
The Sodomitic Reputation of Weimar Berlin

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Resumo

A Berlim da República de Weimar tornou-se a cidade europeia, por excelência, dos sonhos eróticos e dos pesadelos morais. Berlim tornou-se o símbolo tanto das coisas maravilhosas que poderiam ser alcançadas se se lutasse por elas, quanto das coisas terríveis que poderiam acontecer se não se lutasse contra elas. A proliferação e a visibilidade da vida homossexual berlinense era tanto uma promessa quanto uma ameaça. O legado de Weimar não foi tanto o moralismo vingativo do Nazismo, quanto o fervor eficaz com o qual a Berlim queer conseguiu se reestabelecer e prosperar depois da guerra, apesar de estar no hostil epicentro da Guerra Fria.

Palavras-chave: Berlim. Homossexualismo. Nazismo.

Visiting Berlin in 1919 in the aftermath of Germany's defeat in the Great War, Kurt von Stutterheim found that "all kinds of dubious resorts had sprung up like mushrooms". Censorship had been relaxed, with the result that "Notorious magazines, which no chief of police of former times would have permitted, were sold openly on the Potsdamer Platz". Having already deplored the open display of these unnamed publications on the streets, Stutterheim could not resist going into the "dubious resorts" to see if they were any less shocking: "An acquaintance took me into a dance-hall where painted men were dancing dressed in women's clothes. I was refused admission to another resort because it was only open to women, half of whom were dressed as men" (STUTTERHEIM, 1939, p. 163). (He must have looked in the door and counted, or perhaps he asked a lesbian.) The whole of "the public" appears to be behaving like him, searching out the *frisson* of the abnormal: "The German theatre had become a home for the display of overheated and perverse sexuality, for which the public bought tickets with the expectation of witnessing something abnormal" (STUTTERHEIM, 1939, p. 172). Market forces gave them what they wanted.

Berlin had become *the* European city of erotic dreams and moral nightmares. If its reputation as a modern Sodom had a basis in the reality of the lives of Berliners—offering, among other delights, male homosexual bars and restaurants along the Friedrichstrasse, lesbian cafés on the Bülowstrasse, and male prostitutes along various avenues in the Tiergarten—in the rest of Germany and beyond, reports of that reality were simplified and repeated for ulterior purposes. Berlin became the symbol both of the wonderful things that could be achieved if one fought for them and of the terrible things that might happen if one did not fight against them. The openness and proliferation of Berlin's homosexual life was both a promise and a threat.

In his 1962 novel *Down There on a Visit*, Christopher Isherwood recalls Mr Lancaster's having warned him, in 1928, about Berlin:

Christopher—in the whole of *The Thousand and One Nights*, in the most shameless rituals of the Tantras, in the carvings on the Black Pagoda, in the Japanese brothel pictures, in the vilest perversions of the Oriental mind, you couldn't find anything more nauseating than what goes on there, quite openly, every day. That city is doomed, more surely than Sodom ever was (ISHERWOOD, 1964, p. 26).

The reference to Sodom narrows things down from a generalised, polymorphous orientalism to something more precisely likely to appeal to Christopher's tastes (although Mr Lancaster apparently does not know this; nor, indeed, do the readers unless they are aware of the author's homosexuality). The warning has an instantaneous effect, if not the one which was intended. Christopher writes: "I decided that, no matter how, I would get to Berlin just as soon as ever I could and that I would stay there a long, long time" (ISHERWOOD, 1964, p. 27).

When Carl Van Vechten visited Berlin in 1929 with his second wife, Fania Marinoff, he said the city “was like Rome under Caligula” (KELLNER, 1968, p. 242). This was definitely, from Van Vechten’s viewpoint, a compliment; but others who could draw similar classical comparisons did so to warn of a dangerous decline in the city’s moral standards. After all, had not the Roman Empire been destroyed from within, by its own moral laxity?

As often as not, observers of the economic and political crisis in the Weimar Republic during the 1930s allowed their scrutiny to shift in what they regarded as a logical association from financial disaster—the great inflation—to cultural decadence, especially as evinced in changes in sexual behaviour. Liberty had been sought, and liberties had been taken. For those to whom such things were scandalous, the sexual laxness of Berlin was used to represent the whole of the Weimar Republic. Both right-wing German commentators and anti-German voices abroad indulged in similar versions of the same argument. Under the provocative title *Is Germany Finished?* (1931) Pierre Viénot observed that in Germany “sexual life, especially among the younger generation, is no longer regarded in itself from the standpoint of sin”. He identified three tendencies which were characteristic of this decline in the morality of young people: firstly, prospective husbands were no longer insisting that their wives be virgins; secondly, “Homosexuality is no longer regarded as degrading, but is considered as a natural fact: witness the agitation for the rescinding of the clause in the German penal code [Paragraph 175] which makes homosexuality a criminal offence”; and thirdly, contraception had come to be widely regarded as legitimate (VIÉNOT, 1931, p. 39). The implication of Viénot’s argument is that, unless these degenerative trends can be reversed—as economic decline had to be reversed—Germany will be finished indeed. All three of his claims are overstated: they were really only true of a small proportion of the population, mainly concentrated in the big urban centres, but in Berlin especially. The mere existence of an argument against Paragraph 175 conjures up a familiar old fear, that unrestricted sodomy destroys empires. There would be times when this dread looked more like a dream, when it came from Germanophobic observers.

