



by Clemens J. Setz
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Fiction

🏆 Winner of the Austrian
Book Prize 2023

🏆 Nominated for the Leipzig
Book Fair Prize 2023

🏆 Longlisted for the
German Book Prize 2023

🏆 Georg Büchner Prize
2021

Moons before the Landing

Monde vor der Landung

review

Already a bestseller in Germany, *Monde vor der Landung* is Clemens J. Setz's much-anticipated first book since winning one of Germany's highest literary honours, the Georg Büchner Prize, in 2021. The book is a literary biography of Peter Bender, a pilot during the First World War and proponent of the abstruse 'Hollow World Theory'. Setz follows the fascinating story of this eccentric man and his family at the beginning of the twentieth century, through the rise of Nazism.

Setz describes Bender's life from his early career as a pilot, through his marriage, and his efforts to promote his theories. Bender believed that the earth was a sphere, but maintained that human beings live not on the outside of the globe but within its hollow interior. He found a number of followers, including a contingent in the USA, who later partly supported him and his family. Bender is arrested for incitement, before being sent to an asylum for his questionable mental state. He is released from the asylum only to be imprisoned in a concentration camp where he dies.

The novel focuses on Bender's marriage to Charlotte, a war nurse, and his relationship with his long-time mistress, Else. Charlotte is a devoted wife who supports her husband and their two children through hard times. Else is a demanding mistress, eventually disappearing from Bender's life to be replaced by another mistress, Hedwig.

Both Charlotte and Hedwig are Jewish and are increasingly subjected to Nazi oppression. For Bender, trapped in his own mind, these events are only on the fringe of his world. While his wife suffers under the Nazi regime, he is only marginally disturbed and is more concerned about the diminishing support for his theory. The depiction of the mindset of this extreme narcissist is impressive and disturbing: Bender sees the world only in regard to himself, his thinking, the effect his relationships have on him, and how others react to him. Bender's character and his surroundings are convincingly presented, but infused with a sense of absurdity and narrative detachment that heighten the reader's pleasure in the book.

Setz's observations conjure up a vivid picture of people, places, and situations, and he achieves the impressive feat of completely recreating the deranged mindset of his protagonist. His extraordinary prose style is clear, sophisticated, and elaborate – a joy to read!

<https://www.suhrkamp.de/rights/book/clemens-j-setz-moons-before-the-landing-fr-9783518431092>

press quotes

There are few other writers able to create such fantastic interconnections of the organic and the mechanical, the animate and the inanimate.

Jutta Person, Süddeutsche Zeitung

... through bold metaphors and synesthetic connections even the most everyday fragments of reality are presented as exceptional cases of individual perception. Hardly any other writer of contemporary German-language literature has the ability to present this disarrangement of focus as suggestively as Setz ...

Richard Kämmerlings, Welt am Sonntag

The illuminating thing about Clemens Setz's new novel is that present and past are not brought into a state of mutual denunciation. The novel neither passes judgement nor draws conclusions. It observes and describes.

Paul Jandl, Neue Zürcher Zeitung

His aesthetics are so unique in German-language literature – and not just in this context – that it would not be inappropriate to describe Clemens J. Setz using any and all available superlatives.

Marie Schmidt, Süddeutsche Zeitung

about the author

Clemens J. Setz, born in Graz in 1982, studied Mathematics and German Language and Literature at the University of Graz from 2001 to 2009. Today he lives in Vienna.

Clemens J. Setz is the author of novels, short stories, poems and plays and the recipient of numerous awards.

Der Triumph der Waldrebe in Europa (2022); *Die Bienen und das Unsichtbare* (2020); *Der Trost runder Dinge* (2019); *Bot* (2018); *Die Stunde zwischen Frau und Gitarre* (2015); *Till Eulenspiegel* (2015); *Glücklich wie Blei im Getreide* (2015); *Die Vogelstraußtrompete* (2014); *Indigo / Indigo* (2012); *Die Liebe zur Zeit des Mahlstädter Kindes* (2011).

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