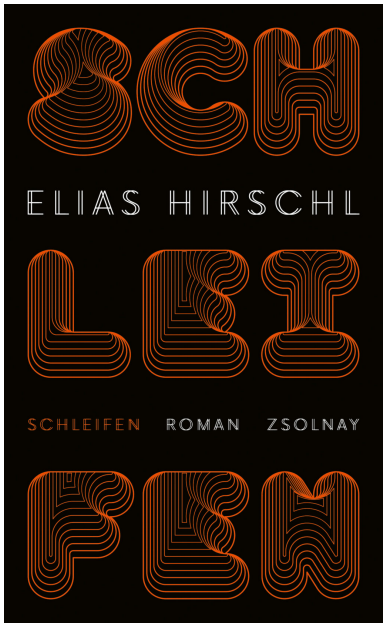


by Elias Hirschl
Paul Zsolnay Verlag
January 2026 / 415pp
Fiction

Winner of the 2026 Düsseldorf Literature Prize

Loops

Schleifen

review

‘Loops’ is Elias Hirschl’s most intellectually ambitious and inventive work to date, and will appeal to readers of Italo Calvino and Ben Lerner.

The novel is a high-concept, absurdist exploration of language, information overload, and the nature of human identity. It is a text that manages to be deeply philosophical while remaining contemporary, witty, and frequently laugh-out-loud funny – a rare feat for a novel that essentially charts the logical self-destruction of humanity.

Protagonist Franziska Denk is born into the heady intellectual circles of early 20th-century Vienna. Franziska suffers from a mysterious, psychosomatic condition in which her body physically manifests any medical symptom she hears or reads about. This literalisation of the power of language sets her on a path towards Otto Mandl, a brilliant mathematician. Together, they embark on a quest to develop a ‘perfect language’, a journey that eventually devolves into the radical movement of ‘non-verbalism’. Seeking to abolish spoken and written words entirely to reach a purer truth, the movement fragments into increasingly violent factions, leading to a surreal, dystopian endgame in the fictional state of Wodot.

The novel’s structure is as mind-bending as its premise. Hirschl uses the Möbius loop as a recurring metaphor, reflecting a world where knowledge is infinite but entirely self-referential. This is mirrored in the

book's fragmented form, which blends traditional prose with letters, emails, fictionalised history, and meta-narratives. The final act introduces a book within the book – also called 'Loops' – a living, intelligent autofiction that loops endlessly and adapts its content based on the reader's perspective. As the world loses its words, humanity begins to collapse into a singular hive mind of individuals all named Jim Blum, serving as a bitingly funny critique of our current era of digital homogeneity.

Hirschl's background as a slam poet is evident in the rhythmic, engaging flow of his prose, which prevents the sophisticated intellectual references – ranging from medieval theology to advanced mathematics – from ever feeling smug or inaccessible. His bold, visionary voice speaks to the 'information loops' of the 21st century. 'Loops' is a monumental work that confirms Hirschl as one of the most exciting young authors currently writing in German.

Find out more:
https://www.hanser-literaturverlage.de/en/buch/elias-hirschl-schleifen-9783552075887-t-5834

press quotes

> *One stands amazed at Hirschl's ingenuity … A great, playful, clever game and a joy to read. Hirschl strolls casually into the big linguistic, psychological and aesthetic questions and toys with them in the most delightful way.*

Standard

> *The most extraordinary novel of 2026 … phenomenal new writing from Austria!*

Deutschlandfunk Kulter

about the author



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Elias Hirschl was born in Vienna in 1994 and is a writer, slam poet and musician. He received the Reinhard Priessnitz Prize in 2020. His publications include H*undert schwarze Nähmaschinen* (‘One Hundred Black Sewing Machines’, 2017), and most recently, published by Zsolnay, *Salonfähig* (‘Socially Acceptable’, 2021) and *Content* (‘Content’, 2024).

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