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NEWSLETTER FOR LITERATURE AND CULTURE IN THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

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GDR BULLETIN

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FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Midwest Marxist Literary Group is currently soliciting papers for this year's Marxist Forum at the Midwest Modern Language Association meeting, Nov. 4-6 in St. Louis. The topic which has been tentatively approved is "Literature and Revolution in the Bicentennial Year". This subject provides a wide range of possibilities for prospective contributors. One possibility is the analysis of revolution (not restricted to the American Revolution) as reflected in literature. Studies of a cross-cultural nature (e.g. the effect of the French, Cuban, or Vietnamese Revolution on European, American, or Third World writers) are included under this heading. Another alternative concerns a focus on the development of revolutionary movements which have not or did not culminate in wide-scale confrontation. Studies of the Jakobiner movement in Germany in the late 18th century or aspects of minority movements in the USA today are examples in this area. Finally, one may choose to deal with the pedagogical problem of teaching literature dealing with revolution or teaching revolutionary thought.

Papers should be no more than 8 pages single-spaced and should be submitted by the beginning of May to the coordinators for this Forum: Ileana Rodriguez and Marc Zimmerman, 1020 Sixth St., Minneapolis, Minn. 55414, or Bob Holub, University of Wisconsin-Madison, German Department, 1220 Linden Drive, 8th Floor Van Hise Hall, Madison, Wisc. 53706. Questions concerning the appropriateness of topics should likewise be directed to the coordinators. Collective projects are encouraged.

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STUDENTS PERFORM PLENZDORF

On April 24 and 25, 1976, the University of Connecticut will present the American premiere of Ulrich Plenzdorf's drama, "Die neuen Leiden des jungen W." The performance, under the direction of Herbert Lederer, will be performed by German department students from the first year through the graduate level. The production is based on Lederer's own bilingual adaptation, interspersing English commentary into the German text, so that it will be accessible to an audience with a minimal knowledge of German.

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GDR FILMS

The following résumés of the GDR films now being distributed in the U.S.is reproduced from the February 1976 calendar of the Pacific Film Archive, 2621 Durant Ave., Berkeley, California, as was the information in the last issue of the Bulletin. Films can be rented through Audio Brandon, 34 MacQuesten Parkway, Mount Vernon, N.Y. 10550.

THE LEGEND OF PAUL AND PAULA (DIE LEGENDE VON PAUL UND PAULA)

"The term 'legend' used for this love story is justified at least in one important aspect: love is depicted as something wonderful which promotes and challenges man in his entirety. Carow, Plenzdorf and their star Angelica Domrose present the need for love and its fulfillment as something natural, most human. They do not withhold anything from us and we see and hear that Paula enjoys love. Anyone may say that louder or softer tones might be more adequate. What I consider important is that nothing is being advertised. Nothing is viewed through a keyhole, but with the door open, free, natural and self-understood, as I have hardly known it from any other DEFA film. Unfortunately there are a few weak spots which the authors have inserted into their splendid dish. It seems to me that one must not present the social environment, the world of labor so simply and polemically with such powerful partners as Paula. And this is what happens here . . . I am at a loss to understand why a child must die from a road accident so that Paul creates trouble with Paula. Doesn't Paul offer other causes for conflicts and difficulties? And Paula's death? Does the legend need it at all? Does her death raise the effect of her example, the demand on Paul, the transposition of the imaginary story into the social reality of the public?" —Peter Ahrend in the GDR journal *Weltbuhne* (October 4, 1973). Directed by Heiner Carow. Screenplay by Carow and Ulrich Plenzdorf. With Angelica Domröse, Winfried Glatzeder, Rolf Ludwig. (1973, 104 mins, color, 35mm, English titles)

THE NAKED MAN IN THE PLAYING FIELD (DER NACKTE MANN AUF DEM SPOTPLATZ)

According to Museum of Modern Art (New York) film curator Adrienne Mancia: "One of the more interesting recent films, THE NAKED MAN IN THE PLAYING FIELD by the experienced director Konrad Wolf, meditates on the role of the artist and his relation to the community for which he creates. This personal, psychological film attempts to deal with an inner as well as an exterior reality, and in so doing may foreshadow another trend in the cinematic future of the German Democratic Republic." One German critic, Fred Gehler, noted: "There is, in the first place, an impression of modesty and unobtrusiveness. There are only a few films in our production which are, just as this one, bereft of anything spectacular or intensely strained. There is nothing like imposed emotionality . . . That modesty has a lot to do with the artistic-political morality of the authors of this film, in relation to the subject as well as to the public." Kurt Böwe stars as the sculptor Kemmel. Directed by Konrad Wolf. With Ursula Karusseit. (1974, 100 mins, 35mm, Color, English titles)

