

STRUCTURE AND TIME,
NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE AND FEMINISM
IN IRMTRAUD MORGNER'S
LEBEN UND ABENTEUER DER TROBADORA BEATRIZ
NACH ZEUGNISSEN IHRER SPIELFRAU LAURA

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ABSTRACT

The structure of the novel *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura* is problematic. Most critical literature describes it as a *Montageroman* because of its seemingly chaotic sequence. Irmtraud Morgner rejects the term as inappropriate and insists that she adhered to a strict plan. Such a plan has not been recognised by the critics who have interpreted the novel so far.

This thesis examines whether there is such a plan and whether Irmtraud Morgner is thus justified in dismissing her critics' failure to recognise the complete structure of her book. It concludes that a very sophisticated mechanical and thematic structure does indeed exist in this work. The thematic structure lies in the feminist orientation of the novel, in its subject matter and viewpoint. The mechanical structure is based upon time, specifically upon the calendar for the period from May 6, 1968 to August 22, 1973. The calendar is the matrix in which the fictional story and the factual information is embedded. A study of structure is a study of the complications, of the means by which this obvious skeleton has been obscured.

The seemingly chaotic sequence reflects the thematic structure. The mechanical structure is the plan by which the author, in the person of a fictional editor with her own

name, imposes order upon chaos and still lets it appear to be chaotic.

The thesis reveals that *Leben und Abenteuer* is a feminist novel, and not a text in which the GDR and its politics dominate. It is basically and primarily a critique of Western patriarchal civilisation from the perspective of modern women. The subject matter is the emancipation of women and their particular problems in the period during which the book was written and which it chronicles. *Leben und Abenteuer* is both a product and a mirror of its time. It reflects the gender of the author, and looks at actual life as a reflection of the theories which support the patriarchal status quo. It finds both life and theory wanting.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ABSTRACT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
SECTION A - <u>LITERARY FORM</u>	
CHAPTER I - THE BOOK	6
1. Basic information	6
2. The literary idea	7
3. The story and the plot	12
4. The subject matter	14
5. Fragmentation and length	16
6. Fragmentation, feminism and structure	17
CHAPTER II - <i>VORSÄTZE</i>	25
1. <i>Vorsätze</i> as part of the work proper	26
2. What happens in <i>Vorsätze</i> ?	27
3. Literary precedents of <i>Vorsätze</i>	30
4. <i>Vorsätze</i> as a signifier of the author's intentions	31
5. The specific significance of <i>Vorsätze</i> for <i>Leben und Abenteuer</i>	33
6. The present as narrative perspective	35
7. Art, women, work and money	40
8. Summary	45
CHAPTER III - <i>MONTAGEROMAN</i>	50
1. <i>Montageroman</i> as a critical term	51
2. "Montage" entries in <i>Leben und Abenteuer</i>	55
3. The usage of the term <i>Montageroman</i> in the novel	57
a) Laura's interpretation	58
b) Is a <i>Montageroman</i> art or patchwork?	64
c) <i>Montageroman</i> as a novel having factory life as its subject matter	68
4. Summary	70

	<u>Page</u>
SECTION B - <u>VIEWPOINT AND THEME</u>	
CHAPTER IV - THEMATIC INTRODUCTION	76
CHAPTER V - PRIMARY VIEWPOINT: SOCIALIST OR FEMINIST?	83
CHAPTER VI - THE IMPORTANCE OF MARXISM IN IRMTRAUD MORGNER'S FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE	124
CHAPTER VII - GENDER DIFFERENTIATION AS THE BASIC FEMINIST POSITION	140
CHAPTER VIII - CULTURAL IDEAS AND IMAGES FROM THE FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE	164
1. The unicorn sequence	170
2. The creation myth	182
3. The Nature of Woman	188
SECTION C - <u>STRUCTURE</u>	
CHAPTER IX - THE CALENDAR AND TIME AS STRUCTURAL MATRIX	197
1. The fiction and the calendar	200
2. Factual information and the calendar	203
3. Chronology	210
CHAPTER X - THE SEVEN INTERMEZZI	221
CONCLUSION	229
BIBLIOGRAPHY	232

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INTRODUCTION

The novel *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura* (hereafter cited as *Leben und Abenteuer*) is an important, indeed probably seminal, work in contemporary literature. Yet it has not been particularly well served by those who have written about it so far.

The work does not fit any of the conventional categories of genre. It is a mixture of numerous literary types. It could be called a biography, a chronicle or history, a picaresque novel, a *Bildungsroman*, a romance or a fantasy. Literary criticism regards the novel as a *Montageroman* because of its strikingly fragmented form that has been mistaken for structure. The critics have tried to explain and justify the fragmentation by relating it to one of the main themes of the work: the continually disrupted daily life of women. According to critical consensus, the apparent lack of structure in the novel reflects the lack of unity in the lives of women. This study concedes that the text is indeed decidedly fragmented, but nonetheless argues for recognition of a quite explicit structure to the work; significantly this structure is only indirectly linked to the fragmentary nature of women's lives.

By focusing on fragmentation in their attempt to equate theme with structure, critics have left unconsidered the remarkable coherence of thought and imagination pervading the novel. Recognising this coherence provides us with a

more satisfactory means of understanding the book and the author's intention.

This level of unity derives in part from the dominant theme and in part from the formal structure of the novel. The thematic unity derives from the immediacy of the social and historical relevancy of the subject matter, in particular from the feminism of the period in which the book is set. *Leben und Abenteuer* is a novel by a woman about women and their particular concerns during the period May 1968 to August 1973, the period chronicled in the novel. The structure provides an artistic coherence based on time, in fact on the real calendar bracketed by precisely those dates.

One of the unusual features of the book is the conceit that it was created by some of its own characters. In fact one of them, the editor, is the namesake of the real author. Another is Laura, whom critics have with good reason also identified with the real Irmtraud Morgner and with her viewpoint.

Its purported authorship by some of the book's own characters has not been acknowledged by critics. The result has been uncertainty about who is speaking for the real author. In fact, the lack of clarity as to viewpoint is intentional. Irmtraud Morgner claims to be a mere observer and recorder of ongoing social change. The reader is to focus and think about what he reads, rather than consider someone else's opinions. This pretence at editorial

neutrality and consequent absence of a recognisable viewpoint is a conscious literary device presented in the introductory section to the novel called *Vorsätze*. *Vorsätze* sets forth the artifice which forms the framework of the novel. Its total neglect by those who have analysed the novel up to now is therefore surprising.

The division of roles between editor and writers hints at an explanation for the sequence in which the individual entries are presented. In addition, it permits an enlightening dialectic on the relationship between life and art.

The fictional editor, named Irmtraud Morgner, stands for order, while Laura stands for creative disorder. Thus the tension is not between East and West, as critics have so far claimed but between the discipline of fiction and the natural disorder of life. The device which Irmtraud Morgner has used to discuss this dichotomy involves splitting herself into two fictional personalities, the editor and Laura.

It is crucial to understand that *Leben und Abenteuer* is a novel of the present, despite the title and despite the fact that it contains segments set in medieval and even in mythological times. The viewpoint is consistently modern and presents specifically the feminist outlook of the years 1968 to 1973.

Irmtraud Morgner is a Marxist, as are most of her critics who have written about the novel. However, while

she gives primary importance to history and the idea of constant change of society in time, her critics are preoccupied with the confrontation between East and West, with the different economic systems, and with political ideology. Irmtraud Morgner is concerned with fundamental Marxist historical theory, while the secondary literature has become mired in contemporary political issues and emotions. In fact, while critical of certain aspects of capitalist society, the novel actually straddles East and West; the main thrust of the text is a critique of Western civilisation as manifested in both its contemporary socialist and non-socialist aspects.

Within her Marxist historical framework, Irmtraud Morgner identifies the emancipation of women as the dominant theme of the modern epoch. Marxist critics and, for a time, Irmtraud Morgner herself, have been reluctant to acknowledge that she is a feminist, let alone one who shares many of the concerns of Western feminists. In fact, one critic explicitly denied the possibility that Irmtraud Morgner could be a feminist since feminism is a capitalist phenomenon and thus hostile to socialism. This view has up to now not been overtly questioned or denied. The critics have avoided discussing the feminist perspective of the novel and so have failed to recognise that it is one that which links the many disparate and seemingly unrelated references and ideas.

Although the book has enjoyed considerable popularity, it has not received the recognition which is its due. Its extraordinary expressive power cannot be denied, and its seminal role in modern literature has been felt, yet the reasons for intuitive awareness of its importance have so far been inadequately defined. Literary analysis appears to have ground to a halt after having followed early false leads as far as they can be taken. There has been no study of the work since 1985, and that was more or less a repetition of a critique of 1981. It is time to take a fresh look at *Leben und Abenteuer* in the hope of stimulating greater comprehension and appreciation of this remarkable book.

This thesis attempts to define and analyse the major critical problems relating to structure and narrative perspective which are crucial to understanding both the author's intent and the work itself.

Chapter I

THE BOOK

"Read it. It is about itself being made."¹

This chapter summarises some of the striking characteristics of the novel *Leben und Abenteuer*. The analysis of these characteristics forms the basis for the more detailed discussion in further chapters.

1. Basic information

The full title of the novel by Irmtraud Morgner is *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura*. The book was first published in 1974 by the Aufbau-Verlag in the German Democratic Republic. Ingeborg Nordmann, writing there, says that by 1981 the novel had been re-issued three times.² In the Federal Republic of Germany, *Leben und Abenteuer* was published by Luchterhand in 1976, and had been re-issued eleven times by 1985. It was translated into French, and to judge from the reviews, was well received in France.³ During her stay in Solothurn (1984) Irmtraud Morgner spoke of *Leben und Abenteuer* as "the book" among her works, signifying by the definite article, that she herself considers this her outstanding work.⁴ She said on the same occasion that to her knowledge the demand for the novel far outstripped the supply. In *Vorsätze*, the preamble to the main text, the character Laura promises fame to the person who would take on the job of organising her ill-assorted parcel of papers

for publication. (The documents in this parcel are what was to become *Leben und Abenteuer*.) In retrospect this witty and ironic promise gains prophetic quality, for this novel has certainly brought fame to its author. This is attested to by the attention and the space devoted to Irmtraud Morgner and to this particular work in the latest history of German literature.⁵ The American critic, Patricia Herminhouse, has called *Leben und Abenteuer* "the most complex novel in German literature" -- albeit with the qualifier that it had been "written by a woman".⁶

2. The literary idea

The imaginative starting point in *Leben und Abenteuer* is the fiction regarding its own creation. In order to understand the structure one has to recognise the relationship between the sequential arrangement of the text and this conception. The novel consists of two components: a fictional tale and other (fictional and non-fictional) texts. It contains the main story as indicated by the title: the biographies of Beatriz and Laura as well as a great deal of other material such as short stories, poems, parables, dramatic scenes, historical treatises, excerpts from other novels, and biographies. Among the seemingly unrelated inclusions is the text of a political speech, the text of newspaper interviews and of newspaper clippings.

In length and quantity the insertions outweigh by far the fictional tale of Beatriz. Indeed, within this welter of material and of ideas, the life of Beatriz itself appears

to be of minor importance. Her life and adventures, however, are the structural glue for all the diverse documents. In Alice Schwarzer's words, they are "the red thread" through the maze of the narrative.⁷ The relationship between the fictional biographies of Beatriz and of Laura and the extraneous documents is grounded in the idea of creating a book. Beatriz, Laura, or the Beautiful Melusine, (a half-dragon, half-woman distantly related to Beatriz) have variously written, read, remembered, or copied material from other sources.⁸ Beatriz reads about Agent Orange; she listens to Uwe eulogize the GDR as the land of equality for men and women. Laura writes her letters and sends telegrams; she remembers her own past. These writings, readings, remembrances, or copies constitute what appears to be matter extraneous to the central story. Its inclusion, however, is motivated by the main idea: the creation of a book centering around the lives of these women and their interests during a specific period in their private lives. These interests reflect the history of that period.

The relationship that exists between the literary idea and the diverse contents of the novel has so far not been set out in any of the critical literature, not even where the structure of the novel is discussed. The reception of the novel by general public and by critics alike suggests that the power of the novel derives from its timeliness, its choice of contemporary subject matter and its reflection of

current social realities. The success of the novel is due to the fact that it appeared at the right moment in time. In Irmtraud Morgner's words "die politische, weltpolitische und kulturpolitische Landschaft" were all in its favour.⁹ To judge from the many reviews, both short and long, and from the critical literature, the novel *Leben und Abenteuer* has chiefly been read as a true-to-life social document. For its theme, *Leben und Abenteuer* claims to chronicle "den Eintritt der Frau in die Historie".¹⁰ The fiction closely parallels the actual demands and the actual claims made by women during the past twenty years. It is in this true-to-life and true-to-history aspect that the immediate appeal of *Leben und Abenteuer* lies. And though unrecognised so far, structure and theme converge in their relationship to time and history. All subject matter is of interest to the historic moment and is attached to hidden but persistent time references in the text.

Yet, *Leben und Abenteuer* undoubtedly looks not only to real life for its models but to literature itself. To take but three of many examples in which unusual images in art are treated as if they were ordinary occurrences in present-day life: Beatriz, like Sleeping Beauty, awakens in a rose-covered castle but exits on the building site of a super highway; the Beautiful Melusine, half-woman, half-dragon, flies through the air like an airplane and might possibly even be detected on a radar screen; Beatriz finds the unicorn, rides home on its back, but arrives in Berlin

accompanied by only a little dog. Such surrealistic combinations of images contribute to the charm of the novel as a work of highly imaginative fiction.

Irmtraud Morgner's approach is very matter-of-fact. She looks at the outwardness of things and does not probe into the psyche. Whatever emotional response the text achieves comes from the reader only. In this respect, *Leben und Abenteuer* resembles an eighteenth-century text, one of its many disconcerting aspects for the modern reader.

The novel furthermore appears to deal with familiar matters. Yet this familiarity can deceive, for there is always a little catch which points to a divergence from the established meaning and requires an adjustment in the reader's understanding. The author makes the familiar seem strange, a method of *Verfremdung*.¹¹ The language, the words themselves, even the punctuation, always direct the reader away from the norm and point to what is missing or to a difference.¹² The estrangement of the familiar is undoubtedly Irmtraud Morgner's favoured method for communicating with her readers, and thus in *Leben und Abenteuer* the ambiguity and the indeterminate aspect of the narrative are conscious and intentional devices. While the author pleases and amuses, she at the same time consistently introduces elements of disharmony, however slight. The reader's recognition of this strategy is important for the understanding of the narrative perspective of the work.

The novel is an extraordinarily witty and funny book. After the publication of *Leben und Abenteuer*, Irmtraud Morgner received a great many letters; most people who wrote responded largely to the laughter in her novel.¹³ However, since the subtext is highly serious, the humour is sometimes forgotten in secondary literature. Ingeborg Nordmann, for instance, interprets the fact that Beatriz on her return to Berlin from the unicorn hunt appears accompanied by only a little dog with a paper horn strapped to its forehead. This image, according to Nordmann, symbolises the recognition that Beatriz has lost her ability to fantasize.¹⁴ In fact, Beatriz's reappearance with her dog is one of the wittiest vignettes in the novel. It is also an ingenious solution to several seemingly impossible strategic problems, which arise out of the initial idea of the hunt. It circumvents the answers to such questions as: Are there unicorns? What are unicorns? Since they have never been found, can one be found, especially by a woman who had been married, raped, loves men and has had many lovers? (Traditionally unicorns are associated with virgins.) The suspense in the novel created by these questions is resolved in a most unexpected manner. It lightens the tone while at the same time pointing indirectly to the contention of the novel that there is artifice in art no matter how closely it reflects life.

3. The story and the plot

Irmtraud Morgner claims in an interview with Eva Kaufmann that a definite design underlies the apparent chaos of the narrative. This design is so well hidden that the general consensus among critics declares that fragmentation itself is the structural glue of the work. (For a fuller discussion of this point see Chapter III, *Montageroman*)

Leben und Abenteuer has a highly complex story, but the events in it do not themselves provide unity. Plot and story could at best be described as episodic. That is the case at least at the beginning of the book, which deals with Beatriz in France. However, plot and story soon disappear in a welter of detail and, as in an eighteen-century novel, the progress of the tale is at times seen only in the chapter headings.

The title promises a certain focus upon the characters in the novel. It pretends to offer a biography about Beatriz written by Laura. Here, too, the promise implied is not carried through, for the characters themselves are not the focus, nor is Beatriz the centre of attention. A great deal of the narrative is about Laura herself.

The plot of such a book can never be adequately summarised. Many of the reviewers show their own preferences in concentrating upon the adventures of either Beatriz or Laura. However misleading it might be to attempt a summary of the plot, the novel does have a structural time line which is centred around Beatriz and her life. This in

turn provides the rationale for the title. The following synopsis illustrates this: Beatriz awakens from her sleep of 808 years in her rose-covered castle of Almacis in Provence in May 1968. She spends some time in France. After Christmas 1969 she leaves France and travels to "the promised land", the German Democratic Republic. There she meets Laura, leaves again to hunt the unicorn in foreign lands (some geographically real and some, like the Eleusinian fields, imaginary). She returns to Berlin, works on a novel and falls to her death the day after the French election, on March 12, 1973.

This particular synopsis takes no account of the fact that the greater part of the narrative centres on Laura and her life, rather than on that of Beatriz. It also omits the many actual historic events to which the novel refers and which are on public record for the years 1968-1973. Furthermore, it does not take into account the important concentration upon the actual composition of the book itself, involving the editor's work with the manuscripts collected by Laura and Beatriz. (See chapter *Vorsätze*.)

History and literature are closely intermingled in *Leben und Abenteuer*. History forms the basis for the fiction. It provides the facts, while literature provides the imaginative interpretation of those facts. *Leben und Abenteuer* thus chronicles not only the fictional journey through the years 1968 to 1973, but documents it as well.

4. The subject matter

Clearly, dates and time matter. In fact, it is my thesis that the novel is a self-conscious product of its time and that time, rather than place, is its central unifying concept. *Leben und Abenteuer* makes no effort to transcend the present despite the fact that some episodes are set in the distant mythological past, some in Medieval times, and others are contemporary.

The immediacy of the present is reflected in the subject matter of *Leben und Abenteuer*. In its choice of topics, the novel reflects the period in which the book was written, which is also the period encompassing the dates of Beatriz's life. The sixties and the early seventies were years of widespread social dissent and social change, and years which saw enormous scientific and technological advances. The details of the novel mirror these concerns. *Leben und Abenteuer* contains a strand of references to the Vietnam War and to technological revolutions such as computers and robots. It refers to the peace movement and to research into artificial food. During the time chronicled in *Leben und Abenteuer*, abortion was legalised and rape became a subject for public debate. Bobby Fischer played chess, Sarah Kirsch wrote poetry and so did Volker Braun. The Piéta in St. Peter's, Rome, was mutilated. *Leben und Abenteuer* mentions the underground presses which defied the copyright protection of larger publishing houses. (The books of the Beautiful Melusine are stolen by such an

underground publisher.) It mentions Angela Davis and the black power movement. It refers to "the quasi-anarchistic grass-roots politics of Agit-Prop" which the Beautiful Melusine supports in the novel.¹⁵ It mentions Che Guevara and his Tanya, the East German girl Tamara Bunke. Beatriz finds out that her style of song has not lost its charm and brings her a goodly sum of money, because she awakens in 1968 and the sixties were a period when interest in the revival of ancient music was high. When she awakens, she discovers to her surprise that her slightly ripped medieval gown fits well into the fashion scene. People wear the clothes either of the youth counter-culture, of the hippie movement, or else they sport a unisex fashion as overt signs of their belief in the equality of the sexes. The novel bristles with names of people whose actions and ideas were fashionable, a fad, or influenced the period. The book gives the impression of wanting to include everything which happened during those years. It is a work remarkable for the many strands of different topics and subject matter consisting of contemporary political references and of social and cultural history which run concurrently through time. All narrative strands are tightly intertwined and therefore not easily disentangled: yet all support each other to make a whole.

5. Fragmentation and length

Leben und Abenteuer seems at first reading to be one of the most loosely constructed works in German literature. The text is a maze of vaguely connected ideas and of prose entries on a great variety of subjects. The novel lingers in the memory as a chaotic text, containing a vast amount of detailed knowledge, much of which is factually or historically accurate.

Its remarkable length adds to the complexity resulting from its multitudes of ideas: the Aufbau-Verlag edition of *Leben und Abenteuer* is 698 pages long. These are formally divided into thirteen books consisting of a total of 165 chapters. Interspersed here and there are seven *Intermezzi*. These *Intermezzi*, the portions least connected to the main theme, take up a considerable portion (145 pages) of the text.

Long books have again become fashionable in recent years. But when *Leben und Abenteuer* first appeared its length was quite unusual and it was one of the characteristics to which reviewers and critics alike invariably referred. The length and the fragmentation of the novel make it a challenge to read. It certainly requires a prodigious memory to keep even the basic story of Beatriz and Laura straight. There are so many digressions that one at times quite forgets where the main fictional tale has got to.¹⁶

6. Fragmentation, feminism and structure

During the late sixties and early seventies, feminists began to search for a language, a form and a structure which would reflect the lives of women more perfectly than the inherited patriarchal linguistic structures. The critical literature on *Leben und Abenteuer* links the fragmentation and the chaos of the narrative to the self-conscious aim of contemporary women writers to experiment and to find a non-male form and structure; it does so even though these same critics deny that Irmtraud Morgner is a feminist.¹⁷

Critics argue convincingly that the novel reflects the daily life of women and that Irmtraud Morgner used the experiences of her own life as the structuring principle. Indeed, in *Leben und Abenteuer* Laura argues for the desirability of textual fragmentation as a realistic reflection of her own life. This fragmentation of *Leben und Abenteuer* has led critics to describe the work as a *Montageroman*; this term has been in turn taken as explaining its structure without much real internal evidence.

Every aspect in Irmtraud Morgner's work indicates that she is very aware of the philosophical thoughts of her own time. It is possible that such feminist thoughts have suggested to her the idea of combining many of her bits and pieces of writing and giving them meaning by tying them to contemporary feminist philosophy.

Yet, the author herself indicates in the introductory section (*Vorsätze*) that quite a different structural principle is involved. (See chapter *Vorsätze*.) In the interview with Eva Kaufmann as well Irmtraud Morgner confirms that her actual method of writing has little to do with either the composition of her finished work or with her own philosophy of the relationship between life and art.

This interview contains many ideas which have a bearing upon the specific question of structure of *Leben und Abenteuer*. We learn that Irmtraud Morgner is a passionate writer and that literature is her life. She admits that she can never quite follow any proposal which her publisher requires of her. Her work always diverges from her initial plans. Therefore she does not like to work from outlines and finds them somewhat a waste of time.¹⁸ Indeed in *Leben und Abenteuer*, the fictional Laura attempts to solve this particular problem for all writers. Tongue in cheek, she suggests to the Aufbau-Verlag that there be a changed evaluation system. Since outlines are never followed by any truly creative writer and since the whole idea is in conflict with the creative process itself, the final payment for a finished work should be higher the greater the deviation between the finished product and the initial proposal will be.¹⁹

Irmtraud Morgner admits her inability to follow a fixed plan; this she ascribes to the circumstances of her daily life with its interruptions. Yet she adds that to her

surprise she often discovers that a lost idea may after all become usable in a different context. *Leben und Abenteuer* is a case in point. It contains chapters which were written at different times to fit different concepts.²⁰

From reading the novel one might suppose that Irmtraud Morgner at one point attempted to write a picaresque novel very much along the lines of *Lazarillo de Tormes* with Beatriz as heroine, and that at another time she attempted to write a novel to fulfill the requirements of socialist realism with Laura as heroine. One might surmise that both attempts failed because she could not find an ending for either one of them, or else that she indeed was interrupted by school holidays or other domestic demands. However, in the interview with Eva Kaufmann she says that the story of Laura came first and that she looked for a long time for a character to complement Laura before she found it in the short *vita* of the historic Countess de Dia.²¹ In other words, her initial conception is reflected neither in the opening nor in the progress of *Leben und Abenteuer*. The definite claim by the critic Annemarie Auer that the novel was not "artificially thought out" but simply grew along the lines demanded by life, is contradicted by the author who states that it was exactly that, an artifice thoughtfully constructed.²²

To judge from the entire body of Irmtraud Morgner's work, we may conclude, however, that the writing of short pieces of prose is in all likelihood not only the result of

time restrictions but also due to the temperament of the author. (This is a trait ascribed by Laura to Beatriz in the novel.) Irmtraud Morgner has always written short pieces of prose. Her novels *Die wundersamen Reisen Gustavs des Weltfahrers* and *Hochzeit in Konstantinopel* are made up of episodic components. Both novels consist of a series of short stories held together by a fairly simple superstructure. The first is an attempt to reconstruct a biography, the second is based on the idea of the telling of stories very much like *1001 Nights*.

Eva Kaufmann's interpretation of *Hochzeit in Konstantinopel* shows the important point of that particular work as its "Makrostruktur".²³ The slim framework narrative lends meaning and significance to all of them. This same point applies to *Leben und Abenteuer*. Here, the few pages preceding the main part of the book called *Vorsätze* provide the rationale for the sequence and the significance of the macrostructure. In *Vorsätze* we discover that *Leben und Abenteuer* is a multi-layered work. It is a fiction about its own creation. It is also a chronicle of the social change during the period between May 6, 1968 and August 22, 1973. *Vorsätze* hints at an idea developed in detail later: the main impetus for that change lies in the development of feminism during that particular historic slice of time.

The fragmentation of the novel may indeed reflect one aspect of feminist thought of the time. However, the structure of *Leben und Abenteuer* cannot be explained by its

fragmentation. In the pertinent interview with Eva Kaufmann, Irmtraud Morgner says herself that a firm scaffold supports her manifold motives and ideas.²⁴

And thus, while it cannot be denied that the feminist orientation provides an element of intellectual and imaginative coherence, the scaffolding of which she speaks can only be her strict adherence to a time line covering the five calendar years from May 1968 to August 1973. The imaginative consistency in the novel comes from its feminist themes, but time alone, not plot nor character nor theme, provides the significant unity which any work of art needs. Irmtraud Morgner's proposal which sees Beatriz' reawakening on May 6, 1968 as signifying "the entry of woman into history" is technically tied to dates and time references which correspond to the actual calendar for the period bracketed by the dates given in the text, May 6, 1968 to August 22, 1973.

In view of the fact that she carefully tied her montage entries to the story of Beatriz and Laura, and superimposed calendar time upon her own montage entries, Irmtraud Morgner reveals that she believes art needs a considered structure. Even chaos, she demonstrates, must have its own order.

Notes

1 Dawson Gaillard, *Dorothy L. Sayers* (New York: Ungar 1981) 27.

2 Ingeborg Nordmann, "Die halbierte Geschichtsfähigkeit der Frau. Zu Irmtraud Morgners Roman *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura*", *Amsterdamer Beiträge* 11/12 (1981): 423.

3 Anne Roche, "Un humour féroce" *La Quinzaine Littéraire* (Paris: 16 - 31. Jan. 1984) 26.

4 Irmtraud Morgner, *Die Hexe im Landhaus* (Zürich: Raureif, 1984) 79.

5 Wolfgang Beutin, ed., *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1984) 415.

6 Patricia Herminhouse, "Legal Equality and Women's Reality in the German Democratic Republic" *German Feminism: Readings in Politics and Literature*, ed. Edith Hoshino Altbach (Albany: SUNY, 1984) 45.

7 Alice Schwarzer, "Auch Genossen sind nicht automatisch Brüder", *Konkret* (Sept. 1976) 57.

8 In the secondary literature the Beautiful Melusine is at times described as a creature of the sea, a mermaid. This possibly arises from an identification of this particular Beautiful Melusine with Goethe's "Die Schöne Melusine". In *Leben und Abenteuer*, however, the Beautiful Melusine is French and not German. Irmtraud Morgner imagines a continuation in the present of the legend of Marie de Lusignan who in the twelfth century every eighth day took on the form of a half-woman and half-dragon in order to practice magic. Irmtraud Morgner wittily points out that this is merely what men thought she did. In her version Marie de Lusignan actually reads political tracts (45).

9 Eva Kaufmann, "Interview mit Irmtraud Morgner", *Weimarer Beiträge* 9 (1984) 1495.

10 Although it is much used, the phrase does not appear in the novel itself. The wording, however, is Irmtraud Morgner's. When asked in 1972 what the central theme of her new novel will be, she said without amplification: "Der Eintritt der Frau in die Historie."
Eva Kaufmann, "Der Hölle die Zunge rausstrecken ...," *Weimarer Beiträge* 9 (1984) 1522.

11 For instance, in attempting to come to terms with the unicorn episodes in the novel, some critics have given the dictionary readings of the unicorn myth and have embellished upon it. They have not pointed to the difference between the novel and the established understanding of the myth. This can partly be accounted for by the fact that their whole interpretation is based on a factual misreading of the text in the novel. In the novel the distinctive quality of the unicorn is its brain. Irmtraud Morgner here indulges in a play with the similarity between the words *Horn* and *Hirn* which are close in German. The text, however, is really quite clear. She means the other, the differing aspect from the conventionally expected one. Her play with words has not been noticed.
Nordmann 441.

12 This appears to be very obvious from the motto alone. There we are directed to the differing aspect. It reads, 'Am Anfang war die *andere* Tat', instead of, 'Am Anfang war die Tat'. This is not a repetition but a variation with the stress on the otherness.

13 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1504.

14 Nordmann 442.

15 David Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge* (London: Macmillan, 1983) 56.

16 For example, to illustrate how the maze of details, the fragmentation and length can confuse the reader, Annemarie Auer in her essay says that "die Schöne Melusine" throws bombs in Paris, while the novel clearly states that the throwing of bombs was done by Beatriz and her friend Jacqueline. [Auer 1092] All critics have read that Beatriz hunts for the horn of the unicorn (*Horn* in German). Even the author herself seems to have become confused at times. At one point she calls Uwe Parnitzke, Uwe Pakulat (531). She has Beatriz buy a train ticket at the Gare de l'Est, but makes her depart for Hamburg from the Gare de Lyon, going south instead of north. It is possible that Irmtraud Morgner may have intentionally thrown in misleading clues to confuse her reader. She speaks of her novels as *Knüller*, a crime story. [*Die Hexe im Landhaus*, 72] In its technique of dropping clues and withholding information it certainly illustrates her love of mystifying and keeping secrets.

17 Annemarie Auer, "Trobadora unterwegs oder Schulung in Realismus", *Sinn und Form* 28 (1976) 1068.

18 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1508.

19 Irmtraud Morgner, *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1974) 262. Hereafter all references to the novel will appear as page numbers in parentheses in the text of this thesis.

20 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1495.

21 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1499.

22 Auer, "Trobadora unterwegs" 1105:
"Es zeigt sich, dass es sich bei dem Morgnerschen Montage-Roman nicht um ein Konstruiertes, künstlich Ausgedachtes handelt, ...".

23 Kaufmann, "Hölle" 1518.

24 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1511.

Chapter II

VORSÄTZE

Most of life is a mess and a muddle; all chance and luck. Perhaps you can look back years later and say, well, *this* happened, or *that*, and then it will all fall into place, cause and effect, straightforward and logical. That is the business of fiction, to put things in order.

Nina Bawden¹

When discussing the structure of *Leben und Abenteuer*, the main point at issue is whether the novel consists of an edited as opposed to a merely assembled text. Does the sequential arrangement of the text merely reflect "the mess and muddle of life" or has Irmtraud Morgner in fact imposed a conscious order upon her material? Critics have favoured the former opinion. It has been assumed that, since the theme of the work is the fragmentary life of ordinary women, the fragmented text is a reflection of this theme. This argument in turn has given rise to the genre description *Montageroman* for the work. (For a full discussion see chapter 3, *Montageroman*.)

However, in the introductory section of the work, entitled *Vorsätze*, we are told that the novel is the work of two people: Laura did some of the writing and assembled the individual parts; Irmtraud Morgner edited the material to create a coherent whole. Both Laura and this particular Irmtraud Morgner are fictional characters. This significant fictional concept of two contributors with two separate functions has been ignored in the secondary literature.

However, *Vorsätze* deserves a detailed discussion not only because it has been left unexamined but also because the conceit established here provides the clues to an understanding of the sequence of the text and thus to the structure of the work. Besides, *Vorsätze* introduces a number of the key thematic concepts.

1. Vorsätze as part of the work proper

The very sequence of the novel points to the importance of *Vorsätze*. While it is true that *Vorsätze* stands outside the story of the life and the adventures of Beatriz as indicated by the title, the book's layout suggests that this section of text is an essential part of the work and that it ought to be considered in a discussion of structure. *Leben und Abenteuer* opens with a lengthy list of characters, explains their convoluted relationships to each other, and closes with an index of several pages, called "Bauplan des Romans", a blueprint to the novel. A blueprint is a building guide, a guide which explains how individual parts are put together to make one whole, and *Vorsätze* is listed on it. *Vorsätze* is therefore part of the building plan and, by the use of this concept, Irmtraud Morgner signals to the reader that there is deliberation in her art and that, in addition to the structure of each episode, the novel has a superstructure imposed upon it.²

2. What happens in *Vorsätze*?

Since there is no indication whatsoever in the secondary literature that critics have taken this introductory section into account when discussing structure, it would be well to look at *Vorsätze* in some detail.

