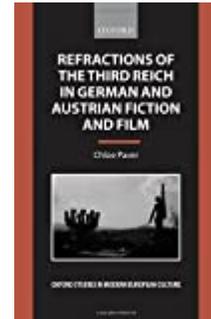




Chloe Paver. *Refractions of the Third Reich in German and Austrian Fiction and Film.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. vi + 174 pp. \$74.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-926611-1.



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New Perspectives in Literary and Cultural Studies of the Nazi Past

Representations of the Third Reich and fictional strategies for memorializing its monstrous crimes always require either artists or scholars to undertake a two-fold critical position that, first, questions the choice of objects under scrutiny and second, poses a challenge to one's own writing and methodological approach. At the outset, Chloe Paver engages explicitly with this dual task of cultural criticism as she begins her monograph with the question of "to what extent this particular object of study is constituted by the scholar's ... critical approach" (p. 2). Paver criticizes the decisions of many critics to select their objects of study based on preconceived theoretical or critical concepts that consequently exclude certain types of genres or media from the canon of scholarly writings. Paver identifies two major strains of such a scholarship. The first is an "ethical approach" that emerged in the 1980s. Largely privileging liberal writers of the immediate postwar era, critics "adopt a morally informed intellectual position" (p. 5) that corresponds to a similar position produced by the texts, which call their readers "to take responsibility" for the past in order "to come to terms" with it. The second approach appears in the 1990s in form of a "psychological turn"

which, based on Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich's groundbreaking psychoanalytical study, discusses literary and cinematic texts according to their ability or inability to perform the work of mourning.[3]

In order to dismantle the canon, Chloe Paver proposes an interdisciplinary, transnational, and historically non-chronological approach, following the intention of including diverse forms of textual expressions. Previously neglected texts and media play a decisive role in the formation of our cultural history and memory of the Third Reich, Paver insists, and thus deserve a "value-free" critical engagement. The monograph is composed of a "deliberately eclectic selection" (p. 12) that explicitly focuses on so-called marginalized genres and media, such as popular film (for example, chapter 1 on Michael Verhoeven's *Das schreckliche MÄdchen* [1989]), women writers and filmmakers (chapter 3 on "Documentary and Gender"), as well as memorial art and culture (chapter 5 on "Memorial Landscapes").

The book's originality lies not only in bringing these forms together in one volume, but in conducting a number of cross-textual and cross-media analyses, often

within one and the same chapter. Paver does not completely dismiss the established methodologies she has critically reflected on in the introduction. Rather, the author manages to appropriate traditional critical systems while producing at the same time an original reading that dismantles former notions of sociopolitical images and cultural memory. In addition, the author refers to a number of secondary sources primarily conducted in the last two decades within different disciplines, such as Aleida Assmann's work on cultural memory, Pierre Nora's concept of the *lieu de mémoire*, Marianne Hirsch's notion of "postmemory," and James E. Young's studies on memorial culture. The critical focus of each chapter is, furthermore, flushed out through the addition of a chapter entitled "Further Reading and Viewing" at the end of the book.

In the first chapter, Paver demonstrates how Verhoeven's *Das schreckliche Mädchen* produces its educative and moralizing message by conflating and misconstruing fictional as well as historical or biographical elements. Like Verhoeven's film, most of the texts discussed in the monograph address the problem of memorializing the past in the present and for following generations. Chapter 2 compares two German novels, Peter Schneider's *Vati* (1987) and Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* (1995), by way of a literary-historical approach. Both novels focus thematically on the relationship between first-generation Nazi perpetrators and participants and a postwar second generation coming of age during the 1960s. Paver compellingly outlines how the two novels produce an idea of postwar national identity that comes to be represented by an image of the generation of '68 itself constructed through the exclusion of women and the working classes.

Following this material, the third chapter deals specifically with three women artists from Austria and Germany working within different media: Helga Schubert's German nonfiction novel *Judasfrauen* (1990) as well as two documentary films, Helke Sander's *Befreier und Befreite. Krieg, Vergewaltigungen, Kinder* (1992) and Ruth Beckermann's *Jenseits des Krieges* (1997). All three works "share a common concern with the ways in which gender shaped personal experience of the Third Reich and with the way in which it shapes post-war memory" (p. 52). In spite of the documentary form and its sociological or journalistic underpinnings, all three works fail to produce a convincing presentation of historical events, and precisely this failure activates Paver's alternative reading. The two films and the novel are "valuable not so much for telling us 'how it was' in the Third Reich," Paver suggests, "as for highlighting what kind of knowl-

edge one would need to have about the Third Reich in order to understand it better" (p. 85).

