

THE CULTURAL ROOTS OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

Hermann Glaser

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HERMANN GLASER
TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION
AND NOTES BY ERNEST A. MENZE

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HERMANN GLASER

Translated, with an Introduction and Notes by

ERNEST A. MENZE



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Still trembling, I laughed and laughed and said with uncertain heart:
Here dwell all impostors. With blotted faces and limbs there you sit
and amaze me, you men of the day! Surrounded by fifty-odd echoes
which tickle your fancy and ape your airs! Truly, no better mask
than your own face could conceal your fraud. Who can know — you!
From those who deign to know you you hide behind the runes of
the past and more recent scars. And even those who see the core fail
to grasp it: for who would believe that there is one!
Façade and plaster seem your substance.
Your bearing flimsily reflects all ages and nations. Remove your
veils and cloaks, your paint and pose, and what is left but a
scarecrow. Truly, I am the feathered victim who saw you raw and
bare; and I flew away as the skeleton beckoned me with love.

Friedrich Nietzsche



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PREFACE

It is characteristic of the paradoxical nature of this study that Nietzsche's words appear as its epigraph; for these are the words of a philosopher some of whose thought, in so far as it was confused and confusing, substantially aided in imperilling and destroying the German intellect, morality and culture. On the other hand, it was particularly this thinker who, faced by the perennial abyss, fearlessly gazed downward and began to survey its depth. A third factor makes his fate exemplary: his life and work were subjected to a misinterpretation which bordered on deliberate distortion. This was a tendency found time and again in the intellectual and cultural history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. 'Nietzsche's case', therefore, may well serve to illustrate the reflections contained in the following chapters.

The past century and a half was a period of intellectual confusion, many instances of which will be shown in this study. Yet they will only amount to a small selection from the monstrous catalogue of *Weltanschauungen* that were prevalent during the recent and more remote past. Büchner had already grasped this terror when he reminded us in *Woyzeck* that 'everyman is an abyss and it is dizzying to contemplate the chasm'.

Misinterpretation and distortion play important roles in all these examinations of the past. German culture, regardless of the period in question, whether it be the Classical age, the Romantic, or the Age of Enlightenment, cannot be made responsible for the year 1933. Neither the Romantic age, the Classical age, nor any other time were 'tragic' periods in German history; true culture can never be a disaster! It must also be remembered that the Classical and Romantic ages were no more susceptible to misinterpretation than any other period. They were victimized because they were nearer in time. The concluding phase of the Romantic age actually paralleled the rise of its earliest unimaginative imitators. But the Classical and the Romantic periods were also victimized because, as extremely fruitful epochs of German intellectual and cultural life, they were most flagrantly abused as façades of culture. The national tragedy rests on the fact that prime elements of German culture, especially Classicism and Romanticism, were perverted, distorted, twisted into opposites and yet nominally retained. What remained were lifeless, resentful words deprived of their

meaning. Culture became façade, and *Logos* (the word; meaningful speech and reason *per se*) was destroyed and replaced by a confused myth, which in itself was a distortion of the word *Mythos*. This repression of intellect, reason and truth brought about emotional attitudes which must be interpreted on the basis of a psychopathological examination; we encounter a conglomeration of complexes which again produced a host of disparate and deranged ideas.

The Nietzschean epigraph can be related to the intellectual intent in every aspect of this study; methodological as well as textual introductory remarks, therefore, are best included in the framework of this *ad hoc* exegesis.

Still trembling, I laughed and laughed and said with uncertain heart:
 Here dwell all impostors. With blotted faces and limbs there you sit
 and amaze me, you men of the day! Surrounded by fifty-odd echoes
 which tickle your fancy and ape your airs!

Whoever explores the manifestations of the 'official' German mentality of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries finds himself enmeshed in a cabaret of culture, verse and thought that seems to have no end; he stands transfixed, gaping in the face of *Weltanschauungen* that were 'conceived on Victorian velvet and realized in the gas ovens of Auschwitz and Theresienstadt' (Hühnerfeld).

The concept of *Weltanschauung* must be parenthesized and used with care: at best it represents a *mélange*. Nietzsche speaks of blotted faces, and such is the *Spiesser's*¹ plumage today and yesterday. The concept *Spiesser* must not be understood sociologically as relating to profession, income or standard of living; rather, it is meant to portray a psychological and anthropological condition. The term *petit bourgeois* signifies a quite specific form of spiritual and intellectual behaviour, a mode of conduct which is called *Spiesser*-ideology here; the description and documentation of its manifold aspects will be attempted in this study. On the whole the *petit bourgeois* is mediocre and provincial, fanatical and brutal, narrow-minded and full of resentment; but he is also 'sensitive' and given to 'sentiment'. He is very much a part of everyone's environment. The separate strands of his make-up permeate the texture of our 'great society': Victorian velvet in the neon age, Hitler still alive in us. Some of the speeches quoted could well be given today, and some still are. This study is limited to the past for reasons of methodological convenience. Contemporary culture therefore will not be taken into account.