On the surface the reader is presented with a situational comedy. What information *Vorsätze* contains is transmitted by free association of ideas and images. One seemingly inappropriate thought leads to the next one equally inappropriate. The whole episode appears to be inconsequential, for it is very funny and witty.

The action may be summarized as follows: Early one rainy morning, a woman with her son on the way to Kindergarten meets another woman, who also struggles with her son in the rain. At first no names are given, but eventually one is identified as Irmtraud Morgner, the other as Laura. Laura is described as short and dumpy with a sniffly runny nose. She approaches Irmtraud Morgner and very aggressively pressures her into buying a bundle of papers, a parcel weighing five pounds.³ These are the documents which she, Laura, and her friend Beatriz in their recently shared lives had partly written, partly collected, and had hoped to turn into a marketable product. But Beatriz has died and Laura is no longer interested in writing. She wants to return to her job as a streetcar conductor. Yet she knows that her bundle of paper is a treasure trove. It contains a great number of wonderful

documents which would bring world fame to someone, perhaps to Irmtraud Morgner. Irmtraud Morgner as a writer of fiction, so Laura speculates, must surely be looking for new and sensational material. Laura's bundle which contains "die ganze Welt", will save the lucky possessor a great deal of time in researching, in conversations and in other activities which writers must undertake to accumulate material for their books.

All the while Laura argues the children play in the rain and get dirty. Laura employs reason and flattery in her sales pitch. She mentions the butcher as a mutual acquaintance, she sniffles, cries and bullies. Irmtraud Morgner, after voicing initial scruples concerning her integrity as creative artist, (she has to be original and must not use the work of others, she says) succumbs to the temptation of the promise of world fame and to her curiosity about the dead Beatriz. She buys the bundle of papers after haggling about the price. Laura, convinced that she has valuable merchandise on her hands, wants a great deal of money. She initially demands 5000 Marks, a demand which is whittled down to 700 Marks. This sum is less than Laura hoped for but, being all the housekeeping money for the month of April, it is still much more than Irmtraud Morgner can afford.

After the purchase the attention of the reader switches from Laura to Irmtraud Morgner, who becomes a *persona* in her own story. This Irmtraud Morgner rushes her child to

Kindergarten, is late, and is reprimanded. Then she must do her housework and only when her domestic duties are complete can she indulge her passion for reading and writing. Now she reveals herself as a person of meticulous habits. After muddle, rain and runny noses, we suddenly have precision and order.

Irmtraud Morgner, the editor, is an exceptionally time-conscious person. Dates and times appear in the text of *Vorsätze*. She writes down the day on which she bought the papers: It is the 3rd of April. She records the hour when her domestic duties are completed and she finally can begin reading: It is on the ninth hour of the same day. On the 7th of April, three weeks after the death of Beatriz, she attends the funeral. On that occasion she meets Benno, the new husband of Laura, and the poet Guntram Pomerence, both characters in the novel. By attending the funeral, the editor thus becomes part of the circle of friends and of the story proper. Of chief interest, however, is the precision with which times and dates are set down. One cannot help noticing that the "mere editor", Irmtraud Morgner, has a clock and a calendar and gives a great deal of attention to both.

Of the papers themselves the editor writes that the material excites her by being truly "sensational".⁴ She writes further that she immediately begins to bring order into the disordered collection of documents in the paper parcel. She makes the explicit point of saying that she

neither altered nor omitted a single word of the texts which she finds:

Die vorliegende Buchfassung folgt in der Beschreibung aller wesentlichen Ereignisse streng den Quellen. Schriftstücke wurden unverändert in neuer, dem Leser entgegenkommender Reihenfolge wiedergegeben. (12)

The reader is further told that the fictional editor completes her task on August 22, 1973. This date is one of several in the novel upon which the fiction becomes confirmed as "true" by being correlated to some factual information. On this day with which the fiction ends, the real Irmtraud Morgner celebrated her fortieth birthday.

3. Literary precedents of Vorsätze

The precedents for the conceit of the found documents, of the fictional editor as well as for the lengthy and descriptive title are to be found in the early novels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was common practice then for a novelist to disclaim authorship and to pretend "to have found some forgotten manuscripts in a cupboard, attic or box"....⁵ The reading public of that time had a taste for "true" accounts, or for at least the overriding illusion that, even in fiction, life was reflected as truthfully as possible. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* claims to be a fictional memoir, the author merely editing a genuine life. An early example in German literature in which a memoir is sent forth into the world by its unknown author is the *Simplicissimus* (1669) by Grimmelshausen. Grimmelshausen signed his work with a

series of ingenious anagrams based on his name. He was so successful in hiding his authorship that his identity remained concealed for over a century.⁶ Even in modern times the device of the found documents and the "mere editor" has not lost all its charm and usefulness. Umberto Eco, for instance, employs it in his currently fashionable novel, *The Name of the Rose*. There, as in Irmtraud Morgner's *Leben und Abenteuer*, however, the literary conceit is no longer meant to deceive the reader as to the identity of the real author.

Through framing her novel by such a conceit as described above, Irmtraud Morgner tells us that in *Leben und Abenteuer* she will not only look to life and to contemporary history, the two aspects of interest to critics so far, but also to art and literature for her models. It is worth noticing how the wording of her claim, to order the material so as to please the reader, for instance, reflects similar expressions in many eighteenth century novels.

4. Vorsätze as a signifier of the author's intentions

In its position, *Vorsätze* stands in place of a foreword, a *Vorwort*, to the main body of the novel *Leben und Abenteuer*. Throughout the book Irmtraud Morgner conveys meaning by "Verfremdung", by playing what is against what ought to be. By using a single but unusual word, *Vorsätze* instead of *Vorwort* at the very beginning of the narrative, she points to her aim of breaking with conventions at the same time she is pretending to continue them.

Although much in the novel hovers on the crest between nonsense and seriousness, it does not suffice to assume that the choice of *Vorsätze* here is only a witty alternative to the word *Vorwort*, or a willful play with the convention which demands that a foreword be at this place in a text. Irmtraud Morgner chooses her words very carefully indeed. Here, by the use of *Vorsätze* instead of *Vorwort*, the rhythm of language and of thought is broken and the focus is directed onto the specific semantic meaning of both words. The German word *Vorsatz*, and its plural *Vorsätze*, means "intention" and "intentions", and indirectly we are made aware what the precise relationship between this section and the rest of the narrative might be: it is the declaration of the intentions of the author toward her material. It is meant as a road sign to the text by providing an imaginative starting point for the reader.

Vorsätze brings to the attention of the reader that *Leben und Abenteuer* is not only a novel about contemporary society but that it also contains a deliberation on the art of writing and the business of literature. In her interview with Eva Kaufmann, Irmtraud Morgner indicated that she is well aware of the effort and complications involved in the "business of literature": the research, the novel outline, the writing and publishing of a book, the climate in national, world, and cultural politics.⁷ She knows "was alles im Spiel ist".⁸ It is not the writing alone which

creates a work of art, and in the situational comedy in *Vorsätze* one transaction in the chain of the business of literature is enacted for the reader.

5. The specific significance of *Vorsätze* for *Leben und Abenteuer*

The comically serious events in *Vorsätze* also initiate some specific ideas which will recur again and again in the novel. The main ones are a subtle consideration of the similarities and differences in attitudes of women to the same problems.

A look at Laura and the fictional editor illustrates this difference of approach. Lack of time and the lack of money characterise both Laura and the editor, but their attitude differs in regard to the papers. Laura has collected and written the documents. To her, content and tone are of primary importance. She has given up on the *Montageroman* for the Aufbau-Verlag because she could not decide on the emotional tenor of the work, on whether to present her material in the comic or tragic vein. "Auch fiel mir schwer, zu entscheiden, ob gelacht oder geweint werden sollte," she says (12).

This is no problem for the editor. She leaves the individual entries untouched, for she is rather obsessed with order and time. She is described as being most precise, and not only in the importance she attaches to time and dates. She displays a markedly analytical, unemotional bent and a striking sense of duty to the material which she finds. For her part, the editor, by insisting on a change

of sequence, emphasises that art requires order and sequence. Art needs more control than life provides.

The pretence of the editor's objectivity is enhanced by the detached tone of the narrative. The editor pretends to have no opinions. The text presents itself as the objective observations by some women at a particular period in time. By including all, yet by not altering anything except the order of the papers, the editor makes no selection and takes no responsibility for any of the opinions expressed therein.

Her problem as editor arises from the fact that her concern for order, for dates and times had not been shared by the untidy Laura. Laura had written and collected relatively short works of prose (because she had little time), on subjects which interested her and which she thought might become saleable. She claims to have simply responded to the stimuli of everyday life and collected what came her way and what interested her. Her vision had a short range; the editor looks at the larger picture.

The matter is complicated by the fact that the fictional editor is both a writer of fiction and an editor. By dividing the creation of the book between two roles, the author makes us aware that a writer and an editor face different problems. An editor works with the material which she is given; a writer selects material to fit her story. The editor in *Vorsätze* is both: she is known as a writer but she is taking on the role of editor. Her specific responsibility is to find a new order, or put into a

sensible relationship the material written and collected by someone else. This sequence will to some degree be determined by her sensibilities as a writer of fiction when she places particular entries into close proximity in the text based on their similarity of theme or imagery.

Yet, although she is a writer of fiction, she could not in this case, as a writer of fiction normally would do, collect data to fit her novel herself. She has to bring order into the mass of material written and collected by Laura, Beatriz and the Beautiful Melusine. The main problem for the editor is one of structure; it is a question of sequence and of establishing relationships among the bits and pieces of Laura's everyday writing. Thus by dividing the fictional authorship of the work into two, Irmtraud Morgner separates writing and editing and so differentiates between the creative and the analytical capacity of the mind, the characteristics of "author" and "editor" respectively.

6. The present as narrative perspective

However, a look at what the editor actually does with the five pound parcel of papers will show that, despite protestations to the contrary, she has found it hard to remain totally uninvolved with regard to the material. The editor in *Vorsätze* stresses the fact that she has neither omitted nor altered a single word of the text. She does, however, not admit that she has added to the material which she finds. She includes her own interview with Laura into

the text (39-42), and addresses her male readers directly in order to encourage them to continue reading (149). The headings to the individual chapters must also be considered hers. They are all in the present tense. They explain the progress of the story and tie story and non-related material together. The headings, by being in the present tense, establish the present time, i.e. the period between 1968 and 1973, as the perspective from which the writings must be viewed. The novel becomes a novel of the present. All excursions into whatever other time the individual chapters may take, return at the beginning of each new entry to a starting point in the immediate present. The period between April 3, and August 22, 1973 becomes the time of reference for the reader.

The title of the work promises a biography, and thus by implication a retrospective narrative. In such a biographical narrative the author and the reader traditionally unite in sentiment and attention and look back upon another time in the past during which the tale happened. This assumes a moment in time distant from the events in the fiction. In that respect Irmtraud Morgner's use of the earlier literary device of the fictional editor and the bought documents differs from other models.

In both Defoe and Ecco the reader and the author are distanced by time and place from the events in their books. There is no such gap in *Leben und Abenteuer*. In *Leben und Abenteuer* the flow of time between *Vorsätze* and the story of

Beatriz and Laura told in the main body of the book is hardly broken. There is no gap between time narrated and time happening. In the text the death of Beatriz at the end of the novel is the reason for the encounter in *Vorsätze*. The last longer entry in the book, *Gute Botschaft der Valeska*, is a mere spatial separation between end and beginning. It is included because Laura reads it to console herself about the loss of Beatriz (646). During the funeral, for a short moment in time on April 7, all three are together: the corpse of Beatriz, Irmtraud Morgner, and Laura. Irmtraud Morgner becomes Laura's friend and replaces the dead Beatriz. This is a moment when fiction and reality, past and present overlap. The story and the book end together. The temporal process of narrative, begun on May 6, 1968 as we are told in the opening chapter of the novel, is ended when Irmtraud Morgner as "mere editor" of her own book puts her signature to *Vorsätze* on August 22, 1973.

The fictional life of Beatriz begins and ends, and the book is completed. We are to infer, however, that the historic social change brought about by the feminist movement, which the creation of the book parallels and the story chronicles, is not at an end. It continues and that process is still unfolding after the book is finished. This is the intimation of the continuation of the flow of time from fiction into a situation which appears to be a more true-to-life account.

Vorsätze itself contains no summation. The reader is left firmly positioned between past and future. In the narrative, the ongoing present becomes the only viewpoint from which to evaluate what is read. This applies particularly to the empathy which is expected from the reader towards the text, and this empathy in turn derives from the sensibilities of the time, particularly its feminism.

August 22, 1973 was the fortieth birthday of Irmtraud Morgner.⁹ The significance of this date for the book may merely be that she celebrated herself and the completion of this, her most ambitious work, by recording its completion on this date. However, it further muddies the distinction between the real author and the pose of the objective editor which she assumes. It is significant that by the trick of giving the fictional editor her own name, and by including her own birthday, the objective stance is immediately fused with the subjective participation of Irmtraud Morgner in her own fiction. She, as woman, is part of the social and cultural change which the novel records. She is a participant in the historic process and her novel, by extension, must be recognised as a contribution to the process of recording the present, revising the past and possibly determining what the future might be like.

The editor's concern is with order, time, and the calendar. She imposes what order she can and finds it in the life of Beatriz. The reader when turning the page and

starting on the novel proper discovers that, indeed, she begins at the beginning with Beatriz surfacing in her castle of Almacis, Provence, on May 6, 1968. This explains the significance of the title which suggests a biography, and which in turn suggests a narrative in linear time. What might be suspected from the editor's obsession with time in *Vorsätze* is borne out in the opening chapter of the novel: the tale will apparently proceed in orderly fashion, describing event upon event as they happen one after the other in time, passing through a middle and arriving at some ending.

However, this good intention is not maintained for long and confusion sets in almost immediately. Soon the story of Beatriz is lost and the totally mechanical approach which the editor chooses to impose order seems at first glance to be glaringly inappropriate to such material as Laura and life have provided. The editor's pompous claim to have provided this order "to please the reader" appears to be startlingly absent in the actual result and might be dismissed offhand as irony. In fact, on a first reading of the novel, the wit of this solemn claim overrides a consideration of its justice or seriousness. For the first and instinctive response to the fragmentary text and the multiplicity of ideas is the thought that Irmtraud Morgner may be a good writer but she is certainly a very bad editor. The "mess-and-muddle-of-life-approach" appears to have won out.

Still, while it draws attention to the different concerns in the process of writing and of editing on the one hand, on the other the episode in *Vorsätze* illustrates that both aspects are needed in the creation of a book. Both Laura and the editor have essential roles in the preparation of the novel before the reader. Laura contributes her parcel of "weighty matter", her five pounds of paper which contain the whole world and the tragic-comic tone. The editor contributes enthusiasm, hard work and order. Thus while not denying that art is possibly a mysterious product of inspiration and a gift, *Vorsätze* demonstrates that art needs a little more order and a little more structure than everyday life can provide, contrary to what Laura claims later in the novel.

7. Art, women, work and money

Throughout *Leben und Abenteuer* literary ideas, ideas on history, and the themes on women in contemporary life are closely interwoven. In *Vorsätze* we have an illustration of that interweaving in the discussion of money, art and fame. In the haggling about the papers, Laura tempts Irmtraud Morgner with fame while she herself shrewdly attempts to get as much money as possible for her parcel.

If the device of the found documents is not new to *Leben und Abenteuer*, neither is the conceit of the author pretending not to be the author of her own novel. Striking and unexpected in this context, however, is the unashamed link between art and money in the transaction between Laura

and Irmtraud Morgner. In older literary examples, the finding of a manuscript had the air of a rescue mission. The myth implied that the publication was a greater fortune for the reader or even for the documents themselves than for the mere editor or the publisher. The good fortune lay in the rescue of the manuscripts from oblivion. Daniel Defoe claimed to have done the world a great service in bringing the manuscript of *Robinson Crusoe* for publication. Fame may have been the reward for artistic creation, but money rarely is.

Both these points, the rescue mission and the nobility of the artist in money matters, for instance, are expressed in the preamble to the novella *Aquis Submersus* by Theodor Storm. There the narrator is handed some old papers which are of interest to no one and which have no value: "... es sind so alte Schriften; Wert steckt nicht darin."¹⁰ This is an explicit expression of the gentility surrounding the myth of artistic creation and the myth of the artist and money. It is also a pious lie, for the papers are indeed valuable enough to become the novella *Aquis Submersus* which, it is to be hoped, brought its author some money. The somewhat pious conventional assumption is that money is not quite nice. "True" artists, or at least artists of genius, were not (and are not?) expected to have money matters on their minds but to strive for higher things.¹¹ That these assumptions still exist is born out in the secondary literature on *Leben und Abenteuer* where the money motif

which is blatantly and repeatedly stressed in the text has been either sublimated or totally ignored.¹²

While there is an assertion in the opening to the novella by Storm that literary creation is somehow apart from the making of money, in *Vorsätze*, and in *Leben und Abenteuer* generally, the notion that artistic creation is sublime and pure and apart from the "ignoble" pursuit of money is thoroughly disavowed. The process of haggling between Laura and Irmtraud Morgner about the price of the documents is lengthy; there are interruptions in the discussion, digressions and repeated returns to the topic. The situation is described in such a way that one is reminded of the buying and selling processes in a Middle Eastern market place. Laura pursues her aim with stubborn singlemindedness; Irmtraud Morgner retreats and advances with passionate intensity. Rarely has the pursuit of money so blatantly and yet at the same time so favourably been linked to the pursuit of art. The inherent claim in *Vorsätze* is that art and money are not mutually exclusive and that both women and art require money.

The haggling about money and the value of the papers in *Vorsätze* is very amusing, but the significance goes further than the lightness of wit might indicate. (See also Chapter *Primary Viewpoint: Socialist or Feminist?*) In contrast to the hint of the sacredness of art and the nobility of literature which is above the considerations of money in the fiction of Storm, no such thought is entertained by Laura,

agreeing no doubt with Dr. Johnson, who said, "No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money."¹³ Nor is any such thought to be entertained by the reader after finishing the novel. Literature is a commodity as are other products of modern society, and Laura knows that her papers are not worthless, as indeed the papers found by the nameless narrator of the novella by Storm had not been worthless. Her haggling is not meant to present her in a negative light as a woman only interested in money. It is an explicit device to point in a witty manner at popular attitudes which have found support in literature itself, namely that art is above and apart from the market place. *Vorsätze* demonstrates that it may be witty but it is no longer wickered to talk about money.

Quite in contrast to Samuel Johnson, Laurence Sterne in a letter to Sir Joshua Reynolds said: "I wrote, not to be fed but to be famous."¹⁴ In *Vorsätze* we are told that Laura clearly wrote to be fed and, saying: "Weltruhm, garantiert, Sie sind doch Schriftsteller - oder?", hopes that Irmtraud Morgner will buy and edit to be famous.

The situational comedy discussed above illustrates the circumstances which govern the lives of modern women generally and Irmtraud Morgner and Laura specifically. In the novel a distinction is drawn between women and men in all aspects, and the specific focus is on women. *Leben und Abenteuer* is a novel by women, about women, and about their position in a society where the end of the exploitation of

women is officially equated with the socialist revolution of May 8, 1945.¹⁵ The novel challenges this public assumption and demonstrates over and over again firstly that women are still exploited and are constantly expected to do a great deal more work than men, and secondly that they are called upon to subordinate their visions, their desires, and their competence to the demands placed upon them by others.

Vorsätze begins as a witty parody of a literary device but, towards the end of the little tale told in it, the illusion shifts to make it a more realistic and contemporary account. This is partly due to the setting, a rainy Berlin street, and partly to the fact that it is very recognisably in the present. Thus *Vorsätze* introduces the theme and focus of the novel: it is the position of women in contemporary society. Ideas and theories in Irmtraud Morgner's work are always given a human face. Her method of presenting abstractions in story form tangibly illustrates what ideas and theories mean when reduced to the human experience. In *Vorsätze* the abstract theme of the novel, "the exploitation of women by society" is illustrated by showing Laura and the editor, Irmtraud Morgner, as having to hurry, as being overworked, as needing money. The daily experience of what it means to be a woman unites both women and is reflected in the manner in which both understand the unspoken words between them. They need not verbalise everything: they know and understand. Both are pretty much in the same boat and know it.

Vorsätze illustrates what Irmtraud Morgner means when she speaks of the double shift of women, the double contribution of women to society. The editor has two matters on her mind: getting her son to kindergarten and negotiating a literary project. She does both concurrently and both in haste. She and her son arrive late at the kindergarten and have to swallow pride and rebuke because they are late. Despite her fervour for her work, for the bundle of papers, she has first to complete a number of domestic tasks before she can do what is really of passionate importance to her. Laura, as we find out, in her turn has been dogged by circumstances all her life. In *Vorsätze* she is at a point where frustration again looms on the horizon. Because she has remarried she can no longer be certain that Wesselin will have his place at the kindergarten and she might have to put aside her own desires to work as street car conductor once more.

8. Summary

Rather than being a simple and negligible introduction which might be ignored, *Vorsätze* is an important component of the work. It informs us that *Leben und Abenteuer* was not written in the sequence which is presented to us, but that it was intentionally put into that sequence. It establishes the conscious fictionality of the work, while at the same time acknowledging the close inter-relationship of life and art, of history and literature. Its theme, the position of

women in our time, is historic; yet *Leben und Abenteuer* is a novel and not a sociological or political tract.

The literary critics' lack of interest in *Vorsätze* is no more than an indicator that for them, in view of the topicality of its subject matter and focus, the novelistic technique has not been the most interesting aspect of the work. The absence of any consideration of *Vorsätze* in the secondary literature suggests that the section was viewed simply as a witty play with conventions. However, the significance of that play with conventional expectations has to be considered, even when it is disguised as humour. The fact that Irmtraud Morgner very pointedly draws attention here to the novel as an artifice cannot be ignored in a discussion of structure. *Vorsätze* has an essential role in establishing the imaginative position for reading the novel. *Vorsätze* indicates that the novel *Leben und Abenteuer* is primarily a consciously constructed artifice, contrary to the statements made by Annemarie Auer that it is not thought out but simply grew.

The novel's fragmentary nature reflects the fact that it is (or purports to be) separate creations of a number of people at different occasions. In *Vorsätze*, however, by becoming a *persona* in her own book, Irmtraud Morgner makes the point that she wishes her reader to consider the processes of intuitive creation and the application of analytical order in a work of literature independently of one another. The little charade of *Vorsätze* does not imply

a disavowal of authorship, but it does require the reader to be aware of this duality.

Critics have not differentiated between the opinions expressed by Laura in the novel and the author Irmtraud Morgner. There is some justification for this view. Irmtraud Morgner says that she writes only about what she knows, implying that everything she writes contains a kernel of herself.¹⁶ In this book, moreover, she has attached many of her own autobiographical traits to Laura. In *Vorsätze* she actually separates herself into two people and complicates matters by giving one of them her own name. Thus while it may be true that all the voices in the narrative are hers, in *Vorsätze* she indicates that she holds more complex and all-inclusive views than Laura does in the novel. This is important for the discussion of structure, because Laura's arguments in the novel have provided the justification for treating it as *Montageroman*.

Notes

- 1 Nina Bawden, *Walking Naked* (London: Macmillan, 1981) 15.
- 2 Eva Kaufmann, "Der Hölle die Zunge rausstrecken ...", *Weimarer Beiträge* 9 (1984): 1519.
Eva Kaufmann employs the term *Makrostruktur* for Irmtraud Morgner's novel *Hochzeit in Konstantinopel*. She points out that the significance of the short stories in that book derives from the tale framing them all. She says that, though each story has its own structure, they are nonetheless held together by the rather insignificant tale framing them all. *Vorsätze in Leben und Abenteuer* does not have quite the same function. It does not give significance, but merely provides a rationale for the inclusion of "everything" in the five pound parcel of papers.
- 3 Irmtraud Morgner, *Amanda* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1985) 122.
Irmtraud Morgner uses a pun in German which connects weight with seriousness. In her *Koffergeschichte* she measures the value of the German classics by their weight (6 kg), playing with the cliché *schwere Literatur*, "weighty literature".
- 4 This is a word of importance and of value in her vocabulary. She uses it again in the heading to the chapter which contains a questioning of the concept of the "eternal feminine" (157).
- 5 George Watson, *The Story of the Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1979) 15.
- 6 Watson 17.
- 7 Eva Kaufmann, "Interview mit Irmtraud Morgner", *Weimarer Beiträge* 9 (1984): 1495.
- 8 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1496.
- 9 This has remained unnoticed in the secondary literature so far.
- 10 Theodor Storm, "Aquis Submersus", in *Sämtliche Werke*, Berlin/Weimar: Aufbau, 1978, 635.
- 11 As if to substantiate this claim, in a recent article on William Faulkner it says: "Off and on over the years Faulkner claimed that he had written *Sanctuary* only for the money, which may or may not be true but which detracts gratuitously from this powerful book."
Willie Morris, "Faulkner's Mississippi", in *National Geographic*, March 1989, 320.

- 12 Ingeborg Nordmann, "Die halbierte Geschichtsfähigkeit der Frau. Zu Irmtraud Morgners Roman *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura*", *Amsterdamer Beiträge* 11/12 (1981): 434. The money motif has been "sublimated" in the secondary literature. Nordmann explains Laura's acceptance of the job of *Spielfrau* as a symbolic expression for the liberating function of fantasy in combination with actual work. She interprets the phrase Laura "arbeitet sich selbst in die Tasche" to showing approval of the *Montageroman* project and the new job as *Spielfrau*.
- 13 Samuel Johnson, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotation*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1972) 273.
- 14 Laurence Sterne, quoted in the introduction by Christopher Ricks to *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1976, 10.
- 15 Patricia Herminghouse, "Die Frau und das Phantastische in der neueren DDR-Literatur", in Wolfgang Paulsen, ed. *Die Frau als Heldin und Autorin*, Bern/München: Francke, 1979, 257.
- 16 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1509.

Chapter III

MONTAGEROMAN

... women's books should be shorter, more concentrated, than those of men, and framed so that they do not need long hours of steady and uninterrupted work. For interruptions there will always be.

Virginia Woolf¹

In the critical literature, *Leben und Abenteuer* is most commonly called a *Montageroman*. This term is said to reflect the fragmentary nature of the narrative which in turn mirrors the modern world and especially the life of women as it really is. Thus the novel by its structure appears to confirm contemporary sensibilities which see the world as a disjointed and unconnected rather than as a unified whole. As is evidenced by the many reviews and in the more formal secondary literature, the novel has been read chiefly as a true-to-life narrative. However, Irmtraud Morgner herself has expressed annoyance with her critics who describe the structure of *Leben und Abenteuer* as *Montageroman*.

Irmtraud Morgner, who loves to play with words and ideas, has taken specific delight in toying with the concepts of "montage" and *Montageroman* in this novel. A detailed discussion of these concepts shows her mischievous pleasure at creating confusion and ambivalence. It might be assumed that she no doubt meant to enlarge the discussion of these concepts but up to now her clues seem only to have

misled critics. The interpretation has been narrowed rather than widened.

1. Montageroman as a critical term

Leben und Abenteuer differs from other novels particularly in its narrative structure. According to the consensus of most critics, it is a work without artistry. Its only coherence derives from its feminist focus. Yet, while one can imagine that its feminist themes at some time in the future might become dated as the particular issues are resolved, the narrative structure, and possibly the style, of the novel will remain its most unique aspects.

The novel appears to be lacking in organisation. The first impression is indeed one of fragmentation and chaos. The earliest reviewers had searched for a word which might convey the general lack of unity and the unusual character of the text and settled upon *Montageroman*. This term is used by Laura, one of the main characters in the book itself. She employs it to describe a text very much like *Leben und Abenteuer*, a text which consists of many entries of short prose having as their subject matter the daily lives of women. As part of the plot of *Leben und Abenteuer*, Laura attempts to sell a manuscript of a novel to a GDR publishing house, the Aufbau-Verlag. Her attempt, presented in the form of a discussion with the publisher, is in fact part of an ongoing literary discussion which constitutes one of many subtexts in *Leben und Abenteuer*. It is particularly here an exploration of the question whether art, more

specifically a novel, needs a structure other than the one provided by life. Laura argues in favour of a fragmented work because it reflects life as it is. She gropes for phrases which might describe such a work. They are: *Romanform der Zukunft*, *Montageroman*, and *ein Romanensemble kurzer Prosa* (257-259). By adopting one or the other of her terms, it can be seen that critics of *Leben und Abenteuer* have identified with her argument, as indeed have many other readers of the book. Taking the lead from Laura's words to the editor, and ignoring the evidence in *Vorsätze*, most critics have described the structure as *Montageroman*, meaning no more by this term, however, than confusion in the novel's sequence. If *Montageroman* means shortness, fragmentation and lack of organisation, then the appearance of the book (165 chapters, mostly short) and the experience of reading it would indeed confirm the aptness of the term.

But not all literary critics were entirely happy with that designation and showed their unease by toying with the other alternatives in Laura's list. Sigrid Damm, in the first literary appraisal of the novel, created the image of a turned over box of file notes -- *ein ausgekippter Zettelkasten*, and warned that the definition *Montageroman* has to be taken with a grain of salt. She wrote that it is "eine mit Augenzwinkern aufzunehmende Definition".² Patricia Herminghouse opted for the term *Roman der Zukunft*.³ *Leben und Abenteuer* is rarely called simply a novel,

although that is its appellation on the front page. There it concisely says *Roman*.

However, most critics merely explained why the novel should be called a *Montageroman*. Annemarie Auer closely tied the perceived fragmentation in Irmtraud Morgner's private life to the seemingly chaotic structure of the novel. She wrote that *Leben und Abenteuer* is not "artificially thought out" but grew organically.⁴ Ingeborg Nordmann also accepted the term *Montageroman*. The fragmentary appearance of the text, according to Nordmann, is also the structure of the novel.⁵ To describe this structure she points to the montage technique in modern film. Sonja Hilzinger elaborated on Nordmann. She found further support for the use of the term *Montageroman* in the actual mechanics of weaving because the tapestries of *The Lady with the Unicorn* in the Cluny Museum are described in the novel.⁶ Biddy Martin wrote that the novel has become "identified by both author and critics as a *Montageroman*."⁷ As these examples show, the term *Montageroman* has become accepted not only to describe the form and structure of the work, but also reasons have been added to explain why this should be so. However, there is no evidence in any of the critical literature to indicate that anyone has asked the question *how* the novel is actually put together.

The author does not agree with her critics. In 1984, in an interview with Eva Kaufmann, Irmtraud Morgner quite testily said that she is tired of the eternal and mindless

critical repetitions in which the structure of her novel is described as *Montageroman*:

'Die ewige Kolportierung des Begriffs "Montageroman" als Aussage des Autors über die Struktur seines Romans erscheint mir über die Jahre geradezu deprimierend. Den Begriff benutzte eine Romanfigur, die einem Verlag ein Buch mit gängigem Etikett andrehen will. Ein hinter sinniger Begriff also, der seither in Rezensionen platt weitergereicht wird.⁸

Irmtraud Morgner continues to say that she had followed a complicated building plan which satisfied her search for artistic perfection. She admits, however, that this complicated structure may not necessarily be obvious to the reader.⁹ Strangely, Eva Kaufmann in the interview and in her essay on Irmtraud Morgner does not mention this problem again. It is not clear whether she asked the author to elucidate her plan and was not answered, or whether she accepted Irmtraud Morgner's remarks as evasions and mystifications without much significance. Irmtraud Morgner is after all secretive and wordy, and her meaning is often not particularly simple.

So habitual has the description of the structure of the novel as *Montageroman* become, that the term continues to be used even now. All critics before Kaufmann have ignored the message set out in *Vorsätze*, and Hilzinger in 1985, later than Kaufmann, has felt no compunction in offering the most elaborate interpretation yet of the structure as *Montageroman*.

2. Montage entries in *Leben und Abenteuer*

A *Montageroman* in literature may be compared to a collage in the visual arts. In both art forms the real creative process lies in the selection and the re-arrangement of the material. A collage is made up of bits and pieces, but their place on the canvas is selected by the artist. The separate ingredients alone do not account for the finished product. The artist chooses the image, the order and the arrangement.

The novel *Leben und Abenteuer* is made up of many separate entries which were clearly selected and ordered by the author. The novel contains not just a few but a vast number of borrowings from other sources. The two largest are from works of Irmtraud Morgner herself. They are excerpts from an earlier novel, *Rumba auf einen Herbst* and the complete story *Gute Botschaft der Valeska*. Both works had been written for a different occasion but had not been published previously.

Although it is listed frequently among the works of Irmtraud Morgner, the complete novel *Rumba auf einen Herbst* never received the required permit for its publication. Irmtraud Morgner states that only a few chapters from *Rumba auf einen Herbst* became part of *Leben und Abenteuer*.

