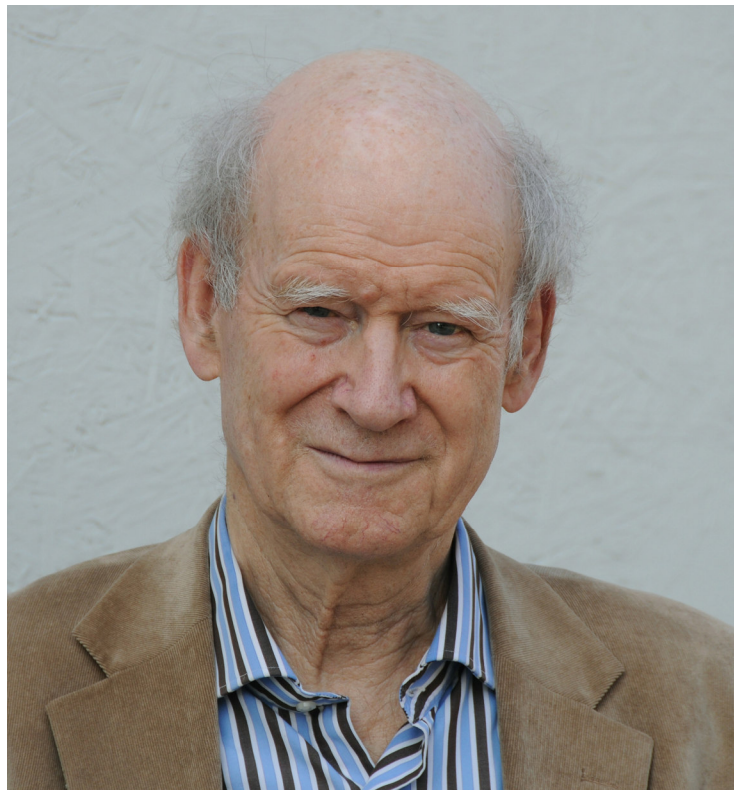




Schweizerisches Institut für  
Kinder- und Jugendmedien

## HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN AWARD 2022

FOR AN AUTHOR



**FRANZ HOHLER**

Author

Candidate for the Swiss Section of IBBY

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## 1. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION



- 1943 Born in Biel. His parents are teachers.
- 1959 The Oltner Tagblatt prints his first story.
- 1963 Studies German and Romance languages at the University of Zurich.
- 1965 Presents *pizzicato*, his first programme for the stage. Leaves university to take the programme on tour through Switzerland, Germany and Austria.
- 1967 First book: *Das verlorene Gähnen und andere nutzlose Geschichten* (*The Lost Yawn and Other Useless Stories*).
- 1968 Marriage to Ursula Nagel.
- 1971 Birth of first son, Lukas.
- 1973 First children's television programme, with René Quellet in the series *Das Spielhaus* (*The Playhouse*).
- 1974 Birth of second son, Kaspar.
- 1978 First children's novel: *Tschipo*. Family moves to Zurich's Oerlikon district, where Hohler and his wife live to this day.
- 2006 First exhibition of Hohler's work for children in Zurich's Strauhof, a museum dedicated to literature.

## 2. FRANZ HOHLER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

### 2.1. Grownup stories for children, childish stories for grownups

Franz Hohler tells his stories in the form of songs, poems, narratives, micro-stories, novels, plays and a wide range of hybrids; and he presents them to his audience – both adults and children – as books, cabaret programmes, radio and television shows, readings and even films. Telling stories just seems to be his vocation, a calling that manifest itself already early on in his life.

For Franz Hohler, there has never been a strict division between the stories he writes for adults and those he writes for children. Some of his stories have therefore over the course of their lives changed sides, beginning as miniatures for “grownups” only to find themselves collected in a volume of stories for “little ones” (such as *Die Riesen im Parkhaus* [*The Giants in the Car Park*]<sup>1</sup>). What all his stories have in common, however, is a basic narrative principle grounded in fantasy.

They begin with an idea, with an assumption that contains a break with the ordinary, with logic or with so-called reality: Let's say a chicken wants to attend a radio show, or a hiking boot and a running shoe want to go to a ball together. In Franz Hohler's stories, such initial premises have consequences, lifeless objects take on human features and trigger catastrophes in the “real” world (as in *Ein schöner Nachmittag* [*A Fine Afternoon*]<sup>2</sup>), animals prevail in “human” conflicts (as in *Der Affe und das Krokodil* [*The Monkey and the Crocodile*]<sup>3</sup>), an abattoir becomes the scene of fairytale happenings<sup>4</sup>, a flying chamber pot can lead to adventure<sup>5</sup> and a young boy's dreams can be the doorway to some truly fantastical journeys<sup>6</sup>.

### 2.2. A meeting place of fiction and language in fantasy

The unmistakable quality of Franz Hohler's texts has its origins both in their fictional approach and in their linguistic execution: both are marked by a profound confidence in human fantasy in general, and in that of children in particular. Hohler's books for children are like keys to another reality, and their readers not only enter the author's poetic worlds, they also find themselves unexpectedly confronted by their own fantasy. But Hohler never loses sight of the circumstances of his readers' present-

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<sup>1</sup> In *Der Riese und die Erdbeerkonfitüre* („The Giant and the Strawberry Jam“).

<sup>2</sup> In *Der Granitblock im Kino* („The Block of Granite in the Cinema“).

<sup>3</sup> Idem.

<sup>4</sup> In *Der Riese und die Erdbeerkonfitüre* („The Giant and the Strawberry Jam“).

<sup>5</sup> *Der Nachthafen* („The Chamber Pot“).

<sup>6</sup> The Three Tschipo volumes. *Caesurae*

day lives. On the contrary, his radical focus on fundamental problems of society allows him to provide his fictional worlds with a compelling social level and thus create a striking mixture of virtuoso diction, fantasy and social critique that is probably unique in children's and young people's literature in the German-speaking world.

### 2.3. The jury's arguments

The extensive oeuvre by Franz Hohler stands alone in contemporary German-language children's literature. Since the appearance of his first book, *Tschipo*, in 1978, the author has published poems and stories for children and, with his readings, encourages entire young audiences to try their own hand at versifying.

Franz Hohler's trademark is his fantastic-realist narrative style. He typically begins with a real-life situation, to which he adds the most varied palette of peculiar and surreal elements, distorting reality and rendering it strange enough to make his readers view their surroundings for a moment through entirely new eyes. Time and again, Hohler's texts thus shore up a principle of appropriation of the world that belongs profoundly to the child's experience. Playful, enigmatic, poetic, humorous, humane, radical – these are just a few of the ways Hohler's work might be described, attributes that make his oeuvre unmistakably his own. An oeuvre that children can read in over twenty languages around the world.

### 3. Appreciative Essays and Interviews

#### 3.1. Writing for children - Writing for adults. The Crosswriter Franz Hohler

Mikota, Jana (2016). *Schreiben für Kinder – Schreiben für Erwachsene. Der Crosswriter Franz Hohler*. In: Pecher, C; Franz, K., Burkard, M. (Hrsg.). Was die weißen Raben haben. Gedichte für Kinder und Jugendliche von 1945 bis heute. Schriftenreihe der Deutschen Akademie für Kinder- und Jugendliteratur Nr. 46, Hohengehren, Schneider, S. 177-191.

Franz Hohler is one of those authors who write poems, stories and longer texts for both children and adults. He began as an author for adults with short stories, and since 1978 he has also written regularly for children with "the same seriousness" with which he also publishes texts for adults (Gien 2003, p. 4). When asked whether they write differently for children and adults, the writer and satirist Franz Hohler (born 1943) answers as follows:

The difference isn't so big. In the story collection *The Big Book*, that's about 90 stories for children and there are at least 30 which were originally not for children, but just written. First I read it to the adults and then I noticed, that it is also good for children. The only thing I pay more attention to, is that when I write for children I don't overtax. But I don't want to chum up the language either. I then have to find a language with which I am satisfied. (Wegmann 2014, no page)

For adult readers, Hohler mainly writes short prose, while in his children's literary work he makes use of various forms: picture books, poems, theatre, short prose and novels.

The following article will focus on the lyrical work of the author, whereby his prose cannot be completely ignored. Similarities and differences in writing for children and adults are to be indicated. Hohler's statements on children's and youth literature are also reminiscent of another crosswriter of German-language literature who, however, is largely perceived in the context of adult literature. The author is Bertolt Brecht, who wrote poems for children with his collection of children's songs (1934/1937) and also thought about children's literature. Franz Hohler's collection *Es war einmal Igel* (*Once There Was a Hedgehog*, 2011) can be read in this tradition (see also Payrhuber 2012), because Hohler is also less concerned with a literature specific to addressees than with literature that can be read with pleasure by both children and adults.

The article focuses on the phenomenon of crosswriting and approaches the question as follows: The aspect of intertextuality and multiple addressing is presented as an important feature of crosswriting and shows how Hohler uses these aspects as a matter of course in his children's literary work, thus designing the texts for both child and adult readers.

