

Sky Glow

Streulicht

Presented by: Christoph Schaub

Published in 2020, *Streulicht* (*Sky Glow*) is the debut novel of Deniz Ohde, who was born in 1988 in West Germany to a German mother and a Turkish father. The novel is told by a nameless first-person narrator, who shares similarities with Ohde's social position but diverges significantly from her biography in many ways (as the author has emphasised in interviews). The novel explores the dynamics of classism and racism, precarity and the history of the transnational working class, family memory and trauma, feelings of shame and non-belonging. It tells the narrator's biography in terms of education, as it chronicles her way from being raised in a working-class family by a German father and a Turkish mother to graduating from university. Yet *Streulicht* does not tell the story of successful upward mobility, as the narrator's position remains economically, socially, and emotionally precarious throughout. The novel engages the challenges, opportunities, and discrimination that are inherent in Germany's educational system and how they affect various groups and individuals differently due to their social origins.

The narrative of a return home frames the novel, as the narrator visits the place she grew up in for the wedding of her two best friends from childhood and youth who, unlike her, belong to Germany's White middle class. This retrospective narrative framing allows the narrator, now older and more knowledgeable, to critically analyze this social environment as well as her complicated family history. The retrospective telling of her own story also stages her gaining a voice that she did not have for most of her childhood and youth. Importantly, the novel forgoes the use of political and analytical terms or the formulation of political ideas; instead, it proceeds with detailed, insightful, and often literary stunning descriptions of everyday actions, feelings, spaces, objects, and language use. This central stylistic feature of the novel can be understood in the sense of literary politics that strives to make discrimination and social conditions relatable and to create empathy by developing the personal dimension. As Ohde explains in an interview with the broadcaster MDR: "I did not use the terms 'racism' or 'equal opportunity' because these are abstract and not very literary terms. To me, it was important to make these terms palpable [*erlebbbar*]. And what they mean for a biography and how they feel and the very small situations in which they happen."

A bestseller, *Streulicht* has been translated into Greek, Macedonian, Polish, and Turkish, and it won or was shortlisted for several literary prizes in Germany, among them the prestigious Deutscher Buchpreis. Besides stressing the extraordinary literary quality of the novel, the award juries tended to highlight how the novel contributes to making visible marginalized postmigration working-class communities and experiences and how it formulates a literary critique of an educational system that reproduces social inequality. At least partly, the novel's success can be understood with respect to a new politicization of German literary publics in the second and third decades of the twenty-first century and is also indicative of the role questions of diversity play in this context.

Along with other contemporary publications by such authors as Bov Bjerg or Christian Baron, Streulicht has been discussed in Germany because it takes up issues of class relations, class origin, memory, and personal experience (partially through an intersectional lens). This new writing about class constitutes a development in literary production that can be situated against the background of French sociologist Didier Eribon's *Returning to Reims* (2009) which exerted great influence on literary writing and political awareness in Germany after its translation into German in 2016 (along with the subsequent reception of Annie Ernaux and Édouard Louis). The fact, however, that neither the authors of these texts nor large parts of their reception (initially) connected this kind of literary practice back to similar texts in German literary history, such as Karin Struck's *Klassenliebe* (1973; *Class Love*), can also be read politically: This lacuna may be seen as symptomatic for literary, journalistic, and academic publics that, from the 1980s to very recently, had largely written social class and the working class out of debates about literature.

This novel was discussed at the CAPONEU book club in Berlin in March 2024.

LANGUAGE: German / Deutsch

CENSORSHIP STATUS: