

It was like *gray worlds*, the visits of our relatives that lived in the house on the steep street, that was built a long time ago and later on, after being destroyed in World War II, had been reconstructed and underwent from then on a constant process of improvement and renovating, a cumbersome task as my uncle pointed out, most of it done by his own hand, because there was not enough money, a result of the self-run, ailing metal goods business. *Gray worlds* because the house radiated almost no warmth_{basement}, but had always made a gray, gloomy impression on me, even when the SPINELESS fruit trees blossomed in the garden during spring time and indicated new life, or the birds twittered in the air and the flowers bloomed, and even when hot summer days made the air dusty and stuffy_{bath tub}, and also not in the fall, when the fruit was harvested, a task that was usually put on my father's shoulder and mine, and of course not at all during winter time, when bitter cold seized the house. Surely one reason for this must have been that they couldn't have children_{instead there was a nice dog and a snappy dog}, that could have filled the house with life, and this fate must have made them embittered_{acursing tirade} and lonely, depending on relatives and friends and – was it out of virtue or just pure necessity – spent much time and effort to keep a tight relationship with them, and yet there was an emptiness that could not be filled even with children, and likewise the many volumes of the big encyclopedia that were passionately studied with a magnifying glass didn't change anything. It filled the house like stale air, despite the strenuous production of festivities, the finest_{roasts}, pastries, cakes and tarts, beer and wine, bombastic words and laughter, cheerful gatherings, day trips with the own car_{pay attention to the road}, this was new to me because my parents never had one, visits to other towns, villages and butcher shops_{she gave me some pocket money every now and then}, monasteries and churches, walks in parks, and a stop-over in the own garden plot, a tough, windy part of the land, at Christmas the nicely decorated Christmas tree, more beautiful than the one at home, with presents that could only be received after a meticulously held waiting time and the ignition of sparkler candles, all this taking place in the good living room that was warmed up as an exception, at all other times cold as stone *joy like air bubbles in water*. From time to time I was allowed to play records with an old and somewhat dusted record player, but one had to choose the right revolutions per minute, but many times I wanted to have it in a

different way, in order to listen to the sounds of a distorted world, and yet the music kept its sadness, like my relatives, and like me, *puppets on a string* and *Elisabeth*. Then there was the aquarium and the TV, both strong attractions for me because my parents had neither of them^{only some years later they bought a TV}, the interesting watching of the little fish that lived in the aquarium swimming from one side to the other, constrained and yet somehow content, or maybe just dull, but at least an *impression* of life, and then the TV, much more fascinating, magic^{music}, attraction, gliding into glittering shadow worlds, right into the suction of a strange life, finally to see what had been withheld from me, to view the world as it really was, full of life, danger, adventures, cities and countries, revolvers and blinking lights, *Lassie* and *Fury*, and yet I always felt afterwards awkward, hollow and empty, like dancing *puppets on a string*, without a real inner life, drawn by hanging cords, operated by an unknown hand, and I became gray, gray to an extent^{Elisabeth} that I came closer to death than life and only the *little games* kept me alive. Only sometimes was it *less gray*, when my uncle described that once he had been far away from home and all of a sudden an inner restlessness came upon him and he somehow felt that he should quickly go back home, and then found his wife sick, lying in front of the bed, already cold and close to death, and only his quick return saved her life, and yet there was **no** God whom they could have expressed gratitude.