LITERATURE, 1880 TO THE PRESENT

By Alan Best, Senior Lecturer in German
in the University of Hull*

I. GENERAL

LITERARY HISTORIES AND SURVEYS. Propyläen Geschichte der Literatur. 6. Die moderne Welt. 1914 bis heute, ed. Erika Wischer, Berlin, 671 pp., is a fine wide-ranging survey of the literature of our period in the German-speaking world and beyond. Of particular relevance for our purposes are the opening five chapters (all of them substantial): A. Thorlby, ‘Literatur und Psychoanalyse’; H. M. Klein, ‘Literarische Reaktionen auf den Ersten Weltkrieg’; N. Honsza, ‘Die Oktoberrevolution und ihre literarischen Auswirkungen’; R. A. Berman, ‘Wurzeln und Ausprägungen faschistischer Literatur’; W. Köpke, ‘Antifaschistische Literatur am Beispiel Deutschlands’. In addition the following contributions have a German orientation. M. Durzak, ‘Zwei deutsche Literaturen nach 1945’ is perceptive, K. Riha, ‘Das Experiment in Sprache und Literatur. Anmerkungen zur literarischen Avantgarde’ refers to Arno Holz, Dadaism, collage and montage, and the ‘Wiener Gruppe’, and J. Wilcke, ‘Tendenzen des modernen Theaters’ traces a course from the Meiningen via Reinhardt to Piscator and Brecht, W. Faulstich, ‘Literatur und Massenmedien’ charts the changing concept of literature with comments on radio play and TV play in the BRD, while M. Jurgensen, ‘Der literarische Betrieb des 20. Jahrhunderts am Beispiel Deutschlands’ treads familiar ground. Clearly aimed at a German audience, the surveys none the less provide helpful insights and on the whole combine breadth of vision with shrewd comment. The volume is considerably enhanced by the illustrations, photographs, and reproductions, many of which have a German flavour. There is a good bibliography and a ‘synchronoptic survey’ in chart form for literature and theatre, arts and the media, and history. As would be expected the index is full and usefully arranged.


Kristina Zerges, Sozialdemokratische Presse und Literatur. Empirische Untersuchungen zur Literaturvermittlung in der sozialdemokratischen Presse 1876 bis 1933, Stuttgart, Metzler Studienausgabe, 319 pp., threatens to overwhelm with jargon: ‘Konfigurationsfrequenzanalyse’, ‘EDV’, ‘hierarchische KFA’, but she successfully evades the worst excesses

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and seeks to apply empirical methods from sociological investigation to this detailed study. Popular literature, literature for the workers is, after all, the base line. Most critics acknowledge its significance, if only to show how other writers have risen above it; Z. argues that the reader would be helped if he could be sure the critic knew his material, and if there were empirical yardsticks the critic’s arguments could be better assessed. Her source material derives from three Socialist journals, Vorwärts (1891–1933), Die neue Welt (1892–1917), and In freien Stunden (1897–1919), with the emphasis placed on the period to 1914. The questions to which answers are sought are the theoretical concepts which the SPD believed should sustain literature in the workers’ press, the way it was in fact transmitted and how it was received. In addition to the journals Z. refers to the relevant debates at SPD party conferences and official organs. There are copious tables and statistics and a list of the published narratives year by year. Her approach has considerable merit, throwing up many interesting aspects of this area of literature and generally avoiding the impression of a methodological sledgehammer taken to a literary nut. One of the ironies to emerge is the discovery that publication of works by authors (and 617 were selected for the study) occurred on average 34 years after their death, emphasizing the essentially received (and conservative) nature of the works and their readership. By far the greater proportion were ‘Abenteuerromane’, ‘Auskandererromane’, ‘Bauernromane’ with social and historical novels. Authors such as Viebig, Gerstäcker, Zahn, Hauff, and Kurz are well represented here, and scholars whose material takes them to the fringes of this subculture will find this a useful addition to their shelves. J. Victor-Rood, ‘A critical survey of published computer-generated indexes and concordances to modern German literature’, ALLC, 9, 1981, no. 2:1–8. Margot E. Zutschi, Literary Theory in Germany: A Study of Genre and Evaluative Theories 1945–1965 (EH, I, 427), 1981, 196 pp., argues that literary theory was particularly volatile in the 20 years studied. Z. analyses four representative works as stages in this process (by Staiger, Hamburger, Hans-Egon Hass, and Müller-Seidel). She detects more continuity between ideas of the 18th and 19th cs and 20th-c. theory up to 1965 than between the atmosphere of 1965 and subsequent developments. A welcome addition to the discussion. R. C. Holub, ‘The American reception of reception theory’, GQ, 55:80–96. D. Bellos, ‘What are “Reception Aesthetics”?’, SMLS, 2:3–16.