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Jens Nielsen. *Flusspferd im Frauenbad*. Kleine Erzählungen, 18. Lucerne: Der gesunde Menschenversand, 2016. 191 p.

ALBRECHT CLASSEN  
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This small but interesting publisher focuses on literary works that reflect spoken words, performances, and stage presentations from the contemporary Swiss literary scene. *Flusspferd im Frauenbad* comprises not short stories, despite the title of the series, but a collection of poems by Jens Nielsen (b. 1966 in Aarau) who has gained a public reputation with his dramatic pieces for the theater and with radio plays. Both the book title (Hippos in the Woman's Bathroom) and the name of the publisher represent challenges. The publisher's name is a surreal contortion of a proverbial statement: the healthy human mind. But the crucial letter 't' is missing in the word "Menschenverstand," so this now means instead: shipping of people. The website has the same spelling, so this cannot be the result of an error. Deliberate idiosyncrasy appears to be the strategy behind it all. The same applies to Nielsen's poems that immediately strike one as unusual, fascinating, but also as somewhat nonsensical, perturbing, challenging, and irrational, if not quixotic. This is also the case with one dialogue text, "Piercing II," though there is no "Piercing I." Some of his performative pieces, which at times almost remind me of Kafka, can also be listened to online at <https://www.spoken-word.ch/en/artiste/1106/album> (last accessed on Oct. 15, 2017).

The very fact that the reader (or listener) can recognize the situation and yet does not fully understand what is discussed here makes all the texts by Nielsen (80 altogether) unique literary expressions. We find ourselves each time in quite ordinary life situations, but those are suddenly viewed from an irrational and incomprehensible perspective. At first, this might seem a little irritating and frustrating, but he succeeds, oddly enough, to capture our attention and curiosity about what really happens here and what this all could mean. Most of the poems are titled in a rather banal fashion as: "Kochkurs" (Cooking Class), "Prophezeiungen" (Prophecies), "Weihnachten" (Christmas), or "Meine Schwester" (My Sister). But are they poems? The texts consist of a loose narrative consistency, with individual statements (virtually in prose) taking us from one situation to another. But then there are many anacoluthons, forcing us to face a significant switch in thinking, leading to a radical change in events, which all are borrowed from everyday life scenes.

Let us illustrate this with the case of "Verkaufsgespräche" (Dialogue in a Store), which reflects on the word of greeting exchanged between a potential customer and a salesperson in a book store, simply "Hallo." The cus-

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tomers is alone in the store, it is evening, and he feels startled about the clerk's repeated greeting with this one word. Although he intended to buy a book, he then puts it down and hides behind some piles of bestsellers in order to observe the woman. He discovers that she regularly utters the word "Hallo," whether a new customer has come in or not. The narrator then suggests that it might be better not to tell anyone about this phenomenon to keep it a secret, which he would like to preserve for a long time. However, the 'poem' relates it, after all.

Another example could be "Entwicklung" (Development), where the speaker talks about his new inclination to dust off everything, both objects and people, and whenever he visits others, or has a dinner in a restaurant with a woman, he dusts and dusts. When he then asks his partner whether she knows already what she would like to order, she gets up without saying a word and leaves. The speaker stays behind, confused, unable to explain what this might have meant. Is this hence nonsense poetry? Existentialist literature? Expressionist narratives? In "Mobiliar" (Furnishings) a friend is calling the speaker over the phone, asking for help because he can no longer enter his own apartment, which is crammed-full with furniture, kitchen utensils, and countless other objects. Full of frustration, that friend keeps sitting on the staircase outside of the apartment and does not know what to do. The speaker replies that he would come immediately, which puts him into a good mood, although the reason for this seems unclear to him as well. What are we to make of this? Do the reflections about the relationship of moon and earth in "Partielle Offenbarung" (Partial Enlightenment), which seemingly result in the admission that the speaker's ideas are absurd, if not crazy, truly carry meaning, or are they ludic strategies?

A careful analysis demonstrates that Nielsen employs numerous rhetorical devices, such as the zeugma, the play with names, and anaphora, proverbs, metaphorical expressions, and the like, which transcend ordinary language and transform these texts into absurd, at times even mysterious statements about human epistemology that cannot be fully comprehended. Playfulness dominates, but there is no element of mysticism, whereas linguistic experimentation flourishes, which is really literary fun, as much as we might feel fooled or shocked. Reality is no longer what it seemed to be before, and yet the performance of these pieces suggests that there is a reality. However, Nielsen does not reveal to us what reality that might be. What a whimsical poet/writer/performer! These are, after all, remarkable, surprising texts from a contemporary Swiss performance poet.