

ADOLF GLASSBRENNER

GERMAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
MONOGRAPHS

Wolfgang W. Moelleken, *General Editor*

Corresponding Editors

Dagmar Barnouw (Purdue University, West Lafayette)
Raimund Belgardt (Michigan State University, East Lansing)
Clifford A. Bernd (University of California, Davis)
Klaus H. Bongart (Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo)
Henrich Brockhaus (Western Washington State College, Bellingham)
Donald G. Daviau (University of California, Riverside)
Ernst S. Dick (University of Kansas, Lawrence)
Jürgen Eichhoff (University of Wisconsin, Madison)
John M. Ellis (University of California, Santa Cruz)
Richard Exner (University of California, Santa Barbara)
Evelyn S. Firchow (University of Minnesota, Minneapolis)
Ingeborg Glier (Yale University, New Haven)
Reinhold Grimm (University of Wisconsin, Madison)
Shaun F. D. Hughes (Harvard University, Cambridge)
Ray M. Immerwahr (University of Western Ontario, London)
Christiane Keck (Purdue University, West Lafayette)
Helmut Krause (Queen's University, Kingston)
Herbert L. Kufner (Cornell University, Ithaca)
Robert E. Lewis (University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati)
Walter F. W. Lohnes (Stanford University, Stanford)
Karl Menges (University of California, Davis)
Herbert Penzl (University of California, Berkeley)
Helmut Pfanner (University of New Hampshire, Durham)
Carroll E. Reed (University of Massachusetts, Amherst)
Paul Schach (University of Nebraska, Lincoln)
Peter Schaeffer (University of California, Davis)
Lester W. Seifert (University of Wisconsin, Madison)
Hans Wagener (University of California, Los Angeles)
Donald Ward (University of California, Los Angeles)

Volume 6

Heinz Bulmahn

Adolf Glassbrenner: his development
from *Jungdeutscher* to *Vormärzler*

HEINZ BULMAHN

ADOLF GLASSBRENNER:
HIS DEVELOPMENT FROM
JUNGDEUTSCHER TO VORMÄRZLER

AMSTERDAM / JOHN BENJAMINS B. V.

1978

© Copyright by Heinz Bulmahn 1974
ISBN 90 272 0966 9

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print,
photoprint, microfilm or any other means without written permission
from the publisher.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my thanks to Jost Hermand for suggesting the topic for this study and for his continuous support, advice, and encouragement in the course of writing it. Also, I would like to express my gratitude to my wife Sandra and my children Heidi and Emily for their patience and understanding.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION AND THE PRESENT STATE OF GLASSBRENNER RESEARCH	1
II. GLASSBRENNER'S USE OF THE POPULAR TRADITION WITHIN THE YOUNG GERMAN LITERARY MOVEMENT	23
III. GLASSBRENNER'S VIEW OF THE COMMON MAN IN BERLIN DURING THE 1830's	41
IV. THE <i>VORMÄRZ</i> LYRIC--A CALL TO FREEDOM	67
V. THE CHARACTERS--THE TASK OF PREPARING THE LOWER MIDDLE CLASS FOR REVOLUTIONARY ACTION	87
VI. THE EPIC-- <i>DER NEUE REINEKE FUCHS</i> (1846)-- AN ATTACK ON THE CHURCH AND FEUDALISM	107
VII. THE PETTY BOURGEOISIE AS CARRIERS OF DEMOCRATIC IDEALS	129
VIII. CONCLUSION	145
BIBLIOGRAPHY	149

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION AND THE PRESENT STATE OF GLASSBRENNER RESEARCH

Adolf Glassbrenner was born in Berlin on March 27, 1810. His father was the owner of a small factory which produced decorative feathers. For four years the young Glassbrenner attended a *Gymnasium*, but was not able to finish because of financial difficulties. While he was an apprentice in merchandizing in a silk factory, he also attended the University of Berlin where he was a student of Hegel. By 1827 he had already submitted several short pieces to various Berlin newspapers and became a steady contributor to Moritz Saphir's *Berliner Courier*. In 1830 he gave up his apprenticeship and devoted all his energies to establishing himself as a journalist. In January of 1832 his weekly paper *Berliner Don Quixote* appeared, but it was banned by December of 1833.¹ In 1832 he also began the series *Berlin wie es ist und-trinkt*, which achieved such success that Glassbrenner was able to support himself solely by his writings. In this series of pamphlets, which were imitated in all parts of Germany, he became a staunch defender of the lower classes in Berlin. Almost everything Glassbrenner wrote hereafter is a

