

GERMAN MUSINGS

- Notes from a sojourn, spring/summer 2013 and memories from the 50s., 60s, 80s and 90s

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Ronald G Young
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Introduction

My Relationship with Germany

We Scots have had a special relationship with Europe - the North Sea, for example, gave us special access to Russia and Poland in medieval times. In the early 1970s I was on a small official delegation from the shipbuilding town of Greenock on the River Clyde which had been invited to Luebeck (home to Thomas Mann) for the opening of a pub (!!) carrying the name "Greenock". We were told that this was the name by which sea nymphs were known in the North Sea!!!

Our architects left their marks in Tsarist Russia; - and our traders established a quarter in Gdansk which was still active recently.

The Protestant faith was also a factor which created links with (North) Germany.

My father was one of a few Scottish pastors who developed a "Reconciliation" mission in the post-war period there - focusing on Detmold, Heiligenkirchen and Bad Meinberg areas in Nord-Rhein Westphalia. He took us with him on at least one trip there in the mid 1950s and it is to this I owe my (mainland) European orientation and (in all probability) the direction my life has taken - particularly in the past 25 years in central Europe and Central Asia.

My memory as a 13-year old is of kindnessand generous houses surrounded by birch trees.....it clearly influenced my (unusual) choice of German as a third language at both school and university although I did switch from modern languages to politics and economics in my third and fourth years....And some of the writers who grabbed my attention in those studies were Germans such as Max Weber, Robert Michels, Josef Schumpeter, R Niebuhr and, of the modern generation, sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf with his [Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society](#).

One of my fond family memories is of my father wading through the various parts of the weekend Die Zeit newspaper - printed on special thin but glossy paper - which was flown over to him. Not surprisingly I excelled at German and French at school - and started out on a language degree at University (which I changed half-way through to an Economics and Politics one)

In 1961 I ventured to a Polish student work-camp - via Berlin - and will never forget the sight from the train of a still-bombed out Breslau (now Wroclaw). Nor, a month later, watching from my train as Russian tanks headed into the city as I made my return journey into East Berlin at the end of August.

1962 saw me in Gottingen University for a few summer weeks of language study - where I was introduced to the post-war stories of Heinrich Boell. And I spent a couple of months in Berlin again in 1964 on a student exchange in the Robert Bosch Elektronik GmbH company which helped open up German culture further for me and where I encountered for the first time the fervour of an old Nazi - the mother of my girlfriend of the time.

For these various reasons, I have had a particular fascination with the issue of how the Germans have tried to come to terms with the terrifying social transformation of the Nazi period. One of my treasured possessions after a 1980s visit was a collection of letters written by ordinary Germans

trying to make sense of what was going on around them in the early and mid 1930s.

I was to make several other visits to Berlin in the 80s (courtesy of various EC networks) - once staying with a German Professor of urban studies. I also had brief but one-to-one meetings with [two great German Presidents](#) - [Richard von Weizsacker](#) and [Johannes Rau](#).

Weizsacker was a Christian Democrat and President 1984-1994 and West Berlin Mayor 1981-84.

Rau was a Social Democrat; President 1999-2004 and Head of the huge RheinWestphalen Land (Region) from 1978-98. I was lucky enough to meet both of these men informally and can therefore vouch personally for the humility they brought to their role.

Weizsacker was holidaying in Scotland and popped in quietly to pay his respects to the leader of the Regional Council. As the (elected) Secretary to the majority party, I had private access to the Leader's office and stumbled in on their meeting.

Rau I also came across when in a Duisberg hotel on Council business. He was not then the President - but I recognised him when he came in with his wife and a couple of assistants, introduced myself (as a fellow social democrat); gave him a gift book on my Region which I happened to be carrying and was rewarded with a chat.

Then there was [Tisa von der Schulenburg](#) - Prussian aristocrat, nun and artist in 1920s Berlin who supported her brother in the plot to assassinate Hitler. I Tisa met a few years before her death (at 97!) at an exhibition (in Duisberg I think) of the sketches she had done in the 1930s of the Durham miners to which I had dropped in completely by accident during some European networking. I write later below about this experience....



I was incredibly fortunate in being offered in 1990 an amazing 6 month experience visiting most of the capitals of the newly independent countries of central and east Europe - after which I joined a small Berlin energy company which employed me to be the Director of its EC Energy Centre in Prague. This involved quite a few drives from Prague via Dresden and Berlin (the HQ of the company) and to towns such as Leipzig (where I actually delivered a paper in German!) and Goerlitz and to the progressive Danish energy projects - with return visits to see the delights of places such as the Sans Souci Palace in Potsdam.

But I had imagined that I was part of a network of equals when it became increasingly clear to me that the (EU funded) network was pushing the interests of Western companies. It was the Head of that company who responded memorably to one of my many critiques by saying "we do not pay you to think - but to obey!!"

Despite that experience, I worked for 2 years (in Kyrgyzstan) for another small German company and, finally but much more briefly, in China in early 2010 for Germany's International Aid Agency - whose bureaucratic double-reporting system was one of several factors which persuaded me to make an early exit....

Why Koln?

I have been out of the UK for 25 years - spending about 2 years apiece living and working in about a dozen countries on projects designed to improve the capacity of their state institutions. I was in Bulgaria in early 2013 when I was diagnosed with prostate cancer and had to decide where to go for appropriate treatment.

But first I had to learn more about the condition and its treatment - which helped me understand that the surgical treatments which had become routine were now being questioned - not just because of their invasive nature but because there was every probability that the symptoms would reappear after a few years....

As an expat Brit I quickly ruled out that country - partly for the delays trying to go as a citizen without medical records would entail but also because the French and German health systems were performing better (in general terms) in the various international league tables (not least WHO). I also wanted to go to a country whose language I spoke.

I narrowed the search to hospitals which seemed to have a good record for treating prostate cancer and sent off some queries....The French hospitals were quickly ruled out for two reasons -

- Their focus seemed to be on surgery and I was determined to avoid that
- They required bureaucratic paperwork which annoyed me

The West German Prostate Centre (Koln) simply asked me to send electronic copies of the diagnosis I had received and quickly gave a detailed commentary which persuaded me that this was the place to go. A few weeks later, on the first of May I touched down in Koln and remained there until mid-July - undergoing initially daily radiation treatment and then three minor operations.....

Time weighed - but Daniela and I were lucky in the choice of flat we had made - even although it involved a couple of moves....

We were in the outskirts - with great parks to walk in (the cemetery was our favourite); trams to ride; and bookshops to visit.....Unhappily, however, we found few people to talk with - apart from our last landlord.....

When I eventually was able to connect with the internet, I started to blog and surf again (the habit had started in 2009) and that is what forms the core of this little offering....

I hardly mention Koln in these posts - let alone the treatment I was undergoing. This was rather an opportunity to sink into another culture - using the immediate environment as a trigger for questions and casual insights..... One of my delights, for example, was the open-air charity stall near my treatment which offered free second-books.....

Getting Under the Skin

Tourism is one of the biggest global industries and yet gives us few real opportunities to fathom the soul of a country - although a retired generation is now beginning to experience some of the treasures which Europe offers.....and some publishing houses such as [The Collected Traveler](#), The Intercultural Press and [Cities of the Imagination](#) do offer books which offer great cultural insights into cities as well as countries.

Those, however, committed to real cultural exchange have networks such as Quaker-based Servas or more functional ones which offer Home Exchanges.

It is in that spirit that this booklet is offered - the latest indeed in what is becoming a series of mine - which started in serious when my daughters started to visit me in Romania and Bulgaria from which came these cultural guides -

- [Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#) (2014)
- [Bulgarian Realists - getting to know Bulgaria through its Art](#) (May 2017)

But my cultural explorations arguably started earlier - with such things as -

- [Administrative Reform with Chinese Characteristics](#) (2011)
- [The Independence Argument - home thoughts from abroad](#) (2014)

What follows are simply the initial notes of what I hope is an intelligent, curious traveler and reader who had the good luck to have a compassionate father; great Scottish state schooling in the immediate post-war period; opportunities to visit and revisit Germany; and is good at hyperlinks.....

The notes start in 2012.....

Understanding Germany



First - on the eve of the German-Greek World Cup football match - have a look at [this side-splitting Monty Python clip of a German-Greece football match](#) - whose members consist almost entirely ofphilosophers!!

Who do you read when you want to get under the skin of a country - and don't have the opportunity to go and live there? In the 1960s we had Alistair Cooke for the USA; Luigi Barzini for the Italians; in the 1970s Richard Cobb and John Ardagh

for France; in the 1980s Theodor Zeldin for France, John Ardagh for Germany - and Eric Newby and Norman Lewis for the rest of the globe!

France and Italy have become popular tourist destinations for the reading classes since then and created the market for a lot of books - [most of the slightly mocking sort about rural life](#) pioneered by Peter Mayle (Ginsborg's 1990 [History of Contemporary Italy: society and politics 1943-1980](#); The [Dark Heart of Italy](#) by Tobias Jones; and [The Pursuit of Italy](#) by David Gilmour are honourable exceptions).

But HOW do you best get under the skin is perhaps an even more important question.

- Through historical recitations?
- Through [literary and cultural explorations](#)?
- Through textbooks on political systems?
- Or perhaps by a combination of these - eg the superb Peter Robb's "Midnight in Sicily" (which focussed on politics, the mafia and food); or "Molotov's Magic Lantern" on which I commented recently?

Despite the role and significance of Germany over the past century and in present times, any visitor to that country who wanted a good briefing had a stark choice - heavy academic histories or the Rough Guide. John Ardagh's voluminous and highly readable "Germany and the Germans" has been sadly out of the print for more than a decade. The situation has improved in recent years with Peter Watson's German Genius and Simon Winder's [Germania - a personal history of Germans Ancient and Modern.](#) (for summary of latter see page 14 below)

22 June 2012

The Politics of Cultural Despair



A [very thoughtful blog](#) reminds us how anti-liberalism poisoned the politics of Weimar Germany and paved the way for Nazism. The post summarises something else written in the 1960s - *The Politics of Cultural Despair* - which looked closely at the ideas of three writers whose [critique of modernity](#) in the late 19th century, the author (Fritz Stern) argued, prepared the mental ground for the acceptance of Nazism.

The central focus of this cultural criticism was the fact of modernity - liberalism, secularism, Manchesterism, consumptionism, and individualism. These were conservative critics; they favored an earlier time that was more traditional, moral, hierarchical, and religious. They preferred villages and towns to cities; they preferred cultivated thinkers to merchants and professionals, and they feared the rise of the proletariat.

By liberalism they meant to encompass several ideas: individualism, self-interest, parliamentary government, and glorification of commerce and the market. And their criticisms were unswerving:

they hoped to turn back all of the liberal democratic and industrial transformations that modern Europe was undergoing.

The movement did embody a paradox: its followers sought to destroy the despised present in order to recapture an idealized past in an imaginary future. They were disinherited conservatives, who had nothing to conserve, because the spiritual values of the past had largely been buried and the material remnants of conservative power did not interest them. They sought a breakthrough to the past, and they longed for a new community in which old ideas and institutions would once again command universal allegiance.

The conservative revolutionaries denounced every aspect of the capitalistic society and its putative materialism. They railed against the spiritual emptiness of life in an urban, commercial civilization, and lamented the decline of intellect and virtue in a mass society. They attacked the press as corrupt, the political parties as the agents of national dissension, and the new rulers as ineffectual mediocrities. The bleaker their picture of the present, the more attractive seemed the past, and they indulged in nostalgic recollections of the uncorrupted life of earlier rural communities, when men were peasants and kings true rulers.

Fritz Stern, the author, is a marvellous historian born in Breslau/Wroclaw in 1926 who escaped to America in 1938 and wrote a powerful autobiography essay which I read a few years back with great pleasure and benefit - [Five Germanies I have known](#). He is a highly engaging character - as you can see both from his book and [this video of him introducing it](#)

Watching the video reminded me of the great interviews Clive James has on his website - and I liked his short piece attacking the rebranding which Britain's privatised railway companies carried out you can see half-way through (3 mins 50 secs to be precise) [this video interview about George Orwell](#).

Coming to terms with evil

After an initial period of silence, it appeared that by the 1980s the schools were making a good job of helping the new generation face us to their past.

German historian Moritz Pfeiffer asked his granddad what he did in World War II, and then fact-checked the testimony. [His findings in a new book](#) shed light on a dying generation that remains outwardly unrepentant, but is increasingly willing to break decades of silence on how, and why, it followed Hitler -

Germany has won praise for collectively confronting its Nazi past, but the subject has remained a taboo in millions of family homes -- with children and grandchildren declining to press their elders on what they did in the war. At least 20 to 25 million Germans knew about the Holocaust while it was happening, according to conservative estimates, and some 10 million fought on the Eastern Front in a war of annihilation that targeted civilians from the start. That, says German historian Moritz Pfeiffer, makes the genocide and the crimes against humanity a part of family history.

Time is running out. The answer to how a cultured, civilized nation stooped so low lies in the minds of the dying Third Reich generation, many of whom are ready and willing to talk at the end of their lives, says Pfeiffer, 29, who has just completed an unprecedented research project based on his own family.

"The situation has changed radically compared with the decades immediately after the war," Pfeiffer, a historian at a museum on the SS at Wewelsburg Castle, told SPIEGEL ONLINE. "The generation of eyewitnesses evidently wants to talk now, at least that's my impression. Towards the end of one's life the distance to the events is so great that people are ready to give testimony."

"Immediately after the war, conversations about it between parents and children appear to have been impossible because it was all too fresh," Pfeiffer continued. "Now the problem is that no one is listening to that generation anymore. As a source of information, one's relatives are largely being ignored. But one day it will be too late."

New Approach to Questioning Relatives

Oral history has become increasingly popular, even though personal reminiscences are chronically unreliable as they are distorted by time. But Pfeiffer took a new approach by interviewing his two maternal grandparents about what they did in the war, and then systematically checking their statements using contemporary sources such as letters and army records.

He juxtaposed his findings with context from up-to-date historical research on the period and wrote a book that has shed new light on the generation that unquestioningly followed Hitler, failed to own up to its guilt in the immediate aftermath of the war and, more than six decades on, remains unable to express personal remorse for the civilian casualties of Hitler's war of aggression, let alone for the Holocaust.

His recently published book, "My Grandfather in the War 1939-1945," (published in German only) is



based on the interviews he conducted in 2005 with his grandfather, named only as Hans Hermann K., who was a career officer in a Wehrmacht infantry regiment. His grandmother Edith was too ill to be interviewed at length but he analyzed many of her letters. Both died in 2006. Both of them supported the Nazi regime and Pfeiffer admits that they were morally "contaminated," like millions of ordinary Germans of that generation. He describes his grandmother Edith as a "committed, almost fanatical Nazi."

'No One Can Say What They Would Have Done'

But the project wasn't an attempt to pass judgment on his grandparents, says Pfeiffer. He only wanted to understand them. "No one today can say what they would have done or thought at the time," he said. "I believe that people will learn a lot if they understand how their respected and loved parents or grandparents behaved in the face of a totalitarian dictatorship and murderous racial ideology," Pfeiffer said. "Dealing with one's family history in the Nazi period in an open, factual and self-critical way is an important contribution to accepting democracy and avoiding a repeat of what happened between 1933 and 1945."

Hans Hermann K. was so good at goosestepping that he was briefly transferred to a parade unit in Berlin. Edith joined the Nazi Party and was so zealous that when she married Hans Hermann in 1943, she provided documentation tracing her Aryan roots all the way back to the early 18th century -- even SS members were "only" required to verify their racial purity back to January 1, 1800.

During the course of his research, Moritz Pfeiffer found large gaps, contradictions and evasive answers in Hans Hermann's testimony -- regarding his purported ignorance of mass executions of civilians, for example.

Grandfather Fought in France, Poland, Soviet Union

Hans Hermann was a lieutenant in the famous 6th Army and fought in the invasions of Poland, France and the Soviet Union, where he lost an eye in September 1942 when a shell exploded near him. His wound probably saved his life. Shortly after he was evacuated back to Germany for treatment, his unit was sent to Stalingrad and virtually wiped out. Only 6,000 men survived out of the more than 100,000 that were taken prisoner by the Red Army at Stalingrad.

Few would disagree that Germany as a nation has worked hard to atone for its past, unlike Austria and Japan which have cloaked themselves in denial. Germany has paid an estimated €70 billion in compensation for the suffering it caused, conducts solemn ceremonies to commemorate the victims and, above all, has owned up to what was done in its name.

Companies and government ministries have opened up their archives to historians to illuminate their role in the Third Reich, and a late push in prosecutions of war criminals is underway to make up for the failure to bring them to justice in the decades after the war.

But millions never confronted their own personal role as cogs in the Nazi machinery.

Hans Hermann was no different, even though he readily agreed to talk to his grandson.

He was born in 1921 to an arch-conservative, nationalist family with military traditions in the western city of Wuppertal. His father, a furniture store owner, regaled him with stories about his time as a lieutenant in World War I, and it was instilled in him at an early age that the war reparations of the Versailles Treaty were exaggerated. The store boomed after Hitler took power because the new government provided cheap government loans for married couples to buy kitchen and bedroom furniture.

In the interview, Hans Hermann was frank about his attitude towards Jews in the mid-1930s, when he was in his early teens and a member of the Jungvolk youth organization, which was affiliated with the Hitler Youth. Asked by Moritz whether he thought at the time that the racial laws banning Jews from public life and systematically expropriating their property were unfair, he said: "No, we didn't regard that as injustice, we had to go with the times and the times were like that. The media didn't have the importance then that they do today."

Part 2: 'We Had to Keep Our Mouths Shut'

But Hans Hermann didn't join the Nazi party, and said in 2005 that he opposed the Reichskristallnacht, the Nov. 9, 1938 pogrom organized by the Nazi regime in which thousands of Jewish stores and synagogues were attacked and burned.

"That wasn't right. We were angry about the violence and the fire in the synagogue, that wasn't our thing," he said.

"That was the SA, that was the SS, we rejected that ... But we couldn't do anything, we had to keep our mouths shut."

Asked about the invasion of Poland and the executions of civilians, Hans Hermann was evasive, at first describing relations between the German army and Poles as "friendly" and saying he knew nothing about mass shootings of Polish civilians at the time.

When pressed by Moritz, however, he admitted he knew about killings being committed by the SS, but added that the Wehrmacht had nothing to do with it -- a typical attitude that reflected the long-held myth that regular German soldiers weren't involved in atrocities.

Pfeiffer said he found his grandfather's indifference to the suffering of the Polish population, 6 million of whom died in the war, "staggering" but, again, typical of the response of many Germans of his generation.

In 1941, Hans Hermann took part in Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union. He was in the Infantry Regiment 208 of the 79th Infantry Division, and he said he knew nothing about criminal orders such as the German army's infamous "Commissar Order" -- that all Soviet political commissars detected among the captured must be killed.

'Hardly Believable'

Asked about the Commissar Order, Hans Hermann said: "I didn't hear anything about that, don't know it. We were behind the combat troops who were the ones taking prisoners."

Pfeiffer refuted the claim that his grandfather's unit took no prisoners. He found the war diary of the 79th Infantry Division which records that 5,088 Russian soldiers were captured between August 5 and August 31 alone. Between September 20 and 25, a further 24,000 were taken prisoner.

Even the ones who weren't shot dead on the spot had a slim chance of survival. More than 3 million of the 5.7 million Red Army soldiers captured by German forces in World War II died, a proportion of almost 60 percent.

Pfeiffer said his grandfather as a front line officer and company commander would have been subject to the order to weed out the political commissars from among captured Red Army soldiers and have them shot. The historian said he couldn't ascertain whether his grandfather ever had to take such a decision. But historical evidence exists that the 79th Infantry division carried out the order.

Also, historians have proven that the 6th Army, which Hans Hermann's division was part of, carried out war crimes and massacres, and assisted in the murder of 33,771 Jews in the ravine of Babi Yar in Ukraine at the end of September 1941. Pfeiffer said it was "hardly believable" that his grandfather didn't know anything about the mass killings. Hans Hermann also said: "The Bolsheviks were our enemies, that was clear and we had to be guided by that. But those who greeted us with salt and bread on their doorstep, they couldn't be enemies, we treated them well." He didn't say what happened to civilians who didn't greet the troops with salt and bread.

'Spellbound by the Words of the Führer'

Pfeiffer's book also presents letters written by his grandmother Edith that showed her ardent support for Hitler. On Nov. 8, 1943, she wrote to her husband after hearing Hitler speak: "I am still totally spellbound by the words of the Führer that were stirring and inspiring as ever! I glow with enthusiasm ... One feels strong enough to tear out trees." In his interview, Hans Hermann expressed criticism of the Allied bombings of German cities. "How could that be possible, against the civilian population!" He made no mention of German bombing attacks on Rotterdam and Coventry in 1940. He was taken prisoner by American forces in Metz, France, in October 1944 and didn't see his wife again until March 1946.

Pfeiffer concluded that his grandfather wasn't lying outright in his interviews, but merely doing what millions of Germans had done after the war -- engaging in denial, playing down their role to lessen their responsibility.

It led to the convenient myth in the immediate aftermath of the war that the entire nation had been duped by a small clique of criminals who bore sole responsibility for the Holocaust -- and that ordinary Germans had themselves been victims.

Germany has long since jettisoned that fallacy. But Pfeiffer admits that his book didn't answer a key question about his loving, kind grandparents who were pillars of his family for decades.

"Why did the humanity of my grandparents not rebel against the mass murders and why didn't my grandfather, even in his interview in 2005, concede guilt or shame or express any sympathy for the victims?"

'Moral Insanity'

When asked whether he felt that he shared any of the collective guilt for the Holocaust, Hans Hermann said: "No. That is no guilt collectively. No group is levelling this collective guilt, it's differentiated today, in historical research as well. The individual guilt of people and groups is being researched."

Pfeiffer writes that his grandparents were infected by the same "moral insanity" that afflicted many Germans during and after World War I: "A state of emotional coldness, a lack of self-criticism and absolute egotism combined with a strong deficit of moral judgment as well as the support, acceptance and justification of cruelty when the enemy was affected by it."

Those are damning words. Pfeiffer said his grandparents' generation probably had no choice but to suppress their guilt in order to keep on functioning in the hard post-war years when all their energy was focused on rebuilding their livelihoods. "It was a necessary human reaction," said Pfeiffer.

The Vergangenheitsbewältigung -- the confrontation with the past -- got a much-needed push with the 1968 student protests. For many, the atonement didn't come fast enough. German author Ralph Giordano referred to the "Second Guilt" in a book he wrote in 1987 -- the reluctance to own up to the crimes, and the ability of Nazi perpetrators to prosper in postwar West Germany.

Pfeiffer hopes his book will encourage other children and grandchildren of eyewitnesses to follow suit. "I think conversations like the ones I carried out will bring relatives together rather than drive a wedge between them," he said. Pfeiffer's original intention had been just to write a family history for personal use. After he interviewed his grandfather, he edited the transcript and presented it to the family at Christmas in 2005.

'Non-Verbal Admissions of Guilt'

But he had noticed omissions in his grandfather's testimony and had asked him to submit to a second, more rigorous interview in summer 2006. Hans Hermann agreed. Unfortunately, Moritz never got the chance to conduct it. Edith died in June that year after a long illness. Overcome by grief, Hans Hermann died six weeks later.

Asked how he thinks his grandfather would have reacted to his book, Pfeiffer said: "I think he would have initially been shocked about the unsparing presentation of his life story and wouldn't exactly have been delighted at my critical comments and conclusions. "But I think he would have spent a long time examining it and would acknowledge the factual analysis and the fact that I wasn't trying to discredit him or settle any scores."

Pfeiffer sees a big difference between what the dying generation is able to articulate and what it is actually feeling. He detected what he called "non-verbal admissions of guilt" in his grandfather's behavior. After the war, Hans Hermann encouraged his daughter to learn French and hosted French pupils on exchange programs. He also supported the European integration policy of Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle, and avoided going to veterans' reunions.

In 2005, he was outraged at first by a research report Pfeiffer co-wrote at the University of Freiburg about the involvement of the Wehrmacht in war crimes. A few weeks later, however, he told his grandson: "I have thought a lot about it -- and there's some truth to it."

Moritz Pfeiffer: "Mein Großvater im Krieg 1939-1945. Erinnerung und Fakten im Vergleich". Donat-Verlag, Bremen 2012, 216 Seiten

13 April 2012

The torture of choice

For the past decade I haven't been able to decide where to live - a condition the Germans call "Die Qual der Wahl", the torture of choice.

I've lived in more than ten countries since I left Scotland in 1990. Since leaving Kyrgyzstan in 2007 I seem to have settled down - dividing my time between Bulgaria (where I had a couple of projects); Transylvania (where I have a mountain house); and Bucharest where I have access to a very small flat. But I need a flat in a city I enjoy - with proper space for my paintings and artefacts. And time is running out!



Scotland is ruled out for its weather; I tried the French (or rather Brittany) rural market briefly (in 2010) but realised that, much as I love the French language and culture, I did not need another rural place. I then considered, for their cultural treasures, Brussels and Vienna - but they are too pricey. At the moment I find Sofia the best location (I currently rent a place there); but have, for the past month, been in Koln - receiving medical treatment which is scheduled to finish in mid-July. Occasionally I have wondered about Germany as a place to retire to...

Much as I appreciate German culture and society, my experience so far would not suggest this as an option. It is simply too expensive (although I notice that property in many parts of Germany can still be bought at reasonable prices); the shopping experiences are too bland; and the Rheinland anyway far too cold and damp. I miss my Balkan vegetables and warmth! Little wonder that so many sunbed and physiotherapy services are on offer here!

Of course I am impressed with the neatness of residential areas (so much "touching up" going on); the profusion of greenery; the politeness; the cycling; the regularity and cleanliness of public transport; and the sheer number of old people who use it. But I resent the charges the museums and galleries make - 10 euros, for example, to access Koln's permanent exhibition of the Expressionists. So my only taste of culture so far has been the great **Käthe Kollwitz museum** at Neumarkt. It was 1964 when I first came across **Kollwitz** (1867-1945) - and Georg Grosz - when I lived for a short time in Berlin. Both were a great inspiration for the Bulgarian graphic artists of the first half of the century - the piece which fronts this post is one of the series she did on the Peasants' Revolt.

The Wine festival which has been occupying Neumarkt for the past 2 weeks is, quite frankly, pathetic - with 2.50 euros being charged for 0.15 millilitre glasses. What a contrast with the 10 euros 2-day ticket I bought for the Sofia wine-tasting in October when I could fill my face! The German property market is supposed to be more sensible than (say) the British - but I was still disappointed to find that the cheapest flats I could rent here are 60 euros a night (although that does reflect reasonably the higher cost of living compared, for example, with Sofia where I pay one seventh of the rent; such proportionality is not the case for food!).

And internet connections seem to be very slow - one of several reasons why I have not been posting recently.

25 May 2013

Stunde Null



When you're in the centre of Köln, you don't need much of an imagination to sense what life was like here in the dying days of the war. The place has been completely rebuilt - such was the scale of the bombing. In the first week of my occupancy of the flat I have taken in a pleasant Köln suburb, television had black-grained images of American troops edging in March 1945 into the rubble of the the outskirts and centres of Bonn and Köln. And these continue to be shown - although May 9 is well past. Postcards with scenes of this rubble and destruction are also prominently on display in the city centre's kiosks.

In 1961 I spent a few summer weeks on a German course at Gottingen University - where my core text was Heinrich Böll's *Der Zug Kam Punktlich* which described powerfully but laconically the journey to the eastern front of a German soldier in 1943 or so who knew he would meet his death and simply wondered which of the station names which flashed by would be his resting place.

Böll's bleak post-1945 novels made a big impact on me and it was therefore with a sense of serendipity that I picked up for free at some bookcases near my Clinic his *The Silent Angel*.

Heinrich Böll's The Silent Angel was one of only a handful of postwar novels that depicted the aftermath of intensive carpet bombing of Germany in the second world war. Though written early in Böll's career, the novel was not published in his lifetime due to the subject matter that was perceived by his publisher as unpalatable to the German public. Isn't it inappropriate to dwell on a topic that brings home the very episodes one wanted to forget? After so much destruction and suffering, is it not perhaps best to move on to cheery stories? Böll described the wasteland of war-torn Germany right after the end of the bombings. Amid this tortured landscape the characters moved like zombies, traumatized by their experiences and haunted by relentless hunger. The lack of food and shelter consigned the majority of the citizens to the status of refugees. They lived only to survive hunger, scrounging for the rare bread and provisions that came at high prices.

At the start of the novel, Hans, a German soldier who lacked proper identification, stumbled into a hospital and was offered a bread loaf by a nun working there. The reader was given a first taste of the novel's subject.

Quickly he broke off a large piece of the bread. His chin trembled and he felt the muscles of his mouth and jaws twitch. Then he buried his teeth in the soft, uneven place where the bread had been broken, and bit in. The loaf was old, at least four or five days old, perhaps even older, plain brown bread bearing some bakery's red paper label; but it tasted so sweet. He bit in even more deeply, taking the leathery, brown crust into his mouth as well; then he seized the loaf in his hands and tore off a new piece. While

he ate with his right hand he held the loaf fast in his left, as if someone might come and try to take it from him, and he saw his hand lying on the bread, thin and dirty, with a deep scratch that was soiled and scabbed

Physical hunger and destroyed landscapes of the city inhabit the tissues of the novel. Hunger (and destruction) was so pervasive as to go beyond the realm of the physical. It crossed the threshold of the characters' physical state, to become the hunger of their souls, the debilitating poverty of spirit. It became the very fires in their belly that drove them to resist that very same hunger. Böll was able to illuminate a time that was barely recorded, even consciously avoided, according to Sebald—erased from memory, sanitized and repressed by German writers. It was not a popular subject but it was necessary to keep a record of destruction of cities and its effects on men and women. Sebald found in *The Silent Angel* not only an important subject but a quality of writing that he felt approached the gravity of the subject.

Sebald's essay ["Air War and Literature"] takes to task the postwar German writers for failing to record the destruction wrought by wars. For Sebald, the books of Ledig, as well as that of Heinrich Böll and Peter Weiss, among others, are a rare exception to this apparent defect in the German letters. Sebald champions the kind of novels that speak plainly and precisely, and with unpretentious objectivity, as opposed to novels full of "aesthetic or pseudo-aesthetic effects." He favors the concrete and documentary style of writing over the abstract and imaginary. For Sebald, accounts of suffering must be commensurate to the magnitude of the human loss; these are the kind of novels worth writing about in the face of total destruction.

*In *The Silent Angel*, the imaginary was given up in favor of the imaginative.*

The curtains had been pulled open, and in the large, black window frames stood the fantasylike image of the ruins: smoke-blackened flanks of buildings, cracked gables that seemed about to fall—overgrown mounds that had been ripped apart a second time, leaving only a few spots where the green was mossy and peaceful. . . . (91-92)

The above passage described the image of the ruins as "fantasylike" but the real view of destruction made the image un-fantasylike. The qualification of the smoke-blackened, cracked, overgrown, andripped objects could not deny the direct harms inflicted to the people on the ground.

Likewise, Böll's similes and imagery were purposefully constructed. *An open piano in a corner "stood like a monster with a thousand false teeth" (39). In a particular ruin could be seen "only naked destruction, desolate and terribly empty, as if the breath of the bomb still hung in the air" (86). That lingering "breath of the bomb" was sufficient to convey the utter "nakedness" of the damage. A most powerful description of destruction was that of the silent statues in a church.*

His gaze remained below: the altar was buried in debris, the choir stalls had been toppled by the blast. He saw their broad brown backs inclined in what seemed sarcastic prayer. The lower rank of saints on the columns showed gaps as well: abraded torsos and flayed stone, hideous in its mutilation and painfully deformed, as if it once had been alive. He was struck by the demonic grotesqueness. A few faces grimaced like furious cripples because they lacked an ear or a chin, or because strange cracks deformed them; others were headless, and the stone stumps of their necks thrust up horribly from their bodies. Equally disturbing were those who lacked hands. They almost seemed to bleed, silently imploring, and a baroque plaster statue was oddly split, almost cracked like an egg: the pale plaster face of the saint was undamaged, the narrow, melancholy face of a Jesuit, but its chest and belly were ripped open. The plaster had trickled down—it lay in whitish flakes at the base of the figure—and from the dark hollow of the belly straw spilled forth, saturated with hardened plaster. (119-120)

This posthumous horror was probably one of the most indirect and one of the most graphic descriptions of the aftermath of a night of "successful" bombing run a reader will encounter in fiction.

Despite the depressing, vivid images in the novel, the reader could not fail to detect the deep sense of the novelist's humanity. He did not reduce his characters to virtual zombies. Instead, the novelist kept intact their human strengths and failings. Amid the piles of debris in the city, the white powder chalk and plaster, signs of renewal of vegetation started to shoot up from the ground. From these bleak surroundings, Böll's beautiful prose was able to yield a comforting quality of tenderness. The words had lightness and softness, like sweet bread. It was not really all black smoke and white dust:

He stood up, walked quietly over to the door, and opened it cautiously. Light was coming from the kitchen. The old, blue coat that she had draped over the windowpane let large, yellow beams of light in through its tattered holes, and the rays fell onto the debris in the hall: the axe blade gleamed somewhere and he saw the dark logs, their split surfaces glowing yellowly. He approached slowly and now he could see her. He realized he'd never seen her like this before. She was lying on the couch with her legs drawn up, wrapped in a large, red blanket, reading. He saw her from behind. Her long, damply shining hair seemed darker, tinged with red; it fell across the arm of the couch. A lamp stood beside her, and the stove was lit. A pack of cigarettes lay on the table, together with a jar of marmalade, a loaf of bread that had been cut into, and beside it the knife with its loose, black handle. . . . (130-131)

The colours and sheen (blue, yellow, gleamed, dark, glowing yellow, red, damply shining, darker, tinged with red, black) were so lovingly spread over this description of domestic setting and minutiae (coat, windowpane, axe blade, logs, couch, blanket, "book", hair, lamp, stove, cigarettes, marmalade, bread, knife handle) as to drum up the characters' expectations of a return to peaceful, normal circumstances. There was a flicker of love in that passage, a sense that all was not lost. The sense that hunger (physical, spiritual) does not go unfulfilled. The intermittent pangs of hunger only served as their amulet

26 May 2013

The neglect of Germany



Despite the role and significance of Germany over the past century and in present times, any visitor to that country who wanted a good book on the country had, until recently, a stark choice - heavy academic histories or the Rough Guide. The 600 page *Germany and the Germans* which John Ardagh produced in the mid 1980s sadly went out of print after its final edition of 1995. In 2010, however, two large and serious books appeared - Peter Watson's blockbuster - *German Genius* which is reviewed [here](#) and [here](#)

Watson has not simply written a survey of the German intellect from Goethe to Botho Strauss - nothing so dilettantist. In the course of nearly 1,000 pages, he covers German idealism, porcelain, the symphony, *Johann Joachim Winckelmann*, telegraphy, homeopathy, strategy, Sanskrit, colour theory, the Nazarenes, universities, Hegel, jurisprudence, the conservation of energy, *the Biedermeier*, entropy, fractals, dyestuffs, the PhD, heroin, automobiles, the

unconscious, the cannon, *the Altar of Pergamon*, sociology, militarism, the waltz, anti-semitism, continental drift, quantum theory and serial music.

The second book was Simon Winder's *Germania- a personal history of Germans Ancient and Modern* which I [referred to at the end of a blog last year](#) but did not find an easy book to persevere with - by virtue of its idiosyncratic approach. I've drawn on some of the Amazon reviews to give a sense of its key features.

It's the history of Germany in the broadest sense of that name - starting with the residue of the Roman Empire and ending with the founding of the Third Empire in 1933 when the author can't bear to continue. It encompasses cities from Brussels to Gdansk to Milan and all the way down the Danube, allowing the author to potter around old castles and cathedrals to his heart's content. A higgledy-piggledy mixture of more or less independent duchies, principalities and bishoprics coalesced slowly into modern states (plural - Winder uses Germania for Austria and Germany, and doesn't hesitate to visit other countries nearby). History as folly, incompetence and grudge; the author dismisses his own work as anecdotal facetiousness but it's far better than that. A flavour - "a slice through any given month in Germany's history turns up a staggering array of rulers: a discredited soldier, a pious archbishop, a sickly boy and his throne-grabbing regent, and a half-demented miser obsessed with alchemy".

This book is a travelogue (in the Bill Bryson style) fused with a cultural and political history of Germany. If you're looking for only one or the other, you will be disappointed. But if you just want to find out about Germany, and are ready to accept a few idiosyncrasies of style along the way, you'll love this book.

Neither book, however, deals with contemporary Germany - that's why the 1995 John Ardagh book is sorely missed, with its explanation of such important aspects of German life as federalism and the social market. The only bit of writing which I can unreservedly recommend about contemporary Germany is [the long article on Germany written a few years ago by Perry Andersen](#).

Winder's focus on history gives some good insights:

- The role the earliest centuries and the Middle Ages play in the imagination of the Germans in all sorts of ways; and how much medieval -architecture remains in Germany
- Why the Holy Roman Emperors, with no proper capital before 1533 when Vienna was declared the capital city of the Habsburgs, never managed to overcome the extraordinary fragmentation of Germany in the way in which the English and the French managed it many centuries earlier. There are delightful vignettes of the courts of tiny principalities, often presided over by dotty or self-indulgent rulers. Due to the frequent absence of primogeniture, many of them had hyphenated names, like Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg which provided the wife for Edward VII: the more hyphenated, the tinier they were.
- How weak Prussia was between the end of the reign of Frederick the Great in 1786 and Bismarck's Danish War of 1864. Winder asserts that "Frederick's actions DID NOT LEAD (his italics) to Bismarck's empire." Winder doesn't think much of Frederick's achievements, but admires Maria Theresa and her "adorable", "fun" husband, the Holy Roman Emperor Francis I.
- And after all the tomes that have been written about the Prussian - later German - armies, it is interesting to see Winder rather debunking their achievements "outside the delusive little seven year period [covering the Danish, Austrian and French wars between 1864 and 1871]". He also debunks the German navy. He lays into some conventional views about the run-up to and course of the First World War with a zest reminiscent of A.J.P. Taylor. He makes a case for saying that Germany between 1871 and 1914 was militarily less aggressive than Russia Britain, France or Italy during the same period. He sees the French as the main trouble-makers in Europe from Louis XIV onwards. But then he had decided from the start that his book would "bale out" in 1933. (He does not completely manage that: reference to the Nazi period are dotted throughout the book.) He told us at the beginning that he wanted us to look at pre-1933 Germany free from the hostile mind-set which has been created by the two World Wars, and which had been quite absent from Britain for almost the whole of the 19th century. For him there was no German "Sonderweg": for him "Germany in 1914 had been a normal country, espousing much of the same racism, military posturing, and taste for ugly public buildings that bedevilled the rest of the Continent."
- This is more of an impressionist account, though, like an impressionist painting, consisting of many brilliant and highly coloured individual brush strokes. It is basically, but not always chronological; and it is interspersed with digressions and bits of autobiography which increase in length as the book proceeds. Winder is having fun: "fun" used as an adjective occurs frequently in the book, which is light-hearted, often hilarious, discursive, never short of an opinion and indeed sometimes opinionated and over-the-top: he calls Weber's book on the Protestant Ethic "famously idiotic"; Napoleon III is rebuked for his "sheer childishness"; the word "mad" occurs with a somewhat maddening frequency; he describes the successor states of the Habsburg Empire as "a mass of poisonous micro-states". It is also quite serious, in many ways insightful, cultured, affectionate but also critical, and fantastically knowledgeable.

The book certainly has made me (and others- it has 100 reviews on the Amazon site) think. It has more than 100 bibliographical references and, significantly, half are literary or cultural.

As it's a public holiday in this part of Germany (the fourth this month - it's Corpus Christi for Catholics and several hundred parishioners have just passed by with a brass band under my balcony) my internet is working very well even mid-morning and I've been able to surf the internet for articles about Germany. I was quickly rewarded with a book about the country written by an American whose German family background in Pennsylvania led him to a European trip in the 1970s which led to a 14-year stay in Germany and the research which led to the production in 2000 of the book *Germany - Unravelling an Enigma* which seems to focus on aspects of social behaviour and explanations of the social market.

30 May 2013

Interest in the German model

This blog has referred several times to 'the Scandinavian model' of society and government (or "governance" in modern parlance) but it had failed to pick up the growing interest of the British "chattering classes" in 'the German model'. More than a year ago, one of the British Think Tanks was drawn to observe that -

*at some point in every generation, British policymakers look in envy and awe at the German economy. It last happened in the early 1990s, when the UK was recovering from the post-Lawson bust and the ignominy of forced exit from the exchange rate mechanism. Will Hutton's *The State We're In* captured the zeitgeist of this era brilliantly: a time when the Rhineland social market economy appeared to offer a stronger and fairer variety of capitalism than its rapacious, unequal and structurally weak Anglo-Saxon competitor.*



The tables turned as the 1990s wore on. Anglo-Saxon economies boomed and created jobs while the German economy got stuck in low growth and high unemployment. Gerhard Schroeder talked about the 'Neue Mitte', in conscious emulation of the Clinton-Blair 'third way'. Germany embarked on difficult structural reform of its labour market and held down real wages as it entered the euro. The pendulum has swung back and the German model is now in vogue again. The TUC produced in early 2012 a detailed report on the lessons of Germany's manufacturing strength, attributing its export prowess to deep institutional foundations in its social partnerships, apprenticeships and industrial strategies. Maurice Glasman regularly sings hymns of praise to Germany's regional banks, vocational traditions (implanted, he argues, by Ernie Bevin after the second world war), and the fact that workers share fully in company decision-making. Meanwhile, shadow business secretary Chuka Ummuna has recently been on a study tour of Germany to mug up on how it achieves a more patient, responsible and resilient capitalism.

Germany's appeal is not difficult to understand. Its famous Mittelstand of medium-sized family companies that export all over the world has long been admired. It has a superb apprenticeship system and huge

investments in both physical and human capital. Its industrial social partnerships have proved a source of durability and strength in the era of globalised markets, not a weakness. Recently it has coupled an expanding service sector to its historic industrial pre-eminence.

What has attracted most attention recently, however, is its employment performance. Germany's unemployment rate is now lower than it was before the financial crisis struck, while in most of the rest of the OECD it remains high or rising. This is a huge turnaround from the position Germany was in barely half a dozen years ago.

I have always felt at home in Germany - my father was one of a few Scottish pastors who developed a "Reconciliation" mission in the post-war period there - focussing on Detmold, Heiligenkirchen and Bad Meinberg areas in Nord-Rhein Westphalia. He took us with him on at least one trip there in the mid 1950s and it is to this I owe my (mainland) European orientation and (in all probability) the direction my life has taken in the past 20 years in central Europe and Central Asia.

One of my fond family memories is of my father is his wading through the various parts of the weekend Die Zeit newspaper - printed on special thin but glossy paper - which was flown over to him. Not surprisingly I excelled at German and French at school - and started out on a language degree at University (which I changed half-way through to an Economics and Politics one) In 1961 I ventured to a Polish student work-camp - via Berlin - and will never forget the sight from the train of a still-bombed out Wroclaw.

The next year I spent some weeks at a summer school at Gottingen University - where I was introduced to **the post-war stories of Heinrich Boll**.

In 1964 I spent 2 months living and working in Berlin (thanks to the student economic association AISEC) where I encountered for the first time the fervour of an old Nazi - the mother of my girlfriend of the time.

And, as a regional politician, I visited the country several times in the 1980s becoming very aware of how civilised the coverage of German politics seemed to be compared with Britain and envious of the role and status of German regional politicians in national policy-making.

Such a federal system was, of course, the post-war creation of the Anglo-Americans - building on the older system of Laender. And the worker representation embodied in the cooperative system of Mitbestimmung was very much a British element. But the wider aspects of the "social market" (as clearly **set out in chapter five of this book**) and to be seen in the industrial role played by the state-owned regional banks; in the strength of the training system; in the constant emphasis given to savings were very German; and embodied in their neglected concept of "**ordoliberalism**" is specifically German. The role of social insurance in the funding of the health system (and of the churches in the management of schooling) are yet more examples of how pluralistic the German system is.

31 May 2013

German perceptions

Germany is in election mode - although **Neal Ascherson makes the point** in the current LRB that

Europe and the euro crisis scarcely figure in this election campaign. Listening to the speeches or reading the manifestos, you would never guess that boys and girls in other countries are charging water cannon and raving about German neo-imperialism, or burning pictures of Merkel as the destroyer of Europe. There is some heavy cliché about wanting 'a European Germany, not a German Europe'. But where are the positive ideas about how German economic strength might relieve nations swamped by debt? The turmoil seems a long way off.

Those who are aware of how hated Germany has become in parts of Southern Europe feel merely pained, misunderstood. The self-image of Germany as a bewildered, kindly nation, helpless to defend itself against greedy neighbours, dies hard. It was lent credibility a few weeks ago by an eccentric European Central Bank report which asserted that - in terms of 'per household property' - the Germans were among the poorest in the Eurozone, with an average wealth of €51,000 - less than the Slovaks and far less than a Greek or Cypriot household. This morally comforting estimate was soon rubbished; it ignored family income, which puts the Germans near the top of the league, and crudely set bank wealth against population (billions in septic bank holdings divided by the total number of Cypriot households equals €267,000, equals meaningless).

And yet, beyond the nonsense, the report implied some interesting things about German political psychology. People still prefer to rent rather than to own their homes, a contrast to post-Communist nations in the Eurozone where public housing was sold off to its tenants. The Germans tend to put their money into local savings banks (Sparkassen) at low but secure interest, rather than buy real estate or invest in the stock market. Thrift and caution are still hard-wired into society.

1 June 2013

The curious behaviour of German banks

I mentioned the state-owned regional banks as one of the lynchpins of the post-war German success story - their support of the essentially family-owned industrial companies endowing its society with a long-term perspective difficult for Anglo-Americans to understand.

In any other society, such a combination of finance and politics would make for collusive corruption of the highest degree - as is shown in the behaviour of the Spanish Cajas.

The consensual nature of corporate decision-making - as embodied in the Mitbestimmung system of worker representation and involvement has also been a key feature of the post-war German model.

But, as Perry Anderson showed in his 2009 article on The New Germany

the landscape of the Berlin Republic has become steadily more polarized in the past decade or so. At the top, traditional restraints on the accumulation and display of wealth were cast to the winds, as capital markets were prised loose and Anglo-American norms of executive pay increasingly accepted by German business.

Gerhard Schröder gave his own enrichissez-vous blessing to the process in the first half of the 2000s, slashing corporation and upper-bracket income tax, and rejecting any wealth tax,. Structurally still more important, by abolishing capital gains tax on the sale of cross-holdings, his government encouraged the dissolution of the long-term investments by banks in companies, and reciprocal stakes in firms, traditionally central to German corporatism—or in the consecrated phrase, the 'Rhenish' model of capitalism. In its place, shareholder value was increasingly set free. By 2006, foreigners had acquired an average of over 50 per cent of the free float of German blue-chip companies

I haven't so far picked up any analysis on the internet about exactly how this has changed the German "social market". On the face of it a lot of the basic features are still there - although the scale of the German banks' exposure to the sub-prime market disaster did take us all by surprise. Michael Lewis got himself into some trouble a couple of years ago with his [Vanity Fair article on Germany](#) which focused a bit too much on anal vocabulary - but his [article did contain some important vignettes](#) -

He is a type familiar in Germany but absolutely freakish in Greece—or for that matter the United States: a keenly intelligent, highly ambitious civil servant who has no other desire but to serve his country. His sparkling curriculum vitae is missing a line that would be found on the résumés of men in his position most anywhere else in the world—the line where he leaves government service for Goldman Sachs to cash out. When I asked another prominent German civil servant why he hadn't taken time out of public service to make his fortune working for some bank, the way every American civil servant who is anywhere near finance seems to want to do, his expression changed to alarm. "But I could never do this," he said. "It would be disloyal!"

The curious thing about the eruption of cheap and indiscriminate lending of money during the past decade was the different effects it had from country to country. Every developed country was subjected to more or less the same temptation, but no two countries responded in precisely the same way. The rest of Europe, in effect, used Germany's credit rating to indulge its material desires. They borrowed as cheaply as Germans could to buy stuff they couldn't afford. Given the chance to take something for nothing, the German people alone simply ignored the offer. "There was no credit boom in Germany. Real-estate prices were completely flat.

There was no borrowing for consumption. Because this behaviour is rather alien to Germans. Germans save whenever possible. This is deeply in German genes. Perhaps a leftover of the collective memory of the Great Depression and the hyperinflation of the 1920s." The German government was equally prudent because, he went on, "there is a consensus among the different parties about this: if you're not adhering to fiscal responsibility, you have no chance in elections, because the people are that way."

In that moment of temptation, Germany became something like a mirror image of Iceland and Ireland and Greece and, for that matter, the United States. Other countries used foreign money to fuel various forms of insanity.

The Germans, through their bankers, used their own money to enable foreigners to behave insanely. This is what makes the German case so peculiar. If they had been merely the only big, developed nation with decent financial morals, they would present one sort of picture, of simple rectitude. But they had done something far more peculiar: during the boom German bankers had gone out of their way to get dirty. They lent money to American subprime borrowers, to Irish real-estate barons, to Icelandic banking tycoons to do things that no German would ever do. The German losses are still being toted up, but at last count they stand at \$21 billion in the Icelandic banks, \$100 billion in Irish banks, \$60 billion in various U.S. subprime-backed bonds, and some yet-to-be-determined amount in Greek bonds. The only financial disaster in the last decade German bankers appear to have missed was investing with Bernie Madoff.

A German economist named Henrik Enderlein, who teaches at the Hertie School of Governance, in Berlin, has described the radical change that occurred in German banks beginning about 2003. In a paper in progress, Enderlein points out that "many observers initially believed German banks would be relatively less exposed to the crisis. The contrary turned out to be the case. German banks ended up being among the most severely affected in continental Europe and this despite relatively favorable economic conditions." Everyone thought that German bankers were more conservative, and more isolated from the outside world,

than, say, the French. And it wasn't true. "There had never been any innovation in German banking," says Enderlein. "You gave money to some company, and the company paid you back. They went [virtually overnight] from this to being American. And they weren't any good at it."

