

BOOK REVIEWS

Boa, Elizabeth and Janet Wharton, eds. *Women and the Wende: Social Effects and Cultural Reflections of the German Unification Process*. German Monitor 31. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994. 264 pp.

The essays collected in *Women and the Wende* are the published proceedings of the Women in German Studies conference held in Nottingham, England, in 1993. Bringing together scholars from a variety of disciplines—political science, sociology, literary criticism, art, media studies—and several countries—primarily Great Britain, but also (East) Germany and the United States—the collection documents a bygone stage in academic research on women in the GDR. Reading these contributions five years after unification, i.e. two years after they were presented in the context of the conference, I am uncomfortably reminded of the debates taking place in the US around the same time, when angry expressions of solidarity lamenting East German women's fates as losers of unification blocked much scholarly analysis.

The contributions address a number of issues central to women's lives such as access to abortion, gender-stratification of the labor market, and discrimination in the political and cultural sphere. However, the volume's focus on the immediate post-Wende years frequently curtails the critical and analytical dimension of the debates. *Women and the Wende* largely continues the tradition of "reporting from behind the iron curtain" that marked so much GDR research undertaken prior to 1989. The necessary historicization of the GDR and its political and cultural discourses is far less a concern to most contributors than is the continuation of a utopian bent of feminist GDR research rooted in an essentialist notion of femininity. This outlook creates such unlikely allies as Sabine Bergmann-Pohl, CDU, who presents her plea for a societal reevaluation of women's nurturing roles as a political answer to disproportionately high female unemployment, and Georgina Paul, who would rather see lesbians quietly living a societal alternative than noisily clamoring for social equality.

Only a few contributors analyze representational gendered discourses that make the collection worth reading even five years after the *Wende*. Martha Wörsching's analysis of the GDR women's journal *Für Dich* vividly illustrates the propagandistic

function of femininity in the GDR. Ingrid Sharp's discussion of the sexualized discourse of unification exposes the patriarchal continuum between both systems. Anna Kuhn's documentation of the Christa Wolf debate reveals the connections between the discreditation of a feminine/female aesthetics and the moral outrage over a woman writer's personal politics. Making the academic discourse on GDR women itself the subject of her analysis, Irene Dölling identifies a dangerous tendency among (East German) feminist scholars to limit their own critical perspective by GDR nostalgia and hide behind an undifferentiated "Subjekt Frau," internalizing the status of "victim of the unification process." This self-critical perspective on the profession that puts into question many of the other contributions is, however, safely buried in the middle of the collection. Instead, it is the powerful yet nostalgic literary reflections by Barbara Köhler and Helga Königsdorf that set the tone for the volume, making it a historical document rather than a point of departure for future feminist research on the GDR.

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Böhlig, Peter and Klaus Michael, eds. *Machtspiele. Literatur und Staatssicherheit*. Leipzig: Reclam, 1993.

By now this collection has become more or less a companion volume to *Der deutsch-deutsche Literaturstreit* edited by Karl Deiritz and Hannes Krauss in 1991. It contents certainly add credence to the claim put forth by contributing author Gabriele Dietze that "die Wiedervereinigung uns in eine neue Denunziationskultur stürzt" (29), a dubious distinction fueled mercilessly by the feuilletonist one-upmanship of the conquering West. By exposing the IM activities of two GDR writers, Sascha Anderson and Reiner Schedlinski, it has become possible to discredit the entire avant-garde movement of the 1980s. Therefore, using the logic of the *Literaturstreit*, if Christa Wolf is tainted, then nothing of literary value could have ever been produced in the GDR by her nor by anyone else; and likewise, it follows, à la Frank Schirrmacher, that Anderson's activities "zerstört den letzten Glauben an eine genuine, intakte DDR-Kunst" (305).

Peter Böhlig and Klaus Michael have put together a collection of over 40 essays which includes a

representative selection from the feuilleton articles, source material from Stasi-files, informed commentary expressing a variety of interpretive viewpoints, and the voice of many authors who were directly or indirectly affected by the actions of Anderson and Schedlinski. The diverse comprehensiveness of the volume effectively rejects Schirmmacher's statement. The title is misleading, however, inasmuch as the book is intended as a presentation of "Machtspiele" only within the scope of the Prenzlauer Berg "scene," where the editors have their own roots.

