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*Aufklärer der Gegenwart. Politische Autorschaft zu Beginn
des 21. Jahrhunderts–Juli Zeh, Ilija Trojanow, Uwe
Tellkamp* von Sabrina Wagner (review)

Lars Richter

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Insgesamt bietet die Untersuchung anregende Einblicke in Timms Umgang mit Erinnerungen in seinen Werken. Doch werden zentrale Fragen vereinfacht dargestellt und die fehlende Auseinandersetzung mit Bereichen der Forschungsliteratur beeinträchtigt die Studie.

Goucher College

—Antje Krüger

Aufklärer der Gegenwart. Politische Autorschaft zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts – Juli Zeh, Ilija Trojanow, Uwe Tellkamp.

Von Sabrina Wagner. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015. 346 Seiten. €39,90 gebunden, €31,99 eBook.

The relationship between politics and literature has been a long runner in both literary discourses and German studies for decades and commonly focuses on the seemingly insurmountable gap between the content or ‘message’ of literature perceived as political and its aesthetic merits. Particularly Juli Zeh and Ilija Trojanow, two of the three authors that are at the focus of Sabrina Wagner’s study *Aufklärer der Gegenwart*, have been repeatedly confronted with accusations that their literary engagement with the sociopolitical realities of the twenty-first century is praiseworthy but at the same time lacking in aesthetic quality. Whether one agrees with such assessments or not, it is commendable that Wagner shifts her focus away from the interrelation between form and content towards the way in which the selected writers, Uwe Tellkamp being the third, are perceived as political by audiences and critics alike and how their poetological elaborations help to define their position as political authors within the literary field.

It becomes clear early on in the study that, when analyzing these writers with regards to their reception by literary critics and the reading public, the author is not quite as dead as the title of Roland Barthes’s seminal essay would have us believe. Quite the contrary, it is first and foremost the authors’ biographies, more specifically their professional training as jurist and doctor in the case of Zeh and Tellkamp and the transnational background for Trojanow, that endows these authors with the necessary cultural capital to be regarded as authorities within public discourse. Against this background, Wagner develops a model of political authorship around three distinct points of view from which, she asserts, the authors look upon contemporary society: the view from the inside (“Blick aus der Mitte”) for Juli Zeh, the view from the outside (“Blick von außen”) for Ilija Trojanow, and the view from above (“Blick von oben”) for Uwe Tellkamp. Wagner emphasizes that these perspectives are the currently dominant configurations of political authorship, thus allowing for an expansion of the model that might—and perhaps even should—include other points of view as well, for example one from the margins of society. As the polysemous title *Aufklärer der Gegenwart* suggests, the three authors are certainly invested in enlightening both readers and the sociopolitical status quo, but they do so by referencing many writers who came before them. Thus, Wagner situates Zeh, Trojanow, and Tellkamp in a long line of tradition that can be traced back to the Enlightenment, elaborates on seminal texts on *littérature engagée* like Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Qu’est-ce que la littéra-*

ture? (1948), and includes points of convergence with other well-known representatives of the author as public intellectual, such as Günter Grass.

The clearly defined model of political authorship developed in *Aufklärer der Gegenwart* also provides the study with its equally distinct structure. Preceded by a concise yet sufficiently comprehensive section that presents an overview of the relationship between authors, their texts, and politics at the turn of the millennium, Wagner explores the individual configuration of political authorship for Zeh, Trojanow, and Tellkamp in three consecutive chapters. Each chapter is organized in the same way and begins by situating the respective author within the literary field as being perceived as political based on biographical information. In the case of Juli Zeh, for example, Wagner positions her in the long tradition of “Dichterjuristen” (65) like Heinrich Heine, Kurt Tucholsky, and Bernhard Schlink, thus demonstrating again that the three authors at the center of *Aufklärer der Gegenwart* do not operate in a void or break entirely new ground but rather reconfigure what political authorship means within the conditions of the twenty-first century. Following the contextualization of the authors, the chapters offer an overview of major fictional and non-fictional publications, again with special emphasis on the reception of these texts in literary reviews in the German feuilleton. Wagner complements these introductory remarks with a detailed description of the authors’ poetological self-fashioning that draws on an impressively rich body of interviews, essays, and poetics lectures. The stress on poetological statements is perhaps one of the biggest strengths of this study because it allows Wagner to provide a lucid analysis of the complex and at times contradictory interrelations between poetics, texts, authorial self-statements, and the receptive side of literature.

The study ends with a comparison of all three authors that contrasts the configuration of political authorship for Zeh, Trojanow, and Tellkamp as well as drawing attention to the role that expectations from both literary audiences and literary critics play for the establishment of political authorship. Furthermore, the comparison reveals often-surprising connections among the selected authors. While many readers may be familiar with the close relationship between Juli Zeh and Ilija Trojanow that is arguably best exemplified in their co-authored *Angriff auf die Freiheit* (2009), Wagner’s analysis demonstrates that Zeh and Uwe Tellkamp have poetological points of view that overlap in significant ways, even if their political opinions—and, not least, literary texts—may be miles apart.

For readers who are interested in the multifaceted if not messy liaison between literature and politics as well as those who conduct research on Juli Zeh, Ilija Trojanow, and Uwe Tellkamp, *Aufklärer der Gegenwart* is quite simply a must-read. Thoroughly researched and written in an eloquent yet accessible style, the study provides important insights into the work and reception of the three authors with respect to their roles as political writers and public intellectuals. While their full importance is best grasped when read within the context of the whole study, the individual chapters can also be read in isolation and serve as detailed examinations of the work of Zeh, Trojanow, and Tellkamp. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, the model of political authorship that Sabrina Wagner develops in her study based on the authors’ respective points of view on society is a fruitful addition to research on this topic. Looking at political authorship as being determined by a view from the inside, a view from the outside, and a view from above provides sufficient structure to allow detailed

exploration, but it is at the same time flexible enough to accommodate expansions and modifications. Most significantly, this model is not tied to a specific national or linguistic background and can therefore easily be applied to authors beyond the German-language literary market.

University of Manitoba

—*Lars Richter*