
Metapolitics Revisited

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There are now three changed editions of my *Metapolitics*, with varying subtitles. Written between 1936 and 1941, while the author was an undergraduate and graduate at Harvard and Oxford, the first edition appeared with Knopf in mid 1941 (before Pearl Harbor and written—or overwritten—in the anguished emotional context of Hitler seemingly winning). This first edition was accepted as my Harvard Ph.D. thesis in January 1942. The second edition, a Putnam Capricorn paperback, appeared in 1961 and 1965, the original text unchanged but with several key appendices (Wagner, Jahn, Alfred Rosenberg, etc.) and with a new (1961) preface (in the calmer context of Hitler's defeat).

The present third edition, prepared in 2002 and released in 2004 by Transaction Publishers, is—in effect—a new book. It leaves unchanged the 1941 original (whose mood of crisis cannot be recaptured or rewritten now), its index, and the 1961-65 appendices and preface. But it adds well over a hundred completely new pages as part 2, headed “Discoveries in German Culture.” The latter comprises essays on Albert Speer, Claus von Stauffenberg, Georg Heym, and Stefan George, culminating in a brief assessment of Hugo von Hofmannsthal. The publisher's suggestion was to supply the contexts (and contradictions?) of my thoughts ranging from 1936-41 (late teen-age, early twenties) to 2004 (at age eighty-eight)—a sixty-eight year palimpsest.

Note: This article is based on the Introduction to the Transaction Edition of Viereck's *Metapolitics* (new material copyright © 2004 by Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, New Jersey) and is here reprinted with the prior written permission of the copyright holder.

My bibliographies aim not at completeness nor up-to-dateness (anybody can copy off a library list). They aim to show the books on which (aside from my many interviews with Germans) I based my research. Not listed are the hundreds of books and articles on Wagner and on Hitler that have appeared thereafter and are thus irrelevant to my argument. The 1941 edition has its share of prophecies (e.g., of Hitler's later use specifically of gas chambers, cf. "The Rooted German," page 317). Tampering with first editions can lead, among other things, to a seeming precognition.

Too late for inclusion in my earlier editions were Cosima Wagner's diaries about her husband Richard, long suppressed by the family. The quotations that follow are all from volume II of *Cosima Wagner's Diaries, 1878-1882* (English translation published by Harcourt Brace, New York 1980; German edition, Munich 1977). Here are random examples from the American edition. In 1879 (p. 302), Wagner praises a German writer as "another true German" for calling Jews "beasts of prey," a phrase that "pleases him greatly." February 19, 1881 (p. 627): "He enlarges upon the subject of how terrible it is to have this foreign Jewish element in our midst, and how we have lost everything." February 15, 1881 (p. 622): Discussing his friendship with Count Gobineau, the French apostle of Nordic superiority, Richard "adds jokingly, 'If our civilization comes to an end, what does it matter? But if it comes to an end through the Jews, that is a disgrace.'" December 27, 1878 (p. 240): "Very animated discussion of the evils the Jews have brought on us Germans. Richard says that he personally has had some very good friends among the Jews, but their emancipation and equality . . . has been ruinous. He considers Germany finished. . . . The Germans have been exploited and ridiculed by the Jews. . . ." September 6, 1880 (p. 534): "Richard is amused by Rothschild's request for an audience with the Emperor in order to explain to him to what extent the Jews in Germany are endangered, and he says with a certain satisfaction, 'I have played some part in that.'"

Well, the nineteenth century is full of such "philosophers" of anti-Semitism in Germany (and anti-Dreyfusard France). But none talked of physical mass murder of Jews, not one, not Treitschke, not Lagarde, with the lone exception of Wagner. December 19, 1881 (p. 773): "He makes a drastic joke to the effect that all Jews should be burned at a performance of *Nathan*." To decode this, we must recall two facts: Lessing's play *Nathan Der Weise* warned

against persecution of Jews, attracting many German Jews and enraging Wagner. And Wagner was reacting with glee to the actual burning alive of over 400 Jews in 1881 in Vienna when the Ring Theater caught fire. His remark has been defended as merely a “joke.” Some joke. Nowhere else in the long range of racism has mass murder been praised (prophesied?) even as a joke.

*Nietzsche's
anti-anti-
Semitism.*

In the diaries, Wagner objected to Nietzsche's anti-anti-Semitism. This Nietzsche became the basis for Stefan George's defense of his many Jewish disciples in 1904 against proto-Nazis (cf. my George essays in part 2) and perhaps indirectly led to Stauffenberg's bomb against Hitler and Werner Best's saving of the Jews of Denmark.

Cosima certainly and Wagner (through Ludwig Geyer) possibly were of partly Jewish origin. Since racial determinism is nonsense to start with, what matters is not whether Wagner (as Nietzsche implied) was half Jewish. What matters is whether he may have *feared* he was and hence protested too much his Aryanism. Add to Wagner's fear the fact that his work was frequently called “Jewish music” by contemporaries and was promoted by many Jewish names. Here we may be getting into psychobabble. But note Wagner's complaint of April 5, 1882 (p. 639) in the diaries that “support for his music comes only from Jews and young people.” Here he had a good point. His music was supported by an overwhelming count of prominent Jews (listed by Elaine Brody in an issue of *Opera Quarterly*). He especially needed and wooed the support of the conductor Hermann Levi and the pianist Carl Tausig.

*Marx attacked
Jews on
economic,
Wagner on
racial,
grounds.*

Yet in the 1869 edition of his 1850 polemic *Judaism In Music* he added that his work was being persecuted by Jews. The Nazis never mentioned how much this Wagner essay owed to Karl Marx, who had attacked Jews as bankers and for turning creations into commodities. The difference: Marx attacked Jews on economic grounds, Wagner increasingly on racial grounds. Thus Wagner's *Heldentum and Christentum*, 1881, called all races capable of salvation through Christ with the single exception of Jews.

Could Hitler have been shown, privately, some of the unpublished Cosima diaries? Notably, the item about “burning all Jews”? Unlikely. Unprovable conjecture. Rather, his frequent visits were saturated in the whole metapolitical atmosphere of the Wagner circle. Introduced in 1923 by Alfred Rosenberg and Dietrich

Eckart, he became not only a political hero to the Wagner family but a close personal friend. He was, so to speak, Cosima's and Winifred's darling boy. With the important exception of Gottfried Wagner, the family doted on Hitler, especially the children, who called him "Uncle Wolf."

Most public lives need some kind of private life as refuge. Hitler, the resentful lone wolf, had no real personal friend, no real home, no real family. Without his Bayreuth refuge, perhaps he could not have continued functioning. Way back in 1923, Wagner's son-in-law and apostle, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, called Hitler the Messiah for whom Chamberlain, as John the Baptist, had been waiting. After the fall of the Third Reich, I received a curious letter in 1947 from Winifred (wife of Wagner's son Siegfried) exculpating herself. It was unconvincing. While director of Bayreuth, she was a fanatic Hitlerite for which she was convicted after the war by a German denazification court. Like Chamberlain, husband of Wagner's daughter Eva, she was British-born. The self-invented Hitler called Wagner "my only ancestor," meant not politically but as an artist struggling against the odds. Full circle: On May 1, 1945, the Nazi radio played Wagner music to announce Hitler's death.

