

2018

RENATE WELSH

The Hans Christian Andersen Award 2018
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

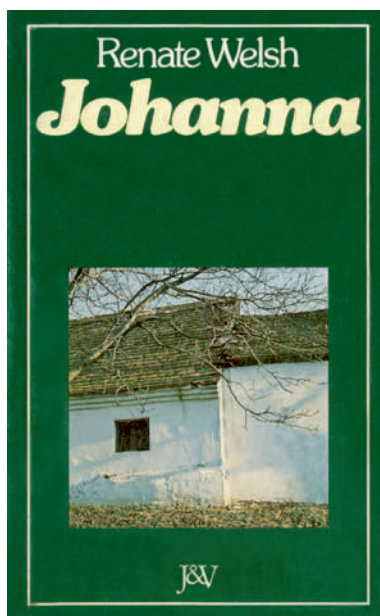
Her commitment to the socially disadvantaged runs like a red thread through Welsh's entire work. The »socially disadvantaged«: these are on the one hand the typical marginalised groups such as drug addicts (»Und schicke ihn hinaus in die Wüste«/And Send Him out into the Desert) or migrant workers as 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.

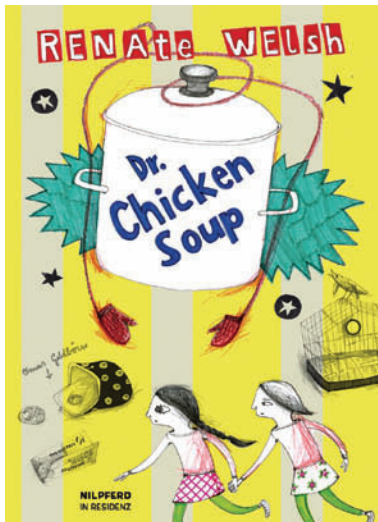
More than ten years ago, she was asked for the first time to organise a writing workshop for young handicapped people.

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.

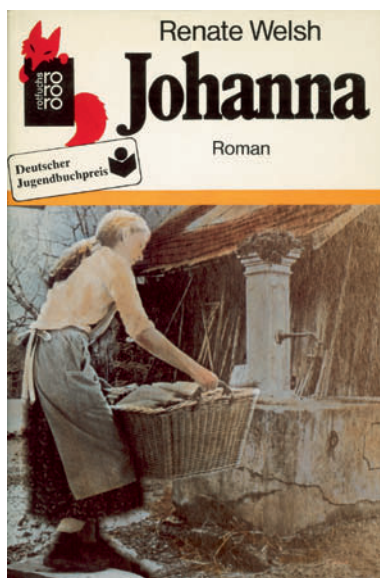
The book does not resort to the traditional sentimental patterns, does not aim at arousing compassion, is much more than the forever inadequate appeal »Be nice to the handicapped«, but does not seek to create a fiction of normality either. Welsh carefully explores the problems encountered in living with 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

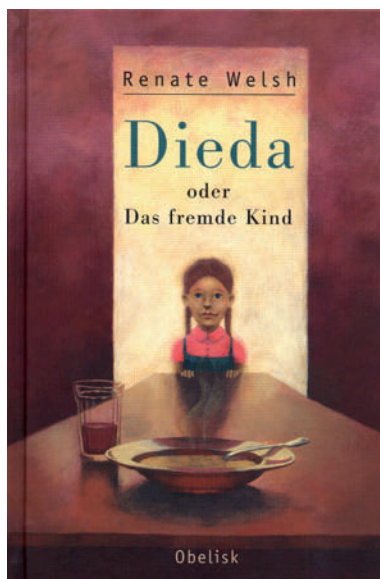
The characters, the plot elements, the dialogues, motifs, narrative perspectives and the language in Renate Welsh's texts make abstract terms illustrative and show the necessity – even in the here and now – to constantly question one's own actions attentively and critically and to see how they are related 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

