

**F**OCUS  
ON GERMAN STUDIES

---

BOOK REVIEWS

---





---

MAXIM BILLER. *Der gebrauchte Jude*. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2009. 174 S. € 16.95

---

**M**axim Biller, regular contributor to the *New Yorker* as well as the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, never was someone to have a safe place in the hearts of a conventional middle-class audience. Selling his novel *Esra* (2003) is still illegal in Germany, after his former girlfriend sued him for explicit descriptions of their relationship. Biller is not a writer of sublime poetry. His field is social criticism, scathing sarcasm and provocation.

With *Der gebrauchte Jude*, he turns his skill to his experiences as a Jew in present-day Germany. The Germans lose out quite clearly, being portrayed as clumsy and embarrassed when confronted with someone like himself, “der in Deutschland nicht vorgesehen war” (11). There is the fellow student who puts it to him that the Israelis are avenging Auschwitz in their treatment of the Palestinians. There is his professor Delgarde who mentions during the final oral exam, “Die Juden fehlen uns genauso wie wir ihnen” (41). Delgarde disagrees with the author’s condemnation of Thomas Mann’s latent anti-Semitism, suggesting that Mann’s later “literarische Wiedergutmachung” compensated for it (43). It is chilling to read that as late as the 1980’s, on a visit to the *Bayrischer Rundfunk*, following a smart remark, a presenter shouted: “Was wollen Sie hier? Warum gehen Sie nicht zurück nach Israel, wo Sie herkommen?!” (55).

An incident like this seems incredible to the second generation after the war, the author’s contemporaries. For young Germans today, anti-Semitism is a thing of the past, a phenomenon we have heard too much of already and are not interested in since it seems far removed from the economic success and stable democracy of the Federal Republic. However, the increasing popularity of right-wing extremism, notably in former East Germany, with recurring violence against immigrants, proves that neo-fascism still exists and must not be underestimated. For that reason it is invaluable that Biller raises awareness of those remnants of anti-Semitism which still are in Germany, stirred up by the present Arab-Israeli conflict.

The few insights which Biller provides into contemporary German-Jewish life are very interesting and it is unfortunate that the author’s unrelenting aggression leaves little room for objectivity and detailed observation. Many German readers would be fascinated to see

---

how the century-old German-Jewish symbiosis is reviving today, after the brutal schism of the Nazi regime. Regrettably, here, where the reader expects more socio-psychological observation and attention to cultural detail, Biller continues to punish. Easing the atmosphere with a paragraph or two of amorous adventures does not leave the reader any wiser, neither with respect to contemporary German-Jewish culture, nor to the development of the plot.

And yet, in spite of all of his anger towards Germans, Biller reflects on the nature of Jewishness here and there, thus contributing to a certain understanding of the present-day Jewish community. Biller equates "Judesein" with "Schriftstellersein" (170), which is reminiscent of something Stefan Zweig has suggested: Jews are pre-disposed to a career in literature or the arts, because their role as social outsiders has become inherent. Indeed, in a conversation with Marcel Reich-Ranicki, Biller confesses in regards to being Jewish, "Man kann es sich nicht aussuchen" (168).

Discussing the concept of a "gebrauchter Jude," Biller suggests that this phrase can have several meanings. For one, it can be the used or abused Jew, but for another, it can mean the needed Jew. These are diametrically opposed connotations. Professor Delgarde, quoted above, uses the second definition, whereas the author plays with both. He sees himself as the abused Jew, but at the same time as the writer who will not let the country forget what anti-Semitism can lead to. It is this responsibility that justifies Biller's book. Meanwhile, many publishers have recognized its commercial potential. And it is in this sense that Biller uses the term when speaking of a fellow Jewish writer, Gabriel Laub, who refuses his publisher's book commission. "Der gebrauchte Jude verweigerte endlich einmal seinen Dienst" (63).

The author draws a line between confident Israelis and European "Diasporajuden" (25), who are still painfully aware of the twentieth-century genocide. Had Biller shown more varied characters and conflicting interests in a European Jewish community today, he would have ensured his readers' gratitude. But he does not seem to enjoy descriptions of characters and psychological motives. Biller prefers to draw vague "types" with a few strong, swift strokes, and then unleashes his cynicism on them. In order to strengthen his critical points against anti-Semitism, the author should have described his characters in greater detail, making them more life-like.

From the early days of modern anti-Semitism, which became a political force in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Jews never were the united, uniform block their persecutors made them out

---

to be. For one, there were the impoverished immigrants from Eastern Europe, fleeing from the Russian pogroms. They had little in common with the assimilated, non-confessing Jews of the middle classes, who were contributing immensely to journalism and the literary culture of the German-speaking world. Even among the emancipated Jews themselves, there were anti-Semites who converted to Catholicism; there were German nationalists, Zionists and those who simply wanted to be left alone to continue their lives as law-abiding citizens.

Apart from the Jew as a victim, very much the way Biller sees himself, though as one who has learned how to fight, he also mentions the “starke und harte jüdische Männer, die das neue Frankfurt errichtet hatten” (88). Biller describes these Jews as using forms of bribery against politicians in order to tear down old quarters of Frankfurt for new building projects. Here again, the “characterization” is socio-economic rather than psychological, and reminds one of the stereotypical wealthy Jewish industrialist.

Towards the end, Biller reflects on the word “jüdisch.” Being Jewish, he says, means seeing a problem from different viewpoints and changing his own, “ohne Furcht, daß ich am Ende auf der falschen Seite stehen könnte” (140).

The danger of using life as a plot is that life hardly provides the structured development a coherent argument requires. This makes for further weaknesses of *Der gebrauchte Jude*: Not only is Biller’s criticism lacking in coherency, his characters appear quite randomly, confusing the reader, and reducing the otherwise powerful effect of his description of German awkwardness. The reader wonders what he is actually trying to say. The only coherency seems to be the relation to the author himself. It seems to be nothing more than his personality that brings together people as diverse as Germany’s foremost literary critic Reich-Ranicki and the politician and businessman Ignatz Bubis. The only other thing these two have in common is their Jewishness. It would have been helpful to expand upon precisely that, as well as on their diverging feelings about their backgrounds. Reich-Ranicki, for instance, refuses to acknowledge that he, too, might be a “gebrauchter Jude.” He prefers the assimilated approach and does not like to speak about his Jewish background in his interviews with Biller. But the author’s self-focus proves detrimental to exploring exactly how Jews feel about being Jewish in Germany today.

It is this and Biller’s continuous aggression that damage the book’s aesthetic effect. *Der gebrauchte Jude* does not aim to be a work of art. Occasionally, he captures the essence of a social milieu in an original

phrase such as, “[Sie war] groß, deutsch, und zu Hause ein Bett aus Daunen” (28). His use of metaphor is effective when he distills the loneliness of the immigrant strolling through the streets of a foreign city into the image of his being watched from “tausend graue[n] Fenster so böse [...], als hätte er ihnen etwas getan” (50). But these are the only sparks of light in a rather short and limited syntax that carries the reader along with a quick-paced flow of its own, although it lacks the aesthetic quality of other contemporary writers such as Martin Suter.

Biller has not only stylistic challenges to consider. In the very delicate matter of German-Jewish relations: The two cultural groups need mutual support and goodwill, an open mind and a hand extended in friendship more than anything else. Biller fails to work productively towards German-Jewish togetherness. His book aims in exactly the opposite direction: It opens old wounds, it provokes necessarily, but also at times when provocation should be avoided. The book does not even attempt to offer a solution for the German-Jewish dilemma.

In Germany today, there is an overwhelming amount of material available to anyone interested in the Third Reich and the Holocaust. There are several daily television documentaries on that period by the popular historian Guido Knopp. The school curricula, devised by the first postwar generation who wanted to find out everything there was about their parents’ involvement in the horrors of World War II, is centered on the 1930s to the point that Medieval and Early Modern history appear neglected to students today. The Berlin Holocaust Memorial, located in the heart of the capital, is a clear sign of the Federal Republic’s repentance and its open approach to the Jewish community. But it must not be forgotten that the building of the memorial was hugely controversial and that the third largest city of the country, Munich, the former “Hauptstadt der Bewegung,” still lacks a proper museum for that darkest period in German history. This is why Biller thinks of himself as a needed Jew and why he refuses to leave the country, in spite of his great sympathies for Israel. He considers himself on a mission: a mission to keep the memory of the horrors of the twentieth century alive, despite the comforts of democracy in Europe’s economic powerhouse. There is a dangerous tendency to neglect these issues because of these comforts and because of over-exposure in schools and in the media. Biller strikes a blow against forgetting – even if it means that he is working against German-Jewish reconciliation at the same time.

*Max Haberich, University of Cambridge*

---

CYNTHIA CONNOP. Dir. *BloodLines*. New York: Women Make Movies, 2007. 52 min. \$ 89.00

---

Cynthia Connop's 52-minute documentary deals with the meeting of two women and their problematic heritage. Bettina Göring, grandniece of Herman Göring, contacts Ruth Rich, acclaimed painter and daughter of Holocaust survivors, in an attempt to come to terms with her family's past. A child of the post-war 1950s, Bettina tells the story of her early life in a confusing historic and social surrounding. She talks of her complicated relationship to her father that culminates with a confrontation in which she calls him and her grandfather murderers. She moves out of her parent's house at the age of 13. Subsequently, after a troubled time as a teenager roaming around Germany, she moves around the globe in an attempt to find a solution for her desire to rid herself of what she calls a "murderous bloodline." Now living in Santa Fe as an acupuncturist, she encounters Ruth's life story and artwork on a website and invests much emotional energy to contact Ruth, which symbolically conveys the final stage of her reconciliation with her troubled self.

Connop carefully constructs the interviews in the documentary to reflect the personal story she is telling. Close-ups and private settings are crucial for the intimate structure of the interaction between Bettina and Ruth. To meet both Bettina and Ruth at their homes is no coincidence then. The private becomes the ideal space for the personal to develop into a narrative for the public. The viewer is introduced to Ruth at her home in Australia. She was sent there to escape the horrors of the concentration camps in the early 1940s, which her parents and her younger brother could not be saved from. Ruth tells of the horrible end that most of her family members were subject to, which invariably manifested itself in her artwork. We learn that Ruth's artwork centers on the Holocaust, specifically how it impacted her family life. In a show and tell, Ruth walks the camera through the stages of her creativity that at the end of the documentary functions as symbol of a successful reconciliation on both ends of the interaction. Ruth's aesthetic center shifts from drawing inspiration from the Holocaust with all its dark imagery to nature, to light colors and light objects.

The interaction between Bettina and Ruth was Connop's ambitious attempt to bring two extremes together "at a time when seemingly irreconcilable divisions between groups are tearing the world

---

apart,” to quote the back cover of the DVD case. Unfortunately, one has to question to what extent this endeavor was successful. One cannot doubt the seriousness of the subject and Connop herself is highly aware of this. While the interaction between Bettina and Ruth is a highly emotional event for both, the camera seems to be unable to communicate the genuine interactions between the two because they are constantly aware of the camera’s presence. The tension between Bettina and Ruth is very apparent throughout the whole documentary for many obvious reasons. For one, Ruth is not entirely certain of the meeting between the two being at all productive for either. Their personal tension lessens during highly emotional scenes, for example when Ruth elaborates on her family tree. Still, the tension between the camera and what it wants to depict is large enough to become a problem for the prospect of the project itself, which ultimately wants to show a reconciliation where one seemingly would not exist.

The documentary has an audience in mind that is very well informed about the Holocaust and German National Socialist history. As such, it is not ideal for everyone. Connop’s intentions lie outside of the need to create another history of the Holocaust, rather they focus on giving a voice to the stories that were non-existent before. Connop’s project remains very interesting because of its unique approach and, regardless of its issues, still remains an important addition to Holocaust studies.

*Ervin Malakaj, Washington University in St. Louis*

HEINRICH DETERING. *Wrist: Gedichte*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009. 77 S. € 14.90

The cover art for Heinrich Detering’s collection of poems entitled *Wrist* depicts a stream stretching as far as the eye can see. This image aptly suggests the two most important contextual elements contained in this collection: time and space. Although Detering juxtaposes specific times and places, as seen in the poems entitled “Warschau, dritter Oktober” and “Husum, kurz vor sieben,” he also portrays time and space in an abstract manner. He compares time and space to contrasting opposite constructions such as above and below or night and day.

Heinrich Detering is a professor at the Universität Göttingen and has not only published poetry but has also written or edited various



secondary works. The secondary works explore everything from Bob Dylan to Thomas Mann to the German / Scandinavian literary relationship, a topic that he researched while at the Christian-Albrechts-Universität Kiel. In 2001, he won the *Preis des Landeskulturverbandes Schleswig-Holstein*, in 2003 the *Preis der Kritik* and in 2006 the *Kulturpreis der Stadt Kiel*. Detering's latest book of poetry is named after the northern municipality of Wrist in Schleswig-Holstein. The poetry collection *Wrist* is broken into four sections: "Semiotik in Erlangen," "Leichenschatten," "unter den Pappeln" and "Königstür." The first two sections have thirteen poems each and the last two fourteen. While there is no central recurrent narrative being told through the collection, there are themes linking them. These themes include an emphasis on geography and the relationship between time and space.

While Detering's poems lack a narrated plot, the images created through time and space may suggest a historical context. For example, in the poem "Weinheber," Detering writes of a person who is placed on a spectrum of time "bevor er sich vergiftete bevor / die Russen kamen bevor / er sein Gedicht schrieb" (50). The placement of "bevor" on the previous line strengthens the stress of this happening as a series of events thus putting the reader in the position of connecting these moments in time to its larger significance. In this way, the poem's structure suggests a story highlighting how time relates to the reader's understanding and critique of the fascist who "spricht von Folter / solange seine Zunge noch / nicht zu schwer geworden ist" (49). The weight of torture on the fascist's tongue could inhibit his speech, thus showing the moral implications of the torturous actions. Since poetry is driven by words, limiting the ability to speak as punishment seems poetic justice.

Because the poems' meaning largely rests on structure linked to content, it is important to explore the main content of Detering's poetry: time and place. In terms of physical location, Detering takes his reader to places ranging from "Paradies" (63) to "zwischen Tüten von Karstadt" (60) to cities such as Hannover (30). The range of location type that Detering presents shows the scope with which his poems are willing to engage. Paradise is a metaphysical space, while "between Karstadt bags" places the reader in consumerist society, while never directly stating where in the world the bags are. This type of referential space allows the readers to place location within their own concept of space. Detering draws on the tradition of the *Reisebericht*, causing one to think immediately of Goethe's or Heine's travels, but Detering does so in a language placing society between extremes of present and absent.

---

---

Detering allows the reader to always understand where they are in society, even if it is a trip “ins Leere” (47). This journey is not only made in terms of place, but also through language.

Detering moves not only between countries and cities of the world, but also through language. Detering was a guest lecturer at the University of California, Irvine, and he makes use of the English language in his German poetry. In one of the cleverest moves in the work, Detering rhymes German words with English words. In “ein Metaphysiker spricht,” Detering rhymes words like “share” and “fair” with “irgendwer” (27). He also switches between German and English when he says “doch ein metaphysical poet / ist auch nicht irgendwer” (27). This mixture of German and English has interesting applications to the German classroom in English-speaking countries. Depending on the level of German, teachers can have their students focus on language shifting in order to point to the lack of adjective endings or possible suggestions why certain words are best expressed in English or German in this German-language poetry collection. Clearly, in a work so focused on time and space, the role language and words play in poetry deserves a close examination as the readers also travel through the space of language.

There are implications for Detering’s work in the classroom exploring geography, time and space as well as culture. As the calls within the field for the study of culture suggest, German teachers are constantly looking for ways to teach culture through language. Detering’s poems present an excellent way for teachers to approach this difficult and complex topic with students. Because Detering plays with the conventions of language to express meaning in his poetry, it is advisable to use his work with more advanced students, or teachers must at least be aware that they must provide this information for students to make an accurate reading of the work.

Detering’s collection *Wrist* explores the physical and metaphysical concepts of time and space which demonstrate his work in northern Germany, but also his research and time spent in other cultures and countries. This collection of 54 poems would make an excellent addition to the German literary classroom exploring concepts of time, space, travel and culture.

