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David B. Dennis, *Inhumanities: Nazi Interpretations of Western Culture*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2012; xvi + 541 pp.; 9781107020498, £25.99 (hbk)

**Reviewed by:** Andrew G. Bonnell, *University of Queensland, Australia*

David B. Dennis's topic is the use, misuse, and often outright abuse, of the Western cultural tradition by the National Socialist party and regime, as presented through the prism of the official party newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, from 1920 to 1945. Dennis has exhaustively combed through the twenty-five years of the newspaper on microfilm (it has not yet been digitized), in search of cultural commentary, and here presents his findings. Scholars who have also worked through such voluminous series of papers on microfilm will appreciate the labour involved in this, and Dennis presents a more thorough selection of Nazi cultural views than earlier, necessarily more selective anthologies. The work is also justified in so far as the recent large-scale study of the *Völkischer Beobachter* by Detlef Mühlberger (*Hitler's Voice*, 2004) does not particularly focus on the paper's writing on culture.

Dennis organizes his material thematically, looking in turn at Nazi claims that all culture showed the creative spirit of the 'Aryan race', while also pressing the Western tradition into the service of anti-Semitic ideology; Nazi appropriations of classicism and romanticism (with a clear bias towards the latter); Nazi criticisms of modern culture, at least after Wagner; and the 'culture wars' which the Nazis prosecuted during the Weimar Republic, before turning to the uses to which the Nazi regime put culture during wartime.

As one might expect from the author of a study of Beethoven's reception in German history (*Beethoven and German Politics, 1870–1989*, 1996), Dennis is perhaps at his best discussing the reception of music in the Nazi paper. One of the few surprises in the book is just how extensive the treatment of music was in the *Völkischer Beobachter*: over 1000 of the 1600 articles which Dennis collated on cultural topics dealt with music. Among the musicians, not surprisingly, Richard Wagner occupied pride of place in the Nazi pantheon. Wagner admirers who would prefer to see the composer's popularity in the 'Third Reich' as just the product of a personal tic on the part of Adolf Hitler will find little comfort here. Wagner's emphasis on Germanic culture and his obsessive and virulent anti-Semitism made him a perfect fit for the lines pursued by the *Völkischer Beobachter*.

Unfortunately, for readers familiar with the cultural history of National Socialism, surprises are few and far between here. (One of the few surprises for me was the very positive representation of Arthur Rimbaud, who was celebrated in late 1944 as a 'poet and arms trafficker' (231).) Readers will not be astonished to learn that in the columns of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, figures such as Leonardo da Vinci, Shakespeare and Rembrandt were hailed as expressions of Nordic genius; that Bach, Haydn, and other great composers were characterized as quintessentially German, and that Jewish writers and artists like Heinrich Heine were reviled. After a few hundred pages of this, I started to sympathize involuntarily with Thomas Mann's exclamation in September 1945 that everything printed in Germany under Hitler should be pulped. One problem with Dennis's approach

is that it gives a picture of the *Völkischer Beobachter* as the sole mouthpiece of Nazi views on culture: there is little sense of the battles between Joseph Goebbels, Alfred Rosenberg and others over the power to make cultural policy. Only rarely does Dennis afford us a glimpse of this, for example, in the case of Richard Strauss, in which Rosenberg had to back-pedal after his attacks on Strauss in the 1920s once Goebbels decided to turn the composer into one of the regime's leading cultural trophy figures in 1933. When dealing with theatre, there is little discussion of reviews of performances (or 'commentary', after actual criticism was banned), as opposed to discussions of the works and lives of authors. Dennis is somewhat reticent in engaging with questions of how to theorize ideology or questions of reader reception of the newspaper until a few pages in the conclusion. And the ease of reading is not assisted by occasionally clunky translations from German (which are not solely due to the stilted quality of the original).

In some respects, Dennis has been handsomely served by his publisher – the book is a generous length, and is very well illustrated and produced. The only shortcomings here are the absence of a bibliography and the lack of more rigorous copy-editing in parts. But Dennis's labours have produced a work that will be a very valuable reference for any subsequent scholars on Nazi culture, and it will no doubt save many other researchers long days slaving over microfilm readers, at least until someone digitizes the *Völkischer Beobachter*.

Philip G. Dwyer and Lyndall Ryan, eds, *Theatres of Violence: Massacre, Mass Killing and Atrocity Throughout History*, Berghahn: New York, 2012; 350 pp., 8 figs and tables; 9780857452993, £75.00 (hbk)

**Reviewed by:** Uğur Ümit Üngör, *NIOD: Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Netherlands*

Dwyer and Ryan have edited an admirable and varied collection of 20 chapters on the phenomenon of massacre. The cases cover the Greek and Roman eras, medieval Europe, settler colonialist violence against indigenous groups, the Soviet Union, South Africa, Vietnam, Algeria, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Afghanistan. These chapters are organized in four chronological parts covering the ancient world, the colonial frontier, the modern era and chapters on memory and narrative.

The editors theorize the concept in the introduction and argue that massacre is a legitimate research topic in itself, generally overshadowed by the study of genocide. The distinction between massacre and genocide is that of event and incident versus process and policy. Whereas massacres are limited in time and confined in space, genocides are extended and sustained processes consisting of a series of massacres. Dwyer and Ryan argue that 'the tendency to cover up a massacre or mass killing is a relatively recent phenomenon' (xix). This confirms recent studies by Steven Pinker and Darius Rejali which argue that it is not political violence that has increased globally, but our sensitivity to it.