

The
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International
Booker
Prize

From Judging Room to Living Room A Discussion Guide for Readers



The Dangers of Smoking in Bed

Mariana Enríquez

Translated from Spanish by Megan McDowell

Granta Books

thebookerprizes.com

What the judges decided

'An extraordinarily intelligent collection of short stories that knowingly uses the tropes of the horror story, the ghost story and even pulp fiction to think about Argentina's painful past. In the process, it fashions a 'Magical Realism Version 2.0', from a subtly feminist perspective. Smart, political, unputdownable.'

What the judges discussed: ideas to explore

- *The Dangers of Smoking in Bed* features missing children who come back from the dead and unearthed bones that carry terrible curses. What does it tell you about how a writer can use fiction to help process the past?
- The voices in the stories are quite nonchalant, almost dismissive about the supernatural elements. What effect does this have on the reader?
- The jacket sleeve says: 'Welcome to Buenos Aires, a place of nightmares and twisted imaginings.' Mariana Enríquez, as the judges said, has studied magical realism, a kind of writing that Latin America made famous. How does she use magical realism to tell us something about Argentina?
- Why do you think we like reading books that make us squirm?
- Which is your favourite story? And which do you think is the author's favourite story?

About the book

Written against the backdrop of contemporary Argentina, *The Dangers of Smoking in Bed* is populated by unruly teenagers, crooked witches, homeless ghosts, and hungry women. The stories walk the uneasy line between urban realism and horror, but with a resounding tenderness toward those in pain, in fear and in limbo. As terrifying as they are socially conscious, the stories press into the unspoken - fetish, illness, the female body, the darkness of human history - with bracing urgency. A woman is sexually obsessed with the human heart; a lost, rotting baby crawls out of a backyard and into a bedroom; a pair of teenage girls can't let go of their idol; an entire neighbourhood is cursed to death when it fails to respond correctly to a moral dilemma.

About the author and translator

Mariana Enríquez was born in 1973 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She is a novelist, journalist and short-story writer. As well as *Things We Lost in the Fire* and *The Dangers of Smoking in Bed*, she is the author of a collection of travel writings, a novella and three novels. In 2019 her latest novel, *Our Share of Night*, was awarded the prestigious Premio Herralde de Novela. She is an editor at *Página/12*, a newspaper based in Buenos Aires. Her novels in Spanish include *Bajar es lo peor*, *Cómo desaparecer completamente*, *Éste es el mar* and *Nuestra parte de noche*.

Megan McDowell was born in October 1978 in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, USA. Her translations include books by Alejandro Zambra, Samanta Schweblin, Mariana Enríquez, Lina Meruane and Carlos Fonseca. Her short story translations have been published in *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *Tin House*, *McSweeney's*, *Granta*, *The Atlantic* and *Harper's*, among others. She has won the English PEN award for writing in translation and the Valle-Inclán prize from the Society of Authors, and has been shortlisted or longlisted for the International Booker Prize three times. She has also won a 2020 Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She lives in Santiago, Chile.



The author says...

'These are stories about our ghosts, our history and its violence.'



The translator says...

'It's the details of the characters' normal lives that make the abnormal parts hit harder. To create that darkness, you have to create a convincing light, for the contrast.'