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Expressionism as an International Literary Phenomenon: 21 Essays and a Bibliography by Ulrich Weisstein

Review by: Theodore Ziolkowski

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made to the essays on Unamuno and Ramón Gómez de la Serna, which provide interesting and fruitful reading.

A better case may be made for the second part, where Newberry's premises are more successful. She shows the influence and awareness of Pirandello's dramaturgy in Azorín, the Machado brothers, García Lorca, Casona, Sastre and others with a fairly convincing approach. If the author's ultimate objective is to show the importance and pervasiveness of Pirandello's thought and technique outside of Italy, then she has accomplished this.

Joseph V. Ricapito
Indiana University

Kenneth Rexroth. *The Elastic Retort: Essays in Literature and Ideas*. New York. Seabury. 1973. viii + 280 pages. \$7.95.

Kenneth Rexroth's latest book is a collection of thirty-nine critical essays on literature, philosophy and religion, some of which have appeared in *The Antioch Review*, *Continuum*, *The Nation* and *Saturday Review*. They range from the twenty-nine four- to five-page essays in the "More Classics Revisited" section and the somewhat longer essays in the "Japan" section to a 51-page, two-part essay on "The Evolution of Anglo-Catholicism" in a third section titled "Religion."

Rexroth is well known for his "Classics Revisited" essays. In this collection he ranges from *The Song of Songs* to Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*, which he considers one of the few books of lasting value written in the twentieth century. He brings to each reading an enormous knowledge of world literature and the history of ideas. Although the subjects are works about which volumes have been written, the essays are so short they tend to be more like encyclopedia articles than critical assessments. However, if the reader has read the subject work and a good deal of the criticism, Rexroth's essays are generally incisive enough to cause a serious re-thinking and re-reading of the work.

The "Japan" section also serves as a stimulus to reading the works treated. The "Religion" section is insightful and thought-provoking and will mostly interest those for whom the subject is appealing. The last essay, on Bernard Lonergan, S.J., a Canadian Jesuit, is an account of how religious dialogue, when all of the conditions are just right, can lead to that communion between persons that is distinctly beautiful.

The entire collection demonstrates that the

search for truth in literature, philosophy and religion, except for differences in mode and expression, tends to be one human search.

Marvin J. LaHood
Salem State College

Ulrich Weisstein, ed. *Expressionism as an International Literary Phenomenon: 21 Essays and a Bibliography*. Paris. Budapest. Didier, Akadémiai Kiadó. 1973. 360 pages.

Sponsored by the International Comparative Literature Association, the present volume constitutes the first of a projected "Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages." Since the twenty-one essays are presented as a companion piece to Wolfgang Iser's *Expressionismus als Literatur* (1969; see *BA* 45:1, p. 113), they do not focus principally on literary expressionism in its country of origin: Germany. Instead, there are three essays dealing with foreign influences on German expressionist drama, poetry and prose. These are followed by chapters on dadaism and vorticism along with considerations of expressionist literature in its relations to painting, music and film. The second part of the volume contains appraisals of expressionist influences on English, American and Russian theater. The volume concludes with sections dealing with expressionism in other areas: Scandinavia, Belgium and Holland, Romania, Hungary, Poland, Russia and among the South Slavs.

The volume is conspicuously dominated by its editor, Ulrich Weisstein, who contributed, in addition to the preface, three of the twenty-one essays as well as the comprehensive annotated bibliography of "Expressionism as an International Phenomenon." In contrast to Walter Sokel (in *The Writer in Extremis*), who emphasized the thematic consistency of expressionism, Weisstein (as he stresses in his preface and chapters) sees expressionism principally as a stylistic phenomenon that was indigenous to German-speaking countries during the "expressionist decade" from 1910 to 1920 or 1925. Weisstein evinces a clear conception of expressionism as an antimimetic, anthropocentric art which rejects subjectivity for Jungian universals. His collaborators, unfortunately, have no such clear notion of the subject. Their discussions of the various national "expressionisms" tend, therefore, either to be vaguely apologetic or else, like Lotte Eisner's discussion of expressionist film, to degenerate into little more than in-group gossip.

