

2020

RENATE WELSH

The Hans Christian Andersen Award 2020
Austrian Section of IBBY

Author



Renate Welsh

was born in Vienna on December 22nd, 1937. More than once the author has described her childhood as having been an unhappy one, a fact she attributes to the early death of loved ones (her mother and her grandfather), the resulting vague feelings of guilt and living through the Second World War. Early in her life Welsh started to process her experiences by writing and inventing stories. At the age of fifteen she was awarded a scholarship and went to Portland, Oregon, as an exchange student for one year. In 1955 she started to study English, Spanish and political sciences; however, after her wedding in 1956 she broke off her university studies in order to work for the British Council in Vienna. Initially she worked there part-time and as of 1962 she started to work as a freelance translator.

She began to write after she had had to stay at a hospital for an extended period in the Year of 1968. This long phase of being bedridden and contemplating triggered her first book, *Der Enkel des Löwenjägers* (The Lion Hunter's Grandson), which was on the Roll of Honour on the occasion of the 1970 Austrian State Award. Since 1975 Renate Welsh has worked as a freelance writer.

In her comprehensive and versatile overall work she has written about the current tendencies of change in a modern childhood and youth in an exemplary and socially committed way. In addition to the author's narrating style, which is masterly, formally sophisticated and often innovative, the contents are what make her books relevant. Renate Welsh focuses on children's social reality, therefore enabling them to cope with their own lives. Family crises and social injustice, illnesses, social exclusion, violence at home and at school, isolation and identity conflicts are depicted with remarkable honesty. Her books are highly ethical while making do without any preaching qualities.

The children's and teen books by Renate Welsh have enjoyed undivided recognition within all German-speaking countries and beyond. The writer has received the Austrian Children's and Juvenile Book Award many times over; she has received the German Youth Literature Award for Johanna – an award only few Austrian books have received; in 1992 she was awarded the Austrian Recognition Award for Children's and Juvenile literature and was on the Roll of Honour of the Hans Christian Andersen Award.

Most of her books have been published in several editions; many were translated into numerous foreign languages. This has made Renate Welsh, who has worked as a writer and developed her art for more than four decades, one of the most renowned writers of contemporary German literature for children and teens.

I cannot Give You Any Answers But Stand By Your Questions!

by Karin Haller

Renate Welsh has already written more than 50 books, not counting her contributions to many collective projects. Again and again, she successfully hits her reader's tone and emotions without patronizing them.

Between her first book »Der Enkel des Löwenjägers« (The Lion's Hunter's Grandson), published in 1969, and her most recent »Dr. Chickensoup« lie 42 years of literary and personal development.

But it had actually all started much earlier: in the village school the girl who says today that she was more or less an outsider wrote compositions for the strongest boy in the class – who in turn protected her on her way home. Writing to promote the interests of an outsider – this, in a nutshell, already identifies the central concern of her literary work: Welsh writes to lend speech to those who cannot (yet) speak up for themselves.

Empirical realism and research

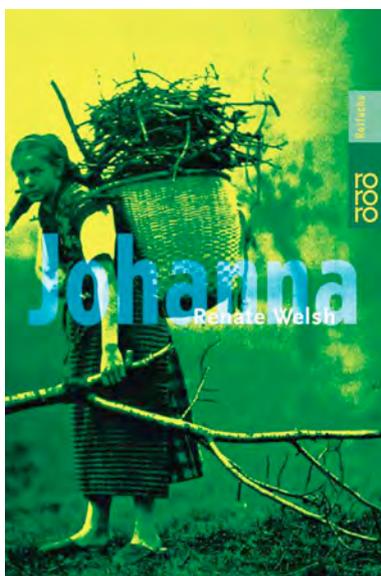
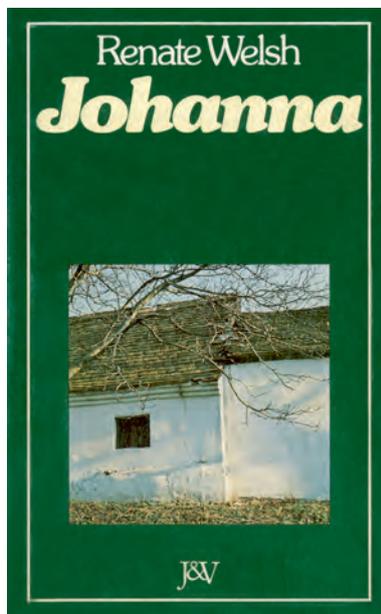
Her commitment to the socially disadvantaged runs like a red thread through Welsh's entire work. The »socially disadvantaged«: these are on the one hand the typical marginalised groups such as drug addicts (»Und schicke ihn hinaus in die Wüste«/And Send Him out into the Desert) or migrant workers as described in her book »Spinat auf Rädern« (Spinach on Wheels), in which Maria, the Daughter of emigrants from Romania, meets slightly whimsical Aunt Paula who helps her to better come to terms with her new environment and to be accepted by the other children as she is.

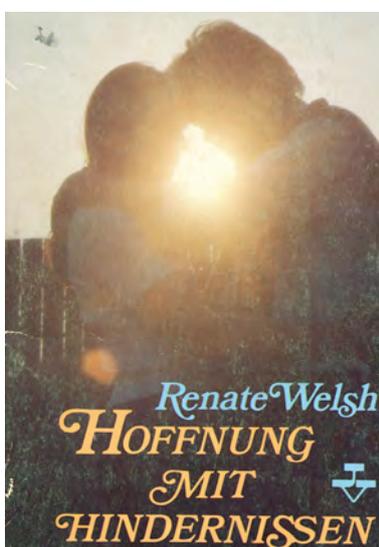
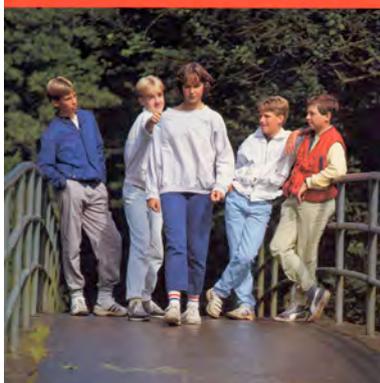
Welsh's greatest strength is possibly the literary transformation of authentic experiences. An excellent example of this is »Johanna«, one of her most successful books, which is based on conversations she had with the real person over a number of years. The story is set in the Austria of the thirties (1931 through 1936), the time between the wars, which was characterised by political instability, poverty, unemployment, and the rise of National Socialism.

Johanna, an illegitimate child without rights and opportunities, is exploited for years as a farm-hand until she liberates herself from the suppression mechanisms, takes her own decisions and assumes responsibility for her own life. It is a novel of inner development but Welsh has done much more than portray just the fate of a single person from an underprivileged class: her existence as an individual is placed in the context of political developments.

The atmosphere in the village changes – incomprehensibly to Johanna – as Chancellor Seipel dies, Hitler comes to power in Germany, and Chancellor Dollfuß is assassinated. In numerous reflections and dialogues, discussions and brawls between farmers and workers, and the word of a priest wielding political influence recent Austrian history comes to life – received with interest not only in Austria: in 1980, »Johanna« was awarded the German Prize for Youth Literature.

A characteristic feature of Welsh's style is the enormous wealth of detail making up the reality that she describes. In conveying moods and statements





Welsh does not rely on explicit descriptions but focuses instead on items of seemingly secondary importance, which are joined together to create an even more effective picture.

It is a style that is somehow reminiscent of film settings in which much remains unspoken but everything is said.

»Johanna« was not to be the last literary treatment of Austrian history by the author. In 1988 she wrote »In die Waagschale geworfen. Österreicher im Widerstand« (Thrown into the Scales. Austrians in the Resistance Movement) which was based again on authentic reports: »None of the stories has been invented. Renate Welsh spoke to survivors and their families. These talks, supplemented by studies of documents, records, and biographies form the basis of this book.

In 1993 »Das Haus in den Bäumen« (The House in the Trees) was published, describing a childhood in the country in the last year of the war. A childhood marked both by the experience of a deep-felt friendship and the terrible impressions of the war.

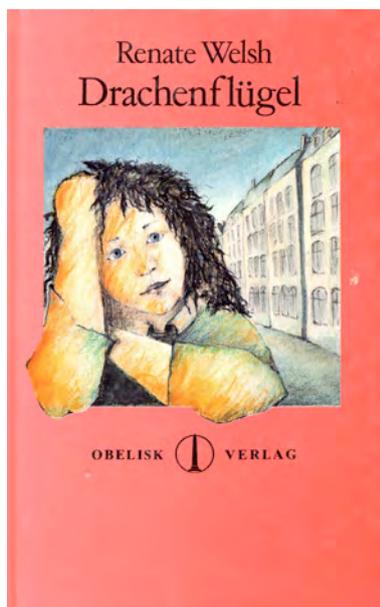
A central theme in her books is again and again the search of young people for their identity, young people in situations of conflict and crisis in which they have to cope with their environment and stand their own ground.

In »Wie in fremden Schuhen« (As if Walking in Somebody Else's Shoes) twelve-year-old Claudia lives in the country in outwardly secure circumstances with her mother, her step-father, her siblings, and her grandmother. Inwardly, however, she feels strangely excluded, as if not belonging with them, as if playing a role that does not suit her – »as if walking in somebody else's shoes«. She hopes that a meeting with her real father, the »gentleman of fortune and unreliable character« of whom she believes to have inherited all »evil« traits will help her in orientating herself, in taking her bearings: »She only wanted to know what it was that prevented her from fully belonging with them. Once she knew she might perhaps push it aside«.

In »Hoffnung mit Hindernissen« (Hope with Hurdles), a book about the slow growth of a problematic love affair, the breaking away of young people from their parents and possible reactions to disturbed family relationships, the struggle for identity, inner disintegration, and aggression are not the result of inner insecurity and lack of orientation but of external conditions: the father is a drinker and unfaithful to his wife; the mother is a weak, suffering helplessly, full of self-pity, without the ability to draw consequences.

Renate Welsh sees the inner development of a young person as a »hurdle race into the future«, which is one of the key ideas in her literary conception of youth. One of the greatest hurdles in an individual's search for his/her identity is – needless to say – the individual itself. In ever fresh variants, Welsh describes the »Homelessness« of her main characters who, feeling useless and isolated, withdraw into themselves.

Other books by Welsh are »Schneckenhäuser« (Snail's Shells) and »Zwischenwände« (Internal Walls). Both books are about a person's withdrawal from an environment apparently or truly lacking in understanding into that person's own, rigorously protected inner world. The young people's social contacts are characterised by empty and unsatisfactory superficiality. Insecurity and fear are obstacles to spontaneous reactions and desires.



In their attempts to overcome these invisible yet apparently insurmountable »internal walls« young people are ultimately left to their own resources, with the key, according to Welsh, lying in the affection we receive from others which in turn enables us to give affection to others.

Associating with other people, opening up at least some of the strictly protected inner life may be a decisive step in finding one's own identity. The course set by the author leads from speechlessness to speech, to dialogue. She does not offer cut-and-dried solutions with binding and valid promises for the future. The only answers that she can or wants to give in her texts to the question of »Do things have to be like that?« is »Let's hope not«. »The open form, which we frequently see in more recent realistic books for young people and which corresponds to the open-endedness of real life is intended to encourage the reader (who lives in the same type of reality) to ask questions and propose his or her own solutions.«

»Questions« – a central concept in Welsh's literary work: »I believe one of the most important functions of a writer is to say: I cannot give you any answers but stand by your questions. Insist that you are not satisfied by answers. I believe that children are being constantly filled up with pudding and answers – and I don't think a lot of neither. Insisting on one's questions is important. Most of the time, after all, one would be lying if one pretended to give valid answers.

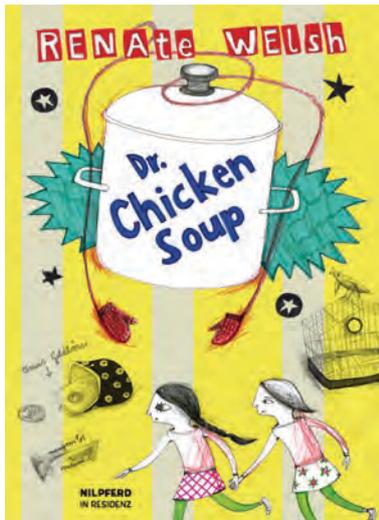
More than ten years ago, she was asked for the first time to organise a writing workshop for young handicapped people.

As a result of her intensive personal involvement with the handicapped she wrote »Drachenflügel« (Dragon's Wings) – a book that would not have been possible without the innumerable learning processes that preceded it and – as she says herself – the help of people for whom their handicaps are their daily experiences of their own selves. »Dragon's Wings«, winner of the 1989 Austrian State Award for Youth Literature, approaches the theme of handicaps from a fresh angle.

Its central character is not severely handicapped Jakob, suffering from spastic paralysis, but his eleven-year-old sister Anne, from whose perspective the story is told. It is therefore not so much the story of a handicap but the story of those who live with the handicapped person: their daily lives, their contacts with their environment, their problems and their joys. Anne has withdrawn behind a wall of speechless-aggressive aloofness that makes any dialogue impossible. Any reaction by her environment is equally insupportable to her.

Her unrestrictedly positive attitude towards Jakob is of an exclusiveness that cannot be maintained in contacts with the environment. It is only with the help of a new friend that Anne gradually comes to realise that she will attain a more open and more relaxed attitude towards herself and her brother's handicap only by giving up her position of defiant and rejecting speechlessness.

»Carefully and gently, with subjective justice, her story shows the extent to which a handicapped person influences the lives of others, entangling them in moral problems that may differ widely from one person to the other and are experienced differently by the sister and the mother«.



The author does not shy away from confronting the questions and consequences inherent in such a fate. She avoids embellishment as much as excessive dramatization.

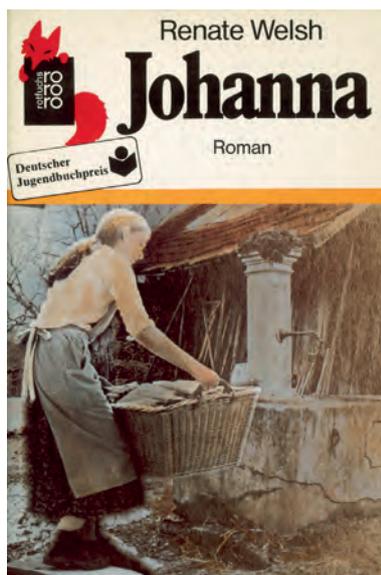
The book does not resort to the traditional sentimental patterns, does not aim at arousing compassion, is much more than the forever inadequate appeal »Be nice to the handicapped«, but does not seek to create a fiction of normality either. Welsh carefully explores the problems encountered in living with a handicapped person. The book is about the true acceptance of a life that is indeed different from »normal« lives, and of the obligations every single person has for this life.

Renate Welsh is one of the most complex and multifaceted writers of books for young people. Her books in fact have many more aspects to offer than have been addressed here (e.g. the death motif or the frequent treatment of the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren). But what is true for all genuinely good writers also holds for Renate Welsh: you simply have to read her books yourself.

Living with a Backbone

by Martina Rényi

The independent thinking and acting, the moral courage and integrity in selected books by Renate Welsh



Renate Welsh belongs to a generation of writers who grew up during World War II and the post-war era. Again and again the memories and experiences of that time have formed the basis of her literary work which continuously uncovers mechanisms of power and suppression, demanding independent thinking and acting, the responsibility of individuals, moral courage and integrity as well as the intention not to forget the past. With narratives such as *Johanna*, *In die Waagschale geworfen* (Put Your Thumb on the Scales), *Besuch aus der Vergangenheit* (A Visit from the Past) and *Dieda oder Das fremde Kind* (That Girl or The Strange Child) Renate Welsh has made contemporary history – which she has either experienced herself or researched meticulously – something the reader can experience as well with the aid of mundane interpersonal incidents and behaviour, thus showing impressively

»that any historical narrative should not only look back but can also be a signal from the past for the presence: the help to understand the presence in more detail and with greater awareness, to become more sharply aware of the things that have come to be and to see their contours better.«¹

The characters, the plot elements, the dialogues, motifs, narrative perspectives and the language in Renate Welsh's texts make abstract terms illustrative and show the necessity – even in the here and now – to constantly question one's own actions attentively and critically and to see how they are related to historical events. This process is not always an easy one and even Renate Welsh has subjected herself to it:

»I can only hope that I would have known my place at the decisive moment. Each time I remain silent when I should be talking, each time I look away where I should interfere, I get this sinking feeling that I could not depend on acting the way I think is absolutely called for.«²

But to find out what is absolutely called for, to recognize connections and to be able to properly react to them is a process of growth that Renate Welsh depicts with the aid of many a novel character, thus making it accessible to her readers. The same applies to a scene taken from *Besuch aus der Vergangenheit* (A Visit from the Past), in which the protagonist, Lena, happens to overhear a conversation between two men in a streetcar and starts to struggle with herself:

»Now I should really get up and say that they did help us, that there was this Marshal Plan, that we got a lot of money and that we certainly did not rebuild this country with our bare hands, Lena thought. But she stayed put.«³

Mundane situations in Renate Welsh's narratives, such as this one, depict complex issues clearly and unambiguously, in the meaning of Maria Lypp's postulated simplicity as a category that manages to make multi-faceted contents in an easy-to-understand style and clear images accessible even to young readers.⁴



Take Renate Welsh's Johanna from the novel with the same title that deals with the era between the two wars or the Austrians opposing the Nazi Regime that are portrayed in the book *In die Waagschale geworfen*, take Lena in *Besuch aus der Vergangenheit*, which plays in Vienna in the 1990s, or the World War II protagonist in *Dieda oder Das fremde Kind* – they all show and/or go through a process of growth that enables them to think and act independently and in which they have their say.

By using the personalized narrative form in her novels *Johanna* and *Dieda oder Das fremde Kind*, Renate Welsh insistently describes the initial suppression of the female protagonists as well as their eventual rebellion and liberation. In *Johanna's* case Welsh explains her choice of perspective in one of her poetological notes:

»The personalized narrative form resulted from the fact that the view from below the boots, the perspective of a young woman who was not only deprived of her rights and abused but who was also forced to live in a limbo of uniform lives that punished any attempt to find orientation as being insolent. Johanna knew hardly anything about the world outside her village but she was starving for knowledge.«⁵

Lena, who grows up in a loving environment, is starving for knowledge, too, and gets it – against the initial resistance of her mother and grandmother – from Emma Greenburg, a Jewess living in Canada who had to flee from Vienna with her family after Hitler had come to power and who returns sixty years later to find the former apartment of her childhood that had been occupied by the Arians now inhabited by Lena's family. By creating the character of Emma Greenburg, Renate Welsh has drawn a kind old lady with a vision that she struggled hard to gain over the years and which is reflected in passages such as this one:

»Mrs. Greenburg shook her head. ›It's not as simple as that. It has shown what people are capable of, what people can do to other people, and that concerns all of us. Just like you don't know how you would have acted had you been born sixty years earlier, I don't know how I would have acted if I hadn't been Jewish. And don't think that all of the victims were decent, honourable people. [...] There were selfish and generous, mean and decent, stupid and ingenious victims; there were all kinds of different people. To realize that doesn't reduce their dignity. On the contrary: It is only then that we realize that they were slaughtering real people, real people, the way you'd never slaughter an animal.«⁶

Lena enjoys spending time with Emma Greenburg, a woman who takes her serious even though she is only a child and who is able to put a lot of things into words that have never been spoken of before. This confuses the young protagonist Lena and makes her wonder, »Why is it that she talks to me like a regular person? Actually not like a regular person, not like most of the grown-ups talk to me – she talks to me as if she was glad that I'm around.«⁷

That is the very feeling *Dieda*, the protagonist of the novel with the same title, is missing – a novel that claimed a lot of attention when it was first published in 2002 because due to the young protagonist, who is about seven years old, and the dense description of her life, the narrative cannot be assigned to any specific genre. *Dieda* is mainly ignored, if not even suppressed and humiliated, by her environment; the girl's many questions about the circumstances under



which her mother died and the confusing events of the Third Reich are not answered. For a long time Dieda is left alone to cope with the fears that result from not knowing anything:

They kept saying something to her. Do this, do that, don't do that. But they didn't say anything about the really important things. Not even when she asked them. When she found the right words. Why did they leave her so terribly alone? There were so many of them. And she was the only one who did not belong. Anywhere.⁸

Dieda has to gather the information she is looking for, which is incomplete and often misunderstood, from isolated sentences, secretly discovered newspaper notes and overheard fragments of conversation that are continuously integrated into the loose sequences of events and memories. Stupendous phrases and sayings emphasize a totalitarian system that prohibits independent thinking and acting as meaninglessly as the phrases themselves. A softened version of the same phrases can be found in *Besuch aus der Vergangenheit* as well. There they are a means of escape for Lena's grandmother, who keeps reacting to the process of remembering that is forced on her by citing apparently comforting phrases such as »You have to pay for everything you get in life. You won't get anything for free«⁹, thus attempting to wave off the suppressed past including her feelings of guilt. On the very first page an inauspicious quote from a fairy tale announces the presumed threat of the past that is about to break into her home when Lena, while meeting Mrs Greenburg for the first time, thinks, »She had the biggest eyes Lena had ever seen, eyes with heavy and well-defined eyelids. Grandmother, why are your eyes so big? Nonsense. She was a nice woman.«¹⁰

In *Dieda* oder *Das fremde Kind* quotes from fairy tales are used as well; they shockingly reflect the girl's torturous feelings of guilt and indicate a reality that is interspersed with brutality. Only the neighbour Mrs. Fischer, who has a liberal mind, takes the disturbed girl seriously and shows courage in the midst of the Third Reich as described from the child's perspective and therefore only reconstructible from indicative fragments. Renate Welsh »does not explain or categorize anything – the historical context, which is frequently only hinted at in magic words, as much as the psychological meaning of the events, has to be deduced from the context.«¹¹ Mrs. Fischer, who, like Mrs. Greenburg, is described as a warm-hearted and empathic woman, provides Dieda finally with some answers to her questions, thus contributing to Dieda's mental growth.

Johanna, too, gradually frees herself from her suppressive social environment and the ignorance and silence that comes with it. At first no one answers her questions and she is completely on her own when it comes to daily matters, human issues or even political issues. It is only Peter Steiner who helps Johanna emotionally by starting a dialogue with her. Now she has someone she can talk to, someone who frees her from her »confinement of speechlessness«¹². Peter Steiner calls Johanna by her name, gives her an identity and takes her questions and concerns seriously. »You're not stupid, remember that! [...] He talked to her the way he would talk to somebody he could trust. And if he trusted her, then she could surely trust him, too. Somehow. She started to smile.«¹³ For the first time in her life she is perceived as a human and a woman because »[t]o be able to listen and trust that the other person is able to listen provides the grounds on which self-confidence and respect of others can thrive.«¹⁴ As a result Johanna slowly starts to claim her rights by using

arguments and to verbally confront the resistance – that also shows in the form of worn-out meaningless phrases. In this novel, which was published in 1979, Renate Welsh already »exposed the ideological contents of proverbs, phrases and political paroles with great sensitivity and by keeping up with the tradition of a critical eye on language that has been particularly effectively practised in Austrian literature.«¹⁵

Though formally very different yet with the identical intention not to forget, Renate Welsh's *In die Waagschale geworfen* gives the Austrian resistance movement its own distinct face, thus showing once more the importance of one's stance. »It was as if the perpetrators had placated the residual conscience they had to have after all by trying to break the backs of those who had managed to stand up and walk straight despite everything.«¹⁶ The fact that they did not always manage to do so is a comforting thought that gives hope. It is a principle you can frequently find in Renate Welsh's texts even when – or especially when – she makes the unimaginable graspable cautiously and distinctly, as she did in her approach to the subject of Vicar DDR. Heinrich Maier, who, being a member of the resistance, was decapitated on 22 March 1945, the last day any executions were carried out at the Higher Court in Vienna.

»He would not only be punished for his [Vicar DDr. Heinrich Maier's] sins. It was no sin to stand up to a regime that turns good into evil and evil into good. That was no God-given authority. And if it was arrogant to think you could oppose it, then that very arrogance might have been his best feature.«¹⁷

Scenarios such as this one confirm the conviction Renate Welsh has expressed over and over again, namely that literature has the power to change things. »I believe literature can help to claim not only the experiences the protagonists make in your place but also your own personal experiences. By possessing its language, the individual can feel like a real individual instead of a nobody.«¹⁸ This circumstance is the prerequisite that is required to make the moral courage, integrity as well as independent thinking and acting that Renate Welsh constantly demands possible even outside of literature.

