



by Lukas Maisel
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Fiction

Tanner's Earth

Tanners Erde

review

The second work of fiction by Swiss author Lukas Maisel, *Tanners Erde* is an evocative, mesmerising novella whose simple, unsentimental style belies a powerful message. Clearly allegorical, with overtones of Kafka, it can be easily read in one sitting.

Written in the third person and structured as seventeen brief chapters, *Tanners Erde* takes the reader on a powerful ride through rural Swiss life. Tanner, the protagonist, has a small farm on the outskirts of a village in the Swiss Alps. He lives with his wife, Marie, some chickens and a few cows. Though Tanner adores Marie and loves his land and animals, he struggles to show his affection openly.

Suddenly, overnight, a huge hole appears in one of his fields. Roughly six metres in diameter, it is soon joined by a second, smaller hole. Tanner is perplexed and tries to find an explanation, calling everything in his life into question. He seeks advice from the local priest, the mayor and his fellow farmers, before various experts and geologists are brought in to assess the hole. While some believe it is a sinkhole or landslide, no one seems able to explain it, and all promises of help soon prove empty.

Tanner is on his own: even Marie seems to be retreating, and he finds it impossible to discuss his fears with her. With his beloved cows unable to graze on the field, his main source of income is lost, and eventually he is forced to sell the animals. The book ends with Tanner

standing at the edge of the hole. While Maisel leaves it ambiguous, the implication is that Tanner takes his own life – an outcome that speaks to the tragically rising suicide rate among European farmers.

An unusual, powerful novella, *Tanners Erde* is stark in both language and imagery. Maisel keeps his prose pared back, yet still creates some highly atmospheric scenes. The topicality of the storyline – not just the struggles involved in farming and the slow decline of rural life, but also humanity's distorted relationship with nature – provides plenty of food for thought, and is underpinned by timeless themes such as love, faith and the values by which we live. Undoubtedly melancholic yet never resorting to kitsch, *Tanners Erde* is high-calibre literary fiction.

Rights sold: Italy, Dadò; The Netherlands, Atlas Contact.

Read more on the publisher's website

here: <https://www.rowohlt.de/buch/lukas-maisel-tanners-erde-9783498003081>

press quotes

So slight, so powerful. With this slender novel, Maisel has created a masterwork.

Stern

Humorous despite the tragedy, and masterfully crafted [...] a perfect little work of literature.

Jutta Duhm-Heitzmann, WDR Lesestoff

about the author



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Lukas Maisel was born in Zurich in 1987. He completed a printing apprenticeship before studying at the Literature Institute in Biel. His debut novel, *Buch der geträumten Inseln*, received several awards, including the Swiss Schiller Foundation's Terra Nova Prize. In 2021 he was nominated for the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize.

Other works: *Buch der geträumten Inseln*, Rowohlt Verlag GmbH (2020).

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