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Dresden Mon Amour

REALISM OR REVISIONISM? GERMANS REVISIT THE WAR

BY NOAH ISENBERG • "A SIGNAL IS NEEDED AGAINST THE ONE-SIDED MOURNING IN GERMANY," DECLARED PETER LAUER, A SIXTY-FOUR-YEAR-OLD SCHOOLTEACHER TAKING PART IN A NEO-NAZI COUNTERDEMONSTRATION TO MARK THE SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIREBOMBING OF DRESDEN, ON FEBRUARY 13 OF THIS YEAR. "WE MUST ALSO MOURN THE GERMAN VICTIMS." THE EMOTIONALLY CHARGED ANNIVERSARY WAS ALSO MARKED BY AN OFFICIAL CEREMONY AND A MASS PROCESSION

in which many of the marchers bore white roses as a symbol of opposition to the presence of Lauer's group, the largest neo-Nazi gathering in decades. But while Lauer identifies himself as a supporter of the rightist National Democratic Party (NPD), which now holds twelve seats in the local Saxon parliament, his sentiment does not represent merely Germany's fringe. Indeed, this year's anniversary of the end of the war has seen not only official commemorations of the enormous death toll brought about by the Nazi regime but also much attention paid to German suffering and German civilian casualties incurred during the Allied bombing of cities like Dresden. This development, which can be charted along a number of different lines (historical, literary, popular, etc.), was previously unimaginable.

For over half a century, German discussions of the Third Reich have focused almost unremittingly on the crimes committed by the Nazis, and in doing so have tended to implicate not only Hitler's most fervent supporters but the German population as a whole—for its passivity, for its basic endorsement of the regime, for its incapacity to recognize the heinous nature of the National Socialist cause. Even if these discussions have occasionally been punctuated by sharp challenges—such as the infamous *Historikerstreit* ("historians' dispute") of 1986, when a strident

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WORKS DISCUSSED IN THIS ARTICLE:

THE END: HAMBURG 1943
BY HANS ERICH NOSSACK
TRANSLATED AND WITH A FOREWORD BY JOEL AGEE
CHICAGO: UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS. 112 PAGES. $20.

ON THE NATURAL HISTORY OF DESTRUCTION
BY W. G. SEBALD, TRANSLATED BY ANTHEA BELL
NEW YORK: MODERN LIBRARY. 224 PAGES. $13.

DRESDEN VATERSTADT
BY JOCHEN AND HARF ZIMMERMANN
BERLIN: NICOLAISCHE VERLAGSBUCHHANDLUNG. 120 PAGES. $26.

DER BRAND: DEUTSCHLAND IM BOMBENKRIEG, 1940–1945
BY JÖRG FRIEDRICH
BERLIN: LIST TASCHENBUCH. 589 PAGES. $14.

DOWNFALL
DIRECTED BY OLIVER HIRSCHBIEGEL

effort to normalize the German past was put forward by conservative historian Ernst Nolte—Germans have generally felt deeply and irreversibly entrenched on the side of the perpetrators. As a result, a sense of bereavement for their own people has not come easily. In the late 1960s, the psychoanalysts Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich wrote presciently of Germany's "inability to mourn." In the years since, the self-imposed silence often elicited by mention of the war or the Holocaust has similarly impaired any candid expression of German loss.

But in fall 1997, in what was one of the first prominent, unflinching examinations of German suffering during the Allied air campaign, the acclaimed German novelist W. G. Sebald gave a series of lectures in Zurich under the title "Air War and Literature" (published in English translation, after Sebald's untimely death in 2001, as *On the Natural History of Destruction*). Pitched in a semipolemical vein, Sebald's remarks took to task German writers of the previous generation, and the German public along with them, for falling under the spell of a kind of "individual and collective amnesia," a willful forgetting that kept them from addressing this vital part of their postwar identity. As Sebald told it, from the end of the war into the late 1990s very few literary testimonies were written, and those that were faced severe delays in publication—as in the case of Heinrich Böll's dark war novel *Der Engel schwieg* (The Silent Angel), which was written in the late 1940s but didn't appear until 1992—or barely reached an audience. Despite the fact that so many Germans were profoundly affected by the unprecedented devastation—according to Sebald's calculations, some six hundred thousand civilians died in the air raids, and by the war's final days 7.5 million citizens of the former Reich were without a home—the topic was essentially closed to debate. Germany, in Sebald's words, was "always looking and looking away at the same time."