»Perhaps writing is actually an attempt with possibly unsuitable means to extend the limits of belonging, to tear down watchtowers set up against the others or to turn them into belvederes, to defuse mine fields? It certainly is for me and probably for all those others who are without a roof over their heads, of which there are quite a few by now.«¹⁹

- 1 Winfried Kaminski / Gerhard Haas: *Zeitgeschichtliche und politische Kinder- und Jugendliteratur*. -In: *Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Ein Handbuch*. Hg. v. Gerhard Haas. 3. Aufl. -Stuttgart 1984. S. 105.
- 2 Renate Welsh: *Geschichten hinter den Geschichten*. Innsbrucker Poetik Vorlesung. -Innsbruck 1995 (Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft, Sonderband). S. 26.
- 3 Renate Welsh: *Besuch aus der Vergangenheit*. -Zürich, Frauenfeld: Nagel & Kimche 1999. S. 58.
- 4 Vgl.: Maria Lypp: *Einfachheit als Kategorie der Kinderliteratur*. -Frankfurt 1984
- 5 Renate Welsh: *Gesichter im Spiegel*. -In: *Auf der Suche nach der Matrix. Ästhetische Verfahren in der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur*. Reihe Fokus im Fernkurs Kinder- und Jugendliteratur der STUBE. Hrsg. v. Inge Cevela und Heidi Lexe. -Wien 2001 [Fernkurskriptum]. S.38.
- 6 Renate Welsh: *Besuch aus der Vergangenheit*, a.a.O., S. 48f.
- 7 Renate Welsh: *Besuch aus der Vergangenheit*, a.a.O., S. 30.
- 8 Renate Welsh: *Dieda oder Das fremde Kind*. -Hamburg: Oetinger 2002. S. 99.

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- 9 Renate Welsh: Besuch aus der Vergangenheit, a.a.O., S. 87.
 - 10 Renate Welsh: Besuch aus der Vergangenheit, a.a.O., S. 5.
 - 11 Elisabeth Bauschmid: Das Drama vom bösen Kind. Renate Welsh erzählt eine exemplarische Geschichte. -In: Beilage der SZ 9.10.2002. S. V2/28.
 - 12 Renate Welsh: Gesichter im Spiegel. -In: Auf der Suche nach der Matrix. Ästhetische Verfahren in der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Reihe Fokus im Fernkurs Kinder- und Jugendliteratur der STUBE. Hrsg. v. Inge Cevela und Heidi Lexe. -Wien 2001 [Fernkursskriptum]. S. 38.
 - 13 Renate Welsh: Johanna. -Reinbek bei Hamburg 2002 (rororo 21202). [1979]. S. 187ff.
 - 14 Renate Welsh: Geschichten hinter den Geschichten, a.a.O., S. 11.
 - 15 Renate Langer: Erzähltechniken und politischer Gehalt in Jugendliteratur. -In: Auf der Suche nach der Matrix. Ästhetische Verfahren in der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Reihe Fokus im Fernkurs Kinder- und Jugendliteratur der STUBE. Hrsg. v. Inge Cevela und Heidi Lexe. -Wien 2001 [Fernkursskriptum].S. 21.
 - 16 Renate Welsh: Geschichten hinter den Geschichten, a.a.O., S. 27.
 - 17 Renate Welsh: In die Waagschale geworfen. Österreicher im Widerstand. -Wien: Jugend & Volk 1988. S. 31.
 - 18 Renate Welsh: Gefährliche Brutstätten des Geistes. -In: 1000 und 1 Buch 2/2003. S. 12.
 - 19 Renate Welsh: Geschichten hinter den Geschichten, a.a.O., S. 37.

Awards and Prizes

- 1977 Austrian Children's and Juvenile Book Award for Empfänger unbekannt – zurück! (Recipient Unknown – Return to Sender!)
Children's and Juvenile Book Award of the City of Vienna for Empfänger unbekannt – zurück! (Recipient Unknown – Return to Sender!)
- 1978 Austrian Children's and Juvenile Book Award for ...und Terpsi geht zum Zirkus (Terpsi Joins the Circus)
Children's and Juvenile Book Award of the City of Vienna for ...und Terpsi geht zum Zirkus (Terpsi Joins the Circus)
- 1980 Children's and Juvenile Book Award of the City of Vienna for Johanna
German Juvenile Book Award for Johanna
- 1984 Austrian Children's and Juvenile Book Award for Wie in fremden Schuhen (As if Walking in Somebody Else's Shoes)
Children's and Juvenile Book Award of the City of Vienna for Wie in fremden Schuhen (As if Walking in Somebody Else's Shoes)
- 1985 Austrian State Award for Juvenile Literature
- 1986 Children's and Juvenile Book Award of the City of Vienna for Eine Hand zum Anfassen (A Hand to Take)
- 1988 Children's and Juvenile Book Award of the City of Vienna
- 1989 Austrian Children's and Juvenile Book Award for Drachenflügel (Dragon's Wing)
Silver Pen Awarded by the German Doctor's Association
- 1991 Children's and Juvenile Book Award of the City of Vienna
Children's Cultural Award presented by the Dr. Helmut und Hannelore Greve Sciences Foundation
Bad Harzburg Youth Literature Award
Award of the Catholic Academy of Hamburg
- 1992 Honorary Austrian Children's and Juvenile Book Award
- 1997 Austrian Children's and Juvenile Book Award for Disteltage (Thistle days)
- 2000 Children's and Juvenile Book Award of the City of Vienna for Besuch aus der Vergangenheit

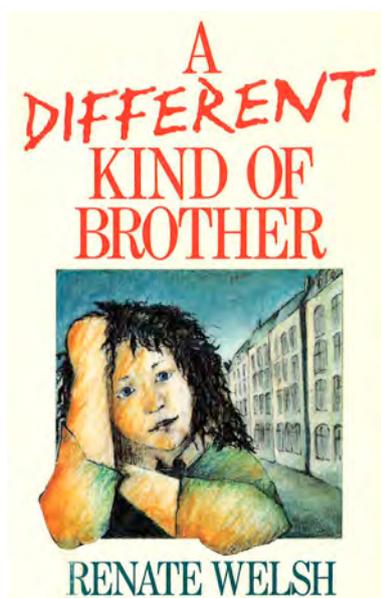
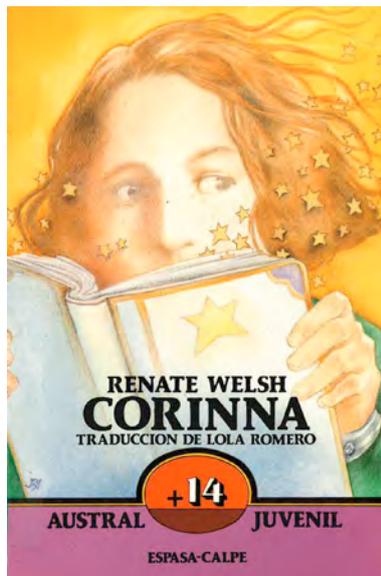
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- 2003 Austrian Children's and Juvenile Book Award for Dieda oder Das fremde Kind
Children's and Juvenile Book Award of the City of Vienna for Dieda oder das fremde Kind
Great Award of the German Academy of Children's and Teen Literature e.V. Volkach
- 2005 Readers' Votes – The Young Readers' Award (Association of Austrian Libraries) for Katzenmusik
- 2006 Recognition Award for Literature issued by Lower Austria
- 2009 Austrian Children's and Juvenile Book Award (Honor List) for Und raus bist du
- 2012 Austrian Children's and Juvenile Book Award (Honor List) for Dr. Chickensoup
- 2015 Austrian Children's and Juvenile Book Award (Honor List) for Sarah spinnt Geschichten (Sarah telling Stories)
- 2016 Literary Prize of the City of Vienna
- 2017 Theodor Kramer Preis für Schreiben im Widerstand und im Exil (Theodor Kramer Award for Writing In Exile and In Resistance)
- Numerous mentions on the honorary lists of European Children's and Juvenile Book Awards

Books by Renate Welsh

- 1970 Der Enkel des Löwenjägers (The Hunter's Grandson) | Wien; Innsbruck: Obelisk Verlag | Illustrated by Karlheinz Groß
- 1973 Ülkü – das fremde Mädchen. Erzählung und Dokumentation (Ülkü the Strange Girl) | Wien: Jugend und Volk
Das Seifenkistenrennen (The Soapbox Derby) | Wien: Jugend und Volk | Illustrated by Sabine Richter
- 1974 Alle Kinder nach Kleinstadt (All Children to Children's City) | Wien: Jugend und Volk | Illustrated by Wulf Bugatti
- 1975 Der Staatsanwalt klagt an. Jugend vor Gericht (The Public Prosecutor Brings Charges) | Wien: Jugend und Volk
Thomas und Billy oder Katzen springen anders (Thomas and Billy or: cats jump in another way) | Wien: Jugend und Volk | Illustrated by Emanuela Delignon
Einmal sechzehn und nie wieder (Once 16 and Never Again) | Wien: Jungbrunnen
- 1976 Corinna kann hellsehen (Corinna have second sight) | Wien: Jugend und Volk
Drittes Bett links (The third bed on the left side) | Dortmund: Schaffstein
Empfänger unbekannt – Zurück! (Recipient Unknown – Return to Sender) | Wien: Jungbrunnen
- 1977 Hoffnung mit Hindernissen (Hope with Obstacles) | Wien: Jungbrunnen
...und Terpsi geht zum Zirkus (Terpsi Joins the Circus) | Wien: Jugend und Volk | Illustrated by Wilfried Zeller-Zellenberg
Fiona und Michael (Fiona and Michael) | Wien: Jungbrunnen
- 1978 Das Erbsenauto (The Pea-Car) | Wien: Jugend und Volk | Illustrated by Eva Voelkel
Zwischenwände (Internal Walls) | Wien: Jungbrunnen
- 1979 Johanna | Wien: Jugend und Volk
13000 Mixgeschichten und noch ein paar mehr! (13000 Mixed Stories and Even More!) | Dortmund: Schaffstein
Das Vamperl (The little Vampire) | Dortmund: Schaffstein | Illustrated by Siegfried Wagner
- 1980 Ende gut, gar nichts gut (In the End Nothing is Well) | Wien: Jungbrunnen
Das Leben leben. Evas Alltagsgeschichte (To Learn Living or: Evas Day-to-Day-Live) | Wien: Schneider
- 1981 ...und schicke ihn hinaus in die Wüste (and Send him to the Desert...) | Wien: Jugend und Volk
- 1982 Bald geht's dir wieder gut! (You will be alright next time) | Wien: Jugend und Volk | Illustrated by Gerri Zotter
Wörterputzer und andere Erzählungen (Word Cleaners and Other Tales) | Stuttgart: Union-Verlag
Philip und sein Fluß. Ein Bilderbuch (Philip and his River) | Ravensburg: Maier-Verlag | Illustrated by Pieter Kunstreich
- 1983 Der Brieftaubenbeamte (The Carrier Pigeon Officer) | Wien: Jugend und Volk | Illustrated by Reinhard Kiesel
Wie in fremden Schuhen (As if Walking in Somebody Else's Shoes) | Wien: Jungbrunnen
Paul und der Baßgeigenpaul (Paul and Bass Fiddle Paul) | Würzburg: Arena | Illustrated by Christopher Welsh

-
- 1984 Julie auf dem Fussballplatz (Julie on the Football Pitch) | Wien: Jugend und Volk | Illustrated by Doris Podhrazky
Einfach dazugehören (Just Belonging) | Wien: Jungbrunnen
Würstel mit Kukuruz (Worsty and Kukuruz) | Wien: Dachs | Illustrated by Franz S. Sklenitzka
- 1985 Eine Hand zum Anfassen. Ein Briefroman (A Hand to Take) | Wien: Jungbrunnen
Karolin und Knuddel. Eine Geschichte (Karolin and Knuddel) | Wien: Jugend und Volk | Illustrated by Otmar Grisseemann
Lisa und ihr Tannenbaum. Eine Geschichte (Lisa and her Christmas Tree) | Ravensburg: Maier | Illustrated by Mary Rahn
Das kleine Moorgespenst (The Little Swamp Spirit) | Hamburg: Oetinger | Illustrated by Sabine Lohf
Nina sieht alles ganz anders (Nina sees Things Differently) | Ravensburg: Maier | Illustrated by Otto S. Svend
- 1986 Ein Geburtstag für Kitty (A Birthday for Kitty) | München: Dt. Taschenbuch-Verlag | Illustrated by Hans Poppel
Schneckenhäuser (Snail-Shells) | Wien: Jungbrunnen
Schnirkel, das Schneckenkind und andere Tiergeschichten (Snirkle the Snail Kid and other Animal Stories) | Wien: Jungbrunnen | Illustrated by Chris Welsh
- 1987 Die Melodie im Kopf. Alltagsgeschichten (That Melody on My Mind. Everyday Stories) | München: Schneider
Ich schenk' dir einen Kindertag (I'll Give You a Children's Day) | Wien: Jugend und Volk
- 1988 In die Waagschale geworfen. Österreicher im Widerstand (Thrown into the Scales) | Wien: Jugend und Volk
Seifenblasen in Australien (Soap Bubbles till Australia) | Wien: Jungbrunnen | Illustrated by Christopher Welsh
Drachenflügel (Dragon's Wing) | Wien: Obelisk
- 1989 Stefan | Wien: Jungbrunnen | Photographs by Ulrich Schwecke
- 1990 Melanie Miraculi. Eine Kindergeschichte | Wien: Obelisk | Illustrated by Kirsten Höcker
Constanze Mozart. Eine unbedeutende Frau (Constanze Mozart. An Insignificant Woman) | Wien: Jugend und Volk
- 1991 Du bist doch schon groß (You are already grown up) | Hamburg: Oetinger | Illustrated by Gitte Spee
... denn Toto ist groß und stark (... Because Toto is big and strong) | Wien: Neuer Breitschopf | Illustrated by François Ruyer
Spinat auf Rädern: Kinderroman (Spinach on Wheels) | Zürich: Nagel & Kimche | Illustrated by Kirsten Höcker
- 1992 Eine Krone aus Papier. Kinderroman (A Paper Crown) | Wien: Obelisk
Tanja und die Gespenster (Tanja and the Ghosts) | Wien: Dachs-Verlag | Illustrated by Elisabeth Oberrauch
Wer fängt Kitty? (Who will catch Kitty?) | München: Dt. Taschenbuch-Verlag | Illustrated by Siglint Kessler
Vamperl soll nicht alleine bleiben (The little Vampire shouldn't stay alone) | München: Dt. Taschenbuch-Verlag | Illustrated by Siglint Kessler
- 1993 Das Haus in den Bäumen (The House in the Trees) | Zürich: Nagel & Kimche | Illustrated by Wolfgang Rudelius
Mit Hannibal wär alles anders (Things Would Be Different If Hannibal Was Around) | Hamburg: Oetinger | Illustrated by Antje Burger
Martin in der Seifenschale (Martin in the Soap Dish) | Wien: Jugend und Volk | Illustrated by Kamila Stanclova

-
- 1994 Sonst bist du dran! : Eine Erzählung zum Thema Gewalt in der Schule (Or Else It'll Be You) | Würzburg: Arena | Illustrated by Dorothea Tust
- 1995 Mäusespuk (Mice-Apparition) | Wien: Obelisk | Illustrated by Carola Holland
- 1996 Disteltage (Thistle days) | Wien: Obelisk
- 1997 Das Gesicht im Spiegel (The Face in the Mirror) | Wien: Obelisk
Phil und Lip (Phil and Lip) | Hamburg: Oetinger | Illustrated by Katrin Engelking
- 1998 Sechs Streuner (Six Stray Dogs) | Zürich: Nagel & Kimche | Illustrated by Franz Hoffmann
Wiederssehen mit Vamperl (Reunion with the little Vampire) | München: Dt. Taschenbuch-Verlag | Illustrated by Heribert Schulmeyer
- 1999 Besuche aus der Vergangenheit (Visit from the Past) | Wien: Obelisk
Max, der Neue (Max, the New Boy) | Würzburg: Arena
- 2002 Dieda oder das fremde Kind (That Girl or The Strange Child) | Wien: Obelisk
Vor Taschendieben wird gewarnt (Beware of Pickpockets) | Wien: Obelisk
| Illustrated by Stefanie Scharnberg
- 2004 Katzenmusik (Caterwauling) | Wien: Obelisk | Illustrated by Carola Holland
- 2005 Lillis Elefantenglück (Lilli's Happiness as Huge as an Elephant) | Wien: Obelisk
| Illustrated by Franz Hoffmann
- 2006 Gut, dass niemand weiß... (Good that Nobody Knows...) | Wien: Obelisk
| Illustrated by Chris Welsh
- 2008 ... und raus bist du (And You're Out) | Wien: Obelisk
- 2010 Ohne Vamperl geht es nicht (Not Without Little Vampie) | München: Dt. Taschenbuch-Verlag | Illustrated by Heribert Schulmeyer
- 2011 Wehr dich, wenn du dich traust (Fight Back If You Dare) | Wien: Arena
| Illustrated by Melanie Garanin
Dr. Chickensoup | St. Pölten: Residenz | Illustrated by Friederike Grünstich
- 2013 Ganz schön bunt (Colours Everywhere!) | Wien: Obelisk
| Illustrated by Monika Maslowska
- 2014 Sarah spinnt Geschichten (Sarah telling Stories) | Wien: Obelisk
| Illustrated by Suse Schweizer
- 2016 O' du fröhliche: 12 Weihnachtsgeschichten (12 Christmas Tales) | Wien: Obelisk | Illustrated by Julie Völk
- 2017 Zeit ist (k)eine Torte (Time Is [No] Tart) | Wien: Obelisk | Illustrated by Julie Völk



Translations

Besuch aus der Vergangenheit

Una visita del pasado | Spanish | Berta Vias Mahou | Madrid: Espasa-Calpe 2001

Un oaspete din trecut | Romanian | Doina Sandu | Bucarest: Editura Eminescu 2001

Der Briefftaubenbeamte

Roderik får en idé | Swedish | Ingrid Windisch | Malmö: Bergh 1984

Du bist doch schon groß

Du er jo en stor pige | Danish | Søren H. Madsen | Kopenhagen: Sommer & Sørensen 1992

Constanze Mozart

Constanze Mozart | English | Beth Bjorklund | Riverside, Calif.: Ariadne Press 1997

Zhena Mot's'arta | Russian | Galina Snezhinskai'a' | St. Petersburg: Limbus Press 2002

Konsutantue motuaruto no monogatari | Japanese | Akihiro and Reiko Kooka | Tokyo: Alphabeta Publishing 2007

Corinna kann hellsehen

Corinna | Spanish | Lola Romero | Madrid: Espasa-Calpe 1987

... denn Toto ist groß und stark

... want Toto is groot en sterk | Dutch | Ineke Ris | Antwerpen:

De Vries-Brouwers 1992

Mais je suis le plus fort! | French | Evelyne Douailler | Tournai: Casterman 1993

Dieda oder das fremde Kind

Bie renjia de haizi | Chinese | Yisha Li | Taipei: Aolin wenhua shiye youxian gongsi 2003

Disteltage

Vinterkulde | Danish | Lise Jørgensen | Kopenhagen: Sommer & Sørensen 1996

Zoveel dingen aan je hoofd | Dutch | Els Verbiest | Tiel: Lannoo 1998

Días oscuros | Spanish | Carlos Fortea | Barcelona: Edebè 1998

Naje en sv t | Czech | Hana Linhartová | Praha: Amulet 2000

Zile cu spine | Romanian | Doina Sandu | Bucarest: Editura Eminescu 2000

Rasked päevad | Estonian | Andrus Simsel | Tallinn: Steamark 2001

Drachenflügel

Drakevleugels | Dutch | Trees Wissenburg | Zeist: Christoffor 1991

Ta ftera tou drakou | Greek | Kira Sinos | Athen: Psychogios 1991

Ales de drac | Catalanian | Francina Jordà | Barcelona: Empuries 1992

Yume o miru anne | Japanese | Akiko Tooyama | Tokyo: Kodansha 1992

A different kind of brother | English | Anthea Bell | London: Andersen Press 1993

Zmeul din vis | Romanian | Doina Sandu | Bukarest: Editura Univers 1999

Drakon sparnai | Lithuanian | Rasa Ma elyt | Vilnius: Alma littera, 2001

Flatrat e dragoit | Albanian | Afrim Koçi | Tiranë: Andersen 2004



Ejderha Kanadı | Turkish | Ayça Sabuncuo lu | Istanbul: Kuraldää Yayäncäläk 2010

Drittes Bett links

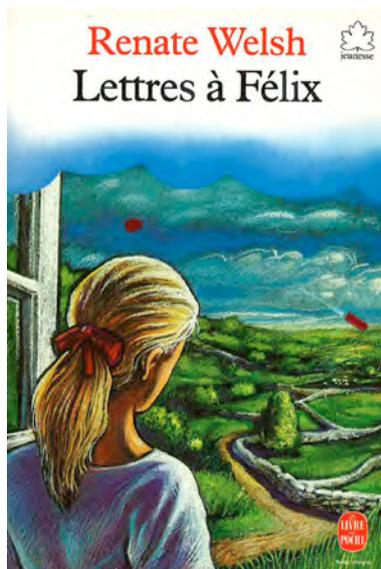
Tredje seng fra venstre | Danish | Ellen Kirk | Kopenhagen: Munksgaard 1977
Tredje sängen till vänster | Swedish | Jann Westrup | Stockholm: Sjöstrand 1986

Einfach dazugehören

Att få höra till | Swedish | Ingrid Mjöberg | Stockholm: Nyblom 1986
Erbij horen | Dutch | Ivo Buyle | Antwerpen: De Vries-Brouwers 1988

Einmal sechzehn und nie wieder

Seksten år | Danish | Irma Kvist-Jensen | Kopenhagen: Gyldendal 1977, 1978
Als ik maar ouder was | Dutch | Elly Schurink-Vooren | Utrecht/Antwerpen: A.W. Bruna & Zoon 1979
Mattias 16 år | Swedish | Sven Lundström | Vänersborg: Bokförlaget Opal 1978, 2006



Empfänger unbekannt – zurück!

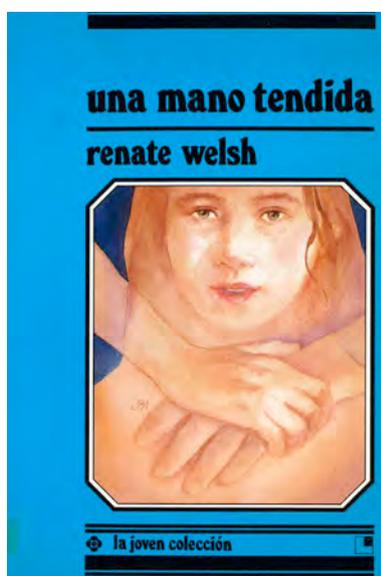
Ontvanger onbekend ... terug | Afrikaans | H. Technau | Pretoria: Daan Retief Uitgewers 1982, 1985
Adressat ubekendt | Danish | Birgitte Brix | Tellerup 1984
Adressaten okänd | Swedish | Ingegerd Leczinsky | Malmö: Bergh 1985
Destinatarul necunoscut – retur | Romanian | Doina Sandu | Bucarest: Editura Univers 2003

Ende gut – gar nichts gut

Eind goed, al goed? | Dutch | Ivo Buyle | Rotterdam: Antwerpen: De Vries-Brouwers 1993
Nar enden er god, er alting skidt | Danish | Tom Havemann | Tellerup 1984

Ganz schön bunt!

Renk Renk Rengarenk | Turkish | Özgür Yalçın | Istanbul: Kuraldää Yayäncäläk 2016



Das Gesicht im Spiegel

Laura davanti allo specchio | Italien | Anna Frisan | Casale Monferrato: Piemme 1998
Het gezicht in de spiegel | Dutch | Ivo Buyle | Antwerpen: De Vries-Brouwers 2000
Chipul din oglind | Romanian | Doina Sandu | Bucarest: Editura Univers [n.d.]

Großmutter's Schuhe

Mo iut s palikimas | Lithuanian | Vilnius: Gimtasis odis 2010

Eine Hand zum Anfassen

En trøstende hånd | Danish | Inger Boriis | Kopenhagen: Sommer & Sørensen 1986
Een hand om vast te houden | Dutch | Angèle Janse | Tiel: Lannoo 1990
Lettres à Félix | French | Ghislaine Alexandre | Paris: Hachette 1991
Una mano tendida | Spanish | L. Rodríguez López | Loguez 1994, 2001
Hīsu saku oka no hosupisu kara | Japanese | Asaka Matuzawa | Tokyo: Saera syobō 1996
Szorítsd meg a kezem! | Hungarian | Kósáné Oláh Julianna | [Nyíregyháza]: Kósáné Oláh J. 2010



Das Haus in den Bäumen

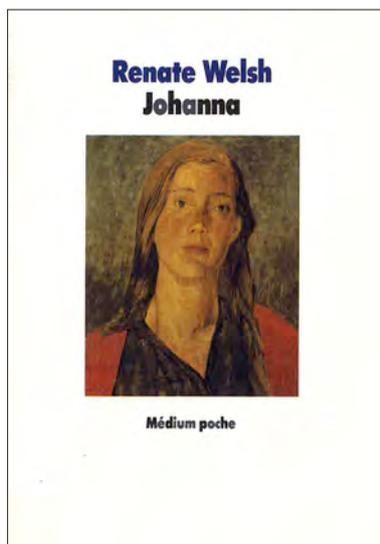
Huset i træet | Danish | Erik Jensen | København: Sommer & Sørensen 1993
La Casa tra gli alberi | Italian | Ezio Bacchetta | Casale Monferrato: Piemme 1997

Hoffnung mit Hindernissen

Förhoppningar med förhinder | Swedish | Christina Tranmark-Kossmann | Malmö: Berghs förlag 1984
Tør du håbe, Eva? | Danish | Irma Kvist-Jensen | København: Gyldendal 1997

Ich verstehe die Trommel nicht mehr

Jag förstår inte trummorna längre | Swedish | Edward Brehmer | Malmö: Berghs Förlag 1982
Jeg forstår ikke trommen mere | Danish | Erik Jensen | København: Sommer & Sørensen 1983



Johanna

De lange weg van Johanna | Dutch | Arie C. Baaijens | Hoorn: Westfriesland 1983
Johanna | Danish | Erik Jensen | København: Sommer & Sørensen 1983
Johanna | Swedish | Roland Adlerberth | Malmö: Berghs förlag 1983, 1988, 2006
Johanna | French | Luc de Goustine | L'école des loisirs 1984, 1986, 1990
Johanna | Catalanian | Judith Vilar | La Galera 1987
Johanna | Latvian | Līga Mura | Riga: Liesma [USSR to 1991] 1987
Johanna | Spanish | Rosa Grueso y Thies Nelson | Barcelona: La Galera 1988

Julie auf dem Fußballplatz

Ikke noget for tøser? | Danish | Gyda Skat Nielsen | København: Sommer & Sørensen 1984
Anke de voetbalfan | Dutch | Maaïke Nagel | Zutphen: Thieme 1987
Julie en el campo del fútbol | Spanish | Silvia Bardelás Álvarez | Editorial Everest 2009



Eine Krone aus Papier

En krone af papir | Danish | Birgitte Brix | København: Sommer & Sørensen 1992
En krone av papir | Norwegian | Beate Mulholland | Oslo: Aschehoug, 1994
Una corona de papel | Spanish | Herminia Dauer | Barcelona: Edebé 1993
Een kroontje van papier | Dutch | Trees Wissenburg | Zeist: Christoffor 1995
La corona di carta | Italian | Modena: F. Panini ragazzi 1995
Mongkut Kradat | Thai | A'mpha O'trakul | Krung thep: Phraaw Yaowachon, 2544 [2001]

Lisa und ihr Tannenbaum

Lisa og hendes juletræ | Danish | Eva Glistrup | København: Sommer & Sørensen 1986
The everlasting Christmas tree | English | Helen East | London: Macdonald 1987

Das Lufthaus

A house of cards | English | Linda C. DeMerritt and Beth Bjorklund | Riverside Calif.: Ariadne Press 2002

Martin in der Seifenschale

Martín en la bañera | Spanish | Jesús Larriba | Madrid: SM 1994
En Martí a la banyera | Catalanian | Núria Font i Ferré | Barcelona: Cruïlla 1995



Mäusespuk

Russian | 1997

Melanie Miraculi

Melanie y la formula magica | Spanish | Amalia Bermejo | Madrid: Espasa-Calpe 1991

Melani Miraculi | Dutch | Trees Wissenburg | Zeist: Christoffor 1992

A, chijinjatta | Japanese | Sasaki Tazuko | Tokyo: Kodansha 1992

Italian | Modena: Panini 1995

Mélani Miráculi | Galician | Editorial Galaxia 1996

Melani kai ta magia | Greek | Maia Routsou | Athi na: Patakis 1997, 2002



Mit Hannibal wär alles anders

Hvis jeg bare hadde en hund | Norwegian | Kari Bolstad | Oslo: Cappelen 1994

Wu, un perro fantástico | Spanish | Jesús Larriba | Madrid: SM 1994

Con Hannibal sarebbe un'altra cosa | Italian | Mario Sala Gallini | Casale

Monferrato: Piemme 1995

Hvis bare jeg havde Hannibal | Danish | Søren H. Madsen | København: Sommer & Sørensen 1995

Cun Hannibal fissigl tot oter | Rhaeto-Romanic | Thomas Beer | Cuera: Lia rumantscha 1997

Akta er för Hannibal! | Swedish | Harriette Söderblom | Stockholm: Bergh 2000

Nina sieht alles ganz anders

Nina – og de andre | Danish | Eva Glistrup | København: Sommer & Sørensen 1985

Ninah ro'ah ha-kol aheret | Hebrew | Yakov Shavit | Giv'atajim: Masadah 1988

Nina ziet alles anders | Dutch | Henk Hokke | Kampen: Kok Educatief 1991



Ohne Vamperl geht es nicht

Chinese | Beijing: King-in-Culture 2013

Paul und der Baßgeigenpaul

Lille Paul och store Paul | Swedish | Gunvor V. Blomqvist | Broma: Opal 1985

Paul, the musician | English | Alisa Jaffa | London: Burke 1985

Philip und sein Fluss

Philippe et sa rivière | French | Florence Faucompré | Paris: Éditions du Centurion 1983

Schneckenhäuser

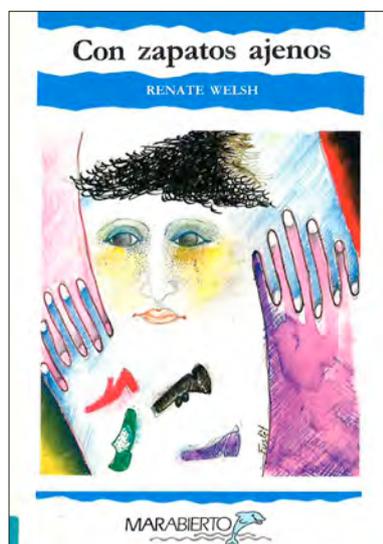
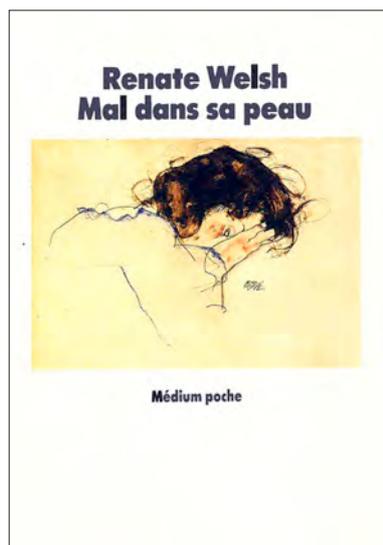
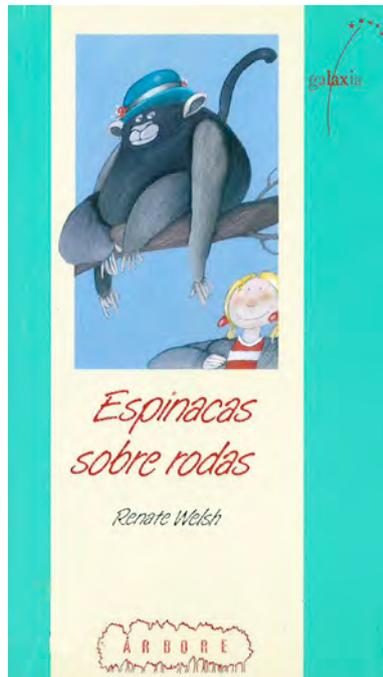
De er dumme alle sammen | Danish | Birgitte Brix | København: Sommer & Sørensen 1987

Das Seifenkistenrennen

Trka sanduka | Serbo-Croatian and German | Mira Pavlovi | Wien: Jugend & Volk 1973

Seifenblasen bis Australien

Spanish | Empuries 1991



Sonst bist du dran!

Én skal det jo gå ud over? | Danish | Eva Glistrup | Århus: CDR 1995

Spinat auf Rädern

Spinat på hjul | Danish | John Graae | Kopenhagen: Sommer & Sørensen 1993

Spinazie op wieltjes | Dutch | Trees Wissenburg | Zeist: Christoffoor 1994

Espinacas sobre rodas | Galician | Xosé Reimúndez Fernández | Vigo: Galaxia 1995

Zile cu spinii | Romanian | Bucarest: Editura Eminescu 2000

Ülkü, das fremde Mädchen

Ülkü, den fremmede pige | Danish | Irma Kvist-Jensen | Kopenhagen: Gyldendal 1980

Das Vamperl

Le petite vampire | French | Mélanie Erhardy | Nathan 1981, 1985

Vampyrus | Danish | Inger Boriis | Kopenhagen: Sommer & Sørensen 1986

Het vampiertje | Dutch | Annemarie Houwink ten Cate | Antwerpen: De Vries-Brouwers 1994

Un vampiro piccolo piccolo | Italian | Barbara Griffini | Milano: Feltrinelli 1999

Lithuanian | Vilnius: Alma littera 2001

El Vampirillo | Spanish/Castilian | Francisco Mar Rubio | Madrid: Espasa Calpe 2004

Wampiurek | Polish | Jolanta Sztuczy ska | Warszawa: Nasza Ksiegarnia 2005

Vampirjatko | Ukrainian | Ol'ha Sydor | Tov Calvaria 2006

Little Vampie | English | Birgit Hock | München: Dt. Taschenbuch-Verlag 2007

Korean | Seoul: Joong Ang Publishing 2008

Bulgarian | Sofia: Gea-Libris 2008

Chinese | Beijing: King-in-Culture 2013

Vampek | Slovenian | Ana Gmek | Ljubljana: eBesede 2014

Il Vamperlin | Rhaeto-Romanic | Rita Bearth | Laax: Surselva Romontscha 2015

Vamperl soll nicht alleine bleiben

Vampiertje mag niet alleen blijven | Dutch | Annemarie Houwink ten Cate | Antwerpen: De Vries-Brouwers 1992, 1994

Vampi si fidanza | Italian | Domenica Luciani | Milano: Feltrinelli 2000

Vampirillo no puede quedarse solo | Spanish | Madrid: Espasa Calpe 2004

Wampiurek szuka zony | Polish | Jolanta Sztuczy ska | Warszawa: Nasza Ksiegarnia 2005

Chinese | Beijing: King-in-Culture 2013

Vor Taschendieben wird gewarnt

Pozor, zeparji! | Slovenian | Ana Gmek | Ljubljana: eBesede 2012

Wie in fremden Schuhen

Hvem er jeg | Danish | Erik Jensen | Kopenhagen: Sommer & Sørensen 1984

Som i främmande skor | Swedish | Ingrid Windisch |Malmp: Berghs Förlag 1985

Als een vreemde eend | Dutch | Saskia Hulsman | Hoorn: Westfriesland 1984

Mal dans sa peau | French | Sylvia Radzyner | L école des loisirs 1987, 1988

Ik sykje mysels | Friesian | Jan de Jong | Ljouwert [Leeuwarden]: Algemeine Fryske Underrjocht Kommissje 1988

Con zapatos ajenos | Spanish | Sonia Tapia | Barcelona: Ediciones B 1990



Amb sabates massa grans | Catalanian | Mar Sauret | Barcelona: Ediciones B 1990

Wiedersehen mit Vamperl

Italian | Milano: Feltrinelli 1998

Reencuentro Con Vampirillo | Spanish | Espasa Calpe 2004

Spotkanie z Wampiurkiem | Polish | Jolanta Sztuczynska | Warszawa: Nasza Ksiegarnia 2005

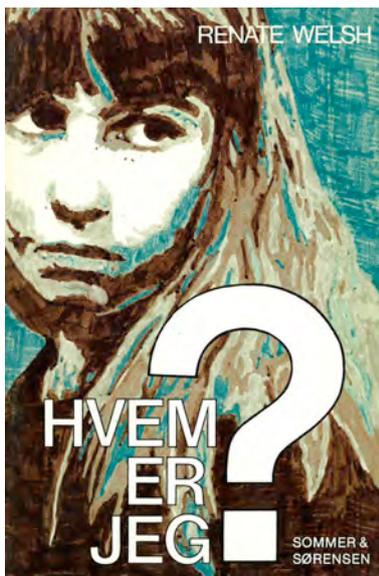
Chinese | Beijing: King-in-Culture 2013

Wörterputzer und andere Erzählungen

I morgen ... måske, fortællinger | Danish | Birgitte Brix | Tellerup 1983

Vazheh shur va dastan-ha-ye-digar | Persian | Na'imeh Khalili; Fereshteh

Mehrabi; Roqiyyeh Sadeqinur | Esfahan: Chahar Bagh 2004



Würstel mit Kukuruz

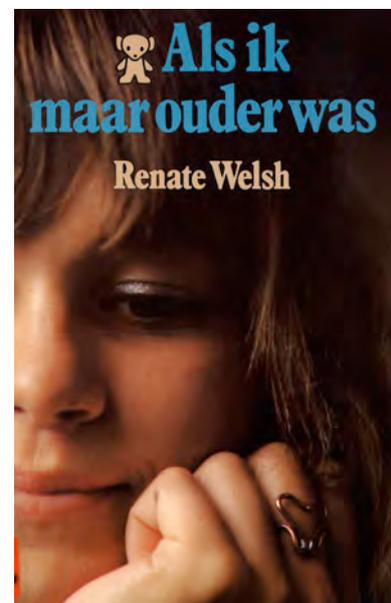
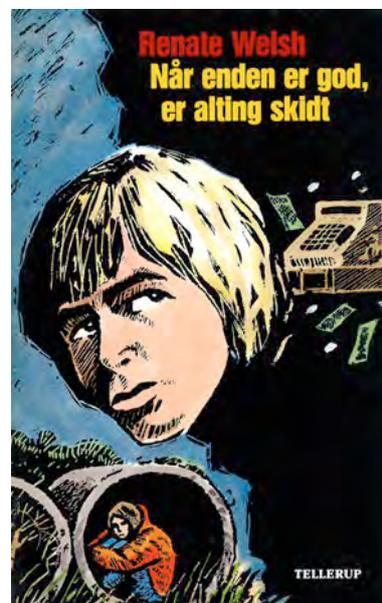
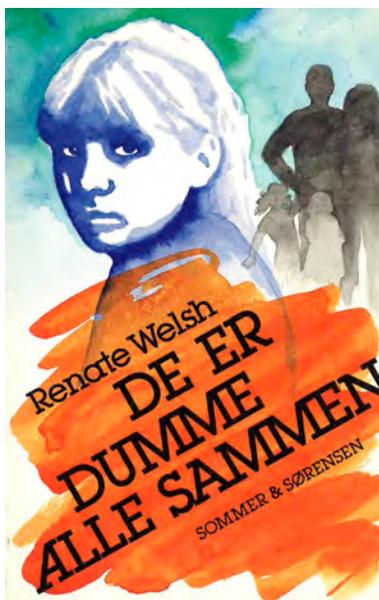
Alle tiders ferie | Danish | Gyda Skat Nielsen | Kopenhagen: Sommer & Sorensen 1984

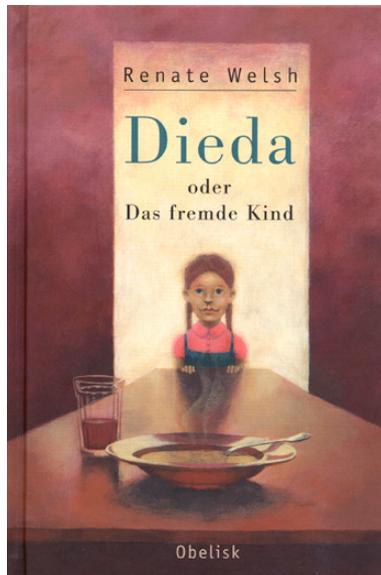
Zwischenwände

Spørg ikke så dumt | Danish | Irma Kvist-Jensen | Gyldendal 1981

Das Vamperl / Vamperl soll nicht alleine bleiben / Wiedersehen mit Vamperl

Vampyriukas neturi likti vienas | Lithuanian | Kristina Sprind i nait | Vilnius: Alma littera 2001





Books submitted to the Jury

Dieda oder das fremde Kind

(That Girl or The Strange Child)

Wien: Obelisk 2002

Johanna

Reinbek bei Hamburg:

Rowohlt-Taschenbuch-Verlag 2002

Sarah spinnst Geschichten

(Sarah telling Stories)

Wien: Obelisk 2014

Das große Buch vom Vamperl

(The Big Book of Little Vampie)

München: dtv 2011

A different kind of brother

(Drachenflügel)

translated by Anthea Bell

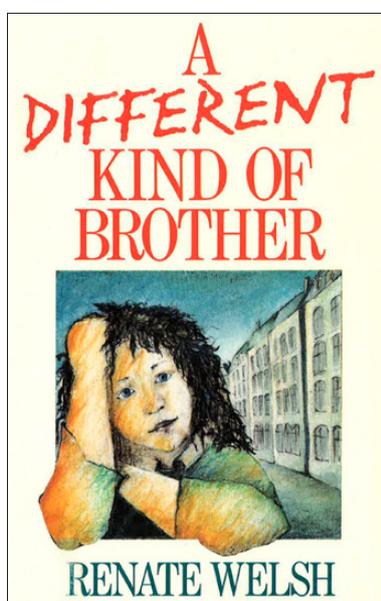
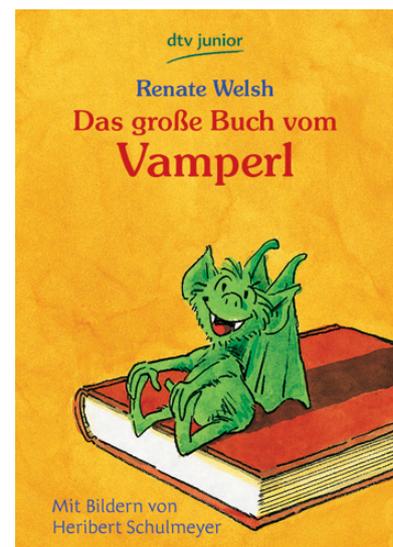
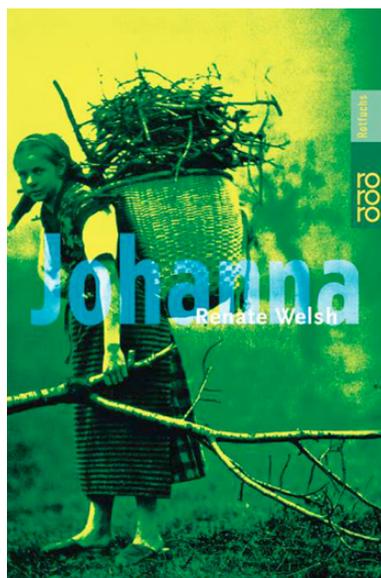
London: Andersen Press 1993

Zeit ist (k)eine Torte

(Time Is [No] Tart)

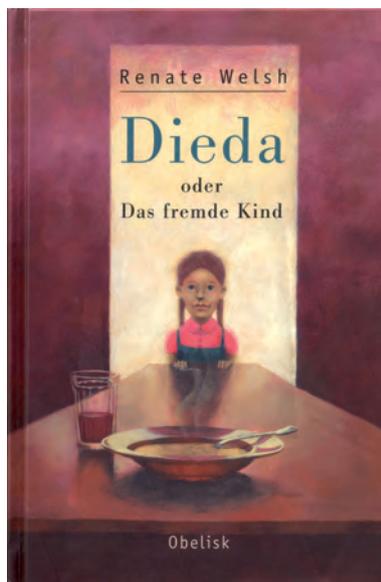
illustrated by Julie Völk

Innsbruck: Obelisk 2017



Dieda oder das fremde Kind (That Girl or The Strange Child)

Wien: Obelisk 2002



The tradition of the strange child in children's literature reaches from Pippi Longstocking to Zora, the outsider of Uskoken Castle, to Nöstlinger's exchange pupil. Renate Welsh re-arranges the conditions of the motif: Here it is the protagonist herself who sees herself as the strange child due to the new situation she finds herself in. Changes within her family have turned a formerly familiar place where she used to spend happy summers into a place of estrangement from herself. The heroine, who was separated from her father after her mother's death (the physician has stayed in Vienna at the end of World War II), is now living with his second wife and her family and experiences her former summer domicile in the country under different preconditions: No one is to show any empathy with this child – everyone who has shared her past is kept away from the new family.

Being a stranger, the young protagonist gets a new name by reacting only when addressed as »that girl« (»Die-da«). Completely committed to the childlike perspective, Renate Welsh describes little mundane scenarios of social exclusion. Seen through this childlike perspective, any memories of her biological mother, her mother's illness and death are as fragmented as the historical-political situation. Nobody is willing to explain the things Dieda overhears or observes to her. It is only one time that Dieda manages to escape and ask a neighbour for help when she is troubled about her first confrontation with her sexuality. Her life is dominated by the »old man«, by his rules of unfair treatment, by his strict ways and slapping hand. It is only when her new mother is visibly pregnant and returns to Vienna with Dieda that emotional loopholes and selective chances of more closeness open up. Sensitive and to the point, Renate Welsh's narrative circles around the so-called little things in life that always have a permanent effect nevertheless.

Heidi Lexe in 1000 und 1 Buch

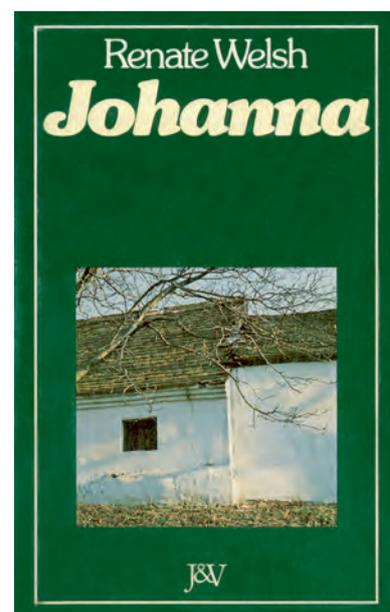
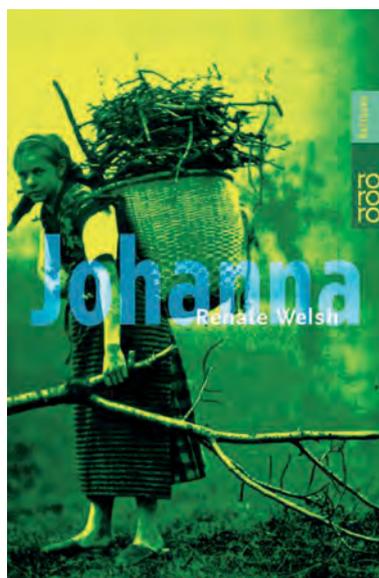
Johanna

Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt-Taschenbuch-Verlag 2002

Real-life experience – timeless history

The novel *Johanna* by Renate Welsh, which was first published in 1979 and received the German Youth Literature Award the very next year, is one of the most well-known books the Austrian author of children's and teen books, who has turned 70 recently, has written. The novel narrates the true story of the illegitimate child Johanna who lived on a farm in Lower Austria where she was abused and humiliated as being a whore for many years during the time between the two world wars. The story is set in a village, in the social environment of the rural lower class. Very gradually the protagonist manages to free herself from the suppressive mechanisms of her environment and to grow from a child without any identity into a responsible young woman and mother who runs her own life. In the end there is the hope that Johanna might be able to break with the pressure of having history repeat itself and – unlike her mother – to lead a self-controlled life.

Meticulous research and a lot of empathy have enabled Renate Welsh to depict the life of an individual influenced by political events of contemporary history while showing the mechanisms of human faults and virtues that have always been valid. The use of the personalized narrative perspective that directly presents the events is essential. The different ideological viewpoints represented by various characters oppose each other; the convictions of followers of Dollfuß, illegal Nazis and socialists are described without judging them or commenting on them. The embedding of ideologies and dull stereotypes into the plot is the very thing that exposes them – sometimes in the form of vehement arguments.

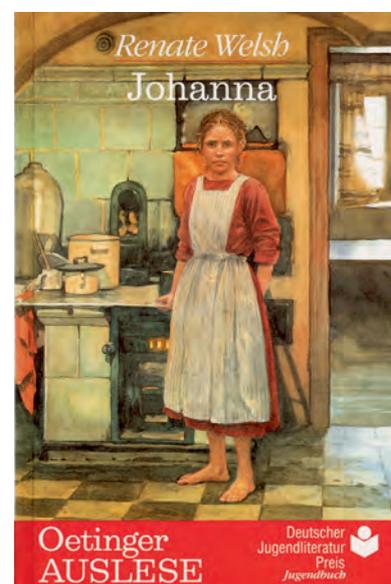


Welsh's conviction »that language can co-create and re-create the real world even if its effects are a lot less direct« is also reflected in her skilful application of language. It is the art of not telling everything that lets the reader feel and experience the text in a depressive manner. There is no omnipotent narrator; everything is told consistently from the protagonist's perspective, a fact that lets the reader experience Johanna's development from her initial speechlessness to her gradually growing self-reflection. No connexions that remain obscure to Johanna are explained; the reader is forced to adopt the protagonist's own view, which is gradually expanding, and to go through her process of finding herself with her. Furthermore Renate Welsh manages to expose the ideological content of language by employing political slogans, proverbs and figures of speech.

Renate Welsh uses miniature episodes taken from daily life to make large historical connexions accessible and to illustrate the mechanisms of suppression and power. During one of her first shopping tours on her own Johanna wonders about the courtesy and sensitivity of a Jewish salesman. To her, the way he treats her is a special kind of friendliness. A kind of friendliness she has never yet experienced. And old Löwy has to be a Jew. For the first time in her life Johanna is treated like a worthy and responsible human being – by a man who, because of who he is, is met with hatred and prejudice by his Austrian fellowmen in the Nineteen Thirties. Johanna's great surprise of being treated so nicely by a Jew – of all people – emphasizes that social trend while calmly presenting a piece of history en passant.