Authors of the Prenzlauer Berg, in varying degrees, seemed to have pursued political and aesthetic autonomy, an emancipation of art from anything "was sie in den Dienst außerkünstlerischer Zwecke zu stellen versucht" (Wolfgang Ullmann, 20) and many of them, as I recall, rejected out of hand any GDR author not publishing in the underground forums as suspect, lumping the older generation together with little differentiation, as though they were all, in the worst case scenario, Dieter Knoll or, at best, Hermann Kant (whose actions in the Writer's Union, to cite one example, to expel Reiner Kunze from the GDR cannot be construed as less damaging than anything Anderson did). Missing from the commentary of the authors in this volume is an adequate contextualization of work by older, critical—and often censored—intellectuals in the GDR such as Günter de Bruyn and Christoph Hein (*Horns Ende* was the only work ever openly published in the GDR without an official *Genehmigung*), whose speeches at the annual congress of 1987, given while the Stasi was raiding the Umweltbibliothek and confiscating the presses there, were instrumental in the effective end of central censorship which took place in 1988. The influence of Franz Fühmann, without whose efforts there never would have been a "scene" at the Prenzlauer Berg and without whom Wolfgang Hilbig (not a member of the "scene") would have surely ended in unproductive, disillusioned alcoholism or Uwe Kolbe might never have gotten anything published in the East until after the end of the GDR, is discussed by Klaus Michael. Another graybeard, Adolf Endler, that scurrilous surrealist whose efforts (along with ex-wife and fellow immigrant from the West, Elke Erb) were essential in terms of encouragement, organizing readings, and in the production of the underground journals, appears as a marginal figure. Gerhard Wolf, who finally succeeded with his plans for the series *Außer der Reihe* to create a forum for young authors, including first GDR works by Schedlinski himself, Bert Papenfuß-Gorek, and Reinhard Jirgl, is also only found on the margin. A break with historical continuity was a portentous issue for the younger generation, however, and the reasons for creating a separate context included

the desire to establish an intellectual dimension for language experimentation without political or aesthetic restraints.

The contributions are divided into four categories, "Sprechen in Deutschland," which provides a loose theoretical introduction and argues that the role of the Stasi or of any secret police in the restriction of artistic expression is actually quite limited. Böthig's own article in this section points out that we cannot comprehend the history of the GDR or of an independent sub-culture in it by reading Stasi files. Böthig further argues that, although it was clearly a betrayal to have brought autonomy to art by denouncing others, that it is nevertheless absurd to think that the political and aesthetic autonomy was broken up by the work of the IMs. The biographies and the works of those who were spied upon remains authentic, perhaps even that of the spies: "Nicht die Literatur, die kulturelle Identität des 'Prenzlauer Bergs' ist eingestürzt" (63).

Part II is "Literatur und Macht," in which the authors speak out, including Sascha Anderson. It seems to me that for those readers from the West who never had an opportunity to spend longer periods of time in the GDR, Uwe Kolbe's contribution, with its undisguised hurt and pain, provides an essential key to understanding not only what the Prenzlauer Berg was all about, but perhaps even what a life so cultivated in the private sphere in the East meant for a very significant portion of the educated population, not just in Berlin, but throughout East Germany. It is Kolbe, "auf meine Art naiv," as he says, who traces the restricting cultural politics back to a distortion of Lenin's 1905 article on Party Organization and Party Literature, and it was Kolbe who worked in naive trust with Anderson on the *Anthologie sogenannter Nachwuchsautoren* initiated by Franz Fühmann and edited by Elke Erb, rejected at all levels of censorship, and finally appearing in the West as *Berührung ist nur eine Randerscheinung* (Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1985). Kolbe's accusation is laced with emotion, the source of which, he states, is found "in einem sehr, sehr tief sitzenden moralischen Kodex." He feels compelled to indicate that this moral codex developed as a result of growing up and living for 30 years in the GDR: "Er hat meine moralischen Maßstäbe geprägt und also auch die, mit denen ich Sascha Anderson, Rainer Schedlinski und alle anderen Inoffiziellen Mitarbeiter beurteile, besonders die meines Alters und eines ähnlichen Werdegangs." In Berlin, Dresden and Leipzig "eine Dichte des Gesprächs" manifested itself which included a widely understood "wissende[s] Schweigen," the constitution of a behavioral codex towards one another, and of a solidarity against the intrusion of the

government. Whoever broke the taboo of this code was widely condemned, and if it happened in artistic circles, well, then the public was and is likely to hear it articulated. This moral codex is the least understood aspect of life in the GDR and manifestations of it continue to be ridiculed and belittled in the West (including by some former GDR writers), all of which itself is an expression of the difficulties in communication between East and West which are expected to continue into the next century.

