

English Modernism, National Identity, and the Germans, 1890-1950. By Petra Rau. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009. 243 pp. \$99.95 cloth.

The number of works that examine literary and cultural interactions between Germany and Britain has burgeoned since Rosemary Ashton first published *The German Idea*, her landmark 1980 study of the reception of German thought in Coleridge, Carlyle, Lewes, and Eliot. Scholars who followed have tended to look at how other British writers engaged with German authors (as in Rüdiger Görner's *Anglo-German Affinities and Antipathies* or Patrick Bridgwater's *Anglo-German Interactions in the Literature of the 1890s*), at the experiences of British authors in German-speaking central Europe (Peter Firchow's *Strange Meetings*), or at changing representations of Germany and the Germans in British fiction (Firchow's *The Death of the*

German Cousin; Gisela Argyle's *Germany as Model and Monster*). Petra Rau's monograph is an important addition to this latter body of work, even if she takes a slightly different tack: while her focus is on the troping of Germanness in a wide variety of British texts and images between 1890 and 1950, her goal is less to examine British notions of Germanness than it is to explore "what this protracted German discourse tells us about *Englishness* and *English* cultural anxieties in the early twentieth century" (2, my emphasis).

Rau proceeds from the premise that a certain instability lies at the very heart of the notion of English modernism—that in the early twentieth century, Englishness and modernism were often discursively produced as antithetical to one another. As modernism was consistently associated with new trends in Germany, those who were invested in articulating English national identity made moves either to reconcile the [German] Modern with Englishness or to define Englishness in contradistinction to the [German] Modern. Rau argues that contemporary negotiations of Englishness, then, relied not only on the mutually reinforcing, nostalgic notions of Empire and Homeland, but also on "a third element . . . : the Germans" (8), for the "tension between modernity and national identity" demands "a conduit that serves to channel . . . anxiety onto an 'other' through which imponderables can be more easily articulated" (1). "The Germans" are, for Rau, that "useful conduit for more or less anxiously negotiating Englishness and England's place in the world" (16).

While this claim may initially seem to be something of an overstatement, in each chapter Rau picks a different "imponderable" and shows how it is "articulated" using the "conduit" of Germanness in specific works by English and Anglo-Irish writers. In her parallel readings of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Women in Love*, for instance, Rau finds plenty of textual evidence for the ubiquity of German bodies in situations where anxieties about English bodies are being expressed; and she demonstrates convincingly just how both Woolf and Lawrence "make a point of articulating their ambivalences about certain types of modernity through a grotesque national habitus identified as German" (120-21). Similarly, in a chapter on Joseph Conrad's fiction, she demonstrates the ways in which Conrad deploys the figure of the "German renegade" to give some semblance of integrity to the brittle and compromised figure of the "English hero" (17). But it is not only in its negative incarnations that the German serves as a constitutive "other" in articulations of English identity. In chapters on robust Anglo-Saxon hybridity in E. M. Forster and Elizabeth von Arnim, on how modernity is embraced in the popular fiction of Buchan and Saki, and on the fascinating Fascist body in Isherwood and Stevie Smith, Rau builds her case that the cultural response to Germany in the early twentieth century "was not uniformly characterized by hostility" (9).

Rau marshals an extraordinary variety of texts and images in support of her argument. Primary texts subjected to close readings include landmarks of modernism (*Mrs. Dalloway*, *Lord Jim*, *Women in Love*), Edwardian fictions that explore hyphenated identities (*Howards End*, *Elizabeth and her German Garden*), popular invasion fantasies (*The Riddle of the Sands*, *The 39 Steps*), and World War II spy novels (*The Ministry of Fear* and *The Heat of the Day*). Reproductions of a variety of propaganda posters and political cartoons demonstrate how contemporary visual culture complemented fictional representations of Germans. But it is Rau's command of non-fictional sources (in both English and German) that impresses throughout the volume: she turns, for instance, to correspondence with publishers to establish the demographics of Conrad's readership; to Baedeker guides and Thomas Cook newspaper advertisements for data on the affordability of sojourns at German resorts; to German medical and sexological works to flesh out British fears of German corporeality; and to works of racial hygiene and eugenics to explore anxieties surrounding English national character in the late twentieth century. Rau rarely generalizes without providing ample supporting footnotes, and the range of sources and materials she cites is consistently impressive.

While it is evident throughout the monograph that the legacy of Freudian psychoanalysis holds much interest for the author (10, 24, 28, 172), she generally—refreshingly—avoids the overuse of psychoanalytic models in her analysis of British literary representations of Germanness. An exception is her discussion in the final chapter of Freud's notion of the uncanny, *das Unheimliche*. In what is perhaps the most elegantly argued chapter of the study, Rau picks up a thread suggested in her introduction that “the Germans” functioned as an uncomfortable double of “the English” for much of the early twentieth century, a “strangely familiar” nation with “potentially too intimate cultural affinities” (10). In times of war, these affinities are effaced in nationalist propaganda, she demonstrates, only to resurface and haunt the pages of popular fiction. This is especially the case with the spy novels of Graham Greene and Elizabeth Bowen, which for Rau “explore the perilous space along the common frontier between the self and the perceived other” (195). Rau deftly handles the notion of the uncanny in this final chapter, and one senses that early chapters might also have benefited from this model of repeated English and German “misrecognition[s]” (200).

The study is not without one or two shortcomings. The chapter on fictional English forays into German spa towns (most prominently Bad Nauheim in Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*) makes for fascinating reading, but seems out of place in the overall structure of the work. Had it followed the chapter on the grotesque German body in Woolf and Lawrence, it would have benefited from the evidence presented there of

changing German attitudes towards the body, and of the physical culture (or *Lebensreform*) movements that had swept the country and changed German spa culture around the turn of the century. As it stands, *The Good Soldier* might just as well have been set in a French or even American spa town, and Rau's insights in this chapter throw light on her overall project only in retrospect. More problematic is the lack of a clear conclusion to Rau's study. The final chapter looks at spy fiction of the 1940s, and closes with a gesture in the direction of a future project that might deal with the imbrication of Germanness with post-Cold War understandings of English identity. Here Rau might have taken on more directly the argument made in the conclusion of *Germany as Model and Monster*, in which Gisela Argyle claims that the advent of globalization and a multi-ethnic Britain has closed off the German as "the obvious figure of comparison for the English" (184). Not only does Rau not engage Argyle's argument, she does her own volume a disservice by not pulling together the threads she has so skillfully spun out over two hundred pages. Rau's closing with a mere hint at a future book detracts from the very real accomplishments of the book in hand, and seems an abrupt and even reductive way to close a work that has ranged so carefully over so much rich material.

These problems are relatively minor, however, and neither detracts seriously from the work as a whole. *English Modernism, National Identity, and the Germans, 1890-1950* represents a significant addition to the body of works dealing with Anglo-German literary relations: in focusing on the troping of Germanness in British fiction, editorials, cartoons, posters, and travel guides, Rau has broadened the generic scope of the field; and in insisting that we not treat the two World Wars as start or end points in a teleological narrative of Anglo-German relations since 1890, she has shed new light on interventions that had previously been overshadowed by the legacy of World War II.

Works Cited

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