Swarthmore College
Works

Russian Faculty Works Russian

1999

Translation Of "The Silk, The Shears" By I. Vrkljan

I. Vrkljan

Sibelan E. S. Forrester , translator
Swarthmore College, sforres1@swarthmore.edu

C. Hawkesworth , translator

Follow this and additional works at: https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-russian

Part of the Slavic Languages and Societies Commons
Let us know how access to these works benefits you

Recommended Citation
I. Vrkljan; Sibelan E. S. Forrester , translator; and C. Hawkesworth , translator. (1999). "Translation Of "The Silk, The Shears" By I. Vrkljan". *The Silk, The Shears And Marina; Or, About Biography*. 1-96.
https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-russian/174

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Russian Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact myworks@swarthmore.edu.

I
CHILDHOOD IN THE KINGDOM

The Wire

"The Gypsy is here, let her in!" I sometimes cry out in my sleep. It's the same person who, if she survived the concentration camp in the war, once again sells roasted corn on the street in front of Saint Sophia's Orthodox Church. The church was at the end of Saint Sava Street in Belgrade, the capital city of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, where I was born. The sons of the land were traveling then, looking for work, through the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and so at the end of 1920 my father came to Belgrade by way of Varna and Graz and found employment as an agent for the Weinschenker Corporation. My mother, born in Bosnia, came from Vienna and found work as a secretary at the Belgrade office of Siemens. They married, and later moved with me onto that street. It was broad and white, the houses new, it smelled eternally of roasted corn. Gypsies squatted on the pavement. Their small, rough hands turned the cobs over the fire and were completely black. "You're not supposed to eat that corn from the Gypsies," my parents would say. Much later, when I came again to Saint Sava Street, it was narrow, gray, its houses dilapidated. I ate corn in front of the church with pleasure.

In the yard of the house, in the royal city of that time, low barbed wire wound around two patches of trampled grass.

Once while playing I fell on that wire, blood ran, the janitor bandaged the wound, they took me to the hospital. At that my mother, in some other, Catholic church, vowed that she would never intentionally terminate a pregnancy if I remained alive.

Above that yard was a balcony where stern-looking Father would stand in the afternoon. I played "doctor" in the basement with Gordana, the janitor's black-haired daughter. Once we stripped naked, we investigated each other above the thighs with a safety pin. Something forgotten, horrible? I wasn't allowed out into the yard anymore. "Gordana is a bad girl, a bad girl!" my parents shouted. The impossibility of escape, desolation. From then on I had to play with Lotte, the daughter of Mama's friend. They had a small house of their own, they loved power and thought that they were better than everyone else. Because of that you had to speak German with them, even at home. I still didn't know that it wasn't the local language and so I grew up bilingual. Gordana and Lotte. Downstairs and upstairs. The joints of the old dolls' limbs have been rusting ever since. I still see the blood on the barbed wire, I still smell it. But the flagstones of that yard, bordered with tar, have disappeared. Only the wire flies everywhere, lies all around. Barbed wire—*Stacheldraht.* The blood between two languages.

Besides the yard there were also foreign places. We would spend the summer vacation in Begunj, in Slovenia. There my mother's mother, a certain von Rukavina, would come to visit from Vienna. When we went for walks she tied a thin chain to my hand so I wouldn't run away. Under the great chestnuts of the hotel, Father would play chess with the village priest. Disgust at lunchtime because of the chicken skin. Swallowing, secretly drinking water. Nausea. You have to clean your plate. Always the last one at the table. Father and that priest have been moving the black and white figures for

a long time now. So under the shadowy trees of various summer vacation spots unfolds the torture of a good upbringing, senseless punishments firm the torso of a society that insures itself against ruin with such rituals. It sees its most important goal in a clean plate, and to this day spends its vacation in haughtiness, in days without luster. So too they banned the little, sour Slovene apples. I wasn't allowed to eat them, in the name of those new ones, beautiful and poisonous, the kind you see today. Green apples, which fell into the grass almost soundlessly, together with the bees. Today one of the hotel owner's sons whom I played with then sells the old songs of his land, adapted and unrecognizable, to television stations in Germany. He has forgotten everything: the old songs and the little apples.

