

1992

Monika Maron: Stille Zeile Sechs

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Recommended Citation

Hock, Lisa (1992) "Monika Maron: Stille Zeile Sechs," *GDR Bulletin*: Vol. 18: Iss. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/gdrb.v18i2.1068>

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Maron, Monika. *Stille Zeile Sechs*. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1991. 219 pp.

Rosalind Polkowski is already familiar to readers of Monika Maron's works. She shares many personal characteristics with the journalist, Josepha Nadler, in Maron's environmental novel *Flugasche* (Fischer, 1981); and she appears as the main character in *Die Überläuferin* (Fischer, 1986), a work in which she confronts the memories and phantasies that form the basis of her reality. In *Stille Zeile Sechs*, Maron, winner of the Kleist Prize for 1992, examines a further aspect of Rosalind's relationship to her past. The work reflects on the legacy of communism through the exploration of Rosalind's attempt to come to terms with her relationship to her father and to her existence in the paternalistic East German State, both of which are embodied in the person of Herbert Beerenbaum.

Stille Zeile Sechs continues where *Die Überläuferin* leaves off. After having decided that it is scandalous, perhaps even forbidden, to think in exchange for money, Rosalind has quit her job at a prestigious research institute. To support herself, she works a number of odd jobs until she meets Beerenbaum, a former SED party official who, because of a crippled hand, is searching for someone to help him write his memoirs. Rosalind agrees to the task on the condition that she not be expected to think. Thus begin six months of twice weekly visits to Beerenbaum's house, address *Stille Zeile Sechs*, in the secluded neighborhood of Pankow in East Berlin, visits which continue until Beerenbaum's death.

Disappointingly, the narrative style of the work is far more sober than that of its predecessor. This may be attributed to the requirements of the material. Yet, in the most poetic passages of the work, Maron allows the fantastic to burst through the surface of and mesh with her more representational depictions in a manner which is the hallmark of her best writing. Layers of reality are further intertwined through the structure of the text, a personal narrative, in which Rosalind's description of Beerenbaum's funeral forms the frame for the story of her relationship to him. This allows the narrative the flexibility to move from one position to another, from present to past, from Rosalind's story to that of Beerenbaum, merging all into an amalgam in which all elements belong to Rosalind's present.

Rosalind's relationship to Beerenbaum should not be interpreted as a black and white symbolic depiction of the overthrow of communism. Rather, it is characterized by complexity and ambivalence. Over a period of six months, Beerenbaum comes to

represent on the one hand Rosalind's deceased father, an ardent communist who was more concerned with the world revolution than the emotional needs of his daughter. The tension of this relationship, the desire both to please and to rebel against her father, contributes significantly to the ambivalent nature of Rosalind's relationship to Beerenbaum.

Further, Beerenbaum, like Rosalind's father, belongs to a generation which has undergone a transformation from victim to perpetrator. Afraid of again succumbing to the forces against which they fought, members of this generation are unwilling to leave room for individual thought and have attempted to force all following generations into positions of silence. Ironically, by agreeing to serve only as Beerenbaum's hand, Rosalind initially consents to maintain this silence. Already during their first meeting, however, an inner tension between her self-imposed silence and her mental protest arises, leading to a complex sense of guilt and anger.

The longer she silently records Beerenbaum's account of history, the more intense Rosalind's anger becomes. Yet, her desire to criticize, to lash out against Beerenbaum and his generation, is inhibited by the realization that they had acted out of a sense of mission. In contrast, she finds no similar aspirations in her own generation. Responding to a reading of Ernst Toller, Rosalind asks herself whether guilt is the inevitable corollary of action, whether the authoritarian nature of the SED government was a direct result of its founders' depth of commitment to a cause. Further, she asks whether, if such a development is unavoidable, it is preferable to avoid committing oneself to any cause, any form of action.

Eventually, Rosalind comes to realize that her self-imposed silence is a form of acquiescence. Her attempts to convince herself that she is no more guilty than the typewriter on which she records Beerenbaum's memoirs are unsuccessful. Action becomes unavoidable, and she moves toward a final, explosive confrontation with Beerenbaum.

