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Lutz Rathenow: Sterne jonglieren

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Barbara Mabees Studie beeindruckt besonders durch ihre genaue Arbeit am Text. Darüberhinaus gelingt es ihr, ihre Einzelanalysen sinnvoll in einen übergreifenden Interpretationszusammenhang einzufügen. Gewiß wird jede/r Leser/in in diesem Band zahlreiche Ansatzpunkte finden, sich mit dem Werk von Sarah Kirsch erneut auseinzusetzen.

Kathie von Ankum
Smith College

Rathenow, Lutz. *Sterne jonglieren*. Illustrated by Andreas Röckner. Ravensburg: Otto Maier, 1989.

Many authors, once they have established themselves with an adult public, devote at least part of their energies to literature for children. This genre has many special attractions. While adult literature is constantly subject to fads and fashions, the tradition of children's literature is remarkably stable. Despite periodic attempts by adults to promote other styles, the major forms of children's literature have been, perhaps from time immemorial, the fairy tale and the nursery rime.

Public expectations, at least since the later eighteenth century, have required successful authors for adults to assume an unnatural degree of egotism. To maintain this over the years becomes, even for the most arrogant of us, a perpetual strain. Literature for children, however, exempts authors from many pressures of both the literary marketplace and cultural bureaucracies.

Lutz Rathenow has now published six books for children over the last five years. The first two, *Spiegelbärchen* and *Der Tiger im Hochhaus*, though charming, were probably written as little more than whimsies. The subsequent two, *Ein seltsamer Zoo* and, most especially, *Floh Dickbauch* are more innovative. Even their flaws testify to a serious engagement with children's literature. His latest volume, *Sterne jonglieren*, is the most deliberately composed of the lot.

In the tradition of Lewis Carroll and Christian Morgenstern, Rathenow uses the nursery rime as a vehicle for metaphysical speculation and social satire. A good example is the poem "Ein Märchen," which begins as follows:

Spitzel kriegen grüne Ohren
Der General hat die Armee verloren
Zwei Minister haben glatt ihr Amt vergessen
Der dritte überlebte nicht das Festtagessen
Der Rest hat sich im Auslande verlaufen
Der Dichterherde ertrank beim Saufen

There is no tone of condescension, no facile moralizing. A number of these poems risk going over the heads of an immature public, but they never offer a simplistic vision. Illustrations are a major part of any book for children. The pictures by Andreas Röckner are certainly polished, but I find them overly commercial. Some are flawed by excessive cuteness. Several do illuminate the poems effectively, but they do not add very much.

Rathenow's books for adults have been uneven in quality. Beautifully crafted pieces have often alternated with others which seem to be hardly more than the casual journal entries. It is possible that economic pressure has forced him to publish too much. I believe, however, that lack of judgment on his part has also played a role here. A rather turbulent career, marked by clashes with GDR cultural authorities, has not allowed him to develop much critical detachment or objectivity.

Erratic technique and sloppy editing are, in general, characteristic of the younger generations of GDR authors. This is an indirect effect of intense political censorship. Literary criticism, since it deals so directly with value judgments, is more easily vulnerable to censorship than fiction, drama or poetry. But without strong critical traditions, all literary activity will suffer.

Perhaps it is not entirely an accident that, as the Berlin Wall is finally dismantled, Rathenow seems to be overcoming a weakness in critical judgment. *Sterne jonglieren* consists of only 28 short poems. While many are modest in scope, every one, without exception, is well realized.

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Rathenow, Lutz. *Zärtlich kreist die Faust: Gedichte*. Pfaffenweiler: Pfaffenweiler Press, 1989. 47 pp.

The idea that poetry can fully transcend its time and place is a romantic legacy, but the fact is that we read a translation of an ancient Chinese poem far differently than we read a contemporary American one. Our understanding of the cultural context determines the questions we ask and the expectations with which we approach a manuscript. Since the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, it is hard even to open a book from the GDR without feeling a slight perplexity. Is this creation East German? German? European?

Zärtlich kreist die Faust, a new collection of poems by Lutz Rathenow, belongs to a tradition that I would characterize as "East European." The spare construction, folk motifs, and stoical vision may be found in other GDR poets who have taken their inspiration largely from Slavic cultures. Among the major representatives of this style are Johannes Bobrowski, Peter Huchel, Heinz Cibulka, and Kito Lorenc.

Rathenow celebrates harsh landscapes like those of the European plains. Among the images he uses repeatedly are snow, autumn leaves, and bare trees. A representative piece, short enough to give in its entirety, is "Das letzte Gedicht":

Ein störrischer Baum,
der nicht aufblüht,
nicht eingeht,
der keine Neigung zeigt,
seinen Zustand zu ändern

Gone are the occasional melodrama and the coy word games which added a note of self-consciousness to *Zangengeburt*, Rathenow's first collection of poems.

Rathenow first became known largely as a political writer. It is paradoxical that now, in a time of enormous upheavals, he should produce a collection of poems that are almost militantly apolitical. This could, perhaps, be understood as a symptom of disillusionment with the public realm, but Rathenow continues elsewhere to speak out on social issues. I prefer to understand this book as a check against the hubris that accompanies almost any revolutionary change.

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Richter, Ludwig, Heinrich Olschowsky, Juri W. Bogdanow, and Swetlana A. Scherlaimowa. *Literatur im Wandel. Entwicklungen in europäischen sozialistischen Ländern 1944/45- 1980*. Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1986. 511 S.

Die zwanzig Beiträge des vorliegenden Sammelbandes sind ein Gemeinschaftsunternehmen des Zentralinstituts der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR und des Instituts für Slawistik und Balkanistik der Akademie der Wissenschaften der UdSSR. Die Verfasser verfolgen die Entwicklung des sozialistischen Realismus in der UdSSR und suchen aufzuzeigen, wie sich dieser nach 1945 in der DDR, der Tschechoslowakei, in Polen, Jugoslawien, Bulgarien, Ungarn und Rumänien durchzusetzen beginnt und wie Inhalt und Form der Literatur sowie ästhetisch-theoretische Forderungen im Rahmen des gesellschaftlichen Entwicklungsprozesses programmatische Funktion annehmen.