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Lothar Höricke: Das Lofotenbaby. Ein kleiner Roman

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zum Altersheim, zum Krankenhaus, zur Gartentaube (und nicht der romantischen Version). Oft stehen die Alten im Mittelpunkt, das Thema "Tod" wird in beinahe einem Drittel aller Geschichten angesprochen. Die Jugend, angeödet von Feten und organisierten Freizeitbeschäftigungen, sieht einer ungewissen Zukunft entgegen. Kurz: ein jeder trägt schwer an seinem Schicksal, da ändert der Sozialismus auch nichts dran. Dem muß aber gleich hinzugefügt werden, daß der Staat nicht etwa in Frage gestellt wird, im Gegenteil das Selbstverständnis mit dem sich die Menschen im Staat und seinen Institutionen bewegen ist offensichtlich. Abstürze werden hier, wie überall, meist verursacht durch "pilot error."

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Das Lofotenbaby: Ein kleiner Roman. By Lothar Hörnicke. Berlin: Neues Leben, 1986. 254 pages.

Despite strict health regulations established by the state and the dutiful enforcement of these regulations by the medical advisor to the Fishing Ministry, Dr. Schmidt, it happened that on one sunny morning on a government fishing trawler in the North Sea, in the vicinity of the Lofoten Islands, one of the women workers, Marietta Müller, is overcome by what are initially described as stomach cramps and shortness of breath. In reality Marietta is experiencing labor pains. Because the ship is not equipped to handle such an emergency, the East German ship captain requests help from the Norwegian rescue service. Marietta's son, Mario, is born in the rescue helicopter.

At first glance the focal point of Hörnicke's novel appears to be an unheard of occurrence: the birth of a baby to a woman, who contrary to medical reports denying the pregnancy, was indeed six months pregnant when the voyage began. The novel begins with Marietta's labor. Following chapters describe the background leading up to the birth of her son, including the oversight by Dr. Schmidt. While the tale itself is rather entertaining, Hörnicke has some

rhetorical tricks and some criticism of GDR bureaucracy intertwined with his story which help to hold the reader's attention.

Let us begin with the author's intertwining of dream and reality. "Es...warnt ihn [den Leser] vor der Gefahr, in die er gerät, wenn er die Wirklichkeit mit einem Traum verwechselt." This subtitle to the first chapter sets the tone of the entire novel. The author poses the question of how one separates reality from dream and examines the ease with which the two different worlds can become confused. The novel begins with the narrator's explanation of a phone call he received from an old friend. The friend relates a dream, which he would like the narrator to transcribe into a novel.

The scandal in the Fishing Ministry which arises because of this occurrence in the North Sea is caused by a journalist from West Germany, who somehow found out about the content of the novel. He then printed a story in a Hamburg newspaper, a copy of which found its way to the Fishing Ministry. This West German reporter mistakenly held what was total fiction for reality. Finally, in a meeting at the Fishing Ministry, the East Germans realized that this so-called Lofoten baby did not really exist. Just to be sure, the fishing minister called the author to determine the status of the novel, at which point the narrator declares: "I'm finished!"

Within the context of the story, Hörnicke has several opportunities to criticize the bureaucratic system of the GDR. On several occasions he demonstrates just how ridiculous the bureaucracy and red tape can become. A very good example occurs when one of the East German civil servants attempts to make the birth of the baby official. The agency which is usually responsible for recording births claims no responsibility, because the baby was not born within the GDR borders. The next department claims no responsibility because, although the baby was born in a helicopter, the helicopter belongs to the Norwegian rescue service and not to a commercial airline. There is, however, no department for babies born in foreign rescue vehicles. The civil servant finally receives the necessary documents from the civil servant in charge of births on the sea. Although this also was not the

correct department, the rules had to be bent slightly to accommodate the unusual nature of the birth.

Other such bureaucratic idiosyncrasies occur when Marietta tries to re-enter the country with her baby and also when she tries to claim the money owed her for being a mother. She cannot receive this money because, although she has her baby as proof of motherhood, there are no medical records verifying the pregnancy.

Lothar Hörnicke takes a rather simple story, the premise for which was a dream, and develops an interesting juxtaposition of dream and reality and manages to poke fun at some of the more ridiculous bureaucratic maneuvers of the GDR. Hörnicke manages to criticize without causing his novel to become tedious critique.

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Geschichte der Deutschen Literatur - vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart, 1918-1980, Band III. Hrsg. Viktor Zmegac, Athenäum, Königstein/Ts., 1984. 876 S.

The concluding book in Viktor Zmegac's three volume history of German literature covers the period 1918 to 1980. The third volume is divided into six sections providing analyses of the various epochs and literary trends in the different German-speaking countries since 1945. The chapter on GDR literature, upon which this review will focus, was written by John Milfull.

Milfull, like the other authors on their respective fields, offers not only a thematic overview of specific trends but also individual interpretations of exemplary works. He begins his study with the early years of the GDR and the questions facing the literary "Remigranten." Their primary concern, the establishment of a socialist-oriented literature, is considered with regard to Milfull's four "Geburtshelfer" of the GDR literary tradition: Anna Seghers, Bertold Brecht, Eduard Claudius, and Stephan Heym. Although sharing a basic fundamental approach, each of the authors represents a

unique position and/or concept, and the plurality of their methods significantly shaped subsequent literary trends. Milfull is correct in pointing to the gradual "Entdogmatisierungsprozeß" in GDR writing which, in spite of several setbacks in the 60s, proved to be a central element in establishing a productive literature. Moreover, Milfull does not limit his analysis to an overview of literary genres and representative names. Instead he focuses on the writer and his or her audience and examines "wirkungsästhetische Probleme bei Lyrik, Drama und erzählender Prosa." His approach is convincing for he sees literature within the overall context of "Kulturpolitik der DDR" and in its relationship to the working class population. Furthermore, he never loses sight of theoretical concerns and the oft-occurring contradictions resulting from putting theory into practice. In terms of "Rezeption," Milfull recognizes one distinction within the genres, namely that while novels and theater pieces are received quite differently in East and West, GDR poetry seems immune from such distinguishing traits. Thus poets such as Bobrowski, Kunert, Kunze, and Kirsch enjoy what can be termed a "gesamtdeutsche Leserschaft."

Another strength of Milfull's contribution is his depiction of the literary climate in the GDR, in particular his exposition of the first Bitterfelder Konferenz (1959) and the resultant literary maxims. Finally, the interpretations of works by numerous authors (e.g. Seghers, Brecht, Wolf, Neutsch, Kant, Strittmatter, Hermlin, Müller, Braun, Plenzdorf, Hacks, Morgner, Mickel) provide detailed commentary illustrative of overriding trends in GDR literature.

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The Silence of Entropy or Universal Discourse: The Postmodernist Poetics of Heiner Müller. By Arlene A. Teraoka. New York University Ottendorfer Series. Neue Folge Band 21. New York: Peter Lang, 1985. 240 pp.

In Kuhnian terms most dissertations are "normal science," i.e. the detailed demonstration of generally