In one sense, I was mistaken to call Hitler an *artiste manqué*. For several years in Vienna before 1914, his paintings and sketches did quite well, far more successful than, say, Gauguin or Van Gogh at that young age. At times, Hitler's work was commissioned for wider distribution by the Jewish art dealer Morgenstern, whom Hitler cultivated as his patron. Even so, I still stick to "manqué" in the traumatizing sense, the passionate, unachieved artistic ambitions crushed (actually thrice) by the Vienna academy.

Hitler's wound as rejected painter never healed. In the 1930s, he put enormous emphasis on the Munich exhibit of "degenerate art," that crusade against many of the most successful avant-garde painters. Throughout his life he continued buying the kind of academic paintings he did like. This is the theme of Peter Cohen's indispensable film *Die Architektur des Untergangs*. A curious trait: just when political or military danger most threatened Hitler, he took time out to buy still more paintings.

The disciplined militarist and the arty bohemian coexisted in Hitler. The mix enhanced his sadistic brutality. The mix also enhanced the air of mystery needed for his charisma. The mix ex-

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and arty
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plains something else: Corporal Hitler received a medal for military bravery, yet never was promoted to the rank of officer, this future Fuehrer (and withdrawn brooder) being found lacking in "leadership qualities."

Already then and right till his 1945 suicide, Hitler was acting out his model *Rienzi*. Once in power, Hitler had seized from the Bayreuth archive (and refused to return) the original text of *Rienzi*. He desperately clung to it as a sacred talisman, right through the final bunker days.

In interpreting Wagner, pro or con, nuance matters more than dogmatism because of his ambivalences. For example, the dwarf Alberich, in the Nibelungen cycle, lusts for gold and hence, for the Nazis, symbolizes Judaism. But, for the socialist Bernard Shaw, Alberich symbolizes capitalism. And for the Nazi philosopher Alfred Rosenberg, both: "Wagner, beside Lagarde, fought alone against the whole bourgeois capitalist world of the Alberichs, especially Jews but not only Jews." Cosima quotes Wagner as saying that he meant Alberich to be a Mongol. Whom to believe?

Many critics today see not only Alberich but Mime and (in *Parsifal*) Klingsor as Jewish caricatures. Other critics (and they make an interesting point) stress that Wagner, feeling himself an outcast, actually felt empathy for these fellow outsiders and the other supposed Jews in his operas; thus he allegedly humanized them, identified with them.

A typical contradiction: in 1881 Wagner refused to sign an anti-Semitic petition by Bernhard Foerster (whose wife, Nietzsche's sister and falsifier, lived to be honored by Hitler). Soon after, Wagner was writing his patron and disciple, King Ludwig II of Bavaria, "I consider the Jewish race the born enemy of pure humanity and all that is noble in man. There is no doubt but that we Germans especially will be destroyed by them, and I may well be the last remaining German who, as an artist, has known how to hold his ground in the face of a Judaism which is now all-powerful." So why did Wagner refuse to sign the petition? I think, but am not sure, because Foerster represented right-wing reaction and Prussianism. To the end, Wagner retained some kind of socialist idealism, and his was in part a left-wing, anti-banker anti-Semitism.

In any case, this book is about Hitler and what he derived from Wagner, not about rival interpretations. Hitler interpreted the

wound of King Amfortas in *Parsifal* as racial impurity, and was probably misinterpreting Wagner. What matters in these pages is that this shows what Wagner meant to Hitler: “We must interpret Parsifal in a totally different way. . . . The king is suffering from the incurable ailment of corrupted blood.”

Did my 1941 edition miss any major Wagner-Hitler connection? Yes, it did. More than once, Hitler said he based his concept of a Nazi Party brotherhood of saviors on the Grail society of *Parsifal*. Let me quote Hans Frank, Hitler’s lawyer, later hanged as a war criminal, on Hitler’s remark after listening to “Wagner, his master”: “Out of *Parsifal* I am building my religion—the solemnity of the Mass without theological party bickering.” Later Theodore Adorno of the Frankfurt school commented, “The glorified blood-brotherhood of *Parsifal* is the prototype of . . . Fuehrer adorers.”

Today we know so much more about Hitler as teenager in pre-war Vienna, thanks to books (not entirely reliable) like those of Jetzinger, Kubizek, and others. Hitler’s Wagner obsession began even earlier than I had realized. In 1906, age seventeen, he saw *Tristan* and was writing Wagnerian compositions. On a postcard home he wrote, “Powerful waves of tone flood the room . . . a terrible roaring frenzy of sound.” And Kubizek¹ describes the ecstatic rapture with which at age fifteen this young would-be artist responded to Wagner’s *Rienzi*. This was probably the turning point in Hitler’s life. The character of *Rienzi* gave him an identity and a goal, *Rienzi* being the heroic folk orator, messianic to the Roman masses but betrayed by the nobles, just as Hitler in 1944 felt betrayed by the nobles. Though he knew much of Wagner’s prose by heart, it is the operas that were the main source of emotion throughout Hitler’s life, a deeper emotion than with any man or woman. Already in the 1941 edition I quoted Hitler’s statement that “whoever wants to understand National Socialist Germany must know Wagner.”

Wagner’s
operas
Hitler’s main
source of
emotion.

¹ August Kubizek, *Adolf Hitler, Mein Jugendfreund* (Graz, 1953, English edition, 1954). Here, this friend of the teenage Hitler describes how the latter reacted to watching Wagner’s *Rienzi*: “My friend, . . . silent and withdrawn, strode through the streets. . . . Never before and never again have I heard Adolf Hitler speak as he did in that hour. . . . It was a state of complete ecstasy and rapture, in which he transferred the character of *Rienzi* . . . with visionary power to the plan of his own ambitions.” Some of Kubizek’s memories are faked: when encouraged to expand them in later editions. But his account of young Hitler’s intense identification with *Rienzi* in Vienna rings true and is corroborated by separate sources.

And what must you know to understand Hitler? I leave that to the biographers except to stress that you must start by linking two concepts, “l’artiste manqué” and what Nietzsche calls “ressentiment.” If Hitler had not been rejected as painter by the academy in Vienna before 1914, he might never have volunteered for the German army (deserting Austria) and might never have avenged his ego in politics. (If one may jest about the unfunny, perhaps there should be reverse Guggenheim fellowships to curtail the resentment of artistic failure.)

During his war, Hitler was quoted as saying that, after winning it and Wagnerizing the world, he would retire to a mountaintop to devote his life to his original ambition, painting. “Unsatisfactory”: for this one word the globe has paid in blood. It is the word used for his submitted sample by the Vienna art academy.

Aesthete

Right to his bunkered end, he was continually redesigning blueprints for his hometown of Linz as the future art capital of the world, a Wagnerian Valhalla. The 1941 *Metapolitics* summarizes Hitler as “an aesthete with brass knuckles” and gives a section the title “What an artist dies in me.” This section was reprinted by André Gide in his magazine *L’Arche* while in Algiers, 1944. In this spirit, rather than of economic motives, Peter Schjelahl reviewed current shows of Hitler’s paintings (*New Yorker*, August 19, 2000): “He employed artistic means—hypnotic oratory, moving spectacles, elegant design—not just to gain power but to wield it. . . . The cult of Aryanism and anti-Semitism” served “his artistic intent as much as the other way around . . . a program that remodeled the world according to a certain [aesthetic] taste.”

