

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF GABRIELE WOHMANN'S PROSE WORKS
BETWEEN 1957 AND 1975

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Abstract

This thesis examines the prose works of Gabriele Wohmann written between 1957 and 1975, delineating and concentrating on her most notable thematic concerns. These embrace some of the principal determinants of human behaviour patterns such as feelings of guilt, the erotic and death. Wohmann's interest in these is not an abstract one, but is related to a social and domestic sphere in which relationships are revealed as tenuous and individuals reduced to a state of extreme isolation.

Part One comprises a consideration of Wohmann's short stories and novels, the two genres in which most of her work has appeared. Brief outlines of the stylistic features of these genres, and the author's use of them, are illustrated by reference to specific texts. In this way it is intended to construct a profile of her stylistic methods and thematic interests.

Part Two focuses on the dominant themes in Wohmann's works. These are assessed independently, in separate chapters, but when viewed as a whole they serve to catalogue the author's artistic responses to herself, other people, and her social environment.

Throughout this thesis extensive references are made to the primary literature in support of specific lines of argument, but attention is also paid, where relevant, to such secondary sources as critical studies, newspaper and periodical reviews, and interviews with the author, insofar as they provide illuminating insights or cross references.

It is borne in mind, however, that a study of this kind, which has as its substance the works of a contemporary writer whose literary output promises to continue for many years to come, must, by its very nature, be open-ended. Present conclusions, therefore, should be viewed as provisional rather than definitive, and may require adjustment or revision in the light of future research.

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Introduction

Gabriele, the third of Pastor Paul Daniel Guyot and his wife Luise's four children, was born on 21st May, 1932, in Darmstadt. Her childhood in the parsonage, with its roomy villa-like proportions and its sprawling garden, offering endless possibilities for play and discovery, was by all accounts a happy one, and is described in some detail in the short prose piece Das Pfarrhaus¹. The Guyot children enjoyed a relatively sheltered childhood at a time when National Socialism was creating mounting tensions and apprehension in German society², sensing, perhaps, that they could rely on the protective intervention of their articulate and supportive father to uphold family values:

Er [der Vater] hörte nicht auf, meinen Bruder in der Verweigerung des HJ-Dienstes zu unterstützen. Mit meiner Schwester und mir ist er froh gewesen, als ein gelber Zettel uns endlich unehrenhaft vom Dienst in Uniform befreite. Hier war er nicht für Versöhnlichkeit und Anpassung, hier war er es, der an die Haustür kam, wenn eine SCHAFTS- oder SCHAR-FÜHRERIN dort klingelte, er hat ihren Vorwürfen geantwortet³.

During these years Gabriele Guyot came to despise any form of authoritarianism and restrictions on individual development, and later this may have been responsible for her failure to complete more than four semesters of what she regarded as a limiting and dogmatised university course in German Philology at the University of Frankfurt⁴, and for her speedy abandonment of the teaching profession after she had taught on the North Sea island of Langeoog⁵ for only one year, and subsequently in the Darmstadt Volkshochschule and also at a private commercial school for approximately a further three years.

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- 1) In Gabriele Wohmann: Materialienbuch, edited by Thomas Scheuffelen (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1977), pp.17-22.
 - 2) See also thesis p. 91.
 - 3) Vaterporträt in Die Väter, edited by Peter Härtling (Frankfurt, 1968), pp.219-230. Also published in Selbstverteidigung (Neuwied, Berlin, 1971), pp.197-213 (pp.200-201), from which page references here are taken.
 - 4) Referring to her school years, Wohmann mentions the 'verlorene[n] Privatminuten jeden Morgen zu viele Jahre lang', (Ekkehart Rudolph, Protokoll zur Person (Munich, 1971), pp.145-157 (p.146)), and of university she says: 'Studium: Philologie und ein paar Anhängsel, insgesamt enttäuschend, den Literaturgeschmack ansäuernd. Ich beendete das vorzeitig' (p.147).
 - 5) This was a school at which Wohmann herself had studied for a year as a boarder in order to take her Abitur.

Since 1953 she has been married to Reiner Wohmann, formerly a teacher at Darmstadt's Studienkolleg für ausländische Studierende¹, and today they live in Darmstadt's renowned 'Künstlerkolonie', Park Rosenhöhe. With neighbours such as the writer and editor Georg Hensel and the poet Karl Krolow, having regular contact with composers, painters, critics, publishers, academics and writers, as well as with fellow members of the Darmstadt PEN Club, Gabriele Wohmann lives out a literary existence which is in many ways isolated from the rest of society. She is aware of the problems which such a rarefied existence can bring:

So wirklichen Kontakt mit der Gesellschaft, wie man ihn haben muß, beispielsweise, wenn man Lehrer ist, habe ich nicht².

Her contacts with the outside world are mainly through television viewing, through her publishers (themselves a similar 'breed' to writers), through personal appearances on television, and during 'Leseabende', although in all but the first instance she is aware that the members of the public whom she is meeting have come specifically to see, and frequently to admire her, which is in itself an exceptional situation. Wohmann has in fact come to accept this lack of contact with the rest of society:

Und das ist das, was ich immer wieder an mir feststelle, daß ich oft zwischen mir und dem, was ich beobachte, was andere Leute tun, überhaupt keinen Kontakt finden kann³.

She displays no apparent inclination to alter this modus vivendi; indeed, it would seem more likely that it is her very apartness that enables her to observe and depict the behaviour patterns of others with such accuracy.

The year 1956 marked a turning point in Gabriele Wohmann's life, for in that year she began to write, and within a very short space of time, this activity had developed into a veritable 'graphomania'⁴. Encouraged by early success with the publication in 1957 of the short story

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- 1) Reiner Wohmann resigned his post in 1980, in order to devote his time to assisting Gabriele Wohmann in the preparation of bibliographies for publishers, the cataloguing of details of her works, and similar administrative tasks.
 - 2) Hella Schlumberger, 'Gabriele Wohmann: "Die Sprache ist krank" oder: "Ich bin eine andere Generation"', Publikation, 22(6/1972), pp.24-29 (p.29).
 - 3) Ekkehart Rudolph, Aussage zur Person (Tübingen, Basel, 1977), pp.192-207 (p.201).
 - 4) Rudolph, Protokoll zur Person, p.148.

Ein unwiderstehlicher Mann in Akzente (1/1957, pp.79-95), Wohmann quickly established herself as a prolific and highly articulate prose writer whose enthusiasm for self-expression resulted in her experimenting with numerous literary genres. Her novels and short stories are undoubtedly the decisive factor in the steady growth of her literary fame in Germany, but it should be noted that they are complemented, often on a lighter level, by such diverse items as radio and television plays, a 'Reportage'-like examination of a theatrical production (Theater von innen¹), a witty 'Who's Who'-come-guide to her home town Darmstadt (In Darmstadt leben die künste²), a gramophone recording of some short stories, and, to date, four volumes of verse³. For the purpose of this study, however, the results of Wohmann's experimentation with different genres will be of interest only in as far as they have a bearing on, or offer relevant material for the thematic analysis. For while Wohmann has understandably enjoyed and exploited the opportunities offered by the predominantly commercially slanted media of television and radio, she has nevertheless remained true to her more disciplined artistic values, and has assiduously responded to the demands and rigours of her primary literary task.

In order to provide an essential background to the development of the thematic trends in Wohmann's works, it was felt that an evaluation of a modest selection of short stories and novels would best serve to outline her initial artistic direction. The short stories have been selected with a view to illustrating the existence of distinct stylistic features in Wohmann's approach to short story writing and, for ease of discussion, they have been divided into three different stages. It must be stressed, however, that these stages are intended to function as guidelines only, suggesting a broad, but by no means categorical pattern of development⁴, and that the parameters used in

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- 1) Theater von innen. Protokoll einer Inszenierung (Olten, Freiburg, 1966).
 - 2) In Darmstadt leben die künste (Darmstadt, 1967).
 - 3) So ist die Lage (Düsseldorf, 1974). Grund zur Aufregung (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1978). Ich weiß das auch nicht besser (Munich, 1980). Komm lieber Mai (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1981).
 - 4) It is particularly relevant, for instance, to note that the story chosen to illustrate the general tone of Wohmann's 'third stage', Hartes Laub (in Sieg über die Dämmerung (Munich, 1960), pp.98-99), was in fact written as early as 1957 (the year of the publication of Ein unwiderstehlicher Mann, which is chosen to represent the 'first stage'), although it was not published until 1960. See thesis p.25.

this study must be viewed as a flexible and convenient scaffold, erected merely as a framework for the examination of the complexities and variables in the works of a writer in the middle of her career. The novels, Jetzt und nie¹, Abschied für länger², Ernste Absicht³, Paulinchen war allein zu Haus⁴ and Schönes Gehege⁵, are approached chronologically in order to illustrate the development of the author within the selected time span, 1957-1975. In each novel the psychological and emotional state of the main character⁶ is of primary interest to the author, particularly with regard to his or her reactions to various degrees of personal upheaval and crisis in his or her life. The publication of Schönes Gehege, after nearly two decades of literary output, indicated a new direction in Wohmann's thoughts, suggesting by its uncharacteristically positive tone that Wohmann was making a break with a number of past ideas. It lent itself, therefore, as an appropriate choice with which to conclude an introduction to her works, in that it seemed to represent a watershed in her thinking. However, in the light of the resurgence of more negative and introspective attitudes in subsequent novels (in particular Frühherbst in Badenweiler⁷, Ach wie gut, daß niemand weiß⁸, Das Glücksspiel⁹), which lie outside the chosen time span of this thesis, this watershed must be viewed with some caution.

The main section of this study, the analysis of recurrent themes in Wohmann's works, illustrates the range of her interests, in which the private concerns of the individual do tend to predominate. She is concerned primarily with what she terms 'die gewöhnlichen Schrecken'¹⁰, the 'ordinary horrors' of everyday life (difficulties

1) Jetzt und nie (Darmstadt, Berlin, Neuwied, 1958).

2) Abschied für länger (Olten, 1965).

3) Ernste Absicht (Neuwied, Berlin, 1970).

4) Paulinchen war allein zu Haus (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1974).

5) Schönes Gehege (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1975).

6) In Jetzt und nie, considerable space is devoted to a secondary character also, see thesis pp.36-37 and 129-130.

7) Frühherbst in Badenweiler (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1978).

8) Ach wie gut, daß niemand weiß (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1980).

9) Das Glücksspiel (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1981).

10) 'Gespräch mit Gabriele Wohmann', Das Fernsehspiel im ZDF, 1(1973), pp.1-5,(p.4).

within relationships, tensions between members of a family, dissatisfaction with one's profession, the frustrations of a monotonous daily routine, and so on). This sphere of interest, together with a number of first person narrators who clearly resemble her, have resulted in her acquiring the unflattering and misleading reputation of being a '100% Dauerselbststellerin'¹. In fact, Wohmann's approach to public life and society is one of great subtlety, with her views emerging only obliquely (see Chapters 3 and 5 of this thesis). As if anticipating the ultimate tedium of overt and pedantic politicising, she reveals her philanthropic concerns through her treatment of private issues, an area which she is confident will always hold the interest of the individual:

Das Private kann gar nicht veralten, denn
mit seiner Psyche ist doch jeder immerzu allein.²

Here she reigns supreme, relentlessly observing and cataloguing aspects of human behaviour and reproducing them in her works in such a way that the reader is presented with a seemingly endless mosaic of the intricacies of human existence.

The flow of Gabriele Wohmann's literary output continues unabated. For this reason it seemed advisable to conclude this study at a point which would enable the passage of a few years to create a certain amount of critical distance, and the span of approximately the first two decades offered itself as a natural delimitation. While it is neither advisable nor possible to make conclusive judgements on the works of a living author, it is hoped that this study will make a modest contribution to the growing field of research into the works of Gabriele Wohmann.

1) Oellers Kleiner. Hierarchischer Katalog zur Einordnung der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur (Munich, 1974 (expanded 1979)), p.29.
2) Schlumberger, 'Gabriele Wohmann: "Die Sprache ist krank" ', p.28.

PART ONE

Chapter 1

The Short Stories

The short story as a genre has gained literary respectability alongside the more established tradition of the novel only relatively recently.¹ It was necessary first for both publishers and readers to realise that the short story was not trying to compete with the novel and that very different yardsticks would have to be used to assess its merit. Generally, the origins of the short story are humble; it is born of no more than an incident, gesture or sentence which catches the author's attention, and from this he constructs a story which is his reflection of the moment. The story must be autonomous, it must be aware that there may be vast untapped temporal expanses lying before and after its own short life span, but it must be content to exist in the cursory moment of time which it describes. With regard to actions in the story, the author cannot afford to describe what could have happened 'if' ..., with regard to characterization, he must be prepared to limit his use of psychological motivation, which would require considerably longer treatment and discussion than his space allows. Parallel actions can have no place, subsidiary characters are rarely independently introduced, but are usually seen from the viewpoint of the main character. The contour of every thought must be sharp and unequivocal, and the language is subjected to the strictest control. In fact, the short story probably demands greater discipline from the author than any other genre.

Gabriele Wohmann excels in this genre. Since the appearance in 1957 of her first short story Ein unwiderstehlicher Mann, she has shown herself to be not only at her most inspired in this genre, but also at her most productive, with editions of short stories greatly outnumbering her novels. Her stories are the product of her talent for sharp and accurate vision, her unerring eye for the essence of things, and the intensely aware realism of her artistic perception. Excessive detail is a luxury which cannot be tolerated in the short story, where the merest trace of peripheral narrative can destroy the lexical tension so meticulously sustained for the brief duration of the story. Wohmann achieves such a successful synthesis of stylistic control and artistic expression that she can turn these structural requirements to her

1) The modern short story, as we know it, has increased in popularity steadily since the turn of the century, but, in Germany, has flourished in particular in the post-war period.

advantage, whereas for many a lesser author they would prove limiting. In the 'Mini-Roman'¹ Die Bütows², for instance, the spartan artistic regimen is employed to heighten the satire on the lifestyle of the Bütows, caryatids of the philistine bourgeois society so execrated by Wohmann. The condensed narrative tone of the first paragraph is sustained throughout the story:

Die Bütows sind beliebt. Karl Bütow war in sämtlichen Semesterferien Werkstudent. Als Pharmazeut handelte er klug, Else, die Apothekertochter, zu heiraten. Er hat die Schwiegereltern rasch von seinen Fähigkeiten überzeugt und leitet längst die Apotheke allein, eine Goldgrube (p.7).

With the minimum of words Wohmann has here constructed a character study of a talented and utterly self-confident man whose irritatingly industrious nature and pragmatically oriented brain contrive to bring him the advantages of a marriage of convenience. Embarked upon a course of small-scale plotting and scheming, he succeeds in ingratiating himself into the favour of his in-laws to such an extent that they are persuaded to hand over to him full responsibility for the pharmacy. His astute and business-like mind has been quick to grasp the long term financial prospects in this venture, and he must feel able to congratulate himself on the successful match he has made in marrying Else. Here is a character, therefore, who has not committed any heinous crime and whose personality has been no more than implied by the author through innuendo, yet who instantly evokes a negative response in the reader and is condemned as a duplicitous opportunist. The situation outlined in the first paragraph of this 'mini-novel' develops into a series of 'mini-atrocities', mainly taking the form of excessive punishing and disciplining of the Bütow children, actions which the parents always manage to accommodate under the umbrella of social acceptability.

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- 1) This would seem to be no more than a light-hearted variation of the term 'Erzählung' or 'Kurzgeschichte', perhaps in order to poke gentle fun at the more grandiose thematic and structural scope of the conventional type of 'family saga'.
 - 2) Die Bütows (Düsseldorf, 1967).

In the story Treibjagd¹, on the other hand, the lexical tension produces understatement rather than satire in an account of a young woman's first meeting with her potential future husband. She had responded to an advertisement which the man had placed through the Hortensia Friendship League, and her nervous excitement prior to the rendezvous produces a medley of fevered thoughts and anticipations:

Sie fing wieder an, sich auf das neue Leben zu freuen, zum Beispiel auf Club-Abende. Darf ich vorstellen: unser neues Mitglied, Hortensie Eva Maria, ganz nebenbei meine Verlobte. Verlobte man sich überhaupt in diesem Fall? Alles mögliche, womit sie früher einmal gerechnet hatte, fiel weg: das ganze Geflüster, Hinhalten, jegliche Ziererei und alles Rätselraten. Sie liebt mich, liebt mich von Herzen, mit Schmerzen, kanns gar nicht lassen, über alle Maßen - Ja-nein-ja-nein - Verliebt, verlobt, verheirat', geschieden - Ihr gemeinsames Bedürfnis war aktenkundig. Es konnte nur noch passieren, daß sie sich nicht sympathisch waren. Konnte das noch passieren? Plötzlich lag ihr daran, ihn vielleicht gräßlich zu finden. Lieber Herr Panter, es tut mir so leid, aber ich muß Ihnen mitteilen ... An so Sachen wie Mundgeruch hatte sie während der ganzen Briefschreiberei mit Panter nie gedacht. Sie lernten sich zu spät kennen. Vielleicht war sein Foto ebenfalls fünf Jahre alt (p.155).

Her pleasurable anticipation of the new horizons awaiting her is tempered by the awareness that dreams of a romantically idealised courtship will fade in the face of the artificiality of their first meeting. There can be no possibility of either party indulging in an intriguing guessing game about the other's feelings or intentions, since their whole relationship has been based upon the open admission that they are both in search of a marriage partner. In an attempt to camouflage her feeling of dependency upon her unknown suitor, the woman savours for a moment the idea that she may not even like him, and would tell him so, but the dominant feeling is her consternation at the realisation that she has all but committed herself to a binding relationship with a person who is still a totally unknown quantity.² Even if she were to find him of a genial disposition, there would be the inevitable physical side to their relationship to contend with also. (Here Wohmann's careful choice of a 'mentionable' condition such as halitosis in order to hint at the whole spectrum of possible offensive

1) In Ländliches Fest (Neuwied, Berlin, 1968), pp.148-173.

2) Compare thesis pp.66-67 (Die Antwort, Vor der Hochzeit).

somatic features adequately illustrates her masterful control of the disciplined narrative). And perhaps he too had believed that the impression given by an out-of-date photograph was preferable to an immediate confrontation with the truth.

In this passage, the unstated and the understated are the most accurate reflections of the young woman's inwardly troubled state as she wrestles with the implications of the unusual and unnerving situation in which she finds herself. Her yearning for a passionate and mutually committed relationship is not specified, it is merely hinted at. The discomfort and embarrassment which she feels as a result of her own freely submitted reply to the advertisement is subtly imbued into the narrative rather than suffused by means of explicit comment. Here, as elsewhere, there is little doubt that the evocative power of Wohmann's style is such that a more explicit rendering of her subject matter would be to its detriment rather than to its advantage.

In a general sense, the short story could be considered to be the ideal genre for modern times. In the routinised and regimented way of life characteristic of so many contemporary Western societies, one might well expect a potential reader, whose very leisure time is often worked to a schedule, to reach for the visually compact short story in preference to a longer discursive work - if indeed television has not already obviated the need for books. The fundamental restrictions which the short story, by nature of its controlled length, imposes on the development, the setting, the action and the characters within the narrative, would seem to guarantee that it should find favour above all other genres in fast-moving societies. Indeed it is possible to argue that there is a correlation between the development of such societies and the emergence of the genre itself, as the literary historian Fritz Martini suggests:

Ihr [die Story] geistiger Vater ist das Lebens-
tempo der modernen Zivilisation.¹

Yet statistically its favour appears dubious, for sales of longer novels far outstrip those of volumes of short stories, indicating

1) Fritz Martini, 'Begegnung mit der Story', Story 5 (Vienna, Majorca, New York, 1950).

a clear preference among the reading public for longer works. A number of hypotheses can be proffered to explain this phenomenon: perhaps a greater sense of security and continuity can be derived from the slower process of reading a novel, than from the 'single-session' encounter with a short story; perhaps it enables the reader to feel that he can escape from the frenzy of modern life by transposing himself for protracted periods into the new world described in the novel; perhaps the novel panders to his phantasy by supplying him with a fictional alter-ego whose life abounds in all the elements of success and fulfilment which his own life lacks; or perhaps it is less demanding for the reader to follow the plot of a novel and to familiarize himself with its characters than to adjust to different plots, characters and moods each time he begins a new story. Yet another explanation is offered by M.C. McDougall, who suggests:

The short story depends for its effect not only on the skill of the writer, but also on the chords it strikes within the experience or the sensitivity of the reader. It is like poetry in that the reader's pleasure depends largely upon something within himself which responds to the written word.¹

The success of Wohmann's short stories², therefore, in spite of the fact that the balance of popularity is weighted against this genre, is testimony to the response which she arouses in the reader through the power of her words. The significance of the individual word in the short story tends to be greater than in the novel, not least because there are fewer of them through which the author can express his ideas. Wohmann displays supreme control in manipulating her unfailingly rich vocabulary, and this, together with her skill in word selection,

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- 1) Murdoch C. McDougall, 'The Development of the Short Story in German - with particular reference to the Post-War period, 1945-1965' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1971), p.188.
 - 2) Irene Ferchl, in her study Die Rolle des Alltäglichen in der Kurzprosa von Gabriele Wohmann (Bonn, 1980), illustrates the sales successes of Wohmann's short stories with the example of Ländliches Fest: 'Der Erzählungsband "Ländliches Fest" erschien 1968 im Luchterhand Verlag, erreichte noch im selben Jahr eine zweite Auflage, wurde 1969 von der Deutschen Buchgemeinschaft/Moderner Buchclub herausgebracht, im Januar 1971 erschien bei DTY eine Taschenbuchausgabe mit einer Startauflage von 10.000 Exemplaren, bereits im Juni 1971 kam es zu einer 2. Auflage mit 7000 Exemplaren, 1975 brachte der Luchterhand Verlag den Band in seiner Paperback Reihe (Sammlung Luchterhand) erneut auf den Markt' (p.88).

produces truly masterful short stories.

In the story Aus den Ketten¹, for instance, the reader immediately understands and sympathises with the intensely hostile emotional reactions of a young man called Dietrich towards his middle-aged father, whose urbane manner and ingratiating flattery charm the young woman Helena, whom Dietrich was hoping would be his own girlfriend. The father overlooks his promise to leave the group of young friends alone during Dietrich's birthday celebrations and instead joins the company, ostentatiously treating them to a boat trip, followed by luncheon, and then coffee later on. When it is time to catch the return boat, Dietrich goes into the 'Seeschlößchen', where they had been drinking coffee, to look for his father and Helena:

Er stand auf, ging hinein. Der Innenraum war leer, ein paar Tage nach dem Ende der Saison. Er sah sich um nach dem Vater, nach Helenes rotem Kleid. Er hörte seine Schritte einzeln und hart. Im kleinen Gang, der zur Garderobe führte, war es dämmrig, roch nach Seife. Am Ende des Gangs sah er den Vater in einer angespannten gebeugten Haltung, gebeugt und vertieft; er blieb stehen, wartete. Gebeugt und vertieft über Helene, schöne Helena [sic]. Es fesselte ihn, bezwang ihn.

Er drehte sich vorsichtig um und ging leise zurück. Er haßte ihn nicht mehr. Im Innenraum setzte er sich auf einen der leeren Sessel, stemmte die Ellenbogen auf die Tischplatte, legte das heiße Gesicht in die heißen Handmuscheln. Er hätte ihn gern wieder gehaßt. Er wartete, saß wartend darauf, daß er etwas Neues spürte. Eine neue Regung für den Vater. War er stolz auf ihn? Ja, vielleicht. Aber sein Stolz war nicht zärtlich wie sein Haß, nicht schwach und pathetisch. Schöne Helena verliebt in den Mann, von dem er schamvoll gefürchtet hatte, er wirke wie ein langweiliger Trottel auf sie. Er wartete. Es ereignete sich nichts. Er spürte nichts Neues, keinen Ersatz, fand es angenehm: leer und aus den Ketten. Er wartete und hielt sich bereit, aber es kam nichts, er spürte nichts mehr (p.49).

A remarkable transformation takes place in Dietrich at this point, when he is confronted with the proof of the attraction Helena feels towards his father. The hatred which up to now had been the hallmark of his every reference to his father vanishes completely and gives way

1) In Trinken ist das Herrlichste (Darmstadt, 1963), pp.44-49.

to a feeling of immense relief. The imaginative inclusion by the author of an ostensible linguistic paradox at this juncture, whereby the same scene can effect both a tightening and a loosening of emotional and psychological fetters ('Es fesselte ihn, bezwang ihn ... Er spürte nichts Neues, keinen Ersatz, fand es angenehm: leer und aus den Ketten'), points to the true paradox and ambivalence of the young man's feelings towards his father. He had unquestioningly stereotyped his father into a shadowy unobtrusive background figure, and for this reason was so resentful of any independent actions, such as his father's intruding into his birthday celebrations. Consequently, the shock of realising that this confident and slightly overweening man demands to be accepted in his own right as an individual, indeed as one who is still capable of attracting a woman young enough to be his daughter, must not be underestimated. The emotional paroxysm resulting from this discovery dispels his feelings of hatred, and, to his surprise, offers no significant alternative emotion in its place. But strangely, the vacuum remaining is the most comforting and comfortable experience. He feels free at last, psychologically released from the restrictive chains of his preconceived ideas about the father/son relationship.

Wohmann's stories capture the essence of a given area of human experience in the minimum of words and create in the reader a sensation of intimate involvement with the situation or characters depicted. The experience for the reader is brief but consummate, a unique experience, comparable only to that of an encounter with a piece of poetry, and eliciting a similar emotional response, as McDougall suggests (thesis p.15). In addition, the themes in Wohmann's short stories are instantly recognisable, they are snapshots of everyday life which capture the normal, unremarkable experiences of ordinary, unremarkable people, and as such are immediately familiar. The unease which the reader may feel when he discovers that some of his own less prepossessing characteristics are reflected uncompromisingly in a fictional character, when he perceives that the author has on occasion selected the monstrosity of the small things of life, of the microcosm, and has enlarged and illuminated it in order to carry it into the consciousness of the reader, does not diminish his compulsion to read on.

In the story Ein schöner Tag¹, for instance, the reader may feel some of his own attitudes uncomfortably reflected in the calculated aloofness of the narrator towards members of her family. What reveals itself in the course of the narrative to be the scrupulously enforced exclusion of the narrator's father, sister and aunt from the pleasant setting of her home, cannot here be excused because of the fear of over-involvement, as is often the case in Wohmann's characters². Rather it would seem to indicate an egocentric concentration on preventing infiltration by other members of the family into the privileged domestic regime of the narrator and her husband, as is illustrated in the following passage:

Wir werden um das Freigelände beneidet, über das wir an der Westfront unseres Hauses verfügen. Mein Vater, meine Tante und meine Schwester, die drei kämen gern öfter zu uns heraus. Der Konkurs meines Vaters hat sie in eine enge Wohnung verschlagen. Leider sind die Stunden gezählt, die Robert und ich der Geselligkeit opfern können. Abends haben wir bisweilen Besuch oder gehen aus. Abends kommt von meiner Familie niemand. Es ist ein schönes Haus. Was für ein schöner Tag war das heute in diesem schönen Haus und um es herum. Die großen Fenster gehen auf den schönen Wald. Schöne Fasanen und schöne Hasen nähern sich in schöner Zutraulichkeit unseren verschiedenen schönen Sitzplätzen. Meine Familie würde gar nicht gut daran tun, uns allzu oft zu besuchen: jede Rückkehr schärft ihnen den Blick für ihr dunkles Zwangsquartier (p.4).

Perhaps in addition the narrator regards the economic dilemma of her bankrupt father as a potential threat to her own financial security. Or perhaps she anticipates some possible social embarrassment if her family and her friends were to meet, which would explain why her family have so clearly been advised never to call in the evening. The most unrepentant admission of the narrator's callousness towards her family's needs, however, appears in the meticulously constructed epithetic sequence, whereby the eight-fold repetition of the adjective 'schön' is followed by the stark unilateral judgement that it is in fact better if they do not visit too often, since the gloom of their own accommodation would subsequently be that much more evident.

1) In Treibjagd (Stuttgart, 1970), pp.3-9.

2) Compare thesis p.48, and pp.105-106.

The observation of the writer Jürg Federspiel:

Die Short Story schildert den Alltag einer Ameise,¹ could aptly be applied to describe Wohmann's stories. But perhaps because of the very unpretentiousness of her themes she is able to produce such startling glimpses of a truth which might otherwise be swamped by a more grandiose subject matter. Remarkably, however, Wohmann herself acknowledges her fame for her short stories without enthusiasm. In the prose text Nachruf², for instance, where Wohmann composes an imaginary obituary for herself, she recalls her reputation with some irony:

Zwar probierte sie auf dem literarischen Terrain so ziemlich alles aus, ließ Funk, Fernsehen und sogar Lyrik nicht unverschont (während wir dabei blieben, daß die sogenannte Kleine Prosa ihre Stärke sei) (p.309).

Clearly resenting the limitations imposed on her by her readers and critics, she continues:

Doch jeweils war sie einzuordnen in die Kategorie Alltagsbeobachtung, Detailstudie, böser Blick auf mittelkleine Ereignisse zwischen mittelkleinen Personen (p.309).

While deprecating the restricting implications of the terms 'einordnen' and 'Kategorie', it must nevertheless be affirmed that Wohmann's talent for observing everyday life and being receptive to the smallest detail is in fact her greatest asset in her short story writing. No detail, however small, escapes her notice³. Wohmann herself, on another occasion, admits her attraction to the familiarities, even the trivialities of day to day life, which she significantly terms 'the ordinary

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- 1) Jürg Federspiel, Museum des Hasses. Tage in Manhattan (Munich, 1969), p.168.
 - 2) In Vorletzte Worte, edited by K.H. Kramberg (Frankfurt, 1970), pp.143-148. Also in Selbstverteidigung, pp.309-316, from which page references here are taken.
 - 3) In my correspondence with Prof. Dr. Ulrich Klein, University of Osnabrück, about Gabriele Wohmann's works, Prof. Dr. Klein observed: 'Gabriele Wohmann hat eine scharfe Beobachtungsgabe. Sie notiert sich auf Reisen alles Auffällige. Ich bin sicher, daß vieles von diesen Notizen in ihre Bücher wandert. So fand sie es in Ludwigsburg ... höchst auffällig, daß in der Stadt ein Friseur 'Ordnung' hieße ...' (Letter of 19.5.1974). It is interesting to note the following lines from Ernste Absicht: 'Da, mein Thema: der Haarschnitt. Der Friseurladen namens ORDNUNG. Meine Entscheidung für keine Frisur' (p.171).

horrors', rather than to occasional moments of epic grandeur:

Mich interessieren immer die gewöhnlichen Schrecken,
nicht die sogenannten großen Ereignisse, die 'Themen'.¹

Her stories are cameos of everyday life which fix upon familiar events with sharp detail, and in so doing reveal a multiplicity of behaviour patterns against the background of the diverse structures of human relationships. They expose problems which have become particularly acute in modern times: the loneliness of the individual whose existence lacks the sustenance of a supportive relationship, in an age which suffers the consequences of the breakdown of the extensive and amorphous family unit, replaced by compact and isolated domestic nuclei²; loneliness, too, in the public sphere, where the sense of belonging once felt in rural or small-town communities has been transformed into a bewildering sense of anonymity in a faceless, bureaucratized world; the lack of personal contact with all but a very few, and the regular verbal aggression within these few relationships, expressing the individual's frustration and helplessness. By concentrating on the apparently insignificant aspects of everyday experiences, Wohmann constructs a much more accurate, but rarely pleasing, overall picture of inter-human contacts, while at the same time hinting at the great source of comfort which these very insignificant aspects can offer the individual. In Die Wahrheit über uns³, for instance, a character observes:

Ich bin im allgemeinen nicht kleinlich. Aber es
gibt alltägliche Winzigkeiten, hochprozentige
Miniaturgewohnheiten im Dickicht der groben
Gewohnheiten, und an ihnen muß man festhalten (p.108).

It is 'miniatures' of familiar situations which Wohmann presents in her short stories: monotonous marriages, troubled relationships between lovers, the problems of the nonconformist in society. From the familiar emanate both disquiet and comfort, pain and pleasure, in short, the familiar provides Wohmann with situations containing a virtually inexhaustible source of pregnant subject matter, as will be elaborated in the main section of this study, the thematic analysis.

1) Das Fernsehspiel im ZDF, p.4.

2) See also thesis p.59.

3) In Ländliches Fest, pp.106-129.

The growth of Wohmann's literary confidence over the years and the emergence of a sophistication born of experience in the genre are mirrored in the changing style of her short stories. Diffidence in the early days of her literary career seemed to persuade Wohmann to adhere more to the traditional form of short story writing, furnishing the story with an introduction and conclusion to neatly frame the main subject matter, such as in the stories Ein unwiderstehlicher Mann, Im Irrgarten¹, In einem Dorf wie unserm², Der Abflug³, and many others. With increased assurance of her ability, however, she graduated towards the more unorthodox and individualistic, observing stylistic guidelines only when it suited her purpose, so that her stories, while retaining their potency, acquired the added dimension of the new and the unexpected, such as in Der Antrag⁴, Hartes Laub, Der Boxkampf⁵ and Selbstverteidigung⁶, as will be illustrated shortly.

In 1971 Wohmann looked back on her first publication, Ein unwiderstehlicher Mann, and observed:

Als Geschichte, thematisch und formal, ist das heute weit von mir entfernt, von dem, was ich nun schreibe und schreiben will, und wie ich es schreibe und schreiben will. (Rudolph, Protokoll zur Person, p.147).

This work, Ein unwiderstehlicher Mann, conforms to the Aristotelian-type story pattern, where the story is an entity, consisting of introduction, central action and conclusion. A narrator provides the background details of her love for the husband of her best friend; he, meanwhile, unaware of her feelings, finds himself in the unenviable position where both his wife and his mistress are pregnant by him. He confides in the female narrator, who then casually, but not, perhaps, without a trace of malice, advocates suicide as the most convenient solution to his problems; he follows her advice, and she concludes her tale in the sad and ironical knowledge that the only thing she has shared with the

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- 1) In Sieg über die Dämmerung (Munich, 1960), pp.13-24.
 - 2) In Trinken ist das Herrlichste, pp.38-43.
 - 3) In Sieg über die Dämmerung, pp.25-49.
 - 4) In Sieg über die Dämmerung, pp.142-146.
 - 5) In Selbstverteidigung, pp.256-271.
 - 6) In Selbstverteidigung, pp.240-255.

man she loved is his death¹. The theme and methods in this story are conventional: the boundaries are firmly established at the beginning; the setting is so fully described that the reader can concentrate his attention on the action, which is monolinear. This, therefore, is Wohmann launching herself as a writer and taking no risks with her subject matter. The methodology is meticulous, although perhaps at the expense of the content, which often seems laboured and insubstantial.

Another story written along conventional lines is Im Irrgarten, where a clearly structured retrospective time sequence leads the reader up to the fated moment in the maze when one of a group of friends, Schobs, disappears, never to be seen again. The characters are concisely but graphically portrayed by the narrator, the settings of house and park are vividly familiar, and the minor irritations felt by the friends because of over-exposure to each other's company are quietly implied. Each stage of the action is painstakingly protocolled; some friends meet up, travel to the park, amuse themselves in various ways, and finally play a practical joke on the unsuspecting Schobs as they direct him into the most complicated route of the maze. When he fails to reappear they notify the park authorities and the police, but after what could be viewed as rather half-hearted attempts at finding him, they give him up for lost.

Once more the plethora of subsidiary details leaves no practical questions unanswered in the reader's mind, and indeed the very title of the story might excusably lead him to jump to correct though premature conclusions as to the likely outcome. The main interest, therefore, must lie in an assessment of the psychological motivation behind the friends' deliberate attempt to lose Schobs, but even here suggestions are adequately provided by the narrator, with the result

1) Ein unwiderstehlicher Mann is subsequently used by Wohmann as the basis for the television play Die Witwen, broadcast by the Sender Freies Berlin, 25.1.72, and subsequently published by Reclam (Stuttgart, 1972).

that there is not a great deal of scope for additional interpretation by the reader¹.

Far more subtle in both presentation and content is Der Antrag (Sieg über die Dämmerung, pp.142-146), the work chosen here to represent the second stage in the development of Wohmann's short story technique. It begins in the middle of a dialogue, the action is edged into the background, and it is only at the end that the reader becomes aware that there was any action at all. Depicted is a situation where a woman has to decide whether or not to accept a proposal of marriage. No description is given of her, her spoken words number only eighteen, and her firm intention to decline the offer is conveyed instead through interior monologues². Information about the setting and the man's occupation becomes clear only gradually, in the course of several paragraphs: they are sitting on a beach initially, and then on the terrace of a restaurant; not far from them a couple embrace and splash in the sea; the man owns a private school and is preoccupied with temporary financial difficulties to the extent of viewing his proposal of marriage largely as a financial arrangement also. Finally, however, after the woman has continually prepared a mental rejection of the proposal, the last sentence reads:

Ja, sagte sie und senkte den kühlen Alpakalöffel
ins Eis (p.146).

1) A much more elaborate interpretation has appeared in the recently published Autorenbuch, (Günter Häntzschel (co-editor), Gabriele Wohmann (Munich, 1982)), where Häntzschel concludes his assessment of the story thus:

Deutlich wird, daß diese Erzählung, der groteske Vorfall und die Indifferenz der Beteiligten, in zugespitzt allegorischer Weise ein Verhaltenssyndrom der Gesellschaft darstellen soll und etwa im geschilderten besonderen Fall die allgemein zu registrierende Gleichgültigkeit gegenüber Unglücksfällen, schrecklichen Ereignissen, Katastrophen entlarven könnte, ohne daß jedoch eine direkte Beziehung zwischen Vorgang und übertragener Bedeutung gegeben wäre (p.20).