What Germans did with money between 2003 and 2008 would never have been possible within Germany, as there was no one to take the other side of the many deals they did which made no sense. They lost massive sums, in everything they touched. Indeed, one view of the European debt crisis—the Greek street view—is that it is an elaborate attempt by the German government on behalf of its banks to get their money back without calling attention to what they are up to. The German government gives money to the European Union rescue fund so that it can give money to the Irish government so that the Irish government can give money to Irish banks so the Irish banks can repay their loans to the German banks. "They are playing billiards," says Enderlein. "The easier way to do it would be to give German money to the German banks and let the Irish banks fail." Why they don't simply do this is a question worth trying to answer.

.....On the surface IKB's German bond traders resembled the reckless traders who made similarly stupid bets for Citigroup and Morgan Stanley. Beneath it they were playing an entirely different game. The American bond traders may have sunk their firms by turning a blind eye to the risks in the subprime-bond market, but they made a fortune for themselves in the bargain and have for the most part never been called to account. They were paid to put their firms in jeopardy, and so it is hard to know whether they did it intentionally or not. The German bond traders, on the other hand, had been paid roughly \$100,000 a year, with, at most, another \$50,000 bonus. **In general, German bankers were paid peanuts to run the risk that sank their banks**—which suggests they really didn't know what they were doing. But—and here is the strange thing—**unlike their American counterparts, they are being treated by the German public as crooks**. The former C.E.O. of IKB, Stefan Ortseifen, received a 10-month suspended sentence and has been asked by the bank to return his salary: eight hundred and five thousand euros.

2 June 2013

German Europe??

Ulrich Beck is a German sociologist whose name I encounter from time to time – from his work on risk society (which I don't pretend to understand). He has now jumped to almost best-selling status in the UK by virtue of his small book with the fairly self-explanatory title of "German Europe"

It appeared in English in April and has got the English chattering classes drooling covering, as it does, two of the hate subjects of the English – Europe and the Germans.

The book itself seems a bit incoherent – a bit of knock-about fun at Angela Merkel's expense; an emphasis on her (and Germany's) Protestant/Lutheran discipline (rather missing the point about the Catholic contribution to the concept of the social market); some obvious assertions about the new divisions in Europe; and then some wishy-washy points about the future.....

You can make up your own mind from this interview, podcast; and summary

I would say that the first thing we have to think about is what the purpose of the European Union actually is. Is there any purpose? Why Europe and not the whole world? Why not do it alone in Germany, or the UK, or France?

I think there are four answers in this respect. First, the European Union is about enemies becoming neighbours. In the context of European history this actually constitutes something of a miracle. The second purpose of the European Union is that it can prevent countries from being lost in world politics. A post-

European Britain, or a post-European Germany, is a lost Britain, and a lost Germany. Europe is part of what makes these countries important from a global perspective.

The third point is that we should not only think about a new Europe, we also have to think about how the European nations have to change. They are part of the process and I would say that Europe is about redefining the national interest in a European way. Europe is not an obstacle to national sovereignty; it is the necessary means to improve national sovereignty. Nationalism is now the enemy of the nation because only through the European Union can these countries have genuine sovereignty.

The fourth point is that European modernity, which has been distributed all over the world, is a suicidal project. It's producing all kinds of basic problems, such as climate change and the financial crisis. It's a bit like if a car company created a car without any brakes and it started to cause accidents: the company would take these cars back to redesign them and that's exactly what Europe should do with modernity.

Reinventing modernity could be a specific purpose for Europe.

Taken together these four points form what you could say is a grand narrative of Europe, but one basic issue is missing in the whole design. So far we've thought about things like institutions, law, and economics, but we haven't asked what the European Union means for individuals.

What do individuals gain from the European project?

First of all I would say that, particularly in terms of the younger generation, more Europe is producing more freedom. It's not only about the free movement of people across Europe; it's also about opening up your own perspective and living in a space which is essentially grounded on law.

Second, European workers, but also students as well, are now confronted with the kind of existential uncertainty which needs an answer. Half of the best educated generation in Spanish and Greek history lack any future prospects. So what we need is a vision for a social Europe in the sense that the individual can see that there is not necessarily social security, but that there is less uncertainty. Finally we need to redefine democracy from the bottom up. We need to ask how an individual can become engaged with the European project. In that respect I have made a manifesto, along with Daniel Cohn-Bendit, called "[We Are Europe](#)", arguing that we need a free year for everyone to do a project in another country with other Europeans in order to start a European civil society.

The Council of Europe published recently a series of lectures by various intellectuals on the crisis and Beck's [Europe at risk - a cosmopolitan perspective](#) gives a good sense of his book - and his other contributions. Self-indulgent academic sloganising which comes from too much time in incestuous discussions.

3 June 2013

Saturday in Junkersdorf

The world could not have been more beautiful yesterday at the Rhein Energie Stadion and the Junkersdorf woods. The area is huge and intensively used by Koln people at weekends whether for ball games, cycling, festivals - or simply walking around its picturesque small lakes.

A Sporting High school is also located in a superb wooded area.

Yesterday an ecumenical group was singing its heart out in the stadium; a family athletics fair was in full swing in a nearby racing track; and a large number of young men and women were taking part in the finals of the German Touch Rugby competition in the complex of football fields.

First time I've seen this game - the friendly spirit evident was very impressive - as was the sheer mix of shapes and sizes of those taking part.

Germany at its most civilised!



German reading



German newspaper stands offer a profusion of titles - with the various regional titles reflecting perspectives not available in centralised England and France. The (weekly) Die Zeit is the country's most weighty publication - in more senses than one (!). I had enjoyed last month the glimpse one of its articles had given us of ex-Chancellor Helmut Schmidt's long love affair with painting - not least those of the German Expressionists. Schmidt is now a still active 94 year-old whose trademark cigarette was on display in a recent television interview here. He was not only German Chancellor 1974-82 but also publisher of the Hamburg-based paper for a couple of decades after he left the Chancellory. And I am now reading with interest the account of this rich life of his - *Unser Schmidt* written

by Theo Sommer.

He will doubtless be reading with his usual critical eye the latest fat issue of *Die Zeit* whose special magazine today focuses on questions such as *What is the good life?*

From the profusion of titles, I've developed a taste for the much thinner and leftist daily - Die Tageszeitung whose sentence construction is less convoluted than the heavies such as Der Spiegel which I have now deserted for the easier Stern. Although Bavaria is a stronghold of the right, Die Suddeutsche Zeitung is an attractively packaged left-leaning daily with interesting

content. Franfurte Allgemeine Zeitung is a rather boring conservative paper - and the Cologne titles are very superficial.

Der Spiegel's English edition continues to be part of my daily reading - its latest offers first a take on some of the construction scandals which are filling the columns of German papers; then a rare insight into war-time Berlin -

The diary of Brigitte Eicke, a Berlin teenager in World War II, is an account of cinema visits, first kisses, hairdos and dressmaking, along with a brief, untroubled reference to disappearing Jews. Recently published, it highlights the public indifference that paved the road to Auschwitz. Hers is a perspective seldom glimpsed in Germany's World War II literature, a field in which the female voice took a while to be heard.

"In the 1950s and '60s, the focus was more on memories of battle and the male experience," says Arnulf Scriba, who coordinates a project at the German Historical Museum called "Collective Memory," an archive of personal testimonies. *"The school had been bombed when we arrived this morning. Waltraud, Melitta and I went back to Gisela's and danced to gramophone records."* (1 Feb 1944)

Young girls are made of stern stuff. In December 1942, while Allied bombs rained on Berlin and Nazi troops fought for control of Stalingrad, 15-year-old Brigitte Eicke began keeping a diary. For the next three years, the young office apprentice wrote in it every single day. Now published in German as "Backfisch im Bombenkrieg" -- backfisch being an old-fashioned term for a girl on the cusp of womanhood -- it adds a new perspective to Germany's World War II experience and shows not only how mundane war can become but also how the majority of Germans were able to turn a blind eye to Nazi brutality. Until relatively recently, accounts of Germans' own wartime suffering were considered something of a taboo, their own trauma eclipsed by the horror of the Holocaust. But now that the wartime generation is dying, every slice of first-hand social history has inherent value.

Another story focuses on the German Constitutional Court's current consideration of the legality of the ECB bond buying program known as Outright Monetary Transactions (OMT).

The program, announced last autumn, envisions the ECB buying unlimited quantities of sovereign bonds from ailing euro-zone member states to hold down their borrowing costs. To date, the ECB has not made any bond purchases, but the mere announcement that it might has proven enough to calm the markets and provide European leaders with some to seek agreement on longer-term measures to solve the crisis. Even opponents of the program have acknowledged its success. The OMT "has been the most successful measure taken in saving the euro thus far," says Dietrich Murswiek, who represents co-claimant Peter Gauweiler, a member of parliament with Bavaria's Christian Social Union.

But despite its success, the OMT program is illegal, say the plaintiffs. "State financing, whether direct or indirect, is not allowed for the ECB," says one of their attorneys, Karl Albrecht Schachtschneider. And his complaint is far from fanciful -- it is difficult not to see the OMT program as state financing. In essence, the court is being asked to decide whether economic pragmatism trumps a strict interpretation of the law.

Open Europe has a [blog on the issue](#)

The painting is one of Hans Purrmann's - a glorious colourist I have just come across who was strongly influenced by Matisse - and whose paintings were banned by the Nazis.

It seems appropriate to end with [this link to a marvellous table listing about 150 novels in the German language](#) which Guardian readers recommended for a World Literature Tour, The [equivalent French list is here](#).

13 June 2013

June 17 1953 - Electing another people!

Sixty years ago today, East German workers rose against their government - an event which is being marked extensively in the German media.

The uprising (quickly put down) is nowadays best known for a short poem written by Bert Brecht at the time - which was not however published until 1959 after his death in 1956.



Die Lösung

Nach dem Aufstand des 17. Juni
Ließ der Sekretär des Schriftstellerverbands
In der Stalinallee Flugblätter verteilen
Auf denen zu lesen war, daß das Volk
Das Vertrauen der Regierung verscherzt habe
Und es nur durch verdoppelte Arbeit
zurückerobern könne. Wäre es da
Nicht doch einfacher, die Regierung
Löste das Volk auf und
Wählte ein anderes?

The Solution

After the uprising of the 17th of June
The Secretary of the Writers' Union
Had leaflets distributed in the Stalinallee
Stating that the people
Had forfeited the confidence of the government
And could win it back only
By redoubled efforts. Would it not be easier
In that case for the government
To dissolve the people
And elect another?

Although I am a great admirer of Brecht's poetry, I readily admit he was not the most admirable of human beings...

German rulers out of touch?



As I was wading through last Thursday's copy of Die Zeit, I was hit with a full-page ad from a group which is trying to bring a radical perspective to autumn's national election here in Germany (which is currently looking a foregone conclusion, so great is Merkel's lead over the SDP in the polls).

"Das Generationen-Manifesto" gives first ten short but blunt warnings -

WE CAUTION - In the interest of future generations and the social and ecological balance

1 Climate change is the biggest threat we have ever experienced. The federal government and all parties are not treating the issue with the highest priority. The life and well-being of future generations is being put at risk.

2 The energy revolution, the most important project of our generation is being dealt with in a half-hearted and inconsistent way by policy makers. We will make them liable if they negligently endanger the chances of this future project because of party political power games.

3 The rulers govern past us citizens. They hide in their ivory towers, without explaining what consequences will result from far-reaching political

decisions (eg energy policy and euro crisis) for our lives and the lives of our children.

4 The present policy places massive debts on the shoulders of our children and grandchildren. The government deficit is further increased rather than reduced, and thus the scope of the next generations curtailed dramatically.

5 Profits are privatized, losses socialized. Our rulers have been seduced by the financial industry and disregards the interests of the citizens.

6 Politicians are splitting society with their inaction. Recent years have seen the divergence between rich and poor increase to an unacceptable degree.

7 We are increasing our prosperity at the expense of people in the emerging and developing countries, who often work under inhumane conditions for us. It is a shame that we struggle with obesity and excess, while the rest of the world millions of people don't even have the basic necessities of life.

8 Our education system is failing miserably in the face of challenges posed by the future. Policy-makers from politics, economy and society know that our education system is unfair and opaque and not prepare our children for future learning content requirements. But there is a lack of courage for radical change.

9 The sustainable modernization of the economy is demanded in speeches, but not taken seriously. Unless subsidies overtook place in trendsetting industries and technologies are directed, we forego the opportunities that present themselves to Germany as an international pioneer of a green or blue economic change.

10. The generational contract has been terminated unilaterally. The present generation of parents and grandparents are protecting their own vested rights at the expense of their children and grandchildren.

The signatories include one particularly famous name - that of Professor Ernest von Weizsacker, one of the country's most prominent intellectuals; writer on ecological and sustainable issues (and brother of Richard, from 1984-94. the country's most respected President). Otherwise, the list of 28 signatories seems to consist mainly of actors, writers and Foundation people - with one bank President. The manifesto goes on to set out 10 demands which, for me, are curiously light on detail -

WE DEMAND - courage, honesty and generational just action

1 The fight against climate change must be taken as a national objective in the Constitution. A law passed at the beginning of the new term climate protection law needs to provide the basis for it. If Europe and Germany lead the way on climate change and the introduction of mitigation techniques, others - already competitive

reasons - follow.

2 The energy transition must be actively pursued, both as a "green" energy production, as well as energy saving turnaround. Through innovations in energy efficiency and a focus on energy savings in companies and households can manage the transformation of energy at reasonable costs for all involved. With the great energy transition opportunities are economically connected, not only for our country but also for Europe and for the world. Today's generation has a duty to provide a safe power base for future generations.

3 We demand our right to a participation and voice. Citizens want to actively participate in decision-making in politics, economy and society. If politicians do not want to jeopardize democracy, they must justify and convey what they are doing and why. We call on our leaders to leave their ivory towers to seek sincere discourse with citizens and make decisions on this basis. The voters need to know what they can choose and rely on politicians.

4 We urge the government to reform government finances so that the debt reduced and new priorities for a future just and sustainable output design can be set. The interest burden on the state budget must be reduced and sustainable future investments encouraged. Only a financially stable state can ensure security, education, culture, research and development, social security and other public goods to all citizens.

5 We call for a reform and strict regulation of private finance. Banks are servants of the economy and the citizens, not their rulers. "Systemically important" banks take an entire society hostage. Therefore, the limitation of bank power is indispensable. The polluter pays principle must also enter in the financial sector to bear: the consequential costs of financial crises must bear those who earn high profits with incalculable risks. As a bank customer, we call for full transparency in the use of entrusted funds and crisis-proof variety of banks.

6 We demand social justice in Germany. Poverty and lack of opportunities must be overcome. A crash programme is needed to stop the growing rift between rich and poor. Participation in private prosperity and public goods must be secured and strengthened social cohesion. An effective minimum wage would be an essential bulwark against the social crash. High earners and the wealthy must contribute more to the financing of public tasks.

7 We demand a serious effort to fight hunger, poverty and underdevelopment in the world. Need for this is an emergency package of measures to implement the Millennium Development Goals. Multinational companies must be required by law to protect the social and human rights of workers in their factories and suppliers, and to contribute to a survivable level to raise their living standards.

8 We call for a sustainable development of our economy, fair competition rules and the reduction of environmentally harmful subsidies. With the sustainable transformation of our economic system, great opportunities for Germany are possible because environmentally friendly technologies and products will be a competitive advantage and export in the future.

9 We call for a comprehensive nationwide reform of the education and training system, because education is the most effective, most social and economical way of securing the future of our society and the fuel. It is a prerequisite for participation in society and creates the potential for innovation in our country. All young people need regardless of their parents' income equal access and opportunities for advancement in the education system. Curricula, teaching methods and grading systems of the past must be checked and designed so that the desire to learn, commitment and talents of young people are supported in their diversity and their self-confidence is strengthened. School must be a place of enthusiasm, the strengthening of self-awareness, the development of individual potentials and prepare them for the challenges of the future.

10. We demand a new fair contract between generations. If our children are to have at least the chance of a life as it was our generation, we must stop the destruction of natural resources and the exclusion of talents

and cultural diversity of people . We need new visions and debates about the future of the good life. We want to give our children a society that allows them and enables them to realize their dreams. Because our children especially in times of demographic change are entitled to a promising life.

We call a strategy of change for Germany, Europe and the world . Sustainability requires more than a few cosmetic changes. And she needs to close ranks with the emerging and developing countries that have a special meaning for all sustainability issues due to their dynamic development. We must with a long breath and consistently work towards an ecologically and socially just society. We call on all politicians to make decisions in their choice not dependent on short-term forecasts, power shifts or lobby interests.

Although there seem to have been a generally favourable reaction, I sense a lack of excitement - something very cerebral..... contrasting with the intensity which has been characteristic of German discussion of social issues in recent times.

And it would be interesting to compare and contrast it with the [UK Power Inquiry](#) of 2004 which was [a powerful diagnosis of the ills of British democracy](#).....but which sank like a stone after the 2010 elections.....My [own take on its analysis](#) is here....Interesting that Europe simply doesn't figure in the German manifesto!

18 June 2013

German introspection

I've spent 7 weeks so far in Koln - Germany's fourth largest urban district. The same time I spent in Berlin in 1964. It is my first real venture into the country since all of 50 years ago. The bubble in which I existed then and there was, of course, a very different one from the one in which I am presently enveloped.

I was 22 then, just finished University, living in a room in a small Berlin flat and encountering a new civilisation for the first time - as student pressures were building prior to the 1968 explosion. And it was a mere 3 years after I had seen with my own eyes (and from a train crossing East Germany parallel with Russian tanks) the first bricks of the Berlin wall being laid.

Now I'm in an affluent Koln suburb making a daily crossing of the Rhein to receive medical treatment and trying to understand the Germans through bookshops rather than friendships. Helmut Schmidt remains big here - about 8 of his books spread on a table in the huge 3 storey bookshop on Neumarkt (plus 2 of his late wife's; and 2 of his daughter Susanne's. The latter [is a financial journalist](#)).

From a great remaindered bookshop nearby I had last week picked up for 5 euros [Deutschland for Beginners](#) which was published in English in 2007 by Ben Donald as *Springtime for Germany*. It's a light-hearted romp through the country which seems to have annoyed most of its British readers none of whom seem to have spotted the basic logic of the book's chapter structure - words which go to the core of German identity such as

- weltschmerz;
- angst
- gemutlichkeit
- gesundheit
- kindergarten

- schadenfreude
- zeitgeist
- lebensraum
- wanderlust
- weltmeister

I'm enjoying the book - which I'm able to read (slowly) in German making my usual pencilled annotations for later checking.

I spotted several "zeitgeist" titles about the country aimed more at a German audience on the Koln bookshelves - such as Stefan Gaertner's Deutschlandreise - forays into a crazy country (2012) which seems a rather hurriedly-written set of notes for a satire on German tourist resorts. Mein Deutschland, dein Deutschland by Stamer and Buhrow (2011) records the first impressions of Germany of a journalist couple after being absent in France and the USA for more than a decade; and a highly controversial tour of Germany - Allein unter Deutschen by New York based Israeli Tuvia Tenenbom (2012) was initially refused publication for its scurrilous accusations about German racism.

The most interesting, however, looked Die Rupelrepublik - The Bully Republic - why we are so unsociable by Jorg Schindler (2012).

19 June 2013

A sado-masochistic canter through some German reading

Everything is going to the dogs, if we are to believe the books to be found on the shelves of average mainstreet German bookshops today. Thomas Wieczorek is a prolific (and angry) German journalist who has been charting the excesses of the power elite over the past decade, for example in The Dumb Republic - how the media, business and the politicians are selling us which first appeared in 2009. His latest title can be translated variously as "Ruined" or Fucked up - why our country is going downhill and who's profiting from this which gives a pretty good sense of its drift.

Juergen Toth's Webs of power - how the political and business elite is destroying our country (2013) seems to be a powerful critique of neo-liberalism and its effects on Germany. It plots the tight links between business, politics, media, think tanks etc and therefore covers the same ground as Wieczorek (who is strangely not acknowledged in the notes) Sasha Adamek's The Power machine (2013) tries to shine a light into this murky area by focusing first on the two astounding recent resignations of German Presidents and then on the work of lobbyists. Horst Koehler had apparently to go because he was too independent; Christian Wulff for



the opposite reason - he was too dependent on and pally with dubious business friends. Adamek suggests that crony capitalism is alive and well in Germany -

In total, about 18 000 German officers work in Berlin and Bonn ministries. In addition, 620 members of parliament with their average of two employees. Thus nearly 20 000 representatives of government and parliament are facing about 5,000 lobbyists. Statistically, a lobbyist take care of four representatives from politics and government. More than 400 lobbyists paid by corporations or associations also contribute a desk in the federal ministries. But why we are already living in a corrupt republic?

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development was published recently in the 2010 comparative study "Life in Transition Survey II" to the question of how common are experiences of greasing or favors in different countries. Who has made in the past twelve months, an unofficial payment or presents a gift to the other person "like a"? At least ten per cent of the respondents affirmed this specific question. So that more people in this country gave to real acts of corruption as for example the inhabitants of Georgia, Italy or Croatia. The advantage is an integral part of everyday life and thus also the power structure in Germany.

Klaus Norbert is apparently another critical German journalist with several critiques to his name. The title of his latest book is certainly one which I would not normally apply to Germans - Idioten- made in Germany (2011) and shows that restless educational reform is not merely a feature of modern Britain but is also wreaking havoc here in Germany.

Two other books completed my sado-masochistic canter through current German publishers' lists - Our prosperity and its enemies by Gabor Steingart; and German soil - a participant observation by Moritz von Ustar

25 June

The painting is an Otto Dix

Footloose and fancy free

Several times on this blog, I have highlighted the nomadic life I have lived for the past 22 years - with least 20 addresses during that period. Although my project life has been quiet for the past 3 years, I still commute between 3-4 locations and have been on the lookout for an urban base which I could really call home. In 2010 I explored the idea of a house in Brittany but realised that I did not need another rural retreat but rather an urban base for winter. Living in Koln these past 2 months has made the idea of a German base one worth further study. Notwithstanding the sourness of a lot of German journalistic comment at the moment, their transport systems; greenery; civilised behaviour and general costs make this a very attractive place to live.

I've been looking (casually) at the housing market during my present 2 month stay in Koln - the internet and also the VOX television programme called "Mieten, kaufen, wohnen" allow me to get a good sense of what the market is like. Furnished rented accommodation is not easy to find - I'm paying 8 times here what I pay in Sofia for my central flat - which, unlike food, petrol and communal services, is about the right relationship given incomes in Bulgaria. And there are signs of stress - the free copy of Der Spiegel which I was given this week as part of a special offer has a story about the extent of decay in the country's infrastructure which I had not expected to read in a German paper.

And another story tells of an apparent shortage of housing accommodation which, on closer examination, is not quite what it seems -

Long lines stretch out in front of apartments in Munich, Stuttgart, Düsseldorf, Cologne and Frankfurt during house showings. Desperate apartment hunters are even starting Facebook campaigns, writing chain emails or posting ads on streetlights: "A small family is looking for a home in this area! Please give us a chance!" Politicians are starting to react. Hamburg has proposed housing students and trainees on ships. In Berlin, Federal Minister of Transport, Building and Urban Development Peter Ramsauer of the conservative Christian Democrats plans to convert vacant military barracks into dorms and is urging the city to be imaginative. Meanwhile, Peer Steinbrück, the centre-left Social Democrats' candidate for the Chancellery, is promoting subsidized housing during his campaign. Even the ever-hesitant chancellor, Angela Merkel, suddenly seems to feel inclined to put an end to rising rents.

Merkel even surprised many in her own party with her campaign pledge a few weeks back to cap price increases on properties coming up for re-rental to 10 per cent of average rents in the area. But when the Green Party, which has been touting the issue for two years, tried to push a similar initiative through parliament on Friday, Merkel's coalition parties rejected it. The chancellor appears keen to chalk up a victory on the popular issue in her next term in office.

Run on Fashionable Areas

The overall impression is that Germany's big cities are facing a housing shortage as bad as the one caused by World War II. But experts, real estate associations, German renter groups and municipal building companies convey a different message: There is no general housing shortage in Germany. Instead, there is a massive run on certain fashionable areas in popular cities, which inflates prices. Too many people want to live in the same neighborhoods and yet they are surprised that prices for apartments are increasing.

Comparisons to Hong Kong

"A much greater number of people today exclusively focus on the hip districts in spite of prices. So rents continue to rise and the search for apartments is growing increasingly harder," says Axel Gedaschko, president of the Federal Association of Housing and Real Estate Associations (GdW). That's the reason why many people get the impression that the housing shortage in large German cities has grown to dimensions comparable to Hong Kong.

Often it's only two or three subway stops that make all the difference. According to an analysis by Internet portal Immobilienscout24.de, which runs classified ads for rentals and property for sale, five times more inquiries are made for apartments in Cologne's city center compared to the district of Bilderstöckchen -- which isn't much further out.

"It makes my blood boil," says the manager of one property management company is responsible for around 4,000 apartments. "Those who claim that there are no affordable living spaces in all of Cologne and in other big cities are lying," he insists.

The average rent excluding heat and utilities in Cologne has risen by 9 percent. But dramatic increases in price have only occurred in re-rentals in some popular neighbourhoods. He says the hikes in price are also a result of the government encouraging homeowners to conduct renovations to make homes more energy efficient -- costs that are in part then passed on to the renter.

He also places some blame on today's generation of renters, who he says make it easier for property owners to raise rents on a regular basis. "Today's renter tends to be unsettled," Pass says. He points to singles as an example. At first they're satisfied with 50 square meters (538 square feet), but after they receive their first pay raise, they move into a 70-square-meter apartment. That gives apartment owners the perfect opportunity to turn the screws: They have no problems whatsoever increasing the rent when the re-rent the old apartment to a new tenant.

Already today, around 50 percent of the people residing in large cities are living alone, in some cases occupying living space that would be suitable for up to three people. Something urgently needs to be done for families with low incomes.

If true, that's an amazing statistic - 50% of people living alone in large German cities. I feel we need more flexibility. Take my case - I want to buy somewhere - but only for use during the winter. The place I'm currently renting (upper floor of an old house) would be ideal - but the market doesn't cater for such eccentricities.....

Coincidentally, The Guardian has today a story about [developments in the English market for rented accommodation](#)

29 June 2013

Burning andCelebration of Books

My local branch of the Thalia bookstore chain was offering remaindered books yesterday in the huge Rhein Centre Mall just minutes from the house I'm renting in the delightful Bahnstrasse [whose quiet street goes back 100 years](#). I emerged clutching 4 books for 10 euros - all of them real finds. First [Umberto Eco's stunning 450 page On Ugliness](#) (although my version was in German, [Scribd gives me the full version here in English!!](#)) which immediately goes into the short list I have of "beautiful books" (others include [The History of Reading](#); [The Embarrassment of Riches](#); and [Bean Eaters and Bread Soup](#)).

It was 80 years ago (10 May 1933) that the infamous "[burning of the books](#)" took place in Nazi Germany - an [event which is still marked today](#). Volker Weidermann is a German literary critic who has published [The Book of Burned Books](#) which was my second purchase. The website [I love German books](#) noted 3 years ago that it -



provides portraits of every writer on a list compiled by the librarian Wolfgang Herrmann who drew up his list of books by 131 writers of "un-German spirit" for removal from public libraries. It was the student organisation Deutsche Studentenschaft that organised the book burnings around Germany, using the list to select the titles. The writers in question were communists, Jews, anti-militarists and feminists - in a few cases all of the above. The book burning had different consequences for many of them. There were those who went into exile, many of them dying far from home, those who resorted to "inner emigration" of varying degrees of hypocrisy - and some who adapted to the regime, openly writing propaganda for the Nazis. Many of them are still household names in a certain kind of household today, while others died in poverty and obscurity. Plenty of names would be familiar to English readers: Klaus Mann, Heinrich Mann, Bertolt Brecht, Stefan Zweig and Joseph Roth. And Weidermann gives us some quirky details on these writers, such as the letters exchanged between Zweig and Roth and Heinrich Mann's fading optimism in the USA.



And one man - Georg Salzmann - started in the 1970s to collect specimens of these books from flea markets and antiquarian bookshops, [amassing a collection of 12,000](#) which he donated in 2009 to the University of Augsburg. I admire such obsessions!

My third book is actually a comic - the first I have ever bought (in any language). [Der Bewegte man](#) (I thought it meant the "aroused man") appeared in 1987 was probably one of Germany's first gay comic strips. The author - [Ralf König](#) - reminds me of [Claire Bretecher](#) and is now the country's most famous "bande desseinist". I won't make the obvious comment about the meaning of "bander" in French!

My final bargain was a collection of short essays [What do we want?](#) by one Ingo Schulze who turns out to have [interesting views](#) about contemporary events, for example [in this issue of Der Freitag](#) which is a worthy German weekly.

30 June 2013

Model Germany?

Germany has, at the moment, the reputation of an invincible powerhouse - although it was some 15 years ago seen to be somewhat sluggish. I have referred in recent posts to the various critiques which have surfaced in the past few years. Last week's Der Spiegel had a large feature on the [decline of public investment - and the deterioration in public infrastructure](#).

This theme is picked up again in a publication by the European Council for Foreign Relations, entitled - a [German Model for Europe?](#) which

examines the reasons for the success of the German economy during the last decade. In particular, it describes the elements of the Agenda 2010 - essentially a set of labour market reforms implemented by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder from 2003 onwards - and explores their contribution to Germany's macroeconomic performance. It points out some problematic elements of Germany's economic performance during the last decade and concludes that Germany's economic success is a product of a combination of nominal wage restraint, supported by labour market reforms which have brought down the reservation wage and put downward pressure on wages, and severe spending restraints on public investment as well as on research and development and education. On the whole, this cannot serve as a blueprint for Europe.

3 July

getting to know the Germans

Last year I dared to recommend "getting to know the Bulgarians through their painters" (of the last 100 years) and to produce a small book about it. Now I've had the idea of trying to understand the Germans through their literature of the past 50 years.

I've been gripped by a book I picked up a couple of days ago (for 1.5 euros) called Light Years - a short history of German literature from 1945 to the present, available, sadly, only in German. It's very far from being your normal, dry listing of worthy books - but rather a series of short and very human vignettes by Volker Weidermann (of the FAZ) of German writers as they struggled to make a living in post-war Germany. I'm almost half way through - and already feel I have made a lot of new friends.



As I've mentioned already in this series of postings I've been doing in the past 2 months from Koln (20 so far), anglo-saxons wanting to read about European countries are well served with countries such as France, Italy and Spain but starved when it comes to Germany. There is no contemporary John Ardagh writing - despite the best efforts of Simon Winder and Peter Watson. Of course there's no apparent market for such books - apart, perhaps, from those taking short-trips to Berlin for stag parties! But Germany is so vast, diverse and culturally rich that it definitely deserves far more books devoted to it than the dreadful choice currently available eg Spring Time for Germany - a little better, admittedly, than the stuff which Roger Boyes has been inflicting on the British public. Watson's "German Genius" or Winder's "Germania" are not the easiest of reads.

I see that there is a "very short introduction" to German Literature available on the Amazon site - it will be interesting to read it - and compare with the Weidermann text.

In a small way, Weidermann's book reminds me of the magnum opus of Clive James - "Cultural Amnesia" - which gave us a few pages apiece on European writers of the last century (most neglected) and was indeed tempted to alert him to Weidermann's book - not least because of this profile.

I've been one of James' camp followers for some 40 years and cannot imagine a world without him (see his website!!). I find him one of the world's best wordsmiths and renaissance men! One of the very few people I would like to spend some hours with. I was, first, captivated by his songs with Pete Atkin (the 1970s?); amused with his TV commentaries (written and TV); seduced by his autobiographies; and then stunned with his massive "Cultural Amnesia"

7 July 2013

The German connection



Almost a month ago I had been so impressed by the opening story of a book devoted to stories of Anglo-German friendships and loves that I used it [in a post I called "remembering"](#). With all the work I've been doing on the little guide to Romania, it's only now that I've finished what turned out to be a fascinating book with the intriguing title - [Noble Endeavours - the Life of Two Countries, England and Germany, in Many Stories](#) by [Miranda Seymour](#) whose blog also gives background on some of their characters as well as explaining [what brought her to write the book](#).

I've reached the stage of my life when stories about individuals have become more important to me than narratives about historical events. Perhaps the book's author focuses a tad much for contemporary tastes on the higher social echelons, but the stories she tells of

Germans in England and Angles in Germany are nonetheless important - particularly with the appearance of German emigres after the abortive 1848 revolutions. But the most shocking stories appear at the end of the book when it reaches the 1930s and recounts how various Germans and Angles reacted to Hitler. For once the former are the goodies and the latter the baddies - with the [various warnings being actively sidelined by the Foreign Office](#) - including those of [British spies with excellent connections](#)

And I was delighted to see [Tisa Schulenburg](#) appear in the story. Somewhere in Germany, in 1990, I happened to wander in from the street to an exhibition of wonderful sketches of coalminers. They turned out to be Durham miners in the 1930s and executed by "Tisa" Schulenburg - a very graceful lady in her 80s who was kind enough to chat with me and (a few weeks later) send me reproductions of her work and a couple of her books. I knew nothing about her and discovered her full story only later - as [I recounted in a blogpost](#)

"Tisa" Schulenburg's life was by any standard remarkable. Having grown up among the Prussian nobility and witnessed the trauma of Germany's defeat in the Great War, she frequented the salons of Weimar Berlin, shocked her family by marrying a Jewish divorcee in the 1930s, fled Nazi Germany for England, worked as [an artist with the Durham coal miners](#), and spent her later years in a convent in the Ruhr. Her experience of the darker moments of the 20th century was reflected in her sculpture and drawing, in which the subject of human suffering and hardship was a constant theme - whether in the form of Nazi terror or the back-breaking grind of manual labour at the coal face.





When she heard that I was a politician from Strathclyde Region - with its mining traditions in Lanarkshire and Ayrshire - she presented me with a signed portfolio of her 1930s drawings of the NE English miners and their families (some embedded in text) for onward donation to the Scottish miners. She died more than a decade later at the age of 97 - having lived the most amazing life.....

I have copies of them - from which these are selections
The two books she sent are the small "Meine Dunklen Brueder" - which recounts her stay in the North-East villages and contains many of the sketches; and the more substantial "Ich Hab's Gewagt - Bildhauerin und Ordensfrau - ein unkonventionelles Leben" - her autobiography which she has signed in large, clear script, with an address sticker for the St Ursula Convent in Dorsten where she was then living.

I prize the books - and will now work my way through her autobiography.....I notice that the second book had run into 8 editions by the time she sent it to me - with the last imprint being in 1990.

Thursday, May 15, 2014

Remembering

It was remiss of me not to have mentioned the exhibition of [Otto Dix](#) graphics now in its last few weeks at the Bucharest National Gallery (the side entrance near the English bookshop).

Dix is not a favourite painter of mine - but his graphics about the First World War are quite stunning.

I've also included - by way of comparison - one of the many sketches of Ilya Petrov I bought earlier this year in Sofia....



I was reminded because of opening a new book about Anglo-German Relations called '[Noble](#)

[Endeavours, the Life of Two Countries, England and Germany, in Many Stories](#)' which starts with a profile of one, [Herbert Sulzbach](#) whose life is described by the author in the following terms -

Herbert Sulzbach fought for Germany in the First World War and for Britain in the Second. His most challenging war began later. On November 11 1945, this quietly charming and slightly-built man succeeded in persuading the 4,000 Nazi PoWs with whom he had spent the past 11 months to stand alongside him, on Armistice Day, and pledge themselves to return home as good Europeans, "to take part in the reconciliation of all people and the maintenance of peace."

*Subsequently, working among the high-ranking SS officers imprisoned at Featherstone Park in Northumbria, Sulzbach ensured that these more hardened candidates also returned home with a clear understanding of how a liberal democracy should work. Sulzbach's persuasive method — he made a point of imposing no form of censorship — proved remarkably effective. The 3,000 ex-prisoners who later wrote to thank him for his endeavours had little to gain at that point from their gratitude. One reformed PoW, Willi Brundert, went on to become a celebrated mayor of Frankfurt. Twenty-five of Sulzbach's Nazi pupils would freely form a European branch of Featherstone. It was still going strong when Sulzbach died in 1985..... In 1948, Herbert Sulzbach publicly described the PoWs returning home as the best of envoys for future peace and understanding between Germany and England. Nearly 40 years later, he warned that "first, the old distrust must disappear". The time has surely come to pay heed to Sulzbach's words. Writing my book, *Noble Endeavours*, I was greatly struck by the spirit of forgiveness I encountered among people who had come to England as Kindertransport children. Born in Germany and now profoundly attached to England, all of them echoed Sulzbach's wish for an end to the old distrust.*

On the eve of a year of remembering the horrors that began in 1914, I hope that recalling the past won't allow us to undo, or to neglect, the task of reconciliation for which so much was done by two heroic Jews.

I'm glad to do my little bit in remembering not so much the two World Wars - but the few good people who have tried to do something positive with their lives.....

10 June 2014

[The Loss of German Identity?](#)

In the post-war period academics were about the only British writers who tried to deal with Germany - and then only historians such as AJP Taylor and Richard Evans or political scientists such as Willie Patterson. John Ardagh was the exception with his large book on contemporary German society - [Germany and the Germans](#) - which came out in the early 1990s but was quickly out of print. Those wanting to read about Germany had to make do with books about the Nazi period or knockabouts such as Ben Donald's [Springtime for Germany - or how I learned to love Lederhosen](#) (2007) whose German edition ("Deutschland for Beginners") I found a good read when I picked it up in a remaindered pile for 1 euro a couple of years ago.

About five years ago, things began to change with Peter Watson's monumental [German Genius](#) and Simon Winder's rather eccentric [Germania](#). Now a trickle has turned into a stream with serious books such as [Germany - Memories of a Nation](#) (focusing on cultural objects); [Reluctant Meister - how Germany's past is Shaping its European Future](#); and [Germany - beyond the Enchanted Forest](#) (a literary anthology) vying for space on the bookshelves. Last year a long book actually appeared with the title [The Novel in German since 1990](#) (which is actually the only one of this new stream now to be wending its way to me)

And Berlin's new role as a tourist hotspot has produced a variety of tantalising books such as Cees Nooteboom's [Roads to Berlin](#) (2012); Peter Schneider's [Berlin Now - the City after the Wall](#) (2014); and Rory McLean's [Berlin - Imagine a City](#) (2014) - all of which await on my bookshelf for my attention

Curiously, however, still nothing on contemporary Germany to vie with John Ardagh's book of 20 years ago!

These last few days, however, I have been devouring a large book which has just appeared - [Death of a Nation; a new History of Germany](#) - a delightful and enlightening read which I could hardly put down (despite the weight of its 700 pages). The provocative title gives a clue to the author's approach - which focuses on the loss of German identity and lands since its heyday a century ago.....

This is a real history - whereas Watson and Winder concentrate on intellectual achievement and cultural monuments respectively. But it's not your typical dry academic stuff! It's highly committed and doesn't pull punches - opening my eyes, for example, to the behavior of Czechs and Poles in the early part of the last century.....

And he really makes the history of the German lands (and key actors in both Germany and Europe) come alive in a way I have not experienced with other history books. Although I lived in Prague for more than a year in the early 90s, I never real understood the remnants I saw there of its German past....Unusually for an historian he doesn't hesitate to "contextualize" German brutalities by citing the extensive history of massacres perpetrated by Belgian, British and Soviet authorities in Africa, Russia and Asia.

The author states clearly in his Preface his intention to

" put in a much broader historical context the enormous human and cultural cost to Germany and German Austria of losing two world wars and the damage that has done to their sense of national identity"

This focus becomes clear in the second half of the book - which covers the fate not only of Jews but of the people who, in 2 World Wars, suddenly found themselves (by the massive border changes) living as minorities in foreign countries - a tale which has been ignored until recently in the huge literature of the second world war. As someone who has been living in central and eastern Europe for the past 25 years, I find this is an important and highly commendable objective and one rarely attempted by an outsider.

I have to confess, however, that my focus wavered in the section dealing with the death struggle of the Nazi regime (more than 100 pages after page 400). He had carried me with him until that point - and then lost me...too harrowing????

I will complete the reading and give a final assessment in a few days.....

Saturday, August 1, 2015

Schuld

I'm conscious that my big readers these past few weeks have been from Russian servers - although I'm not sure if they are from heartland Russia or, perhaps, from places like Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan where I lived for 7 years - ie friends who happen to have Russian servers.....

So far they don't seem to have been turned off by my recent posts on German subjects - so let me pursue the thoughts aroused by the latest book I have been reading these last few days.....

Gunther Grass - writer, artist (not least gastronomic) and political activist - was a larger than life German who died last April at the age of 87. I was never a fan of his novels (I preferred Heinrich Boll) - although I did appreciate his social activism (so typical of the post-war German generation). I found a lovely English first edition of his autobiography - "Peeling the Onion" - in Sofia's great second-hand bookshop (The Elephant) a few months ago and was bowled over when I eventually got round to reading it. It's not just that it charts so powerfully the trajectory of an intelligent youngster (from an area which is now in Poland) facing the monstrosities of the times - but the sheer poetry.....

It apparently caused a sensation in Germany a decade ago when it revealed that he had been in a youth SS group for the last year of the war - something which he had carefully hidden until the last phase of his life.....

But Timothy Garton Ash, the indefatigable chronicler of the 1980s central European spirit of revolution, was able to rise above that furore in the NYRB review (in the year of its English translation) entitled The Road from Danzig

this is a wonderful book, a return to classic Grass territory and style, after long years of disappointing, wooden, and sometimes insufferably hectoring works from his tireless pen, and a perfect pendant to his great "Danzig trilogy" of novels, starting with The Tin Drum.

An account of his life from the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, when as an eleven-year-old war-enthusiast he collected fragments of shrapnel from the first fighting in his native Danzig, to the publication of The Tin Drum in 1959, "Peeling the Onion" repeatedly surprises, delights, and moves with passages of great descriptive power.

He enables us not merely to see but to hear, touch, and smell life in the tiny, two-room apartment in Danzig where he grew up, with a shared lavatory on the staircase—"a stink-cell, the walls of which fingers had smeared."¹ From this suffocating narrowness the teenager longed to escape into what he saw as the romantic, heroic world of service in the Führer's armed forces. So at the age of fifteen he volunteered to fight on a U-boat, but his offer was not accepted (although he was called up a year later to a SS brigade).

One of my favourite British blogs - That's How the Light Gets In - picked up the story in a recent post-

What follows after this last admission (which stunned the world) is a brilliant evocation of scenes that the teenager witnessed when his unit was taken to the collapsing front in Lower Silesia, passing through a burning Dresden:

Soldiers young and old, in Wehrmacht uniforms. Hanging from trees still bare along the road, from linden trees in the marketplaces. With cardboard signs on their chests branding them as cowards and subversive elements. [...] Off to the side I see peasants working their fields, furrow after furrow, as if nothing were wrong. One has a cow hitched to his

plough, Crows following the plough. Then I see more refugees, filling the streets in long processions: horse carts and overladen handcarts pushed and pulled by old women and adolescents; i see children clutching dolls, perched on suitcases and rope-bound bundles. An old man is pulling a cart containing two lambs hoping to survive the war.

His first encounter with the enemy comes with a 'Stalin Organ' rocket attack that leaves bodies strewn everywhere. Soon he is stranded behind enemy lines, in woods with Russians close by. Twigs crack underfoot – someone is nearby; a figure approaches and, terrified, the young Grass sings a German melody which is answered in kind.

Grass the memoirist can now only identify the man who appeared, the man who became his guardian angel, who led him out of the woods, over the fields and across the Russian front line, as 'the lance corporal'. He had fought with the Polish campaign, in France and Greece, and as far afield as the Crimea. The lance corporal is his saviour, but then, in a Soviet tank attack, the lance corporal's legs are ripped to bits. The last sight young Gunter has of him is of him being wheeled past from a battlefield operating room, his eyes wide open, amazed and unbelieving – a legless torso.

Soon the Fuhrer is no more and Grass, having been transferred to a military hospital in Marienbad finds himself, a seventeen-year-old priapic youth, under the care of Finnish nurses. Hungry for sex, he is even more hungry for nourishment. Finally freed from the American POW camp at Bad Aibling, a displaced person in the British Occupied Zone, Grass found his first officially-registered residence as a free man in Cologne,

'a pile of debris with an occasional miraculously-surviving street sign stuck to what was left of a façade, or hung on a pole sticking out of the rubble, which was also sprouting lush patches of dandelions about to blossom.'

He scavenges 'like a stray dog for food, a place to sleep, and – driven by that other hunger – skin on skin contact'. An encounter in the station waiting-room leads him to Hanover and his first job of work after the war is over: an encounter with 'the eternal lance-corporal in his dyed Wehrmacht uniform', his wooden leg stretched out in front of him, smoking a pipe filled with 'an indefinable substance only distantly related to tobacco'. He looked as if he had survived not only the most recent war but also the Thirty Years' War and Seven Years' War: he was timeless. The veteran suggests Hanover where there is work underground in the potash mines.

There, Gunter finds work as a coupler boy, hooking up dumper wagons laden with potash to form underground trains. It is there in the mine that, for the first time by his own account, he entered the world of politics, albeit still only as a teenage observer. During breaks in the intensive work routine caused by regular power cuts, the older men would sit and argue politics – the Communists, the Nazi nostalgists, and the Social-Democrats:

Even though I had trouble making sense of the issues that infuriated them so, I realized, coupler boy and idiot on the fringe, that when push came to shove the Communists inevitably teamed up with the Nazis to shout down the Social Democrat remainder.

One Sunday morning Gunter's locomotive driver took him into Hanover to hear the head of the Social Democratic Party, Kurt Schumacher, speak to an open-air audience of several thousand (mull over that number for a minute). No he didn't speak, he screamed, the way all politicians ... screamed. And yet the future Social Democrat and unflinching supporter of "ontheonehandandontheother" took to heart some of the words that the frail figure with the empty, fluttering sleeve thundered down to his ten thousand adherents in the blazing sun.

Later, of course, Grass would be a supporter and speech-writer for Willy Brandt and his 'policy of small steps', and in "The Diary of a Snail" would prescribe 'crawling shoes for the ills of progress. The snail's track, not the fast track. A long road paved with cobblestones of doubt.'

And, finally, to the NYRB review -

Fear and hunger are the twin sensations that permeate these pages. His chapter about seeing action with the Waffen-SS is entitled "How I Learned Fear."

His hunger is threefold. First, hunger for food, especially in American prisoner-of-war camps. Second, hunger for sex, described in a kind of lingering, amused physical detail that reminds me of the work of the English poet Craig Raine, whose poem "The Onion, Memory" anticipates Grass's book-long metaphor.

The object of Grass's final hunger, after food and sex, is art. He calls his chapter about becoming an artist "The Third Hunger." Battling his way, alone, with a strong will and professed egoism, up the physical and social rubble mountains of postwar Germany, he becomes first a stonemason and part-time sculptor, then a graphic artist, then a poet, and only at the end, in his late twenties, a writer of prose, inspired by Alfred Döblin's Berlin Alexanderplatz and Joyce's Ulysses, both discovered and devoured in the library of the well-heeled, cultivated Swiss parents of his first wife, Anna. "Anna's dowry," he calls it. The memoir ends with his finding, in Paris, what would become one of the most famous first lines of any novel—"Granted: I am an inmate of a mental hospital." And the rest is literature.

A New Germany? Perry Anderson

Excerpt from April 2009 NLR 57 <http://newleftreview.org/II/57/perry-anderson-a-new-germany>

Perry Anderson must be unique amongst Brits for the depth of his (first-hand) reading of works and events which have shaped recent generations in not only European countries such as the UK, Italy, France and Germany but also America and India - and then producing long essays (in some cases book-length). They have all appeared in the New Left Review journal.

This is the last section of his study of contemporary Germany - focusing on cultural aspects.....

Culture (p24)

..... The leitmotif (of the Federal Republic) has always been, and remains, consensus—the unity of all sensible citizens around a prosperous economy and a pacified state, without social conflicts or structural contradictions. No other political system in post-war Europe is so ideologically gun-shy, averse to any expression of sharp words or irreconcilable opinions; so devoted to banality and blandness. The quest for respectability after 1945, federal checks and balances, the etiquette of coalitions, all have contributed to making a distinctively German style of politics, an unmistakable code of high-minded, sententious conformism.

This was not, of course, a mere ideological mannerism. It reflected the reality of a bipartisan—Christian and Social Democratic—convergence on a corporatist model of development, designed to square all interests: naturally, each according to their station, or *Mitbestimmung* writ large, as a charter for social harmony.

This consensus is now, for the first time since the late sixties, under serious pressure. From one direction, demands for social justice risk splitting the fictive unity it has cultivated. The received name for this danger, abhorrent to every self-respecting pundit and politician, is populism—incarnate in the demagogue Lafontaine. It threatens the legacy of Bonn from the left. But the same consensus was also under pressure from an opposite direction. This came from opinion attacking it in the name of liberalism, and calling for a new paradigm of politics worthy of the move to Berlin.

For these critics of the status quo, the vital spirit that post-war Germany always lacked is what Anglo-American societies have long possessed: a sense of individual liberty, suspicion of the state, faith in the market, willingness to take risks—the tradition of Locke, Smith, Jefferson, Ricardo, Mill and their successors.²¹ Politically, the marginality of the FDP reflected the weakness of any such outlook in the Federal Republic. Even the nearest German equivalent after 1945, the Freiburg School of *Ordo-Liberals*—Eucken, Müller-Armack, Röpke—still had, for all their positive influence on Ludwig Erhard, too limited a vision of what a free society requires, as the capture of their originally anti-statist slogan of a 'social market economy' by the clammy corporatism of later years had shown.

