

Völkische Altnordistik: The Politics of Nordic Studies in the German-Speaking Countries, 1926-45

Bernard Mees

University of Melbourne

Blaue Nacht mit lauen Wellen!
Am Geländ' die Juchzer gellen,

Wo noch Hollas Büsche blühh.
Feuer leuchten durch die Tale,
Wie Balders Grabesmale,
Und des Rades Funken glühh.
Laßt die Sonnenrunne funkeln,
Hakenkreuz erstrahl' im Dunkeln,
Sei begrüßt, erhabner Phol!
Tausend Bauta-Steine reden,
Druiden-Weisheit, Edda, Veden,
Von dir, ewigem 'Symbol'!

Blue night with mild waves!
In the open country, the cry of the delighted
rings,
Where still Holle's bushes bloom.
Fire shines through the valleys,
Like Balder's monuments,
And from the wheel sparks glow.
Let the sun-rune spark,
Swastika radiant in the dark,
Be welcome, exalted Phol!
A thousand Bauta-stones counsel,
Druidic wisdom, Edda, Vedas,
From you, eternal 'symbol'!

So reads an anonymous *völkisch* poem of 1899 glorifying the swastika, known from an Old Norse source as the *sólarhvel* ('sun-wheel').¹ Drawing on a smorgasbord of references to German, Norse and other Indo-European traditions, it appeared in *Heimdall* (1897-1918), one of a number of political journals of Wilhelmine times with names evoking a Nordic connection, also including *Odin* (1899-1901), *Hammer* (1901-1913, 33), *Runen* (1918-29) and the *Werdandi-Jahrbücher* (c. 1913). All of the groups that published these journals had one trait in common apart from an interest in pagan Nordic antiquity: they were all devotees of a new movement of the political far right that had been christened by its proponents as *völkisch*.

The *Völkisch* Movement has its genesis in a political sense in the unresolved question of the German-speaking citizens of the Hapsburg Empire since the unification of (what to many of them amounted to merely the rest of) Germany in 1871 as the 'little-Germany', Prussian-dominated and excluding the Austro-Germans. Although the German cult of the *Volk* can be traced back to the days of Herder, in order to separate the political identity of the Austro-Germans from the concept of nation (in fact to transcend it), a new term appeared in the political vocabulary, in the manner of a calque based on the term *national*. *Volk*, apparently the indigenous equivalent of the Latin loan *Nation* became the model for an indigenous identity, and the term *völkisch* 'common, popular' took on a new, political meaning.²

The most effective representation of these *völkisch* Germans were the Pan-Germans (*Alldeutsche*) whose movement was founded in Vienna in the 1870s. Pan-German sentiment soon spread to Wilhelmine Germany where the purview of Pan-Germanism (*Alldeutschtum*) expanded to encompass German overseas interests, and colonialist Pan-Germans entered the Reichstag from the 1890s.³ The various *völkisch* parties of Austria and Germany were never to enjoy much success among the public at large until one of these groups, founded as a workers' branch of Munich's Thule Society, the publisher of *Runen*, rejected the elitism typical of their *völkisch* forebears, and sought instead to capture a mass following. As the National Socialist German Workers' Party it was to achieve a *völkisch* victory in 1933, a unified Greater Germany by 1938 and a thousand year Reich that ended in ruins after only twelve.

To understand *völkisch* thought, the approach today is to view it as an

¹ Anon., 'Sonnenwende', *Heimdall* 13, 14. 4/1899, p. 95; K. Weißmann, *Schwarze Fahnen, Runenzeichen*, Düsseldorf 1991, pp. 67 ff.

² J. & W. Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* XXVI, Berlin 1951, p. 485; A. G. Whiteside, *The Socialism of Fools*, Berkeley 1975; F. L. Carsten, *Fascist Movements in Austria*, London 1977; G. Hartung, 'Völkische Ideologie', *Weimarer Beiträge* 33, 1987, pp. 1174-85; J. Hermand, *Old Dreams of a New Reich*, trans. P. Levesque with S. Soldovieri, Bloomington 1992; B. Schönemann, 'Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse XII.3', in O. Brunner, W. Conze and R. Kosselleck (eds), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* VII, Stuttgart 1992, pp. 373-76.

