

German Historical Institute London Bulletin

Bd. 28

2006

Nr. 1

Copyright

Das Digitalisat wird Ihnen von perspectivia.net, der Online-Publikationsplattform der Max Weber Stiftung – Stiftung Deutsche Geisteswissenschaftliche Institute im Ausland, zur Verfügung gestellt. Bitte beachten Sie, dass das Digitalisat urheberrechtlich geschützt ist. Erlaubt ist aber das Lesen, das Ausdrucken des Textes, das Herunterladen, das Speichern der Daten auf einem eigenen Datenträger soweit die vorgenannten Handlungen ausschließlich zu privaten und nicht-kommerziellen Zwecken erfolgen. Eine darüber hinausgehende unerlaubte Verwendung, Reproduktion oder Weitergabe einzelner Inhalte oder Bilder können sowohl zivil- als auch strafrechtlich verfolgt werden.

FRANK-RUTGER HAUSMANN (ed.), with the assistance of ELISABETH MÜLLER-LUCKNER, *Die Rolle der Geisteswissenschaften im Dritten Reich 1933–1945*, Schriften des Historischen Kollegs, Kolloquien 53 (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2002), xxv + 373 pp. ISBN 3 486 56639 3. EUR 64.80

KARL-HEINZ SCHOEPS, *Literature and Film in the Third Reich*, trans. by Kathleen M. Dell’Orto, 1st English-language edn., based on the 2nd German edn. but revised and expanded, *Studies in German Literature, Linguistics and Culture* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), viii + 371 pp. ISBN 1 57113 252 X. \$75.00. £50.00

Successive German ambassadors to the Court of St James’s have noted, and deplored in vain, what they have seen as a British obsession with Hitler and the Third Reich, not only in the media but also in the history syllabus of our schools. At the end of 2005 the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) echoed their complaints and offered suggestions on how schools might widen their teaching to cover the momentous events that have shaped Germany since 1945—division, the Cold War, the Berlin Wall, reunification—and the country’s successful transformation into a strong and stable democracy. These are laudable sentiments. However, there is no disputing the fact that the Nazi dictatorship retains a powerful fascination for anyone interested in the nature of human evil, or how highly civilized communities can swiftly collapse into barbarism. What the ambassadors and the QCA overlook is the fact that German historians, too, are equally indefatigable in studying and researching the Hitler period. In their case an even greater impetus has been given to scholars by the sudden accessibility of archives that came with unification and the end of the Cold War. Frank-Rutger Hausmann’s *Die Rolle der Geisteswissenschaften im Dritten Reich 1933–1945* is an excellent example of the spate of high-quality publications on the period that have appeared over the last two decades.

The essays in this stimulating and well-researched volume are the product of a colloquium held in the Munich Historisches Kolleg in February 2000 on the theme of ‘Kontinuität und Wandel’. The scope is broad: English studies, *Germanistik*, history, Celtic studies, music, philosophy, psychology, Slavonic philology, sports science, linguistics, and pre- and early history are all covered. The volume opens with two general essays: a magisterial overview by Otto Gerhard

Book Reviews

Oexle (“Wirklichkeit” – “Krise der Wirklichkeit” – “Neue Wirklichkeit”: Deutungsmuster und Paradigmenkämpfe in der deutschen Wissenschaft vor und nach 1933’) and a fascinating investigation by Lothar Mertens of the principal research body in the Third Reich, ‘Die Notgemeinschaft der deutschen Wissenschaft/Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft 1933–1936’. The Notgemeinschaft der deutschen Wissenschaft (NdW) was founded in 1920 and re-named the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DfG) – the title it retains today – in 1934 when, presumably, the Nazis deemed any research funding emergency long since past.

As his rather forbidding title indicates, Oexle traces the progressive loss of confidence in the existence of an objective reality that set in at the turn of the century in the wake of Nietzsche. The crisis affected not only philosophy, but also literature, art, and the natural sciences in equal measure. His survey of the impact of intellectual and moral relativity, the sudden undermining of once stable norms and values, covers familiar ground but in unusual depth. Oexle argues that such constant debates, the search for a reality that could offer a sense of belonging, actually lent plausibility, even a veneer of respectability, to the *Machtergreifung*. Consequently, the disastrous outcome of the First World War, above all, the inflation of 1923, and the fatal fragility of the Weimar Republic could easily be interpreted as the necessary preconditions for the National Socialist revolution with its seductive vision of a new and revitalized Germany. Oexle quotes one of the most perceptive contemporary witnesses of the disintegration of values and the crude reality behind such a spurious teleology. In 1939, the year he fled to London, Sebastian Haffner wrote that 1923 and all that had led up to it ‘did not prepare Germany specifically for Nazism but for any fantastic adventure’ (p. 12).

