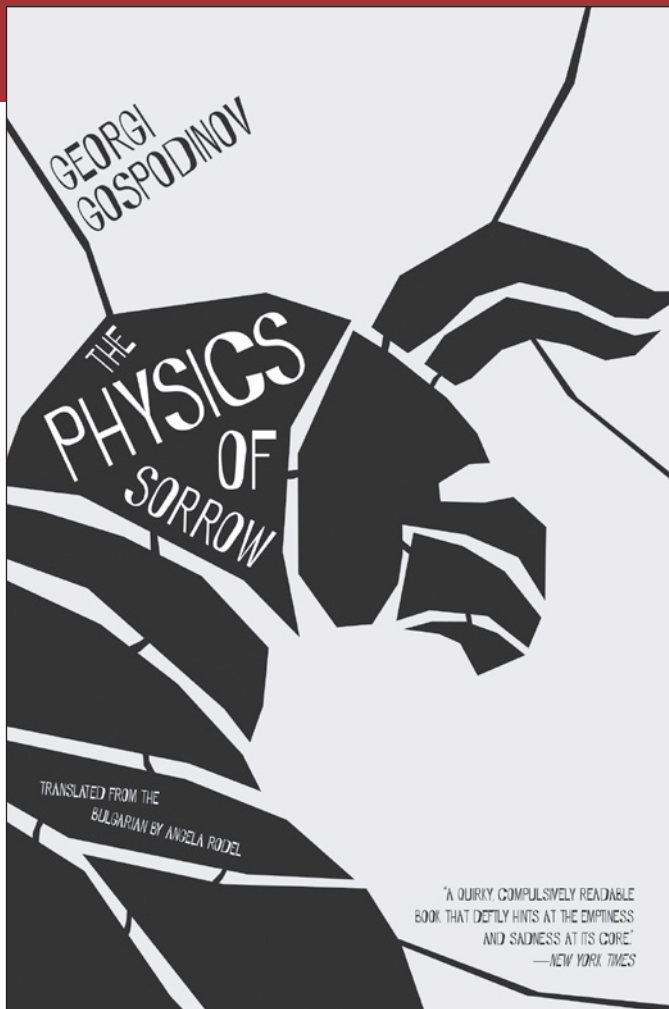
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FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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THE PHYSICS OF SORROW

GEORGI GOSPODINOV

Trans. from the Bulgarian by Angela Rodel

A finalist for both the Strega Europeo and Gregor von Rezzori Awards (and winner of every Bulgarian honor possible), *The Physics of Sorrow* reaffirms Georgi Gospodinov's place as one of Europe's most inventive and daring writers.

Using the myth of the Minotaur as its organizing image, the narrator of Gospodinov's long-awaited novel constructs a labyrinth of stories about his family, jumping from era to era and viewpoint to viewpoint, exploring the mindset and trappings of Eastern Europeans. Incredibly moving—such as with the story of his grandfather accidentally being left behind at a mill—and extraordinarily funny—see the section on the awfulness of the question “how are you?”—*Physics* is a book that you can inhabit, tracing connections, following the narrator down various “side passages,” getting pleasantly lost in the various stories and empathizing with the sorrowful, misunderstood Minotaur at the center of it all.

The Physics of Sorrow will appeal to fans of Dave Eggers, Tom McCarthy, and Dubravka Ugresic for its unique structure, humanitarian concerns, and stunning storytelling.

“A quirky, compulsively readable book that deftly hints at the emptiness and sadness at its core.”

—*New York Times*

“Georgi Gospodinov wants to blow your mind—or maybe just provide the ultimate bathroom reader. . . . The formal playfulness suggests Kundera with A.D.D. and potty jokes.”

—Ed Park, *Village Voice*

Georgi Gospodinov was born in 1968 and is one of the most translated contemporary Bulgarian writers. His first novel, *Natural Novel* was published by Dalkey Archive Press in 2005 and was praised by the *New Yorker*, *New York Times*, and several other prestigious review outlets. A collection of his short stories, *And Other Stories* was published by Northwestern University Press. *The Physics of Sorrow* is his second novel.

Angela Rodel earned an MA in linguistics from UCLA and received a Fulbright Fellowship to study and learn 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 and received an NEA Fellowship for her translation of *The Physics of Sorrow*.

FROM THE PHYSICS OF SORROW GEORGI GOSPODINOV



And then from somewhere behind me I hear:

Step right up, ladies and gents . . . A child with a bull's head. A never-before-seen wonder. The little Minotaur from the Labyrinth, only twelve years old . . . You can eat up your fiver, drink up your fiver, or spend your fiver to see a marvel you'll talk about your whole life long.

[. . .]

In the middle of the tent stands an iron cage about five or six paces long and a little taller than human height. The thin metal bars have begun to darken with rust. Inside there is a mattress and a small, three-legged stool at one end, while at the other—a pail of water and scattered hay. One corner for the human, one for the beast.

