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Hans Kruppa. *Kaito: Ein Märchen*. Munich. Goldmann. 1988. 158 pages. DM 16.80.

———. *Die fliegenden Erdbeeren*. Munich. Goldmann. 1988. 191 pages.

At thirty-seven, Hans Kruppa has established himself as a versatile and popular writer. Among his twenty-five books are lyric collections, short stories, novels, aphorisms, and radio plays. In the past two years he has published two *Märchen* or fairy tales, *Das Zauberbuch* (1987) and *Kaito*—which, besides providing interesting plots, also deal with education, religion, philosophy, and self-understanding—and an ironic and highly amusing spy novel, *Die fliegenden Erdbeeren* (The Flying Strawberries).

Whereas *Das Zauberbuch* covers a whole range of activities from love to crime to politics, its companion volume *Kaito* concentrates much more on the education of an artist. In the former a wise teacher has died and left a magic book that provides a mirror for anyone who looks into it to see himself as he really is. In the latter another wise teacher is at the end of a long and successful career, ready to initiate his highly gifted pupil Kaito into the mysteries of the *shakuhachi* or bamboo flute. Like Eichendorff's "Tage-nichts," Kaito is unsuited for the everyday work in his village and decides to travel and seek his fortune. An astrologer's prophecy leads him to the great teacher Togana, who accepts him as his sole pupil. In addition to music, Kaito is instructed in literature, philosophy, and other subjects in discussions with Togana and his highly educated servant Yinwa. After years of successful study, Kaito leaves Togana's house and is happily united with his sweetheart Miata.



Throughout the novel the world of most people is described as slavish, repetitious, and tiring. One must find the right way to the light, to freedom, and to self-understanding. Only a few are able to do so; the rest must settle for less, sometimes with bitterness, sometimes with resignation. Equally as interesting as *Kaito* are three young men who are not so successful with their music; one wanders from place to place, continually seeking answers without finding them; one finds a home in a monastery; and the third turns from music to politics when his father dies and he inherits the kingdom. Kruppa renders all this in polished style and with an excellent ear for sound and rhythm; the interspersed poems in both *Kaito* and *Das Zauberbuch* give further testimony to his talent.

*Die fliegenden Erdbeeren* contains all the ingredients of a modern spy novel: an eccentric scientist secretly building bombs, a beautiful KGB agent, a CIA agent somewhat reminiscent of James Bond, and a French adventurer called "Black Cat." The plot turns the usual thriller on its head, however, because the bombs the scientist is building—in the form of flying strawberries—are actually designed to spread love rather than destruction. When the secret agents discover this, they are forced to reconsider their values and to make quick decisions.

The story is complicated by the extraordinary, sometimes supernatural powers of the main characters. Billy Strong, the CIA agent, is a specialist in drugs and in "teleportation," the ability to will himself through any door in the world. Natasha Nikolayevna, who is directed from the Kremlin by the "Czar," an organic computer made up of the brainwashed minds of highly intelligent dissidents, is ravishingly beautiful and possessed of an irresistible sexual technique. Black Cat can hypnotize people at a glance, and in an underground laboratory the scientist Gutsnuts, believed to be dead, has developed with the help of his girlfriend Gudrun a method of storing "love units," which he collects from a highly sexed couple and stores in specially prepared strawberries.

All this playfulness allows Kruppa to make fun of many current ideals and to point toward a safer, saner society. His prose flows smoothly. He hovers above his characters, treating them ironically but not unkindly. The story fits together neatly into a unity, and the message that love may save the world is both logical and convincing.

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