

Zitierhinweis

Mas, Dorothy: review of: Robert Gerwarth, Hitler's Hangman. The Life of Heydrich, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011, in: Reviews in History, 2012, April, downloaded from Website



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Hitler's Hangman. The Life of Heydrich

Robert Gerwarth

New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2011, ISBN: 9780300115758 ; 336pp.

Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany

edited by: Pamela Swett

Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, ISBN: 9780230271685 ; 320pp.

'He was one of the best National Socialists, one of the strongest defenders of the German Reich, one of the greatest opponents of all enemies of the Empire. He has died as martyr for the preservation and protection of the Reich': it is with these words that Hitler celebrated Reinhard Heydrich as an exemplary National Socialist and SS man during his elaborate and pompous funeral on 9 June 1942 (p. 279). Plans to assassinate Heydrich emerged in London in late September 1941 and crystallized in Operation Anthropoid on the morning of 27 May 1942. Merely 38 years old at the time of his death, Heydrich rose to Nazi prominence by accumulating the offices of Chief of the Nazi Criminal Police, the SS Security Service and the Gestapo as well as Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia. These elevated him to a decisive driving force behind the Final Solution and policies aimed at re-creating Europe's ethnic makeup, forever imprinting him as one of the most infamous personalities in Nazi Germany.

Drawing on a variety of sources (official documents, speeches, letters and private correspondence) scattered in over 15 different archives in Germany, Britain, United States, Israel, Russia and the Czech Republic, Robert Gerwarth elaborately reconstructs the life and deeds of one of the most powerful and feared men in the Third Reich. Through a combination of the private and the political, he shows how an 'ordinary' man from a privileged middle-class background evolved and recreated himself into one of the most exuberant proponents of Nazi ideology. Although the image of Heydrich as 'Hitler's Hangman' has remained unchallenged over the years, the author rightfully notes that the pillars of that image have long been eroded by new scholarship. The biography is an admirable contribution to perpetrator research and does an exceptional job at revising many old and popularly-held assumptions about Heydrich's path and stance towards Nazism as well as his share of and responsibility for the Holocaust. At the same time it offers a unique perspective and insight into the development and radicalization of the Nazi regime and its rule.

Reinhard Tristan Eugen Heydrich was born on 7 March 1904 in the Prussian city of Halle. His father, Bruno Heydrich, was an acclaimed composer and opera singer as well as the founding director of the Halle Conservatory. Heydrich's mother Elisabeth devoted most of her time to the household and child-rearing, only occasionally working as a piano teacher at her husband's conservatory. Born into a family of considerable financial means and social standing, one which also placed great emphasis on education and culture, Heydrich led a privileged and carefree childhood. At a time when secondary education was the domain of a select male elite, Heydrich attended the *Reformgymnasium*, harbouring the ambition of becoming a chemist. As a teenager, he developed a keen interest in crime fiction and spy novels. At this point no one would have suspected that his fascination with and knowledge of the genre would be successfully put to use during a meeting with Himmler in which Heydrich was allotted 20 minutes to sketch out a plan for a future SS intelligence service. The First World War, along with the post-war revolutionary upheaval and the turbulent years of the Weimar Republic shook up the privileged life of the Heydrich family. The conservatory fell into financial difficulties and was eventually closed down. Contrary to his initial intentions, Heydrich opted for a career in the German Navy after his *Abitur*, which proved far less distinguished and much shorter than anticipated. Seen as an outsider, Heydrich was ostracized for his educated middle-class background, his cultural and especially musical

proclivities and total disinterest in political matters. Commenting on the latter point, his wife-to-be Lina von Osten, already a committed Nazi at the age of 19, noted: 'politically he was clueless ... He regarded all parties, particularly the Nazi Party, with arrogance and considered politics itself to be vulgar. In this connection he acted very much the snob and regarded his naval career as the most important thing. The rest didn't count' (p. 36). Of equal importance were rumours of his alleged Jewish ancestry which had emerged already in 1916 and lead to a humiliating party investigation in 1932. The marriage between Ernestine Hedyrich, Bruno's mother following the early death of her husband Carl Heydrich, and Gustav Robert Süss, a Protestant locksmith, gave rise to these speculations, despite that Süss was neither Jewish nor connected to Reinhard by blood.