I WAS NINETEEN (ICH WAR NEUNZEHN)

A very personal film by Konrad Wolf, son of the famous physician and author Friedrich Wolf. In 1933, Konrad Wolf fled Nazi Germany with his father, taking refuge in the Soviet Union. In 1945, at age 19, Konrad Wolf re-entered Berlin as a soldier in the Red Army. This film, set in 1945 at the time of the convergence of war and peace, remains a remarkable and intelligently reflective autobiographical work. Critic Günther Sobe has written of it: "I WAS 19 is a most human film. It transforms images of heroes into images of real people' It is tough and still full of poetic feeling. Many experiences from the past twenty years had to flow into this film in order to produce it in its present form. I WAS 19 is one of the best DEFA films in existence. It is a film deeper and more suggestive than others: a film which intends to supply answers to complicated questions of that time by using an impressively artistic language. This film does not give anything away to anybody, but demands participation and thought. Anybody who goes to a cinema to see real art and not prescriptions, must go and see this film." Directed by Konrad Wolf. Written by Wolf and Wolfgang Kohlhaase. With Jaecki Schwarz, Wassili Liwanow. (1968, 118 mins, English titles)

FAREWELL (ABSCHIED)

This film by Egon Günther is adapted from a well-known novel by Johannes R. Becher, which evoked the author's childhood and youth in Munich just beforfe and during the first World War. One of the most ambitious DEFA films of recent years, FAREWELL was the subject of "big discussions" at the time of its release, meaning it was a very controversial film; many in the avant garde circles praised it for introducing a positive formalistic element into the structure of DEFA films. At the same time the critic for *Neues Deutschland* accused the film of "surrendering its effect for intellectual opulence, for a dialectical stratification of a literary prototype." Directed by Egon Günther. Screenplay by Günther and Günter Kunert, based on the novel by Becher. Music by Paul Dessau. Sets by Harald Horn. With Jan Spitzer, Rolf Ludwig, Katharina Lind. (1968, 115 mins, English titles)

THE DEVIL'S ELIXIR (DIE ELIXIERE DES TEUFELS)

A delightful adaptation, in color, of E. T. A. Hoffman's novel, true to the late romantic spirit of the original, and to the particular blend of realism and fantasy which characterizes *The Tales of Hoffman.* Critic Hans Dieter Tok, writing in *Wochenpost,* praised director Ralf Kirsten for creating "a remarkable adaptation of literature which respects the original while interpreting it in an up-to-date manner. He makes use of the entire emotional and rational wealth of the story and consistently uses it for filmic purposes. And that means the film captivates through its pictorial composition replete with high aesthetic culture and full of fascinating beauty, by combining high viewing and entertaining values with committed morality." Directed by Ralf Kirsten. A co-production between DEFA (GDR) and Brandov Studio (Czechoslovakia). With Benjamin Besson, Jaroslava Schallerova, Andrzej Kopiczinski. (1972, 105 mins, color, 35mm, English titles)

THE SEVENTH YEAR (DAS SIEBENTE JAHR)

THE SEVENTH YEAR describes seven days of a week during the seventh year of a marriage between a heart surgeon and her actor husband. The director, Frank Vogel, has stated of his film: "There are too few contemporary films in which a woman and her problems occupy a central and pivotal position. Too frequently the woman plays an auxiliary and accessory role within the story that is being narrated. This is really a contradiction given the place women occupy in the life of our society. The concerns of the film, however, are not iron-clad rules for me. But what happens today interests me much more than an historical occurrence." THE SEVENTH YEAR, as a probing work dealing with contemporary life in the GDR, was both praised and attacked in the press; one critic, Harmut Albrecht, noted of the central character in a line which sounds like inverted praise: "Her inner conflict is, however, not sufficiently clearcut in the staging: the absolutely necessary reference of her collective problems and solutions of problems to the central figure is not consistent enough" Written and Directed by Frank Beyer (born 1929, first film 1958, 7 features to date). With Jessy Rameik, Wolfgang Kieling, Ulrich Thein. (1969, 82 mins, English titles)

MY DEAR ROBINSON (MEIN LIEBER ROBINSON)

