

My Weil

Lars Iyer

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In Lars Iyer's comedic novel *My Weil*, a ragtag cohort of doctoral candidates studies at a Manchester university's second-rate philosophy program—rebranded Disaster Studies. The members of this grimy and vibrant group spend a lot of their time together, pondering the politics of the apocalypse. They quote philosophers, bicker, and compete over hookup partners too. Still, they are their own family by choice, sharing esoteric knowledge, nicknames, and hangouts.

As a unit, the students bus and wander from the university to their regular café and their regular bar. Satire rules in the wild park space, the Ees, where they're creating a theory-heavy student film. Their discourses are funny, even as their surroundings become psychedelic and unmoored from England's decaying rust belt. Their intoxication and boisterousness contrast with their austere new friend, who has taken the very name of thinker Simone Weil as her own.

The book also revels in Manchester's rich musical history. Joy Division's doomed Ian Curtis, frozen forever in the big emotions of young adulthood, sets a lovelorn tone for the story that mirrors that of its central narrator, Johnny. Johnny's voice often disappears into the collective one, but he's the one member of the group looking outward. His friends are all thinking about themselves or their art—except for fascinating Simone, who seems determined to erase herself in the name of religious servitude.

Party scenes send them all out of their comfort zones; the book's quick summaries of the other students lead to hilarity. The descriptions of the goth philosophical duo, Weep (allies to Johnny and friends) are delightful whenever they make an appearance, including in departmental badminton games.

A perfect comic novel, *My Weil* shares the intense, urgent feelings of close young friends who are out to save the world, whether it notices them or not.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS (September / October 2023)

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