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Hans Kaufmann, ed.: Tendenzen und Beispiele. Zur DDR-Literatur in den siebziger Jahren

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Tendenzen und Beispiele. Zur DDR-Literatur in den siebziger Jahren. Edited by Hans Kaufmann. Universal-Bibliothek (Kunstwissenschaft). Volume 894. Leipzig: Verlag Philipp Reclam jun., 1981. 269 Pages. DDR 2,- M.

This collection of seven essays offers an informative account of recent literary developments in the GDR. Its authors include four members of the German faculty at Humboldt University (Ursula Heukenkamp, Frank Hörnigk, Eva Kaufmann, and Brigitte Stuhlmacher), two members of the Zentralinstitut für Literaturgeschichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften (Reinhard Hillich and Hans Kaufmann) and one member of the Bezirksverband Berlin of the Schriftstellerverband der DDR (Marianne Krumrey). Although the group worked collectively, the editor, Hans Kaufmann, takes pains to point out that the result is a collective work only in the sense that its authors reached common or similar conclusions and criticized and exchanged view on the individual essays. They made no attempt to agree on every thesis and view nor to endow the volume with any kind of "institutional blessing."

Hans Kaufmann's introductory essay, "Veränderte Literaturwissenschaft," sets the stage for the essays to follow by suggesting that the seventies reflect significant changes in the literary process which include the confirmation of socialist humanism, a new view of daily life, a need to find meaning in life, and an awareness of developments in world history. In works of the seventies by Stephen Hermlin (Abendlicht), Heiner Müller (Der Auftrag), and Ulrich Plenzdorf (Legende vom Glück ohne Ende) which have in common the discovering of "sich bewährender Vorstellungen vom Wert und Sinn individuellen Daseins innerhalb der Determinanten eines gesellschaftlichen Lebensprozesses" (p. 10), he sees characteristic subject matter and artistic possibilities for contemporary literature of the GDR.

While not intended to be a history of GDR literature in the seventies, the collection of essays as a whole offers a survey of developments in the novel, the lyric, and the drama during those years and such themes as the worker, youth, revolution, and nature. Kaufmann sketches the new literary landscape in general terms. Marianne Krumrey examines work, the worker, and the working class in Volker Braun's story "Die Tribüne," Joachim Nowotny's novel Ein gewisser Robel, and Paul Gratzik's novel Transportpaule. Eva Kaufmann traces the development of socialist humanism on the basis of a variety of works. Reinhard Hillich examines aesthetic theory in the use of creative invention in a single novel by Fritz Rudolf Fries, Das Luft-Schiff. Frank Hörnigk treats the theme of revolution and the development of the drama in plays by Heiner Müller (Der Auftrag), Peter Hacks (Die Fische) and Volker Braun (Guevara oder der Sonnenstaat). Brigitte Stuhlmacher discusses the problem of youth in Ulrich Plenzdorf's novel Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. and compares Plenzdorf's handling of the theme with that of earlier treatments by Max Halbe in Jugend, Frank Wedekind in Frühlingserwachen, and Walter Hasenclever in Der Sohn. In the last essay, Ursula Heukenkamp discusses the changing attitude toward nature in the GDR lyric.

The essays are at their best when they focus on the analysis of one or just a few authors, works and themes. When they treat several works and authors, they are superficial and invariably fall back on socialist ideology for an underlying theme.

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Dieter Aner, Pjotr Nestorowitsch Kurilenko, Dietrich Herrde, Siegfried Schlegel, Horst Uhlemann (Leiter und Hauptautor), Klaus Zorn: Bildung, Wissenschaft und kulturelles Leben in der DDR. Arbeitshefte Landeskunde DDR für Ausländer. Leipzig: VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie, 1981. 228 pages. 6,-M.

This volume, the last in the series, deals with three separate topics: education, the arts, and (in a broad sense) cultural aspects of everyday life. It is more detailed than the previous volume reviewed, and more problems emerge if one reads between the lines. Difficulties with youth, often misunderstandings across the generation gap, are used to justify the importance of communist education. The latter is supremely important, for the present young generation is the one, it is claimed, which will complete the transition from a socialist to the long-sought communist society. Older East Germans, having struggled to set up a socialist state, are shocked at the critical attitude of today's youth, who do not realize their good fortune--the authors try to smooth over the differences. They do feel justified, however, in admonishing adolescent apprentices who seem more concerned with beer, cigarettes and sex than with their education. New dormitories are being built in order to supervise them more closely (at present only 25% are accommodated in hostels). In the previous volume, the free choice of the workplace was stressed: here it is admitted that it is not always possible to fulfill requests. Nonetheless, students receive more definite advance preparation for their career than in many Western countries. By the tenth grade at the latest a contract for vocational training is signed; and college students are informed of their post and its location at least one year before graduation. The entire education system is well explained in this volume with up-to-date information: for example, 90% of three to five year-olds took advantage of free kindergarten places in 1979. The recent introduction of the Vorpraktikum, a period of experience in the workplace before university entry, is outlined. This, on top of military service, is producing a generally older generation of students, many of them married, which has created new demands on the student grants and housing authorities. In the arts, a portrayal of the growth of the socialist personality is expected. The working class has always tended to be the central object of art in the GDR, but since 1977 there has been a move away from the abstractly symbolic towards a more concrete portrayal of everyday events. The authors stress the openness of publishing policies, concerning works of foreign literature (at the same time admitting censorship). They give high praise to the film industry, much of whose work consists of dubbing foreign movies; the recording industry is likewise acclaimed for its rapid expansion without neglecting quality, and the meticulous preparation of standard editions of the complete works of important composers (Beethoven and Hanns Eisler are mentioned in the same breath). The generous support of live concerts and music festivals is also described. The final section covers leisure pursuits more generally, and also traditional customs (some modified from religious festivals), but in addition everyday life in the workplace and home. The necessary role of the unions for correcting an absence of "socialist responsibility" is stressed again. But such political control does not extend into the home, and this volume, like the other, complains about uncooperative husbands who refuse to help their wives with the shopping and housework in acknowledgement of the equal status of women. One sees in the end how difficult it is to change ingrained attitudes in the private sphere even in the fully socialist state.

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