

Marion Tauschwitz, *Hilde Domin: Dass ich sein kann, wie ich bin. Biografie*. Mainz: André Thiele, 2011. 606 pp. 16,90 €.

Hilde Domin (1909-2006) is not well-known outside Germany these days as a major twentieth-century poet. But that was not always the case, and Marion Tauschwitz's lovingly written yet authoritative and detailed biography may well encourage a revival of interest.

For those of us who knew Domin in her last decades, when accolades rolled in and she seemed a fixture in contemporary German letters, this book offers a sharp corrective on a life that was troubled in early years by extended exile, marital tensions, and near-constant sense of restless alienation.

Born into a family of assimilated Jews "im großbürgerlichen Stil" (23) in Köln, Hilde Löwenstein began her university studies in Heidelberg in law but then switched to philosophy and attended the lectures of Karl Jaspers. While in Heidelberg she met Erwin Walter Palm, also Jewish, a southern-looking, "dandyhaft" man who, despite a successful career as an archaeologist and cultural historian, wrote poems and plays throughout his life that were never as successful as his wife's were to become.

Their marital life together was troubled almost from the start. For one thing, political developments were dire. The rise of Nazi influence forced the Palms to escape to Italy, where Erwin completed his Doktorarbeit on Ovid and Hilde taught German. They married in 1936 and escaped to England. When war threatened there, they arrived as refugees in the Dominican Republic, where they remained for most of the next eleven years. From the beginning, Hilde was gifted in writing, but these years were spent largely helping her husband, editing and typing his manuscripts and lectures.

Tauschwitz provides wonderfully evocative descriptions, particularly at the outset and close of chapters. Santa Domingo was initially exotic and charming, but harsher realities set in and the Palms increasingly felt alienated. When Hilde turned to poetry, Erwin dismissed her work: "die Dichtkunst sollte Männerdomäne bleiben" (221).

In 1954 the Palms returned to Germany for the first time in 21 years. Hilde adopted her literary name—Domin—for the first time, honoring their former country of safe haven. Her first major book, *Nur eine Rose als Stütze*, appeared in 1959 and proved a great success in terms of sales and readership. Her readings were often wildly popular. Then the prizes began rolling in, from the Bundesverdienstkreuz (1983) to the Konrad-Adenauer Preis (1995) and a nomination for the Nobel Prize. Domin's literary criticism, particularly *Doppelinterpretationen* (1966) and *Wozu Lyrik heute* (1968), established her firmly as a first-rate scholar as well as poet.

Marion Tauschwitz, Domin's personal secretary in the waning years of her life, has provided an authoritative, sensitive, incisive yet discreet account of a fascinating literary life. She does not shy away from Domin's personal shortcomings or marital troubles, but she also does not venture beyond the facts. Tauschwitz had access to thousands of pages of letters, diaries, and poems, indicated in more than 80 pages of helpful background material.

It is difficult to imagine any life account of Hilde Domin this "souverän" emerging anytime soon. It is definitely a masterpiece of its kind.

David Radavich