

## Blood Book

## Blutbuch

Presented by: Sarah Colvin

Described by critics as a sensation, Kim de l'Horizon's *Blutbuch* (2022) won the German Book Prize in 2022. It has since been published in English as *Blood Book* in the UK (Sceptre), and as *Sea, Mothers, Swallow, Tongues* in the US (FSG); it is also available in French, Dutch, and Polish.

*Blutbuch* is a complex and multifaceted novel. It takes the form of a fictional or autofictional memoir, narrated by the nonbinary person Kim - the narrator shares the name of the novel's author. The narrative is addressed throughout to Kim's grandmother, who is addressed using the Swiss German *Grossmeier*; the final section takes the form of fictional letters written by Kim to *Grossmeier*. The novel is in five parts, where the first four parts are quest narratives (Looking for ...), and the final part, titled 'Coming full spiral', reflects on questions of belonging, homecoming, and storytelling. The shape of a spiral is open, and the novel's ending is also self-consciously open – Kim explains that their narrative project is the creation of possible futures.

The title of de l'Horizon's 'blood book' points to bloodlines and bloody histories. In German it also evokes the *Blutbuche* or copper beech tree, a semantically unthreatening plant in English but for German speakers imaginatively drenched in blood. Part 3 of the novel describes the history of men's obsession with the copper beech as an ornamental tree, including Kim's own great-grandfather, who seems to have a dark secret. Part 4 tracks seven centuries of femicidal hate in Europe, after Kim finds and reads a family archive compiled by their mother, which tells the story of the maternal line since the fourteenth century: from the plague epidemic of the fourteenth century through the European witch hunts, the brutalities of the 30 Years War (1618-48) and colonial slavery through to nineteenth-century repressive paternalism and forced hysterectomies in twentieth-century Switzerland.

Critics have observed the novel's explicit intertextual references to theoretical concepts including Donna Haraway's chthulucene and Astrida Neimanis's hydrofeminism, as well as to Annette von Droste-Hülshoff's nineteenth-century novella *Die Judenbuche*. Others have explored its engagement with questions of identity and finding one's voice, its queering of memory narratives and subversion of narrative form, and its negotiation of problems of language, nation, and gender. They have noted its exploration of emancipatory forms of kinship, but also the violence and trauma that shape the narrative. A noteworthy and much-overlooked feature of *Blutbuch* is de l'Horizon's use of humour and irony as a critical aesthetic strategy that avoids spectacularizing violence.

### References

Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham, NC 2026.

Astrida Neimanis, 'Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water' in Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni, and Fanny Söderbäck (eds), *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, New York: 2012, pp. 85-100.

**LANGUAGE:** German / Deutsch

**This title was not censored before publishing**