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Der Brief im deutschen Drama des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts
von Irene Rupp (review)

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innovative theoretical insights may want to turn elsewhere. Others, seeking an introduction to this particular tradition of German poetry, will likely appreciate the panoramic view Anderegg creates in his book. He is interested in the larger connections, for sure, and the breadth of the material that this volume covers is impressive—from Pindar to Rilke, from the “Book of Psalms” to Eduard Mörike, with Catharina von Greiffenberg, Opitz, and Klopstock in between. It also deserves mention that while there may be books about the influence of the Horatian Ode on German poetry, a study on a poetry of praise of the scope of Anderegg’s is undoubtedly unique.

I will point out three instances of what the study leaves to be desired. First, Anderegg is highly justified in closing with a look at Rainer Maria Rilke. Nonetheless, he doesn’t manage to clarify the link of Rilke’s specific brand of praise (“Rühmen”) to the figure and the task of the poet, in general; quite surprisingly, especially in light of having chosen Goethe’s “Boy Charioteer” as his starting point. Had Anderegg mentioned Heidegger’s essay “What Are Poets For?” not just in passing but explored Heidegger’s distinctive reading carefully, he would have arrived at a better result. Second, readers may ask why Anderegg included Hölderlin, arguably one of German language’s greatest poets, in his study, since he has hardly anything original to say about him. The stereotypical keyword under which he discusses him—“homeless”—is indicative of this. Furthermore, when Anderegg states that understanding Hölderlin’s poetry depends on a “tightly knit poetic web” (185) of the entirety of his work, he seems to adhere to a theory of “parallel occurrences” that has been convincingly challenged by Peter Szondi in his treatise “On Textual Understanding” (1970). Third, Anderegg often writes in a manner that assumes his readers already know what he is talking about. Examples of such writing can be found in chapters where he makes a claim about a poem or an entire body of texts and then, after a colon, follows up with a few verses that are supposed to document the claim, without deeper textual analysis. It is also palpable in the chapter on Celtis where he quotes five Latin odes (in German translation) within the space of seven pages, a strategy that does not leave a lot of space for commentary or analysis. It bears repeating, however, that Anderegg’s book is a trailblazing study on the tradition of the poetry of praise from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, a comprehensive effort that, so far, had not yet been undertaken.

Kenyon College

—Paul Gebhardt

Der Brief im deutschen Drama des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts.

Von Irene Rupp. Bern: Peter Lang, 2016. 272 Seiten. €56,95 / \$69.95 gebunden oder eBook.

In this monograph, Irene Rupp analyzes the “dramenästhetische und dramentechnische Funktionalisierungen” of letters in dramas written starting in the Enlightenment and continuing through the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century (62). The study begins with an overview of the rise of the letter as a genre and the parallel development of bourgeois theater in Germany, particularly after Johann Christian Gottsched’s attempts to renew and modernize German theater circa 1730. While both the letter and a revitalized theater scene are, to some extent, expressions of the rise of a bourgeois articulation of a sense of self, Rupp cautions her readers about seeing this as the

primary reason for the increase in the number of dramas between 1750 and approximately 1860 containing letters as a key component of the play (cf. 13, 29). She argues that the letter, due to its material existence as a prop and the audience's (un)conscious knowledge of the letter as a "relational, intentional act" consisting of three parts, "Schreibvorgang, Übermittlungsvorgang und Empfangs- und Lesevorgang," is particularly well-suited to serve a variety of functions in both tragedies and comedies, as well as in dramas with a closed or open form (53). Letters serve in a variety of roles "indem sie Anlage und Struktur des Stücks mitbestimmen, Handlung in Gang setzen oder verzögern, akzentuieren und charakterisieren, Verbindungen schaffen und Sinn stiften" (242).

Before analyzing specific dramas, Rupp discusses the communicative functions of letters and dramas, pointing out their similarities, but also making clear that it is the contrast between the dramatic (the play) and the narrative (the letter) which distinguishes the letter due to the "Mittelbarkeit dieses Mediums, seiner Abfassung und der Rezeption und [...] Dauerhaftigkeit, der Verbindlichkeit der Autorität des geschriebenen Wortes" (62). In the body of the text, Rupp analyzes nineteen plays from twelve different playwrights including multiple examples from Schiller (3), Nestroy (2), and Lessing (4). The only female playwright discussed is Luise Adelgunde Victorie Gottsched. Rupp chose works to discuss that are primarily canonical (cf. 25) and which represent a variety of dramatic forms. Each work illustrates a particular function grouped under four broad categories—as a prop in the stage design and as the crux of specific scenes, as a way of character development, as a means of structuring time, and as constitutive elements of the plot and motivation thereof. Two of the most frequent types of scenes including letters are the mimesis of the writing stage and that of the reception/reading stage. Rupp also highlights the "*Briefintrige*" as a special case that demonstrates the malleability of the letter and its consequences. All of the analyses take the existence of an audience at a production of the play, not as a reader, into consideration (cf. 27).

Although for most of the examples, scenes revolving around letters do not dominate an entire play, even when they are pivotal for the plot, a notable exception is J.M.R. Lenz's *Die Soldaten* (1776). As Rupp points out, in 15 of the 35 scenes, letters play an active role: "Sie organisieren die Handlung, gewährleisten Übergänge und definieren Ortswechsel und Zeitverhältnisse" (132). Due to this fact, letters fulfill multiple functions. Rupp particularly highlights the way in which letters reveal covert actions and link together diverse locations. However, the examples she details also demonstrate how letters can be used to define characters and introduce ones who are not yet on stage, or to deal with the issue of time by discussing events that occurred prior to the onset of the action on stage, and which motivate the actions of various characters.

It is noteworthy that when Rupp states that letter-writing scenes are very effective in capturing the mental state of the writer, all three examples she gives involve women struggling to express themselves: Luise Miller in Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*, Sara Sampson in Lessing's *Miss Sara Sampson*, and Marie Wesener (whom Rupp identifies as Mariane) in Lenz's *Die Soldaten* (cf. 76–77). She describes in some detail two scenes in *Die Soldaten* in which Marie, a "*Bürgermädchen*," struggles with writing letters that are stylistically and orthographically correct (cf. 132–134). Although in her analysis of these scenes, she implies the potential for gender differences in

regards to letter writing and reception, it is an aspect she never directly addresses. Indeed, Roman Graf in his 1993 article, “‘Die Folgen des ehelosen Standes der Herren Soldaten’: Male Homosocial Desire in Lenz’s *Die Soldaten*” in the volume *Space to Act: The Theater of J.M.R. Lenz*, makes a compelling argument that “Lenz seems to incorporate notions of an *écriture masculine* versus an *écriture féminine*” that highlight gender roles and the power relationships associated with them (37). Certainly, this is a perspective that needs to be more closely investigated. Is it predominantly women who, in particular, are shown to struggle with writing letters? And if so, does this reflect women’s reality or does it reflect the assessment of women’s abilities as writers by male dramatists?

As stated earlier, Rupp assigns a special status to the “Briefintrigue,” the only use of letters for which she includes two examples: a tragedy, Schiller’s *Kabale und Liebe* (1784), and a comedy, Nestroy’s *Zu ebener Erde und erster Stock oder Die Launen des Glücks* (1835). The crux of such dramas is that the trust embodied in “ungestörte[r] Briefverkehr” can be brutally abused by the writer of the letter, by a third party on its way to the recipient, and even occasionally by the recipient (cf. 198). Suspense in such dramas is created “durch Wissensunterschiede zwischen den Handlungsfiguren einerseits und zwischen Handlungsfiguren und Zuschauern andererseits [. . .]” (193). Furthermore, Rupp argues the intrigue arouses the audience’s sense of morality—condemning the schemer (*Intrigant*) and creating a sense of sympathy and/or empathy with the victim (cf. 194–195). Thus, for centuries, authors have utilized the *Intrigenbrief* as an effective means of drawing an audience into the plot and helping them to identify with the central conflict and its potentially deadly effects (Schiller/tragedies) or its more harmless guises of deception (Nestroy/comedies). Of further interest in this chapter is Rupp’s discussion of the *Simultanbühne* used in staging Nestroy’s play.

Rupp’s focus is clearly on cataloging the various aesthetic uses of letters in drama. At the end, she includes a list of 360 dramas that use letters as an element in the plot. The theoretical chapters as well as the individual analyses are accessible to advanced undergraduates and graduate students and her specific examples provide good textual and reception-based evidence of the layers of meaning letters can add to drama. In her conclusion, Rupp briefly mentions that there is a double-sided effect of looking at this dramatic element, namely, that it also allows one to realize things about the “nature of the letter” (cf. 242). With the *Intrigenbrief*, there is an obvious emphasis on miscommunication, but Rupp also notes that Lessing “zeigt [. . .] in seinen Schauspielen den Brief als ein dem mündlichen Gespräch unterlegenes Medium [und] weist auf die Gefahren hin, welche die schriftliche Mittelbarkeit mit sich bringt” (169). Furthermore, a number of her examples show that letters are incapable of bridging class differences (Lenz, Schiller, Nestroy). Such representations of letters in the dramas cast into question the letter’s supposed authority as a written record and its potential for truthful communication between writer and (intended) recipient. This critique should certainly be considered when using letters as a source of “accurate” information/communication in the “age of the letter.” And, although the medium may have changed in the present day, the questions that these playwrights raise about the malleability of these written texts in their dramas, showing their uses and abuses, are still valid.