When *Metapolitics* expressed these same thoughts back in 1941, almost nobody believed them (except the book’s sponsor, Thomas Mann).² That evil can overlap with a tyrant’s sincere love of art should have been obvious ever since Nero’s “qualis artifex pereo.”

Monumental thinking automatically subordinates individual

² See Mann’s letters to the editor of *Common Sense* and to the publisher of the 1941 edition of *Metapolitics*, reprinted in Peter Viereck, *Metapolitics: From Wagner and the German Romantics to Hitler*, expanded edition (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2004), li-lxi; all further references to *Metapolitics* in the notes are to this edition.

lives and liberties to the collective. Grandiosity obsessed Hitler in music, in mass theater, in architecture (he planned to build “the world’s biggest building” in Berlin). Also in time span: his phrase “thousand-year Reich” and his premature victory gloat of November 8, 1941, “Never was a great empire crushed and destroyed in shorter time than Soviet Russia. . . . The destiny of Europe for the next thousand years has been decided.” Had his think-big compulsion been analyzed earlier, no appeasement. Privately, he labeled as “pygmies” the think-small appeasers he met and beguiled at the 1938 Munich pact.

Monumental thinking subordinates individual to the collective.

Here’s what’s wrong with the current books and articles about Hitler as aesthete. They mostly treat him in a vacuum, out of his nineteenth-century context. Hence as an original. Hence as a rare (though evil) genius, thereby unintentionally making him more sympathetic and more fascinating. But he was not unique, and German enthusiasm for him was not surprising. Not in the early nineteenth-century context (omitted by these writers) that *Metapolitics* stressed.

The same context is true of Slavophilism (imitated from German romantics by the Aksakov brothers) and today’s Arab *Volk* mystique. Had I but world enough and time (at 86), I’d have expanded *Metapolitics* to enable me to add to its subtitle: “From the German Romantics to Russians and Arabs.”

One major source (one among many) for Arab nationalists is the study of Germans, especially Fichte (1767-1814) and Herder (1744-1803), by founders of the Baath parties (Iraq, Syria) and of Arab anti-Westernism.

For example, Sati al-Husri, father of pan-Arabism in the 1920s, was a devoted Fichte scholar. So was Sami al-Jundi, a founder of the Baath, who likewise admired Fichte and Hitler and misunderstood Nietzsche. Note the repeated word “race” and the inclusive “we” in the following (quoted from Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism*): “We were racists, admiring Nazism, reading its books and the sources of its thoughts, particularly Nietzsche . . . Fichte, and [Houston Stewart] Chamberlain’s *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, which revolves on race.”

Earlier Arab xenophobes like Wahhab (1703-1791), founder of Saudi Wahhabism, based their hate on religion, not on race. Mohammad and the Koran criticized other religions but were not racists. Current Arab racism and lawless terror are not traditional Islam but a recent import from Germany. A minority. But isn’t history made by intense minorities?

My 1941 edition (which is included in the 2004 edition) shows the key influence of Fichte³ and of Herder,⁴ both heroes in Nazi textbooks. Both writers, Herder unintentionally, prepared Germans for some sort of national socialism, writ small. Like all romantics except Jahn, both would have been horrified by National Socialism, writ large.

Fichte coined the word “Ur-Volk” for Germans: to sum up their deep primordial destiny as opposed to the shallow French invaders. Easy for Arab Volkists, in a later century, to equate this opposition with an Arab Ur-Volk against Westernizers. It took over a century for these German ideas of educated Arab philosophers to seep down into the street masses of today.

And it took over a century for the racist and Volk fever to burn out in Germany. Not after liberal Wilsonian sermons but after defeat in two wars. Will such terrifying measures be needed against the Middle East terror? I wouldn’t bet on sweet reasonableness. As in Germany, the Arab terrorists have some legitimate grievances which should be met. But do grievances justify terror and mass murder of the innocent?

Third World anti-Westernism is Western, being partly traceable to Asian students of Marx in London and Arab students of Volk in Berlin.

Western sources of Third World anti-Westernism.

I am far from pinning horns and tail indiscriminately on “romantics.” The word has too many contradictory meanings, good and bad, as demonstrated by Arthur O. Lovejoy. The greatest lyricist of all, Keats, though romantically yearning for “sensations rather than thoughts,” had no hint of Volk. And the tolerant, peace-loving Herder (he “didn’t know it was loaded”) claimed he was preventing all future wars by transforming the globe from imperialist “states” to friendly Volks (“Voelker” in German), blooming together in brotherly love. Then why the bloody consequences now that the globe has been transformed? Because Volks are hopelessly mixed up with each other (as in Bosnia) in disputed territory.

In 1941 (America had not yet entered the war), I was called anti-German for correctly tracing Nazism to German romantic nationalism, not capitalism. Recently a bestseller went much further, tracing back genocidal anti-Semitism as a German national trait. Factually, this is simply not so. What I stressed in 1941, and con-

³ *Metapolitics*, 6, 7, 18, 33, 189-199, 261, and 294.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 51 and *passim*.

tinue to stress now, is the balanced reality of “two souls in one breast,” not just romantic nationalism but a noble tradition of tolerance, free universities, and rule of law (*Rechtstaat*), closely bound to Western values.

Incidentally most Germans are, like Hitler, Goebbels, Himmler, dark-haired. Only Scandinavians have a blondhaired majority, and these have little interest in Aryan racist nonsense.

In 2002, Germany’s Western soul is clearly in the ascendant. Let us cheer this. Perhaps with two cheers, not three. For Clio is a jealous goddess, not always easily or permanently escaped.

Germany’s two-souls split, Kultur vs. civilization, was already recognized by Gustav Engel in *Vossische Zeitung*, September 1878 (in this quotation you may now substitute “Hitler” for “Wagner”): “Wagner’s fundamental Germanness is un-German. He represents only one facet of the life of the nation—the obstinate German-at-all-costs side, the striving for depth without clarity . . . with no objective restraints. . . . We must rid ourselves of this Gothic-ness and barbarism.” Thomas Mann, 1911: “The Germans should be made to decide between Goethe and Wagner. They cannot have both.” When Nietzsche called Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger* a “lance against civilization,” he was using the latter word in this sense of Kultur vs. civilization, with Hans Sachs incarnating Kultur and the villain (according to most interpreters) a caricature of the half-Jewish critic Eduard Hanslick who rejected Wagner’s music and aesthetic. The opera’s key line is, “Dann ehret eure deutschen Meister” (then honor your German masters). This line seems to me to be tragically echoed in Celan’s line, “Der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland” (death is a master from Germany).

*Germans
could emulate
Goethe or
Wagner—
but not both.*

Did I make any major scholarly error in my earlier editions? Yes, at least one. I traced too far back the five German revolts against—inferiority complex toward—Western civilization. There are diminishing returns the farther back you trace any strand in history. About the influence on 1933 of the German anti-French struggle of the early 1800s, I’m still quite certain. But tracing the strand back to 9 AD (the defeat of Rome by the German tribal leader Hermann) is stretching it far too much. What I should have said is: anti-French Germans of the early 1800s, such as Kleist in his play “The Battle of Hermann,” did trace their movement (probably mistakenly) back to that ancient battle. What enabled Hitler to supersede his many nationalist competitors is that he

seemed best to incarnate the overcompensation for this German inferiority complex.