## Crosswriting – Crossover

The phenomenon of crosswriting is not a new trend in (children's and youth) literature, but looks back on a longer tradition. In research, this term stands alongside terms such as 'crossover', 'multiple addressing' or 'ambiguous literature' (cf. Blümer). Since the publication of the first Harry Potter volume (1997), the terms have been experiencing a blossoming and one reads "more and more frequently about 'crosswriting', 'crossover' and 'all-age' literature" (cf. Blümer). Kümmerling-Meibauer distinguishes between three forms:

In relation to children's literature, the term [crosswriting] can be used to mean three things:

First, the fact that many authors of children's books have been also write works for adults; secondly, the phenomenon that a first conceived as a book for adults by the same author as an or vice versa; thirdly, a recipient of the book. Comprehensive writing, i.e. a literary text for children, in this case addresses both children's and adult readers. (Kümmerling-Meibauer 2003, p. 248)

However, in children's and youth literature research, in literary criticism and in the publishing world, the term is primarily narrowed to the third aspect (cf. also Blümer). Hohler's literary work can be examined under the second and third phenomena, because his children's literary work can be characterized as ambiguous and, despite its supposed simplicity, is characterized by a high degree of complexity. In particular, the aspect of intertextuality plays a decisive role. Intertextuality initially refers to the relationship between texts and means that texts enter into a dialogue with each other (cf. Kristeva, Bakhtin and others). Following Pfister's explanations, the present contribution here limits intertextuality to the "process of a more or less conscious reference to individual pretexts" (Pfister 1985, p. 15, cf. also Wicke 2014).

Wicke divides the pretexts relevant to children's and youth literature into the following groups: Such from the field of children's literature, biblical and mythological texts, works of adult literature and invented pretexts". (Vetch 2014, p. 14)

Children's and young people's literature research concentrates primarily on narrative literature, but also on children's lyrical texts, which, as is still shown in Hohler's work, are characterised by numerous intertextual aspects. Here we find references to individual texts, but also to systems such as genres or myths. According to Kurt Franz in his volume *Kinderlyrik*, intertextuality is a more recent trend in children's poetry. Hohler himself does not think in terms of children's, youth or adult literature:

I don't believe in a clear separation between children's and adult literature. Very often I see children reacting to texts that are actually written for adults. [...] Good children's literature is always good literature for adults. If something only pleases children, then I suspect an ingratiating of an adult author behind it. (Quote from Gien 2003, p. 19)

Nevertheless, he believes that children have their own "world view" (Gien 2003, p. 19), and in many of his "narratives he illuminates only excerpts of reality as with a searchlight" (Gien 2003, p. 19). He vehemently rejects the pedagogical index finger,

and above all his poems and stories resist orders and rules. Bertolt Brecht also deals with ideas of children's literature. His children's songs take up themes similar to those of his poems for adults, but are distinguished by their performance.

All of Brecht's children's songs show that the "adult themes" are also for children; "childlike" alone their presentation must take place, that is, the themes must be presented linguistically in such a way that children can realize them in their imagination. The art is not to speak primitively, but simply.

Simplicity is the result of what is difficult and difficult to do. (Button 2006, p.97)

In contrast to Brecht, however, Hohler's children's literary texts differ thematically and linguistically from his adult poetry. They lack the political, which is inherent in Brecht's poems and which also characterises Hohler's adult poetry.

### Of fairies and animals:

#### Double meaning in Hohler's literary work for children

Fairy tales and legends are an important part of Hohler's work. The title of his collection *Es war einmal ein Igel* (*Once there was a hedgehog*, 2011) already refers to fairy tales. But the beginning, at least for the adult reader, does not only mean a conclusion about the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm, but also refers to a possible tradition: Christian Morgenstern, Joachim Ringelnatz and Bertolt Brecht also chose the beginning "Once upon a time" in their poems.

Once upon a time there was a gnu  
That buys a shoe.  
The shoe was too small for him.  
It gave it to a pig.  
The pig says: Thank you very much. And puts him in the closet.  
He would rather have four shoes  
But it doesn't talk about it.  
(Hohler 2011, p. 10, rough translation)

Hohler's poems have an ending rhyme and live from repetitions. The stanzaic form varies, the length varies between two and five verses. The structure of the poems is identical: according to the initial formula, the object or living being is introduced, followed by an incident that ends in a witty, quirky punch line. His poems are dominated by animals who are confronted with different and for them contradictory situations. Characteristic is the nonsense moment, which possibly irritates, takes up everyday situations and designs them in incompatible situations.

The English word nonsense literally means nonsense. Literary studies uses the term to approach a form of text in which the connections "are not based on wit, humour, comedy or irony, but on mere absurdity and illogicality. Connection of paradoxical ideas" (Wilpert 1989, p. 625). Stylistic devices include puns, imitations of sounds, or breakthroughs in reading expectations. Well-known representatives of nonsense poetry are Christian Morgenstern and Joachim Ringelnatz, and they are linked with Hohler's poetry. According to Kurt Franz, nonsense has long been an essential



element in children's poetry (<http://epub.uni-regensburg.de/257821|lubrl2888ocr.pdf>).

Hohler's poems initially demand no understanding from their readers; the focus is, among other things, on the sound of language and on playing with words. The poem *Es war einmal ein Gnu* (*Once upon a time there was a Gnu*) already quoted creates a paradoxical situation and contains what characterizes Hohler's poems in the collection: They are puns, the end rhymes seem to combine indiscriminately to form a story, and the joke lies above all in the last verse and, as will be shown, also in the illustration. But the poem also reveals courtesies and possibly questions patterns of behaviour.

Other poems describe problems or worries and at first seem to deal with them in a playful way.

Once upon a time there was a hat.  
He had no dad.  
He cried a hundred times.  
Now he doesn't care.  
(Hohler 2011, p. 40)

They are poems that children grasp in their wit, while adults sometimes truncate the accuracy and subject matter. One review says that the adult reader needs a "nanosecond for head processing program" (Lövenberg 2011). However, while in the poetry collection *Es war einmal ein Igel* nonsense dominates, readers encounter dogs without mouths and lakes in love, his poetry for adults is more serious and far more critical, without losing its humorous tone.

In his poems for adults, however, Hohler works more with irony and sarcasm, which are not always accessible to the child reader.

The poems from the collection *Vom richtigen Gebrauch der Zeit* (*The Right Use of Time*, 2006) will serve as an example. The request to the cameraman says:

Could you  
cameraman  
Next time  
if you film the hunger  
and zoom in on the flies  
on the eyes of the Ethiopian child  
could you then  
lower your camera  
and instead  
drive the flies away?  
Thank you  
(Hohler 2006, p. 15, rough translation)

Here Hohler presents himself as a precise observer of his environment. The poem, written in the you-form, directly criticises the behaviour of television people, poses a

supposedly simple question and thus inspires reflection. It is an examination of the media and the form of reporting.

Hohler uses a simple language in his poetry for both children and adults, but nonsense and playing with words dominate in his children's literary poems, while his poems for adults are socially and socially critical and full of irony. Linguistically, Hohler takes both target groups seriously, while his thematic focus is different. The children's poetry, however, reveals other special features of the author. On the one hand some of the poems from the poetry collection can be classified in the tradition of animal poems, on the other hand it takes the beginning of the fairy tale, which children are probably familiar with. Animal poems, but also animal stories look back on a long tradition. Bamberger and Haas even see "one of the most important genres of the youth book" in the "Animal Book" (Haas 1996, p. 1), but exclude the animal poem, and also a look at the database of youth literature of the Frankfurt Youth Book Institute shows that keywords such as animal lyricism or animal poetry have been little researched. This may come as a surprise because animal poems have already been included in the *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*-collection (see also Payrhuber 2015) and animal poems also enjoy great popularity in everyday school life. In his collection, Franz Hohler uses animal poems from different traditions, and it is above all Brecht's children's poems that can serve as pretexts in addition to the aforementioned influence of the Ringelnatz and Morgenstern:

Two ants lived in Hamburg,  
 who wanted to go to Australia.  
 Near Altona, on the Chaussee,  
 their legs hurt,  
 and there they wisely renounced  
 then to the last part of the journey.  
 (Ringelnatz 1933, p. 32, rough translation)

Roland Stark emphasizes that "Ringelnatz, like „no other German writer of the 20th century [...] dominated the nonsense verse]" (Stark 2001, p. 1), is thus tying to old traditions and modernizing them. Similar to Hohler, he creates a contradictory situation, showing ants who have taken on a task. Ants who embody diligence and work have not failed in the poem, but their abandonment is accepted as "wise". In the figurative sense, the poem can also be seen as an invitation not to stubbornly push things forward, but also to admit failure.

Hohler's poems from the collection *Once upon a time there was a hedgehog* follow this strand on the one hand, but on the other hand there are also signs of proximity to Brecht's animal verses. Bertolt Brecht wrote poems for children in the 1920s.

