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Franziska Linkerhand — Introduction and analysis of the Last (Unfinished) Work by the Late GDR Novelist Brigitte Reimann.

Karin McPherson

1974 saw the publication of *Franziska Linkerhand*,¹ the last novel of the East German writer Brigitte Reimann, who died of cancer in 1973 at the early age of thirty-nine. This remarkable work of some 580 pages (15 chapters) was the product of ten years of devoted and sorely trouble labour.² The author, until then, had been best known for her novel *Ankunft im Alltag*, a work which gave the name *Ankunftsliteratur* to a whole period of East German prose writing of the early 1960's. In *Franziska Linkerhand*, she set out to prove herself a writer worthy of her early reputation among critics and the reading public.

Brigitte Reimann, the daughter of a journalist, was born in 1933 near Magdeburg, and the formative years of her school education took place during the early postwar period, before and after the foundation of the GDR. After leaving school, she worked first as a teacher and then in various other jobs, before joining a workers' brigade at the industrial plant "Schwarze Pumpe" at Hoyerswerda in 1960. This period had a decisive influence on her development as a writer. Her first prose work, *Die Frau am Pranger* (1956) deals with the tragic consequences of a love between a young German and a Russian, a theme subsequently taken up by Christa Wolf in her earliest prose narrative, *Moskauer Novelle* (1961). Reimann's next work, the short novel *Ankunft im Alltag* (1961), draws its conclusions from the first Bitterfeld Conference of 1959, which encouraged intellectuals to work in industry and agriculture. The novel deals with a group of young girls who, after finishing grammar school, spend a year working on an industrial building site. The novel *Die Geschwister* (1963) brought her the Heinrich Mann Prize for literature in 1976. With its themes of the conflict of loyalties within a family and the ideological defense of the GDR against influences from the West, highlighted by the young sister who tries to dissuade her brother from leaving, the novel clearly belongs in the context of the late 1950s and early 1960s, as does Christa Wolf's novel *Der geteilte Himmel* which appeared in the same year, and which also brought the author the Heinrich Mann Prize (1963). In the brother-sister relationship in the novel *Die Geschwister*, Reimann anticipates a motif which appears in *Franziska Linkerhand*. However, although this last novel was conceived as early as 1963, it belongs essentially to the later 1960s and early 1970s, as this analysis hopes to establish.

Apart from a documentary report of her journey to Siberia in 1964, Reimann spent the last ten years of her life working on this novel. From a number of letters written at irregular intervals between 1963 and 1972 to her friend and

critic Annemarie Auer (published in 1975),³ we gain considerable insight into those last ten years. They lead us from the moment when the first ideas for the new novel came to her, through the various stages of its progress and the accompanying doubts about herself and her ability to write, to her increasing frustration and, especially after 1969, her fear of not being able to finish the work, because of cancer. Auer, a well-known critic and writer, who also suffered from cancer, guided and supported her friend through all stages in the process of writing. Above all, she reassured Reimann by showing faith in her ability to develop as a writer, and by reminding her, again and again, of the great strength in her personality, her positive and affirmative attitude to life, and her inexhaustible mental energy. These seventeen letters, together with six replies and a preface by Auer, are essential to the understanding of the novel and of the author herself, about whom very little is otherwise known.

The earliest letters of 1963, written after Reimann had returned to Hoyerswerda for the second time, express great happiness at being back "in meinem verdammten geliebten Kombinat" (24/3/63).⁴ But simultaneously with a deep sense of belonging, of being a natural part of the day-to-day working and living, there is an unmistakable feeling of frustration with the standardized, unimaginative way in which a new town is built with total disregard for the human needs of those who live in it.⁵ This concern leads to a thorough investigation of problems in architecture and in particular to the inevitable conflict between building creatively and building economically. The publication of a controversial and outspokenly critical newspaper article by Reimann on this subject led to major disputes both amongst the experts and in the Party (3/10/63).⁶ Through her interest in the building at Hoyerswerda she made the acquaintance of a leading professor of architecture in Berlin, as well as of the architect in charge of industrial building in the GDR.

