

by Simon Elson
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Fiction

Story of Disorder

Geschichte der Unordnung

review

Simon Elson's debut novel is a modern coming-of-age story: it reads like a 21st-century take on Goethe's autobiographical classic, The Sorrows of Young Werther, and is a stand-out example of the auto-fictional genre that is so prevalent in contemporary German-language literature.

The protagonist of 'Story of Disorder' is born into a Hamburg-based family of anthroposophists in 1980. The family follow the beliefs of Rudolf Steiner, the founder of anthroposophy, who maintained that an individual's spiritualgrowthwas achieved through the application of human logic to the understanding of the world. The protagonist attends a Waldorf school where his father works as a teacher. Periodically overwhelmed by bouts of inexplicable fear, he relies upon his loving father to set things right. When his father dies in a car crash, his world is turned upside down. His mother cannot talk about her grief, and is unable to cope. The boy and his siblings are leftto their own devices, and he struggles with the cloud of despair surrounding his mother and the family as a whole. He rarely sleeps at home, laughs off remarks about his torn clothes, frequently skips school, and learns to internalise his inner turmoil.

Elson's hero soon finds ways of numbing his pain: literature and sex to begin with, then alcohol and drugs. After completing his school education, he leaves home for Berlin. City life is utterly diverting, but no matter how many unhappy relationships, one-night stands, and

drug-fuelled experiences he collects, he can neither escape from himself nor fulfil his one true ambition of becoming a writer. In the end, even massive doses of cocaine can no longer subdue his deeper emotions and they break free in theform of devastating panic attacks. Luckily for him, he is saved from a rock ‘n’ roll death by a female therapist, who helps him finally to face his psychological troubles.

A hero’s voyage to hell and back might be a well-known proposition, but Elson offers a contemporary perspective on this timeless storyline. Spanning three decades, from the early 1980s to the early 2020s, his protagonist’s extraordinary childhood and his travails in crazy post-unification Berlin constitute a fascinating life story. Elson’s knack for punchy one-liners and for marrying the absurd, the hilarious and the deeply tragic in a single anecdote make ‘Story of Disorder’ an immensely rewarding read.

Find out more:
https://www.aufbau-verlage.de/blumenbar/geschichte-der-unordnung/978-3-351-05124-2

press quotes

> *Elson’s intense imagery is delivered in clear and poetic language.*

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about the author



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Simon Elson, born in 1980 in Hamburg, writes occasionally for the Berlin magazines Weltkunst and Monopol, but mainly writes books about art and artists. Story of Disorder is his first novel.

Previous non-fiction titles f. e. “Der Wolkensammler”, Rowohlt, 2020, “Macht der Stille: Janus la Cour und das Bild der Natur”, Sandstein Kommunikation (2022).

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