

CAPONEU - The Cartography of the Political Novel in Europe

Yade Yasemin Önder

Anti Müller

Presented by: Isabel Blankfield

Are we doomed to reproduce patriarchal structures in our personal lives? This question haunts Yade Yasemin Önder's second novel, *Anti Müller*. Set in 2020s Berlin, its unnamed narrator-protagonist is a writer in her mid-thirties who finds that her growing desire to have children stands in conflict with the unreliability and indecision of the men around her. The text plays with elements of the *Gesellschaftsroman* (social novel), constructing a flawed, compelling female subject who navigates the fraught terrain of relationships, reproduction and German literary institutions.

The protagonist's personal life is mired in frustration. Kar, her long-term partner, ends the relationship abruptly, after years of *yes, no, maybe*. Andi, whose first appearance as a ghostlike figure floating along Berlin's Landwehrkanal anticipates his inconsistency, teases her with the possibility of a stable future to which he refuses to commit.

Anti Müller is at times a humorous milieu satire about performative male feminists, who lurk on dating apps and start podcasts about "soft masculinity". At other times it is a profoundly troubling exploration of female agency denied or displaced. Önder's text offers a pointed political insight: patriarchal power is not only exerted through extreme violence, but through smaller, accumulating acts of withholding and egocentrism, whose consequences are brought to bear on women's bodies. In other words, seemingly minor demonstrations of male self-interest can nonetheless play into structural oppression. If their symptoms are so diffuse, how, if at all, can these forms of patriarchy be resisted?

The novel's political position is most visible in its consideration of motherhood and childbearing (its title refers to the reproductive hormone that indicates ovarian egg reserves – a subject that preoccupies the protagonist). Men, the text suggests, have the privilege of imagining a "someday", while women are not necessarily able to wait for this undefined future to act on their intentions. In conversations with an imagined psychoanalyst, the narrator-protagonist dwells on the anger and pain brought about by her unfulfilled desire, and begins to contemplate forms of escape. The first-person narrative moves frenetically between introspection and clinical descriptions of hormone injections and egg freezing, reflecting the extent to which individual women pay – both emotionally and literally, as treatment costs accrue – for a patriarchal social system in which men can postpone responsibility.

The meandering, fragmented narrative voice mirrors this sense of desperation. A conversation with Andi, explicitly about commitment and children, is told from a distance, through a series of relative clauses ("she, who..."; "he, who..."), which emphasise the incompatibility of the gendered positions. In the course of the novel, the distinction between the real and the exaggerated collapses: we follow the protagonist for hours as she rides around Berlin's Ringbahn, desperate to encounter any man who might impregnate her before her self-imposed deadline.

There are, too, passages that resemble a political manifesto. Önder's narrator calls on the women of the world to deny men access to their bodies, and pledges to conduct a long overdue "autopsy" of

the injustices and inconsistencies of men who call themselves feminists but refuse to relinquish any social power. Each encounter with a new potential partner provides further evidence that the boundary between personal selfishness and patriarchal structural oppression is, at the very least, an unstable one.

At the same time, the novel reminds us that patriarchy does take on violent forms: when an acquaintance, Jérôme, is accused of sexual assault, the self-proclaimed feminist Andi defends him, furiously and wholeheartedly.

Anti Müller's political project is deliberately ambivalent and uncomfortable. The narrator-protagonist's angry, swirling monologues trace the descent of her desires into obsession and impulsivity. In increasingly extreme ways, the text depicts a female character who manipulates, coerces, threatens, and inflicts harm on her own body and on others, complicating any straightforward reading of the text as a feminist indictment of unreliable, selfish men. Rather, the narrative reflects the chaos and contradiction of its protagonist and, by extension, of the contemporary social landscape it depicts.

LANGUAGE: German / Deutsch

This title was not censored before publishing