A more radical break with inveterate national reflexes, closer to the intransigent temper of a Hayek or Popper, was required. This line of argument, hitting the post-war settlement at an unfamiliar angle, has been a development of intellectual opinion, distant from any obvious popular

mood, but resonating across a wide band of the media. How significant is it politically? German tradition, famously, tended to separate the world of culture from that of power, as a compensation or sphere superior to it.

In his recent study of *The Seduction of Culture in German History*, Wolfgang Ienaghi convicts this inclination of a significant share of blame for the country's surrender to authoritarianism, from the Second to the Third Reich, pointing in particular to the failure of so many German thinkers and writers to defend Weimar democracy; indeed, their often outright hostility or contempt towards it. In the postwar period, so this case goes, such attitudes gradually waned: 'Germany's special path eventually flowed into the mainstream of parliamentary democracy, the market and the rule of the law. Playing off culture against civilization no longer made much sense. It also no longer made much sense to think of culture as a substitute for politics.' By 1949 Leo Strauss was complaining that German thinking had become indistinguishable from Western thought in general. Actually, Ienaghi comments, in such assimilation lay 'one of the great political success stories of the twentieth century'.²² The temptations and delusions of Germany as *Kulturnation* were eventually set aside for a sturdy adjustment to the everyday world of contemporary politics in Bonn.

From this perspective, there was a troublesome interlude around 1968, when students rejected the new normalcy under the influence of traditions now out of time—not necessarily of the same stamp as those uppermost between the wars, but in their way no less disdainful of markets and parliaments. However, such revolutionary fevers were soon over, leaving behind only a mild counter-cultural *Schwärmerei*, eventually issuing into an inoffensive *Greenery*. Thereafter, the intellectual climate in the Federal Republic by and large reflected the stability of the political system. No culture is ever made of one piece, and cross-currents persisted.

But if Kohl's long rule, as distinct from the system over which he presided, found few admirers, the cultural 'dominant' of the period could be described as a theoretical version of the practices of government, in more left-liberal register. The two emblematic thinkers of these years might indeed be said to illustrate, each in his own way, the validity of Ienaghi's diagnosis, exhibiting the reconciliation of culture and power in a pacified German democracy. They shared, appropriately enough, a common American point of departure in Talcott Parsons's *Social System*—a work which nowhere else in Europe enjoyed such a reception.

Habermas's huge *Theory of Communicative Action*, which appeared in 1981, supplied an affirmative variation on Parsons, developing his idealist emphasis on value-integration as the basis of any modern social order into a still loftier conception of consensus, as not only the hallmark of a political democracy, but touchstone of philosophical truth. Niklas Luhmann offered a saturnine variant, radicalizing Parsons's account of differentiated sub-systems within society—economy, polity, family etc.—into a theory of their complete autonomization as self-reproducing, self-adjusting orders, without subjective agency or structural interpenetration, functioning simply to reduce the complexity of the environments outside them. Though less palatable to polite opinion, Luhmann's tacit construction of the Bonn Republic as a matter-of-fact complex of so many mechanisms of technocratic routine disavowed any critical intent. If Habermas told his readers that things could be as they should be—and, under the protection of the *Grundgesetz*, mostly were—Luhmann's message was dryer, but no less reassuring: things were as they had to be.

On the heights of social theory, these bodies of thought commanded the terrain. In history, the other discipline of greatest public projection, the scene was much more varied, with significant

conservative figures and schools continuously active. But here too, the cutting edge of research and intervention—the 'societal' history associated with Bielefeld—was a left-liberal loyalism, critical of the Second Reich as an antechamber of the Third, and tracing the path of a reactionary Sonderweg that, in separating Germany from the West, had led to disaster. Here political emphasis fell on the contrast between a calamitous past and a transfigured present: the Bonn Republic as everything that Weimar had not been—stable, consensual, faithful to the international community. As prolific as Habermas, a close friend from schooldays, Hans-Ulrich Wehler was no less active a presence in the public sphere, sustaining the values of the post-war settlement with a distinctive tranchant of his own. Still more pointed as instruction for the present was the work of Heinrich Winkler on the German labour movement between the wars, dwelling on the blindness of the SPD's failure to understand that compromise with parties of the bourgeois centre could alone save German democracy, as had thankfully been upheld since the war.

Rightist dissidents

The hegemony of a left-liberal culture in essential syntony with the character of the political system—while always keeping a critical distance from its particular incumbents—was never exclusive. Powerful earlier bodies of writing, dating back to the interwar period, continued to circulate and exercise influence to other effects, less hospitable to the status quo. The Frankfurt School had been one of these, central in detonating the rebellion of the late sixties. Consensus was not a value dear to it. But once the hyper-activist turn of the revolt had passed, or was crushed, and the legacy of Adorno and Horkheimer had been put through the blender of Habermas's philosophy of communication, little memory was left of the critical theory for which they had stood. Dissonance now increasingly came from the right. There could be found the still active figures of Heidegger, Schmitt, Jünger, Gehlen, all compromised during the Third Reich, each an intellectual legend in his own right. Of these, Heidegger, the best known abroad, was probably of least importance, his post-war reception greater in France than in Germany itself, where under American influence analytical philosophy gained entry early on; his runic ontology had only a narrow purchase on the political or social issues of the period, as one generically desolate vision of technological modernity among others.

The other three, all—unlike Heidegger—masters of a terse, vivid German prose, were of greater moment: Schmitt, the most ruthlessly brilliant, unstable mind of his generation, for his kaleidoscopic ability to shake sovereignty, law, war, politics into sharply new and unsettling patterns; Gehlen, for his uncanny sense of the closure of ideological and artistic forms in the 'crystallizations' of a post-histoire, and the probability of student and guerrilla rebellions against it; Jünger, for the arresting arc of a trajectory from lyricist of a machine civilization to seer of ecological disaster. The calendars and areas of their influence were not the same, in part depending on their personal situations. Schmitt, institutionally the most ostracized, was intellectually the most consulted, constitutional lawyers flocking to his ideas early on.²³ Gehlen, who died much younger, was stylized as a counter-weight to Adorno. Jünger, who lived longest, regained the most complete *droit de cité*, ending up with every kind of honour, indeed decorated by Mitterrand. But, though never 'residual', in Raymond Williams's sense, the intellectual world such thinkers embodied could not compete with the post-war consensus as any kind of public doctrine. It was an alternative to the dominant discourse, inescapable yet peripheral, incapable of displacing it. Hegemony remained left-liberal.

Around the mid-eighties, there were the first premonitions of a change. Habermas's last great book, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, appeared in 1985. Intellectually, it was already on the defensive—a noble rescue operation to save the idea of modernity from the descendants of Nietzsche, from Bataille to Foucault to Derrida, who were darkening it once more into an ecstatic antinomianism. If the dangers Habermas discerned were principally French, it was not long before German subvariants materialized. Peter Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason*, greeted respectfully by Habermas himself, had set the ball rolling two years earlier: a bestseller born of a sojourn with the guru Bhagwan Rajneesh in Poona. Over the next twenty years, a torrent of sequels poured out, zig-zagging across every possible terrain of frisson or fashion, from psychotherapy to the ozone layer, religion to genetic engineering, and catapulting Sloterdijk to the status of talk-show host and popular celebrity—a Teutonic version, more whimsical and bear-like, of Bernard-Henri Lévy. The sway of communicative reason could hardly survive this triumph of public relations. Habermas's pupils, Albrecht Wellmer and Axel Honneth, have continued to produce honourable work, on occasion more radical in tenor than that of their mentor, of late increasingly preoccupied with religion. But the philosophical props of the peace of Bonn have gone.

In the historical field, the story was different. There the mid-eighties saw a more direct assault on left-liberal heights, which was successfully repulsed, but marked a shift of acceptable opinion all the same. The *Historikerstreit* of 1986 was set off by Ernst Nolte's argument that Nazi atrocities were a reaction to prior Bolshevik crimes, and should not be treated as either unique, or as absolute definitions of the German past.

This soon involved a wider group of conservative historians, making less extreme claims, but in the eyes of their critics—Wehler and Habermas among them—nonetheless not only palliating the criminality of the Third Reich, but undermining the necessary centrality of the Judeocide to the identity of post-war Germany, as memory and responsibility.²⁴ National rehabilitation was not to be had in this fashion. There could be no question who won this dispute. Soon afterwards, however, the tables were turned, when in their zeal to preclude any revival of national sentiment the leading lights of left-liberalism—Winkler, Wehler, Habermas—expressed their reserve or opposition to reunification of the country, even as it was plainly about to become a reality. However justified were their objections to the form it took, there was no concealing the fact that this was a transformation of Germany they had never conceived or wished for, as their antagonists had. Here too the dominant had dissolved.

Trouble-makers?

In the gradual change of intellectual atmosphere, one catalyst stands out. Since the war, Germany's leading journal of ideas has been *Merkur*, which can claim a record of continuous distinction arguably without equal in Europe. Its remarkable founding editor Hans Paeschke gave it an interdisciplinary span—from the arts through philosophy and sociology to the hard sciences—of exceptional breadth, canvassed with consistent elegance and concision. But what made it unique was the creed of its editor. Inspired by Wieland's encyclopaedism, Paeschke gave the ecumenical range of his Enlightenment model a more agonistic twist, combining the capacity for *Gegenwirkung* that Goethe had praised in Wieland—who had published Burke and Wollstonecraft alike—with a *Polarisierung* of his own, as twin mottos for the journal.

These remained the constants in *Merkur's* changeable liberalism—first conservative, then national, then left, as Paeschke later described its phases: an editorial practice welcoming opposites, and setting them in play against each other. 'The more liberal, the richer in tensions.'²⁶ At one time or another Broch, Arendt, Curtius, Adorno, Heidegger, Brecht, Gehlen, Löwith, Weizsäcker, Voegelin, Borkenau, Bloch, Schmitt, Habermas, Weinrich, Benn all appeared in its pages. Uninterested in the *Wirtschaftswunder*, hostile to the Cold War, regarding Adenauer's Germany as a 'pseudomorphosis', Paeschke maintained good relations with writers in the East, and when the political scene changed in the sixties, was sympathetic to both the student revolt and the turn to an *Ostpolitik*.

Averse to any kind of *Syntheselei*, he conceived the journal socratically, as a dialectical enterprise, in keeping with the dictum *Der Geist ist ein Wühler*.²⁷ Spirit is not a reconciler, but a trouble-maker. Paeschke retired in the late seventies, and in 1984 the succession passed to Karl Heinz Bohrer, pre-eminently equipped for the role of *Wühler*. A student of German Romanticism, and theorist of Jünger's early work, Bohrer made his *début* in *Merkur* in 1968, with a defence of the student revolt against liberal attacks in the mainstream press, praising it as the expression, at its best, of an eclectic anarchism.²⁸ Not the Frankfurt School, he argued, but the French Surrealism that Benjamin had admired and Adorno dismissed, was the appropriate inspiration for rebellion against the detestable *juste milieu* of the Bonn system.²⁹ These were the sentiments of a writer who was soon making a name for himself as editor of the *feuilleton* section of the country's leading conservative newspaper, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, before falling out with his superiors and being packed off as correspondent to London.

A decade later, he returned to the charge in *Merkur* with a bravura survey of the fate of the movements of 1968—compared to those of 1848 and 1870-71—as uprising and counter-culture, covering politics, theatre, film, art, theory and music, and marking 1974 as the end of a revolutionary epoch in which Blake's tiger had stalked the streets. A mere restoration of 'oldbourgeois cultural piety' was no longer possible, but the new culture had by now lost its magnetism: only an artist like Beuys retained an anarchic force of subversion.³⁰ Bohrer's own deepest allegiances were to 'suddenness' as the dangerous moment, without past or future, in which true aesthetic experience ruptures the continuity of existence and so, potentially, the social fabric. Captured by Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Hofmannsthal and Jünger—in their own way Woolf or Joyce, too—the sudden found its political expression in the decisionism of Schmitt.³¹

The central figure in this pantheon, combining more than any other its aesthetic and political moments—epiphany and act—remained Jünger, the subject of Bohrer's *Ästhetik des Schreckens* (1978), the work that won him a chair in Modern German Literary History at Bielefeld. On taking charge of *Merkur* soon afterwards, Bohrer opened his editorship in spectacular fashion, with a merciless satire on the petty-bourgeois philistinism, provincialism and consumerism of Bonn politics and culture, complete with a ruinous portrait of Kohl as the personification of a mindless gluttony.³² This was a state, wanting all aesthetic form, that could only be described in the spirit of the early Brecht, or Baudelaire on Belgium.

A three-part pasquinade on the German political class followed, depicting both the new-found *cdu-dfp* coalition and the *spd* opposition to it with blistering derision.³³ Time did not soften these judgements. At the turn of the nineties, Bohrer unleashed another ferocious fusillade against German provincialism, in a six-part series covering government, literature, television, advertising,

press, songs, stars, movies, cityscapes, and culminating in special scorn for delusions that the enthusiasm of his compatriots for Europe was anything other than a tourist form of the same parochialism. From the 'pastoral boredom' of Die Zeit and the faz, to the 'fussy sentimentalism' of Grass or Walser, to the grotesqueries of Kohl as 'Giant of the Caucasus' and Genscher as his Sancho Panza, little escaped Bohrer's scathing report. At best, the Frankfurt of the sixties had not been quite so dreary as Düsseldorf or Munich, and Fassbinder was a bright spot.³⁴

The polemical élan of such broadsides was never just destructive. From the beginning, Bohrer had a normative ideal in mind. Germany was in need of a creative aesthetics of the state. It was the absence of one that produced the dismal landscape scanned in his first editorial, and its many sequels. To those who taxed him with that 'aestheticization of politics' which Benjamin had identified as peculiar to fascism, he replied that in fact every democratic state that respected itself had its own aesthetic, expressed in its capital city, public buildings, ceremonies, spaces, forms of rule and rhetoric—contemporary America, England, France or Italy supplied the evidence, to which a special issue of Merkur was devoted.³⁵ It was in these that the identity of the nation acquired tangible legitimacy and shape: a state without its own distinctive symbolic forms, in which politics was reduced to mere social assistance, was hardly worth the name. It was time for Germany to put the stunted half-life of the Bonn Republic behind it.

When the Berlin Wall came down five years later, but reunification was still quite uncertain, and resisted by the liberal left in the West, Bohrer was thus well positioned to publish, in the Frankfurter Allgemeine, perhaps the most powerful single essay of the time in favour of German unity: '*Why We Are Not a Nation—and Why We Should Become One*'.³⁶ His leading adversary was Habermas, treated with the respect Bohrer had always shown him. The contribution to Merkur immediately following his famous 'Aesthetics of the State' had, indeed, been an article by Habermas on the peace demonstrations against the stationing of Pershing missiles, and when the Historikerstreit came two years later, Bohrer had not hesitated to side with him. But Habermas's resistance to unification, worthy though his notion of a disembodied constitutional patriotism might be as an abstract ideal, was a delusion. Behind it lay a 'negative chiasm', in which the Judeocide stood as the unconditional event of the German past, barring the country from any recovery of a traditional national identity, with its own psychic and cultural forms. 'Did our specifically "irrational" tradition of Romanticism have to be so thoroughly destroyed by the bulldozers

Deficiencies of form

With reunification and the transfer of the capital to Berlin came possibilities of another kind of Germany, for which Bohrer had polemicized. For with them faded the intellectual nimbus of the old order. But if the arrival of the Berlin Republic marked the passage to a new situation, it was not one which Bohrer viewed in any spirit of complacent vindication. When Merkur took stock of the country in late 2006 with a book-length special issue '*On the Physiognomy of the Berlin Republic*', under the rubric, *Ein neues Deutschland?*—a virtuoso composition, containing essays on everything from ideology to politics, journalism to architecture, slums to managers, patriots to professors, legitimacy to diplomacy—Bohrer's editorial, 'The Aesthetics of the State Revisited', made clear how little he had relented.³⁷

Germany was now a sovereign nation once more; it had a proper capital; and globalization ruled out any retreat into the self-abasing niche of the past. These were welcome changes. But in many respects the lowering heritage of the Bonn era lived on. In Berlin itself, the new government quarter was for the most part a vacuous desolation, inviting mass tourism, redeemed only by the restoration of the Reichstag—even that banalized by fashionable bric-à-brac and political correctness, not to speak of the droning addresses delivered within it.³⁸ Alone had dignity the ensemble of Prussian classicism, at length recovered, extending east from the Brandenburg Gate to the Gendarmenmarkt. Nor had Berlin's return to the position of a national capital had any transformative effect on other German cities, or even aroused their interest: if anything, each had become more regional, the country more centrifugal, than ever. The feel-good patriotism of the World Cup of 2006, with its sea of bon enfant flag-waving youth, as vapid as it was vulgar, was the obverse of the lack of any serious statecraft at the helm of the republic, of which Merkel was only the latest dispiriting, institutionally determined, incarnation.

Missing in this order was any will to style. The expressive deficit of the Bonn Republic had not been overcome.

True independence of mind, Bohrer would subsequently remark, was to be found in those thinkers—Montaigne, Schlegel, Nietzsche—who replaced Sinnfragen with Formfragen,³⁹ a substitution that could be taken as the motto of his own work. But Sinn and Form are not so easily separated. Bohrer's critique of the deficiencies of the German state, both before and after the move to Berlin, could by its own logic never remain a purely formal matter, of aesthetics alone. From the beginning, his editorial interventions in *Merkur* had a substantive edge. A state that respected itself enough to develop a symbolic form was one that knew how to assert itself, where required, in the field of relations between states.

From his post in London, Bohrer had admired British resolve in the Falklands War, and he thereafter consistently backed Western military interventions, in the Balkans or the Middle East. The deficit of the German state was thus not just a matter of buildings or speeches, it was also one of arms. Bohrer was a scathing critic of Kohl's failure to join in Operation Desert Storm; advocated the dispatch of German ground troops to Yugoslavia; and handed Schröder a white feather over Iraq. With such belligerence has gone a shift of cultural reference. Paeschke subtitled *Merkur* 'A German Journal of European Thought', and kept his word—Gide, Eliot, Montale, Ortega, Russell appearing alongside his native eminences.

Few German intellectuals of his generation were as well equipped to maintain this tradition as Bohrer, whose contempt for the provincialism of Bonn and all it stood for was rooted in personal experience. Steeped in Anglo-French culture, after working in London he later lived much of the time in Paris, editing *Merkur* from afar. But by the turn of the century, a change had come over the journal under him.

The presence of Europe faded. Contributors, topics and arguments were now more insistently American. Bohrer had never been an enthusiast for the eu, his view of it close to a British scepticism—he liked to invoke the *Spectator*—he had long admired. Intellectual sources in the United States, however, were something new. The combination of a hawkish Aussenpolitik and multiplying signatures from the Heritage Foundation or Cato Institute can give the impression that a German version of us-style neo-conservatism has of late taken shape in *Merkur*.

Bohrer rejects any such classification.

If he is to be labelled at all, it should be as a 'neo-liberal' in the spirit, not of the IMF, but of Richard Rorty, at once patriot and ironist. That he cannot, in fact, be aligned with either kind of transatlantic import is clear not only from his more accurate self-description elsewhere as an 'anti-authoritarian, subjectivist liberal', but also the occasion that produced it, an essay on the fortieth anniversary of the student revolt in Germany. 'Eight Scenes from Sixty-Eight'—clipped reminiscences of that year: so many strobe-lit flashes of Dutschke and Krahll, Enzensberger and Adorno, Habermas and Ulrike Meinhof—is sometimes acerbic, but for the most part unabashedly lyrical in its memories of the intellectual and sensual awakening of that year: 'Who has not known those days and nights of psychological, and literal, masquerade and identity-switching, does not know what makes life exciting, to vary Talleyrand's phrase'.⁴⁰ Reitz's *Zweite Heimat* offered an unforgettable recreation of them.

The worst that could be said of 68ers was that they destroyed what was left of symbolic form in Germany. The best, that they were never Spiessers. If they left a residue of fanaticism, today that had perhaps become most conspicuous in root-and-branch denunciations of 68 by former participants in it. Bohrer had little time for such renegades.

He was not Daniel Bell: the antinomian held no fears for him.

vi. world power

Looking back on Paeschke's command at *Merkur*, Bohrer once remarked of it that though Schlegel's *Athenaeum* was a much more original journal than Wieland's *Teutsche Merkur*, it was the latter—which lasted so much longer—that marked its epoch; regularity and consistency requiring that eccentricity be curbed, if authority was to be gained. This was a lesson Paeschke had learnt. He himself, however, came out of the Romantic, not the Enlightenment tradition, and took some time to see it, before attempting to conjugate the two.⁴¹

As Bohrer's tenure moved towards its appointed end, the results of that effort were visible. In intention, at any rate, authority has increasingly materialized, in the shape of contributors from just those organs of opinion Bohrer had once castigated as the voices of a pious ennui: editors and columnists from *Die Zeit*, *Die Welt*, the *faz*, coming thick and fast in the pages of the journal. Here a genuinely neo-liberal front, excoriating the lame compromises of the Schröder-Merkel years, is on the attack, aggressively seeking to replace one 'paradigm' with another.

Flanking it, if at a slight angle, is the journal's theorist of geopolitics, Herfried Münkler, author of an ambitious body of writing on war and empire,⁴² whose recent essays in *Merkur* offer the most systematic prospectus for returning Germany, in the new century, to the theatre of *Weltpolitik*. The logic of the inter-state system of today, Münkler suggests, may best be illustrated by an Athenian fable to be found in Aristotle. In an assembly of beasts, the hares demanded equal rights for all animals; the lions replied, 'But where are your claws and teeth?', whereupon the proposal was rejected, and the hares withdrew to the back rows again.

Moral: for equal rights to obtain, there must be a reasonable equality of powers. In their reaction to the American lion's attack on Iraq, countries like France and Germany protested like so many hares, earning only leonine contempt. Even united, Europe could not itself become a lion overnight,

and should realize this. But what it could, and should, become is a continental fox in alliance with the lion, complementing—in Machiavelli's formula—the force of the one with the cunning of the other; in contemporary jargon, American hard power with European soft power. The loyalty of the fox to the lion must be beyond question, and each must overcome current resentment against the other—the lion feeling betrayed, the foxes humiliated, by what has happened in the Middle East.

But once good relations are restored, the fox has a special role to play in the cooperation between them, as a beast more alert than the lion to another, increasingly prominent species in the animal kingdom—rats, now multiplying, and spreading the plague of terror. Such rodents do not belong to the diet of lions; but foxes, which have their own—lesser, but still sharp—teeth and claws, devour them, and can halt their proliferation. That zoological duty will require of Europe, however, that it develop a will to fashion a world politics of its own—*ein eigener weltpolitischer Gestaltungswille*. The necessary self-assertion of Europe demands nothing less.⁴³

What of Germany? In contrast to the Second Reich and the Weimar Republic, both deeply insecure, and the rabid attempt to over-compensate such insecurity in the Third Reich, the Berlin Republic exhibits a new and warranted self-confidence. Post-war Germany for long sought to buy its way back into international respectability, simply with its cheque-book.

Kohl, helping to defray the costs of the Gulf War without participating in it, was the last episode in that inglorious process. Since his departure, Münkler argues, the Federal Republic has finally assumed its responsibilities as an outward-looking member of the European Union: dispatching its armed forces to the Balkans, Afghanistan and Congo, not in any selfish pursuit of its own interests, but for the common good, to protect others. Such is the appropriate role for a medium power, which must rely more on prestige and reputation than repression for its position in the world, and has naturally sought a permanent seat in the Security Council commensurate with its contribution to the operations of the un.⁴⁴ Yet Germany, politically integrated into the eu and militarily into nato, still relies too much on its economic weight for its role as a sovereign state in the world. It needs to diversify its portfolio of power, above all by recovering the ideological and cultural attraction it formerly possessed, becoming once again the *Kulturnation* und *Wissenschaftslandschaft* of old.

The attraction of the new Berlin as an international city, comparable to its radiance in Weimar days, will help. But soft power alone will not be enough. All Europe, and Germany with it, confronts resistances to the existing world order of capitalism, not from a China or India that are now sub-centres of it, but from the periphery of the system. There, terrorism remains the principal challenge to the post-heroic societies of the West, of which Germany is the deepest example. It would be naïve to think it could be defeated by mere economic aid or moral exhortation.⁴⁵ Propositions such as these, adjusting Prussian modes of thought to contemporary conditions, aim at making policy.

Münkler, no figure of the right but a frequenter of the spd, is listened to within today's Wilhelmstrasse, which has organized ambassadorial conclaves to discuss his ideas. German diplomats, he writes with satisfaction, are readier to play on the different keyboards of power he recommends than are, so far, politicians. Here is probably the closest interface between the

review and the state to be found in *Merkur*. The influence of a journal of ideas is never easy to measure. Bohrer's enterprise has certainly played a critical role in dethroning the comfortable left-liberalism of the postwar intellectual establishment. But its destructive capacity has not—or not yet—been equalled by an ability to construct a comparable new consensus. The kind of hegemony that a journal like *Le Débat* for a period achieved in France has been beyond it. In part, this has been a question of form: the essays in *Merkur*, closer to a still vigorous German tradition of *belles lettres*, remain less 'modern' than the more empirical, better documented, contributions to the French review. But it has also been a function of Bohrer's own distinctive handling of his office. In the tension between Schlegel and Wieland, although he would respect the goal of authority, his own higher value has always been idiosyncrasy—that is, originality, of which the strange cocktail of themes and positions he developed out of Romantic and Surrealist materials in his own texts, effervescent and potent enough by any measure, was the presiding example. Editorially, even in its late neo-liberal moods, *Merkur* always comprised contrary opinions, in the spirit of Paeschke's *Gegenwirkung*. But the underlying impulse was polarizing, not in his but in the avant-garde sense inaugurated by the *Athenaeum*. To Bohrer's credit, conventional authority was forfeited with it.

21 For a pungent version of this complaint from the chief editor of *Die Zeit*, see Josef Joffe, 'Was fehlt?', *Merkur* 689-690, September-October 2006.

22 Wolfgang Ienaghi, *The Seduction of Culture in German History*, Princeton 2006, p. 128.26 nlr 57

23 Schmitt's juridical influence is documented in Dirk van Laak, *Gespräche in der Sicherheit des Schweigens: Carl Schmitt in der politischen Geistesgeschichte der frühen Bundesrepublik*, Berlin 1993; and his wider intellectual impact in Jan-Werner Müller, *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought*, New Haven 2003, pp. 76ff, which, as its title indicates, extends beyond the German field itself.

24 Habermas: *Eine Art Schadensabwicklung*, Munich 1987; Wehler: *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit?*, Munich 1988.

25 Within a year of the Historikerstreit, there had appeared sociologist Claus Leggewie's knockabout tour through what he took to be the emergent forms of a new conservatism, *Der Geist steht rechts. Ausflüge in die Denkfabriken der Wende*, Berlin 1987. In this constellation, the most significant figure was Armin Mohler, secretary to Jünger and friend of Schmitt, famous as the author of *Die conservative Revolution in Deutschland, 1918-1932: Grundriss ihrer Weltanschauungen*, which had appeared in 1950, on whom see pp. 187-211.

26 'Kann keine Trauer sein', *Merkur* 367, December 1978, p. 1180: Paeschke took the title of this beautiful farewell to the journal he had edited from Gottfried Benn's last poem, written a few weeks before his death, published in *Merkur*.

27 'Vorbemerkung', in *Merkur. Gesamtregister für die Jahrgänge I-XXXII, 1947-1978*, Stuttgart 1986, p. x. The phrase comes from Burckhardt.

28 'Die Missverständene Rebellion', *Merkur* 238, January 1968.

29 'Surrealismus und Terror', *Merkur* 258, October 1969.

30 'Die ausverkauften Ideen', *Merkur* 365, October 1978.

31 'Der gefährliche Augenblick', *Merkur* 358, March 1978; themes developed in *Plötzlichkeit: zum Augenblick des ästhetischen Scheins*, Frankfurt 1981, of which there is an English translation, *Suddenness: on the Moment of Aesthetic Appearance*, New York 1994.

32 'Die Ästhetik des Staates', *Merkur* 423, January 1984.

33 'Die Unschuld an die Macht', *Merkur* 425, March 1984; *Merkur* 427, May 1984; *Merkur* 431, January 1985.

34 'Provinzialismus', *Merkur* 501, December 1990; *Merkur* 504, March 1991; *Merkur* 505, April 1991; *Merkur* 507, June 1991; *Merkur* 509, August 1991; *Merkur* 512, November 1991.

35 'Ästhetik und Politik sowie einige damit zusammenhängende Fragen', *Merkur* 451-452, September-October 1986.

36 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13 January 1990; for an English version of this text, see *New German Critique*, no. 52, Winter 1991. Its translator, Stephen Brockmann, would later describe Bohrer's arguments as 'a foundational discourse for the triumphal conservatism that emerged on the German right in the wake of reunification'. For this judgement, see his *Literature and German Reunification*, Cambridge 1999, p. 57.

37 'Die Ästhetik des Staates revisited', *Merkur* 689-690, September-October 2006. The title of the special number alludes, of course, ironically to the official daily of the former ddr.

38 For a mocking tour of the fixtures and fittings of the new Bundestag, and of the government district at large, see Gustav Seibt's deadly squib, 'Post aus Ozeanien', *Merkur* 689-690.

- 39 'Was heisst unabhängig denken?', *Merkur* 699, July 2007, p. 574.
- 40 'Acht Szenen Achtundsechzig', *Merkur* 708, May 2008, p. 419.
- 41 'Hans Paeschke und der Merkur. Erinnerung und Gegenwart', *Merkur* 510-511, September-October 1991.
- 42 For a penetrating critique of his major recent work, *Imperien*, which came out in 2005, see Benno Teschke, 'Empires by Analogy', nlr 40, July-August 2006.
- 43 Münkler, 'Die Selbstbehauptung Europas. Fabelhafte Überlegungen', *Merkur* 649, May 2003.
- 44 Münkler, 'Die selbstbewusste Mittelmacht. Aussenpolitik im souveränen Staat', *Merkur* 689-690, September-October 2006.
- 45 Münkler, 'Heroische und postheroische Gesellschaften', *Merkur* 700, August-September 2007.

Germany: Recommended Reading and Viewing

To get a feel for Germany past and present, consider these books and films:

Books: Non-Fiction

Germany: A New History (Schulze) is a one-volume compendium covering 2,000 years. Albert Speer's *Inside the Third Reich*, based on 1,200 manuscript pages, is an authoritative account of 1933 through 1945. *Stasiland: True Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall* (Funder) relays the secrets of the Stasi, the East German Ministry for State Security.

Germany and the Germans (Ardagh) is interesting if you'd like to know more about the 1990s reunification. For more on modern Germany, including cultural insights, pick up *Culture Shock!*

Germany (Lord), *When in Germany, Do as the Germans Do* (Flippo)

http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=When+in+Germany%2C+Do+as+the+Germans+Do+, and *Of German Ways* (Rippley).

Gourmets may want to grab *The Marling Menu-Master* for Germany.

Memoirs: Günter Grass stirred up controversy with his 2007 memoir, *Peeling the Onion*, which revealed he was a soldier in the dreaded Waffen-SS. *A Time of Gifts* (Fermor) tells of the author's walking tour of Europe — and Germany — in the 1930s. In *A Tramp Abroad*, Mark Twain recounts his amusing European adventures, including some in Germany.

Books: Fiction

Classics of German fiction include the works of Thomas Mann (*Buddenbrooks* and *The Magic Mountain*) and Hermann Hesse (*Narcissus and Goldmund* and *Siddhartha*).

Some of the best modern German literature has wrestled with the country's warmongering past. *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a classroom classic by Erich Maria Remarque, speaks with eloquence about World War I.

First published before World War II, *Address Unknown* (Kathrine Kressman Taylor) is a novella with a cautionary tone about what would follow.

In *The Tin Drum*, Günter Grass broke the post-WWII silence, creating a landmark work of literature in the process.

The Silent Angel is a complex love story set after the war (by Nobel Prize winner Heinrich Böll).

A book of science fiction and time travel, *1632* (Flint) sends West Virginians back to 17th-century Germany.

The Good German (Kanon), set during the postwar years, is part thriller, part historical fiction. *Berlin Noir* (Kerr) is filled with stories of secrets and crime.

For a recently written read, consider the following books, published since the mid-1990s.

Esther Freud, the daughter of artist Lucien Freud, set *Summer at Gaglow* during the Great War.

Stones from the River, the story of a dwarf in Nazi Germany, and *Floating in My Mother's Palm*, which takes place in a small town on the Rhine, have brought Ursula Hegi accolades.

Told by a sympathetic narrator, *The Reader* (Schlink) challenges readers to think, "What if my loved ones had been Nazis?"

Saints and Villains (Giardina) is the fictionalized account of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Protestant theologian who protested against Hitler's rise.

Marrying Mozart (Cowell) reveals a more intimate side of the famous composer.

Films

Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935) is infamous Nazi propaganda turned film classic. Orson Welles infuses *The Third Man* (1949, actually shot in a bombed-out and Soviet-occupied Vienna) with noir foreboding.

Cabaret (1972), a musical about the crazy Berlin scene in 1931 as the Nazis were rising to power, made Liza Minnelli a star.

The Tin Drum (1979) is based on Günter Grass' seminal novel (see above).

Other meditations on the war years — films filled with allegory and metaphor about the Nazis' rise to power — include *Mephisto* (1981) and Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1979).

Downfall (2004) tells of the Führer's final days.

Schindler's List (1993) — about a factory owner's inspirational efforts to save his Jewish employees from deportation to concentration camps — won Steven Spielberg the Best Picture and Best Director Oscars.

Shoah (1985) is a 9.5-hour Holocaust documentary that includes no wartime footage, only interviews with those who lived through it.

The well-respected *Das Boot* (1981) has a strong pacifist message, as do the films about the students who defied Hitler — and were ultimately sentenced to die: *The White Rose* (1982) and the beautiful, devastating *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* (2005).

But German film is not comprised of only dramatic, war-themed movies. Set in Berlin, *Wings of Desire* (1987) is Wim Wenders' best film, showing an angel who falls in love and falls to earth. *Amadeus* (1984) made Mozart into a flesh-and-blood man (who giggles), as did *Immortal Beloved* (1994) for Beethoven. *Run Lola Run* (1998) was an art-house phenomenon, combining action, love, and mobsters.

Jewish refugees settle in 1930s Kenya in *Nowhere in Africa* (2001). *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003) is a funny, poignant look at a son's struggle to re-create long-gone Eastern Europe for his mother, while the former GDR's harsh secrets are exposed in *The Lives of Others* (2006).

http://www.amazon.de/Lichtjahre-kurze-Geschichte-deutschen-Literatur/dp/3442736420/ref=pd_sim_sbs_b_2

<http://www.weltwoche.ch/ausgaben/2006-21/artikel-2006-21-so-ein-ich-und.html>

He ranks just behind Marcel Reich-Ranicki: With its unorthodox small literary history "Light Years" was Volker Weidermann, 36, this spring on the first attempt "second most famous literary critic in Germany" (newspaper). Of the Reich-Ranicki incidentally highly acclaimed book is on the bestseller lists for weeks and polarized as currently no other. Weidermann, literary editor of the Sunday newspaper, loves wild men, women and enterprising young talent with a lot of feeling.

That "light years" is a "brief history of German literature from 1945 to the present," as it is stated in the subtitle, is only partly true. Above all, it is a handout for nichtverkopfte contemporaries want the answers to two questions: Whom should we read? Whom shall we leave? It's amazing how many established authors and poets are missing in this book, for example, Brigitte Kronauer, Marlene

Streeruwitz, Arnold Stadler, Franzobel, Ralf Rothmann, Thomas Kling, Herta Müller, Hanns-Josef Ortheil. And how Weidemann for it with his favorites - among other Wolf Wondratschek, Thomas Bernhard, Maxim Biller, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Terézia Mora, Judith Hermann, Ingo Schulze, Luke Baerfuss - the pages filled. Therefore has happened in Germany immediately after the publication of the book what always happens when a radically subjective appeals to the public: the division into supporters and rejecters. Such review the books ex cathedra, that now seem "Gnostics," and those who passion to raise scale, as "Emphatiker" (Hubert Winkels). The Gnostics are the pure, the Emphatiker are sensuous, but naive. To the Gnostics is the majority of literary critics and academics who Emphatiker recruited mainly from younger critics and general readers.

Weidemann provides for the meaning of a literary work on criteria that are nightmares for Gnostics. Prompt the Frankfurter Rundschau responded alarmist: "Attention, attention: The whole body literary criticism takes over.» «How are the good and therefore necessary books?" asks Weidemann, "what is this person who wrote this book?" the particular Biographical drives around him, he declared that his 140 books chosen from their CVs. Academic recognition is not interested in it, the more the Human, All Too Human.

Mr. Weidemann, Wolf Biermann is offended by what you have written about him, even he changes the publisher. Was there a clarifying conversation? , not yet. This went as high here, first it was said that he was offended that I have written, it had become silent lately about him. The point was that he has not heard of the German Communist Party. When all the fuss has died down, I'll call him. To our common publisher will therefore probably not return unfortunately.

before "Fräuleinwunder" Judith Hermann, however you get on your knees and give even to not be able to describe how much you adore them for their two books. Has not to do with the fact that you belong to the same generation? Yeah, I've found myself again especially in the first book. My dreams, my happiness and my sorrow, my dream of life and of Berlin. Anything.

Are you the accusation embarrassed to be friends with an author, you beschwärmen unrestrained - Maxim Biller Do you know how small the so-called literary world? Perhaps 25 interesting critics, 15 interesting publishers, 100 interesting writer. Everyone knows everyone. Some like it, others less so. Virtually every living writer, I write about is personally known to me. Regardless, I must make clear, comprehensible sentences.

Thor Kunkel's novel "amplifier" They have highly praised in your newspaper, but left out in your book. Why? Straight from the young writers are missing a lot to the'm sorry. But you have limited space, and in many the next books will decide. ,

but why did you Arno Geiger omitted, although he "It's good to us" for his family saga received the prestigious German Book Prize? Nice that he received the book prize. I found the novel incredibly boring. I could write a thousand-page book, and people have been complaining that this or that is missing. A literary history is an interminable project.

Are you shocked by the huge reaction to your book? I'm excited. When is last so bitterly, seriously, angry and been involved arguing about literature?

did you write this book to your own taste, your personal reading pleasure. Some critics colleagues shocked this procedure. these are the last ones, who are contacted by the book. It is not written for experts, but for people who want to be guided, so that everything was in the last sixty years in the German written and well worth reading. ,

your employer, the BBC, announced your book have a controversy about triggered "as biographical, literary criticism as passionate today may be." the intensity of the debate also shows the deep unease among critics. Reader surveys and reports from publishers say that classical literature review plays virtually no role. You will not read, have no impact on the sale. Even the greatest artists in the steady Altkritikern know that new ways of promoting literature must be sought in order not to lose even more readers. It's about the difference between science and journalism. In a newspaper journalist has to write for readers. Not scientifically for professors and colleagues.

therefore it is no longer solely the work of about Ingeborg Bachmann or Günter Grass, the focus, but also the author or the author? point it was only because the work? There's no more public person than Günter Grass! Is there a more widely known than the story of the tragic death of Ingeborg Bachmann? Writers are always people public interest. If a reader bind the books of an author, he wants to know: What is a person who writes it?

Does it matter so that a critic must justify its decision not large in theory, but instead of passion praises or blames a book? A judgment must always be traceable. It is not enough simply to lower or raise the thumb. The reasons may lie in the language or history or what makes the text with the reader. But the reader needs a clear judgment at the end.

telling of the aged Gisela Elsner, who desires a young man, but learns in the hotel rooms that they have to pay for sex. From Macho Wolf Wondratschek, who shares with the film producer Bernd Eichinger a mistress, and how the two guys drinking all night after they killed himself. By Elfriede Jelinek, who has cut from their self-hate with a razor blade sheath. ? To which these compromising details Elfriede Jelinek tells of her self-mutilation in an interview the time - they obviously did not compromising it. Gisela Elsner's history dates back to the movie that you own, they adoring son has turned on them. And Wolf Wondratschek tells this story with his lover again and again with great pride. There is nothing compromising in these anecdotes. I'll tell you anything that the authors have not even made public. And because I think it is important to understand these people.

How should the group 47, this legendary writers association of German language will be judged today? In my opinion, the members of Group 47, which was also an instrument of power, much prevented. You are responsible for ensuring that the tradition after the Second World War has been capped, the connection to the Jewish-German narrative tradition. People like Andersch, judges and Boll have said early on that they could not do anything with these exiles. It has made a clean sweep, as radical as rarely before in the German literature. ,

it is noticeable that you will find many great writers who were unhappy. Drinkers or Lebensuntüchtige. Examples are Jörg Fauser, Hubert Fichte or Uwe Johnson. Do you have to be unhappy to produce good literature? No, no, of course not! But it is striking that biographies of

writers are almost never lucky biographies. And those who keep the world for happy, like that of Thomas Mann - children, loving wife, man of the world, the Nobel Prize, a novel success after another - but face to posterity as the inner terror of life dar.

writing many at all only because they are unhappy? I think there is often a feeling of a lack before. Something is missing, fortunately, something crucial. This often results necessary books. Not this write-school pro-sa-nonsense now produced all over the world. ,

the literature from the former GDR receives a lot of space in your book. Why? Here, the literature has played such an existential, fundamental, political, vital role, as it never was the case in Germany. That fascinated me.

Anyone ever experienced at a reading Christa Wolf, had "at least an inkling of what has been literature in the GDR," you write. What was it compared to the West? She had a tremendous importance, both politically and personally. The young state was - in contrast to the FRG - extremely interested in the return of the writer in exile. They had them - Anna Seghers, Arnold Zweig, Johannes R. Becher, Bertolt Brecht, even politically compromised as Hans Fallada and Gerhart Hauptmann - an important role in building the new socialist Germany is intended. This self-awareness that the authors of the powers conferred to the beginning, the state was later undoing. When there was the usual, that a small, upright poet with guitar - his name is Wolf Biermann - a state so deeply shaken that feels compelled auszubürgern him? In the West, it is hard to imagine what that meant a new book by Christa Wolf or a reading with her. That was life! Courage! Encouragement! For many, this was a matter of survival.

Yet you do not like Christa Wolf's books. Why? Do not it's not my world. To humorless, sorry about love, which is alien to me.

Without Günter Grass would be "the land of another," you write. What? A worse. One in which an important warning voice, the same is not too bad to announce the nuisance and to refer to morality, sense of history and responsibility. This man is a gift, whether you like it or not all of his books.

Hans Magnus Enzensberger is a guarantor of the intellectuals, but has not reached the mass reader. They write, "There is not really many book titles" that one associates with him. What you really think of him? inspires me his mental agility, this anti-Grass-gorgeous. A flying Robert, often ahead of his time. And even if he verrennt, he is more interesting than generations of longwall earth core.

With Heiner Müller, however, you go hard on. "Few dramas are so inaccessible to me ..." you write. cigars fog. Big German words. Gravitas voice. I'm sure I'm doing it wrong and his work, but his pieces are a mystery to me.

Frisch, however, you say, had "taught us to say I am." His greatest achievement are books like 'Stiller', 'I' or The trip to Beijing ", " Homo Faber ". You feel so close to him. This is such an ego and a knowledge and awareness flash. Fresh is the brother of the reader. That's what I always liked.

was recently in the FAZ, the Swiss literature could "no longer compete internationally," she was in crisis, there is no culture of debate and no important intellectuals. Is that really true? Crisis Culture is always in demand. As a Swiss, I would because I do not worry. There are great young talents like Luke Baerfuss, fantastic stylists as Peter Stamm, one of the best writers of the middle generation. There are Grossromanciers with mass success as Charles Lewinsky and the great men have Hugo Loetscher, Adolf Muschg and Peter von Matt. Viewed from the outside: Switzerland is a lucky country.

most Swiss writer but do not want to be such. You do not want to see her reduced to the National creations. Behind it a feeling of inferiority? No, that sounds like a great self-confidence. Which author sees himself like the first National reduced? The first home of the writer is always the language.

Peter Bichsel want him and his ilk as "writing German Authors in Switzerland" are referred to. In Berlin bear road signs that point to the seat of the German Parliament, the inscription: "Reichstag building, seat of the German Bundestag. " Highly accurate, unfortunately mistaken tourists still disoriented. Peter Bichsel has it covered very nice, but the term itself - at least outside of Switzerland -. Not prevail

Swiss reader moves currently "Melnitz" by Charles Lewinsky, the analysis of the history of the Jews in their own country. Do you know the book? Oh yes, and it was a surprise! From one to me until then completely unknown author such a light-footed, entertaining and accurate family novel is written there, in his reading, I learned so much about Switzerland, Swiss Jews and Swiss history as yet in any book before.

Ulrich Schmid, "ash man» promises to be a bestseller success. The interesting thing is that the NZZ journalist reveals how former cadre of East Germany in Ethiopia organized under the Marxist Mengistu as the Red Terror torture experts. Have you ever looked inside? I completely read the book and find the story sensational! So there is something far too rare in German literature: hard research, policy, cosmopolitanism, historical knowledge, true connoisseurship. Linguistically, the book comes across somewhat flowery and therefore forces the reader the moral of the story too offensive to.

Going to Austria. Many readers will find it difficult to access monomanischem Thomas Bernhard's work. For you it is, "The Greatest." There are existential books written intoxicating, breathless, the reader drifting through the power of language through books. They cover Austria and the world so long with his hatred and anger until you know that it is about love.

You're enthusiastic about WG Sebald, a German who spent most of his life in England. Why he has no audience in his home? Because he was geek. Only when Susan Sontag in the New York Times called the Nobel Prize for him, he was perceived here reluctantly. Who does not cooperate in the operation, does not matter. In Klagenfurt he was indeed bowled out. Unbelievable!

Bernhard Schlink reached with "The Reader" a million copies. They accuse him of "kitsch and a bit of history verschrobenes» next. Yeah, yeah, concentration camp guards are only human, and

often good, with which it has meant bad fate. And by reading we can be saved. I think it's cranky, yes.

Why is Peter Handke, who wrote great books, but Milosevic holds a hero and condones war of extermination of Serbs, so bonkers? How should I know? He has loose track since a long time has passed in a circle, as he thought voranzustürmen against the media, NATO, the West. Now he has become so deeply embedded in his circle running, that he no longer sees much.

Why do you have the title chosen "light years" for your book? There is meant time, in the sense that these literary epoch will shine for a long time. Quite contrary to the speculations of those critics who saw will dull the luster of German literature fifty years ago.

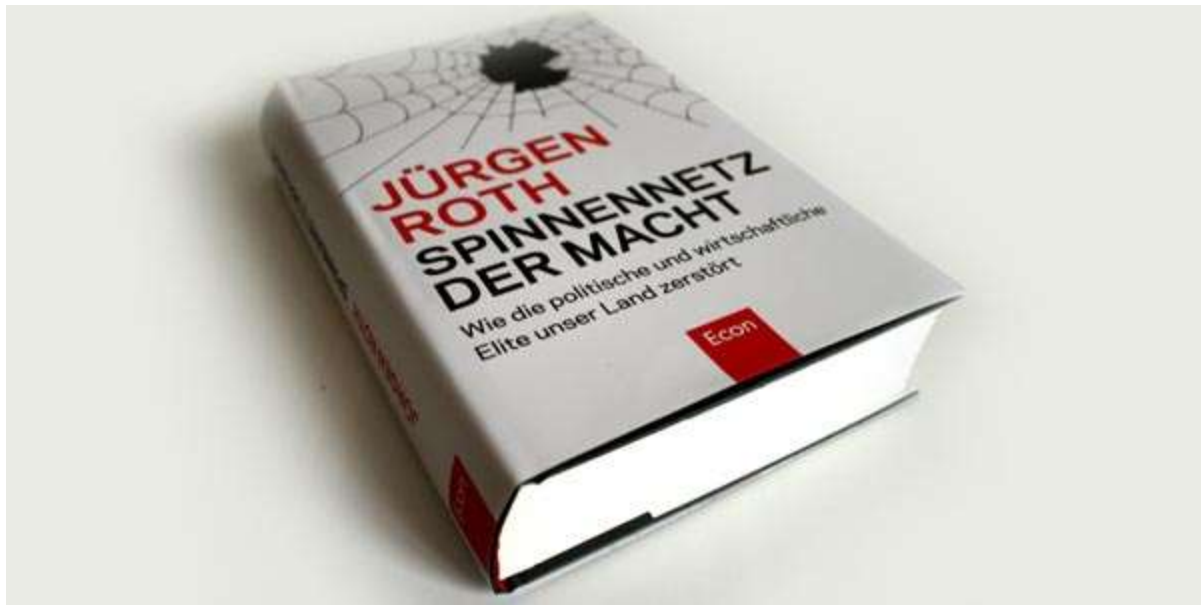
Volker Weidermann: light years. A brief history of German literature from 1945. Still Kiepenheuer & Malevich. 329 pp., £ 34.90

<http://www.faz.net/redaktion/volker-weidermann-11104442.html>

<http://www.theguardian.com/money/2011/mar/19/brits-buy-germans-rent>

Juergen Toth Webs of power - how the political and business elite is destroying our country
<http://www.l-iz.de/Bildung/B%C3%BCcher/2013/04/Spinnennetz-der-Macht-Juergen-Roth-Sachsensumpf-47379.html> seems to be a powerful critique of neo-liberalism and its effects on Germany. r

the networks behind the foundations, think tanks, chairs, clubs and links to the relevant politicians with the various groups in the country. In Bundestag there are continuous themes: extra earnings, political contributions, lobbying, and political careers in addition to political office. And of course the question of how to take their businesses and interest groups to influence policy? How do they change laws and even constitutions? And to what end? Where they ensure that controls and standards be lowered? Where they directly access the wealth of society? And what are the consequences? One of the consequences which makes Juergen Roth most afraid of from years of mining is all the protection mechanisms that should protect the citizen from being plundered and rights.



