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Autor: Linsmayer, Charles
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From Kathmandu to Somerset via Rome

At home anywhere in the world, Alexandra Lavizzari is pursuing her own path as an author.

CHARLES LINSMAYER

Alexandra Lavizzari, born on 11 August 1953 in Basel, is a Swiss Abroad par excellence. As though she was intentionally preparing for what lay ahead, she studied Ethnology and Islamic Studies before living, from 1980, in Kathmandu, Islamabad, Bangkok and finally Rome for ten years as the wife of a Swiss diplomat and mother of three children and then settling down in the discarded railway station of Bishops Lydeard in Somerset, UK, in 2008 with her second life partner, a British scholar of German.

Her time in the East is only alluded to in her early articles and sketches published in the NZZ and in her first literary work in 1992, "Warqa und Gulschah", the only German translation to date of a work by the Persian poet Ayyuqi. Her writing otherwise opens up worlds that bear witness to personal encounters with poetry, culture and history and – more clearly in the longer works – a powerful imagination and incredible associative linguistic ability. In 2001 she produced a moving portrait novel of the Welsh artist Gwendolen Mary John (1876 to 1939) entitled "Gwen John – Rodins kleine Muse", while in 2008 and 2009 she perceptively explored unusual literary relationships in "Annemarie Schwarzenbach und Carson McCullers" and "Glanz und Schatten. Die Freundschaft von Truman Capote und Harper Lee".

Towards a crime novel

Alexandra Lavizzari relied on her own invention for the first time in "Ein Sommer", a 1999 novella about a young girl who stabs her mother. Her 2007 book "Wenn ich wüsste wohin" was much more convincing. She drew on her own life experiences in a novel that depicts, in a very unspectacular way, the life crisis of a 50-year-old who suddenly feels butterflies in the stomach again. The story collection

"Flucht aus dem Irisgarten" marked a shift towards crime fiction in 2010. Chasms could suddenly open up taking events into the realms of the surreal. She produced fully fledged crime novels of a sophisticated literary nature in 2012 with "Mädchen IV mit Leguan" – the monologue of a young woman who gradually overcomes the psychological trauma caused by sexual abuse – and in 2013 with "Somerset" about a mother who desperately tries to save her daughter from disaster against the backdrop of a cider production cooperative which turns out to be a crime syndicate. This book owes its authenticity not least to a landscape whose beauty but also eeriness the author has been familiar with for many years.



"The ground has disappeared and I'm falling and falling until I cling onto the very first memory. It's mainly the tattooing. It frightens me, and I want to continue falling deeper. Nobody catches me or suspects that I am now plunging with other people's children into the waters where the ashes of the dead swim."

(Taken from: "Kindern und Fischen nach", in "Flucht aus dem Irisgarten", Zytglogge-Verlag, 2010)

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Alexandra Lavizzari's books are available from Zytglogge, Basel and Edition Ebersbach, Berlin.

Exciting Renaissance painting

As though her desire to travel had been reawakened, at least in a literary sense, Alexandra Lavizzari's most recent novel "Vesals Vermächtnis", published in 2015, is set way back in the Renaissance period in Greece, Venice and a number of other locations between the Po Valley, the Gotthard and Basel. The title character, the famous Anatom Vesalius (1514 to 1564), dies right at the beginning of the novel but like a virus his meagre legacy infects a Venetian goldsmith with an enlightening passion which inspires him to explore the traces of the deceased after numerous dramatic adventures. Alexandra Lavizzari has never written a more vivid, exciting or atmospheric journey to one's inner self than in this novel, and it would seem that she has finally found herself as an author and creator of characters after travelling and visiting many parts of the world.

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST IN ZÜRICH