The low room in Vinkovci was also a foreign place. Hard clay paths to the doors of the house, the sun shone and burned on them. We were visiting Mama's friend. The two of them sat in the garden, drank cold juices and chatted for days on end. The friend, very tall and very blond, was an angel, but a snappish angel among darkly dressed and stooping peasants. Her son and her daughter caught butterflies by twilight and stuck them on slender pins. They kept the boxes with glass lids in that low room. I wanted to catch a butterfly too, but it flapped wildly in my hand and I let it go right away. A fine, brown dust remained on my fingers. The children laughed at me spitefully, saying, "It was stupid to let it go, such a wonderful specimen, and when you touch a butterfly and wipe the dust off its wings it can't live any longer anyway. Look for it, look for it, it must be lying somewhere dead in the grass." I desperately begged my mother, who was sitting in a white lawn chair, to take me home. The angel's children laughed, Mother laughed too. People who think they know best always teach us something bad. And I realized that stopping halfway means the same thing as going all the way. We have to beware of beginning.

Ever since, the fine brown dust always reminds me of the pin that follows after it.

Crosses

Death. It sounded for the first time in the sublet room where Papa's widowed mother lived. Grandma had a big jewelry box of black leather that I was allowed to play with. In it she kept yellowed letters, a dry corsage of violets, a brooch with a false stone, Austro-Hungarian medals, bunches of music paper, her own compositions, waltzes she played around 1900 in a tavern in Ruse in Bulgaria. Grandfather sat next to her, protected her from the drunks, and turned the pages. He had abandoned her at the beginning of their marriage and after many years she found him there, sick and in the grip of alcohol. And so she played in taverns and fed the family with her knowledge from music school in Zagreb. Her husband beat the children terribly, there were six of them. They all just died off like flies. Only my father remained, burdened until his death with hatred for his parents. There was a letter in the box from his ten-year-old brother Sasha. That scribbled letter, the black box, Grandma's stories about the spice trade of her childhood, ice-skating and playing, her departure from Yugoslavia, the catastrophes of dying. Little Sasha who died of a common cold, Vladimir who died at four probably from an inflammation of the brain, the little girl who was mowed down by typhus. About those little ones who died right after birth, Boda whom she left with strangers when she set off to look for her husband, who took his pillow and stayed out in the woods for three days, who fell into a barrel of rainwater and almost drowned, who was bit in the face by a dog, who once almost burned up. All those stories, and photographs of a stately woman in a big hat taken somewhere in Varna when they had money again for two years and Grandfather wasn't drinking, all that just settled into me, colored the beginning, it was like the grounds of some long-drunk coffee. That

grandmother, whom I later visited in the asylum, wore a ribbon of black velvet around her neck. Scents from old cupboards reigned in her room, she recalled her graves without consequences. She didn't see any connection in it, she talked about everything as if she were talking about a storm or bad weather. She didn't know that people can defend themselves, and so she died in a madness which was also gentle and small. They buried her in the autumn in the asylum hospital cemetery, and Father went to the movies that afternoon after the burial. My mother reproached him for that. The black box disappeared in a move—her music, all the letters, that life.

My mother's mother died many years later in Vienna. My aunt had them pierce her heart with a pin so that she wouldn't wake up in the coffin. She got a marble cross, the other grandmother a wooden one. It was visible from the train until they redug the grave. But even today the tree-lined road that leads to the Vrapče Asylum smells of death, of the dress my mother was wearing, of dark afternoons sitting in her lap, of a room with a big icy mirror, and of the child in it. Of Father's name, Bogdan, Mother's name, Mary, Grandpa Djuro, Aunt Helena, who sometimes arrived from Vienna, wrapped in the sharp scent of eau de cologne 4711. Lorgnons, big hats, fur coats. Decay and ruin. In 1934 they took me to a hall where a black carriage stood. On a white bier an empty, golden uniform. A high, stiff collar with a hole in it. Spots of blood. The king has been killed. Many people in the hall are crying. The hole and the collar must not be touched. Some people say, the new King Petar is young and handsome, long live the monarchy! People talk about fine dresses, big hats. And they think there are no moths living in the red plush of the throne.

