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Michael Kinne and Birgit Strube-Edelmann: Kleines Wörterbuch des DDR-Wortschatzes

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Die Nacht des Käuzchens: Erzählungen aus drei Jahrzehnten. By Eduard Claudius. Halle-Leipzig: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1979. 571 pages. 10,80 M.

The stories of this volume, the first volume of Claudius' collected works to be published since his death, appeared originally between 1940 and 1968. Characterized by a strongly autobiographical stance, they reflect the turbulent and colorful course of Claudius' life.

In the first of these stories, "Salz der Erde," Eduard Claudius (1911-1976) creates a fictionalized account of his life from childhood up to his early twenties; he here attempts a more mature treatment of these years than that of his earlier novel Jugend im Umbruch. Like Claudius himself, Arthur Barth, by trade a bricklayer, has returned to his home in the Ruhr after several years of nomadic wandering throughout Southern Europe. Arthur, the prodigal son, hopes to make a new beginning in his homeland but is soon disillusioned by the widespread unemployment, gross economic inequality, hunger, political anarchy, and despair which marked the final months of the Weimar Republic. Like Claudius, Arthur joins the Communist Party, is incarcerated, and upon his release from prison leaves Germany to continue his agitation from abroad.

The second story in this volume, "Die Nacht des Käuzchens," later reworked as a drama entitled Die Söhne Garibaldi, picks up the thread of Claudius' life in the spring of 1945 when he joined the partisan brigade Garibaldi. It was this brigade which single-handedly captured Mussolini. Like "Salz der Erde," this story expresses very concretely and emotionally Claudius' intense opposition to fascism as embodied not only in German and Italian fascists but also in the victorious American occupation forces.

In 1945 Claudius returned to western Germany but already in 1947 took up residence in Potsdam. Two stories in this volume record Claudius' enthusiastic response to early phases in the collectivization of industry and agriculture. "Vom schweren Anfang" later expanded into the novel Mensch an unserer Seite, portrays an actual incident: in 1950 the bricklayer Hans Garbe together with a few heroic co-workers overcomes both enormous physical hardship and persistent attempts at sabotage as he rebuilds the only remaining oven in the VEB plant Siemens-Plania without extinguishing the fire and thus shutting down the plant. Similarly, the story "Dorf ohne Feldrain" depicts the utopianism, cynicism, conflict, and final sense of satisfaction accompanying the initial stages of collectivization in rural villages.

The remaining stories--from "Son Excellence L'ambassadeur" to "Der letzte Tiger" and "Geschichten von Trang Quynh"--arise out of Claudius' experiences in the foreign service of the GDR, first in Damascus and later as ambassador to Vietnam. These stories depict the ongoing struggle between the regressive forces of exploitation and repression and the progressive forces of emancipation, equality, and universal brotherhood in the underdeveloped countries of the Third World.

All of these stories could be criticized as simplistic, for they convey a naive faith in the progress of international communism. The questioning and critical stance characteristic of much GDR literature of the later sixties and seventies has not yet examined these fictional worlds. On the other hand it is precisely Claudius' total allegiance to his cause, an allegiance born of first-hand experience and considerable personal sacrifice, which enables him to write with such persuasive immediacy.

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Kleines Wörterbuch des DDR-Wortschatzes. Von Michael Kinne und Birgit Strube-Edelmann. Düsseldorf: Pädagogischer Verlag Schwann, 1980. 252 S.

During the last two decades language in the two Germanies has changed, in part as a result of different economic, political and cultural conditions. Significant vocabulary changes have occurred in the GDR, which could result in communication problems between individuals from the two Germanies, especially in the areas of politics, ideology and commerce. As the first GDR-specific dictionary, the recently published Kleines Wörterbuch des DDR-Wortschatzes, edited by Michael Kinne and Birgit Strube-Edelmann, makes some of the research conducted at the "Forschungsstelle für den öffentlichen Sprachgebrauch" (Bonn and Mannheim) available to students and scholars interested in the GDR.

Kinne and Strube-Edelmann's dictionary defines and explains eight hundred neologisms of contemporary GDR language and lists separately many GDR abbreviations. Their preface to the dictionary summarizes concisely the results of prior research on German language development conducted by Eastern and Western scholars, providing valuable background for those unfamiliar with postwar developments in GDR language. The editors selected words which came into existence or were modified after 1945. Occasional inclusion of KPD terminology and other words coined by the KPD prior to 1945 reflects their continued use in the GDR.

The authors define three types of neologisms: 1) words newly created in the GDR (Neuwörter); 2) familiar words which have new meanings or definitions (Neubedeutungen); and 3) newly formed compounds (Neuprägungen) (p. 9). For each entry, definitions, examples of usage, and related words based on that root are provided, while etymology is, for the most part, omitted.

Among the surprisingly vast number of neologisms in the GDR, genuine Neuwörter form the smallest group. Contrary to assumptions often made by the Western media, new technology and industries, not politics or ideology, have contributed the most Neuwörter. Thus Plastik is called der Plast in the GDR, and Western shoppers purchase a Brathähnchen sold as der Broiler in the East.

With Neubedeutungen, the authors are careful to specify whether older meanings have been retained alongside newer ones. The friend from one's adolescent years may still be termed a Jugendfreund, but the designation is also used in reference to and as a form of address among members of the Free German Youth (FDJ).

Many new compounds listed as Neuprägungen provide information about GDR practices and conventions where there is little danger of misunderstanding (eg. Westfernsehen or Westgeld). In the wake of the recent German past, for example, compounds with Führer are carefully avoided in the GDR, hence the use of Stadterklärer instead of Stadtführer. An attempt is also made to avoid such "decadent" Americanisms as Disk-Jockey, for which Schallplattenunterhalter is substituted.

The user desperate for an explanation of abbreviations or acronyms which proliferate in the GDR language will appreciate the extensive list supplied in the appendix (eight pages and over two hundred and sixty entries).

In spite of its limitations, the Kleines Wörterbuch des DDR-Wortschatzes is a practical and unique source of information concerning the vast number of neologisms that have emerged in all areas of social, political and economic life in the GDR. Further expansion of this reference tool, so valuable to students and scholars interested in the GDR, would be most welcome.

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