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Barbara Einhorn: Living in Berlin

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highly readable selection of revealing and well-written stories.

Richard J. Rundell
New Mexico State University

Living in Berlin. By Barbara Einhorn.
Macdonald and Company Ltd., 1986. 45 pages.

Living in Berlin is part of a series designed to acquaint young readers with various world cities. In its abbreviated fashion it does convey important facts about the vicissitudes of life in the two complex cities of East and West Berlin. Author Barbara Einhorn discusses relevant historical, political and social reality which includes the Nazi period, the division of Berlin, the Berlin Wall, housing, education, mass transport, along with some of the more mundane details of daily life. It is a wide range of material, and Einhorn handles it effectively. Yet in her apparent desire to provide a balanced picture of two very different yet related cities, her writing suffers from an excess of caution and tact. She presents "just the facts" (but which facts?), laced with an optimism and domesticity intended to appeal to young readers. Yet such tact prevents a more hard-nosed appraisal of the differences between East and West Berlin. There is no mention of the "Ausländerhaß" that has so shaken West Berlin in recent years. Instead, we read of the "colorful mixture of <the city's> population." Nor is there mention of the orders to shoot to kill during escape attempts from East Berlin -- a powerful fact known to even very young East Berlin children. Similarly, in a brief discussion on "Families and Festivals," the author describes the Day of the Republic as "the biggest family festival in East Berlin"; yet she neglects the fact that participants in several

of that day's activities are compelled to take part, that East Berliners (including children) speak wryly of "freiwilliger Zwang" -- forced voluntary participation. These, too, are the facts; and they do require commentary which is missing in this book. As one reads through this volume, one senses that the author is avoiding some very thorny questions -- questions, by the way, that children are more than capable of asking.

At a deeper level, the author misses an opportunity to examine more closely the ways in which politics and history infiltrate individual and family life in these cities. Existentially, let alone politically or economically, it is a very different experience to be on the East as opposed to the West Berlin side of the Wall. Yet, in a brief section of this book, "Young Berliners Speak," there are, in fact, no East Berlin voices -- an important omission. Certainly a book for young people ought to shed some light on the ways in which these German children come to terms with a complicated political and social predicament. And some of these statements by West Berlin youngsters about the Wall are instructive, if brief: "I think it would be better if the Wall wasn't there. It would be easier for people to stay in touch with their families. It's sad, really." But what would an East Berlin youngster have to say? Perhaps something like I heard from a twelve year old girl in that city, after she had witnessed a televised news report about an escape attempt from her city, her home. "I'll never forget it. That was when I really began to feel like they were lying to us here. Up until then I just thought the Wall was there to keep 'them' out. But that night on the West news they told about this man who was killed when he tried to get over the Wall. There was one picture of him lying there in 'no man's land,' dead I think. And just because he wanted to go to the West. They should have just let him go; but they won't let any of us go. That's

why the Wall is there!" This is poignant reality that children on both sides of the Wall are dealing with, and its influence runs deep.

Obviously this book is intended as an introduction to East and West Berlin, not as a comprehensive political and social history of these cities, and as such it works reasonably well. And the author is right to acknowledge the positive attributes to life on either side of the Wall. Yet there are also harsh truths here, and they are very much on the minds of children and young people growing up with them. I wish that these realities, too, had made it into this book.

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Harvard University

Bettina von Arnim. Ein Leben zwischen Tag und Traum. Von Fritz Böttger. Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1986. 438 Seiten. 17,50 M.

Bettina von Arnim ist nicht nur als romantische Schriftstellerin, sondern auch wegen ihres politischen Engagements in die Literaturgeschichte eingegangen. Die Nachwelt verbindet mit ihrem Namen eine Persönlichkeit von außergewöhnlicher Spontaneität und überlegener Intelligenz.

Bettina war eine Enkelin Sophie von La Roches, Schwester Clemens Brentanos und Gattin Achim von Arnims. Die meisten bedeutenden Menschen ihrer Zeit kannte sie persönlich. Goethe, einige Dichter der Heidelberger und Jenaer Romantik, Schelling, Beethoven, der junge Karl Marx und viele andere gehörten zu ihrem Freundeskreis. Ihr erstes Buch "Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde", eine freie literarische Bearbeitung ihrer eigenen Korrespondenz mit dem Dichter, machte sie schlagartig berühmt.

Sie erlebte die bewegte Zeit zwischen der französischen Revolution und den Volkserhebungen von 1848 in Berlin und Wien. Als eine der ersten deutschen Frauen versuchte sie, vor allem in ihren letzten Lebensjahren, in die Politik einzugreifen. Dies gelang ihr zumindest teilweise durch Publikationen, durch Briefe, und nicht zuletzt durch die Faszinationskraft ihrer Persönlichkeit, die vor allem auf die Anhänger des Vormärz und die studentische Jugend wirkte.

Das gängige Bettina-Bild hat Böttger grundsätzlich kaum verändert. Auch die Anlage seines Buches, das die Parallelität und wechselseitige Beeinflussung von individueller und Zeitgeschichte herausarbeitet, ist in der Bettina-Forschung bereits ausgeführt worden. Was die vorliegende Darstelllung unterscheidet, sind die weit angelegten Recherchen, mit deren Hilfe Lücken der bisherigen Bettina-Forschung geschlossen werden konnten.

In klarer Sprache und überzeugender Argumentation ist es dem Verfasser gelungen, ein lebendiges und facettenreiches Portrait von Bettina und ihren Lebensumständen zu vermitteln. Man hat beim Lesen häufig den Eindruck, daß nicht der Autor, sondern die Personen selbst zu uns sprechen. Dabei ist die Darstellung stets sachlich, Tatsachen, Behauptungen und reine Spekulationen sind immer als solche gekennzeichnet. Die Akribie, mit der die Thesen jeweils begründet werden, ist konsequent durchgehalten. Doch wird nichts Überflüssiges vorgestellt, sondern jeder angeführte Aspekt hebt das Bettina-Bild plastischer hervor.

Böttger stellt zwei Hauptzüge von Bettinas Wesen heraus: ihre humanistisch-emanzipatorische Aufgeschlossenheit gegenüber der Außenwelt und ihre selbstbezogene Exaltiertheit. Entsprechend sieht er ihr Leben von der Spannung von aufgeklärter und romantischer Lebenshaltung bestimmt oder zwischen "Tag und Traum" - so der Untertitel dieser Biographie - angesiedelt. Böttgers Sympathie gehört deutlich der ersten Kategorie. Bettinas politisches Wirken gilt ihm