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Margy Gerber, et al.: Studies in GDR Culture and Society 6: Selected Papers from the Eleventh New Hampshire Symposium on the German Democratic Republic

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Studies in GDR Culture and Society 6 : Selected Papers from the Eleventh New Hampshire Symposium on the German Democratic Republic. Ed. by Margy Gerber et al. Lanham, London: University Press of America, 1986. viii + 206 pp.

This is the sixth volume in the by now well-established series, presenting fourteen revised versions of papers first given at the New Hampshire Symposium in 1985. The contributors, from six different countries, including the GDR, come from a variety of scholarly pursuits, which creates not only an international but also an interdisciplinary panel and survey.

Areas dealt with range from assessments of the GDR's economic performance (Arthur A. Stahnke) and its problems and opportunities (Pieter A. Boot), to fascinating and informative essays on the poetry and social thought of the poet Richard Pietraß (Anna Chiarloni) and the critical appraisal of Wolf Biermann's production and position in West Germany (Dennis R. McCormick). Foreign policy issues are the focus of a brief East German appeal for international cooperation, remarkable mainly for what sounds like an attempt to establish an independent position between the superpowers (Karl-Heinz Röder).

At least four pieces are devoted to what can best be described as GDR society and social issues. Included is a very realistic description of the conflict between rhetoric and practice or official and private attitudes toward the role of women in GDR life, and how it is partially reflected in literary works (Irene Dölling). This follows an equally illusion-free account of the problems arising from the emphasis on technology and productivity in a social and political system theoretically devoted to the humanization of work (Mike Dennis). A close and critical look at social attitudes, such as the peculiarly Prussian one of Untertänigkeit, reveals some changes, especially since the early Seventies (Dietrich Staritz) which are, unfortu-

nately, not nearly as obvious in the area of Marxist theory and its uses in Eastern Europe (Lyman H. Legters). This excellent Marxist critique of Eastern European politics should be required reading for any student of GDR reality, be it social or literary, since it provides a framework for understanding many of the issues raised in policy debates as well as in novels. The piece on attitudes toward sex and marriage (Rüdiger Pieper) reminds one of Volker Braun's Hinze-Kunze Roman, in which the party and its theory are also quite often ahead of the attitudes and realities of the rank and file. This essay dovetails neatly with the findings of Dölling and Staritz indicated above.

The remaining contributions all deal with literary questions, but place them firmly in the sociopolitical matrix established in the other essays and reinforce or correct some of their findings. Whether that is done by investigating "Changing Patterns of Male and Female Identity in Recent GDR Prose," (Christiane Zehl Romero), a brilliant piece, or examining depictions of outsiders and the critique of the ideal socialist personality type in a most evocative fashion (Carol Poore), these essays set the agenda for future discussions of changes in the GDR. Equally indicative are the two perceptive essays written in German which focus on the change in the theory and practice of literary criticism and scholarship in the GDR in the Eighties. The second one (Gerd Labrousse) exposes progress in this area, a view also expressed in a detailed look at the recent discussion of avantgarde und postmodernism in the GDR (Günther Erbe).

An overall unified image of change, albeit slow change, and a society beset with most of the problems shared by modern industrialized nations emerges and serves as an excellent framework for any attempt at understanding the GDR today.

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