

Review

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by Karin Tebben

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books should find their way into all libraries covering nineteenth-century German theatre history.

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

W. E. YATES

*Deutschsprachige Schriftstellerinnen des Fin de siècle*. Ed. by KARIN TEBBEN. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft. 1999. vii + 350 pp. DM 58.

Publication timing (December 1999) was outstanding, choice of subjects, despite the omission of the dramatist Elsa Bernstein, equally impressive. Karin Tebben surveys the essays within the context of the dichotomy between realism and Naturalism as manifestations of the external appearances and internal realities of women in bourgeois society. She shows how violent descriptions by women writers served to highlight often hidden cruelty. The influence of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Stirner is assessed, together with the phenomenon of nervous illness particularly among women who sought a new identity through writing or art. Against Ernst Mach's infamous dictum 'Das Ich ist unrettbar', writing emerges as a way towards a more fulfilling, often ecstatic form of existence. Tebben pinpoints the essential concerns of women writers at the turn of the century as sexuality, marriage, motherhood, education and career. She further formulates their underlying basic problem as: 'War "Weiblichkeit" eine naturgegebene Eigenschaft der Frau oder eine kulturelle Konstruktion?' (p. 20).

Typification by men of woman as *femme fragile* or *femme fatale* provoked nearly all women writers to construct alternative models free from threats of violence and domination. Indeed, one aim of the book as a whole is to correct traditional, often partial interpretations of their works, as in Katharina von Hammerstein's presentation of Franziska zu Reventlow as someone who used her personal experiences as an unmarried mother to engage with contemporary political and social issues. Another example is Eva Borst's discussion of the real significance of the prostitute-novels *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen* by Margaret Böhme (1905) and *Der heilige Skarabäus* by Else Jerusalem (1909). The problem of hysteria as a sign of both female sexuality and suppression of the subconscious focuses the frustration of women, especially women writers, faced by aesthetic laws and traditions reflecting male attitudes. The categorizing influence of Otto Weininger's *Geschlecht und Charakter* (1903) prolonged well into the twentieth century the idealized portrayal of motherhood found in Lou Andreas-Salomé's *Ma. Ein Porträt* (1901). Tebben cites such writers as Hedwig Dohm, Helene Stöcker, Helene Lange, Helene Böhlau and Gabriele Reuter, each reacting against such male type-casting. In examining *Heimatkunst*, a term applied to the works of Enrica von Handel-Mazzetti and Clara Viebig, she also reveals other influences such as Langbehn's *Rembrandt als Erzieher*. That Tebben finishes her introduction with the advent of Expressionism may seem a touch artificial. Nevertheless she amply proves the need to reconsider in detail many of the writers discussed in this volume.

Elke-Maria Clauss corrects traditional views on Lou Andreas-Salomé by emphasizing her role in social gatherings as registered in both her letters and literary writings. Her *Feuilletons*, particularly from 1880 to 1918, and her three monographs on Nietzsche, Rilke and Freud are understood to have included 'Echostruktur' (p. 61) as forms of dialogue, each with their own selective reflection of the great men she encountered. Gabriele Wagner-Zereini highlights the dualism between autonomy and dependence between men and women recorded in Ida Boy-Ed's novels. Her works on Charlotte von Kalb, Charlotte von Stein and Germaine de Staël insist on specific female views on life and society and underscore her refusal, as in her

novels, to let woman accept the role of victim. Alyth F. Grant examines the way from blue-stocking to a form of motherhood through which self-identity might be achieved in the example of Helene Böhlau. The temptation to categorize her works as conservative or feminist is avoided, and problems such as spiritual as opposed to sexual betrayal appear as part of the narrative rather than topics for preaching. Grant uses *Das Haus zur Flamm* (1907) as an example of Böhlau's maturer writing, where Marianne has overcome the Nietzschean enthusiasm expressed in *Halbtier!* (1899) and become a 'Künstlerin der Seele' (p. 109).

Margarete Böhme's *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen*, according to Eva Borst, exemplifies the life of a whole generation of women doomed never to achieve self-identity and thought independent of a male-dominated world. Prostitution provides the requisite signs of 'Körperlosigkeit' and 'Sprachlosigkeit' (p. 119). The 700 pages of Else Jerusalem's *Der heilige Skarabäus* were seen on publication to be more outrageous than any similar work written by a man and are treated as a foil to Helene Stöcker, the only other feminist of the time to publish openly on the problems of female sexuality and prostitution.

