



The Chosen Ones

Steve Sem-Sandberg , Anna Paterson (translator)

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The Am Spiegelgrund clinic, in glittering Vienna, masqueraded as a well-intentioned reform school for wayward boys and girls and a home for chronically ill children. The reality, however, was very different: in the wake of Germany's annexation of Austria on the eve of World War II, its doctors, nurses, and teachers created a monstrous parody of the institution's benign-sounding brief. The Nazi regime's euthanasia program would come to determine the fate of many of the clinic's inhabitants.

Through the eyes of a child inmate, Adrian Ziegler, and a nurse, Anna Katschenka, Steve Sem-Sandberg, the author of the award-winning *The Emperor of Lies*, explores the very meaning of survival. An absorbing, emotionally overwhelming novel, rich in incident and character, *The Chosen Ones* is obliquely illuminated by the author's sharp sense of the absurd. Passionately serious, meticulously researched, and deeply profound, this extraordinary and dramatic novel bears witness to oppression and injustice, and offers invaluable and necessary insight into an intolerable chapter in Austria's past.

The Chosen Ones Details

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From Reader Review The Chosen Ones for online ebook

The Jewish Book Council says

"Steve Sem-Sandberg turns his fearless gaze on a lesser-known evil, the origins of genocide in the Aktion T4 Nazi euthanasia program in Austria." Review by Ranen Omer-Sherman for the Jewish Book Council.

Stephanie says

Set during World War 2, this interesting book allows the reader to see inside the minds of the children patients and medical professionals at Spiegelgrund. Spiegelgrund was one of the "hospitals" used to euthanize unfit and disabled children by the Nazi regime. The way the book is written in multiple voices makes it even more haunting.

patrycja polczyk says

Si?gaj?c po "Wybra?c?w" wydawa?o mi si?, ?e jest to ksi??ka o szpitalu psychiatrycznym dla doros?ych. Ogromnie si? pomyli?am. Plac?wka, w kt?rej rzecz si? dzieje, nie do ko?ca jest o?rodkiem psychiatrycznym. Pe?na jest za to dzieci i ich cierpienia. Doro?li si? tam oczywi?cie pojawiaj?, ale nie w charakterze pacjent?w. Nie potrafi? oceni? tej ksi??ki w kategorii "podoba?o mi si?". Nie jest to ksi??ka, kt?r? mo?na "lubi?". Oceniam raczej jej warto?? i styl. Historia nie jest ani ?atwa, ani przyjemna. Ta opowie?? uderza jak m?ot w sam ?rodek g?owy i sprawia b?l. Strony tej opartej na faktach ksi??ki pe?ne s? z?a i barbarzy?stwa. Je?li kto? tego nie dostrze?a, co? jest z t? osob? nie tak. Emocje, kt?re nadal odczuwam, szybko nie min?. Nie powinno si? zapomina? takich historii, za to powinno si? traktowa? je jako przestro??. Co? takiego nigdy nie powinno by?o mie? miejsca, ale je?li nie da si? tego cofn??, to nale?y dopilnowa? aby si? to nigdy nie powt?rzy?o. Niech ta nie?atwa historia b?dzie przestro??. Dla ka?dego.

TheCosyDragon says

The Nazi-run "Spiegelgrund clinic was apparently well-intentioned: both a reform school for lost, wayward boys and girls, and a clinic for chronically ill or malformed children." Instead, this novel exposes the truth of what happened behind those walls - children tortured and left to cry before being allowed to get sick and medicated to death.

I picked up this novel several times. I really wanted to love it, I thought that the content was fascinating when I read the blurb. However, the execution completely floored me. rare sporadic speech was interspersed throughout text with little to no paragraphing.

One of the things that seriously confused me was the constant transitions between different forms of names. I could cope with the Viennese names, but I couldn't cope with the crazy swapping between nicknames, last names and first names. Or no name at all, and just a description of their physical or mental state at the time (which was unreliable anyway).

This novel had so much potential because I was very interested in the subject matter. I wanted to love it, which is why I let it percolate on its shelf for 2 years and why it survived two novel cleanouts. I'm now going to release it on Book Crossing, even my mom wasn't attracted to reading it.

This novel had the positive potential of Max but instead ended up in my could-not-complete pile with I am Sasha. 1 star from me. I couldn't finish it. Occasionally I can tolerate this kind of abstract writing but I just couldn't.

Chiara Ropolo says

<https://laettricesullenuvole.blogspot...>

Leggo soprattutto per evadere dal quotidiano, quindi spesso i titoli che vi propongo sono leggeri. Nel giorno della memoria però mi pare doveroso uscire dalla mia confort-zone e parlarvi di questo libro.

