

The Time of the Cicadas

Die Zeit der Zikaden

by Moritz Heger
Diogenes Verlag
June 2024 / 304pp
Fiction

review

‘The Time of the Cicadas’ is a literary triumph: an arresting contemporary novel set in Germany and Italy, about the experience of aging and the desire for a change of place and identity.?

Alex is in her early sixties when she retires, swapping her teaching career and attic apartment with roof garden for a tiny house on wheels and a relocation to the Baltic Sea. Johann, an undertaker in his mid-fifties, contemplates retirement and the possibility of taking up drawing and painting again. He escapes to Liguria, Italy, where he has inherited a house, to reflect on his stale marriage and his family.

After meeting Alex at his son’s wedding, and a subsequent encounter with her, Johann invites her to join him in Italy. Alex accepts and travels to Liguria with her tiny house, placing it in Johann’s garden. In Alex, Johann finds a muse and a model to paint. A fragile bond develops between them, which is not without its challenges as the differences in their personalities and expectations emerge. Whereas Alex lives in the here and now, embracing openness and spontaneity, Johann’s world seems more rigid and closed off. Alex is an extrovert whose life has an outward focus, but Johann is inward-looking and has a tendency towards depression.

Alex arranges a visit from Johann’s estranged daughter, Nora – young, beautiful, and nonconformist – which gives rise to reflections on what it means to grow old. Nora’s arrival ultimately strengthens the

bond between Johann and Alex. The collaboration between father and daughter during a testing expedition benefits their relationship and opens up the emotionally constrained Johann. As Nora follows her own plans, Johann realises that he has to get his affairs in order at home. Meanwhile Alex cherishes her dream of setting up a performing arts space in Liguria.

'The Time of the Cicadas' eloquently addresses its central themes of aging, personal identity, and place, while touching on a myriad of other important issues, including grief, diversity, inclusion, climate, digitalisation, minimalism, and religion. Heger's characters are authentic and seem to evolve organically as the story unfolds. The linear narrative is interspersed with reflective episodes which complement the storyline. Readers will delight in losing themselves in this compelling story, whose impact continues long after finishing the book.

Find out more:
https://www.diogenes.ch/foreign-rights/titles.html?detail=00ef9ed8-170d-4bbe-b97f-fcd88d9fe0af

press quotes

> *Mesmerising — a book I would like to re-read at different stages of my life.*

Birgit Wildt, NBG Reader

about the author



© Maurice Haas

Moritz Heger was born in Stuttgart in 1971 and studied German, Protestant Theology and Theatre Studies in Mainz. He won the MDR Literature Prize and the associated Audience Prize in 2007. As well as being an author, he also teaches at a high school in Stuttgart. 'From the Depth of the Lake' (2021) is his debut with Diogenes and his second novel after 'In the Snow' (2008).

Previous works: *Aus der Mitte des Sees*,

Diogenes (2021).

rights information

Diogenes Verlag

Contact: Susanne Bauknecht
susanne.bauknecht@diogenes.ch
Tel: +4144 254 8554

https://www.diogenes.ch