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Literarische Aesthetik: Methoden und Modelle der Literaturwissenschaft by Peter V. Zima

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programs for children, but as “nodal” treatises that comment on Benjamin’s fundamental theoretical writings on the one hand, and as “the closest we can hope to come to the transcript of a psychoanalysis of Walter Benjamin” (5) on the other.

Organizing the radio scripts around the two most salient motifs (fraud and catastrophe) and the two main temporal divisions (childhood and maturity), Mehlman integrates literary-historical intertexts and biographical notes to highlight the centrality of these texts. The same type of “parquetry,” or “inlaid work” (36), found by Mehlman to be characteristic of Benjamin’s radio plays becomes the method of his own analysis. In one exemplary case, Mehlman’s interpretation of Benjamin’s tale of the Mississippi flooding, “Die Mississippi-Überschwemmung 1927” (broadcast in Berlin on 23 March 1932), places the script in the nexus of Benjamin’s ideas expressed in his now famous essay of 1923, “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,” and the kabbalistic notion of “the breaking of the vessels,” focusing on the prophetic bearing that this constellation has on Benjamin’s later decision to take his life in 1940. Just as Benjamin’s theory of translation affirms that the “translatability” of a work exceeds the mere “reproduction of meaning,” so too follows Mehlman’s reading of Benjamin’s “translation” of the Mississippi flood. “The Mississippi,” Mehlman argues, “with its meanders, as it appears on the map, resembles the work of art, with its subordinate complexities, and its subservience to a meaningful end” (31). Mehlman goes on to translate the script’s parable of suicide onto Benjamin’s life, thereby revealing a striking resonance, indeed a hidden aspect of Benjamin’s writing which Mehlman further investigates in his subsequent analysis of Benjamin and Primo Levi (88–97).

Beyond his discussion of fraud and catastrophe, Mehlman also pays significant attention to the cultural topography of the Berlin as it is treated in the radio plays. Here he reads three scripts from 1930, “Das dämonische Berlin,” “Ein Berliner Straßenszene,” and “Berliner Spielzeugwanderung,” noting the profound affinity between Benjamin’s discourse on the city, modernity, and urban strolling in these texts and his autobiographical reflections from *Berliner Chronik* and *Berliner Kindheit um 1900*. Weaving through the intersections of the often dense and disorienting textual space, Mehlman presents a diverse collection of critical insights for interpreting Benjamin’s

work. Whether or not one fully accepts his sometimes idiosyncratic readings, Mehlman convincingly shows that Benjamin’s radio scripts furnish “an index of the surprising depths of the thinker [Benjamin] as well as the bitter ‘enlightenment’ that children of all ages, as the cliché goes, may draw from them” (81).

In the wake of the 100th birthday celebration of Walter Benjamin in 1992, honored by international symposia, by the Suhrkamp paperback edition of his seven-volume *Gesammelte Schriften*, and by a notable spate of publications from Europe to North America, Jeffrey Mehlman’s new study introduces yet another important dimension to the still evolving Benjamin scholarship. Indeed, Mehlman presents a highly sophisticated, critical reading of a relatively unknown area of Benjamin’s literary-theoretical oeuvre. Since these mini-essays—first published in Germany in 1985 under the curious title *Aufklärung für Kinder*—have yet to reach an English readership, Mehlman’s contribution makes available new material, providing rich samples from these lesser known texts, situated in the larger context of Benjamin’s life and work.

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Zima, Peter V. *Literarische Aesthetik: Methoden und Modelle der Literaturwissenschaft*. Tübingen: Francke, 1991. 439 pp.

According to Zima, modern literary criticism oscillates between neo-Kantian and neo-Hegelian positions: the neo-Kantian or formalist elevates the autonomy of art, its modes of expression, and the artwork’s resistance to conceptualization; the neo-Hegelian, including the Marxist, embeds art in its socio-historic context and focuses on the work’s content or meaning. Zima’s introduction and first chapter delineate this overarching dichotomy. They also explore the Young-Hegelians’ resistance to Hegel’s system, including their elevation of contingency and alleged development of a negative dialectic.

