This month, we are reading a different kind of existential discussion of life in Dorthe Nors’ book that was nominated for the Man Booker International Prize in 2017.

In thinking about our last read, *The Liar*, there are a lot of comparisons in their treatment of a mid-life crisis, insecurity, and the desire to find a solid and safe home. However, this book is contemporary and approaches the issues in a different, more humorous, and maybe more relatable manner.

I am hoping that some of my thoughts might help inspire your thoughts about the book, and that – as usual – we will have a lively and stimulating discussion.

-Nete Schmidt, Book Club Moderator

1. We jump right into the action (“in medias res”) and meet our protagonist, Sonja, who is a translator of Swedish crime stories – much like the occupation of Dorthe Nors when she started her career. How do you feel about this deductive way of unpacking the action as compared to the more traditional, classic introduction?
2. What are your thoughts about Sonja as “such a fighter” in her relationship with sister Kate and brother-in-law Frank? What is going on and what happens throughout the book? Why is there a barrier between them?
3. How does the notion of “home” define her existence? Where is her “home,” and how is it different from her current home? How do you find your way home?
4. In connection with that, what are your thoughts about the discrepancy between nature and culture/civilization in the book? How does Sonja feel about nature versus the city? What is the significance of the field of grain she keeps remembering? And why does she go to the graveyard to relax?
5. When you think about getting a driver’s license, where would you rather learn how to drive and why? What kind of an instructor would you want (Jytte – Folke) – and, of course, the big question: Why can’t she shift gears – quite literally as well as metaphorically?
6. What do you think is the reason for her problem with balance? Benign Positional Paroxysmal Vertigo. Ear stones? Is it merely hereditary, or is it also a reaction to something?
7. How does her massage therapist try to help her? Is it really help, or what does Ellen represent? Does she want the best for Sonja?
8. How does Sonja feel about direct confrontation? Directness is usually one of the traits ascribed to Danes, so where does Sonja fit in and why?
9. What role does language play in relationships? Is language a bridge-builder, is Sonja lacking language, and can she only communicate via translations?
10. How does Folke succeed in teaching her to shift gears? Why is she so suspicious of him? What does he represent?
11. She says that it is impossible to return to the place you came from. It has changed, and you are a stranger – what does she mean, and is she right?
12. How does one find oneself? Is it necessary to get all the “bad stuff” out of your organism in order not to explode? How does one find balance and order in life?
13. What has happened to her dreams of love and sexuality? Is Sonja happy?
14. What is the significance of the small break with the memories of WWII and the bombing of Shellhuset?
15. As a child, she was happy when playing her recorder in a tree. She did not want to learn from a book; she merely wanted to play. How is this reflected in her adult life, and how does it affect her relationship with Ellen, Molly, and Kate?
16. What is the significance of the meeting with Martha towards the end of the book?
17. What do you think happens at the end of the book and why?
18. What is the book really about, how does the problem with shifting gears illustrate Sonja’s life, and how is it relevant for us?