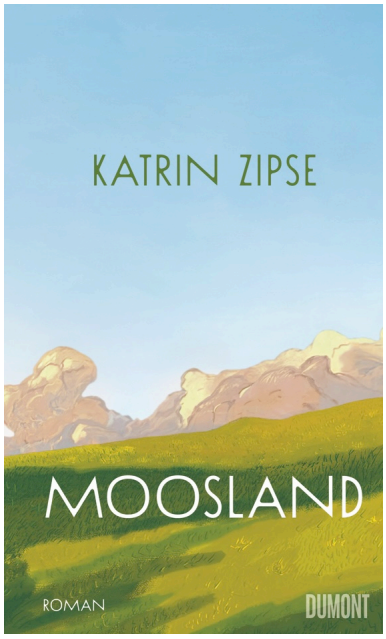


by Katrin Zipse
DuMont Verlag
March 2026 / 224pp
Fiction

Shortlisted for the Harbour Front Debut Prize 2026

Land of Moss

Moosland

review

rights have already been sold to
Meridiaan (Dutch); JC Lattès (French); Einaudi Stile Libero (Italian); Prostor (Czech)

Katrin Zipse's debut novel is an atmospheric, finely detailed novel about silence, survival, and the slow, risky work of learning to belong again. Set in 1949, it draws on a little-known post-war episode: hundreds of young German women travelled to Iceland for a year of farm work, arriving with little knowledge of the language and few options, and often finding their lives remade by the place.

Elsa is one such woman. War and loss have left her shut down, and even in German she speaks sparingly, grieving her friend Sola and refusing, at least at first, to imagine a future. On an isolated farmstead, the turf house, the hanging fish, the endless light, and the brutal practicalities of rural labour speak more immediately to her exhausted body than any words.

Zipse stays tightly with Elsa's perspective, letting the reader share her disorientation as she tries to find her footing in a household and a language she cannot yet properly engage with. Names come late, sometimes only as phonetic impressions, neatly recreating the experience of being surrounded by speech you cannot make sense of. A farmhand quietly teaches her new words at night, and Zipse makes language feel physical: something learned in the mouth,

tested in the air, and chosen, each time, to counteract fear.

The novel is equally alive to the forces of nature. The landscape is something Elsa must negotiate day by day: the glare and vastness of the Icelandic sky, the pull of the sea, the sudden shifts in weather, the turning of the seasons, the elements dictating what can be done and when. This is a new, strange environment that contrasts with what Elsa remembers from home (woods, trees, familiar smells), and it becomes a measure of her distance from herself, as much as from other people. Traditional farm work, attuned to the land, sits alongside the inner work of endurance.

The seasons move from summer 1949 towards the following year, and the plot is threaded with flashbacks that catch Elsa off guard, pushing her towards flight and self-harm. Around her, the farm's internal balance shifts. Elsa's presence changes the dynamic between the sons, and a missing daughter, never spoken of directly, haunts the household in ways Elsa can sense before she can explain.

With its strong historical hook, careful psychological insight, and vivid sense of place, 'Land of Moss' should appeal to English-language readers of post-war women's stories and quietly suspenseful rural fiction. It's a novel about departure and arrival, and about the moment a new language stops being noise and becomes, cautiously, a way back to life.

Find out more:
https://www.dumont-buchverlag.de/en/buch/katrin-zipse-moosland-9783755811831-t-7798

about the author



Katrin Zipse was born in Stuttgart in 1964 and works as an author and radio editor in Baden-Baden. She read Theatre Studies and German Philology at the Free University of Berlin and worked for several years in the theatre. Since 1993, she has been a writer and editor of radio plays for various broadcasters. In autumn 2019, she was awarded a scholarship for Moosland by the Association of German Writers in

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Baden-Württemberg.

Previous works: *Die Quersumme von Liebe*, Magellan (2015); *Glücksdrachenzeit*, Magellan (2014); *Antonia rettet die Welt – Waschbärbingo*, Magellan (2017); *Antonia rettet die Welt – Schildkrötenküsse*, Magellan (2017); *Antonia rettet die Welt – Papageienparty*, Magellan (2016); P*inella Propella*, Magellan (2018)

rights information

DuMont Buchverlag (Germany)

Amsterdamer Strasse 192
50735 Cologne

Contact: Judith Habermas
judith.habermas@dumont.de

Tel: +49 (0)221 224-1942

www.dumont-buchverlag.de