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Wolfgang Licht: Bilanz mit Vierunddreißig oder Die Ehe der Claudia M.

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Geschichte der deutschen Literatur: 1789 bis 1830. Von Autorenkollektiven unter der Leitung von Hans-Dietrich Dahnke, Thomas Höhle und Hans-Georg Werner. Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, Band 7. Berlin/GDR: Volk und Wissen, 1978. 967 pages. 35,- M.

Volume 7 of the eleven-volume, GDR Geschichte der deutschen Literatur covers the literary periods generally conceived by bourgeois scholarship as Classicism and Romanticism. From the outset, however, this literary history breaks with the tradition of Stil-epochen and applies the orthodox Marxist framework of political chronology to organize the cultural material. Thus, the volume is divided into two major sections, edited and written by two different collectives: "From the French Revolution to the Fall of the Holy Roman Empire (1789-1806)" and "From the Anti-Napoleonic Independence Movement to the July Revolution (1806-1830)." Each of these is then divided, once again, into two subsections. As a result of this framework, the literary history does not rely on chronology solely as a continuum punctuated by the great names and works of German literature, but also attempts to relate the forces of social change to specific events in the cultural sphere. The primacy of political economy as an organizing principle ~~eschews~~ a mechanistic base/superstructure model, although occasional generalizations about an author's progressive or reactionary response to events in the political sphere are translated into literary judgments. Indeed, this Marxist approach opens the literary history to a far wider scope than is usually the case. For instance, besides chapters on topics such as the beginnings of mass literature, the development of a profit-oriented book market, and journalistic writing (especially by democrats and revolutionaries), there are extensive sections on social history and political movements as they relate to cultural developments. Both classical and romantic literature are seen as a product of and a response to the ugliness and prosaic quality of bourgeois attitudes under early capitalism in Germany. Within these confines, the authors try to avoid the traditional clichés in Marxist

literary criticism. They present neither a normative and idealistic apology for German Classicism nor a rigorous rejection of Romanticism on political grounds. Nonetheless, the collectives do resort to well-worn definitions of realism as the yardstick of progressive literary currents. Thus, such debatable concepts as Widerspiegelung, das Typische and das Repräsentative surface frequently, and--particularly in evaluating Romanticism--the ideological function of the fantastic as an outlet for utopian desires is neglected.

The volume is rounded out with numerous visual aids often not found in other literary histories--sociological and political maps, charts, portraits, reproductions of paintings (some in color) and, of course, photographs of title pages. In addition there are extensive notes (60 pages) drawing on the most recent research in Eastern and--less so--in Western Europe, and a detailed index of names and works. This literary history offers a carefully edited introduction to literary culture during a period of intense political ferment in Germany. The historical material goes far beyond what is usually presented in such works, while the literary analysis remains within a rather traditional framework.

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Bilanz mit Vierunddreißig oder Die Ehe der Claudia M. By Wolfgang Licht. Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1978. 269 pages. 8,50 M.

The question raised by this novel is an intensely interesting one, especially in the context of an emerging women's consciousness in the literature of the GDR, namely: to what extent is it possible in the sensitive ambience of the present day for a male author to write using a female voice to project his view of gender relations?

The first-person narrator and main figure of this novel is the Claudia M. of the title, who might be said to be undergoing a mid-life crisis, in which she questions and reassesses her expectations of life,

her aspirations and the choices she has made thus far, in particular with regard to her marriage partner, whom she submits to very critical scrutiny.

The work lacks any notable action, the various locations functioning as mere backdrop to the central figure's at times boringly repetitive interior monologues. The novel may be compared with other GDR works, notably Jedes Leben hat auch seine Zeit, by Elisabeth Schulz-Semrau (1974), Jahre mit Camilla, by Helmut H. Schulz (1973), and Johanna oder Die Wege des Dr. Kanuga, by Manfred Jendryschik (1972); the latter two feature a male central figure who is left puzzled by the failure of a relationship and by his inability to satisfy the needs of the woman with whom he was involved. Whether at work, at home, walking in the woods, or on holiday, Claudia's concerns remain unchanged: has she made a mistake in marrying Martin, who seems to her, after seven years of marriage, far from stimulating. He inhibits her development as a person: "Martin will sich an das Bewährte halten (...) Es sei viel, wenn es gelänge, sich miteinander einzurichten (...) Wir müssen uns beschränken, wenn wir wirken wollen (...) Und ich begreife, daß für mich Selbstbeschränken, noch Selbstabtöten heißt." (pp. 93-4)

Does this feeling reflect simply the monotony of a well-oiled daily routine without children or other sources of surprises and upsets, or are they fundamentally incompatible? Both Claudia and Martin are doctors, she an obstetrician and gynecologist and he a specialist in blood-clotting disorders who spends his evenings keeping up with professional journals. Claudia's dissatisfaction is crystallized through a comparison with Wilm Anders, a colleague on the maternity ward. He seems to her so spontaneous, assisting new life into the world with such a deft touch, while Martin treats people as case histories, gris for his research. Here her feelings echo those of Gerti Tetzner's Karen W., who feels that her husband Peters is drying up in the midst of his intellectual work and the pressures of a hierarchical career structure, while she feels moved to reject her career as a lawyer on the grounds that the legal process reduces people to "cases" on file.

Convincing as it is in some passages on the question of the nature and viability of long-term relationships--for example, "Wir hindern einander vielmehr durch Lustlosigkeit (...) Wir sind eingestellt und auf-

einander angewiesen in allen Dingen. Als hätten wir die Fähigkeit, uns allein zu entwickeln, verloren" (p. 111)--the novel ultimately lacks credibility because of the crude gender stereotyping in terms of which Claudia expresses her discontent. Having portrayed Martin as oppressively unspontaneous and afraid of his own emotions, she chides herself with the reminder (without irony) that she had wanted it this way: "Wollte ich nicht, daß er höher stand als ich? (...) War es nicht so: der Mann denkend und fühlend die Frau?" (p. 114). From this realization she turns to a love affair with the apparently sensitive and stimulating Wilm, thus reducing her malaise to the level of the traditional triangle constellation.

The all too frequent resort to kitsch in Claudia's reflections on life seriously detracts from the work, adding to the pervasive sexism, which will surely enrage those of the new generation of women writers in the GDR who are addressing themselves to some of the problems and contradictions faced by women in the GDR today. The sexism is further exemplified in the portrayal of what Claudia calls "unser gleiches Recht in der Mozartstraße" (p. 112), which appears to consist of her coming home from a late shift to worry about how hungry Martin must be and to hasten to prepare the supper, or on the occasion of a lecture given by Martin, of her blushing guiltily at the sight of a possibly missing shirt button, "denn hier komme ich ins Spiel." (p. 121) Similarly, she accepts without question that this "domestic equality" should be automatically overridden in the professional world, for "er hat im Leitungssystem die Spitze inne, ich muß mir meinen unteren Platz suchen (...) Es muß, sagen wir, Leiter geben und Geleitete." (p. 112) Thus it is entirely consistent with this fundamentally male, hierarchical view of gender relations that Claudia should return finally to her role as provider of meals and sustenance to Martin, filled with pity at how lost he is without her, "seine Ordnung zerstört" (p. 257), his crumpled shirt thrown over a chair and missing a button. In conclusion, this novel represents an interesting but ultimately unsuccessful attempt by a man to understand, through empathy, the "new woman" in the GDR.

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