Thomas Mann has been described as a very German author, but has met with incredible international success. Mann’s poems, which Detering is familiar with due to his own research on them, seem to invite the same paradox as Detering’s work: While being so rooted in Germany, the poetry of both Mann and Detering takes on a larger scope physically and thematically than its national particularity might first imply.

*Amanda Sheffer, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

---

---

ANDREA GEIER and JAN SÜSELBECK, hrsg. *Konkurrenzen, Konflikte, Kontinuitäten. Generationenfragen in der Literatur seit 1990*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2009. 206 S. € 24.90

---

This collection of essays examines conceptions of generation in the German literary scene post-1990. As a biological classification, generation denotes one degree of descent from a set of ancestors within a family; as a sociological construct it signifies a collective that shares cultural and historical experiences. Hence generation has become a leitmotif for three lines of literary inquiry: the begetting (perhaps even evolution) of literature and its periodization; the thematization within literature of generation-specific events; and the projection of literature to its readership. *Konkurrenzen, Konflikte, Kontinuitäten* is concerned with these lines of inquiry. It considers the ways in which contemporary authors deal with aspects of Germany's past and analyzes the phenomenon of *Popliteratur*, conceived and marketed as particular to a peer group. The contributors are themselves of different generations and such plurality of perspective extends to their professional backgrounds: The author Tanja Dückers and the journalist Jörg Sundermeier offer essays alongside academics. Such heterogeneity is inspiring and makes for dynamic intellectual exchange.

The contributions are from a conference held in Marburg in 2006 and were thus initially conceived independently of each other. This inevitably presents difficulties of sequence, but the editors should be commended for the volume's inductive structure. It comprises three main sections, each with three essays. Dietmar Till and Jan Süselbeck begin the first with an examination of literary retrospection on National Socialism. Both contributors discuss Dückers' work. Hence, a subsequent essay by the author herself on national sentiments during the 2006 World Cup is a natural progression. In the second part, Elke Brüns, Ilse Nagelschmidt and Andrea Geier analyze recollections of the GDR, and each makes reference to the genre of the following (third) section, in which Heinrich Kaulen, Heinz Drügh and Sundermeier survey *Popliteratur*. This main body of the collection is framed by a contribution on the conceptual force of generation as idea (Thomas Anz) and a concluding study of Turkish-German literature (Kirsten Prinz).

Although such organization is undoubtedly useful for those who work on specific themes such as memory or migration, it does obscure

---

some of the fascinating connections a more unconventional ordering might have rendered apparent. For example, Till explores the functions of literature – and in particular the *Generationenroman* genre – in relation to changes in collective memory of National Socialism. In drawing upon frameworks from other disciplines for types of memory, his essay provides a useful theoretical basis for later readings pertaining to the former GDR, particularly Nagelschmidt's. This juxtaposition of Till and Nagelschmidt is worthwhile because Till draws similarities between two generation narratives by Uwe Timm and Tanja Dückers written in 2003 (*Am Beispiel meines Bruders* and *Himmelskörper*), but notes that the two authors are of different 'biological' generations – they were born twenty-eight years apart (47). This allows us to problematize the relationship between the present in which an author writes and the generation-specific past that has conditioned that author's present state of mind. Nagelschmidt, on the other hand, groups narrowly defined generations of East German writers from Christa Wolf to Jana Hensel. She aligns these with concepts of identity and shifts in narrative perspective and poetics across authors and over time. This fine analysis of a possible generation-specificity of form is in some ways framed by Till's conclusion, in which he writes of modes of literary representation unique to fiction. Throughout his essay, Till cursorily analyzes the significance of first person narration and internal monologues for the narrative texts he discusses. One is left with a desire for further and a more technical close reading in his paper. However, it is surely a sign of this conference volume's success that it generates such an engaged response in the reader and that multiple connections can be drawn across contributors. Its aim, as the editors note in their introduction is the very provocation of thought (15). It does not lay claim to comprehensiveness.

In addition to narrative perspective, another intriguing red-thread addressed by contributors, and especially Geier, is the function of intertextuality. Geier convincingly discusses the appropriation of intertextual references for the purposes of a text's social engagement post-1990 across generations, regardless of an author's background. Till implies that authors of the grandchild generation can only understand Germany's Nazi past through other texts, since they cannot speak from direct personal experience (46). The third section of this collection discusses the literary forbearers who re-emerge in contemporary *Popliteratur*. That conceptions of generation have often been used for marketing purposes is mentioned (e.g. *Beat Generation*, *Generation Golf*), but in general *Konkurrenzen, Konflikte, Kontinuitäten* does not consider the

---

---

possibility that intertextuality might serve the function of anxiety-of-influence-type authorial self-projection in post-1990 works. The narrator in Sibylle Berg's *Sex II* (1998), for example – a text not examined in this collection – writes that she is part of an incest generation. By this Berg means that she does “useless” things such as writing stories; she therefore becomes part of a literary family which always reproduces amongst its own members (indeed, her novel makes fun of contemporary *Popliteraten*).

Anz writes that generation as a concept became attractive in the eighteenth century (primarily rendered at that time, one assumes, by the word “Geschlechtsfolge”). Anz alludes to literary youth movements throughout history, of which he cites the Expressionists as a late example (22). However, although *Sturm und Drang* is perhaps paradigmatic of an eighteenth-century movement that comprised juvenile authors, these authors projected themselves as individual geniuses, not as a unified generation. Kaulen mentions Moritz Baßler's accusation that Rainald Goetz returns to – phrased provocatively – sentimental genius aesthetics (150), but genius as a conceptual metaphor seems generally absent from *Popliteratur* vocabulary. Genius and generation come from the same etymological root, and one wonders if precise investigation into the valence of generation within the poetics of those authors who explicitly align themselves with conceptions of generation might not be worthwhile. Has generation replaced genius as driving conceptualizations of creativity? It certainly makes for animated conjecture.

Above all, *Konkurrenzen, Konflikte, Kontinuitäten* is a fertile selection of ideas for further research. The papers' lucid styles, accessible prose and provocative questions help problematize post-1990 literature in new ways and invite application of resultant thoughts to earlier literatures. Its final essay examines, amongst other authors, Zafer Şenocak. Geier and Süselbeck's conference proceedings attempt – and achieve – far more than categorization of literature by generation.

*Seán M. Williams, Jesus College, Oxford.*

---

AXEL GOODBODY, PÓL Ó DOCHARTAIGH and DENNIS TATE, eds. *Dislocation and Reorientation: Exile, Division and the End of Communism in German Culture and Politics*. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2009. 330 pp. € 68.00

---

As the first volume in the GDR / German Monitor series to be published since its founder, Ian Wallace, retired as General Editor, the above collection of essays compiled in his honor by Axel Goodbody, Pól Ó Dochartaigh and Dennis Tate is an appropriate celebration of his career. In acknowledgement of his international reputation as a scholar of both GDR and exile studies, the essays contained within *Dislocation and Reorientation: Exile, Division and the End of Communism in German Culture and Politics* not only successfully synthesize Ian Wallace's two main fields of study but also form a fitting tribute to his life's work.

Based on the premise that the themes of dislocation and reorientation have been central experiences in twentieth-century German history, particularly in light of the major caesuras of 1933, 1945 and 1989-90, this volume attempts to understand how the chain of political, social and economic change has affected generations of Germans who not only had to come to terms with their lost past but were simultaneously forced to forge new identities in light of each upheaval. The essays in this volume thus seek to explore the parallels and differences between the impact of dislocation and reorientation on German communities, not simply in a physical sense, but also in terms of social and intellectual transformations, which the contributors of this collection trace both through political discourses and across the cultural spectrum.

The volume itself comprises twenty-five individual essays by renowned 'German Studies' scholars from Europe and the United States, whose brief biographies are provided at the back of the book. The editors of the volume draw, most evidently, on distinguished yet diverse academic backgrounds in twentieth-century German literature (Goodbody), post-war German socio-cultural history (Ó Dochartaigh) and specialized GDR studies (Tate), thus helping to target the volume to readers with various levels and ranges of interest in German culture and society. That said, however, nine of the volume's essays have been written and published in German, ultimately rendering a third of the book inaccessible to the non-German-speaking market.

---

---

As the title of the volume suggests, each of its essays concentrates on a different aspect of German culture and politics. Although the majority of articles clearly focuses on aspects of literature, ranging from fiction to autobiography and from poetry to drama, analyses of the central themes of dislocation and reorientation are, refreshingly, not limited to the literary sphere. Providing readers with an insight into how the sporting arena was not immune to political interference from the Communist state, for example, Mike Dennis looks at the specific case of soccer in the GDR and how resentment over the state's political restructuring of the game often resulted in violent protests from its fans (209-220).

Taking a more sociological and anthropological approach, Ian Connor explores the attitudes of German 'expellees,' who found themselves forced to re-orientate to life on the German side of the Oder-Neiße line following post-war territorial adjustments (167-178). Similarly, Peter Barker tracks the steady erosion of 'Sorbian' German identity in his socio-cultural study of the impact of modernization upon the peoples of Upper and Lower Lusatia, who not only had to come to terms with the relocation associated with the industrialization of the 1950s, but are now also counting the cost of further loss brought about by high post-Unification unemployment levels (195-197).

Specifically appealing to historians is Daniel Azuélós' account of the reactions of German exiles in Britain and the USA to the assassination attempt on Hitler on July 20th 1944, which proves the response of the *Exilpresse* more diverse than the enthusiasm we have come to expect from the myth of *innerer Widerstand* and the supposed *Selbstbefreiung* attempts of the German people (61-70). In the same vein, Dieter Segert recalls the events in the run-up to the fall of the Wall in 1989 with the aim of questioning whether the GDR intelligentsia, which came to power on October 18th, actually lived up to its political responsibilities to shape and reform the country's future (233-244).

The more traditionalist reader will be pleased to learn that this volume has not veered too far from the conventional roots of German literary studies. Articles such as Peter Hutchinson's study of the exile poetry of Stefan Heym (113-123) or Roger Wood's account of East German autobiography since the Wende (245-255) serve to further our insight into how the socio-historical conditions associated with physical dislocation and reorientation have directly influenced the style of contemporary German writers and genres. The most studied author in this volume is undoubtedly the poet, dramatist and novelist Volker Braun who, in addition to contributing to the collection himself with an

---

---

extract from his newly published novel *Machwerk oder Das Schichtbuch des Flick vom Lauchhammer* (1-4), forms the subject of analysis for no less than four independent scholars in the first sixty pages of the book.

Born in Dresden in 1939 and having lived the majority of his life within the geographical and ideological boundaries of the GDR, Volker Braun can be regarded as a true product of German political change. Having begun his career as a writer, penning works in favor of socialist ideals before suddenly turning towards criticism of his socialist government following the scandalous expatriation of Wolf Biermann in 1976, Braun's post-*Wende* works are rich in images of physical and metaphorical displacement as the author struggles to come to terms with the end of a political system which had, for so long, shaped his worldly outlook. With Volker Braun continuing to produce prize-winning works dealing with his ongoing attempt to readjust to the political and cultural values of the 'new' Germany and to bury the demons of his socialist past, it is no wonder that Braun provides the context for wide discussions on his tireless search for meaning in life (Anna Chiarloni 5-19), his resistance to the human 'catastrophes' of old age and death (Karen Leeder 33-45), his critique of global capitalism (Axel Goodbody 21-32) and his fundamental rejection of art restricted to the realm of ideas (Gerd Labrousse 47-60).

It is, however, not just the essays on Braun, which take a new and invigorating approach to the themes of dislocation and reorientation within contemporary German literature. Most noteworthy is Christine Cosentino's focus on the modern-day literature of Ingo Schulze and his use of the mobile telephone as a symbol of the pressures facing former East Germans as they try to adjust to life in the twenty-first century (269-277). Gerrit-Jan Berendse's report on the use of Berlin as a leitmotiv in the poetry of Wolf Biermann also reveals how the connotations of the German capital in Biermann's poems become less utopian and, instead, more 'homely' and 'livable' as the poet visibly comes to terms with the nature of his twenty-first century city (257-268).

What is more, it is particularly striking that the final word in the volume goes to Gert-Joachim Glaeßner with his assessment of whether the Germany of today conforms to Thomas Mann's vision of the 'European Germany,' which he hoped would emerge from the rubble of the Third Reich (303-314). Tracing the development of democracy and political order in the Federal Republic from the divisions and tensions of the immediate post-war era through to the German Reunification of 1990, Glaeßner suggests that Mann's optimistic vision can finally be seen to have become reality amidst the stable, civil society of twenty-first

---



century Germany. By concluding the volume with such a politically-focused article, the editors not only acknowledge political developments as the key instigators of cultural and intellectual change in Germany over the past sixty years but, more importantly, demonstrate that, despite a century of successive dislocation, the Germany that has finally re-orientated itself in the twenty-first century is one that is fully aware of its subsidiary identity as the cornerstone of Europe.

In light of its concluding message, the editors of *Dislocation and Reorientation* have most definitely chosen essays which, in their own dislocation, comprise twenty-five captivating and convincing testimonies of the impact of political change on the German condition. Yet, in their reorientation into one coherent whole, the essays together present a comprehensive account of the evolution of all levels of contemporary German culture. Having shown Germany to have dealt so meticulously with the continuous demands on its identity of the past, the vision of the 'new' Germany which emerges from *Dislocation and Reorientation* ultimately proves itself completely capable of embracing the 'European German' identity of the future.

*Diana Jane Beech, University of Cambridge*

---

JUDITH HERMANN. *Alice*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2009. 189 S. € 18.95

---

**M**it den Werken Judith Herrmanns verhält es sich so wie mit den Alben diverser populärer Musikgruppen oder -künstler. Ist das Debüt ein Überraschungshit, wird das zweite Werk ungeduldig herbeigesehnt und nach seinem Erscheinen von den Kritikern in den höchsten Tönen gelobt. Meist kann der gelungene Zweitling nicht nur an den Sensationserfolg des Ersten anknüpfen, sondern ihn gar noch übertreffen. Das dritte Werk jedoch – von der Kritik argwöhnisch begutachtet und im Detail analysiert – entscheidet in der Regel die professionelle Zukunft des Künstlers. Kann sich diese(r) in der Szene etablieren oder bleibt es bei einer populären Phase, die schnell wieder verfliegt?

Im Fall Judith Hermann war und ist es nicht anders. Ihr Debüt *Sommerhaus, später* (1998) wurde von dem deutschen Literaturpapst Marcel Reich-Ranicki und seinem Kollegen des literarischen Quartetts, Helmut Karasek, als „der Sound einer neuen Generation“ unerhört bejubelt. Das fragmentarisierte Lebensgefühl einer weitgehend

---

---

unpolitischen Generation von Zwanzig- bis Dreißigjährigen, die mit verlorenen oder nie gehegten Illusionen – vorzugsweise in der Hauptstadt Berlin oder im umliegenden Brandenburg – durchs Leben driften, hat die Autorin in Kurzgeschichten festgehalten. Ihre Sicht des Lebens und die lakonische Sprache in rhapsodischem Stil machten ihr erstes Buch zum literarischen Ereignis.

Mit ihrem sehnlich erwarteten Zweitwerk *Nichts als Gespenster* (2003) hat sie zum Anfang des neuen Jahrtausends etwas leisere Töne angeschlagen. Die Autorin ließ sich ungewöhnlich lange Zeit um ihre nächste Sammlung von Geschichten zu veröffentlichen. Die unterschiedlichsten Protagonisten in den Geschichten sind jetzt fünf Jahre älter und leben in einem Zwischenreich der Träume, der Nacht und der Orientierungslosigkeit. Sie befinden sich in einem Alter, in dem der Druck der Gesellschaft sich festzulegen und sich niederzulassen auf ihnen lastet. Ihre Unbefangenheit und Unbekümmertheit, welche in Hermanns erstem Werk noch zu spüren war, ist auf dem Weg verloren gegangen.