It is clear that the Nazis played on the same fears when they yoked their socially disciplinarian policies to an idealised vision of traditional sexual morality, embodied in the perfect wife. In *Germany Reborn* (1934), Hermann Goering connected the “reds” who had presided over economic collapse with the question of sexual and cultural decadence. He stated the case plainly, even if with a flatulent rhetoric, in this passage on Weimar:

The princes had been driven away and the red monsters climbed into the vacant thrones, but did not on that account become rulers. Above them all the Golden Calf was enthroned and the parties continue their grotesque dance. In every walk

of life we see decadence and decay, the break-up of the Nation grows yearly more apparent, and the Reich is, from now on, a shadow, a framework held together with difficulty, already brittle in many places and without any sense of purpose. Corruption, immorality and indecency were the outward signs of the "proud" Republic. And the decline of culture begins with the loosening of morals. (GOERING, 1934, p. 38-39).

It is easy to see in such a narrative of national decline, despite its brevity, a programme for rebuilding which involves the rooting out of those similar dangers to the State, leftists and perverts. (The third force, as it were, of the enemy within would be that which bore the brunt of the Nazis' vengeful reforms: the Jews.) If manifestations of sexual immorality were the "outward signs" of a national sickness, then sending the boot-boys into the clubs and cabarets would, similarly, be a demonstration, a sign, of the resistance to decline. It would show that the Nazis meant business when they spoke of morality. The more spectacular sign would be the bonfire of books they lit when they raided Magnus Hirschfeld's institute in May 1933.

Among many approving voices in Britain, voices of those who felt Britain would have been much improved by a moral clean-up on the scale the Nazis were attempting, was the Conservative member of parliament Sir Edward Grigg. In *Britain Looks at Germany* (1938) Grigg expanded on a number of his pet obsessions, including the fecklessness of youth. He had observed and approved of Baden-Powell's achievements with the scout movement, his main reservation being that Britain had not used the scouts in the systematic way that the Nazis had. As he said in a sentence with an especially telling parenthesis, "One of the most salient points of the German system is that no section of German youth (except, indeed, an unhappy but exiguous minority of ostracized non-Aryans) is allowed to think of off-time spent in loafing" (GRIGG, 1938, p. 194). He is thinking, mainly, of boys, and of what idle hands get up to. Later, he waxes lyrical about "scouting", when what he is really talking about is the Hitler Youth:

To put some romance and some sense of purpose into every young mind is surely one of the essential goals of education. Romance is quickening sunlight for boyish minds and hearts, and none should lack a share of its radiance. Scouting has been universal in its appeal, because it is compact of romantic interest. Few boys are not kindled to a keener sense of what can be made of life by the call of the open trail and the ancient knightly code of courage, truth and service to humanity (GRIGG, 1938, p. 200).

Because he had no ambitions as a writer, Baden-Powell never wrote this badly. Besides, his version of scouting was a much jollier affair, pig-sticking its way across the British Empire, romantic, if at all, at a less demonstrative level, and without much of the humbug of ancient codes, knightly or otherwise. Indeed, it is Grigg's heavy-

handed attempt to mythologise the scouts that betrays his having moved beyond scouting as it existed in Britain to something, in his eyes, all the more rigorous, disciplined and purposeful: an enforced mass youth movement designed to eradicate the waywardness of the young and prepare them for a future—as what? Dutiful servants of the thousand-year Reich, it seems.

Anti-Nazi voices, on the other hand, instead of praising National Socialism for having sluiced out the stables of Weimar and reimposed a moral discipline on the German people, allowed the lax reputation of Weimar to linger over Germany as a whole for the sake of British and American readers, and then developed that sense by building up the myth of Nazism itself as being sexually perverse. At the centre of this myth were claims, either that Hitler surrounded himself with homosexuals—although Ernst Röhm was usually the only one they could name—or that the Führer was himself homosexual. In *Hitler as Frankenstein* (undated, but probably written in 1939), Johannes Steel has a chapter called “Men Around Hitler” in which he lists the known flaws and vices of senior Nazis. Thus: “Roehm is a notorious homosexual, and he has frequently abused his military power as a supreme master over young men in a terrible manner” (STEEL, [n.d], p. 143-144); and, a little further down the list: “[Edmund] Heines belonged to the circle around the homo-sexual Roehm” (STEEL, [n.d], p. 146) and was therefore, literally by association, homosexual himself. He does not mention that Rudolph Hess was well-known on the gay scene. When he visited the clubs he was known as ‘schwarze Maria’ (WOLFF, 1986, p. 429). Steel sums up the chapter with this closing flourish:

The moral baseness of the Hitler Movement is clearly illuminated by the type of men Hitler has collected around him. This list could be prolonged into hundreds, for one lunatic in office gives another lunatic a post; one murderer, who is a Police Chief, makes another murderer a Captain of Police; one homosexual “youth regenerator” makes another homosexual his A.D.C. (STEEL, [n.d], p. 147).

