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Review

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Heinrich Mann's works, as these are predominantly seen and discussed in their historical settings and in view of their contemporary social relevance. Extensive, though essentially similar, bibliographies have been added to both volumes, and several pictures of Heinrich Mann (some including his brother Thomas) in different stages of his life provide useful illustrations.

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MANN, HEINRICH. *Man of Straw (Der Untertan)*. Trans. Ernest Boyd. New York: Penguin Books, 1984.

Heinrich Mann's *Der Untertan*, one of the few outstanding political satires of German literature, presents a panoramic picture of life in the Wilhelminian period. A new English edition is welcome, for the novel is of interest not only to students of literature, but also historians, sociologists, and political philosophers. In the popular reader *The Political Imagination in Literature* (Ed. Philip Green and Michael Walzer. New York: The Free Press, 1969), which presents selections from Homer and Sophocles to the present, only *Der Untertan* and *The Brothers Karamazov* have the honor of being represented by two entries.

The translation is, unfortunately, not new. The Penguin edition represents with minimal changes Ernest Boyd's work, previously published as *The Patrioteer* (1921) and *Little Superman* (1945). Along with a few words here and there, e.g. "ordered" becomes "sent for" (p. 63), "scruple" becomes "hesitate" (p. 164), the title has been changed. Finding an appropriate translation for the word "Untertan" is indeed difficult, and I admit that I have no aesthetically pleasing solution. I belong to the school that likes to leave certain foreign words in their original form. Philosophers have long wrestled with this kind of problem. The secondary literature on Hegel in English is filled with words like *Sittlichkeit*, *Geist*, and *Aufhebung*. Actual translations of Hegel, however, are left generally free of German and thus, in most cases, slightly muddled. One could easily introduce foreign words like *Sittlichkeit* or *Untertan* into English prose as long as a lengthy definition and commentary accompanies its first appearance in any text. For some this may sound like avoiding the problem, but I would argue that the purpose of translation is not primarily to test the skills of the translator but to convey a precise and meaningful text to the uninitiated.

While Boyd and his subsequent publishers prefer to translate the word *Untertan*, they leave in the original such simple and easily rendered words as "Kommersbuch" (p. 21), "Lachsschinken" (p. 86), and "Bierstube" (p. 141), which must send the reader who knows no German up the wall. When Boyd does not leave his words in German, he sometimes translates them into French; "private encounter" would be an adequate English equivalent for "tête-à-tête" (p. 12), and "self-esteem" might replace "amour-propre" (p. 265).

The age of the translation sometimes presses itself upon the reader. The expression "You have an infernal . . . cheek" (p. 16) (for "Das ist aber doch eine . . . Frechheit") is rarely used today. More blatant and somewhat comical, Diederich's courting of Guste ("Er machte ihr eifrig den Hof") cannot, at least in the 1980s, be rendered as "He diligently made love to her" (p. 124).

Other inadequacies are not restricted to the age of the translation. Boyd does not capture Diederich's sudden turn from consummating his marriage to thoughts of the Emperor as well as he might. The German reads:

“Bevor wir zur Sache selbst schreiten,” sagte er abgehackt, “gedenken wir Seiner Majestät unseres allergnädigsten Kaisers. Denn die Sache hat den höheren Zweck, daß wir Seiner Majestät Ehre machen und tüchtige Soldaten liefern.”

Boyd renders as follows:

“Before we go any farther,” he said in martial tones, “let us think of His Majesty, our Gracious Emperor. We must keep before us the higher aim of doing honour to His Majesty, and of giving him capable soldiers.” (p. 228)

‘To go farther’ does not capture the matter-of-fact tone of Diederich’s “zur Sache selbst schreiten.” “Die Sache” is overlooked again in the second sentence. Meanwhile the verb “liefern” is best rendered by the impersonal “deliver.” Mayor Scheffelweis’s relativistic world-view, characterized by his incessant use of the terms “einerseits-andererseits” should be rendered throughout as “on the one hand-on the other hand.” Otherwise, the consistent inconsistency of the character and the humor of the situation is lost, as is the case for example on page 190. Finally, Boyd is not always as precise as he might be. Given the importance throughout the novel of Diederich’s lies, his translation of “Lüge” as “untruth” (p. 164) is inexact. After pointing to a few of Boyd’s less successful constructions, I should like to state that the translation is nonetheless useful and would provide a fine first draft for an updated and improved edition.

