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Brigitte Martin: Nach Freude anstehen. Erzählung

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The narrator awakens to an absurd situation. "Als ich zu mir kam, lag ich im Nachthemd in einer ... Rinne ... parallel zum Fussboden." (85) He experiences all sorts of fantastic incidents, and is even enjoined "freiwillig in eine sinnreich erdachte Foltermaschine zu kriechen." (91)

Other titles in the collection are: "Die Hecke," "Der Schatten," "Die Wolke," and "Die Vollendung des Menschen." They are all extremely interesting, but not always with satisfying conclusions. The book is not meant for light, informative reading. But, if one likes puzzles, decoding, or, as Grüning puts it, reading "gegen den Strom" (135), then these stories will provide a stimulating and challenging exercise.

J. David Sullivan
Blackburn College

Nach Freude anstehen: Erzählung. By Brigitte Martin.
Berlin: Buchverlag der Morgen, 1981. 160 pages. 7,20 M.

At the beginning of the story, the heroine, Edith, lies awake at the side of her boyfriend Ulrich reviewing her life situation with discontent. Edith is a divorced mother of two young girls, works at a computer center, and has a boyfriend who -- significantly enough -- will not be spending Christmas with her. Edith is a new formulation of that central figure in GDR literature and film, the woman on her own, working, raising children by herself and searching for happiness. This cultural figure is the site of most of the perhaps irresolvable contradictions in GDR society and the debate on social options and values is couched in terms of her life choices and conflicts. Here the conflict lies in the heroine's consciousness itself -- Edith's two thought systems, two hearts, the "zwei Seelen" in her breast: in her restless, masculine role, Edith has mastered the analytic, goal-oriented thought and bureaucratic language of the cybernetic generation of scientific socialism (cf. Lutz in Kindheitsmuster), the goal of which is mastery of natural and social forces. The actuality of her work and continuing education is one of petty incidents with co-workers and doubtful effects on the social order. The other Edith is one who spends a significant amount of the narrative getting her children dressed, cleaning up after a kitten, worrying, making household repairs, riding the subway -- and looking for help from all quarters. Spending Christmas with mother explores the possibility of going home again, but raises impossible demands to be a good worker, mother, daughter and lover. The chain of events after a petty shoplifting incident involving her daughter displays the insufficiencies of the school system and of psychotherapy in dealing with the individual who is sensitive and less capable of conforming to the norm. In the array of familial and social institutions from which she seeks support, there is nothing on which she can depend.

The story is told in a dry prose of disenchantment, not what one would expect from the author of the lyrical Der rote Bailon. Brigitte Martin is presumably still developing as an author. Here her narrative style is not satisfying, but her account of daily life rings true and her honesty offers no easy answers. Only the narrative resolution seems unprepared and tacked-on. It is not quite a retreat into private life, but rather the sudden realization that she need not be defined by the expectations of others, thus the sudden becoming of a subject. The book is worth reading as an important contribution to cultural debate on values and goals and as the work of an author of promise.

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GDR BULLETIN

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Probleme der Literaturinterpretation: Zur Dialektik der Inhalt-Form-Beziehungen bei der Analyse und Interpretation literarischer Werke. Von E. Arndt, W. Herden, U. Heuenkamp, F. Hörnigk, E. Kaufmann. Einführung in die Literaturwissenschaft in Einzeldarstellungen. Hrsg. von Annaliese Löffler. Leipzig: VEB Bibliographisches Institut, 1981. 221 Seiten.

The title, both of this particular work and of the series in which it appears, says really everything. The authors are concerned with asserting (defending?) the authority of literary history and its resultant analysis/interpretation methods. In this effort they would doubtless find bipartisan support for many of their otherwise distrustful non-socialist colleagues who are equally disturbed by the eruption of the debates derived from structuralism and post-structuralism's impact on literary theory. In short, we can imagine here the beginnings of a firm front crossing ideological lines in pursuit of the historical interpretive method. The literary work means something, is about something -- something ultimately social, and the task of literary scholarship is to get at this something and make it clear (clearer at least than ever it was or is in the literary works themselves). As Eva Kaufmann so well and so plainly puts it concluding her interpretation of Anna Seghers' Das wirkliche Blau (pp. 115ff), "Das wirkliche Blau ist eine künstlerische Leistung von hohem Rang. In ihr 'Geheimnis' einzudringen, mit ihr vertraut zu machen, ihre Schönheit tiefer empfinden und genauer sehen zu lehren, sollte Zweck der wissenschaftlichen Bemühung sein" (p. 144).

Most of the students of literature at Brown University and their teachers would doubtless fully agree with this conception of literary reading and with most of the other literary readings presented in this "introductory" textbook (the latter my word) of literary criticism's raison d'être.

The 221 pages of small print consist of an apologia for the conception Kaufmann puts forth in the first of three exemplary readings or analyses/interpretations which comprise the second part of the book. The other two exemplary readings are F. Hörnigk on Alexander Gelman's play (later filmed) whose German title is Protokoll einer Sitzung, and U. Heuenkamp's reading of Johannes Bobrowski's poem Ebene. W. Herden is responsible for the lengthy apologia. Needless to say, Hörnigk's and Heuenkamp's conceptions of the task of literary