There is hardly much point in arguing, on the contrary, that lunatic, murderer and homosexual alike—if one really must lump them together—are likely to *avoid* appointing lunatics, murderers and homosexuals respectively, for fear of drawing attention to themselves. It is just as plausible that, as long as they had to hide the nature of their own personalities, they would actively discriminate against individuals of their own sort. But that is not the point. Nor is the fact that, if you wanted to present Nazism as a conspiracy, it would make a little more sense to present it as a clique of men who shared the same extreme political views. That would, at least, include most of them, whereas homosexuality does not. In addition, there are the Night of the Long Knives and the men with the pink triangles to be taken into account. Röhm’s homosexuality could be overlooked as long as he remained useful; the moment he did not, it became a reason for getting rid of him—as is made perfectly clear in this entry in Goebbels’ diary:

What Röhm wanted was, of course, right in itself but in practice it could not be carried through by a homosexual and an anarchist. Had Röhm been an upright solid personality, in all probability some hundred generals rather than some hundred SA leaders would have been shot on 30 June [1934]. (TREVOR-ROPER, 1978, p. 248).

In other words, it was ultimately his homosexuality that made him *and* his policies expendable. Nazism was, of course, fundamentally *anti*-homosexual, even if a proportion of Nazis were homosexual themselves. But the myth of collective perversion had a purpose to serve in the anti-Nazi struggle—which was rarely noticeably pro-homosexual itself—and the facts of the matter could be allowed to lie fallow. (More disturbing, perhaps, is the way the myth of Nazi homosexuality and the rumour of Hitler's homosexuality have kept resurfacing in the decades since 1945.)

A measured, if brief, examination of this question of Hitler's possible homosexuality takes place in Karl Billinger's book *Hitler Is No Fool* (undated, but apparently written in 1939). Billinger was an anti-Nazi who had been incarcerated in a concentration camp and had then gone into exile in the United States. In his chapter "Who Is Hitler?" a subsection headed "The Bachelor" discusses the rumours of homosexuality, impotence and syphilis: "Almost all of them are without foundation, because those who really know will not or can no longer tell". The most Billinger will commit himself to is that "he undoubtedly is suffering from sexual repressions". He mentions the open homosexuality of Röhm and Heines—"The orgies which they held almost publicly more than once aroused storms of protest within the Nazi Movement itself"—and the fact that Count Helldorf's affair with "the adventurer Hanussen, alias Steinschneider" did not cost the former his job as Berlin's chief of police. ("It cost only Hanussen's life.") He also reports that in 1927, when asked to dismiss various SA officers who were said to have been sexually abusing boys in the Hitler Youth, Hitler dismissed the matter, saying, "I don't give a hoot whether they — from the front or the back!" Billinger disagrees with Goebbels' claim that Röhm and Heines were shot because they were homosexual. And yet, despite these signs of indulgence towards homosexuality within Nazism—"He protected his followers as long as he believed he was sure of their faithfulness"—Billinger concludes by reiterating that "there is no known basis for the assumption that Hitler himself is homosexual—or ever has indulged in homosexuality" (BILLINGER, [n.d.], p. 29-30).

In *Germany Possessed*, H.G. Baines (1941) implicitly purveyed the rumour of Hitler's perversion, via an attribution of unmanliness. But just as interesting is the contrast he establishes with Joseph Stalin: "Stalin is a wolf: killing is natural to him. But Hitler is subtle, austere, effeminate, secluded. His make-up has probably a preponderance of feminine elements, albeit in a perverted form" (BAINES, 1941, p. 222).

Baines adds a thumbnail sketch of Hitler in his jackboots, "never unaware of the impression he is making, like a vain woman" (BAINES, 1941, p. 223). There is something here about class: the difference between the "natural" brutality of the peasant and the twisted wiles of the bourgeois ex-artist. By contrast with the later Yalta meeting's trinity of old men—Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill—Hitler and Mussolini were often represented as blinded by personal vanity. Mussolini was more frankly ridiculed as a buffoon, but his masculinity was hardly ever impugned in the ways that Hitler's was. Homosexual, impotent, monostesticular or infested with syphilis—Hitler's manifest cleverness had to be undermined by the impression of a volatile hysteric whose political perversity had origins in perversion. August Kubizek, a close friend during Hitler's youth in Vienna, famously dismissed the possibility that Hitler was homosexual, in his post-war memoir:

He could not bear the shallow superficiality of certain circles in Vienna, and I cannot remember a single occasion when he let himself go in his attitude to the other sex. At the same time, I must categorically assert that Adolf, in physical as well as sexual aspects, was absolutely normal. What was extraordinary in him was not to be found in the erotic or sexual spheres, but in quite other realms of his being (KUBIZEK, 1954, p. 169).

This is the period around which the rumours are most densely concentrated; there is an all-male hostel, where Hitler stayed, which tends to feature in them. Kubizek's book is generally persuasive, and he has usually been received as an honest witness. However, those who have credited the sexual rumours have argued that, if Kubizek, as an intimate friend, had himself been involved in that aspect of Hitler's life, he would later have covered it up. Apart from a few mavericks, later biographers have taken the line that the matter needs raising, so persistently has it been aired, even if mostly by writers with ulterior motives; but that no evidence has ever been found to support rumours which so clearly had their propagandistic uses. Even as relentlessly creative a psychological biographer as Robert Waite summarises the case in very few words: "There is insufficient evidence to warrant the conclusion that Hitler was an overt homosexual. But it seems clear that he had latent homosexual tendencies, and it is certain that he worried a great deal about them" (WAITE, 1977, p. 234).

There is an obvious contradiction in the latter sentence—how can it be so "certain" that he worried about something that it only "seems clear that he had"?—but coming from a biographer who sounds as if he would have relished drawing a more positive conclusion on the matter, this position statement is admirably restrained. As ever, though, the rumours are served in being raised at all, even if they go on to be judiciously dismissed.

