



Best European Fiction 2012

Aleksandar Hemon (Editor) , Nicole Krauss (Preface) , David Dephy (Contributor) , Desmond Hogan (Contributor) , Danila Davydov (Contributor) , Jiří Kratochvíl (Contributor) , Armin Köömägi (Contributor) , Róbert Gál (Contributor) , more... Marie Darrieussecq (Contributor) , Bjarte Breiteig (Contributor) , Muharem Bazdulj (Contributor) , Gerður Kristný (Contributor) , Patricia De Martelaere (Contributor) , Noëlle Revaz (Contributor) , Donal McLaughlin (Contributor) , Sanneke van Hassel (Contributor) , Maritta Lintunen (Contributor) , Duncan Bush (Contributor) , Branko Gradišnik (Contributor) , Marija Knežević (Contributor) , Patrick Boltshauser (Contributor) , Pep Puig (Contributor) , Lee Rourke (Contributor) , Maja Hrgović (Contributor) , Andrej Nikolaidis (Contributor) , Michael Stauffer (Contributor) , Santiago Pajares (Contributor) , Serhiy Zhadan (Contributor) , Clemens Meyer (Contributor) , Bernard Quiriny (Contributor) , Agustín Fernández Paz (Contributor) , Janusz Rudnicki (Contributor) , Gabriel Rosenstock (Contributor) , Zsófia Bán (Contributor) , Arno Camenisch (Contributor) , Rui Zink (Contributor) , Edward Gauvin (Translator) ...less

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Now in its third year, the *Best European Fiction* series has become a mainstay in the literary landscape, each year featuring new voices from throughout Europe alongside more established names such as Hilary Mantel, Jean-Philippe Toussaint, Ingo Schulze, George Konrad, Victor Pelevin, and Enrique Vila-Matas.

For 2012, Aleksandar Hemon introduces a whole new cross-section of European fiction, and there are a few editorial changes as well. For the first time, the preface will be by an American—Nicole Krauss—and the stories, one per country/language, will be arranged within themes (love, art, war, the body), to facilitate book club and reading group discussions.

[belgium: dutch], PATRICIA DE MARTELAERE, *My Hand Is Exhausted*

[croatia] MAJA HRGOVIĆ, *Zlatka*

[spain: galician], AGUSTIN FERNANDEZ PAZ, *This Strange Lucidity*

[poland], JANUSZ RUDNICKI, *The Sorrows of Idiot Augustus*

[ireland: irish], GABRIEL ROSENSTOCK, “. . . everything emptying into white”

[hungary], ZSOFIA BAN, *When There Were Only Animals*

[switzerland: rhaeto-romanian · german], ARNO CAMENISCH, *Sez Ner*

[portugal], RUI ZINK, *Tourist Destination*

[georgia], DAVID DEPHY, *Before the End*

[ireland: english] DESMOND HOGAN, *Kennedy*

[russia], DANILA DAVYDOV, The Telescope
 [czech republic], JIRI KRATOCHVIL, I, Loshad'
 [estonia], ARMIN KOOMAGI, Logisticians Anonymous
 [slovakia], ROBERT GAL, Agnomia
 [france], MARIE DARRIEUSSECQ, Juergen the Perfect Son-in-Law
 [norway], BJARTE BREITEIG, Down There They Don't Mourn
 [bosnia and herzegovina], MUHAREM BAZDULJ, Magic and Sarajevo
 [iceland], GERÐUR KRISTNÝ, The Ice People
 [switzerland: french], NOELLE REVAZ, The Children
 [united kingdom: scotland], DONAL MCLAUGHLIN, enough to make your heart
 [netherlands], SANNEKE VAN HASSEL, Pearl
 [finland], MARITTA LINTUNEN, Passiontide
 [united kingdom: wales], DUNCAN BUSH, Bigamy
 [slovenia], BRANKO GRADISNIK, Memorinth
 [serbia], MARIJA KNEŽEVI?, Without Fear of Change
 [liechtenstein], PATRICK BOLTSHAUSER, Tomorrow It's Deggendorf
 [spain: catalan], PEP PUIG, Clara Bou
 [united kingdom: england], LEE ROURKE, Catastrophe
 [montenegro], ANDREJ NIKOLAIDIS, The Coming
 [switzerland: german], MICHAEL STAUFFER, The Woman with the Stocks
 [spain: castilian], SANTIAGO PAJARES, Today
 [ukraine], SERHIY ZHADAN, The Owners
 [germany], CLEMENS MEYER, The Case of M.
 [belgium: french], BERNARD QUIRINY, Rara Avis

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From Reader Review Best European Fiction 2012 for online ebook

Alicia Weinstein says

Great short stories-pick it up often and always enjoy them.

