

Adieu bis bald, Reisebriefe. By Richard Christ. Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag. 1979. 213 pages. 8,20.- M.

The study itself has a concrete structure: two introductory chapters (Partition: Two Political Entities and Two Language Communities?; The Background: Exemplarism and Experimentation) and two concluding sections (The Wider Tradition: Teleological Humanism and Creative Zest; Collective Concretism: Representative Anthologies and Invitational Anthologies) which flank the solid core: The Concrete Poem. Chapters are contrastive. The GDR section, for example, is a look at lyrical verse in general from Bobrowski to Gerlach, from sonnet to ballad to ode, all under the label dicentric genres (i.e. discursive); the concrete poets of the FRG under focus are Gomringer, Heissenbüttel, Mon, and the Austrians Jandl and Kriwet, with their Constellations, Combinations, Topographies, Articulations, Verbal Landscapes and Round Disks. This is all sensibly organized and presented but offers little that is new (save the pages on F. Kriwet). The two concluding sections enlarge the Perspective and supplement the samples, properly showing the complex variety and international dimension of (Western) concrete poetry. One could indeed question the rather arbitrary judgment "that only the Concrete poetry of the GDR qualifies as lyrical, because it makes connections with traditional verse..." (xi) and regret the modish jargon (e.g. superized icon). One might have wished that the creative zest, devious wit, and lucid gravity characteristic of (Western) Concrete poetry had been treated with less academic sobriety.

Missing from the otherwise excellent bibliography is Arp's On My Way (1948) worth citing at least for its Jourdian-like retrospective insight: concrete art aims to transform the world. It aims to make existence more bearable... where concrete art enters, melancholy departs, dragging with it its gray suitcases full of black sighs. It is altogether fitting that Dieter Kessler's equally welcome study, Untersuchungen zur Konkreten Dichtung, appeared across the sea also in 1976.

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Richard Christ loves to travel alone. He experiences his travels by himself, not with others or with someone he can't avoid. The profession of writer implies, however, exchange; the exchange of ideas with others. Travel letters (Reisebriefe) fulfill this need. The unknown becomes clear through correspondences.

In letters to his publisher, a friend, his daughter and his former teacher, Christ relates his travel impressions of India, the USSR, Austria, the FRG and Slovakia. He also reveals much of his past, relates places visited to his literary encounters and in general arouses one's desire to someday visit most of the places he describes.

One of the great advantages of travel is learning to appreciate one's home. It is difficult for Richard Christ to leave on a trip. His reverence for his homeland offers the reader some interesting insights into life in the GDR by way of contrasts between the FRG, Austria and Cuba. His homesickness is expressed through the leitmotif of trying to find an acceptable beer in the various countries.

His letters from India do not leave the reader with the desire to visit that country. Christ encounters difficulty, sickness and misery. In his letters from Austria, he comments on all the new influences not known at home: Karajan, Boulevardpressen, Gastarbeiter, Pornofilms, etc. He enjoys the visible history and art but deplores the student beggars.

In the USSR Christ enjoys the hospitality and marvels at the sport center at Medeo. In Cuba he is treated to baseball, Castro and the world of Hemingway, which he relives in vivid detail.

In the Pfalz he, at last, locates his acceptable beer and the memories of his childhood and birthplace. The reader gains a good picture of his background. The final letter from Fiest'any presents a view of life on a Kur. One wonders if the overwhelming nature of the Frankfurter Buchmesse made Christ ripe for the treatment. He leaves the Kur in good health and is ready to travel as soon as he overcomes the paradox of Reiselust when at home and Heimweh while traveling.

Although he does not discuss his literary his reader's curiosity about a very diverse reader's curiosity about a very diverse world.

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