After 1945, the diminishing German minority who still worshipped Hitler tended to use round-about code language. For example, after 1945 Winifred Wagner, former director of the Bayreuth festivals, signed her letters to friends "88." This meant "Heil Hitler," "H" being the eighth letter of the alphabet. This was still the same Winifred who gushed in September 1921, "He [Hitler] visited the Master's grave alone and came back in a state of great emotion, saying, 'Out of Parsifal I make a religion.' " And who called Hitler "our Savior." And who soon was gushing about how tenderly Hitler was putting her children to bed while charming them with stories. And whose young son, Wieland, said he wished Uncle Wolf were his father instead of his real father, Siegfried Wagner.

*Sentimentality
goes well with
brutality.*

Wallowing in all this mawkishness, I think of what the widow of Heydrich, the SS mass murderer, said: "I married him because he played the violin so soulfully." And I think of the concentration camp boss who wept over Rilke while stoking the gas chamber. Such sentimentality, as opposed to authentic feeling, goes well with brutality.

This German mood of a vulgarized and brutalized version, by 1930, of the highly gifted (and originally gentle) romantic movement of the 1800s was best predicted and summarized not by hundreds of fat academic tomes but by a twelve-line poem of 1931. It was written by a forgotten cabaret poet of light verse, Werner Finck. I can't find him in a library and saw the poem by chance in the 1930s. So I quote from (fallible) memory and give my rough translation:

DIE NEUE HERZLICHKEIT

Wir stehn vor einer neuen Periode.
Die Sachlichkeit verliert an Sympathie.
Die kalte Schnauze geht schon aus der Mode.
Zurueck zur Seele! Herz is *dernier cri*.

Der Schmerz darf einen wieder uebermannen.
Am Juengling sucht die Jungfrau wieder Halt.
Das Unterleibchen laesst sich nach and nach entspannen.
Und nur des Krieger's Faust bleibt noch gebalt.

Und da wir grade von den Kriegern reden,
Die Reichswehr macht uns wieder neue Lust.
Man gibt es auf sie zu befehlen.
Es wird wie einst im Mai. Und dann wie im August.

THE RETURN TO THE HEART, 1931

We're at the threshold of a new era.
Hard-boiled realism is losing sympathy.
The cold snout is becoming obsolete.
Back to soul! Heart is *dernier cri*.

We can allow heartache to overwhelm us.
Girls need support from males as catalyst.
The belly, bit by bit, gets less uptight.
And nothing's clenched now but the warrior's fist.

And as we happen to be mentioning soldiers,
The Reichswehr's our delight again.
We've given up our feuding with it.
We'll be as once in May. And August then.

After eleven and a half lines of euphoria, the poem's prophetic fury comes in the one last word, "August," referring to the start of World War I. "Es wird wie einst im Mai" is from a popular sentimental poem of the nineteenth century.

Debate clarifies. So my publisher included, in Appendix A, the strong 1942 rebuttal to my thesis about Wagner-Hitler and romantic nationalism by the very distinguished scholar Jacques Barzun. Mr. Barzun had recently published a favorable book, *Marx, Darwin, Wagner*, treating Wagner as an 1848 liberal. My own counter-rebuttal follows Mr. Barzun's review. Both sides appeared in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, January, 1942. Mr. Barzun and I also clashed head-on over his seeing Hitler as just another nationalist like Winston Churchill.⁵ As a young upstart publishing his first book, I was intimidated at being put down by a Big Name. Let the reader compare arguments and judge for himself.

As the Barzun review shows, my Wagner-Hitler research was greeted with general skepticism in 1941. Also by economic deter-

⁵ Ibid., 485-493.

minists, who saw only a capitalist plot, a kind of Protocols of the Elders of Wall Street.

But today commentary on the Wagner link has gone too far in the opposite direction. Countless exaggerated articles on Wagner-Hitler. Today what is overlooked is the crucial differences between the two. One book (by the rebel great-grandson Gottfried Wagner) even declares that there is not a single line in *Mein Kampf* that doesn't derive from Wagner. *Mein Kampf* has major sources unconnected with Wagner, such as the lost war, German humiliation by Versailles, and the Free Corps of 1919-1920. In turn, the complicated Wagner (again, we need nuance) had not only major proto-Nazi strains but was influenced by totally un-Nazi strains, such as pacifism, Christianity, Feuerbach, Bakunin, Buddhism, Schopenhauer (the stress on doom, on the twilight of the gods), and a fanatic vegetarianism and anti-vivisection. The last two were shared by Hitler but not by the Party.

Waldheim

A bizarre coincidence. My 1941 edition had explained (footnote, p. 4) that I took my title "metapolitics" from a letter that the anti-Semite and Wagnerian author Constantin Frantz wrote in June 1878, "Open Letter to Richard Wagner." There Frantz coined the word to foretell their shared dream of a future racist and Fuehrer-led *Volk*-state. In her diaries Cosima quotes Wagner, September 8, 1880, as saying, "There are only two people who seriously discuss serious questions—Constantin Frantz and I." In 1971, imagine my surprise at reading that Kurt Waldheim had been appointed secretary general of the UN. Later he was elected president of Austria, The surprising coincidence was that, during the war, Waldheim had written his Ph.D. thesis on Frantz, glorifying him as prophet of Nazism.

Odd behavior for an antifascist organization like the UN. Waldheim stated, at the time he was appointed, that he had little connection with Nazism, having been released early from the Reichswehr to write this Ph.D. thesis in Vienna. We now know that Waldheim downright lied about the early release. Instead, he had been an active officer in two areas of maximum Nazi atrocities, Salonika and Yugoslavia. In Salonika, he served during the mass deportation of Greek Jews to death camps.

Through their communist sources, the Soviets must have

known of Waldheim's role in Yugoslavia. So their support of him to head the UN would probably have been in order to blackmail him into his pro-Soviet policies. In any case, my 1941 title ended with a strange detective story in the 1970s and 1980s.

Economic Determinism

Capitalism has enough wrongs; no need to invent imaginary ones. In the early years of the Nazi dictatorship, great applause greeted the book by a French communist explaining Hitler as merely the bought lackey of Fritz Thyssen, the millionaire German industrialist. The book stated quite correctly that Thyssen had helped finance Hitler before 1933. Why did the applause and sales of this sensational book suddenly cease, like a dropped stone? Because Hitler expropriated Thyssen's steel empire and handed it to Goering to run. Thyssen (right-wing and no Jew) ended as a refugee in Paris, lamenting that he had been tricked.

Of course, German capitalists originally financed Hitler, as an imagined bulwark against communists (in 1945, Russia landed in Berlin). But the essence of Hitler's skill, less intelligence than peasant shrewdness, was to pretend to be all things to all men. He was trusted not only by big business but by millions of socialist workers. The party's official name was the National Socialist German Workers Party. And there was indeed a semi-socialist wing to the party (the Strasser brothers, Roehm and his SA group), which Hitler used to get votes and then literally killed. Neville Chamberlain trusted Hitler's promises ("I bring you peace in our time"). So did Hugenberg's Nationalist Party and the Catholic Center Party, both of which, in turn for promised immunity, gave Hitler the votes badly needed in parliament for the Enabling Act, legally making him dictator. Soon after, he abolished both parties. In Rome in 1944, as an American soldier in Psychological Warfare, I met Monsignor Kaas, who had authorized this Centrist vote and was now anti-Nazi and pro-American. I asked him why he had made the Enabling Act possible. He clasped his hands and murmured "*Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.*"

Hitler not a capitalist.

