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Christoph Hein: Öffentlich arbeiten. Essais und Gespräche

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the inquiry into the effects of environmental mismanagement and social alienation in GDR society remains central to an understanding of the events leading up to the revolution and to an interpretation of the psychological consequences of unification.

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Studies in GDR Culture and Society 9. Selected Papers from the Fourteenth New Hampshire Symposium on the German Democratic Republic. Ed. by Margy Gerber et al. Lanham, New York, and London: University Press of America, 1989. vii + 210 pp.

The topic of the fourteenth interdisciplinary New Hampshire Symposium on the GDR, held in June, 1988, was "Dimensions of Change." Eleven of the twenty-five papers delivered there by sociologists, political scientists, economists, germanists, and linguists have been published in the present volume. Today one cannot help but read these papers, all of them well-researched and well-written, in light of the ultimate change in store for the GDR in the fall of this year. Thus what has been regarded as the most burning of its national problems and is the focal point of the initial three articles, namely, the "intensification" of the production process to insure the continued political and economic viability of the country, will have ceased to exist. These articles describe the severe obstacles faced by an SED leadership which in the interests of its own survival has refused to undertake a radical restructuring of its economic system and instead has been pursuing a lethal strategy of crisis management in hopes of maintaining the status quo. Among these obstacles: the industrial workers, whose modicum of loyalty to the regime would vanish if it sought to increase efficiency through a modernization process; the scientific and technical people, whose mediocre performance (especially among the younger scientists) is due to a centralized planning system which discourages creativity as well as a school system which rewards conformity to the detriment of independent thinking; and an intelligentsia that, instead of living up to its function to supply the nation with an existential or societal reason for being, tends more and more to "experience socialism not as an unfulfilled project of hope but rather as deformed and restrictive reality" (18).

That the revolutionary fervor shown by the writers of the fifties and sixties has waned considerably is attested to by three articles dealing with contemporary authors. The first is an examination of a "dialogue" with Anna Seghers conducted by Volker Braun and Heiner Müller in three plays based on materials written by her. Both playwrights evince considerable discomfort with the Eurocentric, Soviet-style proletarian brand of revolution commandeered by white *male* intellectuals that was advocated by Seghers and are unable to share her view of GDR reality as heroic and hopeful. The second article deals with the mounting concern about the environmental crisis in the GDR expressed by a number of lyricists who deplore the inaction of their government in this matter. The third is a discussion of Christa Wolf's recently published *Störfall*, which was inspired by the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl. The book points out "the author's deeply serious questioning of her earlier enthusiasm for Gagarin's space flight, which, twenty-five years before, she used as an almost visionary support of the ideological and technological superiority of the socialist system" (107).

Three articles struck a somewhat optimistic note: a piece on the growing positive reception of Kafka in light of the breakdown of the dualism of socialist realism and modernism; a clever study of how the partially enhanced status of women is reflected in the illustrations of GDR periodicals; and a fairly upbeat examination of how old people, especially old women, are depicted in current GDR fiction, highlighting efforts to expose outmoded ways of thinking about old age in a country where the grandmother as

working woman merits respect. The final two articles in the collection deal with issues that, like those discussed in the initial three, will evanesce with unification: the problem of preserving the Jewish community (reduced from a high of 4,639 souls in 1946 to a low of 360 in 1988) in an anti-Zionist country that admits no responsibility for the crimes of Nazi Germany; and the question of the linguistic consequences of having two Germanys.

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Hein, Christoph. *Öffentlich arbeiten. Essais und Gespräche.* Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1987. 199 S.

In der heutigen Auseinandersetzung um die Frage nach der Kompromißbereitschaft, Konformität und Schuld der DDR-Autoren zeigt der vorliegende Band, daß es durchaus auch in der DDR kritische Schriftsteller gab (nicht nur unter denjenigen Autoren, die aus der DDR ausgewandert sind, wie jetzt oft behauptet wird), die ihr Publikum durch die Beschreibung der oft unakzeptablen Verhältnisse in ihrem Lande sensibilisieren wollten.

Der Band enthält Essais, Aufsätze, Interviews, die zwischen 1978 und 1986 entstanden sind, aber erst 1987 in der DDR herausgebracht wurden. Die meisten von ihnen wurden schon vorher im Westen publiziert.