³ R. Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German*, Boston 1984.

element of the German (and Austrian) variety of a generic political form: fascism. Although there have been many shifts in the manner in which historians have viewed the Third Reich over the past 50 years, the end of the Cold War essentially saw the end of the interpretation of Nazism as Hitlerism (as a mirror to the enemy of Communism/Stalinism). The German experience is now more readily compared with movements of a similar ilk, not just in Italy, but also in England, France, Belgium, Spain, Finland, Hungary, Rumania, and even as far afield as Brazil and South Africa. The common thread of this fascism is, according to Roger Griffin, 'a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism'.⁴ In other words, all of these movements aimed at a radical renewal of their societies. As such, fascist thought is riddled with idealistic notions of nation and the past, and pleas for renewal, resurgence, reinvigoration, rebirth.

In Italy the utopian past of Mussolini's Fascists was ancient Rome. In Germany, the *völkisch* utopia comprised a mixture of the Ideals of 1914 (the time of the Civil Truce or *Burgenfrieden* declared at the outbreak of WWI), the spirit of the *Kultur* of the nineteenth century, the medieval *Ritterzeit* of the early days of the Holy Roman Empire, but increasingly, and most romantically, the Germania of the time of Tacitus, Arminius and the *furor Teutonicus*. *Völkisch* notions of genealogy and rootedness led these thinkers back to the pure, untrammelled youngest Germany of pre-Christian times. Indeed, the writings of leading National Socialists are filled with notions of remote antiquity: Hitler's call for 'a Germanic State of the German Nation' (*einen germanischen Staat deutscher Nation*) clearly draws on the picture of the racially pure ancient Germany described in the fourth book of the Germanic ethnography of Tacitus.⁵ The *völkisch* ideal increasingly became a Germanic utopia reliant upon the picture of antiquity developed by popularisers and scholars, both past and contemporary. The use of the swastika and various runes as emblems for organs of the NSDAP kept the ideal of the pre-Christian Germany evermore to the fore, and among more radical ideologues such as Himmler, even led to the revival of a National Socialist neopaganism based in reconstruction of practices from the Germanic Iron and even Bronze Age.

Although German texts published between 1933 and 1945 are often used with some care by researchers today, the influence of *völkisch* thought on scholarship pre-dates the Nazi seizure of power. *Völkisch* thought first makes its overt presence felt in scholarship of the 1890s with Gustaf Kossinna and thereafter the archaeological school he founded in Berlin, and Rudolf Much and the school of folklore studies (*Volkskunde*) he inaugurated in Vienna. Both were

⁴ R. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, London 1991, p. 26.

⁵ A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 44th ed., Munich 1933, p. 362. Some authors seek to link this phrase solely with the medieval *Heilige Römische Reich Deutscher Nation*, though the chapter it ends concerns race which clearly reveals it also as a Tacitean reference: (*pace*) F.-L. Kroll, *Utopie als Ideologie*, Paderborn 1998, p. 73.

Nordicists/ Germanists, and along with the physician Ludwig Wilser, the writer of dozens of antiquarian and anthropological works, they were to engender *völkisch* modes of thought in German archaeology, anthropology, literary philology, linguistics, runology and Old Norse studies.

Of course Kossinna and Much did not themselves make an indelible impression in Old Norse scholarship. Yet their legacy continued on after the 1914-1918 war and is represented in the studies of scholars who came after them. A leading example of the *völkisch* legacy was the publication in 1926 of a collection of essays by academics from Germany, Austria and Switzerland under the editorship of Herman Nollau. This volume, *Germanic Resurgence (Germanische Wieder-erstehung)*, sought to capitalise on the growing popularity of Old Germanic studies, and contains a lead article on the Nordic branch of Germania by Andreas Heusler.⁶

Heusler's influence on Nordic studies is immense. Mentioned by one commentator in comparison with the Grimms,⁷ the Swiss-born philologist had an enormous impact on his colleagues at the University of Berlin until his retirement in 1919, and thereafter in his publications written back in Arlesheim-bei-Basel until his death in 1940. Linguists of course remember him most fondly for his work on comparative Germanic meter, though in Old Germanic studies as a whole he is probably best known for his concept of Germanicness (*Germanentum*).⁸ Although he did not coin this expression (which had to that time usually been merely a grandiose synonym of *Deutschtum*),⁹ he imbued in it a new meaning; in fact he conceptualised Germanicness formally for the first time.¹⁰ He also proselytised this conception, perhaps most famously in his collection of essays from 1933, entitled simply *Germanicness (Germanentum)*. The lead essay in this work is a reprint of that of 1926's *Germanic*

⁶ H. Nollau (ed.), *Germanische Wiedererstehung*, Heidelberg 1926.

