



by Valerie Fritsch  
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Fiction

🏆 Longlisted for the  
German Book Prize 2015

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## Winters Garten

### *Paradise lost*

#### review

Valerie Fritsch's dystopian narrative is as thought-provoking as it is unsettling. The intense, resonant prose is a perfect match for its apocalyptic themes.

Protagonist Anton Winter enjoys an idyllic – if highly unusual – childhood, growing up in a rambling old farmhouse in a sort of family commune. The enormous, lush garden is the setting for childhood games which extend into the woodland and farmland beyond. Some of the family members travel to the city by the sea to work, and it is described to the children as a place of danger: if Winter's Garden is a paradise of sorts then the city is a place where society is diseased and unhealthy.

Nonetheless, Anton ends up living at the top of a high-rise in that very place. He leads a solitary existence as a breeder of birds. The climate has changed so that rain and cold winds are now the norm, and the city is disintegrating, growing empty, dilapidated and full of the horrors of decay. From his bird's-eye view, Anton gazes into the windows of the desperately lonely. The end of the world is fast approaching, and a cult of mass suicides competes with a cult of mass weddings; the streets belong to the children, who are better at living in the present, and to the animals – packs of streetdogs and the occasional wandering zoo animal. The harbour is piled high with the corpses of sailors, the scales of the last fish glittering amongst the broken glass and medals of one-time heroes.

This apocalyptic vision would seem an unlikely place for love.

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However, this is as much a love story as an end-of-the-world tale. Frederike works at the one remaining hospital, now caring exclusively for pregnant women and their babies. Even with mere weeks or days remaining before the End, new life emerges and fascinates this young volunteer. She and Anton meet on one of their respective macabre harbour walks, and eventually the lovers journey back to the now ramshackle farmhouse and wildly overgrown garden, to wait for the End together. While the city burns, it is left open as to whether a new kind of garden of paradise, or at least an oasis of new life, may be established back in the place that had once thrummed with life and the eternal promise of nature. English-language readers will be captivated by Fritsch's haunting novel.

An English-language review of *Paradise Lost* from Literaturhaus Wien is available here:

<http://www.literaturhaus.at/index.php?id=11016>

## press quotes

*'Valerie Fritsch's work is a triumph of language and her appearance on the stage of German-language literature is a cause for celebration. Melancholy and joy, decay, death and lively growth are all entwined. Her prose is fearless, full of style, and dedicated to the eternal mystery of the world. This is a prize for a young master.'*

*– 2015 Peter Rosegger Literature Prize Jury Statement*

## about the author

**Valerie Fritsch** was born in 1989 and grew up in Graz and Carinthia, Austria. After graduating in 2007 she completed her studies at the Academy of Applied Photography and has since worked as a photoartist. Fritsch's texts have been published in numerous literary magazines and anthologies, and broadcast on the radio. She has also contributed to theatrical and cinematic texts. *Winter's Garden* is her first novel published by Suhrkamp Verlag. In 2015, Fritsch received the Kelag-Preis and the BKS-audience award at the Festival for German-language Literature in Klagenfurt. She lives in Graz and Vienna.

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