Scenarios like this one make Johanna a timeless historical piece of juvenile literature even almost 30 years after the book was first published and confirm Renate Welsh's conviction that written words can make a difference. »I believe literature can help to claim not only the experiences the protagonists make in your place but also your own personal experiences. By possessing its language, the individual can feel like a real individual instead of a nobody.«

Martina Rényi for 1000 und 1 Buch



Zeit ist (k)eine Torte (Time Is [No] Tart)

illustrated by Julie Völk
Innsbruck: Obelisk 2017

Holidays at last! Elli has been looking forward to the planned skiing holiday with her parents for so long. All her friends at school are also going away on holiday, in other words nobody at home to play with. But, as Elli might have expected, her parents cancel the whole journey just before departure. Typical! Mum has to attend a congress urgently and unexpectedly, and dad always has a lot to do at the company anyway. His mobile rings everywhere all the time. And as if that weren't enough, the three of them are also let down by the babysitter. What should Elli do now, if nobody has time for her? A plan is required! The old and somewhat quirky neighbor, Mrs. Neudeck, steps in. She can tell wonderfully bizarre stories of the past and Elli likes anything that is bizarre. Together with Mrs. Neudeck, the cat Basti and Mrs. Neudeck's friend Mr. Pospischil, Elli experiences all kinds of exciting adventures, totally forgetting to be sad about the cancelled skiing holiday. Elli now has three new friends, after all, who she can always go to if she ever feels lonely, or her parents are too busy as usual. There is still time to teach Elli's parents to slow down. Children have to be patient with adults.



Sarah spinnt Geschichten (Sarah telling Stories)

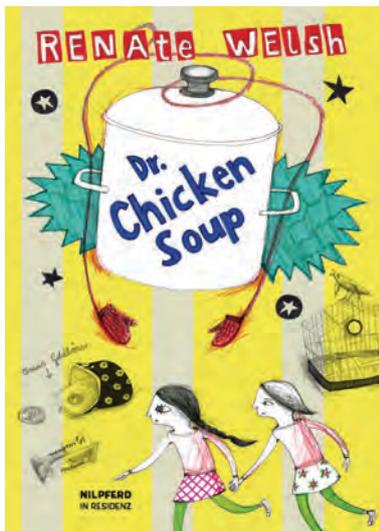
Wien: Obelisk 2014

Sarah is not able to turn cartwheels, and neither can she properly whistle. This does not necessarily make things easier for her in her new class, and brute Gustl turns her way home into hell. Until Gustl asks a story from her – and the words come right out of Sarah's mouth, promising and in colorful language. The chestnut seller becomes an astronaut, the newsman a millionaire, and the cyclist simply ends up on top of the church tower. And slowly, the proportions between Sarah and Gustl start to change ...

Sarah spins a tale:

»Once upon a time, there was a boy who wanted to be a sailor. But he lived in a country without seashore. ›You could drive cars‹, people used to tell him. But this was not what he wanted. ›I want to be by the sea‹ said he. One day, it started to rain. It kept raining on and on. All alleys turned into creeks, all streets became rivers, and all squares were lakes. The boy took a seat in a laundry basket, put up his grandmother's umbrella and sailed all the way to the sea. Then the rain stopped.«





Dr. Chickensoup

St. Pölten: Residenz 2011

What does it mean to be poor?

What does it mean to be poor? Julia, a fourth-grader, wonders. Her mother never finished school, got divorced from Julia's father and has a menial job. Of course it is hard to make ends meet and Julia is often left alone with her sinister thoughts that make her a loner. And she misses her dad. Her grandmother helps out as much as she can. Yet the two women frequently argue. Julia's mother is troubled by feelings of guilt, and her lack of gratitude upsets Grandma. Julia, who will finish primary school soon, is burdened down by the hope of her family to make up for missed chances for a better future.

Renate Welsh knows how to encourage children to find a way out of a challenging situation. Welsh describes the fears and the pride of »the poor« whose shame lets them pull back from society, thus demonstrating an aloofness to others that is perceived as being arrogant. Welsh has elegantly managed to unite the topics of economic need and integration. It takes Leyla, a refugee who had to flee from her homeland with her family and who becomes Julia's new classmate, to enable Julia to integrate.

Money isn't everything but sticking together as a family and friends is – even when sparks fly. A verbal exchange not only enables you to recognize problems but also to develop empathy and interests that may lead to solutions. This could turn a hearty chicken soup into effective medicine for humanity. In summary: A true masterpiece of children's literature with many philosophical ideas and an exciting narrative!

Ingrid Reichel for LitGes, Literarische Gesellschaft St. Pölten

Das große Buch vom Vamperl (The Big Book of Little Vampie)

München: dtv 2011

Frau Lizzi gets quite a shock when she discovers a little vampire in her flat. It looks tiny and helpless, and she decides to bring it up on the bottle – with milk, of course, not blood.

The little vampire develops only one characteristic feature: whenever someone flies into a rage or starts shouting, the vampire pricks the person's gall bladder and sucks out all the poison. People turn quiet and gentle as a lamb. One day, somebody discovers the usefulness of this poison-sucking little animal, and the tiny creature almost dies with intoxication. Of course it is saved in the end!

The educational intention of this book is well disguised in this humorous story.



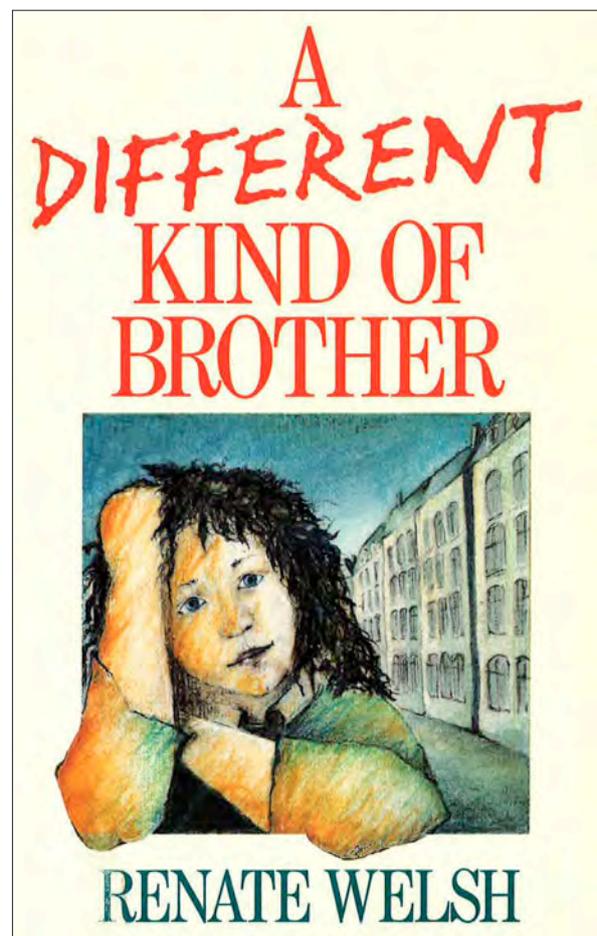
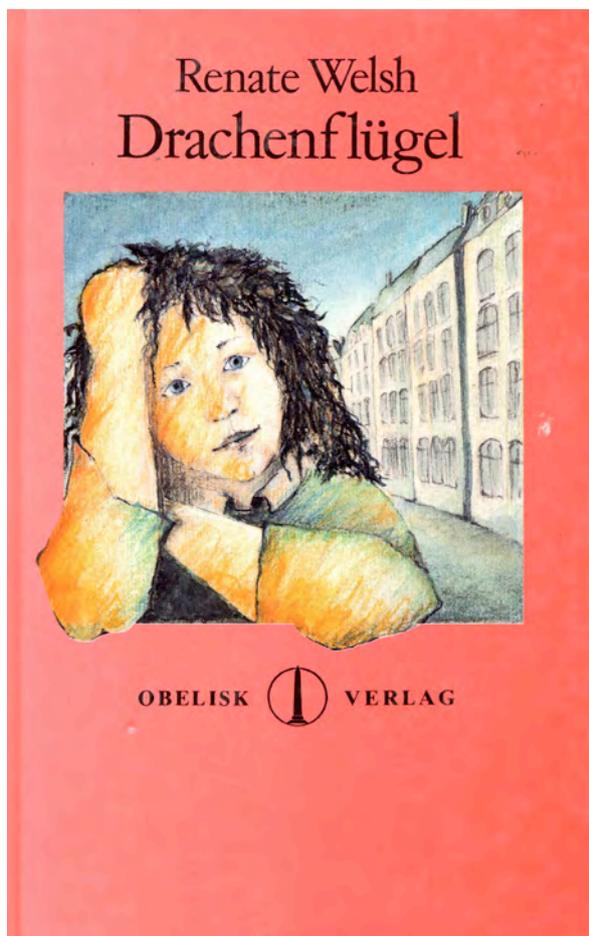
Drachenflügel (A different kind of brother)

Zürich: Nagel & Kimche 1993

Anne is devoted to her handicapped brother Jacob and extremely sensitive to other people's reactions to him. She cannot bear their looks of pity or rejection and she retreats into a dreamworld of her own. Only when she meets Leah does she learn the importance of friendship but then a chance remark of Leah's puts their new friendship in jeopardy.

The writer has managed to create a story of a family living with disablement and balancing the love and the pressure of the situation without ever being patronising.

Wendy Cooling, Children's Book Foundation





**... und raus bist du
(... And You Are Out)**

Wien: Obelisk 2008

Content: Pino opened the mailbox that, once again, was full of advertising brochures. Mum refused from picking up the mail. She was certainly afraid a letter from the immigration authorities might be amongst it. Esad said again and again, if the letter has been sent it has been sent – it doesn't matter if you read it or not. But mum just shook her head and refused from talking about this topic. Renate Welsh uses siblings Pino and Esad and their mother as an example to tell of people who come from a place destroyed by war to find shelter in our country. The kids are good at school, their parents are hard-working people, and all of them make friends – until ... until, frequently years later, they are being told: »You've got to go home!« Home? Where is that supposed to be? They are allowed to take two suitcases full of baggage with them, all the rest has to be left back... So, what does being good at school, doing hard work that hardly anyone else wants to do and what do the friends made help you now? Can we really afford letting these people go? Esad's friend Ismail, for instance, is someone who makes this experience. Pino, Esad and their mother spend day by day in fear of also receiving the deportation order. But they have so many friends who want to help them – more than they would have ever believed. Will their help be successful? A catching story that will stir you up! With this book, the author once again shows her commitment for those disadvantaged, her engagement in fighting unfairness and the understanding she has for the impotent fury and desperation young people like Esad feel in such a situation. Instead of an epilogue, this book contains unfortunately true short stories that tell of specific children's' fate.



**Das Gesicht im Spiegel
(Face In The Mirror)**

Wien: Obelisk 1997

Content: Laura is an adopted child. She and her brother Boris, who was also adopted when he was a baby, live with their mum and dad who never made a secret out of not being their birth parents. Actually, Laura and Boris are doing perfectly fine. They don't miss anything and their parents always have an ear for them when they need it. And still, Laura has recently been more and more withdrawn herself. She can't stop thinking of her natural mother, who all she knows of is her name. Why did this woman called Ursula Riedmüller give her away back then? Might well be, they might cross each other's way on day in Vienna without even knowing it!



**Das Haus in den Bäumen
(The House In The Trees)**

Wien: Obelisk 1993

Content: Eva likes to see the evening sun shine red through Peter's sticky-out ears. She likes everything about Peter – only when Mr. Dreborg, Peter's dad, comes rushing up on his motorbike, Peter becomes a stranger to her. Fortunately, this doesn't happen too often. The adults are rarely ever around in these months before the war ends, and so Eva and Peter spend endless days with each other in the overgrown garden behind the mill. Empathically and linguistically convincing, Renate Welsh tells of Eva's und Peter's peaceful childhood love in times of war.



Das kleine Moorgespent (The Little Moorghost)

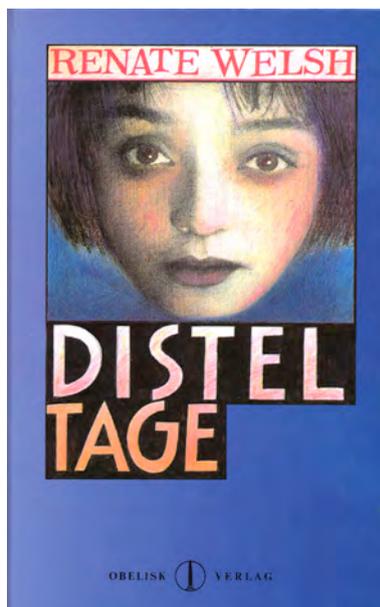
Wien: Obelisk 1985

Content: The little swamp ghost is the cutest little ghost that swamp ghost lady Walli has ever seen. That's why she is looking for a just as attractive name for her ghost-child – as names are the most important thing for swamp ghosts. Those who have no name will have to fear everyone and everything. But before Walli could find a nice name, a big black cloud came passing by and carried her away. The little ghost was left all alone. How will it do, without its mum?

Disteltage (Thistledays)

Wien: Obelisk 1996

Content: Sarah's mum hasn't been at the office for days, she didn't cook and neglected the apartment. She is just lying in bed and seems to be someone else. Since her dad is on a business trip and her grandma is not at hand, either, Sarah quickly realises she will have to do something. She tries to keep her mother's state a closely guarded secret to the neighbours. She gets a sick note and uses her best efforts to care for her mum and the home. But soon things just become too much for her.



Drachenflügel (A different kind of brother)

Wien: Obelisk 1988

Content: »Which Anne are you talking about?« – »The one whose brother is disabled«. How could Lea say something like that? Anne wants no pity, neither for herself nor for Jakob. Because she loves her brother so much, Anne builds a protective wall around herself and her family. She withdraws more and more from her surroundings – and thus from her friend Lea. But Lea is persistent and not willing to be thrown off so easily.

Eine Krone aus Papier (A Crown OF Paper)

Wien: Obelisk 1992

Content: Nicole and Theresa are friends. They have exchanged their hair slides and pullovers, and nobody would invite only one of them. But then, all of a sudden, Nicole claims to actually be a princess. And while they are still arguing, Nicole's mum gets sick. Nicole moves in with Theresa's parents and a hard time begins: for Nicole as well as for Theresa, who has to make compromises and comfort Nicole ... An inherently consistent book about children's dreams and fears.





**Ganz schön bunt!
(Colours Everywhere)**

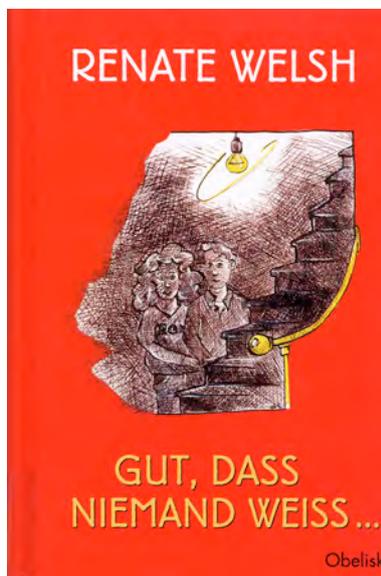
Wien: Obelisk 2013

Content: Red, orange, yellow, green – for the first time ever, the Zwutschg sees a rainbow and is sure to want to own it. But the radiant colourful one is hard to catch! On his trip, the Zwutschg comes across a smart fire salamander, a grumbly badger who does offer help, though, an all-blue bird, a swinging frog and many others. They all show him where to catch colours and what you can find without even looking for it.

**Gut, dass niemand weiss ...
(Good that no one knows ...)**

Wien: Obelisk 2006

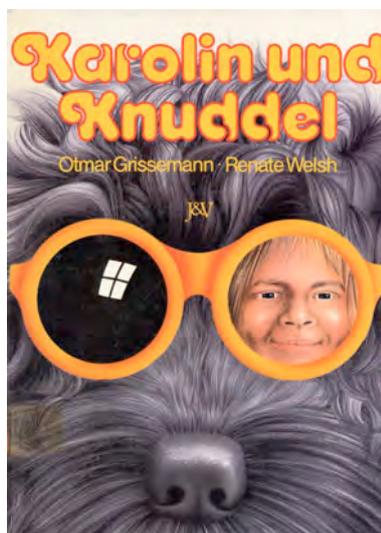
Content: Once again, Renate Welsh addresses a tricky subject from the world of school kids: bullying – formerly also known as «dissing someone». Within the scope of this thrilling story – almost a crime story – she precisely works up the children's personalities from a psychological point of view and thus comes to the »case's« logical solution.



**Karolin und Knuddel
(Caroline And Cnuddel)**

Wien: Obelisk 1985

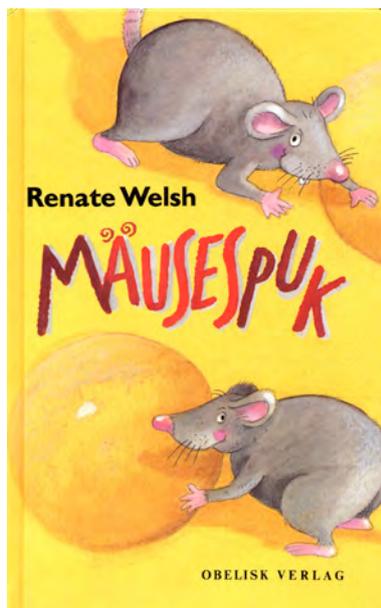
Content: Karolin is not afraid of anything. She doesn't fear crocodiles. She doesn't fear constrictors. And she sure doesn't fear lions. The only thing she fears is dogs. Big dogs and small ones. She fears dogs that growl and dogs that scramble. She is also afraid of Knuddel, her neighbour's blind dog. Will she have to be afraid forever?



**Katzenmusik
Cathawling**

Wien: Obelisk 2004

Content: Whenever she has young ones, the mother cat charges her kittens: »Never forget, your great-great-great-grandmother was an Egyptian temple cat!« And to remind them of their noble origin, she always calls her kittens Wahed, Tani and Talet: the first, the second and the third. Tani may just be the second but she is the bravest of all three kittens. She finds a violin clef a magpie has dropped. When she touches an instrument with it, wonderful music plays. Tani becomes famous a musical genius cat – and she also gets haunted and kidnapped by gangsters. A cat thriller – full of action and wit, full of love for cats and love for music, written with a profound feeling for language – truly, a book by Renate Welsh! This book has been awarded the Leserstimmen-Preis (Reader's Prize) in 2008!



Mäusespuk (Mousespook)

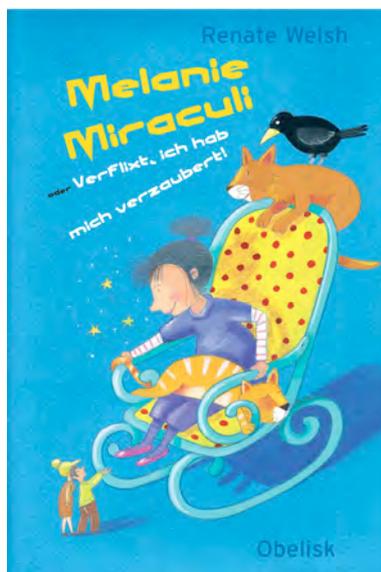
Wien: Obelisk 1995

Content: Actually, Thursdays are Mine's favourite days because she has her mum all for herself then. But today, everything is different. Her annoying brothers and sisters hog her mother and her best friend Verena treats Mine like air. When Mine then finds a mouse in her room, nobody believes her, of course. With the empathy characteristic for her, Renate Welsh describes a girl's conflicting feelings towards her family, friends and even herself. Carola Holland illustrated this turbulent story with amusing and bold pictures of mice.

Melanie Miraculi – Verflixt, ich habe mich verzaubert (Melanie Miraculi – I Witched Myself)

Wien: Obelisk 1990

Content: Melanie's grandmother is an unusual woman. But she quit doing magic the day that Melanie moved in with her. Only once she needed the craft again: to minimise the furniture Melanie's parents stored in her home. Melanie kept the spell in mind. And this leads to terrible consequences. A most beautiful fairy tale. Each line of it reveals a writer who knows her craft.



Nina sieht alles ganz anders (Nina Sees Everything In A Different Way)

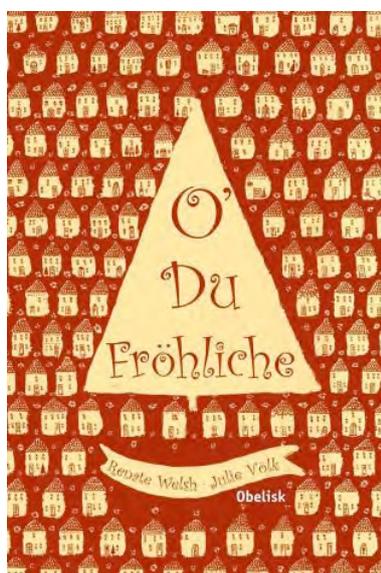
Wien: Obelisk 1998

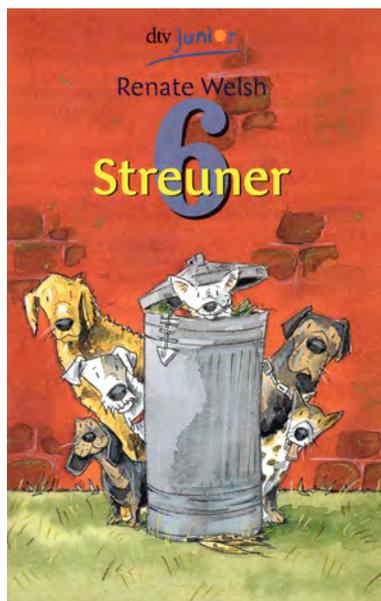
Content: Laura is an adopted child. She and her brother Boris, who was also adopted when he was a baby, live with their mum and dad who never made a secret out of not being their birth parents. Actually, Laura and Boris are doing perfectly fine. They don't miss anything and their parents always have an ear for them when they need it. And still, Laura has recently been more and more withdrawn herself. She can't stop thinking of her natural mother, who all she knows of is her name. Why did this woman called Ursula Riedmüller give her away back then? Might well be, they might cross each other's way on day in Vienna without even knowing it! Laura gathers all her courage and writes a letter to Ursula Riedmüller. A little later she receives a friendly response: the woman who sent it writes that Laura's letter touched her deeply but also says she is not ready for meeting her yet. Laura is disappointed without even knowing what she actually expected. But still she thinks it was good to write that letter because she feels it helps to ask unanswered questions ...

O du fröhliche – 12 Weihnachtsgeschichten (Oh You Lucky One)

Wien: Obelisk 2016

Content: Renate Welsh tells Christmas tales: of Puddle the cat who adopts a family as its new owners on Christmas, of weird trumpet sounds instead of harmonious flute melodies, of a little red fire engine on a cemetery, of Saint Nicolas and the Krampus, of Father Christmas and Baby Jesus. Twelve moody Christmas short stories off the beaten track that ask for the »real« Christmas spirit and make us think in the Advent season.





Sechs Streuner (Six Estrays)

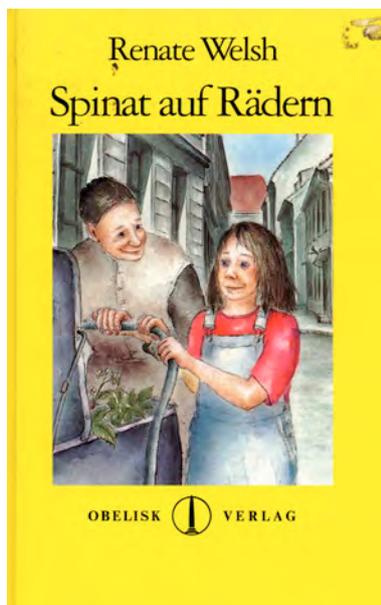
Wien: Obelisk 1998

Content: A pack of dogs is running through the city. They are headed by the senior who – in a little distance – is followed by all the rest. All of them once had a basket or a blanket to sleep on and enjoyed a full food bowl every day. Now, they live without human companies, stray the streets and the park together and look for food. At night, they sleep closely snuggled together to keep each other warm ... With a lot of empathy, the famous Austrian author writes of the bitter fate of stray dogs – as she has observed it visiting Russia.

Spinat auf Rädern (Spinach On Wheels)

Wien: Obelisk 1991

Content: Maria has not been living in this foreign city for long, in which everything is different from home: the sky, the hurried adults, and the scornful children. »Romanian« they call her. But this is not what Maria is. One day, Maria gets to know Aunt Paula, an old lady who takes her balcony plants to the city park in a buggy every afternoon. Maria joins her. And step by step she gets to know other children who take and perceive her as what she is.



Vor Taschendieben wird gewarnt (Attention – Burglars)

Wien: Obelisk 2005

Content: Percy is such an untalented pick-pocket, he even gets flunked out of the pick-pocket college. It just makes him sick to have to steal from others. Not even his mum's private lessons help him! Whenever Percy can, he escapes the lessons to visit Mrs. Morris and walks her dog. And he even likes his new school. But one day it happens: Percy gets kidnapped – by three men who want to talk him into burglary. Will that work? And anyways: how are these guys? A funny and thrilling novel for children written by the famous Austrian author.



