



by Necati Öziri
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Fiction

🏆 Shortlisted for the
German Book Prize 2023

Birth Mark

Vatermal

review

Shortlisted for the German Book Prize, Necati Öziri's *Vatermal* is a searing debut about family, trauma and coming to terms with the past. Its keen observations, striking imagery and skilled use of humour make this an immersive and memorable read.

Arda, a university student of Turkish heritage, is critically ill in hospital. As he waits for a prognosis, he begins to write his life story, addressing it to his father, Metin, who abandoned the family before he was born. Arda and his sister, Aylin, grew up in Germany without citizenship, meaning their childhood was marked by bureaucratic challenges as well as neglect by their mother, Ümran, who struggled to cope alone. While Aylin did her best to look after Arda, her relationship with Ümran gradually worsened until she left to live with a foster family.

Much of *Vatermal* concerns Arda's teenage years, which he spent largely with a group of friends hanging around on benches. Öziri's elegant prose captures the feeling of endless waiting, but also brings scenes to life through authentic dialogue and snippets of untranslated Turkish. At the same time, the reader gains a keen sense of the institutionalised racism and class-based discrimination that Arda faces in everyday life. At the age of eighteen, he is finally granted German citizenship and, having always dreamed of studying literature, proceeds to university. Only shortly after, he falls ill with liver failure.

This main narrative is interspersed with stories of Arda's mother's life and, later, what he learns about his absent father. Metin was a member of a left-wing revolutionary group, DevSol, and fled Turkey to avoid arrest. He later returned to hand himself in before starting afresh with a new family. Ümran, meanwhile, came to Germany as a teenager following an earthquake that destroyed her family's livelihood; her parents moved first, leaving Ümran to care for her siblings under the guardianship of a conservative aunt. When she was finally reunited with her parents in Germany, she found her father already on his deathbed.

The various traumas that Arda, his family members and friends go through are handled with sensitivity and clearly inform their later choices. Öziri moves between past and present to give us a well-rounded sense of his characters, portraying their flaws in a sympathetic manner. Written with great humanity, lyricism and a quiet fury, *Vatermal* is a powerful debut from an exciting new talent in German literature.

Find out more:

<https://www.ullstein.de/werke/vatermal/hardcover/9783546100618>

press quotes

What a marvellous storm of emotions!

Sasha Marianna Salzmann

For anyone who also knows what it's like definitively to lose an absent father or to find kindred spirits in cold places or to hold your breath as you hover between life and death, Necati Öziri's beguiling debut is a triumph.

Sharon Dodua Otoo

Necati Öziri has written an intoxicating novel depicting the realities of German-Turkish life without making them its central theme.

Deutschlandfunk Kultur

Outrageously well written, painful and heartrending, sometimes terrifically funny, with stunning tenderness and assertiveness. A debut novel of dazzling beauty from every angle.

Eva Marburg, SWR2 Lesenswert

The book's linguistic style generates a multitude of vivid, emotionally powerful and even exciting scenes.

Burkhard Müller, Süddeutsche Zeitung

about the author



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Necati Öziri studied Philosophy and German in Bochum, Istanbul, and Berlin. He writes plays for the Maxim Gorki Theater, the National Theater Mannheim, and the Schauspielhaus Zurich, among others. As a curator, he directed the Maxim Gorki Theater's Studio ? and the International Forum of the Berliner Festspiele. His prose writings have won two prestigious Ingeborg Bachmann Prize reading competition awards.

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