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Nyota Thun: Krieg und Literatur. Studien zur sowjetischen Prosa von 1941 bis zur Gegenwart

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Krieg und Literatur. Studien zur sowjetischen Prosa von 1941 bis zur Gegenwart. By Nyota Thun. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1977. 299 pages.

The purpose of Thun's study is to describe and analyze three stages he has posited as having developed in Soviet prose about war since 1941. The first stage began with portrayals of the arduous struggles not only of the soldiers themselves, but of the entire Soviet citizenry (e.g., I. Bergholz, I. Ehrenburg, A. Bek, K. Simonov). One of the hallmarks of this first stage was the association drawn between the struggle in World War II and the heroic involvement in the October Revolution and the ensuing Civil War. By the mid-1950's, a new stage in war literature had emerged--one that had lost much of its morale-boosting tone and became more concerned with the less heroic aspects of military conflict, emphasizing historical and semi-autobiographical elements. As demonstrated by such authors as S. Mirnov and J. Bondarev, concentration here was on a reconstruction of what actually occurred. Surfacing in the early 1970's, the third stream of Soviet war literature displayed a more complex narrative structure, placed renewed emphasis on the international character of World War II and stressed the "humanisierende Funktion" of war literature more than before. Writers exemplifying this latest stage include D. Granin, V. Astafev, and A. Adamovich.

Contrary to what the subtitle indicates, this study does not deal wholly with Soviet prose works portraying the theme of war, nor does it treat novels and stories that were written only after 1941, and in these respects it is a much more interesting study than it otherwise would have been. In order to place the Soviet (including White Russian, Lithuanian, and Estonian) contribution to war literature in perspective, Thun goes back to Tolstoy, discussing the enormous influence which such works as The Sevastopol Stories and War and Peace had on subsequent writers on the topic of war. Moreover, Thun scrutinizes some examples of pre-World War II Soviet war literature, notably Sholokhov's The Quiet Don. Additionally, he provides coherent commentaries on prominent non-Soviet novelists about war, beginning with Hemingway, Remarque, and Seghers, and concluding with a lengthy discussion of Hemingway's The Naked and the Dead and anti-war novel tendencies in America and Japan. Of particular interest to the student and scholar of GDR literature are Thun's discussions of Heiner Müller's Die Schlacht and especially of Christa Wolf's Kindheitsmuster.

While many of the names in this volume will not be familiar to the Germanist, Thun's comparative approach, coupled with his eminently readable commentary, nevertheless makes this a worthwhile book for anyone interested in literary treatments of the theme of war.

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Der Roman in der DDR 1949-1969. Die Gestaltung des Verhältnisses von Individuum und Gesellschaft. Eine Analyse der Erzählstruktur. By Barbara Einhorn. Kronberg: Scriptor Verlag. 1978. (Monographien Literaturwissenschaft, 40.) 543 Seiten, 38 DM.

Als der Scriptor Verlag vor einigen Monaten ein 543 seitiges Buch mit dem Titel Der Roman in der DDR 1949-1969 ankündigte, war nicht nur meine erste Reaktion: endlich! Anthologien und Geschichten der DDR-Literatur gibt es inzwischen ja wahrlich genug-- eine fundierte Einführung in das wichtigste Genre der 'anderen' deutschen Literatur, das könnte lernenden und lehrenden Germanisten dagegen von Nutzen sein.

Dann kam das Buch und mit ihm der Ärger an. Es handelt sich hier keineswegs um eine jener üblichen Dissertationen, denen es besser bekäme, im finstersten Stockwerk einer Universitätsbibliothek versteckt zu bleiben. Sicherlich, überarbeitet worden ist wohl auch dieser Text für den Druck nicht oder so gut wie nicht: der ebenso übersichtliche wie langweilige Aufbau und das schlechte Deutsch ('trotzdem' und 'obwohl' sind halt nicht austauschbar) bringen das ebenso an den Tag wie der stereotype Einschub "wie schon erwähnt wurde". Auch hapert es hier und da mit der Terminologie, wenn sich sozialistische Perspektivekonzeption und die Erzählperspektive der Romane in den Weg geraten. Schließlich ist