



Verklemt

Peter Sichrovsky

Ari Roth, Contributor

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Authentic, reportorial stories explore diverse articulations of modern Jewish identity.

The short-story collection *Verklemt* is Peter Sichrovsky's first fiction work to be translated into English, and its stories explore modern Jewish identity in myriad ways. A longtime journalist and politician, Sichrovsky writes with a crisp prose that makes his everyday characters real, with a touch of humor and subtle points about what being Jewish means today. This is a strong collection.

Sichrovsky writes in the book's foreword that each of these stories is based on a real-life experience, and that comes through in the conversational and real tone of the writing. One of the best stories in *Verklemt*, "The Sirens," involves a couple living in Israel during a rocket attack by Saddam Hussein, debating whether it's worth it to stay through the threat or if they should find a safer spot for their family, while getting conflicting suggestions from their two sets of parents. By making one partner a transplanted American and the other a native, with parents to match, the author uses those differing backgrounds to drive the characters' perspectives about what to do.

"Berlin" is a seemingly straightforward story about a reporter, a camerawoman, and their subject meeting for an interview. But each character brings his or her own sense of being the descendant of a survivor for different reasons, and both Jewish men have feelings for the blond woman they're meeting with, so their every line of dialogue is loaded with those agendas. Another highlight is "Pigs Blood," in which a one-eyed cab driver who was formerly a Hitler Youth shares his wartime experiences with the writer narrator, including his first meeting with a Jewish woman. Or "Clearance Sale," in which a newly promoted retail-store department head can't get anyone in his life to care about his new job, except for an attractive new assistant manager who might understand him.

Each of the eleven stories that make up *Verklemt* demonstrates Sichrovsky's craft. The writing has an almost reportorial quality, and the dialogue similarly feels honest while hinting at much that isn't said. The pieces here are memorable and diverse, making *Verklemt* an excellent English-language introduction to the author's fiction.

JEFF FLEISCHER (Spring 2016)

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