It was previously common practice in Germany to respect the separation of powers as a precious commodity and politics as the art of balancing. For they had indeed learned from the history of the Weimar Republic that social imbalances and a political process dominated by the extremes lead to disaster. However, with the justified by Milton Friedman Chicago School got what some people "free market economy" call today, a studied with theses content with action recipes, which, since pretty much 1973 a country is subject to the other the wild neoliberal instructions. The main key points of this theory. Deregulation and privatization is that it rather is about the weaknesses of the states and thus to circumvent new freedoms, laws and norms that undermine or equal to abolish, is exactly the hidden downside of what is now the Europeans experience as a plundering of their society. There are the instructions of the Chicago School, which countries like Greece, Spain, Italy, Cyprus ... are driven into the payment and inability to act. And that exactly this disempowerment of states of the police, judiciary, tax authorities is almost an invitation for the major clans of organized crime, the investigators know and the truly dedicated lawyers and judges in the country. You get to do it again and again. However, in general, the process is them if they want to bring these structures to the body, deprived, they are equal to happen then or equal to publicly discredited. But if the phraseology of the Chicago School thinking once determined, then you need about the not be surprised Windschnittigkeit most politicians today. Who falls off the grid, even in its own herd to outsiders. Roth's book takes the reader also to Hesse, Baden-Wuerttemberg and neighboring Saxony-Anhalt. He tells how the close involvement of banks and the political cost innocent citizens in the country's existence. He relates the case Mollath which is presently back, and where it originally was to try to show the money jacking a bank. But not the bank landed before the Kadi (although now it is clear how many German tax savers have put their money on the black border to Switzerland) but the complainant was admitted to the psychiatric ward.

<http://www.freitag.de/buch-der-woche/die-machtmaschine>

Power and coercion

'Occurred on May 31, 2010, Horst Köhler, the Office of the President back Until today there is speculation about the reasons for his resignation A now imagined book illuminates the' power unit 'policy and dedicated to Kohler's Office Task The thesis of the author... Germany's most powerful woman forced him to take this step. " [RP Online](#)

Theory and probability

"The book is called 'The Power Machine - Sex, Lies and Politics' (Heyne).Sasha has written Adamek, renowned political writer, filmmaker in the ARD. And he says Horst Koehler resigned because of Angela Merkel.Basis of his thesis is: The Chancellor lacked any respect for the highest office, it is their only means for the political purpose of personal power assertion. The chancellor's office commented on this allegation and the book on request stern.de not. However - there is much of this theory. " [Stern.de](#)

Bullying, inconspicuously

"The reason for the totally unexpected resignation Horst Koehler on May 31, 2010 date was the harsh criticism of the president because of his interview on the flight back from Afghanistan. Then he had said the army would provide in an emergency for 'free trade routes.' Yet now declared the renowned ARD journalist Sasha Adamek in his book 'The Power Machine - Sex, Lies and Politics': The Interview vortex was at most of the straw that broke the camel's back - because Kohler was bullied by the Chancellor downright out of office been. " [tz online](#)

Sex, lies and politics

"'The power machine' - this is the new book by Sascha Adamek He reveals what it says Jürgen Deppe.." [NDR Kultur](#)

Questions, questions

"Why did he do that? When Horst Köhler in May 2010 resigned the office of president, ask yourself the many. Now a book is published that attempts to give an answer. Has been written by the German journalist Sasha Adamek. The title 'Power Machine - Sex, Lies and Politics' makes people curious. " [Wochenblatt.de](#)

1 The power unit - an attempt to survey

"Soon it came to self-indulgence, which halted before neither private nor public officials before, and because everyone lived in their own way, were added daily to a thousand times wrong."

Exactly 500 years ago, the Florentine politician, diplomat and scholar Niccolò Machiavelli began writing down his thoughts on the seductions of power. He described how a rampant favoritism a breeding ground for all sorts of conspiracies and intrigues, and how the perfidious political means of personal slander acted in the networks of power for centuries: *"As for the honor, the men injured in the deepest dishonor their women , then the abuse of one's own person. "*

But Machiavelli was not a voyeur, his concern was to describe a social decay, which again it led to permanent reallocation of power from the Prince rule to rule by the people and for the princely rule soon. He lived in times of war, in which power relations often - and often in a violent way - changed. Nevertheless Machiavelli was, like many, despite repeated citations, not a "Machiavellian". He was not, as Frederick the Great wrote, the *"fiend, as it hardly bring forth hell"* .Machiavelli was a cool supporter of obsession with power and also their early critic and analyst.

He described what happens when power auswuchert freely and is not shared in the republican sense. Here, however, he distanced themselves from the Christian ethics and virtues derived from it. In his standard work of the Government Art *The Prince*, written and intended as a prince consultant, he formulates: *"A wise ruler can not and should not keep his word if he feels this enough to damage and the reasons for which he gave it, have become obsolete. If all good people, this advice would be worthless, but because they are not very good and break their word against you, so you need not to keep them."*

Machiavelli argues that a prince never lacks of good reasons, *"to gloss to break his word"*. Many might have come a long way in this manner. However, warns the medieval political advisor, need it to further not just virtuous character trait: *"Of course it is necessary that one understands sent to disguise this nature and in the adjustment and falsehood is a masterpiece. Because people are so stupid and so obey the impression of the moment, that he who comes behind them, always find those that can be deceiving."*

Half a millennium later, the same tactics of power are maintained. Why should the delicate game of sex, lies and politics have lost its meaning in modern popular government? Task independent observers and critics remains to reveal the diverse mechanisms of influencing the politicians to drive their decisions. It is not enough to ask whether Mr. Wulff of the CDU something could what Mr. Özdemir of the Greens also did something similar, and what Mr. Steinbrück have need of social democracy or Mr Westerwelle of the Free Democrats not only because they previously earned a fortune with contacts for the financial industry.

This book is about the power unit is to penetrate behind the fuzzy matrix of hidden lobbying and government policy. Because we live in a time in which, under the pretext of rescuing United States banks are funded with taxpayers' money, and in the pretext of saving Europe's largest and secular achievement of this continent is at stake: democracy.

So it's time to ask the question of power again. Not only the political power often seems remote and seldom uneasy, but it is one of their own species, that we can not escape it. No, the question of power concerned us from the terrible twos at first to the last breath. Power, so put it half a century ago, the philosopher Hannah Arendt, is where people not only act, but join with others to act by consensus. The power lies not in an individual but resulted from a number of people who authorized him to his action <have.

Power is conferred. Following this idea, the result of power among Germany's 80 million inhabitants, as well as under two newlyweds. Eventually we learn that even matters of love sometimes turn out to be issues of power. Is it any wonder then that we have a very ambivalent relationship to power? A study by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation research showed that 37 percent of Germans, that democracy "less good or bad works." Despite their skepticism more than 75 percent of Germans participate in decades but in federal elections. In a similar paradox we encounter in assessing the institution of marriage: 72 percent of Germans have very large or quite a lot of confidence in the marriage. It should not have escaped them that now about one in three marriages ends in divorce in Germany.

All abusive calls from the "German afraid," despite so we are a country of optimists. However, only 15 percent of respondents believe that the government does what the people expected. This

number can turn to several possible interpretations. Some will conclude that the political establishment have ruled once more from the people, the other will say that politicians despite regular elections stood resist populist temptations, and to do what they thought was reasonable. Again, I think this result for a proof of our desire for more democratic participation and also a testimony of our democratic maturity. We maintain a healthy distrust law.
Power and influence wealth

To date, the Max Weber's sociological theory of power is very widespread: *"power is every chance within a social relationship, to impose one's will even against resistance pursuit, no matter what that opportunity is based."*

Power has, in this sense, above all, who is able to impose its will against others, so to find majorities against others, even beyond good arguments. A hundred years ago, the power-handed "machine" far beyond the parliamentary political space beyond. Here Max Weber saw the extra-parliamentary power, such as the "American Bosses" against the professional politicians, quite positive. He is powerful because he creates values. Weber described the still very current phenomenon of "powerful political patrons or manager interested clubs" as part of a large machine *Machtma*: *"The bottom line is that this whole human apparatus - the machine," as it is called in the Anglo-Saxon countries, significantly - or, rather, those who direct it, provide the parliamentarians chess and quite largely impose their will are able. «*

It will not be spared to us to judge the question of power also to ourselves. We love to enjoy democracy in the sense of an 'easy listening'. Maybe we can find the policy only bearable as background noise. The supporters of the talk-show democracy are satisfied when we do not even make an attempt to analyze the savvy and complicated mechanism of exercising power, and instead content ourselves with the exchange of keywords.

Maybe we are a little reluctant because we could arrive at the finding itself to be part of this exercise of power. We might find, for example, that the power of a people was only able to grow as inappropriate in our eyes, because we have previously given him. That goes as well for the marital vows and for voting in federal elections. The philosopher Michel Foucault criticized the widespread perception to perceive power reflexively as an instrument of oppression or restriction: *"So my assumption of a repression to which it generally returns the mechanisms of power appears very inadequate and perhaps even dangerous."*

So we try to look disinterested power - as an influence wealth, as a physical state which characterizes the strength to exercise the people meet are able, for any reason whatsoever. Foucault tried the concept of power from the throat to rid the legitimation of power and refers to the variety of "power relations" that applies to look at it. He distinguishes between strategic relations, techniques of government and rule conditions.
To understand the power, so it is not helpful to continually draw their legitimacy into question. But it may be possible to measure by their mechanics? Foucault remains skeptical: *"Wherever there is power, power is exercised. No one is basically holders of power, and yet it is always exerted in a particular direction, with the one on the one side and the other on the other side, you do not know who she really, but you know who has not . "*

We make an attempt with the help of some naked figures from the government center of German politics: In total, about 18 000 German officers working in Berlin and Bonn ministries. In addition, 620 members of parliament with their academic average of two employees. This nearly 20 000 representatives of government and parliament are facing about 5,000 lobbyists. Statistically, So a lobbyist care of four representatives from politics and government. More than 400 lobbyists paid by corporations or associations also had to contribute a desk at the law since 2006 and officially even directly in the federal ministries.

But why we are already living in a corrupt republic? The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development was published recently in the 2010 comparative study "Life in Transition Survey II" to the question of how common are experiences of greasing or favors in different countries. Who has made in the past twelve months, an unofficial payment or presents a gift to the other person "like a"? At least ten percent of the respondents affirmed this specific question. So that more people in this country gave to real acts of corruption as for example the inhabitants of Georgia, Italy or Croatia. The advantage is an integral part of everyday life and thus also the power structure in Germany.

The Republic of minions

However, the consideration of the power machine is to go beyond the known mechanisms of lobbying. Who are the favorites, and who are the patrons? Quickly it will turn out that these roles are often interchangeable. It's about the diverse involvement of policy-makers, the rich and influential, and those that might just keep it. Usually results in a so-called win-win situation in which everyone expects something and have long been accustomed to much to get. At first glance, this seems to feudal system, because it excluding those who are not willing to participate or are not asked because of their lack of relevance.

Indeed, it is in the power of modern machine to a postfeudales system - a republic of minions - because it leveled and negated in doubt even the social origins. Anyone who works in the high politics and networked with the supposedly correct "decision-makers" has every chance to play a major role in political parties and associations and, finally, in the state without dynastic background. Unartigkeiten of "homo politicus"

Beautiful women and rich men belong in the 21st Century, at least in the self-proclaimed Christian West to the outer trappings of power. Their negligence often underestimated side effect is the political and media, sometimes even personal blackmail. They gave Europe recently, several spectacular resignations. The French fast-presidential candidate and IMF Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn lost office and dignity during one of his many sex affairs. The semidiktatorische Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi had to go because he thought the majority of his countrymen had many years to go through corruption and tax evasion, but not the alleged sex with an underage prostitute.

In Germany eliminated within less than two years, two unscheduled President from office, the second - Christian Wulff - fell over his private life change and a controversial deal with rich friends from the industry. Given these and many other Unartigkeiten the German "gay politicus" the question arises: What is driving politicians to missteps, and here's why deny the highly paid consultants and guardians of political discourse?

Narcissistic disorders in driving power

Heiko Kretschmer is one of the most important German political consultant and since its membership in the National Board of the Young Socialists, a political head. From his work with leading politicians of several parties, he knows the dangerous side effects of power. The "public effect" and the "personal confirmation" deceptive, as Kretschmer, an addiction potential. Especially after a forced resignation to show the degree of obsession with power:

"If I have to find that people whom I believed that they were no longer call beyond politics also something of friends, suddenly no longer interested in me just because I have stopped had with politics or perhaps even resign and now am still a leper, then the moments of very deep case in which the psychological dependency is very blatantly clear. "

The psychologist Hans-Joachim Maaz thinks that power itself has a tendency to compensate for mental deficits. Narcissistic disorders are to be found in his view, every leading politician. In his book "The narcissistic society," writes Maaz:

"The narcissist does everything to get the affirmation he needs to live.; effort, diligence, perfectionism, performance, appearance, manipulation, suggestions, gifts, bribes, promises, participation, leadership - everything, everything from only a need to be <this> loved ": out. Maaz it is not surprising that leaders stubbornly cling to their posts, while they were long overdue for a resignation in the eyes of the public.

"He needs to maintain this facade. When he opens it, it opens the door so to speak, to his deeper emotional hurt or need. "

The whole building interior defense was suddenly in danger and will therefore defended stubbornly. The spectrum of this obsession is correspondingly high. Enough of orgiastic pleasure during power up to the obsessive fear holding on to her *"The power is an absolute aphrodisiac"* , once said Henry Kissinger. The events surrounding Dominique Strauss-Kahn suggest to extend the analysis to a previously taboo combat zone: The power machine consists not only of a complex network of political and sometimes financial entanglements of politicians, they do not often touched their privacy.

Lies and covert lobbying so far marched hand in hand with the political history of the Federal Republic. That along the way but not Eros rarely interferes in the affairs, is in the evaluation of political involvement - at least in Germany - so far underestimated and largely taboo - from the legitimate respect for the privacy of top politicians out. On the other hand, there are those entanglements without public attention, and an attentive observer of the tabloid media would hardly escape that revelation particularly questionable circumstances of the private life of a politician is almost always done in close temporal proximity to major policy decisions that affect these politicians or for which he stands up with his person.

There is no doubt that with the private life in Germany long policy is made. But still can not maintain secrets politician? That is a question whose answer is no simple yes or no tolerate. On one side was and still is among journalists as a good custom to respect the privacy of politicians and not to make them the subject of reporting. However, some politicians and their advisors think they have to present themselves to the electorate through staged insight into her private life more human and closer to the people. You pay for the waiver of the protection of their privacy. For all other

politicians is: the political information outweighs the public interest must be reported also about private matters.

Politicians who spend their hand or their million dollar port job in the business have already secured the Minister or Chancellor's Office, nor can argue with the right to protect their private affairs. But as it is with a very private, intimate depths? As citizens, we should deal with our indulgent politicians, their vices and carelessness, because we want to be governed by people, not by machines. And who of us wanted to throw the first stone in this regard?

Caution appears appropriate where exactly these vices and carelessness are exploited to influence decision-making by politicians - positive, by providing them the stimuli for which they have a known weakness, or negatively, by being intimate with her or Privacy blackmailed. Both varieties are among the realities of modern power machinery. Long sit the politicians not only tabloid journalists in the neck, but also political opponents, by the way, in most cases, their own "party friends". The gathering of information, which can also sometimes affect the private and intimate life is long since the business of some governments and parties, tabloids, and not least of intelligence.

At election time is of the policy strategists usually an "enemy observation" installed to bring the strengths and weaknesses of the top candidates in experience. In this secretive world will only talk when it is opportune, if the message at the right time - is rumored as possible and mass distribution - in the sense of their clients. It is a dark, yet barely illuminated dimension of political power machine. To conceal or deny this dimension do would be to perpetuate undemocratic mechanisms. Covert influence exercised to personal and political blackmail not agree in principle with democracy. We'll still can not banish from the political life.

The history of Christian Wulff will occupy much space in this book, because it can apply to many phenomena of political power, and personal integration as archetypal. Moreover, it teaches us that not everything is corrupt in the legal sense, giving the outward appearance. The interests, which combined with Wulff's actions, such as his personal intervention of the Prime Minister of Lower Saxony in favor of the German insurance industry in the Federal Council were, at least not necessarily his own. The principle of "cui bono" should accompany us as we explore the engine room of power. It depends on a precise distinction between motives, interests, and the "desire for power", as Michel Foucault put it:

"Not necessarily, those who exercise the power, the interest of exercising them, those who have an interest in enforcing them, they do not exercise, and the desire for power drives between the power and the interest is still a unique game. (...) This game between desire, power and interest is still little known. "

The private is sometimes politically

"The personal is sometimes politically," says Kai Diekmann, editor of Bild newspaper and Germany's most influential journalist. In his vault sometime a dossier to have landed on the private life of Christian Wulff and his wife Bettina, what Diekmann however denies. The 598 days-long history of the couple Wulff at Bellevue Palace resembles a publicly listed dream quickly turned into a nightmare and in the end even led to their separation. It was the years of their inherent potential for blackmail, which made the history of Christian and Bettina Wulff politically relevant. This not only legal to understand potential blackmail weighed equally to the way extortable as to the possible

extortionists - people who are at highest places politically active as before. There are people living in relations of power, as Foucault would say.

Nico Fried wrote a few years ago in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* about the difficulty of developing standards by which reports from the private lives of politicians are justified: *"The argument that private must be reported if it has political consequences, is a crutch whose stability depends on how much you supported it. Ultimately, the decision lies with the journalists. It is his freedom. And his responsibility. Who comes to the conclusion, Private is politically relevant, must report it - can then also criticize."*

Sascha Adamek, in February 2013

<http://www.freitag.de/buch-der-woche/abgewirtschaftet/wieczorekleseprobe>

The State of Things

Insights Be it the crumbling of the middle class, social injustice, corruption or nepotism - it hooks somewhere apparently huge in the system. Experiment on a collection

<http://zeitfug.unity99.net/index.php?page=655>

<http://www.arvelle.de/magazin/2012/05/thomas-wieczorek-bringt-dem-burger-politik-nahe/>

<http://www.diebuengerlobby.de/thema/korruption/>

Earlier were "German" and "incorruptible" one and the same word. Bribe was somewhere far away in the East, and accordingly assumed *asbaksheesh* means. Nepotism and Amigo systems were - also usually limited at the community level - exception.

Today, almost every day is another German economy captain or politicians alleged corruption in the headlines. MPs bribery is allowed. Even at the university, students learn that unscrupulous greed 'rational' integrity and morality, however something is underexposed for wimps and that only important not to get caught. Formerly "as the train was on time," a household word. Even a five-minute delay was almost a scandal. And had earlier announced the news, most of the trains would fail because of snow and cold, so you would have believed in a *Karnevalsulk*.

Today a punctual train is pure coincidence - even a broken clock is hand-yes, like a corny joke says right twice a day. And privately run-down and dilapidated disaster sweatshops like the Berlin German railway subsidiary *SBahn* feel unable to guarantee binding in winter at all nor any trains. Probably would have even the operators of the first railway from Nuremberg to Fürth in December 1835 - almost 170 years ago! - Outrageous ass off about such stupid excuses.

Previously, people had a future and life perspective. "A promise is a promise" was an integral part of German guiding culture. Today one can only rely on the fact that you can rely on nothing more. What today is what people trust and which they base their whole life, is tomorrow's waste. Immediately after their adoption laws are "touched up". Solemnly promised projects turn out to be lies and election be postponed until the cows come home day. The compliance of the breach of promise pledge differs among the most fictitious pretext of "non-alternative forced kind."

All human dignity articles of the Basic Law and speeches of politicians despite it is increasingly clear that just not the economy is there for the people, but rather the reverse: long ago became man "to" human capital, to the annoying appendage and necessary evil of the economy, the ballast at the unrestrained greed. This applies to decisively, but certainly not the only economic but also the whole of human existence. The environment is created not by the ideas of the people, the question

is whether anyone feels comfortable, but whether it "pays", that uses the full and unrestrained amoral profit maximization.

So soft environmentally destructive recreation parks golf courses and residential complexes intact morbidly swanky office blocks. Popular swimming pools are bulldozed in favour of small town like shopping centres, hospitals, and from much needed luxury spa farms. That even these projects are usually not even needed and used by the rich and powerful, but almost exclusively as a systematic economic crime serve as the corrupt subsidy fraud and disguised as a government contract to handle tax coffers, completes the picture. The comprehensive galloping decadence of the Republic does not stop at politics.

"Dilettante dabblers, selfish, cold-hearted, corrupt and over-supplied" - so long appreciate not only more radical left-wing lunatics persecution, but more and more of the average citizen a our elected representatives. Accordingly, the number of non-voters increases constantly. Even in the general election with 29.8 percent in 2009 they presented the largest group of voters. CDU / CSU only came to 23.7 percent, the SPD in a ridiculous 19.8 percent. Even the two strongest parties together represent 43.5 percent so not even half of the citizens.

The journalist Jakob Augstein a nasty suspicion: "What the pollsters call 'asymmetric demobilization', is the norm of the campaign strategy.'s Policy is deliberately to ensure that as few people go to the polls - but from the opposite side even less"

Much more to the voting bloc must not shrink, however. Already makes the horror concept of the *legitimacy crisis* around. "In whose name speaks and what right have actually decides the policy for the people?", More and more citizens ask. No wonder that politicians anxious to literally grab any straw. As one can even find in the - because of their lack of incorporation or in the corrupt political system in the established hated - Pirate Party something positive. At least they have a "good effect on non-voters," praises SPD boss Sigmar Gabriel. The only thing missing that a similar argument against the prohibition of the NPD: "Better than Nazi voters did not vote."

Is our system so the *apocalypse*, the *Twilight of the Gods* before? Anyway, even warns the *manager magazine*: "The income of the German drift apart ever faster. Despite the upturn middle classes fear the social crash. The market economy is threatened by a crisis of legitimacy -. Having dangerous consequences "

1 PARASITIC "ELITES":

THE COMPANY STINKS FROM HER HEADS

DECADENCE THE DEBATE

It is virtually impossible to detect even halfway witty and zitierwürdige submissions of "Big Brother" Guido Westerwelle. But even the blindest hen sometimes finds a grain: This "recklessness in dealing with the power of thought worried me deeply," he wrote on 11February 2010 *World Online*. "Whoever promises the people effortless prosperity, invites to late Roman decadence." Well of course it is very brave of a failed FDP boss, that of all he brings the ratio of output and income into play. With his "Dekadenzalarm" but he is absolutely right. That he absurdly enough, this refers to the Hartz IV recipients, you might see a man in who has ever found yourself "minimum wage is pure DDR secreted without walls."

But decadence almost in the final stages of the Roman Empire is hard to see even with us the beginning of the third millennium: At that time there was a moral, morally, culturally and spiritually neglected, stinkfaule and perverse in every way and worthless filthy rich parasites caste - a nasty, purulent ulcer on the backside of Roman society. And some, even a lot of tradition on this Roman upper class, inevitably reminiscent of our caste, the rich and powerful of today.

COURT CASES IN CLASS SOCIETY

The seemingly clumsy Prejudice »The little one hangs, the Great allowed to run" proves on closer inspection, almost as a scientific analysis. Dodger, small shoplifters or sprayer wander sometimes in the construction, while the judiciary is even professional scammers and amateur pimp under bending of the Basic Law and the Penal Code set free - so that they, as in the case Hartz, pretty soon can ensure hooker supplies from Brazil, again. However, as yet no judge could be proved that he has benefited from it. Congratulations to the judges wives.

HARTZ

"That sounds like wheeling," John Roehrig was the *star* of the short literally trial before the Regional Court of Braunschweig against the namesake of the "poverty by law", the VW manager Peter Hartz. For infidelity and forbidden favor of a works council, he received "as agreed" two years probation and ridiculous for him 576 000 euro fine - »he remains free." Indeed, probation means yes only: Hartz must only settle if he impresses again soon a VW works council and feeds him his punishment Brazilian prostitutes.

According to the *Star* "it was done to him easily in court. After only two days of negotiations, the process was over, some questions were unsatisfactory explanations such as which of a possible complicity of the VW patriarch Ferdinand Piëch in the affair, "In plain language. Activity against these Geheimkungelei not even Chinese show trials as due process ? "Sure, not a few spectators in the courtroom 141 would have liked the ladies on the witness stand, with which Hartz amused while traveling or in a discreet apartment rented Braunschweig VW costs. This embarrassing chapter in the scandal was spared Hartz, which was part of the deal. Anyone who knows the statements of the whores that they gave the record before the prosecutor can guess that trial observers were brought here for their amusement. "

And again: "Had the whores occurred, the image of Hartz would be another ... To what higher interest he had a key to an apartment paid for by VW, which was used exclusively for discreet meetings with women from the milieu? Hartz, a seduced? Or is it also seducer? The answer to this is the process remain guilty. "

Not be light years between the rule of this kind lubricate comedies and rape those processes in which unscrupulous defender squeeze in porn fashion, the victims of the most perverse details? Well: prosecutors are *bound by instructions* , ultimately to the Minister of Justice and thus the Prime Minister, in whose hand is *de facto* their career.

MAN MAN

As well as for a huge part of our judicial scandal was typical of the Mannesmann process (2004 - 2006) before the District Court of Dusseldorf against parts of the Supervisory Board for breach of trust or aid because it five board members a total of DM 111 million (56.8 million euros)

"recognition awards" had wangled total, including DM 50 million (25.6 million euros), the chief executive Klaus Esser.

On 23 June 2004 asked the public prosecutor for the supervisory board chief Joachim Funk three years imprisonment, for Klaus Esser two and a half years. German Bank chief Josef Ackermann was two years IG Metall boss Klaus Zwickel 22 months as well as council chairman Jürgen Ladberg and personnel director Dietmar Droste one year each in prison. On 22 July 2004, however, were all accused - who would have thought in the metropolis coterie NRW? - Acquitted.

»How it's really no, what should the international think?" Probably thought the judges of the Supreme Court, there were 21 December 2005, the defendants guilty and very well made, the process to another Criminal Court in Düsseldorf. This is the Rhenish prosecutor and judge, however, itched very little: The second method was 29 November 2006 compared 5.8 million euro fine for the time being set with the consent of the prosecutor. »No acquittal second class, 'rejoiced FAZ. After fulfillment of the conditions provided the Trial Chamber on 5 February 2007 according to § 153 Code of Criminal Procedure, the process ceases.

KOHL

An investigation on suspicion of disloyalty to the detriment of his party questioned the Bonn public prosecutor in spring 2001 for a payment of DM 300 000 (153 387 euro) fine for low debt (!) Pursuant to § 153 a of the Code of Criminal Procedure. A process came naturally out of the question - what will the common herd of voters already the criminal machinations of the ruling caste? But otherwise it went - extramarital affairs or not - financially dazzling. Between 1999 and 2002 he collected from the media tycoon Leo Kirch, which he had enabling the private television market of 600 000 (306 775 EUR). But he had "must carry up to twelve personal conversations" with church year. By the way: At the time of rain money after all carbon sat still in the Bundestag.

MANFRED KANTHER

Manfred Kanther, former Minister of the Interior, master of law and order and clean man of the nation, received on 18 April 2007 by the Landgericht Wiesbaden 54 000 euro fine for breach of trust. An earlier sentenced to 18 months jail on parole and 25 000 euro fine had picked up the Supreme Court. Kanther had let the end of 1983 as the then General Secretary of the CDU, Hessen-approximately 20.8 million marks party assets deposited in Switzerland, to avoid the disclosure requirement. As part of the high criminal black money scandal of the Hessian CDU Kanther applies as the then State Chancellery Minister Franz Josef Jung as pawns in favor of the innocence of Lamb, Prime Minister Roland Koch. And yes both heaved later in the federal government, as a caricature of a young defense.

Zumwinkler

One of the most important and influential of his time German top managers, Deutsche Post CEO Klaus Zumwinkler received from the Landgericht Bochum on 26 January 2009 two years imprisonment - of course on probation - and one million euro fine. The shining example of German business administration junior had confessed to evading about 970 000 euros tax on its foundation in Liechtenstein zwischen 2002 and 2006. And in the judgment of the statute of limitations tax fraud was not even considered. How much of the criminal CEO must have deceived the public generally, can begin to develop on the basis of following his flying up from it "voluntarily" paid back nearly four million taxes, interest and fees.

Quite different than the criminals from the ruling caste judge our judges when it comes to the common people, so to those who work the entire wealth of the parasite class. Here is an example that perhaps for hundreds, if not thousands is: who was sitting innocently eight hundred eighty-eight days like a banana dictatorship behind bars must carry with us even the cost of his evidence of innocence itself. "Innocence? Costs 13 000 euros," etched in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Heribert Prantl, formerly self prosecutor and judge at the district court.

A classic case: An age of fifty, Berlin nurse sat innocently eight hundred eighty-eight days as a killer, heavy arsonist and insurance scammer behind bars. Supposedly they had the house where she lived with her father and her partner, lit with alcohol in order to collect the insurance.

"On the basis of a sloppy and false fire report of the state criminal office," said the former district court judge Heribert Prantl, they got the infamous Berlin Regional Court long live the "severity of the fault," attests. »Debt for the proof of innocence," Prantl stated further: "The innocent defendant resisted desperately, they moved heaven and earth - especially good fire experts. They plunged into debt, they begged and pleaded for help to research to check, she found specialists who helped her and debunked the report as trashy trashy opinion with scientific research. "

"On the basis of a sloppy and false fire report issued by Office of Criminal Investigation," as Prantl, you had just time "for life" given and found the "severity of the fault," the Berlin Landgericht Berlin. "After such a spell would normally not see freedom again - there is no parole after 15 years."

The Supreme Court made this Stümperspuk an end, and in the new negotiating dared the Court of Appeal, no new miscarriage of justice - so there was acquittal. But the Court of Appeal "was embarrassed not to convict an innocent man, but now activated the meticulousness, which was lacking in the examination of junk-report - it pushed for the costs to be reimbursed. The woman is sitting at 13067.98 euros and must bear the costs of the dispute over the costs. This is the price for their freedom. It is written between the lines of ... shameful decision. "

Shoplifters, dodgers and anti-war demonstrators in our land ever in jail, while for example a bribed elected officials can not be prosecuted because - you can hardly believe it - the unlimited bribes assumption is still allowed here.

Opinion : "reducing labor costs", "location factors go before social", "state-owned enterprises are profitable only through privatization" - politicians and radical market lobbyists, these and similar claims like as immutable "constraints" that for which there are no alternatives. But in "The demented Republic" says author Thomas Wiecek, that factors such as globalization are not god-given, but were only made by human hands. By these "constraints" but highest validity is given, it pushes the same benefits of the welfare state more and more marginalized. Thus, the gap between the few rich and many poor opens up more and more. The primary goal of the "elites" is the protecting and increasing their own wealth, while the common people should be held to the greatest possible distance from it. , the mass media play in this system, several important roles: firstly, they have the distraction. As long as the people get distracted by more or less convincingly staged "documentary" soaps and other substitutes for the good old circus freak show, hopefully she does not worry about the inequitable distribution of wealth. Is for the masses, meanwhile, according to Wiecek virtually no chance of being accepted into the circle of the wealthy - the only legal way

for social or financial advancement is a lottery win. And that the people may know: In a survey, how they could be fastest-rich, was the most frequently cited answer is "tax evasion". Really worth this way, but only for people of the caliber of former post-bosses Zumwinkel. People who can not afford the appropriate lawyers to contrast must expect severe penalties for their offenses. too, to bring about a social cleavage bearing the mass media at: Extreme individual cases as "Florida Rolf" are so often dragged out and described in full width, that the audience keeps them sooner or later inevitably for typical. As quickly gives the impression that all the unemployed are work-shy "social parasites".

To escape these parasites undeserved subsidies, citizens agree to agree quickly when a reduction in unemployment benefits is proposed. So fronts are artificially built: workers against the unemployed, career women to housewife, old people, the pension fund burden by denying their "socially acceptable early death" against rampaging, is in a coma drunken teenagers who to all day long with "killer games" for practice next school rampage. This split in ultimately irrelevant groups means that the population does not understand as a unit and, therefore, a common protest is less likely. Finally, the mass media actively support the spread of neo-liberal world view, not only by representatives of market-radical interest groups such as the INSM can occur or accept prefabricated posts critical of these groups - (Initiative for a New Social Market Economy) - disguised as a supposedly "independent experts". In other, seemingly harmless entertainment formats is the message of pure meritocracy, which has for losers nothing left, transferred if such gain in talent shows only those candidates who submit all the helpfulness of their competitors overboard and their will to win through to demonstrate self-degrading task. In theoretical equality of opportunity for all participants to come only a single candidate to benefit from the symbolic reward (which of course is also only an almost immoral adhesion contract).

All the others have gone to waste effort - and get in return for that they served the viewers amusement and have the transmitters the framework program for their commercials filled a penny. Journalist Thomas Wiecezorek decomposed into "The dumb Republic - How are the media, business and sell policies for fools "the rhetoric of politicians, business leaders and journalists. He uses a liquid and amusing writing style, the reader also maintains in the face of bitter topic impinging well with sarcasm and black humor.

Here makes Wiecezoreks past editor of the satirical magazine "Eulenspiegel" noticeable. The book thereby provides as some food for thought, as it demonstrates that not only tabloids and private channels contribute to the dumbing down, but also as "honorable" force media sometimes dark patches on the vest. however, presents "The dumb Republic" no solutions - the author has apparently written primarily the frustration of the soul. But at least he supports his statements with a rich source directory. To complain is at most that his reasoning altogether maybe a little too one-sided (and occasionally little argumentative) is advised because the citizen is presented as perfectly defenseless victim, who is in his position completely innocent and not defend themselves against exploitation through neoliberal bigwigs can.

As a result, there is sometimes a little impression of a conspiracy theory. - Which is irrefutable as such because every counter argument of course is part of the conspiracy , the book is relatively current, work on it but was apparently completed just before the current global financial crisis. Insofar as it does not refer to the very recent economic developments. Nevertheless, there

are also still plenty of politicians, the "constraints" refer exactly as it ever was supposed to make the necessary savings in the welfare system so that the public debt decreases. Especially in these times of crisis, but a fully functioning welfare state for many sufferers would certainly be more desirable than the introduction of "bad banks" or bailouts for struggling companies, which in the end still many thousands of workers will lose their jobs, while large shareholders to continue benefiting from high dividends allowed.

Conclusion : Although the title puts this might suggest offering "The dumb Republic" not a pure mockery of the uneducated, as occurs for example in books such as "Stupid Generation". Instead, it examines who fault is lack of information on citizens - and the answer is simple: The rich, who are afraid that the exploited, forced into poverty masses could take their fair share. Thus, the book is a well packaged as simply knit social criticism that will be presented snappy and clear polemical and very far left positioned without fear, appropriate forms of society such as communism, but by no means opposed to critical. Although some of the conclusions seem a little like the result of a conspiracy theory, but Thomas Wiczorek is the numerous quotations on which it is based, with an impressive bibliography. Provides interesting food for thought "The Republic dumb" all when it debunks many relationships in politics and media and warns against the machinations well camouflaged lobbyists. On top of that, the book presents a powerful plea for the return to the welfare state dar.

- See more at: <http://www.booklove.de/sachbuch/kultur-zeitgeschehen/die-verbloedete-republik.html#sthash.sPniSOC7.dpuf>

<http://www.nachdenkseiten.de/>

SDP

<http://www.nachdenkseiten.de/?p=11824>

Michael Lewis

Perhaps because they have such a gift for creating difficulties with non-Germans, the Germans have been on the receiving end of many scholarly attempts to understand their collective behaviour. In this vast and growing enterprise, a small book with a funny title towers over many larger, more ponderous ones. Published in 1984 by a distinguished anthropologist named Alan Dundes, *Life Is Like a Chicken Coop Ladder* set out to describe the German character through the stories that ordinary Germans liked to tell one another. Dundes specialized in folklore, and in German folklore, as he put it, "one finds an inordinate number of texts concerned with anality. Scheisse (shit), Dreck (dirt), Mist (manure), Arsch (ass).... Folksongs, folktales, proverbs, riddles, folk speech—all attest to the Germans' longstanding special interest in this area of human activity."

He then proceeded to pile up a shockingly high stack of evidence to support his theory. There's a popular German folk character called der Dukatenscheisser ("The Money Shitter"), who is commonly depicted crapping coins from his rear end. Europe's only museum devoted exclusively to toilets was built in Munich. The German word for "shit" performs a vast number of bizarre linguistic duties—for instance, a common German term of endearment was once "my little shit bag." The first thing Gutenberg sought to publish, after the Bible, was a laxative timetable he called a "Purgation-

Calendar." Then there are the astonishing number of anal German folk sayings: "As the fish lives in water, so does the shit stick to the asshole!" to select but one of the seemingly endless examples. Dundes caused a bit of a stir, for an anthropologist, by tracking this single low national character trait into the most important moments in German history. The fiercely scatological Martin Luther ("I am like ripe shit, and the world is a gigantic asshole," Luther once explained) had the idea that launched the Protestant Reformation while sitting on the john. Mozart's letters revealed a mind, as Dundes put it, whose "indulgence in fecal imagery may be virtually unmatched." One of Hitler's favorite words was Scheisskerl ("shithead"): he apparently used it to describe not only other people but himself as well.

After the war, Hitler's doctors told U.S. intelligence officers that their patient had devoted surprising energy to examining his own feces, and there was pretty strong evidence that one of his favorite things to do with women was to have them poop on him. Perhaps Hitler was so persuasive to Germans, Dundes suggested, because he shared their quintessential trait, a public abhorrence of filth that masked a private obsession. "The combination of clean and dirty: clean exterior-dirty interior, or clean form and dirty content—is very much a part of the German national character," he wrote.

The anthropologist confined himself mainly to a study of low German culture. (For those hoping to examine coprophilia in German high culture he recommended another book, by a pair of German scholars, entitled *The Call of Human Nature: The Role of Scatology in Modern German Literature*.) Still, it was hard to come away from his treatise without the strong sense that all Germans, high and low, were a bit different from you and me—a point he made in the introduction to the paperback version of his book. "The American wife of a German-born colleague confessed to me that she understood her husband much better after reading the book," he wrote. "Prior to that time, she had wrongly assumed that he must have some kind of peculiar psychological hang-up inasmuch as he insisted upon discussing at great length the state of his latest bowel movements."

The Hamburg red-light district had caught Dundes's eye because the locals made such a big deal of mud-wrestling. Naked women fought in a metaphorical ring of filth while the spectators wore plastic caps, a sort of head condom, to avoid being splattered. "Thus," wrote Dundes, "the audience can remain clean while enjoying dirt!" Germans longed to be near the shit, but not in it. This, as it turns out, was an excellent description of their role in the current financial crisis.

The Scheisse Hits the Fan

A week or so earlier, in Berlin, I had gone to see Germany's deputy minister of finance, a 44-year-old career government official named Jörg Asmussen. The Germans are now in possession of the only Finance Ministry in the big-time developed world whose leaders don't need to worry whether their economy will collapse the moment investors stop buying their bonds. As unemployment in Greece climbs to the highest on record (16.2 percent at last count), it falls in Germany to 20-year lows (6.9 percent). Germany appears to have experienced a financial crisis without economic consequences.

They'd donned head condoms in the presence of their bankers, and so they had avoided being splattered by their mud. As a result, for the past year or so the financial markets have been trying and failing to get a bead on the German people: they can probably afford to pay off the debts of their fellow Europeans, but will they actually do it? Are they now Europeans, or are they still Germans? Any utterance or gesture by any German official anywhere near this decision for the past

18 months has been a market-moving headline, and there have been plenty, most of them echoing German public opinion, and expressing incomprehension and outrage that other peoples can behave so irresponsibly. Asmussen is one of the Germans now being obsessively watched. He and his boss, Wolfgang Schäuble, are the two German officials present in every conversation between the German government and the deadbeats.

The Finance Ministry, built in the mid-1930s, is a monument to both the Nazis' ambition and their taste. A faceless butte, it is so big that if you circle it in the wrong direction it can take you 20 minutes to find the front door. I circle it in the wrong direction, then sweat and huff to make up for lost time, all the while wondering if provincial Nazis in from the sticks had had the same experience, wandering outside these forbidding stone walls and trying to figure out how to get in. At length I find a familiar-looking courtyard: the only difference between it and famous old photographs of it is that Hitler is no longer marching in and out of the front door, and the statues of eagles perched atop swastikas have been removed. "It was built for Göring's Air Ministry," says the waiting Finance Ministry public-relations man, who is, oddly enough, French. "You can tell from the cheerful architecture." He then explains that the building is so big because Hermann Göring wanted to be able to land planes on its roof.

I have arrived about three minutes late, but the German deputy minister of finance runs a full five minutes later, which, I will learn, is viewed by Germans almost as a felony. He apologizes a lot more than he needs to for the delay. He wears the slender-framed spectacles of a German film director, and is extremely fit and bald, but by choice rather than circumstance. Extremely fit white men who shave their heads are making a statement, in my experience of them. "I don't need body fat and I don't need hair," they seem to be saying, while also implying that anyone who does is a wuss. The deputy finance minister even laughs just as all extremely fit men with shaved heads should laugh, if they want to remain in character. Instead of opening his mouth to allow the air to pass he purses his lips and snorts the sound out through his nose. He may need laughter as much as other men, but he needs less air to laugh with. His desk is a template of self-discipline. It is alive with implied activity—legal pads, Post-it notes, manila folders—but every single object on it is perfectly aligned with all the others, and with the edges of the desk. Every angle is precisely 90 degrees. But the most striking optional décor is a big white sign on the wall beside the desk. It's in German but translates easily back into the original English:

the secret of success is to understand the point of view of others.
—henry ford

This surprises me. It's not at all what an extremely fit bald man should have as his mantra. It's soft. The deputy finance minister further disturbs my wild assumptions about him by speaking clearly, even recklessly, about subjects most finance ministers believe it is their job to obscure. He offers up, without much prompting, that he has just finished reading the latest unpublished report by I.M.F. investigators on the progress made by the Greek government in reforming itself. "They have not sufficiently implemented the measures they have promised to implement," he says simply. "And they have a massive problem still with revenue collection. Not with the tax law itself.

It's the collection which needs to be overhauled."
Greeks are still refusing to pay their taxes, in other words. But it is only one of many Greek sins. "They are also having a problem with the structural reform. Their labour market is changing—but

not as fast as it needs to," he continues. "Due to the developments in the last 10 years, a similar job in Germany pays 55,000 euros. In Greece it is 70,000." To get around pay restraints in the calendar year the Greek government simply paid employees a 13th and even 14th monthly salary—months that didn't exist. "There needs to be a change of the relationship between people and the government," he continues. "It is not a task that can be done in three months. You need time." He couldn't put it more bluntly: if the Greeks and the Germans are to coexist in a currency union, the Greeks need to change who they are.

This is unlikely to happen soon enough to matter. The Greeks not only have massive debts but are still running big deficits. Trapped by an artificially strong currency, they cannot turn these deficits into surpluses, even if they do everything that outsiders ask them to do. Their exports, priced in euros, remain expensive. The German government wants the Greeks to slash the size of their government, but that will also slow economic growth and reduce tax revenues. And so one of two things must happen. Either Germans must agree to a new system in which they would be fiscally integrated with other European countries as Indiana is integrated with Mississippi: the tax dollars of ordinary Germans would go into a common coffer and be used to pay for the lifestyle of ordinary Greeks. Or the Greeks (and probably, eventually, every non-German) must introduce "structural reform," a euphemism for magically and radically transforming themselves into a people as efficient and productive as the Germans. The first solution is pleasant for Greeks but painful for Germans.

The second solution is pleasant for Germans but painful, even suicidal, for Greeks.

The only economically plausible scenario is that Germans, with a bit of help from a rapidly shrinking population of solvent European countries, suck it up, work harder, and pay for everyone else. But what is economically plausible appears to be politically unacceptable. The German people all know at least one fact about the euro: that before they agreed to trade in their deutsche marks their leaders promised them, explicitly, they would never be required to bail out other countries. That rule was created with the founding of the European Central Bank (E.C.B.)—and was violated a year ago. The German public is every day more upset by the violation—so upset that Chancellor Angela Merkel, who has a reputation for reading the public mood, hasn't even bothered to try to go before the German people to persuade them that it might be in their interests to help the Greeks.

That is why Europe's money problems feel not just problematic but intractable. It's why Greeks are now mailing bombs to Merkel, and thugs in Berlin are hurling stones through the window of the Greek consulate. And it's why European leaders have done nothing but delay the inevitable reckoning, by scrambling every few months to find cash to plug the ever growing economic holes in Greece and Ireland and Portugal and praying that even bigger and more alarming holes in Spain, Italy, and even France refrain from revealing themselves.

Until now the European Central Bank, in Frankfurt, has been the main source of this cash. The E.C.B. was designed to behave with the same discipline as the German Bundesbank, but it has morphed into something very different. Since the start of the financial crisis it has bought, outright, something like \$80 billion of Greek and Irish and Portuguese government bonds, and lent another \$450 billion or so to various European governments and European banks, accepting virtually any collateral, including Greek government bonds. But the E.C.B. has a rule—and the Germans think the rule very important—that they cannot accept as collateral bonds classified by the U.S. ratings agencies as in default. Given that they once had a rule against buying bonds outright in the open market, and another rule against government bailouts, it's a little odd that they have gotten so hung up on this

technicality. But they have. If Greece defaults on its debt, the E.C.B. will not only lose a pile on its holdings of Greek bonds but must return the bonds to the European banks, and the European banks must fork over \$450 billion in cash. The E.C.B. itself might face insolvency, which would mean turning for funds to its solvent member governments, led by Germany. (The senior official at the Bundesbank told me they already have thought about how to deal with the request. "We have 3,400 tons of gold," he said. "We are the only country that has not sold its original allotment from the [late 1940s]. So we are covered to some extent.") The bigger problem with a Greek default is that it might well force other European countries and their banks into default. At the very least it would create panic and confusion in the market for both sovereign and bank debt, at a time when a lot of banks and at least two big European debt-ridden countries, Italy and Spain, cannot afford panic and confusion.

At the bottom of this unholy mess, from the point of view of the German Finance Ministry, is the unwillingness, or inability, of the Greeks to change their behaviour.

That was what the currency union always implied: entire peoples had to change their ways of life. Conceived as a tool for integrating Germany into Europe, and preventing Germans from dominating others, it has become the opposite. For better or for worse, the Germans now own Europe. If the rest of Europe is to continue to enjoy the benefits of what is essentially a German currency, they need to become more German. And so, once again, all sorts of people who would rather not think about what it means to be "German" are compelled to do so.

Jörg Asmussen offers the first hint of an answer—in his personal behaviour. He is a type familiar in Germany but absolutely freakish in Greece—or for that matter the United States: a keenly intelligent, highly ambitious civil servant who has no other desire but to serve his country. His sparkling curriculum vitae is missing a line that would be found on the résumés of men in his position most anywhere else in the world—the line where he leaves government service for Goldman Sachs to cash out. When I asked another prominent German civil servant why he hadn't taken time out of public service to make his fortune working for some bank, the way every American civil servant who is anywhere near finance seems to want to do, his expression changed to alarm. "But I could never do this," he said. "It would be illoyal!"

Asmussen agrees and then addresses the German question more directly. The curious thing about the eruption of cheap and indiscriminate lending of money during the past decade was the different effects it had from country to country. Every developed country was subjected to more or less the same temptation, but no two countries responded in precisely the same way. The rest of Europe, in effect, used Germany's credit rating to indulge its material desires. They borrowed as cheaply as Germans could to buy stuff they couldn't afford. Given the chance to take something for nothing, the German people alone simply ignored the offer. "There was no credit boom in Germany," says Asmussen. "Real-estate prices were completely flat. There was no borrowing for consumption. Because this behavior is rather alien to Germans. Germans save whenever possible. This is deeply in German genes. Perhaps a leftover of the collective memory of the Great Depression and the hyperinflation of the 1920s." The German government was equally prudent because, he went on, "there is a consensus among the different parties about this: if you're not adhering to fiscal responsibility, you have no chance in elections, because the people are that way."

In that moment of temptation, Germany became something like a mirror image of Iceland and Ireland and Greece and, for that matter, the United States. Other countries used foreign money to fuel various forms of insanity. The Germans, through their bankers, used their own money to enable foreigners to behave insanely.

This is what makes the German case so peculiar. If they had been merely the only big, developed nation with decent financial morals, they would present one sort of picture, of simple rectitude. But they had done something far more peculiar: during the boom German bankers had gone out of their way to get dirty. They lent money to American subprime borrowers, to Irish real-estate barons, to Icelandic banking tycoons to do things that no German would ever do. The German losses are still being toted up, but at last count they stand at \$21 billion in the Icelandic banks, \$100 billion in Irish banks, \$60 billion in various U.S. subprime-backed bonds, and some yet-to-be-determined amount in Greek bonds. The only financial disaster in the last decade German bankers appear to have missed was investing with Bernie Madoff. (Perhaps the only advantage to the German financial system of having no Jews.) In their own country, however, these seemingly crazed bankers behaved with restraint. The German people did not allow them to behave otherwise. It was another case of clean on the outside, dirty on the inside. The German banks that wanted to get a little dirty needed to go abroad to do it.

About this the deputy finance minister has not that much to say. He continues to wonder how a real-estate crisis in Florida could end with all these losses in Germany.

A German economist named Henrik Enderlein, who teaches at the Hertie School of Governance, in Berlin, has described the radical change that occurred in German banks beginning about 2003. In a paper in progress, Enderlein points out that "many observers initially believed German banks would be relatively less exposed to the crisis. The contrary turned out to be the case. German banks ended up being among the most severely affected in continental Europe and this despite relatively favorable economic conditions." Everyone thought that German bankers were more conservative, and more isolated from the outside world, than, say, the French. And it wasn't true. "There had never been any innovation in German banking," says Enderlein. "You gave money to some company, and the company paid you back. They went [virtually overnight] from this to being American. And they weren't any good at it."

