

Include Me Out

María Sonia Cristoff

Katherine Silver, Translator

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In the novel *Include Me Out*, a woman tries to remake her life on her own terms and meets unexpected obstacles.

Mara is a simultaneous interpreter who has had enough of a job that demands constant attention to language. All she wants is to observe the world in meditative silence according to the rules in her prized manual of rhetoric. She moves to a small Argentinian town to work as a museum guard where she can speak as little as possible. Her plan is complicated when she is asked to help a taxidermist restore two horses of historical significance, drawing her out of her solitude.

Mara's single-minded focus on her goal of silence is utterly convincing. She is a powerful protagonist whose belief in herself remains strong even as her plans go awry and her attempts to improvise become stranger and stranger. The contrast between Mara's confidence and the oddness of her plans is one of the novel's pleasures. Her refusal to lead a conventional life is both a delight and a challenge.

Cristoff's close third person narrator reports on Mara's thoughts in matter-of-fact, nonjudgmental language that belies her unusual ambitions. This narrator also captures a double view of Mara's colleagues, bosses, and acquaintances, allowing them to emerge both as others might see them and as Mara sees them.

Interspersed throughout are brief sections labeled "From the *Notebook*," with notes from an unnamed source who is perhaps Mara or perhaps Cristoff herself. These sections cover a range of material, including the history of the town's museum, stories of travel and adventure, and accounts of the evolutionary development of horses. They provide background information on Mara's location, job, and personal ambitions that enrich the novel's setting and help to ground the plot.

María Sonia Cristoff's *Include Me Out* is an innovative, genre-bending exploration of women's agency and the power of silence.

REBECCA HUSSEY (January / February 2020)

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