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Manfred Jäger: Sozialliteraten. Funktion und Selbstverständnis der Schriftsteller in der DDR

Theodor Langenbruch

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Das Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen in Bonn veröffentlicht ein Merkblatt "Reisen in die DDR". Obgleich dieses 51-seitige Büchlein hauptsächlich für Westdeutsche und West-Berliner gedacht ist, enthält es nichtsdestoweniger auch für Amerikaner interessante Tatsachen und Hinweise.

(F. H.)

BOOK REVIEWS

Manfred Jäger : Sozilliteraten.

Funktion und Selbstverständnis der Schriftsteller in der DDR

(Bertelsmann Universitätsverlag, Düsseldorf, 1973); 240 Seiten, ISBN 3-571-09289-9

Jäger's theme is the process of emancipation (and, to some extent, of disillusionment) of the GDR authors within the framework of the accepted new social order. The term "Sozilliteraten" is not used in a polemical sense, but refers to the "relative autonomy of literature" in the GDR. The most important chapter of this volume is "Auf dem langen Weg zur Wahrheit. Fragen, Antworten und neue Fragen in den Erzählungen, Aufsätzen und Reden Christa Wolfs." These 90 pages include a general discussion of topics such as optimism, spontaneity, the typical, positive and mixed heroes, naturalistic and symbolic writing, the "language problem", literary traditions, and West Germany reception of GDR literature. As for Wolf's work, Jäger emphasizes structural, thematic, and ideological continuity, while acknowledging differentiations in several respects. In addition, this book contains interesting portraits of the poets Kunze, Braun, and Biermann, an extended essay "Brecht und sein Theater im schwierigen Milieu der DDR", another essay on Wolfgang Harich, and one on the GDR reception of Peter Weiss. The wide thematic range of this book is underscored by the last item: "Das ganz neue Lachen. Die Funktion von Humor und Satire in der marxistischen

Theorie des Komischen und in der Praxis des politischen Kabarets der DDR."

Jäger's method is close interpretation of selected passages. In trying to detect underlying inner tensions and hidden conflicts, he uses a sort of textual psychoanalysis. At times, his admitted "Lust zum Pointieren" leads him to bold paraphrases and overinterpretations. Thus, Mayer's problematical "slave language" metaphor is not illuminating with respect to Biermann's Dra-Dra, even if Jäger speaks of emancipated slaves. In the somewhat abstract essay on Harich, the reviewer would have liked to find a broader discussion of the objects of Harich's polemics, e.g. of Heiner Müller.

Despite such occasional shortcomings Jäger's book as a whole is a major contribution in the field of GDR research -- it is a pleasure to read stimulating, and well documented (251 footnotes on the Christa Wolf chapter alone give an idea of his thorough research and documentation)

(Theodor Langenbruch)

FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

Basis V, which will appear in June, 1975, carries a number of articles on GDR literature, among them Helen Fehervary's "Hölderlin und Marx in der DDR", Andreas Huyssen's "Auf den Spuren Ernst Blochs -- Nachdenken über Christa Wolf" and Paul Michael Lützeler's "Goethes Faust und der Sozialismus."

Theodor Langenbruch's Dialectical Humor in Kant's Novel "Die Aula" (Bonn: Bouvier Abhandlungen zur Kunst Musik- und Literaturwissenschaft No. 163, 1974) will be delayed until early fall.
