

**OPEN
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**SUM
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2010

DEAR READERS,

Welcome to the fourth Open Letter catalog. Now that we have 17 books in print, and more than 15 lined up for the next few years, we can hardly consider ourselves a “new” press anymore. And it’s gotten to the point that picking favorite books (or even favorite catalogs) is like picking your favorite child—every one is obviously the best!

Over the past year, we’ve seen a significant increase in coverage of the press and its books. For instance, we recently had two titles reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review*, and a special article about the press and the University of Rochester’s literary translation programs in the daily paper. *The Discoverer* by Jan Kjørstad was recommended by Monica Ali in the *Times Literary Supplement* as one of the best books of 2009, and *Season of Ash* made NPR’s list of the “five best works of foreign fiction” published last year.

So, in terms of that “favorite kid” analogy, I think this season’s list is most certainly one of the best yet, and will definitely help Open Letter reach more readers. This season we’re publishing our first South African book—Ingrid Winterbach’s *To Hell with Cronjé*—and Andreas Maier’s *Klausen* is our first official German book. We’re also very excited about Alejandro Zambra’s *The Private Lives of Trees* (his novel *Bonsai* was a finalist for the Best Translated Book Award last year), and Quim Monzó is an amazing author to add to our list (we’ll be publishing a collection of his short stories in 2011, too). Finally, we’re continuing to cultivate an audience for Jerzy Pilch by bringing out *A Thousand Peaceful Cities*, which fits in nicely with *The Mighty Angel*, one of our most popular books to date.

I hope you enjoy all of these titles, and whether you’re a reviewer, bookseller, translator, or general reader, please feel to contact me for any additional information about any of our programs. I’d also recommend checking out both the Open Letter Books (openletterbooks.org) and Three Percent (rochester.edu/threepcent) websites for additional information, special offers, and news about our events and activities.

Finally, I’d like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has shown support through financial contributions (which are fully tax-deductible), including Amazon.com’s sponsorship of *The Wall in My Head* and the dozens of individual donations that we’ve received. Without all of you, none of this would be possible.

Best,



Chad W. Post
Director, Open Letter
chad.post@rochester.edu

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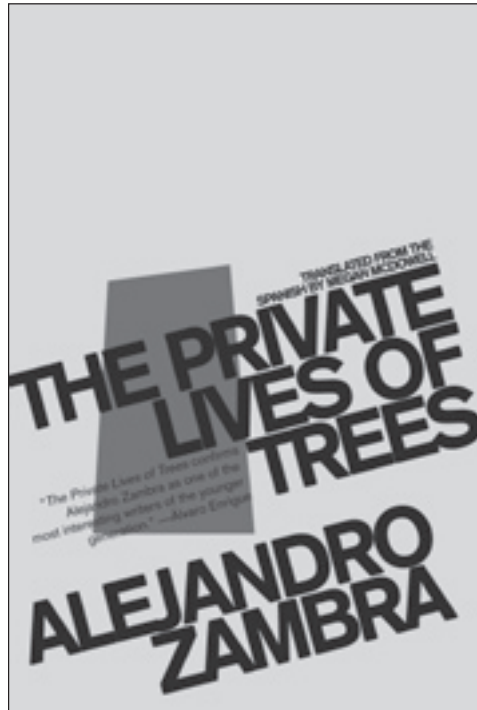


THE PRIVATE LIVES OF TREES

ALEJANDRO ZAMBRA

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY MEGAN MCDOWELL

[read an excerpt >](#)



First English Translation

July 2010

A Novel

96 pgs.

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5" x 8"

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Territory: World English

"*The Private Lives of Trees* confirms Alejandro Zambra as one of the most interesting writers of the younger generation."

—Álvaro Enrique

"Zambra is indeed the herald of a new wave of Chilean fiction."

—Marcela Valdez, *The Nation*

The *Private Lives of Trees* tells the story of a single night: a young professor of literature named Julián is reading to his step-daughter Daniela and nervously waiting for his wife Verónica to return from her art class. Each night, Julián has been improvising a story about trees to tell Daniela before she goes to sleep—and each Sunday he works on a novel about a man tending to his bonsai—but something about this night is different. As Julián becomes increasingly concerned that Verónica won't return, he reflects on their life together in minute detail, and imagines what Daniela—at twenty, at twenty-five, at thirty years old, without a mother—will think of his novel.

Perhaps even more daring and dizzying than Zambra's magical *Bonsai*, *The Private Lives of Trees* demands to be read in a single sitting, and it casts a spell that will bring you back to it again and again.

Alejandro Zambra is acclaimed as the greatest writer of Chile's younger generation. He is a poet and critic and currently teaches literature at the Diego Portales University in Santiago. His first novel, *Bonsai*, was awarded Chile's Literary Critics' Award for Best Novel, and the English translation by Carolina De Robertis (Melville House, 2008) was a finalist for the Best Translated Book Award.