The fourth chapter investigates the intersections between, on the one hand, two novels *Le Roi des Aulnes* (1970) by Michel Tournier and Marcel Beyer's *Flughunde* (1995) and, on the other hand, Tournier's novel and its filmic adaptation as *Der Unhold* (1996) by Volker Schlöndorff. It is the most intricate set of analyses across disciplinary, material, and national boundaries in the monograph. Although the insertion of a French novel appears somewhat odd in a volume on "German and Austrian fiction," Tournier's text provides an excellent focal point in its dual relationship to the literary and the cinematic text. While the previous chapters operated primarily on a narrative level, this segment attempts to take the analysis a step further by referring to the textual and material layers of each work. By focusing on the function of sound and language, Paver outlines how a fascist body, or a body under fascism, is constructed by way of the voice, both in its ability to render spoken language and acoustic utterances. The construction of the body is, then, extended to the larger body of contemporary European filmmaking practices and politics. Recent films, like *Der Unhold*, cross linguistic and "national boundaries, largely for practical and commercial reasons, and films about the Third Reich are inevitably caught up in this trend" (p. 87). European filmmaking in the post-industrialist era, Paver seems to suggest, is thus in danger of repeating the way in which language barriers functioned to support power structures under fascism.

In the final chapter, memory is discussed in relation to place through an analysis of memorial sites, the two former Austrian concentration camps Mauthausen and Ebensee. Paver is interested in the way in which these memorial landscapes become inscribed into a literary text, Christoph Ransmayr's *Morbus Kitahara* (1995). The novel uses the locale of the two camp sites in an attempt to articulate a larger "critique of the culture of commemoration" (p. 122). Ransmayr's critique informs Paver's own analysis of the topographical sites, which function to reveal "the tensions between landscape as national myth and as burial ground" (p. 153). In conclusion, the author calls for continuing artistic and scholarly engagement with the subject matter and draws attention to a lack of it within recent German *Popliteratur*, thus ending her study on a cautionary rather than celebratory note.

In conclusion, Paver reflects critically on diverse texts and her cross-analysis helps to reveal their function in

the construction of cultural memory. But being invested in this interdisciplinary approach would have required a further analysis of how different representational systems are able to communicate with each other, given their generic and material specificity. For instance, her focus on verbal and acoustic utterances in chapter 4 calls for a stronger differentiation of what it means to speak in a literary text, that is, to render voice and sound in writing, and the ways in which speech acts are then inscribed audiovisually into the cinematic material. It seems, then, that the choice to compare certain works with one another is informed more by a common subject matter than by a shared basis of production or modes of textual systems.

Moreover, the merits of Paver's "value-free" reading practice may appear, in a different light, as shortcomings, specifically if we consider the historical impact that this period had on the "value system" of postwar cultural history and criticism. Chloe Paver's pronounced neglect of so-called "liberal" or "high cultural" texts obscures the fact that many of these works entered an "unspoken canon" (p. 4) not simply for the purpose of privileging "high" over "low," but precisely because they spoke in a language that became explicitly articulated in reaction to National Socialism and its crimes. The novels, films, and exhibitions discussed in this monograph are, in other words, not only about the Third Reich but at the same time are written and produced after the Holocaust. Chloe Paver seems to ignore an important part of a critical debate that preceded and informed the studies in the 1980s and 1990s mentioned in the introduction, for instance, the postwar writings of the Frankfurt School and in particular Theodor W. Adorno's critical intervention of what it means "to write poetry after Auschwitz."^[3] This discussion cannot be easily dismissed even, or precisely, if one has the intention to reevaluate popular texts. Perhaps because this discussion is neglected, in this study

the historical period of National Socialism appears primarily as a subject matter contained within distinct, aesthetic objects of investigation. This monograph, then, provides us with reflections (rather than "refractions" as suggested by the title) of the Third Reich and, in doing so, fails to testify to one of the most important "lessons" we can learn from engaging with the Nazi past: the refusal to turn subjects into aesthetic objects.

Despite these criticisms, however, Chloe Paver's critical technique of reassessing traditional forms of representation through the selection and interrelation of diverse genres or media appears to be a valuable and important enterprise, especially in its attempt to propose a fundamental critique of those power structures involved in the establishment of critical regimes within academic fields. The cross-disciplinary strategy produces, furthermore, a number of original readings and important insights. The monograph's greatest contribution thus lies in this engagement with the primary material presented as a process of drawing new and often unexpected connections between different cultural forms of expression.

Notes

[1]. For example, Judith Ryan, *The Uncompleted Past: Postwar German Novels and the Third Reich* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983); and Anton Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

[2]. For example, Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); and Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[3]. Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Samuel Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 17-34.

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