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Viktor Ullmann (review)

Sharon Krebs

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Ob von einer Freundschaft im Exil, wie der Titel suggeriert, wirklich die Rede sein kann, ist fragwürdig. Zu unterschiedlich war die Situation der beiden Autoren: Als sie sich 1938 in Princeton trafen, logierte Thomas Mann in einer Villa mit zehn Räumen und fünf Badezimmern, während Broch in einer winzigen Kammer hausen musste. Es entsteht eher das Bild einer durch das Schicksal bewirkten Verbundenheit, die sich schließlich auch in gemeinsamen Aktionen gegen den Nationalsozialismus manifestierte, wobei Mann besondere Achtung vor Broch dem Psychologen des Massenwahns zeigte, auch wenn er in Brochs theoretischen Schriften die aktuelle Verwertbarkeit vermisste. Es entsteht das Bild von gegenseitigem Respekt und von Anteilnahme an den Arbeiten des anderen. Immerhin gehörte Broch in den Princeton Jahren (1938–1941) zum engeren Bekanntenkreis der Familie Mann und übernahm sogar die Rolle des Trauzeugen bei der Heirat der jüngsten Mann-Tochter Elisabeth. Auch stand Broch immer auf der Besucherliste, wenn Thomas Mann später von seinem kalifornischen Domizil an die Ostküste reiste. Doch waren die beiden Schriftsteller nicht nur in Hinsicht auf Alter und Bekanntheit, sondern auch in ihrem Naturell zu verschieden, um sich wirklich ganz nahe zu kommen. “Bei aller Hochachtung, die sie einander bewahrten,” so das einleuchtende Resümee Lützelers, “bei allem generellen Respekt blieb im literarischen wie im politischen Bereich immer das Bewusstsein einer Differenz” (29). Für Broch war Thomas Mann letztlich zu sehr Dichterstern und selbsternannter Repräsentant der deutschen Nation, er sah um den Nobelpreisträger den “Zaubermantel der Ungemütlichkeit” (199) wehen. Dennoch – und dies ist ein weiterer spannender Aspekt, der durch Lützelers Band zutage tritt – zeigte sich Broch loyal, als Thomas Mann in der Nachkriegszeit von Frank Thiess im Zuge des Streites zwischen Schriftstellern des Exils und der inneren Emigration heftig angegriffen wurde. Da Broch sich sowohl Mann als auch Thiess (der ihm bei der *Schlafwandler*-Trilogie mit vielen praktischen Hinweisen geholfen hatte) verpflichtet fühlte, erforderte seine Haltung in diesem Konflikt, wie Lützeler schreibt, “viel diplomatisches Geschick” (24), was Broch denn auch mit viel Noblesse bewies. Die von ihm sicher begehrte Aufnahme in die Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung, wo Thiess als Vizepräsident amtierte, scheiterte, weil Broch dem berühmteren Kollegen den Vorzug lassen wollte.

Paul Michael Lützelers vorbildlich zusammengestellter Band verschafft dem Leser nicht nur ein komplexes und facettenreiches Bild über das Verhältnis der beiden so verschiedenen Autoren, er bietet auch einen guten Einblick in Diskussionen und Aktionen der deutschsprachigen Schriftsteller im US-amerikanischen Exil. Wer sich mit einem der beiden Autoren oder mit Forschungen zum Exil befasst, sollte dieses Buch in seinem Regal stehen haben.

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Mitsuko Shirai, voice. *Viktor Ullmann*. With Hartmut Höll, piano, and Elisabeth Verhoeven, readings. *Cappriccio* (#10897), 2001. Euro 16.99 (Compact Disc)
ASIN B00005QHVE.

The lieder recordings of Mitsuko Shirai and Hartmut Höll are always thoughtfully selected collections, performed with intelligence and insight. The present CD, on which they are joined by Elisabeth Verhoeven, is yet another in a long line of memorable re-

cordings. The three artists have produced a poignant testament to the outstanding talent of the Jewish composer Viktor Ullmann (1898–1944), who perished in Auschwitz on 18 October 1944, two days after having been sent there from Theresienstadt.

The CD opens with a group of five songs composed in Prague in 1939, with texts from the *Liebesgedichte* of Ricarda Huch. Settings of Huch's poetry are not numerous; aside from Ullmann, Hans Pfitzner has set seven poems, five of which are also from Huch's *Liebesgedichte*. Although some might not find Ullmann's music accessible at first hearing, it beautifully captures the almost fanatical rapture of Huch's love poetry. Shirai and Höll give a gripping performance, which, like Ullmann's music, amply repays multiple listenings.

