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Ulrich Plenzdorf: The New Sufferings of Young W. - A Novel

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The New Sufferings of Young W.: A Novel.
by Ulrich Plenzdorf. Trans. Kenneth P.
Wilcox. New York: Frederick Ungar Publish-
ing Co., 1979 xii + 84 pages. \$2.95.

This translation of Plenzdorf's novel will be an important addition to courses in translation on the GDR, contemporary East and West Germany, and recent German literature and culture. Since the book is sure to be widely used, it is a great pity that Kenneth Wilcox' translation is not better than it is. Certainly the work is a difficult one to translate into American English precisely because of its reliance on American culture, and a gifted translator would have recognized the necessity of devising linguistic strategies to convey the strangeness of Edgar's Americanisms in an East German context. But even from a translation which is not brilliant readers should be able to expect an accurate and idiomatic American appropriate to Plenzdorf's characters. Instead, Wilcox disappoints us on many counts, as the examples I cite here--taken from many--will show. Important recurring phrases are translated inconsistently, so that "über den Jordan gehen" becomes variously "the Great Beyond" (7) and "bite the dust" (48), "sie rumkriegen," "bring her round" (4) and "lay her" (26)--which Edgar would never have said about Charlie. Edgar sometimes uses contemporary expressions and sometimes uses slang which has not been spoken by American teenagers for at least fifteen years: "broads" (10), "croaked" (11), "to be hot for a woman" (68). Wilcox is often unidiomatic: "Wahrscheinlich hatte ich sie aufgestört" becomes "I'd probably roused them" (81). Sometimes he is so literal that the translation makes no sense: "Mother enlightened me" (4) or "Stop howling" (23) ("Heul doch nicht."). And sometimes Wilcox' translation is simply wrong. Most shocking is his distortion of Edgar's explanation for why wearing jeans after one has joined the establishment is a contradiction in terms: "Das ist, wie wenn einer dem Abzeichen nach Kommunist ist und zu Hause seine Frau prügelt." In Wilcox' version, Communism and wife-beating are conjoined: "That is, if they're card-carrying Communists and beat their wives" (14). As this political misunderstanding might indicate, Wilcox' edition also does little to clarify the novel's East German setting for American readers. His infrequent notes on GDR references are misleading as often as not. Though his introduction attempts to locate Plenzdorf's work historically and literarily, he fails to explain the real issues of Plenz-

dorf's novel as GDR readers regarded it. In some respects, as in his introduction's ominous last sentence, Wilcox even perpetuates the stereotypes about the GDR which American readers already possess: "Looming behind almost everything to which Edgar takes exception is an official policy of the Party controlling the society in which he lives" (xii). It appears that we will nonetheless have to make do with this translation: it is easily accessible, inexpensive, and Plenzdorf is an almost essential component of many of our courses. Forewarned, instructors can at least counter the translation's worst faults and advise their students that Die neuen Leiden is a much better work than it appears to be in English.

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Zur gesellschaftlichen Stellung der Frau in der DDR. Herausgegeben vom Wissenschaftlichen Beirat "Die Frau in der sozialistischen Gesellschaft" bei der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR unter Leitung von Herta Kuhrig und Wulfram Speigner. Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1978. 376 pages.

This is a Sammelband by an Autorenkollektiv of twenty-one authors, the majority of whom are women. Of the contributors, nineteen are wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiter and/or chairpersons of their respective departments, or directors of their specific institutes (such as the "Institut für Soziologie und Sozialpolitik an der A. d. W." in Berlin, the Research Institute for Labor in Dresden, the Departments of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine at the Karl-Marx-Universität in Leipzig, the Law School and the School of Education at the Humboldt-Universität in Berlin, the Central Institute for Food Research in Potsdam, the Institute for Child and Adolescent Hygiene in Berlin, etc.). From this very impressive and varied list of contributors one should expect a wide variety of topics to be expertly and thoroughly discussed, and this reader, once she had stomachached in each chapter the apparently obligatory initial paragraphs of socio-political and socio-economic "laudations" of the GDR, was not disappointed. After these self-congratulatory paragraphs in each chapter ("Undenkbar wären die Erfolge unserer Sozialistischen Republik ohne die Mitarbeit der Frauen. Sie haben entscheidenden Anteil am politischen, sozialen und geistig-kulturellen Fortschritt unserer Gesellschaft," etc., etc.), the authors present an assortment of factual material, including