What Germans did with money between 2003 and 2008 would never have been possible within Germany, as there was no one to take the other side of the many deals they did which made no sense. They lost massive sums, in everything they touched. Indeed, one view of the European debt crisis—the Greek street view—is that it is an elaborate attempt by the German government on behalf of its banks to get their money back without calling attention to what they are up to. The German government gives money to the European Union rescue fund so that it can give money to the Irish government so that the Irish government can give money to Irish banks so the Irish banks can repay their loans to the German banks. "They are playing billiards," says Enderlein. "The easier way to do it would be to give German money to the German banks and let the Irish banks fail." Why they don't simply do this is a question worth trying to answer.

The 20-minute walk from the German Finance Ministry to the office of the chairman of Commerzbank, one of Germany's two giant private banks, is punctuated by officially sanctioned memories: the new Holocaust Memorial, two and a half times the acreage occupied by the U.S. Embassy; the new street beside it, called Hannah Arendt Street; the signs pointing to Berlin's new

Jewish Museum; the park that contains the Berlin Zoo, where, after spending decades denying they had ever mistreated Jews, they have newly installed, on the Antelope House, a plaque acknowledging their Nazi-era expropriation of shares in the zoo owned by Jews. Along the way you also pass Hitler's bunker, but you'd never know it was there, as it has been paved over for a parking lot, and the small plaque that commemorates it is well hidden.

The streets of Berlin can feel like an elaborate shrine to German guilt. It's as if the Germans have been required to accept that they will always play the villain. Hardly anyone still alive is responsible for what happened: now everyone is. But when everyone is guilty, no one is.

At any rate, if some Martian landed on the streets of Berlin knowing nothing of its history, he might wonder: who are these people called "the Jews" and how did they come to run this place? But there are no Jews in Germany, or not many. "They never see Jews," says Gary Smith, the director of the American Academy of Berlin. "Jews are unreal to them. When they think of Jews they think of victims." The farther away the German people get from their victims, the more conspicuously they commemorate them. Of course, no German in his right mind actually wants to sit around remembering the terrible crimes committed by his ancestors—and there are signs, including the memorials, that they are finding ways to move on. A good friend of mine, a Jew whose family was driven out of Germany in the 1930s, recently visited a German consulate to apply for a passport. He already held one European passport, but he worried that the European Union might one day fall apart, and he wanted access to Germany, just in case. The German official in charge—an Aryan out of central casting, wearing a Teutonic vest—handed him a copy of a pamphlet titled *A Jew's Life in Modern Germany*.

"Would you mind if we take a picture in front of the flag?" he asked my friend after processing his passport application.

My friend stared at the German flag. "What's this for?" he asked. "Our Web site," said the German official, then added that the German government hoped to post the photo with a sign that read: this man is the descendant of holocaust survivors and he has decided to return to germany.

Deutschland Unter Alles

Commerzbank was the first private bank that the German government had to rescue during the financial crisis, with an injection of \$25 billion, but that's not why it had caught my attention. I'd been walking around Frankfurt one night with a German financier when I noticed the Commerzbank building on the skyline. There are strict limits on building heights in Germany, but Frankfurt allows exceptions. The Commerzbank Tower is 53 stories high and unusually shaped: it looks like a giant throne. The top of the building, the arms of the throne, looks more decorative than useful. The interesting thing, said a friend, who visited often, was a room at the top, peering down over Frankfurt. It was a men's bathroom. Commerzbank executives had taken him up to the top to show him how, in full view of the world below, he could urinate on Deutsche Bank. And if he sat in the stall with the door open ...

The bank's chairman, Klaus-Peter Müller, actually works in Berlin inside another very German kind of place. His office is attached to the side of the Brandenburg Gate. The Berlin Wall once ran, roughly speaking, right through the middle of it. One side of his building was once a field of fire for East German border guards, the other a backdrop for Ronald Reagan's famous speech. ("Mr. Gorbachev,

open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!") Looking at it you would never guess any of this. "After the wall came down we were offered the chance to buy [this building] back," says Müller. "It had been ours before the war. But the condition was that we had to put everything back exactly the way it was. It all had to be hand-fabricated." He points out the seemingly antique brass doorknobs and the seemingly antique windows. "Do not ask me what it cost," the bank chairman says, and laughs. Across Germany, in the past 20 years or so, town centers completely destroyed by bombs in World War II have been restored, stone by stone. If the trend continues, Germany will one day appear as if nothing terrible ever happened in it, when everything terrible happened in it. He then offers me the same survey of German banking that I will hear from half a dozen others. German banks are not, like American banks, mainly private enterprises. Most are either explicitly state-backed "lands banks" or small savings co-ops. Commerzbank, Dresdner Bank, and Deutsche Bank, all founded in the 1870s, were the only three big private German banks. In 2008, Commerzbank bought Dresdner; as both turned out to be loaded with toxic assets, the merged bank needed to be rescued by the German government. "We are not a prop-trading nation," he says, getting to the nub of where German banks went so wildly wrong. "Why should you pay \$20 million to a 32-year-old trader? He uses the office space, the I.T., the business card with a first-class name on it. If I take the business card away from that guy he would probably sell hot dogs." He is the German equivalent of the head of Bank of America, or Citigroup, and he is actively hostile to the idea that bankers should make huge sums of money.

In the bargain, he tells me why the current financial crisis has left so unsettled the German banker's view of the financial universe. In the early 1970s, after he started at Commerzbank, the bank opened the first New York branch of any German bank, and he went to work in it. He mists up a bit when he tells stories about the Americans he did business with back then: in one story an American investment banker who had inadvertently shut him out of a deal hunts him down and hands him an envelope with 75 grand in it, because he hadn't meant for the German bank to get stiffed. "You have to understand," he says emphatically, "this is where I get my view of Americans." In the past few years, he adds, that view has changed. "How much did you lose?" I ask. "I don't want to tell you," he says.

He laughs and then continues. "For 40 years we didn't lose a penny on anything with a triple-A rating," he says. "We stopped building the portfolio in subprime in 2006. I had the idea that there was something wrong with your market." He pauses. "I was in the belief that the best supervised of all banking systems was in New York. To me the Fed and the S.E.C. were second to none. I did not believe that there would be e-mail traffic between investment bankers saying that they were selling ... " He pauses and decides he shouldn't say "shit." "Dirt," he says instead. "This is by far my biggest professional disappointment. I was in a much too positive way U.S.-biased. I had a set of beliefs about U.S. values."

The global financial system may exist to bring borrowers and lenders together, but it has become over the past few decades something else too: a tool for maximizing the number of encounters between the strong and the weak, so that one might exploit the other. Extremely smart traders inside Wall Street investment banks devise deeply unfair, diabolically complicated bets, and then send their sales forces out to scour the world for some idiot who will take the other side of those bets. During the boom years a wildly disproportionate number of those idiots were in Germany. As a

reporter for Bloomberg News in Frankfurt, named Aaron Kirchfeld, put it to me, "You'd talk to a New York investment banker, and they'd say, 'No one is going to buy this crap. Oh. Wait. The Landesbanks will!' " When Morgan Stanley designed extremely complicated credit-default swaps all but certain to fail so that their own proprietary traders could bet against them, the main buyers were German. When Goldman Sachs helped the New York hedge-fund manager John Paulson design a bond to bet against—a bond that Paulson hoped would fail—the buyer on the other side was a German bank called IKB. IKB, along with another famous fool at the Wall Street poker table called WestLB, is based in Düsseldorf—which is why, when you asked a smart Wall Street bond trader who was buying all this crap during the boom, he might well say, simply, "Stupid Germans in Düsseldorf."

The drive from Berlin to Düsseldorf takes longer than it should. For long stretches the highway is choked with cars and trucks. A German traffic jam is a peculiar sight: no one honks; no one switches lanes searching for some small, illusory advantage; all trucks remain in the right-hand lane, where they are required to be. The spectacle, sparkling Audis and Mercedeses in the left lane, and immaculate trucks neatly rowed up in the right lane, is almost a pleasure to watch. Because everyone in it obeys the rules, and believes that everyone else will obey them, too, it moves as fast as it can, given the circumstances. But the pretty young German woman behind the wheel of our car doesn't take any pleasure in it. Charlotte huffs and groans at the sight of brake lights stretching into the distance. "I hate being stuck in traffic," she says apologetically.

She pulls from her bag the German edition of Alan Dundes's book, the title of which translates as *You Lick Mine First*. I ask her about it. There is a common German expression, she explains, which translates directly as "Lick my ass." To this hearty salutation the common reply is "You lick mine first!" "Everyone will understand this title," she says. "But this book, I don't know about this."

The last time I'd been in Germany for more than a few days was when I was 17 years old. I traveled across the country with two friends, a bike, a German phrase book, and a German love song taught to me by an American woman of German descent. So few people spoke English that it was better to deploy whatever German came to hand—which usually meant the love song. And so I assumed on this trip I would need an interpreter. I didn't appreciate how much the Germans had been boning up on their English. The entire population seems to have taken a total-immersion Berlitz course in the last few decades. And on Planet Money, even in Germany, English is the official language. It's the working language used for all meetings inside the European Central Bank, even though the E.C.B. is in Germany and the only E.C.B. country in which English is arguably the native tongue is Ireland.

At any rate, through a friend of a friend of a friend I'd landed Charlotte, a sweet-natured, keenly intelligent woman in her 20s who was also shockingly steely—how many sweet-natured young women can say "Lick my ass" without blushing? She spoke seven languages, including Chinese and Polish, and was finishing up her master's degree in Intercultural Misunderstanding, which just has to be Europe's next growth industry. By the time I realized I didn't need an interpreter, I'd already hired her. So she became my driver. As my interpreter, she would have been ridiculously overqualified; as my chauffeur, she is frankly preposterous. But she'd taken on the job with gusto, going so far as to hunt down the old German translation of Dundes's little book.

And it troubled her. For a start she refused to believe there was such a thing as a German national character. "No one in my field believes this anymore," she says. "How do you generalize about 80 million people? You can say they are all the same, but why would they be this way? My question

about Germans' being anally obsessed is how would this spread? Where would it come from?" Dundes himself actually made a stab at answering that question. He suggested that the unusual swaddling techniques employed by German mothers, which left German babies stewing in their own filth for long periods, might be partly responsible for their energetic anality. Charlotte was not buying it. "I've never heard of this," she says.

But just then she spots something and brightens. "Look!" she says. "A German flag." Sure enough, a flag flies over a small house in a distant village. You can spend days in Germany without seeing a flag. Germans aren't allowed to cheer for their team in the way other peoples are. That doesn't mean they don't want to, just that they must disguise what they are doing. "Patriotism," she says, "is still taboo. It's politically incorrect to say, 'I'm proud to be German.' "

The traffic now eases, and we're once again flying toward Düsseldorf. The highway looks brand new, and she guns the rented car until the speedometer tops 210.

"This is a really good road," I say.

"The Nazis built it," she says. "That's what people say about Hitler, when they get tired of saying the usual things. 'Well, at least he built good roads.' "

Back in February 2004 a financial writer in London named Nicholas Dunbar broke the story about some Germans in Düsseldorf, working inside a bank called IKB, who were up to something new. "The name 'IKB' just kept coming up in London with bond salesmen," says Dunbar. "It was like everybody's secret cash cow." Inside the big Wall Street firms there were people whose job it was, when the German customers from Düsseldorf came to London, to have a wad of cash and make sure they got whatever they wanted.

Dunbar's piece appeared in Risk magazine and described how this obscure German bank was rapidly turning into Wall Street's biggest customer. IKB had been created back in 1924 to securitize German war-reparation payments to the Allies, morphed into a successful lender to midsize German companies, and was now morphing into something else. The bank was partially owned by a German state bank, but was not itself guaranteed by the German government. It was a private German financial enterprise, seemingly on the rise. And it had recently hired a man named Dirk Röthig, a German with some experience in the United States (he'd worked for State Street Bank), to do something new and interesting.

With Röthig's help IKB created, in effect, a bank, called Rhineland Funding, incorporated in Delaware and listed on the exchange in Dublin, Ireland. They didn't call it a bank. Had they done so, people might have asked why it was not regulated. They called it a "conduit," a word that had the advantage that hardly anyone understood what it meant. Rhineland borrowed money for short periods of time by issuing what is called commercial paper. It invested that money in longer-term "structured credit," which turned out to be a euphemism for bonds backed by consumer loans. Some of the same Wall Street investment banks that raised the money for Rhineland (by selling the commercial paper) sold Rhineland, among other things, U.S. subprime bonds. Rhineland's profits came from the difference between the rate of interest it paid on the money borrowed and the higher rate of interest it earned on the money it lent through its bond purchases. As IKB guaranteed the entire enterprise, Moody's gave Rhineland its highest rating, enabling it to borrow money cheaply.

The Germans in Düsseldorf had one critical job: to advise this offshore bank they had created on which bonds it should buy. "We are one of the last to get money out of Rhineland," Röthig told *Risk* magazine, "but we're so confident in our ability to advise it in the right way that we still make a profit." Röthig further explained that IKB had invested in special tools to analyze these complicated bonds, called collateralized debt obligations (C.D.O.'s), that Wall Street was now peddling. "I would say it has proven a worthwhile investment because we have not faced a loss so far," he said. In February 2004 all this seemed like a good idea—so good that lots of other German banks rented IKB's conduit and bought subprime-mortgage bonds for themselves. "It sounds like quite a profitable strategy," the man from Moody's who had awarded Rhineland's commercial paper its top rating told *Risk*.

I met Dirk Röthig for lunch at a restaurant in Düsseldorf, on a canal lined with busy shops. From their profitable strategy the German banks have declared losses of something like \$50 billion, though their actual losses are probably greater, as German banks are so slow to declare anything. Röthig viewed himself, with some justice, more as victim than perpetrator. "I left the bank in December 2005," he says quickly as he squeezes himself into a small booth. Then he explains.

The idea for the offshore bank had been his. The German management at IKB had taken to it, as he put it, "as a baby takes to candy." He'd created the bank when the market was paying higher returns to bondholders: Rhineland Funding was paid well for the risk it was taking. By the middle of 2005, with the financial markets refusing to see a cloud in the sky, the price of risk had collapsed. Röthig says he went to his superiors and argued that IKB should look elsewhere for profits. "But they had a profit target and they wanted to meet it. To make the same profit with a lower risk spread they simply had to buy more," he says. The management, he adds, did not want to hear his message. "I showed them the market was turning," he says. "I was taking the candy away from the baby, instead of giving it. So I became the enemy." When he left, others left with him, and the investment staff was reduced, but the investment activity boomed. "One-half the number of people with one-third the experience made twice the number of investments," he says. "They were ordered to buy." He goes on to describe what appeared to be a scrupulous and complicated investment strategy but was actually a mindless, rule-based investment strategy. IKB could "price a C.D.O. to the last basis point," as one admiring observer told *Risk* in 2004. But this expertise was a kind of madness. "They would be really anal about, say, which subprime originator went into these C.D.O.'s," says Nicholas Dunbar. "But it didn't matter. They were arguing about bonds that would collapse from 100 down to 2 or 3. In a sense they were right: they bought the bonds that went to 3, rather than to 2." As long as the bonds offered up by the Wall Street firms abided by the rules specified by IKB's experts, they got hoovered into the Rhineland Funding portfolio without further inspection. Yet the bonds were becoming radically more risky because the loans that underpinned them were becoming crazier and crazier.

After he left, the IKB portfolio went from \$10 billion in 2005 to \$20 billion in 2007, Röthig says, and "it would have gotten bigger if they had had more time to buy. They were still buying when the market crashed. They were on their way to \$30 billion." By the middle of 2007 every Wall Street firm, not just Goldman Sachs, realized that the subprime market was collapsing, and tried frantically to get out of their positions. The last buyers in the entire world, several people on Wall Street have told me, were these willfully oblivious Germans. That is, the only thing that stopped IKB from losing even more than \$15 billion on U.S. subprime loans was that the market ceased to

function. Nothing that happened—no fact, no piece of data—was going to alter their approach to investing money.

On the surface IKB's German bond traders resembled the reckless traders who made similarly stupid bets for Citigroup and Morgan Stanley. Beneath it they were playing an entirely different game. The American bond traders may have sunk their firms by turning a blind eye to the risks in the subprime-bond market, but they made a fortune for themselves in the bargain and have for the most part never been called to account. They were paid to put their firms in jeopardy, and so it is hard to know whether they did it intentionally or not. The German bond traders, on the other hand, had been paid roughly \$100,000 a year, with, at most, another \$50,000 bonus. In general, German bankers were paid peanuts to run the risk that sank their banks—which suggests they really didn't know what they were doing. But—and here is the strange thing—unlike their American counterparts, they are being treated by the German public as crooks. The former C.E.O. of IKB, Stefan Ortseifen, received a 10-month suspended sentence and has been asked by the bank to return his salary: eight hundred and five thousand euros.

The border created by modern finance between Anglo-American and German bankers was treacherous. "The intercultural misunderstandings were quite intense," Röthig says as he tucks into his lobster. "The people in these banks had never been spoiled by any Wall Street salesmen. Suddenly, there is someone with a platinum American Express credit card who can take them to the Grand Prix in Monaco, takes them to all these places. He has no limit. The Landesbanks were the most boring bankers in Germany, so they never got attention like this. And all of a sudden a very smart guy from Merrill Lynch shows up and starts to pay a lot of attention to you. They thought, Oh, he just likes me!" He completes the thought. "The American salespeople are much smarter than the European ones. They play a role much better."

At bottom, he says, the Germans were blind to the possibility that the Americans were playing the game by something other than the official rules. The Germans took the rules at their face value: they looked into the history of triple-A-rated bonds and accepted the official story that triple-A-rated bonds were completely risk-free.

This preternatural love of rules, almost for their own sake, punctuates German finance as it does German life. As it happens, a story had just broken that a division of a German insurance company called Munich Re, back in June 2007, or just before the crash, had sponsored a party for its best producers that offered not just chicken dinners and nearest-to-the-pin golf competitions but a blowout with prostitutes in a public bath. In finance, high or low, this sort of thing is of course not unusual. What was striking was how organized the German event was. The company tied white and yellow and red armbands to the prostitutes to indicate which ones were available to which men. After each sexual encounter the prostitute received a stamp on her arm, to indicate how often she had been used. The Germans didn't want just hookers: they wanted hookers with rules. Perhaps because they were so enamored of the official rules of finance, the Germans proved especially vulnerable to a false idea the rules encouraged: that there is such a thing as a riskless asset.

There is no such thing as a riskless asset. The reason an asset pays a return is that it carries risk. But the idea of the riskless asset, which peaked in late 2006, overran the investment world, and the

Germans fell for it the hardest. I'd heard about this, too, from people on Wall Street who had dealt with German bond buyers. "You have to go back to the German mentality," one of them had told me. "They say, 'I've ticked all the boxes. There is no risk.' It was form over substance. You work with Germans, and—I can't emphasize this enough—they are not natural risktakers." So long as a bond looked clean on the outside, the Germans allowed it to become as dirty on the inside as Wall Street could make it.

The point Röthig wants to stress to me now is that it didn't matter what was on the inside. IKB had to be rescued by a state-owned bank on July 30, 2007. Against capital of roughly \$4 billion it had lost more than \$15 billion. As it collapsed, the German media wanted to know how many U.S. subprime bonds these German bankers had gobbled up. IKB's C.E.O., Stefan Ortseifen, said publicly that IKB owned almost no subprime bonds at all—which is why he's recently been convicted of misleading investors. "He was telling the truth," says Röthig. "He didn't think he owned any subprime. They weren't able to give any correct numbers of the amount of subprime they had because they didn't know. The IKB monitoring systems did not make a distinction between subprime and prime mortgages. And that's why it happened." Back in 2005, Röthig says, he had proposed building a system to track more precisely what loans were behind the complex bonds they were buying from Wall Street firms, but IKB's management didn't want to spend the money. "I told them, You have a portfolio of \$20 billion, you are making \$200 million a year, and you are denying me \$6.5 million. But they didn't want to do it."

As Clear as Mud

For the third time in as many days we cross the border without being able to see it, and spend 20 minutes trying to work out if we are in East or West Germany. Charlotte was born and raised in the East German city of Leipzig, but she is no less uncertain than I am about which former country we are in. "You just would not know anymore unless you are told," she says. "They have to put up a sign to mark it." A landscape once scarred by trenches and barbed wire and minefields exhibits not so much as a ripple. Somewhere near this former border we pull off the road into a gas station. It has three pumps in a narrow channel without space to maneuver or to pass. The three drivers filling their gas tanks need to do it together, and move along together, for if any one driver dawdles, everyone else must wait. No driver dawdles. The German drivers service their cars with the efficiency of a pit crew. Precisely because the arrangement is so archaic Charlotte guesses we must still be in West Germany. "You would never find this kind of gas station in East Germany," she says. "Everything in East Germany is new."

She claims she can guess at sight whether a person, and especially a man, is from the East or the West. "West Germans are much prouder. They stand straight. East Germans are more likely to slouch. West Germans think East Germans are lazy."

"East Germans are the Greeks of Germany," I say.

"Be careful," she says.

From Düsseldorf we drive to Leipzig, and from Leipzig we hop on a train to Hamburg, to find the mud-wrestling. Along the way she searches for signs of anality in her native tongue. "Kackwurst is the term for feces," she says grudgingly. "It literally means 'shit sausage.' And it's horrible. When I see sausages I can't think of anything else." She thinks a moment. Bescheissen: "Someone shit on you." Klugscheisser: "an intelligence shitter." "If you have a lot of money," she says, "you are said to

shit money: *Geldscheisser*." She rips off a handful of other examples, off the top of her head, a little shocked by how fertile this line of thinking is, before she says, "And if you find yourself in a bad situation you say, *Die Kacke ist am Dampfen*: the shit is steaming."

She stops and appears to realize she is encouraging a theory of German character.

"It's just in the words," she says. "It doesn't mean it applies."

Outside of Hamburg we stopped for lunch at a farm, owned by a man named Wilhelm Nölling, a German economist now in his 70s. Back when the idea of the euro was being bandied about, he'd been a council member of the Bundesbank. From the moment the discussion turned serious, Nölling has railed against the euro. He wrote a mournful pamphlet, *Goodbye to the Deutsche Mark?* He wrote another, more declarative pamphlet, *The Euro: A Journey to Hell*. Together with three other prominent German economists and financial leaders, he filed a lawsuit, still wending its way through the German courts, challenging the euro on constitutional grounds. Just before the deutsche mark got scrapped, Nölling had argued to the Bundesbank that they should just keep all the notes. "I said, 'Don't shred it!,' " he now says with great gusto, leaping out of an armchair in the living room of his farmhouse. "I said, 'Pile it all up, put it in a room, in case we need it later!' "

He finds himself stuck: he knows he is tilting at windmills. "Can you turn this back?" he says. "We know we can't turn this back. If they say, 'O.K., we were wrong. You were right,' what do you do? That is the hundred-thousand-million-dollar question." He thinks he knows what should be done, but doesn't think Germans are capable of doing it. The idea he and his fellow dissident German economists have cooked up is to split the European Union in two, for financial purposes. One euro, a kind of second-string currency, would be issued for, and used by, the deadbeat countries—Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy, and so on. The first-string euro would be used by "the homogenous countries, the ones you can rely on." He lists these reliable countries: Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland, and (he hesitates for a second over this) France.

"Are you sure the French belong?"

"We discussed this," he says seriously. They decided that for social reasons you couldn't really exclude the French. It was just too awkward.

As he presided over the Maastricht treaty, that created the euro, the French president François Mitterrand is rumored to have said, privately, that yoking Germany to the rest of Europe in this way was sure to lead to imbalances, and the imbalances were certain to lead to some crisis, but by the time the crisis struck he'd be dead and gone—and others would sort it out. Even if Mitterrand didn't say exactly that, it's the sort of thing he should have said, as he surely thought it. At the time, it was obvious to a lot of people that these countries did not belong together.

But then, how did people who seem so intelligent and successful and honest and well organized as the Germans allow themselves to be drawn into such a mess? In their financial affairs they'd ticked all the little boxes to ensure that the contents of the bigger box were not rotten, and yet ignored the overpowering stench wafting from the big box. Nölling felt the problem had its roots in the German national character. "We entered Maastricht because they had these rules," he says as we move off to his kitchen and plates heaped with the white asparagus Germans take such pride in growing. "We were talked into this under false pretenses. Germans are by and large gullible people. They trust and believe. They like to trust. They like to believe."

If the deputy finance minister has a sign on his wall reminding him to see the point of view of others, here is perhaps why. Others do not behave as Germans do: others lie. In this financial world of deceit, Germans are natives on a protected island who have not been inoculated against the virus carried by visitors. The same instincts that allowed them to trust the Wall Street bond salesmen also allowed them to trust the French when they promised there would be no bailouts, and the Greeks when they swore that their budget was balanced. That is one theory. Another is that they trusted so easily because they didn't care enough about the cost of being wrong, as it came with certain benefits. For the Germans the euro isn't just a currency. It's a device for flushing the past—another Holocaust Memorial. The German public-opinion polls are now running against the Greeks, but deeper forces run in their favor.

In any case, if you are obsessed with cleanliness and order yet harbor a secret fascination with filth and chaos, you are bound to get into some kind of trouble. There is no such thing as clean without dirt. There is no such thing as purity without impurity. The interest in one implies an interest in the other.

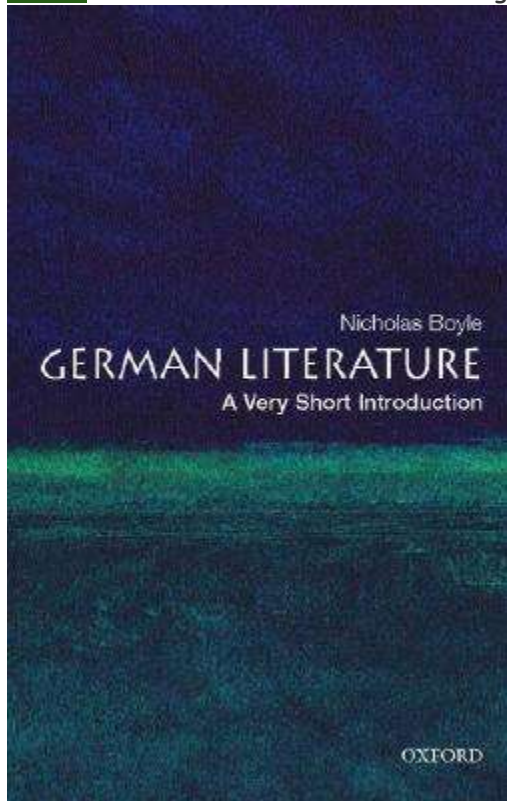
The young German woman who had driven me back and forth across Germany exhibits interest in neither, and it's hard to say whether she is an exception or a new rule. Still, she marches dutifully into Europe's largest red-light district, seeking out a lot of seedy-looking German men to ask them where she might find a female mud-wrestling show. She continues to discover new and surprising ways in which Germans find meaning in filth. "Scheisse glänzt nicht, wenn man sie poliert—Shit won't shine, even if you polish it," she says as we pass the Funky Pussy Club. "Scheissegal: it just means I don't give a shit." She laughs. "That's an oxymoron in Germany, right?"

The night is young and the Reeperbahn is hopping: it's the closest thing I've seen in Germany to a mob scene. Hawkers lean against sex clubs and parse likely customers from the passing crowds. Women who are almost pretty beckon men who are clearly tempted. We pass several times the same corporate logo, a pair of stick figures engaged in anal sex. Charlotte spots it and remembers that a German band, Rammstein, was arrested in the United States for simulating anal sex onstage, while performing a song called "Bück Dich" ("Bend Over"). But on she charges, asking old German men where to find the dirt. At length she finds a definitive answer, from a German who has worked here for decades. "The last one shut down years ago," he says. "It was too expensive."

German Literature Month - Book Review - German Literature : A very short introduction by Nicholas Boyle

November 3, 2012 by [Vishy](#)

I love the VSIs (Very Short Introductions) published by OUP and I have a number of them. I got this one on German Literature last year. I thought I will start this year's [German Literature Month](#) with this book. I finished reading it today. Here is what I think of it.



Nicholas Boyle's introduction gives an overview of German literature from the beginning to the start of the twenty-first century. However the focus of the book is the past 250 years. As I am a layman with respect to German literature and only know about the books of a few of my favourite German authors, and as I am not a scholar or a literary critic or an expert in any way, I don't think I am well-informed enough to review this book. However I will share my mostly random thoughts on the book here and the things that I learnt from the book.

(1) The book discusses the definition of 'German Literature' in the introduction. Boyle decides to go with the Germany as defined by today's political borders. This means that literature of Austria and Switzerland are not covered. It also means that **Kafka** is out. And so is **Pascal Mercier**, who one of my favourites. And so is **Arthur Schnitzler**. It is sad. Luckily **Hermann Hesse**, another of my favourites, survives this definition as he was a German writer who emigrated to Switzerland. I would have preferred a broader definition of German literature

- as anything written in German, irrespective of where the author lived or what passport he / she had. I can, however, see the author's perspective. Because literature is not just about books and authors. It is also about a country, its language, people, culture, religion, politics, history, philosophy. As Boyle says in the introduction :

Literature is not just texts, because texts are not just texts. Texts are always turned, and turn their readers, to something other than texts and readers, something the texts are about. An introduction, even a very short introduction, to a national literature cannot be just an introduction to texts, it is also an introduction to a nation. To ask what German literature is like is to ask what - from a literary point of view - Germany is like.

(2) The book was not an easy read. It started out innocently enough, but for a layman like me, I had to plough through a significant part of the book. Because it was filled with intellectual discussions of different literary eras and it even went into the realms of philosophy when it discussed Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. But I am glad I persevered with it as it was rewarding in the end.

- (3) **Mechthild von Magdeburg** is mentioned in the book. I remember seeing a book of hers in the bookshop once. Being from the 13th century, she must have been one of the first women writers and so one of the pioneers. I would like to read more about her.
- (4) I have always thought that **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's 'Faust'** was inspired by **Christopher Marlowe's 'Doctor Faustus'**. Because I read somewhere that von Goethe read Marlowe's play and liked it very much and he went on to compose his own version of it. This book describes what actually happened, and needless to say, the version of the story I believed in was wrong. This is what actually happened. **'History of Dr John Faust'** was originally published anonymously in Frankfurt in 1587. Boyle further says: "By a quirk of literary fate, travelling English actors soon brought to Germany a dramatic version of the life of Dr Faust which Christopher Marlowe had prepared on the basis of the original chap-book, or its English translation, and which, in popularized and decreasingly recognizable adaptations for amateur productions or puppet plays, diffused the story through the whole of the non-literate German-speaking world." So the Faust legend was essentially German in origin.
- (5) Boyle says that **Johann Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen's 'Adventures of the German Simplicissimus'** has one of Europe's first tales of shipwreck on a desert island. This book published between 1668 and 1671 pre-dates **'Robinson Crusoe'**, published in 1719, by nearly fifty years. Interesting!
- (6) **Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock** (1724-1803) wrote short poems on love, friendship, nature and the pleasures of **ice-skating** 😊 I totally want to read that!
- (7) "The term **'aesthetics'** itself entered academic currency in 1750 as an invention of the Prussian disciple of Wolff, **Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten**."
- (8) **Sturm und Drang** means 'Storm and Stress' (period between the 1760s and the 1770s which is important in German literature)
- (9) "Goethe was exceptional among 18th-century German writers, and not just in his abilities: at least as a young man, he had no need to write for money, or even to work at all. He was a true bourgeois, a member of the upper middle class of the Imperial Free City of Frankfurt. His mother was the daughter of the town clerk, his father lived on his capital, and he studied law - first at Leipzig and then at Strasbourg - more in order to occupy than to advance himself." - The book goes on to describe other later German writers who lived similarly - they wrote not to make a living, but because they wanted to write. I don't know why no one attempts to emulate this lifestyle today - even those who can afford to. The bourgeois lifestyle is not that bad 😊
- (10) "**Gotz von Berlichingen** was one of the first consciously 'historical' works of imaginative literature and it was an important model for Walter Scott, who translated it." - Wow! So Walter Scott is not really the father of the modern historical novel!
- (11) "**Friedrich Schlegel** first gave currency to the term **'romantic'** as a description of post-classical literature generally, and particularly of literature that lent itself to being understood in terms of the new idealist philosophy, as an expression or exploration of subjectivity. If any one person can be said to have founded **'Romanticism'**, it is he."
- (12) "**Friedrich Hölderlin** finally succumbed to schizophrenia in 1806 but by then he had had the 'one summer...and one autumn for ripe son' that he asked the fates to grant him."
- (13) "**Elective Affinities**...structured around one of the supreme examples of the device of the **unreliable narrator**..." - I want to read this now! Sad though, that this line has spoiled the surprise for me.

(14) Some of my favourites whose works I have enjoyed - **Heinrich von Kleist**, **E.T.A. Hoffmann**, **Eduard Mörike**, **Theodor Fontane** and **Theodor Storm** (**'Immensee'** is one of my alltime favourites) - are all mentioned in the book.

(15) **Annette von Droste-Hülshoff** is the first modern German woman writer mentioned in the book. I read her book **'The Jew's Beech'** last year and liked it. I remember just two more modern German women writers / poets mentioned in the book later - **Else Lasker-Schüler** and **Christa Wolf**. I want to read Christa Wolf's **'Patterns of Childhood'**.

(16) *"With none of the theological and ethical subtlety, or literary sensitivity, of his elder brother, Georg, Ludwig Büchner, the Richard Dawkins of his day, asserted the eternity of matter, the development of life out of inorganic particles, and of human beings out of lower animals, and the unscientific redundancy of an such hypotheses as God or immortality".* Ludwig Büchner said this in 1855, four years before Darwin's **'The Origin of Species'** was published. This kind of view - materialistic and atheistic - seems to have been prevalent during that time, even if within a particular section of the population, and was not necessarily propounded by Darwin for the first time.

(17) **'Power protecting interiority'** - **'interiority protected by power'** : *an inner world of art and culture could flourish provided the authoritarian, and ultimately military, structure that protected it was not questioned* - first described by **Thomas Mann**, this seems to be followed in modified form by authoritarian governments today - free economy, so everyone can get rich, but no questioning the government and trying to protest against it. I don't know whether these guys have read Thomas Mann.

(18) *"All that was truly German - Thomas Mann said - was 'culture, soul, freedom, art, and not civilization, society, the right to vote, and literature', 'Civilization' was an Anglo-French superficiality, the illusion entertained by left-wing intellectuals generally, and Heinrich Mann in particular, that the life of the mind amounted to the political agitation and social 'engagement' of journalists who thought the point of writing was to change the world. Germany, by contrast, knew that 'Art' was a deeper affair than literary chatter, and that true freedom was not a matter of parliaments and free presses but of personal, moral, duty."* - I am taking this passage totally out of context and so please don't judge me because of the way I have interpreted it, but it is difficult not to agree with Thomas Mann here. Would love to know what you think about it.

(19) *"Once the American Dawes Plan of 1924 and a huge associated loan had stabilized the German economy..."* - I didn't know that there was a **Marshall Plan** equivalent between the wars to help Germany economically. Interesting!

(20) There was a mention of **Edith Cavell** in the book. I haven't heard of her and so went to Wikipedia to read more about her. This is what it said : *"Edith Cavell was a British nurse and patriot. She is celebrated for saving the lives of soldiers from all sides without distinction and in helping some 200 Allied soldiers escape from German-occupied Belgium during World War I, for which she was arrested. She was subsequently court-martialled, found guilty of treason and sentenced to death. Despite international pressure for mercy, she was shot by a German firing squad. Her execution received worldwide condemnation and extensive press coverage. She is well known for her statement that "patriotism is not enough." Her strong Anglican beliefs propelled her to help all those who needed it, both German and Allied soldiers. She was quoted as saying, "I can't stop while there are lives to be saved".* So inspiring and so sad.

(21) This is what the book says about **Hermann Hesse** - *'an author who had previously specialized either in monuments of self-pity or sugary (and not always well-written)*

stories...Hermann Hesse did not deny his origins but he supped German life with a long spoon...' - Why do my favourite authors always get the short shrift?

(22) There is no mention of **Patrick Süskind**, **Bernhard Schlink** (I don't know how important Schlink is in the German literary canon), **Herta Müller** and **Hans Fallada** in the book - Seriously, Mr.Boyle?

(23) The last chapter of the book which covers German literature post-1945, covers mostly literature which is related to the Second world war, the holocaust, the guilt and the like. I know for a fact that the German literature of this era is quite diverse and rich covering any and every topic under the sun and some of these are experimental works which rival those of other languages. None of these finds a mention in this chapter. Seriously, Mr.Boyle?

I found Nicholas Boyle's book quite interesting and instructive. I learnt a lot of things from it, as you can see above (I hope you enjoyed reading this non-traditional review / post). The book has led to a 'Wishlist' which looks like it is going to topple anytime. If you would like to explore German literature of the past two centuries, this is a wonderful place to start.

Have you read Boyle's book? What do you think about it?

Posted in [Book Review](#), [German Literature Month](#), [Literature Month](#) | Tagged [History of German Literature](#), [Literary History](#), [Nicholas Boyle](#) | 17 Comments

17 Responses

1. on [November 3, 2012 at 6:58 PM](#) / [Reply](#) [German Literature Month - A Quick Update « Beauty is a Sleeping Cat](#)

[...] German Literature - A Short Introduction by Nicholas Boyle (Vishy's Blog) [...]

2. on [November 3, 2012 at 7:09 PM](#) / [Reply](#)  [Caroline](#)

I liked your unorthodox review a great deal. A lot of interesting bits.

When I studied French literature it was the same, it was only French literature written in French and in France, when I went to Paris, they had separate studies called French literatures - and that included them all, Canada, Africa...

I have a few books on German Literature and I'm not sure they include Schlink but Süskind and Fallada are included.

Klopstock is the poet they read in Goethe's Werther.

I don't think that line spoils the Elective Affinities, I wasn't even aware there was an unreliable narrator and I have read it twice.

I was thinking that it would be worth to do a Swiss literature month next year, including books written in the three official languages, German, French, Italian, then you could read Mercier and some others like Stamm. 😊

o on [November 3, 2012 at 7:24 PM](#) / [Reply](#)  [Vishy](#)

Thanks Caroline! Interesting to know that when you studied French literature in France, a similar definition was used for French literature - works written by authors living in France. Nice to know that Süskind and Fallada are included in the German literary canon. I am surprised that they were missed out in this book. Interesting to know that Klopstock is the poet they read in Werther. I didn't know that! I should read Werther again. Thanks for letting me know that the unreliable narrator thing is not a spoiler - I should read 'Elective Affinities' one of these days. It is wonderful that you are thinking of doing a Swiss literature month next year. It will be totally awesome! I will definitely join. Can you give me the link to the signup page? 😊



3. on [November 3, 2012 at 9:20 PM](#) / [Reply](#) [lizzysiddal](#)

I confess to taking the book out this morning and reading 2 pages on German Romanticism ... And that was hard-going. So well-done on making it from cover to cover!



○ on [November 3, 2012 at 10:18 PM](#) / [Reply](#) [Vishy](#)

Nice to know that you got started on the book today, Lizzy. Hope you enjoy reading it. Will look forward to hearing your thoughts on it. It was real hard going for me, but I am glad that I was able to finish it. I hope to dip into it sometimes and read more carefully on specific topics.



4. on [November 4, 2012 at 12:56 AM](#) / [Reply](#) [winstonsdad](#)

must get this I read the Spanish one the other year the great for getting background on writers ,all the best stu



○ on [November 4, 2012 at 11:04 AM](#) / [Reply](#) [Vishy](#)

Nice to know that you read the Spanish literature VSI and liked it, Stu. I will add that to my wishlist. I also want to read the Russian literature VSI. I have been coveting it for sometime 😊



5. on [November 4, 2012 at 1:46 PM](#) / [Reply](#) [Priya](#)

All my what-to-read sources usually come from Wikipedia or something, but this is a far better option. I love your review, thanks for sharing all the little things you learnt from the book - now I won't have to use Wikipedia 😊

○ on [November 6, 2012 at 6:25 PM](#) / [Reply](#)  [Vishy](#)

Glad to know that you liked this post, Priya 😊 I too use Wikipedia to explore more on a writer or a book. I am also making a wishlist based on this book. I can share it with you if you like.

6. on [November 4, 2012 at 3:04 PM](#) / [Reply](#)  [Tony](#)

I have to say that you lost me at point number one - any book which restricts German literature to Germany itself is not worth the paper it's written on 😊 I realise that there is limited space (the title sort of gives that away), but really? No Kafka? Ignoring Austria? it's a good job we're here to fill in the gaps 😊

○ on [November 6, 2012 at 6:28 PM](#) / [Reply](#)  [Vishy](#)

I hope point one didn't deter you from reading the rest of the post, Tony 😊 It is really sad that the book didn't cover the literature of Austria and Switzerland and the exclusion of Kafka was really inexcusable. I totally agree on what you said - that readers and bloggers like us are there to fill the gaps. Can't wait to read your reviews through this month.

7. on [November 5, 2012 at 6:12 PM](#) / [Reply](#)  [Lindsay](#)

This sounds an interesting overview, but I can't imagine Kafka not being included. I studied German literature, and Kafka was an important part of those studies for me. Nice to discover your blog.

○ on [November 6, 2012 at 6:30 PM](#) / [Reply](#)  [Vishy](#)

Thanks for stopping by, Lindsay 😊 The exclusion of Kafka from the book was really inexcusable. I can imagine what you must be thinking. On the positive side, the book covers most of the major authors and I took away some wonderful reading suggestions from the book. I look forward to hopping over to your blog soon and hearing your thoughts on the books you are reading now.

8. on [November 8, 2012 at 11:58 AM](#) / [Reply](#) [German Literature Month - Week I Links « Beauty is a Sleeping Cat](#)

[...] German Literature - A Short Introduction by Nicholas Boyle (Vishy's Blog) [...]



9. on [November 11, 2012 at 7:04 PM](#) / [Reply](#) [Katie](#)

Hi, Vishy, as far as I understand Professor Boyle (who I have had the honour of actually meeting) is a traditionalist specialising primarily in Goethe. Of course, him writing a whole book about Germany literature (note the y) is biased. I quite agree that Kafka should be in there, but so then should I lot more about Austria etc. Schlink is an interesting one. There is a general view that he is not high-brow enough for inclusion in lectures etc, but actually I find his books very interesting. I'm very impressed you read the whole thing cover to cover - I agree with Lizzy, I dip into it!



○ on [November 11, 2012 at 7:21 PM](#) / [Reply](#) [Vishy](#)

I am so jealous that you were able to meet Professor Boyle, Katie! I can't say it enough - I am so, so jealous 😊 He does give a lot of importance to classical German literature in his book. After reading your comment, now i know why. Interesting to know that Bernhard Schlink is not considered high-brow enough to be included in lectures. I personally think that he straddles the line between popular fiction and literary fiction (whatever that means) quite well thus being able to satisfy readers of both genres. I somehow managed to read the book from cover to cover. Now I dip into it once in a while to read more on an author or a book or a literary trend. It is a nice slim compendium to dip into

<http://libcom.org/forums/history/books-german-history-18072012#forum-topic-top>

Mary Fulbrook - *A Concise History of Germany*

Good sweeping overview.

John Ardagh - *Germany and the Germans*

Portrait of the contemporary Federal Republic, circa mid-1990s. Somewhat dated (a LOT has changed since then), but a good informative survey, despite the annoying liberal politics of the author.

Alexandra Ritchie - *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin*

Dense, comprehensive history of Berlin. Very good for detail, an engrossing read, but the author is a horrible Thatcherite.

Victor Grossman: *Crossing The River: A Memoir of the American Left, The Cold War, and Life in East Germany*

Very engaging autobiography of an American Communist Party member who defected to the GDR during the height of the Cold War. A good picture of the ambiguities of "really existing socialism" by a sympathetic participant.

For a good, light-comic glimpse of contemporary Berlin (think Nick Hornby), there is an English translation of Wladimir Kaminer's "Russian Disco". Kaminer is a Russian who writes comic vignettes in his adopted language of German about his adopted city Berlin.

If you eventually read German, there are two good Marxist histories: Bernt Engelmann's "Wir Untertanen" ("We Subordinates" or "We Loyal Subjects") which spans the whole of German history, and Georg Fülberth's *Finis Germaniae*, which is a history of both the FRG and GDR since 1946. Also eventually check out Karl-Heinz Roth's "Die Andere Arbeiterbewegung", an operaist history of German labor (which has recently been translated into Spanish!).

Finally, [An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital](#) by Michael Heinrich gives an introduction to contemporary German value-form theory. 😊

Jul 18 2012 15:34

it is always a matter of taste ... for the Weimar period, i like Detlef Peukert's *The Weimar Republic : the Crisis of Classical Modernity*, on the German Empire, my favourite overview study by Volker Ullrich *Die nervöse Großmacht: Aufstieg und Untergang des deutschen Kaiserreichs 1871-1918* is unfortunately (like many good books) not translated so far, generally, books by historians like Jürgen Kocka, Richard J. Evans or Fritz Fischer can also be recommended ... don't really know a decent overview from Roman times to today further suggestions e.g.

here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Germany#Further_reading

novels which tell a lot about 19th and early 20th century society are e.g. *Buddenbrooks* and *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann, *Der Untertan* and *Professor Unrat* by his more leftwing brother Heinrich Mann ... the leading writer of German naturalism was Gerhart Hauptmann, but unlike Zola he had his focus more on writing for the stage (and became unfortunately pretty nationalistic after 1914) ... in my opinion, a must-read is the Ernst Toller's autobiographical piece *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* (I was a German)

Malva

Jul 18 2012 20:33

These are all great suggestions. Thanks! Exactly what I wanted.

I am learning German (finally confident enough in my French now to move onto something else) but have only been doing so properly for a month. Am at the stage where I can order things in a restaurant and ask for directions that's about it, but when I am further along I'll check out the German language material too.

I'm in to German value theory, one of the reasons I am learning is to read this untranslated neue marx lektüre material and also read Marx in the original. I've got the Heinrich book on Capital on order too.

Thanks again! Oder ... danke!

Entdinglichung

Jul 19 2012 10:44

and some classics:

- <http://marxists.org/archive/mehring/1892/lessing/index.htm>

- <http://marxists.org/archive/mehring/1910/absrev/index.htm>

- <http://marxists.org/archive/rosenberg/history-weimar/index.htm>

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Entdinglichung

Jul 19 2012 10:50

and as far as I know, Geoff Eley has written some good stuff, e.g. on the "Sonderweg/German exceptionalism", a topic difficult to circumvent if you deal with German history (even with 16th century stuff)

Angelus Novus

Jul 19 2012 15:23

I'm really ambiguous toward the concept of "Sonderweg."

It seems to me to be a relict of when the concept of a "bourgeois revolution" was considered the norm for capitalist development, with a stagist conception of history developing from slavery --> feudalism --> capitalism, with France and Britain being the model bourgeois societies (although I guess Perry Anderson and the New Left Review crew even thought that Britain deviated from the "proper" model!)

This is the best case scenario. In the worst case scenario, you've got the Anti-Germans arguing the ludicrous "Germany as a mode of production" line.

Entdinglichung

Jul 19 2012 16:00

italism, with France and Britain being the model bourgeois societies (although I guess Perry Anderson and the New Left Review crew even thought that Britain deviated from the "proper" model!)

As it happens I just finished reading Perry Anderson's "Lineages of the Absolutist State" and the chapters on Prussia and Austria made me realise how little I knew about German history (as in, zip!).

Tbf, I think by the time Anderson had finished Lineages he had pretty much ripped up the "classical" uni-linear model. That book was written back in the 70s so I'm sure there's been some

decent critiques/refutations of Anderson's version by German Marxists somewhere or other, since.
Any good ones come to mind?

Entdinglichung

Jul 19 2012 16:34

as far as I know, Anderson was mostly ignored in Germany

Heh. That's funny but somehow predictable.

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andy g

Jul 20 2012 13:10

blackbourn and eley's "peculiarities of german history" is a good book. It rejects "exceptionalism" and the idea that nazism was a product of an incomplete bourgeois revolution btw. tbf to Anderson he has long since renounced what he has since called a normative conception of bourgeois revolution i.e. setting up the French rev as a model against which all others can be measured. he wrote a good essay on the matter yonks ago - was published as part of his "English Questions" book

rooieravotr

Jul 20 2012 13:55

Detlev Peuker, "Inside Nāzi Germany - conformity, opposition and racism in everyday life"

Tim Mason, "Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class" (essays)

Sebastian Haffner, "Die Verratene revolution" (haven't found a translation in English; I read it in Dutch translation)

Malva

Jul 20 2012 16:02

More good suggestions. Cheers.

Malva

Jul 31 2012 10:59

I've been following up on some of your suggestions. I was just wondering if anyone could also suggest any good tv series in German for picking up the lingo? I guess relatively colloquial stuff would be best, such as sitcoms or crime drama. I can always watch dubbed American sitcoms. This helped with learning French but it also meant having to watch crap like Friends, and I'd rather watch something culturally relevant and interesting.

:13

haven't watched much German TV for the last decade ...

for crime drama [Tatort](#) and Großstadtrevier (with heavy Hamburg accent) are probably the best, if you want to watch really crappy soaps (compared with them, the Guardian stated a couple of years ago that Hollyoaks could be classified as "high artwork"), go for [Gute Zeiten, schlechte Zeiten](#), a more sophisticated soap (inspired by Corrie) is the weekly [Lindenstraße](#) ... and then there are some classics, you can find on youtube: [Ein Herz und eine Seele](#) from the 1970ies, see video below, inspired by Till Death Us Do Part and Motzki (1993): a grumpy and reactionary German pensioner who hates the reunification and its consequences

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[#17](#)

Malva

Jul 31 2012 14:07

Thanks Entdinglichung. More great suggestions. I've managed to find some episodes of Tatort. I shall come back to the comedy when I am a bit further along with my listening comprehension as I found it a bit difficult. Though I understood the second video better than the first.

Cheers!

Angelus Novus

Jul 31 2012 18:03

Malva, this is probably not an appropriate suggestion for your level of German, but eventually, when you're a bit further, definitely check out a television series called [Im Angesicht des Verbrechens](#), which in terms of its realistic depiction of social reality in contemporary Berlin has been compared to The Wire.

