



by Susanne Scholl  
Residenz Verlag  
July 2019 / 248pp  
Fiction

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## The Ladies of the House

### *Die Damen des Hauses*

#### review

Susanne Scholl writes perceptively about ageing in the modern world from the perspectives of four elderly women who share a flat in Vienna.

The owner of the large apartment where the women live is Ella, an activist and a widow. The other residents are Rada, Ella's housekeeper and cook, who has lived through the horrors of Ceausescu's Romania; Maggie, Ella's well-travelled sister, who married a diplomat and worked as an interpreter; and Luise, a putupon divorcee. Visitors to the apartment include Luise's lesbian daughter, who has an adopted child, and Maggie's daughter Nellie, who works in a home for teenage asylum seekers.

The novel outlines the personal histories of the female protagonists before focusing on the group in the present day. Together, they navigate their various illnesses as well as the disagreements that are an inevitable part of cohabitation, all the while guided by Ella and her devoted niece Nellie. Finally, we follow Ella as she loses her memory and is diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Her friends rally round, but she suffers a stroke and dies after a swift decline. With her death, the group has lost its centre, and the women are forced to move out of the apartment as Ella's son wants to move in. We see how the surviving women face up to the challenge of finding a new home.

*The Ladies of the House* is a pacy read, packed with amusing anecdotes and incidents. The likeable characters have rich personal histories that generate interesting reflections on international politics

from the Cold War to the present day, recounted in the novel's lively dialogue. The narrative offers a female perspective on the twentieth century as well as an entertaining and unusual take on the experience of ageing. In addition to exploring the popular theme of female friendship, the novel also engages with contemporary issues around housing that are very relevant to a modern readership, with older people increasingly opting to live in shared accommodation or to share their homes with others in order to pool their resources and benefit from mutual support.

*The Ladies of the House* has much to recommend it to an English-language readership, with strong characterisation, an original setting and topical themes.

## press quotes

*Scholl draws affectionate portraits of four very different women who sometimes rub one another up the wrong way, but without ever really hurting each other.*

Wolfgang Huber-Lang, Austria Presse Agentur

*An unaffected novel written by a smart, warmhearted, wordly-wise woman.*

Reinhold Tauber, Oberösterreichische Nachrichten

## about the author

**Susanne Scholl** was born in Vienna in 1949 and studied Slavic languages in Rome and Moscow. She is best known for her many years as the Moscow correspondent for the Austrian broadcaster ORF. Scholl has published numerous works and received several awards for her journalism and her humanitarian commitment, including the Concordia prize and the Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art.

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