

Insane

Rainald Goetz

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This troubling, complicated literary novel delves into the experiences of mental illness, questioning some of our most basic beliefs about what it means to be insane.

Insane by Rainald Goetz is a complex, multivoiced, experimental look at mental illness and the institutions that try to help its severest sufferers. Moving, insightful, and at times deeply troubling, it is a novel that challenges its audience at every turn.

The novel nominally centers on Raspe, a young doctor at the start of his career, beginning his first job at a psychiatric hospital. But its scope reaches far beyond Raspe's story.

The first of the book's three equal sections contains a series of vignettes and speeches that appear to come from the hospital's patients and doctors. Each is presented briefly and without context, in varying styles and points of view. The second tells Raspe's story in a more traditional, narrative-driven style, while the third returns to the scattered, impressionistic style of the first, this time with Goetz himself emerging as a character.

The first two sections, while different in form and mood, are equally rich in their ideas, character development, and language. The first offers glimpses into the hopes, dreams, and struggles of patients, positioned immediately next to portrayals of the hopes, dreams, and struggles of their doctors.

Goetz's language is varied, capturing an impressive range of emotions and moods. Raspe's story in the second section offers the pleasures of more straightforward storytelling as he begins his new job with hope and encounters a series of obstacles that make him reevaluate the entire psychiatric enterprise.

The third section is less satisfying. Raspe fades into the background, and in his place emerges a confusing array of voices, among them the metafictional voice of the author, pontificating on writing and culture. Some of these ramblings are troubling in their cruel treatment of women and dismissive attitudes toward people of color. This section also displays a much harsher, angrier tone than the rest of the book.

Rainald Goetz's *Insane* is a troubling, complicated literary novel that delves into the experience of mental illness, exploring the stories of doctors and patients alike and questioning some of our most basic beliefs about what it means to be insane.

REBECCA HUSSEY (May/June 2018)

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