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Visiting Lecturers

various authors

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For more information on the program contact Margy Gerber, Institut für Anglistik, Akademiestr. 24, A 5020 Salzburg, Austria. For information on the symposium location, travel arrangements, costs, etc., contact W. Christoph Schmauch, World Fellowship Center, Conway, NH 05818, tel. (603) 356-5208.

Authors: Visiting Lecturers

VISITING LECTURERS

GDR Film Makers in Portland

From November 9-12, 1988, Portland State University hosted a team of GDR-TV film makers including director Peter Vogel, dramaturge Alfred Nehring, screenwriter Eberhard Görner and cameraman Günter Haubold. It was their most recent film, Do Not Sleep at Home, which took the four men to Oregon. This semi-documentary is based on the memories of Fred Manela, a long-time resident of Eugene, Oregon, and sole survivor of a small band of young activists, who tried to warn their fellow-Jews of the impending rampage of the Reichspogromnacht. In memory of that historic night of 50 years ago, the film was shown at Portland State University. The screening was followed by a probing discussion with Mr. Manela and the film team.

The next day the GDR team showed two more of their films on German anti-Nazi resistance during the Hitler years: Leutnant Yorck von Wartenburg and Die erste Reihe, both based on works by author Stephan Hermlin. Although these films were not dubbed and had no English subtitles, they found an interested audience among local film makers and students of German. Again there were discussions about the political and the artistic merits of the films. The audience as well as the East Germans came away with a strong sense of people to people contact, a first-hand experience of glasnost.

The Portland State University visit of the GDR film team was part of a joint venture organized by GDR Television in conjunction with the Department of German at Dartmouth College, NH, the University of Oregon in Eugene, and the University of Wyoming. Support came from a variety of sources, e.g. the Max

Kade Foundation, the Oregon Committee for the Humanities, the Wyoming Council for the Humanities and the Oregon Holocaust Center. Credit for the initiative to organize this highly successful encounter has to go to the GDR screenwriter, Eberhard Görner.

Laureen Nussbaum
Portland State University

Michael P. Hamburger at Washington University

Michael P. Hamburger, dramaturge for the Deutsches Theater in East Berlin, visited the Washington University campus from February 7 to 10. His trip was sponsored by the Washington University Assembly Series as a part of an annual Cultural Celebration.

Although born in Germany, Hamburger spent a large part of his youth in emigration, mainly in Great Britain, studying Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Aberdeen. After his return to East Germany in 1951, he studied physics at the University of Leipzig and also continued his study of philosophy. Starting in 1957, he worked as a freelance translator and journalist, writing theater criticism, as well as radio features on theater and scientific subjects.

Hamburger is well known for his translations of Shakespeare which include: Hamlet, Measure for Measure, A Mid-Summer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, Macbeth, The Tempest, and Julius Caesar. His latest translation, Henry V, will premiere at the Shakespeare Conference in Weimar in April 1989 under the direction of Fritz Bennewitz. Other translations for which Hamburger has gained recognition include translations of the plays of Sean O'Casey, Tennessee Williams' Clothes for a Summer Hotel, and Barry Stavis' The Man Who Never Died.

He has been working at the Deutsches Theater in East Berlin since 1966, first as an assistant director and then since 1970 as dramaturge. Hamburger expresses his primary interest as being "theater as a medium of physical expression and communication." His translations of drama "attempt to convey the specific theatrical qualities of the plays in question as against the more literary mode of previous translations."

While at Washington University, Hamburger gave formal lectures, conducted theater workshops and participated in an informal discussion with the staff members of the GDR Bulletin.

For the public Assembly Series lecture Hamburger spoke on "Bertolt Brecht and the Language and the Strategy of Consent." During the course of this lecture, he gave a thorough account of Brecht's works and their use of language. Hamburger attempted to illustrate the various stages of development in Brecht's use of language and the relationship of these developments to the strategy of consent (Einverständnis). Brecht's dilemma, the inability to accept the established norms of society and the desire for an ordered form of society, found later expression in the extremes of his theatrical program.

Hamburger enumerated several sources of Brecht's dramatic speech. Nostalgic and sentimental overtones from the Bible can be found in both Brecht's poetry and drama. Brecht also relied heavily on his southern German upbringing and the Augsburg dialect. He used dialect to give lower class characters an authentic language inflection. In contrast to the naturalism of Gerhard Hauptmann, however, Brecht adapted native language into an idiom mocking a particular social class. Another source of dramatic speech came from the appropriation of the language of German officialdom. The final source of Brecht's dramatic speech was the incorporation of anglicisms into his language, both words and syntax, which extended the spectrum of the language in an unprecedented way -- lending it an air of uncouth realism.

Hamburger traced Brecht's dramatic speech development along the path of his plays. It is in the Lehrstücke, experiments for the theater, that one encounters the concept of consent. The individual decides of his own free will to take a certain course of action. This often entails the consent to pay with one's own life. A good example of consent can be found in Brecht's Lehrstück Der Jasager: the boy's decision to take part in the expedition implies his consent to his own death. Brecht's later plays no longer solve the dilemma on the stage. Rather the members of the audience must take the problem home with them and try to resolve it.

