Jack Mayer

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**Praise for BEFORE THE COURT OF HEAVEN**

a novel by Jack Mayer

**BOOK AWARDS:**

**2016 IndieReader Discovery Award – 1st Place - Fiction**

**2015 Nautilus Book Award Winner – Fiction – Silver medal**

**2016 Finalist – Grand Prize** (Eric Hoffer Award) **– Fiction**

**2016 First Horizon Award** (Eric Hoffer Award) **Finalist – Fiction**

***Foreword Reviews* INDIEFAB Book of the Year Award Finalist – Historical Fiction**

**2015 Mom’s Choice Award - Gold Medal – Historical Fiction**

**Pinnacle Book Achievement Award - Best Novel Fall 2015**

**2015 Beverly Hills Book Awards** – **Finalist** – “Faction” - fiction based on true stories.

**A Best Indie Book of 2015** **–** IndieReader (5-stars)

**Shelf Unbound – Notable Indie** – 2015 Best Indie Books.

“This is a brilliantly-written tale of internal struggle and redemption in a time of great social and political upheaval. The author does a chillingly good job of illustrating just how seductive the nationalist message was in a beaten and humiliated Germany, how it used and twisted values like patriotism, loyalty and honor to win over people who oth­erwise might have lived out their lives as ordinary, decent, humane people. *Before the Court of Heaven* is a powerful, intensely vivid look at Europe between the World Wars, and one man’s attempt to make sense of his life, his deeds, and their meaning, to himself and to others.”

**–      IndieReader 5-star Review**

“Haunting echoes of Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* and Irwin Shaw’s *The Young Lions* waft through this excellent novel of the turbulent times encompassing Europe and the far reaches of the globe between World Wars I and II. Similar to those groundbreaking tales, Mayer’s story is most concerned with lives rent asunder by historically catastrophic events. By keeping his focus on a small set of human beings caught up in the upheaval of entire populations, he is able to weave a narrative that is as poignant as it is riveting.

The author does a superb job of pulling readers into Ernst’s hopes and fears as he grapples with familial obligations, divided loyalties, and trials by fire and by courts both earthly and heavenly. Mayer’s sweeping saga is simultaneously a compelling chronicle of history, a gripping tale of high adventure, and an enthralling love story in the classic tradition. If such fare whets your literary appetite, you’ll be glad you indulged.”

**- RECOMMENDED by the US Review of Books**

“Jack Mayer has written a strong affecting novel that offers an arresting portrait of a deeply troubled time. His evocations of Ernst Werner Techow and other historical figures are beautifully and thoughtfully rendered. He has a remarkable grasp of period details, and he used these details to create an atmosphere of dense particularity and clarity. This is a story of immense human failure and touching redemption, and it stands among the finer recent portrayals in fiction of the most troubling era of modern history. Mayer’s novel should have a widely sympathetic readership. I recommend *Before the Court of Heaven* whole-heartedly.”

- **Jay Parini**

“A fully engaging read from beginning to end, "Before the Court of Heaven" is a deftly crafted novel that showcases author Jack Mayer's truly impressive storytelling talents as a novelist. A terrifically entertaining read that is enhanced with close attention to historical detail, "Before the Court of Heaven" is very highly recommended for personal reading lists and community library General Fiction collections.”

**- Midwest Book review – Reviewer’s Bookwatch – Feb. 2016**

“Period details come to life through grand-scale revolution as well as domestic minutia in this captivating story of Germany between the wars.

Ernst Werner Techow, a member of Germany’s underground Organization Consul, was the driver of the getaway car in the assassination of Walter Rathenau, a prominent Jewish statesman and foreign minister of Germany during the Weimar Republic. In Jack Mayer’s historical novel, Techow is the fascinating central figure whose story is deftly embellished. Before the Court of Heaven displays a remarkable talent for imagining the unknowable parts of Techow’s psyche.

The book begins with the 1922 crime, then circles through Techow’s memories of a privileged upbringing: his days in the Free Corps after the First World War; his insidious, almost natural recruitment into the terrorist Organization Consul; trial and imprisonment; disillusionment with the Vaterland; the rise of the Nazi party; and, briefly, Techow’s work rescuing refugees during the Second World War.

Threaded with impressionist art, romance, brutality, and self-reckoning, the plot darts between Techow’s private life, his increasing ambivalence regarding his role in the politics of his country, and the larger story of ordinary Germans who confronted the aftermath of the Treaty of Versailles in different ways. Period details come to life through grand-scale revolution as well as domestic minutia. When the story departs from the facts of the real Techow’s life, a courageous alternative blooms.

Techow is humanized through lingering scenes. Salient images from his early years—including golden laburnum trees and trips to the museum with his father—strike poignant notes of a fading civilized life. Techow’s love for art and a Jewish poet’s words also play against the expectations of the Organization Consul. The book steadily builds intriguing polarities in Techow’s nature: on one side lies an appreciation for beauty; on the other, a cold detachment fueled by loss. Such troubled currents keep the work moving. Mayer wisely avoids drawing a straight line from the pains of Techow’s childhood to his involvement in the nationalist movement. Instead, the hardening of his character unfolds in gradual increments. Techow becomes more than a criminal swept up in rhetoric.

Other noteworthy figures include Lisa, Techow’s distant lover, and Fritz, a friend and foil whose path takes increasingly disturbing turns. Leo and Hans Gerd, Techow’s brothers, reveal the divisions within families through their reactions to politics. Puck, a fellow inmate whose eccentric brand of intellectualism beguiles, is particularly memorable. As the man who challenges Techow in his darkest moments, Puck is a pivotal, complex character with provocative dialogue.

Before the Court of Heaven is a distinctive story poised between the drama of a Damascene conversion and a quieter, steadier about-face. Violence and atonement meld with affecting results.

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**- 5-Star Clarion Review**

“*Before the Court of Heaven* is a compelling work of historical fiction, a novel set in post-World War I Germany and in Europe during the Second World War. Jack Mayer patiently and effectively conveys the political evolution of Ernst Werner Techow, a young, anti-Semitic ultra-nationalist involved in the *Freikorps* movement and the 1922 assassination of Walter Rathenau, during the interwar years and World War II. Within a detailed historical context of those troubled times in Germany and throughout Europe, Mayer traces that evolution to Techow’s later role as an anti-Nazi and wanted fugitive from the Third Reich in the late 1930s, and in the end as a rescuer of Jews fleeing Nazi persecution and the Holocaust. Among other things, this story is about the highly diverse molds of resistance in the Third Reich, and the varied motives of those relative few who risked their lives to rescue some of its victims. This is an excellent work of historical fiction, one that nevertheless provides the reader with an important and accurate lens into the past.”

**- Francis Nicosia, Raul Hilberg Distinguished Professor of Holocaust Studies, University of Vermont**

“On June 24, 1922, the terrorist Ernst Werner Techow murdered Walter Rathenau, the Jewish Foreign Minister of the Weimar Republic. Eleven years later, Hitler was sworn in as Chancellor.  *Before the Court of Heaven* is a powerful chronicle of those fateful eleven years.  But it’s much more, and you may choke when reading the (authentic) letter written by Rathenau’s mother to Techow’s mother: ‘In grief unspeakable I give you my hand, you, of all women the most pitiable…I forgive, even as God may forgive.’ Repentance, forgiveness, atonement, redemption. The Talmud said it best: ‘To save one life was to save the universe.’

A luminous book.”

- **Ray Ortali**, **Emeritus Professor of French, University at Albany and Publisher, We Love Books & Company eMagazine**

“*Before the Court of Heaven* is enthralling historical fiction based on the true story and subsequent legends of Ernst Techow, a German assassin turned French legionnaire. Techow is an incredibly well-rounded and flawed character, which makes his transformation over time all the more fascinating. The author’s writing style is, by turns, lively and detail oriented in all the right places. . . . meticulously researched. . . the novel is gripping from the very first line. This is an immersive, exciting, and often heart-breaking story that will engross any reader . . .”

