

1980

Gerd Labrousse, ed.: Zur Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft der DDR

Duncan Smith
Brown University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/gdr>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

Smith, Duncan (1980) "Gerd Labrousse, ed.: Zur Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft der DDR," *GDR Bulletin*: Vol. 6: Iss. 3. <https://doi.org/10.4148/gdrb.v6i3.548>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *GDR Bulletin* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

fourteen essays published elsewhere between 1961 and 1975 and six from his literary estate.

This collection shows the wide range of Batt's literary interests and his remarkable erudition in German literature. They are organized into four groups. Group I consists of a short sketch of and by the author written in the third person and an essay on his theory of criticism. His orientation is Marxist but relatively free of the cultural politics of many of his contemporaries.

Group II includes eight essays on German authors and/or their works from a long piece on Reinke der Fuchs to a reply to a S. Fischer Verlag "Rundfrage" on Thomas Mann. The essays on Lichtenberg and Gott-helf are precise and offer valuable insights into their work. Two essays on Lion Feuchtwanger deal first with Feucht-wanger's theory (and defense) of historical writing and then with an example of it in his historical novel Die Fuchse im Weinberg. This group of essays is founded out with a convincing argument for "Mundartdichtung in der Nationalliteratur" and a delightful piece on "Barlach als Epistolograph". The six essays in Group III deal with Georg Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, Anna Seghers, exile literature, and Expressionism. The title for the collection, Widerspruch und Ubereinkunft, is taken from the theme of one of the major essays -- a discussion about the differences of opinion between Lukács and Seghers on the subject of experience and form as documented in their correspondence between 1938 and 1939. In these essays, the weakest in the collection, Batt is indifferent to Brecht, enthusiastic about Seghers, and critical of Lukács. In five of the six essays Lukács comes under attack mainly for his conservatism and failure to appreciate the importance of social change in imperialism and its effects on the artist.

The four essays in Group IV were found in Batt's literary estate. The first is no more than a review of a book by Heinz Plavius about contemporary FRG literature. The remaining three are devoted to the development of GDR literature. Unfortunately, the editors were careless in their treatment of this part of Batt's estate and either failed to notice or ignored the duplication of long sections of text

from one essay to another. The three essays could have yielded a single masterful account of GDR literature and a fitting capstone to this worthwhile and impressive collection.

Herman K. Doswald
Virginia Polytechnic
Institute and State
University

Zur Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft der DDR. Edited by Gerd Labrousse in Amsterdam. Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik. Band 7. Amsterdam: Rodopi. 1978. 300 pages.

This volume appears in a distinguished series of Amsterdam Studies on recent German Literature. The articles contained in it are of a uniformly high quality and reflect a serious interest in the once ignored literature of the GDR. The first two articles, by Labrousse and Hoogeveen, wrestle with the theoretical definitions of GDR literature. Labrousse points to the immediate questions for western critics, (i.e. can we in fact actually understand GDR literature given our own conceptions of literature?), while Hoogeveen cannot seem to reach a clear position. Indeed, aside from the very detailed and useful survey of works dealing with all aspects of GDR literature for the past twenty years which makes up the first third of this lengthy conclusion, or series of conclusions. What seems to be intended is an intricate questioning of how in fact we in the West can understand GDR literature especially with reference to its own conception of itself and despite the most recent sophisticated theories of reception in the West. I found large sections of the article stylistically too difficult to be able to ascertain what answers Hoogeveen might be offering. While I am certain that his article contains many important insights into theoretical positions in comprehending the phenomenon of GDR literature, the article is for me otherwise an example of the most mannered German academic style which seems intent on making more difficult that, which is already difficult enough.

The Endler article is a lively review of GDR lyric poetry from the somewhat playful point of view of one of its primary figures. Laschen's work on Arendt's poetry is the beginning in this collection of what I see as the most significant aspect of the volume. The articles following Labrousse's and Hoogeveen's, are all excellent examples of literary criticism and analysis, which consciously but not self-consciously deals with literary problems in GDR literature, such as Erbeaneignung dissent, and the individual versus the collective. But with the exception of Werner Krogmann's at times naive questions about the impact of literature on society with reference to the exile of Biermann, most seem to be positive answers to the question first raised by Labrousse and elaborated on by Hoogeveen: it is possible for critics in the West to deal with GDR literature, even on some of its own terms, without becoming non-literary and overly "political" in an anti-literary sense.

Each of the separate articles is well worth reading for the information and analysis it provides. Laschen's and Naaijken's works on Arendt are excellent interpretations of Arendt's overall role in GDR and other German poetry, the former linking him tightly to German Expressionism. Hoefert's analysis of Braun's preoccupation with Faust themes enlightens the reader further about the now "classical" problem of Erbeaneignung and its meaning for a writer viewed in the GDR by many as a "left wing radical". I.A. and J.J. White raise an interesting point in their interpretation of Edgar Wibeau as a Schelm figure and position this work and its author more in the mainstream of European writing which sees existential tragedy in aloneness and individuation but disaster in enforced socialization models. Krogmann, despite his perplexing naivete about politics and literature in non-liberal societies, offers a fine analysis of the beginnings of the middle generation's (Christa Wolf, Günter Kunert, Hermann Kant, Max Walter Schulz) parting of ways with regard to interpretations of literature's role in GDR society.

Johannes Maassen interprets Kunert's continuation of Lichtenberg's commentaries as an expression of Kunert's own distrust of bourgeois value systems coupled with a distaste for the GDR solutions to the problems of achieving freedom in human societies. Gregor Laschen's brief notes connect Fühmann to tradition through innovation in the Märchen. In so brief a space I can only point to the significance of this collection. This represents an attempt at integrating GDR literature but only a specific portion of it -- which, however, here stands for the whole -- into responsible traditions of German and European literature. This leaves the reader of the volume with the slightly misleading impression that responsible and responsive GDR literature is capable of being understood by Western literary scholarship, a comprehension which is linked to a quality judgement. That judgment implies that good GDR literature, i.e. literature susceptible to those forms of analysis, is comprised largely of literature which sees itself as an alternate mainstream in GDR literature and society, at odds with the Party and the official literary institutions but reflective of the deeper concerns of GDR society as a whole. It will be interesting to see how GDR critics review this volume, for it can hardly escape them that it is a refined example of the cultural convergence doctrines which affect other areas of study of the GDR. It is undoubtedly one of the more interesting collections of articles on GDR literature to appear both in regards to the individual contributions and to the meaning of the volume itself in the cultural rapprochement between the FRG and the GDR.

Duncan Smith
Brown University
