Reviews


Jacqueline Vansant
University of Michigan-Dearborn

Barbara Frischmuth (1941), author of several novels, numerous short stories, (radio) plays, essays on literature, and translator of Hungarian and Turkish literature, is one of Austria’s most prominent writers. Making her debut in the late ’60s, Frischmuth has focused on a variety of themes in her works, ranging from the relationship between language and reality, the possibilities for self-actualization in Austrian society for her female protagonists, and the primacy of imagination in re-shaping the world. To represent these themes, she has drawn on Austrian and non-Austrian myths and folk-tales as well as classic world literature. Often, she has played with clichéd language. To date, several dissertations, MA theses, articles in both German and English, and an essay volume in German (editor Kurt Bartsch, Dossier 4) have been devoted to her œuvre. However, Renate S. Posthofen’s edited volume is the first collection of essays in English devoted to Frischmuth. The potential value of the articles for an English-speaking audience is augmented by the translations of three of her works, also available in Ariadne Press.

Posthofen has a specific target audience in mind. The editor states, it “aims at new insights not only for scholars and students of Austrian and German literatures, but equally for those who are in the field of comparative literature and share an appreciation of world literatures” (1). The volume consists of an introduction, fourteen articles, three interviews with Frischmuth, and a translation of an original piece by the author. Arranged “by their particular thematic approach” (7), the articles form approximately ten groupings. These include: Austria’s failure to deal with its National Socialist past, Frischmuth’s literature for children, multiculturalism, cultural identity, spatial epistemologies, ecological aspects of her work, and Frischmuth’s poetics. The three interviews complement themes discussed in some of the articles.

Many of the articles fail to combine a thematic approach with a viable theoretical framework, which might lead to new insights. However, articles that effectively achieve this combination include Peter Arnds’ comparison of Frischmuth and Robert Menasse, Monika Shafi’s comparison of Frischmuth and Anna
Mitgutsch, and Julie Klaassen’s study of the ecological aspects of Frischmuth’s Sternwieser trilogy. Moreover, Gerald Chapple offers an insightful close reading of Frischmuth’s volume of short stories, Hexenherz.

One article that stands out is Johannes F. Evelein’s piece on spatial aesthetics in three of Frischmuth’s radio plays. He introduces a part of Frischmuth’s œuvre which has not been dealt up to this point and approaches it from a fascinating perspective. Focusing on three radio plays, he examines the ways in which space, language, and identity are inter-connected. Although his analysis of the first play Die unbekannte H and seems superficial and somewhat forced, his discussion of spatial identities opens up a new way to approach Frischmuth’s work. One certainly hopes that Evelein pursues this fascinating line of thinking further.

Editing such a volume is no doubt an Amazonian task. Trying to find the successful balance is a particular challenge. Introducing a writer to a wider audience while presenting articles of interest to experts in the area is indeed almost impossible. Although the volume falls short of this goal, selective readers will find articles of interest. ✽

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Victoria Ramirez
Weber State University

The title of Alberto Sandoval-Sanchez’s engaging book on Latino theater does more than announce its general contents. The author explains that “José can you see?” is a conflation of “No way, José” and the first line of our national anthem. The juxtaposition of this unanswerable challenge or “implied command” to José as non-Anglo other, invoked to “see/embrace” America’s dominant culture, sets the socio-political perspective of Sandoval-Sanchez’s work.

He makes clear that his exploration of Latino theater takes place within the context of a revision of Broadway and Hollywood’s negative stereotyping of ethnicity and otherness. For the author, revision is no mere theoretical reflex but rather one of the keys to Latino cultural survival. Thus, Sandoval-Sanchez begins his journey by pausing to re-examine Anglo-American Broadway theater in its treatment of “Latinidad” from a Latino perspective, before offering an historical survey of US Latino/a theater with its various trends, key productions, and pressing issues within a clearly diverse US Latino population.

As a native Puerto Rican now living and teaching in the US, Sandoval-Sanchez is well aware of theater’s ability to create, perpetuate, and disseminate negative