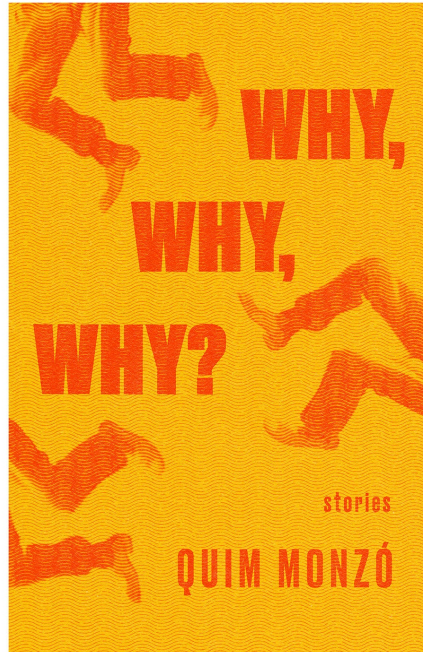


By Quim Monzó
Translated by Peter Bush
119 pp. Open Letter. Paper, \$13.95.



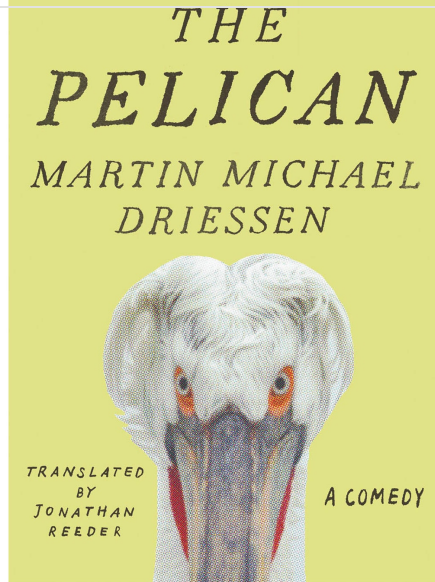
The human, all too human, neuroses laid bare in Monzó’s pithy stories can be discomfiting to read for the nerves they strike — the lies we tell to get by, the rationalizations and hypocrisies, the forbidden thoughts, the randomness of events. In this Catalan writer’s hands, everything can be turned on its head and nothing is sacred, not even fairy tales. What happens after the prince kisses the toad and is rewarded with the woman of his dreams? He looks at his watch, wonders what to say. “What should they talk about? Should he suggest they go straight to his place or will she take it the wrong way?” What happens after Cinderella moves into the palace and becomes queen — and discovers the king is having an affair? If only the shoe hadn’t fit, if only she hadn’t followed him that night and found, at the foot of a bed somewhere deep in the palace, “her husband’s shoes and two pair of extremely high-heeled women’s shoes, one black, size 40, and the other red, size 41” — just the sizes worn by her stepsisters.

Monzó weaves new adages from the well-worn, like the caution to be careful what you wish for. In the story “Love,” “the soccer player” yearns for his lover, “the archivist” — Monzó employs unusual naming conventions — to stop being so mean, so prickly, and to treat him with “the tenderness she is now afraid to show.” And yet, when she finally does. ...

You have 4 free articles remaining.
[Subscribe to The Times](#)

THE PELICAN

By Martin Michael Driessen
Translated by Jonathan Reeder
228 pp. Amazon Crossing. \$19.95.



Josip and Andrej are insignificant men in an insignificant coastal town in 1980s Yugoslavia who form an improbable relationship as each other's blackmailer in this funny, serious, clever novel by a Dutch writer and director. Andrej, a postman who reads other people's mail, starts extorting Josip over his affair with a woman from Zagreb. Josip, a World War II veteran who runs the town's historic funicular, follows suit when he finds out about Andrej's illicit mail habit. Along the way, they become friends, all the while unaware that the other is a Judas.

Each feels he deserves more from life — Josip, more love; Andrej, more recognition — and though their methods may be unsavory, they remain sympathetic if simple characters trying to get by in a complicated world. And it's about to get a whole lot more complicated, as civil war draws ever closer. Because, even here, in this "wallflower of European history," known only for its clock museum and pink pelicans, deeply held hatreds lie in wait. "Sometimes it seemed to the townspeople that the sunshine and sparkling blue sea might be camouflaging some approaching misfortune and inevitable death," Driessen writes. "But most people chose not to think about it. Not think about it, and carry on with one's everyday activities, seemed the most sensible thing to do." Everyday activities like delivering letters, operating the funicular, going fishing, cheating on your wife and blackmailing your friend.

A KITCHEN IN THE CORNER OF THE HOUSE

By Ambai

Translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom

363 pp. Archipelago. Paper, \$20.