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PREVIEW

Barbara Frischmuth's Sternwieser Trilogy
and the Co-Creation of New Social Models

by

Lynda M. Iman-Loch

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Modern Languages & Literatures
(German)

Under the Supervision of Professor Robert Shirer

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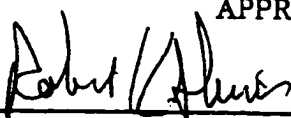
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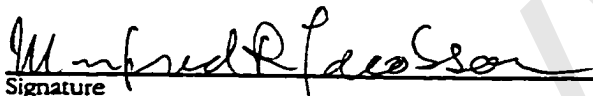
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GRADUATE COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

BARBARA FRISCHMUTH'S STERNWIESER TRILOGY
AND THE CO-CREATION OF NEW SOCIAL MODELS

Lynda M. Iman-Loch, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 1998

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Barbara Frischmuth has said that the goal of her work is to encourage women to develop new social models in order to improve their lives and redistribute social power. Frischmuth uses many techniques to foster co-creation between author-narrator, characters, and reader. In Linguistic Criticism Roger Fowler describes the use of defamiliarization to shock the reader and cause them to think critically about their lives, language, and art. In the Sternwieser trilogy, Die Mystifikationen der Sophie Silber, Amy oder Die Metamorphose, and Kai und die Liebe zu den Modellen, Frischmuth inspires co-creation through defamiliarization. She uses a variety of narrative techniques, shifting points of view, the juxtaposing of settings, the development of unusual characters, and the inclusion of autobiographical material.

PREVIEW

To my husband, my parents, Lynda and Dennis Loch,
my sister Karen Sauvage, family, and friends without
whose support and encouragement this project would
not have been possible.

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PREVIEW

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Changing the Rules of "the Big Game"

Barbara Frischmuth, in a series of five lectures published in Traum der Literatur Literatur des Traums: Münchner Poetik-Vorlesungen, makes a comparison between literature and the weave of a Tibetan carpet. In the first lecture, "Vom Genuß der Literatur," she describes the intention of her lecture series in this way, "Ich werde dabei eine Art Tibetteppich ausrollen, »maschentausendabertausendweit« -- mit einer Unzahl von Mustern, aber was ich auf diesem Teppich sehen lassen möchte, ist, wie und daß alles zusammenhängt."¹ This metaphor of the Tibetan carpet also characterizes the structure of Frischmuth's Sternwieser trilogy Die Mystifikationen der Sophie Silber, Amy oder Die Metamorphose, and Kai und die Liebe zu den Modellen.² Frischmuth weaves many elements of style together in her

¹ Barbara Frischmuth, "Vom Genuß der Literatur," Traum der Literatur Literatur des Traums: Münchner Poetik-Vorlesungen (Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 1991) 7.

² From this point on I will use the abbreviations Mystifikationen, Amy, and Kai to designate the three novels. These three novels are also referred to as the Sternwieser trilogy.

trilogy, and in the following study, I will examine the weave of the threads that create the new and colorful patterns of the novels, and I will investigate the elements that bind the three works together with their vibrant and reverberating colors. The elements of narrative style, characters, settings, and autobiographical material characterize Frischmuth's distinctive style. They also create challenging design proposals for social change, in other words, the rules to "the big game." I will show that the development of the narrative, characters, setting, and autobiographical material create intricate designs that encourage women to attempt change (in other words, co-create new social models) in the patriarchal structure of society, which Frischmuth refers to in the trilogy as "the big game."

While Frischmuth is a prolific author, having written two trilogies, a host of other novels, short stories, poems, plays, and children's stories, I have chosen to examine only the Sternwieser trilogy. In my opinion, this trilogy has the broadest scope of material, and it can be most aptly applied to women's current situations. This series of novels is inviting to the reader, but it is also meaningful and deeply moving without losing the charm of the fantastical elements and unique characters. The Sternwieser trilogy also incorporates in its broadness of text a message of hope

for women in all their different stages of maturity and situations. It is a text that grows with the reader, does not lose its value, and its message is not diminished as the reader matures because of its inclusion of stories from women in all stages of maturity. Also, because of the unique charm of the characters, setting, narrative, and autobiographical material in this trilogy, the invitation to co-create with Frischmuth is irresistible. It is one I have accepted, and I have undertaken my own act of co-creation in this examination of the Sternwieser trilogy.