¹Robert Rodenhauser, *Adolf Glassbrenner. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des "Jungen Deutschlands" und der Berliner Lokaldichtung* (Nikolassee: Max Harrwitz, 1912). A very detailed biography on Adolf Glassbrenner can be found in this work.

view of Prussian society from below, either for the purpose of giving insight into the lower classes or to educate them politically. His humor and satire became primary tools in laying bare the many inequities under which the masses had to suffer. During the 1840's Glassbrenner developed into a committed radical democrat, who attacked the old order ever more boldly, and found it absolutely necessary that the masses develop an independent political consciousness. Many of his pamphlets were published in several editions and his *Komischer Volkskalender* sold out very soon after it appeared on the market. It can therefore be said that Glassbrenner's writings certainly did have an impact during the years preceding the 1848 Revolution. It is, however, unfortunate that this contribution has been disregarded by literary historians, and his works have been largely forgotten. And not many years after the death of Glassbrenner in 1876 very few remembered this defender of the lower classes. And, if they did, most often only his innocent humor was regarded as a lasting contribution, whereas the political content was considered out-dated and of little interest to contemporary readers. It becomes necessary, therefore, to examine the secondary literature in detail, in order to determine what has been written about Adolf Glassbrenner, and then to outline briefly what will be attempted in this study.

Although the writings of Glassbrenner were extremely popular, especially in the ten years before the 1848 Revolution, they became less and less known after his death in 1876. His political satire and biting wit had outlived its usefulness in a Germany ruled by "blood and iron." With the massive emphasis on purely nationalistic and military interests, and the active suppression of any genuine democratic activity by the Prussian government, Glassbrenner's political satire and biting humor had lost its appeal. The common man, concerned with his own material well-being and confronted by the emotionalism and security of nationalism, was therefore no longer receptive to the calls for freedom which before 1848 had echoed everywhere in Germany. Consequently, Glassbrenner's name became associated only with his non-political wit, which in Berlin had in many instances become part of the local jargon.

Commentaries on the works of Glassbrenner are also relatively few.

The early treatments were primarily of a biographical nature with casual reference to some of his major works. An article by Feodor Wehl, a friend of Glassbrenner and a literary critic, served as an introduction to a writer whose works many had read. The article is entitled "Der Erzieher des Berliner Witzes" (1865). The greater portion is biographical, but as can be detected from the title, the major point is that the humor and wit of the common man in Berlin was given credibility. The *Berliner Witz* was taken out of the gutter by Glassbrenner, cleaned up slightly and made into a vehicle of literary expression. For Wehl Glassbrenner's importance lies in the fact that:

Der Berliner Witz war bis dahin nur ein Gassenjunge gewesen, ein Element, das auf allen Brunnenschwengeln, Treppengeländern und Fenstersimsen sass, mit den Beinen schlenkerte und, schnodderige Redensarten machte, aber von niemand recht beachtet wurde, ausgenommen von denen, welchen er seine Schabernacke spielte. Adolf Glassbrenner erlöste ihn aus dieser etwas unbequemen Situation, um ihn in eine epochemachende Stellung zu bringen. . . . Berliner Witz, du bist kein blosser dummer Junge, sagte er zu ihm, du bist das Genie Berlins, der souveräne Geist der Bevölkerung. Wenn du deiner selbst bewusst wirst, so kannst du es zu etwas bringen und sozusagen ein Mann bei der Spritze werden. Du musst dich nur gewöhnen, deine Blicke höher und über die sogenannten Kellerhalse der Häuser hinaus zu richten. Du musst dich um Gott und die Welt, zuletzt auch ein wenig um die Politik und Geschichte kümmern.²

