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## Sigrid Töpelmann: Autoren - Figuren - Entwicklungen. Zur erzählenden Literatur in der DDR

Christiane Zehl Romero  
*Tufts University*

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Autoren - Figuren - Entwicklungen. Zur erzählenden Literatur in der DDR. By Sigrid Töpelmann. Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag 1975. 362 pages. 9.90 Mark.

This paperback is not, as one might infer from the title, an introduction to GDR literature. Töpelmann is only concerned with writers and works in relation to World War II, this "unerhörte Verschärfung des Klassenkampfes", which led to significant changes in many who experienced it, changes which were needed and supported by the new society that emerged in the eastern part of Germany. How were authors affected by the war and what role does the war play in the lives of their characters? In what ways did they change, "verstanden als eine qualitative Änderung" (p. 6), in what ways did they develop, "ein eher stetiges, wenn auch widerspruchsvolles Zuwachsen von Erkenntnissen, an progressiven Veränderungen also" (p.6)? This distinction between change and development helps Töpelmann to handle writers and characters who were already socialist before or during the war (they developed) and those who, young and susceptible to Hitler's propaganda, started out on his side, in his army, but were radically transformed by the horrors they saw. Töpelmann is more interested in the latter, because she considers their changes particularly significant for and representative of GDR society.

There was of course no "Stunde Null" in East German literature; authors could build upon an already vital tradition of socialist writing. To prove this point Töpelmann analyses Segher's Die Toten bleiben jung and Becher's Abschied, works conceived or begun before 1945 and dealing with developments and changes occurring before the end of World War II. They provided examples of how to analyse war as a product of class-society and how to portray individuals who learn and change because of historical situations into which they have been placed.

Töpelmann divides the time after 1945 into three distinct periods. In the first, immediate experiences of war as a horrible dance of death stand in the foreground of literary activity. Holmsten, Der Brückenkopf, Hubalek, Unsere jungen Jahre, Borchert, Draußen vor der Tür, and Flivier, Stalingrad, were either printed

and/or popular in the then Eastern Sector of Germany. Only writers who were already clearly committed to socialism, like Weinert (Memento Stalingrad) and Claudius (Vom schweren Anfang, Menschen an unserer Seite) envisioned a new future beyond the suffering and despair of the war.

In the 1950's a second group emerged, Weiß, ...und drüben singen sie, Loest, Jungen die übrig blieben, Fühmann, Die Fahrt nach Stalingrad and Kameraden, Mundstock, Bis zum letzten Mann, and Thürk, Die Stunde der toten Augen. Overly concerned with presenting only the positive aspects of their new society, these authors often failed to come to grips with the reality they had experienced. Their common danger was "schematism", a criticism which has already been raised by Anna Seghers against much of the literature of that time. Around 1957, however, Töpelmann sees the beginnings of a breakthrough as far as her particular topic is concerned. Writers began to treat specific, if limited aspects of war-related change in depth and with considerable sophistication.

Finally, in the sixties, with Fühmann's Judenauto, Noll's Abenteuer des Werner Holt, de Bruyn's Der Hohlweg, and Schulz's Wir sind nicht Staub im Wind, GDR narrative on the war and the effects it had on people reached its third and highest level of achievement. These works dealt with one of the great challenges of GDR literature, the portrayal of change in a former Nazi soldier, on a large, socially and artistically significant scale.

In general the book is sensitive and convincing in its analyses, but somewhat repetitious in its general discussions. Töpelmann distinguishes clearly between what is only ideologically acceptable and what is artistically successful as well. Her excursions into Böll as an example of the bourgeois-humanist tradition give an interesting perspective to her argument.

Christiane Zehl Romero  
Tufts University

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