⁷ S. Sonderegger, 'Vorwort', in A. Heusler, *Kleine Schriften II*, ed. S. Sonderegger, Berlin 1969, p. v.

⁸ H. Beck, 'Andreas Heuslers Begriff des „Altgermanischen“', in H. Beck (ed.), *Germanenprobleme in heutiger Sicht*, Berlin 1986, pp. 396-412; idem, 'Heusler, Andreas', in J. Hoops, *Reallexikon der germanischehn Altertumskunde XIV*, 2nd ed., Berlin 1999, pp. 533-43.

⁹ According to the Grimms (*Wörterbuch II*, p. 1053) in 1866 *Deutsch(h)um* was a comparatively recent coin (and 'meist ironisch'). *Germanent(h)um*, which is not listed in the relevant (1897) volume of their dictionary, first appears in book titles in (medieval and modern) historical, political and anti-Semitic discourse; cf. also Leo Berg's attempt to claim Ibsen's works as German in character: J. Venedy, *Römerthum, Christenthum und Germanenthum und deren wechselseitiger Einfluß bei der Umgestaltung der Sklaverei des Alterthums und die Leibeigenschaft des Mittelalters*, Frankfurt a. M. 1840; B. Bauer, *Rußland und das Germanenthum*, Charlottenburg 1853; W. Streuber, *Das Germanenthum und Österreich*, Darmstadt 1870; W. Marr, *Das Sieg des Judenthums über das Germanenthum*, Bern 1879; L. Berg, *Henrik Ibsen und das Germanenthum in den modernen Literatur*, Berlin 1887.

¹⁰ For earlier terminologies used by *völkisch* thinkers before Heusler see K. v. See, 'Kulturkritik und Germanenforschung zwischen den Weltkriegen', *Historische Zeitschrift* 245, 1987, pp. 346-48 [= idem, *Barbar, Germane, Arier*, Heidelberg 1994, pp. 189-91].

*Resurgence.*¹¹

Nazi Germany hailed Heusler's work. Yet Germanicness, based principally in interpretations of Norse literature, supplemented (for comparative purposes) with the less copious early English and German literary remains, was in fact a Germanised form of Nordicness. Heusler claimed that 'the thought that [the Scandinavian] Eddas have a common Germanic background no longer excites Nordic hearts and minds' (*der Gedanke, daß ihre Edda einen gemeinengermanischen Hintergrund habe, schlägt keine Funken in nordischen Betrachten*). For Heusler true Germanicness lived on only in Germany; after all, witness the interest in all things Germanic in the Germany of the day. Yet Heusler was fundamentally reliant on Nordic sources for this *verdeutschendes Nordentum*: especially when it came to issues of Germanic sensibility he admits 'we rely on the people of the Icelandic sagas for help' (*nehmen wir die isländischen Sagamenschen zu Hilfe!*) — *Germanentum* could not be reconstructed from the literature of medieval Germany.¹² It is no surprise, then, given the nature of his sources that Heusler's Germanicness is a heroic one. But a militant, and indeed Nietzschean Germanicness¹³ was hailed in fascist Germany as a discovery of genius, and moreover, as an encapsulated *völkisch* past with an uncanny relevance to the struggles of the then present day. Not only was Germanic studies, in the words of Hermann Güntert in 1938, recognised as a 'service to our people' (*Dienst an unserem Volk*).¹⁴ As Hermann Schneider put it in 1939:¹⁵

Das Jahr 1933 brachte eine Betrachtung der deutschen Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte zum Siege, die dem germanischen Element im Deutschen eine bisher ungeahnte Bedeutung verschafte: das Beste am Deutschen ist germanisch und muß in der germanischen Frühzeit in reiner Gestalt zu finden sein.

