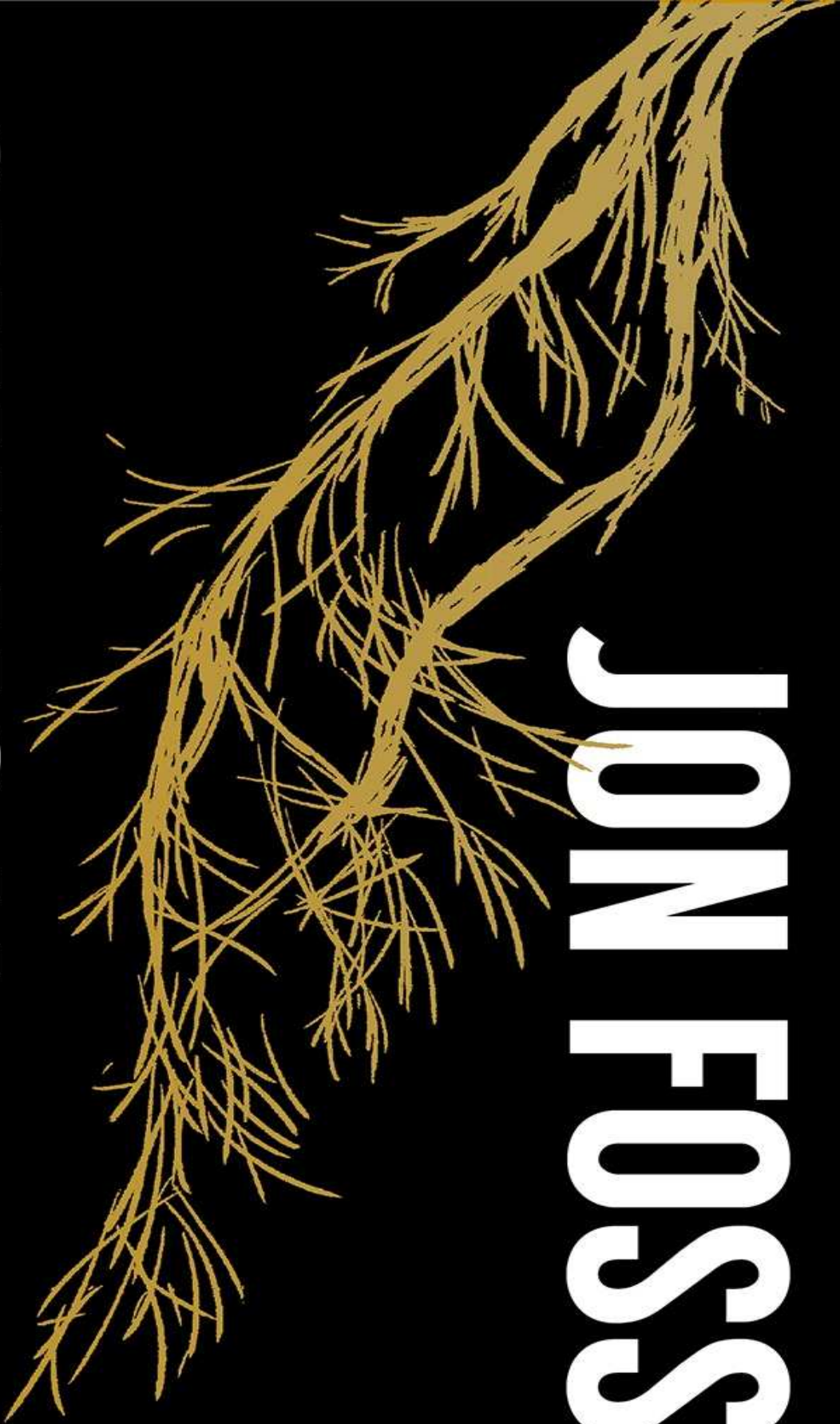


NATIONAL BOOK AWARD-FINALIST

JON FOSSE

TRANSLATED BY DAMION SEARLS



A SHINING

PRAISE FOR *SEPTOLOGY*

“*Septology* is the only novel I have read that has made me believe in the reality of the divine, as the fourteenth-century theologian Meister Eckhart, whom Fosse has read intently, describes it: ‘It is in darkness that one finds the light, so when we are in sorrow, then this light is nearest of all to us.’ None of the comparisons to other writers seem right. Bernhard? Too aggressive. Beckett? Too controlling. Ibsen? ‘He is the most destructive writer I know,’ Fosse claims. ‘I feel that there’s a kind of—I don’t know if it’s a good English word—but a kind of reconciliation in my writing. Or, to use the Catholic or Christian word, peace.’”