The only man Stalin, otherwise so paranoid, trusted was Hitler. Hence Stalin's refusal to believe his own spies, who warned him ahead of Hitler's attack of June 1941. For the first days, Stalin refused to defend Russia against the invaders, believing it was somehow a British-plotted provocation to destroy his comradeship

with Hitler, with whom he had divided Poland. Only recently Stalin had sent Hitler, via Ribbentrop, the reassuring message that Stalin, too, was gradually purging the government of Jews. And through Molotov in Berlin, Stalin had promised Hitler to join the Rome-Berlin axis against the West, in return for territorial concessions in the Balkans.

A second form of economic determinism about Hitler is still being taught in American classrooms: that he triumphed because of the American depression of 1929 hitting Germany in 1930. This sounds plausible at first glance; 1930 was the year that the Nazi party, having won only twelve seats in the 1928 election, suddenly leaped to 107 seats, becoming the most dynamic party in Germany. Such a vast sudden electoral jump is unprecedented in history and sounds incredible.

And it is incredible. There really wasn't such a jump; Nazism already had been wildly popular among high school (*Gymnasium*) students. All that happened is that in 1930 these kids were now old enough to vote. Despite the sociological jargon about the Nazis being mainly "petty bourgeois," they were mainly a youth movement, cutting across all class lines. As for the depression, it did indeed hit Germany in 1930 but only really badly after the 1930 elections. And then benefited the 1932 communist vote almost as much as the Nazi vote.

*German
inferiority
complex
exploited.*

In America and England at the time, the usual youth revolt was leftist, anti-authority, anti-fascist. Why in Germany was the youth revolt pro-authoritarian? Because of the stress on the absent father. Instead of the father being an ever-present tyrant, he (unlike in the west) was thought of as absent on the heroic battlefield, a martyred patriot, not a domestic tyrant. Germany was ripe for paternalist dictatorship, not necessarily of the Nazi kind. Hitler had several popular nationalist rivals. He prevailed over them because he best could overcompensate for the German inferiority complex, a complex going back to French cultural domination since the eighteenth century.

There was a second false analysis made by many Marxists in 1933. It went like this: The communists were wise to enable Hitler to take power by their mainly attacking the Social Democrats as really "Social Fascists" and by refusing to join them in a united front against Hitler. This tactic had been ordered by Stalin (as detailed

in Ruth Fischer's book *Stalin and the German Communist Party*). As late as 1932, communists were wrecking Social Democrat offices. The same Ruth Fischer, back then a Jewish communist, was warning the workers against what she called "Jewish capitalism." Later Bertolt Brecht falsely claimed that Jewish bankers were left in peace by Hitler. For economic reasons (so this communist prediction continued) the capitalist puppet Hitler could not last for more than two years. Thereupon the communists would inherit power and establish a Soviet paradise, where traitors like the Trotskyites would be dealt with fittingly. Hitler was the gateway to communism.

Two years passed; no Nazi collapse. It took a long terrible war to bring the Russians (for a while) to Berlin in 1945, a long-run result of the Germans having sent Lenin to Russia from Swiss exile in 1917.

The most highbrow and harmful versions of the Thyssen-owns-Hitler genre, blinding the west to nazism as a unique new nightmare, were by the sophisticated and brilliant neo-Marxists of the Frankfurt school. For example, Max Horkheimer. Before 1933, he analyzed Nazism as merely a rational utilitarian (though obnoxious) means for capitalists to save their profits, part of the same "ism" as what he scorned as liberalism. In liberalism he saw the roots of Nazism. Both were capitalists together, only less hypocritical and less masked in the case of Nazism. Hence he minimized the importance of Hitler's anti-Semitism (which foretold the Holocaust in my interpretation in chapter 25). After all, anti-Semitism was not profitable. This misses the point of Nazi metapolitics: that it used up its transports for its death camps even when other use of transport would have been of greater economic and military use, just as working the persecuted minorities would have been more profitable than murdering them. Domination of Eastern Europe today by trade gives German capitalists more power and money than did Nazi invasion.

I wrote my book because I found most Americans blind to Hitlerism as a new religion, an evil Wagnerian dream. Not an economic utilitarianism that could be appeased, bought off. Economic determinism explains not merely why my metapolitical approach fell mostly on deaf ears (except for Mann) but, more important, why the Nazi menace, Nazi irrationality, Nazi genocide were underestimated until too late.

Contemporary Dilemma

“Steel
romanticism.”

The most important difference between Hitler and Wagner is that the latter preceded modern technology while Hitler used it to the hilt. No modern nationalism was as technologized as Germany's, not only the Nazis but anti-Nazi nationalists like Ernst Jünger, Oswald Spengler, and the rest. This is why my 1941 edition put special stress on the phrase and concept “steel romanticism.” This fusion was not yet recognized by American historians, causing America's original underestimation of the German danger. Romantic metapolitics was not superseded but strengthened by this technocracy, for which I coined the word metatech. Far from being an oxymoron, this hybrid was as dangerous as mixing uranium and plutonium. The mix produced both Hitler's Volkswagen and Hitler's gas chambers, achieving respectively, through machinery, both the *Volk* goal and the race goal of Wagner. The slogan “steel romanticism” is used by both Rosenberg and Goebbels. Goebbels, 1939: “National Socialism has understood how to take the soulless framework of technology and fill it with the rhythm and hot impulses of our time.”

Metatech
today's great
danger.

The deadly ideology called metapolitics was defeated in World War II, even for Germans. Enshrined technology, metatech, survives, thrives, evolves. For it has been purged of the Nazi atrocities and German provincialism that had discredited it. Hence the truly immense gain in Western Europe of no more murder camps, no more torture chambers. Is this enough? Certainly it is a stupendous improvement to be acknowledged gratefully, never trivialized, or taken for granted. But not quite enough.

Technology first frees us and later we need to be freed from it. Its enemy is the same individualism that opposed Nazi and communist collectivism. Though in a different and lesser way, metatech—the overadjustment of the private life, the robotization of the individual—is now a new threat to the greatness of our American civilization.⁶

The year 1984 came—and went. As menaces go, Huxley's *Brave New World* has outlived Orwell's brilliant *1984*. *Volk* romanticism died at Stalingrad, and Stalinism died during de-Stalinization. The jihad terrorists, though strong at bombing, are weak and anachro-

⁶ The dangers of metatech are discussed in my new book entitled *Unadjusted Man in the Age of Overadjustment: Where History and Literature Intersect* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2004).

nistic as an idea. Hence they can be, and will be, physically defeated.

But metatech, being an idea, cannot be defeated by physical force. To reduce it today (not abolish it, no Luddites), a return is needed to an ornery individual integrity. And a return (no contradiction) to ethical and spiritual values, living ones, not hypocritical ones, conserving not conforming. All civilizations are vulnerable, a brief pirouette on melting ice. And yet, and yet (to sum it up in a two-liner):

“Are all things relative to class, race, fad?”

