

Reviews

Christopher J. Wild

Theater der Keuschheit—Keuschheit des Theaters: Zu einer Geschichte der (Anti) Theatralität von Gryphius bis Kleist.

Freiburg: Rombach, 2003. Pp. 525.

Literary studies have long been in the habit of investigating the category of the literary from various critical perspectives. Indeed, we have come to expect that a book on literature will contain a critical reflection on the limits of literature, knowing that a simple celebration of literature will obscure more than it will reveal. Such self-criticism is much harder to find in theater studies, which still deems its object of study to be under all kinds of threats and therefore in need of constant apology. The value of the theater, or theatricality, is therefore more often presumed than critically reflected on. Christopher J. Wild's book, *Theater der Keuschheit—Keuschheit des Theaters: Zu einer Geschichte der (Anti) Theatralität von Gryphius bis Kleist*, tries to close this critical gap. It is based on the methodological assumption that we can learn from the critics of the theater more than from its friends. For this reason, Wild uses a vocabulary and understanding of the theater that is derived, primarily, from various antitheatrical tracts. The theater thus emerges as a contested art form, one that reacts and even internalizes many of the arguments of its critics. This conceptualization is the central contribution that Wild's book makes to the study of theater.

Although Wild's general methodology provides a unifying principle for his voluminous study, the book nevertheless falls into several distinct sections. A reading of Heinrich von Kleist's short text, *Über das Marionettentheater*, supplies the prologue as well as part of the epilogue. Wild is attuned to the historical context of this text, situating it in the critiques of the lower theatrical genres by those attempting to make theater respectable, but he also approaches it from a theoretical perspective. I would call the general method "historicized deconstruction," a versatile moving between close readings attuned to the difficulties of theatrical representation and historical sources.

From this framing discussion, Wild moves to the first main section, from which the title of the book is derived, investigating the relation between the theater and virginity. Taking his point of departure from

Gryphius's *Catharina von Georgien*, Wild analyzes the ways in which the theater stages virginity. This turns out to be a difficult, indeed well-nigh impossible, undertaking, for the theater, as we learn from antitheatrical tracts, is already an impure and soiling medium and therefore ill-equipped to stage purity. Wild uses this paradoxical endeavor of staging purity as a starting point for a differentiated and fascinating close reading of Gryphius's play that leads us beyond this initial paradox. In the end, neither the theater nor the torture of Catharina's body can really damage her purity. Instead of being soiled by theatrical display, purity is established in the act of testing and of resisting possible violations, including that of being exhibited on a stage. Virginity thus emerges triumphantly from the shady practices of the theater.

The next section, my favorite of the book, shows that the various attempts at establishing a bourgeois theater from Gottsched to Lessing were based on an internalization of a widespread antitheatricalism. Wild shows that theaters from the protestant school theater to the Hamburger Schauspiel were formed not by opposing antitheatricalists but by adopting some of the arguments of the theater's most ardent critics. It is here that Wild's method of learning from antitheatricalism comes to full fruition. Critics of the theater sometimes, if not always, have a sharper eye for the mechanisms of theatrical representation, and playwrights such as Lessing absorb these circulating cultural paradigms. Equally strong is the final section on Friedrich Schiller, who, Wild argues, idealizes the theater to sublimate antitheatrical elements and, in doing so, tries to create a pure theater that would no longer be marked by the theater's supposedly fallen nature.

The book focuses on virginity, and hence on plays that feature virgins. This is the thematic effect of the book's antitheatrical calculus: theater equals impurity. This calculus is enormously productive, leading to insightful close readings as well as to the important antitheatrical frame. Its thematic result, the analysis of the virgin on stage, tends to become allegorical, as Wild himself puts it, thus transposing de Man's allegories of reading to the field of the theater. Even though some readers might have lingering doubts about the extent to which *Emilia Galotti*, for example, is an allegory of antitheatricality, they should take the book's emphasis on the allegorical virgin more as a means to an end, as a thematic remnant that led to the more important method of theater analysis based on antitheatrical insights.

As far as this larger frame is concerned, one assumption of the period might be examined further, namely whether theater can be ade-

quately understood as a medium. In his historical mode, Wild accepts this view, drawing on a number of antitheatrical positions that attack the theater as a medium of the theater, including Plato's famous argument. There is, however, a second understanding of the theater, namely that the theater is dangerously close to being real, that it uses real bodies and real objects, and that its quality as medium is therefore under constant threat. Indeed, this fear has fuelled many antitheatrical tracts. One central figure who sees the theater as more than just a simulated, "third" reality is none other than Plato himself. To be sure, Plato attacked the theater as one of several means of fabricating simulated reality, as Wild points out at various moments. At the same time, Plato himself wrote in the mode of drama, invented characters and scenes and engaged them in dramatic action. Antitheatricalism thus turns out to be only another side of a different or alternative theatricalism.

