



by Irina Kilimnik
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Fiction

Summer in Odesa *Sommer in Odessa*

review

Irina Kilimnik's debut novel tells the story of a pivotal summer for both a young woman and a city. Set during Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, *Sommer in Odessa* is a rich portrait of family and friendship, a novel about identity and personal transformation with a fresh, contemporary feel.

Olga lives in Odesa, on the fifth floor of an old apartment block, with her mother, aunts, three cousins and grandfather. Olga is studying medicine, but only because she thinks this is what her family wants her to do. She spends much of her time with her two closest friends – Radj, also a reluctant student of medicine, and boy-chasing Mascha – as well as Sergej, her first love, an egotistical young pianist who thinks of little but his career.

At home, despite the strong female household, Olga's grandfather is a domineering and manipulative presence. But on the day the family celebrates his birthday, they are surprised by a visit from a long-lost friend: David, who lives in New York, brings a breath of fresh air and entertainment, but also a well-kept secret. When the family's summer house burns down and Olga's grandfather accuses David of arson, all is revealed. David's adopted son, Andrej, is actually Olga's uncle – he was born after her grandfather had an affair.

The revelation makes Olga see her grandfather in a different light, but also begin to question her future. She resolves to leave her studies

behind, deliberately handing in a blank exam paper. Radj returns to India to visit his family, Mascha sets off to work in Germany for the summer, and Olga realises that her relationship with Sergej is not meant to last. Casting aside the future she never wanted, she makes a fresh start.

Narrated as a series of individual days over the course of one summer, *Sommer in Odessa* has an engaging, immediate style. Olga, her friends and family members are well drawn and develop with the novel, while distinctive voices and flashbacks add depth to the narrative. Kilimnik's tone is light and fresh, with a marked contrast between the novel's slow beginnings and rapid pace of events as the annexation picks up and Olga's life begins to change.

Interwoven with the plot are beautifully descriptive passages on Odesa, as well as a wealth of cultural detail and references to political events. The arrival of this book one year after Russia's invasion of Ukraine seems both timely and poignant. At the same time, *Sommer in Odessa* addresses universal themes, giving Kilimnik's debut broad appeal.

Read more on the publisher's website

here: <https://www.keinundaber.ch/buecher/sommer-in-odessa>

press quotes

By turns humorous, shocking and heart-warming [...] altogether a very enjoyable read.

Gwen Clayton, NBG Reader (www.perfectlyphrased.com)

One thing this novel teaches us quickly is to remember that, until recently, Odesa was a city neither wholly Ukrainian nor Russian, but a mixture of both cultures and languages [...] The wonderful thing about Irina Kilimnik's novel is that it could only be set in Odesa and yet, at the same time, in any family in the world.

NDR Kultur

Irina Kilimnik demonstrates admirable sensitivity, not just in writing complex characters but in allowing the precious, fragile transience of daily life in a big city to shine through.

Münchener Merkur

about the author



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Irina Kilimnik was born in Odesa in 1978. At the age of fifteen, she emigrated from Ukraine to Germany, where she studied human medicine and media publishing. She writes essays, short stories and book reviews, and was a participant in the 18th Klagenfurt Literature Course in 2014. She was awarded two prizes at the MDR Literature Competition, and has co-authored a non-fiction title on the Web 3.0. Irina Kilimnik lives in Berlin. *Sommer in Odessa* is her first novel.

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