

1976

Anneliese Löffler, ed.: Auskünfte: Werkstattgespräche mit DDR-Autoren

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Recommended Citation

Burwell, Michael (1976) "Anneliese Löffler, ed.: Auskünfte: Werkstattgespräche mit DDR-Autoren," *GDR Bulletin*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/gdrb.v2i2.341>

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Auskünfte: Werkstattgespräche mit DDR-Autoren. Hrsg. v. Anneliese Löffler. 2. Aufl. Berlin u. Weimar: Aufbau-Vlg., 1976. 548 S. 9,90 Mark.

This book is a collection of interviews with some 27 GDR-authors, that have all previously appeared in the Weimarer Beiträge (1968-74). The publication (and republication without change) of this volume reflects a highly favorable reaction to the interview format as a method of gaining acquaintanceship with how literary works come into being, as well as with the author's unrehearsed views on a variety of cultural and political issues. Although the question of the genesis, development, and realization of a literary idea is the one most frequently asked in these interviews, other matters that are commonly dealt with include the role of tradition in the writer's work, his views on the efficacy of literature, and his ideas on future projects and future plans in general. What ineluctably results from the "dialectic" of these interviews is a valuable view of the artist as an individual and as a human being --something that is not always clearly gleaned through a reading of the writer's works.

The fame of the writers interviewed ranges from the internationally well-known to the relatively obscure, and from the older generation (including Apitz, Gotsche, Joho, Lorbeer, Maurer, Renn, Selbmann, and von Wangenheim) to the "second" generation (including de Bruyn, Deicke, Kant, Kunert, Nachbar, Pitschmann, Wiens, Wolf) to the "third" generation (V. Braun, Hammel, Kahlau, Neutsch, Nowotny). Other than Braun, there are no very young writers in this book.

Reprinted in chronological order and with only minor emendations, the interviews usually vary in length from 15 to 25 pages. However, the conversations with Hermann Kant and Christa Wolf are considerably longer. The editor's introduction, the first part of which is particularly helpful, provides a general orientation to the interviews. Additionally, the appendix contains some very handy biographical sketches of the interviewees, along with a list of their most prominent publications. No secondary literature sources are included. The interviewers, together with their credentials and institutions, are listed as well.

This compilation will be especially helpful to those who do not have easy access to issues of the Weimarer Beiträge. It will also be a useful aid to those scholars who want to make convenient comparisons between authorial opinions without resorting to a xerox machine. Hopefully this type of publication will continue, for not only do more recent and future interviewees need to be included (e.g., Karl-Heinz Jakobs), but it would also be advantageous to possess the views of some of the very same writers at later stages in their careers.

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Klaus Jarmatz, Forschungsfeld Realismus: Theorie, Geschichte, Gegenwart. (Berlin: Aufbauvlg., 1975), pp. 311.

The nine essays collected in this volume -- six of which are revisions of earlier publications -- treat a variety of subjects related to the history of socialist literature in Germany and to the present state of literary production and science in the GDR. Thus, of the three original essays, two discuss literature directly, "Erwin Strittmatter" and "Anmerkungen zur neuesten Frosaliteratur der DDR," while the third, which opens the volume, deals with the development of literary criticism in the pre-1945 Communist and anti-fascist movements, as well as in the GDR itself.

Jarmatz is director of the department for the theory of socialist realism of the Institute for Social Sciences of the central committee of the SED, as well as a leading figure in the critics' section of the Schriftstellerverband of the GDR. There is no doubt, then, that this book will find eager readers in those circles where Eastern European pretensions to socialism are accepted uncritically. Hardly more than a cursory glance, however, at the content of Jarmatz's presentations would suffice to reveal a system of intellectual repression under a taut rhetorical surface.

The introductory essay, for example, purporting to present the history of Communist literary criticism in Germany, barely mentions any real history, except of course for perfunctory apostrophes to various party congresses. Yet the development of Communist aesthetics in the twenties and thirties was intimately tied to the smashing of council communism and the Stalinization of the KPD. None of this in Jarmatz: