

## Class Love

## Klassenliebe

Presented by: Christoph Schaub

The debut novel of Karin Struck, *Klassenliebe* details in often shocking frankness the activities, thoughts, and emotions of the first-person narrator Karin Strauch between May 16 and August 25, 1972. The novel articulates an experience of in-betweenness and out-of-placeness caused by a not-yet-successful process of upward mobility that is accompanied by anxiety, shame, depression, and rage. Situated between the working-class and the bourgeoisie, Karin also stands between two men that represent these different social positions: her working-class husband H. and her bourgeois lover Z., a writer with whom she wishes to have a child. As she struggles with her dissertation, Karin attempts to make sense of her life through writing and reading, engaging such topics as sexuality, mother- and parenthood, gender relations, and class identity.

*Klassenliebe* was written during Struck's increasing disillusionment with the ideologies, practices and organizations that had developed during the 1960s and early 1970s in the students' movement, the New Left, and more traditional Communist organizations. In her mid-twenties when she wrote the novel, Struck had been a former member of the DKP (the German Communist Party) and the SDS (the Socialist German Students' League). In *Klassenliebe*, she uses her narrator to criticize the Left for, among many other things, its "set-phrase language", its disregard of individuality, its "mechanistic image of man [Menschenbild]", and its inability to recognize the double exploitation of women as waged and reproductive workers.

Indicated by the narrator's name, *Klassenliebe* is autofictional in nature. It presents "the private material to the public in an utter and inextricable mix of autobiography and fiction", as the author puts it in her essay "The Private is the Political" (1977), which makes use of a central insight of the contemporaneous women's movement. The novel combines the genres of the diary, the letter, and the dream protocol into an associative and fragmentary text and thereby breaks aesthetically with the kind of writing that predominated influential parts of German working-class literature at the time. Coming up throughout the novel, the organization *Werkkreis Literatur der Arbeitswelt* (Literature of the Working World Workgroup) exemplified this kind of working-class literature that revolved around documentary aesthetics and mostly strove to represent working conditions in the factory and public political struggles. Through its aesthetic form, *Klassenliebe* intervenes into this contemporary working-class literature, which the novel's narrator criticizes for its inability to represent proletarian diversity and to explore workers' private lives and emotions. The novel's form was an integral part in Struck's project of questioning and transforming what counted as political in the literary and political counter-publics from which the novel emerged. In content and form, *Klassenliebe* is an attempt to redefine the boundaries between the public and the private.

A sort of bestseller in Germany, *Klassenliebe* sold about 200.000 copies in the first ten years after its initial publication and was translated into Greek, Italian, Norwegian, and Swedish. In German

literary history, it occupies an important position as a foundational text of the literary current of the Neue Subjektivität (New Subjectivity), often understood as a turn to interiority after the politicized literature of the 1960s. Klassenliebe is also an early, if contested example of the literature of second wave feminism, paving the way for Verena Stefan's even more influential and feminist autobiographical text Häutungen (1975; Shedding). From the vantage point of the 2020s, Struck's novel can be read anew as a precursor of today's internationally booming trend of often autofictional and auto(socio)biographically writing about social origins and precarious upward mobility that is associated with authors such as Christian Baron, Annie Ernaux, Édouard Louis, Deniz Ohde, and Gabriel Krauze.

**LANGUAGE:** German / Deutsch

**PUBLISHERS:** Suhrkamp, Feltrinelli, Bokförlaget Pan/Norstedt, Pax Forlag Politisk Revy, Επικουρος

**CENSORSHIP STATUS:**

Storytelling

## **The Political Novel: A Palimpsest**

By: Ivana Perica