12 SWISS BOOKS

RECOMMENDED FOR TRANSLATION

www.12swissbooks.ch
What you are holding here in your hands is a recommendation. First of all it’s a recommendation of books you might like to read but it’s also a recommendation of books you might consider for translation into the language of your home country and for which we are prepared to offer financial support. We have selected, on your behalf, twelve books from the broad sweep of contemporary Swiss literature; twelve books, which we at the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia are convinced will captivate readers worldwide. They have been carefully selected by both Swiss and international literature experts, and represent three of Switzerland’s official languages. And, for the first time, they include winners of the Swiss Literature Award, awarded by the Federal Office for Culture. We don’t presume to suggest these books have anything in common, any common strand or theme to link them. Each stands on its own merits, has its own style, and in form and content each inhabits its own world. Nonetheless, we do feel justified in claiming that, this year, we have a number of outstanding authors whose inspiration for their stories is drawn directly from dramatic and exceptional situations both inside and outside Switzerland itself. One example is Roland Buti’s story about the 1976 Swiss Summer heatwave; another is Urs Faes’ tale of a Brandenburg Summer in 1935, which deals with Jewish emigration to Palestine; then there’s Gertrud Leutenegger’s London novel about the unpronounceable Icelandic volcano Ejafjallajökull, which brings everything to a standstill; and Heinz Helle, who evokes The Reassuring Sound of Exploding Kerosene; and Andrea Gianinazzi whose story of a raging stormy night ends in disaster. The life of the narrator in Lukas Bäruffuss’ novel is torn apart as if by lightning when his brother commits suicide. Tim Krohn’s Perfect Mattress survives the enormous upheavals of the twentieth century much better than the people who lie on it. In all these books unexpected and monumental events are described with full poetic power.

This same power is also revealed through some striking contrasts, as when Philippe Rahmy exposes his traveller-protagonist, who suffers from brittle-bone disease, to the full force of Shanghai’s concrete colossus; so also, David Bosc contrasts Gustave Courbet’s life of excess with the calm, majestic shores of Lake Geneva. Jürg Schübler’s main character is tipped unceremoniously out of the life he knows – which
is a disaster for those around him but in no way for himself; Andrea Fazioli sets his crime novel in the low-life of Zürich high society. Urs Mannhart spreads his net wide over the interconnected strands of a 1990s Europe shaken by the Balkan War in a novel with the cunningly paradoxical title 

Mountaineering in the Lowlands.

We might almost see Mountaineering in the Lowlands as an evocative allusion to the ‘famous’ cargo crane recently on Zürich’s Limmat River, visible for miles around and which for months was an object of joy, fun, or fury to the local Zürich population. A cargo crane in inland Switzerland? On a tiny river, where at most a couple of flat boats, the Regula and the Felix, ply their trade? The Zürich cargo crane is an expression – of what? Perhaps of a city, of a Switzerland, that loves to play on thoughts, words and humour and makes a cunning statement that Switzerland – against all signs to the contrary – is actually striving to open up to the world.

With that in mind, come aboard! Join us!

On behalf of the editorial team,
Angelika Salvisberg (Pro Helvetia, Head of Literature & Society Division)

KOALA

KOALA

GENRE Novel, LANGUAGE German

“You devour Bärfuss hungrily from his first to his last sentence. Koala is a radical story of astonishing power. It poses shrewd questions, it’s grippingly told and is deeply affecting.”

TIROLER TAGESZEITUNG

LUKAS BÄRFUSS was born in Thun, Switzerland, in 1971. He is one of the most successful dramatists in the German language, and his plays have been performed worldwide. His first novel, Hundert Tage (4 Hundred Days) was highly successful and was nominated for the German and Swiss Book Prizes. It has been translated into 17 languages. Koala is on the longlist for the German Book Prize 2014. Lukas Bärfuss lives in Zürich.

PHOTO © Frederic Meyer

The Dramatist and novelist Lukas Bärfuss comes from Thun. At the beginning of the 19th century, the distinguished poet Heinrich von Kleist – who later committed suicide – spent a month there – and Bärfuss is to deliver a lecture about him, in his home town. The occasion gives him the chance – for the first time in many years – to meet his brother: he has spent his whole life in Thun and has hardly ever left this small community. Bärfuss has no idea that this will be the last time the two will meet. Shortly afterwards, his brother also takes his own life.

This is the point where Lukas Bärfuss’ novel Koala begins, as he remembers that last meeting with his brother. When the author receives the news of his suicide, he is at first dismayed and dumbfounded; but soon, his grief becomes mingled with rage. He searches for an explanation, for possible reasons for his brother’s death; but he comes up against nothing but silence. Even the few friends his brother had are baffled, and he realises how little he really knew about him.

Nevertheless, he pursues his investigation and learns that when his brother was in the Scouts, he had the nickname “Koala”. He had kept the nickname into his adult life, and the narrator now sets out to answer the question, why? He gathers information about this strange animal – which has now been driven almost to extinction – and immerses himself in the history of Australia, and particularly in the time, when that continent was still serving as a penal colony for British prisoners. In the process, he discovers the Koala has a real significance: this solitary, idle animal shuns any unnecessary activity and so sets itself apart from our Swiss philosophy of life, based not least on our notions of hard work and ambition. Was the narrator’s brother also a “Koala” in his lifestyle? In this novel, Lukas Bärfuss sets out an impressive debate on the basic questions of human existence.

