



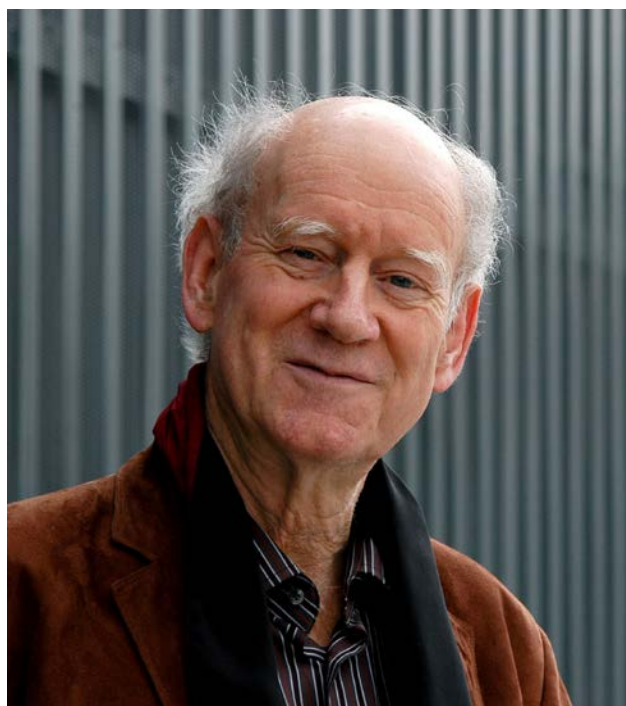
Schweizerisches Institut für  
Kinder- und Jugendmedien

## FRANZ HOHLER

NOMINATED FOR THE  
HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN MEDAL 2018

CATEGORY AUTHOR

BY THE SWISS SECTION OF IBBY



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### 1. [Franz Hohler in brief](#)

- 1943 Born in Biel. His parents are teachers.
- 1947 Family moves to Olten.
- 1959 The Oltner Tagblatt prints his first story.
- 1963 Earns school-leaving certificate in Aarau. Goes on to study 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. The 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 Hohlers contribution to the literature for young people

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 Zurich-based 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.

## 3. Franz Hohlers literary work for children

Franz Hohler is not an ordinary storyteller but one, who is as polyvalent as he is at home in all media: he 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.

Before he had even entered school, reading was a central occupation, and Hohler was inspired by what was read to him, and what he read himself, to create his own stories. As a seven-year-old Hohler wrote stories in the style of Wilhelm Busch, which, he recounts, he gave his parents as Christmas gifts. While still at high school he wrote feature pieces and reviews for a daily newspaper, performed in school theatrical presentations and his first variety programme, and took up playing the cello (the instrument would later play a central role in his cabaret performances). After earning his schoolleaving certificate in 1963 he began studies in German and Romance languages at the University of Zurich, but the power of stories and his urge to "tell" them to an audience were stronger. Following a first and highly successful solo variety show, Hohler left the university to concentrate entirely on storytelling, as an author and cabaret performer.

It was 1965. Since then, in addition to writing and performing a total of fourteen solo variety programmes, Hohler has published an impressive number of books (mainly short and micro-stories, some of which have also appeared as audiobooks), plays (produced in various theatres in Switzerland and Germany) and much more besides. In 1973 Hohler also began producing shows on Swiss television together with a colleague (Rene Quellet) under the title "Franz und Rene" – the start of a series of 47 shows and an explicit relationship with children as an audience, and the definitive birth of Franz Hohler as an author for children and young people.

## Grownup stories for children, childish stories for grownups

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 of 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 in one form or another, 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. What are the consequences? 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 chamberpot 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>

## Poems for children

Franz Hohler has also written poems for children throughout his career, some of them in Swiss dialect. *Es war einmal ein Igel* (“Once There Was a Hedgehog”, 2011), lovingly provided with extraordinarily fascinating illustrations by Kathrin Schärer, is all about rhyme. Proceeding from a formula as found in many versions of a children's ditty popular in the German-speaking world, one that begins “Es war einmal ein Mann, der hatte einen Schwamm” (“Once there was a man who had a sponge”), Hohler amuses himself by simply rhyming away. At least, that's how it seems. But of course Hohler doesn't stop at “man”: he packs everything into his verse he can see and think of, and what appears to be unpremeditated, the first thing that comes into his head, quickly takes on a life of its own. Caesurae become visible in Hohler's apparently seamless verses, and the reader must jump ahead. In laughter or amazement.

## 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

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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.

poetic worlds, they also find themselves unexpectedly confronted by their own fantasy. But Hohler never loses sight of the circumstances of his readers' present-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.

#### 4. List of awards (Selection)

- 1978 Oldenburger Kinderbuchpreis (Childrens book award by the German city of Oldenburg)
- 1994 Swiss Childrens Book Award
- 2000 Cultural Award of the City of Aarau (also for his childrens book)
- 2005 Cultural Award of the City of Zurich (also for his childrens 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 titles 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, Franz 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

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

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 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 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”.

*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>

*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.

Three picture books with texts by Hohler feature the punchily humorous illustrations of Werner Maurer aimed clear-sightedly at their young readership (the drawings in “Dr. Parkplatz” – “Dr Parking Space” – are also by Maurer):

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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.

*In einem Schloss in Schottland lebte einmal ein junges Gespenst* ("In a Castle in Scotland There Once Lived a Young Ghost", 1979) tells the story of a ghost whose attempts at haunting provoke delight rather than terror.

*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 contribution to a more relaxed discussion of a taboo topic that is as fanciful as it is humorous.

*Die Rückeroberung* ("The Reconquest", 1991), illustrated by Karin Widmer, appeared in a series devoted to comics. The story of the jungle that conquers Zurich step by step is a vivid vision of the primal power of nature, which is far superior to humankind's destructive energy. A wonderful utopia in an age of global threats to the environment.

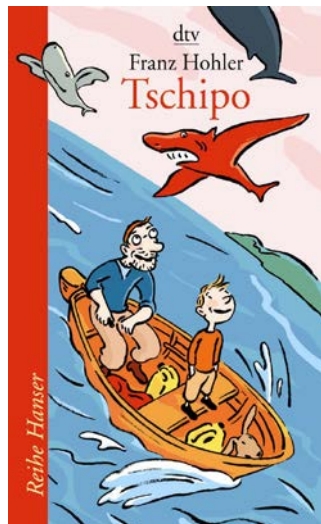
Hohler takes a similar approach in *Der Urwaldschreibtisch* ("The Jungle Desk", 1994), which features illustrations by photo-realist Dieter Leuenberger. This time, however, nature takes the opposite course: the mahogany wood of a writing desk is not only alive, it develops (like many other products) homesickness for the jungle.

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.

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 half the time in another world. 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.

## 6. The five key books submitted to the jury

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 ...

Das grosse Buch (“The Big Book”). Collected children’s stories, with illustrations by Nikolaus Heidelbach. Munich: Hanser 2009. ISBN 978-3-446-23312-6



This fat volume collects all of Hohler’s stories together with the illustrations created by Heidelbach for them. Very nearly Franz Hohler’s life’s work, reflecting the children’s author’s qualities in all of their facets.



Wenn ich mir etwas wünschen könnte („If I Had a Wish“).  
 Illustrations by Rotraut Susanne Berner. Munich: Hanser 2000.  
 ISBN 978-3-446-19819-7



A picture book in which text and illustrations are the ideal complements to one another. This time it is not so much saving the world that is at issue as the solution to an everyday drama: little Barbara is not very selfconfident.

Es war einmal ein Igel (“Once There Was a Hedgehog”).  
 Children’s verses, with illustrations by Kathrin Schärer. Munich: Hanser 2011.  
 ISBN 978-3-446-23662-2



Hohler packs everything he can see and think of into a poem: “Once there was ...” – and moves from there from star to tower, from pig to monkey, from shark to shriek. And once you open the book, you won’t be able to stop: reading, reciting – and creating verses of your own.

Die Nacht des Kometen ("Night of the Comet"). Illustrated by Kathrin Schärer  
Munich: Hanser 2016.  
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 ...

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- Etienne Delessert: YOK-YOK 4. Die Nacht und drei weitere Geschichten: Text: Anne van der Essen; Deutsch von Franz Hohler. Köln: Middelhaue 1979.
- Etienne Delessert: YOK-YOK 5. Der Hase und drei weitere Geschichten: Text: Anne van der Essen; Deutsch von Franz Hohler. Köln: Middelhaue 1979.
- Etienne Delessert: YOK-YOK 6. Die Raupe und drei weitere Geschichten: Text: Anne van der Essen; Deutsch von Franz Hohler. Köln: Middelhaue 1979.
- Shel Silverstein: Der freigebig Baum. Deutsche Fassung von Franz Hohler. Köln: Middelhaue 1979.
- Helme Heine: Gueti Fründ. Schwyzerdütsch vom Franz Hohler. Köln: Middelhaue 1987.
- Leo Lionni: Frederick. Schwyzerdütsch vom Franz Hohler. Köln: Middelhaue 1987.
- Jean-Pierre Siméon (Text)/Olivier Tallec (Illustration): Gedicht für einen Goldfisch.
- Aus dem Französischen nachgedichtet von Franz Hohler. Hildesheim: Gerstenberg 2009
- Axel Scheffler, Julia Donaldson: Der Grüffalo. Schwizerdütsch von Franz Hohler. Weinheim: Beltz & Gelberg 2013

## Plays, TV-programs, Radio programs

Plays:

**David und Goliath.** Stück für Kinder, 1977 in der Schpilkische, Basel

**Die drei Sprachen.** Stück für Kinder, 1997 im Kindertheater Sarajevo

TV-programs:

**Franz und René.** Kinderstunden für «Das Spielhaus» am Fernsehen DRS (zusammen mit René Quellet) von 1973–1994

Radio programs:

Viele Kindersendungen («Gschpass mit em Franz Hohler») und Einzelbeiträge in Radio DRS, ORF, SWR, BR, SR, WDR, NDR, MDR, RIAS, Deutschlandradio.

## Books for adults by Franz Hohler (selection)

Der Rand von Ostermundigen. München: Luchterhand 1973. (Wagenbach Taschenbuch Nr. 342)

Wegwerfgeschichten. Gümligen: Zytglogge Verlag 1974.

Da, wo ich wohne. München: Luchterhand 1993.

Die blaue Amsel. München: Luchterhand 1995. (Taschenbuch btb 73673)

Die Steinflut. Novelle. München: Luchterhand 1998 (Taschenbuch dtv 1550)

Zur Mündung, 37 Geschichten von Leben und Tod. München: Luchterhand 2000.

Die Karawane am Boden des Milchkrugs. Grotteske Geschichten. München: Luchterhand 2003.

Die Torte und andere Erzählungen. München: Luchterhand 2004. (Taschenbuch btb 73451)

Vom richtigen Gebrauch der Zeit. Gedichte. München: Luchterhand 2006.

Es klopft. Roman. München: Luchterhand 2007. (Taschenbuch btb 73920)

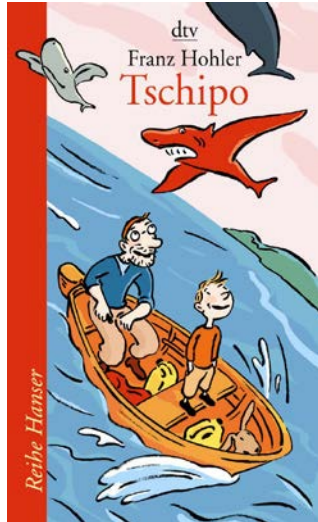
Das Ende eines ganz normalen Tages. Geschichten. München: Luchterhand Verlag 2008. (Taschenbuch btb 74081)

Das Kurze. Das Einfache. Das Kindliche. Ein Gedankenbuch. München: Luchterhand 2010.

## 8. Reviews of books by Franz Hohler

<http://www.literaturschweiz.ch/de/Lesetipp/a947f97a16164605> (30.1.2017)

### The World of Tschipo



"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.

Gerda Wurzenberger

**Die Wochenzeitung, 26.10.2006**

*Franz Hohler, Jürg Schubiger: Aller Anfang ("The Beginning of Everything").  
Weinheim: Beltz & Gelberg 2006*

### How Did Things Get into the Egg?

Humankind has always wondered about what was there at the beginning, and no progress, no findings of the natural or social sciences have been able to lessen the



fascination of accounts of the events surrounding this gap. Indeed, it even seems as if the pleasure in making up stories about the beginning of our world and of other possible worlds is a proven means to holding up the fool's mask to our media-infused, globalized everyday existence. At least, whoever reads Franz Hohler's and Jürg Schubiger's new book *Aller Anfang* sees the world for a while through different eyes.

