

Zsófia Bán**When There Were Only Animals**

Original Hungarian title: Amikor még csak az állatok éltek, published in 2012 by Magvető



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About

Emigration, displacement, the brutal rupture that separates a life into a before and an after – these experiences form the centre of gravity around which the fifteen stories that make up this volume revolve.

On a busy beach in Rio de Janeiro, young Anna is separated from her mother. After a brief nightmarish moment's confusion, she catches sight of her mother standing at the water's edge. But as she approaches her from behind she hears her muttering »Even here ... even here!« despairingly under her breath.

Not until decades later, Anna, now working as a photographer studying the meteorological phenomenon of whiteout – the all-consuming whiteness – at a research station in Antarctica, does she finally come to understand the significance of these words and above all who her mother was, who spoke seven languages but still couldn't find one in which to talk to her daughter.

And Zsófia Bán is a writer of such skill that her text brings the traumatic truth of this life to light in such a way that its memory occurs only in the moment of its telling.

Praise

»It's this constant struggle between great empathy and bold construction that structures Zsófia Bán's narration and creates meaning in the most appealing and mesmerizing way and that leaves, surprisingly, space for catastrophes.« *NZZ*

»Zsófia Bán discovers a whole new continent for Hungarian and women's literature, including an ironic and feminist rereading. And all this is done not with the hubris of a conquistador but the sensitivity of the cultural translator.« *Hungarian Literature Online*

»Images as sharp as razor blades [...] *When There Were Only Animals* is a book full of passion and tragedy.« *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*

»There's something weightless about this book, something akin to garlands, lightly intertwined; but the more you advance into the seemingly disconnected stories, the more it becomes apparent how many shocking moments there are, [...] moments, in which a memory snaps shut like a trap, hope is being destroyed in a matter of seconds, a premonition opens up like an abyss.« *Süddeutsche Zeitung*

»These stories are subtle and provoking, full of unsettling traces – yet the certainty that they cannot just be erased is immensely comforting.« *Der Tagesspiegel*

»Her stories, that lie somewhere between essay and prose, are texts on something

(German title: *Als nur die Tiere lebten*)

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Zsófia Bán, author, art and literary critic, has published several collections of essays. She was born in 1957 in Rio de Janeiro and grew up in Brazil and Hungary. She currently teaches American studies in Budapest.

Evening School was awarded with the Attila József Prize in 2008.

Amikor még csak az állatok éltek was awarded with the Tibor Déry Prize in 2012 and shortlisted for the International Literature Award – Haus der Kulturen der Welt 2014.

and simultaneously texts that realise this something. [...] Those who narrate also have to conceal, and it's exactly the non-narrated, the omitted, forgotten, elided which Zsófia Bán is after.« *NZZ am Sonntag*

»The stories [...] are condensates that challenge the reader. Hard cuts, bold montages connect two, sometimes three narrative levels [...] This extremely appealing way of storytelling, filled with great empathy and suspense despite all calculating ingenuity, follows the example of advanced cinematography rather than that of Marcel Proust's narrative of memories.« *Deutschlandradio Kultur*

»With tremendous power of imagination, Zsófia Bán creates possibilities and memories; her sentences, that come close to being exposed feelings, are joined to form gasping inner monologues, melodic, well-informed and with images that are addictive.« *Badische Zeitung*