—**Merve Emre**, *The New Yorker*

“An extraordinary seven-novel sequence about an old man’s recursive reckoning with the braided realities of God, art, identity, family life and human life itself ... The books feel like the culminating project of an already major career.”

—**Randy Boyagoda**, *The New York Times*

“With *Septology*, Fosse has found a new approach to writing fiction, different from what he has written before and—it is strange to say, as the novel enters its fifth century—different from what has been written before. *Septology* feels new.”

—**Wyatt Mason**, *Harper’s Magazine*

“I hesitate to compare the experience of reading these works to the act of meditation. But that is the closest I can come to describing how something in the critical self is shed in the process of reading Fosse, only to be replaced by something more primal. A mood. An atmosphere. The sound of words moving on a page.”

—**Ruth Margalit**, *The New York Review of Books*

“In *The Other Name*’s rhythmic accumulation of words, [there is] something

incantatory and self-annihilating—something that feels almost holy.”—**Sam Sacks, *The Wall Street Journal***

“It ties *2666* by Roberto Bolaño as my favorite book from the twenty-first century ... What I read was nothing less than a desperate prayer made radiant by sudden spikes of ecstatic beauty.”

—**Lauren Groff, *Literary Hub***

“*The Other Name* trembles with the beauty, doubt, and gnostic weariness of great religious fiction. In Fosse’s hands, God is a difficult, pungent, overwhelmingly aesthetic force, ‘the invisible inside the visible.’”—**Dustin Illingworth, *The Nation***

“Fosse’s portrait of intersecting lives is that rare metaphysical novel that readers will find compulsively readable.”

—***Publishers Weekly, Starred Review***

“Fosse’s fusing of the commonplace and the existential, together with his dramatic forays into the past, make for a relentlessly consuming work: already *Septology* feels momentous.”—***The Guardian***

“Its striking characters and whiplash prose make for compulsive reading, engrossing from the start, unforgettable at the end.”

—***World Literature Today***

“Fosse has written a strange mystical moebius strip of a novel, in which an artist struggles with faith and loneliness, and watches himself, or versions of himself, fall away into the lower depths. The social world seems distant and foggy in this profound, existential narrative, which is only the first part of what promises to be a major work of Scandinavian fiction.”

—**Hari Kunzru, author of *White Tears***

A SHINING

Jon Fosse

Translated from the Norwegian by
Damion Searls



**TRANSIT
BOOKS**

Published by Transit Books
1569 Solano Ave #142, Berkeley, CA 94707
www.transitbooks.org

© Jon Fosse, 2023

Translation copyright © Damion Searls, 2023

All rights reserved by and controlled through Gina Winje Agency Originally published in English translation by Fitzcarraldo Editions in the UK in 2023

ISBN: 978-1-945492-77-8 (paperback)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023941710

COVER DESIGN

Sarah Schulte

TYPESETTING

Justin Carder

DISTRIBUTED BY

Consortium Book Sales & Distribution

(800) 283-3572 | cbsd.com

Printed in the United States of America

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

I was taking a drive. It was nice. It felt good to be moving. I didn't know where I was going, I was just driving. Boredom had taken hold of me—usually I was never bored but now I had fallen prey to it. I couldn't think of anything I wanted to do. So I just did something. I got in my car and drove and when I got somewhere I could turn right or left I turned right, and at the next place I could turn right or left I turned left, and so on. I kept driving like that. Eventually I'd driven a long way up a forest road where the ruts gradually got so deep that I felt like the car was getting stuck. I just kept driving, until the car got totally stuck. I tried to reverse but I couldn't, so I stopped the car. Turned the engine off. I was sitting in the car. Yes, well, now I'm here, I thought, now I'm sitting here, and I felt empty, as if the boredom had turned into emptiness. Or maybe into a kind of anxiety, because I felt something like fear as I sat there empty, looking straight ahead as if into a void. Into nothingness. What am I talking about, I thought. There's the forest in front of me, it's just a forest, I thought. All right then, this sudden urge to drive off somewhere had brought me to a forest. And there was another way of talking, according to which something, something or another, led, whatever that might mean, to something else, yes, something else. I peered into the forest in front of me. Forest. Yes. Trees right next to one another, pines, pine trees. And between the trees was brown soil that looked like it was mostly dry. I felt empty. And then this anxiety. What was I scared of. Why was I scared. Was I so scared that I couldn't get out of the car, didn't dare to. Well, this was the end of the forest road I had driven onto and gotten stuck on, I was near where the road ended. And that was probably why I felt this anxiety, because I had gotten my car stuck at the end of a forest road, and here, at the end of the forest road, there was nowhere I could turn around. And I couldn't remember having driven past a shoulder or turnoff since I'd started on this forest road. And that might well be true. Yes, because if I'd seen somewhere to turn around I would definitely have stopped the car and turned around, since it's not like driving on a narrow road through this landscape of low hills was making me feel any less bored, on the contrary, it made the boredom worse. But I hadn't seen anywhere to turn around, I was probably waiting the whole time for one to turn up, yes, waiting to see