The impression created here, however, is that this is a somewhat laboured interpretation for what is, after all, a relatively straightforward story.

2) A more detailed consideration of interior monologues will be given in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

In an essay entitled Gabriele Wohmann, Rainer Hagen comments on this story as follows:

Auf dreierlei wird die Aufmerksamkeit des Lesers gelenkt: auf den Kugelschreiber, mit dem der Mann Zahlen in die Luft schreibt - Symbol für das, was ihm wichtig ist; auf ein sich tätschelnd und küssend entfernendes Liebespaar - Symbol für das, was der Ehe fehlen wird; und auf das Durcheinander im Kopf des Mädchens - abwehrende Sätze, die es nicht ausspricht, hämische Beobachtungen ... Aus der Flut von Geträumtem und Halbgedachtem taucht das 'ja' dann auf als gut gehütete Pointe.¹

Hagen correctly points to the symbolic relevance of the prominent features of the story: the woman's unspoken and, therefore, still daringly candid words, an unknown couple whose physical intimacy contrasts so starkly with the man's business-like wooing of his future bride, and the larger-than-life presence of his compliant biro-pen, whose imaginary calculations further estrange the woman. This increasing use of the symbol constitutes a stylistic device whereby Wohmann can achieve greater expressiveness in her thematic concerns, in this case, for instance, by creating a fragile but highly effective framework of illuminating details which indirectly convey the charged atmosphere of the decisive meeting between the couple. The first development in Wohmann's short stories, therefore, is one away from the traditional structure of a story with a clear action pattern and well-defined background towards a less specific presentation of a momentary scene, with a considerable amount of external detail condensed into the projections of an inner monologue.

Thematically Der Antrag and Ein unwiderstehlicher Mann could be linked, in that they both deal with relationships between the sexes, but there the similarity ends, since Der Antrag already penetrates far deeper into the greyness of sexual ambiguity and obscure motives, intimating that the woman is about to commit herself to a union with a man towards whom she feels no physical or psychological attraction. In its reluctance to reveal the background details to the situation it describes, this story allows for a much more sensitive narrative tone, and there can be little doubt that the mind of the motif-seeking reader

1) Rainer Hagen, 'Gabriele Wohmann' in Schriftsteller der Gegenwart, edited by Klaus Nonnenmann, (Olten and Freiburg im Breisgau, 1963), pp.325-330 (p.326).

would be stimulated far more by the enigmatic 'Ja' than by the complicity of the narrator of Ein unwiderstehlicher Mann in the man's suicide.

A third stage in the initial development in the style of Wohmann's short stories can be seen in the story Hartes Laub (Sieg über die Dämmerung, pp.98-99), although it could be argued that the term 'story' is hardly still appropriate. The reader is no longer presented with a story, in fact, but with a situation report of pure description. Here there is no omniscient narrator to guide the reader, nor do interior monologues afford him valuable access to the psyche of the main character; it is a pure situation report in which the most definable feature is the oppressive atmosphere of what appears to be a tropical swamp. At the end of the 'story' no decision has been taken, no conclusions can be drawn, the single instance of recognisable action remains ambiguous, and the situation and possibilities within the narrative remain open. The situation featured is that of a bare-foot, hungry man wearily attempting to advance through the quagmire of a forest swamp. There is no story line, no reason given for his presence there, no explanation for his hunger and near exhaustion, and no indication of where he is going or why. Indeed, the active personae of the story would seem to be more the greedily sucking softness beneath his feet, described as:

nachgiebig und gierig, endlos; schluckt blasig,
läßt sinken, tiefer, tiefer; modelliert empfangend,

and the paradoxically 'hard' foliage which creates a menacing, swaying cage-like roof of darkness above the man's head. When he feels himself sinking calf-deep into the cold sludge, he grasps desperately upwards to support himself in the foliage. The story ends:

Er hängt im schuppigen festen Dach (Hartes Laub, p.99).

The suggestion by Ulrich Klein in his book Entdeckendes Lesen¹ that the man perishes would appear to be an unjustifiable interpretation:

1) Ulrich Klein, Entdeckendes Lesen, (Hannover, 1971), in particular pp.94-107.

Ein flüchtiger Gefangener oder Expeditions-
teilnehmer oder Zivilisationsverdrossener oder
auch nur Verirrter geht im Sumpfwald zugrunde (p.96),
and would furnish the story with a conclusion which is not necessarily
there. Logically one may indeed doubt the man's ability to survive
such adverse conditions, but Wohmann chooses to end the story without
concluding this herself. Her personal reflection on the embryonic
stage of this story is particularly revealing:

Hartes Laub, Juli 57: darüber weiß ich am wenigsten.
Ich glaube, ich las damals irgendeinen Baedeker,
vermutlich Südamerika. Handlung hat mich bei diesem
Text ganz besonders wenig interessiert (p.94).¹

It is clear, therefore, that Wohmann's potential for the imaginative
adaptation of reality is in evidence from the earliest stages of her
writing. It is a practice which, in Wohmann's earliest works at least,
can only be discovered by means of some detective work, but which in
her later works will be seen to emerge as one of the most conspicuous
features in its own right. Klein refers to Wohmann's statement and
links it to other details he was able to glean from the author regarding
the stimulus behind certain stories:

Die Äußerung vermag ein Schlaglicht auf die Arbeits-
weise der Autorin zu werfen. Konzeptionspunkte
für das Erzählen sind nicht etwa reine Phantasie-
gebilde, schweifende Hirngespinnste, absurde Sprach-
spielereien oder utopische Möglichkeitsvisionen;
Ausgangspunkt ist überwiegend Faktenmaterial:
hier irgendein 'Baedeker', in der Kurzgeschichte
Die Klavierstunde² biographische Einzelheiten (das
gleiche gilt für Ich Sperber³), in der Erzählung
Muränenfang⁴ eine Lese Frucht über Muränen, eine
Zeitungsnotiz inspirierte die Kurzgeschichte
Im Tunnel⁵. Das Skizze Kastanienblatt⁶ ist eine
Auftragsarbeit zu einem Photo (pp.94-95).

Klein undermines his own conclusions, however, by succumbing to the
temptation to polarize what he implies are the two possible approaches
to creative writing: either it is based on pure phantasy, rambling

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- 1) Klein's references are taken from unpublished letters between
himself and Gabriele Wohmann.
 - 2) In Erzählungen (Ebenhausen), pp.67-70.
 - 3) In Erzählungen (Karlsruhe), pp.12-15.
 - 4) In Sieg über die Dämmerung, pp.118-121.
 - 5) In Sieg über die Dämmerung, pp.106-109.
 - 6) In Trinken ist das Herrlichste, pp.57-58.

fancy, absurd language play or visions of utopian possibilities (terms which are clearly coloured with mildly negative undertones), or that it is based on facts. The alternative suggestion that one should look to the murkier and more obscure area between these two poles, where reality becomes inextricably fused in endless variations with the imaginative impulses of a creative mind, may result in an untidier intellectual hypothesis, but, arguably, a more convincing one.

Some of Wohmann's later stories point to a distinctive (though taken in the larger context of her work, not decisive) development in her treatment of the genre. Often they relate to each other only methodologically, in so far as they are composed of splinters of language woven together into a structured text. They do, however, echo basic thematic concerns and fundamental interests which pervade Wohmann's works, (in particular conflicts in relationships and the fundamental insecurity of the individual), as will become evident later in this study. It is doubtful, in fact, whether some of the later stories can still justifiably be called stories. Perhaps the term 'text' would be more appropriate, since they gravitate more towards a report containing a series of ostensibly factual statements delivered in a controlled and impassive tone, and away from traditional and more subjective story models. In itself, this stylistic phenomenon is sufficient to produce several questions in the reader's mind: what is the reason for the withdrawal of authorial involvement? What purpose is served by the extreme austerity of style? Is the change in style linked with any deep-rooted change in the personal philosophy of the author? Predictably, there can be no conclusive answers, only the speculation that Wohmann is experimenting with a kind of alienation technique in order to express her subject matter (which, as has been noted, does not vary a great deal thematically from the rest of her work) through an abstract, and therefore, it could be contended, more authoritative voice. As a result of this conscious depersonalisation, the linguistic value takes precedence over the narrative value of the material, and the technical excellence of the language is of more importance than the literary merits of the story.

In one such 'text', Der Boxkampf (Selbstverteidigung), pp.256-271),¹ Wohmann complements a montage effect of individual thought units (sentences) piled one on top of the other, by further dividing the text into fifteen sections or 'rounds' of the 'fight'. The analogy between a world-championship boxing match and the brutality of life in general is, not surprisingly, a predominant theme, along with that of illustrating how language can be a more effective instrument of violence than any purely physical means. Analogies are made between the enclosure of the boxing ring and the four walls enclosing a typical married couple:

Wir sind ganz allein, einbetoniert in dieser
behaglichen Wohnung. Die Fenster schließen
dicht, wir können uns ohne Scham anschreien.
Anspucken hört sowieso keiner, Grimassen,
Fratzen, Zerkratzen hört sowieso keiner (p.262).

Reminders such as this that the physical viciousness of a boxing championship is really no greater than the everyday verbal viciousness between individuals are familiar features in Wohmann's works. They indicate a considerable degree of pessimism in the author's mind about the possibility of success in intimate relationships, where the inevitable monotony of unalleviated togetherness produces staleness and indifference as well as endless exchanges of the cruelest vituperations. Similar ideas are propounded in the texts Gegenangriff² and Selbstverteidigung, as the titles indeed suggest, and together these texts gradually reveal the weakness of the stylistic and thematic method: stylistically the initial and novel impact created

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- 1) In a persuasive, if not altogether convincing assessment, Günter Häntzschel (Autorenbuch) suggests that this text constitutes an artistic statement by Wohmann in response to demands by critics that she should broaden the horizons of her themes and literary style:
'Hinter dem Boxkampf zwischen dem 'Weltmeister' und dem 'Herausforderer' deutet sich der Kampf zwischen traditionellem Schreiber, konservativ und geradlinig, und dem Sprachexperimentator an, der auf seine Weise gegen die gesellschaftlichen Mechanismen angehen will und auch Resonanz beim Publikum zu erwarten hat. Es ist wohl nicht übertrieben, die Autorin Gabriele Wohmann hier auf einer Grenzsituation zu sehen, sich bemügend, mit dem Neuen gegen das Alte anzukämpfen (p.33).
 - 2) In Gegenangriff (Neuwied, Berlin, 1972), pp.161-181.

by the collage effect of applying metaphysical ideas onto a realistic background loses its intensity as the text proceeds over several pages in virtually identical narrative block divisions; thematically there is the risk that the premeditated grotesqueness of the envisaged acts of aggression might ultimately alienate the reader to the extent that he will reject the validity of the authorial statement. One such extreme example is to be found in Selbstverteidigung (Selbstverteidigung, pp.240-255):

Mit den geschlossenen Fäusten schlagen Sie dem Umklammerer in die Geschlechtsteile. Sind Ihre Arme umklammert, stoßen Sie mit Ihrem Hinterkopf fest gegen seine Nase. Es wäre ja ein übles Versäumnis, ohne die jederzeit möglichen üblen Gedanken einzuschlafen, sogar ruhig, sogar ohne Atembeschwerden, sogar ohne Hautempfindlichkeiten (p.244).

Here the slightly perverse blending of acceptable methods of self-defence into the sphere of nocturnal intimacy must again lead the reader to question Wohmann's attitudes to sexual relationships¹ and ponder whether her picture of them here is legitimate. Less extreme, perhaps, is the example of the first sentence of Der Boxkampf:

Wenn jemand mit der Sprache jemanden flach auf den Boden legt (p.256).

This gives a pungent illustration of how one person is literally able to overpower another through language. Wohmann indicates that there are numerous variations of such language, which could be anything from a simple, perhaps unexpected insult, to a conscious psychological attack, but in every case they are 'gezielte Sätze' (p.258), that is, the use of 'Grammatik, Stil, Ausdruck, Inhalt und Artikulation' (p.259), to produce a 'grobe Körperverletzung' (p.259). The contenders perform:

Den legalisierten Totschlag ... die edle Selbstverteidigung, mit dem Wortschatz, mit der Syntax, mit den Schwingern, im Nahkampf (p.264).

1) The equivocal nature of many sexual relationships, in particular, will be discussed in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

The text itself is a series of sentences showing the variations of the effect of language, and so the two spheres, medium and subject, are closely correlated. The flaw of the text in literary value and interest lies in the fact that the methodology becomes more important than the subject matter, and so the text becomes of interest to the linguist, while becoming too specialised and restricted for the more conventional reader. Use of this form, however, seems to have been no more than a passing phase for Wohmann; happily, since these texts lack the vitality present in the best of her stories (such as the ones selected for their particular thematic interest in Part Two of this thesis), and seem almost static, in spite of the tireless flow of sentences.

Jetzt und nie

Only a year after making her literary début with Ein unwiderstehlicher Mann, Wohmann published her first novel, Jetzt und nie (1958). The new dimensions afforded to her works in this genre are naturally significant: there is more space for reflection and description, there is a more leisurely pace allowing for the elaboration of detail around the plot (although the plots themselves do not tend to be of great import in Wohmann's novels), there is leeway to devote more attention to secondary characters while still creating an intricate portrait of the main character, and there is the opportunity of exploiting the effectiveness of recurring motifs.

In Jetzt und nie Wohmann still displays much of the freshness and vitality which are familiar features of her short stories, but already she has moved away from the more dramatic style of her earliest stories. Now mood and atmosphere are of greater importance, and they are evoked with the minimum of concrete details. To a large extent the possibility of conclusive external action is thwarted by the mental turmoil of the main character, and his introversion causes potential dialogues to shrink into interior monologues.

By presenting her main character on the inner level of thoughts rather than on the outer one of actions, Wohmann intensifies the experience of the reader, who becomes the inadvertent confidant of this character's mental ruminations. Placed in such a position, the reader's response will be far more personal than might otherwise have been the case. He may appreciate the intimacy of his relationship with the main character, or he may feel embarrassed and ill-at-ease with the psychological conflicts he discovers in the character, but it is unlikely that he will be able to remain neutral. It is interesting, too, that on this first occasion of writing at length on the emotional and psychological problems of her characters, Wohmann should have opted for a man as the main character¹. Perhaps she was reluctant as yet to dwell for too long on female considerations, fearing that

1) For a further assessment of this character, see Chapter 7 of this thesis.

her readers would automatically assume that she was writing autobiographically; perhaps it was a conscious effort to broaden the scope of her interests by concentrating on a male figure; or perhaps she felt drawn to examine the workings of the mind of a person of the opposite sex. This last possibility is probably the least likely one, firstly because it was not until 1975, with Schönes Gehege, that Wohmann returned to a detailed presentation of a male character (and even then it was as a thinly disguised autobiographical work - see thesis p. 53), and secondly because in the intervening period she claimed in an interview that she would never again use a male 'Ich-Person':

In meinem ersten Roman war die 'Ich-Person' ein Mann. So etwas würde ich nie wieder machen, weil ich nur über etwas schreibe, über das ich Bescheid weiß, also Frauen. Obwohl der Prototyp der Frau eine ganz andere Existenz hat als ich. Es muß ein ganz anderes Leben sein, wenn man den Tag mit einer halben Stunde Make-up beginnt. Unter solchen Frauen fühle ich mich als Fremdkörper ... Die Befreiung der Frauen kann aus meinen Büchern geschlossen werden, aber es ist keine theoretische, explizite Forderung, weil ich nicht 'die Frau' oder 'der Mann' sage, sondern der einzelne ist mir wichtiger, das Anecken des einzelnen an Normen der Gesellschaft.¹

The above statement, however, should be read in conjunction with the following assertion:

...meine 'Selbstaussagen' stimmen mich nie froh. Nicht während ich sie mache, erst recht nicht, wenn ich sie nachträglich lese.²

Leaving aside, therefore, her highly contentious definition of a 'typical' woman, her statement is of interest not only because she (fortunately) reneges on her promise to restrict her 'Ich-Personen' to female characters, but also because of her unjustifiable inference that she does not know enough about the male character to portray it accurately. Here she does herself a gross disservice, for the portrayal of the main character in Jetzt und nie proves conclusively

1) 'Lächelnd wird sie plötzlich böse', AZ Feuilleton, 25/26.8.73.

2) Personal letter from Gabriele Wohmann, 10.6.76.

that she shares the capacity of all great writers to enter fully into the psyche of their characters, regardless of the sex of either writer or character. Whatever her motives, therefore, the successful depiction of the male psyche of the main character in Jetzt und nie is a tribute to Wohmann's intellectual finesse and artistic flexibility, and testifies at an early stage to her potential as a writer.

There are two distinct narrative threads which emerge in Jetzt und nie as foils to the character studies, and these concern the man on whom the work centres, and a young girl employee in the children's home where the man's son Ritz is in care. The threads run parallel, but never cross.

The man is preoccupied with failure on all levels: failing health, a failing marriage, failed career prospects, and failure to succeed in a particular sexual conquest. He spends much of the day wandering around aimlessly, plotting seduction and sexual adventure in an attempt to escape from the depressing reality of his situation. His performance as a bitumen sales representative is declining; his sexual performance, while not actually put to the test in the novel, promises to be less spectacular than he envisages in view of the two debilitating attacks he suffers in the course of the day; and the silent reproaches of his bedridden and neglected wife and of his son in the children's home remind him of his pitiable performance as a husband and father.

The limited actions of the day's activities are described by the narrator, but a far greater expanse of time is covered by the interior monologues of the man himself. Use of the interior monologue to depict the stream of consciousness (to use the phrase coined by William James) opens up important new avenues for an author. In this way he can capture the irrational and often incoherent quality of private unuttered consciousness, and in so doing, reveal to his readers the psychic being of his character. Because the interior monologue takes place on the prespeech level, and therefore does not have the communicative aim of the speech level, it will appear in the text in its pristine form, that is, uncensored, and neither rationally controlled, nor logically ordered. The author disappears entirely.

The narrative is in the first person. The tense is past, present, future or conditional, as the character's mind dictates, and there are no commentaries and no 'stage directions' from the author. An example of this kind of interior monologue can be seen in the second paragraph below:

Er lag bewegungslos, dumpf glücklich, halb noch mitleidig; lag behaglich schwach und dankbar gerührt von der Milde seiner Empfindungen.

Meints gut mit mir, Unser Vater im Himmel. Vergebt Schuldigen. Ich vergebe auch. Wem. Martina. Veronika. Sissys petites cochonneries. Elle couche avec chacun. Hätte das hier alles umgangen wenn ich brav und solide wie jeden Sonntagabend. Samstags Kultur, sonntags Liebe. Wenn ich nicht rausgefahren wäre, um mit Martina in der Strandhalle zu tanzen. Isn't it romantic. Die halbe Nacht vertanzt mit ihr, die andre Hälfte rumgelungert. In die fischige Suppe gespuckt, die Nachtgier; in den Hafentrog mein müdes Verlangen gespuckt ... Kleine saubere Intaktheit nach Haus gebracht, ins Palacebordell, in die Arme des Liebhabers. Schichtwechsel. Isn't it romantic. Heut nacht wieder. Sie ist wieder da, Kaninchenaugen und die spröde Unterlippe. Im Meerwasser gebadet, schaumnaß. Brauchte ein Aphrodisiakum, um sie nur zu wollen. Wie damals in Paris, als ich so genug von Meta hatte ...

Eine Wolke bauschte sich vor die Sonne, und er stellte verwundert fest, daß er vor Kälte zitterte. Wärmend rieb er mit den Handflächen über die nackte Haut unter den losen Decken aus Kleidungsstücken (pp.36-37).

In the first and third paragraphs the author, through the voice of the narrator, is in control, giving background details and extrinsic indications of the man's mood. In the second paragraph the author is no longer present, and the reader is placed directly in touch with the man's inner consciousness. His uninhibited mental wanderings are determined by his own sensations, memories, and imagination, and are not subjected to selection or scrutiny by the author. They proceed freely and in what appears to be an arbitrary and unconnected fashion, since the reader has no infallible key to the character's psyche which would enable him to decode his mental associations and private memories. It is only the continuous infiltration of information and detail into the reader's mind during the course of the novel as a whole which equips him to attempt an interpretation.

Thus the reference to the Lord's forgiveness probably relates to the man's previous anticipation of the horror he would cause if he were to be discovered lying naked and dead in the sand (he had just experienced a pain in his heart after swimming in an ice cold sea):

Gott wird ihn strafen, der gerechte Vater. Son
schweiniger Witz, tot im Sand zu liegen (p.35).

The concept of forgiveness then reminds him of acts against himself which he feels would require his forgiveness: the young woman Martina's suspected 'infidelity', even though he has not yet succeeded in establishing a relationship with her; his wife Veronika's former charms, for which he abandoned the opportunity of a career as a pianist; the indiscriminate favours of the barmaid Sissy, with whom he has enjoyed a regular but casual affair on Sunday evenings. He is irritated with himself for becoming so infatuated with Martina that he is spending all his free time pursuing her, and the repeated motif of the words of a popular song 'Isn't it romantic', which penetrate his thoughts, prevents him from forgetting his irritation. The memory of his early morning walk by the harbour (which he had described as a 'großer Spucknapf für die Fischer' (p.6)), along with the discovery which he (mistakenly) thinks that he has made, that Martina left him the evening before to spend the night with another man, remind him of his frustration. His annoyance with Martina makes him try to persuade himself that he would feel little desire for her in any case when they would next meet that evening, and this thought triggers off a memory of a similar situation where he had become tired of an affair with another woman, Meta.

In this interior monologue, therefore, the present, the past, the projected future, imagined situations, stifled bitterness and sexual ambiguity all find expression, but by understatement and stream of consciousness innuendoes rather than by explicit analysis.

The picture which emerges as the novel advances is of a man mentally and physically exhausted, immune to the stimuli of personal ambition or the love of another person. His fate seems sealed by the recurrent phrase that he stands 'mit einem Bein im Grab'¹, words which echo in

1) See thesis p.76.

the reader's mind throughout the work like a leitmotif. In her presentation of her main character, Wohmann produces a fascinating psychological study of the male consciousness, by considering the vital areas of his attitude to work, his relationships with colleagues and with his wife, his most secret fears and worries, and above all, his sexuality. In no other work does Wohmann treat male sexuality as sympathetically or as convincingly as she does here, where the honesty of her attempt to 'think herself' into the male mind is completely uncoloured by female considerations¹.

Jetzt und nie is divided systematically into sections relating to the man and sections relating to the girl working in the children's home, although the latter occupy far less space. Nevertheless, the regular switch to the girl's situation has the important function of alleviating the deepening depression and pessimism surrounding the man. The dust cover introducing the Luchterhand edition sees the leitmotif of the book as 'verlorene Illusionen', but adds:

Das Leitmotiv des Buches erhält in der Gestalt der naiv-vitalen Kinderschwester seine ermunternde Korrektur, den Akzent frischer Lebenshoffnung mit der 'wehenden Flagge der Zuversicht.'²

Unknown to the man, the girl feels both romantically and erotically³ attracted towards him, and she compensates for the drudgery of her daily routine in the children's home with dreams of returning his child to him in a triumphant gesture. Perhaps because of her feelings for his father, she is particularly protective towards his son, Ritz, and rather than face the thought of abandoning him that evening, when

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- 1) 'Female considerations' here refers to the sexual experiences of the female (often linked in Wohmann's works with bitterness, jealousy, disappointment and frustration) which appear to affect Wohmann's attitude towards some male characters in her later works. Chapter 7 of this thesis contains a more detailed consideration of this, and of the sexuality of the main character in Jetzt und nie.
 - 2) The words quoted within the reference are from p.92 of the novel.
 - 3) See also thesis Chapter 7.2.

she leaves the home to take up a new post elsewhere, she resolves to take him with her. This she does, and at the end of the novel she and the child are seen roaming in the night, searching for Ritz's father, with her confidence and energy beginning to flag and only her determination still intact.

At the beginning of the novel, at least, she is presented as the complete opposite of the man - young, healthy, hopeful, naive and confident. The difference between them is perhaps best illustrated in their attitudes to nature. The man longs for a passive, symbiotic union with nature:

Ich möchte ein Baum sein oder Erde, Grasbüschel
in den Wind geworfen. Etwas das nicht klopft,
das der Tag beatmet. Und das die Nacht sacht
beschleicht. Riechen und Erde sein mit der such-
enden Nase. Sterben, Erde und eine Muschel, im
Wind und im Sand bespült weiterleben ... (p.67).

He would let the elements ride over him without resistance, finding fulfilment through being absorbed into the forces of the universe and being able to abandon his human form. The girl, on the other hand, has already achieved a union with nature, but on a much more positive level:

Sie war Sand und Gras und Wurzel, war Sonne und
Wind und vom Fischatem behauchte Sehnsucht nach
dem Meer, sie lag und war die Glut, in der sie
lag; war vom Wehen und Zittern und Rufen, vom
trägen und wilden Herzklopfen des Himmels und
der Erde gefüllter Leib (p.70).

Her very being is powered by the elements and it is as if her body is recharged by their forces. Her defiant gesture of taking Ritz with her when she leaves the home marks her move to independence and expresses her readiness to respond to the challenges of the future. Set against this surging of youthful enthusiasm, the man's numbing sense of failure and despair is all the more poignant.

The events of the novel take place during one day and the following night, ending abruptly and ambiguously and leaving a series of unresolved questions in the reader's mind, such as: does the man return to his sick wife after his apparent failure to seduce Martina? Do the man and his wife die of their respective illnesses? What

happens to the girl and Ritz after they have absconded from the children's home? Together the stories of the man and the girl make Jetzt und nie one of the most compassionate novels Wohmann has written, one where the unashamedly emotional overtones invest the dilemmas of the characters with an atmosphere of authenticity such as is less easily produced by the more sophisticated narrative tone of her later works.

... later, ... The story begins at the railway station, ... she takes on a new job with a film company, ... and all ... during the ... which she spends ... in the ... in which she is involved ... The nature of ... his ... half his ... travelling, and ... one of brief ...

Strass und ich, wir haben in Hotelstern ... an ... in ...

- 1) ... the first ... is out of ...
- 2) ... characters are, as a rule, financially ...
- 3) ... is the only work where financial hardship plays a significant role in dictating a person's life-cycle, even to the extent of ...
- 4) ... to note the ... of the minor ... of ...

Abschied für länger

Wohmann's second, and shortest novel, Abschied für länger¹, firmly establishes the milieu in her novels as that of her own social stratum: the professional middle class². The young female narrator, a journalist, describes her love affair with Strass, a consultant on organisational practices for a large company, from their first sexual encounter (on the evening they met) to its termination some months later. The story begins as she waves goodbye to her family at the railway station, then follows her attempts to stay near Strass as she takes on a new job with a film company in an unfamiliar town 600 kilometers from her home town. Here she experiences loneliness and mild depression during the considerable periods which she spends alone, and relatively little job satisfaction in the project in which she is involved (making a film about young girls). The nature of Strass's profession entails his spending approximately half his time travelling, and so their relationship is basically one of brief meetings between longer separations:

Strass und ich, wir haben in Hotelzimmern gewohnt,
am Strand gelegen, im Meer gebadet, Promenaden
abgewandert und auf Piers geangelt, Roulette
gespielt, Reusen gehoben, Bier getrunken, Muscheln
gegessen, aber immer war nur noch wenig Zeit
geblieben bis zu irgendeinem Aufbruch (p.27).³

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- 1) As the first edition (Walter Verlag, Olten, 1965) is out of print, quotations and page references are taken from the Rowohlt Taschenbuch edition of 1969.
 - 2) Wohmann's characters are, as a rule, financially comfortably off. Jetzt und nie is the only work where financial hardship plays a significant role in dictating a person's lifestyle, even to the extent of influencing the man's choice of chocolate for his sick wife (pp.7 and 56).
 - 3) It is interesting to note the recurrence of the minor themes of separation, journeys, short or protracted stays in hotels and the accompanying unsettling effect on the mental state of the individual, as they occur in later works. In these Wohmann develops their inclusion on a much more personal level, basing her comments quite openly on personal experience as a result of her numerous professional travelling commitments.

Even when the woman takes a week's leave in order to accompany Strass, she spends most of the time alone in their hotel room or half-heartedly exploring her surroundings while waiting for him to conclude his business transactions. An intervening summer which she spends with her family, and a month spent with Strass in London appear in retrospect as retarding moments before their relationship finally reaches an impasse. The contributing factors of Strass's concealing that he has been granted a divorce, and the narrator's attempt to push Strass into the Thames¹, seem almost incidental to the increasingly inevitable breakdown of their relationship. For the externally imposed instability in their lives is paralleled by an internal emotional instability, which is the dominant feature of their relationship and which causes it eventually to collapse under the pressure of constant physical and psychological upheaval. Even when they are together, meaningful communication between them is infrequent², and their activities (as described by the narrator in the quotation above) have an air of the unreal, and are more akin to those of a casual holiday romance. This would seem to indicate that perhaps their relationship would not withstand the strains of a permanent arrangement, and thus offers a further possible explanation for their final separation.

Abschied für länger begins to illustrate Wohmann's conception of the strains produced by modern society on an individual, for it is the problems and demands of a competitive modern society which play a considerable part in precipitating the breakdown of understanding between Strass and the narrator. In Strass the reader recognises with some alarm what must nowadays be considered a fairly typical picture of the intellectually absorbed modern organization man, in whom genuine emotional feelings have been superseded by abstract numbers. He is a man whose willing commitment to his profession so engrosses his time and energy that the narrator has difficulty concealing her jealousy and resentment. She describes his enthusiasm for his work as follows:

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- 1) See thesis Chapter 6.1.
 - 2) See thesis Chapter 3.2.

Leise, belustigt vor Konzentration, redet Strass über innerbetriebliche Organisation und arbeitssparende Methoden. Das ist wirklich sein Lieblingsgebiet (p.83),

and, Strass ... dieser Statistiker aus Passion (p.25).

These descriptions contrast sharply with her references to 'die paar Sätze' (p.72), 'das Wenige' (p.72) and 'unsere unausgeführten Sätze' (p.73), with regard to the level of communication between them, all of which point to Strass's rather less than enthusiastic approach to their relationship, since the narrator, for her part, repeatedly tries to draw him into conversation and discussions about their situation, but with little success¹.

In addition, the narrator is troubled by the thought that she has failed in her responsibility to her family by leaving them in order to be with Strass (she refers on several occasions, for instance, to her mother's sciatica attacks, and to the fact that her Aunt Gusta had to be committed to a psychiatric hospital), and this no doubt fuels the dissatisfaction which she already feels about her relationship with Strass. And finally, it would appear that she suffers from a certain lack of confidence in herself also, since she shows herself vulnerable to the indirect expression of society's disapproval. The stereotyped and often bigoted attitude of society towards women is evident in the following quotations:

Ich bestellte immer wieder Bohnen und dazu die billigen unkomplizierten Gerichte trotz meiner Verlegenheit gegenüber der Serviererin und dem jungen und etwas schnippischen Hotelierehepaar ... ich aber wollte während des Essens lesen und selbstverständlich auch sparen, abgesehen davon, eine Frau allein am Tisch in trüber Beleuchtung hat karg zu essen, fand ich (p.45).

Aber er ist verheiratet, oder? David sah aus wie ein neugieriges Pferd. Ich machte eine Handbewegung, um ihm auszuweichen (p.79).

1) See thesis Chapter 3.2.

The narrator chooses modestly from the menu in the restaurant as if she feels it might be improper or unseemly for an unaccompanied woman to appear to eat for enjoyment, rather than merely to still her hunger; and by reading a book at the same time, she confirms the impression that the consumption of food is a tiresome though necessary activity, and dispels any possible suspicion that she is inviting company to her dimly lit table. And while she has the courage, on the one hand, to become involved in a love affair with a married man, she is not completely inured to society's subtle pressures, as can be seen in the second quotation above, where her evasive gesture in response to her acquaintance David's faintly spiteful question betrays her discomfort.

Alongside the social pressures are more serious personal dilemmas: the narrator's obsession with guilt feelings at having caused her sister's death twenty years earlier¹, Strass's deteriorating health as a result of suspected cancer of the larynx², and the narrator's bizarre plan to kill him by pushing him into the Thames³. The combination of all these factors ultimately leads to a total stalemate in their relationship, to a complete failure to communicate, and finally to their separation, and to the narrator's return to her family.

Albeit clothed in the outward trappings of a traditional romance story, this short novel does not present a conventional picture of two lovers and their happy - or in this case unhappy - relationship. Rather it would seem that Wohmann is concerned with more fundamental human problems, in particular those of lack of communication between individuals and of the stranglehold which guilt feelings can develop over a person. This novel, therefore, along with Jetzt und nie, remains thematically close to many of her short stories in that it continues to reveal the deep concern of the author for the problems facing ordinary people going about their ordinary day-to-day lives, that is for 'die gewöhnlichen Schrecken'⁴ which can render lives intolerable. By contrast, in her

1) See thesis Chapter 6.1.

2) See thesis Chapter 3.2.

3) See thesis Chapter 6.1.

4) See thesis p.20.

third and much longer novel Ernste Absicht, Wohmann seems to pause and take stock of her own position, writing in a considerably more introspective style and indulging in protracted self-analysis, while at the same time maintaining a degree of camouflage and immunity behind the figure of her first person narrator.

... a long by way and wholly factual account of the preparation for the publication. Although all the incidents are... Wohmann regarded Ernste Absicht as an isolated publication of the real story of her own life, it is clear that in these years she found a certain... which... with... She... that she felt no special... that she... and was... that... and yet... between herself and her... and resulted in her writing an account of... in reasonable detail.

It is... surprising, therefore, that in the first of Wohmann's works... certain unmistakably neuro-psychical illusions. It is the... disturbing feeling of... which... the first person narrator... and... with a... and... she then... of the other... in a comfortable... of... The... from three factors: firstly, the... and... secondly, she is at a watershed with regard to her relationships with her... and therefore... an... in order to gain... and... she would... by... to her own feelings.

11. Ernste Absicht, "Ein Buch von Frustration", Städtische Zeitung, 1932, S. 72.

Ernste Absicht

'Gabriele Wohmanns literarische Form ist das Protokoll', commented Günter Blöcker¹, in a reference to Wohmann's Theater von innen, in which, with the true detached and sober style of the formal protocolist, she gives a step by step and wholly factual account of the preparations for a theatrical production. Although all the indications are that Wohmann regarded Theater von innen as an isolated publication on the periphery of her creative writing, it is clear that in this genre she found a medium particularly suited to her literary style of precise depiction, combined with critical distance. She admitted at the time of writing this minutely detailed report that she felt no special love for the theatre, that the milieu, the terminology, and even the people working in that field were alien to her, and yet, paradoxically, this distance between herself and her subject made her all the more productive and resulted in her writing an account of considerable length and remarkable detail.

It may seem surprising, therefore, that in the first of Wohmann's works to contain unmistakably autobiographical allusions, it is the same disturbing feeling of apartness which arouses the curiosity of the first person narrator, and compels her to take stock with a sharper, more exacting and more intimate eye than could any of the other characters, who feel themselves safely cocooned in a comfortable sense of belonging. The apartness would seem to stem from three factors: firstly, the narrator is to undergo major surgery and so is forcibly set apart from her normal existence; secondly, she is at a watershed with regard to her relationships with her former husband and her lover, and therefore is consciously introducing an element of distance between them and herself in order to gain clarity about her feelings; and thirdly, having embarked upon a relentless course of soul-searching, she would naturally seek to attain the maximum degree of objectivity by contriving a distanced approach to her own feelings.

1) Günter Blöcker, 'Ein Hauch von Frustration', Süddeutsche Zeitung, 26/27.9.70.

This approach explains, for instance, the presence in the novel of an inventory of the items in the narrator's apartment at the Villa Massimo in Rome¹, totalling over one hundred, and ranging from '1 Fußmatte und 1 Lampe' to '1 Sieb für Tee. 1 Reibe'(pp.188-189). This is not merely a whimsical insertion to provide variety of style, but rather it indicates the measured and totally comprehensive way in which Wohmann experiences, records, and constantly reviews reality. In Ernste Absicht the 'inventory' of the narrator's life is made during a hospital stay, which serves as a framework around which the narrative is constructed. It is the story of a young woman who painstakingly records the stages of her hospitalisation before and after an operation, while at the same time jotting down at random fragments of her biography. In this way she tries to analyse her position in relation to the groups and individuals with whom her own existence is closely linked. In broad terms, the book is a search for self-knowledge, a desperate attempt by the narrator to regain her sense of identity, which has been undermined by the insecurity of her relationships with others and by the uncertainty resulting from her fears about the imminent operation:

Jetzt willst du dringend du selber sein. Du
hast dich verloren, du kommst dir abhanden (p.273).

The preoccupation with her own problems, which the narrator examines with assiduity, has made the novel a highly personal document and has earned Wohmann the criticism of several reviewers:

Der Leser braucht ein hohes Maß an Einfühlung,
an Geduld, an Mithaltetfähigkeit, um Gewinn aus
diesem hypertroph wuchernden Monolog-Compositum
zu ziehen.²

Mit Ernste Absicht hat Gabriele Wohmann sich
sozusagen auf die Marathonstrecke gewagt - über
486 Seiten quält sie sich und ihre Leser, von
denen wohl mancher ermüdet auf der Strecke
bleiben wird.³

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- 1) Gabriele Wohmann was herself a guest of the Deutsche Akademie at the Villa Massimo in Rome for ten months from 1967-68.
 - 2) Ernst Günther Bleisch, 'Nörgelt und leiert sich von Rom bis Brooklyn: die Wohmann', Münchener Merkur, 24/25.10.70.
 - 3) J.P. Wallmann, 'Gabriele Wohmann hat den bösen Blick', Rheinische Post, 24.10.70.

