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## Joochen Laabs: Himmel sträflicher Leichtsinn. Gedichte

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Kippenberg. By Dieter Noll. Berlin: Aufbau Verlag 1979. 627 pages.

Kippenberg, the latest novel by Dieter Noll, is a type of philosophical socialist apprenticeship work, told in flashback narrative form. The main character, the brilliant middle-aged East Berlin scientist Joachim Kippenberg, relates a series of events, beginning in February 1967, which called his entire existence into question. Kippenberg, the outwardly successful, exemplary professional man, "eigentlich Kopf des Institutes für biologisch aktive Stoffe" and son-in-law of the respected but lonely, old-fashioned director of the institute, Professor Lankwitz, is suddenly confronted with an identity crisis. His youthful idealism has been compromised by the demands of a self-centered professional life.

This theme is indicated right at the beginning when Kippenberg says: "bis in mein sechsunddreissigstes Jahr war ich im Inneren kühl und berechnend, und der Wille zum Aufstieg deformierte mein Wesen." With middle-age, Kippenberg realizes he has been living with illusions, not only about his profession, but also about his responsibility to his wife, and to society. How Kippenberg reestablishes communication and identity with his true, mature self, his wife, and his society provides the focal point for this first-person narrative.

Noll's focus is, however, not restricted to just one man's story, rather the novel is interestingly enhanced by the presence of a variety of lively delineated characters, and the supporting substance of a series of important contemporary social themes. Almost all of these minor themes, like the role of women in professional life, career and marriage, the relationship between research and industry, the importance of shared responsibility in the work environment, or the generation gap between the elders of the Republic and their postwar offspring, flavor this work with a broad international appeal. There are, however, some themes which are decidedly more regional, e.g. the responsibility of the individual, especially the scientist, to the party and the state; the necessary partnership between the research institute and the industrial collective; the dangerous debilitating influence of West German ("Schmutzkonzurrenz") materialism on those living and working in the GDR. In spite of the many supporting characters and

themes, frequent flashbacks, and changes in narrative perspective, the novel is quite tightly constructed and certainly not undramatic. Stylistically, Noll's language is generally brisk and animated. Lengthy descriptive, analytical, and philosophical passages are interspersed with realistic dialogue, often spiced with an abundance of colloquialisms. Although Kippenberg's transformation and the "happy end" atmosphere at the end of the story seem like political contrivance, nevertheless, this significant work does provide the reader with a fascinating portrayal of an important segment of GDR society, the scientific-industrial community.

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Himmel sträflicher Leichtsin. Gedichte.  
Von Joochen Laabs. Leipzig: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1978. 85 pages.

This is an attractive volume of poetry, interspersed with eight ink drawings by Erhard Grütter. The unifying theme in the book is travel--all conceivable aspects of travel: we hitchhike, we fly, ride on trains and buses and drive a car. We walk through cities, sit in restaurants and visit other countries. Some are as familiar as Russia, others are as foreign and exotic as the BRD or Australia. We contemplate bridges, see the bustling life in the ports and suffer from the heat among a mass of tourists in front of Roman ruins. Some poems are complete Weltreisen, tours de force, such as the title poem, "Himmel sträflicher Leichtsin," or, "Als Kind in alten Büchern las ich von Surabaja." The poems are actually untitled, but the first line is printed in red and doubles as a title. The beginning of the poems is usually related to some daily occurrence, e.g., "Manchmal mach ich mir im Stehen eine Schitte" or is a statement reflecting common knowledge, "Sydney hat einen großen Hafen." Occasionally it is also a manipulation of a set phrase; "Wir setzen uns unseren Blicken aus." Thus the poems start in a rather innocent, even trivial way. The language remains consistently conversational, fitting mostly everyday situations and thoughts. Yet, it is amazing how Laabs, within this framework of simple language and imagery, can probe and reach the heart of the

matter. A description of a typically Mediterranean setting — Roman ruins, the ocean, boats moving with the waves in their moorings, embracing couples in the shadows, the moon — is followed by this lapidary conclusion:

"...Das gleiche kann/man auch in Warnemünde am Alten Strom erleben oder an/ jedem x-beliebigen Teich zu Haus, der einen Steg mit/Booten hat."

In every poem, Laabs pulls the rug out from under us in the last few lines. It is precisely this element and the irony involved — sometimes subtle, sometimes not so subtle — which makes the poems very enjoyable. Several of the poems, especially the smaller ones, are built on nature imagery. Nature is seen in a totally unromantic way:

"Manchmal denk ich wir Menschen/ habens doch besser als Vögel./ Zum Beispiel Dohlen feuchtkalten März./ Wenn sie satt sind und sich begattet haben..."

Sometimes the images have a very different, creative perspective:

"Die Weiden treten dicht ans Ufer und schöpfen/ mit langen grünen Haaren Wasser aus dem See."

Often nature, represented by animals, mostly birds and trees, is compared to the behavior and the life of man. On the other hand, some of the technical aspects of travel imagery seem to especially fascinate Laabs. Again and again, we see a car, are traveling in a car, i.e. rushing mindlessly along, driven and directed by forces outside us. The form of the poems differs, although the page-long poems with very long lines and enjambement — almost prose-like, yet strongly rhythmical — are predominant. There is no rhyme and very little alliteration. On the other hand, onomatopoeia, careful punctuation, anaphoric structures and a word order which takes poetic license (and thus often clashes with the conversational speech register) help to bring out the innate irony. The division of the poetry into three sections seems warranted by neither form nor content; perhaps it reflects time slots in which they were written.

I found this small volume of poetry to be fast, invigorating and refreshing reading. At least some of the poems deserve as much attention as those by Sarah Kirsch, for instance, of whom this poetry is reminiscent.

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Due to lack of space in the present issue the following reviews will appear in the Spring GDR Bulletin. Our apologies for the delay.

- \* Werk und Wirkung Thomas Manns in unserer Epoche: Ein internationaler Dialog. Herausgegeben von Helmut Brandt und Hans Kaufmann.
- \* Märkische Forschungen. By Günter de Bruyn.
- \* Scherben: Gedichte. By Christiane Grosz.
- \* Widersprüche--Hoffnungen: Literatur und Kulturpolitik der DDR--Die Prosa Günter Kunerts. By Dieter Jonsson.
- \* The German Democratic Republic: A Developed Socialist Society. Ed. by Lyman H. Legters.
- \* Literarisches Leben in der DDR 1945-1960: Literaturkonzepte und Leseprogramme. By Ingeborg Münz-Koenen.
- \* Gerhart Hauptmann. By Rolf Rohmer.
- \* Anna Seghers. By Klaus Sauer.
- \* Geschichten aus der DDR. Ed. by Hans-Jürgen Schmitt.

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