The year 1933 brought a victory for the way in which we regard German cultural and intellectual history. It gave the Germanic element in German a previously unforeseen importance. The best in German is Germanic and its pure form can only be found in early Germanic times.

In a speech given to the National Socialist Teachers' League (Nationalsozialistische Lehrerbund) in 1935, Heusler's work was held up as

¹¹ A. Heusler, *Germanentum*, Heidelberg 1934.

¹² A. Heusler 'Von germanisch und deutsche Art', *Zeitschrift für Deutschkunde* 39, 1925, pp. 746-57 [= *Germanentum*, pp. 79-88 = *Kleine Schriften* II, pp. 598-607].

¹³ Heusler, *Germanentum*, p. 71; and cf. H. Beck, 'Andreas Heusler und die zeitgenössischen religionsgeschichtlichen Interpretationen des Germanentums', in E. Walter and H. Mittelstädt (eds), *Altnordistik: Vielfalt und Einheit*, Weimar 1989, pp. 33-45; idem, 'Heusler, Andreas', pp. 538-40; K. v. See, 'Andreas Heusler in seinen Briefen', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 119, 1990, pp. 387-88 [= *Barbar, Germane, Arier*, pp. 271-72].

¹⁴ H. Güntert, 'Neue Zeit - neues Ziel', *Wörter und Sachen* 19 (NF 1), 1938, p. 11.

¹⁵ H. Schneider, 'Die germanische Altertumskunde zwischen 1933 und 1938', *Forschungen und Fortschritte* 15, 1939, pp. 1-3.

essential reading for the times. After summarising Heusler's expressions of Germanicness, the speaker, Hans Taeger, commented:¹⁶

Heusler hat uns für die künstlerischen Qualitäten der Edda, für die Eigenart germanischen Kunst und germanischen Menschentums den Blick geschäft und in ihrer Beziehung auf Nietzsches sittliche Forderungen die Brücke von der Vergangenheit zur Gegenwart geschlagen.

Heusler has produced in us an appreciation of the artistic quality of the Eddas, the characteristically Germanic art and Germanic humanity, and with his affinity with Nietzsche's moral challenge has forged a bridge from the past to the present.

The bridge from the past to the present had become the course for a German Germanic resurgence.

Clear evidence for the impact of Heusler's concept of Germanicness is the manner in which brown literature began to take on the trappings of his language and speak in terms of this new notion of *Germanentum*. Another Nazi writer in 1944 described Germanicness so:¹⁷

Deutsches Germanentum ist aus nordischen Rassenentum entspringende metaphysische Charkterlichkeit, die sich in einer schöpferischen Gestaltungskraft auf dem Grunde eine heraldisch Haltung ... erschließt ... Das deutsches Germanentum hat die Aufgabe, die weltgeschichtliche Neuordnung zu vollziehen.

German Germanicness is a metaphysical form of character, derived from a Nordic racial essence, which reveals itself in a creative power based on a heroic attitude ... German Germanicness has the task of bringing the new order of world history to completion.

Heusler's Germanicness had become the transalpine sister of Fascist Italy's *Romanit *.¹⁸

Taeger also mentions another leading figure in the study of Germanicness, a well-known Nordacist who had succeeded Heusler at Berlin, the Prussian scholar Gustav Neckel. Neckel's offerings, however, went much further down the *v lkisch* path than had Heusler. In 1929, for example, he came out in favour of the old *v lkisch* theory (once proselytised by Wilser and Kossinna) that rather than based in a Mediterranean prototype, the runes were an indigenous creation of the North, and although he first couched his words in terms of a cognate relationship (*Urverwandschaft*) between the Germanic and the Mediterranean scripts, by 1933 he had come out squarely in favour of this most preposterous of *v lkisch* postulates.¹⁹ Moreover, like Much in Vienna, Neckel

¹⁶ H. Taeger, 'Germanentum und wir', *Zeitschrift f r Deutschkunde* 50, 1936, p. 409.

¹⁷ F. A. Beck, *Der Aufstieg des germanischen Weltalters*, Bochum 1944, pp. 45-47.

