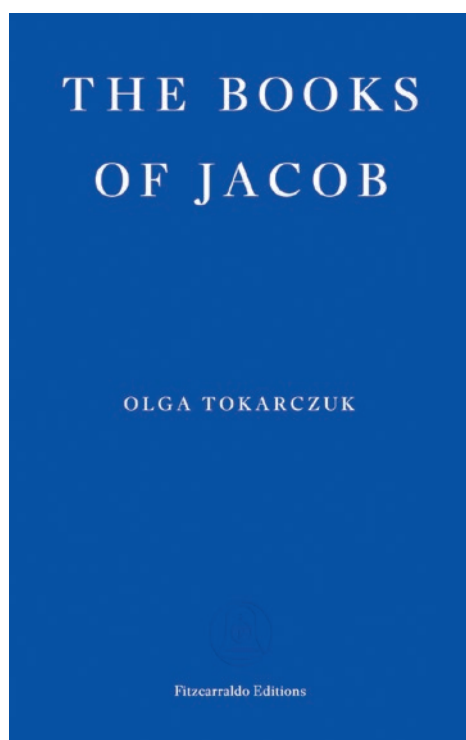




Reading Guide



The Books of Jacob

Olga Tokarczuk

Translated by Jennifer Croft

Fitzcarraldo Editions

thebookerprizes.com

What the judges said

'Olga Tokarczuk's *The Books of Jacob* weaves an epic tapestry from the bizarre, mundane, and utterly unpredictable sweep of history as it is created moment by moment, crammed with a staggering cast of characters, places and historical events. Jennifer Croft's lithe, elegant translation nimbly conveys the novel's delicate irony and its ethereal beauty.'

About the book

In the mid-eighteenth century, as new ideas begin to sweep the continent, a young Jew of mysterious origins arrives in a village in Poland. Before long, he has changed not only his name but his persona; visited by what seem to be ecstatic experiences, Jacob Frank casts a charismatic spell that attracts an increasingly fervent following. In the decade to come, Frank will traverse the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires, throngs of disciples in his thrall as he reinvents himself again and again, converts to Islam and then Catholicism, is pilloried as a heretic and revered as the Messiah, and wreaks havoc on the conventional order, Jewish and Christian alike, with scandalous rumours of his sect's secret rituals and the spread of his increasingly iconoclastic beliefs. In *The Books of Jacob*, her masterpiece, 2018 Nobel Prize in Literature laureate Olga Tokarczuk writes the story of Frank through the perspectives of his contemporaries, capturing Enlightenment Europe on the cusp of precipitous change, searching for certainty and longing for transcendence.

About the author

Olga Tokarczuk is the author of nine novels, three short story collections and has been translated into thirty languages. Her novel *Flights* won the 2018 International Booker Prize, in Jennifer Croft's translation. In 2019, she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. She was born in Sulechów, Poland in 1962 and lives in Wrocław.

About the translator

Jennifer Croft is the recipient of Fulbright, PEN, and National Endowment for the Arts grants, as well as the Michael Henry Heim Prize, and her translations from Polish, Spanish, and Ukrainian have appeared in the *New York Times*, *n+1*, *Electric Literature*, *The New Republic*, *BOMB*, *Guernica*, and elsewhere. She holds a Ph.D. from Northwestern University and an M.F.A. from the University of Iowa. She is a founding editor of *The Buenos Aires Review*. In 2018 she won the International Booker Prize for her translation of *Flights* by Olga Tokarczuk. She was born in Stillwater, US in 1981 and lives in Los Angeles.



The author says...

'I think the thing that most inspired me to write this book was that this incredible, amazing story was virtually unknown, so I had a real sense of purpose, of mission, to tell it as accurately and as well as I could.'



The translator says...

'I love translating Olga for so many reasons. Her prose is so lyrical, so beautiful, so soothing, even when tackling the most horrific subjects. I am always fascinated by her projects and her ability to balance accessibility with ambition and range. *The Books of Jacob* was a bit more of a challenge than usual simply because it takes place in a variety of locations in the eighteenth century, which meant I got to learn a lot of new vocabulary in English as well as Polish.'

Further reading

Olga Tokarczuk *Flights*

Olga Tokarczuk *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*

Jennifer Croft *Homesick*

Stanislaw Lem *Solaris*

Boleslaw Prus *The Doll*

Bruno Schultz *Nocturnal Reveries*

Witold Gombrowicz *Pornografia*

Wisława Szymborska *Map: Collected and Last Poems*