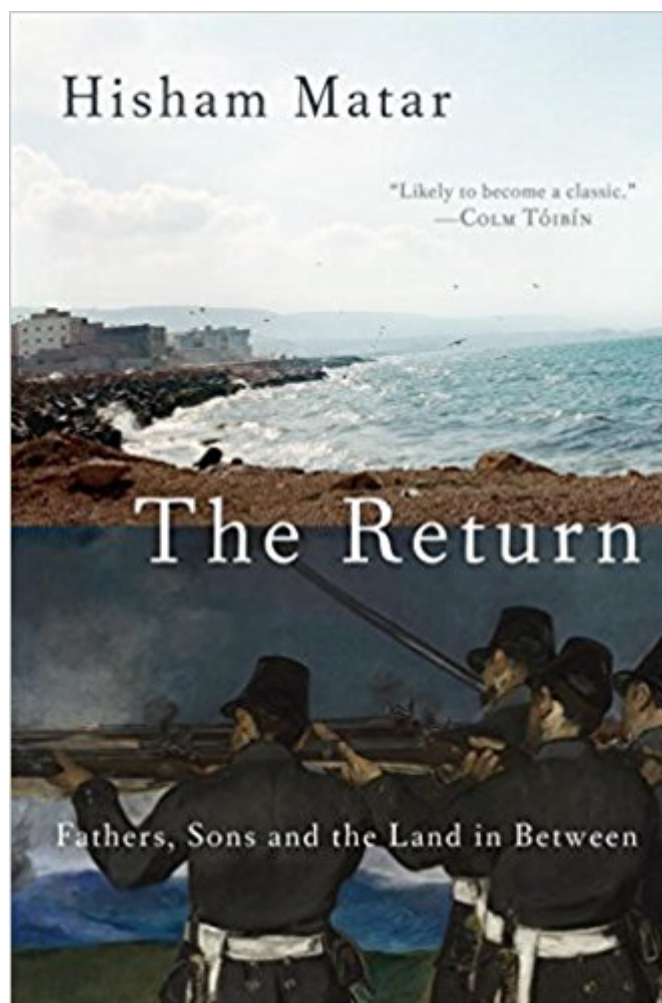


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# The Return: Fathers, Sons And The Land In Between



## Synopsis

From the author of *In the Country of Men*, a Man Booker Prize and National Book Critics Circle Award finalist, comes a beautifully written, uplifting memoir of his journey home to his native Libya in search of the truth behind his father's disappearance. When Hisham Matar was a nineteen-year-old university student in England, his father was kidnapped. One of the Qaddafi regime's most prominent opponents in exile, he was held in a secret prison in Libya. Hisham would never see him again. But he never gave up hope that his father might still be alive. "Hope," as he writes, "is cunning and persistent." Twenty-two years later, after the fall of Qaddafi, the prison cells are empty and there is no sign of Jaballa Matar. Hisham returns with his mother and wife to the homeland he never thought he'd go back to again. *The Return* is the story of what he found there. It is at once an exquisite meditation on history, politics, and art, a brilliant portrait of a nation and a people on the cusp of change, and a disquieting depiction of the brutal legacy of absolute power. Above all, it is a universal tale of loss and love and of one family's life. Hisham Matar asks the harrowing question: How does one go on living in the face of a loved one's uncertain fate?

**Praise for *The Return***

"[Matar] writes with both a novelist's eye for physical and emotional detail, and a reporter's tactile sense of place and time. The prose is precise, economical, chiseled; the narrative elliptical, almost musical. . . . *The Return* is, at once, a suspenseful detective story about a writer investigating his father's fate at the hands of a brutal dictatorship, and a son's efforts to come to terms with his father's ghost, who has haunted more than half his life by his absence." —Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

"It seems unfair to call Hisham Matar's extraordinary new book a memoir, since it is so many other things besides: a reflection on exile and the consolations of art, an analysis of authoritarianism, a family history, a portrait of a country in the throes of a revolution, and an impassioned work of mourning. . . . For all its terrible human drama . . . the most impressive thing about *The Return* is that it also tells a common story, the story of sons everywhere who have lost their fathers, as all sons eventually must." —Robyn Creswell, *The New York Times Book Review*