¹⁸ See R. Visser, 'Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of *Romanit *', *Journal of Contemporary History* 27, 1992, pp. 5-22 [Thanks to Steven R. Welch for this reference].

¹⁹ G. Neckel, review of M. Hammarstr m, 'Om runeskriftens h rkomst' (*Studier i nordisk filologi* 20, 1929), *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 50, 1929, pp. 1237-39; idem, 'Die Herkunft der Runenschrift', *Neue Jahrb cher f r Wissenschaft und Jugendbildung* 9, 1933, pp. 406-17 = L. Roselius (ed.), *Erstes Nordisches Thing*, Bremen 1933, pp. 60-76.

had become a champion of Germanicness. In the year of the onset of the Great Depression he penned a book that started with an attack on the German Gothicist Sigmund Feist and finished with an immoderate attack on the *General Characteristics of the Germanic Languages* of the great French linguist Antoine Meillet, comparing it adversely to Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* of Napoleonic times simply because he felt that Meillet's acceptance of the substrate theory inaugurated by Feist impugned the honour of the Germanic tribes.²⁰ Not surprisingly, in his private correspondence with Wilhelm Ranisch, Heusler attacked Neckel, called into question his sanity, and accused him of fostering delusions. Yet Heusler had joined this project some years earlier, and by the early 1930s, with political backing of a most overt nature, *völkisch* Germanomania had become a state-sponsored enterprise. A posthumous collection of Neckel's works were published in 1944 under the Heuslerian title *On Germanicness (Zur Germanentum)*. Indeed, Neckel was even upbraided for not toeing the official party line in 1935 after an exchange with the young Amt-Rosenberg-aligned Nordicist Bernhard Kummer (who had served as his assistant at Berlin from 1930-33), and was banished to Göttingen for two years where he became the inaugural holder of a Nordic chair at the university of the Grimms.²¹

Neckel's '*Altertumsfimmels*' (deluded picture of antiquity)²² was one that could be found in the works of earlier authors enraptured by the *völkisch* spell. Study of the Germanic ancestors had become worship, and for some writers dreaming. Such an attitude had been part and parcel of *völkisch* thought since the 1890s when the Austrian mysticist Guido (von) List had started having visions about Germanic antiquity, and clearly under the influence of Helena Blavatsky's Theosophy, inaugurated Ariosophy (or as he termed it Armanism), a seminal step in the revival of Germanic paganism.²³ List's attempt to produce a new Teutonism was part of a tradition that began with Paul de Lagarde and Richard Wagner that sought to distill a German spirituality from German

²⁰ A. Meillet, *Caractères généraux des langues germanique*, Paris 1917; R. Much, 'Sigmund Feist und das germanische Altertum', *Wiener Prähistorische Zeitschrift* 15, 1928, pp. 1-19, 72-81; G. Neckel, *Germanen und Kelten*, Heidelberg 1929; B. Mees, 'Linguistics and Nationalism: Henry d'Arbois de Jubainville and Cultural Hegemony', *Melbourne Historical Journal* 25, 1997, pp. 46-64.

²¹ G. Neckel, *Vom Germanentum. Ausgewählte Aufsätze und Vorträge von Gustav Neckel*, ed. W. Heydenreich and H. M. Neckel, Leipzig 1944; F. Paul, 'Zur Geschichte der Skandinavistik an der Georg-August-Universität Göttingen: Eine vorläufige Skizze (1985)', <www.gwdg.de/huhsk/semgesch.htm>; K. Düwel and H. Beck (eds), *Andreas Heusler an Wilhelm Ranisch. Briefe aus den Jahren 1890-1940*, Basel 1989, nos 466/2 (10.3.35), 475/1 (8.12.35), 529 (6.4.33). On Kummer see K. v. See, 'Das "Nordische" in der deutschen Wissenschaft des 20. Jahrhunderts', *Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik* 15/2, 1983, pp. 27 ff. [= *Barbar, Germane, Arier*, pp. 224 ff.].

²² Heuser to Ranisch 28/1/38 (letter no. 499/2).

²³ G. v. List, *Das Geheimnis der Runen*, Gross-Lichterfelde 1907 [Leipzig 1908]; N. Goodrick-Clark, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, Wellingborough 1985.

