



by Robert Seethaler
Claassen
April 2023 / 288pp
Fiction

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translation rights to the book
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once an English language
translation is published.

The Café Without Name

Das Café ohne Namen

review

Written in his signature accessible style, with a keen eye for detail, *Das Café ohne Namen* is the latest work of fiction by Robert Seethaler, whose novel *A Whole Life* (tr. Charlotte Collins, Picador) was shortlisted for the 2016 International Booker Prize. A vivid depiction of one Viennese district throughout a decade of social and economic change, *Das Café ohne Namen* is also a portrait of ordinary lives centred on a neighbourhood café.

In 1966, having had enough of hard physical labour at Vienna's Carmeliter Market, and encouraged by local master butcher Johannes Berg, Robert Simon takes over a neglected café in the Leopoldstadt district. His calm, non-judgemental nature soon attracts a range of customers – market workers and locals as well as visitors. Robert listens to their life stories and defuses tensions, working alone until, at Berg's suggestion, he takes on Mila, an unemployed seamstress.

As the novel unfolds over the course of a decade, we come to know the many figures who visit the café – some only on a single occasion, others much more frequently. One such character is René, a summertime wrestler and bouncer at the dodgems in the nearby Prater amusement park, who drinks away his winnings and dreams of making it big in America. René and Mila get married, but later are devastated by the loss of their baby. Romance also blossoms between local cheese-seller Heide and painter Mischa, while Robert

himself falls briefly and unhappily in love with Jascha, a young Croatian woman.

At the same time, we also see Robert's developing relationship with his landlady, an elderly war widow. As time passes she grows frail and confused, but Robert looks out for her and eventually goes to visit her in a nursing home. Her reminiscences and reflections on life are delivered in monologue-style chapters that serve to break up the main third-person narrative.

Much change comes to the area, including the building of the Viennese Underground, and in 1976 the café closes when Vavrovsky, who had inherited the building, decides to sell it to pay off some debts. The night of the closing party, 31 July, the nearby Reichsbrücke collapses – a real-life event that left the city shaken.

Focusing on his characters while rooting their lives in the social and political events that shaped Vienna in real life, Seethaler has delivered another evocative novel that lives from its detail and celebration of the ordinary. Like Claire Keegan, who also has an eye for everyday heroisms, Seethaler uses *Das Café ohne Namen* to portray what it is to live through great change and still make the best of one's circumstances.

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Read more on the publisher's website

here: <https://www.ullstein.de/werke/das-cafe-ohne-namen/hardcover/9783546100328>

press quotes

This book drew me into a shabby, workaday Vienna, made vivid through the cast of characters, particularly the calm, kind proprietor. I became a regular at the Café with No Name and was as bereft as any of its customers at its closure.

Deirdre McMahon, NBG reader

about the author



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Robert Seethaler was born in Vienna in 1966. He is an actor and bestselling writer who has published several highly acclaimed novels and a number of dramas. After selling over 100,000 copies in German, *Ein ganzes Leben* was translated by Charlotte Collins as *A Whole Life* and published by Picador; it went on to be shortlisted for the 2016 International Booker Prize and the 2017 Dublin Literary Prize. Two further novels, *The Tobacconist* and *The Field*, have also been published in English. Robert Seethaler lives in Berlin and Vienna.

Other works: *Die Biene und der Kurt*, Kein & Aber (2006); *Die weiteren Aussichten*, Kein & Aber (2008); *Jetzt wird's ernst*, Kein & Aber (2010); *Der Trafikant*, Kein & Aber (2012); *Ein ganzes Leben*, Hanser (2014); *Das Feld*, Hanser (2018); *Der letzte Satz*, Hanser (2020).

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