

XII. Summary

The present work is concerned with the book "Shedding" by Verena Stefan which gave rise to fiery discussions by critics as well as by readers. "I am my other self"¹⁶⁴ should become the result of the search for a feminine I. The leitmotif of the whole book is the self-acceptance of the protagonist which had to be gained step by step, by eliminating the feeling about her own estranged body. At the end of the book the question remains whether this will be converted into a permanent victory.

I tried to find out various aspects in Verena Stefan's first book. The focus lay in the analysis of possible accesses to the new feminine identity. In the first part I concentrated on the formal and contextual aspects, in order to find out and define the characteristics of the new feminine literature. Stefan's "Shedding" launched many other publications which form part of the new German Feminist Literature.

"Shedding" by Verena Stefan made the influence of the Women's Movement visible for the first time. Although "Shedding" is considered a landmark in the history of the new feminist literature, its influence was limited to only one current and not to all publications in this field printed in the following period, as was erroneously said in other scientific documents on literature.

A further role played by the discourse on feminist literature in this book was the launching of a discussion on feminine esthetics and a feminine way of writing. Due to the fact that "Shedding" drew the attention on the patriarchal structures in language, a new form of political understanding arose. In her book Verena Stefan accentuated feminism within the political and literary current. As a result, feminism delinked from leftist structural thinking. The central claim of feminism, "the private sphere is a political one" corresponded with Stefan's description of events, experiences, sensitivity and perceptions. However, we must not classify

¹⁶⁴ Stefan, Verena: *Shedding*

this book as belonging to the kind of authentic diaries, as the autobiographical content was chosen very conscientiously by Stefan.

She described in detail the intimate sphere of women and thus contributed to the breaking of the prevailing taboo. When Stefan wrote about feminine sexuality from a women's perspective, this was considered a revolutionary act.

"From books films and experiences that affirmed that which we know from books and films, we know what she/he wants. We act and react accordingly. We react to her/his knowing what he/she wants. We count on that which we know from books and films and experiences indeed being accurate".¹⁶⁵

The erotic passages underlined the importance of the feminine body leading to a new way of writing on women's subjectivity.

When I started to write, my image of this authoress was in no way defined. In my opinion Verena Stefan is an interesting person, who was not only committed to literature, but also to feminism, ecology and creative writing. She belongs to the feminist German authors who create their own profile by not exclusively writing about their ideas on emancipation and feminist postulates. According to her she wanted to create a place for women, as persons who belong to a social as well as a linguistic area. In this period this was contrary to many feminist activists who had tackled this issue lifelong. This was the reason why I thought that it might be interesting to compare it with the biography of the well-known feminist authoress Alice Schwarzer in order to discover striking parallels. In Verena Stefan's book "Fremdschläfer" the feminist ductus can no longer be found, as other topics, such as migration, cancer or lesbian love stories prevail. As the authoress became very scared about her life and due to repeated changes of her environment, this issue became more distant. "You were born in Switzerland, you have lived a

¹⁶⁵ Verena Stefan, *Shedding & Literally Dreaming*, with an afterword by Tobe Levin, *Shedding* transl. by Johanna Steigleder Moor and Beth E. Weckmueller, *Literally Dreaming* transl. by Johanna Albert and Tobe Levin, The Feminist Press at the City University New York: New York, 1994, pp.27 f.

long time in Germany and are actually living in Canada. What comes to your mind when you hear the word "Heimat" (home)?" "Writing!"¹⁶⁶

In this story which appeared in the novel "Fremdschläfer" a relationship with our country became clear. "Your father is a Sudeten. Have you ever been to the Czech Republic? Do you feel any links to this country?" "I was in Prague twice, only a couple of days and before the big change. Unfortunately I have never enough time for a longer trip, when I am in Europe. I would be very happy if I were invited to readings, if people were interested. I would also like to speak about my last publication on German speaking Jewish people in Montreal, whose origins are in Europe."¹⁶⁷

The search for the feminine self is closely linked to the term "feminine writing". When discussing the role which it played in the literary discourse of the Seventies it must be underlined, that this concept of feminine writing cannot only be related to women, as it was also ascribed to men. In seminars and discussions this issue was often analyzed, especially within the context of feminine subjectivity. However, I was not able to define a clear structure, unambiguous limits nor typical characteristics of feminine writing. As a final variation for the process of forming a new feminine identity I chose the search for a specifically feminine language. Making a difference between a feminine and masculine perspective which appeared in "Häutungen" (Shedding) as completely different issues, in order to try to program the emotional and sexual relationships, turned out to be functional. The need for a new language must not be understood in its linguistic meaning. The present document did not aim at explaining in detail the means of feminist linguistics. I analyzed the difference between male and female languages within the framework of female identity while the existing linguistic system with its patriarchal structures should pave the way for the new language, which could really express the feminine self.

Furthermore I investigated the short story "Ein Schritt nach Gommorha" by the Austrian authoress Ingeborg Bachmann comparing it to Stefan's

¹⁶⁶ See interview with Verena Stefan on 19.10.2011, Appendix 1

¹⁶⁷ See interview with Verena Stefan on 19.10.2011 Appendix 1

book "Häutungen" which was published fourteen years later. Together with Virginia Woolf and Unica Zürn, Ingeborg Bachmann did not comply with the demands and ideas of feminist literature prevailing in the Seventies, as they were convinced that the issues of femininity and feminine writing should be dealt with from a masculine perspective. Male criticism and the discourse of the women's movement provoked anything but a positive acceptance. The above texts point at the destructive structures of the masculine order which exerts a strong influence on feminine thinking, acting and awareness. At the same time they do not demonstrate any belligerence against patriarchal systems and structures. Women did not appear as the contextual center. Today her books on the issue of feminine esthetics are widely read, whilst Bachmann's skepticism vis-à-vis the language and the position of women within the social system is certainly more understandable than at the beginning of the feminist discourse.

The book "Häutungen" (Shedding) cannot simply be judged according to its role within feminist literature. The rising number of books on self-awareness in Germany was supported by reports about personal experiences coming from American women's movements. Verena Stefan's "Häutungen" served as starting point for a number of publications on self-awareness. The texts were closely related to letters and diaries which served as authentic reports about the personal life of their authoresses. The texts on self-awareness very consciously launched the presumably outdated literary forms, developed them further and upgraded them within the framework of the literary and social discourse.

My aim consisted in viewing the book "Häutungen" as highly inspiring for other publications dealing with feminine literature, in order to examine shared issues. I found it very interesting to find the different ideas about "feminine esthetics" as well as the way women's images were depicted.