the frankfurt magazine

Juergen Boos in Conversation with Regina Kammerer
The Wall and the Wende — Stories Between East and West
The Future Starts Here — Anthropocene
A Book is a Film is a Game — German Stories on Screen
Dear readers,

The title of our cover illustration – created by the artist Christoph Niemann – is ‘Premiere’. It shows people watching a blank screen, while at the same time turning us all into onlookers. The blank screen fittingly serves as the title box of this magazine – putting our themes under the spotlight. It is also in keeping with our piece on film adaptation ‘A Book is a Film is a Game – German Stories on Screen′ – and the fact that books are increasingly forming the basis for films, scripts, TV productions and series, or indeed games. Looking at the cover illustration from a different point of view, I find myself wondering: are we merely onlookers? Are we passively waiting for something to happen in these times of enormous change and alarming political developments? Or do we want to make an impact and actively deal with these changes and challenges? The frankfurt magazine features some of the challenging issues we face today – and as such, they are of course also reflected in publishers’ agendas. As we are just coming through the warmest winter ever in Europe, the article ‘The Future Starts Here – Anthropocene: the Age of Human Influence on Nature and the Climate’ highlights books on global warming. And ‘The Wall and the Wende – Stories Between East and West′ explores books on the fall of the Berlin Wall, written 30 years or so after that event – in a political climate marked by the rise of a new and frightening right-wing party in Germany. Luchterhand Verlag is the home of some of the most striking new literary voices from Germany. In conversation with publisher Regina Kammerer, Frankfurter Buchmesse director Juergen Boos talks about finding and nurturing talent. Asked what she always wanted to say about Germany, Georgian-born author Nino Haratischvili tells of the seventeen years she has spent in the country, becoming both more Georgian and more German year by year. Artist Christoph Niemann, born in 1970, tells stories with a (humorous) twist through his art. He first became famous in the 1990s, and his work has appeared on the covers of The New Yorker, NYT Magazine, The New York Times, and in Germany’s Zeit Magazin. He returned to Germany in 2011 and has lived there ever since. Christoph Niemann is also the author of many books, and his artwork is exhibited in museums and galleries across Europe. I hope you enjoy our latest issue of the frankfurt magazine.

Bärbel Becker

EDITORIAL

Bärbel Becker has been at the Frankfurter Buchmesse for many years and is the director of the International Projects department.

Christoph Niemann
You can see his incredible work at christoph niemann.com

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You can see his incredible work at christoph niemann.com
Good literature challenges the reader, but it can also be entertaining, says Regina Kammerer, publisher at Luchterhand Verlag, home to some of the most vibrant new voices in German literature. Director of Frankfurter Buchmesse, Juergen Boos, talked to her about tradition, talent and literary trends in Germany.

I'm always on the lookout for the voice, for something original in the writing that sets a great writer apart.

Juergen Boos in conversation with Regina Kammerer

JUERGEN BOOS IN CONVERSATION WITH
Regina Kammerer

Luchterhand has a long and impressive history in the publishing world. At home I've got an old edition of Gunter Grass' Katz and Maus on my shelves. And here at the Book Fair I've once again seen some really interesting titles, including books from our guest countries, published by Luchterhand.

When I took over responsibility in 2005, working with Georg Reuchlein at that time, our publishing house already had a long history – with its ups and downs, of course. It's wonderful that apart from Gunter Grass and Christa Wolf, who are no longer with Luchterhand, we've still got many authors on our list who were published by Luchterhand long before the takeover by Random House. Writers like Kerstin Hensel, Franz Hohler and Christian Haller. And of course Ernst Jandl, a real veteran. Luchterhand was, and still is, an institution.

How did you develop your list in 2005? Did you work on the basis of particular themes?

It was a challenging time. We were faced with the task of ensuring stability while simultaneously seeking out young German voices looking for a publishing home. Saša Stanišić was one of the first new writers I was able to sign up for Luchterhand. His first novel Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert became a huge success. Here was a writer seeking out young German voices looking for a publishing home. Saša Stanišić was one of the first new writers I was able to sign up for Luchterhand. His first novel Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert became a huge success. Here was a writer

That hunch about a new writer – is it something you learn with time? Or is it more of a gut feeling that tells you: this is one to sign up?

Saša Stanišić?

I'm maybe a bit old-fashioned here, but I listen to my gut feeling. I'm always on the lookout for the voice, for something original in the writing that sets a great writer apart. I'm less bothered about the plot. It's interesting too, but a text either speaks to me or it doesn't.

Have you ever been really disappointed?

I'd rather not call it disappointment, it's more sad to see when a writer loses confidence in their work and doesn't have the desire or the strength to carry on.

If things don't work out from a business point of view?

That's a different thing altogether. Of course a literary publishing house must be commercially successful in order to survive. And of course you want a book that you believe in to be a success. But I do think you can have faith in books and writers that maybe take a little time to become successful. I have huge respect for writers. When they write, they expose themselves and make themselves vulnerable, even with work that's not autobiographical. I would never see the job of an editor as being to make a writer do something they don't want to.

That buzzword: critics. Do you think they're important? Because sometimes a book is successful and then it's not.

Critics are important, but unfortunately they don't always see what can happen when you support authors as much as you can. Saša became a huge success. Here was a writer

What if you don't get the right and away from the media? It's also a pity of 1996 with the aim later they expanded the range to include hardbacks.

Juergen Boos

Director of Frankfurter Buchmesse, Juergen Boos, talked to her about tradition, talent and literary trends in Germany.
As a publisher you’ve got to be curious, open to other cultures and to different age groups.

**JB:** What did those trips involve?

**RK:** I visited publishing houses. At that time there weren’t many agencies and foreign rights were negotiated directly through the publishers. For years I travelled regularly to Denmark, Norway and Sweden. I went to Iceland with the fellowship programme where I met everyone working in publishing. I found those experiences to be very enriching. I eventually started with Scandinavian authors at btb and later at Luchterhand as well. For example Knausgärd, Lena Andersson – and this autumn we’ll be publishing a new book by Johannes Anyuru, one of the really great Swedish writers, who’s just been published in the USA. As a publisher you’ve got to be curious, open to other cultures and to different age groups. Take Sally Rooney for example and her novel Gespräche – or not. I think we’ve got a good mixture: established female and male writers, young voices, a range of temperaments, German writers and writers in translation.

**JB:** Luchterhand is an imprint of the Random House publishing group. What does it mean for a publishing company which sees itself as a writers’ publisher to be part of a group of companies?

**RK:** It’s never held me back. I’ve always been able to realise the projects that were dear to my heart, and I still can. When Georg Rauchlein and I started at Luchterhand, we were allowed to take the long view – I am grateful that this continues with Gruße Juncker – and it has paid off.

**JB:** If you had to explain to a foreign reader what’s going on in German literature at the moment, what would you say? What do you see as the trends?

**RK:** In general I’d say: literature emerges from the English-speaking world. It was one of the highlights of my publishing career. Turning to quite a different topic in today’s German book industry – the ratio of published female to male writers. Many companies publish more male writers; at Luchterhand, in the preview of upcoming books, it’s equal: six male to six female writers.

