

UNDERGROUND HUMOUR IN NAZI GERMANY 1933-1945



F. K. M. HILLENBRAND

ROUTLEDGE

UNDERGROUND HUMOUR IN
NAZI GERMANY
1933-1945



1 The Whispering (original linocut by Heinke Jenkins, 1963)

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E. K. M. Hillenbrand



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To the memory of those
who did not bow the knee to Baal
(I Kings 19.18; St Paul, Romans 11.4)

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PREFACE

In 1982 I was given some slender volumes of anti-Nazi jokes collected clandestinely between 1933 and 1945 but published in Germany and Austria only after the collapse of the Third Reich. At the same time I was encouraged to make available to a fairly wide English readership some of these anti-authoritarian responses of ordinary Germans to the régime under which they lived. It soon became clear to me that this would be a difficult undertaking, as it would be necessary to make German humour not just accessible but also acceptable to the English way of thinking. And by degrees the book came to be more than just an accumulation of political jokes. What counts is the motivation underlying them; for many people found in the telling of such jokes their only means of protest against the police state in which they lived – and only a few engaged in active resistance to Hitler.

I wish to thank first of all my publisher, Andrew Wheatcroft, for accepting my book. I am also grateful to him for recommending the book *Between the Wars 1919–1939, The Cartoonists' Vision* by Roy Douglas as a guide to the selection of the best contemporary cartoons which of course add extra punch to the jokes.

I am most grateful to Professor John Hiden of Bradford University for his early interest in my work, for reading the synopsis and for his welcome criticisms. I also wish to thank Dr Jill Stephenson of Edinburgh University, who read part of the book early on, for her valuable comments.

Dr Margaret Whidden deserves full praise for her work with the word-processor, despite many technical adversities, and for the meticulous attention she applied to every aspect of the text.

A lucky find by my son, Dr Peter Hillenbrand, introduced me to the artist, Mrs Heinke Jenkins. Her linocut 'The whispering' most appropriately reveals the 'German glance', i.e. the way in which most anti-Nazi jokes were told during those years, and I therefore chose the print as the book's cover illustration and frontispiece. I am most grateful for the artist's kind permission to make use of her work in this way. My thanks are also due to the publishers of the books from which I selected the illustrations. All of these are contemporaneous with the jokes presented in the text.

Last, but not least, my heartfelt thanks go to my son, Professor Robert Hillenbrand of Edinburgh University, without whom this book would

xiv *Preface*

never have been written. He suggested that I should write it, being well acquainted with my personal experiences during the Nazi years and my sharp memories of that time. His linguistic expertise, his command of literary style, his ever-ready help and his unflagging patience with my shortcomings were indispensable. His continuing interest in getting the book published was crowned by his most generous offer of editing it, for which I am most grateful.

INTRODUCTION

The principal aim of this book is to draw attention to a half-forgotten aspect of the Third Reich: the varied ways in which widespread popular discontent was expressed.

‘Discontent? Widespread? Popular?’ some may ask. Didn’t Hitler have millions of followers? Weren’t the great majority of Germans Nazis at heart even if they were not members of the Nazi party? I would maintain that only someone who lived through the twelve years of Adolf Hitler’s ‘Thousand Year Reich’ in Germany would be able to attempt to answer these questions from firsthand experience, and could explain the purpose of this book.

This is now more than ever a timely undertaking. As the years go by fewer and fewer people remain who can, when recalling their experiences in the course of those years, recollect their own and their friends’ criticisms of the régime without having to take recourse to hindsight, the necessary hallmark of studies about the Third Reich which have accumulated since 1945. Although detailed and on occasion very moving studies of *Zeit-* or *Alltagsgeschichte* (the history of everyday life) of this period are plentiful, this book aims to look at Nazi Germany from an entirely different angle, namely humour, in the belief that this reveals most directly the mood of the time.

A brief summary of the contemporary background will put the popular discontent with the new order into context. By the end of 1932 Germany was in a sorry state, with over seven million people unemployed and the aftermath of the Wall Street crash of 1929 affecting the whole country. Banks in Berlin, for example, closed for lengthy periods – as I experienced myself since I was then a student there – and a most disturbing political instability was manifesting itself. There were over three dozen political parties in the *Reichstag*, some of them of minute size with a weak centre, but there were two rather powerful and rowdy ones at the extremes, Nazis and Communists. I witnessed many fights between them, some extending even to the precincts of the University. Most people living in the capital at that time felt some relief when President von Hindenburg entrusted the Chancellor of the Reich, a man of the centre, with emergency powers, since this seemed the only alternative to yet another failed coalition government.

