



by Anna Stern  
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Fiction

## **blue the wind, black the night** *blau der wind, schwarz die nacht*

### **review**

Set in modern Switzerland, Anna Stern's innovative novel explores the boundaries between individuals, roles, and language(s), and between reality and delusion, in an unsettling world where trauma, war and environmental decline are never far away.

Written without capital letters, the unconventionality of Stern's writing is evident from the first page. 'blue the wind, black the night' is constructed as a circular series of encounters between characters who stand in different relationships to each other through family, work, or other connections.

Hannah, a young psychiatrist with two children, who has lost her parents and whose marriage to Lukas has broken down, is ordered to take four weeks' leave by her employers. We next see Hannah still at work, hours after she should have finished her shift, being persuaded to see Alva, a vulnerable young woman at risk of self-harm. Hannah takes Alva home, breaching the boundary between patient and physician, something she reflects on throughout the book. The relationship between Hannah and Alva links together many of the episodes and settings in the narrative. Alva tries to make sense of the world and her pain through writing, filling notebooks with descriptions of her surroundings and her fragmentary memories and imaginings. While her writing can be playful, it is also violent and disturbing.

When a planned outing with his children is cancelled, Hannah's ex-

husband Lukas immerses himself in the alternative world of Katmai National Park, Alaska. He watches the park obsessively through his computer and several monitors, neglecting normal life as he engages with the online chatroom community. Eventually he buys a ticket to Alaska and disappears.

The book is written using the perspectives and voices of various characters, ranging from the compulsive notebook-writing of Alva, chatroom conversations, quotations from songs and works of literature, to psychiatry journals. Stern plays with language and the text includes neologisms as well as fragments of Estonian, English, and French. While the novel is set in Switzerland, there are references to global environmental catastrophe and pandemics. The novel ends with a solitary character describing a landscape empty of people in the aftermath of some cataclysm. Foxes, dogs, and many animal species are extinct and the old maps still show America. Whether this is Alva's writings or an actual dystopia remains ambiguous.

'blue the wind, black the night' is Anna Stern's most radical and experimental book to date, pushing the boundaries of narrative, language, and literary rules. Masterfully constructed, often poetic and lyrical, it a disturbing and dislocating read.

Find out more here:

<https://lectorbooks.com/products/anna-stern-blau-der-wind-schwarz-die-nacht>

## about the author



Anna Stern is a Swiss writer and was born in 1990. She has published four novels and a collection of short stories (Beim Auftauchen der Himmel, lectorbooks, 2017). She has won numerous awards for her books, most recently the Swiss Book Prize in 2020. She has a doctorate in pathogen ecology from ETH Zürich.

Previous works: Schneestill, Salis (2014), Der Gutachter, Salis (2016), Beim Auftauchen der Himmel, lectorbooks (2017), Wild wie die Wellen des Meeres, Salis

(2019), das alles hier, jetzt., Salis (2020).

Previous translated works: all this here,  
now, Lolli Editions (2024).

## rights information

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