According to Kaulen, these are mainly parodies of older literary originals (Kaulen 1994, p.27). His children's songs were written between 1934 and 1937 and were intended for private use. In his children's songs - *Lieder für Steff* he wrote 14 animal verses in which eagles, ravens, hedgehogs, woodlogs, dogs, pigs, chickens, camels, horses, elephants, mice, eels, goats and snakes cavort and are integrated into the political context of the 1930s.

The animal figures reflect social conditions and are presented to readers in encrypted form. It is known from research that the animal verses for his son Stefan (born 1924) and thus "for the education of the 'proletarian mother'" (Knopf 1996, p. 97) were gedacht. Brecht's children's songs can also be attempts "to respond to the children, but also to make sure of them, by initiating them into the knowledge of reality that induced the parents to flee to foreign lands" (cf. Knopf 1996, p. 97).

Therefore, Brecht naturally draws on the themes that he also uses in his other works. Brecht's poems thus aim to enlighten and comment on the political situation. They adapt themselves linguistically to the childlike addressees. His verses begin with the familiar opening formula "Once upon a time", which Hohler also uses in his poems. In both poetry collections, the introduction creates a unity between the individual poems. The words "Once upon a time" are to be understood parodistically, at least in Brecht's poems, just as Ringelnatz uses them in his poems.

Hohler's poems, on the other hand, are more interested in language, in playing with language and nonsense. This is illustrated by two poems.

Once upon a time there was a hedgehog  
 He suddenly grew wings.  
 He flew, you hardly believe it  
 On a tree.  
 There he jumps up and down and sings the most beautiful songs.  
 Only in the morning when he wakes up. There he feels his thorns.  
 (Hohler 2011, p. 20, rough translation)

Once upon a time there was a hedgehog  
 He fell into a crucible.  
 With rancid salad oil and  
 It softened the spines.  
 Then he entered the League of Nations.  
 From a blind tiger  
 He was then passed around as a converted warrior.  
 (Brecht 1967, p. 508, rough translation)

According to Kaulen, Brecht's animal poems are reminiscent of the versfables of the Enlightenment, which [narrate] exemplary events in "model-like shortening in order to initiate processes of cognition in the reader" (cf. Kaulen 2001, p. 268). Brecht's poem can be read as a pacifist poem on the one hand, but also as a critical view of the League of Nations on the other. The hedgehog's spines are involuntarily oiled, he no longer appears dangerous and joins the League of Nations in order to be protected. Here he is cared for by a blind tiger who also needs the protection of the League of Nations and who introduces the hedgehog as a "converted warrior". But the hedgehog has not voluntarily become a pacifist. Brecht uses a simple expression in his poems to draw attention to complex situations and to create a problem awareness.

Hohler's poem of the hedgehog plays on different levels with the meaning of the spines, which can also have sexual connotations. The child reader laughs at the paradoxical situation of the singing hedgehog, who may be pricked by pine needles in

the morning, while the adult reader discovers a meta-level that is not common in children's literary texts. Hohler's poems play with contrasts, tell the contradictory and describe absurd situations. The focus is on linguistic design. He presents his readers with something that can be done with language and focuses not on teaching, but on creativity.

But: Kaulen rightly points out that Brecht's animal verses should not be reduced "one-sidedly to their didactic and didactic tendencies" (Kaulen 2001, p. 268). In addition to political teaching poems, Brecht also writes nonsense verses, which are characterized above all by the joy of language and the deconstruction of an everyday order (cf. Kaulen 2001, p. 268). These include, among others:

Once upon a time there was a pig  
 It only had one leg.  
 Once it was in a hurry  
 And then it slipped on the back.  
 Into the violet bed:  
 It was a right pig.  
 (Brecht 1962 p. 509, rough translation)

In other words, both Brecht and Hohler take on situations in their poems that were long considered taboo in children's literature, such as the hedgehog waking up in the morning, the pig drinking red wine or the fart that was too short. Hohler, however, does not dispense with these themes; she presents them differently to child readers and makes it possible for them to understand the text differently from adult readers. Brecht's poems also show an honourable tendency.

Hohler wants to tell "about life as a whole" and encourage readers to play the language:

I am happy when I can support their imagination or creativity. I always get stories written by children in my children's stories. Entire school classes send me stories. Also on the poems. And the children say: We can do that too. And I almost envy them. An 8-year-old sent me a verse once: Once upon a time there was a raven who had a gift. He could fly backwards, even lying down. For me, these are dream experiences when you see that you get something going with your readers. And not admiration or reverence, but my own creativity. And that they say: Come, we can do that too. Now we make a brittle story and then we send it to him' and I have to read it and answer it. (Wegmann 2014)

Such statements document how readers work with his texts, implement them creatively and understand the play with sounds. But that's not all: Hohler attaches great importance to linguistic accuracy and repeatedly mocks colloquial language as in the poem *Sprachlicher Rückstand (Linguistic Backwardness)*:

Still  
 we call  
 what's happening in the morning

the sun rises  
 although we know since Copernicus  
 the sun stays still  
 and  
 the world's coming to an end.  
 (Hohler 2000/2015, p. 143, rough translation)

But his poems show even more in the context of the questions of intertextuality: they enter into an "open" discourse with Brecht and Ringelnatz (cf. Payrhuber 2012), for "the "simple" children's poem is not self-contained, but is also determined by what was written before it and has flowed into it consciously or unconsciously" (ibid., p. 77). But it is not only Bertolt Brecht who can be regarded as a model for Hohler's childlike lyrical work. He also takes up the Swiss saga in his poems. Fairies appear in his poems, but seemingly without a deeper meaning, if they say so:

Once upon a time there was a lake  
 who loved a fairy.  
 He always liked her better  
 He ended up slopping over.  
 (Hohler 2011, p. 13, rough translation)

Unlike his poems for adults, however, Hohler's children's poetry must be perceived in conjunction with the illustrations, as poems for children are usually illustrated. Gelberg pointed out in 2005 that the connection between images and lyrical language as well as colours and language had been largely ignored in research so far (cf. Gelberg 2005). In current research, Franz-Iosef Payrhuber examines the significance of illustrations in selected anthologies and thus opens up a new approach to poetry for children. Illustrations have different functions in picture and children's books:

- 1) Symmetrical relationship: text and image convey approximately the same information.
2. complementary relationship: text and image complement each other "by filling mutual spaces".
3. enrichment: information is acquired by the other sign system.
4. counterpoint: picture and writing contain different information, tell a story together.
5. contradiction: information in picture and text are mutually exclusive (according to Staiger 2014, p. 19 f.).

The illustrations by Kathrin Schärer in Hohler's collection *Es war einmal ein Igel* (*Once there was hedgehog*) are also characterised by blank spaces and thus complement the text.

The illustration to the already circulated poem *Es war einmal ein Igel* shows a hedgehog sitting between two birds and injuring them with his spines. The facial expression of the birds makes their pain clear and thus takes up another reading of the text. Image and text thus contain different information and set different

emphases. However, the ambiguity of the poem is removed, because now one concentrates only on birds and hedgehogs. The information is extended - the hedgehog can be seen between the two birds - on the one hand, and shortened on the other, since the reader is offered a meaning that is, however, opposite to the end of the poem. I.e. text and illustration work with contradictions.

The following poem, on the other hand, shows an illustration that adds a moment to the text that is not mentioned in the poem.

Once upon a time there was a fish  
He was sitting at my table.

And panted through the gills.  
Until I pulled myself together

And threw it quickly back into the water.  
Now he's feeling better again.  
(Hohler 2011, p. 16, rough translation)

The drawing shows, however, a carp which is not lying at the table but on it and is to be eaten. He looks anxious, and thus the illustration reinforces and focuses on the situation told in the poem. It provides a reading and supplements the poem, because at least the text leaves it open why the fish is sitting at the table. Text and illustration thus provide different information and complement each other to form a story.

The drawings in the volume always take up individual passages from the text, illustrating, supplementing, commenting on and extending the conclusion. They provide new perspectives on what is happening, and the tension that arises from text and illustration in turn offers new reasons for speech and thought.

But Hohler not only makes use of intertextual aspects in his lyrical texts, but also in his prose. His picture book *If I had a Wish* (2000), illustrated by Rotraut Susanne Berner, takes up fairy tale elements. The picture book tells the story of the girl Barbara, who is full of self-doubt.

She thinks she can't do anything that is important: "She couldn't count well, she couldn't read well, she couldn't write well." (Hohler 2000, p. 6)

Again and again she thinks the saying "If I could wish for something" (Hohler 2000, p. 6) and thinks about what she would wish for. Then a fairy actually shows up and Barbara is so excited that she wants the wrong thing three times. Nevertheless, Barbara changes and it remains open whether it is the objects that help her to a new self. Similar to his poems, Franz Hohler also picks up familiar motifs in his picture book and partly reverses them. His play with language and his penchant for nonsense also characterise the picture book. In his short prose, Hohler also deals with different genres, varies them and offers his childish readers innovative possibilities. In *The Three Sons*, the question of winners and losers is taken up. The narrator complains that in fairy tales it is always the third child who is rewarded. Therefore, the fairy tale *The Three Sons* is a text in which the first and second born win. Again and again Hohler plays with fairy tale elements, reverses them and even renounces the usual

happy ending. Here, too, there are signs of a certain nonsense character and the play with language that already characterise Hohler's poems.