Truly, no better mask than your own face could conceal your fraud! Who can know — you! From those who deign to know you you hide behind the runes of the past and more recent scars. And even those who see the core fail to grasp it: for who would believe that there is one! Façade and plaster seem your substance.

It is not an easy task to penetrate and unmask the petit-bourgeois attitude to life. Even among the petit-bourgeois élite, mediocrity is not a pretence like a propagandistic gesture: it is reality. Their mediocrity is existential, not accidental. Only rarely will one be able to raise the charge of hypocrisy. Lying, vulgarity and crime, preposterously pretentious art appreciation and ominously idyllic 'inwardness', all these traits are most genuine. Whoever interprets them is bound to err here and there, to over- or even underestimate their importance. The origin of the slogans and streamers which characterize or envelop these petit-bourgeois beings (unwrap them and search in vain for a core or substance: 'For who would believe that there is one!') is disputable, and considerably varying opinions may be held about them. The provocative nature of this study should, therefore, be understood by the reader to be a challenge to discussion.

All times and nations are reflected in your many-hued veils; and mores and faiths speak animatedly in your gestures.

The determining of the specific characteristics of the petit-bourgeois species is not just a concern of German anthropology. The reasons for concentrating on Germany are primarily methodological in nature: a manageable area of investigation was chosen which is especially relevant to Germans. Besides, if the petit-bourgeois were treated as a supra-national anthropological concept, the peculiarly chauvinistic nature of the petit-bourgeois mentality could not be properly valued. Most importantly, it should not be forgotten that in other nations petit-bourgeois character and behaviour never assumed the proportions they did in Germany. We must face the fact that the masses joyfully trod the path to 'cultural despair' — a flock of sheep following an ass, as one might pointedly phrase it. We must face the fact that the German people have never been effectively divided over questions of political ideology, but instead found themselves more or less united in their assent to political perversions of the most varied kinds. The opposition to this 'official' trend was isolated in small groups in self-imposed exile at home or abroad. Viewed typologically and anthropologically, as

modes of being rather than as historical periodization, such great counter-currents as Realism, Naturalism, Expressionism and Surrealism were repressed, not acknowledged and then ridiculed. The exile of Büchner,² Marx, Heine,³ the withdrawal of Stifter,⁴ Grillparzer,⁵ or Fontane,⁶ the proscription of Hauptmann,⁷ the despair of Trakl,⁸ all these are symptomatic. Theodor Mommsen⁹ asserted in his political testament:

In my innermost being, and by that I mean with the best I have within me, I have always been an *animal politicum*, and wanted to be a good citizen. This is not possible in our nation, where the individual, even the best, never transcends service in the rank and file of political idolatry. This internal alienation from the people to whom I belong has determined me to refrain as far as possible from appearing in person before a German public which I do not respect.

That should make it clear that this volume is not concerned with the real German intellect and culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a culture and intellect that could be denied only by fanatical Germanophobes. This is not an exercise in self-denigration; rather, it is a lament that the self was not nurtured and that it was permitted to fall from culture into barbarism. In other words, the outstanding and truly great performances and accomplishments of the German artistic and political genius were 'officially' unacknowledged. Worse yet, it is part of the perversion of culture that one can hardly use words such as great, exalted, or other justifiable words of praise any longer in good conscience. 'Official', as used here and elsewhere, means the taste of the masses as it was guided, supported, promoted or — on account of the lack of opportunity to choose or to make comparisons, that is, because of the suppression of pluralistic taste — created in the first place by state authority. It is precisely in this connection that one can speak of the enormous guilt of those responsible. They cannot excuse themselves by claiming to be the victims of an unfortunate historical constellation or captives of a one-way street. They consciously turned the highway signs in the wrong direction and twisted the guideposts of the German spirit. The 'submissive'¹⁰ judges, clerics, officers, bureaucrats, professors, teachers and journalists who thus became 'pillars of society' are the accused.

Why did all this happen? Why were the ideas of democracy and liberality, of evolutionary socialism and cosmopolitanism, of an intellectual and spiritual culture unable to make much impression,

even though so many Germans were their creators, advocates and representatives? Various answers will be advanced in the course of this study. In the final analysis an answer without recourse to metaphysics will not be possible; but the present writer will not hazard an excursion into this field. Our principal concern is in the realm of phenomenology *Phainomenon* means that which manifests itself, that which appears, and manifestations will be described here. An inventory of this kind must, of course, give rise to moral impulses; Nietzsche demanded these when he said: 'I will make up to my children that I am the child of my fathers: and this day shall be eternity!'

