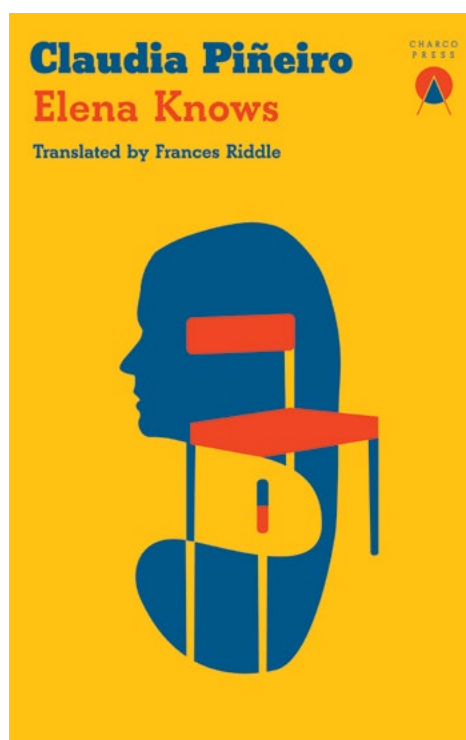




Reading Guide



Elena Knows

Claudia Piñeiro

Translated by Frances Riddle

Charco Press

thebookerprizes.com

What the judges said

'*Elena Knows*, Claudia Piñeiro's short and deeply felt novel, evokes the loneliness of ageing and the uncertainty of memory. Frances Riddle's brutal yet sparing translation suggests the shadows and light of noir without ever eclipsing the very human tragedy at the core of the book.'

About the book

From the 'Hitchcock of the River Plate' (*Corriere della Sera*) comes *Elena Knows*, a unique story that interweaves crime fiction with intimate tales of morality and search for individual freedom.

After Rita is found dead in the bell tower of the church she used to attend, the official investigation into the incident is quickly closed. Her sickly mother is the only person still determined to find the culprit. Chronicling a difficult journey across the suburbs of the city, an old debt and a revealing conversation, *Elena Knows* unravels the secrets of its characters and the hidden facets of authoritarianism and hypocrisy in our society.

About the author

As an author and scriptwriter for television Claudia Piñeiro (b. Argentina, 1960) has already won numerous national and international prizes, among them the renowned German Literaturpreis for *Elena Knows* and the prestigious Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Prize for *Las grietas de Jara* (A crack in the wall). She is best known for her crime novels which are bestsellers in Argentina, Latin America and around the world. Many of her novels have been adapted for the big screen. Claudia Piñeiro is the third most translated Argentinian author, after Borges and Cortázar. More recently, Piñeiro has become a very active figure in the fight for the legalisation of abortion in Argentina and for the legal recognition of writers as workers. Her fiction (as shown with *Elena Knows*) is rooted in the detective novel but has recently turned increasingly political. She's been called 'the Hitchcock of the River Plate'.

About the translator

Frances Riddle was born in Raleigh, US and lives in Buenos Aires, where she works as a translator, writer, and editor. She holds an MA in translation studies from the University of Buenos Aires and a BA in Spanish literature. Her book-length publications include *A Simple Story* by Leila Guerriero (New Directions, 2017); *Bodies of Summer* by Martín Felipe Castagnet (Dalkey Archive Press, 2017); and *The Life and Deaths of Ethel Jurado* (Hispanbooks, 2017). This is her fourth title for Charco Press after *Slum Virgin* by Gabriela Cabezón Cámara (2017), *The German Room* by Carla Maliandi (2018) and *Theatre of War* by Andrea Jeftanovic (2020).



The author says...

From the start of the book, Elena wants to know why her daughter appeared hanging in the belfry of the church. When I wrote the book, my creative writing teacher, Guillermo Saccomanno, suggested I change the form of death because he found it too unlikely. The fact is, in Burzaco, the small town in the province of Buenos Aires where I was born and grew up, it wasn't unusual for someone to climb up to the church belfry to kill themselves. In fact, during my childhood, I saw dead people being brought down from the belfry of the Church of the Immaculate Conception on three occasions. After that comment by my teacher, chatting with a friend I grew up with, we had the following conversation: 'Are you writing at the moment?' she asked me. 'Yes,' I replied. 'What's the new novel about?' 'It's the story of a woman whose daughter is found hanging from the belfry and she wants to know if she killed herself or was killed.' 'Ah, so it takes place in Burzaco then,' my friend concluded.



The translator says...

I think the things I found most enjoyable about translating *Elena Knows* were also the biggest challenges. I was initially drawn to the style and format of this book with its long sentences and long paragraphs and unmarked speech. Elena's day is structured around her medication schedule since when her pill wears off she isn't able to move, and the book is structured this way as well: the readers witness all the everyday complications of her Parkinson's disease, which is hard to read about, hard to translate.

Further reading

Jorge Luis Borges *Labyrinths*

Julio Cortázar *Blow-up and Other Stories*

Manuel Puig *Kiss of the Spider Woman*

Gabriela Cabezón Cámara *The Adventures of China Iron*

Samanta Schweblin *Fever Dream*

Mariana Enríquez *The Dangers of Smoking in Bed*

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