

1977

Günther Deicke, ed.: Time for Dreams: Poetry from the German Democratic Republic

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Recommended Citation

Zipes, Jack (1977) "Günther Deicke, ed.: Time for Dreams: Poetry from the German Democratic Republic," *GDR Bulletin*: Vol. 3: Iss. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/gdrb.v3i2.387>

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in Vietnam and Chile, for example, are also mentioned, pointing to the broader implications of the work.

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Time for Dreams: Poetry from the German Democratic Republic. Edited by Günther Deicke. Translated by Jack Mitchell. Berlin: Seven Seas Publishers, 1976. 179 pages

Given the scarcity of GDR literature in translation, a volume of poetry from the German Democratic Republic would appear to be a welcome addition to the material which is slowly becoming available to readers who have no knowledge of German. In the particular case of poetry, there are already fine selections of East German poetry (with the German originals) in the 1973 special GDR issue of Dimension edited by Günter Kunert and in the anthology East German Poetry edited by Michael Hamburger. The present volume, Time for Dreams, is useful in that it does not duplicate the works included in Dimension and East German Poetry and it gives a good cross-sampling of established poets' works since 1968. However, the volume must be used with great care since the representation of poets is inadequate and the poetry is often poorly translated.

Let us begin first with the selection made by Deicke. As he readily admits, "anthologies are always coloured to a certain extent by the editor's own preferences, no matter how much he may be at pains to achieve objectivity." His criteria for selection center around a cross-section of the more established poets whose work is representative and typical of verse committed to "literary realism in a society building socialism." Missing from this volume are such established "renegades" as Wolf Biermann (of course), Heiner Müller, Thomas Brasch, and Peter Huchel. Nor are the more provocative poems of writers like Reiner Kunze presented. Apparent is a narrow political perspective which limits the ideological concern of the poetry. Otherwise, the works of 21 poets are presented, and there is a nice balance achieved between poems which deal with the everyday life in the GDR, literary and historical subjects, and acceptable political topics. The title of the anthology is taken from a poem by Paul Wiens and suggests the utopian impetus behind the volume: "When is it time for dreams?/Never/And always." Obviously a defense of the poetic imagination is intended which is the critical measure of

stark reality and the rationalization of society. Much of the poetry allows for a critical interpretation of the GDR reality, but the translations do not make the poems more susceptible for such critical interpretation.

Since it is always difficult to capture the full aesthetic and substantial meaning of poetry, the German originals should have been included as was done in the anthologies edited by Kunert and Hamburger. In fact, the translations by themselves are not sufficient to carry out the intended purpose of the volume. For one thing, Mitchell has sacrificed the meters, rhythms, and rhymes for literary accuracy, and in some cases, even the accuracy is questionable. In spot-checking the translations, I found them uniformly lacking in poetic verve and imagination. The translations of such works as Karl Mickel's "Nächtliches Gespräch über Gott und die Welt" and "Epitaph für Partisanen," Volker Braun's "Provokation für mich," and Günter Kunert's "Notizen in Kreide" disregard the poets' use of metrical structure to underline the emotional impact of their message. There are also poor choices of words and metaphors which fail to convey the contents of the original poems. To cite some examples from Braun's "Provokation für mich," Mitchell translates "andauernd" with the awkward phrase "with grim determination." He uses the word "extol" for "preisen" when the simple term "praise" would have been more suitable. Later in the poem, he actually switches to the word "praise" and shows an inconsistency in usage. Finally, the term "Honorar der Herzen" is translated as "wages of hearts," which totally misses the point that Braun wants to make. These are only a few examples from one poem. It does no service to East German poetry to produce a volume of translated poems just for the sake of making GDR artistic production available in the West. Both the aesthetic and political implications of this anthology must be studied and used with critical reservation if it is to serve a genuine purpose of cultural reception in the West.

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