**JB:** Turning to quite a different topic in today’s German book industry – the ratio of published female to male writers. Many companies publish more male writers; at Luchterhand, in the preview of upcoming books, it’s equal: six male to six female writers.

**RK:** Well, that’s really good, isn’t it. To be honest it may be by chance, but it reflects my approach. I think a publisher’s list should be as broad as possible – but I’d never publish a book because a man wrote it, and I’d never publish a woman I didn’t believe in. I’m either captivated by the tone of a book – or not. I think we’ve got a good mixture: established female and male writers, young voices, a range of temperaments, German writers and writers in translation.

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here were you 30 years ago when the Berlin Wall fell? Were you there perhaps, like me? Or watching the extraordinary events unfold on TV? Some of you weren’t even born: how must that be, not to have experienced the Wall, the GDR and divided Germany, not to have been shaped by those events? We were euphoric. The walls were down; Europe, we believed, was free. For me, as a German graduate and rookie BBC journalist, and for everyone featured in this article, our lives were shaped by those events. 30 years later we still debate them vigorously – perhaps even more so after three decades of reflecting. So, what are the reflections of German writers? Anniversaries are the perfect time to answer that question. To mark this 30th anniversary, there are hundreds of recent publications. The range is impressive: from photography, investigative journalism, graphic novels and children’s books to family epics. Never before has Germany addressed its own history with such energy and openness.

As a voracious reader of books about Germany, this is my dream task. I took German at university, studying ‘the Greats’ – Goethe, Brecht, Grass, Kafka, and so on – and in my final year specialised in ‘GRD literature’ (which was considered exotic then), reading Christa Wolf and Ulrich Plenzdorf. When I later met Christa Wolf in a stairwell in Berlin, I nearly had a heart attack: how should I address my literary heroine? I didn’t! As a BBC journalist, keen to deepen my knowledge of the complexities of the country and language I love, I immersed myself in German history. I’ve since read and met Jenny Erpenbeck, Julia Franck, Daniel Kehlmann, Sasa Stanišić, Ingo Schulze and others – world-class authors who address the country’s many historic upheavals, from war to Wall to Wende.

If once the labels ‘Wenderoman’ or ‘DDR-Roman’ were slapped on any book about the Wall or the GDR, today the branding is blurred. The subjects remain, but as the books show, the treatment is more subtle, sober and varied. After 30 years of ‘togetherness’, writers are still occupied by the questions of brass tacks (how did it happen?) and the state of East-West reconciliation and German unity (have they worked?) I’m certain they will
Across walls and borders

sensual Geh doch rüber! Revisited: Ein Ost-West-Lesebuch und seine Geschichte, first published in 1986 by psychologists Frank Blomh, about cross-border relationships. Basically, his message is pos itive, but it’s complicated. I read in a survey in The Economist (Oct 31st 2019) marking the 30th anniversary that, ‘Germans (still) view reunification differently. Half of west Germans consider the east a success. Two-thirds of east Germans disagree... Wessis lived on average as normal. Not a hit on the balance and legacy, aware that genuine healing of a divided Germany – also the lack of nostalgia, the famous “Ostalgie”, previously so strong. Maybe it’s a form of resignation, maybe wisdom.

New revelations and hidden stories from that time continue to be expected. Ich freue mich, dass ich geboren bin, by one of my favourite German writers, Birgit Vandeberke, is an autobiographical novel set in 1960s West Germany about the childhood of an East German refugee. These East-West transit camps were horrific. Some are in use today as immigration camps. Vandeberke’s novel is sad and well written and her writing is superb. Interestingly, she is one author who has succeeded on the stubborn UK book market. We only read about 5% in translation, and not enough German literature. My ambition, of course, is to change that!

My abiding images of November 1989 all come from photos. Photographers have always been central to the depiction of the Wall and the Wende, and several leading photographers, such as Maria Kamm and Jürgen Rützer, have brought out new books. Once upon a time all eyes were on Berlin, but a batch of new books examining what happened elsewhere in the East proves that the focus has shifted to other cities. Packed with photos and

Hidden stories and new research

information, Ingo Juchler’s 1989 in Deutschland. Schauplätze der Friedländischen Revolution takes us on a tour of the main showcases of “the Peaceful Revolution” including Leipzig, Dresden and Jena.

As you might recall, the protests in Leipzig in October 1989 were a key turning point in bringing down the GDR, so I’d like to recommend another book focusing on Leipzig by the journalist Peter Wensierski. Die unheimliche Leichtigkeit der Revolution. Wie eine Gruppe junger Leipziger die Rebellion in der DDR wage. Several authors provide new research and tackle current controversies, such as continuing revelations from the Stasi files, immigration and the rise of the far right.

9.00 a.m. Statement from the Ministry of the Interior and the Security Service about the meeting of the Officers of the Ministry at the request of the Politburo to draw up new regulations on border crossings so that the country is open.' The GDR border is at present act ing as a border. The officials consider it impossible (S. Fischer)

12.00 midday Press conference of the Central Committee. The news release is open.' The GDR border is at present acting as a border. The officials consider it impossible (be.bra)

4.00 p.m. The implementing regulations for the travel bill, which were given the final scrutiny by the Interior Ministry and the State Security Service, are to go into effect on the 1st November. Egon Krenz reads out the proposal (S. Fischer)

6.00 p.m. Schaabowski announces new travel regulations, 9 November 1989. Was easily made by a journalist when the regulations were too new, Schaabowski answers: ‘As of now, unexpectedly’

7.05 p.m. The German daily Die Zeit issues the news flash: ‘GDR border open’, ØRF at 7.41 p.m: ‘The GDR border is open’... the border becomes a political frontier. (be.bra)

8.15 p.m. Egon Krenz reads out the draft travel bill, which he now has as the result of a discussion of the Central Committee, including a press release, to theSED Central Committee.

End of the Central Committee.

9.34 p.m. According to a press report by the East Berlin Volkszeitung, the 60 East Berliners have gathered at the border crossing with the GDR, broken through the border and the Westernisation phase.

10.00 a.m. Start of the second day of the press conference.

10.30 a.m. Press conference of the Central Committee.

11.00 a.m. Press conference of the Ministry of the Interior and the Security Service with an end resolu tion to ‘private trips’, regarding the right to go to West Germany. Applications are still to be made here. (be.bra)
Novelist too are addressing these topics. Take Lukas Rietzschel’s *Mit der Faust in die Welt schlagen*, about two brothers born in the 1990s in the old East and growing up in reunited Germany. One fared well, the other joins a group of anti-immigrant neo-Nazis. It doesn’t get more topical than this. Lukas Rietzschel, born in 1994 in the former GDR, is a bestselling debut novelist. Christoph Hauß, born in 1964, is one of those ignoring these books’ dazzling artwork and original approach to difficult issues, from immigration to the Holocaust. I am now a convert. My final choice for you is Maxi’s prize-winning graphic novel *Kinderland*. Eine Kindheit im Schatten der Mauer, which passionately and gorgeously depicts the last days of East Germany through the eyes of a child. 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the profound challenge of German reunification, writers are analyzing and representing their history with new vigour, creating diverse and distinctive works, which are not just essential for action. The escape from the Wall falls and life and music are never the same again!

The joys of these books for me are many and varied: I’ve rediscovered familiar authors, encountered new voices and been impressed by fresh approaches to familiar topics – it’s clear there’s still lots to uncover. One of my happiest discoveries is the graphic novel for me Germany’s greatest and most inclusive contribution to the book industry. After years of ignoring these books’ dazzling artwork and original approach to difficult issues, from immigration to the Holocaust, I am now a convert. My final choice for you is Maxi’s prize-winning graphic novel *Kinderland*. Eine Kindheit im Schatten der Mauer, which passionately and gorgeously depicts the last days of East Germany through the eyes of a child. 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the profound challenge of German reunification, writers are analyzing and representing their history with new vigour, creating diverse and distinctive works, which are not just essential for action. The escape from the Wall falls and life and music are never the same again!

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Future
Human Influence on Nature
Starts
ANTHROPOCENE
Here
The
Age of
Human Influence on Nature
and the Climate

Dissolving boundaries between nature and culture

H umanity has created lots of great stories, from the Epic of Gilgamesh to In Search of Lost Time. But according to natural scientists, the greatest human story of all is unfolding in the present day.

Moreover, this story isn’t by a single author; instead we’re all working on it together. The way billions of us are consuming plastic, emitting greenhouse gases from cars, and destroying animal and plant species is changing our planet so fundamentally and profoundly that we are collectively writing Earth’s history.

Burning rainforests in the Amazon, record temperatures in the Arctic and in Australia, dwindling insect populations, huge quantities of plastics in the sea … These are not just individual environmental problems, say scientists, but evidence of a gigantic upheaval that is affecting politics, the economy, science, culture – the whole of society, in other words. This radical shift has a dazzling and increasingly well-known name: the Anthropocene, the geological epoch of humankind.

As long ago as in 2000, Paul Crutzen, winner of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, put forward the argument that we are making history in geological terms. ‘Anthropocene’ comes from the ancient Greek words ‘anthropos’ for ‘human’ and kainos for ‘new’. Since then, scientists have been collecting dramatic evidence of the Anthropocene to pave the way for an official renaming of our current epoch, the Holocene, to the Anthropocene.

It’s hardly surprising that the book market has reacted too. Authors are approaching the Anthropocene in diverse ways: as a fascinating event, a scientific provocation, an ecological nightmare, a catalyst for key debates on the concepts of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, or as a wake-up call for personal action.

The world of the Anthropocene is as new as it is disquieting. With our gigantic cities, we humans are creating artificial structures of stone, metal and glass that extend across ever wider areas of land mass. We synthesise minerals, along with new kinds of radioactive isotopes and elements being deposited in rock layers. We extract raw materials in huge quantities for our electronic devices; we encircle the Earth with a mantle of space debris; we produce new types of ‘techno-fossils’ from electronic waste. Engineers create hundreds of thousands of kilometres of roads, railway lines and cables.

Agriculture also produces enormous amounts of future fossils, such as the bone residues of chicken, cattle and pigs. Our hunger for resources is so great that all of the concrete we’ve produced thus far is equivalent to a kilogramme for every square metre of earth – and we could wrap the planet in clingfilm using the plastic we’ve generated to date.

Trade was awarded the 2019 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade to honour an exceptional visual artist who has continuously campaigned for peace and social justice and whose entire photographic oeuvre lends a sense of urgency to the global debate surrounding nature conservation and environmental protection.

The German book market plays a special, leading role in exploring the Anthropocene globally. One reason for this is that German authors have had something of a head start. Not only does Paul Crutzen live in Mainz, near Frankfurt, but German cultural institutes were the first to take up the subject in a way that had public appeal. For a number of years, Berlin’s Haus der Kulturen der Welt (House of World Cultures) led an interna-
Drone experts were the first to take up the subject

Numerous works are devoted specifically to the Anthropocene, such as the recently published book Anthropozän zur Einführung by Eva Horn and Hanno Bergthaller, or the anthology Willkommen im Anthropozän by the Deutsches Museum. Other works explore popular subjects – such as the life of the environmental pioneer Alexander von Humboldt – in the context of Earth’s new epoch. The engagement even of usually rather reserved German natural scientists is notable – such as the climate researcher Hans Joachim Schellnhuber and biologist Matthias Glaubrecht in his newly published Das Ende der Evolution. German authors see the Anthropocene as far more than just a specialist field – it’s an absolutely fundamental topic that affects everyone. The magazine Dritte Natur, for example, focuses on the dissolving boundaries between nature and culture. How can we view as natural a hurricane that draws its energy from man-made global warming? Or rock formed from plastic sediments or mining slag? Previously untouched nature is turning into ‘touched nature’ and this has an impact on us all. Consequently, there is no lack of calls for individuals to take personal action. Everyone needs to help avert the climate crisis, warn the #FridaysForFuture activists Luisa Neubauer and Alexander Repenning in their book Vom Ende der Klimakrise – which, in contrast to other works, strikes an optimistic note. The question of when the Anthropocene will be officially declared Earth’s new epoch is still open. The hottest candidate for a start date is 1945 to 1950, when the fallout from nuclear weapons explosions and the first global wave of plastic consumption altered the Earth. At any rate, the notion of the Anthropocene is already changing our thinking about the relationship between humanity, nature and technology. We now realise that this is about much more than the sum of our environmental problems – it’s about consciously shaping the planet’s future, which is why leading politicians such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel regularly reference the Anthropocene in their speeches. The science historian Jürgen Renn, co-author of Das Anthropozän, says that it is simply about formalizing a new geological epoch, but about developing a much deeper awareness of our own role in the Earth’s future.

Christian Schwägerl is a political and environmental journalist living in Berlin. He works for outlets such as FAZ, GEO and YaleE360, and is co-founder of www.riffreporter.de. In 2010 he published Menschenzeit (Riemann), the first widely read book in Germany on the Anthropocene. It was the impetus for two major projects at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt and the Deutsches Museum.
nniversaries give publishers a welcome opportunity to honour famous people with new books. So it’s no surprise that Ludwig van Beethoven’s 250th birthday has prompted not only an impressive range of concerts and recordings of his musical oeuvre, but a number of new books on the character and work of probably the most frequently performed classical composer in the world.

One particularly impressive example is the 430-page biography Akkord der Welt by music historian Matthias Henke, who has spent years working his way through source materials. Henke challenges many of the common labels and generalisations about Beethoven, exploring how the innovator and giant of Viennese Classicism became a humorous, empathetic love letter to a quirky Beethoven as he struggles with the trials of everyday life.