Die gute Botschaft der Valeska was written as part of a literary competition on the theme of sex change. The winning entries were printed in the anthology *Blitz aus*

heiterem Himmel. Irmtraud Morgner's entry was not among them.¹⁰

In the critical literature, the fact that neither work had previously found a publisher has given rise to the notion that *Leben und Abenteuer* contains everything which could not be printed anywhere else and that the novel is so fragmented and so long because it had to include so much. Wolfgang Emmerich establishes this particular causal relationship.¹¹ He alone among critics, however, also acknowledges that there might be a distinction between the appearance and the structure of the novel. Emmerich writes: "Wie die Autorin die Valeska-Geschichte mit dem sonstigen Romangeschehen verknüpft und die drei Heldinnen Laura, Trobadora und Valeska aufeinander bezieht, ist eine eigene Untersuchung wert, der ich hier nicht nachgehen kann."¹² (The italics are mine.) Emmerich recognises that the term *Montägeroman* itself says little about the organisation of the material and that the problem of rational order must be examined.¹³

Leben und Abenteuer contains not only excerpts from earlier works of Irmtraud Morgner herself, but also very many entries from the works of other authors. Some noticeable and striking borrowings come from the novel *Love of Worker Bees* by Alexandra Kollontai (98), from the biography *Memories of Lenin* by Nadeshda Kruspkaya (408), and from *Trobadorlyrik und Höfischer Roman* by E. Köhler (48-50).¹⁴ There is also the speech by Dr. Ludwig Mecklinger on

the abortion legislation taken from the newspaper, *Neues Deutschland* (503). *Leben und Abenteuer* furthermore includes as part of its text the best known canzona by the historical Countess de Dia (34); it contains "Das Lied vom Kommunismus" by Volker Braun (546). The list is long and the variety of material attests to the wide range of topics in the novel and to the detailed research which underpins even the most whimsical reference in *Leben und Abenteuer*.

3. The usage of the term *Montageroman* in the novel itself

However, the critical codification of *Leben und Abenteuer* as *Montageroman* does not rest upon critical considerations of the varying aspects of 'montage' in it. The main support for the designation is taken from one particular episode within the novel where Laura discusses novel theory, life and the ethical problem of montage with the editor of the Aufbau-Verlag.

A close reading confirms that Irmtraud Morgner plays with the term *Montageroman* herself in her novel. While critics have concentrated on one instance alone, there are other references to *Montageroman* in the book. The concept is offered for consideration in three separate discussions. In the first instance, *Montageroman* is equated with the idea that such a novel is not art but, in Irmtraud Morgner's own words a "*Flickwerk*". The second reference to *Montageroman* in the novel occurs in a conversation between Laura and the editor of the Aufbau-Verlag. This is the conversation which in the critical literature has served to support the

application of *Montageroman* for the structure of *Leben und Abenteuer*. In the third instance, Irmtraud Morgner, playing on the double meanings of the word *Montage* in German, defines a *Montageroman* humorously as a novel about industrial production, having as its setting any one of several large factories in the GDR. The list is provided by the Aufbau-Verlag.

A look at the three instances in which the term *Montageroman* occurs in the novel demonstrates the aptness of Sigrid Damm's phrase that the term is indeed "eine mit Augenzwinkern aufzunehmende Definition", a definition not to be taken seriously. In Auer's words, Laura's theoretical discussion is a bone thrown out by the writer for the theoreticians to gnaw on, *ein Knochen, vom Dichter den Theoretikern zum Benagen hingeworfen*.¹⁵

a) Laura's interpretation of *Montageroman*

Since the second instance in which the term *Montageroman* occurs in *Leben und Abenteuer* is the source for critical acceptance of the term, I shall discuss it first. The context in which it is used is important because Laura, who in many biographical details resembles Irmtraud Morgner, does here not speak for the author. Irmtraud Morgner makes this clear in her conversation with Eva Kaufmann. When Laura offers a novel to the Aufbau-Verlag which she calls *den operativen Montageroman*, she is actually trying to find a simple and quick way of making money. She tries to sell the idea of a novel which will consist of a collection of

short prose writings on a variety of topics, "*ein Romanensemble kurzer Prosa*" (259). At that point in the story Laura has reluctantly become the minstrel of Beatriz. Laura has had a baby and has discovered that babies and work outside the home do not easily go together. She has to stay home much of the time when she should be at work. Her savings account is small (222), and Laura urgently needs money (260). She negotiates for an advance for the novel project but pretends that Beatriz will write the book. She gets the contract and the advance because Beatriz has a literary name.¹⁶ Laura believes that she can write short pieces of prose herself and that she will be able to collect sufficient material to satisfy the publisher.

Laura relates the "shortness" of her pieces of prose to the interruptions in her daily life and to that of women generally. This idea is not new. It had been expressed, for example, in *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf.¹⁷ Laura says that her novel would reflect the actualities of a woman's everyday existence. She asserts, echoing Woolf:

Abgesehen vom Temperament, entspricht kurze Prosa dem gesellschaftlich, nicht biologisch bedingtem Lebensrhythmus einer gewöhnlichen Frau, die ständig von haushaltbedingten Abhaltungen zerstreut wird. Zeitmangel und nicht berechenbare Störungen zwingen zu schnellen Würfeln ohne mähliche Einstimmung, ... (259)

Laura speaks specifically for Beatriz but her argument has persuasive emotional force. The claim that short prose reflects the rhythm of the daily life of women, that women are constantly plagued by interruptions which cannot be

foreseen, that there is never enough time for work of one's own choosing, is indeed a commonplace. Laura's words have been accepted as expressing a universal truth, a truth universally acknowledged -- by women at least. Her argument sounds convincing because there is much truth in her description of a woman's daily life. Indeed, since everyday life is one of fragmentation and frustration, it is somewhat comforting to be told that social demands and cultural patterns rather than biology or ability are to blame for any lack of coherence.

Laura's argument furthermore has been seen as an extension of the arguments brought forward by Irmtraud Morgner herself on her own behalf. This is an assumption for which she has given ample reason especially in the interview with Eva Kaufmann. She says there that she regrets her many lost ideas and lost novels, when her writing was interrupted by school holidays and other mundane demands.¹⁸ She does not say, however, that when she writes, she writes without plan or structure in mind as Laura intended to do with her *Montageroman*.

If one compares Laura's words and the quote from Virginia Woolf at the beginning of this chapter, one cannot help noticing the echo in argument and in sentiment. Neither can it escape notice that theory and practice do not necessarily go hand in hand. Despite presenting a persuasive argument for the writing of short prose pieces,

Leben und Abenteuer is a very long novel, as are many of Virginia Woolf's novels.

Laura, in brief, states that life must shape art, and since the form of *Leben und Abenteuer* fits her description well, her term *Montageroman* has become the accepted critical usage for its form and structure. It has escaped notice that Laura is depicted as a student of literature and that her search for unity in life, form and structure is a conventional critical literary position. Her argument is so conventional and therefore plausible that critics writing on *Leben und Abenteuer* seem to have readily accepted it without examining if, in fact, it is valid for the work before them. In short, critics have based their findings on the words of the person in the novel who, in the implicitly ongoing literary debate, stands for the critical rather than the creative process.

Even if what Laura says is true for life, it is not true for the novel. Irmtraud Morgner demonstrates that art demands selection. In *Vorsätze* Laura is shown not to have succeeded in finishing the work by her method. Despite the critical acceptance of Laura's attempted analysis of the term *Montageroman*, it actually fails to explain the sequence in which the material in *Leben und Abenteuer* is in fact ordered by the editor and presented to the reader.

In the crucial conversation between Laura and the editor of the Aufbau-Verlag another very important matter relating to *montage* arises. It concerns the ethics of

montage and relates to the novel's thematic preoccupation with feminism. In the interview with Eva Kaufmann, Irmtraud Morgner throws light upon this aspect of the literary discussion. In both novel and interview the ethical aspect of 'montage' or borrowing from other artists is discussed. Irmtraud Morgner believes that borrowings are permissible and cannot be avoided. She considers that the apt quotation constitutes a form of truth and wisdom and that, since lies are continually repeated, all forms of truth and wisdom must be repeated as well.¹⁹ In the novel literature is described as "Dichten als Nachfolgeeinrichtung", as an institution of descent, as the inheritor of imagery and ideas from preceding artists and their works (157). All literary creativity is also a matter of literary inheritance and may be used freely by succeeding writers. However, Irmtraud Morgner places an ethical restriction upon such usage. She says that the origin or the source must be acknowledged. All other usage is plagiarism, or stealing.

This generally expressed view is given a specifically feminist twist in the novel. A leap of thought relates it to the theme of the exploitation of women. We read that "der berühmte Dichter B.", identified as Brecht, has made stealing fashionable by not crediting his collaborators and his sources. The editor of the Aufbau-Verlag says that Brecht, unlike most men, liked clever women, chiefly because they did a great deal of work for him. This explains the extent of his literary output. This witty stab at Brecht is

no more than a feminist correction of the historical record because it is indeed true that Brecht had many female collaborators.²⁰ Sigrid Damm reacted to this in a manner which indicates how iconoclastic even such a slight critique of an established and famous author, especially of a man, still was in 1975. She writes that these remarks are in bad taste. They are, she writes, "im Ton vergriffen".²¹ Damm gives no thought to the fact that they are true and verifiable.

Damm also failed to notice that Irmtraud Morgner's feminist critique is qualified because it places Brecht and his attitude into his own historical period. Brecht is seen as a product of his time. He was part of a generation which considered it the natural prerogative of men to appropriate the labour of others, especially of women. Since women willingly put their work at his disposal, it did not occur to him to acknowledge either help or source. The idea that this might not be the natural order of things simply did not arise. This point is ironically illustrated. Brecht in the "Gedicht vom Lesenden Arbeiter", which is quoted in the novel by Bele H., honours the contribution to the monuments of civilisation by the male slaves and labourers who had been forgotten by history until resurrected in this century after the socialist revolution had shifted the focus from kings to workers and peasants (295). Irmtraud Morgner follows upon this with the addendum that now it is woman's turn to be resurrected from the blank pages of history.

Irmtraud Morgner claims that the relationship between men and women on the Marxist scale of social and historic development has progressed up to now only one step beyond slavery, to the *Frauenhalterordnung*:

Die grosse griechische Kultur basierte auf der Sklavenhalterordnung. Die grossen künstlerischen, wissenschaftlichen und technischen Errungenschaften der Kultur, die wir jetzt haben, basieren auf der Frauenhalterordnung.²² (My italics.)

There may be equality in law and in economics, but in social and cultural development, Morgner claims, we are only one step above slavery. Men still rely on women, as Brecht did.²³

b) Is a Montageroman art or patchwork?

Annemarie Auer advises future critics to study the pronouncements of the author outside the novel in order to understand her fiction. She and others have pointed out that Irmtraud Morgner very often puts her own words, words spoken in interviews or discussions, into the mouths of her fictional characters. This is indeed often so; but Auer's advice is not necessarily a safe key to the interpretation of the literary work of Irmtraud Morgner, for one of the author's delights is to mystify and to confuse. She is a playful and ambivalent author, and *Leben und Abenteuer* is a text full of ambivalence and contradictions. While it may be true that what Irmtraud Morgner says in her interviews may be reflected in her novels, it does not necessarily follow that all the views of her fictional characters reflect her own position. The author has distanced herself

from Laura in regard to the *Montageroman* interpretation. Life is not fiction, and fiction is art, not life.

In the novel, the literary debate centering on *Montageroman* had begun before the discussion between Laura and the editor of the Aufbau-Verlag. In the first episode in which the term occurs, Laura draws the conclusion that a *Montageroman* is not art. In this episode, she and Beatriz talk about literature, life, work, and how to make money.

At the moment of discussion, Beatriz has begun to realise that her desire to write love poetry is impossible at present, especially her kind of love poetry which goes beyond the mere words and conventions of the genre and attempts to express the "real" experience of love. Despite the progress of sexual liberation, her kind of poetry is not yet possible. Laura is relieved to hear it, for they need to make money and she, being a pragmatist, knew all along that love poetry is still the prerogative of male poets. Her (ironic) position is that much may have changed but the belief that only men can write proper love poems is firmly entrenched in the consciousness of both women and men (59). Customs and traditions have not changed yet in this respect.

Besides, so the discussion between Laura and Beatriz continues, the contemporary male is still so caught up in conventional, outmoded attitudes that he would not be a fit object for the poems which Beatriz wishes to write. In patriarchal society and culture, feminists claim, man is traditionally the active party, the subject; woman the

passive party, or object. According to her gender, Beatriz should be satisfied to remain the object. Yet, being Beatriz and over-ambitious, she dares to place herself into the position of the subject: "Das Objekt erkühnt sich des Subjekts." Nonetheless despite her daring, she cannot find her object (172). Men, the two women conclude, are out of step with the times and with women who know quite well that the idioms in conventional love poems are merely rules of language, "eine Art Sprachregelung". Love poems may be beautiful but they no longer reflect contemporary mores and understanding, and they certainly do not reflect the female experience.

This is one of many conversations in the novel in which the participants seemingly walk in and out of each other's mind without feeling the need to express in words the relationship of one thought to the next. Having arrived at the above conclusions, Beatriz expresses complete disenchantment with her lot as artist. She decides not only to give up the writing of love poetry but also to give up all forms of art. Whereupon, in continuance of that decision Laura declares that now they can offer a *Montageroman* to the Aufbau-Verlag (249). This work will be saleable and requires no art, for as she says, albeit at a different moment, she is not going to be stopped by having to write a few pages of prose. Laura at this point obviously believes that anyone can write prose and thus anyone can produce a *Montageroman*, for she understands it to

be not art but merely a patchwork of words. She will eventually find out that this is not so. She will then sell her parcel of papers to Irmtraud Morgner, as described in *Vorsätze*.

However here, when she draws the equation that a *Montageroman* is not art, she displays her literary knowledge and echoes early critics of the novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* by Döblin, one of the first novels based on the technique of montage in German literature.²⁴ Irmtraud Morgner indicates that she is aware of the critical appraisal of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. She says that critics who interpret the structure of her work as *Montageroman* have defined it as *Flickwerk*, a patchwork, put together with neither thought nor skill.²⁵ The word *Flickwerk* resembles in meaning the word *Stoffhuberei* applied by critics to *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. There the derogatory term *Stoffhuberei* was connected to the charge of plagiarism by the author, an issue which also has its place in the discussion of "montage" in *Leben und Abenteuer*.

The similarity of the vocabulary might lead to the conclusion that Irmtraud Morgner herself thinks that a *Montageroman* is not art, and by extension that *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is not art. However, despite many factual resemblances between Laura's fictional and Irmtraud Morgner's private life, Laura rarely echoes the complete thoughts of her creator. Laura here speaks as an amateur critic. Irmtraud Morgner in her objections to the term

Montageroman for her novel specifically rejects its application to the *structure*. She does not speak of her own 'montage' entries. Based upon the number of 'montage' entries, the novel might well be called *Montageroman*. The structure, however, is not the result of the 'montage' in *Leben und Abenteuer*. The term *Montageroman* must be taken to be merely descriptive. In itself it says nothing about how material in the paper parcel was shaped into a novel.

c) *Montageroman* as a novel having factory life as its subject matter

In *Leben und Abenteuer* the term *Montageroman* appears once more in yet another context. When Beatriz returns from her journey to Berlin, the Aufbau-Verlag sends her a letter to let her know that her novel outline does not support the demands of a *Montageroman*. Included in this letter is a list of names of factories. It is a list of *Montagewerken* or *Montagehallen*. The Aufbau-Verlag, it appears, was looking for socialist realism and had expected *ein Produktionsstück*, a work which had at least as its setting a factory or an assembly plant and offers this list as background material for the *Wirklichkeitsstudien für die literarische Arbeit* (216).

Irmtraud Morgner says that the term 'montage' has a strong technical connotation.²⁶ The reader of the novel is thereby reminded that the word "montage" has a meaning outside the context of literature and art. It is a technical term signifying the construction or assembly of

some piece of machinery or building according to some plan. The carefully thought out plan underlying the structure of the novel *Leben und Abenteuer* is recognisable as *ein Bauplan* such as Irmtraud Morgner attaches at the end of her novel to guide the reader.

Beatriz had not known of her obligation to the Aufbau-Verlag before receiving this letter. (She had originally rejected the contract but Laura had nonetheless signed it in her name.) Still, she deals well and eagerly with the project entered into on her behalf by Laura. Beatriz has lost much of her rebelliousness on her journey and, like a heroine in a *Bildungsroman*, upon her return home is willing (too willing?) to fit into society as it is. She visits factories and gathers background information. She produces three stories which comply with the demands of socialist realism: She edits and comments on the diary of Genossin Martha (531); she relates the second to last journey of Johann Salman on his beloved train engine "Pauline" (548); and she describes in a Kafkaesque parable, "Das Seil" (594), the working place and conditions in a scientific institution. These three contributions are called "Bitterfelder Frucht" after the place where the socialist realist perspective was articulated for East Germany. We read that Beatriz eventually, however, abandons the *Montageroman*: "Da zog Beatriz den *Montageroman* zurück und versprach dem Aufbau-Verlag, den bestehenden Vertragsverpflichtungen statt dessen mit einem

zukunftsweisenden Roman nachzukommen." (579) She starts on her new project of which we know nothing but the phrase: *ein Roman der Zukunft* (604). Her *Montageroman* remains uncompleted as does Laura's, and the fiction about the writing of fiction is carried through in its most minute detail.

There is no evidence in the secondary literature that the game which Irmtraud Morgner plays with her readers and with the concept *Montageroman* has been noticed. This term for structure, form and content has become firmly established with "proof" from within the text and from without by reference to Irmtraud Morgner's occasional remarks.

4. Summary

Sonja Hilzinger sums up all interpretations preceding her study. She echoes Auer when she speaks of the identity of theme, life and author. She quotes Damm as she continues to relate the structure of the *Montageroman* to the fragmentation of the 'daily existence of women. She writes: "...die Strukturierung der Prosa durch den Alltag und die offene Form charakterisieren diese Art weiblichen Schreibens, eine Mischung aus 'Autobiographie, Pädagogik und Bekenntnis", very much as Damm had done.²⁷ Hilzinger enlarges upon the film reference made by Nordmann and reasserts that the novel was conceived by Irmtraud Morgner as *Montageroman*.²⁸ To this she adds her own support for this genre description. She compares the manner in which,

according to her belief, Irmtraud Morgner must have written *Leben und Abenteuer* to the method in which tapestries are woven. Just as women wove the tapestries of the Lady with the Unicorn in the Cluny Museum bit by bit so, according to Hilzinger, Irmtraud Morgner wrote *Leben und Abenteuer*, a little bit here and a little bit there.²⁹ This is in all likelihood quite true but it does not explain the sequential arrangement of the text.

Irmtraud Morgner had denied a year earlier that the term *Montageroman* as interpreted by critics coincides with her organising principles. The term is not the appropriate term for the structure of *Leben und Abenteuer*. In her interview with Eva Kaufmann, she speaks of her firm plan and the discipline this plan demanded from her. She implicitly dismisses the notion that art is accidental, just as in *Leben und Abenteuer* Beatriz dislikes her story, her "Dritte Bitterfelder Frucht: Das Seil" which is part of the *Montageroman* project. We read that the reason this story displeases Beatriz is in part because it was an accidental and not a planned creation. "An der aber dann doch nicht nur die zufällige Entstehungsart missfiel. Bei ihrem neuen Romanprojekt ging sie aber systematisch zu Werke." (604)

Thus it might be concluded that Irmtraud Morgner, in her conversation with Kaufmann, rejects the term *Montageroman* not only because she rejects the absolute identification of her person with her fictional character Laura, but also because Laura's argument implies that the

success of the novel *Leben und Abenteuer* is the outcome of sheer luck. She rejects the assumptions that the individual stories and other collected material resulted from an everyday whim and that the novel grew organically depending on whatever the circumstances of the day were. Indeed, it must irk a prolific, intellectual and imaginative writer such as she is, to read over and over again and with greater and greater elaboration that her most successful work owes nothing to artistic control and everything to the whim of time and circumstance in her personal life.

The term *Montageroman* is employed in the novel as part of an ongoing literary theoretical discussion not in order to describe its structure. The many montage inclusions in the text could qualify *Leben und Abenteuer* to be called a *Montageroman*. However, a study of the many borrowed entries, their sources and their variations, would yield insight into Irmtraud Morgner's reading and her inspiration derived from it rather than tell us much about her choice of sequence in *Leben und Abenteuer*.

Notes

- 1 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) 78.
- 2 Sigrid Damm, "Irmtraud Morgner: *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura*", *Weimarer Beiträge* 9 (1975): 146.
- 3 Patricia Herminhouse, "Die Frau und das Phantastische in der neueren DDR-Literatur", *Die Frau als Heldin und Autorin*, ed. Wolfgang Paulsen, (Bern/München: Francke, 1979) 261.
- 4 Annemarie Auer, "Trobadora unterwegs oder Schulung in Realismus", *Sinn und Form* 28 (1976): 1105.
- 5 Ingeborg Nordmann, "Die halbierte Geschichtsfähigkeit der Frau. Zu Irmtraud Morgners Roman *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura*", *Amsterdamer Beiträge* 11/12 (1981): 453.
Ingeborg Nordmann appears to have failed to observe that "montage" in film is very often merely a mechanical device. It is a means of presenting visually what everyone knows: that several actions can occur in different places but at the same time. This is an understanding of montage in film which is very much more pertinent to *Leben und Abenteuer* where different things befall different people, if not exactly at the same moment, then within approximately the same period of time.
- 6 Sonja Hilzinger, "*Als ganzer Mensch zu leben ...*" *Emanzipatorische Tendenzen in der neueren Frauen-Literatur der DDR* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1985) 138.
- 7 Biddy Martin, "Irmtraud Morgner's *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz*", *Beyond the eternal Feminine: Critical Essays on Women and German Literature*, eds. Susan L. Cocalis and Kay Goodmann (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1982) 423.
- 8 Eva Kaufmann, "Interview mit Irmtraud Morgner", *Weimarer Beiträge* 9 (1984): 1511.
- 9 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1511.
- 10 Wolfgang Emmerich, in Sarah Kirsch, Irmtraud Morgner, Christa Wolf, *Geschlechtertausch* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1984) 115.
- 11 Emmerich, *Geschlechtertausch*, 115.
Wolfgang Emmerich claims that the complete novel *Rumba auf einen Herbst* is included in *Leben und Abenteuer* and implies that had the story "Gute Botschaft der Valeska" been printed

in "Blitz aus heiterem Himmel" it might not have become a montage entry in *Leben und Abenteuer*: "Nachdem der Abdruck in der Anthologie nicht gebilligt worden war, baute sie die Geschichte (wie übrigens gleich noch einen ganzen, Mitte der 60er Jahre vom Druck ferngehaltenen Roman, 'Rumba auf einen Herbst') einfach in ihren aufregenden und verwirrenden "Montage-Roman" *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura* ein.

12 Emmerich, *Geschlechtertausch*, 115.

13 Wolfgang Emmerich implies that the answer to the structure might lie in a study of the relationship of several of the fictional characters to each other. I do not believe that such a study would provide the answer concerning the problem of structure. It might strengthen the notion that the novel crosses borders by revealing that all characters are in some manner related, either by law or by bonds of friendship.

14 This chapter is a mixture of history and fiction. The first two parts are from Köhler, the third is a fictional interpretation by Laura. Laura pads her factual research with a fictional extension.

15 Auer, "Trobadora unterwegs" 1100.

16 Beatriz refuses to sign the contract with the Aufbau-Verlag because, she says, no book can be written according to Laura's intentions: "Darin bezeichnete sie Lauras Vorsätze zur Buchherstellung als schandbar. Mit solchen könnte man weder ein gutes noch ein schlechtes Buch schreiben, sondern gar keins." (271)

17 Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 78.

18 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1495.

19 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1506.

20 John Fuegi, Gisela Bahr, and John Willett, *Brecht Women and Politics* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985).

21 Damm, 143.

22 Nordmann, 424.

23 Irmtraud Morgner no doubt means what she says about acknowledging sources, plagiarism and stealing. She realises, however, that a theoretical conviction is sometimes hard to maintain in everyday life. Her fictional characters are not endowed with her scruples. Indeed, the very first words in the book are an unacknowledged theft.

In the motto to the novel, Irmtraud Morgner ascribes a slightly altered phrase from Goethe's *Faust* to Beatriz de Dia and thus fooled one of her critics, it seems. Sonja Hilzinger when discussing the phrase, *Am Anfang war die andere Tat*, appears not to recognise the source and claims that it is truly came from the historic Beatriz de Dia. In another instance, Laura signs the contract with the Aufbau-Verlag in the name of Beatriz and submits a number of pieces in her name. Beatriz when in need of a protest song, pinches "Das Lied vom Kommunismus" by Volker Braun and passes it off as her own in part payment of her debt to the Beautiful Mélusine. Yet, apart from those instances where plagiarism or stealing is part of the plot or characterisation in *Leben und Abenteuer* itself, it must be noted that the author is remarkably fastidious in acknowledging her sources directly or indirectly.

24 Wolfgang Beutin ed., *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte*, 341.

25 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1511.

26 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1511.

Eva Kaufmann quotes Irmtraud Morgner as saying: "Montage hat einen technizistischen Beiklang."

27 Hilzinger, 133.

28 Hilzinger, 138.

29 Weaving as a metaphor for the creation of a literary text is not uncommon. In fact in recent years it has become almost a set piece to pursue the analogy of weaving and writing. In the episode which serves Hilzinger as a basis for the comparison of the mechanics of weaving and the structure of the novel, Laura is the speaker and she speaks as a person who knows contemporary attitudes. When she refers to the lost cultural contributions of women and ties her reference to the poem of Brecht she does not compare the tapestries to the pyramids. The tapestries themselves are not visible signs of lost names. (They were in all likelihood not even woven by women.) Laura does not speak of the art of weaving as such. She speaks of the scenes depicted on the tapestries which are unreal. Historic selection has left us with the tapestries and their symbolic representation of the (male) vision of ideal womanhood.

Hilzinger leaves unconsidered the fact that tapestries were woven according to detailed and precise patterns. It is true that the weavers had to weave them bit by bit but they had to follow a strict order.

CHAPTER IV

THEMATIC INTRODUCTION

In writing off the apparent chaos of the book by calling it a *Montageroman*, critics have so far avoided considering how *Leben und Abenteuer* is, in fact, put together. It is proposed in this thesis that the calendar for 1968 to 1973 is the structural matrix and that the main ordering principle is that of time.

However, the work also gains cohesion from an imaginative structure of ideas and images. The sequential arrangement of the text depends on the idea of the creation of the novel itself, which in its turn is to contain the selected remembrances, readings, and writings of several people. Once this strategy is recognised, a connection can be established between the many disparate entries if, in addition, one remembers that the editor of the material is also a writer of fiction. Where an ordering as to time will not serve, this editor, Irmtraud Morgner, employs the literary technique of free association. She groups strictly fictional entries according to their thematic relationship to each other and these, where possible, in proximity to a datable entry in the narrative. This leads to a sequence in which one idea and one story begets the next.

The overt topics in *Leben und Abenteuer* are the affairs in the everyday lives of women, their search for autonomy and their exploitation by society. The major points are made in many relatively short entries which illustrate and

put a human face to such specific concerns as love, marriage and work. Associated ideas occur in clusters throughout the text. Such sequences of association of ideas, of words, of related episodes, provide a deliberate structural unity of thought and imagination.

The text gives the appearance of being fragmented and there is no obvious logic to the sequence in which topics are introduced and ideas developed. However, despite the appearance of accidental creation, the text is not assembled by a hit and miss method as suggested in Damm's image of the turned over box of notes. The arrangement of topics and ideas follows in a controlled sequence. Irmtraud Morgner speaks of having created a firm structure through the method of association of ideas, word sequences and motifs.¹ Ideas and themes do not simply tumble through the text, but are introduced, picked up and continued in a manner which the imagination is quite well able to order.

How is it done? A few examples may suffice. We are told that Beatriz marries Gerson. This information leads to Laura's remembering the marriage of Aunt Jenny. From then on, the topic of marriage and living arrangements is a natural consequence. Beatriz visits the "Kommune Roter Mai" in its heyday of sexual orgies. This leads to the reading of a tract on free love by Alexandra Kollontai and in turn to a consideration of the importance of sex, biology and men in a woman's life. We read an excerpt from the memoirs of Nadeshda Krupskaya in which she describes how she, besides

working full time, nonetheless also cared for the daily needs of Lenin (408). The theme of this entry is picked up a page later in a story written by Laura (411). From it we learn that little has changed since Kruspkaya wrote. Women still surrender their own ambitions in support of that of their husbands, and expect of themselves, as they are expected by society, to work the "double shift".

Uwe Parnitzke participates in the events of the story in Paris during the last weeks of 1969. His involvement leads to the first Intermezzo which provides a look into his past and touches upon the other side of the coin of feminism: the position and the feelings of men in response to the changes affecting women. Though laconic in style and lacking in expository passages, these true-to-life concerns are easily recognisable and relatively easy to follow.

Irmtraud Morgner's main rhetorical device is repetition. Words are repeated, such as the enigmatic references to Anaximander. Images are repeated such as the Goddesses Demeter and Persephone shown imprisoned in a bunker, as is Gretchen in the *Faust* production (419). Whole chapters are repeated such as the pub scene or the introductory speech by Beatriz on behalf of Guntram Pomeranke.

According to the critical literature, Irmtraud Morgner's basic thought pattern as revealed in *Leben und Abenteuer* is based on the concept of comparing and contrasting. Sigrid Damm writes that *Leben und Abenteuer* is

structured according the principles of confrontation. According to her, the different levels of time -- the past, the present and the future -- are confrontational in concept. Thus one episode stands in opposition to the episode preceding or succeeding it.² Ingeborg Nordmann agrees with this perception of oppositional thought patterns in the novel. In her opinion the method of contrasting elements, time, theme and characters, are part of the structuring principle of the novel which give it dramatic tension but which at the same time inhibit a uniform understanding of the text.³ In addition, both these critics declare that this concept of oppositional thought in the novel serves as a polemic against the capitalist system. The novel, according to Damm for instance, directs the view towards the mere pretence of the emancipatory efforts in capitalist countries.⁴

The notion that the narrative works primarily on the principle of showing up contrasts rather than similarities is shared by all critics. While it cannot be denied that Irmtraud Morgner points to differences between East and West, there is little evidence in *Leben und Abenteuer* that she is very much concerned with contrasting the one with the other. There is certainly no easy identification with good and bad along political lines in *Leben und Abenteuer*.

Rather than thinking in terms of contrast, *Leben und Abenteuer* is remarkable in that it, despite the appearance of fragmentation, suggests "den Zusammenhang der Dinge", the

connectedness of things. In *Vorsätze* attention is drawn to the growing involvement of Irmtraud Morgner with Laura's text and her empathy with its viewpoint. She is sympathetic and curious enough to attend the funeral of Beatriz. The women in *Leben und Abenteuer* are friendly towards each other and there is no enmity expressed between any of them in the novel. There is frustration, annoyance and a fit of jealousy, but no hostility. Sigrid Damm, believing that the novel is confrontational in concept, expresses her surprise that Irmtraud Morgner deals so favourably with Beatriz, a representative of a hostile capitalist system.⁵

Ingeborg Nordmann laments the novel's lack of form, "den Mangel an Formgebung".⁶ This lamentation is understandable if, as she and other critics do, one interprets the work as being concerned with contrasting East and West and with describing "den schlechteren Westen".⁷

If however, one changes one's perspective a little and looks to the text, rather than to opinions of what the text should say, one discovers that *Leben und Abenteuer*, (rather than hammering the differences) is concerned with revealing similarities. Indeed, one of the more striking features of the book is the remarkable consistency of ideas and of the imagination, despite the absence of a clearly discernible story or plot and the absence of any focus or perspective centred upon one or two main characters.

Critics agree that *Leben und Abenteuer* is an emancipatory narrative. However, what this means precisely,

as illustrated in the text, has not been addressed. A close look at the text will show that it is not just generally emancipatory but a specifically feminist emancipatory narrative.

Notes

1 Eva Kaufmann, "Interview mit Irmtraud Morgner",
Weimarer Beiträge 9 (1984) 1511.

2 Sigrid Damm, "Irmtraud Morgner: *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura*",
Weimarer Beiträge 9 (1975) 142.

3 Ingeborg Nordmann, "Die halbierte Geschichtsfähigkeit der Frau. Zu Irmtraud Morgners Roman *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura*", *Amsterdamer Beiträge* 11/12 (1981) 425.

4 Damm 143.

5 Damm 143.

6 Nordmann 438.

7 Nordmann 441.

CHAPTER V

PRIMARY VIEWPOINT: SOCIALIST OR FEMINIST?

"The whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction, I take to be governed by the question of the point of view - ."

Percy Lubbock.¹

"Das Buch der Morgner stinkt nach innerer Zensur."

Irmtraud Morgner.²

The search for a governing viewpoint in *Leben und Abenteuer* is beset by several problems, not the least of which is that the text itself states no explicit viewpoint. It has to be sought out, and this can lead to basic differences in interpretation. A further question which needs to be resolved is whether the text is a feminist text and whether Irmtraud Morgner is a feminist writer. In addition, there is the question whether *Leben und Abenteuer* transcends political boundaries, or whether it is primarily a GDR novel. Critics have unanimously opted for the latter. It is my contention, however, that this critical focus is mistaken and misleading. Only by seeing this work from a primarily feminist viewpoint which ignores political borders to a large degree do many complexities of the work fall into place.

Leben und Abenteuer technically lacks a conventional viewpoint. There is not one person, one place or one stationary moment in time upon which the reader can fix his attention in order to gain a confident basis for evaluating

what is written. *Leben und Abenteuer* is neither a first person nor a third person narrative. Nor does Irmtraud Morgner, the author, choose to speak through or to focus upon one particular character.