No, some are just plain good or bad.

A sense of proportion and sense of humor exclude from “spiritual” any right-wing lobby of politicized misuse of religion. Their golden rule has become the gilded rule. The point is for our opinion makers to embody values, not soapbox them; to live values that cannot always be reduced to sound-bites.

No solution (in the intellectual snob fashion, home and abroad) in lofty-browed condescension against committing consumer ads or Hollywood kitsch or the rouged clichés of TV. These don’t merely trick forth false needs and false thoughts; they give the public what it already wants. Now what?

Yes, what the public wants. There is something awry when 230 million Americans, with the highest living standard in history, create less great drama, lyrics, or paintings than some 100,000 Athenians (or Florentines, or Elizabethans). (Along, admittedly, with slavery, plagues, all sorts of misery and injustice.) Can it be because the 230 million Americans are (with exceptions) mostly masses while the 100,000 were (with exceptions) mostly individuals?

Most modern readers are not even bothered by the difference between skillful literary technique, mass produced, and the living product of individual heart’s anguish. In a free democracy, the needed aristocracy is that of creative loneliness, the artistically creative scars of the inner imagination against the outer mechanization—the fight for the private life.

So much pious intoning about “values” rings hollow. The real distinction is between stereotype and archetype values. British freedom, rooted in the ages, survived where the Weimar Republic, lacking deep roots in history, succumbed and where the French

Mechanical blueprints no substitute for time-tested institutions.

had endless new revolutions and constitutions. The contrast between institutions grown from ancient time-tested archetypes and arbitrary mechanical blueprints was summed up by a British librarian on being asked for the French constitution: "Sorry, sir, but we don't stock periodicals."

The sudden uprooting of archetypes was the trauma caused by the speed of the industrial revolution. There should have been not only political evolution but industrial evolution. Today the crude Babbitt of the right and the left-wing Babbitt of radical chic⁷ (the open conformity and the conformity of professional nonconformity) are both rooted in nothing deeper than the thin topsoil of current with-it stereotypes, But this is a discussion for another of my Transaction books, *Unadjusted Man in the Age of Overadjustment*.⁸

Psychological Warfare, 1943-45

What was my job in the American army overseas during World War II? I served with the PWB (our Psychological Warfare Branch) in Africa and Italy, mainly editing and analyzing foreign radio news, especially from Germany but also Russia and France. My reports were then printed as newsletters for the OSS (Office of Strategic Services), OWI (Office of War Information), U.S. Intelligence, and our embassies. By reading the lines and between the lines of German domestic broadcasts, I could evaluate morale, food shortages, their war propaganda, etc., and could make predictions. Here my years of research for *Metapolitics* came in handy.

More objectively, I will let excerpts from my superiors summarize my chores.

William R. Tyler, Chief, PWB, Western Mediterranean, Allied Force Headquarters, July 12, 1944: "Sgt. Peter Viereck has been editing and writing the Summary of Enemy Propaganda Trends for Radio Monitoring Division of PWB, AFHQ. His exceptional knowledge of enemy psychology and his experience in the propaganda methods of the enemy, have made his contribution particularly valuable. It is my opinion that he is ably discharging his

⁷ In my 1952 book *Shame and Glory of the Intellectuals* (Beacon, reprinted by Greenwood) the phrase "radical chic" originated. The book analyzes this concept, the ancestor of what today is called "political correctness." The term "Babbitt" as used here is based on Sinclair Lewis's fictional character George Babbitt.

⁸ Op. cit.

present duties and that his work is of real value to our organization.”

H. Stuart Hughes, Major AUS, Chief Research and Analysis Branch, OSS, July 15, 1944: “I regard him [Sgt. Peter Viereck] as one of the most talented and imaginative men of my acquaintance, whose knowledge of the historical background of the present war is most unusual. His literary skill and understanding of the National Socialist Movement make him an extraordinarily valuable man for any sort of propaganda work. I am entirely familiar with T/L [Sgt.] Viereck’s social and political ideals. These are characterized by unwavering loyalty to the United States and to democratic ideals. As a member of the Office of Strategic Services, I have read and used his roundup of enemy propaganda for PWB. This is a most valuable document, which analyses in concise and penetrating fashion the current themes of German broadcasts.”

E. Y. Hartshorne, Ph.D., Chief, German Intelligence Section, Allied Forces In Italy, July 20, 1944: “For two months late in 1943 I was fortunate in having him as a collaborator in the German Intelligence Section in Algiers. I have always felt that the type of work he was doing merited higher status than T/4 [Sgt]. His present work as chief editor of the daily round up of Axis Propaganda Trends for PWB, AFHQ, merits particular recognition.”

These letters in full, plus related documents and samples of my newsletters about wartime Germany, will be available to the public, though once marked “restricted,” as I plan to donate them to a university archive, along with personal letters about Germany from Thomas Mann and his family.

Though working with colonels at officer-level tasks, it was impossible for me to be publicly made an officer instead of sergeant, as explained by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Life in the 20th Century* (Boston, 2000, pp. 239, 284, 285): “With his expertise on Nazism, his unassailable anti-Nazi credentials, Peter was eminently qualified for a job in Office of Strategic Services,” or as an officer but was prevented, as a matter of public relations, by having a notoriously pro-Nazi father. “Peter continued his struggle to get into the war, . . . served in N. Africa and Italy and won two battle stars. . . . In 1941 Peter published *Metapolitics*, an important and original work tracing the historical roots of Nazi racism and messianism to the excesses of German romanticism, a view rediscovered to much *éclat* in the Nineties. Thomas Mann, though a fan

of Wagner, approved Peter's account and praised him for going back to 'the sources of German nationalism, which is the most dangerous in existence, because it is mechanized mysticism.'"

Despite some off-limits exclusions, I was lucky to have work so fascinating. And there were hilarious concomitants. For example, once a general, doing a check up on security, burst into our PWB office, where I was completing my daily propaganda analysis. "How dare a Sgt. be allowed to read such restricted material?" bellowed the general. The colonel in charge of our office stuttered back, "He—well, er, um—wrote it."

At PWB we had the illusion of a personal duel to the death with Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels. As a historian, my two most interesting experiences were decoding his weekly radio speeches, which influenced millions of Germans, and hearing how differently French leaders responded to America's landing in Normandy.

Why did Goebbels completely reverse the party line after the German defeat at Stalingrad? He always lied. But before then, his lies exaggerated German triumphs and assumed "final victory" ("Endsieg"). After Stalingrad, he lied in exaggerating German defeats. He declared Stalingrad a day of national mourning. The victory lies had been good for morale because most Germans then still believed in their Fuehrer. Later, the defeatist lies served to scare Germans to fight on, even without belief in Hitler, by horror stories of what defeat would mean to them. The men would be lined up in castration stations, the women raped by France's African troops. There actually was a crank book in English urging mass castration. Totally ignored in the West. Used effectively by the Nazis. Unlike World War I, the Germans did fight on to the end in World War II, even after disillusionment with their Nazi dreams.