Auch hier beharrt sie auf die Kurzgeschichte als ihr bevorzugtes literarisches Genre. Nur beschränkt sie sich nicht mehr auf den im Debüt noch vorherrschenden „Berliner Jugendstil,“ sondern lokalisiert nun die Leere und Isolation des Individuums in einer globalen Welt, in der sich das Individuum erst noch zurecht finden muss. Die Figuren sind allesamt wie unter einer Glasglocke unerreichbar und unberührbar und immer in aufsteigendem Zigarettenrauch verfangen. Iris Radisch schreibt von globaler Lebenstraurigkeit oder „Tristesse globale“ in ihrer Rezension in *DIE ZEIT* (06/2003) – aber auch von der melancholischen Schönheit Hermanns beschreibenden Erzählstils. Sie resümiert jedoch: „Es ist bekannt, dass man an zu viel Schönheit sterben kann. Doch dazu ist es noch viel zu früh.“

Es scheint als müsse Judith Hermann mit ihrem dritten und neuesten Buch *Alice* (2009) nun unter Beweis stellen, dass sie aus der literarischen Landschaft nicht mehr wegzudenken ist. In der literarischen Fachwelt staunt man immer noch, welche Erwartungen auf der Rezeption ihres Drittwerts liegen: Kann die Autorin dem Druck von Hoffnungen, Enttäuschungen und Projektionen standhalten, dem sie seit elf Jahren ausgesetzt ist?

Mit der Figur Alice kreiert die Autorin zum ersten Mal eine Protagonistin, die in jeder Geschichte auftaucht. Sie ist das weibliche Bindeglied zwischen den männlichen Titelfiguren der fünf Geschichten. Somit wird eine chronologische Erzählweise angedeutet, die bislang in Hermanns Werken fremd war. Auch macht die Autorin keine Anstalten ihre neuen Geschichten als Roman zu klassifizieren. Sie hält an dem

---

---

Genre der Kurzgeschichte fest, obgleich die beiden Genres hier nicht mehr klar zu trennen sind.

Es gibt noch einen weiteren Verknüpfungspunkt: das Motiv des Sterbens und des Todes. Der Leser wird schon auf der ersten Seite damit konfrontiert: „Aber Micha starb nicht. Nicht in der Nacht von Montag zu Dienstag, auch nicht in der Nacht von Dienstag zu Mittwoch. Möglicherweise würde er am Mittwoch sterben oder in der Nacht zu Donnerstag. Alice glaubte, gehört zu haben, die meisten Leute stürben nachts“ (5). Alice steht der Frau ihres Ex-Liebhhabers Micha, der auf der Krebsstation in einem Provinzkrankenhaus liegt, tapfer zur Seite.

In der folgenden Geschichte besucht sie einen alten Freund und Mentor Conrad, der kurz nach ihrer Ankunft an einer Herzattacke in einer italienischen Notaufnahme stirbt. In Berlin begleitet sie einen Bekannten namens Richard, die dritte Titelfigur, bis zum Tod. Dann trifft sie auf einen alten Freund ihres Onkels Malte, der sich vor vierzig Jahren im damaligen West-Berlin das Leben genommen hat. Zuletzt stirbt Raymond, ihr Lebensgefährte, dessen Habseligkeiten sie nun entsorgen muss. Sie kündigt in jeder Geschichte selbst an, dass alle männlichen Titelfiguren sterben werden oder schon gestorben sind. Alice fungiert als ein Todesengel – wo sie auftaucht, beginnt das Sterben.

Judith Hermanns *Alice* setzt sich von seinen Vorgängern ab. Die Autorin behält zwar den frostigen Erzählstil mit den wiederkehrenden Alltagsbeschreibungen, dem Aufsammeln und Anordnen von Gesprächsfragmenten oder Bildbeschreibungen bei, jedoch wirkt ihre Sprache, nicht zuletzt wegen des Motiv des Sterbens, zusammenhängend und ihr Stil einfühlsam und nicht distanziert oder fragmentarisiert. Die grundmelancholische Erzählweise der Autorin bleibt aber erhalten – wenn auch einige Kritiker behaupten, der Erzählstoff sei ein Übermaß an Tragödie und Krisenpotential für eine Vierzigjährige. Man sieht also eine deutlich positive Entwicklung in Hermanns Prosa, in der Themen wie Alter, Tod, Leidenschaft und Liebe durchweg vorherrschend sind und über elf Jahre gereift sind. Ihre Charaktere sind erwachsen geworden. Sie lässt Alice von Vergänglichkeit, Frieden und dem gleichmütigen Fortschieben des Lebens in unmittelbarer Nähe des Todes erzählen. Trotz des schwermütigen Abschiednehmens von den ihr Nahestehenden bleibt die Welt immer noch intakt und spiegelt hierbei den Zyklus des Lebens wider.

Auch wenn ihre literarische Arbeit anfänglich eine kleine Sensation auf dem Literaturmarkt auslöste und die Kritiker skeptisch waren, ob der Erfolg anhalten würde, hat Judith Hermann mit *Alice* bewiesen, dass sie sich mit großen Fragen des Lebens auseinandersetzen

---

kann. Sie hat sich spätestens mit *Alice* als feste Größe im literarischen Kanon der Gegenwartsliteratur etabliert und ist keinesfalls mehr wegzudenken.

*Alexandra Hagen, University of Cincinnati*

---

TODD HERZOG. *Crime Stories: Criminalistic Fantasy and the Culture of Crisis in Weimar Germany* (Monographs in German History, 22). New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2009. 169 pp. \$ 75.00

---

Within the field of German Studies, one expects the words ‘Weimar Republic’ to be associated with the term ‘crisis’ nearly as frequently as ‘Goethe’ is with ‘Schiller.’ What Herzog’s historiographic analysis of crime during this tumultuous period offers the reader is a decidedly unique approach to “the culture of crisis.” He deftly maneuvers his way through a multitude of sources (scholarly and popular) in order to understand the Weimar Republic as it understood itself through its criminals. Within the discourse on criminality, he locates a breakdown of the borders separating reality from fantasy, criminal from non-criminal, normalcy from aberration and public from private. Herzog demonstrates how the crime story serves as a paradigmatic example illustrating the more general crises of genre, causality and reason which came to a head in the Weimar Republic.

As his point of departure, Herzog takes the term “criminalistic fantasy” which was coined by Bernhard Weiß (Deputy President of the Berlin Police Force, 1927) and refers to the active interest and engagement of the public in matters of crime. He argues that, in the criminalistic fantasy, the popular perception of lawlessness continued long after crime rates had decreased. To investigate the public’s reaction to crime, Herzog divides his work into four dense chapters. These chapters demonstrate how crime permeated all levels of society: Critical theorists sought to understand the modern condition through detective stories; modernist authors wrote crime studies to reveal societal problems in the Republic; and filmmakers captured a unique cooperation between the police force and the public to identify and track criminals.

In chapter one, Herzog explains why critical theorists such as Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht were drawn to crime novels. Essentially, what they appreciated about the genre was the

---

---

insight it gave into the role of the individual in modernity. For example, Benjamin identified a parallel between the representative figure of modernity, the *flâneur*, and the detective. Just as the detective combs the city in search of clues which will enable him to solve the crime, the *flâneur* must negotiate the strange city space to search for clues which will, hopefully, allow him to make sense of society's current state of crisis. Thus, what the detective story has to offer the reader is a narrative which gives form and meaning to the inscrutable lived experience (cf. 25).

Herzog makes a compelling argument for why the criminal, like the detective, is a figure offering insight into the condition of modern man. As a liminal figure, the criminal is always outside and inside of society at the same time. This existence on the periphery is utilized by modernist writers to demonstrate the inseparability of the individual and society. Herzog's key example is the first book from the *Außenseiter der Gesellschaft: Die Verbrechen der Gegenwart* (1924-25) series of crime studies: *Die beiden Freundinnen und ihr Giftmord* by Alfred Döblin. It focuses on an event which inspired writers such as Joseph Roth and Robert Musil to look at criminal behavior from a sociological perspective and to question the impetus in society driving individuals to crime. Herzog illustrates Döblin's refusal to placate the audience by locating guilt in an individual in order to maintain societal order (64); instead he attempts in *Die Freundinnen*, and also later in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, to show how inexorably the individual and society are linked by narrating them both at the same time. This differs from the traditional crime story in which there is a series of causal events leading the detective to the criminal. Through Döblin, Herzog successfully shows how there is no border between the individual and society and no identifiable causality in the Weimar Republic. As such, the modernist author is forced into a paradoxical situation: He/she is driven to narrate a life without lying about causality but is also driven to tell stories (78). The *Außenseiter* series, as well as Döblin's works in general, present a montage of evidence offering a variety of perspectives (medical, judicial and literary writings) on a particular crime in order to show the battle among discourses. This not only blurs the lines between genres and causality, but, as Herzog justly argues, it also makes visible and critiques what Foucault would refer to fifty years later as the "scientific-legal complex" (45). This new type of literature, which would come to be known as the documentary crime novel, questioned the norm instead of showing what deviates from the norm.

For the final two chapters, Herzog shifts gears from modernist writers to popular culture and from a crisis of narration to a crisis of

---

distinction. Examples of traditional methods of identifying a criminal include Cesare Lombroso's attempt to locate a visible difference in the criminal, outlined in *Criminal Man* (1876), and Sherlock Holmes' methodology of tracking a series of visual clues. Herzog claims that, in the 1920s and 1930s, the reliability of visual evidence in determining character undergoes a crisis, which is proven by the appearance of such figures as the *Hochstapler*, an "imposter" who is indistinguishable from the noncriminal, in literature and film (102). The ability of serial killers such as Peter Kürten to elude the police also made it increasingly obvious that identifying a criminal on the basis of visual clues was not working, thus society called for a new method to track and locate criminals, which resulted in the active integration of the public into police matters. Examples of the mobilization of the mass community to capture criminals include the films *M* (Fritz Lang, 1931) and *Emil und die Detektive* (Gerhard Lamprecht, 1931). The films demonstrate a further border crossing: The public assumes a role previously allotted only to the professional.

While Herzog's conclusion treats several texts from the Weimar Republic which gained in popularity in the late 1990s, there are only a few citations referring to works written in the last couple of years. Because this work is multi-disciplinary (incorporating sociology, history, critical theory, literature and film) and relies on a wide range of sources, an updated bibliography would help the reader gain a deeper understanding of the current state of research in this area. Only very recently has the academic world begun to take a closer look at this topic: publications include *Criminals and their Scientists* (Becker and Wetzell, 2006) and the *Crime and Madness* issue in the *Journal of European Studies* (Sept. 2009). Even in popular culture today, the blurring of the lines between fiction and reality continues. Take for example the cinematic renditions of the Armin Meiwes ("Cannibal of Rotenburg") incident and the continued fascination in Germany with crime stories whether on television (*Tatort*) or in books; no less than 50% of the top ten books from the weekly bestseller list in *Der Spiegel* (5/2010) are crime/detective novels. Overall, Herzog's arguments are insightful and persuasive. This seminal book is a valuable contribution to the interdisciplinary field of German Studies and should be incorporated in courses on the Weimar Republic.

Melissa Etzler, University of California, Berkeley

---

REINHARD JIRGL. *Die Stille*. München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2009. 533 S. € 24.90

---

**R**einhard Jirgl is regarded one of the most important avant-gardist authors in contemporary Germany. He has received various literature prizes such as the *Alfred Döblin Preis* (1993), the *Marburger Literaturpreis* (1995), *Kranichsteiner Literaturpreis* (2003) and *Lion-Feuchtmwanger Preis* (2009). Born in 1953 East-Berlin, Jirgl started his experimental writing in the seventies, yet remained underground and practically unknown until after German unification.

In his novels, everything seems spoiled from the start due to the circumstances into which his characters are born. This implies that catastrophes of the past will repeat themselves in the future, since time for Jirgl is not linear but circular. The pre-existing conditions into which his characters are born also include standardized and bureaucratic language, inadequate to express the internal world of emotions. Therefore the author has created his own orthography. Exploiting the various connotations of words and sounds, Jirgl highlights a certain unconventional meaning through his personal spelling. “Romanze” thus becomes “roh-Manze.” Other creations are “Wirtschaft,” “Fant-Asien” or “Müll-jö.” At times, Jirgl's writing imitates oral speech, with its dialects, emotional distortions and incomprehensible fragmentation. In this regard the author has been compared to expressionist writers such as Alfred Döblin, Arno Schmidt, Uwe Johnson, Wolfgang Hilbig and Heiner Müller.

All of Jirgl's novels, from *Mutter Vater Roman* (1990), *Abschied von den Feinden* (1995) and *Hundsnächte* (1997) to *Die Atlantische Mauer* (2000), *Die Unvollendeten* (2003) and *Abtrünnig* (2005), explore the border between lived experience and official discourse, internal territories and geography. His latest novel *Die Stille* could be counted among the family or generational novels, if one wants to call it a novel at all. Thematically all topics of Jirgl's earlier works come together in this book: the violence of small village communities, the expulsions from Eastern Europe in the wake of the Second World War, the cynicism of international capitalism and socialist bureaucracy, the living dead in areas and times of transition, the utopia of and emigration to the New World. Formally, Jirgl makes use of his arabesque orthography and the alphanumeric code, enforcing intellectual reflection, while at the same time gripping the reader with graphic descriptions, internal monologues and psycho-narration.

---

In the first of the three parts of the polyphonic narrative, the physician Georg, born in 1935, looks back upon his life and is interrupted by the voice of his sister Felicitas. In the second part Georg travels to Frankfurt am Main in order to see his son Henry, born in 1960, before the latter's emigration to the USA. In this part of the book, Henry's account of his (step-) mother's family history dominates. Yet the voices of other family members intersperse this perspective. The destinies of the two families, which make up Henry's officially recorded ancestors, are thus intertwined, involving incest, murder, false fathers and delusions of grandeur at the root of all evil. Bureaucratic documents inserted in the text are exposed as erroneous and arbitrary despite their cynicism and powerful status.

Jirgl's forty-five chapters are arranged along one hundred short descriptions of photographs in a family album Georg is to hand over from his sister Felicitas to Henry. However, the content of these chapters does not correspond to the photographs, which themselves are not chronologically ordered, but represent a collage arranged by Georg's mother in law. The chapters too do not fulfill the function of ordering. They are placed arbitrarily, and sometimes even cut through sentences. This arbitrariness has been criticized in Jirgl and creates the impression of personal willfulness. The text accumulates a general noise of voices, uncovering the chronology of past events bit by bit to the reader who has to be active and willing to follow Jirgl's self-initiated excursions and re-directions to other passages in the book. A similar method of intertwining personal and official history by narrating along the pictures in a photo album is used by Günter Grass in *Die Box. Dunkelkammerngeschichten* (2008). Yet, in contrast to Grass's coziness, Jirgl is much more radical in erasing the border between victimizers and victims, oppressors and the oppressed, thus potentially upsetting his readers, forcing them out of their comfort zones.

Converting the spatial, visual representations of the family members in the photographs into temporal narrative, the dead are brought to life again via the process of writing. The stories told thus become stories between life and death, "am Lebensrand" (45), conjuring up life by way of the dead: "*Wie nun weiter. Gar anfangen mit Erzählen: Ich. Von Dingen u Schimären – von Lebenden u von Toten -. Und weiter mit Dingen u Schimären; immer weiter. Das ist als sei die Wühlarbeit für die Zukunft - !als obs Arbeit gäbe - !als obs Zukunft gäbe – Arbeit & Zukunft : das heißt Altsein....*" (126). Despite all the pessimism the book evokes, Jirgl seems to regard writing and narration as a way out of the vicious circle



of reality because, as the author suggests, where there are words, there is no reality. At the extreme point of absolute reality is silence: *Die Stille*.

*Die Stille* stands for empty time itself, raw life without meaning or ideological constructs. This materiality has taken control in the twentieth century in the form of money and bureaucracy, weapons and machines that level all differences. Oliver Jungen in a review for the *FAZ* notes fittingly: “Die Stille ist nicht der Tod, sondern die Unendlichkeit, in die sich die Endlichkeit hineingeschlichen hat.”<sup>1</sup> Absolute secularism of late capitalism, in other words, tips over into an uncanny, spectral endlessness. The taste of silence and death is described as chalk- or dust-like throughout the novel, corresponding to the book’s cover picture, which shows two female faces, one made of stone facing the viewer, the other one alive, looking down and away from the reader. Both figures are covered with a thin layer of sand or chalk, thus suggesting that life and death are barely differentiable in our era. Felicitas’ voice is quoted asking: “Doch, Georg, wenn nun Photographien nicht Abbild von ?Leben wären, sondern Leben das Abbild von?Photographien - ?was dann?” (44).

