GDR Bulletin

Volume 2
Issue 2 April

1976

GDR Films

various authors

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FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Midwest Marxist Literary Group is currently soliciting papers for this year's Marxist Forum at the Midwest Modern Language Association meeting, Nov. 4-6 in St. Louis. The topic which has been tentatively approved is "Literature and Revolution in the Bicentennial Year". This subject provides a wide range of possibilities for prospective contributors. One possibility is the analysis of revolution (not restricted to the American Revolution) as reflected in literature. Studies of a cross-cultural nature (e.g. the effect of the French, Cuban, or Vietnamese Revolution on European, American, or Third World writers) are included under this heading. Another alternative concerns a focus on the development of revolutionary movements which have not or did not culminate in wide-scale confrontation. Studies of the Jakobiner movement in Germany in the late 19th century or aspects of minority movements in the USA today are examples in this area. Finally, one may choose to deal with the pedagogical problem of teaching literature dealing with revolution or teaching revolutionary thought.

Papers should be no more than 8 pages single-spaced and should be submitted by the beginning of May to the coordinators for this Forum: Ileana Rodriguez and Marc Zimmerman, 1020 Sixth St., Minneapolis, Minn. 55414, or Bob Holub, University of Wisconsin-Madison, German Department, 1220 Linden Drive, 8th Floor Van Hise Hall, Madison, Wisc. 53706. Questions concerning the appropriateness of topics should likewise be directed to the coordinators. Collective projects are encouraged.

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STUDENTS PERFORM PLENZDORF

On April 24 and 25, 1976, the University of Connecticut will present the American premiere of Ulrich Plenzdorf's drama, "Die neuen Leiden des jungen W." The performance, under the direction of Herbert Lederer, will be performed by German department students from the first year through the graduate level. The production is based on Lederer's own bilingual adaptation, interspersing English commentary into the German text, so that it will be accessible to an audience with a minimal knowledge of German.

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GDR FILMS

The following résumés of the GDR films now being distributed in the U.S. is reproduced from the February 1976 calendar of the Pacific Film Archive, 2621 Durant Ave., Berkeley, California, as was the information in the last issue of the Bulletin. Films can be rented through Audio Brandon, 34 Macquesten Parkway, Mount Vernon, N.Y. 10550.
THE LEGEND OF PAUL AND PAULA (DIE LEGENDE VON PAUL UND PAULA)

"The term 'legend' used for this love story is justified at least in one important aspect: love is defined as something wonderful which promotes and challenges man in his entirety. Carow, Plenzdorf and their star Angelica Domrrose present the legend for love and its fulfillment as something natural, most human. They do not withhold anything, they do not hide and hear that Paula enjoys it. Anyone that says that louder or softer tones might be more adequate, what I consider important is that nothing is being advertised. Nothing is hidden, but what the scriptwriters have inserted into their story, open, free, natural and self-understood, as we have hardly known it from other films. And that is what makes THE LEGEND OF PAUL AND PAULA a spectacle which the authors have inserted into their splendid dish. It seems to me to be the only screen presentation of the world of labor so simply and poetically with such powerful partners as Paula. And this is what happens here . . . I am at a loss to understand why a child must form a road accident so that Paula creates trouble with Paula. Doesn't Paula offer other causes for conflict and difficulty? And Paula's death? Does the legend need it all? Does her death raise the effect of her example, the demand on Paula?" —Peter Albrand in the GDR journal Welt-Blatt. Directed by Heiner Carow. Screenplay by Heiner Carow and Ulrich Plenzdorf. With Angelica Domrrose, Winfried Glätzer, Rolf Ludwig. (1972, 104 mins, color, 35mm, English titles)

THE SEVENTH YEAR (DAS SIEBENTE JAHR)

The seventh year describes seven days of a week during the seventh year of a marriage between a heart surgeon and her actor husband. The director, Frank Vogel, has stated of his film: "There are no iron-clad rules for me. But what happens today interests me much more than an historical occurrence." THE SEVENTH YEAR, as a working film dealing with the problems, conflicts, and difficulties which arise every day among friends, workmates and the mother of his child to reflect upon his feelings in a naive, strange and often comical way. Caused by his friends, workmates and the mother of his child to reflect upon his feelings which make it easy for the spectator to relate to the action on the screen." —Horst Knietzsch. Directed by Frank Vogel. Written by Wolf and Wolfgang Kohlhaase. (1972, 81 mins, English titles)

DO YOU KNOW URBAN?

"Ulrich Plenzdorf has written a novel based on a true story by the journalist Gisela Karau, about young people in the contemporary world. These are young people who are searching for their place in a socialistic society. There are those who have already found their niche, and who yet are still searching. The formation of a personal social identity is a continuous process, by reaching some goal . . . The film contains scenes pregnant with serenity, reflective and thoughtfully episodes. And there are also those conflicts, conflicts, and every day of the people who are living together. Happily the film is not buried under a mountain of pedagogical commonplace. Instead it sounds like a probing study of the restlessness of modern youth in the GDR. Directed by Ingard Reschke. (1972, 52 mins, English titles)

THE GLEIWITZ CASE (DER FALL GLEIWITZ)

This film by Egon Günther is adapted from a well-known novel by Johann Peter Haag. The story of the sculpture Kemmel. Directed by Konrad Wolf. Written by Wolf and Wolfgang Kohlhaase. With Jacek Stewert, Wastaw Liwanow. (1968, 118 mins, English titles)

THE THIRD (DER Dritte)