The Minotaur is sitting on the stool, with his back to the audience. The shock comes not from the fact that he looks like a beast, but that he is in some way human. Precisely his humanness is staggering. His body is boyish, just like mine.

The first down of adolescence on his legs, feet with long toes, who knows why I expected to see hooves. Faded shorts that reach his knees, a short-sleeved shirt . . . and the head of a young bull. Slightly disproportionate to the body, large, hairy, and heavy. As if nature had hesitated. And just dropped everything right in the middle between bull and man—nature got frightened or distracted. This head is not just a bull's, nor just a human's. How can you describe it,

when the tongue is also pulled in two directions? The face (or snout?)—elongated; the forehead—slightly sloped backward, but nevertheless massive, with bones jutting out above the eyes. (Actually, it is not unlike the forehead of all the men in our family. At this point I unwittingly run my hand over my own skull.) His lower jaw is rather protruded, the lips quite thick. The bestial always hides in the jaw, it's where the animal leaves us last. His eyes, due to the elongated face (or snout) that flattens out on the sides, are wide set. Over the whole facial area there is some brownish fuzz, not a beard, but fuzz. Only toward the ears and neck does this fuzz congeal into fur, the hair growing wild and in disarray. And yet he is more human than anything else. There is a sorrow in him, which no animal possesses.

Once the tent fills up, the man makes the Minotaur-boy stand. He gets up off the stool and for the first time looks at the crowd in the tent. His gaze wanders over us, he has to turn his head, given his obliquely set eyes. They seem to rest on me for a moment. Could we be the same age?

The man who herded us into the tent (his master and guardian) begins his tale. An odd mix of legend and biography, honed over the course of long repetitions at fairs. A story in which eras catch up with one another and intertwine. Some events happen now, others in the distant and immemorial past.

The places are also confused, palaces and basements, Cretan kings and local shepherds build the labyrinth of this story about the Minotaur-boy, until you get lost in it. It winds like a maze and unfortunately I will never be able to retrace its steps. A story with dead-end corridors, threads that snap, blind spots, and obvious discrepancies. The more unbelievable it looks, the more you believe it. The pale and straight line—the only way I can retell it now, lacking the magic of that tale—goes roughly as follows.

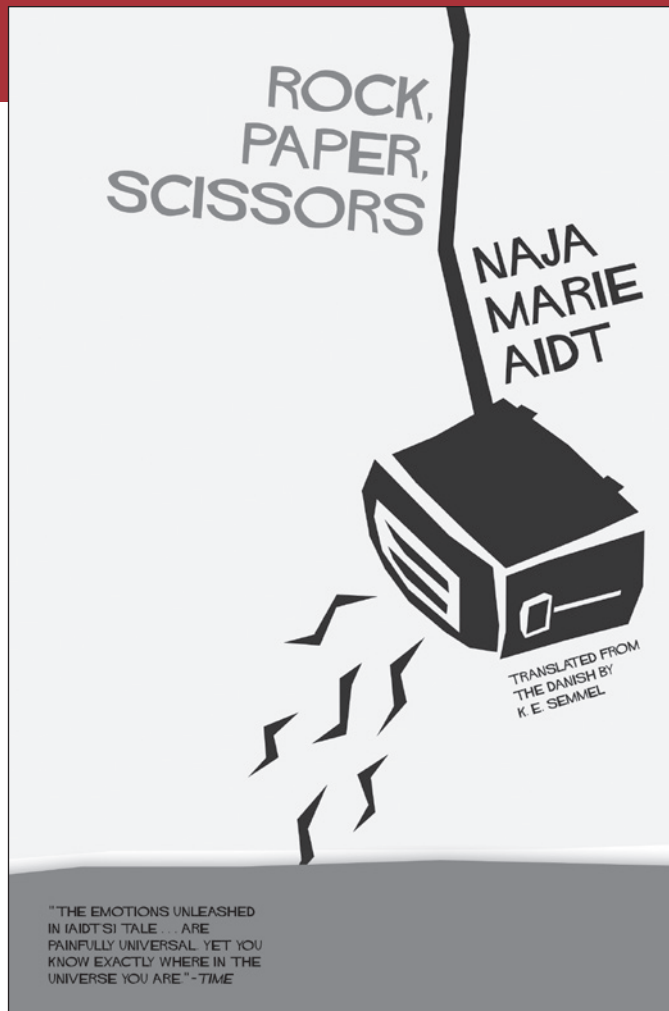
Helio, the boy's grandfather on his mother's side, was in charge of the sun and the stars; in the evening he locked up the sun and drove the stars out into the sky, like driving a herd out to pasture. In the morning he gathered up his herd and let the sun out to graze. The old man's daughter, Pasifette, the mother of this boy here, was kind and beautiful, she married a mighty king from somewhere way down there in the islands. This was long ago, even before the wars. It was a rich kingdom, the Lord God himself (their god, that is, the local one) drank whiskey with the king of the islands, they set store by each other, God even gave him a big bull with a pure white hide, which was a downright wonder to behold. So the years went by and God demanded that same bull as a sacrifice. But Old King Minyo (Minos, Minos . . . somebody yelled out) was feeling stingy and decided to pull a fast one on God and slaughtered another bull, again fat and well fed. But can you really pull a fast one on God? God found out, hit the roof, started

