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Gabriele Eckart: Per Anhalter. Geschichten und Erlebnisse

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over, Strittmatter himself often withdraws into the background to present the people whom he has encountered in his unusual life. Most touching are his portraits of the older generation--especially his grandparents. For example, "Wie ich meinen Großvater kennenlernte" is an affectionate recollection of the grandfather, who unhesitatingly assumes the responsibility for the Strittmatter family when Strittmatter's father is off at war. Another memorable portrait is that of his aunt Elli or "Schneewittchen," whose fairy-tale "happy ending" only occurs in death, for her life is one of continuing hardship and disappointment.

Strittmatter recaptures the awe and fascination of the circus in "Zirkus Wind," whose hero, Charlie Wind, a circus performer, unsuccessfully attempts to become a Normalmensch. Strittmatter's sensitive portrayal of this person mirrors his own struggles with trying to become a writer. "Meine Freundin Tina Babe" reveals the two increasingly different yet complementary persons in Strittmatter: the nascent writer and the ordinary man, whose job permits him to meet a host of different people. The preoccupations of these various people are heightened by the setting--National Socialist Germany.

"Grüner Juni" looks back at the Germans and Germany during that first post-war June, which represents an opportunity for a new beginning. Before this can happen, however, Strittmatter must deal with his past, and with ironic detachment, he narrates the demise of his first marriage.

Lebenszeit consists of excerpts taken from a number of previously published and unpublished Strittmatter works. Both the title and subtitle suggest that this volume is autobiographical, but Helga Pankoke, the editor, does not present Erwin Strittmatter's life in a traditional chronological sequence. Instead, the text is impressionistic: one topic leads to another. Thus, less than three pages after Strittmatter's birth, there is a passage dealing with a conversation with Brecht. Indeed, the accompanying family photographs actually provide a better chronological foundation than Strittmatter's anecdotal reflections and recollections. The central theme of Lebenszeit is Erwin Strittmatter's vision and concept of a writer. For Strittmatter,

writing and living are synonymous, and these passages reveal his charm, wit, and humility as a writer.

Of the two volumes, Nachtigallgeschichten is the more noteworthy, because it offers a glimpse of the ordinary people of a bygone Germany. As an ordinary person, Strittmatter succeeds in emphasizing the humanness which we all share, and that undeniably is what makes his stories and writings so enjoyable. At one point in "Wie ich meinen Großvater kennenlernte," Strittmatter states that "Großvaters Dichtungen bestanden nur aus Gesprächen." Fortunately for us, Erwin Strittmatter is a storyteller as well as a writer.

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Eckart, Gabriele. Per Anhalter: Geschichten und Erlebnisse. Berlin: Buchverlag Der Morgen, 1987. 143 pp.

The twenty-one interview transcriptions which Gabriele Eckart published in West Germany in 1984 as So sehe ick die Sache: Protokolle aus der DDR were sufficiently negative in their critical, dissident tone, that one is slightly surprised to encounter this collection of stories, a number of which paint a rather bleak and depressing image of the GDR. There are twelve of them, vignettes of ordinary individuals with whom one can identify, of varying lengths (4-37 pages). Men and women, old and young, in love and alone, happy and resigned--these dozen rather pointedly undramatic tales constitute a mosaic of human experience, which will be easily accessible to American readers. The book's title (also the title of the last story) is a metaphor for being on the road and meeting people on their own terms, listening dispassionately to their stories and reporting them in their own words; but these are fictional short stories, not interviews.

One of the most rewarding is "Die Lange," about an abnormally tall young woman to whom boys pay little attention until she meets a similarly shy and solitary construction worker who dances with her at the local disco. But the shyness keeps him from pursuing her seriously; one of his friends seduces the tall girl and gets her pregnant. The shy fellow, having given up

his job at an urban construction site and returned to his village, never learns that she has killed herself after asking what had become of him and learning that he had left no forwarding address.