During these last few weeks of the Weimar Republic Hitler was, so to

speak, waiting in the wings. Although his party had suffered a serious setback at the last elections – in November 1932 – he remained determined to come to power legally, if at all possible, with right-wing and less radical (and therefore more respectable) support. Through the intervention of a former right-wing Reich Chancellor, his friend the aristocrat von Papen, von Hindenburg was eventually, though reluctantly, persuaded to accept Hitler as the nominal head of a right-wing coalition, with von Papen as Vice-Chancellor to serve as a watchdog. (Hitler was duly appointed Reich Chancellor by von Hindenburg on 30th January 1933.)

At first not many Germans shared the old President's serious apprehension about the untried stranger from Austria. After all, it was Hitler's political honeymoon, and everybody wishes a honeymooner well, as did the great majority of Germans at this time. Most people were willing to give him the benefit of the doubt. However, within weeks there occurred the *Reichstag* fire and soon Göring's uniformed stormtroopers, transformed into armed auxiliary police, began hunting down political opponents. In addition, they molested and arrested innocent civilians on the streets of the capital, as I personally experienced. Such oppressive behaviour at street level caused widespread resentment, which worsened as the manifold restrictions issued by the new government began to bite.

This generated the first wave of somewhat tame jokes with a political edge – not a very sharp one at first. Later, as it gradually dawned on people that they were now living in a police state, these jokes took on a much harsher note. Measures like *Gleichschaltung*, the Aryan laws, the Röhms *Putsch*, the *Anschluss* of Austria and the subjugation of Czechoslovakia brought in their wake a flood of cutting satirical comments and jokes. Eventually, after Hitler had led Germany into his war, her defeat and utter ruin, the people reacted with *Galgenhumor* (gallows humour), which was more bitter than witty, often scabrous and with an undercurrent of desperation.

Throughout all these years overt opposition resulted in swift reprisals, but the more common covert variety vented itself in jokes against the régime and its representatives. They whispered their way through Germany with remarkable speed. It was even rumoured that an anti-Nazi joke was actually produced in the Ministry of Propaganda run by Dr Goebbels in an attempt to test the geographical distribution of these anti-Nazi jokes inside Germany. Thus the joke was sent on its way from the foothills of the Alps to the north, and a scant week later had reached the shores of the Baltic – a distance of more than 1,000 miles. A sprinkling of jokes in my book probably stems from the same Nazi source. These were either intended to defame their opponents or reflected the internecine rivalry of those at the top of the Nazi hierarchy.

A good many of the jokes stem from the capital, and are full of the ready wit, repartee and rhyming slang for which the Berliners – like the Cockneys

– were famous. With all due precautions these jokes were told and retold with gusto, as I can personally testify since I heard many of them at their place of origin.

Naturally, people preferred to be safe rather than sorry and went to some lengths to take the proper precautions. Eventually they became conditioned to looking around surreptitiously when whispering such jokes to each other. The term ‘German glance’ (*der deutsche Blick*) was coined to describe just this habit. Hence, too, the term ‘whispered jokes’ (*Flüsterwitze*), so vividly illustrated on the cover and frontispiece of this book. People were afraid that their telephones were bugged and thus, in Berlin at least, such conversations were often carried on in some form of code. The same applied to letters and diaries. Germans by and large were fully aware of the system of informers (*Denunziantentum*) which was in operation – a typical and essential by-product of the Nazi police state. Even tête-à-tête conversations criticizing the régime or telling jokes about leading Nazis were risky, and rendered one liable to end up in a concentration camp. From Berlin alone there are documented instances, involving for example a minister of religion and a deaconess, of those who were denounced, tried and executed for such offences.

Less clandestine criticisms and sarcastic anecdotes were occasionally voiced by a few prominent actors and more especially by one or two daring compères in the nightclubs of Berlin and Munich, who poked fun at the *Prominente* to the delight of their audiences. All of them eventually had to pay for their frankness. Yet of course this kind of opposition, for all that it was risky, was simply not comparable to the active political engagement of the German Resistance.

