

German writer of the mid-nineteenth century was obsessed with Napoleon. The answer is: traumatic events have always shaped the next generation and, oftentimes, the generation thereafter. Is it being exploited? Of course it is being exploited! Are there cheap exploitative things that have to do with the Holocaust? Of course. Should we forbid this as a topic? No. But we should – and the conference will probably address this – ask the hard questions about how it is used, why it is used, what the implications of the audience are, and what the implications of the theme presented the way it is presented are. And sometimes the answer is: 'it is a good thing,' sometimes the answer is: 'it is a bad thing.' And again – back to the question of interpretation – our views may or may not resonate.

FOCUS: What new fields of research do you see emerging? Which do you find most promising?

Gilman: Well, in terms of young writers looking at Germany as a multicultural society, I think that writers like Thomas Meinicke and Zafer Senocak are the most interesting young writers in Germany right now. There is Dürs Grünbein, the poet. These are poets and authors who are dealing with the complexity of a new Germany in Europe and they are clearly the most interesting people. Günter Grass has evidently just published a new novel. I have not read a Günter Grass novel in a number of years. But it has gotten enormously good reviews – and not just by the Grass-clique. Because, evidently, he has gone back to this very simple narrative and he has gone to the topic of the war. So, it will be interesting to see these younger, very experimental writers, Ingo Schulz, Thomas Meinicke, Zafer Senocak, also in terms of this whole question about: 'Ok, we now have this new Germany, what do we do with it?' And I think we are still in the age of the novel. I think that, except for Grünbein, new poetry is certainly not terribly engaging. And the new post-Heiner-Müller-theater has just been a disaster.

FOCUS: Thank you for this interview.

Gilman: You are welcome.

Cincinnati, February 21, 2002.

Word and Flesh

CONVERSATION WITH DOROTHEA GRÜNZWEIG

Dorothea Grünzweig was born in 1952 in Korntal near Stuttgart. She studied German and English in Tübingen and Bangor, Wales, after which she conducted research on the poet Gerald Manley Hopkins in Oxford. After teaching at the University of Dundee in Scotland, and at a school in South Germany, she moved to Finland, where she taught at the Deutsche Schule in Helsinki from 1989 to 1998. She now lives in Helsinki and in the country. Grünzweig received several prizes including the: Lyrikpreis der Stiftung Niedersachsen (1997) and the Heinrich-Heine-Stipendium im Literaturhaus Lüneberg (2000). Two of her collections have been published with the Wallstein Verlag in German: *Mittsommerschnitt* (1997) and *Vom Eisgebreit* (2000). The first collection translated into English by Derk Wynand will appear in 2002 as *Midsummer Cut* (Ottawa, Ontario: BushekBooks). The following conversation took place in German and occasionally English. It was decided to produce a transcript in English, with both parties involved in the translation process.

JEREMIAH: One of the aspects of your poems which I find so fascinating is the challenge they pose to such traditional philosophical dichotomies as self/other, culture/nature, and human/animal (see Jeremiah 154-57). Another opposition which they question is that between body and mind. Feelings are evoked by means of very concrete, physical images, whereby the body is both a symbol of and a participant in certain states of mind. Do you consciously set out to explore corporeality, and how do you understand embodiment? A big question!

Grünzweig: Yes, quite! Well, what I can say is that I have been thinking a lot recently about the physicality of words. At the moment, working on the new poems, I now and then find myself exploring how the names of things – that is, words, and maybe more specifically *poetry* – can be on the one hand empty, inauthentic, or then, on the other hand, bodily, or true. Poetic language, when it yields itself up to discovery, means for me that

things gain bodiliness. That is to say, when I am not in contact with poetic language, the world slips from my grasp. For me there is no sight, no perception, unless it is by means of language, and more particularly poetry. Since childhood, with my father preaching the "word" as a minister, and being somehow physically unattainable and God-like, but then also loving, I have been fascinated by the connection between flesh and word.

JEREMIAH: But if I think of "Passion", there seems there to be a *division* between word and flesh. Paternal severity, associated with darkness and maybe also stuffiness, is contrasted with the sensual, colourful world of the garden, as if the two – the word and the world – were in fact opposites.