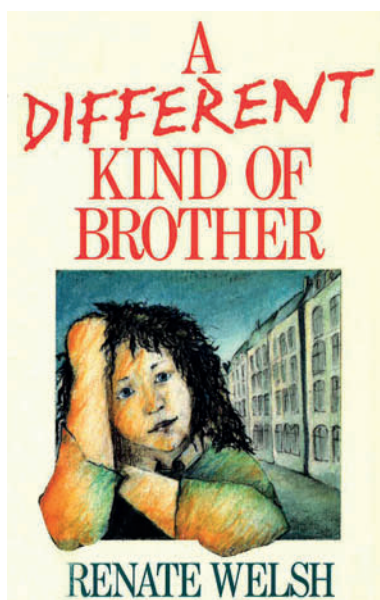
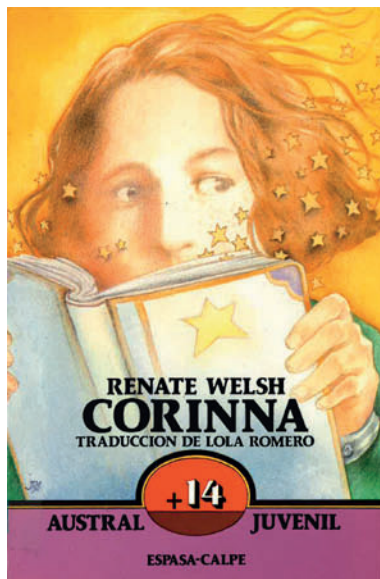
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- 2003 Austrian Children's and Juvenile Book Award for Dieda oder Das fremde Kind
Children's and Juvenile Book Award of the City of Vienna for Dieda oder das fremde Kind
Great Award of the German Academy of Children's and Teen Literature e.V. Volkach
- 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 Children's and Juvenile Book Award of the City of Vienna
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 (Thistledays) | 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
Wiedersehen 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



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

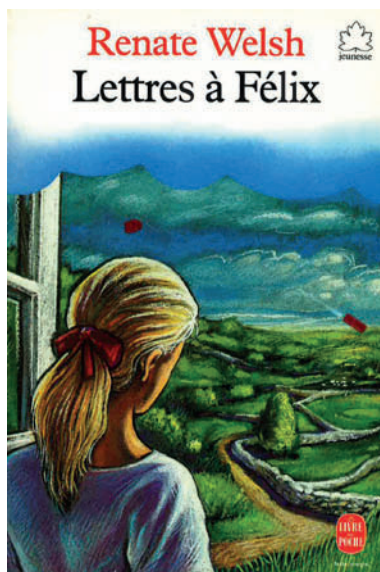
Tredje seng fra venstre | Danish | Ellen Kirk | Kopenhagen: Munksgaard 1977
Tredje sängen till vänster | Swedish | Jann Westrup | Stockholm: Sjöstrand 1986

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

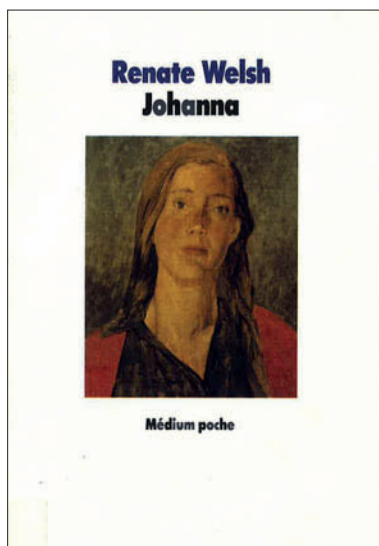
Huset i træet | Danish | Erik Jensen | København: Sommer & Sørensen 1993
La Casa tra gli alberi | Italian | Ezio Bacchetta | Casale Monferrato: Piemme 1997