Despite the absence of a committed viewpoint by the author, the novel does not lack in focus. In fact, the absence of viewpoint draws the attention of the reader most insistently to the subject matter. Many voices come together to illuminate, explore and focus on the varying aspects of the epoch's dominant theme which, according to Irmtraud Morgner, is the emancipation of women. Feminist thought of the period, indeed, is the fundamental thematic structure of *Leben und Abenteuer*: the focus and the repetition of feminist themes provide an inner logic within the apparent chaos of the narrative.

Irmtraud Morgner speaks of the empty spaces between her words and chapters. She adds that her pauses are written in and have to be read as well as the actual words in order to understand what she wants to say.³ In her writing the tension between words and the energy emanating from a subtext, give her work its particular quality.⁴ The implication of her demand depends on the assumption that the reader is knowledgeable about the conventions of language, of metaphor, and of literary precedent, combined with a sensitivity to changes in modern sensibilities.

Irmtraud Morgner's request that we read the empty spaces is in itself not particularly startling. Much of the

effect of literature and art is indeed based on a displacement of expectations.⁵ In the secondary literature on *Leben und Abenteuer* the use of the Brechtian "Verfremdungseffekt" is generally recognised as Irmtraud Morgner's main stylistic device. Yet, despite this recognition and the more general critical consensus that a particular point of view governs the reading and writing of any work, in the case of *Leben und Abenteuer* the question of viewpoint has so far not been specifically discussed in the critical literature.

Most critics have started from the premise that *Leben und Abenteuer* is a novel by Irmtraud Morgner and all voices in it are those of the author. In specific instances, such as with regard to the question of the structure of the novel as *Montageroman*, for instance, the opinions of Laura in the novel have been taken to be those of the author.⁶ The general critical position ignores the device of the fictional editor which was surely created to bring such a normal assumptions into question. The intentional ambivalence created by this device means that to assert the author is or is not speaking may, at any given point, be either true or not true, or both!

The issue of viewpoint has been muddied by the writings of critics and has stayed muddied. The secondary literature has as its basis a sociological and political rather than a literary or cultural approach to the work. It follows the present conventional critical pattern towards East German

literature and assumes that because the novel was written in the GDR by an East German writer it naturally must set out to measure and evaluate the contrasts between East and West. No critic so far has taken into consideration the fact that the novel was a huge success in both East and West. Clearly it contains a common ground of appeal to readers both in socialist and capitalist societies. Worthy of further consideration is the fact that *Leben und Abenteuer* aroused the greatest response and enthusiasm in female readers. This, as well as the baffled response from male reviewers, would suggest that the novel presented a common ground of concern to women. Women had an immediate empathy with the subject matter. The absence of a technical viewpoint or the lack of commitment by the author to the opinions expressed, apparently presented no significant problems for these readers. It can be assumed that they understood the "scheinbare Leere zwischen den Worten" in the text and shared a viewpoint with the author.

This intuitive understanding between female readers and the work is paralleled by the interaction among the characters in the book. In *Vorsätze* the reader is asked to accept the fiction that the separate entries which make up the novel were written or collected by Laura but that the organisation of the complete novel is the work of another person. Laura took her inspiration from the daily lives of women, but she never stated explicitly what aspect in their daily lives interested her. Nonetheless the editor understands her

immediately without any need to discuss the matter. She merely comments that she finds Laura's material "sensational" and shows her empathy with the views expressed by her eagerness to publish Laura's collection.

Clearly *Leben und Abenteuer* is a feminine book which speaks to common experiences and recognises an empathy which women share. That it is concerned as well with the emancipation of women has also been recognised by most critics. Is it permissible to assert that Irmtraud Morgner is a feminist author and *Leben und Abenteuer* a feminist book?

That she is a feminist has been denied. The GDR critic Annemarie Auer states very firmly that Irmtraud Morgner is not a feminist.⁷ To Auer, as an East German, feminism is a "capitalist plot" which creates and fosters the hostility between men and women, and thus deflects women's attention away from their oppressive existence in capitalist countries.

Auer's definition of feminism is not confined to East Germany, however. Sheila Rowbotham encountered the identical argument in London during the same period.⁸ She considered it to be part of a broader political strategy which had distinct propaganda overtones and, springing from a male bias, was intended to serve as a constraint upon women within the socialist movement. For Rowbotham, the purpose of the argument was to keep female revolutionaries from noticing their subordinate position within the

revolutionary movement itself.⁹ Auer supports her own definition of feminism by citing a Russian study; Rowbotham quotes a male colleague. Since the argument was employed in both East Germany and England during the same period it cannot be taken, as Auer takes it, strictly as a West versus East argument. Moreover, coming as it does completely from outside the frame of reference appropriate for the work it cannot seriously be taken to support the claim that Irmtraud Morgner is not a feminist and the novel not a feminist text.

Auer and other critics who stressed the "antagonistic" aspect between East and West, wrote in the GDR. Sonja Hilzinger, writing in the West, however, also emphasises the difference between the feminist movements in East and West, calling the one "emancipatory", the other "feminist". She does not define the difference but implies that it lies in the public nature of women's revolt in the West as opposed to the more hidden discontent of women in the East.

The reading of the novel has clearly been influenced by the prevailing patterns of thought as regards East/West relations. Irmtraud Morgner in her interview with Eva Kaufmann (1984) said that it is only in the last ten years that women have been discussed with any sense of realism and validity: "Es gibt nun ungefähr seit zehn Jahren einen Zustand, in dem über die soziale Befindlichkeit der weiblichen Existenz auch literarisch nachgedacht wird..."¹⁰ It follows that the altered sensibilities of these years must apply also to the reading and interpretation of her

work and, as a consequence, it is not sufficient to read her work simply as that of a woman writer: she must be read as a feminist.

It is extremely difficult to arrive at universal definition of feminism. One generally acceptable definition of feminist philosophy is the following:

feminism shares with all traditions of progressive thought since the Enlightenment the principle of the equal worth of all human beings. The unequal treatment of women simply because of their sex has come to be called 'sexism'.¹¹

This is a definition of "feminism" which is generally accepted among people who take the problem seriously. Even men now may be called feminists. The novel clearly assumes the philosophic stance thus expressed.

Feminism means, broadly speaking, that in all disciplines the category of gender is added as a critical tool. Specifically, however, feminism can mean many different things depending on the discipline to which it is applied. In the field of psychology, for instance, it may mean a questioning of the Freudian view. In literature it means a re-interpretation and re-imagining of the role of women in literature and art. Feminism also involves re-examining the moral judgements by male critics on women in literature. *Leben und Abenteuer* does all this, and its critical edge thus is feminist.

At the time the novel was written, published and first reviewed, feminism in the West was in its extreme phase. In Sarah Kirsch's words, feminism was simply "too strident in

the West."¹² Compared to the East it appeared to be a more revolutionary movement, and it certainly was a more public expression of female discontent. But the differences were chiefly ones of appearance. Since *Leben und Abenteuer* advocates a peaceful process of change, early critical views determined that the novel was not feminist. Although the understanding of feminism has since broadened, the early critical attitudes have persisted. The critical literature has not changed its focus or its basic understanding of *Leben und Abenteuer* as merely a GDR work, and therefore not a feminist one.

At first, Irmtraud Morgner herself also declined the label "feminist". In her more recent pronouncements she has come to accept it, however. It is interesting that in the more popular reviews on her book, as distinct from formal literary criticism, she has always been identified as a feminist.¹³ She, however, never shared the objections which Auer voiced on her behalf, nor did she disassociate herself from the public demonstrations of women which Sonja Hilzinger uses as her touchstone of differentiation. To Irmtraud Morgner "feminism" had a restrictive connotation of a different sort. She believed at one point that the term "feminism" was too narrow. She felt it was understood to mean that the emancipation of women was an issue of concern to women only. She, then and now, maintains that the emancipation of women is a matter of concern for society as a whole. The emancipation of women concerns both men and

women, individually and collectively. It is a problem for humanity, *ein Menschheitsproblem*.¹⁴

It would appear that the reluctance by critics to call her a feminist is due to a desire to protect her from a charge of disloyalty to her country. It is undeniable that Irmtraud Morgner's primary identity is that of a Marxist, living in the GDR. She believes that the emancipation of women cannot come about without a socialist revolution. Such a conviction is not entirely foreign to feminists in the West. It is the belief shared by many, such as Sheila Rowbotham, Sheila Delaney and Mary O'Brien. Irmtraud Morgner, however, believes that a political revolution must come first, in fact must precede in time any revolution in patriarchal customs and traditions:

Sittliche Verhältnisse lassen sich nur revolutionieren nach der Revolutionierung der ökonomischen Verhältnisse. Man kann den zweiten Schritt nicht vor dem ersten tun. In der DDR ist der erste Schritt längst getan. Jetzt beschäftigt uns der zweite, sela. (*Leben und Abenteuer*, 589)¹⁵

In *Leben und Abenteuer* the political and economic revolution has been taken for granted: the issue is, rather, the turning point in a *Weltanschauung*, the recognition that women differ from men and that their situation is specific and distinct.

When calling Irmtraud Morgner a feminist and *Leben und Abenteuer* a feminist narrative, the loyalty of the author and of her fictional characters to their own country is not in question. Berlin is the centre of her and their universe and it contains all they need and love. It is home and the

socialist revolution of 1945 is an accomplishment, of which the reader of *Leben und Abenteuer* is occasionally reminded. However, in Irmtraud Morgner's mature works the economic and political differences between Marxist socialist and capitalist society are not the primary focus. Her concerns are the customs and traditions of patriarchal Western society which transcends political borders.

The most explicit demonstration that she holds this attitude is found in her novel *Amanda* in the story "Barbara, die Heiratsschwindlerin".¹⁶ In it, Barbara leaves the GDR because she does not want to become a working animal ("ein Arbeitstier") like her mother. Barbara follows her father to Hamburg in the Federal Republic. There she makes a disastrous marriage, has two children, undergoes a painful divorce and a separation from her children. She returns home to the GDR where, in order to survive, she takes to fraud. Barbara becomes a marriage swindler, a role traditionally limited to men. She advertises for partners with money and then cheats the men out of their savings.

The story of Barbara has a realistic beginning but has no realistic ending. As so often in Irmtraud Morgner's writing, a story which begins in one mode does not necessarily end in the same mode. She gives the story of Barbara a fairy tale ending, displaying in literary terms a lack of a proper "sense of an ending".¹⁷ The men do not notice the fraud and all is well for Barbara. She starts a fruit and vegetable farm where all her men live and work

happily under the shade of a magic canopy which confers invisibility.

At the beginning of *Leben und Abenteuer Irmtraud Morgner* visualized a change from fairy tale to reality: Beatriz leaves her rose-covered castle and steps out onto a building site. In the story of Barbara, Irmtraud Morgner begins in a realistic mode and escapes back into a fairy tale. This progression from fairy tale to reality and vice-versa reveals a specific contemporary dilemma which many feminists recognise. It is a result of their new-found vision of world and society. They know what is wrong: they are working towards change: but there has as yet been no precedent in real life and its reflection in contemporary literature upon which a visionary model for the future could be based. The vision of the future remains a vague belief or hope, and thus the vague escapist fairy tale ending.

There are very few references in the work of Irmtraud Morgner to the other Germany, the Federal Republic. It is significant that the farce of Barbara consciously straddles not just East and West but specifically East and West Germany. That her story is an exemplary tale may be deduced from the fact that Irmtraud Morgner herself chose it for her reading in Solothurn, Switzerland.¹⁸ If it were true that the chief concern in the work of Irmtraud Morgner is to demonstrate the "confrontational attitudes between the capitalist West and the socialist East", and thus, as Damm writes, to show how much better the lot of women is in the

GDR, the story of Barbara would certainly subvert this aim. The message of Barbara's story is rather to show that women do not have much to choose from in either East or West. As Barbara crosses borders, so do the problems of women. Women are second-class citizens in either system. There are differences, and Irmtraud Morgner merely delineates these differences. The contrast may, or may not, arise in the reader's mind. The text, as Irmtraud Morgner presents it, does not give an answer.

Since literary critics have hesitated to call her a feminist, it is reassuring to have Irmtraud Morgner's verbal commitment to feminism. She said:

Karl Marx hat in unübertroffener Klarheit gesagt, dass sich der gesellschaftliche Fortschritt exakt messen lässt an der gesellschaftlichen Stellung des "schönen Geschlechts". Im präzisen Sinne dieses Marx-Satzes bin ich eine Feministin.¹⁹

Yet even if that remark were not on record, *Leben und Abenteuer* itself is clearly a feminist narrative. The feminist position and viewpoint is implicitly, yet persistently indicated. The critic Robert Weimann writes on the complicated aspects and the absence of a viewpoint in the modern novel: "The artist's opinions, whether expressed privately or publicly, are relevant mainly insofar as they reflect or inspire his sensibility or his all-round apprehension and comprehension of things."²⁰ This "all-round apprehension and comprehension of things" by Irmtraud Morgner is revealed in *Leben und Abenteuer* by her selection of subject matter and by her treatment of it. This subject

matter derives its relevance from the gender of the author, the gender of all her characters, and from the historical period in which the novel was written and which it chronicles.

It appears that Annemarie Auer's firm dismissal of the notion that Irmtraud Morgner might be a feminist has closed the door effectively to an examination of the feminist orientation of the novel. Its emancipatory subject matter has been noticed, but not its feminist cutting edge. There is an important difference between a female and a feminist writer. It is entirely possible to be a woman and to read and write like a man, for the present generation of educated women were, after all, educated along strict male lines. This is a problem much discussed by feminists.²¹ That the difference is not quite understood is obvious in the interpretations of *Leben und Abenteuer*. Two related examples may suffice.

Irmtraud Morgner compares literature to musical composition.²² By that she is, however, not referring to the sound of words, but to their placement, to repetitions of phrases and whole episodes in many possible variations, depending on the contexts within the text. It matters to recognise connections, remember earlier occurrences and effects. In *Leben und Abenteuer* two particularly striking episodes are repeated which clearly can be appreciated only if the feminist slant is recognised. The repetitions here have the purpose of directing the attention of the reader

onto the differences in experience as a result of gender. One of the repeated episodes presents a social encounter in a pub, where a woman/man makes sexual advances to a man/woman. The other is the speech given by Beatriz on the admission of the poet Guntram Pomerence to the PEN club. The pub scenes are actually written out in two chapters using almost identical words. Indeed, the only difference between them is that one is the description by a woman, the other by a man (169).

The speech, however, occurs only once. That it is a repetition, however, is revealed in the heading of the chapter: "Laudatio für den Dichter Guntram Pomerence anlässlich seiner Aufnahme in den PEN, gehalten von Beatriz de Dia nach dem Muster, das der Trobadora ein Jahr früher bei gleicher Gelegenheit zgedacht worden war" (606). The heading provides the pertinent information that Beatriz has repeated the style and content of the speech to which she herself had been subjected.

The speech honouring Pomerence begins with the rhetorical question, "Denn welcher Dichter deutscher Zunge gleicht seinen Maßen?" In answer, we read a catalogue of his physical size, beginning with the length of Pomerence's fingers as being in ideal contrast with the width of his shoulders, and summing up his greatness by comparing his eyes to his poetry, both having the power of being equally penetrating (607).

If one reads the novel merely from the viewpoint of a woman then one might, as Herminhouse has done, interpret the repetition of the pub scene and the praise of one poet for another as the author's intention to tell women not to behave like men. Herminhouse believes that Irmtraud Morgner merely demonstrates that patriarchal attitudes must not be repeated by women, for to do so would only replace one evil with another.²³ This, of course, is true, but it leaves unconsidered the satirical edge of the descriptions: the rudeness in the one and the extravagant detailed physical description in place of praise of poetry in the other. Surely the purpose of the speech in the novel, the repetition, the conscious reference to the model of the year before, is not aimed at teaching women to avoid copying male methods and manners. Realistic as the descriptions in both episodes sound, they can only be read as extended metaphors illustrating the claim of the double standard so frequently made by women in private and public life. Women are evaluated by their looks before any attention is paid to intellectual content or artistic achievement.²⁴ A feminist will recognise in the pub-scene a comment on the matter-of-fact indignity to which women are subjected in everyday life. The repetition of the pub scene illustrates how outmoded habitual male actions are in contrast to contemporary female sensibilities. In the introductory speech praising the poet, a feminist would not miss the ironic commentary on the idea of assessing anyone's work by

physical appearance. The lesson is not that women must not behave like men, but that such behaviour is silly, is unjust to women and must become a thing of the past.

The author says that she personally, by temperament, favours people with a certain aggressive edge to their personality.²⁵ This aggressive edge is evident in her text. Patricia Herminhouse has read the repetition of the pub scene and the introductory speech as didactic instruction to women to keep their place, thereby missing the irony. That would have been a traditional female but not a feminist approach. It is my contention that reading the text from a feminist perspective constitutes the proper approach. Throughout the novel the repetition of feminist themes provide the only inner logic within the apparent chaos of the narrative.

However, as the critical literature has shown, reading this book as a feminist text is neither obvious nor easy. There are certain obstacles to recognition of a feminist viewpoint. As mentioned, one is the absence of a conventional expression of any viewpoint in the narrative itself. The other is the attitude of critics who maintain that the book is a GDR book only and, since feminism is Western, it therefore cannot be feminist.

Most of the literary criticism on *Leben und Abenteuer* so far was written in the GDR. The starting point has therefore been a search for praise of its economic and political system accompanied by denigration of the West.

However, a specific example which has been used by one critic, Annemarie Auer, to illustrate this contention shows, when put into context, how very limiting this approach can be. Annemarie Auer begins by stating that Beatriz is happy because when she leaves France she leaves a country in which women are paid less than men for equal work.²⁶ A remark of this nature is indeed made in *Leben und Abenteuer* (687). However, while it must be admitted that here the GDR is praised at the expense of a Western country, the remark reflects nonetheless only an incidental thought and has little to do with the action in the novel.²⁷ Beatriz leaves France at the exact moment when she is obliged to do so. Her departure in the novel is attributed not to inequality of pay but to her terrorist activity. "Als sie erfuhr, dass Hector unter Jacquelines Bett Handgranaten entdeckt hatte, kaufte sie sich auf dem Gare de l'Est eine Fahrkarte nach Berlin." (109) Later in the novel, when Beatriz travels in search of the unicorn, the author refers back to this particular incident. We read that Beatriz cannot return and search for the unicorn in France because the police are still looking for her there. While it is true that Beatriz is economically and sexually exploited in France, this is not the reason for her leaving. And the attraction of the GDR is not money but her hope of being able to work there as a female troubador. Her desire to work as a troubador is a search for autonomy and her longing symbolizes the hopes of all feminists of that period for self-expression. The GDR

has been described to her as a paradise, for it is, in a man's words, a land of total equality.

The remark referring to the equal pay issue in the novel and taken by Auer as praise of the GDR over the capitalist West when examined in more depth shows that the novel transcends political ideology and national borders. When Beatriz enters the GDR she is told that she is not entering paradise but a socialist state and the equal pay issue is a signal to alert the reader to look to the realities in that society. These realities do not necessarily coincide with the official claims made on behalf of women in the GDR. While it is true that, in the GDR, women are paid the same as men for the same work, which was not true at the time in France, Sonja Hilzinger has pointed out that most women in the GDR work in lower paying jobs and she cites Irmtraud Morgner as being aware of this issue and speaking about it.²⁸ The implied contention is that exploitation of women in any patriarchal society is not only a theory but has a material basis in real life. In the novel, Laura is constantly in need of money. Her main incentive for writing is money. It might be argued that although the economic exploitation of women in the GDR lacks the added dimension it has in France where equal pay for equal work is not guaranteed by law, in reality there is a little difference in the economic position of women in the GDR and France. Women in both countries are the poorer half of the population.

In *Leben und Abenteuer*, Irmtraud Morgner is discussing the value of women to society, not the value of the constitution which guarantees equal pay for equal work. She persists in drawing attention to the fact that the contribution of women to society is enormous but that this contribution is taken for granted because much of it is done without pay and without public recognition. In this Irmtraud Morgner does not differ from other feminists who contend that the economic contribution of women to society is much greater than the economic contribution of men. This is especially true in a socialist society in which 80% of women work full time in the public domain and still carry a full load at home.²⁹ This is the main thrust of the narrative. There it is constantly illustrated that society puts a double demand on women, especially in the GDR where the economic structure demands that most women work full time outside the home. While the novel does not attack the economic structure, it deplores the social attitudes and customs which have changed so little with the coming of socialism that the full burden of children and home still fall on women and, moreover, that many people still consider this to be the natural state of things.³⁰

In *Leben und Abenteuer*, the recurring and specific theme is the double shift. The term "double shift" is a concept from industrial production, and to discuss the work women do at home in terms of a work shift is in itself indicative of a new perception. The "doppelte Schicht"

dealt with in the novel was of specific concern to the author in her private life. Irmtraud Morgner defined her new insight especially in its relationship to the legal status of women:

Gleichberechtigung, was heisst denn das? Man hat die gleichen Rechte. Man hat das gleiche Recht zu arbeiten. Das heisst, ich habe die doppelten Pflichten. Eine Gleichberechtigung sagt nichts über die Pflichten aus. Gleichberechtigung heisst, man hat die gleichen Rechte wie der Mann, aber man hat die doppelten Pflichten als Frau. Wer weiss, ob man die Rechte in Anspruch nehmen kann?³¹

In *Leben und Abenteuer* the double burden of home and job dominates the lives of younger women. It is most vividly and most explicitly exemplified in the story of Vera Hill. In this story the balancing skills required of a woman who is both scientist and mother is described as a modern miracle. Vera Hill can manage family life and scientific research only by an act of will using all her skills as part time trapeze artist (594). Vera Hill can manage her double life and fulfil her duties only as long as she does not think about what she is doing. When it is made clear to her by her fellow workers that in rational terms her life is an impossibility, she falls to her death.

The story of Vera Hill has this specific point. But it has gone unrecognised that Laura as one of the main characters is also such a woman encumbered by excessive demands. In the secondary literature Laura is interpreted as a satisfied woman, a model of virtue and correctness, especially when contrasted with the less predictable Beatriz. It is true that in the novel her life is not

treated with metaphoric flight of fancy as is Vera Hill's. The restrictions in Laura's life are subtly acted out in the text. Laura has equality in law but must carry the double duties of home and job and is unable to exercise her right to equality. For example, in the literary criticism much is made of Laura's independence and her non-traditional job as a street car conductor and of the meaning this has within Irmtraud Morgner's symbolic system. Irmtraud Morgner associates "den fahrenden Beruf" with autonomy, with being on the move, with independence and with leadership on the forefront of society. Laura is seen to embody all these qualities. This is not substantiated in the novel. For much of the time covered therein, Laura is stationary and does not work as street car conductor. When she describes the beauty of her work in terms fitting the meaning which Irmtraud Morgner attaches to the concept "fahrender Beruf", it is presented as a day dream and with great longing.

This "not being able to do what one wishes to do" is also symbolically acted out in *Leben und Abenteuer*. In two episodes women place symbolic objects into glass cases. These objects embody beauty, dreams, or lost opportunities. In "Schuhe" a young woman puts her shoes into a glass Vitrine. They symbolise "the roads not taken" because of being a woman, a mother and wife. Laura puts into her vitrine a starter key to a street car engine, given to her in consolation for domestic difficulties by her neighbour (279).

All the freedoms associated with the symbol of the "fahrenden Beruf" are inaccessible to Laura during the time chronicled in the novel because she is a woman and because she is pregnant. Motherhood interferes with her freedom to choose. When we meet her, she has a sedentary job selling tickets. Later in the novel, after the birth of her son, she has to take many leaves of absence because the child is sick and caring for him keeps her at home. Eventually, when she discovers that she spends more time at home than at work, she takes a formal leave of absence and only then does she accept the job of "Spielfrau" to Beatriz (222). This is not a job which she accepts freely and with joy. To become a writer or a literary agent is for her making do with a lesser job. It is a matter of necessity.

In *Vorsätze*, which contains the last months chronicled in *Leben und Abenteuer*, we are told that Laura's chance at work and her right to economic independence are in jeopardy again. We read that she once more cannot be certain of her job as street car driver because she is now married again. As a result of the marriage, Wesselin may lose his place in Kindergarten and she may have to stay home to look after him. Laura is caught between the demands of society and the necessities of home and child care. She is not free to take advantage of her legal rights and choose what she wants to do.³²

Leben und Abenteuer goes beyond lamentation. It goes beyond seeing and describing women as the only victims of

patriarchal society. The overt message is that any kind of suppression or exploitation is undignified and unfair and that women are the suppressed half of humankind. The implicit message, however, is that men are no longer served by patriarchal attitudes either: "was historisch überlebt ist, [ist] vom selben Augenblick an auch schädlich, glückszersetzend, menschenvernichtend..."³³ In *Leben und Abenteuer* we are shown that the burdens placed on women is so great that something has to be sacrificed. Included, among many other things, is the relationship between men and women. Eva Kaufmann writes that in the work of Irmtraud Morgner job and child come first, the men come last.³⁴ The younger women, those who work full time, can cope with jobs and children, but not with husbands as well. Indeed, in *Leben und Abenteuer* we read that Valeska initiates divorce proceedings against Uwe immediately after she finds out that she is pregnant (327).

Patricia Herminhouse writes that the novel does not criticise the institution of the family.³⁵ This is true in only a very limited sense. There is no theoretical discussion of the subject "family" in *Leben und Abenteuer*, but there are a number of models displayed, described and examined which show the conventional family as a barrier. Indeed, Irmtraud Morgner speaks of "*die Barriere der Familie*" (688).

While theoretically it may still be believed that the nuclear family (*die Kernfamilie*), consisting of father,

mother and children is still the best ideological model, in the novel this is an ideal which appears to be no longer achievable in reality.³⁶ For younger women marriage is a patriarchal institution, as Beatriz says, and many reject it for that reason (61).

None of the traditional models of family life described in *Leben und Abenteuer* are particularly desirable. The most chilling marriage described in the novel is the story of Aunt Jenny, a sensitive and somewhat incompetent woman, who is crushed by marriage. She is treated with utter lack of understanding and sympathy by all family members, male and female alike, until she eventually commits suicide (76).

Her story illustrates that the institution of family and marriage does not protect its weaker members.

It is often said, and is confirmed in this story, that the economic dependence of women on men leads to competition and divisiveness between women themselves. Weak women like Aunt Jenny cannot hope to find solace and comfort, for patriarchy ensures that women themselves, since they depend on the male bread winner for their material existence and their identity, do not develop strong ties with each other. The old attitudes and rules prevail with a vengeance in the household of Laura's aunt. There is no solidarity between the women of this household. Uncle Kurt, the husband, who causes his wife's misery, though generally odious and disliked, is not opposed by any family member. On the contrary, he is actively supported by his mother. In fact,

the point of the story appears to be to show precisely how all conspire to make even the most vile male behaviour appear natural and normal. Even Laura sadly recognises a lack of empathy and detachment in herself. Only the death of her aunt shocks her into thought and into proper sympathy. Her viewpoint changes and she, by remembering this situation as having positively come to an end, is able empathetically to understand the endless misery in such a marriage relationship. She realises how powerless women may be under certain circumstances.

The story of Aunt Jenny exemplifies Irmtraud Morgner's contention that women not only live in patriarchy but that patriarchy also lives within them. She writes: "Die Frauen leben nicht nur im Patriarchat, es lebt auch in ihnen."³⁷

The marriage of Laura's parents, Johann and Olga Salman, offers a second example of traditional marriage and family life. The Salmans have a very conventional marriage, typical for people of their generation. The best that can be said of such a marriage is that it is all right. It is more kind than the marriage of Uncle Kurt and Aunt Jenny, because the Salmans are kind people. But nonetheless the roles in their relationship are traditionally defined. The Salmans do not share any interests, and Johann is no companion for his wife. Both partners live beside each other rather than with each other. They do not know how to break out of the traditional pattern, typical for people of their generation: nor do they show any desire to do so.

Olga stays at home and Johann works; he speaks and she listens; he expresses his opinions and she swallows hers. Olga looks forward to her husband's retirement but when the time comes, her life, instead of becoming freer and less lonely, becomes even more restricted and joyless. Even the attractions of being a grandmother and having a kind daughter are not sufficient. She elects to retire into sleep as Beatriz had done some eight hundred odd years before in the hope of coming back to life at a better time for women.

A marriage such as her parents' would be quite impossible for Laura and the other women in her generation, Beatriz, Valeska Kantus and Vera Hill. The ideal community in *Leben und Abenteuer* for women of that age group is not the traditional nuclear family, but a communal living arrangement in which four working women and their children share all responsibilities and all domestic duties. The men live somewhere else -- the reader is not told where. Each of the women assumes certain duties for one week, freeing the others and giving them leisure time for such simple but hitherto unobtainable pleasures as walking, reading the paper and listening to music. Leisure time is, according to Marx, the utmost luxury.³⁸ Women in *Leben und Abenteuer* can claim their right to this luxury only in situations where there are no men.

The central focus of *Leben und Abenteuer* is on the lives of women of a particular age group. Laura, Beatriz,

Valeska Kantus and Vera Hill (as well as the author herself at the time of writing) are all between 35-40 years old. Not one of them lives in a conventional marriage. Laura was married twice, she is divorced, alone and pregnant when Beatriz first meets her. Her lover Lutz has a wife somewhere else. Lutz is a philanderer and Beatriz, who likes men, eventually takes Lutz over. The relationship among Laura, Beatriz, and Lutz is a ménage à trois but the common pattern of such an arrangement, a triangle of one man and two women is modified. The man is not in control. On the contrary, the woman has the power of choice and not, as it was until recently believed, (and in Jane Austen's words) only "the power of refusal." In *Leben und Abenteuer*, the relationship with Lutz is not the source for either unhappiness or happiness, for tragedy or comedy. Lutz is not the centre of the relationship, nor is he the person who decides how the relationship should be arranged. This is left to Laura and Beatriz. *Leben und Abenteuer*, as other feminist texts, speaks of women becoming the subjects of their own lives rather than remaining the objects in the lives of men. The relationship between the three, Beatriz, Laura and Lutz, is an example in practice of that theoretical contention.

All of the episodes, the brief comedies and tragedies in *Leben und Abenteuer*, are practical demonstrations of feminist theories. One of the main themes of contemporary feminism and of the novel is the role of love and sexuality

in a woman's life. In the example of the triangular relationship between Laura, Beatriz and Lutz this theme is touched upon. The common traditional assumption is that for a woman sex is destiny, and a woman without a man is incomplete. Irmtraud Morgner makes fun of this notion in *Amanda*. There she quotes the French feminist slogan: "A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle."³⁹ In *Leben und Abenteuer* the question of whether every woman needs a man in order to be fulfilled and what the degree of her involvement in such a relationship should be is repeatedly discussed.

The belief that every woman can complete herself solely in a relationship with a man who then becomes her whole life is the ultimate patriarchal male view of the purpose of life for women. It has been floating around in the cultural consciousness and is summarised in the well-known verses of Lord Byron: "Man's love is of man's life a thing apart, / 'Tis woman's whole existence".⁴⁰ The relationship between Lutz, Beatriz and Laura is a demonstrable denial of that assumption. Lutz is not terribly important. He is merely one of three people involved in a passing relationship. He is the object rather than the subject in the triangular configuration. As time passes, and as Laura and Beatriz become interested in other matters, such as the baby Wesselin and the *Montageroman* project for the *Aufbau-Verlag*, Lutz disappears from their lives and from the novel.⁴¹ This is so skillfully done in the narrative that his

disappearance is hardly noticed by the reader, and he is certainly not missed.

There is a witty implication attached to the relationship of the three. Irmtraud Morgner implies that women have progressed further than men and that the sexes are out of step in their perception and understanding of contemporary social reality. Lutz, being of the same generation as Laura, is considered too old for Laura. When Laura wants to marry again, the suitability of the right man is a much discussed issue and his suitability centres around age. Beatriz and the Beautiful Melusine believe that a woman of 40 and a man of 20 can be expected to have an approximately similar attitude and a similar understanding of the modern realities. They suggest that it would be best for Laura to marry a man of twenty and that that man be the son of Lutz from his legal marriage. His age is just right. Upon consideration, however, all feel that such a marriage might create too delicate a kinship problem. This is not only because of the age difference but because Lutz (possibly) is the father of Wesselin. The resulting kinship pattern would simply be too complicated and would break too many social taboos. When Laura does eventually marry, she chooses Benno, the younger brother of Lutz. (This makes Benno the step-father and uncle of Wesselin, if we deduce correctly from the dates in the novel that Lutz is the father of Wesselin.)

Leben und Abenteuer is governed by a sense of displacement in time and a search for connectedness. People, while they sympathize with each other, as Laura sympathizes with her parents and their generation, are in step neither with each other nor with the present realities. The older people's problem is the generation gap.⁴² The novel maintains that people very rarely change or relearn attitudes. Although times may change, all generations tend to hold on to their own patterns of thought and behaviour. The problem for the younger generation is one of gender and women are alleged to be two generations ahead of the men. When Laura marries Benno, she compromises. For, though reasonably happy, he lags one generation behind her in understanding. Nonetheless, in the novel, Benno is hardly a fully developed character. He is a vehicle which provides a specific focus on the relationship between men and women. He is not absolutely necessary to Laura and he disappears from Laura's life as did his brother Lutz.⁴³

The somewhat unusual pattern of Laura's relationship to men is not to be taken as a serious prescription for happiness in marriage or life. *Leben und Abenteuer* is basically a very funny novel which employs hyperbole and makes its point by pushing ideas to extremes. Speculations about age and kinship patterns are part of the fun and games in *Leben und Abenteuer*, although no doubt they are also reflections on contemporary and social reality with respect to marriage and family from a feminist point of view.

