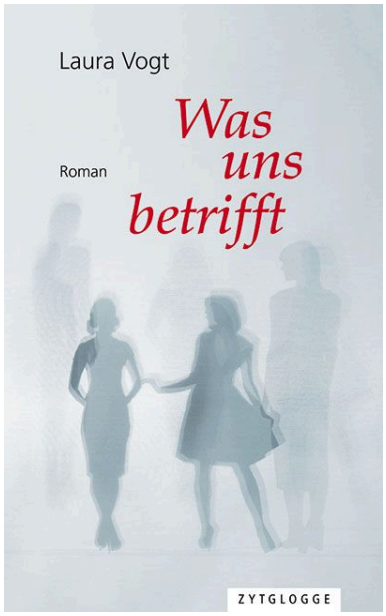

by Laura Vogt
Zytglogge
February 2020 / 210pp
Fiction

prohelvetia

Pro Helvetia supported the English language translation of this book.

What Concerns Us

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review

Sisterhood

What Concerns Us is a punchy contemporary read that scrutinises gender roles within our society, examining what it means to be a mother and the nature of femininity, as well as how to remain independent in a variety of different types of relationship.

The novel follows two sisters, Rahel and Fenna, during their late twenties and early thirties, as they struggle with issues in their relationships and their respective pregnancies. Rahel is a talented jazz singer and song-writer. Her sister, Fenna, trained as a primary school teacher but now works in a café. The sisters were brought up by their mother, Verena, a hard-working woman abandoned by the girls' father. Rahel feels very much the product of a female household in which men have no role and yet all three of them have been impacted by Erik's departure. Verena goes on to have a relationship with Irma, a woman with whom she has a long and contented association.

When we first encounter Rahel she is pregnant by her boyfriend, who has run off, and is strongly attracted to the writer, Boris, whose reading she is attending. She asks him outright if she can move in with him. He lives in an idyllic rural setting in an old farmhouse. Boris agrees to take her in and supports her before and after the birth.

Rahel gives birth to a baby boy whom they both dote on. Rahel turns her back on her singing career and enjoys the rural family life.

When she and Boris have a little girl together, Rahel experiences severe postnatal depression. She completely rejects Boris and mentally rejects the baby, while constantly breastfeeding her. Rahel explores how she might leave her young family and baffled partner for her old life in the jazz clubs. Meanwhile, Fenna turns up at their home, newly pregnant, wanting time away from Luc, the father of her child – a man who can turn from charming hippy to childish aggressor in a heartbeat, raping her on a woodland walk well into their relationship. Fenna's reaction to the rape is at first rage and then a view of her own conduct that suggests she somehow made this thing happen to herself. Their mother Verena develops breast cancer and turns up at the farmhouse, too. Boris takes the children away for a night or two to leave the women to themselves again.

Vogt's snappy writing style and fast-paced depiction of the life experiences of the two sisters, along with its focus on contested aspects of female identity in private and public life, ensures *What Concerns Us* is a page-turner with universal appeal.

press quotes

> *'Laura Vogt records in a straightforward and credible, dense and melancholic way how individualism and motherhood can rub against each other, how liberation and dependence belong together. […] A remarkable book, especially recommended for men.'*

Markus Gasser, SRF Literaturfenster Schweiz

> *'Laura Vogt's second novel is brimming with femininity. Whether man or woman, those who read the novel What Concerns Us sink deeper and deeper into a dense web of intimacies that are never revealing but unspeakably honest. What Concerns Us concerns us, whether man or woman'.*

Gallus Frei-Tomic, Thurgau Kultur

about the author

© Rahel Flückiger

Laura Vogt was born in Teufen (AR) and studied at the Swiss Literature Institute in Biel after a few semesters of cultural studies at the University of Luzern. Alongside prose she also writes lyrical, dramatic, and journalistic texts and works as an interpreter and mentor. Her debut novel *So einfach war es also zu gehen* was published in 2016. Laura Vogt lives in the canton of St. Gallen.

Previous Works: *So einfach war es also zu gehen*, VGS St. Gallen (2016).

http://lauravogt.ch/

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