One reading technique Frischmuth uses is co-creation. The idea of motivating the reader to co-create with the author-narrator and author of a book is addressed in her lecture "Traum der Literatur."

Ich komme nun zu einem Text, der vielleicht einen der nobelsten Träume der Literatur verkörpert, [Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz in Auenthal], nämlich den des Lesers als Mitschöpfer. Wie viele Texte legen es darauf an -- man sagt, die besten --, daß sie vom Leser mit- und zu Ende geschaffen werden. Daß Lesen eine kreative Tätigkeit sei, haben wir oft genug gehört.³

³ Barbara Frischmuth, "Traum der Literatur," Traum der Literatur Literatur des Traums: Münchner Poetik-Vorlesungen (Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 1991) 27.

Reading as a creative activity is translated in Frischmuth's trilogy into the co-creation between the author-narrator, the author, the characters, and the reader of new social models. Within the text of the trilogy the characters also work together to co-create new models for social change. The reader experiences the characters' struggles, and she⁴ identifies with some of the situations in which the protagonists, Sophie Silber, Amaryllis Sternwieser, Amy Stern, and Kai find themselves.⁵ The reader realizes that her problems are not exclusive to her. She is encouraged by the actions of the protagonists to change her own circumstances thereby co-creating new models for social structure.

The reader is also challenged to co-create by a style in which it can be difficult to discern all of the layers of text, and in doing so, to discover the messages woven deeply into the fabric of Frischmuth's trilogy. The complex style draws the reader deeper into the novels' unfamiliarity, and it invites the reader to contemplate her position in society. The reader is introduced to many elements, or patterns, that Roger

⁴ Since the burden of the social change in Frischmuth's novels falls on the women I have chosen to use "she" for the generic pronoun instead of "he".

⁵ Sophie Silber is Sophie von Weitersleben's stage name. She changed her last name to Silber after Saul Silber, her "stepfather," dies. Amaryllis Sternwieser becomes Amy Stern after she becomes a human.

Fowler would say are defamiliarizing. Fowler defines the technique of defamiliarization in his book Linguistic Criticism:

Defamiliarization occurs when the context of reference introduces elements which in any way deviate from the expected cultural context. There are numerous techniques by which this can be effected. They include, for example, the introduction of sociologically deviant characters with discourse styles at odds with the norms of the narrative voice (the circus people in Dickens's Hard Times); children, idiots, and primitives whose world-views are defective or skewed compared with ours; in animal fantasies such as Watership Down or Animal Farm, the appropriation of 'our' context of culture by beings who are not normally thought to enjoy it; in science fiction, or fantasies such as The Faerie Queene or Gulliver's Travels, the creation of contexts of reference which are systematic transformations of our world--possible worlds understandable on the basis of our ideology and technology, but not factually experienced, including, for example, beings with brains and motives like ours but dissimilar bodies, or the other way

around; finally, there are texts in which the poet attempts to construct a world which is a logical denial or inversion of the experiential norms supplied by the context of culture.⁶

Defamiliarization in the Sternwieser trilogy encompasses the continuously changing narrative and embedded stories, the protagonists, the settings of the novels, and the heavy use of autobiographical material.

Defamiliarization, Frischmuth's eclectic style, and the readers' increased efforts to cope with the texts Frischmuth weaves are the catalysts for co-creation between the reader, the characters, the author-narrator, and the author.