While engaged to Lina von Osten, whom he met at a ball in Kiel on 6 December 1930, Heydrich continued to cultivate a romantic relationship with a young woman, seducing her with vacant promises of marriage. Unfortunately for Heydrich, the woman's father had ties to the Navy Senior Officer Staff and the young Casanova was summoned before a military court of honour. Instead of owning up to the situation and accepting the blame, his arrogant attempt at whitewashing himself led to his dismissal which coincided with the crash of the New York Stock Exchange in 1929. Against the backdrop of domestic political changes which only further exasperated the economic crisis, Heydrich's future seemed gloomy – he 'locked himself in his room and cried for days in rage and self-pity' (p. 45). As a result of a mixture of factors beyond his control, and a certain opportunism, the apolitical Heydrich joined the Nazi Party on 1 June 1931. In his portrayal of Heydrich as a simultaneously 'typical and atypical representative of his generation', Gerwarth convincingly argues that Heydrich's immersion in a milieu replete with violent and deep political extremism resulted in a deep internalization of Nazism. Particularly influential were his encounters when already within the SS after 1931 and his relationship with Heinrich Himmler, his superior and ideological reference point. In the attempt to atone for the lack of early Nazi credentials, he continuously tried to impress Himmler by adopting, transforming and radicalizing his utopian worldview and ideas of the SS, an atonement which only fuelled his radicalism (p. xviii).

Already while in the navy Heydrich had been perceived by his colleagues as someone whose 'talents, knowledge and ability were above average', a man who 'was always convinced of his own abilities, ambitions and able to present his achievements to his superiors in a favourable light' (p. 39). These qualities, along with his diligence, zeal and the need to outshine everyone around him, greatly aided his rapid rise through the hierarchy of the SS. Starting out with the development of the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD), each new task brought him more power, simultaneously facilitating and accelerating his involvement in the regime's policies of exclusion, persecution and murder. From the development of the police apparatus to the planning and the co-ordination of the Night of the Long Knives in 1934, the *Kristallnacht* in November 1938, and the organization of Jewish emigration from Germany and Austria, Heydrich proved himself as a skilled tactician whose appetite grew with every success. If deportation and massive expulsion prior to 1939 seemed to at least temporarily solve the problem of Jews and, by extension, all other undesirables, Gerwarth shows how in the next two years a combination of various factors 'led to a situation in which he [Heydrich] perceived systematic mass murder to be both feasible and desirable' (p. xix). Simultaneously feared, respected and admired by his subordinates, Heydrich acquired virtually unlimited power and became involved in all important decisions regarding the Holocaust and the murder of hundreds of thousands of other nationalities. In 1941 he assumed the post of Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia. Compared to his predecessor Konstantin von Neurath, whose light occupation policies reflected his scepticism and even rejection of certain Nazi policies, Heydrich built on his long experience of fabricating and promoting an illusory group of enemies of the Reich, unleashing a policy of terror aimed at pacifying the Protectorate and safeguarding German interests. As an example, in the first three days of Heydrich's rule, 92 defendants were sentenced to death by the SD and Sipo staffed courts. (p. 227). Along with

the reorganization and Germanization of the Protectorate, the policies of terror and death continued with only minor intervals. Ironically, they escalated to full-scale genocide in the aftermath of Heydrich's death. In the words of Himmler: 'It is our secret obligation to avenge his death, to take over his mission and to destroy without mercy and weakness, now more than ever, the enemies of our people' (p. 286). Himmler remained loyal to his pledge. Of the 6 million Jews who would be murdered by the end of the war, about 4.5 million were still alive in May 1942. Nearly 2 million of these lost their lives in the extermination programme 'Aktion Reinhardt' alone.