## Conclusion: Writing for Children - Writing for Adults

If you look at Hohler's varied work, you can see that there are differences between poems for adults and for children, but also similarities: The differences can be found above all in the repertoire of figures, especially in his prose, and in the subject matter.

The staff differs in Hohler's work. In his short stories for adults, they are "pseudokauzige Männer" (Wegmann 2014), tyrannical children or married men. In his stories for children, however, Hohler tells of giants, spaghetti women, animals, gardeners, and so on. Some of them are fantastic worlds which he designs and which describe another world. Thematically, his poems for adults are socially critical and take up political/social aspects that are missing at least in the collection *Once there was Hedgehog*.

In his children's literary work, Franz Hohler leaves children's readers room for imagination and their own ideas without a direct pedagogical index finger. His poems and stories are not socialisation literature, but are above all intended to arouse interest in language and the play with language. This is where the common ground lies in writing, because Hohler takes both groups of readers seriously. In his texts for adults Hohler works with satirical elements and exposes social grievances; in his children's poetry it is nonsense and contradiction. In his poems, Hohler picks up on what children might be familiar with and takes up their love and fun in puns. All in all, it can be said that Hohler operates quite naturally with figures from the world of fairy tales, legends and myths and shows them in situations that contradict the actual perception. His poems are anchored in various traditions and intertextuality is an integral part of his children's literary work, which, however, is likely to be recognised above all by adult readers. His texts are thus addressed several times. At the same time Hohler takes all his readers seriously and can be described as a crosswriter.

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### 3.2 "When I write for children, I don't wear overalls." – Franz Hohler in conversation with Ute Wegmann

[https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/kabarettist-und-schriftsteller-franz-hohler-wenn-ich-fuer.1202.de.html?dram:article\\_id=412691](https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/kabarettist-und-schriftsteller-franz-hohler-wenn-ich-fuer.1202.de.html?dram:article_id=412691) (accessed 20/01/21)

The Swiss cabaret artist and author Franz Hohler began writing texts not only for adults, but also for children as early as the end of the 1970s. When he writes for children, he avoids foreign words. But in the Deutschlandfunk Hohler said that he was not in the mood for "cute verses for the limited little ones".

*Ute Wegmann: Whoever did not recognize him immediately, my guest comes from Switzerland: I warmly welcome Franz Hohler, cabaret artist, writer, poet, narrator for young people, narrator for all people.*

*Born on 1 March 1943 in Biel, he grew up in Olten, graduated from high school in Aarau, studied German and Romance languages in Zurich, albeit not to the bitter end - how much of a world did you already know that you wanted to become a cabaret artist so young?*

Hohler: Actually, I hadn't got to know much of the world by then. The decision to leave university was connected with getting to know more of the world. I grew up as the son of a couple of teachers who had strong cultural interests, my father was very much interested in literature, he played the theatre. As a little toddler I was allowed to go on stage, in the Dramatische Gesellschaft Olten, where I played the son of the Valiant Little Tailor. My father was the Valiant Little Tailor. I grew up normal, there were no bigger journeys. And I had the feeling at university that I had to do too many things that I didn't want to do. I always had the desire to do something of my own and to go out into the world with it.

*Wegmann: You have won many prizes, performed 14 solo programmes on the cabaret stage alone, achieved many successes in the various fields, but once in*

*your life you were unfit for service: you did not have to go to the military. Was that a gift?*

Hohler: It was for me. If you had to fill out the form when you were enlisted, you could indicate which type of weapon you would like to go to. I wasn't ready to refuse service, but I applied to the ambulance, although I have some difficulty seeing blood. But as a child I had a serious illness, the origin of which was never really clarified, and I received a certificate from the doctors who had treated me in the children's hospital: It was probably more careful not to bring me into contact with rifle, fat and other military substances, otherwise I could have become a serious case for military insurance. That was the gift to me. Yes!

*Wegmann: Now I have said that you were born in 1943. The 1960s, especially 1968, which marks its 50th anniversary this year, the rebellion against silence about the Nazi past, the rebellion against old-fashioned learning content at universities, against the Vietnam War and nuclear armament - all this was a big topic in Germany, how did you experience the time of the student revolts in Switzerland?*

Hohler: It all spread to Switzerland too. I think it was a movement, it was a wave of globalisation. There were strong protests in France as well. Always for different motives, but the common denominator was the unease about what was then. So in Switzerland one still lived in the times of the so-called intellectual national defence with a very strict world view. The enemy image of National Socialism was seamlessly replaced by the enemy image of Communism. One of our best-known cabaret artists made a trip to China at that time and was immediately punished by the cancellation of guest performances, his radio show was also cancelled. And not to forget: In Switzerland there was no right to vote for women, which in retrospect is a monstrosity. Also the whole marriage law. A woman was not allowed to have her own bank account or work without her husband's signature. If you tell young women that today, they hardly believe it.

*Wegmann: Has the young Franz Hohler also been on the street?*

Hohler: Yes, I was also on the street - I was once at a big demo. I have the feeling that the restlessness of the youth back then was looking for motives. There was also a great lack of understanding in Switzerland at that time about what the Swiss youth had to protest. You could understand the Germans, they had the old Nazis, who held high offices everywhere. But what is wrong with us? At the station bridge there was a makeshift where the old department store, the Globus, was, because it had been rebuilt at the original place, that was called the Globus makeshift, and there, when the Globus went to its place of origin, a youth centre was to be built there. There was a big demonstration, I was there too. You were splashed by the water cannons of the brave police, I swivelled a rose and sang the song: "L'importance est la rose". The

rose was washed down violently, and so was I. And the Zurich police commander stood on a balcony of the restaurant "Du Nord" and shouted at us: Please dissolve, so please dissolve! And this request already seemed very absurd to me back then. For me it was a linguistic symbol for the contrast between old and young.

*Wegmann: I'm just trying to remember that women's suffrage was only introduced at the end of the 1970s.*

Hohler: At the beginning of the 70s, I have to say in honour of the Swiss men. 1971, but to a certain extent you are still right, because cantonal electoral law was only introduced in the canton of Appenzell in 1991.

A novel is a park

*Wegmann: More than 20 books have been published, with poems or short stories, but also novels. Most recently the volume of poems "Alt?" and the novel "Das Päckchen". What appeals to you about the short form? What about the long one?*

Hohler: The short form is like a spotlight that highlights a motif from the semi-darkness, describes this motif and omits everything around it. This is a form that has always appealed to me. Long writing, writing a novel, means illuminating a larger landscape if we stick to the image of the spotlight. Or you could also say that a novel is a park in which you invite your readers to take a walk, sit down on the small bench among these bushes or trees, admire the view, meet people who come unexpectedly along the way. And the short story, it would just linger on the bench where someone sits and someone else comes along and it comes to an encounter. Both are very attractive forms for me. When a motif comes to my mind, I think to myself: Is it a motif for a short story or is it at best a motif for a long story? And I don't have that many motifs for a long story.

*Wegmann: We know about the importance of editing, to leave the importance of something behind, to reconsider. Does that have the same amount of work with the short and the long form? You rarely have something like a first draft.*

Hohler: I actually often have a first draft

*Wegmann: Then I didn't say anything.*

Hohler: But when the first draft arrives, I always print it out. I print out every page, even a novel, then I look at it until I know every word personally and can say it: That's how it has to be, that's how I want it to be, that's how I think it's coherent. And that's the same process with a short story as with a novel.

No cute verses for the poor limited little ones

*Wegmann: Very early on, at the end of the 1970s, you wrote your first children's story, you even had a series on the Swiss children's television. This was followed by the "Tschipo" series, then story volumes such as "Der Riese und die Erdbeerkonfitüre", "Die Spaghettifrau", much more and finally "Es war einmal ein Igel", poems illustrated by Katrin Schärer. When I read your stories or poems for children, I hardly see any difference in your attitude compared to the adult stories.*

Hohler: Let's put it this way: When I write for children, I don't wear overalls. Instead, I sit down in the same clothes. The only thing I like to think about is that I don't overburden them with vocabulary. When I write for adults, I don't take any account of comprehensibility, for children I make sure that I have few foreign words with me, or so that I think they can ask their parents, because I don't want to underchallenge them either, and I don't want to make cute verses for the poor limited little ones, but those that work. The search for the simple expression, which should not be banal or trivial, is something interesting. In my large story collection "The Great Book", there are 90 stories in it and at least a third of them I didn't originally write for children. But I have noticed that children enjoy it. And then I sometimes see if I could simplify them. There are also several creation stories from me.