Both men become characters in her new novel, together with people from her immediate environment in Hoyerswerda. Her original intention, which was to write a "mere" love story, or rather, to write about the discovery of love, and to discuss the question of moral standards of the new Socialist society, has now been superseded by her growing interest in the problems of architecture (24/3/63).⁷ Eight months later, Reimann reports that she has begun her book, but that the original love story has been changed to the account of a talented young girl full of passionate ideas, who comes to live and work in an expanding industrial city and finds her idealistic dreams of building the perfect town brought down to earth by practical economic considerations and by constant friction with the builders (26/11/63).⁸

The outlines of the central character of the novel, Franziska Linkerhand, are recognizable from the details of this letter. Like her character, the author became at times so immersed in the day-to-day struggles of the building site where she lived that she had little time left for her writing (3/10/63). This explains in part why it is not until eighteen months later that she mentions the novel again, reporting that the first chapter is now almost complete (11/2/65).⁹ During this period the author married, but lived separately from her husband, so that, as she explained, their love would not be destroyed by the day-to-day

McPherson: Franziska Linkerhand — Introduction and Analysis of the trivialities of living. The intensity of this relationship is reflected in the love story which continues to be an essential element of the novel.

Reimann's later letters, written at long intervals, tell the story of her heroic fight to write the novel against the increasing threat of incurable illness until, towards the end, her will to live becomes entirely centered upon the effort to complete the book. These later letters reflect her awareness of her responsibilities as a writer. She feels she has to justify her reputation gained from earlier works, and in particular, to correct and enhance the picture of the author who contributed to the literary history of GDR the catchwork "Ankunftsliteratur" which, in retrospect, she now considers "a dubious concept" (16/1/72).¹⁰ In spite of her own doubts about her talent as a writer, her last novel contains many new developments for her as an author, and it represents an important and serious contribution to the prose literature of the 1970s.

The novel consists of memoirs and retrospective reflections, in the form of a loosely connected, continuous address by the central character, Franziska Linkerhand, to a person to whom she gives the name "Ben", and who also appears in the novel as her lover, under the name of Trojanowicz. The novel begins with a lament that she has only known him for such a small part of her life and ends with their final separation, as can be concluded from Franziska's farewell letter to her lover in the unfinished last chapter.

In her perceptive and informative review of *Franziska Linkerhand* in *Weimarer Beiträge* (6/75), Sigrid Töpelmann points out that the present narrative perspective was not contained in the original concept of the novel, but was introduced at a later date (after the first excerpts were published in 1964). The need for this additional level of narrative reflection arises from the development towards a more mature ideological outlook which Franziska experiences in the course of the novel, and which cannot be expressed merely through plot.¹¹ The figure of Ben becomes for Franziska a kind of inner guide, and it is this which compels her to reflect upon her thoughts, emotions and actions of the past and present, and to reassess her relationship to others.¹² Through these reflections she achieves a critical distance from herself and her own past, which is part of the process of maturing, of forming a more definite ideological outlook.

Towards the end of the novel, it becomes apparent that Franziska is writing a book which is completed when the novel breaks off. Furthermore, there are indications that she is encouraging her lover to do likewise, to write down his experiences, in order to clarify his attitude to his own past and develop a more positive outlook. (From a few preliminary notes referring to "our man", a marked contrast between his objective and detached third-person narrative and her subjective, involved self-revelations becomes obvious.) The idea of writing a book is, however, not essential to the understanding of the novel, as it is, for instance, in Jurek Becker's *Irreführung der Behörden*, or in Christa Wolf's later novels, *Nachdenken über Christa T.* and *Kindheitsmuster*, where reflections on the process of creative writing, as a way of finding one's identity, are part of the main theme. In *Franziska Linkerhand*, the motif of writing a book appears as an afterthought, an attempt perhaps to give tangible objective form to the self-analysis, and to create a lasting achievement. We have to bear in mind the

author's struggle to complete the novel, in order to understand the experimental and incomplete character of its narrative aspects.¹³

The novel is narrated alternately in the first and third person, often changing in the middle of a paragraph, or even in mid sentence. This gives the impression that the reflections of the central character are close to those of the author; but Franziska's perspective remains dominant throughout the novel, and we hear her story, not Reimann's biography. In some instances the perspective is shifted to another character, and in a few places the author cuts in with a comment. Dialogue is introduced as unpolished, natural speech, with unfinished sentences and all the idiosyncracies of the speaker.

