

## BOOK REVIEW

Michael Baumann, *B. Traven: An Introduction* (University of New Mexico Press, 1976).

B. Traven's true identity has been a mystery for years, although his works have been issued in many editions since the 1920's. In 1929 he published five novels in Germany, an indication of his prolific output. All of his works reveal an intimate knowledge of American conditions, especially the plight of American migratory workers. He knew and described the land like a native. All of his books were written in German, but were translated in Great Britain by English authors and published there and in the U.S. The key chapter in this book is on "The Language Questions." It finally solves the mystery of Traven.

Baumann demonstrates the following salient points with reference to the language of Traven: Traven's German is much better than his English, but his German is not that of a European German. It is different. Traven always introduces English words or literal translations of American phrases rather than utilizing a German equivalent. Also his English betrayed the fact that his mother tongue was German. Moreover, Traven spoke German with a slight accent, an American accent. What does this indicate about Traven's origin?

Baumann, himself a bilingual, brilliantly analyzes the language of Traven. The conclusion is obvious, convincing and overwhelmingly supported by Baumann's masterful study: Traven was an American-born German-American. He was born in one of the many German-speaking communities across the U.S. The fact that he was a German-American explains his language, his peculiar English, his Anglicisms in his written German, and the slight "American accent." With reference to his accent it must be stated that it was not one of a foreign speaker, but rather that of a provincial speaker. Students of American German dialects are well aware of the different accent in America.

This study contends that Traven was a self-taught German-American intellectual whose favorite authors were: Whitman, Jack London, Shelley, Upton Sinclair, J. F. Cooper and other American writers. This outstanding piece of scholarship not

only reveals Traven's German-American origin, but also inadvertently indicates the vitality of the German language in America. In the past century a major author was a German-American: Karl Postl/Charles Sealsfield. Now it can be stated that a major author of the present century was also a German-American: B. Traven. Any German-Americanist will be interested in this work. In spite of the fact that he sought seclusion, Traven's language bares the unmistakable imprint of his homeland, German-America.

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### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sehr geehrter Herr Redakteur!

Don Heinrich Tolzmanns Erwiderung auf meinen Leserbrief im zehnten Band der *German-American Studies* (Seite 63-65, 66-70) habe ich mit Interesse und Aufmerksamkeit zur Kenntnis genommen. Einige Punkte der Antwort Tolzmanns kann ich jedoch nicht unwidersprochen hinnehmen:

- 1) In Sachen österreichische, Schweizer etc. Literatur: der Fehler liegt nicht bei mir, sondern eher bei Tolzmann — ich habe in indirekter Rede zitiert (S. 63, 67: "Kriker . . . führen . . . ins Feld, *dass* . . ."). Ich habe mich an keiner Stelle mit dem Inhalt dieser Kritik identifiziert. Tolzmanns Einwand ist somit gegenstandslos.
- 2) Träume/Schäume: Tolzmann hat sich auch hier nicht an den "Text" gehalten. Ich hatte geschrieben: "Tolzmanns Träume 'von einer grossen und hochstehenden deutschamerikanischen Literatur' . . . *scheinen vorerst* nichts weiter als Schäume zu sein" (S. 64). Die Tatsache, dass Tolzmann 1974 ca. 100 deutschamerikanische Autoren quasi aus dem Nichts zusammengetrommelt hat, gibt keinerlei Aufschluss über die literarische Qualität der Werke dieser Autoren. Meine Bedenken bleiben nach wie vor bestehen.
- 3) Es freut mich zu erfahren, dass Tolzmanns literarisches Werk konkreter deutschamerikanischer Erfahrung entspringt. Gilt dies jedoch auch für andere Autoren? Wie