
REVIEWS

Renate S. Posthofen, ed. *Barbara Frischmuth in Contemporary Context*.
Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1999. 346p.

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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 oeuvre. 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 oeuvre 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 unbekante Hand* 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. ✨