



by Erich Hackl  
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Fiction

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## This Book Belongs to My Mother

### *Dieses Buch gehört meiner Mutter*

#### review

*This Book Belongs to My Mother* is a stunning chronicle in which the author gives a voice to his mother, a simple farm girl from a remote, mountainous region of Austria close to the Czech border. Hackl reconstructs what his mother's life must have been like in her modest native hamlet, conjuring both her inner life and her everyday home environment in a luminous prose that reads like poetry.

The narrative begins two generations before his mother's birth and continues until the end of World War II, when she gets married at the age of twenty-five. The book illuminates some charming aspects of rural life in the mother's hamlet and beyond but does not shy from dwelling on its darker side. Scenes of churchgoing, school-life and events at the local inn are set amid widespread child labour and a pervasive atmosphere of brutality. We observe attitudes towards gypsies, the suppression of women, and petty small-town cruelty. Everybody in the hamlet knows everybody else and their business, which includes a case of incest, a suspected paedophile, a devastating fire and a great-aunt killed in a botched abortion.

The life of this straightforward, plainspoken woman is portrayed through a series of vivid highlights that provide a panoramic social and historical view of a world determined by grinding poverty and hardship. She takes part in a magical trip to Vienna, has first-hand experience of Nazism before and after the annexation of Austria, and witnesses the burials of the hamlet's fallen soldiers, the arrival of the – mainly Russian and French – Prisoners of War, the plight of the

Jews and the 'liberation' by the Red Army, until she finally meets her husband, who takes her away from the village and changes her life. But the memory of all those years has stayed with her, waiting to be articulated by her son with an intelligibility and insight that she herself was incapable of.

Justly renowned for his literary-biographical talents, Erich Hackl's latest book is both an intimate biography and a precisely described historical portrait of life as experienced by a small community during hard and uncertain times. Written in clear, spare language which is ideally suited to the mother's uncomplicated view of the world, the book's brevity belies the extraordinary richness of its subject matter.

## press quotes

*'The name Erich Hackl is a trademark unique in contemporary German language literature.'*

*– Kulturspiegel, Hamburg*

*'Erich Hackl's concise, haunting prose works have earned him a huge audience and great success.'*

*– World Literature Today, New York*

*'For Erich Hackl, reality is far more absorbing than anything he could imagine.'* – *Berliner Zeitung*

## about the author

**Erich Hackl** Born in Steyr, Austria, in 1954, Erich Hackl studied German and Hispanic studies and worked for a number of years as a teacher and editor. Both Madrid and Vienna, where he works as a writer and translator, have been home to him for a long time now. Both his literary work and his journalism are concerned with finding connections between those who are unable to come to terms with current injustice and others who have felt indignation in the past and no longer want to be alone with those feelings. His stories are based on authentic cases. *Aurora's Motive* and *Farewell Sidonia* are on school reading lists. Erich Hackl's books have been published in twenty-five languages.

### **Previous works include:**

*Abschied von Sidonie* (1991); *Als ob ein Engel* (2007); *Auroras Anlass* (1989); *Die Hochzeit von Auschwitz* (2002)

## rights information

Diogenes Verlag AG

Sprecherstrasse 8

8032 Zürich, Switzerland

Contact: Susanne Bauknecht

Tel: +41 44 254 85 54

Email: [bau@diogenes.ch](mailto:bau@diogenes.ch)

[www.diogenes.ch](http://www.diogenes.ch)

**Diogenes Verlag** was founded in Zurich in 1952 by Daniel Keel and Rudolf C. Bettschart. One of the leading international publishing houses, it numbers among its authors Alfred Andersch, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Patricia Highsmith, Donna Leon, Bernhard Schlink and Patrick Süskind. Children's authors include Tatjana Hauptmann, Ute Krause, Karl Friedrich Waechter and Tomi Ungerer.