TITLE Koala
PUBLISHER Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen
PUBLICATION DATE 2014
PAGES 182
ISBN 978-3-8353-0653-0
TRANSLATION RIGHTS Stefan Diezmann, SDiezmann@wallstein-verlag.de
Da diese Stadt klein ist und die Gasthäuser früh schließen, es nach dem Vortrag also zu spät sein würde, um noch einem mächtigen Bau aus dem sechzehnten Jahrhundert, eine Kugel in den Rachen geschossen hätte. Im Rathaus, teilten wir wenig, und gewöhnlich reichten uns zwei Stunden, um angenehmen Kindheits- und Jugenderinnerungen zu teilen, außer der Mutter und einigen nicht aus den Augen zu verlieren, Genüge zu tun.

Man hatte mich in meine Heimatstadt geladen, damit ich einen Vortrag über einen deutschen Dichter halte, der Wannsee in Berlin eine Mulde gesucht und danach seiner Freundin Henrietta Vogel ins Herz und schließlich sich selbst einen kleinen Raum in den Räumen der Stadt geschaffen hatte. Im Rathaus, einem mächtigen Bau aus dem sechzehnten Jahrhundert, am zentralen Platz gelegen, sollte ich im großen Saal einige Gedanken zu diesem Mann und seinen Werken äußern, und seitens der Stadt, die jene Stadt in zwei Armen durchschneidet, sollte ich im großen Saal einige Gedanken zu diesem Mann und seinen Werken äußern, und seitens der Stadt, die jene Stadt in zwei Armen durchschneidet.

Neben den Leuten, die diesen Anlass organisiert hatten, traf eine halbe Stunde später, nachdem das Essen bereits bestellt war, mein Bruder ein und setzte sich zu uns. Ich hatte ihn vor ein paar Wochen angerufen und über meinen Vortrag an einem Tag im November, an einem Tag im November, hatte ihn vor ein paar Wochen angerufen.

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La fin de l’année 1976. C’était le début des grandes vacances de mes treize ans. C’était l’année de la sécheresse. Des wagons-citernes acheminaient de l’eau puisée au fond des lacs vers les villages ; sous un ciel aussi jaune que du papier mâché, les militaires avec leurs camions et leurs moteumpotassiaient les arrosages de secrètes pour sauver les plantations qui pouvaient encore l’être. Les autorités avaient activé le plan RICRA. Il ne pleuvait plus depuis des semaines ; comme il n’avait pas neigé sur les montagnes durant l’hiver, les nappes phréatiques ne s’étaient pas remplies au printemps. Tout était sec en dessous, tout était sec en surface et notre campagne ressemblait à un vieux biscuit dur. Certains disaient que le soleil s’était rapproché de la Terre ; d’autres disaient que la Terre avait changé d’axe et que c’était elle qui, au contraire, était attirée par le soleil. Je pensais que cette chaleur particulière était causée par un météore tombé non loin de chez nous, par un corps célestes constitué d’un métal inconnu dégageant des vapeurs toxiques invisibles. Comment expliquer autrement que par des gaz lentement diffusés vers les maisons du village nous empoisonnant à notre insu la modification insidieuse du caractère de maman, sa transformation en une autre personne, la perte de la maîtrise de nos vies au cours de cet été, la fin du monde de mon enfance ?

Depuis quelques jours, Rudy me disait que l’herbe sentait mauvais. Quand je lui avais demandé pourquoi, il m’avait répondu triste et sérieux que c’était parce qu’elle souffrait. Rudy était exactement le genre d’individu capable d’imaginer une végétation qui manifesterait son inconfort par l’odeur d’unฟเืษกุฉิมที่สามารถทำให้ทุกคนไม่สามารถสัมผัสได้ แต่สำหรับฉัน ฉันมีความซึ้งในใจของเธอ ของครอบครัวฉัน ซ้ำซ้ำๆกัน ฉันกลับมาถึง personalities, her transformation into someone else, our loss of control over our own lives that summer, the end of my childhood world ?

For several days, Rudy had been telling me the plants smelled bad. When I asked him why, he answered in a sad, serious tone that it was because they were suffering. Rudy was exactly the kind of person who would imagine vegetation could show discomfort by emitting an unpleasant smell. An odour of celery and sulphur hovered over our back yard, which was scattered with scrappy blades of grass trampled by the cattle. The dull green of the ivy clinging to the vegetable garden’s low wall had turned almost black. The sun heated the stones, curled the ivy’s leaves and twisted its shrivelled stems as they made one last effort not to detach from their branch and drop onto the sandy soil. When I approached the ivy to examine its clinging shoots, which looked like tiny fists balled in despair, I had to admit, it stank.

**The Middle of the Horizon Rolando Buti**

Excerpt translated by Tess Lewis

It was June, 1976. I was thirteen years old and the summer holidays had just begun. It was the year of the drought. Water carriers brought water pumped from the bottom of the lakes to the villages. Under a sky as yellow as cornhusks, soldiers with trucks and motor-pumps were irrigating those crops that could still be saved. The local authorities had activated the Catastrophic Responsive Plan. There had been no rain for weeks and because it had not snowed on the mountains that winter, the groundwater had not been replenished in the spring. Everything was dry below ground, everything was dry on the surface and the countryside looked like an old hard biscuit. Some claimed the sun had suddenly moved closer to the earth; others claimed instead that the earth’s axis had shifted and it was the one being drawn closer to the sun. Personally, I thought this particular heat wave was caused by an asteroid that had fallen not far from us, a large celestial body made of some unknown metal giving off invisible toxic fumes. What, besides the slow leak of gas into the houses in our village poisoning us unaware, could explain the insidious changes in mother’s personality, her transformation into someone else, our loss of control over our own lives that summer, the end of my childhood world ?