Megan McDowell received her Master's degree in Literary Translation from the University of Texas at Dallas. Her writings and translations can be found in *Vice*, *Translation Review*, and *Words Without Borders*. Other translation projects have included song lyrics for the Chilean singer Joe Vasconcellos, and a collaboration with her sister Jessye McDowell on the short film *Los Triviños de Huasco*.

Julián lulls the little girl to sleep with “The Private Lives of Trees,” an ongoing story he’s made up to tell her at bedtime. The protagonists are a poplar tree and a baobab tree, who, at night, when no one can see them, talk about photosynthesis, squirrels, or the many advantages of being trees and not people or animals or, as they say to each other, stupid hunks of cement.

Daniela is not his daughter, but it is hard for him not to think of her that way. Three years ago Julián joined the family. He came to them; Verónica and the little girl were already there. He married Verónica and in some ways, also, Daniela, who was hesitant at first but little by little began to accept her new life: “Julián is uglier than my dad, but he’s still nice,” she would say to her friends, who nodded with surprising seriousness, even solemnity, as if they somehow understood that Julián’s arrival was not an accident. As the months passed this stepfather even earned a place in the drawings Daniela made at school. There’s one in particular that Julián always keeps nearby: the three of them, at the beach, the little girl and Verónica are making cakes out of sand, and he is dressed in jeans and a shirt, reading and smoking under a perfectly round and yellow sun.

Julián is uglier than Daniela’s dad; on the other hand, he is younger. He works more and earns less money, smokes more and drinks less, he exercises less—doesn’t, in fact, exercise at all—and he knows more about trees than about countries. He is less white-skinned and less simple and more confused than Fernando—Fernando, because that is Daniela’s father’s name, he must have a name, even if he isn’t, exactly, Julián’s enemy, or anyone else’s. The problem is exactly this: in this story there are no enemies: Verónica has no enemies—Julián has no enemies, Fernando has no enemies, and Daniela, except for an insolent little classmate who spends all his time making faces at her, has no enemies either.

Sometimes Fernando is a blotch on Daniela’s life, but who isn’t, at times, a blotch on someone else’s life.

Julián is Fernando without the blotch, but sometimes Fernando is Julián without the blotch.

And Verónica, who is:

For now Verónica is someone who hasn’t arrived, who still hasn’t returned from her drawing class. Verónica is someone who is absent from the blue room—the blue room is Daniela’s bedroom, and the white room is Verónica and Julián’s room. There is, in addition, a green room, which they jokingly call the guest room, since it wouldn’t be easy to sleep in that mess of books, folders, and paintbrushes. The big trunk, which several months ago stored their summer clothes, serves as an uncomfortable sofa.

The ends of their days have settled into an established routine: Julián and Verónica leave the blue room when Daniela falls asleep, and later, in the guest room, Verónica draws and Julián reads. Every once in a while she interrupts him or he interrupts her,

and these mutual interferences constitute dialogues and light conversations, or sometimes important, decisive ones. Later they move to the white room, where they watch television or make love or start to argue—nothing serious, nothing that can’t be fixed immediately, before the movie is over or when one of them gives up, wanting to sleep or have sex. The usual end to those fights is a fast and silent screw, or maybe a long one, replete with moans and laughter. Then five or six hours of sleep. And then the next day begins.

But this night is not an average night, at least not yet. It’s still not completely certain that there will be a next day, since Verónica hasn’t come back from her drawing class. When she returns, the novel will end. But as long as she is not back, the book will continue. The book continues until she returns, or until Julián is sure that she won’t return. For now Verónica is missing from the blue room, where Julián lulls the little girl to sleep with a story about the private lives of trees.

Right now, sheltered by the solitude of the park, the trees are commenting on the bad luck of an oak—two people have carved their names, as a symbol of their friendship, into his bark. “No one has the right to give you a tattoo without your consent,” says the poplar; the baobab is even more emphatic: “The oak has been the victim of a deplorable act of vandalism. Those people deserve to be punished. I will not rest until they receive the punishment they deserve. I will traverse earth, sky, and sea in their pursuit.” The little girl laughs hard, without the least sign of sleepiness. And she, urgently, anxiously, asks the inevitable questions, never just one, always at least two or three: “What’s vandalism, Julián? Can you bring me a glass of lemonade, with three spoonfuls of sugar?”

Did you and my mother ever carve your names into a tree, as a symbol of your friendship?”

Julián answers patiently, trying to respect the order of the questions:

“ONE OF THE GREATEST LITERARY EVENTS OF RECENT YEARS.”

