Horst Uhlemann, et al., eds.: Bildung, Wissenschaft und kulturelles Leben in der DDR

Geoffrey J. Giles
University of Florida

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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 Heuenkamp, 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 views 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 continuation 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 Hermin (Abendlicht), Reiner Müller (Der Auftrag), and Ulrich Plenzdorf (Legende vom Glück ohne Ende) which have in common the discovering of "sich bewundernder 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 Rutowcy’s novel Ein gewisser Robel, and Paul Gratzius’s novel Transportpaula. Eva Kaufmann traces the development of socialist humanism on the basis of a variety of works. Reinhard Hillich examine analytic theory in the use of creative invention in a single novel by Fritz Rudolf Fries, Das Hoff-Schiff. Frank Hörnigk treats the theme of revolution and the development of the drama in plays by Hainer Müller (Der Auftrag), Peter Hacks (Die Fische) and Volker graun (Gouvernor oder der Sonnenstreich). Brigitte Stuhlmacher discusses the problem of youth in Ulrich Plenzdorf’s novel Die neuen Leiden des jugen M., 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 Heuenkamp 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 superficially and invariably fall back on socialist ideology for an underlying theme.

Herman K. Dowland
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

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