Before any teacher decides to adopt the novel for immediate classroom use, however, he or she should know that we are dealing with an expurgated text. Penguin Books has released, scandalously, a text which contains the title *Der Untertan* on the cover but which is not a full translation of the original. According to my count, twelve passages of at least a paragraph or more are missing. They would have begun on the following pages of the Penguin edition: 178, 184, 197, 201, 211, 213, 223, 239, 242, 245, 275, 278. The omissions are nowhere noted. Some of the missing passages might well be termed significant (subsequent page references to the German edition: Munich, dtv, 1978): Diederich’s exploits with Guste in the rag room of his factory, which mirror the earlier condemned conduct of his employees (p. 193); Napoleon Fischer’s conversation with Diederich in which he overlooks for political ends the rights of a female worker (pp. 202-05); the hero’s momentary renunciation of power before his conversation with Wulckow (p. 253); the performance of Wagner’s *Lohengrin*, that develops the important theatrical metaphor (pp. 265-71); Diederich’s speech in favor of racial superiority and sterilization (p. 295); and finally, the comic reversal in which Guste, a woman, assumes the role of master and relegates Diederich to the status of *Untertan* (p. 340). There is at least one additional shorter passage missing. On page 80 Boyd abbreviates, arbitrarily, an expression that tells us quite a bit about the times: “<Er konnte> einfach der Wuchererstraße folgen, die jetzt Kaiser-Wilhelm-Straße hieß” becomes “he had simply to go along Kaiser Wilhelmsstraße.” Let the instructor who assigns the text beware; other such passages may exist.

The American intellectual community needs a new, improved translation of *Der Untertan* with the complete text intact. I would recommend also an introduction focusing on the historical context (1848, 1870, the political parties, the Emperor, anti-Semitism, the *Untertan* mentality, the role of women) and aesthetic elements (comic incongruities, satire, chapter endings, the play within the play, nature imagery). A new edition would also benefit from a number of annotations. What is the uninformed reader to make of a Forty-Eighter (p. 11), Sedan (p. 43), or a franc-tireur (p. 107)? Titles of songs and lyrics, for example "Ich hatt' einen Kameraden" (p. 10) and "Die Wacht am Rhein" (p. 292) should be translated and/or annotated. Finally, a short bibliography listing other works by Heinrich Mann in English and secondary literature on *Der Untertan* in English would serve most readers well.

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DICKHOFF, WILFRIED W. *Zur Hermeneutik des Schweigens. Ein Versuch über das Imaginäre bei Gottfried Benn.* Hochschulschriften Literaturwissenschaft, 64. Königstein/Ts.: Forum Academicum, 1984. 365 pp. DM 78.

Wie die meisten Arbeiten, die sich legitimerweise auf Adorno berufen, zeichnet sich diese Dissertation durch ein hohes Maß an kritischer Intellektualität, durch die Konsistenz methodologischer Rückversicherung und durch eine selbstreflexiv differenzierte Begriffssprache aus. Damit ist zugleich eine autonomistische Abkapselung von all dem verbunden, was sich nur noch in Anführungsstrichen als literatur'wissenschaftliche Interpretation bezeichnen läßt und hier als "sog." Benn-Forschung abgetan wird. Ihm sei "die Tendenz der Vereinnahmung von Literatur in den Diskurs der Macht wesentlich" (S. 17). Dem stellt sich der Diskurs einer negativ subversiven Kritik entgegen, die im Vollbewußtsein eigener Vorstellungszirkularität gar nicht erst die Diskussion sucht. Formulierungen wie die folgende sind eine ihrer Konsequenzen: "Das Nichts, d.h. die Verdinglichung der absoluten Negation, erfährt seine Materialisierung (d.h. seine VerDINGlichung qua Irrealisierung des 'Materials') durch die Hypostasierung der Sprache, was die ständige Nichtung der Bedeutung 'bedeutet'" (p. 191). Es enthält also alles Geschichtliche (und gerade die im Hier und Jetzt erfahrene Vergangenheit) immer auch seine eigenen "ideologischen" Positionen, spricht die Sprache der Macht im Interesse seiner Bedeutung. Diesbezüglich hält sich Dickhoff an Benjamins Orientierung, daß "Vergangenes historisch artikulieren heißt (. . .), sich einer Erinnerung bemächtigen, wie sie im Augenblick einer Gefahr aufblitzt" (vgl. p. 15). Vollauf berechtigt ist die damit verbundene Aversion gegen eine Praxis, die Werke nicht nur der Schriftsteller in objektivistischer Reduktion auf beweisbare Tatsachen und eindeutige Aussagen hin festlegt; nicht weniger berechtigt müßte die Skepsis gegenüber epiphanischer Erleuchtung sein angesichts der Erfahrung, daß gerade künstlerisch strukturierende Erinnerung recht selektiv und ihre Auslese sehr oft voluntaristisch verfährt—Sartres "Schwarze Diktatur." Solchen Bedenken verschließt sich Dickhoff keineswegs, begegnet ihnen aber doch etwas zu knapp und forciert erst ganz am Schluß mit der Coda von Hinweisen, wie Identitätsbildung, in der kontrafaktisch "affirmativen Ästhetik" (Lyotard, Deleuze, Foucault) des sog. Poststrukturalismus als denkbar erscheint.