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Engendering the Subject of Terror: Friedrich Christian Delius and Friedrich Dürrenmatt in the Mid-1980s

With their scenes of feminine victimisation and feminist defiance, Friedrich Christian Delius’ *Mogadischu Fensterplatz* and Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s *Der Auftrag* engage and test the tropes of ‘woman’ and ‘terrorist’ that circulated and sometimes intersected in Western Europe in the 1970s and 80s. Casting female protagonists, the authors tested out the then-current vicissitudes of gender and national identity. This chapter places Delius and Dürrenmatt’s novels in the historical and literary-critical context of the mid-1980s. It also reaches back to the first years after WWII to draw a useful comparison with Ernst von Salomon’s novel *Der Fragebogen*. Key reference points are second-wave feminism, the ‘Historikerstreit’ (historians’ debate), and the ‘Tendenzwende’ (conservative consolidation).

In April of 1977 a Stuttgart court sentenced three leaders of the Red Army Faction to life in prison. The verdict: Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, and Jan-Carl Raspe were guilty of forming a criminal association, committing four murders, and attempting twenty-seven more. RAF members who were still on the run found themselves in a deadlock with the law and escalated their violent trajectory in an attempt to gain the release of their jailed comrades. First they kidnapped Hanns Martin Schleyer, a prominent industrialist and former SS ‘Hauptsturmführer’; then, in October of the same year, the RAF collaborated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the military wing of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, to hijack a Lufthansa plane. A Palestinian commando seized control of Flight 737 and took its ninety-one passengers and crew hostage, detouring the craft from Majorca to Italy, Dubai, Bahrain, Yemen, and finally to the parched runways of the international airport in Mogadishu, Somalia. When negotiations between the PLO, the RAF, and the West German government came to crisis, the militants shot one of the Lufthansa pilots and doused the passengers with alcohol. They then started a countdown to death.

Back in the Federal Republic, viewers sat fixated before their television sets, where history seemed to explode onto the screen. A series of pictures repeated over the five-day standoff: maps of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, sullen photos of renegade women and men on most-wanted posters, diagrams of terrorist cell networks, and still shots of the ‘Landshut’ aircraft stalled on the tarmac of dis-
tant airports. These reports recalled the recent broadcasts of the 1976 hijacking of an Air France flight to Entebbe, Uganda – an operation staged by the PFLP and members of another German group of terrorists, the Revolutionary Cells. Across Europe, these images and events entered into both the records of history and the registers of collective memory as some of the most significant moments since 1945. Both the new strains of political violence and the state’s reaction to them triggered debates about post-war national identity that shot through every level of society.

Taking this cultural condition as its point of departure, Friedrich Christian Delius’s novel *Mogadischu Fensterplatz* (1987) narrows its scope to frame a detailed study of the seventies-era hijacking.¹ The narrative takes samples from the Mogadishu and Entebbe abductions to focus on the condition of the individual hostage – the anxiety of the zero hour, the timed approach to death. Delius’s work of historical fiction draws on airline culture – the strictures of seatbelts and tray tables, the wait to be relieved of remaining service items – to convey the dimension of terror that develops when the indignities of travel metastasise into a death game.

The novel also illuminates the sexual politics that shaped post-war Germany. Delius chooses the figure Andrea Boländer as his ideal hostage: a young zoologist taking a holiday time-out from her boyfriend back home. Delius’s protagonist recalls the main character of Heinrich Böll’s *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum* (1974), but a sharper comparison can be drawn between *Mogadischu Fensterplatz* and Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s *Der Auftrag, oder Vom Beobachten des Beobachters der Beobachter* (1986).² Published shortly before Delius’s novel, *Der Auftrag* places a feminine figure called F. at centre stage: a documentary filmmaker at work in the Middle East, she drinks Campari in the morning, wears a long red fur over her denim suit, and parts with her crew to go it alone.

With their scenes of feminine victimisation and defiance, both *Mogadischu Fensterplatz* and *Der Auftrag* variously engage and test the tropes of ‘woman’ and ‘terrorist’ that circulated and sometimes intersected in Western Europe in the 1970s and 80s. As the economy flourished, women attained an unprecedented degree of public prominence. They entered new levels of the workforce and demanded legislative change, including the right to abortion. The market catered to new demands and launched advertising schemes that charged