

Lars Richter

Preußner, Heinz-Peter (Hg.). Juli Zeh

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After the publication of *ZwischenWelten*, Juli Zeh's most recent novel, co-authored with Simon Urban, the author once again was omnipresent in German media while the novel itself topped the bestseller charts. Zeh's ubiquitous presence in the literary landscape finds itself matched by increasing scholarly attention. In 2021, the venerable journal *TEXT+KRITIK* published its first issue dedicated to the work of Zeh, entitled *Divergenzen des Schreibens* and edited by Klaus Schenk and Christina Rossi. A mere two years later, this new volume, edited by Heinz-Peter Preußner, is further testament to the ongoing scholarly interest in Zeh's work. Despite its shortness – the issue barely crosses the one-hundred-page mark – the volume does not lack in scope. Its nine essays cover aspects ranging from narratology to adaptation to literary awards, and, not surprisingly, given Zeh's academic training in law, the relationship between literature and law.

The aforementioned scope of topics finds its echo in the diverse approaches the individual authors take in their analyses. Stephen Brockmann dedicates his essay to the question of how liberalism is conceptualized in Zeh's novels, while Agnes Mueller, a cousin of the author, chooses to write her analysis of the blurring of textual boundaries in *Unterleuten* in the form of a personal letter, thus referencing Zeh's own poetics lecture *Treideln* from 2013. Other contributions venture into previously unexplored scholarly territory, like Sarah Maaß in her essay on awards and their implication for Zeh's position in the literary field, or Heinz-Peter Preußner's aptly titled "Ungeheures, Unerhörtes," an examination of plot twists that covers the entirety of Zeh's oeuvre so far. Michael Töteberg, in turn, focuses on adaptations of Zeh's second novel *Spieltrieb* for the stage as well as the big and the small screen, of which a Brazilian television series from 2013, *A Menina sem Qualidades*, is arguably the least known and therefore the most surprising discovery. Matteo Galli, in his critical essay dedicated to the representation of rural East Germany, takes Zeh's ruminations on kitsch, as outlined in *Treideln*, and applies them to *Unterleuten* and *Über Menschen*, whereas Michael Vauth connects the dystopian aspects of Zeh's writing by bringing into dialogue *Spieltrieb*, *Corpus Delicti*, and *Leere Herzen*. What emerges is a kaleidoscopic picture of Zeh's work that affirms, adds, and expands previously existing scholarship on the prominent author.

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Quite fittingly, two contributions by Zeh herself open and close the issue. The interview with Heinz-Peter Preußner on literary practices and poetics may not add anything substantial that Zeh has not expressed elsewhere in greater detail; at the same time, it serves as an apt summary of her current poetological positions. Of perhaps greater interest is the collection of textual fragments that open the volume. It consists of beginnings from four novels that Zeh, for one reason or another, either never finished or left unpublished. On the one hand, these fragments illustrate the remarkable productivity of Zeh, as the projected page count of the unfinished novels ranges from twenty to more than eight-hundred pages. On the other hand, they allow readers to draw connections to works that Zeh did decide to publish, as is the case with *Wolfenstein*, a fragment from 2009 comprised of e-mails that now reads like a precursor to *Zwischen Welten*, the 2023 novel co-written with Simon Urban that is entirely comprised of text messages the two protagonists sent one another. Lastly, after reading these four fragments, one cannot help but wonder how many more unfinished projects are stored on Zeh's hard drives that one day will enlarge her already vast literary oeuvre.

Because of the topical range of contributions, the volume is suitable for academic readers who are less familiar with Zeh's literary oeuvre as well as for those who want to deepen their scholarly understanding of the author's work. Commendably, the volume thus offers a concise yet comprehensive overview of the status quo of scholarship dedicated to Germany's most prominent representative of a politically engaged contemporary literature.