Grünzweig: Yes, true, but I think on the other hand there is also a movement in the other direction, towards the understanding that one's eroticism orients itself in and towards language.

JEREMIAH: And writing is then a physical process? I suppose if we think of singing, where music and words are interwoven...

Grünzweig: Yes, definitely. Music certainly involves a union of the physical and the mental, and so, I think, does poetry, being a close relative of music, its Siamese twin, even. I read somewhere recently that both halves of the brain – the right half, responsible for movement and dance, and the left half, in which linguistic ability resides – are called upon in poetic activity. Poetry, which contains this musical element, involves a merging of the two. I've been thinking about physicality with regard to Hopkins, and the poem we've been working on. I've noticed that since I've been writing poetry, I've been reflecting on what physical conditions are necessary for poetic writing, and also what poetic writing, in turn, produces by way of physical conditions. I think of poetry as a suspension of gravity. As I said before, for me, the world only arises, or emerges from a tremulous grey mist, by means of poetry, and then it involves a feeling of losing gravity...

JEREMIAH: Transcendence?

Grünzweig: Not really, because I think of it as a physical feeling, like swimming. I remember reading something which I found fascinating, about

dolphins and swimming, and the fact that when they are at ease and swimming actively, their minds attain a highly creative state. They begin in fruitful play to invent original twists and leaps. I find writing – for me personally, writing poetry – an analogous activity. The state in which one writes is first of all a physical one. And then there are other conditions – we've talked about migration, for example...so a particular way of life is also called for. And then also, with regard to creativity and physicality, I think of birth.

JEREMIAH: This wateriness makes me think of the fluidity of the body in the poems, the uncertain boundaries between inner and outer, whereby a fresh and joyous sensuality often arises. But then this lack of solidity, the apparent fragility of individuality, also seems – to me, anyway! – threatening.

Grünzweig: Well, yes, to me too, but maybe in a different way from you! In situations in which I find this instability threatening, and in which it is impossible for me to write, then I feel really desperate. But words are for me like fastenings, planks on to which I can cling in the flood-water, or from which I can make myself a raft. Of course, since I've been writing poetry, the threat of dissolution has let up, because it's ever more embedded in a perception of a zig-zagging, or sinuous, creative process. One is even glad when such states arise, because they mean a great mental clarity.

JEREMIAH: The body *is* often imagined as mobile and free in the poems, but then also, in the poems about your father, it becomes a prison. Do you sometimes conceive the body as a cage, a "mean house"?

Grünzweig: Yes, I think one has to. One has these experiences. I've always been aware of being subject to these physical givens, but then also, on the other hand, there are these brief moments of freedom, just like in "The Caged Skylark", when one has a physical sensation of non-physicality, and one is somehow expanded. I seek out such situations, not only as I did in moving away from Germany, but also now, in the way I live, in swimming, cycling, walking... Sometimes, I have the impression that I have to walk my way to words, that I need movement to be inspired.

JEREMIAH: Your notion of the body does not accord with traditional Western ideas on the subject, according to which corporeality is to be

controlled, or mastered, by the mind. And the female body in particular has been imagined as leaky and limp, and therefore especially in need of taming. Not that men's bodies haven't been controlled too, as Foucault shows us. But particularly as a woman reader I find your depiction of the body as mobile and dynamic really liberating. Is it for you as a woman important to stress bodily freedom, or is that not an issue for you?

Grünzweig: Maybe I'll get round to this matter of femininity soon. Your questions are useful prompts... In any case, physical movement, the need for physical movement, is for me a pressing concern. I have this urge to run, jump, plunge in, as into a lake, however cold it may be. And then I have a tendency towards tomfoolery, so that people think I'm not all there, and I like that! And – this is related – I like using inappropriate words, ones which irritate other people. It's like pulling faces or being clumsy. There's this desire to alienate through words – I find it amusing. Here I think there's a parallel with Hopkins who, as a Jesuit priest, had to live within a regulatory linguistic system, and who also perhaps felt a need to subvert this system. But as a woman... yes, maybe...

JEREMIAH: Yes, I mean, I find the fact that women travel itself notable and exciting, you know like Mary Wollstonecraft in the eighteenth century, and now migrant literature by female writers... That women are moving and writing about it, and that the female body need not be just a resource or a container or an object...

Grünzweig: Hmm. Yes, well there is this breadth... I do conceive feminine personalities as huge territories in which I can reside, but of course this terrain is always under threat of disruption or invasion. As far as writing as a woman is concerned, I haven't thought about it directly or consciously, but there is this fusion and blurring which you mentioned. When words rush at me, or when I gather impressions, I have a sensation of being utterly open, like a sluice, or rather like a highly permeable membrane.

JEREMIAH: How far do you exercise control over this process, and how far – well, perhaps you can't know – is it the result of unconscious impulses?

Grünzweig: I do have a feeling of control, but only when I go over the poems. I have these notebooks in which I scribble quite wildly, in bursts, but then comes a desire for order. A process of aestheticization has to involve an element of control. The subconscious for me is just the mine on which one draws; constant ordering takes place. The less my consciousness filters and censors, the more things are brought together which in the conscious top layer would not be brought together. So for example you have an encounter with a person, then you observe a natural phenomenon, then you write about the latter. During this process the two things are linked together, so that both areas are fused; a complex of motifs in the poem reveals itself to be an image pertaining to the experiences with the person. Such a weaving together of different strands presupposes the state of weightlessness I was talking about, this being unencumbered by expectations, appointments, preparation for work – so in a condition in which those things do not drag you down. In such a state, writing causes subconscious forms to solidify, like when metal is cast into figures.

JEREMIAH: Of course the reader's unconscious is involved, too. One finds things interesting in a text because they appeal to one in perhaps quite unconscious ways. I'm interested in this relationship between reader and writer, and was wondering if you also thought of writing as a relational process?

Grünzweig: Yes, absolutely. The last words of *Vom Eisgebreit*, "Aber als Geistesgetreue zu denen/ ich rede zu denen ich denke/ kämt ihr ja mit", sum up my attitude towards this relationship. There is in this poem a desire for continuous motion towards the unknown, the as-yet-unnamed, and at the same time, the "I" of the poem is always speaking to addressees. These others are far away, but they will also be involved in the process of naming in which the "I" is engaged. The further away they are, the better! But yes, poems are despatches to others.

JEREMIAH: But you have also said that you want to work quite independently of everyone, and this tension is interesting, particularly for women, of whom it is expected that they serve others, a pressure which you yourself have felt. But you don't serve others by writing?

Grünzweig: Oh, no! No. When writing, I don't feel I'm making the slightest

concession to anyone. In other circumstances, in one's personal relationships, say, those feelings of duty and guilt *are* present, but not in writing, no.

JEREMIAH: Thinking more about the question of reading as relational: it has been said that translation represents the most intimate form of reading. I was wondering how you conceive the relationship between translator and translatee, in your case, Sirkka Turkka, Jorma Eronen, and Hopkins, for example. Because it is an ethical question, and one which involves power; you take the words of another and – well, it seems presumptuous, to take on such an important task.

Grünzweig: Yes, it is presumptuous. You certainly can't justify it by claiming that you are conjuring up the same creation in the new language. Poems one translates are like prompts which lead you to recreate something corresponding, or related, in the other language. This thought helps me to get over this fundamental feeling of guilt I have about daring to work with the poems of others. So I know what you mean when you talk about the dubious ethics of translation. And regarding the relationship between translator and translatee... I have in general a feeling of being completely open to everything, of dissolving and of being inundated – in my work as a teacher, for instance – and so I take the words of others into me, too, and they live not only in my heart and head, but also in my entrails and my womb. Working with someone else's poems triggers off a process of rejection. It's like having a skin graft, or someone else's hand attached to you, whereby you have the feeling sometimes that you can hardly bear it. As far as power is concerned, when you enter into the kingdom of another poet, you are forced into a position of humility, as you have the feeling that you have your *own* realm of words, for which you live – and this reconciliation is difficult. But of course, this only throws light on the difficult aspects of translation. Translation can have the opposite effect as well, being inspiring and educational. One has the opportunity to train under a poet one reveres. As regards Hopkins, I sometimes have the feeling that one has at some point just to give up. But then I can imagine that having decided to carry out a translation project, you can justify it in a different way. Maybe by thinking that you are enabling a particular poet to be received and understood in the other culture when s/he would otherwise not have been encountered there.