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**“More happens in Panic Spring than in three comparable novels put together.”**

**DIE ZEIT**

GERTRUD LEUTENEGGER was born in 1948 and brought up in Schwyz, but subsequently lived for several years first in France, then in Italian Switzerland. After many trips to, and sojourns in Florence and Berlin, she spent several years in Japan. Today, she lives in Zürich. She writes novels, short stories and essays; her first novel was Vorabend (The Evening Before), published in 1975. Panic Spring is on the shortlist for the German Book Prize 2014.

PHOTO © Peter Peltach, peltachphoto.com

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The reassuring sound of exploding kerosene

Der beruhigende Klang von explodierendem Kerosin

GENRE Novel, LANGUAGE German

The pivotal figure in Heinz Helle’s first novel – The Reassuring Sound of Exploding Kerosene – is an anonymous ‘I’ – a first-person narrator, who wants to discover, who this ‘I’ is; who tells this story about himself; about the world around this ‘I’; and about his girlfriend, with whom he’s been together for some time.

The narrator is studying for his doctorate of philosophy; he comes to New York to spend a semester as a Visiting Scholar at the City University and to give a lecture on Consciousness.

He spends a lot of time moving about the city and is continually checking his thoughts and observations. Does the world about him really exist, or is it just a construct? What is this ‘I’, that is simultaneously both consciousness and perception, experience itself and the representation of experience? These are questions about identity which countless disciplines have been grappling with for centuries – the ‘I’-narrator is well aware of this. “The words in my head don’t exist, I tell myself with the words in my head.” His attempt to observe himself through self-observation is bound to fail. His uncertainty brings him no peace: he moves forward, only to fall back, for he is in no position to mould his experiences into a practical philosophical theory. And so, he has to trace everything that happens to him back to hard facts and he has to base everything on strong, unambiguous points of reference. He strives for a kind of ecstatic alienation, he seeks out sexual encounters and turns to heavy drinking. At the same time, he shrinks from everything that is familiar; from the people he knows; who tells this story about himself; about his girlfriend, with whom he’s been together for two years now.

Heinz Helle has created an exceptionally authentic language for his characters, which envelops the painfully absent precision of their lives.

“The empty spring sky cast an illusion of blue on the water, a ripple on the water and a pungent smell of the sea rose from the rocks on the banks. My head thrown back, I peered into the sky where floating ash particles were now visible, some looked like simple dust motes, without form or structure, others were sharp like needles, still others were rounded, frayed or jagged like crystals. Suddenly I pictured myself and my childhood friends again, on the main square after church on Ash Wednesday, staring at each other as obtusely as I was now looking into the sky, crossed only by birds.”

“Finally, not a novel that oozes references to our crisis-ridden consciousness, but a novel that coolly and clearly describes the crisis of consciousness of our times.” BASLER ZEITUNG

HEINZ HELLE was born in 1978 and studied Philosophy in Munich and New York. He works as an advertising copy-writer. He is a graduate of the Swiss Institute of Literature, in Biel, where he lives. Der beruhigende Klang von explodierendem Kerosin (The Reassuring Sound of Exploding Kerosene) is his first novel.

PHOTO © juergen-bauer.com

Enjoy an excerpt on the next page! >


“Reining us of Michel Houellebecq with his impassiveness, he writes in careful, sharply-defined prose about existence in all its ill-definedness.” SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG
Lo sciame
Il binario sembrava morto per davvero: due linee di ferro appoggiate su una massicciata ormai invasa dalle erbacce. Qualche arbusto era riuscito ad attecchire anche fra le traverse e cominciava a rinvigorirsi. Jean non si era mai preoccupato di sapere nè da dove venisse, nè dove andasse quel binario: forse una deviazione di una linea secondaria finita nel dimenticatoio. Sì, puoi darsi che lo avesse anche saputo, ma l’aveva dimenticato. Era lì e basta, sepolti dal verde, come tante cose che l’uomo abbandona al proprio destino.

Quando quel trapezio di terra gli era toccato in eredità, lo aveva abbandonato al proprio destino. Lì, accanto a quel binario, Jean aveva costruito il proprio giardino. “Stupida”. I Francesi hanno definito “drôle” (farsa, scherzo), ormai è il momento di quelle grandi. Già, “grandi”! Mai una guerra mondiale. Ci sono state guerre giuste, sante, civili; si capisce bene come possa essere “grande” una seconda guerra mondiale. Ma forse, forse, forse può essere “grande” una seconda guerra mondiale. “Stupida”. “Drôle”. Jean era troppo anziano per queste cose; lui si era accontentato di vivere e non era mai stato adatto per fare le trave in corto, per fare le trave in lungo. Non era mai stato adatto per fare le trave in corto, per fare le trave in lungo.

Jean aveva visto passare, lasciandosi dietro una coda di fumo subito dopo il passaggio del treno, un soldato o di un carro. Niente. Qualche aereo sì, lo si era visto passare, lasciandosi dietro una coda di fumo subito dopo il passaggio del treno. Niente. Qualche aereo sì, lo si era visto passare, lasciandosi dietro una coda di fumo subito dopo il passaggio del treno.

