

Chapter One

Predecessors and Predilections: A Problematic Legacy

The Enlightenment and the French Revolution were the beginnings of the modern world, and Romanticism was the first reaction to this world. In this first postrevolutionary era, both the idea of conservatism and the image of the writer as first and foremost a unique individual with a highly developed subjectivity made their appearance. At first glance, the two phenomena not only have little to do with each other, they even seem to be diametrically opposed. The single-minded path taken by the modern writer is, after all, hardly an expression of an homage to customs and traditions that evolved over time. The protected and at the same time monitored position of the writer at court in the days of the *ancien régime* was, in the course of the nineteenth century, consigned to the dustbin of history. Due to censorship and, in some cases, criminal prosecution, not a few word-smiths had to ply their trade in exile. Making a virtue of necessity, the exiles initiated, or at least accelerated, the process of intercultural communication. The German Romantics, who were reacting to a revolution not at home, but abroad, also went into a kind of exile. They sought out a realm of fantasy in which their spirits could take flight, unfettered by history or politics. One cannot ignore a strain of prorevolutionary radicalism in the early years, embodied by such figures as Friederich Schlegel or Joseph Görres, but these two—and others like them—later became advocates of the repressive restoration system constructed by Metternich. The “turn to the right” has, at least until recently, put its stamp on the perception of the entire movement, making it the Romantics’ fate to have their image “fade extremely one-sidedly into the past.”¹ In the context of this study, the Romantic with the most enduring impact is Friederich von Hardenberg, called Novalis (1772–1801).

Novalis, an aristocrat and landowner's son, studied philosophy with Fichte, law, and mining engineering. His ties with everyday reality were actually quite strong compared to many of those who strove to emulate him: "It is this combination of an active life and poetical contemplation that lends to his work a peculiar tension."² Although his views on history and society can be culled from purely literary works such as the novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802), it seems expedient to concentrate on his nonfictional writings, namely *Miscellaneous Observations/Pollen* (*Vermischte Bemerkungen/Blüthenstaub*, 1797/98), *Belief and Love* (*Glauben und Liebe*, 1798), *Political Aphorisms* (*Politische Aphorismen*, 1798), *Universal Sketches* (*Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, 1798/99) and *Christendom or Europe* (*Die Christenheit oder Europa*, 1799).³ One should keep in mind that Novalis did not live to see Napoleon as the imperialist emperor and occupier of Germany and much of continental Europe. He was thus reflecting upon the course of the revolution in France, not upon its later transmutation. As in the case of Georg Büchner, we are dealing with the observations of a rather young author.

Already in *Miscellaneous Observations/Pollen*, one encounters motifs and beliefs that are, even today, part and parcel of the conservative cultural scene. The poet, for example, is given a special status—or rather, it is lamented that such a status has been lost:

Poets and priests were originally one, and only later times separated them. The true poet is, however, always a priest, just as the true priest has always remained a poet. And should not the future reinstate the old ways? (*Bst*, no. 71, 255 and 257)

The elevation of the poet goes hand in hand with the assertion that most princes, or monarchs, are representatives of the genius of their time (*Bst*, no. 76). One might assume that this would be considered the pinnacle of civilization, but Novalis leaves no doubt that the poet is one step higher, since he has the potential to be "a perfect representative of the genius of mankind" (*Bst*, no. 76, 261), placing him clearly beyond the bounds—and bonds—of any one epoch. Although Edmund Burke is praised, Novalis does not call for a return to pre-1789 conditions. The ideal here is the "poetic state," the only one seen as true and perfect (*VB*, no. 122, 282). This state is a juxtaposition of democracy and monarchy, and it is the poetic spirit which mediates between the masses and the prince. Such a model might be taken for constitutional monarchy or enlightened absolutism, but it is in fact neither, since it contains a utopian element. The poetic spirit is given

the task of uniting the past and the future, and the locus of said unification is “the atmosphere of the poet” (*Bst*, no. 109, 283). What might this future be? When it said that children represent a “Golden Age” (*Bst*, no. 97, 273), the implication is that the young, not yet completely integrated into organized society, carry with them not only the shape of the future, but a knowledge of our most ancient origins.⁴ One should note that the antithesis of the utopian, i.e., the philistine, also makes an appearance in this work. Novalis makes his disdain for this type utterly clear. The philistine never transcends everyday life, he has little use for poetry, and his religion is little more than an “opiate” (*Bst*, no. 77, 263). The worst of these are apparently the ultra-materialist “revolutionary philistines.” The French Revolution is hence set in opposition to the glories of the poetic spirit.

Belief and Love, an apotheosis of King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia and especially of Queen Luise, continues this sort of nonpolitical critique of political developments (underlined by the collection of short poems printed at the beginning). Even more than in *Pollen*,⁵ the Germans are portrayed as the saviors of European civilization: “A land that satisfies heart and mind could well be a German invention . . .” (*GuL*, no. 7, 291). To counter the democratic fetish of the philistines (“miserable philistines, devoid of spirit and lacking in heart” — no. 23, 296), Novalis envisions a revitalized — in actuality thoroughly idealized — monarchy. He is not blind to the injustices committed by reigning monarchs, but he is also afraid of majority rule, at least rule by the *existing* majority. The solution is to have the masses educated by the king until they reach the point where they are all “capable of ruling” (no. 18, 294). This would lead to authentic republicanism, characterized by “general participation in all affairs of state, close contact and harmony of all members of the state” (no. 37, 302). As a poetic vision, this is not overly controversial, but there are some aspects that are troublesome. The belief that identification with the state can more than compensate for such trivial concerns as sufficient nourishment (no. 8, 291), and the notion that medals and uniforms should be used to demonstrate that each and every person is a citizen — i.e., someone whose identity is derived primarily from his association with the state (no. 19, 295) — were transformed into social reality during the Third Reich.⁶ It is easy to overlook such details, given that the prince is seen as the chief artist in a nation of artists striving to reach the above-mentioned “Golden Age” (nos. 39 and 41, 303f). The mixing of art and politics is alternatively intriguing and maddening.

The *Political Aphorisms* revolve around similar themes, placing love and the family at the center of the state. Novalis restates his fear that the majority—given the less than flattering name “the large crowd” (*PA*, no. 67, 308)—will be manipulated by narrow-minded populist demagogues. Pre-figurations of Tocqueville’s analysis of American democracy abound. Specific recommendations are only provided in the vaguest form, however: The nature of the state would be irrelevant if only we would be ruled by the original laws of humankind (no. 67, 309). It is never made clear what these laws might be. Those who seek more clarity in *Universal Sketches* will be disappointed. Once again, the high status of the poet, the centrality of religion, and the role of the family are emphasized. It is only in *Christendom or Europe* that a historical dimension is introduced, in the shape of medieval Europe.

As many have remarked, this dimension is in reality no more than a facade. Novalis’s portrait of the Middle Ages is no less idealized than his image of monarchy. It is a plea for belief and art set against skepticism and critical thinking, formulated in the hope that the Golden Age (*CoE*, 745), the “holy time of eternal peace” (750), will not forever remain a dream. Surely it is no accident that the words “childlike” and “childish” appear on the first few pages, linked to such words as “trust,” “dream,” and “innocence.” On the path to true humanity, one must rid oneself of the trappings of everyday reality, and this can be most easily accomplished by children—or the “child-like,” e.g., the artist—who have not yet been entwined in a web of pragmatic considerations.⁷ This smacks of escapism, but it is only one facet of the essay. Novalis is not blind to the conditions that led to the Reformation (clerical laxity and decadence, for example), and he also does not condemn outright the forces of revolution active in his own time. He recognizes that the old politics will no longer suffice, so he proposes a compromise, namely religion as mediator between the political adversaries. His description of the two camps is of no little interest here:

The old world and the new are battling each other, the deficiencies and insufficiencies of the previous state institutions have become obvious in the form of terrible phenomena. . . . Both sides have great, necessary claims which they must make, driven by the spirit of the world and of humankind. Both are indestructible powers in the human breast; here the reverence toward the ancient, the devotion to that which has evolved over time, the love for the monuments of the forefathers and for the glorious old national family, and friends of obedience; there the rapturous feeling of freedom, the boundless expectation of grand areas of activity, the pleasure in the new and the young, the casual contact with all fellow citizens, the pride in the general validity of humanity, the enjoy-

ment of personal rights and of common property, and the powerful sentiment of citizenship. (*CoE*, 748)⁸

This is anything but a conservative manifesto, but it does not stand alone. When one reads that nature (“so wondrous and incomprehensible, so poetic and endless” — 742) resists all attempts to “modernize” it, and that it is foolish to attempt to “model” history and humanity (744), one wonders if the holder of such views and the author of the just-quoted passage are one and the same.

Taken as a whole, *Christendom or Europe* is a confusing conglomerate bound to frustrate those who would divine one single thrust from it. In one regard, however, it is possible to establish a line of continuity from the earlier aphorisms and observations to this work. Once again, it is the Germans who have been chosen to implement the highest aspirations of the human race. It is in Germany, Novalis proclaims, that signs of a new world (744) can already be discerned, whereas the other European lands are still involved in useless disputes. These disputes are “war, financial speculation, and partisanship” (744). The Germans, in contrast, are occupied with history, the arts, and science, and their endeavors are blessed with “an incomparable diversity, a wonderful profundity. . . , broad knowledge, and a rich fantasy” (745). Marx could have been thinking of these words when he wrote his “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right” in 1843 (although his assessment of Germany’s lot was quite different). There is no doubt that Novalis was idealizing his countrymen, but he was far from nationalist chauvinism. We will never know whether he would have gone in this direction if he had lived until 1815. It was left to others to interpret his fragmentary and often cryptic writings.

The process of interpretation—sometimes reencryption—has been evolving for almost two centuries. Hermann Kurzke has convincingly demonstrated that the use and abuse of Novalis for various kinds of conservative causes is based on a fundamental—whether intentional or not—misreading, one that ignores the utopian impulse of his writings. Even Kurzke, though, admits that the unsystematic nature of Novalis’s oeuvre lends itself to misinterpretation: The fascination with the irrational is not an end in itself (it is subordinated to the recreation of a Golden Age), but it must be seen as one of the many building blocks of later fascist or totalitarian ideologies.⁹ From a liberal perspective, this has been confirmed but excused as the product of a mainly poetic mind-set.¹⁰ From an orthodox Marxist perspective, Novalis is a minor player in the wave of irrationalism that swept Europe

for over a century.¹¹ In the standard collection of the political writings of the German Romantics, Novalis appears as a utopian dreamer who refused to participate in traditional politics—in contrast to some of his contemporaries, who served the cause of restoration rather than utopia.¹² This debate will doubtless continue for some time. For our purposes, it is perhaps most important to place emphasis on two points. First of all, Novalis chose—after the rejection of *Belief and Love*—to ignore the possibility of political activity or change in the framework of the system that existed in his own time. Second, when he did ponder the nature of society and history, he did not separate such themes from his identity as a poet. Since the poet, as we have seen, was placed at the pinnacle of the cultural and social hierarchy, his views were meant to be prescriptive. This is a model that can be encountered again and again in the evolution of modern German culture.

The literary periods following Romanticism contributed little to the genesis of twentieth-century cultural conservatism. This is clearly the case with regard to the representatives of “Junges Deutschland” or the “Vormärz,” but it also holds true for the “Biedermeier,” a time generally described as conservative. Even a work like Adalbert Stifter’s voluminous novel *Indian Summer* (1857), an attempt to defend ethics and idealism against the encroachment of a modern age characterized by industrialism, materialism, and urbanization, was ultimately too escapist and quietistic.¹³ The proponents of “Poetic Realism” in the second half of the nineteenth century vacillated between rather mild social criticism and resignation. Not surprisingly, then, the next torchbearer was a not really a literary figure at all, but rather a philosopher who occasionally wrote poetry, namely Friedrich Nietzsche. One must of course speak not of Nietzsche, but of the many Nietzsches.¹⁴ It is difficult to dispute the fact that Nietzsche influenced almost everyone to some degree,¹⁵ but, as in the case of Novalis, many readers—and a number of nonreaders as well¹⁶—selected certain ideas and simply ignored others. Like Stifter, Nietzsche was reacting to inchoate mass society, albeit in a diametrically opposed manner. His extreme individualism, loathing for conformity, and preference for an existence on the margins of society were the products of a combative, not quiescent nature. Instead of dedicating himself to the preservation of the artifacts and practices of an idealized past, he chose to construct a mode of thinking and living appropriate to the future—as he envisioned it. It is not immediately apparent how the parameters of such a project would jibe with conservatism.

According to Lukács, Nietzsche's "whole life's work was a continuous polemic against Marxism and socialism."¹⁷ This was carried out in a rather roundabout manner, since, as Lukács himself points out, Nietzsche did not read Marx. Said polemic was directed in general terms toward anything that might promote democracy and hinder the rule of the elite. The "democratic movement" is seen as the "heir of the Christian movement,"¹⁸ and Christianity was the target of Nietzsche's most biting comments. This religion, with its "resentment *against* life" and its promotion of guilt and the "herd animal morality,"¹⁹ was his mortal enemy. One dilemma for most conservative readers is already clear: the critique of democracy and socialism must be divorced from the rejection of the Christian religion. The masses must also be convinced that the "master's morality" must guide the cultural and societal elite, whereas they themselves will have to submit to the tenets of the "slave morality." No mean feat!

One method of uniting the elite and the masses would be to place them under the umbrella of the nation or "Volk." This was unexpectedly successful in 1914, for example. Nietzsche's works are, once again, of limited usefulness for such an endeavor. He castigated the cultural decline that accompanied the economic and political ascendancy of the Reich, lamented the "nationalistic squandering of power" after 1871,²⁰ termed Goethe, the country's greatest writer, "not a German event, but a European one,"²¹ often boasted of his purported ancestors in the Polish aristocracy, and spent extended periods of time abroad. He did, however make a disturbing connection between the democratization of Europe and a "physiological process" by which the Europeans would become more alike, gradually losing their ties to the milieu and conditions that had molded them for centuries.²² This could easily be read as a warning against racial mixing and a justification for ethnocentrism, but it is not a major theme found in a number of his works. The question remains: Which Nietzsche mesmerized German conservative writers—and not a few of their left-leaning colleagues as well?

There seem to be two answers to this. First of all, especially in the years before the First World War, the incomparable aura surrounding Nietzsche was attributable less to his writings than to his life. It was as "an exemplary personality"²³ that he had the most impact. He became known as the ultimate rebel, the outsider utterly disgusted with the trappings of bourgeois society—and one willing to forego the comforts and perquisites of that society. He was part of European decadence, but he strove to overcome it. The "generation of

1914,” disgusted with the self-satisfaction of the establishment and the unheroic nature of life, felt a strong affinity with him (or at least with the myth of his life that was being created). When he taught that destruction was not to be feared, but welcomed as a liberation of creative energies, this was what many — especially the young — wanted to hear. The danger inherent in praising the “proud and well-developed human being” and in the same breath detesting the misguided intercession on behalf of “all that is weak, sick, failure, suffering from itself—*all that ought to perish*”²⁴ only became apparent much later. Secondly, Nietzsche, like Novalis, placed the elite intellectual — whether in his manifestation as philosopher or artist/poet — on a pedestal. (The fact that Nietzsche rejected Romanticism in his later years does not mean that he bade farewell to this particular aspect.) Those who felt a similar calling within themselves could find ample vindication for their strivings in his works. Beginning with the early formulation in the *Birth of Tragedy* (“[I]t is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*”²⁵), and continuing until the very end (“Art is the great stimulus to life”²⁶), Nietzsche outlined the contours of a new aristocracy. A number of Germans felt that they deserved to be given an entry in the *Gotha* of that select group.

One of the first was the poet Stefan George (1868–1933). In contrast to the creator of Zarathustra, who did not recruit “believers” and feared that he would be “canonized,”²⁷ George cultivated the image of the prophet and endeavored to surround himself with a circle of disciples. One observer chose the adjective “zarathustraähnlich” (similar to Zarathustra)²⁸ to describe him. In his poem “Nietzsche,” George refers to his mentor as the “thunderer,” the “redeemer,” and even the Christ-like leader (“führer mit der blutigen krone”). Adulation does not preclude criticism, however: Nietzsche’s solitude is contrasted with George’s own need to be surrounded by a group, and the philosopher’s preference for polemics over poetry is lamented.²⁹ The differences between the two can be attributed at least in part to the changing times. Whereas Nietzsche lived during the most bombastic and self-congratulatory phase of the *Kaiserreich*, George came of age in a period when symptoms of the crisis that would lead to the outbreak of the First World War were difficult to overlook. Initially, George dealt with these symptoms from an exclusively esthetic perspective — to such a great extent, in fact, that he has been termed the ultimate practitioner of the “esthetic evaluation of social conditions.”³⁰

George’s career is usually divided into two parts. During the first phase, which lasted until the beginning of the twentieth century, he pursued a pro-

gram of pure estheticism borrowed mainly from Baudelaire and Mallarmé. Traversing Europe in search of poetic perfection and kindred spirits, he strove to renew German as a language of beauty. (It can hardly be denied that this project was a necessary one, since German poetry in the late Wilhelminian era was wallowing in an imitative backwater.) Due to the efforts of George, his sometime collaborator Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and others, German poetry did regain its former status. This proved to be merely a prelude to a broader cultural mission, however. The purely artistic group originally associated with the journal *Art News* (Blätter für die Kunst) was transformed into a fellowship dedicated to a general cultural renewal. The shift is reflected in the title of the new journal *Yearbooks for the Spiritual Movement* (Jahrbücher für die geistige Bewegung), which appeared from 1910 to 1912. Art was supplanted by a much more ambitious reformatory thrust. A new aristocracy was to transform society by means of high culture. After a quasi-religious episode involving the worship of young Maximilian Kronberger as an incarnation of beauty, youth, and the Hellenic ideal—an episode that scandalized many—George and his circle worked to lay the groundwork for a new heroic age set in opposition to degeneracy, democracy, and materialism. Their ideology of “power, service, fellowship, and empire”³¹ was not meant to be overtly political, but it was undeniably interpreted that way by those youthful sympathizers who volunteered in 1914 to demonstrate that they were worthy to serve.

George himself did not come out in favor of the war, but he did not denounce it publicly either. His long 1917 poem “War” (“Der Krieg”) composed in typically hermetic language, is a mirror of this ambivalence. On the one hand, the prophet (“Seher”) declares that the war is merely the external manifestation and culmination of those currents that only he was capable of feeling. He also shows no enthusiasm for “domestic [i.e., German] virtue” and no disdain for “foreign treachery.”³² In both camps, he asserts, no one senses what is at stake, since both are preoccupied with petty concerns. The only shimmer of hope lies in the reception of the prophet’s message about a future on a higher level of being. Unfortunately, the sublimity of the message is marred by a reference to the desecration of the blood and the warning that those who engage in it deserve to be exterminated—unless they are redeemed by the actions of the elite.³³

Even though these lines were written over eighty years ago, it is still chilling to read them in light of what was to follow. After 1918, George came

to believe that the Germans, having been cleansed by defeat, were the only people capable of transcending the abominations of the modern age (including feminism and plutocracy). Is this not a modern version of Novalis's dreams for then-"backward" Germany?³⁴ As has often been pointed out, George was anything but a Nazi (although his elitist rejection of National Socialism had more to do with his disdain for vulgarity and the unwashed masses than with morality or politics).³⁵ To his credit, he refused to be associated in any way with the NSDAP, turning down the presidency of the "Poets' Academy" in the Prussian Academy of Arts and choosing to die abroad. He was also untainted by anti-Semitism, although it is ironic that his Jewish disciples tended to be more German than the Germans themselves when it came to glorifying Germany's cultural mission. The antidemocratic bias of his circle—which included a streak of anti-Americanism,³⁶ common to most of the sworn enemies of the Weimar Republic—doubtless contributed to the climate that facilitated Hitler's seizure of power. In the end, he was one of the many who were used by the Nazis and then discarded as soon as real power was within reach.³⁷ George did not have to reconsider the ramifications of his political naiveté, as he died before the fascist atrocities reached their peak (just as Novalis did not see the rise of German nationalism and Francophobia and Nietzsche did not experience World War I firsthand). Three of the writers considered in the next section did live long enough to engage in retrospective reevaluation.