As a result, the subject of German loss had no place in the dominant postwar narrative of reconstruction and rebirth, the so-called *Wirtschaftswunder* ("economic miracle") for which the Federal Republic of Germany would soon become famous. Not unlike the protagonist of R. W. Fassbinder's politically minded 1979 film *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (The Marriage of Maria Braun), a woman whose relentless zeal for upward mobility mirrors the development of the nation, postwar Germany was largely content to paper over its tarnished image, to rebuild directly atop the ruins, and to avoid, at all costs, looking back. As Sebald put it, "The darkest aspects of the final act of destruction, as experienced by the great majority of the German population, remained under a kind of taboo like a shameful family secret, a secret that perhaps could not even be privately acknowledged."

As we know from period documentary footage, mainly photographs and newsreels, a number of German cities were completely leveled in World War II. The Allied air campaign left them buried beneath mountains of ruins; Dresden alone had as much as 42.8 cubic meters of rubble per inhabitant. The Allied bombing of Dresden represents, for many, an especially tragic example, given that it occurred so late in the war, that it destroyed the city's most precious cultural institutions, and that Dresden, unlike Hamburg, was not considered a vital military target. In his survey of the destruction, Sebald includes, as he typically does in his fictional work as well, an array of uncaptioned photographs, providing a visual dimension to his words. The poignant images—decimated cityscapes dotted with heaps of rubble, charred body parts strewn across a city street, bombed-out buildings evoking statuelike severed torsos or ancient ruins—betray not only the horrifying scale of the destruction but also the sweeping effort to repress these horrors. In a number of instances, Sebald includes a diptych, the first an image from the aftermath of the bombings, the second a shot of the city reconstructed. (A recent German publication, *Dresden Vaterstadt*, a father-son photographic collaboration by Jochen and Harf Zimmermann, takes a similar approach—presenting snapshots from 1949 juxtaposed with those taken from the same vantage point in 2004—to show the complex course of urban development and to remind viewers what the city had looked like before it was rebuilt.) "People's ability to forget what they do not want to know," Sebald avers, "to overlook what is before their eyes, was seldom put to the test better than in Germany at that time. The population decided—out of sheer panic at first—to carry on as if nothing had happened."

ERICH ANDRES/DENKMALSCHUTZAMT, HAMBURG BILDARCHIV

Opposite and above: Hamburg, July 1943.

While very few works of the so-called *Trümmerliteratur*, or "rubble literature," published in the immediate postwar period meet Sebald's exacting standards for an unrestrained confrontation with German experience of the air raids, there are several that pass the initial test. He mentions, with qualified praise, literary works by the German authors Böll, Arno Schmidt, and Hermann Kasack, as well as non-German eyewitness reports by Stig Dagerman and Janet Flanner, among others. Also on his list is one of the most riveting accounts of the war, novelist Hans Erich Nossack's threadbare, laconic rendering of the firebombing of Hamburg, *Der Untergang: Hamburg 1943*, first published in Germany in 1948, as part of a collection of the author's shorter pieces titled *Interview mit dem Tode* (Interview with Death), and published in English translation this past winter as *The End*. Nossack recorded his observations of the decimated city in November 1943—during the actual attacks, he and his wife happened to be vacationing in a village beyond the city outskirts, across the Elbe River—just a few months after Operation Gomorrah, as the Allied air campaign was called, had taken its toll. Nossack opens in the matter-of-fact style he maintains, with a few notable exceptions of allegorical and poetic flourish, throughout much of his account: "I experienced the destruction of Hamburg as a spectator. I was spared the fate of playing a role in it. I don't know why. I can't even decide whether that was a privilege. . . . For me the city went to ruin as a whole, and my danger consisted in being overpowered by seeing and knowing the entirety of its fate." He then explains, with acute self-awareness and unusual foresight, the nature of his undertaking:

> I feel that I have been given a mandate to render an account. Let no one ask me why I presume to speak of a mandate: I cannot answer that. I feel that my mouth would remain closed forever if I did not take care of this first. Also, I feel an urgency to set it down right away, even though only three months have passed. For reason will never be capable of comprehending as a reality or preserving in memory what happened there. I am afraid that, if I do not bear witness now, it will gradually fade like an evil dream.

As if possessing a sick, prophetic sense of the blanket of silence that would soon come to shroud the event, Nossack then proceeds to transcribe his impressions of the devastation around him. Like his fellow wartime diarist Victor Klemperer, whose multivolume *Ich will Zeugnis ablegen bis zum letzten* (I Will Bear Witness) gives a Jewish eyewitness account of the war years, Nossack sees his role as a kind of moral imperative.

Nossack's chronicle addresses, and even anticipates, many of the same issues that Sebald would treat in his lectures more than half a century later: the "uncanny silence," the almost immediate desire to move forward, the guilt, fear, and shame that promptly set in. *The End* portrays, in a number of revealing instances, how the trauma from the attacks manifested itself: "People were simply without a center, the roots were torn out and swayed back and forth in search of some soil." A woman Nossack observes, surrounded by rubble, insists on frantically scrubbing her windows. In a related moment, he notes how Hamburg's citizens, reverting to their established bourgeois habits in the wake of the bombing, sit on their verandas and drink coffee. Even those who lost family and friends appear, in Nossack's account, bent on erasing—or repressing—the experience. "How often, when I ask one of the victims about someone who I know was their friend, do I hear the answer: He's finished for me." One finds in Nossack's narrative that along with the palpable sense of doom (the original German title, *Der Untergang*, means at once "the collapse," "the demise," and "the downfall"), there are also hints of a new beginning. Unable to dismiss or repress these urges, and clearly made uncomfortable by them, Nossack instead confronts them as they impinge on his project. "Why go on? I mean, why record all this? Wouldn't it be better to surrender it to oblivion for all time? For those who were there certainly don't have to read it. And the others, and those who will come later?"

Nowhere in Nossack's short work does one detect anger at what has occurred or anger directed at those who dropped the bombs. Although he refers to the air raids as "punishment" (in German the word he uses is *Gericht*, which comes from juridical language and means "tribunal" or "judgment"), he is also quick to insist, "I have not heard a single person curse the enemies or blame them for the destruction. When the newspapers published epithets like 'pirates of the air' and 'criminal arsonists,' we had no ears for that." It's almost as if he quietly accepts the bitter hand dealt by the Allied attacks and sees them as a justified response to the Nazi megalomania: "We felt our fate to be the end." It is, perhaps, this remarkable candor and humility that first prompted Sebald to champion Nossack as the sole German writer who "was ready or able to put any concrete facts down on paper about the progress and repercussions of this gigantic, long-term campaign of destruction."

If, as Sebald suggests, the German public was incapable of countenancing Nossack's unvarnished account at the time of its initial publication, the American public was no better equipped. Translator Joel Agee notes in his foreword to the English edition that when he first tried to find a publisher for the work in the early '70s, during the Vietnam War, he was told that "Americans just weren't prepared to sympathize with a German description of the suffering of Germans in World War Two." Now, however, sixty years after the end of the war, Americans may be more willing to

accept the idea of German suffering. Even more important is the unmistakable affinity that Nossack's text has with other accounts of terror and trauma, and that, in the wake of our own experience with air attacks at home, we are now, sadly, able to appreciate. Anyone who witnessed 9/11 firsthand is apt to relate to Nossack's somber, almost surreal landscape, "the smell of charred household effects, of rot and decay, hanging over the city," coupled with "the population's readiness to help."

The American edition of *The End* includes, as an appendix, a selection of the wartime photographs of Hamburg surreptitiously taken by acclaimed photojournalist Erich Andres. There are, as one might expect, images of the spectacular ruins, some of them still smoldering while the city's inhabitants traverse the rubble; there is also the shocking image of charred corpses lying next to a scorched bucket, the same photo that Sebald incorporates into his text. But the shot that may speak most directly to an American audience still haunted by the specter of photographs of missing loved ones plastered on the walls and lampposts of New York City shows a soldier writing in chalk on a bare concrete wall. In the adjacent photo appear the words "Hilde, where are you? We're alive" (this is echoed in Nossack's text: "Where are you, Mother? Please let me know. I now live at this and that place").

