

1995

## Steffen Mensching: Der Struwwelpeter neu erzählt

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### Recommended Citation

Cox, Judith H. (1995) "Steffen Mensching: Der Struwwelpeter neu erzählt," *GDR Bulletin*: Vol. 22: Iss. 2.  
<https://doi.org/10.4148/gdrb.v22i2.1186>

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Hein's most recent and very difficult post-*Wende* novel. McKnight sees the book within the context of the *Historikerstreit* and the Germans' attempt at relativizing the Nazi past. An important and interesting aspect that McKnight includes in his treatment of Hein's dramatic works is the varying stage receptions they received in East and West Germany.

This reviewer would like to offer two specific criticisms of *Understanding Christoph Hein*: In Chapter 1 the section on "Writing in East Germany" will no doubt leave particularly the non-academic reader, which this series purports to address, dissatisfied since it is somewhat sketchy, although additional background is provided in the same chapter in the section "Working in a 'Reader's Land'" after an excursion into Hein's biography. A more cogent picture of writing in the GDR would have resulted from organizing the material of these two sections into one and from perhaps including a mini-history of GDR literature of which Hein is so clearly a part. Chapter 7 on Hein's short prose is incomplete since it does not include his most recent volume of short stories, *Exekution eines Kalbes* (1994). McKnight alludes to it but does not analyze it, nor does he inform the reader as to the reason for this omission. Perhaps there were deadlines to meet: *Exekution eines Kalbes* may have been published at the time when McKnight's manuscript was due at the publisher so that it could appear in 1995. This omission is nonetheless noteworthy since, as McKnight himself states, Hein writes much of his best work in the genre of short prose.

This criticism is not to be understood as calling the whole study into question. In conclusion this reviewer would like to emphasize once more that McKnight has provided those interested in GDR literature with refreshingly accessible, non-convoluted scholarship on one of the GDR's and Germany's premier authors. It is a study that is a welcome addition to scholarship on Christoph Hein, especially since, to this reader's knowledge, it is the first one written in English. The editorial work on *Understanding Christoph Hein* is nearly impeccable; this reader discovered only one typographical error.

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**Mensching, Steffen.** *Der Struwwelpeter neu erzählt*. Berlin: Rütten & Loening GmbH, 1994. 24 pp. ISBN 3-352-00514-1. DM 19,90.

Dr. Heinrich Hoffmann's *Der Struwwelpeter* is 150 years old this year and the Germans (and the world) have not lost their fascination for it. One of the most successful books in the German language and translated into many others, *Der Struwwelpeter*, like the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* and to some extent Busch's *Max und Moritz*, combined wit and entertainment with didacticism and was a means of socialization for the young readers. *Der Struwwelpeter neu erzählt* begins with: "Jeder kann aus alten Sachen,/ Wenn er will, sich neue machen./ . . . Kann zu altbekannten Bildern/Andere Geschichten schildern." Steffen Mensching has done just that. This is not the first time that *Struwwelpeter* has been reworked in some manner: e.g., *Der Struwwelpeter umgetopft* by F.W. Bernstein, *Die Struwwelpaula: struwwelige Geschichten und harrige Bilder* by Renate Alf, et al, and *Der Struwwelpeter: Lustige Geschichten von Dr. Heinrich Hoffmann und drollige Bilder von Manfred Bofinger*. These versions maintain the spirit of the original work by presenting "das sich nicht anpassende Kind," often contributing new pictures, neo-nazis and punks, for example, to the old text.

Steffen Mensching, one half of the well-known East German clown duo, Mensching and Wenzel, has taken the opposite approach. He has kept Dr. Hoffmann's classic pictures, but has added his own "lustige Geschichten." Mensching's stories turn the originals on their head. We may learn a few things, but primarily we are presented with the problems and realities of everyday life. The children in these stories are basically good; it is the environment, i.e. society or a parent, that brings about their problems or misfortunes. The children's actions, when not good, can be explained psychologically or medically. We learn that Hans is "nicht normal," but more than that, we are confronted with neglected children and psychopaths.

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