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Cora Lee Kluge, ed. *Other Witnesses: An Anthology of Literature of the German Americans, 1850-1914.* Madison: Max Kade Institute for German American Studies, 2007. 450 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-924119-41-5.

Reviewed by Andrew P. Yox (Northeast Texas Community College)

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Back in Print: Cora Kluge's Rediscovery of Exemplary German American Texts

Cora Lee Kluge's reclamation of notable texts by German Americans, all in German, testifies to a new spin that may be given to an old dictum: outcastes may write stories, but elites publish the history. The best German American literature has remained so buried that leading historians in the field twenty years ago wrote as if it did not exist. *Other Witnesses*, like works by other scholars, such as Winfried Fluck, Werner Sollors, Frank Trommler, and Lorie Vanchena, contributes to the restoration of this literature, with its obvious relevance for German American and American history.

Kluge's anthology is an exhibit of national forgetfulness. She showcases some very capable writing. Two authors in particular, Theodore Kirchhoff, a peripatetic businessman, and Reinhold Solger, a Forty-Eighter intellectual, suddenly emerge after languishing over a century in obscurity as important American writers. Though these two German American authors lacked the lexical magic and streamlined plots of an Ambrose Bierce, Stephen Crane, Hamlin Garlin, Mark Twain, or William Dean Howells, who could not prefer Solger's vibrant description of an Irish American street brawl, or Kirchhoff's sublime descriptions of the Yosemite Valley (a kind of literary counterpart to Albert Bierstadt's painting) to the often torturous crypto-intellectual exchanges of a Henry James novel, or the overly descriptive Victorian surmises evoked by a George Washington Cable, or a George William Curtis? Kirchhoff and Solger, like Abraham Cahan, explored the strange ethnic secrets that informed the lives of immigrants we would actually like to learn more about. If one knows the context in which they wrote, Kirchhoff and Solger can be hilarious, and they could fruitfully be compared to other ethnic humorists, such as Finley Peter Dunne and Fred L. GardaphÃ©. Kirchhoff's story in this volume of "Peter and Paul im SÅ±den," exhibits two German Americans on the make in Mississippi, and the reader easily shares in their believable yet increasingly outlandish victories. They water-downed whiskey for humanitarian reasons and still somehow managed to make thousands of dollars in profits. They got around a Mississippi ordinance against kingpin bowling by inventing democratic bowling. Solger did a brilliant job of using a sanctimonious Berlin citizen to turbo-charge the pretensions of one of the ill-fated professors who tried to guide Germany's destiny during the Frankfurt Parliament of 1848. The Reichstag professor's vision of a united German Republic, under the red-black and gold banner of liberalism, drew inordinate praise from "Herr Heuler," but the professor actually had been cruelly harassed by the authorities in Berlin. A brilliant unmasking of the savant and his acclaimed ideals occurred, which climaxed in a conversation with a Berlin police chief:

Lieutenant: "promise me you will not display the black, red and gold."

Professor: I promise everything, I will display the

white and black ... and will only strive for other possibilities."

Lieutenant: "You will not strive after other possibilities."

Professor: "Good, I will not strive after other possibilities" (p. 62).

These two authors provide unforgettable scenes of the German American experience, such as Solger's courtroom display of nativism, and Kirchhoff's heartrending New Year's Eve, when aside from celebrating with friends he learned of his father's death in Germany. Both authors, in addition, reached this level of excellence, not simply as isolated, maverick authors writing in German, but as representatives of ethnic culture. Both worked to "detoxify" such invasive elements as the pretentiousness and philistinism of American businessmen (Solger's Frederick Snobbs), and the perils of German American prostitution (reported on in this volume by Kirchhoff) with exposÃ©s. Both exuded the heft and value of the culture, the reasons why many German Americans would cling to their community, their "Deutschtum," especially before World War I.

The lack of information about the two talented authoresses, Lotta Leser and Fernande Richter, illustrates a corollary of Kluge's main point: scholarly amnesia leads to neglect and imbalance. Leser's very existence after 1910 remains a mystery; her works are currently uncatalogued and languishing in any number of crumbling German language journals. Kluge presents one of her stories, "How Peter Meffert learned to say 'No,' " a fascinating, prize-winning study of sheepish devotion–with, I believe, anti-Christian, as well as neo-fascist overtones. Leser was unable to even complete the tale because the Chicago journal that was publishing the story in serial form, *Die Glocke*, went out of business. Richter, a formidable all-German writer long after her emigration, presents the case of another fascinating enigma. One wonders how her play, "The Bridge" with its punctilious German, feminist overtones, and fin-de-siÃ¨cle morbidity, ever survived even the rehearsals of a Milwaukee stage in 1917. And yet, for those who have argued that the German language was in irrevocable decline by 1917, or that German American feminism was undeveloped, or that German American life had become dumbed-down and folksy by 1900, here is a momento of yet another facet of the experience. In an age of high-pressured Americanization, Richter brilliantly documented the tragedy of a female engineer, surrounded by would-be managers of cultural conformity, her mother, aunt, father, and suitor. And yet again, we have no biography of Richter, no catalogue of her published work, and no sense in other histories of how her ideas mattered to the larger German American culture.