This study should not be mistaken for a historical work, a *Geistesgeschichte* bound by the principle of chronology. Recognized traits will be compared frequently without regard to chronology and repeatedly portrayed from various points of view. This study asserts and attempts to substantiate the thesis that the history of 'official' German culture during the last 150 years was not marked by development, but resembled a monotonous rotation around unchanging ideological distortions and perversions of reality; thus Fichte¹¹ appears as a Nazi professor, Menzel¹² as a 'new-German' student leader, Jahn¹³ as the national sports administrator, Hitler as an author of the *Gartenlaube*¹⁴ or a racist Ganghofer,¹⁵ Rosenberg is emulating Wagner, and Goebbels is a kind of Wilhelm II. What may now appear as a journalistic gag will be substantiated in the course of the study.

Truly, I am the feathered victim who saw you raw and bare; and
I flew away as the skeleton beckoned me with love.

Camus tells us in *L'Etat de siège* that profanity revolts, while stupidity disheartens. Reflection on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries revolts, disheartens, even terrifies the beholder. The author cannot remain neutral. He cannot reject German warmth, German spirit and German culture. He cannot deny those two great Germans, Goethe and Schiller. He still believes in the idyll that was the sentimental *Biedermeier* period and the moonlight madness of Romanticism with its delightful and perceptive irony. But when these things beckon the beholder as 'skeletons' he must 'fly away'. Today it is impossible to accept any of these values without qualms of conscience. We have not lost this culture, it is true; but we have lost our joy in it. Before we can claim it again, we must clear away the ideological rubble or must wade through the watershed of intellectual catharsis.

After all that had happened, National Socialism was not an accident

of German history. Rather, it was the terminus of a broad and invitingly laid-out path; alternative paths were travelled only by a few. Hitler's rise to power did not initiate the crisis; it made it apparent – visible to one and all and favoured by the politico-economic situation. It is therefore wrong to make the political and economic conditions of the Weimar Republic responsible for the development and success of National Socialism. They destroyed the forces of resistance, it is true, and thus enabled the disease (whose long incubation period will be described in this volume) to spread so speedily and with such devastating results. The crisis would have come to a head even without Hitler, or else it would have taken prolonged therapy to neutralize the poisonous seeds of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which had already caused widespread contamination. A victorious war would not have freed the forces necessary for this process; it would only have meant the continuation of Wilhelminian autocracy. But in this case the existing anti-democratic and anti-humanitarian currents would probably not have assumed the degree of brutality they developed under Hitler's National Socialism.

Hitler was a petit bourgeois surrounded by petit-bourgeois paladins.

These were not demons who struggled fiercely to reach the top and ultimately succeeded; they were more or less average citizens. They succeeded not because they were different, but because of their conformity. . . It is not only men of character who make history; hooligans do too, because they can sense the desires and cravings of the masses and set them in motion with dynamic and epoch-making power. It takes only a small pebble to create mighty waves [Heiber].

The National Socialist view of the world was, in the final analysis, *Spiesser* ideology. Frequent examples from the national Socialist era, especially from *Mein Kampf*, therefore fit well into the context of this study and assist our analysis. A commentary on Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, an examination of its anthropological, sociological and psychological contents show that this book was nothing but a reservoir of currents arising chiefly from the misinterpretation of Classicism and Romanticism during the nineteenth century. These currents of thought had long been paving the way for Germany's doom; they culminated in the destruction of German culture, morality and politics. It has been said that the importance and influence of *Mein Kampf* should not be over-estimated, since the book, though widely distributed, was rarely read. That may be true; but from this observation one could draw a

conclusion which may, at first sight, seem paradoxical: the book did not have to be read to become a success. The consciousness and outlook of most Germans were reflected in Hitler's book. Its contents, propagated in thousands of pamphlets, newspapers and journals, reflected the *Spiesser's* heart and soul: abysmal vulgarity, overworked verbal blancmange, resentments couched in oblique metaphors, endless tirades, rhetorically painted platitudes and shallow, 'arty' dilettantism. *Mein Kampf* thus appears as the *Spiesser's* mirror *par excellence*. Hitler possessed the genius of mediocrity. His 'Averageness' was above average; so it was his mediocrity that became the destiny of a nation, a nation that permitted itself to be led, step by step, away from the theory and practice of humanity.

