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Honoring, Reinventing, and Creating German Masters

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make the narrative understandable. Furthermore, the selection of illustrations, including the frontispiece and the end piece, are superb, well captioned, and surprisingly new to a reviewer who thought he had seen most pictures of the Great War.

Hastings ends his impressive study with a sober reminder, which is a direct challenge to Niall Ferguson's silly comment in *The Pity of War* that a German victory would have been all right. Mostly that view presupposes that the British Empire would have continued, not torn by the losses of the war that came in 1914 and later. For Hastings, those who fought against Germany and a victorious *Kaiserreich* "did not perish for nothing, save insofar as all sacrifice in all wars is just cause for lamentation." However put, the Great War was a catastrophe whose effects still shape our contemporary world.

—Samuel R. Williamson, Jr.

HONORING, REINVENTING, AND CREATING GERMAN MASTERS

*Inhumanities: Nazi Interpretations of
Western Culture*
by David B. Dennis
(Cambridge University Press, 2012.
xvi + 542 pages. \$35.99)

David B. Dennis has written a compelling study of articles published in the cultural section of the most widely read newspaper in Nazi Germany, the *Völkischer Beobachter* (Folkish Observer). His

source, much of it assessed for the first time in English, runs to 1,600 articles from the *VB* on literature, painting, music, and philosophy. Dennis, a history professor at Loyola University Chicago, whose previous publications include *Beethoven in German Politics, 1870–1989* (1996), approaches the *VB*'s cultural pages with interdisciplinary élan. He skillfully focuses on the sophistry employed by a single newspaper in reshaping Germans' understanding of Western cultural history. Its contributors created a pantheon of German masters by selectively showcasing, and editing, particular artists' careers and works to illuminate, as they saw it, Western culture's culmination in National Socialism.

Forty-one percent of the cultural section's authors (the largest part of identified contributors) were academics, most of them musicologists and music historians, together with specialists in literature, history, art history, and philosophy. These authors rarely betrayed their readers with fabricated scholarship. To the contrary criticism revolved around a process of "selection and omission," "of emphasis and diminution." It was important, too, that the articles were clearly written ("obvious, proven, and historically substantiated"). Furthermore Dennis points out that the titles of many articles—e.g., "Goethe's Ideal of the Führer," "Heinrich Heine as Communist Agitator," "Richard Wagner's Fight for the Volkish Idea"—were probably sufficiently communicable to most readers without their needing to read farther. The *VB* had the virtue of being academically legitimate while being appropriately *völkisch*.

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Thus, under the editorship of Alfred Rosenberg, Nazism's chief philosopher, the *VB*'s critical program was not wholly propagandistic. Certainly it was complicit in denigrating democratic and parliamentary values, but its manipulation of the arts also legitimized the Nazi movement culturally and intellectually. By setting German *Kultur* in opposition to the crude superficial forces of *Zivilisation* (embodied by the aesthetics of the Weimar Republic), the *VB* played a critical role in the formulation of the Nazi *Weltanschauung*: "It is apparent that those who provided these interpretations of Western culture did not conceive them as just 'reflective' of Nazi ideology or instrumental tools of Nazi politics, but as core components of Nazi thought." Dennis adopts an interpretive framework akin to George L. Mosse's canonical *The Nationalization of the Masses* (1975) which showed how Nazi culture was forged through repetition ("propagandizing with a hammer") and invoked and practiced liturgically, making it resistant to rationalization or intellectualism.

Nazi culture as depicted in the *VB*, like Nazi ideology in general, was fluid and revolved around a canon of masters and their masterworks. Depending on the circumstances, their works and existing information about their lives were magnified or diminished. German masters were funneled into a matrix of racial Germanness, *Volkstümlichkeit* (folkishness), nationalism, and anti-Semitism. In the first case art was biologized: Mozart's "blood heritage" (his parents' mixed regional bloodlines—"heavy" Swabian, "vivacious" Allemannisch, and so on) explained his musical

personality—seriousness mixed with rococo playfulness. While "great men of the Nordic west" were ushered into the pantheon, simultaneously they had to remain *völkisch*, accessible, and rough-hewn. The northern Renaissance painter Albrecht Altdorfer's "naïve and elementary" art represented the "purest embodiment of Bavarian folk style." The composer Anton Bruckner, praised for his folksiness as a south German Catholic and a heavy drinker, became a romantic pendant to Altdorfer. Shakespeare was reduced to a *Szenenerschütterer* ("great scene-shaker"); the political struggles in the germanized bard's tragedies convey "a chain of apparently aimless crimes and bloody tests of strength" signifying "the fate and struggle of the Volk." Aquinas's *Summa contra Gentiles* was presented as a scholastic antecedent to the Nuremberg laws, because the saint discouraged Jews' holding administrative positions in civil or religious society.

Persistent decontextualization and simplification were the engines of such legerdemain. Nietzsche's rich poetic and aphoristic corpus was reduced to antidemocratic grumbling; his tendency toward aristocratic thinking was squared with the *völkisch* ethos by differentiating between his distaste for the mob ("social illness") and his supposed alignment with the Volk ("national health" and a manly "will to power"). Consistency was rarely achieved, especially when modern figures were discussed. Social realism ("dispassionate literalism") was decried as proto-Leninist in Tolstoy's oeuvre, yet the entirety of Dickens's *Oliver Twist* was reprinted in serialized form.

