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## The Portrayal of Old Age and the Aging Process in the Literature of the German Speaking and Scandinavian Countries

Gerd K. Schneider  
*Syracuse University*

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# THE PORTRAYAL OF OLD AGE AND THE AGING PROCESS IN THE LITERATURE OF THE GERMAN SPEAKING AND SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES

## INTRODUCTION

This volume contains, with the exception of the papers by Inge Bilek and Margarethe Landwehr, presentations made in the special session on "The Portrayal of the Elderly in Literature" at the Kentucky Foreign Language Conference in 1989 and 1990.

The first paper by Horst S. Daemmrich analyzes selected works by Wilhelm Raabe and Thomas Mann. He suggests a thematic approach to the literary study of old age by taking into account five aspects: multifunctionality of old age, linkage of old age with other textual elements, the relationship of old age to the theme of self-realization, the apparent simultaneity of old age and youth in the narrative voice, and old age as serenity. The second contribution by Inge A. Bilek focuses on the aging Casanova whose contradictions are viewed within the *Schein-Sein-Problematik* of his as well as Schnitzler's own time. Fear of getting old is the subject of Margarete Landwehr's paper on Martin Walser. According to Landwehr, during mid-life crisis one becomes aware of one's own mortality which in Walser's protagonists often leads them to discover the neglected inner self and, through this discovery, to begin a new life. A more modern Austrian view on old age is supplied by Gerald A. Fetz in his treatment of Thomas Bernhard whose subjective and idiosyncratic portrayal of aging occurs in conjunction with an appreciation of the importance old people had in this author's personal life.

The next two papers treat Knut Hamsun. Dolores Buttry shows how Hamsun's personal experiences shaped his negative attitudes toward old age and how these experiences are reflected in his work. Gerd K. Schneider analyzes the portrayal of the old Knut Hamsun in the play *Eiszeit* by Tankred Dorst and Ursula Ehler. Because Dorst and Ehler incorporate into this play facts of the Nobel-laureate's collaboration with the Nazis, the work also takes on a political dimension.

Tamara S. Evans discusses the protagonist Geiser in Max Frisch's *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* as transmutation of the archetypical wise old man. She also compares Geiser to other literary precursors, such as Père Goriot, Gustav von Risach, and Dubslav von Stechlin. The final two papers give an overview of the liter-

ature depicting old age in the German Democratic Republic. Miriam Jokiniemi focuses on the treatment of old women in recent GDR-literature while Barbara Kienbaum treats the theme of aging from an ideological perspective.

This volume is intended to inform readers interested in this timely topic of aging in the literature of the German-speaking countries and Scandinavia; accordingly thorough bibliographies are appended to most of the contributions.

Gerd K. Schneider, guest editor  
Syracuse University