Kirsten says

I'm usually impatient with "best" anything anthologies and their typically pompous contents, but nearly every story in this one was sharp as hell. It gave me hope for contemporary fiction. I'm a huge fan of Hemon, and I now worship him more for his good taste.

Chris says

"One might say that growing up in America right now with an appetite for contemporary Polish, Chinese, or Portuguese literature isn't so unlike growing up as a blues fan on the Dartford Marshes in the 1950s: only 0.7% of the books published annually in the States are translations of literary fiction and poetry, and you'll never hear about most of them unless..." -Nicole Krauss, from the Preface.

"Literature opens our eyes to the horrors and the beauties of the relentless flow of calamities we call the world."

"Literature is an inherently democratic (if utopian) project, capable not only of dealing with the onrushing train of history but with the ever-demanding questions of sheer being alive as well." -Aleksandar Hemon, from the Introduction

this year's volume is divided thematically (sort of). i didn't read the book in order, but i read the stories in each theme together. it worked well for me this way.

Gurldoggie says

Just a wonderful mix of characters and thoughts. Keep it by your bedside and read it for months. Unpredictable and transporting.

Dewey says

Following the overall excellence of the 2011 collection, this one was a complete letdown. Either 2012 was a poor year for European short fiction, or Aleksandar Hemon has run his course as a compiler. Though I think another reason could be the ambiguous and, in a way, childish way in which they split them into categories like 'love' and 'evil.' I didn't read all the stories in the end (brushing through the last nine or so), but the ones I

read did not fit well into the categories. If you read this collection, don't allow these categorisations to cement too much in your mind if you can help it.

That said, it wasn't a complete waste. The two most notable names were France's Marie Darieussecq (a good story about photography) and the prolific Irish language writer Gabriel Rosenstock, who has a large understanding of internationality and whose prose is much better coming from his imagination than when he translates stuff from Irish into English. I'd only really known him before from the latter and from a nonsense novel he wrote, so I was glad to have him redeemed in my mind. The story by Patricia de Martelaere was very interesting and cerebral, but like many of these writers I was disappointed that she hasn't had anything else translated into English. It's astonishing how many Dutch/Flemish writers aren't translated; given its status as a quasi-major language, this translation deficiency is rather unfortunate. As for some others: one plus is including a story from Galician: I would have chosen a different one, but if there's one language one could argue for not having many options, it's that one. The Rudnicki story from Polish didn't speak to me, but it was clearly good and will speak to others. The Czech story by Kratochvil was excellent: it wasn't Kundera, but it didn't let the good reputation of Czech language literature slip. Despite not doing the same for others, Dalkey has also maintained an upward trend in the quality of Estonian stories. The one in this volume, Logisticians Anonymous, was great and funny. The Danila Davydov story from Russia was very good too. If there were any other good ones, I skipped through them. But I might go back and re-read the Pep Puig story translated from the Catalan and the ones from Serbia, Wales, Slovenia and Germany's Clemens Meyer, who is supposed to be building a good reputation in Germany and whose style looks to have much in common with Elfriede Jelinek, one of my all-time favourite woman writers. All the rest aren't worth the time.

If you want to collect the whole Best European Fiction series, then of course you shouldn't overlook this volume. Those who want a short intro to Gabriel Rosenstock and Marie Darieussecq will not be disappointed. But if you want to be impressed by the series, get the 2011 volume by all means. I almost decided not to get the rest, were it not for the juicy looking inclusions in the 2013 volume.

Derek says

best year yet. Though strange that out of 26 European countries & 34 languages, Italy wasn't represented. Are things really that bad here?

Etan Ilfeld says

Excellent collection of short stories from all over Europe (translated from their original languages ;-)
I particularly like the story about the first gay night club in Ukraine.

Anna says

See my video review in The Collagist: <http://www.dzancbooks.org/the-collagi...>

Inexplicably, Best European Fiction features a preface by Nicole Krauss, an American author. There is no context or explanation for why Krauss was chosen to introduce this volume to us. Krauss details the influence that writers in translation had on her. While I do think it's strange to have an American author

introducing a collection of European fiction, I appreciate that Krauss elevates the reader's experience in encountering fiction like this.

