



WILEY

---

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man by Thomas Mann and Walter D. Morris

Review by: Mark W. Roche

Source: *The Modern Language Journal*, Vol. 71, No. 4 (Winter, 1987), pp. 458-459

Published by: Wiley on behalf of the National Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/328502>

Accessed: 30-08-2018 00:05 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*National Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations, Wiley* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Modern Language Journal*

thetic innovations. The concise notes and the bibliography of 119 articles and books written about Büchner in English make this an ideal source for American scholars and students alike.

Schmidt is a gifted translator. This impressive volume should underscore how translations function as essential vehicles of cross-cultural interaction. Schmidt produces evocatively precise and idiomatic English detailing: "Durch das leise Singen des Mädchen und die Stimme der Alten zugleich tönte das Sausen des Windes bald näher, bald ferner, und der bald helle, bald verhüllte Mond warf sein wechselndes Licht traumartig in die Stube" becomes "The rushing wind sounded sometimes near, sometimes far through the girl's soft singing and the old woman's voice, and the moon, now bright, now hidden, cast its changing light dreamlike into the room" (p. 150). He shows a feeling for Büchner's staccato, obsessive sentence structures: "Er wollte mit sich sprechen, aber er konnte nicht, er wagte kaum zu atmen, das Biegen seines Fußes tönte wie Donner unter ihm" becomes "he wanted to talk to himself, but he could not breathe, he hardly dared, the creak of his foot below him sounded like thunder" (p. 140). He conveys Büchner's bizarrely ironic, colloquial epistemological thrusts: "Dann – habe ich nachzudenken, wie es wohl angehn mag, daß ich mir einmal auf den Kopf sehe" becomes "Then – I must figure out how I could manage to see the top of my head for once" (p. 165).

It is said that a translation must be redone or refocused every twenty-five years. This translation is so finely tuned, sensitive, and adroit that I predict it will have a longer life; and the renewal of the provocation to literary theory, which Büchner's work constitutes, seems certain.

DONNA L. HOFFMEISTER  
University of Pittsburgh

---

LATZEL, SIGBERT. *sprechen von? sprechen über?: Übungen zu sinnverwandten Präpositionalverben*. München: Hueber, 1986. Pp. 127. 16,80 DM, paper.

---

In *sprechen von? sprechen über?*, Latzel, a member of the Didactic Section of the Goethe-Institut

in Munich, presents some thirty-nine exercises involving the selection of prepositional complements for twenty-seven German verbs ranging in alphabetic order from *antworten* (*auf, mit*) over the title's *sprechen* (*von, über*; also *vor, mit, zu, für, gegen*) to *wissen* (*von, über, um*). Schemata of the semantic factors that determine the selection of one or the other of the prepositional complements, as well as complete-sentence examples, precede the exercise(s) for a specific verb. The workbook ends with an answer-key, a register of sources for the illustrative sentences, and a bibliography. Following a table of contents, the workbook begins with a one-paragraph foreword, along with explanation of symbols used.

No doubt having written the workbook with a view toward German language instruction under the auspices of the Goethe-Institut, Latzel sees the work supplying new and necessary supplementary materials for the intermediate and advanced levels of German as a foreign language. After working through the exercises with American college students and courses in mind, my own recommendation is that Latzel's workbook be considered only in connection with the most advanced conversation and/or composition courses within a German-major program. While some of the schemata designed to aid the student in selecting the requisite prepositional complements may be clearer than others, once the student has internalized the selection processes through the exercises, the schemata are no longer needed. The answer-key may make completely independent study of the exercises possible—but only for a student with extraordinary motivation.

B. J. KOEKKOEK  
State University of New York, Buffalo

---

MANN, THOMAS. *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*. Trans. Walter D. Morris. New York: Ungar, 1987. Pp. xvii, 435. \$14.95, paper.

---

Thomas Mann packs a lot into his *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* (1918): the feud with brother Heinrich; the culture versus civilization controversy; lengthy polemics against democracy and politics; discussions of Schopen-

hauer, Nietzsche, and Wagner; insightful, if limited, analyses of satire and irony; reflections on suffering and happiness; an assertion of the superiority of moods over principles; occasional commentary on *Buddenbrooks*, *Tonio Kröger*, *Fiorenza* (and material that eventually makes its way, transformed, into the later novels). Mann writes: "I want to say everything—that is the purpose of this book" (p. 312).

The text is in parts embarrassing. Although its complex patterns of thought cannot be reduced to patriotic prejudices, it does contain many nationalist clichés that are nowhere ironized. In numerous respects the work is self-cancelling: it contains an unequivocal argument in favor of ambiguity; an intellectual attempt to establish the superiority of life over intellect; the *a priori* assertion of relativism; an outspoken commitment to noncommitment; and of course the political reflections of a non-political man. The greatest problem of the text—beyond its obviously ideological assertions and its self-admitted "self-contradiction" (p. 191)—is one of content and form: antithetical thought is best preserved in rigorous philosophy or in art: Mann's text is not fully equal to its task.

The translation, which has been available in hardcover since 1983, reads well. One might even call it elegant. A German friend once told me that he preferred to read Kant in English. Not able to work with gender, Kant's translators were forced to separate and thus clarify Kant's lengthy sentences. No need for a German to check out Morris' rendition of Mann: Morris has remained true to the rhythm and syntax of the original. The author's avoidance of oversimplification, his desire to see issues from all sides, is splendidly conveyed—thematically and formally. One might quibble on some of Morris' decisions. Is "intellect" the best choice for "Geist"? And why, if Morris wants to employ this term, does he select "spirit" on page thirty-nine? Nonetheless, there is little that does not satisfy.

The text includes a brief introduction, which focuses on the work's origins and reception rather than its content or the author's anomalous use of such terms as "literature" and "art." Although Morris might have doubled the text by preparing a complete apparatus of footnotes, uninitiated readers will miss numerous allusions. In addition, the reader who knows no

German had better know French; quotations from this language are not translated.

*Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* is a book for cultural historians interested in the spirit of the age or the elusive German character, for philosophers interested in the interrelation of art and knowledge, and above all for students who read Thomas Mann in translation. Excerpts might be used for literature classes though one can hardly imagine assigning the entire text, especially since this would mean eliminating some of Mann's superior fictional works. The "Prologue," followed by "Soul-Searching," offers the concisest synthesis of themes.

MARK W. ROCHE  
Ohio State University

---

*Philosophy of German Idealism*. Ed. Ernst Behler. German Library 23. New York: Continuum, 1987. Pp. xxii, 284. \$24.50, cloth; \$10.95, paper.

---

The twenty-third volume of the German Library series contains two selections from Fichte, two from Jacobi, three from Schelling, and "The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism," a fragment composed by either Schelling or Hegel that calls for the supremacy of aesthetics in the development of a new philosophy.

Written in the wake of Kant, Fichte's *Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation* is a beautiful and sensitive work that develops a social ethics and an assessment of the scholar's vocation by way of the law of self-harmony (or non-contradiction). Its statements are timeless and can be recommended to anyone. The other Fichte selection, *A Crystal Clear Report to the General Public Concerning the Actual Essence of the Newest Philosophy: An Attempt to Force the Reader to Understand*, is less felicitous. Basically a defense of the Fichtean system, it is directed to the reader who is already familiar with the system but doesn't understand it correctly or remains unconvinced. Fichte's *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre* would have offered readers a richer statement of the need for a first principle, while the first and second introductions to the *Wissenschaftslehre* present more insightful summaries.

In his *Open Letter to Fichte* Jacobi attempts to