Die jüngere Frau, die alles so ziemlich kachektisch findet, ist die Icherzählerin des Romans. Sie nörgelt sich so durch. Was immer sie erinnert von ihren Reisen, aus der Familie, von den Ehebrüchen, aus der Villa Massimo oder von ihren Dichterlesungen, ist mies wie der Kartoffelsalat in Neustadt.¹

But for Wohmann, as she admits in So ist die Lage, the self-indulgence for which she is criticised is her only means of coping with life and finding some meaning in existence:

... Zuerst muß ich allein über mich ermitteln,
Ob ich auf die Nachrichten überhaupt reagieren kann
Ohne mich in einem mundgerechten Ergriffensein nur aufzuspielen
Zuerst die persönliche Nachricht (p.7).

For Wohmann it would be hypocrisy to try to cope with the larger problems of society without first overcoming personal and localised ones². She therefore would see no reason to apologize for the self-analysis in Ernste Absicht, which is composed of a flow of disjointed thoughts, associated only in their relevance to the narrator's life, as they emerge almost uninvited from the depths of her mind. The writer Heinz Piontek, in a review of Ernste Absicht, describes the process as follows:

Das grübelnde Selbstverhör vollzieht sich meist sprunghaft, assoziativ, zwischen zwei Sätzen können tausend Kilometer liegen, zwischen zwei Atemzüge Gesichter auftauchen, verschwinden, Orte und Jahre wirbeln durcheinander.³

Emerging from the abundant images produced by the narrator's hyperactive mind are the background details to her situation; she is a young, successful writer living in a luxurious apartment, while her son, her divorced husband and members of his family live in the

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- 1) Heinz Beckmann, 'Sie nörgelt sich so durch', Rheinischer Merkur, 25.9.70.
 - 2) See also thesis p.87.
 - 3) Heinz Piontek, 'Im Strom der Lebensspuren gespiegelt: das Bewußtsein einer Frau Ende dreißig', Kölnische Rundschau, 21.11.70. An extended version of this article has since been published in Piontek's volume of essays, Das Handwerk des Lesens (Munich, 1979), pp.185-190.

cramped surroundings of a 'Notwohnung'¹, into which they moved after her ex-husband's voluntary premature retirement. Her free time is shared between them and her lover Rubin, a married man with children. Apart from this, she is fully occupied with professional commitments, which include travelling around the country giving public readings of her own work.

It is interesting to compare these aspects of the narrator's life with similar details in the life of the narrator in Abschied für länger. There the existence of the wife and family of Strass creates far greater tension in the couple's relationship than does the existence of their counterparts in Ernste Absicht, as here the narrator already has a close family of her own and therefore does not experience jealousy because of Rubin's family. Another difference is that in Ernste Absicht it is the woman protagonist who must travel as part of her occupation, which results in her appearing much more in control of the situation and confident of her own professional ability². The activity of travelling, of being always 'unterwegs', is developed in much greater detail in Ernste Absicht than in Abschied für länger, where it was mainly the physical disruption to normal life caused by travelling which interested the author. In Ernste Absicht travelling is an important aspect of the narrator's life, and provides insight into her psychological turmoil when, for example, she suggests:

Ich muß lernen anzukommen (p.217).

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- 1) This is clearly a reference to the experience of Wohmann's father when she was still a child. It is illustrated, for example, in her comment in Das Pfarrhaus about her father's successor to the parsonage:
'Im Unterschied zu seinem Vorgänger im Amt, meinem Vater, kennt er keine neurotischen Bedenken gegenüber dem Fällen von Bäumen und läßt die Zuschauer, meine Eltern in der Notwohnung des Schwesternhauses, angesichts der Sakrilege erschauern, die den Garten verändern.' (Materialienbuch, p.19).
 - 2) The independent career woman is the exception rather than the rule in Wohmann's works, as indeed in society in general, and much of Wohmann's concern is directed towards the problems of the dependent married woman, as can be seen in Chapter 3.2. of this thesis.

Her train journeys symbolise her restlessness, her dissatisfaction with existing relationships and her wish to escape. But they can be of little long term help to her, since they never take her to a final destination; at most they can provide temporary goals in her search for the peace of mind which will only be attained when she 'arrives' - that is, when she comes to terms with herself. What the train journeys do offer is another means of prolonging the sense of detachment and lack of involvement which may even be the basic causes of the narrator's psychological disturbances, as she herself intimates:

Das Beste unterwegs: Unterwegsbleiben. (Typisch für Personen, die sich vor ihrer Verantwortlichkeit drücken) (pp.216-217).

Her fear of accepting responsibilities, together with her fear of too great an involvement in personal relationships, is the main obstacle in all her dealings with those she is close to, and creates a situation whose dangers she can recognise, yet which she is unable to remedy.

An acute feeling of insecurity seems to permeate the narrative, and is perhaps most evident in the narrator's total lack of identification with any idea of the future. Events of the past and the present are related in copious detail, but thoughts of the future are pointedly ignored or suppressed. This cannot simply be attributed to the 'freezing' of time during hospitalisation, when, cut off from the outside world, a patient attempts to conceal any hopes for the future, fearing perhaps an arbitrary development in his illness. Rather, in the case of the narrator, it is symptomatic of her inability to cope with life at present, which, not surprisingly, is coupled with a fear of the future. Her physical ailment, (though there is no suggestion that it is in itself psychosomatic), provides her with a channel through which to express these fears. She recognises her emotional dependency on her illness when she says:

Meiner nicht operablen Psyche wurden im Verlauf der Operation Organteile meiner operablen Physis weggenommen, an denen sie früher ihre Belastungen hatte manifestieren können. Wohin nun mit den Belastungen. Meine Psyche wird sich neue Wirkungsstätten suchen müssen (p.180).

The very presence of such self-analytical powers as these indicates the fundamental rationality of her mental state, for she is able to make an objective diagnosis of her own behaviour while being at the same time subjectively involved in it. The neurosis from which she is suffering is therefore one over which she can exercise a limited degree of control, at least as far as the manifestation of it is concerned, and it is not so mentally crippling that it distorts her potential for self-assessment. Her unusual psychological state produces certain anomalies in her reactions, especially with regard to concepts of time. She talks of life becoming senseless because it is without future and overwhelmed by the past ('zukunftslos und erdrückt von Vergangenen ... und von da an wird es sinnlos' p.408), yet elsewhere the future is seen as something threatening, as was noted above, and the past is anything but stifling and oppressive. It is to the past, for instance, that the narrator turns for comfort in the course of her desultory reflections, in the same way that the narrator in Abschied für länger was also attracted to the past, noting:

Ich pflege ja im allgemeinen nur Vergangenes zu genießen; das ist eine lästige Marotte, immer verknüpft mit Reue (p.42).

This significant juxtaposing of enjoyment and regret (a protective measure, perhaps, which absolves the narrator in Abschied für länger from responsibility in the present while promising a not unpalatable remorse for the future¹), is apparent also in Ernste Absicht, in the narrator's relationships with those close to her². She analyses her response to the present, the past and the future in a passage whose structural compression and repetition reflects the temporal compression in her mind.

Du wiederholst in der 2. Minute die 1. Minute und in der 3. Minute die 2. Minute und in der 4. Minute die 3. Minute; so überfüllst du deine Minuten mit Verdoppelungen. Denn du stopfst ins Gegenwärtige das Vorangegangene. Bald wirst du den übergewichtigen Minuten auch noch Zukunft aufladen, nämlich die Angst vor der kommenden Minute. Du wiederholst in der 7. Minute die 6. Minute und befürchtest die 8. Minute. Jede Minute ist das Dreifache ihrer selbst, Daran kann man aber ersticken (p.318).

1) See also thesis Chapter 6.1.

2) Ibid.

Here Wohmann exemplifies the oppressive and suffocating atmosphere surrounding the thoughts and actions of the narrator, where the present is continually invaded by the past, and where the future is regarded only through a screen of fear. Any attempt by the narrator to devote herself to matters of the present is hampered by the barrage of memories from the past, as is symbolised in the text by the dominant position given to the lower cipher of each pair of minutes: even where the distance between past and present is seen as no greater than a single moment, it is still that preceding moment which overshadows the present and blurs the narrator's appreciation of it. Similarly, with an expanse of no more than one minute separating her concept of present and future, the very contemplation of that future intimidates her, and will remain a threat until it too has receded into the past. The narrator's preoccupation with the stages of time is, in the most literal sense, a waste of time, since each of the three levels is paralysed by one of the others. Her inability to draw comfort from either past, present or future results in a pessimistic and negative outlook which intensifies her general malaise.

The novel progresses almost exclusively along these lines of private reflection and emotional stock-taking, and offers no conventional story line. The experience for the reader is like that of reading a person's most intimate and revealing diary, it is a protracted initiation ceremony into the secrets of another's soul. But it is not only the narrator's soul which is laid bare before the reader, for through her comments she discloses numerous private details about the lives of those around her. The inevitable consequence of such extensive divulgations in the works of a contemporary writer is that comparisons have been made between the readily accessible details of the narrator's life and details of Gabriele Wohmann's own life. From the striking similarities between the narrator and Wohmann it would seem that she must have intended her creation to be viewed in many ways as a self-portrait. Moreover, similarities between secondary characters and real-life acquaintances of Wohmann have quite obviously revealed themselves to the initiated, as Heinz Piontek indicates:

Man kann den Roman also neugierig durchschnüffeln, mit dem Finger auf gewisse Stellen deuten und aha rufen.¹

Wohmann is in fact often criticised for presenting in her works too many patent references to her own family and acquaintances. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the wounded pride of people who have recognised themselves in her works results in the accusation that she has distorted the truth in her representation of them. This is a point, however, which Wohmann accepts, since her skills as an author depend considerably on the selection of certain aspects of information, rather than on the documentary regurgitation of the absolute truth, and consequently she is inured to the comment:

Andere sagen die Wahrheit, du aber läßt immer was weg. Das verzerrt die Perspektive (p.455).

Nevertheless, it is interesting, for example, that the narrator of Ernste Absicht refers to:

Meine lieben, mißhandelten Anschauungsobjekte, mein Material, das sich geduldig deformieren läßt (p.297),²

when assessing the picture she has given of her family.

The narrator, herself a writer, hints that perhaps it is truth itself which she is trying to avoid through her distortion of it:

Ich freue mich über Verleumdungen, denn sie lenken von der Wahrheit ab (p.197).

By distorting her view of others and risking antagonising those she loves, as well as those who mean nothing to her (but who provide her with interesting material), she is protecting herself from over-involvement and from the necessity of revealing her own feelings.

In the short prose work Nachruf, which was published at approximately the same time as Ernste Absicht, and can therefore be taken as being a reasonably reliable guide to Wohmann's feelings at that time, she

1) Piontek, 'Im Strom der Lebensspuren gespiegelt'.

2) See also thesis p.120.

comments:

Sich selber schonte sie, die andern nicht
(Selbstverteidigung, p.312).

Yet this remark, if placed in perspective, (compare the self-addressed plea in Ernstes Absicht: 'Warum haben sie die Wahrheit nicht zur richtigen Zeit jeweils an deinen Abweichungen und Irrtümern erkannt' (p.69)), serves as a warning against judging Wohmann summarily from the first impression gained of her works. That she handles her 'Anschauungsobjekte' ruthlessly cannot be denied, but her reasons for doing so seem to indicate a personal sense of insecurity and an attempt to conceal her own vulnerability, rather than a vindictive crusade against those who proffer affection.¹

1) See also thesis Chapter 6.3.

Paulinchen war allein zu Haus

Gabriele Wohmann's fourth novel, Paulinchen war allein zu Haus, appears anomalous when set against all her other works to date, for although its thematic concerns continue to focus on the psychological well-being of the main character, its narrative perspective is fundamentally different. Here the protagonist is a child, the eight year old orphan Paula, depicted during her relationship with her adoptive parents, Christa and Kurt, and the first impression is that the novel offers an objective account of the development of their relationship. Closer analysis, however, reveals the subtle way in which the narrator divulges only those details, incidents or conversations which have been, or which could have been directly experienced or overheard by the child¹, and thus a novel for adult readers evolves exclusively from the perspective of a young child.

The plot, as so often is the case in Wohmann's novels, is sparse: at the age of eight, Paula, who had been cared for by her grandparents since losing her family in an accident five years previously, is adopted by Christa and Kurt, both professional writers, whose marriage of over sixteen years had been childless by choice. For approximately two years² the adults and the child live together, without ever achieving the atmosphere of spontaneous affection and mutual caring so vital for the emotional stability of Paula, and the novel ends with her request to be allowed to leave their home and continue her education in a boarding school.

-
- 1) Some critics have lamented what they regard as a lack of a clearly defined authorial standpoint, for example:
'Eine durchweg sympathische Figur gibt es in diesem Buch so wenig wie eine identifizierbare Position der Autorin, die aus wechselnden, oft ineinanderübergehenden und immer an die Personen der Handlung gebundenen Perspektiven erzählt.' Christian Schultz-Gerstein, 'Erziehungsstudio', Die Zeit, 20.12.74.
Such views fail to take account of the author's unmistakable sympathy with the child's position, and fail to recognise the strict censorship of the viewpoints of Christa and Kurt which occurs in order to ensure that the reader's sympathies, also, should remain with the child.
 - 2) There is no clear chronological pattern of events in the novel, nor any reliable way of attributing Paula's thoughts to specific stages in the time she spends with her adoptive parents.

The main weakness of the novel is its excessive length¹ in relation to its subject matter, and its tendency towards repetition. Details of Paula's nocturnal visits to the lavatory, for instance, occur on pages 5, 35, 36, 47 and 64², and discussions as to the advisability of allowing her to continue to use a chamber pot appear even more frequently³. Furthermore, abundant references are made as to whether the child sees herself as 'Paula', 'Paul' or 'Paulinchen',⁴ without anything more than a superficial exploration of the significance for the child of each 'identity'. Minor irritations relate to various situations which the reader could find unlikely: Christa and Kurt entertain friends in the evening with an amazing regularity (are the invitations never reciprocated? - we never hear that Paula, who enjoys being alone in the house, is left alone, or with a minder, during an evening), and on such occasions Paula invariably manages to stay awake until very late in order to eavesdrop on their conversations, while successfully feigning sleep whenever someone looks into her 'Schlafverschlag'. Such a gathering takes place even after Paula had been discovered in a drunken sleep earlier one afternoon, and still she manages to eavesdrop. And although Christa and Kurt insist throughout the novel that every issue, large or small, should be discussed and reflected upon, Paula's written request (following her consumption of alcohol) that she should be sent to a boarding school, is accepted almost immediately, after only a brief discussion with friends, and no discussion at all with Paula herself.

These weaknesses apart, the novel presents a poignant account of

1) 235 pages.

2) Even the vocabulary is repetitious: 'Das Kind versuchte, schläfrig zu bleiben, auch diesmal. Allerdings war der Befehl Schläfrigbleiben schon eine kleine Tat im Kopf' (p.5). 'An sein warmes Bett zu denken, erlaubte es seinem Kopf, denn das war ein Beitrag zur Absicht Schläfrigbleiben, Schlaf schön finden' (p.35). 'Das Kind machte die Augen fast nicht auf, es behielt sein Bettschlafgesicht bei, es erschnupperte sich selber, aber halbschläfrigwohlig' (p.36). 'Es mußte weiter darauf aufpassen, wenig zu empfinden...und versuchte, trotzdem gleichzeitig seine Schläfrigkeitsreste zu überwachen' (p.47). 'Genau so geräuscharm müßte das Kind den Rückweg hinkriegen. Es müßte aber trotzdem schläfrig bleiben. Auf den Rückwegen war es noch weniger als auf den Hinwegen einigermaßen auch von selbst noch schläfrig' (p.64).

3) pp.5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 32, 131.

4) pp.7, 11, 12, 19, 22, 23, 29, 30, 39, 40, 41, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 60, 76, 77, 83, 86, 90, 93, 97, 101, 102, 105, 106, 111, 119, 127, 128, 129, 139, 140, 141, 143, 167, 175, 196, 197, 198, 218, 219, 224, 227, 229, 231, 232, 233.

the young child's relationship with the 'Erklärungsprofis' and 'Erziehungsfanatiker' Christa and Kurt, whose misguided attempt to apply textbook knowledge to the real life situation with Paula causes her endless distress¹. The child longs for 'Nestwärme', a homely, uncomplicated environment in which she can express her own affectionate nature², and she is offered instead a kind of modern and progressive camaraderie:

Christa und Kurt: immer so nett, meistens so nett zu ihm [dem Kind]. Aber nett und beinah sonst nichts (p.58).

She feels constantly observed, and is aware that she is being 'used' as a model for a character in Christa's next book, and she feels still more frustrated when even her most desperate attempts to draw attention to her craving for warmth and affection fail. For nothing she can do will shock the adults: she bites Christa's hand, cuts the face of a valuable doll, consumes Christa's sedatives, purposely wets the bed, steals money³, throws away large quantities of food, gets drunk, and breaks some expensive glasses. Yet for everything Christa and Kurt can find an explanation in their textbooks, and their reprimands are so restrained and coldly articulate, that the child feels helpless:

Es fiel nie ein hartes Wort. Das Kind empfand die kühlen, sachlichen Wörter als hart. Als steinig steinern, in solche Wörtersteine kann ich kaum jemals ein Loch machen (p.51).

[Das Kind] notierte: Jedes Wort ist ein Wort zuviel. Es korrigierte: Immer ein Wort zuwenig. Es dachte: Was stimmt denn jetzt. Es schrieb: Nie das richtige schöne wohltuende Wort (p.87).

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- 1) It may seem surprising that Wohmann has attributed largely negative features to fellow professional writers, but it can be surmised that the choice of profession for Christa and Kurt was determined primarily because of the opportunity for intense interaction with the child as a result of their almost constant presence at home.
 - 2) In a relationship where great stress is laid on the fact that Paula is never 'forbidden' to do anything, it is ironic that she suffers most from what she terms a 'Gefühlsverbot' (p.197), a 'Schmerzverbot' (p.198), and a 'Tränenverbot, Trostverbot, Taschentuchverbot' (p.217).
 - 3) A typical example of the adults' limited perception occurs after the stealing incidents, when they overlook the potential of unsophisticated and common sense questioning, yet are indiscriminating in their acceptance of textbook explanations:
'Fragen, die überhaupt nicht fielen: Brauchst du Geld, für irgendwas? Was vermißt du, sparst du etwa, was steckt dahinter, warum willst du, daß wir nach dem Zorn mitleidig werden. Ganz offenkundig war den Erwachsenen auch ein scheinbar sinnloses Klauen, ein zweckungebundener Diebstahl aus Lehrbüchern gut bekannt und eine längst schon vor Paulas Einfällen kinderpsychologisch gelöste Rätselaufgabe' (pp.166-167).

In her relationship with the adults, Paula displays a fairly common mixture of the desire to outrage and the desire to please, and in particular she strives to win the affection of Kurt, the less dogmatic of the couple with regard to how the child should be handled. Kurt is more sensitive to Paula's needs than is Christa, and he pinpoints the main problem when he describes a story he is planning:

Ich will mal Eltern schildern, die eben keine Bösewichter sind, bei denen die Abneigung des Lesers gegen sie nicht so billig und leicht faßbar ist, nicht so auf der Hand liegt, kurzum: es ist nicht vordergründig zu verstehen, was sie eigentlich falsch machen...Die machen im Grunde alles richtig. Und doch klappt zwischen ihnen und den wie unsere Paula frei und unautoritär erzogenen Kindern ein Abgrund. Es gibt keine Nestwärme (pp.145-146).

As a result, the suffering accompanying any failure of Kurt's to understand her is correspondingly greater; when he insists, for example, that she should go to bed instead of dozing in front of the television, we are told:

Es war ihm [dem Kind] entsetzlich peinlich. Es war im Bett noch schockiert (p.181).

Towards the end of the novel, when Kurt disengages his arm from Paula's hand on an occasion when she was intending to offer him solidarity and proof of her affection for him, the resulting injury to her feelings seems to precipitate her desire to leave:

Es [das Kind] erlitt seinen üblichen Verlust, aber dieser war besonders schwer. Aus dem Mitleidsschwund für Kurt wurde ein unförmiger, unbegrenzter Mitleidszuwachs des sowieso in dem Kind verankerten Mitleids mit sich selber (p.222).

The feeling of sympathy towards herself escalates swiftly into her decision to go to a boarding school, where her certain unhappiness¹ will result in a measure of masochistic satisfaction at her own misfortune. Christa and Kurt, though startled by Paula's request, find it more convenient to dismiss their nagging doubts about the wisdom of such a move, and conclude instead that Paula has indeed decided to become a 'vernünftiger Mensch' (p.232).

For two years or so, Christa and Kurt had met with repeated failure in the application of the most progressive pedagogical methods, and it is to the failure on the part of the adults which Gerhard and Mona Knapp² rightly point when they describe the novel as a parody

1) Compare Paula's comments on p.167, and see also thesis p.63.

2) Gerhard P. Knapp and Mona Knapp, Gabriele Wohmann (Königstein/Taunus, 1981).

of the traditional 'Erziehungsroman':

[Dem Kind] gegenüber erscheinen die Adoptiveltern trotz allen Aufgeklärtseins oft hilflos. Am Ende wissen sie nicht mehr ein noch aus. Es liegt auf der Hand, daß Gabriele Wohmann die Grundpositionen des traditionellen Erziehungsromans satirisch gleichsam auf den Kopf stellt. Im Gegensatz zu Texten wie etwa Hesses 'Peter Camenzind' oder 'Demian' ist es hier nicht der zu Erziehende, der aus dem naiven Bewußtsein in ein Erkennen von Polaritäten - und somit seiner selbst - hineinwächst, es sind im Gegenteil die Erzieherpersonen, die im Verlauf der Romanhandlung der Kurzsichtigkeit überführt werden.¹

Their shortsightedness lies in their conviction that pedagogical textbooks, however modern, could provide a foolproof guide to the emotional needs of a child and an explanation for its behaviour patterns. Consequently they often ignore, or even deride Paula's own unambiguous pointers to her predominantly simple needs: her wish to hold hands with the adults when they are out together, to be allowed occasionally to stay up late watching television, to send them letters or buy a small present, to have a smile reciprocated, or simply to be her naturally talkative self without having to hear that she is 'verstiegen', 'verschwärmt' or 'überdreht'. It is possible, however, that Christa and Kurt overlook the underlying simplicity of Paula's needs because of the greater impact made on them by the distinctly precocious nature of several aspects of her personality²: her fascination with Goethe's poetry and with collecting literary quotations (see, for example, pp.107-108, and compare also thesis p.63), her ability to analyse her own thoughts and emotions and formulate them as entries in her private notebooks, and her ever increasing tendency towards introspection:

Das Kind empfand häufig, daß es eigentlich überhaupt nichts mehr lernen wollte, nichts von andern und von außen her, nichts, was beigebracht und gelehrt werden mußte. Es wollte nur dauernd Erfahrungen machen mit sich selber und dem, was es selber zuerst außen und danach innen wahrnahm (p.164).

Nevertheless, the fact remains that, in spite of all their sophisticated methods, Christa and Kurt have consistently misunderstood

1) G.P. and M.Knapp, Gabriele Wohmann, p.91.

2) These aspects frequently detract from the credibility of Paula as a child protagonist, and lead the reader to conclude that Wohmann was more concerned with the conveying of ideas than with the rigid matching of age and potential in her character. (See also thesis p.62).

the child, and it is a sad reflection on their creed of progressive and rational thinking that, at the end of the novel, the child compensates for her vulnerability and insecurity by reminding herself of the adults' imperviousness in the more old fashioned, but more human sphere of the emotions:

Viel wissen, das tun sie ja, aber viel auch noch
fühlen, das gehört dringend dazu...Sie fühlen
ganz wenig, fast nichts (p.235).

Schönes Gehege

Traces of insecurity and vulnerability in the main character, Robert Plath, are still very much in evidence in the last novel to be looked at here, Schönes Gehege. However, alongside these, there is also a rather surprising excess of consolation and comfort experienced by him, which is unusual in Wohmann's works. Having been guided by the author until now along well-trodden paths of cynicism and scepticism with regard to personal relationships and social issues¹, the reader is confronted in Schönes Gehege with an authorial volte-face, and is introduced to spheres of reconciliation and harmony. Robert Plath is, like Wohmann herself at the time of writing this novel, a well-known writer in his mid forties, and there is never any doubt that Wohmann herself is poised recognisably behind this flimsy fiction². The limited external action is structured around the filming of a television portrait of Plath, with the crucial internal action focusing upon the conflict of interests which results from the filming: Plath wishes the portrait to reflect the security of his present emotional plateau, while the film director A.P. Roll champions the public's wish to see the unstable and vulnerable figure which Plath has always represented for them in the past, and reprimands him with this in mind:

Aber Herr Plath ... Aber aber, Sie machen weder das NACHDENKLICHE noch das RATLOSE Gesicht, schon gar nicht ein VERZWEIFELTES. Und bitte, den Kopf halb in die Hände vergraben (p.298).

Plath's efforts to emphasise that the image of the resigned melancholic and satirist expected by the public no longer corresponds to his present more philosophic state of mind results only in distress as he discovers how exclusively he has been typecast into this role. The public's reaction to his works is amply illustrated in the novel in the responses of reporters who wish to write articles on him, of literary connoisseurs from broadcasting companies and the national

1) Albeit on a more limited scale. (See thesis Chapter 5.)

2) Compare Rudolph, Aussage zur Person, pp.199-200 where the interview centres around the similarities between Plath and Wohmann.

press, of students of literature who conduct interviews¹, or when Plath appears at literary conferences or in front of school classes. In the course of the novel he attempts to break free from the clichéd public image of himself and construct a personally ratified counter-stand, resolving at the same time to abandon his pungent literary style and concentrate instead on an appreciation of the conciliatory potential within human relationships. Instrumental in this process of change is the death of Plath's much loved father², which prompts him to reassess on a positive basis relationships which he had previously taken for granted, in particular the most emotionally demanding relationship in his life, his marriage with Johanna. Evolving from this revaluation is the emotional watershed previously mentioned (thesis p.9) from which Wohmann emerges with a significantly more mellowed outlook than hitherto. This is illustrated, for example, by Plath's decisions that relationships are now to be treasured (compare thesis pp.120-121), that religion is to be embraced as the most effective psychological defence against death (compare thesis pp.85-86) and by his succumbing to a feeling of regret about the defamatory nature of many characterisations which have appeared in his works (compare thesis p.120).

1) Heinrich Vormweg suggests in his article 'Das Gehege der mittleren Jahre', (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 6/7.9.75), that many of the occasions described will be familiar to people acquainted with the contemporary literary scene in West Germany. In my own experience, an interview which I conducted with Gabriele Wohmann in August 1974 is alluded to on p.77 of Schönes Gehege. Compare also Piontek's comments on Ernste Absicht (thesis pp.50-51).

2) This further strengthens the links between Plath and Wohmann, as Wohmann's father died in September 1974 (compare thesis Chapter 4.3.). In Schönes Gehege the narrative standpoint is coloured from the outset by the retrospective knowledge of what is presented as the father's approaching death. But even the most personal experiences such as this are to be catalogued for future use, and Wohmann, through Plath, prepares her readers for her next novel, Ausflug mit der Mutter (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1976), the contents of which Plath summarises as follows:

'Ich habe immer gedacht, DAS dürfte ich nicht auch noch eines Tages zum Schreibstoff machen. Das: den Tod des Vaters und die Zusammenhänge, den Bruder, die Fassungslosigkeiten und die Gefährlichkeiten der Mutter, das alles. Ich habe gedacht, es wäre gemein, prosaprofihundsgemein, es wäre verletzend. Eine schwere Kränkung. Jetzt denke ich das Gegenteil. Ich tue dem Vater den größten Gefallen meines und seines Lebens, ich tue das Wichtigste und Beste was ich tun kann für ihn. Ich werde über den Tod des Vaters schreiben. Über mich selber also doch wieder' (p.322).

However, not even the novelty value of his newly embraced positive outlook on life can ignore or camouflage the fundamental pressures on Plath resulting from his profession: the blatant attempt in a media-marketing exercise to distort his personality while filming; the unrelenting strain of frequent public appearances and the tedium of endless interviews, from which there usually emerge misquotations and insidiously misleading inferences; the probing and offensively insinuating questions of inquisitive acquaintances at parties or other social gatherings. Plath's dislike of the presumptive assessments of others is evident in the following passage:

Das Schreiben kam ihm wie etwas Unanständiges vor, wie eine Verdauungsabnormität des Gehirns, wenn er so als Halbwahnsinniger, so obstinat, darauf festgenagelt wurde. Diese Aushorcherei mit dem Wunsch, ich sei ein Besessener, macht das Schreiben gleichzeitig pathetisch und lächerlich. Unanständig. Abnorm stehe ich wieder in meinem eigenartigen Gehege, ich lasse mich beäugen, es ist spannend zuzuschauen, welches Futter ich annehme und welches nicht. Ich werde auf der Stelle verblöden, wenn das so weitergeht (p.17).

More and more resolutely Plath resists the procedure whereby the public will only believe statements which correspond to what they were expecting to hear, in order that he might avoid being placed for eternity under the rubric 'cynical pessimist'. The misguided expectations of the public seem to him to be epitomised in the film project, with the result that his resentment increases until the point is reached when he finally withdraws from the project altogether, indicating as a professional palliative, however, that perhaps filming could be resumed at some future date.

If hospitalisation was the catalyst for the narrator in Ernste Absicht to engage in a probing self-analysis, in Schönes Gehege it was the initial stages of filming. But the 'grübelndes Selbstverhör' (compare thesis p.46) of Ernste Absicht is superseded here by a eulogy on 'ganz gut verlaufende Tage' (p.174), on the gentle pleasure of ordinary living - a walk or drive in the country, an intimate conversation, an enjoyable meal, the appreciation of literature, art or music, and by a reaffirmation of the powerful bonds of marital and family relationships. It is not that Plath no longer experiences any negative influences in his life, but rather that he is now able to view them in some perspective,

and while he is still prepared to comment fully on such negative aspects in his writing, he opts to apply them more as a foil to the positive aspects of life. On balance, he feels, it would even be psychologically easier for a person to live negatively, since this would create less of an emotional burden on him:

Plaths Antwort WÄRE ICH HOFFNUNGSLOS, GINGE ES MIR WAHRSCHEINLICH AUSGEZEICHNET hat Roll nicht verstanden. Ich meine : HOFFNUNGSLOS, das muß relativ einfach sein, sagte Plath. Das wäre so ein Zustand ohne Erwartungen, einer, mit dem man sich abgefunden hat, indem man sich mit allem einfach mies und übellaunig abgefunden hat (p.27).

The moral obligation which Plath feels to ensure that the output from his literary vocation is a true reflection of his mollified human perception is, he freely admits, frequently harder to fulfil and express in his writing than was his former disconsolate narrative tone. His reflections constitute an unambiguous artistic statement representing Wohmann's own views, namely her intention in future to view life much more positively¹. This intention is evident, for example, on an occasion when Plath is troubled by his own inarticulateness and failure to contradict Roll more assertively, but it is significant that the whole passage of positivism quoted below is preceded by a negation, indicating deep-rooted and persistent problems of vacillation and inadequacy:

Ich sage nicht: Herr Roll, warum wollen Sie auch da wieder verschleiern und entstellen, was wirklich zu konstatieren wäre? Es geht mir gut. Zumindest zeitweise. Vielleicht sogar: prinzipiell. Das stimmt vielleicht allerdings nicht, doch würde es mir passen, wenn wir, da wir sowieso manipulieren, eben DAS behaupteten. Ich bin um so viel ernster geworden, daß ich mich für fähiger halte, fröhlich zu sein. Ach verdammt, es stimmt seit den letzten Wochen wieder gar nicht, aber verschweigen wir eben mal DAS. Ich habe wirklich vor, ständig an der Ermöglichung von irgendwas Gutem, Richtigem, Schöнем zu arbeiten, an diesen winzigen Anstiftungen zum Glück (p.26).

Plath's wish that any exaggeration should be along positive lines, that is, making him appear to be a predominantly happy, sanguine person, is

1) Speculation that this might be as a result of the death of Wohmann's father is expressed in Chapter 4.3. of this thesis.

not founded on complete honesty, as he is forced to admit. Interestingly, he attributes his enhanced capacity for happiness to his generally more serious and pensive approach to life, which has emphasised for him the transitoriness of human existence, and therefore has taught him to value and enjoy each experience more. His determination to work at, and show in his writing, the creation in human relationships of things which are good, right and beautiful, is one which is sustained throughout the novel. To the detriment of the work as a whole, however, the self-conscious affirmatives are in effect almost as unpalatable as the unremitting negatives in Ernste Absicht. Both novels lack the breadth of perspective necessary to present a totally convincing picture of the predicaments of their protagonists, in both the views are too stylised and the words chosen often too platitudinous and hackneyed. The following passage from Schönes Gehege gives a typical example of a mixture of stylistic and thematic deficiency:

Ja, so ist auch mein Gehirn, nichts weiter, in nichts unterschiedlicher von anderen Gehirnen. Es speichert Wissen und wer weiß was, und das Ganze sind bloß eiweißartige Stoffe, auch bei mir. Gedächtnismoleküle. Alles, woran ich hänge, glücklich oder verzweifelt: molekular, keines extremen Staunens würdig. Der greifbare Geist, auch meiner, ja, jeder Forscher kann meinen Geist greifen, und meine Erinnerungen sind ein Pulver. Die Seele aber, na ja, so irgendwo zwischendrin, vielleicht auch pulverisiert, nicht so lokalisierbar. Bis jetzt zum Glück - oder? Auch meine Erinnerung, zum Beispiel an die unentbehrlichen AN DEN MOND-Zeilen, kann, dieses unscheinbare Pulver, zum Beispiel im Labor untersucht werden (pp.36-37).

The measured dismay and surprise, so meticulously tempered with an element of resignation, that the narrator's brain should be comprised of the same grey matter as everyone else's, is surely an intellectual anachronism for a novel written in the mid 1970s, indicating a degree of authorial naivety. And the choice of such an obvious Goethe poem to illustrate the therapeutic value of memory to the individual could mean that the undisputed sincerity of thought fades alongside the use of what is almost a literary cliché. Clearly some reviewers, too, have felt unhappy with Wohmann's stylistic approach in this novel, as is evident in the observation of Gert Ueding in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung¹:

1) Gert Ueding, 'Sehnsucht nach Montaignes Turm', Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 6.9.75.

...Mit immer gleicher Wichtigkeit werden da vor dem Leser Platitüden und Lese Früchte, Zitatfragmente und Reflexionen in Stil und Niveau schlechter Besinnungsaufsätze ausgebreitet - und das in einer Sprache, die auch der innere Monolog nicht zu entschuldigen vermag. Da hofft Plath, 'von einer ihn eher zum Outsider machenden stabilen Gläubigkeit umzingelt zu sein (p.127), und wartet im Gottesdienst 'auf die vage Erfüllung von irgendwas Vagem' (p.128), auch kommt es vor, daß er (gleich zweimal hintereinander) 'wie ein Fragezeichen im Weg' (p.72) steht, einen 'Cocktail aus Paradoxien' (p.137) in der Hand: 'Schweigend traf Plath auf sich selber mitten in der Verwertung seiner eigenen Bezugssysteme' (p.210).¹

The tonal similarities between Ernste Absicht and Schönes Gehege seem remarkable when it is borne in mind that two very different viewpoints are adopted in the novels, although their foundations in self-questioning and self-analysis are, at least, identical. But Schönes Gehege makes at least a temporary break² with the tradition of pessimism in Ernste Absicht, in that the author now embarks upon a course of applied positive thinking³, even if she still relies heavily on the crutches of self-persuasion and reassurance to counterbalance her inherent leanings towards pessimism and negativism.

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- 1) References to the pages which I have indicated in brackets, however, will reveal a certain amount of poetic licence enjoyed by the critic in the structuring of his illustrations.
 - 2) See thesis p.9.
 - 3) Hitherto, instances of positive thinking in Wohmann's novels have been few, finding expression only in the naive optimism of the children's nurse in Jetzt und nie (see thesis p.36), and perhaps also, in Abschied für länger, in the return of the narrator to the comfort of her family circle after the breakdown of her relationship with Strass (see thesis p.42).

PART TWO

Chapter 3

The Isolation of the Individual

An appropriate way in which to begin the assessment of the thematic interests in Gabriele Wohmann's prose works seemed to be to consider what must be a virtually universal concern of modern writers, the isolation of the individual. The two spheres in which the individual experiences contentment or dissatisfaction, a sense of belonging or isolation, are his public and private lives. While in recent years the trends in literature have gravitated increasingly towards examining the individual in the context of the society in which he lives, in Wohmann's works, the examination takes place almost exclusively within the boundaries of the private sphere of activity of the individual¹. In particular, Wohmann concentrates on family life and the behaviour of the individual within it, for it is here that she feels that the most damaging isolation frequently occurs.

The predominance of autonomous, close-knit family units in modern times, which are the product of the social gradation through several centuries away from larger group communities with collective responsibilities and interests, is frequently cited as a contributing factor to the problems of isolation in the individual within the family unit. No longer has he a large pool of human contacts who offer him comradeship and affection; in the modern family he is confined within a much smaller circle in which he may be unable to find someone for whom he feels spontaneous affection. In addition, he may feel pressurised by society's expectations that there should be an intense emotional bond between members of the same family, and so may feel even more isolated if he fails to experience this attachment.