Christianity; and indeed Hitler was seen by some National Socialists as the new German messiah who would complete Luther's work of German reformation.²⁴ This interest in a *völkisch* religiosity, however, was also paralleled by another development in Nordic and Germanic studies in Germany: the beginnings of a properly historical *Germanische Religionsgeschichte*, a History of Germanic Religion.

Before the publication of the first volume of Karl Helm's *History of Old Germanic Religion* in 1913, the study of Norse myth was usually characterised as mythological study. Since the time of Jacob Grimm, Germanic mythology was essentially studied in the shadow of the repertoire of Norse myths, as continental and Anglo-Saxon figures were interpreted in light of those of the Eddas. Helm instead concentrated on pre-Christian beliefs among the Germanic tribes as a developmental process. He spoke of the development of cults, such as that of Woden/Wuotan/Óðinn over time and indeed over space.²⁵ Eugen Mogk recognised the breakthrough made by Helm when the second edition of his *Germanic Mythology* appeared as *Germanic Religious History and Mythology* in 1921.²⁶ In 1938, Jost Trier marked out the development of the new understanding of the history of Germanic religion in a review of an exciting new development. The approach in Helm's initial work had become so developed over the succeeding decades that a true picture of the development of the religiosity of the Germanic past could now be attained. The work in which this *Religionsgeschichte* had reached its apogee was that which was the occasion of Trier's review, the first edition of Jan de Vries' *History of Old Germanic Religion*.²⁷

After Helm's breakthrough work, Germanic mythology (which is, of course, mostly Norse mythology) could be seen as a stage in the development of Germanic and German religiosity. No better example of this could be seen than in the Much school which by this time had developed an altogether new manner of looking into Germanic myths and folktales. Much had been heavily criticised by the leading German linguist Herman Hirt in 1896 for his chauvinistic

²⁴ G. L. Mosse, 'The Mystical Origins of National Socialism', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22, 1961, pp. 81-96; idem, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, New York 1964, pp. 31 ff., 280 ff.; I. Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth"*, Oxford 1987.

²⁵ K. Helm, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 2 vols, Heidelberg 1913-53; idem, 'Spaltung, Schichtung und Mischung im germanischen Heidentum', in P. Merker and W. Stämmeler (eds), *Vom Werden des deutschen Geistes: Festgabe Gustav Ehrismann*, Berlin 1925, pp. 1-20.

²⁶ E. Mogk, *Germanische Mythologie*, Leipzig 1906; idem, *Germanische Religionsgeschichte und Mythologie*, Leipzig 1921; though cf. R. M. Meyer, *Germanische Religionsgeschichte*, Berlin 1910.

²⁷ J. de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* (Grundriß der germanischen Philologie³ 12), 2 vols, Berlin 1935-37; J. Trier, 'Germanische Religionsgeschichte', *Zeitschrift für Deutschkunde* 52, 1938, pp. 382-86; cf. W. H. Vogt, 'Altgermanische Religiosität', *Forschungen und Fortschritte* 15, 1939, pp. 246-48.

approach to Germanic philology,²⁸ but such criticism did not faze him, and under his influence Vienna had become a hotbed for *völkisch* Germanism, a mantle unfortunately it has only thrown off comparatively recently. The breakthrough work in this new school has turned out to be Lily Weiser's 1927 study *Old Germanic Juvenile Devotions and Men's Leagues*. The investigation of *Männerbünde* (Men's Leagues) is clearly reminiscent of developments within the Youth Movement in Germany and Austria at the time. Politics had infiltrated this originally apolitical (or rather idealistic) movement, especially that of the *völkisch* theorists. The *völkisch* theorists of the German Youth Movement had developed a notion of Eros, the bond of affinity that developed among young men. This Eros was held by some to be the equivalent of the *esprit de corps* of the front soldiers of the Great War. The youth in the *Männerbund* was to become the partner of the fascist new man.²⁹

