

Wound

Oksana Vasyakina

Elina Alter, Translator

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A Russian woman recalls her mother's final days and her own grieving process in Oksana Vasyakina's novel *Wound*.

After her mother's death, Oksana has an endless list of tasks to complete, the most important of which is to take her mother's ashes home to Siberia. Along the way, she looks back on her past and her relationship with her mother. From her youthful attempts to gain her mother's attention through poetry to the unexpected difficulty of burying her ashes and thus relinquishing her physical presence, Oksana's journey is both universal and personal.

Oksana's childhood was different from most: often distant, her mother thought nothing of leaving her alone in dangerous circumstances. Misery and abuse tumbled down from generation to generation. Oksana recounts tales of her foremothers' unhappy relationships with men and her own unhappy relationships with women. In the present, she contemplates the small moments that make up a death. Some have dark humor about them, as when she puts her mother's urn in a dog food box for safekeeping on the flight to Siberia. And as Oksana seeks to reclaim her voice from her grief, she experiments with different ways of expressing her feelings, including writing poetry and imagining events from her mother's perspective. The result is "unconventional in form and criminal in content."

A target of censorship in Russia, *Wound* holds nothing back in its exploration of complex relationships, including lesbian ones, and its unsparing approach to difficult subjects. It ends with one final experiment: Oksana speaks to her mother rather than about her, demonstrating her ability to stand independently and to communicate in her own way for the first time.

Wound is a wide-ranging novel that reflects on death, grief, womanhood, creativity, and women's sexuality.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (September / October 2023)

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