



by David Wagner
Rowohlt
August 2024 / 400pp
Fiction

Verkin *Verkin*

review

David Wagner's 'Verkin' is a dazzling work of literary fiction that will appeal to fans of Orhan Pamuk. Told through the eyes of David, a German writer, the novel charts his encounter and evolving relationship with the unforgettable Verkin – a seventy-year-old Armenian-Turkish woman whose life story reads like an epic.

Verkin is a force of nature: elegant, eccentric, and utterly captivating. First introduced at a Berlin party – wearing a sequined dress and gold boots, and having smuggled a pedigree cat from Anatolia – she quickly becomes a guide for David, not only through Istanbul and Turkey, but also through the region's colourful and complex history. As David is drawn into her world, readers journey through time and place, from Ottoman-era tragedies to contemporary Turkish politics.

Although the narrative is grounded in historical events – particularly the Armenian genocide of 1915 and its lasting cultural aftermath – it remains light, fluid, and intimate. Wagner's prose, filtered through David's quiet observation, brings Verkin's stories to life with authenticity and verve. Whether she is recounting her family's rise and fall, her stormy love affairs, or her savvy political manoeuvring as a member of Erdogan's Justice and Development Party and local Mukhtar, Verkin emerges as both a vividly drawn individual and a symbol of adaptation and survival.

The books navigates its serious themes with humour, charm, and

conversational ease. Verkin's gossipy anecdotes, name-dropping, and dramatic flair add a levity that contrasts beautifully with the weight of history she carries. The contrast between the narrator's quiet, restrained tone and Verkin's vibrant presence enhances her credibility and leaves an air of mystery around her. The novel ends when David and Verkin return to Istanbul's new airport from a visit to Van and hear of a new disease that has caused a city of ten million people in China to be locked down. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic reminds us that history is not static and continues to unfold.

'Verkin' is a stylish portrait of a remarkable woman and a culture in flux, told with warmth, and intelligence. The book offers a lively and accessible insider's analysis of Turkey under Erdogan and Armenian-Turkish relations before and after the genocide of 1915. The novel is a must-read for anyone interested in Armenian-Turkish history, strong female characters, or the intersections of personal and political life.

Find out more:

<https://www.rowohlt.de/verlag/rights/book/david-wagner-verkin-9783498002244>

press quotes

As the heroine tumbles turbulently through contemporary history, you feel pleasantly tipsy and reminded of films like Forrest Gump.

Der Spiegel

'Verkin' is by far his best and most mature work (...) A great novel that you put down only reluctantly, and whose fundamental topics – incidentally – are political wisdom, tactics and strategy, disguise, and toughness.

Die Zeit

David Wagner allows his heroine to be utterly ambivalent. In doing so, he creates a rich portrait of Turkish society and its upper class, with all their contradictions. (...) Verkin is a dazzling masterpiece of literary mimicry – humble in style, yet completely confident in execution.

Süddeutsche Zeitung

about the author



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David Wagner was born in 1971 in Andernach, Germany. His debut, *Meine nachtblaue Hose* (My Midnight-Blue Trousers) attracted significant critical attention. In 2014, he was appointed the first Friedrich Dürrenmatt guest professor for world literature at the University of Bern. In 2019, he won the Bavarian Book Award for his novel, *Der vergessliche Riese* (The Forgetful Giant), and he was shortlisted for the Wilhelm Raabe Prize the same year.

His books have been translated into many languages. He lives in Berlin.

Previous work: *Vier Äpfel*, Rowohlt Verlag (2009) | *Leben*, Rowohlt Verlag (2013) | *Der vergessliche Riese*, Rowohlt Verlag (2019)

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