somewhere I could steer the car to the side, back up a little, drive forward again, maybe do it a few more times, yes, until eventually of course the car would be turned around and I could drive back down the forest road to the main road, and then drive to a town, but what town, to some town anyway, where there were people, and I could maybe buy something, a hot sausage in a bun for example, or maybe, I mean it could happen, I would come across a little roadside coffee shop where I could stop and get myself some dinner. I mean it's possible. And then I suddenly realized it had been several days, I couldn't remember how many, since I'd last had dinner. But that's probably how it is for all of us who live alone. It's like a chore to make yourself dinner, yes, it's just easier to grab whatever's closest, a slice of bread if I have any bread in the house, and put something on it, often it's just mayonnaise on the bread and then two or three slices of lamb sausage. But is that what I should be sitting here thinking about, as if I have nothing more important to worry about. But then what should I be thinking about. But how stupid is that, asking that, thinking that. I went and got my car stuck on a forest road, far away from any people, and I can't get it free, so that means I have more than enough to keep me busy, yes, busy is what they call it, busy getting the car unstuck. Because the car can't just stay stuck how it is now. That's obvious. So obvious that it's just stupid to think like this. I stand there looking at the car, and the car just sits there and kind of looks stupidly back at me. Or maybe it's me looking stupidly at it. And god, how stupid it looks, sitting there stuck on a mound, yes, you'd have to call it a mound, between two ruts right in the middle of the forest road, and the road continues for ten or fifteen more feet until it ends at a footpath leading straight into the forest. And what was I doing on this forest road. Why did I drive into the forest on it. What kind of idea was that. What was my reason for doing it. None. No reason at all. And so why did I drive onto the forest road then. It was purely by accident, maybe. Pure chance. Yes, you probably couldn't call it anything else. But chance, what's that anyway. No, I can't start in with that kind of silly thinking. It never goes anywhere. And what I have to do now is get my car free, yes, just that. And then I have to try to turn it around. But that. Yes, it's because I didn't pass anywhere I could turn the car around, if I had then of course I would've turned around, a long time ago, because this forest road

is pretty much the most boring road to drive on that you can imagine. Gentle rolling hills, and other than them the only thing to see was a farm, one abandoned small farm, yes, it must have been abandoned since several windows in the farmhouse had boards of one kind or another nailed over them. And the farmhouse paint was bad, totally gone in many places. And half the roof of the hay barn had collapsed. Rundown houses are sad. Neglected houses. Houses no one cares about. And why doesn't anyone care about them. Because before this house started falling apart it must have been, well, a beautiful house, yes. I would have liked living in a house like that, yes, so I would have liked living in that house, the one I drove past, but it would have had to be earlier in my life, when I was young, not now. And of course I wouldn't have wanted to live in a house as rundown as that one was now. Now no one could live in it, of course not, not people and not, not what. Animals? Maybe. Yes, maybe animals of some kind had moved in. And the house was probably full of mice. Maybe rats had started living in the house too. Or, well, it doesn't matter. There weren't any people in the house in any case, that's for sure, and what I needed now was a person, someone with a car, or better yet a tractor that could pull the car free. But there was no one in the farmhouse I'd driven past, that's for sure. And then I'd driven a long way without seeing anything but these hills, until I saw a cabin above this forest road, it looked in good shape, like it was being taken care of well enough, but the curtains were drawn so there were no people in the cabin either, that's for sure. And so, yes, so I'd have to go all the way back down to the main road to find anyone. And now that I think about it, I didn't drive past that many houses on the main road either, it was pretty deserted around here, yes, after the last time I turned left or right or whatever it was. Had I driven past any houses at all during that last long stretch I drove on the main road. Maybe. Maybe not. In any case it was a long stretch, the main road was probably going to end before too long and I would have had to turn around there if I hadn't taken a left and started driving up this forest road. Because were there any houses there, along the main road somewhere, no, not that I noticed, not if I turned right and not if I turned left, but then again I wasn't looking for any houses either. Houses hadn't been on my mind, to tell the truth. Of course that didn't mean I hadn't driven past some house or another.