Leben und Abenteuer shows a changed and a changing society in depicting such patterns of marriage and family life. Each generation differs sharply from the preceding one. The changes, whether good or bad, are the inevitable outcome of a changed economic structure and the accompanying evolution in the historic process. No one in *Leben und Abenteuer* regrets the changes. There is no feeling of nostalgia and no longing for the good old days, because the good old days were not such good days, especially not for women. Irmtraud Morgner states that feminism is a social problem, "ein Menschheitsproblem", not a problem for women only.⁴⁴ However, in her work she nonetheless implicitly demands that the attitudes which must change are chiefly those of men, or those expressing the male bias towards women. In more abstract language, she demands that the customs and traditions which are the inner structures of patriarchy be recognised as obstacles to a truly just society and be done away with.

Ingeborg Nordmann regrets that there are so few critical interpretations of *Leben und Abenteuer*, especially since the novel was so very successful and popular and since it clearly is a narrative of great intelligence and skill. The reason is that *Leben und Abenteuer* is an unusually difficult work, presenting many false leads to conventional interpretation. It lacks, as already stated, a conventional unified viewpoint which would make it clear who speaks or from what vantage point of place or time. But it seems more

likely that the problem of viewpoint could have been overcome had the novel from the outset not been placed into the stereotype of an East German novel demonstrating primarily the superiority of the socialist East. The continuous dialogue between East and West is based largely on a comparison between the relative merits of the socialist and the capitalist economic systems. In the relevant literary criticism there is such an overwhelming awareness of the differences between socialism and capitalism, differences which are moreover always expressed as "antagonistic", that political considerations have come to influence every discussion.

The political component is there but it is not central to the novel as critics subsequently asserted. This insistence has diverted attention from what is in fact the basic stance, a critique of Western patriarchal civilisation as manifested both in socialist and capitalist countries. Of dominant concern in *Leben und Abenteuer* are the various forms of exploitation of women and the effect this exploitation has on contemporary society. The novel deals chiefly with the exploitation of women as a result of the changed social and political conditions which happened in the GDR after May 1945 but which were not accompanied by changed patterns of behaviour and thought. In the GDR the exploitation of women continues, according to Irmtraud Morgner, because their full value to society remains unrecognised. A comparison between the pattern of

exploitation in France and in the GDR is simply a comparison in degree, not in substance. The political remarks in the novel are distractions from the main concern and critics, by following the distractions, have drawn attention away from the more fundamental concerns of *Leben und Abenteuer*. In fact, the political tensions between East and West are minor in contrast to the social tensions between the aspirations of feminism and the patriarchal status quo. The main thematic focus of *Leben und Abenteuer* and the major social concern of the author are centered around the exploitation of women by society. Only on the periphery are there statements made which imply a favourable comparison with the West, such as the one cited by Auer and seized upon as the dominant and the outstanding remark in the novel.

Notes

- 1 Quoted in Robert Weimann, *Structure and Society in Literary History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976) 238.
- 2 Irmtraud Morgner, *Amanda* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1985) 23.
- 3 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1496.
- 4 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1513.
- 5 Victor Shlovsky, "Art as Technique", in Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism* (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska, 1965) 5.
- 6 Ingeborg Nordmann, "Die halbierte Geschichtsfähigkeit der Frau. Zu Irmtraud Morgners Roman *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura*", *Amsterdamer Beiträge* 11/12 (1981): 455. Nordmann identifies Laura and her views with Irmtraud Morgner personally. She also assumes and says that Laura is the teller of the tale.
It is to be noticed, however, that Irmtraud Morgner at times also speaks through Beatriz. She does so, for instance, in the erotic poems which Beatriz writes before leaving Paris (94-96).
- 7 Annemarie Auer, "Trobadora unterwegs oder Schulung in Realismus", *Sinn und Form* 28 (1976): 1068 and 1082. Auer writes: "Irmtraud Morgner ist keine Feministin. Sie denkt nicht daran, gegen die Männer aufzurüsten." (1068) She furthermore does not permit the "Ärgernis stiftende Suffragettenwort Emanzipation". (1068) Feminism, explains Auer, is a capitalist trick to direct the energies of women towards a futile battle of the sexes and thus rob society of the creative work of women. (1082) Feminism, according to Auer, is chiefly a hostile movement towards men.
- 8 Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 19.
- 9 Suzanne Levine and Harriet Lyons, eds., *The Decade of Women* (New York: Putnam's, 1980) 29. Interestingly enough, the FBI in the early '70s, "pointed out that the so-called Women's Liberation Movement had its origin in Soviet Russia. ... Radicals are increasingly finding in the WLM as a vehicle through which to radicalize women."
- 10 Eva Kaufmann, "Interview mit Irmtraud Morgner", *Weimarer Beiträge* 9 (1984) 1501.

11 David Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge* (London: Macmillan, 1983) 62.

12 Jürgen Serke, *Frauen schreiben* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1982) 234.

10. Serke 228.

Serke in his collection of essays on 33 women writers describes Irmtraud Morgner as a feminist writer. Only she among all women writers interviewed for his volume, is called a feminist in the title preceding the essay on her. The title reads, "Eine Feministin, die die Männer nicht aufgibt." The phraseology of the title reveals the common, yet somewhat simplistic assumption that a feminist is by definition against men and that Irmtraud Morgner is an exception in this respect.

14 Patricia Herminhouse, "Die Frau und das Phantastische in der neueren DDR-Literatur", in *Die Frau als Heldin und Autorin*, ed. Wolfgang Paulsen, (Bern/München: Francke, 1979) 257.

15 That this is not necessarily so can perhaps be demonstrated in regard to the abortion issue. The campaign of women to control their own bodies is at times called the "opening wedge" of the feminist movement [German Feminism, 102]. In France, in April of 1971, the Paris Women's Movement published the names of 343 French women who had had an abortion illegally. In West Germany on July 6, 1971 the magazine *Der Stern* published the names of 374 women who declared openly that they too had broken the law, and by publishing their names now have broken the taboo surrounding the abortion issue [German Feminism, 104]. The public confession of these women in France and in West Germany gave inspiration and strength to women in "almost all Western countries" to fight openly for the right of self-determination. "In November 1971, women took to the street in almost all Western countries. In Paris alone, over 4,000 demonstrated." As a consequence, legislation to legalize abortion was passed, almost concurrently, in many countries. In *Leben und Abenteuer* we read that in the GDR the law was passed on March 9, 1972 (503). In the United States the Supreme Court handed down the so-called Roe-v.-Wade decision legalising abortion "on Monday morning, January 22, 1973". In Great Britain, abortion had been legalised on April 27, 1968. *Der Spiegel* reports on January 26, 1970 that abortion had become big business in England. The passage of the abortion legislation in the GDR cannot, as Sonja Hilzinger does, be taken as an example to demonstrate the particular progressive position of women in the GDR, nor can it be said that capitalism must be overthrown before the social (and cultural) emancipation of women can come about.

16 Morgner, *Amanda*, 319.

The story of Laura continues in *Amanda*. The focus in this novel as in *Leben und Abenteuer* is on women, their relationship to men and their position in society.

17 Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (London/New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).

18 Irmtraud Morgner, *Die Hexe im Landhaus* (Zürich: Rauhreif, 1984) 23.

19 Peter Schütt, "Wir brauchen Humor und Phantasie, um zu überleben", *Unsere Zeit*, Hamburg, 22. April 1983, 10.

20 Weimann 242.

21 Sigrid Weigel, "Double Focus: On the History of Women's Writing", in *Feminist Aesthetics*, ed. Gisela Ecker (London: The Women's Press, 1985) 59.

22 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1505.

23 Herminhouse 258.

Patricia Herminhouse writes: Die weiblichen Gegenbilder zu patriarchalischen Handlungsweisen zeigen ... bloss Morgners Abneigung, das eine Übel durch das andere zu ersetzen, indem Frauen sich wie Männer benehmen."

24 An equally amusing and effective parallel is to be found in the chapter in which the editor Irmtraud Morgner reassures the male readers of the novel that what they read is true by citing the physical measurements of Beatriz (149).

25 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1513.

26 Auer 1095.

Annemarie Auer, speaking with pride of the superiority of the GDR over the capitalist countries, quotes from the novel the following: "Sie durchquerte ein Land, in dem die Frauen gleiche Arbeit wie Männer verrichteten und schlechter bezahlt wurden, und eins, in dem sie für gleiche Arbeit gleichen Lohn erhielten. Dort liess sie sich nieder und nahm Arbeit in einer Versschmiede. Solche Aggregate waren in allen Bezirken und Kreisstädten des Landes aufgestellt." I was not able to trace this particular formulation in the novel.

- 27 The sentence: "Sie durchquerte ein Land, in dem Frauen, wenn sie die gleiche Arbeit wie Männer verrichteten, schlechter bezahlt wurden, und eins, in dem sie für gleiche Arbeit gleichen Lohn erhielten." is contained in the consoling story which Benno tells Laura at the very end of the novel (687). It is a summary of many points in the novel; the phrasing is hyperbolic and, in Patricia Herminhouse's words, the novel ends on a *leichteren Note*, on a light note. [Herminhouse 254.]
- 28 Sonja Hilzinger, "*Als ganzer Mensch zu leben ...*" *Emanzipatorische Tendenzen in der neueren Frauen-Literatur der DDR* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1985) 130.
- 29 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1523.
- 30 Hilzinger 130
- 31 Morgner, *Hexe* 89.
- 32 Little is said about Benno, her new husband, but the implication is that her position differs sharply from his on account of her gender.
- 33 Auer 1098.
- 34 Eva Kaufmann, "Der Hölle die Zunge rausstrecken ...", *Weimarer Beiträge* 9 (1984) 1523.
- 35 Herminhouse 258.
- 36 Indeed, the episode in which Laura remembers her grandfather as the contented lover of two equally contented sisters implicitly casts doubt on the theory that the harmonious and ideal nuclear family as conventionally defined ever existed (298).
- 37 Morgner, *Amanda*, 91.
- 38 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1500.
- 39 Morgner, *Amanda*, 557.
There it says that Laura wrote two books. The title of her first book is "Trobadora Beatriz", the title of the second is "Eine Frau ohne Mann ist wie ein Fisch ohne Fahrrad."
- 40 Byron, Lord George Gordon. *Selected Works*. (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1972) 404.
- 41 In *Leben und Abenteuer*, children are the children of mothers, the father is either not named or is secondary: Wesselin is Laura's son and Arno is Valeska's son (7).

42 Auer 1079.

43 When in *Amanda* the story of Laura resumes, Benno is no longer a part of it. There is a simple reference to his death in a car crash caused by himself when drunk. No one mourns him.

44 Ursula Krechel, "Das eine tun und das andere nicht lassen", in *konkret* (August 1976) 43-45.

CHAPTER VI

THE IMPORTANCE OF MARXISM IN
IRMTRAUD MORGNER'S FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Ich schreibe historische
Gegenwartsromane.

Irmtraud Morgner¹

Irmtraud Morgner's concept of the emancipation of women as expressed in her novels differs from that of her critics in that it has a fundamental relationship to time rather than a limited concern with place. Her feminism is a concept which arises from her understanding of and pre-occupation with history. History and ongoing time are at the centre of her thought. History goes on and time necessarily brings social change. Her particular awareness of the force of time and history is amply illustrated in her interview with Eva Kaufmann.² In *Leben und Abenteuer* her Marxism is chiefly revealed in her notions of time, progress, and the inevitability of change.

The chief concern of Marxism is with history, and indeed, Marxist historical theory is of fundamental importance to *Leben und Abenteuer*.³ Thus a critical approach which begins by recognising the importance of history is much more fruitful than one which stresses economics and politics, or the antagonism between East and West. It enables us to unlock many of the secrets of structure and organisation of *Leben und Abenteuer*.

History was the basic science for Marx, and history is basic to the novel. It is also the common ground between

feminists in East and West, since the feminist revolution of 1968 was truly revolutionary in that it led to the discovery of history from the perspective of women. Irmtraud Morgner expresses this discovery in her thematic statement for the novel: *der Eintritt der Frau in die Historie* -- the entry of woman into history.⁴

For Marx, history was a linear and continuous process and his ideas of history were remarkably orderly and rational.⁵ He considered the study of history to be the basic discipline within which man himself and his social and cultural environment could be understood. Social systems, such as feudalism, capitalism, or socialism, which succeed each other, are defined as epochs. Each epoch is conceived as an improvement upon the preceding one but the change from one epoch to the next is always effected by revolution. In Mills' words: "Within an epoch there are evolutionary changes; between one epoch and another, revolution. In world history, human society thus evolves from one revolution to another, each revolution marking off a new epoch."⁶ The outcome of this belief in man's social evolution is an optimistic position with regard to human nature. Mankind will become better, societies fairer and more humane. This optimistic belief in human nature is a recognisable sentiment permeating the novel *Leben und Abenteuer*. Irmtraud Morgner as a Marxist believes that socialism, being a step beyond capitalism, is the highest social order humankind can achieve and her feminism is the

result of evolutionary changes in a basically fair and humane society.

In theory, Irmtraud Morgner's starting point is precise and she differs from feminists in the West in that she believes socialism must be achieved before customs and traditions will even begin to change. In actuality her feminist concerns coincide with the concerns of feminists in the West.

Marx stated that life itself, not our ideas about life, shape our consciousness, what we are, and how we see ourselves.⁷ Feminists agree but point out that how women see themselves is largely a creation of a male conception of what they are. Women themselves have few models to follow. In common with other feminists, including those in the West, Irmtraud Morgner's specific interests lie in making known the unacknowledged work of women, in examining the images of women in art, in pointing to the differences of experience and perception deriving from gender, and in history itself.

Her starting point, however, is the end of the Second World War. In the GDR, May 8, 1945 is considered to be the date of both the end of capitalism and the start of a new epoch. It was the moment of revolution according to Marxist historical theory. Irmtraud Morgner throws light on that question in *Amanda*, when Laura describes the confusion and the euphoria of that day. She employs the image of society as a pyramid of class and of privilege.⁸ On that day the pyramid stood on its apex: "1945 wurde Lauras Welt durch den

Sieg der sowjetischen Armee und ihrer Verbündeten auf den Kopf gestellt."⁹ In *Leben und Abenteuer*, Laura and the fictional editor look back upon that moment in time from the vantage point of 1973. The end of war brought an end to the exploitation of man by man, but the roles of women remained largely unchanged. Nobody then thought of women as separate entities:

L.S. ...Im Fluge wurde die Ausbeutung des Menschen durch den Menschen abgeschafft.

I.M. ...und die Ausbeutung der Frau durch den Menschen...

L.S. ...fiel in der Eile nicht auf, ... (27)

The emancipation of women as autonomous beings was of minor importance in 1945. In 1973, however, Laura and the editor, both women, recognise that a distinction based on gender has now to be made. In the work of Irmtraud Morgner who speaks as a feminist of the seventies, this growing awareness of gender as a fundamental factor is the result of gradual changes in her society during the years from 1945 to 1973. To her, feminism is a natural development in the historical process of social change in a Marxist society.

The social model for Marx's historical theory happened to be mid-nineteenth century capitalist society. A model in the sense of Marx is concerned with the details with which a problem can be illuminated. It is "concerned with trends having the span of a historically specific epoch."¹⁰ Marx realised that the model would change in future societies.

This definition makes it possible to see *Leben und Abenteuer* as a model for its time.

Irmtraud Morgner states that the emancipation of women is the dominant theme of the present epoch; it is the basic experience and the existing reality, "das Grunderlebnis, die Gegebenheit" of a generation.¹¹ She limits her fictional study of the feminist phenomena to the details of a definite period between May 6, 1968 and August 22, 1973. The evolving attitudes are accounted for by the Marxist concept of change. According to Marx "each epoch must be examined as an independent historical formation in terms of categories suitable to it."¹² The categories most suitable to the present epoch come from the new feminist ideas and theories. By using the word epoch for the present time, Irmtraud Morgner herself establishes a relationship with Marxist historical theory, and the emancipation of women thus becomes a movement which can be understood in historical terms. Feminism is the most important evolutionary social movement in contemporary society. The social changes are observable and Irmtraud Morgner records them in her work as they happen. While feminism in the West is widely considered to be revolutionary in itself, for Irmtraud Morgner feminism is an evolutionary refinement of the existing socialist epoch.

Irmtraud Morgner's understanding of history is precise and based on Marxist theory. However, her emphasis on history also coincides in broad outlines with the interests

of feminists in the West. The chief theoretical concern of feminists everywhere in the '60s and '70s was with history itself, particularly with the absence of women from the historical record. It is still sometimes said that women have no history. This is a misconception, as many recent feminist studies have shown. Women not only form half of the population but also contribute to history and are part of it. Nevertheless, in the past the fact that at least half of humanity is female tended to be ignored. The lives and the activities of women were of interest for the historic record only when they coincided with the interests of men. As a result most of the history of women is unrecorded and un-interpreted and the female viewpoint as separate from the male perspective is absent.

Irmtraud Morgner speaks of the black chapters in the historic record and considers it one of the great functions of literature at present to correct, to re-evaluate, and possibly to re-imagine the historical past. What appears as Irmtraud Morgner's unusual fantasy is often no more than her attempt to imagine a different significance for the cultural icons of the past and to understand the past in terms of the new-found feminist viewpoint. In 1974 Irmtraud Morgner spoke of the duty of literature to provide the imaginative models for women which are lacking in recorded history:

"Wenn die Frauen gegenwärtig beginnen, Menschen werden zu wollen, das heisst sich Natur anzueignen, zuerst ihre eigne, brauchen sie das Bewusstsein ihrer Geschichte - als Vorgabe und Widerstandskraft ... Nach der ökonomischen auch die historische Enteignung rückgängig zu machen, denen, die heute unseren Staat tragen, ihre legendäre Geschichte als Vorgabe fühlbar zu machen, das halte ich für eine grosse Aufgabe der Literatur."¹³

The silence concerning women in history was broken in May 1968. For the contemporary feminist movement, which had already begun to develop and to gain momentum during the 60's, May 1968 was a crucial moment. Suddenly women became united and discovered that they had an international voice and an international audience. May 1968 is regarded by many feminists as the date marking the beginning of the present movement; it is the date on which women entered the main stream of history. Sheila Rowbotham, always a Marxist, writes that she became a feminist during the student uprising of 1968. It was then that she suddenly became aware that gender and class were not the same.¹⁴ Julia Kristeva, the French feminist theoretician, counts May 1968 as the turning point in feminist consciousness.¹⁵ Writers of fiction as well frequently use May 1968 either as a benchmark date or to indicate the moment of some epiphany when a new consciousness was born and changed the course of the lives of their characters. For instance, May 1968 is given as the turning point in the lives of the women in *The Women's Room* by Marilyn French.

It can be no sheer accident but must be due to careful consideration that Irmtraud Morgner chooses May 6, 1968 as

the beginning date in her fiction which records the process of the emancipation of women. In *Leben und Abenteuer* Beatriz surfaces in May 1968 and, by her appearance, she exemplifies the general theoretical feminist claim made for that date, as well as the claim by Irmtraud Morgner that the emancipation of women is the theme of the epoch chronicled in *Leben und Abenteuer*. For Beatriz is not only a character with specific interests: she also stands for women collectively.

The main idea in the conversation between the editor and Laura quoted earlier (p. 127) lies in the realisation that the emancipation of women does not necessarily coincide with a political revolution. It did not do so in 1945 in the GDR and it does not do so in 1968 in France. Laura, in *Amanda*, not only remembers the general euphoria but also her particular disenchantment as a woman in May 1945. She describes how at the end of the war she believed that with the overthrow of the Nazi regime and the establishment of the socialist state, women as well as men could expect total equality in all spheres of life. The social pyramid stood on its apex in May 1945, she says, but not for women. "Das Ende [des Krieges] war der Anfang meiner grössten Illusion," says Laura.¹⁶ This remark recognises that the emancipation of women was not part of the establishment of a classless society in 1945. No matter what the theoretical aims of a revolution, equality for women in patriarchal society

requires more than an overthrow of the preceding political order.

Irmtraud Morgner here gives voice to the understanding that the suppression of women is separate and distinct from the oppression of class. In *Leben und Abenteuer*, women in all stations in life are shown to be suppressed and this point is illustrated by many examples from different historical periods. In mythological times the goddesses Demeter and Persephone were oppressed and exploited by the male gods. In feudal times women, no matter, to what class they belonged were oppressed by the men of their class. In the twelfth century Marie de Montpellier, though noble and very rich, was nonetheless nothing more than an object for the transmission of property and power from male to male, from father to husband. High class women such as Beatriz herself and Marie de Lusignan (appearing in *Leben und Abenteuer* as the Beautiful Melusine) are suppressed and exploited. An example from the more recent past, indicating that suppression itself is not yet historically obsolete, is the story of Aunt Jenny, a working class woman oppressed by her husband and also by the women of her family.

Until very recently "the differences between class relations and relations between the sexes" were little understood.¹⁷ Women, although very often in a majority, were commonly classed together with minorities, such as slaves and other outsiders of society.¹⁸ But as feminist theorists and writers in the last two decades have

demonstrated, being a woman is not a matter of class. In the work of Irmtraud Morgner, Laura discovered this in 1945. Beatriz discovers it in 1968.

Gerda Lerner makes the point that while it is true that minorities such as peasants, slaves, proletarians have been oppressed at one time or other in history and excluded from the historical record, as times changed they have become subjects of interest and of historical research. As a class, for instance, slaves are now included in the historical record. She writes:

That is, the experiences of the males of their group; females were, as usual, excluded. The point is that men and women have suffered exclusion and discrimination because of their class. No man has been excluded from the historical record because of his sex, yet all women were.¹⁹

In *Leben und Abenteuer* this last point is illustrated by a recurring example and the repetition of the allusion requires that it be noticed. The novel includes several references to the poem by Brecht, "Gedicht vom Lesenden Arbeiter". In it Brecht points to the class bias of earlier historians. Brecht laments the fact that we know the names of the great men who commissioned the monuments of antiquity but we do not know the names of the slaves who build them. The poem speaks only of men, and the references to it in *Leben und Abenteuer* point to the exclusion of women from consideration in male minds, namely Brecht's, as recently as the writing of that poem. The specificity of the reference in the novel is to the male bias of the poet himself. As a Marxist, Irmtraud Morgner points out that the male bias was

a natural bias at the time the poem was written. One cannot expect Brecht to have lamented the absence of women from the historical record but, says *Leben und Abenteuer*, if women want to be included in the historical record in future and honoured in literary works they had better do it themselves:

"Ich warte auf den Dichter, der eine lesende Arbeiterin fragen lassen könnte", sagte Bele H. ... "Auf den Dichter warten Sie wahrscheinlich vergeblich", sagte ich, [Beatriz] "die Dichterin ist nahe..." "Äh", erwiderte Bele H.(296) (My italics.)

Although Laura had been disappointed in 1945, nonetheless 1945 is considered the moment of change. From that date onward there were constant and progressive changes. When *Leben und Abenteuer* opens in May 1968, twenty-three years of evolutionary changes have passed. The time had come, now in 1968, for the voices of women to be heard.

The claim is made that society has evolved and now can take up and actively address problems inherent in a patriarchal system. In this the novel echoes one of the Marxist theories of history which states that "mankind always takes up only such problems as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, we will always find that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation."²⁰ There is an implicit understanding in both novels, *Leben und Abenteuer* and *Amanda*, that the time has come and that society is ready to cope with the new challenges of feminism.

In *Leben und Abenteuer*, however, society as a whole has not quite recognised that the conditions necessary for change are present. It is the women who chiefly believe that the time has come, for their experiences tell them so. Not all men are aware that dramatic changes have occurred. When Beatriz travels to Leipzig, she engages in a conversation with a soldier. Irmtraud Morgner puts into her mouth almost the identical words which Laura and the editor use when commenting on the fact that in May 1945 women did not gain effective equality. While the women express agreement on the point, the soldier is unable to appreciate a female viewpoint (152).

Some men acknowledge that the aspirations of women are fair and should be considered. Others concur intellectually but have emotional difficulties. Uwe, for instance, understands the claims of women but his emotional responses to women in practical life remain unchanged. Some men have acquired the vocabulary of feminism and use it to their own advantage. Dr. Solojow in the interview with the Beautiful Melusine justifies his lack of support for his wife's rights which he acknowledges by claiming that his loss of time would reduce his status in the international world of chess. His argument is a lesson in how to use feminist sentiments and vocabulary in support of the status quo. Solojow says that if he publicly and theoretically acknowledges the rights of his wife, he need do nothing in practice.

The device of the fictional editor allows Irmtraud Morgner the freedom to write from a personal perspective but yet at the same time to lay claim to objectivity. Thus she can make fun of the unwillingness of men to recognise the actual social reality of the present. The device also absolves her, among other things, from the need to reconcile opposing views. Men who have no empathy for the aspirations of women are also heard in the novel but their views are subtly undermined by laughter and irony. Rudolf, for instance, evaluates feminism from a global perspective and trivializes it. He declares that the emancipation of women is a bagatelle and is not to be taken seriously in view of the fact that twenty-five million people a year die of hunger (672). His argument sounds convincing until one realizes that the two problems are unrelated. The irony is doubled since Rudolf, all evidence to the contrary, believes that the problem of world hunger could be solved. Shenja, speaking in the subjunctive, repeats his arguments with irony and claims that the time for emancipation has come and the material conditions exist. Her argument contains a distinct Marxist echo:

Shenja konnte sich nicht verkneifen, Rudolf mit seinen Ansichten in schlechtes Licht zu setzen. Frauenrechtlerische Bestrebungen erschienen ihm nämlich gegenüber der Tatsache, dass jährlich fünfundzwanzig Millionen Menschen Hungers sterben, als Bagatelle, nicht ernstlich auf der Tagesordnung stehend, weil *Gesellschaften sich nur Aufgaben stellten, die sie lösen könnten.* (672) (My italics.)

Irmtraud Morgner's theoretical starting position and her points of reference are very precise, and in that she

differs from many feminists in the West. She sees feminism as the natural evolutionary movement according to the Marxist theory of history. Nevertheless her observations and her interests which she expresses as fiction in her novels, *Leben und Abenteuer* and *Amanda*, do coincide with the concerns of feminists in the West. For these two novels are first and foremost a critique of Western patriarchal civilisation which is an inheritance common to society in both East and West.

Notes

- 1 Eva Kaufmann, "Interview mit Irmtraud Morgner", *Weimarer Beiträge* 9 (1984) 1510.
- 2 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1499.
- 3 C. Wright Mills, *The Marxists* (New York: Dell, 1962) 41.
C. Wright Mills writes that Marx is most often thought of as an economist or as an agitator, but that he was also a historian had in the past been much forgotten. Wright continues to say that only: "Of late, Marx the philosopher of history, the political sociologist, and The Young Marx as humanist and moralist, have been stressed."
- 4 Eva Kaufmann, "Der Hölle die Zunge rausstrecken ...", *Weimarer Beiträge* 9 (1984) 1522.
This phrase, much used and applied to the work, does not occur in the novel itself. It comes from an interview with Irmtraud Morgner in 1972 before the novel was published but while the work was in progress.
- 5 Mills 25.
- 6 Mills 38.
- 7 This understanding of the interchange between the visible and experienced world and the consciousness of man appears somewhat unremarkable today and merely an "obvious" reflection. That it was revolutionary in its time and that Marx first clearly annunciated it, has been almost forgotten. In Marx's words: "My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea,' he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea.' With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought."
[Karl Marx, "The Materialist Conception of History", quoted in Mills 45.]
- 8 The image of the world being turned upside down was used by Hegel to describe the ferment of intellectual thought and of the actual changes brought about by the French Revolution. The image as an exemplary metaphor is quoted by Friedrich Engels in "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" [Mills 72].
- 9 Irmtraud Morgner, *Amanda* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1985) 28.
The conversation between Beatriz and Laura, described in

Amanda, is a remembered conversation which had occurred in 1971. Laura's words were spoken during the years chronicled in *Leben und Abenteuer*.

10 Mills 37.

11 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1502/1503.
Irmtraud Morgner said: "Kurzum: Emanzipation (nicht nur der Frau) ist kein Kampagnethema, sondern -- nach Marx -- ein Epochenproblem."

12 Mills 38.

13 Irmtraud Morgner quoted in Ingeborg Nordmann, "Die halbierte Geschichtsfähigkeit der Frau. Zu Irmtraud Morgners Roman *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura*", *Amsterdamer Beiträge* 11/12 (1981) 425.

14 Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) X.

15 Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," in *Feminist Theory*, eds. Nannerl O. Keohane, Michelle Z Rosaldo, and Barbara C. Gelpi (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982) 37.

16 Morgner, *Amanda* 19

17 Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 24.
Lerner writes that Engels in his study, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, identifies the relation of the sexes as 'class antagonism'. She quotes Engels: "The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male."

18 Hans Mayer, *Outsiders: a study in life and letters* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982).
Hans Mayer has three categories of outsiders: women, homosexuals, and Jews.

19 Lerner 5.

20 Mills 43.

CHAPTER VII

GENDER DIFFERENTIATION AS THE BASIC FEMINIST POSITION

"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness."

Karl Marx.¹

Vorsätze establishes the pretence that there is no single viewpoint, no particular selection by any one person in the novel. Laura collected from many sources and herself wrote a few pages of prose. The editor claims to have included everything found in the five pound parcel of papers which Laura sold to her, merely having changed the sequence. She pretends to have added nothing of significance to the material but simply provided a rationale for the sequence which is to explain why such seemingly unrelated matters as the history of the search for artificial intelligence (in the story of the Golem of Prague and Hartmann Halbholz) and the abortion issue can be contained in one work.

This fiction, in conjunction with the absence of an explicitly stated narrative perspective in the novel itself and the critical approach of examining the book chiefly under a political perspective, has obscured the fact that the novel has one overriding focal point: this is the consideration of the differences made by gender. All entries in *Leben und Abenteuer* include or refer to the new-found realisation of the late sixties, that gender matters and that the experiences of women are nothing like those of

men. What has been called the objective norm is in reality often merely the expression of a male point of view.

It is this absolute insistence on an awareness of gender as influencing all aspects of life and culture that *Leben und Abenteuer* transcends geographic borders and political systems. The common ground of Eastern and Western feminists lies in the recognition of gender as a determinant of all aspects of life.

However, this issue, too, is muddied. Annemarie Auer in her denial of the author as feminist went so far as to state imperatively that the act of writing is gender undifferentiated.² This is a meaningless statement. The act of writing may indeed be gender undifferentiated, but the novel clearly makes the point over and over again that experiences, words, language and cultural icons are not. Gender makes a difference, and *Leben und Abenteuer* insists on delineating that difference.

It is this insistence on gender differentiation which makes the novel *Leben und Abenteuer* truly a feminist work of international dimension. Feminists, whether French with their stress on psychology, English with their stress on Marxism, American with their emphasis on expression, agree that the difference, the "otherness" of woman has been ignored and is largely absent from the historical and cultural record. Marx in his much quoted saying: "It is not the consciousness of men which determines their being, but it is, on the contrary, their social being which

determines their consciousness" expressed a revolutionary thought in his time.³ The notion that man is what circumstances make him -- a cultural construct who in turn constructs his society, his ideas and his civilisation -- provided an entirely new perspective of thought in Marx's time.⁴ Until recently this statement stood unqualified by gender. Marxist feminists in the late sixties and early seventies have joined other feminists in adding to this understanding the concept of gender as critical tool. For Marxists, the differences between men and women are also cultural constructs, i.e. men and women are biologically different but the values and the explanations for the differences are cultural in origin. Sheila Rowbotham writes:

The predicament of being born a woman ... is specific. The social situation of women and the way in which we learn to be feminine is peculiar to us. Men do not share it, consequently we cannot be simply included under the general heading of 'mankind'. The only claim that this word has to be general comes from the dominance of men in society. As the rulers they presume to define others by their own criteria.⁵

In the sixties "the traditional assumption that what was true for men was true for women" became a highly questionable certainty. The insistence on gender differentiation, "this coming-into-consciousness of women [became] the dialectical force moving them into action to change their condition and to enter a new relationship to male-dominated society."⁶ As a Marxist, Irmtraud Morgner subscribes to the Marxist belief that the forces which shape the individual are cultural but, in agreement with Marxist

feminists such as Rowbotham, she adds the specific focus of differentiation by gender to everything she discusses.

Leben und Abenteuer does not deal with the consciousness of man, or mankind, it deals specifically with female experiences and how those experiences shape the specific consciousness of women.

Gender differentiation is itself an explicit topic in the novel. It is the subject of a witty tale in the early part of the book. Since this story comes from Laura's pen, it must be taken to reflect her preoccupation with the issue of gender.

Irmtraud Morgner, the fictional editor, after beginning the job of organising the documents, needs more factual proof that the documents are "true", i.e. solidly founded in history. For the sake of veracity, she asks Laura to provide her with more details on the life of the historic Beatriz, Countess de Dia. Laura complies with the request. Her research material is included as chapter 15 of Book One (48). It is in three parts. Two of them are montage entries taken from the studies of feudal society by E. Köhler. The third, significantly, is her own.

