

Morton, Marsha. *Max Klinger and Wilhelmine Culture. On the Threshold of German Modernism.* Farnham: Ashgate, 2014. 434 pp. £80.00 (hardcover).

Max Klinger's (1857–1920) life-size, polychrome marble sculpture of Ludwig van Beethoven formed the centerpiece of the 14th Vienna Secession Exhibition in 1902. In many ways, the exhibition was as much a celebration of the Leipzig artist as it was of the great composer. By this point in time, Klinger had reached the zenith of his international fame as a modern artist and yet, his art historical position soon started to become increasingly precarious—especially after his death in 1920. Although his drawings and print cycles continued to enter private and public collections (especially in the United States), Klinger's idiosyncratic realism—especially in his paintings—posed an insurmountable challenge to post-war formalism and abstraction. Klinger was virtually forgotten until the 1960s and 1970s, when a series of exhibitions and publications gradually generated renewed interest. Since then, Klinger slowly made his way back into the “story of modern art” but most of the scholarship continues to be offered in German. Marsha Morton's 2014 publication under review here changes this unsatisfactory situation and makes a significant intervention not only in Klinger scholarship but also in the study of late nineteenth-century German art and culture more generally.

Morton's book is so multi-faceted that this short review cannot do it justice. But her key thesis is constructed around Klinger's evocative visual engagement with the disquieting psychological undercurrents of modern urban life. This analytical emphasis on the psychological rather than an exclusively formalist modernism is part of a broader shift in the literature (the work of Debora L. Silvermann and André Dombrowski would be an obvious case in point). Morton argues that Klinger's prints and drawings produced during the 1870s and 1880s manifested a decisive shift in German art from academic convention to innovation during a period of socio-political transition and cultural flux in the German Empire (1871–1918). Although Morton cautions her reader not to posit Klinger as a direct predecessor of German Expressionism, she urges us to recalibrate our more conventional understanding of German modernism, which always begins with the formation of *Die Brücke* (1905) and *Der Blaue Reiter* (1911). According to Morton, Klinger laid the foundation for an alternative modernism that did not embrace abstraction (arguably initiated by Charles Baudelaire's 1868 call for a “pure art”), but instead activated a mode of representation that remained anchored in the phenomenological world and projected psychologically charged states of mind as well as metaphysical ideas. Klinger clearly articulated this aesthetic position in his treatise, *Malerei und Zeichnung* (1891), where he argued that drawing conveyed ideas rather than external appearances. This might tempt us to place him into a Symbolist camp, but, as Morton rightly points out, his relationship with Symbolism was problematic and rife with tensions.

It is a well-known fact that Klinger's print portfolios and drawings explore a wide spectrum of human behavior—from ill-fated love affairs and sex to violence and death. Morton carefully revisits Klinger's early oeuvre and posits the visual in relation to Klinger's own writings as well as his extensive contemporary reception. This ultimately enables her to argue that Klinger deserves a place amongst the elite circles of Europe's progressive artists of his day. Morton's compelling interpretation links her to a dynamic group of scholars who, over the past three decades, have begun to dismantle a monolithic (Greenbergian) Modernism in favor of heterogeneous modernism(s) with distinctive visual languages but shared ideals and ideologies (such as Patricia Berman, Jay A. Clarke, Michelle Facos, Françoise Forster-Hahn, Beth Irwin Lewis, and Maria Makela). Morton's revisionism, however, does not simply put Klinger back

into German modernism, but questions—and maybe even disassembles—the very institutional practices and disciplinary paradigms that created a modernist canon in the first place.

Morton offers an excellent reading of Imperial Germany's early socio-political and cultural landscapes that is relevant to scholars across disciplines. She closely interrogates Klinger's emerging reputation during the 1870s and 1880s as a "modern spirit" who responded to conflicting concerns of his time. Morton clearly states that she is not interested in a "comprehensive monographic survey of his prints" but wants to focus instead on ways in which Klinger's art was "interpreted within the context of what people in Wilhelmine Germany were thinking, reading, discussing and worrying about" (2). Her interest in Klinger's popular reception explains Morton's exclusive focus on his prints and drawings. As the *Gründerzeit* was deeply fraught with social, political, and cultural tensions and uncertainties, Morton's approach offers an entirely convincing reading of Klinger's modernism as a "subversive challenge to the identity and values [...] of the Wilhelmine bourgeoisie" (3). To achieve this interpretative goal, Morton employs a truly cross-disciplinary approach that reinforces the great analytical and intellectual potential of an archival-based reception history. The book is thematically organised and each chapter functions as a "case study" that explores Klinger's engagement with specific themes, individuals, or texts. As a result of this approach, Morton is more or less able to address Klinger's print cycles in chronological order.