La guerra era lontana: forse all’estremità di quelle due strisce di ferro, da una parte o dall’altra. Quindi non arrivava niente, nemmeno un rumore, uno scoppio, il passaggio di un soldato o di un carro. Niente. Qualche aereo sì, lo si era visto passare, lasciandosi dietro una coda di fumo subito dopo il passaggio del treno.


zu konzentrieren.
erinnerte sich an den Vorsatz, sich ganz auf die Gegenwart
würde weitreichende Sparmaßnahmen erfordern – aber er
Arbeiten wegen gewiss doppelt so saftig ausfiele. Das
die Kamran am Schluss des Auftrags stellen würde, Irynas
ein in den dichten und schnellen Verkehr, in das große Ge-
fiel wie unbenutztes Schmirgelpapier. Kaum hatten sie
unsicher, wo er einsteigen sollte, blickte forschend zu
»Wir müssen aufs Amt«, übersetzte Iryna, und Steinhövel,
sicher, dass Gerardo Gambelli, der in Bern sehr darunter
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half to say: it is a real opportunity, and the other side is to have a
had a question looking, who gave the impression of having made a
firm decision to share the rear seat with Iryna.
"It’s dangerous up front," Iryna said brusquely, as she
directed Steinhövel and Gambelli to the rear, whose old
impression leather upholstery felt like unused sandpaper.
They had hardly taken home, it appeared to Kamran, as the gear
shift, worked the pedals forcefully and swung the
trusty car into the rapid flow of heavy traffic, into the
mighty uproar. Only now did it dawn on Steinhövel that the
bill Kamran would present at the end of the job would surely
turn out to be twice as hefty thanks to Iryna’s charm.
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sound.
RF: Four years ago in Oslo, hosted a specialist gathering of you learn? and literature and those hard-fought freedoms in Europe, many now under work. It made people think about the relationship between free expression France and Switzerland. It was ground-breaking. We were catalysts for delegates, from Turkey and Georgia to traditional ‘houses’ like Germany, Literature Houses, to expand the idea to Writers’ and Translation Houses in cities like Moscow or East Berlin or Bucharest and also Trans- Austria, Switzerland and France. Then there were interesting Writers’ idea which became popular about twenty-five years ago and spread to Free House in Oslo and needed little persuasion to support us in London, Fritt Ord

RG: This summer Free Word achieved a major coup, something you because those paradoxes – of being a world city, yet insular, not having House in Oslo and needed little persuasion to support us in London, a Literature House yet having a strong tradition of literature – made Free Word

RG: In the rest of Europe Free Word would possibly be called a Literature House but formally they don’t exist in the UK. To what extent do you model yourself on them?

RF: Free Word was very much inspired by the German Literature House idea which became popular about twenty-five years ago and spread to Austria, Switzerland and France. Then there were interesting Writers’ Houses in cities like Moscow or East Berlin or Bucharest and also Translators’ Houses, a sort of amalgamation of both. Fritt Ord (‘free word’ in Norwegian), one of our key sponsors, is a private foundation supporting freedom of expression and free press. It helped find the Literature House idea and needed little persuasion to support us in London, because those paradoxes – of being a world city, yet insular, not having a Literature House yet having a strong tradition of literature – made sense.

RG: This summer Free Word achieved a major coup, something you instigated: you brought together European Literature Houses from the whole of Europe to the UK for the first time. Why did you do it? What did you learn?

RF: Four years ago in Oslo, Fritt Ord hosted a specialist gathering of core Literature Houses mostly from western Europe. It was really important and influential because it met again. London and Free Word were suggested. I saw it as a great way to familiarize myself with Literature Houses, to expand the idea to Writers’ and Translation Houses and to include a greater diversity of voices from across Europe, as well as to strategic individuals and organisations in the UK. We had forty-two delegates, from Turkey and Georgia to traditional ‘houses’ like Germany, France and Switzerland. It was ground-breaking. We were catalysts for each other. We found partners to develop European projects. We shared best practice, new ideas and got to know each other.

RG: It was a closed conference of intense discussion, panels and work- shops: what do you think people took away from it?

RF: It was the most remarkable gathering. It stretched the networks, if you like: stretched them beyond the comfortable Literature House net- work. It made people think about the relationship between free expression and literature and those hard-fought freedoms in Europe, many now under threat. You had to hear the Hungarians and Georgians talk. And we all discussed how we integrate, without becoming overtly politicised, how we navigate free speech, how we ‘freshen up’ the traditional Literary Houses. We opened up the Germans, French and Swiss raised. How do we support writers and engage with wider audiences and the digital development of literature and translation exchange.

RG: It’s a fact that here in Britain we are ahead of the game with digital.

RF: Our use of social media, and how writers can engage online, shows how digital can be incredibly creative and develop new, more inclusive relationships with audiences, beyond the narrow elites. For all of us at that meeting, I think it shook up our notions of what a Literature House can be and of our role in Europe today at a time when we need to be vigilant.

RG: What’s your own background Rose? How did your ideas develop?

RF: I am a committed internationalist. My childhood was spent travelling around Eastern Europe in a van, living in forests in Poland, on beaches in Romania, going to a village school in Greece. I was co-director of the London International Festival of Theatre for twenty-five years, bringing theatre from all over the world to perform in London and I approached Free Word with the same philosophy – smashing through hierarchies, our Anglo-Saxon arrogance, engaging with communities and providing other voices and international perspectives. The paradox of Britain is that we’ve got this insular mentality but in London we have one of the most diverse populations in the world. 300 languages are spoken here. Half the children in our state schools in London speak English as a second language. And rather than saying this is a terrible problem – as some politicians do – I say let’s celebrate it because it means we can be world players, not in the old testamentary sense, but through dialogue. If someone lives part of their time here and part of their time in Nigeria, they can be and of our role in Europe today at a time when we need to be vigilant.