JEREMIAH: Does it help writers in general to know other languages? And if so, how does this knowledge have an influence on one's writing?

Grünzweig: Well, there's this state of hovering I've talked about, which is linked to physicality and which is a condition of inspiration. And I see the linguistic sphere similarly. Physically, I imagine German to be weighing me down as if I were lying on the ground with stones on top of me. The Finnish language, in its otherness, pulls this weight in the other direction, so the pressure is suspended. One language pulls one way, the other the opposite way. And so this hovering is permitted. Another thought: one's own language is a refuge in a foreign environment, but it is also relativised. You can find concepts, expressions, or patterns of sound funny, even grotesque, when you hear them from the outside. That which is one's own becomes strange, and that's a good thing. And then this constant childlike wonder which a foreign language provokes. I find that sense of mystery analogous to a kind of creative state in which the poet no longer entirely knows what is happening to her, when the words gain the upper hand and require humility. The foreign language is like air at high altitude; it refreshes, and allows expansion.

Helsinki, February 7, 2002.

POSITION LOSING

Here this country
which agrees with me
leaves me cold

My voice with which I once
spoke for everyone
is shrinking

Here I sit
force myself
through newspaper reports
get stuck in the entanglement of sounds
and after that I don't breathe a word

Unmolested on the sidelines
I take note
of the disasters of the homeland
The thought that it might need me
crashes during the flight
over the Baltic sea

A chip off the old
Germany
is what they say about me
since then I've covered the mirrors

Obituary

Responsive
to no country

Poem by Dorothea Grünzweig, translated by Emily Jeremiah.

„Das Ende der Illusionen ist noch lange nicht das
Ende des Glücks“:

oder

Der Wunderglaube von Mario Wirz

Mario Wirz ist im Jahre 1956 in Marburg a. d. Lahn geboren. Zu seinen frühen Werken zählen Theaterstücke und Gedichtsbände, u.a. *Und Traum zerzaust dein Haar. Nachtgedichte* (1982) und *Ich rufe die Wölfe* (Aufbau, 1983). Nach seiner Ausbildung zum Schauspieler, zog er 1988 nach Berlin, wo er seitdem als freier Schriftsteller arbeitet. Seine viel diskutierten und umstrittenen Romane *Es ist spät, ich kann nicht atmen. Ein nächtlicher Bericht* (Aufbau, 1992) und *Biographie eines lebendigen Tages* (Aufbau, 1994) stellen nicht nur das Selbstbild des „emanzipierten“ Schwulen, sondern auch das Selbstbild des HIV-Infizierten in Frage – etwas, wofür er Kritik inner- und außerhalb der schwulen Community dulden musste. Neben kritischen Reaktionen gab es auch hymnisches Lob. Wirz' literarische Arbeit wurde mit dem Liechtensteiner PEN-Preis und dem Förderpreis des Brandenburgischen Literaturpreises ausgezeichnet. In dem folgenden Interview mit David Prickett äußert er seine Meinung zu „Identitätsliteratur“, zeitgenössischer deutscher Literatur, Tennessee Williams und dem lasterhaften „Handy“.

PRICKETT: Ich habe das Glück gehabt, dich dieses Jahr kennenzulernen. Wenn ich deine Werke lese, habe ich deine „hysterischen“ Gesten – sprich deine Körpersprache – im Kopf. Wie kann – oder sollte – man das Autobiographische von Mario Wirz und das literarische Moment von Mario Wirz unterscheiden?

Wirz: Hysterische Gesten? Das Interview ist für mich beendet (*lacht und spielt den Beleidigten*). Wahrnehmung ist immer Interpretation. Im Kopf eines Lesers, der Wirz privat nicht kennt, entstehen natürlich andere Bilder. Andere Interpretationen. Kein Leser liest das Buch, das ein Autor geschrieben hat. Und meistens hat sogar den Autor kein exaktes Wissen über seinen Text. Der Text ist oft ehrlicher und radikaler und klüger als der Autor. Jedes