Joachim Nowotny: Letzter Auftritt der Komparsen

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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 raining 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.

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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" (11). 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" (36), where the spacing of the verses visually renders the poem's theme:

Durch Drehen und Spiegeln
Durch stetiges Fügen des immergleichen
Schenkligen 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.

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