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Liselotte Gumpel: "Concrete Poetry" from East and West Germany. The Language of Exemplarism and Experimentalism

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Aufnahme in dieses Lexikon fanden" eingeschränkt wird. Hier dürften nun einige wertende Bemerkungen am Platze sein.

Als Nachfolger des Deutschen Schriftstellerlexikons ist dieses Werk eines der wichtigsten und brauchbarsten Dokumente zur "Absatzbewegung" der Literaturpolitik der DDR. Daß Namen wie M. Bieler, W. Biermann, P. Huchel, E. Loest, H. Mayer, Ch. Reinig, G. Zehm oder G. Zwenz fehlen, d.h. die Namen jener, die sich durch ihre Arbeit oder durch Verlassen der DDR (Redaktionsschluß war der 31.12.1973!) offizielles Mißfallen einbrachten, verwundert den Beobachter außerhalb der DDR oder BRD genausowenig wie folgende Bemerkung im westdeutschen DDR Handbuch (1975): "Ferner wurden auch Titel aus der DDR nicht aufgenommen, da davon auszugehen ist, daß die Mehrzahl der Benutzer des Handbuches keinen Zugang zu DDR-Quellen besitzt." Interessant ist, daß diese Namen auch aus dem Gedächtnis der Literaturpreise entfernt wurden. So wird zwar der Lion-Feuchtwanger-Preis beschrieben und seine Preisträger aufgeführt, Lion Feuchtwanger selbst ist jedoch im alphabetischen Teil und unter den Nationalpreisträgern nicht zu finden. Weitere Beispiele könnten genannt werden. Dies macht das Lexikon auf den ersten Blick zwar weniger brauchbar, gibt ihm aber einen erhöhten literaturwissenschaftlichen Wert, besonders in bezug auf zu erwartende weitere Auflagen.

Der Bedeutung der Kinderliteratur in sozialistischen Ländern entsprechend wäre es wünschenswert gewesen, wenn auch die Preisträger des Preises des Ministeriums für Kultur zur Förderung der sozialistischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur, der seit 1951 vergeben wird, aufgeführt worden wären. Hier und da könnte das Lexikon noch an Genauigkeit gewinnen. So wird im alphabetischen Teil dem Dramatiker und Übersetzer Helmut Baierl die Erich-Weinert-Medaille für das Jahr 1970 verliehen, unter der Aufzählung der Preisträger fehlt er jedoch.

Neben dem Deutschen Schriftstellerlexikon, Konrad Frankes Die Literatur der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, das hoffentlich bald als Taschenbuch erscheinen wird, und dem DDR Handbuch sind die Schriftsteller der DDR jedem zu empfehlen, der sich über die Literatur und Kultur der DDR informieren will oder sich mit ihr beschäftigt. In den USA ist es durch den Buchhandel (z.B. von Rosenberg oder Adler's) zum Preise von \$ 8,95, aus der BRD (z.B. von Harrassowitz) für DM 29,- erhältlich.

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"Concrete" Poetry from East and West Germany
The Language of Exemplarism and Experimentalism. By Liselotte Gumpel. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976.

Liselotte Gumpel is author of several articles and studies on language and of a forthcoming publication on Semitism in the GDR. In the present book she compares two poetic trends of unequal dimensions: GDR concrete poetry is an entire system, while FRG concrete poetry is only a movement. Gumpel attempts to demonstrate the difference in the concept "Concrete poetry" in the GDR and West Germany and thus give evidence of the change the German language is undergoing in the two states. In the first chapter, she presents the historical development of the two Germanies since 1945 with the emphasis on their diverging concepts of literature and, specifically, concrete poetry. She connects with this the problem of "linguistic alienation," i.e., the differing approaches to the German language which she examines by comparing the GDR "Leipziger Duden" and the FRG "Mannheimer Duden." The influence these differences have on the concept of poetry in the two states is demonstrated by the positions of F.C. Weiskopf in the GDR and Helmut Heißenbüttel in the FRG. The basic thesis is that, in the GDR, a concrete poem must represent reality and it can only do so "when the tangible world comes to light through the content of meaning(s)." In West Germany, a concrete poem is an experiment with aesthetic innovation as its aim; it is not based upon an ideological commitment as the GDR poem is. In further chapters Gumpel discusses the background of concretism, the concrete poem itself, the wider tradition, and anthologies of concrete poetry. They are divided into two parts: the first one dealing with the GDR's and the second with the FRG's concepts of concrete poetry.

