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Review of Stanley Corngold, *Complex Pleasure: Forms of Feeling in German Literature*.

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Stanley Corngold, *Complex Pleasure: Forms of Feeling in German Literature*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999. 244 pp. ISBN 080472940.

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The premise of Stanley Corngold's *Complex Pleasure* is based on a pleasant juxtaposition of a simple (or self-evident) assumption and a complex argument that is intended to illustrate the truth of that assumption. Corngold's highly erudite and challenging investigation begins with a deceptively straightforward and unambiguous statement of his theses. He maintains that literature always generates a complex pleasure which arises from the "impression of a disclosure" (xv). This disclosure, it is then revealed, is the pleasure afforded by gaining access to the intelligibility of the text. In other words, it is a kind of hermeneutic high. The awareness of this complex pleasure is inscribed into the works of many canonical writers. In fact, the fashion in which many exemplary works of the German literary tradition identify and define literary feeling as a pleasurable experience (however contested or paradoxical) becomes an important index in a critical appreciation of this tradition. The last of Corngold's stated theses claims that the form and principles of feeling (suggested, demonstrated, or performed) differ from writer to writer, since each redefines and renames a particular mode of literary feeling.

Corngold goes on to demonstrate these theses through a highly analytic, conceptually fine-tuned, and rigorous reading of eight German works representing prose fiction (novel, novella), poetry, criticism, and critique. He locates points of conceptual revelation—as pleasure—in the "mediating agencies" (26) of wit and judgment in G. E. Lessing and Immanuel Kant, "swift comprehension" in Friedrich Hölderlin, "moods" in Friedrich Nietzsche, sadism as a powerful agent of mood in Robert Musil's novel *Young Törless*, aesthetic pleasure allied with fatigue, exile, and alienation in Franz Kafka's "The Boy Who Sank Out of Sight," poetic opacity in Georg Trakl, and "affective understanding" [*fühlendes Erfassen*] in Walter Benjamin's reading of Hölderlin's "Timidity," which mimics the poetic tension of the ode.

Corngold's analysis takes as its point of departure Immanuel Kant's negotiation of reason and sensibility in order to stake out a legitimate geography for aesthetic feeling. Kant's third critique, *Critique of Judgment*, argues that judgment always involves several faculties and the free accord between these. The universality of aesthetic pleasure is attributable to the free play of cognitive powers charged with the task of providing a conceptual framework for given representations. Corngold states that "Kant grants a special power of disclosure to a type of judgment—the aesthetic judgment of the beautiful—which discloses, as a mood, the attunement of faculties of conceptuality and imagination required for cognition in concepts" (4). The word "mood" seems, in Corngold's discourse, interchangeable with "feeling." In fact, throughout this study, and most visibly in Corngold's reading of Nietzsche and Musil, it displaces feeling as a marker of cognitive disclosure. In Nietzsche, however, "mood" has a rather short "shelf-life" (90), for Nietzsche's famous paradigm of the will to power demands "a harder, more painful body language than mood." Thus, "moods give way to affects, which constitute more readable signs in the alphabet-script of the body—a language without conceptual grammar" (101). In Musil, "Nietzsche's abandoned category of mood" is reclaimed for its "powers of cognitive disclosure" (115).

Corngold detects, through a deconstructive mode of reading, the aporias each text under discussion creates and transcends. In Musil's case, it is the blind spot of justifying "an aesthetic intelligence by means of an aesthetic intelligence in practice" (120). In Kafka, "the rapture of distraction" appears paradoxically "to be an extreme marker of the condition of exile" (125). In Hölderlin, a poet in whose writing the contradictions of his age glare through poetic veiling, the poet's madness becomes an act of philosophical grandeur or "sacrifice" (77). Trakl's aporia, like Hölderlin's, is "the impossibility of paraphrase" (140). Here "melos", euphony, converges on homophony—homophony on homonymy—and homonymy disseminates the poem among contending, irreconcilable fields" (148). Benjamin's attribution of superiority to Hölderlin's ode "Timidity" is justified by the ode's freedom from factual or objective mythological content and its effort to legitimize "the truth content" (Benjamin) of art through self-reflexivity and critique. What Corngold aims to illustrate in all these depictions of conceptual aporia cannot be conceptually defined in the works themselves but, as in the Romantic critical tradition—the very subject of Benjamin's doctoral dissertation—are raised to a higher (poetic) power, to another level of aporia. And herein lie the crux of literary feeling and its paradoxical pleasures.

Although the feeling of bliss generated by cognitive grasp is not always readily accessible to the reader, the challenge of Corngold's argument itself generates a form of "complex pleasure." Rhetorically fluid and elegant yet conceptually rigorous and trying, *Complex Pleasure* is a performance of its own thesis that confronting the challenge of interpretation generates pleasure. However, there is something that distracts the reader from the rigor of reading that promises conceptual bliss. *Complex Pleasure* is not immune to problems germane to academic studies written in English of German texts. When analyses rely heavily on nuances of language and feeling in the original text, much is lost in translation for the reader, even when the original German idiom is given in parentheses. This is especially true here, since Corngold's readings follow a trajectory of temporally and spatially imagined successive linguistic and metaphorical stations of the text. In these stations, various transpositions and translations within words and texts take place. In Nietzsche's case, the move from "mood"—translated variously by translators and critics—to "affect" and other forms of feeling is crucial to Corngold's argument. However, as long as the original (or the full context) is not given, even a reader fluent in German has to depend on the critic's reading and interpretive choice and cannot partake in this linguistic labor of love and its attendant pleasures. Nevertheless, the originality, inventiveness, and the critical rigor of Corngold's analyses make for a very compelling reading experience. This is a book that scholars of German and Comparative Literature will keep turning to for ideas and inspiration in new critical ventures.