Before starting school I would leaf through Papa's books. Many of the bindings were done during the Secession, they

always seemed a little forbidding. Albums with postcards, Italian madonnas, Murillo's boys, photographs of the mines where Father sold drilling machines. Pictures from Vienna, Mother's brother in uniform, the one who drowned at eighteen on an Easter boating trip because he was wearing heavy officer's boots. Grandmother knelt on the shore and called for help. They never found him. Bright-colored cards, Bellini's squarish bodies, blood from the breast, Morgenstern's poems beneath the gallows, Böcklin's *Island of the Dead,* Raphael, Adriaen van der Werff, Heine's poems. "The mother stood at the window, the son lay in the bed." Late afternoons, pale curtains, mysterious pictures, and the text: "On his deathbed, in bed lay the son."

Golden threads in the gray ribbon of days—those are the birthdays, name days, Christmas. Holy days in the three rooms of the apartment, always indoors, never on the street, never with others. Money, success, and gift giving are celebrated in hiding, on the premises. The more presents there are, the better we're doing. For we are somewhat better than the rest of the world, Papa and Mama love each other on those days. They don't fight. At that time I loved Ana, the servant in full skirts. She was from the Banat, she had a boyfriend and got fired because she was always kissing me, and she wasn't especially clean. They even wanted her to give up the boyfriend, whom she stood embracing in the kitchen every Sunday. She retaliated wonderfully with a yell, packed her trunks, in spite of their protests pressed one more kiss on my forehead, and disappeared. Her skirts from the Banat rustled proudly as she departed, and her white skin remained in a child's memory without a single blemish.

The details of those days have melted into one: bed, room, dining-room table. Sundays, the empty ones, change in memory. Father was suddenly earning more. A new apartment, different, business friends would drop by. They pulled

a Sunday dress on me and we went visiting down steep streets, down the cobblestone pavement. Once a month to a white villa with a garden. There I would play with Miki, the dreamy son of a small businessman. Today he is half-blind, a professor in Belgrade. They lived in their own house, and the attic was finished as a playroom. An upside-down table with blankets turned into a boat, with islands around it, the sea. In the attic there was a puppet theater too, a king, a queen, it couldn't have been otherwise. The mamas would interrupt these journeys with loud calls. They were afraid of the silence in the attic, we knew that. All the same, in that world of ours there wasn't a single shadow of forbidden play, and I never had anything to say when my friends would tell stories like that from childhood. What could there be? Miki went to the French school, he wore, oddly enough, a French beret, and we traveled to our islands. Miki never escaped from the closed world of that house. Not even when the house got old and became impractical. He stayed in it, a prisoner of fidelity to possession, in its basement he almost lost his head in the war. He almost goes hungry because of the constant repairs, he sits half-blind by the window of his old nursery, and he'll die in that deserted ruin with Greek words on his lips.

They soon packed me off to the German-Serbian primary school. Mrs. Bugarski was overshadowed by the handsome German teacher Schuetz, who later died on the eastern front. We didn't like her classes. Almost all the children were from middle-class families. Zoran later wound up in prison for smuggling American cigarettes, Mihajlo became an airplane designer and emigrated to Switzerland in 1947, infatuated with jazz. Damjana—her father was a well-known doctor—found a rich husband. Jelka—her father was an adjutant to the queen—talked about life at court. Today she lives in Ljubljana, her brother recently died in an accident in the mountains. Mirjana played tennis, Ivan V. became a