RG: A confirmation of a huge desire to work across borders in Europe. As a novelist, I became

Juana Salabert

Author and Translator

As a novelist, I became acquainted with the Swiss-Russian author Marius Daniel Popescu in 2009 and, in particu-

lar, with his novel La Symphonie du loup (The Wolf’s Symphony), which I have now translated into Spanish for Nocturna Editions. This was during one of the liter-
ary conferences organised by the French writer Patrick Deville in the town of Saint-Nazaire. At the time, I could only skim through Popescu’s publications, but I remember having been immediately struck by its singular stylistic tone, by the freedom of a fictional approach, which was not in any way subjected to the dicta

A Unique Voice

Geoffrey C. Howes, Professor and Translator

An editor of my translation of Jürg Laederach’s Das ganze Leben wanted changes on the first page, maybe so that readers would see it up the second paragraph. An ethico-aesthetic dilemma: either stay faithful to the text, or take the freedom to adapt and take the distance to understanding that is a part of it. The first page of The Whole of Life is one of the knottiest in a generally challenging book, a warning that this is ‘experimental literature’. I made some changes, with misgivings even though I understood the marketing problem. Then the book was published without the revisions at all.

And sure enough, the novel’s first re-

viewer said he had never spent so much time reading and re-reading a first page of a novel in his life. ‘The whole book is based on a sentence.’ Laederach’s books have evoked such reactions before. A reviewer of Passion: Ein Geständnis (1993) apologizes that his book is ‘incoherent and anarcho’, but says it is unified compared to the book itself. He notes that Laederach is consistent – consistently indigestible, that is. In this way the Swiss writer Jürg Laederach joins some American ‘experimental’ authors whose critics were likewise irritated. Reviewers variously called William H. Gass’s The Tunnel (1995) “a monster,” “a load of crap,” “infuriating and offensive”; but also “beautiful,” “comp- lex”, and “disturbing”. Walter Abish’s alphabetical Africa has been called murky and absurd, but also an adventure book marked by knowledge and wit. It is no coincidence that Laederach has translated Gass and Abish.

A more recent example is David Foster Wallace’s Infinite Jest, a novel, according to Jay McInerney, with many uninteresting pages, but few uninter-
resting sentences. Experimental texts challenge not only readers, but translators too. First, there is accuracy. Without the suggestions of a translator, it is hard to know whether you’re getting it right. Second, one is tempted to translate so that the text makes more ‘normal’ sense than the original. Third, one worries about

JUANA SALABERT, AUTHOR AND TRANSLATOR
of trends or any 'market'. It was when I returned to Spain that I was able to read this novel, teeming with departures and returns, with a multitude of voices, with paths to embark upon for the first time or over again, with upheaval of all kinds and with stories situated beyond the overwhelming weight of History with a capital 'H'. This dizzying, at once Swiss and Romanian book, from which unspoken thoughts are excluded in principle and on the principle of a narrative exhaustiveness that Nathalie Sarraute would surely have appreciated, resembled no other. Published by Éditions José Corti, La Symphonie du loup is a Novel-Quest which, above all, should not be placed within the rather vague framework of so-called 'auto-fiction.' It is an intimate epic that takes place in daily life, exuding a rare and poignant tenderness and inhabited by the living and the dead, by parents and children, by landscapes, by memories, and by the desires of the young narrator who has grown up in Ceausescu's terrifying, dictatorial Romania and who has subsequently married in Switzerland and is the father of two little girls. The novel is also a meditation on the value and impact of words devolved into slogans lauding the virtues of King Money, in our Western consumer societies. It is an unusual and tenacious meditation on the 'outside' and 'inside' of our lives, on freedom and the lack of freedom, on personal paths taken amidst crowds, all at ground level in a democratic system, certainly, yet one in which the frivolity and perverse abusiveness of its messages are rarely dealt with in contemporary fiction. This is why, as both a writer and a translator, I felt the urge to translate this courageous book, with its diverse stylistic registers and tonalities, which has been written in French by a Romanian author living in Lausanne. It was a difficult task because, to my mind, translating a literary work means respecting it completely, not betraying its inner music, and 'effacing oneself' behind its rhythms. Juana Salabert is a Spanish writer who was born in Paris. Her novels have won several important prizes, her latest novel La faz de la tierra is a finalist for the Best European Book Prize, the latest novel was translated into English by the Romanian author living in Lausanne. It was a difficult task because, to my mind, translating a literary work means respecting it completely, not betraying its inner music, and 'effacing oneself' behind its rhythms. Juana Salabert is a Spanish writer who was born in Paris. Her novels have won several important prizes, her latest novel La faz de la tierra is a finalist for the Best European Book Prize, the latest novel was translated into English by the Romanian author living in Lausanne. It was a difficult task because, to my mind, translating a literary work means respecting it completely, not betraying its inner music, and 'effacing oneself' behind its rhythms.
wie neugierig war und seiner jungenhaften Art nicht
Haut und langen, schmalen Gliedern, die so schüchtern
mit grünen Augen, schwarzem Haar, fast olivenfarbener
Speisekarte, dann für die Kellnerin, eine junge Sizilianerin
mit Blick auf Osteria del Nonno
So fuhr er allein, aß in einer
Leichtigkeit des Orts genießen sollten, mochte ihm keiner
dort in einem Grotto oder einer Trattoria die mediterrane
dass nun doch alle gemeinsam nach Locarno fahren und
erhielt, war dürftig, und als er zum Abschluss vorschlug,
und Schwarzmalerei zu beschwören. Der Applaus, den er
den Versuchen zu votieren, eine neue Ära der Finsternis
losigkeit, für eine frisch-fröhliche Ignoranz gegenüber all
für ein Europa in lichten Tönen, für Wagemut und Sorg-
»Anstreicher Hitler« erwähnte, um von dort ausgehend
auch seine eigene kurze Ansprache, in der er flüchtig den
farben – klar, rein, leuchtend«. Von Wasserfarben handelte