Gabriele Wohmann depicts isolation of the individual as occurring in every stage of his life from childhood through to old age. Tensions within family relationships are shown to exacerbate the condition or indeed to be themselves the inherent cause of it, as a result of the jealousy, hostility and resentment which often exist between members

1) The reasons for this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

of a family and which slowly erode any last vestiges of affection between them. The act of giving birth and creating new life is therefore not seen by Wohmann as a triumph of humanity, but rather as the mechanics of producing yet another number to join the anonymous masses of the unloved and the unwanted:

Vor sechzehn Jahren hat seine Mutter ihn mit allen Mühen und Anstrengungen des Lebens an die Welt befördert, als ob es sich lohnte. Ein Mensch. Nach dem Kampf hat sie ihn in die Arme genommen und gelächelt und der Vater hat ein Photo gemacht. Ein neuer Mensch. Sie haben den obligatorischen Aufwand getrieben. Vielleicht Liebe. Wenig Liebe. Ein Opfer.¹

For such a child born to a mother whose reaction towards it bears few traces of love and whose main thoughts are of the sacrifices which she herself has had to make in order to bring him into the world, the welcome he receives is meagre. Wohmann's capacity for affection and pity regarding the position of children in the family and society is considerable², and clearly the sad plight of the isolated individual becomes even more poignant for her when the individual in question is a child, already one of the most vulnerable members of society. Perhaps it is for this reason that Wohmann, whose own childhood was spent happily in the midst of a caring family, includes in her works so many instances of isolated children.

3.1 Isolation in Childhood

Children in Wohmann's works are shown as being deposited into an unwelcoming world where the prospects are bleak and where the family circle is rarely a source of encouragement and affection. However, the immaturity of their own conceptual powers may prevent them from articulating their reaction to this situation, and in this case Wohmann lets

1) Sie sind alle reizend in Selbstverteidigung, pp.35-46 (p.43).

2) One might speculate that as Wohmann herself is childless, this has accentuated her sympathy for children in general. It is interesting, for example, that she refers to children when answering a broad question about her writing programme:

Rudolph: 'Sie haben einmal gesagt, Ihr Programm sei eine Sensibilisierung der Umwelt. Wie ist das gemeint?

Wohmann: Das kann man vielleicht mit ein paar Beispielen belegen; Etwa wenn eine Mutter ihr Kind schlägt, da würde ich mich mit Grausen abwenden ...' (Aussage zur Person, pp.202-203).

the behaviour of the adult world serve as adequate proof of it. There is, for example, the mother who is portrayed in the ostensibly benign stance of waving goodbye to her child as he leaves for school, but whose thoughts soon betray her true feelings towards him:

Seine Mutter winkte ihm zu, die Hände voll Abfall.
Sie war zufrieden drüber: daß der Fliederstock ange-
gangen war, daß sie ihren Frühstücksspeck noch vor
sich hatte, daß sein Vater nicht mehr lebte, daß
er heut spät aus der Schule käme, daß er niemandem
ähnlich war den sie kannte, weit und breit. So ein
komischer kleiner, erschreckender kleiner Kerl,
mit seinem merkwürdig zerknirschten faltigen Gesicht
- konnte irgendwer sein. Jetzt ging er ja endlich
weiter, weg vom Holztor, wäre bald bei der Brücke
und bis fünf so wenig da, als gäbe es ihn nicht,
als hätte sie ihn nie gekannt.¹

The sensual satisfaction afforded by the blossoming lilac tree and the thought of the bacon breakfast awaiting her is equalled by the satisfaction of knowing that her child's father is no longer alive (from which must be concluded that the relationship between the boy's parents was also unrewarding), that her son will be late home from school, and that his odd, rather squashed and wrinkled face fortunately does not resemble anyone else's. She relishes the knowledge that the child will soon be out of sight, and that for the duration of his absence she can pretend that he does not exist at all. It can only be a matter of time before the as yet unsuspecting child becomes aware of his mother's dislike of him, and one can only speculate about the devastating effect this realisation may have on the development of his personality. Perhaps the dead child in Ländliches Fest², also, unidentified and unclaimed by relatives, experienced a similar lack of affection in early childhood:

Vielleicht ist dem Kind das Sterben ganz recht
gewesen, denn seine Eltern kann es nicht so gern
gehabt haben, wie ich das sehe (p.69).

In the novel Paulinchen war allein zu Haus, Wohmann devotes herself entirely to the analysis of the isolation and extreme loneliness of a child. Here, however, the description of the situation does not evolve through the comments of others, as in the examples above, but

1) Gerechtigkeit in Selbstverteidigung, pp.54-61 (p.57).

2) In Ländliches Fest, pp.52-71.

it is the main character herself, the eight year old orphan Paula, who catalogues her sentiments towards the couple who have adopted her. She does this in a style and with a vocabulary which are at times unlikely and inappropriate for a child of her age, but which are of vital interest for the pointers they contain to Wohmann's own opinions. The child is an avid reader, and identifies with the isolation of the child characters she encounters in certain stories, which gives Wohmann the chance of introducing a remarkable passage where the stories being referred to are her own Der Knurrhahn-Stil and Wachsfiguren:

Das Kind erinnerte sich an zwei Geschichten von Kindern, die aus Einsamkeitsschmerz nicht mehr leben wollten. Das eine Kind war auf seiner Lieblingsbühne immer weiter ins Meer gegangen und hatte dann die Flut abgewartet. Ins Wasser mit dem Kind, die Flut verschlang das Kind. Das andere Kind wurde Hase genannt, weil es eine Hasenscharte hatte. Keiner in der Familie hatte dieses Kind besonders gern. Der häßliche kleine Hase störte ... Im Wachsfigurenkabinett war der Hase plötzlich heimlich hinter der sonntäglich vergnügten und aufgeputzten Familie im Gedrängel der ganzen Besucher zurückgeblieben und hatte sich zwischen ausgestopfte Könige und berühmte Schauspieler auf ein gerade freies Podest gestellt und auf dem Podest beschlossen, so schnell wie möglich das Atmen einzustellen (p.228).

Paulinchen's identification with the children in these stories is not, however, total, since the mini-adult which Wohmann has created in the figure of Paulinchen is capable of rationalising her present loneliness and relating it to more hopeful future prospects:

Für mich ist es nicht aussichtslos. Ich kann soviel genießen. Mich erwartet noch viel zuviel, ich bin neugierig auf mich (p.229).

It is this kind of intellectual precociousness which makes Paulinchen the least convincing of all Wohmann's child figures, and it comes as no surprise when Wohmann admits that the child is a conscious mouth-piece for herself:

Sicher, das Kind ist nicht typisch, ich habe es halt erfunden, es ist eine Kunstfigur, ich habe auch nicht recherchiert, was in achtjährigen Kindern vorgeht. Ich habe viel von mir selber in das Kind hineingesteckt.¹

1) In: Dieter E. Zimmer, 'Weg mit der Tarnung', Die Zeit, 20.12.74.

Isolation in Wohmann's terms is not to be confused with being alone, which is regarded as therapeutic and vital for survival. In a passage which again refers directly to Wohmann herself¹, Paulinchen's bedroom area is described:

Die eigene Wand des Kindes war bespickt mit Bildchen, Ausschnitten aus Zeitschriften, mit Ansichtskarten und mit Zitaten, auch mit eigenen Zitaten und mit aufgeklebten Zetteln, die es selbst beschrieben hatte: darauf standen Sätze und Zeilen, die ihm gefielen. Sie drückten etwas aus, das es selber auch schon empfunden hatte oder das eine Empfindungsmöglichkeit in ihm war. Das Kind liebte seine eigene Wand, aber es wünschte sich vergeblich einen Vorhangsverschlag, der die Wand ähnlich wie sein Bett abschirmte. Dahinter wäre es gern mit seiner Wand allein, oft, jederzeit wenn möglich und nötig (p.27).

The irony in Paulinchen's situation lies in the fact that she can find neither privacy nor companionship in the home of her new guardians Kurt and Christa, in spite of the latter's assurance:

Das Haus ist ja außerdem sozusagen türlos², und sie hat keine Besuchssperren bei Kurt und mir und keine Zimmerverbote und nirgendwo Grenzen, sie kann uns - einen von uns, wir machen das miteinander ab - jederzeit erreichen, wenn sie uns braucht. Wir teilen uns in sie, in ihre Sorgen, sozusagen (p.14).

The companionship is hollow and insincere, the privacy is insufficient, so that finally the child reaches the decision to ask to be sent to a boarding school, paradoxically, where in the midst of the enforced cohabitation she will feel secure in her personal apartness.

The temptation to hope that the isolation endured by children in Wohmann's works could at least be partly attributed (Paulinchen apart) to their inability to give adequate expression to their feelings, and

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- 1) Compare the comment of Georg Hensel as he interviewed Gabriele Wohmann:
'Ich sage nichts, weil ich damit beschäftigt bin, wenigstens ein paar der Zettel abzuschreiben, die sich Gabriele an die Wand geheftet hat, ins Blickfeld des Schreibtischs.'
In 'Ich bin da einfach reingeraten. Die Schriftstellerin Gabriele Wohmann, porträtiert von ihrem Nachbarn Georg Hensel', Die Weltwoche, 12.7.72. The interview also appears as 'Portrait Gabriele Wohmann' in the Materialienbuch, pp.31-38 (p.32).
 - 2) Gabriele Wohmann's own house is virtually without doors inside also.

to hope that greater powers of articulation in adulthood could lead to increased communication and less acute isolation, is rapidly revealed to be misguided when the adult characters are scrutinised. The stunted emotional development as children produces emotionally deprived adults, and it is here that Wohmann illustrates most vividly the strangulation of human intercourse as a result of the isolation of the individual, and the total permeation of human life by this isolation.

3.2 Isolation in Adulthood

Isolation within even the most intimate relationships between the sexes appears frequently in Wohmann's works and is symptomatic of the communication barriers which the characters are unable to surmount. The image of 'die Wand der Zeitung'¹, for instance, regularly suggests both a physical and emotional barricade between a couple, a barricade which leaves the excluded person feeling confused and bitter. Such is the situation in Hamster, Hamster!², where the narrator, temporarily without even the television set to relieve the monotony of her marriage, persistently divides her unwelcome attention between the equally unreceptive figures of her husband Sammy and her hamster Henry:

Interessant, das Zeug, was du liest? ... Interessant Sammy? Wer ist gestorben? Oh, du brauchst es mir nicht zu sagen, ich finde auch, man soll nicht so viel über Trauriges reden ... Ist das eine schwierige Woche ohne den Apparat, herrje. Ich meine bloß! Ich käme blendend aus ohne die Fernseherei, wenn man mit dir reden könnte ... Ich weiß, du findest mich geschwätzig, ich weiß, Sammy. Aber ich weiß nicht, was ohne mein Gerede mit uns wäre, hörst du mich, ohne meinen Gesang um alles, ohne meine Worte über uns - was wäre mit uns, Sam, was? Ich glaube nicht, daß wir überhaupt noch lebten ohne meine Stimme, ohne meine Nachreden (pp.119 and 122).

The tension and frustration in the woman's voice is almost palpable as she attempts to lure her husband into a verbal exchange with her, however brief. His refusal to appear to condone the garrulity of his

1) Schönes goldenes Haar in Ländliches Fest, pp.72-75 (p.72).

2) In Erzählungen (Ebenhausen), pp.111-131 .

wife by responding to her conversational overtures forces her into a kind of rhetorical monologue in which she propounds the palliative effect of her conversations on the sterility of their daily lives. She appears a pathetic and lonely figure, being emotionally tortured by a silence which is broken only by her own unsolicited remarks.

In Abschied für länger the lack of communication leading to the isolation of the lovers from each other is formalised in the serious and deteriorating throat ailment of Strass, with the result that he becomes progressively more silent and withdrawn. The pain which he experiences when talking proves to be a plausible excuse for not talking, which is evidently the situation he prefers¹. In the passage quoted below, where the couple are staying with acquaintances at a time when their relationship is becoming increasingly unstable, Wohmann masterfully portrays the breakdown of communication between them:

Monica rief Essen. Und um zu reden, stritt ich allein über die Benennung von Mücken, Fliegen und Schnaken. Monica rief Essen, und ich redete weiter über blauschwarze Flecken im Herbstlaub, dann sagte ich: denen zu Haus geht's schlecht ohne mich. Ich weiß nicht, ob Strass zuhörte. Essen, rief Monica, mein Vater bekommt keinen Tee, meine Mutter liegt in Ischiasschmerzen, mein Bruder lernt nicht, freundet sich nicht an, singt nicht mehr weiter, Strass schlief nicht; er sah mich nicht einmal neugierig an, er flüsterte, um seine Kehle zu schonen: Wir müssen zum Essen (p.96).

Various psychological weapons are employed by the narrator in this passage. Firstly, she introduces a totally alien subject of conversation in the hope of gaining Strass's attention, after their intimacy has already been disturbed by a call that they should join the others for a meal. On noticing her lack of success, and once more being interrupted by the intrusion of the voice from without, she goes off at a tangent, seeking to impose emotional pressure on her lover by reminding him of his privileged position of enjoying her company while her family are reportedly suffering through her absence. All the time the narrator's frustration is increased by the fact that she does not even know if Strass is listening. She is battling in limbo, unsure of whether her

1) Compare: 'Viel reden [lag] ihm nie' (p.29), and: 'Strass aber ist ein Nachgeber, um es still zu haben' (p.52).

opponent is apathy or hostility. In order to substantiate her comment on her family's suffering, she is now forced to enumerate trivial details of their lack of well-being, and in so doing she lends them a totally false tone of importance. Strass had not even complied by showing total boredom and succumbing to sleep, which would at least have given her a tangible cause for annoyance; neither, however, does he display the slightest trace of interest, and instead he responds to the invitation from outside and suggests that they go and eat. His subdued tone is not a means of preserving the intimate atmosphere between them, but is merely a way of avoiding putting undue strain on his already failing voice.

In Protokoll zur Person, Wohmann suggests a reason why people are unable to communicate:

Eine Person kann auch dadurch unfähig sein, sich mitzuteilen, daß die andere Person nichts mitgeteilt bekommen will (Angst vor Unvorhergesehenem, Überraschungsfaktoren, das Abbild könnte nicht mehr mit dem Original übereinstimmen, Angst vor dem Original) (pp.149-150).

This theory is of particular relevance with regard to the narrator in Abschied für länger, since her ability to communicate is clearly hampered by the awareness that Strass wishes to have no lasting part in her life and that he intends to be uninvolved in her problems. This is indicated by her reference to their 'ernste unaufgeklärte Angelegenheit' (p.49), and by the last words of the book, where she describes Strass's reaction to her confessions of guilt concerning her sister's death¹:

Ich war schuld dran, sagte ich zu Strass in sämtlichen Zimmern. Er hat es nicht hören wollen, nett wie er ist und zu müde für alle Bekenntnisse (p.121).

In the somewhat humorous outcome of the short story Die Antwort², Wohmann takes the question of communication a step further. At the vital moment in a wedding ceremony, when all eyes are on the groom for the pronouncement of the proverbial 'I will', the man is struck dumb:

1) See also the more detailed assessment in Chapter 6.1. of this thesis.

2) In Habgier (Düsseldorf, 1973), pp.65-70.

Der Pfarrer hatte zu Ende gefragt und sah seinen besten Schüler an: Georg, willst du Trudy, willst du, willst du, sag es endlich, sag es! Das war schon kein Warten mehr: durch diese stumme Pause spannte sich Entsetzen (p.69).

Leaving aside the possible psychosomatic causes for such a strange occurrence, conclusions can be drawn about Wohmann's view of the frailty of human relationships; her depiction of a lifelong partnership being entered upon, as happens here, without the actual consent of one partner, reflects her deep concern at the lack of reflection and the neglect of communication characteristic of so many relationships.

Similarly, in the story Vor der Hochzeit¹, a young girl feels frightened at the thought of leaving familiar surroundings and familiar people to marry a man whom she feels she hardly knows, and yet is prepared to put her whole future at stake for the sake of social convention:

Ich heirat ihn, kenn ihn gar nicht, die andern
tuns auch und nennens Glückhaben (p.136).

In the story Flitterwochen, dritter Tag², Wohmann permits no illusions to linger when she demonstrates that isolation and alienation begin if not before, then immediately after the marriage, in the supposedly idyllic setting of the honeymoon. Here the woman is being informed by her new husband of the detailed plans he has for the way her future life should be structured:

Du wirst deine Arbeit aufgeben. Du wirst einfach
kündigen ... Die Wohnung werden wir nach deinem
Geschmack einrichten ... Hauptsache, du bist dein
blödes Büro los ... (pp.103-104).

The patronising concession that their apartment should be furnished according to his wife's taste does little to diminish the crushing effect of the husband's offensive belittling of his wife's occupation as he peremptorily decides upon her resignation and furthermore applies the epithet 'blöd' to describe her place of work. But all the time her husband is speaking, the woman's attention is drawn to a man with a sizeable wart, which looks like a polypus. Her revulsion, though

1) In Erzählungen (Karlsruhe), pp.133-137.

2) In Ländliches Fest, pp.103-105.

subdued, is evident, and culminates in the successful 'pointe' at the end of the story when it is revealed that the man with the wart is in fact her husband. For the woman, the marriage (entered into, one suspects, again, for the sake of social conventions) has meant the sacrificing of her personal liberty to the domination of a man who has no regard for her interests and who, moreover, physically repels her.¹ For the man the marriage provides a practical area in which he can exercise his male-chauvinistic tendencies, while deluding himself that the arrangement is ideal for them both:

Liebling, he! Wir sind getraut! Du und ich,
wir zwei ... Freust du dich, Schatz? ... Auf alles,
Schatz? (pp.103 and 105).

With no mutual ground of interest in the marriage, it is reasonable to assume that the isolation, particularly of the woman, who already feels alienated, will increase rapidly.

In another honeymoon situation, in the story Endlich allein - endlich zu zwein², the bride leaves her sleeping husband to roam the decks of the ship on which they are travelling, and pretends to be a divorcee in search of adventure:

Sie spürte eine schmerzende Anspannung im Kopf
und in den Gliedern. Die drei Decks durchstreifen
auf der Spur eines Abenteuers ... Allein sein und
frei für irgendeinen neuen Anfang (p.25).

The admission of the distaste she feels at the thought of remaining in the cramped bunk bed with her husband, 'im friedfertigen Schwitzen der Hochzeitsnacht' (p.25), is the first step towards turning her mental alienation into physical reality, and rejecting the dissemblance which would characterise their sexual activity³.

One of the most tragically isolated figures in Wohmann's works is the main character in Jetzt und nie. The man remains unnamed⁴ throughout the work, and is thus dependent on his relationships with others in

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- 1) This explains her focusing on her husband's wart as a form of symbolic revenge.
 - 2) In Trinken ist das Herrlichste, pp.25-34.
 - 3) For a further assessment of female characters' reaction to the sexual act, see thesis Chapter 7.2.
 - 4) Apart from one indirect reference made by his father to: 'Mein Sohn Edmund' (p.53).

order to define his own identity and role in life. He is in turn: Veronika's husband, Ritz's father, Sissy's occasional lover, Migge's cultural companion, Pellis's business colleague, and the hero of the daydreams of the young girl working in the children's home. The man's total dissatisfaction with his situation and his increasing longing for death¹, have led him to recognise these roles as meaningless functions imposed by society. He feels alienated from himself and his environment:

Fremdkörper, der er war, menschliches entfremdetes
Fleisch (p.29).

At other times he refers to 'seine Unzugehörigkeit' (p.8) and 'ein Gefühl des Ausgestoßenseins' (p.13), but perhaps his most potent attempt at the assessment of his alienation occurs when he imagines how others will remember him after he is dead, starting with the girl Martina, whose affections he is pursuing at the time:

Wer ist er? Weiß nicht. Einer, der nach gutem Rasierwasser roch und erfahren war, Frau und Kind hatte er, aber die gingen uns nichts an. Er wollt mir sagen, wie das Rasierwasser heißt. Und er, wie heißt er? Weiß nicht. Was hatte er mit Ihnen zu tun? Er wollt mit mir schlafen. Wenn sie Ritz fragen: einer der kam und mir verdorbene Pflaumen mitbrachte, die ich ins Clo warf, und der nichts mit mir zu sprechen wußte, winke winke machte ich, wenn er ging. Migges menschenfreundlicher Kulturkompagnon, ein Freund der schönen Künste, berühmte Whiskyschnauze, ohne Namen. Keiner weiß. Er las vor und kaufte Bonbons und war nicht gut genug. Und Dichter bisweilen, mehr oder weniger pathetisch. Und anonym als ein Tier (p.226).

He has lived in anonymity and isolation, and in death, too, he will be isolated, since his failure to establish meaningful relationships in life suggests that his presence in the memory of those who knew him will be short lived.

For the narrator in Ernste Absicht, likewise unnamed in the text, the isolation² of her room in hospital provides her with a temporary escape from the responsibilities of emotional commitments with her family and friends:

1) See thesis Chapter 4.1.

2) In this instance, however, the isolation is a positive factor, enabling the narrator to be alone with her thoughts.

Ich kann also hier etwas genießen: Unzugehörigkeiten. Es geht mich nichts an (p.462).

This, however, will only be a temporary reprieve from the problems of learning how to form successful and positive relationships with those around her, which is arguably the narrator's greatest problem. Fear of involvement frequently paralyses her spontaneous desire to express her care and concern for others, and this results in a constant battle within herself to camouflage her affection in the belief that by isolating herself, she will make herself less vulnerable. It is fear, for instance, which makes her recoil from the emotional demands made by Helene, the debilitated sister of her ex-husband:

Adieu, Schwägerin, Adieu, ehe dein Irrsinn,
ehe dein Elend mich wirklich angreifen, ehe womöglich
irgendwas wirklich passiert, ehe mich womöglich
wirklich irgendwas bewegt, ehe mir womöglich jede
Ausrede im Hals stecken bleibt und ich bleiben muß
(pp.328-329).

In her desperation to avoid over-identification with others, however, the narrator is awakened to the frightening realisation that she can no longer identify with herself either:

Du bist neben dir, das ist dein Körper, aber du
bist nicht da. Du bist nicht mit dir identisch,
also bist du nicht frei (p.273).

Dein Körper, neben dem du hertappst, dein Körper,
in den du zurückwillst, dein Körper, das bist du
nicht. Darin befindet sich - wer denn? Keiner
(pp.308-309).

The novel becomes a search for self-knowledge, an attempt to regain her own identity, and a struggle to overcome the fear of accepting committed relationships, which would free her from her isolation. The prospects are not encouraging, as is suggested by the comment at the end of the novel:

Ich sterbe, am Leben, immer weiter. Unverbindlich,
unentschlossen (p.486),

but the positive step of recognising and analysing the problem has been taken, and the lengthy process of solving it has at least begun.

Symptomatic of the extreme isolation and loneliness experienced by so many of Wohmann's characters is their frequent recourse to alcohol in the hope of finding comfort, however temporary. In the short story and

radio play Komm donnerstags¹, for instance, Cäcilie drinks heavily to compensate for an undesirable husband, an unfortunately ugly child, and a broken love affair. The bleakness of her prospects results in her total despair:

Weißt du, das Leben ist so öde. Ist es nicht
schrecklich öde (p.22).

In Hamster, Hamster! the husband and wife seek to relieve the tedium and inevitable conflict when they spend an evening together by first ensuring that alcohol soothes their nerves:

Man trank sich in Stimmung (Erzählungen
(Ebenhausen), p.114).

And in Trinken ist das Herrlichste², a brief attempt is made by one of the characters to analyse the individual's need to drink:

Weswegen trinkt der Mensch, frag ich dich. -
Aus Angst. Wer nicht trinkt, ist hilflos (p.13).

Alcohol has played a problematic part in Gabriele Wohmann's own life, and it would not seem frivolous to suggest that her treatment of the subject in her works has been, in part, a personal safety-valve in coming to terms with the problem. In his portrait of the author, Georg Hensel writes:

Sie zeigt mir ihre Tabletten³, Revonal retard,
das ist nichts Besonderes, das nehme ich gelegentlich
auch, und sie sagt, als schäme sie sich dessen: 'Seit
ersten Juli 71 trinke ich nicht mehr.' 1963 hieß ihr
Erzählungsband 'Trinken ist das Herrlichste', jetzt
steht ein Glas vor ihr mit Lindenblütentee
(Materialienbuch, p.35).

Equally interesting is the dialogue reported in Schönes Gehege, where Plath, undeniably Wohmann's spokesman⁴, replies to the provocative remark:

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- 1) In Der Monat 28 (1961/62), pp.21-24. (First broadcast by the Hessischer Rundfunk, 29.4.64. Also published separately by DTV (Munich, 1981)).
 - 2) In Trinken ist das Herrlichste, pp.7-14.
 - 3) 'Social' drug abuse (especially with Valium) is the theme of Wohmann's television play Entziehung (ZDF, June 1973; published edition: Entziehung. Materialien zu einem Fernsehfilm (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1974)), in which Wohmann played the leading role.
 - 4) At least with regard to fundamental issues of 'Weltanschauung' such as this.

Waren es nicht doch außerdem produktivere Zeiten, jetzt meinen wir, als auch Sie noch zu den Alkoholkonsumenten gehörten ... Sie schrieben ganz schön hochprozentige Sachen,

with the retort:

Ich schrieb nie mit Alkohol, den trank ich im Privatleben, und was ich jetzt schreibe, seit ich nichts mehr trinke, ist noch immer toxisch, wenn Sie so wollen (p.135).

The toxic nature of Wohmann's works lies in her descriptions of the misery of everyday situations, where boredom, lack of affection and emotional isolation drain people of their enthusiasm for life. Wohmann believes strongly that a successful everyday existence is in many ways the key to human happiness. This she shows unequivocally through the observations of Robert Plath in Schönes Gehege (see thesis p.56), although her own observations would seem to indicate that she feels that the overwhelming majority of relationships lack the solid foundation of trust, respect and affection on which Robert and Johanna Plath's marriage is built. In the interview with Ekkehart Rudolph she is challenged on this point, with the comment:

Bei Ihnen gibt es vor allem ein Thema, das immer wiederkehrt: das ist der Alltag, das zermürbende Einerlei des Alltags, des Ehealltags zum Beispiel. In Ihren Arbeiten spielt die Ehe, spielen die Beziehungen zwischen Mann und Frau immer eine große Rolle. Aber diese Beziehungen werden kaum bejubelt ... Jedenfalls wird das verödende Einerlei dieser Beziehungen dargestellt (Protokoll zur Person, p.148).

Wohmann's reply reveals a great deal about her personal philosophy of life:

Gerade weil ich vom Alltag viel halte, weil ich sein Gelingen für sehr wichtig halte, gerade deshalb zeige ich auf seine häßlichen Kehrseiten, auf sein zerstörerisches Mißlingen. Als Modelle für diejenigen, die den Alltag herstellen müssen, bieten Familien, Ehepaare sich natürlich an. Ans Zermürben denke ich eigentlich weniger als an die Verzweiflung über die Aporien von Verständigung, im Bewußtsein von dem, was schön und gut und richtig ist (pp.148-149).

The ugly underside of everyday existence, which Wohmann ruthlessly exposes in order to warn of its consequences, is produced not only by rejection and emotional starvation, but also by the effects of

excessive interference and emotional demands which quickly suffocate the victim. When one member of the family in the story Nichts Geringeres als Liebe¹, breaks under the strain of the engulfing family interference into her private life, she is viewed by them as neurotic and ungrateful:

Ist das ihre Qual? Ist es das? Ist es das?
Ihre Qualglocke, saugpfötchenstreichelnde Liebe,
räkelnde Liebesfäden, Tanten, Kinder, Vater, Mutter,
Freunde, schleichend um sie gezogen, wir holen sie
nicht heraus, wir decken sie tiefer zu, umschmeicheln
und bepappen sie mit galertigem Gitterwerk, so fein
und undurchdringlich und durchwirkt von nichts
Geringerem als Liebe (p.71).²

The burden of the stifling interest of the numerous and completely insensitive members of the family isolates the individual every bit as much as total lack of affection and involvement. A situation such as this completes the picture of the isolation of the individual in Wohmann's works. Isolation is shown to follow the attempt to force a person to abandon his solitude and privacy, indeed, his identity itself as in the case above, or else it is consciously sought by the individual who fears the demands of emotional attachments, as in the case of the narrator in Ernste Absicht, or it is the undesired and emotionally damaging response of other people to the individual who longs for fellowship, as, for instance, in the examples given of isolation in children.

Paradoxically, however, the problem of isolation does not resolve itself even where the emotional attachment between individuals is balanced and genuine, and where mutual support is potentially the most stabilising element of the relationship. In such cases fear of the pain which can accompany the deep emotional attachment, especially in cases of bereavement, hampers the free expression of affection:

Etwas macht uns immer noch unzufrieden. Etwas entzweit uns, treibt Keile zwischen uns, ist identisch mit dem, was uns aneinanderdrängt, es ist die Unruhe umeinander. Um unserer eigenen Sicherheit willen sollten wir uns viel weniger gern haben. Diesem formlosen Monstrum Liebe müssen wir ein Übermaß an Zurückhaltung, Stauung und Kühle entgegenstemmen. (Ernste Absicht, p.251).

1) In Trinken ist das Herrlichste, pp.68-75.

2) This passage appears in capitals in the text, clearly emphasising the importance of its content.

The question of death and bereavement, so intricately connected with the evaluation of all relationships, is one which has been of deep concern to Gabriele Wohmann in all her major works. Through her attitude to death further revelations are made about her philosophy of life, and the awesome prospect of the ultimate form of isolation, death, at times is seen to dwarf all other considerations.

Chapter 4

Death

Ich sage: mich beunruhigt der Tod, weil
mich das Leben beunruhigt (Ernste Absicht, p.58)

The contemplation of death, engendered initially by fear, which pervades Wohmann's major works, is one of the most consistently revealing features of the author's development. This contemplation takes the form of a veritable dialogue with death, where the author grapples verbally with the philosophical implications of the termination of life, and death replies with its impassionate physical reality. The most significant aspect of Wohmann's contemplation of death is the way in which her own attitude gradually evolves from one of fear to one of acceptance, creating a pronounced sense of inner peace in some of her later works - in particular in Schönes Gehege and Ausflug mit der Mutter. The comparison of the two passages below, the first from the early work Jetzt und nie and the second from Schönes Gehege, indicates this change well:

Wollen uns mit aller Gewalt am Leben erhalten. Alle. Quasseln vom schönen Jenseits, wollen aber nicht hin. Keiner. Wollen Nonnen hin oder Mönche, religiöse Fanatiker, Selbstmörder? Sollte man mal in Erfahrung bringen. Wollen vielleicht, weil Tod und Jenseits für sie vorstellbare Begriffe sind. Für uns zu abstrakt. Konkret nur modriges Grab als Ruhestätte nach abscheulichen Agonien. Reden uns was vom Jenseits ein, damit wir die Angst verlieren? (Jetzt und nie, p.34).

Ich muß euren Tod hinter meinen Tod verlegen, ich muß von meinem Tod hoffen, daß ich durch ihn euren Tod annehmen kann, daß er mir dann einleuchtet, daß ich da irgendwelche Zusammenhänge kapiere und daß ich das Ende von allem nicht als das größte Entsetzen umgehe, sondern als die größte Hoffnung und den wahren Anfang, als etwas endlich Erreichtes, Eingelöstes, Erlöstes, es sogar bejahe (Schönes Gehege, pp.110-111).

For the main character in Jetzt und nie, who is seriously ill and who therefore must view death as an imminent prospect, it is an unimaginable concept whose abstract form cannot be anticipated during life. Without the religious belief in an after-life, he can envisage only horrendous pain before death and physical decay afterwards. He interprets talk of life after death as no more than a panacea for fear. In death he will exist in the memory of others merely as the conglomeration

of his most characteristic physical activities, as he is convinced that they will think of him as no more than a:

totgesoffengerauchtgeliebtgehaßtgelebter Kulturmanager (p.35).

Set against this, the approach of Robert Plath in Schönes Gehege, published seventeen years after Jetzt und nie, is vastly different. Forced to come to terms with the fact that his much loved, but ageing parents may soon die, he finds that he can formulate his thoughts in the direction of hope and optimism. Death must not be shunned as the end of all things, but rather must be embraced as the true beginning, and as such must be affirmed. While such thoughts contain unmistakably religious overtones, Wohmann never commits herself to the acceptance of any orthodox religious dogmas. It seems probable that her upbringing in a practising Christian family has indeed equipped her with a distinct religious awareness, but it is one which defies definition and which remains very much a personal, often nebulous faith.

The transformation from a sensation of fear at the thought of death to inner peace at the thought of a continued existence after death can best be traced by a closer examination of the theme of death in the novels Jetzt und nie, Ernste Absicht and Schönes Gehege.¹ Each novel presents a different and highly individualistic attitude to death and each marks a different stage in Wohmann's thoughts on the death of the individual and at times also on the problems of bereavement.

4.1 Jetzt und nie

Gesunde leben nur partiell. Leben lebt am Leben vorbei. Muß mal kurz vorm Abkratzen gewesen sein um zu wissen, wie leben ist (Jetzt und nie, p.34).

Inherent in the presentation of death in Jetzt und nie is the ambiguity of the disillusioned intellect which still clings hopelessly to ineffectual romantic ideals. The main character is suffering from a critical heart complaint; he is acutely aware of the closeness of death²,

1) Novels rather than short stories were chosen here to illustrate Wohmann's changing approach to death, since they offer a more accessible chronological guide to the author's attitudes.

2) This is indicated by the leitmotif: 'Mit einem Bein im Grab' which appears on the following pages: 32 (twice), 54, 55, 61, 62, 64, 89, 91, 126, 129, 178.

he is burdened by the knowledge that his wife, too, is dangerously ill, and that his son has been virtually abandoned by him in a children's home. Over and above this, he now feels only contempt for his profession¹ and for his former cultural interests. These are the factors which drive him into the quicksand of idealised solutions: he seeks physical bliss in an affair with a young girl², and metaphysical bliss in his conception of the ideal death. Neither wish is fulfilled in the course of the novel.

In an image which forms one of the leitmotifs in the work, the man envisages dying like a mussel on the seashore³, whereby he would be purified and freed from pain:

Sterben wie eine Muschel. Sandig, salzig, schmerzlos. Saubergewaschen. Sterben und an der Flutmarke aufs Wasser warten und auf den Wind warten, trocken und naß und tot (p.31).

The comforting romanticism of these thoughts offers him spiritual sustenance most of the time, and even allows for a qualified welcoming of death:

Wollen und wollen nicht sterben. Unbereitwillige Bereitschaft (p.227),

but the inclusion of the parallel leitmotif of the popular song title 'Isn't it romantic'⁴ indicates that his illusions are constantly under attack from relentless self irony.

The reality of the approach of death is far removed from his romantic conceptions. It is brutal, humiliating and irreverent, and it produces only revulsion in the man's mind, in particular because he

1) The man is a sales representative for a bitumen and asphalt producing company. His distaste for his profession is captured in his description of colleagues competing for commissions: 'Zappelnde Bitumenvertreterflieglein balgen sich um das Tröpfchen Honig, das am Löffel klebt' (p.75).

2) See thesis Chapter 7.1.

3) pp.27, 31, 41, 52, 60, 64, 67, 85, 93, 100, 105, 126, 132, 145, 151, 160, 179.

4) pp.25, 36 (twice), 42, 45, 59, 62 (three times), 67, 80, 87, 100, 107 (twice), 114, 118, 140, 142, 148, 165, 171, 192, 209, 213, 215 (twice), 219, 220.

has seen the once stunning beauty of his dying wife deformed by the ugliness of obesity as she turned to food for her only consolation:

Wie verfressen sie sind, ein paar Monate vor dem Tod. Na, sie haben nur noch das (p.9),

Verfressene gierige Todeskandidatin ... Hängt an ihren kleinen Freuden (p.64).

Within the course of the novel the man suffers two painful and demoralising attacks (pp.30-33 and 149-151), which impress upon him the gravity of his condition. After the pain of the first attack has abated, he reflects upon the revival of his senses:

Das Gefühl der Kälte kam wieder, aber er nahm es wohligh auf. Lebendig fühlte er sich vom Frieren durchschauert, freudig froh er im Behagen seiner Empfindsamkeit für alles, was von außen auf ihn einwirkte. Er registrierte mit physischer Freude schlaffe müde zaghafte Glieder, die das Bewußtsein deutlich wieder zurückgewann. Zehen: bewegliche, lebendige Zehen; kühle kratzige Sandhäufchen in den Zwischenräumen. Einen hungrigen Magen. Schwachen lebendigen Druck auf der Blase. Im trocknen Gaumen weckte salziger Geschmack das Verlangen nach Feuchtigkeit. Wünsche, kleine körperliche Unbehaglichkeiten - wiedergewonnenes Leben (p.33).

Each physical sensation, even less pleasant ones such as coldness, tiredness, hunger, the desire to pass urine, dryness of the mouth, is a sheer joy to him as it indicates that he is still alive and his body still functioning. The repetition of the word 'lebendig' and the abundance of sensory denotations such as 'Gefühl', 'Empfindsamkeit', 'Bewußtsein' and 'Verlangen' convey his pleasure and relief at his 'wiedergewonnenes Leben'. The aftermath of the second attack, however, leaves no further room for optimism, when a sudden surging of vomit seems to symbolise the malignant force of illness within the man's body, awaiting the moment when it too will surge up and destroy him completely:

... Und den Schmerz in der Brust spürte er zugleich mit der Übelkeit, die aus ihm vorbrach wie etwas, das in ihm gewohnt hatte, wachsam seine Zeit ablauerte (p.151).

His very contemplation, therefore, of the elemental purity of a death cleansed by the sea and the wind would seem to be no more than a sad and desperate delusion. All the indications are that when the moment of death comes, it is unlikely that the man will experience anything

above the crippling pain and disability of the final attack.

