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Editorial

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In the *Wolfschanze*, the infamous “Wolf’s Lair”, Hitler was apparently a kind gentleman who loved animals and was quite capable of shedding copious tears over his sick dog. According to his secretaries, the Führer “was frightened of looking reality in the face” to the extent that there was an unspoken rule of “avoiding unpleasant things”. Who knows if among the “pleasant things” gracing the walls of the *Wolfschanze* there were any paintings that Hitler deemed “entartete Kunst” (degenerate art). Degenerate, but also stolen, confiscated, looted and even exchanged on the European art market. This is what emerges from a number of recent articles devoted to the Gurlitt case – the paintings found in the possession of the son of Hitler’s art dealer – which Giuliano Lozzi examines and presents in this edition of “Studi Germanici”. In this context we should consider that a whole range of taboos were in place (again to keep those unpleasant things at bay): never, even in the most classified service orders could terms such as “shooting”, “asphyxiation” or “hanging” be used; this occurred not for reasons of secrecy or convenience, but because it appeared less unpleasant, or perhaps just simpler, to sign an order to murder the sick or the old or even a whole town, by calling it the “evacuation of a zone behind the lines”. We should also consider that this “delicacy of the spirit”, or rather, the inability to look brutality, destruction and death full in the face, shows how art, which on the contrary looks unblinkingly at – and into the heart of – what we are, may well indeed be “degenerate”, but also fascinating and inescapable. It is an art – a lasting witness to the fatal contradictions of Nazism – that still evokes the catastrophe of those times. A contradiction and a catastrophe that continue to speak to us.

So why should “Studi Germanici” open with a discussion of Nazism? And specifically in the opening “Bussole e bilanci” (Compasses and scales) section, the part of our periodical that is intended to orient the reader and provoke reflection? Clearly, our ideas about Nazism could go on *ad infinitum*. But why is this? Undoubtedly for the reasons that Simonetta Sanna mentions in her two essays which,



indeed, have stimulated these very considerations. But these days the impression is that the novels, the explanations, the personal testimonies and re-enactments – the wretched suffering, the plain, appalling suffering – produced by such terrible events, do not suffice. Yet apart from the horror (and perhaps it is inappropriate to say such a thing), just what does Nazism tell us now, in 2015? As Simonetta Sanna says when citing Bernhard Schlink, the truth is that “by 2025 nobody guilty of the crimes perpetrated between 1933 and 1945 will be alive, and neither will any of the original victims. The ‘experienced past of survivors’ that we can witness is destined to become a ‘completed past, removed from direct experience’; the lived past vanishing as the older generation disappears.” It seems to me that the point here is that 2015 already seems to be 2025, perhaps even more so. The past is already done with and it is no longer our own experience. While there is no longer continuity, perhaps there is an unforeseen consequentiality or causality. From the perspective of 2015, Nazism informs us that something began then which is still being enacted; and what we are witnessing is the end of Europe as the cradle of Western civilization. Seen in this way, it marks the end of a utopia – which had been partially accomplished owing to the fact that it was *not* ideological. But it became a utopia of the rational perfectibility of the human species. A monstrous thing: a terrible idea that the West entertained right up to its witnessing of murder on a mass scale. It is an idea that characterized twentieth century Europe on both the right (Nazism) and the left (communism). Utopia is criminal, and if there is one thing that Nazism taught us, it is this. Communism, being characterized by a more explicitly expressed idea of utopia, succeeded in playing its cards better. In reality, it was a rough draft for new social contracts aimed (as ever) at satisfying the need to escape the primitive (not to say primordial) brutality, which governs the actions of our animal species. Nazism found its historical-anthropological ‘truth’ the moment that it joined the anarchic violence of a reptilian brain to the mind’s ability to plan rationally, the result of what Gottfried Benn called cerebralization. Thus not only the twentieth century, but also European civilization was buried, that is, all those enlightened centuries that had preceded it (perhaps even



