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Heinz Plavius: Kriterien und Kritik

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Kriterien und Kritik. By Heinz Plavius. Rostock: Hinstorff, 1977. 160 pages. 3,80. - M.

This collection of essays, most of which appeared in Neue Deutsche Literatur, is preceded by a 30 page introduction in which Plavius gives contour to his studies. His major concern is the relationship between literature and reality, and this results in an apologetic for those newer GDR prose works which deviate from the established norms of socialist realism. Such works are characterized by a greater degree of subjectivity, the inclusion of fantastic elements such as parables, legends, and fairy tales, the introduction of the categories of the game and chance, an interest by authors in writing about writing, and an increased concern for GDR history. Although Plavius criticizes similar developments in the West because they represent for him the increasing alienation of the individual from society, he finds their appearance in the GDR to be commendable. He feels that writers are thereby gaining an increased understanding of the role they play in society and are communicating a heightened concept of the importance of literature to their readers. Moreover, Plavius attributes an additional cognitive function to this type of literature: it acts as a "Sinnes- und Erkenntnisorgan" since it creates "Modell...oder Gegenwirklichkeit, Zukunftsprojektion oder ideell-reale Kontour, Entwurf oder Aufforderung."

All of the essays revolve around these concerns. Plavius accepts, with reservations, the importance that Fühmann's essays ascribe to myth in literature and he agrees with Fühmann that literature has a singularity of existence and function separate from science. He praises Christa Wolf's Kindheitsmuster for its pioneering attempt to come to terms with past and present by means of a mixture of narrative levels. He sees in the works of the children's author, Alfred Wellm, a productive combination of the elements of chance, social pedagogy, a bridging of generation gaps, and the creation of possible models for the future. He delineates with

appropriation the exemplary nature of three diverse works: Strittmatter's Wundertäter II, which contains introspective explorations of the author's metier, Brežan's Krabat, which presents many parables, and Seghers' Das Vertrauen, which is a straightforward historical retrospective of the events surrounding June 17, 1953. It is refreshing to note that Plavius is attempting to overcome the traditional Marxist distrust of the "experimental" and to thereby expand the parameters of the realistic mode. This endeavor is marred at times by the use of assertive reasoning and the inability to clearly distinguish between the autonomous and non-autonomous aspects of literature. Nevertheless, the book provides a useful and pleasantly composed compendium to the GDR literature of the first half of the Seventies.

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Widerspruch und Übereinkunft: Aufsätze zur Literatur. By Kurt Batt. Reclams Universal-Bibliothek, Band 753. Leipzig: Verlag Philipp Reclam jun., 1978. 384 pages. 2,50.M

Kurt Batt (1931-1975) was not the usual literary critic. Although he studied Germanistik at the University of Leipzig and received a doctorate from the University of Greifswald for a work on Anna Seghers, his brief professional life was spent as a reader for the Hinstorff-Verlag in Rostock. During those years he not only kept abreast of the latest developments in GDR literature by reading the contemporary writers Hinstorff was to publish, but he also wrote introductory essays for editions of such authors as Gotthelf and Lichtenberg, edited works, and wrote articles for such journals as Sinn und Form, Neue Deutsche Literatur, and Weimarer Beiträge. Many of the latter articles appeared in a Reclam Universal-Bibliothek volume titled Revolte intern. The present Reclam collection of his essays, edited and published three years after his death by Konrad Reich and the prominent GDR author Franz Fühmann, gathers twenty pieces of Batt's work, including