Stories behind the Stories

by Renate Welsh

With many text samples from her books

translated by

Renée Von Paschen © 2002

Writing about young people or even for them, when one is far beyond that age oneself, is somewhat questionable. A person's own memories have been filtered many times by all the experiences and developments one has since made, marked by the understanding of another time, and even if one could find a new filter to neutralize all the existing filters, one's own past experiences would not be very comparable to the experiences of today's youth. I have the impression that many adults only perceive being young in the sense that plenty of taboos, restrictions and fears of the past have since disappeared – in particular those concerned with sexuality. I am afraid they have only been replaced by new ones; it would be nothing but whitewashing to claim it is total bliss being young nowadays. I am quite sure that the child or young person I was would have had problems with the adult that I am, perhaps even to the extent that I did with my own mother, albeit problems of another kind. It sometimes seems to me that many adults, who have vivid memories of the insults and injuries of their own childhoods, which provide fruitful grounds for self-pity and accusations of all kinds, still manage to idealize childhood as such – a strange contradiction. It may be justifiable to sigh: ‚I wish I were my own dog.‘ Probably most of us would be very grateful if the parallel aspiration, ‚I wish I were my own child,‘ could have been fulfilled. I think one can trace one's own track by means of writing; language is a very clear indicator of where honesty was relinquished in favor of a self-image enabling one to find a passably comfortable existence. I am convinced that language also uncovers whatever one has artificially and ardently tried to cover up. However, one must pay careful attention, otherwise there can only be vague recognition, as if one were passing by a showcase window looking at a distorted reflection out of the corner of one's eye.

Working with young people is important to me, not only as a prerequisite for writing. One's own children are not a justification; I don't believe it is possible to see them in clear contours at all, because so much that happens to them and with them also has to do with one's own self, because so often they hold in front of us the mirror that least enhances ourselves, but mostly because they are burdened with so much of their parents' own soul-searching.

Some distance does help provide a clear view, switches off the continual attempts to justify one's own way of being. It also enables good perception in observing and listening, if one doesn't jump to conclusions. I think highly of very careful listening and observation; if we are really attentive, we may go far beyond the stage of dissecting and analyzing and will come closer to the whole picture.

I have to attribute most of my books to being able to listen, and I am grateful to my father for learning to listen, since I became his ‚errand girl‘ at a very early age. Whenever he returned from visiting his patients in their homes, he rang our apartment upstairs, and I had to go to the pharmacy with the prescriptions and bring the medication to those patients who had no one to do this errand for them. »And while you're at it, you might as well go shopping for them as well.« I was very proud

to do these errands; most of the old people were pleased when I came, and they showed me their photo albums and talked to me about long ago. ‚Long ago‘ must have been an incredibly interesting time, I thought, and I felt important and useful when I sat on someone's coal box, blue-knitted Dutch skaters on my back, and listened excitedly.

I profited from these experiences later on; they broadened my horizon which would have otherwise been limited to my family and school friends.

For example, in order to experience Johanna's story so that I could retell it, I first had to learn a good deal of hard facts from a neighbor in my village, who I named Johanna in the book – everything from turning up the soil to rolling out strudel dough. We drank countless cups of coffee in her kitchen or mine, before she was actually able to start telling me about herself. Naturally we had also talked about her grandchildren and my children prior to that, about the problem of finding a doctor on Sunday, about politics and the village gossip, but these conversations had merely touched the surface, a smoothed surface. Perhaps she was afraid that her disorderly origins might cast a shadow on her current orderly situation; perhaps she needed to carry around with her a retouched picture of her past complying with the norms, in order not to jeopardize her self-respect. Sometimes it appears to me that many people ashamedly hide those major injuries, which eat at their substance, while they almost boastfully display the slight scratches of everyday life.

From countless observations, communications and gestures, a picture pieces itself together for me, which I then try to translate into language. This is, of course, questionable. How much does this process of translation distort whatever was experienced mutely? Can it ring true at all? Or does it lose all of its rough corners and become smoothed, retouched and untrue?

I hope that a very careful translation process makes understanding possible, not only regarding the way our environment sees us, but also the way we see ourselves. It was at first a startling experience for me – others may have known this for a long time, however each of us has to invent the wheel for ourselves anew with respect to human relations – I was mystified by the fact that outsiders blindly accept every kind of norm, even if and when they violate these norms themselves. It would appear that to be able to question something is a luxury, which a person can only permit himself if he has a certain security ‚within‘ and is not exposed on the edge of society.

It would seem important to continually repeat the question: »Do things really have to be the way they are?«

Will anything change as a result of this? I still hope so in the face of all the questions and uncertainties, which have grown like cancer over the course of the years. Conversations with schoolchildren and letters from my readers nourish this stubborn hope. The confrontation that formed the basis and background of my books certainly changed something for those whom I write about. I don't believe I'm suffering from delusions. Alone the fact that someone listened, showed an interest and asked questions was a new experience for most of my ‚heroines.‘ They

saw themselves with different eyes, because someone was there who saw them. In the course of time, they often began seeing their immediate surroundings differently, as well; they were able to take up a new relationship with their environment, because those who were being questioned, learned to ask questions themselves. With a good deal of luck, senseless aggression also becomes unnecessary, since it only reconfirms whatever it is directed towards; it not only fails to change a thing, it even postpones the necessary changes, if it hasn't already rendered them impossible.

But back to Johanna. When I asked her for the first time, whether I may write about her, she shook her head. »Someone who comes where you come from, can never understand what's with someone where I come from,« she said.

I was very disappointed, even angry. I had already invested a lot of time in order to make myself sufficiently acquainted with the 1930s in Austria, so as to feel at home in that era. This period, in particular, was taboo, deleted from the standard historical picture. If one included Austro-fascism, if the beautified image of Austria as a lamentable victim of Hitler was questioned, the issue of fault and responsibility would have to be reexamined, if the annexation by Hitler's troops should not be viewed as the curse of destiny or a natural catastrophe, but the logical consequence of a certain development. Back then, in the 1960s, the time for such self-reflection had not yet dawned. I had honestly struggled to attain a picture of that era from newspapers, lifetime recollections, conversations with witnesses of the period, and the fiction of the thirties. I had worked on a farm in order to experience the everyday life of a farmhand in my backbone as well as my head. I was truly insulted that she had reproached me for my educated, bourgeois background, which I had already experienced as a great flaw and hindrance on the path towards writing.

One day we met while sweeping the sidewalk; my neighbor told me she had still had to tend the cows barefoot on All Saint's Day as a young maiden. I imagined the frost on the stubble fields, the piercing pain in her foot soles and toes, which became stiff, but not numb; I imagined how Johanna stood on one foot and tried to rub the other between her hands. Then my sight focussed upon the cow pies, which steamed in the cold air. Revulsion was a luxury she could not afford. I had Johanna step in a cow pie, feel the warmth between her ties, feel how they regained their flexibility, how the pain decreased. I wrote down this scene; apparently I had not completely abandoned the hope of receiving her approval.

Two days later, my neighbor and I were drinking coffee in my kitchen. Suddenly she laughed. »I can't tell you what we did when it was frosty, and we had to tend the cows. Otherwise you wouldn't put your feet under the same table with me.« I stood up, got those few lines and handed them to her to read. »Who gave me away?« she asked.

»No one.«

»Where else did you find that out?«

I told her it had seemed logical to me.

»If you find things like that logical, then you may write a book about me,« she said.

From that day onwards, I no longer had to fear she might consider a question to be pushy.

The legitimization to speak for someone else often results from such a minor incident.

I had invented a character in Johanna; I required her for dramaturgical purposes as a counterweight for another protagonist.

My neighbor refused to read the manuscript or the proofs. »I had to live through that, and I should have to read it, too?« Her husband, her children and grandchildren read the book, and she was satisfied that the 'young ones' now saw her with different eyes. After the death of her husband, I saw her in her courtyard with my book in her hands. My heart throbbed; I broke out in a sweat. That was the most difficult test I had had ever experienced. I crept around her, and she spoke about the weather. At one point she said: »But I didn't even tell you anything about N. How did you know?« A great burden fell from my shoulders.

At this point I would like to interrupt myself to retell the passage, which was responsible for this book and which includes the sentence that hit Johanna like an arrow and didn't show its nasty head again over all those years. When she related it to me the first time, it created a rage in me, which I carried around with myself for the entire period that I worked on this book. I think it helped me too, when I had to separate myself from a sentence that carried the strong 'scent' of myself.

»... Two men sat in the room with their elbows on the table talking loudly about a new pump-station for the fire brigade. When the housekeeper, Johanna, approached through the doorway, they broke off their conversation.

»There you have your new maiden,« one of them said.

Maiden? Did he say maiden?

The taller one stood up and stepped beside Johanna. His breath smelled stale. He grabbed her upper arm.

»Thin but tough,« he said, satisfied.

»There you go,« said the other as though he had achieved something. His smile was smug.

Johanna took a deep breath. »I want to become a seamstress,« she heard herself say. »That's what they promised me.«

The two men exchanged glances. »Promised? You?«

»Yes, that's why I came here.«

They tall one gestured impatiently with his hand and said to the fat one, who was rubbing his hands and laughing: »Is that what it's come to?« He turned to Johanna, »you've come to me as a maid, just so you know.«

»No.«

A frown appeared on the fat man's forehead. »No shouting around here, understood?«

Johanna pulled herself together. »I'm not staying here. I'm going home. My mother sewed the ticket money into my hem

anyway.«

The housekeeper put her hand on Johanna's shoulder, and said imploringly: »No, child, you're only making it harder for yourself.« Johanna shook off her hand, raised her head and looked straight into the tall man's face.

His cheeks began turning red under the stubble of his beard. He began shouting: »Nobody asked you anyway, understood? You're my maiden and nothing else!«

»Sir, Overseer of the Poor...« began the housekeeper, but no one paid any attention to her.

The fat man crossed his arms. »It would be a fine ordeal if little children were allowed to want anything!« Suddenly his round, pink hand appeared. Johanna stepped back.

»Remember one thing: you do what you're told, understood? Someone like you had better not be cheeky, otherwise....« The threat hung in the air. After a while he added: »You may not realize how many others would be glad to find any work at all. 300,000 or more! And if you cause any trouble, we'll keep your money, you hear?«

Johanna tightened her grip on the pocket of her apron.

»You're wrinkling your pretty apron,« murmured the housekeeper.

The tall man pulled a golden watch out of his pocket, flicked it open, frowned and held out his hand to the fat man.

»Let's go then. We'll talk about the pump-station later.« He held gave a coin to the housekeeper, who accepted it with a curtsy; then he grabbed Johanna's arm and led her outside.

The sun blinded Johanna as the gateway opened.

»How did you know?« That sentence is the greatest compliment one can earn in this genre of writing, the encouragement that one needs to keep going. One needs it dearly, not only because the question constantly arises as to whether one has introduced too much of one's own into the narrative of others' destinies, but also because obligations arise from this type of work. Relationships develop that cannot simply be broken off when the last page has been written. However, a few of these relationships are nicely symmetrical, for example the Nigerian student, from whom I had hoped to get a story for a volume about Africa. She also resisted at first. »You are white. You cannot shed your white skin.« Somehow we began speaking about the fact that she couldn't swim and was ashamed of it. I offered to teach her, since I had taught my sons to swim, as well. We went to the pool together each Thursday for several weeks. When she managed a whole length for the first time, I gave her the title story of ‚Ich verstehe die Trommel nicht mehr‘ (lit. trans.: I No Longer Understand the Drums). She kept shaking her head while she was reading; I already presumed I had made some bad mistakes, when she said: »That's impossible! Who told you that?«

»You,« I said. »A little under the shower, a little on the way back – a sentence or two now and then.«

Then she brought her friends to me, and I was able to write the book. In the meantime she had a little daughter. Now and then we meet, have a cup of coffee, exchange news, just as

friends without obligation.

Drinking coffee plays a great role in my work. What good luck I have such low blood pressure!

Sometimes stories are delivered to my door without my doing or planning anything at all. ‚Hope with Obstacles‘ was related to me by a girl, who one of my sons had invited over.

She insisted I should write down her friend's story; I resisted for a long time but then gave in and wrote the first chapter. When she read the manuscript, she remarked: »You made one mistake, on page 21. Fiona says she plays poker, but she always loses. I have never lost at poker in all my life.« I didn't correct that mistake.

‚Schneckenhäuser‘ (lit. trans.: Snail Shells) is based upon a letter in which a girl wrote she had read all my books, and now I should write one about her. Her father died of leukemia; her mother married a widower with two little daughters and only had time for them now. The mother manages a hotel, and when it is very full, she has to clear out her room in five minutes and sleep in the room of her great grandmother, who does love her, but she is always afraid her great grandmother might die the very night she's sleeping there. And on her twelfth birthday, her mother told her that she was expecting another child. That made her decide to hate the unborn child. And she also has braces.

We exchanged several letters, and she accepted it, when I explained to her that I could not write about her. Three or four years later, I realized she had found a permanent place in the back of my head and had grown there, nourished by her letters, the memories of myself at that age which she had reawakened, and many tiny observations along the way.

It is often necessary for time to pass. I rarely manage to find a form for immediate impressions of the important experiences I have had, and if so, only for very brief texts. I apparently require a bit of distance in order to recognize possible structures. Seven years had passed since my experiences at an English Hospice, a clinic for terminal cancer patients, before I was able to begin writing about them. It had been clear to me from the beginning, that only a novel in the form of letters would enable me to provide the necessary explanations without them seeming drafted. (Mira Lobe and I have a favorite example for this problem, a quote, which – I believe – is taken from a Marlitt novel: »Your father, who, as you know, is a well-to-do financial consultant, has requested you at his cashier's desk.«) At first I wasn't able to imagine the letters without a reply; I also thought it necessary to introduce ordinary life into the boy's letters as a counterpoint to his experiences with the dying. Writing ‚in a disguised voice‘ is suspect to me, so I began writing actual letters to a German colleague who replied under the name of Felix. After some time – we had exchanged perhaps fifteen letters - he began to have basic problems with his role, which he considered too lightweight. Disappointed, I left my letters lying aside for two or three years, before it became clear to me that the replies could also be composed in my reader's heads. Later, a girl wrote me that she had missed the replies very much and had complained

to her friend about this. For her birthday, he had now written an answer to each of the letters in the book.

I considered this letter to be a gift. I believe that every book needs a reader in order to become a book. Before that, it is only printed paper. The reader, who finds in it his or her own experiences, own memories, hopes, wishes and fears, is the one who creates the third dimension which enables life to emanate from the printed pages, bestows skin and bones to each character created of words, and enables them to become active outside of the narrative. I am entirely convinced the strength and power of literature lies hidden in the fact that it is so incomplete. If it were more complete, it would not be able to take full effect like it does in the best case. Literature should not lie dormant like a perfect painting, which neither requires our questions, nor our answers, in order to exist. Books are – at least to me – a constant challenge to become active oneself, participate in the course of things, internally and externally, see one's own language anew, take sides, follow the tangled paths in another person's head, paths that change as we pass through them and that change us, too. I don't believe that two people can ever read the same book, because each will create their own book from the existing text. When I state that this constitutes the power of literature for me, then the following is also valid: its weakness and powerlessness also lie herein. It is not only subject to the creative reader, but also to the destructive one, who may not want to experience it, but is perhaps just looking for a weapon to further his own purposes. Sometimes I feel sorry for books, but more often for people. In order not to be misunderstood: it is of course, completely legitimate to use a book as stone quarry: The reader may look for building stones in it to build his own tower, maybe even an observation platform that will finally provide the overview which he has searched for in vain so far. I simply believe that a book – however imperfect it may be – is primarily a complete creation. Yet when a living person comes in contact with this creation, something new may come into being. If its parts are dissected into their elements, then they are no longer alive by nature, since they have been torn out of their context, which perhaps even collapsed, when one particular element was removed. Then the book can only be viewed an object, and personal acquaintance is no longer possible. The reader who only dissects and analyzes, who refuses to make any personal acquaintance or contribution, becomes a gravedigger, whether knowingly or not.

A passage from the letter-novel ‚A Hand to Hold‘ can perhaps exemplify my understanding of the relationship between reading and writing.

Margaret is doing worse. She can no longer get up; her lipstick is already too heavy. Today she asked me very shyly whether I could help her with her makeup; she was so ashamed of her naked face.... So I put lipstick on her lips, painted eye-shadow on her and applied mascara. Now and then Margaret looked out of the corner of her eye at my grandmother, but she held her head towards the window the whole time and acted as though she hadn't noticed a thing. In reality, a person notices when

someone else is looking at her!

When I had finished, Margaret asked for a mirror. She took a quick look, shook her head and got her photographs out of the drawer. »Don't be angry,« she said, »but it's not any good yet. I need to look like this. Use some blush, don't hesitate, and my eyes, my eyes aren't right. Put the picture beside me on the pillow; then you'll know what to do.« I put more blush on her and applied eyeliner, but my fingers were shaking; I only hope she didn't notice. She still wasn't satisfied, dipped her pointer finger into the pot of rouge and smeared huge spots on her cheeks. Then she smiled. »Like this, you see. You shouldn't be afraid of a little color; the world is gray enough.«

Then I went to my grandmother to shake her pillows, but she said: »Don't you want to wash you hands first?«

In the afternoon, I arrived while the head nurse was saying to the head doctor: »I think we she should transfer Dorothy« – that's my grandmother – »to another room. Her prejudices are a part of her, they are a part of the corset that gives her support. She's no longer going to learn to accept Margaret. And - how long does she still have anyway?«

Her boss's eyes flashed at her through his glasses, which had almost slipped down to the tip of his nose again. »Is she still alive or not?« he asked in a strict voice.

I think I should remember that sentence, as uncomfortable as it is. I do think it's funny that the very same man claims he's not here to educate anyone.

Today I'm in a very strange mood. Each time I write, I ask myself whether you're going to understand what's really meant. Especially when I write what someone else said. Maybe that has to do with the fact that I'm writing down in German what was said in English, but it's not just that.

I've been staring straight ahead of myself for a long time, and realized that I wouldn't even be able to describe the wild grapevine in front of the window in detail. You would still have to recall the grapevine in your memory in order to imagine mine, and then it would be yours and not mine. That makes me very sad. Or maybe you would put your own picture over my image, and the two images would join to make a new one, which is not just flat but has gained depth?

I recall an incident in first grade. Funny that I had never thought of it, and now it has come back very clearly with colors and scents; I can even feel my knapsack on my back. I left school to go home, when I saw a mountain ash with very dark red berries and dark green leaves against a dark blue sky with one huge white cloud. The sun shone on the mountain ash, and it was so beautiful that I stopped and looked at it for a long time. Suddenly I noticed it must have become very late, and at the same moment I thought: ‚If I tell them at home that I hung around because the berries were so red and the leaves so green and the sky so blue – how do I know they can understand? How do I know whether they see the same things I see, when they say red, or whether they see a completely different color and have just been taught it's called red? This thought made me sad and completely mute when I finally got home. My mother absolutely wanted to know where I had been, and got really angry; later

on she even cried, but I couldn't open my mouth, not even long after I wanted to.

Somehow I feel the same way now; I'm thinking about many things, but my thoughts aren't getting me anywhere. In principle, it's not even really contemplation; images are just flashing through my head, single words, sentences; sometimes I catch myself staring at something or the shadow it casts on the wall. And then I feel the way I do with a refrain or a melody I've become attached to, when it won't let go. It really frightens me, sometimes.

Go right ahead and think: 'It sounds like she's going crazy.' I've thought the same myself. What happens with time here is strange, too; it no longer has anything to do with clocks and even less so with calendars....

I think I'd better close now.

I've noticed that I have worked in, and sometimes through, a great deal of myself in those books where I portrayed completely different experiences and living circumstances from my own, and thought I was far removed from myself and had slipped into an alter ego. However, I didn't realize that until years later, often quite suddenly while reading. But contemplating others presumably always means contemplating oneself as well, and not only when we're reading what we can identify with.

Someone I'm very close to once claimed that I am incapable of admitting complete unfamiliarity; I am constantly searching for reasons behind each deviation from the norm, which would eventually permit a certain degree of familiarity; and I took such trouble in order to protect my cherished image of mankind. Perhaps he is right. However, there are enough writers and enough different kinds of them, in order to make it unnecessary for anyone to attempt to isolate each type of character in writing – or to extract them from their flat-formatted shelf-life when reading.

I believe that the reservation in the face of permitting too much of one's own self to flow along, when it is completely out of place, has hindered me for so long from writing about people in the resistance against National Socialism. I will never be able to clarify how I would have acted. Whether I would have gone along with the masses, jeered along with them, just glad not to be one of those who were ostracized, outcast and humiliated. I can only hope I would have known where my place was in the deciding moment. Each time I am silent when I should speak out; each time I look away when I should get involved, the suspicion arises that I might not be able to trust myself to act the way I consider absolutely necessary. A very everyday example: I'm standing at the streetcar stop, see a notice in a shop window: 'Hard-working cleaning woman needed, no foreigners!' I think to myself, I should go in and tell them that I will never purchase anything in their store again, if that is their basic attitude. The streetcar comes, I get on, I'm really in a hurry, and I only have on my old, faded and stretched sweater which multiplies my shyness even further. They won't take anyone seriously, who looks like me; I'll take the next opportunity to go into the store

and talk with them. I never did; there was always a good reason: Today I'm so grumpy, I won't be able to hold a reasonable conversation with such people; I'll just drive them further into their set prejudices.... Excuses are cheap.

I'm afraid it is the small things, the importance of which does not seem to justify the effort, that reveal our own true convictions. If someone says something clearly horrible, for example anti-Semitic remarks, at least my level of inhibition is much lower; I react before I can even think, before I've had time to recall my own cowardice. I believe that those mean little remarks, each as small and nasty as the point of a needle, are perhaps the most dangerous. In any case, I didn't consider myself authorized to write about the people in the Resistance for those reasons and more, even though I felt a great need to express my gratitude to those who saved everything of value in our cultural and linguistic heritage. Without them our language would have been hopelessly desecrated by Goebbels' venom. It would otherwise have been very difficult to accept that heritage, with all its rat holes in the cellar and rot in the rafters, all its flaws and all its beauty, as the only one we have. A heritage can only be taken over as a whole, not selectively. I found it shameful that so many of these people had never been properly thanked. One day, Hertha Kratzer, an editor whom I hold in particularly high esteem, asked me to do the very thing. We had some long conversations, after which I declared myself prepared to give it a try. I visited Eva Zilcher. When she spoke of Dorothea Neff, her friend took on life again; I could hear and see her more clearly than on the tapes which Mrs. Zilcher later played for me. When I drove home, entire passages of the title story of 'Thrown into the Scales' were finished. A few weeks later, I was able to present the story to Mrs. Zilcher. She insisted upon reading it at once. I sat across from her with butterflies in my stomach, forcing myself not to watch her read, looking at the book spines in the shelf, tracing the pattern on the carpet. Her reaction gave me the courage to write further stories. Experiences, which are difficult to classify but still reverberate, accumulated during the work on that book. The willingness to talk to me and answer my questions, which I experienced with all these people, and the natural friendliness with which they greeted me, were presents. Many said that no one had ever expressed an interest in their story before. Only in a very few cases, did their persecution end after the collapse of the Nazi regime. It was as though the perpetrators had placated the remains of the consciences they should have had, by attempting to break the backbones of those who had maintained an upright gait in spite of everything. Then the perpetrators would finally be able to convince themselves, if they shouted it out loudly enough, that they had had no other choice but to take part in it all.

I had purposely chosen mostly people from the small-scale, unknown resistance, who had nevertheless survived and were exceptions to the obedient sheep of resignation, which are unfortunately not a thing of the past. But then I came upon Heinrich Maier in a short newspaper notice. He was a priest who had been arrested at his altar and was beheaded on the last

execution day at the Vienna Regional Court prior to the liberation of Vienna. I was followed by the image of a priest in a practically empty church on a weekday, turning around to bless the few women in the pews and seeing the Gestapo men. Naturally there are historical-literary associations: »Who will rid me of this troublesome priest?« I called the parish of Gersthof, where a deacon had put together a Maier archive. He showed me all the documents, made photocopies of what I needed, and even gave me two pictures of Dr. Maier. I contemplated the smooth face of the remarkably good-looking man – but I became more and more alienated from him to the point that I thought I would not be able to write about him, as much as I wanted to, since it was not at all taken for granted at that time for a priest to cooperate on a friendly basis with Jews and Social Democrats. I asked the deacon whether there were any handwritten documents of Dr. Maier's, not because I understood anything about graphology; I just wanted to get an impression of his writing. The deacon hesitated. There were two private letters, however the recipient had given them to him under the express condition that nothing in them be published during his lifetime. If I would promise him not to cite anything out of the letters, I may read them. Right after the first sentences, I already had the feeling I was listening to a very familiar voice. Maier's diction was just like my father's – the same rapid associations, which covered many special fields and presupposed the same breath of horizon in the recipient; the same colourful language, carefully constructed subordinate clauses which read so naturally.