For a while, the homosexuality of Ernst Röhm was a favourite topic among left-wing journalists, attracting a range of negative

responses between ridicule and moral outrage, all designed to undermine the broader Nazi claim to social discipline and moral superiority. Finally, a man called Kurt Tucholsky wrote a short essay for *Die Weltbühne* (26 April 1932) straightforwardly entitled "Röhm", in which he made a simple and rather touching plea for the homophobic propaganda to stop. "I consider these attacks against the man improper", he writes, for the well-mannered reason that "one should not seek out one's enemy in bed". It is not clear whom he means by "we" in his climactic peroration—it is vaguely possible that he is a homosexual identifying with fellow homosexuals, but more probable that he means fellow leftists, in which case he is overstating the left's commitment to homosexual law reform—but his rhetoric requires the collective first person to remind the left of the requirement for solidarity:

We oppose the disgraceful Paragraph 175 wherever we can; therefore we may not join voices with the chorus that would condemn a man because he is a homosexual. Did Röhm commit a public scandal? No. Has he abused young boys? No. Has he consciously transmitted venereal diseases? No. Such and only such can justify public criticism—everything else is his affair.

It has to be said that Tucholsky's is an isolated voice, certainly an untypical one. His argument that Röhm is, as it were, a "good" homosexual and deserving of the courtesy of a private life cannot have carried much weight in anti-Nazi circles, where the slightest hint of sexual scandal among men who had laid such a substantial claim to the moral high ground would be developed to its fullest propagandistic potential. In a sense, Tucholsky's intervention cannot be accepted as valid in the struggle against Nazism; but it is a timely and persuasively generous contribution to the argument about homosexual equality. He does, though, allow one way in which the knowledge about Röhm's homosexuality can legitimately be used against the Nazis while not being used against homosexuals: "If Goebbels screeches or Hitler thunders about the moral decay of modern times, then it should be pointed out that there are obviously homosexuals among the Nazi troops". It is a reasonable argument, but one which would lose its validity on 30 June 1934, once Röhm and his friends had been killed.

The Nazis' own mythology always represented their seizure of power as no less a moral than an economic crusade. A British sympathiser, Charles Domville-Fife, states the typical version of the matter on the first page of *This Is Germany* (1939): "To have rebuilt a nation which had fallen from the high estate of a great empire to the chaotic human, economic and geographical debris left by defeat in war, disillusionment, penury, starvation, moral degeneracy and revolution, was a great task"—a great task, such commentators usually add, requiring the heroic puissance which only a great leader like the Führer could have provided (DOMVILLE-FIFE, 1939, p. 13). The victory

over degeneracy is as important an aspect of the myth as was the defeat of rampant inflation.

The first sentence of the Prologue of Sven Hedín's *Germany and World Peace* (1937), an unmediated screed of pro-Nazi propaganda, published in London, pithily restates the moral myth: "National Socialism has saved Germany from a state of political and moral disintegration" (HEDÍN, 1937, p. vii). In his eighth chapter, Hedín enlarges on the standard claim by attempting to show the depths to which the Weimar Republic had sunk. Public life had degenerated, taking private life with it: "simultaneously with the disintegration of political life, one saw evidences in the streets and market-places, in drawing-rooms and in public bars, of immorality and the decay of family life". Berlin was a kind of open sore, bringing to the surface the sickness within the national body. Cultural Bolshevism had infected the arts: "The atmosphere of the theatre was pestilential—it was a fetid quagmire in which unhealthy sexual and pornographic plays sprang up like mushrooms in autumn". Needless to say, it was not the true German who had created the conditions for this continuous festival of immorality, but the supposed outsider: "Jewish writers and artists were largely responsible for this deplorable state of affairs, because they were the leaders of so-called Bolshevik culture". Hedín does not dwell on homosexuality in the manner of so many other commentators at this time. For him, the mention of the Jew is sufficient on its own to conjure up the wraith of moral degeneracy and sexual perversion.

The anti-Nazi voice of Charles Wolff, who had been incarcerated in a concentration camp in France, presents the same case against Weimar, in the same terms, but not in order to praise Nazism for the successful subsequent clean-up; rather, to blame the indiscipline of the Weimar Republic for the excessive discipline of the Third Reich. In *Journey Into Chaos* (undated, but published in London after 1942), Wolff says of Weimar: "A dissolute liberty ruled here as never before. Desires and impulses, which before had been hidden according to the demands of morality, had at least been moderated by it, were flaunted in broad daylight, so to speak" (WOLFF, [n.d], p. 70). As ever, the prime evidence of this dissoluteness was provided by the new visibility and organisation of homosexuals: "The homosexuals of both sexes no longer imposed any constraint on themselves. They had their clubs, their meeting-places and their own magazines" (WOLFF, [n.d], p. 71). It takes something of a leap to deduce the first sentence from the manifestations of modest collective action in the second, but it is a leap which observers on all sides, most of them strongly opposed to homosexual emancipation, were able to take without much sign of effort.