*Wegmann: The back and forth stories definitely belongs to the short form - "Aller Anfang" (All Beginning) of the titles - written in alternation with the wonderful Swiss writer Jürg Schubiger, who died in 2014. How did your writing together look like?*

Hohler: Well, we knew each other since our student days, he was older. He struck me as one of the few people who knew why they were studying. Most of them did it just like that. So did I. This became a friendship. We followed each other's work. He actually studied in order to later take over his father's educational publishing house with an academic degree, but he also always wrote. We always read our stories to each other, he also visited my stage programmes. And we made our remarks, each of us also tolerated the criticism of the other. And one day the idea came, and it came from Jürg, that we could write stories that would shake hands. I write a story, and you answer with a motif that you see in my story. And I answer again with a motif from your answer story and so there should be a literary chain. That's how the back and forth stories came about. Later we also did a radio play. With the same method. And then the creation stories "All Beginning": The back and forth stories were stories for adults, the creation stories for children. Or they still are.

*Wegmann: You both ask the question about the origin of the world. Was there a big bang or a magician, a box of peas or a god? What does Franz Hohler believe in?*

Hohler: Yes, if you really ask me. I am an agnostic. I don't know, that's why I don't believe either. For me, creation is one of the great mysteries of this world. I cannot

explain it to myself. Even if I consider that balance, that nature constantly strives for, all the subtleties of creation, then I actually get dizzy.

Actually, I'm more interested in the things I don't know

*Wegmann: Is this dizziness perhaps the view that you make possible for us again and again through your stories of reality? The gaze, which is always also oblique, cheerful, absurd, sometimes even evil?*

Hohler: Actually, I'm more interested in the things I don't know than in the things I know. I also think stories come more out of the curiosity to explore something unknown or to tell an aspect that you think is worth telling, that perhaps doesn't correspond to the usual view and experience. The invention, the fantasy, it belongs to the feeling of becoming dizzy.

*Wegmann: You'll also find a lot of amusing and informative stuff on Franz Hohler's website [www.franzhohler.ch](http://www.franzhohler.ch), one of the funniest websites I've ever seen: black and white, minimalist to zero design, depressive photo booth pictures and the worst reviews are gathered there, until at some point you approach something positive after all. How does Franz Hohler deal with criticism?*

Hohler: Yes, well, by always being curious as to whether there's any bad criticism, and then I put it on the website. This is a game with the critics and as a counterpole to websites where there are always only the best critiques, they then become unbelievable at some point. But of course one rather has good critiques than bad ones, that applies to me as well. But the criticism with which I can do something, it should not demand something from me, which I cannot do, but it should start with what I can do, what my field is. My wife is a very good critic and also a connoisseur, who knows what can be asked of me. That is what I call constructive criticism, which challenges me. Jürg Schubiger and I also criticized ourselves because everyone knew each other's strengths and weaknesses.

*Wegmann: Many famous artists have contributed pictures to your stories: Katrin Schärer, Klaus Ensikat, Jacky Gleich, "Das große Buch" by Nikolaus Heidelberg. "All beginnings" by Jutta Bauer. Is it important that the illustrator has a kind of affinity with you, shares your humor, shares your view of the world? Or what is the prerequisite for a successful cooperation?*

Hohler: I do believe that someone who illustrates my stories, who has to enjoy them, has to be happy to do so. And that also means that he or she has a similar sense of humour, irony, playfulness or the lightness of the text. A good illustration doesn't illustrate, but extends the text.

"I open the coat to the universe"

*Wegmann: Your last volume of poetry is called "Alt? Poems that deal with growing old, with farewells, with death. The poem that gives the title is very long: "And why does the dark suit - in the wardrobe - no longer want to move to the back? Or: "Will the energy-saving lamp that you screw into the toilet that lasts 10,000 hours last longer than you? - "... what do times matter to you that you will hardly live to see?", but then the granddaughter's gaze and the turning point. Here we get to know a very thoughtful, not so sharp, weird, funny Franz Hohler.*

Hohler: That's a part of me too. Even the cheerful people are not always cheerful. I like to write about the whole state of being, i.e. "about the swing of life that oscillates between laughing and crying", that's what Morgenstern wrote.

*Wegmann: The Austrian writer Heimito von Doderer says: "You have to pull the cloak of concrete activity tighter around your shoulders in old age in order to survive the approaching cold of space". How does Franz Hohler prepare himself for old age?*

Hohler: I open my coat to the universe, I don't even want to protect myself from what is coming, from what is about to happen. I think that every day you live is worth living, I am happy as long as you can get up without immediately buckling. I am also happy about the weather. When I sit inside as I do today, and I see the wind driving the snowflakes horizontally through the Gugelstrasse, where I live. Then I am happy about it. But of course you are surrounded by goodbye, the dark suit never moves far back. And every farewell that comes up to you reminds you of your own farewell. I've been dealing with death since my youth. There is an old poem I wrote when I was 20, "Signal".

Auf der Fluh  
steht ein Mann  
schwingt eine Fackel  
hin und her  
dass die Nacht sich erhellt  
mit Funken von Rot.  
Die Fackel bin ich  
der sie schwingt, ist der Tod.

(On the rock  
stands a man  
swings a torch  
back and forth

so that the night may light up  
with sparks of red.  
The torch that's me  
the one who swings it is death.)

*Wegmann: Read us another poem from a new children's poetry volume, because a new book with illustrations by Katrin Schärer will be published in autumn.*

Ein Elefant im Zoo von Brüssel  
Hat einen furchtbar langen Rüssel.  
Er holt in Rom Kastanien und Nüsse in Albanien.“

(An elephant in the Brussels Zoo  
Has an awfully long trunk.  
He fetches chestnuts in Rome and nuts in Albania.)

*Wegmann: These will mainly be animal poems.*

Hohler: Yes, exactly, under the title: "A white ermine that wanted to go to Berlin".

### 3.3. Telling the unlikely in a likely way - Encounter with Franz Hohler

Source: Magazin Buch&Maus, No. 3/2015, S. 19-20

<https://www.sikjm.ch/publikationen/buchundmaus/>

This autumn, Franz Hohler presents a new children's book, „Die Nacht des Kometen“ (The night of the comet). In this conversation he explains why in his Bethlehem, a groundhog is accompanying the heavenly hosts, what the alp means to him, and why he places dependable adults next to his child protagonists. By Elisabeth Eggenberger

*Your new children's book "The Night of the Comet" tells of the siblings Jona and Mona, who witness supernatural events during their holidays on a Swiss alp. One night, the "camel rock", on which they sit and observe a comet, comes alive and puts them through a time gap to Bethlehem, where they are in the stable when Jesus is born. Why is Franz Hohler now also writing a Christmas story?*

Franz Hohler: Why not? (laughs) When I started writing this story, I didn't know it was going to be a Christmas story. I wanted to write a story about a change of worlds because it's something I've always been interested in and I feel like it's close to a child's imagination. Children like to imagine that they are somewhere else or that they can leave this world through a time gate. And I have already played with this

motif in earlier stories, already in "Tschipo". So I already knew that Mona and Jona would go somewhere else. Then this comet motif came to my mind and from the comet motif the Christmas story.

*Like others of your texts the book lives on the balance between the fidelity to facts and the use of surrealism. In your Bethlehem people naturally speak Aramaic and at birth there is an umbilical cord and vomit. But the children can travel through time and rocks come to life. What would you like to create with this discrepancy?*

If you want to tell something unlikely, you should tell it as probable as possible - I think. This creates a friction surface with reality and leads to these irritating questions: What's the point of that? What is true now and what is not true? I like telling in a way that the waymarks, the milestones of this journey, are small question marks.

In the angel's choir a groundhog and a frog are singing along. Are such refractions a protection from too much kitsch?

Of course I wanted to alienate the story a little - on the one hand in order to make them a little less idyllic: In the Christmas story there is a danger that you might see difficulties of the birth too romantically. In today's world of experience they come along like refugees and have to "camp" in some absolutely inappropriate makeshift - I wanted to express that.

On the other hand it is also a game with the unsuitable. Well, an angel's choir is in itself a fantasy structure. But that it is then equipped with other elements - I enjoy describing it this way - and I think children might enjoy it too. Even when they see Kathrin Schärer's illustration and discover: "Oh, lue, da isch ja s Murmeli no!" (Oh, look, there's a groundhog here, too.)

*The religious meaning of Jesus' birth is not mentioned in the story, it is abandoned in favour of the amazement about the miracle of birth itself and about the historically strange world in which the children find themselves. Somewhat provocatively asked: Is this the Christmas story for the modern Swiss family - something supernatural, but rather without a Christian content?*

The story in the Bible is a legend itself, not a factual report. It is only in the Gospel of Luke, and there you can see that it is told as a story, that there is a narrator behind it who tells the story in this way. It is questionable whether people at that time were aware of this or the mother of Jesus - I don't even consider that to be certain and therefore not essential. Every child that comes into the world is God's son or God's daughter. Every birth is a miracle. Every child who is born brings a new world with him, just as Jesus brought a new world with him. In this respect the religious aspect is not so important to me - rather the play with the motive.



