

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Max Frisch (1911-1991)

Introduction

Max Frisch was born and educated in Switzerland, working first as an architect—he drew the design for the central swimming pool in Zuerich--then working as a journalist with the *Neue Zuercher Zeitung*, with which he would stay in close connection all his life. However when it came to post-War consciousness in German—concern with human rights, identity issues, political dignity—he proved to be an exceptional spokesperson for the *whole* German speaking world. His plays, novels, and journalistic works dug deep into the human condition, and he, like Wolf and Grass (ahead), was deeply concerned with the construction of a new German society after the Nazis.

Given the thematic concerns of his work, it is no surprise that in all his major work—novels like *I am not Stiller* or *Homo Faber*, plays like *The Chinese Wall* or *Andorra*—Frisch is writing a quasi autobiography, a dramatization of his own views. In *Montauk*, however, Frisch writes a less fictionally cloaked self-writing, and generates a tight literary squeeze of the events of 'his own life.' (The self-portrait is subtly molded to his own contours: a shy and yet addicted womanizer, a sensualist of the eye and mood, an observing and ironic student of himself, an astute judge of cultural differences.) It is interesting to note the style of this work, which creates self-image through a blend of fictional adroitnesses—mixed up time sequences; sharp flashbacks; mood repetitions, as in the recurrent visions of the misty coast off Long Island—with the realisms of a sixty-three year old man exposing both his lasting romantic nature and the physical/perspectival differences he discovers between himself and the thirty-one year old Lynn.

Reading: Montauk (trans. Skelton) (New York, 1975)

Questions:

Christa Wolf and Max Frisch, as well as Guenter Grass (ahead) all write as voices of the *Nachkriegszeit*, the Post War period of Germany that set in at the middle of the twentieth century. While each of these authors related very differently to the war time, and addressed issues of personal conscience differently, each of them wrestles with human issues raised by the war and its aftermaths. What do you see in common to the works of these three authors, as writers of personal testimony?

You have read some orthodox narrative autobiography in this course—Bismarck, Wagner—in which the narrator speaks in his own voice, not disguising that voice under any more indirect narrative devices. How does Frisch present his own voice in *Montauk*? Do we feel we are hearing *him* in the text?

How does Frisch deal with the issue of 'fame' or 'literary reputation'? Does he define himself in terms of others' views of him, or is he indifferent to others? How does the way one writes his autobiography overlap with the way he deals with others' attitudes toward him?