The novel is narrated from the point of view of the present — at some time in the late Sixties or early Seventies — and looks back over the past life of the heroine. Chronology is maintained throughout the novel, by following the various stages in Franziska's life, from her early teens to her late twenties. But the degree of emphasis varies greatly from one event to the other. The detailed and vivid description of events at the end of World War II, in May 1945, in the first chapter, creates an impression of historical and personal authenticity which is not continued throughout the novel. (From a letter of 11/2/65 one learns that these early parts were re-written, as a new beginning to the novel.) The increasing emphasis in later chapters on thoughts, feelings and reflections, in accordance with the change in concept, may explain the difference of the earlier parts.

Franziska Linkerhand, the child of an outwardly sheltered middle class home, is in her early teens when the war ends. After grammar school education, she goes on to study architecture under a famous and brilliant professor, who selects her as his star pupil to work with him on the restoration of historical buildings destroyed by the war.¹⁴ Fundamental historical and social changes take place during her most formative years; she experiences the collapse of Nazi Germany and the development of socialism in the GDR, where she continues to live, in spite of strong pressure from her parents to leave for the West. Her father, who owned a small but successful publishing house during the Nazi period, refuses to take any part in the new Socialist state, because in his eyes it threatens the old values. Her mother, a crafty opportunist, takes advantage of the new state, while at the same time planning the family's defection to the West. It is over this issue that the already existing rift between Franziska and her parents becomes final; she steadfastly refuses to leave the GDR, and has nothing but scorn and contempt for her mother's motives, while she pities her father's preoccupation with aesthetic values to the total exclusion of the world around him. While the parents refuse to get involved in the new state which, to them, seems barbaric, Franziska and her brother participate eagerly in the early development of the GDR. But in retrospect, there is a lack of conscious participation on Franziska's part. Her limitations are caused partly by her youth and partly by her bourgeois upbringing which prevents her from developing naturally within the framework of social and economic change. As a first act of defiance against her bourgeois background, she marries, at the age of 19, a young worker, who turns out to be insensitive, unintelligent and politically unedu-

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cated, a man who has nothing at all in common with the intelligent, well brought
up and ambitious Franziska. He turns to drink and violence to protect himself,
while she puts all her physical and mental energies into her work, through
which she dissociates herself completely from her existence as a married
woman.

When she is twenty-five, her marriage comes to a disastrous end; she decides
to leave her home town and exchange her prestigious work for a job in the con-
struction industry, building a new satellite town (Neustadt) in a remote Eastern
corner of the GDR. At first everything there appears hostile and transient to
Franziska: the primitive room in a new block of flats where she lives among
workers without families; the construction office where she works, in a hut
overlooking a graveyard; the noisy, smoke-filled drinking parlour where she
spends her evenings among migrant workers and social drop-outs; the company
of a woman secretary whom she tries to cure of alcoholism. In this environment,
on her first evening in Neustadt, Franziska sets eyes on the man who she decides
at once is meant to be the great love of her life. The man's almost perfect physi-
cal likeness to her brother whom she loves and respects deeply (a motif from the
novel *Die Geschwister*) has much influence on her choice. Franziska's first
marriage, however, has left her fearful of love; she looks for understanding,
chivalry and protectiveness in men, qualities characteristic of her brother.

It requires a good deal of initiative on her part, as well as a number of coinci-
dences, to bring about an encounter with the man upon whom she has set her
heart. Trojanowicz, who works as a truck driver on the building site, reveals
little about his own past and less about his feelings for Franziska, until their
relationship has developed into a deep mutual love. But in spite of the intensity
of their feelings for each other, barriers remain between them which prove in-
creasingly difficult to overcome. Franziska resents his apparent indifference,
his lack of involvement, both with regard to other people, and to his work. He is
incapable of sharing her sense of commitment to her work, and the happiness
she derives from it. For his part, he feels that he cannot live up to the image
which Franziska has formed of him, an image which, though realistic in detail,
is idealized in its totality and does not do justice to the real person he is.¹⁵