**—ALFONSO CORTÍNEZ,
LAS ÚLTIMAS NOTICIAS**

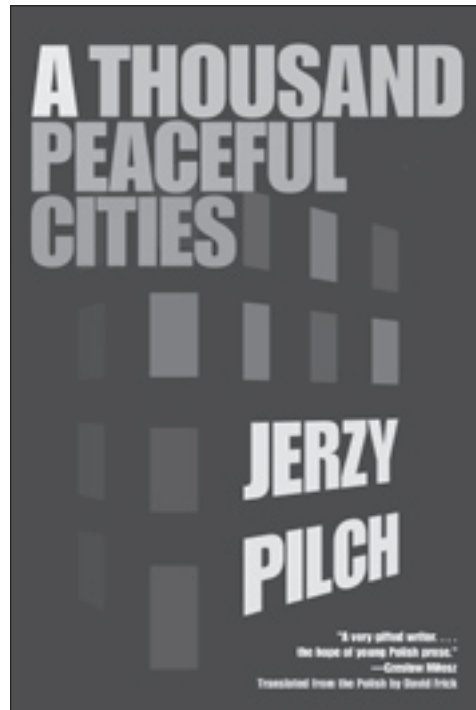
“Vandalism is what vandals do, vandals are people who do damage just for the joy of doing damage. And yes, I can bring you a glass of lemonade. And no, your mother and I never carved our names in the bark of a tree.”

A THOUSAND PEACEFUL CITIES

JERZY PILCH

TRANSLATED FROM THE POLISH BY DAVID FRICK

[read an excerpt >](#)



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Territory: World English

"A highly original voice."

—*Washington Times*

"Pilch's prose is masterful, and the bulk of *The Mighty Angel* evokes the same numb, floating sensation as a bottle of Żółdkowa Gorzka."

—*L Magazine*

A comic gem, Jerzy Pilch's *A Thousand Peaceful Cities* takes place in 1963, in the latter days of the Polish post-Stalinist "thaw." The narrator, Jerzyk ("little Jerzy"), is a teenager who is keenly interested in his father, a retired postal administrator, and his father's closest friend, Mr. Trąba, a failed Lutheran clergyman, alcoholic, would-be Polish insurrectionist, and one of the wildest literary characters since Laurence Sterne's Uncle Toby. One drunken afternoon, Mr. Trąba and the narrator's nameless father decide to take charge of their lives and do one final good turn for humanity: travel to distant Warsaw and assassinate the de facto Polish head of state, First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party, Władysław Gomułka—assassinating Mao Tse-tung, after all, would be impractical. And they decide to involve Jerzyk in their scheme . . .

Jerzy Pilch is one of Poland's most important contemporary writers and journalists—Czesław Miłosz once called him "the hope of young Polish prose." In addition to his long-running satirical newspaper column, Pilch has published several novels, and he has been nominated for Poland's prestigious NIKE Literary Award four times; he won the award in 2001 for *The Mighty Angel*, also available from Open Letter.

David Frick is a Professor in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of California, Berkeley.

I've been thinking a long time, Chief, a long time, and I know more or less what I should do for humanity with my last deed. Except that my knowledge is general, and my deed must be concrete."

"Mr. Trqba, if I were in your place . . ." Father's voice echoed with the gravity filled with puffed-up didacticism that I couldn't stand. "If I were in your place, and if I truly knew, let's say, that I would die the day after tomorrow, I would live tomorrow just the same as yesterday. I would eat breakfast, I would seek out the truth between the lines in *The People's Tribune*, I would work in the garden . . ."

"I appreciate the beauty and nobility of the idea of living tomorrow like today or yesterday, but that sort of beauty and that sort of nobility have nothing to do with me. From its dawn, Chief, my life has passed under pressure for irrevocable change. For as long as I can remember, I have promised myself that tomorrow would be different from yesterday, next week different from the past. For as long as I can remember, my today is always supposed to be a caesura between the old and the new life. For as long as I can remember, I've been trying, every day, to change something. And now, when an unavoidable change is approaching, when my presence will quickly change into my absence, I intend to do something for the world, as long as I'm still here, which—I won't hide the fact—will relieve the monotony of the final act of my existence on this vale of tears, with respect to both form and content."

"What exactly will you do, Mr. Trqba?"

"Well, what can you do, when nothing is to be done, when it's clear that I won't build a house, I won't establish a family, I won't raise a child, I won't put my opinions in order and write them down, I won't render the proper respect to my forebears, and I won't even give up my addictions? What can you do, when a terrible lack, a void, a road drowning in Asiatic grasses, a precipitous bank, nothingness, and nausea suddenly declare themselves? What remains, when nothing remains? . . . Kill somebody—that remains."

Father impatiently shrugged it off.