Nevertheless, this very risk added some spice to the dull intellectual fare dished out to the German people. Moreover, these jokes provided a welcome emotional release from pressure and restrictions ‘from above’ and from the daily pinpricks of the hordes of Nazi officials of the lesser order, the ‘little Hitlers’ in their obscene brown uniforms, who got on the wick of so many Germans. Thus underground humour had some therapeutic value for the millions living in the prison-without-bars which Germany had now become, even in peacetime. This became even more true when war broke out.

Since such humour necessarily had to go underground, the bulk of the jokes in the book were collected privately under the code-name *Schmetterlinge* (butterflies), though they could be published in Germany and in Austria only after the collapse of the Third Reich. A few of the jokes stem from German emigrés, from the memoirs of Germans who held office under Hitler, and from foreign correspondents and diplomats who lived in Berlin until 1939.

This book aims to be much more than a stark compilation of political jokes. They make sense only in their contemporary political setting, and are

for that reason constantly interwoven with the very words of prominent Nazis and with my comments on them. Only in this way may one hope that these jokes, witticisms and anecdotes will stand out in their full clarity as a *historical source of the first importance*. They should transport the reader right back into the vanished world of half a century ago, and thus reveal some of the spirit of the age, entirely undistorted by hindsight. Outside Germany itself this precious *primary material* does not seem to have impinged on public awareness to any significant extent, and the present book is a modest attempt to redress the balance.

The cartoons are there to provide extra punch. With one or two exceptions, they are – like the jokes – from contemporary German sources. They bear only brief captions, as the jokes are self-explanatory.

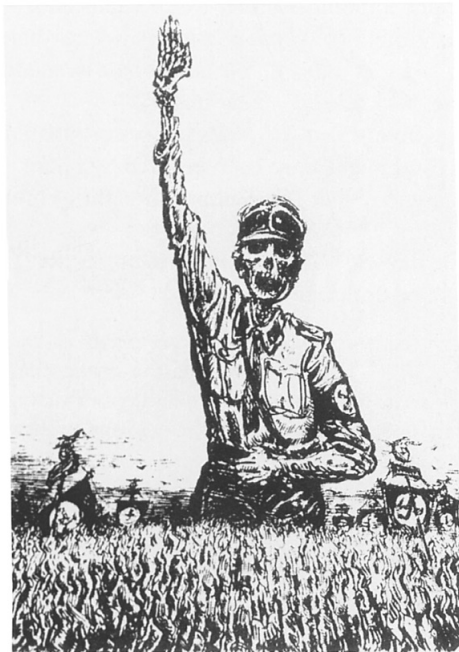
To sum up, contemporary political satire provides some relatively unexpected insights into the attitudes of ordinary Germans disenchanted with the régime. In fairness, more than that cannot be claimed for this account of underground humour as the mouthpiece of a passive opposition, the only alternative to the heroic active resistance of the few.

As better people than I have discovered, the Third Reich is not an easy phenomenon to explain. My point of view is simply that of one who was there and lived in the world which produced these jokes. I laughed at them too, while taking care not to criticize the régime in public, and thus I lived to tell the tale.

1 REPRESENTATIVES OF THE OLD ORDER

PRESIDENT VON HINDENBURG

In 1932, the last year of the Weimar Republic, political jokes began to circulate at an ever-increasing rate. Many centred on the President. In office since 1925, he stood for re-election in March 1932 and on that occasion just failed to get the absolute majority required by the constitution; a month later a second election resulted in an absolute majority for the old President. Hindenburg was then nearly eighty-five years old. By the majority of German moderates he was remembered from the war as a venerable father-figure,¹ but by some merely as a man of average ability inexplicably elevated to mythological greatness,² or as less a man than a national monument,³ or even, in stark contrast to both these images, as a 'Zero paving the way for Nero.'⁴



2 Hitler – a German fate

2 Underground Humour in Nazi Germany 1933–1945



3 Potsdam, 21 March 1933

The President's frequently vacillating attitude as Head of State during that turbulent year showed his age.⁵ Despite the now diminishing periods of mental lucidity,⁶ which became embarrassing toward the end,⁷ Hindenburg retained his distrust of 'that Bohemian corporal'⁸ for a very long time. As late as 26 January 1933 – only four days before he appointed Hitler Reich Chancellor – Hindenburg declared that he would not think of such a possibility.⁹ According to another source the President is reputed to have said, 'He can at best be made Postmaster General, then he can ... my backside on the stamps!'¹⁰

It may well be that most of the jokes about the President's senility originated in Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda, and might have been inspired by Hitler's vindictiveness. When Hitler came to power, what Hindenburg thought of him can hardly have remained a secret to him.