Considering the unrelenting proximity of death in Jetzt und nie, it is perhaps surprising that it is to the novel Ernste Absicht that the poet and critic Karl Krolow refers with the comment:

Ich glaube nicht zu übertreiben, wenn ich dieses Buch als das todessüchtigste Buch bezeichne, das mir in diesen Jahren unter die Augen gekommen ist.¹

In comparison with Jetzt und nie, Ernste Absicht would seem to provide an almost frivolous treatise on death, as will be seen below, in spite of the title of the book, which clearly indicates Wohmann's concern for her subject matter.

4.2 Ernste Absicht

Gelangweilt? Dann empfiehlt sich die mit äußerster Spannung geladene Vorfremde auf das äußerste, das größte Abenteuer, das Ihrer Biografie vergönnt sein wird, die knisternde äußerste Spannung beim Denken daran, daß Sie sterben werden. Einen besseren Kitzel gibt es nicht für Sie.²

In Ernste Absicht the speculation on death is undertaken by the first person narrator, a woman in her mid-thirties, who is about to undergo major surgery for the removal of unspecified internal growths ('gewachsene Gewächse', p.21). The novel is a record of her personal stock-taking both before and after the operation, as part of her preparation for the eventuality that she might die as a result of the treatment. What seems frivolous by comparison with the situation in Jetzt und nie is that the narrator appears to flirt with death from a position of relative safety:

Das ganze Unternehmen ist eine Art von Selbstmordversuch mit eingebauter Selbsterhaltungstendenz (p.152).

She seems to toy with the idea of dying as a means of conjuring up the reaction of others to her death, and she uses the situation to reassure

1) Karl Krolow, 'Ein todessüchtiges Buch', *Weser-Kurier*, 12.1.71.

2) Nachrichtensperre in Gegenangriff, pp.149-160 (pp.151-152).

herself of the importance she has for others, as, for example, when she confronts her devoted ex-husband with the following statement:

Aber auch in deinem Gesicht sehe ich meinen Tod, sage ich zu meinem Mann, auch in deinem, ich sehe dich, wie du nach meinem Tod alles ordnest, gelegentlich fällt dir ein, daß du was essen müßtest, du hältst dich nicht lange damit auf, du übertreibst gar nichts, du gönnst dir am Abend eine Ruhepause, du vergißt das Weltgeschehen nicht, du liest die Zeitung, du bist sehr traurig, du bist blaß, du erinnerst dich daran, daß es gesund ist, eine Stunde spazierenzugehen, du gehst, das ist unser Weg, ich falle dir ein (pp.67-68).

Death is the most sophisticated weapon she has as a means of extorting the desired emotional response from those close to her. The vision of their suffering after her demise calms her uncertainty about her place in their affections and nurtures her ego, which is temporarily depressed. There can be little doubt that the novel is to some extent a narcissistic exercise in autosuggestion and morale boosting, and here, surely, lies the clue to the real illness of the narrator.

Her physical illness is incidental, but is vital in order that the confrontation with death can be undertaken on plausible grounds. This confrontation is ambiguous in that, on the one hand, it is a flirtation with death, as has already been suggested, but, on the other, it is an embryonic suicide wish. As this is something which the narrator herself cannot fully accept, she puts the verbal formulation of the situation into the words of a doctor, as she imagines his comment after her death during the operation:

Sie hat nicht leiden müssen. Nehmen wir frühere Verhaltensweisen aus ihrem Leben, so läßt sich vielleicht sogar auf Einverständnis schließen. Sie hat sich immerhin und zuletzt für den bequemsten Selbstmord entschieden, ging allerdings die Überlebensgefahr ein. Sie hatte Glück. Sie ist einer der heutzutage ganz seltenen Fälle, die das tödliche Glück im Op trifft (p.179).

From this angle, the risk she took was not that she might die during surgery, but that she might survive, that her attempt at committing suicide discreetly and comfortably might misfire. The articulation of the opinion that the narrator was conceivably making a suicide attempt complicates her position still further, as she feels obliged to concede

that, strictly speaking, she would be the last to qualify to be called a suicide case:

Ich habe mich nicht vergiftet, ich habe mir eine Tetanussspritze geben lassen, sogar mein Gebiß schütze ich vor dem Verfall, ich entferne meine Splitter, ich benutze das Heizkissen, ich legte meine Schädeldecke nicht an die Kreissäge, ich warf mich nicht vor den Zug, ich betrete die Straße nicht bei Rot, halte mich auch fern von den Möglichkeiten Erschießen, Strangulation. Dennoch schneide ich kleine Meldungen, die den Tod betreffen, aus meiner Lokalzeitung und hefte sie an die Wände (p.198).

The one word 'dennoch' is of particular significance here; for although the narrator has no actual reason for wishing to die, and although she admits that she has never made any serious attempt to end her life, 'nevertheless' she is obsessed with death, to the extent of cutting out newspaper clippings and pinning them to the wall as a constant reminder of the presence of death. Her own death will not be a dramatic event of shocking proportions, instead it will be the outcome of the relentless daily corrosion of the will to live:

... ich sterbe täglich in kleiner Dosierung, anstatt mir durchs Herz zu schießen oder mich mit eiszeitlichem Dolinenwasser aufzublähen, ja, ja, so hebe ich mich auf, während es endet und damit weitergeht, ja so sterbe ich nicht, während ich sterbe, denn ich hatte keine Lust, da haben Sie mein Motiv (p.203).

The one factor which prevents her from encouraging a premature encounter with death is fear. Fear of life makes her contemplate death, yet fear of death prevents her from taking decisive action to end her life:

Es ist nur ein Schritt zwischen mir und dem Tode. Der Schritt Horror. ... Aus Angst hast du dich nicht ausreichend vergiftet. Aus Angst hast du angefangen, dich zu vergiften. Über diese geringe Entfernung zwischen dir und dem Tode denkst du nach aus Angst. Diese geringe Entfernung zwischen dir und dem Tode legst du aus Angst nicht zurück. Es ist dieser eine Schritt. Die Angst verlängert den Schritt. Die Angst erinnert dich an den Schritt (p.337).

The narrator has, therefore, reached an impasse with virtually no room for manoeuvre. She knows that she must decide between surrendering herself to death or rededicating herself to life, and that one step in either direction would suffice, but her fear effects a total paralysis.

Not only does fear obstruct her path towards either life or death, but it also adds to her torment by forcing her to reflect continuously on the extremely narrow divide between them. By the end of the novel not an inch of progress has been made towards a solution of her problems, which seem likely to continue indefinitely. The achievement of the novel as regards its thematic content, therefore, lies not in its ability to provide a resolution of the problems described, but in the clarity it produces through the presentation of the issues and in its honest concession of the inability to solve them.

Five years later, in the novel Schönes Gehege, death is confronted in a very different manner: fear gives way to reconciliation, death is no longer viewed as a negative terminal force, and the resulting maturity of judgement suggests that Gabriele Wohmann had by then reached a significant plateau of harmony in the contemplation of the transitory nature of human life.

4.3 Schönes Gehege

Vor uns liegen andere Wahrheiten, mit uns sind
andere Wahrheiten, viel anstrengendere: die
Verwandten sterben (Schönes Gehege, p.103).

Schönes Gehege marks a turning point in Gabriele Wohmann's writing, as has already been indicated, brought about by the painful realisation that the passage of time means that loved ones are beginning to die. It is written, significantly, at the time of the death (September 1974) of Wohmann's own father, Paul Daniel Guyot, to whom she was deeply attached (compare Vaterporträt in Selbstverteidigung, pp.197-213), and there can be little doubt that this sad event is instrumental in her change of attitude. In Schönes Gehege, the death of Robert Plath's much loved father sets in motion a complete reassessment and restructuring of his life. He renounces his once regular adventures in extra-marital love affairs (p.103), which so hurt and insulted his wife Johanna, whom he loves; he renounces the 'böser Blick' (p.286)¹, which up until then had been the most striking and consistent feature of his

1) This is also one of the most frequently attributed characteristics of Wohmann's own writing (compare thesis p.19).

creative approach, whereby he had deformed and caricatured, abused and belittled all those who appeared in his works:

Er wollte doch seine Umwelt nicht mehr schreibend mißbrauchen. Alles, was ihm zu nah stand, was ihm zu sehr am Herzen lag, wurde doch blindlings Wort für Wort sein Opfer. Er mißhandelte seine engen, diese wenigen engen und für ihn lebensrettenden, immer von plötzlichen Abbrüchen bedrohten Beziehungen zur Wirklichkeit (p.210).¹

And he experiences something like a vocational drive to depict the happy moments of life, to have the courage to endorse the simple everyday joys of living:

Sind denn nicht die Glücksfälle eigentlich mein Ziel, wenn ich etwas zu beschreiben anfangen, und schreibe ich nicht auf ihre wahre Entdeckung zu, in der Absicht, sie, die klein nur scheinen, triftig und lebensrettend vorzuführen, sie ganz zu finden und finden zu lassen? (p.259).

The impact of his father's death is devastating in more than one sense, for Plath must learn to cope with his bereavement at the same time as he is learning to adopt a more positive outlook on life. Fear of death, so powerful in Ernste Absicht, is likewise a decisive element in Schönes Gehege, although here it is tempered by melancholy and solemnity; Plath now applies death as a mechanism for gauging his feelings towards others:²

Plath konnte erst sagen, wie gern er jemanden hatte, wenn er sich vorstellte, daß auch diese Person, die auch, sterben würde (p.185).

This process, however, is of little value in facing up to the death of his father, whom Plath loved almost to excess³. In a most illuminating passage, Plath reveals himself unable to mourn the death; he plans his mourning for a future date, and he feebly attempts to lay the blame for this postponement on the external circumstances surrounding the death:

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- 1) Compare the comments of the narrator in Ernste Absicht, (thesis, p.51.)
 - 2) This is the opposite of the narrator in Ernste Absicht, who applies death as a mechanism for gauging others' feelings towards herself. Compare thesis p.80.
 - 3) Plath is acutely aware of the intensity of his emotions towards his family:
'Gernhaben, das heißt bei mir immer ZUGERNhaben, und glauben Sie ruhig: Das ist nicht einfach '(p.50).

Plath dachte: Ich werde auf Johannas Herbstferien warten. Sie hat es um meinetwillen bei ihrem Chef erreicht, wir haben zwei Tage zusätzlich. Bis dahin muß ich in dieser Betäubtheit bleiben, während es so aussieht, als nähme ich wie die andern teil und kümmere mich wie die andern um die ersten Schmerzen dieser nach mehr als 50 Lebensjahren im Stich gelassenen Frau, meine Mutter heißt jetzt Witwe, und gleich nach dem Tod kommen der Traurigkeit massenhaft bürokratische Belästigungen in den Clinch, das alles werde ich anderswo überdenken, vom Amtsgericht bis zum Steuerberater, dem unauffindbaren Testament, dem Erbschein, alles aus der Ferne (p.310).¹

In the meantime Plath's inner feelings are sufficiently numbed so that he cannot experience the full pain of his grief, and outwardly he feigns involvement in the rest of the family's efforts to console his widowed mother. Understandably the alienating effect of the bureaucratic requirements must contribute towards his apparent impassivity, although in the above context it seems indisputable that they are listed by Plath in a definite attempt at self-exoneration.

In the course of his contemplation of his father's death, however, Plath performs a volte-face, whereupon his perspective changes (although he does not openly admit this) to that of being rather smugly conscious of the satisfaction of still being alive himself. What fears remain are unlikely to be debilitating for long:

Meine Angst vor deinem Tod und vor meinem ist meine
Angst vor meiner Fähigkeit, weiterzumachen, drüberweg-
zukommen, demnächst wieder mir die Nägel zu schneiden,
einen Espresso wichtig zu finden (p.180).

This is because he recognises that these are largely fears which will be quickly overcome by the practicalities of everyday life, by the

1) A similar resolution is described in the poem Alte Herzen - Schwere Herzen (So ist die Lage, pp.27-31); here again the promise is to mourn at a future date, and again the distracting practical considerations are held responsible for this decision:

Anderswo werde ich mit mehr Ruhe leiden können,
stelle ich mir vor / Nicht so abgelenkt von den
trivialen schrecklichen Begleitumständen / Von
den furchtbar nützlichen Handreichungen, den
Maßnahmen, / den Organisationen, die schon über
dich hinausgehen / Aus der Entfernung werde ich
dich schwer betrauern (pp.29-30).

sheer physical necessity of continuing to perform minor daily functions. Already Plath is confident that time will live up to its reputation of healing and bringing forgetfulness:

Ich bemitleide dich, weil du stirbst und weil ich
darüber wegkomme (p.181).

There remains only the question as to whether Plath's convenient way of accommodating death tidily into the course of life bears witness to his sincerely felt hopes and beliefs, or whether it results from self-delusion, without which he could not survive. His hope is certainly adequately catered for in the most explicit declaration:

Ich bin so wahnsinnig hoffnungsvoll, daß ich nämlich
LEBE. Ich lebe überhaupt nicht ungerne. Sterben
würde ich frühestens dann erst wollen, wenn ich un-
umstößlich sicher wäre, daß es auch nach dem Sterben
nicht aus ist mit mir. In das GAR NICHTS kann ich
einfach nicht einwilligen. Ich hasse diesen
Fatalismus, oder: dieses NA JA, aus und vorbei,
nichts als Asche, Erde, Gewürm, Nichts. Ich mache
das nicht mit. Das Nichts macht mir einen Ekel (p.29).

The difference between these views and the views of the narrator in Ernste Absicht is little short of startling; an unprecedented life force surges out of the words of Robert Plath which contrasts starkly with the listless gloom in Ernste Absicht. Plath's grip on life is so determined, that he would require firm assurances of an after-life before he would release it willingly. But at the same time he considers the belief in the mortality of human beings to be fatalistic and complacent, and he adamantly rejects it. His personal convictions would seem to be unassailable, were it not for the nagging suspicion in the mind of the reader that the possibility of self-delusion cannot be excluded. This suspicion is produced partly by the over-zealous, almost crusading attempt to convince, and partly by the categorical reference to self-delusion in the final two sentences of the novel:

Schmutz von rund 100 000 Tonnen Gewicht befördert
der Rhein täglich in das Meer. Das Meer sieht schön
aus (p.325).

These sentences have been assessed with considerable discernment by Michael Christian Rutschky in his contribution to the Materialienbuch:

Das ist die Metaphorisierung der apologetischen Lebensweisheit: man soll sich entschieden an die Schönheit der Erscheinungen halten, auch wenn man über deren häßliches Wesen genau Bescheid weiß.¹

This seems a pertinent way to describe Plath's behaviour throughout the novel - his determination to present the good side of things and to divert his attention from less attractive things; his tremendous effort to praise the institution of marriage (which is indeed an unfamiliar attitude in Wohmann's works); and his ready-made solutions to enable him to virtually dispense with the problem of death. Whether or not the constant note of reconciliation is convincing, and whether or not it is a feature which will stand the test of time, is perhaps of little relevance. What must be accepted and noted for its undisputed significance is that Gabriele Wohmann achieved in this novel a peak of consolation and a haven of inner strength, which at the time of writing sheltered her from former doubts and anxieties. It is difficult to imagine that the author of Ernste Absicht also wrote the following lines:

Würde doch der Tod richtig verstanden, als der Übergang zum wahren -wenn auch zugegebenermaßen leider unbekanntem - Sein, dann nur könnte vernünftig gelebt und gestorben werden. Mit dem Sterben gelebt werden. Tödlich leben, lebend sterben: das hört sich nur grausam an, oder was, aber im Grunde ist es tröstlich, schmerzstillend (Schönes Gehege, p.244).

Observing the spirit of Wohmann's optimism in Schönes Gehege, it would seem appropriate to return at this point to the discussion of life, whose problems occupy her even more relentlessly, since a daily confrontation with them is unavoidable. Whereas the problems of death are at their most intense in a private context, those of life demand a response from the individual on both a private and a public plane. On the whole Wohmann chooses to address herself at length only to the problems of the private sphere, allowing her response to those of the public sphere (as will be illustrated in the next chapter) to reveal itself unobtrusively to the eye of the sensitive reader in a delicate and subtle fusion of the two spheres.

1) Michael Christian Rutschky, 'Der Wille zur Ungreifbarkeit', Materialienbuch, pp.86-90 (p.89).

Der Soundso-Krieg am Soundso-Schauplatz findet dauernd statt. Aber ich suche nach im angeblich verjäherten, aber niemals verjährenden Privaten, wo es anfängt mit den mehr oder weniger kleinen Seelenmorden, den Intoleranzen, den Anpassungsmechanismen, der Unmoral des Denkens.¹

Man hat kein Maß mehr, für nichts, seit das Menschenleben nicht mehr das Maß ist.²

Political awareness expresses itself so often through the literary works of contemporary writers, that the absence of overt socio-political comments in the novels and stories of Gabriele Wohmann may seem surprising. The author herself, while denying that she is apolitical, if only because she accepts that a human being is a fundamentally political creature³, nevertheless concedes that her writing basically lacks any obvious political slant, and she is aware that this may disappoint some readers. However, her opinions on this matter are clearly formulated, as can be seen when Robert Plath (who, as has already been indicated, is in many respects a spokesman for, if not an impersonation of the author) comments on the effect on him of an evening's television viewing:

Es steht so ziemlich fest ... daß ich mich nicht um die ganze Welt kümmern kann, an einem einzigen Abend nicht und wahrscheinlich ohnehin nicht. Es kann mich an einem einzigen Abend nicht alles betreffen aus der Auswahl von Mittlerem, halbwegs Schrecklichem, ganz Schrecklichem, halbwegs Begrüßenswertem, das mir zugeliefert wird; unterschlagene und interpretierte Gangstereien. Betreffen kann mich allerdings jederzeit, was meine Frau sagt und wie sie es sagt, was mein Privatleben mir zuliefert, das Gangsterunwesen und die Friedensbemühungen darin, das schon und jederzeit (Schönes Gehege, p.63).

And when Wohmann does include specific political allusions, such as:

BOBBY KENNEDY DIES ... HE DIES AND DIES. Aus allen Teilen der Welt reist die weitverzweigte Familie an. Das Ambassador-Hotel, der leicht verstaubte Tatort, geht in die Geschichte ein (Ernste Absicht, p.5).

1) Rudolph, Protokoll zur Person, p.156

2) Elias Canetti, Die Provinz des Menschen (Munich, 1973), section relating to the year 1942, p.19.

3) 'Kein Tun, auch kein Unterlassen, kein Satz und kein nicht gesagter Satz ist unpolitisch. Was ist überhaupt unpolitisch?' (Protokoll zur Person, p.156).

or:

Die Offiziersfrauen in der US-Siedlung Perlacher Forst verhalten sich dem Attentat gegenüber weitgehend gleichgültig. Bei den Farbigen herrschen Trauer und Ratlosigkeit vor (Ernste Absicht, p.6),

the dominant impression is of their being merely applied onto the text for effect. The resulting verbal collage never merges into an entity, since the substance, as Wohmann describes in the poem Politische Teilnahme¹, is by nature fragmented:

Noch eine Meldung, über noch einen empörenden Mißstand
Und diese Notiz, den Leitartikel auch
Ausgeschnitten, gesammelt - die nach mir werden sich beim
Hotelier beschweren
Aber weiter mit mir, weiter mit meinem Eifer
Mit den Amputationen der Tageszeitung und der konsumierbaren
Auswahl an Wirklichkeit (p.35).

Wohmann's social statements emerge more successfully in the form of criticisms of values which are ratified by society, but which for her are anathema. Some of these are prevalent in most contemporary western societies: for example, the accumulation of material wealth, the segregation of the socially unacceptable², the insistence on conformity to prescribed sexual roles, the concomitant intolerance of individualistic behaviour, and the emphasis on the preservation of recognised family units. Others are more clearly distinguishable as peculiarly West German features, reminiscent of the ultra-conservatism of the Wilhelmine and National Socialist periods: the authoritarian attitudes in education and in the parental supervision of children, the encouragement of achievement in sporting activities, the rejection of the 'Versager', (a term which will be used in the broad sense of referring to anyone who fails to meet society's expectations of him.) In his book Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland³, the sociologist and historian Ralf Dahrendorf demonstrates how the assessment of a country's benevolence towards its citizens can be gauged from the quality of treatment received by the socially disadvantaged, for example, the physically or mentally infirm, children, prisoners, and, in West Germany, 'Gastarbeiter'. Dahrendorf develops his argument as follows:

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- 1) In So ist die Lage, pp.35-37.
 - 2) Specific references will be made to the infirm, the elderly, and those who offend established behaviour patterns.
 - 3) Ralf Dahrendorf, Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland (Munich, 1968).

Gastarbeiter, Geisteskranke und Gefangene - sind sie wirklich geeignete Zeugen für deutsche Humanität? Ja, sie sind es. Ich will gar nicht von ihrer Zahl sprechen; wo vom Verhalten der Menschen zueinander die Rede ist, zählen keine Zahlen. An den Außenstehenden dokumentiert sich aber das, was in einer Gesellschaft vor sich geht. Denn die beschriebenen Mängel sind nicht das Ergebnis des Versagens Einzelner. Die Preisgabe der anderen ist selbst soziales Gesetz und gerät mit den übrigen Werten, die gelten, in das Benehmen des Einzelnen. Er macht sich unbeliebt, wenn er humaner ist: der anklagende Kriminologe bei seinen juristischen Kollegen, der selbstkritische Richter in seinem Stand, der Freund des geistig Kranken bei seinen Freunden, der Wirt, der sein Restaurant für Fremde öffnet, bei seinen Kunden. Daß der Virus der Unmenschlichkeit so viele Menschen befallen hat, beruht also auf der Schwächung ihrer Resistenz durch soziale Strukturen. Daher bleibt seine Wirkung auch nicht auf die Fremden beschränkt. Die Infektion breitet sich aus, die Mißachtung des Lebens, der Integrität des einzelnen Menschen wird auf die Zugehörigen übertragen. Zunächst noch sind diese vor allem dann betroffen, wenn sie wehrlos und damit selbst an dem Rand des sich immer mehr einengenden 'Normalen' gedrängt sind: als Kinder, als Kranke, als Alte (p.381).

The numerous examples offered by Dahrendorf to illustrate his point all relate to fairly common and unspectacular practices, ranging from the tendency to push a child to the back of the queue in a shop, to the reluctance to administer pain-killing drugs to women during childbirth¹. The composite picture is one of a fundamentally insensitive society.

Similarly, in Wohmann's works, it is the cumulative effect of the innumerable examples of seemingly trifling injustices which arouses the reader to awareness of the author's condemnation of the callous and uncaring society she observes. By considering three representative examples, therefore, children, the sick and the aged, as they appear in Wohmann's works, it will be found that Dahrendorf's factual analysis is fully corroborated in Wohmann's fictitious presentations.

1) Wohmann, too, comments sardonically on this practice: 'Gute Eltern bestehen darauf, daß die gute Mutter bei der Niederkunft Narkose verweigert und ihre Kinder bei vollem Bewußtsein gebärt.'
(Von guten Eltern/Ein Kalender, Eremitenkalender 1970 (Stierstadt, 1969). Also published in Gegenangriff, pp.109-113 (pp.112-113), from which page references here are taken.)

5.1 Children

... es war eins von denen, die gequält werden müssen.¹

In a materialistic society, such as West Germany in this case, children are in a sense social outcasts per se, since they are unable to contribute to the growth of the economy and, moreover, are parasites on the potential productive work force, since they require considerable amounts of adult supervision for several years². Insofar as the children accept and abide by society's dictates (upheld and supervised by the agents family and school), and as long as their behaviour shows gratitude and respect, they are at least tolerated. Should they stray from the norm, however, for instance by trying to avoid sporting activities³, by scorning material possessions⁴, by being inordinately timid⁵, or by preferring the life of the imagination to that of reality⁶, then they are admonished and tormented to such an extent, that several seek escape in suicide⁷. In fact hardly a child appears in Wohmann's works whose behaviour does not display signs of emotional disturbance as a result of pressures from one or both of the two main influences on its life, the family and school. Wohmann's choice of circumstance and detail in her depictions of children delineates her concern for their hapless existence.

Two of the aspects mentioned above, the dislike of sport and the retreat into the world of the imagination, will be considered in greater detail, and are offered here as representative illustrations of Wohmann's empathy with the child's predicament.

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- 1) Jetzt und nie, p.19, referring to the five year old boy Ritz.
 - 2) The same is true of the old or infirm, which explains the close sociological link between these groups.
 - 3) Compare: Denk immer an heut nachmittag (Trinken ist das Herrlichste, pp.50-53); Der Knurrhahn-Stil (Ländliches Fest, pp.186-196); Der Fall Rufus (radio play first broadcast by the Westdeutscher Rundfunk, December 1969, later adapted by Wohmann for the published edition (Stierstadt, 1971)), from which page references here are taken.
 - 4) Compare: Habgier (Habgier, pp.5-19).
 - 5) Compare: the boy Ritz in Jetzt und nie.
 - 6) Compare: Ich Sperber (Erzählungen (Karlsruhe), pp.12-15).
 - 7) Compare: Der Knurrhahn-Stil; Wachsfiguren (Habgier, pp.43-46); Im Tunnel (Sieg über die Dämmerung, pp.106-109); Der Fall Rufus.

5.1.1 Children and Sport

Der Sport erzieht zum zoon politikon
(Der Knurrhahn-Stil, p.195),

Sport heißt Gemeinschaftssinn (Der
Fall Rufus, p.14).

The radio play Der Fall Rufus is a pungent diatribe against the mandatory enthusiasm for sport which Wohmann feels is a feature of West German schools. Despite the plethora of allusions in the play to Germany's National Socialist past¹, Wohmann insists that the play is not anchored in the past:

Mein Stück spielt nicht in dieser Vergangenheit, sondern in ihrer gegenwärtigen Fortsetzung. Zwar tarnt sich die Gesinnung, wandelt sich ab, zugleich mit - einigem - Vokabular. Aber wie steht's mit dem Hymnus auf das Lieblingswort Leistung, mit dem Ertüchtigen, dem Sport, mit der Verachtung jeder Version von Versagen, der hilflosen, aber gewalttätigen Wut auf Einzelgängerisches?²

The schoolboy Rufus could be any contemporary schoolboy, and his school is to be regarded as any modern school, with the only difference being that the situations would no longer be discussed in such frank terms as they are in the play. The story is as follows: Rufus, a sensitive schoolboy and a loner, with no talent for sport and little belief in the public morality of his ex-Nazi teachers³, ultimately hangs himself in order to evade the jibes and sarcasm of his peers and teachers about his inaptitude in sport. A parents' meeting is

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- 1) Apart from the specific references to Germany's National Socialist past contained in this play, where Wohmann's childhood memories of the horrors of the fascist era and of the type of school she exposes in the play convey her revulsion, her observations on this period are, on the whole, restrained. She comments only briefly on the difficulties she experienced as a result of her father's profession: 'Heute macht es wenig aus, wenn man sagt: mein Vater ist Pfarrer. Aber als ich, in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus, aufwuchs, brachte man sich damit Verdacht und Gehässigkeit ein' (Das Pfarrhaus, Materialienbuch, p.17). She speaks more freely in the commentary Zum Hörspiel 'Der Fall Rufus' (Materialienbuch, pp.22-23), where she registers a very clear protest against the familiar social 'rehabilitation' of ex-National Socialists, deploring society's readiness to turn a blind eye to their former heinous activities.
 - 2) Zum Hörspiel 'Der Fall Rufus', p.23.
 - 3) Rufus has further incensed his schoolmates and teachers by his letter to a local newspaper, in which he had exposed the activities of former National Socialists (Der Fall Rufus, p.13).

subsequently held at the school to determine whether such a 'Nest-beschmutzer' (p.13), should be posthumously awarded the school leaving certificate (Reifezeugnis). The decision falls adversely, on the grounds that:

Wer nicht turnt in deutschem Land,
Der ist und bleibt ein Denunziant!
(p.22).

This constitutes the strongest condemnation of him by his compatriots, since it follows on the previous declaration that:

Der ärgste Feind im Vaterland
das ist und bleibt der -
Denunziant!
(p.12).

In another context, the accusation of being one's country's worst enemy because of the failure to perform in the gymnasium, would of course be ludicrous, but it must be stressed that the presence of such exaggerated situations or statements in the text is wholly intentional. The language employed by Wohmann, when, for instance, the teachers and pupils frequently extemporize in Latin, or quote from the Greek Classics, is to create a carefully constructed parody of the classical ethos of Nazi Germany and to satirize the 'humanistisches Ideal' represented by their 'Gymnasien'. The exaggerated language¹ and the constant references to the Third Reich do not prevent the reader from being acutely aware of the actuality of the events described, and of the fact that contemporary West Germany is still a society building on the principle of achievement (Leistungsprinzip), and tends to be intolerant of those whose values differ. The critic Lothar Romain, however, hastens to warn Wohmann of the danger of creating a monument to the very fascist mentality which she wishes to denounce, by omitting a consideration of the subsequent historical evolution which would act as a balance to the record of such unadulterated fascism:

1) Wohmann supports her use of exaggeration as follows: 'Mit Absicht verzerre und überspitze ich ... Von parodistischen, irrationalen Brechungen verspreche ich mir, bei diesem Stoff, mehr als vom getreulichbraven Dokumentarspielton'. Contained in her comments on Der Fall Rufus in the WDR Programmheft, 2. Halbjahr, 1969.

Allerdings baut ihm [dem Faschismus] Gabriele Wohmann mit ihrem Stück unfreiwillig ein Monument, dem man eher wie vor Jahren den Relikten auf dem Nürnberger Reichsparteitagsgelände gegenübersteht, weil im Fall Rufus Differenzierungen fehlen, weil zuviel unverblümter Faschismus zusammengebracht wurde und zu wenig die geschichtlichen Wandlungen in der Argumentationsweise deutlich werden. Selbst wenn man überzeugt ist, daß im Kern der Faschismus hierzulande resistent geblieben sei - was so pauschal jedenfalls nicht zutrifft -, so muß man doch die historisch bedingten Veränderungen im Kleinbürgerwesen, und seien sie auch nur äußerliche, sekundäre, herausstellen. Ohne solche Hinweise bleibt zu wenig Analyse und zuviel Polemik, von der man nicht getroffen wird.¹

This view echoes the opinion already voiced in this thesis that Wohmann's handling of explicit political material is gauche and perhaps a little naive, although it would be misguided to attach excessive importance to the historical accuracies or inaccuracies, since the play stands, above all, as a piece of literature. In this capacity the text retains its full merit, especially regarding its relevance to the examination of children in Wohmann's works, as it offers a vivid depiction of the systematic onslaught of the forces of society against the individualist who refuses to conform.

The theme of sport and children reappears in the short story Der Knurrhahn-Stil (Ländliches Fest, pp.186-196), where a young boy's desperate efforts to avoid gymnastic lessons are viewed by his parents with growing consternation:

Hast du etwa Angst? Dann müßtest du dich augenblicklich überwinden. Dann ist Sport das Beste. Angst kann man als Mann nicht gebrauchen ... etwas Saublödes und sehr Schlimmes, das ist Angst, mein Sohn (p.192).

The effect of these words on the child is to subject him to pressure on several counts. The first question: 'Hast du etwa Angst?' indicates that he has shocked his parents not only by his unwillingness to participate in sport, but also by their conclusion that an emotion as contemptible to them as fear may have given rise to his reluctance. This, in their eyes, would be tantamount to a lack of filial concern for his parents' values. His maturity and potential masculinity now

1) Lothar Romain, 'Ein Querulant', Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 21.10.72.

also become equivocal, and his parents remind him that fear cannot be tolerated by a true man. The father's implication that fear is something weak and feminine, conveyed here through the emphasis on the words 'als Mann', must further undermine the boy's confidence. Furthermore he stands accused of entertaining an emotion which, he is told, is both stupid and bad; thus the calibre of his intellect and character is challenged as well. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the boy seeks consolation and the recovery of his dignity after suffering such humiliation, and for this he turns as so often do Wohmann's children, to the realm of the imagination:

Beim Stabhochsprung landet er in den Wolken.
Es gibt Schnee (pp.192-193).

With perfect physical prowess he has excelled, in a phantasy world, in the very field where, in reality, he is the most ineffective. He has performed such a magnificent gymnastic feat that he has reached the clouds and is surrounded by the snow he loves¹. The development of the boy's reverie is particularly interesting, since it constitutes one of the rare occasions where Wohmann shows a child reacting aggressively towards its aggressors:

Mit dem Schnee fällt er zurück, seine Spikes drücken
sich dem Sportlehrer ins Gesicht; der sofort
blutende Sportlehrer schreit auf vor Schmerz, aber
der Beifall der Mannschaften übertönt ihn, hier
zählt nur die sportliche Leistung, und auch der
Sportlehrer, den die Verwundungen lebenslänglich
verunstalten werden, muß das hinnehmen (p.193).

For his attack on the symbol of his persecution, the teacher, the boy is rewarded with the admiration of his class-mates. In reality, such a hostile act would doubtless have produced an equally hostile response in the onlookers, since the sports teacher stands as a figure to be admired and emulated. Yet, paradoxically, in the dream, the teacher has indoctrinated his pupils so successfully with the belief that achievement in sport must be their ultimate goal, that they adhere to this principle even in the most gruesome situation which ensues. The story attains an impressive level of sophistication in the final irony that the teacher too must sanction the excellence of the feat in spite of the permanent disfigurement he will suffer.

1) Compare also: 'Er wünscht sich Schnee. Es schneit, wenn er es sich vorstellt.' (p.192).

Escape in this way, however, can provide only temporary relief, and when the boy has exhausted all possibilities of feigning illness in order to be excused sport, he must formulate a more effective, indeed an irreversible strategy, death by drowning:

Paul macht nicht mehr kehrt vor der Flut ... Ins Meer, ins Meer, grau und abwegig, während Schnee fällt. Vorläufig geschieht das in Pauls Bett, eine Vorsichtsmaßnahme und ein Provisorium, durch welche die Erziehungsberechtigten in ganz falscher Sicherheit gewiegt werden (p.196).

The fall of snow as he drowns suggests that the prospect is an inviting one for Paul, because it is linked for him with memories of his triumph over the schoolmaster. But he has been driven so far in defending himself against the taunts of the adult world, that he first craves a degree of self-satisfaction, as he savours the thought of using his plan to punish those who have previously tormented him. Ironically, however, not even this procedure will offer him compensation, since he is sadly mistaken in the belief that his death will either grieve or defame his tormentors. Such is the conclusion reached by an examination of his parents' reaction even to the possibility that their child's ailments could be genuine:

Wie traurig, den kleinen Paul so früh zu verlieren, falls es sich wirklich um eine ernste Erkrankung handeln sollte (p.189).

The word 'traurig' here is a conventional and predictable emotional expletive, added merely in order to preclude criticism of the parents, and it contains no traces of genuine anxiety. It cannot, therefore, be anticipated that Paul's death would have any great effect on his parents.

The boy will be alone in his death, just as he had previously been alone with his fear and with his imagination. Solitude, in fact, is felt by most of Wohmann's child characters to be the most comforting state, and some children will go to remarkable lengths to obtain it. There is, for example, the boy in the short story Im Tunnel (Sieg über die Dämmerung, pp.106-109), who tunnels into sand, exhilarated by the adventure he is creating for himself and excited at the prospect of being completely alone:

Nein, dieser Tunnel war für ihn allein. Während er wild schaufelte, wunderte er sich: das war wie der Ausbruch einer Krankheit, die lang in ihm gelauert hatte, und jetzt wußte er endlich Bescheid; er brauchte einen Platz für sich allein (p.107).

When he hears the sounds of people trying frantically to dig him out of the tunnel, he entrenches himself deeper into the sand, determined not to be forced to return to the outside world, even though he will have to pay the price for solitude with his life.

Er spürte es: dahin könnte er nicht mehr zurück. Er stach in die Deckwand des Tunnels und duckte den Kopf unter die pladdernden Lawinen, er krümmte sich in die alleschluckende Einsamkeit seines Sandes (pp.108-109).

There are no real indications in the text of the reason for the boy's wish to escape, but set against the background of Wohmann's other works, with their descriptions of the torments so often faced by children, his action does not seem incomprehensible. When circumstances prevent the children from attaining a state of solitude in a concrete sense, however, they will use their imagination as a surrogate means of escape, and in such situations Wohmann gives some truly penetrating glimpses into the phantasy world of the child.

5.1.2 The World of the Imagination

In the short story Ich Sperber (Erzählungen (Karlsruhe), pp.12-15)¹, a young boy is taken home from school by his teacher for insisting that his name is 'Sperber' - sparrow hawk. The child's auto-suggestive identification with this bird would seem to stem from two urges: firstly, the desire to be as free as a bird and to master the art of flying², which would transport him high into the sky and away from the

1) In a letter to Ulrich Klein, Wohmann refers to this story when describing the small boy in Im Tunnel: 'Es ist wieder so ein 'Sperber'-Typ, jetzt ist es der Sand, der Frieden stiften soll' (Entdeckendes Lesen, p.95).

2) Compare Der Knurrhahn-Stil, and also the many allusions to Rufus's empathy with birds in Der Fall Rufus, in particular:

Zum letzten Mal, weit ausgespannt / Hat seine
Arme er Flügel genannt / Und Schnabel den Mund,
Kralle die Zehe / Und sich selber Dohle, Rabe
und Krähe (p.44).

restrictions of earth-bound life, and secondly, to be as effectively self-assertive in his own sphere as the mighty sparrow hawk is in the bird kingdom. Significantly, it is the two main female influences in his life, his mother and his teacher, who seek to suppress any aggressive instincts in the boy by initiating a verbal attack, which, if successful, would ultimately lead to his virtual emasculation:

Warum bist du ausgerechnet so ein böser Raubvogel,
warum nicht eine liebe kleine Blaumeise, warum nicht?
Du bist doch viel lieber und viel braver als all deine
Freunde in der Klasse, weißt du das nicht? Viel
sanfter und kleiner (p.15, teacher).

