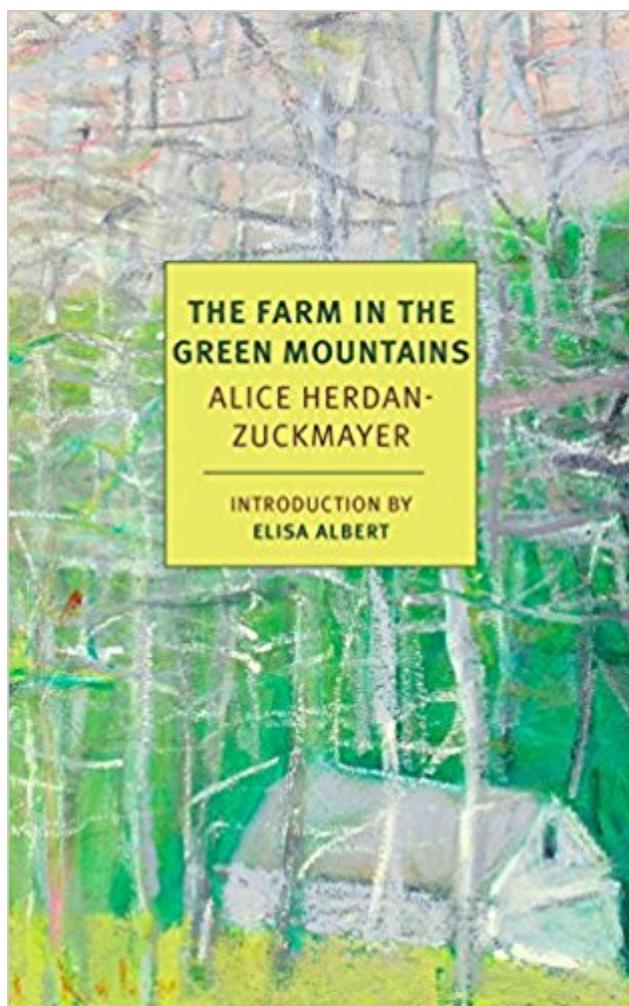


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The Farm In The Green Mountains (NYRB Classics)



Synopsis

The Farm in the Green Mountains is a story of a refugee family finding its true home—thousands of miles from its homeland. Alice and Carl Zuckmayer lived at the center of Weimar era Berlin. She was a former actor turned medical student, he was a playwright, and their circle of friends included Stefan Zweig, Alma Mahler, and Bertolt Brecht. But then the Nazis took over and Carl's most recent success, a play satirizing German militarism, impressed them in all the wrong ways. The couple and their two daughters were forced to flee, first to Austria, then to Switzerland, and finally to the United States. Los Angeles didn't suit them, neither did New York, but a chance stroll in the Vermont woods led them to Backwoods Farm and the eighteenth-century farmhouse where they would spend the next five years. In Europe, the Zuckmayers were accustomed to servants; in Vermont, they found themselves building chicken coops, refereeing fights between fractious ducks, and caring for temperamental water pipes like babies. But in spite of the endless work and the brutal, depressing winters, Alice found that in America she had at last discovered her native land. This generous, surprising, and witty memoir, a best seller in postwar Germany, has all the charm of an unlikely romantic comedy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"These literate glimpses of rural America make good stand-alone chapter reads: raising chickens,

meeting reticent New England neighbors, marveling at the mysterious USDA pamphlets or the Sears, Roebuck catalog, journeying to the Dartmouth library, etc...This volume will be of special regional and historical interest as well as of general interest in public libraries where anecdotal essays are popular." *Booklist* "The Zuckmayers' courage and strength is an inspiration to all who may be set in unfamiliar surroundings, even in their own country."

Publishers Weekly "The book offers readers an interesting historical perspective of Vermont during the war years, as well as an inspiring narrative on the indomitable human instinct to survive. The contemporary reader will come away feeling inspired by the Zuckmayers' perseverance and with renewed gratitude for all of the amenities (like heat) which we now take for granted." *Jennifer Falvey, Vermont Standard* "Part memoir, part diary, part fascinating account of rural life in 1940s Vermont...these are things that haven't changed at all in the last century in Vermont...The sounds an old post-and-beam farmhouse makes when it gets cold, for instance, or the way the snowplow rattles the windowpanes at 4am...." *Emily Abroad Blog*