Soon after 30 January 1933 (the day of Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor), the following story circulated in Berlin:

- [1] On the balcony of his palace the old President is watching the seemingly endless columns of Stormtroopers in their brown shirts marching past carrying their torchlights. Hindenburg, confusing this scene in his memory with his famous victory over Russia in 1914,¹¹ asks his Secretary of State, 'Meissner, is there no end to these Russian POWs?'¹²

Hindenburg eventually submitted to repeated demands by his immediate entourage¹³ to sign the document which effected Hitler's chancellorship. This may be the background reflected in the following two jokes:

- [2] A lady is waiting in the anteroom for an interview with the President. Before going in, she is about to unwrap a bunch of flowers she has brought along, when Secretary

of State Meissner warns her, 'Please don't leave any paper lying about here, Madam; the old gentleman might sign it otherwise!'

- [3] The Wilhelmstrasse¹⁴ has to be swept several times a day in order to prevent Hindenburg from signing any wastepaper lying about.

Even nastier:

- [4] The Wilhelmstrasse is closed for traffic every morning from eight to nine in order to enable Hindenburg to have some exercise; he enjoys spinning a top without being endangered by traffic.
- [5] Hitler has an audience with the old President. After he has left, Hindenburg asks his Secretary of State, 'Tell me, Meissner, how long has Brüning been wearing a moustache?'¹⁵
- [6] Which is the smallest concentration camp in Germany? Neudeck. It has only one prisoner: Hindenburg.¹⁶

This list of jokes about Hindenburg may best be concluded by relating an event which, though it may seem hardly credible, is nevertheless historically correct. When Hindenburg died on 2 August 1934, Hitler seized his chance to use the state funeral to promote his own Nordic fantasies. He gave the official farewell, which was broadcast, with these words: 'And now, old warrior, depart on your journey to Valhalla!'¹⁷

And so the funeral of Germany's grand old man, a life-long practising Christian, took place to the musical accompaniment of an orchestra playing Wagner's 'Twilight of the Gods.'¹⁸

SECRETARY OF STATE DR MEISSNER

Dr Hans Otto Meissner (1880–1953) was the Head of the Presidential Chancellory under Ebert, von Hindenburg and eventually also under Hitler. Together with von Papen he was instrumental in bringing about the appointment of Hitler as Reich Chancellor.¹⁹ Although Meissner maintained his influential position as confidant of the aged President he did not attempt to enforce any restrictions on the new masters of Germany during the street excesses of the Stormtroopers in the early weeks of 1933.²⁰ During the war Meissner was critical of Ribbentrop²¹ and also, in retrospect, of Hitler's spellbinding effect on Oscar von Hindenburg, the President's son and adjutant.²² Meissner was considered by contemporaries alternatively as a careerist²³ or as the typical non-political senior civil servant.²⁴ His 'longevity' as the servant of three régimes so utterly dissimilar to each other is reflected in these jokes:

- [7] Meissner, the political quick-change artiste, is also known as the Chameleon.²⁵
- [8] Although the world has been submerged by another flood, much more devastating than Noah's, someone did survive – Dr Meissner, on the top of the Himalayas.²⁶

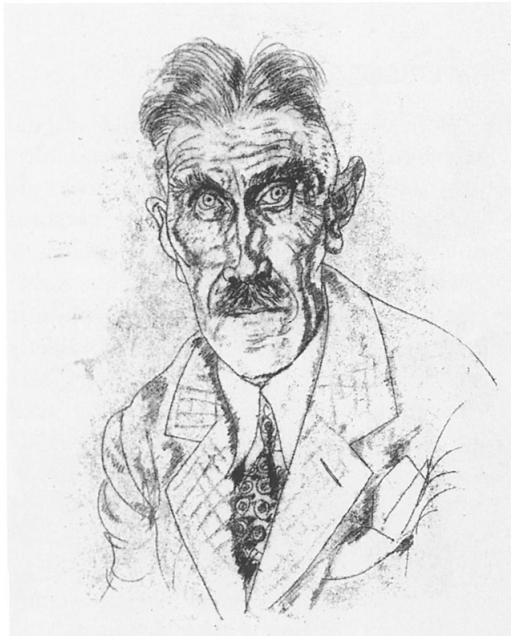
4 *Underground Humour in Nazi Germany 1933–1945*