"A pathetic joke, Mr. Trqba, and if it isn't a joke, then you really must be suffering significant losses in the lateral occipital lobes."

But Mr. Trqba had plunged wholeheartedly into the inexorable logic of his own deduction.

"Kill somebody—that remains. Kill somebody, whose killing will be for the good of mankind. Who? Obviously one of the great tyrants of mankind. As of today, the situation with the great tyrants of mankind looks as follows: Adolf Hitler—passé, Joseph Stalin—passé. Who remains? There remains, irrefutably, Chairman Mao Tse-tung."

Father exploded in artificial, affected, overly ecstatic laughter.

"I hope, Chief, that your laughter is not derisive laughter, but rather the laughter of a

person enchanted . . . no, the laughter of the demiurge enchanted with his own deed, the laughter of God. After all, everybody is different, but you of all people, Chief, will appreciate the dark beauty of the idea of killing Chairman Mao Tse-tung. Weren't you debased by Moscow? Yes, or no? You were debased," Mr. Trqba answered his own question, "you were irrevocably debased in the morals department. And since morality has gone by the board irrevocably, let's at least go into raptures over the pure beauty of our demise. 'Enough has been given to morality; now comes the turn of Taste and the Fine Arts,' as a certain criminal Englishman said in his disquisition 'On Murder Considered As One of the Fine Arts. Yes, Chief, the murder of Chairman Mao can be fine art, and this is irrefutable reasoning. The expedition to the Middle Kingdom itself will be a source of unparalleled aesthetic experiences. Just consider the hypothetical path of this murderous journey."

Mr. Trqba began to trace the map of the continent in the air, with sure and frequently practiced motions.

"It would be simplest, of course, to travel to Vladivostok by the Transsiberian Railroad. There, in the vicinity of Vladivostok, to cross the Chinese border, retreat a little to Harbin in order to gain the support of the local Polish émigrés—mostly I am thinking of dry rations, but also of moral support—and then, from Harbin, like a flash, all the time through rice fields, avoiding Changchun, Mukden, and Anshan, to reach the capital of the Peoples' Republic of China. [. . .]

"And in Peking? And in Peking—then what?"

"What do you mean 'in Peking—then what?'" said Mr. Trqba, suddenly angry. "You will forgive me, Chief, but sometimes I have to treat you like a small child. What do you mean 'in Peking—then what?' In Peking we will have to take a look around."

"As I understand it, we will have to look around for Chairman Mao. But when we catch sight of him, when the Chairman turns up, when he himself comes into our grasp in some Peking alleyway, then . . ." and Father moved his hand across his throat in the classic gesture.

"We will have to look around," now it was Mr. Trqba's turn for venomous simulation of Stoic calm, "we will have to look around for

"IT IS ALTERNATELY REFLECTIVE, ZANY, AND GLOOMY, AS HE PULLS FROM HIS OWN LIFE TO CREATE ANOTHER SHORT YET POTENT NOVEL."

**—MATT JAKUBOWSKI,
THE QUARTERLY CONVERSATION**

the road leading to the Palace of the All-Chinese Assembly of the People's Representatives. It is somewhere in the very heart of Peking, between the Eternal City and the Imperial City, right in the vicinity of the Forbidden City."

"Yes, and then what? We reach the Palace of the All-Chinese Assembly of the People's Representatives and then what?" Father said ostentatiously, with the tone of the cynical psychiatrist conversing with his agitated patient.

"Then we find out whether the Chairman is inside, and if he is in a nearby teashop, we wait for nightfall. Mao, like the majority of despots, leads a nocturnal life, which means that it is more difficult to catch him sleeping, since he sleeps during the day. And besides, as you know, Chief, there's no honor in killing a sleeping man." ■

TO HELL WITH CRONJÉ

INGRID WINTERBACH

TRANSLATED FROM THE AFRIKAANS BY ELSA SILKE

[read an excerpt >](#)



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Territory: North America/UK

"This unforgettable novel establishes Ingrid Winterbach as one of the most important novelists writing in Afrikaans."

—Thys Human

"An exquisite book, an essential voice."

—Antjie Krog

Two scientists, Reitz Steyn and Ben Maritz, find themselves in a "transit camp for those temporarily and permanently unfit for battle" during the Boer War. Captured on suspicion of desertion and treason—during a trek across an unchanging desert of bushes, rocks, and ant hills to help transport a fellow-soldier, who has suffered debilitating shell-shock, to his mother—they are forced to await the judgment of a General Bergh, unsure whether they are to be conscripted into Bergh's commando, allowed to continue their mission, or executed for treason. As the weeks pass, and the men's despair at ever returning to their families reaches its peak, they are sent on a bizarre mission . . .