Immanuel Wassermann war zu einer Versammlung von Frei-
geister aus ganz Europa auf dem Monte Verità gewesen, nicht so sehr der Versammlung wegen wie der Fahrt dort-
hin. Der September 1935 war noch sommerlich warm, und er konnte der Versuchung nicht widerstehen, in seinem
offenen Isotta-Fraschini von Berlin ins Tessin zu rasen. Die
Versammlung selbst blieb ihm nur wegen des Essens und
des Weins in Erinnerung, die Reden waren ihm zu düster,
dass er ihnen Aufmerksamkeit hätte schenken wollen. Er
zeichnerte währenddessen kleine Mädchen, die mit elfrig
vorgestreckter Zunge malten, denn auf der Fahrt hatte er
die Idee gehabt, ein solches Mädchen für das neueste
Produkt seiner Firma werben zu lassen: »Isabella Wasser-
farben – klar, rein, leuchtend«. Von Wasserfarben handelte
auch seine eigene kurze Ansprache, in der er flüchtig den

»A little jewel.« SONNTAGSZEITUNG

A MAGNIFICENT DECEPTION
UNO SPLENDIDO INGANNO
GENRE Novel, LANGUAGE Italian

Guido Morreti is a man of the highest inte-
grity, who has worked all his life as an
accountant, first in Italy, then in Switzer-
land. One day, someone robs the service
station where he works. No one is hurt,
but Guido alone notices something, a small
detail he cannot get out of his mind. Shortly
afterwards, he retires. So, is this to be
the start of life of monotony? Or just going
for walks and playing cards? Not a bit of it.
Guido is a man of regular habits and an
irreproachable way of life, but he becomes
captivated by the beautiful and provocative
Vanessa, a professional confidence trick-
ster. Can she really be in love with him?
Or is she after something? And if so, what?
The backdrop to the story is Zürich, an
excessively wealthy and clean city, whose
vices are concealed beneath the manicured
lawns of well-appointed villas, while the
events set in Ascona and Milan highlight the
nervous tension between North and South,
a tension typical of Italian-speaking Switzer-
land. Fazioli tells a story of adventure and
suspense – in which no one is what they
seem. For all their confidence tricks, the
fraudsters are perhaps more genuine than
the austerer citizens who make money,
collect original paintings and live in sumptu-
ous residences, in a round of crowded
cocktail parties and hushed conversations
beside the lake...
Quell’aiuola nel tardo pomeriggio, con la luce che scompariva e l’oscurità avvolgeva le forme e per le sfumature semiavvolte nell’oscurità. Vanessa capì in quel momento. 

Il cane fece i suoi bisogni. Vanessa vide l’uomo estrarre da un sacchetto con un nodo e lo gettò nell’apposito cassonetto, lasciandolo libero di scorrazzare in un’aiuola. Traenne l’uomo e il cane, la strada era deserta. Di lì a poco sarebbe diventato buio. I lampioni erano già accesi e l’occhio faticava a distinguere i colori. Vanessa notò il profilo degli alberi, che spiccava contro il fondale azzurro cupo del cielo. 

Le piaceva quel momento particolare del giorno. Come si poteva definire? Crepuscolo, forse. I tedeschi avevano una bella espressione: Abendsehen. Sguardo serale. Ecce, Vanessa sentiva di avere uno sguardo serale, una sensibilità che la faticava a definire e che senza la strada deserta regalò a Vanessa un’intuizione. Ecco che parla un’aiuola deserta, quasi al buio, quando nessuno lo guarda e l’uomo che raccoglie la cacca del cane, quella strada deserta regalò a Vanessa un’intuizione. Ecce che cosa le mancava: la capacità di rischiare tutto in base a una comprensione profonda della natura umana. Tutte le sue operazioni si basavano sulla psicologia, naturalmente, ma non sapeva come fosse. Era come se avesse vista e intuizione, ma nessuno aveva ragione di dire che le mancava una comprensione profonda della natura umana. 

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Ma prima ci voleva un uomo affidabile. 

A MAGNIFICENT DECEPTION ANDREA FAZIOLI

Excerpt translated by Simon Knight

The refuse truck was passing by on the main street. It stopped at every gateway to pick up the grey plastic sacks. Under Vanessa’s window, a man with a dog stopped to watch the bin men. Men are always fascinated by work, she thought. She had known several for whom it was their only relaxation, watching people work or talking about work. The man watched the bin men as they picked up the sacks and threw them into the back of the truck. Then the truck moved on and the man let the dog off the lead, leaving it free to root around in a flowerbed. Apart from the man and his dog, the street was deserted. 

It would soon be dark: the street lamps were already lit and it was hard to make out colours. Vanessa observed the outline of the trees, silhouetted against the sombre blue of the sky. She liked this time of day. How could you define it? Dusk, maybe. The Germans had a word for it: Abendsehen. 

Evening gaze. Yes, Vanessa felt she had an evening gaze, a sensitivity to shapes and shades of colour half shrouded in darkness. The dog did its business. Vanessa saw the man take a plastic bag from the pocket of his overcoat and use it like a glove to pick up the dog turds. Then he knotted the bag and deposited it in the bin on the edge of the flowerbed. 

It was then that Vanessa understood. 

That flowerbed in the late afternoon, with the light fading and the man picking up his dog’s poo, the deserted street sparked in Vanessa a flash of intuition. This was what she lacked: the ability to risk everything on the strength of her understanding of human nature. All her operations were based on psychology, of course, and on the victims’ cravings. But they followed well-worn patterns, tried-and-tested mechanisms. 

