



# Arrogance

*Joanna Scott*

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## **Arrogance** Joanna Scott

In Joanna Scott's breakthrough novel the Austrian artist Egon Schiele comes to prismatic life in a narrative that defies convention, history, and identity. A self-professed genius and student of August Klimt, Scott's Schiele repeatedly challenges the boundaries of early twentieth-century Europe. Thrown in jail on charges of immorality, Schiele's Mephistophelean reputation only grows in stature until at the age of twenty-eight, the artist dies in the Great Flu Pandemic. Told from a crosscurrent of voices, viewpoints and times, this stunning novel won Scott a nomination for the 1991 PEN/Faulkner Award.

## **Arrogance Details**

Date : Published June 1st 2004 by Picador (first published 1990)  
ISBN : 9780312423889  
Author : Joanna Scott  
Format : Paperback 288 pages  
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## From Reader Review Arrogance for online ebook

### Robert Wechsler says

An incredible novel about the Austrian artist Egon Schiele and the people in his life, including one young woman whose small role in his life led to his imprisonment (she tells her story in the first person, the only such POV in the novel). The two things that are most special about this novel are (1) the prose, which is very fine and often painfully beautiful, and (2) the opening up of the novel's principal POV, third person limited, from Egon to, in the second half, one character after another.

The biggest negative in the book for me is the way the stories are chopped into pieces and alternated with each other, so that a very special novel takes a form like so many, where short sections and withheld information keep the reader's interest. I don't think this novel needed this. But Scott does it as well as anyone, and it doesn't take much away from her amazing effort.

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### Caddy Rowland says

I was really excited to get this book and saved it for a special treat. I wanted so badly to love it! Unfortunately, I didn't. I can't even say I liked it.

I am a painter, so this should have been right up my alley. However, it didn't present any real details about his work nor did the author take the risk of really telling us details about different "sexual" interludes or desires. Much is hinted at, nothing really told. I found that very irritating and dishonest. Either spit it out and tell it or keep silent about it, please. Also, it is mentioned that an artist paints "lean over fat" layers, when in fact the opposite is true. It is "fat over lean" unless you want your painting to crack!

I usually love literary fiction, which this book is. Although it can also be considered historical fiction, it is written as a character study. Unfortunately, the character is only hinted at instead of studied. We are constantly "teased" about who and what the man was.

The writing went off on tangents which jolted me out of the story numerous times. Much of what was written was unnecessary, taking away from the story instead of adding layers to it. I felt as though the author was trying to show how "arty" she could be and, for me, she didn't pull it off.

I finally gave up half way through. My jaws ached from clenching them out of frustration. After hoping against hope that things would improve, I decided to finally cut my losses.

I do know some people really enjoyed this book. I guess it is just a difference in readers. Their opinions are legitimate, as are mine, of course. Ah well. Time to move on to another book!

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### Bill Wallace says

A book not unlike a gallery of its subject's work. Alternately beautiful, raw, and even shocking (no easy thing), Ms. Scott's fictionalized account of the life of Egon Schiele took a couple of chapters to gel for me but I was hooked after that. Told in multiple viewpoints, including a cloaked first person, the story unfolds in multiple sequences that are, more or less, chronological, but divergent enough to create interesting

counterpoints of theme and symbol. A few of the scenes are strikingly, deliberately transgressive and pluck at modern sensitivities the way Schiele's drawings and paintings must have struck his contemporaries. Some of the passages are amazing, my favorite being a beautiful but nightmarish imagining of a children's puppet show based on the Mayerling incident. Altogether a very different and very fine piece of historical fiction.

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### **Richard Anderson says**

Very well-written and entertaining; the fact that Schiele in the center of things remains such an enigma is probably inevitable.

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### **Schuyler says**

This was the first novel I've read by Joanna Scott, not to be confused with the other two Joanna Scotts. I think I first heard of Scott when I was reading an interview with an author that I liked (can't remember who...Wallace? DeLillo?) and they mentioned her name as a contemporary author they admired, so I went and looked her up. To give brief synopsis, it is a novel based on the life of Expressionist Austrian painter Egon Schiele, whose art was 'controversial' and often deemed 'pornographic'. But it is a fascinating and ultimately sympathetic look into the life/mind of a classic 'tortured soul', narrated from several view points and a scattered timeline. The only thing that prevented me from giving this book four stars is the fact that it set in the early 1900's, from his birth in 1890 to his death in 1918. I have a hard time placing myself emotionally in anything written before 1950, which is a fault of my own and not of Miss Scott, or any author that chooses pre-1950. It is just my preference, hence my inclination towards DeLillo, Wallace, Eggers, etc. So maybe I should give this book four-stars because really why should that have any sway over the rating? It just made me feel disconnected at times. I look forward to reading another book by Scott and enjoying her language which is down right musical at points. The last ten pages are beautifully written and very satisfying.

