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Review of *Uwe Johnsons Frühwerk: Im Spiegel der deutschsprachigen Literaturkritik* by Nicolai Riedel

Robert K. Shirer

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, rshirer1@unlnotes.unl.edu

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Nicolai Riedel, ed. *Uwe Johnsons Frühwerk: Im Spiegel der deutschsprachigen Literaturkritik: Dokumente zur publizistischen Rezeption der Romane "Mutmassungen über Jakob," "Das dritte Buch über Achim" und "Ingrid Babendererde."* (Abhandlungen zur Kunst-, Musik- und Literaturwissenschaft, 371). Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1987. Pp. 277. Cloth DM 69,—.

Nicolai Riedel has once more performed a valuable service for Uwe Johnson scholars. With this volume he provides a documentary complement to his excellent bibliographies and his useful analyses of Johnson reception. Riedel has collected seventy short newspaper and magazine pieces about Johnson's early work, many of which have been hitherto virtually inaccessible. There are six general features, twenty-two reviews of *Mutmassungen über Jakob*, twenty-two reviews of *Das dritte Buch über Achim*, and twenty reviews of the posthumously published first novel *Ingrid Babendererde*.

Riedel devotes the first section of the anthology to early short sketches about Johnson and his work. They serve to remind us that the young author was a complete unknown and that the publication of *Mutmassungen über Jakob* was accompanied by a number of speculations about Johnson. The most noteworthy of these are a far-sighted piece by Jean Améry and a vitriolic polemic by Arno Hochmuth and Horst Kessler, which first appeared in the GDR cultural weekly *Sonntag* and which is characteristic of what little GDR reception there was of Johnson's early work.

The anthology provides an excellent overview of the initial reactions to *Mutmassungen* and *Achim*. Riedel has gathered reviews not only from the national press but also from regional and local publications, and the breadth of his sample demonstrates the powerful impact these two novels had upon the West German literary scene. It has become a cliché to think of Johnson as "der Dichter der beiden Deutschland" — an appellation the author himself always found quite irritating —, but these reviews reveal how eagerly critics in the West embraced the young man who conceived of the border as a "literary category." Although, as one might expect from such a large sample, a few of the reviews are quite superficial, a remarkable number are both perceptive and prescient. Although some reviewers berate Johnson for the difficulties of his language and his modernistic techniques, a significant majority combines enthusiasm for the young author's extraordinary narrative talents with satisfaction that someone had finally confronted the theme of a divided Germany.;

Riedel made an excellent decision by including reviews of *Ingrid Babendererde*, for they illustrate an obvious but fascinating phenomenon in the reception of an author's works. Because this first novel was not published until 1985, more than twenty-five years after *Mutmassungen über Jakob*, reviewers cannot help but approach the text as a part of Johnson's whole oeuvre. The fresh, direct, often polemical responses to the first two published novels contrast with reviews which, positive or negative, are clearly informed by the respect the critics have for the author of *Jahrestage*.

This useful and important volume concludes with detailed bibliographical information about each review, with a selected bibliography of early scholarly treatments of Johnson's work, and with an index.

ROBERT K. SHIRER, *University of Nebraska-Lincoln*