Irmtraud Morgner compares the character of Beatriz and of Faust. She points out that both are historic figures but while Faust, being a male figure, in the course of history had had many legends attached to him, the historic Beatriz, being female, has so far had none. Women need legends to serve as models for the imagination, so Laura creates a

legend here. She is the "Legendenbildnerin".⁷ She interprets the findings of Köhler from a personal as well as from a modern perspective. (All themes in *Leben und Abenteuer* are modern and very feminist.) Here in particular Laura deals with the double standard due to gender in the raising of children and in the keeping of historical records. She attributes the greater fame of the historic Raimbaut d'Aurenga and the lesser fame of the Countess de Dia to the differing attitudes towards boys and girls in the twelfth century. Laura imagines and tells of the day when Raimbaut d'Aurenga and Beatriz, after a poetic competition (which is historically documented), mistakenly drink a magic love potion. The potion, having been intended for the stable boy and not the nobility, had been carelessly mixed by the village witch. As a result Raimbaut and Beatriz do not fall in love with each other, instead the memories of three or four years of their early childhood are transferred from the one to the other. The male Raimbaut and female Beatriz suddenly remember a different upbringing and different treatment as children. The reader is to understand that twelfth century attitudes were not very different from those of the present day. The standard attitude towards boys then, whether deserved or not, was one of effusive praise. Girls, in contrast, were corrected and reprimanded. The magic drink reverses these memories and Beatriz suddenly remembers visions of oceans and stars and hears voices which tell her that she is gifted and blessed

and sent to bring peace to the land. Raimbaut in turn remembers gossip and intrigues, thinks of embroidery hoops and hears voices which say he must be married off as early as possible before he dies. We read that Beatriz gains confidence when remembering those years, but that Raimbaut falls into a depression and dies soon thereafter at the age of thirty-five. (The historic Raimbaut did indeed die at age 35). The inner voices create an inner vision which is beneficial for Beatriz and bad for Raimbaut. They lift her spirits and are deadly to his. And more importantly, the voices speak in response to the gender of the recipient and not in response to ability or to talent.

Laura's addition is a modern interpretation based upon historical information by Köhler. Laura re-imagines the relationship of Beatriz and of Raimbaut and re-interprets the few facts known about them. To her, their respective fame or lack thereof, stands in no relationship to the quality and quantity of their poetry. A large number of poems by the troubador Raimbaut d'Aurenga exist. Yet only five canzonas of the historic Countess de Dia are still known. Laura's fictional embellishment must be seen as arising from a contemporary imagination feeding upon topics of present day interests. Her addition reveals a feminist critique of values based on gender and a critique of the perpetuation of such values in society.

The renewed vigour of Beatriz and the death of Raimbaut is an example of a point made repeatedly throughout the

novel. It is the contention that personal value and inner vision come largely from outside recognition. This recognition is harder to achieve for women than for men. Self-esteem is derived from social approbation and social approbation is biased in favour of the male. It is often denied to women simply because they are women. In modern times in the novel, Valeska, a successful scientist, for instance, contemplates not her actual competency as scientist but her weak sense of self-worth and thinks of her past as of her "Vergangenheit mit Rollenerziehung", and she expresses the wish to be a woman with a male past: "eine Frau mit männlicher Vergangenheit müsste man sein." (442) By this she does not wish for anything more than a past without self-doubt about her value as a person and a scientist.

In *Leben und Abenteuer*, specifically, the fact that only five canzonas of the historic Countess de Dia are extant, even though her output had been prolific, serves as one example of the male bias to consider important only that which is understood by men. The text says that she wrote many beautiful songs of which only a few (five) survive (15). The rest were burned by her husband after Beatriz' disappearance because they expressed what he considered "inappropriate" emotions.⁸

In *Leben und Abenteuer* the poetry of the historic Countess de Dia serves as a suitable example for the feminist contention that works by women in art and in

literature are so few in number, not because women have not created works but because such works have been of little interest to men who, in the historic past, were the sole decision-makers and evaluators. What men valued coincided with their own visions and their own interests. What women said, wrote, and did was of no value to men, because it did not fit male criteria and thus was lost from history.

In the novel, Beatriz does not escape in the twelfth century because she does not like men, as some critics have written, but because she was not permitted to express what she truly felt. Irmtraud Morgner herself in *Amanda* refutes the theory that Beatriz did not like the men of the twelfth century: "Nicht um der Liebesunfähigkeit Raimbauts und anderer Herren zu entrinnen -- um in meinem Beruf 'konkret' arbeiten zu können, erschlief ich bessere Zeiten."⁹ In the twelfth century Beatriz had to escape into sleep because she offended her husband by the openness of her feelings and by her honesty in revealing them. This argument in the novel fits contemporary thought but it is also based on modern poetic analysis of the works of the historic Countess de Dia.¹⁰ The historic Countess de Dia was remarkable not because she violated the poetic form of troubador lyric, as Sonja Hilzinger writes, but because she broke with the prescribed conventions governing what and how emotions were to be expressed.¹¹ The form of the five existing canzonas of the Countess de Dia is standard but the expression of feelings in the poems broke with the conventions of the

times. Claude Marks writes, that the Countess de Dia insisted on "the principle of absolute equality in love" and did not hesitate to say so openly at a time when women did not speak openly. The play with the concept of *dunkler Stil* in the novel derives from a concept of troubadour lyric, the *trobar clus*. Concealment and secrecy are the chief characteristics of the *trobar clus*. In the novel the "dark style" describing the style of Raimbaut d'Aurenga, the lover of Beatriz, was the preferred style of the period. The historic Raimbaut IV, Count of Orange, was indeed a master of the *trobar clus*. His contemporaries acknowledged his mastery but found his poems "lacking in gaiety and warmth". Claude Marks, assessing the poetry of both Raimbaut and the Countess de Dia, agrees with the judgement on Raimbaut by his contemporaries but, speaking for modern man adds that "at the same time we find a passion and an urgency in the countess's lyrics that move us far more than the clever and studied verses of Raimbaut".¹²

This contemporary critical assessment is part of the argument in *Leben und Abenteuer*. In the novel Beatriz transgresses against social conventions and goes beyond the limits set for her by men. Decorum required her to keep private her true feelings of what it meant to be female.

In the novel a contemporary, twentieth-century interpretation is superimposed on the few historic facts known about the Countess. It supports the feminist contention that female experiences are hidden, not because

women did not have any remarkable experiences, or because works of art were not created by women, but because their specific experiences were discounted and men kept for posterity only what interested them.

The theory of gender differentiation is also at the centre of the story of Beatriz and of Laura, set in the present time of the novel. It is taken for granted by critics that because Beatriz surfaces on May 6, 1968 during the student revolt and the workers' uprising in France that this is merely a date to record the general revolt of the late sixties and that it indicates that Beatriz is an active participant in the political events among many students of both sexes.¹³ However, this understanding is not based on the actual happenings in *Leben und Abenteuer*. It is true that Beatriz comes back to life on May 6, 1968, the day when the political unrest in France began. But the text shows that because she is a woman, she is kept from participating actively in the events of that period.

May 1968 was the revolutionary moment in time when the overthrow of the right wing government of General de Gaulle seemed quite possible. The fact that a socialist revolution did not come about has led critics to describe those weeks by the slightly derogatory term *Scheinrevolution*, a revolution which appeared to be one but which was not. It is fitting that Irmtraud Morgner, who does not believe that equality of women can be achieved without a socialist revolution, has her character Beatriz surface on that day of

possibilities. But we also read that Beatriz discovers that she has been woken up too early.

This time concept of "too early" is repeated frequently in the novel. It is ambivalent but has been taken to refer only to the political events and the social revolution which did not come about. The implications are wider, however. The reader is asked to understand that the time when the full emancipation of women should be achieved has not yet arrived in either East or West.¹⁴

Beatriz expected to return to life at a time when patriarchy as an institution had passed.¹⁵ But she is too early. When stepping out of her rose-covered bower she, unlike Sleeping Beauty, is rejected by the first two men whom she encounters. She consoles herself, in vain, with the thought that two men do not necessarily speak for all, or for the patriarchal system: "Zwei Unmenschen machen noch kein Patriarchat, es war alles nicht so schlimm." (20)

While critics put much emphasis on the political moment, Beatriz in the text is not particularly interested in social revolution. She is by temperament enthusiastic and participates when the occasion demands of her to become involved but her interests are largely private. Later in the novel, for instance, she does not herself write the revolutionary songs which she promised to the Beautiful Melusine but rather plagiarizes (or, rather, "montages") the *Lied vom Kommunismus* by Volker Braun (546).

Her interest is the writing of love poetry. We are told that she expected to wake up at a time when it would be possible to give voice to the female experience in her poetry, i.e. when she could write love poetry as a woman for an audience that would appreciate it. For this she is still too early, for the writing of love poetry has not yet ceased to be the sole prerogative of men. In the novel it is said that this opinion is universally held. The statement, however, is belied by the inclusion in the novel of some erotic verses by Irmtraud Morgner herself (94-96). We are to conclude that women are quite well able to write explicit verse but the general readership is still not ready for it.

Gender began to matter in May 1968 and gender matters in the novel *Leben und Abenteuer* from its very beginning. In critical studies of this novel this has so far not been recognised as the dominant focus. The events of twenty months which Beatriz spends in France are often compressed into a single moment of time expressing the general politics of the period.¹⁶ What happens to Beatriz in *Leben und Abenteuer* is, however, gender-specific and applies only and distinctly to a woman. There is no solidarity between students and women, or between workers and women in *Leben und Abenteuer*. The statement by Sheila Rowbotham, written as a result of her own experiences during the late sixties: "Women are not the same as other oppressed groups. ... Sex and class are not the same." appears to be exemplified in the novel.¹⁷ After awakening like Sleeping Beauty, Beatriz

is not "wachgeliebt" as Auer writes, but is cursed as a nuisance by one man; she is briefly considered for her economic value as possible tourist attraction by the second man.¹⁸ Sleeping Beauty exits the fairy tale and enters reality. There is no prince in *Leben und Abenteuer*, and the third man she meets rapes her.

All the men whom Beatriz encounters conspire to keep her dependent upon them and thus to retain power over her. When Beatriz succeeds almost immediately in establishing her economic independence, trouble follows. She joins a group of tourists in the court yard of the castle at Tarascon, spontaneously sings her canzonas and is showered with money. After she returns to the site of her own castle Almacis, this money allows her to decline the invitation of the road building crew to become their servant and housekeeper in exchange for room and board. Whereupon, the novel flatly and without commentary states, the money is stolen during the following night. Though it is not said, the implication is that the thieves were the construction workers, for they alone knew that she had the money. Beatriz is made helpless again and now has to work for room and board. She cannot hope for any redress. When she threatens to report the theft to the police, she is merely laughed at, for policemen are men too.

Meanwhile, broadcasts of the escalating violence of the student and worker's uprising in Paris are heard and listened to eagerly. Yet when Beatriz wants to speak and to

participate in the discussion of the political situation she is not allowed to do so because she is a woman. And when she declines marriage to one of the foreign workers because marriage is a patriarchal institution, several arguments are made to counter her objection. The first is based on the assumption that any man is better than none. The second argument more specifically points to some of the advantages for men. Beatriz is told that she should marry one of the foreign workers because he then could acquire French citizenship. To the man who attempts to persuade Beatriz to marriage it is not important that the foreign worker smells, is dirty and uneducated and, in addition, is a Moslem whose religion does not count women among human beings. The argument appears to be that, because it is good for men, marriage must obviously and naturally be desirable for any woman.

The next argument links physical appearance to the aspirations of feminism. Beatriz is told that teenagers and ugly old women might hold trendy feminist views about marriage as a patriarchal institution. But, so the foreman assures Beatriz, though she herself is no longer young, she is still too pretty to need emancipation.

Similar arguments linking physical defects in male eyes to feminism are repeated several times in the novel. Irmtraud Morgner when speaking to Laura about the manuscript of *Leben und Abenteuer*, reports that the gentlemen at her publisher's are beginning to examine her face more closely

to see if she is uglier than they had thought her to be. Her involvement with such feminist material as the documents which make up the novel is directly related to her appearance:

"Bist du etwa unter die Frauenrechtlerinnen gegangen", fragt mein Verlagsleiter neulich, "hast du das nötig?" Der Umgang mit den Zeugnissen baut mein Ansehen systematisch ab, Blaustrümpfe werden bereits unter meinen langen Hosen vermutet. Herren durchforschen mein Gesicht nach hässlichen Anhaltspunkten. (42)

The novel implies with irony that the gentlemen come to the same conclusion as had the French worker. Irmtraud Morgner like Beatriz is still too attractive to need emancipation, and we may conclude that the male suspicions of the editor and of the manuscript were allayed, for the documents were indeed published as the novel *Leben und Abenteuer*.

The repetition of the argument linking appearance and feminism has two purposes. It is to verbalise the male bias towards feminism and to expose the male bias as a thoughtless and emotional attitude towards the process of social change which is actually happening as they speak. Men generally pride themselves on their ability to reason logically and believe that they are superior to women who argue from emotion, from the heart and not the head. In *Leben und Abenteuer*, male "logical" thought when it concerns women is unmasked as merely linear argument originating from and based upon emotional reflexes. Deducing further from the two specific examples, the experiences of Beatriz in 1968 in France and of Irmtraud Morgner in 1973 in East

Berlin, one is led to conclude that patriarchal society is the same whether it speaks French or German, and that patriarchal concepts do not respect borders or political ideologies but are typical of Western civilisation. Male attitudes and arguments are identical in the south of France and in Berlin, and women, whoever they are, are treated and addressed with identical condescension.

Beatriz spends a period of twenty months in France before she leaves for the GDR. Critics have treated these twenty months merely as a prelude to the more essential and important years later on.¹⁹ These twenty months are perceived as important only in relationship to what happens later in the GDR. In the novel, however, they are not only a waiting period before Beatriz reaches Berlin. Her life in France also has its significance.

The beginning of the book resembles a picaresque novel and, in keeping with such novels, a great number of events befall Beatriz in succession. In the summer of 1968, Beatriz reaches Paris but she is too late for the student uprising. Her lateness is not the result of carelessness but is due to circumstances which can only happen to a woman. She starts out for Paris in May 1968 with the intention of joining the Beautiful Melusine there. Because she had recently been raped and had had her money stolen, she felt she could not hitchhike and she had no money to buy a bus or train ticket.²⁰ She therefore attempted to walk from Les Baux to Paris but collapsed from hunger and heat in

Lyon. When she arrived in Paris in July, the summer holidays had started and the revolt was already over. Beatriz drifted back to the south of France again and attempted to earn her living. She discovered soon that she could only make sufficient money by becoming a prostitute and, a year later and back in Paris, she marries her 'client' Gerson.

Marriage is better than prostitution but only minimally so. Marriage to Gerson provided Beatriz with shelter and food but robbed her of independence and dignity. It is quite different for old Gerson. Marriage in *Leben und Abenteuer* is generally good for men, even if not for women, and in keeping with this pattern, Gerson's self-esteem improves. His outstanding characteristic is vanity and this vanity blinds him to what is actually going on. He prides himself in his responsibility for Beatriz and his concern could be touching, were it not so costly in personal terms for her. She finds herself in a situation in which the man has the principles and she has to pay for them. Gerson decides what she can do or cannot do and his concern translates into control over her. Beatriz is not allowed to work or even to go out for walks. She must stay home under his protection. Gerson believes that he has rescued her from the gutter and he expects gratitude because, as the novel has it, "das nackte Leben", the bare necessities of life, ought to make a person grateful. Gerson even takes credit for Beatriz's talent as singer and poet, and claims

that his generosity in marrying her has awakened her gifts. Irmtraud Morgner writes with irony: "Wegen der Demütigung war ihre eigene Stimmlage freigelegt worden." (88) In the novel this is the situation and this is the moment in time when the terrorist attacks begin in Paris.

It is not during the student revolt of May 1968 that Beatriz throws bombs, and it is not the Beautiful Melusine who throws the bombs as Auer writes.²¹ Paris is terrorised in the winter of 1969 by Beatriz and her friend Jacqueline, another former prostitute and now "grateful" wife. And Beatriz' journey to the GDR, after the bombs are discovered, is not only a search for paradise but also an escape from justice. There are many more incidents during the months in which the action of the novel takes place in France. But this short summary of the events and their implication indicates that a separation must be made between the general political discontent of 1968 and the specific condition of Beatriz as a woman during that period.

Irmtraud Morgner establishes a particular category of extreme circumstances, "extreme Zustände", in the novel. Extreme circumstances always result in extreme behaviour. The marriage to Gerson, and by extension the situation of any woman in such a marriage, falls into this category of "extreme Zustände". To a politically alert person, the terrorist activities of Jacqueline and Beatriz might appear as a reflection of the general political unrest in Europe, especially if, as critics write, no distinction is made

between the events of May 1968 and those of late December 1969. A cursory look at the newspaper headlines in the years 1968 -1969 show that Europe was indeed racked by terrorist activities. But in the novel the circumstances of Beatriz's personal life, described in terms of sexual and economic exploitation, turn Beatriz into a radical feminist and terrorist. The novel says: "Beatriz fühlte sich zwar verstandesmässig, disziplinalber und aus Anhänglichkeit für Melusine der persephonischen Opposition nach wie vor verbunden. Ihre Sympathien gehörten mittlerweile der rachsüchtigen Richtung, die Vergeltung plante." (87) The actions of Beatriz are not political acts directed in a general manner against the capitalist system, as critics imply, but they are specific reactions to the extreme exploitation of her as a woman, especially within her marriage.

In the novel the terrorist acts in the winter of 1969 are separated from the political events of 1968. The feminist slogan of the late sixties and early seventies was, "The personal is the political". Only in this one sense can the actions of Beatriz be described as political.

In the text of the novel, the announcement of the marriage of Beatriz and Gerson is followed by the story of Laura's Aunt Jenny. The theme of both stories, one taking place in France, the other in East Germany, is male dominance and sexual and economic exploitation of females in marriage. The proximity of the two stories in the text

point to similarities as well as to differences. Unlike Aunt Jenny who is unaware of what is happening to her and eventually, utterly demoralized, knows only how to commit suicide, Beatriz throws a few bombs and buys a train ticket to paradise, the GDR.

The difference between the two stories, though placed in proximity in the text, is a difference in detail rather than in essence. But it would be superficial to conclude that Irmtraud Morgner intends to point out that there are no differences at all between East and West. The two stories tell that the thoughts, actions and behaviour of people are very rarely influenced by a change in political systems or by the law. Changes in law and in political systems merely provide the basis for changes to come in the future. This basis for the GDR was the socialist revolution of 1945.

The dominant impression transmitted by the close proximity in which the two stories are placed, is that of a shared empathy of the women involved. The choice of subject matter itself indicates the shared concern of the three women, Laura, Beatriz, and the fictional editor, Irmtraud Morgner, involved at that moment with each other and the text. As editor, Irmtraud Morgner is in command of the sequential organisation of the documents. She places the story of Aunt Jenny, told by Laura, next to the tale of Beatriz with its description of marriage as an escape from public to private prostitution. One story leads to the other. The memory of the one evokes the remembrance of the

other. The editor's choice of placement gives weight to the seriousness of the topic. It expresses an understanding of, and an empathy with the female situation described in both tales. She recognises the similarity in theme and wants the reader to do so as well and to enter with her into an sympathetic understanding for women. Though it is not stated, she is not on the side of Uncle Kurt or of Gerson, but sympathises with the women trapped in the patriarchal institution of marriage.

However, it must be conceded that the sequential arrangement in the text in this case supports the general critical contention that the novel means to delineate the progressiveness of the GDR in contrast to France. The thematic content of both stories is alike but time separates them. We are to understand that the conditions faced by Beatriz in France are a thing of the past in the GDR.

The story of Aunt Jenny and Uncle Kurt is set against the background of the Weimar Republic, the Nazi period and the recent past up to the mid-fifties. Their story, in the novel is a memory of the past. The marriage of Beatriz, in contrast, takes place at the end of 1969 in France. It is a contemporary event and concurrent with other events chronicled in the novel. The heading of the chapter which contains Laura's memory of family life reads: "Darin Laura den fehlenden positiven Schluss des ersten Buchs nachliefert, indem sie garantiert echte Vorkommnisse aus ihrem Leben beschreibt". Her story is a memorial to a woman

and to a particularly nasty type of marriage. From the phraseology of the heading we are to assume that such things have come to an end in the GDR. For, in contrast to France, in the GDR women have gained legal equality with men and are economically independent. This is the important first step in the emancipation of women, according to Irmtraud Morgner (589).

Notes

- 1 C. Wright Mills, *The Marxists* (New York: Dell, 1962) 42.
- 2 Annemarie Auer, "Trobadora unterwegs oder Schulung in Realismus", *Sinn und Form* 28 (1976): 1068.
She writes: "Und damit zurück zum Literarischen, ehe das Ärgernis stiftende Suffragettenwort Emanzipation in die Debatte fällt. Dass wer sich 'freischreibt', vernimmt man schon williger. Handelt es sich doch bei dem Freischreiben um einen unter Schreibenden allgemeinmenschlichen Vorgang von *geschlechtsindifferenter Qualität*. (My italics.)"
- 3 Mills 42.
- 4 Rolf Gruner, *Philosophies of History* (Aldershot: Gower, 1985) 75.
- 5 Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 116.
- 6 Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 5.
- 7 Eva Kaufmann, "Interview mit Irmtraud Morgner", *Weimarer Beiträge* 9 (1984) 1501.
- 8 The text of *Leben und Abenteuer* is freely sprinkled with names and references to women: Kollontai, Krupskaya, Petrarch's Laura, Dante's Beatrice, Penthesilea, Aspasia, Tamara Bunke, etc. This can be taken as a small contribution to halt "the female obliterating process" from the historic record, as Michele Landsberg calls it. [Michele Landsberg, *Women & Children First* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 15.]
- 9 Irmtraud Morgner, *Amanda* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1985) 41.
- 10 Claude Marks, *Pilgrims, Heretics, and Lovers* (New York: Macmillan, 1975) 221.
It is no longer certain that the first name of the Countess de Dia was Beatrix as has been thought for a long time. Claude Marks writes that some interior evidence from a poem by Raimbaut suggests that her name may have been Laure. This suggestions comes from a word play in *trobar clus* fashion on L'or, gold.
- 11 Hilzinger 135.
- 12 Marks 223.

13 Patricia Herminghouse, "Die Frau und das Phantastische in der neueren DDR-Literatur", in *Die Frau als Heldin und Autorin*, ed. Wolfgang Paulsen, (Bern/München: Francke, 1979) 250.

14 In the critical literature much is made of one of Irmtraud Morgner's literary whimsies. She recalls the assembly of the Round Table at the Court of King Arthur which for Mediaeval times was the image of the most ideal society known to humankind. The members of the table in the novel consist of men and women who work secretly towards the achievement of a similar civilised society which, in Irmtraud Morgner's definition, will be neither matriarchal nor patriarchal but human. However, we are also told that this court is located in the clouds somewhere between the past and the future, but still very distant from the present moment.

15 Kaufmann, "Interview" 1499.
Irmtraud Morgner is aware that the right moment matters. She says, for instance: "Amanda hat das Glück, dass sie nicht zu früh geboren ist. Sie ist nicht spät genug geboren, um Wunder entbehren zu können." This statement throws light upon an ironic shading of her much repeated phrase: "Natürlich ist das Land ein Ort des Wunderbaren." The GDR is a wonderful country but even there women, such as Vera Hill, still need miracles in order to survive. Beatriz also wakes too early because she wants to live without miracles and utterly by her own abilities, but cannot as yet.

16 Herminghouse 250.

17 Rowbotham 117.

18 Auer 1091.

19 Herminghouse 251.

20 Thomas Zenke, "Aus dem Dornröschenschlaf erwacht," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16 November 1976, S.L. 1. Not all male reviewers have understood this point. When Beatriz is raped, the novel is silent on her reaction. This has been interpreted as a sign that she does not really seem to mind.

21 Auer 1092.

CHAPTER VIII

CULTURAL IDEAS AND IMAGES FROM THE FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

The philosophers have only
interpreted the world differently,
 the point is, to *change* it.

Karl Marx¹

In *Leben und Abenteuer*, certain events, phrases, words and images, which in their immediate context appear to have little significance, are repeated with sufficient insistence that they have to be taken to point to important concerns in the novel as a whole. Of these repeated references, the most noticeable are the unicorn sequence, the motto, and the references to the Nature of Women. An explanation which would provide some unity of thought and imagination must come from outside the novel and is to be found in the feminist claims and in feminist theory as it became current in the late sixties and early seventies. The feminist claim, in brief, states that models in art and in literature embody patriarchal ideas and are used as arguments to justify the practice of patriarchy in life.

The feminist intention of *Leben und Abenteuer*, shared by feminists in all disciplines in both East and West, is the aim to re-examine the validity of such literary models, of language and metaphor as structures of patriarchy and to re-interpret their meaning and their usefulness for contemporary society. In this respect, *Leben und Abenteuer* truly crosses borders.

Roland Barthes wrote that myths "are a collection of ideas which evoke a stock response in the reader".²

Feminist writers in the last two decades have demonstrated that there is really no such thing as a stock response. Symbols and myths depend on who creates and interprets them. Responses are learned and women learn and react differently from men. But until recently "women have [had] only myths made by men", as Sheila Rowbotham wrote in 1973.³ And Annemarie Auer, while on the one hand insisting that Irmtraud Morgner is not a feminist and that writing is not gender differentiated, nonetheless quite correctly points out that the text of *Leben und Abenteuer* is simply infused with the recognition that "all myths are man-made".⁴

The insidious influence of myths and metaphors on our consciousness is a topic which many feminist writers and critics have addressed. Michelle Landsberg speaking on behalf of women, writes:

Dreams, wishes, and mythologies may seem to drift in and out of our mind as freely as air, but they are costlier than we [women] realise. Myths may -- and do -- underpin our laws, reinforce cultural patterns, and receive for generations the unquestioning adherence that even established religions are no longer able to command.⁵

The man-made dreams, the wishes and the mythologies have always caused particular problems for women, but only recently has this become recognised and subjected to analytical examination. In literature and in art, the idea of Woman reflects an ideology of femaleness rather than a representation of women as living beings. Women are depicted as monolithic entities, as Irmtraud Morgner calls it (149). They are either virgins or harlots, saints or

sinners. They are stick figures with little differentiation and individuality and with no relationship to the female experiences in life.

The ideological conception of femininity places an extraordinary emotional burden on women, for the ideal is unobtainable as well as undesirable. Beatriz leaves the twelfth century partly because she was tired of being put on a pedestal and thus of being robbed of real life experiences. We read: "Anlässlich dieser Erfahrung mit Marienkult beschloss die Comtessa, die mittelalterliche Welt der Männer zu verlassen." (687) At the same time real experiences, especially those centering around female sexuality and the female body, have remained taboo and thus are largely undiscussed. In the novel it is conceded that art falsifies female reality, and that the true experience of women is hidden behind metaphors or is sublimated into abstractions. It is the didactic purpose of feminist writing on the one hand to call into question the man-made myths which support the intellectual and the symbolic concepts underlying the structures of patriarchy, and on the other hand to describe the realities of being female.

The work of Irmtraud Morgner clearly contains these feminist concepts. This is especially apparent in *Amanda*, the sequel to *Leben und Abenteuer*. There the re-examination, the re-interpretation, and the undermining of patriarchy is the stated duty of Laura. She is told:

Für eine wie dich genügt nämlich nicht, dass du die männliche Hälfte der Welt von aussen kennst und die weibliche Hälfte von innen und aussen. Du musst auch die männliche von innen kennen, wenn du was ausrichten willst. Denn innen liegen die Geheimnisse der autoritären Strukturen, die unterwandert werden müssen.⁶

This function also falls to her in *Leben und Abenteuer*.

Here it is however, not explicitly stated and must be inferred. But, in this novel as well, it is also Laura who attempts to deconstruct the inner structures of patriarchy.

As regards matters of the mind, Laura is really quite radical and indeed in the forefront of thinking. This is not recognised in the critical literature. Some critics have attempted to differentiate between Laura and Beatriz, and their attempts unfortunately also reflect contemporary political thought. Sigrid Damm is surprised that Beatriz, coming from the West, is drawn so favourably by her author.⁷ Ingeborg Nordmann interprets Beatriz as being in sharp contrast to Laura because Beatriz cannot be integrated into society as Nordmann understands society.⁸ Laura is approved of, Beatriz is to be distrusted because she is considered to be more radical than Laura. And while it is true that Laura is less flamboyant, she is nonetheless at least as involved as is Beatriz in the events of her time. Beatriz is the literary figure, the outsider, who naively observes and comments without any noticeable development of character. She is impulsive but not very responsible. Laura is more pragmatic, and she is also the deliberate and the conscious feminist. It is she who introduces topics which question

the basic philosophical and theoretical ideas upon which the suppression of women in patriarchy rests. It is she who directs the attention to literary models, artistic metaphors and the mythology which supports the argument for the superiority of men and the suppression of women. Laura introduces the discussion of the symbolism and the metaphor of the unicorn, and she writes a review of a production of Goethe's *Faust*. Her references reveal a preoccupation with such concepts as the creation of the world, the nature of women and other mythologies which shape patriarchal actions and thoughts. She reveals herself as a feminist simply by her choice of issues, by her observations and by the specific criticism she offers.

Laura is an educated woman. Though she would rather drive a street car through Berlin, she nonetheless is well versed in literature, having studied German literature at university and having been involved in literary research. In *Leben und Abenteuer* Laura demonstrates that she is aware of the ideas of many feminist writers and critics who in recent years have examined the role of literature and of art in creating and in perpetuating the mythologies of Western civilisation and their effects on the relationships between men and women.

One of the chapter headings in *Amanda* reads: *Neue Wirklichkeit für alte Kunst*.⁹ The content of that chapter has little to do with art. It deals with the art of life and examines to what degree truth has to give way to the

lies and hypocrisy which society requires in order to function as society. In this particular chapter polite discourse with the neighbours is bought at the cost of Laura's sense of justice and of truth. But the title is broadly indicative of the general focus in the work of Irmtraud Morgner. Her tendency is to re-examine and to re-interpret the artistic representations from the past in the light of contemporary sensibilities. In this context it must be stressed once more that her novels are works of the present and for the present. Everything relates to the present as stipulated by the time frame in the novel. The critical edge, as well as the empathy, comes from present day understanding and perception of reality.

Irmtraud Morgner does not find fault with the past as such. She merely evaluates the relevancy of the lessons and the images from the past and either reconciles them with the present or dismisses them as outdated. The inner structures of patriarchy in *Leben und Abenteuer*, the symbols and metaphors as they support patriarchal ideology, are measured against the realities of present day society and present day female sensibilities.

This is the position which needs to be understood in order to see the unity in the fragmented but persistently recurring references to the unicorn, the motto, and the Nature of Women.

Irmtraud Morgner's interest in the repetition of well-known ideas and symbols is tied to her interest in cultural

history. She writes from within Western tradition, but she repeats the tradition not in order to confirm it but to depart from the traditional understanding. She examines the validity of her and our inheritance for present day society.

1. The unicorn sequence

Her method can be demonstrated in the interpretations of the significance of the unicorn in *Leben und Abenteuer*. Her interest in searching out the "new meaning in old art" leads her to examine the symbolism attached to the image of the unicorn in several episodes which vary in significance.

Since she is very much aware of present day life, fashions and trends, her thoughts can be seen to have as starting point the very mundane pre-occupation with the unicorns as a merely decorative pattern. The unicorn as an emblem and symbol has experienced a revival in recent years. Wherever one looks there are unicorns. There are books on unicorns. They appear as stuffed animals, as decorations on cups, and on key chains. The emblem and the allegory of the unicorn obviously exerts a strong fascination on many minds and has done so over the centuries. The ancient unicorn has again become very much a contemporary obsession.

In the novel the image of the unicorn in art is imaginatively tied to the tapestries of the Lady with the Unicorn in the Cluny Museum in Paris. These tapestries are stunning examples of the art of tapestry design and weaving. There are six tapestries in Cluny and there is a further

series of very similar tapestries depicting the hunt of the unicorn at the Cloisters in New York. All information on the tapestries is based on hypothesis. It is not exactly known when and where they were woven. It is however conjectured that they date from the beginning of the sixteenth century and come from a workshop in Flanders. Contrary to the novel wherein Laura claims that they were woven by women and wherein she laments the fact that the lives of those weavers are hidden and forgotten, it is believed that the Cluny tapestries were designed and were woven by men. Nevertheless it is true that the images and the subject matter depicted on the tapestries say nothing about the real lives of women. This is the point which Laura in the novel no doubt wishes to make.

All six Cluny tapestries bear the coat of arms of the Le Viste family. Five of the panels show allegorical representations of the five senses. The sixth panel is called the dedication tapestry. It shows the lady and her servant bearing a casket with jewels. Both women stand in front of a tent. The tent flap is held open by a lion on the one side and by a unicorn on the other. It is the only tapestry which contains words: "A mon seul désir". This sentiment has inspired the thought that the tapestries were a betrothal gift from a man to a woman. And it is this sixth tapestry which is described in the novel.¹⁰

However, the episodes in the novel are only vaguely related to the allegories of the tapestries. There is no

strict comparison, for instance, between the first tapestry and the first episode. The tapestries are simply the background against which the ideas in the novel are displayed.