When Sebald wrote his Zurich lectures, and when he articulated his claim that "we [Germans] have not yet succeeded in bringing the horrors of the air war to public attention through historical or literary accounts," military historian Jörg Friedrich had yet to publish his monumental, highly controversial work *Der Brand: Deutschland im Bombenkrieg, 1940–1945* (The Fire: Germany in the Bombing Campaign, 1940–1945, the English translation of which is forthcoming from Columbia University Press). In a radical departure from previous scholarly norms and standard areas of emphasis—Friedrich himself previously worked on research projects dealing with Nazi war crimes and the Holocaust—*The Fire* sets out to document the full magnitude of the Allied air raids as experienced in German cities across the Reich. When the work appeared in Germany in 2002, critics were quick to call foul, not so much because of what Friedrich had attempted to do but because of how he had done it. By personalizing the story, by providing eyewitness accounts in lurid, painful detail (an act of "hysterical expressivity," as one German critic called it), and by employing the type of language previously reserved for discussing victims of the Holocaust, Friedrich opened himself up to charges of historical revisionism and cozying up to the radical Right.

Yet Friedrich's book is also brimming with statistics, which he often wields the way a talented trial lawyer marshals evidence. Consider, for example, his discussion of the Hamburg firebombing, an odd mixture of straight information and rhetorical flourish: "The approximately 40,000 fatalities in the July 1943 campaigns are, together with those in Dresden, Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki, emblems of the most extreme kind of violent warfare ever inflicted upon a creature. Not because of the streams of blood spilled, but rather because of the way that living beings were erased from the world with a deadly wind. In fire bombing as in nuclear war very little blood flows. Rescue workers in Hamburg report that the hurricane-like, blazing gusts of air reached hundreds of people one later found lying naked in the streets. Their skin was allegedly of a brown texture, their hair in good condition, their mucous membranes in their faces dried up and incrusted." Friedrich was castigated for such passages and also for failing to emphasize sufficiently that Germany had itself pioneered the bombing *continued on page 8*

NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE

Mark M. Anderson on German Literary History

A NEW HISTORY OF GERMAN LITERATURE

EDITED BY DAVID E. WELLBERY (EDITOR IN CHIEF), JUDITH RYAN (GENERAL EDITOR), HANS ULRICH GUMBRECHT, ANTON KAES, JOSEPH LEO KOERNER, AND DOROTHEA VON MÜCKE (EDITORS)

CAMBRIDGE, MA: HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS. 1,004 PAGES. $45.

In 1989, as the theory wars over deconstruction and poststructuralism were beginning to ease up, Harvard University Press published *A New History of French Literature*. Edited by Denis Hollier, the volume did away with the traditional taxonomies of literary movements and writers by organizing itself as one long series of dates, each of which testified to a signal moment in French literary history. Apart from its novel presentation (itself no mean achievement in the often dusty realm of reference works), this editorial technique had the advantage of stressing the contingent, "happening" quality of literature: literature in the making rather than as a collection of timeless and fixed "great works." And because each entry was written by a different scholar, the encylopedia offered a cornucopia of French literary criticism at the time, a "tasting menu," as it were, of leading critics, sensibilities, and methods. Literary history became an encounter.

Fifteen years later, *A New History of German Literature* uses the same structure of momentous dates and subjective critical perspectives to similar effect and gain. "Every poem is datable," wrote the poet Paul Celan, by which he meant (as editor in chief David Wellbery writes in the introduction) that the "meaning of literary texts . . . is inseparably tied to the singularity of their moment, to their primary historical character as contingent events." This conception of history owes much to Walter Benjamin, who emphasized the breaks in the temporal continuum in order to disrupt the monumentalizing and ossifying tendencies of traditional historicist views and to make history come alive for each human subject. In practice, this approach can be disorienting. Students of German literature will search the table of contents of *A New History of German Literature* in vain for such terms as *Sturm und Drang*, *Romanticism*, and even, believe it or not, the name *Goethe*. We find instead enigmatic and somewhat mystifying titles, such as "Contagious Violence," "Pathologies of Literature," and (my favorite) "An Alien Fallen from the Moon," which come coupled with precise but equally enigmatic dates: "circa 1200," "1774, January–March," or "1796, June 10." Only by scouring the index or reading the entries in question can the reader discover that these titles and dates refer to the composition of the medieval epic *Nibelungenlied*, to Goethe's breakthrough novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, and to the arrival in Weimar of Romantic author Jean Paul, dismissed by Schiller as an "alien" to classical German literature.

The use of these titles is somewhat of a tease (they provide, in essence, the poetic half of traditional academic titles, leaving off the descriptive half that usually follows the colon), but speaks to Wellbery's stated desire to enliven and disrupt conventional histories. Goethe, that "towering figure of the German literary tradition," is to be met in this encyclopedia not in his monumentality but at three or four moments of his career: "We see him writing his *Werther*, censoring his own *Roman Elegies*, declaring his *Faust* complete; in one entry, we even see him hiding behind a curtain to listen to F. A. Wolf lecture on Homer." Although this strategy sometimes descends into the anecdotal and arbitrary, more often than not the entries succeed in illuminating the "dynamics of their various subject matters," as well as testifying to the theoretical paradigms, insight, and sensibility of the individual contributors.