Beethoven is regarded as one of the most important ambassadors of European culture; his works are part of the cultural heritage of humanity. Musicologist Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen focuses on the age of ideas that informed Beethoven’s music, looking at the intellectual currents of the ‘revolutionary’ era and how these became the foundation of the composer’s musical message.

In Rausch und Stille, Karl-Heinz Ott examines the influence of Beethoven’s symphonies down the centuries and their ability, even today, to transport us into a state of rapture. He tries to figure out their magnetic pull – and reveals the recordings you should definitely listen to.

Even the world of crime has discovered Beethoven. Musicologist Oliver Buslau’s crime novel Feuer im Elysium is set around the time of the Ninth Symphony’s premiere at Vienna’s Carrathian Gate Theatre on 7 May 1824. It’s a lovely addition to the very diverse range of books celebrating the great man’s 250th birthday.

Happy Birthday Beethoven!

More information about the featured titles in German and English can be found here.

Ode to Freedom: in 1989, Leonard Bernstein conducted Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 at Christmas concerts in East and West Berlin with musicians from France, Great Britain, the USA, the Soviet Union and both German states – and replaced the word ‘Joy’ with ‘Freedom’.

The logo of the German Jubilee celebrations derives from Beethoven himself: when he signed his scores he sometimes omitted the vowels and wrote ‘Bthvn’.

© Pixabay, Richard Mcall

Graffiti on a wall in Verona, Italy.

More information about the featured titles in German and English can be found here.

buchmesse.de/magazine/beethoven

Karl-Heinz Ott
Rausch und Stille
(Heinrichs & Corpo)

A winner for connoisseurs and laypersons alike: ‘One of the most beautiful books on Beethoven.’ (Der Blaue Sofa)

Martin Geck
Beethoven (Pustet)

What was Beethoven’s relationship with Goethe, Napoleon and Schiller? How important was he to Richard Wagner, Glenn Gould or Aldous Huxley?

Kirsten Jüngling
Beethoven (Propyläen)

He was a genius with wit and a sense of humour. But he was also a man who wrestled with life’s challenges.

Oliver Buslau
Feuer im Elysium (Emons)

Can a symphony bring about freedom? Not without a dangerous web of intrigue and clandestine politics.

Matthias Henke
Akkord der Welt (Hanser)

Beyond idolatry: an innovative portrait of Ludwig van Beethoven, caught between Bonn and Vienna.
A BOOK IS A FILM IS A GAME

TheFrankfurter Buchmesse promotes networking between the book and film industries.

last year, 2019, saw a boom in screen adaptations. From Ferdinand von Schirach’s Der Fall Collini, to Siegfried Lenz’ Deutschstunde, from Judith Kerr’s children’s classic Als Hitler das rosa Kaninchen stahl to Alfons Zitterbacke, well known in the former GDR; the appetite of film producers for literary material knows no bounds. The crucial factor is a book’s success, as is the case with the Kanguru-Chroniken by Marc-Uwe Kling, coming to cinema screens this year. But classics like Narziss und Goldmund by Hermann Hesse or Döblin’s Berlin Alexanderplatz are also of interest to directors. Material from Germany is clearly popular among international producers too – the film rights to Daniel Kehlmann’s Tyll have been secured by Netflix.

‘There are books whose message we can all relate to, biographies of famous or infamous characters, or books with great drama and suspense, which work in every medium,’ says Sibylle Seidel of the Seidel Media Agency. She’s sold the film rights to books by Zeruya Shalev, Daniel Glattauer, Petra Hammesfahr and Pascal Mercier among others. It’s a long road from book to film and good personal networks are essential for successful negotiation, says Sibylle Seidel. For many years now the Frankfurter Buchmesse has been working to support networking between the film and book industries. Since 2006, rights holders have been pitching material they think has potential at ‘Books at Berlinale’, an event held under the aegis of the European Film Market. In 2020 around 170 international texts were submitted; of that number, 12 were presented at Books at Berlinale at the end of February. (See next page).

Attendance at the major international festivals is also part of the networking strategy initiated by Frankfurter Buchmesse: this year, visits to the Cannes International Film Festival and the Toronto International Film Festival are on the programme. The two-day publishers’ tour to the Croisette takes place on the 18th and 19th of May 2020 and is supported by the Federal Foreign Office. The tour gives selected publishers and literary agencies from German-speaking countries the opportunity to make presentations at the film festival. With the networking day A Book is a Film is a Game, the Frankfurter Buchmesse has created another format to bring people from the film and book industries together: around 60 participants will discuss ideas via pitches, case studies, analysing trends and panel discussions. The event will take place at the Fair in 2020.

The Frankfurter Buchmesse recognises outstanding screen adaptations with the Frankfurter Buchmesse Film Awards. There are two categories: ‘Best International Literary Adaptation’ and ‘Best International Adaptation for Children and Young Adults’.◊

Recent literary adaptations based on German books:
Als Hitler das rosa Kaninchen stahl (Germany 2019)
Judith Kerr
Directed by Caroline Link
Mein Lotta Leben – Alles Bingo mit Flamingo (Germany 2019)
Alice Pantermüller
Directed by Neele Leana Vollmar

Das geheime Leben der Baume (Germany 2020)
Peter Wohlleben
Directed by Jörg Adolph, Jan Haft

Die Kanguru-Chroniken (Germany 2020)
Marc-Uwe Kling
Directed by Dani Levy

Zwischen uns die Mauer (Germany 2019)
Katja Hildebrand
Directed by Norbert Lechner

Deutschstunde (Germany, since 2017)
Volker Kutscher
Directed by Tom Tykwer, Achim von Bornew, Hendrik Handisage

Recent literary adaptations based on

More information about the featured titles in German and English can be found here.
Hamburg, 1954: Three strong young women launch a beauty parlour on wheels. They soon become the talk of the town. Their customers are delighted – the beauty treatments help them to forget their sorrows and relax.

A severely depressed young woman, a terminally ill 83-year-old, an elderly German Shepherd mongrel, a chicken with a broken leg – and an unbearable feeling of loss. Miraculously, all of this turns into a hilarious, heart-warming adventure.

A mysterious crime, an old love and a murderous double game. To save his family, a Jewish antiquarian has to infiltrate the Gestapo and become a spy among wolves.

The true story of the rise and fall of two Jewish brothers who are the theatre kings of Berlin in the glamorous 1920s, but lose everything due to the economic crises and the Nazi regime and die mysteriously in exile.