poet. The devotion I felt to them has disappeared just as their faces have in recollection. Father was losing himself more and more then in the world of Boehler Steel, his work was visible in new furniture, in new beige-colored china with red tulips, in new blue cups, very thin, in the expert cook, a pink ostrich-feather jacket for Mama and a big picture by the Viennese painter Neuboeck. Piles of linen and bedding grew in the cupboards, new dishes in the china cabinet. And what else, what was all that? My parents would go out in the evening to the Majestic or To the Russian Tsar, guests arrived and departed, they danced the tango. I unaccountably refused to say "I kiss your hands," I didn't want to go obediently to my room and disappear obediently into bed. Exasperated fury on all sides. On the threshold between the nursery and the room with the guests drinking sparkling wine, Father's heavy hand once and for all taught me passivity in the face of violence. I no longer believed in justice. Ties with others grew thin, and since then every act of violence by someone stronger brings nausea. There was a stink of alcohol, Father's laugh abruptly turned into a roar. I hated those festivities, the fine china, the guests. A lot of light, that means pain, so it seemed to me, and I ran into the small dark bedroom. I hid myself there.

The Pattern

Between the department stores and the empty evening streets of Wilmersdorf, where the young people in exotic garb believe that they have finally freed themselves from the dazzling advertisement of the West, that little shop in Belgrade from long ago always appears to me. The shining silk in bales, its beauty, the soft velvet, the smooth wood of the counters, Mother's hand passing over the satin, the dazzling colors. Turkish coffee in the back room, dust on the street outside, the deathbed odor of the cotton. That picture from long ago then goes quickly and fearfully back into the depths, looks for warmth and shelter, changes color, but

never ages. The seahorse pattern on the silk slowly unfolds on the sales counter and remains in recollection at that movement. The creases of the silk are eternal. The shears that cut had ornamented handles and were dull. The scratches of the shears on the counter have outlived everything: the purchased silk, its pattern, my fear. Because they hurt the little horse, they cut it in half. Its head stayed behind in the shop, in the bale of silk on the shelf. Its body rested for a long time in the hem of that worn-out skirt.

A girl's upbringing. Sometimes submission with pleasure. I accompanied mother to Mr. Doroslovac's cosmetic salon, I was fascinated with the rejuvenating perfumes. I accompanied her to the hairdresser's and found that dyed curls were beautiful. Chosen as a housewife's companion, I looked into the same shop windows. In spite of that, and in fact illogically, I chose my neurotic father more and more often. He signified that other, meaningful life outside—knowledge, books, conversations. When he wasn't in the house, time passed in the everyday dusting, in purchases, washing clothes. But I didn't pass Mother's light blows on to dolls, I didn't like to play with them, I didn't feed them. I hated the imitation of maternity, I didn't learn to cook for them. But I am still nothing more than an exact reflection of the capabilities that my mother possessed, or did not possess. She didn't cook much either, I am her imprint, a copy, her miniature. I tried to cross to the other shore to the deceptive self-sufficiency of the male world, I didn't perceive the interchangeability of roles, I quickly ran aground on unfertile shores, coquettish and a little dull in my gestures. Attempts to escape looked futile. Relapses. It left a gloomy masquerade in front of the mirror, a dance with hat and cane, once again silk, ornaments, and trifles. The imprint of a little woman, a doll's doll. All the rooms turn into structures of rubber, silk ringlets, and glass eyes. And so I began to break the dolls' arms and legs, and to get only books for my birthday.

Hatred, interpreted as a love for reading. It got to be that, but by a detour, through bad children's books and comics. I dug my fingernails into my palms, no, we aren't dolls, I feel that. I cut off my long curls on the eve of March 27, 1941.