Kluge brings together a variety of styles and mÃ©tiers that hopefully will have an impact on future German American histories. There are the humorous plays–a kind of German American sitcom–by Christian Essellen and Julius Gugler that feature striking inversions, and absurdity, many times related to alcohol, German American political ambitions, and local hypocrisy. Gugler, who was also a lithographer, created a likeable and even believable mayoral candidate of "Porcupine City," Gottfried Buehler. The German American businessman, in his stumbling, English-German rant, campaigned for mayor saying that the Germans had a mission to make Americans better drinkers. As Kluge notes that this 1889 play exhilarated a Milwaukee audience, producing recurrent bursts of laughter, we realize how much more valuable it is as a reflection of German American consciousness. At the very least, *For Mayor Godfrey Buehler* exhibits believable cases of code switching, of how German Americans talked in a bilingual world, and indicates how even mundane conversations touched on allegiances to German and American values. Kluge's volume also includes touching autobiographical recollections by Robert Reitzel and Richter, au courant news reports by Kirchhoff and Udo Brachvogel, and an important chapter on German American poetry. This last chapter, concentrating on a field of writing that the German Americans themselves were more apt to champion, quite rightly chronicles the double nationalism that flourished in this field, the allegiance to both the United States and Germany. Here, one might argue that there were better and more influential German American poems. Anton Zuendt's marvelous poem about the night is omitted, for instance, as is the German American standard bearer, "An meine Kinder," by Friedrich Castelhun. But Kluge nevertheless provides a useful cross-sample of German American poems by such skilled writers as Caspar Butz, Kirchhoff, Conrad Krez, and others.

Kluge believes her work is more a "sampler" than a true anthology. Indeed, there could be other still undiscovered gems of German American prose, but this volume is not a "sampler" either in that she omits works by Catholic and Lutheran authors. (Note Brent Peterson's work on German American Lutheran narratives.) Though her subtitle is misleading, her method could be justified, and she does perform the best work to date of exhibiting the quality of German American writing. The

German American mind-set was–at least to the extent that it gloried in being German–secular and even pagan. German philosophical traditions stand behind all of the writing in this volume, and such thought often became religious, such as when Reitzel, the best German American radical writer, invoked gods, devils, witches, righteous pagans, heaven, and magic. One can sense Johann von Herder's warnings against cultural hybridization in "This Too a Philosophy" in Gugler's stigmatization of a German American dude, "Oldham," in Essellen's absurd German American Methodists–Schoppen and Brandt–and in Kirchhoff's indignation over the "Hurdy Gurdy" prostitutes of the American West. Schelling's apotheosis of nature seeps in with Solger's ecstasy over a wet forest, Kirchhoff's evocation of the PohonÃ³ River, and Udo Brachvogel's depiction of Cave of the Winds under Niagara Falls. Most important, the freedom that Fichte took to be a ramification of the divine, and which Hegel placed at the center of his history of the cosmos, shows up consistently at the top of the German American values pyramid. The poet Wilhelm MÅ±ller, extolled the effects of worship before the "high altar of freedom," and ten of the thirteen upbeat poems in Kluge's final chapter carry some allusion to freedom: to the freedom of the "German spirit," wars for freedom, the "free word," the "free land," "freedom's thirst for action," and the "star of freedom" (pp. 416, 417-418, 407, 409, 414, 421, 402).

