



by Claus-Ulrich Bielefeld,
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Fiction

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Non-stop to Berlin

Auf der Strecke. Ein Fall für Berlin und Wien

review

Set in Berlin and Vienna, this elegant and sophisticated literary whodunnit thrives on the cultural rivalry between the two capitals, and on the personality clash between the lively and outspoken Viennese detective, Anna Habel, and her sceptical colleague from Berlin, Thomas Bernhardt.

On the night train from Vienna to Berlin, up-and-coming young writer Xaver Pucher – ‘a would-be German Bret Easton Ellis, an amoral moralist’ – is brutally strangled. Habel, herself a lover of literature, is charged with investigating his murder. Hoping for guidance in what seems an overwhelmingly complex case, she reluctantly contacts Bernhardt. Between them, they begin their enquiries.

Events take a turn for the worse when Pucher’s agent, a key witness, is found murdered. Bernhardt is assaulted at the scene of the crime and begins to suspect that money is the true motive behind the murders. After three days of misunderstandings over the phone, the two detectives finally meet to attend Pucher’s funeral. Next morning, Habel awakens to the news that Pucher’s former lover has attempted suicide in an apartment belonging to a rival author. As the plot unravels, links come to light between a property tycoon with roots in the former East Germany on the one hand and the Austrian communist party on the other, with the dandy Pucher mixed up in the middle. Finally Habel, who was convinced all along that the ‘solution lies in the manuscript’, manages to decipher the ominous text of

guarantee.

Pucher's last manuscript.

The plot is seamless and the style consistently elegant and witty. The joint authors skilfully produce distinct differences in tone and emphasis between the two settings. The descriptions of the many faces of Berlin, past and present, are strikingly evocative and succinct, clearly written by somebody who knows the city and its people inside out. The tone of the Viennese chapters is livelier and more openly humorous. There is a delightful scene in which Habel accompanies the forensic experts through her recently burgled flat, utterly distraught at the sight of her belongings scattered throughout her bedroom. She then shows them to her sixteen-year-old son Florian's room, with an equally detailed description of the chaos awaiting them, only to remark that, no, the burglar clearly hadn't entered that room.

A literature-lover's crime novel *par excellence*.

about the authors

Claus-Ulrich Bielefeld was born in 1947 in Bad Schwalbach. He studied German, sociology and philosophy. He currently works as a literary editor for Berlin-Brandenburg Radio, and as a literary critic for numerous newspapers.

Petra Hartlieb was born in Munich in 1967 and grew up in northern Austria. She studied psychology and history in Vienna, and then worked as a PR representative and a literary critic in Vienna and Hamburg. Since 2001, she has run a bookshop in Vienna with her husband.

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Diogenes Verlag was founded in Zurich in 1952 by Daniel Keel and Rudolf C. Bettschart. One of the leading international publishing houses, it numbers among its authors Alfred Andersch, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Patricia Highsmith, Donna Leon, Bernhard Schlink and Patrick Süskind. Children's authors include Tatjana Hauptmann, Ute Krause, Karl Friedrich Waechter and Tomi Ungerer.