

women's novels, while connecting these novels to others considered "more serious." This work, in itself, is a significant political act. In short, *The Politics of the Feminist Novel* is a "must read" for specialists in women's studies, for those who do social-political examinations of literature, and for others who, quite simply, like to think about women's lives.

Russell A. Berman

THE RISE OF THE MODERN GERMAN NOVEL: CRISIS AND CHARISMA

Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Pp. IX + 311, \$29.50

Reviewed by Josef Schmidt

This is a fascinating book, both for its qualities and its weaknesses, as Berman's analysis offers a comprehensive view of the development of the genre within a national literature/culture. It does so, however, in a jargonesque teutonic prose that is as pretentious as the title suggests. The rise of a hypothesis, namely that the genre reflects, in its historical development, the German societal reactions to modernism according to Max Weber's categories, unfortunately, has a corresponding "fall" in that behind the critical jargon lurks an extremely traditional concept of the history of literature (e.g. of "Nationalliteratur" without proper differentiation of national "German" literatures outside the German Reich!); and judging even by very traditional criteria, there are important conceptual and factual omissions.

The book opens with lucidity and clarity. "The question of modernist rupture" is analyzed employing a model treating the "rhetorical structures of the texts as aspects of a communicative strategy . . . responsive to the social crisis" (p. vi). Max Weber's category of charisma is carefully developed within its historical and religious contexts; the "solution to his categorical antinomies" (p. 51) in what he saw as a decisive cultural crisis evolved from the legal, traditional, and religious tensions he attributed to Wilhelminian liberalism. While there are inevitable generalizations on the part of Berman, the reader is truly enlightened. The ponderous phrases in which these thoughts are presented, however, are an enormous obstacle. E.g., on pp. 58-59, one of the central themes is stated thus: "The reification of realism, the loss of its communicative substance, consequently represents the literary-historical counterpart to the Weberian problem of bureaucratization. Just as bureaucracy extrapolates from the initial forms of legal rationality, while at the same time sequestering the subjectivity of rational individuality in the prison of the iron cage, a trivialized realism, which appears late on the scene but always was imminent in the realist paradigm, casts off earlier critical and emancipatory potential, offering instead the affirmation of a status quo: destiny and necessity are its fare, be it in the form of sentimentalized pseudotragedy or ineluctable happy endings."

Things get worse when, in the second part, Berman elucidates "crisis and charisma" by putting his concept to the test in applying it to the canon of "modern" German novels of high literature. Not only are names like C.F. Meyer missing altogether, but best-selling authors of enormous influence like Felix Dahn, Ida Gräfin Hahn-Hahn, or Berta Suttner are never mentioned. Instead, we are treated to yet another extensive restating of Thomas Mann's "The German Republic" while Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is dismissed with a few sentences, suggesting marginal status. On the conceptual side, Berman covers too much well-known ground while ignoring broader aspects of the history of reception. E.g., in chapter 7 on Georg Hermann's novels (i.e., *Jettchen Gebert*, 1906), the main thrust of Berman's argument is yet one more case of manipulated estrangement of the reader by being presented with a "reification of the literary detail;" but the critic fails to include the wider context of German-Jewish assimilation which would appear central to his basic theory. (Itta Shedletzky has provided a valuable insight into this question in her article on the popular Jewish "Zeitroman" from 1879-1900; *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 9, No. 3, [1982]). And another puzzling omission: Berman hardly ever refers to articles in journals as his secondary sources; his notes almost exclusively refer to books. And central articles like Fredric Jameson's "Postmodernism,

or *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*" (*New Left Review*, 1984) would have fitted well into the general concept of this study. Established authorities on the history of the period, like Peter Gay, are also absent in the notes. These idiosyncracies make the reading, for the most part, painful; and the frustrated reader is left with many valuable insights, penetrating questions, and analyses that do not, for some of the aforementioned reasons, come fully into their own.

John H. Timmerman

JOHN STEINBECK'S FICTION: THE AESTHETICS OF THE ROAD TAKEN

Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986. Pp. 314,
\$22.50

Reviewed by John Ditsky

Steinbeck studies are currently enjoying a bit of a boom, with the resurgence of interest in the writer and his works not only having largely swept aside old critical misperceptions, but also making it no longer necessary for each new critical survey to make its doggedly methodical way through the entire canon with a careful eye to "balanced," proportional coverage of every item. In taking advantage of this option to reflect one's pet interests in discussing more or less the whole of Steinbeck's fiction—at a time when the nonfiction is beginning to get increasing attention—Calvin College Professor John H. Timmerman has created a novel, sometimes quirkily fascinating, account of the values he finds (or fails to find) in the novels, with some additional (if sometimes sketchy) coverage of the short stories as well. Timmerman seems most interested in Steinbeck's lifelong preoccupation with moral concerns and issues, a religious dimension surprisingly profound in so confessedly agnostic a writer.

This concern with the moral on the parts of both Steinbeck and Timmerman culminates in an inventive application of Miltonic conceptions of personal freedom to Steinbeck's late and ambitious work *East of Eden*. Timmerman's insights make for a genuine contribution to the further understanding of this formerly much-maligned book. But though Steinbeck's moralistic concerns are for Timmerman a great reason for the achievements of *East of Eden*, they are also part of the cause of what Timmerman sees as the failure of the writer's final novel, *The Winter of Our Discontent*. This reviewer would be one of those who might quarrel with Timmerman's assessment of *Winter's* central figure as being of insufficient stature to bear the weight of so heavy a moral freight; yet Ethan Allen Hawley's self-consciousness, his awareness of himself as a role-player in a moral drama, can be said to some extent to cast him as an artist-hero finally caught in the toils of his own inventiveness in interfering in the lives of "his" characters. To suggest as much is also to credit Timmerman for being provocative in his assertions and assessments; and to his further credit, he brings to bear upon *Winter* the force of a comparison with Melville's notions of tragic heroism, the latter author usually mentioned in connection with Steinbeck only as a clue to the structural ambitions of *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Though Timmerman makes ample use of Jackson J. Benson's presumably definitive biography of Steinbeck, he, for the most part, relies on earlier critical assessments of the major work, and does not seem fully attuned—perhaps the right word is "receptive"—to more recent trends in Steinbeck criticism. Not always discriminating between the reliable and the merely pragmatically useful (or seemingly useful) among his secondary sources, Timmerman may not even think of himself as a particularly "revisionist" critic. But there are sections of his coverage which strike the reader as venturing upon scarcely trodden ground; and when he is riding his own hobby horses he is quite the interesting act to watch. *Cup of Gold*, for instance, was Steinbeck's first novel and therefore of some interest as an adumbration of what would come; but it is also a potboiler of a historical adventure yarn that few have seen much inherent value in. Timmerman gives it perhaps the fullest coverage it has received to date,