One of the ways in which this volume could fruitfully be used in the study of the German American consciousness would be to further explore German American concepts, such as "freedom." In what I would like to call the "chain-and-chattel breakers" of this volume, "freedom" becomes so conspicuous a value, that the distinctiveness of the belief system also becomes apparent. The "breakers" would include such German American radicals as Mathilde Anneke, Reitzel, Leser, and Richter. Their "freedom" is a talisman to be protected at all costs. German culture, German anarchism, and the German American community were in the end only vehicles to this truth. The chain-and-chattel breakers ultimately had no loyalty to anything but freedom. Anneke, for instance, rewrote Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for a German audience. The Christianity of Stowe's tale disappeared, but a new form of "holiness" was granted the slave Angelina, who had her young daughter pick flowers by a cliff, so she could fall off and die without having to endure further slavery. This tale not only would inform a history of abortion in America, but also could be used to update our understanding of Forty-Eighter radicalism, and why many Forty-Eighters in the end felt more at home with New England Transcendentalists than their countrymen. Indeed, in Anneke's tale, the ultimate chain-and-chattel breaker, the abolitionist, Gerrit Smith, verged on becoming a god, handing out benedictions, pontificating on how freedom might be too high a price to pay for love, and becoming the *deus ex machina* who resolved the entire plot. With Leser and Richter we learn in ever more dramatic ways the high cost of love, and how it too can be an instrument of slavery. The contradictions of German American freedom fantasies, however, reached their height with Reitzel. Reitzel, unlike Kirchhoff and Solger, found nothing sublime about life, and found humankind, as a whole, hopelessly in bondage to state and church. But as a free writer funded by a German brewer, Reitzel also felt no need himself to organize a working-class cadre to start assassinating factory owners. He could talk like Trotsky, but also remain free to be the humorous storyteller, Reitzel. It is remarkable how this prophet of freedom so readily became also the merchant of working-class guilt. He told the German American workers, in a speech to their activists after the Haymarket affair, that if they did not start a revolution, they were cowards, and traitors to their own ideals. However, the chain-and-chattel breaker felt no compunction to chain his fate to theirs. He was there simply to allow his utterly free mind to state the truth.

There are many ways in which this volume could inform the broader outlines of American history. One is struck, for instance, on how German American literature reinforced the "Victorian culture" of the United States in the late nineteenth century, at least on certain key points. To be sure, Gugler's Gustav Dorn questioned whether anyone could be a German American and be simultaneously willing to support a temperance law. Essellen's play is essentially a critique of the moral hypocrisy in American Protestantism. Still, perhaps the most preeminent gatekeeper of German American letters, the editor of the *New-Yorker Belletristisches Journal*, Brachvogel, showed an intriguing sympathy for the great Victorian litigator, Myra Clark Gains. Solger's hero, Anton, appreciated the Victorian matron, Mrs. Dawson, though he distrusted a robust and single intellectual feminist, Miss Parsons. Kirchhoff sympathized with Texas women in a way he did not with the fierce libertinism of Texas males. Both Essellen and Gugler, in their depictions of Johanna and Rosa, exhibited paragons of womanhood; they were ladies of high moral standards, who simultaneously cultivated High German, and suspected the more lowbrow aspects of American culture. Rosa, in the end, even settled for a well-bred Anglo-American gentleman, whose

trustworthiness and fluency in High German can be authenticated.

Kluge's German American authors were informed and trenchant enough to broaden our awareness of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American history. At the same time, they attest to a German American consciousness that was distinctive, and represents an alluring field for further study. One culprit that Kluge fails to indict for ignoring this consciousness until now is the historical profession itself. In recent decades, ethnic historians have often treated the German-American communal experience, what immigrants called their âDeutschtum,â as epiphenomenal. The German Americans appear intently conscious of their seniority as Americans, and readily re-classifiable as belonging to separate working-class and religious minorities. Sollors, for instance, made an influential foray into German American literature with his discussion of Emil Klauprecht's *Cincinnati*; *oder, Geheimnisse des Westens* in *Beyond Ethnicity* in 1986, but the implication of this discussion was that ethnic literature reflected American themes, in this case, of going West, and reinventing oneself. Ethnicity itself was comparable to the phantom invoked by a playground kid who tells of the strength of his father or big brother in an effort to keep his playmates in line, and win the game. The real issue is the game, and not the strength of the father. Kluge's authors suggest a different mentality. The preeminent impression that one gains of the United States from these German American authors is that though their new homeland represented a type of progress, it was a progress that had somehow gone wrong. American society was Solger's Miss Parsons, making her *salto mortale*, her deadly leap down from a coach, a jump that left her hanging between heaven and earth. The *Terzerol*, or pocket pistol remained the dark secret of American society. Smartness trumped intellect. Money was the curmudgeon that ruled the roost. The great zero hour of the freethinker, discussing important issues over wine or beer, was to be replaced by a business-like gulping down of ice cream. German culture, in the urban and working-class jungles, described by Solger, Kirchhoff, Gugler, Leser, and Reitzel, had a reason for being, if for no other purpose than to transmit the best thought and civilization to future generations.

Kluge's *Other Witnesses* performs a valuable service, and should be translated into English despite the obvious challenges in conveying German provincial dialects, and code switching.

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