A South African *Heart of Darkness*, Ingrid Winterbach's *To Hell with Cronjé* is a poetic exploration of friendship and camaraderie, an eerie reflection on the futility of war, and a thought-provoking re-examination of the founding moments of the South African nation.

Ingrid Winterbach is an artist and novelist whose work has won South Africa's M-Net Prize, Old Mutual Literary Prize, the University of Johannesburg Prize for Creative Writing, and the W.A. Hofmeyr Prize. *To Hell with Cronjé* won the 2004 Hertzog Prize, an honor she shares with the novelists Bryten Brytenbach and Etienne Leroux.

Elsa Silke translates from Afrikaans and was the winner of the 2006 South African Translator's Institute/Via Afrika Prize for her translation of Karel Schoeman's *This Life*.

According to Willem's compass they are still travelling in a northeasterly direction.

They talk—about one thing and another—but not about what they recently left behind.

Namely the commando under leadership of Commandant Servaas Senekal.

The hero of Skeurbuikhoogte, Ben would sometimes call him—in muted tones, of course.

Hero's backside, Reitz would say.

By day the commandant could mostly be found in front of his tent, smoking. Making his fruitless plans. Unless the commando happened to be on the run, of course.

He wore a black tailcoat and top hat (like General Maroela Erasmus, the men joked). His mood was seldom good. His eyes were unfocused from smoking and narrowed with suspicion. His talent for making the wrong tactical decisions seemed boundless.

Old flathead on the loose, Reitz would mutter.

Reitz, Ben would say, the man has a responsibility to the people to make his plans.

Like hell, Reitz would reply. Or: Oh heavens. Or sometimes in an unguarded moment: The downfall of the people has already been secured.

Careful, Ben would admonish, some things are better left unsaid.

When the commando moved from one encampment to another, Ben and Reitz used the opportunity to do field work in the area. They documented their findings in their journals. These journals they took with them everywhere they went—in the event of anything unforeseen.

The other burghers spent their days sleeping in the shade, or playing cards, or gambling. Few of them still read, or wrote regular letters home to fill the dragging hours.

The past weeks have seen Ben and Reitz become increasingly disillusioned with the course of the war. (Neither had ever been a passionate believer in the cause—Ben even less so than Reitz.)

Is there still a leader worth his salt, Ben? Reitz asked. And Ben replied: You're asking the wrong man. Or the wrong question.

Over which hill or low ridge, from which direction, Reitz wondered, would the harbinger of good news appear—to present them with an order, or the possibility of a way out?

Commandant Senekal's judgment had not improved since they were obliged to join his commando in the early autumn of the previous year. In fact, it seemed clear he was losing what remained of it. Moreover, he had a weakness for female flesh and any accompanying form of intoxication: whether obtained from the bottle, from tobacco, or some other substance.

Accordingly the movements of the commando were determined by the availability of the above, rather than the whereabouts of the enemy.

At Norraspoort, with the commandant in hot pursuit of a certain widow, they narrowly escaped being lured into a fatal ambush. Fine examples of sills formed by intrusive rock, Reitz just had time to notice in passing.

At Skeurbuikhoogte and at Allesverloren shortly afterwards they had a quick brush with the enemy and did not come out of it well, but at Droogleegte—about three weeks ago—after two days of bloody battle they buried fifteen men in the late afternoon, including the able scout Faan Oosthuizen, and young Abraham's older brother. The confrontation at Droogleegte could have been avoided—Faan himself had strongly advised Senekal against engaging with the Khakis in that specific spot.

That evening Reitz's gaze swept across the graves, across the sandstone plains, and he thought: I've had my fill of bloodshed.

We've lost a good man here, Reitz, Ben spoke quietly beside him. One of the last good ones.

Willem stood facing them, his pale blue eyes grimly searching the sky. As if in anticipation of a vision or a sign.

At Droogleegte young Abraham's brother fell by his side. His head and chest blown away. For hours Abraham sat with his dead brother in his arms—until Willem led him away, subsequently taking him under his wing. The fallen brother had been his friend.

After this, young Abraham's condition deteriorated. He lay curled up in the tent next to Reitz and Ben's. He never spoke coherently again—he uttered gibberish, unrelated phrases, confused cries; at night he suffered nightmares and delusions. He did not eat, he did not move. His body was rigid, like a corpse.

It was there—at Droogleegte, in the evenings beside the cooking fires—that Reitz and Ben began to confer with Willem in monosyllables and undertones.

A word here, a remark there. At first Willem said: The brother's blood is calling for revenge. Forget revenge, Ben replied, this is neither the time nor the place for revenge.

Finally they decided: There was no other way. Willem had to get young Abraham away from Senekal's laager and take him to his mother, where he could be cared for,

and Reitz and Ben would accompany them, for Willem would not cope on his own with the debilitated, bewildered young man.