We were standing at the window and looking down into the street. There a multitude of people moved in waves. "Better war than the pact!" I couldn't find out from anyone who those people were and why they were shouting. My parents closed the window and we went to bed. That and the birth of twin sisters were the prelude to the war. Sunday April 6 brought curtains of glass dust and an incomprehensible scorching heat. The wailing of bombers, detonations. Rudely dragged out of bed, weeping in the basement where people sat on the coal, fire, later a bloody hand on the electric wire, fragments, rubble. I understood nothing of all that. Nothing of the escape from Belgrade in a train full of women and children. A rain of bullets fell suddenly, we could see the German pilot, he was flying so low. We lay along the tracks, the wood of the wagons no longer offered any protection. After the attack people got up again, but not all of them. The dead remained lying in the grass and we continued our journey. In front, on the locomotive, a white sheet from our trunk fluttered quite in vain. In the evening we came to Zagreb. With two pieces of luggage. Everything stayed behind, the blue cups and the fine china were lost. When Father went to Belgrade for the things there were already Germans in the apartment. But he found the furniture. He surely spoke German. All the rest was chalked up to fate. We fled to our relatives in Zagreb, where a quisling government had proclaimed the Independent State of Croatia. And everything began from the beginning: work, salary, Boehler Steel. People believed: Everything will be fine, the war will only last a few weeks, it's nothing, nothing terrible, only a small misfortune of history.

I still had a fear of noises. If a door slammed somewhere, I

would throw myself onto the floor. They called the doctor. He consoled the family with time, which heals everything. Even regret for the attic with the islands, for the seahorse on the silk.

Aunt Viktorija's apartment, where we lived at first, was an old-fashioned three-room apartment with dirty windows. In the long, dark corridor stood cupboards, jars of cherries-in-rum in them, and it always smelled of food. The little armchairs in the room were red, the dog Jacky always lay in one of them. When I stroked him my palm was covered with a layer of brown grease. It would rub off in black crumbs. The spoons gave every soup the sourish taste of metal. The lamp burned above the table even in the daytime. My aunt's sons were interested only in acquiring provisions, they bought flour and sugar by the sack, and so the sacks stood in the corridor too. But there was also a yard with a big tree in it. I would sit under it for hours and stare at nothing. That tree and my great-aunt's indestructible flowered dress that smelled of mothballs and shortening, that was all that remained in me. No knowledge of the war, the Germans, the partisans in the mountains. Those were empty days in the old aunts' house. Viktorija had two more sisters, they lived on the ground floor, all the three did was cook, play solitaire, and cook. My forgetting Vinogradska Street expresses resistance toward them. It still reminds me of their old, wrinkled skin, dull boredom, and the stink of rats spreads in its basements.

The rest of the 1941 school year, in a parochial elementary school, has also gone into oblivion. After that we lived two months in a building on the former Ban Jelačić Square. The Central Apothecary is in it now. All that's left is the recollection of glass doors with a patch of sun on them. Then we moved to a building at 10 Buconjić Street. A bedroom, a dining room, Papa's office, the nursery, and the room between all of them, in the middle of the apartment, where I

slept. I was in everyone's way then, I didn't have a table for studying, and I would take refuge again in the girls' room, read there. The family was occupied with my sisters, and soon a cook came. And guests, dancing, dinners. I collected pictures of actresses, Marike Röck, de Kowa. I hated movies about Popeye and the spinach that strengthened his muscles. I cried because of little Shirley Temple's broken glass ball, because of stupid songs on the radio—"Buy Me a Colored Balloon"—that I liked to listen to. A smooth, unenlightened middle-class world. So much sweetness leaves traces.

At age eleven they sent me to high school to be taught by the nuns. White kneesocks, black smocks, pigtails. I fell in love with young Sister Estera, she taught biology, and so the young schoolgirl also wanted to become a nun. Estera loved her protégées with the love that is born in lonely empty dormitories, and she showed us her closely cropped hair under the white cap and her flattened, wrapped breasts. She later left the convent, got married, and for a long time kept on writing to me. In the photograph she enclosed she was fat and had no aura, the man beside her was bald.