On another note, Shiele's art is interesting and worth exploring, even though he was, yes, arrogant, and like all tortured artists, a little bit crazy.

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### **Brendan says**

Well written and fascinating, this fictionalized account of Schiele's life held my interest from the start. The ever-shifting setting, timeframe and narrator show a crucial attention to detail and a vibrancy that most straight biographies and art histories sorely lack.

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### **Chrissie says**

The last chapter was so perfect, so beautiful, so moving. You get into the heads of Vallie(the mistress), Gerti (the youngest sister) and Egon himself - the artist. You understand who he was and why he was the way he was. I would like to tell you more, but I do not want to wreck it for you. Another 5 star book. If you are moved by art - then read this book! I was going to read Girl with a Pearl Earring after this, but to do that would be unfair. I would compare the two, and I believe I would unfairly judge Chevalier's book. It cannot be as good as this. I like getting into the heads of the main protagonists. Will Chevalier's book do that? I will

read it soon, but not immediately. Oh also, note that I put Arrogance onto my "relationships shelf".

Through page 167: It is important to understand what Schiele was rebelling against, what was being taught at the art academies at this time. Three years before Schiele was put in prison for 24 days on the charges of seduction of minors (but later changed to corruption of minors due to lack of evidence) he was following lectures at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. The professor says, as he points to the model, a nude young man with his back turned to the students: "Such perfect proportions. The eye follows the movement of light and shade. The human figure is most pleasing to us in its absolute symmetry - beauty depends on symmetry, just as truth depends on logic." The author continues: "But today a small group of students listen carefully - these are the youngsters, led by Egon Schiele, who have been voicing increasingly hostile views, and now they sit with their arms folded in defiance." The students then protest by banging their fists on the wooden box chairs. The teacher, hysterically out of control, leaves the lecture hall and locks all the students inside. To understand Schiele you have to understand the straight-laced art he was being taught. To understand why the young girls enjoyed visiting Egon and his mistress in their little cottage of the village Neulengbach, you have to know that the girls were raised in a deprived, poor, extremely restrictive environment. They loved how Schiele encouraged them to dance and sing and somersault around the room, and his mistress shared the chocolates she herself adored with the kids.

Through page 140: The reader sits on the sidelines, watching and observing while Schiele destroys himself. He does nothing to save himself.... Such genius, such talent but no understanding for self-preservation. Are the two incompatible? If one has artistic talent and creativity is it impossible to be a little bit practical? I am wondering why the reader feels no revulsion for Schiele's extreme interest in young girls. Maybe b/c you look at each particular relationship separately and see what motivates the two individuals. Neither side is without guilt. Your knowledge prevents you from making hasty snap-judgements. Sure, you often feel that Schiele is acting so damn stupid, but you kind of understand and realize that simply was who he was. You also know what is false gossip. Concerning the author's writing style - it is magnificent. It is artistic in its own way, and blends well with the book's central theme, art. The author is adept in her ability to bring to life the personalities of Schiele and those close to him, particularly his mistress and his younger sister.

Through page 89: Having an artistic temperament must be both a gift and a terrible curse. I certainly don't have it! I can only read to try and imagine what it might be like. Again - definitely a book for adults.

Through page 67: The writing is marvelous. I should copy a bit here, but I am too lazy. You have to relax and accept each UNchronological episode as it hits you. You come to understand Egon's very difficult childhood, his fear and his total lack of comprehension of what is happening around him. His father repeatedly destroyed Egon's artwork. As a small child, he could not understand his father's anger and unpredictable behavior. This fear remained with Egon as he grew older. Artistic, imaginative and creative qualities are an integral part of who Schiele was. These qualities produced his art and of course also made his life unconventional and often filled with controversy. The author is very good at letting the reader see through Egon's eyes - the beauty of a beetle, the impulsive need for play, the enjoyment our senses can give us. Knowing more about Schiele's life makes me appreciate his artwork even more than when I started.

Through page 57: Definitely a good pick, but sometimes I am confused about the role of the narrator. There are also shifts in time. I will quote Library Journal b/c they express this much better than I do: "Diverse narrative voices and shifting chronological perspectives create a potentially confusing structure; yet this story is so intriguing, and Scott's richly textured style so mesmerizing....." the reader thoroughly enjoys themselves. It is good to like Schiele's art and be interested in knowing more about his short life.