Another story, "Feldberg und zurück," involves the daughter of a highly placed government official, who sets out to hitchhike to the country for the weekend and is picked up by a West German physician with whom she has a brief romantic encounter. She finds herself revealing a side of her personality to him which she has kept under wraps from family and friends. She worries about what kind of relationship she can possibly have with a West Berliner, but when he must go back across the border, he says he will be back the next day and asks for her address. All the next day she is oddly preoccupied and tense; when the time for their planned meeting arrives, she breaks down and cries--she had intentionally given him a false address, and they will never cross each other's paths again.

Sentimental, even tending somewhat toward soap opera, these stories nonetheless ring true and authentic. The milieu of rural and urban GDR is genuine, without inordinate attention paid to consumer inadequacies (although they get mentioned) or to socialist achievements (also noted); the surroundings are incidental to the small comedies and tragedies of everyday encounters. There are, inevitably, GDR locutions which the Western reader will need to decipher, as when a crane operator talks about the summer when the Berlin Wall was built: "Seid nich doof, ick hab da meine Erfahrungen...Einundsechzig, ick war bei der Fahne. Een Zeitungsfristze kommt, fracht mich, wat ick von der Sache halte, den Maßnahmen. Det erste, wat mir dabei infällt, sach ick, is, daß ick bis jetzt zu meiner Arbeit in Berlin zehn Minuten gebraucht hab, mit der S-Bahn, jetzt muß ick'n Riesenumweg machen und brauch 'ne Stunde...Und in der Zeitung steht dann: Ick empfinde, daß die Grenze schon ville eher nötig gewesen wäre" (58). Eckart has a fine ear for real speech, and the way her characters talk is one of the strengths of her writing.

These stories make up an intriguing composite of Landeskunde information, but they are also touching

and sincerely drawn portraits, and the book is very much worth reading.

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Gosse, Peter. Poesiealbum 252. Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1988. 31 pp.

In 28 Gedichten präsentiert sich hier der Gosse der 80er Jahre. Nach wie vor liegt auch diesen Gedichten eine Freude am formalen Experiment zugrunde. Von den beiden formvollendeten Sonetten eingangs bis zum Prosagedicht am Ende ist so ziemlich alles vertreten, Gereimtes und Ungereimtes. Hand in Hand mit der Freude an der Form geht die Freude an der Sprache. Viele der Gedichte, insbesondere die längeren, sind reine Sprachorgien, zerklüftete Syntax, zwischen deren Steilwänden der Laut, das Echo musikalische Eigendynamik entwickeln. Assoziationsfelder überlagern sich entsprechend zur dritten oder vierten Potenz, was vielen der Gedichte etwas den Charakter von Denksportaufgaben zuteil werden läßt.

Das Wesentliche? Eine frisch-fröhliche, jedoch zutiefst kritische Grundhaltung gekoppelt mit einer intellektuellen Ironie: "Statt beichten berichten-/ auf das r kommt es an, / Alfabets Eckzahn." In den ungefähr 20 Jahren seit der Erscheinung seines ersten Gedichtbandes Antiherbstzeitloses (1968) hat Peter Gosse einen weiten Weg zurückgelegt, von einer jugendlich begeisterten Bejahung des politisch-sozialen Umfelds hin zur massiven Kritik, zu Anflügen von Resignation. Hin und wieder war es notwendig, daß der Theoretiker zum Pragmatiker wurde, der, wie er es in einem Gedichtband aus dem Jahre 1982, Ausfahrt aus Byzanz, ausdrückt, zwischen einer oberen und unteren Grenze die Möglichkeiten des Machbaren auslotet. Die Hoffnung, wie ein gerüttelt Maß an Lebensfreude, hat er nie aufgegeben, obwohl sie, die Hoffnung, spröde geworden ist, kosmisch entrückt. Das letzte Gedicht "Der Stern" schließt mit den Worten:

Ja, vorm Jahrtausend hatte die Menschheit sich der Erde bemächtigt mit ihren Kontinenten, vorm Jahr-