

BOOK REVIEWS

We would like to apologize for the omission of a portion of Herman K. Doswald's review of Amerikanische Literaturkritik im Engagement in the Winter, 1979, issue of the GDR Bulletin. The last three sentences of the third paragraph should read as follows:

Richard Wasson's essay on new Marxist criticism appeared originally as an introduction to the November, 1972, issue of College English which was devoted to Marxist criticism. David R. Peck's essay on the sixties' revival of American literature of the thirties, appeared originally in the Fall, 1968, issue of Science and Society. Peck argues convincingly that the revival neglected the importance and scope of Marxism in America in the thirties.

Sehnsucht nach Bomarzo. Reisegedichte. Mit zwölf Federzeichnungen des Autors. By Günter Kunert. Leipzig: Verlag Philip Reclam jun., 1978. 73 pages.

The drawing on the jacket depicts a bearded traveler carried in a sedan-chair by two grim-looking coolies. Perhaps the mode of travel permits the conclusion that instead of providing a panorama of hasty impressions, Kunert will present thorough descriptions of views and events. The figures might suggest marionettes who, with mechanical limbs, are moved through the world as if on a stage. And a stage it seems to be indeed, for Kunert, the narrator, the prose writer, the essayist as well as poet; a stage revealing the landscapes, sounds and people from Wales to Istria, from Vienna to Venice, from Manhattan to Truth or Consequences; a stage where the imperial vestiges of age and familiarity are unveiled and torn down in order for us to view and reflect upon the present core. In all of these poems Kunert's concern is not Socialist Realism in the GDR per se, but human existence revolving in time.

Sehnsucht nach Bomarzo should in many ways be considered an extension of Warnung vor Spiegeln, an excursion behind the looking-glass. The reader finds in the seemingly unimportant, in the unknown and never-to-be-known, and above all, in the passing of time, the fibers of our lives, be they comical or tragic: "Skelett einer römischen Villa,/ leer von Erinnerung"; a small hotel's yard, "ein Schacht . . . sehr eng"; a "grautrauernder Hinterhof" where "fortwährend/ein melancholisches Lied erschallt/das nur für uns noch hörbar ist". Kunert's lyrical voice forces us into involvement with all "Toten, für die nirgendwo/ein Grab ist/ausser in unserem Gedächtnis". He mourns: "Hingestürzte hinterlassen nichts/als das Abbild ihres Falles/und das ist: kein besonderer" and ". . . es hat nie eine Stadt/auf einer Lagune gegeben/Alles Erfindung" and "Die Spuren der toten Indianer/hat die auslaufende Welle gelöscht/wie die unsern". He fears: "Auch hier wie anderswo/trügt der Schein./Die Wahrheit ist/wir fürchten immer wir sind/von Knossos gestartet/und wissen es nicht". Finally, his longing culminates in the title poem: ". . . solcher Landschaft sich innig verbinden:/wenigstens vorübergehend/unsterblich".

It should be stressed, however, that Kunert is very strongly tied to Berlin. Therefore, it was not surprising to find the Berlin poems among his most moving. In one of them he quite frankly describes the goal of our "Reise/durch das Universum/in Richtung des vergessenen Gesetzes/vor dem wir unsere Gebeine ausbreiten wollen/und/um Gnade bitten". Due to Kunert's affinity for a prosaic, almost sparse mode of expression, clear syntax, adherence to capitalization and rules of punctuation, Sehnsucht nach Bomarzo should be easily accessible to students, even at the end of their second year. The wide range of scenery (including the U.S.) will be of topical interest to them, and the seriousness of thought is tempered by the author's own drawings, most of which are delightfully humorous.

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