*Goebbels high
in I.Q., zero
in ethics.*

Goebbels was high in I.Q., zero in ethics. He was the best-read and educated of the Nazi leaders. Hitler, too, read more widely than is realized, not only Wagner but, for example Trotsky (to learn how to overthrow a democratic government) and LeBon (to learn how to manipulate crowds). Both Hitler and Goebbels were undersized, dark-haired, un-Nordic looking. Tiny, crippled Goebbels had not even served in the army (clubfoot) and had a very swarthy complexion. What else could he do, in a Nazi regime, but be 200 percent pro-soldier, pro-militarism, pro-"Aryan." When defeat came, two top Nazi leaders, Goering and Himmler,

tried to bargain with the West. The genocidal Himmler, besides offering us "Hitler's head," made a flabbergasting suggestion: "Time to bury the hatchet between Germans and Jews." (Both criminals committed suicide after guile failed. Goering after Nuremberg.) In contrast, Goebbels went to the Berlin bunker to die with his leader. There Goebbels killed not only himself but his five innocent children, saying they were better dead than begging at an American soup kitchen. Despite Speer's claim to be Hitler's best friend, Goebbels was the person closest to Hitler, the two arty resenters. Intriguing but quite unconfirmed is the report that, at the last, Goebbels offered Stalin his services as an anti-American propagandist.

*Goebbels and
Hitler arty
resenters.*

How many neo-Nazis are aware that Hitler, before killing himself, repudiated the Germany he had led into war? He said the Russians had proved the tougher people. Implication: Germans deserved to lose by the law of survival of the fittest. Germans had replaced Jews as the Chosen People. Now Russians replaced Germans as Chosen. Stalin and Hitler had always admired each other during their alliance of 1939-41. (Stalin had sent a message to Hitler saying Stalin, too, would purge his Jews.) Now both dictators are linked in history forever as historians explore the methods of totalitarianism. Wagner's twilight of the Nordic gods (*Goetterdaemmerung*) fulfilled itself in Hitler's bunker.

Herr Doktor Goebbels earned his Ph.D. at Heidelberg University, where he attended the lectures by Stefan George's Jewish disciple Friedrich Gundolf. A Heidelberg friend, Helmut Meyer, told me that Gundolf said of his pupil Goebbels, "This young man will become either a great liar or a great criminal." Both, of course.

In the 1920s, Goebbels published *Michael*, a wildly ambitious and totally unsuccessful novel (another *artiste manqué*). The key scene tells you more about the Goebbels psyche than you want to know. The hero, with whom the author identifies, stands with his healthy strong legs on his Slavic foe, crushing his skull underfoot while shouting a berserk victory cry. Not since Byron has a club-foot led to such overcompensation. The novel's heroine is named Hertha (meaning earth mother) and is modeled on a Jewish woman to whom young Goebbels was attached.

The final 1945 bunker talks between Hitler and Goebbels are illuminating. Both detested Franco (puppets don't stay puppets) for ungratefully refusing to enter the war on their side. Hitler said

he'd rather have a tooth pulled than listen to Franco's excuses. Hitler and Goebbels agreed that, if they had to do it over again, Germany should have sided with "the workers" in the Spanish Civil War, not with the big Catholic landowners. Since Stalin kidnapped the Spanish worker side (read Orwell), a Stalinist Spain would have sided with Nazi Germany during their alliance of 1939-41.

A Stalinist Spain—by opening up the western Mediterranean, the Atlantic, and Gibraltar—would very likely have enabled Germany to win World War II. Brutal Franco Spain, more than occupied France, became, though precarious, an escape route to the West for Jews fleeing Hitler.

My second PWB experience as historian: during the suspense of our Normandy landing in 1944, I was in Italy with the PWB, listening to our radio recording of three speeches to the people of France: General Pétain, the Vichy head of state; De Gaulle, leader of the Free French resistance; and Laval, the Nazi puppet and collaborator. Pétain said this was not France's war. Frenchmen should stand aside. De Gaulle urged an anti-Nazi uprising. Laval urged the French to help the Germans throw the Anglo-Saxons into the sea.

After the liberation of France, Laval fled to Nazi Germany and was quartered in the house of my acquaintance Hans Christoph von Stauffenberg, cousin of the heroic Claus. In April 1965, visiting me in South Hadley, Massachusetts, Hans Christoph repeated to me his conversations with Laval. Laval kept insisting that he and de Gaulle really had the identical motive: to make sure France was on the winning side, thereby escaping the fate of Poland. The sole difference between them, said Laval, was that de Gaulle guessed the Allies would win and Laval bet on the Germans—and guessed wrong. Laval was so total an opportunist that he didn't see any other difference (moral or patriotic) between his choice and de Gaulle's. Typical opportunism: the same Laval had organized the French-Soviet pact against Germany shortly before Germany won the 1940 war.

When Germany surrendered, Laval fled to Franco's Spain, whence he was extradited to France. Sentenced to death for treason. Laval swallowed concealed poison. The authorities used a stomach pump to remove much of the poison and dragged him, writhing and half dead, to the firing squad. Thereafter the mass

lies began, the Germans denying knowledge of the Holocaust, the French denying how many had supported Pétain. Clio was re-invented.

Mutual misconceptions: opposite lessons had been learnt from World War I. The West concluded that Germans had been too brutal (notably in Belgium). Most Germans, including non-Nazis, concluded that they had not been ruthless enough. All atrocity accusations, some false, some true, were dismissed by almost all Germans as propaganda myths. If Germans had not been ruthless enough in the past, then Nazi methods became more acceptable after 1933.

*Contradictory
lessons from
World War I.*

Similar confusion about appeasement. It's a superb policy when dealing with the appeasable. Hitler and Stalin happened to be unappeasable. The treaty of Versailles had never been fully enforced. Most Westerners, not Churchill, assumed that the Munich pact letting down the Czechoslovak democracy would satisfy Germany. For most Germans, including anti-Nazis, this was not enough. Alsace Lorraine, Danzig, and the Polish corridor remained to be reclaimed. No meeting of minds.

Time to drop the myth of the Weimar republic as mainly a paradise of fancy films, anti-war novels like Remarque's, and sex for British poets. Underneath was the secret illegal re-arming for revenge against Versailles, giving military training through the disguise of sports clubs, and building planes on Soviet soil. This took place prior to Hitler and after the 1922 Rapallo treaty between Weimar and the Soviet Union. After 1933, Weimar's ex-chancellor Heinrich Brüning fled from Hitler to a teaching post at Harvard. When Hitler first paraded a fleet of warplanes he claimed to have built to spite Versailles, Brüning exclaimed indignantly—yes, indignantly—to a reliable professor friend of mine that Hitler deserved no credit for these planes; they had been secretly built under Weimar.

A defeated nation may resort for stability to an ancient, semi-senile, prestige-exuding general, hero of a previous war. Pétain in 1940 stood for accepting occupation by the German enemies, accepting defeat. Hindenburg, German president 1925-1934, stood for resisting the Allies who had defeated his country and in 1933 appointed Hitler as chancellor. Better for mankind if a defeated France had had a Hindenburg and a defeated Germany had had a Pétain.

