Norbert Eke: Heiner Müller. Apokalypse und Utopie

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Overall, the section on Schiller’s poetry is the least satisfactory. Neither Johan Golcz nor Günter Mieh refer to Theodore Ziolkowski’s The Classical German Elegy (1980) in their examinations of “Spaziergang.” And it is evident that Schiller’s poems, unlike his dramas, have quite fallen out of fashion. Taken as a whole, the volume is a benchmark of the state of Schiller scholarship to the mid 1980’s, internationally as well as in the GDR. The reception of Schiller has always registered the shifts in German political history, and it will be interesting to observe whether and how the changed conditions in the GDR will affect the discourse on Schiller and on Weimar Klassik. One might speculate, for example, that Schiller’s fascination with conspiracy and intrigue in the making of historical events might now be discussed more openly. It may also be possible to move away from a dogmatic insistence upon Schiller as an unassailable beacon of the humanistic tradition and to see some of the authoritarian implications of his position.

The book has been carefully printed. It has an index of names and of references to Schiller’s texts, which will enhance its durability as a standard volume.

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The nine chapters of Norbert Eke’s volume on Heiner Müller (a shorter version of his dissertation for Paderborn) provide insightful commentary on Müller’s aesthetics as well as interpretive readings of six plays (Der Auftrag 1979, Quartett 1980, Verkommenes Ufer Medeamaterial Landschaft mit Argonauten 1982, Bildbeschreibung 1984, Wolokolamsker Chaussee (1 and II) 1984-85, and the classic, Hamletmaschine 1977).

Focusing primarily on various aspects of the problem of Erinnerung, this analysis responds to most of the traditional directions of thought in Müller scholarship. Eke gives his own mark of originality to some of the much discussed topics—such as Müller’s theory of theater, his relationship to the concept of revolution—by sometimes veering from a generally accepted argument (e.g. downplaying the aesthetic heritage of Artaud). Although Eke’s analysis displays a firm background in critical theory, his discussion might have benefited from consideration of Ingeborg Hoesterey’s definitive work on the subject, Verschlungene Schriftzeichen (1988).

It is hardly a critique to claim that Eke’s work suffers only from having been concluded too soon, i.e. without having accounted for certain seminal studies that were published just before or simultaneously with this book. For example, the author’s brief reference to the Benjaminian concept of Eingedenken would have profited from access to Frank Hornig’s article on precisely that topic in Heiner Müller Material, ed. Hornig (1989). Similarly, Eke’s discussion of Müller’s understanding of history should have considered John Botterman’s excellent dissertation on the subject (1987). The hint of incompleteness is probably most disturbing in the chapter on Wolokolamsker Chaussee I and II. One wonders why the remaining three segments (published in 1986, 1987, and 1988: manuscripts available earlier) were not accounted for, given that the five parts were written to comprise a complete unit, and that the content of the latter three affects the interpretation of the initial two segments.

An important contribution of this volume is its bibliography, the most complete one on the works of this playwright since Marc Silberman’s Forschungsbericht of 1980. Eke’s 100-page bibliography proceeds from a list of every publication of each of Müller’s plays, followed by a comprehensive ordering of all performances according to place of production (the GDR, the FRG and other German speaking countries, and all others). Sources for critical reviews of both the publications and the stage productions are arranged chronologically. This painstaking bibliographical ordering can aid the Müller scholar in a number of ways. For example, sources for all twelve publications of Der Lohndrücker (1956) are made accessible in one handy reference. Eke’s record locates 58 reviews of this play (through 1981), which had been performed only eight times before the critically and popularly successful production of Deutsches Theater in 1988 (Berlin/GDR).

Eke’s bibliography offers a complete list of sources for Müller’s poetry, prose, speeches, essays, reviews, and journalistic writings, material which has received relatively little scholarly attention to date. One can appreciate the inclusion of less common bibliographical categories, such as Müller’s translation of plays by other writers, or his comments on his own works, in addition to a detailed section on interviews, in which Eke sometimes names every participant in a group discussion. Because the category of secondary literature is extensive but not exhaustive, Eke invites information about any overlooked reference.

Scholars will eagerly await the expanded version of this edition, which unfortunately covers works only through the autumn of 1987, just when the easing of censorship in the GDR brought five plays to the stage for the first time in that country. The subsequent period has been marked by a noticeable surge of scholarship on Müller. Of course a bibliographer cannot be held responsible for material appearing after the completion of a manuscript, but, as Eke’s book was not published until 1989, an update would have been appropriate, i.e., an appendage to the bibliography as well as an afterword for the text.

Although an occasional proofreading error can be found (e.g. 269; paragraph 2, sentence 2: the first Bek should read Müller), Eke’s elegant style makes reading this work a pleasure. This impressive volume will no doubt whet the appetite for an updated edition and for more input from Norbert Eke in the rapidly expanding body of Müller scholarship.

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This collection of revised papers from the 1987 GDR Symposium on the social, political, and cultural experience of GDR “Alltag” reminds scholars of the Endzeitstimmung present in the subtexts of the cultural artifacts of the everyday before the fall of 1989. A reading of these articles demands that GDR scholars rethink the assumptions and perceptions of GDR scholarship within the context of the events and consciousness that precipitated the dissolution of the GDR state. The articles include interpretations of the social phenomenon of Alltag either as mediated in literary and related texts, as displayed in industry and leisure time, or as interpreted in social research. The articles present an inter-disciplinary view of GDR culture.