*But you assume that the story will be recognized?*

I almost expect it. By far not all children go to religious education today. On the other hand all children here in the canton Zurich from the first class on have "Religion und Kultur" (religion and culture). With my neighbour boy, who has just entered the second class, I can have a technical talk about Buddhism. But the religious message is probably no longer as formative as it was in my time, in any case. Less present than before.

At the same time, one of my most printed texts is a Christmas story. "Christmas as it really was" from the "Big Book", a game with the motifs of the Christmas story. Well, through the falsification I actually present what the original was supposed to be like. When I read it out, the children have a lot of fun with it. And in such a way that I mean, they know what I'm playing at...

*The alp seems to be "in" right now. Alp documentary films celebrate big successes, young city dwellers spend the summer herding cows and Heidi and Schellen-Ursli celebrate a comeback on the screen. Where is the fascination for this narrative world?*

For me, the alp is - not only today but has been for decades - an experience space that I have always loved very much. Why, that's not so easy to explain. Surely because of the proximity to the mountains - I am a mountaineer. You can't necessarily explain that either, because climbing mountains is relatively pointless: you climb up and then you go down again. But: our urban world gets more and more regulated - every shopping centre is set up according to the same rules. When you get in, first comes the perfumery and below is the food. Our life takes place more and more in artificial rooms. And the more cellars there are, the more diameter lines and station Löwenstrasse, the more you are in an artificial world. And in a world that is also digitally organized, with display boards, monitors and electronic cash registers.

The alp is - and this is perhaps why it is becoming more and more popular today - a counter-world. It is also a world of longing - only that the mobile phone doesn't work there (that's what I describe in the book). Every summer we're in such a place as well. When you want to make sure the SMS has been sent, you have to go to the small bridge in front because there is a dead spot in the back. Today we consider having no connection a privilege.

So the alp is a romantic retreat?

The romantic idea that you can do whatever you want on the alp is far from reality. On the - managed - alp other laws apply, but there are laws. That's being said in the book as well. The animal-like rocks have stories and the Senn (alpine dairyman) tells the family one; it's rather a little legend. From such alp legends we know how important it is that the laws of the alp or the mountain are being met. And who doesn't meet them can be treated terribly. So you have to watch out that you don't

romanticize them too much. But – let's say – these are analogous rules. That's why the alp is also a space of longing and a projection surface for us urban creatures.

*The wise, prophetic shepherd Samuel on the alp still lives in harmony with nature, knows the ancient legends and the millennial calendar. Isn't that a little clichéd?*

What is the difference between a cliché and an archetype? If Samuel is only a clichéd figure, he would not be a success. He does represent someone who has a stronger connection to nature and a stronger connection to the secrets of life - and for me he should do that. But of course: a pattern lurks everywhere.

*A comparison with the novella "Die Steinflut" is obvious. There, too, a child experiences the story, also it is pointed out that old legends and myths still have their justification today and humans should listen to nature more. But "Die Steinflut" ends badly, "Die Nacht des Kometen" very happily. Is this one of the differences in writing for children and adults?*

It is the case that children like to have happy ends. By the way, adults also like happy ends, the difference isn't really that big.

I probably wouldn't let a longer story for children end badly, but I have written smaller stories again and again, which actually have a hard ending. I have to say that I didn't originally write them for children but they ended up in my big book because I noticed that children are interested in them and that they like to read or hear them. "The giants in the parking garage" for example, a terrible story, or "The enterprising prince", that's a bad story and it doesn't end well at all. It is said that the prince beheads two women - one always hopes that these heads will somehow be put back on at the end with a little herb, in fairytale style, but that's not the case. And the moral is: "Sometimes a stupid remark is enough and you're done." Now you can say that you can't tell the children that, that's terrible. At the same time I think that this is also a preparation for the bad things in life. And whenever I hear a story from a guy in the subway who tells two boys they shouldn't smoke in there and is almost beaten to death, I think about my story again: "Sometimes a stupid remark is enough and you're done". There is also a truth in it, a cruel truth.

But: In principle, it's the case that I put more burdens on adults than on children, but the difference is not so fundamental.

*In "Die Nacht des Kometen" the narrator shares the feelings and thoughts of the adults, of Mona's and Jona's parents, with the child readers. What is the reflection behind this?*

I just gave these two kids parents, like I thought they would be smart parents for them now. (laughs) Or parents who go on holiday to such a place at all - not everyone would do that. Many would rather go swimming in Rimini or Greece than to such a place.

Perhaps this is the difference in my writing for children and adults: When I write for children, I'd like to put the child protagonists in an environment where they are not totally left alone. In the adult novel "Die Steinflut" I always stay with the child. There is no change of perspective. Everything is focalized through the eyes of Katharina, who has no reliable adults around her other than her grandmother, who is on her way to ruin in the end too, because she does not believe in the catastrophe that Katharina sees before her inner eye. In this novel there are only very few reliable adult characters. And the others, those who do not believe Katharina and do not trust her perception, those she loses – the whole family. In "Die Nacht des Kometen", this is different. Mona and Jona are still alone enough on their journey which they have to muddle through. But they have the safe haven which they can return to, and this gives them a ground for their actions.

#### **4. AWARDS (Selection)**

- 1978 Oldenburger Kinderbuchpreis (Childrens book award by the German city of Oldenburg)
- 1994 Swiss Children's Book Award
- 2000 Cultural Award of the City of Aarau (also for his children's book)
- 2005 Cultural Award of the City of Zurich (also for his children's book)
- 2011 "Heidelberger Leander", Award by the German city of Heidelberg for the book "There Once Was a Porcupine"
- 2013 Solothurner Literaturpreis, Cultural Award of the City of Solothurn for his oeuvre
- 2014 Johann-Peter-Hebel-Preis by the Ministry of Science, Baden-Württemberg

## 5. TEN IMPORTANT TITELS BY FRANZ HOHLER

### The Tschipo novels

*Tschipo* (1978), *Tschipo und die Pinguine* (*Tschipo and the Penguins*, 1985) and *Tschipo in der Steinzeit* (*Tschipo in the Stone Age*, 1995) are three novels for children that feature the same protagonist and basic concept: young Tschipo, whose intensive dreams often leave something behind the next morning, either in his bed or in his room, a scent, a pinecone, a chocolate bicycle or a live penguin.

### *Der Granitblock im Kino* (*The Block of Granite in the Cinema*, 1981)

This first collection of stories for children (with black-and-white drawings by Arthur Loosli) is an impressive testament to the close links between Hohler's literary works for children and those for adults: among the children's stories are works from two collections the author published for adults in the 1970s.<sup>7</sup> In these short stories and micro-stories, Hohler's most basic fortés are especially to the fore, his parable-like way with fantasy and his playful use of language. Although the basic idea of many of the stories gives them a truly absurd cast, their laconic and meticulous execution allows them to escape the shadow of pure absurdity and, as a result, provoke readers to laughter and thought in equal measures. At the same time, Hohler's language is at first glance entirely unobtrusive. Nevertheless, the very inconspicuous ordinariness of his language conceals a profundity that is revealed in the act of reading, whether to oneself or aloud. The stories tend to begin quite harmlessly, lulling readers into letting down their guard, at which point there comes a twist, a little linguistic detail, a stumbling-block – and readers find themselves laughing, marvelling, thinking or fantasizing. One might call it the Hohler method.

*Der Nachthafen* (*The Chamber Pot*, 1984) is a humorous tale of a boy who goes on an adventure with the help of a flying chamber pot and finds himself in a royal castle, where he is received as a king. The story's pièce de résistance is the fact that the chamber pot only takes on its magical function when it is used for its designated purpose. The boy must therefore literally “shit” (in Hohler's words) in fear into the chamber pot in order to gain its aid in an escape from a perilous situation. A fanciful contribution to a more relaxed discussion of a taboo topic.

### *Der Riese und die Erdbeerkonfitüre* (*The Giant and the Strawberry Jam*, 1993)

The second collection of stories for children, continues the tradition established by the first – although in this case the author wrote nearly all the stories in this volume quite deliberately for children. This is manifest principally in a significant increase in

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<sup>7</sup> From *Wegwerfgeschichten* („Disposable Stories”, 1974) and *Ein eigenartiger Tag* („A Peculiar Day”, 1979).

fairy-tale motifs made accessible to the sensibilities of a modern-day audience by the author's disruption of their original structure.

*Die Spaghettifrau* (*The Spaghetti Lady*, 1998) comprises newer stories, some of which are included in *Der grosse Zwerg ... und andere Geschichten* ("The Big Dwarf ... and Other Stories", 2003). Once again, it is this "imbrication of fantasy and dream, spook and reality triggered by irony"<sup>8</sup> that gives these stories their very special character. And as ever, Hohler is concerned with "individuality and the struggle against assimilation".