Frischmuth, like the protagonists of her trilogy, uses the artistic medium of story telling to encourage societal change. By inspiring women through her texts to examine their relationships and to co-create new models for social roles Frischmuth creates a study of women's place in a patriarchal society. Although Frischmuth proposes many possible models and poses many questions about society, she has been criticized for not supplying definitive answers to the questions she raises. It is defamiliarizing to the reader, since, as the critics note, Frischmuth does not provide answers to the

⁶ Roger Fowler, Linguistic Criticism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 89-90.

questions she raises. Frischmuth addresses the issue of leaving the reader without definitive answers in her speech "Denken Sie bitte nach, meine Damen!".

Mir wurde auf Grund meiner Erzählungen von und über Frauen vorgeworfen, ich würde mich darauf beschränken, das Schicksal einzelner Frauen und die Mechanismen ihres Unglücks in allen Details darzustellen, ohne eine Lösung des Problems oder auch nur den Ansatz zu einem Ausweg anzubieten. Als Feststellung mag das stimmen, gegen den Vorwurf möchte ich sagen, daß ich es nicht für die primäre Aufgabe der Literatur halte, die Antwort auf eine aufgeworfene Frage mitzuliefern, ich sehe sie eher als Rätsel, das der Leser selbst zu knacken hat.⁷

Leaving the reader to find her own solutions to the demands society places upon her is one way of compelling the reader to co-create. As a single mother and author Frischmuth has had to find her own methods for breaking through the barriers of the social roles imposed upon her and her career in a male dominated profession. These methods are portrayed in the undercurrent of autobiographical material in the trilogy. This

⁷ Barbara Frischmuth, "Denken Sie bitte nach, meine Damen! Ringen um ein neues Weltmodell: Die Feuerprobe für Kreativität, Mutterwitz und Verstand der Frau ist gekommen," Die Presse 8./9. März 1975: 22.

autobiographical material is combined with fantasy, mythology, and unusual protagonists. This defamiliarizing combination of style elements creates a colorful portrayal of society, or carpet, that is unexpectedly candid in its depiction of the problems women have living within society's current structure.

In her essay "Traumtänzerin mit Fangnetz: Formen weiblicher Ästhetik bei Barbara Frischmuth," Margret Brüggemann describes the process of reading and unravelling Frischmuth's work in this way:

Wenn man sich mit der Lektüre von Barbara Frischmuths Texten beschäftigt, ist es einem geraten, eine kleine Handbibliothek griffbereit zu haben. Im Handbereich sollten auf jeden Fall ein Abriß griechischer Mythologie wie auch eine Auswahl von Texten deutscher Romantiker stehen. Aber auch Freuds Traumdeutung, Geschichten aus 1001 Nacht und Betrachtungen zu Matriarchatstheorien könnten hilfreich sein. Frischmuth arbeitet mit zahlreichen intertextuellen Versatzstücken, was auf den ersten Blick dazu führen könnte, ihre Texte als intellektuell und konstruiert abzustempeln. Nichts ist jedoch weniger wahr. Eine gründliche Kenntnis der obigen Literatur erhöht den Lesegenuß, da der Leser dem Sprach- und

Zitierspiel der Autorin folgen kann und so in den vollen Genuß des doppelbödigen Erzählwitzes kommt. Frischmuth ist eine große Meisterin im Fabulieren, wobei Orient und Okzident ihren Einfluß auf die Erzählweise der Autorin deutlich zeigen. Oder wie Jürgen Serke sagt: »Den Katholizismus in der Haut und die Märchen aus 1001 Nacht -- ihr Lieblingsbuch -- im Herzen.«⁸

Following the threads of the carpet through the multiple levels of discourse in Frischmuth's work can be daunting, but as Brüggmann writes, there are recognizable recurring elements in Frischmuth's work that are combined and woven into new and intricate patterns.

