

The Treatment



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Amazon.com At 32, Jake Singer is trapped inside not only his own thoughts but also those of his antic, hectoring psychiatrist, a "madman privateer for whom conservative Freudianism was merely a flag of convenience." In between his triweekly skirmishes with the malaprop-slinging Dr. Morales, Jake does manage to carry on: he teaches at Coventry, a New York City private school, and has a small trust fund and an adequate Upper West Side apartment. Yet the protagonist of Daniel Menaker's first novel is increasingly alone. He hasn't seen his doctor father in four years, his mother died when he was six, and his most recent girlfriend left him. "I wasn't so crazy that I didn't know how boring my plight would be to most people," he later realizes. "Even the banality of evil is outstripped by the banality of anxiety neurosis." In fact, there's nothing remotely banal about Jake's anxiety, which Menaker makes both very real and very, very funny. Though Dr. Morales is dead-on about his patient's inertia, his antic method gives the term critical care (not to mention shrink wrap) new meaning. Indeed, Jake and his doctor's hostilities are both hilarious and deeply painful, skidding between progress and "emotional vivisection." Is the foul-mouthed, foul-minded Morales a sport of psychiatric nature, or is he on the right track? Neither patient nor reader will ever be quite sure, though Jake does come out of his long slump, inheriting the responsibility for his own life--and those of several others. The

Treatment ruffles with comic energy and risky shifts, but also with something increasingly rare in fiction--tenderness. Menaker, unlike his protagonist, seems unafraid of emotion and has a perfect ear for the momentary exchange that simultaneously reveals and conceals all. He can also dish up epigrams with the best of them. Jake turns Wallace Stevens's hieratic pronunciamento into a surprising home truth: "If death is in fact the mother of beauty, she never spends any time with her kids." Any reader interested in the fresh pleasures of language, character, and sharp social landscaping should look no further. The Treatment is both a merry novel about loss and a melancholy fiction about the pleasures of intimacy--sexual, familial, and, of course, therapeutic. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title. From Publishers Weekly Menaker's clever, very funny and surprisingly tender first novel is a triumphant satire of Freudianism gone amok, a touching love story and a quintessential picture of New York life. In the annals of intellectual urban existence at the end of the 20th century, 32-year-old Jake Singer's lonely, anxiety-filled daily routine qualifies as an existential hell. Just passed over as head of the English department at Coventry, a prestigious Manhattan prep school, estranged from his cold father, still subconsciously guilty about his mother's death when he was six, unable to connect emotionally with a woman, Jake is locked in combat with the devil in the form of psychiatrist Dr. Ernesto Morales. The black-bearded, Cuban-born, devoutly Catholic Morales has put his personal stamp on the psychoanalytic process that he calls "the treatment": he is aggressively confrontational, vociferously opinionated and invariably accusatory as he hectors Jake in hilariously accented, "flamboyantly Spanished" diatribes designed to keep his patient intimidated. Even when Jake is not being bullied by Morales in person, he hears the doctor's voice in his head, in tandem with his own typically sardonic replies. But Jake's life undergoes an astonishing transformation when he meets wealthy socialite widow Allegra Marshall at a Coventry fund-raiser, and the two beautiful WASP and "neurotic secular atheist Jew" begin a passionate affair. Fate brings them into contact with a young woman living in the Berkshires (this gives Menaker another chance to depict the residents and terrain of his memorable collection of short stories, *The Old Left*). In a series of (perhaps too convenient) coincidences, Jake initiates acts of courage, reconciliation and healing, meanwhile achieving his own fulfillment. Menaker's supple command of language, his witty turns of phrase and riposte-sharpened dialogue are informed by an ironic eye, a wryly compassionate understanding of human frailties and a skeptical but also guardedly hopeful appraisal of the human condition. (June) FYI: Menaker, formerly a senior editor at the New Yorker, is a senior editor at Random House. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title. See all Editorial Reviews

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