Du bist doch mein lieber kleiner Fink, meine
winzige Meise (p.15, mother).

The emphasis on the words 'lieb' and 'klein' leave no doubt as to the desire of both mother and teacher to maintain their jurisdiction over what they regard as a young mind being perverted by pathological day-dreaming. Consequently they employ the guiles of feminine and maternal flattery and charm in an attempt to counter the threat posed by the boy's adopted avian personality.

There may at first seem to be a contradiction between the attitudes expressed in this story and those in Der Knurrhahn-Stil. Here there is vehement opposition to the development of potentially aggressive traits in the child, while in Der Knurrhahn-Stil there is positive encouragement of traditionally aggressive masculine prowess in the pursuit of sport. It should not be forgotten, however, that sport can also act as an emasculating agent, since, while permitting aggression in its own restricted sphere, it subsequently leaves the participant, especially a child, too physically drained to contemplate further aggressive acts. Such also is the encouragement of sporting activities in adolescent youths, so that they might sublimate their increasing sexual appetite.

Although the story ends for the boy on a determined note, when he claims:

Nein, alle kleinen Vögel, alle Mäuse und Insekten
werde ich töten, ich Sperber (p.15),

it would seem inevitable that his protest will ultimately crumble beneath the adult opposition.

The bird theme appears again in Große Liebe¹, where the teenage brother of the main character Xenia is similarly obsessed with birds. Once again, the mother voices displeasure:

Er ist so ein Einzelgänger. Immer nur mit Vögeln
zur Gesellschaft ... Eines Tages wird Daniel selber
ein Vogel sein. Er wird uns verlassen (p.23).

Here, however, her complaints barely conceal her fear that her son will one day desert her. To blame the company of birds for promoting this likelihood is, therefore, illogical, but it serves to provide her with a reprehensible source for what she feels is Daniel's neglect of his family. It can be conjectured that, as the boy becomes more and more an outsider figure, he will eventually be rejected by his family, even if he does not first leave under his own initiative.

Again in the story Hamster, Hamster! (Erzählungen (Ebenhausen), pp.111-131), where the narrator's brother Steffen is accused of being a 'Versager' (p.122), much of the criticism against him is directed towards his preoccupation with birds:

Bruder Steffen, Sorgensohn Steffen, er hat nie was
davon gehalten, mit beiden Beinen auf dem Boden zu
stehen, er hat, als kleines Kind schon immer gesagt:
Fliegen, Fliegen! ... Später hat er immer Rabe ge-
spielt, oder Milan (p.122).

The additional allegation that he forged signatures and concealed school reports (p.126), which presumably contained similar reprimands from his teachers, is yet another reason for reproach from his family. The narrator herself is so irritated by her brother that she recommends that he should hang himself, and, as in Ein unwiderstehlicher Mann (see thesis p.21), this advice is accepted and the boy commits suicide.

In each of these cases, the child has an acute sense of being different from and unworthy of others, and he seeks consolation in the association with an alien species from which he need not fear rejection². Perhaps the child experiences a measure of gratification at the very thought of being different: this at least would seem to be the situation in the

1) Große Liebe, television play, (Bad Homburg, 1971).

2) This theme is repeated in the adult world with Genoveva's passion for the mysterious black bird in Der Abflug (Sieg über die Dämmerung, pp.25-49).

story Grün ist schöner¹, where the child smugly contemplates the problems he will have in later life because of his 'green' skin:

Das wird überhaupt schlimm, wenn ich mal mehr unter
Leute komme. In der Schule und dann als Erwachsener.
Ich muß so viel wie möglich verdecken (p.147).

The fact that it is only the bathroom light which produces the green hue prevents the inclusion of this child amongst the ranks of the 'outsiders' in Wohmann's works, and hints at an element of child-like satisfaction. The boy also relishes the thought of his noble behaviour in future as he will strive to conceal his awful secret, in order not to shock those around him. In this way he privately counteracts what the adult world will term his insignificance and irrelevance.

Even more vulnerable than the 'outsider' child, however, is the sick child, as it will be seen that the reaction of family and society towards sick children frequently polarises into one of total rejection. The development of the pattern of responses in the adult world is consistent and clearly defined, progressing from reproach and persuasion (where behavioural reform is still deemed possible, as has been described in this section), to more explicit demonstrations of repulsion, such as those directed towards the child with the hare-lip in Wachsfiguren, and finally culminating in extremes of intolerance, where the physical removal of the offending body is regarded as the only solution.

5.2 The sick

As a group, the sick will be regarded as an entity here, without further division into the categories of mentally or physically sick, since in Wohmann's works there is little differentiation in the nature of the social stigma attached to either form of illness, and, following on from the previous section, sickness in children will be considered first.

The presence of subnormal children, for instance, in the conformist, self-conscious families depicted by Wohmann is patently anathema to the non-afflicted relatives, with the result that considerable energy is

1) In Sieg über die Dämmerung, pp.147-149.

devoted to the search for a palatable pretext for their segregation into institutions¹. Thus the altruism of the couple in the story Fehldiagnosen² who volunteer their retarded child for use in medical research is highly suspect:

Es ist schließlich nicht bloß eine Ratte, von der sie getrennt leben, ist auch kein Meerschweinchen, sondern ist Iwanchen, mit dessen Hilfe das Forscher-Team immerhin schon dem Gammaglobulin auf die Spur kam. Bald vielleicht oder eines Tages wird man die Hepatitis ganz aus der Welt schaffen können, und, im Verein mit seinen kleinen debilen Genossen der Abteilung 6, wird Iwanchen hierbei seinen Beitrag geleistet haben, wenn auch wahrscheinlich draufgegangen sein. Die Zukunft eines debilen Kindes ist kaum rosig (pp.100-101).

Each thought structure in this passage reveals a mixture of guilt and self-delusion in the parents, as the attempt is made to justify their action. The inclusion of the word 'schließlich' in the first sentence suggests that the parents must camouflage their lack of instinctive emotional attachment to their child with a veneer of rationality, in order to come to terms with the nature of the child. Finally, towards the end of the story, the parents' revulsion towards their son can no longer be contained, and it culminates in the most injurious analogy:

Iwanchens Gesicht sieht wie ein alter Apfel aus ...
Wie ein verdellter, wie ein wurmstichiger, wie
ein aufgedozter Apfel (p.102).

The parents seek justification for surrendering parental responsibility by emphasising the fact that scientific progress has indeed been made through experiments on their child ('bald vielleicht, oder eines Tages

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- 1) Klaus Wellner, in his book Leiden an der Familie (Stuttgart, 1976), also picks on this feature for comment: 'Die Verbannung an die Peripherie des Systems oder die Abschiebung in die Anstalt und der widerwillige und immer seltener werdende Besuch des Stigmatisierten sind Themen, die in immer neuen Variationen dargestellt werden ... Die Skala der stigmatisierenden Merkmale ist dabei breit: Sie reicht von körperlichen Abweichungen über unbequeme Erlebnisweisen und Nichtanpassung an Systemnormen bis hin zu Geisteskrankheiten' (p.74).
- 2) In Ländliches Fest, pp.100-101.

wird man die Hepatitis ganz aus der Welt schaffen können'); however the preceding conciliatory 'immerhin' betrays the probable insignificant contribution to medical research made by the experiments on the child. In addition, the grandiose expectation that through their son hepatitis could eventually be eliminated as a disease, is thoroughly unconvincing. More relevant to their true interests is their anticipation, indeed their expectation, that the child will die at some point during the experiments. In any case, they hasten to add, one can hardly expect such a child to have a rosy future. The controlled understatement in this observation is employed by the parents as a protective measure against the possibility of third party reproach, and it allows them to overlook the obvious alternative solution, namely to offer their child a caring family circle in which it could best exploit its own potential for happiness.

A similar situation, but one attaining still higher degrees of callousness, is to be found in the text Selbstverteidigung¹. Here a married couple visit Bert (a handicapped twenty year old, who looks like an eight year old, and who has an even lower mental age), in order to provide themselves with the psychic stimulation they need to enliven their marriage:

Machen wir uns auf den Weg und besuchen wir die wirklich eklige Heilanstalt, den kleinen Bert, wir kriegen unsere Reizspiele dort umsonst (p.242).

The wife triumphantly asserts herself as the superior partner in the marriage because it is the husband who is related to the physical and mental pariah Bert:

Auch mit Hilfe des kleinen Bert kann ich dich jederzeit bezichtigen, beschimpfen, schwer anklagen, denn ihr seid blutsverwandt (p.242),

and as a couple they likewise contemplate the possible advantages of offering their relative for medical research:

Wir werden ermitteln, ob sich das finanziell auszahlt, wenn wir den kleinen Bert in den Dienst der medizinischen Forschung stellen (p.243).

1) In Selbstverteidigung, pp.240-255.

In case such deplorable abuse of a human being either as a pawn in a marital squabble or as a means of procuring financial gain should shock or appal, the couple refer with calculating alacrity to an even more sensitive branch of medical research, the use of foetuses in experiments, in order to deflect attention from their own now seemingly minor offence against the human race:

Zum Aufschluß für arthritische Krankheitserscheinungen bevorzugt ein bestimmter Mediziner Zehen und Finger von Foeti. Tote Foeti sind sehr brauchbar. Es geht ja nur um die Frage, ob man diesen Eiern ein Begräbnis bereiten oder sie der Einäscherungsmaschine übergeben soll. Keime, die potentiell ein Mensch werden könnten - wandern sie in den Ausguß? Und warum denn nicht? (p.243).

Having persuaded herself that foetuses cannot be considered to be human beings, it is then not difficult for the narrator to come to terms with her own conscience by allowing herself to believe that a mentally handicapped person cannot really be termed a human being either:

Ich persönlich nenne den kleinen Bert nicht MENSCH, ich nicht, da ich weiß, was ein Mensch ist, weil ich ein Mensch bin (p.253).

The frenetic pace of the text, which incorporates descriptions of the debilitated Bert, details of the sterility of the narrator's marriage and the framework of an imagined physical fight (whence the title image of 'self-defence'), creates a sobering picture of Wohmann's view of man's inhumanity to man.

One of the best examples of sickness in adults is to be found in the story Die Friedfertigen¹, where a group of workers visit a colleague who is seriously ill. They are intimidated by the sight of the sick man, and are aware of an unbridgeable gulf now existing between themselves and their friend and colleague:

Sie waren nicht sentimental, aber sie wagten nicht, ihn anzusehn, Auge in Auge; mit ihm zu sprechen wie mit ihresgleichen: sie empfanden, daß er nicht zu ihnen gehörte, so lang er so aussah, so dalag. Sie stimmten nicht, wie sie es sonst getan hätten, wenn ihnen Will nicht so fremd vorgekommen wäre, seinen

1) In Sieg über die Dämmerung, pp.64-75.

Klagen zu, auch Lehner nicht, den eine dunkle Ahnung vom Ausmaß der Leiden, die der Kollege litt, befiel und beschwerte: sie taten etwas ganz Ungewohntes, Anomales gegenüber dem Freund, vierten Mann der Bürostube - sie trösteten (pp.68-69).

Their rejection of their colleague is based purely on physical appearance, the fact that he looks ill and is bed-ridden. Because of this they refuse to treat him as their equal, to talk to him like one of 'ihresgleichen', so that their rejection of him is on an intellectual as well as a physical level. Their despair at the transformation of their friend leads them to the completely irresponsible action of offering him alcohol:

Sie sahen ihm zu, wie er austrank; sie liebten ihn, jetzt war er wieder der bekannte Gefährte des alltäglichen Einerleis, sein Gesicht paßte hinter die knistrige raschlige Wand aus bedrucktem Papier (p.71).

For a moment they are comforted by the sight of their old familiar friend again, whose features briefly conform once more to their normal daily surroundings instead of being conspicuous by traces of illness. But this moment of relief is short lived, for within seconds he lies dead in front of them, and the isolation is total.

In the story Elstern¹ Wohmann presents the awareness of isolation from the perspective of the sick person. As the sick man lies in bed he watches some starlings who have nested in a tree outside his window; he regrets at the same time that he will not be able to tell his wife about the pleasure he has in watching them:

Denn leider könnte er Vera nichts von den Elstern erzählen. Lachen würde ihn sofort unterbrechen: du liebe Zeit, man sieht, die Krankheit schadet deinem armen Kopf! Es zeigt sich, wohin das lange Liegen leider führt (p.151).

His dignity, which must now be his only means of retaining his personal identity at a time when his physical being is at the mercy of others, will not permit him to expose his feelings to certain ridicule.

1) In Sieg über die Dämmerung, pp.150-153.

Such dignity is not, however, afforded to the majority of the characters with mental or physical illnesses when they appear in Wohmann's works, since the narrative is normally directed by one of the hostile observers. Family ties play no part in lessening the revulsion felt towards the disabled, nor do they make for greater tolerance. In the story Wenn der Wolf geht¹, for instance, a sister talks of her brother in the following terms:

Karl aber hielten wir seither für anders als die meisten jungen Leute ... (p.188),

... Er ist ja reichlich behindert. Ich rede jetzt von den vorhin angedeuteten gewissen Gründen, die ihn außerhalb der Gesellschaft anderer junger Leute stellen. Da ist einmal sein Palatum fissum, sein Wolfsrachen. Er kann nur mühsam sprechen, nur das Nötigste, und vor Schüchternheit verschweigt er meistens auch das. Im Ernst, es hört sich schauerlich an. Die Kinder hier in der Nachbarschaft fürchten sich vor Karl. Als Kinder haben auch wir immer gerufen: Wenn der Wolf kommt, dann lauf ich! Wie Kinder so sind (pp.190-191).

The narrator's first seemingly innocuous suggestion that Karl is different from most other young people assumes its true malicious character only when observed in conjunction with her subsequent explanation of the reasons why he is considered different. Then the familiar prejudices come into play, as it becomes evident that he is ostracised solely on account of his cleft palate and because his inevitably imperfect speech frightens the neighbourhood children. Instead of convincing others that fear is the most inappropriate reaction to this unfortunate but insignificant physical handicap, the sister encourages the hysteria of the children by declaring that she too (along with Karl's other sister) used to react in a similar way. Karl is forced more and more to become a prisoner in his isolation, too timid to speak because of the effect his speech has on others, and unable, therefore, ever to improve his speech through practice.

In this situation there is admittedly a visible disability which is offered as justification for the rejection of the sufferer by society, but this need not necessarily be so; for in the case of the boy Ritz in Jetzt und nie, the rejection of him by Oda (one of the employees in

1) In Selbstverteidigung, pp.187-196.

the children's home) is based on no such tangible evidence:

... Son komisches Kind, macht den Mund überhaupt
nicht auf ... Ich find, ein Kind muß wild sein
... Ein Junge. Ein Junge muß wild sein. Bestimmt.
Nicht so rumstehn wie der. Der läßt sich ja
schlagen. Ich wollt keinen Jungen, der sich
schlagen läßt (p.47).

The difficulties experienced by Ritz in communicating with others or in conforming to the expected behaviour patterns for a young boy could probably have been avoided, had he been brought up in a normal family situation. Instead he must endure isolation and loneliness as a result of his forced separation from his parents, and his inability to adapt to life in an institutionalised children's home. It is not stated how many of his five years have been spent in the children's home, but already he has become timid, withdrawn and unable to defend himself against the aggressions of other children, yet the symptoms of the original psychological damage (produced by the social ostracism of the child) evoke contempt rather than sympathy in the very people who could reasonably be expected to understand the situation.

Where society fails to meet the needs of the individual during two of his most vulnerable phases, in childhood and at times of sickness, it is unlikely that it will offer any more support in the third period of vulnerability to be considered here, in old age. Wohmann once more makes her socio-political judgements indirectly, by allowing the evils of an uncaring society to reveal themselves through her characters' actions.

5.3 The Aged

Wohmann's treatment of the aged is invariably rich in ambiguity; her attitude reflects what appears to be a mixture of despair at the approach of death for the aged, and alienation from them as a result of the degeneration of their mental and physical faculties as they become old. In the novels Schönes Gehege and Ausflug mit der Mutter in particular, there is little attempt to conceal the author's own feeling behind the words of the narrator when fear is expressed about the certainty that soon the much loved elderly parents will die, or when words of grief

follow the actual death. But often the attitude towards the old is expressly hostile, perhaps again as a consequence of the fear underlying her own, and therefore her characters' words. In the story Der alte Mann¹, for example, the narrator reveals the following thoughts:

Einem alten Mann wünsche ich nichts Gutes ...
Anstatt den alten Mann in Ruhe zu lassen, ihn mit
meinem Denken zu verschonen, wünsche ich ihm über-
haupt nichts Gutes. Ich kann genau so gut hinsehen.
Ich sehe den alten Mann, auch wenn ich nicht hin-
sehe, weil ich ihn gesehen habe ... Gegen meinen
ausdrücklichen Wunsch entsteht der unfreundliche
Wunsch für den alten Mann, und während ich mich
ausdrücklich nach Freundlichkeit sehne, spüre ich
meine Unfreundlichkeit (pp.37-38).

The image of the old man haunts the narrator, making her think of him even if she avoids looking at him, and she suspects that her aggressive feelings are unwarranted. However, something deep-rooted and powerful (probably another variant of fear) dictates the reaction of the narrator against her own wishes; the antipathy felt by the sub-conscious towards the old is more powerful than the efforts of the conscious mind to display even the simplest forms of friendship. In another instance the narrator of the story Wenn ich es vorschlage² recognises that warmth and communication could exist between different generations, but is unable to take the first step in this direction. She describes how she suggests that her parents should take a walk, in order that she should be free of their presence in the house:

Geht doch, geht doch, schönes Wetter, seht ihr
nicht? ... Nein, das sind nicht meine Eltern,
sage ich zu meinen Freunden. Wir stehen einen
halben Meter von den schwach gebogenen, rheumat-
ischen Rücken meiner Eltern entfernt ... Ich
könnte den Arm ausstrecken und sie erreichen (p.49).

The contact remains no more than a vague possibility, and not a likelihood, although the narrator's description of the bent rheumatic backs of her parents indicates that in fact physical closeness might be a considerable comfort to them. But not only does she deny them this small comfort, she even denies that they are her parents at all, as if

1) In Habgier, pp.29-42.

2) In Ländliches Fest, pp.48-51.

attempting to avoid being herself contaminated by the stigma of the old.

Wohmann's exposure of callousness towards the old reveals itself in such casual statements as:

Die Großeltern sind inzwischen ins Altersheim verfrachtet worden. So ein Zirkus. Ein Mordspektakel (Paulinchen war allein zu Haus, p.146),

where the use of the verb 'verfrachten' indicates that they are no more than objects in the eyes of the narrator, where the image of the circus is used to ridicule the behaviour of the residents in the home for the elderly, and where the reference to the 'Mordspektakel' once more conjures up the hullabaloo of the circus and further dehumanises the residents. Then there are the more detailed confessions, such as:

Ich höre manchmal Streit von nebenan ... Es erinnert uns an das gebrochene Versprechen, meinen Vater bei uns aufzunehmen, aber meine Mutter, sterbend, wußte ja schon nicht mehr, was sie verlangte, und übrigens starb mein Vater knapp drei Monate später in einem sehr ordentlichen Altersheim.¹

This narrator is adept at self-justification; she feels no obligation to carry out the wishes of her dying mother, since she considers them unreasonable and no more than the frantic requests of a dying person. Her father's death shortly afterwards seems to her to be vindication of her refusal to take him into her home, all the more so because he expired in an old people's home which was 'sehr ordentlich'. The only hint that in fact the decision might have been the cause of personal trauma or remorse lies in the introduction to the reference to the episode, in that she is reminded of it by the 'arguing next door'. Some heart-searching and friction must therefore have preceded the action, but filial commitments were evidently not given final precedence over self-interest and personal convenience.

In the novel Ausflug mit der Mutter Wohmann devotes her attention to the predicament of a newly widowed mother of a grown-up family. The general acknowledgement that this book contains details from Wohmann's

1) Verjährt in Ländliches Fest, pp.42-47 (pp.46-47).

own family situation¹ makes her statements here all the more fascinating. The narrator and her husband plan to visit her sister and brother-in-law, and she describes her reaction to her mother's suggestion that she might be included in the gathering:

Mit innerer Ungeduld erwanne ich beispielsweise, da keiner von uns viel Zeit fur sie haben wird. Das macht ihr wenig aus. Und du meinst wirklich, du konntest dort auch schlafen? Wir gehen namlich ins Hotel. Wir bleiben abends immer sehr lang auf, das wurde dich storen, wenn du dort ubernachtest. Gemeint ist, da es uns stort (p.99).

Her excuses are feeble, as she must know that her mother would neither require constant company and entertainment nor be prevented from sleeping by the sound of her children's voices. As the narrator is forced to admit, her concern is not that her mother would be disturbed by the children, but quite the reverse: they, the children, would be disturbed and inhibited by their mother's presence. In spite of the narrator's extensive allocation of time and effort in the book as she analyses her mother's situation as a widow, there still remains the ultimate barrier between mother and child, between the old and the (relatively) young. The daughter's refusal to incorporate her now lonely mother into other family units is expressed in the following firm though regretful terms:

Satze, die nicht gesagt worden sind. Man sollte einer Witwe wie dieser eigentlich sagen: Du bist allein. Horst du: allein. Alles andere ist Taktik. Darin kommt gewi auch Schones fur dich vor, mehr aber als Irrtum. Wie Irre lieben wir dich. Vor den Verwirklichungen stehen wir wie Irre. Wo das Irren aufhort, stellt sich die Wahrheit ein: du bist jetzt allein, einfach allein, ganz und gar allein. Das ist das einzige, was sich von jetzt an noch von selbst versteht (p.100).

The ambiguity which has already been mentioned as occurring frequently in Wohmann's presentation of the old can be seen when the above passage is compared with the following lines from Schones Gehege, where Robert Plath, thinly disguising Wohmann herself, describes his excessive emotional commitment to his parents:

1) When, in my correspondence with Gabriele Wohmann, I queried a newspaper reference, she replied: 'Ausflug mit der Mutter ist das 'noch personlichere' Buch, auf das diese Salzburger Zeitung sich bezieht.' Letter of 10.6.76.

Gernhaben, das heißt bei mir immer ZUGERNhaben ...
Wäre ich richtig gesund, wenn keiner mehr lebte,
von denen, die ich zu gern habe? Ganz indifferent,
was ginge mich dann noch an. Vielleicht müßte man
seine Eltern verlieren, wenn man selber noch in
einem leichtsinnigen, unbeschwerten, ablenkbaren
Lebensalter ist, so ungefähr mit 15, in der ersten
großen pubertären Liebesaffäre, es wäre nicht so
schlimm. Je älter wir aber alle werden, desto
länger und inhaltsreicher wird die Lebenszeit, an
die wir uns erinnern müssen, die Lebenszeit dessen,
der aus der Welt herausgenommen wird ... Mir tun
die ganz alten Leute leid, die langsam sterben:
Sie haben von so unheimlich viel an Welt Abschied
zu nehmen, sie trennen sich von einer so ungeheuer-
lichen langen Phase, wie fremd muß ihnen alles sein,
das nicht EXISTIEREN ist (pp.50-51).

Here Plath is concerned not with his revulsion at the thought of the ageing process, but rather with his fear of losing loved ones. With something close to reverence he contemplates the wealth of experience and feelings acquired by the old, and he laments the loss to others when they die. But a passage such as this is the exception in Wohmann's works, and its conciliatory tone must be viewed, at most, as a palliative. The overriding impression created is of a society lacking in compassion and of families lacking in love and humanity. When affection and understanding are not forthcoming within the microcosm of the family unit, they cannot be expected in the macrocosm of society, and when society's indifference towards the needs of its most vulnerable citizens is paralleled by indifference and intolerance within families, then the prospect of social change is slim indeed. Any change would have to begin on an intimate and private level in the relationships between individuals, and only then could it spread to produce larger-scale improvements in society; it is for this reason that Gabriele Wohmann concentrates on examining the individual's personal patterns of behaviour, for by highlighting the deficiencies, she hopes to stimulate the desire for improvement.

Chapter 6

Guilt within Relationships

The intensity of Gabriele Wohmann's concern for the success of interpersonal relationships, which, paradoxically, has produced so many works describing their failure, gives rise on occasion to a cathartic need to attribute guilt. The acknowledgement of guilt, without which the emotional rehabilitation of the offender cannot begin, differs considerably for each individual; while the more articulate characters will be able to formulate their guilt into an intellectual concept, those less able to express themselves will be seen to indicate their guilt in a much more circuitous way. And, as so often is the case, the adamant denial of guilt will also be found to be an indirect confession of guilt. The analysis of the expression of guilt in Wohmann's works does not only throw light on the defective nature of many relationships, it also includes the author's personal awareness of the guilt she incurs when she abuses those close to her in her 'Schreibprozeß', whereby she turns them into characters in her works.

6.1 Active preoccupation with personal guilt

One of the most poignant records of the mental anguish accompanying the recognition of guilt is to be found in Wohmann's first novel, Jetzt und nie, where the main character is tormented by the knowledge that he has completely failed in his role as a father. The underlying Biblical concept of the 'sins of the fathers' has produced in the man a sense of sinfulness of such gargantuan proportions that it colours his whole assessment of the father/child relationship. He refers to his son Ritz as the 'Produkt meiner Schuld' (p.41), and to children in general as 'Produkte der Schuld, die Schuld fortzeugen' (p.113). The child is the innocent party, a victim of the never ending cycle of guilt:

Unschuld aus meiner Schuld. Das schmerzhafteste
Konzentrat all dessen, was in meinem Leben
Schuld und Qual und Elend ist (p.206).

The child's inheritance is the accumulation of guilt and misery, with little chance of an individual claim to happiness. He is fathered not for his own sake, but for the punishment and atonement of the father;

Guck, da ist der liebe liebe Papa, sag schön guten Tag. Der dich zu seiner Strafe und zu seiner Buße zeugte und nicht um deiner selbst willen (p.142).

If the father anticipated the possibility of atonement through the life of the child, he is deluding himself. The propagation of life has only produced the perpetuation of a guilt syndrome. On a more concrete level, also, the father is reminded of his guilt by a relatively trivial incident during a long overdue visit to his son in the children's home. He takes him a cheap bag of overripe plums instead of something which his son might really appreciate, and he thus fails to maintain even a façade of affectionate parental involvement for the sake of the child. The visit benefits neither father nor child, and their estrangement seems total. The father's embarrassment and shame is evident in the description of his departure:

Er nickte einen Gruß, öffnete den Mund und wollte etwas sagen, seine Lippen sagen lassen; aber aus der Kehle kam kein Laut. Er kniff die Augen zusammen. Hätte ihm was Nettes, was wirklich Nettes. Er nickte wieder, verkrampfte seine Gesichtsmuskeln: Lächeln; ging davon auf dem dunklen Flur, die Dielen nörgelten. Am Geländerpfosten der Treppe wandte er sich um, sah die Tante neben dem Kind niederkauern: winken. Überstürzt verließ er das Haus (p.103).

The father's involuntary silence is the price extracted by his conscience for his culpability. Excuses would be meaningless and a further insult to the dignity of the child, who is already cowed by the intuitive perception that his father is responsible for his isolation and suffering¹. The father's distress at his failure to communicate with his child is transferred into physical terms by his facial contortions.

It is interesting that this is the only instance in Wohmann's works where the adult guilt in the parent/child relationship is treated specifically and separately. In later works the adult attitude has undergone a metamorphosis: the need for guilt and remorse is obviated by the presence of blind disciplinarianism and the belief in somewhat trumped-up social responsibilities, both of which allow the adult to treat the child in a totally depersonalised manner, and release him from the obligation to communicate. Examples of this are abundant; there are the grotesquely authoritarian parents in the Bütow family who

1) 'Hat Angst vor mir, spürt, daß ich der Schuldige bin, der Urheber' (p.103).

proudly claim:

Das Familienmotto heißt Ertüchtigung (Die Bütows,
p.8),

and who pride themselves on the regular and humiliating corporal punishment which they administer to their children:

Die Bütows nennen ihre Erziehung Vorbereitung
fürs Leben (p.12).

Then there are the self-congratulating adoptive parents of the child Paula, who force their 'enlightened' views on the eight year old girl:

Jeder von uns ist ein Mit-Mensch oder muß einer
werden. Kapiert? (Paulinchen war allein zu Haus,
p.111).

In so doing they starve the child of the fundamental human warmth and affection which she desperately needs, with the result that she becomes even more withdrawn and engrossed in her own uncommunicative world.

These two representative examples reveal the trend away from the voluntary formulation of the responsibilities in the adult/child relationship, and its replacement by convenient social platitudes; but nowhere does Wohmann suggest that this is a satisfactory solution, and the original problems remain unsolved.

In Abschied für länger the question of guilt is so uppermost in the narrator's mind that she repeatedly addresses the narrative to her older sister Ruthie, for whose death, twenty years earlier, she feels responsible. In this way she reminds herself, of her own volition, of her culpability. Ruthie died after falling from a tree, where she had been goaded by her thirteen year old sister - the narrator - to climb to a manifestly unsafe height; the narrator confesses, furthermore, that she herself was afraid of climbing trees, and that she was irked by her sister's daring (p.13). At the time of the incident, however, her family had discounted any question of the younger daughter's responsibility for the elder daughter's accident:

Und die andere, die Kleinere? Unschuldig, auf
jeden Fall (p.14).

Had the narrator's guilt feeling been given free expression at the time, (after all, she was thirteen years old and presumably mature enough to recognise the gravity of her action), then her deep sense of

remorse might have finally mellowed into sad acceptance of the irreversible. What appears to have happened instead is that the stifled emotions she experienced as a young girl remained with her through to adulthood, and as a mature woman she is still troubled by memories of unacknowledged guilt.

This disturbed emotional state is of considerable importance in view of her attempt, at the end of the novel, to murder her lover Strass by pushing him into the Thames during a visit to England. The implications of her involvement in her sister's accident are now vividly recalled in this attempt to push Strass off a bridge and into the river. She fails to do so through lack of physical strength. Had she succeeded, however, she would have been faced with the choice of either reporting his death as an unfortunate accident, and thus prolonging the guilt syndrome, or admitting her crime and exposing her guilt in its present form, as a premeditated act committed by an otherwise responsible adult.

Her emphasis throughout the book that the conception of the crime did not occur until very late in their relationship¹, along with the suggestion of some critics that she was only sparing Strass the agony of death as a result of a protracted illness², cannot be regarded as reliable arguments in her defence, although they do lend themselves as convenient explanations for her actions:

Das Kehlkopfleiden scheint sich als böseartig zu entpuppen, das Mädchen möchte den Mann davon erlösen und kann es schließlich doch nicht.³

-
- 1) Compare: 'Ich wollte es nicht tun' (p.28); 'Nein, ich hatte keinen Plan' (p.29); 'Ich wollte es nicht tun' (p.41); 'Ich wollte es nicht' (p.47); 'Nein, ich hatte keinen Plan' (p.61); 'Ich wollte es nicht tun' (p.69); 'Damals dachte ich natürlich überhaupt noch nicht daran, keine Rede von einem Plan' (p.74); 'Nein, ich hatte keinen Plan' (p.95).
 - 2) There are clear indications throughout the novel that Strass is suffering from cancer of the larynx.
 - 3) tzo, 'Talentproben der jungen Generation', Neue Zürcher Nachrichten, 10.12.65.

Verstörung ... als die junge Frau den todkranken Strass fast in die Themse gestoßen hätte, weil sie's nicht ertragen wollte, seinem Sterben zuzusehen.¹

Am Schluß schließt sich der Kreis, denn ganz ähnliche Umstände wie beim Tod dieser Schwester führt sie noch einmal herbei, wenn sie ihrem todkranken Freund das qualvolle Ende abzukürzen gedenkt.²

If the woman intended her action to be a humanitarian means of sparing Strass further pain, there would be no occasion for her to make the following statement:

Jetzt dachte ich kaum an die Ausführung. Die Krankheit führt, sich selbst überlassen, binnen kurzem zum Tod (p.117),

which seems to indicate, on the contrary, a specific death wish in her feelings towards Strass. For similar reasons the interpretation offered by the reviewer 'mgh' is inadequate:

Dieser etwas kindische Mordversuch bleibt als Schuld zurück, durch sein Mißlingen jedoch vielleicht auch als Beweis einer tieferen Unschuld wieder auf den Schuldkomplex aus der Kindheit hindeutend.³

While correctly referring to the guilt-complex she has harboured since childhood, this view leaves one important area untouched: namely her aggressiveness and the wish to inflict harm, which on closer analysis of the woman's character, reveal themselves to be distinct features of her personality.

In both her major acts of aggression, the motives she mentions in her defence belie the intensity of the aggression they produce. Her sister's daring had irked her because she herself was a more timid child, and for this reason alone she had urged her to climb up into the dangerously thin branches of the tree. Towards Strass she felt resentment at being an unmarried woman in an affair with a married

1) Ingeborg Drewitz, 'Sie drückt ganz schön fest zu, aber sie lächelt ja', Merkur 28 (October 1974), pp.989-992 (p.991).

2) Beate Kayser, 'Novembernebel aufs Lesergemüt', Münchener Merkur, 6/7.11.65.

3) mgh, 'Das Spiel von Liebe und Tod - heute', National-Zeitung Basel, 26.2.66.

man, blaming him for her own vulnerability. Further cause for hostility arises when she learns from others that Strass has already obtained a divorce, yet it is clear that he has neither the inclination nor the intention to marry her. Nevertheless, attempted murder must seem an excessive way of reacting to her situation. It may be argued that it would be over-interpreting the issues to conclude that the woman's attempt to murder her lover is her only way of confronting the world with her guilt¹, but in view of the shortcomings of the other interpretations, this conclusion has much to recommend it.

Independent of interpretations, however, the novel stands as the documentation of the efforts of an individual to come to terms with guilt. In Wohmann's later works the question of guilt becomes more subtle, and the active preoccupation with personal guilt gives way to much more inhibited revelations, characterised by a plethora of largely unconvincing apologetics.

6.2 Detectable undercurrents of guilt

Es ist gemütlich oder sieht so aus.²

The stage-managed normality of many of the relationships described by Wohmann is often the most reliable pointer to the troubled reality of the true situation, making these apparently harmonious settings the obvious place to unearth latent guilt complexes. In the story Verjährt (Ländliches Fest, pp.42-47), for instance, the reader is

1) In an interview with Gabriele Wohmann at her home in August 1974, I mentioned my interpretation of the narrator's attempt to kill Strass (- that by so doing she would be able to accept the guilt which she was prevented from accepting at the death of her sister). Frau Wohmann seemed interested in this hypothesis, but stated that she had not thought of any development of that kind when writing the book. She thought that the attempt to push Strass into the water had been something more of an impulse on the lines: 'Let's get rid of Strass. I've had enough!' I do not find this explanation satisfactory, in view of the preponderance of evidence already considered in this section suggesting deeper psychological disturbances affecting the narrator's activities.

2) Der Report in Erzählungen (Karlsruhe), pp.27-41 (p.40).

introduced to:

Nette Leute ... Ruhige Leute, mit vorwiegend angenehmen Erinnerungen (p.42),

only to be immediately bombarded with memories kept vivid by guilt: the husband had run over and killed their own daughter, for which the wife could never forgive him; she, on the other hand, herself once an alcoholic, had given the child so much wine that she had simply walked into the moving vehicle. The husband had a mistress who committed suicide; the wife had taken a lover, conceived a child by him, but the husband had refused to accept the child into his home. They had broken their promise to the wife's dying mother to look after her father, and instead had sent him to an old people's home¹, where he died three months later. The list of horrors seems endless², and the place of guilt and remorse in their lives is guaranteed.

In order to keep their guilt feelings at bay, however, the couple have devised a ritualised existence which excludes any stimulus which might open up their wounds and remind them anew of their guilt: their conversation is restricted to familiar and permitted topics, they spend their holidays each year in the same place, at the same hotel and at the same time of year, and their infrequent verbal interchanges are often identical with those of other years. Such is the power of the guilt which has forced them to develop a completely new life style as a defence against its relentless attacks.

In the story Der Report (Erzählungen (Karlsruhe), pp.27-41), the narrator feigns indifference and boredom as regards questions of guilt and responsibility, and she refuses to be party to her sister's anxieties about their sick aunt:

Margot beunruhigt sich dennoch. Ich halte ihr vor, daß seit Wochen alles gut ging. Sie gibt nicht nach. Sie erkennt im Vergangenen keine Gewähr für das Kommende. Ich finde es übertrieben, doch von einem bestimmten Punkt an langweilen mich Auseinandersetzungen, und mit einem Schulterzucken gebe ich ihr weder recht noch unrecht (p.29).

1) See also thesis p.107.

2) Here the reader could justifiably question whether Wohmann is still portraying 'gewöhnliche Schrecken'. Such a catalogue of unhappiness and domestic tragedy can hardly be termed the normal experience of the majority of people.

She further rejects Margot's concern for the emotional well-being of their mother, who, although worried and fretful about the outcome of her sister's operation, is nevertheless exiled to her bedroom by her daughters while they entertain friends downstairs:

Dies ingrimmige, nicht totzukriegende Gewissen Margots: sie hat mir in einem Augenblick, da die andern keine Notiz von uns nahmen, eingestanden, sie mache sich Vorwürfe wegen der alleingelassenen Mutter (p.35).