Beugt man sich über das Oeuvre von Barbara Frischmuth, so kann man sich einer erstaunlichen Produktivität gegenüber sehen. Schon allein das literarische Werk ist von eindrucksvoller Größe. Beim Lesen wird man an ein Kaleidoskop erinnert, da verschiedene, anweisbare Versatzstücke in anderen Kombinationen wieder auftauchen. Aber jedes

⁸ Margret Brüggmann, "Traumtänzerin mit Fangnetz: Formen weiblicher Ästhetik bei Barbara Frischmuth," Barbara Frischmuth, ed. Kurt Bartsch (Graz: Verlag Droschl Graz-Wien, 1992) 23. Brüggmann quotes Jürgen Serke, Frauen Schreiben: Ein neues Kapitel deutschsprachiger Literatur (Hamburg: Gruner & Jahr, 1979) 158.

Mal ergeben sich neue Muster und neue Geschichten. Frischmuth betont wiederholt, daß alles mit allem zusammenhängt: Schreiben, Leben und Phantasieren, Zukunft und Vergangenheit, Göttliches und Profanes bedingen einander. In ihrem Werk sind denn auch zahlreiche biographische, aber auch literarische, historische und tagespolitische Aspekte miteinander verbunden. Da die Autorin selbst jedoch auf formale Verarbeitung und Distanz bei der Verarbeitung alltäglicher Geschehnisse zu Literatur als wichtigstes ästhetisches Kriterium besteht, erscheint es hier sekundär, die Texte auf die authentische, biografische Korrelation von ihrem Leben und Schreiben als Ausdruckform weiblicher Ästhetik abzuklopfen.⁹

In each of the novels in the Sternwieser trilogy narrative style, characters, environment, and autobiographical elements are woven into new patterns. As the trilogy progresses the characters change and take on new forms, but they can still be recognized by the careful reader. Frischmuth's message, the colored threads of the carpet, advocating social change remains clear, even if the pattern of the design changes. The novels are about Sophie Silber's, Amaryllis

⁹ Brüggmann 24-5.

Sternwieser's, and Amy Stern's search for identity and self within the structure of "the big game," or patriarchal society.

As a female in a profession dominated by men Frischmuth has had to examine her role and place as an author. Frischmuth has questioned what affect she can have on her profession, and if she can "pave the way" for other women to join this male dominated profession. In "Die Schwierigkeit zu schreiben oder der neue Ort der Phantasie," Frischmuth speaks about the effect of the growing numbers of female authors on the production of literature.

Wir sind davon ausgegangen zu untersuchen,
welche Literatur nottut. Ich komme zum Thema.
Welche Literatur tut den weiblichen Autoren
not, warum tut ihnen Literatur überhaupt not,
nachdem sie so lange so gut wie ohne
ausgekommen sind? Ich glaube nicht, daß es nur
die Gelegenheit ist, die besseren
Bildungsmöglichkeiten, die großzügigeren
Wohnverhältnisse, arbeitssparende Maschinen,
die die Frauen zum Schreiben gebracht hat,
obwohl das alles sehr wichtig ist, aber
Kinderkacke bleibt auch in einer Papierwindel
Kinderkacke. Auch wäre da wohl aus den
Frauenklöstern mehr an Literatur gekommen, als

die erotisch eingefärbte Gottesminne einiger Mystikerinnen. Ich glaube vielmehr, daß die Mehrzahl der weiblichen Autoren in der Stimmung des Aufbruchs zu schreiben begonnen hat. All die scheinbaren und wirklichen Möglichkeiten, das überkommene häusliche Leben mit einem anderen zu vertauschen, haben das Denken der Frauen in Bewegung gebracht. Noch mangelt es an echten Ideen zu neuen lebberen Modellen, aber wie kommt es zu Ideen? Indem man mit seiner Phantasie nachdenkt.¹⁰

In the Sternwieser trilogy Frischmuth portrays the struggle of Amy Stern to overcome her situation as a single parent and create new possibilities in her career. Amy Stern graphically depicts the necessity of using one's imagination. Amy Stern's example inspires readers to exercise their imaginations and co-create new social models that are healthier for all participants in "the big game."

Frischmuth addresses the issue of dwindling human imagination directly in her work. In Mystifikationen Amaryllis Sternwieser holds the humans' waning fantasy and imagination responsible for the social problems and foundering relationships humans currently experience.

