



by Anna-Elisabeth Mayer  
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## Flyweight

### *Fliegengewicht*

#### review

*Flyweight* is a gem. The charm of its characters and the unanticipated depths of emotion that it evokes make reading it a rare and warm experience. The dialogue, intelligent and funny, makes it impossible not to fall in love with the people in and around hospital room number five.

Set in a hospital cardiology department, the first-person narrator is slowly recovering from an operation. The novel's setting is the room that she shares with three old ladies: Frau Ott is the ringleader with two passions in life, men and Sophia Loren; Frau Ferdinand secretly mourns the tragic love of her youth, regrets her life and waits for the death that never seems to come for her; and Frau Blaser frets about her son, Ursl, who has escaped her mother's crippling concern by moving to America, and daughter Ursl, who has not.

The atmosphere is largely the creation of these three ladies. The constant banal prattle that fills room five is often funny and always disarmingly charming. The three elderly ladies are by turns completely lovable and utterly exasperating; they are convincingly written as examples of the kind of elderly relative whose idiosyncrasies have become part of the reason we adore them. The narrator is quickly drawn into the peculiar atmosphere of the shared room, though she speaks very little herself, expressing most of her opinions only in the form of thoughts. The action of the novel, if it may indeed be called action, is character-driven, plot events being of secondary importance and mostly of a fairly trivial nature.

When the action does slip from these shared trivialities to true drama, it is fatal: Frau Blaser dies unexpectedly. The silence and sudden anxiety that overtake the remaining occupants of room five are felt all the more strongly because they cut through the very fabric of the text, providing a concrete but unobtrusive commentary on loss and how people can unexpectedly change you without you even noticing.

Mayer's winning style is simple and straightforward. The strength of her writing is her ability to create dialogue that is absurd, at times extremely funny and above all very real. There is undeniably genuine love and genuine sorrow in *Flyweight* and it will be with regret that the reader eventually puts the book down. A perfect summer read.

## press quotes

*'In this novel dreams become tangible.'*

– ORF, Austrian Radio

*'Distressing and touching'– Falter*

*'Mayer creates a medley of voices, warm and intimate, that can only develop on a hospital ward – a little distanced from the world. She describes a brief idyll – before life breaks in again – with poetry and sensitivity ... Flyweight is a mature debut, a clever novel.'*

– Literaturhaus Wien

## about the author

**Anna-Elisabeth Mayer** was born in 1977 in Salzburg and now lives in Vienna. She studied Philosophy and Art History and subsequently taught literacy programmes for female immigrants. Mayer then continued her studies at the German Literature Institute in Leipzig. She has received various literary awards, and regularly publishes in periodicals and anthologies. *Fliegengewicht* is her first novel.

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