

# “Quiet! Let Them Talk!”: Women Writing Postwar

## Concept

An anthology of 10-15 short stories by critically acclaimed postwar women authors, in translation from German, to arrive at a length of approx. 150 pages. By offering a female gaze on the period, this collection provides a counterbalance to conventional understandings. It engages with themes that are as relevant and emotionally resonant as ever, such as patriarchy, trauma, and survival.

## An Alternative Approach

In postwar Germany, the renowned Gruppe 47 established a new literary tradition that distanced itself from Nazi structures by focusing on the future, purposely refraining from investigating the psychological effects of the Second World War. However, in her recent book *Einige Herren sagten etwas dazu* (KiWi, 2024), Nicole Seifert demonstrated the group’s hostility to the female perspective. Our aim is to shine a spotlight on the alternative, female literary tradition that was being established alongside Gruppe 47, and which engaged with issues sidestepped by their male counterparts – to both popular success and critical acclaim.

These women’s innovative work is characterised by deceptively simple plots and undercut with sophisticated psychological insights, an arresting immediacy, and wry humour. Their stories are experimental: they are, for example, written in reverse or entirely in dialogue. Inciting incidents are often taken from the quotidian – through a misplaced key or holiday stroll the authors explore themes such as trauma and toxic masculinity.

The title “Quiet! Let Them Talk!” is the last line of Ilse Aichinger’s ‘In the Mirror’, a short story that won the Gruppe 47 Prize in 1952. This quotation reflects our aim to create space for these important voices, which have seldom been heard in English.

## Authors

**Ilse Aichinger** (1921-2016) was one of the few female members of Gruppe 47. Her accolades include the Gruppe 47 and Nelly Sachs Prizes; her oeuvre includes poetry, fiction and essays.

**Ingeborg Drewitz** (1923-1986) was a multi-award winning writer focused on postwar history and women’s position in society. Her novel *Yesterday was Today* is still taught in schools.

**Marie Luise Kaschnitz** (1901-1974) won the Büchner Prize and was twice nominated for a Nobel Prize. Her work deals with the loss of innocence, female agency, trauma, and survival.

**Luise Rinser** (1911-2002) achieved fame with *Prison Journal*. She won multiple awards for her critical examination of politics and religion and was a Green Party presidential nominee.

## Short Stories

Short stories contain the emotions and insights of a novel within a neat package that can be read in one sitting: in today's harried world, they are a timely literary form. Lucia Berlin's *A Manual for Cleaning Women* was in *The New York Times's* '100 Best Books of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', and the International Booker Prize has recently short- and longlisted various short story collections, including the 2025 winner, *Heart Lamp* by Banu Mushtaq (tr. Deepa Bhasthi), which captures the everyday lives of women in southern India.

The short stories we have chosen are both timeless and timely. We are proud that our translation of 'In the Mirror' was shortlisted for the 2025 John Dryden Translation Competition and our translations of 'A Tambourine, a Horse' and 'Long Shadows' were longlisted in 2024. 'Long Shadows' has since been published in [Asymptote](#).

### *Translated*

**Ilse Aichinger, 'In the Mirror'**. 1952 Gruppe 47 Prize. A young woman's life unspools, connecting her death and birth through poignant vignettes. (Fischer, 1949. 3,400 words.)

**Marie Luise Kaschnitz, 'A Tambourine, a Horse'**. In wartime, a misplaced key becomes the catalyst for tragedy; the instability of the everyday is manifest. (Insel, 1952. 1,700 words.)

**Marie Luise Kaschnitz, 'Long Shadows'**. Rosie, on holiday with her embarrassing family, finds inner strength in the face of threatened violence. (Suhrkamp, 1960. 2,700 words.)

**Luise Rinser, 'A Posy of White Daffodils'**. Religious and social mores are explored through dialogue between an angel and a woman who has just died. (Fischer, 1956. 2,600 words.)

**Luise Rinser, 'The Red Tabby'**. A graphic account of a family's struggle for survival in the harsh winter of 1946. (Fischer, 1956. 2,400 words.)

