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## Ursula Ullrich: Am Abend sind die Schatten lang. Erzählungen

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dem neuen Ort noch sinnvoll erschienen, "Leben versprach."

Uz's psychological state is a confused one, and Gerlach's choice of a narrative repeatedly interrupted by a return to the novella's opening scene underscores the writer's distress: Uz, sunken in resignation, has just finished his sixth glass of wine. At the same time, an exaggerated anticipation of the approaching hour of midnight preoccupies him: he has received an anonymous message concerning a rendezvous, and he can only hope that its sender is Climene, the woman he has fallen in love with.

As the hour of Uz's rendezvous approaches, he leaves the tavern, but then meets an acquaintance and invites him to climb one of the town's towers for a view of the sleeping city below. At this juncture, the fine line which divided reality from the fantastic world of hallucination for this frustrated writer and disillusioned civil servant rapidly begins to dissolve, and accordingly, Gerlach's disjointed retrospective narrative increases in complexity. The remainder of the novella consists of a jumbled description of the confused protagonist's rendezvous (Uz's self has separated, and he observes himself from the tower above), an account of the events of the past sixteen months, and Uz's conversation with his acquaintance Hommel.

Gerlach sympathizes with the historical figure he has reincarnated, but his sympathy is not without critical overtones, and to discuss the novella without mentioning the irony with which Gerlach treats his subject would be a failure to do it justice. Here we have a desperate man who had once sought and found refuge in poetic verse, finally confronted with the realities of rejected love and a world unable to act according to reason (The diplomatic mission of which Uz was a part has failed, and military action is eventually taken in order to solve the conflict). The novella is a well-written and entertaining characterization of a 17th-century writer's dilemma from a contemporary perspective, which suggests that irony is an essential tool with which the contemporary reader is to approach such a figure.

In a short section of notes at the conclusion of the novella, Gerlach makes his point clear: Uz's stay in Rômhild has often been characterized as the happiest

period in his life, but according to Gerlach, it was actually a very unproductive and unhappy one. Gerlach's attempt to portray Uz's frustration and emotional collapse is yet another example of the currently popular effort to establish a better understanding of the literary figures of the past via the medium of fiction.

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Ullrich, Ursula. Am Abend sind die Schatten lang. Erzählungen. Berlin: Union, 1987. 232 pp.

Wie der Titel bereits impliziert, präsentiert der Erzähler hier zum größten Teil Geschichten über Figuren, deren Lebensabend vom baldigen "Schritt durch die dunkle Pforte" (148) überschattet wird. Man erfährt, "wie es ist, alt zu sein" (157): wenn Augen und Ohren ihren Dienst in zunehmendem Maße verweigern, wenn Gebrechlichkeit, Krankheit und ständiger Schmerz zum Tagesrhythmus gehören und das Krankenhaus sich in ein "Schlachthaus" (83) zu verwandeln droht; wobei diese Aspekte erst die physiologische Seite jener Altersproblematik skizzieren. Noch tragischer wirkt das "Angewiesensein auf andere" (153), deren mangelndes Verständnis für die (sich oft nach dem Tod sehnenen) alten Leute häufig sogar als seelische Grausamkeit transparent wird: "Der Sohn weiß mit der kranken Frau [seiner Mutter] nichts anzufangen" (160). Er stellt das Radio an, läßt sich von einer Fußballreportage ablenken und veranschaulicht, "wie unfähig die meisten Menschen sind, wirklichem Elend zu begegnen" (17).

Das Gefühl des nahen Todes löst bei etlichen Figuren Reflexionen über die weit zurückreichende Vergangenheit aus - gewissermaßen zum Verständnis der eigenen und allgemein menschlichen Vergänglichkeit. Darunter fallen u.a. das Heimweh nach einem (agrarmantisch verklärten) Leben auf dem Bauernhof und die erlebten, furchtbaren Schrecken des I. und II. Weltkrieges und die via Fernsehen vermittelten Eindrücke von den Kämpfen in Vietnam: "Eine Mutter, der man das Kind erschlug, ein Bauer, dem man Hütte und Feld niederbrannte, ein Junge, dem man das ent-

setzte Gesicht zerschloß, das waren Bilder, die sie bis in die Träume verfolgten" (102).

