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Siegfried Rönisch, ed.: DDR-Literatur '85 im Gespräch

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zum Beispiel in den USA, wo sich in einer ganzen Reihe von sehr verschiedenartigen Archiven eine Fülle von Unterlagen zum Druck und zur Rezeption so berühmter Romane wie Das siebte Kreuz und Transit finden läßt, ganz zu schweigen von biographischen Details, unbekanntem Drehbüchern, verloren geglaubten Bühnentexten und verschollenen Versionen einer Kurzgeschichte. Oder auch in Mexiko, wo bislang noch kaum in Regierungsarchiven und Zeitungsredaktionen gesucht wurde. Und natürlich in der DDR, wo - um nur ein Beispiel zu nennen -, jahrelang die ebenerst teilweise publizierte Briefwechsel zwischen Anna Seghers und ihren New Yorker Kontaktleuten Wieland Herzfelde und F. C. Weiskopf zugänglich waren.

Im Klappentext von Kathleen J. LaBahns Studie steht geschrieben, daß die Verfasserin in Tübingen und bei der, von Hans Albert Walter freilich lange Jahre vernachlässigten und heruntergewirtschafteten "Arbeitsstelle für deutsche Exilliteratur" in Hamburg "research" betrieben habe. Es wäre schön, wenn sie sich jetzt ohne den Druck, eine Dissertation produzieren zu müssen, noch einmal in Ruhe an diesen und anderen Orten nach Material und Ideen zu den mexikanischen Exiljahren Anna Seghers umsehen könnte. Zu finden gäbe es da nämlich, das würde sie schon bald merken, eine ganze Menge.

Alexander Stephan
University of Florida

DDR-Literatur '85 im Gespräch. Siegfried Rönisch ed. Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1986. 355 pp.

The question do poets and writers presage ideas and social change or reflect the Zeitgeist can't be conclusively answered, particularly not for a controlled society where denied publications are an additional unknown. Yet some trends present in DDR-Literatur '85 im Gespräch seem to

indicate notable changes in the country.

The editor states that this is the third of such literary discussions which do not propose to be in-depth critical assessments of the year's writings but merely hope to raise issues and suggest perspectives. That this volume does. A bibliography of belletristic and scholarly literary publications during 1985 is included.

Several encompassing essays provide breadth which reviews of individual publications can't. Of particular interest seem Christel Berger's "Die Zeit des Faschismus in der DDR-Prosa 1985," Klaus Schuhmann's "Lagebericht zur ökologischen Situation - Beobachtungen zur Lyrik der achtziger Jahre," and Klaus Hammer's "Erzählen vom Reisen." Three additional essays on juvenile literature, radio plays, and the role of women in contemporary class struggles are interesting but reveal less that is new in social attitude.

Christel Berger presents her reflections carefully and thoughtfully. She discusses at greater length Günther Rücker and his stories Herr von De. Hilde, das Dienstmädchen (1984) and Anton Popper und andere Erzählungen (1985), as well as Gerhard Holtz-Baumert's remembrances of his proletarian childhood in Die pucklige Verwandtschaft. Both books and a third, Erwin Strittmatter's Grüner Juni are also reviewed individually. In these books and others, Berger essentially perceives a greater realism in the depiction of various members of the German people during the Hitler years. Nazi types could be fascinatingly attractive, and not all working class members were aware of the class struggle and the political dangers, nor were they always morally appealing characters. As Berger sums up, "Man versucht genau zu sein, und polemisiert gegen glatte Schablonen." (22)

Klaus Schumann finds that poets of the eighties take a very critical position toward the environmental practices of the state. The push for industrialization during the formative years of the Republic exacted a dear price from

the environment. Volker Braun contrasts his own future oriented poems of the seventies with his present grim view of violated nature. Other poets, such as Wulf Kirsten, Richard Pietraß, Heinz Czechowski are not as introspective as Braun, but they arrive at the same conclusions, often presented in the matter-of-fact language of technical publications.

Finally, Klaus Hammer's essay on travel literature surprises by the global parameters of the publications and the reflective and contrastive, critical nature of the contents. These three essays reveal a surer attitude that writers have about their society, thus allowing them stronger criticism of fundamentals and a more mature and differentiated depiction of the working class as well as the history and development of the GDR.

Some of the individual reviews group themselves around poetry, while others relate to the German Romantics. Christa and Gerhard Wolf published a collection of various forms of writing of the early Romantics. The Wolfs incorporate the reader by using the pronoun "we" or addressing him in dialogue to connect insights about the Romantics to issues confronting present society. The reviewer relates the book to writings on the Romantics by other GDR authors, thus providing a broader perspective. Also connected to the Romantics is a biography by Sigrid Damm on Lenz which its reviewer considers eminently readable prose. It integrates scholarly discussion, including documentation, and yet leaves questions unresolved where there are no answers.

Tangential to historical awareness is Klaus-Dieter Hähnel's discussion of Peter Hacks's essay on the genre of the ballad. Hähnel considers the essay not without controversy but sees its primary value in relating the awareness of genre to an increasing consciousness of tradition. (125) Finally the essay on the novel Das sanfte Labyrinth by Heinz Zander, a painter and graphic artist, places him into the romantic tradition during the discussions of his

writings. The novel itself is set in a phantastic, timeless world which, however, is part of our technological age. The demise of this phantasy world stands as warning that technical as well as artistic experimentation undertaken without regard to humanistic values are bound to be self-destructive.

Among the reviews of poetry the finally published poems of Inge Müller seem most interesting. She wrote them during the fifties and sixties when future orientation and building the new state were the slogans. Müller, however, turns to the experiences of WW II and the lasting injury that all suffered from it. Her language is stark, employing rhyme not for poetic aesthetics but to further the communicative impulse. Of interest are also Kristian Pech's erotic, satirical quatrains, written in Lausitz dialect, coupled with real and invented language of the baroque era. Pech's reviewer, Grabow, minimally discusses the poems, but he advances interesting cross-connections of Pech's language to the Wiener Gruppe around Jandl and discusses their historical indebtedness to expressionism. The review appeals through its thought provoking perspectives and the curious poems it introduces.

There are many more individual reviews that might interest. Christiane Barckhausen's Schwestern. Tonbandprotokolle aus sechs Ländern and Valerie Radtke's Ich suche Liebe. Roman meines Lebens. Kindheit come under the rubric of documentary writing. Kant's Bronzeit, Braun's Hinze-Kunze, de Bruyn's Neue Herrlichkeit are discussed, and a Berlin history, personalized by linking it with Mathilde Jacob, a friend of Rosa Luxemburg, might be appealing.

Obviously, the quality of the discussions varies, but the book keeps its promise to open perspectives on the GDR literature of 1985.

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