

## Wanderer

**Sarah Léon**

**John Cullen, Translator**

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Patterned after the music of Schubert and described as a *winterreise* (German for “winter journey”), Sarah Léon’s *Wanderer* is a story all about unspoken feelings. Constructed around the relationship between two characters, the novel takes its time exploring the many nuances hanging between them.

Composer Hermin lives in solitude in the Bourbonnais mountains of France, struggling to finish his latest piece against the backdrop of the January winter. Abruptly, his former student Lenny arrives at his cabin, seeking a place to stay. Lenny, a piano savant, has vowed never to play again, and Hermin spends much of the book trying to understand his onetime friend while thinking about their past together.

The book shifts between the past and present freely, with the current day written in the present tense, and Hermin’s memories written in italics and in the past tense. It’s not quite stream-of-consciousness, but it is evocative in conveying the viewpoint of the characters’ running thoughts. This is a deeply internal novel, with more thought and observed than said or done. Through Hermin’s thoughts about Lenny, the reader is left to build their own interpretations of the dynamics between the two men.

Some of these musings become repetitive. Hermin narrates multiple variations of wondering what happened to change Lenny so much; these seem to pad the short book. References to German Romanticism and classical music are underlined and feel inorganic. Various German phrases and terms are translated in footnotes and lose their mystery.

The prose pays close attention to the particulars of the wintry setting and the subtleties of the action and dialogue between its characters. *Wanderer* is a subdued but emotional story.

DANIEL SCHINDEL (January/February 2019)

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