



by Verena Kessler  
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Fiction

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## Gym *Gym*

### review

'Gym' is a story for our fitness-obsessed times: a fun, highly readable book, full of wryly observed episodes from modern life, and perfect for fans of Lisa Taddeo and Ottessa Moshfegh.

The novel's protagonist is a woman who has lost her way in life, but finds herself again when she starts working at a gym and begins to follow a strict training programme. The novel opens with a lie that the protagonist tells during the interview for her job at the gym.

Embarrassed by her unfit body, she tells Ferhat, the owner of MEGA GYM, that she has recently given birth and is a single mother to her young baby. Ferhat replies that he is a feminist, and gives the thirty-six-year-old protagonist the job. The days at MEGA GYM soon settle into a predictable rhythm, punctuated by made-up phone calls from her mother, who is supposedly at home taking care of the baby.

As the novel progresses, the protagonist's lie begins to take on a life of its own. Her boss takes a keen interest in the baby and also gives her advice about how to regain her figure after childbirth, developing a personalised training plan for her. The protagonist leans into her fabricated life and embraces the fitness regime, enjoying the corresponding changes she sees in her body.

In the second part of the novel, the protagonist begins to narrate the story of what happened in her life before she started working at the gym. This part of the story is interspersed with the continuation of the

present-day narrative, in which the protagonist begins to idolise a female bodybuilder called Vick who starts training at the gym. These alternating narratives both culminate in violent attacks carried out by the protagonist.

The final section of the novel is narrated from the psychiatric hospital where the protagonist has been admitted following a violent assault on Ferhat. She is a self-aware, calculating patient who coolly observes the other patients and believes herself to be in control of the regular conversations she has with her psychiatrist. The novel ends with the sinister insinuation that she may be plotting further acts of violence.

'Gym' is a diverting page-turner that starts off simply and evolves into something much more complex as the author explores the tension between the version of herself the protagonist presents to her friends and colleagues at the gym, and the dark past she is concealing from them, which is gradually divulged to the reader. Verena Kessler's fresh, energetic voice is a hallmark of high-quality twenty-first century literary entertainment.

Find out

more:<https://www.hanser-literaturverlage.de/en/buch/verena-kessler-gym-9783446281639-t-5667>

## about the author

**Verena Kessler** was born in 1988 in Hamburg and lives in Leipzig, where she studied at the German Institute for Literature. Her debut novel, *Die Gespenster von Demmin* (The ghosts of Demmin), was nominated for numerous prizes and was awarded the Kranichsteiner Youth Literature Fellowship. Her novel, *Eva*, was recently published by Hanser Berlin, and won Kessler the literary 'Der zweite Roman' prize. Verena Kessler: [verena-kessler.com](http://verena-kessler.com) and on [Instagram](#)

Previous work: *Die Gespenster von Demmin*, Hanser (2020); *Eva*, Hanser (2023)

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