The remainder of the CD is devoted to works composed in Theresienstadt, where Ullmann had been incarcerated since the autumn of 1942. Many authors have commented on the ironic twist of fate by which many of Ullmann's Theresienstadt compositions have survived, while most of his earlier work has been lost. In 1943, Ullmann commenced the composition of a *Hölderlin-Liederbuch*, beginning with the next two songs on this recording: "Sonnenuntergang" and "Der Frühling." It is not certain why Ullmann abandoned his Hölderlin project, but he crossed the suffix "-buch" out. Several months later he set his last Hölderlin poem, "Abendphantasie," leaving the world only three *Hölderlin-Lieder*. As one listens to these compositions, considered to be among Ullmann's masterpieces, it is fascinating to contemplate the choice of texts, the interaction of music and text, and the circumstances under which this music came into being. The interpretations on this recording are very moving, in particular "Abendphantasie," the last of the group.

The final vocal piece on the CD is the "Little Cakewalk," apparently the only surviving song of a group of *chansons des enfants francaises*. Shirai's performance achieves such a completely different vocal colour from that of the earlier lieder that one could almost be convinced that another singer is performing. The piece is just over two minutes long, although Ullmann's performance instructions request "répétition avec humeur jusqu'à fin de siècle." Light and carefree on the surface and having a children's counting rhyme as a text, the piece has been described as a deliberate reaction against the horrors of life in a concentration camp. Shirai's and Höll's rendition of the "Little Cakewalk," while not lacking in lightness and playfulness, gives us glimpses of these darker undercurrents.

The CD concludes with a longer work, over half an hour in duration. Rilke wrote *Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph Rilke* in 1899, reworked it in 1904 before its publication in Prague, and then reworked it again for the German publication of 1906. Ullmann chose to set Rilke's *Prosadichtung* as a *Melodram*, a genre in which the text is recited – not sung – to a musical (in this case, piano) accompaniment, resulting in what one might term a "heightened" recitation. The incredible expressive power of the human voice is supplemented by an equally expressive piano part. And when, as on this recording, the *Melodram* is performed by two superb artists, the result is thrilling.

Ullmann chose not to use Rilke's entire text, cutting the length almost exactly in half. For the most part, he selected or left out complete segments of the work. However, if a chosen segment contained a reference to an earlier omitted segment, Ullmann deleted that reference. The entire story of the Marquis was cut, for example, and any later mention of the rose petal that the Marquis bestowed upon the Cornet at their farewell was also removed. Ullmann's work is thus a distilled version of the original Rilke text.

This recording is potentially useful in a number of different areas of the discipline of German Studies. In Ricarda Huch studies, for example, a discussion of the statement in the CD booklet that Ullmann “strengthened the prevailing mood of the poetry, and added new components to it” (14) could be very fruitful. In addition, Ullmann’s editing of Rilke’s text and its effect on the work promises a fascinating project, while Ullmann’s entire biography offers a particularly compelling instance of an artist’s confrontation with National Socialism and the Holocaust. Given an academic climate that actively promotes interdisciplinarity, it is wonderful to find a recording that brings music and *Germanistik* together in so many ways.

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Heinz Antor, Sylvia Brown, John Considine, Klaus Stierstorfer, eds. *Refractions of Germany in Canadian Literature and Culture*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003. 377 pp. Euro 108 (Hardcover). ISBN 3-11-017666-1.

Germany and Germans figure in Canada’s literary consciousness in complex ways. Canadian and German literary critics explore some of these “refractions” in this important collection. The seventeen essays, originating as presentations at a conference in Banff, Alberta, in 2002, are carefully edited and, essentially, of evenly high quality. They are grouped in three sections: “Diaspora and Settledness,” “Jewish Experience and the Holocaust,” and “Literature and Cultural Exchange.” These themes are “refracted” rather than merely summarized in John Considine’s introduction and in an essay/poem by Robert Kroetsch.

In the first two essays of section one, Sylvia Brown and Anna Wittmann claim German immigrants’ oral histories about flight, displacement, and eventual settlement in Canada during and after WWII as Canadian literature. Brown examines her father’s and other Prussian-Germans’ stories and silences about the loss of *Heimat*. Juxtaposing fiction and oral history, Wittmann investigates East European Germans’ continually shifting identities in times of war and migration. While it is unclear how the life stories are shaped by the Canadian experience, it is clear that their marginalization has shaped the two authors. Thus both articles are expressions of second generation German-Canadians finding their voice in Canadian society. Peter Webb echoes this political motivation in his carefully crafted rehabilitation of Martin Blecher, a German-American living part-time in Ontario, who until recently has been suspected by Germanophobic Anglo-Canadians of murdering Canadian painter Tom Thomson in 1917. The next three essays pick up the idea of constructing a German-Canadian cultural memory. Considine analyzes Jack Thiessen’s Mennonite dictionaries as an archive of language and thus as a (or the) *Heimat* for Mennonites. Others felt that “home” could or even should be religious rather than ethnic, as is evident in Thomas Mengel’s descriptive analysis of “Der deutsche Katholik in Kanada (1964–1993).” That identity and *Heimat* are socially contested concepts is evidenced by Heinz Antor’s useful examination not only of the impact of Rudy Wiebe’s Mennonite heritage on his writings but also of his writings about Mennonites on Canadian society. Wiebe writes against truisms held about and by Mennonites.