Tutti noi sappiamo molte cose riguardo all'olocausto. Sono convinta che non sia mai abbastanza, ma libri e film possono aiutarci. Il nazismo però non ha solo preso di mira gli ebrei, ma ha sistematicamente cercato di eliminare ogni imperfezione alla razza ariana, che sia data da zingari o da persone con problemi fisici e mentali. Questo argomento, purtroppo, è molto meno conosciuto e trattato, così quando ho letto la trama de I prescelti mi è sembrato giusto leggerlo, per saperne di più. Credo che lo scopo del giorno della memoria sia proprio questo.

Il libro racconta di quanto accaduto a Spiegelgrund, l'ospedale di Vienna predisposto a curare i bambini con difficoltà. In realtà in quel posto veniva fatto di tutto, tranne pensare al benessere dei suoi occupanti. L'atrocità di quanto accaduto mi ha colpita molto, è stato proprio un pugno nello stomaco. Ero a conoscenza di qualcosa ma leggere nero su bianco e in modo dettagliato ciò che è accaduto mi ha turbata, tanto. Tutti i bambini sono indifesi, quelli con difficoltà ancora di più. Per un ideale di purezza si è provveduto all'eutanasia sistematica, dopo averne studiato ogni aspetto.

Oltre a essere inorridita per queste pratiche, sono stata ulteriormente turbata dall'assenza di ogni emozione da parte dei medici e di alcune infermiere. Le piccole vittime sono state pezzi di carne da studiare, da analizzare e infine da eliminare. Il tutto per un ideale di razza pura.

Ciò che è accaduto a Spiegelgrund, così come in altri posti, poi non ha avuto riconoscenza né vendetta. Manca la giustizia per quelle vittime, in quanto le testimonianze non sono state credute e reperirle è stato difficoltoso. C'è veramente da riflettere su questo, ci si sente impotenti.

L'argomento trattato dal libro quindi mi ha molto colpita e coinvolta. Purtroppo però la forma in cui è scritto ha notevolmente frenato il mio entusiasmo.

... continua sul blog

Anna says

Kolejny epizod z historii II Wojny światowej pokazuj? okrucie?stwo nazistów. Ksi??ka pokazuje cz??? akcji T4 czyli usuwania ludzi niepe?nosprawnych, chorych psychicznie i innych uznanych przez III Rzesz? za ?ycie niewarte ?ycia.

Karen Brush says

Disturbing

Viktor Säfström says

En bra bok som ger perspektiv på vad en totalitär stat gör med sina invånare. För att gilla den här boken måste du ha ganska hård hud eller gott om näsdukar.

Emma says

This is one of those books which is both monstrous and beautiful.

Sem-Sandberg has an incredible talent for character and description. The words of both main characters come in an almost stream of consciousness style, full of detail and the minutiae of daily life, that feels like the inner workings of a mind. The resulting realism adds to the tension created by the knowledge that the situation is real, the story based on real events. Together they produce a rather unsettling read, definitely not easy, but illuminating and important.

Many thanks to Steve Sem-Sandberg, Faber & Faber, and Netgalley for this copy in exchange for an honest review.

Alyssia Cooke says

The subject matter covered by this novel is harrowing but the prose itself is bland and formulaic with no heart or soul behind it to catch you and draw you in. In fact, I would potentially go so far as to say that the only reason this novel has gained so many five star reviews is because of the content and because nobody wants to negatively rate a book about the forced euthanasia of so many children during Nazi times. But for all of the horrendous acts that are described; children dying due to procedures, being put down with medicines, guts hanging out of backsides and even the process of disembowelling oneself... this is somehow, bland and boring.

At no point do you gain any real attachment for the main characters, even though the tale is virtually told through two of them; a nurse and a boy in the same institution. I don't think I ever really felt sorrow or pity despite knowing that what had happened was horrendously wrong. This book just didn't draw me into these characters lives and force me to care about them. In fact, many times I would forget characters names entirely and be surprised when they were brought up later as I had somehow just assumed they were dead already. The naming conventions for staff and children kept changing as well, with them sometimes being referred to by first names, sometimes second names and because the names are not English this made it much harder to keep track of what was going on. With other characters there is no conclusion to the novel, no

closure and threads are just left hanging in the wind.

The novel's scope is also too broad, going from childhood to adulthood, to the pinnacle of these doctors' careers to their deaths and trials. It just seemed to meander along and never pick up enough pace to be interesting. If anything, the most interesting sections are the trial bits and these are right at the end and such a tiny fraction of the book that it's almost as if they aren't important. Instead, you are bored to tears with the various tales of where Adrian goes after being moved from the institution as unreformable and it's all as bleakly depressing and yet mind-numbingly boring as the rest of it... there's no emotion or pull throughout... it is all just very bland, he did this, she did that.