For obvious reasons, Berlin in the 1920s and 1930s attracted sexual tourists, both from the German regions and from abroad. As Christopher Isherwood observed in *Goodbye to Berlin*, certain clubs and cabarets seemed to have been developed with an eye to such tourists,

rather than as routine social facilities for the people of the city. Such places were invariably expensive to frequent, and often seemed packed with observers rather than with the clientele they purported to serve. Gay clubs would end up catering to foreign heterosexuals who were looking for a hint of the "decadence" which only Berlin—or so it was said—could provide. Isherwood shows parties of young American men egging each other on to enter such a place, *The Salomé* (ISHERWOOD, 1945, p. 190-191). Most of these observers, both German and foreign, must have gone for their own amusement. A significant number of others, however, went to be horrified, and then wrote up what they had seen, affecting the detachment of the anthropologist at the same time as they spluttered with moral self-righteousness. As well as a moral agenda, many of them came armed with a political agenda, too.

In his chapter on Cultural Bolshevism (*Kultur-Bolschewismus*) in *Germany Puts the Clock Back* (1933), Edgar Ansel Mowrer lists the titles of books he found on display in a bookshop window in the very centre of Berlin in July 1932. He stood on the pavement in front of the shop and copied them down into a notebook; they included *The Witches' Love-Kettle*, *Flagellatism and Jesuit Confessions*, *Sadism and Masochism*, *Sappho and Lesbos*, the magazine *The Third Sex* and a handy guide for all those sexual tourists, *Places of Prostitution in Berlin*. Mowrer sounds taken aback to report: "While I stood and wrote down the titles, a crowd of adolescents gathered and made remarks about 'lustful foreigners'". They seemed as used to the sight of the sexual tourist they took him for as they must have been to the shop window itself. Meanwhile, according to Mowrer, the arts had relinquished their duty to uplift the spirit and unify the culture; instead, "art had sickened, integral style given way to eclecticism, atonal music, cubism, futurism, experimental literature. After the defeat [of 1918] and revolution, nothing of the old order seemed to be left". In its place, where once there were "scruples" and "discipline", the democrats of the Weimar Republic instated liberty—or, as Mowrer calls it, "the liberty of catastrophe". Of this disaster, one of the worst signs was a changing attitude to the "sexual perversions"—by which, he seems to mean only homosexuality (and male homosexuality, at that): "After the war the laws punishing these practices were not changed, but they were ignored. An agitation was started to make perversions that did not entail the seduction or abuse of minors a purely private matter". There had been, as he says, no change in the law; the very fact of a campaign against Paragraph 175 was sufficient proof of collective moral decay (MOWRER, 1933, p. 192-194).

Edgar Ansel Mowrer's list of the titles of dirty books, the collection of which cost him so much public embarrassment, reappears in its entirety in F. Yeats-Brown's *European Jungle* (1939), where it serves the same purpose as it did in Mowrer's book by illustrating, virtually unsupported by any other hard evidence, the depth to which the

Republic had sunk before National Socialism came along. But at least Mowrer had gone to Berlin and copied down his list on a real sidewalk, taunted by real victims of Germany's moral decline; and at least he presented it as an item of empirical evidence from which to draw wider conclusions. In Yeats-Brown's book, the evidence is the same and the prejudged conclusion is the same, but the leap between them is somehow even more breathtaking. From the one seedy bookshop in Berlin and the kids outside who taunted Mowrer, Yeats-Brown derives this grand overview of national change: "Pornographic literature was displayed in the leading bookshops of the principal cities, and eagerly bought by boys and girls who thought themselves emancipated from the cramping complexes of their elders". Of course, they have to be "boys and girls" rather than young people, to emphasise the theme of the corruption of children; and that they are seeking to escape the "complexes" of their parents suggests an impertinent Freudianism, the modernistic theories of the Viennese Jew which had seduced the younger generation away from the older generation's decent ignorance of the unconscious. Yeats-Brown cannot resist another racist slur in this account of Weimar's moral failure: "There is a Slav element in the Germans, and the same dark forces as had captured Russia [Cultural Bolshevism, presumably] were working here in an underworld of failures, hysterics and sadists. All travellers to Germany at this time noted the corruption of manners and morals" (YEATS-BROWN, 1939, p. 142-143). For Slav read Jew, the infection from the east. For "failures, hysterics and sadists" read sexual perverts, conjured into being by words ("hysterics", "sadists") which had not existed before a pack of Jewish psychoanalysts and sexologists started inventing new perversions of the natural reproductive instinct.

In *Hitler's Wonderland*, Michael Fry (1934) provides another list of "pornographic" books available in Weimar Germany, these all published by Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute of Sexual Science. They include *Stories of Morals in Paris*, *The Lustful Woman*, *Picture Gallery of Erotic Practices*, and so on. Like Mowrer before him and Yeats-Brown after, Fry is not interested in the arguments of the publications he lists except to the meagre extent that their titles suggest their contents. Merely to raise certain topics at all, to name certain problems, is to promote them; and to promote them is akin to the publishing of pornography. (In a paragraph deploring a publication on abortion, Fry himself does not write the word itself. Instead he mentions "illegal operations" carried out "with the intention of facilitating 'free love'".) He mentions in passing "Richard Linsert's masterpiece" *Unzucht unter Männern* (*Male Sexual Offences*), which offered "a frank excuse of homosexuality" and "pretended to show that particularly degrading vice in a favourable light" (FRY, 1934, p. 20-21). Fry ridicules the defenders of such publications and the very idea that, in suppressing the Institute and its capacity to publish them, the Nazis were conducting a campaign against culture:

Quite naturally, if the uncensored publications issued by the Institute and other publishers belong to the realm of "culture", then Hitler should be severely condemned for retarding the progress of civilisation. On the other hand, if "culture" and pornography are synonymous—as was undoubtedly the case in [pre-Nazi] Germany—then for the sake of Christian civilisation and the moral health of coming generations, it would be much safer to abolish "culture" (FRY, 1934, p. 21).

