

by Iris Wolff
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Fiction

TOP 10 SPIEGEL bestseller list

More than 25,000 copies sold in one month

SWR Bestenliste Februar 2024

Nominated for the German Book Prize 2024

The Goethe-Institut supported the English translation of this book.

Clearing

Lichtungen

review

‘Clearing’ is a beautiful work of literary fiction depicting a lifelong friendship alongside the changes wrought on Romania under Communism and after the fall of the Iron Curtain. As befits its title, the novel reads like a sequence of bright, clear moments in the characters’ lives.

The novel is constructed as a love story told in reverse, beginning in the present day and taking us back to the beginnings of the couple’s friendship during the 1960s. We first meet the main characters, Kato and Lev, on a beach at the end of a six-week road trip around Europe. Lev has just told Kato he needs to go home, and Kato surprises him by saying she will go with him.

Kato and Lev grew up in a village in Romania, but Kato left for the West as soon as the borders opened and has since spent most of her time working as a street painter and moving around with an itinerant named Tom, who was responsible for her leaving the village in the first place. Lev and Kato have a complex relationship – they have been best friends since childhood, but there seems to be something more between them. We see how devastated he was when Tom arrived and Kato decided to leave with him.

As the novel progresses, we see more of Romania under Communism – including Kato’s and Lev’s encounter with the underground resistance through another pair of friends. The final

chapters concentrate on the early days of the couple's friendship, which came about when Lev was bedridden for several months at the age of eleven. As Lev was unable to go to school, Kato – shunned by the other children but considered bright by her teachers – was sent to help Lev with the work he was missing. Though initially wary of another, their friendship soon blossoms.

'Clearing' tells a powerful story of enduring friendship. While the novel focuses firmly on a specific period in the history of Central and Eastern Europe, the themes that underpin it have continued relevance today: (national) identity, home and family, migration and what constitutes belonging. Iris Wolff's skilful literary craftsmanship means that her prose is both easy to read and intensely atmospheric, notable for its vivid yet gracefully composed descriptions, keenly observed dialogue, and sharply focused detail from the natural world.

Find out more here:
https://www.klett-cotta.de/produkt/iris-wolff-lichtungen-9783608987706-t-8538

press quotes

Iris Wolff is a master of the art of omission, and she confers this ability on her characters too. Some things are deliberately withheld, sometimes it takes years before things can be told. […] [Her] novel asks how friendship grows. It becomes deeper as the friends search for their path in life, both together and independently. A very assured tale.

Claudia Ingenhoven, mdr Kultur, 17 January 2024

'Glimmer of Light' is more than just another Romanian novel from Iris Wolff. It is the psychograph of a soul maimed by different dictatorships, a soul that survives because it is able to wait and which in the end […] cast off the most merciless of all tyrannies: one's own feeling of not being enough for another person. […] A magnificent contemporary novel.

Andreas Platthaus, FAZ, 13 January 2024

Wolff's language allows her to capture the spaces between people. The rhythm of her sentences resounds with love, friendship and distance.

Cornelia Geissler, Berliner Zeitung, 13 January 2024

Two lives – and the life of a country – told backwards, in a novel that is hauntingly beautiful and filled with moments of startling clarity. Atmospheric, nuanced and deeply compelling.

Eleanor Updegraff

about the author



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Iris Wolff was born in 1977, grew up in Transylvania and emigrated to Germany in 1985. She has been nominated for the Bavarian Book Prize, the German Book Prize and received numerous awards, including the Marie-Luise-Kaschnitz-Prize and the Solothurn literary prize.

Previous works: Halber Stein, Otto Müller Verlag (2012) • Leuchtende Schatten, Otto Müller Verlag (2015) • So tun, als ob es regnet, Otto Müller Verlag (2017) • Die Unschärfe der Welt, Klett-Cotta (2020).

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