



by Klara Blum  
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Forgotten Gem

## The Shepherd and the Weaver *Der Hirte und die Weberin*

### review

Read an essay by Julia Franck, *The Restless Wild Obstinacy: Klara Blum and her Novel The Shepherd and the Weaver*, translated by Sarah Wolbach [here](#).

Regarded as the most important work by Austrian-Jewish journalist Klara Blum, *Der Hirte und die Weberin* is a moving love story and testament to one woman's extraordinary life. Newly rediscovered some fifty years after the author's death, this autobiographical novel is stylistically varied, an account of a continent-spanning romance that offers insights into the twentieth-century politics and cultures of Europe, the Soviet Union and China.

*Der Hirte und die Weberin* opens in Shanghai in 1929. Tschang Nju-Lang, a social activist and theatre director, is unhappy in his marriage and increasingly disillusioned with the social inequalities and repression he perceives in China. In search of a new perspective, he sets out for Europe, travelling to Paris and Moscow. There he meets Hanna, a Jewish writer, and the two fall passionately in love.

After three months, Nju-Lang disappears, leaving Hanna at a loss as to his whereabouts. The narrative perspective – which often switches and includes a section written in the form of diary entries – now takes up Hanna's story as she tries to locate her lover. A cryptic phone call leads her to suspect that he has been called back to China to work as a communist secret agent, and after the war she duly travels there.

Despite the fact that she is alone in a foreign country, facing prejudice, hostility and numerous other challenges, Hanna persists in trying to find the man she loves. This mission takes her on an incredible journey, introduces her to Nju-Lang's family and, after eleven long years, she finally tracks him down. The lovers are reunited for one night only. The next day, they have to separate, knowing that their commitment to the communist cause means they are unlikely ever to meet again.

*Der Hirte und die Weberin* closely mirrors Klara Blum's own story – a dedicated communist, she fell in love with Chinese author and director Zhu Rangcheng on a visit to Moscow in 1937. When Zhu disappeared, Blum travelled to China to find him; she never succeeded, but remained there until her death. The fictionalised meeting between Hanna and Nju-Lang is based on the Chinese fairy tale that gives the novel its title: the shepherd and the weaver are two constellations that love one another but can meet just once a year, when birds form a bridge across the night sky.

At times highly stylised, Blum's prose reflects the alienation both protagonists feel when they visit countries vastly different to their own. Themes of feminism and conflict between the personal and political further add to the novel's universal quality. With its engaging historical context and strong autobiographical elements, *Der Hirte und die Weberin* is a truly unique work of fiction.

Find out more:

<https://www.aufbau-verlage.de/die-andere-bibliothek/der-hirte-und-die-weberin/978-3-8477-0463-8>

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## press quotes

*This story of the two lovers who spend their lives searching blissfully and accursedly for each other is an unforgettable ballad.*

Lion Feuchtwanger

## about the author



Klara Blum was born in Chernivtsi, Bukovina, and grew up in Vienna. She studied Psychology and worked as a journalist. As a Jewish woman with a feminist and socialist agenda, she emigrated to Moscow in 1934. Her love for Chinese director and revolutionary Zhu Xiangcheng led her to move to China after the end of World War II, where she took the name Zhu Bailan and became a Chinese citizen. She worked as a Professor of German Studies and was an important voice in German exile literature. She died in 1971 in Guangzhou, in southern China.

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