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SPECIAL ISSUE ON MODERNISM AND POST MODERNISM IN CONTEMPORARY GERMAN LITERATURE

GUEST EDITOR
Rainer Nägele

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Modernism and Postmodernism. The Margins of Articulation.
Rainer Nägele. 5

Abstract. The difference between 'Modernism' and 'Postmodernism' is not one of definitions. The latter is rather a radicalization of a tendency inherent already in Modernism: calling into question the underlying principles of definitions, delimitations and boundaries. If, in Modernism, this tendency is marked by an increasing self-reflective gesture of the text, Postmodernism radicalizes this self-reflection to the point where the self-reflective circle and its closure are broken. The subversion of demarcation takes place not only on the semantic level, but on the level of the text's literal and linguistic qualities. Such a move displaces particularly any totalizing project, which, for example, is implied in Jürgen Habermas's recent critique of Post-modernism. The following essay traces some of these effects in the development of the German novel of the last two decades and in some examples of experimental and concrete texts, where the reflection on the principle of demarcation leads to the margins of articulation and with that to the margin where the cultural opposition of culture/nature is constituted. (RN)

Avant-garde: The Convulsions of a Concept.

Michael T. Jones27

Abstract. The current status of the «avant-garde» provokes many questions, which include both inner-artistic matters and matters of history and society commonly associated with Marxist or reception-oriented thinkers. The convolution of questions cannot be disentangled; efforts to confront the dilemmas of the avant-garde cannot abstract from matters of commodification, recent reception, or the complex dialectic of «classical» and «modern.» The essay deals with the most recent manifestations of avant-garde aesthetic impulses. It emphasizes the *historical* and *social* aspects of German theorizing in contrast to purely formalist or ahistorical conceptions commonly found elsewhere. It insists that such «materialist» theory does greater justice than formalist conceptualizations to the proverbial connections of «art» and «life.» It tries to integrate the present phenomenon of proliferating theory into the theoretical exposition, as a characteristic trait of the current situation. It warns against abandoning the subversive content of classical modernism in the course of developing a theory of post-modernism. (MTJ)

The Gender of Authorship: Heiner Müller and Christa Wolf.

Helen Fehervary41

Abstract. The relationship between sexuality and politics has always been an underlying assumption of the avant-garde. In recent East German avant-garde literature, the notion of authorship as production has become associated with technological rationality and the patriarchal socialist state. The ensuing crisis of the traditional male author has thus led necessarily to a radicalization of subjectivity and to the politics of gender. A comparison of two contemporary texts, one by a female author, one by a male, shows that the crisis of authorship assumes two distinctly different forms when differences in gender are taken into account. The East German authors Heiner Müller and Christa Wolf have exhibited remarkably similar literary and political developments. Two of their most recent texts, Müller's *Hamletmachine* and Wolf's *No Place. Nowhere*, both address the problematic of traditional male authorship and the disintegration of a preconceived literary gender identity. Yet, these two texts exemplify very different assumptions about the relationship between authorship and the literary tradition. Müller's text suggests the imprisonment of the male author within a petrified system of tradition and images, and hence the necessity of deconstruction. Wolf's text manifests a process of creating a new form of female-identified authorship and the possibility of redefining the tradition of literature and its future.

Socialist Patriarchy and the Limits of Reform: A Reading of Irmtraud Morgner's *Life and Adventures of Troubadora Beatriz as Chronicled by her Minstrel Laura*.

Biddy Martin.59

Abstract. Irmtraud Morgner's *Life and Adventures of Troubador Beatriz* is one of several important anti-patriarchal texts to come out of the GDR over the past ten years. It is a complex and ambitious attempt to elaborate the meaning of women's emancipation in a socialist society, an attempt which is structurally and thematically marked by a struggle between oppositional and orthodox approaches to questions of sexuality, knowledge and power. This particular reading of the text emphasizes the limitations which traditional Marxist analysis and representational practices impose upon a textual field which necessarily introduces conflict and difference into the repressive stability of GDR socialism and its conventional narrative representation. Having made women's radically different desires, experiences and relationships with one another a legitimate subject, the text opens up knowledges which threaten to violate traditional political, social and sexual orders, and conventional narrative consistencies. I have attempted to read the text's transgressions and radical oppositions against the pressure of its insistently conclusive Marxism and to suggest the need for a critical re-thinking of the relations between sexuality, representation and power. (BM)

In the Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters: Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina*.

Sara Lennox75

Abstract. Bachmann's novel *Malina* is about the absence of a female voice. The unnamed female I of this novel defines herself with respect to two male figures. Malina is her *Doppelgänger*, the voice of male reason which women must assume if they wish to speak at all. In relationship to Ivan, her lover, the I constitutes herself as traditionally feminine and suffers the agonies of romantic love. Though evidently miserable, the I must represent herself as content with her position between these two men, simply inversions of one another. Yet the novel also contains another story of the I which cannot be given coherent narrative form, for there is no way to speak who she really is. In the middle section of the novel, entitled «The Third Man,» the I gives expression to her distress and pain in a series of nightmares, in which her father, termed by Bachmann «the murderer whom we all have,» figures as her tormentor. That which patriarchy does not allow to speak here cries out

nonetheless. Moreover, counterposed to and subversive of the patriarchal subsumption of women is an archaic and utopian fantasy of sensual joy and freedom which threads its way through the novel. Though the I disappears at the end of the novel, female desire can't be completely silenced. Contemporary feminists thus can use Bachmann by turning this promise of future happiness against the present misery of women which *Malina* depicts. (SL)

«Quotation and Literary Echo as Structural Principles in Gabriele Wohmann's *Frühherbst in Badenweiler*.»

Walter H. Sokel. 107

Abstract. In her novel of 1978, Wohmann uses the montage technique—quotations, literary echoes, erudite allusions—of the «classics of modernism» to put the contemporary West German phenomenon of «New Inwardness» in an ironic light. Her protagonist, the composer Hubert Frey, retreats from the stresses of contemporary life to the Black Forest spa of Badenweiler. New Inwardness in him appears allied to New Conservatism which, in reaction to the New Left of the sixties, revives the old German ideal of the «A-Political Man.» Echoing a work of restaurative mentality, Stifter's *Nachsommer*, Frey's *Frühherbst* looks back nostalgically on Goethe's classicist phase. As Goethe put his Storm and Stress behind him, Frey analogously repudiates the turbulent youth of the sixties. He sums up his ethos of withdrawal by quoting a passage from one of Goethe's letters. He quotes inaccurately and his self-identification with Goethe rests on shaky foundations. By revealing her protagonist's erudition as faulty and confused, Wohmann unmasks his whole stance as—literally—false. Another of Frey's models, Conrad Aiken, a writer of inwardness and subjectivity, turns out to have been the wrong author for Frey's choice of Badenweiler. The American writer who had actually sojourned there turns out to have been the realist Stephen Crane. Inwardness thus proves literally incorrect and inappropriate to the protagonist's needs. The displacement of the symbolist Aiken by the realist Crane points ahead to the conclusion of the novel. Whereas a World War had been needed to dislodge Thomas Mann's Hans Castorp from *his* retreat, a mere mouse, invading Frey's hotel room, serves the analogous function in Wohmann's novel. Literary echo, a structural device, functions thematically as both the symptom and the cure of her protagonist's passing relapse into German inwardness. (WHS)