



Ilija Trojanow

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Peter Lang

Contemporary German Writers and Filmmakers
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Preface

Ilija Trojanow shot to attention in the literary world with the publication of what to date is his central work, *Der Weltensammler/The Collector of Worlds*, a biographical adventure novel about the British soldier and explorer, Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821–1890). The novel was praised by critics and sold in high numbers. Among the reasons for its success we must count the sensuality of its narrative and Trojanow's ability to retell a classic story of derring-do from the age of European colonialism for our own multicultural and – as he would say – neo-imperialist times. *Der Weltensammler* was too a novel that the German-speaking countries perhaps needed to read in 2006: as a contribution from the realm of the imagination to discussions about identity in the wake of the American-led 'war on terror' and to the ongoing German debates about immigration and the value of culturally heterogeneous societies. Trojanow was also part of a growing phenomenon of non-German born authors opting to express themselves in the German language. In his fiction he is concerned with travel and migration: a family's flight across borders to a new life in a new land (*Die Welt ist groß und Rettung lauert überall/The World Is Large and Salvation Lurks Around Every Corner*); the social nightmare of prison convoys on a dystopian motorway network (*Autopol*); three of Richard Burton's celebrated expeditions to India, Arabia, or East Africa (*Der Weltensammler*); or a cruise voyage to the imperilled Antarctic ice cap (*EisTau/Melting Ice*). For all these reasons he embodies a certain vision of Germany and Austria as places of international cultural communication at the beginning of the twenty-first century. His readiness to make his views known, to make a stand with a provocatively placed article or interview, or even with full-length books on subjects such as the surveillance state or relations between the West and the Muslim East (his answer to Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilisations'), have raised his profile as a public intellectual further.

As Ilija Trojanow argues with the world, in this volume of essays we have tried to honour his engagement by arguing back with him when appropriate. *Der Weltensammler* is a focus of attention in four of these essays (those by Caitríona Ní Dhúill, Ernest Schonfield, Ben Morgan, and Eva M. Knopp) and a point of reference in most of the others. His three other shorter novels are subjected to critical scrutiny, in some cases for the first time in a scholarly format. After literary fiction, Trojanow's genre is undoubtedly the travel book. Ernest Schonfield compares his two accounts of a pilgrimage to Mecca, one a retelling of Burton's journey in the 1850s, the other a report on his own hajj one hundred and fifty years later, with Burton's own best-selling Victorian travelogue. Christina Kraenzle assesses Trojanow's re-negotiation of the traditional genre boundaries in his travel writing, in particular the book ostensibly about *Der Weltensammler*, in which he reflects critically on his own novel and his research into it: *Ein Nomade auf vier Kontinenten*/A Nomad on Four Continents. In the concluding chapter, I attempt to characterise some of his other travel writing with reference to the practice of 'reportage'.

What we hope will emerge is a critical portrait of a many-sided contemporary writer, whose best works are deceptively rich, perhaps straightforward to read but not easy to apprehend in full.

Most of these essays were first presented as papers at a symposium entitled 'Blurring the Lines: Ilija Trojanow as Traveller, Essayist, Novelist' held at Swansea University on 7 May 2010. I am grateful to the Austrian Cultural Forum and the Swansea Centre for Contemporary German Culture for their support, as well as to the contributors for their participation.

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