One of the major reference points for contemporary Germany's New Right is the so-called Conservative Revolution. This movement, once considered a historical footnote to the rise of Nazism, has received much attention in recent years. The ongoing attempts to rehabilitate its representatives and divorce its ideas from the Third Reich will be discussed in chapter 2 of this study. At this juncture, a profile of four major authors will be presented. The term itself was first used by Thomas Mann in his *Russian Anthology* of 1921, after the struggle of conservative intellectuals against the Weimar Republic had begun. In his analysis of Nazism, Karl Dietrich Bracher delineates the cultural and political parameters of a world view to which a rather heterogeneous collection of individuals adhered:

. . . the *topos* of the incomparable uniqueness and higher quality of German nationalism, its anti-Western mission in the battle against the supposedly subversive effect of liberalism and capitalism with regard to state and community, against miscegenation and emancipation, international socialism, pacifism, and bourgeoisification.³⁸

These are the marching orders for the cultural variant of the infamous German “special path” (*Sonderweg*), which left its indelible stamp on the course of the twentieth century.³⁹ The outlines of this path were discernible in the late nineteenth century, but it was the experience of World War I that brought them to the forefront. In the course of that war, an extended essay on literature and politics was written, one that amazed not only many readers, but also the author himself.

When the guns of August sounded, Thomas Mann was a well-respected writer and financially secure member of the upper middle class. Up until that time, he had been known as the quintessential *homme de lettres*, albeit one who enjoyed a level of material prosperity rarely seen in literary circles. His emergence as a tribune of German nationalism — not the only one from the intellectual elite, to be sure — had two root causes. First of all, he was appalled by the vicious propaganda unleashed by the Allies against Germany. This propaganda in effect situated the homeland of Dürer, Goethe, and Beethoven beyond the pale of civilized (i.e., Western) society. Secondly, Mann’s older brother Heinrich, especially in his essay “Zola” (1915), criticized the excessive chauvinism of the Germans in general and (without naming him directly) of Thomas Mann in particular. The Francophile Heinrich not only advocated the politicization of literature, castigated “capitalist militarism” and agitated against the tyranny of the “ultra-patriotic good-for-nothings,” he also expressed his disgust for those “creatures of luxury” who live mainly the life of the soul and defined estheticism as “a product of hopeless times, hopeless states.”⁴⁰ Such epithets were directed not only at Thomas: they were also an exercise in self-criticism, since Heinrich had espoused estheticism, monarchism, and anti-Semitism well into the 1890s. At the time, no one could have imagined that the author of venomous tracts against Jews, liberals, socialists, and suffragettes would later become the leading spokesman of the German literary left.⁴¹ His more famous brother went through a similar (but not identical) transformation, but it occurred much later. On the way, he penned the *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* (*Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*).⁴²

As a writer, the extremely erudite Thomas Mann had much to say. Unfortunately, he also tended to say too much. In the case of the *Reflections*, there are mitigating circumstances, however. This book was less of a literary exercise than a kind of exorcism. The author had reached a crossroads, and the inability to choose a future direction led to a personal crisis, one that was

exacerbated by the war. Mann describes the process of writing the *Reflections* as a “more than two-year intellectual military service” (1). If he suffered ill effects from the war, they lay mainly in the inability to create imaginative works. He thus describes his long essay as an “artist’s work” as opposed to a “work of art” (2). His thoughts are directed to a specific audience, namely the “educated bourgeois public sphere” (11), meaning that he is engaging in a dialogue with the intellectual elite of the nation. Most of this elite—including such imposing figures as the philosopher Max Scheler, the economist Werner Sombart, the philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel, and Rudolf Eucken, winner of the 1908 Nobel Prize for Literature—was clearly, even rabidly in favor of the war. Thomas Mann was no different—or was he?

This self-described “child of the nineteenth century” engaged in a life-long dialogue with the icons of that era, namely “Romanticism, nationalism, middle-class culture and identity (“Bürgerlichkeit”), music, pessimism, and humor” (13–14). There are obviously some icons missing from this list, e.g., industrialization, the idea of progress, and revolution—and that is not an oversight on Mann’s part: these are phenomena that not only do not belong to his world, but even militate against it. The opposing forces are masterfully portrayed in the 1901 novel *Buddenbrooks*, where the author’s sympathies clearly lie with the older, humanistically educated middle class (*Bildungsbürgertum*). This stratum is doomed by the rise of the new entrepreneurs, the poorly educated parvenus.⁴³ One could say that Mann never truly accepted the inevitability of this process, even though he was capable of accurately portraying it. In the *Reflections*, he attempted a tour de force: the already marginalized “old” bourgeoisie was to be put forward as one of the bulwarks of the nation. Since it did not produce the weapons of mass destruction needed for modern warfare, it had to produce something less tangible, albeit equally necessary, i.e., ideology. The necessary prerequisite for this enterprise was the bridging of the gap between culture and politics (“Geist und Macht”) in Germany (246, 281). To effect this, Mann pursues a two-pronged strategy.

On the one hand, he becomes a mouthpiece for some of the most distasteful propaganda and prejudice gushing forth from Germany at the time. He has no trouble justifying the violation of Belgian sovereignty (142, 178), he stands behind unlimited submarine warfare and has no sympathy for the victims of the sinking of the *Lusitania* (330, 417, 445), wishes for a Europe disgusted by “Negro-like sybaritism” (480),⁴⁴ deplors

the influence of the Jews (443, 462, 520), recommends the feudal system (!) as an appropriate bulwark against the West (426), and even offers some inane biologicistic prattle concerning the drop in the German birth rate as a direct result of the influx of Western “civilization” into Germany (577–578). Should one laugh or cry when one reads that in 1876, the year in which German fertility reached its peak, “there lived in Germany Bismarck, Moltke, Helmholtz, Nietzsche, Wagner, Fontane” (578)? Mann does not hesitate to leave behind the bastions of high culture in search of allies, as evidenced by his praise for Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the British-German advocate of Aryan superiority (554) and his multiple references to the middle-brow fanatic Paul de Lagarde, one of the founders of the Volkish movement.⁴⁵ It is shocking enough that Mann would lower himself to de Lagarde’s level, but even more incredible that he would term him one of the great men of Germany, on the same plane as Nietzsche and Wagner (268). These passages can surely be regarded as the absolute nadir of Mann’s career.

