
REVIEWS

Wolfgang G. Natter. *Literature at War, 1914-1940: Representing the "Time of Greatness" in Germany*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999. 280p.

Judy Suh
University of Pittsburgh

The breadth of *Literature at War* will strike the reader as exceptional. In order to contemplate the bureaucratization of German culture from World War I to World War II, Natter investigates materials usually peripheral to literary criticism such as state and military edicts, publishers' letters, and library statistics, as well as more standard fare like novels and journals. Natter moves between analyzing writers' formal strategies to investigating official state orders controlling the writing and circulation of literature. Book distribution, state censorship, publishing processes, and editorial histories sometimes become central here to "reformulate the aim of literary analysis as a social process" (175).

Throughout, Natter articulates how textual production inflects and creates the memory of war. He argues convincingly that conservative values in Germany at the time were systematically deployed through the supposedly "value-free" publishing and reading customs of literary culture. Institutions and those in positions of power eventually appear to have very conscious intentions of propaganda. As a result, the book draws a relatively simple hierarchical relationship between the state and the reading public. At some points, however, a much subtler description of the relationships between power and literature is at work. At its best, Natter's representation of memory construction contributes to an understanding of hegemony as a complex relationship between power and culture, and as a complicated fusion of consent and domination.

Natter's talents lie in reinterpreting seemingly opaque material, and making it simultaneously lucid and undeniably tied to a network of culture. His particular and more finely tuned talent lies in the formal analysis of fiction. In the context of aesthetic and political discussions, Natter elegantly discusses how literature, through differing modes of narrative style, produces or resists statist constructions such as the pretension to an authorial, "authentic" voice of the war. The brief but sharp concentrations on literary style render a use of literature that is inseparable from politics. The book takes care, at the same time, not to collapse the distinc-

tions. In particular, as a challenge to presumptions about identity and authenticity, his focus on memory draws on similar critiques made by Horkheimer and Adorno, Benjamin, and Freud.

For instance, a Freudian understanding of memory in which meaning and history depend heavily upon belatedness and censorship, informs the analysis. Natter discusses how power is deployed in literary distribution, and Freud's work on displacement in dream work becomes an analogy for how meaning is produced in the writing of war fiction and non-fiction. Adorno and Horkheimer on mass cultural production, affirmative mass reading culture, and the culture industry also appear as significant scaffolding. In addition, Natter gives a description of fascism that is in line with the spirit of Benjamin's assessment of fascism as an aestheticization of politics. The combination of these thinkers allows a focus on textual production through censorship, as well as on the specific contributions of censorship and distribution to the culture of warfare. In this context, these evocations are quite original and appropriate.

Nevertheless, these thinkers remain relatively unintegrated throughout. The theoretical rigor promised by Natter's critical allusions is not thorough; the book as a whole does not shed new light on these figures. For the most part, they "support" his assertions about the literature and state proclamations. They're assumed, in other words, to be fairly transparent and applicable, and stand without an adequate probing of their possible limits. Very rarely do they become the central object of analysis.

One of the most stimulating aspects of this book, though, is its theoretical concern with the development of National Socialism. A partial but rich picture of Nazi culture lurks throughout this book and it slowly emerges as a combination of state censorship, nationalist and conservative cultural politics, and the pretensions to a "classless" utopian society supposedly operating in the trenches of World War I. The book would therefore appeal to those interested in the intersection of fascism and literature, to those interested in the politics of literary distribution during wartime, or in the role of the state in twentieth-century literary production.

This study is by no means a comprehensive survey of German literature during the era, but it is all the stronger for its careful selectivity. Natter takes seriously the injunction to read books without losing sight of the process of institutionalization that brought them to light or, on the other hand, censored them into obscurity. ✿