



by Marica Bodrožić
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Fiction

Blade of Hearts *Das Herzflorett*

review

Marica Bodrožić has won numerous literary awards over the course of her career, including the Manès Sperber Prize for her entire body of work, which spans novels, short story collections and poetry. Her most recent novel, *Blade of Hearts*, is a lyrical coming of age story set between Yugoslavia and Germany and exploring cultural and generational differences.

Pepsi loves the searing heat on her grandfather's farm in Dalmatia. She spends her days outside with her feet in the grass and her eyes trained on the sky. Nonetheless, she can't wait to leave Yugoslavia and rejoin her family in Germany. It's the early 1980s, and her parents have moved abroad to find work, while Pepsi is shipped from one set of relatives to the next, always feeling like an outsider.

The mythical West and the reunion with her parents, brother and sister prove disappointing though. At school, Pepsi is either ignored or bullied. At home, her father has turned to drink, having injured his back working on building sites. Toiling to keep the family afloat, her mother is too exhausted to show her children any real affection. Both parents, as they repeatedly make clear, are terrified their daughters will succumb to corrupt Western influences, as they see them, and become 'sluts'. Pepsi's only ally is her quiet younger sister.

While Pepsi thinks back with fondness to the sounds, scents and sights of her rural childhood, her home country is torn apart by war.

Refugees – relatives and family friends – start showing up on the doorstep.

Despite everything, Pepsi falls in love with the German language, which she learns from a second-hand dictionary. But when she tells her parents she wants to finish school and go to university, they refuse – after all, it's not like she's a boy! Taking on an apprenticeship as a bookseller, she finally manages to save enough money to escape from her family home and move into a small studio flat.

Blade of Hearts is written in a close third person narrative in chronological order, with occasional flashbacks. The seven chapters each skip forward in time by a couple of years, homing in on particularly memorable years, including those of the Chernobyl disaster, the fall of the Iron Curtain, and the Yugoslav war.

Bodroži? brings together sensuous descriptions of nature with insightful, sometimes witty commentary on cultural differences in this tale of a young woman fighting for independence.

press quotes

'What Bodroži? is interested in above all is the question of who we are.'

3sat Kulturzeit

'A style that captivates every one of our senses.'

Bayern 2, Diwan – Das Büchermagazin

about the author



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Marica Bodroži? was born in Croatia in 1973 and has lived in Germany since 1983. She has published poems, stories, novels and essays, which have been translated into more than sixteen languages. Her writing has been awarded many prizes and scholarships, including an the Walter

Hasenclever Literature Prize, the Manès-Sperber-Prize for her entire body of work, and the Irmtraud Morgner Prize.

Previous works: Tito ist tot, Suhrkamp (2002); Der Spieler der inneren Stunde, Suhrkamp (2005); Sterne erben, Sterne färben, Suhrkamp (2007); Ein Kolibri kam unverwandelt, Otto Müller (2007); Der Windsammler, Suhrkamp (2007); Lichtorgeln, Otto Müller (2008); Das Gedächtnis der Libellen, Luchterhand Literaturverlag (2010); Quittenstunden, Otto Müller (2011); Kirschholz und alte Gefühle, Luchterhand Literaturverlag (2012); Mein weißer Frieden, Luchterhand Literaturverlag (2014); Das Auge hinter dem Auge, Otto Müller (2015); Das Wasser unserer Träume, Luchterhand Literaturverlag (2016); Die Wahrheit kann niemand verbrennen, Das Wunderhorn (2018); Poetische Vernunft im Zeitalter gusseiserner Begriffe, Matthes & Seitz (2019); Pantherzeit, Otto Müller (2021); Die Arbeit der Vögel, Luchterhand Literaturverlag (2022); Mystische Fauna, Matthes & Seitz (2023); Die Rebellion der Liebenden, btb (2024).

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