"A moving, unflinching memoir of a family torn apart by the savage realities of today's Middle East. The crushing of hopes raised by the Arab spring at both the personal and national levels is conveyed all the more powerfully because Matar's anger remains controlled, his belief in humanity undimmed." —Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Best Summer Books*

"The Guardian" —Few trips could be as emotionally freighted as the one taken by Libyan-raised novelist Hisham Matar in his thriller-like memoir, *The Return: Fathers, Sons, and the Land in Between*, about the post-Qaddafi search for his dissident father and his own deeply ambivalent

sense of homecoming.â "Vogue" âA triumph of art over tyranny, structurally thrilling, intensely moving, *The Return* is a treasure for the ages.â "Peter Carey" âThe Return is tremendously powerful. Although it filled me with rage again and again, I never lost sight of Matar's beautiful intelligence as he tried to get to the heart of the mystery. I am so very grateful he has written this book.â "Nadeem Aslam"

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

After reading Hisham Matar's two novels, each featuring a protagonist who is a young Libyan boy whose life is disrupted by the abduction/disappearance of a father or father figure from his life, it almost comes as a relief to turn to this memoir in which Matar finally confronts head on the central trauma of his life: the abduction of his own father, a prominent Libyan dissident, by the Qadaffi regime, when he was a 19-year-old university student. By then, Matar and his family had been living in exile for a decade, an experience that he recounts in this book. At boarding school in England, the future novelist had to pretend to be the son of an Egyptian mother and an American mother, and his classmates included the son of a Qadaffi government minister. It was a strange, strained existence, as they watched their fellow exiles murdered or kidnapped, but Jaballa Matar only became more determined to fight the Libyan regime. When he vanished, it was years before his wife and two sons learned that he was still alive and held in a Libyan prison, and a few years later, word stopped coming altogether. But did he die in jail, or had he just vanished into an even deeper form of imprisonment, from which it was impossible to bribe a jailer to get word out? Until the fall of Qadaffi -- in which some of Hisham Matar's relatives participated, as he recounts here -- they would

never even have a chance to find out, even though this memoir includes some creepy encounters with Qaddafi's son, Seif el-Islam, who promises to try to find out (as if he doesn't know already...) But once Qaddafi is dead, Hisham can finally try to find out whether his father has survived.

In 2010, Desmond Tutu issued a statement calling on Muammar Qaddafi "to urgently clarify the fate and whereabouts of Jaballa Matar." (It was a bold move by Archbishop Tutu; Qaddafi's influence in Africa was such that not even Nelson Mandela would do or say anything to annoy him.) Jaballa Matar had fought against the Italians in liberating Libya, then served in the Libyan Army under King Idris, and for a time after Qaddafi seized power he was a Libyan diplomat to the United Nations. But repulsed by the increasing tyranny of Qaddafi, Jaballa Matar became one of the most prominent Libyan dissidents. He moved his family to Cairo while he himself began organizing rebel forces just outside of Libya in Chad. Then, in March 1990, Egyptian secret police (on orders from Hosni Mubarak) abducted him from his apartment in Cairo and delivered him to Qaddafi's operatives, who took him to Libya and locked him away in Abu Salim, Qaddafi's infamous prison for critics and dissidents. It is known that Jaballa Matar was still in Abu Salim in April 1996, but after that he disappeared. At the time of Desmond Tutu's appeal to Qaddafi in 2010, there was no public information about whether Jaballa Matar was alive or dead, though most strongly suspected it was the latter. Hisham Matar, the author of this important book, is the younger son of Jaballa Matar. Hisham spent much of his boyhood in Libya, but left in 1979 when his father extracted the family from the country. For most of his adult life, Hisham has lived in or around London. While he is the author of two acclaimed novels, his foremost project in life has been to find out what happened to his father and to lobby worldwide on behalf of other Libyan dissidents.

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