H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Maria Tatar. *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995. xii + 213 pp. $23.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-04338-8.

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Published on H-German (November, 1995)

Maria Tatar's study is part of a recent and most welcome wave of interdisciplinary scholarship that situates representations of gender in Weimar's sociopolitical context. Tatar, a professor of German at Harvard, finds it disturbing that the standard cultural histories of Weimar confront neither the mass murderers who loomed so large in public consciousness in the 1920s nor the portrayals of sexual murder that litter the Weimar cultural canon. Alarmed by the frequency with which mutilated female bodies appear in Weimar art, Tatar argues that works such as Fritz Lang's film *M*, paintings by Otto Dix and George Grosz, novels by Alfred Doeblin, and even contemporary press accounts of sex murders, reveal *Lustmord* to be at the heart of a modernist project of aestheticizing violence and "managing certain kinds of sexual, social and political anxieties" (p. 6) – anxieties produced by a lost war and its grim harvest of mutilated male bodies.

Tatar's argument hinges on the reality of women's increasing public visibility and attendant male fears of chaos. In a vein similar to Susan Kingsley Kent's study of postwar Britain, Tatar lucidly demonstrates how male resentment toward the "enemy on the home front" who appeared to escape the war physically intact (the thousands of female victims of starvation and disease are overlooked by both contemporaries and Tatar) manifested itself in both physical and symbolic violence. Part One of the book convincingly shows how journalistic practice rendered violence against women (particularly those of "questionable" morality) "natural" and even justifiable (pp. 52-54). Tatar also illuminates the press's role not only in creating the mass murderer (as in the case of Peter Kuerten, who stated that press coverage actually motivated him to commit even more heinous sexual crimes) but in constructing him as the pitiable victim of a pathological femininity, a device Lang replicates in *M*. That same press created a frightened, femininized populace obsessed with notions of social contagion that linked femininity, Jewishness, disease, and criminality in a "discursive Gleichschaltung" (p. 64) the Nazis would later tap to justify their own social cleansing. Tatar offers a powerful reminder that rampant anxiety over a perceived loss of social and moral (not to mention economic) control was fertile soil for Nazi promises to restore neat gender boundaries.

The book's second part offers case studies of Dix, Grosz, Doeblin, and Lang – artists Tatar calls "personally implicated" (p. 4) in a male project to control female bodies through practices centered on the mutilated female corpse. Tatar sets up a dichotomy in which male artists working through the traumas of war must "kill" their female subjects (the act of representing murder is treated as tantamount to murder itself) to reclaim creative powers threatened by female reproduction and self-sufficiency. "It is as if the war functioned as an event that released the creative energies of artists and legitimized the representation of brutal violence directed at the female enemy on the domestic front rather than the male adversary on the military battlefield" (p. 68).

Tatar measures artists' complicity in this misogynist project by how "sympathetically" they portray sex murderers. Yet her reading of these figures often runs the risk of sacrificing the specificity of Weimar to broader theories about "Western notions of what drives men to murder women" (p. 7). For example, Tatar reads Dix's and Grosz's self-portraits as sex murderers as transparent statements of untroubled identification with some universal male drive to destroy a femininity at once suffocatingly maternal and corrosively promiscuous. Yet what of the war's fracturing of stable subjectivity, as revealed, for example, in Grosz's pseudonyms and provocative role-playing? Could not these artists – all of whom saw themselves in opposition to the current regime – also have identified at some level with the corpses in their work, not the murderers? By dismissing these artists' politics out of hand, Tatar may be lifting their work too far out of context. While rage against women runs like a red thread through Grosz's work, they were certainly not his sole target. Grosz was indeed fascinated with pulp fic-

tion and killers, though one such object of his sustained interest was not a sex murderer at all but rather a businessman who blew up his own ship and the hundreds aboard to collect the insurance. (See Beth Irwin Lewis, "The Medical Journal of Dr. William King Thomas, USA," in Peter Nisbet, ed., *The Sketchbooks of George Grosz.*) While Tatar should not be castigated for not being an historian, it would have been useful if she had treated these artists' prominent political commitments seriously. Is the nude in Grosz's *Down with Liebknecht* merely the sign of an unhealthy obsession with the naked female body, as Tatar suggests (101)? Or could it - and by extension the motif of the mutilated woman - serve to comment on what Grosz saw as a sick, corrupt, sociopolitical order? Weimar art was permeated with images of disfiguration, from Dix's crippled veterans to Hannah Hoech's fragmented female bodies. While Tatar's study offers a sobering reminder of the ubiquity of the violated female corpse from the Victorian era to our own, it blurs the uniqueness of Weimar art by decoupling *Lustmord* from other mutilations in play at the time.

Tatar also does not explore the implications of the fact that Grosz's fiancee posed as the victim in his 1918 *Self-Portrait as Jack the Ripper*, a work Tatar uses to set the stage for her study. Central to her general argument are Grosz's depictions of women as "shapeless" and "obese," which she claims were calculated to obliterate them as objects of desire. Anyone who has read Grosz's lustful letters to his zaftig wife Eva could reply that there may be different standards of physical beauty at work here. Tatar's rigid male-female/murderer-victim dichotomy forecloses any possibility of complicity or pleasure in Eva Peter's pose, and fails to shed light on the crucial story of women's participation in the renegotiation of gender identities during Weimar. Interestingly, this book appears at a time when cultural and gender studies are moving away from firm dichotomies and straightforward models of victimization.

Like Peter Gay before her, Maria Tatar creates a new framework to interpret Weimar culture. Where Gay saw a revolt of sons against fathers, Tatar sees sons seeking revenge against women. As with all such overarching explanations, Tatar's often verges on the ahistorical. Yet this caveat should not discourage scholars of the period, regardless of their disciplinary allegiances, from reading a work which can only be seen as a useful addition to a field that Germanists have neglected for too long. Tatar should be applauded for expanding the scope of critical inquiry and rescuing the mute, mutilated female subjects of so much Weimar cultural production – bodies long submerged in critics' drive to dismiss issues of content for those of form in modernist art. She provides food for thought on which historians, literary critics, and art historians can all chew.

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Citation: Julia E. Sneeringer. Review of Tatar, Maria, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany.* H-German, H-Net Reviews. November, 1995.
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