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: Pataki s 1997, 2002



Mit Hannibal wär alles anders

Hvis jeg bare hadde un 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

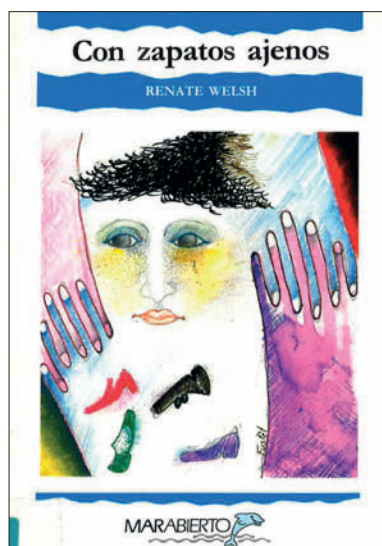
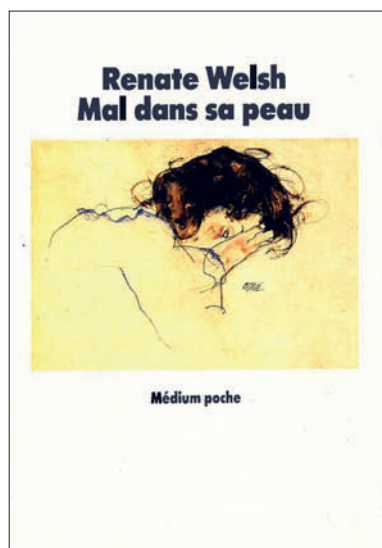
De er dumme alle sammen | Danish | Birgitte Brix | København: Sommer & Sørensen 1987

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 Księgarnia 2005

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

Little Vampire | 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 Księgarnia 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

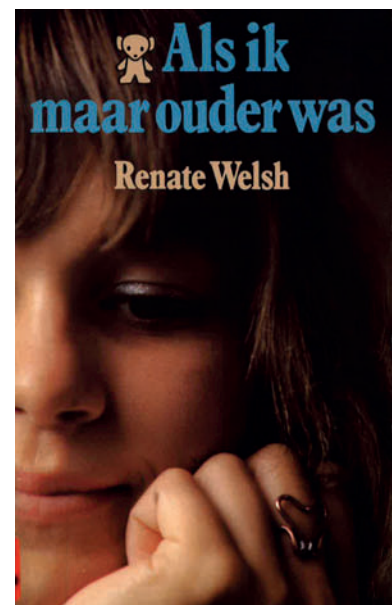
Alle tiders ferie | Danish | Gyda Skat Nielsen | Kopenhagen: Sommer & Sorensen 1984

Zwischenwände

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

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

Vampyriskas 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 spinnt Geschichten

(Sarah telling Stories)

Wien: Obelisk 2014

Dr. Chickensoup

St. Pölten: Residenz 2011

Das große Buch vom Vamperl

(The Big Book of Little Vampie)

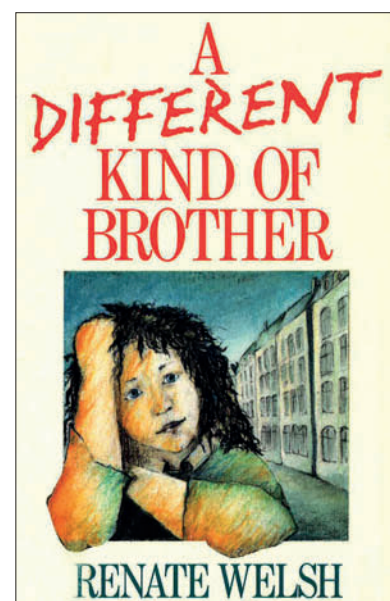
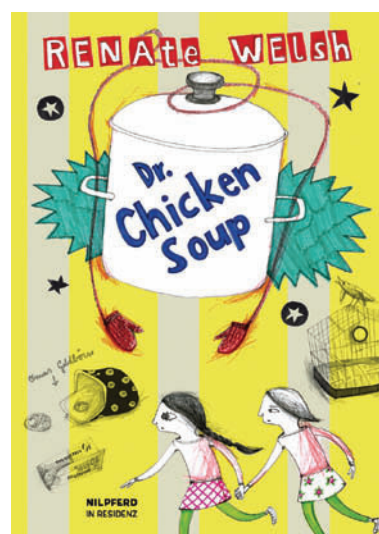
München: dtv 2011