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The 2020 Berlinale marks the 70th anniversary of the Berlin International Film Festival. The anniversary festival (20 February – 1 March 2020) will also be the first festival headed by director duo Mariette Rissenbeek (Executive Director) and Carlo Chatrian (Artistic Director).
The ten best architectural books in 2019. The prize, unique in its kind and now highly regarded, honours the best architectural books of a year. 100 architectural and art book publishers from all over the world accepted the joint invitation to participate. A jury made up of external experts and representatives of DAM met to select the year’s ten best architectural books from 227 entries. They based their decision on criteria such as design, content, quality of material and finishing, innovation, and topicality. As an honorary award, there is no prize money involved. Rather, the prize winners are presented at the Book Fair. The DAM Architectural Book Award was initiated in 2009 and ever since it has been met with increasing response.

https://dam-online.de/en/program/architecture-prizes/dam-architectural-book-award/
I have translated Nino Haratischwili into Spanish and what an experience that has been for me, a translator from German who is completely immersed in Georgian. I am specialized in German culture and, all of a sudden, the characters I give voice to in Spanish speak German, evidently, but they come from a different culture, different landscapes, different worlds of experience. I have never been to Tbilisi, so the images I depict for the reader are verbal ones, a product of a linguistic interpretation (although, naturally, Google Images has helped me out a tad ...). Paradoxically, of all these I find it easiest to work with the trip to Georgia, its life and its culture. It is precisely this that opens up a different view on the development of the Third World's War. The translator, of course, is required to do the same.

Jesper Festin, born 1988 in Uppsala, Sweden, is a literary translator from German. He lives in Berlin and Uppsala. Since his debut with the children's book Ich groß du klein by Lilli L’Arronge in 2015, he has translated about 10 other works into Swedish, including Außer sich by Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Die Kieferninseln by Marion Poschmann. His translation of Tyll is his latest translation, published in 2019.

My translation of The Zoekoop’s War by journalist Jan Mohnhaupt tells the story of two rival zoos in divided Berlin. Released in English to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Wall, it paints a poignant picture of a society forced apart by the toxic and unsightly concrete-and-barbed-wire Berlin Wall. Many of the book’s gripping animal stories involve border crossings, including a clandestine exchange of coveted ‘communist tigers’ for ‘capitalist mountain tigers’. Most poignant are animal shipments carrying human cargo across the border. In one cloak-and-dagger suit-case, a zookeeper escapes to the West by sharing a narrow crate with a listless moose, whose warm breath on the zookeeper’s neck lends the fraught circumstances a cozy touch as the zookeeper strains to hear guards searching each crate. To enable the zookeeper to exit the crate, it was fitted with special flaps, but the moose itself was unfappable. Translation is about tearing down linguistic walls. This translation contains ‘stealth glosses’ embedded in the text to serve as cultural bridges to geography, word play, and tips as to why the book’s jokes are actually funny. Why would zoo director Klos be dubbed a dumpling? And why do so many of the zookeepers’ surnames (Gewalt, Bertrolt) seem oddly suited to their professions? This uncanny timely book builds understanding of a seemingly remote time and place, with subjects – borders, cages, family separations, walls – that are shockingly familiar to US readers.

Shelley Frisch, Ph.D. German literature, Princeton University, taught at Wellesley College for many years before turning to translation full-time. Her translations, which include biographies of Nietzsche, Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci, Dietrich/Riefenstahl (dual biography), and Kafka, have been awarded numerous translation prizes. She is currently completing a translation of filmmaker Billi Wilder’s early essays and a study of Early German Romanticiast.
Fifty Books That
Travel

Contemporary storytelling by German, Swiss and Austrian writers

When American friends ask me which book by a German-language writer or which author I would recommend, I pause. I pause for a long time shuffling all these novels in my head and thinking of not just the authors but also of the wonderful translators who have brought these books alive in English. Where to start? We have so many genres, books, and authors that are available in English thanks to talented translators and brilliant English-language editors. These books are a treasure chest of memory and diaries. There are illustrated and children’s and YA authors. We have so many genres, books, and authors that are available in English thanks to talented translators and brilliant English-language editors. There are fresh voices exploring questions of contemporary society, of adapting and belonging, of the past and the future, of East and West. There are strong female voices and authors who live and write between several languages as well as familiar names who have shaped our literature for decades. There are crime writers and bestselling authors. There are award-winning literary novelists and experts in history and neuroscience, travel writers and recorders of memories and diaries. There are illustrators and children’s and YA authors.

I can’t possibly name just one author. I can name fifty and I could name more. Here are 50 Books which I could name more. Here are 50 Books

Debut Novel/ Literary Fiction

Pierre Jarawan Am Ende bleiben der Zedern (Piper) This moving and gripping novel about family secrets, love, and friendship, Pierre Jarawan does for Lebanon what Khaled Hosseini’s The Kite Runner did for Afghanistan.

Sascha Marianne Salzmann Ausser sich (Suhrkamp) Beside Myself: My daughter, Benedikt, has Autistic Asperger’s and has been driven to the edge of her brother’s existence, the extent of her brother’s existence, the extent of her brother’s existence, the extent of her brother’s existence, the extent of her brother’s existence.

Lutz Seiler Kruso (Suhrkamp) The lyrical, heartbreaking story of a family across four generations. At its heart is a teen’s search for her brother.

Simon Sträuli Susen Nachtke (Auflage) An invented protagonist is drawn into a scheme where each night at 7 a clock, he must commit one of the 7 sins. The most, the most, the most reviewed, and recommended German language debut of the last decade.

Simon Sträuli Der Club (Kein & Aber) An international bestseller from a brilliant young German writer, set in the hollowed halls of Cambridge University, a thrillingly suspenseful story of class, privilege, and matters of the heart.

Otis Gjiroku Gott ist nicht skochtsrsum (Suhrkamp) From one of Germany’s most talented literary voices comes a movingly written story of brutality, loss, and how hope can shine through when darkness feels overwhelming.

Karen Duve Macht (Gallimard) A hugely entertaining novel about feminism, masculinity and the battle between the sexes for domination. A brilliant, devastating portrayal of a rich, grotesque society, which is full of contradictory humour and highly charged politics.

Philipp Winkler Die Club (Kein & Aber) An international bestseller from a brilliant young German writer, set in the hollowed halls of Cambridge University, a thrillingly suspenseful story of class, privilege, and matters of the heart.

Balance Oh figura (btb) Hildebrandt tells the story of Karim, an Iraqi refugee living in Germany. In our era of mass migration, much of it driven by war and its aftermath, A Slap in the Face could not be more timely.
Fifty Books That Travel

Roland Schimmelpfenning
An einem klaren, ein­kulturen Jahr­hunderts zu Beginn des 21. Jahr­hunderts
A contemporary Berlin fairy tale.

Peter Stehr
Die schöne Gleich­gültigkeit der Welt (S. Fischer)
A charming, playful, profound tale of lost souls in search of transformation in modern Japan.

Martin Walser
Ein lieber Mann (Rowohlt)
The love between 73-year-old Gustave and 19-year-old Urike von Leston causes a storm of emotion and hatred in the Marienthal Elbing, one of his last great works.

Benedikt Weils
Von Ende der Einsam­keit (Deutsch­land)
Talks through the lives of three siblings, Weil's novel is a heart­felt novel about love and kindness, family, and love. Winner of the European Union Prize for Literature.

Esther Kinsky
Am Fluss (Mat­thias & Sohn)
River is a remark­able novel, full of poignant images and poetic observa­tions, an ode to nature, edge­lands, and the transcendence of all things human.

Silke Schumann
Die Stunde zwischen Hund und Wolf (Schöfling)
The story of two sisters and the surprise life confronts them with.

