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)
- *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 Whispering City by Sara Moliner

Barcelona, 1952: General Franco's fascist government is at the height of its oppressive powers, casting a black shadow across the city. When wealthy socialite Mariona Sobrerroca is found dead in her mansion in the exclusive Tibidabo district, the police scramble to seize control of the investigation. Ana Martí Noguer, an eager young journalist, is surprised to be assigned this important story, shadowing Inspector Isidro Castro. But Ana soon realises that a bundle of strange letters unearthed at the scene points to a sequence of events dramatically different from the official version. She enlists the help of her cousin Beatriz, a scholar, and what begins as an intriguing puzzle opens up a series of revelations that implicate the regime's most influential figures.

About the author

Sara Moliner is the pseudonym for the writing duo Rosa Ribas and Sabine Hofmann. Rosa Ribas was born in 1963 in Barcelona, and since 1991 has lived in Frankfurt where she teaches at the university. She is the celebrated author of six previous novels. Sabine Hofmann was born in 1964 and is a former lecturer in philology at Frankfurt University. The Whispering City is their first novel together. Highly acclaimed in Spain, it has been published in several languages around the world.

About the translator


For discussion

1. The Whispering City has drawn comparisons to other international crime thrillers like The Shadow of the Wind and the Millennium (Girl with the Dragon Tattoo) series. What distinguishes this book from others in its genre? What points of comparison are there?

2. With two literary protagonists, Ana the journalist and Beatriz the academic, The Whispering City conjures a world in which those who create, share and appreciate writing are ‘good’, and those who try to silence and control it are ‘bad’. Discuss the novel’s treatment of text, story and writing.

3. The Whispering City is set during the height of fascism in Franco’s Spain, when speaking Catalan was a crime and even fascist police officers ‘ended up in jail because they didn’t show sufficient enthusiasm’. How does the book convey the paranoia and hypocrisy of the time and place?

4. The story follows two female protagonists, solving the complex murder of an influential woman and railing against misogynist policemen. The novel also takes as its starting point the person Mariona Sobrerocca transformed into a ‘blonde, pale, voluptuous… and dead’ body. Is this a feminist text?

5. When it comes to explaining real historical moments, what can fiction do that non-fiction can’t?