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Meine Mutter sagte zu mir / My Mother Said

Ute Reich

M. Grunwald

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Poetry by Mary Grunwald and Ute Reich

Mary Grunwald and Ute Reich were women's studies students at the Kennedy Institute of American Studies, Free University of Berlin, in the summer of 1978. Grunwald, 36, writes poems and journalism; makes linoleum block prints, a sample of which appears on this page; and works in community politics. Reich, 50, wrote two novels (still in the drawer) before her marriage and published short stories in the sixties. She has two grown children and is vice-chairman of the Deutscher Staatsbürgerinnen Verband, a traditional German women's organization. As a result of the term's encouragement, she has started writing again.

For the Teacher

Rummaging through my images
Looking for something you'd like
And be like, to give you.
Not the missionaries, too many
Misunderstandings; but something of
that.

Not Jesus and his news agency,
Too irascible; but something of that.
Oh here, the original hot lunch
program,

Loaves, fishes, something of that.
Better, the bread by itself.
Let it be your own favorite
Hot white from Second Avenue,
Dixie pone, steamed Boston brown,
bagel,

Wholewheat healthnut natural or even
Limp all-American lunchbox slab—
Whatever you love. You be the bread
And there you are by the lake
Five loaves only, remember, the
thousands

Pouring in hungry, hold it, wasn't
This supposed to be a desert.
And marvelously you are enough
You go around blessing the bellies
Telling them, You are full now
(Your quarrels are beautiful
Your poems will be patched up)
Go nourish the rest of the body.

Everyone is satisfied. The big moon rises.
One committee collects leftovers in
baskets
Another organizes buddy-groups for the
skinny-dip.

Mary Grunwald (30 June 1978)

Meine Mutter sagte zu mir,
wenn du alt bist,
darfst du deine Hand
nicht mehr flach
vor dich hinlegen,
so . . . ,—
dann sieht man
die schrumpelige Haut
und die blauen Adern
treten hervor.
Wenn du eine Faust machst,
so . . . ,—
ist sie glatt und gespannt!
Der Unterschied ist
wirklich verblüffend.

Ich hatte selbst schon
daran gedacht,
in Zukunft immer
Handschuhe zu tragen,
wenn ein jüngerer Mann
mit mir ausgeht.
Aber vielleicht reicht
Mutters Trick noch,
dass er die ersten
Pigmentflecken für
Sommersprossen hält,
falls sein Blick von
meinem Gesicht abgleitet.

Wann werden die Lachfältchen
um die Augen
Krähfüsse sein?
Wenn erst die Wimpern
ausfallen,
hilft auch Mascara
nicht mehr.
Könnte ich doch
Gelassenheit auftragen
mit der Kräutermaske . . .
Das Gesicht lässt sich
nicht ballen.

Ute Reich (1978)

My mother said,
when you're old
mustn't let your hand lie
flat out before you;
people will notice
the withered skin,
the blue veins
sticking out.
If you make a fist
it's smooth and taut.
Look; the difference
is really amazing.

It had occurred to me
from now on always
to wear gloves
when a younger man
goes out with me.
Maybe
using Mother's trick
he still might think
the first liver spots
are freckles—
should his gaze
leave my face.

When will the laugh lines
at the eyes' edges
be crow's feet?
What good is mascara
after the lashes
have fallen out?
If only the herbal mask
could let tranquility
work deep down . . .
You can't make a fist
with your face.

Ute Reich (1978)
(Translation:
M. Grunwald)



Print by Mary Grunwald