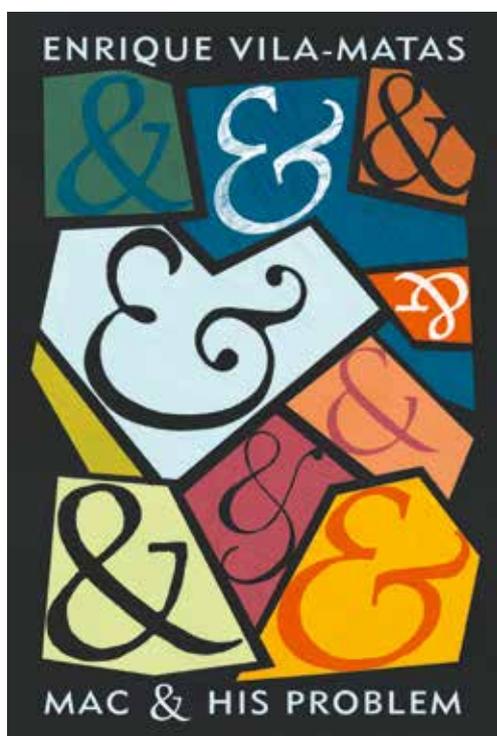


The  
2020  
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# Readers' Guide



## Mac & His Problem

### Enrique Vila-Matas

Translated by Margaret Jull Costa OBE  
and Sophie Hughes

Harvill Secker

Other novels by Enrique Vila-Matas

*Bartleby & Co* (2005)

*Dublineseque* (2013)

*Never Any End to Paris* (2015)

*Montano* (2016)

*Vampire in Love* (2016)

*The Illogic of Kassal* (2017)

[thebookerprizes.com](http://thebookerprizes.com)

## About the author

Enrique Vila-Matas was born in Barcelona, Spain, in March 1948. He is widely considered to be one of Spain's most important contemporary novelists. His work has been translated into 30 languages and has won numerous international literary prizes, including the Herralde Prize, the Prix Médicis étranger and the Premio Rómulo Gallegos. Vila-Matas' books have been longlisted (*Montano*) and shortlisted (*Dublineseque*) for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize, and *Never Any End to Paris* was a finalist for the US Best Translated Book Award. He lives in Spain.

## About the translators

Margaret Jull Costa was born in Richmond, Surrey, UK, in May 1949. She has translated the works of many Spanish - and Portuguese -language writers. Her work has brought her various prizes, most recently the 2017 Premio Valle-Inclán for *On the Edge* by Rafael Chirbes. In 2013, she was appointed a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and, in 2014, was awarded an OBE for services to literature. She lives in Evington.

Sophie Hughes was born in Chertsey, UK, in June 1986. She has translated novels by several contemporary Latin American and Spanish authors, including *The Remainder* by Alia Trabucco Zerán, which was shortlisted for the Valle Inclán Prize and the Man Booker International Prize in 2019. She has been the recipient of a British Centre for Literary Translation mentorship and a PEN Heim Literary Translation grant. She lives in Birmingham.

## About the book

Mac is not writing a novel. He is writing a diary, which no one will ever read. At over 60, and recently unemployed, Mac is a beginner, a novice, an apprentice – delighted by the themes of repetition and falsification, and humbly armed with an encyclopaedic knowledge of literature.

Mac's wife, Carmen, thinks he is simply wasting his time and in danger of sliding further into depression and idleness. But Mac persists, diligently recording his daily walks through the neighbourhood. It is the hottest summer Barcelona has seen in over a century.

Soon, despite his best intentions (not to write a novel), Mac begins to notice that life is exhibiting strange literary overtones and imitating fragments of plot. As he sizzles in the heatwave, he becomes ever more immersed in literature – a literature haunted by death, but alive with the sheer pleasure of writing.

## What the judges thought

'In his metafictional explorations of the tiny repetitions of life, Vila-Matas's imagination constantly produces new constellations. A literary novel that is happy to call itself literary, born out of a compulsion to carve meaning from the mundane.'

## Discussion points

What does Mac say about writing, reading and repetition in the novel?

The novel takes place during the hottest summer Barcelona has experienced for one hundred years. How relevant is this to the story?

Do you think Mac's writing is more a diary or a novel?

How does Mac use *Walter and His Problem* for his own work?

The US title of the novel is *Mac's Problem*. Do you think this gives a different impression of the book?

## Themed reading

*53 Days* by Georges Perec  
*If On a Winter's Night a Traveller* by Italo Calvino  
*The Confidence-Man* by Herman Melville

## Useful links

<http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/espana/vilamat8.htm>

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/enrique-vila-matas/mac-s-problem/>

<https://www.bookforum.com/print/2601/mac-s-problem-by-enrique-vila-matas-20815>

<https://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/the-runaway-combinatorics-of-macs-problem/>

<https://www.the-fts.co.uk/articles/vila-matas-fiction/>

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