A different kind of brother

(Drachenflügel)

translated by Anthea Bell

London: Andersen Press 1993



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

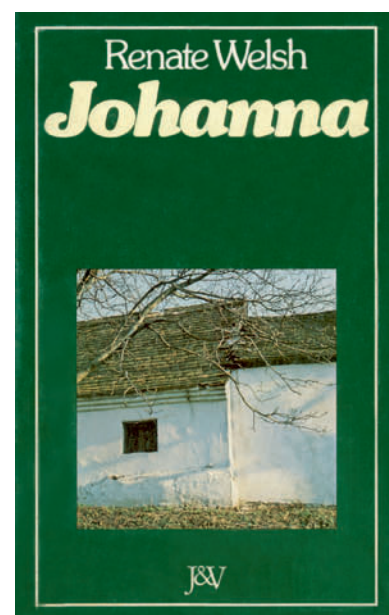
Johanna

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



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:

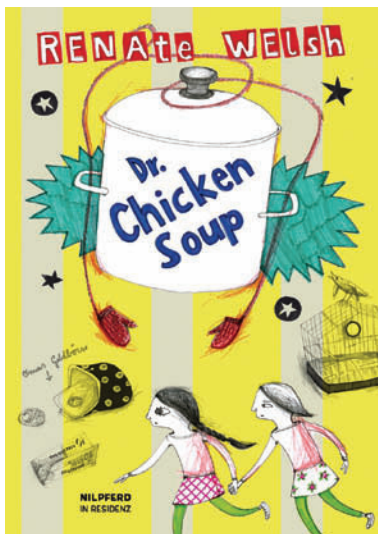
»Once upon a time, there was a boy who wanted to be a sailor. But he lived in a country without seashore. ›You could drive cars‹, people used to tell him. But this was not what he wanted. ›I want to be by the sea‹ said he. One day, it started to rain. It kept raining on and on. All alleys turned into 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.



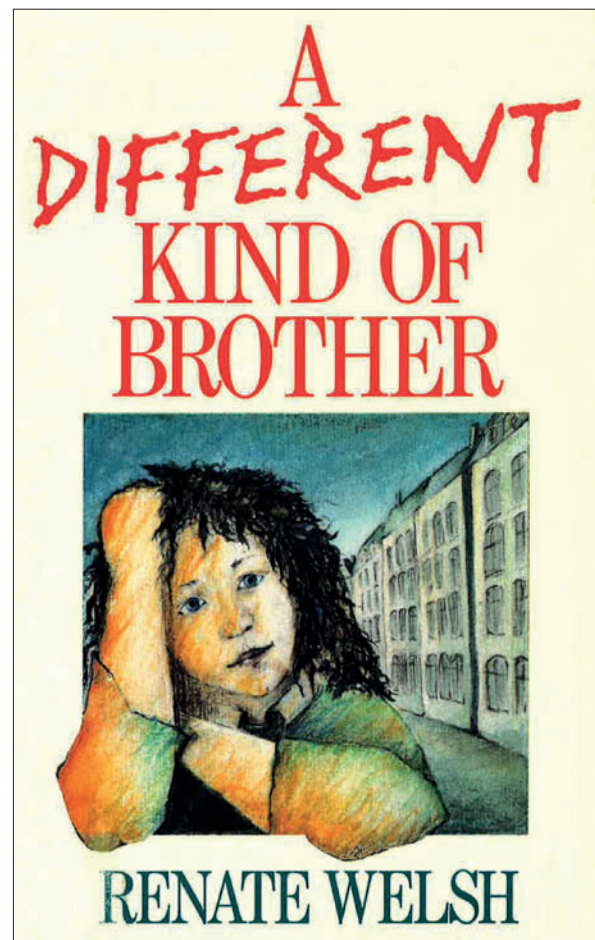
Drachenflügel (A different kind of brother)

