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Heinz Ludwig Arnold, ed.: Jurek Becker

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Arnold, Heinz Ludwig, ed. *Jurek Becker*. TEXT + KRITIK. Heft 116. München: edition text + kritik, 1992. 99 pp.

This volume on Jurek Becker is a welcome addition to the TEXT + KRITIK authors' series, as it recognizes a significant contemporary author whose work is well known and has been the subject of considerable attention by literary critics in recent years. It offers a good combination of selections by the author, it depicts critical discussions of his work, and some of these contributions have been published previously. It also contains an interview with Becker and a selective bibliography. This mix is especially helpful in facilitating the reader's understanding of this author whose loss of part of his past in the Holocaust years has even impaired his knowledge of himself.

The selections by Becker are quite varied, presenting different facets of his work and concerns. The first, "Anstiftung zum Verrat," is a handwritten note, in which he describes the game of interrupting "[d]as Selbstverständliche" by playing the role of one's own enemy, a game which must continue as long as the role is productive (3). The suggestion, reflective of Becker's creative imagination, may even be a metaphor for his literary process. "Der Nachteil eines Vorteils," his familiar vignette about penguins, can be seen as an allegory on the outsider, a category into which he has often been cast as Holocaust survivor, as GDR author in West Germany, or simply as an author. "Die unsichtbare Stadt" is certainly the most moving and perhaps the most revealing of Becker's selections. Published in *Das Ghetto in Lodz 1940-1944* (1991), it recounts his futile attempt to recover lost memories of his childhood by viewing and re-ordering photographs from the 1989 Frankfurt exhibition on the ghetto, and his emotional reaction to the pictures despite his self-confessed aversion to sentimentality (17). His "Brief an Hermann Kant" of June 1979 offers another fascinating glimpse into Becker's psyche, as it records his response to Kant the day before the expulsion of nine writers from the GDR Writer's Union. It speaks so plainly about the deceptions of which Kant was guilty and the abuses and bad conditions in the GDR that it surely sealed Kant's hatred of him. "Die Wiedervereinigung der deutschen Literatur" (1990) is an excellent choice as the last Becker selection, because this post-"Wende" essay offers his assessment of both GDR and FRG literature and his pessimistic view of the quality of a reunited German literature.

The critical portion of the volume is carefully chosen to support and illuminate the selections by Becker. An interview by Heinz Ludwig Arnold sets the tone by touching on such themes as Becker's use of personal experience in his works, his personal and literary relationship to the Holocaust, his central concern of "Anpassung" versus rebellion (7), the "Ersatzfunktion" of GDR literature (8), his views on politics and literature, his unique relationship to the German language, and the effects of his move to the West, all in the context of a wide-ranging conversation on Becker's individual works. The critical essays then expand on some of these themes and introduce others. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard's "Schreiben im Schatten der Shoah" uses Becker's "Die unsichtbare Stadt" and his essay "Mein Judentum" as symbolic points of reference in treating his three novels with a Holocaust theme as his attempt to seek out the memories of his forgotten past, and in "Das unterhaltsame Ghetto," Helmut Schmiedt further explores the crucial Holocaust component of Becker's work by offering an impressive interpretation of Becker's use of the spatial dimension in *Jakob der Lügner* to convey the true nature of ghetto life despite the novel's humor. Hannes Krauss's "Sprachspiele--bitterernst" provides a good transition to the consideration of language and narrative strategy by relating Becker's unusual use of language to his "existentielles Dilemma" at war's end as a child survivor of the Holocaust who could not speak German and ultimately achieved a very precise language as a means of control (40-41). Krauss interprets Becker's choice of an "'unangemessenen Erzählstil'" (41) as part of his method of playing with his material and his reader in order to help the latter achieve clarity (42). Martin Krumbholz continues the discussion of narrative strategy by considering in "Standorte, Standpunkte" to what extent Becker expresses personal opinions in his works. After examining individual novels, he determines that Becker's narrative stance is characterized by the effort to help readers form their own opinions without telling them what to think (49) and by "die Tendenz zur abgeschlossenen Fabel" despite his awareness of the great gap between "Darstellung und Gegenstand" (50). Peter Hanenberg's "'Und sich mühen, aufrichtig zu sein.' DDR-Geschichten" addresses another important aspect of Becker's works: their GDR specificity. His analysis of the individual works concludes that they are GDR-specific, yet have a "gesamtdeutsche Bedeutung" (62), as they focus on the "deutsches Thema" of accommodation and resistance (66). The final critical essay, Oliver