The central figure in Mertens’s account of the NdW/DFG is Johannes Stark, winner of the 1919 Nobel Prize for Physics. Despite his professional pre-eminence, Stark was a wilful eccentric and deeply unpleasant anti-Semite who misused his powers of patronage in the most shameful way. During his presidency of the DFG from 1934 to 1936, for example, he largely ignored disciplines other than his own. Quite apart from the emigration of many gifted physicists, Stark’s bitter opposition to Einstein’s work – Einstein’s non-Jewish supporters such as Werner Heisenberg were notoriously defamed as ‘white Jews’ – crucially hindered the development of the subject in

Germany. Through such telling portraits Mertens highlights how research and its funding were constantly subject to personal animosities and feuds between various competing Nazi agencies. As for younger scholars with careers to establish, an examination of the files of over 1,200 applications to the NdW/DFG for research grants during the years 1934–7, lodged since 1945 in the Hoover Institution in Stanford, clearly shows a readiness for opportunistic *Selbstgleichschaltung*: before 1933 only 41 applicants were already members of the NSDAP (a further 16 had joined the SA, and 1 the SS); by summer of that year 51 had joined the party, 125 the SA, and 19 the SS. Though these figures show that around 75 per cent appear to have kept their distance from active participation in party organizations, none appear to have registered any opposition or much interest in the fate of their Jewish colleagues.

The succeeding accounts of individual disciplines all indicate, to a greater or lesser degree, the supine attitude of most academics whenever they came into contact with Nazi ideological requirements. K. Ludwig Pfeiffer, for example, demonstrates the difficulties the *Anglisten* had in their half-hearted attempts to dismantle traditional views of England as a leading cultural force. The result—seen most clearly in the two volumes of essays, published in 1941 and 1943 as the profession’s contribution to the Aktion Ritterbusch (the so-called *Kriegseinsatz der Geisteswissenschaften*¹)—was banality and intellectual mediocrity.

As Pfeiffer remarks, English studies was a Cinderella subject. *Germanistik*, on the other hand, was a centrally important discipline. Germanists had long seen themselves as crucial actors in the process of nation-building. Holger Dainat’s authoritative essay shows not only how the subject’s traditionally conservative syllabus was, in effect, maintained throughout the Nazi dictatorship—though Jewish writers, of course, were silently written out of the canon—but also throws fresh light on the socio-political dimensions of the university system. Indeed, because the main task of university German depart-

¹ Paul Ritterbusch, a lawyer, was *Rektor* of Kiel University. He co-ordinated the *Kriegseinsatz der Geisteswissenschaften* (1940–5), the largest humanities project of the Third Reich. The many volumes of this public enterprise sharply revise the self-serving image of the scholar tucked away in his ivory tower with no responsibility for the terrible events unfolding around him.

Book Reviews

ments was the training of secondary school teachers, they were always peculiarly dependent on the state and its cultural policies. The discipline's roots can thus be traced deep into the authoritarian structures of the Wilhelmine period. Consequently, Jews, liberals, and women had less chance of establishing a career in this field than in many others. This entrenched conservative temperament largely explains the depressing submissiveness of Germanists in the Third Reich. There were relatively few dismissals and certainly fewer protests. Indeed, to the shame of many, there was significant support for Nazi ideology, even if much of it was opportunistic. Nevertheless, despite such conformity, Dainat paints a complex picture of the efforts made to maintain academic standards. For example, Nazi interference in the appointments to Chairs declined after 1937, though, of course, by then the field had been cleared of most racially and politically undesirable individuals. It is also clear that what university autonomy existed was allowed only because institutions offered little resistance to their ultimate masters. The fact that Germanists in the Third Reich ruthlessly pursued their academic careers, even as their society sank into unparalleled barbarity, ensured for most of them a smooth transition into the post-war dispensation.

The only rival in the humanities to *Germanistik* in terms of size and importance was history. Jürgen Elvert's wide-ranging contribution traces the complex and often contradictory post-war assessments of the role played by historians in the Third Reich. His close analysis of institutional changes shows that in 1933, one fifth (31) of 147 professors of history were dismissed or forced into retirement on racial or political grounds. Although a minority maintained a critical, if obviously muted or coded, attitude towards Nazi ideology, Elvert points to the melancholy fact that a proportionately greater number of historians overtly threw in their lot with the Nazis than in other disciplines. The central phenomenon is shown to be similar to that already noted in *Germanistik*: the characteristically anti-democratic, conservative-radical views of the majority of historians were formed long before the Nazis seized power.² Their hostility towards the Weimar

² For example, Elvert notes that of the 180 full professors in all branches of history in the 1920s, barely a dozen could be described as convinced or 'Vernunft-Republikaner' (p. 114). If anything, the older generation of Germanists, especially those who had fought in the First World War, was even more hostile to the Weimar Republic.

Republic, shared, of course, by many intellectuals, made it significantly easier for the Nazis' aggressive vision of a strong state to be widely accepted, at least initially. Given such intellectual and moral failure, it is all the more regrettable that it took until the 1998 *Historikertag* in Frankfurt-on-Main for a thorough debate on the role played by historians in the Third Reich to begin – over three decades later than that initiated by the younger generation of Germanists in their subject.

Joachim Lerchenmüller and Anselm Gerhard cover the smaller disciplines of Celtic studies and music, respectively. The former is shown to have been thoroughly politicized. Its proponents made up for their small number by the enthusiasm with which they served the Nazi state. In particular, they maintained strong links to the SS and Himmler's *Ahnenerbe* research programme that was intended to demonstrate the superiority of the cultural heritage of the Germanic past. Music scholars, on the other hand, needed no convincing of the cultural pre-eminence of their subject and thus required little pressure to share the nationalistic arrogance of the Nazis. Nevertheless, Gerhard's concentration on four case studies (Heinrich Bessler, Friedrich Blume, Hans-Joachim Moser, and Alfred Einstein) enables him to offer a carefully differentiated picture of a small profession that was distorted more by personal conflicts than ideological intolerance. The most interesting figure is Bessler: although he had been a member of the NSDAP since 1937, he did his best to protect his Jewish postgraduates. He later became a major figure in the GDR – a considerable achievement in a state that dealt more severely with ex-Nazis or Nazi opportunists than was the norm in the FRG.

In contrast to such small professional groups, philosophy with its relevance to practically every discipline within the university was a major subject and one seen as especially 'German'. The clashes both at personal and ideological level were correspondingly more explosive. Hans-Joachim Dahm's impressive survey covers not only the reception of Plato and Nietzsche and the infamous role of Heidegger in the Third Reich, but underlines also the crucial damage inflicted on the discipline by the dismissal after 1933 of one third of the professoriate with the subsequent suppression of such fields as Jewish *Religionsphilosophie*, logical empiricism, and neo-Kantian philosophy. Like Gerhard, Dahm strengthens his analysis with a close study of the ideas and activities of five exemplary philosophers, the most

Book Reviews

interesting of whom are Erich Rothacker and Heidegger himself. Neither showed any strident sympathy for National Socialism before 1933, though Rothacker did publicly support Hitler for the Reich Presidency in 1932, when most men of his national-conservative temper were for Hindenburg. Both, however, became deeply embroiled in the Third Reich. The Heidegger story and his shabby evasiveness after the war are well-known, Rothacker's activities less so. For example, Rothacker held a major post in Goebbels's Propaganda Ministry, where one of his duties was to liaise with students organizing the 'Aktion gegen den undeutschen Geist', the infamous campaign that culminated in the *Bücherverbrennung* of 10 May 1933.³

In the only essay specifically commissioned for this volume, Mitchell G. Ash traces the individual and ideological ruptures in psychology after 1933. One third of the subject's professors (5) were promptly dismissed or hurried into retirement by the Nazis. A familiar pattern emerges: isolated voices of protest were drowned out by the noisy enthusiasm of opportunists. Psychology, with its intimate relationship to the sister disciplines of psychiatry, biology, and anthropology, was peculiarly susceptible to the sinister, irrational dictates of Nazi ideology. Once the profession had 'eliminated a parasitically rampant Judaism' (p. 241), to quote Friedrich Sander, who had promptly succeeded to the Chair of a dismissed Jewish colleague at Jena, it was ready to sacrifice all academic integrity in order to advance Nazi aims.