Abweichungen von den obengenannten Themenkreisen konzentrieren sich vornehmlich in der Brief-Erzählung "Liebe Hella," der als Handlungsgerüst eine brennende Fabel zugrunde liegt: Durch ihre Liebesbeziehung zu einem farbigen Südafrikaner gerät eine junge Studentin in Konfliktsituationen mit ihrem bürgerlich-konservativen Vater, dessen "Weltsicht" (120) rassistische Perspektiven aufweist.

Die Art und Weise, wie die bewegenden Themen dieses Buches künstlerisch verarbeitet werden, kann weniger überzeugen, denn ihre Darstellung erscheint mitunter naiv, epigonal, teilweise banal und - zugegebenermaßen nur an vereinzelt Stellen - moralisierend. Ferner bringen die auf Versöhnung angelegten Handlungen einiger Figuren keine glaubwürdigen Alternativen hervor; sie hinterlassen eher den Eindruck konformistischer Reaktionen. Ein weiteres Problem bildet das Verhältnis von Erzählzeit und erzählter Zeit, d.h. die letztere erstreckt sich mit Hilfe von Rückblenden häufig über den gesamten Lebenszeitraum einer Person, womit im begrenzten Rahmen der Erzählungen die Präsentation von Klischees und Stereotypen des öfteren nicht vermieden werden kann. Als eine Stärke erweist sich wiederum die Verwendung von Dialekten in der Sprechweise der ländlichen Bevölkerung.

Hier liegt interessante Literatur vor, doch leider kein interessantes Kunstwerk, und dennoch erkennt man (einmal mehr) den dringend nötigen Appell zur Verbesserung der oft inhumanen Beziehungen zwischen den Generationen.

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Bartusch, Hagen and Martin Reso, eds. Bauernmarkt--Dorfgeschichten einmal anders. Halle-Leipzig: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1987. 279 pp., 47 plates, 31 color.

It is not surprising that this anthology was published in the GDR--"the first workers' and farmers' state on German soil." It came about through the combined efforts of the Association of Farmers' Mutual

Aid, the Writers' Union, the Union of Artists, and the Mitteldeutscher Verlag. Much of this book will remind the reader of the efforts of the "Bitterfelder Weg" movement of a quarter of a century ago.

The purpose of this anthology was formulated at the XIIth Farmers' Congress in the early 1980s. It was to be a cooperative effort between representatives from the agrarian community and writers and artists. The latter would articulate in their medium the accomplishments that had been achieved in agriculture during the three decades since the founding of the new state.

With the exception of a few stories by well-known writers such as Hermann Kant, Jurij Brezan, and Erwin Strittmatter, most of the thirty-three selections were written by less-distinguished individuals. Most selections are character sketches of individuals who, through hard work and sacrifice, contributed in great measure to the present-day success of the agricultural enterprise. Some stories relate the long, hard road from the days of fascism, through the early days of difficulties in the new state, to the present time when the now senior citizens are still actively participating in their community's work. Other sketches tell of younger people being integrated into the highly technical world of agriculture. Even though many accounts can recall for the reader novels in the tradition of Strittmatter's Ole Bienkopp, these lack the style and imagination that a good prose writer naturally offers.

Of much greater interest and artistic quality are the colored plates illustrating the paintings by very prominent contemporary artists. One can, for example, examine the socialist realism in the large murals of Ronald Paris and Arno Mohr, the almost impressionistic portraits of Willi Sitte, new subjectivity in Wolfgang Matheuer's work, and Bernhard Heisig's landscape painted in the tradition of Kokoschka. The most spectacular work, illustrated in five parts, is Werner Tübke's "Frühbürgerliche Revolution in Deutschland." This massive painting (139x1230 cm) can only be compared to the great Medieval and Renaissance masterpieces of Bosch and Breughel. It is plain to see that these artists did not necessarily go off to a village with pen in hand to record the accomplishments of an industrious citizen.