



by Christoph Poschenrieder
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Fiction

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Child with No Name

Kind ohne Namen

review

Child with No Name is a modern fable about the impact of immigration upon a small village, a literary reflection on the European migrant crisis and on Germany's recent admission of almost one million migrants.

When Xenia, the novel's narrator, gives up on college after two semesters and returns home, her fellow villagers are surprised to see her back. Xenia is cagey about the cause for her return, concealing the fact that she is pregnant. The villagers are distracted by the dozen migrants who have just been sent to live among them, and Xenia helps her mother, the village's de facto mayor, form a welcoming committee for the migrants – a welcoming committee that consists only of the two of them, as the rest of the village declines to participate.

The villagers' hostility towards the migrants increases when the village patron, the Burgherr, decides to renovate some houses for them to live in. The renovation work is nearly complete when, one night, the houses are burned to the ground. A body is found in the wreckage – one of the migrants – and suddenly the village is national news. The plot then takes a delightfully unexpected turn as we enter the realm of fairy tale. It emerges that Xenia's mother persuaded the Burgherr to torch the houses because she wanted to give the villagers more time to adjust to the migrants. In return, she agreed to the Burgherr's demand for an unbaptised child – unaware that her own daughter is pregnant. When Xenia's child is born, the Burgherr

comes to collect it, and in the middle of the night Xenia and her mother rush to find a priest to baptise the child. Enraged that Xenia's mother has not kept her part of the bargain, the Burgherr unleashes his wrath.

Poschenrieder deals masterfully with a highly topical subject by treating it at the local level. The dynamic of the village also allows the author to deal in archetypes – villagers as insiders, migrants (and Xenia) as outsiders – which gives the book a more universal resonance beyond the immediate political context. Fairy-tale elements in the novel reinforce its archetypal note, while also tying the book in with a broader literary tradition. All of this is made possible through the brilliantly drawn main character: Xenia's first-person narration drives the book, by turns funny, irreverent, and sincere. *Child with No Name* calls to mind Kathleen Glasgow's *Girl in Pieces*, both for the young female narrator as well as the vivid community and sense of place that novel evokes.

press quotes

*Christoph Poschenrieder is a true wordsmith –
one of the best German authors writing today.
– SWR 3*

about the author

Christoph Poschenrieder was born near Boston in 1964 and studied philosophy in Munich. He also attended the Journalism School of Columbia University, New York, and worked as a freelance journalist and documentary filmmaker. Today his focus is on literary writing. His novel *A Grain of Sand* was longlisted for the German Book Prize in 2014. Having held fellowships in Bamberg and Venice, Christoph Poschenrieder now lives in Munich.

rights information

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