But of course the real story is the stories. The fiction in BEF 2012 feels more mixed than the previous two editions, with more middling stories than I expected and few that I was head over heels for. What I liked best is the black comedy, inventive sentences, and the dramas that grapple with the ferocity of modern life, from terrorist attacks to same-sex love affairs. This is a book to keep on your nightstand and to pick through over many months.

Nino Frewat says

I hesitated to buy this book because it had this ridiculous superlative "Best". But then the cover auto-remedied its own deficiency by declaring that this collection is edited by Aleksandar Hemon with a preface by Nicole Krauss, both writers I have previously read and liked in *The New Yorker*.

I read this book in complete web2.0 seclusion: my smartphone was on airplane mode, I had no access to wifi, no access to any library or bookstore or human being to share my reading with, and so this book proved particularly difficult for me. I wonder if one is "permitted" when reading collections to skip some stories when nothing makes sense anymore...

The idea behind this collection is that Hemon selects one story from each European country, or more precisely from each European ethnicity. This is the reason why Spain, for example has 3 stories translated from Galician, Castilian and Catalan. Surprisingly, Italy has none. The stories are grouped according to 8 themes: love, desire, family, thought, art, home, work, evil. Apparently, special effort was given to translation, as Krauss notes it in the preface: there are writers and translators' biographies and I appreciated that. When I had access to wifi again, I checked Dalkey Archive, the publishers of this collection, and it seems they specialize in publishing out of print books, writers that few publishers want to work with, and of course works in translation, precisely because American audience, publishers claim, are not too keen on translated works. Their website even has a growing page of interviews with contemporary writers, such as: David Markson, Cortazar, Kundera, etc...

Belgium

Under the category Love, I liked Patricia de Martelaere's (Belgium: Dutch) *My Hand is Exhausted*, a story about a pure moment of love between a painter and her model, examining along the way painting, or perhaps the creative process, as impossible to separate from the emotions of the creator. I loved the character of Esther, a woman who endures her monotonous life while being fully conscious of its monotony.

Spain

This Strange Lucidity by Augustin Fernandez Paz (Spain: Galician) tells the story of the beginning and the end of a relationship told from the perspective of the guy's dog. I had to re-read the first passage because I could not imagine that the main narrator would be a dog.

Santiago Pajares' (Spain: Castilian) *Today* is a story that I loved because it's one of the few that I found quite funny. It deals, as its title tells, with the protagonist's daily life, his one and a half relationship which at the start of the book has ended and the changes that happen with him at work, changes against which he has no

saying. I think we all find ourselves in such a situation when we decide, today or tomorrow, that we will be changing something with out daily routine, something to keep the negative vibes away.

" It's not that I haven't gotten laid in a year and a half, of course that's not it. I've had sex with three women. I met all three in a bar - not in the same bar - and I asked all three if they wanted to get breakfast the next morning, but they all declined. They had to get to work. All three of them worked on Sunday."

"I work for a technology company, a midsize company that's been acquired by large corporation, so that even though I still work in the same office, and the majority of my colleagues are still around, our logo is different now."

Estonia

One of the stories I loved was Armin Koomagi's Logisticians Anonymous. It's funny and smart, and talks about an expert in logistics who is so efficient in his work and in reorganization of businesses that he once fired himself to improve efficiency. It's quite a different take at the current corporate world obsessed with cost-cuttings and competitiveness and its implications on our own daily lives, us who populate the corporate world.

Norway

I was completely taken by Bjarte Breiteig's Down There They Don't Mourn. In this story a student at a vocational school takes an escape from his swimming class and together with a friend goes on destroying the content of the classrooms along with the students' projects. The violence that is quite visible in his acts made me wonder why a Norwegian would write about violence and destruction until I read the author's biography bit in the book, and recalled the massacre that Anders Breivik committed.

This story is one of the reasons why I liked this collection and even ordered the 2014 one. In a quick glimpse of 10 pages at most, one gets a feeling of a distant society and the issues that people have to deal with. Strangely, this reason is also why I find foreign literature difficult to read, since I sometimes am not familiar, except vaguely, with the socio-political construct of a certain country, or with the personal background of a particular writer.