Also, one more reading suggestion: even though it's got tepid Green politics, [die tageszeitung](#) is the best daily newspaper for learners of German. At least that was my experience. Simply written, relatively short articles. It tries to appeal to a multicultural audience, which explains why the German is kept at a level understandable for non-native speakers.

Malva

Aug 1 2012 08:50

Thanks Angelus Novus. These are some good resources. Im Angesicht des Verbrechens sounds particularly interesting.

Mephisto

Aug 1 2012 19:41

Malva wrote:

I was just wondering if anyone could also suggest any good tv series in German for picking up the lingo?

I'm learning German as well and asked the German poster Railyon here a similar question on a libcommunity thread. Here was his response:

Railyon wrote:

Ogion wrote:

Were there any cool cartoons or series produced in Germany in the 80's (or 90's)?

There's two or three I can think of.

[Felidae](#), [Werner Beinhart](#) (total classic, dubbed in my local dialect as the creator lives right around the corner), [Kleines Arschloch](#)

Don't know about any German series though.

Edit: Now there are a few coming to mind - Benjamin Blümchen, Bibi Blocksberg, Petterson und Findus...

Pretty popular but far older were puppet shows like Die Augsburger Puppenkiste, shit is seriously old but a classic of German TV...

These seem worthwhile to check out. Some of this you may not right now be able to understand (I'm at what I suppose is an intermediate level, and I still have a lot of difficulty watching German TV), but they are cartoons and children's television shows so if you can get a hold of them they may not prove to be too hard for learning.

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Aug 1 2012 20:14

Nice one Ogion. Thanks 😊

Angelus Novus

Aug 16 2012 21:28

I'm actually kind of surprised that no one mentioned this (myself included), but Malva, if you haven't already, read [Fire and Flames by Geronimo](#). Don't get misled by the title; it's not only about the Autonomen (although that's the main focus); it also doubles as basically the best Malva

Aug 17 2012 16:32

Cheers Angelus. I shall add it to my reading list.

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wojtek

Aug 17 2012 17:49

Some I watched are [Extr@](#), [Das Boot](#), [Das Experiment](#) and [Run Lola Run](#). The first three are on youtube.

medwards

Aug 19 2012 08:25

There's "All Power to the Councils!: A Documentary History of the German Revolution of 1918-1919" by Gabriel Kuhn that's I've been excited about ever since Ramsey told me they were going to do a Bavarian council book. I also enjoyed the Landauer and Muhsam essay readers that preceded it.

There isn't so much history, but you often get glimpses of what it was like to live in it.

Angelus Novus wrote:

] Also eventually check out Karl-Heinz Roth's "Die Andere Arbeiterbewegung", an operaist history of German labor (which has recently been translated into Spanish!).

Is that ever going to be published in English? It would be good to read it as it seems interesting and cos there are few operaist histories in english about. Also, a bit off topic i know, but another one i'd like to see translated is the book edited by Roth and Marcel van der Linden and Roth called Uber Marx (which is not about Germany - it's about global working class history IIRC).

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Skraeling

Aug 19 2012 23:10

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Skraeling

Aug 19 2012 23:10

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Angelus Novus

Aug 20 2012 14:47

AFAIK, Roth is not so positive on the prospect of having it officially released as a book, since he has always wanted to make major revisions to it (that's why it's out of print in German), but somebody I spoke to says he might be amenable to an English translation of it just being published on the web. I'd be totally down for doing this in between paid jobs, as long as people are cool with long waiting times between installments. Ideally, it would appear on Libcom.

I have no idea how the Spanish version from Traficantes de Sueños came about, presumably they would've also had to ask his permission.

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Skraeling

Aug 21 2012 21:23

Ah I see, thanks Angelus. I suppose the major revisions Roth wants to make it are in response to the criticism of it? Is the co-author of the book, Elisabeth Behrens, still around? In any case, i'd (and hopefully heaps of others would also) be v grateful if u could translate it in installments.

SPRINGTIME GERMANY

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Springtime-Germany-Learned-Love-Lederhosen/dp/0316732478/ref=wl_mb_hu_c_1_dp

<http://www.eurocheapo.com/blog/book-review-a-very-rough-guide-to-germany.html>

I'm a Germanophile and i've been to Germany 6 or 7 times in the last two years and I love Germany. I have friends in Germany and i am painfully in love with the country. I have a German boyfriend and have spent a lot of time with his family. Most of my fellow Brits think I'm a bit weird for loving Germany so much, i make Germans miss Germany. I'm that bad! so lets get that clear at the start of this review! basically i'm biased. also lets get it clear that when i read this i had a head start on many people, because i have read/watched an obscene amount about Germany, i read German newspapers etc. However when i started this book (17 months ago!) i had read less, been there less etc. the information in this book is very useful and did give me an insight into the German spirit. It did help, when i was having conversations with Germans, to have knowledge i'd absorbed from the book, so i could sound like a giant geek and say 'I've read about that...!' To be honest i probably didn't need to read this book any faster than i did! I'm glad I've read it and glad i have it, but a lot

of the stuff in there i, personally, have/could have found out first hand for myself from my friends.

i find this book very difficult to describe! I - as already stated - found this book incredibly difficult to read/finish! i had to keep putting it down and coming back to it later i'd read a chapter or half a chapter and get fed up or bored and wander off to another book! i kept forgetting about it and then remembering it and trying to force myself to read it! It's very heavy with cultural and historical information, there is a side helping of the typical english-impression-of-anything-german, which is obviously being expanded during the course of the book. he has a prejudice/ignorance about German wine - for example - which i found very typical of English attitudes. and actually it's very typical of German attitudes towards German wine! most Germans I've met think their own wine is rubbish! except Riesling of course!

i respect the man for doing what he did in Germany, he actually got naked in a german sauna, which is something i refuse to do (by the way i have met Germans who don't want to be naked in saunas lol.) and, i suppose, i find it difficult to relate to a lot of his ORIGINAL opinions about Germany. He tends to start in one mode of thinking and then progress to another. so his impressions/prejudices are gradually being changed and expanded to allow a more realistic image of Germany to creep through.

i found some sections offensive. on page 233 he becomes a borderline misogynist when he says all high culture such as classical music, art, literature, philosophy are resilient male and strong, while the world of consumerism and celebrities is more feminine! i didn't like that!

overall i'd say the book is a good history/culture lesson!

His impression of modern Germany, while accurate, is not, in my opinion, complete, since he doesn't really have long conversations with Germans about anything significant. for example when he goes to Berlin, he seems to meet no one there and do nothing, as far as i can discern he goes to a coffee shop! that's all i know. He then goes on to describe the atmosphere of Berlin which i felt was fairly accurate and describing atmosphere is a good thing to do, but then he again lapses into history and culture. then he makes several judgements about Berlin, but i can't tell what those judgements are really based on, as he doesn't recount any conversations with people or even say that he met people. This book, obviously, lacks that 'insider' aspect. but it is a good place to start. Bear in mind, though, the question of how he is getting his impressions and whether he is judging the place fairly or accurately. but this is also HIS personal opinion.

i DID agree with a lot of his conclusions and he did bring to light a few interesting points, about Berlin, for example, he questions whether being artistic in Berlin is no longer a political/personal expression of someone's individuality, are people NOW going to Berlin to be poor artists because it's cool/trendy to do so! Berlin has a certain unique history, it always attracted weirdo's and misfits and still does. but how genuine is it in the 21st century?! this is a very good point/question which had risen in my mind when I was there!

i do think the book is lacking some kind of bibliography or further reading/viewing section, because he makes reference to a lot of writers, musicians, films etc which i feel could be put in list form in the back for reference!!

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1 of 4 people found the following review helpful

5.0 out of 5 stars entertaining, 16 July 2011

By

[ct1003](#) (Shropshire, England) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)

The Short version:

Most of the reviews on this page are rubbish. Some of them are plain wrong. Read this book, you'll like it.

The Long version:

This book has attracted a number of negative reviews. I can say that this was not the book those readers were looking for, and they obviously don't have a sense of humour. An exploration of modern Germany, a witty meditation on modern tourism and some well researched tidbits of German cultural history, this book is a romp. At the very least the critics have to admit that it's an original contribution. What it is not is a definitive analysis of modern Germany, cultural or otherwise. I think of it as a 'Beginners Guide to Germany' and it should not be seen as the final word by any stretch. Also, the jokes serve a purpose, as they are aimed more at insular Brits than supposedly humourless Germans. I am enjoying this book.

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1 of 1 people found the following review helpful

3.0 out of 5 stars So much potential..., 11 July 2010

By

[Andrew Jones](#) (London, UK) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)

Looking at the reviews, this book has polarised opinion somewhat and I can understand why.

What frustrates me about it, is that it could have been a great book. Clearly the author does like Germany. Clearly he researched and learnt a lot about the country. Clearly he can even write.

I even liked the premise of rediscovering travel through seeing the beauty of a place that would normally be dismissed as boring. This in fact affected me somewhat and made me think about my travelling in general.

So WHY OH WHY did he have to pepper the book with the puerile stereotypes and ridiculous "v instead of w" jokes which led me to roll my eyes every five minutes. Was this honestly how Ben Donald wanted to write the book, or was he told to dumb it down to make the book more accessible?

These jokes also made him appear quite negative about Germany at times which I suspect wasn't even really intended. This may be a symptom of the British cultural cringe which requires "as much as I hate to admit it" or something similar to preface any positive comment about Germany. The book unashamedly shouts "I quite like Germany even though I feel like I shouldn't" which is, of course, part of the premise but gets rather tiring.

So after all this, why have I still given *Springtime for Germany* three stars? Unlike many who have reviewed it here, I managed to enjoy reading it despite all that and think that it has a lot to offer not only in terms of knowledge about Germany but also with regard to philosophy of travel. It's a shame that I could not really recommend it without a massive set of disclaimers attached.

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2 of 3 people found the following review helpful

2.0 out of 5 stars Disappointing, 16 Jun 2010

By

[David Goodman "trapezoiddave"](#) (Edinburgh, UK) - [See all my reviews](#)

(REAL NAME)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)

I picked this up as part of preparation for a long weekend in Hamburg, and because I'm interested in the under-appreciated nature of Germany as a holiday destination for Brits. From the jacket copy it seemed a perfect fit.

About the only thing I've got out of this book is a semi-reasonable feel for the different areas of Germany, but I could have got that by leafing through my *Lonely Planet* guide. Ben Donald writes the odd lyrical or descriptive passage, but they are buried amidst simply acres of laboured 'jokes' about the Germans. I mean, it's almost like he's incapable of admitting any sort of enjoyment, appreciation or fruitful experience without hedging it around with 'har-de-har, bratwurst, lederhosen, ja ja ja' idiocy.

I've persevered with it because it's (mercifully) short and I paid full price for it, but this is not a very competent, thoughtful or interesting book. It's neither a credible travel narrative or a competent piece of literature. It is plodding, laboured and deeply unfunny.

As other reviewers have said, a waste of a good idea and the editor who let this go to print without excising all or most of the 'humour' did not do their job properly. Mind you, if you cut out all the awful nudge-nudge-wink-Germans-eh stuff (every third or fourth sentence), it would be a pamphlet, not a book.

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4 of 4 people found the following review helpful

3.0 out of 5 stars Achtung Cannibals, 21 Feb 2010

By

[Reisender](#) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)
Being German, I have to admit that the author is indeed an accurate observer of (a few aspects of) today's Germany. Still, finishing EVERY chapter by attributing the chapter's topic to the German pursuit of *Gemütlichkeit* is tiring. With the only exception of putting the story of cannibal Meiwes into the chapter on German cuisine and calling it curiously German (obviously a tribute to British humour or bad taste only?) I cannot see, why one should feel offended by this book. More than one time I had to smile because of feeling caught red-handed. When I discovered this book in the store, I was thrilled by the idea of an Englishman writing about Germany. The book is worth reading but did not quite live up to my expectations on this great idea. My last remark is no conclusion on the quality of the book, I just consider it a pity that in spite of several comments on how the author (or the first-person narrator?) learned to like or appreciate Germany during his research I could not help to notice it hardly ever felt honest. But then in the end, perhaps he does want Germany to stay *tierra inconocida* for the British in order to keep it all for himself ;-)

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3 of 3 people found the following review helpful

3.0 out of 5 stars Mischmasch, 17 Nov 2008

By

[Anna P](#) (Great Britain) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)
This book is a hotchpotch of the well-researched and the banal. Ben Donald takes aspects of stereotypical Germany and the Germans, as seen by the British, and attempts to test the truth of these. In the process he tries to reveal some little-known corners of German life and characteristics. These aims are admirable but the format is irritating. The travel mentor "Manny" (did he really exist?) is a diversion from the basic premise. Yes, he provides guidance but he limits the author's own curiosity, ingenuity and sense of exploration. The writing style relies too much on the repetition of the "towels on sunbeds" and other clichés.

Under the surface there is a potentially very good insight into the Germans and their country just crying to get out. It's a shame that the author did not approach it in a less convoluted manner.

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3 of 6 people found the following review helpful

1.0 out of 5 stars Simply awful, 23 Oct 2008

By

[Blencathra](#) (West Yorkshire.) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)
Awful, truly awful, building on all the ghastly stereotypes portrayed in the tabloids. As another reviewer said, Ben Donald's agent did him absolutely no favours, not the least because he simply isn't remotely funny. The only saving grace was that I was fortunate (??) enough to pick this up very cheaply in a charity shop, so didn't waste too much money.

Why is it so difficult to find a decent travel lit book in Germany (in print, at least)? Three that I've found currently on the market, all disappointing, but this one possibly the worst. Admittedly, I did have my doubts beforehand given the variety of reviews here, but I couldn't believe quite how bad it would actually be. No, I didn't finish it, it didn't warrant the time, nor did it go back to the charity shop - I couldn't possibly inflict this rubbish on anybody else as misguided as I was, so straight to recycling in the hope that the pulp would be better used.

This review may seem over the top, but I can't recall trying to read a worse book: certainly the first I've wanted to give zero stars to.

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5 of 7 people found the following review helpful

3.0 out of 5 stars Unusual piece of travel writing about a unique country, 13 July 2008

By

[Mr X "A reader"](#) (London) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)
When I read some of the other reviewers' entries I was surprised that there was so much negative feeling about this book. I enjoyed it and think that writing a travel book about Germany was a novel (from the lack of similar books) and interesting idea!

I am British and it is hard to judge how accurate the author's comments about Germany are, not being a country or people I know well or have much experience of. That is a pity since all the Germans I have met have been very pleasant and polite and although stereotypes are amusing, the Germans I've met are quite unlike their national stereotype!

The book itself was mostly good and added quite a lot to my knowledge about Germany (for example I hadn't realised that most fairytales had a German origin or that there were more old castles in Germany than Spain). However, there were parts of the book that went into too much philosophical detail and, for the general reader, I think these parts are a bit dull and the book would be better without them. It is quite an unusual piece of travel writing as, unlike Bryson or Theroux, the author doesn't meet that many locals (at least not in any level of depth); I think the book suffers for this lack of direct human interaction

Still, definitely one worth reading and it certainly increased my knowledge of Germany (if not so much of the Germans themselves).

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5 of 7 people found the following review helpful

1.0 out of 5 stars Possibly the worst book I've ever read, 5 July 2008

By

[Mike Ryko "mike ryko"](#) (Spain) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen (Paperback)
How did this ever get published? Selling itself as a "humorous" travel book could surely make it liable for prosecution under the Trades Description Act. I gave up counting the "ho ho ho" references to sun-loungers when I reached 20 and I hadn't even read that many pages. Whoever gave Ben Donald the idea that he was in any way a wit has done us all a great disservice. Tim Moore this is not.

Somebody else wrote a review here saying they wouldn't even give their copy to a charity shop, this struck a chord as I had come to the same conclusion. I briefly contemplated returning it to the publishers and demanding my money back, (with every feeble sun-lounger crack underlined) but life is too short. So mine went in the bin.

Despite the large number of similarly dismayed reviews here on Amazon I notice the book has been given an average of over 4 stars. This appears to have been a result of a number of 5 star reviews, all written in a suspiciously similar style (not in the least bit as amusing as they clearly think they are). Baffling behaviour as I doubt even the author's mother could love this book.

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3 of 6 people found the following review helpful

3.0 out of 5 stars Mixed bag of cliches and good stuff !, 3 May 2008

By

[Ann Fairweather](#) (England) - [See all my reviews](#)

(VINE VOICE)

This review is from: Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen (Paperback)
Having just read 'Springtime in Germany' I am not surprised to see all the previous negative comments about it. Yes this book is a very odd mix of near insults and occasional declaration of love. The artificial device of 'Manny' the travel doctor and mentor is just that : artificial and dreadful and nearly stopped me reading the book. Yet I persisted and indeed considering how few are the travel writing books on Germany, it is quite worth reading. If lots of stuff come through as 'cliches', it is difficult to deny there's always some part of truth in there. Ben Donald managed to be sometimes genuinely amusing , and on the whole, if one has never been to Germany and want to

have some feel for the place in advance, I suppose one can read Donald for want of a better equivalent.

But I agree that if I were German, I would feel rather insulted by the crass cover and the overall condescending tone of the book.

13 of 16 people found the following review helpful

2.0 out of 5 stars Revealing, 30 Jan 2008

By

[Nordlicht](#) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)
Revealing

This book is quite revealing - and in this sense probably better than the author expected. And for sure different: It does reveal much more about the author than about Germany.

Yes, the author heads beyond the Monty-Python and The Sun clichés about Germany, but, unfortunately to get stuck in just some others. It is refreshing to read some funny words about the German *Geistesgeschichte*, how romanticism influenced German writers, artists, philosophers and probably also politicians. But explaining everything? Well, this is as if you would like to explain the sex life of British working class teenagers by referring back to Queen Victoria.

Okay, clichés are wonderful fun, got that, but a running gag might get slightly boring after maybe the first 200 pages - especially, when the idea behind it is so obviously wrong. One could call this attitude superficial.

The book also reveals a lot about how little the author knows about the world, and about his own Britain. Many examples presented as typical German are so abundant in the rest of the world, often, because they have been exported from the United States. Take the sex life: Yes, Germans are not exactly prudish, and for many of them it is quite natural to swim or enter a sauna naked. This might indeed be something typical. But then this absence of subtlety and erotic in a swinger club, is this typical German? I wouldn't expect a US or British establishment being a place of finesse or sophistication, not even a French one. And actually, when looking at Ann Summers Lingerie, female British students and Victoria Beckham, I am quite surprised to read such a comment from a Brit. Another one: The highly official German word for sex is something like "sex traffic". Well, not really erotic, I agree. But is sexual intercourse so much better? ;-) I think Germans use their word as much as the British theirs.

Actually, this whole language thing is rather ignorant: Yes, German has got the ability to connect words and thus to build really long words like

Arbeitnehmer-Entsendegesetz. But could at least the author of a book about Germany have the knowledge and fantasy to imagine that also we Germans don't like such monstrous words? Recognize that this ability of German sometimes helps to create short and elegant words were English need loads of "ofs"? Understand that a German bureaucrat's language is as dull as a UK bureaucrats language ("health and safety regulations") and pretty far away from world literature. But nothing, just the clichés again.

But, although a lot in the book is about sex, there are so many other things sold as typical German which they are not: Take the walking. Donald was so surprised of all the Germans on the Island of Rügen, leaving their car and then walking for two or three miles to the famous cliffs. Well, one of the first things about Britain I read in my Lonely Planet was that Brits are keen walkers. And I have

seen loads of them, along the North Norfolk coast, in Dartmoor or in Scotland. Could it be that the author never visited any such place in the UK?

Another thing is the allegedly Puritan character of the Germans. Everything Donald sees is dominated by the Protestant work ethic. Maybe he learned about it at school. But he didn't learn that half of the Germans are Catholic and the German Lutheran church is much more laid back and liberal than, say, the Calvinist church or the puritanic variants in Scandinavia or Scotland. Or was the author mixing up the two words Puritan and Prussian? Quite similar, eh? But also the Prussian working ethic is quite different from its clichés, and again dominated only parts of Germany.

And then, for British readers maybe most important, the part about humour: Also here, Donald was stuck. You might get a flavour of the difference between German and British humour when you first go to a German and then to a British pub. The level of laughter will probably be the same in both places. But: The things people in Britain laugh about, are actually mostly funny. The author did not manage to get an idea of this typical teutonic sense of so-called humour which you will only understand when you spend new years eve in Germany and watch one of the public TV channel (not N3, they show Dinner for One). Furthermore, humour in Germany is (as everywhere) a very region specific and also class dependent thing. In Northern Germany, people have a quite deadpan humour without spending many words. In some areas of Southern Germany, instead, people are quite chatty. And, yes, others have no sense of humour at all. But nothing about regional or class influences, just the clichés again.

There are good bits in the book. I found the part about fairy tails nice. And the one about Trimmichpfade very funny, also some others. But then, having everything pressed into this theory of romanticism, sounds as if the author were, well, a bit too German :-). So, even British readers who are looking for some nice German bashing or for some new clichés might be disappointed.

I agree that the spelling in the book is dreadful. But it just tells another story about (the publisher and) a country, where newsreaders emphasise the second syllable in Sarkozy (and the first in Nicolas) and almost no graduate is fluent in a foreign language.

It would be fun reading a British book about Germany, getting to know new things about your home country, all the peculiarities you have never thought of, with passion and humour. But this is not what this book is about.

Douglas, Norwich, UK

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26 of 29 people found the following review helpful

1.0 out of 5 stars A truly awful book, 19 Dec 2007

By

[King Julian](#) (Germany) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)
I was interested in reading the newest attempt, or pretence of an attempt of an Englishman to understand my homecountry. After numerous disastrous attempts I was hopeful because the author seemed to feel fit to present his insights to everyone willing to get to know us better. What a dreadful thought people might actually think this book comes even close to getting anything.

Frankly, I would never even dare to write about English humour without being able to understand and speak the language. My English may not be perfect but I get and love English humour, the good one at least, especially because it is quite similar to German humour. Now writing about your travelling is one thing but taking a shot at writing about German humour without actually being able to experience German humour or being able to listen to some of our amazing stand-up comedians (since the author allows himself to touch on that topic) because Mr. Donald does not understand German, is painful to read. You read on and on, you search for the joke that is not there, you ignore the worst cliché and then you finally ask yourself, what is that country this man is talking about? Unknown to me in it's one-dimensionality, full of cliché and boring, sometimes plain bad humour. Maybe in an attempt to make it sound more "German" by writing it in a style of what is perceived as German style in England.

If you want to learn something about Germany, please don't read this book. If you like yourself a good load of cliché, a cheap laugh or two and the guarantee that you won't know Germany any better than before you picked up this book, I recommend it. The thought that some readers actually state they learned something and got rid of some biase is frightening. Just imagine how distorted their view of Germany must have been prior to reading a book that provides a very distorted view itself.

Pity that the gift of humour seems to fail English writers most of the time they try to write about Germany.

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15 of 17 people found the following review helpful

1.0 out of 5 stars This book is awful, 20 Nov 2007

By

[M. G. Lynam](#) (Dublin, Ireland) - [See all my reviews](#)

(REAL NAME)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)

Nice idea, shame Bill Bryson was busy and it was left to someone who thinks that sticking V and W into sentences is a scream. The narrative is laboured, what I did on my holidays type stuff.

It contradicts itself regularly, eg devoting a whole chapter about how wonderful the Oktoberfest is having 100,000 inebriated people in the one place, with food, toilets etc laid on and no trouble and then at the end saying that the whole German party feels too organised. Also saying that Cologne Carnival starts in November and then goes on to write about Mardi Gras which is when the Cologne

Canival actually happens.

The author is apparently bored with the whole travel thing, which obviously is an issue if you are a travel writer. However he comes across as such a dull character in the book one can not be surprised he would be bored with his own company.

I cannot even bring myself to drop this book around to the charity shop as it would be lurking on the shelf to waste someone else's time.

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18 of 20 people found the following review helpful

3.0 out of 5 stars Why do publishers treat us like we are stupid?, 19 Sep 2007

By

[PaulB](#) (Manchester) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen (Paperback)

If it hadn't been for the fact that this was the only piece of travel writing (as opposed to a guidebook) I could find on Germany, I wouldn't have bought this book. The most obvious trend of recent years in travel writing has been down towards the lowest common denominator, with puerile writing about contrived - supposedly humorous - situations. Both the jacket design and the title of this book led me to suppose that this was no exception.

In fact, there is an element of the puerile and jokey (and, in places, clunky) to the writing. And the central conceit about the travel therapist quickly becomes rather wearisome. But behind it all, Ben Donald has evidently put in a lot of time and research and, when he leaves the tired gags about the German sense of humour and sunbed habits alone, what he has written has a great deal to offer. I came away feeling I had learned a lot about the Germans and Germany.

I am not entirely sure who it is in the publishing industry that has come to the view that the reading public are all idiots who must be suckered into buying a travel book by cramming it with schoolboy jokes, giving it a hackneyed title and wrapping up the whole in a tacky cover - but I wish they would desist. I have a sneaking suspicion that it is the publishers themselves, who think they can sell more copies that way. In his acknowledgements, Ben Donald thanks his agent for persuading him that a 'straight' travel book about Germany wouldn't work (or sell?). I think this is probably learned behaviour on the part of the agent, but in any case - I don't think your agent actually did you any favours, Ben!

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6 of 12 people found the following review helpful

5.0 out of 5 stars Vorsprung durch Völkerverständigung, 11 Sep 2007

By

[Georg Stahl "Georg"](#) (London, UK) - [See all my reviews](#)

(REAL NAME)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)
Some of the reviewers seem to have mistaken Ben Donald's book as a detailed travel guide or an accurate dictionary. I don't think it's either of those. Rather it's a very entertaining insight into German Befindlichkeit that goes well beyond the World War II, Wembley 1966, and beer & sausages trivia. Of course, not everybody might find the comparison of cheap airlines and the Kraft durch Freude scheme funny. But Ben Donald did some interesting research and explains events and facts about my country I wasn't aware of before. But, and that's the added value, Ben Donald also manages to tell something about the British by way of dismantling prejudices so often used on the British Isles. In that sense, I'd give the book the certificate Vorsprung durch Völkerverständigung. Help other customers find the most helpful reviews

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17 of 21 people found the following review helpful

1.0 out of 5 stars Echter Muell! (Rubbish), 23 Aug 2007

By

[B. Osthaus](#) (Exeter, UK) - [See all my reviews](#)

(REAL NAME)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)
I was pleased to find a travel book about Germany, but after reading about 6 pages I returned it to my local bookshop for a full refund.

How can someone write a book about a country, quoting lots of its language, and not even ask a native speaker to check the spelling and translation?! Too much trouble, Mr Donald???

Germans don't build 'Schloesser' on the beach, but 'Burgen', which means castle. The plural of 'Strandkorb' is 'Strandkoerbe' and not 'Strandkoerben'. And 'Vorsprung' does not mean 'progress', as claimed in the glossary, but 'advance', or 'being one step ahead'. I am sure these are not the only factual errors, but, as stated above, I gave up.

What a badly researched and written book!

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7 of 14 people found the following review helpful

5.0 out of 5 stars Must read for those visiting Germany, 21 Aug 2007

By

[Die Ausländer](#) (NRW, Germany) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)
I love this book! Being "Ausländer" living in Germany, we have lived it all first-hand. The book brought back great memories of the craziness that unfolded with each trip in all the places Ben visited. While on a recent trip, we were inspired by the book to make a detour to see "Herman the German" and the birthplace of Germany. We have convinced several of our German friends that they need to read the book too.

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1 of 14 people found the following review helpful

5.0 out of 5 stars Volkswagen Transporter, 24 July 2007

By

[Special Agent](#) (schleswig holstein) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)

The sticker on the flowerpower VW bus said: "Sell my van? I'd rather stick wasps up my arse" - which is I'm told a good German joke ("All German jokes are good", Fritz concurred).

A quixotic (re)introduction to our saxon heritage - fun and fast-paced, and surprisingly informative.

No more mistaking your angst from your elbow.

1 of 21 people found the following review helpful

5.0 out of 5 stars Teutonic Heaven, 24 July 2007

By

[Andrew Arentsen](#) - [See all my reviews](#)

(REAL NAME)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)

I must confess to some reservations about our Germanic cousins. Their history is of aggressive militarism and Wagnerian melodrama. Allied to that they gave us Rudi Voller's hair. Wholly unforgivable. This book made me think again. What Donald does so well is to make you feel German. He thinks and writes in their linear and humourless manner. His jokes smell of stale cabbage and sweaty leather pants. His writing is a blitzkrieg against style and subtlety. He makes you feel that your name is Hans and start to sing the songs from the Student Prince. He made me want to move to Munich and marry Helga with the steins of Lowenbrau. This truly is writing of the highest social order. Snell Snell Herr Donald.

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4 of 13 people found the following review helpful

5.0 out of 5 stars Springtime for Germany, 23 July 2007

By

[Charles Bailey](#) - [See all my reviews](#)

(REAL NAME)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)
Written with a personal insight gained from living in Germany as a boy in the 1970s, *Springtime for Germany* is entertaining, self effacing and informative. The book champions the cause of a world weary traveller. Exasperated by games of holiday one-upmanship at smart dinner parties, the author has a chance meeting that sets him on his way to Germany and to rediscovering his love of travel.

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5 of 15 people found the following review helpful

5.0 out of 5 stars Sehr gut, 23 July 2007

By

[Mr. M. Naylor "marcusnaylor26"](#) (Bognor Regis) - [See all my reviews](#)

(REAL NAME)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)
The author's claim to have learned to love what has always set Germans apart through ridicule intrigued me enough to read this book. Ben Donald flies the (German) flag of embracing Europe and not taking our German brethren at face value. Taking the time to read this book will allow you to appreciate the depth of character that exists behind those serious Germanic exteriors. This stereotype masks true diversity within the nation of Krauts - from nudist beaches in the north to beer swilling Bavarians in the South, from Western car manufacturing powerhouses to Eastern tribes of Trebant drivers. There is a lot of humour within the country's borders which Ben Donald reflects well - it's worth buying the book just for the tales of his escapades in the shade of red lights! A delight to find a book that is a very enjoyable read and will also serve as a guide to future destinations in the land of the Teutons. Wunderbar!

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5 of 15 people found the following review helpful

5.0 out of 5 stars Alles Klaar, 23 July 2007

By

[Jose Cuervo](#) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: *Springtime for Germany: or How I Learned to Love Lederhosen* (Paperback)
Book that sunlounger, put your towell out, shed all your clothing, stock up on the pretzels and weissbier, and grab a copy of Donald's book because you're going to laugh your socks (and sandals) off with this amusing travelogue on a country and its inhabitants that you thought you knew but don't really. It's not all lederhosen and bratwurst - well just a little - but it certainly dispels a lot of myths, clears up some stereotypes and - best of all - tells you where to find the best nudist

beaches in *Germany*. Oh, and it also makes you want to drop everything - even your towel - and go travelling. Which has to be the sign of a good travel book!

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World literature tour: Germany

We asked for suggestions of your [favourite books and authors from or about Germany](#). Here are the results

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Germany	Sasa Stanisic	How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone	RichardLea	Anthea Bell	Striking evocation of childhood among the chaos of the Bosnian war
Germany	Thomas Pletzinger	Funeral for a Dog	RichardLea	Ross Benjamin	Deft and moving portrait of characters struggling with the realisation that life is not entirely under their control
Austria	Joseph Roth	Radetzkymarsch	NieWiederLeagueOne		A wonderful evocation of Austria/Hungary before the First World War
Germany	Hans Fallada	Every Man Dies Alone			Incredibly compelling inside view of life in Germany during WW2.
Germany	Herta Müller	Atemschaukel/Everything I possess, I	Nilpferd	English version due 2011?	An extraordinarily poetic examination of a German-Romanian's attempt to survive a

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Name of country	Name of author	Title of book	Your username	Translation by	Tell us why this book/author is great
		carry with me			post-war Russian labour camp, and a discourse on how humans behave when one group is given absolute power over another. Through its exploration of conflicting national loyalties as well as themes of reparation/exorcism of guilt, the novel also contains valuable insights into contemporary Germany.
Germany	Patrick Süskind	Das Parfum	dholliday		The original German is the only read I can recall which successfully transferred taste and smell from its pages to your senses. I never saw that skill in Creative Writing class!
Germany	Wolfgang Herrndorf	Tschick	cantchoose	?	Herrndorf probably hates to hear that comparison by now - but TSCHICK is better than CATCHER IN THE RYE!
Germany	Hermann Hesse	Siddhartha	Zenimo	Hilda Rosner	One of the usual suspects but that doesn't make it any less of a wonderful novel. Its limpid beauty is created with stylistic grace and a deep understanding of eastern philosophy.
Germany	Frank Schätzing	Der Schwarm	dholliday		Deep, vivid, epic blockbuster sci-fi action. If you know your

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					American movies & TV, then it's a bit like The Abyss meets SeaQuest DSV meets The Day After Tomorrow... ...but far superior, obviously.
Germany	Andreas Steinhöfel	Die Mitte der Welt		into English: Alisa Jaffa; edited by Jonas Sachwitz; Centre of my World und die Neuauflage: The Center of the World.	
Germany	Theodor Storm	Der Schimmelreiter	JaneH	Denis Jackson	Quiet and simple prose that is creeping with tension and gathers momentum to an inevitable end; the themes of nature vs. man and struggle to act upon scientific/technical foresight against prevailing attitude of the masses is all the more relevant in the era of rapid climate change -- flooding of inadequately designed/maintained structures sound familiar to anyone?
Germany	Ian McEwan	The Innocent	Paul Baron		An excellent book based in post-WWII Berlin of an inexperienced

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					and sensitive Brit thrown in at the deep end of a damaged and war torn city that has no real sense of individuality and is a muddle of different nationalities.
Germany	Andreas Steinhöfel	Die Mitte der Welt	MsGellhorn	into English: Alisa Jaffa; edited by Jonas Sachwitz; Centre of my World; new edition: The Center of the World.	It's emotional - its language is simply yet alluring - it is (in my opinion) completely 'out of the box'. Yes, it is being described as a 'how-to-cope-with-puperty' novel but for me it is more. It is magical and disturbing at times.
United Kingdom	Knut Hamsun	Hunger	Nick Craske	Alfred A. Knopf, c. 1899.	Written after Hamsun's return from an ill-fated tour of America, Hunger is loosely based on the author's own impoverished life before his breakthrough in 1890. Set in late 19th century Kristiania, the novel recounts the adventures of a starving young man whose sense of reality is giving way to a delusionary existence on the darker side of a modern metropolis. While he vainly tries to maintain an outer shell of respectability, his mental and physical decay are recounted in detail. His ordeal, enhanced by

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					his inability or unwillingness to pursue a professional career, which he deems unfit for someone of his abilities, is pictured in a series of encounters which Hamsun himself described as 'a series of analyses.' In many ways, the protagonist of the novel displays traits reminiscent of Raskolnikov[citation needed], whose creator, Fyodor Dostoevsky, was one of Hamsun's main influences. The influence of naturalist authors such as Emile Zola is apparent in the novel, as is his rejection of the realist tradition.
Germany/Austria	Ingeborg Bachmann	Darkness Spoken	ELIJAH JOON - Author of TEMPORAL: a Novel of Consciousness and Time; Screenwriter of Indie Film FOCAL POINT (2010)	Peter Filkins	Ingeborg Bachmann is one of the most influential German language writers and poets of post WWII. Her writings convey power and intense emotion even when diluted through translation into other languages. Her poems retain an immediate, rhythmic quality that is simply captivating. A true contemporary of Sylvia Plath in themes and feminist power and class struggles, it is a shame Ingeborg is not as well known the world over, especially among American poetry

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					enthusiasts.
Germany	Marta Hillers - Published as anonymous	A woman in Berlin - Eine Frau in Berlin	FrancescaBrazzorotto	Philip Boehm	A touching account of a woman's life in Berlin during the occupation of the city by the Red Army (post WWII). The author's cruel and straight-forward style is equally poetic. The experience of women in war-occupied zones, is a page of history which is not often dealt with, and which should not be ignored.
Germany	Georg Christoph Lichtenberg	The Waste Books	southeast	R. J. Hollingdale	Because it is extremely funny but also deep and philosophical. It contains a lot of brilliant aphorisms and apothegms. A classic.
Germany	Lion Feuchtwanger	Die Geschwister Oppermann (The Oppermann Siblings)	Urchinette		Written in 1933, this is an astonishingly powerful novel about the effects of Nazism on one upper-middle-class Jewish German family. The action starts a few months (I think) before Hitler comes to power and ends about a year later, by which time the family, and its comfortable place in Berlin society, has been utterly destroyed (one member of the family, an idealistic schoolboy, is eventually driven to suicide by the Nazification of his

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					school, which is immediately forced to teach subjects like history and German literature through a Nazi filter; another ends up in an early concentration camp). Feuchtwanger started writing it in January '33, so as he wrote he was only a few months ahead of his characters, giving the book an extraordinarily immediate feel. I read it as a German-studying university undergraduate as part of a course devoted to novels published outside of Germany during the Nazi period by anti-Nazi German writers and it made a huge impression on me - I've only read it in German so I have no idea how good (or bad) the current American translation of it is. But the original is fantastic.
Germany	Josef von Eichendorff	Aus Dem Leben Eines Taugenichts	Spursgirl		It's a fun, picaresque novel about a young man travelling through Italy in the early 1800s. It's reminiscent of Tom Jones or Joseph Andrews.
United States	Heinrich Boll	Ansichten eines Clowns, ("The	koolieman	Leila Vennewitz	Sobs of a clown left meandering through Bonn with no religion and the ability to identify smells through the telephone. With this,

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		Clown")			the novel mixes social, religious, and political commentary about the era during and after The War. Boll's critique of the Roman Catholic Church and the role it played in Europe at the time is significant.
Germany	Hans Keilson	Comedy in a Minor Key	Literary Spy		Wonderfully witty book with a serious subject by a man who knew his subject. The book is about how a Dutch couple hide a Jewish man, what it's like to have a stranger in your house and what they do when he dies and they have a corpse to dispose of.
Germany	Franz Kafka	Metamorphosis	AlBranson	Project Gutenberg's David Wyllie	Kafka's "Metamorphosis" was the "work of the day" on Project Gutenberg's site. I thought the title sounded interesting enough and admittedly, I knew it would be about an individual's change of heart. I looked forward to reading the story. Sadly, I had only heard about Kafka - that he was a writer. Nothing about his personal life or his writings. Kafka's words were so defining and real. The thought process to create such a work left me in awe and empathetic to his person. I was so concerned for how he must have grown up that

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					it encouraged me read biographies of his life and his works. I now make it my business to read whatever he has written. "Metamorphosis" was such a powerful work for me that I had to read it twice, and I find myself recommending it to others. The online version is a standard part of my e-reader, and I am searching for the book (in its rare form) for my collection. I have been reading for such a long time. John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men" has been my favorite work since my teenage years. "Metamorphosis" is now added to that list. By the way, I was not sure which country you were requesting - my country or the country of the work. My country is the United States.
Germany	Matthias Politycki	Next World Novella	Dan Holloway	Anthea Bell	It's easy to forget just how skilful, approachable and dazzling contemporary German fiction can be when we look at the great works of the past.
Germanu	Michael Ende	The Neverending Story	johnsturm1610	Ralph Manheim	What's not to love about this book? Not only is it a fantastic fantasy read it's also a statement/warning about the loss

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					of imagination and reading. In this world of reality TV this theme is even more relevant today than it was 32 years ago.
Germany	Maikw Wetzel	Long Days (Lange Tage)	short stuff	Lyn Marven	A wonderful young short story writer, Wetzel is incredibly skilled at taking us into the complex internal worlds of her characters. They're often troubled teenagers, tasting love or disappointment or anger for the first time. Several of the stories are set against the backdrop of the late 80s and early 90s (the time of Wetzel's own childhood), with the fall of the Wall ubiquitous behind the personal rifts and reunifications of Wetzel's teenage characters.
Germany	Pascal Mercier	Night Train to Lisbon			You have to read it yourself. This book refreshed my mind.
Germany	Daniel Kehlmann	Measuring the World	woku	Carol Brown Janeway	Germans have humour! Apart from its literary value the book is about an important epoch of German culture, covering science and humanities. What more to expect?!
Germany	Michael Ende	Momo	dislocatedmartian	Francis Lobb as The Grey Gentlemen,	The list of my favourite German writers is long, and I was recently reminded of this book I had read

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				and by J. Maxwell Brownjohn as Momo	as a child. It is the most frightening thing I have ever read: that such people could actually exist, people who steal time. And as I grew up, turns out, Ende was not far from the terrifying truth: they do exist, time is being stolen. There is something about childrens books that speak with much more terror to the grown up reader.
UK	Heinrich Böll	Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum	KleineKlasse		Böll's Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum is a prescient novella about the sensationalist and immoral methods of the tabloid press. It also has historical interest as a commentary on 1970s West German society.
USA	Heinrich Böll	Die Verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum	Roach	read in German	Absolutely fantastic. Each time I see a story where the media are lampooning a person or celebrity I am reminded of this story. If only everybody could get their revenge.....
Germany	Siegfried Lenz	German Lesson	woku	Ernest Kaiser & Eithne Wilkins	An account of the political sensitivities after WW II using the art scene as a framework (expressionism which was defamed art - Entartete Kunst - during the Third Reich). A book

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					not to put away until finished.
Germany	Kurt Tucholsky	Schloss Gripsholm	schribaere	??	Kurt Tucholsky is one of Germany's wittiest writers. He was a poet, novelist, songwriter, critic, publisher, satirist and political writer in the Weimar republic. He constantly warned against the Nazi threat and his works were later banned in the Third Reich. His sharp and witty writing style is among the best in German literature. Unfortunately, he's hardly known outside Germany.
Germany	E.T.A. Hoffmann	Der Sandmann	Nilpferd		Classic novella of the romantic period. A gothic horror exploring ideas of hubris and human/machine interaction at the dawn of the industrial age.
Germany	Herman Hesse	Siddhartha	Inspired		The journey of Siddhartha -from birth to 'enlightenment'- with all its trials and tribulations, joys and heartaches, achievements and losses, discoveries and learnings is described in the most concise, eloquent, precise and deep way imaginable. Most authors would need to write a few books to convey what Hesse conveys within this short novel. An absolute

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Name of country	Name of author	Title of book	Your username	Translation by	Tell us why this book/author is great
					classic.
Germany	Hans Fallada	Little Man, What Now?	johu	Susan Bennett	One of the modernist greats of the Weimar era, Fallada wrote powerful, but accessible and popular prose. His most famous novel 'Kleiner Mann, was nun?' – a 'Grapes of Wrath'-style story about the downfall of a young family during the Great Depression, published in 1932 – is still a tremendous and relevant read, especially in today's credit crisis. A modern classic.
Germany	Gert Hoffmann	The Parable of the Blind	kushti	Christopher Middleton	A modernist interpretation of the Pieter Brueghel painting. Six blind men are taken to the artist's studio, and attempt to make some kind of sense of what is going on. Sparse, haunting, and at times painfully funny in the kind of desperate way that Beckett can be funny.
Germany	Erich Kästner	Als ich ein kleiner Junge war (When I was a little boy)	Fran	McHugh	Kästner was born and grew up in Dresden/ Germany, and this city was basically his first and everlasting love. He describes his childhood and youth in the city and is thus reflecting on the huge changes the city and the whole country was undergoing from the

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					year of his birth 1899 onwards. He was a critic, a pacifist and a journalist who also wrote plays and poetry but is best known for his children's books. I read the book first when I was seven, then at fourteen. I reread it at the age of 19 and 22 - it's been a different experience every time, but always great. It's an emotional recollection of Käsnters memories, half a century old but incredibly captivating. Never met anyone who didn't enjoy it.
Germany	Jakob Arjouni	Happy Birthday, Turk!	Paul4Jags	Anselm Hollo	Kayankaya, the detective of this crime novel is, like the author, a German of Turkish descent so as well as the typical detective noir story you get to experience the racism immigrants are facing in the German city he works through his eyes.
Germany	Hermann Hesse	Peter Camenzind	znin	W.J.Strachan	I've read books by Thomas Mann, Patrick Suskind, Gunter Grass, Theodor Storm, Joseph Roth and Heinrich Boll, the first and last of which particularly impressed me. Hermann Hesse, however, became one of the few writers whose books, after reading one, I wanted to read all of. They're

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					acheingly beautiful; deeply lyrical and melancholic, evoking a very personalized and nostalgic sense of lost youth. They're also full of tenderness; these stories don't leave you feeling pessimistic despite the often bittersweet content. 'Peter Camenzind' might just about be my favourite, but I could equally have chosen 'Knulp', 'Klingsor's Last Summer', 'Narziss and Goldmund' or 'Steppenwolf'.
Turkey	Stendhal	Lucien Leuwen	whatcoulditbe		Just read it please.
USA	Franz Kafka	The Metamorphosis	ggb		
Turkey	Franz Kafka	The Trial	ggb		
germany	theodor fontane	frau jenny treibel	ibartsch		Fontane (1819-1898) was an author, who was great on portraying women- especially those, who were under pressure. The circumstances in late 19th century were not easy for women, they had scarce opportunities like education, voting rights, freedom of choosing her partner. Fontane portrayed those women, if they were bourgeois or aristocrats,

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					with humor, sympathy and intelligence. One of these is corinna, intelligent and educated, daughter of Professor Schmidt. She has her own plans about her future and wants to seduce rich Leopold Treibel, although her dad wants her to marry her cousin. Two families meet, that have already -and also romantic-relationships in the past. Loads of funny dialogues! Fontane is best known for "Effie Briest" and "Der Stechlin". He also wrote ballads and poems. Another author who followed him in terms of literarily technics and who admired Fontane, was Nobel Prize Winner Thomas Mann (1875 - 1955).
Turkey	Thomas Mann	Death in Venice	bbg		
Germany	Jenny Erpenbeck	Visitation	AggieH		Exquisite writing, and remarkable that any author can find a new and relevant way to tell stories based on (relatively speaking) recent German history. Just when you thought there was no new way to present events and evoke lives in (and around) Germany in the first half of the 20th century, just when you fretted that

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					constant Holocaust-based references were giving us an emotional free pass not to bother our heads thinking of all the other horrors in the world - the ones we do nothing about in our own lifetimes - along comes Erpenbeck with something that makes you react and understand in a new way.
United Kingdom	Klaus Mann	The Turning Point	Dr John S. Partington		This autobiography of the author of 'Mephisto' portrays the hopes of Weimar Germany followed by its collapse into Nazism - and the end of Germany as Mann knew it. Indeed, during his exile in the USA, Mann joined the US Army and contributed to the liberation of his country, whilst also reporting on postwar Germany for the American press. Such was his sense of rootlessness in the society devastated by Nazism and war that he felt alone and adrift in postwar Germany. The readers' knowledge of Mann's suicide in 1949 adds to the sombre mood of this text, which spirals into an abyss and shows no recovery despite the end of the war in a liberated - albeit fractured - Germany. A truly great account of

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Name of country	Name of author	Title of book	Your username	Translation by	Tell us why this book/author is great
					socio-moral collapse and the irreparable loss to one man.
Germany	Wolfgang Schorlau	Das München-Komplott	Stuttgarter		"Das München-Komplott" by Wolfgang Schorlau is a thriller which re-examines the bomb attack at the Oktoberfest in Munich in 1980. This was the worst act of terrorism in post-war Germany and Schorlau makes a convincing case for it being state-sponsored. His other thrillers with the same central figure, Georg Dengler, a former Bundeskriminalamt investigator turned private eye, also look at the darker side of Germany, past and present. I don't think any of these are available in English.
Bosnia	Ivo Andric	The Damned Yard and other stories	Jelica Gavrilovic	Svetozar Koljevic, Joseph Schallert, Ronelle Alexander, Felicity Rosslyn, Lenore Grenoble	It tells the story of the essence of imagination, its importance to our survival and enjoyment of life in in the face of political and social stupidity. That imagination saves us from ourselves, along with organisation, and can lead us in to a more positive future. Ivo deals with the former Yugoslavia republics and states with a vast visionary approach and makes us realise how important it is to hear everyone's story -all stories are

World literature tour: Germany

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					important in the making of humanity. Ivo Andric was made literary laureate in 1961 for his incredible understanding of the area he lived in.
Germany	Rafik Schami	Das Letzte Wort der Wanderratte	Feodor		Any New Europe literature tour that cannot place Kafka will be fatally taken. However, before that bitter end, I'd like to recommend Rafik Schami. Unlike his novels - set mostly in Syria - his stories narrate migration and immigration in Germany. Like his novels, though, his volume, Das Letzte Wort der Wanderratte, draws on oral storytelling and fantastic plots. The best story of the lot would be Als der Meister auftrat, where the migrant takes the skin of a modern day Siegfried only to rue the effort at assimilation.
Germany	Hermann Hesse	Demian	Fragezeichen	?	Demian is not just a book - it's a revelation. Hesse is one of the few authors whose books have a certain magic to it. A magic of style and of depth. The famous psychologist C.G. Jung once called this rather short (less than 200 pages) and accessible book "a beacon of light in a stormy sea".

