

SvD KULTUR

The Nazis sought legitimacy in the cultural heritage

To win the intellectual reputation of its ideology invested Nazis frequently on cultural journalism in the main body *Völkischer Beobachter*. It was made "Germanic" greats as Luther, Bach, Goethe and Wagner as a forerunner to National Socialism.



Völkischer Beobachter, 1933.

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Nazi relationship to culture summed up in the public consciousness often in the quote: "When I hear the word culture, I cocks my revolver." Ambiguities arise primarily in respect of whom the quote is attributed - Goering, Goebbels and playwright Hanns Johst. Petimetrarna out that there was originally talk of a Browning, who is not a gun but a semi-automatic pistol. But no matter what, is the gist that Nazism was deeply hostile culture.

As historian David B. Dennis, worked at Loyola University in Chicago, shows in his book *Inhumanities: Nazi interpretations of western culture* (Cambridge University Press, 541 s), however, was actually more complicated than that. Nazism may have been the primary manifestation of organized barbarism we know today. But the movement was cultivated perception that the party opposite belonged to the Western cultural mainstream of history, and in a more authentic way than any other movement gave expression to this culture - in fact, was the highlight of Western culture. Rather than doubtful their revolvers, Nazi propagandists did everything they could to associate their ideology with culture.

How was that possible? Dennis has studied this issue by studying the culture Guard in *Völkischer Beobachter*, "the folklike beholder", which was the National Socialist Party's main body. There is a choice of materials that have good reasons for it. *Völkischer Beobachter* was from the beginning a central institution in the party. During the 1920s ruled the party from the editorial: Hitler's routine was that day after breakfast go to the editors to receive visitors there. During the period 1923-37 was also the leading Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg magazine's editor in chief.

The newspaper, which originally published locally in Munich, had a circulation of 330,000 years 1933rd In 1940 it reached enmiljonsgränsen, and the year before war was its circulation 1.7 million copies. *Völkischer Beobachter* was both official news source and normative opinion makers - editors of other Nazi newspapers were invited to read *Völkischer Beobachter* to find out what was ideologically. And culture had a seemingly obvious position in this "fight Journal": until the end of april 1945, the daily culture department.

The basis of the concept of culture put forward on the magazine's pages was that all true culture, all cultural renewal, could be traced to a race that alternately described as a German, Germanic, Aryan and Nordic. This was not a new idea, but had occurred in writer Houston Stewart Chamberlain. There was also a view that advocated by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*: "What we now see before us of human culture, the arts, science and technology achievements, is ... exclusively created by the Aryan."

On *Völkischer Beobachter* fell the task of providing these general statements with details and examples. By claiming large parts of the Western cultural history, and to distance themselves from the trends in contemporary perceived as a departure from this culture's basic features, sought to create cultural legitimacy to the Nazi enterprise. "The cultural and historical discourse in *Völkischer Beobachter*," writes Dennis, "was designed to make the party and in particular its anti-Semitic ideology respectable". Culture served as to impart prejudices and hatred intellectual reputation.

In practice this was done by the readers faced a gallery of German cultural figures: especially giants like Martin Luther, Bach, Goethe, Schiller and Wagner, but also a variety of lesser-known writers. All were produced as the precursor to National Socialism.

The verb Dennis usually use about *Völkischer Beobachter* was the case for this celebration crowd is "appropriate", ie, to acquire or expropriate. In some cases, this tillägnandeprocess simple - there was no rival grouping that claimed the same person. But the bigger names were, the greater were generally competitive. "Humanitarian minded", "Republicans" and "frimuraraktiga world citizens" claimed for example that Schiller belong to them, but employees in *Völkischer Beobachter* rejected all competing claims. His Fabricius, who later wrote the official history of the Nazi party, claimed in the paper that the spirit of Schiller's drama was exactly the same spirit that lived in all true National Socialists.

If Goethe was an equally intense battle against the "pacifists, Jews, Democrats and Republicans." The writers of *Völkischer Beobachter*, however, was convinced that he was theirs, and found themselves in him even find support for the German expansionism.

In the case of Goethe turns out, however, a peculiarity that can be observed in many other cases, namely that it focused on small and sometimes remote parts of the production. When it came to Goethe reference was mainly to his conversation with Johann Peter Eckermann, when it came to Luther produced the like "The Jews and their Lies" was his magnum opus. Even

in the most dreamy and unworldly romantic poets sought for political, nationalistic and anti-Semitic.

In some cases, they had it easier - Richard Wagner was a rich source. Other times, you had to fight a lot more. Friedrich Nietzsche, for example, had undoubtedly significant intellectual legitimacy. But to squeeze him and his superhuman thoughts in the folksiness ideals that guided the newspaper's culture assessment, it was necessary to stretch the language is nothing ägandes limit.