The two have been thinking about creation stories for some time. The genre began to interest Hohler after he had read Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*. At the launch of *Aller Anfang*, the author said he had understood nothing of what he had read, and had begun to write his own creation story out of spite. His account tells of the universe arising from a crate full of peas. Hohler had the story translated into English and sent it to the astrophysicist. He has yet to receive an answer.

In many of his books, Jürg Schubiger inquires into the nature of things; he wonders about the mysteries at the heart of everyday life. Schubiger contributes the first story to *Aller Anfang*, in which the entire world is gradually hatched from an enormous egg. Schubiger here is playing a game within a game: how did that egg get there, after all, and how did things make their way into it? Franz Hohler closes the book with a story in which a host of angels delightfully consume the earth, now become bread. Between the egg of creation and the earth made incarnate there stretches a string of accounts of the creation consisting of 32 back-and-forth stories of the most wonderful kind. In these stories, writing becomes a way to invent the world, which is in fact the genuine mission of literature.

In one account, Eve comes to the world from another country, bearing with her a milking stool and chicken feed; in another a clumsy god brings a goddess's creations to the earth, and earns himself the everlasting adulation of humankind. There are also, however, stories told by earthly creatures. By a princess, for example, who constructs a prince for herself because she has found all of the men who have asked for her hand, among them a polar bear in disguise, too stupid or too ugly. But her creation takes on a mind of its own and makes its way into the world, and in the end she calls back the polar bear. We learn about Ektisch, an ancient language that consisted of just two words, as well as other useful things, such as where cold comes from, why the camel looks mean, and why lions eat meat.

Schubiger and Hohler's is a game that demands much of both of them. They must respond to their partner's gambit, each taking up the echo of the previous story in his own. You can clearly sense how the one's lead has inspired the other's fantasy, and how much trust the two men have in each other.

Here are two authors at work who are no longer forced to prove anything, and who know where their strengths lie.

Christine Tresch

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Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 14.03.2009, no. 62, p. 34

*Franz Hohler, Nikolaus Heidelbach: Das große Buch. Geschichten für Kinder („The Big Book: Stories for Children“), Munich: Hanser Verlag, 2009*

## The Big Book of Wish Fulfillment



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 Heidelbach, 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 Heidelbach'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 Heidelbach'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.

[...]

Felicitas von Lovenberg

Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 3. August 2011

<https://www.nzz.ch/es-war-einmal-ein-reim-1.11750253> (30.1.2017)

## Once there was rhyme (rough translation)



Among the treasures of popular poetry is the man with the sponge, who found all his inadequacies (sponge too wet, grass too green, Berlin too big) and end with his the sneezing, vegetable-cooking woman or in bed with a mouse. Franz Hohler sketches life drafts in a traditionally children's rhyme form. The first rhyme begins with: "Once there was a man who was very slender. / He was a thin line." Until the rhyming "I" has to realize: "This line is / about me, about me, about me!" Even the lonely star who loves cows, the lake, who loves the fairy (like the mountain the dwarf or the tower the worm) contain something of this ego, which kindly and often with melancholia is coloring the grey tones of our

existence. There is the dog without mouth barking with his paws and the noisy stream who disappears with fish and rat in a water supply dam. Or the anarchic chicken, which has nothing to do but to have a dump in the toilet. Or the fatherless cat, which gives in in his fate.

At the end of these short rhymes remains astonishment about miraculous sound-constellations: What is to be thought of a deer with earache being helped by a snake? The snake extracts with a pliers a bird's nest out of the deer's ear "Many thanks the deer uttered freed from earache / to this terribly nice snake." The illustrator Kathrin Schärer takes these beautiful absurdities seriously and extends them playfully: the birds in the ear of the deer unbar their beaks because they believe they are being fed by the snake's tip of the tail. Life is strange. Nobody knows this better than the rhyme which engages in everything. Let's stick to the great drama of the lama, in whose first act a worm seizes another. "But what went on further / has not yet sorted out completely." A delightful book, which can make addictive.

Angelika Overath

Franz Hohler schreibt die schönste Weihnachtsgeschichte des Jahres.  
DIE ZEIT Nr. 47/2015, 19. November 2015

## The most beautiful Christmas Carol of the Year (rough translation)



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 about their legendary tale, despite all the evidence. The reader is quite certain, however, that everything must have happened like told in this book.

Ariane Breyer