This may be perhaps due to the translation. Perhaps it works better in its native language. Of that I cannot say. It is after all written with a clearly skilled hand, even if the style was certainly not to my taste. What I can say is that I found this dry, dreary and dull in spite of the fact that the content itself should have been horrifying. I found myself skipping paragraphs or even pages because I'd completely lost interest in it before picking up something vaguely eye-catching for a while before once more becoming bored and fast-reading again...

Susan says

This novel is based upon real events, although the characters are fictional. The story unfolds through the testimony and memories of two main characters; Anna Katschenka, a nurse, and Adrian Ziegler, who is a young boy at the time of events.

The book involves a care institution, 'Am Spiegelgrund' in Vienna. Although the clinic begins as a hospital for handicapped children, as well as for those who are deemed to be in need of care through 'wayward' behaviour; under the years when Austria is governed by the National Socialist German war machine, it is charged with the duty of, 'examining and assessing all mentally deviant children' with 'data' collected for scientific study. If that sounds ominous, that is because it is, as the author asks how a hospital which is meant to care for children, turns into a place of experimentation and euthanasia.

Both the central characters offer a different perspective into events. Anna Katschenka is a nurse for many years. Responsible for her parents and with a marriage to a Jewish man which is frowned upon by the authorities, she is unable to find work under the new regime. So thankful is she at being offered a job at Spiegelgrund in 1941, especially with Doctor Jekelius, a man she admires from afar, as acting medical director, that she asks no questions. In fact, she is perfect material for a clinic which makes Anna profoundly uncomfortable. What unfolds among the staff is a conspiracy of silence, as the treatment of the children who arrive is called, "part of a natural disinfection" process. Meanwhile, concerned parents – pathetic and trembling – try to press for answers and they haunt these pages as they haunt the corridors and spaces outside of the clinic in the book.

Adrian Ziegler, also arrives at the clinic in 1941, albeit not so willingly. With a doubtful genetic heritage – his father labelled as a 'gypsy' – and a childhood filled with poverty, minor misdemeanors and domestic abuse; Adrian finds himself ricocheting through a system of foster parents and children's homes, until he ends up at the doors of Spiegelgrund. Although much of this book is upsetting and difficult to read about – for example as Adrian is put on show in front of rows of students, as the doctor uses a pointer to highlight his racial impurities – as well as much worse, there is also much humour about his character. Adrian is a born

survivor and, as we know he is recounting his story from the beginning of the novel, this is not a spoiler. As just one boy, his story represents the other, countless stories, that the reader just touch on – some more deeply than others.

This novel asks difficult questions and would be an ideal reading group choice. It looks at love, shame, complicity, secrets and conspiracies. As the war unravels and the Russians approach, the infrastructure of the country collapses and those involved with the clinic are accused. The aftermath of war, and of a policy which is utterly abhorrent, is explored in this book. How did this happen and why were only some held to account, while others denied everything and evaded blame. A thought provoking and interesting novel, I found this disturbing and yet extremely readable. Lastly, I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review.

Karen Kozich says

Couldn't get through this book.

Felix says

I'll be honest. I'm not sure how I felt about this book. I mean, obviously, if I'm rating the book on moral worthiness of the subject or how much the story of Am Spiegelgrund needs to be told, then it's 1000/5 stars. But as a reading experience... I just didn't enjoy it.

For one, I got MAJOR book burnout halfway through. The topic is *heavy*, and there's no moments of levity anywhere. It was tough for me to slog through pages and pages of kids with severe developmental problems being abused by the nurses.

It almost didn't seem to go anywhere? I felt that there were a lot of times when there were descriptions of the behaviours of the kids in the wards just because. Or nights on the wards just because it filled the time. Which got very dull.

The bit I found the easiest to read was the liberation by the Russians and the trial, because I could sense the comeuppance coming. But - and as heinous as it sounds - I just didn't *care* about the main characters. Adrian didn't draw me in. He just had a tough life all the way through, and although I'm not saying that that doesn't always produce a great hero (Heathcliff, Jane Eyre, etc beg to differ!), I just got to the point where I was going 'Oh, and he's in jail again. And he's lost his job again. And he's back in jail.' Even the twist where Gross is his psychiatrist after his last jail stint didn't make me care about him, or what would happen to him. Sorry. And Anna Katschenka I only cared about enough to be happy that she was accused and tried as an accomplice to murder, WHICH SHE WAS.

And lastly, I'm not a fan of the style. 1. I couldn't understand why the book was separated into sections almost like chapters, and yet the start of every new 'scene' was given a bolded, same-line 'title' of its own within those chapters? What was that about? and 2. Steve Sem-Sandberg's style is a bit like Stephen King's, whom I find impossible to read because it just sticks and seems to go so slowly for me and I can't stand it, so I probably didn't like it for that reason. But hey, that doesn't stop Stephen King from being probably the 2nd most well known author on the planet ever. So.

