From One Reader to Another

An invitation to read internationally

To celebrate the tenth anniversary of its Writers in Translation programme, English PEN is teaming up with The Reading Agency and Free Word to invite book groups to read and discuss titles from the World Bookshelf, a unique online showcase of the most exciting contemporary literature available in English translation.

There are over 100 books on the World Bookshelf but here is a suggested reading list to get you started:

- *The Yacoubian Building* by Alaa Al Aswany (Egypt, Arabic)
- *Dreams from the Endz* by Faïza Guène (France, French)
- *Arab Jazz* by Karim Miské (France, French)
- *Compartment No.6* by Rosa Liksom (Finland, Finnish)
- *The Lady from Tel Aviv* by Rabai al-Madhoun (Palestine, Arabic)
- *Vango: Between Sky and Earth* by Timothée de Fombelle (France, French)
- *The Devil’s Workshop* by Jachym Topol (Czech Republic, Czech)
- *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles* (for younger readers) by Fabio Geda (Italy, Italian)
- *Bronze and Sunflower* (for younger readers) by Cao Wenxuan (China, Mandarin)
- *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone* by Saša Stanišić (Bosnia-Herzegovina, German)
- *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* by Alain Mabanckou (Congo, French)
- *The Goddess Chronicle* by Natsuo Kirino (Japan, Japanese)
- *Allah Is Not Obliged* by Ahmadou Kourouma (Ivory Coast, French)
- *The Iraqi Christ* by Hassan Blasim (Iraq, Arabic)
- *Morning Sea* by Margaret Mazzantini (Italy, Italian)
- *Sworn Virgin* by Elvira Dones (Albania, Italian)
- *A Perfect Crime* by A Yi (China, Mandarin)
- *The End of Days* by Jenny Erpenbeck (Germany, German)
- *The Sound of Things Falling* by Juan Gabriel Vásquez (Colombia, Spanish)
- *The Whispering City* by Sara Moliner (Spain, Spanish)

Share your thoughts about these books by leaving a comment on the website or by getting in touch on Twitter: @englishpen, @readingagency, @FreeWordCentre
How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone by Saša Stanišić

Aleksandar is Comrade-in-Chief of fishing, the best magician in the non-aligned States and painter of unfinished things. He spends most of his time playing football in the Bosnian town of Visegrad on the banks of the river Drina. When his grandfather, a master storyteller, dies of world’s fastest heart attack, Aleksandar promises to carry on the tradition. But then the shadow of war spreads to Visegrad and the world as he knows it stops. Suddenly it is not important how heavy a spider’s life weighs, or why Marko’s horse is related to Superman. Suddenly it is important to have the right name and to pretend that the little Muslim girl Asija is his sister. Then Aleksandar’s parents decide to flee to Germany and he must leave his new friend behind...

About the author

Saša Stanišić was born in 1978 in Višegrad, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and has lived in Germany since 1992. How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone is his first novel and was shortlisted for the German Book Award as well as winning several other major prizes with translations into 24 languages forthcoming. Stanišić is also the recipient of the prestigious Graz and Iowa writing fellowships.

About the translator

Anthea Bell was born in Suffolk and is a translator from French and German. Her award-winning translations include, from German, a number of works by classic authors and, from French (with Derek Hockridge), the entire Astérix le Gaulois series by Goscinny and Uderzo.

For discussion

1. The novel has hopefully made you laugh out loud, but Stanišić’s humour has a dark undercurrent. Discuss the use of humour in the story.

2. Aleksandar describes himself as an ‘artist of the lovely unfinished’. What does he mean by that, and how is the novel a reflection of Aleksandar’s attitude?

3. A number of young girls appear the story – Danijela, Asija, Emina, Marija, Natasa. Are they just replaceable romantic stereotypes, easily interchanged, or do they come alive as individual human beings?

4. Discuss the structure of the novel: orderly chapters to start, then fragmentary letters and notes, then Aleksander’s mirror novel... what is the intended and actual effect of all these shifts in narrative? Is there an overall structure? Is the story more tightly constructed than it appears?

5. Although Grandpa Slavko dies at the very beginning of the novel, his spirit presides over the entire story. How is he a symbol of the old Yugoslavia?