Notes

1. For a definition of the term *Spiesser* see Ernest A. Menze's Introduction.
2. Georg Büchner (1813-37), revolutionary dramatist of major talent to whom maturity came early and whose incomplete work was rediscovered by later generations; it anticipated modern developments in the drama.
3. Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), major poet and writer of Jewish descent whose life and work were dedicated to mediation between German and French intellectual life and whose tragic death in exile was an omen of Germany's future alienation from the West.
4. Adalbert Stifter (1805-68), Austrian poet, painter and school official who attempted a synthesis of German Romanticism and Classicism; he sought to master the tensions of the age by emphasizing Christian-humanist themes.
5. Franz Grillparzer (1791-1872), major Austrian writer and dramatist.
6. Theodor Fontane (1819-98), major German poet and novelist.
7. Gerhart Hauptmann (1862-1946), German poet and dramatist, one of the principal figures of modern German literature whose work combined stylistic innovation with powerful themes of social criticism.
8. Georg Trakl (1887-1914), poet of the pre-First World War period who matured while still young and whose work reflects the anxiety of impending doom.
9. Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903), the dean of historians of Roman antiquity, an outstanding individual of far-ranging influence.
10. German *untertänig*, prone to a subject mentality.
11. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), one of the major German idealist philosophers, whose work was of world-wide significance in its influence on Romanticism and the theory of knowledge; his political writings reflect strong nationalist tendencies.
12. Wolfgang Menzel (1798-1873), writer, editor and historian who was jailed for his involvement in the German student movement of the post-Napoleonic period and who stressed moral and political convictions as standards in the evaluation of achievement in art and literature.
13. Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778-1852). Berlin high-school teacher and German patriot active in the liberation movement against Napoleon; he advocated sound minds in sound bodies in the struggle for the fatherland and to this end he organized gymnastics courses. Jahn's ideas were instrumental in the

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nation-wide Turner movement, which was also taken to America by German immigrants.

14. The *Gartenlaube*, German weekly family journal established at Leipzig in 1853; initially liberal, it followed the trend of increasing vulgarization of culture and politics and eventually became the reflection of the lowest common denominator of the propertied middle class.
15. Ludwig Ganghofer (1855-1920), Austrian writer and editor who moved to Munich in 1895 and became famous for his romantic stories of country life and the mountains – popular idealizations of the naïveté, warmth and piety of life.

INTRODUCTION

Ernest A. Menze

Mr Glaser's pointed and pitiless indictment of the forces he deems responsible for the destruction of German *Kultur* speaks for itself. The impact of Glaser's words at the time of publication may be measured by the intensity of the immediate response in the press. *Spiesser-Ideologie*, the title of the German original, has meanwhile become a widely accepted term designating the particular attitude of mind that is the subject of this work. The long-term validity of Glaser's analysis will be determined by the judgement of history. But one conclusion can already be drawn. More than thirty years after Hitler's *Götterdämmerung* and many years after their composition the sting of his words has not abated and new aspects of their comparative applicability to other societies are constantly becoming apparent.

To be sure, Glaser's work is not addressed to other societies, nor does its content permit facile analogies. It was and is an invitation to discuss the causes and consequences of cultural developments that made the most tragic period of German history possible. The scholar and student of German history will find much food for thought, but also a good deal of provocation in Glaser's challenge to his countrymen. By focusing his analysis on Germany, Glaser did not imply that the phenomena of cultural decay so prominent in Germany do not manifest themselves in other societies. Though his remarks concerning Germany do not need an introduction, their relevance to situations elsewhere might benefit from one.

These introductory remarks, then, aside from serving to define the *Spiesser* in his German setting and to discuss the critical reaction to Glaser's book, are principally concerned with drawing analogies between problems which afflicted Germany and are being repeated in America. America serves as a model only — the list of societies subject to the crises examined by Glaser is limited only by the relative stage of their development. An excursion into comparative analysis is undertaken in full awareness of the limitations of that method in relation to something so uniquely German as the *Spiessertum* and its historical consequences. If the comparative method is applied here, it is done not least to counteract the 'reverse' type of historicism which has insisted on the uniqueness of the 'German problem'. The specific

conditions that render some aspects of a nation's culture so different from all others are legitimately stressed in the study of history. But their significance can become truly apparent only when they are judged in the context of broader perspectives and when their ever-present common human undercurrents are revealed in the process.

The term *Spiesser* itself is not rendered easily in English. The dictionary version of 'philistine' is a 'loan' from the past rather than an adequate translation. No doubt the *Spiesser* shares some traits with the philistines of myth and history. Like Webster's philistine he is 'temperamentally inaccessible to' or 'afraid of new ideas, esp. of ideas whose acceptance would involve change';¹ he is actively or passively opposed to progress or progressive ideas, 'antagonistic to those of artistic or poetic temperament', in short, again with Webster, 'a prosaic person'. The modern academic usage of the term as opprobrium — dating from the seventeenth century — and alternately conceiving of the philistine as a former student confined to bourgeois life or simply as the 'unacademic' person had its genesis as much in biblical allusions as did the uncomplimentary references to him in Origen, Abelard and others. The negative characteristics of the philistine are largely the fruit of myth. But even myth does not suffice as a synonym for the German *Spiesser*.

The German *Spiesser*, as Glaser depicts him, is a product of the nineteenth century whose roots lie deep in German social history. The 'everyman' of the swiftly expanding middle class, his domicile is not to be sought in one particular income group. His kind of middle-class mentality extended from the ranks of workers climbing the social ladder to the footsteps of the throne. Conceiving of himself as the representative of his nation's culture, he was not aware of the fact that his understanding of culture was a perversion, his representation of it an empty and distorted shell. Caught in the midst of rapid change, the average middle-class man found his own limited cultural resources taxed by the increasing demands of his environment. Lacking the leisure, education and often the perception to make the cultural heritage of mankind part of his own life, he substituted nationalist catch-phrases made readily available by the advocates of 'national culture', the modern apostles of mediocrity.