While Nazi Germany is largely associated with the pain, violence, fear and brutality originating from criminal policies initiated by men such as Reinhard Heydrich, pleasure, happiness, and joy were anything but trivial in the Third Reich. It is precisely this point which is explored by Pamela E. Swett and others in *Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany*. The collection of essays builds on the already existing literature which, rather indirectly, tackles the topic of pleasure in one form or other. In contrast to it, however, the new study takes pleasure and pleasure-seeking as its focal point, highlighting their variability and diverse manifestations. Seen as social constructs, the notions provide a unique way of exploring patterns of socio-cultural change and the relationship between the regime and its citizens. The book consists of 11 essays, excluding the introduction, and is divided into three thematic sections: 'Consumption and the privileges of pleasure'; 'Entertainments and the aesthetics of pleasure'; and 'The pleasures of community and consensus'. Taken together, they show pleasure and power as mutually reinforcing entities. The question of whether pleasure ought to function for its own sake or solely for the purposes of political acquiescence and mobilization was never really resolved by the Nazi leadership: 'Pleasure in the Third Reich was both a means and an end' (p. 1). The collection argues that private and communal pleasures rather than blunt indoctrination, repression and terror promised greater returns in terms of socio-political stabilization and devotion to the *Volksgemeinschaft*. However, while the regime confidently exploited notions of pleasure, there were also limits to that instrumentalization.

The book's first section explores the relationship between pleasure and consumption by delineating (dis)continuities in consumer practices after 1933 and highlighting the extent to which individual and consumption based pleasure was tolerated and encouraged by the regime. It opens with an essay by S. J. Wiesen which addresses the work of the *Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung* (GfK – Society for Consumer Research), an organization founded in 1934 with the aim of researching leisure practices and buying habits. Although the organization aided the regime by providing it with insight into social disposition, the author notes that the complicity of consumer research in state politics and the regime's ability to manipulate its population must not be overestimated. This becomes particularly clear in his analysis of indulgences anathema to the state's ideological aims of creating and sustaining a healthy *Volk* such as smoking or drinking.

In 'Selling sexual pleasure in 1930s Germany', Pamela Swett looks at the advertising campaigns for Titus Pearls, an anti-impotence drug, co-invented by Weimar sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld and introduced on the market in 1927 by the pharmaceutical company Much AG. While the quantity of the company's pro-sex campaigns remained untouched, their content changed due to a combination of company initiative and attempts to prevent criticism from the side of the regime. The most notable shift included the omission of any reference to female sexuality which, as noted by the author could be seen as indicative of 'the company's acceptance of the regime's privileging of male power and male pleasure' (p. 53). The product was no longer celebrated as a means to satisfaction of both spouses and thus a happy marriage. Instead it emphasized male pleasure alone; one which was seen as integral to the spiritual and physical well-being and which could 'deliver men who stood a little more closely to the National Socialist ideal: more content, youthful, virile and confident in their ability to control the world' (p. 62).

The final article in this section by F. D'Almeida explores Nazi understanding of luxury and distinction by focusing on clothing, furnishings, food and other rare goods and activities. Along with the attempt to delegitimize concepts of luxury prevalent in the Weimar Republic and cut off a substantial portion of the society from such enjoyment by means of racial exclusion, the state promoted a particular concept of luxury, one divorced from wealth which could be extended to the entire *Volksgemeinschaft*. The essay closes with the author's speculations about redefinitions of pleasure and privilege among those imprisoned and employed in death and concentration camps. Thus while party and state elites indulged in their sumptuous lifestyles, the rest of the racially defined community enjoyed similar pleasures albeit on a much lesser scale, benefiting from the pillage of the occupied territories. However, for those not part of the Nazi community and any privileged group within the camps, 'normal life itself' appeared a luxury (p. 81).

Four chapters of the second section of the book tackle the connection between experiences of pleasure and entertainment. They illustrate that, contrary to perceptions, the most popular forms of entertainment were not necessarily those which offered a blatant mixture of escapist and political propaganda but rather ones which tied the audience to the fate of the nation through subtle messages emphasizing and celebrating the triumphant state and its racial community. David Pan looks at the 'The structure of aesthetic pleasure in the Nazi reception of Goethe's Faust'. Following a brief overview of the role and character of theatre in Nazi Germany, the author turns to the staging of Faust within the context of other German and selected foreign classics. The play enjoyed particular popularity. In 1940–1 alone Faust I was performed 368 times, and in 1941–2, 339 times. Goethe's tragedy offered entertainment as well as acceptance of and diversion from violence perpetuated during Nazi rule. By looking into concepts of violence, sacrifice and the individual's role in society, the author shows how the structure of aesthetic pleasure in Faust and the regime's understanding of morality as well as its cultural and ideological agenda were not anathema to one another. The inescapability of violence and the need to transcend traditional concepts of sacrifice highlights their compatibility. By examining this interconnection, the author attempts to understand Nazi morality as a continuum in the longer developments of German culture, neither seeing Goethe as proto-fascist, nor Nazism as a normalized symptom of modernization.

In "'German humour' in books: the attractiveness and political significance of laughter during the Nazi era', Patrick Merziger captures an image of a society whose laughter and sense of pleasure was far from repressed. Not satire, the classic comedy genre of National Socialism, but rather 'German humour' in the form of the *Humoreske*, a collection of anecdotes and stories, is at the focus of the analysis. Having its intellectual roots in middle-class traditions, 'German humour' was not a National Socialist invention although it was exuberantly embraced by the public. As convincingly argued, however, the reading of such material could not constitute an act of rebellion as the genre corresponded well with Nazi ideology by simultaneously promising warmth, security and integrity of the racially defined and harmonious *Volksgemeinschaft* and excluding those who deviated from the norm (Jews, homosexuals, blacks, etc). If minor deviations were addressed, 'the truly shocking ... real life contradictions and acts of exclusion' were omitted, thereby facilitating and encouraging pleasure and enjoyment from laughter, while National Socialist crimes remained 'deliberately invisible' (p. 126).

The following essay by Karl Christian Führer looks at popular general interest magazines between 1933 and 1939 (ie. *Mein Blatt*, *Die Braune Post*, *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*). A discussion of circulation figures, target groups and content, allows for the conclusions that Germans opted for magazines which offered a mixture of information, entertainment and, in particular, household advice. There was pleasure in practicality, self-improvement and better living. The author shows that general interest magazines did not feature any negative propaganda messages. On the contrary, they were replete with positive propaganda, that is, one which celebrated the regime and the unified *Volksgemeinschaft*, the optimistic outlooks of

its members, and played down any expressions of hatred which targeted enemies at a time when the daily newspapers engaged in unending vilification campaigns.

The section's closing chapter by Corey Ross explores the role and character of radio and film during wartime. Prior to 1941 both forms brought the audience closer to the regime by offering a repertoire which linked individual fate to that of the nation and celebrated loyalty, duty and sacrifice. Emphasis was placed on the combination of information with entertainment. The newsreels proved a particularly popular and gratifying avenue of experiencing the Wehrmacht campaigns and satisfying their 'thrill of victory' (p. 158).

Equally popular were historical dramas and revue films, including *Wunschkonzert* (1940) and *Die große Liebe* (1942). They emphasized pleasure as a reward for hardship, thereby justifying war and military conquest as a path to individual and, by extension, national prosperity and happiness. National unity was similarly lauded in radio programmes. Most popular was the *Wunschkonzert für die Wehrmacht*, a radio programme in which soldiers on the front sent in music requests and personal messages to their loved ones. However, from 1942 onwards, the mobilizing role of radio and TV broadcasting could no longer hold up in view of the military defeats. Along with the changes in the socio-political situation, came a shift in the character of radio and films which began to distract from war and politics by offering purely escapist entertainment.