Notice that he narrows the concept of civilisation down to "Christian civilisation", a phrase which, in the context of National Socialism, has undisguised implications of exclusion. In claiming that Hirschfeld's Institute was the "chief source of the lewd publications which flooded Germany's bookstalls", Fry has already made a point of adding that "nearly all the members of this Institute were Jews" (FRY, 1934, p. 22). For Fry, as for his ideological masters, resistance to the sexual reform movement was a racist project, since psychoanalysis and sexology were regarded as instruments in a Jewish plot to undermine the Aryan soul. The undissembling acceptance of the abolition of what others call culture, delivered with an irony that is every bit as complacent as it is clumsy, is an unexceptional attack on anything that might be stigmatised as unChristian.

Fry's next gambit is to attribute the evils of Berlin's gay scene to the same agency, by name the Institute of Sexual Science but by implication the Jews who were behind it:

With the Institute, supported by many other sources, turning out pornographic magazines and books, it was only natural that the public should be supplied with places where all this "culture" could be put into practice. The corrupt administration of the cities did not censure the Institute, so why should it forbid Pervert-Clubs, Homosexuality Leagues or "Daisy" Bars? (FRY, 1934, p. 19).

("Daisy" bars were drag bars.) The implication is that, without the Institute, there would be no homosexuals in Berlin; or perhaps, slightly more logically, without the Institute to suggest the idea and to give them the necessary confidence, homosexuals would not have begun to gather in "public" locations. Fry now takes us on a short tour of these locations, starting with a club called the Eldorado. At first, the place seems not unlike other nightclubs, although it does seem ominous that instead of dancing to the jazz that is being played, "couples slither listlessly round the floor" to it. Using all his literary powers, including the galumphing irony to which he has already subjected his readers for some time, Fry sits down at a table in the corner and allows us to watch what he points out, starting with "that rather pretty blonde girl over there"; we may ask her to dance if we wish to, but before we do he feels he should point out (in italics denoting an appropriate level of shock) that "*she happens to be a man*" (FRY, 1934, p. 20). She is one of many such creatures in Berlin, although the prettiness that Fry has dared to notice sets her apart from many of her sort:

Now that your eye is trained, you can pick out fifty of these "Daisies" at a glance—most of them are rather unattractive. That is because we are in the "Eldorado", the popular resort. For those who can afford them, there are smaller, more exclusive night-clubs, where you find no creatures with rough chins dressed in imitation Paris models. There you would see the cream of the "Daisies"—the *beau-monde* of homosexuality—the better class of male prostitutes of which Berlin, Hamburg, Stuttgart, München, Cologne, etc. are full (FRY, 1934, p. 24-25).

Although he has a "trained" eye for these exotic creatures, and is willing to pass on his training to his readers, the extent of Fry's experience as a witness to such marvels is unclear. One must be generous in supposing that he had actually exercised his eye for a five o'clock shadow in the Eldorado, since he does describe the place, even if only sketchily; he may even have visited one or two of the "more exclusive" dives which someone has told him about, although that is less likely; but he shows no sign of actually have seen those whores on the streets and in the bars of the other major German cities. By now, his "short tour" of visible vice has started to sound like hearsay. Hearsay, in the present context, means Nazi propaganda.

Our intrepid Virgil now leads us out into the street, pointing out the male "street-walkers" as we pass on to the Kurfürstendamm and Potsdamerstrasse. He adds helpfully didactic comments: "Notice how they accost the men—competing with women in the oldest profession in the world". But in this cliché he reaches the limit of his familiarity with the homosexual degeneracy which has flooded not only Berlin but "Christian civilisation" itself. For lack of any further revelations about man-loving men, he leads us instead into what he calls "a Kaffir Dance Hall" and launches into a tirade of racist invective. So the sum total of his first-hand observation of homosexuality in Germany is one drag bar and some hustlers in the street; plus, of course, one pro-homosexual book by Richard Linsert. Yet the tone of this whole passage is set at a regulation pitch of hysteria, to give the impression that more is being revealed than actually is. It is then with summary satisfaction that Fry is able to report the beneficial effects of National Socialism: "Hitler has cleaned up all the vice and filth which I have chronicled here—immoral Germany is a thing of the past" (FRY, 1934, p. 27). As the men with the pink triangles and the women with the black triangles are given hard labour or worse, Fry is happy to be able to report that "Things are different nowadays ... you can walk round the streets without being accosted by scores of male street-walkers [...] the Institute of Sexual Science is no more [...] The very air you breathe is purer" (FRY, 1934, p. 30).

