

Gisela Müting. *Die Literatur "bemächtigt sich" der Reklame: Untersuchungen zur Verarbeitung von Werbung und werbendem Sprechen in literarischen Texten der Weimarer Zeit.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004. 377 S. EUR 56.50 (paper), ISBN 978-3-631-52725-2.



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Ad Space in Great Books

The second phase of the Industrial Revolution, of course, continued to change everything. Slower, pastoral lifestyles faded away as entire generations flocked to glittering, nascent metropolises. An ever-expanding, ever-accelerating cycle obtained that remains to this day. New technologies created new jobs, raised income levels and produced endless market goods consumed in turn by those same masses, which now possessed new jobs and higher income levels. Urban anthropologists such as Georg Simmel, Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin recorded their observations of the strange organisms brought forth by the heat and pressure, the stresses and strains, the needs and demands of the Big City. Because of their records, we know more about the flâneur, about boredom and blasé attitudes, about the fragmentation of the body, about the effect of electronic media on perception, even about things as seemingly trivial as postcards and chorus lines. Behind all of these metropolitan phenomena—stimulating when not creating interest among a harried public—stood advertisers. They, too, availed themselves of every form of media to deliver their message: Buy! Ads proliferated in multifar-

ious forms and places: newspapers, magazines, flyers, posters, sandwich boards, billboards, flashing lights. And just as nothing else in the metropolis could stand still, neither did the message. Ads could be read on streetcars, in streamers behind airplanes and on the sides and bellies of zeppelins. Proceeding from the reasonable assumption that these incessant and omnipresent calls for attention affected German literature of the Weimar era, Gisela Müting presents an extensive collection of examples to demonstrate just how they did so.

The author restricts her analysis to Weimar authors “die eine Beziehung zu Berlin oder zu einer anderen Großstadt hatten und mit ihrer bürgerlichen Erziehung, aber progressiven Haltung der Literatur neue Perspektiven und Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten vermitteln” (p. 41). Her subjects also had to retain an appreciable amount of cultural durability in order to hold the interest of readers to this day. Alfred Döblin, Erich Kästner, Bertolt Brecht and Thomas Mann thus figure prominently among Müting’s hundreds of citations, as do journals such as the *Vossische Zeitung*, *B.Z. am Mit-*

tag, and *Querschnitt*. She then categorizes her material under five rubrics: the thematization of advertising as a phenomenon of the time (whereby an ad becomes an object in a text); the representation of professional engagement in advertising (characters as buyers, consumer advisors, or as the writers, artists and designers in an ad agency); the manipulation of the advertising medium (references to non-specific advertisements whose form, color or placement carries symbolic meaning); the manipulation of citations from advertisements (use of modified brand slogans and the appropriation of ad-style language, which was self-explanatory, if admittedly difficult because “[d]ie Frage, ob es überhaupt einen ‘Sprachstil’ der Werbung gibt, dürfte hinsichtlich der heutigen Werbetexte bzw. angesichts wissenschaftlich fundierter Werbemethoden erheblich schwieriger zu beantworten sein als für die Reklame der zwanziger Jahre” [p. 54]).

These thematic preliminaries aside, Müting proceeds for the next three hundred pages to set out her findings. She has amassed a prodigious number of quotations and displays a minute familiarity with dozens of Weimar-era texts. She locates not only clear, if long overlooked, references to products and manufacturers, but also directs the reader’s attention to the significance of various parts of speech used to describe a given commodity. Why, for example, does Kurt Tucholsky modify the disparate nouns “Zigarette,” “Stuhlzapfen,” and “Sektmarke” with the adjectives “schnittig” and “rassig” (p. 140)? But Müting’s presentation, while exhaustive, can also be exhausting. The book springs from the author’s dissertation. Unfortunately, little seems to have been done to adapt the narrative from the style de-

manded by a professorial committee to one that would delight an educated, if non-specialist, public. The whole is redolent of library archives and midnight oil. Except for short chapter introductions and summaries, the bulk of the work is framed in outline form, sprinkled throughout with dashes and bullet points, each chapter, subchapter, sub-subchapter and so on tagged with a number. Müting dispenses altogether with illustrations. This decision compels her to expend much ink describing the layout, typeface, and location of many of the ads she cites, forgetting a dictum of the industry that a picture is worth a thousand words. She also refers to developments in film, light and art without penetrating to a theoretical level to establish connections among them.[1] Films such as *M* (1931) and *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927), while not written texts, abound in images of advertisements and stage shifting modes of urban specularity that comprise the author’s primary concerns.

Nevertheless, Müting has performed a great service for Germanists, social historians and literary scholars. Her study unveils a subtle connection between ephemeral catchphrases and enduring literature, one that deserves further investigation within Weimar Germany and extrapolation to other times and places.

Note

[1]. Readers interested in pursuing the link between light, Weimar cinema and nocturnal culture—including electric billboards and storefronts—might turn to Frances Guerin, *A Culture of Light: Cinema and Technology in 1920s Germany* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

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