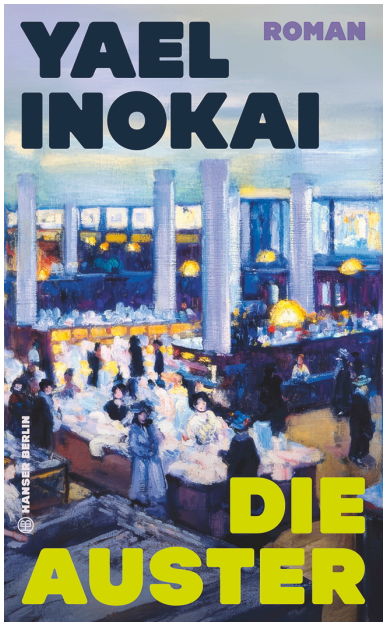


by Yael Inokai
Hanser Verlag
July 2026 / 224pp
Fiction

Shortlisted for the Swiss Book Prize 2026

The Oyster

Die Auster

review

A murder mystery, a social novel and a remarkable portrait of a working life, ‘The Oyster’ is a quietly devastating exploration of class, labour and dignity.

When seventy-three-year-old Leonora arrives to clean the home of her long-time employer, department store director Dr Bronstett, she finds him brutally murdered. Acting on instinct, after a lifetime of cleaning, she thoroughly cleans the crime scene before calling the police. As rumours spread and the investigation unfolds, Leonora loses her livelihood as well as her employer. Returning to the department store where she once worked, she begins piecing together both the murder and the hidden life of the man whose houses she cleaned for almost forty years.

Rather than building suspense around the identity of the killer, Inokai is interested in the lives that exist at the edges of wealth and power. Leonora has spent decades making other people’s lives run smoothly while remaining almost invisible herself. She?had been Dr Bronstett’s cleaner, off and on, for almost forty years, and while she finds him essentially unknowable, the bits and pieces she’s seen and the off-hand comments he made to her turn him into another character, who is just as alive to her as the living ones. Through her friendships with former colleagues, her unexpected connection with Bronstett’s estranged daughter, and her reflections on a lifetime of service work, the novel asks who gets to be seen, who is

remembered, and what kind of knowledge is gained by those who quietly observe from the margins.

When the funeral arrives, so do the police: the murderer, one of Bronstett's friends, is arrested, but Leonora, a lover of crime thrillers, has come to her own conclusions and suspects that the real story is different. More importantly, however, she has reconnected with her friends and as a result her life has become more meaningful.

Inokai writes with remarkable precision and restraint, transforming everyday routines into moments of emotional and political resonance. Leonora is an unforgettable protagonist: pragmatic, wryly funny and deeply relatable. Her voice lends warmth and subtle irony to a novel that refuses easy judgements, revealing the hidden relationships that underpin contemporary working life.

Following the success of her previous novel, *A Simple Intervention* (tr. Marielle Sutherland, Peirene Press, 2024), Inokai once again demonstrates her gift for combining psychological acuity with urgent social questions. 'The Oyster's' subtle psychological observation and ability to uncover profound emotional and social truths within the routines of everyday life will appeal to readers of Elizabeth Strout's *Olive Kitteridge* and fans of contemporary Japanese literary fiction by writers such as Hiromi Kawakami and Sayaka Murata.

Find out more:
https://www.hanser-literaturverlage.de/en/buch/yael-inokai-die-auster-9783446284593-t-6095

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press quotes

> *'The Oyster' reads like a true classic, yet is simultaneously disturbingly relevant. Characters such as Leonora Bloch stay with you long after you've read the final sentence.*

Stefanie de Velasco

> *A crime novel unfolding beneath Berlin's grey winter skies, and at the same time a highly literary mystery. The Oyster is a novel of brilliant reflections. It is, quite literally, a book about surfaces—but also about the dark depths of criminal intent*

Paul Jandl, Neue Zürcher Zeitung

> *The Oyster is a striking novel about exhaustion and about growing older in a relentlessly restless present… Yael Inokai has written a novel that manages to be many things at once: gripping, funny, sad and intelligent—and, throughout, utterly Berlin."*

Leander Berger, SWR Kultur

> *In The Oyster, Yael Inokai skilfully weaves together sharply observed human lives.*

ZDF Morgenmagazin

about the author



© Ladina Bischof

Yael Inokai was born in 1989 in Basel, and now lives in Berlin. Her second novel, *Mahlstrom* (2017), won the Swiss Literature Prize in 2018. She was awarded the Anna Seghers Prize 2022 and the Clemens Brentano Prize 2023 for her novel *Ein*

simpler Eingriff (2022) (*A Simple Intervention*, tr. Marielle Sutherland, Peirene, 2024).

Previous works: *Ein simpler Eingriff*, Hanser (2022); *Mahlstrom*, Rotpunktverlag (2018); *Storchenbiss*, Rotpunktverlag (2012)

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