### *In Progress*

**Ilse Aichinger, 'The Broken Seal'**. Amid the chaos and heightened tensions of war, an official order is open to misinterpretation. (Fischer, 1953. ~2,300 words.)

**Ingeborg Drewitz, 'The Captive City'**. A man makes a conscious decision to stay in East Germany. (Sachse und Pohl, 1963. ~3,100 words. Rights with Frau Jutta Hoppe.)

**Ingeborg Drewitz, 'Shadow Grid'**. A tale of forbidden love, attempted flight, and a forced denunciation. (Sachse und Pohl, 1963. ~2,900 words. Rights with Frau Jutta Hoppe.)

--- Excerpts from the Kaschnitz stories on the following pages ---

# A Tambourine, a Horse

Marie Luise Kaschnitz

A house at the edge of the forest, a villa of sorts, not grand but not humble either, one floor and a couple of rooms in the attic with crooked walls, where the child sleeps. A *Hampelmann* hangs over the bed, a little jumping jack that hangs freely, a thin cord dangling between its legs; the child pulls the cord before going to sleep and the last light of the day falls into the room as the *Hampelmann* raises its legs in their funny little trousers up as high as it can. The child is eleven years old, a contented orphan who enjoys going to school, enjoys helping her foster mother at home, enjoys accompanying her foster father along a stretch of track where the old railwayman records every minute of delay. Most of the time it's war – railway carriages filled with soldiers or prisoners rolling through the little birch grove and on the low embankment through the moor. The little town isn't so close to the front that residents are being evacuated, nor is there any shooting, but one day foreign soldiers arrive and billet themselves everywhere.

A few days earlier the child had heard her foster parents whispering urgently, we're old and the child is a child, we'll give them everything we have, nothing can happen to us. The child doesn't understand what should happen, soldiers have food and share food, she was even given chocolate once. So one night, when the banging begins on the door downstairs, the child is scared, but not unduly. Get dressed, her foster father calls, and immediately thereafter: we're coming, yes, we're coming, and his light tread patters down the stairs. A few minutes later, everyone's standing in the entrance hall, foster parents, child, and foreign soldiers who, it turns out, are neither demanding quarters nor plundering but rather searching for someone they believe to be concealed in the house. But the child knows for certain no one is in the house, so when her foster parents shake their heads she shakes her head too. The soldiers' faces darken, one of them grabs her foster father by the shoulders and turns him round, shoves a revolver into his back and forces him to march through all the rooms, through the kitchen, and the pantry, until finally they climb the stairs. Next to the

child's room is another small room with crooked walls; it used to be rented out, but it's been a long time since any guests came; then it was used as a storeroom, but there's nothing to store anymore, now it's just filled with clutter. Recently, her foster mother happened to take the key out of the lock: child, put it in the tambourine, and the child, who'd slipped the key into her little apron pocket believes she really did put it away; her foster parents keep their keys in a small, calf-leather tambourine, the one from the fancy dress box with its high sides and tinkly bells. And now here they are, standing in front of the room again, this time at night and supposedly with a fugitive hiding in there; the soldiers rattle the door handle and the child's foster mother sends her for the tambourine – it has its own special place in the kitchen cupboard so it's easy to find. The child carries the thing up the stairs as fast as she can, that familiar jingling and jangling feels wrong so she wraps her apron round the little bells and holds the dancing keys tight. Electric lights burn everywhere, but beyond the staircase window the gardens, the meadows, and the edge of the forest lie in a ghostly half-light. Slowly, the child begins to feel a sense of foreboding, a silent fear that things could turn out badly and never again be as they were. Her foster father takes the tambourine from her, his hands shaking so badly that the keys agitate in a flurry of drumming, a sound that triggers the soldiers' fury and their fright. Now all four have revolvers in their hands and they all talk over one another in a language the child doesn't understand.

--- *End of sample* ---

Original title: 'Ein Tamburin, ein Pferd', in *Ferngespräche*, Insel Verlag, 1952; reissued 1992 (4th edition 2016).