Writing of MY DEAR ROBINSON in *Kino DDR,* Karl-Hein Tetzer notes: "Cameraman Roland Graf- 'original, interesting, and gifted' has directed his first film. The title of the film is MEIN LIEBER ROBINSON. In humor and poetry the film tells the story of a playful 18-year-old boy, caught in his own world of fantasy, who unexpectedly becomes a father and examines his thoughts and feelings in a naive, strange and often comical way. Caused by his friends, workmates and the mother of his child to reflect upon his situation he manages to take stock of himself, and confesses his love and responsibilities." Directed by Roland Graf. Screenplay by Graf and Klaus Poche. With Jan Bereska, Gabrielle Simon, Alfred Muller. (1972, 81 mins, English titles)

DO YOU KNOW URBAN?

"Ulrich Plenzdorf has written a novel based on a true story by the journalist Gisela Karau, about young people in the contemporary world. These are young people who are searching for their place in a socialistic society. There are those who have already found their niche, and who yet are still searching. The formation of a socialist personality is a continuous process which does not come to an end by reaching some 'goal' . . . The film contains scenes pregnant with serene, reflective and thoughtworthy episodes. And there are also the problems, conflicts, and difficulties which arise every day among people who are living together. Happily the film is not buried under a mound of pedagogical speech. The film conveys a neighborly feeling which makes it easy for the spectator to relate to the action on the screen." —Horst Knietzsch. From this GDR critic's response, it sounds like a probing study of the restlessness of modern youth in the GDR. Directed by Ingrid Reschke. (1971, 92 mins, English titles)

THE GLEIWITZ CASE (DER FALL GLEIWITZ)

A tense, visually charged documentary-like work, THE GLEIWITZ CASE re-creates the incident that launched World War II—the simulated attack by Germans dressed as Poles on the radio station at Gleiwitz, a German town near the Polish frontier. According to the critic for *Berliner Zeitung:* "The entire Nazi mentality is laid bare in a way that has so far been successful only in the a very few films. Mendacious ideals: greatness, faith, honor, obedience, the dream of a race of fair-haired masters, cold-bloodedness coupled with nostalgic blood-and-soil mentality. But there is no scene where a smile might be appropriate. No caricatures and nowhere the face of a burly cannibal. Behind these SS thungs lurks cold peril." Directed by Gerhard Klein. With Hannjo Hasee, Herwart Grosse, Hilmar Thate. (1961, 66 mins, English titles)

THE THIRD (DER DRITTE)

One of the first films of the post-Ulbricht era, THE THIRD deals with the question of sex equality in a way that was considered daring at the time of its release in 1972. (It was the first time a DEFA film contained scenes alluding to Lesbian love.) THE THIRD was widely appreciated at International Film Festivals, and was the first GDR film to be presented at the Los Angeles FILMEX, where Phillip Chamberlin noted: "Rarely does a film about a woman succeed in presenting a balanced, realistic and insightful view. It is remarkable then that DER DRITTE, which is directed by a man whose previous films have tackled masculine themes, is able to accomplish this goal.

"DEFA, the official production company of East Germany, produces about fifty features each year, half for theatres and half for television. Since DEFA has declared itself responsible for the development of a Socialist, anti-Fascist cienama and has customarily dealt with cultural and emotional problems, it is not surprising that the plight of a young, unmarried working girl with two children would constitute the project assigned to a veteran director like Egon Günther. What is particularly unusual in this case is the fortunate combination of directorial sensitivity to the material and the natural talent of Jutte Hoffman as Margit in the central role. Margit has had two vital but rather unhappy affairs in her life and has consequently turned to another girl (Barbara Dittus) for consolation and friendship. Enter the third (Rolf Ludwig). Will this affair succeed where the others have ended in disaster? The plot may sound like soap opera, but the treatment assuredly is not. Supplementing the story are revealing glimpses of a society struggling to assert itself in a competitive world, adding a considerable measure of interest to this example of East German cinema today."

Directed by Egon Günther. With Jutte Hoffman, Rolf Ludwig, Armin Muller-Stahl. (1972, 100 mins, 35mm, Color, English titles)

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CORRIGENDUM

In connection with the information on films about the GDR available from the United States Committee for Friendship with the German Democratic Republic, their address was erroneously printed. It should read

U.S.C.F.G.D.R.
130 East 16th St.
New York, N.Y. 10003

Sincere apologies to those readers who experienced delays in obtaining their films because of requests addressed to Sixth St. !

