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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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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

in Vietnam and Chile, for example, are also mentioned, pointing to the broader implications of the work.

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

Given the scarcity of GDR literature in translation, a volume of poetry from the German Democratic Republic would appear to be a welcome addition to the material which is slowly becoming available to readers who have no knowledge 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 Günter Kunert and in the anthology East German Poetry edited by Michael Hamburger. The present volume, Time for Dreams, is useful in that it does not duplicate the works included in Dimension and East German Poetry and it gives a good cross-sampling of established 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 Müller, Thomas Brasch, and Peter Huchel. Nor are the more provocative poems of writers like Reiner Kunze presented. Apparent is a narrow political 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." Obviously 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 interpretation.

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 translations 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 accuracy, and in some cases, even the accuracy is questionable. In spot-checking the translations, 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 are also 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 "andauernd" 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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