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Anthologies: Two Views

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"Communist Manifesto" of Marx and Engels in the definition of "Humanismus".

The Germanist will likewise find this dictionary useful for understanding and defining the social realistic literature of the GDR. Since this is a textbook, the writers have been careful to point out possible confusions in terms and to explicate contrasting terms such as "allegory" and "symbol" and "critical" and "social" realism. It also indicates the view that GDR educators take of movements such as "expressionism" and "naturalism". This text is a good source for concise definitions of politically-colored terms such as "Neuertum", "Kulturpolitik" and "Sozialistische Parteilichkeit" which appear so often in reference works on GDR literature. It will also provide thorough definitions of terms such as "Ästhetik" and "Humanismus" interpreted in terms of Marxist-Leninist philosophy and of words such as "Elegie" and "Autorenstand" which have taken on new meanings in the literature of the GDR. Good, up-to-date definitions are also given for terms such as "Feature" which have a particular meaning in reference to socialist literature. And lastly, the student concerned with the socialist literature of the "Arbeiterbewegung" in the 1920's and 30's will be interested in the entries such as "Proletkult" and "BFRS".

All in all this reference handbook will be an addition to the library of educators and students concerned with the GDR but otherwise would not be appropriate as a text or dictionary for general literary study.

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ANTHOLOGIES: TWO VIEWS

Wolff, Lutz-W., ed. Fahrt mit der S-Bahn: Erzähler der DDR. München (dtv): 1971. 259 pp., paper, DM 4,80. ISBN 2-423-00779-8.

Schmitt, Hans-Jürgen, ed. 19 Erzähler der DDR. Ffm (Fischer): 1971. 255 pp., paper, DM 4,80. ISBN 3-436-01409-5.

Schmitt, Doris & Hans-Jürgen, eds. Neun Erzähler der DDR. Ffm (Fischer): 1975. 208 pp., paper, DM 4,80. ISBN 3-436-02043-5.

There is some astonishingly good short prose writing in the GDR, and these three anthologies contain an excellent cross-section of it. Fahrt
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mit der S-Bahn has 22 stories by 15 authors, 19 Erzähler der DDR has 21 stories by 19 authors, and Neue Erzähler der DDR has 16 stories by 16 "new" authors (average age 41). Fahrt mit der S-Bahn and 19 Erzähler der DDR overlap to the extent that the work of 12 of the same authors is represented in both books, but only three stories are actual duplications (de Bruyn's "Fedezeen," Neutsch's "Drei Tage unseres Lebens," and Morgner's "Drei Variationen über meine Grossmutter"). Of the total of 38 writers, 5 are women.

Not only is the general quality of the stories high, but also the breadth of styles and subjects is extensive, ranging from bitter anti-war war stories, to socialism-building exemplary pieces, to sophisticated modern satire. These are, without exception, authors who began to write in the GDR, and their work illustrates the theoretical premises of the Bitterfelder Weg and the societal utility of fiction literature.

Most interestingly, these stories constitute a literary mosaic which permits some telling observations about the state of the nation. There is a fresh, productive confidence in this prose which runs diametrically opposite to the Western image of the GDR as a prison full of malcontents. Nor is this political Pollyannaism; these authors are clearly not as isolated as they are commonly thought to be, nor are they blindly doctrinaire in their commitment to socialism.

The most striking single difference between these stories and stories written in the FRG during roughly the same period (the sixties), and the comparison is scarcely avoidable, is the near-total absence of alienation in the GDR writing. Editor Hans-Jürgen Schnitt states that literature, since it is integrated into society, "kann in der DDR nicht primär schon in Zweifel gezogen werden," and herein lies the fundamental condition of these authors and their narrative fiction. Perhaps the recurrent crises of Western literature will yet come to the GDR, but this seems increasingly unlikely in light of the functional position of literature in the overall culture-production framework of the modern GDR.

For the student or German instructor who wishes to get into GDR literature but is loathe to approach the growing stack of full-length novels, these short stories are a superb introduction.

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