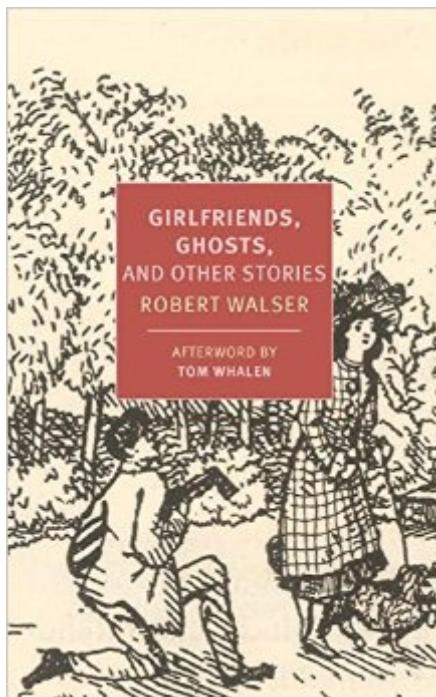


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Girlfriends, Ghosts, And Other Stories (New York Review Books Classics)



Synopsis

Girlfriends, Ghosts, and Other Stories brings together eighty-one brief texts spanning Robert Walser's career, from pieces conceived amid his early triumphs to later works written at a psychiatric clinic in Bern. Many were published in the feuilleton sections of newspapers during Walser's life; others were jotted down on slips of paper and all but forgotten. They are strung together like consciousness, idiosyncratic and vulnerable, genuine in their irony, wistful in their humor. Some dwell on childish or transient topics—“carousels, the latest hairstyles, an ekphrasis” of the illustrations in a picture book—“others on the grand themes of nature, art, and love. But they remain conversational, almost lighter than air. Every emotion ventured takes on the weight of a sincerity that is imperiled as soon as it comes into contact with the outside world, which retains all of the novelty it had in childhood—and all of the danger.

Book Information

Series: New York Review Books Classics

Paperback: 192 pages

Publisher: NYRB Classics; Main edition (September 13, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1681370166

ISBN-13: 978-1681370163

Product Dimensions: 5 x 0.4 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 7 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars (See all reviews) (2 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #29,729 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #40 in Books > Literature & Fiction > World Literature > European > German #288 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Short Stories & Anthologies > Anthologies #535 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Short Stories & Anthologies > Short Stories

Customer Reviews

Tom Whalen has been translating the works of German-language author Robert Walser for decades. This new collection contains over 80 pieces translated by Whalen alone or with either Annette Wiesner or Nicole Kongeter. The pieces excite the imagination, soothe the troubled psyche, or combine these outcomes. As well, some stories will make you guffaw by exploring a dilemma we may share with a put-upon observer. Or you may have a desire to join the narrator and weep at some shared sadness. Or, conversely, bask in the many pleasures of nature Walser

inculcates. Walser has a poetic sensibility, which he imbues in short prose pieces with a fulsome quality that belies their brevity. It goes without saying that the author, who died in 1956, has been overlooked in great part by the reading public. Perhaps the difficulty is promulgated by Walser and his enormous scope. Is Walser a romantic? Yes. Is he a realist? Yes. Is he a humorist? Yes. Is he a serious observer? Yes. This author is not easily pigeonholed. Robert Walser is supremely human. In reading him, you can easily develop a kinship with him. He is your secret friend. As a consequence, you may feel you do not need to share him with others. And while this may be good for you, this sense of exclusivity may rob others of the pleasure of this writer's company. In truth, I believe Walser wants to be one with all of us. Perhaps his inability to break through to others sufficiently through his writing in his own lifetime drove him from the throng of society. Walser is probably one of the greatest writers you may not have heard of. Let's change that. We will derive so much in return if we share him with one another.

I put out Obscure Publications' chapbook of prose pieces by Robert Walser entitled THE NIMBLE AND THE LAZY in 2000. That limited edition of 60 copies consisted of eleven pieces translated by Tom Whalen and Annette Wiesner, together with a longer piece translated by Susan Bernofsky. Nine of these previously hard-to-find translations by Tom and Annette are now included in GIRLFRIENDS, GHOSTS AND OTHER STORIES. Largely skipping over stories written in Berlin, this meticulous NYRB collection focuses on stories from Walser's Biel and Bern periods (1913-1933). An American writer and teacher based in Stuttgart, Tom has done a magnificent job in bringing more of this lucid madman into English. GIRLFRIENDS should be snapped up by all readers who enjoy Walser.

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