

1980

Margarete Neumann: Windflöte und andere Erzählungen

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construction worker, etc.; but the perception of her changes drastically from virgin to whore, drudge, witch and from communal pest to bulwark of the community.

The history of the community can be divided into four stages, according to the four parts of the novel: a communal-tribal period; an agricultural-individualistic period; a period of scientific development and economic exploitation which threatens to obliterate Ruhin as an entity; and the development of a regulated utopia or Kurort. The novel ends with a review of Alma's children and what they have become. Apparent weaknesses of the novel are actually its strengths: its specificity to GDR society and its ideological framework make the problematic less accessible to outsiders but all the more important as a view and critique from within. Other weaknesses such as the sparseness of Gestalt and the occasional clumsiness of narration result from the limitations of allegory and narrative viewpoint as well as to-be-perfected writing skills. The author, a true product of the Bitterfelder Weg, has received critical attention in the GDR especially since Der Krott oder Das Ding unterm Hut (See Eva Kaufmann, Weimarer Beiträge 10, 1978, pages 90-113). Hinter den Bergen is a promise of more which will interest students of the GDR and its literature.

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Windflöte und andere Erzählungen. By Margarete Neumann. Edition Neue Texte. Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1978. 142 pages.

Like Margarete Neumann's previous collections of short stories, Windflöte und andere Erzählungen consists of descriptive vignettes, some as short as two or three pages, others longer. They are drawn, one suspects, from the author's own experiences or from incidents she has witnessed or heard about. (Sarah Kirsch, in an afterword to another collection, Am Abend vor der Heimreise, recalled how a conversation between Neumann and some fellow-travelers about their cat became a story in that book: "Die Katze.")

All the stories focus on the personal and the momentary, rather than on large-scale developments, either in the course of the characters' lives or in society. Not that the larger perspective is lacking, but it is always more implied than stated. What is important is how a decisive moment--sometimes even an ordinary event--affects the individual. Neumann

herself identifies this concern in a note in the dust jacket of this book: "Ich möchte das Wichtigste sichtbar machen für einen Augenblick, die Bewegung, den Strom. Wie ein Bild sich einfängt, das einer in sich, mit sich fortträgt, wie eine Empfindung entsteht, ein Gedanke, ein Lächeln, wie ein Schmerz sich zusammenballt, eine Liebe verlöscht."

The stories in Windflöte all have this personal focus, but the background, the incidents and people around which they are built, and the narrative technique vary considerably. Most of the stories are told from a particular point of view by a first-person narrator. Others are in the third-person, although some of these, like the title story, come close to being erlebte Rede. The last story in the book, "Maria," approaches interior monologue in that it sets down exactly what the narrator is thinking or saying at the moment (so that much of it is in the second person). "Dichterlesung" is an account of a nightmarish reading during which the listeners leave one by one--it turns out, amusingly, to have been a dream. The stories are arranged chronologically. Two fifths of the book is set in the years before 1945, the rest, rather vaguely, in the present "Großmuttergeschichte" are short episodes that illuminate the author's childhood in the 1920's and '30's; "Trauer" and "Gottesurteil" show a young girl growing up in the years before the war. "Abstellgleis" narrates three separate incidents from the war years, none of them the less horrifying for the understated style in which they are told. One of the most startling stories is "Giselher," in which a band of wandering German soldiers, waiting for the front to reach them again, are organized according to the ideals of the Nibelungenlied--absolute loyalty and obedience. In the end only the youngest, Giselher, is left. The stories that take place in the GDR are no less interesting. The human element is always at the center. "Freitag vor Ostern" is especially glowing; it portrays a momentary breach of the barriers between people caught up in the monotony of city life. "Der weiße Fiat" has a surprise twist at the end. The last four stories in the book take place among groups of GDR workers on highway building projects in the Soviet Union. Except for "Maria," already mentioned, these stories are relatively weak, although the description of a Ukrainian wedding is lively, and "Der Sohn" is a sensitive characterization of a young man who doesn't really fit anywhere in society.

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