

by Leon Engler
DuMont Verlag
August 2025 / 208pp
Fiction

🏆 Nominated for the ZDF “aspekte” Literature Prize 2025

🏆 Swiss-German Booksellers’ Favourite Novel 2026

We are delighted that this book has now been published in English translation.

Botany of Madness

Botanik des Wahnsinns

review

This debut novel by the 2022 3-sat award-winner of the Bachmann Prize captures a narrator’s struggles to come to terms with his parents’ mental illnesses, interspersed with accounts of his work as a psychologist in a psychiatric clinic. The book opens with the narrator’s realisation that seven storage boxes containing what he believed to be family mementoes are in fact full of rubbish: the actual keepsakes he thought they contained have been accidentally thrown away.

As a teen, the narrator was terrified he would inherit his mother’s bipolar disorder, or his father’s alcoholism and depression. Through flashbacks, we learn about his childhood and those of his parents. His father had been adopted by a strict Catholic family after periods spent in an orphanage. His mum, meanwhile, had had to contend with her own mother trying to kill herself and repeatedly threatening to abandon her. The narrator himself often endured extreme situations with his parents, such as eviction, and witnessing his father’s bouts of depression. As soon as he is old enough, he tries to flee his demons and create some distance from these problems by moving to New York, then Paris, and finally Vienna. In Austria, he starts a degree in theatre and befriends his neighbour, an elderly man. The two strike up a close friendship, and the narrator is distraught when the old man dies.

After retraining in the field of mental health, the narrator ends up in the place he had feared – in a psychiatric hospital – but as a

psychologist rather than a patient. His works brings him closer to his family and he is able to reach some kind of understanding about his parents.

The narrator's father, meanwhile, continues to move from one house and job to another. His mother becomes a successful journalist but after coming into money, quits her job and descends into alcoholism. She is evicted, and moves in and out of rehab. The narrator tries to help her, and to connect with his father, but isn't sure how to do either.

Eventually the narrator leaves his job and returns to Vienna to retrace his family's lives. On finding the boxes of rubbish in the storage unit, he decides to write his family's story himself.

Subtly evoked in open, generous and compassionate prose, this debut adds to the discourse around mental health issues.

Find out more:
https://www.dumont-buchverlag.de/buch/leon-engler-botanik-des-wahnsinns-9783755811299-t-7701

80,000 copies sold and **rights have so far been sold to:**

OceanMore (Croatian); Gyldendal (Danish); De Arbeiderspers (Dutch); New Vessel Press (English – North American Rights); Scribe (English UK Common-wealth excl. Canada); Tänapäev (Estonian); Libri (Hungarian); Feltrinelli Gramma (Italian); Gyldendal Norsk (Norwegian); Filtry (Polish); ej.publishing (Slovak); Libros del Asteroide (Spanish); Koridor (Turkish);

press quotes

> *Irresistible. A book that is at once grave and light, tender and tough, satirical and earnest.*

Siri Hustvedt

> *“A fantastic book – abysmal and yet comforting. I devoured it.”*

Doris Dörrie

about the author



© Niklas Berg

Leon Engler grew up in Munich and studied Theatre, Film, Media, Cultural Studies and Psychology in Vienna, Paris and Berlin. He has published numerous theatre plays, radio plays and short stories and was awarded the 3-sat-Prize at the Bachmann Competition in 2022. He works as an author, psychologist and lecturer in psychology and literary writing. ‘Botany of Madness’ is his first novel.

rights information

DuMont Buchverlag (Germany)

Amsterdamer Strasse 192
50735 Cologne

Contact: Judith Habermas
judith.habermas@dumont.de

Tel: +49 (0)221 224-1942

www.dumont-buchverlag.de