going back to the Ancient Greeks). If communism was a direct consequence of the French Revolution, then we can also propose a further line of enquiry: what does Nazism owe to that same revolution? We should at least think about it at the level of the rationalization (the cerebralization) of brutality (the guillotine), which was not “as God intends”, but which had a rational, functional basis. In a period of terrible hubris, the brilliance of Reason led us to believe that our continent was the First World, the whole world. We could thus dominate the rest of the planet, basking in the glory of our own splendour and greatness. All this has now gone; and while I may be mistaken, or perhaps things are slightly different from what I am about to propose, Simonetta Sanna’s essays suggest that Nazism and communism – albeit in a different ways, but not in *such* different ways – brought about a fracture. Therefore, despite the commendable efforts made by Europeans in the post-war period, the creation of the European Community and the decades of peace which followed, a fault line opened (the very consequence of what is “rational”) and a relentless change began to come about: this is what history is. What we have before us, what we can see, is the birth of a new European civilization and it is impossible, and also unfair, to try to pass judgement or even give an opinion about it; perhaps, in fact, it cannot be any worse than what the twentieth century bequeathed us. Yet another question, perhaps too closely linked to current events, comes to mind: what are the origins of the planned slaughter, the brutal and “nationalist” action of the so-called Caliphate? This does not seem to be consonant with the history of Islam. It seems very Western. An ironic nod to our own cultural hegemony. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the most ruthless young men involved are those who have been imbued with European culture – who recreate in a different context something that belongs to us. Reflection, a way of orienting ourselves and weighing things up, might help us to think about where all this started, where the cracks started to appear in the popular imaginary, what the utopia of our perfectibility has become. The term “imaginary” is fitting on this occasion; in fact Simonetta Sanna writes of literature and Giuliano Lozzi of art, spaces where we are what we are, even when we do not want it, or we would not wish it.



As we know, the foundation of the Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici (the Italian Institute of Germanic Studies) has its own associations with Fascism: the Institute was officially inaugurated by Benito Mussolini, who delivered a speech in German for the occasion. This was in 1931 and as Massimiliano Biscuso notes when quoting Scaravelli, its aim, or, as we would now say, its “mission statement”, was as follows: “The Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici intends to encourage Italians to learn of the Germanic world, its history, its thought, its poetry and its art, and not only of the German nation itself, but also of the peoples of Germanic languages beyond the borders of the Reich, whether Austrian, Swiss German, Danish, Dutch, Norwegian or Swedish”. Summarizing this event, Biscuso continues: “It was a milestone ‘in creating closer intellectual relations with northern Europe’ and it also corresponded to efforts made to improve the ‘knowledge of Italian things’, thanks to the ‘institution of university chairs and lectorships and the creation of Italo-German institutes, the first of which has already opened at Cologne’, the Petrarca-Haus, inaugurated on October 26th 1931. In order to carry out its aims, the Institute provided public access to its library and published a periodical, “Cultura Germanica”, which, as is known, only began to appear in 1935 under the title “Studi Germanici” (Germanic Studies). It also published scientific research, monographs, translations, grammar books and dictionaries. Furthermore, ‘the Institute will invite leading figures from the fields of poetry, art and culture to Rome for conferences and talks. It will also promote a series of lessons taught by Italian and foreign scholars.’”

This mission has remained the same, but the way in which it is carried out altered radically the moment we became a public research body. This has changed so much that it has also changed the nature of our mission: there is now not only the element of “propaganda” (if I may use such a word) aimed, as Scaravelli said, at increasing Italians’ knowledge of Nordic cultures, but also, in a real sense, enhancing the cultures of northern Europe with original research carried out by Italians. In this way, the Institute is now set to become a university without students, a university composed of researchers



and scholars. A place where research is carried out and disseminated, a place where the very idea of education is linked to the idea of research, that is, to a doctorate programme with an international perspective. A doctorate along these lines will be set up some time between the end of this year and the start of the next.