The bravest and most perceptive of my PWB colleagues was Sergeant Klaus Mann. He constantly risked his life, under fire on the front lines, to interview new German prisoners and unmask concealed Nazi leaders. His recent German biographer mentions none of this but mainly emphasizes his drug addictions, his depressions, and his homosexuality. So I herewith choose to place on record his courage, his decency, and his valuable understanding of the enemy. Once in Rome in 1944 he lamented that reviews of his books always began by calling him son of Thomas Mann. Jokingly I replied, "In some far future, when you die, the obits will begin with "the son of Thomas Mann etc." He laughed what's called "heartily."

Soon after the war, I picked up a newspaper. An obit headline announced, "SON OF THOMAS MANN COMMITS SUICIDE."

Berenson, Santayana

My most fascinating visits and talks in 1944-45 were with the American philosopher George Santayana, retired in a Catholic convent in Rome, and Bernard Berenson ("BB") in his Settignano villa near Florence.

Almost no mail service existed for civilians during 1944-45. Sometimes I had to commute between the Florence and Rome PWB. So I was also the messenger between these two octogenarians, long-time friends since Harvard days, each now sending greetings to the other via me. BB invited me to stay at his villa when I needed vacations from barracks.

Both "sages" were graceful and perceptive talkers. Only a few of their best remarks can be found in their published letters to me (cf. *Letters of George Santayana*, New York, 1955, and *Selected Letters of Bernard Berenson*, Boston, 1964). Two things stick especially in my mind: BB telling me "what it means to be a Jew" and Santayana, an aesthetic Catholic, saying, "There is no God, and Mary is his mother." What struck me was his harmonizing use of the word "and," not "but." Santayana liked to tease with light banter. For example, saying he regretted not being eligible to join the Free Masons. Falling into the trap I asked why. "For two reasons. First, because I'm a Catholic. Second, because I'm an atheist."

A much later version of BB's "definition of Jew," echoing his

talk to me, appears on page 144 of his diaries *Sunset and Twilight* (New York, 1963), starting with: "Peter Viereck asked who and what was a Jew. At last I think I have the answer." The passage is too long to quote here but is definitely worth reading for its Chestertonian originality. A. K. McComb, the editor and footnoter of BB's *Selected Letters*, quotes his 1946 letter to me, starting with, "You dearest of all wild men"; McComb's footnote to this says, "BB became very fond of him and his Russian wife. BB jokingly called him 'der wilde Mann.'" Later BB became my son's godfather.

Although Santayana wrote of my poems, "It is what you were born to do, and you will be great at it" (*Letters of Santayana*, 238-39), he loathed my *Metapolitics*. I asked him why, as his own philosophy was clearly at odds with Hitler. He replied, "Of course, you are right to explain and refute the absurd ideology and actions of Hitler. But you fail to do justice to what counts humanly more: the Nazi emotion, namely one's wonderful feeling of watching thousands of sturdy young lads marching." This phrase again sticks in my memory because of a single word, "one's" instead of the less cautious word "my." Nursed by nuns, he yet never referred to females. He was annoyed when I once brought along a Santayana fan, Marjorie Ferguson, a most intelligent "intelligence officer."

"Wonderful feeling" of watching thousands marching.

The most bizarre character I met in Rome was the colorful journalist Longernesini, who applied for a job with the PWB as an American propagandist. Till then, he had been Mussolini's sycophant, inventing the phrase "*Il Duce a sempre ragione*" (the Duce is always right). Mussolini was as delighted as a child with this new toy, posting the slogan everywhere and rewarding his flatterer with cash. Naturally I argued forcibly against employing this turncoat. But I could not help being amused, though not charmed, by the picaresque insolence of so shameless a switch.

BB's companion, the kind Nicky Mariano, sort of mothered my occasional loneliness. Sharing the villa was her sister's husband, von Anrep. His anecdotes about his friend Hugo von Hofmannsthal (whom I was then translating) include the latter's private comment on Rilke: "*diese kitschige Mystik*" (this banal mysticism).

Though both were self-exiled aesthetes from Harvard to classical Italy, Santayana impressed with his witty cruelty, BB with his

generous kindness. Example of the latter: in 1945 four American generals, prowling for “celebrities,” came for lunch chez BB on a day when I was there too. Seeing a sergeant in his twenties, one tourist general, with condescending good will, asked me what kind of manual chores was I hired for at the villa? I replied, “Oh, cleaning kitchens and latrines, sir.” Overhearing this exchange, BB spent the rest of the half hour ignoring the flock of generals and talking to me about philosophy and metaphysics, completely beyond the comprehension of the generals. I’ve witnessed too many similar acts of kindness to accept the gossip about BB’s selfishness. Meanwhile my book was being translated into Italian with a new title, *Dai Romantici A Hitler*, later published in Milan 1946.

After conveying mutual friendship between the two octogenarians, it dawned on me that they actually hated each other. Here were two rival shrines. Italy was not big enough to hold two great American aesthetes, martyrs in art’s hairshirts, cashmere hairshirts, both wincing sensitively at American vulgarity and materialism. They’d mostly conclude their effusive regards with a quick little animadversion. BB would note Santayana’s “heart of ice.” Santayana, when I asked his opinion of BB as art critic, answered not with words but with gesture: daintily rubbing his hands. I construed this as code for either anti-huckster or anti-Semite or both.

Most of my many handwritten letters from BB and Santayana were not included in their published letters. Along with my PWB records, all above letters and materials, my Thomas Mann letters, (also my earlier three-way correspondence with Bernard Shaw and the exiled Kaiser Wilhelm II about World War I) will be made accessible to detached judgment in university archives.

During the war, my most personal writing was a nonpolitical, purely personal elegy of 1944 for my brother, George Sylvester Viereck, Jr., also in the American Army and killed fighting the Germans (here reprinted from the Library of America *Poets of World War II*).

“Vale” from Carthage

Author’s note: The word “Vale” (Latin for “farewell”) was used on Roman tombstones. “*Ave atque vale*” is, of course, the phrase immortalized by Catullus in his elegy to his brother, killed fight-

ing for Rome in an older war than mine. As a sergeant in the U.S. Army's African campaign in Tunis, 1944, I was among the Roman tombstones in the ruins of Carthage when I heard the news that my brother was killed by a German bullet in the Anzio beachhead, near Rome. He and I last met at Times Square, New York.

I, now at Carthage. He, shot dead at Rome.
Shipmates last May. "And what if one of us,"
I asked last May, in fun, in gentleness,
"Wears doom, like dungarees, and doesn't know?"
He laughed, "*Not see Times Square again?*" The foam,
Feathering across that deck a year ago,
Swept those five words—like seeds—beyond the seas
 Into his future. There they grew like trees;
 And as he passed them there next spring, they laid
 Upon his road of fire their sudden shade.
Though he had always scraped his mess-kit pure
And scrubbed redeemingly his barracks floor,
Though all his buttons glowed their ritual-hymn
Like cloudless moons to intercede for him,
No furlough fluttered from the sky. He will
Not see Times Square—he will not see—he will
Not see Times
change; at Carthage (while my friend,
Living those words at Rome, screamed in the end)
I saw an ancient Roman's tomb and read
"*Vale*" in stone. Here two wars mix their dead:
 Roman, my shipmate's dream walks hand in hand
 With yours tonight ("*New York again*" and "*Rome*"),
 Like widowed sisters bearing water home
 On tired heads through hot Tunisian sand
 In good cool urns, and says, "I understand."
Roman, you'll see your Forum Square no more.
What's left but this to say of any war?

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