In the meantime Ben—more so than Reitz—had begun to consider laying

down arms, signing the oath, going back to his wife and children. Reitz said: You know what the Boers do with traitors.

The plan was to take young Abraham back to his mother in Ladybrand. From there Ben would visit his wife and children in his home town Burgershoop, southwest of Ladybrand. (It has been more than a year since he last saw his family.) Then he and Reitz would perforce join another commando. They would not, however, be returning to Commandant Senekal's laager. Time would tell, but they certainly weren't going back to Senekal.

Reluctantly Senekal gave them leave to take Abraham home, and one morning seven days ago the four departed, carrying with them the letter and the map. ■

“WITH THIS EXCELLENT NOVEL INGRID WINTERBACH PROVES AGAIN THAT SHE IS ONE OF OUR MOST ORIGINAL NOVELISTS.”

—LOUIS VILJOEN

GASOLINE

QUIM MONZÓ

TRANSLATED FROM THE CATALAN BY MARY ANN NEWMAN

[read an excerpt >](#)



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Territory: World English

"A gifted writer, he draws well on the rich tradition of Spanish surrealism to put a deliberately paranoid sense of menace in the apparently mundane everyday and also to sustain the lyrical, visionary quality of his imagination."

—*New York Times*

"Quim Monzó is today's best known writer in Catalan. He is also, no exaggeration, one of the world's great short-story writers. This novel shows all his idiosyncrasy and originality. We have at last gained the opportunity to read (in English) one of the most original writers of our time."

—*The Independent* (UK)

For the first time in his life, Heribert Julià is unable to paint. On the eve of an important gallery exhibition, for which he's created nothing, he's bored with life: he falls asleep while making love with his mistress, wanders from bar to bar, drinking whatever comes to his attention first, and meets the evidence of his wife Helena's infidelity with complete indifference. Humbert Herrera, an up-and-coming artist who can't stop creating, picks up the threads of Heribert's life, taking his wife, replacing him at the gallery, and pursuing his former mistress. Heribert is finally undone by a massive sculpture, while Humbert is planning the sculpture to end sculpture, the poem to end poetry, and the film to end film, all while mounting three simultaneous shows.

A fun-house mirror through which he examines the creative process, the life and loves of artists, and the New York art scene, *Gasoline* confirms Quim Monzó as the foremost Catalan writer of his generation.

Quim Monzó was born in Barcelona in 1952. He has been awarded the National Award for fiction, the City of Barcelona Award for fiction, the Prudenci Bertrana Award for fiction, the El Temps Award for best novel, the Lletra d'Or Prize for the best book of the year, and the Catalan Writers' Award; 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.

Mary Ann Newman is the Director of the Catalan Center at New York University's Center for European and Mediterranean Studies. She is a translator, editor, and occasional writer on Catalan culture. In addition to Quim Monzó, she has translated Xavier Rubert de Ventós, Joan Maragall, Josep Carner, Narcís Comadira, and many others.

Afterwards, he is completely overcome with sleep. When he opens his eyes again, the sun (a pale, faint sun) is high in the sky and Hildegarda is sitting in the armchair with a blue robe on (sky blue, bluer by far than today's gray sky), painting her toenails, each nail a different color: one pink, one blue, one gold, one black, one purple, one white, one silver, one yellow, and one gray.

Hildegarda is reconstructing the (approximately) two weeks they've been involved, weighing the pros and cons of the relationship. Heribert thinks that the terms she's using ("involved," "our relationship") are mere euphemisms. Euphemisms for what, though? What does "involved" mean? The two weeks we've spent touching each other? "Touching each other" sounded like another euphemism to him, though. "The two weeks we've spent kissing and caressing each other's genitals?" He finds the last expression cold enough to be accurate. Then he turns his attention entirely to what Hildegarda is saying to him: everything he hears is a euphemism.

"You don't know," she's saying, "how hard it was for me to convince Tiziana I wasn't coming here. She wanted to come along. 'You go there every year and you never invite me,' she said. She said that I always say I'm not coming and then I always come. That's why I'm afraid she might surprise us and show up with a bouquet of flowers and a box of chocolates. She gets more and more melancholy every year, and she wants someone to put up with her gloom, and, frankly, I just can't do it any more. Not only that, why should I be the one to get stuck holding her hand when Marino's gone. She should call him. I can't stand her dependency. And not only that, but I wouldn't like her to know that you and I . . . can you imagine? You didn't like Tiziana at all, did you? But the party was a lot of fun. Didn't you think so? Marino didn't like her much at the beginning, either, and now look at them . . . Everyone changes. Even him. He's a strange guy. Not because he changes. He's strange for lots of reasons; he goes off on these tangents. You artists are all a little strange, no matter what field you're in, or at least you all pretend to be. And not just artists, either. I used to get along so well with him. Now it's as if he weren't interested in me at all. I used to study (have I told you this?) in a school of *bel canto*. I wanted to sing in the opera. Have you ever sung, opera or anything? Or done anything onstage, like acting? I really love the feeling of being onstage . . . I know what it's like, because I've been there, in the chorus, and I know the feeling of being alone before the abyss of the audience. ('The abyss of the audience . . . that's pretty good, isn't it?) I've never been up there alone, of course, but I know what I'm saying. You feel alone all the same, no matter how many people are up there with you. Tiziana used to sing with me. We met at the school. I met Marino in my last year, before I sang in the chorus. He was the one who got me into the chorus, because he was really pursuing me back then. Not any more. He's such a great singer, and he always has so much work that he doesn't have any time for me. I don't know what I stopped liking first: him or the