"Das Schreiben ist noch nicht der verändernde Zugriff auf die Welt, aber es ist die erste Voraussetzung aller Veränderungen" (56), sagt Hein. Eine Erklärung, warum die Beschreibung bestehender Zustände stärker wirkt als die Situation selbst, findet er in der bekannten Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie von Marx: "Man muß den wirklichen Druck noch drückender machen, indem man ihm das Bewußtsein des Drucks hinzufügt, die Schmach noch schmachvoller, indem man sie publiziert... man muß die versteinerten Verhältnisse dadurch zum Tanzen zwingen, daß man ihnen ihre eigene Melodie vorsingt! Man muß das Volk vor sich selbst erschrecken lehren, um ihm Courage zu machen" (52). Hein umfaßt sein schriftstellerisches Programm mit den Worten: "Schreiben um zu beschreiben, beschreiben um weiterarbeiten zu können, um hoffen zu können. Auch um auf Änderungen, Veränderungen hoffen zu können" (56).

Obwohl sich Hein scheinbar in seinem Werk auf seine eigenen Erlebnisse begrenzt ("Der Stoff ist der Autor selbst," 34), ist seine individuelle, persönliche Autobiographie nicht ohne den ganzen gesellschaftlichen Kontext vorstellbar, und somit ist sie auch eine kritische Aussage über den Zustand der Gesellschaft, in der er lebt.

In dieser Sammlung stellt sich Hein offiziell gegen die von der Macht an den Künstler gestellten Forderungen im Sinne des sozialistischen Realismus, indem er eine neue Ästhetik fordert. Der Staat wünscht eine überprüfbare, normative Ästhetik, aus Angst vor dem unbekanntem Neuen. Hein will diese Unterordnung der Sprache unter die Macht, die er mit Brecht "Sklavenspache" (71) nennt, nicht akzeptieren. Es gilt für ihn nicht mehr, die Welt mit alten tradierten Mitteln zu beschreiben. "Die Ästhetik der Toten" ist für ihn eine "tote Ästhetik" (24). Die Kunst solle sich durch Neuheit legitimieren, sie sei parasitär, wenn sie mit Mitteln gegebener Ästhetiken arbeite--eine Aussage, die Hein sichtbar mit der Forderung der sozialistischen "Erbepflege" in einen Konflikt bringen mußte.

Der Titel dieser Essay- und Interviewsammlung bezieht sich auf den Vortrag "Öffentlich arbeiten," den Hein bei einer Diskussion im Schriftstellerverband der DDR am 3. Juni 1982 gehalten hat. Die Öffentlichkeit betrachtet Hein als die wichtigste Voraussetzung für die Existenz der Kunst. Er versteht darunter die Einbringung des ganzen geistigen Reichtums der Gesellschaft mitsamt ihrer Divergenz in die Kultur, die selektierte Kultur sei

keine Kultur. Für eine solche Öffentlichkeit plädiert er in den abgedruckten Essays und in seiner Rede auf dem X. Schriftstellerkongreß der DDR im November 1987, wo er mutig und kompromißlos mit der Zensur in seinem Staat ins Gericht geht: "Die Zensur der Verlage und Bücher, der Verleger und Autoren ist überlebt, nutzlos, paradox, menschenfeindlich, volksfeindlich, ungesetzlich und strafbar" (*Die Zeit*, 4. Dez. 1987). In dieser Bemerkung richtet er ironischerweise gegen die Zensur diejenigen Argumente, deren sie sich gewöhnlich selbst bedient bei der Verweigerung der Druckgenehmigung.

Sich der Problematik seiner Zeit aktiv zu stellen, ist nach Hein die wichtigste Aufgabe des Künstlers. Wie er selbst dieser Forderung nachkommt, beweisen am besten seine Präsenz in den öffentlichen Diskussionen, wo es jeweils um die Rolle der Kultur in seinem Staate geht, und seine Werke. Im Kontext der heutigen Debatte um das Verhältnis der Intellektuellen der DDR zu den demokratischen Veränderungen in ihrem Lande bietet die vorliegende Sammlung sicherlich eine aufschlußreiche und interessante Lektüre.

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Christoph Hein. *Der Tangospieler*. Frankfurt a. M.: Luchterhand Literaturverlag, 1989. 217 pp. [Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1989.]

The acrimonious debate over Christ Wolf's *Was bleibt* quickly spilled from feuilleton to front page because it raised questions about the moral and political responsibility of intellectuals in the GDR. My criticism of Christoph Hein's *Tangospieler*, by way of contrast, only outraged about half the audience in one session of a recent conference--but for much the same reason. In spite of the undisputed "quality" of the two works, the issue in such discussions is anything but "aesthetic." Until recently, when Wolf and Hein wrote about intellectuals, as they almost always did, their texts constituted part of an alternative public sphere; what they discussed was, in turn, discussed by others, with an openness that was otherwise rare. At the same time, the political status of their texts virtually forced both Wolf and Hein to function as political and moral instances during last fall's "November Revolution," only to disappear when their idealism and hopes for a social-democratic future became utterly unpopular. Retrospective reviews of their work are therefore necessarily about what they and the characters they created might have done differently.