Jirgl’s powerful eloquence, his poetic images and the nonlinearity of his narrative make the reading of his novel an exciting and at times shocking adventure of language. His uncompromising stories of human exploitation and injustice have an inherent truth to them which will not leave the reader untouched. At the same time his emotional punctuation and experimental orthography dissociates, making his texts difficult, especially for readers unaccustomed to this style of writing. The difficulties of transferring Jirgl’s success in Germany to the non-German language world have to do with the sheer impossibility of translating his texts, many of which visualize the spoken word, as in “1=für=!Allemaal” (53).<sup>2</sup> The author can be interpreted as an epitome of a new type of national literature that abandons standardized high language in favor of a new subjective writing.

*Katrin Polak- Springer, Rutgers University*

---

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Jungen, Oliver. “Reinhard Jirg: ‚Die Stille.‘ Schluss jetzt mit der ewigen Wiederkehr!” *FAZ Net*, 12 March 2009. Web. 23 December 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Jirgl, Reinhard. *Die atlantische Mauer*. Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2000. Print.

---

DANIEL KEHLMANN. *Rubm. Ein Roman in neun Geschichten*. Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2009. 203 S. € 18.90

---

Daniel Kehlmann wurde mit seinem 2005 erschienenen Roman *Die Vermessung der Welt*, einer fiktiven Doppelbiographie des Mathematikers Carl Friedrich Gauß und des Naturforschers Alexander von Humboldt, zu einem der meistgelesenen deutschsprachigen Autoren der Gegenwart. Auch sein aktuelles Werk *Rubm* trägt die Bezeichnung „Roman“ im Titel, lässt sich allerdings nur schwer dem herkömmlichen Romanbegriff unterordnen. An die Stelle einer integrierenden Erzählinstanz tritt bei Kehlmann eine Collage changierender Erzählperspektiven und die *eine* Geschichte mit ihren unterschiedlichen Erzählsträngen wird – der Untertitel verrät es – in neun Geschichten aufgelöst, die durch ein Netz intertextueller Bezüge verbunden sind. Diese Bezüge sind komplex gestaltet und verdichten sich über die einzelnen Geschichten zu einer fiktionalen Welt. Eine in der zweiten Geschichte beiläufig abgeschickte SMS initiiert zum Beispiel die fünfte Geschichte, die damit endet, dass eine vierzigjährige verheiratete Frau im Nirgendwo zwischen Kasachstan und Tadschikistan ohne Hoffnung auf Rettung verschwindet, was dann Gesprächsstoff für ein Paar in der letzten Geschichte bietet. Außerdem ist in jeder Episode ein Buch des fiktiven brasilianischen Bestsellerautors Miguel Auristos Blancos versteckt, bis diese unverhohlene Paulo-Coelho-Karikatur selbst zum Protagonisten der sechsten Geschichte wird und einen zynischen Kommentar zu seinen esoterischen Lebenshilferatgebern mit tröstlichen Titeln wie *Frag den Kosmos, er wird sprechen* verfasst. Einige der Bezüge nehmen leitmotivischen Charakter an, etwa das ständige Läuten von Mobiltelefonen, das die Geschichten auslöst, verbindet, durchsetzt und mit dem der Roman eröffnet und schließt.

Diese intertextuellen Bezüge werden durch metatextuelle Bezüge wie die Reflexion der gesamten Erzählung und des Mediums Literatur in einzelnen Geschichten ergänzt. So setzt die zweite Geschichte unvermittelt mit einer direkten Figurenrede ein. Leo Richter, „Autor vertrackter Kurzgeschichten“ (29), stellt sein aktuelles Projekt vor: „Ein Roman ohne Hauptfigur! [...] Die Komposition, die Verbindung, der Bogen, aber kein Protagonist, kein durchgehender Held“ (25). Mit dem ersten Wechsel von Geschichte und Erzählperspektive präsentiert eine Romanfigur das literarische

---

Programm, von dem sie ironischerweise selbst ein Teil ist. Damit ist die virtuose Konstruktion des Romans allerdings noch nicht an ihrem Ende.

Kehlmann spielt zusätzlich mit zwei verschiedenen Fiktionsebenen. Zwar sind alle Geschichten parallel angeordnet und können auch unabhängig voneinander gelesen werden, doch teilt sich Kehlmann gewissermaßen die Lorbeeren für zwei Geschichten mit Leo Richter, der innerhalb des literarischen Weltentwurfs Kehlmanns als ihr Autor auftritt – eine Fiktion in der Fiktion. Richter kommentiert am Ende des Romans: „Geschichten in Geschichten in Geschichten. Man weiß nie, wo eine endet und eine andere beginnt!“ (201). Eine der Episoden mit gedoppelter Autorschaft ist gar – wie man nach einigen Seiten erschließen kann – die literarische Verarbeitung einer Reise, die Leo Richter in der zweiten Geschichte mit seiner Freundin unternimmt. Als kleiner, zugleich selbstironischer Seitenhieb erhebt sich in der anderen Episode inmitten der geschickt angelegten Fiktionsebenen und autopoetologischen Reflexionen die Stimme des (doppelt fingierten) Autors, der bekennt, „daß [er] [...] eigentlich nicht die Art von Schriftsteller [ist] [...], bei dem die Fakten stimmen. Andere freuen sich, wenn sie die kleinen Details akribisch recherchiert haben und irgendein Geschäft, an dem eine Figur achtlos vorbeisclendert, im Buch den richtigen Namen trägt. Aber [ihm] [...] ist so etwas egal“ (53). Dieser souveräne Umgang mit „realen“ Fakten liefert zugleich die mokante Rechtfertigung für die Kehlmann gelegentlich angekreidete Überschreitung historischer Faktizität in *Die Vermessung der Welt*. Collage, Intertextualität, Ironie, mis-en-abyme – der Leser hat es mit einem postmodernen Roman zu tun.

Postmoderne Motive bestimmen nicht nur den formalen Aufbau des Romans, sondern auch seinen Inhalt. *Rubm* handelt von der menschlichen Existenz im ubiquitären technologischen Zeitalter. Thematisch werden Identitätsbrüche, -wechsel und -konstruktionen präsentiert. Es geht um Kommunikation – um fehlgeschlagene, fehlgeleitete Kommunikation, den plötzlichen Abbruch oder Ausfall von Kommunikation, um Mediennutzung im Allgemeinen. Es geht um Veränderungen in der Struktur des Verhältnisses zu sich selbst und zu anderen Menschen, seitdem Mobiltelefon, Kino, Internetblog und VoIP den Alltag bestimmen. Nicht zuletzt geht es um das Wechselspiel von Fiktion und Realität. Die Figuren Kehlmanns verlieren oder finden sich in Geschichten, werden in sie ein- oder aus ihnen ausgeschlossen, verstricken sich in ihnen oder verschwinden aus ihnen. „Wir sind immer in Geschichten“ (201), resümiert Leo Richter und spricht damit nicht zuletzt den Leser an. Geschichten sind es, die uns Menschen

---

ausmachen, die großen gesellschaftlichen ebenso wie die kleinen privaten. Ohne sie würden wir spurlos verschwinden. Aber inwiefern kommt ihnen ein Realitätsgehalt zu? Wo liegt die Grenze zur Fiktion?

Das Figurenensemble der neun Episoden ist trotz des Übergewichts von Vertretern Kehlmanns eigener Zunft bunt gemischt. Dem Leser begegnet beispielsweise ein Computertechniker, der seinem Leben teilnahmslos gegenübersteht, allerdings plötzlich durch einen Irrtum in der Nummernvergabe Zugriff auf das aufregende Leben eines Anderen erhält. Er macht Bekanntschaft mit einem berühmten Schauspieler, der plötzlich nicht mehr angerufen wird und in einer Vorstadtdiskotheek, in der sich die Doubles bekannter Schauspieler treffen, daran scheitert, sich selbst zu imitieren. Im Roman tritt weiterhin ein dicker, schwitzender Telekommunikationsangestellter auf, der in fortschreitender geistiger Zerrüttung seine Erlebnisse in einem Internetblog dokumentiert, und ebenso sein Chef, der ein Doppelleben mit einer jeweils anderen Frau führt, was mit zunehmender emotionaler Dissoziation einhergeht, bis die Geschichte abbricht, als die beiden Frauen seiner unterschiedlichen Leben aufeinandertreffen. Die krebserkrankte Rosalie ist vielleicht am besten geeignet, die Anlage des Romans zu verdeutlichen. „Rosalie geht sterben“ ist eine der beiden Geschichten aus der Feder Leo Richters. Doch – wie von vornherein durch die doppelte Fiktion angelegt – wird das Konzept von Autorschaft im Laufe der Geschichte zunehmend fragwürdiger. Es passieren gar Dinge in der Geschichte, die den Intentionen des Autors, der sich in der Geschichte als Erzähler zu Wort meldet, zuwiderlaufen und ihm selbst unerklärlich sind. Die Handlung der Geschichte ist schnell erzählt: Die todkranke Rosalie macht sich nach Ihrer Krebsdiagnose auf den Weg in ein Schweizer Sterbehilfzentrum. Sie kann sich allerdings nicht in ihr Schicksal ergeben und wendet sich flehend an Ihren Schöpfer, der – und das ist der Witz – der Erzähler selbst ist, der zugleich als Autor auftritt und als solcher angesprochen wird. „Laß mich leben!“ (64), fleht Rosalie als Figur ihren Autor an, der in mehreren Gesprächen versucht, ihr die Paradoxie ihrer Bitte nahezubringen.

Kehlmann nutzt Rosalies Bitte und ihre Frage, *warum* sie sterben müsse, zur Analogisierung von Autorschaft und Schöpfertum, literarischer Erzählung und Schicksal. Wie in anderen Episoden wird die prägnant kurze Geschichte mit den regalmeterfüllenden Themen verknüpft. Mühelos bekommt die Geschichte, ja die literarische Produktion als Ganzes, eine moralisch-theologische Grundierung. Gedanken wie der einer ersten Ursache in einer Welt, die nach Kausalität nicht mehr fragt, sondern ganz zufrieden mit ihrem Rausch

---

an der Oberfläche ist, werden mal humorvoll, mal ironisch, mal zynisch, jedoch immer in spielerischer Distanz aufgegriffen, ohne dass der Text jemals verkopft wirkt und den spröden Charakter einer Abhandlung annimmt. Das verdient, hervorgehoben zu werden: Kehlmann ist ein routinierter Erzähler. Wie er bereits in seinem Vorgängerroman unter Beweis stellen konnte, beherrscht er den geschickten Einsatz elliptischer Überblendungen zu Zwecken der Komik. Bei aller Komplexität des formalen Aufbaus verliert der Roman dank des kunstfertigen Spiels mit wechselnden Perspektiven und Textarten niemals seinen Schwung, sondern bleibt, wenngleich die Episoden in ihrer literarischen Qualität variieren, kurzweilig. Der Roman ist allerdings – und auch dies sei betont – kein avantgardistisches Sprachexperiment. Er bietet eine geistreiche und unterhaltsame, stets kreative Anverwandlung von Erzählstilen und Motiven, die – um nur die bekanntesten Vertreter zu nennen – aus Don DeLillos *White Noise* (1985), Robert Altmans *Short Cuts* (1993) und Ingo Schulzes *Simple Stories* (1998) vertraut sind.

Ein Vergleich mit den späten Filmen Woody Allens kann eine leichte Irritation verdeutlichen, die die Lektüre hinterlassen mag. Ähnlich wie in Allens Filmen *Match Point* (2005) und *Vicky, Cristina, Barcelona* (2008) ist Kehlmanns Roman von seiner konstruktiven Anlage geprägt. Der erzählerische Apparat ist entworfen und die Geschichten werden – um sich der Filmsprache zu bedienen – spielend abgespult. Selbst die autopoetologische Reflexion, die Zurschaustellung des Apparats, integriert sich bei Kehlmann reibungslos. Manchem mag das zu glatt, zu unkompliziert und zu abgefeilt sein, doch dieses Kunststück bleibt eine beachtliche Leistung.

*Kai Löser, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg*

---

LUTZ KOEPNICK and ERIN MCGLOTHLIN, eds. *After the Digital Divide? German Aesthetic Theory in New Media*. New York: Camden House, 2009. 215 pp. \$ 75.00

---

**G**ermanists doing interdisciplinary work in the fields of art history and film studies must now contend with the respective existential questions of those disciplines, namely what does digital technology do to art theory? And what are the tasks and dimensions of a film scholar in a post-cinematic world? Such questions indicate the substantive concerns of Lutz Koepnick and Erin

---

---

McGlothlin's *After the Digital Divide? German Aesthetic Theory in New Media*, a collected volume of essays reflecting the title and content of the Eighteenth St. Louis Symposium on German Literature and Culture at Washington University at St. Louis in spring 2006. Taking the German Critical Theory media theorists – Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer – as their point of departure, Koepnick and McGlothlin have assembled a provocative and informative body of scholarship seeking concrete aesthetic consequences of the new media, which is “loosely understood as the rise of digital capture, image and sound manipulation, storage and display” (2).

The question mark in the book's title already reveals Koepnick and McGlothlin's willful skepticism of epistemological rupture within aesthetic histories of new media. For if the “digital divide” is a given, how does one know that one has reached the age “after” it, and is not still under the auspice of “during” - or even “before?” And if the “digital divide” is not a given, then how would one seek to define the term – or abolish it – in terms of long-term aesthetic patterns in mediation and virtualization? In the present vernacular, “digital divide” more refers to asymmetrical access to information technologies across geopolitical divisions than to an aesthetic rupture caused by digitalization. The titular question is simply left unaddressed. Koepnick and McGlothlin's subtitle “German Aesthetic Theory in the Age of New Media” actually describes what the book is about: a presumed age of new media offering an opportunity to return to the phenomenological emphases of earlier German aesthetic theories. Twelve chapters divided into three parts couple German Critical Theory with Geertzian thick description to confront current artifacts of digital culture.

“Part 1: What is New About New Media?” proves itself the most solid of the three parts by articulating the specific aesthetic ramifications of new digital technologies without relying on excessive jargon or techno-babble. Media phenomenologist Boris Groys opens the discussion in chapter 1 by examining the digital image in terms of its durability and potency. Referencing Benjamin's notion of the “aura,” Groys concludes that digital images prove both stronger *and* weaker, since such images are not visual markers pointing toward the transcendently Invisible (the sacred) but visualizations *of* the Invisible itself (the profane). Exhibition in closed spaces such as museums merely expose digital images' fragility, whereas analog images condemned to decay are at least protected and bear continuous material witness to their existence in such spaces. Diedrich Diederichsen departs from the visual and takes on the aural sphere with a comparative analysis of analog

---

---

montage and digital sampling in chapter 2. Whereas analog film and musical montage in the twentieth century is preoccupied with representational illusionism – the question of “hiding the cut” – Diederichsen posits that digital sampling both foregrounds its own artificiality and proudly claims its historical sources. This historicity can be seen, for example, in the development of hip-hop, which has inscribed its own aesthetic and identity politics into an otherwise computer-driven art method.

Chapters 3 and 4 chart transmedial trends and processes. Preeminent new media theorist Lev Manovich describes the interrelated phenomena of “remixability” – the capacity of digital culture to be continuously reworked by diverse interested parties – and “modularity,” or the separability and recombining of individual media components. Manovich contends that cultural modularity tends to ease remixability, a fact from which today’s cultural producers benefit, but culture itself seems to resist its own industrialization despite increasing modularity – a counter-thesis to that of Adorno and Horkheimer. Carsten Strathausen asserts in chapter 4, however, that new media needs an aesthetics to avoid categorical dismissal and suggests a combination of rigorous media genealogy and media archaeology to usher it into existence. The chapter concludes with an implicit call to interdisciplinarity, as a new media aesthetics draws on discourses of science and engineering over those of philosophy and politics, “its heroes are Boscovich, Boole, Turing and Bense instead of Aristotle, Kant, Hegel or Adorno” (59). The point is worth the consideration of cultural and literary historians, though aesthetic movements are often more defined by the traditions they refute than by those they champion.