A man she could trust. Vanessa needed to find a man like that: one capable of collecting his dog’s shit in a deserted flowerbed, almost in the dark, when no one was watching and he could have just walked on. In the end, as Vanessa knew very well, no one would collect the dog’s poop but one. 

A Magnificent Deception is a paradox noir, played on the double string of deceit (true) and of truth (deceitful).” IL CORRIERE DELLA SERA

It’s Summer, 1938. Lissy Harb and Ron Berend are spending some time in Brandenburg, working on a Jewish agricultural training project in Ahrensford, near Trebbin. Ron is from Hamburg, Lissy from Vienna. Along with other young people, they’re getting ready to emigrate to Palestine. Once they arrive, they’ll be living on a kibbutz, so they have to learn the skills they’ll need to survive out there. They’re taking courses in agriculture, vegetable farming and joinery; they’re learning new languages and are being instructed in Jewish culture and religion.

Urs Faes’ carefully researched novel reveals to us a little known aspect of Jewish history. It takes as its starting point a photograph of the lovers, and - underpinned by proven facts - imagines how in those uncertain times, young people might have come together and lived in what were called Hochschulen or Jewish training camps in Nazi Germany, at a time of great unrest, fear and also great hope. The Jewish would-be emigrants have lived for a long time in ‘enemy territory’, the Hitler Youth has a camp in the neighbourhood, there’s also an aerodrome nearby. Everyone is fearful, as to whether they’ll be able to get out of Germany in good time, and get permission from the British authorities, to travel to the British Mandate in Palestine.

Interwoven into this picture of a German Summer, is the love story of Lissy and Ron, who meet in Ahrensford, fall in love - and then lose each other again. They wanted to build a life together in Palestine; this novel becomes their touching memorial.

SUMMER IN BRANDENBURG

GENRE Novel. LANGUAGE German

“Summer in Brandenburg is such a thrilling but thoughtful love story, ...a superb contribution to a new genre of story-telling based on memory, in an age when eye-witness tales are disappearing.”

DEUTSCHLANDRADIO KULTUR

“Summer in Brandenburg is such a thrilling but thoughtful love story, ...a superb contribution to a new genre of story-telling based on memory, in an age when eye-witness tales are disappearing.”
Was war das für eine Stimme, ein Lachen, nicht laut, aber eindringlich, übermäßig verspielt, unbekannt, vor allem das: ein Mädchenlachen, das er nie zuvor gehört hatte, ein Klang, der ihm fremd war, kehlig, rauh. Er kannte sie doch alle, die hier waren, seit Monaten, die Mädchen und die Jungen, Chawerot und Chawerim. Er lauschte, hielt die Hand gegen die Sonne, die blendete, Geräusch, darüber der Himmel, blau, prallblau, dieser große Himmel, Frühsummer noch und heißt. Schnell sprang er über die Schattenspreizung auf dem Weg, eilte dem Stall zu, wollte das Tor schließen, dann hinunter zum Sportplatz, für ein paar Ballhörner in den Korb vor dem Abendbrot. Vom Brunnen drang noch immer das Lachen herüber, ausgedehnt und breit. Was gab es da zu lachen, vor dem Brunnen. Dahinter schimmerte der Schwanenteich; er stürzte die Libellen, an diesem Spätnachmittag als Drohung über dem Schiff, bläulich durchlässig. Hecken säumten das Ufer, darüber das Grün der hohen Eichen, die den Weg versirren die Libellen, an diesem Spätnachmittag als Drohung für den Pioniergeist. Was war das für eine Stimme, ein Lachen, nicht laut, aber eindringlich, übermäßig verspielt, unbekannt, vor allem das: ein Mädchenlachen, das er nie zuvor gehört hatte, ein Klang, der ihm fremd war, kehlig, rauh. Er kannte sie doch alle, die hier waren, seit Monaten, die Mädchen und die Jungen, Chawerot und Chawerim. Er lauschte, hielt die Hand gegen die Sonne, die blendete, Geräusch, darüber der Himmel, blau, prallblau, dieser große Himmel, Frühsummer noch und heißt. Schnell sprang er über die Schattenspreizung auf dem Weg, eilte dem Stall zu, wollte das Tor schließen, dann hinunter zum Sportplatz, für ein paar Ballhörner in den Korb vor dem Abendbrot. Vom Brunnen drang noch immer das Lachen herüber, ausgedehnt und breit. Was gab es da zu lachen, vor dem Brunnen. 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He listened, holding up his hand to shield his eyes from the blinding sun, the glare, and above it the sky, blue, Prussian blue; this huge sky, early summer and already hot. He leapt quickly over the dappled shadows on the path and hurried to the stall, hoping to shut the gate and go down to the playing field and throw a few balls into the net before dinner. From the fountain the laugh, broad and ample, still reached him. What was there to laugh about over by the fountain anyway. The swan pond shimmered behind it; the dragonflies buzzed, a threat above the reeds on this late afternoon, bluishly transparent. Hedges lined the riverbanks, with the green of the tall oak trees above them, shading the path that was sandy and dry because it hadn't rained for days. Crows flew over the high fence surrounding the estate. We have geese and chickens, goats, even two horses, he had written to Helma, six cows, enough for a whole dairy farm, with cheese, curd cheese, quark. Helma's answer had poked fun, talking about summer camp, boy scout fantasies that were not enough for the pioneer spirit needed in a foreign country. What did Helma know. The laugh, whose was it? The voice, a bit loud for a time in which they had learned to be quiet and unobtrusive, not to attract any attention, act as though they were not there. And now here was someone laughing, calling across to the building where the other girls were leaning out and waving with outstretched arms.
Le dimanche 29 mars 1874, Courbet se tient sur la scène d’un théâtre de Genève. Il chante. Il est membre de la chorale de Vevey et il chante sur la scène en s’appliquant. Avec son cofte et sa bedaine, avec sa barbe de sapeur, on l’aurait attendu, on l’aurait cherché au pupitre des basses, or il avait une voix de tête, c’est-à-dire qu’il chantait alors dans les aigus. Il est donc à cet endroit du chœur où sont ensemble les hommes et les femmes. Partout où il a vécu, même très peu de temps, Courbet est mêlé aux sociétés les plus diverses. Il participait. Il s’inscrivait dans les jours de ses semblables en faisant les mêmes choses qu’eux. Il se préférait aux forces et aux calamités, il battait la mesure et fredonnait s’il ne connaissait pas les paroles. Dans la nuit d’hiver, Courbet tirait la rumeur lourde de son pas jusqu’au sommet de l’escalier de bois. Lorsqu’il atteignait sa chambre, faisait grimper et ployer le squelette du lit, il sentait sa joie mouchée d’un coup comme une chandelle.