It is his indifference, and not his relationship to another woman to whom he
is bound through a sense of moral obligation, which causes the first serious rift
between the lovers.¹⁶ It is significant that Franziska decides at this point to
make Neustadt her permanent home. Whereas she started work with high
ideals and ambitious plans, still much under the influence of her former train-
ing, she gradually becomes more realistic in her outlook and acknowledges
limitations on the scope of her work. At this point, she also breaks off the last
connection with her former professor and commits herself to the rules of her
superior in Neustadt, the city architect Schafheutlin with whom she has, up till
now, waged a constant war over the recognition of her plans.

The final chapters of the novel sketch further developments: after an act of
defiance of existing demolition rulings, Trojanowicz and Franziska, who have
come together again, are sent away from Neustadt to a more primitive and

bleak building site where Franziska works as an unskilled labourer. The couple live separately, each occupied in their spare time with the task of writing down their life stories. Franziska meets another man, a tough and outspoken building foreman who opens her eyes to her real vocation which lies in her work in Neustadt where she has already invested so much of herself. The novel ends when she leaves her lover and returns to Neustadt, to resume work under Schafheutlin.

The title of the novel, *Franziska Linkerhand*, indicates the key function of the main female character. The novel's underlying ideas and problems can only be understood through the analysis of the heroine, and her relationship to other characters in the book. Franziska's personality, as she sees herself, is to a considerable extent the product of her rigid, restrictive and protected bourgeois upbringing, with its emphasis on good manners and self-discipline, and its lack of understanding of social phenomena outside her range of experience. From her family background, and her education shared with young people of her own class, she had made a smooth transition into the intelligentsia of the new Socialist state. However, she had missed out on the experiences of young people from workingclass backgrounds who grew more naturally into the new social structures. (This problem is of a particular significance for an author like Reimann, who was herself of bourgeois background and had to overcome special barriers in trying to integrate herself, as well as her literary characters, into society.) It is not surprising, then, that Franziska's development is seen to a considerable extent as the attempt to bridge the gap between her background and her new environment in Neustadt. She suffers from a lack of spontaneity and self-confidence in her approach to others, but she also lacks insight into their thoughts and feelings; her self-centered outlook often conflicts with her social conscience — her need to help others, particularly the underprivileged and the social outcast.

In her attitude towards other women, Franziska's lack of insight frequently leads to impatience and harsh criticism, which is interpreted as arrogance by her comrades. In her assessment of the lot of wives and mothers, she alternates between scorn, pity, and sarcasm. The restrictions of a housewife's life she regards as self-inflicted martyrdom. For herself, she rejects the role of housewife and mother, since her mother tried to force her into this role during her teens. Consequently, her attitude towards men is of a complex and difficult nature. Her disastrous attempt at marriage, partly explained as a reaction against her background, is also a result of her total lack of comprehension of her husband. Her search for the great lover, her choice of the man who fits the image of her brother, are signs of an emotional insecurity and lack of judgment. It is when the relationship to the chosen man develops into genuine deep mutual love that Franziska finally faces up to the conflict between past and present, between dreams and reality and, above all, between emotional and professional fulfillment.

As a woman, her most remarkable characteristic is her total commitment to work. This is stressed through her choice of a male-dominated profession, and a workplace where she is the only woman among men. Her particularly feminine attributes stand in striking contrast to her approach to work and often prevent

her from being taken seriously. Her small slight figure, her red hair and amber eyes, the appearance of helplessness and vulnerability make her attractive to most men, who feel a need to protect her. Her idealism, her energy, her critical approach to the work done around her, the high standards she sets for herself and others, however, alienate her from her male colleagues. Her high-reaching plans and projects to create a town centre with cultural and recreational facilities, with shops and pleasant streets, into which she puts all her energies to the point of physical exhaustion, are being restricted, rejected, and crushed by economic considerations and by the lack of imagination and flexibility in those responsible for executing plans.

Her main opponent in this respect is her colleague in Neustadt, the city architect Schafheutlin. He becomes a more important factor in her development than her lover; he complements and contrasts Franziska's character.¹⁷ He retains a certain independence and is unique among the figures in the novel, in that his thoughts and feelings are expressed from his own perspective, or through the author, while Franziska, the narrator of the novel, remains unaware of them.