Translation © Jennifer Busch and Audrey Delphendahl.

# Long Shadows

Marie Luise Kaschnitz

Boring, it's all boring, the hotel lobby, the dining room, the beach where her parents lie in the sun, fall asleep open-mouthed, wake up, yawn, go in the water, fifteen minutes in the morning, fifteen minutes in the afternoon, always together. Seen from behind: Father's legs are too thin, Mother's too fat, with varicose veins; then in the water the two of them perk up and splash about childishly. Rosie never goes bathing with her parents, instead she has to mind her sisters, still young but no longer sweet, those silly geese, pouring sand in your book or laying a jellyfish on your bare back. Having a family is dreadful, other people suffer from their families too, Rosie sees this quite clearly, for instance the tanned man with the fine gold chain, she calls him the Shah, instead of staying under the parasol with his own people he's perched at the bar or driving a motorboat, wild, giddy turns, and always alone. A family is such a bother, why can't people come into the world fully grown then immediately go their own way. I'm going my own way, says Rosie one day after luncheon, adding, as a precautionary measure, into town to buy postcards, picture postcards for my school friends, as if she would dream of writing silly little cards to the foolish dolts in her class, Greetings from the deep blue Mediterranean Sea, how are you, I am fine. We're coming with you, shout her little sisters, but praise be, no, they're not allowed to, they have to go to bed for their afternoon nap. Well, just up the road to the market square and straight back again, says her father, and do not speak to anyone, then he follows her mother and little sisters, he has a poor, buckled office-worker-back, today he took a boat on the water, but he'll never make a sailor. Just up the road, at the top the town clings to the mountain with its walls and towers, but her parents have never been there, the way is too long for them, too hot, which it is, no shade far or wide. Rosie doesn't need shade, whatever for, she's at ease everywhere, at ease in her own sun-oil-gleaming skin, provided, of course, that no-one's finding fault with her and no-one's asking her any questions. Being alone makes everything big and strange and gives a sense of sole ownership: my street, my mangy black cat, my dead bird, disgusting, eaten away at by ants, but that simply must be picked up, mine. My long legs in

faded linen trousers, my white sandals, my feet one in front of the other, no-one's on the street, the sun's blazing. There, where the street meets the hill, it begins to snake up, blue snake in golden vineyards, and in the fields the crickets are chirping like mad. Rosie takes a shortcut through the allotments, an old woman comes towards her, a mummy, for God's sake, still roaming about here, she belongs in the grave. A young man overtakes Rosie then stops, and Rosie puts on a stern expression. The young men here are importunate ne'er-do-wells, you don't need parents to know that, actually, why do you need parents, the devil they paint on the wall changed its face long ago.

--- *End of sample* ---

Original title: 'Lange Schatten', in *Das dicke Kind und andere Erzählungen* © Suhrkamp Verlag, 1960; reissued 2002 (6th edition 2024).

Translation © Jennifer Busch and Audrey Delphendahl.

## Rights

The rights for the Kaschnitz, Rinser, and Drewitz stories we have selected are available. The rights for the collection containing our Aichinger preferences have been sold; however, we are not aware of existing published translations.

## Translators

**Jennifer Busch** is a freelance translator and editor as well as senior copy editor for *Asymptote*. She holds an MA in Translation with Distinction from the University of Bristol and her work has appeared in *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*, among other publications.

**Audrey Delphendahl**, formerly a lawyer, now a translator, received a *Radial-Initiativstipendium* from the *Deutscher Übersetzerfonds* for an excerpt from her master's thesis in Literary Translation. Her work has appeared in the poetry magazine *Konzepte*.

## Contact Information

Jennifer Busch: [+49 176 4573 6682](tel:+4917645736682) | [jen@jennifer-busch.com](mailto:jen@jennifer-busch.com) | [jennifer-busch.com](http://jennifer-busch.com)  
Audrey Delphendahl: [+49 157 7621 0178](tel:+4915776210178) | [audrey@delmore1986.com](mailto:audrey@delmore1986.com) | [audreydelphendahl.com](http://audreydelphendahl.com)