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Anke Biendarra. Germans Going Global: Contemporary Literature and Cultural Globalization. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2012. x + 244 pp.

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Abstract

Review of Anke Biendarra. *Germans Going Global: Contemporary Literature and Cultural Globalization*. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2012. x + 244 pp.

Keywords

German literature, globalization

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Anke Biendarra's innovative study *Germans Going Global: Contemporary Literature and Cultural Globalization* (2012) examines a topic that, as she states herself, "has come rather slowly to German Studies" (7): globalization. Her book is a first attempt at closing the gap in understanding how globalization affects German literature. Biendarra emphasizes the exploration of the "aesthetic production" (7) of literature from both a global and local perspective, an orientation that she, borrowing from Roland Robertson, describes as *glocal*. Biendarra begins her ambitious project after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a choice she justifies by arguing that globalization arrived in full force with the *Wende* (era of German unification) and has been impacting German culture and literature ever since (10).

Germans Going Global is divided into six chapters, a division based on Arjun Appadurai's "five different global cultural 'flows'" (13) or *-scapes*: technoscape, financescape, mediascape, ideoscape, and ethnoscape. These metaphors work well as structuring categories. In her first chapter, for instance, Biendarra uses both Appadurai's concepts of media- and technoscape to explore "how global forces have impacted the production and material dissemination of literature and led to discussions in Germany's lively public sphere about the very significance of literary culture in a globalized world" (14). The chapter focuses on the literary marketplace and on strategies that authors, particularly young authors, employ to create a marketable image in order to promote their literary works successfully. Chapter Two depicts a whole array of recent literary debates and discourses "about the future of German-language literature" since the 1990s. Biendarra explores various literary trends such as *Neue Lesbarkeit*, or "a focus on consumption and popular culture" (15), and detects a new tendency herself, which she calls "the authentic everyday . . . as a sign of an increasingly glocalized literature" (15). Chapters Three and Four are devoted to the New Economy in Germany, its recent downfall, the impact new economic practices have on ethical behavior of big corporations, and the relentless decrease in job opportunities. In her literary analyses, Biendarra identifies an increasing frustration among authors with the German job market and ultimately with globalization, ranging from the sometimes unbearable stresses of high-profile jobs, feelings of insecurity and uncertainty, and a sense of heightened anxiety due to one's seeming unemployability. Chapter Five, which explores travel and mobility or a lack thereof in the last twenty years, portrays globalization in a fairly critical light, too. As in Chapters Three and Four, Biendarra comes to the rather discouraging conclusion that "[w]hile stable liaisons offer a network of support in a global

society characterized by increased mobility and homogeneity, they are not immune to the gripping global forces that leave human beings, in Anthony Giddens's words, 'fraught with anxieties'" (152). Chapter Six serves as a coda and takes a brief look at the impact that September 11, 2001 had on German authors and their attempts to come to terms aesthetically with an event that defies all descriptions. A brief summary of all her findings serves as a final conclusion and ends the book nicely.

Published as part of the de Gruyter series "Interdisciplinary German Cultural Studies," Biendarra's work brings together a host of theories from different academic subjects that clearly go beyond the traditional field of *Germanistik*. Biendarra covers a plethora of materials, providing her readers with a comprehensive overview of the literary activities of the 1990s and the new millennium. Each chapter discusses a literary trend caused by or closely connected to globalization. While these topics are undoubtedly broad, Biendarra does not make sweeping generalizations, but carefully examines each of her topics and presents her findings in great detail. For instance, in Chapter Three, "Brave New Work World: Narratives of the New Economy," Biendarra not only provides her readers with a wide variety of literary narratives that deal with the workforce on a broader basis, but also delves into in-depth discussions of Joachim Bessing's *Wir Maschine* (2001), Rainer Merkel's *Das Jahr der Wunder* (2001), John von Düffel's *EGO* (2001) and Kathrin Röggla's *wir schlafen nicht* (2004). Some of these selected, of course, would have benefitted from a more thorough analysis, but doing so would have taken the book beyond the scope of its 200 pages. Thus, with satisfying analyses throughout, Biendarra paints a nuanced picture of the early decades of the newly established German Republic.

It becomes clear that Biendarra's study is only a first attempt at the rather overwhelming intersection of German Studies and globalization that invites other scholars to engage with the topic and expand it in multiple directions. Biendarra is clearly aware of her role as pioneer and deliberately mentions the book's limitations, be it the complete absence of transnational literature or its rather precursory study of travel writing that, as she readily admits, "could have provided material for a separate study" (152). However, Biendarra's book has to be viewed as a landmark for many others to come and displays many more strengths than weaknesses. Last but not least, Biendarra's *Germans Going Global* could serve as a guide for teaching globalization within a German context in the classroom. The structure of the respective chapters would lend itself well for different course units during which some of the examined authors could be discussed in more detail and supplemented by readings from the authors that Biendarra only mentions in passing. Overall, *Germans Going Global* is a well-

researched and very convincing piece of work that may hopefully be the beginning of a long line of future investigations.

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