blustering, saying, don't pull this while-the-grass-grows-the-horse-starves business on me, now you'll see who you're messing with. He fixed it so that Minyo's meek and loyal wife, Pasifette, sinned with that very same handsome stud of a bull. (Here a buzz of disapproval sweeps through the crowd.) And from this a child was born—a man in body, but a bull in countenance, with a bull's head. His mother nursed him and cared for him, but that laughingstock King Minyo just couldn't stomach the disgrace. He didn't have the heart to kill the little baby-Minotaur, so he ordered it to be locked up in the basement of the palace. And that basement was a real labyrinth, a master stonemason made it so that once you go in, there's no getting out.

[. . .]

While he tells this story, the Minotaur bows his head, as if the story has nothing to do with him, only making a soft throaty sound from time to time. The same as I made with my locked lips.

Now show 'em how you drink water, the master orders and the Minotaur, with visible displeasure, falls to his knees, dunks his head into the bucket and slurps noisily. Now say hello to these good people. The Minotaur is silent, looking down. Say hello to these people, the man repeats once again. Now I see that in one hand he is holding a staff with a sharp spike on one end. The Minotaur opens his mouth and growls out what is more likely a deep, raspy, unfriendly Mooooo . . . With that, the show ends. ■



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(World)



ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS
NAJA MARIE AIDT

Trans. from the Danish by K. E. Semmel

Naja Marie Aidt's long-awaited first novel is a breathtaking page-turner and complex portrait of a man whose life slowly devolves into one of violence and jealousy.

Rock, Paper, Scissors opens shortly after the death of Thomas and Jenny's criminal father. While trying to fix a toaster that he left behind, Thomas discovers a secret wad of cash, setting into motion a series of events leading to the dissolution of his life, and plunging him into a dark, shadowy underworld of violence and betrayal.

A gripping story written with a poet's sensibility and attention to language, *Rock, Paper, Scissors* showcases all of Aidt's gifts and will greatly expand the readership for one of Denmark's most decorated and beloved writers.

"The emotions unleashed in this tale . . . are painfully universal. Yet you know exactly where in the universe you are. This is the hallmark of great short stories, from Chekhov's portraits of discontented Russians to Joyce's struggling Dubliners."

—Radhika Jones, *Time*

"Unusual, laconic language and . . . extraordinary plots . . . you are faced with a universe that unmistakably is that of Naja Marie Aidt."

—*World Literature Today*

Naja Marie Aidt was born in Greenland and raised in Copenhagen. She is the author of seven collections of poetry and five short story collections, including *Baboon* (Two Lines Press), which received the Nordic Council's Literature Prize and the Danish Critics Prize for Literature. *Rock, Paper, Scissors* is her first novel.

K. E. Semmel is a writer and translator whose work has appeared in the *Ontario Review*, *Washington Post*, *Aufgabe*, *Brooklyn Review*, *Bitter Oleander*, and elsewhere. His translations include books by Karin Fossum, Erik Valeur, and Simon Fruelund.

FROM ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS NAJA MARIE AIDT



"Remember when Dad brought us here the night of the accident, after you'd been to the emergency room? We sat over there." Jenny points at a table next to the window. "I think it must've been this same waiter, back when he was young. You were pale as a sheet. How old were we?"

"I was eleven, you were nine."

"And we got to order whatever we wanted. All I ate was chocolate cake. Three slices." She laughs suddenly and loudly. "Ha! You were pale as a sheet, though nothing had happened. Nothing serious, Thomas. Bumps and bruises. Just a few bumps and bruises."

The waiter sets steaming plates before them. The bartender places a red drink, a pallid stalk of celery poking out of it, in the middle of the table as if it were meant to be shared.

"Just a few bumps and bruises," Thomas repeats slowly, pushing the drink toward Jenny. "That's one way to look at it."

"Oh, don't be so dramatic. Eat your food. Cheers."

She raises her Bloody Mary so that the lamplight shines through the red liquid. "Ha! Just a few bumps and bruises!"

