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John L. Flood, ed.: Kurz bevor der Vorhang fiel: zum Theater der DDR

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John L. Flood, ed. *Kurz bevor der Vorhang fiel: zum Theater der DDR*. GDR Monitor Special Series No. 7. Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1990. 104 pp.

When one reads recent essays about the literature of the former GDR, one is probably confronted by a host of ambivalent emotions. Not the least of these, no doubt, is a sense of loss at the final passing of an era, coupled with a profound feeling of relief that a state, which hid its atrocities (being revealed now on almost daily basis) behind all too well-known clichés, has met its demise. Such ambivalence is certainly elicited by the articles in the present volume. Some are almost tedious since they are clothed in the now defunct jargon, such as dramatist Reiner Kerndl's brief overview of GDR drama, in which he also takes directors to task for bringing too much of their personal venue onto the stage, or the theater critic Christoph Funke's view of his metier, or Hanne Carsten's nonetheless informative description of cabarets. Other articles evoke a tinge of sadness, like the director Gerd Jurgons' description of the problems faced in staging productions, or the playwright Rudi Strahl's valiant attempt to justify the function of comedy in the GDR. Still other articles (the best ones in the volume) cause one to reflect on the effects the dramatically charged political situation will have on the most talented of the East German writers. Included in this category are Tony Meech's excellent overview of Christoph Hein's works, Moray McGowan's fascinating investigation of Marxism and postmodernism in the plays of Heiner Müller, and Hugh Rorrison's cogent interpretation of the 1988 version of Müller's play *Lohndrucker*. In spite of their varied emotional appeal, however, all of these essays will no doubt have lasting historical value, for they were written at a critical juncture, and they provide valuable insights into the final throes of a now defunct cultural entity.

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Fuchs, Jürgen. "*...und wann kommt der Hammer?*" *Psychologie, Opposition und Staatssicherheit*. Berlin: BasisDruck, 1990. 161 pp.

It is interesting to compare the ways in which Germans and Americans confront the brutality of their respective histories. Both nations are prone to periodic bouts of collective guilt. For Americans, far more pragmatic, things like black slavery, the near genocide of Native Americans or the internment of ethnic Japanese during World War II lead to calls for corrections and sometimes for reparations, yet they inspire very little introspection. For German intellectuals, by contrast, the issue of reparations for the victims of the Gestapo or the Stasi has never been a foremost concern. Far more energy has been devoted to introspection. Questions of a sort seldom heard in the United States are continually posed: How was this possible? What is wrong with the national character? What is human nature?

Revelations about the extent of the Stasi networks in the GDR have inspired a new examination of the national character in Germany, similar in kind, though not in scale, to the examination which followed World War II. Perhaps we in the United States may eventually feel compelled to follow the German example and undertake a more probing look at our philosophical heritage. If that happens, I can only hope we may have a few people here as judicious and insightful as Jürgen Fuchs to lead us in that undertaking.

Fuchs was imprisoned on political grounds in the GDR for nine months in 1977-78, then exiled to the West. He never entirely assimilated, but continued to devote himself, as an author and activist, to the special concerns of those still living in the GDR. Following the unification of Germany, he emerged as a foremost authority on the dynamics of dissent and repression in the former Eastern bloc. Recognizing the legacy of lives destroyed by the Stasi, Fuchs is angry, yet remarkably, almost entirely without rancor. While exploring the problems, both practical and philosophical, posed by recent revelations about the Stasi, he declines to offer any simplistic solutions.

"...und wann kommt der Hammer?" is filled with intriguing observations, yet these fragments carry a promise which remains largely unfulfilled. The volume consists of an interview, an essay and a collection of letters, perhaps a bit too casually thrown together, which do not fully constitute a cohesive whole. The interview concentrates on the experience of Fuchs with the Stasi, especially during his imprisonment. The essay explores the work of