Gabry Pailer chooses from Hedwig Dohm's extensive literary production *Werde, die du bist* (1894), a *Novelle*, and the novel *Sibilla Dalmar* (1896). In the *Novelle* she finds in the isolated Agnes Schmidt a forerunner of poststructuralist models, whereas the novel portrays a whole society through the emptiness of the central figure's existence. Here the cultural norm depends on an asymmetric division of roles between man and woman. A projection of the male comprehension of female sexuality is rejected in favour of her identification as loving mother.

Helmut Koopmann puts down Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach's writings with undisguised contempt, by contrasting them with achievements by other contemporary writers. He complains of her 'Gartenlaubenstil' (p. 165), mediocrity (p. 176) and superficiality (p. 178). 'Was ihr fehlte, war Selbstkritik, Schreibkritik, Kritik an einer Prosa, die uns heute nicht nur an einigen Stellen so maßlos kitschig erscheinen will' (p. 178).

Maria Janitschek's fifty-five books receive more favourable treatment by Theresia Klusberger and Sigrid Schmidt-Bortenschlager, who claim they should not be referred back automatically to their author. Irony, ambivalence, intertextuality and narrative distance characterize a set of variations on the underlying theme: the problematics of self-realization. Equally positive are Minna Kautsky's works, examined by Heidi Margrit Müller under the rubric of social criticism and hope for the future. Her little-known biography is sketched in, including the joint creation and production with her husband and son of the drama *Atlantic-Pacific-Compagnie. Original Spectakel-Stück in 10 Bildern* (1878) on the struggle between two companies for the contract to build the Panama Canal. Her criticisms of Austrian society and of the vogue for Schopenhauer's pessimism are not only early examples of working-class literature or *Heimatkunst*, but also well-researched early documentary literature.

Isolde Kurz's mocking of religion is seen by Sandra Singer as a reason for critical rejection. The contrasting position of the Swedish writer Ellen Key as an outspoken champion of women's rights redefines Kurz's attitude towards marriage as a social contract. She accepts differences between man and woman, yet rejects any relationships not leading to that ideal. Her involvement with National Socialist ideas is not avoided, but used to point up the differences between her earlier success with *Florentiner Novellen* (1890) and works on the Renaissance, now criticized for her praise of conservative views on woman's role in family and society (see also the novel *Vanadis*, 1931). Her works are finally summed up as a 'Kulturdokument ihrer Zeit' (p. 228) because they developed no clear stand against Nazi ideology.

Similarly, the works of Enrica Handel-Mazzetti emerge as a 'Spiegel der Zeit' (p. 245) at the end of Bernhard Doppler's examination of critics' contrary views. Once seen as a contender for the Nobel Prize alongside Thomas Mann, she was also castigated for her over-emphasis on frustrated sexuality. Tensions within a monastery in *Meinrad Helmpersers denkwürdiges Jahr* (1900) and the Reformation background to *Jesse und Maria* (1906) elicited incomprehension among Catholic critics, yet problems of church-going communities in both novels rang true among Catholic readers. Doppler pinpoints problems of critics under the thrall of their own anti-Semitic or anti-liberal views when faced by such engaged literature.

Ricarda Huch's huge oeuvre is assessed by Ortrud Gutjahr first as Neoromanticism, later as the product of a writer outside the literary mainstream. She combined historical biographies and philosophical convictions alongside her study on Romanticism as an anthropological model in relation to modernism. This led her to formulate new ideas on the ancient world as a necessary transitional stage towards modernism, for her a radical offshoot of Romanticism. She marked out her position separate from most feminists in her views on *Nervenkunst*, seeing works by Hofmannsthal and Altenberg as a new feminization of style. Thus, Gutjahr claims, Huch redefined the division of male and female.

Karin Tebben identifies the components of Gabriele Reuter's works as the sufferings of bourgeois women unable to construct lives in answer to their own needs, the search for their inner spiritual autonomy, the interchange between perspectives from inner and outer worlds, also a deep-rooted humour. She analyses in detail the central figures of Reuter's novels, including the rare male positive example in *Der Amerikaner* (1907) and leading up to *Ins neue Land* (1916) where she used Expressionism in style and situation. Later works appear as throwbacks to her earlier style, hence by the 1930s out of fashion, condemning her to be forgotten.

