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Reviews

## LONG DAYS

by **Maïke Wetzel**

*Translated from the German by Lyn Marven*

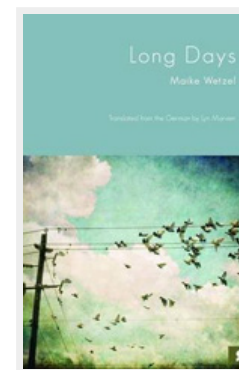
Reviewed by **Andy Barnes**

Maïke Wetzel has begun to garner considerable attention in her native Germany and beyond, but, at present, her published prose consists of just two short story collections, with the promise of a novel in the pipeline. *Long Days* is the first of Wetzel's works to be translated into English, and it has left me breathlessly waiting for more.

*Long Days* is a slim volume, and each story is only 10 to 20 pages in length, so it is a relatively quick read. However, each story, though brief, still achieves a depth that many writers of longer pieces can only dream of. The remarkable thing about her prose is that it often achieves this depth not because of what is written, but by what is left unwritten.

Wetzel's stories are largely observations of normal domesticity, of love and loss, and the mundane moments that make up everyday life. Each moment, no matter how seemingly inconsequential, becomes an epiphany for her characters, freezing time and resulting in a deep introspection that the outside world struggles to penetrate. Wetzel contrasts the known and the hidden, and each story is pitched so that nothing makes sense without both. Occasionally the reader is given complete access, while characters remain in ignorance. In the opening story a woman talks to a friend about finding the body of a boy who had been killed in a car crash. The woman chooses not to tell her friend that the boy was a former boyfriend, which means that her friend cannot possibly understand the significance of the story. In another, an anorexic girl suddenly begins to eat again, but the girl's family, and the reader, are left in complete ignorance as to the reason. We know we have observed a significant moment in the girl's life, but have no idea what it was.

Wetzel's stories create a view of family life in which knowledge, and unwillingness to share knowledge, become tools of power and repression. Characters who refuse to speak to each other, and a writer who refuses to speak to her readers, become experts in the manipulation of their relationships. *Long Days* is a razor sharp observation and powerful critique of the silences that punctuate our everyday lives, the truths those silences can mask and the gulfs in understanding those missing truths can result in. The themes are easily recognisable because of their domesticity, and easily accessible because of their universality. *Long Days* is a fantastic collection of short stories from one of Europe's most promising young writers. I only hope we don't have too long to wait for that novel.



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