

AWAKE
by Harald Voetmann

Translated from the Danish by Johanne Sorgenfri Ottosen

Nominated for the Nordic Council
Literature Prize

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Harald Voetmann’s eye-opening English debut, *Awake*, is the first book of his erudite and grotesque trilogy about humankind’s inhuman will to conquer nature

In a shuttered bedroom in ancient Italy, the sleepless Pliny the Elder lies in bed obsessively dictating new chapters of his *Natural History* to his slave Diocles. Wheezing, imperious, and prone to nosebleeds, Pliny doesn’t believe in spending his evenings in repose. No – to be awake is to be alive. There’s no time to waste if he is to classify every element of the natural world in a single work. By day, Pliny the Elder carries out his civic duties and gives the occasional disastrous public reading. But despite his astonishing ambition to catalogue everything from precious metals to the moon, Pliny the Elder still takes pleasure in the common rose. After rushing to an erupting Mount Vesuvius, Pliny perishes in the ash, and his nephew, Pliny the Younger, becomes custodian of his life’s work. But where Pliny the Elder saw starlight, Pliny the Younger only sees fireflies.

In masterfully honed prose, Voetmann brings the formidable Pliny the Elder (and his pompous nephew) to life. *Awake* is a comic delight about one of history’s great minds and the not-so-great human body it was housed in.

HARALD VOETMANN (b. 1978) was nominated for the Nordic Council Literature Prize and has written novels, short stories, poetry, and a monograph on the Roman poet Sulpicia. He also translates classical Latin literature, notably Petronius and Juvenal. *Awake* is the first in his series of three historical novels: the second centres on the sixteenth-century Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe, and the final book introduces the eleventh-century German mystic Othlo of St. Emmeram.

JOHANNE SORGFRI OTTOSEN is a Danish translator. She currently lives in Copenhagen where she also works as an illustrator and literary editor.

PRAISE FOR *A WAKE*

'Reading Voetmann's books makes me feel so alive. His voice is like no other, his hold on his material masterful. You will never read anything like *Awake* – a hardcore, pulsating portrait of a first-century Roman weirdo. A wonderful and unpleasant treasure.'

– **Olga Ravn**

'No one else can describe ancient life with such beauty and humour, while never sparing you from the gross and terrifying pain of being human.'

– **Naja Marie Aidt**

'With a scholar's knowledge and a poet's playfulness, Harald Voetmann brings us into the mind and times of its protagonist, Pliny the Elder. Visceral and lyrical, entertaining and provoking, it evokes a dazzling world on the brink of destruction, resounding with our own conflicted age.'

– **Sjón**

'Vivid, earthy, by turns hilarious, gross, and tragic, but always powerfully engaging. Reading and rereading this book remains a rare pleasure.'

– **Susanna Nied**

'This is an interesting book. The writing is beautiful. A fine translation by J.S. Ottosen.'

– **Patti Smith**

'*Awake* is original, piercing, and richly exhilarating. Voetmann's text is a sharp reminder of how powerfully and succinctly well-chosen words can create a world, render experiences, and express thoughts – in short, transport us, to places and in ways we could not have imagined.'

– **Harper's**

'A slim novel of ideas, seemingly turning its back on the present, or rather illuminating from within a turn that leads to the very history of European mentality.'

– **Svenska Dagbladet**

'A flawless and sparkling little monument to human life.'

– **Information**