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Uwe Kolbe: Die Situation

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work, especially when the ever-shrinking number of Yiddish-readers means that Katzenelson becomes increasingly accessible only in translation.

The flaw in this otherwise welcome volume lies in Biermann's conception of the role of the translator: "Jeder Übersetzer auch der bescheidenste, muß den Hergeiz haben, es wenigstens besser zu machen als das – Original!!" (209). Biermann has not succeeded in his ambition to improve Katzenelson, but he has managed to overshadow him. In his commendable eagerness to (re-)introduce *Dos lied* to German-speaking readers, Biermann has wrapped this already sufficient "monument" in a monumental shell.

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Kolbe, Uwe. *Die Situation*. Heinz Ludwig Arnold, ed. Series: Göttingen Sudelblätter. Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 1994. 46 pp.

Kolbe's account of the writer's world in the GDR between 1975 and 1985 does not attempt to be all-inclusive. It is a personal memoir that seeks to clarify the author's own experiences and behavior within the framework of a milieu that encapsulated the best and the worst of that world: the *Szene* of Prenzlauer Berg. At the same time, Kolbe implies that to some degree his story is that of his generation, "die erste und letzte echte 'DDR-Generation'" (15). It is, without doubt, a story that contains elements representative of his generation of GDR writers and artists, betrayed by their own government, by the friends and associates that government corrupted, and finally by history.

Two figures accompany Kolbe's account and define his approach to it: friend and fellow poet Frank-Wolf Matthies, who eventually broke with Kolbe, and writer-publicist and *Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter* Sasha Anderson, who informed on Kolbe to the Stasi. Kolbe reserves most of his bitterness and venom for Anderson, quoting the latter's reports to the Stasi, made during Anderson's most active period of engagement in the Prenzlauer Berg writers' scene. Kolbe and Anderson have had their say in the well-known *Zeit* pieces of November 1991. This small book adds little new in that regard.

Die Situation was written, at least in part it would seem, in response to Matthies's piece "Einer, der tatsächlich etwas getan hat" (*Frankfurter Rundschau*, 3 January 1993). It has obviously been more difficult for Kolbe to come to terms with Matthies's reactions to the path Kolbe followed during the decade after his first poetry reading, a program in the East Berlin "Haus der jungen Talente" that he shared with Matthies. It is likely that the Stasi arranged the meeting between the two in order to recruit Kolbe to spy on Matthies, who had already been imprisoned because of the "subversive" nature of his writing. The two writers began a friendship, one cherished more, perhaps, by the six-years-younger Kolbe than by Matthies, and one that was to end because of the corrosive power of the social and political conditions surrounding it, even though Kolbe rejected the Stasi overture.

Having stayed in the GDR, watching Matthies and many others leave, Kolbe seems to need to explain – to himself as much as to those others – what made it possible for him to do so. He finds the reason in the naive belief that he and his writings could aid in the attainment of true socialism from within the GDR. Consequently, he followed the model of his mentor Franz Fühmann of "saying everything everywhere." As an explanation of his behavior, this method excuses much: "Es war harmonie-

BOOK REVIEWS

süchtig. Es war infantil. Es war gefährlich naiv. Aber es war echt, und: Es machte mich aus, jahrelang" (27, n. 21). But Kolbe also blames his naiveté. For example, he writes that the intellectual landscape of Prenzlauer Berg was damaged as much by his and others' naiveté as it was by the deceptions and betrayals of the Sasha Andersons (2). Matthies's lack of understanding for Kolbe's positive stance towards reform from within obviously rankles. Kolbe refers to occasions in 1980 and 1981 when the two argued over this, Matthies on the last occasion saying: "Wer mit den Schweinen spricht, ist selber eins" (27). Kolbe accuses Matthies of moral rigidity, but admits to his own brand of the same, to some degree a mirror image of that of his older friend (35, 46).

Kolbe's memoir offers poignant examples of the pain and loss many intellectuals suffered in their friendships and professional relationships during the death-throes of the GDR state (the "situation" the title refers to) and in the aftermath of the revelations of the Stasi files. Although it makes reference to milestones in the Berlin literary scene and to various stages and aspects of the high point of Prenzlauer Berg intellectual culture, this is much more a personal than an historical text. Therein lie its strengths and its limitations.

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Labrousse, Gerd and Anthonya Visser, eds. *Im Blick behalten: Lyrik der DDR. Neue Beiträge des Forschungsprojekts DDR-Literatur an der Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. German Monitor 32.* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994.

The useful German Monitor series is well-known to readers of the *GDR Bulletin* for making available documentary material that would otherwise be hard to collect. This is also the strength of this volume, even if the word "new" in the subtitle is something of an overstatement. The two contributions by Anthonya Visser, "Die Lyrikreihe Auswahl – ein Sprungbrett für junge Talente in der DDR" (87-134) and "Das Ordnen des 'innersten Landes'. Motto-Bezüge in Volker Braun's Zyklus 'Der Stoff zum Leben' als eine Spezialform von Intertextualität" (153-227), are based on a dissertation published in 1994. Only one of Gerd Labrousse's contributions, that on Heinz Czechowski, has not been published elsewhere. In these days of dwindling funds for book acquisitions, such reduplication may seem a bit self-indulgent.

Having said that, it is worth stressing that the six articles do fit together well and offer a great deal of useful information about a terrain that was always relatively neglected outside the GDR and still needs extensive spadework. The lot of poetry in this century has been said to have more writers than readers. Out of all the poems produced, so few have attained even local fame in their own language, much less anything like international fame. When Visser refers to 300 GDR poets, one is startled. Who were they all? Where is one to begin reading, assessing, sifting, understanding?

Initially, we need solid information. For twenty years, an ongoing research project of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam has taken an inclusive documentary approach to GDR literature, using techniques of literary history, literary sociology, reception research and bibliography in order to gain a comprehensive picture of the GDR literary system. The principles guiding the project are outlined by Labrousse in the opening article, which also has a list of publications that have emerged from the project.

Labrousse's second article concentrates on the more recent poetry of Heinz Czechowski, especially on his political, social and historical allusions. Although at times the commentary on these poems by Labrousse may come across as pedestrian, no doubt it is important to preserve all this information as much as possible. Future readers will have need of glosses to Lidice, Heydrich or to lines from Stephan Hermlin as well as explanations of the perpetual energy crisis of the GDR.

Similarly, Labrousse's "Das Erfahren von Geschichte in der DDR-Lyrik der 80er Jahre" operates by decoding