The other four disciplines covered—Slavonic philology (Helmut W. Schaller), sports science (Jürgen Court), linguistics (Clemens Knoblauch), and pre- and early history (Wolfgang Pape)—receive equally informative treatment. Although Slavonic philology was taught at only five universities, Schaller shows that despite the *Wendenerlaß* of 1937 that was aimed at the oppression of the Lausitzian Sorbs, the Slavists on the whole remained untainted by accommodation with the regime. Sport, on the other hand, readily lent itself to instrumentalization by the Nazis. The discipline had rap-

³ After a short de-Nazification process in 1945, Rothacker was able to stay in his Bonn Chair where he was later to become Jürgen Habermas's Ph.D. supervisor. His activities in the Third Reich were not revealed until the 1980s. He published his memoirs in 1963 with the extraordinary title, *Heitere Erinnerungen*.

idly established itself after the First World War, and Court's essay reveals how Nazi policy merely continued the authoritarian, anti-democratic traditions developed in the Weimar Republic. He demonstrates the origins and impact of such ideas by a startling juxtaposition of the personalities of Carl Diem, the father of sports science in Germany, and Victor Klemperer, the Jewish Romanist. Both shared an almost identical intellectual and social formation—and thus similar ideas about the role of sport. However, whereas Diem found no difficulty in serving the Nazi regime, Klemperer was forced by circumstance and experience to re-think his earlier espousal of vitalistic Idealism. Thus it was Klemperer, not Diem, who was able to gauge the true significance of the Berlin Olympic Games in 1936 and to appreciate how easily idealist principles can be corrupted by political power.

Although linguistics was not an independent discipline at the time, Knoblauch's thoughtful essay argues that the idea of a 'value-free' science is a chimera. He demonstrates how linguistics was infiltrated by socio-political and ideological considerations well before the Nazis seized power. Indeed, where scholars' research helped to define and defend linguistic minorities, for example, it could be claimed that their work had beneficial effects. The problem, of course, arises when such efforts are distorted for criminal, racist, or aggressively expansionist ends—what Christopher Hutton has called, in a trenchant phrase, 'mother-tongue fascism'.⁴

The final chapter by Wolfgang Pape documents the extraordinary rise in popularity of pre- and early history. For example, between 1933 and 1942, the number of Chairs in the field tripled. In Breslau alone student numbers rose from 350 in 1932 to 2,000 a mere two years later. Naturally, this expansion reflected the value the Nazis placed on the subject and the readiness of its teachers to deliver what was required, that is, evidence of the supremacy of the Nordic races. Not surprisingly, perhaps, this branch of history was markedly over-represented in the ranks of the NSDAP—indeed, many had joined the party before 1933—and even more so in the SA and the SS where the *Ahnenerbe* project acted as a magnet for scholars in search of funding and openings for personal advancement. Pape delivers chapter

⁴ See Christopher M. Hutton, *Linguistics and the Third Reich: Mother-Tongue Fascism, Race and the Science of Language* (London, 1999).

Book Reviews

and verse, via a series of fascinating charts, for this high level of conformism. More depressingly, he is able to show that 1945 brought no decisive caesura in the careers of those involved: nearly all remained in their university posts.

Throughout these essays the authors point, time and again, to uncomfortable continuities from the Wilhelmine era, through the Weimar Republic to the Third Reich, into the fledgling democracy of the Federal Republic, and occasionally into the GDR. The strength of many of the contributions lies in linking the history of institutions with exemplary case studies of individual scholars that have drawn fruitfully on the relevant university archives. In sum, the book admirably fulfils its aim of assessing the current state of research into the individual disciplines and pointing to the work that still has to be done. In one particular, however, a reservation must be made. If Klaus Hildebrand's recent complaint (quoted in Hausmann's introduction, p. vii) that the general public have not taken much notice of the considerable body of research into the situation of the universities in the Third Reich is correct, it behoves scholars to make their work more accessible. Hausmann himself defensively points to the need for careful referencing in the presentation of new research. But too many of the contributions are written in such convoluted German and equipped with so many footnotes – the record is 148 in an essay of 23 pages – that only the most dedicated members of the *Zunft* are likely to grind their way through them.