Zuzana says

Já v?bec nevím, jak hodnotit.

Téma dobré, ještě? jsem to v beletrii nepotkala.

Autor schopný.

Jen jsem se asi n?jak nesžila s pro m? naprosto chaotickou linkou, kdy jsem dost dlouho tápala v tom r?zném skákání z místa na místo, z ?lov?ka na ?lov?ka. Nakonec jsem se rozhodla, že o tom nebudu p?líš p?emýšlet a budu ?íst dál a dál, což fungovalo. Ale byl to asi d?vod, pro? jsem se ne úpln? za?etla.

A p?edevším: Tohle fakt není knížka pro ?erstv? t?hotné. Fakt ne.

Lolanta says

<https://lolantaczyta.wordpress.com/20...>

Josephine (Jo) says

I do feel really guilty about not finishing this book but I had got about a third of the way through and I just could not get into it at all. The subject matter was so sad and the characters were in a heart breaking situation but the telling of the story was so so slow! I tried to persist as I hate to give in but I found myself thinking about tomorrows shopping and realised I had read a page and not a word had sunk in!

It would have been fascinating to fully know the story of the inmates of the Am Spiegelgrund clinic but the time it would have taken to get to the end of this ponderous tome was just not worth the effort. The stories of Anna Katschenka, a nurse, and Adrian Ziegler, a young boy who is an inmate of the clinic are so interesting and the author writes so well and describes the inmates and their surroundings so well and in great detail, but maybe there is just too much detail, it rambles a little. The only way I can describe the way it made me feel is that it was like trying to eat crackers with no butter or cheese, just to dry to manage to swallow.

I hate to give a negative review but I also have to be honest, many people have given the book four and five stars so maybe it is just me.

Anne says

I hate giving bad reviews and to say I read this book is a bit of a lie as I only got about a third of the way

through it before giving up (something else I hate to do). I can see it is well written, the subject matter is interesting and I also acknowledge the amount of research involved. However I simply struggled with the format and the density of the prose. And there are too many other books that I want to read

Gill says

Definitely a 5 star read. The writing is excellent and the language is often beautiful. I had to read this quite slowly, because of its grimness. What a work of witness, all kudos to the author.

Paul Bryant says

This most heartrending of novels is, I humbly suggest, unreadable. I will go further – my base, ignoble heart is telling me that all the huge praise this novel gets is from people who have not read every page of it. And more – I would bet all the reviewers skipped and skipped and skipped again, and found out to their dismay that page 237 was almost replicated on page 383, and the abuses rained down on children in chapter two had only been slightly modified by chapter 17.

I think the vast praise and the 5 star reviews are due to this novel's untouchable, almost holy subject, which is, the Nazi euthanasia program for severely disabled children. There were a few facilities set up to perform this horrible task and *The Chosen Ones* tells the story of Am Spiegelgrund, a clinic in Vienna, through the eyes of a nurse and one of the boys who survived. It operated from 1940 to 1945 and around 800 children were killed there.

This is a non-fiction novel, like *In Cold Blood* or *The Executioner's Song*, meaning that everything included is factual. The problem here is that unlike those two brilliant achievements, *The Chosen Ones* has no narrative. The author presents the daily grind of minor or major outrages perpetrated on various children by various medical personnel. Emotion is drained out of each sentence, as the awfulness speaks for itself. But what reader can take 557 pages of minutely described misery heaped on completely defenseless children?

Here are some random samples so you can see what I mean :

Page 73

Soon afterwards, she is called to pavilion 17, where a boy is banging his head against the wall. He has to be restrained. In the other ward, a boy has come down with scarlet fever

Page 155

The staff was ordered to keep the windows open at all times, even during the raw, damp and cold days in winter, even though the children were in a very poor condition and often febrile.

Page 273

The Pelikan lad stands next to her with his face so close up against the window that his face is outlined in the condensation on the glass. Crossly, she grabs at his twitching arm and hauls him back into the day room, but

Pelikan whimpers and resists, then tries to reach round her with his other arm, which she throws to the side again and again as if it were a lifeless object.

P325

The structure is a little like the one he was put in when Dr Gross measured his head on his first day at Spiegelgrund. Two nurses take a firm hold of his arms and place him in the structure, where he is to sit leaning forward on the stool... By now he is terrified. They lower the top of the steel frame down over him

Eventually there are escapes by older children and the defeat of the Nazis and liberation of the inmates, and the trial and convenient dementia of one or two perpetrators (the rest of them melt away). No spoiler there! You all knew *that* was going to happen. This wrap-up gets about 80 pages at the end. My hat is off to any reader who makes it that far without skipping like 50 pages at a time.

If I was rating on grounds of moral worthiness this is an obvious five star novel, but as a reading experience it's a disaster.

Julie says

Just didn't hold my interest enough to finish it.
