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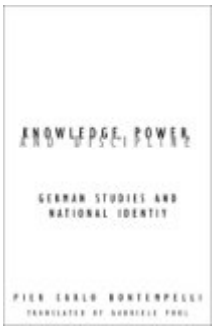
Pier Carlo Bontempelli. *Knowledge, Power, and Discipline: German Studies and National Identity.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. xxxii + 258 pp. $75.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8166-4111-6.



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Pier Carlo Bontempelli's history of German Studies, *Knowledge, Power, and Discipline: German Studies and National Identity*, is sharply focused on "analyzing German Studies as a disciplinary system" (p. xi), yet also satisfyingly extensive in its coverage of the ways that this disciplinary system has endured over roughly two hundred years of fluctuations in the politics of the nation that is the object of its study. Spanning the years from 1810, when the first university chair of German Studies was established at the University of Berlin, to the beginning of the twenty-first century, Bontempelli's study draws upon the official and unofficial documents of German Studies scholars to explore their long campaign to promote and protect the status of their discipline as the steward of German identity, as well as the skirmishes that occurred along the way as competing visions of that identity played out against the political changes of the two centuries. His research is thorough and engaging and gives equal consideration to every period of his study, not shortchanging the postwar or even the contemporary scene, as works with a broad historical scope are often prone to do.

The author, a professor of German Studies at the University of Cassino in Italy, adheres strictly to the theoretical model for analyzing disciplines pioneered by Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. He looks at German Studies as a self-referential disciplinary system that uses the ideological, material, and legal instruments of power at its disposal to preserve its status and guard against outside influence. He asserts emphatically that his work is not a history, but rather a genealogy, aimed at exposing the contested interpretations of German identity and German Studies that, Bontempelli argues, tend to be leveled out when scholars try to provide a single, comprehensive interpretation of the discipline's history. Indeed, for Bontempelli those moments when German Studies scholars have worked hardest to tell a continuous and progressive story about their discipline are precisely those in which the disciplining instruments are most actively deployed to erase the contestations that would upset that story.

While he is indeed keen to the contests that have taken place within the uneven ideological terrain of German Studies, Bontempelli's interpretation is in its own way also singular and comprehensive. He interprets the discipline's history as a sequence of episodes in which German Studies functions as a self-referential, self-sustaining system that reconfigures itself from within to keep its status and autonomy amidst the nation's political transformations--an unassailable system powerful enough that it even withstands the significant efforts by the National Socialist government to bring German Studies into its program of cultural coordination. This fact is all the more surprising and illustrative of disciplinary independence given the trailblazing role played by many German Studies scholars in promoting the kinds of purist, exclusivist, and reactionary understandings of German identity that were a central pillar of Nazi ideology and policy. While Bontempelli rightly works to undo any progressive or triumphalist narratives of the discipline, he operates consistently within a cynical mode of historical narrative, in which ideals of progress, cumulative knowledge, and critical understanding are facades behind which lurk human foibles and folly.

The nine chapters of Bontempelli's book are structured around the ongoing tension between two approaches to German Studies: one strictly philological and scholarly, the other inclined toward mixing philology with other fields of study like literature and esthetics in order to produce knowledge for a broader public sphere. Chapter 1 looks at the beginning of this tension in the personas of Karl Lachmann and Jacob Grimm. If there is a villain in Bontempelli's story of German Studies it is Karl Lachmann, who became professor of German Studies at the University of Berlin in 1825. Bontempelli analyzes Lachmann's successful effort to supplant what he calls the "wild" philology of Jakob Grimm, with its pretense of teaching the German public about the varieties of German cultural expression in the past and present, with a "tame" and "taming" philology intent on accumulating specialized knowledge for trained experts. While Grimm's approach was thoroughly embedded in a vision of German culture as the center for an incipient national identity, Lachmann, "the great normalizer" (p. 16), successfully promoted a narrow, specialized, self-contained understanding of the discipline, and championed a system of scholarship that demanded both an ascetic, rigorous work ethic from trainees and their total submission to the direction of strict teachers (p. 14). It was Lachmann who made German Studies truly into a discipline, a self-referential system that uses its instruments of power to subdue and co-opt its practitioners while keeping outsiders from encroaching upon its position to speak with authority on German traditions and identity.