The links between the *Männerbund* theories emanating out of Vienna and *völkisch* ideology was not to become palpable until 1934 when the Nordacist Otto Höfler, another of Much's students, published his professional thesis, *Secret Cultic Leagues of the Germanic Peoples*, not with a traditional publisher, but in the new monograph series of Moritz Diesterweg's, a Frankfurt firm better known as publisher of a journal of a *völkisch* Youth Movement group, the Artam League (Bund-Artam), that had at one time included Himmler among its members. This journal, *The Sun*, used the (younger) Norse h-rune, *Hagal* (which had been attributed special powers by German mysticists), as its emblem and bore the subtitle the 'Monthly of Nordic Life and Ideology'.³⁰ A favourite book of Himmler's, after the appearance of his *Secret Cultic Leagues* Höfler was to become a leading National Socialist academic, overseeing the German translation of Vilhelm Grønbech's *World of the Teutons* (published by the Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt — another *völkisch* publisher, but by then firmly under National Socialist control). The theories of the Much school are based around the continuity of antiquity into the present — whether this be Eros or Höfler's demonic aspect of the Germanic warrior band. Höfler's fuller treatment of Germanic continuity even appeared as the lead article in the prestigious *Historische Zeitschrift* in 1938 after he had given it as a speech to a conference of historians in Erfurt the previous summer.³¹

²⁸ H. Hirt, 'Nochmals die Deutung der germanischen Völkernamen', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 21, 1896, p. 127.

²⁹ L. Weiser, *Altgermanische Jünglingsweihen und Männerbünde*, Bühl 1927; O. Bockhorn, 'Von Ritualen, Mythen und Lebenskreisen: Volkskunde im Umfeld der Universität Wien', in W. Jacobeit, H. Lixfeld and O. Bockhorn (eds), *Völkische Wissenschaft*, Vienna 1994, pp. 477-526.

³⁰ *Die Sonne: Monatsschrift für nordische Weltanschauung und Lebensgestaltung* 1923-44; M. H. Kater, 'Die Artamanenschaft: Völkische Jugend in der Weimarer Republik', *Historische Zeitschrift* 213, 1971, pp. 557-638.

³¹ O. Höfler, *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen I*, Frankfurt a. M. 1934; idem, *Die germanische Kontinuitätsproblem* (Schriften des Reichsinstituts für die Geschichte des Neuen Deutschlands), Hamburg 1937 = *Historische Zeitschrift* 157, 1938, pp. 1-26 and as a Dutch

Heusler's Germanicness, Helm's *Religionsgeschichte* and the Germanic continuities of the Much school were heavily influenced by and indeed had become entwined with the development of *völkisch* thought, one of the major planks of the National Socialist Weltanschauung. The interest of Himmler in such developments led to the establishment of a learned society within the SS whose aim was to promote Old Germanic learning. The influence of the Party, especially after 1935 in the form of the SS-Ahnenerbe in the expansion of archaeology and runology in the Third Reich, was fundamental to the boom in academic archaeology and runology at the time, as, in the *völkisch* tradition, both drew on wells of unimpeachable pedigree: the legacies of Kossinna and List.³² The development in Nordic studies over a comparable period is not so palpably influenced by *völkisch* thinkers, but by the language of the *Volk*, of *völkisch* renewal, of German(ic) religiosity and continuity from ancient times; all are to be witnessed in the works of Nordacists from Heusler to Neckel and Much's students in Vienna and beyond. Some such as Höfler and Trier³³ were to continue on the *völkisch* project after the war and some of the more extreme post-war German runology obviously owes a debt to the developments of the 1930s and 40s. It is also clear that such thinking was a critical influence on Jan de Vries, who after the war explained his collaboration with the Ahnenerbe in terms of a hope for a Germanic renewal on Dutch soil.³⁴ It comes as no surprise,