Interdisciplinarity and methodological eclecticism are the rule. This is very much a "German studies" account of German literature, reflecting the state of a discipline that has moved increasingly toward the study of literature and language as cultural forces in a historical and social context. Readers will find articles on the Crusades and Luther, on Wagner's *Ring* cycle and Schopenhauer's philosophy of the will, on Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* and the New German Cinema of the 1970s—all written by Germanists currently working in American German departments. But readers will also find "visiting" scholars from other fields, some quite unexpected: early-modern historian Anthony Grafton on Johannes Reuchlin and the Kabbalah; pop music critic Greil Marcus on Dada; historian of science Lorraine Daston on Lichtenberg's aphoristic mode; Arthur C. Danto on Hegel and the "end of art"; even the Harvard executive editor himself, Lindsay Waters, on Walter Benjamin's celebrated essay on art in the age of mechanical reproduction.

A New History of German Literature is large: In just over a thousand pages it winds its way over a thousand years of history, across different genres, disciplines, and cultures, from the tenth-century magical formulas written in alliterative Old High German to W. G. Sebald's 2001 novel *Austerlitz*. But despite its gargantuan scope, the focus on single moments makes the reader aware of just how fragmentary and subjective the *New History* is. There are clear winners and losers. An astonishing amount of space (some 340 pages) is allocated to the medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque—periods that are virtually untaught today in most German literature departments throughout this country. A welcome corrective to this curricular gap, the articles in the section provide a rich portrait of historical, scientific, and social forces in the pre-Enlightenment development of German literature. The other clear winner, at more than four hundred pages and nearly seventy articles, is the twentieth century. In addition to entries on individual texts by Kafka, Rilke, Thomas Mann, and Paul Celan, we find essays on Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, Daniel Libeskind's new Jewish Museum in Berlin, and "spectacles of multiculturalism" and Turkish identity politics in contemporary Germany.

The problem with these riches is that little space is left over for the rest of German literature. Only 170 pages are devoted to the Enlightenment, Classical, and Romantic periods from 1750 to 1821—arguably the most important phase of German literature, when it developed into a modern idiom and a European force, a "world" model for other literatures. (The imbalance is particularly odd since Wellbery's own specialization is in this period.) The real loser is the post-Romantic nineteenth century, from Heine to Hauptmann, not only because it receives a scant hundred pages but because much of this section doesn't specifically deal with literature. One welcomes, to be sure, articles on Schubert's *Winterreise*, Schopenhauer's philosophy of the will, Marx's "Communist Manifesto," and *continued on page 8*

Isenberg continued from page 6 raids, in cities such as Warsaw (1939), Rotterdam (1940), and Coventry (1940). In reaction, in a recent piece in the German daily *Die Welt*, published just days before the sixtieth anniversary of the firebombing of Dresden, Friedrich made a point of noting the German precedent but added a critical rejoinder. In his words, "It was only since 1943 that the incineration of cities from the air had amounted to deliberate mass killing. The fire bombing of Hamburg killed 45,000 [*sic*] people overnight, more than the Luftwaffe had achieved in nine months of dropping bombs on England." Just as the *Historikerstreit* applied great pressure to the issue of moral equivalency—with the effort from the Right to compare the crimes of Hitler with those of Stalin—so, too, the issue resurges in Friedrich's work.

