

## The Hard Work of Modernity

*Mühen der Moderne: Von Kleist bis Tschéchow—deutsche und russische Publizisten des 19. Jahrhunderts.* Edited by Horst Pöttker and Aleksandr Stan'ko. Cologne: Herbert von Halem Verlag, 2016. Paperback, 544 pp., €34.

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In 1810, Heinrich von Kleist—that troubled luminary of German letters—fell into journalism in an old, familiar way. Financially desperate and hungry for an audience, the then-little-known writer launched *Berliner Abendblätter*, the city's first daily newspaper. Kleist served as publisher, editor, and reporter, barely able to avoid the censor while courting a skeptical public and enduring critique from his literary peers (Wilhelm Grimm dubbed it “die ideale Wurstzeitung”—the ideal wrapping for sausages) (42). The paper lasted five months. Still, Kleist managed to anticipate trends that would help define the press in the modern era. This included a “feel for the boulevard,” which manifested in “authentic, fact-oriented, and detailed” coverage of local crime (40).

Kleist is revered today as a literary modernist *avant la lettre*, whose haunting fiction thematized the crisis of order and meaning nearly one hundred years before its time. But it is the curiosity, if not outright irony, of Kleist's foresight in the realm of journalism that makes him worthy of the opening chapter in *Mühen der Moderne: Von Kleist bis Tschéchow—deutsche und russische Publizisten des 19. Jahrhunderts*, a collection of essays recently published in Halem Verlag's scholarly series *Öffentlichkeit und Geschichte* [Public and history].

As its title suggests, the volume chronicles the journalism of influential nineteenth century German and Russian authors. These range from writers well known as journalists in their home countries (Heinrich Heine) to authors primarily famous for their fiction (Lev Tolstoj). What unites the fourteen freestanding chapters is a shared animating idea: that this journalistic activity might serve as a sign of burgeoning modernity in Germany and Russia, nations late to the social, political, and technological advancements already underway in neighboring countries to the west.

Edited by Horst Pöttker, professor emeritus of journalism at the Technische Universität Dortmund, and Aleksandr Stan'ko, professor of journalism at Southern Federal University in Russia, the collection is the fruit of a long-standing multidisciplinary collaboration between scholars in both countries. “[T]he book,” the editors explain in their foreword, “should bring German readers closer to nineteenth



century Russian culture, and Russian to German” (14). Indeed, intercultural understanding drives many aspects of the collection. This includes, most noticeably, its unusual bilingual format. Each article appears in both languages, the German version printed on the left side of every page, and Russian version on the right.

The impulse for outreach also means that readers new to nineteenth century Russian and German literature will gain the most from this volume, less so experts in one or both. The chapters serve as introductions to individual authors, and the methodology in play is primarily philological, combining biography digested from of longer works of secondary literature with brief textual analysis. As with all volumes of collected essays, *Mühen der Moderne* exhibits some unevenness in the depth between contributions. The chapters offering more sustained analysis of sample texts are the most satisfying to read, largely because they are able to better show the link between the featured author’s journalistic contribution and the coming modern world. Of particular note are the chapters by coeditor Horst Pöttke—on Heinrich Heine and Georg Büchner—which are longer, argument-driven, and clearly speak to the collection’s thesis.

If the broad sweep across one hundred years, fourteen authors, and two countries loses depth, it certainly gains horizon. The book as a whole provides a wide-angled view to various intersecting constellations of figures and publications, all advocating in their own way for the public sphere during a deeply undemocratic moment. A sense of common struggle comes across, in pointillist fashion, against repressive laws, heavy-handed censorship, arrest, and exile. Some of these figures moved in the same circles; Heinrich Heine, Ludwig Börne, and Karl Gutzkow, for instance, are all affiliated with the Young Germany movement. These Young Germans, and later others like Aleksandr Gercen and Georg Weerth, fled to London and Paris, inspired, and ultimately disappointed, by the revolutions of 1830 and 1848.

The volume also makes clear how often literary strategies served as political protection, especially for those who were unable, or chose not to leave their home countries. This aspect of the collection will no doubt be of most interest to literary journalism scholars. “Times of censor are times of camouflage,” Gunter Reus points out in his piece on Kleist (48). Those who opted to openly use their polemical skills faced consequences, as plenty of anecdotes in the book show. Some are amusing, like Ludwig Börne’s censor offering stylistic critique in addition to policing content. Some are heart wrenching; the idealistic and morally scrupulous Vladimir Korolenko spent years under constant arrest and banishment. Many learned to work around the censor by cloaking social and political critique in satire, historical narrative, pastiche, blends of fact and fiction, or by cloaking themselves in *noms de plume*. Especially diverting is Aleksandr Puškin’s politically strategic use of fantasy, from pastiche to imagined conversations with the czar, as described by coeditor Stan’ko.

In this respect, although *Mühen der Moderne* was not conceptualized as a piece of literary journalism research, scholars in the field with reading knowledge of German or Russian will find this book to be a handy introductory guide to key players in nineteenth-century journalistic practice, and a useful springboard for detailed future study.