The translation of Karl-Heinz Schoeps's well-known study, first published in 1992 under the title *Literatur im Dritten Reich*, is welcome. It is based on the second German edition (2000), but revised, expanded, and brought up to date with current scholarship. Although the book is well researched, fully referenced, and equipped with a good bibliography, it would not claim the depth of original scholarship that informs the Hausmann compilation. That is not its purpose. Schoeps offers instead a broad-brush introduction to his topic that creates a reliable starting point for students. Two introductory chapters briefly set out the historical and ideological context of the period; these are followed by a more substantial discussion of literature and cultural policies in the Third Reich. The scope is wide: for example, it surveys the work of the Amt Rosenberg, Himmler's *Ahnenerbe* programme, and the morally dubious role played by many Germanists in pursuit of their careers. A particularly useful section

discusses the ideological significance of the many histories of German literature that flooded the market during the Third Reich, culminating in the multi-authored, five-volume *Von deutscher Art in Sprache und Dichtung*, the Germanists' contribution to the mammoth *Kriegseinsatz der Geisteswissenschaften*. Although the author does not examine the content of this sorry enterprise, he does single out for justifiably detailed attention the popular racist histories of German literature by Adolf Bartels and Hellmuth Langenbucher, a key figure in the Amt Rosenberg.

Individual chapters are devoted to the National Socialist novel, drama, poetry, and film, with a final essay on non-Nazi or anti-Nazi literature. There is little to be said for specifically Nazi literature in terms of quality; the work has merely historical value. On the other hand, Schoeps accurately notes the ambiguities of the so-called 'innere Emigration' which enabled such ostensibly 'oppositional' novels as Werner Bergengruen's *Der Großtyrann und das Gericht* (1935) and Ernst Jünger's *Auf den Marmorklippen* (1939) to be successfully published in the Third Reich. Indeed, Jünger's reputation in the Third Reich was so high that in 1942 the German Army published a special edition of 20,000 copies of *Auf den Marmorklippen* for distribution to the troops.⁵ In contrast, this is followed by an interesting overview of specifically anti-Nazi literature, with special attention paid to the poetry of Albrecht Haushofer, imprisoned and executed after the July plot, and Rose Ausländer who survived the Czernowitz ghetto. The assessments have the merit of succinctness, though they all too often incline towards description rather than critical analysis. The chapter ends with an odd and scrappy note on the uses made of Schiller's *Don Carlos* and *Wilhelm Tell* in the Third Reich, which an attentive editor would have cut since most of it already appears in chapter 3.

The chapter devoted to 'Film in the Third Reich', however, is problematic. Although it has been enlarged and a few stills of such popular films as *Hitlerjunge Quex* and the notorious *Jud Süß* have been added, it still only runs to a mere fourteen pages of text, scarcely 5 per cent of the book's length. This raises the question of whether

⁵ Jünger himself always denied that his novel was politically inspired or intended as a contribution to resistance. See J. M. Ritchie, *German Literature under National Socialism* (Beckenham, 1983), pp. 128 f.

Book Reviews

the title of the volume is misleading. The original version already contained a six-page chapter on the topic, but 'film' was not included in its title until the second edition. Even with the current modest expansion, the changed title is clearly unjustified. Moreover, although Schoeps rightly notes that Goebbels thoroughly understood the need for escapism in the films offered to the public, no discussion of Nazi film is adequate without a proper consideration of its most gifted practitioner, Leni Riefenstahl. Here nothing new is added to the meagre handful of sentences that appeared in the first edition. Nor is there any mention of the propaganda use the Nazis made of the *Wochenschau*, a central ingredient in cinema programming during the war years. However, despite such objections, *Literature and Film in the Third Reich* offers plenty of fascinating information for further study; it is also fluently and accurately translated.

MICHAEL BUTLER is Professor of Modern German Literature at the University of Birmingham. He has written widely on German and German-Swiss literature, and is a regular reviewer of contemporary German literature for the *Times Literary Supplement*.