What Sebald lamented about the lack of open discourse on the air war appears to have been blown apart with the publication of *Der Brand*, and in the three years since, the topic of German suffering has been addressed with more fervor than Sebald may have been able to imagine. Authors as diverse as Günter Grass and Uwe Timm have taken up variations of the subject in their work—the Russian sinking of a Nazi cruise ship carrying German refugees in the case of Grass, and the indoctrination and ultimate sacrifice of young, naive Germans at the hands of the SS in Timm—and contemporary filmmakers have similarly seized on the occasion to shift their focus to formerly taboo terrain. Though it has the same title as Nossack's book, Oliver Hirschbiegel's blockbuster film *Der Untergang* (Downfall) is not about the Allied air raids in Hamburg, but about Hitler's final moments under siege in Berlin. Much of it takes place in the depths of Hitler's bunker, where the increasingly deluded Führer, played with mesmerizing skill by Bruno Ganz, loses his grip. The film follows Hitler on his suicidal path, but it also shows how those around him—especially his young, naive secretary, Traudl Junge (Alexandra Maria Lara)—are made to suffer. We witness the poisoning of the Goebbels children, the mass suicides, the destruction of those who act out their ideological will to sacrifice, and, finally, the salvaged hopes for rebirth among those who survive Hitler's wrath. In his review of the film, J. Hoberman likened it to a German *Kammerspiel*, or "domestic drama," a tradition that tends to emphasize the intimate nature of characters and their social relations over external politics and larger concerns. Although it has been criticized for humanizing Hitler, what *Downfall* really does is domesticate German suffering, an effect it may share with Friedrich's work.

While this debate raises real, well-placed fears of vulgar revisionism, and of playing into the hands of neo-Nazi slogans such as the "Bombing Holocaust" (even Nossack's text has found its way, in excerpted form, onto the American right-wing website Stormfront, the "White Nationalist Community" platform from which David Duke airs his weekly speeches), it also has led to positive developments. German authors, filmmakers, historians, and the public at large have been challenged to face a part of German history that needed to resurface. Even if some of the consequences may be frightening, bottling up this agonizing chapter of history is no longer an option. Toward the end of *In My Brother's Shadow: A Life and Death in the SS*, Uwe Timm observes, "They [the Germans] did not know because they would not see, they looked away." A mere eight years after Sebald voiced grave concerns about Germany's propensity to repress the past, to always be "looking and looking away at the same time," it is now no longer possible to look away. □

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Anderson continued from page 6 Wagner's *Ring*—texts that are all interesting in their own right and that have played an incalculable role in the development of German literature. But the heart sinks when one considers the omissions: nothing substantial on Heine's poetry or his Judaism; nothing on the Realist authors Storm, Grabbe, and C. F. Meyer; only passing reference to Gerhart Hauptmann, the Zola of German Naturalism; and nothing at all on the Jewish genre writers Auerbach, Franzos, and Sacher-Masoch.

To be sure, every literary history has to make choices, and writers' reputations rise and fall over time. But the real issue is the "German studies" approach behind so many of these articles, which tend to put aside formal literary questions (genre, prosody, figural language, stylistics, etc.) in order to probe connections with nonliterary realms. The editorial mandate to choose a specific date almost automatically pushes the contributors away from a text's formal literary features in favor of a historical event in which its ideological or extraliterary significance can be understood to crystallize. This technique works best when larger issues are addressed, in particular for the medieval and early modern periods, whose specialists have long employed historical and interdisciplinary methods. The fascinating article "The Culture of the Book," on Renaissance Nuremberg, by Tracy Adams and Stephen G. Nichols, is a case in point: It not only sketches a miniature portrait of that city's "world" significance for early modern Europe, but also suggests how knowledge of Renaissance book culture can expand and transform our present-day notion of authors and readers. A manufacturing and trading center located at the crossroads of twelve trade routes, Nuremberg was also the "de facto capital of the Holy Roman Empire," the site of Germany's first municipal library, and the printing capital for its flourishing Humanist studies. Marion Aptroot's article "The Emergence of Yiddish Literature" uses the scholarly debate over a collection of ancient manuscripts in Hebrew script in order to point out the linguistic and ideological stakes in determining the border between Middle High German and Yiddish. Are these manuscripts, discovered in the late nineteenth century in a Cairo synagogue, essentially German texts written in Hebrew letters, or are they Yiddish texts in a Jewish literary tradition that borrowed elements from the surrounding German culture? Orrin Robinson's model essay "Luther's Bible and the Emergence of Standard German" convincingly tempers the widespread view that Luther's translations and writings "created the German language" (as Heine put it), allowing us to see them as part of a broader literary development as well as a decisive intervention in their own right. In these and many other essays (on monastic scriptoria, medieval court life, Old Norse literature, mysticism, and scholastic theology), we find a felicitous mix of broad historical knowledge, philosophical insight, and traditional philology, which, to this reader at least, proves exhilarating as well as convincing.

