

Anna Elisabet Weirauch (1887-1970)

“Could love be a sin?” This question raised in Zarah Leander’s song would certainly have been denied by Mellita Rudloff - the protagonist of the cult book “Der Skorpion” (i.e., “The Scorpion”). Real love - like the love she felt for her beloved Olga Rado - did not have anything to do with dirt or sin. The writer Anna Elisabet Weirauch (1887-1970) wrote “Der Skorpion” in 1919, that is, at a time when intimate relationships between women were risqué.

The issue of intimate relationships between women seemed to be important to Elisabet Weirauch. She did not stop with the first volume: in 1921 it was followed by the second and in 1931 by the third part of what became a trilogy. In the early 90ies a new edition of the complete trilogy was republished. Even before in 1977 – without permission from the publisher – the “Lesbische Aktionszentrum Berlin” had already reproduced the first volume. They wished to make it accessible to our lesbian community because it is an important document of our not very well documented history. The trilogy was also recognized abroad: between 1932 and 1975 several translations appeared in the USA.

“Der Skorpion” is one of the first novels written in German which openly talks about lesbian relationships in a positive way. What is the book about? The protagonist Mellita Rudloff, shortly called Mette, grows up in a bourgeois but unloving and strict family from Berlin. She is 20 years old when she first meets 10 year older Olga Rado, and she immediately admires the woman from Vienna for her knowledge, her charm and her beauty. They slowly developed a deep intellectual friendship which becomes accompanied by more and more erotic. It finally results in the first wild romantic night whose description was unique and must have been provoking at the time.

Mette’s family does not appreciate the obvious affection between the women. They hired a detective and later a psychiatrist to try to stop their intimate relationship and “cure” Mette. Since this does not work out, the family accuses Olga of seduction of a minor. When the police comes to Olga’s pension room, Olga denies her intimate relationship

with Mette. Since she has been already reported to the police back in Austria, she does not stand the pressure any longer.

She finally commits suicide shortly after breaking with Mette. Fearing discrimination Mette tries to escape by marrying somebody, but when she inherits a considerable fortune a little later - by that time she is of age - she breaks the engagement, leaves her family and starts to travel. In Munich she dives into the homosexual subculture and starts a love affair. But a romantic affair without intellectual stimulation does not satisfy Mette for long. She goes to Hamburg and once more tries to have a “normal” life.

In Berlin she gets swept away by a new love affair with Cora von Gjellerström who years ago used to be Olga’s lover. It was Cora who once gave to Olga a cigarette box with had a scorpion engraved because the scorpion stands for a creature who is able to kill itself with its stinger in a desperate situation. Mette finally start a new life on the country. Although the relationship with Cora does not last, and she gets used to be on her own, a future intimate relationship is not precluded.

Weirauch not only traces the development of a lesbian woman in a very sensitive way but also describes different forms of discrimination that lesbian women (and gay men) experienced at the time. In contrast to contemporary pieces of literature she did not associate homosexuality with crime, illness or sin. Although it was very popular for the time to discuss why a women would turn into a lesbian, she also never focused on that aspect. Maybe this explains why “The Skorpion” was very popular during the Weimar Republic - and not only among a lesbian readership as several reviews prove. Hilde Radusch, a Berlin witness, says that the book made a deep impression on her because she could recognize herself.

It is remarkable that Weirauch picked such a touchy topic for her debut as a writer. Before she already had gotten a name as an actor. Born in Galatz, Romania, as the youngest of 4 children on the 7th of August 1887, Weirauch moves with her mother to Germany when her father – the founder of the Bank of Romania – passed away in 1891. After attending the “Höhere Töchterschule”, Weirauch studied singing and acting. Soon she became a member of Max Reinhardt’s prestigious ensemble at the Deutsche

Theater, with which she performed “Wintermärchen” (“The Winter’s Tale”) by Shakespeare in 1906. Although she had been writing during her time as an actress, she discovered only after the end of the war that her real talent was writing and this was the beginning of her long career as a writer. During her life she wrote more than 60 novels, which partially appeared in series in several journals and newspapers. In many of her novels women are the protagonists as, for example, in “Ruth Meyer” (1922), “Lotte” (1932) or “Das Rätsel Manuela” (1939), and in most cases the plot takes place in Berlin.

However, except “Der Tag der Artemis” which depicts a homoerotic adolescence friendship, “Der Skorpion” is Weirauch’s only novel in which she writes about lesbian love. On the other hand, “Der Skorpion” is her only trilogy, a fact from which one may conclude that she must have been intensely preoccupied writing the book. Did she write it for an educational purpose only, or does the “Der Skorpion” also contain autobiographical narratives? One can only speculate.

Since the mid 20s for the rest of her life she lived with Helena Geisenhainer, a Dutch woman 10 years her junior. In the 30s they both moved from Berlin Schöneberg to Gastag in Bavaria. In order for her work to still be published she became a member of propaganda minister Goebbels’ “Reichsschrifttumskammer” but she was not a member of the Nazi party NSDAP. During the Nazi regime she published at least 21 novels. The books she wrote during that time which are available today seem that to be free of Nazi ideology; at least they hardly differ in content and style from her earlier work. Only one of her books, “Der Skorpion”-trilogy was set on the index of dangerous and unwanted literature and had to be removed from the bookstores and the libraries during the Nazi time.

After the second world war Elisabeth Weirauch and her friend lived in Munich; in 1961 they returned to Berlin and stayed in Käthe-Dorsch institution for former actresses. She kept on writing until shortly before her death on December 21, 1970. Helena Geisenhainer died on August 10, 1990. Both found their last home at a cemetery in Berlin Reinickendorf.

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Anita Winter (Translation, Berkeley/Erlangen 2005)

Remarks:

- In 1992/1993 the “Feministischer Buchverlag Wiesbaden” published the trilogy “Der Skorpion”. The first volume is out of print (as well as the next edition published with “Ullstein Verlag”).
- Some of her books as well as other documents from her estate can be found in “Lesbenarchiv Spinnboden” (Anklamer Strasse 38, 10115 Berlin).
- For cemetery tourists: Domkirchhof St. Hedwig, Ollenhauerstr. 27, Berlin Reinickendorf (Abt. FIII, Reihe 2, Nr. 14/15).

Proposal for quotation

Author name, author first name year: text. Ingeborg Boxhammer/Christiane Leidinger: online-project lesbian history. translation by translator first name name (year).

URL:<<http://www.lesbengeschichte.de>>