Paradoxically, this act of self-expression is a symbolic repetition of the actions of the generation of Beerenbaum and her father, and it is at this point that Rosalind comes to understand them: "Ja, der Handelnde muß schuldig werden, immer und immer, oder, wenn er nicht schuldig werden will, untergehen. Als hätte ich nur das gesucht: meine Schuld. Alles, nur nicht Opfer sein. Das wußte auch Herbert Beerenbaum, der Arbeiter aus dem Ruhrgebiet: Alles, nur nicht noch einmal Opfer

sein." (210).

On many levels, *Stille Zeile Sechs* raises questions which, in view of the current political situation in Germany, require close examination. While a chapter in German political history may have been buried, the individuals touched by the political, cultural and philosophical situation of both Germanys between 1945-1989 continue to be haunted by their past. Following Beerenbaum's funeral, his son gives Rosalind a package containing the manuscript she has so faithfully recorded. Even as she is insisting that she will not open it, she realizes that Beerenbaum's story has become her own, that she cannot escape her father, that, whether we choose to recognize it or not, the past continues to move in us, motivating both the action and the silence for which we must eventually take responsibility.

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Lutz Rathenow. *Die lautere Bosheit*. Maulwurf-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1992. 128 S.

"Ich glaube an die Realität der Absurdität", schreibt der 1952 in Jena geborene Schriftsteller Lutz Rathenow in seinem erfolgreichen Text-Bildband *Berlin-Ost-Die andere Seite einer Stadt*. Wie um diesen Satz zu untermauern, legt er nun mit seinem neuesten Buch eine Sammlung Satiren, Grotesken und Travestien vor, die zwischen 1978 und 1989 in der DDR entstanden. Gedeihen Satiren an sich schon als seltene Pflanzen auf dem deutschen Büchermarkt, ist diesem Buch ein doppelt außerordentlicher Stellenwert beizumessen. Erstmals wird hier DDR-Aufarbeitung anhand ihres spielerisch vorweggenommenen Endes dokumentiert.

Der Band versammelt kürzere Texte, in denen es von Spitzeln, selbstgefälligen Regierern, Staatsstreichen und Selbstmordwilligen wimmelt. Dazu kommen umgedichtete Märchen, Kurzkrimis und "Eingaben", unzählige Einfälle, mit denen Lutz Rathenow die Isolation thematisiert und die zunehmend verzerrte Ordnung des real existierenden Sozialismus à la DDR karikiert.

In dem aufschlußreichen Fastnachwort beschreibt er Lesungen als wichtigste Möglichkeit, die Wirkung seiner Texte in der DDR zu testen: "In einer Wohnung oder einem kirchlichen Raum durfte gelacht werden. Man lachte sich Mut zu oder reagierte sich ab." Einige Geschichten mögen aus dem Abstand heraus konstruiert erscheinen. Andere verblüffen in ihrer prophetischen Aussage. Arbeiten wie die *Böse Geschichte mit gutem Ende* trafen einen besonderen Nerv, denn sie behandelten erstmals das Tabuthema Stasi.

"Der Spitzel, um den es hier geht, war kein gewöhnlicher Spitzel, sondern der beste des Landes..." Er entwickelte die außerordentliche Fähigkeit zu erstarren, sich zur Tarnung in Gegenstände zu verwandeln, um die Leute auf der Straße, die Geheimdienstchefs und selbst den Regierer auszuspähen. Aber: "Die Führung des Staates wurde von immer größerer Zahl demonstrierenden Volkes bedrängt und gestürzt..., dieser Spitzel degenerierte allmählich zum Menschen, der erkannte, überflüssig geworden zu sein..."

Diese Vision entstand bereits 1978(!). Solcherart Satiren waren einer der Gründe, weshalb Erich Mielke rot sah, wenn er den Namen Lutz Rathenow auch nur hörte. In Rathenows Stasiakte findet sich 1986 u.a. Schriftverkehr zwischen Hager und Mielke, wonach dem "feindlich negativen Schriftsteller Lutz Rathenow" keine Reise genehmigung in die BRD zu erteilen, anlässlich seines Berlinbuches