World literature tour: Germany

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					Why did he do that? Because there is a malaise at the heart of modern time. A malaise of superficiality and a general feeling of incompleteness. This book is not a cure, but it gives names to thing that are so far away from the normal discourse of the media that they can be considered largely forgotten. It's an awakening of the subconscious; breathing life into facets of the human mind one did not even entirely knew existed, but whose absence - while not being understood - is felt clearly.
Germany	Michael Ende	Jim Knopf und Lukas der Lokomotivführer	ltho		
Uruguay	Juan Carlos Onetti	The Shipyard	Laurita	Nick Caistor	Onetti is great at conjuring worlds out of imagination. After a long absence, Larsen (a middle-aged former brothel-owner) is back in his fictional hometown of Santa María, a backwater place where nothing happens (on the surface at least), with a scheme for getting his hands on the fortune of the town's entrepreneur, the

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					shipyard's owner. Uruguayan Juan Carlos Onetti, who has been compared to William Faulkner and Graham Greene, is a great author to begin for those of you who are tired of magical realism -- - and even more so for those who think that Latin American literature has nothing to offer but luxuriant vegetation and family sagas involving magic-working grandmothers. If you want to set stereotypes aside and embark on a strange journey through a bleak landscape, Onetti is your man.
Germany	Christa Wolf	Cassandra	Katherine Govier		
Germany	Walter Moers	Rumo	lgottli1		The characters are colorful and unlike the normal "how the hero developed" stories, the hero also gets hit with reality that there are others like him. The book takes its time to get to its point, but it's not dull. Moers allows the characters to develop, while the plot stews.
Germany	Goethe	Selected Poems	IanC	David Luke	Goethe is of Shakespearean stature and is as fertile and hard to pin down as our own greatest writer. He reinvented himself several times as an artist over a long lifetime, and wrote great

World literature tour: Germany

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					novels and plays as well as magnificent poetry. But the glory of Goethe is his poetry. David Luke's recent dual-language Penguin Classics translation is a great achievement by one of our best scholars of classic German literature.
Germany	Alfred Neumann	Six of Them	Marleen	Anatol Murad	<p>Book details: Original Title: Es Waren Ihrer Sechs The book tells the story about the White Rose "movement" in Germany during WW II. It's the fictionalised story of the six "members" of the White Rose in a gripping tale. What makes the book extra special is that Neumann was in America during WW II and read about the arrest of the six in a newspaper there. He wrote the whole book based on the little information that article contained. It turned out later that he had been far more accurate than he could have hoped for. See this site for more information:</p> <p>http://neglectedbooks.com/?p=147 It's not only the best German book I ever read, it is also one of the best books overall I've had the pleasure of coming across. It's a huge shame that as far as I know,</p>

World literature tour: Germany

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Name of country	Name of author	Title of book	Your username	Translation by	Tell us why this book/author is great
					this book is no longer available. Another favourite of mine is Die Neuen Leiden Des Jungen W by Ulrich Plenzdorf. Since I haven't been able to find an English translation of this book I won't expand on this title.
germany	heinrich böll	fürsorgliche belagerung	bonnie	don't know	read it and you will know.
Germany	Wolfgang Herrndorf	Tschick	Besteckfach		It's a book you don't forget, at least when you get to know the story behind it. It's a getaway story of two Berlin youngsters driving an old Lada southwards, written in vivid language. There were few critics who didn't mention Salinger... It's not too elaborate, but at the same time very gripping. The author restarted the book when he got diagnosed with a brain tumor. He wrote a blog about his illness and struggle to stay alive which was widely recognised as a very sophisticated read. So you get two in one if you read both, the book and the blog. The book is shortlisted for the The Leipzig Book Fair Prize on thursday.
Germany	Theodor	"Effi Briest"	Yankreader	Penguin	Fontane is a great German writer

World literature tour: Germany

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	Fontane			edition: Rorrison and Chambers	who didn't publish his first novel until he was 58 in 1878. He deserves to be better known by English speakers. Thomas Mann in 1919 said Fontane's "Effi Briest" belonged to the six most significant novels ever written. Fassbinder filmed it. Angel Books in the UK has come out with English translations of several Fontane novels. Recently read Angel Books' translation of Fontane's "On Tangled Paths" (German: "Irrungen, Wirrungen"), a short but also great novel.
Germany	Hermann Hesse	The Glass Bead Game	phollando	Richard and Clara Winston	It is a book, for which Hesse rightly won the Nobel Prize, of startling complexity and unbelievably audacious in concept. A utopian novel set in a society at whose zenith lies the eponymous game. From what started as a device aimed at teaching students the principles of counterpoint it developed in a literally all-encompassing contest the aim of which is the synthesis the totality of all human knowledge. In some ways it is typical of the bildungsroman of Goethe but Joseph Knecht's

World literature tour: Germany

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					lifelong passion isn't for any old Bavarian Fraulein, it is for learning itself. I shall always be in awe of this book.
Germany	Judith Hermann	Sommerhaus, später (Summerhouse, later)	Lily_D		"Nichts als Gespenster"(2004) and "Sommerhaus, später"(2000) are collections of short stories (which is very rare in Germany at the moment). I would recommend both those books. Judith Hermann writes really beautifully about little fractures in peoples lives.
Germany	WG Sebald	The Rings of Saturn	phollando	Michael Hulse	Perhaps the greatest book by the greatest author of the last twenty years. It is a work of melancholic meta-fiction where the authors meditations on the past mixed in with Michael Hamburgers exquisite pictures of the present leave one in a Proustian world of dreamy remembrance. Quite unlike anything else you will ever read.
Germany	Gunter Grass	Tin Drum	PaulOnBooks	Breon Mitchell	Magnificent sweeping tale allegorising Nazi Germany and the ages old battle between art and war. The main protagonist lives life from asylum to the madness of the Nazi regime, back to the

World literature tour: Germany

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Name of country	Name of author	Title of book	Your username	Translation by	Tell us why this book/author is great
					asylum. The beauty of the prose, the ideas flooding forth, all render this a glorious oiece of fiction.
Germany	Thomas Mann	Death in Venice	britthebohemian		This is such a introspective and existential book that I could not help myself to think over and over again on every sentence that Mann wrote. It tells me. It tells you. It tells everybody.
Germany	Emine Sevgi Özdamar	Sonne auf halbem Weg	Lily_D		This book is unusual and interesting on a lot of levels. "Sonne auf halbem Weg" (2006) is also called the Belrin-Istanbul trilogy (it includes: "Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei, hat zwei Türen, aus einer kam ich rein, aus der anderen ging ich raus", "Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn" and "Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde"). The novel has autobiographical elements and manages to use the difference between Berlin and Istanbul not only in its story but also its style. Imagine 1001 Nights meets the Blechtrommel. It's a bit like that, but totally different...
Germany	Victor Klemperer	The diaries of Victor Klemperer	AggieH		Unusual in being a contemporaneous account of daily life in Germany (by a secular Jew

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					converted to Protestantism to marry) from '33-'45, the language, intelligence and insight are brilliant. Paradoxically, the tiny, pedantic, terrible details of daily life have the effect of emphasising the potential universality of it all. You are left in no doubt as to the fact that any ordinary people in any ordinary society anywhere can contribute to a society's wrongs, if by nothing else than keeping silent as teeny tiny steps are taken in the wrong direction, one after the other after the other.
Germany	Daniel Kehlman	Die Vermessung Der Welt	AggieH		Historical fiction that thinks big and small at the same time. Equally sharp on the provincial life of the Germany of the time and on the opening up of new geographical and intellectual horizons across the world. The author handles the shifts in perspective extremely well. And it's a fairly gripping read. All in all, a story - or rather, several stories - well told.
Germany	Hans-Jurgen Massaquoi	Destined to Witness	georgia89		Brilliant autobiography of a half-German half-Liberian boy growing up in Nazi Germany, facing the prejudices against him

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					because of his skin colour. At times very sad but also very funny, this book shows an insight into Germany under the Nazis from a completely different perspective from that which you normally see.
Germany	Sven Regener	Neue Vahr Süd	Lily_D		Sven Regener is the singer of the band Element of Crime. His songs and his novels as well, manage to be sentimental (more the songs) and funny (more the novels) at the same time (without getting on your nerves). Neue Vahr Süd is the prequel to Herr Lehmann (translated as "Berlin Blues") and the second of three novels focusing on Herr Lehmann. To me it is even more amusing than the first part. The novel tells us about the time that Frank Lehmann is still in Bremen, lives in a flatshare and goes to the Bundeswehr (armed forces) at the same time.
Germany	Sebastian Haffner	Defying Hitler	annaroxelana	Oliver Pretzel	Like many 16 year olds doing History for GCSE, the hardest hitting topic was Nazi Germany. As the cornerstone of the UK history curriculum (along with the Tudors), it's not easy to deal with

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					at 8am every week. You learn to resent the period and have a superficial sense there must have been something wrong with the Germans. I digress, this book is simply the best human perspective I've ever read on Nazi Germany. It's not only beautifully written and translated, but a really humbling book about making assertions or stereotyping people. It really explains why people were persuaded by Nazism, including the authors friends and colleagues. Definitely a great book to read if you want a better understanding and a more enjoyable read than a textbook could give you!
Germany	Herman Hesse	Demian	Picotee		Most people hear Hesse and immediately think of Steppenwolf, but this is well worth a look. Contains a brilliant description of drinking for no particular reason that was strangely resonant at the time I first read this. One of my all time favourites.
Germany	Cornelia Funke	Tintenherz	sarah_dorra	Anthea Bell	The exotic adventure tour makes me forget about the world and, ironically enough, I do enter the

World literature tour: Germany

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Name of country	Name of author	Title of book	Your username	Translation by	Tell us why this book/author is great
					world of Inkheart.
Germany	Markus Zusak	The Book Thief	sarah_dorra		Zusak finds a skillfull way to link the life of individuals to the political current issues of Nazi Germany in a way that engages readers, including those not interested in political issues. I even read it during 25th Revolution here in Egypt, which was very ironic. Enjoyed it very very much.
Germany	Friedrich Durrenmatt	Der Besuch der Alten dame	jennyf		Great story with morals - read it for german a level
germany	hans fallada	every man dies alone	dalstonjunction	michael hoffman	the best book i've read in a decade – and i've covered some ground. this is a book that delves through classes, religion, politics – lives. every character – and there are dozens in this novel – gets his due from the brilliant author. it's a long book but it flies by. i wished it never ended – and i still wish that, one year later.
germany	Clemens Meyer	Als wir träumten	Malte	don't know of any translation	"Als wir träumten" is the debut novel of Clemens Meyer. It shows the life of the youth in a district of Leipzig just after the political changes of 1989. It transports the

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					atmosphere of the time and also shares the hopes, dreams but also desillusion of the protagonist as he and some of his friends and their families are struggling in the changing setting. In my opinion Meyer has a brilliantly dense style, which makes the book a gem.
Germany	Erich Maria Remarque	Im Westen nichts Neues (All Quiet on the Western Front)	dannydear		I enjoyed Faulks' 'Birdsong', but this book is in an altogether different league!
Germany	Christa Wolf	Medea [and/or] Kassandra	library_pirate	dont' know	History just repeats itself. You don't believe? Read Christa Wolf's books (not only, but especially for understanding GDR history). Power distorts people. People having power become weak - weak, angry and militant. Truth will be threaten like the few, that tell it. The powerful will win, but everything will be lost. The writing of Christa Wolf is magical and full of clarity at the same time. Literally classical, by form and content. And - for me really crucial - in a short distance. Enjoy! And think.

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Name of country	Name of author	Title of book	Your username	Translation by	Tell us why this book/author is great
Germany	Hans Fallada	Every Man Dies Alone	poyma		I don't know what Nazi Germany was like to live in, I was born 16 years after WWII ended. But I have a sneaking suspicion ordinary life was alot like how Hans Fallada describes it. Tension, pettiness, feeling scared and worried all the time. Surrounded by pompous big mouths repeating empty Nazi slogans and propaganda. Vivid descriptions. Every book that really grabs me seems to create the same reaction for me: I can't wait to devour each page, but at the same time, I want to read slowly and stretch out the experience as long as possible.
Germany	Hermann Hesse	Steppenwolf	Silverhawk	Basil Creighton	I first read this in my “angst filled” teens. The angst bit mainly meant stepping back from everyone else and sneering at a world I found difficult to be reconciled with. I could identify with Harry Haller even though the character was written as a middle aged man. It goes far beyond an appeal to the angst filled, as it sat well along side the Camus and Sartre I was reading at the time in philosophical enquiry.

World literature tour: Germany

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Croatia	Slavenka Drakulić	"Frida`s Bed"	Hrvoje21	Christina Pribichevich-Zoric	It`s a superb story about the pain and the fight of famous mexican artist Frida Kahlo. Drakulić has captured her emotions just like camera, and that is great about her book!
Germany	Friedrich Hölderlin	Hyperion			
Germany	Helmut Krausser	Eros	Kanikay-reader	Mike Mitchell	With the vast majority of Anglo-American literature of the present time refusing to tackle the big issues of serious love, country, moral choices and more, it was great to discover a book that stands like a cathedral amongst pygmies. It is large in scope, philosophical and contemporary, even though it is set in the Germany of the Second World War and soon after. There are few books of the recent past that deal so beautifully with unrequited love and commitment to a cause. A splendid work of literature.
USA	Arno Schmidt	Brand's Heath	Old Scratch	John E. Woods	Every line is an often hilarious explosion. If much is lost in translation what makes it through is more than enough to jar and refresh the reader. Makes Pynchon look like Carver.

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Name of country	Name of author	Title of book	Your username	Translation by	Tell us why this book/author is great
Germany	Benno von Archimboldi	Mitzi's Treasure	RobertoB.	Piero Morini	This is Archimboldi's finest novel, even if it is his slimmest. Archimboldi's vision is like no other living writer in its darkness, which reaches levels of misanthropy that Celine would have found shocking, but it is a misanthropy tempered by hope and love and occasionally, if I may be permitted to say so, the soft grasp of affirmative friendship, the kind of friendship one finds only later in life, surrounded by the headstones.
Germany	Friedrich Hoelderlin	Selected Poems	Eloha	David Constantine	In its breathlessly extending sentences and urgent rhythms Hoelderlin's poetry makes you feel what it would be like to be gathered into a new age of open, loving solidarity and beauty; it also makes you feel the total dejection and brokenness of the failure of that new age to materialize. Hoelderlin is the ultimate utopian romantic poet and a modernist avant la lettre, especially in his intensifying translations of Sophocles and Pindar.
Netherlands	Joseph Roth	What I Saw	fanshawe	Michael Hoffman	Journalism par excellence. Roth walks around and writes about

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					what he sees in Weimar Berlin. Yes, yes, he captures the spirit of the age, as if it needed saying.
Germany	Goethe	Faust	zinaida	David Constantine	major new translation of this classic appeared last year in Penguin classics translated by the poet and translator David Constantine. Very little fanfare around its arrival but it must count as one of the great works of translation: formally perfect, epic, moving, funny. Read this and you might finally understand what makes it such a great book in German. Constantine is working on The Sorrows of Young Werther, the book that thrilled a generation of young Europeans upon its arrival in print. Watch out for it!
Germany					Germany has, more so than any other country, always punished its most individual and (believe it or not) genuinely funny authors with neglect and oblivion. There's a forgotten genius for every century: Johann Fischart, Jean Paul Friedrich Richter, Wilhelm Raabe and Arno Schmidt. Unfortunately, translations may be somewhat hard to come by.

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Hungary	Tandori Dezsö	Az Evidenciatör ténetek	cru-jean	?	With great erudition & imaginative sketches Mr Tandori shows, that live is not so very beauriful,
Germany	Bernhard Schlink	The Reader	bluewhisky	Carol Brown Janeway	Sparse, poignant description; fantastic narrative skill; extremely well contextualised.
Germany	Walter Kempowski	Echolot, Part 2, "Fuga Furiosa"	An Avid Reader	none	A collection of diary entries, letters, postcards, personal memories etc. of famous people as well as ordinary citizens in Europe (mostly Germans, but also British, French, Russians, etc.) during the time of WWII. The entries / contributions are sorted by days (the entire series of ten volumes is entitled "A collective diary"), and Part II deals with the winter of 1945. The contributions by ordinary citizens fleeing before the advances of the Red Army, or those of concentration camp inmates on the death marches are absolutely harrowing and an education. Walter Kempowski collected and arranged all these texts, but added no comments of his own.
Germany					

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united Kingdom	Alexander Kluge	The Devil's Blind Spot	Ofenheizung	Michael Hulse/Martin Chalmers	Kluge is fantastic and should be much better known in English. He mixes fact and fiction in a way that Sebald did. His films are pretty good, too.
Germany	Ingo Schulze	New Lives	Andrew Hewitt		A moving and vivid account of life before, during and after re-unification. With Schulze, German literature moves on from the traumas of World War Two; instead we experience the trauma that follows the forcible re-joining of Siamese twins, separated long ago.
Germany	Marlen Haushofer	Die Wand	marjpeyer@bluewin.ch		I don't say this book is great but it is memorable.
Germany	Peter Weiss	The Aesthetics of Resistance	Marcus Speh	Frederic Jameson	Weiss, a member of Gruppe 47, the influential German post war writers group, is better known to baby boomers as the author of the play Marat/Sade. It's a great book of literary fiction, anchored in German history that helps us understand ourselves, but not necessarily an easy read. As one review says: "...feels like an endless soliloquy on a bare stage, but one that takes the audience on the most amazingly imaginative time-and-space journey, with the

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					narrative perspective cutting like a movie director's camera from one intensely rendered visual detail to the next." (for more raving reviews, see here: http://amzn.to/hxLDH8). This book (in three volumes) is, in my view, altogether more accessible than Peter Handke and less accessible than Günter Grass or Herta Müller but also much less in love with itself than any of these writers, thank god. This is modern writing that is also moral fiction in the sense of John Gardner. Highly recommended and perhaps too little known.
Germany	Friedrich Schiller	Don Carlos	Agelster	R.D. Boylan	The first "Classical" play by Germany's greatest playwright, about power and its price, hubris, love and the making of choices, and about what they do to the human soul. Breaks your heart with its inevitability and still leaves you with a soaring pride in humanity. Makes blank verse sound like the most natural form of expression imaginable, and the translation by the otherwise strangely obscure R.D. Boylan is congenial in every respect – a feat in itself.

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Name of country	Name of author	Title of book	Your username	Translation by	Tell us why this book/author is great
Germany	Jan Swafford	Johannes Brahms	RichardLea		Partly because it's brilliant, and partly because it throws a fascinating light on German cultural life as well as conjuring up a marvellous portrait of the man himself. This biography looks beyond the prophetic, biblical image of his later years - the traditionalist resisting the assault of the Wagnerians - to rediscover a young, hotheaded, Romantic Brahms, or as Swafford puts it, a Brahms ohne Bart - Brahms behind the beard.
Germany		Nothing for Ungood			
Austria	Heimito von Doderer	Die Strudlhofstiege (The Strudelhof Steps)	wine_snob	Vincent Kling (partial transl.)	One of the best "long-haul" novelists of the 20th century. Up there with Proust, Musil, and Thomas Mann, but a lot more accessible. The book is a meticulous reconstruction of life in Vienna before the 1st world war. This theme is shared with Musil and Joseph Roth, but the texture is much richer. The feeling for time and place it conveys is almost uncanny. At the same time, a great coming-of-age novel about the book's central character, a Lieutenant Melzer.

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Name of country	Name of author	Title of book	Your username	Translation by	Tell us why this book/author is great
Germany	Günter Grass	The Tin Drum	puddles	Breon Mitchell	<p>Written in realist style on the surface, but radical at the core. Great sense of rhythm.</p> <p>The book is a historical satire that spans the end of Weimar Republic to the Nazi era. In a funny and highly ironic text and it is also a critique towards the general style of books about that time. A boy who refused to grow up but with the mind of an adult. Dark humour even about the cooking of spaghetti. Some chapters read like stand-up comedy but while extremely funny the theme of the book is cruelty. As is all the "Danzig Trilogy" The Flounder by Grass is also a good read but a very fragmented and sometimes confusing book or maybe it is the translation.</p>
Germany	Siegfried Lenz	Deutschstunde	Cleptop	?	<p>siegfried Lenz's ability to sketch characters without judging them or patronizing them has been acknowledged by various literates. On the one hand he stands for the subtle and plain storytelling of the north and on the other hand he thus proposes a great contradiction to the southern blunt stereotype.</p>

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Name of country	Name of author	Title of book	Your username	Translation by	Tell us why this book/author is great
Germany	Cornelia Funke	Inkheart	radicallib		A wonderful fantasy adventure on the power of the book
Germany	Sarah Kuttner	Mängelexemplar	Urchinette		It's very funny, it's very sad, and it's a totally convincing portrayal of a young woman with a relatively mild but still debilitating mental illness. The heroine is a young, hipsterish Berliner with a job in TV who starts experiencing serious anxiety, and Kuttner, a TV presenter, describes her experiences without sentimentality and with a sense of humour. I really loved it and keep hoping she'll write another novel. I genuinely can't understand why it hasn't been translated into English - it seems like a potential big seller in any language.
Germany	Katharina Hagen	Der Geschmack von Apfelkernen	Liburuak Book Blog	Unfortunately, no translation yet	"Der Geschmack von Apfelkernen" (The Taste of Apple Seeds) will bring you a summery feeling of lightness, with a wonderful dose of melancholy mixed in. There is already a French translation, and the book is highly deserving of an English one.
Germany	Walter Moers	Die Stadt	BodLover	John	A really good fun children's book

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		der träumenden Bücher		Brownjohn	in a fantasy world in which books and reading are the be all and end all of everything in life; plenty of pictures (also by Moers, who is originally a cartoonist and did an (very definitely) adult cartoon series, 'Kleines Arschloch'), plenty of adventure, lots of mystery. Moers does this sort of thing extraordinarily well - in terms of structure, this book is not so very different from his better-known children's episodic novel 'The 13 1/2 lives of Captain Bluebear' (also excellent fun, by the way).
Germany	Akif Pirinçci	Felidae, and its sequel felidae on the Road	frustrated artist		It's a thoroughly entertaining satire of the 'hard-boiled ' detective genre, narrated by a cat. All the humans are shown as rather stupid ineffectual background characters, with the heroes, villains and victims all being cats. Great fun- I'd happily read the rest of the series if they were translated into English.
German	Georg Büchner	Lenz	njm		Büchner is an incredible author and achieved a lot in his short life. Though perhaps better known as a playwright, this short prose fragment is my favourite of all of his works. Written in 1835, it

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Name of country	Name of author	Title of book	Your username	Translation by	Tell us why this book/author is great
					shows a shockingly modern insight into mental illness and schizophrenia in particular. The language is dense and beautiful. The opening page is perhaps one of the greatest examples of prose in German, if not World literature.
Germany	Christa Wolf	Kassandra	njm	Jan Van Heurck	Wolf is one of my favourite German authors. Her books frequently deal with questions about memory, identity and her concept of 'subjective authenticity' which are of course still relevant today and to those living outside Germany, but which also provide an important insight into the task faced by those living in the GDR of coming to terms with their Nazi past in the face of their Communist present. Wolf's texts ask how people were supposed to have any true sense of identity when the world surrounding them and the ideas they were expected to adopt kept changing so drastically. In Kassandra she addresses these problems against the backdrop of the Trojan war and asks questions about what it means to have a voice and to stay true to this voice

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Name of country	Name of author	Title of book	Your username	Translation by	Tell us why this book/author is great
					even in the face of great adversity. The book is also interesting when considered as part of the tendency of German authors to go back to ancient Greek culture and is an interesting counterpoint to authors such as Goethe who admired Greek culture for its harmony and close relationship to nature. It's also a prime example of Wolf's feminist writing as she goes back to the defeat of the Trojans as the point at which patriarchy, as transmitted by Greek values, started to take over the world in order to see how these structures might be changed for the better in a post-patriarchal society. The book's accompanying essays are also well worth a look and also provide another reading of the story - that is of 'male' aggression and the fear she and her generation lived in of nuclear war.
Austria	Peter Handke	Kindergeschichte/Child Story	LaLaetti	?	Peter Handke is rather known as the one bashing everyone for everything, literally in his "Publikumsbeschimpfung" (public bashing), and later even more ferociously during and after the Balkan war. In

World literature tour: Germany

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Name of country	Name of author	Title of book	Your username	Translation by	Tell us why this book/author is great
Germany	Walter Moers	Die Stadt der traumenden Bücher (The city of the dreaming Books)	JRGZ	John Brownjohn	<p>"Kindergeschichte" he allows a look at an almost innocent part of his soul. Really touching.</p> <p>The book breaches all frontiers. As the Detroit News put it for one of his earlier novels "Moers' creative mind is like J.K. Rowling's on extacy", and this is to be taken literally. The book combines an extraordinary imagination with a brilliant style of writing. Based in the fictional continent of Zamonien the book follows the footsteps a young dinosaur Optimus Yarnspinner, on his search of the author of the maybe best piece of literature ever written. On his journey he will realise that books are much more than just bound paper. Like in all his novels Moers is not bound by the ties of cliché, stereotype or even genre. Furthermore this book is a love letter to literature and the reader will soon discover that many of the books characters names are anagrams of real existing authors. The author is well known in Germany. He invented on Germany's most famous children character Captain Bluebear, but also</p>

World literature tour: Germany

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Name of country	Name of author	Title of book	Your username	Translation by	Tell us why this book/author is great
					contributed many politically very incorrect cartoons to Germany's biggest satire magazine Titanic. Recently he has mainly worked on his novels which have become international bestsellers.
Germany	Friedrich Schiller	Wallenstein	Hibernese	F. J. Lamport	At 300 pages one of the longest theatrical works ever written, Wallenstein is a chronicle play to rival anything Shakespeare produced. (Though the play was written over two centuries ago, it was only staged in a single performance for the first time in 2007 - by Peter Stein in Berlin.) The tragic, ambiguously motivated figure of Albrecht von Wallenstein - the warlord and powerbroker who might well have brought the appalling Thirty Years War to an early close, is here immortalised by Schiller's astounding command of stagecraft and dialogue. The man's hamartia is his integrity: because he truly believes in honour, he cannot see his betrayal coming. An absolutely compelling play, seething with political intrigue and Schiller's thorough knowledge of the era and his subject. Every other page has a

World literature tour: Germany

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					quotable passage or a shimmering insight into human nature and how we are all threatened by inner and outer foes. Quite simply, it's hard to imagine a more gripping drama.
Germany	Jenny Erpenbeck	Visitation	jl原因	Susan Bernofsky	A poetic exploration of a house through a century of turmoil, entering the lives of all the families that pass through and live in it. The prose is moving, involving, and devastating.
Germany	W.G. Sebald	(all of his novels)	jl原因	Michael Hulse, Anthea Bell	Hypnotic melancholy prose that crosses boundaries, both physical and psychological ones, you follow the prose wherever it takes you, not caring a wit about plot or traditional structure, just being led by his sure hand into deeper and deeper layers of meaning.
Germany	Heinrich von Kleist	Selected Prose	jl原因	Peter Wortsman	What strikes me about his stories in general is how he tends to put his otherwise rather normal characters in these extremely tumultuous situations, and he shows you how they are almost moved by larger forces into becoming either monsters or angels. Many times his characters act with such mercilessness and

World literature tour: Germany

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					violence that it is hard to stomach, but also seemingly inevitable, like watching a chain reaction that you cannot turn away from.
Germany	Hans Henny Jahnn	The Ship	jlr	Catherine Hutter	The book alternates between mysterious goings-on aboard a ship carrying coffin shaped cargo and circuitous thoughts within the characters' heads... "agonizing exertions" as Gustave puts it himself, full of paranoia, self doubt, moments of clarity, touching vulnerabilities, childish naivete, emotional outpourings, formal and/or ornate declarations, etc. etc. The prose style is so unique, often the sentences are notable for their handsome bone structure, alternating between vague unknowns and specificity. I felt sea-sick the whole time.
Germany	Heinrich Böll	The Bread of Those Early Years	LadyV	Leila Vennewitz	Heinrich Böll's The Bread of Those Early Years perfectly depicts the struggles of post-war German society. The title says it all: it explores the hunger, not just to survive and succeed but to regain meaning and purpose. It explores the ferociousness of the

World literature tour: Germany

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					<p>war-torn and downtrodden German people to get back on their feet again. The story is so powerful, so beautifully written and dripping with striking images and turns of phrase. The symbolism of bread works incredibly well to highlight the social issues Böll was trying to explore in the framework of the story. The narration is so simple, so understated, so matter-of-fact and it really works. Even 56 years after the novella was first published you are in the thick of this desperate society, walking the streets with Walter, meeting Hedwig, seeing the poverty through their eyes, even experiencing it with them. There is the added dimension of a tentative love story between Walter and Hedwig. The strength of emotion between them is not explicit; the reader is allowed to experience it developing as the characters experience it themselves. The most striking moment of the book is Hedwig's description of her encounter with a stranger who 'accosted' her while Walter was not there. She</p>

World literature tour: Germany

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					describes with such desperation how she imagined her life with him: 'I didn't have much time: one minute, and I lived a whole lifetime at his side...' She goes on to describe in poignant detail how she had his children, how she watched him swap his suits, how they celebrated a pay rise, how she became his widow. It is the most striking piece of dialogue I have read. Certainly, Böll and The Bread of Those Early Years deserve to be recommended as one of Germany's literary greats.
Germany	Inka Parei	The Shadow-Boxing Woman	lovegermanbooks	Katy Derbyshire	I translated it and love this short novel about a woman in late '80s/early '90s Berlin. Full of loving details, it really captures a lost time and place.
Germany	Theodor Storm	Der Schimmelreiter	eiskalt		A superb evocation of a small town (Husum) on Germany's bleak North Sea coast sometime in the 19th century and the battle to save it from the ever-present threat of a breach of the dykes. The eponymous white horse and rider add to the spine-tingling atmosphere.
USA	Theodor	IRRETRIEV	Peter Foges	Douglas	Theodor Fontane -- surely one of

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Name of country	Name of author	Title of book	Your username	Translation by	Tell us why this book/author is great
	Fontane	ABLE		Parmee	the finest European novelists of the nineteenth century -- is nowadays mostly unknown in the English -speaking world. At least as good as Flaubert in my view, his resurrection in the often provincial (and persistently anti-German) Anglo Saxon literary world is long overdue. "Irretrievable" ("Unwiederbringlich", 1891), in a wonderful translation by Douglas Parmee, is a short historical love story about the decline of a once happy marriage. Fontane sets this beautiful bitter-sweet tale on the Baltic coast and in Copenhagen in the 1840s at a time of crisis and war between Germans and Danes -- the famously obscure "Schleswig Holstein Question" which he renders with great accuracy and fascinating insight. A little gem.
Germany	Michael Ende	Die Unendliche Geschichte	garym		It's a great adventure story, a journey of self-discovery, and a commentary on fantasy literature all combined recursively.
Germany	Thomas Mann	Der Zauberberg	hertfordbridge		It contains everything ever thought, ever said, ever discussed - either before its time or after.

World literature tour: Germany

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Germany	Isherwood	Berlin Stories	-darnit-		I love "Berlin Stories" because it gets the atmosphere of the "between-the-wars"-time in Berlin so well - It's the time of the expressionists, Dix, Mendelsohn... its an easy read, but very well worth it!
Germany	Hans Christoph Buch	Haiti Cherie	ravotins		Amazingly vivid description of the trials and tribulations of those living in this poor country.
Germany	Walter Moers	Die Stadt der Träumenden Bücher/The City of Dreaming Books	Berend	John Brownjohn	Not only does this book put paid to the stale notion that Germans lack a sense of humour, it is also one of the few books that does not merely claim to bridge the gap between fantasy and high literature, but actually manages it. It is set in the metropolitan city of Buchhaim/Bookholm, a place where everything revolves around literature. It is dominated by publishing firms, second-hand bookstores, writer's groups, and so forth. This does not mean that it a place for the meek: Bookholm is a place where literature actually matters, and as a consequence, the book trade in Bookholm is roughly as violent as the crack trade in the Baltimore of The Wire. In this city, dinosaur and

World literature tour: Germany

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					aspiring author Hildegund von Mythenmetz must go on a quest for the writer of what are probably the greatest two pages of fiction ever written. The brilliance of this book is that it is at once a fantasy and adventure novel, and a parody on the world of literature. To me, it is the greatest crossover novel ever written.
Germany	Franz Kafka	Der Prozess	Paulfr		The individual in an alien world. This is a major theme in Kafka's work and probably the major theme of this novel. That's why he's such an influential author today. Another of his great works is the short story Metamorphosis.
Germany	Christa Wolf	Accident	StanPersky		An innovative book about the aftermath of a nuclear power plant catastrophe.
Germany	"Bonaventura", presumably Ernst August Friedrich Klingemann	Nachtwachen		don't know	One of the maddest books ever. The passionately misanthropic night watchman Kreuzgang leads us through his cabinet of human existence, all the while pretending to fulfill literary conventions whilst secretly sneering at them. Anger and eloquence have seldom complemented each other in such an entertaining way. The book is

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					both a masterpiece of dark romanticism and a satire of its own genre. Furthermore, its poignant humour has aged remarkably well; most parts of it still make for an utterly hilarious read. Perhaps unsurprisingly, German critics have been slow to acknowledge this and preferred to shrug it off as nihilism, instead devoting themselves fervently (and at long last successfully) to the exposure of the author's identity.
Germany	Pascal Mercier	Nachtzug nach Lissabon (Night Train to Lisbon)	Liburuak Book Blog	Barbara Harshav	This is something like the German version of Carlos Ruiz Zafón's "The Shadow of the Wind" - it's all about diving deeper and deeper into someone else's literature. A seemingly normal teacher suddenly decides to leave his classroom and travels to Lisbon in order to follow up on the stories of Amadeo de Prado. Exciting and deeply intellectual. (The author is originally Swiss but I believe he lives in Berlin, does that make him German?)
Germany	Heinrich Böll	The Lost Honour of Katharina	StAndrewsReads		While the book was in a way a child of it's generation, the issues it deals with are just as real for us

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		Blum, or: how violence develops and where it can lead			today. Böll wrote the book after the German BILD-Zeitung had started a smear campaign against him for 'sympathising with terrorists' (i.e. writing a critical article). Re-reading this book last summer made me wonder whether today's Europe is that different from 1970s Germany.
Germany	Cornelia Funke	Inkheart	Artemisia	No idea	Just because the lack of German fantasy was brought up - she's a must. She's been called the German J.K. Rowling, and while the latter remains unsurpassed, Funke considers this a compliment and is definitely offering similar quality.
Germany	Rebecca Gablé	Das Spiel der Könige	Meli84		I don't even know wether a translation for Gablé's books exists but it definitely should. She writes about England during the 100 Years' War and the War of the Roses, much better than any other historical writer I've discovered so far.
Germany	Daniel Kehlmann	Die Vermessung der Welt	Caroline Cook	?	It' s funny and interesting and informative and very well-written. It's about Alexander von Humboldt and Carl Friedrich Gauss.It sounds heavy but it isn't.

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					Kehlmann's other books are all good.
Germany	Hans Keilson	Comedy in a Minor Key	Milanova		Stunningly written, subtle and measured, it's an intimate depiction of the domestic life of a Dutch couple who take in a Jewish man during the holocaust. Outside events only filter through brief references and the minutiae of everyday life is detailed increasingly as tensions grow- both of the couple, and of their 'guest' who is increasingly plagued by the worries, the boredom and claustrophobia of being in hiding. It twists and turns from the farcical, to the mundane, then ironic and tragic.
UK	Leo Perutz	The Swedish Cavalier	fabelhaftem		Perutz, whilst not a German himself is hugely popular in Germany. This particular tale plays out with eye-popping twists that leave you in disbelief (in a positive way) by the end of the book. Perutz is massively overlooked in English literature but his works really delve into metaphysics but in a way that makes you want to follow him. Both The Swedish Cavalier and By Night Under The Stone Bridge are well worth

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					designating a day to and devouring in all their glory.
germany					
Sweden	Jenny Erpenbeck	Die Geschichte vom alten Kind	Linnéa		
Germany?	Joseph Roth	Radetzky March	effibriest	Michael Hofmann	Everyone seems to know what a great book this is but I just wanted to put in a word for Michael Hofmann's translation. It seems to me to be perfectly judged, just a miracle of taste and irony and humour and a pure pleasure to read. I found there were many passages in the German that I could make no sense of at all in literal translation and I'm so grateful to Michael Hofmann for clearing things up and even making me laugh when I could finally see what Roth meant.
Germany	W. G. Sebald	The Emigrants			
Germany	Heinrich Boll	Lost Honour Of Katharina Blum	AFictionHabit	unknown	Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1972. Brilliant satirist and commentator of post war Germany. Unfortunately very

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						little of his work is available in translation. Some of his short stories are hilarious and incredibly sharp witted. I originally discovered him while studying German at A level 20 years ago, but he is still rewarding to read in the original and in translation.
Germany	Christian Morgenstern	Galgenlieder und andere Gedichte (Gallows songs and other poems)	AS		Max Knight	Can we translate poetry? Obviously Morgenstern's poems are beautiful, smart, extremely funny and include some of the most original and hilarious wordplay in German literature - but this translation really is a work of art in itself: it actually manages to adapt both content and rhyme whilst staying true to the wisdom as well as the cheeky charm of the original. So apparently: Yes we can!
Germany	Andrea Maria Schenkel	Murder Farm (original: Tannöd)	Liburuak Book Blog liburuak.wordpress.com	Anthea Bell		One of the most gripping crime novels I've read in a long time, yet so short you can devour it in one afternoon. Schenkel has an amazing ability to laconically describe the narrow-mindedness of a 1950s rural German community in which a terrible crime has occurred. An entire

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					family of poor farmers has been cruelly slayed. They weren't popular, but what else lurks behind everyone's appearances? The little novel's structure keeps your eyes glued to the page as gradually, the horrific details of what happened are revealed.
Germany	Hans-Ulrich Treichel	Der Verlorene	ReneK	not translated	Treichels personal family tragedy (his older brother was lost and never found again as child when the parents had to flee the former eastern german territories) is a repeatedly visited topic in his work. So also in "Der Verlorene" (The lost one), which depicts a family still deeply traumatized by the war and the loss of their son. I never read a novel where the stifling atmosphere of the 50's and 60's has been more authentically and disturbingly described.

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About the author

Ronald Young lived the first 48 years of his life in the West of Scotland - 22 of them as an aspiring academic and innovative politician in local, then Regional, Government.

The last 26 years have been spent as a consultant in central Europe and central Asia - generally leading small teams in institutional development or training projects.

He has had a house in the Carpathian mountains since 2000 which he has been able to enjoy since 2007 - although he divides his time between the house and flats in Sofia and Bucharest.

In 2008 he started a website which contains the major papers he has written over the years about his attempts to reform various public organisations in the various roles he has had - politician; academic/trainer; consultant.

"Most of the writing in my field is done by academics - and gives little help to individuals who are struggling to survive in or change public bureaucracies. Or else it is propaganda drafted by consultants and officials trying to talk up their reforms. And most of it covers work at a national level - whereas most of the worthwhile effort is at a more local level.

The restless search for the new dishonours the work we have done in the past. As Zeldin once said - "To have a new vision of the future it is first necessary to have new vision of the past"

In 2009 he started a blog - called [Balkan and Carpathian Musings](#) - to try to make sense of the organisational endeavours he has been involved in - to see if there are any lessons which can be passed on. To restore a bit of institutional memory and social history - particularly in the endeavour of what used to be known as "social justice".

"My generation believed that political activity could improve things - that belief is now dead and that cynicism threatens civilisation. I also read a lot and wanted to pass on the results of this to those who have neither the time nor inclination - as well as my love of painting, particularly the realist 20th century schools of Bulgaria and Belgium".

He now has a new website - [Mapping the Common Ground](#) - which is a library for articles and books he considers useful for those who - like Brecht - feel that "So ist die Welt - und muss nicht so sein"!

I've always had great difficulty answering the simple question "What do you do?" "Student" was easy but, after graduation, I had a quick succession of jobs in what could be called generally the "planning" field - and "planner" is as vague a term as "manager" and enjoyed a rather limited vogue. In 1968 I joined a polytechnic and was also elected to a town council - so "lecturer" was as good a description as what I did as any. Using my voice was what I was paid for - whether to transmit information or opinions. I read widely - so "reader" was also a pertinent word. I became heavily involved in community development - managing to straddle the worlds of community action and political bureaucracy (for 20 years I was the Secretary of ruling Labour groups in municipal and regional Councils and also a sponsor of community action) and figured in a book about "reticulists" (networkers) - but imagine putting that word in a passport application!

For a few years I was Director of a so-called "Research Unit" which was more like a Think Tank in its proselytising workshops and publications celebrating the new rationalism of corporate management and community development.

At age 43 my default activity became full-time (regional) politics - with a leader role but of a rather maverick nature who never aspired to the top job but was content to be at the interstices of bureaucracy, politics and academia. I remember my reception at an OECD function in central Sweden as someone with a proclivity to challenge.

All this paved the way for the "consultancy" which I have apparently practised for the past 20 years in Central Europe and Central Asia. But "consultant" is not only a vague but a (rightly) increasingly insulting term - so I was tempted for a period to enter the word "writer" on my Visa application forms since this was as good a description of what I actually did as any. At one stage indeed, my despairing Secretary in the Region had actually given me the nickname "Paperback writer". Except that this was seen by many border guards in central Asia as a threatening activity! Robert Reich's "symbolic analyst" briefly tempted - but was perhaps too close to the term "spy"!

When I did the [Belbin test on team roles](#) to which I was subjecting my teams, I had expected to come out as a leader - but was not altogether surprised to discover that my stronger role was a "resource person" - someone who surfed information and knowledge widely and shared it. What some people saw as the utopian streak in my writing gave me the idea of using the term "poet" at the airport guiches - but I have a poor memory for verse.

This morning, as I looked around at the various artefacts in the house, a new label came to me - "collector"! I collect beautiful objects - not only books and paintings but pottery, pens, pencils, laquered cases, miniatures, carpets, Uzbek wall-hangings, Kyrgyz and Iranian table coverings, glassware, terrace cotta figurines, plates, Chinese screens, wooden carvings et al. Of very little - except sentimental - value I hasten to add! But, of course, I have these things simply because I have been an "explorer" - first of ideas (desperately searching for the holy grail) and then of countries - in the 1980s Western Europe, the 1990s central Europe - finally central Asia and beyond.

Some 25 years ago, when I was going through some difficult times, my sister-in-law tried to help me by encouraging me to explore the various roles I had - father, son, husband, politician, writer, activist etc. I didn't understand what she was driving at. Now I do! Lecturer, reticulist, politician, maverick, leader, writer, explorer, consultant, resource person, collector - I have indeed played all these roles (and more too intimate for this blog!). Makes me wonder what tombstone I should have carved for myself in the marvellous [Sapanta cemetery in Maramures](#) where people are remembered humourously in verse and pictures for their work or way they died!!

And it was TS Eliot who wrote that

old men ought to be explorers

Hopefully [this flickr account](#) will be built up more in the months to come with more examples of art.....

LIST OF Author's PUBLICATIONS

[In Praise of Doubt - a blogger's year](#) (2016)

[The Global Crisis - Telling it as it is](#) (2015)

[Crafting Effective Public Management](#) (2015)

[Bulgarian Realists - getting to know the Bulgarians through their art](#) (2015)

[Introducing the Romanian Realists of the 19th and early 20th Centuries](#) (2014)

[Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#) (2014)

[Introducing the Bulgarian Realists - how to get to know the Bulgarians through their paintings](#) (2012)

[The Search for the Holy Grail - some reflections on 40 years of trying to make government and its systems work for people](#) 2012

[Just Words](#) - a glossary and bibliography for the fight against the pretensions and perversities of power (2012)

[A Draft Guide for the Perplexed](#) (2011)

[The Long Game - not the log-frame](#); (2011)

[Administrative Reform with Chinese Characteristics](#) (2010)

[Training that works! How do we build training systems which actually improve the performance of state bodies?](#) (2010) Even altho I say it myself - it is one of the best papers on the subject

[Learning from Experience - a Bulgarian](#) project (2009)

[Building Municipal Capacity](#) (2007) an interesting account of an intellectual journey

[Roadmap for Local Government in Kyrgyzstan](#) (2007) this is a long doc (117 pages. I enjoyed pulling out this metaphor - and developing using (in workshops) the diagram at pages 76-77

[Building Local Government in a Hostile Climate \(2006\)](#)

[Overview of PAR in transition countries](#) (2006) This is the paper I drafted for the European Agency for Reconstruction after the staff retreat the EAR Director invited me to speak at in June 2006 in Skopje, Macedonia. The best papers are always written after the event!

[Transfer of Functions - European experiences 1970-2000](#) I learned a lot as I drafted this paper for my Uzbek colleagues. I haven't seen this sort of typology before.

[Case Study in Organisational Development and Political Amnesia \(1999\)](#)

[In Transit - Part One](#) (1999) The first section of the book I wrote for young Central European reformers. I find it stands up pretty well to the test of time

[Annotated Bibliography for change agents](#) - For quite a few years I had the habit of keeping notes on the books I was reading.

There is no doubt that in 2008 the capitalist system in Europe and in United States suffered a severe shock from which has not yet recovered. Suggestive indications of this "permanent crisis" are the draconian austerity packages that the economic elites implemented as a response to these developments triggering the dissolution of European Union, the collapse of democratic institutions, the impoverishment of the working people and emergence of far-right movements and parties throughout the European continent.

Few are more appropriate to explain such developments in their historicity alongside the rise of Nazism and Fascism in the interwar period, and the historiographical complexities around these issues, than the British historian [Geoff Eley](#). His work on the history of Germany and the authoritarian regimes of the interwar period; the role of class, gender and race in current debates within the field of historiography; and the inextricable trajectories of European democracy and the European left give him an insightful understanding of today's political momentum and its meaning for the left. In particular, Eley's contributions in the field of history have transformed the way we deal with the origins and the nature of autocratic politics, the history of the non-Stalinist left and the liaisons between history and politics.

Eley grew up in the north of England in the end of 1940s and went to university as an undergraduate in the late 1960s, continuing on to graduate school in 1970-74. In other words, he was a baby-boomer of the postwar Keynesian conjuncture and indirectly part of British new left that emerged in 1956 as outcome of a double crisis: on the one hand, the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution by Soviet tanks, and on the other by the British and French invasion of the Suez Canal zone. Under the influence of this milieu his work was formed both by the intellectual developments around the New Left Review and the Communist Party Historians group.

In his first study *Reshaping The German Right*, he sheds light on the political context in which the German extreme right developed. Examining the political trajectory of several pressure groups (Navy League, Pan-German League) Geoff Eley argues that the German right was subjected to a right-wing radicalization under the pressure of the political demands from below by various groups of civil society for which it was unable to articulate adequate hegemonic responses opening in that way the political space for the rise of far-right. In that sense, Eley demonstrated against the mainstream historiography of the time that German Nazism during the interwar period emerged not from a society that had a weak civil society or from a society in which the aristocracy was the dominant social class but rather from a social formation in which civic and associational development outstripped the development of hegemonic political parties.

Four year later, Geoff Eley co-authored with David Blackbourn the study that established him as prominent scholar of Nazi Germany which challenged the orthodoxy in German social history known as the *Sonderweg* (or special path) thesis that advocated that Nazism can be explained with reference to the supposed failure of a bourgeois revolution in Germany in contrast to its success in France after 1789 and in England in the 1640's. The two historians focus on the contrary on Weimar years and the impact of the First World War, along with the period of the late Kaiserreich, when the extreme tensions resulting from the consequences of Germany's capitalist industrialization (the "contradictions of German modernity," "modernity at its limits") enabled the conditions of

possibility for radicalized forms of right-wing politics to develop. Shifting the analysis from the *longue durée* of feudal domination to the conjunctural hegemonic crisis of the 1920s and 1930s indicate how the divisiveness of the bourgeois political parties, the emergence of antisystemic movements, and German capitalism contributed to the rise of Hitler. The next important study shifts to the left of the political spectrum and consists in the study of the making of the European left movement, *Forging Democracy: The history of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000*. The study, as its title indicates, is structured around the idea that the left is best understood in terms of advancing the boundaries of democracy. Through this he conceptualizes western democracy as an open-ended historical process that was formed - against the dominant rhetoric - by the struggles from below through conflicts, violent confrontations and challenges to the established political order. In these and other works, Geoff Eley attempts to offer narratives in which the historical social process is structured but open-ended and its specific forms and interactions are ultimately undetermined. In this interview we discuss with him his insights on the historiographical debates on the German and Italian authoritarian regimes; the past, present and the future of the left and its role in the democratic processes; and the current geopolitical developments within and outside European Union.

George Souvlis: Would you like to present yourself by focusing on the formative experiences (academic and political) that strongly influenced you?

Geoff Eley: I was born in 1949, grew up during the 1950s and 1960s in the north of England (more strictly, the very southern edge of the north), and went to university as an undergraduate in the late 1960s, continuing on to graduate school in 1970-74. So in those terms I'd describe myself as simultaneously a child of the welfare state and the postwar settlement and an unrepentant 68er.

My family was extremely lower middle class, provincial, and Methodist, with strong roots in a kind of Gladstonian-liberal Nonconformity - one grandfather was a photographer and skilled mold-maker in the Potteries (unemployed during much of the thirties); the other was a greengrocer. Each of my parents had gone to grammar school, but neither had been able to go to university for economic reasons. While acutely conscious of the advantages I received from both family and the time - the former gave me an understanding of the importance of education and a strong social conscience, the latter gave me all the benefits of the welfare state - I also found each to have been profoundly limiting in other ways. From that point of view, the explosion of new thinking, cultural experimentation, public permissiveness, and sexual freedoms during the sixties was immensely liberating - dizzyingly so! I was incredibly lucky to have come of age when I did and to have been a student during 1967-70. By accident, I also landed in a succession of remarkably intense and exciting institutions - first Balliol at Oxford, next Sussex for my Ph.D., then teaching in Cambridge 1975-79. I learned more from the times than from my teachers, although I certainly had an extraordinary immediate mentor, Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, who taught me my European history in Balliol and then directed my dissertation at Sussex. I also learned hugely from those we usually call the British Marxist historians - Eric Hobsbawm, Edward Thompson, Christopher Hill, George Rudé, and so forth - along with their successors associated during the 1960s and 1970s with *New Left Review*, including especially Perry Anderson. The other name to cap this list would be Raymond Williams.

More generally, I benefitted hugely from the extraordinary ferment of Marxist creativity in the 1970s - especially the translations of Gramsci; everything proceeding via NLR and *New Left*

Books/Verso; the proliferating new journals discipline by discipline; the new interdisciplinarity, especially cultural studies; the opening up of debate in and around the Communist Party; and so forth. Both in dialogue with the new Marxisms and flourishing independently of them, often very impatiently, was the new range of feminist theory. Finally, especially during the later seventies, I have to mention Stuart Hall, along with Ernesto Laclau (for thinking about ideology and fascism) and Göran Therborn (ditto ideology, but also the state); and I'd made a very important detour via Althusser and Poulantzas! By the time I left the UK for Michigan in 1979, my key influences – my intellectual and political guides, really – had become Stuart Hall, feminism, Gramsci, Williams, Anderson, Laclau. What came later during the eighties included Foucault, cultural studies more broadly, and all that we now call the cultural turn. Politically between the mid-seventies and mid-eighties I was most comfortable with a kind of feminist left-Eurocommunism.

