

1981

Conferences

various authors

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CONFERENCES

WOMEN AND GDR LITERATURE IN PERUGIA

"La questione femminile nella letteratura della RDT" was the topic of a conference at the university of Perugia, May 5 - 6, 1981. The following papers and readings were presented:

- "La questione femminile nella letteratura della RDT: temi e tendenze." (Lia Secci, Perugia) -
 "La ricerca d'identità e il tema del 'Geschlechtertausch.'" (Anna Pegoraro, Turin)
 "La posizione della donna nella legislazione della RDT." (Maria Luisa Weichselbaumer, Messina)
 "Modelli di scrittura: tra autobiografia e fantasia." (Antonella Gargano, Rome)
 "Christa Wolf: 'L'ombra di un sogno.'" (Vanda Perretta, Pescara)
 "Die Frau als Produzentin und Gegenstand in der Literatur der DDR." (Eva Kaufmann, Berlin)
 "Maxie Wander e la letteratura documentaria." (Christine Wolter, author)
 Reading by Irmaud Morgner from the novel Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura, introduced by Erika Knoglinger, Perugia.

SEVENTH ANNUAL GDR SYMPOSIUM, JUNE, 1981 CONWAY, N.H.

The relaxed atmosphere of the World Fellowship Center once again provided the setting for the Seventh Annual Symposium on the GDR. Among the circa fifty participants were citizens, not only of the United States and Canada, but also of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, which made discussions -- both during the sessions and at mealtimes -- especially engaging. However, as in previous years, Germanists far outnumbered scholars from other fields. It can be hoped that the welcome innovation of a keynote address will be used by the organizers in the future to extend a special invitation to social scientists. For the first time, the Embassy of the GDR was able to send a representative. GDR cultural attaché Claus Wolf welcomed suggestions for improving communication between the Embassy and colleges and universities. In addition, Dr. Joachim Rogge, President of the Evangelical Church of the Union in the GDR, was present for most of the symposium, and his personal warmth and wit added a special note to many of the discussions. Dr. Rogge's presentation of theology and the church in the GDR, based on a recently published article (Evangelische Theologie, Heft 1/2, Munich, 1981), was for many the highpoint of the week.

Some of the seminars stand out not only because of the overall high caliber of the presentations, but also because of their organization around a well-defined theme. The first two sessions formed just such a model seminar. Patricia Herminhouse (Washington University) gave the keynote address, highlighting the reasons for "the Rediscovery of Romanticism in the GDR." Papers

by Christiane Zehl-Romero (Tufts) on Anna Seghers and Sara Lennox (U. Mass, Amherst) on Christa Wolf and the women Romantics then examined the influence of Romanticism on these writers in detail, while Sibylle Ehrlich (Goucher) provided a valuable counterpoint by looking at a broader range of recent prose works using the fantastic. These papers complemented each other so well, yet diverged in their approach, thus providing not only a broad survey of this significant development, but ample basis for a meaningful general discussion. Similarly, the seminar on "Women in GDR Literature and Society" stands out not only because of the quantity and quality of the papers, but because of the attempt of the organizers to overcome the segregation between literary and other approaches which can too easily occur at such an ostensibly interdisciplinary conference. A case in point -- one might very well have also included here the informative presentation with slides by Robert Greenberg (U. North Carolina) on "The Provision of Health Care Services to Rural Areas," since his primary interest was health care to pregnant women and mothers (Mutterberatungsstellen).

Pedagogical issues were dealt with only in an informal workshop, a regrettable change in format, for the consideration of teaching materials and method has traditionally been emphasized at this symposium. A return to a more formal presentation of actual course syllabi and bibliographies as the basis for discussion is in order. Nevertheless, Jochen Hoffmann's (Smith) paper on lexicography and language change in the GDR and FRG provided important practical advice with its analysis of available dictionaries and its warning that "dictionaries do not tell us how a word is used, but how it is supposed to be used." His study led him to the conclusion that claims in both East and West are "exaggerated," and that there is not yet evidence of a new national language variant in the GDR, despite changes in vocabulary in both Germanies. Among the many excellent literary papers, those by Marilyn Sibley Fries (Yale) and Dieter Sevin (Vanderbilt) on Christa Wolf were especially important because of their attention to issues of narrative structure and aesthetic theory. In her sensitive analysis of Sarah Kirsch's "westliche Dichtung," Christine Consentino-Dougherty (Rutgers) raised the difficult issue of what happens to a writer creatively after leaving the GDR.

The GDR Symposium in Conway is a unique conference because of the humane way in which time is made available for personal interaction as well as intellectual interchange, not to mention exercise and contemplation. Although one must go in order to appreciate these aspects, the 1981 proceedings -- if published like those of 1980 -- will contribute much to our understanding of GDR culture and society.

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