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Jan Šołta: Abriß der sorbischen Geschichte

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BOOK REVIEWS

Rundell: Jan Šořta: Abriß der sorbischen Geschichte

Stade's collection is highly recommended for the new or unacquainted reader.

Siebzehn schöne Fische. By Martin Stade.
Berlin: Buchverlag Der Morgen, 1976. 200 pages.
M 6,90.

• David Sullivan
Blackburn College

Martin Stade's new collection of short stories offers the reader a fascinating variety of themes and structures which reflect the author's benevolently critical posture on contemporary GDR life. Stade provides no fixed answers. Rather, through his blend of lively prose and diverse situations, he suggests many questions which the alert reader is encouraged to ponder.

The subjects of these stories take us from urban to rural environments, consider younger and older generations, focus on concrete reality or fragile fantasy. In spirited imaginative language which reflects a mixture of resignation and explosive power, of peasant subtleties and practical experience, Stade attempts to present his view of the GDR today. Although the individual themes are different, one main thought reoccurs. Man in contemporary society should attempt to maintain a personal integrity and balance amidst changing social values. Sometimes the effort is successful. The alternative can lead to exclusion and isolation.

The idea of adjustment is reinforced in various ways. Titles like "Was ich träumte nach einer Beschimpfung," "Von einem, der alles doppelt sah," or "Der Betruke" are suggestive of different perspectives. Words and phrases throughout the stories also reinforce the idea of new realities. The notion of change is more subtle as when Usko-reit, one of the many representatives of the older generation, departs "als liesse er für ewige Zeit die Kneipe hinter sich." A more dramatic example of change is the retired studienrätin, who after losing her only companion ("Es war nur ein Hund"), becomes "die Trostlosigkeit in Person."

Intriguing is the pronounced role assumed by the animal world. Animals serve as mirrors of pervasive social types, or they reflect technological influence. Prominent are the starlings ("Lie scharf beobachten Stare") which are like "Stoß-trupps...vorzüglich organisiert." In the title story, however, the narrator's identification with the fishes as Brüder results from a total rejection of technological society where one fishes with Kriegsgeräte.

The final story, "Der Präsentkorb," reiterates many of the previous themes. It also suggests that there can be a positive reappraisal of the future, that technology can be put in proper perspective, and that generation conflicts are surmountable.

Tragikomödien des Alltags. Gerichtsberichte.
By Rudolf Hirsch. Berlin: Verlag des Renn
Berlin, 1976. 302 pages. DM 5,-.

Like Haley's Roots, this very pleasant book is hard to classify as fact or fiction, but has an element of both. The author is apparently a court reporter and his book is a collection of slightly fictionalized but essentially factual reports on crime and punishment in the contemporary GDR.

Tragikomödien des Alltags is light reading, perfectly suited to a summer afternoon. Though it deals with crime and warns of the punishment for breaches of the criminal code, it does not do so in a menacing or didactic way. Rather, these are tales of das menschliche and das All-zumenschliche, of human failings and foibles. They are cheerful little stories of embezzlement, of marital infidelity, of black-market activities, of bribery, of theft, but always presented with humor and lightness of touch. In a very real sense, the reader can feel the texture of daily life in the GDR through these short narratives. The jobs, titles, and salaries; the localities; the makes of the cars; even the names of the people bring the daily reality of GDR living vividly to the fore. Though Rudolf Hirsch is sarcastic at times to point out the errors of his tragic-comic heroes ways, the overall tone of his amusing, instructive narratives is positive and optimistic. It is a book to be enjoyed by all.

Richard J. Wood
University of Puerto Rico

Abriß der sorbischen Geschichte. By Jan Šořta.
Bautzen: VEB Demowina Verlag, 1976. 370 pages.
5,30 Mark.

A detailed collection of reference works on the GDR should include some material on the Sorbs, a Slavic minority of about 300,000 people, or 0.5% of the population of the GDR today. The Sorbs (or, as they are also called in historical ethnography, the Lendis) have managed to resist total assimilation throughout the sev-

eral attempts at forced interpretation since the late 19th century, most recently under Hitler.^{GDR Bulletin, Vol. 3/1981} They are now protected explicitly by the GDR constitution, which states: "Bürger der DDR sorbischer Nationalität haben das Recht zur Pflege ihrer Muttersprache und Kultur. Die Ausübung dieses Rechts wird vom Staat gefördert." The Sorbian population area encompasses parts of Cottbus and Dresden districts and centers primarily around the towns of Cottbus and Bautzen. The Sorbs are well integrated into socialism and have made numerous contributions to socialist culture, of which the most widely known is probably author Jurij Brézan, twice National Prize winner (1954 and 1961) for his short stories, poetry, and the Felix Manusch novel trilogy.