“Part 2: From Aura to Distraction” offers us four essays that mix art history and philosophy in a fashion very much modeled on Kracauer’s or Benjamin’s styles of art criticism. Sabine Eckmann takes up the thread of reproducibility in chapter 5, finding interdependent interactions between the virtual and the real in works by Michel Majerus and Olafur Eliasson. Michel Chaouli’s essay on the World Wide Web and the archive, however, emphasizes a more radical aesthetic shift: that of *overwritability*. Chaouli plainly articulates how – in a world where works of art are not so much reproducible but continuously “versioned” through the mechanisms of the Internet – the terms “author” and “work” no longer hold any stability. Since their inception, electronic texts have relied on analog media solutions, be they books or paper print-outs, to preserve their permanence, leaving us with troubling implications for the archivability of web content and e-mail. Chapter 7,

---

---

entitled "Please Hold" by Juliet Koss, stands out as the most Kracauerian of the collection: an embodied meditation on the visual history of the telephone. Juliane Rebentisch's following philosophical chapter on the rejection of medium-specific arts in favor of their hybridization was not particularly persuasive, however, due to what appears to be a poor German-English translation.

"Part 3: Reworking History" illustrates some of the above-mentioned aesthetic consequences through contemporary examples, though the four essays certainly do their fair share of theorizing. Richard Langston's chapter 9 explains, via a well-selected sequence from *CSI* and the visual experiment *Foreigners Out!* by Christoph Schlingensiefel, how digital culture has reduced the avant-garde's ability to shock populations into social change. Nora M. Alter addresses the work of Mathias Poledna and the significance of a digitally modular sound archive in representing history. HyperCities founder Todd Presner integrates Walter Ruttmann's vision of *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927) into his own participatory hypermedia project, which literally maps multifaceted histories of Berlin onto digital renderings of the city at different points in time. The volume concludes with "Fragging Fascism," Margit Grieb's refreshing cultural studies analysis of Nazi Chic in recent video games.

A rudimentary critique of *After the Digital Divide?* would be that it lacks the sense of political economy found in the works of German Critical Theory, particularly in Benjamin. Aesthetics can be stripped of neither their labor nor their function within global profit systems. There is also a particular emphasis on installation art of the early 2000s, which leaves my curiosity about the aesthetics of, say, commercially marketed ring-tones or embedded Internet videos unfulfilled. In addition, all the authors seem to agree on their usage of German Critical Theory, but then generally privilege literary poststructuralists like Jacques Derrida and Fredric Jameson over Jean Baudrillard or Gilles Deleuze, whose work on media studies and phenomenology respectively might enrich the discussions in the volume.

To say the book is groundbreaking would be premature, but it *does* provide an interdisciplinary apparatus that is at once re-treading familiar theoretical ground (i.e. German Critical Theory, post-structuralism) while shedding light on uncharted, frequently rhizomatic digital aesthetic phenomena. Perhaps this equipoise is precisely Koepnick and McGlothlin's intention with the book, suggesting that academics conducting long-term phenomenological observations on new media products may have a firmer grip on modern aesthetics than

---



alarmist commentators rapidly churning out new jargon in response to what Thomas Elsaesser calls the “non-linear, non-directional ‘too much/all at once’ state of permanent tension” that new media engenders (39).<sup>1</sup>

*Evan Torner, University of Massachusetts Amherst*

---

### Note

---

<sup>1</sup> Elsaesser, Thomas. “Cinephilia, or the uses of disenchantment.” *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener, eds. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam UP, 2005. 27-44. Print.

---

KLAUS KÖHLER. *Alles in Butter. Wie Walter Kempowski, Bernhard Schlink und Martin Walser den Zivilisationsbruch unter den Teppich kehren*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009. 473 S. € 48.00

---

Die deutsche Literatur habe in Hinsicht auf die Aufgabe, den „Zivilisationsbruch“ adäquat darzustellen, vollständig versagt, proklamiert Klaus Köhler in seiner Untersuchung *Alles in Butter. Wie Walter Kempowski, Bernhard Schlink und Martin Walser den Zivilisationsbruch unter den Teppich kehren* (2009). Mit einer gewissermaßen vergleichenden Untersuchung, die aber keine Literaturkritik, sondern eine Mentalitätsstudie sein soll, beteiligt er sich an der Auseinandersetzung über angemessene literarische Verfahren bei der Darstellung des Holocausts. Hierbei werden Walter Kempowskis, Bernhard Schlinks und Martin Walsers narrative Verfahren als Negativbeispiele denjenigen von Reinhard Baumgart, Dagmar Leupold und Uwe Timm gegenübergestellt. In weitreichenden Betrachtungen stellt Köhler in den Werken der ersteren eine poetische Desavouierung von allgemeiner und individueller deutscher Schuld während des Nationalsozialismus fest. „Alles in Butter“ ist seine Metapher für die poetischen Verdrehungen und die Schönsprache dieser Autoren, die nach Köhler die verbrecherischen Einstellungen und das Verhalten bekräftigen, welche den Holocaust verursacht haben sollen.

Köhler sieht die Rolle der Literatur als ein Medium, das ein eindeutiges Urteil der aktiven oder passiven Beteiligung der

---

„Volksgemeinschaft“ an die nationalsozialistischen Verbrechen kommuniziert. Die Texte fungieren in seinem kritischen Konzept als zentraler Ort, an dem ein Gegengewicht zur deutschen Reue- und Schamlosigkeit nach dem Krieg erschaffen werden kann und muss.

Den mentalitätsgeschichtlichen Teil seiner Untersuchung bilden historische Abrisse, die unter den Textbetrachtungen eingebaut sind. Allgemeine Vorstellungen der deutschen „Volksgemeinschaft“ über die Juden werden kritisch in der Tradition des deutschen Judenhasses mit dem Fazit verfolgt, dass dieser Hass konstitutiv für die Etablierung der deutschen „Nation sans phrase“ sei.

Die Erinnerungswerke von Sebastian Haffner und Reinhard Baumgart werden als Veranschaulichung des mentalitätsverändernden Potenzials von Literatur herbeigezogen. Im Gegensatz demonstriert Walter Kempowskis und Peter Wapnewskis Erinnerungswerk die „Weigerung, das Innenleben zentraler Bereiche des nationalsozialistischen Deutschland auszuleuchten“ (61).

An Kempowski werden die Montagetechnik und Erzählperspektive kritisiert, die Kausalitäten und die Beteiligung des Einzelnen an den Verbrechen eliminieren. Uwe Johnsons, Uwe Timms und Dagmar Leupolds Erzählverfahren und Sprache werden bei der Gegenüberstellung angemessener behandelt. Indem sie die Rahmenbedingungen des Krieges darstellen, so Köhler, sprechen sie die Frage der Schuld direkt an und verdeutlichen mentale Prozesse, die den „Zivilisationsbruch“ ermöglicht haben. Kempowskis Methode der Parallelisierung jedoch betone das deutsche Leid im Krieg, anstatt eine Umkehrung und Schuldbewusstsein zu stimulieren. „Poetik des Geredes“ nennt Köhler Kempowskis Erzählweise, der Explizierung des Holocausts und Tiefendimension fehle.

Die unpräzise Sprache der Studie, die zu Übertreibungen neigt, macht es schwierig berechnete Argumente ernst zu nehmen. Kempowskis Roman *Letzte Grüße* sei zum Beispiel „nichts als entfesselter Schwachsinn“ (231). Die vielzähligen, teilweise derben Ausdrücke dieser Art schwächen den wissenschaftlichen Charakter des vorliegenden Textes.

Die häufige, kommentarlose Aneinanderreihung von Zitaten – manche von ihnen in mehrfacher Wiederholung – kann des Weiteren keiner Argumentation dienlich sein. Die Argumentation entspricht oft nicht dem Ausmaß der Behauptungen, die dann als gezwungene Effekte erscheinen. Beispielhaft dafür wäre die Formel „60 Jahre Stunde Null,“ mit der Köhler die fortdauernde und vergebliche Suche seiner „Nation sans phrase“ nach einem Narrativ bezeichnet. Verallgemeinerungen

dieser Art sind in seiner Ausführung auch deswegen nicht haltbar, weil sie den eigenen Beobachtungen gelungener Holocaust-Repräsentationen widersprechen.

Die Studie übermittelt einen Literaturbegriff, der hinter seiner Zeit allzu weit zurückbleibt. Nach dem Vorbild der Eindeutigkeit und Ausführlichkeit gibt der Autor Verbesserungsvorschläge zu den kritisierten Werken. So würde Schlinks Roman *Der Vorleser* dem Holocaust gerechter, wenn zu den Lebensumständen der Hauptprotagonistin recherchiert und diese Funde in den Text integriert worden wären. Auch Peter Wapnewski hätte laut Köhler bestimmten Aspekten zum Ausgangspunkt seines Textes nachgehen sollen.

Klaus Köhlers Ausführungen wollen zweifellos auf schädliche Einstellungen hinweisen, die unter extremen Umständen fatale Konsequenzen haben. Der Holocaust ist das monströseste Beispiel für diese hochaktuelle Gefahr und auch dasjenige, das die meiste Reflexion verursacht – gerade wegen seiner kalkulierten Monströsität an einem Ort und in einer Zeit, die Zivilisationsniveau beanspruchen konnten. Jede Studie, die sich damit auseinandersetzt, kann zum Verständnis und zur Verhinderung künftiger Katastrophen beitragen und auch Klaus Köhlers Untersuchung leistet ihren Beitrag.

*Darina Stamova, Washington University in St. Louis*

---

MARCUS KOLGA. Dir. *Sinking the Gustloff: A Tragedy Exiled from Memory*. Toronto: RealWorld Pictures, 2009. 46 min. 30 sec. \$ 25.00

---

*Sinking the Gustloff* by the award winning Estonian-Canadian director Marcus Kolga introduces a Canadian audience to the tragic sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* and thereby to German suffering during WWII. The documentary, which won the 2008 Jury Prize at the Estonian Film Festival in Toronto and the Best Documentary Award from the Canadian Ethnic Media Association in 2009, aired on Omni Television on March 2 of the same year and offers the German-born Canadian Horst Woit, a survivor of the sinking, a new medium in which to share his traumatic memories. It follows him back to his birthplace in modern Poland, where he commemorates the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the tragedy with two other survivors. Kolga, who worked on every aspect of the production, leaves little to criticize in terms of his skill. In spite of the occasional kitschy sound effect or his reluctance to cite clips

---

borrowed from Nazi propaganda or Frank Wisbar's classic *Nacht fiel über Gotenhafen* (1959) and to differentiate the vintage footage from the stock footage of shipwrecks and castaways, the piece is worthy of its accolades. A German audience and especially scholars of German Studies, however, will find many (missing) elements to be problematic.

According to the press kit, Kolga was inspired by Günter Grass's *Im Krebsgang* (2002), whereas *Sinking the Gustloff* lacks the balance of Grass's novella. Kolga informs his audience of the extent of the tragedy in which over 9,000 refugees, mostly women and children, perished in the freezing Baltic Sea on January 30, 1945, but fails to properly contextualize the incident. He allows Woit to finally express his enduring trauma, but does not establish a critical distance to German suffering by referencing the root cause of that suffering, i.e. the well-documented brutality of common Germans. With respect to the *Gustloff's* own dark past, there is no mention of the cruise ship's success in the Nazi propaganda machine, of its past service as a troop transport and naval barracks, nor of the *U-Boot* division and the Nazi elite on board when it sank. Through comparisons the film also risks reducing the *Gustloff* to a German version of the *Titanic*, albeit much deadlier, as was the case with highly criticized German productions, such as Joseph Vilsmaier's *Die Gustloff* (2008).

The film's bias reaches a peak when former Secretary for the United Nations Commission for Human Rights and author of *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans*, Alfred de Zayas, argues that the sinking of the *Gustloff* was, in fact, a war crime. Although de Zayas's argument regarding the greater context of *Flucht und Vertreibung* is credible, no serious historian or author who has treated the *Gustloff* since the fall of the Berlin Wall has interpreted the event as a violation of international agreements. Even the foremost expert Heinz Schön, one of the two survivors Woit meets in Poland, has repeatedly stressed that the vessel was armed, was transporting military personnel to active duty and was marked in every way as a warship.

But in many ways the documentary seems to follow a Cold War script. The opinion of one member of the Russian navy that Alexander Marinesco, the Captain of the Soviet submarine that sank the *Gustloff*, was a war hero who killed thousands of Nazis is presented as if representative of all Russians, and the naval historian Sergey Kurnosov is consulted only in as much as his expertise might expose the compromised character and motives of the Soviet captain. The Russian perspective on the *Gustloff-Katastrophe* in particular and on *Flucht und Vertreibung* in general is absent, not to mention the complicity of the US

---

---

and Great Britain in the forced expulsion of German civilians. In light of this, one has to question the perspective of the director himself, whose parents were forced to flee their home in Estonia in 1944 and who is active in the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation based in Washington D.C.

One must also take issue with the title. Any claim that remembering the *Gustloff*, or any other instance of German suffering, was taboo or repressed in Germany needs to be qualified by the fact that there were numerous accounts and depictions in German memory culture throughout the history of the BRD, and that the tragedy survived in the private memory and family narratives of survivors and in the rhetoric of special interest groups and the political Right. Current scholarship suggests that the lack of public interest in German suffering was a relatively recent and brief phenomenon and more a matter of reception than production. Therefore the notion of the *Gustloff* being “exiled” from memory can only be understood as specific to the experience of the immigrant Horst Voit, whose need to tell his story understandably fell on deaf ears in Canada.

But it should be stressed that these criticisms are from the perspective of a Germanist. The documentary remains both informative and appropriate in a North American context, in which the perpetration of Germans has received much more attention than their victimization, and it does add to the body of knowledge surrounding the *Wilhelm Gustloff*. Eva Rothschild, the second survivor Voit meets in Poland, whose Jewish husband had family members murdered in the Holocaust, brings an otherwise undocumented twist to the *Gustloff* discourse, offering at least one example of a survivor whose own trauma was repressed by Auschwitz. Also to the film’s credit is a concluding remark by Heinz Schön, who reminds Voit and the audience that there is a reason the collective memory of the Russians is quite different than that of the Germans and that one must never forget that German submarines purposely sank civilian ships as well. Finally, no critical analysis can take away from Kolga’s primary goal of giving a foreign-born citizen a voice.

*Mike Ennis, University of Cincinnati*

---

TERÉZIA MORA. *Der einzige Mann auf dem Kontinent*. München: Luchterhand Literaturverlag, 2009. 384 S. € 21.95

---

**T**erézia Mora's *Der einzige Mann auf dem Kontinent* tells of a week in the life of Darius Kopp, a blond, corpulent, satisfied Berliner. He fills the center of the narrative, and while chaos threatens to flood him from every side – his boss is unreachable, the towers of old computer parts and unanswered mail collapse on him in his office, his mother's legs are amputated (albeit only in a dream), a friend attempts suicide, and his wife slips back into despondency – Kopp, with a little help from the internet, stays afloat, and even becomes a better person.

The novel races along and changes narrative perspective, often mid-sentence, with a skill that mirrors Kopp's changing lanes on the German *Autobahn*. The authenticity of the many first person perspectives does Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polyphony proud as the novel fulfills the genre's ability to carry interacting voices. All the major characters speak, as does the city itself as Mora inserts television, advertising and noises into the text. Mora also sprinkles in plenty of English and convincingly integrates the vocabulary of computer technology and business without showing off. An ironically funny narrator accompanies all these voices and teases readers with hints of restrained influence. We are often told how the narrative could continue, but then watch as Kopp takes a different turn.

This novel, like her best-selling *Alle Tage*, showcases Mora's ear for dialogue and her talent for evocative description and detail. For Kopp, hunger arrived with capitalism, "Mit der Wende kam der Appetit" (9). Kopp's insatiable appetite is for food, and it often drives the narrative. The reader also craves cappuccinos with extra sugar but, above all, red meat and we feel his satisfaction when he finally bites into the novel's rich subtext: roast pig, crackling and dripping with fat, and perfectly grilled steaks. The food consumed in the novel and the pairing with *Sauerkraut* and German beer position Kopp securely in his Germanness. I find that this need for extra emphasis on Kopp as German reflects an uneasiness on the part of the novel and the readership.