The book's complicated structure is held together by Morton's disciplined focus on Klinger's own motivations, his critical reception, and larger discourse operating in the young Empire. In Chapter 3, for example, Morton explores Klinger's print cycles, *Intermezzo I* and *II* (1881), in relation to Klinger's timely discovery of Darwin (1875). But she places Klinger's interest in Darwinism within a context of Germany's late nineteenth-century fascination with natural history and popular scientific discourse as it was disseminated through exhibitions, aquariums, zoos, menageries, and the popular press. Morton employs the same methodology in Chapters 4 and 5, which introduce other drawings and print cycles (e.g. his illustrations for a deluxe edition of Apuleius' *Amor and Psyche* published in 1880) to unveil Klinger's engagement with non-Western cultures and ancient mythology respectively. Klinger's aesthetic journey is once again located within larger knowledge structures emerging in Imperial Germany such as ethnography (tied in with the German colonial project), anthropology, and what we now might label comparative cultural history. Morton sustains this cross-disciplinarity throughout her book's seven chapters. After anchoring Klinger's aesthetic pursuit in German Romanticism and literary traditions of the grotesque (Chapters 1 and 2), she then rounds her book off by presenting an exceptionally convincing, critical dialogue between Klinger's work and nineteenth-century psychology (Chapter 6) as well as urban experience, social dissent, and criminology (Chapter 7).

The research and critical analysis presented in Morton's book attests to the author's sustained intellectual engagement with Max Klinger and Imperial Germany. This way of working seems to come under increasing pressure and it has been a pleasure to review a book that upholds such high academic standards. The book has been beautifully produced by Ashgate and includes 141 high-quality black and white illustrations (ideally suited for the reproduction of prints and drawings). The introductory comprehensive literature review and historiography of Klinger's conflicted reception since the artist's death in 1920 as well as the book's clearly structured and impressive bibliography further underline Morton's scholarly integrity and her commitment to modern German art and culture. But this publication is so much more than the first comprehensive study of Klinger in English. Morton's book represents a new *Standardwerk* on Klinger and a must-read for any scholar interested in Imperial Germany's

fascinating and often fractured cultural history. The only ever-so-slight reservation I have is that Morton's writing can be rather challenging because she tries to convey too much information at once. But in light of Morton's wide scope of analysis and the intellectual depth of her argument, this should not come as a surprise nor should it present a serious hindrance to the enjoyment of such an elegant and scholarly publication. Ultimately, I hope that *Max Klinger and Wilhelmine Germany* will pave the way for a long-overdue critical engagement with Klinger's more problematic paintings and sculptures, which might actually disrupt Morton's convincing narrative of Klinger's alternative modernism.

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Oswald, Stephan. *Früchte einer großen Stadt — Goethes Venezianische Epigramme.* Heidelberg: Winter, 2014. 424 pp. €62.00 (hardcover).

Goethe's *Venezianische Epigramme* do not have a good press. They were long treated with palpable embarrassment, since it is difficult to explain away the patently anti-Christian and erotic transgressions in them as merely the result of Goethe's supposed foul mood (a view that has been successfully challenged) or of generic compulsion from the erotic ancient epigram. Considering that the *Epigramme* are one of Goethe's major poetic cycles, there is precious little scholarship on them; most of it that is useful has been published since the mid-1990s. Thus, the appearance of the first full-length study of the epigrams is a matter of some moment. Stephan Oswald, who has spent his academic career mainly in Italy, worked on it sporadically for three decades. In it, he has in some respects revised the assessment formulated in his earlier entry on the work in the *Goethe-Handbuch* (Stephan Oswald, "Venezianische Epigramme," in Bernd Witte et al., eds. *Goethe-Handbuch* [Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1996–1999], vol. 1, 232–37).

The sprawling study bears the marks of having been written over such a long time, having accrued a plethora of assorted topics related to the *Epigramme*. To be sure, there are some important central theses of the book. Foremost among these is the focus on urban life signalled in Oswald's title and echoing Goethe's own description of the epigrams in a letter to Charlotte von Kalb on April 30, 1790: "Es sind dieses Früchte die in einer großen Stadt gedeihen, überall findet man Stoff und es braucht nicht viel Zeit sie zu machen." What Goethe does not say here is that the urban themes he favors include very prominently beggars, prostitution, a young street contortionist who exhibits auto-cunnilingus, and so on—decidedly heterodox material for the German eighteenth-century reader that triggered no small measure of friendly "censorship" by the editor, Schiller. Oswald makes a sound case for the notion that Goethe consciously avoided depicting the byzantine world of Venetian high society, which he experienced in the entourage of dowager duchess Anna Amalia, but rather consciously focused on the demi-monde. This thesis has some roots in the brilliant 1977 analysis of the Bettina epigrams by