



by Gertraud Klemm  
Kreimayr & Scheriau  
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Fiction

## Unicellular *Einzeller*

### review

*Unicellular* is a work of feminist literary fiction, following five very different female characters and the conflicts they encounter as part of their flatshare living arrangement and participation in a TV talk show. Klemm's novel is a thought-provoking and timely analysis of current feminist discourse, addressing intersectionality and the ways in which race, class, and gender impact upon the feminist movement.

The novel's protagonists, Simone, Lilly, Flora, Eleanora, and Maren, are of varying ages. They share a flat in Vienna and appear on a reality-style conversation show called *Big Sista*. The narrative is recounted primarily from the perspectives of Simone and Lilly. The novel is divided into two parts, the first section following the characters during the national election campaign, and the second a year or so later when Simone and Lilly regard themselves as having 'left' public feminism. Simone is an older woman and retired teacher who is having an affair with a government minister, and has residual trauma from a violent incident during a student fight when she was teaching. She struggles with her views on feminism being seen as outdated in the present day. Lilly, meanwhile, is a young college student, a contemporary activist who is navigating a tense relationship with her wealthy father, and her own infidelity with her vegan partner Samu's meat-eating roommate, Aaron.

The two women are at odds in their interactions in the flat; Lilly regards Simone as domineering, rigid, and immovable, and their

diverging views on solidarity and intersectionality come to a head. They also disagree on the television show about Simone's clashes with a Muslim convert and a trans woman who is also a sex worker. Seamlessly blending the personal, political, and public spheres, the novel not only showcases the conflict through Lilly and Simone's ideological introspection, but also through their interactions with Eleanora and Maren, and the reactions of the nationwide TV audience to their disagreements.

The novel's action then resumes a year later, when Simone is in Berlin visiting her daughter and grandchildren, only to be called back to Vienna to receive the Women's Prize. Lilly has a baby daughter with Aaron, and is living in financial security now that her father approves of her choices. In the novel's shocking conclusion, both women encounter devastating violence. Lilly, discovers that Aaron is physically abusive, while Simone is viciously attacked and dies from her injuries. It is left unclear who the attacker is, and emphasised that it could have been absolutely anyone.

Klemm's dry, satirical prose is the perfect medium for this well-balanced novel, which focuses as much on its sharply delineated characters as on the ideological tensions between them.

## press quotes

*The pleasure of reading it lies in the subtle details, in the small discrepancies between doing and thinking, between the words and actions of each individual character. And in the consistency with which the author demonstrates how far politics spreads into the private sphere.*

Judith Hoffmann, Ö1

## about the author



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Born in Vienna in 1971, Gertraud Klemm studied Biology and worked as a hygienic expert for the City of Vienna. She has been a freelance author since 2006. Her novel *Aberland* was longlisted for the German

Book Prize in 2015. She has received numerous awards for her works, including the Audience Award at the Bachmann Prize 2014, the Outstanding Artist Award for Literature 2020, the Ernst Toller Prize 2021, and the Anton Wildgans Prize 2022. Her novel *Hippocampus* was recently published by Kremayr & Scheriau.

Other works: *Herzmilch*, Droschl (2014) *Aberland*, Droschl (2015) *Muttergehäuse*, Kremayr & Scheriau (2016) *Erbsenzählen*, Kremayr & Scheriau (2017) *Hippocampus*, Kremayr & Scheriau (2019).

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