Völkischer Beobachter raised not up, it also ran away. Especially searched its employees prove that no people with jew background had ever made any positive contribution to German culture. In Heinrich Heine conducted what must be described as a hate campaign, but also Felix Mendelssohn was written off as an imitator and parasites in the total absence of any own creativity. The Mendelssohn rediscovered Bach's St Matthew Passion was dismissed as a piece of jew propaganda. And in any case, wrote the paper, did Mendelssohn as large changes in Bach's masterpiece to a "total fake version" was the result.

In light of the Nazi ideology postulates of a strict link between race and culture, were employees of Völkischer Beobachter also devote considerable energy to explaining - and excuses - leading kulturpersonligheters background. The rumor that Richard Wagner, who as Goebbels was the most German of all Germans, would have had "Jewish blood" was from their perspective a serious accusation that is not allowed to stand unchallenged. Judging by the portrait, they wrote, was the person named as Wagner's biological father, Ludwig Geyer, "an entirely German head without the slightest indication of foreign blood."

Regarding Beethoven had another problem, namely that all the portraits testified an appearance very different from the Aryan stereotypes and thus at odds with the racial musicological. On the one hand it took to explain his music, which some in the movement was seen as a symbol of the people's prosperity during Hitler's reign, as a foreign or inferior. On the other hand, it was not assumed that he was short, dark-haired and

swarthy. At best, one could argue that he had blue eyes. What else was Beethoven's father suffered from a reputable alcohol dependence according to the prevailing thinking in normal circumstances would have prevented all cultural creativity even in the son. *Völkischer Beobachter*, however, had also explanations on these troubling circumstances: Beethoven had a darker skin color during his walks in the free nature, and the father's drinking habits were an expression of a life-happy local culture.

Völkischer Beobachter was also a highly committed participants in the Weimar era culture wars, not least when it came to Erich Maria Remarque war novel "On the Western Front," George Grosz church and war critical drawings and Ernst Krenek's jazz-inspired opera "Jonny spielt auf" (1927). A special grudge harbored one of the "Trendige, EUR cosmopolitan" Thomas Mann, but the Weimar epoch creative flowering (see *SvD Culture* 5/1 2013) was the newspaper's perspective, a single cultural catastrophe. Above all, they turned against modernism in music, "Jewish terror".

Again they made claims to historical legitimacy, arguing that past centuries master had seen on Weimar culture with the same disgust as the Nazis themselves viewed it. And again let it be guided by anti-Semitism, also in the assessment of composers like Paul Hindemith ("socialized in international Jewish circles") and Krenek (wife of Gustav Mahler's daughter and student of "Jew Franz Schreker," the Austrian composer). Alfred Rosenberg saw in Richard Strauss's musical trend awareness and alleged business sense indications that the composer had "a Jew component of blood." (When Strauss later was appointed president in Reichsmusikkammer and began to praise of the Nazi leadership, became the magazine had to take an opposite position.)

Both glorification of past centuries culture critique of contemporary culture continued in this manner as a simple ideological model, albeit a model that when applied could lead to unforeseen complications.

Where the newspaper, according to their own conditions, was the most difficult, however, was the demonstration of the Nazi

breakthrough would have meant a cultural rebirth. Two years after taking power Hitler said in a speech that he was convinced that the Germans would now produce more and better art than what had been achieved over the previous decades under "Jewish rule". "If one considers Nazism as a cultural movement - as much as a political movement - stands the task of realizing such a rebirth as the primary measure of success," writes Dennis.

But it soon turned out that it had been easier to unite in hatred of the Weimar Republic's culture than to lay the foundations of a cultural renaissance. Prominent cultural creators were difficult to find in all areas. Both in literature as in art resulted from a recognition of favorites is today largely forgotten, with the possible exception of Arno Breker. Not even in music, which was at the center of culture *Guard in Völkischer Beobachter*, had any clear idea of the desired direction after Wagner. Siegfried Wagner, Paul Graener and Max von Schillings were some of the composers, the newspaper emphasized, but as the basis for claims of cultural flowering was not enough. "You can not make an artist," Goebbels was forced to admit.

Dennis is particularly interested in the Nazi cultural discourse, and less of the individuals behind it. But the cultural writers in *Völkischer Beobachter* that have been identified, only eight percent party representatives. The largest group, 41 percent were academics, specifically humanists. "On a statistical level," writes Dennis, "confirms my research there has been an alarming discovery in all areas of German cultural history: that many scientists actively contributed to the politicization, internationalization and nazifisering of the culture."

Hitler: More quizar



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