

leads us through the images, sounds, and discourses that constitute Lang's *M* as a historical "event."

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Kießling-Sonntag, Jochem. *Gestalten der Stille. Untersuchungen zur Prosa Robert Walsers.* Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 1997. 289pp. DM 58.00 paperback.

To write about Robert Walser is to write about someone who goes for a walk while you are writing about him. The Ph.D. thesis by Jochem Kießling-Sonntag tries to catch Walser on his walk, but he has already moved on. So he has to follow him again and again. In the end Kießling-Sonntag is the hare and Walser the hedgehog. This, in brief, is the impression gained from reading his book.

His main concern is to look into the use of silence (*Stille*) as a theme in Walser's works from the beginnings, through his Berlin and Biel periods, to the texts from his time in Bern. At first glance the book seems clearly structured. Kießling-Sonntag studies Walser's main texts: "Greifensee" and "Fritz Kochers Aufsätze" for his early years, "Geschwister Tanner" and "Kleist in Thun" for his time in Berlin, "Der Spaziergang" and "Naturstudie" for the Biel period, and "Der Herbst" and "Der Einsame" for his years in Bern. He constantly refers to older studies and makes the point that "Stille" changes from a more or less religious mood, through a sceptical phase, to an equilibrium in Walser's late prose. So why didn't he manage to catch the hedgehog?

There are methodological reasons and a general undecidedness as to what exactly his main question is. Does he want to know whether silence is the main theme, a motif running through Walser's texts, an idea determining the structure of his texts, a dialectical response to the acceleration of the modern way of life, an opinion by the author and/or the narrator, or the view of his characters? All this is mentioned, but nothing is carried through to its conclusion. From chapter to chapter and even within the chapters Kießling-Sonntag changes the perspective. All too often he is therefore forced to switch between

thematic readings of Walser's works, analysing the influence of Büchner or Goethe, a psychological portrait of the author, and a general theory of modernisation (especially Max Weber). Implicitly, Kießling-Sonntag suggests taking Walser's characters as expressions of his psychological situation as an author under the pressure of the speeding up of the modern world. But to which modern author (and not only to them) does this not apply? The result is commonplace: "Walsers Beschäftigung mit Gestalten der Stille zeugt von der Einheit seines Werkes, aber auch von seinem Weg poetischer Weiterentwicklung. In jeder Phase seines Wirkens setzt Walser die Auseinandersetzung mit der Stille als eines der Medien ein, mit deren Hilfe er die Beziehungen zwischen dem Subjekt und seiner Umwelt zu erkunden und speziell die Position des Schriftstellers zu bestimmen sucht" (276).

Kießling-Sonntag considers every word by Walser important. According equal value to each word may be a typical fault of a Ph.D. thesis-writer who views his subject without any distance. No doubt Walser is a conscious writer. No doubt silence is a main topic for Walser. No doubt Walser made differing uses of silence in his works. But too many passages in Kießling-Sonntag's thesis are merely paraphrases—with one main difference. He has not the slightest idea of irony. A lot of research has been done on irony and its self-reflective function in Walser's works (e.g., Baßler, *Die Entdeckung der Textur*), but Kießling-Sonntag has no idea of the game of rhetoric, no sensitivity for hyperbolic or grotesque techniques in Walser's writing. He didn't recognise the use of trivial pattern, neo-romantic exaggeration, or the inversion of readers' expectations. His book misses the literary nature of Walser's texts. When Walser quotes ironically from Goethe's poems, Kießling-Sonntag doesn't notice that Walser didn't quote the original Goethe but the *bildungsbürgerlich* deformation of his poetic works. Kießling-Sonntag really believes that Walser is giving his readers a "bodenständige Tugendlehre" (197), an ironic commentary on the educational situation of his time. And like most papers and works on the author, Walser's texts seem to have no other history than a vague modern history. In the end it all ends up in silence. Is there a Robert Walser in this thesis? Yes—in the quotations.

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