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Hans Friedrich Blunck

Poet and Nazi Collaborator, 1888–1961

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Introduction

This study examines the life and artistic career of a poet and writer who collaborated with the Nazis. Hans Friedrich Blunck was an influential Third Reich *Literatus*. He was president of the *Reichsschrifttumskammer* (“Reich Literary Chamber”; RSK) from late 1933 until 1935 and president of a hitherto-unknown cultural embassy of his own invention, *Die Stiftung des deutschen Auslandswerks* (“Foundation for German Foreign Work”; DAW), until 1940. These aspects of his life, along with his literary work, have established his legacy. The stain of his association with the Nazis has been indelible.

When the Nazis seized power, Blunck was a representative of neo-romantic, traditional folk-styles who had seen successes in the 1920s, but whose literary career was in general decline. Known for his semi-historical works about the early Germanic peoples and his native Schleswig-Holstein, he had also written ballads, fairy tales, and poems in the old heroic style, often with pastoral themes. In an exaggerated, often sentimental way, he represented genres that had reached their zenith sixty years earlier and were now falling out of favor with the reading public. On account of his nationalistic, *völkisch* bent, he was nonetheless an agreeable choice to head the RSK, which had been founded by Joseph Goebbels. Not surprisingly, the Propaganda Minister was more interested in propaganda than popularity. The RSK joined writers in one comprehensive organization. It “unionized” them by making it illegal to publish without being a member. After a slow estrangement from the RSK, Blunck left the organization and formed the DAW. This international propaganda organization endeavored, through informal ties, to help foreign countries “understand” both the culture and political interests of Nazi Germany.

In the years since 1945, historians have tended to neglect writers like Blunck who played leading roles in the Third Reich, as well as the organizations in which they were involved. Indeed, although once well known, many writers of this caliber – and, in particular, Blunck – have been buried in the ashes of their complicity in the murderous

regime. Some scholars have applauded this neglect, arguing that such writers, their work, and their affiliations are not worth remembering. However, as a result of this mindset, the cultural influences that propelled the Nazis remain unclear.

The following study seeks to help fill this gap in the historical literature. Its purpose is to examine Blunck's life and works and then relate them to his collaboration with the Nazis. As will become clear early on, Blunck's life and works were informed by a passionate love for his native region of Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Germany. During his childhood, Blunck learned of Schleswig-Holstein's and Lower Germany's mystical traditions of "democracy" and "freedom." His parents raised him with an awareness of the prehistoric origins in the region of the Germanic peoples. They also depicted Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Germany as Germany's cultural fount. Many of these beliefs were exaggerated and, in some respects, false. Nonetheless, as Blunck matured, he embraced them. In his literature, he exalted Lower Germany as the embodiment of "true" Germanic traditions. Likewise, his engagement in cultural and political affairs focused on promoting his region's art and history. Accordingly, he developed a vigorous loathing, fired by his own literary disappointments, for Berlin and its "asphalt" literature. The city's modern artistic movements, particularly Expressionism, he believed, were polluting German and Germanic traditions and ignoring time-honored provincial genres like those of Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Germany.

For Blunck, the Nazi seizure of power represented an opportunity. Guided by the romantic, fantastical images he had collected since childhood, he believed the new regime would end Berlin's hegemony of so-called "smut" and "dirt" (as traditionalists often referred to Weimar art) and, thus, restore provincial writers like himself to their proper place as Germany's cultural elite. He also believed the regime would reinvigorate the "old Reich" in the spirit of the mythical "Song of the Nibelungen" (*Nibelungenlied*), in which the provinces, particularly the Imperial Netherlands (*Reichsniederlande*), which had included Lower Germany, were dominant. Minimizing the barbarism of events, he conceived of the RSK as a "corporation" reminiscent of Lower Germany's and Schleswig-Holstein's medieval

guilds. He convinced himself that the chamber would protect the independence of writers, especially in the provinces. Furthermore, he created the DAW to foster European understanding based on his idyllic view, also learned from his parents, that medieval Europe had been united in prosperity and peace around a dominant, culturally vibrant German Reich, whose strength emanated from its northern regions.

That Blunck's concerns coincided, at least in part, with the Nazis' is an important aspect of the tale, for it speaks to the question of how the Nazis gained support among Germany's conservative provincial writers. Blunck's complicity also speaks to the question of how historical and cultural traditions – real or imaginary – in Germany's various provinces, in his case Schleswig-Holstein, engendered support for the movement. Indeed, according to the poet's experience, the Nazis rode to power, culturally speaking, a wave of provincial discontent.