The background chapter treats the ideas of Georg Lukács and J.R. Becher as continuing to dominate the literary criticism of the GDR, while for West German concretism she considers Eugen Gomringer the "progenitor of Concrete poetry" and Max Bense as the father of its theoretical justification. This material is very informative, with perhaps too much emphasis on West German concrete poetry and its origin. The interpretations of the "dicentric genres" (especially the sonnet, the ballad, and the ode) of the East and the "rhematic connexes" of the West utilize the semiotics of Max Bense and C.S. Peirce. They are fresh and unbiased, but do not go into great detail with the poems. Under the aspects of "teleological humanism" and "creative zest," the wider tradition of the concrete poem

is explored--the GDR concrete poem is concerned with "dialogical popularity" and the FRG concrete poem with a "monological game." Informative is the discussion of the various anthologies in which Gumpel offers not only analyses of the volumes but also background material on their structure and reasons for the inclusion and exclusion of certain authors.

For someone not familiar with the vocabulary of semiotics, this book is not always easy reading. However, it is an interesting study of the concepts of "Concrete poetry" in the GDR and West Germany and of the changing language in the two German states.

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Kindheitsmuster. By Christa Wolf. Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1976. 534 pages. D.M. 9,90.

When discussing Christa Wolf's works, beginning always appears problematic, because one does not know with exactly what term to classify them. This characterization is especially true of her latest publication Kindheitsmuster. Lengthy reviews dealing with the question of whether it is an autobiography, an essay or a novel have already appeared and will most certainly continue. Such discussions have not, however, aided in understanding or evaluating this work and may even obstruct the reader's insight into one of the main themes: the method and function of writing.

The narrator introduces a modern GDR family on a week-end trip to a town in Poland, the birthplace of the mother. The purpose of this trip for her is to come to grips with her past, in order to lead a full and constructive life in the present and to anticipate and mold the future. She attempts to deal with the question of what actually occurred between 1929 and 1946, the years of her childhood and youth. The investigation of this period necessitates true remembering, genuine questioning of conscience. Through the portrayal of such an inquiry, the narration of which is conducted on the contemporary temporal level, an entire generation is being addressed and encouraged to make an attempt at overcoming this particular time.

This generation must examine its own, as well as its elders' actions and reactions to what was happening around them, in order to relieve themselves of guilt feelings which they do not understand. The questioning of the conscience should not, however, remain iso-

lated in this apparently selfish motive but should also result in improved communication between generations, as exemplified by the relationship between Lenka, the teen-aged daughter, and her mother.

It is through writing that Christa Wolf herself is able to deal with the aforementioned problems and communicate with others. In other words, she goes through a process of remembering similar to that of the mother, the main difference being that Christa Wolf comes to grips with her past through writing. Because the act of writing is of such central importance to the author, she does not only reflect on specific events such as the Hitlerjugend rallies or the Reichskristallnacht, but also frequently discusses her reasons for writing, the difficulties encountered, the methods used, and the purpose it is to serve. But this constant reflection and discussion does not at all deprive the reader of using his imagination or detract from the "artistic" quality of the work, as has been suggested by some critics. Instead, this well-integrated stylistic device gives the work a very realistic quality and immensely aids the reader in analyzing the basic themes. It also adds a new dimension, under which Christa Wolf's entire literary work can be better understood: the discussion of how and why she writes. It is through reflection within the book that Christa Wolf makes it possible for the reader to experience a similar contemplative process, which does not necessarily mean that the conclusions reached by the reader will be identical to those of Christa Wolf. It does, however, create an intimate atmosphere between the reader and the author and encourages the reader to take a stand on the presented issues.

In Kindheitsmuster Christa Wolf attempts to describe and communicate her own childhood experiences with such sensitivity that her readers will also realize the need to reflect on what at first glance may appear to be simply a past, moral issue. One cannot, however, deny the contemporary, political implications, especially within the context of the GDR. As the author herself has pointed out in a discussion of the book, the younger generation in the GDR is still asking questions about the period during which Hitler rose to power, and the older generation is either unable or unwilling to answer. Although Kindheitsmuster is primarily directed toward the GDR reading public, occurrences