



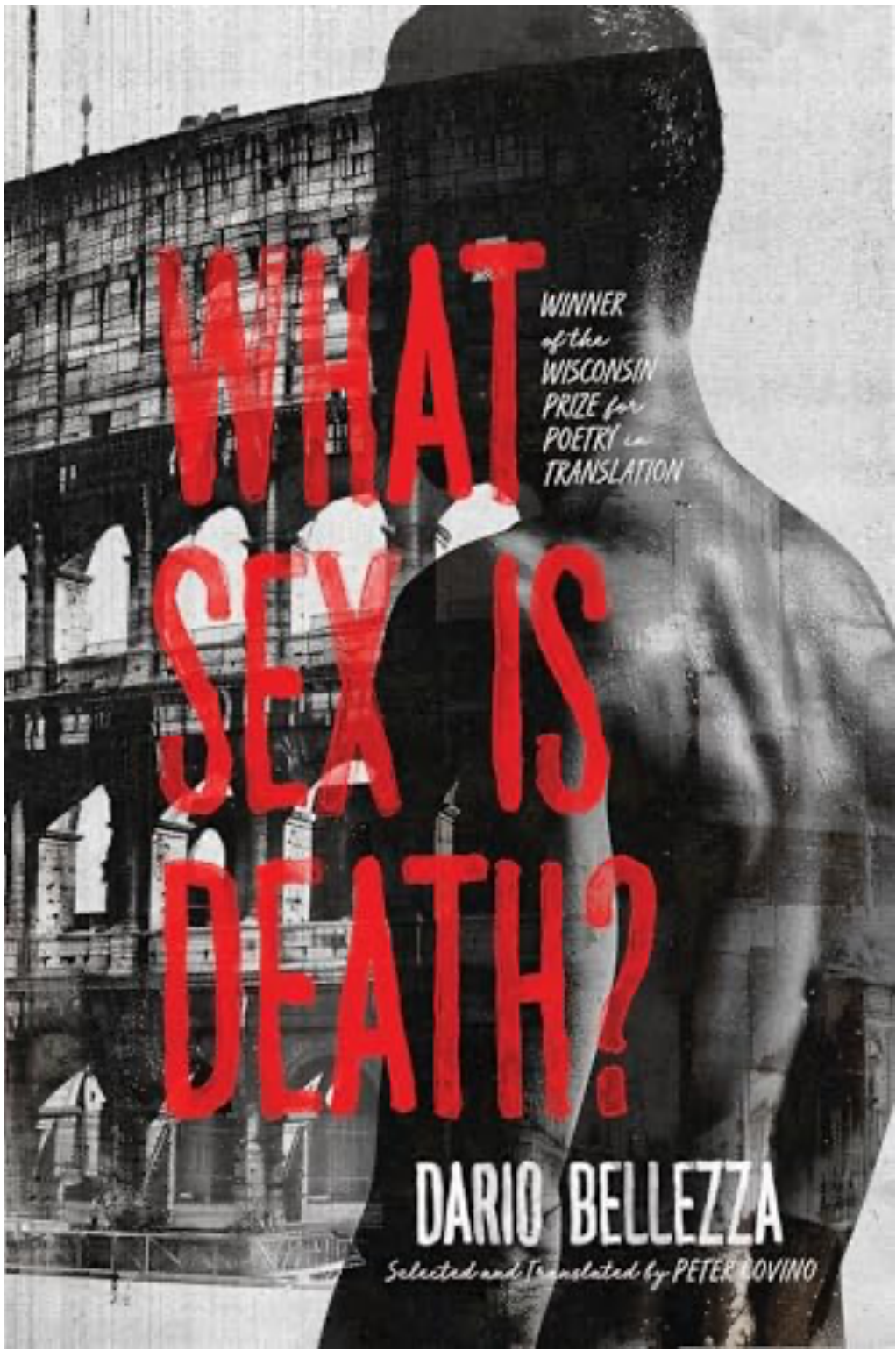
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★What Sex Is Death?

Dario Bellezza, trans. from the Italian by Peter Covino. Univ. of Wisconsin, \$18.95 trade paper (232p) ISBN 978-0-299-35034-5

Roman poet Bellezza (1944–1996) evinces a fixation on death in this intricate collection, his first to be published in English. Indeed, death is a near-constant presence (“We should take note of this:/ that we are flesh and we die”; the body is a “beast that sweats as proof while waiting/ to become cold as a slab of marble”). This obsession provides the backdrop to his vivid explorations of gay sex and desire in “At the Amber Palace,” “Coliseum,” and “[In the mornings, beer, ‘salade,’ a bit of caviar].” There and elsewhere, Bellezza composes erotic scenes of overwhelming poignancy: a casual lover borrows an old T-shirt “to go/ to the sea where you don’t drown/ while bathing your wings.” His later poems take on new dimensions, incorporating odes to his cats (“catness is a constant/ and magnificent essence/ of which men are/ totally lacking”) and arch political commentary (“the bourgeoisie... fears the monsters/ it itself produces”). With the arrival, in poems such as “AIDS” and “[Once again behold repetition],” of the epidemic that would take his life, Bellezza finds, devastatingly, a central subject for his career-long preoccupations: death and eros. It’s a brutal and beautiful introduction to a potent poetic voice. *(Feb.)*

DETAILS



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Imtiaz Dharker

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