Schafheutlin appears at first to be the complete opposite to Franziska in every respect. As a person, he is cautious, shy and inhibited, rigid and undemonstrative; he seems strict, cold, physically unattractive. In his work, he is pedantic, lacks imagination and follows faithfully instructions from above; he never indulges in his own ideas. Franziska, in contrast, is careless, spontaneous, passionate in expressing her feelings, untidy, but full of original ideas. She acknowledges no authority, scorns rules and restrictions, and tries to break through them. At their first encounter she feels an immediate and instinctive dislike for Schafheutlin (p. 138).

He for his part distrusts her and disapproves of all her habits. But he also feels a need to protect her, and he gradually understands her and develops a love for her which he takes great pains to hide. (Ironically, it is Franziska's lover who tries to make her aware of Schafheutlin's feelings and warns her not to hurt him.) Franziska herself remains insensitive to these feelings; she never succeeds in understanding them, but gradually comes to admire Schafheutlin for certain qualities which she herself lacks: his upright, strong inflexible attitude and his honesty. She takes him on as a challenge, she fights with him over the recognition of her creative plans. He in turn keeps reminding her of the realities, the hard and fast facts of industrial building in the GDR.

Although this character and what he stands for has all the makings of the stereotype loyal party member and workmate, a frequent figure in the Socialist Realist prose of the Fifties, a man who helps the erring individual to find his or her place in society, Schafheutlin turns out quite differently under the author's sensitive character portrayal. Through learning more about his own youth, his family ties, and his problems at work, Franziska (and the reader with her) develops a better understanding of this character. In a rare moment of emotion, Schafheutlin confesses to Franziska that he, too, as a young architect in Berlin, had his dreams and ideals, and that he suffered disappointments and set-backs, comparable to hers. Through this confession, he gains her respect, and she

listens to him when he tells her to get on with her work and do what is asked of her, here and now (p. 572).¹⁸

From him, she learns to accept certain restrictions and develop a more sober and realistic outlook, one which enables her to channel some of her ideas into effective work. But important though Schafheutlin may be for her development to greater maturity, she never becomes like him. Her idealism and enthusiasm, her "gift for happiness",¹⁹ are too strong to be destroyed. When she returns to Neustadt to work on Schafbeutlin's terms, she refuses to give up her ideals, and her belief in their realization in the future. In her farewell letter to her lover, she declares

"So I shall return to Schafheutlin — and not downhearted, not broken in spirit. . . . It must, it simply must be possible to find it, this wise synthesis between today and tomorrow, between gray blocks of flats and cheerful lively streets, between the functional and the beautiful, and I am on its trail,...and one day I shall discover it" (p. 582).

This optimistic belief helps Franziska through her deepest emotional crisis, when she renounces her lover, who becomes, at this moment, a merely beloved image ("ein nur noch geliebtes Bild" (p. 582). But Trojanowicz, too, plays an important part in her development towards greater maturity. In him, her dream of the great love becomes a reality. And as she begins to understand the limitations of this love, so her image of him becomes more realistic. Her search for traces of his past play an important part in this process. In a few pages towards the end of the novel, Franziska outlines in retrospect, in the cryptic style of a chronicler, what he has told her about himself. We learn of his working-class background, his access to higher education through the *Arbeiter- und Bauern-fakultät*, of his political involvement as a student of journalism at Leipzig University, and of his subsequent imprisonment for offenses he has not committed. Through understanding his past, Franziska becomes more aware and conscious of her own early development.²⁰

If *Franziska Linkerhand* is an extraordinarily complex novel, the reasons lie in the central character. She not only tells a gripping story and portrays a great variety of characters, she also conveys a good deal of factual specialist knowledge in a critically evaluating manner which betrays a strong intellect; yet, she is capable of descriptions of compelling lyrical beauty, and of a wide range of emotional expression. Only in the portrayal of the love relationship, particularly in the erotic scenes, does the book show some weaknesses in language and style. Here the author is inclined to use cliché and trivial and sometimes trite expressions.²¹ But the subtle character analysis, the candid and critical depiction of building a modern town and the social conditions in it, are impressive, and here her style is mature and self-assured.

