



by Raphaella Edelbauer

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Fiction

🏆 Longlisted for the
German Book Prize 2023

The Incommensurables

Die Inkommensurablen

review

Prizewinning author Raphaella Edelbauer's latest book is a remarkable work of literary fiction. Set in Vienna in the early twentieth century, Edelbauer's narrative deftly interweaves historical fact and fiction to portray the upheaval of a society on the brink of war, the gulf between people's dreams and reality, and the disparity between rich and poor.

On 30 July 1914 – just as the First World War is about to be declared – seventeen-year-old Hans, a penniless groom from Tirol, arrives in Vienna to seek therapy from Helene, a psychoanalyst who specialises in mass hysteria and parapsychological emotions. Hans believes he has a gift: the uncanny ability to voice thoughts in his head that are then uttered by other people. Helene grants him a brief audience and tells him to come back the following day for a session.

On his way out, Hans meets Klara, an aspiring mathematician from a poor background, who, having received financial support from Helene, is preparing for her viva on the incommensurability of numbers. Klara introduces him to her friend Adam, who is also receiving therapy from Helene. Adam is from an aristocratic family and destined to fight for his country. The three strike up an instant friendship and Klara and Adam offer to take Hans under their wing. In less than forty-eight hours, Hans accompanies Adam to a rehearsal of Schönberg's second string quartet that culminates in a fight; attends a formal dinner at Adam's parents' house dressed in some of

his clothes; is taken to the Trabant, an underground bar filled with all sorts of unsavoury characters from different walks of life; takes drugs; finds out about Adam's illegitimate child; and visits the hovel that is Klara's parents' home so that she can retrieve some papers.

Together they navigate various obstacles, getting caught up in brawls and the unrest of a country about to go to war. When they finally get to the university for Klara's viva, the examination is interrupted by an unruly mob and her hopes of becoming one of the few women to be awarded a doctorate are dashed. Adam bids his farewell and goes to join his regiment, and although Hans had no intention of joining up, he is spotted by a young man whom he met when he arrived in Vienna and is persuaded to join up.

The Incommensurables is richly populated with well-developed characters and showcases pre-war Viennese society, with numerous allusions to famous political figures, notable composers, biologists, psychotherapists, mathematicians and philosophers. The novel deals with mass behaviour, women's rights and social injustice. It will pique readers' interest from the title onwards, maintaining their attention all the way to its fascinating conclusion.

https://www.klett-cotta.de/buch/Gegenwartsliteratur/Die_Inkommensurablen/650526

press quotes

An outstanding talent. The Americans have Joyce Carol Oates as a universal narrative genius; we have Raphaela Edelbauer.

Clemens Setz

about the author



Raphaella Edelbauer
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Raphaella Edelbauer, born in Vienna in 1990, studied creative writing at the University of Vienna. Her previous novels *The Liquid Land* and *Dave* were also selected by New Books in German, and the rights have been sold in various countries. Edelbauer lives in Vienna.

Edelbauer has been:

- Winner of the Rauriser Literaturtage 2018
- Winner of the audience award at the Ingeborg Bachmann competition 2018
- Winner of the Theodor-Körner-Prize 2019
- Shortlisted for the German Book Prize 2019
- Winner of the Austrian Book Prize 2021

Other works: *Das flüssige Land*, Klett-Cotta (2019); *The Liquid Land*, Scribe (2021); *DAVE*, Klett-Cotta (2021).

Other languages: Arab World: Aser Al-Kotob (DAVE+Das flüssige Land); France: Éditions Globe (Das flüssige Land); Italy: Rizzoli (DAVE+Das flüssige Land).

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