



**Doron Rabinovici**

**The Position**

Novel

(Original German title: Die Einstellung. Roman)

224 pages, Clothbound

Publication date: 14 February 2022

© Suhrkamp Verlag Berlin 2022

Sample translation by Laura Radosh

made for [INCENTIVES – Austrian Literature in Translation](#)

pp. 8 – 10

*From the review by Erkan Osmanovic, 07 April 2022. Translation by Laura Radosh:*

**A blow-up of hate**

Just one heartbeat, one release of the shutter—that’s all it took for August Becker to expose the right-wing populist Ulli Popp. The photographer took a snapshot of the moment that Popp was tapping into a keg of beer, revealing “the face of a killer, a blow-up of hate.”

Capturing people and their viewpoints in his portraits is Becker’s speciality, he’s been doing it for years. He’s well-liked in the media industry. And his snapshot of Popp showed he’s still got what it takes. But his employer, *Forum* magazine, doesn’t want to print the image. Why not?

Out of fear of the populist and his fan base?

No. *Forum* is afraid of being accused of using the photo to manipulate the final phase of the campaign. Suddenly, Popp himself becomes interested in the photo and buys it from the photographer. Becker can’t make heads or tails of the world anymore. But Popp knows exactly what he’s doing. He uses the image himself for his campaign. And Becker? He got a lot of money and, unfortunately, intense blowback. His former allies now view him as a traitor who has sold his soul.

## **Naturally in opposition**

In his latest novel, Doron Rabinovici dissects the connections between politics, media, and the language of images. The title of the book can be read two ways. On the one hand, it's about camera perspective, on the other hand, it's about how the characters view the world. While Becker is a demoralized idealist, Popp is a power-hungry man who isn't fighting *for* anything, just against "those at the top."

As the novel progresses, however, it also becomes clear that viewpoints can be changed, whether through slogans, photographs—or money. The need and greed for money is a leitmotiv of the novel. It's financial trouble alone that forces Becker to sell his photo, and Popp is interested not only in winning the election, but also in handing over "public projects" or "shares in domestic companies" to a mysterious businessman.

## **Speed and Corruption**

*Die Einstellung* is a novel full of contrasts—regarding both the characters and the plot. While Becker, for example, is a drifter, Popp makes everyone and everything do his bidding. The focus is on politics and the media and their mutual dependency. But Rabinovici intentionally refrains from any references to Austria's current political or media landscape. He prefers to generalize, which does not mean he remains superficial. The juxtaposition of corruption and idealism is packed into a gripping, fast-paced story. Rabinovici does not want his readers to be bored. He needn't worry.

**Translation sample:**

Popp said he's only saying what ordinary people think, because the elites are covering up a threat faced by the whole country, because there's a tsunami coming that's going to sweep it all away and whoever didn't want to hear about it and instead lulled people into a false sense of security was betraying the interests of the entire nation. And then he said something that grabbed the attention of most of those present: "fake news," Popp said, and gave a short smug smile, as if he didn't really mean to insult the present company, as if the words were simply a pet name, an ironic witticism—and in that moment August released the shutter and snapped a series of shots. Then he paused for a second, to check the images on the display. Just an automatic glance, a routine inspection to see if he needed to adjust the settings, but in the moment he looked at the shots something occurred that had never happened to him before. August was repulsed by his own photos. That was not what he'd been trying to capture. And suddenly all he wanted was to get out of there.

He weaved his way through the crush of his colleagues from various media outlets, pushed past someone with a camera and sidestepped around Marion Ettl's legs, who gave him such an astonished look that he immediately tripped over a radio reporter's microphone cable. At the other end of the room, Popp, too, noticed the commotion and glanced in his direction, but by then August was already out on the street and a second later didn't know what had gotten into him. But he didn't want to go back in, past everyone again, and there was no real reason to photograph Popp today anyway. He wasn't under deadline and nobody had sent him to this press conference. He'd gone of his own volition, because he'd felt like he had to prepare for the task. What a ridiculous idea! Since when did he need studies to do his job well? Maybe Selma had somehow led him into it.

Without his photo no story, not even a sentence, not a single word, Selma had said. She always preferred to work with him, with August Becker, but for this topic, she insisted. As far as she was concerned there was no other choice. Nobody but August, she'd said, came into question. When she saw the photos others took of Ulli Popp, she lost interest in writing an article; she didn't want to be one of those people who were always making that charlatan look so glamorous and important. His images, August realized after hearing her words, had to be completely different, and capture Popp like he'd never been seen before.

Selma had laid out her plans at the last editorial meeting. Ulli Popp, she'd explained, had to be the magazine's opener. Popp was the man who held the whole country in suspense;

at least since the beginning of the campaign. It was no longer possible to ignore the impending danger. She wanted to write a feature on Ulli Popp and his campaign. A groan went through the room. One of the younger colleagues sighed, it wouldn't help to demonize Popp. But Bruno, the editor-in-chief, gave the OK. He trusted Selma's intuition. The story, however, needed first-rate photos of the man. And no polemics please, Bruno said, he wanted an in-depth portrait. Nobody was surprised when Selma answered that that was the reason she wanted to work together with August Becker on this, and no one else. Selma had barely mentioned her plans—no story, not one sentence, not a single word without his image—before August was gripped by apprehension. He'd decided to go off on his own. Without letting her know. That's why he'd gone to Popp's press conference, which he'd basically fled from as soon as he saw the snapshots on his camera's display.

[...]

### **Doron Rabinovici**

Writer and historian, born 1961 in Tel Aviv, grew up in Vienna. His work includes short stories, novels, and academic writing. In Austria, he has repeatedly taken a public stand against racism and antisemitism. Recent awards include the Anton Wildgans Prize and the Austrian Booksellers' Prize of Honor for Tolerance in Thinking and Acting.

#### **Recent books:**

- *Andernorts (Elsewhere)*. Novel. Berlin: Suhrkamp 2010.
- *Die Außerirdischen (The Aliens)*. Novel. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017.
- *I wie Rabinovici. Zu Sprachen finden (I as in Rabinovici. Finding Language)*. Salzburger Stefan Zweig Lecture in Poetics. Vienna: Sonderzahl Verlag 2019.
- *Die Einstellung (The Viewpoint)*. Novel. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2022.

**Website:** <http://www.rabinovici.at>