Rotraut Susanne Berner's illustrations for *Wenn ich mir etwas wünschen könnte* (*If I Had a Wish*, 2000) are in her unmistakable style. Her pictures are the ideal complement to Hohler's text, which this time is not so much about saving the world as it is about the solution to an everyday drama: little Barbara is not terribly self-confident. She isn't pretty, nor can she do maths, read or sing well, so she pins her hopes on a fairy who offers her three wishes. When the fairy does in fact materialize, Barbara is so excited she does not make the wish she had intended to. But although she has made the wrong wishes, they seem to work anyway, and Barbara's life begins to change imperceptibly – until one day she realizes how happy she is.

*Aller Anfang* (*The Beginning of Everything*, 2006, congenially illustrated by Jutta Bauer) offers a presentation of the complex aesthetic possibilities of the printed book in a manner that is as surprising as it is persuasive. In this book, Franz Hohler once again takes up the principle of "back and forth stories" devised with Jürg Schubiger (*Hin- und Hergeschichten*, published in 1986 by Nagel&Kimche and long out of print). Together, the two Swiss authors return to the origins of the world and of life to recreate the world anew over and over in a few sentences in just under three dozen stories. Children are thus able to discover the pleasure of creation myths – by continuing Hohler and Schubiger's accounts, or by inventing their own.

*Das grosse Buch* (*The Big Book*, 2009), finally, once again collects all of Hohler's stories together with the Heidelberg illustrations created for them. A fat volume that contains between its covers something very close to Hohler's life's work and presents the qualities of the children's book author in all of their facets. The Frankfurter Rundschau's assessment of the story collection is laconic and to the point in a way that must please the author: "These are fairy tales that are not set in a castle, but in a supermarket, among other places."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Sibylle Tamin, „Die Harke im Gras. (Der Granitblock im Kino)“, in Michael Bauer and Klaus Siblewski (eds.), Franz Hohler. Texte, Daten, Bilder. Luchterhand: Hamburg 1993, p. 136.

<sup>9</sup> Frankfurter Rundschau, 25.6.2009, literature/children's books.

Maya, in *Mayas Handtäschchen* (*Maya's Little Handbag*, 2008), has such a complicated last name that everyone simply calls her "Frau Maya". When one day she buys a small, yellowed oriental handbag instead of the oriental cookbook she had actually been looking for, her life changes. In the little handbag – which is soon followed by a second and a third – Maya finds a mirror, out of which an oriental woman peers back at her and offers her advice. From now on, Maya lives in another world half the time. Not only does she learn how to cook wonderful oriental food and sew splendid garments, she also embarks on a journey to a strange oriental land where she awakens a prince, Sleeping Beauty-like, from his slumber.

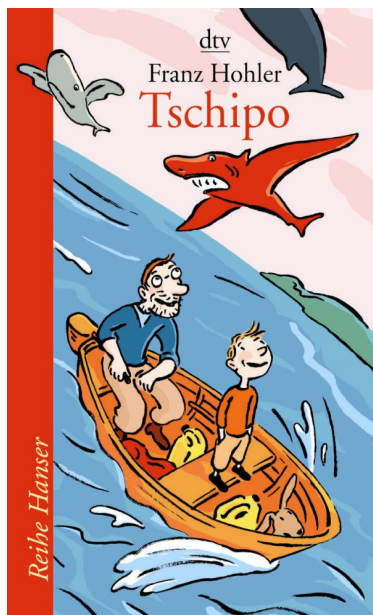
*Es war einmal ein Igel* (*Once There Was a Hedgehog*, 2011) is the fresh proof that Franz Hohler is the undisputed master of comic story-telling among children's book authors. There once was a porcupine, who suddenly grew wings ... There once was a whale, who slipped on a pail. This is how his rhyming stories begin, and if you want to know how they end, you'll find out after eight lines at the most.

Stories don't get any shorter than this. Franz Hohler's children's poems are little comic masterpieces, ideal goodnight stories or just for in-between, when there isn't much time for reading aloud. They have become standard texts in schools.

## 6. THE FIVE KEY BOOKS SUBMITTED TO THE JURY

6.1. *Tschipo*. TB dtv Reihe Hanser, 2006 (originally Hanser 1978).

ISBN 978-3-423-62293-6



Young Tschipo is a “transactive” dreamer: his intensive dreams often leave something behind the next morning, in his bed or in his room, a smell, a pinecone, a chocolate bicycle or a live penguin ...

6.2. *Wenn ich mir etwas wünschen könnte (If I Had a Wish)*.

Illustrations by Rotraut Susanne Berner. Munich: Hanser 2000, 32 p.

ISBN 978-3-446-19819-7



The fairy grants Barbara three wishes, and three times she chooses the wrong things. First the blue shoes that her mother refused to buy her, then a red ballpoint pen and finally a big, colourful parrot. How silly, what does she want with these things? But with the new shoes Barbara can run as fast as Erich, Anna can copy her homework because with the red pen she does not make any mistakes, and the parrot teaches the whole class to sing. In the end, Barbara has found friends and is happy at school. Sometimes even the wrong wishes turn out to be the right ones after all.

6.3. *Das grosse Buch* (*The Big Book*). Collected children's stories, with illustrations by Nikolaus Heidelbach. Munich: Hanser 2009, 320 p. / ISBN 978-3-446-23312-6



The world is full of riddles, each one offering material from which yarns can be spun. Franz Hohler is the unparalleled master of such storytelling. His secret is that he takes nothing at face value. He is not afraid of asking even the oddest questions, or of coming up with the most bizarre answers. This is just the way children respond to problems, and his stories will have them laughing long before they are able to read them on their own.

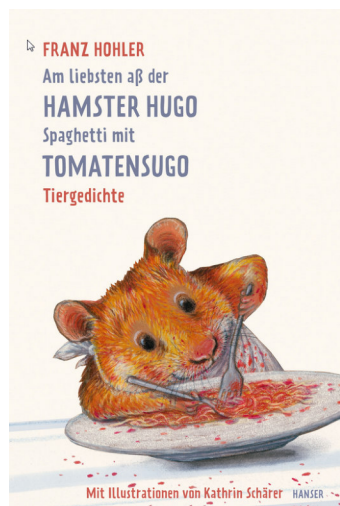
6.4. *Die Nacht des Kometen* (*Night of the Comet*). Illustrated by Kathrin Schärer. Munich: Hanser 2016, 96 p. ISBN 978-3-446-24927-1



Set high in the mountains, the beautiful valley is the most amazing adventure playground imaginable. Mona and Jona could spend forever playing by the stream, building cairns and trying to make out the shapes of animals in the rocks of the striking cliff faces. Here's a stone with two humps that looks like a camel the two of them could ride! But there's something even more exciting in store – the night when a comet will pass really close to the Earth. A legendary and mysterious night that Samuel the shepherd has told them all about. Still, what really happens that night is something even the most gifted storyteller couldn't possibly dream up. But then they do say that truth is stranger than fiction ...



6.5. Am liebsten aß der Hamster Hugo Spaghetti mit Tomatensugo.  
Tiergedichte („The Favourite Food of Hamster Hugo was Spaghetti with  
Tomato Sugo- Animal poems”). Illustrated by Kathrin Schärer. Munich:  
Hanser 2018, 64 p.  
ISBN 978-3-446-26055-9



Mini-stories that put you in a good mood and tell you about the particularities and secrets of animals. The story about the weakly tarantula, who has to improve stamina; about a traveling ermine on its way to Berlin, about a grey hipster wolf and his newest hobby golf, about a great love story yet untold between a fly and a goat, or about a deer caught in the rain, using Twitter to ease her pain. Franz Hohler has mastered the art of rhymed entertainment like no other. His animal poems are fun and spread so much joy.

## 7. REVIEWS OF THE FIVE KEY BOOKS

### 7.1. The World of Tschipo

Author: Gerda Wurzenberger

Source: <http://www.literaturschweiz.ch/de/Lesetipp/a947f97a16164605>

[accessed 21/01/20]

"He did not even notice that he was talking in another language, it only struck him that he was lying under a thick fur on a heap of foliage and that daylight did not come in through a window but through a hole in the rock."

Tschipo (1978), Tschipo und die Pinguine ("Tschipo and the Penguins", 1985) and Tschipo in der Steinzeit ("Tschipo in the Stone Age", 1995) are three novels for children that feature the same protagonist and basic concept: young Tschipo, whose intensive dreams often leave something behind the next morning, either in his bed or in his room, a scent, a pinecone, a chocolate bicycle or a live penguin. But Tschipo can also dream his way to the scene of his dream, in the first book to an island in the South Seas and in the third to the Stone Age. With his invention of the "transactive" dreamer Tschipo, Franz Hohler has opened some wonderful, fanciful perspectives.

Ever new accounts of unbelievable adventures become possible, a window is opened on ever new worlds, because dreams are not bound by the laws of reality. A tension both pleasurable and creative arises between the realistic level of the novels Tschipo's everyday surroundings, commentaries by the narrator that speak directly to the reader and the unpredictability of dream activities and their consequences. And this tension is heightened by the author's playful way with language, a language which is also aware that a different German is spoken in everyday life in German-speaking Switzerland (Tschipo's explicit homeland) – namely, Swiss-German.

