



by Christine Nöstlinger
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Forgotten Gem

Fiery Frederica

Die feuerrote Friederike

review

Vicky Tischer remembers one of Europe's finest writers for children and young adults.

Christine Nöstlinger's books have inspired generations of young readers through her anti-authoritarian take on the adult world, her strong characters, and her ready confrontation of the social issues that are so important in young people's lives, from discrimination to body-acceptance. Although her writing is rooted in realism (she never liked fantasy), there are elements of surrealism and much humour, providing the quirky nuance that is so typical of her work.

One of my earliest reading experiences is *Die feuerrote Friederike*, which was published in English as *Fiery Frederica* in 1975 (Grasshopper Books) but is now out of print. Nöstlinger also provided the illustrations. Friederike has unusually bright red hair and is teased by her school mates ('her head is on fire'). However, she soon finds out that her red hair gives her the magic of flight. I still recall how Friederike ties her long hair around a laundry basket, into which her friend the postman climbs with his family, before she calls on her magic hair to fly them all to a more peaceful and tolerant world. Which seven-year-old wouldn't like to have a friend like Friederike?

In my teenage years, *Luki Live* (1978) made a lasting impression. Luki dedicates himself to an unconventional lifestyle and initially receives a lot of admiration, but soon realises that his closest friends are no longer able to relate to him. It was Luki's voice and

individuality that fascinated me – it is still a quality I look for now, but with the knowledge that we sometimes need to compromise as friends, too.

In an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 2016, Nöstlinger said that she was ‘just so sad’ about today’s world, when hope was vanishing amidst the move to the political right and there was so much hate between people. Hope had inspired her to write in the past, but she struggled to write for children today.

And yet Christine Nöstlinger’s stories are so relevant for today’s readers. helping children and young adults to be proud of who they are and to treasure their individuality, without the need of any association to a nation, race or gender. Friederike would still be a much-admired friend to many.

Some of Christine Nöstlinger’s most acclaimed books have been published in English:

Maikäfer Flieg! (*Fly Away Home!* Abelard-Schuman, Andersen Press and Vintage Classics, first published 1976), which is drawn from her childhood experiences of growing up during and after the Second World War.

In *Konrad, das Kind aus der Konservenbüchse* (*The Factory Made Boy*: Andersen Press, 2012), Nöstlinger breaks with convention when the perfect child is delivered, packed in a tin, to live with an anarchic, bohemian family.

Wir pfeifen auf den Gurkenkönig (*The Cucumber King*: Target, Bergh and Andersen Press, first published 1976) was awarded the German Youth Literature Prize and translated into English by Anthea Bell. It tells the story of the disruptive cucumber king and what happens when he emerges from a cellar, chased away by his own people, to join the life of a very normal family. Nöstlinger’s humour and satire is at its best here. An attractive new edition illustrated by Jutta Bauer was published in 2018 (Beltz).

about the author

Christine Nöstlinger, one of the best-loved children’s and young adult authors in the German language, died in June 2018. Born in 1936, she grew up during and after the Second World War in a working-class family in the Viennese suburbs. Nöstlinger published more than 150 books, with translations into thirty languages. She received many accolades during her lifetime, including the Hans Christian Andersen

Medal in 1984 and the first Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award in 2003. The Lindgren jury described her as a 'staunch supporter of children and those living on the margins of society'.

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