



by Wolf Haas
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Fiction

🏆 Shortlisted for the
Austrian Book Prize 2023

🏆 Nominated for the Leipzig
Book Fair Prize 2024

Property *Eigentum*

review

Prizewinning crime novelist Wolf Haas shares memories of his upbringing in rural Austria and of the days immediately before his mother's death in this luminous family narrative.

Haas's intimate account of his family's story is also the history of a country – even a world – between the wars and in their aftermath. He writes movingly of ordinary people's struggle to survive and make the best of things in the challenging circumstances in which they find themselves. Haas offers a relatable and accessible glimpse of an enduringly fascinating period, sharing valuable insights into a century we are still trying to understand.

Born in 1923, a time of economic depression and inflation, in a remote area of rural Austria, Haas's mother's lifetime ambition is to own her own home. Growing up between the two world wars, her life is far from easy, and is characterised by an ongoing struggle to belong. She is given away to a farmer at the age of ten, because her parents cannot afford to feed all their children. During World War II she is part of the female workforce, and afterwards she works in the hospitality industry in Switzerland, sending her earnings home to support her family in Austria.

Haas's mother's death, at the age of ninety-four, is the starting point for the narrative. Flashbacks are used to good effect, shifting back and forth between Haas's mother's account of her life and Haas

recounting what he can remember of the stories she told. The anticipation of her death is interwoven with a history spanning World War II and jumps seamlessly between the past and the present. The stories are not told chronologically, but are linked to the last conversations and memories his mother shares with him.

Property is a story of displacement, poverty, and daily life during the turbulent twentieth century. Haas's mother's life is focused on building a family home, and, when she is pregnant with Haas's older brother, she moves into the house she helped to build. This is where she brings up her sons and lives for the rest of her life. Despite finally having a place to live, the fear of not belonging and of being forced to leave always remains with her.

Property is a keenly observed work of autofiction, full of wit and humorous wordplay. Haas's distinctive literary style, so beloved by readers of his crime fiction, shines through in this appealing novel, and can be tracked full circle back to his upbringing.

about the author



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Wolf Haas was born in 1960 in Maria Alm am Steinernen Meer and lives in Vienna. His crime fiction novels starring private eye Simon Brenner sold millions of copies and have been made into successful films. He received the 2016 Jonathan Swift International Prize for Satire and Humour for the Brenner series and the 2013 Bremen Literature Prize for his novel *Verteidigung der Missionarsstellung*.

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