In his pro-Hitlerite book *Hitler*, Wyndham Lewis (1931) self-consciously conducts "the Anglo-Saxon reader around a characteristic *Nachtlokal*" in the Berlin of 1930. The club in question is (again) the Eldorado, on the Motzstrasse. As we are led in, we find the usual atmosphere and jazz music—or, as Lewis calls them, "the true appropriate glitter and nigger-hubbub"; and yet, indeed, this very

expectedness is disappointing, since Lewis takes it for granted that the readers he is introducing to the place are looking, not for a mere nightclub from the range of their own experience, but for “the *frisson* of the exotic and the peculiar”. With that in mind, when we enter the Eldorado “all at first is depressingly normal”. The idea is to sit down with one of the club’s expensive-looking hostesses and buy her a drink; but, as Lewis points out in an almost impenetrably double-negated sentence, the unsuspecting visitor’s first impression will be that “the exotic and the peculiar” are not on offer here: “still, he will have to be a sightseer of some penetration not to think that his sightseeing eyes may not this time be destined to gloat, upon what he had promised them he should find there”. All is not lost, though: for after a couple more expensive drinks the hostesses will confidently whisper to their guests “that they are *men*”. So we have got what we came for, and it serves us right. In case we doubt their word, since the appearance of these seeming women “is too like, it is too true to nature by far”, each of our hostesses “will invite the sceptical tourist to pass his disbelieving paw beneath her chin”. (Is this the closest we shall come to a caress? It may depend on how many of those expensive drinks we can afford). The proof of manhood will be found beneath their jawbones: “a bed of harsh unshaven bristles as stiff as those of a toothbrush”. In an ironic reversal, Lewis leaves his Anglo-Saxon tourist so confused by the womanly normality of “all these *trompe l’oeil*, spurious ladies” that, even after feeling the physical proof of the ill-shaven jaw, he is still asking himself “What if after all he is being deceived?” What if these male transvestites are not men at all, but the very women they appear to be? Lewis wittily leads us to a point at which we must accept that these ladies, be they female or male, may be not only *trompe l’oeil* but also *trompe la taille*. He treats the matter pretty lightly, even to the point of admitting from the start that he was himself deceived by the Eldorado’s male prostitutes. But that is not the point of this guided tour of Berlin’s underworld. He is describing a city—a whole culture, indeed—gone bad.

At the end of the decade, Wyndham Lewis published a second book about Nazism, *The Hitler Cult* (1939), this time expressing a disillusioned view. Knowing—and hating the fact—that he will be compared with André Gide, who famously reported his disillusionment with the Soviet system in *Retour de l’URSS* (1936) after he had actually observed it at first hand, Lewis claims never to have been truly taken in by fascism (as if he had seen the underside of its jaw from afar). He underlines this claim with a homophobic gibe at Gide and others: “I could not ‘find out’ Hitler or Mussolini because the nationalist uplift in which they traffic has never appealed to me. In a word, boy scouts are not my cup of tea” (LEWIS, 1939, p. 24-25). As part of his justification for having believed that the arrival of Hitler on the scene had been beneficial for Germany, he restates the customary argument about the decadent state of Weimar Berlin:

Pre-Hitler Berlin was a sink of iniquity—the fingers of any moderately fussy patriot must have itched to spring-clean it. Its male prostitutes alone, with their india-rubber breasts and padded hips—the fairy hostesses of *Eldorado*—were a standing invitation to the Puritan to organise a “march on Berlin” (LEWIS, 1939, p. 22).

This is the “moral” argument at its crudest and most pared-down. No “patriot” could have seen such a place as the Eldorado with Lewis’ own lightheartedness when he described it in his earlier book. By implication, presumably, insofar as no “patriot” could want to frequent such a dive—both because it is for tourists and because it contains particular kinds of Germans—no “patriot” can be imagined as having a homosexual identity. The mere presence of *ersatz* women in the club is enough to foment and justify a right-wing putsch. At this point, Lewis reprints in full the description of the club from the earlier book. Somehow, that ironic account returns him to a good humour and, at a distance of a mere year, he makes the following comment on what Nazism has done to the Berlin he visited:

In 1930 the German capital was the most diverting place in Europe for the sightseer, though, as you will have gathered from the above passage, the sightseer must not be morally squeamish. To-day it is strangely shrunken, and given over to political edification. For the Berliner, life has become like a never-ending film of *The Life of Adolf Hitler* (LEWIS, 1939, p. 23).

Thus, although he felt the city needed spring-cleaning, he is sorry to find it no longer grubby. The posture is perverse, and he recognises it as such. The cleaner Berlin is an altogether duller spot than it used to be. This is one of the rather flimsy bases of Lewis’ sudden conversion to the anti-Nazi cause (LEWIS, 1939, p. 25).

One last tourist of Berlin dives, this one a conquering soldier. In his account of Germany in the interwar period, *Assize of Arms* (1945), J.H. Morgan provides the customary report of moral disintegration in the arts and on the streets, throughout a nation brought low by military defeat and economic mismanagement. Morgan’s grand narrative—it fills two volumes—of disarmament and rearmament includes in its undertones a related narrative of *moral* disarmament and rearmament, occurring at the same time, sharing the same participants, and driven by many of the same causal factors. Having described a stage review called *Harem Nights* (*Harem Nachte*) at Berlin’s Apollo Theatre, in which naked women were ravaged by what the management described as “genuine blacks from Africa” (*echte Schwarze aus Afrika*), “almost as nude” as their victims, Morgan reflects that at least the “sex appeal” of the gyrating women was “natural”. By contrast,

What repelled British officers in Berlin and elsewhere with an almost physical nausea was the open and blatant evidence, which confronted us wherever we went, of the unnatural. That “dark” offence [...] “which is not so much as to be mentioned

among Christians", flourished like a horrible fungus in the moral decay around us. It seemed to be accepted as a matter of course. "Soliciting" by men was practised with the most shameless impudence in the streets, the Tiergarten, the foyers of fashionable hotels, as though they were licensed by the police. Even in polite society one German would say of another, and his tastes, "Er ist homosexual" [sic], as one might speak of a man being fond of cricket or golf. (MORGAN, 1945, p. 195).

