

Beata Gorycka, Résumé

The submitted dissertation is devoted to the short prose of Judith Hermann (born 1970).

The author began her career as an icon of *Fräuleinwunder* literature. In her texts, she depicts the experiences and life plans of her generation, which reflect unstable times, i.e. global, technology-driven transformations of the social, economic and political worlds. These entail transformations of traditional forms of self-expression, familiar cultural reference points and age-old habits of thought, which often take place in conflicting ways. Society is forced to be flexible, which not everyone can cope with. The fates of many characters in Hermann's short prose are set in a big city (Berlin). They live in a world marked by the loss of secure values and identity models, in which alternative forms of life and community are tested. The characters often give the impression of being emotionally unstable, inconsistent, sometimes unpredictable, unreliable, fragile and vulnerable to manipulation. On the one hand, they often live without deeper emotional bonds, but on the other hand, they long for them. They rarely belong to the system of the typical family, but this one, positively perceived, seems to be on the horizon of the systems they form, quasi-familial communities, but just as important as the typical family. Both in the system of the traditional family and in the new patterns of friendship relations, individuals feel lonely. Not infrequently it is loneliness in twos or in larger groups, exacerbated by a lack of real communication, which often contributes to the breakdown of the system.

The present dissertation, entitled *Stille Perturbationen. (Kon)figurationen der Instabilitäten im Schaffen Judith Hermanns* (Silent perturbations. Creations and configurations of instability in Judith Hermann's work), explores a subject matter which current research takes into account only marginally. It aims to draw attention to (con)figurations of instability in the author's short stories. Four volumes of short stories are analysed: *Sommerhaus, später* (1998), *Nichtsals Gespenster* (2003), *Alice* (2009) and *Lettipark* (2016). This research examines both the figurative constellations shown by Hermann, through which she explores the existential problem of her generation, characterised by instability and disorders or lack of communication, and the writer's minimalist literary strategies. The dissertation refers to Niklas Luhmann's "social systems theory" and its successors. Hermann makes no secret that the configurations of her prose are determined by the socio-cultural and mental contexts of the present. Therefore, employing a sociological perspective to analyse literary figures seems justified. The dissertation uses the conceptual tools of Niklas Luhmann, who places the phenomenon of "communication", also highlighted in Judith Hermann's texts, at the centre of his reflection. In attempting to demonstrate the usefulness of Luhmann's theory for literary studies, I follow, among others,

Carsten Gansel, Norman Ächtler, Linda Simonis, Paweł Zimniak and Wolfgang Brylla. Like the authors mentioned here, I focus on Luhmannian concepts of the system and its disorders. These serve to capture the unstable relationships depicted in the texts, as well as the inner world of the confused characters. Particular attention is paid to the question of how (con)figurations are affected by perturbations, i.e. additional factors that disrupt already unstable relationships, such as illness, loss or even unexpected visits or travel, which can also throw characters off balance.

After a brief introduction depicting the instability of contemporary times, the dissertation presents the life and work of Judith Hermann. Since Hermann's texts are read as being part of the *Fräuleinwunder*, the next chapter of the dissertation is devoted to this current. In addition to Judith Hermann, authors such as Jenny Erpenbeck (born 1967), Felicitas Hoppe (born 1960), Zoë Jenny (born 1974), Juli Zeh (born 1974) or Julia Franck (born 1970), among others, are mentioned.

In the next chapter, on the question of genre, the features of a story and a short form called short story are presented. The next chapter is an attempt to classify Hermann's texts against the currents of contemporary literature. In addition to the aforementioned *Fräuleinwunder* current, Hermann's short stories are read as popular literature, as well as literature associated with Berlin and turn-of-the-century literature.

Hermann's characters are distinguished by their distanced attitude to the people around them, uncertainty of their own identity, inability to make decisions, passivity, melancholy and coldness. The distance stems from lack of a relationship with oneself and the world, and a deficit of successful relationships. This is reflected in the characters' malaise, their vague longings, their search for something indefinable, and their hope for a successful relationship. Hermann's characters seem not only passive but even indifferent to the people around them. Apathetic and aloof, the characters go through their lives as spectators, as external observers, rather than as committed actors who can confront the complex present. It is also violence in Hermann's texts, which has so far been passed over in research. Another important strand of research concerns the political in Hermann's seemingly apolitical short prose. Anke Biendarra concludes that the personal is also political, especially since the focus on the private sphere is inseparable from the experience of living in a globalised world.

In the next chapter, the research methodology is presented. The discussion concerns the notions mentioned above, related to social systems theory, useful in text analyses, such as communication, including intimate communication, as well as irritation and disorder.

In the analytical part of the dissertation, Judith Hermann's narratives are analysed in detail with the use of the aforementioned theoretical instruments based on Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory.

The analytical chapter "Figuraler Gefühlshaushalt" (Figurative emotional states) contains an analysis of the world depicted in the selected stories according to the categories: disturbed communication, identification or lack thereof, including the questions: body (sexuality) and women's genealogies as well as other references to family. The next subchapter is devoted to distancing and shows this problem on three planes: the topographical plane, the plane of relationships and the plane of coping with death. A separate subchapter is devoted to the analysis of irritation.

The next chapter contains an analysis of existential instabilities, taking into account three phenomena: states of suspension, existential disorders exemplified by illnesses, loss of control and compensation.

The next chapter is devoted to the structural features of the narrative plane and takes into account narrative techniques, minimalist character occurrence and character constellations in single stories. The second subchapter contains the role of "blank spaces", taking into account the irritation potential of "indeterminate spaces".

The final analytical chapter presents concluding remarks.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Beata Gorycka". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Beata" and the last name "Gorycka" written in a single continuous line.