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New York. Random House. 2016. 243 pages. So few books manage to convey the emotional anguish of searching for an answer as well as Hisham Matar’s recent Pulitzer Prize–winning memoir, *The Return*. Matar grew up in Libya during the reign of Muammar Qaddafi. His father, Jabala Matar, a major opposition figure, eventually had to move the family to Egypt for their safety. In 1990 Jabala Matar was kidnapped and sent to a jail in Libya, with all news of him stopping three years later. Hisham Matar goes on to study in the United Kingdom and become a successful novelist. Eventually, he begins his search for his father, which brings him back to Libya, in a post-2011 reality, carrying with him a palpable longing for home and for closure. Matar’s prose is haunting, tearful, and heartfelt. He reflects on the state of being fatherless and the inner turmoil of living a dual life, writing: “To be a man is to be part of a chain of gratitude and remembering, of blame and forgetting, of surrender and rebellion, until a son’s gaze is made so wounded and keen that, on looking back, he sees nothing but shadows.” The often-poetic memoir also includes Matar’s debates over the effects of leaving his childhood home and his hunger for a stronger connection to his roots. It also reads as an investigation piece, where he interviews his relatives in Libya and details the phone calls and illusive meetings between himself and Qaddafi’s son, the great “liberal” hope, Seif al-Islam, adding bits and pieces of Libyan history when necessary. Ultimately, this memoir summarizes to perfection the identity conundrum and dreams of return faced by so many exiles and those who flee war. It is also a state of reality understood by so many today, especially second-generation Arabs who grow up in different cultures. He writes, “My feet were heavy. I noticed how old I had become, but also the boyishness that persisted, as if part of me had stopped developing the moment we left Libya. I was like David Malouf’s imagining of Ovid in his banishment, infantilized by exile.” Hisham Matar could be Syrian, Iraqi, Afghani, or one of many more nationalities plagued by the refugee crisis. He is an adult product of war and politics, struggling with his identity. Thus his story is crucial to read and unfortunately timeless and still relevant today. Shereen Ahmed RafeaEast Riffa, Bahrain Get the book on Amazon or add it to your Goodreads reading list. Hisham Matar’s revered Father, businessman and wealthy ex-Libyan Jaballa Matar, was a financier hero of several mysterious and failed Libya liberation movements fighting against the alpha male dictator Muammar Qaddafi. Muammer Qaddafi had engineered a coup in Libya in 1969 overthrowing Libya’s monarch, and he soon began a campaign of torture and terror to kill any possible political competition. Very male author Hisham Matar, the respected masculine writer of this award-winning very masculine-ge Hisham Matar’s revered Father, businessman and wealthy ex-Libyan Jaballa Matar, was a financier hero of several mysterious and failed Libya liberation movements fighting against the alpha male dictator Muammar Qaddafi. Muammer Qaddafi had engineered a coup in Libya in 1969 overthrowing Libya’s monarch, and he soon began a campaign of torture and terror to kill any possible political competition. Very male author Hisham Matar, the respected masculine writer of this award-winning very masculine-gendered book, had manfully loved, admired, and pined away for his masculine missing Father for decades.All of you who prefer living in a world without women except for the females who cook or serve meals silently can relax now, as I will follow the male author Hisham Matar’s example from here forward and pretend no women live or have ever existed in Libya, New York City, Rome, Nairobi, London or Cairo as Matar details for us his masculine-gender only autobiography and award-winning memoir, ‘The Return’. ‘The Return’ mostly is sort of a masculine-gender only literary diary of masculine Hisham Matar manfully searching for his missing masculine Father; Jaballa Matar, the masculine-gender idol of all his yearning. Hisham manfully questions, calls and visits manly Libyan men and masculine-gender Libyan relatives who were involved with his masculine Father. Through flashbacks, we also learn a bit about Libya’s infamous alpha-male Qaddafi dictatorship.Hisham Matar was born in New York City where only masculine-gendered people apparently live. The Libyan diplomat Jaballa Matar and family returned to Libya when masculine-gender Hisham was three. When masculine Hisham was nine, the Matars fled to men-only-matter Egypt because of Libya’s dictator Qaddafi’s political oppression. Masculine-gender Hisham finished growing up in men-only-matter Egypt until he went to London to attend school and university at age 15. While Hisham was in London at age 19, he received word Jaballa had been kidnapped from Cairo by agents of Muammer Qaddafi, butch masculine-gender Libyan leader-for-life (which actually worked out to be 42 years). The kidnapping of Jaballa occurred in 1990. Except for two letters, the masculine Matar family in Egypt never heard from Jaballa again.So masculine-gender Hisham wrote this male-angst memoir about his one admired manly masculine-gender parent and about some of Libya’s recent history, despite that his, ugh, female mother has apparently hung about for all of his life so far, although only in the background making sure manly Matar had Libyan olive oil wherever the family lived. Matar appreciated her (ugh) ability to find Libyan olive oil.Some of the surviving masculine-gender Matar relatives were imprisoned with masculine Jaballa