Reviewers universally hail *Der einzige Mann auf dem Kontinent* as a truly German novel, as the latest work of the next great German novelist and as the novel that shows Mora's full arrival in German literature. Yet, on March 4, 2010 Terézia Mora, who grew up in Sopron

---

---

speaking both German and Hungarian, received the Adelbert von Chamisso literary prize, given annually to an author whose works make an important contribution to German literature, but whose mother tongue and cultural background are non-German. Although prominent voices have begun to question the very separation of this literature from some imaginary category of non-inclusive and “wholly German” literature, the two primary approaches to these prize-winners have either been an insistence on their work as “not-quite” German (in the words of the popular literary magazine *Literaturen* in April 2005) or an uneasy celebration of what is “special” about this literature. A symposium in November 2009 at the Marbach archives dared to ask and attempted to answer the question of what makes Chamisso prize-winning literature unique. The discussion included papers on the linguistic differences marking its otherness. While Mora included elements of the expected exoticism in her first two books, *Seltsame Materie* (1999) and *Alle Tage* (2004), the “not quite German” appears in *Der einzige Mann auf dem Kontinent* only in the figure of Kopp’s delicate Hungarian wife. Aptly named Flora, she blooms far away from Berlin, in the off line garden property of a friend, much to Kopp’s discomfort and jealousy. Parenthetically, Mora hits a perfect tone for the relationship between Darius and Flora: Their marriage, replete with small frustrations, sacrifices and pleasures, is based on a deep liking of each other and throughout the novel opens into a sensitive, if complicated, story of their love. In writing the voice of Darius Kopp, Terézia Mora frees herself from the expectations of a foreign perspective; an attempt obviously undermined, but perhaps also supported, by the awarding of the Chamisso prize: Although the prize places her work again firmly in not-quite-German literature, now an unquestionably German book belongs in the body of Chamisso prize winning literature. The reviews also unanimously hail *Der einzige Mann auf dem Kontinent* as a novel of our times and I find particular timeliness in its reflection of these changes in German identity.

Beyond the nerve of German identity, this novel also predicts and impressively represents the current financial collapse, though interviews with Mora reveal that she began writing years ago and it was actually the burst of the internet bubble a decade ago that inspired Darius Kopp. A series of mergers leaves Kopp alone responsible for an entire continent of clients and sales but his days are surprisingly empty. Kopp reflects our constant virtual connection, but like Abel of *Alle Tage* he is singularly unable to communicate. He loses cell phone reception and battery at inopportune times and his internet searches uncover little

---

beyond further proof of the novel's timeliness, such as news stories about the failure of Lehman brothers and the takeover of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Yet this novel also perfectly explores our present virtual culture. "Merkwürdig. Ich mag Geld – als Zahlen [...], aber als Gegenstand sagt es mir quasi nichts" (46). The story's chaos is set off by a box full of euro bills: A client pays forty thousand euro to Kopp in cash, the exact amount owed to Kopp by his company for back payments on benefits he has paid the German government out of his own pocket (the amount owed itself comments on the dangers of relying on American style business). From there on we follow Kopp in his distracted attempts to restore the stacks of bills as numbers on a screen.

German literature is changing and this quickly read book convincingly creates a world of possibility, as all novels should. In this case it is a possible world for this translingual, post- 9/11, post-financial crisis German space. We grow fond of Kopp, we wish him well on his journey into joblessness – perhaps the truest marker of the novel's timeliness – and we close the book with hope as *Der einzige Mann auf dem Kontinent* ends with Kopp's words to Flora, "du bist die Liebe meines Lebens" (379).

*Laura Bohn, Yale University*

---

ANGELIKA OVERATH. *Flughafenfische*. München: Luchterhand Literaturverlag, 2009. 173 S. € 17.95

---

**E**in Zwischenstopp im Transit eines futuristischen, namenlosen Flughafens. Elis ist als Magazinfotografin mit dem Fliegen und dem Warten auf Verbindungsflüge vertraut und kann doch, obwohl todmüde, nicht entspannen. Plötzlich steht sie vor einem 200.000-Liter-Meerwasseraquarium, in dem Fische aus tropischen Meeren still über Korallenbänke und Anemonenwiesen ziehen, während draußen der Strom der Reisenden den Glaskörper umfließt. Als sie Tobias entdeckt, der die Scheiben reinigt, beginnt sie, sich für diesen Mann zu interessieren und spricht ihn an. Auch er hat sie beobachtet. Als Aquaristiker im Flughafen ist sein prüfender Blick mit der Zeit ganz unwillkürlich von den Fischen auf die Menschen übergegangen: „Diese Reisenden kamen ihm unter als Umgeleitete, Verirrte aus allen Kontinenten, ein exotischer Fang“ (14). Auf die Analogie zwischen Flugreisenden, die aus den Ziehharmonikagängen in den Flughafen strömen, und kreisenden

---



---

Fischschwärmen kommt Angelika Overath in ihrem Roman *Flughafenfische* immer wieder zurück. Die Autorin schildert Luft und Wasser als jeweils verschiedene Lebensräume – und doch gründen beide auf einem ähnlich komplexen, symbiotischen und labilen Gleichgewicht.

In achtzehn kurzen Kapiteln werden hier drei Menschen beschrieben, die mit ihrem Leben hadern. Neben der Fotografin Elis und dem Aquaristiker Tobias ist da ein alternder Professor für Biochemie, der sich in einem der abgegrenzten Raucherfoyers in einen finalen Ehemonlog trinkt, nachdem seine Frau deren dreißigjährige Beziehung per SMS beendet hat. In der Hand eine Flasche Whisky philosophiert er etwas selbstgefällig über die Ehe, die einmal wie das Rauchen Distinktion war, nun jedoch, in seinem gläsernen, anonymen Exil, erscheinen ihm sowohl seine Ehe als auch das Rauchen jeder Würde beraubt. Overaths zweiter Roman nach *Nabe Tage* (2005) handelt vor allem von inneren Leerständen und der Isolation des Menschen innerhalb der globalisierten Transitgesellschaft. 2006 las die Autorin einen Ausschnitt aus dem Manuskript von *Flughafenfische* beim Ingeborg-Bachmann-Wettbewerb in Klagenfurt vor und wurde mit dem Ernst-Willner-Preis ausgezeichnet. Vergangenes Jahr stand dann der Roman auf der Longlist sowohl für den Deutschen als auch für den Schweizer Buchpreis. Mit ihm gelingt es der Autorin, einen sterilen und scheinbar handlungsarmen Zwischen-Ort in eine Vielzahl intimer aber auch irritierender Innenräume zu verwandeln.

Der Flughafen als Allegorie des modernen, beschleunigten Menschen ist in Literatur und Film bereits eine etablierte Kategorie; das Augenmerk in *Flughafenfische* liegt jedoch auf einem nach innen gerichteten Blick. Die ort- und zeitlose Gegenwart des Transits ist das verlängerte Vakuum des Flugzeugaumes, in dem Elis ihren Gedanken und Erinnerungen nachhängt. In den leeren Stunden im Luftraum fühlt sie sich sicher, denn hier ist sie für kurze Zeit für nichts mehr verantwortlich. Der Übergang in die Wartehalle fällt ihr dann schon schwerer. Im Gleichschritt mit dem „dickflüssigen Gemenge der Reisenden“ treibt sie vorbei an spontanen Müllablagerungen – den „Altären“ und den „Fetischen der Flieger“ (29). Plastikflaschen, Zahnpastatuben, Deodorants oder Babynahrung sind die neuen Flugrisiken; im Zeitalter nach 9/11 hat sogar der Müll seine Unschuld verloren. Angst vor Attentaten hat die Protagonistin keine: Die „exquisite Brutalität eines Todes durch ein Flugzeugattentat schien ihr für ihre Person nicht recht zu passen“ (25). Mit einer wunderbar präzisen, poetischen Sprache macht die Autorin Raum- und Körpererfahrungen spürbar, die Flugreisende aus eigener Erfahrung kennen: die künstliche, sauerstoffarme Luft, die quälende

---

Langsamkeit der Kontrollen und vor allem die über allem liegende, bleierne Müdigkeit. Wenn Tobias die Menschen in der Transithalle studiert, dann fallen ihm vor allem die verschiedenen Ausdrucksformen dieser Schlaflosigkeit ins Auge: „Er bewahrte im Gedächtnis, was die Reisenden taten, wenn sie schlafen wollten und nicht schliefen. Er sammelte ihre Müdigkeiten. *Memory and desire*. Ja er sammelte und klassifiziert sie. Für sich. Und für alle. Es wäre eine Art Schlaf-Futter, eine Art Schlaf-Unterfutter für einen heiligen Mantel, der all jene umschloss, die müde waren und nicht schliefen“ (17). Angelika Overath hat selbst so einen Mantel geschaffen: Zusammen mit Manfred Koch veröffentlichte sie 2002 *Schlaflos: Das Buch der hellen Nächte*, eine literarische Pathologie der durchwachten Nächte mit einschlägigen Texten von beispielsweise Raymond Carver, Ernest Hemingway oder Franz Kafka.

In den Kapiteln mit Tobias und Elis offenbart sich einmal mehr der geschulte Blick der Reporterin. Die 1957 in Karlsruhe geborene und heute in Sent in der Schweiz lebende Overath hat sich neben ihren Romanen und Anthologien auch durch preisgekrönte Reportagen, Essays und Literaturkritiken für *GEO*, *DIE ZEIT* oder *mare* einen Namen gemacht. Mit den Mitteln des realistischen, streckenweise journalistischen Erzählens skizziert sie ein sensibles Gesellschaftspanorama. Darüber hinaus bezieht der Roman eine seiner Stärken aus der kenntnisreichen und einfühlsamen Schilderung der Unterwasserwelt. Die Vorliebe der Autorin für das Element Wasser ist nachvollziehbar. 1986 promovierte sie mit einer Arbeit über die Farbe Blau in der modernen Lyrik. „Hier am Riff gelten andere Gesetze als im offenen Meer: das Riff ist ein Kulturraum,“ reflektiert Tobias (131). Insbesondere die Seepferdchen haben es ihm angetan: „Er mochte ihr schutzloses Dasein, bei dem sich nicht immer unterscheiden ließ, war es ein Schwimmen, war es ein Schlafen“ (76). Auch wenn sich hier eine Parallele zu der schläfrigen Trance der Reisenden auftut, erscheint die Effizienz der Transitwelt gegenüber dem Mikrokosmos des Riffaquariums geradezu kulturlos. Wer nicht wegdämmert, der nutzt die Reisezeit als Arbeitszeit und macht so den Flughafen zum Großraumbüro oder geht im Duty-free-Bereich auf Schnäppchenjagd. Selbst das Reisen an sich, so Tobias, sei ein Konsumgut geworden, denn der Käufer werde für wenig Geld auf einer sicheren Umlaufbahn ans Ziel seiner Wünsche transportiert: „Flughafen, Flugzeug, Flughafen, Hoteltransfer: Meer“ (42). Anstatt mit ihren Enkeln den Zoo zu besuchen, würden Großeltern nun lieber mit ihnen an den Strand fliegen. Da ihm jedoch das Hineindenken und -sehen in die Welt der Reisenden zutiefst verstört – reist er selbst doch nicht – lenkt Tobias seine Aufmerksamkeit bald wieder auf die geliebten Fische. Als Elis und Tobias

schließlich vor der Scheibe des Aquariums miteinander ins Gespräch kommen, gibt er zunächst etwas unwillig Auskunft über Fischsymbiosen, die Fortpflanzung von Korallen und die mühselige Schöpfung eines Riffaquariums; Elis erzählt von Reisen und einer unglücklichen Liebe. Die beiden sprechen aneinander vorbei und geraten doch in eine vorsichtige Vertrautheit. Schon der erste Satz des Buches – „Es war einer jener langen, unbedeutenden Nachmittage, und es sollte doch der letzte seiner Art sein“ (7) – deutet auf eine Veränderung hin. Am Schluss kann Elis tatsächlich ihre Augen schließen, während Tobias über ihren Schlaf wie zuvor über seine Fische wacht und ihren Mantel über sie zieht – den zitierten Mantel des Schlafes.

Gewinnen sowohl die Innen- und Zwischenräume von Flugzeug, Transit und Aquarium als auch die zwei Protagonisten dank der poetischen Dichte des Romans zunehmend an Bildlichkeit, bleibt im Gegensatz dazu „der Raucher“ ein Fremdkörper. Und das trotz oder gerade wegen seiner selbstbemitleidenden Emotionalität, die an diesem künstlichen Ort fehl am Platz wirkt. Er ist der Charakter, den sich die Autorin als Ich-Erzähler aussucht, und erscheint dennoch lediglich als Kontrapunkt zu Elis und Tobias. Deren stumme, auf Körpersprache beruhende Annäherung erinnert oftmals an einen Tanz oder einen gut orchestrierten Bewegungsablauf, wie derjenige der Menschen- und Fischschwärme im Flughafen und im Aquarium. Die verbale Unbeholfenheit zwischen den beiden Charakteren ist Ausdruck ihrer Kommunikationsunfähigkeit und ist somit inhaltlich begründet, trägt aber nichtsdestotrotz dazu bei, dass dem Roman seine Kulisse und sein Motiv stellenweise im Weg stehen.

*Silja Maehl, Brown University*

WILFRIED WILMS and WILLIAM RASCH, eds. *German Postwar Films: Life and Love in the Ruins*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 224 pp. \$ 84.95

Peter Schneider is probably correct when he asserts in his 1999 novel *Eduards Heimkehr* that one of the only analogies suitable to the uniquely German difficulty of remembering the past appropriately and honestly is that of a narcissistic male trying to understand how to systematically bring his wife to a satisfying sexual climax. Some mysteries are destined to remain unsolved. The task here, as with many complicated aspects of life, memory and people, ultimately

should not be to “solve” the situation and move on, but rather to learn to live with a half-understood acceptance of the predicament and the persons involved in a way that honors the relationship. Wilfried Wilms and William Rasch have selected a series of articles for this book which does exactly this: examine the various ways that German films have honored and negotiated the experience of the rubble immediately following the Second World War.

The collection of articles in this volume features a swath of films which, apart from a few standard cinematic classics from canon lists in German departments in American universities, are largely forgotten and possibly even forgettable. If many of these films have been lost to contemporary memory, it is because we wanted to forget them. William Rasch points out in his introduction that each of the films calls for a moral reaction on our behalf. Frequently our contemporary attitudes cause a kind of righteous indignation at either the simplistic moral frameworks with which early film makers treated the immediate postwar society or at the naiveté with which guilt and shame were ignored or “overcome.” Both Rasch and Lutz Koepnick, who provides the final article to the volume, agree that contemporary audiences are very good at reacting against and condemning the feeble attempts of these early directors and writers to grapple, not only with the guilt, but with the very tangible difficulties of a nation laid waste after a total war. We would like to think that we have learned to negotiate our relationship with the mess of war rubble in a much more sophisticated fashion, that we have the ability to “solve” the difficulties and move on.

It is interesting that this attitude to assess the disaster and “move on” was exactly the attitude driving the Nazi propaganda late in the war, even as their own political structures crumbled. Erhard Schütz begins the book with a discussion of films such as Helmut Käutner’s *In jenen Tagen*, Hans Betram’s *Feuertaufe* and Rolf Hansen’s *Die große Liebe*. In these early propaganda pieces, the Nazi attitude is clear: No matter what rubble we have caused or suffered, we will persevere and preserve those heroic values which have made us great. Wagnerian themes are woven into the soundtracks of many of these stories and the optimism of a redemptive triumph, of solidarity strengthened through suffering, is ever present to counter the (increasingly) distressing reality of a demolished Germany late in the war.

Once military victory disappeared as a justification or redemptive explanation for the rubble after the war, Germany sought out new stories to help them cope with what seemed to be the complete cultural, societal, economic and historical failure of the nation. Wilfried

---

---

Wilms presents a discussion of how German cinema treated guilt and culpability after the war. He features the two films *...und über uns der Himmel* and *Der Ruf*, both directed by Josef von Báký. In different ways, both of these films acknowledge the difficulty of assigning culpability for the catastrophe of the war – particularly the air raids – and fall to the theme of suffering, yet creative, Germans who try to survive after the war. The films couple questions of German responsibility and accountability with subtle accusations of Allied abuse of power in the postwar occupation. The resulting impression from both films is a kind of moral ambiguity, attributing the catastrophe of war more to natural phenomenon and “the way of the world” than human failings.

The next few articles treat the East German DEFA rubble films, as well as a few American films as an Allied perspective. Wolfgang Staudte’s *Die Mörder sind unter uns* and Stanley Kramer’s *Judgment at Nuremberg* are both examples of overly simplistic conclusions to the moral dilemmas surrounding the postwar landscape. Although Dagmar Barnouw’s article acknowledges the unique and respectful silence of American cinema regarding Allied triumph over the Nazi regime, a film such as *Judgment at Nuremberg* is satisfied to present actors such as Burt Lancaster admitting, as a German, to the culpability of Nazi officials in their crimes against humanity. DEFA was likewise, under Soviet influence, all too happy to portray the inherent guilt of the Nazis and to give the audiences a sense of final, silver-screen retribution against the murderers who still lurked among them. The “solution” for dealing with the past in many DEFA films was presented in terms of killing off the remaining corrupted, cultural Nazi appendages and to emphasize the new generation. DEFA films often portrayed the East German youth as crawling out of the literal rubble, and in doing so these children represented the social and spiritual rubble from which the new nation would be created. The tone of these films is optimistic, though once again falling prey to the tendency of “solving” the problem and moving on.

Gerd Gemünden and Jennifer Fay wrestle with the issue of nostalgia and finding comfort in the cinematic spaces which attempt to revitalize the past. Both Gemünden and Fay are critical of Billy Wilder’s *A Foreign Affair* in that, while perhaps the film harkens back to the better times of the Weimar era, that same bygone culture offered a hollow resistance, at best, to the Nazi pressures which followed. The Weimar period was nice but empty. Fay capitalizes on the metaphor of the abandoned Regina Palast Hotel, featured in Harald Braun’s 1947 noir film *Zwischen Gerstern und Morgen*, to represent the inherently flawed and flimsy social structures which gave way to Nazism. Nostalgia for the

---

past only served to illustrate how shoddy the cultural values prior to the war really were: The past is no place from which to draw comfort.

In the final article, Lutz Koepnick provides an appropriate “bookend” to these several essays, almost in an attempt to summarize the various ways in which German cinema has reacted to the immediate postwar years. Koepnick specifically examines the use of various soundtracks in German films, noting the early importance of Wagner for embodying Nazi values, and the subsequent denial and rejection of anything resembling Wagnerian music in later German cinema when treating the past. It is strange, then, that Werner Herzog’s movies, in particular his *Lessons of Darkness*, a documentary of the Kuwait survivors immediately following the first Gulf War, incorporate Wagner’s music – passages from *Parsifal* and *Götterdämmerung*. This odd juxtaposition, Koepnick argues, provides a kind of homeopathic aesthetics for healing. The road to accepting the past lies not so much on the radical rejection of its corrupted vestiges, nor the nostalgic identification with those bygone values. The path to emotional and spiritual healing of memories and to very tangible, rubble-like tragedies, is what Koepnick calls “becoming Wagnerites” in order that we might move beyond Wagner and the corrupt ideologies associated with his music. Herzog’s films, and his soundtracks, act as a kind of vaccination for contemporary society: We must take in and absorb some of the poison so that we may develop an organic resistance to it.

This collection of articles is not only valuable for those students of film and those fascinated by the esoteric details of forgotten German cinema, but also for those interested in memory culture and the different ways in which the past, particularly traumatic events, can be addressed, reacted against, denied, nurtured, celebrated and ultimately accepted. Conforming to the proposed topic, the discourse is limited largely to these immediate postwar films and is by no means a survey of German memory or trauma films up through contemporary cinema. Koepnick opens the possibility of furthering the discussion by addressing the work of contemporary director Werner Herzog and the way in which Herzog incorporates motifs and themes from these earlier films. We can hope that someone will take Koepnick’s lead and pursue the topic further, comparatively examining the works of other contemporary German film directors as they creatively build their own projects out of the rubble of the past.

*Wes Jackson, University of Cincinnati*

---

---

BENJAMIN ROBINSON. *The Skin of the System. On Germany's Socialist Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford UP 2009. 368 pp. \$ 65.00

---

Set at the intersections of philosophy, social theory and literary studies, Benjamin Robinson's densely and skilfully written *The Skin of the System: On Germany's Socialist Modernity* argues for understanding existing socialism – exemplified here by the GDR – as “an alternate form of modernity, one strangely different from the familiar modernity of liberal capitalism” (4). In this sense, Robinson positions himself not only against those who deny the importance of existing socialism when considering modernity, but also against those who follow the Marxist tradition of cultural studies (Frankfurt School, British Cultural Studies) which avoids engaging the reality of socialism while emphasizing a symbolic or utopian meaning of socialism. Thus, *The Skin of the System* situates itself in critical solidarity with socialism and holds that such an engagement with the reality of socialism illuminates our understanding of social transformations, which could provide an alternative to capitalism and enlighten how we conceptualize modernity. The “burden of this book [...] to elaborate a positive ontological sense of socialism” is therefore seen by its author as carrying political *and* theoretical significance (31).

Methodologically, Robinson employs a framework and vocabulary taken from systems theory and post-analytical philosophy to engage with how socialism's systemic difference – that *otherness* which distinguishes its reality from liberalism and fascism – is understood, experienced and explored by a writer committed to the socialist cause, namely Franz Fühmann (1922-1984). Fühmann, however, does not serve Robinson for illustrating the philosophical categories he develops in the first of the book's two parts. Instead, he is understood “as equally *explanandum* and *explanans* – as both a part of socialism to be explained and as a singularly telling explicator of socialist phenomena” (13). Robinson argues that existing socialism's systemic difference – its positive ontological qualification as “an other system” (2) – can be located in “socialism's strange difference from economy” (100), “its potential to supersede and exclude capitalism as an inferior organization of modern experience” (97).

Combining close reading, philosophical reflection and biography, Robinson traces this problem in regard to three central categories in Fühmann's works “that mark historical stations in

---

---

Fühmann's biography and conceptual stations in socialist transformation" (14): camps, laws and plans. His approach to Fühmann is thus always simultaneously theoretically / conceptually and empirically / biographically oriented which is appropriate to Robinson's project of understanding the ontological nature of existing socialism and its historical reality. Fühmann, however, does not arrive at capturing exactly what this "measure of the new [the New Human]" is (252). Rather, his work is marked by and, as Robinson holds, is remarkable for the constant attempt to aesthetically experience this systemic difference, taking seriously and exploring the significance of real socialism not as a stable reference point, i.e. not as something that can be named unambiguously, but in its reality as an ongoing process of social transformation. In doing so, Robinson argues, Fühmann develops a "'systems erotics of socialism,' the passionate dialectic by which Fühmann writes of his commitment to socialism as a search for an *optimum optimorum* that takes the form of an identification with difference from economy, an evisceration of and desire for all the achievements of self-ordering" (90).

Robinson's study, however, is important and merits discussion not only for its detailed readings of Fühmann, but also for its take on how to think "fractured modernity" (3). It needs to be put into dialogue with a different tradition of rethinking modernity that Robinson himself unfortunately does not address – a fact that testifies to a more general 'non-communication' between social theorists. On the one hand, there are theories of modernity that focus on social differentiation and systemic difference. On the other hand, there are theories that focus on social stratification as the crucial aspect of modern societies. The project of rethinking modernity as complex, contradictory and multi-dimensional has been carried out mostly by and associated with interventions coming from feminist, African American and postcolonial perspectives that emphasize both different realities and different experiences of modernity concerning race, class and gender within a single social system. Robinson's thinking about "alternate modernities" differs in rethinking the "alternate modernities" of different social systems (liberalism, fascism, socialism) by employing a theoretical framework of social differentiation. However, throughout his book, Robinson thinks "fractured modernity" exclusively in regard to systemic difference and does not address the internal 'fracturedness' of existing socialism – an aspect that needs to be accounted for when taking socialism's reality seriously.

---



This does not mean however that Robinson provides a one-dimensional account of socialist reality. The problem is rather that he only discusses how socialism's systemic difference is thought about and experienced differently. He does not address how these different thoughts and experiences of existing socialism may relate to the 'inner-fracturedness' of modern social systems themselves. The compelling comparative interpretation of Christa Wolf and Fühmann in chapter three is a case in point:

Where Wolf is concerned with the mediated identity of selfhood and the desire for an authentic, stable equilibrium of social belongings, Fühmann is concerned with the multiplicity of mediated worlds and the nonuniqueness of any equilibrium. Fühmann's writing figures socialism under the grammatical sign of the deictic partitive – socialism is *some* one thing, not another. [...] Wolf's writing figures socialism under the grammatical sign of the privative (or internal negation) – socialism is always a lacking state of *disequilibrium* or *imbalance*. (82)

So, it would have been interesting to investigate – especially considering the emphasis on "identity of selfhood" in Wolf (*ibid.*) – if and to what extent this reading would be enriched by addressing issues of gender, providing yet another layer of what existing socialism was.

*Christoph Schaub, Columbia University*

---

HELMUT SCHMITZ. *Von der nationalen zur internationalen Literatur: Transkulturelle deutschsprachige Literatur und Kultur im Zeitalter globaler Migration*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009. 362 S. € 72.00

---

Helmut Schmitz's volume *Von der nationalen zur internationalen Literatur: Transkulturelle deutschsprachige Literatur und Kultur im Zeitalter globaler Migration* contains eighteen essays that were originally presented in a summer 2007 conference co-organized by Schmitz. The volume is divided into five parts with an accompanying introduction and information on the contributors. Its title announces a departure both from *Migrantenliteratur* and narrowly defined national literatures in favor of what Schmitz calls "Interkulturelle Literatur." In the introduction, Helmut Schmitz delineates "Interkulturelle Literatur" as hybrid literature that problematizes the notion of homogeneously conceived national identities, redefines a national concept of literature and undermines the binary logic of various oppositions: foreign and

---

familiar, West and East and self and other. The rationale behind the editor's choice of miscellaneous essays is to highlight multifarious facets of inter- / transcultural literature.

In the first section, entitled "Historisches," Jürgen Joachimsthaler provides an insightful historical excursus into a neglected and largely unknown intercultural German literature which existed before the first waves of immigrants in post-war Germany. Joachimsthaler argues that Germany or the German Empire was always a multicultural state that included territories populated by various national and ethnic minorities: Poles, Lithuanians, Sorbs, Masurians and Kashubians, among others. In the second section, Karl Esselborn reviews several recent German publications on intercultural literature and summarizes new trends and theoretical approaches in the field. Together with other German scholars, Esselborn advocates a "transnationale Erweiterung der europäischen Nationalphilologien," which expands the purview of national literature and its objects of study but also adopts an interdisciplinary approach (55).

The remaining three sections are organized according to the national, ethnic and religious affiliation of the authors under discussion: "Deutsch-türkische Literatur und Film" (five essays), "Ost- und Südosteuropa" (six) and "Deutsch-jüdische Literatur im europäischen Raum" (three). This choice appears to be at odds with the volume's conceptualization of an intercultural literature that transgresses national and other boundaries. Due to their Jewish and East-European backgrounds, authors Wladimir Kaminer and Vladimir Vertlib dominate over other writers in the collection (Kaminer and Vertlib are analyzed in three and four articles respectively). Further, it is unclear why Jim Jordan's essay on Arab-German writers Jusuf Naoum and Salim Alafenisch, Syrian-German author Rafik Schami and Mongolian poet and writer Galsan Tschinag are included in the section on German-Turkish literature and film.

In general, the critics' essays gravitate around long-established themes in scholarship on minority discourse and literature, such as identity, language, memory, etc. Alexandra Lübcke, whose analysis is informed by Aleida and Jan Assmann's concept of collective memory and Leslie Adelson's "touching tales," examines selected texts of the Turkish-German authors Şenocak, Kara and Zaimoğlu as historiographic texts that co- and rewrite the nation's history. Volker Dörr reexamines frequently used terms such as Diaspora and hybridity and proceeds to investigate the correlation between individual and collective identities in Şenocak's novel *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft*, arguing

---

that the protagonist ceases to be representative of the groups to which his ancestors belonged, whether Turkish or German-Jewish or both.

Margaret Littler's essay builds on her previous discussions of the mystical and poetic traditions of Islamic Sufism in Özdamar's texts. By adding the short story "Gottes Krieger" in Zaimoğlu's *Zwölf Gramm Glück* to the discussion, she succeeds in dismantling the negative image of Islam in German society. Karin Yeşilada examines the new trend in Turkish-German women's literature, arguing that although a new generation of Turkish-German women writers has discarded the subservient figure of 'geschundene Suleika' and instead depicts modern, independent and successful Turkish female characters the writers of what she calls "Chick-lit a la turca," continue to draw on the clichéd images of the exotic Orient and Oriental women. To strengthen her otherwise convincing analysis, Yeşilada could have also considered the expectations of the German readership, including the fascination with the Orient, as another probable cause for the popularity of this literature. Jim Jordan's article promises a new perspective on hyphenated literature by reexamining its so-called 'Oriental' qualities. While he discerns a subversive potential in the exotic and fairy-tale like elements, which can be used by minority writers as indirect means to criticize social and political conditions in German society, his second identified strategy, described as "eine aufklärerische, sogar pädagogische Funktion, die aus den Erfahrungen der Autoren von Ablehnung und Entfremdung in der deutschen Gesellschaft entsteht," is troubling (159-160). He argues that it is not the duty of minority authors to question and redefine the meaning of Germanness, but rather that they should seek acceptance from the majority population by educating the readership about the cultural 'Others.' In doing so, he relegates this literature to the status of what Zaimoğlu once called a "weinerliche, sich anbietende [...] Gastarbeiterliteratur" (11).<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the themes of migration and intercultural crossovers, discussions of *Heimat* and the construction of the host countries and countries of origin dominate the essays in the last two sections. Katrin Molnár focuses on different constructions of *Heimat* by Jewish authors. Whereas Hessing and Noll found *Heimat* in Israel, the country with which they can identify based on a shared ethnic and religious affiliation, for Kaminer and Vertlib, home is debunked as a fictional and utopian place that cannot be bound to one nation, ethnicity or religion. In his intriguing analysis, Christoph Meurer applies the term "Third Space" to the construction of the Soviet Union in Wladimir Kaminer's texts and argues that Soviet identities emerged as a result of the

---

---

encounters, exchanges and negotiations with other identities. Terry Albrecht leaves it to the reader to draw points of intersection between the texts of Terezia Mora, in which intercultural experiences are marked by loneliness, displacement and loss of language, and those of Yoko Tawada, which are characterized by the rich and powerful imagery of the author's poetic language. Boris Previšić examines the treatment of the Balkans and Balkan war in German literature. His verdict favors the debut novel by the young author Saša Stanišić (from the former Yugoslavia) over texts by other German authors, who according to Previšić were incapable of grasping the complexity of the Balkan region. Ernst Grabovszki gives a survey of contemporary Austrian authors of various immigrant backgrounds, including Nigerian author and poet Chibo Onyeji, Iranian Hamid Sadr, poet and novelist Stanislav Struhar from the former Czechoslovakia and Vladimir Vertlib from the former Soviet Union. Grabovszki emphasizes the 'outside' perspective of the immigrant writers that allows them to challenge the concept of national Austrian literature and Austrian identity. Though in the context of selected pieces of literature which thematize open as well as hidden forms of racism and discrimination, his proposed thesis that "Da es keine 'reinen' Nationalstaaten mehr gebe, gebe es auch keine Nationalliteraturen mehr" seems too optimistic and is yet to be accepted in Austrian society (291). At the same time, most of the scholars who contributed to this volume are aware of the applicable limits and remain realistic about the ability of literature to bring about change in how national identities are defined in German speaking countries (Michaela Haberkorn).

The numerous essays in the volume share the understanding that intercultural literature reflects the realities of post-modern, postcolonial and post-national societies, in which individual subjects constantly redefine themselves in terms that defy categories of binary oppositions. The authors disagree in terms of their interpretations of frequently used terms, such as intercultural vs. transcultural, diaspora and 'in-betweenness.' For instance, following Leslie Adelson and Jim Jordan's critique of the category of 'in-betweenness,' Sandra Vlasta's in her article "Ende des Dazwischen" sets up to deflate this myth as an inappropriate and outdated approach for the analysis of Turkish-German literature. However, in Aigi Heero's essay on authors with East-European backgrounds, the concept of 'dazwischen' has a positive meaning: Instead of being a "no man's land," it denotes a place that marks the "Umstand des Unterwegsseins, des Dazulernens und der Entwicklung des eigenen Selbst" (224).

