

1988

Arlene A. Teraoka: The Silence of Entropy or Universal Discourse: The Postmodernist Poetics of Heiner Müller

Herbert A. Arnold
Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/gdr>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

Arnold, Herbert A. (1988) "Arlene A. Teraoka: The Silence of Entropy or Universal Discourse: The Postmodernist Poetics of Heiner Müller," *GDR Bulletin*: Vol. 14: Iss. 1. <https://doi.org/10.4148/gdrb.v14i1.848>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *GDR Bulletin* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

correct department, the rules had to be bent slightly to accommodate the unusual nature of the birth.

Other such bureaucratic idiosyncrasies occur when Marietta tries to re-enter the country with her baby and also when she tries to claim the money owed her for being a mother. She cannot receive this money because, although she has her baby as proof of motherhood, there are no medical records verifying the pregnancy.

Lothar Hörnicke takes a rather simple story, the premise for which was a dream, and develops an interesting juxtaposition of dream and reality and manages to poke fun at some of the more ridiculous bureaucratic maneuvers of the GDR. Hörnicke manages to criticize without causing his novel to become tedious critique.

Carol Anne Costabile
Washington University

Geschichte der Deutschen Literatur - vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart, 1918-1980, Band III. Hrsg. Viktor Zmegac, Athenäum, Königstein/Ts., 1984. 876 S.

The concluding book in Viktor Zmegac's three volume history of German literature covers the period 1918 to 1980. The third volume is divided into six sections providing analyses of the various epochs and literary trends in the different German-speaking countries since 1945. The chapter on GDR literature, upon which this review will focus, was written by John Milfull.

Milfull, like the other authors on their respective fields, offers not only a thematic overview of specific trends but also individual interpretations of exemplary works. He begins his study with the early years of the GDR and the questions facing the literary "Remigranten." Their primary concern, the establishment of a socialist-oriented literature, is considered with regard to Milfull's four "Geburtshelfer" of the GDR literary tradition: Anna Seghers, Bertold Brecht, Eduard Claudius, and Stephan Heym. Although sharing a basic fundamental approach, each of the authors represents a

unique position and/or concept, and the plurality of their methods significantly shaped subsequent literary trends. Milfull is correct in pointing to the gradual "Entdogmatisierungsprozeß" in GDR writing which, in spite of several setbacks in the 60s, proved to be a central element in establishing a productive literature. Moreover, Milfull does not limit his analysis to an overview of literary genres and representative names. Instead he focuses on the writer and his or her audience and examines "wirkungsästhetische Probleme bei Lyrik, Drama und erzählender Prosa." His approach is convincing for he sees literature within the overall context of "Kulturpolitik der DDR" and in its relationship to the working class population. Furthermore, he never loses sight of theoretical concerns and the oft-occurring contradictions resulting from putting theory into practice. In terms of "Rezeption," Milfull recognizes one distinction within the genres, namely that while novels and theater pieces are received quite differently in East and West, GDR poetry seems immune from such distinguishing traits. Thus poets such as Bobrowski, Kunert, Kunze, and Kirsch enjoy what can be termed a "gesamtdeutsche Leserschaft."

Another strength of Milfull's contribution is his depiction of the literary climate in the GDR, in particular his exposition of the first Bitterfelder Konferenz (1959) and the resultant literary maxims. Finally, the interpretations of works by numerous authors (e.g. Seghers, Brecht, Wolf, Neutsch, Kant, Strittmatter, Hermlin, Müller, Braun, Plenzdorf, Hacks, Morgner, Mickel) provide detailed commentary illustrative of overriding trends in GDR literature.

Greg Divers
Washington University/Frei Universität Berlin

The Silence of Entropy or Universal Discourse: The Postmodernist Poetics of Heiner Müller. By Arlene A. Teraoka. New York University Ottendorfer Series. Neue Folge Band 21. New York: Peter Lang, 1985. 240 pp.

In Kuhnian terms most dissertations are "normal science," i.e. the detailed demonstration of generally

established views, using familiar models. Rarely, if ever, does one expect a dissertation to break new ground and establish new rules. Ms. Teraoka's book is one of those rare cases. Making judicious use of the Frankfurt School's critique of the Enlightenment and of Peter Szondi's theory of modern drama, she undertakes a successful analysis of Heiner Müller's project of deconstruction as presented in his major and most difficult plays of the 1970s, Leben Gundlings, Hamletmaschine, and Auftrag. After first establishing some of Müller's aesthetic ideas relevant for this period of his dramatic writing, Teraoka provides some brilliant and convincing readings. She argues that Müller's main concern in these plays is the deconstruction of authority and privilege, of the artist in society, of Europe in the world, of paternalistic and oppressive structures everywhere. With close attention to the text and Müller's poetics she shows his critique of the Enlightenment, bourgeois models of drama and teleological history in Leben Gundlings. Hamletmaschine extends this critique by focusing both on the betrayal of the revolutionary impulse by the intellectual who knows but does not act on his knowledge and on the anti-rational revolutionary counterforce represented by Ophelia and sexuality. The failure of reason and teleology in history, of Lessing and Hegel, of bourgeois perceptions, necessitates a new view of history and of the conflicts between men and women, fathers and sons, revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries, oppressors and oppressed. In Der Auftrag the scope widens to include the now also superceded Brechtian model of the socialist Lehrstück judged in the light of the world-wide conflicts between a Third World consciousness of otherness and oppression and European modes of thinking, exploitation, privilege and betrayal of the utopia of revolution.

While Teraoka does not establish them herself, anyone familiar with Müller's earlier work will detect connections, e.g. to Philoktet, which is illuminated by the concept of betrayal of the revolutionary impulse. She also raises many questions requiring further exploration. For instance, is it possible to insist on a postmodernist openness to interpretation, the universal discourse of the title, and be politically relevant in actual historical terms? This question may also be a

useful, non-polemical restatement of the old accusation levelled against Müller that his plays are "geschichtspessimistisch." Teraoka, it appears, is perhaps more sanguine about the chances for a revolution of the oppressed Third World, based on the models of Lautreamont, Artaud, and Fanon, than Müller himself seems to indicate in his plays.

One may also want to draw some of the conclusions which Teraoka tactfully leaves to the reader about the betrayal of Marx and socialist utopia in various peoples' democracies around the world, an issue which masks the very real question whether permanent revolution is either possible or desirable in historical actuality rather than in the theories of intellectuals, the authors of drama or political essays. It will also be necessary to investigate the nature of the relationship of reason and revolt, especially if the latter appears in the shape of unreason which may also be Fascism, or just revolt for no particular end, creating a new and different form of oppression.

In short, this is a seminal book for Müller studies. It provides some very convincing readings for his most difficult plays and raises serious issues, especially in light of his most recent play, Wolokolomsker Chaussee, in which he returns to a post-Stalinist Lehrstück model, i.e. a post-Brechtian one. No future work on Müller can be taken seriously that does not engage this genuinely important book, nor can any future discussion of postmodernism proceed without it.

Herbert A. Arnold
Wesleyan University

Über die Fähigkeit zu trauern. Das Bild der Wandlung im Prosawerk von Christa Wolf und Franz Fühmann. Von Uwe Wittstock. Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1987. 218 S., DM 48.00.

Dieses Buch ist, im Jahre der Kontroverse um die faschistische Vergangenheit des österreichischen Bundespräsidenten Waldheim, ein zeitgerechtes Buch, das Beachtung und eingehende Lektüre verdient. Es befaßt sich mit dem--nunmehr etwas abgegriffenen--