It is due to Wild's sophisticated study that the importance of antitheatricalism (including the odd alliances between antitheatricalism and theatricalism) for theater studies is beginning to acquire the visibility it deserves. *Theater der Keuschheit* should be read as a carefully researched study of a significant period in German theater history, but also as an excellent model of theatrical analysis.

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Leslie A. Adelson
The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration.
New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Pp. 264.

Leslie A. Adelson's 2006 monograph brings a lively theoretic vigilance to her years of probing readings in German-Turkish literature. The book's subtitle, *Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration*, announces a focus on narrative structures and linguistic subjectivity in "the literature of migration." *The Turkish Turn* is accordingly uninterested in proposing a sociology of migrant experiences, or in simply clearing a permanent nook for immigrant writers in Germanistik. Adelson, rather, calls attention to how "location" is at once the productive matrix of migration studies and its perennial stumbling block.

Her dissatisfaction with the extant biographical readings of Turkish-German texts sets the stakes high for a subfield still prone to the routine gestures of celebratory multiculturalism.

Throughout its conceptual introduction and three thematic chapters, *The Turkish Turn* refrains from heralding the dissolution of national borders amid transnational flows. Refreshingly, the analysis does not take up a deferential stance toward “the global” as a theoretical panacea. For Adelson, migration fiction has never been immune to the directives of nation-building; on the contrary, literary markets tend to conscript immigrant writers as the nation-state’s most credible corroborators. *The Turkish Turn* thus seeks to highlight works of fiction that flout the illusion of a privileged migrant informant behind the narrating “I”—works that imagine new modes of subjectivity through transnational means. Standard-bearers from the 1990s are read anew, including Aras Ören, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Feridun Zaimoğlu, Zafer Şenocak, and Sten Nadolny. With few exceptions, Adelson has chosen works composed after German Reunification, and thus nearly two decades after the discontinuation of the West German guest-worker program in 1973.

Adelson’s literary readings are broadly conceived, drawing on a prism of positions from the humanities and social sciences that traditionally lie far afield from one another in literary analysis. Of particular importance to Adelson’s project is Laura Brown’s work on “cultural fables.” Brown (2001) describes how eighteenth-century English literary works, and the interpretive practices of their readers, were constrained by a closed set of cultural myths about the New World. Independent of any given author, these traveling fables relied on a distinctly structured tableau of interrelated figures, which presented an authentic far-off world for readers who lacked the epistemic resources to verify its referents. Adelson transposes this narrative principle to post-Wall Germany, showing how domestic literary markets continue to compel immigrant and multilingual authors to collaborate in the production of fables about “life between” Turkey and Germany.

Adelson calls this commodified mode of narrative a “locative conceit”—a narrative pattern that, once affixed to cross-cultural personae in fiction, tends to discard any enunciations that might undermine the ethnographic function of the narrative. In each chapter, Adelson examines literary examples of narrative excess or fracture that tend to upend the long-held functionalist fables about migration. Chapter 1, “Dialogue and Storytelling,” sets Sten Nadolny’s 1990 novel *Selim, oder die Gabe*

der Rede [Selim, or the Gift of Speech] in contact with Emine Sevgi Özdamar's 2001 short story "Der Hof im Spiegel" ["The Courtyard in the Mirror"]. Nadolny's epic novel follows two men, the German student-soldier Alexander and the Turkish guest worker and wrestler Selim, in their evolving relationship over two decades. The characters meet in 1960s West Germany, as war crimes trials are taking the national stage and a million Turks and Italians are arriving on special guest-worker trains. Adelson sees the impromptu orator Selim as an ersatz storyteller for the beleaguered, withdrawn Alexander. With his carefree, yet painstakingly acquired eloquence in German, Selim intrudes on Alexander's "narraphasia" in matters of German history. Nadolny thus dramatizes a mode of cultural difference in which Turkishness and Germanness interweave in the production of postwar narrative.

Adelson then reads Özdamar's "Courtyard in the Mirror" as a narrative experiment in diasporic context and copresence. Drawing on Appadurai's "technologies of location," she focuses on the textual production of "deictic presence"—the overall effect of here-ness, now-ness, and self-sameness. From her quiet urban apartment, Özdamar's unnamed protagonist "touches" absent persons through the mundane media in her home—mirrors, light, window frames, ceilings, televisions, and telephones—testing the material nexus of consequence and distance that gives "the local" its emotional immediacy. Adelson also makes vigorous use of one intertextual figure in Özdamar's story: the grinning Cheshire Cat from Lewis Carroll's 1869 *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The cat's grin, which outlasts its disappearing body, is read as an expression of the obsolescence—and yet charismatic ubiquity—of nationalism in late modernity.