VON PAPEN

Franz von Papen (1879–1969) became the penultimate Reich Chancellor of the Weimar Republic when he succeeded Brüning in June 1932. General Kurt von Schleicher, who succeeded von Papen on 2 December 1932, had been responsible for von Papen's appointment as he had for Brüning's before him, in 1930.²⁷ As the man behind the throne, the General became known, not inappropriately, as the 'field-grey eminence',²⁸ and by the Nazis as 'primo de Schleicheros',²⁹ because they suspected him of playing with the idea of a *coup d'état*.

As the new Reich Chancellor, von Papen soon won the old President's confidence, and before long this confidence developed into a close friendship. Von Hindenburg approved of von Papen's 'cabinet of barons',³⁰ which was to include General von Schleicher as Minister of Defence.

Von Papen's aristocratic background, his excellent horsemanship,³¹ his military service in an exclusive cavalry regiment before the war,³² and his connections with industry and the Catholic Church³³ were all assets for his high office. On the debit side there was his character itself³⁴ and certain aspects of his former diplomatic career³⁵ and these factors caused widespread incredulity that the President should have chosen von Papen as Reich Chancellor.³⁶ After the crushing defeat of von Papen's government in the *Reichstag*³⁷ even von Hindenburg's authority could not have prevented the fall of the 'cabinet of barons'. Yet, when General von Schleicher succeeded von Papen as Reich Chancellor on 2 December 1932 he only managed to hold office for fifty-seven



4 Franz von Papen

days.³⁸ Following this short interregnum von Papen was instrumental in bringing about Hitler's legal appointment as Reich Chancellor on 30 January 1933. Von Papen mistakenly believed that he could keep Hitler under his personal control³⁹ by serving under him as Vice-Chancellor with the support of a majority of conservative Ministers in the new cabinet. However, before long he was himself, in company with the other conservative Ministers, dismissed by Hitler. Nevertheless, von Papen continued to serve Hitler: first in 1933 as envoy to the Vatican,⁴⁰ then from 1934–8 as Minister in Vienna, and finally from 1939–44 as ambassador to Turkey.

Many of von Papen's political activities remained unknown to the wider public, which may account for the paucity of jokes about him. Nevertheless, a few satirical quips do survive, and these throw some light on this still shadowy and controversial figure.

- [9] The cabinet of von Papen called itself a 'government of national concentration', but it might as well have been called a 'government of national consternation'.⁴¹
- [10] Historically speaking, von Papen acted as the midwife at the birth of the Third Reich.⁴²
- [11] General von Schleicher had been warned beforehand about his choice of von Papen as Chancellor in June 1932, to which he is said to have replied, 'I don't need a head, I need a hat.'⁴³
- [12] The fact that von Papen, contrary to Schleicher's low opinion of his potential as



5 1932: the New Year

6 *Underground Humour in Nazi Germany 1933–1945*

Chancellor, seemed to assume the stature of something like a statesman after taking office showed the General's error of judgement. As he himself admitted, 'Would you have thought it possible – our Francis has discovered himself!'⁴⁴

- [13] What is the difference between Bismarck, Hitler, Goebbels and Papen? Bismarck said what he believed, Hitler believed what he said, Goebbels did not believe what he said, and Papen did not say what he believed.⁴⁵

SCHACHT

Dr Hjalmar Horace Greeley Schacht (1877–1970), President of the Reichsbank from 1923–30, had managed to stabilize the German currency in 1923. Reappointed in 1933 to his former post, he served in that capacity and also as Minister of Economics until 1937.⁴⁶ At first he was a fervent admirer of Hitler, and indeed from 1931 he was the Führer's financial adviser. Nevertheless, Schacht came to realize the adverse effect of 'Aryanization'⁴⁷ on the German economy, and did what he could to stem the tide. His international standing was considerable, and even after his dismissal by Hitler Schacht tried to further Jewish emigration from Nazi Germany.⁴⁸ By 1938 Schacht seems to have become convinced of the criminal element in Germany's new rulers,⁴⁹ and soon afterwards he became involved in plans to remove Hitler.⁵⁰ This led in 1944, after the failed attempt on Hitler's life, to Schacht's arrest and imprisonment in a concentration camp.⁵¹ At the Nuremberg trial in 1946 Schacht was, like von Papen, acquitted by the Allied Court, but was later imprisoned following a trial by a German denazification court.⁵²

Jokes about Schacht are few and far between. As one might expect, they refer to his marked thriftiness and his financial wizardry.

