



by Judith Kuckart
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Fiction

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once an English language
translation is published.

Café of the Invisibles *Café der Unsichtbaren*

review

Café der Unsichtbaren is a beautiful and topical meditation on loneliness, on the power of listening and storytelling, and on human connections.

Jamie Lee Searle , Reader

Judith Kuckart's novella is set in modern-day Germany in the offices of a telephone counselling service, focusing on the lives of the seven volunteers there, and the people who phone in – the so-called 'invisibles' – who are often on the fringes of society. This is beautifully written, high-quality literary fiction, centred around a fresh and well-executed concept.

Café der Unsichtbaren feels especially topical due to the growth of loneliness as a societal issue, exacerbated further by the Covid lockdowns of the past two years. With its focus on the detail of its characters' inner lives, and the structure, which plays out over the five days of an Easter weekend, the novella is reminiscent of Ian McEwan's writing.

The seven volunteers are very different people. The eldest, 80-year-old Frau von Schrey, is the narrator. There's also Dr Lorentz; Marianne, in her mid-50s; Rieke, a theology student who volunteered as preparation for giving pastoral care; Wanda, who manages the

collections at a GDR museum; Matthias, whose father committed suicide years ago; and Emilia, who is encountered predominantly through the gaze of Matthias, who is in love with her.

The callers and their struggles are well-written and prompt both sadness and humour. Although the volunteers aren't able to help every caller, it's still clear that truly listening to someone and giving them your attention, if only for a short while, is a priceless gift. To those who feel unseen by society, being able to call the service provides an anchor during sleepless nights. And it helps the volunteers too, allowing them to better understand events in their pasts.

The novella is narrated in five chapters, each one spanning a day over the Easter weekend, from Maundy Thursday to Easter Monday. In the penultimate chapter, the volunteers gather at the apartment of Dr Lorentz for an Easter meal, the only time in the narrative they are all together. As the days progress we find out more about each volunteer's individual biography, both contextualising their motivation for doing this work and illuminating their own struggles.

Judith Kuckart has that rare gift of being able to capture complex truths in a stunningly simple way. Her descriptions of the night shifts are delightfully languorous, interspersed with moments of light and clarity, making the night seem more real than the day. The German cultural setting, and Berlin specifically, are important in the book's appeal; at the same time, the depiction of loneliness is universal, and the settings are domestic and relatable.

<https://www.dumont-buchverlag.de/lizenzen-foreign-rights/books/details/kuckart-cafe-der-unsichtbaren-9783832181567/>

press quotes

Multi-layered and profound, a literary and poetic kaleidoscope to get lost in.

Andrea Gerk, MDR KULTUR

about the author



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Lenas Liebe, DuMont (2002); *Die Autorenwitwe*, DuMont (2003), *Der Bibliothekar*, Eichborn (1998), DuMont (2004); *Kaiserstraße*, DuMont (2006), *Die Verdächtige*, DuMont (2008), *Wünsche*, DuMont (2013), *Dass man durch Belgien muss auf dem Weg zum Glück*, DuMont (2015), *Kein Sturm, nur Wetter*, DuMont (2019).

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