GDR Film Festival in U.S.

Reviewed by Dr. Robert Ante

Twenty-one films from the GDR were shown during November and December, 1975, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City through the cooperation of the State Film Archives of the GDR, Deutsche Film-Aktien Gesellschaft (DEFA), and MacMillan/Audio Brandon.

The films can be roughly classified into two broad groups: (1) those films which recount the evils and the collapse of the Nazi era, and (2) those films which reflect the problems and achievements of a State that is constructing socialism. Of course, several of the films must be grouped under another heading -- (3) other.

The most cinematically powerful films shown were those portraying the rise of Hitler fascism as well as the struggle against it. These films include the Murderers are Among Us (1946), Jacob the Liar (1974) Marriage in the Shadows (1947), The Blum Affair (1948), The Submissive (1951), Lissy (1957), The Gleiwitz Case (1961), They Called Him Amigo (1959), I Was 19 (1968). Two other films, Wozzeck (1947) and Farewell (1968), dealt with the role that dehumanized bourgeois culture and science plays in sowing the seeds of fascism.

Less successful and memorable are those films dealing with the problems of contemporary society in the GDR such as The Seventh Year (1969), The Third (1972), My Dear Robinson (1972), The Story of Paul and Paula (1973), and The Naked Man in the Playing Field (1974).

Undoubtedly, the greater artistic impact of the first group of films is based upon their thematic content. Perhaps one aspect of their more ready acceptance by American audiences is that they more closely reflect the social realities of the present day U.S.A. Marriage in the Shadows describes the moral and/or physical destruction of those who acquiesed to Hitler fascism. The concept that "art and artists should be pure and not involved with politics" and the phrase "I joined such-and-such governmental or privat art fund because I could then exert a countervailing liberal influence against the Nazis", rings more familiar to the American ear than the moral and social transformation of a younghood into a genuine human being in Do You Know Urban? The multi-faceted mass appeal of fascism is revealed by Lissy. Fascism had an appeal to the unemployed petty bourgeoisie (Lissy's husband), to socialists who accepted the Nazi's militant Wallacite tirades against the banks and the capitalists at face value (Lissy's brother), to those without moral scruples who simply viewed the Nazi party as a way to "get ahead" (her husband's friend). The general tenor of conversation by the audience after watching Lissy was "it hits too close to home!" Other films from this first group also have their contemporary counterparts: Wozzeck -- experiments with syphilis on Blacks; The Blum Affair -- the Angela Davis frameup, the Elsberg Case; The Gleiwitz Case -- the Tonkin Bay incident.

A second reason for the greater success of the first group of films as compared with the second group is that the literature of struggle against tyranny is thousands of years old and already has well structured and defined formulas wheras the problem of how to artistically express the construction of how socialism has not yet been solved to the same extent. For example, Konrad Wolf, who directed two of the most powerful films included in this series, Lissy and I Was 19, both of which dealt with the Nazi period, also directed one of the most forgettable, The Naked Man in the Playing Field, which deals with an artist in contemporary socialist society.

On the other hand, whatever their artistic success, this second group attempts to deal with real problems: the working married professional woman and motherhood (The Seventh Year), the search for true love and a happy marriage (The Third), the limitations of our desires by the realities of life (The Story of Paul and Paula), the problems of teenage marriage and children (My Dear Robinson), the rehabilitation of an ex-convict (Do You Know Urban). The humanistic quality of society in the GDR is perhaps best revealed in those films populated by less than admirable characters. Obvicusly, the GDR film makers do not maintain that socialist realism must portray a utopia, but rather, a society striving for a better life for all.

Two remaining films must be mentioned. The only comment that can be made about The Flying Dutchman (1964) is that Richard Wagner would surely have said: "Exactly what I had in mind!" The Devil's Elixir was not as successful. Methodical and scientific attention to meticulous detail created strong artistic impact in such films as Lissy, but the audience could not place The Devil's Elixir in time because of the ambiguities of costuming. The actors also had a plastic Hollywood quality about them. The moral of a story, that a monastary, a commune, or the church offers no refuge from the world of struggle between good and evil was lost in unrealistic timeless fantasy.

While those who attended the films in this series generally appreciated them, many younger people were unable to appreciate these films because they lacked the necessary historical and cultural background about the nature of Hitlerism, and the alignment of forces during World War II. This was the most disturbing aspect of this series. The American educational system has seen fit not to educate its youth about the evils of fascism.

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P.A.H.