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Stefan Heym: Die Schmähchrift oder die Königin gegen Defoe

Richard Zipser
Oberlin College

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with her practice. In this moment of truth the past appears as hypocrisy, a lie, the bonds of marriage and forced fidelity as crippling and senseless self-castigation ("Verzicht und Selbstkasteiung"). Knowing the student/mermaid has broken down his wall of security and self-assuredness, black and white categories yield to doubt and reevaluation ("...ich habe meine Sicherheit eingetauscht" (60), "Ich erfahre hier aber nur immer neue Ungewissheiten" (89)). The imperturbable male has become the vulnerable human.

Panitz seems to have had trouble (either from within or without) accepting the ethics of so much hedonistic individualism and abandoning responsibility for sexual pleasure. He has built up an elaborate network of moral justifications to vindicate his hero. We learn, for instance, that his wife before him had once taken off for Cape Pizunda and couldn't be reached even when her mother died; furthermore, the professor is clearly not the initiator of the affair, but is seduced while inebriated by his student, whom he imagines to be a mermaid he hooked while innocently fishing one evening; as theoretical support for all that abandon, Panitz even arms his hero with a moral affirmation of the pleasure principle in the words of Spinoza, whose Mathematik der Moral the student/mermaid happens to find under her professor's bed.

The book does not offer a utopian glimpse at what a relationship between the sexes might look like, as the first chapter almost leads one to hope. Nor does it depict woman as anything more than a nymph, a fantastic vehicle to man's self-knowledge and personal growth. Nor is the imagery terribly subtle (most obviously the water metaphors: risk-taking as diving into cool water, or breaking away from the familiar solid world as plunging into the water world: "Sprung ins Ungewisse" (120)). To the feminist reader, to the intellectual reader, the book cannot help but be somewhat disappointing. However, the problem of repressive marital relationships based on fear, possessiveness, jealousy, self-denial ("eingesargte Wünsche" (100) is one which continues to have relevance -- perhaps particularly in the socialist countries.

Karen Achberger
St. Olaf College

Die Schmähschrift oder die Königin gegen Defoe. By Stefan Heym. Berlin: Buchverlag der Morgen. 1978. 90 pp. 8,80 M.

Published first in English under the title The Queen Against Defoe (1970), Stefan Heym's short prose work did not appear in the GDR until 1978. Still, given the restrictive cultural-political climate that prevailed after the "expatriation" of dissident author Wolf Biermann in November 1976, it is remarkable that Heym's story was ever approved for publication in his own country.

Die Schmähschrift recounts Daniel Defoe's clash with nobility and clergy during the reign of Queen Anne following the anonymous publication of his pamphlet, The Shortest Way with the Dissenters (1702). Appearing to support the English Establishment in the most exaggerated terms, Defoe satirized the extremist position of many high churchmen and Tories on the question of how to deal with religious dissent. Unfortunately, the trenchant humor in his treatment of this ecclesiastical/political problem was lost on most readers, and the anonymous author was denounced as an enemy of Church and State. When Defoe's identity was discovered, a reward was offered for information leading to his capture, and after several months he was apprehended. At the Old Bailey trial Defoe's defense was poorly managed, and he was persuaded to plead guilty. Consequently, he was fined 200 marks, condemned to be pilloried three times, and sentenced to indefinite imprisonment. His exposure in the pillory, however, was more a triumph than a physical punishment or public humiliation, for the people (aroused in Heym's account by Defoe's recitation of passages from his Hymn to the Pillory) took his side and protected him from bodily harm. Heym's historical novella is concerned chiefly with the role of literature and the problems facing writers in states which attempt to restrict artistic freedom. Not only is Defoe portrayed as a pillar of strength in the battle against his oppressors, but he is also shown to achieve that elusive socialist goal -- the solidarity of proletariat and intellectuals -- through his courageous defiance of the Establishment. Told in a manner reminiscent of the early 18th century, and based on the notes of the fictitious police agent Josiah Creech, Heym's tale has the ring of authenticity. In fact, it sounds so convincing that a professor of English at a well-known American university once asked Heym to help him locate

the original Creech manuscript, as he had been unable to find any reference to it through libraries.

Like Defoe some three centuries ago, Heym has not shied away from political conflict and controversy, and he, too, has preferred to suffer the consequences rather than compromise himself as a writer. His first confrontation with the authorities came in 1931 because of an anti-imperialistic poem he wrote while a high school student in Chemnitz. This poem, an attack on General von Seeckt who was sending German officers to China to instruct Chiang Kai-shek's army, led to a public denunciation of Heym and his expulsion from school. More recently, following the publication in the West of his novel Collin (1979), which loyalist GDR writers described as "anti-communist rubbish," Heym found himself in trouble with the ruling Socialist Unity Party. Facing prosecution for alleged currency offences, he wrote to me in late April of 1979: "If you've been following the news, you may have noticed that there's trouble brewing in this place -- I am going to be prosecuted on a trumped-up charge of violation of foreign currency rules, in reality, because I refused to ask the GDR authorities for permission to have my books printed abroad if they're forbidden here. I refer you to Schmähschrift -- it's all told there."

Richard A. Zipser
Oberlin College

Jenseits der Allee. Geschichten. Von Beate Morgenstern. Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag. 1979. 198 Seiten. 5,40 M.

Wie viele ihrer literarischen Generationsgefährten versteht auch Beate Morgenstern (Jg. 1946) Schreiben als Verständigungsprozess mit sich selbst und mit anderen, dabei das Ziel verfolgend, Erfahrungen zu übertragen und in den Erfahrungsbestand anderer Menschen gleichsam als deren eigenes Erleben zu überführen. In den Geschichten der Debütantin herrscht die Offenheit eines Blicks ins Leben, der nur individuelle Befindlichkeiten ausbreiten, nicht aber zu Resultaten kommen will und sich der Schürzung und Lösung des Knotens gänzlich enthält. Das Fragmentarische, Unausgetragene begreift sie als essentielles Moment

gelebten Lebens, sie erhebt nicht den Anspruch, sich selbst und die Welt mit dem ästhetischen Schein austragbarer Konstellationen zu umkleiden. Ihre Neugierde erregen Menschen, deren Tüchtigkeit und menschlicher Wert nicht auffällig zutage treten, deren Leben sie aber groß und erzählenswert findet. Ihr Interesse am Biographischen bewirkt so ihre Affinität zum literarischen Porträt, das wie ein Seismograph Veränderungen der gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit in den Individualgeschichten zu registrieren vermag. Auch scheinbar geringfügige Konflikte werden auf ihren Zusammenhang mit der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung und mit umfassenderen Lebensprozessen untersucht. Unter der Oberfläche eines alltäglichen Geschehens und Lebensflusses vermag die Autorin Werte zu entdecken, die die Unentbehrlichkeit der "kleinen Leute" im realen Sozialismus sinnfällig machen.

Jenseits der Allee, in ihren Altbauwohnungen, mit dem Blick auf den Hinterhof, leben sie, die Jungen und die Alten, mit ihren Wünschen und Hoffnungen, ihren Ängsten und Zweifeln, ihren Einsichten und Absichten, ihrer Verzweiflung und ihrem Verstricktsein in das, was man durchweg Schicksal nennt, und auch mit ihrem Mut und ihrer Zuversicht in die Überwindung - aber selbst da endet das betroffene Nachdenken nicht.

Da rafft sich der erfolglose Pianist Renzoni nach sechs Jahrzehnten sinn- und nutzloser Existenz noch einmal zu einer neuen Lebensleistung auf, und es gelingt ihm, 90 Jahre alt zu werden. Erst dann heißt es: "Er brauchte nie mehr aufzustehen und durfte es sich leisten, vom Leben auszuruhen." Die alte Gemüse-Erna kämpft um ihre Kriegerwitwenrente, die ihr deshalb verweigert wird, weil ihr Mann nicht an der Front gefallen war, sondern sich selbst den Tod gegeben hatte, als er in den Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion ziehen sollte. "Wenn sie nicht mal Hermanns Witwe wäre, was bliebe dann von ihm." Die Begegnung zwischen einem jungen Mädchen und einem älteren, verheirateten Mann endet nicht im Klischee einer banalen Liebesgeschichte, sondern findet ihre Erfüllung gerade in der moralischen Grenze, die ihnen Alter, Verantwortung, Bindung und unterschiedliche Erfahrung auferlegen.