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)

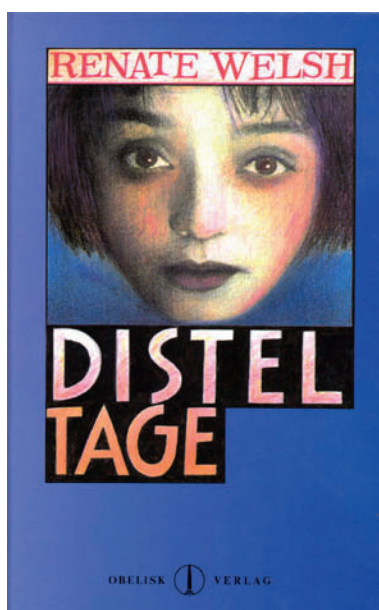
Wien: Obelisk 1985

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)**

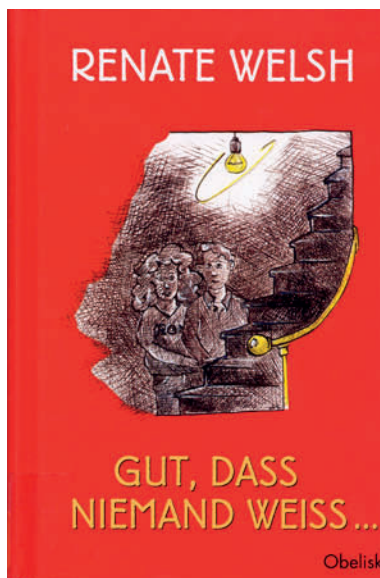
Wien: Obelisk 2013

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)**

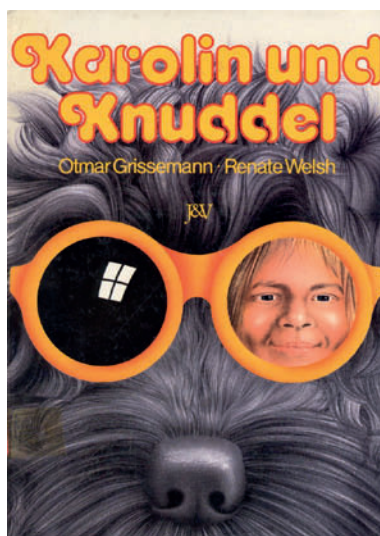
Wien: Obelisk 1985

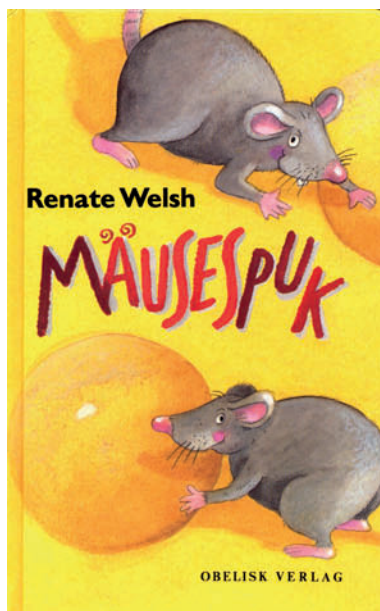
Content: Karolin is not afraid of anything. She doesn't fear crocodiles. She doesn't fear constrictors. And she sure doesn't fear lions. The only thing she fears is dogs. Big dogs and small ones. She fears dogs that growl and dogs that scramble. She is also afraid of Knuddel, her neighbour's blind dog.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