translation in *Volksche Wacht* 8, 1943, pp. 289-97; idem, 'Die politische Leistung der Völkerwanderungszeit', *Kieler Blätter* 1938, pp. 282-97 [= Schriften der wissenschaftlichen Akademie des NSD-Dozentenbundes der Christian-Albrechts-Universität Kiel, Heft 7, Neumünster 1939 = idem, *Kleine Schriften*, ed. H. Birkhan, Hamburg 1982, pp. 1-16]; idem, 'Volkskunde und politische Geschichte', *Historische Zeitschrift* 162, 1940, pp. 1-18; W. Grönbech, *Kultur und Religion der Germanen*, ed. O. Höfler, trans. E. Hoffmeyer, 2 vols, Hamburg 1937-39, 4th ed. 1940-42; Mosse, *Crisis of German Ideology*, pp. 204-33; K. v. See, 'Politische Männerbunde-Ideologie von der wilhelmischen Zeit bis zum Nationalsozialismus', in G. Völger and K. v. Welck (eds), *Männerbunde, Männerbünde*, 2 vols, 1990, I, pp. 93-102 [= a revised version in *Barbar, Germane, Arier*, pp. 319-42]; J. Hirschbigel, 'Die „germanische Kontinuitätstheorie“ Otto Höflers', *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Schleswig-Holsteine Geschichte* 117, 1992, pp. 181-98; U. Wiggershaus-Müller, *Nationalsozialismus und Geschichtswissenschaft*, Hamburg 1998, pp. 153 ff.; and regrettably A. H. Price, *The Germanic Warrior Clubs*, 2nd ed., Tübingen 1996.

³² M. H. Kater, *Das „Ahnenerbe“ der SS 1935-1945*, Stuttgart 1974; U. Hunger, *Die Runenkunde im Dritten Reich*, Frankfurt a. M. 1984; U. Veit, 'Ethnic Concepts in German Prehistory: A Case Study on the Relationship between Cultural Identity and Archaeological Objectivity', in S. Shennan (ed.), *Archaeological Approaches to Cultural Identity*, London 1989, pp. 35-56; B. Arnold, 'The Past as Propaganda - Totalitarian Archaeology in Nazi Germany', *Antiquity* 64, 1990, pp. 464-78; W. J. McCann, "'Volk und Germanentum': The Presentation of the Past in Nazi Germany', in P. Gathercole and D. Lowenthal (eds), *The Politics of the Past*, London 1990, pp. 74-88; B. Arnold and H. Hausmann, 'Archaeology in Nazi Germany: The Legacy of the Faustian Bargain', in P. L. Kohl and C. Fawcett (eds), *Nationalism, Politics and Practice of Archaeology*, Cambridge 1995, pp. 70-81.

³³ On Trier, see now C. H. Hutton, *Linguistics and the Third Reich*, London 1999, pp. 86-105.

³⁴ K. Heeroma, 'Vorwart', in J. de Vries, *Kleine Schriften*, ed. K. Heeroma and A. Kylstra, Berlin 1965, p. vi.

then, to discover the French friend of Höfler and De Vries, Georges Dumézil, associated with French radicals of the far right including Charles Maurras — indeed he dedicated his first monograph to his friend Pierre Gaxotte, the editor of the ultra-right French journal *Candide*, and another leading figure of the Action Française.³⁵

All of these scholars were at the very least at one time sympathetic to the Nazi cause; and although Nazism is often derided as an incoherent mass of conflicting ideals, *völkisch* ideology in its many forms had as powerful a hold over its believers in its day as any of the other *grands récits* of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The criticism of the historical theorist Hayden White that fascism like chiliarism was not ‘cognitively responsible’ is another expression of this prejudice that dismisses *völkisch* thought as anti-intellectual — merely an extreme form of reaction.³⁶ Instead, the manner in which *völkisch* thought intruded into disciplines such as Old Norse studies in Germany in the 1920s and 30s is very much what is expected of a coherent ideology; and the continuity of this thought in the comparativism of the post-war scholarship of De Vries, Dumézil, Trier and Höfler underlines again the intellectual consistency to be found in fascist, palingenetic thought and its search for rooted continuities and ancestral utopia.

³⁵ G. Dumézil, *Le Festin d'immoralité*, Paris 1924; idem, *Entretiens avec Didier Eribon*, Paris 1987, pp. 205-8; E. Weber, *Action Française*, Stanford 1962; R. Soucy, *French Fascism: The First Wave 1924-1933*, New Haven 1986, pp. 20-26; B. D. Lincoln, *Death, War and Sacrifice*, Chicago 1991, pp. 234-38, 267, n. 18.

³⁶ H. White, *Metahistory*, Baltimore 1973, p. 22, n. 11.