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 End of Days* by Jenny Erpenbeck

Winner of the *Independent* Foreign Fiction Prize 2015. From one of the most daring voices in European fiction, this is a story of the twentieth century traced through the various possible lives of one woman. She is a baby who barely survives beyond her first breath, and suffocates in the cradle. Or perhaps not? She lives to become an adult and dies beloved. Or dies betrayed. Or perhaps not? Her memory is honoured. Or she is forgotten by everyone. Moving from a small Galician town at the turn of the century, through pre-war Vienna and Stalin's Moscow to present-day Berlin, Jenny Erpenbeck homes in on the moments when life follows a particular branch and ‘fate’ suddenly emerges from the sly interplay between history, character and pure chance.

**About the author**

Jenny Erpenbeck was born in East Berlin in 1967. She has worked on opera and musical productions and her fiction has been translated worldwide. She is the author of *The Old Child & The Book of Words, Visitation* and *The End of Days*, all published by Portobello Books.

**About the translator**

Translator and author Susan Bernofsky, former Chair of the Translation Committee of the PEN American Center, teaches literary translation in the School of the Arts MFA Program in Writing at Columbia University. Her prizes and awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2014, the 2006 Helen and Kurt Wolff Translation Prize, the 2012 Herman Hesse Translation Prize and the 2015 Oxford Weidenfeld Translation Prize.

**For discussion**

1. The unnamed protagonist is given many lives in this book. What is the effect of the branching narratives? In what way can they add up to an account of one life?

2. 'How much better it would be... if the world were ruled by chance not a God.' To what extent is Erpenbeck writing back against the ‘Gods’, absolutes and dichotomies that governed the 20th century – religions, wars, ideologies?

3. The protagonist works for a time as a translator, during her incarnation in Moscow. Erpenbeck draws comparisons between the act of translation and the homelessness, limbo and rootlessness which the protagonist experiences throughout her lives: ‘Where was a poem while it was being translated from one language to another?’ the protagonist wonders as she navigates ‘this no-man's-land of words’. Discuss the book’s treatment of translation. Are languages homes? Identities?

4. Discuss how historical events and forces relate to subjective experiences in *The End of Days*.

5. Does the book suggest that the power of imagination can (at least partially) counteract the inevitability of death?