The first mention of the tapestries in the novel is made by Laura during a discussion between her and the fictional editor Irmtraud Morgner when they meet to discuss further material needed for the book. Laura refers to an earlier visit to the Museum of Cluny where she saw the six tapestries. This visit is described in detail towards the end of the novel. At this point in the text, however, Laura simply relates her impressions and her thoughts on the tapestries.

As there are six tapestries in the Museum of Cluny, there are six distinct episodes in the novel relating to the unicorn. However, this symmetry does not go beyond a mere technical and structural similarity. In the novel the six episodes which constitute the cycle of the unicorn echoes its larger structure. A sense of cyclic linearity is build into the novel as it is into the cycle of the unicorn. One might describe the unicorn episodes as a smaller cycle within a larger one. Just as *Vorsätze* contained the beginning and the end of the novel, so the first description of the tapestry in the novel is the last in time. But here as well, the beginning is the end and the end is the beginning. The first description in the immediate present is last in time as far as the story is concerned. Yet it is

told first and colours all subsequent references in the text. It sets the stage for the exploration of ideas surrounding the "unicorn" complex, and it contains the summation of the findings.

It comes as somewhat as a surprise that the significance of the second unicorn episode in *Leben und Abenteuer* is not derived from the tapestry. This episode, tells of Laura's search for a solution to a practical problem and her answer to it found in literature. Laura has discovered that Beatriz knows how to make bombs and that she had been a terrorist in Paris. Now Beatriz is toying with the idea of throwing a few bombs in Berlin in order to speed up the abortion legislation. According to Laura, a violent method to effect change is never necessary in the GDR. She realises, however, that she must protect both the state and Beatriz, and in that context she remembers the romances of Chrétien de Troyes. It is not made clear why. The explanation offered is really no explanation. It merely suggests that Laura's mind leaps about in a fairly unregulated manner. Laura remembers that the image in the opening verses of the romance *Erec* is a white stag and the white stag suggests to her the unicorn. This reads as if it were a quite natural sequence of associations, although there is, of course, only a vague physical resemblance between the stag and the unicorn as such. The connection which Laura sees lies in an apparent function of both animals as corrective therapy. In the romances, says Laura,

the knights are seemingly cured from one extreme state of being by another extreme state of being. As Laura describes it, they alternated between staying in bed and making love or going on adventure and making war. This is no doubt a questionable procedure if the aim is to inculcate a sense of moderation, but nonetheless this is the precedent for Laura's solution.

She sends Beatriz on the hunt for the unicorn to obtain its *Gehirn*, the brain -- not its *Gehörn*, its horn. The unicorn in this episode in *Leben und Abenteuer* is an image of peace and not the overt traditional image of sexual purity. It ties in with the function ascribed to Beatriz, that of a searcher and a bringer of peace. She is so described in the novel, and this is her destiny in life wished upon her by Laura. It was foretold to her by the voices which she miraculously heard after drinking the love potion meant for the stable boy in the twelfth century, and it is repeated in the text when she remembers this prophecy. Laura explains further that the brain of the unicorn or its chemical equivalent, added to the water supply of all large cities, will turn the population into peace loving citizens. In all critical interpretations this has been misunderstood. All critics have read *Horn* instead of *Hirn*. However, the traditional identification of the unicorn horn with sexuality is undermined in *Leben und Abenteuer* and the subversion begins here.¹¹

The third reference in the novel does indeed examine the concept of sexuality as represented by the unicorn. In this episode the myth of the unicorn is unmasked as a reflection of male ideology of femaleness. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have analysed a certain need of feminist writers "to act out male metaphors" in their texts in order to come to an understanding of the implications of such metaphors.¹² The story which Laura tells in the third unicorn episode in *Leben und Abenteuer* is such a re-enactment and it shows that the process of growing up female may willfully be attached to some such symbol as the unicorn but the reality of female experiences bears little relationship to its symbolic shorthand expression.

This episode is presented as a letter which Laura writes to Beatriz to cheer her up. In it she pretends to attempt to make reality fit the symbol and her letter is comic in that her attempt fails.

Critics have dealt with the letter only in serious terms, for indeed it deals with a serious matter. But the tone of the letter is set by the word "spasseshalber" in the title. This word can mean "for the sake of argument", or "as a joke". The letter is an exploration of the unicorn symbol of sexuality, virginity and purity. In it Laura tells of her life from childhood to first year university and concurrently informs us of her biological and psychological development from female child to mature woman. The unicorn is the friend of her imagination. It first

appears to her when playing Hide and Seek. The unicorn is undemanding, it does not eat and is invisible. Later, in her mid-teens when Laura becomes interested in boys, the unicorn undergoes a sex change from neuter to male. Later again, after her first sexual encounter, during her first year at university, the unicorn leaves her.

Critics have seized upon this departure point, interpreting it as a re-affirmation of the belief that women lose their autonomy with the loss of their virginity.¹³ But sexuality is not destiny in *Leben und Abenteuer*, and this critical reading is a reading with a male bias, for the text of the novel says nothing of a loss. The text speaks of a gain. Laura gains "ambivalence" (309). Her letter evaluates the experience gained against the mythical significance of a first sexual encounter and of the loss of virginity. This myth imbues the event with magic, romance and a certain regret, symbolised in the leaving of the unicorn. The myth is part of Western cultural tradition and as such plays a part in the socialisation process of women. In *Leben und Abenteuer* we read that Laura had been told the facts of life by her mother and by literature. Laura's expectation of the event is based on her upbringing and on her education, but the event itself bears no relationship to either. The description of her experience demystifies the symbol most wittily. The man is a cardboard figure without name, with little skill and no romance. She forgets him and remembers the event as something of a joke. She does not

suffer any trauma, but is left puzzled. The reality is nothing like the magic and the romance promised and represented in the magic of the unicorn symbol.

The leaving of the unicorn must be interpreted that Laura is shedding the myth now that she has grown up and experienced the ordinariness of the reality. Rather than being a lament for the loss of female autonomy, as critics have suggested, Laura's letter to Beatriz records a step in her emancipation from cultural and social stereotyping. Laura's letter is the only unicorn episode in *Leben und Abenteuer* in which the dominant unicorn symbol is addressed as that of sexuality, and the purpose is clearly to deflate it.

The fourth episode in the novel describes how Beatriz finds the unicorn in Venice. This episode is a vivid reminder that *Leben und Abenteuer* takes its examples only in part from life and that literature itself serves for its models. This unicorn episode is full of echoes to other works of German literature in which Italy as idea or Italy as reality are explored.¹⁴

The great enthusiasm of Germans for travel to the sunny south dates from the early eighteenth century when Winckelmann's writing first stimulated the German imagination with a longing for antiquities under a hot sun. Goethe in his *Italian Journey* and his *Römische Elegien* continued to idealize Italy and the Italian experience. In the early nineteenth century all the great Romantic writers,

with the exception of Hoffmann and Eichendorff, traveled to Italy and gave glowing reports of it. These glowing descriptions of fascinating sites, landscapes and people imbued Italy with an aura of magnificence which at times did not correspond to reality. Eichendorff in his *Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts* intentionally played upon this discrepancy between the ideal and the reality. In his work, odd things befall the German traveller in Italy. A more recent German work, Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig*, also takes place in Venice and in it the unexpected happens as well: death, not rejuvenation, comes to Aschenbach.¹⁵

The fourth unicorn episode in *Leben und Abenteuer* is within this tradition. Beatriz on her southern travel feels cool and calm, but ends up highly neurotic in Venice. There she meets the Jandas. At first she is overjoyed to hear them speak and recognise the beloved accent of Saxony, but gradually she is overcome by suspicion towards them which leads her to avoid them and to escape from them. One senses that it is the place which has this effect upon her. Beatriz, like Aschenbach in *Der Tod in Venedig*, wanders through the maze of streets in Venice; she feels herself persecuted by a woman when this woman merely smiles at her; and she runs into a palace where she comes upon the tapestry of The Lady with the Unicorn. There the unicorn steps out from the picture: Beatriz straps her cardboard suitcases onto its back and flees Italy, riding home towards the north, as the *Taugenichts* had done before her.

Besides being a parody of other literary works, this episode is also one of the most delightful and distinctive imaginative vignettes in the novel. Yet in the critical literature this episode has been avoided, possibly because it is so unexpected, irrational and illogical. Sonja Hilzinger writes that the hunt for the unicorn was in vain.¹⁶ This is not quite so and it is doubtful that many readers actually expect Beatriz to find the unicorn. When Beatriz reappears in the fifth unicorn episode, three unexplained months later, she is accompanied by a little dog with a horn strapped to its forehead. The drama and the tension comes from the uncertainty created in the reader. One wonders how Irmtraud Morgner will resolve an impossible situation, that of Beatriz leaving Venice on the back of the unicorn.

Irmtraud Morgner provides a witty solution which, however, is not unconnected to the tapestry. On all six tapestries in the Cluny Museum, the lady is accompanied by a lion, a unicorn and a little dog. Although the lion is of the same size as the unicorn, it is not included in the name of the tapestries. A little dog is present in all the tapestries but is never remarked upon at all. All three, unicorn, lion and dog, are depicted with the lady. When Irmtraud Morgner takes the unicorn's fellow creature and works it into her solution, she stays within the picture in the tapestry.

The event in the novel is a dramatisation of that picture with a changed focus. In the manner in which Irmtraud Morgner handles the solution, she demonstrates the intention of the novel which is to create a new awareness and a new vision. The reader's attention is directed away from the impossible unicorn and the improbable lion to the possible dog. The dog is the one animal which Beatriz could truly have acquired in life.

The sixth unicorn episode in the narrative is a description of Laura's visit to the exhibition hall of the Museum of Cluny in which the tapestries of the Lady with the Unicorn are displayed. This visit takes place in a dream but it is treated in such a manner that it appears to be a real event. Laura flies on the back of the Beautiful Melusine from Berlin to Paris. She enters the museum by night through a small upstairs window. Inside she takes off all her clothes and walks completely naked around the room in which the six tapestries are displayed. Her action can be interpreted to symbolize that the traditional understanding of the symbol unicorn requires a new interpretation. By discarding her clothes, Laura discards the old ideas and the old meanings attached to the image of the unicorn. Virginia Woolf has speculated on the question whether we wear our clothes or whether our clothes wear us. Clothes, she says, mould our hearts, our brains and our tongues to their liking.¹⁷ The stripping of garments here

symbolises Laura stripping herself of ideas which had moulded her emotions and thoughts.

All unicorn episodes in the novel contain signals which indicate that Irmtraud Morgner questions the traditional symbolic meanings of the unicorn rather than re-confirms them. The effect in the novel is accumulative and the image of the naked Laura in the Cluny Museum is the visual presentation of the idea behind it. Laura casts off the encumbrances of the past. The tapestries themselves and their value as art have not changed. They remain uniquely beautiful but their ideological content is altered. Laura has merely found new meaning in old art. Her nakedness symbolises her freedom from the values which she herself hitherto, being a product of socialisation and culture, might have accepted.

The summary of Laura's experiences is given in the first episode in the text. In the interview with the fictional editor Irmtraud Morgner, Laura particularly describes this visit. Her new thoughts on the tapestries are an expression of her new-found recognition - and of her feminism - that the harmony suggested by the scenes in the tapestries is wonderful and unreal. Nothing depicted in them stands or stood in any meaningful relationship to life. They are in part pictures of an extreme utopia, a flight into unreality, partly because there are no men depicted in them. Irmtraud Morgner writes: "Die männliche Variante war unterschlagen". (41) As such they are pictures of a worldly

harmony, "weltlicher Harmonie", but not necessarily a symbol of female longing, as Sonja Hilzinger writes.¹⁸ For despite a rather critical attitude towards men, the novel recognises that men, though they are not a woman's whole existence, are at least a necessary and pleasant part thereof.

It is difficult to account for the views of critics who express irritation with Irmtraud Morgner for not liberating the female vision and imagination from the myths of femininity created by men.¹⁹ Upon close reading, the text appears to do exactly that. And not only does it do so in the unicorn sequence but whenever the Nature of Woman, female sexuality and eroticism are discussed.

2. The creation myth

Irmtraud Morgner's conceit of not being the creator but simply the editor of the five pound parcel of documents makes it possible to avoid discussing any one particular issue as a consecutive unit. This freedom from sequence is of course also an indirect reminder that we are reading a novel and not a sociological or historical treatise. The unicorn episodes, for instance, are not placed together in the novel as textual units. The basic fictional idea suggests that the editor in the process of creating a book from Laura's papers also edits a biography, a life and the unicorn episodes pertain to different moments during this life's span. Thus the events described are separated by many pages of text and the references to the unicorn and its

possible shades of meaning are dispersed throughout the narrative.

This leads to the impression that no idea stands clearly illuminated on its own. Every single idea is interconnected to other ideas and the text of *Leben und Abenteuer* becomes very dense. Irmtraud Morgner establishes imaginative associations between everything - all ideas and all images - yet these connections are often merely hinted at. The unicorn sequence, for instance, is linked to its traditional symbolic meaning (which the novel undermines), to chemical research, and to models in German literature. It is also tied by a slim thread to the ever-recurring references to the biblical creation myth in the novel.

It is recognised by many feminists that the biblical creation myth is the most basic and the most influential symbolic structure of patriarchal society. Gerda Lerner writes that Western civilisation draws "its leading metaphors and definitions of gender and morality from the Bible" and bases its justification for the suppression of women by men upon the creation myth in it.²⁰ Many feminists have shown a particular interest in revealing this myth as a creation by man, as a cultural construct which can be deconstructed.²¹ This is obliquely but insistently done in *Leben und Abenteuer*.

The motto which precedes the novel introduces the topic. The motto is a direct allusion to the biblical story of creation according to the Gospel of Saint John. In the

novel the motto is ascribed to Beatriz and reads: "Am Anfang war die andre Tat." (My italics.) The words translate as: "In the beginning was the other deed". The important word in the phrase by Irmtraud Morgner is the word *other*.

The sentence in *Leben und Abenteuer* is a variation on a well-known German saying which originally comes from Goethe's *Faust*. There it occurs in a passage in which Faust himself contemplates the mystery of creation and provides his own translation of the gospel of St. John which begins: "In the beginning was the Word." Faust questions the adequacy of the translation of 'logos' in the original Greek version. He feels that it is unsatisfactory to ascribe the creation of the world to a simple pronouncement. He considers other concepts such as thought, or intellect, or power, and he eventually replaces "word" with "deed." Faust settles on "Am Anfang war die Tat." Goethe in *Faust* created his own version of a sacred text and it is this literary version of the biblical sentence which Irmtraud Morgner picks up and changes. Goethe in *Faust*, however, stays within the basic belief of the Christian myth of creation. He simply provides his own interpretation of the gospel which preaches it.

What interests feminists is that the Christian myth of creation is used to explain the subordination of women as divinely ordained, for the bible establishes a hierarchy from God to man, to woman and to the animal world. Feminist writers and critics consider the biblical story as one of

the early myths created by men to substantiate their claim to the leading position in the social hierarchy. It is not surprising that in *Leben und Abenteuer* all allusions to the creation myth are dismissive. France, for instance, is put down as a country because there women are still willing to accept the assertion that they derive their being from a rib of Adam (154).

But more interestingly, in *Leben und Abenteuer* a counter claim to the biblical account of creation is presented. This is contained in the repeated references to Anaximander. Beatriz looks for the unicorn which, we are told, is intentionally named Anaximander after a Greek philosopher. Anaximander of Miletus was a philosopher who explained the creation of the world as a scientific phenomenon. In fact he suggested a theory which might be considered to be loosely akin to an early theory of evolution, for Anaximander was a pragmatist who reasoned from observing the physical world around him. He came to the conclusion that man evolved from a lower order of life. To him, the accepted belief in a hierarchy with the Gods at the apex of the social pyramid made no sense, since it could not be substantiated by any observation from life.

The importance of the many references to Anaximander for feminism lies in the divergence in his theory from the belief based upon a patriarchal God as the creator of life.²² Irmtraud Morgner indicates that she favours

Anaximander's ideas over the Christian myth. This agrees with the generally anti-religious slant of the novel.

The implied reference to the theory of Anaximander is also significant in that it points out that new ideas are at times merely variations of old ideas. Irmtraud Morgner, here as well as in many other places in the novel, finds an example from the past to suggest that revolutionary contemporary discoveries might not be so revolutionary after all. What is believed and becomes important is all a question of choice made by society at certain points in history. Anaximander's rational ideas of creation had not gained acceptance in subsequent centuries - until Darwin gave new validity to the concept of evolution. And even though the Judeo-Christian creation myth which was dominant over so many intervening centuries has finally been shaken, many of the beliefs and structures based upon it persist, one of them being the justification for the subjugation of women.

Feminists of the late sixties have voiced quite radical ideas concerning the creation myths. These ideas would have had little credence even ten years earlier. Basically they hold that the creation of Patriarchy is a system which can be historically explained. It is not a system based on the will and word of God, which in men's eyes gave it its ahistorical, eternal, invisible and unchanging quality.²³ Feminists hold that the story of creation has shaped Western thought and Western definitions of gender. These are

rationalisations by men with the specific intention of relegating women to an inferior position.²⁴ In the creation myths it is not the voice of God which speaks but man himself explaining his superior placement on a hierarchical ladder. This belief is a cultural construct which feminist theoreticians and writers are intent on deconstructing.²⁵

The motto preceding the narrative of *Leben und Abenteuer* is a literary variation on a literary variation by Goethe.²⁶ Goethe's change in *Faust* might be taken as an argument that the bible itself was seen by him as a historical literary document which can be altered. However, the alteration laboured over by Faust is minor. Faust endeavoured to explain the world, not to change it. The idea that man need not confine himself to explaining and understanding the world, but that he ought to be actively engaged in changing his world came later. It is one of Marx's revolutionary ideas.

Irmtraud Morgner often speaks of themes which relate to the difference between explaining and changing the world. Her impulse is to create a world; she uses the word "Weltmachen". As a feminist she would like to re-create society, as a Marxist, she realises that it is not possible to ignore the past and to return to a virginal state. And even though past customs and traditional thought no longer serve present society, one has to be content with changing the world rather than re-creating it. The motto of the novel, with its stress on the word "other" and its

accreditation to a woman, namely Beatriz de Dia, points to the difference between the two actions, that of creating and changing the world. It implies at the same time an understanding that the outcome of these actions depend on the gender of the person acting. The motto is a declaration that *Leben und Abenteuer* itself is a document supporting the ideas which shape the thinking of the epoch which is that a man's world view differs from that of a woman. In the novel the voice of women is heard and *Die andre Tat* is the deed to create a female viewpoint and, while unmasking the existing cultural ideas transmitted in art as carriers of patriarchal structures and thus by deconstructing them, to change the world.

3. The Nature of Woman

A major topic for feminism and part of the subtext of ideas in *Leben und Abenteuer* concerns the Nature of Woman. There are repeated references to the desirability for women to acquire their own nature now that they have entered history. The novel implicitly claims that women are treated as monolithic entities, are first and foremost evaluated by their physical appearance, or are required by custom to surrender all distinctive individuality in marriage. The question asked, however, is whether female biology is destiny or whether women as well as men can transcend their biology.

This is the reason for including an excerpt from the novel, *Love of the Worker Bees*, by Kollontai (98). In it

Alexandra Kollontai attempts to explain that for many women, sexuality is not of paramount importance to their being. It is only a part of their existence. Kollontai's fictional character, like she herself, sacrificed personal relationships in favour of work for the Russian revolution.

The Nature of Woman as male ideology also underlies Laura's letter in which she introduces the unicorn for the sake of argument or as a matter for joking. In it she measures the actuality of female existence against the implications of femaleness in metaphor and symbol.

The theme of the Nature of Woman is, however, also specifically addressed in one particular chapter of *Leben und Abenteuer*. It is the explicit focus of a theatre review of a production of Goethe's *Faust* which Laura records into her notebook (417-419). In her critique Laura uncovers the traditional concept of the Nature of Woman, propagated by Goethe, as questionable. Her review is in turn copied by the Beautiful Melusine into her own "eternal" record of significant material. The purpose of the books of the Beautiful Melusine is to safeguard valuable opinions against possible loss through the indifference by male record keepers and thus pass on present writing as wisdom of the past for future generations. The complicated manner by which Laura's review is treated in the novel conveys its importance.

Irmtraud Morgner is on record as an admirer of Goethe. But as feminist she cannot blindly subscribe to a

continuation of all of his ideas. She questions particularly his traditional ideology of the Nature of Women. She deals with the question of how much more "natural" a woman might be as compared to a man. The ideology of the Nature of Woman has been used to explain woman's lower status in the social hierarchy. This belief is supported by the Greek and biblical myths of creation. Mary O'Brien, analysing the ambivalent relationship of men to nature and to women, writes that basic to the argument is the male contention that, "The Nature of Woman appears to differ from the Nature of Man precisely because she is somehow more 'Natural'".²⁷ Woman is thought to be closer to nature and therefore lesser in her ability to think and to transcend nature than is man. Laura in her review of *Faust* paraphrases a poem by Goethe which says just that. The poem reflects in its theme the unquestioned truth of woman as nature and man as nurturer of this idea. In his poem, "Gefunden", Goethe speaks of woman as a little wild flower which asks to be transplanted and nurtured by man. Laura writes that generations of men have found this a "hot" idea. She continues in an off-hand tone to say that the fact that men believe this, is in part a result of the endless repetition of that statement. If any assertion is unchallenged and repeated over generations it eventually comes to be accepted as a truth (418).

The idea that woman is more "nature" than man is reflected in the manner in which Gretchen is played in the

production of *Faust* reviewed by Laura. She writes that it is a conventional performance and is already *abgespielt* (played out) because it had been conceived four years earlier. In her reference to time, Irmtraud Morgner points out that the viewpoint has radically changed within the last four years. What was acceptable in 1967/8 is no longer acceptable in 1972, or should not be. Gretchen is played as "natural", and so is Faust. But his naturalness, meaning his sexual passion for Gretchen, is "zeitbedingt", i.e. it affects him only at a certain time in his life. Gretchen's sexuality in contrast is played as if to prove the contention that love, i.e. a man, is a woman's whole existence.²⁸ In this production of *Faust* the underlying assumption appears to be that women have no other life than that determined by their biology and their sexuality and their dependence on men. Man in contrast has a dual existence, that of his biology and that of his ability to transcend his biology.

Laura's critical review analyses this theory and rejects it as "historisch", meaning outmoded and not applicable to the present and to modern women. The role of Gretchen is interpreted in a conventional and historical manner, she writes. It does not take into account the new realisation that Gretchen is a product of culture and society, and not of nature: "Denn Gretchen ist keineswegs ein wildes 'Blümlein' im Sinne von Stück Natur, sondern eine Züchtung." (419) Laura does not suggest how the role of

Gretchen should have been interpreted, for the character of Gretchen as conceived by Goethe is exactly that: a woman defined and confined by the male ideology of female sexuality. The fact that Laura only criticizes and does not suggest a creative alternative expresses the ever-recurring recognition in *Leben und Abenteuer* that we have come to acknowledge at present the difference between the male and female viewpoint. However, this is a new and recent awareness so we do not yet possess role models through which to express the female experience. Life will provide those with time.

Here as in the dismantling of the symbolic meaning of the unicorn, and in the rejection of the biblical myth of creation, the novel uncovers the shortcomings of traditional thought. The changes due to the changing awareness of the differing female viewpoint is an ongoing process during the period chronicled in the novel. There are no models for women and for future society as yet. Time will provide those as well. The present (1968-1973) is a period chiefly of deconstructing and a time in which possible future patterns are only vaguely recognizable, such as in the independence of Laura as a single mother, or in the emotional and intellectual freedom achieved by Valeska.

By evoking old and familiar images, Irmtraud Morgner at the same time denies them their traditional significance. All of her references are familiar but they are somewhat skewed, like the *Hirn* and *Horn* reference, and the motto of

the novel. They are familiar at the first blush but under the surface there is a little twist to them which changes their meaning or their context. If the reader misses the force of these twists it becomes impossible to interpret the novel, and the perception is one of chaos. The feminist aspect, combined with the recognition of history as an ongoing process of change brings order into the whole.

Notes

- 1 Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach", in C. Wright Mills, *The Marxists* (New York: Dell, 1962) 71.
- 2 Maximilian E. Novak, *Realism, Myth, and History in Defoe's Fiction* (Lincoln/London: The University of Nebraska Press, 1983) 10.
- 3 Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 117.
- 4 Annemarie Auer, "Trobadora unterwegs oder Schulung in Realismus", *Sinn und Form* 28 (1976) 1106.
- 5 Michele Landsberg, *Women & Children First* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 70.
- 6 Irmtraud Morgner, *Amanda* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1985) 132.
- 7 Sigrid Damm, "Irmtraud Morgner: *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura*", *Weimarer Beiträge* 9 (1975) 143.
- 8 Ingeborg Nordmann, "Die halbierte Geschichtsfähigkeit der Frau. Zu Irmtraud Morgners Roman *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura*", *Amsterdamer Beiträge* 11/12 (1981) 442.
- 9 Morgner, *Amanda* 104.
- 10 Literature and the pictorial arts are closely connected in the work of Irmtraud Morgner. In the interview with Eva Kaufmann Irmtraud Morgner draws no critical distinction between "Bild" and "Wort". The concepts fuse and are treated as one. Indeed, the most unusual and delightful aspect of the style of Irmtraud Morgner is her pictorial imagination. She evokes images from the pictorial arts and mixes them with examples taken from literature. The reproduction on the book cover to the novel (Luchterhand edition) is of the tapestry metaphorically representing sight. It is not of the tapestry referred to in *Leben und Abenteuer*.
- 11 In German the two words for the brain or the horn are very close. The difference between the two written words consists of one vowel. But in meaning they are very different indeed. Beginning with Damm, critics have consistently made a Freudian slip by misreading the word *Horn* for *Hirn*.
- 12 Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1979) XII.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar studied the writings of women and found that women in the attempt to free themselves from the models provided by male writers do so by describing an acting-out of male images. "A common female impulse to struggle free from literary confinement through strategic redefinitions of self, art and society ... they seem in reaction to have found it necessary to act out male metaphors in their own text, as if trying to understand their implications."

13 Sonja Hilzinger, "Als ganzer Mensch zu leben ..." *Emanzipatorische Tendenzen in der neueren Frauen-Literatur der DDR* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1985) 139. Hilzinger follows Auer, but Auer is mistaken in saying that the unicorn leaves when Laura is fifteen. In the letter Laura does not stop recounting her life at puberty, but at maturity, during her first year at university. [Auer 1076].

14 This episode in a larger context also relates to the topic of *Fernweh*, the longing for distant places, in *Leben und Abenteuer*. *Fernweh* as a topic is not particularly concerned with feminism, although it too contains references which apply only to women.

15 Thomas Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1954) 17. Aschenbach thinks: "Wenn man über Nacht das Unvergleichliche, das märchenhafte Abweichende zu erreichen wünschte, wohin ging man? Aber das war klar. ...nach Venedig...". And later we read that the city makes him ill, all is "Sinnestäuschung" and "vernunftswidrig". He attempts to leave but cannot.

16 Hilzinger 137.

17 Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1970) 170. Woolf writes: "Vain trifles as they seem, clothes have, they say, more important offices than merely to keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world's view of us. ... Thus, there is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them; we may make them take the mould of arm or breast, but they mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking." It is not entirely inappropriate to cite the ideas of Virginia Woolf. In the work of Irmtraud Morgner there are definite allusions to Virginia Woolf. In *Leben und Abenteuer* the juggler in the circus Eos is called Orlando. This is a highly unusual name in German. Besides, the novel contains the story of a sex change just as Orlando is the story of a sex change and a tracing of male and female sensibilities brought about as a result of that change. It is evident that Irmtraud Morgner knows Woolf's novels. The book *Amanda* contains a reference to *A Room of One's Own*. [Amanda 78.]

18 Hilzinger 137.

19 Hilzinger 148.

20 Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 161.

21 The novel *L'Euguelionne* by Louky Bersianik is in part a re-writing of the biblical story of Genesis. In German literature Christa Reinig, for instance, has used the story of the fall in her short story, "Ophiuchus/Serpens".

22 H.D.F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951) 181.

Kitto writes: "...the freedom of Anaximander's thought is shown most remarkably in his speculations on the origin of the human race, which mythology had derived indirectly from the gods and the Titans. This Ionian suggested that all living creatures arose from water as it was evaporated by the sun, and that man was originally a fish. ... this theory is not a random guess. It is based partly on pure reasoning. ... What other arguments may have moved him we do not know, but we can see that it was a combination of pure reasoning with observation that led him to state a theory which was startling when repeated to our own grandfathers."

23 Lerner 37.

24 This essentially is the thesis of Gerda Lerner.

25 Mary O'Brien, "Feminist Theory and Dialectical Logic", in *Feminist Theory*, eds. Nannerl O. Keohane, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Barbara C. Gelpi (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982) 99.

26 Hilzinger 132.

Hilzinger attributes the motto to the historic Beatriz de Dia. She writes it is, "ein Zitat der Beatriz de Dia aufgreifend".

27 Mary O'Brien 102.

28 Byron, a younger contemporary of Goethe, expressed the male ideology of woman's nature in his well-known verse from *Don Juan*: "Man's love is of man's life a thing apart, / 'tis woman's whole existence." [Don Juan, c.I.cxciv.] Both Goethe and Byron make exactly the same point, which is much contested by feminist writers at present.

CHAPTER IX

THE CALENDAR AND TIME AS STRUCTURAL MATRIX

Jeder Stoff verlangt, das Gesetz zu finden, das im Stoff steckt, das Gesetz für das Experiment, das da ablaufen soll, das Gesetz, wonach die Figuren antreten.

Irmtraud Morgner¹

"Go on with your theory - only remember that to guess how a job might have been done isn't the same thing as proving that it was done that way..."

Dorothy L. Sayers.²

Irmtraud Morgner uses the tapestry image within the framework of her novel and some critics have seized upon this image as being a metaphor for the structure of the work itself. Sonja Hilzinger suggested that the small fields which make up the tapestry are analogous to the separate entries in the text.³ This is her justification for describing the structure of the novel as *Montageroman*. However, a tapestry is woven on a framework of horizontal and vertical threads, and the images on a tapestry have the effect of hiding this underlying structure. The images of the lady, the unicorn, the dog, the rabbits and the flowers on the tapestry of the "Lady with the Unicorn" have nothing to do with the framework of threads. These things refer not to the mechanical structure, the warp and weft of the fabric, but to a different structure of the imagination which is overlaid upon it.

If one wishes to continue the analogy between weaving and structure, then it is more profitable to seek for the framework of threads upon which the pictures are woven. In the case of *Leben und Abenteuer* it is not the separate entries which explain the structure, but the warp and weft itself.

It is my hypothesis that the matrix underlying the text of *Leben und Abenteuer* is the actual calendar bracketed by the beginning and end dates given in the novel, May 6, 1968 and August 22, 1973. If this is so, it has not been recognised up to now and therefore it follows that a study of the structure of the novel must also inquire how this basically simple linear sequence is hidden.

Two points are to be made at the outset: firstly, the novel is an edited text and was not written consecutively; secondly, the formal structure cannot be explained entirely by the theme. It is not *what* the novel contains, but *how* the material is arranged which constitutes the formal structure. The structure can be explained by searching for the artifice in art, and not by looking at "the mess and muddle of life".

In *Vorsätze* the reader is invited to enter into a fiction about the fiction. He is asked to believe that two women were chiefly responsible for the book: Laura for writing and collecting the material, and the fictional editor Irmtraud Morgner for establishing a rational sequence for the five pound parcel of documents. Yet, no matter what

Vorsätze invites us to believe, Irmtraud Morgner is the author of *Leben und Abenteuer*. An awareness of this fact in turn emphasises the recognition that the novel is a very carefully planned work and not a novel which grew organically without thought and artifice.

The conceit in *Vorsätze* provides the book's framework. It is the literary device which permits Irmtraud Morgner to include material written in response to the daily stimuli of the material world around her. *Leben und Abenteuer* is the history of her thinking, reading and writing. She can include short pieces of prose, attempts at poetry, newspaper clippings and her contemplations on changing ideas about art and literature, changing social attitudes, advances in technology and science, and historical events.

The text is a mixture of fact and fiction but everything is topical for the period during which the novel was written, even the elements which purport to refer to historical or mythological events. In the book at least as much space is devoted to lengthy texts from other sources as to the story of the life of Beatriz as promised by the title. The outer world which shapes the inner world is given as much space as the fictional reworking of the historical and social contemporary reality. The author provides full documentation of many of the external influences which go into shaping the life and opinions of her fictional characters.

1. The fiction and the calendar

However, it is not possible to separate fiction and fact neatly in order to show how much weight Irmtraud Morgner gives to the one over the other. *Leben und Abenteuer* is called a novel and thus the fiction may serve as main focus to examine the sequential arrangement of the text.

Indeed, it is the story of Beatriz and of Laura which, in Alice Schwarzer's words, provides "the red thread" through the maze of the narrative.⁴ Schwarzer is the only critic who has recognised that the story, despite the fact that it at times totally disappears from the reader's awareness, provides a continuity to which everything in the book is made to relate. This is true with respect to the various places where the scenes of the novel are set. Much more important, the main story ties the disparate elements together in time. Even though some episodes in the novel are set in the distant mythological past, some in Medieval times and others are contemporary, the story links them all together in the present. Often the headings alone establish the sequence in the story which is missing in the narrative proper and, more importantly, by being written in the present tense ground the story line firmly in the present.