The central figure in *Der Tangospieler*, Hans-Peter Dallow, is a young historian, who is innocently caught up in the jaws of the GDR's machinery of repression. The novel opens early in 1968, as Dallow is released from prison, where he has spent twenty-one months for playing the piano accompaniment to a tango whose text, unbeknown to Dallow, "den greisen Führer des Staates verspottete" (77). This "accident" is the source of all of his subsequent problems: Having been punished for a political crime, Dallow is no longer able to occupy his position as an *Oberassistent* at the university's historical institute, much less to hope for a promotion. Since GDR law required its citizens to have some form of employment, Dallow cannot simply drop out, but no one seems to be particularly interested in hiring an ex-historian to drive trucks or to wait on tables. Dallow does realize that the help he is offered, by two men who are obviously members of the Stasi, would certainly compromise him, and he is also unwilling to resume working at the institute until someone apologizes for the mistake "they" made in imprisoning him. Curiously, however, Dallow's principled refusal evaporates completely when he is offered a *Dozentur*. It seems that his old rival stumbled into the same sort of arbitrary trap as Dallow; the unfortunate fellow unwittingly parroted the party line and claimed that an invasion

of Czechoslovakia by her fellow socialist states was logically impossible, on the very morning that their troops marched in. Hein uses Dallow in part to criticize the GDR's role in the suppression of "socialism with human face," and since Dallow is incapable of reflection and completely untroubled by his rival's fate, one can easily imagine him falling again, and just as quickly, had he managed to survive until October or November of 1989.

In addition to his political obtuseness, the book is awash with Dallow's gratuitous sexism. Except when drunk or otherwise dodging responsibility, the man's sensibilities begin and end at his penis. One wonders how Hein could even imagine women submitting to this lout, and I find it inexplicable that the same writer who so convincingly portrayed the female doctor of *Der fremde Freund* shows no more interest in this book's women and their lives than does his hero. If Dallow is an innocent political victim, his punishment could easily be justified on other grounds.

It is, to sure, no accident that Dallow is an historian, and the novel is fundamentally a powerful rejection of a kind of official history that was, particularly for the Marxists of the GDR, the central legitimizing discourse in a society that was forever undergoing an identity crisis--German but not Germany. As Dallow puts it at one point:

Ich hatte mich mit Neuerer Geschichte zu befassen und unentwegt danach zu forschen, wie die illegalen sozialdemokratischen Zeitungen vor einhundert Jahren konspirativ gedruckt und über den Bodensee gerudert wurden. Und wie die tapferen Arbeiter und Handwerker der Prager Neustadt sich mit Besenstielen und Sandeimern des Bombardements von Windischgrätz erwehrten. Wenn von einer Wissenschaft nur noch Anekdoten übrigbleiben, wird es ermüdend.

Yet, in spite of his insight, Dallow is unable either to reflect on or to work through his own recent past, and the narrative of his failure, both personally and professionally, has to be regarded as typical of the whole historiographical enterprise of the GDR.

I use the term narrative here advisedly as a characterization of Hein's indictment. *Der Tangospieler* is not only a sustained attack on the profession of history; its form is that of a conventional story with an identifiable beginning, middle, and end. Such narratives imply the existence of a God-like instance whose power is external (extradiegetic) and timeless, but whose perspective is necessary as an organizing principle, and, as Hayden White argues, narrated coherence is inevitably a moral judgment about the "real" or imaginary figures and events that have been selected and ordered. In essence, the form of *Der Tangospieler* is an enabling condition for the reasoned critique that Hein launches against the practice of historical scholarship in the GDR.

At the level of form *Der Tangospieler* differs markedly from Hein's previous novel, *Horns Ende*, even though both novels are historical. In contrast to *Der Tangospieler*'s linearity *Horns Ende* is a multi-dimensional jigsaw puzzle that refuses to impose a single, coherent narration on the numerous partial stories it contains. Although it deals with the persecution of gypsies and the mentally ill, i.e., with events that are universally condemned, *Horns Ende* refuses *Der Tangospieler*'s moralizing certainty to advance what seems to me to be a far more damning critique of GDR historiography. By denying the possibility of any single, unambiguous narrative, and by refusing the moral instance of a narrator, in effect, by entrusting narration to its readers, *Horns Ende* makes a gesture that is far more democratic and far more empowering than any narrativized condemnation can ever be. The lesson of *Der Tangospieler* might well be that a writer as gifted as Christoph Hein should not pick such easy targets. By claiming the moral high ground he produced a novel that seems to me to fail on every level. It fails to arouse our sympathy for the historian Dallow, who was unjustly prosecuted for a minor political offense, because the novel needs the same character to represent the evil of the compromised intellectual. Should someone actually identify with this