CONCLUSION

All in all, I liked this collection. The stories weren't all straightforward and easy to digest, but their advantage to me - and this was highlighted in the preface - is that they gave me a different take on the issues that are affecting Europe. By a different take, I mean different from the one I get reading newspapers and magazines and blogs. These stories present characters, they take the time to develop the characters and their surroundings, even though they are short stories, they showed me how ordinary people cope with the changing world. Packing the lives of ordinary people in short stories, offers the reader the much needed advantage of staying away from political colorings that frequently taint the news as reported by the media. Lives change independently of political strategies, partisan calculations or changes in economic orientations. The human being will find methods to cope, some are time-tested, some are unorthodox, some are criminal and some decide to just quit.

More on my blog

Arkadi says

There are a few good stories, the vast majority are so so/boring and a few are just stupid. For a book this size this is unforgivable.

Charlotte says

It was good to read a cross-section of new fiction from the far-flung corners of Europe and to remember that we brits on our insular island are still part of a Europe that is rich in history and culture. The quality of the writing was varied but I do love a story rampage and reading this anthology was like belting through the dreams of dozens of dozing Europeans at high speed. Great respect to Aleksander Hemon for the crazy endeavour that putting together this book must be. So many different languages and such a wealth of work to sift through in one year! I guess he thinks it's worth it though: 'literature is the best way to stay truly engaged with the immensity of human experience. ... [it's] an inherently democratic (if utopian) project, capable not only of dealing with the onrushing train of history but with the ever-demanding questions of sheer being alive as well.'

All the big stuff gets covered in some respect. My favourite stories were...

Estonian Armin Koomagi's story 'Logisticians Anonymous', which reminded me of Nabokov's 'Symbols and Signs' (<http://www.newyorker.com/archive/1948...>) and was funny from a philosophy point of view.

The psychologically spooky and vaguely sad tale from French Marie Darriessecq ('Jeurgien the Perfect Son-in-Law').

Jubilant, Nietzschean rage and angst found in Norwegian Bjarte Breiteig's 'Down There They Don't Mourn' and Croatian Maja Hrgovic's 'Zltaka'. Also, Castilian Santiago Pajares' 'Today'.

And on the other end of the spectrum, there was tragically ascetic and restrained stories of Dutch Patricia De Martelaere's 'My Hand is Exhausted' and Gabriel Rosenstock's '...everything emptying into white'.

Polish Janusz Rudnicki's 'The Sorrows of Idiot Augustus' probably treads the line between these two extremes. Honest about gut feelings like Duncan Bush's 'Bigamy' (from Wales). The first character acts upon the gut instincts, the second doesn't. One devastated, liberated, and ruined, the other devastated in his silence.

One downright weird one from Ukraine: 'The Owners' by Serhiy Zhadan. And one politically jabby one, which I read on a bus in London and which cheered me up and woke me up nicely 'The Woman with the Stocks' by German Michael Stauffer.

Tuxlie says

“Best European Fiction is an exhilarating read.”—TimeNow in its third year, the Best European Fiction series has become a mainstay in the literary landscape, each year featuring new voices from throughout Europe alongside more established names such as Hilary Mantel, Jean-Philippe Toussaint, Ingo Schulze, George Konrad, Victor Pelevin, and Enrique Vila-Matas. For 2012, Aleksandar Hemon introduces a whole new cross-section of European fiction, and there are a few editorial changes as well. For the first time, the preface will be by an American—Nicole Krauss—and the stories, one per country/language, will be arranged within themes (love, art, war, the body), to facilitate book club and reading group discussions.

MJ Nicholls says

All year long the Dalkey Archive sends its minions roaming across Europe for the Best Fiction, peeping under kettles in Prague, sifting under barstools in Utrecht, raiding towerblocks in Bristol for the Truly Best Words on Paper. Not really. The logistics of screening all mildly avant-garde writers in every European nation to find the edgiest freshest morsels are mindbending—who reads work in the original languages before translations are commissioned? how are untranslated writers read in the first place? how many writers in each nation are read before entrants are chosen, and who translates those writers so Aleksandar Hemon can read them? More likely countries elect entrants via word-of-mouth or emails sent to John O’Brien by cultural attachés, limiting the amount of truly audacious stories that make their way into these anthologies. And sadly, the word that came to mind with this collection was *tame*. Inventive, distinctive, but hardly bursting with writers urgently in need of my readerly attention. If anything the pseudopoetical literariness of many of these pieces sees Europe only catching up with the work McSweeney’s was turning out at the start of the millennium. Otherwise, seasonally entertaining.
