

1980

Herbert Nachbar: Keller der alten Schmiede

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economic and social geography of "Germany" from 1815 to 1945 and in the post-war period, 1945-1950. In the main body of the book he then deals with the social and economic geography of the two contemporary German states, including East and West Berlin. Mellor's approach to his subject is an historical one. He notes in his preface that he has been greatly impressed "by the importance of the events, personalities and attitudes that comprise history in influencing the contemporary." Mellor carefully traces the historical and political motivations of the conditions he describes; he is ever aware that change is the result of responses to new spatial, economic and political orientations, and that, given this fact, the geographical conditions he is describing are constantly undergoing change.

The discussion of the two contemporary German states comprises just under two-thirds of the text. Of this, a disappointingly small part is devoted to the GDR (4 chapters, approximately 65 pages, as opposed to 8 chapters, 170 pages for the Federal Republic). The chapters on the GDR address the demographic changes and present population patterns in the GDR, including city planning and the nature and function of the Bezirke; the industrial development of the GDR, with discussion of its sources and supply of energy and raw materials, its heavy industry (steel making, chemical concerns, engineering); agriculture and forestry; and transportation.

Aside from the disproportionate amount of space given to the GDR, the book is praiseworthy: it is objective in its approach; it is easily read and yet scholarly in nature, with an index and an extensive bibliography of German, English and French titles through 1977, and with many readily understood graphs and maps. Each chapter has a list of further readings. The frequent inclusion of the original German names and terms in addition to their English translation is an appreciated detail. I consider the book quite recommendable for use in undergraduate (and graduate) courses in German studies, particularly in courses dealing with both Germanies; it is a good basic book.

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Keller der alten Schmiede. Von Herbert Nachbar. Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1979. 8,80 M.

Nachbar's novel deals with growing up during the Nazi regime and the early years of the GDR. Theo Olafson's life is narrated partly in the first person, and partly in the third person. The alternation in narrative stance is sometimes annoying, especially since the reader does not gain any more insight into Theo from himself than he does from the third person narrator. The book is divided into three parts: Theo's boyhood in Beutin, a small village in North Germany; his experiences at the teacher training institute and its camp; and his life during the early years of the GDR. Theo's youth in Beutin is filled with the small pleasures, anxieties, and questions of any boy at that time. He ventures into the forbidden cellar of the old forge with his fiend Franz, wonders why the Jews in the village are set apart from the others, and helps Franz transport his paralyzed Onkel Otto in a wagon to see a train before he dies. Onkel Otto, who sometimes suffers from "memory loss" and who tells the boys stories, is one of the most memorable characters in the book. The reader wishes, however, that Nachbar had also developed Theo's relationship to the Jews in the village; even more unfortunate is Theo's later casual reference to their deaths in a concentration camp. In the second part of the novel, Theo, while at the teacher's training camp, grows through a brief encounter with a girl who calls herself only "Rumpelstilzchen" and through his friendship with Wolfgang Lewerenz. Theo and Wolfgang anticipate the ultimate failure of the Nazi regime, but their flaunting of camp discipline is more youthful rebellion than political revolt. Theo's later desertion from the teacher training institute is also motivated more by resentment against the staff than by political conviction. The third part of the novel is the weakest. With the war over, Theo's family moves to a fishing community. The defeat of Fascism, the coming of the Soviet troops, and the establishment of the GDR changes Theo's life. At first seemingly unaffected, he then shows support for the government by persuading his entire class to join the FDJ. Theo's

sudden and awkwardly handled political awakening is not developed; rather, the novel goes on to introduce another theme almost obligatory in the GDR works set before the Berlin wall: the foray into the Western zone and the discovery that its society is based on gain. Theo's return to his boyhood home at the end of the novel leads him to the insight that time does not stand still, and to the thought "Wer nichts macht aus seinem Leben, haust im Keller der alten Schmiede, Untermieter beim Tod." His insight is not unique enough to justify recounting his adventures, and the reader is left wondering whether Theo will make any significant contributions to the new GDR society. Keller der alten Schmiede is sometimes readable because of the refreshing dialogue and original characters, but it is not a major contribution to GDR literature.

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Scherben: Gedichte. Von Christiane Grosz.
Edition Neue Texte. Berlin and Weimar:
Aufbau Verlag, 1978. 99 Seiten. 4,50 M.

Coffee pots with lids and handles: the daily output (and companions) of the ceramist. "Hier ein Deckel ohne Dose," and maybe there a pot in search of a lid: disorder born of incompleteness. Incompleteness the result of destruction. A lid is smashed. A marriage is broken.

The poet's artistic freedom is squelched in a liaison weak on love, "die Liebe klein, geflohn." The dissolution is accomplished all too rationally: "Dir den Sessel/Mir den Kessel...Für dich Tschai-kowski/ Für mich Bobrowski" ("Aufteilvers"). Along with conflicting feelings of emptiness, relief, hate, and jealousy, a burden of guilt remains. "Und das Kind?" As freedom is gained, new fetters take shape: "Betten deine/Ketten meine."

A succession of outlets involving the theater, graphics, writing, and ceramics outline a start-and-stop existence in the not always so "free" arts. Her life, fragmented, resembles a collection of potscherds. But from the broken pieces and incomplete sets will come new sources of creativity.

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Each new start in life is accomplished with the stripping away of a former self; "Unter mir der Fluß führt/alle meine Felle, die davon/ geschwommen sind." In the mill that is the artistic process, heavy hammers "...münzen/meine Felle um in eine/ neue Währung." Poems emerge from life's experiences, even (especially!) the painful ones; art is relentless, "Ohne Schonung," but it is the path she must pursue: "Mein Weg/schmal und weiß/ist aus Papier." Christiane Grosz evinces compassion for the helpless, be they children, potters' apprentices, or old people, yet she scoffs at shallow sentimentality. In a collection as autobiographically oriented as Scherben, there is a risk of the poet's taking herself too seriously, of becoming melodramatic. Rarely is this a problem here. If there is a tinge of bitterness, there is also a reservoir of humor and self-irony ("Tonputtel").

Now and then a clever line at the end of a poem suggests the possibility that the poem was created in order to feature it; "Aber/geht ihr für mich durchs Feuer." ("Lieblich auf meine Töpfe"); but that is hardly a serious criticism. It is rather to be hoped that the poet will further develop her obvious talent for the epigram. The nature poems are concise, straightforward, vivid in their imagery, often beautiful. That they are interspersed among the more unabashedly "personal" poems does not detract from, but rather heightens the autobiographical quality of the work: the poet strives to establish a sense of order and finds comfort in the regularity of the recurring seasons and (Christian) holidays.

Scherben works as a collection partly because of the fruitful tension between the desire to be free to break with the past, to begin new lives (Felle--one is reminded of the image "häuten"), and the need for order and regularity. It is impossible to maintain perfect equilibrium. On the one hand, "Ordnung" can tyrannize: "vierfüßige Jamben,/wollen sich überall einmischen/ und endlich Ordnung in die/geordnete Unordnung bringen" ("Angsttraum"). On the other hand, freedom is seldom really absolute "Ich werde dich verlassen/und nicht von dir gehn." The new beginnings are not to be seen as complete breaks from the past; "Fühl dich nie/wie neu geboren. /Neu geboren du nicht."