The final section of the book focuses on individual and group identity pleasure. The opening essay by Elizabeth Harvey explores the notion of visual pleasure. Beginning with a brief overview of (dis)continuities in the role and nature of photography and photojournalism after 1933, she then reflects on the female presence in the male dominated Nazi press world by looking at the career trajectories of three travel reporters: Erika Schmachtenberger, Ilse Steinhoff and Liselotte Purper. Using their work, especially that of Purper as a case study, the author outlines how images of the expanding sphere of German domination as a 'realm of fun and personal freedom' for both sexes was perpetuated in various women's magazines (p. 178). Also explored are the propagandistic character of their photojournalistic endeavours; their function as a form of 'emotional management', the ways the aesthetically pleasing photographs captured and evoked pleasure from seeing the world and thus experiencing the new Nazi Order.

In 'The pleasures of being a 'political soldier': Nazi functionaries and their service to the 'movement', Daniel Mühlenfeld examines the development and transformation of the image of the 'political soldier' and the significance of pleasure in the commitment to the Nazi movement. Applied initially to those National Socialists which had helped bring down the despised Weimar Republic, especially SA members, the term underwent a shift in meaning as it came to embrace other representatives of the regime. Thus while the initial image of the 'political soldier' as one which represented the ideal movement fighter driven by moral integrity, readiness for action and self-sacrifice, constituted a source of pride and pleasure, those feelings of enjoyment began to wane as the war progressed. Failing to measure up to the ideals of the movement on account of the continuous indulgence in socializing and pleasure-seeking activities, frequently underpinned by alcohol and violence, low-level functionaries were scolded by party elites and criticized by the public for their misconduct. Although their behaviour was far from exemplary, the author concludes that the regime as a whole was spared criticism, with the guiding tenets of the *Volksgemeinschaft* intact.

If shared roguery and crime was perpetuated by the storm troopers before 1933, following the Nazi rise to power and particularly after the outbreak of war, such activities took on diametrically new dimensions. It is these dimensions embraced by the SS and police troops in occupied territories that Thomas Kühne explores in his article on 'The pleasure of terror: belonging through genocide'. Resting on a sociological rather than psychological understanding of pleasure, one which also dismisses the demonization and pathologization of perpetrators, the analysis depicts how acts of terror and genocide against Jews and other groups elicited a pleasurable sense of togetherness, belonging and community among the

perpetrators. Of course, not all experienced this particular group murder and terror based pleasure in the same way and not embraced it to the same extent. Ultimately, however, 'the wholly diverse attitudes and variations in conduct in themselves oiled the machinery of genocidal warfare' (p. 247).

As form of contrast, the book's final essay by Mark Roseman looks at the history and activities of the Ruhr-based League for Socialist Life, also known as the Bund, a life-reform group. The author shows how its approach to sociability, recreation and exercise, especially *Körperbildung* (body training) and gymnastics elicited a sense of cohesion, loyalty, commitment to common goals and, ultimately, camouflage to not only survive the regime, but also live the better society in accordance with the group's principles. These principles facilitated the pleasures of shared activities which crystalized themselves into opposition that protected and saved a number of Jews and half-Jews.

Hitler's Hangman. The Life of Heydrich and *Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany* are highly absorbing and important works which aid our understanding of the Third Reich by contributing to issues of popular consent and perpetration between 1933 and 1945. They illustrate why many came to embrace Nazi ideology and how from mere *Mitläufer* or supporters, they sometimes evolved into remorseless perpetrators. Taken together, the relationship between pleasure and terror as two sides of the same regime make the two contributions a highly recommendable and worthwhile read for anyone interested in 20th-century German history.

The editors of *Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany* are happy to accept this review and do not wish to respond.

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