in the infamous butch Libyan prison, Abu Salim. Jaballa was imprisoned and tortured after being kidnapped from men-only-matter Egypt. Abu Salim was attacked by anti-Qaddafi rebels in 2011 when Qaddafi was overthrown and all of the masculine-gender prisoners who were still alive were released. They all spoke of a massacre of masculine-gender prisoners in 1996. Manly Hisham suspects his still missing masculine-gender Father met his death in this massacre of prisoners.Libyans initially were happy about macho Qaddafi’s coup. However, Qaddafi soon followed in the footsteps of all butch African and Middle-eastern leaders and established a strict masculine kleptocrat dictatorship with male theocratic pretensions. He staged a number of political purges of important rich male Libyans. Many Libyans went into exile in the men-only-matter country of Egypt after fleeing Libya. Jaballa made his home in Egypt with a lot of loyal male relatives, raising his two boys single-handed, apparently, without any women helping or even many existing apparently (mother mentioned as confined to the kitchen). These male relatives and male friends, and some masculine-gender Qaddafi supporters, are the only people who matter in every chapter in the book. There is an occasional mention of Matar’s wife, Diana. Diana is an artist and companion, so he puts her name into the book more often than mentions of his mom, but never with any implied or actual importance. Not once did Matar mention any other women except the brief sentences about his agent, mother and wife ghosting through occasionally in all of these hundreds of pages and pages and pages of different men meeting, drinking, eating and talking about history, grief, death and politics in different countries. You know what I mean, important talk and memories only those humans with brains know and retain - stuff women could not possibly understand or have any knowledge about, since whatever any woman may have heard, seen, experienced or witnessed is completely beyond any female’s mental capacity to process.I happen to know that women do exist in Libya, Egypt, London and New York City, including women who suffered in prisons and who fought against cruel political oppression or who have feelings they express about their imprisoned husbands, fathers and sons. I suspect Matar’s Mom and Diana actually have opinions and sufferings. Maybe the Pulitzer judges are ok with this author’s overt sexism and sneaky hidden literary suppression by omission of any recognition of the sufferings of Matar women in the family, but I am not. This book is unforgivably oppressively sexist. Matar didn’t even feel it necessary to write of the Matar women or give them a voice in his memoir to speak of his family’s tragedy. Matar gives the impression he feels women are only brainless uncaring sheep, particularly when mentioning his mother. Women are apparently too unimportant or unaware for any inclusion or mention in these pages about the Matar family grief and losses experienced in these horrific civil wars and atrocities.This book is not recommended by me. It is sexist garbage, oppressing and politically suppressing women by omission even as it condemns the oppression of Libya’s men. ...more “A triumph of art over tyranny, structurally thrilling, intensely moving, *The Return* is a treasure for the ages.”— Peter Carey“What a brilliant book. Hisham Matar has the quality all historians—of the world and the self—most need: He knows how to stand back and let the past speak. In chronicling his quest for his father, his manner is fastidious, even detached, but his anger is raw and unreconciled; through his narrative art he bodies out the shape of loss and gives a universality to his very particular experience of desolation. *The Return* reads as easily as a thriller, but is a story that will stick: A person is lost, but gravity and resonance remain.” — Hilary Mantel“A masterpiece of a different kind. . . . [T]he natural delicacy of Matar’s writing, its concision and reserve, only heightens the power of a gripping and agonizing story.” — Alan Hollinghurst“A moving, unflinching memoir of a family torn apart.” — Kazuo Ishiguro“*The Return* is a riveting book about love and hope, but it is also a moving meditation on grief and loss. It draws a memorable portrait of a family in exile and manages also to explore the politics of Libya with subtlety and steely intelligence. It is a quest for the truth in a dark time, constructed with a novelist’s skill, written in tones that are both precise and passionate. It is likely to become a classic.” — Colm TóibínSelected ReviewsHe Will Need a Raincoat, London Review of Books, Blake MorrisonGrammar of Loss, The Times Literary Supplement, Elizabeth Lowry‘The Return,’ a Son’s Pained Search for a Missing Father, The New York Times, Michiko KakutaniAmong The Lost, The New York Times Book Review, Robyn CreswellLiving in the Aftermath, LA Review of Books, Leah MirakhorThe Lost Souls of Libya, The Telegraph, Duncan WhiteBooks Inside Books: An Infinite History of Modern Libya, WarScapes, Marcia Lynx QualeyAwardsPremio Libro Del Año, Gremio de Libreros de Madrid, Finalist (Spain), 2017Geschwister-Scholl-Preis Winner (Germany), 2017Rathbones Folio Prize, 2017Pulitzer Prize Winner for Biography/Autobiography, 2017FEN/jean Stein Book Award Winner, 2017Prix du livre étranger Winner (France), 2017National Book Critics Circle Award for Autobiography, Finalist, 2017The Baillie Gifford Prize, Shortlist, 2016Costa Biography Award, Shortlist, 2016The Slightly Foxed Best First Biography Prize Winner, 2016Cited as one of The New York Times’ “Top 10 Books of 2016”Get the book in the UK, US or Canada.

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