- [14] 'Did you know that Göring, Goebbels and Schacht recently went to a restaurant on the *Ku-Damm*⁵³ and that nobody recognized them?'
'Oh, really! How was that possible?'
'Well, Göring was not in uniform and had left all his decorations at home, Goebbels didn't say a word all evening, and Schacht paid their bill!'⁵⁴
- [15] Schacht invites Hitler, Göring, Hess and Goebbels for lunch in a restaurant. He makes a bet with them to the effect that each of them can choose a meal to cost less than 13 marks, and that he will manage the total bill with a 20 mark note, which is all he has in his wallet.
This is how he managed to win his bet, and this is the account written down by him:⁵⁵

Hitler	1/3 mark
Göring	1/3 "
Goebbels	1/3 "
Hess	1/3 "
Schacht	1/3 "
	— -

$$5 + 15 = 20 \text{ marks}$$

2 HITLER

Hitler is unique in world history, alike among the despots of his own time and of the past. Indeed, one has to go far back into antiquity to find anyone obsessed with such a pathological drive towards destruction and notoriety.¹

However, Hitler is of course quite without equal in his effect on the fate of millions in Germany and abroad. He was the main protagonist in a drama which engulfed the majority of developed nations in a worldwide war, resulted in the map of Europe being completely redrawn and ushered in many more years of human suffering on a gigantic scale.

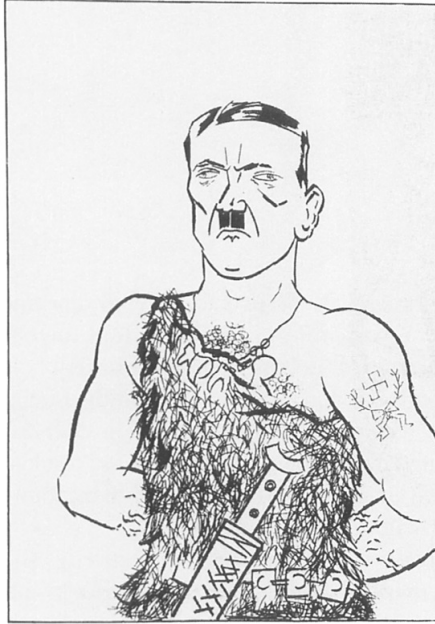
The outstanding aspects of his personality were his egocentricity and megalomania. These were, however, masked to a remarkable degree by his mesmeric genius which bewitched the German masses. Likewise, his masterly play-acting time and again duped the representatives of foreign powers.

Like many other autocrats, Hitler came from the periphery of the country he



6 The Third Reich in caricature

8 Underground Humour in Nazi Germany 1933–1945



7 Hitler the saviour

was to dominate.² His Austrian background, behaviour and accent as well as the obscurity and hint of disgrace which surrounded his origins³ were amply reflected in contemporary humour and satire. Similarly, his appearance, his tastes, his cruelty, and his megalomania were the butts of many a joke.

Finally, Hitler's close associates from his early days as a politician – men who later formed his 'inner circle' – were ready targets for satirists; indeed they revealed much of the man himself.⁴

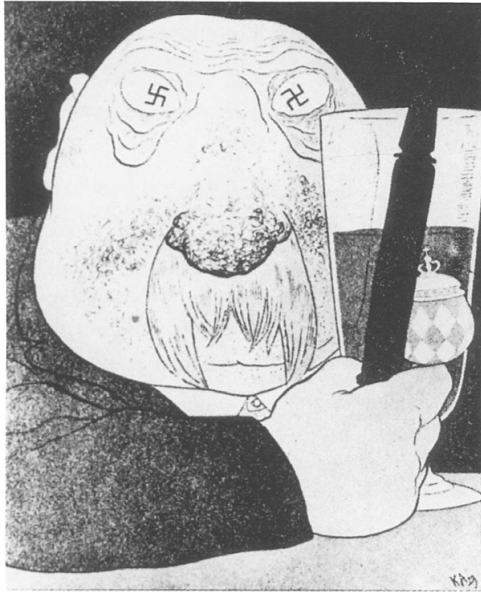
Contemporaneous satire about Hitler concentrated on the following aspects of the man: his background, appearance, path to power, personal traits, 'universal genius' and his decline.

