

A drifting traveller at Istanbul Airport

Honeyeater

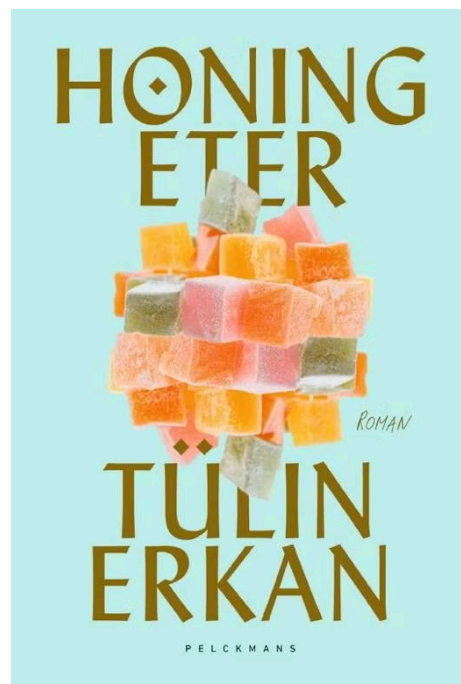
TÜLIN ERKAN

Every single day, Turkish-Belgian Sibel deliberately misses her flight home from Istanbul Airport. She does not feel truly at home in either country and wants above all to get to grips with her memories of her dead Turkish father and rediscover her language. She kills time by rigorously observing other passengers or caring for a stray sniffer dog. Sibel is under observation herself, too, by security man Ömer, who follows her on his screens. He decides to protect her, as a father might. Then Sibel meets Wernicke, a pilot as displaced as she is, who loses his job, his language and his health. Sibel, Ömer and Wernicke all live illegally at the airport. They have their own baggage and seem incapable of real communication. A snowstorm extends their awkward interaction for a while, but ultimately their parting is inescapable.

The atmosphere is vaguely reminiscent of Ben Lerner, Samuel Beckett and also the early Peter Handke.

DE MORGEN

Erkan has written a remarkable debut in which alienation plays an important part. The multi-layered title 'Honeyeater' refers not just to the sickly sweet Turkish delight that the airport inhabitants tuck into but to Australian songbirds of that name, who are threatened with extinction because they no longer recognize their own song. They symbolize a new generation of adults who do not feel at home in the countries where they were born, nor in their parents' native lands. Erkan sensitively describes what it's like to grow up between two cultures. In her novel, language and the inability to understand one another are central, as is the impossibility of feeling truly at home if you are unable to speak your mother tongue. Erkan deploys descriptive language and poetic metaphors that beautifully portray her characters' vulnerability as individuals.



AUTHOR



Flemish-Turkish author **Tülin Erkan** (b. 1988) grew up in Flanders with a French-speaking mother and an English-speaking grandmother, spending her summers with her father in Turkey. Her debut 'Honeyeater' makes clear that she experienced for herself what it is to become lost in multilingualism. Her style is sensitive and precise, her analogies inventive. Photo © Wouter Van Vooren

ORIGINAL TITLE Honingeter (2021, Pelckmans, 208 pp.)

PRIZES Shortlist De Boon Literature Prize

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