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Two books by Angela Krauß

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Krauß, Angela. *Glashaus*. Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau, 1988. 186 pp. *Dienstjahre und andere Prosa*. Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau, 1991. 95 pp.

"Sappho aus Preußen" arrives in Berlin. The demand: "Welche Geschäfte in Preußens Hauptstadt!" She replies: "Liedermacherin, Herr" (*Glashaus*, 33). As she speaks through various characters in the Berlin of several eras, "Sappho's" song is the language of light, dreams, and moments in the eastern part of Germany. She is a central figure in Angela Krauß's *Glashaus* and *Dienstjahre und andere Prosa*, two collections of often lyrical pieces.

Krauß's style is as difficult to define as the catchphrase "postmodern," yet postmodern it undeniably is—as it appropriates the narrator-centric, intensely psychological descriptions of fleeting episodes in a fragmented everyday that characterize so much current German literature in East and West. Although *Glashaus* and *Dienstjahre* depart stylistically from *Das Vergnügen*, Krauß's satirical 1984 interpretation of the "Betriebsroman" genre, the difference between internal reality and its linguistic expression is central to all three works. In *Das Vergnügen*, protagonist Felizitas's speech impediment simultaneously incapacitates and liberates; the psyches populating *Glashaus* and *Dienstjahre* suffer from other language disabilities. But in each work, Krauß isolates problems of perception and communication and works at reducing the difference between the two.

Krauß's writing is at its most effective in pieces such as "Die Tagträumerin," a love story which weaves a woman's grey daily S-Bahn commute with her active fantasy life. When her fairly innocuous daydreams about a fellow commuter threaten to become imperfect reality, she becomes ill. In order for a "happy ending" to take place, the woman's inner and outer existences must meet, if only temporarily. When this happens for the character, it also happens, simply and directly, in Krauß's structure. The heroine meets the subject of her daydreams: "Er war nicht so grazil wie in ihren lebhaften Träumen, aber er war wirklich da" (*Glashaus*, 91). "Frau in Chamois" consists of descriptions painstaking in detail, yet so successfully interwoven as to yield an almost physical impression of the passage of time and of mortality.

The attempt to use words as concretely as possible while simultaneously demonstrating the disastrous effects of the chasm between language and reality can result in some loss of accessibility. In "Ströme," a tale of a thwarted love affair, the protagonist's need to equate the events in his life with the relative strengths of electric currents is not compelling enough to carry the entire piece. The nighttime journey of an engineer in "Dinosaurius" evokes strong corporeal images, but no convincing overall impression.

Dienstjahre, published in 1991 (and recipient of the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize), contains three pieces from the 1988 *Glashaus* collection. There are no obvious discrepancies between the volume published before and the one published after the demise of the GDR; as exemplified in *Das Vergnügen*, Krauß was critical of sanctioned GDR art forms well before the events of 1989. Although the style of the prose collections is quite different from that of her novel, *Glashaus* and *Dienstjahre* do not exist in an apolitical vacuum any more than they are irrevocably GDR-specific. "Ein Morgen auf dem Land" presents a party secretary whose "Ermunterung kommt aus der Vorstandsrunde" (*Glashaus*, 91). There is also an 84-year-old "Veteran," tired and confused: "Der Genossenschaftsbauer ist für den Frieden...."

Aber der Eintritt in eine Genossenschaft ist kein Zwang, sondern eine objektive Notwendigkeit. Wer hat das gesagt? Wo hat-?" (72-3). But Krauß's implicit critique is not restricted to the various ways in which SED functionaries warped language, and these two works are not only relevant within the context of a dead or dying socialist regime. The generation whose "Dienstjahre" span the beginnings of the atomic age and the information era experienced the separation of words from things perhaps stronger than any other. In recording the impact of this separation, Krauß has recovered the ability to mean what she says.

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Lemke, Jürgen. *Ganz normal anders. Auskünfte schwuler Männer*. Mit einer Vorbemerkung von Irene Runge. Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1989.

Pre-Wall. Post-Wall. East. West. Straight. Gay. The drawing on the book's cover (by J.A.W., one of the men interviewed) illustrates another dichotomy: a man, clothed in a military uniform on the left side, with his left eye closed, and a harlequin costume on his right side, with his right eye open. Pre-Wall=Oppression/Post-Wall=Liberation? No, it is not so simple. The debates about abolishing Paragraph 175 (the "sodomy" law) in "West Germany" and the increasing incidents of gay-bashing by neo-Nazis in "East Germany" provide ample proof of that.

In contrast to the image on the cover, Lemke's interviews with fourteen gay men give us insight into the variety of identities which these men, ranging in age from eighteen to eighty-four, managed to create before the momentous events beginning in late 1989. The "interviews" were conducted between 1981 and 1988, although most took place between 1983 and 1986. The book is really a series of "Protokolle," in the tradition of Maxie Wander's *Guten Morgen, du Schöne* (1977): the men tell Jürgen the stories of their lives and we receive them as well-organized (by Lemke) monologues. There is real art in weaving into a coherent narrative the answers to the many questions the interviewer posed while also omitting the interviewer as an active participant in the narrative process. Lemke has mastered that craft.

Lemke's book achieved great success and a remarkable resonance both inside and outside the GDR. A West German edition was quickly published (with an addition to the subtitle: "Auskunftschwuler Männer aus der DDR"; Frankfurt am Main: Luchterhand Literaturverlag, 1989). Lemke himself adapted several of the interviews into a dramatic version which ran for several months at the Theater im Palast in East Berlin. The book has been translated into English with the translators (of which I am one) providing brief introductions to the interviews: *Gay Voices from East Germany*, ed. John Borneman (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991).

Lemke presents a panorama of gay experiences and attitudes. Such is needed in a country where public discussion of homosexuality barely existed. This book is one of barely a handful which brought such discussion into being. (One thinks also of Volker Carow's film *Coming Out* [1990]). Thus, these men's stories validate the stereotype of "The Homosexual Male" made an effeminate hairdresser/interior designer/waiter/actor by a close-binding mother and