¹⁰ Barbara Frischmuth, "Die Schwierigkeit zu schreiben oder der neue Ort der Phantasie," Jarhbuch der Wiener Goethe-Vereins 81/83 (1977-1979): 322-23.

Lack of imagination is also responsible for the nearly nonexistent relationship between the fairies and modern humans. After becoming human Amaryllis/Amy chooses to pursue a career as an author. This is a career in which she can use her imagination to create new social models and inspire others to do the same.

Frischmuth uses her imagination to fill in the gaping holes in history concerning women. Women are conspicuously absent from history and as authors of that history. Frischmuth creates in the text of Mystifikationen a hypothetical history for women using mythology and material borrowed from other authors. This is important, as Brüggmann notes, since new literature is based on the literature and history that comes before it.

Kommen wir noch einmal zurück auf die These, daß Literatur aus Literatur entstünde. Dies bedeutet, daß jeder Text ein Weiterschreiben bestehender Texte beinhaltet. Frischmuth zitiert in einem anderen Zusammenhang den Schulmeister Wutz von Jean Paul, der diese intertextuelle Bewegung bis ins Absurde treibt. Er schreibt auf Grund von neu erschienenen Titeln die Bücher selbst, und hält diese letztlich für echter als die Bücher, deren Texte wirklich unter einem bestimmten Titel erschienen. Man könnte hier von einem

Simulakrum sprechen. Die Kopie erscheint echter als das Original. Übertragen auf die Intertextualität könnte man sagen, jeder neue Text übertrifft die bestehenden Texte, weil er noch schillernder, noch origineller die vorhandenen Einfälle kombinieren kann. Diese Denkfigur steht in einem gewissen Widerspruch zur Idee einer ursprünglichen, originären Genie-Tätigkeit. Doch sympathisiert Frischmuth deutlich mit dieser Vorstellung von Textualität. Sie ermöglicht es Autorinnen nämlich, ohne sich historisch legitimieren zu müssen mit einer eigenen Tradition, Versatzstücke aus der bestehenden Literatur zu »stehlen«, um sie in das eigene Textgewebe einzuflechten.¹¹

Frischmuth includes and adapts characters from E.T.A. Hoffmann, George MacDonald, and other authors in her work.¹² She also relies heavily on the Demeter mythology.¹³ In Mystifikationen a hypothetical history

¹¹ Brüggemann 33.

¹² Hansjörg Graf, "Die Mystifikationen der Barbara Frischmuth," Barbara Frischmuth, ed. Kurt Bartsch (Graz: Verlag Droschl Graz-Wien, 1992) 126.

¹³ For an in depth discussion of Frischmuth's fascination with the Demeter story see her speech "Von den Langexistierenden" in Traum der Literatur Literatur des Traums: Münchner Poetik-Vorlesungen.

is illustrated in the Ceremony of Remembrance in which Amaryllis Sternwieser recalls memories reaching back to the time before creative forces were divided into male and female. Amaryllis has many of the same creative qualities and powers as Demeter. In using these materials Frischmuth creatively fills in the missing history of women and the lack of female authors.

Frischmuth acknowledges the lack of female authors and the new role women have in producing literature. Within the novels the characters discuss the role of artists in society, and they also talk over the opportunities for women who want to pursue careers in the arts. Frischmuth asks if the new literature produced by women is fundamentally different from that of their male counterparts.

Das Experiment liegt für mich einfach darin, zu sehen was dabei herauskommt, wenn Frauen schreiben, wenn sie ihr Geschlecht und den dadurch geprägten Sehakt in die Literatur einbringen. Und es müssen wohl noch viel mehr Frauen schreiben, ich meine ernsthaft Literatur machen, bis man das Experiment als abgeschlossen wird betrachten können, das heißt, bis man die Frage mit ja oder nein beantworten kann, ob die Frauen wirklich einen neuen Aspekt in die Literatur eingebracht haben