## 7.2. If I had a Wish

**Author:** Helene Schär

**Source:**

<https://www.sikjm.ch/rezensionen/datenbank/?id=277&c=1&author=Franz%20Hohler> (accessed 18.1.19)

Barbara can do everything less well than the others, has neither friends nor is she beautiful. One night a fairy appears and gives her a wish. A pair of blue shoes! The next morning there are not the brown shoes in the box that the mother bought her the day before, but a pair of blue ones. With these Barbara can suddenly run fast, gets admiring looks and is even accompanied home. One night the fairy comes back. Barbara immediately knows that she wants a red ballpoint pen. The wish comes true and Barbara can suddenly write beautifully and correctly. When the fairy appears for the third time, Barbara wants a parrot. And lo and behold, the postman is standing with a parrot in front of her door in the morning. The mother is not enthusiastic. But the parrot sings many songs, and Barbara can suddenly sing much better at school. And because the parrot says "Good morning, beautiful ones" to the mother and Barbara every morning, the two have indeed become much more beautiful, and the mother has come to terms with the bird. - Following the fairy tale with the three wishes and many other fairy tale elements, Franz Hohler tells a modern story about a girl who gradually learns to be herself and to believe in herself. The story contains many subtly observed subtleties; the cheerful and colourful illustrations complement the text in an imaginative way and undoubtedly appeal to children.

## 7.3. The Big Book of Wish Fulfillment

**Author:** Felicitas von Lovenberg

**Source:** Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 14.03.2009, no. 62, p. 34

Author Franz Hohler and painter Nikolaus Heidelbach are a team beloved not only of children. Now at last, all of their stories and pictures are available in one volume.

[...] For each and every one of these 91 completely wonderful stories by Franz Hohler there is a picture by Heidelberg, sometimes two. Such abundance does not, of course, simply roll down from the Swiss Alps, in the country where Hohler lives, nor does it flow down the Rhine imperturbably from Heidelberg's studio in Cologne, but represents the interest and compound interest of a long relationship between the author and the painter. Many of the stories readers know from earlier collaborations now sport a new or additional illustration, and it is in keeping with the cost-benefit ratio of this fall's books, which is in any event a source of continual amazement, that reading the book feels like inserting a small coin into a gigantic candy machine, which begins to gurgle and crash mightily - before emitting, instead of one little biscuit, its entire store.

Not that Franz Hohler's stories ever have anything sickly-sweet about them: on the contrary, they are - more than anything else - surprising. There is no story by the 66-year-old Swiss author, not even half a page long, whose outcome is predictable, not one hackneyed sentence, not the least evidence of routine, habit or fatigue. Which is completely comprehensible, considering that in Hohler's stories everything is alive: the bathtub and the freezer compartment, the ticket machine and the spaghetti package. The fireplace has throat ache, the block of granite is bored, the salesman's clothes march out of his house without Mr Zogg in them, a handstand and a headstand tie the knot, a short-circuit and a megaphone make an announcement together, a high-pressure zone joins forces with a low-pressure zone to produce a mighty storm - and then there's the pencil sharpener affixed to a gymnasium for certain thought-provoking reasons. In addition there are all kinds of fairy-tale motifs, a particular specialty of Heidelberg's: there's the last prince, who becomes a house-husband, and the princess who becomes an apothecary, the mouse family that gives a concert during a state visit, the giant who cooks strawberry jam, and the brave little dog that finds its paradise. Many of Hohler's ideas are funny, some of them just strange, but they all attest to a philosophical cheerfulness and hope that captivate readers of all ages.

You can't even count all of the most original of the strange stories, the wittiest of the humorous ones, but the aetiology of the mountains of Switzerland (they came from Holland, as a trade for Alpine tulips) is pretty sensational, as is the poem "Weihnachten, wie es wirklich war" ("Christmas as it really was") or the fate of poor misunderstood Herr Beeli, who was so fond of keeping sheep. Of course, children, whose sense for possibility has not yet been stifled, have a better time with Hohler, are able to visit the little man in the syrup bottle or the lady from the spaghetti package and can lock animals back into the magazine out of which they have broken free. But Hohler also knows about the child within the adult who has himself gorged full of toys, or the old man for whom everything is inverted. Such lack of sense and

purpose gives rise to a magic, one that works reliably against considerations of plausibility and is therefore required more than once a day.

(...)

#### 7.4. Night of the Comet

**Author: Ariane Breyer**

**Source: DIE ZEIT Nr. 47/2015, 19. November 2015**

How recount a story we've heard so often that we almost feel we've experienced it ourselves? For example by asking the question how it would have been when we would have experienced it ourselves.

Franz Hohler, the great Swiss narrator and cabaret artist, begins his Christmas story far from the moment when everything goes on quite fantastic: during the summer holidays. Jonas and Mona spend their time with their parents in a small house in the Swiss mountains. How strange this valley is becomes quickly clear: Owl calls come from the interior of a cliff, which looks like an owl; the children have to interrupt their game on the camel rock because of a thunderstorm - but after the storm the blanket, which they have forgotten on their camel, is still quite dry: Jonas finds at the end of a rainbow a genuine Roman coin.

Fortunately Samuel, the alpine herdsman, understands the peculiarities of the area better than Jonas and Mona's parents. He assumes that all these phenomena have something to do with the comet, which shines particularly bright during these summer nights. Whenever the comet appeared in the past, he brought heat waves, floods and miseries with him, Samuel knows. But the father does not really believe in these stories.

This is the case with most adults who do not really want to believe what is actually obvious. Therefore the greatest miracles happen only to children - like time travels. And again Samuel knows: "Just as a wall can have cracks even the time has cracks, very small, fine cracks, crevices, and now and then such a time gap opens, and we are in another time or the other time is with us." The conditions for such a time trip could not be better than during the nights when the comet shines brightly. And in such nights it's just a camel jump into that very night when the most famous of all comets was shining.

Hohler tells the story of Christ's birth as a realistic adventure story. Instead of looking at comets on their rocks, Jonas and Mona suddenly ride on a real camel through the desert. At a gate to Bethlehem they meet Yussuf and the highly pregnant Mirjam. They stay with the couple in the next stable and assist in giving birth as best they can. A few ragged, flute-playing figures pass by, an angelic choir starts singing on the roof and finally, "three extraordinarily worthy men" pass by. Almost at the end

the camel is stolen, which has slipped with them through the time gap, but of course everything goes well.

Hohler arranges this best of all known stories from the perspective of two children, who are astonishingly well versed in foreign times thanks to their curiosity and their willingness to help. Though, they are not unprepared, either. That you have to say "salve" if you want to be led into a city guarded by Roman soldier, they already knew. They also pick up a few chunks of Aramaic. And with the coin Jonas had found with one can bribe a guard post if necessary.

Hohler plays with the absurdity that arises when the present and the time of Emperor Augustus overlap and things from the Swiss Alps suddenly appear in Judea. These fractures can also be found in the illustrations by Kathrin Schärer. Jonas and Mona are absolutely fond of helping. This is why the night of the comet is not a wild fantasy, but in the details even biblical. Except for the two children in their colorful anoraks. Their father doubts their legendary tale, despite all the evidence. The reader is quite certain, however, that everything must have happened as it is told in this book.

## 7.5. The favourite food of Hamster Hugo was Spaghetti with Tomato Sugo- Animal poems

**Author:** Doris Lanz

**Source:**

[https://www.kjmbefr.ch/rezensionsdatenbank?field\\_autor\\_value=Sch%C3%A4rer%2C%20Kathrin](https://www.kjmbefr.ch/rezensionsdatenbank?field_autor_value=Sch%C3%A4rer%2C%20Kathrin) (accessed 21/01/20)

A weak tarantula training with a dumbbell; an otter loving "Harry Potter"; a fly falling in love with a goat; a wolf who likes to play golf: These are likeable protagonists in Franz Hohler's new, self-encouraging children's verse. The animals - among them numerous birds - have special characteristics and preferences. They populate a fantasy world in which everything seems possible and many things are realistic and deeply human.

This book has undoubtedly been written and drawn with great pleasure. Reading and repeating the cryptic poems, written almost entirely in rhyming pairs, is a pleasure, and looking at Kathrin Schärer's mischievous animals with their beautiful facial expressions is a pleasure. Especially beautiful are the last two poems, in which a huge ear hears the universe panting and the mountains are still cliffs of a sea inhabited by corals, shells and fish. Masterful!

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- Axel Scheffler, Julia Donaldson: *Der Gruffalo*. Schwyzerdütsch von Franz Hohler. Weinheim: Beltz & Gelberg 2013

### 8.3. Catalogue

- Exhibition „Lieber Franz Hohler. Ein Autor schreibt für Kinder – Kinder schreiben einem Autor. SIKJM: Zurich 20006