

Anna Mitgutsch



Foto: randomhouse.de

Waltraud Anna Mitgutsch graduated from the high school in Linz in 1967. Afterwards she studied at the university of Salzburg English and German. She made numerous trips and taught from 1971-1973 at British universities in Hull and Norwich. In 1974 she graduated to doctor of philosophy in Salzburg with a thesis on Ted Hughes. From 1975 to 1978 she was a research assistant at the Institute for American Studies at the University of Innsbruck. This was followed by renewed stays abroad in East Asia and the United States. In 1978 she was a visiting professor of German and English at the State University of Seoul and from 1980 to 1985 at various universities of the US East coast. In 1985 she returned Austria. Since then she has been living as a freelance writer alternately in Linz or Boston. She got a number of awards and prizes for her works.

Zwei Leben und ein Tag. Roman, München: Luchterhand, 2007



Foto: Buchumschlag Luchterhand

Edith, the main character of this novel, writes letters to her former husband, however, she never sends them. She thinks about her broken relationship as well about her failed life.

Edith also writes about Herman Melville, the American novelist (1819 – 1891) He is a favorite writer of Edith and her husband. They long cherished the idea to jointly write his biography, but they never succeeded. In this novel Anna Mitgutsch portrays characters who failed in life, who are “different” from other people and who finally are destroyed by life as Herman Melville or even killed as Edith’s son Gabriel. They are innocent outsiders and scapegoats which are taken advantage of and laughed at by stronger people. They are never successful neither in their work nor in their relationships. They are trusting and sincere and can easily be deceived.

Herman Melville created the character of “Billy Budd” (a magnificent opera by Benjamin Britten). This is a handsome young man but he has a speech impediment and cannot defend and protect himself from other people. This is a parallel to Edith’s son Gabriel who is slightly handicapped. Gabriel is “different” after a disease in his childhood. He is an innocent person who is always cheated, exploited and finally even killed.

All characters in Anna Mitgutsch’s novel are failing in Life: Edith and her husband in their relationship and in their work, Gabriel becomes a victim of cruel persons, Herman Melville

was not accepted and appreciated by his contemporaries and by the literature critics and his books were pulled to pieces. His persistence to continue writing in spite of the opposition of his environment, is admirable but at the end both he and his family were destroyed by life. The interest in the biography of Melville as well as the fate of their common son Gabriel is still a link with her husband. The life of Herman Melville is included in this book in the form of intertext. It is a modern novel using modern style, The reader is invited to introduce his own knowledge of American history and literature.

Remarks to the novel “Zwei Leben und ein Tag”

Basically it is a very pessimistic book. The main character Edith fails in everything: death of the only child, failure of her marriage, no professional career, in the end death from cancer. Of course this is an extreme example of a woman's life but there are women who have similar fates. Even if in Europe life for women is better than in many other parts of the world, they are still often discriminated. Therefore women should try to help other women and facilitate their lives and not make it more difficult.

Rezensiert von Herta Spitaler