Sill's "'Lieber sprechen als hören, lieber gehen als stehen.' Jurek Becker als politischer Kommentator," takes as its premise Becker's statement that the need to express resistance or take a stand is the basic impetus for writing (71) and then analyzes his explicit and implicit political criticism, another essential component of his work. The last contribution is Nicolai Riedel's excellent bibliography on Becker's work covering the period 1969-92. Although this selective bibliography neither intends nor achieves completeness, its extensive, well-arranged information provides the reader with the promised "Ariadnefaden durch die ... Forschungs- und Wirkungsgeschichte" (87).

This slender volume, then, offers both breadth and depth; it will be equally useful to a student who seeks an introduction to Becker and to a specialist who is researching a particular aspect of his work. From a technical standpoint, it is very well done--I found no printing errors or other technical problems. TEXT + KRITIK has produced another excellent addition to the scholarly library.

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Sahlmen, Andrea. *Das Vehikel der Imagination. Loests Erzählwerk als Reflexion innerdeutscher Diskrepanzen*. (Europäische Hochschulschriften: Reihe 1, Deutsche Sprache und Literatur, Bd. 1326). Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 1992. 229 S.

Diese Studie weist zurecht darauf hin, daß es keine Sekundärliteratur gibt, "die Loests Prosa in angemessenem Rahmen darstellt" (9). Sie will deshalb dazu beitragen, "daß eine systematische Erfassung des Erzählwerks Loests verfügbar wird" (9). Diesem Anspruch wird die Studie keineswegs gerecht.

Schon beim Versuch, den Titel der Untersuchung als inhaltlichen Leitfaden zu verstehen, hatte dieser Rezensent Schwierigkeiten. Das "Vehikel der Imagination" als Flucht aus der Realität ist ein Blochsches Prinzip und trifft insofern auf Loest zu, als es ihm half, die Bautzener Gefängnisjahre zu überleben. Entsprechend spielt der Begriff eine Rolle bei Sahlmens Ausführungen zu Loests Buch über Karl May *Swallow mein wackerer Mustang* (1980) und zum in seiner Autobiographie *Durch die Erde ein Riß* (1981) enthaltenen Kapitel "Mein albanisches Wunder". Darin scheint sich aber die Brauchbarkeit des Begriffs für die Autorin zu erschöpfen; er taucht im Rest der Studie nicht wieder auf. Ebenfalls kommen die "innerdeutschen Diskrepanzen" viel zu kurz, zumal sie erst auf S. 102 als weiterer Leitfaden der Studie Erwähnung finden. In den darauffolgenden Analysen werden diese Diskrepanzen als Thematik in Loests Werk dann auch nicht ausreichend behandelt, besonders im Zusammenhang mit *Froschkonzert* (1987), Loests erstem Roman nach der Übersiedlung in die Bundesrepublik, der ost- und westdeutsche Wirklichkeiten aufeinander stoßen läßt. Vor allem wird der von Loest dem Roman zugrundegelegten Bedeutung nicht nachgegangen, daß sich "Genüsse und Schmerzen, Konflikte und Banalitäten, Triumphe und Blamagen" (153) in östlichen und westlichen Organisationsformen kaum voneinander unterscheiden, daß es also nicht nur um Diskrepanzen geht. Auch der Analyse zur *Fallhöhe* (1989) fehlt der Bezug zum Titel der Studie, und ohnehin hätte der Roman wegen seiner DDR-Schriftstellerthematik im Zusammenhang mit dem Kapitelteil "Über die Unmöglichkeit, Tabus zu brechen: Schreibschwierigkeiten übergesiedelter DDR-Autoren" behandelt werden sollen. Unklar ist ebenfalls der Zusammenhang zwischen dem ersten Teil der Studie zu Loests Auseinandersetzung mit dem Faschismus und dem Rest der Untersuchung.