"That actually looks like blood," he says, pointing at the glass with his fork. Then he bores into his oxtail and shovels the sauce with his knife. The waiter limps back carrying a half-empty bottle of red wine along with a plate of olives. But Jenny isn't happy. "They

aren't anything like the ones we had last time. Plain, tasteless. I bet they got them at the local supermarket. Try them yourself. Everything gets worse over time, everything, everything. Doesn't it?" Thomas refuses to try the tasteless olives. He takes a swig of wine, and says: "Dear Jenny, you're always complaining. Everything doesn't get worse over time, everything gets better. We're rid of Dad, for one thing. Think about that. And he'll never come back. Except in our most terrifying nightmares."

[. . .]

"Okay," she says. "Listen. This is how it was: We sat right over there, at the table by the window, and Dad said: 'Order whatever you want.' He didn't care, he said. At first I didn't believe him, but he was serious. You remember that? He snorted and groaned. Sweat dripped from his temples down his cheeks. Remember how sweat used to run down his temples? Who'd called him anyway?"

"You know. Someone from the emergency room. I waited for hours. Do we need to discuss this?"

"Yes, we do. Dad visited you in the emergency room, then what?"

"Jenny . . . let it go." Thomas stares resignedly at her.

"Come on. Then what?"

"Something had happened. I sprained

my left arm, banged my head, and injured some vertebrae."

Jenny leans back smiling patronizingly, almost gleefully.

"It's true," Thomas goes on, annoyed. "And the first thing he said to me when he walked into the room was, 'What the hell have you done now?' He didn't care that I'd been hit by a car. He thought it was my fault."

"Did you walk in front of the car, or what?"

"No, and you know it." Thomas feels anger surging in him, his voice growing shrill. "It was speeding, it turned the corner, it hit me, I landed on the hood. You know all that. Maybe the sun blinded him. It was spring."

"Who was blinded by the sun?"

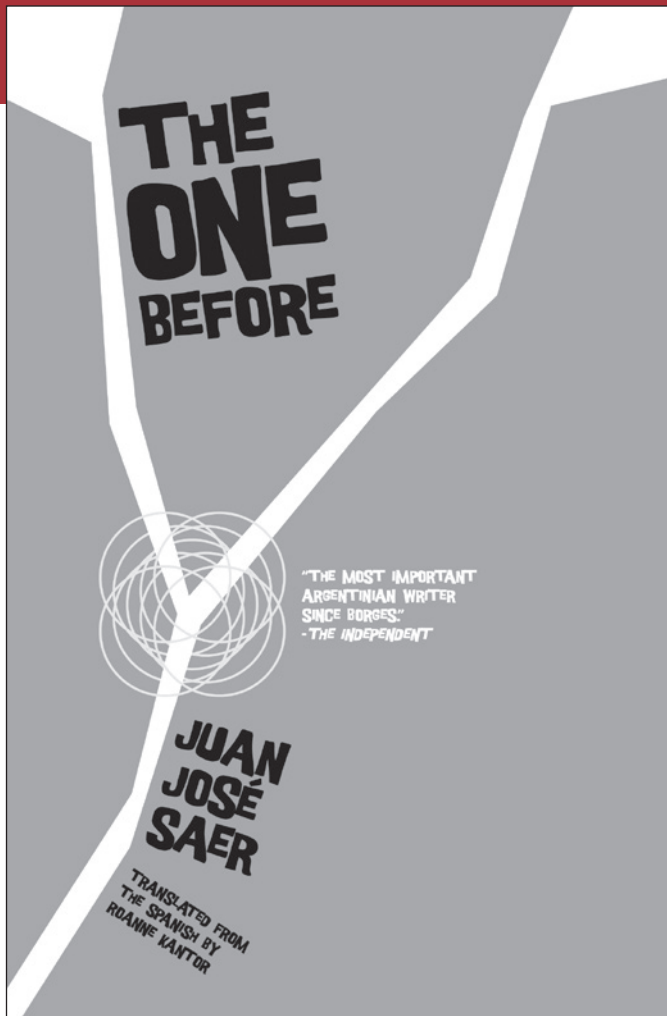
"The driver! But it wasn't my fault." Thomas sighs loudly. "I was going to buy bread . . ."

"Yes." Jenny flares her nostrils and turns away, eyebrows lifted. "I waited for you in the hallway. Waited and waited. But you never came."

[. . .]

They stare at each other a moment, then each loses focus. Thomas zones out, his eyes resting on two men bent over their pasta. One of the men dabs his mouth with his napkin; the other says something, and the two laugh at the private joke. Thomas smokes greedily and drains the last of his cold, bitter coffee. Jenny gnaws at her pinky