On the other hand, the titanic struggle against Western democracy and civilization that makes up the bulk of the *Reflections* is a half-hearted effort at best. Even though considerable polemical energy is expended countering the alleged “stultification” (Verdummung) of the Germans and their transformation into “social and political [as opposed to cultural] animals” in the process of “de-Germanization” (264), Thomas Mann does not really believe that Germany will win the war. He hastens to distance himself from bloodthirsty “war panegyrists” like D’Annunzio, emphasizing that, far from propagating war, he seeks to support the German people in this conflict that has become its fate (569).⁴⁶ (A similar mentality was equally alive and well during World War II, long after Mann had rid himself of it.) The fate of the masses, especially of the troops at the front, is not the main concern, however. The real motivation behind much of Mann’s rhetoric is the fear that the coming of democracy will inevitably lead to a culture of mediocrity and with it to the end of the privileged status of the elites. When Mann warns of the demise of the “great man,” it is significant that he inserts an excerpt from a poem by Stefan George in which it is asserted that the “noblest of the noble” only flourish in Germany (357). Those who ask wherein this nobility might lie can find the answer in Mann’s vision of the peoples of postwar Europe. He imagines an exchange of material and spiritual goods among “the handsome Englishman, the polished Frenchman, the humane Russian and *the*

wise German" (481; my emphasis). In this same passage, Mann also dreams of a time when his soul will be "cleansed of politics" (481). Now we have come full circle—back to the "nonpolitical man" of the title. The higher pursuits of the human race have been assigned to the Germans (actually: the German elites), and the nature and organization of life in society are mere bagatelles that distract them from their sublime mission. By the end of the *Reflections*, Mann has retracted almost everything, denying that he is a militarist or nationalist, even claiming that he is not a conservative (577)—after he has argued at length that conservative Russia (as represented by Dostoevsky) is the only true soul mate of Germany. At least Mann did not become afraid of his own courage, as the Germans say. After he had finished his military service with the pen, he shocked everyone and dismayed his erstwhile comrades by transforming himself into perhaps the most prominent supporter of the Weimar Republic.

The nature of this transformation is thrown into relief in the 1922 public address "On German Democracy."⁴⁷ In a preface written after the fact, Mann declares that he has *not* had a change of heart. In the speech itself, he repeats this claim, choosing language close to that of Martin Luther: "I retract nothing. I do not take back anything substantial" (829). He had of course already done so in the *Reflections*. (Perhaps he thought that very few Germans had actually read all six hundred pages of that work!) "On German Democracy" is dedicated to the author Gerhart Hauptmann on his sixtieth birthday. Hauptmann had received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1912, and Mann addresses him here as a "people's king . . . a king of the republic" (812). This is not exactly what one would expect in a text designed to make democracy appealing to the German people. In fact, the main witness called by Mann to defend the idea of democracy is none other than the Romantic Novalis, a "special kind of royalist" who believed that there could be no king without a republic and vice versa (812). There is also praise for Stefan George, who has, according to Mann, transcended his Francophile origins and become a "purely national affair" (814). The Social Democrat president of the republic, Friedrich Ebert, is given the title "father" (i.e., of the nation), but there is no doubt that Mann wishes to provide his listeners primarily, yet again, with an apotheosis of the writer. Literature is, he asserts, "a heroic act, a sanctified life, an overcoming of human frailty, a renunciation of everything conventional and a struggle against it" (823). In a strangely undemocratic manner, then,

Mann has set himself up as a prophet, one who now must preach the doctrine of democracy, a sort of brainwashed Zarathustra. In this role, he actually does criticize Nietzsche: the master race, the blond beast, and the rejection of Christianity are now outdated (836). More significantly, war is rejected as a basis of nationalism. If the Germans are to save the remnants of their national identity, they must, according to Mann, posit as its essence not the “mystical-poetical” element of war, but a “cult of peace” (816). It took no little courage to utter such sentiments in a chaotic time, and Mann risked his prestige as a prominent cultural figure by doing so. One cannot ignore the fact, however, that he couched his remarks in such a way as to make them absolutely inaccessible to the majority of the German people. The symbiotic brew of Hellenic culture, Goethe, Novalis, Nietzsche, and even Walt Whitman that was to yield a “Third Reich of religious humanity under the aegis of Eros” (846–847)⁴⁸ could hardly have held an attraction for the disoriented masses thirsting for a way out of the post-Versailles dilemma.

The *Reflections* remain controversial to this day, and this can be attributed to a great extent to the international recognition of Mann as a central figure of world literature in the twentieth century. One observer believes that the book is not a document of the Conservative Revolution,⁴⁹ whereas another finds it very significant because of Mann’s conscious effort to defend his conservatism while distancing himself from the “radical right.”⁵⁰ The author of a monumental biography of Mann characterizes the “innermost essence” of the *Reflections* as “the announcement of the revolt of irrationality that was to hurl Germany and Europe into the abyss.”⁵¹ The debate will doubtless continue for years to come.

Another text, the one that contributed greatly to the popularization of the term Conservative Revolution, has remained relatively unknown, at least beyond literary circles.⁵² It was thus something of a sensation when, in 1997, German officials from the Office for the Protection of the Constitution not only referred to the author of this text as the originator of the Conservative Revolution, but did so in the context of a report about right-wing radicalism in today’s Germany.⁵³ They were referring to a speech entitled “Literature as the Spiritual Sphere of the Nation” that was given by the Austrian author Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874–1929) at the University of Munich in 1927. Can one imagine the creator of *Everyman* and *Der Rosenkavalier* and cofounder of the Salzburg Festival as an extremist?

If one reads Hofmannsthal's speech after finishing Mann's *Reflections*, the first impression is that the tone and temperament are quite different. Mann is aggressive, combative, and irritated. A cultural manifesto is juxtaposed with a personal vendetta. None of this is evident in Hofmannsthal's 1927 speech, delivered just two years before the author's death. This is an end point, not a phase in intellectual development. Hofmannsthal, an esthete and precocious poet in his youth (Stefan George had attempted without success to win him over for his project of elitist cultural renewal), had gradually turned toward "the idea of Austria" as a model for cultural dialogue, cross-fertilization, and reconciliation. It has not escaped most observers that much of that "idea" was the stuff of myth, but to this day, many Austrians do not share that assessment. During the early years of World War I, Hofmannsthal produced some pieces of patriotic propaganda that were totally out of character for a polyglot reader and critic of world literature.⁵⁴ The outcome of the war signaled the end of the old Greater Austria—the one that he had hoped would be a model for all of Europe. He became increasingly conservative and resigned to the eclipse of long-held dreams. The only antidote to resignation was to transfer previous visions from the political to the cultural—especially literary—sphere.

