



by Arno Geiger  
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Fiction

🏆 This author won the 2005  
German Book Prize

## The Happy Secret

### *Das glückliche Geheimnis*

#### review

Arno Geiger won the very first German Book Prize in 2005 with *Es geht uns gut*, (*We are doing fine*, translated by Maria Poglitsch Bauer, Ariadne Press, 2011), and is one of the best-known authors in the German-speaking world. *The Happy Secret* charts the author's incredible evolution from a rubbish-collector rooting through Vienna's bins – a self-confessed 'vagabond, a tramp, ... a nobody' – into a distinguished literary figure.

The author lets readers into his secret life: hours of sifting through refuse and recycling bins in Vienna over twenty-five years, principally in search of written material. Geiger is simultaneously fascinated and ashamed by what he is doing, and horrified at the idea that his parents might find out about his secret. He explores the significance of what people throw away, observing how the composition of the city's rubbish changes over time and considering what this tells us about society, as well as touching on the ethical question of collecting rubbish.

Geiger describes his early years as a writer – how he develops his clandestine habit from the age of twenty-four, and how the books and letters that others have thrown away have a positive influence on his writing. The book is also a meditation on relationships, life and death, with excursions on his aging parents, in which he returns to the subject matter of *The Old King in His Exile* (translated by Stefan Tobler, And Other Stories, 2017).

Geiger's father suffers from dementia and later dies; his mother, long separated from his father, suffers a stroke and subsequently requires the author's constant care. The author's progress as a writer is interwoven into the narrative, with descriptions of awards, workshops and publications as they occur. These various strands are organised into unnumbered chapters.

This is an entertaining, highly readable, bravely honest and beautifully written book, offering a fascinating insight into how Geiger has collected and filtered material for his novels. He highlights the value of the authentic writing he finds in old discarded letters, which he contrasts with the sometimes arch, overworked language of fiction.

Very few authors are prepared to let readers into their private lives with such candour and wit. *The Happy Secret* is already a bestseller in Germany: an excellent book, concisely written and refreshingly different from most autobiography.

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<https://www.hanser-literaturverlage.de/en/buch/the-happy-secret/978-3-446-27617-8/>

Listen to a German reading of *The Happy Secret*.

## press quotes

*This story is as fascinating as Geiger's open-hearted account of it. Immediately after reading it, you want to dive into all his previous works. And the sight of a full waste paper container suddenly creates an unexpected tingling sensation.*

Judith Hoffmann, ORF, Ö1

## about the author



Arno Geiger, born in 1968, lives in Vienna and Wolfurt. His works are published by Hanser, including most recently *Alles über Sally* (2010); *Der alte König in seinem Exil*

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(2011); *Grenzgehen* (2011); *Selbstporträt mit Flusspferd* (2015); and *Unter der Drachenwand* (2018).

He has received, among others, the German Book Prize (2005), the Hölderlin Prize (2011), the Adenauer Foundation Literature Prize (2011), the Alemannic Literature Prize (2017), the Joseph Breitbach Prize (2018), the Bremen Literature Prize (2019) and the European Literary Prijs (2019) awarded in the Netherlands.

Other works include: *Grenzgehen. Drei Reden*, Hanser (2011); *Selbstporträt mit Flusspferd*, Hanser (2015); *Unter der Drachenwand*, Hanser (2018); *Der Hahnenschrei. Drei Reden*, Hanser (2019).

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Carl Hanser Verlag

Contact: Friederike Barakat

friederike.barakat@hanser.de

Tel: +49-89-99830-509

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