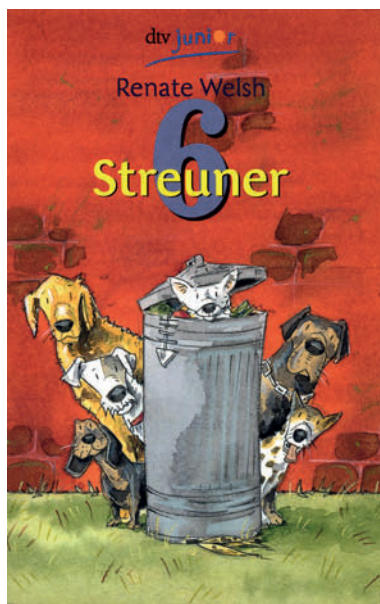
Content: Laura is an adopted child. She and her brother Boris, who was also adopted when he was a baby, live with their mum and dad who never made a secret out of not being their birth parents. Actually, Laura and Boris are doing perfectly fine. They don't miss anything and their parents always have 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.



Sample Translation by Sally-Ann Spencer

That Girl or The Strange Girl
Acclaimed children's author Renate Welsh tells a tale from wartime Austria.

The story so far: After Ursel's mother dies, her father, a doctor, remarries. Ursel's new stepmother is cold and distant, and not a bit like her real mum. In her head she calls her 'the woman', and resents the way she bosses her around. But things are about to get far, far worse for Ursel. When Allied bombs start to fall on Vienna, her father sends her away to live with her stepmother and her family in the country. Ursel's new grandfather, whom she calls 'the old man', is even stricter than her step-mum, and, as the Allied troops draw nearer, his mood becomes increasingly violent. Ursel can't wait to go home to her father and her real grandparents. In the meantime she refuses to give in to her step-family. Her name, she decides, is too good for them to use – from now on she'll no longer answer to 'Ursel' but only to 'Kid', the name the old man spitefully called her. In the following extract she hears worrying news from Vienna ...

On her way home Kid's sandal broke in two. The woman scolded her. Kid's foot was swollen, but the woman didn't notice until evening. She bathed it with carbolic soap, which stank but stopped the wound from throbbing.

That night she dreamt of Vienna. She was walking towards the house where her parents lived, with granddad on one side and granny on the other, when a white ship landed on the roof, a shiny white ship, and all of a sudden fire shot out of the second-floor windows and the house was filled with flames. 'Daddy!' she screamed, and couldn't stop screaming even when she'd woken up.

The woman was standing next to her bed, talking to her. 'What's wrong? What's the matter?'

Kid told her about the dream, and the woman sat on the edge of her bed, her cool hand caressing her forehead. 'Everything's fine. Go back to sleep,' she murmured. It felt nice to be stroked. The woman's voice sounded different, warmer and softer than usual. She fell asleep.

The next morning she couldn't stand up. The wound on her sole had a soft yellow patch at its centre. It was swollen and the skin around the edges had a nasty shine to it. Kid hopped on one foot to the toilet. The woman fetched her another tub of soapy water. 'You can't go to school today,' she said. She lent Kid a proper sketch pad along with her own paint set, made up of lots of tiny blocks of paint.

With one foot dangling in the tub, Kid sat painting the posy of wild flowers on the kitchen table – a picture for her dad.

The woman was stirring batter. Her sisters and the old man had gone out.

‘You’ve made a good job of the bluebells’, she said. ‘The daisies look silly,’ said Kid, but secretly she was pleased.

‘Why don’t you paint them yellow around the outside, to make it look as if there’s sunshine on the flowers?’

The postman came into the kitchen with a telegram. The woman ripped it open, and stood rooted to the spot. She looked at Kid, re-read the telegram, and sat down at the table. ‘Tell me your dream again.’

Kid began to tell her, but tears were rolling down her cheeks. She wiped them away, but they still kept coming, she didn’t know why. The woman rested her hand on Kid’s head.