In the works of Glassbrenner the lower classes were provided with a means by which they could establish their identity by being accurately depicted and allowed to express their own opinions in their own way on the problems and issues which confronted them, as Wehl accurately points out. However, in his attempt to give Glassbrenner more literary respectability he places the emphasis on his ability to describe and relate to others the life styles, the refreshing sense of humor, and the sometimes naive political understanding of a whole segment of the population in Berlin which was long neglected in literature. Glassbrenner

²Feodor Wehl, "Der Erzieher des Berliner Witzes," *Leipziger Gartenlaube*, 1865, p. 117.

is assigned the role of a photographer who has discovered a primitive society, and finds these people who speak in a dialect and are very witty worthy of a place in literature. The early pamphlets in the series *Berlin wie es ist und-trinkt* do in fact demonstrate this quality. One gets the feeling that Glassbrenner is observing as an outsider the internal function of a sub-culture, and this method continues through many of his later works, but in addition to allowing the lower classes and the petty bourgeoisie to paint a self-portrait, his perspective goes much beyond the *Biedermeier* family *Genrebild*. Wehl, in stressing Glassbrenner's descriptive ability, fails to recognize that Glassbrenner not only gives the common people a literary identity but also attempts to gain for them a political identity. The people depicted by Glassbrenner, according to Wehl, take on the quality of objects whose humor and life style we as readers can admire. It seems, however, that these same people are not only to be viewed as objects, because at the same time they are shouting at the reader to awaken him from his political complacency. The cultivation of the *Berliner Witz* is of course an admirable and very noteworthy contribution, because the depiction of the lower classes in literature was a rarity until Glassbrenner. Those representatives of the masses that can be found in German literature prior to this time were generally stereotypes playing minor roles, usually as servants who provided an element of comic relief. Feodor Wehl credits him with seriously treating the lower classes and also recognizes, however vaguely, the potentially political engagement which may accompany such an attempt. But his effort to depict Glassbrenner sociologically, to make him more viable literarily, and thereby de-emphasizing the political aspect, contributed to the fact that later generations knew Glassbrenner primarily as the humorist of *blühenden Unsinn*. The tables of content of many anthologies reflect this, where those works of a political or tendential nature were totally omitted.

The trend begun by Feodor Wehl was continued by Richard Schmidt-Cabanis in an article written only a few years after the death of Glassbrenner. Schmidt-Cabanis, a colleague of Glassbrenner's on the *Berliner Montag Zeitung*, in paying homage to a friend, assigns him the

well-deserved title of *Vater des Berliner Witzes* (1881). But this title, too, is intended to muffle the political side of his works and amplify the local color aspects. In his opinion, the establishment of the witty and refreshing humor of the *Urberliner* in literature is what will grant permanence to the work of Glassbrenner, not the writings of a tendential nature, for these only satisfy particular moments in history. In a discussion of Glassbrenner's family background, he does, however, concede apologetically that there was another side to his works:

Schöpfungen und Schöpfer vereinten in sich die Gemütsiefe, die frische Ursprünglichkeit des Süddeutschen mit dem kaustischen Witz und der Schärfe des Nordländers--speciell des Berliners--zu vollster Harmonie; und wann und wo ja einmal das letztere Ingredienz in "überschüssigem" Masse sich kundgab, richtete sich seine Wirksamkeit sicher nur gegen faulige, verderbliche Stoffe in Staat, Kirche und Gesellschaft.³

The major contribution however is "der kecke Witz" and "der poetisch frische Hauch"⁴ which permeate all of his works. In an attempt not to alienate his middle class readers and to keep the name of Glassbrenner alive within these circles, Schmidt-Cabanis de-emphasizes those works of a political nature. The contribution Glassbrenner made in developing a politically conscious petty bourgeoisie, and, in turn, their part in bringing about the Revolution of 1848, is not for what he will be remembered, but, as Schmidt-Cabanis says in summary:

Ein Unvergänglicheres hat sich Adolf Glassbrenner in den Herzen der deutschen Nation gestiftet, die ihren liebenswürdigsten, volksthümlichsten heitern Schriftsteller nimmer vergessen wird, solange der Sinn für Humor und das Streben nach dem Guten und Schönen in ihr nicht völlig erstirbt.⁵

An extensive work written by Robert Rodenhauser in 1912 entitled *Adolf Glassbrenner: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des "Jungen Deutschlands" und der Berliner Lokaldichtung* offers much valuable biographical

³Richard Schmidt-Cabanis, *Adolf Glassbrenner* (Berlin, 1881), p. 242.

