

Joachim Nowotny: Letzter Auftritt der Komparsen. Halle-Leipzig: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1981. 214 pages. 7.-- M.

From the outset, the narrator admits that his story was borne of necessity and that its conclusion is a tragic one. Perhaps the author intends thereby to set the tone, though one later suspects that he is minimizing the impact of his highly reflective accounts. Is it, then, deliberate understatement? Or is Nowotny dealing in some other mode of artistically-generated urgency to supply the momentum necessary to launch a Novelle and, more importantly, to keep it afloat? To this reader, the piece is simply too heavy, too flat to be convincing. It lacks even the minimum amount of tension to render its resolution, the death of an only superficially sketched character, effective. At times it appears that an attempt at a Rahmenerzählung has been undertaken, though the requisite motivation or conflict is missing.

What about the title? Komparsen, silent players in walk-on parts, move about in a mining village which is being torn down. The task assigned to narrator-producer Krambach is to write a light-hearted play about life in this rural community. One anticipates a story about the threads that tie human life to the subtleties of this disappearing landscape. Occasionally, one can perceive in Krambach a faint shadow-play between states of mind, though nothing happens that really enhances the reader's involvement. At best there is proof here that tepid language, if you will, suffocates.

Thomas I. Bacon
Texas Tech University

Andreas Albrecht: Entfernung zu einem Ort. Gedichte. Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1982. 126 pages. 4,50 M.

Andreas Albrecht initially made a name for himself as a writer of promise with the enthusiastic reception in 1981 of a collection of stories entitled Unter Umständen die Liebe. Unfortunately his first attempt at poetry, Entfernung zu einem Ort, is less impressive. Despite a rather general, laudatory afterword by Rudo Melchert, which seeks to place Albrecht firmly in the fold of younger GDR poets articulately committed to the state and its people, the work fails as pure poetry. There are 83 poems in the collection, grouped into five roughly equal sections, the titles of which refer to aspects of an imaginary train journey undertaken by the author: "In Richtung der Gleise," "Hafen im Acker," "Reise nach Südosten," "Stadt auf freiem Feld," and "Unvollendete Kanäle." The cycle opens with the description of an apparent occurrence -- "Ziemlicher Vorgang" -- in which Albrecht, referring to himself by name, likens himself to the vagabonds of old, hitching rides on passing trains, uncertain of their destinations, and sure only of their desire to travel and to experience. In the poems which follow it is the author's imagination which becomes the vehicle for a dizzying journey to people and places, both near and far. The train itself recurs often as the central image of movement forward through time and space, enabling one to ride as far and as fast as one can, until the journey's end: "Im Februar/ Mit der Eisenbahn fahren hell beleuchtet zur Nacht/ Hinter die Sterne wo der Zug ein letztes Mal hält/ Mit der Eisenbahn fahren, Übers Ende hinaus/ Bis der Schaffner die Laternen einpackt" (71).

Contextually the poems deal alternately with the common folk and their lives -- "Vollständiger Bericht über Brigade kegeln" and "Betriebsausflug Oranienbaum 25.5.1978" -- or with the famous figures of world history, particularly its artists and intellectuals: Bach, Van Gogh, Nietzsche, and Brecht. The author resorts to such juxtaposition in an effort to show that everyone contributes in a unique and meaningful way to society's progress: "Allesamt baun was fürs nächste Jahrtausend" (18).

The collection's most telling flaw is its lack of precision and of structure in both individual poems and as a whole. Almost all the poems are written in an effusive unrhymed free verse and contain all-too-clever metaphors, which simply do not work -- "Pubertierende Braunkohlenindustrie" (11) being just one example. Only in Section II has the author shown himself to be a more consummate poet, fully conscious of form and its relationship to content, as for instance, in the poem "Platonische Liebe" (38), where the spacing of the verses visually renders the poem's theme:

Durch Drehen und Spiegeln
Durch stetiges Fügen des immergleichen
Schenklichen Dreiecks
Schließt sich und entsteht

Das Objekt meiner Liebe

Der Platonische Körper

The poems in this section are also far more concise, tight, and less pretentious than those in the rest of the collection. They adhere to stricter verse patterns and are characterized by cross rhyme or rhymed couplets; there is even a sonnet present. For this reason they are unquestionably the most satisfying from a purely aesthetic point of view. What is regrettable is that the remainder of Albrecht's poems are not of the same caliber.

Thomas Di Napoli
Louisiana State University

GDR BULLETIN

Published three times a year by the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, James F. Poag, Chairperson, Box 1104, Washington University, St. Louis, MO 63130.

Editor: Barton Byg

Departmental Staff

Book Reviews: Friederike Eigler, Priscilla Hayden, Marc Iwand, Magdalene Müller, Hildegard Pietsch, Tineke Ritmeester

Bibliography: Friederike Eigler, Janet Finkel, Marc Iwand, Dugald Sturges

Journal Notes: Judy Wessler

Literature in Translation: Dugald Sturges

Notes in Brief: Dugald Sturges

Travel and Exchange: Magdalene Müller

Research in Progress: Dugald Sturges

Visiting Lecturers: Barton Byg

All departments can be contacted at the address above.