I highly recommend that you also read The Notebooks of Don Rigoberto. After reading Llosa's book, you will want to know more!

I totally love Schiele as an artist. I have seen many of his pieces and although he is most known for his

portraits he also does fabulous landscapes and village scenes. Furthermore the author is supposed to be promising.

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### **Abailart says**

The artist who 'crucified himself for his art', a crosscutting of narratives and voices that reveal an inevitability about the suffering of tortured genius. Well written and intensely engaging, deeply sad and shabby yet with the fierce uplift of arrogance.

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### **Michael Lackey says**

This is a remarkable book, one of the best biographical novels ever written. It would be worth reading Arrogance alongside Bruce Duffy's *The World as I Found It*. Both writers brilliantly incorporate Otto Weininger into their narratives in order to define the kind of thinking that led to the demonization and violation of women and Jews in the early twentieth century. As for Scott's portrayal of Egon Schiele, it is profoundly satisfying. No hagiography in this novel. He was a great artist, who was very mixed up. If you like novels that offer no simple answers and sparkle with originality on every page, this is an absolute must read.

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### **Susan Liston says**

hmmm...the author is a creative writing professor and there were parts of this that felt like she was doing an assignment for her own class. If an author is going to spend four pages describing someone lying in a field looking at a mole coming out its hole the writing better be so exquisite you don't mind that it has nothing to do with anything, and this wasn't. But I did stick with it, and it did pick up the pace a bit later. The story of Egon Schiele is an interesting one, and I'll give this book the benefit of three stars because it wasn't bad, by any stretch, I just might not have been in the mood to give it the patience it needs.

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### **Mara says**

Growing on me. Read at first by sheer will-power, but finally to a point where I am past repulsion at Schiele and open to how it's moving. Hardest thing is that I cannot binge-read, I have to take it in small doses, because it is overwhelming.

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### **JoAnna says**

Three-line review: This high-brow piece of literary fiction tells a fictionalized version of the Austrian artist Egon Schiele's life. Jumping among different characters in Schiele's life and through a variety of time periods, the story helps explain who the artist is and the circumstances that led him to being such a controversial figure. It took awhile for me to get into the book, but I found it to be quite readable and an interesting depiction of an actual person with whom I was unfamiliar.

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## Loel says

An interesting insight into the life of painter Egon Schiele, mostly from the perspective of various women in his life. Fiction. It was a bit difficult to track the story lines, and I didn't feel that I learned as much about his personality and art as I had hoped. Writing is spotty.

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## Corey says

Never heard of her, but an interview I read once had David Foster Wallace including her in a list of writers he called "the cream of the nation's younger crop."

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## Ubik 2.0 says

### Schiele

Egon Schiele è artista straordinario e le sue opere, tele, acquarelli e disegni, fra le più significative del '900.

L'arco della vita del pittore sembra prefigurato dalla drammaticità espressa nei dipinti, con la morte precoce a 28 anni, la concentrazione di un notevole corpus pittorico in un lasso di tempo fra i più brevi della Storia dell'Arte, la carcerazione con l'accusa, poi ridimensionata, di abuso di minori.

Tuttavia questo romanzo è deludente e abbastanza noioso: a discolpa dell'onestà dell'autrice va ricordato che il titolo originale "Arrogance" sembra voler evitare il riverbero immediato della fama di Schiele tanto che anche altri personaggi e ambienti sono posti in primo piano rispetto all'artista nel corso del racconto.

Come prevedibile, l'edizione italiana provvede a colmare questa "lacuna di marketing" reintonando il libro col nome dell'artista e creando conseguenti false aspettative di una biografia o di un saggio (che è esattamente il meccanismo che mi ha abbindolato), mentre la parte romanzata, deboluccia di per sé, diventa per il lettore quasi un'evitabile digressione.

Resta l'occasione per riprendere in mano e sfogliare ancora una volta la rappresentazione dei magnifici nudi e ritratti creati dal giovane genio e rimpiangere quella che avrebbe potuto essere la sua evoluzione, se la Spagnola non l'avesse sottratto alla storia della pittura e della cultura.

N.B.: Mi è capitato di leggere parte di questo libro in concomitanza con un capolavoro di Faulkner. Non escludo che possa essere scattata in me la sindrome liceale dell' "Interrogazione col primo della classe", contribuendo a rimpicciolire il valore di "Egon" ben oltre i suoi demeriti...

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