GS: In your first study, *Reshaping The German Right* (Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1980), you discuss the political context in which the German extreme right developed. Scrutinizing the political trajectory of several pressure groups (Navy League, Pan-German League) you argue that the German right was subjected to a right-wing radicalization under the pressure of the political demands from below by various groups of civil society like the ones you examine. This process produced the necessary historical conditions for the emergence of Nazism. In other words, using a Gramscian terminology, the inability or the unwillingness of the dominant bourgeois political establishment to articulate adequate hegemonic responses to such pressures from below created the political space for the rise of the German radical right. A direct theoretical implication of this reasoning is that German Nazism during the interwar period emerged not from a society that had a weak civil society or from a society in which the aristocracy was the dominant social class but rather from a social formation in which civic and associational development outstripped the development of hegemonic political parties. Do you agree with this interpretation?

GE: I like the way you've summarized what I was trying to do with that first book. The main thrust was certainly to argue against that whole complex of assumptions about what made Germany different or peculiar that we call the *Sonderweg* [ed: special path] – i.e. failed bourgeois revolution, weak liberalism, primacy of pre-industrial traditions, feudalization of the bourgeoisie, etc etc. I found Laclau's formulations about populism extraordinary helpful – inspiring, in fact – in trying to think my ideas through; his book containing the essays on populism and fascism was published by Verso just as I was struggling to formulate my arguments about radical nationalism and its relationship to the given dominant forms of the Right in the ten years before 1914. The one cautionary note I'd add to how you've described my argument concerns that phrase "the necessary historical conditions for the emergence of Nazism." I'd put it rather differently. I was extremely concerned not to reach forward from 1913-14 too straightforwardly or directly to the Nazis (to fascism), because the intervening impact and consequences of both the First World War and the revolutionary conjuncture of 1917-23, along with the 1920s and the later crisis conjuncture of 1929-33, were absolutely decisive in that regard. So my own formulation in the final sentence at the very end of the book, about which some reviewers complained, but which was very deliberately cautious and distanced on my part was that the pre-1914 radicalization had produced "a vital condition of future possibility for the emergence of a German fascism."

GS: What do you think about the rediscussion of the *Sonderweg*? Does it still have some uses?

GE: In general the Sonderweg has exhausted its usefulness. Returning to the "special path" leads only to a dead end. Once upon a time, it clearly had its uses. It came from an entire discursive formation of the post-1945 era, when a definite ideal of the successfully "modernized" liberal-democratic "West" modeled on ideologically constructed and sanitized histories of Britain and the United States (more ambiguously of France) could be fashioned into a plausibly normative claim about how successful modern societies and their political systems develop in general - a claim of powerful appeal for a society like West Germany, where progressive intellectuals were passionately committed to coming to terms with the Nazi past and developing a general interpretation of how the "German catastrophe" was ever able to happen. But heavily normative history of that kind was always based on comparative understanding that was poorly grounded and conceptually flawed. It presumed a reading of British and French history that had long been superseded in those historiographies themselves. It reflected assumptions about what had happened in Britain and France between the 17th and 19th centuries that were never properly examined, with the result that German historical inquiry became focused around the wrong questions. Part of our critique in *Peculiarities* was to pose the most fundamental of counterfactuals: namely, if the case for Germany's "failed bourgeois revolution" (i.e. the Sonderweg) was to be seriously made, then what was the positive concept of bourgeois revolution that had to be presumed? And once the answer to that question was pursued, it rapidly emerged that what Wehler and co. believed had happened in the histories of Britain and France was precisely what revisionist historians of the English and French Revolutions had so decisively pulled apart and set aside. The Sonderweg turned out to be based on a fantasy of what happened in the British and French elsewhere. This was all deliciously ironic. A British Marxist (myself) was able to invoke anti-Marxist revisionist historiographies of the English and French Revolutions against West German anti-Marxists (Wehler and co.), who relied on discredited Marxist interpretations of British and French history.

In response, we wanted to build up a different and more fruitful basis for thinking about German history's comparative location and thence to reopen the question of a more sensible and sophisticated approach to the "origins of Nazism." Partly this involved shifting the focus back to the Weimar years and the impact of the First World War, along with the period of the late Kaiserreich, when the extreme tensions resulting from the consequences of Germany's capitalist industrialization (the "contradictions of German modernity," "modernity at its limits") enabled the conditions of possibility for radicalized forms of right-wing politics to develop. From that, over the ensuing couple of decades, there developed a long-term interest in establishing the coherence of the overall period between the 1890s and 1930s. But it also involved shifting the possible grounds of comparison. Rather than persisting in the Dahrendorfian lament ("why wasn't Germany England?" as David Blackbourn quipped), perhaps it would be more interesting to put Germany alongside Italy. Each was a new state unified in the 1860s; each society produced a governing fascism; each had extreme disparities of regional social formation (East Elbia and Bavaria as against the Mezzogiorno). Then, on a similar basis of equivalence, we might also add Japan. So for us, the issue was never one of comparison per se - never whether to compare, but rather how and on what basis?

These underlying questions are still the ones at stake in German historical discussion. And any return of a Sonderweg perspective, however modified or muted, still renders them confused. What are the best ways of locating 1933 in the longer course of the German past? How did Germany

differ from other national histories and in what ways? What are the most fruitful strategies for conceptualizing the movement of whole societies through time? How might a workable understanding of "the modern" or "modernity" be historicized by looking closely at the German case?

How should national histories best be compared? The best place from which to begin remains the more immediate conjunctures, in my view, and not the deep mists of German time.

There's yet another dimension, one that becomes ever-more apparent in the contemporary priorities of the historian's working agenda, viz. the insufficiencies of a national-historical perspective in a variety of ways, some of them scalar, some structural, some theoretical and epistemological, some ontological and experiential. The *Sonderweg* approach remains problematic in all of these directions. It becomes all the harder to defend any deep-longitudinal account of a particular national history now that the global and the transnational have increasingly captured the historian's imagination. Some of the most interesting historical work is now occurring in contexts either larger or smaller than the territorially sovereign national state – either in relation to globalization and transnationally defined entities of one kind or another, in smaller-scale supra-national regions that transgress established and nationally understood frontiers, or through inventively constructed microhistories. By projecting German peculiarities (the distinctiveness of Germany's history in the first half of the 20th century) ever more deeply into much earlier periods, from 1848 all the way back to the Reformation, inside a discretely bounded conception of how "Germany" should be defined, the *Sonderweg* approach pulls implicitly away from these current grounds of analysis and discussion.

Once we move away from scholarly historiography, unfortunately, the *Sonderweg* style of thinking remains very much alive and well – whether among broader publics or in the common-sense assumptions that still guide the thinking of politicians, journalists, and scholars who aren't historians (especially political scientists and literary scholars) when they're writing about Nazism's relationship to the deeper German past. The huge commotions surrounding Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1996) twenty years ago offer especially egregious evidence of that kind. But among German historians at large, the *Sonderweg* seems mainly to have been abandoned. Vestigial traces can still be found here and there, especially among the Bielefelder and other Kehrite veterans of the 1960s and their allies – e.g. in arguments about the authoritarianism of the Kaiserreich's core institutions, which Wehler continued doggedly defending. A particularly unbudging advocate of the classic *Sonderweg* perspective, Heinrich August Winkler, has codified it into two sequences of general history, one a two-volume history of Germany per se, *Germany: The Long Road West, 1789-1990*, the other a two-volume history of the West in the 20th century. But these are mainly expressions of an earlier dogma. A few colleagues in the English-speaking world seem to be smuggling disguised or equivocal versions of a *Sonderweg* perspective back in, but even they will usually disclaim any such intention. The full range of interests and available approaches in the field has long outgrown that older framework, which has long ceased to enable any fruitful directions or insights. Very tellingly, the single most important general history of Germany's 20th century yet to have appeared, Ulrich Herbert's magisterial *Geschichte Deutschlands im 20. Jahrhundert* (2014), entirely eschews any such reference or discussion.

GS: Can we apply this analytical scheme in order to interpret the rise of Fascism in Italy? In Italy we do not have nationalist leagues in quite the same way as in the German case but rather a civil

society whose manifestations included the wide spread of agrarian cooperatives in several rural regions (Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy, Liguria). Do we have here the same dynamic of a crisis expressed through the fascisization of these components of civil society because of the political elites' inability to satisfy their demands? (opening in that way political opportunities for the National Fascist Party)

GE: Interesting. In the Italian case it was surely the imposing strength of the Socialists in the northern countryside during 1919-20 that finally precipitated the convergence of the elites with Mussolini's movement. On the one hand, this brought a drastic rightward movement of the Fascists, through which the early progressivism of the early program of 1919 was rapidly shed and the use of militarized forms and direct violence taken up (killing socialists and beating them up rather than just arguing with them on the speaker's platform); on the other hand, the landowners and capitalists saw the Fascists as their solution, given the ineffectuality of the liberal state and the rhetorical maximalism of the PSI. So it was the far greater radicalism of the PSI (compared with the SPD, for instance) that created the dimensions of crisis in which the Fascist option started to make sense for the Italian elites. In Germany, the SPD turned out to be a far more crucial stabilizing factor against the Left.

From the interwar period to current crisis

GS: Could we detect some analogies between the socioeconomic crisis of the interwar period and the ongoing capitalist crisis we are experiencing since 2008?

GE: Here I still tend to be extremely Poulantzian! I've always found his idea of a dual crisis, or of powerfully intersecting twin crises - crisis of representation, crisis of hegemony - incredibly helpful in beginning to define the kind of crisis from which fascism might come - that is, the kind of crisis in which the idea of turning to fascism starts to seem feasible. On the one hand, the state-institutional complex becomes paralyzed or ceases to function, so that the process of organizing a sufficient basis of cohesion among the key fractions of the dominant classes becomes harder and harder to accomplish. In that case strategies like a presidential dictatorship (e.g. Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution) or a "government of experts" or some other form of authoritarian and non-accountable government start to become appealing for the Right and their allies, so that constitutional democracy and proceduralism can be set aside. On the other hand, the complexities of mobilizing sufficiently broad bases of popular support among the people (in the electorate) also become too unmanageable and the existing party apparatuses fall apart. In that case, the popular constituencies also begin to look elsewhere. If we use this framework of a dual crisis, then we have a very good means of beginning to assess the political fallout from the crisis of 2008 - country by country, capitalism by capitalism, polity by polity. Without drawing facile equivalences, it's not too hard to see signs of the elements I've just described (e.g. presidential dictatorship, government by experts, non-accountability, plus disaffection and cynicism of the electorate) in the contemporary European climate. Even though we're a long way from a fullblown "Poulantzian dual crisis," it's really important to identify, as clearheadedly and responsibly as possible, the places where such a crisis can grow.

George Giannakopoulos: How do you assess the recent surge of historical commentary on the peculiarities of the German past? Is the current crisis in Europe a product of the German imperial legacy as some, Brendan Simms for instance, seem to suggest?

GE: On the whole I'm very skeptical about arguments that rely on geopolitical perspectives of a deep-structural kind or long-run, grand-scale continuities going back to the Treaty of Westphalia, Frederick the Great, the reaction against Napoleon, and Bismarck's Realpolitik. These are too often lazy substitutions for the more exacting kinds of analysis that begin from the distinctive features of very particular conjunctures and their shifting political opportunity structures – the complex fields of possibility shaped by the circumstances of particular societies at particular times, which may or may not be strongly interconnected or converge transnationally with one another in the international system, and which the historian needs to find ways of reconstructing and reentering.

Relative to this challenge, I find the various books and essays of Brendan Simms not very suggestive and often quite banal. The resurgence of older-style diplomatic and strategic history delivers no greater insights than it did in the heyday of A. J. P. Taylor in the 1950s and 1960s. It clearly has its place, but the extraordinary gains enabled in the late 1960s and 1970s by the assertion of the "primacy of domestic politics" (Primat der Innenpolitik) by Fritz Fischer and his students along with Hans-Ulrich Wehler deserve to be vigorously upheld. Clearly the contemporary ambitions of a Schäuble bespeak an expansionist conception of Germany's interests profoundly informed or even inspired by a dogmatically derived view of Germany's place in Europe earlier in the 20th century. But the most important starting-point for analyzing the provenance of such a vision (Schäuble's, that is) is now in the late 20th and early 21st century present, and not in the 19th and early 20th geopolitical continuities that Simms wants to prioritize, let alone the even deeper ones going back through Napoleon to the Thirty Years War.

GS: In the book that you edited, *German Colonialism in a Global Age* (Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2014), there is a comprehensive discussion of the German colonial empire and its significance. Considering the current Germany's intentions to be the EU's major political as well as economic power, and to dominate European governance, could it be described as a neocolonial power?

GE: Such a description is very polemically charged for all sorts of historical reasons, to be sure. But in light of all of the disclosures and revelations about the terms through which Schäuble and others have been conducting and understanding the recent negotiations, it's impossible not to see those resonances. The EU has definitely been passing into a different period of its history. "Europe" has never been a democratic project, in terms of the constitutional and procedural mechanisms and modalities of its existence and the complete absence of any form of democratic accountability. But it has certainly been a cultural project of unification and common aspiration (a regime of signification, if you like), and since the 1980s there has increasingly developed a common cultural architecture and even some really existing bases of common belonging. For a time, moreover, between say the mid-eighties and the mid-nineties, it was even possible to convince oneself that "social Europe" had some real conditions of possibility. But now all of that is gone. With exception of the explicitly socialist Left, which remains quite weak, there's no discernible support anywhere in the current European configuration for a project of effective democratization or social progressivism of any kind. "Europe" is reduced only to a "regime of regulation" – one that's patently structured around German hegemony.

The Bourgeois revolution and the challenges of the revisionist historiography

GS: One of the main analytical categories that your study *Peculiarities of German History* attempts to revise is that of the "bourgeois revolution." Has this concept something still to offer to

historians under the light of new studies like that of Neil Davidson? Which are its main limitations and in which ways we can push the historical research some steps further?

GE: Well, to be honest I've not tended to think with that concept for a long time now. That wasn't the result of any specific decision on my part, more a consequence of a gradually developing unease about the hardness of the causal relations it tended to imply (within the Marxist tradition as then constituted) between processes of class formation and the operative forms of politics at the level of collective action and the state. In 1988 I published an essay called "In Search of the Bourgeois Revolution: The Particularities of German History," in which I stepped back from my part of Peculiarities and the immediate Sonderweg debate in order to develop some more explicit generalizing arguments about the comparative implications for political development and state formation. But after that my main interests migrated elsewhere and I've never really gone back to the question of "bourgeois revolution" per se. I've been thinking for quite a while that it would be pretty interesting and important to do so, with Neil Davidson's and others' work as recent prods.

But to do this properly I'd have to spend a lot of time bringing myself up to speed on huge bodies of historiography and theory that have been accumulating during the past quarter century (on the French Revolution alone, for example!), and I've too much else on at the moment to make that feasible. There's no point in doing it unless you can do it conscientiously and seriously. But there are some very interesting recent interventions like Neil Davidson's work. I've also been very taken by Marc Mulholland's *Bourgeois Liberty and the Politics of Fear*, for example. In this respect I've always found it very intriguing that Perry Anderson's successor volume to *Lineages of the Absolutist State* never materialized. E.g. in Cambridge c. 1977 he presented an extraordinary tour de force of a paper on the topic of the "bourgeois revolution" but that's the last that I'm aware of.

GS: One of the central aims of the book, *Reviving the English Revolution* (Verso, London, 1988), you edited along with William Hunt is, by paraphrasing E. P. Thompson, to rescue Christopher Hill's work from the enormous condescension of the conservative revisionists. This historiographical trend expanded to revisionisms affecting almost every modern "revolutionary" process in opposition to the respective Marxist narratives. Is that process in the historiographic field connected with wider social processes or it proceed with relative autonomy in regard to the society? Could we compare the revisionist challenge with the phenomenon of postmodernism? Do you find homologues, both regarding the causes of their emergence and their epistemological claims, between the two?

GE: Hmmm. I'm not sure I like that implied equation! I was actually very excited by the interest in postmodernism from the later-eighties into the early-nineties, especially in the range of interventions that ran from Fred Jameson to David Harvey. Many of the wilder cultural studies discussions were also incredibly interesting in their time, especially among feminists. So I was never resistant or disapproving of those discussions. Under other auspices, the use of the "postmodernist" label to argue for certain new kinds of historical work could also be quite liberating, even if I quickly parted company with the most extreme advocates. Having said that, "postmodernism" did become a very divisive kind of marker in wide areas of debate during the 1990s among historians in the English-speaking world, and that's where I could certainly see the connections you're drawing.

In our book *The Future of Class in History: What's Left of the Social?* (2007), Keith Nield and I devoted an entire chapter to trying to figure out what was enabling and what was wrong-headed in the whole postmodernism discussion, and that's where I tended to leave it!

GS: One of the interesting epistemological underpinnings of your historical work is the suggestion that there is no necessary contradiction between the macro and micro history, or, as you mention in one of your articles, "between the everyday life analytic and the pursuit of the proverbial 'big questions' or the use of theory per se." Would like you to elaborate more on this epistemological parameter that informs your work?

GE: In some ways it's rather straightforward: i.e. for the purposes of addressing different orders of questions you'll always need different registers of theory, different methodologies, and different bodies of knowledge. I'm very avowedly eclectic these days. It all depends on the kinds of questions you're trying to ask. The same questions can also be addressed at a variety of levels and in a variety of ways. There'll always be more than a single approach and more than just one answer. So why do we need to choose? I don't want to be misunderstood: I'm not saying that anything goes in some wishy-washy way. Rather, we need to think through, as rigorously and creatively as possible, how our particular questions can best be addressed, i.e. most imaginatively and most effectively. Sometimes we might need one kind of approach, at other times another. Most commonly we probably need varieties of combination. It all depends what works. Different theory for different purposes. That's what I mean by eclecticism.

Left: Party, movement & power

GS: In your study *Forging Democracy* you insist on the crucial role of working-class parties and movements bringing European democracies into emergence. Taking into account the hollowing of Western democratic institutions that is taking place the last twenty years, do you think that the contemporary left should be aiming at the restoration of bourgeois parliamentary life? and if yes under which conditions.

GE: I'm not sure what the force of the "bourgeois" qualifying adjective might be! If it means "a parliamentary politics structured around a set of primary bourgeois interests and affiliations," then that wouldn't seem very desirable! But if we're approaching "parliamentary politics" institutionally and procedurally as a set of practices and protocols for defining the conduct of politics in a variety of arenas (national, regional, local, supra-national), with a strong proceduralism and a democratic constitution that does NOT exclude other forms of participatory citizenship and grassroots activism, THEN it seems really essential.

That also connects to electoral politics too, clearly. Thus an electoralist strategy - or a politics that focuses on elections - doesn't have to translate necessarily into equivalent forms of the very narrow kinds of electoral politics we have now. There are all sorts of ways of using the electoral process as a vehicle, as an instrument, as a platform, as an arena in which you argue for the importance of your particular kind of politics - as opposed to the electoral machinery that has come to provide the contemporary norm, i.e. an electoralism of the contemporary social democratic parties that's effectively emptied of anything else. By the last third of the 20th century, the whole *raison d'être* of the party became reduced downwards into fighting an election, winning an election, keeping itself in office, or getting back there. But the classic slogan of the SPD left before the

First World War had been *Durch das Fenster reden* ("Speak through the Window!"), i.e.. use the parliamentary chamber as an opportunity to challenge the given rules and boundaries of the politically possible by addressing the people outside, and thereby overcome the gap between the committee room and the street. So the problem isn't so much the bankruptcy of an electoralist politics as such (or parliamentarism *per se*), but rather the degree to which fighting elections and manoeuvring inside parliaments can turn into the sole and sufficient focus, one that's exclusive of the other grounds and arenas of action.

The challenge now is to think of viable political purposes and objectives in a manner to overcome the present limitations. By what means can you acquire a voice of significance, so that you are actually inside the conversations that determine how policy gets made, and how can you use local concentrations of strength in order to ensure the delivery of services and public goods in effective and just ways? Which then become, actually, the bases for political argument themselves. When people can see that something is actually doable, and may even work, then that's how movements can begin to acquire momentum.

Historically speaking, there are lots of examples of a movement or a party, often on a very local basis, using the opportunities for political voice in order to build solidarities, create continuities over time, that were not simply subsumed under the electoral strategy of a Labour party or an SPD at a deradicalized, national level.

So it seems to me to be self-defeatingly ultra-left to ignore elections and parliamentary politics completely. Politics has to begin from the already existing points of access – not least because that's where the majority of people understand politics to be located. So, democratically speaking, it seems self-defeating just to ignore elections and the parliamentary arena or relegate them to purely instrumental or tactical importance. I mean, obviously there will be occasions, and situations, where you may not want to prioritize your politics around an election campaign or building a parliamentary coalition, but, in principle, it seems to be foolish not to acknowledge that this is one of the key places where political practice needs to occur.

GS: The last fifteen years we are observing new modes of theorization and formation of political realities by the left that ignore in their analysis the state apparatus and consequently the institution of the party as the modern form of the representation of the various class interests. Hardt and Negri's work is one example of this theoretico-political tendency. Could you provide us with a historicization of the explanatory causes of this phenomenon? Do you think that the contemporary left should come to grip with these issues more systematically?

GE: It does seem to me that between the 1870s and 1890s, the socialist tradition invented the mass party. The Left established the lasting model of the national parliamentary party and allied trade union federation geared toward elections, while harnessing mass memberships via educational, arts, recreational, sporting, cooperative, self-help, and social clubs, plus big auxiliaries for women and youth. By 1900 this model had become so successful, country by country, that it was also adopted by the Left's opponents – first by Catholics, conservatives, and liberals, then after 1918 by fascists. After 1917-23, Communists followed the same pattern too. This socialist associationism (as we might call it) aspired to enter and organize the entirety of its supporters' lives, ideally backed by the local governments the Left controlled and eventually by the future socialist state.

This model grounded the parliamentary party in the everyday lives of its members. Its promise inspired far wider circles than just workers, focusing many more popular hopes – inside individual communities, during particular campaigns, when votes were cast in elections, as coalitions were formed for government. In their heyday – from the early 1900s to the 1960s – socialist and Communist parties became magnets for very diverse groups: not just waged workers (across skill levels, occupations, ages, religions, ethnicities, genders), but also white-collar workers, professionals, intellectuals, non-employed family members, discriminated national and other minorities, and so on. This was a massive achievement. But post-1945 changes – first the consumer capitalism of the great prosperity, then the post-Fordist transition – slowly destroyed the infrastructures making those very broadly-based socialist cultures possible. As a movement simultaneously rooted in working-class communities but always magnetizing much wider social supporters and hopes, that old mass party has gone. What might possibly replace it is one of the biggest challenges now facing the Left for the future.

I've been summarizing fairly recklessly here, and the argument will obviously vary in many important ways country by country. What I've said applies most straightforwardly to central and northern Europe too. But in principle and as a broad starting-point I think it applies more generally, because it proceeds from a very carefully grounded argument about the kinds of structural circumstances that delivered the infrastructure during the first two thirds of the 20th century for a rather successful version of Left politics. And with the capitalist restructuring and the attendant social transformations and political realignments of the past few decades (including state-institutional relations and forms) – everything we now summarize as neoliberal globalization – that infrastructure has now *GONE*.

So *THIS* is where I'd converge to some extent with the Hardt & Negri argumentation, although I don't find their conception of "multitude" remotely helpful in trying to grasp those new forms of organized collective action and democratic practice that can begin to replace what's now been pretty definitively lost.

In the period since the 1970s, the Left has bifurcated into two sharply separate spheres. One of these is the world of the given parliamentary parties: originally based in comprehensive, high-intensity membership machines, socialist subcultures, and class-based residential and work-related solidarity communities, these are now geared exclusively for the purposes of elections. The other world is that of the new social movements, the new extra-parliamentary popular movements: these are far looser associations of the like-minded, who combine together in remarkably creative citizens' movements and other forms of activism completely beyond the bounds of the parliamentary system. This latter kind of grass-roots dissidence flourishes in both the big-city "alternative scenes" and the more gentrified professional and semi-bohemian enclaves, as well as the ethico-cultural spaces of smaller towns and villages, where communities of sentiment around the post-1968 values coalesced. These two quite distinct Left formations have a separate but overlapping existence. They also correspond to different periods of the Left's history: one is the temporality of the major accomplishments of the social democratic and Communist parties in the first two thirds of the 20th century; the other reflects the fluidities of the period that followed.

What does this splitting into parties and movements mean? Socialist parties can no longer presume the loyalties of long-term supporters who happily reproduce their socialist allegiances over time

(and down the generations) and turn out reliably for elections. Those parties' ability to generate activist identification, binding their members together with wider progressive networks, has definitely gone. They are now exclusively parliamentary operations. In the extra-parliamentary world, in contrast, vigorous social movements have developed locally, largely disconnected from any national party. These parallel systems of Left affiliation may work together for elections, but once socialists form a government they pull apart. Socialist governments may distribute public appointments, create funding opportunities, and sub-contract areas of policy and research (typically for women's issues, racial equality, or culture and the arts), all of which offer areas of social movement participation. Out of office, socialist parties can also converge more easily with those extra-parliamentary oppositions. But since the 1980s, parties have narrowed increasingly around their parliamentary domain. Links are closer with local government, where collaboration with grass-roots and decentralized movements can be easier to manage.

But socialist parties are now completely SCARED of extra-parliamentary energy. The broadest social movements have formed since the 1970s and 1980s around single issues or particular events, but without the backing of many socialist parliamentarians – peace movements, abortion campaigns, anti-nuclear protests, Sicilian anti-Mafia campaigns, urban squatting, anti-roads protests, and so forth. Thus the model of the nationally organized socialist party and its affiliated union federation, so effective from the later 19th century to the 1960s has come to an end. For the first time since the rise of labor movements, the main impulse for democratic enlargement is coming from elsewhere – not only from outside the official socialist parties, but often against them too. In one of the most vital areas of all – anti-racist activism and the collective self-organization of migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, and ethnic minorities – the activity is poorly connected not only with left-wing parties but with the NSMs as well.

A strong and successful Left has always combined electoral and parliamentary with social and extra-parliamentary strategies. In other words, “the committee room” and “the streets” will always need to be moved into acting together. In the European present, unfortunately, resulting from long-term processes of social, cultural, and political change going back to the 1960s and 1970s, these two aspects of democratic politics have been broken apart. How might they be re-connected? Given their almost wholly deradicalized centrism and dismal showing in recent elections, the existing socialist parties are unlikely to offer any solution. Stronger articulations between grass-roots activism and potential allies inside the parties are more likely to occur locally. But if a social movement politics is to outgrow the localism of its immediate context and take on much wider efficacy and resonance, a Left will be needed that can act on a larger-than-local level too – that is, spatially across a region or in chains of coordination across other cities elsewhere, in the multiple settings of contemporary publicness (electronic media, internet, and blogosphere, as well as press, radio, and TV), in national parliaments and assemblies via parties and constellations of NGOs, pressure groups, and campaigning organizations, in the transnationally active versions of all of these forms of coalitioning, and so on. To be effective again, the Left will need ways of bringing each of these spheres and levels together.

It does seem to me that – in dramatic contrast to the utter hopelessness of the British Labour Party in the last two elections, to use an example of a once-vigorous but now entirely hollowed-out electoral party – it's phenomena like the current SNP or Podemos, and of course Syriza (allowing for the outcome of the current crisis) that begin to show us a way into the future.

The Europe during the global economic crisis

GS: In the book, *After the Nazi Racial State* (Rita Chin, Heide Fehrenbach, Geoff Eley, and Atina Grossmann (ed.), Michigan University Press, Michigan, 2009), there is an attempt to reintroduce the notion of race as a legitimate conceptual and empirical tool for the analysis of difference in Europe. Would you like to elaborate more on the reasons you consider this concept useful for the historical analysis of the postwar societies? Do you think that it is possible after the recomposition of the European political scene since the crisis of 2008 to see the conservative and far-right leading the politics of European Union?

GE: Of course this is an exceptionally delicate and complicated area, because any time you argue that "race" has to be taken seriously as a category of analysis you run the risk of seeming to accept that it's something "real" in the sense of having objective or scientific validity. So right from the start I want to make a distinction between the importance of investigating how "race" functions in social and political life and the equal importance, in fact the ethical and epistemological necessity, of continuing to challenge its existence. Taking it seriously doesn't mean accepting the legitimacy of racial theories or reifying racial differences.

What I want to argue is that when ideas of race have such wide circulation and capture such widespread acceptance, they acquire some powerful purchase on social experience, whether or not they have scientific standing, and so in those terms they do become real. A government practice, a system of policy, a set of political languages, a body of scientific or academic knowledge, a religious creed, a big political idea, but also an event or chain of events like a riot or a rash of violent incidents, a public spectacle, or a political campaign, not to speak of deep legacies inside the culture, persistent patterns of unreflected thinking, widely diffused dogmas of common-sense understanding, and straightforward systems of prejudice – all of these generate categories which people then have to inhabit, which they then have to live with and to live inside. This is how the Althusserian concept of "interpellation" wanted us to understand ideology: people begin to understand themselves in a particular way, they recognize themselves in a set of ideas and appeals, they are interpellated by them. That interpellation isn't automatic, it's not inevitable, it's not a process over which people have no choice. There are competing ideas out there too: race can also be contested. But in all sorts of ways ideas about race create places where in practice, with varying degrees of awareness, people in a society have little choice but to dwell. This describes more than just a process of "racialization" or the existence of a racist attitude or an ideology that's somehow external or secondary to a material reality structured around something else. It describes a real social topography: forms of everydayness, actually existing patterns of organized community, an entire architecture of common belonging, ways of regulating public and personal space, institutional machineries, systems of governmentality. If we decide not to tackle race head on, then we miss this vital materiality. Race keeps its tenacity and its appeal because it inhabits an actually existing world of practices and ideas. That's why we need to break the silence about it.

This becomes all the more urgent precisely because the Right finds in "race" such a powerful source of appeal. Since the 1990s, and perhaps all the more so since 2008, the Right has been making race into the ground of its widening success. Now of course I'm not saying that we have to become racists too, or that we have to tack towards the right in order to counter the Right's appeal. That's exactly what the center-left and social democrats have been doing so disastrously for the past 50 years. What I'm saying is that to acknowledge the "realness" of race as a set of descriptions of the

world where people actually live is the first step to developing a politics that might be effective in countering racism.

George Giannakopoulos: You are currently engaged in writing a history of twentieth century Europe. What are the key challenges one faces when reflecting on recent European history at a time of profound political and socio-economic crisis?

GE: Well, many of the challenges are those involved in writing any general history of Europe, whether 20th century or not. I'm fundamentally committed to writing a history that is genuinely European for instance - one that does justice to east as well as west, south as well as north, small countries as well as big ones. Most general accounts quickly devolve in practice into the view from Paris, London, Berlin, and sometimes Rome. I also want to pay attention to all the possible dimensions and types of history - the social, political, and economic, the cultural and intellectual, history of science and technology, history of international relations, history of the environment, history of the big events and the history of everyday life, the micro and the macro, and so forth. I want to register what we've learned as historians during the past few decades from the histories of gender, sexuality, popular culture, the self and subjectivity, everyday life and microhistory, history of emotions, and more. Then there are the big questions of perspective, which I'm continuously trying to keep in mind. How do you write a history that's legitimately focused on Europe without becoming Eurocentric, for example? How do you write the history of European integration without becoming teleological? How do you balance the need for an overall narrative architecture against the full diversity of national, regional, and local patterns and trajectories across the 20th century as a whole? I'm trying in addition to do full justice to the global, the transnational, and the comparative.

The balance between different priorities and registers of analysis - bringing together different temporalities for example, such as the eventfulness of the big moments of political upheaval and transition on the one hand, and the structural patterns and logics of the *longue durée* on the other hand - is very hard to get right. Certain structural and long-run patterns of development - demography, family relations, sexuality, childhood, generational conflicts, leisure and recreation, privacy and intimate life, health and nutrition, ecology and environment, etc etc - don't easily map onto the more familiar political periodizations, which necessarily retain their meanings and salience.

How do you balance the big eventfulness of the spectacular emblematic dates of the 20th century (1914, 1918, 1933, 1939, 1945, 1956, 1968, 1989, and more) with the underlying patterns and trends of that kind? Certain problems are highly specific to the 20th century, of course. How does the Second World War need to be repositioned as we acquire ever-greater distance on that cataclysmic concentration of eventfulness, for example? Now that we're able to view the 20th century from the outside, facing a new horizon of equivalently massive upheavals in the form of climate change and its consequences, how should the century's first half (the so-called Thirty Years' Civil War of 1914-45) be resituated in relation to its second half? How, in the light of the intervening genocides, do we now historicize the Holocaust, and how do we study it comparatively without diminishing its enormities? Shifting focus, how do we best historicize the exceptional accomplishments of western European social democracy in the post-1945 decades during the heyday of the postwar settlement before the inception and advance of neoliberalism started to take those conditions away?

There are many other particular challenges. Underlying them all, for me, is the abiding difficulty of finding the appropriate ground of analysis (epistemologically, perspectively, ethically, politically)

from which, in full recognition of European privilege and its effects, it's possible to continue to write European history responsibly. Once Europe has been "provincialized," in other words, how do you then proceed?

GS: How you would evaluate the political presence both of Syriza and Podemos until now in this crucial conjuncture for the future of Europe? Could be this kind of politics a viable long-term alternative for the ongoing continent's crisis?

GE: My short answer is that Syriza and Podemos, along with the remarkable Jeremy Corbyn story and some other developments we might mention (e.g. the shifting around in Portugal), are each signs that important fissures are appearing in the given political landscape. But this still barely translates across "European" political discourse as such, DiEm25 notwithstanding. The sad conclusion to be drawn from the recent non-negotiations is that the basis from which to imagine a viable left politics in and for Europe seems still distressingly shallow and thin.

¹The interview conducted in August 2015. Two of the questions formulated by George Giannakopoulos and the last question answered by Geoff Eley in March 2016.
http://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/smlr.rutgers.edu/files/documents/Events/call_for_papers_rethinking_german_political_economy.pdf
excellent 15 page analysis - with extensive bib

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jul/21/to-die-in-spring-ralf-rothmann-review-nazi-germany-waffen-ss>

FURTHER READING – initial draft

I suggested in the Introduction that the intelligent traveler who wants well written and thorough insights into a country's culture, history and society is badly served.

[Germany Jekyll and Hyde - a contemporary account of Nazi Germany](#); Sebastian Haffner (1940)

Sebastian Haffner was a German émigré and journalist who has written some of best stuff on modern Germany....

[The Meaning of Hitler](#); Sebastian Haffner (1979)

[Defying Hitler](#) (2002)

[The Politics of Cultural Despair](#); Fritz Stern (1961)

[Before the Deluge - a portrait of Berlin in the 1920s](#); Otto Friedrich (1963)

Ralf Dahrendorf

<https://amphilsoc.org/sites/default/files/proceedings/1554sixDahrendorf.pdf>

<http://www.socsci.uci.edu/~rdalton/germany/PDF/chap4.pdf>

The Germans; Gordon Craig (1982)

<https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=3-michail-after-the-war-and-after-the-wall&site=15>

The Germans; power struggles and the development of habitus in the 19th and 20th Centuries; Norbert Elias (1989) <https://networks.h-net.org/node/35008/reviews/43630/moses-elias-germans-power-struggles-and-development-habitus-nineteenth>

The Germans, we read in the preface, "is the most important book by Norbert Elias since *The Civilizing Process*." This is quite a claim given the fifty years that separate the appearance of the two titles (the former was first published in Germany in 1989, the latter in 1939), raising as it does our expectations that the volume under review contains the ground breaking insights of its illustrious predecessor. It also raises the obvious question of how Elias integrates Germany's singular breach of civilization between 1933 and 1945 into his overall theory of the civilizing process. Readers looking for an explicit answer will be disappointed. *The Germans* is not a systematically developed argument, but rather an assortment of postwar essays on a variety of related themes--German state formation and personality structure, dueling in the *Kaiserreich*, violence in the Weimar Republic, the rise of Nazism, and terrorism in the Federal Republic. The editor is to be commended for making available these dispersed writings, but it is at the cost of considerable overlap in subject matter and analysis. Still, the constant repetition allows the reader to identify those factors that Elias has invested with special significance, and to reconstruct his answer to the burning question of "Civilization and the Holocaust."

Since the "discovery" of Elias in the 1970s, his theory has become well-known. Nevertheless, it repays to recall its essentials. *The Civilizing Process* is no celebratory account of human "progress" over the centuries. A witness to the paramilitary violence of the Weimar Republic, during which a friend was murdered by the *Freikorps*, Elias was acutely conscious of the fragility of those norms that make social life possible. The book highlights the historical contingency of such norms, which Europeans naively and arrogantly assumed were theirs by "nature," by reconstructing the process of their development. Drawing on Freud, he postulated an anthropology of violent and egoistic drives, represented historically in the Middle Ages, where the "warrior" ethos of the aristocracy prevailed. The epochal development was the absolutist state, whose monopoly on force diminished capricious violence in everyday life. The subjects of early modern Europe internalized the new external constraints with the help of etiquette manuals. Knives and forks came into use.

The Civilizing Process is primarily about the French case, because of its paradigmatic constellation of social forces. The aristocracy accepted its reduced status, swapped the "warrior" for a "court" ethos, and socialized the rising middle class in the art of modern manners and self-control. The court at Versailles became the school of the nation. Like the maturation of children, the civilization of a society is its gradual replacement of external with internal authority. At the summit of this process stands parliamentary democracy, whose functioning requires the anthropologically remarkable ability of individuals and groups to delay or forgo gratification in the name of compromise. Civilization is the habitus of self-control.

If France is the model, how does Germany compare? In *The Germans*, it is actually England and Great Britain that Elias holds up as the paradigmatically civilized country with which he contrasts his native land (p. 324). This comes as no surprise. He lived and worked there for decades after the war, and like other liberal, Jewish refugees from Nazism--Hans Rosenberg, for example--he explained Germany's descent into barbarism by reference to its divergence from the west. In Elias, in other words, we have an unashamed proponent of the *Sonderweg* thesis. He has no truck with the bleakness of a "dialectic of enlightenment" or the cultural pessimism of "modernity and the Holocaust." The answer to the above question is not to be found within civilization itself. Germans were in thrall to Nazism and they perpetrated the Holocaust because they were never civilized in the first place. Why the civilizing process failed in Germany is the underlying theme of *The Germans* and the subject of the book's long, central section (pp. 299-402), which was written between 1961 and 1962 in response to the Eichmann trial. Like Hannah Arendt, whose magazine articles on the trial Elias does not appear to have read, Elias was interested in the German conscience under the Nazi regime. Unlike Arendt, however, he thinks this was a specifically German problem. The vulnerability to Nazism was the result of the German tradition, which "bore all its [i.e., Nazism's] characteristic hallmarks" (p. 331).

The origins of this pernicious tradition can be traced to the chaos of the seventeenth century, when the country was ravaged by the Thirty Years War. Germany has been in decline ever since, a tendency exacerbated by the decentralized structures of the Holy Roman Empire, which inhibited the development of a strong state and dominant court. Germans' insecurity about their collective identity bred a backward-looking yearning for the restoration of an apprehended former greatness. As a result of this dream and Germany's exposed borders, the aristocratic elites anachronistically retained their military role far longer than in other western countries, a role cemented by the

victory over Austria and France in the wars of unification. In awe of its superiors, who had finally realized the national dream, middle class Germans abandoned their humanistic and universal culture for *Realpolitik* and contented themselves with a subordinate role in the power structure.

This social constellation is the fatal turning point, or rather backward step. Elias singles out Nietzsche as the philosophical incarnation of the retention, consolidation, and spread of the warrior ethos in middle class Germany, although the historian Friedrich Meinecke should have been mentioned when Elias writes that "Seldom before had so much been said and written in praise of power, even of the violent sort" (p. 180). Dueling fraternities and the army became the school of the nation, and bourgeois Germans spared no effort to associate themselves with these institutions, which inculcated "a pitiless human habitus," or in other words, the anti-civilizational ethos of the feudal aristocracy (p. 107ff.). The strong emphasis on ritual in this milieu was the external authority that compensated and inhibited the development of internal restraints. And yet only those who were part of this milieu could "give satisfaction" in a duel and qualify as members of the "true Germany." Socialists, Jews, and other outsiders were without honor and considered a threat to the national ideal.

Elias is frank in his assessment of the personality structure or habitus that this historical experience produced. Middle class Germans possessed a "lust for submission." They oppressed those beneath them rather than rebel against those that oppressed them. They did not develop the self control or conscience that could restrain their national delusions when the rule of law was removed. They were, in other words, civilizational children. The defeat in 1918 and the rise to power of the despised Social Democrats traumatized the bourgeois German habitus, but the "humiliation of Versailles" affected all Germans. Unlike Britain after the Second World War, they were unable to come to terms with their national decline. Consequently, they opposed the Weimar Republic and its policy of international co-operation, eventually following the man who promised to fulfill their dream of historical greatness. The Nazis merely generalized the anti-civilizational habitus that hitherto had been limited to middle class and aristocratic Germany (pp. 197, 374). When they began to implement their ideologically-driven plans of genocide, there was little within Germans to prevent their participation.

This brief reconstruction does not do justice to the wealth of information and insights that Elias brings to bear on this historical problem. The originality of the analysis lies in the attention to the dynamic relation between the macro-level of state formation and the micro-level of personality structure. The static categories of "the individual" and "society" are historicized and situated within an overarching theory of modernization. Cultural historians will welcome his attention to practices like dueling and the invocation of "habitus" (long before Bourdieu), while social historians will be pleased that class and power remain operational categories.

Still, an important issue is left unclarified. Elias tends to define civilization as a functional matter of self-control (eating with knives and forks), but it is apparent that he thinks that it also contains a normative component (cf., pp. 32f., 109). This tension is evident in the fact that the Nazis ate with knives and forks and that Himmler, in his infamous "Posen Speech," took pride in the "decency" of his men, because they had not robbed the Jews they had just shot. Had Elias thematized and

resolved this paradox, his theory might have resembled that of Juergen Habermas. His civilization looks very much like Habermas's post-conventional/post-national telos.

Elias is blissfully unaware of the historical and sociological literature on the subjects about which he writes. The reader will look in vain for references to Barrington Moore or Perry Anderson in his treatment of social relations in early modern Europe, or for the names of David Blackbourn, Richard Evans, and Hans-Ulrich Wehler when he discusses the *Sonderweg* thesis. The age of some essays is also apparent in the references to the Nazis as "half-educated men"--a contention disposed of by Ulrich Herbert's biography of Werner Best--as well as in the dating of the decision for the Holocaust in 1939, and the gloomy "Thoughts of the Federal Republic" written when terrorism gripped the country during "German Autumn" of 1977. Despite their idiosyncrasies, however, the essays collected in *The Germans* remain compulsive reading and invite application to contemporary cases of social crisis. Elias's theory of barbarism is as relevant today as his theory of civilization was in 1939.

<http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=2826>

http://www.dirkmoses.com/uploads/7/3/8/2/7382125/moses_new_german_critique.pdf

Faust's Metropolis - a history of Berlin; Alexandra Ritchie (1999)
a voluminous 1107 page book

[Germany - Unravelling an Enigma](#); Greg Nees (Intercultural Press; interaction series 2000)
Very readable analysis of the key elements which make Germany what it is

The German Trauma - experiences and reflections 1938-2001; Gitta Sereny (2000)
For over 50 years Gitta Sereny has been a one-woman truth and reconciliation committee for post-war Germany, inserting her needle every so often to make sure that no one should forget the crimes of the Nazis and to measure the ambient climate of acceptance and regret. *The German Trauma* is a collection of these investigations, loosely tied together with an autobiographical thread. Few writers are better placed than Sereny to examine the German conscience and few do it as well. She attended a Nuremberg rally in 1934 at the age of 11 and has had her hooks into the pernicious influence of Nazism ever since. She is perhaps best known for her brushes with *Albert Speer*, whom she eventually persuaded to admit what he had previously denied: that he had known of the Final Solution. But there are other Nazi apologists and sympathisers here, too--David Irving, Kurt Waldheim, Leni Riefenstahl and John Demjanjuk--and none escapes the Sereny probe. For all that, Sereny is never less than scrupulously fair. She only wants her pound of flesh and takes no more. Those who admit their wrongdoings are blessed with some forgiveness; only the deniers are taken to the wire. The converse of this is that Sereny allows few grey areas into her analyses; there is merely good or bad, wrong or right. One could argue that Nazism permits no other approach, but humans are rarely that two-dimensional. For most of us, there is no one final leap into evil but

rather a continuum of quantum collusive jumps. So when Sereny tells of those who stood up to Nazism, she intends to parade them as ordinary bastions of good with which to bash all those who failed to measure up to such ideals. A more telling way of looking at them might have been to give them a quasi-saintly status, and to view those who failed to measure up as mere fallible mortals. But then one is often left feeling with Sereny that she needs or rather is desperate to paint a picture of a Germany that stepped so far over the moral abyss that it can never be repeated. You can't quibble over the morality, but sadly you can over its abnormality. And there are signs towards the end of the book that Sereny has just begun to understand this. Nazism isn't a one-off; it is being acted out in variant forms in Serbia, Kosovo, Rwanda and Iraq. And with a desperate irony that would not be lost on Sereny, the Israelis can themselves no longer claim any moral high ground in their treatment of the Palestinians. Maybe that's where she will turn her attention next

[German Literature - a very short introduction](#); Nicholas Boyle (2007)

Very good on the social context

[Berlin in the 20th Century - a cultural topography](#); Andrew J Webber (2008)

Rather academic treatment - but looks worth persevering with

The Himmler Brothers - a german family history; Katroin Himmler (2007)

[Deutschland for Beginners](#) (English title - "Springtime for Germany"); Ben Donald (2007)

Quirky but useful

[Five Germanies I have known](#); Fritz Stern - a marvellous historian born in Breslau/Wroclaw in 1926 who escaped to America in 1938 and wrote this powerful autobiography essay which I read a few years back with great pleasure and benefit. He is a highly engaging character - as you can see both from his book and [this video of him introducing it](#)

[Noble Endeavours - the Life of Two Countries, England and Germany, in Many Stories](#) by [Miranda Seymour](#) whose blog also gives background on some of their characters as well as explaining [what brought her to write the book](#).

Weimar Germany - promise and tragedy; Eric Weitz (2009)

[A New Germany?](#) Perry Anderson (New Left Review 57 - April 2009)

If you want a well-written piece based on a lifetime's reading of original source material, this is it

[Roads to Berlin](#); Cees Nooteboom (2009)

A poetic set of diary notes from a famous Netherlands journalist who has known the city since the 1960s and lived in it off and on.

[German Genius](#); Peter Watson (2010)

a massive and well-produced book by Peter Watson which attempts to rectify what he (rightly) considers to be a serious ignorance by the English-speaking world of what Germany has contributed to the world in the past 200 years. The long introduction of *German Genius* summarises various recent debates about the distinctiveness of German development (eg the "Historikerstreit" of the 1980s and the later "Sonderweg" thesis) is intellectual history at its best and demonstrate the depth of Watson's reading and understanding.

[Germania - a personal history of Germans ancient and modern](#) ; Simon Winder (2010)

Rather idiosyncratic treatment which uses historical monuments and artefacts to give us slabs of German history up to 1933. The bits which grabbed my attention are [summarized here](#)

Keeping up with the Germans - a history of Anglo-German encounters; Philip Oltermann (2012)

The Novel in German since 1990; ed Stuart Taberner (2012)

[Germany - memories of a Nation](#); Neil MacGregor (2014)

Focuses on cultural objects - in the spirit of Watson's and Winder's books

[Death of a Nation - a new History of Germany](#); Stephen A'Barrow (2015)

A fascinating book by a non-academic Germanophile

[Berlin; imagine a city](#) Rory McLean (2014)

A look at the historical figures who still prowl the landscape - in the genre of Watson, Winder and MacGregor

Berlin Now - the rise and fall of the wall; Peter Schneider (2014)

[Reluctant Meister - Germany and the new Europe](#); Stephen Green (2016)

Joseph Roth

The Collected Stories of Stefan Zweig (Pushkin Press 2013)

Count Harry Kessler

The Diaries of Victor Klemperer

<https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/culture/communication-media/the-german-blogging-scene>

German Stereotypes in British magazines prior to WWI

http://etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-06092004-150805/unrestricted/Bertolette_thesis.pdf

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/table/2011/mar/21/1>

<http://libcom.org/forums/history/books-german-history-18072012#forum-topic-top>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/mar/18/european-literature-books-editors-trends>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2011/mar/14/germany-literature-tour-new-europe>

dismantling of the welfare state <http://www.nachdenkseiten.de/?p=14462>

Paintings section of Rough Guide to Germany (Gordon McLachlan)

Keeping up with the Germans - a history of Anglo-German encounters - Philip Oltermann (2012)

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Keeping-With-Germans-Anglo-German-Encounters/dp/0571240194/ref=pd_cp_b_0

Deutschland for Beginners; Ben Donald (2007)

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Springtime-Germany-Learned-Love-Lederhosen/dp/0316732478/ref=wl_mb_hu_c_1_dp

<http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2013/05/21/sad-truth-about-today-modern-germany-and-jews/>

Rough Guide - culture

http://books.google.de/books?id=-9rmBw1PIFcC&pg=PA1019&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=4#v=onepage&q&f=false

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Germany-Culture-Smart-Essential-Customs/dp/1857333063/ref=pd_rhf_ee_s_cp_1_ET2X?ie=UTF8&refRID=05MKHR5KZDB1ZHP

http://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Xenophobes-Guide-Germans-Guides/dp/1906042330/ref=pd_sim_b_2