Rather than raising the eye of the uninitiated to the humanity of the representatives of classical German culture, these apostles of mediocrity cheapened the Classicists until they were on a level with the masses. They helped to throw up cultural façades where genuine culture might gradually have been fostered. The *Spiesser* was encouraged to confiscate

the legacy of Goethe, the cosmopolitan, to serve his nationalistic needs. The removal in thought from the age of Goethe was matched by the political transformation of the people into a nation. The ideals of the past had to be reinterpreted to become the new idols. In the end, it was because of a profound misunderstanding of the values which alone can lay claim to German greatness, that the cultural Weimar of Goethe was divorced from the political Weimar of the 'November criminals' of 1918 and linked with the 'noble heritage' of Potsdam. In other words, the Weimar Republic, the sole political creation of modern German history truly consonant with the tenor of the Western world, conceived and called into existence in immediate reference to the classical and humanistic Weimar of old, was relegated to the garbage heap of liberal illusions and replaced by the 'positive' memory of the Prussian kings. Defenceless, 'classical' Weimar — now even more deprived of its inner content — continued in the *Spiesser's* possessive embrace. When the drama of national power and glory were defeated on the battlefield, he needed the consoling image of his nation's splendid past even more. Eventually a synthesis with a new tomorrow would be forged. Hitler's 'thousand-year Reich' was to be the fulfilment of collective memories and aspirations for the *Spiesser*. At each stage of this journey he was sincere in his commitment to a better and greater Germany as he understood it.

Here rests one of the principal problems in an evaluation of the *Spiesser* and his kind. The very genuineness of his commitment, his unswerving adherence to 'values', the touch of righteousness in all his doings make it difficult to ascribe villainy to him. The demands for the portrayal of 'healthy' motifs of art, for 'clean lines' and 'clarity' in art and literature find echoes everywhere. Glaser's association of the idyllic with the murderous in SS figures such as Rudolf Höss, the Commandant of Auschwitz, and Eichmann only spells out the most abhorrent of these uncomfortable truths. It is the *Spiesser's* touching ignorance as much as his demonstrative sense of order that makes him invulnerable to the charge of villainy. How could the nation's most loyal servants be called the destroyers of its culture? How can one whom Schiller's 'sacred words' caused breathless shudders be accused of their perversion? Schiller's language lends itself so well to the expression of the most sublime dreams; but is not this very quality also often abused, to cheat by fancy's flights the sober troops of reason? Glaser's striking array of quotations serves better than any summary definition as a display of the *Spiesser's* idiom.

The stern and persistent indictment contained within Glaser's

treatise tends to present the process of cultural decay as a series of acts, but the actors were victims rather than executors of destiny. As the 'people's attorney' of a generation of betrayed heirs he is compelled to identify the sources of the Germany tragedy. A thorough reading of his book, however, shows that he is well aware of the ground-swells of history that impelled the actors, and the effect of their actions in the world at large. If the author remained true to his task as prosecutor of the German case to the end, he did not thereby discharge his readers from the duty of seeing the broader perspective. The German *Spiesser's* romanticism, his prettifying of life's dimensions, his escape into myth and his envious degrading of intelligence have almost international application. 'Decadent', 'professor', 'liberal democrat', 'socialist criminal' and 'shopkeeper mentality' easily form chains of words that roll in ready reproof from many tongues. The bigot's pride of race and nation, the firm commitment to the destiny of the fittest, insistence on the scapegoat's guilt and yearning for the 'great synthesis' are traits of the upright bourgeois everywhere. His image — mirrored in the German *Spiesser's* fate — deserves a closer look. To begin with, however, the accuracy of Glaser's indictment should be measured against the critical reaction of his countrymen.

The critical reaction to Glaser's book has been intense from the beginning and the discussion is not over yet. The many positive voices stress first of all its value as a stimulant to self-critique and discussion. To Wolfgang Bartsch in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* (13 June 1964) it was proof that Hitler was no accident. It is a book that 'does not only belong in teachers' libraries'. To write it, Bartsch continues, Glaser must have read enormous amounts of material, but he must also possess a strong stomach to resist the sickening effects of wading for years through the ghastly muck of German 'literary' efforts. Depressing as it is, the book must be read, said Ernst Johann in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (30 June 1964) 'because the *Spiesser-Ideologie* of the German past remains the enemy of the German future'. The reviewer made the important distinction — not acknowledged by many critics — that Glaser writes as a critic of culture, not as a historian. Disregarding chronology, Glaser links those strands of German culture which in his view formed the destructive pattern. Further, by the use of judicious contrast and comparison, he shows clearly — if in briefer passages — those elements of genuine greatness in German culture which were not part of the *Spiesser's* world.