⁴Schmidt-Cabanis, *Glassbrenner*, p. 244.

⁵Schmidt-Cabanis, *Glassbrenner*, p. 255.

information expanding upon that of Feodor Wehl and Schmidt-Cabanis. However, the goals and restrictions Robert Rodenhauser lays down for himself in analysing Glassbrenner's works allow him very little latitude and prevent him from recognizing the real intentions of the writer. In the introduction, he states:

So darf eine Arbeit, die sich mit Glassbrenner beschäftigt, zunächst auf historisches Interesse rechnen. Trotzdem wird es weniger unsere Aufgabe sein, seine Bedeutung innerhalb der politischen Geschichte zu verfolgen, als vielmehr seine literarische Stellung einzuschätzen.⁶

This evaluation, however, is based upon rather vague and narrow literary criteria, generating conclusions which in many instances are over-simplified value judgments. Thus a man who cultivated the Berlin dialect for the purpose of giving a voice to the lower classes and whose books and pamphlets achieved a popularity impressive even by today's standards is characterized by Rodenhauser in the following manner: "Sein Talent war beschränkt. Es wäre lächerlich, ihn messen zu wollen selbst mit dem Masstab seiner Zeitgenossen und Mitkämpfer für die liberale Sache, also ihn neben Gutzkow oder Freiligrath zu stellen."⁷

The greater importance is given to the works written before 1840. Here, according to Rodenhauser, Glassbrenner restricts himself to recreating situations accurately and depicting the characters from the lower classes of Berlin. The people appear in their natural state--uncorrupted, liberal, but not yet politicized--and therefore provide the reader with far greater pleasure. Rodenhauser deems these early contributions in the series *Berlin wie es ist und-trinkt* and *Buntes Berlin* more perfect literarily than the later works whose contents are of a more political and tendential nature. He designates 1840 as a turning point: "Die künstlerische Darstellung des Berliner Volkes, die in den dreissiger Jahren den Hauptinhalt seiner Schriften bildet, tritt allmählich bei ihm zurück. Immer stärker wendet er sich der politischen

⁶Rodenhauser, *Glassbrenner*, p. VI.

⁷Rodenhauser, *Glassbrenner*, p. VI.

Satire zu."⁸ This is a very accurate observation, but Rodenhauser finds this *störende Tendenz* as a very negative aspect, in that it contributes to degrading the literary quality. Glassbrenner is at his best when he plays the role of *Betrachter* or *Darsteller* and not that of an agitator: "Er will Menschen aus dem Berliner Volk charakterisieren, zeichnen."⁹ Glassbrenner's intent obviously goes far beyond characterizing, this is evident even in his early works, where he already shows the existing inequities within the city of Berlin. Whereas Glassbrenner had a close alliance with the masses before 1840, Rodenhauser, without considering the political and economic changes, maintains that after 1840 he loses touch with that element: "Gegenstand der Betrachtung ist nicht mehr das unterste Volk, sondern allgemeine politische und gesellschaftliche Verhältnisse werden gebrandtmarkt."¹⁰ More accurately stated, Glassbrenner does not re-orient his focus away from the lower classes simply because the content of his writings is more political. He actually remains faithful to their cause reflecting their greater social and political awareness. He remains the acute observer of the common people he has always been, but now this lower class is beginning to develop a political and social consciousness, and therefore can no longer be depicted in its naive and helpless state. Rodenhauser, in his attempt to isolate Glassbrenner's writings from the historical background and to judge them on purely literary grounds, declares much of the political satire and wit shallow, crude, and arrogant. A pamphlet entitled *Der Weihnachtsmarkt* (1840) serves as an example for Rodenhauser in which he detects a tendential tone the earlier works lacked:

In der Gegenüberstellung von Reich und Arm, von der Leichtfertigkeit, mit der die Frau von X wahllos ihre Kinder mit Geschenken überschüttet, und dem Kummer des armen Webers, der den Seinigen nichts kaufen kann, findet sich ein tendenziöser Zug, der den früheren Heften fehlt und hier glück-

⁸Rodenhauser, *Glassbrenner*, p. 54.

⁹Rodenhauser, *Glassbrenner*, p. 112.

¹⁰Rodenhauser, *Glassbrenner*, p. 55.

licherweise noch nicht gehässig auftritt.¹¹

Rodenhauser fails to recognize that Glassbrenner's intent is not solely literary; he also wants to be effective. He wants to express the frustrations and sentiments of the masses, to educate them politically. After 1840 the economic and political situation of the masses worsens. Whereas the tradesmen enjoyed relative prosperity during the 1830's, the common man is now confronted by a job market that was overcrowded, where many journeymen could find no jobs at all, and where many a master had to work for wages that could hardly sustain his family. Veit Valentin in his history of the 1848 Revolution states that in the early years of the 1840's: "zwei Drittel der Berliner Schneider hatten keine ausreichende Beschäftigung--sie mussten schon zu Schundpreisen für den blühenden Kleiderhandel auf Vorrat arbeiten."¹² Thus the reason Glassbrenner becomes more and more "gehässig" stems from the fact that the people Glassbrenner characterized and sketched in the 1830's have become more radical, because they feel the economic and political isolation and exclusion more acutely.

Literature which concerns itself with "timeless" motifs according to Robert Rodenhauser is far superior to literature which confronts reality directly. Glassbrenner's concern with the daily political and social occurrences is viewed by him as out-dated and therefore of little relevance and interest to literary critics. What is of value is the ability of Glassbrenner to capture and preserve for posterity the wit and humor of the Berliner to which, according to Rodenhauser, anyone can relate, because it seems to possess a timeless quality, whereas the abrasive, argumentative and at times rude political satire cannot speak to another age, and therefore can be disregarded. To use such an approach when dealing with the writings of Adolf Glassbrenner is to totally misunderstand his own personal intentions as a writer. He wished not so much to be remembered by posterity, but rather to have a profound

¹¹Rodenhauser, *Glassbrenner*, p. 55.

¹²Veit Valentin, *Geschichte der deutschen Revolution, 1848-1849* (Berlin, 1930-31), Vol. I, p. 85.

effect on his own time. And only from this perspective, i.e., by not isolating him totally from his time, can one truly appreciate his humor and his satire. All other attempts are prejudicial and unjust.

In conjunction with the rising political awareness of the workers at the turn of the nineteenth century many of the *Vormärz* writers were of great interest to the SPD. The commitment with which the *Vormärzler* attempted to politicize the general populace coincided closely with the SPD's efforts to provide the workers with literature containing social democratic and revolutionary thought. Franz Diederich, whose activities centered primarily in the cultural and educative realm of the party, was responsible for several re-publications by the Vorwärts Verlag of *Vormärz* lyric and prose. He published a collection of Heinrich Heine's political poems, an extensive collection of existing political poems in Germany entitled *Von unten auf*, planned an edition of Georg Weerth's works, and, of particular interest here, edited a collection of Adolf Glassbrenner's works with the title *Unterm Brennglass: Berliner politische Satire, Revolutionsgeist und menschliche Komödie* (1912). This work is the first to acknowledge the political side of Glassbrenner's literary contribution. It adds a new dimension long neglected and forgotten, that of a man actively involved in the political and social problems of the day. One who reacted against a regime supported by anachronistic institutions and who accepted the role as herald of the people with enthusiasm. Franz Diederich does not isolate him from his time as others have done, but rather sees his works as an accurate reflection of the historical situation. The political educative function is of greater importance than his ability as an acute observer.

The whole creative process is directed toward presenting his political point of view to the masses. Therefore Diederich relegates that portion of Glassbrenner's works so highly praised by Robert Rodenhauser to a position of secondary importance. The anecdotes, *Genrebilder*, and descriptions of Berliner types are viewed as the work of a novice, a writer who is familiarizing himself with a milieu:

In Glassbrenner's ersten Schilderungen beruflich abgegrenzter Volksschichten zeigt sich nichts anderes als ein Vorarbeiten und erstes Hintasten zum Erkennen der Merkmale,