

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Thomas Mann's Doktor Faustus: A Novel at the Margin of Modernism
by Herbert Lehnert and Peter C. Pfeiffer

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One caveat: there were innumerable typographical errors in the book (I stopped counting after the initial 15). As one more tribute to Thomas Mann's greatness, this book certainly deserves a place on one's bookshelf.

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HERBERT LEHNERT, and PETER C. PFEIFFER (Ed.): *Thomas Mann's Doktor Faustus: A Novel at the Margin of Modernism*. Columbia, South Carolina: Camden House, 1991. Pages xi + 226. Indexed.

The essays and responses in this volume were originally presented at a Thomas Mann symposium at the University of California, Irvine. Taken collectively, the essays show both the historical «datedness» of Mann's last major novel, *Doktor Faustus*, and its transhistorical relevance, its substantive attempt to wrestle with aesthetic and moral issues that are still very much alive in Germany and the West.

The book opens with essays by Herbert Lehnert and Helmut Koopmann. In the introduction Lehnert argues in favor of the novel's all-pervasive ambiguity and playful indeterminacy. Lehnert's elevation of indeterminacy, however, would seem to render his use of concepts such as «moral judgment» and «guilt» vacuous (15). The topic of Koopmann's essay is German introspection as it is associated with evil, which in the novel remains «indescribable» (27). Koopmann justly points out certain vague aspects of the novel's critique of the German intellectual tradition. However, Koopmann overstates his case when he argues that the novel is wholly without a «message» (30). His conclusion overlooks the unambiguously critical portrayal of the Kridwiß circle; moreover, in presupposing the novel's ultimate formality, he overlooks a metalevel that calls into question the aesthetic elevation of mere formality and ambiguity and identifies the artist Leverkühn as a murderer.

The remaining essays are each published together with a response, which makes any substantive review comments either superfluous or inordinately complex. The essays address the following topics in the context of Mann's novel: recent theories of narcissism (Dierks); the triadic interrelationship of music, love, and death (Fetzer); women characters (Prutti); Jewish characters (Schwarz); Adorno's later *Aesthetic Theory* (Bahr); Joyce, Wagner, and the question of modernism (Vaget); and contemporary German literature, especially Martin Walser (Mundt). The essays are almost without exception high-level contributions, well-written, insightful, and suggestive; they deal in varying degrees with the topic of the symposium, Mann's novel at the margin of modernism.

The most instructive contributions may be those of Schwarz and Vaget. Schwarz criticizes the inadequacy of Mann's portrayal of Jewish figures, which cannot be answered simply by reference to the ironized narrator; Schwarz's analysis concretely underscores the almost universally accepted criticism of *Doktor Faustus*, namely, that as a novel of an epoch it attends far too little to socio-historical factors. Vaget argues that Mann distanced himself from Adorno's negativity in some of the very passages previous critics have taken as evidence for Mann's dependence on Adorno; Vaget's read-

ling culminates in one of the strongest cases to date for the role of grace in the novel and with this a view of *Doktor Faustus* as something other than an unambiguous refutation of Goethe.

Many of the responses take issue with individual points and develop into original contributions in their own right. The dialogical structure is helpful for the reader and might even make the volume useful for theory classes, which often benefit from discussions of competing readings of a single work. The text is a fine contribution to the criticism of one of the greatest novels of this century. Every college and university library should own the book, which is fully accessible to non-readers of German.

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JAY ROSELLINI: Wolf Biermann. Beck'sche Reihe 626: Autorenbücher. München: Beck, 1992. 169 Seiten.

Biographien von lebenden Literaten zu schreiben ist leider nicht leicht. Erstens weil das Element der «Abgeschlossenheit» fehlt und zweitens, weil jegliche Wertung eine eher tentative sein muß. Trotzdem ist natürlich ein solches Unterfangen gerechtfertigt und das ganz besonders beim Phänomen Biermann, dem gesamtdeutschen politisch-polemischen enfant terrible.

Rosellini stellt diese vita in fünf Kapiteln, beinahe hätte ich gesagt Akten dar, die chronologisch geordnet sind: Altona/Auschwitz/Aufbruch/Anecken: Herkunft, Bildungsgang und schriftstellerische Anfänge; Die Jahre der Isolation (1965–1976); Die Ausbürgerung und ihre Folgen; Einmischung in «fremde» Angelegenheiten: Erste Geh- und Schreibversuche im Westen; Vom exilierten DDR-Autor zum gesamtdeutschen Mahner.

Bereits aus dieser Einteilung Rosellinis geht eine Grundwertung hervor: Biermann gewinnt immer mehr an Bedeutung, bis er am Ende zum «gesamtdeutschen Mahner» befördert wird, eine Position, die Dauerbeschäftigung verspricht und aus der heraus er sich kaum in eine Ecke malen wird, eine Möglichkeit, die von Biermanns politischer Einstellung heraus durchaus gegeben ist. Das politisch eher naive Selbstverständnis Biermanns ist zwar immer Motor des Protestes, erschöpft sich aber andererseits in der Utopie.

Lobenswert an dieser Biographie ist, daß Rosellini sich auf Biermanns Œuvre konzentriert und versucht, jede Entwicklung, jede künstlerische Nuance aus dem Werk heraus zu belegen und verständlich zu machen. Somit wird hier nicht so sehr die Privatperson Biermann vorgestellt als vielmehr Biermann der Künstler, die öffentliche Person. Es ist offensichtlich, daß Rosellini mit dieser Person sympathisiert, daß er selbst unverständliche Positionswechsel und Quersprünge noch zu verstehen versucht und teilweise apologisiert. Dabei unterliegt er aber nie der Versuchung, alles durch eine rosarote Brille zu sehen (und «rosarot» kann hier durchaus auf mehreren Ebenen verstanden werden), sondern er bewahrt sich eine durchaus kritische Haltung.

Zu wünschen gewesen wäre vielleicht eine etwas übersichtlichere Schreibweise (sehr lange Abschnitte), zeitweise etwas mehr Zitat (vielen Lesern werden Einzelge-