With all its flaws, Harry Pross concludes in an article in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (27/28 June 1964), that Glaser's book is a must

because of the material it contains. 'Not for a moment does the reader lose the conviction that this is the work of a man who really wants to know, who has the courage to see the uncomfortable perspective. Such virtue is rare.'

One of the principal contentions of Glaser's critics is that he has failed to present the developmental aspects of the issues he raises. Glaser's purposeful and yet seemingly arbitrary crossing of chronological barriers to show that there *was* no significant development of German culture and psyche during the past 150 years irritates them. Glaser's 'phenomenological' approach does not fit into the historian's framework of reference. With refreshing disrespect for the traditional frontiers of Academe his work is a *tour de force* in interdisciplinary research.

Glaser's main thesis, that National Socialism in Germany was not an accident of history, but 'the terminus of a broad and invitingly laid-out path' ('Preface', p.14) and that 'the history of "official" German culture during the last 150 years was not marked by development, but resembled a monotonous rotation around unchanging ideological distortions and perversions of reality' ('Preface', p.13), are borne out throughout the book. Glaser's insistence that his book is not intended to be an intellectual history or an exercise in metaphysics, but a 'phenomenology' – that is, the listing of symptoms without observance of chronology – should have disarmed his critics; but some of them insist on castigating as serious oversight what is serious method to him.

A recurrent charge of Glaser's critics deals with the 'arrangement of his evidence'. One of them saw it as no more than a staged 'carnival display of terror in perverted thought'.² To be sure, the evidence is arranged, but it is arranged as a multitude of examples drawn from related occurrences which – space permitting – could be documented *ad infinitum*. The juxtaposition of related phenomena – even if they were separated in time by years or centuries – carried out within the context of clearly defined methodological and substantive limits of comparative analysis need not – as some of the reviewers thought – lead to a static, unhistorical result, but adds dimensions to historical understanding unattainable in the confines of traditional *Historismus*.

A serious and substantial shortcoming of Glaser's book compared with traditional scholarly monographs is in the absence of exhaustive and fully documented background studies of the principal figures and issues discussed. Such research, it is felt, would have revealed the complex motivation behind the work of authors vacillating between the rational and irrational. More extensive probing into the motives of

the individuals discussed by Glaser would indeed make fascinating intellectual fare: Glaser himself would welcome it heartily. But the point of the matter is that the scope of the book was limited to the raising of issues and tentative hypotheses. That it has done. However, this limitation of scope should not be construed as a conspiracy to deceive the reader. Rather, the whole book is an invitation to others to continue the investigation. Glaser challenged his countrymen to help him remove the rubble of the past. His exemplary work in doing just that has earned him the opprobrium of one 'who fouls his nest' (*Nestbeschmutzer*).

An evaluation of the thought of those who are frustrated by the attempts of Glaser and others to 'overcome' the past can easily lead to unnecessary insinuations. Glaser's tone and method do not spare the already strained sensitivities of German nationalists. Agonized by the tragic ideological and physical division of their land and nervously over-reacting to the ever-present charge of association with the Hitlerian past, they lash out wildly at those who find fault with pre-Hitlerian Germany. It seems unbearable to them that not only the aberrations of the twentieth century, but aberrations throughout the long trail of German history have contained elements that funnelled national energies in the direction of self-destruction. Surprisingly, they overlook the clear insistence of the *Vergangenheitsbewältiger*³ that this development was by no means inevitable, that it was its very 'evitability' which forms the substance of the tragedy. The maligned conservative insists that his opponent is fundamentally alien to the 'national tradition', that his 'negativism' makes him constitutionally incapable of recognizing the 'organic' and 'positive' values of society and forces him to 'foul his nest' by attributing to 'his own kind' hereditary and inescapable character flaws.

The intellectual acuteness of some liberal critics and their somewhat cynical 'stripping' of national myths probably arouses anti-intellectualism in most societies. More about this will have to be said later. In the German context and, specifically with reference to the issues raised in this book and other works by Glaser, these irreconcilable animosities, fomented by both sides, should not be overlooked. On the political left they deteriorate into hysterical polemics and violence of the most extreme order — unfortunately causing a backlash where society can least afford it. On the right they find full-throated expression in the paladins of the eternal yesterday.

Glaser emphasizes that right-wing irrationalism and its consequences were dictated by the course of German history. However, there can be

no mistaking that his message applies to irrationalism wherever it raises its head. That the author has found the mark is borne out by the reaction of his critics.