At this point, it must be remembered that the novel was not completed, and that the author, according to the editor of the manuscript, had expressed her intention to make some structural and possible also linguistic adjustments. It appears that the fifteenth chapter, which breaks off after barely a page, was intended to be the last, in which the reasons for Franziska's final separation from her lover and for her return to Neustadt would be described.²² But suffi-

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 cient motivation for these two crucial decisions of the heroine is already given
 in the novel in its existing form, and as far as theme and concept are concerned,
 it may be regarded as complete.

In spite of the change in the original plan, from a mere love story, to the story
 of a young woman architect whose ideals come in conflict with the realities of
 modern building in the GDR, the two themes are in fact retained and closely
 interlinked. Both lead into a more comprehensive theme which runs through
 the novel and determines its structure and final outcome: the development of
 the central character, from a young woman full of dreams and ideals, but emo-
 tionally insecure and professionally inexperienced, to a more sober and realistic
 person who knows herself and is able to choose her priorities. This theme is
 anticipated when Reimann says, in connection with first mentioning the "new
 book", in her letter of 5/7/63: "Im übrigen arbeite ich an meiner Menschwer-
 dung".²³ (For the remainder, I am working at my development as a human being.)
 More explicitly, it is described by the author, in a later interview, as "ein welt-
 anschaulicher Reifungsprozeß, wie ihn Franziska durchlebt",²⁴ (Franziska's
 development towards a more mature ideological outlook), which required a re-
 structuring of the novel.

At several stages in her life Franziska reflects on its purpose and meaning.
 At seventeen, before leaving school, her life seems to be mapped out before her
 and living is an easy and spontaneous process. At twenty-five, she realizes that
 she has not really lived, that she has only had dreams: of a great love and of the
 great theatre she was going to build (p. 251). After a year or two at Neustadt, she
 has become more realistic in her outlook, as her range of experience has been
 extended, both by love and work, but she still insists that it is not sufficient
 merely to fulfill her day-to-day tasks. Real achievement to her is a creative act
 that requires imagination and ideals, as in the discoveries of the scientist and
 the works of the artist. In this context, she mentions Chopin as her idol, who
 reached his peak while still young, whose life seemed more intense because of
 his early death. "At my age, others have already written books or discovered the
 particle X or re-routed rivers. ...The designs for the future are made in the pres-
 ent, now, this moment... Chopin died at 39. Court et bonne. A life that was worth
 living" (p. 472).²⁵ Franziska feels the need to reach beyond herself, in order to
 fulfill a useful function in society. She is deeply involved in her own society and
 her own time. Self-realization for her is not just individual fulfillment and hap-
 piness; it means the devotion to a task for the improvement of humanity. In this
 respect she remains always an idealist, but in her approach to the issues and de-
 ficiencies of her society she is realistic. This approach is described in her own
 words as: "Den Fuß setzen auf den heiklen Boden der Wirklichkeit" (p. 436) (to
 step upon the delicate ground of reality). It is against the background of imper-
 fect conditions, brought to light through her critical attitude, that we must judge
 her commitment to the "wise synthesis between the functional and the beauti-
 ful" (p. 582).²⁶

Finally, the question arises where to place *Franziska Linkerhand* in the con-
 text of other GDR prose works of the Sixties and Seventies, and how to assess
 the book's particular contribution to the image of women in GDR writing.

The basic situation in the novel, that is, the young intellectual faced with

problems created by practical work, links it with the earlier story, *Ankunft im Alltag*. But the analysis has shown that *Franziska Linkerhand* is first and foremost concerned with the development of the individual, a process which involves a wide range of personal conflicts and problems at work, accompanied by critical and self-critical assessment of the central character herself.

A self-critical analysis of this kind, on a much more limited scale, is to be found in C. Wolf's novel, *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963), and in Hermann Kant's *Die Aula* (1965). The comparison with Wolf's novel in particular shows the difference in outlook between the two main female characters. Rita overcomes a personal crisis through living and working with others, and being like others. Franziska sets higher standards for herself and tries to reach them through her own strength. Although she changes through her work with other people, it is the retention of her ideals as an individual that sees her through her crisis.