In a greatly comforting and encouraging way, I felt myself at home with all the people whose stories are collected in this book. Of course, it was also necessary for me to integrate and understand what I was able to find out in a greater framework, so I spent many hours in the Documentation Archive of the Austrian Resistance, whose employees were more than helpful. Does resistance make people friendly? I actually got the impression that the courage to resist also awakens the courage to face other people more openly. In the Documentation Archive, I came upon an entry in the daily journal of the Vienna Gestapo dated 13th-14th June, 1942:

Elisabeth Jehlik, housemaid, born on 4th April 1892 in Stetiza, citizen of the German Reich, Roman Catholic, single, resident at Gumpendorfer Strasse 141, Vienna VI, was arrested on 10th July 1942 because she attempted to bring the former president of the regional court, Eugen Israel Stein, a large quantity of food. The food was confiscated and deposited in the SS Main Military Hospital. A petition has been filed to take Jehlik into protective custody.

I don't know why it was this entry, which became so deeply enrooted in me. Only a short while ago, I noticed that her door number was the same as that of my family, but I have never made much of numbers, and nothing of cabala. Her first name was the same as my mother's and my stepmother's, but it is not an uncommon name at all. So I really cannot explain, why I absolutely wanted to write about Elisabeth Jehlik, other than that I had known women like her as a child and had found refuge with

them. When the story was finished, I put it aside. I couldn't use it for the book, because I had actually invented a lot, well not really invented, but had used experiences from other people's lives. The president of the regional court was clearly based upon my Uncle Max, and his sister, my Aunt Emmi; I just hadn't noticed that while writing. The story simply wouldn't release me from its spell. I made inquiries about Mr. Stein in the Jewish community, and discovered that he had been the son of a Rabbi from Galicia, had studied law in Vienna, and had become alienated from his provenance. Just like my Uncle Max. He had actually had a sister who died before Austria's annexation. And his apartment had been right around the corner from my uncle's! I kept feeling the need to look behind my back. All this has nothing to do with a sixth sense, but with the yearlong work on a special topic. It was then that I decided to include this story in the volume after all. Nothing speaks against it having been the way I told it.

Wartime Linzer Cake

Elisabeth Jehlik wiped her hands on her apron, a bad habit, which her first mistress had already tried in vain to make her give up. 'Who else will wash the apron, if I don't?' she thought each time, as though she had to justify herself to someone. She cast a doubtful glance at the 'Wartime Linzer Cake.' It looked more or less the way a Linzer Cake should look. But would it taste any good? The bit of batter, which she had tasted, wasn't too promising. Her eyes flew over the recipe:

*50 grams of lard
50 grams of marmalade
50 grams of honey
1 egg
170 grams of flour
100 grams of sugar
½ packet of baking powder*

She hadn't entered this recipe into her book with the marbled cover, but just jotted it down on a calendar page. Sometime this damn war would have to come to an end, and then she would be able to bake a real, genuine Linzer Cake again. She washed her hands and picked up her book.

*150 grams of fried bacon fat
100 grams of hazelnuts
juice and peel of a lemon.....*

This recipe was from the regional court president's sister who had written it in Elisabeth's book in her own handwriting. Such a fine lady, but she had never been too snobby to sit in the kitchen with her, the housemaid, and have coffee with her. She also really knew something about good housework, and not only fine embroidery or crocheting. Elisabeth had gotten the tip from her on how to get rid of spots in the toilet bowl with a mixture of vinegar and salt. Sometimes she felt it was disrespectful that she always thought of the old lady while she was cleaning the toilet. Thank God she had died before those racketeers had marched in. She had had a nice funeral. Such

beautiful flowers.

Elisabeth Jehlik picked up the shopping bag. A packet of noodles, homemade. The regional court president had always said to her: » You know, Mrs. Jehlik, I don't like the noodles anywhere else anymore. The only other person who made noodles like you was my mother.« But now he was certainly no longer fussy, the poor old man. With the ration cards they gave the Jews, you could neither get any meat, nor any white flour, nor white buns, nor milk, nor eggs, nor fish, nor noodles, nor vegetables, nor potatoes. What was there left? Elisabeth Jehlik carefully wrapped an egg in three layers of newspaper. The five tomatoes were the first that had ripened at her kitchen window.

She could begin to smell something in the oven. Her cake had risen after all.

She could have given herself a slap each day, and today again, in particular. When the president had had to let her go, he had said she might take whatever she like. He had even opened the glass cupboard with his best porcelain and the drawer of silver. If she had taken it then, it wouldn't have been stolen by those dirty brown plunderers. She would have saved everything and given it back to the president, as soon as the whole lot of them had gone to the devil where they belonged. They had come in with their dirty boots on the wooden parquet, and had torn the family photos out of their frames; one of them had held his lighter to them and dropped the burning pictures on the carpet. Later, they also carried off the carpet, and one of those snot noses had slapped the president's face because of the fire damage and had requested payment for damages.

»Those are no longer human beings,« Elisabeth Jehlik murmured to herself.

It was hot. She felt the droplets of sweat trickling down her ribs. The leather handles of her shopping bag were glued to her palm. »Silly goose,« she reproached herself. »Why did you put on your corset. In this heat no sensible person wears a corset. Why must you still be vain at your age. Not a cloud in the sky. Tomorrow she would have to go to the cemetery and water the flowers, otherwise the geraniums would dry out.

Hopefully the president had remembered to close the windows facing the street. Otherwise the apartment would be like an oven, since the afternoon sun shone in directly. And the beautiful Gobelin chairs, which the old lady had embroidered herself, would bleach. But the president was so forgetful, he was. Not in his office, not there. But at home. Sometimes she thought, he had never gotten married because he had forgotten to.... Merciful Mother of God!

She slapped her hand against her own forehead. Here she was blaspheming about his forgetfulness, and she had forgotten for a moment that he no longer lived in the Neue-Welt Gasse, but that some bigwig had shacked up there, while the president and fourteen others of mutual destiny were now cooped up in a dark, two-bedroom apartment in the second district.

At least she had been going the right way. Here feet were smarter than her head. She turned into Grosse Sperlgasse. How shabby the house was. The windows on the first floor were nailed shut with boards.

Her left foot stood on the topmost step and her right foot on the landing as she heard quick footsteps behind her. She turned around. A man in a leather coat – a question shot through her head: Why is he wearing a leather coat in this heat? The answer: Gestapo!

She missed the landing and had to hold onto the stair-rail.

The man grabbed her wrist. »What have you got there?« She couldn't get out a word.

He pulled away the bag from her, looked in.

The egg is going to break, she thought.

»You wanted to take that to the Jew!«

It wasn't a question, so she didn't answer.

»Stubborn, huh? he bawled. »Probably a Bolshevik!«

The guy wasn't even 25 yet. And how he was speaking to her! She hadn't done anything wrong, had always been respectable. Always.

»That's my bag,« she said. »And my things.«

The man grabbed her, turned her around, and pushed her down the stairs ahead of him. She was afraid she would fall.

Suddenly he spun around on the landing again and went back with her up to the first floor. His grip hurt her arm. He rang the bell like mad, and when the door didn't open immediately, he held his fist on the bell.

The frightened face of the president through the crack of the door.

»Open up!«

»First I have to close the door,« said the president in a much shriller voice than usual. »Otherwise I can't remove the chain.«

The man let go and slapped his leather gloves in the palm of his left hand. The door opened.

»Do you know this woman?« the Gestapo man barked at the president.

»Should I?«

She opened her mouth, saw his dismissive gaze and clenched her teeth together.

» Not necessary,« said the Gestapo man. »We know, by chance, that this person is your former housemaid.«

»I am not a person!«

The Gestapo man grabbed her upper arm again. »You are under arrest.« Handcuffs clinked. He locked up her hands behind her back. Then he gave her the bag. When they left the house, two women were standing there and talking. They turned away. My God, thought Elisabeth Jehlik, they don't really think I've stolen or anything like that....

She stumbled a lot while walking.

The Hotel Metropol on Morzin Platz looked as it always did on the outside, with the singular difference that a swastika flag hung above the doorway. But Elisabeth Jehlik had heard whisperings about what took place inside. Just

don't think about that now. Otherwise it will make you worry unnecessarily. She begrudged the lout, who was driving her on like a donkey, that pleasure.

She was led over a back staircase into an interrogation room. Someone was sitting behind a desk and staring at her. The Gestapo man, who had brought her there, banged his boots together and shot up his right hand. »Heil Hitler! I caught this woman while she was trying to bring food to the Jew, Eugen Israel Stein, former president of the regional court.« He tore the bag out of her hands, put it on the table, banged together his spurs again, barked »Heil Hitler!« once more and left.

The man behind the desk told her to be seated. He seemed much more sociable than the other one. The president had always said, if officials encroached upon one's rights, one only had to find the responsible person, then one would be granted his rights. The most dangerous ones were those who took out their anger on the people for not having gotten anywhere in life. The interrogation officer requested her personal data in a rather friendly manner. He placed the food on his desk rather carefully, didn't squash the tomatoes; and the egg was still whole. A few crumbs fell out of the cake pan; he wiped them away with a white handkerchief.

»So you worked for that Jew as a housemaid. How long?«

»Fifteen years. No, seventeen.«

»Couldn't you find a position with a German-blooded family?«

»I wasn't looking. I was doing very well at the president's, I...«

He put up his elbows and leaned forward, »What you are saying there falls under the penal clause regarding friendly behavior towards Jews! How often did you provide that Jew with food?«

She considered. »I don't know.«

»What does that mean?«

»I really don't know.«

»Were you given any money or valuables?«

»No, never. Only my wages. And presents for my birthday or Christmas ... or on holidays.«

His eyes took on an opportunistic glint. »What presents?«

»A blouse. A purse. A broach. A nécessaire...«

»No foreign words!«

She fell silent.

He took on another tone, almost fatherly, no, more teacher-like. »You see, a simple woman of the folk like you is using foreign words instead of our strong and unspoilt German language; that already shows how harmful the Jewish influence is.« The purification of the race is the foremost principle for renewal in the National Socialist movement. If you make a full confession now, you may go home today. The German people are engaged in a fight to the death with the Jews. There can never be any reconciliation, let alone private dealings, with members of the Jewish race.« He leaned back, stroked his moustache, and gazed at her expectantly.

She was mute. She felt dizzy.

He began drumming on the desktop.

»I'm waiting.«

»I have nothing to confess.«

The drumming became louder.

»I am an uncommonly patient man, but my patience is slowly coming to an end.«

»I didn't do anything wrong! I never took anything that didn't belong to me, and I've had decent work all my life long.«

He pointed to the food. »And that there?«

»I bought it all with my own money. With my coupons. Nothing's from the black market.«

He was beside her in a leap, hit her face with his fist. She was so taken by surprise that the pain didn't set in for a strangely long time. Her mouth filled with blood. Blood dripped from her nose.

»Filthy mess!« he shouted. »Wipe that up instantly!«

»But how can I?« She turned around, showed him that her hands were cuffed behind her back. She felt terribly nauseous. She was afraid of throwing up.

»Lick it up, for all I care!«

»She tried to get her handkerchief out of her bag with her teeth. She couldn't manage. The blood flowed faster. If she could only spit it out.

»Get moving!«

A new blow. And another.

A spray of blood landed on his shirt collar. She heard him start screaming; then she blacked out.

She came to when someone pulled at her shoulder.

He took off her handcuffs and put a sour smelling rag in her hands.

»Wipe up!«

She wiped and wiped, but drops of blood kept falling.

»Take her into custody!« ordered the man who had seated himself behind his desk again and was wiping his collar with a handkerchief.

»The food is confiscated; you will be brought to the SS Main Military Hospital. Sign here. You're being taken into protective custody.«

As she was led away, Elisabeth Jehlik saw how the Gestapo man bit into one of her tomatoes.

The juice ran down his chin.

After that book was published, I received phone calls in the night, was scolded and threatened. It wasn't very pleasant, but despite my fear of going home in the evening, it was still an acknowledgement.

I had a far more pleasant experience in a special school in Vorarlberg. A pupil told me he had read my book. That is much too difficult for you, I thought. Who could have put that in your hands? He continued: »During our project week in Vienna, I went to the Central Cemetery and put a flower on Dorothea Neff's grave. We need to say thank you to people like that, don't we?«

This all serves to clearly show how grateful I am towards those people, who were prepared to tell me about themselves, as well as those whose reactions to my books gave me new ideas

or showed me a new approach. I am convinced they make the loneliness at my desk bearable. Writing is a lonely business; the blank pages take on a threatening look, and nothing I have yet written has done away with my fear of failing the next time in the face of an ever so important topic. For some strange reason, all one's experience doesn't help; it only creates further fear of routine. But that is my problem, or maybe the problem many writers have, maybe the price for the equally great joy of writing.

Back to the 'Stories behind the Stories.' Since I've been writing for so long and keep myself so terribly busy - as though I could dampen the constantly nagging doubt about the sense of my writing by working especially hard - there are many stories, and I would like to share some more of them with you.

After having given a reading in a town, a young woman came over to me and said she had to talk to me. I was unacquainted with the town, it was drizzling, my next appointment was the following morning, the hotel was bleak - I was grateful not to have to walk through the wet streets alone or sit around in a café. But then the woman only managed to say, »oh, shit« in around ten-minute intervals for almost three hours and pick at her nails. I was about to get up and leave, because I could no longer deal with the situation, when she finally began talking.

She had had a child at the age of sixteen and had put it up for adoption, because her parents had demanded she do so. When she was nineteen, her brother-in-law had caused a bad car accident in which her sister was seriously injured. She managed the household herself, took care of her paraplegic sister and her little niece, in particular, who was only a few months younger than her own child. But now her brother-in-law had filed for divorce; he wanted to marry again shortly and take the child with him. »Now I'm losing my child for the second time, and the little one as well,« she said.

That was my first and only confrontation with a woman who had put up a child for adoption. It must have been in the back of my head, when I began work on adoptive families. A friend had adopted two children of the same approximate ages as my sons. Our experiences were similar in many ways; but I thought she accepted criticism of her children less readily than I did, spread her wings in protection more quickly.

I met other adoptive families more or less by coincidence. I developed close contact with the mothers unbelievably quickly, perhaps because many of them - and here I shall dare to generalize - suffered from the disparity between their images of themselves as mothers and their own self-assessment, similar to the way I did. My mother died when I was four years old, so I had been convinced, without having had the corrective experience of reality, that mothers were always noble, unselfish and good. I then bitterly disappointed myself. I had a child in my arms and loved it, yet I was still just myself.

It's much easier to see others clearly than oneself. Many difficulties the adoptive mothers had with their children seemed to me to be rooted in the mothers' impatience with themselves. They had to repeatedly prove to themselves that they were just as good mothers as those who had borne their own children -

perhaps even better. I noticed a similar onus of proof with regard to myself, as well as other women. I saw them as if they were under a magnifying glass.

While contemplating these families, I repeatedly came back to myself, my life with my own parents, my life with my sons and with people, in general. It certainly played a role that the difficult and painful separation process from my sons took place at the same time as the death of my father, who had always been larger than life to me, and whom I looked up to and felt sorry for, although pity already seemed like betrayal to me. Where was there any leeway in the situation? At most I could act against his wishes, but that only increased the dependency. I was thirty before I dared to think differently than he did without having a guilty conscience, under full consciousness of his intellectual superiority.

The search for an answer to the question, 'Who am I?' includes confronting oneself with one's own parents, and that is more difficult for adoptive children, on the one hand due to the self-imposed obligation to be grateful, but mostly because of that dark bit of unknown past which lies back there. All the children with whom I spoke told me how they used to dream of their first mothers and had imagined a reunion. This reminded me of my own fantasies that I had been mixed up and was a changeling, which would have explained my eternally destructive role in the family - and sometime my real parents would come and everything would be all right. This motive will be familiar to those of you who have read the children's novel 'Eine Krone aus Papier' (lit. trans.: A Crown of Paper).« However, the adoptive children's dreams had their own quality; almost all of them were bound and determined to search for their first mothers at some later time.

»I don't want anything from her,« many of them said in the very same words. »Nothing at all. I just want to see her once. I have part of her in me. If I never find out anything about her, there will always be a hole in me. But I'll have to wait; if I look for her now, it will hurt my mother's feelings.«

My mother - that was the adoptive mother, the other one, first one, or biological one was allotted supplementary appositions....

Only after having confronted myself with these families, did I become aware how often people more or less delightedly coo, »well now, isn't he just like...« at the sight of a child. As though the comparison with another family member were the only thing they thought of in connection with a child. You exist, because you're just like him or her? Be like us, be loyal to your clan, the more we are, the better; then that potato nose will no longer be a beauty flaw, it will be the Mueller nose, a sign of belonging, the secret sign of superiority towards all the non-Muellers. Perhaps writing is merely an attempt to increase one's feeling of belonging with a means which is probably unsuitable, tearing down our watchtowers that were guarding against the others or transforming them into observation towers, defusing mine fields? This holds true for me and probably for all the others who feel at home nowhere, and of whom there are quite a few in the meantime.

The confrontation with one's father and mother repeatedly shifts to the center of attention; it often has nothing to do with living adults but only with our parental images, our own and those we take on. That's what makes it so difficult and painful. I have experienced this most vividly in seminars with the parents and siblings of disabled children. The demands they make upon themselves are unreasonably high. I find it hard to talk about these parents, whom I admire, from an objective point of view. However, I am quite clear about the fact that this admiration places those parents on a pedestal and leaves them very exposed and alone up there. Admiration anyway, yes, I can't find a better word, despite the creeping suspicion that admiration offers protection against getting too closely involved. I felt it was an unearned mark of distinction that I had been requested to plan a photographic picture-book about a severely disabled, seventeen-year-old spastic boy and write the text to accompany it, even more so when the parents and siblings argued pointedly against the critique of an expert who believed I should have given Stefan a more active role. »That would have distorted everything,« the parents said and insisted in front of a large and academically intimidating audience that I should not change a thing. The certainty they demonstrated on that day, although they generally tended towards extreme assimilation, made me particularly happy. There is absolutely no reason why people like that should have to pay for their burden, which is heavy enough anyway, by means of ‚good behavior.’

It must be taken for granted that this text can only tell part of the story without the photos. In spite of that, I would like to cite some passages from it:

Stefan

Felix found a stick.

A stick is practical for walking up a mountain. Or meeting a wild lion. Or knocking down nuts from a tree. Or whatever.

Felix is six. He goes to play-school.

Felix has a sister who's called Rabea. She's still little, only three years old. But she's way bigger than before. When she was new, she was tiny. Especially her hands. She could only sleep and cry and drink and wet her diapers. Now she can do lots. But not as much as Felix.

Sometimes it's nice being a big brother. Sometimes it's just a bother.

Felix is also a little brother. His big sister is called Susanne and is fourteen. Susanne is big and pretty and clever and can do almost anything. Or even more. Felix really likes Susanne. But she's terribly sensible and wants Felix to be terribly sensible, too. He doesn't always want to be.

Building things is lots of fun when Susanne plays, too. She's the best playmate Felix knows.

Felix, Rabea and Susanne also have a big brother. His name is Stefan, and he's seventeen years old. Stefan can't talk

half as much as Rabea.

Stefan can't hold up his head alone. When you push him around in his wheelchair, his head often pitches forward. Stefan can't close his mouth. In summer you have to be very careful that bees don't fly into his mouth. Or wasps.

Stefan can't walk. He can't drink alone. Mama gives him juices with a spoon. He can't eat alone. He has trouble swallowing, so he usually gets mash. It takes a long time before Stefan's plate is empty. Sometimes Felix gets fidgety when Mommy or Daddy feeds Stefan.

But Stefan knows how to be happy. When he's happy, everybody has to laugh along. He gurgles and rocks back and forth. Stefan's happiness is contagious. He's best at being happy in the whole family.

Felix pushes Stefan around in his wheelchair. His wheelchair is heavy, but it's fun. Especially if Susanne comes along, too. She helps at the hard places. She just can't believe that Felix is already such a good wheelchair-pusher. The only places Felix can't push the wheelchair are curbs and stairs. Even Mommy has trouble with that.

Sometimes Felix gets incredibly mad at curb-makers and stairway-builders. They've never had to push a wheelchair.

Felix and Rabea gave Stefan the little mouse. He always needs to hold something in his hand, so he doesn't hurt himself when he gets a spasm. And so that the sweat is soaked up.

The people, who pass by, look away quickly when they see Stefan.

Once a woman gave Felix a shilling, while he was waiting with Stefan in front of a store for Mommy. Felix didn't want the shilling. Even though he was saving up for a bike.

Stefan is already too heavy for Mommy. Next year Felix will carry him. Or the year after. Or at least when he's as big as Daddy.

Felix runs to Mommy and whispers into her ear, »I'm hurrying up to grow anyway.«

She already feels better. Felix is Mommy's best comforter. She always says that.

Sometimes Felix is a racing-car driver. Unfortunately, there are too many things on his racing track, furniture and so on. Rabea won't move from the spot. She's the best getter-in-the-way that Felix knows.

Mommy is feeding Stefan now. When Stefan's being fed, Rabea gets hungry right away. Or thirsty. She's still to little to wait.

Mommy says that waiting is an art. And that many big people don't know that art. And that she's very proud of her Felix, who knows how to wait. At least sometimes.

Daddy's come home. First he goes to Stefan and says hi to him. It's nice when Daddy's home again. He's good at playing.

He's the best rocking horse that Felix knows. And he's good at listening, too.

When the sun's shining, they all go to the playground together. Rabea likes swinging, but not as high as Felix. And Stefan always comes along....

Below the bottom picture on the cover page, it says:

Stefan likes balloons. He likes the ones that can fly, most of all. Maybe Felix will give him one for his next birthday, a big red one. Felix will attach a card to it that says: 'Hello from Felix and Stefan and Susanne and Rabea, and from Mommy and Daddy, too.' Then they will watch while the balloon flies away. It will fly far away, far, far away. To Africa? Well, maybe. And maybe someone will find the card and come visit them. Then, one day Felix will open his door wide.

When I introduce this book in a school, I always ask the children to recapitulate who they think is the best this or that in the family. The best getter-in-the-way, the best Mommy-comforter, etc. Then they notice that the mother has nothing, which she does best, and I tell them I asked Felix about that, because I noticed it, too. »You know, Renate,« said Felix thoughtfully, »sometimes you're even sillier than the other grown-ups. Mommy is the mommy. Don't you know that?« The children understand very well what is meant, and have great fun thinking about what they do best. Who's best at cuddling in your family? Chattering? Shouting? Losing things? Finding things? Always at least one child has spontaneously said: »Well, I would go visit Felix.« They then also talk about their experiences with the disabled. Of course, I cannot judge to which extent the theory is retained that the disabled persons in books do not really drool, spit or whine, it's only portrayed that way, but can be gotten over. Yet I still believe that slipping into someone else's shoes for a moment can have an effect.

I would like to show you the accuracy with which parents and siblings observe disabled children. This text was written by a twelve-year-old girl whose brother suffers from cerebral motor disturbances, cannot sit, cannot talk, cannot control his facial expressions and is constantly wrought by spasms. Stefanie wrote:

A little while ago Thomas brought along a photo of the horse that he rides each Thursday at his daycare center. When he came home with the bus in the afternoon, I picked him up at the door, and he was very excited. I asked him: »Did you do something special today?« He flipped out even more, and when I asked him: »Did you bring something along?« he was hardly able to control himself. So I put him down on his mat and asked: »Should I look in your bag?« I got out a picture of a white horse and asked: »Should I put that down so Mommy and Daddy see it when they come? He laughed and laughed, and was happy all day long. I turned on a cassette for him, and then I went to do my homework.

Convinced I could observe accurately, I had only recognized his expressions of pleasure or lack of pleasure without any specific communication or information value.

Stefanie is one of the girls to whom I am grateful for the character of Anne in »Dragon Wings.« However, the origins of this book lie further back in the past, in my own childhood. In my parent's house there lived ten girls, three of them, my sisters, and one single boy, Tassilo. Tassilo's mother had been killed during a bomb attack on the second last day of the war; he was taken care of by Miss Emma. Even in those times of hunger, it was obvious that she had been intended to be round – round, soft and loving. Tassilo, a Down's Syndrome child – at that time we said 'Mongoloid' – was the center of her life, and because she accepted him quite naturally just as he was, we did the same, which made us the recipients of a great deal of her natural friendliness, as well. It also played a role that Tassilo never resisted having to be the eternal child in our mother-father-child games, that he laughed at our theater performances in the courtyard, that he thought we were marvelous. He enjoyed being with us, and we benefited from Miss Emma's care along with him. Until one day Father, who hadn't taken any notice of this previously, brought home a fastidiously combed, gloomy woman who dismissed Miss Emma and no longer allowed Tassilo to play in the courtyard. Instead, she took him to church every day and martyred herself for him. In the night she tied his hands to the bedposts so he couldn't masturbate. Tassilo now greeted us with a lowered gaze when we met him in the stairwell; he often screamed for hours. We began to be afraid of him. Miss Emma disappeared, and we didn't try to find out her whereabouts. When I inquired about her years later, I was met with slightly confused glances. »Oh dear, Miss Emma. A nice person. I have no idea what happened to her. Tassilo's father was a Nazi bigwig. Poor kid.« Long afterwards, I finally began to realize the importance of what Miss Emma had conveyed simply by the way she lived, completely without pretension or preaching, how much her unconditional and joyful acceptance had also characterized the community of healthy children in the house and even made it possible.

