Kurt Drawert – Biography

born 1956 in Hennigsdorf (Berlin).
1982 - 1985 Study „Institute for Literature“ in Leipzig 1982-1985,
since 1986 self-employed author
since 1990 manys artist`s residences in several foreign countries
1995/96 Villa Massimo (Rom, Italy)
2010 New-York-Price (New York, USA)
2013 House of Literature Prague (Prague, Czech Republic)
2014 Cultural Academy Tarabya, (Istanbul, Turkey)
since 1996 lives and works in Darmstadt

Books – Selection

„Zweite Inventur“, poems, Aufbau Verlag, Berlin and Weimar 1987
„Privateigentum“, poems, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt/Main 1989
„Spiegelland. Ein deutscher Monolog“, novel, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt/Main 1992
„Haus ohne Menschen. Zeitmutschriften“. Essays, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt/Main 1993
„Wo es war“, poems, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt/Main 1996
„Alles ist einfach“, plays for theatre, 1997
„Steinzeit“, plays for theatre, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt/Main 1999
„Reisen im Rückwärtsgang“, Essays, Arche Verlag, Hamburg and Zürich 2000
„Rückseiten der Herrlichkeit. Texte und Kontexte“. Essays, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt/Main 2001
„Frühjahrsfolktion“, poems, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt/Main 2002
„Emma. Ein Weg“, Flaubert-Essay, with photos by Ute Döring, Sonderzahl-Verlag, Wien 2005
„Spiegelland. Roman, Prosa, Material“. Luxbooks Verlag, Wiesbaden 2014
and essays on literature, Luxbooks Verlag, Wiesbaden 2014

Besides: plays for theatre, publications, essays and translations

Prices - Selection

1989 Leonce-und-Lena-Price
1991 Price of literature by Jürgen-Ponto-Stiftung
1993 Price of Poems, Meran, Italien
1993 Ingeborg-Bachmann-Price, Austria
1994 Uwe-Johnson-Price
1995 Rom-Price, Villa Massimo, Italien
1997 Nikolaus-Lenau-Price
2000 Arno-Schmidt-Price
2002 Schiller-Price
2008 Rainer-Malowski-Price
2009 New-York-Price
2013 Werner-Bergengruen-Price
2014 Robert-Gernhardt-Price

More about Kurt Drawert

Kurt Drawert has been recognized as an important voice in contemporary German
literature. A German writer born in 1956 near the former East Berlin, he lived in Dresden and
Leipzig in the 1970s and `80s, and moved to the former West Germany in 1990, initially near
Bremen and later to Stuttgart. In the 1990s, he traveled to several countries including
Australia, Brazil and Russia, and spent a year in Rome, Italy. In 1996, he moved to Darmstadt where he lives with his family now.

In addition to working as a freelance writer, Drawert runs training workshops for writers at the Center for Young Literature in Darmstadt.

In the GDR, Drawert belonged to a subversive young literary scene, to which socialist realism had become meaningless. Because of his critical stance toward the totalitarian ideology of the East German system, Drawert was excluded from the pursuit of higher education. He worked for many years as an unskilled laborer in various occupations, which allowed him to gather valuable and influential life experiences in factories and later in the library. Later on he was allowed to study at the Leipzig Institute for Literature, where he completed his degree in 1986.

His first volume of poems, Second Inventory, was published in 1987 at the Aufbau Verlag in East Berlin. The title alludes to Günter Eich’s 1948 poem 'Inventory' which in its time constituted a new literary tendency in its use of plain language, parataxis, and concrete imagery, commenting both on the general debasement of language and the Nazi experience. This frames Drawert’s own poetry. Second Inventory was severely criticized by the East German government. However, when the prestigious Frankfurter publisher Suhrkamp republished the collection under the title Private Property in 1989, it immediately gained a much wider interest. Numerous awards and scholarships have followed since then.

Drawert’s work includes poetry, prose, drama, and essays. Much of his writing comments on the historical process and reception of reunification between East and West Germany in the 1990s, which, according to him, have resulted in the problematic issue of individual agency in the course of a depleted history. Indeed, language, its potential, its power, and the abuse thereof stand at the center of Drawert’s review of a life lived in a nation in which "anyone could buy innocence by surrendering his conscience to an ideological order."

Drawert’s poetry is primarily concerned with the effect of alienated language on an individual, the breakup of communication, frustration, despair, and existential dispossession. This feeling of dislocation and isolation does not fade with the end of the East German state. It continues – under entirely new commercial conditions – in the West. Without verbal experiment or lyrical rhythms, Drawert’s poetry tends toward prose. Yet this sparseness reflects a complex view of reality, and represents a lyrical attempt at overcoming a certain speechlessness that grew out of the overuse of propaganda and artificial language, both under Communism and capitalism.

His prose also recognizes the intrinsic artificiality of language but highlights and extends it in order to describe life in the GDR. It is an artful combination of narrative and reflection that recreates important memory about the ‘fallen’ GDR, and ultimately also about the relationship between language and freedom. His language philosophy searches for a tabula rasa, an authenticity that would make new and more meaningful communication possible.

His best-known works include Private Property (poetry, 1989); Mirror Country: A German Monologue (novel, 1992); House Without People (essays, 1993); Where It Was (poems, 1996); Stone Age (drama and prose, 1999); The Backside of Glory: Texts and Contexts (essays, 2001); Spring Collection (poems, 2002). All of the above have been published by Suhrkamp in Frankfurt. In 2008, CH Beck in Munich published his latest German-German Wenderoman (reunification novel) I Took My Shadow for Another and Greeted. This novel borrows material from the famous Kaspar Hauser legend, a foundling who was isolated and marginalized, and who symbolizes estrangement from society, language, and religion (ideology). Kaspar Hauser also reflects the very narrow spectrum of human emotion displayed by those around him. In Drawert’s novel, a neglected foundling narrates the demise of the GDR and the many ensuing changes in German society.

In 2009, his play "The Opposite of Nothing at All" premiered in Darmstadt and Frankfurt in time for the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The performance has been likened to Beckett’s Waiting for Godot, but adds a cynical twist while picking up on such diverse themes as the Berlin Wall, the financial crisis, and art history.
Drawert has received many national and international literary awards, including the Leonce and Lena Prize, the Ingeborg-Bachmann-Prize, the Uwe-Johnson-Preis, Nikolaus-Lenau-Prize, and most recently the Rainer-Malkowski-Prize of the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts. His work has been translated into several languages, including Polish, Italian, Romanian, Arabic, English, and French.

He is a member of the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung.