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A mushroom cloud above Linth plain

In his book “Junge Kräfte grünen”, Glarus author Rudolf Kuhn brought a nuclear explosion to upper Lake Zurich in 1941.

CHARLES LINSMAYER

“Industry against farming, machine against people, the book of a poet and people shaper”, as it said on the cover of the book “Die Jostensippe. Roman aus der Gegenwart”, published in 1934. Jörg Jost, who is from an old Glarus family, struggles with the conflicting forces of his paternal and maternal heritage, passionately opposes the era of the machine and returns to the farming way of life of his ancestors, with its strong stability and sense of family. The sentiments of the book resonated with the fledgling ‘Third Reich’. And the ‘Reichsstelle zur Förderung des deutschen Schrifttums’ (the Reich office for the promotion of German Literature) deemed the novel by the architect and writer from Glarus, Rudolf Kuhn, who was born on 16 October 1885 in Netstal and died on 23 February 1958 in Zurich, “significant”. This was despite “the erotic element” which seemed “not entirely healthy, and in some respects decadent”. Eduard Korrodi of the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” called it “a powerful picture of contemporary Switzerland.”

“Junge Kräfte grünen”

In 1937, Rudolf Kuhn joined the 1939 Swiss National Exhibition architects’ team, and when the exhibition opened, he wrote his second and last novel on Entlebuch Alp. It came out in 1941 as the first published by Eugen Rentsch Verlag, based in Erlenbach in the canton of Zurich, under the title of “Junge Kräfte grünen” (which translates as “Young workers in full bloom”). The national socialist censors, whose verdict is unknown, enjoyed reading it. Love in the granary and on the ground, girls with “wide hips” riding nude through the wilderness, women who consider giving birth a religious act – if ever a

Swiss novel from that time met the blood and soil ideology of the Third Reich in terms of natural mysticism, fertility rites and cult heroes, it was this federally financed publication.

“Beware,” preached Simon, “that the stillness of your fields is not shattered by worldly noise and don’t fall victim to the disruption of war, boosted by greed for power and money. Watch out that the rattle of machinery does not drown out the song of the larks in the fields or the mating call of fornication the cheerful call of youth.”

From: Rudolf Kuhn, “Junge Kräfte grünen”. Novel. Eugen Rentsch Verlag, Erlenbach 1941. Out of print.

Yet, this profound, atmospherically dense work also shows the fascination that can result from such a mystically veiled, epic fertility romance. A reaction that can bring the contemporary and all too easily irked reader to a level of self-awareness, as Kuhn

understood only too well the celebrated and ultimately victorious powers of Mother Nature and the earth against modern technical civilisation in the most egregious of its conceivable negative consequences.

Nuclear power: a disaster of technological progress

The explosion of an atom bomb above Linth plain, described with visionary power and impeccable technical knowledge three years after Otto Hahn first split the uranium atom and five years before Hiroshima, is the most amazing aspect of this most disturbing and frighteningly fascinating Swiss novel from the darkest days of the Second World War.

“A blinding flash of light streamed through the window, the ground shook as if in an earthquake, and then the thunder broke above as if the earth were splitting.” The survivors stared in horror at the mushroom cloud rising high above the valley, soon to descend on them as ash rain. The core of the explosion must have been at the secret weapons factory of engineer Christian Unger. The engineer miraculously survives the inferno in an underground tunnel. His wife Gertrud, an incorporation of the healing power of the vegetative forces of nature, succumbs to the radioactive after effects of the explosion, but first nurses the engineer back to health and makes sure he uses nuclear power solely for peaceful purposes.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Rudolf Kuhn’s novels are only available in antiquarian bookstores or libraries.

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Rudolf Kuhn
(1905–1958)