



Profile: Elfriede Jelinek

The Nobel prize winner Elfriede Jelinek is known as everything from a genius to Beelzebub in her native Austria.

One of the most famous women writing in German she was most controversially quoted in 1980 as saying "Austria is a criminal nation", referring to her country's participation in the crimes of the Third Reich.

Her 1990 novel *Wonderful, Wonderful Times* addressed that subject.

Set in post-war Austria, she looks at, as she sees it, her country's inability to come to terms with its wartime activities.

One unpleasant character was an SS officer who recalls being "up to the ankles of our riding-boots in blood in Polish villages" and now makes his wife pose for pornographic pictures.

An online travel guide, aboutAustria.org, describes Jelinek as a "proverbial Beelzebub abused for her critical views, especially in Austria".

But it acknowledges the 57-year-old is one of her country's most influential contemporary writers.

Voyeurism

Her best known work perhaps is *The Piano Teacher*, which was turned into a 2001 film by Austrian director Michael Haneke.

French actress Isabelle Huppert plays the repressed , Erika Kohut, a piano teacher at the Vienna Conservatory.

In it, Jelinek explores voyeurism and masochism in a most graphic and explicit way.

The author herself studied music and composition at the conservatory - passing her organist diploma in 1971 - before turning to languages and theatre.

There was some surprise that the \$1.36m prize went to the Austrian.

Many pundits expected a woman to take this year's prize - Jelinek is only the 10th to do so - but the hot favourites were Algeria's Assia Djebar, Joyce Carol Oates of the US and a Dane, Inger Christensen.

Jelinek said the prize was "surprising and a great honour," the Austrian news agency APA reported.

Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/entertainment/3723618.stm>

Published: 2004/10/07 12:50:55 GMT

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