

realistic fiction and with biography written in a fair and open spirit and not with a yen to depreciate Mormons. Once we have more concrete examples of realistic writing at its best, we can better judge its value.

A SMALL HELPING OF MORMONISM

D. L. Ashliman

Mahlzeiten, a film directed by Edgar Reitz, is one of the most recent and most highly praised of the Young German productions. D. L. Ashliman, an instructor of German at the University of Pittsburgh, wrote this review while he was studying at the University of Göttingen under a grant from the German government. He has written articles on the image of Mormonism in Germany for the *Utah Historical Quarterly* and the *Brigham Young University Studies*.

Mahlzeiten is one of Germany's most discussed current films, and one which will be of special interest to Latter-day Saints. The plot could be reduced to sound like a sensational nineteenth-century thriller: a young married couple is converted to the Mormon religion, he shortly afterward commits suicide, and she emigrates to America with a third Mormon. But there is much more than this to Reitz's production, which even *Der Spiegel's* normally vitriolic reviewers called "a cool, sensible film—the best thus far of the Young German production" (March 27, 1967, p. 122).

"Cool" describes this production well; the film abounds in cold, dispassionate realism, which is both its strength and its weakness. Reitz's exclusive use of improvised dialogue gives the film freshness and candor, but many viewers will feel that his selection of scenes from the lives of seemingly ordinary people is too mundane. And there are those who will be offended by his inclusion of certain revealing (but clinically dispassionate) bedroom and bathroom scenes.¹

The plot, beyond the distorted skeleton mentioned above, is worth noting. Rolf (played by Georg Hauke) seems to be well on the way toward the realization of his life long goal, to become a doctor. Even his courtship with Elisabeth (Heidi Stroh) and her subsequent pregnancy are no serious threat to his success. The two lovers marry, but Elisabeth's view of life as one continuous dinner party (hence the film's title) and her rapid succession of pregnancies are financially and psychologically more than Rolf's medical studies can withstand. He makes an attempt at a related profession, selling pharmaceutical products to doctors, but is also unsuccessful there.

At the depth of the young family's depression, two Mormon missionaries enter the scene. The parts are suitably taken by actual Mormon elders,² speaking typical missionary German; the spectators are treated to a standard "door speech" and to part of an authentic discussion on the need for modern-day revelation. Later in the conversion process the young couple is shown through the Hamburg Stake Center by eager American missionaries. The climax is a

¹*Mahlzeiten* has been placed categorically off limits to the missionaries of at least two of the German missions.

²One reviewer stated that permission to use actual missionaries had to come from Salt Lake City (*Schwäbische Donau-Zeitung*, March 17, 1967). From the preceding footnote it is obvious that some Church officials regret the Church's cooperation in making the film.