Max­lore­King
Qua­lity­land (Nicht)
A bizarre, internationally bestselling novel in the tradition of Kurt Vonn­e­gut, Douglas Adams, and George Orwell.

Ann­ka Kin
Die große Hamburger (Suhrkamp)
An evocative story, political and histor­i­cal novel in one. The Great Home­coming is about friendship, loyalty and betrayal, about the impossible life in a dictatorship.

Marc­­Lueke­King
Der zweite Reiter (KiWi)
The Second Rider in the first volume in a gripping and bestselling series featuring police agent August Emm­reich.

Alfred­River
Der zweite Reiter (KiWi)
The Third in the Black Forest In­vestigations series: Fink­burger detective Louise­Ro­nald­Herr­n­dorff and her collea­gues are put under enormous pressure.

Walter­Kempowski
Mark und Bein (KiWi)
Homeland walks a tightrope between black humour and horror. In the end, neither German guilt can be suppressed.

I look for books that have stood out, that have won acclaim, that tell a good story and convey something distinctive about the culture or the history or what’s going on in the world.
Fifty Books That Travel

Memoir

Ernst Jünger
Strahlungen I
(C.H. Beck)

Ernst Jünger was one of twentieth-century Germany’s most important – and most controversial – writers, who faithfully kept a journal in occupied Paris.

Ketty Petrowiska
Vieillecht Esther
(Schöningh)

An unique and extraordinary moving depiction that pieces together the fascinating story of one woman’s family across 20th-century Russia, Ukraine, Poland and Germany.

Brigitte Romann
Ich bedarfe nichts (She Has)

Frank and refreshing, these diaries provide a candid account of life in socialist Germany. With an amusing tone, they contain details of her love affairs, writing and reflections.

Herve Bude
Das Gefühl der Welt
(Rebuch)

In the aftermath of the financial crisis, many people feel worse off. How can feelings be shared? How do these mutual feelings shape the course of events?

Bern Bradner
Als die Winter noch Winter waren
(Gräben)

This lovingly illustrated meditation on winter entwines the everyday, the spectacular and the extraordinary, capturing the essence of a season.

Non-fiction

Hannes Beck
I’m not nuts! (Goldmann)

In this mind-bending book, a neuroscientist explains why perfectionism is pointless – and argues that mistakes, mistakes, mistakes – and argues that mistakes, mistakes, mistakes...

Navid Kermani
Entlang der Grenzen
(C.M. Beck)

In September 2016 Kermani set out to travel along the trenches that are now re-emerging in Europe, from his home in Cologne to the Caucasus, south to the Caucasus and to Afghanistan.

Jan Mühlenstädt
Der Zauber anderem
(Hanser)

The unbelievable true story of the Cold War’s strangest proxy war, fought between two sides on either side of the Berlin Wall.

Daniel Schöningh
Wetzy and charming, Gier’s contemporary young adult novel follows a girl as she navigates secrets, romance and danger in a new grand hotel way up in the Swiss mountains.

Aisha Franz
Shit is Real
(Fischta)

Aisha Franz is a master of portraying fusing extremes: loneliness and connection while keeping her characters tough and real.

Bringing books from around the world to American readers, who have been historically underserved with translations, is both a pleasure and a privilege.

Peter Blackstock, Grove Atlantic

Literary Collections

Royal Schnitt
Das Geschlecht der Engel
(F. Fischer)

A playful, often ironic tale of the history of letters that follows the Biblical creation of the angel from Babylon to the present day.

Kids

Peter Wohlleben
Bäume sprechen?
(Oetinger)

Did you know that trees have parents, and that trees are related to elephants? Peter Wohlleben shares the mysteries and magic of the forest in language kids will love.

Jens Ruschke, Jens Rasmussen
Do fish sleep?
(Mixtvision)

What do you know about the little brother becomes seriously ill, and dies suddenly? Little brother gives everyone courage and hope.

Peter Ruschke
Mörst du, wie die Bienen sprachst?
(Oetinger)

A unique and entertaining take on the history of letters that follows the Biblical creation of the angel from Babylon to the present day.
The Five Most Beautiful Books of 2019

In the ‘Most Beautiful German Books’ competition, three expert juries chose 25 books which they considered to be exemplary in terms of their design, concept and production quality.

Art Books
Alexander Kluge, Ben Lerner, Stefanih vier Vennig (Spekter Books)

Fiction
Adjaye, Wouter Vanlerberghe, Philipp Hail et al, Tugenden für das 21. Jahrhundert (7 Titel im Schuber) (Nicolai Publishing & Intelligence)

Non-fiction
Jaroslav Kubr, Daniel Winter, Felix Holler, Peter Karl Bloss, Jake, und Ikea: Macht Allah, in Zukunft. Das ist eine Art (Buchkunst)

Children’s Books
Felix Bork, Oh, eine Pflanze! (Eichborn)

More information about the featured titles can be found here: stiftung-buchkunst.de

Canada – Guest of Honour 2020

Caroline Fortin, President of Canada FBM2020 (left), and Canadian author, Margaret Atwood.

Canada’s vibrant book industry will be the star of this celebration in 2020. This is an incredible and unique opportunity to showcase to the world how forward-thinking, diverse, rich and very alive this industry is. From rising and emerging writers and illustrators to highly acclaimed and renowned authors, we will reveal powerful writing from all literary genres and from French, English and Indigenous voices while still heralding the myriad of backgrounds that represent our country.

Caroline Fortin, President Canada FBM2020

I believe in the future of the book and of reading. I believe in the freedom of the word, in variety and ‘bibliodiversity’.

These were the words of Karin Schmidt-Friderichs as she took up her post as Head of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association. For the second time in the history of the Association, there’s a woman in the top job.

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The Germany Book Prize 2019 was awarded to Sascha Stanišić for Herkunft

The finalists of the Germany Book Prize 2019 (f.l.t.r.): Jackie Thomae, Tonio Schachinger, Raphaela Edelbauer, Norbert Scheuer, Anka Sophie Kimme | 3 The German Publishers’ Prize was awarded for the first time on 18 October at the Frankfurter Buchmesse. The prize is worth over one million euros and its aim is to boost the external competitiveness of small, independent publishers. An independent jury selected the 2019 prize winners from a field of 312 submissions: Hahdeke, Knobooks and Specter Books.

Six International Locations in German Novels

GENEVA Nora Boassing, Schutzzone (Schweizer) DAMASCUS Itzik Schamir, Die geheime Mission des Kardinals (Hanser) STOCKHOLM Marlene Streeruwitz, Flammenwand (S. Fischer)

MOSCOW Eugen Rapp, Metropoli (Flaworld) DOVER – CALAIS Ulrike Dassauer, Kanuschwimmer (Mars) MADRID Paul Ingenhousz, Kingspark (Ricou)

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READING TIPS FOR PARENTS AND KIDS

The Knowledge Boom

Judging by current trends in children’s book publishing, the acquisition of knowledge can’t start soon enough. Non-fiction books are ploughing new furrows, both in terms of form and in terms of textual presentation. Knowledge is cool, and is being packaged in ever cooler ways. To help navigate this jungle of new publications, here’s a round-up of some of the top trends in German-language children’s book publishing.

