



by Anna Katharina Hahn
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The Neighbours *Am Schwarzen Berg*

review

The Neighbours is a searching social novel in the tradition of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*. What's more, it's very funny.

The Bubs, Emil and Veronika, consider themselves free-spirited intellectuals and are childless. Hajo and Carla Raus, meanwhile, are as bourgeois as their next-door neighbours are bohemian. It soon becomes clear, however, that all four of them have rested their hopes on Peter, the married son of Hajo and Carla. How his story plays out will dictate how they view their own lives. The novel begins when a distraught Peter moves back in with his parents. Peter's sorry state is the result of the sudden dissolution of his family. His wife, who grew up in considerably less idyllic circumstances than Peter, has had enough of his lax attitude. All this is slowly revealed to Emil, Veronika, Hajo and Carla, whose own foibles and petty affairs are detailed along the way.

Hahn renders her characters in such a way that their flaws gradually become more apparent to the reader. She is unsparing in her criticism even as she demonstrates her affection for them. The tragedy of the novel is partly the result of these characters' blindness to the faults that Hahn reveals.

about the author

Anna Katharina Hahn was born in 1970 and studied German and English literature, as well as Folklore, in Hamburg. She lived in Berlin

for several years and now lives and writes in Stuttgart. She was awarded the Clemens Brentano Prize in 2005 for her novel *Kavaliersdelikt* ('Petty Crime') . She has won numerous prizes, and *Am schwarzen Berg* is nominated for this years Leipzig Book Fair prize.

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