

by Charles Lewinsky
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Fiction

A Different Story

Eine andere Geschichte

review

In this latest novel by the prolific Swiss writer Charles Lewinsky, an ageing Jewish film producer, Curtis Melnitz, tries to blag a prescription for sleeping tablets, only to find himself sentenced to regular psychoanalysis instead. What begins as reluctant grumbling turns into something more like pleasure, as Melnitz starts telling his life story on the couch, one session per chapter, with all the gruff asides, punchlines, and evasions of a man who has spent a lifetime performing.

The frame is deceptively simple. The analyst, Dr Cowan, never speaks on the page, so the reader infers the questions from Melnitz's responses, misunderstandings, and strategic detours. It's a clever set-up for Lewinsky's pleasure in storytelling for its own sake, and for a narrator who can turn a childhood humiliation, a petty theft, or a dirty joke into a set piece.

Melnitz's account runs from a harsh Leipzig upbringing, marked by punishment, loss, and a sour sense of guilt, into a series of misadventures that are by turns comic, nasty, and oddly tender. After his father's death and a spell under the roof of relatives and hangers-on, he falls out with family, drifts, and then cons his way into the film world. Lewinsky references the early history of cinema, silent sets, egos, hustles, and reinvention, without ever letting his research sit too heavily. Curtis remains what he is: canny, self-serving, often entertaining, and not always likeable.

The tone stays light for a long stretch, full of puns, barbed aphorisms, and brisk scene-making. There are wistful passages too, flashes of vulnerability that don't quite soften Melnitz so much as complicate him, especially when the past nudges at the door and he pretends not to notice.

Then the narrative tightens. As the twentieth century turns brutal, Curtis is pulled back towards Germany, and the story ends in a stark, shocking confrontation with what has been waiting off-stage all along. The deliberately abrupt shift forces the reader to re-evaluate Curtis' earlier roguishness and the comfort of anecdote.

This is a Jewish picaresque with a strong narrative engine, a distinctive, voluble voice, and a theatrical structure that makes it a real page-turner. It will appeal to aficionados of Hollywood's darker myths as depicted in Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*, and to those who enjoy Günter Grass's mordant humour in *The Tin Drum* as he walks his readers towards historical catastrophe.

Find out more:
https://www.diogenes.ch/leser/titel/charles-lewinsky/eine-andere-geschichte-9783257073782.html

about the author



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Charles Lewinsky, born in Zurich in 1946, has been a freelance writer since 1980. He won international renown with his novel *Melnitz* (Melnitz, Atlantic Books, 2016), which was awarded numerous prizes. His novel *Der Halbbart* ('Halfbeard') was nominated for both the Swiss Book Prize and the German Book Prize. His works have been published in 16 languages. Charles Lewinsky lives in Vereux (France) in summer, and in Zurich in winter.

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Diogenes Verlag

Contact: Susanne Bauknecht
susanne.bauknecht@diogenes.ch

Tel: +4144 254 8554

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