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Ideology and literature: A study of society and literary criticism with special reference to the reception of Heinrich Böll during the 1970's.

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SYNOPSIS:

Ideology and literature: A study of society and literary criticism with special reference to the reception of Heinrich Böll during the 1970's.

This thesis is an attempt to analyse the role the practice of literary criticism plays in the political processes. After an analysis of the social history of German literary criticism from the Enlightenment to the 1970's, I analyse the reception of three major works by Heinrich Böll published during the 1970's. In my analysis I pay particular attention to the manner in which literary criticism, both as media-based and as academy-based practice, functions politically. From the reception analysis I have distilled certain typical forms of criticism which I describe as being characterized by subjectivity hidden under a layer of mechanisms giving the impression of objectivity. This subjectivity enables the institutions in which criticism functions (i.e. the media and academy-based literary criticism) an unproblematic access to continuity of concepts and practices. It also allows for a continuing monopoly on the definition of these concepts and practices by the way the institutions select and approach the texts.

The evidence indicates that the practice of literary criticism in newspapers and academic journals selects certain texts and approaches to texts and disempowers others. This is achieved simultaneously by: first, the

monopoly on the defining of the category 'literature' which literary criticism is able to maintain, second, by the processes of reproduction of the institution literary criticism and third, by the 'signifying' effects of the selection of texts and approaches to texts. All this helps to prove that literary criticism is ideological in nature. This ideological nature of literary criticism as practiced in the FRG during the 1970's on Heinrich Böll's novels is finally demonstrated more firmly in my concluding chapters. Here, I reiterate the positions which the novels are allocated by the critical reception (i.e. the critical classifications they receive) and assess these in terms of the meanings they tend to mobilize and the significance these meanings have to the prevailing political power structure. The need for the institution to reproduce itself drives it to assign values to these literary works which strip them of their capacity for, and purpose to, change social values and political structures. My conclusion, therefore, is that the reception of Böll's work during the 1970's can be described as being constrained by the ideological nature of the reception. The evidence leads to the conclusion that the practice of literary criticism mobilizes 'meanings' which aid the continued asymmetrical distribution of power.

IDEOLOGY AND LITERATURE:

A STUDY OF SOCIETY AND LITERARY CRITICISM WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE RECEPTION OF HEINRICH BÖLL
DURING THE 1970'S.

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