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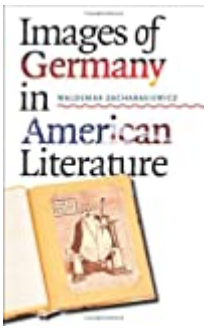

Waldemar Zacharasiewicz. *Images of Germany in American Literature.* Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007. 264 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-58729-524-9.

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Accounts of the "Other"

Waldemar Zacharasiewicz's book about images of Germany in American literature deals with a relatively long time period–about two hundred years–stretching from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the end of the twentieth. The author does not intend to present the reader with a snapshot of an era, but rather wants to show continuity and change in the way Germany was seen in America and make the reader realize how much has changed throughout these two hundred years and how much has remained the same. The author is a professor of English, American, and Canadian studies and the book he wrote is a truly interdisciplinary one: the sources are literary texts, travelogues, letters, and even other types of media (films, caricatures) and the book places itself in the new interdisciplinary field of "comparative imagology," that is, how literature depicts the different images certain nations have created about each other.

In the introduction, as part of the presentation of his methodology, the author also notes that literature can be understood as "part of a social practice in which the power politics of dominant groups and the interplay of forces acquire considerable importance" (p. 2). In other words, literature in this book is presented not as art or aesthetics, but rather as a group of sources that conveys an image of the social reality of a certain society or even as a tool for participating in politics either on the national or the international scene. Zacharasiewicz also notes that the images conveyed in these literary texts are "heterostereotypes," or stereotypes of the other, and they are intended to confirm or perhaps to challenge the autostereotype, the stereotype of the self. Thus, when we read about Americans writing about Germany and the Germans we should always keep in mind that the stereotypes presented are in a way related to the image of American society that exists in the mind of the author (or perhaps in the collective self).

The book proceeds in chronological order, starting with the early nineteenth century and finishing its analysis at the end of the twentieth century and providing a glance towards the future. The diachronic analysis enables us to see how stereotypes of Germans changed

from decade to decade and we are also reminded of the background–the social or political reality that is the origin of these new images. For example, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the image of Germans was primarily shaped by American scholars and students traveling to famous German universities as well as by the fame of German artists and thinkers (*Dichter und Denker*). The heterostereotypes presented in literature also reflected this positive attitude. Nevertheless, when Germany was united under the aegis of the militaristic Prussian state, and especially after the Franco-Prussian War, this image changed significantly, not just because Germany itself was transformed but also because new "messengers" were reporting about the changing country. A new group of American authors (a notable example was Henry James) saw Germany as a threat and an opponent of American values and thus changed the heterostereotype that had existed for many decades. Zacharasiewicz mentions a few authors that played a vital role in shaping these changing images and many of them will be familiar to readers even slightly acquainted with American literature of the past two hundred years. The book is an exciting reading experience in this sense; one is able to discover the new sides of already familiar American authors and obtain ideas for new readings of these writers. The list of authors (and their texts) is impressive–including Mark Twain, Kurt Vonnegut, James, and William Styron, just to name a few; it shows the depth to which the author reached to compose his thorough "imagological" analysis. It was an excellent idea to include short detours from literature to discuss films and political cartoons. This material is naturally much less detailed, providing only an overview of general tendencies. Nevertheless, it adds some new angles on the picture constituted in literature by confirming the idea that the definition of "literature" or "text" has become much broader in the past few decades. The political cartoons and caricatures included in the book enable us to visualize more easily the "images" presented in these heterostereotypes.

The stereotypes discussed in this book are not unfamiliar: the studious, stern, and hard-working Germans; German housewives, restricted to *Kirche*, *KÃ¼che* and *Kinder*; German "GemÃ¼tlichkeit" and love of worldly pleasures; and, from the twentieth century, the barbarous Hun and the Nazi, both excellent heterostereotypes for Americans, as they represent everything that America as "home of the free" opposes. In the closing chapter of the book ("A Look Toward the Future"), Zacharasiewicz tries to assess current images of Germany in America and think about possible new images that may appear in the future. He reflects on the debate initiated by Daniel J. Goldhagen's work, mentioning that the generalizations Goldhagen made about Germans were criticized both in Germany and America; even so, he acknowledges that the large amount of literature and films on the Holocaust and the fact that the image of "the Nazi" has remained vivid in the American mind suggests that Germany is still very often associated with National Socialism. Zacharasiewicz hopes for new, more positive stereotypes about Germans and believes that the end of communism might have initiated a reassessment of central Europe among American intellectuals. At the same time, however, he remains realistic by stating that another generation may need to pass before new, more positive stereotypes about Germans will start to develop on the other side of the Atlantic.

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