

by Lutz Seiler
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Fiction

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The Ticking Heart

Das tickende Herz

review

'The Ticking Heart' is a rich, expansive novel about artistic ambition, love and the search for meaning after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The novel reunites readers with Carl Bischoff, the aspiring poet at the heart of Lutz Seiler's acclaimed *Stern 111* (*Star 111*, tr. Tess Lewis, And Other Stories, 2023), and follows him on a journey that stretches from the bohemian streets of Berlin to the vast steppes of Central Asia.

Carl Bischoff is adrift in Berlin in the late 1990s. His relationship has collapsed, the anarchic artistic community that sustained him is beginning to disappear, and the city itself is changing beyond recognition. But an invitation to an international poetry festival in Rotterdam offers an unexpected turning point. As literary festivals and readings take him across Europe, Carl begins to find recognition as a writer, and his life is transformed by his encounter with Aysha, a mysterious woman of Volga German and Kazakh heritage whose family belongs to a long line of shamans. Their brief, intense love affair draws Carl towards an altogether different understanding of art, memory and belonging. When Aysha disappears to answer a calling she cannot refuse, Carl follows the thread of her absence to Kazakhstan, embarking on an extraordinary journey through the landscapes and spiritual traditions of the former Soviet world.

While the novel follows Carl's external travels, it also charts the uncertain formation of an artist. Seiler traces the fragile process

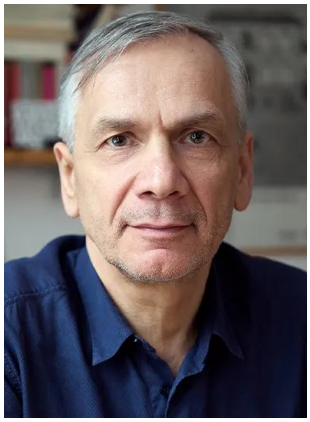
through which experience becomes literature, asking how love and loss shape a writer's imagination. The journey eastwards is both a physical expedition and an inward exploration, as Carl moves beyond the familiar certainties of post-reunification Berlin into a world where myth, ritual and history coexist. Without abandoning its grounding in contemporary reality, the novel gradually incorporates moments of the uncanny, creating an atmosphere in which the boundaries between memory, dream and lived experience become increasingly porous. The result is both a compelling love story and a meditation on artistic vocation, cultural identity and the legacies of twentieth-century Europe.

Seiler writes with his trademark lyrical precision, transforming small physical details into moments of emotional and symbolic resonance. His rhythmic, quietly hypnotic prose allows the everyday to open onto the mythical without ever losing its grounding in lived experience.

Following the international success of *Kruso* (tr. Tess Lewis, Scribe, 2017) and *Stern 111*, Seiler delivers another ambitious and rewarding novel that extends the world of his earlier fiction while standing entirely on its own. 'The Ticking Heart' will appeal to readers of Olga Tokarczuk's *Flights* (tr. Jennifer Croft, Fitzcarraldo, 2017) and W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* (tr. Michael Hulse, Harvill, 1998) for its contemplative journeys across landscapes both physical and psychological.

FInd out more:
https://www.suhrkamp.de/rights/book/lutz-seiler-the-ticking-heart-fr-9783518433157

about the author



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Lutz Seiler was born in Gera, Thuringia, in 1963 and now lives in Wilhelmshorst near Berlin and in Stockholm. He trained as a mason and a carpenter, completing his studies in 1990. Since 1997, he has been the Literary Director and Custodian of the Peter Huchel Museum. He has been Writer-in-residence at the Villa Aurora in Los Angeles and at the German Academy in Rome. His many prizes include the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize, the German

Book Prize, the Fontane Prize, the Uwe Johnson Prize, and most recently the Georg Büchner Prize.

Previous works: *Kruso*, Suhrkamp (2024) (*Kruso*, tr. Tess Lewis, Scribe, 2017; *Stern 111*, Suhrkamp (2020) (*Star 111*, tr. Tess Lewis, And Other Stories, 2023); *schrift für blinde riese*n, Suhrkamp (2021), and various other collections of poetry.

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