



by Carolina Schutti
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Fiction

Ocean Breeze *Meeresbrise*

review

The sixth novel by Austrian author and poet Carolina Schutti, *Meeresbrise* is a work of spare, impressionist literary fiction about two sisters growing up in an Austrian village in the 1980s. Social commentary, childhood trauma and mother–daughter relationships all feed into this slim but memorable novel.

Meeresbrise is narrated by the elder of two sisters whose ages are never explicitly given – only details like their dress sizes help to inform the reader. They live in a small village with their mother, a woman who stands out thanks to her fashionable clothes and proud bearing. Short narrative snippets gradually reveal a picture of what lies beneath this glamorous surface: the girls' (different) fathers are dead and their mother on welfare; she supplements their income through phone sex work and by selling second-hand goods. She often vanishes for long periods, leaving the girls locked in the apartment, but when a social worker visits she puts on a great show to ensure they will not be taken away.

As the girls grow up, the narrator begins to realise that perhaps their lives are not as 'normal' as some of the other children's. At times she finds their flower-filled village beautiful, but she feels increasingly resentful of the way she and her family are laughed at by the community. A sympathetic teacher attempts to take her under her wing and lend her books, and she manages to make one friend at school. But she is also involved in episodes of vicious bullying. At

home, her mother becomes increasingly volatile and the narrator falls out with her beloved sister.

Finally, the narrator does the unthinkable: she packs a bag, gets on a bus and leaves the village for good. She has realised there is more to the world than her narrow home and wants to see the sea in particular, having always loved a brand of soap named 'Meeresbrise' that, to her, represents freedom.

With its striking fragmented structure and sparing yet beautiful use of language, *Meeresbrise* is a haunting novel about undisclosed trauma, social marginalisation, coming of age in a rural community and how we establish a life for ourselves. Schutti's sensitive way with words and keen eye for detail make this high-quality literary fiction with a captivatingly poetic touch.

press quotes

Meeresbrise is a haunting experience, a work of spare lyricism that lives linguistically from the in-between spaces. Language, memory and the childhood dichotomy of fairy tale versus reality all take their turn at the forefront of this delicate, well-worked novel.

Eleanor Updegraff, translator

Carolina Schutti creates an incredible and sometimes uncanny effect. Literature that touches its reader by putting a finger on the fragility of life.

Bernd Melichar, Kleine Zeitung

A slim book, but one that holds a whole world within it – a world of lies and fairy tales into which a somewhat strange mother has spun her two daughters.

Martin Sailer, ORF Tirol

about the author



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Carolina Schutti was born in Innsbruck in 1976. She studied philology, English literature, classical guitar and singing, and holds a PhD. She has written short stories, poetry and radio plays, as well as five novels; her books have been translated into seventeen languages but not yet English. Her second novel, *Einmal muss ich über weiches Gras gelaufen sein* (2012), was awarded the European Prize for Literature, and she took part in the 2020 Ingeborg Bachmann Prize with an excerpt of her fifth novel, *Der Himmel ist ein kleiner Kreis* (2021). Carolina Schutti lives in Innsbruck.

Other works: *Der Himmel ist ein kleiner Kreis*. Novel, Literaturverlag Droschl (2021). *Patagonien*. Novel. Edition laurin (2020). *nervenfieber*. Poems. Edition laurin (2018). *Eulen fliegen lautlos*. Novella. Edition laurin (2015). *einmal muss ich über weiches gras gelaufen sein*. Novel. Otto Müller (2012). *wer getragen wird, braucht keine Schuhe*. Novel. Otto Müller (2010).

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