nail. She goes to the bathroom. Thomas thinks of his father's kitchen, the toaster. The smell of the kitchen, the sound the cupboard next to the stove made when you closed it, how it stuck when you tried to open it. And the toast that would pop up, almost always too burnt at the edges, was like coal against his teeth, like tinfoil. He asks for the check. Jenny returns and begins to rummage in her purse. She fishes out a tube and slathers her hands with cream. A faint odor of menthol spreads around them. Then she begins to talk about her night shifts at the nursing home. About her modest salary and Alice and her friends who eat all her food. "What am I going to do?" she says, raising her hands only to let them drop heavily to her side. Thomas is exhausted, doesn't say much. He pays, and they say goodbye outside the restaurant. Jenny is under a red umbrella, and Thomas is under a black one. Rain lashes the sidewalk with such force that it bounces off as if it were coming from both above and below. She offers him a key. The word Dad is etched onto a small piece of blond wood attached to the key ring. "I'm going out there tomorrow," she says. "Say hi to Alice!" he calls out as she walks away. She raises her arm dismissively but doesn't turn back. Maybe she's begun to cry. For a moment he feels a prickling jab of tenderness for the plump, swaying body disappearing around the corner. Then disgust. Then tenderness again. ■



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THE ONE BEFORE JUAN JOSÉ SAER

Trans. from the Spanish by Roanne Kantor

The One Before is a triptych of sorts, consisting of a series of short pieces—called “Arguments”—and two longer stories—“Half-Erased” and “The One Before”—all of which revolve around the ideas of exile and memory.

Many of the characters who populate Juan José Saer’s other novels appear here, including Tomatis, Ángel Leto, and Washington Noriega (who appear in *La Grande*, *Scars*, and *The Sixty-Five Years of Washington*, all of which are available from Open Letter). Saer’s typical themes are on display in this collection as well, as is his idiosyncratic blend of philosophical ruminations and precise storytelling.

From the story of the two characters who decide to bury a message in a bottle that simply says “MESSAGE,” to Pigeon Garay’s attempt to avoid the rising tides and escape Argentina for Europe, *The One Before* evocatively introduces readers to Saer’s world and gives the already indoctrinated new material about their favorite characters.

“Saer, sometimes cited as the most important Argentine writer of the post-Borges generation, exhibits an elastic yet controlled style that parallels the interwoven, unpredictable world of his characters.”

—*Words Without Borders*

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

—Ricardo Piglia

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

Roanne Kantor is a doctoral student in Comparative Literature at the University of Texas at Austin. Her translation of *The One Before* won the 2009 Susan Sontag Prize for Translation. Her translations from Spanish have appeared in *Little Star* magazine, *Two Lines*, and *Palabras Errantes: Latin American Literature in Translation*.



Hands and Planets

Barco's familiar and skillful fingers unscrewed the chrome top of the saltshaker, dumped the salt onto the tablecloth and then, under Tomatis' tranquil but astonished gaze, began to scatter it, his fingertips pressing onto the grains and turning slowly to fully spread out that little white mountain on the blue cloth. Barco's fingertips had an extraordinarily peculiar shape: they were oval and tapered—they looked like the classical representation of a teardrop. In the whole world there couldn't have been another pair of hands with fingertips like that, and Tomatis would have recognized them immediately from anywhere.

"Probably," said Barco, "in many of these grains of salt there are Ancient Greeces where Heraclitus is thinking that the events of the world are the product of a game of dice played by children."

"Probably," said Tomatis.

"Last night on television I saw the latest mission to the moon," said Barco. "No one cares about those missions to the moon anymore. The whole world is convinced that the moon is already a thing of the past, and that science fiction is becoming an anachronism. Fiction can't keep up with science anymore. Probably, in fifty years everyone will be a

scientist, the way that nowadays everybody drives a car."

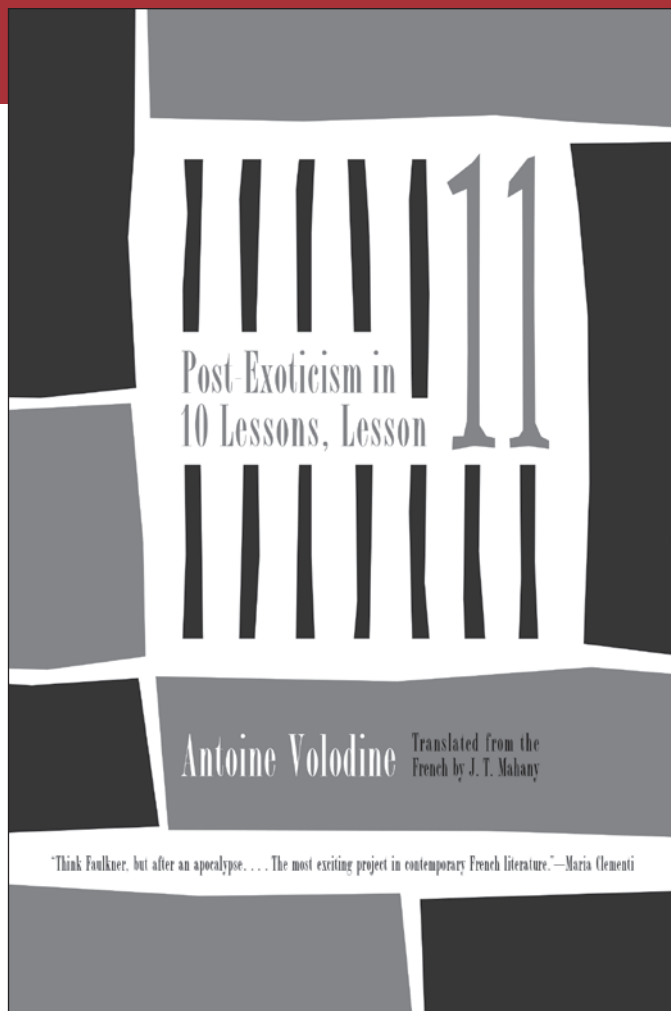
"Probably," said Tomatis, without taking his eyes off of Barco's fingers, which were now resting on the scattered salt and remained motionless.