LA CLAIRE FONTAINE DAVID BOSTC
French original (p. 31-32)

THE CLEAR FOUNTAIN DAVID BOSTC
Excerpt translated by John Taylor

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What exactly is going on around him, Paul can't say, he doesn't know. He has, though, an undeniable suspicion that something isn't right: 'He was ill, so it was said, or, had been. But it wasn't like that for him at all. He didn't have the precise word for this process the troubled people around him called 'convalescence.' He added the word 'contemplative' or 'revitalizing' or 're-emerging.' It is gradually revealed that Paul von Matt has dropped out of his previous life. He's not going to work any more, he's unable to do anything; something has happened. He stumbles through his daily routine, which he could hardly cope with if he hadn't the help of his wife Marion, and he has to live with the fact that his memory is failing. But then, he suddenly and surprisingly remembers something, which is impossible for him to know in such detail, though it's now right before his eyes.

Something has shifted in his mind – we aren't told what. Paul himself knows even less, and sometimes doesn't even know at all, even how to behave. Nonetheless, he who forgets so many things, is not himself forgotten. His brother Theo drops by from time to time, likewise his work colleague Staff – and little by little, from these various elements, there crystallises an idea of the life Paul must once have led. Jürg Schubiger’s novel No Head for Heights tells of this other life. Schubiger is a virtuoso of the subtle shift, the almost unnoticed transition and he sends his protagonist on a precarious journey into the unknown. Even Paul has no idea what awaits him there, because he has lost his memory, he’s forgotten everything. He’s now open to everything and everything is possible. These events are told in a flexible yet tense prose, in which all hangs in the balance until the very end.

Enjoy an excerpt on the next page!

Du machst Fortschritte, sagte Marion, kurz bevor Paul den Löffel so ungeschickt hielt, dass ihm die Suppe dem kleinen Finger entlang in den Ärmel lief. Solche Pannen gehörten nicht mehr zum Alltag. Man rechnete nicht mehr damit.


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CHRISTOPH FEBER born in Sachseln (Canton of Obwalden) in 1954, freelance translator for poetry in Italian, Russian, French, Polish, Bulgarian and lecturer at the University of Catania until 2010, lives in Sicily.

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TRANSLATION HOUSE LOOREN

Since 2005, the Translation House Looren in the Swiss canton of Zürich has been offering professional literary translators from all over the world a place to work and study. All language combinations are welcome. As the first institution of its kind in a country that, with its four national languages, has always been a land of translation, Translation House Looren sees itself primarily as a location for concentrated work. In addition, a programme of events aims to increase the visibility of literary translation and to support its practitioners. Through readings, workshops, and conferences, we offer translators a forum for continuing professional development and for enhancing the public’s awareness of their activities.

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presented by the Federal Office of Culture FOC

Urs Allemann, David Bosc, Roland Buti, Rose-Marie Pagnard, Matteo Terzagli, Urs Widmer and Vera Schindler-Wunderlich are the seven winners of the Swiss Literature Awards for works from the past year. Two Swiss Grand Awards for Literature as well as a Special Award for Translation were also presented by the Federal Office of Culture for the complete works of Philippe Jaccottet, Paul Nizon and Christoph Ferber. For more information: www.literaturpreise.ch

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FRANZ HOHLER
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(Imperium)
CHRISTIAN KRACHT
Translated into Czech by Tomáš Dimter for Mladá fronta

CHI MUORE SI RIVEDE
(Long Time No See)
ANDREA FAZIOLI
Translated into French by Nicolas Bühler for Plaisir de Lire

GESCHWISTER TANNER
(The Tanners)
ROBERT WALSER
Translated into Greek by Vasileios Pateras for Printa Books

DAS LIED VOM HONIG. EINE KULTURGESCHICHTE DER BIENEN
(The Song of Honey – A Cultural History of the Bee)
RALPH DUTLI
Translated into Dutch by Olaf Brenningmeijer for Cossee Publishers

L’OGRE : AVEZ-VOUS DÉJÀ GIFLÉ UN RAT ?
(The Tyrant; Have You Ever Slapped a Rat?)
JACQUES CHESSEX
Translated into Armenian by Aleksandr Topchyan for Lusabats Publishing House

FLAMETTI ODER VOM DANDYSMUS DER ARMEN
(Flametti or The Dandyism of the Poor)
HUGO BALL
Translated into English by Catherine Schelbert for Wakefield Press

EFINA
(Efinà)
NOÉLLE REVAZ
Translated into Italian by Maurizia Balmelli for Keller editore

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