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MEDIA CONTACT: Monica Fernandez, Media Director, media@redhen.org

P.O. Box 40820, Pasadena, CA 91114 / (626) 356-4760 / fax: (626) 356-9974 / redhen.org

Whoever Drowned Here

POETRY BY

Max Sessner

TRANSLATED BY

Francesca Bell

With a magician's deft touch, Sessner raises the curtain on the strange, spectral life of inanimate objects and the sorrows and misadventures of humans who live,

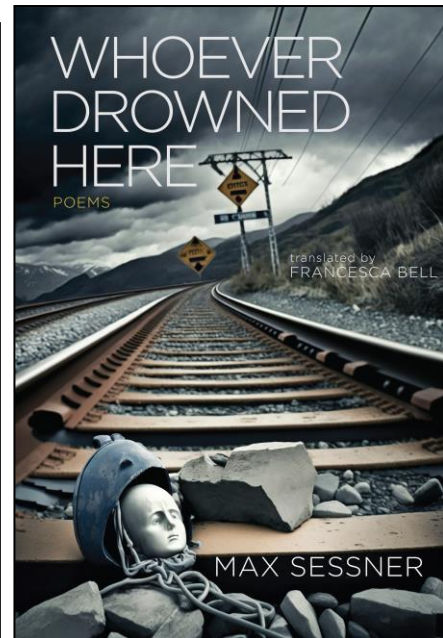
Beloved by contemporary German readers, the poetry of Max Sessner is gathered for the first time in English in *Whoever Drowned Here: New and Selected Poems*. Painstakingly chosen from Sessner's celebrated three collections and from new work, these poems employ a matter-of-fact magical realism to engage the profound, philosophical mysteries of the everyday. Sessner makes nimble use of the material world as he choreographs poignant reenactments of human yearning. Smocks in the window of a dry cleaner "trade stolen / caresses" at night. Death tries on your clothes while you sleep and eats your chocolate. A poem tires of being a poem, "a small mortal / thing that no one notices," and sets off into the world to make a new life. The poems of Max Sessner are like compact, musical fairytales. They delight us and frighten us. They touch us with their ghostly, melancholy fingertips and lead us onward.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Max Sessner was born in 1959 in Fürth, Germany. He has long lived with his wife in Augsburg and has held a wide variety of jobs, working as a bookseller, for the department of public health, and currently for the Augsburg Public Library. Sessner is the author of eight books of poetry including, most recently, *Das Wasser von Gestern* (*The Water of Yesterday*), published by edition Azur in 2019, and *Küchen und Züge* (*Kitchens and Trains*) and *Warum Gerade Heute* (*Why Especially Today*), both from Literaturverlag Droschl. Among other honors, he was awarded the 2019 Rotahorn Literary Prize.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Francesca Bell is a poet and translator. Her debut collection, *Bright Stain* (Red Hen Press 2019), was a finalist for the Washington State Book Award and the Julie Suk Award. Her work appears widely in literary journals, and she has received a Neil Postman Award for Metaphor from Rattle and an Honorable Mention in *Nimrod's* Pablo Neruda Poetry Prize. Bell grew up in Washington and Idaho and did not complete middle school, high school, or college. She lives with her family in Novato, CA.



PUB DATE: August 22, 2023

ISBN: 9781636281384

SIZE: 6 in x 9 in

FORMAT: Casebound

EXTENT: 88pp

PRICE: \$21.00

MEDIA CONTACT

Monica Fernandez

Media Director

626-406-1206

media@redhen.org

MARKETING CONTACT

Tobi Harper

Marketing Director

626-406-1209

marketing@redhen.org

REDHEN PRESS

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Publishers Group West

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ADVANCE PRAISE

“Dreamlike is a place to begin, one of many inadequate ways I might speak of the poems of Max Sessner. Liquid is better, as his poems move like water and surprise me by revealing spaces between objects and people, between moods and moments that I didn’t know existed. If this book were a house, it’d be on the edge of town and have a tree growing through its roof; a river, it’d know your name but never quite make it to the sea; a photo, the person you miss most would be in it but turned around and looking the other way. In searching for passages to quote that would give you a sense of the imagination and vitality of Sessner’s work, its strangely touching warmth, I found it impossible to excise a portion of a poem without including the whole. Lifelike, then, is what I’ll end with, or better yet, alive.”

—**Bob Hicok**, author of *Red Rover Red Rover*

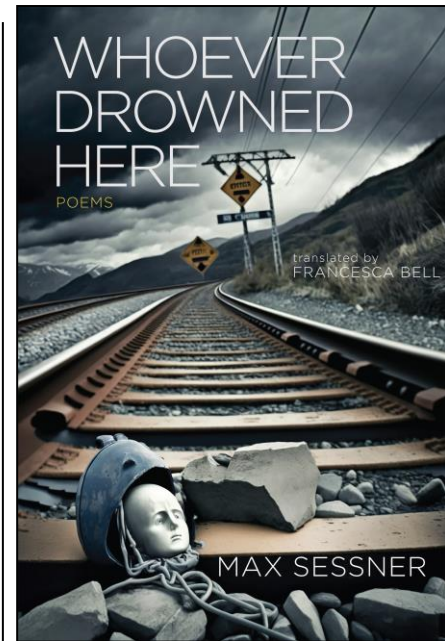
“In Francesca Bell’s nimble and swift translations, Max Sessner’s poems come across from German into English with a deft sureness and dramatic delicacy. The wry, sometimes ironic, voice and point of view of these poems is also probing of the shadow mysteries that animate our everyday lives. Silence, loneliness, unsettled companionship, chaste assertion, and everywhere a sense of shifting depths—Sessner’s poems observe what we miss, and ask us to look again. They are quietly confident about what they know, and what they offer is the kind of value we find only in real poems. I’m grateful to have them.”

—**Joshua Weiner**, author of *Berlin Notebook*

FROM WHOEVER DROWNED HERE

Swimming

Now it is still on the little
lake mid-August the shadows
have deserted the trees and
have first wandered to the shore and
then dived under to
the bottom it makes the water
light if one approaches from the village
the lake in the distance looks like
an eye that stares into the
sky beginning in August it’s the
melancholy that drives me to go
swimming after work
until far into the dusk I
lie on my back and let myself
be carried see on land the beacons
of the cigarettes whoever drowned here
always years after came back



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