Another experience I had was certainly also significant in the history of the origins of 'Dragon Wings.' In 1968, two days before the Red Army marched into Prague, I fell out of an apricot tree and broke the third disk in my neck. For some time it was questionable whether I would ever be able to walk again. But it was mainly my language ability that was impaired; I could speak, yet I was often unable to say what I meant. Instead of: »May I please have a glass of water,« I said, »Could you please open the window.« I knew this was wrong, but I couldn't correct it. It was the same with writing. Instead of he, I wrote hh or eh, and each repeated attempt was reversed, as well. I experienced that as a threat to my identity, which still makes me choke when I think about it; I got a taste of what disabled means.

Years later, a friend of mine gave birth to a child with a closed fontanel. Jakob was not able to sit, stand or talk; he suffered from severe attacks of spasms and asthma. I am still

very close to his parents; I experienced how they were rejected by their surroundings, the feeling of threat, the desperation and the equally desperate hope. I will never forget what the father once wrote to me: »And so, as a rational, enlightened and politically thinking person, I still continue to look for someone who can heal my boy using any means whatsoever.« Jakob died at the age of four, and almost no one understood his parents' terrible grief. Many people said: »Now they can finally start living again.« As if the doom of an unbearable burden weren't yet a more unbearable burden.

I decided to write this book when those same friends were expecting another child. »What would happen if...« Since I wanted to give the Anne in my book something specially nice, a source of strength that would make her understandable and conceivable for those who haven't had any experience with such children; I gave her the best thing I had had in my own childhood – my grandfather. In the course of writing, all the theoretical considerations I had made beforehand that had run through my head, were thrown overboard. It became a sole matter of finding a form which would do justice to the liveliness the characters had already taken on for me, characters who were taken from real life and put together according to innumerable separate observations, all of whom became individual beings, just like children and characters in books should do. Since they would be quite unlively, if they were subject to our control.

First I would like to introduce my Grandfather to you in the form of a short story, just like he is in my memory, and then in his new role as Anne's grandfather. The short story is called »Anfang« (lit. trans.: Beginning); I wrote it for the anthology »Antwort auf keine Frage« (lit. trans.: Don't Answer Any Questions). You will have to judge for yourself whether you consider this text a love story.

Beginning

It was early summer; the room was full of transparent luminosity. I had been lying awake for a long time, as quietly as possible. I was amused when a fly landed on my arm and cleaned its wings. Actually, I had wanted to go to the bathroom, but then I would certainly have woken someone up. I loved the feeling of being the only one awake; everything belonged to me, because I alone could see it. Suddenly the telephone pierced the air.

I heard my father get up, heard him go into the entry room, heard him say: »I'll be there right away.« Immediately afterwards he stood beside my bed. Tears were running down his cheeks; his cheeks trembled.

»Your grandfather died,« he said, »I'm going there now. Do you want to come?«

I got dressed and went with him, hopping alongside holding onto his hand. I can still see how he cast a puzzled sideways glance at me, feel how I squeezed his hand. I clearly remember I thought it wasn't true; Grandma had made a mistake, my grandpa was only seemingly dead, like the woman Resi had told me about. Grandma didn't know better; we

would go there and wake him up; my father can do that; and then I'll sit down beside Grandpa, and we'll look at books; I can read to him, if he's tired.

We went down Hietzinger Hauptstrasse; the robinias had a strong scent and shone in the early morning sun. The house was as usual; green and red spots of light quivered on the tiles; and the brass railing of the stairway landing sparkled. I ran up the stairs ahead of my father and rang the bell. Next, my grandmother stood there with her wrinkly, crinkly face and a stern gaze; but that would change right away; I pushed past her, ran into the bedroom, hugged my grandfather and gave him a kiss.

At that moment I knew he was dead, really dead, and that my father couldn't do anything to wake him up. He looked like usual, a little more serious, the smile he always greeted me with was missing; but he was not there, and he would never be back again. I stood completely motionless with a fear which still takes away my breath to this day; sometime I must have begun to cry, since the next image I can see is the kitchen and my grandmother putting down a cup of hot chocolate for me and wiping her nose. Hot chocolate was costly and was only made for special occasions. My father is standing beside me stroking my hair; the two of them are talking, and I can't understand a word.

The image fades there and doesn't return again until the afternoon. My sisters and I are walking up the hill to the Tiergarten Café with Aunt Emmi and Uncle Max and their dachshund; it's very hot, and a lizard crosses our path; we are drinking apple juice; the adults are sitting in wicker chairs, and I have a wooden table all to myself and am drawing meadow flowers: daisies, scabious, sage and quaking grass. A fine haze lies over the city; a meadowlark is trilling far above, I cannot see it, but I am shortsighted. However no one should know, otherwise I'll get glasses and then I'll be even uglier; and I wonder that I can sit there and draw, and that I'm not all that sad, just strangely far away. It's impossible, I think to myself; it can't be, I love him so much; and then I think I must really be a bad child, otherwise I would be crying now; and to punish myself, I decide not to drink anything anymore, but when Aunt Emmi orders some more apple juice, I drink it after all, and the apple juice tastes good, although afterwards it burns terribly in my throat.

I missed my grandfather very much, at home, on the streets and roads, wherever I had walked with him; I missed him in the apartment where my grandmother and my aunt now lived alone, missed him when I saw or heard something beautiful, missed him when I was sad, missed him when I was confused, missed him when a toy broke, missed him when I was happy. When someone sat in his red plush chair, I got mad; and when my grandmother began burning the papers from his desk, I became desperately defiant.

But my actual mourning for him didn't really begin until much later; at the same time, the images of him that I remembered became clearer and stronger. Nothing new came to light, not that. My imagination didn't fill the blank spaces

left by memory, but everything that was there stood in its own light, like things and people sometimes do in old paintings. He had pointed out flowers to me during our long walks; I learned their names from him. Even today each scabious, each hedge rose that I see is a gift from him. I learned to observe from him, to observe carefully and closely. I learned to listen from him, and to trust that someone can listen to me. I learned to be prudent in my dealings with people, with nature, with books and with language.

He told me stories, many stories, about the cycle of water, about ants, about far-away countries, about past and present and future. When we went for walks on the Roter Berg, through Dostojewski Gasse, through Gogol Gasse, Turgenjew Gasse, and Tolstoi Gasse, we were not in a Viennese suburb, but in Russia. Out of a single birch in a street-side garden, he made a boulevard of birch trees that reached to the horizon; and out of a couple of snow flakes, the tundra in winter. We watched spiders spinning their nets; we waited for a drip to fall from an icicle; we looked for the beginning of the rainbow.

Sometimes I sat on a footstool beside his chair, and he recited poems to me by heart. He recited Homer to me in Greek; I understood nothing, but I loved the sound, and when I held my ear to his chest, I could feel how it resounded in there; it resounded differently when he spoke Greek than when he spoke German.

I could let myself go in his smile of a greeting, then I knew everything would be all right again; I was no longer a cheeky, impossible child, neither stubborn, nor messy, nor ugly; I was changed, not only could I be how I really was with him, but even how I wanted to be. Later on I was often to search for this deliverance from myself. For years I looked for certain paths that we had walked together. I knew them closely; I knew where they began in the immediate vicinity of my grandparent's house. But one had to turn where a peacock butterfly had settled on a blossom, where a brimstone butterfly was fluttering around in a single, watery ray of sun, where a spider-web hung in a spruce tree shimmering with dew. There weren't any road-signs that served as orientation. I searched for those paths with great doggedness, looked ever more desperately when I was twelve or thirteen and felt more and more alienated in my own body, ever further removed from the others. I walked through the district, went through the same streets time and again, looked into open gates in the hope that the path might branch off somewhere there.

I asked my grandmother, but she said: »You're just imagining that.« I asked my father. »There never was any pond there,« he said, too. I didn't believe either of them. My grandmother was so incredibly practical and hardworking; and my father often missed out things and people as he hurried from one sick person to another.

That narrow path between shrubs and netted-wire fence, I hadn't just imagined it. I could still see the water droplets shimmering in the lower tip of the wire rhombus, could see how they slowly rolled downwards. I could feel the tickle on my hand when I touched the ripe pods of the Caragana pea shrub

and they popped out with a crackle. I even felt the nettles on my bare legs. And I came to the logical conclusion that I never could have just imagined them.

I saw how the path widened, saw the tall grating with the gleaming golden orbs on the tips of the spears, the lawn where the peacocks spread their tails, saw their short, twitching, down feathers. I felt the cool pressure of the iron rods on my forehead when I tried to get as close as possible to the white house with the many twinkling windows.

Even more important was the path to the pond, past fallen tree giants, shrill yellow blossoms of broom, through meadows of cotton grass. White, strongly scented asters were blooming at the pond. My grandfather and I sat on a gray, weather-beaten pier and held our hands into the water, which was almost black and very soft. One's hands turned silvery and eerie in this water. There were tiny red crayfish that sometimes pinched. Dragonflies buzzed loudly over our heads; I felt the beat of their wings on my cheek, or hair, and ducked. An ancient alder-tree stood on the bank; when the wind blew, its branches whipped the water; a slippery fish often jumped up and snapped after them.

I looked for this pond again and again, especially when I fell in love the first time.

Then came the day when my school class went to the Museum of Art History, and I got lost in an adjoining room. Suddenly a picture jumped out at me, as small as a postcard in a heavy gilt frame. It was the tree where the path to the pond had branched off. I could recognize each knot in its trunk, each gnarled branch, even recognize the tangle of its roots. We had entered into a picture back then. My grandfather had presumably had a reproduction of it, since I cannot remember ever having been in the museum with him.

I stood rooted fast in front of the picture, incapable of moving, incapable of answering when I was called. Had I just imagined it all? How much more was there that I had only imagined? Most of all, I wanted to tear the picture off the wall. I was sad and angry. Were my house and my pond no to be longer real? Had all my desires had gone up in hot air? For a long time, I didn't want to think about our paths anymore, and when I tried again, they had faded like an old photograph.

Much later I realized it all must have been true, even if the pond could not be found on any map, the house was not listed in any land register. Slowly the colors returned, the scents, the sounds, and last of all, the feeling on my skin, everything as a memory, not as the present; retrievable, but no longer accessible.

Years later, when I stood on the Acropolis for the first time, I experienced that same scare, knew without having any memory of it, that we had also wandered through pictures of the Acropolis. My grandfather had never been in Greece. I stood there now and looked, gently put my hands on a column, traced the tendrils on a toppled pillar with my finger. He would have done the same, with certainty. An Italian family came with a three-year old who wanted to climb every step. Father, mother, grandparents, uncle and aunts tried to hold him back,

but he evaded them again and again; they scolded loudly, until the museum guard came and whistled back the boy. The entire clan pounced on the guard; they spoke Italian, he spoke Greek, all at the same time, all loudly. In the meantime, the boy had climbed up the last step; the columns gleamed in a warm golden tone; the sun was a huge red ball that appeared to be rolling low on the horizon. The boy stood still and stretched out his arms. Then he peed in the setting sun.

I saw my grandfather laugh, despite his great respect for the ancient Greeks.

Here is the version in the children's novel »Dragon Wings«.

... Her grandfather put on a record. There was fiddling, strumming and tooting; then came a singer with a smile in his voice that sometimes turned into a laugh and was sometimes sadder than crying.

»Do you like it?« asked her grandfather.

»Yes, a lot, but I can't understand what he's singing. Only a word or two.«

He explained to her that the songs were in Yiddish and gave her the lyrics to read along.

»That was a wedding song, just now,« said her grandfather, »would you like to go to a wedding party?«

He showed her a picture with a gentle-looking, white goat high in front of a blue curtain; the bride and bridegroom looked small and lost under the wedding baldachin. Behind them could be seen a street with little crooked houses; above them floated a menorah with eight candles.

»Oh, yes,« said Anne.

Her grandfather got up. »This time with music for once, all right?« If you like, you can flip through the book first.«

There were violins on the rooftops, colorful chickens, clocks with wings that stood on the snowy ground, and people without wings who were floating in the sky; a pair of lovers in a lilac bush, and many people going places. Her grandfather turned over the record. He got a woolen shoulder wrap, which had belonged to her grandmother, from the bedroom: »Take this. It might get cold.«

Anne wrapped herself in the cover. It was nice and soft. She put her face into it. A very gentle scent of lavender met her nose.

The music made it impossible to sit still. Anne's fingers snapped, her toes tapped up and down; then she danced with her Grandfather under the menorah with the candles. The bride and bridegroom danced until her veil twirled around them, and the fiddler danced while he was playing. The white goat kicked up its pretty heels. There were already many people in the room; several sang to the music; someone had taken a flute out of his pocket and was playing it; another was drumming. Now the dancers formed a circle; Anne stood between two people she didn't know, and could no longer see her grandfather. She called to him, but the dance began, faster and more whirly than before, and she didn't think of anything

any more, was just carried along by the music and the others. Suddenly the wind blew open a door, the candles went out, the people screamed and shrieked; Anne was jostled, she bumped into someone. A huge wing brushed against her cheek, ice-cold, but it left her skin burning.

The storm that had come in through the open door whirled up high the tables and benches and let them fall again. Windows flew open with a bang.

»Grandfather!« cried Ann, but she couldn't hear her own cry through the noise.

Her grandfather stood in the door and beckoned to her. A narrow path opened in the pushing and crowding, she passed through; her Grandfather took her by the hand.

Behind her the violin began to play again. The snow crunched underfoot. Anne wrapped herself more tightly in the shoulder wrap.

Warm light fell onto the snow from a cottage with very low rafters. How nice it would be to go in there, Anne thought, but her Grandfather pulled her along so quickly that her feet were hardly touching the path.

Wolves were howling far away, hoarse and hungry. Anne turned around. A black horse trotted up to her; a colorful chicken was riding the horse and beating its wings wildly. At each beat of its wings, the horse flew up and whinnied, and wherever the shadow of the wings fell, the snow melted into bubbling, boiling water.

Anne stood rooted, she couldn't move. The horse came ever closer. She could already see the foam in its nostrils, feel the heat that beat against her. Her grandfather stood himself in front of her; the horse stopped in its tracks and kicked up the snow with its hooves.

Blue flames flickered out of the puddles where the snow had melted. The air thundered.

The quiet tone of a violin penetrated the noise, grew higher and stronger, and along with it came the fiddler and the whole wedding party. Anne sneezed, heard a terrible snort, tore open her eyes and saw her grandfather sitting in his chair. His head had sunken to his chest; he was snoring.

Anne's left leg had fallen asleep, prickling and tingling. Carefully she slid from the sofa and tried to stand up; her leg gave way underneath her, she held onto the edge of the table, bumped the book, which fell crashing to the floor.

Her grandfather awoke with a start.

He looked around himself, confused. »I guess that wasn't quite the right thing today,« he murmured.

»No,« agreed Anne.

»I'm very sorry,« said her grandfather. »But you never know what will happen.«

»If you knew, it wouldn't be as exciting,« Anne tried to comfort him.

He stood up, stretched himself and said that one should be careful of too much excitement. »All too much excitement is like too much salt in the soup.«

To calm themselves down again, they played mixing up letters and told each other a terrible story about giant Azamons

and kidget mids who are pidded into printer's ink and kept prisoner by dronster magens. And they sipped at hot hoserip tea with lots of neyho.

Each book is a made up of the many mosaic stones I have found along my way; often enough they are stones I have tripped over, which I finally was able to put together to make a whole picture.

While contemplating my work, it has only now occurred to me that my books for young or very young children rarely came into being for as concrete a reason as those for young people on the verge of adulthood or past. Who can trace the origin of an idea that flies into one's head? I haven't the faintest inkling how long a particular idea has made itself at home in one's head, growing without any further help in some coil of one's brain, and I think it's better that way. However, here is where the work begins, which had better not be spoken about, because it would sound far too pompous, and one would eventually have to return to the mice and the mountains and their laborious births. Every text has a difficult birth.

I can clearly say what triggered the Nina Stories: as the only child in a group, the little daughter of a friend of mine had become bored with the grown-ups, who once again were trying to manage the world, and had drawn us all with giant plug sockets for noses like pigs in comic strips. I looked at the picture and said: »But our nostrils aren't that big, are they?« And this, considering the fact that my best friend's mother had once said with pity: »Poor child, they brought you up so well that you're not even allowed to pick your nose. That's why you now have such absurdly small nostrils.« Yet my little friend held her head sideways, looked up to check again, and said: »Oh, yes. Just that big.« If you look at your neighbors from the perspective of a four-year old, you will see what she meant. Then their nostrils really look like dark tunnels, far more striking than eyes or mouths.

That gave me the impulse to reflect on perspectives, at first only in terms of vision, and then the other senses, altogether different worlds of experience. One might say these anecdotal mini-stories are my theoretical texts.

Nina and the Pigsty

Mother is carrying the freshly washed laundry into Nina's room.

*When she comes out again, she's put on her stormy face.
»Nina!« she calls. »Clean up in there right away. What a pigsty!«*

*So Nina goes into her room.
The dolls are lying on the carpet.
They're watching the stuffed animals.
The building blocks are lying on the carpet
They were supposed to be a tower.
The picture books are lying on the carpet.
Nina wants to look at them.
The cars are lying on the carpet.
They are parked there.
A blue and white-ringed sock is lying on the carpet.*

It's a snake.

Shreds of paper are lying on the carpet.

That's food for the snake.

»Mommy! calls Nina to the kitchen. »Where's the pigsty? I can't see any!«

I also could have chosen the logical sequence according to age and elaborated my books for little children first, but I think it's also legitimate to go backwards – that has the advantage of allowing me to introduce something amusing now that you must already be tired. I got the idea for ‚Das Vamperl‘ (lit. trans.: The Little Vampire) when I was stuck in a traffic jam, one of those entirely superfluous ones that only happen when no one driver gives another one a chance to turn, but everyone creeps ahead a few centimeters as soon as possible, rolling down their windows, shouting, cursing and honking – and no one can move anymore. I was on my way to a reading, annoyed because I hate arriving too late. Suddenly my grandmother came to mind, who had often said: »Why are you spitting poison again?« when there was a fight between us sisters. Someone should invent something to suck the poison out of everyone's gall bladder, I thought, then the world would be more peaceful and friendly. At that time my father was still alive, and I had been discussing with him – or one might say arguing - about the primacy of heredity or environmental influences. His opinion was based upon Eysenck; I said I didn't care two pins which percentage we can change, as long as we do not exhaust the possibilities, no matter whether it be 15, 27 or 63 percent, it is purely a matter of an alibi to base everything on genetics. I thought, when it comes to a poison-sucker, it should be one that is normally only associated with evil, according to the motto: ‚What else can you expect from such a family...?« That was the birth of the idea for a incorrectly raised vampire, who, nourished with warm milk and warm friendliness, spreads friendliness, himself. I told the children of my idea, and they immediately began playing around with it and asked me to write it down as fast as possible. First a radio play came into being, and then a book that found many friends among the children. I would like to quote from the Little Vampire's first ‚mission,‘ and then a chapter from volume two, which I only wrote after much hesitation. You know well, how often sequels suffer from exhaustion....

The Little Vampire

The Little Vampire liked sitting on the windowsill and looking out at the road. He climbed up the curtains and swung on the cord. He sat on Miss Lizzi's shoulder while she was cooking. Sometimes he peeped in her ear. It tickled.

Once it tickled so much that she dropped the cooking spoon into the tomato soup. Then Miss Lizzi and the Little Vampire were covered from head to foot with red polka-dots. It looked like they had measles. Or scarlet fever.

The Little Vampire made his first attempts to fly after three weeks. He spread his large, thin wings. They rustled like tissue

paper. He flapped them a couple of times. Then he jumped. He forgot to beat his wings while he fell and landed on his belly. He peeped pitifully. Miss Lizzi came running into the room. She picked him up. She held him and comforted him. She checked to see if his arms and legs were all right.

»Nothing's broken,« she said relieved. She made some chamomile tea to calm him down.

The vampire didn't like chamomile tea. He blew it back out of his pointed nose, and Miss Lizzi's glasses got covered with spray and could have used windshield wipers.

»March to bed!« she said. She carried him to his room and went back into the kitchen where the milk had boiled over in the meantime. Five minutes later he made his second attempt to fly. This time he started from the windowsill, and this time he did much better. When Miss Lizzi came home, he landed on her head. She took a fright and screamed, and the Little Vampire gently tousled her hair.

One Sunday morning Miss Lizzi heard a shout in the stairwell. »Good heavens, what's going on there?« she said and quickly opened her apartment door. Mrs. Mueller was scolding her son Hannes up on the third floor. He had been at his grandmother's and had picked up a basket of apples there. On the way home, he had passed the playground. His friends were playing soccer there. »Hannes!« they called. They're winning three to one! Come on!«

Hannes put down the basket and joined their game. He didn't even notice he had his Sunday pants on. Now one knee had a hole in it, and the other had a big, green grass spot.

»Come here!« shouted Mrs. Mueller. »You deserve a good slap! You've really earned one. How often have I told you to take care of your things. You seem to think money grows on trees. Just you wait and see what grows on trees!«

Hannes started crying. The basket tipped over. Apples bounced loudly down the stairs. »I'll give you a good reason to cry! Come here, I said!« Mrs. Mueller raised her hand. Miss Lizzi wanted to remind her that children don't think of the same things grown-ups do, and that Hannes didn't mean to do any harm.

But just as she opened her mouth, the vampire flitted past her. Everything happened in the flash of a second. The vampire ran up the handrail to the third floor. He flew directly at Mrs. Mueller, at her stomach.

Miss Lizzi was dizzy for fear. She closed her eyes. She didn't want to see what would happen.

»Ouch!« cried out Mrs. Mueller.

Miss Lizzi blinked. She saw the vampire flapping his wings in the air in front of Mrs. Mueller's tummy. Right in front of her gall bladder. Miss Lizzi knew exactly where that was. She had had a gall bladder operation a year ago. Now the vampire pulled his pointed nose out of Mrs. Mueller's tummy. Mrs. Mueller dropped her hand.

The vampire turned around in the air. He flew back into Miss Lizzi's apartment. Mrs. Mueller stoked her fingers through

Hannes's hair. »You know who you look like? Like the goalie after the championship game in the rain!«

Hannes stared at his mother with his mouth wide open. She smiled. »Who won anyhow?«

»Some-how? Some-where? Some-won?«

»Well, who won the soccer game?« asked his mother.

»What else? What's wrong with you? Are you sick? Have you got a fever?«

Hannes slowly closed his mouth. He brushed the hair off his forehead. »We won, he said, »and I shot the final goal. All alone.« He stuck out his chest, put his thumbs under his suspenders and let them snap back. Mrs. Mueller put her arm around his shoulder. They both went back into the apartment. The Muellers' door closed.

Miss Lizzi went back to her apartment, too. She hadn't noticed how badly her knees were knocking. She had to sit down. The Little Vampire fluttered into her lap. »You're not really a vampire at all,« she said. »A real vampire sucks blood from human beings. But you, you suck out their evil. You know what you are? Just a sweet, Little Vampire.«

He hopped up and down on her knee. »But you gave me such a fright!« she said. »I thought my heart would stop still, I was so afraid.«

The Little Vampire rubbed himself against her.

»I would just like to know how that can be,« she murmured. The Little Vampire stroked his fat little belly with both of his hands and smacked his lips. »Yes, of course! You sucked the poison and gall right out of her, and she suddenly understood that it wasn't half as bad after all. Right?«

The Little Vampire nodded enthusiastically. He turned a couple of summersaults.

Miss Lizzi remembered how startled Hannes had been. »He simply couldn't believe that his mother was suddenly so friendly!« She laughed. Then she was serious again. »But what would have happened, if she'd seen you? You have to be careful, my little one. You have to be very careful.« You know, Little Vampire, when people are afraid, they don't know what they're doing anymore.«

The Little Vampire rubbed his little, pointed vampire nose against her big round human nose.

»Now that I think of it,« Miss Lizzi said, »now that I think of it, there are an awful lot of people who need to have the poison sucked out of them....«

And here's another passage from 'Vamperl soll nicht alleine bleiben' (lit. trans.: A Little Vampire Shouldn't Be Alone). Miss Lizzi has realized that one Little Vampire cannot possibly suck out all the bitter poison and gall in this world, and has set out in search of a wife for him. All her efforts remain without result, so she makes a decision. »Little Vampire,« she says, »we're going to visit the lady who invented us. She should give our problem some thought.«

In her best flowered print, she went on her way to Ziegler Gasse, and rang my bell. I was more than confused, as you can imagine.

No one is going to believe this, I thought. No one at all. Miss Lizzi carried the coffee cups into my study. She would rather sit there, she said. She went over to my desk. »What a mess,« she said. »Don't you ever tidy it up?« I felt offended, since my desk was actually quite neat and clean in my opinion. Miss Lizzi picked up a sheet of paper. What a scrawl you have. I can't even read a thing.« Then she pointed at my typewriter. »Did you invent me on...?«

»Yes,« I said.

»Don't you even have an electric one? Or a computer?«

That's no longer the case. I was probably the last writer to get a computer, but now I have one, too. However, I use it as a typewriter and still write the text by hand first.

»I like my old typewriter. And besides, I have to write each text over and over again, continually correcting until it's as good as I can possibly get it.

