Christa Wolf: Kindheitsmuster

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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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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 1945, 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 isolated 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 Hitler 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 derive 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
in Vietnam and Chile, for example, are also
mentioned, pointing to the broader implica-
tions of the work.

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Time for Dreams: Poetry from the German Demo-
cratic Republic. Edited by Günther Deicke.
Translated by Jack Mitchell. Berlin: Seven
Seas Publishers, 1976. 179 pages

Given the scarcity of GDR literature in trans*
lation, a volume of poetry from the German
Democratic Republic would appear to be a wel-*
come addition to the material which is slowly
becoming available to readers who have no know-
ledge of German. In the particular case of
poetry, there are already fine selections of
East German poetry (with the German originals)
in the 1973 special GDR issue of Dimension
edited by Hinter Kunert and in the anthology
East German Poetry edited by Michael Hamburger.
The present volume, Time for Dreams, is use-*
ful in that it does not duplicate the works
included in Dimension and East German Poetry
and it gives a good cross-sampling of estab-*
lished poets' works since 1968. However, the
volume must be used with great care since the
representation of poets is inadequate and the
poetry is often poorly translated.

Let us begin first with the selection made by
Deicke. As he readily admits, "anthologies
are always coloured to a certain extent by the
editor's own preferences, no matter how much
he may be at pains to achieve objectivity."
His criteria for selection center around a
cross-section of the more established poets
whose work is representative and typical of
verse committed to "literary realism in a
society building socialism." Missing from this
volume are such established "renegades"as
Wolf Biermann (of course), Heiner Müßler,
Thomas Brasch, and Peter Huchel. Nor are the
more provocative poems of writers like Reiner
Kunze presented. Apparent is a narrow politi-
cal perspective which limits the ideological
concern of the poetry. Otherwise, the works
of 21 poets are presented, and there is a nice
balance achieved between poems which deal with
the everyday life in the GDR, literary and
historical subjects, and acceptable political
topics. The title of the anthology is taken
from a poem by Paul Wiens and suggests the
Utopian impetus behind the volume: "When is
it time for dreams? Never/And always." Obvi-
ously a defense of the poetic imagination is
intended which is the critical measure of
stark reality and the rationalization of
society. Much of the poetry allows for a
critical interpretation of the GDR reality,
but the translations do not make the poems
more susceptible for such critical interpre-
tation.

Since it is always difficult to capture the
full aesthetic and substantial meaning of
poetry, the German originals should have been
included as was done in the anthologies edited
by Kunert and Hamburger. In fact, the trans-
lations by themselves are not sufficient to
carry out the intended purpose of the volume.
For one thing, Mitchell has sacrificed the
meters, rhythms, and rhymes for literary acc-
curacy, and in some cases, even the accuracy
is questionable. In spot-checking the trans-
lations, I found them uniformly lacking in
poetic verve and imagination. The translations
of such works as Karl Mickel's "Nächtliches
Gespräch über Gott und die Welt" and "Epitaph
für Partisanen," Volker Braun's "Provokation
für mich," and Günter Kunert's "Notizen in
Kreide" disregard the poets' use of metrical
structure to underline the emotional impact
of their message. There also are poor choices
of words and metaphors which fail to convey
the contents of the original poems. To cite
some examples from Braun's "Provokation für
mich," Mitchell translates "angular" with the
awkward phrase "with grim determination."
He uses the word "extol" for "preisen" when the
simple term "praise" would have been more
suitable. Later in the poem, he actually
switches to the word "praise" and shows an
inconsistency in usage. Finally, the term
"Honorar der Herzen" is translated as "wages
of hearts," which totally misses the point
that Braun wants to make. These are only a
few examples from one poem. It does no service
to East German poetry to produce a volume of
translated poems just for the sake of making
GDR artistic production available in the West.
Both the aesthetic and political implications
of this anthology must be studied and used with
critical reservation if it is to serve a genuine
purpose of cultural reception in the West.

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