The door opened and the old man came in. The woman took her hand away and gave the man the telegram. The sheet of paper quivered and rustled.

‘Oh no,’ said the old man. At that moment the woman’s sisters came in, and the two of them read the telegram. One of them sobbed and the other one clutched her handkerchief. Kid wanted to ask what was wrong, but her mouth wouldn’t work. She was angry too. Everyone had read the news except her.

Harald burst into the kitchen. ‘When’s the funeral?’ he asked.

All four of them turned and shouted at him. This wasn’t the time for silly jokes, Uncle Stefan’s house had been hit by a bomb.

Uncle Stefan – that was daddy. Her daddy! The telegram was meant for her more than anyone else! Kid jumped up, soapy water spraying across the kitchen, and grabbed the paper.

HOUSE AND FLAT DAMAGED STOP BRIGITTA SLIGHTLY WOUNDED STOP
LETTER TO FOLLOW STEFAN

Brigitta was daddy’s assistant. Kid loved Brigitta.

‘What’s happened to daddy?’ she cried.

‘He won’t have been in, he’ll have been at the hospital,’ said the woman. ‘He can’t be hurt, or else he would have said so ...’

‘I want to see my daddy!’ screamed Kid.

‘Stop being hysterical!’ the woman’s sisters scolded.

‘It’s no use crying,’ the old man joined in. ‘Think of the poor soldiers at the front. They put up with much, much worse.’

‘She dreamt it all last night,’ said the woman.

One of the sisters picked up a dish cloth and mopped the floor.

‘Look at all the mess you’ve made,’ the other one said to her.

Kid’s hands hung loosely at the end of her arms. The woman said something. But somehow Kid couldn’t hear a word.

»Fearing the cruelty inside of us«

Interview with Renate Welsh by Friederike Leibl

(Die Presse, 12/21/2013)

Whatever you have seen is not yours before you can tell it: writer Renate Welsh tells »Presse am Sonntag« why she tries to make people write.

You have just published a book that contains text written by homeless people at VinziRast. These people are characterized by a disturbing fate. How deeply may this affect us?

Renate Welsh: Well, since I'm not a therapist it affects me very much. I can't change the world they live in. But I can show them that it does matter how they managed to cope with their fate. I can show them the reason why they should be proud of themselves. A young girl wrote: »You make mistakes where there aren't any«. What a precious sentence.

Apart from being an author, you have also been hosting writing workshops for years. Why?

Probably it's got something to do with my need to do something tangible. Maybe it is related to the loneliness you're facing when you are confronted with a blank sheet of paper. Writing is an extremely lonesome business. And even though I do think that writing does change things I really, really doubt that again and again. When we read, we recreate each and every book. That's why I find it so incredibly sad so many people do not have the chance to reinvent themselves just by reading. I think, writing helps them to get closer to themselves. And by writing, you can also conquer the world of literature.

Can we only read if we can write?

No, but writing is a direct access to reading. This is also related to listening. The ability to listen is incredibly precious and has become very rare. Most families do not speak a lot to each other. Children rarely ever find the things they want to tell being recognized and considered a gift. We can only capture our own experiences if we can tell them.

Parents frequently complain that their children don't talk to them. Is it that one stops talking because the other has stopped listening?

Sometimes, when I'm having a writing workshop with children, I collect the sentences they don't ever want to hear again. Absolutely top-rated is »Clean up your room!« Number two already is: »What was school like today?« There is a form of invitation that actually is none but merely an empty phrase that rather interrupts true talking than to facilitate it. Children sometimes feel this is a test, some kind of interrogation. Maybe they first want to arrive before they are being asked, and this leaves them no chance to arrive.

When it comes to the texts written by the homeless, guilt plays a big role. In your life, too, guilt is an issue. Was your biography also a reason for this kind of work?

Yes, certainly. Since I was already a murderer at the age of four, I had to get this sorted out somehow.

How does it come you felt like a murderer?