She grimaced. »How often did you rewrite us?« I considered. »I don't exactly know anymore; it's been several years. Three or four times, I'm sure.« She looked at me with pity. »Three or four times. And then you simply set us out in the world, the Little Vampire and me, and didn't give any thought to where he could find himself a wife? I'm supposed to take care of everything all alone. And you made me rheumatic on top of it all. Not very considerate of you.« She had a sip of coffee. »Well, the coffee's good.«

When the cake also found her approval, she smiled. Her eyes turned a darker blue. »All right,« she crooned. »That's just the way it is.... But now, seriously: Where can we find him a wife?«

»I don't know,« I said.

»But wait, if you don't know... You just need to write one for him. Quite simple!«

»It's not all that simple,« I protested. »You're no longer just the character I wrote. You've become yourself...«

She interrupted me. »Well I should hope so.«

»Right,« I agreed. »You contradict me. You go your own way. As soon as a book is finished, I no longer have a chance to intervene.«

She shook her head.

»It's similar with children,« I said. »Once they've been born, it's no good saying you would rather have had a different one. You have to take care of them, love them and respect them. Then they learn to love and respect others.« I fell silent. I noticed I wasn't very good at explaining what I meant.

»You can't rewrite children three or four times.«

»That's just it.« Suddenly, I had an idea. »Did you know that the children really like you and the Little Vampire?« I asked.

She turned slightly red. It became her.

I got out my folder of children's letters and placed it in her hands. Miss Lizzi started reading. She couldn't stop.

»... listen, Little Vampire! You don't even know how many adventures you've already survived.« She read him some of the

stories the children had invented about him. Sometimes she laughed.... Sometimes she looked worried. »What children have to go through! So much suffering! And then they even think it's all their fault. Like the little girl who wrote that she needs a Little Vampire all to herself; then she would be an angel, and everyone would love her. As if only angels were lovable!«

The Little Vampire nodded enthusiastically. Miss Lizzi turned the page. »Look, Little Vampire, this girl wrote a nice wife for you. We'll just have to stick to the children's ideas.«

The children's letters mentioned in the second passage already fill a whole shelf in my study. If 'The Little Vampire' were circulating in hardcover, instead of paperback, I would already have been able to pay back my mortgage. But, unfortunately....

I hope very much that I have not tried your patience too far with my Stories behind the Stories, for here come two more books, this time, however, not for young readers. Actually, I didn't want to write the first one, and I was afraid of the second one for years; whether this was justified remains to be seen. The first book describes one day in the life of 80-year-old Constanze Mozart. This book can also be traced back to Hertha Kratzer's incentive – and here I would like to strongly emphasize the significance of the editor for an author, not because we are too lazy to adapt our spelling to the demands of the dictionary, but because we are often given an important incentive by a good editor, because many books would not be written without their accompanying interest, because they contribute important criticism and, in the best case, help turn Smith's opus into an opus magnum. Not by rewriting us, that would be much easier, but by asking the right questions which enable us to find our own way, and putting our fingers on the weak spots – gently, if we're lucky. Many publishing houses think it no longer economical to employ their own editors in this day and age, and delegate such work out of house – any woman or man among you can imagine the loss of continuity. There are even 'publishers' – whereby the word is not correctly employed in this connection – who seriously believe that editing is completely unnecessary; in a pinch any German teacher could do the necessary corrections, they think. I consider this a grave threat to any genre or subcategory of literature, which is bound to promote disorganized thought on top of it all. Mrs. Kratzer asked me whether I'd like to write something about Constanze. At first I declined. Constanze was not really interesting; I wouldn't know what to do with her. Mrs. Kratzer looked me up and down and said she had thought I was against prejudice.... I could find no peace after that. I took a look at the primary sources in order to prove to her that I was no friend of prejudice, but had given her a well-founded reason. In the journal of the English music publisher, Vincent Novello, who had gone on a 'pilgrimage to Mozart' with his wife in 1829, I read a sentence, which moved me. The couple had visited Constanze several times; on the final day before their departure she came to the inn one last time to take her leave from them. There was an obvious mutual liking; Constanze, who was already

very conscious of the value of Mozart relics at that time, gave Vincent a handwritten cadenza for a cantata and half the curl of hair she still had in her possession. When she tried to take her leave, Vincent insisted upon accompanying her. She explained that her sister and her maid had come along, and that she would by no means have to go up the Nonnberg alone. He wouldn't allow himself to be deterred; he absolutely wanted to take the unique chance »to be permitted to accompany someone who had been so close to Mozart.« It then became clear to me that no one was really holding out a hand to this woman; everyone was just groping for the shadow of the man with whom she had been married. They didn't want her; it was always the genius, whom she naturally hadn't understood, how could she? Can a genius be recognized close up? They didn't want her. Her second husband, the Danish diplomat Hans Georg Nissen, had also been looking for Mozart's shadow in her bed. But we all sometimes need recognition for ourselves, want to be noticed, not only as daughter, as wife, as mother. Then I noted that a development had clearly taken place between the two helpless letters she had written as a bride to 'Nannerl' and her letters as a widow to the publishers, who called her greedy, because she wished to have a percentage of the revenue Mozart's works were earning after his death. I was shocked at the lack of relationship in her letters to her sons, but thought I could feel the grief for that which had been irreparably neglected. It certainly also played a role that a grudge was borne against her for her open debts to the deceased, and that hardly anyone asked whether, despite all her weaknesses, she had still been the woman with whom he had been able to live and laugh. So I decided to follow her one day long in the year 1841, fifty years after Mozart's death, when her long life was coming to an end. I was quite well acquainted with the nineteenth century, particularly with a woman's life then, since I had already collected a great deal of material for the next book that I would like to introduce to you. It was the small things of everyday life that I was most interested in. For example, I laughed a lot about an article in a woman's journal from 1835, where it said now that matches had been invented, and housework had lost all of its frights, it was hoped that women, who no longer had to spend two hours a day making and tending the fire, would use the good deal of leisure time they had won to enhance their spirits and intellects, and would not waste it on silliness. It very much reminded me of the commentaries my older relatives made when I bought my first washing machine.

Incidentally, it amused me to read in my great-great-grandfather's journal that he had rented Constanze's garden house in Salzburg for one summer in order to write in peace.

Constanze Mozart

We had already been rated accordingly in Mannheim. Josefa was the able one, who could cook, the sensible one, who remained calm. Louise was the beautiful one, the talented one, our Aloysia with the marvelous voice, with the silky hair, with the delicate little nose, the supple movements. Sophie was the

sweet, little one. And she was simply – Constanze. Without any particular beauty, without wit, without any particular talent. Nothing special about her at all. Not like Nancy Storace, the blonde English woman, the first Susanne, as beautiful as an angel, the way she sang in her wonderful, dark timbre of a mezzo-soprano, with that smile in her voice, and Mozart had always come home late when he had rehearsed Figaro with her, and Constanze had waited at home with her swollen legs and her puffy face, with the spots on her cheeks, with the heaving in her body, and when he finally came in the door, he had such a broad smile that she couldn't believe it was only because of the musicians' applause, because they had clapped after rehearsing an aria and had celebrated him as maestro; and he laughed and kissed her on the nose and didn't take her seriously. At that time she had been convinced that Storace was his mistress, a radiant mistress who sang his melodies as though she had invented them that very moment, no, not invented, but discovered them deep inside herself, and now she must sing them out, because there wasn't enough room in her for so much beauty....

On the manuscript of the scene and aria he had written for Nancy Storace's concert, it said in his handwriting: »For Mamselle Storace and me.« How the piano had flattered the singer's voice, caressed it; they went together just like question and answer, melted together, although each stood for itself and yet was entwined with the other, as if each grew larger when woven together, than it had ever been alone.

The question as to whether Mozart had ever shared his bed with this woman was not only superfluous, it was ridiculous; one should be ashamed to ask it. Actually it would have been even worse if they had never lain in each other's arms. Unfulfilled desire never dies. It stays alive, even after the pain has subsided.

But how could she have known that then? She was so young, hardly capable of reflection. And while she was pregnant, she never could have reflected upon it; she was hindered by the fear that followed her through each and every day, the fear of giving birth, the fear of death. One had hardly become pregnant, when everyone said this woman or that woman had died in childbed, and another had given birth to a monster. And then the heavy breasts, hot, painful and swollen. Sometimes she thought, she should have nursed her children herself; there were women who did it, not only maids and farmer's wives. Mozart didn't want to hear anything of it.

No, it was impossible to reflect upon anything with so much fear inside her. Where could she have learned how? Reflection was not called for.

... Anna Selina Storace. Nancy. She was dead too, had been for years. Had they met each other there?

»In My Father's house are many rooms.« The deacon had held his sermon about that last Sunday.

She only hoped that Mozart and Nancy Storace had separate rooms in the kingdom come. Then she felt ashamed of her thought. First of all it was slanderous, and secondly, at her age. How could she face Saint Peter with such thoughts in

her head? She could be pleased, even if he gave her the tiniest broom closet. Ridiculous. That's not how it was. It wouldn't be like that.

....

»Because she always has to come before I do,« murmured Constanze.

»Who?«

»Storace.« Actually she hadn't wanted to answer.

»But she died long ago,« said Sophie.

That's it, thought Constanze. That's exactly it. And I couldn't even put any blame on him.... »The terrible thing about growing old,« she said, »it not the foot-pain or the poor memory. What could possibly be so important that one has to remember it? The terrible thing about growing old is that nothing is certain any longer, that everything might have been completely different. Earlier on, at least I was certain about a couple of things.«

In spite of that, you're becoming ever more stubborn,« Sophie concluded. »Ever more obstinate, just the way an old woman like you should do, and me,« she added quickly.

Constanze frowned and shrugged her shoulders. »Perhaps I'm becoming stubborn, because I don't know anything for certain, and I have to insist that I'm in the right.«

It had been a good idea to bring Sophie to Salzburg. Her presence in the room did good. Her laugh chased away the shadows. Her questions helped to make one's own more bearable.

»You know, it truly pains me that I am not capable of reflecting upon the person I was like a grandmother reflects upon her dear grandchild. I am always wanting to interfere with the person I was, to set her straight. Sometimes I see her as though I were the mother-in-law who had wished her son to have a different wife. Or her rival. It's most uncomfortable.«

Sophie put aside her knitting. »But it's all you: the little girl, the young lady, the widow. Nothing has changed. I was just thinking, when one sees you in profile, one should be able to recognize you immediately.«

»Perhaps, especially in the dark.«

Sophie hadn't understood. And as usual, when she hadn't understood anything, she wouldn't let anyone get her off the subject. »You've only gotten older, but one gets older each day.«

...

Such disorder in her thoughts. Important and unimportant things all mixed up together, just like her apartment in Rauhenstein Gasse. She tried to remember the fugue Mozart had written for her. A fugue was pure order itself, an artificial structure in which confusion had no place. The fugue had slipped her mind, she couldn't even recall its theme, instead the Papageno-Pamina duet lurked in her mind for no reason at all: »Mann und Weib und Weib und Mann reichen an die Gottheit an.« (lit. trans.: Man and wife, wife and man come close to being gods, they can.)

She must have fallen asleep eventually, since she awoke

with a start; the ringing of the church bells boomed through her room; cool, gray light filtered in. She wondered that she wasn't dead beat after such a night, but strangely awake, looking forward to the day. A coffee scent came in from the kitchen. Constanze lifted her legs out of bed, rinsed her mouth, combed her hair. She always said that an old woman need not run around all ruffled up, since she doesn't make a very pleasant picture in the first place. It wasn't vanity; it was out of consideration.

She went to the window, opened it. A single, watery sunbeam shivered over the square. Mozart was to stand right down there, a nice, dignified monument, that's what everyone had said, who had seen the statue in Munich. Whether he would have minded standing with his back to her? He probably would have shrugged his shoulders. It's not me. And maybe he would add that he was looking forward to the sparrows and doves that deprived every monument of its stiff dignity after a while or so. They're discovering you, she said silently. They now call you the greatest son of your beloved hometown. Does that amuse you? They're recreating you the way they want you to be. I can't do that. And I can no longer unveil you, either.

She breathed in the morning air, felt the cold, the freshness, penetrate her lungs. It was nice to still be alive. She was looking forward to crossing the square, watching the workmen, bringing a sausage skin to the concierge's dog.

Sophie was talking with Luise outside.

Constanze began laughing. Sophie quickly opened the door, stood there, worry written on her face, asking: »What is it? Is something wrong? Aren't you feeling well?«

»Something just became clear to me,« said Constanze. »I will never again be able to imagine how he scratched himself, because I would always have to think: that's the way a genius scratches himself. Do you understand?«

Sophie shook her head.

Constanze hugged her. »It doesn't matter. The air already tastes like snow. Try it.«

This book showed me how much a female writer – even more than a male colleague – is stamped for life, if she has made herself a name in children's literature. In as far as the bookstores even ordered the book, they didn't give it a place in fiction or in the music section, but in the children's section. I had written it, so it must be children's literature. After I had given a reading, one woman told me that the bookstore saleslady had recommended it for her ten-year-old daughter. I naturally don't expect each book salesman or lady to read everything which comes into the store – that would be impossible at over 70,000 new titles annually in the German language alone – but it is an uncomfortable thought to wonder what a ten-year-old should have to do with the problems of an 80-year-old around 150 years ago. I wish the representatives would at least point it out to the bookstore sales personnel when one of my kind has dared to set foot on unknown territory.

But I've done it again. And there is a story behind the story again. My father once gave me quite a large box full of old letters

and memoirs of my great-great grandfather, who had been a delegate in Paulskirche and one of the leaders in the Revolution of 1848 and had stood beside his son on the barricades. It took a long time before I had learned to read the old cursive handwriting, with its elaborate capitalized lettering, more or less fluently; I was enthusiastic about the story of kidnapping and escape, and the constantly renewed yearning for a country without contradictions, was fascinated by the characters which had taken on a great presence for me and accompanied me on my reading tours. It seemed wondrous to me that I was always invited to places where I had wanted to do some research, to Karlsruhe, to Virginia, to Zurich; the greater wonder was that those letters had ever landed on my desk, letters among which the oldest had gone from Vienna to Karlsruhe, from Karlsruhe to Steyr, from Steyr to Vienna, from Vienna to Wroclaw, from Wroclaw to Leipzig, from Leipzig to Paris, from Paris to London, from London to Virginia, from Virginia to Washington, from Washington to Zurich, from Zurich to Heidelberg, from Heidelberg to Steyr, and from Steyr back to Vienna. I soon developed a sisterly affection for Pauline, the girl from the upper bourgeois Jewish family in Karlsruhe, who had followed her loved one into the turbulence of Revolution and exile, whose father had mourned her as if she were dead because she had become the wife of a Christian, and who was torn into pieces by her own centrifugal force when the outer pressure on the relationship finally wore off. In some strange way, I felt obliged to tell her side of the story. I left the men in the original character of the 18th century; they had documented themselves very well in any case, had even saved the notes they made on the barricades.

The House in the Air 1848

*The mail-coach rattled, groaned, rocked and rumbled.
Pauline's head hit the window again and again.*

»Look!« A hand pointed to the bird of prey hovering in the gray sky.

She only saw the hand, the shell-formed nails, the gesture that reminded her of him. She tried not to be disappointed that he had not picked her up, himself. During the entire train trip, she had imagined how he would take her into his arms. Certainly, his father had discussed the plan with her, had explained that this was more sensible.

Sensible! If she were sensible, she wouldn't be here right now, instead of home beside Babette on the sofa across from their mother in her favorite chair at the window with her knitting in her hands.

Don't think of the golden thread, nor the dark-blue velvet, nor the rose pattern. It was to be a yarmulke, a skullcap for her father, sewn by the mother along with her daughters. Don't think of father. His eyes with the heavy lids looked down at her with reproach from the crown of each tree, from each cloud.

By now he knew it already.

Was he raging? Was he crying? Was he silent?

She shivered.

The man beside her put his coat around her shoulders, said something. His voice reminded her of Max, the way he let one word glide into the next, the melody of his speech.

Max. Dear Max.

She wrapped herself up in the coat, closed her eyes.

Emil and her future father-in-law were conversing quietly. Names were spoken which meant nothing to Pauline, names, intrigues, complaints about the indifference of the people's representatives, the .so-called people's representatives.'

When Max's father uttered words such as .people,' .freedom,' or .democracy,' she had to think of her own father again. Gritzner's voice bowed to those words just like her father's did when he cited the Bible.

Was he cursing her now? Was he sitting on a stool with a tear in his clothes and ashes on his head, mourning her as if she were dead?

»My flower,« he had always said.

She could feel his hand on the parting of her hair as he gave her the blessing on Sabbath.

Father.

With great effort she recalled the man he had wanted her to marry, the way he had looked at her, how he had sat there, how he had lifted the cup of tea to his mouth, his voice, everything. The aversion that grew in her protected her from her father. She held on tight to it.

Babette would understand, perhaps not yet, but certainly later on.

Yes, Babette would understand. Her mother....

»Honor thy father and thy mother.«

I honor them! I do honor them. But I love him.

»Whither thou goest, I shall go; whither thou remainest, I shall remain; thy people shall be my people, and thy Lord, my Lord.«

She took a fright. That was what Ruth had said to Naomi, her mother-in-law. Pauline was afraid of Mrs. Gritzner, knew very little of her. Max had fallen silent, when she had asked him about his mother. His parents had separated while he was still very young. Yet they had come to Karlsruhe together a year ago in order to speak with her parents. Mrs. Gritzner had been friendly, but intimidating. A beautiful, tall woman beside whom she had felt tiny and insignificant.

The hand, which was so similar to Max's, straightened the coat around Pauline's shoulders. A stone hit the coach. It was as though she could feel it. Her eyes burnt.

A melody kept repeating itself in her head, only a couple of bars, over and over again. She tried to think of something else, but the melody blocked out everything else; humming didn't help, either. Now she could recall the text as well: »Since the Children of Israel have left Thy covenant, left Thy covenant....«

Mendelssohn. Elijah. Of course, Elijah. Babette had played the aria for her.

Thy covenant. Wasn't it just a covenant of men, men who wore the sign of their covenant on their bodies? Each morning they prayed: »Lord, we give thanks unto Thee, for Thou hath

not created us as women.«

But she had been created a woman. Pauline pressed her arms against her breasts, felt the beat within, felt the blood in her veins, all over. She pressed her thighs together, the beat became stronger. Probably, she really was bad. It was a good thing she had left. Her badness was not fitting in her father's house. She shivered.

»It's all right my child, it's all right. You will see, all will be good.«

All? His murmuring was like a lullaby. She thought of her old nursemaid, the stories she had told her. Stories of danger, full of horror, sins and penance. Yet comforting.

»Cain spoke to the Lord: O Lord, Thou art the mightiest and meekest of bearers, and my sin alone willst Thou not bear?«

The sin, always the sin.

No, she thought, and feared for a moment she had spoken out loud. And so what, she thought, so what, but then she had lost the thread, which thread, red thread, golden thread, I have to catch the thread, the thread ... what hung by a thread? Her arms were hurting as though she had been kneading dough for hours. But why, hopefully she wasn't getting a fever. When one had a fever, each joint was strangely painful just like this.

She fell asleep after all, awoke with a start as the coach halted with a jolt and threw her against a man's shoulder. Why was a man there? Where was she?

Max. On the way to Max, whom she loved. The man was his father. She repeated stubbornly: I love him. I love him.

It was raining as they drove into Aschaffenburg at the break of dawn. Max's father helped her down from the coach. She felt safe when he tightly held her hand.

It was good to enter the common room of the inn behind him, behind his broad back. She could hide herself behind him.

The innkeeper came, disappeared, returned with a clean apron tied around his belly, shaking the cloth in his hand as if he were waving a flag to greet his guests.

»... and coffee for my daughter...« The innkeeper acknowledged the order with a deep bow.

In the shops where they acquired their travelling provisions, they were also met with utmost politeness. »... if the master's daughter would be kind enough to come this way...« No one looked askance at her.

She found it hard to take leave from him. She cried on his shoulder, cried all the tears that she hadn't cried when she left Karlsruhe, felt deserted, not as though she had only seen this man for the third time in her life, but as though she were finally on her way to unknown territory, yet she was on her way to him, to Max.

Emil took her arm and led her to her compartment.

Was it like that, Pauline?

Or entirely different? Was it as though you were lamed after you had taken that step, the step away from your father's house, your childhood, your past, your family, away from all the security you had ever known? Did you just let it happen?

Was Max's presence in you so strong that your love for him gave you warmth? Or did you feel a sudden horror about what you had done? Would you rather have turned around, slipped back into your own home through the backdoor, taken up your handwork again as though you had never left? Would the man you didn't want, whom you dreaded, have been less horrible in that moment than the journey to Steyr, into complete uncertainty? A strange house, strange women who would look you up and down, his mother, his sister – strange women who shared his past?

»I know they'll become fond of you,« Max will have said to you, but you, I think, will have felt the uncertainty in his words and taken it personally, couldn't have known it had overtones of his own fear of those women; he had learned early that it was hard to serve two jealous gods, his father and his mother who each wanted him to themselves alone; he felt torn between them, a victim who was never able to placate both of them at the same time, since the more he offered up his split self to them, the more they demanded his whole self.

I don't believe he had already told you of his illness as a child; you will have learned of that later on, if at all. Or did he think it would have been without honor to bind you to him without your having known it? Hardly. His father writes, he had completely forgotten it. Perhaps you had only caught scent of a weakness hiding behind his urbane cleverness, behind his eloquence, and this weakness justified your love and gave you the strength to leave your father and mother and follow him.

(...)

By now, you probably know far more about me than you wanted to know; you have heard what is probably the most personal text I have ever written; you know some of the themes I have worked on over the past years. It could perhaps be added to my biography that my mother's early death set the tone of my childhood, I felt I was to blame on the surface level, since I had always heard: »Please be quiet, Mommy has a headache.« I naturally thought I had been too loud despite it all, the noise I had made unintentionally, had blown up the thing in her head like a balloon until it popped. Meanwhile I know that girls, in particular, who lose their mother at that age, always feel they are at fault for her death. The knowledge of it doesn't help much, the willingness to take on responsibility like a megalomaniac – and the blame along with the responsibility – is too deeply rooted to be torn out by means of reason alone. When I was five, my father married again, my younger sister was born; I tried unsuccessfully to win over my stepmother's love, without realizing that I wanted to be loved by her without loving her myself. We were only able to find a path to each other quite recently.

I was the troublemaker, the child that always asked inopportune questions, forever starving for recognition, tenderness, forever lying in wait for fear I might be neglected again. I remember how my grandfather on my father's side shook his head on my thirteenth birthday and said: »What a lot of brains! What a sight! And a girl on top of it all – what a catastrophe.« My sisters claim he never would have said that; it

could only be a figment of my imagination. However, it is without doubt that my father didn't go to the hospital until two days after my birth, because he was so disappointed at not having a son. I read that in my mother's diary. I don't want to bore you further with my terrible childhood – most childhoods are like »pails turned over our heads, which we carry along with us for the rest of our lives.« Maybe an unhappy childhood is the treasure that Rilke writes about in his letters to a young poet. Under the prerequisite, however, that it is not kept in a glass cabinet of self-pity as an alibi to be dusted off and marveled at daily, but is put to use to expand the limits of our own self-understanding and our capacity for empathy. In any case – I was terrible, it was terrible. Perhaps this is the origin of my deeply seated aversion to violence of any kind.

I am convinced that when we comfort children, we are simultaneously comforting the child we once were ourselves, that we have the chance to make up for something - catch up with the burden of the past that is weighing down our shoulders too heavily and hindering us from standing upright - when we get involved with children and give them what they need. And I don't mean the famous example of the electric train, which the child is supposed to want and must dutifully demonstrate his gratitude for, just because we didn't get one ourselves a dozen years ago.

In the meantime, I can even live with my thin skin; I accept it as the price I have to pay for that which I need to write, and I know that swindle is no good in this connection.

It's clear to me that I have given you exhaustive details about the research for my work, yet almost nothing about my actual work on the texts. I do make a very detailed 'blueprint' prior to each book, consider each possible angle, where each idea leads when I follow it to its logical conclusion, where the interfaces with other disciplines lie; but as soon as I am seated in front of an empty page, everything turns out quite differently. By page 20 at the latest, I notice that my characters have gone beyond the power of my imagination and have taken on their own lives. I explain this to myself by the fact that writing is not only a conscious process; a lot more flows along than can be captured by intellect alone. I actually believe this is good; our intellect alone would hardly be able to create a living thing. It is therefore even difficult to speak about this, however, I certainly do not wish to make any sort of esoteric postulations. Rather, it is the subconscious experiences, which play a stronger role than the conscious ones and constitute the more decisive influence. To this are added innumerable changes and alterations, until I myself can no longer read what I have written; then I begin the work of more or less neatly typing out my scrawlings and polishing them with each new version. I try to follow Rodin, who said it is very simple to make a statue, one only has to chip away the superfluous stone. The deletions, I believe, provide color for that which remains, color that wouldn't otherwise be there, as well as additional opportunities for the reader to recall his or her own experiences and associations.

**Translated from the German
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(The translator reserves the right to make any revisions prior to publication, which requires the translator's consent: Rvpaschen@verizon.net)