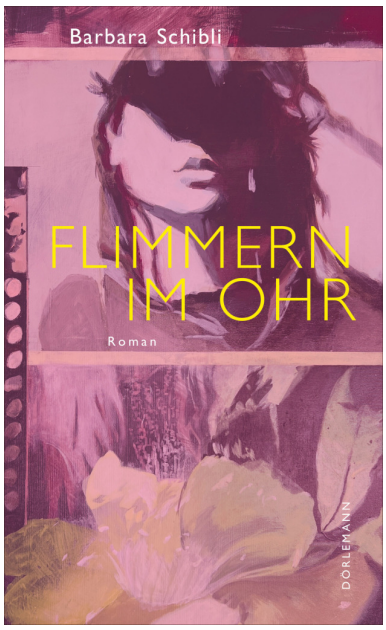


by Barbara Schibli
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Fiction

Flicker in the Ear

Flimmern im Ohr

review

Shedding a light on the feminist movement in 1970s Switzerland, *Flicker in the Ear* is an insightful, empathetic novel that examines personal identity and how we cope with frustration. The second novel by Swiss author Barbara Schibli, it stands out for its original use of language, strong female protagonist and careful positioning of a universal movement within a specific historical and regional context.

Framed as a trip down memory lane aided by the power of music, *Flicker in the Ear* opens in Switzerland in 2010. Priska, the narrator, is in her early fifties and recovering from ear implant surgery; rehabilitation involves listening to her favourite music to retrain her brain. Turning to her collection of classic punk records, Priska is taken back to the late 1970s, when she was a young, idealistic punk closely involved in the Swiss feminist movement.

With women in Switzerland only gaining the right to vote in 1971, the late 1970s and early 1980s were a time in which Priska – and women like her – were trying to forge their own identity, unconstrained by the dictates of society. We see Priska try out different careers, live with an ever-changing cast of flatmates, attend protests and marches, and fall in love with a fellow punk named Gina. Their relationship, however, is unsatisfactory; Gina routinely disappears for long stretches, and at one point the police appear on Priska's doorstep. Frustrated yet vulnerable, Priska tries to fight social injustice but

cannot stand up for herself.

Many years later, living a stable life in a heterosexual relationship and bourgeois surroundings, Priska learns that during her punk years she was under surveillance by the Swiss state. Thousands of citizens were spied on back then if they were identified as rebels or a potential threat to the nation. Priska finds the idea absurd, yet also reflects on her current frustrations: illness, menopause, and perhaps too much stability. She wonders what happened to her younger, idealistic self.

Charting the course of one woman's life within the context of broader sociopolitical change, *Flicker in the Ear* is a powerful reflection on whether idealism can be sustained, how we overcome challenges, and which forces – from music to protests to relationships – help shape our identity.

press quotes

> *"When you hear the words flowing, read the sentences and immerse yourself in the images, you believe that Barbara Schibli finds her stories as easily as in a dream."*

Ursula Fehr, Zürcher Unterländer

about the author



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Barbara Schibli lives in Switzerland where she works as a secondary school teacher in Baden. In 2016, she won the Studer/Ganz Prize for the best unpublished prose manuscript. In 2017, she was awarded the GEDOK Literature Prize for her debut novel Flechten. In 2018, she won the competition of the 8th sonOhr Hörfestival with her radio play Marderschreck. She studied German, Italian literature and journalism.

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