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
The Devil’s Workshop by Jachym Topol

A young man grows up in a town with a sinister history. The concentration camp may have been liberated years ago, but its walls still cast their long shadows and some of the inhabitants are quite determined to not to allow anyone to forget. When the camp is marked for demolition, one of the survivors begins a campaign to preserve it, quickly attracting donations from wealthy benefactors, a cult-like following of young travellers, and a steady stream of tourists buying souvenir t-shirts. But before long, the authorities impose a brutal crack-down, leaving only an ‘official’ memorial and three young collaborators whose commitment to the act of remembering will drive them ever closer to the evils they hoped to escape...

About the author

Jachym Topol is the leading Czech author of his generation. Famous in his youth as an underground poet and songwriter, since the Velvet Revolution he has written the books that have most successfully and imaginatively captured the dislocation brought about by the fall of communism. His novels include Gargling with Tar, which was published by Portobello in 2011, The Devil’s Workshop (2013) and Nightwork (2014).

About the translator

Alex Zucker’s 2013 translation of Jachym Topol’s The Devil’s Workshop received the Typographical Translation Award and was longlisted for the Best Translated Book Award. His translation of All This Belongs to Me, by Petra Hůlová, won the ALTA National Translation Award. His projects include Heda Margolius Kovály’s Innocence, or, Murder on Steep Street for Soho Press, and Tomáš Zmeškal’s Love Letter in Cuneiform for Yale University Press.

For discussion

1. The book is divided into two halves, and compares and contrasts two atrocities of WWII, in Terezin, Czechoslovakia and in Minsk, Belarus. How do the two halves of the book compare?

2. ‘The deepest graves are in Belarus. But nobody knows about them.’ This books shows the massacres in Soviet-era Belarus, a Holocaust which nobody knows about. It raises the question of why Khatyn isn’t recognised as Auschwitz or Terezin are. What does this say about who determines what is remembered throughout history?

3. The simple language of the book contrasts with the complexity of its ideas. How effective is the use of simple language in the telling of the story?

4. Topol, with a certain dark humour, addresses the question of how we remember (or choose to disregard) dark times in human history. What does The Devil’s Workshop say about collective memory and shame?

5. The Devil’s Workshop raises many questions and arguably provides no answers. What questions did the book leave you with?