

1979

## Karl-Heinz Schönfelder and Karl-Heinz Wirzberger: Literatur der USA im Überblick. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart

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### Recommended Citation

Smith, Duncan (1979) "Karl-Heinz Schönfelder and Karl-Heinz Wirzberger: Literatur der USA im Überblick. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart," *GDR Bulletin*: Vol. 5: Iss. 1. <https://doi.org/10.4148/gdrb.v5i1.442>

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A particular merit of this part of Mittenzwei's discussion is the attention he pays to locating Brecht's work in the shifting sands of the definitions of realism current in the sixties--from Goraudy's loosely-knit conception to Lukács' reflection theory, which Brecht rejects in favor of Lenin's more active reflection theory. The major project of the seventies has been to come to terms with Brecht in the context of the classical tradition: Mittenzwei concludes that Brecht's category of productivity is the materialist reversal of the idealistic conception of the development of personality in Weimar classicism (148).

In the meantime, many writers, like Peter Hacks, Heiner Müller, and Helmut Baierl, have turned their backs on Brecht. Mittenzwei sees the "Brecht-Müdigkeit" (152) of the seventies as an aspect of the aesthetic emancipation of GDR literature. Several changes become apparent in the seventies: the task of art is thought less to be directly and practically effective. Opposed to Brecht's notorious trust in science, interest is now directed to the "durchschlagende Kraft des Ästhetischen" (156). And the struggle between socialist modernism and the tradition, which reached its apex in the Brecht-Lukács debate and for decades fired the discussion on realism, has been replaced by other interests. Mittenzwei demonstrates the new aesthetic considerations that are demanded by the changed social situation. The development leads from hesitation, through acceptance, and ultimately to a complete questioning of Brecht's artistic solutions, but constant questioning of the given was one of the methods most dear to the dialectical theory and practice of Brecht himself.

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Literatur der USA im Überblick. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart. By Karl-Heinz Schönfelder and Karl-Heinz Wirzberger. Leipzig: Philipp Reclam jun., Verlag. 1977. 547 pages.

This volume offers an account of American literary history. It omits footnotes and references to secondary sources and intends to serve as an introduction for the general reader to the vast subject of American literature. The author of the first five chapters which cover the earliest periods

of American literature from the pre-colonial and colonial times to the end of the First World War (pp.7-312). The remaining five chapters and brief afterword were written by Wirzberger (pp.313-512). The afterword briefly summarizes the major trends in modern American literature. The bibliography is, of course, selective rather than comprehensive, but it includes Soviet sources which are too frequently and often unjustly neglected by western scholarship.

The Marxist-Leninist approach provides the narrative background for a narration of the social and economic history of the USA and offers the general quality distinction between "progressive" and "non-progressive" authors, works, or trends. The literature of the earlier periods is treated in considerable detail due largely to the relative paucity of writers. The authors of this volume are at pains to provide quantitatively equal coverage of the periods treated by each of them. This conforms to the strict historicism of a Marxist-Leninist literary history, but in so short a volume it at times leads to overly brief treatments of significant modern authors such as Hemingway, in favor of relatively lengthy treatments of writers like William Dean Howells or Frank Norris. This inequality in the treatment of individual writers does not, however, reflect a political attitude. It is the result of two authors being accorded an equal number of lines to deal with an equal number of American writers. On the whole, both authors have admirably coped with the restraints imposed by a one-volume history of some 300 years of literature.

Their accounts of the various directions or tendencies in American literature take particular note of the conflict between the realists and the non-realists. This is an example of reductionism and cannot be entirely the fault of the relative brevity of the volume. It reflects a somewhat formulaic approach to judgments of literary quality, even in a socio-political sense. The lack of any systematic account of the popularity of certain authors, works, or tendencies allows for some historical distortion. This is particularly true of the second half of the book in which Chapter VI (pp.416-446), entitled "Die progressive amerikanische Literatur der dreissiger bis sechziger Jahre", might lead a reader unfamiliar with American literature to believe that Abraham Polonsky, Alvah Bessie, Jack Conroy, Philipp Bonosky, Howard Fast et

al. enjoyed considerable popularity in American literary circles. A comparison of this period's treatment in the GDR volume with the treatment of such writers in a similarly proportioned history of American literature written in the west indicates the slight influence accorded these writers in the west. Yet it is because of such chapters and because of this type of evaluative approach that this volume can interest American readers.

The descriptive treatment of Black American literature throughout the work is useful and, from the author's point of view, objective. Thus James Baldwin is increasingly a disappointment while LeRoi Jones is a much praised writer. Much modern and contemporary American poetry is highly praised for its social and political engagement, especially during the years of the Indochina war, as are also certain now virtually "classic" American playwrights such as Eugene O'Neill or Arthur Miller.

This volume offers a valid historical summary of American literature and for western readers interesting and at times not quite predictable appraisals of "major" and "minor" American authors.

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Amerikanische Literaturkritik im Engagement: Beiträge zur marxistischen Literaturtheorie und Literaturgeschichte. Ed. by Norman Rudich. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1978. 7,-M.

This East German collection of ten essays by American Marxists is based for the most part on a collection published in 1976 by Ramparts Press under the title Weapons of Criticism: Marxism in America and the Literary Tradition. Also edited and with an introduction by Norman Rudich, Weapons of Criticism contained eighteen essays which had been stimulated by two recent developments in Marxist literary activities: the discussion group of the American Institute for Marxist Studies which was established from 1968 to 1970 and held monthly meetings in New York and the Marxist Forum of the Radical Caucus at the 1972 annual meeting of the Modern Language Association. Only seven of the original essays, those dealing exclusively with American

literature, are included here. The remaining three are taken from other sources in the successful effort to further sharpen the American focus of the East German edition. A preface by the East German writer Robert Weiman orients the reader to the subject and the edition. An excellent introduction by Rudich outlines the development of Marxist literary criticism in the United States and some of his own ideas on Marxist literary criticism.

The ten essays selected for the East German edition cover a variety of subjects from Marxist theory to criticism of individual authors and works. The first five, all from the original collection, Weapons of Criticism, are theoretical in nature and include studies by Fredric Jameson, Sidney Finkelstein, Gaylord C. LeRoy, Lee Baxandall, and David G. Stratman. They range from essays on aesthetic theory (Finkelstein) to an attempt to unite literary scholarship and political activism (LeRoy). Richard Wasson's essay on new Marxist criticism appeared originally in the Fall, 1968, issue of Science and Society. Peck argues convincingly that the revival neglected the importance and scope of Marxism in America in the thirties.

Three first-rate essays on individual American authors conclude the collection. H. Bruce Franklin's study of Melville and Annette T. Rubinstein's essay on Henry James appeared in Weapons of Criticism. Ernest Kaiser's essay entitled "William Styron's Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond," (Boston, 1968), criticizes Styron's treatment of black history in The Confessions of Nat Turner as well as a number of careless reviews of the best-selling novel.

This ably translated collection of American essays will offer German language readers a valuable introduction to recent developments and attitudes in Marxist literary theory, history, and criticism in the United States. For readers in the GDR, it will provide an opportunity to examine similarities and differences in Marxist criticism in their own country and may serve to suggest that for all the shortcomings their American Marxist counterparts find in a capitalistic society, one of them is obviously not the suppression of different points of view.

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