Chapter 2 is an analysis of the efforts by the liberal historian Georg Gottfried Gervinus to make the study of Germany's recent national literature a part of German Studies. Writing during the period of liberal revolutionary foment between 1830 and 1848, Gervinus hoped that including greats of German literature like Goethe and Lessing in the canon of German Studies would make the discipline not only relevant to contemporary culture, but also ensure that understanding of German identity would feature the national-liberal ideals of these writers. In the decades following the failed revolution of 1848, Gervinus's approach to literary historiography was overshadowed by intellectual historians like Theodor Wilhelm Danzel and Wilhelm Dilthey, who championed the autonomy of esthetics and who, in opposition to Gervinus, portrayed the golden age of German classicism as a peak of cultural activity that was made possible precisely because its authors eschewed the mundane and the political. While Gervinus sought to present German literary history for a politically active bourgeoisie, Dilthey, according to Bontempelli, created a literary history for a passive bourgeoisie, one that did not just accept the political status quo after 1848 but ele-

vated its own disenfranchisement within the system to a cultural value.

That pattern of enlisting German literature for the political status quo was continued in the decades following unification in 1871 by, among others, Wilhelm Scherer, whose positivist approach to philology is the topic of chapter 3. Scherer believed that nations were like organic life forms, the development of which followed rigidly deterministic laws. With an envious eye toward the prestige of the natural sciences, Scherer wanted philology to work with the rationalized efficiency of a steam engine in order to uncover these immutable laws. Like Lachmann, Scherer asserted that students of German Studies had to learn total selfless submission to the disciplinary machine, a trait that he also held up as the ideal model of the relationship between Germans and the prevailing political order.

Despite its opposition to Scherer's positivism, Dilthey's *Geistesgeschichte* is shown in chapter 4 to have done similarly pacifying ideological work in the decades leading up to World War II. Dilthey eschewed the idea of studying the past to make it relevant to the present and instead suggested that German Studies scholars should seek to understand the unique, time-bound essences of works of German literature. His approach, according to Bontempelli, promoted, on the one hand, a closed, aristocratic community of highly trained scholars, and, on the other hand, an essentialist and populist interest in the great varieties of German literature, a trend which ushered in the study of *Volksliteratur*. Promoters of *Volksliteratur* saw it as a pathway into the true, timeless soul of the German people. Bontempelli argues that this interest in the "true essence" of Germany became the main interpretive paradigm of German Studies in the first decades of the twentieth century, making the discipline one of the most important ideological forbearers of essentialist and exclusivist understandings of German identity.

The solid case that Bontempelli makes about the extensive ideological work done by German Studies scholars for the benefit of the National Socialists cause makes his argument in chapter 5 on the Nazi era all the more surprising and fascinating. Even had it not been already ideologically compliant, German Studies, with its claim to being the sphere in which Germanness is studied and understood, would have been a central front in the Nazis efforts at cultural coordination. Given the ideological compatibilities between the party and the discipline, such coordination would seem to have been a simple task. Numerous prominent German Studies scholars were even enthusiastically cooperative when it came to formal discussions about how to achieve that coordination. When it came to the implementation of those agreements, however, the self-preserving mechanisms of the discipline reared up and consistently sabotaged the kind of smooth coordination that party officials envisioned. Especially when it came to the issue of controlling academic appointments and promotions, the corporation of scholars tended to resist party control passively, mostly by letting the demands of the regime get lost in the grind of academic bureaucracy, and, in many cases, scholars were able to shelter through the war years in their ivory tower.

This theme of self-preservation and disciplinary continuity continues in the next chapter, on the years between 1945 and 1968. In both West and East Germany, the corporation of German Studies seamlessly jettisoned its period of Nazi collaboration, sacrificing a few of its more prominently National Socialist members to public opinion, and returning to doing scholarly work for scholars away from the messy politics of the time. As Bontempelli asserts in the chapter's title, the period was marked by "the break in political continuity and the continuity of the disciplinary apparatus" (p. 117). The following chapter looks at the efforts by student activists in the late sixties to disrupt that disciplinary continuity. The discipline's conveniently forgotten collaboration with

the National Socialist regime was one of the students' main points of discontent. In a rare break from his usual highly critical mode of analysis, Bontempelli valorizes the students for their efforts to structurally reform the discipline and break its closed, exclusivist corporation.

In chapter 8, Bontempelli argues that the students' movement was undermined both from within the discipline, which blunted the students' demands for institutional reform by complying with their interest in broadening the canon of German Studies, and from without, as the era of domestic terrorism made radical politics unpalatable to the broader public. Meanwhile in the East, German Studies scholars were experiencing a high degree of prominence as key figures in the efforts of the state to promote East Germany as a ***Kulturstaat***. Their status was quickly undermined with reunification in 1989, after which German Studies in the East were incorporated into the western disciplinary system, a process which Bontempelli claims was facilitated by the strong disciplinary continuity that had persisted on both sides of the border despite the political break that had lasted for four decades.

Bontempelli's final chapter looks at German Studies after the year 2000. He sees two trends in German Studies. One is a resurgence of the kind of philological work promoted by Lachmann. The field, he argues, is focused right now on the production of collected works, authoritative new editions, and bibliographic minutiae for other scholars. Bontempelli has an interesting discussion of the human costs of this philological work, with scores of overworked and underappreciated assistants performing significant labor without any hope for the kind of recognition or advancement that such works brings for the prominent figures who direct the research and put their names on it. The other trend is the move to a cultural studies paradigm, which Bontempelli sees as the dominant trend in German Studies in North America, and which he suggests holds the promise of reviving Grimm's "wild" approach to the vast varieties of expression in German letters. Any hope he has is guarded, however, as he ends his book by suggesting that these new, potentially positive directions in German Studies seem more likely to produce a fragmented subset of equally closed "discourse societies" within the broader discipline.

Bontempelli's book should be of value to a diverse array of scholars. It seems a necessity for anyone who studies the history of German Studies, and it is a model of the kind of disciplinary history that has broad comparative interest in academia today. Those who study the history of nationalism and the interplay between culture and politics around issues of national identity should find ample material in this book, whether their interest is in Germany specifically or in comparative nationalism studies. Finally, individual chapters may be well worth reading for certain specialists, specifically the chapters on collaboration and resistance with the Nazis and the student movement of the late sixties.

While I wholeheartedly recommend Bontempelli's work to all the interest groups mentioned above, I did have two related difficulties with the text, one with the style and the other with the way he uses Foucault and Bourdieu. Stylistically, the author's inclination to inveigh against German Studies scholars and to treat the discipline itself like a sinister agent sometimes borders on the strident and levels out some of the ideological contour that he is exploring. At times, the style made me suspicious of some of the author's claims about his primary materials. When, for example, he claims that Lachmann's mostly negative evaluation of his peers' work was based on aspersions about their moral integrity rather than the scientific value of their work, I wanted to see more of the primary evidence for myself. Bontempelli's tone made me wonder if he would not be inclined to cast anything Lachmann said in that way. When he follows his summary of Lachmann's behavior by telling us that, according to

Bourdieu and Foucault, this kind of ***ad hominim*** attack is how scientific disciplines usually operate, I wonder if the analysis and the conclusion were not established before the research.

I think his style of writing is, interestingly, closely related to the author's use of the two French theorist's work on disciplines. Working with their theoretical assumptions about the arbitrariness of disciplinary knowledge and the unstoppable power of a discipline to make its would-be subjects submit to its rules, it seems only natural that the mode of historical narrative here is cynical and that the author looks at his subjects wryly. Bontempelli adheres so strictly to a kind of orthodox version of Foucault and Bourdieu's disciplinary theory (a position which in itself seems ironic given the author's consistent criticism of scholars who try to legitimize their own work by calling upon the names of their disciplinary forbearers) that the conclusion--that the discipline always uses its instruments of power arbitrarily to protect itself--is also his analytical starting point. The result seems at times to level out the uneven and contested ideological terrain and to give up the chance to make judgments about when German Studies scholars were acting more arbitrarily and when they were acting less so. The assumption is that any disciplinary work is always already arbitrary, an assertion that is aptly shown to be false by Bontempelli's fine scholarship. Indeed, the fact that this author can help us see and understand the workings of the cultural arbitrary in the past suggests that some knowledge produced in a disciplinary setting can indeed be less arbitrary, more scientific, and closer to the truth of the object of study. Perhaps subjects of a discipline can come to some kind of critical self-understanding and resist those totally arbitrary rules, or at least find new ones that are less so.

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