The application of Glaser's analysis to other societies is made difficult because of the specifically German milieu from which all his evidence is drawn. Careful comparative analysis of phenomena relating to the complex of questions raised by Glaser is, however, possible. The United States of America is only one — but a surprisingly revealing — example of the many societies with which this comparative analysis can be undertaken. Fate has been kind to America in sparing it the kind of predicaments that twisted the course of German history; Clio has been kind to Americans by helping to foster the illusion that their country is 'God's country'. They have difficulty in realizing that they are not immune to the diseases of others. The comparability of German and American phenomena within Glaser's terms of reference is perhaps best brought out if they are analysed in line with the contextual sequence of this book. 'True culture can never be a disaster', Glaser observed as he set out to define the purpose of his work ('Preface', p.9). His attack, then, is directed against the misinterpretations and perversions of German culture during the past century and a half. 'Culture as façade', consists of a nostalgic appeal to a yesterday that never was. The *Spiesser* equipped the great men in German culture with characteristics fitting his own mediocrity, but he instinctively avoided the painful necessity of coming to grips with the contradictions and conflicts that are the attributes of greatness.

To the 'silent American' there is a majestic consistency in the character and works of his founding fathers. Blasphemous indeed is the man who dares to question their motives. When the 'national monument' of the Constitution was attacked by Charles Beard and others as the product of partisan interest, it seemed an incredible charge to make; to the majority it never made sense. Historians have not ceased to debate the issue. Much has been done in the interests of clarification and partisan simplicity on this level is no longer possible. But the myth of the Constitution and its pristine qualities continues to exist undiminished in the hearts of Americans; the widespread conviction of America's uniqueness depends a good deal on it.

Just as the Germans derive their boundless confidence in the uniqueness of their *Kultur* from the German *Klassik* and its masters, Americans see the roots of their heritage in a chronologically parallel classical period of great achievements.

In a land overwhelmingly protestant in its formative years, with

widespread Messianic overtones in religious life, the cultural façade of America's mainstream was bound to have a strong veneer of righteous religiosity. Divorced from the 'decadence' of the Old World, the New erected a cultural façade that claimed a purity all its own. The real achievements that formed the pillars of this creed, the steady advance of democratic processes and social equality, served to deepen the conviction that it was unique. As the Germans burrowed deeper into cultural chauvinism, proudly pronouncing how different they were from the merely civilized traditions of the West, the Americans, so deeply in the 'cultural tow' of Western Europe, began to embrace their own distinctiveness with passion. Critics of this cultural fetishism remained prophets in the wilderness there as well as here in Europe.

Henry Adams, 'an *émigré de l'intérieur*', 'a born critic rather than a born leader', was just such a prophet in the wilderness in the estimation of D.W. Brogan.⁴ When the catharsis of the Civil War — the great attempt at purification and national synthesis — was followed by the vulgarity of the Gilded Age, his idealism turned into 'cultural despair'. Adams, who had 'hitched his wagon', in Emerson's words, 'to the star of reform'

. . . fresh from the cynicism of European diplomacy, had expected to enter an honorable career in the press as the champion and confidant of a new Washington, and already he foresaw a life of wasted energy, sweeping the stables of American society clean of the endless corruption which his second Washington was quite certain to breed.

'The country might outlive' what he then called 'one dirty cesspool of vulgar corruption. . .but not he'.⁵

'Society laughed a vacant and meaningless derision over its own failure', and shrouded itself in the myth of success.⁶ If even at Harvard the craving for conformity was already so strong that 'no irregularity shocked the intellectual atmosphere so much as contradiction or competition between teachers', how hopeless must the rest of American society have looked to Adams.⁷

The American character showed singular limitations which sometimes drove the student of civilized man to despair. Crushed by his own ignorance — lost in the darkness of his own gropings — the scholar finds himself jostled of a sudden by a crowd of men who seem to him ignorant that there is a thing called ignorance; who have

forgotten to amuse themselves; who cannot even understand that they are bored.⁸

Doomed to go on amidst the 'mental inertia of sixty or eighty million people',⁹ he would have liked to escape to the east, 'if it were only to sleep forever in the tradewinds under the southern stars',¹⁰ for he was tired of a world he no longer understood. 'Since 1871 nothing had ruffled the surface of the American world', all was 'busyness' and contentment, but this unruffled façade troubled the American visionary.¹¹

Richard Hofstadter's association of Adams's '... indictment of post-Civil War America as a coarse, materialistic society' with the alienation of the post-First World War intellectuals highlights the universality of the estrangement between the thinking critics and their society.¹²

Based on firmer foundations and feeding on deeper springs of reason than the precarious 'borrowed' Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) in Germany, the American critique of thoughtless conformity stimulated a correspondingly massive anti-intellectual response, which drew on powerful traditions of its own. It is in this response to criticism rather than in the idylls sketched in the first part of Glaser's work that the American equivalent of the *Spiesser* mentality reveals itself. Whereas the intellect in Germany — as in Europe generally — enjoyed abstract respect except where its 'negative', i.e. 'decadent-critical', aspects were concerned, in America it was subject to a much more sweeping rejection.¹³ This rejection — though modified by the sobering demands of modern technology — extends into our day; from President Nixon's disgust with the 'self-appointed intellectual élite'¹⁴ to the numb resentment of the man in the street. Broadly based and uniquely American though it is, this anti-intellectualism clearly corresponds to some of Glaser's categories summarized under the heading '*Mythos* and *Logos*'. The myth as a weapon against the discomfort of reason has universal application. Glaser makes a strong case for its fatal power in German history. But its webs were also finely spun in America's past. Glaser's references to German indictments of intellect as 'the adversary of the soul', of rationalism as the product of 'nervous perspiration', and of — generally Jewish — 'disgusting intellectuals with long hair, horn-rimmed glasses and a 5 o'clock shadow' strikes familiar cords in those conversant with the vocabulary of American anti-intellectualism. The 'effete snobs' of the present — though racially castigated only in the most extreme cases — are the objects of the same frustrated and