BACKGROUND

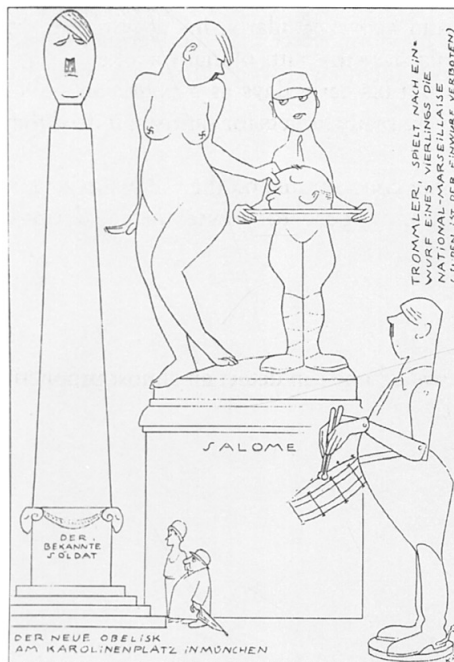
In Goethe's *The Awakening of Epimenides*⁵ one can detect an almost prophetic allusion to Hitler's origin, life and end:

- [1] Boldly from the depths he's sprung
By brazen fate endowed with fame;
World-Conqueror – yet he'll be flung
Eventually from where he came.
In that great anguish now he might
Try to resist; but he will fail,
And thus will perish in that fight
All who once followed in his trail.

Hitler 9



8 The man from Munich



9 Let us build monuments

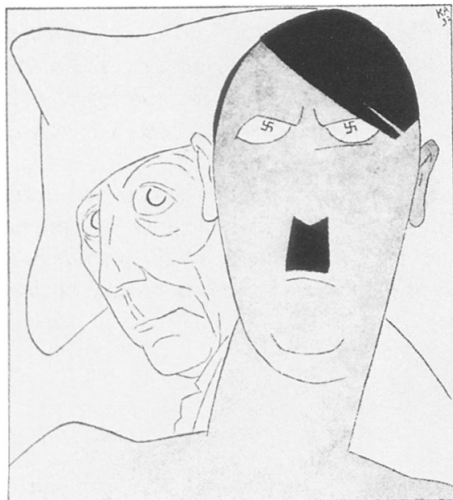
10 *Underground Humour in Nazi Germany 1933–1945*

- [2] In his early days in Munich Hitler was sometimes referred to by his admirers as ‘the King of Munich’, but his opponents dubbed him ‘Proletheus unbound’.⁶
Inevitably, his former career as a painter of sorts became a favourite target:
- [3] ‘When will the Austrian government move into their new office buildings?’
‘Not before the paper-hanger is finished.’
- The first meeting between Hitler and Mussolini in 1937 was said to have not been a great success.
- [4] When Hitler addresses his fellow fascist as ‘dear colleague’ Mussolini replies, ‘Why colleague? I was once a bricklayer, and I have built up a new Italy. You were once a paper-hanger,⁷ yet it seems to me that what you have achieved so far doesn’t amount to much, despite all your whitewash!’
- [5] When in 1944 Churchill toured the Empire he also visited the island of St Helena. When he was shown the house which Napoleon had occupied during his exile, he remarked, ‘Fair enough, though it could do with some new wallpaper. Well, he can do that himself!’

HITLER’S APPEARANCE

Foremost in contemporary comment, satire and caricature were Hitler’s Charlie Chaplin moustache and the Napoleonic forelock.⁸ His blue, glassy eyes – ‘the strongest part of his face’⁹ – were variously described as small,¹⁰ mournful, ‘like raisins’¹¹ glazed and hypnotic.¹²

It can only have been due to this hypnotic effect that the German masses who fell under his spell could convince themselves when looking at him that



10 Hail Prussian!



11 Hitler: a favourite pose

Hitler was a true representative of the ‘master race’ he promulgated to his audiences: blond, with ‘Nordic’ forehead and noble countenance.¹³