Katharina von Hammerstein concentrates on Franziska von Reventlow's transformation in her writings from personal experience towards politically subversive statements, noting already in *Ellen Olesjerne* (1903) 'ein juristisch-politischer Wortschatz' (p. 292). That she earned her living as a translator and wrote herself into feminist debates on the strength of her own personal struggles, even as an occasional prostitute, is used to support the claim that she was an eminently political writer, in contradiction to the views of many earlier critics. She considered herself as activist rather than feminist, being suspicious of bourgeois women's views, and seeing marriage as a hindrance to full expression of eroticism, in this respect coming close to the views of Helene Stöcker.

'Nicht nur *Die Waffen nieder!*' is the title of Edelgard Biedermann's study of Bertha von Suttner, narrating her life, her astonishing meeting with Alfred Nobel, her extensive study of works by Darwin, Buckle, Strauss and Renan, and writing of some forty books and countless essays. Themes from Naturalism gave way to a series of 'Gedankenwerke' (p. 323) dealing with specific contemporary problems. After the international success of *Die Waffen nieder!* (1889) Suttner wrote to stave off bankruptcy, while in her memoirs her background of late nineteenth-century aristocracy sets off her support for new social ideas. Biedermann points to the concentration on one central figure in her novels as a weakness, along with the lack of sub-plots and different social strata, and the use of characters of little depth that merely represent ideas.

Social compassion defines the work of Clara Viebig in the final essay by Hermann Gelhaus. The lack of development in her *Novellen* and twenty-seven novels is noted, yet Gelhaus distinguishes four phases: works based on her early life, others inspired by her experience of reading Zola, the series of novels about life in Berlin, and a

series of historical novels. Her final seventeen years of silence are attributed not to a Nazi ban on publication, but to Viebig's knowledge that she had outlived her time as a writer. Her debts to Naturalism and to *Heimatkunst* are carefully assessed and the need for a thorough examination of her women figures is explained. That she showed society from below in a development of the nineteenth-century *Gesellschaftsroman* justifies renewed interest in her works.

This book is a most important survey of writers whose social impact also belongs to any modern history of German literature. To avoid them is to leave out a dimension and bypass many problems that still engage more than half of the serious reading public. The editor is to be praised for bringing together a set of essays that reflect the variety and fervour of works by German women writers one hundred years ago. Future researchers will find here a wealth of information and views demanding reappraisal. The book still to be written on forgotten German women dramatists would make a suitable companion volume.

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BRIAN KEITH-SMITH

*Approaches to Personal Identity in Kafka's Short Fiction: Freud, Darwin, Kierkegaard.* By LEENA EILITTÄ. Helsinki: Finnish Academy of Sciences. 1999. 227 pp. 120 FMK.

For more than half a century, industrious minds have unpicked every thread in Kafka's work, evaluated each word he used, and upturned every stone on the path he trod. If Valerie Greenberg can uncover parallels between such apparently ill-matched figures as Kafka and Max Planck, then the author's debt to Freudian psychoanalysis, Social Darwinism, and Kierkegaard's religious-existential philosophy should provide an easy brief. The challenge is to find a new purchase on the rock-face. Like so many publications of its type, the book is a close derivative of its author's doctoral thesis, originally researched at the University of Oxford.

Kafka's experience of identity is the point of departure. Acknowledging a debt to Erik Erikson, Leena Eilittä sets out to broaden the definition of the author's 'identity' to include 'the social reality around him', with the ensuing aim of demonstrating that the 'wide-ranging historical and cultural changes, which took place during Kafka's life-time, contributed to the fact that Kafka felt a particular need to elaborate ideas about personal identity into his fiction'. (p. 9) This is a task that would make demands on any postgraduate's abilities. In the book of the thesis, nine pages must suffice for 'Political and Cultural Crises in the Late Habsburg Empire', with valuable space being allocated to photographs of Vienna's *Ringstraße* and *Burgtheater* as they were when Kafka was aged five. R. D. Laing is wheeled in to remind us that 'a human being who throughout his life poses profound questions about himself and his relationship to the world suffers from a deep ontological insecurity'.

After these preliminaries, it comes as something of a relief to find oneself examining the texts themselves. Eilittä begins promisingly with *Beschreibung eines Kampfes*, a text that has produced some confusion among the experts. But in these twenty pages, little is achieved beyond the demonstration of motifs typical of *fin-de-siècle* decadence and the critique of culture.

The impression is of a determined attempt to locate the author within specific temporal and cultural coordinates. The background is well researched; Eilittä builds up a compelling picture of how Kafka came to know his Darwin and Freud. But Kafka's distinctiveness is lost in a tangled maze of analogies. His style is characterized as 'quite similar' to that of contemporaries such as Peter Altenberg,