"Something strange happened," Barco said. "Everything was going fine when they were showing the inside of the spaceship and the crew working on the screen. But suddenly they began showing pictures of the Earth as it got farther and farther away, getting smaller every minute, and then everyone watching the television in the bar stopped what they were doing, or started to sit up slowly in their chairs, or to strain their necks, all this trying to keep the Earth closer, contorting themselves to help the Earth stop in its tracks, like when you're bowling and you twist yourself around so that the ball will follow the imaginary path you've laid out for it, you know? We all tried to get this obscene distancing to stop, so that the Earth wouldn't be erased and disappear forever. I was frozen stiff. And when the voice of the narrator announced that the astronauts could still make out Mexico, we all felt a moment of relief and for a moment we all felt as if we were Mexican: Mexico was

the final crest, the highest, mounted by the wave of nothingness that pushed up from behind, the wave of nothingness that, when we could no longer make out Mexico, flooded everything and left it smoother and more uniform than this wall here. Then we all felt sad and confused, a bit frightened, and I don't think we felt any better when the program about the mission to the moon ended and they cut to the live game at Chacarita Stadium. I'm convinced that last night we broke the identity barrier. Breaking the speed of light or the sound barrier is nothing compared to breaking the barrier of identity. We kept on being erased, until we totally disappeared. We thought that things would stop at some point before they got out of hand, at some point from which we could still make out Mexico, for example, but no, nothing like that, we totally disappeared. And I felt something even more vertiginous: sitting in the chair at the bar, the screen showed me how the Earth had been shrinking, that is, I, the chair, the bar, the screen and the earth on the screen, shrinking, how we were being squeezed by the fist of the cosmos that closed upon us, vertiginously, macerating our bodies and turning them into hardened lava. And I felt it so intensely that I closed my eyes and waited for the walls of the bar to start closing in, subtly, molding

the four into a single wall with us inside, in an inconceivable contraction, until the whole Earth had shrunken to the size of little dice with which little children would play out the destiny of the world. Probably, these grilled fish the waiter is bringing are ours."

"Probably," said Tomatis, seeing Barco's familiar fingertips press into the salt and then lift to his thick lips, fingertips that, like no others in the world—and now also because of their flavor—made him think of the solid form of tears. ■



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POST-EXOTICISM IN TEN LESSONS, LESSON ELEVEN

ANTOINE VOLODINE

Trans. from the French by J. T. Mahany

That is what we had called post-exoticism. It was a construction connected to revolutionary shamanism and literature. . . . It was an interior construction, a withdrawal, a secret welcoming land, but also something offensive that participated in the plot of certain unarmed individuals against the capitalist world and its countless ignominies. This fight was now confined solely to Bassmann's lips.

Like with Antoine Volodine's other works (*Minor Angels*, *We Monks & Soldiers*), *Post-Exoticism in Ten Lessons, Lesson Eleven* takes place in a corrupted future where a small group of radical writers—those who practice “post-exoticism”—have been jailed by those in power and are slowly dying off. But before Lutz Bassmann, the last post-exoticist writer, passes away, journalists will try and pry out all the secrets of this powerful literary movement.

With its explanations of several key “post-exoticist” terms that appear in Volodine's other books, *Lesson Eleven* provides a crucial entryway into one of the most ambitious literary projects of recent times: a project exploring the revolutionary power of literature.

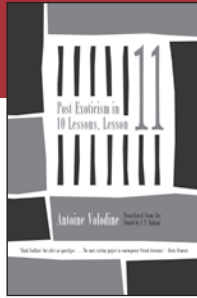
“The interconnected works of Volodine—think Faulkner, but after an apocalypse—constitute the most exciting project in contemporary French literature.”—Maria Clementi

“With the calm strangeness of dreams, and humor deepened by a hint of melancholy, these wonderful stories fool around on the frontiers of the imagination.”—Shelley Jackson

Antoine Volodine is the primary pseudonym of a French writer who has published twenty books under this name, several of which are available in English translation. He also publishes under the names Lutz Bassmann and Manuela Draeger. Most of his works take place in a post-apocalyptic world where members of the “post-exoticism” writing movement have all been arrested as subversive elements. Together, these works constitute one of the most inventive, ambitious projects of contemporary writing.

J. T. Mahany is a graduate of the masters program in literary translation at the University of Rochester and is currently enrolled in the MFA program at the University of Arkansas. He is in the process of translating several more books by Antoine Volodine.

FROM POST-EXOTICISM IN TEN LESSONS, LESSON ELEVEN BY ANTOINE VOLODINE

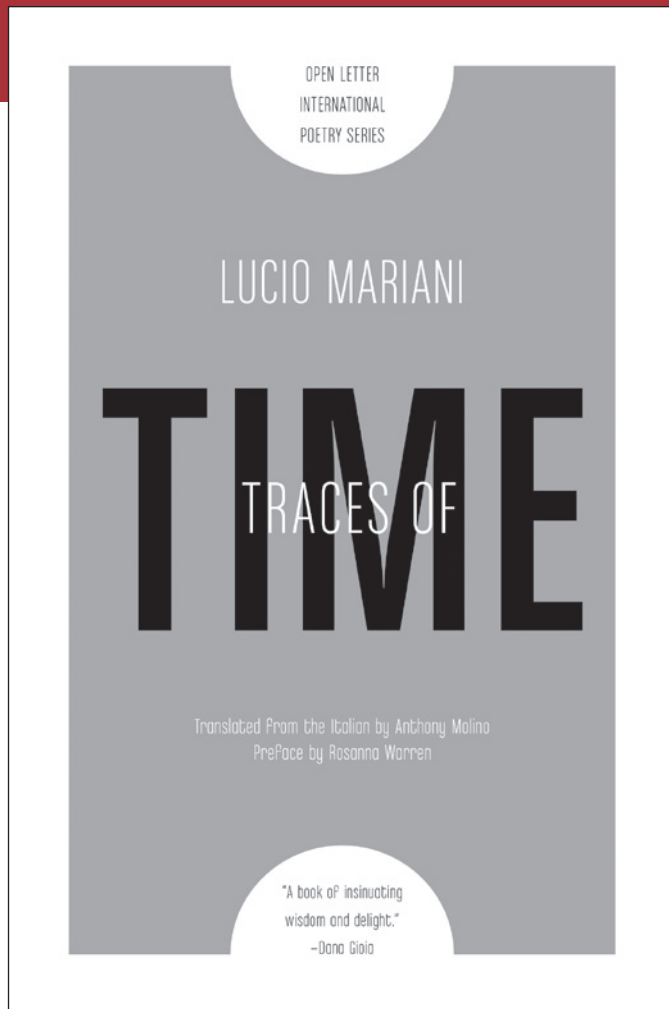


When the last surviving member on the list of the dead—and, this time, it was Bassmann—stammered his final syllable, then, on this side of the story as well as beyond it, only the enemy would keep strutting straight ahead, undefeated, invincible, and, among the victims of the enemy, no spokesperson would now dare come to interpret or reinterpret any of our voices, or to love us. Lucid despite the split personalities corrupting his agony, Bassmann sought only to communicate with the deceased. He no longer tapped on the washbasin pipes or on the door, saying, for example, “Calling cell 546,” or on the sealed siphon behind the toilet bowl, asking for cell 1157, or on the bars of the window, saying “Bassmann here . . . please respond . . . Bassmann is listening . . . please respond . . .” Now he knocked nowhere. He concentrated his gaze on us, the photographs of those who had preceded him in disappearing, and he made the smallest of murmurs pass through his lips, pretending not to be dead and reproducing a whispering technique that the most tantric among us had many a time used in their romances: with an audible exhalation, the narrator prolongs, not his or her own existence, but the existence of those who are going to dwindle into nothing, whose memory can only be preserved by the narrator. Word by word, moan after moan, Lutz Bassmann struggled to make last the mental

edifice that would eventually become dust once again. His breath merged with the putrid sewers that wandered through the prison. He still tenuously held on to reality and he managed to keep together fragments. He managed to keep his voice from giving out again. So that for one hour more, two and a half hours, one more night, the worlds that we had built with swift carpentry and defended would persist. Mental edifice . . . Worlds . . . Swift carpentry . . . What is . . . Huh? I will respond. That is what we had called post-exoticism. It was a construction connected to revolutionary shamanism and literature, literature that was either written by hand or learned by heart and recited, as the administration through the years would sometimes forbid us any paper material; it was an interior construction, a withdrawal, a secret welcoming land, but also something offensive that participated in the plot of certain unarmed individuals against the capitalist world and its countless ignominies. This fight was now confined solely to Bassmann’s lips. It was suspended in a breath. As thirty years of incarceration had left his mind feeble, and reduced his creative spirit to scraps, his final murmurs no longer obeyed the logics of pioneers, combatants, oneiric footprints, or enthusiasm, without which the post-exoticist project had produced no more than two or

