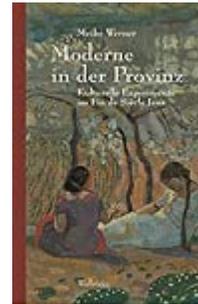




Meike G. Werner. *Moderne in der Provinz: Kulturelle Experimente im Fin de Siècle Jena.* Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003. 368 S. EUR 24.00 (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-89244-594-4.



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A Provincial

Meike Werner, in her examination of “cultural experiments in Fin de Siècle Jena,” concedes that she must first deal with an apparent paradox. Is the *Moderne*, as Georg Simmel posits in his 1903 essay, “Die Großstadt und das Geistesleben,” linked inextricably with the tensions and conditions of urban existence, while the provinces remain, in both the geographical and intellectual sense, far removed from modern life and mired in a traditional mindset? Werner attacks Simmel’s conception of the *Moderne* by noting that the diametrical opposition he creates between “Großstadt/Moderne und provinzieller Kleinstadt/Traditionalismus verschleierte jedoch die Komplexität und vielfältigen Nuancen moderner Kulturgeschichte mehr, als da er aufklärte” (p. 9). Werner contends that Jena in particular and the German provinces in general should be included in any study of the *Moderne*, for Germany did not possess the same degree of centralization of cultural institutions as other European nations of the time. Jena was not only influenced by the events and movements in Berlin, but also actively participated in the shaping of the *Moderne*.

For Werner, the *Moderne* is an epoch that lasted from

the 1890s to the outbreak of World War I, and is marked primarily by ambivalence and tension: between the increasing rationalization of life and work and a drive towards the irrational and mystical, by a sense of crisis (matched with a self-awareness of this crisis), and by the search for new forms of associations and worldviews (pp. 10-11). The Jena *Moderne* was characterized by many of the debates that took place in Berlin: nationalism, anti-Semitism, gender roles, and the search for modern forms of literature, art, and lifestyles. What Werner’s study details, though, is how “das Bewußtsein der Marginalität in bezug auf das Zentrum kreativer Bestandteil dieser Moderne war” (p. 24). The *Moderne* that the figures in this study influenced “kristallisierte, konstellierte sich nicht im Gegensatz, sondern als transformierende Alternative zu dem, was bis dahin mit großstädtischer Moderne konnotiert war” (p. 25).

To that end, she examines three interconnected exemplars of the Jena *Moderne*: the publisher Eugen Diederich, his wife (the writer and poet, Helene Voigt-Diederich), and the Serakreis, a circle of students connected to Diederich. As Werner describes: “Im Zen-

trum der Arbeit stehen drei Aspekte des 'Modernen Jena.' Der Kulturverlag von Eugen Diederichs, der 1904 mit Bedacht seinen acht Jahre zuvor in Florenz und Leipzig gegründeten Verlag an den Ursprungsort des deutschen Idealismus und der Frühromantik verlegte, der freistudentische Serakreis, mit dessen Konzept und experimenteller Praxis moderner Lebensführung sich die Namen junger Intellektueller wie Rudolf Carnap, Wilhelm Flitner, Hans Freyer, Karl Korsch und Franz Roh verbinden, sowie Leben und literarisches Schaffen der Dichterin Helene Voigt-Diederichs, deren heimatbezogene Dichtung sich mit dem literarischen Programm der 'Los von Berlin'-Bewegung in Verbindung bringen lässt. Zentrale Themen der Moderne werden aus Jenaer Perspektive in den Blick genommen: die Emanzipation der Frauen, der Aufbruch der Jugend und das unter den Intellektuellen heftig debattierte, facettenreiche 'Problem der Kultur' (p. 20).

Her study, as Werner freely admits, is neither a comprehensive cultural history of Jena nor a comparative examination of modernity in all of the German provinces. She first provides the reader with an excellent description of the spatial and intellectual configuration of Jena, which was home not only to a university and publishing house, but also to the Zeiss optical works. All three institutions felt the pressures and tensions of modernization and rationalization, but Zeiss in particular is a telling example of industrial innovation in the provinces, for it was one of the few industries to actively ameliorate the tensions of capitalism and industrialization by creating a more equitable distribution of capital to the workers, based on an "ethical social-economic philosophy which is a direct challenge to capitalism." [1] This particular approach allowed the Zeiss works to enjoy a relatively stable existence, even during the Great War, revolutionary upheaval, and the inflation of the 1920s.

In the third chapter on Eugen Diederich ("Der Verleger als kultureller Reichsgründer: Eugen Diederichs in Jena"), Werner closely analyzes the cultural, national, and religious influences that drove the publisher during his time in Jena. Diederich sought to modernize the whole process of publishing, and was at the same time deeply involved in the cultural, artistic, religious, and intellectual debates that were taking place not only among the *Bildungsbürgertum*, but also among Jena's students. Diederich was deeply critical of the culture of his day, but his criticisms cannot be easily typecast as cultural pessimism. (Diederich, in his later years, though, did move further to the right, most notably in the speech that he held for Alfred Rosenberg's Kampfbund für deutsche

Kultur). Diederich recognized that Germany was in a "time of transition" and sought to synthesize a "strong feeling for one's country" with being a "good European" (p. 193). Above all, Diederich believed that a new process of *Gemeinschaftsbildung* was central to the positive development of German culture, and Jena, with both its traditions and innovations, could and should contribute to the new (re)vision of a modern Germany.