Hamburger also gave a lecture sponsored by the German Department and the Performing Arts Department entitled: "Contemporary Playwriting in the GDR." In this lecture, Hamburger began by contrasting the playwriting today with the situation during the 1960s and 70s. According to Hamburger, it is not as difficult to produce plays today. In his opinion, playwrights of the 60s and 70s were writing for posterity: they were writing plays which set out to be classics, so that they could be performed in 20 to 30 years.

The initial objective of the GDR dramatists was overcoming fascism and building up socialism. They dealt with utopian concepts. In order to maintain a clear communist picture, history was varnished over. Theater served as a substitution for public media which was non-existent at the time. This was a function which is not usually germane to theater. The basic attitude of the artists was one of engagement; they wanted to be involved with the building up of society.

In the 1970s new ideas began to form. Although theater took part in developing socialist society, acting as a forum, an assembly for collective association, the didactic nature was reduced. More questions were posed and fewer answers were offered. The writers during this period possessed a transitory feeling regarding their relationship to GDR society. This transitoriness was defined by the impression that history was not progressing; an awareness that everyone was waiting for something to happen. This metaphor of the transitory existence is best expressed in the plays of Volker Braun (Transit Europa, Guevara oder der Sonnenstaat) and Christoph Hein (Passage). The future exists only as a hope, an allusion. The only thing left is the present.

Hamburger mentioned that the most important playwrights in the GDR today are Heiner Müller, Volker Braun, and Christoph Hein. Among the most recently performed plays by these playwrights are: Volker Braun's Lenins Tod, which was originally written in 1970 but was performed for the first time in 1988 and published in the January 1988 edition of Sinn und Form; Heiner Müller's Der Lohndrucker, first performed in 1958, and revised in 1988 by Müller, who also served as director for the production.

A newcomer to the GDR theater scene is Georg Seidel, born in 1945, who chooses for his themes the representation of family life or individual ethics. This style being developed by the younger writers brings history into a small story, a narrower view which contrasts with the broader perspective of Heiner Müller.

As a final note Hamburger addressed the topic of censorship. He claims that censorship as such has all but disappeared in reference to the theater. Censorship is still present, however, in regards to the re-thinking of history. However the production of Braun's Lenins Tod demonstrates a change of attitude and an era of greater sensitivity.

Carol Anne Costabile
Washington University

Holger Teschke to attend Kentucky Foreign Language Conference

One of the most promising, young literary talents in the GDR, Holger Teschke, will be visiting the University of Kentucky at Lexington from April 10-30, 1989 and will be attending the 1989 Kentucky Foreign Language Conference from April 27-29.

Holger Teschke was born in Bergen/Rügen on July 13, 1958 and was trained as a machinist. After four years at sea in that capacity, during which he began writing poetry, he completed studies in theater and stage directing. His first volume of poetry was published in 1985, with a second volume to follow in 1989. After an apprenticeship at a small theater in Senftenberg, he began work in July 1987 in the capacity of technical director (Dramaturg) and director (Regisseur) with the responsibility for staging several plays for the Berliner Ensemble, the theater which still fosters the Brechtian tradition. Teschke has produced versions of Shakespeare's Timon of Athens and The Storm for both stage and radio and has written a number of plays, several of which have been published and produced.

While in the United States he will be holding readings from his works and giving talks on the current tendencies in the works of the youngest generation of

authors: Visiting Lecturers GDR dramatists. His first planned talk is entitled "What happens after Müller?"

Silvia and Dieter Schlenstedt

Professors Silvia and Dieter Schlenstedt of the Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin (GDR), who are currently teaching at the Germanic Languages and Literatures Department of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, will be attending the Kentucky Foreign Language Conference from April 27-29. On April 25, the Schlenstedts will be visiting Washington University in Saint Louis, where Dieter Schlenstedt will give a talk entitled "DDR-Autoren in der Diskussion. Der X. Schriftstellerkongreß, November 1987, und Neues Denken."

INTERVIEW

Interview mit dem Botschafter der DDR in den USA, Dr. Gerhard Herder

Dr. Gerhard Herder, seit 1983 Botschafter der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik in den USA, besuchte im Auftrag des Staatsratsvorsitzenden Erich Honecker am 13. Dezember 1988 St. Louis. Anlaß dieser Reise war die persönliche Überbringung eines Antwortschreibens Honeckers an Erstklässler, die in Zusammenarbeit mit K.I.D.S. (Kids Internationally Distributed Superstation) im Frühjahr 1988 an etwa 170 Staatsoberhäupter geschrieben hatten, um so ihren Beitrag zu Ideen über Frieden und Völkerfreundschaft zu leisten.

In diesem Rahmen hielt Dr. Herder auch einen öffentlichen Vortrag an der Washington University und stellte sich bei dieser Gelegenheit den Herausgebern des GDR Bulletins zu einem Interview zur Verfügung, das hier leicht überarbeitet und gekürzt wiedergegeben wird.

GDR B: Die DDR-Botschaft in Washington D.C. wurde 1973 eingerichtet. Welche kulturpolitischen Initiativen hat die DDR bisher durch ihre Botschaft in den USA unternommen?