No one is more keenly aware of these shortcomings and inconsistencies than the editor himself, who spends two pages of his Preface apologizing for various "unavoidable gaps" in the commissioned contributions (e.g., on Czech expressionism). As a characteristically "German" phenomenon, expressionism tends in other countries to assume forms associated with symbolism, futurism, dada, surrealism, and other movements of the age. Any study of expressionism as an international phenomenon, therefore, involves difficulties that will not affect future volumes in this series (e.g., renaissance, romanticism, and fin de siècle). Although the volume must be regarded as a preliminary survey that falls well short of any real synthesis, it represents both a valuable statement on the impact of German expressionism abroad and a first step in the direction of a systematic comparative history of literatures.

Theodore Ziolkowski
Princeton University

noted

Johannes Anderegg. *Fiktion und Kommunikation: Ein Beitrag zur Theorie der Prosa*. Göttingen. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 1973. 185 pages. 24 DM.

Whoever assumes he knows what is meant by "fiction" is in for some surprise upon struggling through this book. Anderegg tries to get at the meaning of the term from the difficult side of communication theory, which guarantees a method of inquiry that is markedly different from conventional ways of dealing with fiction. Reminding the reader that he is not aiming to establish a literary form but rather certain situations of communication, the author renounces from the start the terminology of literary criticism, replacing it by a technical vocabulary reminiscent of the language of cybernetics. The immediate result of this substitution is that it makes reading of the study difficult.

What have we gained by 150 pages on the proposition that fiction is a mode of communication in which text and reader are mutually inter-dependent? We have known it all along, and we have had the advantage of a method that appraised literary works for what they were meant to be: creative exercises in the esthetic of language art. For those mere words you will be looking in vain in Anderegg's thesis.

K. Opitz

Thorikild Bjørnvig. *Virkeligheden er til*. Copenhagen. Gyldendal. 1973. 296 pages.

Thorikild Bjørnvig's critical essays collected in *Virkeligheden er til* have been written during the last twenty-one years. The scope of the book is very comprehensive; it illustrates at the same time Bjørnvig's erudition and his analytical brilliance. Thorikild Bjørnvig is an outstanding poet and one of the leading literary critics in Denmark today. The present vol-

ume contains essays on such important Danish writers as Paul la Cour, Morton Nielsen, Frank Jæger, Villy Sørensen and Tom Kristensen. Swedish writers discussed are Selma Lagerlöf and Pär Lagerkvist. Bjørnvig, the Rilke specialist and translator, has also included his incisive essay on "Rilke og Duino Elegierne" from 1957. The essay on Edgar Allan Poe reveals a thorough familiarity with Poe's novellas and bizarre, tormented personality.

The leading idea in *Virkeligheden er til* is Thorikild Bjørnvig's conviction that literature cannot be divorced from reality. This is a welcome and refreshing approach today when so much literary criticism in Denmark, as elsewhere, has become sterile and "hermetic."

B. G. Madsen

Ivar Ivask, Gero von Wilpert, eds. *World Literature since 1945: Critical Surveys of the Contemporary Literatures of Europe and the Americas*. New York. Ungar. 1973. xii + 724 pages. \$25.

The original German edition of this unusual volume (1972) was revived in these pages shortly after its publication. In brief, it includes surveys of twenty-eight national literatures in chapters ranging from 6-8 to almost 100 pages. Especially in the sections dealing with little-known literatures (e.g., Catalan, Icelandic, Estonian) the volume provides a wealth of material—factual, critical, and bibliographical—not otherwise easily available. The American edition has added to each section a list of books available in English translation. In addition, the order of the chapters has been changed (that is, alphabetized). And several of the sections have been slightly expanded or revised. It is vaguely surprising that the bibliographies contain no reference to the relevant sections in the *Ungar Encyclopedia of World Literature in the 20th Century* (which, in fact, is advertised on the dust-jacket; see *BA* 42:2, p. 286, 44:1, p. 127, 46:2, p. 311), for it resembles this volume more closely than any other work in English. All in all, the volume constitutes a valuable reference tool for any student of modern comparative literature, and it should be in every college library.

T. Ziolkowski

D. M. Lang, D. R. Dudley, eds. *The Penguin Companion to Classical, Oriental & African Literature*. N. Y. McGraw-Hill. 1973. c1969. 361 pages. \$9.95.

Articles on individual authors written by more than fifty contributors make up this guide to the older, less accessible literatures of the world. Included are The Literature of Greece and Rome, The Literature of Byzantium, Oriental Literature, and African Literature. Much information that is unavailable elsewhere appears in this volume. A short bibliography is appended to most entries.

Other titles in the series are *The Penguin Companion to English Literature*, *The Penguin Companion to American Literature (including Latin America)*, and *The Penguin Companion to European Literature*.

E. A. Harris