Because my mother died of a brain tumour when I was four years old. I was a kid enormously focused on the question why. I had to make out the correlation between cause and effect. I was always told: »Please be quiet, mum has a bad headache« I thought I was too loud, and this made this thing in mum's head burst. And this made me a murderer. This is the logic of a four-year old. And I thought dad likes his patients much more than he likes me. I sure was an extremely unhappy child.

Your father was a physician. Did you ever blame him for being unable to help your mother?

To me, my dad was beyond all allocation of blame. For far too long.

Did you manage to get rid of feeling guilty?

My feelings of guilt turned into a most distinct sense of responsibility. I made so many mistakes – not only when I was small but also when I had already grown up. I wallowed in self-pity for a long time and then finally came to conclusion, a lot of things may have gone wrong, indeed, but in the long run I was also privileged in one or another respect. And I have always had language.

Did your feelings as a daughter affect your behaviour as a mother?

I'm a mother of three sons. It was terrible because I had a completely inappropriate mother image on mind.

What was inappropriate about it?

My mother was 28 when she died. She was beautiful and noble, helpful and good, and everybody talked of her as if she had been a saint. And I thought, okay, I may be terrible but when I have a kid I will also be beautiful and noble, helpful and good. I was twenty when I had my first son, and I loved him very much but I still was nothing but me – and that was quite a bitter disappointment. I thought I'm not a real mum, I'm inadequate.

What kind of relation do you and your adult children have towards each other by now?

It's very intense. Sometimes it is emotionally charged, vivid. The same applies to the relation I've got towards my grandchildren.

You have been writing books for decades now. Do you write different for today's children than you did for those in earlier years?

For the small ones it is okay. I couldn't write youth books anymore. I find it terrible when adults think they could learn teenage slang like some kind of foreign language. This is abstruse and awkward. It's like a pink tummy-tee revealing a lined belly. Teenagers have different taboos, different fears and a different experience of the world.

Jealousy is a big topic for children. Is it possible to love all children just the same?

No. You can't love them all the same. You can love all your children – each in their own way. But all the same? No.

So, that feeling of mum prefers my brother might be basically true?

Yes, I do think so. My children blamed me for this as well, and I think the accusation was justified. There were times when I did prefer one to the others. The only thing that speaks for me is that these preferences took turns.

So maybe, in total the result is equality?

I don't know but I hope so.

Blanks play a major role in your work. Absent objects or individuals influence the structures resulting therefrom. Why is the absent so important?

Blank space is important – in books and in relationships. The things that were have shaped those that remain, even if they have gone. When it comes to text, you first have to write something before you can omit it. Then we can sense the blank.

Adults are frequently terrified by the cruelty in children. Is this something we just come with or is it rather that we experience it and then pass it on?

We are probably so terrified by the cruelty inside out of that we also deny it in children even if it is actually no sign of evil but just a matter of exploring limits. I, personally, have made really bad mistakes in this context because I deprived the children of their chance to develop a culture of conflict. When they were arguing, I intervened much too soon to calm them down. I would come up much too fast with great, fanciful ideas. That wasn't good. I think, some cruelties are based in absent, perverted self-esteem.

One of your books addresses the topic of bullying at school. When should parents intervene?

Bullying constitutes a problem situation the child will not be able to solve by itself. It is, however, the classic dilemma. My mum and dad have to stand up for me. But if they are on my side and against everybody else, they will make things harder for me. In such cases it is very difficult to find a balance. If your own child has bullied others it is very important to let it know: you did something that I find awful. But you are still important and precious to me. And I know you don't like yourself when you are being so evil.

Should feelings of hatred be put into perspective?

It's wrong to pretend the hatred was not real when we are feeling it. As hard as it may be to realise it because it reveals abysses in us that we would rather keep concealed: children know the feeling of hatred, too. But we might give good feelings a chance if we stop denying the bad ones. Conflicts are not solved by pretending they do not exist.