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Being Hamsun

by Jennifer Oh

On Growth of the Soil by Knut Hamsun.

Knut Hamsun

Growth of the Soil.

Penguin, 352 pages, \$13

Nazi collaborator, Nobel laureate: the Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun was both. Hamsun, born in 1859, died penniless and disgraced in 1952, shortly after he was heavily fined by the state for his activities during the war. His *Deutsches Reich* sympathies as an elderly man obscured for decades what had once been world-wide literary recognition; to this day his fellow Norwegians revile his name, but new translations of his writing have fueled interest in Hamsun's texts, some of which have never before been translated into English.

Among his better known works is *Hunger*, a ground-breaking psychological tale of its first-person, desperately starving narrator. *Mysteries* and *Pan*, two other early works from the 1890s, along with *Hunger*, considerably influenced Kafka's writings as well of those of other...

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Jennifer Oh is a writer based in New York City.

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