

Auskünfte: Werkstattgespräche mit DDR-Autoren. Hrsg. v. Anneliese Löffler. 2. Aufl. Berlin u. Weimar: Aufbau-Vlg., 1976. 548 S. 9,90 Mark.

This book is a collection of interviews with some 27 GDR-authors, that have all previously appeared in the Weimarer Beiträge (1968-74). The publication (and republication without change) of this volume reflects a highly favorable reaction to the interview format as a method of gaining acquaintanceship with how literary works come into being, as well as with the author's unrehearsed views on a variety of cultural and political issues. Although the question of the genesis, development, and realization of a literary idea is the one most frequently asked in these interviews, other matters that are commonly dealt with include the role of tradition in the writer's work, his views on the efficacy of literature, and his ideas on future projects and future plans in general. What ineluctably results from the "dialectic" of these interviews is a valuable view of the artist as an individual and as a human being --something that is not always clearly gleaned through a reading of the writer's works.

The fame of the writers interviewed ranges from the internationally well-known to the relatively obscure, and from the older generation (including Apitz, Gotsche, Joho, Lorbeer, Maurer, Renn, Selbmann, and von Wangenheim) to the "second" generation (including de Bruyn, Deicke, Kant, Kunert, Nachbar, Pitschmann, Wiens, Wolf) to the "third" generation (V.Braun, Hammel, Kahlau, Neutsch, Nowotny). Other than Braun, there are no very young writers in this book.

Reprinted in chronological order and with only minor emendations, the interviews usually vary in length from 15 to 25 pages. However, the conversations with Hermann Kant and Christa Wolf are considerably longer. The editor's introduction, the first part of which is particularly helpful, provides a general orientation to the interviews. Additionally, the appendix contains some very handy biographical sketches of the interviewees, along with a list of their most prominent publications. No secondary literature sources are included. The interviewers, together with their credentials and institutions, are listed as well.

This compilation will be especially helpful to those who do not have easy access to issues of the Weimarer Beiträge. It will also be a useful aid to those scholars who want to make convenient comparisons between authorial opinions without resorting to a xerox machine. Hopefully this type of publication will continue, for not only do more recent and future interviewees need to be included (e.g., Karl-Heinz Jakobs), but it would also be advantageous to possess the views of some of the very same writers at later stages in their careers.

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Klaus Jarmatz, Forschungsfeld Realismus: Theorie, Geschichte, Gegenwart. (Berlin: Aufbauvlg., 1975), pp. 311.

The nine essays collected in this volume -- six of which are revisions of earlier publications -- treat a variety of subjects related to the history of socialist literature in Germany and to the present state of literary production and science in the GDR. Thus, of the three original essays, two discuss literature directly, "Erwin Strittmatter" and "Anmerkungen zur neuesten Frosaliteratur der DDR," while the third, which opens the volume, deals with the development of literary criticism in the pre-1945 Communist and anti-fascist movements, as well as in the GDR itself.

Jarmatz is director of the department for the theory of socialist realism of the Institute for Social Sciences of the central committee of the SED, as well as a leading figure in the critics' section of the Schriftstellerverband of the GDR. There is no doubt, then, that this book will find eager readers in those circles where Eastern European pretensions to socialism are accepted uncritically. Hardly more than a cursory glance, however, at the content of Jarmatz' presentations would suffice to reveal a system of intellectual repression under a taut rhetorical surface.

The introductory essay, for example, purporting to present the history of Communist literary criticism in Germany, barely mentions any real history, except of course for perfunctory apostrophes to various party congresses. Yet the development of Communist aesthetics in the twenties and thirties was intimately tied to the smashing of council communism and the Stalinization of the KPD. None of this in Jarmatz:

the left has been excluded from history and Brecht has been post factum assimilated into the mainstream.

Jarmatz applauds the increasing rejection of Lukács' aesthetics. No tears need be shed, but the true character of this rejection has yet to be analyzed. Perhaps the idealist ballast of Lukácsian normative aesthetics conflicts with a heightened instrumentalization of literature by the state. In any case, the political significance of the repression in which Lukács participated -- remember his role in Linkskurve -- cannot be taken back as immediately as, say, Leverkühn tried with Beethoven, simply by sacrificing Lukács' name: the political question remains to be posed.

The worst is yet to come. In an essay originally published in 1969 in Sinn und Form, Jarmatz warms up the old polemic against the Austrian Communist Ernst Fischer, best known to American readers in his Necessity of Art. The events of 1956 in Hungary and Poland, which with Jarmatz with truly exceptional political acumen calls "the attack of the counter-revolution," increased Fischer's estrangement from the bureaucratic consequences of Stalinism. However, he remained active in the KPÖ until his condemnation of the Warsaw Pact invasion of the CSSR led to his expulsion from the party in 1969. Soon, Jarmatz's polemic appeared, taking on a very particular political coloration by identifying Fischer with a "creeping counter-revolution."

The main thrust of Jarmatz's critique -- aside from unsuccessful attempts to associate Fischer with social democracy by taking remarks out of context -- is that Fischer makes alienation the central category of his aesthetics and that his concept of the "human" is ahistorical. Of course alienation has been the key to Western Marxism, while the critique of ahistoricism is made from the standpoint of the most rigid historicism, where all the values implied by the word "human" have been sacrificed to a purely technical instrumentality.

There are serious problems with Fischer's account, but they are not what Jarmatz attacks. Forschungsfeld Realismus is ultimately an orthodox East German account of East Germany's orthodoxy.

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Kaspar, Karlheinz. Sachwörterbuch für den Literaturunterricht, Klassen 9 bis 12. Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigenen Verlag, 1975. 206 pp. 4,20 M.

Both educators studying the educational system of the GDR and students of German literature concerned with developments in the GDR will find this dictionary of literary terms helpful and of interest. This handbook was published as a textbook by an author collective of twenty-four writers at the Pädagogische Hochschule "Clara Zetka" in Leipzig. It was written for classes 5 to 12 in the polytechnical high school to accompany the German text "Lehrbuch für den deutschen Unterricht".

The format of the dictionary is similar to that of v. Wilpert's Sachwörterbuch. A table of contents is included though it seems unnecessary. One problem observed is that the terms are listed under the noun, although this is useful in comparing terms, such as the three types of realism which are thus listed one after the other. There are inconsistencies in the entries chosen: There is a long entry for Soviet literature, but none for the literature of the GDR, let alone for that of England or America. "Sturm und Drang" is listed under "s" but "Die Aufklärung" is under "l" for "Literatur der ...". Odd omissions will be noted, such as "Bearbeitung" which does not appear. A very useful list of literary archives in the GDR and their addresses appears at the end of the volume.

The definitions are guided by Marxist-Leninist aesthetics and socialistic "Kulturpolitik" and written in a concise textbook style, avoiding theoretical arguments. Each entry begins with a terse definition which is followed by examples from world literature and from classical German literature. These examples are then followed by concluding remarks on how this term relates to socialist literary examples from the literature of the GDR and the Soviet Union.

In keeping with the book's purpose of encouraging private study, literature is presented to the student as something important for and part of everyday life. The goal of the handbook thus goes beyond presenting the student with literary terms for understanding humanistic and social realistic literature. It is especially interesting to note the effort to relate antique, traditional and socialist literature. Thus the last visions of the dying Faust are linked with the