



by Anja Kampmann
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Fiction

🏆 Awarded the Hans
Fallada Prize

🏆 Shortlisted for the Leipzig
Book Prize 2026

Rage is a Bright Star

Die Wut ist ein heller Stern

review

The star of Anja Kampmann's third novel is Hedda, an aerial performer in the Alkazar variety show on the Reeperbahn in Hamburg in the years prior to the Third Reich. Her life is full of apparent glamour and adventure until the Nazis come to power, when the chosen family she has found in the club scene start to 'disappear' and new faces turn up in the crowd. As might be expected, the Nazis' harassment gets worse, and the Alkazar 'family' begins to break up in the ongoing effort simply to survive.

As the political mood changes, Hedda finds herself increasingly unsure who to trust during this horrifying period. Her older brother Jaan sets off on a foolhardy whaling expedition to Antarctica, leaving Hedda to protect little brother Pauli as best she can; her efforts are complicated by her mother, who submits meekly to her father, a fervent and brutal brownshirt. Among the other people around Hedda are the old guard at the Alkazar; Leni, a Reeperbahn prostitute with whom Hedda shares a room and in whom she often confides; Maks, a friend from her communist gymnast school days; Uncle Joist, the blacksmith who trained Jaan and is a kind of substitute father to him, Hedda and Pauli; Carsten, a close friend of Hedda and especially Jaan; and 'der Graue,' Hedda's 'sugar daddy' – until he isn't any more.

These believable and well-developed characters contribute to the overall depiction of how individuals had to assess their own situation

and decide how to think and act under the Nazi regime. Internal dialogue and speculation, mostly from Hedda's point of view, about what other characters are thinking and doing, and their motivations, provide a nuanced view of the turbulence in Germany during the Nazi years and how different people reacted to it.

The strong sense of place conveyed in 'Rage is a Bright Star', specifically the setting of the port of Hamburg and the St Pauli district, is underscored by detailed descriptions of various locations and the use of North German Plattdeutsch dialect. The translation of Anja Kampmann's second novel, *Wie hoch die Wasser steigen* (2018), published in English as *High as the Waters Rise* by Catapult in 2021 (tr. Anne Posten), has already demonstrated the suitability of her work for the English-language market.

press quotes

With outstanding linguistic precision and atmospheric intensity, Anja Kampmann tells the story of the precarious existence of a variety-show dancer in the early years of National Socialist Germany and of the shrinking spaces of refuge for all those who were not meant to have a place in that Germany. A novel like a bright star.

From the jury statement, shortlist for the Leipziger
Buchmesse Prize

about the author

Anja Kampmann was born in 1983 in Hamburg. She studied at the University of Hamburg and at the German Institute. *High as the Waters Rise* (2018) was translated into multiple languages, and nominated for the Leipzig Book Fair Prize and the National Book Award in the USA. Her most recent book of poetry, *Der Hund ist immer hungrig* (2021) won the Günter Kunert Literature Prize for Poetry. In 2024, she was awarded the Marie Luise Kaschnitz Prize for her work. Anja Kampmann: www.anjakampmann.de, on [Instagram](#)

Previous Work: *Wie Hoch Die Wasser Steigen*, Hanser (2018); *Der Hund Ist Immer Hungrig*, Hanser (2021); *Proben Von Stein Und Licht*, Hanser (2024)

Previous translations: *High as the Waters Rise*, Catapult (2020)

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