Part III, "Aktendämmerung," should probably be read first, especially the two informative articles by Klaus Michael and Petra Boden, which trace the history of the Prenzlauer Berg and describe the structures in force which limited writers. Source material from the Stasi files of Anderson and Schedlinski are also presented in this section.

The last section, "Debatten im Feuilleton" contains a selection of articles which had previously appeared in journals and newspapers on the topic, including Biermann's acceptance speech for the Georg Büchner Prize. The selected bibliography at the end of the book is extremely useful for anyone interested in further researching the phenomenon of the Prenzlauer Berg.

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Cibulka, Hanns. *Thüringer Tagebücher*. Leipzig: Reclam Verlag, 1993. 279 pp.

Hanns Cibulka is a respected member of the so-called middle generation of GDR writers; their first publications coincided with the infancy of the Republic. His writings are based largely on personal experiences: childhood in Bohemia, six years in the German infantry, three years as a POW in Italy, life in and around his adopted homeland, the towns, fields, forests, and hills of Thuringia. They have found expression in a steady, if not superabundant, stream of poetry, largely rimeless, based on classical and classicistic models with a distinct modernist influence (e.g., the verse of Giuseppe Ungaretti). A great deal of the poetry is taken up in a very form-conscious way with meditations on nature which tend toward the abstract and the monotonous. Barely known in West Germany, Cibulka received good treatment at the hands of his GDR publishers because he was talented, because he gave an occasional nod to the socialist cause, and (very important!) because he cultivated the German heritage. All of this far outweighed his growing expressions of concern about the pollution of the environment (to be sure, the poet never explicitly singled out the ruling Party for blame). And in 1986 he was honored by the

publication of a selection of his poetry, *Losgesprochen: Gedichte aus drei Jahrzehnten*.

In line with his predilection for autobiography, Cibulka has also written a number of diary-like novels as well as actual diaries. Three of the latter are collected in the present volume, and in many ways they can serve as a commentary on the not always readily comprehensible poetry. In the first diary, *Liebeserklärungen in K.* (initially published in 1974), the "K" refers to two towns. The first is Kochdorf in Thuringia, where the poet is spending his summer vacation and where Goethe once spent some time writing love-letters to Charlotte von Stein. The second is Kremenez in German-occupied Poland in the winter of 1942-43, where the poet was convalescing from a wound inflicted in the Soviet Union. Here he fell in love with a Polish college student named Halina, who was reduced to scrubbing floors in the military hospital for a living—a genuinely touching brief encounter, the history of which is interspersed with meditations on the coziness of half-timbered houses, the wonders of language, the beauty of locust trees, the "Prussian State" as a piece of precision machinery reducing life to function, and the prevalence of intellectual superciliousness and arrogance in everyday life, to name a few. For having dated a German soldier the Polish woman is given the dirtiest jobs in the hospital by the head nurse. For having dated a Polish woman Pvt. Cibulka is sent right back to the Eastern Front by the head doctor, instead of to a replacement company in Vienna. Indirectly his love for Halina saves the future poet's life. Overwhelmed by a desire to stay alive he volunteers for the Africa Corps in Kiev and is eventually taken prisoner in Italy, whereas 90% of his company comrades perish in the Don Basin. The story of Hanns and Halina provides the only real-life excitement in the three diaries. Unfortunately, an imagined rendezvous on a bridge in Kochdorf some 30 years later falls flat.

The second journal, *Dornburger Blätter* (1972), records the poet's meditations and observations while spending his summer vacation in Dornburg, which contains a castle where Goethe once stayed. Cibulka has a field-day describing the natural wonders of the Saale Valley, and such man-made marvels as the Naumburg Cathedral and the Cistercian church at Schulpforte (we are told twice that Klopstock, Fichte, and Nietzsche studied there). He treats us to a panegyric on Goethe's *Metamorphose der Pflanzen*, quotes in leitmotif fashion from the Goethe-Eckermann conversations, cites Hölderlin's *Empedocles* as he recalls reading it almost 30 years earlier while waiting in a foxhole for the Americans to parachute into Sicily, offers commentaries on Kleist, Rilke, and Bobrowski, gives us a history lesson on the Saxons in Thuringia,