A chronology can be abstracted for the fictional story of the life and the adventures of Beatriz and of Laura through the calendar time prescribed in the text. This chronology also makes clear some of the complexities which

Irmtraud Morgner introduced into the main story line. The principal one is that she is dealing with the unequal record of the parallel lives of two people. At first we read a lot about Beatriz and very little about Laura. Later we read more about Laura than about Beatriz.

At first Beatriz and Laura live apart in different places: Beatriz in France, Laura in the GDR. Later, they are together in the GDR for a while. They part again when Beatriz travels, and they are reunited once more in Berlin. Rather than separating the strands of their lives when they are apart, Irmtraud Morgner places their records in a sequence which suggests that the events described therein happened more or less concurrently though in different places. This sequential arrangement adds to the fragmentary appearance of the text. However, it also demonstrates the degree to which time, specifically the calendar, dominates as organising principle.

A complication to this premise is that not all the events come with dates provided. By deduction one will, however, find that they either fit into the calendar or, by allusion, match something else which does. This can be illustrated by the insertion of the chapter describing Laura's hike in the mountains of Thuringia with Lutz. Placed very early in the book, it serves as an introduction to Laura who will gradually come to dominate the narrative. Yet at this point in the story no relationship exists between Beatriz and Laura. On the surface the entry appears

to have been placed into the narrative here on the principle that one story begets another similar story, or that one mood suggests a similar mood. The chapter is a fairly lyrical piece, or at least an attempt at one. It matches the description of a walk through the countryside of Provence by Beatriz which precedes it in the text. The technique of allusion was no doubt part of the decision to put the descriptions into juxtaposition. However, since the calendar is the organising principle, it could not have been placed anywhere else. We are given precise months for both episodes, May for Provence, September for Thuringia. The year for Provence is also precise (1968), but it is not given for the Thuringian hike. When considering the events in the life of Laura, one finds that the walk in Thuringia simply had to have happened before Laura was pregnant and before Beatriz first sees her.

At this point in the story the calendar is attached to the life of Beatriz and it stays with her until she meets Laura in Berlin on or very close to May 3, 1970.

For a while the reader's attention is focussed on both Beatriz and Laura. Then it shifts to Laura and the events of her life begin to dominate the time structure after the birth of Wesselin on August 22, 1970. From then on the calendar becomes attached to Laura's life. In a novel by a woman about women, it is fitting that the birth of a child should constitute a major shift. The transfer of focus from Beatriz to Laura at the birth of Wesselin effectively

constitutes the middle of the novel. This mid-point in the novel occurs on Irmtraud Morgner's thirty-seventh birthday and exactly three years before she claims to have finished the novel.

Irmtraud Morgner makes a great number of references to train travel: running on parallel tracks; separating; changing trains. At this point the reader's attention is made to change trains in Berlin. Structurally the novel becomes centred in the GDR. Berlin becomes home. From this point on the reader stays with Laura and moves on her track of time. When Beatriz travels again she leaves Laura and us behind. While Laura's life goes on, we wait for Beatriz' letters, telegrams and reports which are included in the text when they arrive, not when the events they report happen.

Laura's dominance continues even after Beatriz' return when further reports about her adventures during her absence, especially in Italy, are given.

2. Factual information and the calendar

Although the book is called a novel and though this reference to genre the fictional components demand priority, factual reality is to a large degree the starting point of Irmtraud Morgner's fiction. Broadly speaking, some of the factual, historic background material is inserted into the text of the novel in separate entries as closely as seems fitting to the story and the calendar, such as a large segment of the text of the speech on March 9, 1972 by Dr.

Mecklinger rationalising the legalisation of abortions. Laura reads it on March 10, 1972. Or it is woven indirectly into the story as an orientation point, such as the reference to the mutilation of the Piéta in St. Peter's which indirectly tells the reader when Beatriz visited Rome.⁵

The large structural blocks of the novel, the creation of the book and the time span of the story, are bracketed by precise dates. In *Vorsätze* we are told that the editing of the manuscript took from April 3 to August 22, 1973. The fictional life of Beatriz lasted from May 6, 1968 to March 12, 1973. Of these four dates we know that three have some external importance. August 22, 1973 was the fortieth birthday of the author Irmtraud Morgner.⁶ May 6, 1968 is the date marking the outbreak of the student revolt in Paris and is also fixed upon by feminists as the date with which the beginning of their movement formally became identified. March 12, 1973 is the date of the morning after the French election when the combined left wing parties appeared to have come to power in France. Thus, for the beginning and for the end of the novel a precise correlation between fiction and fact is established.

Much attention has been given to the significance of May 6, 1968, but all other dates in the novel have so far gone unnoticed. The beginning date marked the student revolt in France of 1968. The words which Beatriz hears when she listens to the radio are no doubt those spoken or

written at the time. We are told in *Leben und Abenteuer* that to Laura much literature appears "wie aus der Zeitung geschnitten" (280). Much in the novel is indeed taken from newspapers. We know that Irmtraud Morgner and Laura read the paper *Neues Deutschland*, but a look at any newspaper for the period will give the information which Beatriz hears and reads in more or less identical words.⁷ *The Times*, London, for instance, reports on the pitched battles between students on May 6, 1968 on the Boulevard St. Germain and around St. Germain des Près, in words very similar to those which Beatriz reads in "France Soir".⁸ One of the slogans of the students was "Each man must act and thus change the world".⁹ The desire of Irmtraud Morgner's characters in *Leben und Abenteuer* to change or to create a new world thus also reflects immediate historical slogans.

As is Beatriz' re-awakening, so her death is also tied to a precise political event in France. March 12, 1973 links the fiction to the real historical event. On that morning Beatriz fell to her death, after a night of partying and too much wine, in the belief that the political revolution had finally come about in her home country. Beatriz died believing that the parties of the left had won a majority (618). Newspaper reports for March confirm that her optimism was not entirely mistaken. The outcome of the election indeed seemed at first to indicate a leftist victory.¹⁰

The completion of Beatriz' life explains the title of the novel. The full title of *Leben und Abenteuer* itself is melodious and wonderfully suggestive but an oddity in relationship to the content of the book which has relatively little to do with Beatriz. She does not dominate the narrative.¹¹ The title follows a literary precedent which is linked to the preoccupation with time. It comes from the biographical components of the fictional story in *Leben und Abenteuer*. A biography is never arranged according to theme but rather follows chronology. It is the nature of a biographical narrative to be developed in linear fashion. In *Leben und Abenteuer* it is only Beatriz' life which is complete, with a beginning and an end, and thus conformable to the literary precedent.¹²

The major political and historical event of the years chronicled in *Leben und Abenteuer* was the war in Vietnam. Indeed, references to the Vietnam War provide a steady accompanying subtext and reference points throughout the novel from beginning to the end. When Beatriz surfaces in May 1968 the world had become concerned about the escalating involvement of the United States in Vietnam. The shock with which Beatriz reads of Agent Orange and the war shortly after being awoken, is shared by the world at large (65). *Time Magazine* wrote in 1968 that the war "was simmering along".¹³ When Beatriz dies, five years later the same magazine still referred to the Vietnam War in almost identical words: "The war simmers on."¹⁴ The general tenor

of many European papers was anti-American as is the novel *Leben und Abenteuer*.¹⁵

The anti-war position in *Leben und Abenteuer* is loosely tied to the general anti-religious slant of the novel. Images and metaphors of war and destruction are attached to Christmas, the season of peace. Christmas is a convenient marker which measures the years and serves as a temporal orientation point. Within Laura's family the season is celebrated as a joyful secular traditional recurrence, a feast chiefly for children. In the outside world Christmas is a time of bombings and destruction.

The newspapers for the Christmas season in 1969 were full of reports of terrorist attacks and bombings. This is the month in which Beatriz set bombs in Paris, after which she had to leave France. Within the chronology of the story, Christmas of 1969 is also marked by Beatriz's *Flaschenpostlegende* wherein the coming of the Lord is metaphorically celebrated in terms of a squadron of bombers approaching a city.¹⁶ This particular association of Christmas and of war and bombings is re-echoed when Beatriz and Laura celebrate Christmas 1971. Then they listen to radio reports describing the breaking of the traditional Christmas truce and the bombing of Vietnam by B52 bombers as Nixon's Christmas surprise.¹⁷

The war as a political event is a major undercurrent of *Leben und Abenteuer*. There are, however, also many many minor events which contribute to the ability of the reader

to establish his bearings in time. The world-revolutionary movement inspired by Che Guevara dominated the imagination and the news during the late sixties and early seventies; *Leben und Abenteuer* obliquely refers to this fact. The novel in particular remembers Tamara Bunke, Che's Tanya, the East German girl who had walked into an ambush on August 31, 1967 and was killed by Bolivian soldiers.

On a somewhat less serious note *Leben und Abenteuer* informs the reader that the year is 1970 by reference to the chess match "Russia v. Rest of the World" in which Mr. Bobby Fischer, the world chess champion, refused to play.¹⁸ In *Leben und Abenteuer* this refusal is related to the theme of the vanity and megalomania of men which society accepts as normal but which in a woman would be understood as an abnormality (249).

When the mythological queen of the Amazons, Penthesilea, visits Laura in 1972, she is described so as to resemble Angela Davis who, with her Afro hair, her tight jeans and chewing gum, was much in the news in 1972 (523).

Besides politics, literary events as well help to mark time. For instance, Peter Handke's *Publikumsbeschimpfung* was a literary sensation of the late sixties. The play was a great success and was said to express the "protest attitudes" of its time. The text was described as a "Schimpfkanonade", a litany of abusive vocabulary.¹⁹ Irmtraud Morgner mimics Handke's style. Beatriz releases just such a "Schimpfkanonade" early on in the novel when she

returns from her outing to Tarascon to her castle of Almacis and finds it gone (46). In Handke's drama "the audience is the theme and the focus of the play".²⁰ The theme and the focus of Beatriz's abusive vocabulary are men.

In the secondary literature the inclusion of an excerpt of the *Memoirs of Lenin* by Nadesda Krupskaja has been commented upon with approval. It has not been noticed, however, that the theme of the excerpt is the double shift and that, within the timetable of the fictional story, this excerpt occurs around the end of 1970. The year 1970 was the centennial of Lenin's birth, a year in which the "East Bloc countries were deluged with mementos of Lenin."²¹ In *Leben und Abenteuer*, however, the focus is not on Lenin himself but rather reveals the devotion of Krupskaja and the degree to which Lenin was dependent on her (408).²²

These few examples demonstrate that the fictional lives of Laura and Beatriz move in parallel fashion through the calendar years 1968 to 1973 in relation to the real events that happened during those years. The calendar is the structural matrix for the many seemingly fragmentary entries which make up the novel.

In *Vorsätze* we are told that the fictional editor was promised a great deal of research material (the parcel of documents) which would save her a lot of time in writing a book. Indeed, the background research is so meticulously correct that an avoidance of any possible anachronisms appears to have been the main aim of the author. However,

the veracity of the historical facts contained in the fiction no doubt aims to convince the reader that the ideas and the messages in *Leben und Abenteuer*, even if couched in bizarre and fantastic guise, are true.

Based upon the precision of the factual details it can be stated that *Leben und Abenteuer* is a novel which could have been written neither ten years earlier nor ten years later.

3. Chronology

The following pages show the progression through time of the story of Beatriz, as well as the story of the creation of the book from the beginning when Beatriz surfaces on May 6, 1968 to the date on which the novel pretends to have been completed on August 22, 1973.

<u>PAGE</u>	<u>YEAR</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>EVENTS</u>
9	1973	One morning in April	Irmtraud Morgner meets Laura.
12		In the 9th hour of 3 April	She begins to read.
		On 7 April	She attends the funeral of Beatriz.
13		22.8.1973	The book is finished.
16	1968	In the spring of 1968	Beatriz awakens and falls in love.
		Monday, 6 May, 1968	The engineer and the blaster discuss Beatriz.
21		In the afternoon	Beatriz leaves for Tarascon.

21		In the afternoon	Beatriz leaves for Tarascon.
30		At dusk	Beatriz reached Montmajour.
32		When she awoke	The sun was already shining.
45		When she arrived towards evening.	The castle had disappeared.
46		When the sun had set	the lights at the construction site came on.
56		During the night of 10-11 May	Beatriz listens to the radio.
62		13 May	The workers give Beatriz money for a dress.
72		13 July at 7:18 pm	She arrives in Paris (too late for the student revolt)
74/ 76	1968/ 1969	23.7.1968 to 22.10.1969	Diary entries covering several events in Beatriz's life.
76	1969	22.10.1969	Beatriz marries Gerson.
85		Seven days before Christmas	A men's haberdashery was blown up.
85	1969	The next day	Bomb threats force evacuation of police and National Guard buildings.
		22 December	The <i>Musée de l'Armée</i> is closed because of a bomb threat.
		On Christmas Eve	Beatriz places a knitted shirt and some aftershave lotion under the Xmas tree.

- 260 1 March, 1971 (from For two months Beatriz de
calculations). Dia was not heard from.
The *Montageroman* is
offered to the Aufbau-
Verlag. Laura
forges the signature of
Beatriz and waits.
- 280 Beginning of May; Beatriz writes from Los
two weeks later; Angeles, Calcutta and
12 July Zagreb.
- 282 in the summer Benno appears before
Laura in a heavenly
coach.
- 287 21 July Laura is to report in the
offices of the Berlin
Streetcar administration.
- 304 (sometime in the Laura writes that she
summer) will meet Paul Wiens on 7
October, 1971 to discuss
the canzona ordered by
Beatriz for Wenzel
Morolf.
- 388 a night in late Benno appears once more
in summer, his heavenly coach.
- 402 In late summer Wesselin begins to walk.
- 402 1 May, 5:10 pm. Laura's description of
local time her meeting with Paul
Wiens.
The precise time is
incorrect, and the
calendar (*i.e.* the
editor) overrides
Laura's time reference.
She had said earlier
(p. 304) that
she would meet Paul Wiens
on 7 October, 1971.
- 404 a night in early Benno appears once more.
autumn

- 408 Entry from the memoirs of Krupskaya, reminding us of Lenin and 1971 as Lenin year.
- 419 - 1971 Retrospective report of the summer. Beatriz in Rome and Venice. She finds the unicorn.
- 438
- 477, Christmas Eve 1971. Laura celebrates with Wesselin and her parents. Her mother speaks of retirement next October.
- 480 1972 Beginning of February. The weather was like spring. Laura will meet Benno the next day. Beatriz is missing.
- 499 late winter night. Laura telephones the Beautiful Melusine. She discusses her intentions of marrying Benno soon.
- 502 10 March, 1972 Laura reads in the newspaper that the law legalising abortion was passed yesterday.
- 13 March Benno holds his last funeral speech and returns to his construction job.
- 512 17 March, in the morning towards eight Beatriz returns and sleeps three days and three nights.
- 514 9 May Laura and Benno marry.
- 517 On the morning after the wedding Laura leaves on a trip. Benno goes to football camp. Beatriz gets to look after baby Wesselin.
- 525 The Aufbau-Verlag hears of the return of Beatriz and suggests changes in the subject matter for the *Montageroman*.

- 526 Seven days later Beatriz goes on a bus trip arranged by the Aufbau-Verlag for the purpose of "Wirklichkeitsstudien", studies of reality.
- 527 about end of May Beatriz reads a recent communication on the Vietnam War for the period March 30 to May 1, 1972.
- 530 1972 The last journey of Laura's father on the engine "Pauline" is announced.
Beatriz works on her novel and works also for the journal *Sonntag*. She edits the diary of Genossin Martha.
- 545 The Beautiful Melusine wants the protest songs for which she had already paid by providing the funds for the trip to hunt the unicorn.
- 548 seven days before the date of Johann Salman's last working day, Beatriz telephones to confirm that she can accompany him.
- 552 8 October, 1972 Beatriz gets permission to accompany Johann Salman.
- 578 a little later than 8 October, 1972 Beatriz reads the report of the last journey on "Pauline" to Laura and Benno.
- 604 Christmas 1972 is spent at Laura's. Beatriz listens to news about the bombing of Vietnam. Olga is fatigued from her husband's retirement.

- 607 1973 3 January 1973 Laura returns from her holidays in Warnemünde but still yearns to go to visit Almacis in France.
- 11 January Beatriz meets the Beautiful Melusine to arrange "eine Entrückung", a transfiguration.
- 608 28 January Laura notices how similar she and Beatriz have become.
The truce in Vietnam is one day old.
- 609 1973 At the beginning of March On a foggy morning, Olga Salman is "placed into suspension" which will last 300 years.
- 612 11 February, 1973 During the night, the Beautiful Melusine flies Laura to the Cluny Museum. (Date sequence reversed!)
- 618 4 and 11 March The French elections take place. The Beautiful Melusine has been in France since the beginning of the month.
- During the night 4-5 March Laura, Benno and Beatriz drink three bottles of wine.
- During the night 11-12 March They drink six bottles of wine.
At three in the morning Beatriz sings the Marseillaise.

- 618 12 March, a Monday Benno is late for work. Beatriz attempts to clean the windows and falls to her death after waving to the Beautiful Melusine who had circled the house three times.
- 646 7 April, 1973 On the day of the funeral of Beatriz, Laura reads the sex change report of Valeska Kantus. Beatriz had met her three days before her death (9 March)
- 685 During the night of 14-15 March Laura is flown by the Beautiful Melusine to be inducted into the circle of the Round Table.

Notes

- 1 Eva Kaufmann, "Interview mit Irmtraud Morgner", *Weimarer Beiträge* 9 (1984) 1508.
- 2 Dorothy L. Sayers, *Busman's Honeymoon* (London: New English Library, 1977) 228.
- 3 Sonja Hilzinger, "Als ganzer Mensch zu leben ..."
Emanzipatorische Tendenzen in der neueren Frauen-Literatur der DDR (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1985) 136.
- 4 Alice Schwarzer, "Auch Genossen sind nicht automatisch Brüder", *Konkret* (Sept. 1976) 57.
- 5 In May 1972, Laszlo Toth mutilated the Piéta in St. Peter's with a hammer, claiming that the statue was socially dangerous. Beatriz visited Rome shortly before this event (583).
The Times, London, Monday, May 22, 1972, 1.
- 6 It is also the third birthday of the child Wesselin in the novel.
- 7 *Time Magazine*, May 17, 1968, 42.
In May *Time Magazine* reported the spreading revolt and the worker's strike in France. The students were joined by the major unions, by the Communists, Socialists, Christian Socialists and teachers' labour unions. The Sorbonne was closed and the bridges across the Seine were cordoned off.
- 8 *The Times*, London, Tuesday, May 7, 1968, 43.
- 9 *Time Magazine*, May 17, 1968, 26.
- 10 *Time Magazine*, March 19, 1973, 26.
Time Magazine reported that "the preliminary vote showed the Gaullists with 38% compared with the 46% of the united left." A week later *Time Magazine* reported that the Gaullists had won but that their position is weak. "'The large parliamentary majority does not accurately translate its real position in the country.'" wrote the conservative *Figaro*." *Time Magazine* continues to say that the Gaullists "barely edged the left in the popular vote, but gained seats in gerrymandered districts." (*Time Magazine*, March 26, 1973, 26).
- 11 Hilzinger 137.
The confusion in the secondary literature as to who the heroine really might be indicates this sufficiently.

12 For Laura the five years between 1968 and 1973 are only a slice of time. Her life began before May 6, 1968 and continues after the death of Beatriz. Laura's life cannot be summed up yet, for it will continue to develop and change. Indeed, change occurs immediately with Beatriz's death. Laura abandons her novel for the *Aufbau-Verlag*. At the moment when she sells the documents in *Vorsätze*, her life hovers once more in uncertainty. She has arrived at a turning point and what direction her life will take now is not known.

13 *Time Magazine*, May 3, 1968, 28.

14 *Time Magazine*, March 25, 1973, 24.

15 *Der Spiegel*, 1. 12. 1969, 1.

Every edition of *Der Spiegel* for 1969 ran a commentary on the Vietnam war. The headline for December 1, 1969 read: "Amerikanische Kriegsverbrechen in Vietnam".

16 *Time Magazine*, December 28, 1970, 34-39.

Time Magazine contained a long discussion on angels. We read there that the Angel Gabriel is the angel most represented in art. He is the angel of the Annunciation and one of his functions is to preside over paradise. We read further that "Angels could cause or cure plague, summon up earth-quakes and floods and paralyse whole nations with famine. They destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, assisted in the slaying of the first-born of the Egyptians and annihilated the army of Sennacherib..." *Time Magazine* concludes: "The physical shape of angels is only a metaphor, but the spiritual experience to which the now dead form refers may be very much alive."

In accordance with its anti-religious bias, angels in *Leben und Abenteuer* are always agents of disaster and destruction (123). Could it be a coincidence between *Time Magazine* and the novel that the disastrous Christmas story in *Leben und Abenteuer* fits into the time scheme of Christmas 1970 (225)?

17 *Der Spiegel*, 3. 1. 1972, 66.

18 *The Times*, London, April 2, 1970, 6e.

19 *Der Spiegel*, 25. 5. 1970, 174.

20 *Der Spiegel*, 25. 5. 1970, 174.

21 *The Times*, London, Dec. 27, 1969, 6.
The radio services of the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Rumania, East Germany, Hungary and Mongolia asked their listeners to enter essays of 400 words or less on the theme: "When and how did you first hear the name of Lenin and what does it mean to you?" The essays had to be in by Feb. 15, 1970 and the prize was a trip to Russia. The entry in *Leben und Abenteuer* might be considered such an essay. It is 458 (German) words in length, in which Lenin's wife, Krupskaja, remembers him.

22 The theme of this entry is picked up a page later in a story written by Laura called *Schuhe* (411).

CHAPTER X

THE SEVEN INTERMEZZI

Interspersed into the narrative of *Leben und Abenteuer* are seven excerpts from an earlier novel by Irmtraud Morgner. This novel, *Rumba auf einen Herbst*, (1964) was never published, although it is occasionally listed among the extant works of the author.¹ The reason for its non-appearance is given by Irmtraud Morgner herself. She says simply that it did not receive permission to be published and that the only copy of the manuscript was lost, except for a few chapters which had remained in a drawer and which she included in *Leben und Abenteuer*.²

These chapters appear as seven intermezzi at more or less regular intervals among the thirteen books of the novel and they are said to come from the collection of books by the Beautiful Melusine. They have on the surface very little to do with the story of Beatriz and of Laura. They appear as intrusions and add to the sensation of fragmentation in the novel. They have been used as arguments for the classification of the novel as *Montageroman*.³

From the point of structure two questions present themselves: How did they get into the paper parcel which Laura had collected and sold to Irmtraud Morgner, and why did the fictional editor place them into this particular order?

The Beautiful Melusine, as are Laura, Beatriz and Irmtraud Morgner, is a person with literary pretensions. She is not a writer, however, but a collector of works which are of value but which might disappear because this value is not recognised at present. She is an honourable plagiarist because she saves material from oblivion and for the edification of future generations. We have to thank her for recognising the value of *Rumba auf einen Herbst* in 1964. In fact, she copied not only from *Rumba auf einen Herbst* by Irmtraud Morgner, but from many other works. There are a great number of her books around. Beatriz finds the books of the Beautiful Melusine in the Kommune Roter Mai in Paris; Laura shows one of her books to Benno; and the underground press plagiarises her books in its turn. However, the motive of Dr. Alfredo Maurer is profit and gain at the expense of women, which in a convoluted process ties in the books of the Beautiful Melusine to the basic theme of the exploitation of women as a matter of rightful habit.

The Beautiful Melusine in the novel is of French origin and not a German mermaid as she is occasionally thought to be.⁴ She is half-dragon, half-woman and her environment is the air. Her character in the novel, as is the character of Beatriz, is a mixture of legend and of history. The name Beautiful Melusine is the familiar name for Marie de Lusignan and derives from the names of the castles "Melle" and "Lusignan". She is the sister-in-law of Beatriz of the novel. Marie de Lusignan is a historic figure from the

twelfth century as is the historic Countess de Dia, upon which the character of Beatriz is based. In *Leben und Abenteuer*, we are told, both escaped their century and their husbands with the help of Demeter and Persephone, but because Marie de Lusignan was first in her claim, she received the more generous deal. The Beautiful Melusine could stay awake and be above space and time, while Beatriz, who came second, had to go to sleep like Sleeping Beauty.

Legend tells us that Marie de Lusignan was married to Raimund de Lusignan. Part of her marriage agreement was a clause which allowed her utter privacy on each Saturday. On that day she turned herself into the shape which she has in the novel, half-dragon, half-woman. Her husband who found her need for privacy unnatural, suspected her of evil deeds and violated the agreement. One Saturday he broke into her room and she had to flee through the window in her altered shape. In the novel the evil deeds of the Beautiful Melusine consist in the reading of political pamphlets in her room (45). This is the modern version of convening with the devil in the twelfth century. She is said to return to haunt the castle; and in legend and in the novel, she returns to announce the death of a member of the Lusignan family. She then circles the castle three times as she circles the apartment house where Beatriz is washing windows before she falls to her death in the novel.

In *Leben und Abenteuer* the books of the Beautiful Melusine are numbered. The excerpts from *Rumba auf einen*

Herbst appear in the sequence 7, 14, 21, 28, 35, 35, 42. This sequence based on the progression of the number 7 is broken, but it nonetheless suggests some meaning. Is it a mathematical progression or is it a series of magic numbers? There appears to be no particular relationship between number and text. Other excerpts in the novel come from the 103rd and 189th books of the Beautiful Melusine. We are invited, no doubt, to consider the historicity and ahistoricity of concepts even here.

The Beautiful Melusine may attach a certain significance to the symbolism of numbers as Beatriz attaches symbolic significance to colours. Both the Beautiful Melusine and Beatriz are creatures from the twelfth century, after all, when such matters were generally accepted as meaningful. For contemporary society, however, the concept of magic numbers and of colour symbolism is too obscure. When Beatriz gives one of her readings for the "*Olga Benario*" *Werk für Signal- und Sicherungstechnik* she wears a red coat with sleeves from an jacket of Lutz. Beatriz means to indicate her devotion to her lover Lutz. To Laura her patchwork jacket is simply a embarrassingly odd looking garment and injects a jarring note into her contemporary sensibilities. She rejects the idea of expressing feelings through colour as scholastic and as not relevant to modern times: "Laura lehnte solche Bedeutungsbelegungen als scholastisch ab." (217) The workers to whom Beatriz reads the story also do not recognise in the sleeves of Beatriz's

coat a symbolic expression of her temporary devotion. They see a badly put-together garment. It is natural to conclude that any symbolism of magic numbers might also fall into the same category of fun and games. Numerology is merely an esoteric fad, a game played by Irmtraud Morgner and has no deeper significance. A belief in numbers belongs to the past.

What do the seven intermezzi contain? They describe the lives of a previous generation as well as the lives of some of the male characters in the novel *Leben und Abenteuer* at an earlier time. They provide background information for Lutz and Benno, their father, for Uwe Parnitzke and Wenzel Morolf. Since Lutz can be assumed to be the father of Laura's son Wesselin, the books of the Beautiful Melusine contain a family chronicle of sorts.

The world described in the Intermezzi is a very much more old-fashioned world, concerned with bourgeois values of house and property and inheritance. These are likened to burdens to be carried on one's back. Bourgeois values are the basis of the generational conflict between Benno and his father. The past is depicted with melancholic empathy which, however, does not quite hide the rejection of the values of that past as obsolete and as unrelated to the demands of modern and contemporary life.

In remaining within the pretence of the creation of the novel as established in *Vorsätze*, the question is why did the fictional editor place these documents into the

narrative at those specific places, or intervals? It helps to remember that the fictional editor is essentially a writer and that she expressed some scruples at accepting the work of others. The structure of the novel is in part due to the precarious balance between the methods of a writer of fiction and an editor of other people's work. As writer, Irmtraud Morgner would naturally employ artistic techniques which are in contrast to the analytical approach which she had to use to order the documents. The placing of the seven intermezzi is the outcome of her artistic sense of rhythm and the poetic freedom which she can assert as a creative writer. When the staccato effect of the fragmentation of *Leben und Abenteuer* becomes too insistent, approximately every sixty to eighty pages, the rhythm is broken by "something entirely different".

Irmtraud Morgner in the interview with Eva Kaufmann likens literature to the pictorial arts and to music. All the arts are not only *like* each other, they are each other. (The italics are mine.) She draws, for instance, no distinction between picture and word, and she speaks of literature as of a composition in words in a musical sense.⁵ Of *Rumba auf einen Herbst*, the novel which was not published, she says, "Das Buch war der Sonatenform nachgebaut."⁶

The word intermezzo and the function of intermezzi in music and in *Leben und Abenteuer* are very much alike. The word intermezzo is a musical term from the Italian and means

something "in the middle". In music it specifically refers to an instrumental piece in the middle of an opera, or something entirely different from the work preceding and following.⁷ Intermezzo in a non-musical sense means an interruption. The intermezzi in *Leben und Abenteuer* are both, something entirely different, and an interruption in the larger opus. In music as in the novel soothing instrumentalisation relieves the drama of voice and action. The intermezzi provide variety, give depth and add interest. Their style is completely different; it is smooth and almost lyrical in contrast to the abstract and syncopated rhythm, the odd punctuation and the abundance of non-sequiturs of the main part of the novel. The style as well as the subject matter, the middle class family situation in Berlin in 1964, reveal the earlier interests of the author and indirectly heighten her change of vision and the distinctly feminist perspective of the novel *Leben und Abenteuer*.

Notes

- 1 Jürgen Serke, *Frauen schreiben* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1982) 366.
- 2 Eva Kaufmann, "Interview mit Irmtraud Morgner", *Weimarer Beiträge* 9 (1984) 1510.
- 3 Walter Emmerich, in *Geschlechtertausch*, Sarah Kirsch, Irmtraud Morgner, Christa Wolf (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1984) 115.
- 4 Ingeborg Nordmann, "Die halbierte Geschichtsfähigkeit der Frau. Zu Irmtraud Morgners Roman *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura*", *Amsterdamer Beiträge* 11/12 (1981) 438.
5. Kaufmann, "Interview" 1505.
6. Kaufmann, "Interview" 1510.
- 7 Arthur Jacobs, *A New Dictionary of Music* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) 183.

CONCLUSION

The text of *Leben und Abenteuer* is to a large degree a montage, from many texts and most critics have therefore called *Leben und Abenteuer* a *Montageroman*. This term could indeed be taken to describe the work, for the novel is a fragmented narrative, combining many pieces of text from other sources or pieces of prose written by Irmtraud Morgner on other occasions. The term *Montageroman*, however, does not explain the structure of the book. The question of structure concerns the relationship to each other of fragmented entries of diverse subject matter, style and form. Is the relationship, as critics maintained, merely one of fragmentation, or is there a coherent structure? What, in fact, is the sequential ordering of the seemingly chaotic narrative?

Irmtraud Morgner combines the disparate entries by a superstructure based on the literary ideas of the creation of the book itself. Thus the fictional Laura attempts to create and sell a work which in a vague way is to resemble a *Montageroman*. Her plan is that this work will derive its relevance from everyday events and even from the private lives of women, in particular those exemplified by Beatriz's adventures and her own interests. In the fiction, Laura fails in her endeavour.

However, this failure is only partial. She does not finish the book, but a book is completed. This is the novel before the reader. *Leben und Abenteuer* contains Laura's

material and thus reflects her interests and the focus she brings to bear on life. Indeed, the main thread which permits the reader's imagination to create order out of the chaos of the text lies in the consistently modern and feminist viewpoint. The narrator has selected all entries with great care to fit the dominant focus of the novel: chronicling the social changes affecting women and society in general during the period of time given in the text, May 1968 to August 1973. During those years women had advanced beyond mere complaints about injustices, and had begun to analyse and to attack and undermine what Irmtraud Morgner calls the "deeper structures" of patriarchy. The aggressive edge of the work is thus feminist, and *Leben und Abenteuer* is not merely an emancipatory, but a feminist work.

As befits a novel which chronicles the "entry of woman into history", time is the dominant structural element of *Leben und Abenteuer*. Within the fiction of the fiction, the reader is asked to believe that the work is a collaborative effort and that the sequential arrangement of the fragmented text is the work of a person other than the Laura who collected the data. This is a signal that Irmtraud Morgner composed *Leben und Abenteuer* at a different moment in time from that when the many entries had actually been written. The material is arranged in a sequence which traces the life of Beatriz through the calendar years 1968 to 1973, and the real calendar of this period provides the structural matrix to which fiction and fact are made to adhere. The novel

gains stability by moving the reader forward, perhaps imperceptibly, through time and by providing references to actual historical events of that period.

Leben und Abenteuer is not an organically grown novel but a carefully constructed work. Theme and structure converge in their relationship to history, and not, as has been eloquently stated in the secondary literature, in the analogy between the disrupted lives of women and the fragmentation of the text. The sequential ordering of the material of the text reflects Irmtraud Morgner's awareness of the importance of time and the inevitable progress of history.

As a work of art, *Leben und Abenteuer* not only chronicles the social changes, the growing self-awareness and self-determination of women, but in referring to dates at beginning and end of the work, proudly claims to be part of history itself.

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