In 1923, Hofmannsthal edited a *German Reader*, a selection of prose written between 1750 and 1850. At the beginning of his preface, he offered a justification for this project that speaks volumes about the construction of German identity:

It is not insignificant whether or not a nation possesses a keen literary conscience, and this is especially true for our nation, for we do not have a history that could bind us together. As recently as the sixteenth century, there were no deeds and suffering shared by all parts of the people, and even the cultural heritage that stands behind the suffering and could turn it into a common possession is not a common heritage. The distant past, that of the Middle Ages, is too hazy: old fairy tales cannot bind a nation together. It is only in literature that we find our physiognomy. Behind every individual face that gazes upon us meaningfully and honestly, the enigmatic face of the nation appears.⁵⁵

As so often in German⁵⁶ history, the clearest contrast can be found in France, and Hofmannsthal speaks admiringly of the self-awareness of the French, whose language has a legitimate claim to global supremacy. This was rather daring at a time when Germany's eternal enemy ("Erbfeind") was reaping the benefits of the hated Treaty of Versailles. In "Literature as the Spiritual Sphere of the Nation," the comparison with France once again is a central component in the analysis of the German condition.

Neither in the preface to the *Reader* nor in the speech does one find a call to imitate the French model, however. Just as the French have created a culture that is suitable for this “most gregarious of nations,”⁵⁷ a culture that meshes well with their skepticism and orientation toward the here and now (394), the Germans must strike out on their own. Their primary focus, according to Hofmannsthal, is not the national society, but instead “the refutation of the societal” (397). The “deepest of instincts” counters the mixing of the life of the mind and the life in society in Germany (395). One must keep in mind that this instinct holds sway exclusively in an elite of “seekers” who realize that Germany is a nation with a “tragic bent” (400). The impossibility of constructing a civil society founded upon instinct and the tragic apparently did not occur to Hofmannsthal. He puts forth Nietzsche as a prototypical seeker who rails against the superficiality of the half-educated philistines. The danger, as portrayed here, lies in the possibility that the Germans might lose their “originality” and their dreams (392).⁵⁸ If limited to the cultural sphere, this view might well merit serious discussion. Amazingly, Hofmannsthal goes on—despite what he has said previously—to link reverie with the political. An individual figure who emerges from the “chaos” with a claim to the offices of teacher and leader (“Lehrerschaft und Führerschaft”) begins to recruit comrades for his “crusade” (401). This figure is not only a true German, but also an “absolutist” with a “titanic” project. He (a “she” would be inconceivable in this context) has a “dangerously hybrid nature” capable of love and hate, teaching and seduction (402). Anyone who has read these citations—but not the entire text—might think of Hitler, who was already a force on the national scene when the speech was written. Hofmannsthal does speak of a “prophet,” but this prophet is also a poet who intuitively understands the “healing power of language” (401–402). That description fits a Stefan George better than a Hitler. The image of the prophet eventually gives way to a vision of various elite groups (together more in a spiritual sense than a physical one) who can see into the future, embodying the “[instinctually] perceptive, premonitory German essence” (406).⁵⁹ We are now on dangerous ground. Where might this intentionally irrational crusade lead?

If Thomas Mann sought to make democracy attractive to his conservative audience by tracing it back to Novalis and Romanticism, Hofmannsthal chose a very different strategy. Although he did not deny that both the Storm and Stress movement of the 1780s and Romanticism were important

initiatives, he distanced himself from these predecessors. He rejected the “confusing hodgepodge of conceptual ephemera” and the “cult of feeling” and was especially critical of the “irresponsible nature” of the first Enlightenment critics (407–408). He called for a “stricter, more manly behavior” and declared that the new seekers were not searching for freedom, but rather commitment (408). Instead of fleeing from life, as the Romantics did, he proclaimed, life is not worth living without “valid ties” (411). At this point in the speech, the listeners must have been at the edge of their seats. Would Hofmannsthal announce a new political movement? Would he declare his allegiance to an existing grouping? In the end, neither happened. The speaker chose to forego concrete proposals, although it is clear that his conclusions could only appeal to one part of the political spectrum. Referring disparagingly to the “convulsions” of the Enlightenment era, he glorified opposition to the Reformation and the Renaissance, an opposition that he named “a conservative revolution” (413). Even though he referred to the goal of such a movement as “a new German reality,” there was nothing innovative about it. Like Novalis before him, Hofmannsthal looked back to the medieval period for inspiration. In actuality, his antimodernist fantasies were so hopelessly vague that they precluded any union of culture and politics in the turbulent 1920s. It was left to other, more practically oriented Germans to use his terminology and promotion of German alterity as a facade for an upheaval that led not to the elevation, but the destruction of the old cultural elite. The case of Hofmannsthal demonstrates that encyclopedic learning and cosmopolitanism are no guarantee against self-delusion and political naiveté.⁶⁰ It is worthy of mention that this cosmopolitanism had an unexpected, but not inexplicable lacuna. In the 1920s, Hofmannsthal did write a series of articles for the American magazine *The Dial*, but he claimed at the very beginning of his 1927 speech that the United States was nothing like Europe. To him, it was an outwardly powerful young state lacking both an inner sense of spiritual community and a historically rich language transcending everyday communication. There is no doubt that an attitude like this contributed to the German elite’s rejection of Enlightenment rationality and political democracy. It would be exaggerated, however, to assert that Hofmannsthal “popularized” the Conservative Revolution.⁶¹ After the war, he was too isolated to exert lasting influence. It was a charismatic figure from the next generation who was destined to take center stage.

