



Tim Krohn

Aus dem Leben einer Matratze bester Machart (The Life of a Top-Quality Mattress)

Galiani Berlin, February 2014, 120pp. ISBN: 978-3-86971-088-4

Comfort and dreams

Immanuel Wassermann meets a young girl on a business trip to Ticino in 1935 and marries her the next day. They head back to Berlin, stopping in Schaffhausen for their honeymoon night. Immanuel buys the mattress they sleep on and they return to Berlin, where he risks arrest by the Gestapo. Towards the end of the war, the mattress ends up back in Schaffhausen, now in the ownership of Nora who, on leaving for work, instructs her children to hide under the mattress in the cellar if the sirens go off. When the house is hit by a bomb, the children survive, but their mother does not.

The mattress passes from owner to owner, resurfacing in the possession of a couple at a printing press near Zurich, found by a German tourist sheltering from a storm under a bridge in Rome, then floating in the vicinity of an Italian tourist, who has fallen out of his fishing boat while holidaying in Anzio. Time and again the mattress comes to the protagonists' aid; helping them to survive, to love... and to sleep.

Much like Jenny Erpenbeck's *Visitation*, Krohn's book ingeniously uses the device of an object with multiple owners to provide an enthralling historical panorama.



© Jonas Knecht

Tim Krohn was born in 1965, and is a freelance writer who lives in Zurich. His novel *Quatemberkinder* (1998) is a cult book in Switzerland; *Vrenelis Gärtli* stayed at the top of the Swiss bestseller lists for weeks. In 2013, he performed at the two biggest amateur theatre events at the Ballenberg open-air museum and in Einsiedeln. Tim Krohn's most recent books are the novel *Ans Meer* and the novella *Der Geist am Berg*.

Previous works:

Quatemberkinder (1998); *Vrenelis Gärtli* (2010); *Ans Meer* (2009); *Der Geist am Berg* (2010)

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Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch
Contact: Iris Brandt/Aleksandra Erakovic
Tel: +49 (0) 221 376 8522

Email: ibrandt@kiwi-verlag.de
aerakovic@kiwi-verlag.de

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Switzerland (see page 40)

'A gentle book that looks back on the terror of the twentieth century with melancholy and irony.' – WDR 5



Bettina Balàka

Unter Menschen (Among People)

Haymon Verlag, August 2014, 328pp. ISBN: 978-3-7099-7040-9

Something for everyone

This humorous yet bitterly sad novel explores the difficulty of establishing and maintaining our connections with others.

The novel follows the first few years in the life of a dog, Berti, and gives the back-stories of the various people who briefly own him. His first owners are the Hungarian Alexandra and her teenage daughter Gréta, who falls head over heels in love with the puppy. But while Gréta is at school one day, Alexandra packs Berti off to the Michaleks, a retired Austrian couple who re-home dogs to soothe the pain of an empty nest now that their children no longer live at home. From there he is passed on to Marcel, who is depressed after being tricked out of his savings by a Brazilian woman he had fallen in love with on holiday. After a stint in the pound, Berti is chosen by Lydia Prinz, whose ex-husband has kidnapped their five-year-old son Oliver.

The book is filled with warm humour, which is counterposed with moments of dry-eyed sadness. The narration from inside Berti's head comically presents his miscommunications with his various owners and shows his good-natured attempts to follow the rules and signs as he interprets them. There is nothing facile about the characters' fates, and yet Balàka perfectly matches this with her wicked comedic streak.



© Kurt-Michael Westermann

Bettina Balàka was born in 1966 in Salzburg and lives as a freelance writer in Vienna. She has published numerous novels, plays, and radio plays. She was honoured with the Theodor-Körner-Preis (2004), the Salzburger Lyrikpreis (2006) und the Friedrich-Schiedel-Literaturpreis (2008). www.balaka.at

Previous works: *Auf offenem Meer* (2010), *Kassiopeia* (2012)

Haymon Verlag was established in 1982, and is named after the 'Giant Haymon' who, according to legend, founded the Stift Wilten monastery near Innsbruck in the eighth century. The monastery was one of the first cultural centres in the region that later became known as the Tyrol. Since 1988, Haymon has primarily published German-language and international literature, and has been a subsidiary company of the Studienverlag since 2004.

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Haymon Verlag

Contact Person: Anna Stock

Tel: +43 512 576300

Email: anna.stock@haymonverlag.at
www.haymonverlag.at

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Austria (see page 40)