



by Helmut Krausser
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Fiction

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Not Such Bad People

Nicht ganz schlechte Menschen

review

Not Such Bad People is a darkly humorous narrative, filled with intrigue and erotic adventure, as it follows the lives of twin brothers growing up in turbulent interwar Europe.

Karl and Max Loewe are political idealists. They are strongly opposed to the rising tide of European fascism and yet struggle to know how best to live in an age of violent political extremes. Both believe themselves to have clear ideas of right and wrong. But their experiences throughout the novel plunge them into a world of moral relativism in which they are revealed as no better or worse than the not-such-bad-people of the title.

The Loewe twins are born in 1915 into a superficially respectable bourgeois family. Their mother has a scrupulous sense of fairness which leads her, perversely, to lie to her sons that she does not know which of them came into the world first. Meanwhile, Theodor Loewe is a lawyer whose domestic life revolves around a ménage-à-trois with his wife and the boys' nanny. Karl and Max Loewe are precociously intelligent, but their intellectual and political allegiances develop in different directions. Their responses to the sexual advances of their tutor at their Jesuit college are similarly divergent. Whereas Max embraces a life of bisexual adventure, Karl endeavours to sublimate all erotic desire into the pursuit of his political ideals.

Following their parents' death, the twins move to Berlin, where Max takes up with a half-Jewish prostitute. He squanders his inheritance on a hedonistic life of drink, drugs and sex. Meanwhile, Karl is briefly

incarcerated for his communist sympathies. The brothers move to Paris in order to escape national conscription. Krausser's novel depicts their lives at the edge of a web of perilous intrigue of their own making. As the Nazi shadow grows and war begins to look inevitable, Max masterminds a plan to emigrate to America. On the eve of their departure the brothers celebrate in extravagant style with a trip to the races. But while they are there a spectator stand collapses, bringing the young lives of the twenty-five-year-old twins, and the novel itself, to a fittingly dramatic end.

The complex historical and political context of Krausser's novel is brought to life by the light touch of his prose and his witty and beguiling characters.

press quotes

'The funniest German book of the year'

– *Frankfurter Allgemeine*

Sonntagszeitung on Einsamkeit und Sex und Mitleid

'A marvellous episodic novel. Helmut Krausser has accomplished something special: a kind of chorus, reminding one of Jack Kerouac's classic On the Road, whose many voices in the end condense to a love song – at times cheerful, at times sad and not rarely full of yearning.' – *Kölner Stadtanzeiger*

'An intriguing, disconcerting novel of unrequited love'

– *Publisher's Weekly on Eros*

about the author

Helmut Krausser, was born in 1964 and lives in Berlin. He is best known for his plays and novels, which have won him numerous grants and awards, such as the Literary Grant of Munich (1989), the Tukan Prize (1993) and the Grant of the Villa Massimo (1998/1999). His novels *Der große Bagarozy* and *Fette Welt* have been filmed.

Previous works include:

Fette Welt (1992); *Melodien oder Nachträge zum quecksilbernen Zeitalter* (1993); *Thanatos* (1996); *Der große Bagarozy* (1997); *Schweine und Elefanten* (1999); *UC* (Ultrachronos) (2003); *Eros* (2006); *Die kleinen Gärten des Maestro Puccini* (2008); *Einsamkeit und Sex und Mitleid* (2009); *Die letzten*

schönen Tage (2011)

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