



by Nora Bossong
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Fiction

🏆 Longlisted for German
Book Prize 2024

Reichskanzlerplatz

Reichskanzlerplatz

review

A fictionalised retelling of the life of Magda Goebbels, *Reichskanzlerplatz* is an accomplished literary novel by poet and author Nora Bossong. Offering a nuanced character study and confronting the dichotomy of good and evil, this is a compelling and thought-provoking novel that will appeal to readers interested in twentieth-century history.

Narrated in the first person by a fictional figure, Hans Kesselbach, *Reichskanzlerplatz* seamlessly interweaves both real and imagined characters. At school, Hans meets Hellmut Quandt, son of the industrialist Günther Quandt, and slowly becomes infatuated not just with Hellmut but also his young stepmother, Magda. He joins the army after school, while Hellmut and Magda begin an affair that tragically ends when Hellmut dies of a botched appendectomy. Each grieving in their own way, Hans and Magda are drawn into their own affair, at a time – the late 1920s – when the world seems poised on a knife-edge.

When Magda and Quandt eventually divorce, fascism is well on the rise. Magda falls for Joseph Goebbels, propagandist for the NSDAP, whom she marries in late 1931; the novel takes its title from Magda's address, a flat on Reichskanzlerplatz in Berlin, where Hitler, Goebbels and other Nazi officials would often meet. In 1933, Hans bows to social pressure and joins the NSDAP, but vows to keep his head down. Antisemitism grows at a shocking pace, Ernst Röhm is

murdered, Hindenburg dies and Hitler ascends to power.

Hans takes up a position with the Reich's Foreign Office, securing war loans while deceiving himself into believing he doesn't have a choice. He fails to help a Jewish friend who asks for assistance to flee, while Magda moves ever deeper into the vortex of evil. Her and Goebbels' eventual suicide – following the murder of their six children by cyanide – is told of in an appendix to the novel.

While many of these events may be familiar to readers, Bossong's drawing of Magda's character is more unusual. Beyond this, we also see Hans' slow transformation from a peace-loving young man into an active *Mitläufer* (follower), encompassing knotty themes of complicity and guilt. With believable characters, a well-developed chronology and assured narrative style rooted in historical detail, *Reichskanzlerplatz* is a sometimes challenging but fascinating read.

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<https://www.suhrkamp.de/rights/book/nora-bossong-reichskanzlerplatz-fr-9783518431900>

press quotes

'Is it possible to tell stories about the Third Reich? It's a question that is posed often, and with good reason. Nora Bossong provides an answer with this brilliant book by going ahead and doing it – complex, sober, and merciless.'

Daniel Kehlmann

'Nora Bossong's command of literary technique is matched by few other authors of her generation, as she has proven once again with this incredibly intelligent work about people and the abysses within them.'

Inger-Maria Mahlke, winner of the 2018 German Book Prize

about the author



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Nora Bossong, born in Bremen in 1982, is the author of poetry, novels and essays and has received several awards for her works, including the Peter Huchel Prize, the Thomas Mann Prize, the Kranichsteiner Literaturpreis 2019 and the Joseph Breitbach Prize 2020. *Schutzzone* was longlisted for the German Book Prize 2019. Nora Bossong's works have been translated into various languages.

Previous works: *Auch morgen*, Suhrkamp (2021); *Schutzzone*, Suhrkamp (2019); *Kreuzzug mit Hund*, Suhrkamp (2018); *36,9°*, Hanser (2015); *Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung*, Hanser (2012); *Webers Protokoll*, Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt (2009); *Gegend*, Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt (2006).

Previous works translated into English: *Gramsci's Fall*, Seagull Books (2020, translated by Alexander Booth).

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