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Housebound: Selfhood and Domestic Space in Contemporary German Fiction. *By Monika Shafi*

Alexandra Hill

University of Portland, hilla@up.edu

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Shafi, Monika. *Housebound: Selfhood and Domestic Space in Contemporary German Fiction*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2012. xiv + 223 pages. \$75.00

Despite the boom in scholarship on the spatial turn in German cultural studies, the focus of these investigations has been on urban and public spaces; domestic space, Monika Shafi argues, has been largely overlooked. *Housebound* seeks to redress this by examining the role of homes in contemporary German-language fiction. Looking beyond the idea of house as metaphor or as “a mere backdrop for the important forces such as ideology, gender, generation or power,” Shafi looks at the house as “a space in which and through which these factors are shaped, articulated, and comprehended” (4). In six chapters that generally pair two works illustrating a similar representation of the home, Shafi considers novels and short stories by Jenny Erpenbeck, Katharina Hacker, Arno Geiger, Katharina Hagen, Walter Kappacher, Monika Maron, Judith Hermann, Susanne Fischer, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, and (somewhat unexpectedly) Ian McEwan. A wide range of secondary material informs this study, including works by Marjorie Garber, Doreen Massey, Witold Rybczynski, Charles Rice, Georg Simmel, Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin, and Gaston Bachelard.

Chapter 1, “Bodies, Biographies, and Buildings,” pairs Erpenbeck’s *Heimsuchung* and Hacker’s *Der Bademeister* to “show the messy lives of bodies seeking permanence through buildings [...]” (29). Both texts also tackle the issue of political changes and their effects on personal lives, communicating a sense of the insignificance of the individual. Chapter 2, “House Inheritance,” examines the idea of inheriting a family house and history—and thus an assigned role within that history—in Geiger’s *Es geht uns gut* and *Der Geschmack von Apfelkernen* by Hagen. (Note that the table of contents misattributes the latter work to Katharina Hacker, the most significant error in the book.) “Escaping to the Countryside” is the unifying theme of Chapter 3, which pairs Kappacher’s *Selina oder das andere Leben* and Maron’s *Endmoränen*, novels that speak to similar texts in English (Shafi mentions Peter Mayle’s *Provence* books) and provide examples of differing attitudes towards Italy and the United States in the German cultural imaginary.

For the mobile and unrooted characters in selected short stories by Hermann and in Fischer’s novel *Die Platzanweiserin*, as discussed in Chapter 4, the house is uncanny, in part because the characters (and the generation they represent) reject the bourgeois home and its attendant gender roles. At the same time that they are repelled by these traditions, Shafi argues, they are nonetheless drawn to them: “Alternately depicted as comforting and frightening, stable and elusive places, houses show problems whose roots lie not in poorly designed spaces but in deeply conflicted selfhoods” (136). Chapter 5 focuses exclusively on Özdamar’s “Der Hof im Spiegel” and the first half of *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde: Wedding-Pankow 1976/77*. Here Shafi considers the performance of the domestic, praising the main character in “Hof,” who dissolves the boundaries of privacy that define the home by using mirrors placed in her apartment to interact with the world outside it. At the same time, Shafi critiques the students living in the West German WG of *Sterne* for their attempted subversion of bourgeois domesticity, which unintentionally reifies exclusion and hierarchy. Finally, Chapter 6, “(Un)safe Houses,” pairs Hacker’s *Die Habenichtse* and McEwan’s *Saturday*, two responses to the post-9/11 anxiety surrounding home, safety, and violence.

While the works paired together undoubtedly speak to the same issues—*Die Habenichtse* and *Saturday* are almost uncannily similar, especially given their authors' geographic divide—overall the list of authors included is a mixture of German literary figures: one former GDR author, several women in their 40s, two “literary newcomers,” two winners of the *Deutscher Buchpreis*, a Turkish-German, and two Austrians (and one male, British author). Shafi points out in the introduction that her aim is not to provide an overview of current German literary movements, but rather to highlight trends in the representation of domestic space. Yet the list of authors is both representative of current German literature and too limited. (Do two books make a trend?) Perhaps expanding the number of works or authors treated in *Housebound* would have given a stronger sense of existing patterns than a series of case studies.

Shafi's readings of the texts are well crafted, insightful, and a pleasure to read. While it is impossible to find fault with the individual chapters, the book does not come together as the reader would hope; indeed, it reads like the individual articles that were combined for this book. The introduction and conclusion do their jobs with respect to framing the chapters of the book, but I was hoping to read Shafi's own theorization of domestic space, an analysis of the significance of the trends she examines, or a consideration of why these trends are prominent in German-language literature today. Shafi is careful not to extend her conclusions beyond the texts she examines, but the selection of ten authors necessarily restricts her ability to make broader statements. Her analysis of Özdamar in Chapter 5 (mentioned again in the conclusion) tends in this direction of theorizing the dissolution of the boundary between public and private space, but it stops short of being developed fully. Overall, *Housebound* is an important beginning for the examination of domestic space in German-language fiction, and certainly any scholar working on the authors or texts included in this book would benefit from reading it. It is a compliment to Shafi's scholarship that the book leaves her reader wanting more.

University of Portland

- Alexandra Merley Hill