three works. During his death throes, Lutz Bassmann’s only wish was to stir the embers that he had guarded, and not be absorbed too quickly along with them by the nothingness. But even before, at the beginning of the ten years, maybe because he estimated that the confidants were already unattainable or no longer existed, it seemed that he had lost his creative spark. His latest works, his final romanesque jolts, took shelter under rather unattractive and uninspired titles, such as *To Know How to Rot*, *To Know How Not to Rot*, or *Structure of Deconstructed Obscurity*, or *Walk Through Childhood*. These are narrative poems and Shaggås, supposedly compact pieces diluted into vast *arrière-garde* logorrheas that one can take no pleasure in reading. There are also romances, such as *About-Face Vandals*, *One Thousand Nine Hundred Seventy-Seven Years Before the World Revolution*, and even *The Mantis*, but the brooding that inspired them has devolved into nothing communicable. Their encryption is vain, their undeniable beauty is vain, maybe simply because no one—no one is listening. No living being other than Lutz Bassmann is paying attention. In such works, the idea of connivance with the reader, so oily and so generously spread onto the clockwork of official literature, has been disregarded to even the smallest details. Here we have the terminal rumblings, the ultimate punctuated throaty rasps of post-exoticism . . . POST-

EXOTICISM. That word again. Here again this heavy term. Around it we have circled, from the beginning, like vultures around a carcass. WHAT IS POST-EXOTICISM? An insolent question, very unwelcome on the day of Bassmann’s death, but its appearance here demonstrates that a half-century after *Minor Angels*, by Maria Clementi, sympathizers, on the outside, have not . . . Demonstrates that the incarcerated have been left alone. A symposium on post-exoticism was organized with Lutz Bassmann’s involvement before the ‘00s of the twenty-first century, eighteen or nineteen years ago. It lived more or less in 1997. Beyond the walls of the prison, this must have been an age of hollow editorials, or of reflux toward what official literature itself considered the worst. Two popular chroniclers had been sent to us by a cultural magazine in general circulation, subsidized, I believe, by mafia industrialists in meat and construction. I say “I,” and “I believe,” but this is again just a matter of pure convention. The first-person singular serves to accompany the voice of others, it signifies nothing more. Without damage to the understanding of this poem, one can consider that I have been dead for ages, and not take the “I” into account . . . For a post-exotic narrator, anyway, there is not the thickness of a piece of cigarette paper between the first-person and others, and hardly any difference between life and death. ■



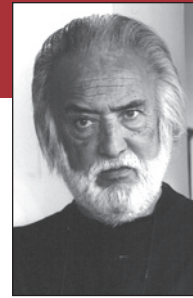
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Trans. from the Italian by Anthony Molino

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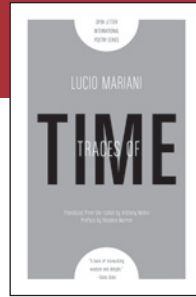
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Anthony Molino is a translator from the Italian, an anthropologist, and a psychoanalyst. His translations include Lucio Mariani's *Echoes of Memory* and works by Valerio Magrelli and Antonio Porta, among others.



Protocols of War

(Baghdad is not far)

Of this time you'll gather no memories
for your eternal hunger.
Can't you see the slugs in the weave
that enfolds the flesh of the living?
Can't you see that the boxes and drawers
where the silver of bygone days abounds
have no room for trinkets or seashells
of a present founded on plaster markets,
lost gazing at itself in the mirror
seeking itself in the halls of the world?
Don't you see that for the first time
every man erects ruins for his heirs
enacting inane protocols of war
while the future slams its shutters tight
so as to celebrate on statistical altars
the glory of mindless marionettes
maneuvered by nothingness,
sprung in the bitter fields of oblivion?
Of this time you'll gather no memories.

Contest

You'd ask if I were ever late.
That's a problem for people stuck
between the second and last lanes.
Me, I'm in lone pursuit.
So that whether I'm early or late
depends solely on my mood and ruminations.
To catch the beat I clapped my hands once or twice,
before splashing my face with particles
of happiness. For getting it right. In the dark.

•

You'll Say

I live your love only in your absence
my love
stitched in the woof
and weft of an invisible thread
endless throb of silence.
That's not love, you'll say, the way pain
not suffered, though dreaded,
isn't pain. You, who ignore that death has set in
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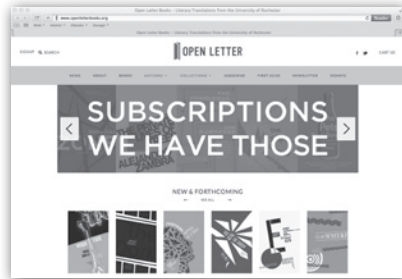
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