For the modern period, however, this interdisciplinary, event-driven conception of literary history is decidedly mixed, and reflects more the current interests of American *Germanistik* than German literature per se. Large chunks of the history of poetry and drama largely disappear, to be replaced by film, photography, philosophy, and politics. David Bathrick's discussion of songwriter and poet Wolf Biermann rightly focuses on issues of censorship and East German party politics (Biermann's poetry is not formally interesting), but the lack of any sustained discussion of Else Lasker-Schüler, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Bertolt Brecht, Ingeborg Bachmann, Johannes Bobrowski, Günter Eich, or Ernst Jandl *as poets* makes it impossible to follow the internal, formal development of a genre that was vitally important to German readers throughout much of the century. (Here I can cite my own contribution—mea culpa—as an example: Though Ingeborg Bachmann's poetry is arguably better, in sheer literary terms, than her novel cycle *Todesarten*, I was commissioned to write on the latter, no doubt because of its greater resonance for German feminist discussions of patriarchy and fascism.) Is this political tendency the result of a "Benjaminian" attempt to break open German literature for new readers and surprising uses, or merely the reflection of poetry's waning influence in the age of the artwork's "mechanical reproducibility"? Ironically enough, Walter Benjamin (like Hannah Arendt and Gershom Scholem) wrote poetry himself, and no doubt he would have lamented the loss of this tradition.

This loss is also a gain, though, since it is intimately connected with the expansion of the traditional study of German literature to include what has become known simply as "visual culture." A fascinating article on Bauhaus photography and typography by Brigid Doherty (a trained art historian who currently teaches in the Princeton German department) has little to do with literature; indeed, it discusses the end of literature (as in Moholy-Nagy's 1923 prediction that "photography will lead in the near future to a replacement of literature by film") and serves as a reflection of the current move toward visual culture in American literature departments. The same can be said of the (excellent) articles by Anton Kaes on German Expressionist cinema, by Eric Rentschler on the German *Heimat* films and the Holocaust, and by Edward Dimendberg on the fall of the Berlin Wall and the new "architecture of commemoration." These topics have all become vital areas of contemporary American *Germanistik*, compelling to students and a rich terrain for New Historicist or cultural-studies methods: archival research, heterogeneous juxtaposition, and an eye toward popular culture and ideological conflict.

In a few places, *A New History of German Literature* falls into topical anecdote or mere theorizing at the expense of literary history. For example, the political importance of *Mein Kampf* is unquestionable. But its impact *as a text* on German literature, or even on German readers, is never clearly demonstrated in an article that highlights instead a piquant but irrelevant detail of the book's reception history (starting on May 1, 1936, it was distributed to all newlywed couples in Germany). "All this," we are told, "was part of the Nazis' effort to create a new aural and visual space in which Germans would be . . . encouraged to assume social and racial identities as so-called Aryans in the 'thousand-year' Reich"; later the author questions whether Germans actually read the book, noting that they "kept and discarded [it] opportunistically." One wonders just how important the "Carnival of Cultures" in Berlin in 2000 will prove to be in the long run for Turkish and other immigrant groups' identity; its importance for German literature is not even discussed. Finally, given the hostility of deconstructionist critics to historical contextualization, one might ask why they make an appearance in what is, for all its theoretical self-consciousness, an Enlightenment attempt to order and make (new) sense of the past. Carol Jacob's brilliant reading of Enlightenment philosopher Johann Hamann predictably winds up concluding that despite his religious conversion and use of scripture, his prose remains caught up in the aporia of language (its "unencompassable figures") and fails to bring about aesthetic closure. And however suggestive it is to see Heine's writing as an allegory of the "instability" and "unidentifiable" nature of the poetic self, one longs for a cogent discussion of *The Book of Songs*, arguably the most popular German work of the nineteenth century, as well as its fraught and fateful significance for generations of German and Jewish readers.

To these minor details one must also add the publisher's unfortunate decision not to send final page proofs to the contributors for correction, which resulted in numerous factual errors, omissions, and stylistic inconsistencies, marring an otherwise elegant volume. Cost-cutting measures seem to have hampered this project throughout its decade-long gestation. Given the importance of visual materials in the editors' conception of literary history, the almost complete lack of illustrations is unfortunate, though no doubt also necessary for reasons of space and finances. These material details, however, should not diminish the stunning intellectual achievement and pedagogical usefulness of *A New History of German Literature*. One can only wish that its absorbingly fresh account of literature and the interpreting process—"here and now," as Wellbery puts it with infectious enthusiasm in his essay on Goethe's *Faust*—will reach the broadest possible audience. □

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