Then came Good Friday. Beneath the organ lay a painted wooden statue of Jesus and people threw coins onto it, gifts to the church. I didn't want to go to mass anymore. Somewhere in that church of Saint Blaise, which looked like a Turkish steam bath, between the pictures of saints, between the uniforms and the smugglers, somewhere in that chaos of ignorance and instinct—one old woman kneeling in Zrinjevac Square with a yellow star on her coat had to clean the high boots of some German officer—somewhere in some corner of family life, I stopped drawing queens, beautiful ladies, Mama's ball gown. A small jolt of feeling passed through the colors and daydreaming, and it tore, crumpled, all the fairies. The remnants of those drawings later yellowed in my mother's drawer. Finished, the end. With my pencil I

drew trees, cypresses, I blackened pieces of paper from edge to edge.

The year 1941: First I wanted to become a nun, then on Sundays I no longer wanted to go to mass, the first books by Šenoa, Gjalski. In class we had to greet the teacher with our hands outstretched, we had to join the Ustaše supporters. I no longer drew pretty dresses, I was in everyone's way.

The owners of the house in Buconjić Street, the old Šlezinger couple, lived on the ground floor. Above us lived a colonel who was driven home by a soldier in a car. His sons were on the eastern front. I didn't know that the Šlezinger family had been driven out of that apartment. I also never heard that they were Jews. One day there was a soldier standing in front of their door on the ground floor. At the window, in the garden behind the house, Mrs. Šlezinger told me softly that they weren't allowed to leave their apartment. In the evening I climbed down from our kitchen balcony into the garden so no one would notice and gave her a bar of chocolate through the window. The next day their apartment was empty. Someone in the house said they had moved. I learned about the night transport, by truck, only after the war, from their grandson Darko Suvin. The Blau family, acquaintances of my parents, committed suicide. That too I found out only in 1945. Papa's friend, the painter Sirovy, killed himself also, somewhat later. Arrest warrants on the fences. Zarah Leander sang on the radio. The occupation. "Lili Marlene." German soldiers in the city. The central post office was blown up. Later I got to know the husband of the clerk who belonged to the illegal group in the post office and who carried out the diversion. Jasenovac concentration camp, corpses floating down the Sava. The Jews who had suddenly disappeared, who were sent away, killed. Why did no one tell me anything? "Not in front of the child," Papa would say sometimes, as I came into the room. Death in the land, Ger-

man films in the movie theaters. That horrible mixture. Air attacks, a child of eleven, senseless upbringing, you must clean your plate, I kiss your hands, to bed at eight.

I see that child in a gray, empty street. There is no one beside her. Today at family funerals I don't wear black. A changed feeling, but it is still a feeling along with a costume, without color. Amazed, humble, and full of anger.

Bad Deeds

In the nuns' high school we cut little shirts out of the graph paper from our arithmetic notebooks. For each good deed we drew a cross in one square with a pencil. When the little shirt was full we would hand it in to our homeroom teacher Sister Agnes. Then she would give us a holy picture for a prayer book and with gentle handwriting would jot down some pious wish for our souls. Agnes was very pale, quiet, had tuberculosis, and was a saint to us. I visited her once after the war in the convent on Frankopanska Street, when the nuns' high school no longer existed. She was still pale, but the charm of dependence had vanished. Outside the school hierarchy she was only pretty, and we could no longer have a conversation about anything. She was uncertain without the school chalkboard behind her back, and I could no longer look at her with an agitated heart, and so I quickly left Frankopanska Street and never visited her again. I no longer know what good deeds it was we drew little crosses for on the little shirts. But I know very well what I considered bad deeds then. And when I stole some sugar once in the larder, I had the feeling, because of the little shirt, that God's three-cornered eye saw everything through the ceiling, that it was examining me through the clouds, and I ran in fear from the cool room. Afterward that eye followed me through life for a long time, Anges's stories about going astray were firm inside me. I also had a troubled conscience for wishing that Sister Estera was my mother. At night I