deriding contempt that beset their counterparts (and not infrequently their fathers) in Germany.

One does not have to go far in America to encounter the word 'decadence' as the ultimate in the derogatory exchanges of contending sides. Glaser shows the cost of this arrogance in the alienation of German society from Western values. His allusion to the quarrel between Thomas and Heinrich Mann as an elevated example of the problem is heavy ammunition indeed. But his catalogue of the blows inflicted by the 'judges of decadence' on the memory of Heine's free spirit cuts to the core. Those who refuse to conform are decadent. Those who are critical of and wish to segregate themselves from society must be decadent. The American 'Yippie' was not allowed to withdraw from the tyranny of the majority; and de Tocqueville had already given warning about this overbearing majority in the nineteenth century.¹⁵ The Yippie was, of course, only an extreme example whose fate is not likely to evoke much sympathy even among the most liberal of the conglomerate majority. For the point of the matter is just that: the charge of decadence comes from society at large, not just from the political right.

'Compromise with power' is the key phrase in Glaser's critique of the conduct of German professors after the failure of the revolution of 1848. The corrupting influence of the consciousness of increasing national power of the German professoriate, from the initial endorsement of Bismarck's methods over the wholehearted approval of their results to the subsequent rationalization of and eventual surrender to the excesses of the twentieth century, is well documented. In view of the present alienation of the academic community from the sources of political power in America, it may seem fatuous to draw an analogy to the liaison German Academe entertained with power. However, the progressive interweaving of public funds and university research and the trend to increased governmental supervision and financing of education in general have created submerged dependencies in relation to which the surface alienation is only the tip of the iceberg. Here it should not be forgotten that the substance of power in American higher education still rests with the boards of trustees, and their relationship to established authority does not need to be belaboured. Though the American academic community on the whole has been infinitely more critical of society than its German counterpart, its secondary school substructure has been, and to a large degree still is, subservient to the mandates of national power. If that national power has so far largely been used to ends that compare favourably to its abuse in Germany,

recent history has again shown that the pitfalls of power spare none that possess it. The increasing interlinking of government and education and the resultant dependencies in America therefore constitute a threat to the safeguards of society that cannot be concealed by the temporary alienation of intellectuals from one administration or the other. Concentration on the 'stars' and prestige campuses of American intellectual life has served to grossly exaggerate the extent of this alienation anyhow.

If the juxtaposition of academic life and political power seemed strained, the attempt to apply Glaser's category of 'Heroes, Hawkers and Democrats' to the American scene appears even less justifiable. American history is testimony to the durability of its democratic institutions and the depth of its democratic tradition. Glaser's gallery of undemocratic figures who damn democracy as 'un-German' have no match in America. However, there are some resemblances: in the section 'Heroes, Hawkers and Democrats' (p.118). Ludwig Marcuse is quoted lamenting the 'tragic alliance of Athens and Agadir' as the downfall of humanistic education; this retrospective myth-making has eerie echoes in America, where modern epigones have lent heroic dimensions to the 'founding fathers' and dressed them in robes of martial glory.

The *Spiesser's* loathing of socialists as pernicious corrupters of society has more relevance to the American scene. If anything, German Social Darwinism and the deep-seated anti-socialist phobia of the propertied fall short of their more broadly based equivalents across the ocean.¹⁶ Hofstadter's puzzled description of American Social Darwinism as '... a conservatism so utterly progressive. . .' in reference to William Graham Sumner's sober farewell to the reign of status¹⁷ points to a significant difference between the German and the American brands.¹⁸ Where American history and social conditions made a consistent application of the implications of Darwin's theories possible, Germans, still confined by the reign of status, used them selectively and ambiguously. They would curse those sympathizing with the workers' lot as sentimentalists, but at the same time sentimentally cling to status relationships. In America both kinds of sentimentality were castigated by the Social Darwinists. Hofstadter's analysis of the historical association of American political conservatism with economic and social innovation on the one side and of moderate 'leftism' with schemes to restore and conserve old values on the other side is a useful example of the difficulties encountered in a comparative study of the Old and the New Worlds.¹⁹ However, the point is not really which brand of Social Darwinism deserves the term 'peculiar', but rather that Social