In her attempt to find herself and assert her own priorities, she has more in common with the main character of C. Wolf's later novel, *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1967), whose motto, taken from Johannes Becher: "Was ist das: Dieses Zu-sich-selber-Kommen des Menschen", signals new developments for the GDR writers of the later Sixties and the Seventies. The claims of the individual for imagination and creativity, in an age of increasing technical progress and mechanized living are a strong link between the two novels. But Christa T. suffers from her need as an individual to be true to herself against the demands of a developing Socialist society. She was born too early, we are told, her time is not ready for her. Franziska is a child of her time. As an individual, she takes up the issues of her society and tries to assert her ideas. Her total involvement as an individual with her society differentiates her from Christa T.

In its candid discussion of subjects which were tabu in GDR literature, well into the Sixties, for instance, sex, violence, and criminal behaviour, the book openly reveals inconsistencies and imperfections in the present-day GDR.²⁷ This is an increasing tendency of the Seventies, to be found in writers like Volker Braun and Ulrich Plenzdorf, among others. But Brigitte Reimann does not simply show the conflicts, she also tries to find solutions, through the untiring efforts of the central figure. In this respect, Franziska Linkerhand belongs to the tradition of enlightened positive heroines.

As a woman, she represents a generation who has been constitutionally granted the right to work, and who claims this right. But, although the right to work is not put into question by the novel, it brings to light some of the emotional conflicts and divided loyalties caused by the need to find love and happiness. In Franziska's case, her emotional needs are set in sharp contrast to her strength and will-power in regard to her work. The conflict is intensified through her struggle against the emotional and social inhibitions arising from her bourgeois background.

As an individual, she is not given to compromise. That Franziska is a stronger character than most of the male figures in the novel makes her decision to sacrifice personal happiness for her work more plausible. This image of the emotionally stronger woman who, in contrast to the man, is capable of independent decisions, can be found in an increasing number of works in the later Sixties and the Seventies, in de Bruyn's *Buridans Esel* (1968), Becker's *Irreführung der*

McPherson: Franziska Linkerhand — Introduction and Analysis of the *Behörden* (1973), in Erik Neutsch's *Auf der Suche nach Gatt* (1973). Among women writers, the subject receives humorous and grotesque treatment in Irmtraud Morgner's latest picaresque novel, *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatrice nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura* (1975), or in Christa Wolf's surrealist story *Selbstversuch* (1973), which is one among a number of short satirical prose works by well-known GDR writers, on the subject of the interchangeability of the male and female sex, which were commissioned for the anthology *Blitz aus heiterem Himmel* (1975).²⁸

But it is Brigitte Reimann's achievement to have created a figure who remains entirely female, who tries to assert herself as a woman, emotionally and professionally, and who is prepared to make sacrifices, without giving up her ideals. In this respect, Franziska Linkerhand is probably a faithful image of her creator, and will perhaps remain unrivalled in the history of GDR literature.

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NOTES

¹(Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1974); cited in this paper according to 3rd edition (1975). (Abbreviated F.L.)

²First GDR reviews of the novel in:

Sonntag 28/7/1974. (30/74), p. 4.

Neue Deutsche Literatur 1 (1975): Heinz Plavius, "Häuser, Bücher, Städte für Menschen. B. Reimann: *Franziska Linkerhand*. Verlag Neues Leben, Berlin." pp. 141-147.

Weimarer Beiträge 6 (1975): Sigrid Töpelmann, "Brigitte Reimann: *Franziska Linkerhand*." (Aufbau-Verlag, Berlin und Weimar, 1974), pp. 144-151. (Abbreviated Töpelmann, WB.)

³*Was zählt, ist die Wahrheit. Briefe von Schriftstellern der DDR*. Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag (1975): "Zeugnis ablegen. Brigitte Reimann-Annemarie Auer", p. 290 ff. Preface by A. Auer, *ibid.*, pp. 288-89. (Abbreviated as *Wahrheit*).

Excerpts from the letters first appeared in: *Neue Deutsche Literatur* 8 (1975), p. 134 ff.

⁴*Wahrheit*, p. 294.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 290 (3/3/63).

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 301.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 297-98.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 302 and 303.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 307.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 319: "Eine wirklich gute Schriftstellerin, wie ich es früher erträumte — werde ich doch nicht mehr, und alles, was ich der deutschen Literaturgeschichte zu bieten habe, ist der dubiose Begriff der "Ankunftsliteratur"."

¹¹Töpelmann (WB 6/75), p. 148, quotes from B. Reimann in her interview with A. Auer, in *Sonntag* 7 (1968): "Einen weltanschaulichen Reifungsprozeß, wie ihn Franziska durchlebt, kann ich nicht auf der bloßen Handlungsebene abwickeln. Ich muß Mittel und Wege finden, die Entwicklungsthematik mit den zugehörigen Überlegungen zu verknüpfen."

- ¹²Ibid., p. 148: "Ben, ob nun anwesend oder nicht, ist für Fr. so etwas wie die innerste richtende Instanz."
- ¹³The editor, in his postscript to the novel, reports that B.R. was unable to write down the ending, as she visualized it, or to go over the whole manuscript once more.
- ¹⁴The novel frequently makes fictitious reference to the "Gewandhaus", the Leipzig concert hall, which has, in fact, not yet been rebuilt.
- ¹⁵See F.L., pp. 420-24 for the key scene which reveals their contrast in outlook.
- ¹⁶F.L., p. 523: "... dein Interesse für meine Arbeit, das unverbindlich ist wie für alles, was du liest, hörst, weißt, worüber du redest oder streitest ..." (Your interest in my work is non-committal, just as your interest in everything you read, hear, know, and about which you talk, or argue ...)
- ¹⁷Plavius (NDL 1/75), p.145, refers to the cross-over movement of the two characters, Ben and Schafheutlin, in the course of the novel, by quoting from A. Auer's review in *Neues Deutschland* (29/7/1974), ("Überkreuzungsbewegung").
- ¹⁸See F.L., p. 568 for the key scene which shows the interrelation of the characters Franziska and Schafheutlin.
- ¹⁹Franziska's father first says: "Du hast ... Talent zum Glückhsein, noch unter den widrigsten Umständen" (p. 131). (You have a gift for happiness, even under the most adverse conditions); her lover later significantly uses the same expression (p. 422).
- ²⁰See F.L., pp. 530-35 for Trojanowicz' life story before his encounter with Franziska.
- ²¹*Wahrheit*, p. 320. A. Auer, in a letter of 20/1/72, points out some of Reimann's earlier stylistic weaknesses.
- ²²F.L., postscript of the editor.
- ²³*Wahrheit*, p. 298.
- ²⁴See note 11.
- ²⁵*Wahrheit*, pp. 288-89. A. Auer points out the relevance of Chopin's death for Reimann, who also died at 39.
- ²⁶Hans Kaufmann, "Ein Vermächtnis, ein Debüt. B. Reimann: *Franziska Linkerhand*, Gerti Tetzner: *Karen W.*" In: Hans und Eva Kaufmann, *Erwartung und Angebot. Studien zum gegenwärtigen Verhältnis von Literatur und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1976), p. 193 ff., gives a first comprehensive analysis of F.L. He is critical of the contradictions between the realistic and the idealistic side in Franziska, both in her personal relations and in her attitude to her profession (p. 199), and regards her idea of a synthesis between the beautiful and the functional as a typical educated bourgeois component, and as such identical with her whole outlook (pp. 200-201). The author of this paper disagrees with this view, by putting the emphasis on the Socialist outlook, which, in its very combination of realistic and idealistic elements, represents a new contribution to the GDR society of the Seventies.
- ²⁷See "Pariser Gespräch über die Prosa der DDR", in: *Sinn und Form*, 6. Heft (Nov./Dec. 1976), p. 1164 ff. "Der ganze Roman von B. Reimann praktiziert ... das Niederreißen von Tabus" (p. 1169). This discussion by French critics contains some valuable contributions to the assessment of tendencies of the Seventies, and places *Franziska Linkerhand* in this context.
- ²⁸Rostock: Hinstorff Verlag, 1975.