Biscuso's essay mentions the role that Scaravelli played in the foundation of the library, and in particular the transfer of the Max Koch collection from Germany: "Dear Piero, I got back from Breslau at midnight last night where I had been for about 7 days sending off some 14,000 books[.] Gabetti had said he'd bought them but hadn't left anything written, giving me spoken orders to "box" them and ship them ... without providing any written authorization etc. Hence two days of difficulties and exasperation at the notary's due to the expired contract, solved by a barrage of telegrams and telephone calls between Berlin and Rome: finally got a warrant giving full powers, the international contract was drawn up and the whole lot set off!!"

Since then the library has grown and it now numbers approximately 70,000 books. If it was already the largest library dedicated to Germany at the time, it is now the most important in southern Europe and in the Mediterranean area in general. However, as it was once carelessly housed in the basement during restoration works at the villa, this great patrimony has suffered a certain degree of damage; similarly, the neglect and deplorable management of the past has limited OPAC cataloguing to around just 10% of the total collection. It is a library at risk, therefore, and it can hardly be deemed accessible by modern standards.

Today, however, I can conclude this editorial by announcing that work has begun on moving the books from the basement to the ground floor, undertaking restoration work where necessary, and, at the same time, cataloguing the whole collection according to OPAC criteria. Moving the books will be completed before summer and they will be catalogued by the end of 2015. Once the library has been



safeguarded and brought into line with the times, there will be room for thinking about its composition, how it will develop, and its function. The whole operation has been conceived and planned by Professor Giovanni Solimine who will follow events from the moving of the first book to drawing up some final considerations.

The essay that Biscuso has dedicated to our history, based, as it is, on records and, in particular, on the papers stored at Villa Sciarra, can only draw our attention to another example of the abandonment to which the IISG was subject before the present board of directors took office in September 2011: its archives. Apart from all the documents produced by the Institute itself, the archives now include two collections of particular historical interest. These were acquired between the end of the last and the beginning of the present century: the archives of the Centro Thomas Mann association and those of Professor Paolo Chiarini, director of the Institute from 1968 to 2006. More specifically, the Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici collection includes all the documentation that has been produced since its foundation up to the present day, and it thus contains extremely interesting material regarding the complete history of the Institute. The oldest section of the archives is of particular historical significance, and comprises a core of approximately 400 letters that bear eloquent witness to the contacts between the board of the Institute and leading intellectuals in both Italy and northern Europe. These include Giovanni Papini, Luigi Pirandello, Luigi Einaudi, Giovanni Gentile, Guido Calogero, Vincenzo Errante, Bruno Arzeni, Martin Heidegger, Karl Löwith, Ernst Robert Curtius, Ernst Jünger, Rudolf Borchardt, Knut Hamsun, Sigrid Undset and Selma Lagerlöf. Work on creating the Institute's archive has already begun and is being coordinated by Dr Alida Caramagno. Nevertheless, wherever possible the Institute intends to acquire the archives of all the directors who have led the Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici since its foundation (Gabetti, Bottachiari, Tecchi), as well as those of leading intellectuals who have served as mediators of German culture in Italy. For this reason, we are in the process of acquiring the Alberto Spaini collection.



In line with our increasing interdisciplinary stance, this edition of “Studi Germanici” also contains an essay which is closely related to the one that Biscuso dedicates to Villa Sciarra: Paul Kahl’s article on “Goethehäuser in Weimar und Rom”. This research takes us into the sphere of the history of culture, though elsewhere space is given over to performance art with essays by Patrizia Veroli (German dance at the beginning of the twentieth century) and Gianluca Paolucci (Expressionist cinema). More closely linked to traditional literary and philological fields are the articles by Bruno Berni, Francesco Rossi, Anna Maria Guerrieri, and the report on the conference on Gregor von Rezzori. In the “German studies in the world” section there are no fewer than three essays dedicated to India. As usual, the “Critical observatory of German studies” section concludes the edition.

Translation from the Italian: Peter Douglas