

HANS WAGENER, ED.

*Zeitkritische Romane des 20.*

*Jahrhunderts: Die Gesellschaft in der Kritik der deutschen Literatur*  
Stuttgart: Reclam, 1975. Pp. 392.

In his preface, Wagener says that, in the case of most authors, it would not be wise to differentiate between "Zeitkritik" on the one hand and "Gesellschaftskritik" on the other. The epoch covered in Wagener's book is subdivided into the following periods: 1. The Society of the "Kaiserreich," 2. The Weimar Republic, 3. The Third Reich, 4. The Immediate Postwar Period, 5. The Affluent Society since about 1965. Sixteen authors are considered: Heinrich Mann, Alfred Döblin, Leonhard Frank, Hermann Broch, Hans Fallada, Erich Kästner, Hermann Kesten, Anna Seghers, Ernst Glaeser, Stefan Andres, Wolfgang Koeppen, Max Frisch, Heinrich Böll, Martin Walser, Günter Grass, Uwe Johnson. The editor explains why he left out Bruno Traven, Robert Musil, and Joseph Roth: the latter two, for instance, were clearly more concerned with Austrian than with German society. Broch, on the other hand, while not being a German citizen, wrote mainly about German society and is, therefore, included; Frisch's case is a special one: his criticism of Swiss society applies to West-German society as well.

Having established his canon, Wagener had to find sixteen critics who would hand in their manuscripts by the deadline. He has succeeded in lining up an impressive number of experts; all essays are competent and some are outstanding; nevertheless, the sensitive reader is bound to feel that, here and there, a scholar is struggling hard to fulfil his commitment while silently cursing his author and himself. Ulrich Weisstein has written about Heinrich Mann again and again; by now he must find it difficult to say anything new. Several other scholars are in a similar position.

This reader has learnt most from two essays on authors who, today, are not in the limelight: Klaus Weissenberger on L. Frank and Thomas Koebner on Ernst Glaeser. Quite objective is Hartmut Steinecke on Hermann Broch; Broch—like other German authors between 1918 and 1945—was, at least politically, inefficient. If we compare him and others to writers like Upton Sinclair (who sold hundreds

of thousands of copies in the Germany of the 1920ies), we see how "tame," impractical, and hopelessly "weltfremd" those German novelists were. Many seem to have had no contact with the masses whatever; they wrote their books without giving a thought to the intellectual (or even stylistic) level of the people who—they thought—should be influenced by their works. Frank, Fallada, and Anna Seghers could—potentially—be understood by the masses; all others had little chance of reaching a large readership. Kästner began to produce popular literature only when it was too late.

Things changed after 1945. There is no doubt about the popularity and integrity of Frisch, Walser, Böll, and Grass; they are, in every respect, more sensitive and much more influential than their prewar colleagues; no wonder, they seem to survive the concerted attacks launched against them from the political right.

There are two points which should be mentioned. One: When Wagener speaks of Germany, he means—after 1945—West Germany only. Two: most critics are not "Literatursoziologen"—as Wagener points out himself. The terminology used in this book, therefore, is often not the best possible. All in all it is an excellent book, carefully edited, beautifully set and printed—a pleasure to read.

Ingrid Schuster

RUTH NICOLS

*Song of the Pearl*

Toronto: Macmillan, 1976.

Pp. 158. \$7.95.

This is Ruth Nicols's fourth book. Her first fiction work, *Ceremony of Innocence*, was also intended for adults, whereas *A Walk out of the World* and the award winning *The Marrow of the World* were primarily addressed to children.

The major theme of the book is the quest of the protagonist, Margaret Redmond of Toronto, for the secret of the profound love-hatred she feels for her uncle.