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(Fagin, like Shakespeare's Shylock and Wagner's Mime, was an attractive anti-Semitic stereotype.) While impressionism ("positivist superficiality") was rejected, the expressionist Edvard Munch was appropriated for his Nordic "sturdiness," lack of intellectualism, and projection of "spiritual reality and psychic strength." Conversely Albert Einstein was attacked for the "superficial gloss" of his "card-trick" theory of relativity, which was pilloried as egghead prattle. Theoretical physics fell within the detested boundaries of "l'art pour l'art."

Procrustean activities such as these continued until hardly any significant European cultural figure had neither been incorporated into (Dante, Dürer, Rembrandt, the older Michelangelo, Montesquieu, Schiller, Fichte, Hölderlin, Schubert, Kierkegaard, Böcklin, Courbet, Sibelius) nor excluded from (Spinoza, Newton, Ibsen, Bizet, Hofmannsthal, Puccini, Mahler, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Grosz) the pantheon. Richard Wagner stood at its apex with 243 articles devoted to him in the VB; Beethoven, most popular after Wagner, was Nazified in 116 articles. As the alpha and omega of Nazi culture, Wagner became the "ingenious creator of phenomenal works of art," the "presentiment and the fulfillment of volkish longing, outlook, and confidence." Notably *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, his mammoth four-opera cycle, was interpreted as prophesying every major event in modern German history from the outbreak of the First World War to the aesthetics and decadence of Weimar culture to, most important, "the brutal measures required to restore the German

Volk." Wagner, the cultural figure most frequently associated with the führer, became the Volk, Germanness, nationalism, and anti-Semitism incarnate.

Dennis maintains neutrality throughout *Inhumanities*, addressing the perpetual *fitting* of creators and their works (some more easily than others) to the Nazi master standard rather than commenting on the accuracy of the VB authors' conclusions. This may or may not be a weakness, but his work includes more obvious limitations. Dennis restricts his discussion of Nazi culture to a sphere governed by its panjandrum *völkisch* theorist, Rosenberg, whose editorializing reflects neither Goebbels's modernist sympathies during the early years of the regime nor Hitler's fusion of reactionary sensibilities with modern technology. Power brokering within Germany's cultural infrastructure (among Rosenberg, Goebbels, Bernhard Rust, Robert Ley, Albert Speer, and their peers) is absent from Dennis's VB history. Even if the newspaper's editorship remained ideologically constant, it does not fully represent the regime's cultural apparatus in miniature. A greater weakness of the study is the relative anonymity of the cultural critics involved. Certain personalities receive bald sketches (e.g., Josef Stolzinger, an editor of the cultural section and its most frequent contributor during the 1930s; Hans Severus Ziegler, the curator of the *Entartete-Musik* exhibition; and Richard Biedrzyński, an art and theater historian and a frequent contributor during the 1940s). Occasional contributors such as Baldur von Schirach, overseer of the Hitler Youth and the Reich's governor of Vienna,

are covered only cursorily. The collective rationale among certain scholars to align themselves with cultural homage, reimagining, and creating; their common educational and professional backgrounds; and their postwar careers, while occasionally glimpsed, would have added an especially welcome dimension to Dennis's scholarship.

These complaints aside, Dennis focuses on a plethora of personalities—artistic, literary, musical, and philosophical—while cogently assessing the VB's manipulation of their works. He displays clearly the tireless ability of dedicated scholars, *völkisch* malcontents, and scientific racists to identify Nazism as an artistic and cultural telos of Western development. Of course even a researcher as skilled as David B. Dennis cannot prove that the VB's readers were convinced by its arguments, but he shows that its cultural authors believed that their created pantheon of German masters not only legitimized the Nazi movement but comprised its intellectual and historical base. The general reader with a passing interest in Nazism or in any of these Nazified German masters will find Dennis's work fascinating and accessible. Researchers of Nazi culture will benefit from Dennis's scholarship for years to come. He should be commended for his labor.

— Matthew Burkhalter

THE *TIRPITZ* ALL TOLD

The Hunt for Hitler's Warship
by Patrick Bishop
(Regnery History, 2013. 426 pages.
Illustrated. \$27.95)

Patrick Bishop, a graduate of Wimbledon College and Corpus Christi, Oxford, first established himself as a significant writer by serving nearly thirty years as a foreign correspondent for such papers as the *Evening Standard*, the *Observer*, the *Sunday Times*, and the *Telegraph*. During that time he saw considerable action while covering major British engagements from the Falklands to Afghanistan and only withdrew from dangerous work when he determined that he was no longer nimble enough to keep up the pace. Thereafter Bishop turned his attention to writing military history and rapidly turned himself into one of the United Kingdom's leading authors on the subject, delivering such critically acclaimed best sellers as *Fighter Boys* (2004), *3 Para* (2006), the book for which he won the British Army's Military Book of the Year award, *Bomber Boys* (2008), *Ground Truth* (2009), *Wings* (2012), and *Target Tirpitz* (2012), published in the United States as *The Hunt for Hitler's Warship* (2013).

Bishop's preparations for writing *The Hunt for Hitler's Warship*, while steadily rewarding, proved both long and arduous. With books like *Fighter Boys* and *Bomber Boys*, Bishop could focus much of his attention on RAF records. *The Hunt* presented a more complex problem, requiring him to do meticulous research in the archives of the Royal Navy, the German Navy, the RAF, and the