Chapters 2 through 8 investigate, in sometimes a chronological order, major players in the debate between art’s *Ausdrucksebene* and *Inhaltsebene*, taking into account, where appropriate, other influences such as Nietzsche and stress-

ing the increasing elevation of dissonance in modern art and criticism. Already in chapter 1, Zima introduces Croce and American new criticism. Chapter 2 explores debates between Marxists and formalists, focusing primarily on Lukàcs and Goldmann. The third chapter studies Bakhtin, as a Young-Hegelian beyond formalism and Hegelianism, who was influenced by the neo-Hegelian Vischer. Chapter 4 discusses Benjamin's and Adorno's attempts to mediate between art's *Begriffslosigkeit* and its *Wahrheitsgehalt*. Chapter 5 focuses on Prague structuralism, above all the writings of Mukarovsky; Hegelian undercurrents are discovered in his ideas of dialectical development and totality. The sixth chapter discusses phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches, including reception theory. Chapter 7 analyzes the semiotic models of Barthes, Eco, and Greimas, and chapter 8 discusses deconstruction. The final chapter privileges a literary criticism that integrates the virtues of both neo-Kantian and neo-Hegelian perspectives and argues for an "interdiskursives Gespräch zwischen Soziolekten" (380), i.e., more reflection on the presuppositions of one's own approach and more dialogue between heterogeneous schools of criticism rather than merely within the individual schools, which tends to nurture "kollektive Vorurteile" (407).

One of the strengths of Zima's approach is his ability to see diverse schools wrestling with what are in effect common problems, the conflicting claims of art's autonomy and its truth-value. Most unusual is Zima's focus on the intellectual-historical roots of contemporary theory, which provides a useful context for current debates. Terry Eagleton's introduction to contemporary theory, in contrast, mentions Kant twice, Hegel once, and Nietzsche not at all. Zima's individual analyses are at times perceptive concerning the one-sidedness of a given approach, its internal contradictions, or both. Exemplary in this regard are his analyses of Jauss and Derrida. Zima's thesis that literary criticism should attend to production-, artwork-, and reception-aesthetics is sound, and his claim that artworks can be grasped conceptually even as these concepts cannot exhaust the works is theoretically defensible as well as commonsensical.

In studying the foundations of contemporary theory, Zima at times overlooks that he is working with a homonym. To address a theory's intellectual-historical foundations is not necessarily to address its logical-conceptual foundations. Zima

narrates a story whereby one opinion seems to supplant another, but he does not always attend to the question whether the old theory has simply been historically relinquished or theoretically refuted. In addition Zima sometimes commits the genetic fallacy, failing to recognize that the "conditions" under which a statement is true or false cannot be reduced to the "conditions" of its genesis. The sequence of analyses follows neither a historical nor a systematic development and seems partially arbitrary. In his conclusion Zima praises dialogue but admits of no means to adjudicate difference. Further, he argues for a consensus theory of truth *vis-à-vis* correspondence, not recognizing that consensus presupposes a correspondence, not of subject and object but of subject and subject.

A few critical points might be made concerning Zima's view of Hegel and neo-Hegelian aesthetics. First, to claim that Hegel elevates only content or disparages "Vieldeutigkeit" as a sign of "Unvollkommenheit" is false (198). Hegel, the dialectical thinker par excellence, sought a synthesis of form and content, not unlike Zima himself, and his evaluation of art was always informed by the categories of unity and multiplicity. Moreover, in his lectures on aesthetics Hegel comments copiously on the formal aspects of art and on contradictory tensions within individual works, such as in his theory of tragedy. Second, Zima's assertion that for Hegel art primarily serves "eine mimetische Funktion" is misleading, especially in the light of Hegel's idealism (73). Third, the claim that Hegel cannot grasp the validity of nature is absurd; indeed, only from an objective-idealist standpoint is nature valued as an externalization of reason. Fourth, Zima reduces the Young Hegelians to their critique of systematic philosophy, neglecting thereby their many attempts to rewrite the Hegelian system in order to integrate elements previously neglected. In Zima's account the Young Hegelians sound more like Rorty than Hegel. Fifth and not unrelated, Zima indiscriminately uses the term "Junghegelianer" for some very non-Hegelian thinkers such as Nietzsche and Derrida.