Nature and environmentalism are pressing concerns, and becoming more urgent by the day. So it’s no wonder the subject is increasingly filtering through into children’s and young adult books. Children’s books in particular have always had a special affinity with the natural world as a theme, not least because so many (sometimes very difficult) issues and challenges can be explored in a child-friendly way through the use of animal characters. These days it almost feels as though authors, illustrators and publishers are making it their business to restore our (or rather, children’s) connection to Mother Nature – a connection which is being progressively weakened by the advance of industrialisation and urbanisation. They are doing this both by (re)mythologising and romanticising nature, and by explicitly (re)integrating it into stories about everyday life and dystopian-style thrillers …

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Read-aloud gems and more

Daniel Napp’s Wie Fliegenpilz Henri das Laufen lernte, um einen Baum zu retten (Fischer Sauerkandi, 6+) is a beautifully illustrated read-aloud gem reminiscent of The Secret Life of Trees. In Der Gorilla-Garten, the first book in Simone Veenstra’s Kathy series (Ravensburger, 5+), a ‘country bumpkin’ moves to the city and, amidst the greyness of her unfamiliar new surroundings, sets out in search of green spaces. Because greenery makes people happy! Modern trends like ‘urban gardening’ and ‘guerrilla gardening’ are seen through a child’s eyes, and described with a child’s voice.

Early reading books are not to be outdone on the nature front – Antonia Michaelis’ Igel gut, alles gut (Oetinger, 8+), for example, is about a club of animal rescuers who set out to help the many different animals in their local neighbourhood, including snails, ladybirds and even trapped mammoths (!). Their rescues are different kinds of unattended consequences, which don’t always go down well with the other residents. But when a hedgehog gets into danger, the animal rescuers really have to show what they’re made of.

Everyday life & adventure plus nature

In land unter bei Samuel by Susanne Weber (Hummelburg, 8+), the theme of climate change is interwoven with a classic problem: Samuel has to move house and start a new school (complete with nasty bully), all because his climate researcher father has got a new job. Samuel decides his only chance of happiness lies in helping his father, whilst also quickly figuring out how to save Kiribati (a group of Pacific islands), in the hope that the islands won’t be submerged beneath the rising seas, and Samuel can move home and be with his friends again.

Karlin Muller, author of many books including numerous animal guide books, also uses the trope of a child moving to a place where they don’t want to live, in the lovingly told story Das Dieffnmädchen (Copperwheat, 9+). Muller explores the theme of animal conservation through a tale about a very special friendship.

Max Held delivers fast-paced environmental detective stories in his series Wild Claws (Arena, 9+), which is set in a national park. There are now three books in this series about a trio of determined children who want to protect nature with environmental activists and adventurers. In Silberflut by Alex Falkner (Arena, 10+), a school trip to a desert island takes a dramatic turn: six kids find themselves fighting for survival after a wave of silvery mist passes over the island. Once the fog lifts, they realise that everyone has vanished: the teachers, the group leader, all the other children. Nature starts to behave in strange and aggressive ways, and they come across a gang of violent youths, sent to the island some time ago for rehabilitation. This is a gripping story with elements of Lord of the Flies.

...Sylvia Muecke was editor-in-chief at Evislar for more than ten years. 

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Cowboys Two has just come out here. And Thienemann has released the first book in its new Tierwandler series: Unser Lehrer ist ein Elch (Thienemann). They’ve been selected by their new teacher’s rescue pig for a special sports team.

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Brilliant non-fiction books

German-language children’s book publishers are currently mining a rich seam of knowledge, with non-fiction books on a huge range of subjects from science to philosophy, democracy to anthropology, life cycles to sine curves and individual biographies to otherness.

In the more traditional non-fiction series, MINT subjects are very well represented: there’s Physik, Einstein and Universum, for example (all Tessloff, 8+), and the sophisticated Umweltschutz (Ravensburger, 8+), which explains complicated processes in a clear and comprehensive way. This method of conveying knowledge is timeless, and the layout, too, has a long “shelf life”. Non-fiction topics for children and young people are becoming increasingly specialised, as can be seen in Kriminalistik (Tessloff, 8+), or Schau in deinen Körper (Beltz & Gelberg, 4+), which is almost medical in its depth of information. These hard fact books can teach even adults a thing or two.

When it comes to philosophical themes, publishers’ lists make room for books on everything from happiness and the search for meaning to grief and coping with tragedy. What makes these books special is often the felicitous intertwining of illustration and text – Glück (Carlsen, 11+), a prime example of the value of illustrated books (and not just for children).

Another striking trend is the number of excellent biographical texts – be they picture books, non-fiction books or anthologies – about real-life role models. These are often books which cannot be clearly defined as belonging to one specific genre. As they are certainly not aimed at one specific age group, as demonstrated by Stark. Rebellionen (Themenwerk, 12+).

As time goes on we are seeing the boundaries between target readerships blur, and this is opening up new genres: non-fiction for all ages, which takes the reader on a visual and textual adventure – a true journey of discovery. New standards are being set aesthetically, with bold layouts and shapes. All-round information and all-round reading – publishers are responding with unusual concepts to young readers who expect more from a book than two cardboard covers with a story in between. Information, pictures and narrative all feature in books tailored to the early years curriculum, such as Nevo, die unfurchtsame Forschermaus (Arena, 4+).

Reading without barriers?

Research into literacy rates has revealed that some primary school children lack the comprehension skills to understand what they are reading. There are many different reasons for this: insufficient language skills, a lack of parental support, overly high expectations of reading ability. For years now, publishers have been developing more accessible books for less confident readers. These books often appear in series and feature themes designed to appeal to boys in particular, such as Lesenlernen in 3 Schritten – Die schönsten Rennfahrergeschichten oder Leselöwen – Alarm auf der Währungsumtafel (all Loewe, 6+). Publishers are bringing out more and more books which have a simple reading structure but subject matter designed to interest older readers. The series Loewe Wow is a response to the new reading habits of “digital natives”, and features titles such as Cornelius & Co. and Vincent flattert ins Abenteuer (Loewe, 9+) – a kind of in-between genre combining elements of graphic novels, comic books and books for beginner readers. These books are often made up of “tiles” of text, and bring together elements from the internet and smartphones to create a language of words and pictures.

Reading about reading

Short, meaningful passages of text, clear vocabulary, strict grammar – working all of these important elements into an appealing story calls for a great deal of experience and skill on the part of authors. Over time, publishing houses have increasingly taken it upon themselves to help improve children’s reading skills – a task that used to be left to families and schools. But it is in publishers’ own interests to promote the art of reading. The creative approaches currently being adopted by publishers are exemplified in Es geht rund (Beltz & Gelberg, 6+), which can be read by several children at the same time: the book becomes a sort of moving disc.