Obviously it didn't mean that. I'd driven past more than one house, most likely. And there must have been people living in the houses I must have driven past. Or at least in some of them. Because if no one lived there, why would there be a main road here. Obviously there must have been houses along the main road I'd driven on just now, or maybe not just now, maybe a while ago, yes, before I saw some kind of forest road, some kind of forest road, yes, and I took the left turn and started driving up it. But it was a long way back down to the main road, it would be a long way to walk, and then how far would I have to walk along the main road before I came to a house, no, well, good point. And then when I finally got to a house, there was no way to know if anyone would be home, and if they were home, well, it was by no means certain they'd have a car, or that the person who did have a car would be at home. But when you live like that you need a car. Or maybe not. In the past, nobody had a car. And probably there was a bus they could take. That certainly might be how it was. And in all likelihood I'd driven past a small farm, where they probably had a tractor, a small tractor, maybe a two-wheel tractor. And a two-wheel tractor could definitely pull my car off this damn mound where it was now totally stuck. It's just that it would be a long way to walk on the forest road down to the main road, and then it would probably, no, definitely be a long way I'd have to walk along the main road before I got to the first house. Maybe I should try one more time to get the car free by hitting the gas, going forward, then putting it in reverse. Forward, backward. Again and again. Forward, backward. Yes, I'll try that again. And I stay sitting there, and I look straight ahead, but it's sort of like I'm not actually looking at anything, just sitting there. And after a while I think that it's started snowing, really I must have seen it a long time ago but it took me a while before I thought about it, noticed it, but it had already started snowing, not that much, but soft little snowflakes are falling, or drifting, down and down, and I sit there and try to follow the dance of the snowflakes with my eyes, first one flake, then the next, as long as I can follow one snowflake I do it, in the beginning it wasn't so hard, even though I couldn't follow a snowflake for that long, but gradually as it snowed more it got harder to keep my eye on just one flake, and then I couldn't do it anymore, and I stopped trying, and then I just sat and looked straight ahead and I

thought that now that it had started snowing it was even harder to get the car free, if it was hard before it was completely impossible now. So there was nothing else to do but go get someone who could pull it free. But in that case I couldn't just stay sitting in the car, I had to go find someone. It was just that I didn't know where I could go to find anyone, the small farm I'd seen was abandoned, and no one was in the cabin I'd seen, and it was a long way back down to the main road. And why had I driven so far. Maybe because I was just driving and not thinking about it, I didn't think about how far I had actually driven. Yes, that's probably why. But now, what now. Yes, well, now the only thing to do was find someone with a tractor, or a car, who could pull my car free. But that's just it. Where was I supposed to go to find that someone. I had to walk back down to the main road, then walk as far as I needed along the main road until I got to a house where there was someone who had either a car or a tractor, and people who lived somewhere as inaccessible as this would certainly have a car. They would if they were on the younger side anyway, older people often didn't have cars, they probably never even got a driver's license, and there'd still be a bus every now and then, even to such a deserted place, because I'd driven for a long time and it was more and more deserted as I went on, yes, I took a left, and I drove until I could turn right, and then until I could turn left again, that's how I kept going all the way until I got here and couldn't go any further. Yes, that's how it is. And now I mustn't wait any longer, I can't. Now something must be done, because now it's snowing like anything. And I just sit and watch the snow fall and fall, or sink and sink, you might call it. And it's getting a little cold, isn't it. Yes it is. But then I can probably just start the engine, I can't believe I didn't think of that before, since after all the car has a good heater. I start the car and turn the heat on full blast. It makes a loud hum. And it doesn't take long before a little warmth starts blowing at me, an even stream clearly separate from the rest of the air. It's nice to feel the heat. And it probably won't be long now before it's all warm in the car. The snow is completely covering the windshield now, and I turn on the windshield wipers. I see that it's stopped snowing and the ground out there is white, and the trees in the forest have also turned white. It's beautiful. The white tree, the white ground. And now it's nice and warm in the car. But I can't stay sitting in the