The fourth chapter ("'Los von Berlin' und 'Literatur in Jena: Helene Voigt-Diederichs'") is by far the shortest of the chapters, and is certainly the most problematic in terms of supporting Werner's notion of a provincial *Moderne*. Helene Voigt-Diederich, who wrote "Abendrot," "Unterstrom," and "Nur ein Gleichnis," has, as the author concedes, "aus den großen Literaturgeschichten weitgehend verschwunden," and is accorded a prominent place only in the canon of popular works in the Third Reich (p. 201). [2] Voigt-Diederich was far more an author of the nineteenth century. As Werner describes, "Als Autorin des 20. Jahrhunderts blieb ihre Schreibweise bis auf naturalistische Einflüsse merkwürdig unberührt von den Experimenten der literarischen Moderne, dem Sekundenstil des konsequenten Naturalismus, jahrhundertwendlicher Sprachskepsis, dem alle sprachlichen Konventionen sprengenden Futurismus, Expressionismus oder Dadaismus" (p. 201). What role, then, does she play in influencing a provincial "Moderne"? Werner contends that Voigt-Diederich lived what should be considered a modern life, in that she tried to break free of the gender roles, societal and moral conventions, and expectations that had been thrust on her as the wife of leading publisher, as a mother, and as a prominent figure in Jena's society. Voigt-Diederich, for example, placed her writing desk outside of the family home, moved in her own intellectual circles, and eventually left Eugen Diederich in 1911, although Werner again concedes, "Zu fragen gilt, ob dieser Bruch Kapitulation oder Emanzipation bedeutete" (p. 21).

The fifth chapter ("Tanz auf dem Vulkan: das 'Junge Jena'") is a remarkable work of scholarship. Werner has already authored no fewer than eight articles on "young Jena" and youth culture, and she draws on a stunning range of archival and primary sources to produce a detailed and nuanced portrait of their lifestyles, celebrations, and patterns of association. It is in this chapter that one can see most clearly the ambivalences, tensions, and desires to form new associations that Werner posits as so essential to the Jena *Moderne*. These students clearly felt themselves to be in a time of transition, and sought to break from old traditions, associations, and connections

in search of new ones. Werner describes how this process (as with Eugen Diederich's cultural criticism) was not cultural pessimism, but rather the strong desire to create newer, more modern ties and associations. The two main groups that she examines—the Jena Freistudentenschaft, which was highly organized, deeply democratic, and concerned with social equality, and the Serakreis, which shied away from organizations, was deeply romantic in character and pursued the irrational and mythical—are presented by Werner as a possible example of the Apollonian/Dionysian divide. But once again, Werner is much more concerned, and rightly so, with demonstrating how such an easy opposition is inadequate. Members, such as Hans Kremers, moved freely between the two groups and saw no clash of values in doing so. Kremers wrote that members of the Serakreis felt that "ihre Existenz in zwei Kreisen auswirkt[e]: In der Freistudentenschaft und [in] der Serageselligkeit; schroffe Gegensätze, in Personalunion verbunden" (p. 276). For those interested in youth culture in Germany or in the figures whom she examines (Rudolf Carnap, Hans Kremers, Karl Korsch, Wilhelm Flitner, Robert Jentsch, Julius Frankenberger, Walter Fränzel, Hans Freyer, and Franz Roh), this chapter will be of great value.

Werner has written a tightly focused, theoretically challenging, and thoroughly researched study of three exemplars of the Jena *Moderne*, and has done so in a manner that bridges many disciplines with particular care to their respective methodologies. Certainly, this study is not the final one on the question of what role

the provinces as a whole played in the formation of the greater German *Moderne*, but her work certainly presents scholars with both new material and new methodological approaches in order to tackle this broader question.[3]

Notes

[1]. Erle Fiske Young, "The Industrial Foundation: A Case-Study of the Carl Zeiss Foundation in Jena, Germany," *Social Forces*, 13, no. 2 (December 1934): pp. 292-299. Young, in describing the philosophy behind the Zeiss Stiftung, notes: "Such objectives are not novel in the field of industry. The uniqueness of the Stiftung lies rather in the literalness with which these objectives are interpreted and the thoroughness of the method employed to attain them. [Ernest] Abbe foresaw the need for rather detailed specifications for the radical departure from tradition[al] relationship if he were to assure its success."

[2]. See Uwe K. Ketelsen, *Literatur und Drittes Reich* (Schernfeld: SH Verlag, 1992).

[3]. See also Sophie Reinhardt, *Avantgarden in Westfalen?: die Moderne in der Provinz, 1902-1933* (Münster: Ardey Verlag, 1999); Norbert Mecklenburg, *Erzählte Provinz: Regionalismus und Moderne im Roman* (Königstein: Athenäum, 1982); Bernd Walter, *Psychiatrie und Gesellschaft in der Moderne: Geisteskrankenfürsorge in der Provinz Westfalen zwischen Kaiserreich und NS-Regime* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1996).

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