**- Starred - BlueInk Review**

*“Before the Court of Heaven* is a remarkable feat of both historical and moral imagination: as an historical novel it captures life in Weimar Germany—the brief period when Germany, humiliated by the terms of its defeat in World War One, enjoyed a fragile democracy that collapsed, finally, into fascism and World War Two. The novel follows the fate of Ernst Werner Techow, a member of the fascist group that, on June 24, 1922, ambushed and assassinated Walter Rathenau, the foreign minister of the Weimar Republic, near his home in Berlin. Rathenau embodied the grievances of these budding fascists: a Jew in high office, he was also one of the negotiators of the humiliating Versailles peace. The novel goes personal, seeking to answer the question that has occupied historians and thinkers since the rise and fall of Nazism: when and how does political disaffection and resentment lead to violent radicalism, as in the case of Rathenau’s assassins?

Thus the novel is also Jack Mayer’s probing attempt at moral imagination, at tracing Techow’s moral development. Recruited by a radical cell to help commit murder for the cause, Techow later seeks redemption for the crime he committed and the suffering he caused. By interweaving biographical fact and literary invention, Mayer has created a spellbinding historical novel and a moral tale of enduring profundity.”

- **Robert S. Schine, Curt C. and Else Silberman Professor of Jewish Studies Middlebury College**

“*Before the Court of Heaven* is an engrossing novel that com­pels you to keep reading to find out how the story ends. Jack Mayer’s impressive skill as a writer allows him to seamlessly weave a riveting, fictional account of one man’s jour­ney into a well-researched and nuanced portrayal of life in Weimar Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe. Far beyond a simple page-turner, however, the book is also an impressive rendering of the historical realities of a dark era and the real uncertainties of the people living through it.”

– **Rebecca Ayako Bennette, Director of Jewish Studies and Associate Professor of History (German), Middlebury College**

“Jack Mayer’s *Before the Court of Heaven* is a captivating read. Loosely based on the historical figure of Ernst Werner Techow, who conspired in the assassination of Weimar Germany’s first foreign minister Walther Rathenau, Mayer’s novel takes its readers through the most tumultuous and painful decades of German history as its tormented pro­tagonist develops. Growing increasingly skeptical of right wing promises for a stronger and better future, Mayer’s Techow lives a live that could have happened at the time, a life that leads him from right wing terrorism to inner exile in Northern Africa to redemption through acts of selfless sup­port for Europe’s refugee Jews. At times supporting basso continuo, at times gripping counter-point, Techow’s tragic love story with his childhood friend Lisa provides an addi­tional layer of humanity that recommends the novel to the silver screen. Mayer’s characters and their stories, though mostly fictional, make the early 20th century come alive, and they stay with you long after you have finished their story. A great read for anyone who enjoys historical fiction.”

 **- Bettina Matthias Professor of German, Middlebury College**

"With the completion of his new novel, *Before the Court of Heaven*, Jack Mayer has hit is stride as a sophisticated and convincing writer of historical fiction.  His writing is vivid in the description of people and places and in the reconstruction of the violent upheavals in Germany that constitute the political landscape of this novel.  Lending momentum to the narrative are his portrayal of Ernst Techow, who was in real life an accomplice in the counterrevolutionary plot to assassinate Walther Rathenau, the most prominent Jew in public office, in 1922 and his captivating fictional account of the main character’s transformation from an early sympathizer of Hitler to an anti-Nazi activist working to rescue Jews in France under the German occupation during the Second World War.  Jack Mayer’s tale of Techow’s journey invites the reader to ponder the meaning and possibilities of redemption."

**- Marjorie Lamberti (Charles A. Dana Professor Emerita of History, Middlebury College)**

“Jack Mayer’s powerful historical novel provides a vivid portrait of a decaying democracy and the choices individuals must make in that context and their inevitable unintended consequences. Mayer’s masterful command of the historical details of Weimar Germany’s collapse and his thoughtful rendering of the book’s central characters make this a rewarding and compelling read. The journey of the novel’s protagonist (Ernst Werner Techow) reveals the capacity for evil and good that can exist in one human being, as well as his or her potential for redemption. While set in another place and time, Before the Court of Heaven prompts reflection on contemporary moral challenges. Not to be missed.”

**- Allison Stanger, Leng Professor of International Politics and Economics**

**Middlebury College**