As in Fry's book, the invocation of the epithet *inter Cristianos non nominandum*, for the love that Christians dare not speak the name of, is unfortunate in the context of interwar Germany, if Morgan does not mean to suggest that Jews are more prone to indulging in that sort of thing. (It is certainly not a point he dwells on as Fry does; in fact, he states later on that homosexuality is no less shocking to the Jews than to the Roman Catholics.) It goes without saying that Morgan cannot have frequented such "polite society" in England as might be found in Oxford colleges or houses in Bloomsbury, where it would have been more shocking to accuse a man of liking golf than to call him a bugger.

Morgan reports that a Major Macmahon, a friend of his at the War Office, once wrote to him in Berlin, mentioning that he had heard there was "a 'society' of homo-sexualists" in Germany who published their own magazine, and asking Morgan, for reasons best known to himself, if he could get him a copy of it. Morgan was taken aback—"I thought at first that Macmahon was pulling my leg"—not by his friend's strange request, but by the very idea that such a "society" (*Verein*) should exist at all. It was not difficult to find out that the magazine was called *Freundschaft* or, indeed, to track down a copy: "I bought a copy for my correspondent at a newspaper kiosk in the Unter den Linden, where I found it openly displayed. One glance at its contents was enough". He was further surprised to discover that the magazine had been appearing regularly since before the war—and had not been suppressed. The issue he sent Macmahon contained one item which Morgan felt was especially pernicious: "The character of this horrible periodical is sufficiently indicated by the fact that it flourished a leading article claiming Jesus Christ's affection for the beloved disciple [John the Evangelist] as a proof that the founder of Christianity approved and practised sexual perversion".

On the whole, Morgan's strict homophobia is, in its way, more measured than that of many other of the shockable tourists who must have been as common on the streets of Berlin as they claimed the hustlers were. Morgan's account seems based on personally observed detail, and his footnotes show that he is joining a debate to which he has listened before opening his mouth. That said, Morgan takes a pretty standard anti-Nazi line by attributing the excesses of homosexuality to the Nazis themselves.¹ Adding "lust", "cruelty", "bestiality" and "homicidal fury" to the homosexuality he has been discussing, he says "it is a simple fact that those whose practice of these vices was the

¹ Among the texts he has been reading is a paper by R.T. Smallbones, whom he had known while in Germany. Dated 14 December 1938, it used homosexuality to account for Nazism. See Woods (1998, p. 250-251).

most notorious were the very men who formed the spearhead of the Nazi conspiracy against the State. Almost without exception, the Nazi leaders were known and notorious as practitioners of these repulsive vices". He cites with approval a German writer's claim that a "homosexual taint... seemed characteristic of them all". He claims that Hitler only ever "affected to discover" in Ernst Röhm, his "boon companion and political bed-fellow", the "vicious habits which had long been known to every one else" once he had decided to have him assassinated for reasons of political rivalry. Indeed, he cites with more approval the claim of a police commissioner that "this nasty vice was and is in Germany at one and the same time the secret of political success, if practised discretely, and the ruin of the practitioner if, in practising it, he is indiscreet" (MORGAN, 1945, p.237-238).² Quoting the commissioner's preposterous claim that in Nazi Germany it is expedient "to have homo-sexual tastes, or to affect to have them", Morgan concludes this stage of his argument with a flourish: 'so much for Hitler's claim to have cleansed Germany from vice' (MORGAN, 1945, p. 236-238).

What Morgan regards, with some distaste, as a failure on the part of the Nazi authorities can just as well be read, instead, as one of the social miracles of the war. Not all the destructive, homophobic zeal of National Socialism could wipe out the homosexual subcultures of Berlin. They survived. When the young homosexual Peter Adam explored the city's nightlife in 1949, he found plenty of interesting *lokals*. There was the Kleist Casino, which catered for men who wanted to dance with other men, and *Die Ewige Lampe* (The Eternal Lamp), which was exclusively lesbian. He especially liked Elly's Beer Bar, "a rather friendly and sleazy working men's bar" run by a formidable transvestite. American and British soldiers used to frequent this place in mufti—for it was off limits—to watch the makeshift wrestling shows staged by Elly's half-naked gang of rent boys (ADAM, 1995, p. 128). Notwithstanding all the viciously intrusive virtue of the puritans, the cheerful vices of Berlin's homosexual population, both native and transient, proved resilient. Weimar's legacy was not so much the vengeful righteousness of Nazism as the efficient fervour with which queer Berlin re-established itself and thrived after the war, even at the hostile epicentre of the Cold War.

Abstract

Weimar Berlin became the European city of erotic dreams and moral nightmares. Berlin became the symbol both of the wonderful things that could be achieved if one fought for them and of the terrible things that might happen if one did not fight against

² The reference is to Treschkow (1922).

them. *The openness and proliferation of Berlin's homosexual life was both a promise and a threat. Weimar's legacy was not so much the vengeful righteousness of Nazism as the efficient fervour with which queer Berlin re-established itself and thrived after the war, even at the hostile epicentre of the Cold War.*

Keywords: Berlin. Homosexuality. Nazism.

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