



by Marlen Pelny
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Fiction

The Reason We Remain

Warum wir noch hier sind

review

A thoughtfully crafted counterpoint to two well-known literary tropes, *Warum wir noch hier sind* is an anti-thriller, anti-Berlin novel about life in the wake of unimaginable trauma. Defiantly literary with a distinctly satirical undertone, it focuses on the human impact of violent crime rather than clever detective work.

In the wake of her fourteen-year-old daughter Etty's random murder just a few paces from her own front door, Heide must work out how to go on living. Narrated from the perspective of her closest friend, *Warum wir noch hier sind* adopts a fragmented structure and economical prose that seems influenced by Pelny's background as a poet and singer-songwriter. Moving away from a conventional linear timeline, it instead reflects life as we live it: a collection of vivid impressions, thoughts and experiences that sometimes overlap, repeat or otherwise refuse to conform to a neat narrative pattern.

Between bouts of looking after Heide, mourning Etty and trying to keep herself afloat in a perilous freelance role (as a casting assistant for the reality TV show *The Farmer Wants a Wife*), the narrator has a close relationship with her grandmother, who lives now in sheltered housing. As a blood relative, the grandmother stands in marked contrast to most other characters in the novel, who together constitute Heide's "elected family" of friends and neighbours. This choice of cast – mainly female friends who love one another fiercely – is another way in which Pelny subverts traditional narratives while reflecting how

many people live today.

Despite the fact that it hinges on a murder, this light-on-plot novel is concerned with emotions rather than events, about what and whom we choose to value, and how to piece a life back together when it has been ripped apart by violence and grief. It also asks a series of universally pertinent questions about what society and governments are – or are not – doing to ensure women’s safety, especially in cities and after dark.

Pelny presents Berlin – a perennially popular setting – in an unglorified yet authentic light, depicting the city’s darker sides without glamorising the grit. *Warum wir noch hier sind* is a refreshing, moving and provocative take on established genres that gives a voice to those who often go unheard.

Find out more:

<https://www.haymonverlag.at/produkt/warum-wir-noch-hier-sind/>

about the author



Marlen Pelny has posted poems on placards in German cities and has published two volumes of poetry, *Auftakt* [Upbeat] (2013) and *Wir müssen noch die Tiere erschlagen* [We still need to slay the animals] (2013). She expresses herself not only on walls and on paper, but also through music, with her band *Zuckerklub*. Her debut novel *Liebe / Liebe* [Love / Love] (2021), for which she was awarded the Klopstock Prize in 2022, is suffused with her characteristic poetic clarity. Her second novel, *Warum wir noch hier sind* [Why we’re still here] deals with connection.

Previous works: *Liebe/Liebe*, Haymon (2021)

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