The generational dimension appears to be a decisive one vis-à-vis the degree of ferocity with which the conservative cultural critics attacked the Weimar Republic. It has been maintained that Hofmannsthal's image of his time was dominated by the impression that the individual was increasingly helpless in the face of entities and mechanisms beyond his control.⁶² This may well have been a feeling characteristic of most of his contemporaries, who had grown up in a relatively stable world. The "angry young men" (once again, women are peripheral to this phenomenon) that followed were born into societies already marked by signs of crisis. The representative of that group who deserves our attention here is Ernst Jünger (1895–1998). Placing Hofmannsthal in a line that leads to Jünger is misleading at best.⁶³ The younger man's involvement in the events of his age was much more intimate, especially in the military sphere. George did not serve in uniform, and neither Thomas Mann nor Hofmannsthal experienced combat,⁶⁴ but Jünger was one of the most highly decorated German soldiers in World War I. He not only spent extended periods at the front, but also went on to mythologize his experiences in several books. These writings, from *Storm of Steel* (1920) and *Battle as an Inner Experience* (1922) to *Copse 125* (1925), *Fire and Blood* (1925), *Total Mobilization* (1931), and beyond, shaped his public image as a writer, even though many volumes were to follow. This observer has great difficulty casting an impartial eye on the man who demonstrated a keen intelligence, gift for language, and ruthlessness bordering on barbarism in these early works. Having said that, I should provide some examples of what disturbs me the most.

Already in the preface to *Storm of Steel*, Jünger takes a position of great distance from the reality of war—and not only war:

Did it not seem then that life itself was speaking out of the confidence of its savage and visionary heart, knowing very well that in its more secret and essential depths it had nothing to fear from even the deadliest of wars, and going its way quite unaffected by the superficial interchange of peace and war?⁶⁵

On the surface of it, this is just one more expression of the "vitalist" philosophy embodied by Nietzsche and (on a more primitive level) Ludwig Klages. There is one crucial difference, however: Jünger's musings were not merely academic, but rather a reaction to combat. As he goes on to say on the page just cited, "[T]he war, for all its destructiveness, was an incomparable schooling of the heart." This "schooling" was actually a hardening or at least a confirmation of a hardness already there. Jünger, like many (mainly male, one imagines) Europeans of his generation, felt restless in the "long period of law

and order” and felt “a real craving for the abnormal” (21). Such sentiments were not foreign to Hermann Hesse, for example, but he chose to spend the war in Swiss exile. Others, like Jünger, sought out combat, only to die or to live to regret their fantasies. Very few men with Jünger’s intelligence could look back at life in the trenches and declare: “What is more sublime than to face death at the head of a hundred men?” (25). There are many such noteworthy phrases in *Storm of Steel* that cannot be inventoried here. For our purposes it must suffice to point out that the final passages praise life in the service of ideals and posit war as “an ideal preparation for life” (282). Like Thomas Mann, Jünger asserts that “bodily suffering always increases the sensitivity of the inner being” (280), but unlike him, he pays homage to a “feeling that dwells in the blood” (283). As an aside, one might ponder that until 1999, the German citizenship law was a *ius sanguinis*.

In his first book, Jünger tried to depict “the experience of war purely.” In the second, he turned to the “psychology” of war.⁶⁶ The essence of this “psychology” is apparent in the introduction and the first chapter—entitled “Blood.” We are told that in war, man (and in this case, the translation of “Mensch” as man—as opposed to human being—is accurate⁶⁷) makes up for everything that he has missed out on. His drives, no longer held in check by society and its laws, now become not only all that matters, but even something holy.⁶⁸ This sounds almost Freudian, except for one minor detail: Jünger celebrates the “wild orgy” of instinct, whereas Freud recognizes it as a distinct possibility and fears it. Freud feels ambivalent about the constraints placed upon individuals in the name of civilization, but Jünger absolutely revels in the “animalistic,” the unbridled “Urmensch,” the “cave dweller” (15). No Mann or Hofmannsthal could have written such things. It should be clear that the term “protofascistic” is meaningless if applied to Jünger *and* his predecessors. The older writers, for all of their patriotism, would hardly have praised modern warriors as “a completely new race . . . magnificent predators . . . the keenest juxtaposition of the body, intelligence, the will, and the senses” (37). When one reads that battle is “the male form of procreation” (50), there is no doubt that the zenith (nadir?) of irrationalism has been reached. Perhaps that is an overstatement, since there were many writers much less intelligent than Jünger who espoused such sentiments. In their cases, later enlistment in the Nazi cause was quite logical (if one may use the term in this context). This is exactly what Jünger did *not* do, and for that reason he remains a fascinating figure.⁶⁹

Ernst Jünger died while this chapter was being written. There was an astonishing number of responses to his death, and the critical literature examining his life and works fills many volumes.⁷⁰ The image of Jünger — especially the current one — will be examined in chapter 2 as well as in the conclusion. He is indubitably one of the key mentors of the contemporary intellectual New Right. As far as the nature of that mentorship is concerned, he appears to play a role similar to the one that Nietzsche played for those born in the 1890s. His works are read, to be sure (albeit selectively), but it is his image as an outsider that exerts the strongest attraction.⁷¹ This is a bit paradoxical, since it is practically impossible to reconcile the stance of the “great refuser” with enthusiastic participation in war. (Nietzsche, like Hemingway, tended to the wounded.⁷²) The solution to the puzzle lies in many observers’ tendency — whether conscious or not — to concentrate primarily on Jünger’s *inner* life as an aristocratic observer, an elitist “Anarch,” as he would say. His turn away from militarism, which most discern in the World War II years, was not accompanied by an embrace of democratic principles or any sudden affinity with the masses. In addition, he accomplished the impressive feat of concealing a strong anti-bourgeois animus within a thoroughly bourgeois facade.⁷³ In this, he was not unlike the chameleon-like François Mitterand, who congratulated him on his one hundredth birthday.⁷⁴

Before turning to the present scene, it would be instructive to contrast Jünger with the poet Gottfried Benn (1886–1956). Although he was at least as elitist as Jünger, Benn made a fatal miscalculation, one destined to make him a fixture in studies of intellectuals and tyranny:⁷⁵ He lent his considerable reputation to the Nazi cause in 1933. Most literary scholars treat his short-term infatuation with fascism as an aberration or a misunderstanding that did not taint the core of his poetic production.⁷⁶ There is something to be said for this viewpoint, but by the same token, one could say that Benn also “misunderstood” Nietzsche as a prophet of pure estheticism. For all of his destructiveness, Nietzsche did believe that new ideals must be found after the overcoming of the old, whereas Benn was too much of a nihilist to believe in the necessity or possibility of such a project (except in 1933!). He also was capable of praising Stefan George,⁷⁷ although the later George subscribed to fundamental cultural renewal in a way that was foreign to him. The procedure was the same as the one he used when writing laudatory prose about Heinrich Mann: the early *l’art pour l’art* phase was posited as a constant, rather than a stage later rejected

by the politically engaged author.⁷⁸ Such myopia had few direct consequences beyond the republic of letters, but Benn's blind spots or distorted vision regarding the nature of the NSDAP enhanced — albeit briefly — the prestige of a regime that he himself came to despise.