opera. I've come to realize that opera is not what I thought it was, what I dreamed of. Do you think I've become disillusioned because I married an opera singer? (Perhaps I shouldn't just say a singer, but the *best* singer, but I don't want to brag; though it isn't really bragging if I'm not talking about myself, is it?) There was a time when I wanted to write. (I've already told you that, haven't I?) I was a teenager . . . The other day I heard a piece I really loved. No, it was jazz. Now I'm starting to like jazz. It was called *Blue Rondo à la Turk*, and it's by the Dave Brubeck Quartet. You've heard it? Oh, since I don't know much about jazz yet, I didn't realize it was very well known . . . You have the record? With *Take Five*? What's *Take Five*? Oh. Would you lend it to me? Oh, I'm so thrilled. Please lend it to me. Don't forget. Maybe some day . . . No, forget it. No . . . well, maybe some day . . . I'd like to try jazz. But I don't know which instrument would be best for me. No, no, it's out of the question. Painting is the thing that totally absorbs me now, ever since I married Marino and abandoned opera. I think I should try having a show. Contact with the public is essential, isn't it? How can a body of work evolve if it doesn't come into contact with the viewers it's meant for? I'm not hinting around, but we've known each other for a while now . . . No, I don't want to show you my paintings, it's too embarrassing. Anyway, I don't know if I'm still interested in painting. But I've been saying I'm not interested any more for a couple of years now, and I'm still at it. No, no. I'd be too embarrassed, you're too good. Give me a kiss. Mmm. All right, if you promise not to make fun of me, I'll show them to you. Really. We

can arrange it some other time. But you have to be very honest. If you don't like them, say so. I don't want you humoring me. I couldn't bear it! Are you in a hurry? I'll drive you into the city. I have to go home, too; I have so much to do . . . I've had a wonderful time, though, all these days we've spent to-

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gether. It was nice to start the year with you. Do you think it's a good sign? For you or for me? Don't you have anything to say? Give me a great big hug. We'll get together soon, won't we? I'll let you off at the subway stop, okay?" ■

KLAUSEN

ANDREAS MAIER

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY KENNETH J. NORTHCOTT

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Nobody knows exactly what happened in the small town of Klausen, or rather, everyone knows: a bomb went off on the autobahn, or at a shack near the autobahn, or someone was shooting at the town from a bridge; it all stems from a fight over measuring noise pollution on the town square, or it was the work of eco-terrorists, or *Italians*. And while nobody knows who or what to blame—although they're certainly uneasy about the Moroccan and Albanian immigrants who are squatting in an abandoned castle—they all suspect that Josef Gasser, who spent several years away from Klausen, in *Berlin*, is behind it all. Only one thing is clear: Klausen was now a crime scene.

In *Klausen*, Andreas Maier has taken Thomas Bernhard's method—the nested indirect speech, the repetition, the endless paragraph—and pointed it at an entire town. A town where one confusion leads to the next, where everyone is living in a fog of rumor, but where everyone claims to know exactly what's going on, even if they've changed their story several times.

Andreas Maier was born in Bad Nauheim outside Frankfurt in 1967. In addition to winning the Ernst Willner Prize at the Ingeborg Bachmann Literary Competition in Klagenfurt, Austria, in 2000, he received the Jürgen Ponto Foundation's Literary Support Prize and the Aspekte Literary Prize for his first novel, *Wäldchestag*.

Kenneth J. Northcott is a professor emeritus of German at the University of Chicago. He has translated many books, among them Thomas Bernhard's *The Voice Imitator*, *Histrionics*, and *Three Novellas*.