Alice Herdan-Zuckmayer (1901–1991) was born Alice Henriette Alberta Herdan-Harris von Valbonne und Belmont in Vienna shortly after her parents' divorce. As a girl, she was a pupil of the radical education reformist Eugenie Schwarzwald and Alice met her first husband, the psychologist and future anti-Nazi leader Karl Frank, through Schwarzwald. Her marriage to Frank was short lived and Alice, now living in Berlin with their daughter Michaela, supported herself by acting and with secretarial work, though she hoped to become a doctor. She met the writer Carl Zuckmayer at a party of actors and artists, and the two married in 1925, the same year Zuckmayer was awarded the Kleist Prize for his play *The Merry Vineyard*. The next year she gave birth to a second daughter, Maria Winnetou. By 1933 Zuckmayer's works had been banned and the family moved, first to Austria, and then, in 1938, to Switzerland. They emigrated to the United States with the help of the journalist Dorothy Thompson in 1939. After the success of *The Farm in the Green Mountains*, Herdan-Zuckmayer published two more memoirs, *Das Käfertchen* (The Box), about her childhood, and *Das Scheusal* (The Monster), about a dog. Elisa Albert is the author of the novels *After Birth* and *The Book of Dahlia*; a short-story collection, *How This Night is Different*; and the editor of the anthology *Freud's Blind Spot*. Her fiction and nonfiction have appeared in various publications, including *The New York Times*, *Tin House*, *The Guardian*, and on NPR. Ida H. Washington taught German literature for many years and, along with her husband, Larry Washington, helped found the German-language program at the University of Massachusetts at

Dartmouth. She is the author of Dorothy Canfield Fisher: A Biography and collaborated with her daughter Carol E. Washington on the translation of The Farm in the Green Mountains.

This is a quiet, thoughtful, and almost relaxing book to read. Comforting in contrast to the tumultuous times we are living in, and especially the tumultuous times it was written during. The book consists of almost instructional details on farming and subsistence living mixed well with some genuinely charming anecdotes and life philosophies. I found Alice

Herndan-Zuckermayer’s voice personable and sophisticated with no trace of arrogance, overt self-awareness or an agenda. I should caveat that while I don’t believe the choice to discuss very little of world war II itself is an agenda of omission, some may feel it’s scarcity within these pages suspicious as it is indeed the reason for the Zuckmayer family’s life in Vermont to begin with. It’s tough to recommend this to just anybody though. At some level, if you have any interest in these people or this area of the world, or an interest in farming, you’ll probably enjoy this book a great deal. If you are coming for a more memoir of how we survived the war type story, I think you’ll be bored and should look elsewhere. Despite being well written, funny, and insightful, there are definitely long asides that didn’t interest me, and sections that decay almost into lists. This is a two star book with several strong five star sections. In fact, when I finished this and handed it to my wife to read, she was shocked to hear my final conclusion. Based on several of the amazing passages I had read aloud to her, she was expecting rave reviews. In truth, if one read only the chapters on the animals, the rats, and the library, and some select passages on Drude and the party line, one would assume this to easily be one of the finest books ever. But, like in life, and certainly in Alice’s life, there are long stretches where not a lot of interesting stuff happens, and perhaps its only fair to give it equal space. Finally though, I must give this strong three and a half star book that final half star for the last chapter and epilogue, as these are actually two versions of the last chapter. These final pages should be studied in every writing class. They are so dissimilar narratively in that one is written much earlier and is a fantasy of returning to the farm, and the other is the actuality of returning, written much later. Some of the passages however are nearly verbatim in both. The tone is subtly dissimilar, still masterfully capturing the melancholic awareness that you can never really go back, but from such dramatically different perspectives. Even more jarring in reading these final two endings is the retrospective awareness it gives you into how carefully constructed the entire narrative has been. There is throughout the book a feeling of reading the words over Alice’s shoulder as she

writes, but this couldn't be further from the truth. She is in fact a craftswoman of considerable skill, which makes the book that much more impressive upon contemplation. Afterword: skip the intro. It's pugnacious and arrogant, and even worse, does a terrible job introducing the book. The tone is opposite that of the material and locks what could be viewed as a timeless text into a specific time and place. If you are a completionist, I recommend reading it after the book. It does reference some passages you may want to return to and is functional in that sense as an afterword.

This is a perfectly charming and delightful book, free of artifice, guile and pretense. The author's lover of the farm, the community, Vermont and Vermonters shines through on every page. As someone who loves my country, despite my distress at its recent choice of president, it is refreshing to encounter an European "urbane sophisticate", as described in the introduction, whose love for our country is unaffected, unabashed and in no way condescending. I cannot help but think of how her attitude contrasts with that of the expatriate, Donna Leon, who expresses nothing but sneering contempt for all things American. Once again, NYRB classics comes through with not only a wonderfully produced book, but with a great read as well.

A good read.

Fascinated about her relationship with animals. Have never read anything like this before. So thought provoking.

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