Chapter 2, "Genocide and Taboo," asks how migration literature in Germany has engaged with the European Holocaust and the Armenian genocide in Turkey. Adelson focuses on two texts that epitomize opposing stylistic poles: Feridun Zaimoğlu's best-selling 1995 mock ethnography *Kanak Sprak* [Kanaki Speak] and Zafer Şenocak's 1998 novel *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* [Perilous Kinship]. In contrast to Özdamar's affect-rich courtyard narrative, the laconic style of *Perilous Kinship* frustrates the reader's desire to behold the novel's interior "I." Şenocak's protagonist Sascha, the grandson of a Russian-speaking Ottoman officer and a German-Jewish grandmother, researches the "unused side of history" as he follows his own family lineage through the late Ottoman period and early Turkish Republic. For Adelson, Şenocak's unwillingness to authenticate any iconically Turkish char-

acters in his novel leaves the reader “no deictic purchase on presence.” She contends, however, that Feridun Zaimoğlu’s bravado-laden Kanak informants deploy just such an authentic image.

Zaimoğlu’s *Kanak Sprak* may be as resistant to theorists as it is to translators, a problem that has led to a vast discrepancy between the book’s status as an indelible sensation in Germany and its relative absence in the research annals of American German Studies. A Turkish turn in German literature is, however, hardly navigable without Zaimoğlu’s “incessant presence,” and the “unruly state of mind” that propels his early texts. Adelson’s engagement with the book is therefore as crucial as it is overdue in the field. Yet despite her cautious praise for the text’s multilingual stylistics, Adelson’s analysis of the narrative tends oddly toward the level of the signified, rather than to the many semiotic movements in the text that would be ripe for inclusion in a “new critical grammar of migration.” It is claimed that, by showcasing an excited narrative kinesis in the form of live informants, the book underwrites the long-standing illusion that Turks in Germany exist primarily as objects of the public gaze, and only secondly as private persons. Adelson reluctantly concludes that *Kanak Sprak* plays into an ethno-realist trap, supplying the “authentic voice” of one social world for the zealous readership of another. Certainly, Şenocak’s serenely told novel and Zaimoğlu’s motley compendium provide irrevocable proof of a “Turkish turn” in German fiction. Yet their vastly divergent approaches to kinship, public space, history, class, and community make these two books odd bedfellows for a comparative chapter on memory and genocide.

Chapter 3 turns to the literary icon of the labor migrant as a locus of cultural capital. Adelson contends that the now anachronistic moniker of the “Turkish guest worker” has accrued an auratic quality over the decades, instantiating pathos and legitimacy in public discourse. As an agent of postnational economic transformation (Saskia Sassen), the labor migrant is an “emblem” of the global distribution of labor. As Rey Chow suggests, however, the guest worker is concurrently a fixed symbol, compelled to express the alienated labor of ethnicity by reproducing a recognizable identity. Aras Ören’s figure Ali İtir, the folly-ridden protagonist of the 1981 novel *Bitte, Nix Polizei* [Please, No Police], serves as Adelson’s primary instance of the ostensibly iconic guest worker in fiction. As in some of the more incisive studies on Kafka’s *Castle* or *America*, Adelson reads the figure of Ali not in a humanistic vein as a unified, conscious character, but as a “remainder” signifier for the accumulated excess of coercive repre-

sentations about labor migrants. Not officially a guest worker “on paper,” Ali functions as a kind of figural “contraband” undermining the exchange value of the iconic labor migrant. Considering that Adelson’s study is chiefly concerned with literature of the 1990s, it is unclear why this chapter focuses only on Ören’s early novel, when his 1995 Berlin-Savignyplatz resurrects Ali Itir for the post-Wall period.

In its theoretical inventiveness, *The Turkish Turn* poses enduring questions for the pursuit of new lines of thought in migration studies. The book repeatedly succeeds in focusing attention on sites of knowledge that lie routinely disregarded on the borders between conflicting fields of inquiry. It also breathes a brisk dose of critical agitation into a corpus of globalization theory that has become sedentary in recent years. Adelson shows why it no longer suffices to apprehend the literature of migration—or German literature, for that matter—collection of human figures testifying to a shared experience. The title itself invites multiple readings. Perhaps it suggests not only a new direction in literary historiography, but a turn of the critical gaze as well—toward the hidden epistemological fissures through which transnational subjects continue to emerge.

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He is the author of *Theater der Keuschheit* "Keuschheit des Theaters. Eine Geschichte der (Anti-)Theatralität von Gryphius bis Kleist" (Freiburg i.Br.: 2003), and has published numerous articles on the history of German theater in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He is also the co-editor, with Stefanie Diekmann and Gabriele Brandstetter of *Theaterfeindlichkeit* (Paderborn: 2012), as well as, with Juliane Vogel, of *Auftreten: Wege auf die Bühne* (Berlin: 2014). Bernd Heinrich Wilhelm von Kleist (18 October 1777 – 21 November 1811) was a German poet, dramatist, novelist, short story writer and journalist. His best known works are the theatre plays *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn*, *The Broken Jug*, *Amphitryon*, *Penthesilea* and the novellas *Michael Kohlhaas* and *The Marquise of O.* Kleist committed suicide together with a close female friend who was terminally ill.