Publishers are pursuing innovative approaches in other areas too. Books about how to read, written in a playful and exciting way, are a form of meta-reading that can appeal equally to very young children. Speaking and reading techniques and tips on emphasis and performance are designed to make reading fun, and are vividly presented in Lies mal vor (Carlsen, 9+). Storybooks featuring photographs are another way of appealing to a wider range of readers: they break down barriers to reading, making stories more accessible. Lotti & Detti, a tale about ponies (Coppenrath, 6+), reads almost like a film, since photos are such a familiar medium. Illustrations require the reader to work harder.

Many illustrated non-fiction books are also aimed at new audiences. They introduce interesting figures and explore ethical problems, explain environmental issues and promote fairness and cooperation, as in Wie sehst du denn aus? (Beltz & Gelberg, 9+).

Perhaps this is the new future of children’s books: breaking the boundaries between genres. Creating new ways of seeing the world. And catering to a wide spectrum of reading ability. From basic comprehension skills to literary irony, wanderlust. Exciting times lie ahead – both in graphic and in literary terms.

Christine Paxmann is the author of numerous books for adults and children and the publisher of Eiselehr, one of the most important German-language journals for children’s and young adult literature.

Data Kanne, Jochen Windhuker (ill.)
Umweltschutz (Ravensburger)
What does a scientist have to do with climate change? This book explores the factors that put a strain on our environment.

Sonya Eismann, Annelie Perras (ill.)
Wie sehst du denn aus? (Beltz & Gelberg)
Is my belly button weird? Why don’t I have straight hair? This book encourages children to talk about body image.

Fréderic Bertrand
A spookily funny tale, with colour illustrations throughout, about Vincent the fat and his search for a friend.
The blogger Berit Glanz has enjoyed a dedicated following for many years. She has 40,000 followers on Twitter. Glanz was born in 1982 and works as an academic specialising in Scandinavian studies at the university in Greifswald, a small coastal town. Without social media I’d feel cut off from things occurring here in the province,” she says. It’s no surprise then that her highly acclaimed debut novel Pixeltänzer (Pixel Dancers), winner of the Hebbel Prize, is a walk through the world of the Internet. Beta, a young woman working at a hip design company, receives messages over the Internet which set her off on a quest of her own. Suddenly she sees quite a different side to this period of her life, the writer (now living in Berlin) sees it as a positive experience. “I knew then that I really wanted to write and that I could do it independently of the market and how it works,” she says. In any case, it’s a story with a happy ending.

Anke Stelling found a new publishing home for her books with a small independent publisher. Her most recent novel Schäfchen im Trockenen (Feath­ering the Nest) won the Leipzig Book Prize, one of the most prestigious prizes in Germany, and went on to become a bestseller. In the novel, which contains some autobiographical elements, a writer and four children is given notice to move out of her flat. Suddenly she sees quite a different side to that wonderful life in Berlin.

In German there’s only an ‘i’ between ‘Leben’ and ‘Liebe’, life and love.

On arrival I think: in Germany there’s no dust, my shoes never need polishing, and when I wash my hair I’m not washing out centuries of history with their occupations and reoccupations, or exhaust fumes from cars imported from the West when they fail their MOTs. Here, no one’s interested in MOTs or anyone’s hair or lungs – the water isn’t black, it’s always clear and pure. In Germany there are no pomegranates, I think to myself, and coriander with Asiatic soups. I love this language and don’t want to be driven from it, but I’m unsure if I can or want to stay here. I leave, I come back, I leave, I come back, interweaving effort/application/discipline/self-determination – important virtues for which I’m eternally grateful to my alma mater. They’re constantly asking me to ‘legitimise’ my staying here; I can’t, because what I do has no material worth, but the authorities don’t recognise any other currency.

What I always wanted to say about Germany

Two female prizewinners with two outstanding novels

A column by Nino Haratischwili

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Self-determination is sometimes painful, and irony still isn’t cool, so I can’t write. I start writing again and everyone says: all girls write – and I could scream but I don’t, and I say: I’m not writing about my troubled love life. I think: I have to leave, I’ll never fit into this world, why did I make so much effort to learn ‘Röslein, Roslein, Roslein rot’ at school? I go away for many months. The place where I am is cold and raw, and I write like I’m possessed. There’s vodka and I smell muddy. I want to prove something to myself and to Germany: namely that we don’t always know best.

I pull it off. I put my stories on stage. People cried and I was happy and knew that this language had adopted me without my having asked it to. I’ve learned: in German there’s only an ‘i’ between ‘Leben’ and ‘Liebe’, life and love.

The Foreign Nationals Registration Office would be just a ridiculous institution full of disgusting filter coffee – which luckily isn’t offered to visitors – and cacti and ugly picture frames, if it wasn’t deciding my future right now. My mother says I have to be better than the Germans to get on here.

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Trains and hotels. I get to know Germany better than the Germans do.

YEAR 7
I’m still not getting German proverbs quite right. I say to a friend: I don’t want to put my nose above the parapet. I still haven’t had any therapy and I still don’t do yoga.

YEAR 8
I have a book out. It’s pale pink (which I think is ironic) and looks very girly. It’s actually about suicidal women and literature. They ‘tolerate’ me. I have to prove that I’m earning enough. I’m called ‘a Georgian writer who writes in German’.

YEAR 9
I have another new book – it’s white. I have a piece of home. I’m called ‘a German-Georgian writer’.

YEAR 10
I read Kleist and watch the documentary Shoah. I think: you can’t have both. But you can.

YEAR 11
Travelling and writing; no longer just tolerated; I’m a little more welcome.

YEAR 12
I have a new, very fat book. It’s about Georgia. I’ve done nothing else for four years but write this book. Suddenly I’m ‘a German author with Georgian roots’. I feel confused.

YEAR 13
Some documentary about Richard Burton and Liz Taylor is on TV. It’s being promoted with a quote from one of his letters to her: ‘If you leave me, I shall have to kill myself’. Among the online comments: ‘A clear case of abuse …’ ‘… urgently needs therapy …’ I think to myself: I’m going back.

YEAR 14
I cook European dishes better than Georgian ones. I become a mother. But I want to be able to cook Georgian food for my child. Everything’s strange: when I speak German to my child it feels like I’m communicating with her via Google Translate. I speak only Georgian.

YEAR 15
I read about the case of Richard Burton and Liz Taylor and think to myself: I’m going back.

YEAR 16
Another new book. I have to take lots more train trips. I’m pregnant. I ask a guard to put my suitcase in the overhead luggage rack; he replies that he can’t ‘due to health and safety reasons’. In the following months, ahead of the birth of my second child, I’m absolutely determined to go back to Georgia and raise the children there. I don’t understand how a health and safety regulation can take precedence over any kind of human empathy or human reason. In the end I decide that I don’t want to understand. And that my words have found a home in this language.

YEAR 17
I become a mother for the second time, and my mother and aunt cook Georgian dishes for days. How Georgian I get the longer I live here, I think. And I think: isn’t it strange how often, when I’m there, I look forward to coming back.
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