One of the first films of the post-Ulbricht era, THE THIRD deals with the question of sex equality in a way that was considered daring at the time of its release in 1972. (It was the first time a DEFA film contained scenes allowing to show a woman works on the screen.) THE THIRD DEFA film contained scenes allowing to show a woman working. THE THIRD was a remarkable mixing of personal considerations, politics and real-life events. It sounds like a probing study of the restlessness of modern youth in the GDR. Directed by Gerhard Klein. With Hannu Haase, Hervart Grosse, Helmar Thate. (1961, 66 mins, English titles)

MY DEAR ROBINSON (MEIN LIEBER ROBINSON)

Writing of MY DEAR ROBINSON in Kino DDR, Karl-Hein Tetter notes: "Cameraman Roland Graf - original, interesting, and gifted - has directed his first film. The title of the film is Mein LIEBER ROBINSON. In honor of this film, I will tell the story of a playful 18-year-old boy, caught in his own world of fantasy, who unexpectedly becomes a father and rejoices in the idea of his new son. This..." —Horst Knietzsch. Directed by Roland Graf. Written by Roland Graf. (1972, 82 mins, English titles)
In connection with the information on films about the GDR available from the United States Committee for Friendship with the German Democratic Republic, their address was erroneously printed. It should read

U.S.C.F.G.D.R.
150 East 16th St.
New York, N.Y. 10003

Sincere apologies to those readers who experienced delays in obtaining their films because of requests addressed to Sixth St.!

CORRIGENDUM

GDR Film Festival in U.S.
Reviewed by Dr. Robert Ante

Twenty-one films from the GDR were shown during November and December, 1975, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City through the cooperation of the State Film Archives of the GDR, Deutsche Film-Akten-Gesellschaft (DEFA), and MacMillan/Audio Brandon.

The films can be roughly classified into two broad groups: (1) those films which recount the evils and the collapse of the Nazi era, and (2) those films which reflect the problems and achievements of a State that is constructing socialism. Of course, several of the films must be grouped under another heading — (3) other.

The most cinematically powerful films shown were those portraying the rise of Hitler fascism as well as the struggle against it. These films include the Murders are Among Us (1946), Jacob the Liar (1974) Marriage in the Shadows (1947), The Blum Affair (1948), The Submissive (1951), Lissy (1957), The Cleitz Case (1961), They Called Him Ape (1969), Farewell (1968). Too other films, Wozzeck (1947) and Farewell (1966), dealt with the role that dehumanized bourgeois culture and science play in sowing the seeds of fascism.

Less successful and memorable are those films dealing with the problems of contemporary society in the GDR such as The Seventh Year (1969), The Third (1972), My Dear Robinson (1972), The Story of Paul and Paula (1973), and The Naked Man in the Playing Field (1974).

Undoubtedly, the greater artistic impact of the first group of films is based upon their thematic content. Perhaps one aspect of their more ready acceptance by American audiences is that they more closely reflect the social realities of the present day U.S.A. Marriage in the Shadows describes the moral and/or physical destruction of those who acquiesced to Hitler fascism. The concept that "art and artists should be pure and not involved with politics" and the phrase "I joined such-and-such governmental or privat art fund because I could then exert a countervailing liberal influence against the Nazis", rings more familiar to the American ear than the moral and social transformation of a youngster into a genuine human being in Do You Know Urban? The multi-faceted mass appeal of fascism is revealed by Lissy. Fascism had an appeal to the unemployed petty bourgeoisie (Lissy's husband), to socialists who accepted the Nazi's militant Wallacite tirades against the banks and the capitalists at face value (Lissy's brother), to those without moral scruples who simply viewed the Nazi party as a way to "get ahead" (her husband's friend). The general tenor of conversation by the audience after watching Lissy was "it hits too close to home!" Other films from this first group also have their contemporary counterparts: Wozzeck — experiments with syphilis on Blacks; The Blum Affair — the Angela Davis frameup, the Elsberg Case; The Cleitz Case — the Tonkin Bay incident.

A second reason for the greater success of the first group of films as compared with the second group is that the literature of struggle against tyranny is thousands of years old and already has well structured and defined formulas whereas the problem of how to artistically express the construction of how socialism has not yet been solved to the same extent. For example, Konrad Wolf, who directed two of the most powerful films included in this series, Lissy and I Was 19, both of which dealt with the Nazi period, also directed one of the most forgettable, The Naked Man in the Playing Field, which deals with an artist in contemporary socialist society.

On the other hand, whatever their artistic success, this second group attempts to deal with real problems: the working married professional woman and motherhood (The Seventh Year), the search for true love and a happy marriage (The Third); the limitations of our desires by the realities of life (The Story of Paul and Paula); the problems of teenage marriage and children (My Dear Robinson), the rehabilitation of an ex-convict (Do You Know Urban). The humanistic quality of society in the GDR is perhaps best revealed in those films populated by less admirable characters. Obviously, the GDR film makers do not maintain that socialist realism must portray a utopia, but rather, a society striving for a better life for all.

Two remaining films must be mentioned. The only comment that can be made about The Flying Dutchman (1964) is that Richard Wagner would surely have said: "Exactly what I had in mind!" The Devil's Elixir was not as successful. Methodical and scientific attention to meticulous detail created strong artistic impact in such films as Lissy, but the audience could not place The Devil's Elixir in time because of the ambiguities of costuming. The actors also had a plastic Hollywood quality about them. The moral of a story, that a monastery, a commune, or the church offers no refuge from the world of struggle between good and evil was lost in unrealistic timeless fantasy.

While those who attended the films in this series generally appreciated them, many younger people were unable to appreciate these films because they lacked the necessary historical and cultural background about the nature of Hitlerism, and the alignment of forces during World War II. This was the most disturbing aspect of this series. The American educational system has seen fit not to educate its youth about the evils of fascism.

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