Klaus Wellner summarises the narrator's position as follows:

Der Kommentar der Ich-Erzählerin weist ... auf eigene unbewältigte Probleme hin, gibt doch die Wendung von dem 'nicht totzukriegenden Gewissen Margots' zu der Vermutung Anlaß, daß diese Gewissensbisse auch der Ich-Erzählerin nicht fremd sind, mit dem Unterschied daß sie diese 'totgekriegt' hat (Leiden an der Familie, p.54).

Wellner's suggestion that the narrator has succeeded in eradicating her guilty conscience would seem to contradict his preceding, and more pertinent remark that she is far from immune to the plague of a guilty conscience. In fact her behaviour is fairly typical of a person very much preoccupied with guilt: the nonchalant dismissal of guilt feelings as irrelevant, the persuasive assurance that they are quite out of place, and the annoyance that they should have been allowed access to her mind at all. This annoyance turns into anger in the short story Das Spiel 'Weinen'¹, where the narrator exclaims:

Was glaubt ihr denn, wie schwierig es für mich ist. Ich bins immer gewesen, die sich mit Schuldgefühlen hat rumschlagen müssen, ihr andern - Davon bleibt ihr verschont, immer. Und ich? Woran bin ich nicht schuld, woran nicht, gibt es was? Bin nicht ich es gewesen, die Tante Tintchen dorthin geschickt hat, ich mit meinem Gerede: Es ist zu viel, sie im Haus zu behalten, sie weiß ja nicht mehr aus noch ein, es ist besser für alle, auch für sie. Und unsere Mutter hat und hat es nicht gewollt, und ich habe es veranlaßt. Und später bei dir, Emmylein! Dasselbe (pp.95-96).

Here the narrator expertly turns the tables so that she becomes the victim rather than the victimiser. She presents herself as a martyr to guilt, while others in her family have escaped with clear consciences. The cause of her guilt is the familiar step taken by so many of Wohmann's characters of committing a person (in this case the narrator's Aunt

1) First broadcast by the Süddeutscher Rundfunk, 6.11.66. Published in Gegenangriff, pp.89-103, from which page references here are taken.

Florentine and her sister Emmy) to an institution, an action which they defend passionately as being for the benefit of everyone. From her shrewdly adopted status of being the one who in fact has the heaviest burden of mental suffering to bear, the narrator feels vindicated in reproaching her sister for harking back to past injustices:

Ist es nicht albern, ich meine schlecht gelaunt
sein wollen, wenn man den Grund dafür längst vergessen
hat. Also gib's auf, Schatz. Außerdem ist es nicht
sehr liebenswürdig, jemandem was nachzutragen (p.89).

By her patronising reminder to her sister that it is unkind to bear grudges, she attempts to deflect attention from her own gross misdeeds, but her near hysterical outburst at the end of the story:

Trag mir nichts nach! Mach mir kein Gesicht!
Emmy! Emmy! (p.103),

reveals that her guilt will survive any efforts to dispel it.

6.3 The authorial conscience

Detection of Gabriele Wohmann's private guilt complexes is virtually unavoidable on becoming acquainted with some of her overtly personalised works such as Ernste Absicht, So ist die Lage and Schönes Gehege. But perhaps guilt is altogether too emotive a term to apply to Wohmann's stirrings of conscience, since any analysis thereof would constitute a presumptuous and unacceptable moral judgement on the author. Nevertheless, Wohmann makes no secret of her fears that she has failed in her responsibilities in some areas of her private and professional life, and she takes considerable pains to construct her self-defence.

She is clearly troubled, for instance, by the impression created by the frequently autobiographical nature of many of her more recent works that she is selfish in her outlook and manifestly indifferent to the problems of the world around her. Believing that honesty is the best policy in such a situation, Wohmann admits (through Plath):

Jedes Wort aber, das nicht mich betrifft, mich
selber subjektiv in meiner Privatheit, erscheint
mir bedingungslos als überflüssig (Schönes Gehege,
p.235).

The conclusion that objective reality is superfluous to her function as a writer is not one which was reached easily. In her volume of verse So ist die Lage, whose very title forms part of Wohmann's apology for her conclusions, a glance at the titles of several of the poems serves to illustrate the author's determination to confront objective reality within her works: So ist die Lage; Umweltfreundlichkeit; Öffentliche Diskussion; Politische Teilnahme; Heute. The essence of the conflict is captured in the last lines of the first poem, So ist die Lage:

Beim Versuch nach etwas Belangvollem Ausschau zu halten
und von mir abzusehen
Mitten im Material für den Rohschnitt
Verirrt und verhakt in den Trümmern und den Grimassen
und in den letzten Infusionen
Zwischen den Toten und denen die tot sein werden
Im Gedränge der Wörter über die Lage die so ernst ist
wie immer
Dermaßen also eingeschlossen in überregionalem Entsetzen
Und von allem was mich auch betrifft, auch mich, wirklich
durchaus
Beim Versuch von mir abzusehen
Bin ich auf mich gestoßen (p.6).

The external horrors referred to here relate to the devastation caused by an earthquake, with the death and destruction graphically portrayed on the television news. But Wohmann has the courage to state the easily explicable, if uncomfortable truth, that even the most well-intentioned philanthropist is ultimately more concerned with his own personal situation, and that the emotional capacity of the individual can cope with little more than the reality of his immediate surroundings. Thus inter-personal relationships have far greater access to the sympathies of the individual than do cosmic issues:

Aber wie kommt es daß mich die Fernsehbilder jetzt
Weniger angreifen als dein Tonfall vorhin
Daß es mich beschäftigt wie wir uns GUTE NACHT sagen
Während die Erdbebengeschädigten keine Schlafstätte haben
(p.5).

This area of concern for Wohmann must not be exaggerated, for there are no grounds on which an author should be made to feel guilty for stating even a regrettable truth. Of far greater import are Wohmann's anxieties about her possible failings in the area of personal relationships, as it is these relationships which she has consistently presented as being the decisive influences on an individual's happiness.

As a writer particularly concerned about the success of close relationships, Gabriele Wohmann is especially vulnerable to the accusation that she transforms real-life people into characters in her works in a malevolent and injurious manner. It is a well known fact that Wohmann draws heavily on reality for her subject matter, and her portrayal of real persons when they appear in print regularly gives offence. Christian Schultz-Gerstein, for instance, in his article 'Im Käfig der Öffentlichkeit'¹, refers with displeasure to several virtual caricature figures in Schönes Gehege:

Über solche Witzfiguren nicht lachen, heißt: keinen Humor haben, ich weiß. An dieser Komik aber kann ich einfach nichts Komisches finden, weil sie mich so intensiv an das wegwerfende Lachen Gesunder über Mißgestaltete erinnert. Und eben wegwerfend ist mir auch die stilistische Lapidarität der Wohmann immer vorgekommen (p.94).

While such criticism of secondary characters has never unduly perturbed Wohmann, she has always been acutely sensitive with regard to the voice of her own conscience, which frequently reproaches her with abusing those she loves. As far back as 1970, the narrator in Ernste Absicht (as has already been noted - see thesis p.51) refers to:

meine lieben, mißhandelten Anschauungsobjekte,
mein Material, das sich geduldig deformieren
läßt (p.297),

revealing Wohmann's unease at her self-confessed tendency to distort. By 1975, with the publication of Schönes Gehege, the unease has turned to near wretchedness in the heart of the author Robert Plath, who is desperately trying to make amends by writing positively about his loved ones. He recognises that his habit of distorting is very nearly an addiction:

Im Denken deformierte er diese Lieben nie. Während der profihaften Schreibprozesse zwangsläufig (p.221).

His sense of shame is so great that it leads him to the unusual step of drawing up what almost amounts to an emotional inventory:

Er hatte seine paar Personen doch so gern, er hatte seine Frau doch so gern. Und die Eltern, die Geschwister, die Angehörigen, die Angeheirateten (pp.210-211).

1) Christian Schultz-Gerstein, 'Im Käfig der Öffentlichkeit', Die Zeit, 5.9.75. This article is also included in the Materialienbuch, pp.93-97, from which page references here are taken.

If this is felt to verge on the mawkish, then perhaps his family's objections, which have clearly troubled his conscience, should be included. They refer to his books as:

Mordinstrumente, diese Sachen von Robert (p.258),

and his wife Johanna, in particular, is embittered by the misrepresentation of their marriage and herself in his works:

Mich verzerrst du nach wie vor unbedenklich ...
Wenn man liest, was du über uns beide schreibst,
könnte man wirklich den gräßlichen Eindruck
haben, als gäbs bei uns nur Streit und Anklagerei
und so was (p.148).

So great are Plath's efforts to reverse the impressions he has given up to that point, to present the joys of their marriage and the rewards of their life together, that his statements become more and more alien to the rest of Wohmann's works. Typical of them is the following passage:

Glück. Versöhnlichkeit. Behutsamkeit. Wenn
zwei Leute, die verheiratet sind, mit den Jahren
lernen, aus dem, was sie, als verliebte Planlosig-
keit, zusammengebracht hat, etwas so Behutsames,
Verwandtschaftliches zu machen: eine große Sache,
gnädiges Glück. Ich finde das lebensfroh todernst,
todernst lebensfroh, das ist das gleiche (p.288).

While this rather cosy success story may accurately describe the marriage of Robert and Johanna Plath, its relevance for the rest of Wohmann's works ends there. Indeed it could be argued that the temporarily hyper-active conscience of the author is doing a positive disservice to the impact of her other works: for by prompting her to present such a rosy picture of marriage, it invites complacency from the reader. The more characteristic and prevalent depictions of the problems within relationships, on the other hand, call for the much more positive and potentially beneficial response of careful reflection and deliberation.

Aber sie hat ja nie so richtig schockiert. Sie wurde niemals so richtig obszön, sie hatte keine Lust zur Pornografie ... auch wenn von Liebe die Rede war, haftete der jeweiligen, doch relevanten Beziehung das für sie merkmalfhafte Öde, Spröde, nicht ganz Beendete oder Beendbare und das nicht ganz Zufriedenstellende an.¹

The erotic is never used by Wohmann to titillate public interest with a view to increasing the sales of her books; indeed, it appears to occupy a comparatively low position altogether in her personal scale of values, and it is not a topic to which she feels frequently drawn to comment upon. When she does introduce the subject, therefore, it attracts particular attention, not least because her approach is the reverse of what might be expected. Wohmann's use of the erotic is not to enhance a description of a successful sexual relationship, it is to complement her general belief in the fragility of human relationships by showing yet another aspect which is often divisive, destructive and debasing. To facilitate the analysis of the erotic in Wohmann's works, the natural division of the sexes will be observed.

7.1. Male sexuality

Wohmann's most detailed references to male sexuality² are to be found in her first novel Jetzt und nie, where the male protagonist divides his thoughts equally between two of the most fundamental experiences of life: the sexual urge and death³. He is deeply depressed and lonely, he is aware that his health is failing rapidly, and he lacks all temporal ambitions. All, that is, except one: the ambition to succeed in the sexual conquest of a wealthy, young and attractive girl called Martina. As this is the only interest which encourages him to cling a little longer to life, the implications of success or failure are enormous.

1) Nachruf in Selbstverteidigung pp.309-316 (p.310).

2) It should be stressed that Wohmann's detailed consideration refers to one individual only, reflecting, therefore, her own impressions of the nature of male sexuality, but not offering extensively researched conclusions on the subject.

3) See thesis Chapter 4.1.

The successful completion of the sexual act with Martina would have several effects on his depressed psychological state. Firstly it would restore the basic human contact he lacks at this point, and would replenish his self-confidence so that he would be able to resume normal gregarious interactions, which he has been neglecting for some time. Secondly, by making love to Martina, whom he believes to be a virgin, he would regain pride in the prerogatives of his sex by exercising the unique masculine power over feminine purity in the act of defloration. Most importantly, however, he would satisfy his persistent and primitive urge to destroy:

Zerstören macht mehr Spaß als aufbauen. Wenn was intakt ist, muß mans kaputt machen und immer mehr kaputt, bis mans nicht mehr gebrauchen kann (p.7).

A cruel and chauvinistic male obsession with violating and destroying the purity of the female forms the substance of his erotic thoughts; but the significance of the virgin's body extends further than this for him, for it would provide him with the opportunity to be cleansed in a haven of elemental purity. This is strongly reminiscent of his search for purity in death, through a union with nature, which has already been noted:

Ich möcht ein Baum sein oder Erde, Grasbüschel in den Wind geworfen ... Sterben, Erde und eine Muschel, im Wind und im Sand bespült weiterleben (p.67).

It emphasises that it is the virgin state to which he is attracted and not simply to the female body; in fact he has ample opportunity for sexual activity with either the barmaid Sissy or with his sick wife, yet memories of these and other relationships leave him unmoved and unaroused:

Brauchte ein Aphrodisiakum, um sie nur zu wollen (p.36).

The man's erotic phantasy, however, is damaged beyond repair when he begins to suspect that Martina is not, after all, a virgin, that she is: 'defekt wie sie alle' (p.34). She is now no more desirable to him than any other woman:

Hätte keinen Spaß gemacht, wo sie defekt ist. Wie die andern (p.17).

This discovery revives his pessimism and results in his somewhat histrionic conclusion that: 'wahre Form ist Deformation' (p.25). Even when he later learns that his suspicions about Martina were based on completely unreliable evidence, it is not sufficient to rekindle his desire, and his anxieties about incurring guilt through the possibility of fathering a child (see thesis p.110) further inhibits his desires and persuades him to abandon his efforts:

Kann dich nicht mehr anfassen, intakt oder defekt,
bin fertig damit. Schuld verzahnt sich in neuer
Schuld (p.216).

The man's desire for extra-marital sexual adventure is a symptom rather than a cause of the breakdown of his marriage with Veronika. The former delights of love for his wife, into whose 'damp harbour of desires'¹ he had once so willingly sunk his future, have now faded, and the accompanying disappointment has turned his love into something akin to hatred:

Schattentage hinter den Scheiben. Verdorren wie
Gras. Ein Mann liest vor, einer Frau, die stirbt.
Wie er sie liebte ... Wie sie sich hassen, nachdem
sie sich so sehr liebten. Die Werke der Zeit hinter
den Scheiben (p.164).

The barrenness of their present relationship and the swift passing of sexual attraction is the cause of deep sorrow for the man. Set against this loss of intimacy and sexual commitment, death loses its horror for him and presents itself more and more as a welcome release. With ambiguous feelings, he has come to equate a woman's sexual desire with death for the man, in that it evokes a:

Süßen schweren Rausch, köstlich zwischen den
Schenkeln eines weiblichen Todes (p.37),

and he sees woman's sexual willingness as a consuming power which sucks the man into its clutches:

Wartende, williggespreizte Gelegenheit, und Tod
durch Ertrinken ist der beste, wenn sie dich rein-
zerren, tiefer und tiefer in ihre geifernden Bereit-
willigkeitsspalten, dich ersäufen in (p.211).

1) 'Wie ich sie liebte ... sie wird meine Frau, meine Zukunft versenke ich im feuchten Hafen ihrer Begierde' (p.15).

His description of the intoxication he experiences during the sexual embrace is of considerable significance, in that it implies the loss of mental powers and intellectual reasoning, which would render him totally vulnerable. By risking such abrogation of his discerning faculties, the man could easily be enticed into self-annihilation. He would be further confused by the concomitant pleasure, indicated by the words 'süß' and 'köstlich', and so, totally compromised, would be completely at the mercy of the woman. The woman, on the other hand, is content to wait patiently, like an animal about to capture its prey, confident of her ability to draw the helpless male deeper and deeper into her being, both physically and metaphysically. Similar ideas are expressed by the French novelist Simone de Beauvoir¹ in the following comments on male and female sexual responses, respectively:

Sans doute, il y a beaucoup de jeunes gens qui ne s'aventurent pas sans angoisse dans les ténèbres secrètes de la femme; ils retrouvent leurs terreurs d'enfant au seuil des grottes, des sépulcres, leur effroi aussi devant les mâchoires, les faux, les pièges à loup : ils imaginent que leur pénis gonflé restera pris dans le fourreau des muqueuses;

elle [la femme] guette comme la plante carnivore, le marécage où insectes et enfants s'enlisent; elle est succion, ventouse, humeuse, elle est poix et glu, un appel immobile, insinuant et visqueux.²

The man in Jetzt und nie faces almost certain destruction, therefore, if he succumbs to his own and to the woman's desires. In addition he will contaminate his death by lust and the demands of the flesh, instead of attaining the elemental purity he longs for ('sterben wie eine Muschel. Sandig, salzig, schmerzlos. Saubergewaschen' (p.31).) Paradoxically, both deaths involve immersion in fluidity, whether into the defilement of female sexual secretions, or into the soothing waters of a cleansing sea. It is this indefinable boundary in his subconscious between pleasure and suffering which produces the ambiguities in his attitudes. Weary of the entanglements accompanying erotic desires, the man concludes that the love which lasts is devoid of physical

1) This comparison is not meant to imply that Wohmann seeks to endow this single male character with prototype status, or claim that details of his reactions are the results of far reaching research, as in the case of de Beauvoir. (See also thesis p.122, fn.2).

2) Simone de Beauvoir, Le deuxième sexe (Gallimard, 1949), pp.146 and 148.

desire or eroticism, and he compares the love he feels for his wife and for Martina:

Wirkliche Liebe ist Mitleid ... Die quälende nagende wahre Liebe, die um den andern leidet, die kein Glück bringt. Die andere, gierige heiße egoistische erbarmungslose Liebe bringt Glück, Selbstbefriedigung. Aber sie dauert nie. Die wahre dauert, obwohl man sie nicht will. Sie klebt dir an der Hand, wenn du sie wegwerfen willst. Sie belastet, tut weh, klagt an, ist Mitleid ... Finstere, anhaltende, unausrott-bare Liebe (p.207).

Wohmann is at her weakest when she permits her characters, as above, to become maudlin. (This has already been shown to be the main flaw in Robert Plath's thoughts on love and marriage.) After a convincing and thought-provoking analysis of the sexuality of her protagonist, a conclusion of this nature lacks plausibility and merely undermines the carefully constructed picture she has presented up to this point. Fortunately, however, this picture is of sufficient substance to out-live the conclusion, and it survives as the only convincing study of male sexuality in Wohmann's works.

The depiction of male sexuality in Schönes Gehege is so different from that in Jetzt und nie, that it is hard to imagine that two so diametrically opposed portraits of men could have emanated from the pen of the same writer. The differences between the attitudes of the two male protagonists are so stark, that the reader is automatically suspicious: what revelation has been gained of the male psyche to make Gabriele Wohmann now write with such certainty about the character's lack of libido, his desire for sexual abstinence and his immutable belief that the erotic is overrated and really rather boring? For Robert Plath is unequivocal about his indifference:

Ich habe keine Lust mehr mir einzureden, der ganze Schlendrian, so wie er zwischen Personen, die sich doch immerhin mal verheiratet haben, wie er zwischen zwei so miteinander verbundenen Personen leider üblich ist und leider noch stilisiert wird, der sei enorm bedeutsam, er diene der Entwicklung zur Persönlichkeit und was nicht alles für einen Blödsinn. Schicksal und der ganze verlogene Quatsch. (Schönes Gehege, p.102).

It would seem that Wohmann is aware that she is treading on sensitive ground by broaching the possibility of masculine disinterest in sex, for she anticipates the reader's objection, and formulates it herself

in the incredulous question of the film director A.P. Roll,

Ist diese Einstellung nicht erlernt? Redet da nicht so ein bißchen Ihre Frau aus Ihnen? (p.103).

Plath's denial is suitably adamant, but nevertheless the suspicion remains that the opinions voiced are indeed those of a woman rather than a man¹. But, as if to defend the legitimacy of his views, Plath volunteers still more information:

Was jetzt für mich gilt: ich habe das Lebensalter der Bettgeschichten hinter mir ... (p.103),

and, Endlich will ich nicht mehr den Leuten zuliebe verhehlen, daß ich es puritanisch ganz gern habe (p.98).

These are the words of a man just turned forty, who has a potentially long and active sex life ahead of him. If his renouncement of it seems surprising, his reasons for doing so are even more so. He claims that he is repelled by the affectation of the sexual act, by the 'bedtime gymnastics' whereby two individuals entwine themselves into ludicrous positions, moan and sigh at the appropriate moments, and purport to find each other's sweating body attractive:

Diese steinalte Tatsache und Überlieferung, daß Männer und Frauen eine beinahe doch überhaupt nicht phantasievolle und schon gar nicht originelle und erst recht auch nicht ästhetische Gymnastik miteinander machen, daß sie sich mit Verrenkungen schweratmig in eine etwas lächerliche und ziemlich aussichtslose Lage bringen müssen ... Eine Turnübung mit angestrengt feierlichem Beigeschmack. Aber so von selbst, ohne Mogelei der Verherrlichung, wird nur geschwitzt, ziemlich hart gearbeitet. Nur halt nach einem Ehrenkodex wird natürlich mit Absicht auch gestöhnt, gekeucht, gewimmert, es werden die paar begleitenden Interjektionen ausgestoßen, geflüstert und so weiter ... Dieses Verhaltensmodell mit seinen paar Grundstellungen und mit seinen paar Abweichungen - Stolz der sogenannten guten Liebhaber und der oversexed few - diese doch wahrlich merkwürdige Ungereimtheit innerhalb der übrigen Umgangsformen und Gepflogenheiten zwischen Männern und Frauen außerhalb der Betten und in Textilien verpackt ... (p.99).

Surely these are the objections of the female, not the male, in her traditional role as the submissive partner: the distasteful memories of the woman who is used for the man's sexual gratification, without

1) This will become even more evident in relation to the following section on female sexuality.

any attempt being made by him to arouse her own sexual desire, and who therefore can view the sexual act dispassionately, even while she is participating in it. They are also so reminiscent of the views of the female narrator in Ernste Absicht (as will be seen shortly) that Wohmann might have done better to omit them altogether, rather than to offer them, as she does, as the creed of Robert Plath, who summarizes the love between the sexes as:

Diese ganzen Prickel, Kitzel, Verstellungen,
Verrenkungen, vorgetäuschten und unterstellten
und erbettelten Triebe (p.185).

It is almost apologetically that he briefly recalls a past love affair with a woman called Regine:

Zwischen Regine und mir war Sexualität ganz unheimlich
integriert und personenbezogen und, na ja: große
Liebe. Leidenschaft. (p.241).

As if to chide himself for dwelling on the forbidden territory of physical pleasure in a sexual relationship, he immediately redirects his attention towards his wife, claiming:

Längst hat das sowieso mit Johanna nichts mehr zu
tun, ich liebe nur Johanna (241).

He takes refuge in the familiarity of his relationship with his wife, where he is not under pressure to perform the exhausting role of the active and passionate lover.

Wohmann's ability to portray the male sexual drive convincingly began and ended, it would seem, with Jetzt und nie. The information in Schönes Gehege is much more closely linked with the views which she normally expresses through female characters, for whom she is naturally better qualified to speak. As an accurate assessment of male sexuality, the information must be rejected, but as complementary information on Wohmann's views on female sexuality (if the reader is prepared to ignore Wohmann's intentions) it is valuable and illuminating.

7.2. Female sexuality

Women in Wohmann's works do not fit easily into the role of being sexual partners to men. Social inhibitions prevent them from expressing their sexuality freely, as they continually feel themselves to be at a disadvantage; if they are unmarried or divorced they feel lonely and vulnerable, if they are no longer young they feel physically unattractive and the object of men's mockery, and if they are married they feel taken for granted and neglected by their husbands. As compensation for their disappointment in love they frequently turn their erotic energies into verbal attacks against man's nefarious sexual exploitation of woman. They reveal jealousy, anger, resentment, possessiveness and hostility in their behaviour towards men, all largely as a result of their own sexual frustration.

In the two examples of note where the woman appears to enjoy sexual satisfaction, the gratification takes place in her erotic phantasy and not in reality. Firstly there is the young children's nurse from Jetzt und nie who dreams of escaping with the boy Ritz and joining his father, and then of abandoning herself to a passionate love affair with him. She lies in the sand at the sea shore and imagines that she is with the man:

Sie öffnete die Lippen und spürte ihn eins mit der
Glut, spürte ihn als den zagenden Wind, fühlte ihn
in der Verkleidung von Sandstaub und Sonnengeruch
und im Krabbeln von Ameisen, und ergab sich. Sie
war Sand und Gras und Wurzel, war Sonne und Wind
und vom Fischatem behauchte Sehnsucht nach dem
Meer, sie lag und war die Glut, in der sie lag;
war vom Wehen und Zittern und Rufen, vom tragen
und wilden Herzklopfen des Himmels und der Erde
gefüllter Leib (p.70).

The naivety of the girl's erotic imagination arouses her sexual desires through images of the natural surroundings she knows, since as yet she has no clear conception of physical intimacy with a man. The man becomes the heat which envelops her, the wind which tentatively touches her, the sand and sunshine which cover her, and the ants which explore her body; and she surrenders to him willingly. In orgasmic fulfilment she unites with the man by herself becoming nature, by becoming those same elements which had aroused her, by becoming a body filled and possessed in sensual intercourse with nature.

On another occasion she sits naked in the bath, where her thoughts again turn to the man:

In der Wiese liegen mit einem Mann, locker liegen
im Gras und die andere Haut dicht über den Augen
Sie öffnete die Schleuse, ließ den schweren
Strom zurückgestauter Vorstellungen breit das
gedörrte Land ihrer Sehnsucht überschwemmen. Wild
wild ließ sie die fremde Haut nah an die eigene,
ließ sie die Hand und den Mund und die Augen Herr
werden über ihren wassermüden Leib (p.91).

The girl's phantasy is slowly becoming more specific in its sexual longings, although it still expresses itself through the imagery of the situation. Perhaps it is the awareness of her nakedness which prompts her to imagine herself lying in a meadow with a man, and the reference, in particular, to his skin, suggests that perhaps he, too, is naked in her imagination. That she is relaxed and responsive as she lies in his embrace is suggested by the adverb 'locker'. In reality, she sits in the bath and turns on the water so that it gushes over her; the imagery, however, suggests her encouragement of the man's ejaculation, which fills and revitalizes her virgin body, awakens new desires in her and fertilizes the unripe landscape of her erotic potential. She welcomes the touch of the hitherto unknown body with frenzied delight, and she revels in the caresses of his hands, his lips and his eyes.

The second example, in the story Der Herbstläufer¹, is likewise a product of the woman's imagination, although she insists to her friends that the encounter was real:

Er küßt mich, sagt Anna. Er streichelt mir den
Bauch. Ich lege mich auf ihn. Er ist das Holz
der Hütte und das Laub des Herbstes und dann ist
er die Erde darunter. Ich lege mich fest auf
ihn und laß ihn mehr und mehr die Erde werden.
Ich küsse seinen Erdmund, beiße ihm die Erdlippen.
Seine Zunge ist zuerst das Holz der Hütte, je
fester ich die Zähne eingrabe, desto morscher und
weicher wird sie, zärtliches nasses Laub und dann
Erde. Wenn ich ihn verlasse, hebt er sich nicht
mehr von ihr ab. Er ist die ganze Erde, ich geh
über ihn weg; wenn ich ihn verlasse, verlasse ich
zugleich den ganzen Wald, alles Laub, alles Holz (p.63).

1) In Trinken ist das Herrlichste, pp.58-63.

Once more nature forms an integral part of the erotic experience, but apart from this similarity, the sexuality of the woman in Der Herbstläufer has little in common with that of the girl in Jetzt und nie. Here it is the woman who is the active partner in the sexual encounter; she takes initiatives herself instead of succumbing to the pace and method of the man's approach. She tells how he kisses her and strokes her stomach - clear masculine preliminaries to intercourse - but then the situation changes, and she becomes the initiator of the progressing moves in the seduction. The woman now lies on the man, feeling both firmness and softness in his body, which is merged with the wood and the foliage of nature. It is she who adopts the sexually aggressive role, proceeding to kiss then bite his mouth and tongue. At first she meets resistance (his tongue is hard like the wood of the hut) but she intensifies her actions, biting harder, so that his tongue gives way between her teeth, becoming the softness of wet foliage and earth. The woman has overpowered the man in the embrace, and when she leaves him he is unable to move, driven in exhaustion into the earth. It is the woman who proudly abandons her lover, caring only for her own sexual gratification.

It would be tempting to surmise from an example such as this that Wohmann is propounding extremist feminist views: men are dispensable, and women can achieve sexual satisfaction either alone, or with the help of a surrogate for the male (in the case above, this would be the substances of nature). To do this, however, would be to ascribe to Wohmann interests which are too narrow and partisan. She does not sport one particular cause in her works, and the scope of her understanding is not restricted to the problems of one particular group. As a woman herself, it is only natural that she should illustrate her overall concern for the lamentable frequency of the breakdown of relationships from the woman's angle, but this is not to say that she would underestimate the effect of a broken relationship on the man also.

To return, therefore, to the representative passages from Jetzt und nie and Der Herbstläufer, it would seem that the importance of these two examples is not to provide a basis for discussion as to whether Wohmann considers that women fare better as the active or the passive partner in

sexual intercourse (and in view of the widespread frustration experienced by most of the female characters in her works this would appear an academic and totally irrelevant point); it is to illustrate the disturbing fact that these women experienced pleasure only in their imagination, and that in reality the women in Wohmann's works derive very little enjoyment from the physicality of sexual relationships.

7.2.1. The collapse of the romantic dream

Ach, war es überhaupt ein Vergnügen für Frauen?
... Richtige Opferlämmer sind Frauen.¹

Disappointment and disillusionment begin for Wohmann's women characters with the onset of physical intimacy with men. The physicalness of the man's body which will invade the woman in the sexual act frequently produces a sense of revulsion in the woman. This is the case with the narrator of Abschied für länger, who wishes the emotional security of marriage, yet is repelled on several counts by the physical characteristics and sexual advances of her lover:

Er fing wieder von meinem Hals an und wollte mich küssen, so wie Strass küßt, es ist eine Art Anschnupern, und er kommt nicht weit, ich rede jetzt von Küssen in der Öffentlichkeit, auch die anderen Küsse sind nicht raffiniert (pp.25-26).

Er nahm meine herunterhängende linke Hand, hob sie hoch und legte sie sich auf den Kopf. Es geniert ihn offenbar nicht, daß sein Haar klebrig und auch nicht frei von Schuppen ist (p.38).

Strass schnauft etwas beim Schlafen. Ich schlafe besser ohne Strass (p.46).

This is the expression of the unmistakable dismay of a woman who had dreamt of being swept off her feet by her lover's sensual kiss, then found that it was like being drooled over by an excited puppy; who had pictured herself running her fingers through his thick gleaming hair, then found that they emerged covered in grease and dandruff; who had longed for warmth and intimacy as she slept entwined in her lover's arms, then found that she was kept awake by his snores. But while there is still an element of reserve in the narrator's revelation of

1) Schönes goldenes Haar in Ländliches Fest, pp.72-75 (p.73).

her disappointment in Abschied für länger, in the later work Ernste Absicht, the complaints are more numerous and the attack more open. In fact, the female protagonist conducts a most noxious and extensive verbal campaign against her lover Rubin, whose unfortunate position of being the rather inadequate lover of an insecure divorcee makes him an ideal target. He suffers ridicule and insults on account of his demeanour and his sexual orientation, as is illustrated by the (far from exhaustive) examples below:

Rubins Atem: eine irdische, verfluchte, von
Passionen verquirelte Mischung aus dem miserablen
Erlebnis eines seiner halben Tage. Alkohol, das
Erbrochene, der Kummer (p.92).

Rubin tröstet sich, pinselt, aber er muß zu oft
unterbrechen, das viele Bier, er muß zu oft das
WC im Zwischenstock aufsuchen. Immerhin spart
er etwas Zeit, indem er die Hose schon gar nicht
mehr zumacht, außer am Bund, und zweitens ver-
tauscht er jetzt das entlegere WC mit dem Bidet
im Badezimmer (p.361).

Der Lunch schmeckt gut. Rubin weiß wohl als
einziger, wie man das macht, bei jedem Bissen
Nahrung über die gesamte äußere Mundpartie zu
verbreiten (p.391).

By directing her remarks to such intimate aspects of the man's person (his alcohol-induced halitosis, his repugnant misuse of the bidet, his refusal to fasten his trousers, and his slovenly manner of eating) the woman first seeks to undermine his confidence and dignity by claims which he cannot deny, since they could presumably be substantiated by members of his family also. Thereafter she can be assured of credence for her peremptory revelations about his sexual predilections, which, she alleges, include masturbation, homosexuality, incest, and a kind of voyeurism:

Neuerdings legt er auch wieder selbst Hand an sich,
wobei es allerdings vorwiegend spirituell zugeht (p.276).

Zur Selbsthilfe greift er jetzt wahrscheinlich mal
häufiger, denn es war doch ziemlich schön und über-
haupt nicht auf niedrigem fleischlichem Niveau (p.310).

... Eifersüchtig auf die eigene Hand (p.479).

Here her cynicism surely stems from her own anger and wounded pride at the realisation that her lover derives more satisfaction from masturb-
bating than from making love with her. And as if believing that more

intense abuse will lessen her own humiliation, she suggests that he should use sperm instead of water as the fluid for his aquarelles¹.

A further excuse for her own inability to absorb all her lover's sexual energies would be the fact that these energies are not exclusively directed towards women, as the narrator assiduously asserts:

Natürlich gab es auch eine postpubertäre Zeit der homosexuellen Beziehungen, besser: Versuche, in Rubins Leben. Professoren, ein namhafter Musiker und ein Dichter befanden sich unter den Interessenten (pp.370-371).

Es ergab sich, daß er in einer bretonischen Pension mit der 1. Tochter das Schlafzimmer teilen mußte. Er hielt sich aber genaugenommen - um das weniger Relevante auszuschneiden - nur im Verlauf von einer, höchstens von 3 Nächten mit größter Willenskraft in seinem Bett zurück, allein leidend mit nennenswerter Erektion und der Grübeleien, was denn eigentlich überhaupt schändlich daran wäre, wenn er seiner eigenen Tochter, ja, gerade der eigenen Tochter, kohabitierte (pp.384-385).

Die Frau des Professors säugt bei jeder Gelegenheit und an jedem Schauplatz ihre verschiedenen kleinen Kinder, ganz archaisch, Rubin hat gar nichts dagegen und sieht hin, besonders, wenn das älteste Kind an der Reihe ist (p.441).

If Rubin's erotic leanings are indeed homosexual, incestuous and voyeuristic, as well as heterosexual and masturbatory, then it is not hard to accept that the woman must have suffered so greatly in the relationship that she is driven to take such malicious revenge on her lover. And while she does not refer specifically to her own frustration, in each attack upon Rubin the devastation of her disappointment and resentment is patent.

Disappointment is likewise the theme of one of Wohmann's earliest short stories, Sand der Enttäuschung², where an unmarried woman in her late thirties is robbed by a petty-thief, after he had gained her confidence by pretending to be attracted to her. She recalls the experience:

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- 1) Compare: 'Rubin sollte mit genitalen Spritzern seine Bilder malen' (p.57), and: 'Seit Rubin es nun allein kann, besteht wirklich Aussicht, daß er nicht nur mit Tränen seine Farben flüssig macht. Er wird es mal mit einem gesäten Bild versuchen' (p.325).
 - 2) In Mit einem Messer (Stierstadt, 1958). Page references here are taken from the later edition (Düsseldorf, 1972), pp.27-38.

Denn obwohl ich litt und liebte, wucherten Zweifel in meinem Hirn, Mißtrauen; Verachtung konnte wild emporschießen, wenn ich daran dachte, daß der Geliebte versagt hatte. Enttäuschung und Leid - sie merzten mich nicht aus (p.27).

Although she had not found the man physically attractive, she had reciprocated his interest out of sheer sexual frustration:

Er ist ein Mann, meinetwegen ein abscheulicher, darauf kommt es nicht mehr an. Es zählt nur seine Absicht, seine lauernde gierige Absicht, die mich zur Frau macht. Armselig sind wir, ja ja, ohne diese Absicht ... bestätigen wollte ich es mir und den interesselosen Zeugen, daß ich Gegenstand sein konnte dem rohen, zärtlichen Willen des Männchens (p.35).

Here the woman is totally dependent on the man for any sexual experience; she is servile, and her attitude is deferential towards the superiority of the male. Without him she is not a true woman, her body is neuter until it is rendered feminine by penetration by the man, and she accepts this age-old, masculine-perpetrated belief without question. Such expression of a woman's sexual dependency on man does not appear in Wohmann's later works, which suggests that Wohmann's more mature judgement (formed, perhaps, as an antidote to disappointment) is to refute this view. This is certainly the case in the much later story Ein Fall von Chemie¹, where the middle-aged married woman suffers similar sexual frustration. Wohmann no longer shows her as being dependent on the phallic generosity of the male:

Sie beschloß, schon morgen einen Termin mit ihrem Gynäkologen zu verabreden ... Sie ließ den Gynäkologen weitaus öfter, als physisch notwendig war, in ihr herumkramen ... Seit sonst sich niemand mehr um diese Körpergegend und ihre Zugänge kümmerte, lief sie mit manischem libidinösem Appetit zum Gynäkologen ... Da erhielt sie jeweils ohne Umschweife einen nahen Termin für die nur mehr dort möglichen Triebbefriedigungen. Brustabfühlen wäre auch mal wieder was ganz Nettes. Am Unterleib lag ihr allerdings viel mehr. Schon die Position als solche vermittelte etwas Lustvolles, noch bevor der Handschuh des Mannes in sie eindrang. Da regte sich eine Spannung in Frau Eschfeld, die matt an frühere Zeiten erinnerte, aber ihrem Geschmack mehr entgegenkam als alles jemals mit Herrn Eschfeld. Beim Gynäkologen stand sie nicht unter dem

1) Ein Fall von Chemie (Düsseldorf, 1975).

quälenden Erfolgswang von damals, Stöhngeräusche entfielen, die Motive brauchten nicht vorgetäuscht zu werden. So gern und so gut sie ja im allgemeinen Theater spielte, Bettlaken-theater war ihr immer als ziemlich mühselig und unergiebig vorgekommen (pp.37-39).