---

---

The collection has its strengths and shortcomings: Whereas some essays featured in this collection offer new perspectives and insights, others appear to recycle the same themes. Overall, this volume will be of interest to scholars of minority literature who want to keep up-to-date on recent trends in the field of Germanistik. The inclusion of studies on authors of various immigrant or cultural backgrounds living in different countries allows one to juxtapose the approaches to and reception of minority literature, such as those from already-settled communities such as Turkish-German and those from younger immigrant communities from East-European countries. Finally, readers will definitely find the footnotes useful, as the contributors cite various recent and relevant publications.

*Svetlana Gordon, The Ohio State University*

---

#### Note

---

<sup>1</sup> Zaimoğlu, Feridun. *Kanak Sprak*. Introduction. Berlin: Rotbuch, 1995. Print.

---

STUART TABERNER, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Günter Grass*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. 255 pp. Paperback £ 17.99 / Hardback £ 50

---

**T**he *Cambridge Companion to Günter Grass* edited by Stuart Taberner consists of 15 chapters, written predominantly by well-known Grass scholars. It offers an overview of a wide range of topics on Grass's life and work, including a detailed analysis of the relationship between Grass's biographical experiences and his political attitudes, art and literature. It examines his dedication to politics, an interest sparked during the late 1960s and his attitude towards issues such as the environment, globalization, poverty, population growth, gender issues and German unification. Furthermore, *The Cambridge Companion* gives a good overview of Grass' literary works, his prose, poetry and drama, as well as an overview of his art and the film adaptations of his novels. Finally, the volume refers to and discusses Grass' autobiographical text *Peeling the Onion*, published in 2006.

---

Julian Preece's chapter, *Biography and Politics*, is the only chapter that creates a direct link between Grass's life and his political attitudes. The chapter discusses the author's commitment to politics, not only in his speeches, but also in his literary work. Beginning with a reference to Grass's autobiographical text *Peeling the Onion* (2006) and his confession of having served in the *Waffen-SS*, Preece examines the link between Grass's fiction and his own personal experiences. Preece states that "most of the other books are forms of autobiographical fiction," supporting his statement with a closer examination of protagonists such as Oskar Matzerath or Pilenz in novels such as *The Tin Drum*, *Cat and Mouse* and *My Century* and in several speeches (10). The article illustrates that biography and fiction are closely related to each other and that the line between the two is blurred. The links between Grass and his protagonists and between Grass's life and the plots of his novels are described, rather than discussed in an in-depth manner. A detailed analysis of the relationship between political attitudes and Grass's life and work is missing. However, the overall aim of the chapter, which is to highlight that texts other than *Peeling the Onion* examine the relationship between literature and life, is fulfilled by Preece.

The wide range of Grass's dedication to politics and the link between his politics and especially his literature is covered in six chapters of the book. The topics covered in these chapters describe the close relationship between Grass's literature and politics, thereby complementing Preece's chapter, and portray Grass as an author who has not only been influenced by his past – National Socialism and the Second World War – but who is also aware of and interested in the contemporary developments of German politics and world politics as is reflected in his prose. The chapters in the book offer summaries and analytical approaches, but no detailed discussion on this matter.

In addition to the links to Grass's prose, subsequent chapters explicitly concentrate on his literary work and fiction, namely the *Danzig Quintet*, *The Rat*, *Too Far Afield*, *The Call of the Toad*, *From the Diary of a Snail*, *The Meeting at Telgte* and *Show Your Tongue*. In the chapters focusing on these texts, summaries and an overview of the most important characters of the novels are given. Furthermore, the texts are discussed from a particular perspective, embedded in a wider context of literary images or approaches such as apocalyptic visions (111-124), authorial construction (96-110) or magical realism (52-66). Due to the brevity of each chapter and the attempts to analyze more than one text in each, analytical aspects are only briefly broached.

---

---

The chapter on Günter Grass as a dramatist by David Barnett is very critical and offers an in-depth evaluation of Grass's plays. Barnett argues that Grass's earlier plays tended to be "absurd" or "poetic," whereas his later plays were more "political" (180). The problem with each of the plays is seen in "[t]he lack of action, the obscurity of the metaphors [...] and the sheer length of the dramas" (190), which make each play appear repetitive and problematic on stage, although the plot itself, given as a summary, may be of interest.

In Richard Erich Schade's chapter, Grass's career as an artist is outlined briefly, before the variety in his art, artistic styles and approaches are discussed in addition to the importance of art for him throughout his life.

Furthermore, the film adaptations of *Cat and Mouse*, *The Rat*, *The Call of the Toad* and *The Tin Drum* are critically discussed in a chapter by Roger Hillman. The author points out the problems of transferring Grass's complex prose texts into the medium of film, which is exemplified by the novel *The Rat*, which is characterized by a lack of cohesion. Referring to the film adaptation of *Cat and Mouse*, Hillman criticizes the way in which the different time-levels are portrayed. The author points out that Pilez is present as an adult person in all scenes to show that he is the one who is remembering the past. According to Hillman, this is "disorienting, rather than enriching, and the time levels clash rather than fuse" (194). In contrast to the film adaptations of the aforementioned novels, those of *The Tin Drum* and *The Call of the Toad* are praised by the author as successful film adaptations. However, they are criticized for not explaining key changes in the screenplay of *The Tin Drum*, for example the fact that Oskar begins to talk too early and without any given reason.

Many chapters in this publication refer to Günter Grass's autobiographical text *Peeling the Onion* (2006) and the debate on and furor over Grass's confession of having served in the *Waffen-SS*. The critique of Grass owing to his late confession and the blurred line between fact and fiction in his autobiographical writing were taken into consideration in so far that they have influenced the analysis of Grass's other texts and have revealed new potential interpretations. In addition to referring to *Peeling the Onion* in many chapters, Stuart Taberner's article focuses explicitly on this autobiographical text which the debates and discussions surrounding the book have predominantly failed to address. The chapter offers another "reading of the novel which emphasises the personal rather than the political" (139). This approach differs from previously published articles and books on *Peeling the Onion*, the majority

---

of which focus on the political rather than the personal. The chapter by Taberner provides a short summary of the text and draws connections between the text and a *Künstlerroman* – “an ‘artist novel’” as *Peeling the Onion* describes (140) – and Grass’s own development as an artist. In relation to this, the chapter critically outlines Grass’s construction of himself for his readers’ eyes within *Peeling the Onion* and his motivation for shaping his image by writing such a book about his past. This personal reading is still quite political given Grass’s status as a public figure. His image enables him to be or disables him from being politically accepted and authentic in public. Therefore, Grass’s self-construction and his motivation may be of political interest. Although Taberner aims at introducing a new perspective on *Peeling the Onion* that concentrates more on the personal than the political, his reading seems to be quite political. Another interesting and important point which Taberner highlights is the function and the use of memory within *Peeling the Onion*. The author states that “the relationship of the subjective, ‘felt’ memory to collective memory is experienced by the narrator as a contradiction, even as a conflict” (147). Taberner elaborates on this aspect, but he does not put it into the wider context of memory theory. Overall, this chapter presents a political and a personal reading of *Peeling the Onion* and focuses on one of the main themes in that text – memory.

Many chapters in this publication question the validity of previous research and re-evaluate Grass in light of *Peeling the Onion* and the debate surrounding the author’s confession of having been a member of the *Waffen-SS*. Newer publications by Günter Grass such as *Peeling the Onion* or his poetic reaction to the discussion about that particular text – *Dummer August* (2007) – are discussed and related to previous work. Furthermore, previous literary texts and speeches by Günter Grass have been re-read and re-analyzed in the context of the recently discovered facts about his past. In this respect, the publication offers new perspectives on both Grass’s previous works and the scholarship on those works.

Unfortunately, some fields of research such as Günter Grass and music (see for example the dissertation by Anselm Weyer) and Grass’s diary from 1990, *Unterwegs von Deutschland nach Deutschland* (2009), were not discussed.

*The Cambridge Companion to Günter Grass* fulfills its aims of giving an overview on Günter Grass’s life, work and dedication to politics, as well as offering “a choice of perspectives and thereby the possibility of real engagement with the ongoing and ever-mutating project of exploring what Grass is” (2). However, if detailed information or in-



depth analysis is required, the reader needs to refer to publications on specific research areas on Günter Grass to complement their research. Overall, this is a much-needed introductory text to Günter Grass, especially for students.

*Alice Mazurek, University of Limerick*

---

JULI ZEH. *Corpus Delicti. Ein Prozess*. Frankfurt am Main: Schöffling & Co., 2009. 264 S. € 19.90

---

Die Schriftstellerin und Juristin Juli Zeh, der bereits mit ihrem 2001 erschienen Debüt *Adler und Engel* ein in 28 Sprachen übersetzter Bestseller gelang, legt nun mit *Corpus Delicti. Ein Prozess* ihren vierten Roman vor. Die zweifache Profession Zehs – sie studierte am Deutschen Literaturinstitut Leipzig und absolvierte zudem ein Studium der Rechtswissenschaften in Passau, Krakau, New York und Leipzig – spiegelt sich stets thematisch in ihren literarischen Texten wider, bewegt und befähigt Zeh jedoch auch, aktiv juristisch und politisch Einfluss auf virulente Debatten und Diskurse zu nehmen. So thematisiert *Adler und Engel* die Problematik des Völkerrechts, während der 2004 erschienene Roman *Spieltrieb* grundsätzliche rechtsphilosophische Fragen nach der objektiven Existenz von Recht und Unrecht erörtert. Im Januar 2008 wurde die Juristin tatsächlich aktiv tätig und reichte zusammen mit Frank Selbmann eine Verfassungsbeschwerde beim Bundesverfassungsgericht ein, um so gegen die Einführung des biometrischen Reisepasses in Deutschland juristisch vorzugehen. Mit ihrem neuesten Text, *Angriff auf die Freiheit: Sicherheitswahn, Überwachungsstaat und der Abbau bürgerlicher Rechte*, den sie zusammen mit Ilija Trojanow verfasst hat, bezieht sie wieder eindeutig politisch Stellung. Das in den deutschen Feuilletons äußerst lobend aufgenommene politische Engagement Zehs, das sich nicht in ihrer Verfassungsbeschwerde erschöpft, sondern sich ebenso bei ihren Podiumsdiskussionen und ihrer Unterstützung der rot-grünen-Koalition im Bundestagswahlkampf 2005 äußert, unterscheidet Zeh wohlthuend von den meisten zeitgenössischen jungen Autoren.

In *Corpus Delicti. Ein Prozess* entwirft Zeh das Szenario einer in der nahen Zukunft angesiedelten Gesundheitsdiktatur, in der die Gesundheit des Körpers oberste Priorität hat und von dem System, das Zeh die „Methode“ nennt (37), notfalls mit absoluter Gewaltausübung

---

eingefordert wird. Zehs Dystopie knüpft somit an die derzeit gefährliche Fetischisierung des Körpers und der Gesundheit an und führt diese Systemstruktur verschärfend bis zu der erzählten Welt fort und offenbart so das diktatorische Potential gegenwärtiger Entwicklungen, die mit der absoluten Setzung der ‚Prävention‘ eine Macht- und Herrschaftsfigur kreieren, deren totalitäres Potential bislang literarisch so noch nicht erfasst und diskutiert wurde. ‚Prävention‘ kann, so Zeh, von der Sorge um das Ich und um den Anderen durch eine Intensivierung der Systemstrukturen in den permanenten Ausnahmezustand führen. *Corpus Delicti. Ein Prozess* reiht sich somit strukturell und gedanklich in die Tradition der dystopischen Klassiker wie etwa 1984 oder *Brave New World* ein.

Der Text setzt mit der Schilderung einer Natur-Idylle ein, in welcher der Natur- und der Kulturraum eine harmonische Verbindung eingehen, in der Krankheit und Umweltverschmutzung überwunden sind. „[S]tillgelegte Fabriken [beherbergen] Kulturzentren [...]; hier hat eine zur Ruhe gekommene Menschheit aufgehört, die Natur und damit sich selbst zu bekämpfen“ (11). Die absolute Reinheit des vollkommenen, aseptischen Naturraums, die Ausrottung aller Krankheiten und das Verbot von giftigen Substanzen wie Nikotin und Alkohol wird von der „Methode“ rigoros kontrolliert und etwaige Verstöße gegen die Gesetze der „Methode“ werden drakonisch sanktioniert. Die gängige Begrüßungsformel „Santé!“ (15) zeigt bereits die Prämisse der erzählten Gesellschaft auf: Die Gesundheit des Körpers, die mittels der Verpflichtung zu täglichem Sporttraining und der Überprüfung sämtlicher Körperwerte von der „Methode“ eingefordert wird, ist sicherzustellen. Das Leben unterliegt einer strengen Kontrolle und Reglementierung; selbst die Liebe, die aufgrund ihrer irrationalen und unplanbaren Struktur als potentielles Gefahrenelement für die Ordnung verstanden werden muss, wird mittels der Zuteilung der potentiellen Partner anhand ihrer DNA-Profile durch eine zentrale Partnervermittlung der Kontrolle und Normierung unterworfen.

Zeh erzählt von der Auflehnung ihrer Protagonistin Mia Holl, die zunächst aufgrund kleiner Vergehen – sie hat ihren „Schlafbericht und Ernährungsbericht“ nicht eingereicht und ihr Sportprogramm vernachlässigt (18) – mit dem Rechtssystem der „Methode“ in Konflikt gerät. Im Laufe der Erzählung wird sie wegen des Selbstmordes ihres Bruders und ihrer Vermutung, dass die „Methode“ ihn ermordet hat, zur Rebellin gegen das System und kämpft schließlich für ein Recht auf Krankheit, Schmutz und Tod. Die Auflehnung gegen die sich rational und menschenfreundlich gebärdende „Methode“ führt Mia Holl

---

schließlich in den dunklen Folterkeller, in dem sie die gewaltsame Struktur der Herrschaftsfigur der ‚Prävention‘ erkennen muss, die sich somit strukturell nicht von anderen totalitären Systemen unterscheiden lässt. „Ein System ist so gut wie das andere. Das Mittelalter ist keine Epoche. Mittelalter ist der Name der menschlichen Natur“ (235).

Im Gegensatz zu den meisten dystopischen Texten versucht Zeh ihre Vision nicht aus einer diktatorischen Ideologie wie etwa dem Faschismus herzuleiten, dem Gewalt aufgrund seiner Exklusionsmechanismen per se eingeschrieben ist, sondern zeigt, wie in einem der Postmoderne verpflichteten Zeitalter das totalitäre Regime aus der Pflicht zur ‚Prävention‘ entsteht. Der Glaube an sämtliche ‚Meta-Erzählungen‘ gehört in diesem Zeitalter scheinbar der Vergangenheit an und die Menschen fühlen sich der positivistisch-rationalen Weltsicht verpflichtet, die sich auf die Erzeugung von Wohlergehen für alle beschränkt. Die „Methode“ setzt den Auflösungserscheinungen des späten 20. und frühen 21. Jahrhundert den Glauben an die Möglichkeit der allgemeinen Gesundheit entgegen – und generiert somit eine neue ‚Meta-Erzählung,‘ die sich gegen den postmodernen Pluralismus stellt und wiederum Gewalt erzeugt.

Die Offenlegung dieser Herrschaftsfigur, der Umschlag von dem derzeit diskutierten Rauchverbot in ein totalitäres Gesundheitssystem, wird von Zeh überaus überzeugend und spannend formuliert. Leider entspricht die Form des Textes nicht immer dem Inhalt; ästhetisch, so muss doch moniert werden, kann das Buch nicht immer ganz überzeugen. Dennoch lässt sich resümierend festhalten, dass Zeh mit *Corpus Delicti. Ein Prozess* ein hochaktuelles und wichtiges Buch vorgelegt hat, dass die derzeitigen Diskurse zur staatlichen Kontrolle, zur Biopolitik und zur Gesundheitspolitik literarisch aufgreift, weiterentwickelt und auf den diskutierten absoluten Fluchtpunkt der Entwicklung bezieht.

*Immanuel Nover, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn*

---





