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Hans-Jürgen Schmitt, ed.: Geschichten aus der DDR

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BOOK REVIEWS

Huetting: Hans-Jürgen Schmitt, ed.: Geschichten aus der DDR

Geschichten aus der DDR. Ed. by Hans-Jürgen Schmitt. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1979. 250 pages.

This anthology contains the following sixteen stories written in the second half of the 1970's by GDR authors, most of whom are also well known in the West: Günter Kunert, Lovestory--made in DDR; Fritz Rudolf Fries, Der Nachlaß von Raül; Klaus Schlesinger, Am Ende der Jugend; Stefan Heym, Mein Richard; Ulrich Plenzdorf, Kein runter, kein fern; Martin Stade, Exmatrikulation 68; Erich Loest, Zwei Briefe von Rohdewald; Thomas Brasch, Fastnacht; Bernd Jentzsch, Jungfer im Grünen; Werner Heiduczek, Das Schicksal treibt mit uns seinen Spott; Volker Braun, Unvollendete Geschichte; Hans Joachim Schädlich, Kurzer Bericht vom Todfall des Nikodemus Frischlin; Helga Schütz, Mittwoch im April; Christa Wolf, Selbstversuch; Karl-Heinz Jakobs, Kanal; Franz Fühmann, Spiegelgeschichte.

Looking at the contents list does whet the reader's appetite, because one is always eager to find new works by these authors, and stories that one has heard about but may not have easy access to (such as Braun and the excerpt from Heiduczek's Tod am Meer). Most of the stories treat past or present GDR problems. The situation of youth is the focus of several stories (Schlesinger, Heym, Plenzdorf, Braun). Stade's story tells of four students who are expelled for seemingly minor infractions (skipping a theater performance on a field trip); Loest's is about a radio announcer who meets, unexpectedly, a former colleague whose pleas for help he ignored when the latter was arrested years previously. Kunert notes ironically in his story, "Im System des organisierten Mangels waren Sekretärinnen knapper als öffentlich geäußerte Wahrheiten."

The stories are almost all interesting because of the personal perspective of the writers, which comes through strongly. This, in fact, is the unifying characteristic of the anthology, and the editor comments on it in his afterword, which, though brief, is a useful survey of trends in recent GDR fiction.

Turning to the source notes, however, one wonders--as one always does with anthologies published in the West--how many of

the stories were actually published in the GDR. The predominance of West German imprints and the note "unpublished" (for Stade, Loest, and Jakobs) is not very encouraging. I am certain in only five cases that they were published in the GDR, although a more thorough check might show others. The editor explains, "Wären die Rechte nicht in der Hand der Autoren oder bei Verlagen in der Bundesrepublik, ich hätte diese Auswahl nie zustande gebracht." And he points to the hardening in cultural politics that is demonstrated at the latest by the expulsion of Wolf Biermann.

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The German Democratic Republic: A Developed Socialist Society. Ed. by Lyman H. Legters. Westview Special Studies on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press 1978. xi & 285 pages.

In his preface to this volume Lyman H. Legters alludes to the "loneliness" perceived by specialists on the GDR up to very recent times. In fact, Legters and his ten fellow contributors, most of whom are political scientists, have made great strides toward overcoming the academic isolation of the recent past. These contributors have written on a variety of aspects of the GDR, from foreign policy and the National People's Army to the New Economic System and the growth of political culture.

It is obviously difficult to review such diverse contributions. However, the changing, dynamic character of the GDR is one of the recurrent themes of these essays. Kenneth Hanf discusses the governmental changes of 1972-74, more specifically, how GDR decision-makers intended to re-structure the relationship between central and local governmental organs. Michael Keren discusses the failure of the New Economic System and the increased state intervention in economic affairs in subsequent years. M. Donald Hancock shows how the planning functions and duties of GDR intellectuals have contributed to non-