On the first impression this may seem merely a portrait of a rather ludicrous and pathetic middle-aged woman, but in fact the passage contains serious pointers to what Wohmann sees as the classic examples of women's misfortunes in sexual relationships. As Frau Eschfeld's physical attractiveness has waned with age, she has had to come to terms with the knowledge that her body is no longer of interest to men; and as this is not automatically accompanied by the disappearance of her own sexual desires, she is faced with the prospect of many years of frustration. Her only recourse is to sublimate the need for phallic penetration into the manual penetration of the gynaecologist. In addition she will be aroused by the examination of her breasts and by her erotic thoughts as she adopts the required position for the vaginal examination. Ironically, however, she admits to preferring this surrogate sexual penetration by the gynaecologist to intercourse with her husband. There she had felt under obligation to simulate passion and orgasm through the appropriate sounds, so that the whole exercise had seemed tedious and pointless. Like the women in Jetzt und nie and Der Herbstläufer, therefore, the woman here experiences the greatest sexual pleasure in her imagination, albeit with some involuntary assistance from the unsuspecting gynaecologist.

In the majority of sexual relationships, whether within the confines of marriage or not, the enjoyment of sexual intercourse is acknowledged by the couple involved with quiet satisfaction, and it is only when it fails to result in physical or emotional fulfilment that it becomes an issue of central importance to one or both partners. In Wohmann's works, the repeated failure of this vital area of human relationships in the lives of both her male and female characters is one more element causing friction and unhappiness between them. It is but one more example of the "gewöhnliche Schrecken" which exert such a decisive influence on the individual's life, and it is in this capacity that the questions of sexuality and the erotic are considered by Wohmann.

Conclusion

The distress caused by the so-called 'ordinary horrors' that have been considered in this study: the feelings of isolation and rejection, the death of a loved one or the fear of one's own death, guilt and shame at one's treatment of others, or the frustration at the apparent impossibility of achieving a rewarding sexual relationship, is often camouflaged beneath a polished social exterior. Yet like a sinister cancer, it undermines the substance of human relationships, producing a virtual aphasia, whereby individuals can no longer express their own thoughts in words and are unable to understand the spoken thoughts of others. If Gabriele Wohmann's sombre statements on human relationships succeed in impelling the reader to reflect on the impact which 'die gewöhnlichen Schrecken' have on his own life, then her declared aim as a writer will be realised: that of sensitising people to each other's needs with a view to improving their relationships¹. In answer to the probing question: 'Was wollen Sie bewirken?', Wohmann committed herself to this aim as follows:

Ja: zuerst einmal überhaupt aufmerksam machen. Die scheinbar unscheinbaren Beschädigungen als monströs entlarven...Ich plädiere für sämtliche Sensibilitäten, die zwischen Menschen möglich sind, auch wenn es sich dann nicht mehr so brutal-bequem leben läßt. Sollte ich überhaupt von einem Programm reden, dann wäre also meins das einer Sensibilisierung, das Gegenteil von dem, was ein Hautarzt tut, wenn jemand eine Allergie hat: er tut es mit Injektionen, die den Patienten immunisieren, gegen Pollen oder was sonst. Ich möchte aber allergisch machen gegen die Unvorsicht des Menschen gegenüber dem Menschen, ich möchte die Angst vor der Angst des andern injizieren. Es ist lebensgefährlich zu leben².

The acridity with which she completes this 'sensitising programme' is the result of the remarkable clarity and sharpness of vision with which she examines her subject matter. At times she may indeed choose, like the caricaturist, to distort, in order to intensify the experience for the reader, but the original accuracy of her vision remains undisputed. It is this accuracy of perception which is her most powerful

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- 1) The weakness of a declaration such as this, however, is that it must remain largely unsubstantiated with regard to the actual writings of Wohmann, which rarely hint at the humanitarian aim of their author. Consequently Wohmann is known far more widely for her reputed 'böser Blick' (see thesis pp.19 and 82) than for the 'Sensibilisierungsprogramm' described above.
 - 2) Rudolph, Protokoll zur Person, p.150.

tool when she turns her attention to the multifarious aspects of inter-human relationships and spotlights each one of them under the glare of her scrutiny.

The works of Gabriele Wohmann have made a very considerable impact on the literary scene in Germany, and she has long assumed her rightful position among the ranks of important contemporary writers. Undoubtedly her willing tolerance of the publicity accompanying success has contributed to her rise in popularity and to her becoming virtually a household name in Germany. She has appeared regularly at 'Lese-Abende' throughout Germany, and abroad¹, has taken part in numerous interviews for television, radio and the press, and played the lead role in her television play Entziehung. A typical Wohmann reader is probably well-educated, reasonably cultured, and from the same social class as Wohmann herself, the middle class², and can therefore readily empathise with the intellectual and psychological problems of both the ordinary men and women, as well as the artists, writers and intellectuals who feature in her works. If the reader is seeking to compensate for his own tedious lifestyle with exotic or thrilling depictions, then Wohmann's works, with their dearth or even absence of conventional action and excitement, will disappoint him. It is more likely that the reader of Wohmann's works is attracted to the thoughtful formulation and artistic representation of the situations which he himself is familiar with, in relation to the characters of an author who can reproduce the mentality of her social peers so convincingly.

The overriding lack of a strictly defined contemporary context in the majority of Wohmann's works, indeed their virtual timelessness, (which has on occasion been criticised by those who wish to see works of literature firmly rooted in an authentic temporal milieu), is another

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- 1) In addition, various works of Wohmann's have been translated into Dutch, English, Hungarian, Norwegian, Polish, Russian, Slovak, Spanish and Swedish.
 - 2) Wohmann has always regarded herself as a 'middle-class' writer: 'Ich möchte mich nicht definieren. Ach ja, die sagen immer, ich schreibe über das Kleinbürger-Milieu. Aber das ist ein Irrtum, weil ich mich in kleinbürgerlichem Milieu schon überhaupt nicht auskenne. Vielleicht lieber mittelbürgerlich. Akademiker, das ist eigentlich meine Zielgruppe' (Schlumberger, 'Gabriele Wohmann: "Die Sprache ist krank"', p. 26.)

factor which contributes to her success as a writer. Because her works are not limited by specified time factors, their contents do not age, and their relevance does not diminish. Although the tone of her observations on inter-human relationships is predominantly negative, it is the product of a committed interest in the success of these very relationships, and should not be mistaken for private pessimism on the part of the author, as Wohmann herself is at pains to point out:

Warum verkehrt sie denn auch das objektiv Positivere in kränkende Negation, warum übermalt sie schwarz, was doch immerhin zumindest grau, ja eher ziemlich hellgrau war und ist? ... KANN sie nicht positiv positiv sein lassen? Ich sage: Wäre ich nicht angegriffen, würde ich mich nicht für dich, kranke, halbschlafende, deine häßlichen Wahrheiten scheuende Außenwelt interessieren und engagieren, samt deinen Personen, die beim Schreiben meine Personen werden; wäre das nicht so, dann gäbe es keine Zeile von mir. Und ist es nicht POSITIV, daß meine Personen es dauernd mit den Beziehungen zwischeneinander probieren, sind die Ursachen ihrer Anpassungsschwierigkeiten nicht POSITIV, weil sie, zum Beispiel, nicht vom Stumpsinn abstammen? (p.348).
(Richard Salis, editor, Motive; Gabriele Wohmann, 'Jemand der schreibt', pp.346-350.)

Intellectual or emotional stultification remains anathema to Wohmann, whose works reflect a keen eye and a constantly inquiring mind and are the products of a compulsion to give literary expression to her preoccupation with the most intimate concerns of the individual: his isolation from, or successful interaction with his fellow men, his psychological wellbeing, his sexuality, and his ultimate and unavoidable confrontation with death. It has been the aim of this thesis to present and examine these primary thematic interests, and in so doing, it is hoped, to contribute to the growing field of research on the works of Gabriele Wohmann.

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| Forster, E.M., | <u>Aspects of the Novel</u> (London, 1927) |
| Humphrey, Robert, | <u>Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel</u>
(Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1954) |
| Jens, Walter, ed., | <u>Literatur und Kritik</u> (Stuttgart, 1980) |
| Mayer, Hans, | <u>Zur deutschen Literatur der Zeit</u> (Reinbek, 1967) |
| McDougall, Murdoch C., | 'The Development of the Short Story in German
- with particular reference to the Post-War
period, 1945-1965' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation,
University of Edinburgh, 1971) |
| Reich-Ranicki, Marcel, | <u>Wer schreibt, provoziert</u> (Munich, 1966) |
| Reid, Ian, | <u>The Short Story</u> (London, 1977) |
| Rohner, Ludwig, | <u>Theorie der Kurzgeschichte</u> (Frankfurt, 1973) |
| Vogt, Jochen, | <u>Aspekte erzählender Prosa</u> (Düsseldorf, 1972) |

2. Primary Literature

a) Chronological List of Gabriele Wohmann's Publications
(Full details in sections b), c), d), e), f) and g).)

- 1958 Mit einem Messer
- 1958 Jetzt und nie
- 1960 Sieg über die Dämmerung
- 1963 Trinken ist das Herrlichste
- 1963 Erzählungen (Karlsruhe)
- 1965 Abschied für länger
- 1966 Theater von innen
- 1966 Erzählungen (Ebenhausen)
- 1967 In darmstadt leben die künste
- 1967 Die Bütows
- 1968 Ländliches Fest
- 1969 Von guten Eltern
- 1970 Sonntag bei den Kreisands
- 1970 Ernste Absicht
- 1970 Treibjagd

- 1971 Der Fall Rufus
1971 Die Gäste
1971 Selbstverteidigung
1971 Große Liebe
1972 Alles für die Galerie
1972 Gegenangriff
1972 Die Witwen
1972 Übersinnlich
1973 Habgier
1974 Entziehung
1974 Paulinchen war allein zu Haus
1974 So ist die Lage
1975 Dorothea Wörth
1975 Schönes Gehege
1975 Ein Fall von Chemie
1976 Alles zu seiner Zeit
1976 Endlich allein - endlich zu zwein
1976 Ausflug mit der Mutter
1977 Böse Streiche
1977 Feuer bitte
1977 Das dicke Wilhelmchen
1978 Grund zur Aufregung
1978 Heiratskandidaten
1978 Der Nachtigall fällt auch nichts Neues ein
1978 Nachrichtensperre
1978 Frühherbst in Badenweiler
1978 Streit
1978 Die Nächste, bitte
1979 Knoblauch am Kamin
1979 Paarlauf
1979 Ausgewählte Erzählungen aus zwanzig Jahren
1979 Wanda Lords Gespenster
1980 Wir sind eine Familie
1980 Ich weiß das auch nicht besser
1980 Ach wie gut, daß niemand weiß
1980 Guilty
1980 Vor der Hochzeit
1980 Violas Vorbilder
1981 Komm lieber Mai
1981 Stolze Zeiten
1981 Ein günstiger Tag
1981 Das Glücksspiel
1981 Nachkommenschaften
1982 Einsamkeit
1982 Hilfe kommt mir von den Bergen

b) Short Stories

Mit einem Messer, Eremitenpresse (Stierstadt, 1958); later edition (with graphics by Günter Dimmer), Eremitenpresse, Reihe Broschur 38 (Düsseldorf, 1972).
(Mit einem Messer. Sand der Enttäuschung.)

Sieg über die Dämmerung, Piper (Munich, 1960); later edition, Piper, Serie Piper 98 (Munich, 1974). Also Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, dtv 1621 (Munich, 1981).

(Sieg über die Dämmerung. Im Irrgarten. Der Abflug. Wir hatten so viel vor. Die Friedfertigen. Sie sind alle reizend. Ein ganz uraltes Vorhaben. Hartes Laub. Der Neger. Im Tunnel. Der Strom. Muränenfang. In einem dünnen Sommer. Hinter dem Pfeiler. Käme doch Schnee. Der Spaziergang. Traumtag. Der Antrag. Grün ist schöner. Elstern.)

Erzählungen, Volksbund für Dichtung, Scheffelbund (Karlsruhe, 1963).

(Den Abend währt das Weinen. Ich Sperber. Nur keine Aufregung. Der Report. Im Tal. Eine großartige Eroberung. Wiedersehen in Venedig. Ein unwiderstehlicher Mann. Der Herr ist ein Freund. Das Begräbnis. Die Schwestern. Mein Sohn. Ein netter Kerl. Vor der Hochzeit. Vor dem Gewitter. Auf der Seite von Zolle. Evas Besuch. Picknick. Das Boot kommt zurück. Das Morgengebet. Mein geschäftiger Tag.)

Trinken ist das Herrlichste, (with illustrations by Eberhard Schlotter), Roether, Hessische Beiträge zur Deutschen Literatur (Darmstadt, 1963).

(Trinken ist das Herrlichste. Ein Rendezvous. Eine Zigarette, eine Zigarette. Endlich allein - endlich zu zweien. Nachmittag. In einem Dorf wie unserm. Aus den Ketten. Denk immer an heut nachmittag. Geradeaus nach Süden. Kastanienblatt. Der Herbstläufer. In der Veranda. Nichts Geringeres als Liebe. Theater. Alles zu seiner Zeit. Gerechtigkeit.)

Erzählungen, Langewiesche-Brandt (Ebenhausen, 1966). Also Rowohlt, rororo 1906 (Reinbek, 1975).

(Ein unwiderstehlicher Mann. Wiedersehen in Venedig. Eine Okkasion. Eine großartige Eroberung. Die Klavierstunde. Die Schwestern. Zu Besuch. Die Fahrt. Ich Sperber. Die Verabredung. Große Leidenschaft. Ein Fall von Leichtsinn. Hamster, Hamster! Der Bruder. Heimlich.)

Die Bütows, (with graphics by Walter Zimbrich), Eremitenpresse (Stierstadt, Düsseldorf, 1967).

Ländliches Fest, Luchterhand (Neuwied, Berlin, 1968). Also: Moderner Buchclub/Deutsche Buchgemeinschaft (Darmstadt, 1969); Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, dtv, sr 92 (Munich, 1971); Luchterhand, Sammlung Luchterhand 204 (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1975).

(Der Report. Konrad und was übrig bleibt. Mein Freund, das neue Jahr. Verjährt. Wenn ich es vorschlage. Ländliches Fest. Schönes goldenes Haar. Schöne Ferien. Eine Schande für den Park. Fehldiagnosen. Flitterwochen, dritter Tag. Die Wahrheit über uns. Schilderung eines Aufenthaltes. Atelierbesuch. Evas Besuch. Treibjagd. Bobby. Der Knurrhahn-Stil. Trinken ist das Herrlichste. Denk immer an heut nachmittag. Geben und Nehmen.)

Sonntag bei den Kreisands, (with graphics by Heinz Balthes), Eremitenpresse, Reihe Broschur 10/11 (Stierstadt, Düsseldorf, 1970).

(Sonntag bei den Kreisands. Schlachten. November paßt. Das einfache Leben. Flamenco. Warum denn? Alles für die Galerie. Ablenkung.)

Treibjagd, Reclam, RUB 7912 (Stuttgart, 1970).

(Ein schöner Tag. In einem Dorf wie unserm. Der Knurrhahn-Stil. Schöne Ferien. Treibjagd. Die Krankheit zum Tode. Lese-Reisen.)

Selbstverteidigung, Luchterhand, Bücher der Neunzehn 202 (Darmstadt, 1971).

(Poems: Nachruf. Wir fanden den Teich wieder. Ich bin kein Insekt. Etwas. Am Meer. Nachbarn. Schöne Übereinstimmung. Ausgelitten. Freunde haben mir dabei geholfen. Rasch lesen. Stories: Sie sind alle reizend. Grün ist schöner. Elstern. Gerechtigkeit. Ich Sperber. Hamster, Hamster! Große Leidenschaft. Ländliches Fest. Treibjagd. Der Knurrhahn-Stil. November paßt. Ablenkung. Warum denn? Wozu leiden. Die Lok. Alberts Programm. Wenn der Wolf geht. Vaterproträt. Innere Ausrede. Die Segelregatta. Wirbeltiere. Selbstverteidigung. Der Boxkampf. Radio play: Kurerfolg. Nachruf.)

Gegenangriff, Luchterhand, Sammlung Luchterhand 55 (Neuwied, Berlin, 1972).

(Der Boxkampf. Nette arme und gerechte Kreaturen. Seegang. Ein schöner Tag. Die Sintflut. Er ist ein Eilfall. Robert. Sylvester. Das Spiel 'Weinen'. The First Golden Era. Von guten Eltern/Ein Kalender. Überglücklich umarmt. Vorübergehend lebenslänglich. Selbstverteidigung. Fahrplan. Nachrichtensperre. Gegenangriff.)

Alles für die Galerie, Aufbau Verlag (Berlin, Weimar, 1972) (edition for the DDR only).

(Eine Okkasion. Die Klavierstunde. Die Schwestern. Zu Besuch. Trinken ist das Herrlichste. Denk immer an heut nachmittag. Alberts Programm. Antrittsrede. Hamster, Hamster! Habgier. Alles für die Galerie. Verjährt. Ablenkung. Sonntag bei den Kreisands. Wenn der Wolf geht. November paßt. Die Bütows.)

Übersinnlich, (with graphics by Klaus Endrikat), Eremitenpresse (Düsseldorf, 1972).

Habgier, (with graphics by Pierre Kröger), Eremitenpresse, Reihe Broschur 49/50 (Düsseldorf, 1973). Also Rowohlt, rororo 4213 (Reinbek, 1978).

(Habgier. Kompakt. Vor dem Tode. Der alte Mann. Wachsfiguren. Das Boot kommt zurück. Antrittsrede. Die Antwort. Ein netter Kerl. Nur keine Aufregung.)

Dorothea Wörth, (with graphics by Heinrich Richter), Eremitenpresse (Düsseldorf, 1975).

Ein Fall von Chemie, (with offset lithographs by Heinz Balthes), Eremitenpresse, Reihe Broschur 65 (Düsseldorf, 1975).

Alles zu seiner Zeit, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, dtv 1164 (Munich, 1976).

(Mit einem Messer. Sand der Enttäuschung. Übersinnlich. Ein Rendezvous. Eine Zigarette, eine Zigarette. Endlich allein - endlich zu zwein. Nachmittag. In einem Dorf wie unserm. Aus

den Ketten. Geradeaus nach Süden. Kastanienblatt. Der Herbstläufer. In der Veranda. Nichts Geringeres als Liebe. Theater. Alles zu seiner Zeit.)

Endlich allein - endlich zu zwein, (with graphics by Anthony Canham), Eremitenpresse, (Düsseldorf, 1976).

Böse Streiche und andere Erzählungen, (with graphics by Hans Borchert), Eremitenpresse, Reihe Broschur 76 (Düsseldorf, 1977). (Brandung. Das Ende aller Erwartung. Der Tod des Vogels. Die Geburtstagsgesellschaft. Picknick. Der Kuß. Der Schatz. Das stärkere Geschlecht. Böse Streiche. Das Malheur. Seit Hans-Angus mein Freund ist. Regensommer.)

Nachrichtensperre. Ausgewählte Erzählungen 1957-1977, Aufbau Verlag (Berlin, Weimar, 1978).

(I. Vaterporträt. Das Pfarrhaus. Ferien. Nachruf.
II. Ein unwiderstehlicher Mann. Eine Okkasion. Die Klavierstunde. Das Morgengebet. Die Schwestern. Sand der Enttäuschung. Zu Besuch. Das Begräbnis. Vor der Hochzeit. Picknick. Mein geschäftiger Tag. Trinken ist das Herrlichste. Der Schatz. Endlich allein - endlich zu zwein. Aus den Ketten. Eine Schande für den Park. Denk immer an heut nachmittag. Evas Besuch. Ein Fall von Leichtsin. Alberts Programm. Antrittsrede. Hamster, Hamster! Habgier. Alles für die Galerie. Verjährt. Ablenkung. Sonntag bei den Kreisands. Wenn der Wolf geht. November paßt. Die Bütows. Der Knurrhahn-Stil. Ein schöner Tag. Ländliches Fest. Konrad und was übrig bleibt. Geben und Nehmen. Nachrichtensperre. Ein Fall von Chemie.
III. Ausflug mit der Mutter.)

Die Nächste, bitte! (with graphics by Bert Gerresheim), Eremitenpresse (Düsseldorf, 1978).

Das dicke Wilhelmchen, (with graphics by Maria Nandor), Eremitenpresse, Reihe Broschur 79 (Düsseldorf, 1978). (Steig endlich aus. Auf der Bühne. Das Morgengebet. Der Absprung. Das dicke Wilhelmchen. Versteck. Wie man sich bettet. Wirklich verrückt. Auf der Seite von Zolle. Auf der Bank. Der Ausflug. Das Begräbnis.)

Streit, (with offset lithographs by Kirsten Hammerström), Eremitenpresse, Reihe Broschur 86 (Düsseldorf, 1978). (So was von Warterei. Morgen bei Photo Hoss. Vor dem Gewitter. Beim Waschen. Streit. Imitation. Beim Bier. Bis Übermorgen. Die Mauer. Immer durch den Wald. Liebe kleine Lea. Vor der Hochzeit. Der Mörder. Die Kette. Der Schwan.)

Böse Streiche. Das dicke Wilhelmchen, Rowohlt, rororo 4414 (Reinbek, 1979).

Contents identical with Böse Streiche und andere Erzählungen and Das dicke Wilhelmchen.

Knoblauch am Kamin, (with graphics by A. Canham), Eremitenpresse (Düsseldorf, 1979).

Violas Vorbilder, (with offset lithographs by Kirsten Hammerström), Eremitenpresse (Düsseldorf, 1979).

Guilty, (with graphics by Günter Dimmer), Eremitenpresse
(Düsseldorf, 1979).

Ausgewählte Erzählungen aus zwanzig Jahren. Two volumes.
Luchterhand, Sammlung Luchterhand 296 and 297 (Darmstadt, 1979).
(Vol. I: Ein unwiderstehlicher Mann. Wiedersehen in Venedig.
Eine Okkasion. Eine großartige Eroberung. Der Antrag. Die
Klavierstunde. Das Morgengebet. Zu Besuch. Das dicke Wilhelmchen.
Trinken ist das Herrlichste. In der Veranda. Sieg über die
Dämmerung. Grün ist schöner. Im Irrgarten. Komm donnerstags.
Ich Sperber. Mein Freund, das neue Jahr. Eine Schande für den
Park. Denk immer an heut nachmittag. Wenn ich es vorschlage.
Regensommer. Die Verabredung. Evas Besuch. Nur keine Aufregung.
Der Report. Alberts Programm. Ein Fall von Leichtsinn. Die Lok.
Vol. II: Antrittsrede. Hamster, Hamster! Habgier. Wozu leiden.
Kompakt. Flitterwochen, dritter Tag. Die Wahrheit über uns.
Treibjagd. Alles für die Galerie. Verjährt. Ablenkung. Schöne
Ferien. Sonntag bei den Kreisands. Wenn der Wolf geht. November
paßt. Der Knurrhahn-Stil. Ein schöner Tag. Ländliches Fest.
Konrad und was übrig bleibt. Geben und Nehmen. Robert. Nette
arme und glückliche Kreaturen. Ein Fall von Chemie. Die Nächste,
bitte! Nachmittag in der Tannhofstraße.)

Paarlauf, Luchterhand (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1979).
(Nachsicht mit Kitty Clematis. Liebesdienste. Violas
Vorbilder. Knoblauch am Kamin. Rühreier mit Senf. Der kleine
Guntram. Eine souveräne Frau. Scherben. Abschied von Lukas
Belwanger. Paarlauf. Rudolph und Aline. Guilty. Gertruds
Interessen. Deutschlandlied.)

Vor der Hochzeit, Rowohlt, rororo 4609 (Reinbek, 1980).
Contents identical with Böse Streiche. Das dicke Wilhelmchen.

Wir sind eine Familie, (with graphics by H.Lauder), Eremitenpresse,
Reihe Broschur 100 (Düsseldorf, 1980.). Also Rowohlt, rororo 4808
(Reinbek, 1981).
(Wir sind eine Familie. Sonntag. Zwei Stunden Zeit. Zeigt mir
die Reiher. Der Himmel war schwarz. Die Probe. Jupiter und ein
wenig Individualität. Mein Sohn. Im Tal. Versöhnung. Ich
habe Ruhe.)

Ein günstiger Tag, Eremitenpresse, Reihe Broschur 108 (Düsseldorf,
1981).
(Küssen macht Spaß. Stolze Zeiten. Tante Tännchen. Der Herr ist
ein Freund. Du bist der Joseph. Der Zahltag. Die Kiefer. Ein
günstiger Tag. Weihrauch mit Nelken. Ein außergewöhnlicher
Abend.)

Stolze Zeiten, Claassen (Düsseldorf, 1981).
(Die Blonde. Vaterporträt. Ich hab' sie in der Hand. Sonntag
bei den Kreisands. Es war sehr schön. Das Begräbnis. Große
Liebe. Habgier. Picknick. Fridas Freund. Vor dem Tode.
Schiller im Schoß. Der alte Mann. Das Boot kommt zurück.
Nette anheimelnde Gegenwart. Das stärkere Geschlecht. Der Beweis.
Die Antwort. Konversation. Warum denn? Auf der Sonnenseite.
Der Ausflug. Auf der Fähre. Böse Streiche. Doppelkorn.
Schlachten. Der Fetisch. Wie man sich bettet. Angst. Auf der
Seite von Zolle. Immer wieder entschlossen. Zugvögel. Ein Mann
zu Besuch.)

Einsamkeit, Luchterhand (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1982).
(Das mittlere Elend. Ach: Männer! So lange es Menschen gibt.
Open end. Erinnerung an den Tod von Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy.
Zwei Frauen im Spiegel. Mein schönster Tag. Tönungswäsche. Stille
Wasser sind tief. Die Herrlichkeit des Lebens. Das Oberhaupt.
Tiefe Not. Feldeinsamkeit. Strafporto. Jeder Dritte stirbt an
Krebs. Das enttäuschte Kind.)

c) Novels

Jetzt und nie, Luchterhand (Darmstadt, Berlin, Neuwied, 1958),
reprinted 1982.

Abschied für länger, Walter (Olten, 1965). Also Rowohlt, rororo
1178 (Reinbek, 1969).

Ernste Absicht, Luchterhand (Neuwied, Berlin, 1970). Also Fischer,
Fischer Taschenbuch 1297 (Frankfurt, 1972).

Paulinchen war allein zu Haus, Luchterhand (Darmstadt, Neuwied,
1974), and Sammlung Luchterhand 219 (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1976).

Schönes Gehege, Luchterhand (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1975). Also
Rowohlt, rororo 4292 (Reinbek, 1978).

Ausflug mit der Mutter, Luchterhand (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1976) and
Sammlung Luchterhand 213 (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1978).

Frühherbst in Badenweiler, Luchterhand (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1978).
Also Fischer, Fischer Taschenbuch 2241 (Frankfurt, 1980).

Ach wie gut, daß niemand weiß, Luchterhand (Darmstadt, Neuwied,
1980). Also Deutsche Buchgemeinschaft/Moderner Buchclub (Darmstadt,
1982).

Das Glücksspiel, Luchterhand (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1981).

d) Verse

So ist die Lage, Eremitenpresse (Düsseldorf, 1974).

Grund zur Aufregung, Luchterhand (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1978).

Ich weiß das auch nicht besser, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, dtv
neue reihe 6307 (Munich, 1980).

Komm lieber Mai, Luchterhand (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1981).

e) Radio Plays

Komm donnerstags, Hessischer Rundfunk, 1964.

Die Gäste, Süddeutscher Rundfunk, 1965. Published with illustrations
by Jürgen von Toméi, Lenos Presse, litprint 95 (Basel-Halten, 1971).

Norwegian Wood, Südwestfunk, 1967. Published in Der Nachtigall
fällt auch nichts Neues ein, pp.31-78.

Der Fall Rufus. Ein Elternabend, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, 1969. Published with graphics by Klaus Staeck, Eremitenpresse, Reihe Broschur 31 (Stierstadt, 1971). Also in Der Nachtigall fällt auch nichts Neues ein, pp.127-170.

Kurerfolg, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Hessischer Rundfunk, 1970. Published in Selbstverteidigung, pp.273-308 and in Heiratskandidaten, pp.97-123.

Der Geburtstag. Eine Diskussion, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, RIAS, 1971. Published in Heiratskandidaten, pp.125-160.

Tod in Basel, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, 1972. Published in Heiratskandidaten, pp.161-188.

Mehr oder weniger kurz vor dem Tode, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, 1974. Published in Der Nachtigall fällt auch nichts Neues ein, pp.79-126.

Wanda Lords Gespenster, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, 1978. Published with offset lithographs by Peter Kaczmarek, Eremitenpresse, Reihe Broschur 96 (Düsseldorf, 1979). Also in Wanda Lords Gespenster. Rendezvous, pp.5-46.

Der Nachtigall fällt auch nichts Neues ein. Vier Hörspiele, (with graphics by Klaus Staeck), Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, dtv, sr 5461 (Munich, 1979). (First published separately: Der Nachtigall fällt auch nichts Neues ein. Ein Dialog, Eremitenpresse (Düsseldorf, 1978). Broadcast by the Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Radio Bremen, 1977). (Der Nachtigall fällt auch nichts Neues ein. Norwegian Wood. Mehr oder weniger kurz vor dem Tode. Der Fall Rufus.)

Hilfe kommt mir von den Bergen, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Sender Freies Berlin, 1980. Published with graphics by Heinz Balthes, Eremitenpresse, Reihe Broschur 114 (Düsseldorf, 1982).

f) Television Plays

Das Rendezvous, ZDF, 1965. Published in Wanda Lords Gespenster. Rendezvous, Rowohlt, rororo 4679 (Reinbek, 1981), pp.47-122.

Große Liebe, ARD, Sender Freies Berlin, 1966. Published by Tsamas (Bad Homburg, 1971).

Die Witwen oder Eine vollkommene Lösung, ARD, Sender Freies Berlin, 1972. Published by Reclam RUB 9389/90 (Stuttgart, 1972).

Entziehung, ZDF, 1973. Published in Entziehung. Materialien zu einem Fernsehfilm, Luchterhand, Sammlung Luchterhand 152 (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1974), pp.7-168.

Heiratskandidaten, ARD, Sender Freies Berlin, 1975. Published in Heiratskandidaten. Ein Fernsehspiel und drei Hörspiele, Piper, Serie Piper 175 (Munich, 1978), pp.5-95. (Heiratskandidaten. Kurerfolg. Der Geburtstag. Tod in Basel.)

Nachkommenschaften, ARD, Sender Freies Berlin, 1977. Published with offset lithographs by Helmut Theodor, Eremitenpresse, Reihe Broschur 111 (Düsseldorf, 1981).

g) Miscellaneous

Theater von innen. Protokoll einer Inszenierung, Walter (Olten, Freiburg, 1966).

In darmstadt leben die künste, (illustrated by Peter Kröger), Schlapp (Darmstadt, 1967).

Von guten Eltern, Eremitenkalender 1970, Eremitenpresse (Stierstadt, 1969).

Feuer bitte, Eremitenkalender 1978, Eremitenpresse (Düsseldorf, 1977).

h) Interviews with and statements by the author (listed chronologically).

'Fernsehen und Theater: Was ein Autor alles erlebt', Theater Heute (8/1966), pp.26-29.

'Stimmen von Stipendiaten', Darmstädter Echo, 11.5.68.

'Endlich bricht der Tränenkrug', Christ und Welt, 8.8.69.

'Nachruf', in Vorletzte Worte, ed. K.H. Kramberg (Frankfurt, 1970), pp.143-148. Also in Selbstverteidigung, pp.309-316.

'Jemand der schreibt', in Motive. Warum ich schreibe, ed. Richard Salis (Tübingen, 1971), pp.346-350.

'Dankrede zur Verleihung des Literaturpreises der Freien Hansestadt Bremen', (held on 26.1.1971 in Bremen), in Luchterhand Almanach, 1971, pp.54-59.

'Telesucht - kein ernster Fall', Der Monat (23/1971), pp.27-31.

'Als Autor in der Hauptrolle', Akzente (4/1973), pp.333-341.

'Die Vielzahl der Ideen', Darmstädter Echo, 22.1.74.

'Meine Lektüre' in Meine Lektüre. Aufsätze über Bücher, ed. Thomas Scheuffelen (Darmstadt, Neuwied, 1980), pp.215-217.

3. Secondary Literature

General

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'Kassandra auf der Rosenhöhe', Publik 4, 24.1.69.

Anderle, Hans Peter,

'Der "schöne Sport des Ertrinkens": Gabriele Wohmann, Erzählerin gegen die Bürgerlichkeit', Hessischer Rundfunk Sprache und Literatur, (Schulfunk, Sept. - Dez., 1970).

- Ayren, Armin, 'Im Stil der Regenbogenpresse', Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 3.11.79.
- Bloch, Peter André (ed.), Gegenwartsliteratur - Mittel und Bedingungen ihrer Produktion, (Bern, 1975); 'Gabriele Wohmann - Antworten auf eine Autorenumfrage', pp.274-275.
- Budzinski, Klaus (ed.), Was gibt's denn da zu lachen? (Deutschsprachige Verssatire unseres Jahrhunderts), (Munich, Bern, Vienna, 1969).
- Cavaliere, Guiseppina, 'Gabriele Wohmann' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Bari, 1970).
- Chotjewitz, Peter O., 'Über die Wirklichkeit des Unwirklichen', introduction to Selbstverteidigung, pp.9-18.
- Cwojdrak, Günther, 'Beim Lesen überlegt', concluding remarks to Alles für die Galerie, pp.159-162.
- Drewitz, Ingeborg, 'Sie drückt ganz schön fest zu, aber sie lächelt ja. Die Prosa der Gabriele Wohmann', Merkur 28(10/1974), pp.989-992.
- Durzak, Manfred, Die deutsche Kurzgeschichte der Gegenwart (Stuttgart, 1980), in particular: 'Ein gewisses Faible für die Kurzgeschichte'. Gespräch mit Gabriele Wohmann', pp.103-114; 'Gabriele Wohmann. Verlustanzeigen aus dem Mittelstand - Mansfield', pp.272-284; and also pp.389-391 (Verjährt), and pp.399-401 (Ländliches Fest).
- Eggeling, Thomas P., 'Interview mit der Schriftstellerin Gabriele Wohmann', Börsenblatt des Deutschen Buchhandels, Nr. 72, 21.8.81.
- ehms, 'Liebe, verdammt kompliziert...', Weserkurier, 5.12.72.
- Ferchl, Irene, Die Rolle des Alltäglichen in der Kurzprosa von Gabriele Wohmann (Bonn, 1980).
- Das Fernsehspiel im ZDF, (1/1973), pp.1-5, 'Gespräch mit Gabriele Wohmann.'
- Fröhlich, Hans, 'So frei sind die Männer nun auch wieder nicht', Stuttgarter Nachrichten, 12.11.75.
- gh, 'In düsteren Tinten', Darmstädter Echo, 2.3.63.
- Hagen, Rainer, 'Gabriele Wohmann', in Schriftsteller der Gegenwart, edited by Klaus Nonnenmann (Olten and Freiburg, 1963), pp.325-330. Included under the heading 'Über Gabriele Wohmanns frühe Prosa' in the Materialienbuch, pp.47-52.
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Important dates in the life of Gabriele Wohmann

- 1932 Born in Darmstadt on 21st May. Third child of the Pfarrer Paul Daniel Guyot and his wife Luise's four children (one elder brother, one elder sister, one younger brother). Father director of the Hessischer und Rheinisch-Westfälischer Diakonieverein.
- 1951 External 'Abitur' after one year at the Nordseepädagogium of Langeoog.
- 1951-53 Four semesters at Frankfurt University, studying German and French Philology, Music and Philosophy.
- 1953 Marriage to Reiner Wohmann, teacher at the Studienkolleg für ausländische Studierende in Darmstadt (until 1980).
- 1953-54 Teacher at the Nordseepädagogium Langeoog.
- 1954-57 Part-time language teacher at the Volkshochschule in Darmstadt.
- 1956 Began to write.
- 1957 First publication (the story 'Ein unwiderstehlicher Mann' in Akzente).
- 1960-67 Attended meetings of the Gruppe 47.
- 1960 Membership of the PEN-Club.
- 1965 Süddeutscher Rundfunk prize for short story for radio (Hamster, Hamster!)
- 1965 Georg-Mackensen prize for literature (Eine großartige Eroberung).
- 1965 Abschied für länger selected 'Buch des Monats'.
- 1966 'Besondere Anerkennung' of Große Liebe by the jury for television prizes of the Deutsche Akademie der Darstellenden Künste, Frankfurt.
- 1967-68 Villa-Massimo scholarship in Rome.
- 1969 Short story prize of the town Neheim-Hüsten (Aus dem weißblauen Tagebuch).
- 1970 Ernste Absicht selected 'Buch des Monats'.
- 1971 Prize for literature of the Freie Hansestadt Bremen (Ernste Absicht).
- 1974 Death of her father, Paul Daniel Guyot.
- 1980 Member of the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung.

- 1980 Awarded the 'Bundesverdienstkreuz'.
- 1981 Artistic adviser to the Hessisches Staatstheater, Darmstadt.
- 1982 Johann Heinrich Merck-Ehrung of her home town Darmstadt.

Lives with Reiner Wohmann in Darmstadt's Park Rosenhöhe.