



10-1976

Banziger, Hans, Zwischen Protest und Traditionsbewusstsein: Arbeiten zum Werk und zur gesellschaftlichen Stellung Max Frischs: Book Review

John Holley
Old Dominion University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/sahs_newsletter



Part of the [European History Commons](#), and the [European Languages and Societies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Holley, John (1976) "Banziger, Hans, Zwischen Protest und Traditionsbewusstsein: Arbeiten zum Werk und zur gesellschaftlichen Stellung Max Frischs: Book Review," *Swiss American Historical Society Newsletter*. Vol. 12: Iss. 3, Article 8.

Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/sahs_newsletter/vol12/iss3/8

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Swiss American Historical Society Newsletter by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

we realize that the study of emigration history is not only a concern of specialists, but also a very direct means to understand and accept our own situation, whether our forebears were emigrants or quite sedentary people.

Lukas F. Burckhardt
Bern

Banziger, Hans, Zwischen Protest und Traditionsbewusstsein: Arbeiten zum Werk und zur gesellschaftlichen Stellung Max Frischs. Bern: Franke Verlag (1975). 121 pp. sFr. 17.80

Neben der Achtung vor dem Werk, dem Dichter und dessen Umwelt hat mich während der Arbeit die Absicht geleitet, Laien und Fachleuten informatorische Dienste zu leisten: durch simples Tatsachenmaterial, durch Hinweise auf Vergessenes wie nirgends verzeichnete Aufsätze, durch Zitate von Pressestimmen, die nicht jedermann zugänglich sind, durch Notierung von nicht-redigierten Textstellen wie die aus Melchingers Andorra-Rezension, kurz durch Kleinigkeiten, die in den grosszügigen Interpretationsversuchen selten Platz finden. ("Vorwort," p. 6)

Lest the reader be frightened away by the author's promise to recount in the service of information those minor details which seldom find a place in "broad attempts at interpretation," it should be mentioned at the outset that this book has more to recommend it than such a pedantic statement of intent might lead one to believe. Indeed, Hans Banziger, appropriately for a peripatetic review of Frisch's work, takes us through a knowledgeable discussion of the major tenets that have long informed the thinking and writing of this most interesting, engaging, and thought provoking contemporary, reminding us of Frisch's abiding concern with the thinker as skeptic, the writer as iconoclast, and convention as liability.

There are, of course, also discussions of specific works, and in one of the more interesting of these the author compares the social difficulties experienced by Frisch's Stiller and Hesse's Harry Haller (the "Steppenwolf" in the novel by the same name), both of whom suffer from what we have come to term an identity problem. Hesse's Haller reads in the Treatise on the Steppenwolf that those people of unusually delicate perceptions who discover that the unity of personality is an illusion and that they are rather a "bundle of selves" are placed under lock and key and labeled schizophrenics, so that humanity is protected "from the necessity of hearing the cry of truth from the lips of these unfortunate persons." This

observation by Hesse becomes the theme of Frisch's novel, where Stiller is indeed held in jail until he accepts the identity, the unity of personality, his society insists is his legal and moral responsibility. Bänziger points out that divided man in a divided world has been a common theme of German literature since Goethe's Faust uttered the famous "zwei Seelen" confession, and that with Hesse and Frisch, who write within the context of modern psychology, the Faustian "two souls" yield to a sense of the frustrated ego either searching the unconscious mind for the various personalities hidden there or rejecting its so-called identity out of hand.

No doubt the section of the book with the broadest appeal is the one dealing with Mell's familiar Apostelspiel and Frisch's popular Biedermann und die Brandstifter. Here Bänziger discusses Frisch's play as a parody in which the earlier theme of trust in the Apostelspiel becomes, viewed in the context of middle-class pseudo values, cowardice and bourgeois gullibility; and the simple redeeming faith that was the strength of Mell's innocents becomes the empty joviality and pretended fellowship of bourgeois decadence:

Der literarisierten Ewigkeitswerte und des alten Hergebrachten überhaupt ist man nun überdrüssig geworden; denn der behaute, verwurzelte, gläubige Mensch, der, nahe der Küche und dem Kachelofen, seinen Herrgottswinkel eingerichtet hat, der christlich und humanistisch gesinnte Österreicher, der Vertreter einer stets heilen Welt, hat in politischer Hinsicht zur Zeit der Nationalsozialisten auf weite Strecken versagt; das deutsche Gemüt, gefeiert seit der Romantik als schönste Eigenart der Nation, ist seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg zur Zielscheibe vieler sarkastischer Bemerkungen geworden. Gottlieb Biedermann ist sentimental, statt gemütsvoll, entwurzelt trotz seiner Etabliertheit, unbehaust trotz der Genugtuung, Hauseigentümer zu sein. (p. 69)

This is not to say that Mell's perception is shallow and naive, while Frisch's is profound and sophisticated. The Apostelspiel reflects a confidence in the strength of the simple faith of the people, a view widely shared after the First World War. Biedermann, on the other hand, was written after the Second World War and welcomed as a healthy ridiculing of stupid gullibility, the bourgeois caricature of "Volksgläubigkeit."

From Biedermann Bänziger turns his attention to Frisch's widely-produced, controversial play Andorra and gives the reader a documented history of its success or lack of same on stages around the world. Curiously, he fails to discuss what effects the newspaper strike in New York may have had on the poor

reception the play found in its American premiere. He does, however, provide a great deal of evidence that the play was at first misunderstood on this side of the Atlantic.

The final chapter, "Tagebuch II und die Presse," treats, as the title implies, the reviews of Frisch's second diary in the world press with the scholarly tediousness of which the reader was forewarned in the opening quotation. On the whole, however, the book is quite readable and can be recommended to Germanists as well as to those with a more casual interest in Max Frisch, his works, and his career.

John Holley
Associate Professor of German
Old Dominion University