dreamed that she lived with us and that I was allowed to hug her. I hoped that she could protect me differently from Mama. Along with these swelled the awful dreams, the ones from movies. The movies were a place of great escape, a refuge. Films were important so that at night I could play all the roles of all those beauties I had seen, so I could dance, love with their faces but with my feelings, and be embraced by Gustav Fröhlich or Viktor Stahl. I sinned every night, pulling the empty and adult face of Marike Röck or Kristine Söderbaum onto a child's body: And I believed these faces were connected with happiness, love, life in a cabin in the snowy mountains. The evil of hit songs, steps in unison up the illuminated stairs, the evil of furs, pearls, and kisses lasted a long time. Compared with my own life, they became the painted scenery of my main goal: those biographies, which were not real ones, those made-up lips. I was already grown up when I finally freed myself from the chains of the movies. Once I began to feel nauseous watching those old films I could save almost nothing from that world. I was as suspicious as a teetotaler who is offered alcohol. But when we finally deny ourselves those kinds of dreams, then at night there is no more music and dancing. The beds we lie in are strangely narrow and cold after the ones built of foam and glitter. Then came the wish for a storm or some fire to destroy all the spinach fields, for the pans of spinach or chicken in the kitchen to fall on the floor, for everything they held to pour out, empty out, and for my plate on the table to remain empty. Or full of my favorite macaroni. I often wished that Papa would leave on a business trip, that Mama would stay forever with her friends in the café, so I could be alone for a long time in the house, could eat as much chocolate as I wanted, and could dream in peace. I went to swim in the Sava with a bad conscience, because I was happy to get away from all of them. I didn't wash my hands long enough, I secretly hid my dirty cuffs in the corner of the bathroom, I cleaned my shoes with white socks,

and all that, measured by the demands of the little shirt, was hell for sure, everything that I did or wished for was bad. I searched through the cupboards for the Christmas presents, but I pretended I still believed that Jesus brought the presents when he visited us. This made my parents happy, I didn't want to be without that happiness. I hated flowers in vases because they wilted quickly and smelled bad, but I picked them in spite of that and gave them politely to Mama. I didn't like to go to the zoo, but I would pester them to take me there. Everything was wrong somehow, I couldn't really be what I truly am, they didn't allow me to. Perhaps childhood is often only a game, pretending to be a child for your parents, for teachers, for all grown-ups—not to cause them pain when something evil and already disfigured shows under the round, innocent face. Every upbringing maintains immaturity for a long time, that is its point. And we know very well what is expected of us, we make ourselves smaller because of it. We are malicious, crafty, obstinate, we take the slaps in the face with pleasure and become babies, tears flow and stop flowing, we do all this because we aren't permitted to grow.

My parents, weighed down with their everyday concerns, never did see through those rituals. Nor could they have, I was fiendishly careful in everything, as if I knew that I had to deceive them constantly, sitting on the floor, crying with a stupid teddy bear in my arms. I pinched the cat in passing, I fell down, I tore my dresses, I lied, I stole cookies, I secretly read pulp romances, I broke the teapot and didn't confess. All that corresponded to the picture of a child, and it was all the kind of bad deeds we commit because we're sitting in prison, on the playing field of the old-fashioned family that you deceive, that deceives you. Because they can't take you seriously either, because they too consider you a stupid kid, and they want to teach you how you should be, what you have to become someday, how you'll have to live someday,

better than they did of course. Their life, yes, their mistakes. A child and parents—that is the epitome of a battle characterized by helplessness, because you have to play that child, otherwise you're lost. Otherwise they rush through all the rooms, all the gardens, pull you by the ears, by the pigtails, back into the house, into their room, where the stick they beat you with is waiting. The most underhanded bad deed is a lie. We know that we're lost without food and a bed, we know that we'd freeze outside alone and without them, that we don't yet know how to steal well, that the three-cornered eye still lives in our heads, in our ears the stories of how we'll burn if we dare to play with fire. We know that we're small and we can't find a job, and so we always return to mama again with a bowed head, we nag for a little pocket money, a gift, or a banana, we do what they expect of us. I didn't really want any of all the things I did, I did everything as it was prescribed, as it was expected, and so the little shirt with the little crosses got emptier and emptier until one day I finally threw it away. Growing up—it's a question of resistance, a question of power. I realized that late. I wanted to conform, and because of that I grew slowly.