Solta's book is an abridged version of the four-volume Geschichte der Sorben of which three volumes have been published to date. In six chapters, Solta spans Sorbian history from the earliest traceable origins of the West Slavic Sorbian tribes around the 6th century AD up to the present, concentrating most heavily on the 19th and 20th centuries. The Sorbian national organization, the Domowina, was formally founded in early 1913 as a parent organization to 31 Sorbian associations, composed largely of peasant farmers. The Sorbs in World War I appear to have felt a Slavic ethnic link to the Russians which made them fundamentally receptive to the October Revolution in 1917. Moreover, the lignite coal miners of the Lausitz area were largely Sorbs and receptive to revolution; Solta calls them the "Braunkohlenproletariat." A similar phenomenon was observed at the end of World War II, when Sorbs are said to have greeted the Soviet army enthusiastically.

Unlike ethnic minorities with which Americans are likely to be more familiar, the Sorbs have not had a noticeable separatist spirit, and their ethnic character is preserved essentially in cultural areas, such as folk costume, dances, music, literature, and art. The bulk of the substantial publishing of the Sorbian Domowina Verlag is of a cultural nature, including much children's literature in both Upper Sorbian (spoken around Bautzen) and Lower Sorbian (spoken around Cottbus).

As a companion volume to a source book such as Beno Cyž' Die DDR und die Sorben: Eine Dokumentation zur Nationalitätenpolitik in der DDR, Bautzen: Domowina, 1969, Solta's Abriß is a usefully informative book which adds dimension to what most outsiders must regard as something of an ethnic oddity.

Richard E. Gundell
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Exil. Die Ausbürgerung Wolf Biermanns auf der DDR, eine Dokumentation. Peter Roos, Hrsg., mit einem Vorwort von Günther Wallraff, unter Mitarbeit von Armin Broeker und Carla Boulboullé. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1977.

Der Umschlag zeigt den bürgerlichen Sänger mit Gitarre und Notenständer, den Blick antwortbereit in die Menge gerichtet. Darunter steht schmal das eckige Wort "Exil". Es war von jeder das Schicksal des Sängers ins Exil gehen oder im Exil bleiben zu müssen, wenn er mit seinem Gesang etwas über seine Zeit und ihre gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse auszusagen bestrebt war. Daß es sich in diesem Falle um ein deutsches Schicksal handelt, signalisieren die Farben: Schwarz-weiß-rot.

Peter Roos hat den Band in Zusammenarbeit mit Armin Broeker und Carla Boulboullé herausgegeben, Günter Wallraff ein Vorwort geschrieben, in dem er die besonderen Schwierigkeiten eines Sängers umreißt, dem die Grundlage seiner Arbeit, die spezifische gesellschaftliche Situation seines Landes, entzogen worden ist. Man stützte sich dabei im wesentlichen auf das von der sogenannten Bochumer Biermann-Initiative gesammelte Material, um aufzuzeigen, wie der "Fall Biermann" durch die Presse in Ost und West vorbereitet, geschaffen und ausgeschlachtet worden ist. Das Bochumer Komitee behandelte den "Fall" in Zusammenhang mit dem allgemein anstehenden Thema Berufsverbot.

Man hat sich um eine breit gestreute Dokumentation bemüht. Carla Boulboullé konzentrierte sich auf die Kommentierung von Seiten der SED und DKP und die Solidaritätsbekundungen in DDR und BRD. Peter Roos untersuchte die maoistische Sicht, die Haltung der internationalen Presse, der AsphaltPresse, der Reaktion und der seriösen Blätter der Bundesrepublik. Der Band ist weiterhin abgerundet und aufgelockert durch eine Untersuchung des Niederschlags in der deutschen Pressekarikatur, in bundesdeutschen Leserbriefen, einige "lyrische" Kommentare und eine aufschlußreiche Sammlung von Umschreibungen Wolf Biermanns, in der von der "empfindsamen Dichterseele" über den "Elf-Jahres-Zimmersänger" bis zum "verklemmten Korken im Flaschenhals der Entspannungspolitik" so ziemlich alles zu finden ist, was dem krampfhaft um Criminalität bemühten Hirn eines bundesdeutschen Journalisten so entspringen mag.

Deutlich wird dabei, daß nur die ernstzunehmenden Organe wie Die Zeit oder die FAZ sich bemüht haben, die Vorgänge zu analysieren und zu interpretieren, während sich die übliche westdeutsche Presse in weit entferntem, schlechtem Antikommunismus erschäfft und