On April 24, 1933, not quite two months after the burning of the Reichstag in Berlin, Benn gave a radio speech entitled “The New State and the Intellectuals.” The text was published the next day in the *Berliner Börsenzeitung*. Benn begins with a salvo against the “intellectuals,” i.e., the leftist intellectuals, who are incapable of seeing that the new system of National Socialism is “anthropologically deeper,” since it is making the transition from the “economic to the mythical collective.”⁷⁹ (This is set up in contrast to the Soviet Union, which is condemned as a “tyrant state” (442), following a line of argument not unknown in the post-1945 period.) It is made very clear that the new state has come into being in opposition to the intellectuals, and Benn applauds that. History, he asserts, is not democratic, but “elemental,” and it works by means of a “new biological type” (444). Nietzsche's largely symbolic “blond beast” has apparently become a creature of flesh and blood. This beast has no need of freedom of speech, for “everything that has made the West famous” was created in “slave states” (446–447), claims Benn. Our striving must be directed toward the “absolute” and the “irrational,” that is, “that which has not yet been formally destroyed by thought” [“zerdacht”] (448–449). What is strange about such postulates is that they are juxtaposed with sarcastic comments about those who have fled the new state. These émigrés are portrayed as interested only in material possessions, e.g., villas and Mercedes automobiles (449). Benn uses a term to describe their wealth (“das Erraffte” — that which has been “grabbed” in a sinister manner) that was central to the Nazi polemics against Jewish capitalists. Did Benn, who was not anti-Semitic and even defended Jewish Expressionists against Nazi cultural functionaries, simply “misunderstand” the Nazi term? He seems to fit a disconcerting pattern of hyperintellectuality and selective perception of social reality common to a certain type of German writer.

A few weeks after Benn's polemic, one of the émigrés, Thomas Mann's son Klaus, responded in the form of a letter to his attacker.⁸⁰ The response was not another polemic, but rather an attempt by an “impassioned and faithful admirer” of Benn's works (74) to understand how a writer as great as Benn could succumb to the lures of fascism. As Peter de Mendelssohn has argued, when a major figure errs, everyone takes notice, and such figures

cannot escape this fate.⁸¹ Klaus Mann, for one, could not imagine that Benn, of all people, could make his peace with the barbarians:

What could have caused you to put your name—that has been for us the embodiment of high standards and a simply fanatical purity—at the disposal of those whose lack of standards is absolutely without parallel in European history and from whose moral impurity the world turns away with disgust? (75)

In the framework of this study, it is important to note that Klaus Mann himself—herein very much his father's son—expresses his own sympathy with the irrational and speaks of its “seductive power” (76). Despite this sympathy, he reaches an insight that recalls the words of Roy Pascal cited above in the preface:

Today, it seems to be almost an inevitability that an overly strong sympathy with the irrational leads to political reaction, if one does not really watch out. First comes the great gesture against “civilization”—a gesture that, as I can attest, holds a strong attraction for intellectuals—; suddenly one arrives at the cult of violence, and then in no time at Adolf Hitler. (76–77)

Mann pleads with Benn to divorce himself from “hysterical brutality,” prophesying that the life of the mind will have no place in the Third Reich. He was right about that, but he was wrong when he claimed that those who did not come out unequivocally against the Nazis would “no longer” be part of the civilized world.

Benn chose to publish Mann's personal letter, using it as a platform to savage the antifascist émigré community. In his “Response to the Literary Émigrés,”⁸² he prefigured the postwar debate between those writers who left Nazi Germany and those who chose to remain when he claimed that only those who have experienced “German events” in Germany were capable of comprehending them (239). He repeated his earlier views about a new man arising from the “inexhaustible fount of the race” and declared proudly: “Of course, this view of history is not enlightened or humanistic, but metaphysical, and my conception of man is even more so” (241). Incredibly, Benn attacked the émigrés in exactly the same manner as Thomas Mann had railed against his “democratic” brother in his *Reflections* almost twenty years earlier, dubbing them “amateurs of civilization and troubadours of Western progress” (242–243). Benn had great respect for Thomas Mann, but once again, he was able to engage in a one-sided reception of his works, ignoring the democratic shift of the 1920s. Despite his thoroughgoing antimaterialism and alienation from the masses, he even went so far as to proclaim that German workers were much better off than before, because the socialist project had been put into practice in Nazi Germany (244–245). The new

homeland (“Heimat”) was a bulwark against “the metropolis, industrialism, and intellectualism” (246). This was dangerous nonsense, but one prophecy did *almost* come true: Benn stated that the entire German people was willing to sacrifice itself (“untergangsbereit”) for the Nazi cause (247).

Was all this intellectual and moral confusion the product of thought processes (muddled as they might have been), or was it nothing but opportunism? The “decadent” Benn was ostracized by the Nazi cultural functionaries in the 1930s⁸³ (he had already emphasized in his “Response” that he did not belong to the NSDAP and had no relationship with its leaders), and as it became apparent that Germany would not win World War II, Benn began searching for ways to change his image. In his autobiography, he expressed amazement at the fact that the younger Klaus Mann had understood the nature of National Socialism better than he.⁸⁴ Just the same, he pointed out that his 1933 essay, despite being “Romantic, effusive, melodramatic,” contained issues that were still “acute” after 1945 (74). In hardly convincing fashion (at least from the perspective of this reader), Benn argued that he had not been an advocate for the Nazis but instead for something akin to the self-determination of nations (80). As a witness, he called none other than Thomas Mann, comparing his own loyalty to the German people with Mann’s patriotism in the *Reflections* (83–84). There is some truth to this, but had history stood still since 1917? Benn portrays the artist and intellectual as one “drawn into the maelstrom” (84). This does not prevent him, however, from criticizing the émigrés (who were, after all, artists and intellectuals themselves) for not saving Germany from the “disaster” (90) before it was too late. The apparent belief that literary intellectuals could have preserved Weimar democracy would be comical if it were not pathetic. (Their efforts to *undermine* democracy were not insignificant, however.) Even *after* the collapse of the Third Reich, Benn failed to come to grips with his own irrationalism or the relationship between politics, economics, and culture.⁸⁵ Despite this, he was eventually given exalted status as a paragon of true art, one rigorously divorced from history, society, or any considerations not situated on the metaphysical plane. To be sure, this status was limited to *West* Germany. The representatives of antifascist culture, those who had been vilified by Benn and other “inner émigrés,” were generally not welcome in the Western zones of occupation.⁸⁶ Many of them settled in the East, and some, like Thomas Mann, never lived in Germany again. They were the heirs of the “other” German tradition,⁸⁷ the one beyond the scope of this book.