



by
Herbig
Verlagsbuchhandlung
July 2016 / 160pp
Fiction

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Of Wars

Von den Kriegen

review

In this intriguing blend of fact and fiction, newspaper death notices illuminate Germany's relationship with its past.

It is the summer of 2015 and Gero Warnecke, a history student, is starting a new research project. A professor has asked him to catalogue a large number of commemorative notices, all published in the last twenty years, and all of German soldiers who died in battle. Gero, who up to this point has cared more for ancient history, is drawn into the personal lives of the dead. His work is meant to be an act of remembrance, an indictment of those who caused the war; but soon he becomes fascinated not only by the soldiers, but also by their loved ones.

Death notices are common in Germany and beyond. Surminski, a prolific writer of fiction and non-fiction, uses 174 of these very short obituaries, published in German newspapers between 1985 and 2015, to raise wider questions of individual and collective acts of remembrances. This is a unique take on a topic that remains highly relevant.

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