Finally, a few points on subject matter: The lengthy discussion of Jakobson and Mukarovsky is especially rewarding in light of their underrepresentation in many surveys of literary theory, but the complete neglect of feminist and psychoanalytic approaches can be considered major lacunae. In addition, American critics are generally underrepresented; the arguments of E. D. Hirsch

and Peter Juhl and the positions of Stanley Fish are not considered.

Although the text can be contested here and there and could also have benefitted from occasional trimming and greater clarity, it represents one of the more substantive introductions to literary theory and should provide many with a sound introduction to contemporary critical debates. It certainly belongs on the recommended readinglist of any graduate introduction to theory.

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Cremerius, Johannes, Wolfram Mauser, Carl Pietzcker, and Frederick Wyatt, eds. *Literarische Entwürfe weiblicher Sexualität*. Freiburger literaturpsychologische Gespräche 12. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1993.

The 13 essays contained in this volume were presented at the annual “psychoanalytisch-literaturwissenschaftliche Arbeitstagung” in Freiburg in 1992. Each examines connections between psychoanalytic theories and representations of women’s sexuality in European and/or American literature. Several contributions proceed from theory to the literary text. Christa Rohde-Dachser emphasizes the differing views of early women psychoanalysts on women’s sexuality and cites works of contemporary thinkers to reinforce her contention that no consensus has emerged on this issue. Irmgard Roebing discusses the connections between notions of sexuality, the women’s movement, and feminist literary theories. Defining sexuality as “Teil politischer Reflexion und Praxis” (21), she emphasizes the importance of going beyond the myths engendered by psychoanalysis, for example those of penis envy and vaginal orgasm, for an understanding of literary works. In an intentionally provocative article, Matthias Kettner issues a challenge to literature—to its writers as well as its critics. Why, he asks, do psychoanalytical investigations of envy focus on women’s alleged envy of the male penis despite the existence of data pointing to an equally powerful male envy of the female role in procreation. Claudia Schmolders, premising her essay on the understanding that men have been granted the power to define women’s erotic feelings, iden-

tifies Julia Kristeva as one of the first women to try to wrest the power of definition from male writers and points to letters as a genre capable of reflecting women’s desires.

Two articles look to the 18th century for an understanding of the connections between literature and psychoanalytical theories. For Verena Ehrich-Haefeli, the 5th book of Rousseau’s *Emile* is a central text for the new discourse about women that developed in Germany in the late 18th century and led, she argues, to Freud’s notion of female masochism. Renate Böschenstein’s topic is the erotic, but sublimated father-daughter relationship sometimes linked in literary works to an increase in the daughters’ creative powers. She concludes that the social constructs underlying such relationships have been a part of middle-class culture since the end of the 18th century and show little sign of dissipating. A number of essays focus on a single writer or literary work from the latter part of the 19th century and into the heyday of psychoanalysis. The article by Monika Becker-Fischer and Gottfried Fischer begins with Flaubert’s famous “Madame Bovary c’est moi” and proceeds to analyze Emma Bovary as a male phantasy, a “Wunschphantasie von insgeheim männlich ‘unterwanderter’ Weiblichkeit” (135). In her second essay in the volume, Irmgard Roebing discusses a 1902 novel and a somewhat later theoretical piece by the little-known Grete Meisel-Hess, not, she insists, to rehabilitate this writer, but to point out that even during Freud’s time theories of female sexuality were being formulated from a woman’s point of view. Examining the figure of Brunelda in Kafka’s *Der Verschollene*, Astrid Lange-Kirchheim suggests that some of the difficulties critics have had with the work in general, and with Brunelda specifically, can be traced to male critics’ antipathy toward this enigmatic figure. Eva-Maria Alves also treats a single work, Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood*. Working with Freud’s belief that literature should bring about in the reader a “milde Narkose” (265), she investigates why this novel so shocked middle-class sensibilities. Other articles concentrate on more contemporary writing. Ortrud Gutjahr investigates the women’s literature of the 70s that foregrounds women’s physicality and sexuality in a new, transitional way: the vulnerable female body in these works is protected by, as she titles her essay, “Immigration in den imaginären Körper.” A radio play, first aired in 1986 in the series *Krimi am Samstag*, is the subject of Brigitte Boothe’s exami-