The landlord in Feldthurns was later unable to tell anyone with complete certainty whether the guest in question was Josef Gasser or not. He said that the young man had ordered a pickled calf's head and a glass of rosé, he, the landlord of the inn in the lower part of the village, had noticed this because the young man had drunk only a single glass of wine, but had not touched the calf's head, merely peered at it in a very ostentatious and peculiar manner so that he, the landlord, had asked him whether there was something wrong with the calf's head. However, the young man had not paid the slightest heed to his questions but had ordered a schnapps and had, on his part, begun asking questions about all sorts of different things. According to the landlord he gave the impression, as he did this, of being on the one hand quite cheerful and on the other strangely interested. The landlord said that he was a member of the Feldthurns Cultural Society, that he was president of it, that Castle Velthurns was a unique place of interest and that, in addition to this, Feldthurns also possessed a swimming pool, and that he was only telling him all this because the guest was growing more and more excited as he listened to him. The guest also asked him once, again without any apparent reason, whether the landlord was Catholic. The landlord said that of course he was Catholic, that all the people in the area were Catholic and that he the guest was presumably also Catholic, since he was evidently also from the Eisack valley, and on hearing this the young man's mood became downright enthusiastic. He even clapped his hands. Things went on like this for a while, and then two tourists came in, a German married couple. The guest's face darkened. The tourists ordered bacon and wine, talked about the route they were taking for their vacation, praised the province of South Tyrol and put a guide book on the table. They immediately started up a conversation with the landlord, the sole purpose of which was to demonstrate how knowledgeable they were about, and what an intimate knowledge of, the country they possessed. Above all, they had some very detailed things to say about Venosta. The landlord, however, did not know Venosta at all. You don't know Venosta? asked the two German tourists in astonishment. The landlord said that he came from the Eisack valley not from Venosta. Whereupon the two tourists began to lecture the landlord about Venosta and the collective beauties of South Tyrol. The aforementioned guest said nothing for a while, and sat staring at the table-top with a more and more sullen expression. But then he suddenly started talking himself, but of quite unrelated matters. As he talked he once more waxed strangely enthusiastic . . . He said that, in his view, the country had a healthy mentality, especially as far as development was concerned, that it was not ruined by the government and by environmental protection measures to the same extent as, for instance, Germany and Austria were, at least you were able to build in South Tyrol, for that was the way things were. The world was there for people, after all, and that was how it had to be developed. He was an engineer. He worked at the Cross of Latzfons. Oh! at the Cross

of Latzfons, said the tourist with a knowing look, although he plainly had no knowledge whatsoever of the Cross of Latzfons. The landlord looked at the guest in amazement. Because, naturally, nothing was being built up at the Cross of Latzfons; all that was up there were meadows with a cross placed at the summit . . . The tourist said that in his opinion the beauty of South Tyrol was also its capital asset and this capital should not be destroyed; they came down from Münster by car twice a year and every time they were here they breathed more easily: South Tyrol was like a second home to them. The countryside had to be protected: develop but protect, interjected the tourist's wife. Exactly said her husband. There must be a happy medium. The countryside must be developed but it must also be protected. If there were too much industrial construction the tourists would stop coming. So what was being built up there at the cross? The young guest: A power station was being built. He himself was the engineer of the Latzfons Cross power station. (The landlord told a journalist from the *Eisacktal Tagblatt* three weeks later that the strange guest had said this in the following words, 'Engineer of the power station at the Cross of Latzfons.'). Of course we cannot do without electricity said the tourist. The wife: What would the world be without electricity? Unimaginable, Klaus, if we had no electricity. The conversation went back and forth like this for a while and it became clear to the landlord that the alleged engineer was only saying such absurd things in order to inveigle the tourists into making the most embarrassing statements and self-revelations possible. Everything finished up with the alleged engineer's almost forcing both of the tourists to eat the calf's head. He praised the calf's head as the particular specialty of the house, saying that everyone here ate the calf's head, that you couldn't have been in the landlord's in Feldthurns without having eaten the calf's head, *etcetera*. At the same time the young man himself had up till then never been seen in the

landlord's or even in Feldthurns at all and could not, therefore, possibly know the calf's head from the landlord's kitchen. The couple did in fact order two portions of pickled calf's head to go with their bacon. The landlord had nothing to say about all this. While the supposed Gasser was still sitting in front of his plate without touching it, the Germans ate up the calf's head, an embarrassing

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situation. Then, according to the landlord, the young man from the Eisack valley left . . . The landlord's mother later insisted that the guest in question was certainly Josef Gasser, she had recognized him immediately, three weeks later, among the pictures in the *Eisacktal Tagblatt* and on the news, and even then as soon as he came into the landlord's she had had a funny feeling. There was something not quite right about him from the beginning. True, she didn't tell the public all this until after the events had already taken place and when she was asked why, if she knew everything so precisely, she had not said something about it before, she simply replied that she had, from the very beginning, said *everything*, but no one had listened to her. ■

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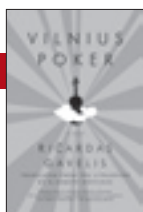
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