In contrast, those who were unbiased saw him as a ‘racially poor type’, typically un-Nordic, indeed Slavic in appearance with his low receding forehead,¹⁴ dark hair, high cheekbones, and ‘unbeautiful’ nose.¹⁵ Hitler’s physique has been described as ignoble,¹⁶ insignificant,¹⁷ with a disagreeable facial expression; to some, he looked altogether undistinguished. ‘You would never notice him in a crowd, and you would take him for the house painter he once was’;¹⁸ or, even more cutting: ‘The commonest little dog I have ever seen.’¹⁹

In contrast to the early appearance of critical comments by contemporaries about Hitler’s physical characteristics, it took some time before the ‘vox populi’ seized on Hitler’s *mouche*²⁰ and latter-day Napoleonic forelock as subjects of ridicule. By then the negative aspects of the Führer’s rule had become obvious to many, as can be seen in these jokes:

[6] The ideal German should be:

As blond as Hitler,
As tall as Goebbels,
As slim as Göring,
And as chaste as Röhm.

12 *Underground Humour in Nazi Germany 1933–1945*



12 Adolf the head-hunter

- [7] According to an old German belief the country's fortune has for centuries depended on the quality of the beards of its rulers. Thus old Emperor Barbarossa in his legendary retreat²¹ would stroke his long beard with the words: 'Long live Germany!' His more recent successor, Emperor William II, proud of his splendid moustache, would plume it and say, 'High may the glory of Germany rise!' Then came Adolf Hitler. When he had finished ruling Germany in 1945 he picked at one or two of the sparse bristles on his upper lip and said, 'Short and small!'²²
- [8] Hitler once visited his barber who tried in vain to straighten the Führer's forelock. After a while Hitler remarked, 'I know my hair is rather difficult to straighten', to which the barber replied, 'If I may suggest a remedy, my Führer? Give the German press its freedom, and you will get some hair-raising news about yourself!'
- Hitler's favourite pose when standing on a dais reviewing units of Nazis or soldiers marching past – clasp his hands just below his belt – lent credence to the varying rumours about his peculiar sex life:
- [9] Q. 'Why does Hitler always hold his hands on his lower stomach just below the belt of his uniform?'
- A. 'Because he wants to protect the last unemployed.'²³
- [10] New film programme for the week beginning 30th June 1934: 'Thus ended a great love' (Main star: Adolf Hitler).²⁴

- [11] The Führer wifeless,
The butcher meatless,
The baker doughless,
The Third Reich hopeless.²⁵

HIS PATH TO POWER

Hitler's early debut as a ranting demagogue is well described in the famous quip:²⁶

- [12] 'The man doesn't exist; he's only the noise he makes.'
- [13] What is paradoxical?
An Austrian with an American uniform who has Soviet ideas, salutes like the Italian fascists and becomes Chancellor of the German Reich.
- [14] Originality:
The Duce brings the uniform and all that Roman pose,
Marx urges, 'Let's collectivize,' while levelling downward goes,
'Ends always justify the means': the principle of Jesuits,
And Machiavelli's ruling style so well the Third Reich fits;
If thus one cannot separate cause from effect at all,
Where in the whole of Adolf's State is aught original?²⁷
- [15] At their first meeting Hitler gives Mussolini the fascist salute with the words: 'Ave Imperator!'²⁸ to which Mussolini replies, 'Ave Imitator!'
- [16] A contemporary definition of Hitler's despotism stems from a German emigrant:²⁹
'What does Hitler represent? He is the personification of the mob which has familiarized itself with Nietzsche's writings; a cheap edition of Mussolini; brutality acquired by imitation.'
- [17] In Vienna, in 1938, before the Anschluss, a German Nazi and a Viennese converse:
'Hitler is God's gift to us,' says the German. 'Oh, that Hitler,' replies the Austrian, 'we have set him on you as our revenge for Sadova!'³⁰
- [18] A few weeks later, also in Vienna, but after the Anschluss, a Viennese meets a friend and asks him:
'Tell me, do I really resemble that fellow Hitler all that much?'
'Why do you think so?' replies his friend.
'Because everybody I meet says "Heil Hitler" to me.'
- [19] At the Dutch frontier before the war, a Dutch and a German customs officer discuss the merits of their respective countries:
The German: 'We have Hitler, and we are satisfied with him.'
The Dutchman: 'And we've got your William, but we've also got plenty of pork, butter, milk and eggs, though I'm afraid that we may be getting your Hitler as well!'³¹
- [20] Hitler visits a town and is welcomed by the people. A little girl is about to present the Führer with a bunch of flowers, but in her excitement she stumbles. Hitler prevents