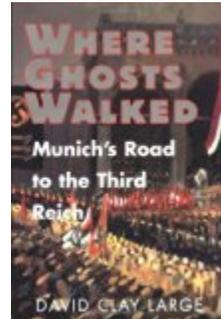


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David Clay Large. *Where Ghosts Walked: Munich's Road to the Third Reich*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997. xxv + 406 pp. \$32.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-393-03836-1.

Reviewed by Raffael Scheck (Colby College)
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This book presents an account of Munich's cultural life and its connections with Nazism. It starts with the cultural achievements of Bavaria's kings, Ludwig I and Ludwig II, and goes on to describe Munich's vibrant avant-garde in the 1890s and early 1900s. The cabaret *Die elf Scharfrichter* gets its share of attention, as do Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Stefan George, the satirical newsletter *Simplicissimus*, and the bitter critic of Catholic bigotry, Oscar Panizza. Rather little is said about the avant-garde in art, and *femme fatale* Franziska von Reventlow gets a share of attention that bears no relationship to her cultural achievements. The point is that Munich became famous for its artistic *bohème* but that it was in decline as a *Kunststadt* already well before World War I. Even the avant-garde, as Large shows with respect to the philosopher Ludwig Klages and others, was often riddled with dumb anti-Semitism and diffuse racism. The Catholic Center Party and the disinterest of rulers following Ludwig II meant greater limits on the cultural life of the city, which exploited its artistic reputation for tourism but was considered increasingly dull by artists themselves, particularly during the Weimar Republic. Yet this was no bad environment for young Adolf Hitler, who liked the flair of *bohème* but shunned experimentalism in art. He could "identify with this city's artistic self-image, its conviction that preeminence in the arts endowed it with a purer and more refined perspective on the problems of the world" (p. 41).

Large goes on to describe the outbreak of nationalist enthusiasm in August 1914 and the chauvinism, anti-Semitism, and hate-filled disillusionment that followed as the war experience became bitter. Wartime Munich did not differ much from other German cities, except that the strains of war transformed a dislike of Prussia into ha-

tred. Large's account of the confused Bavarian revolutions, the repression of the soviet republic, Hitler's return to Munich, and the rise of Nazism until the Beer Hall Putsch is familiar. Noteworthy is that Hitler stubbornly considered Munich home for himself and the Nazi movement and that he resisted transferring party headquarters elsewhere even when his party expanded outside Bavaria, despite the fact that the Nazi vote in Munich and Bavaria was below the national average. Hitler's loyalty to the "birthplace of the movement" did not prevent Munich from losing political influence even as the Nazis took power in Berlin; the purge of the Munich-based SA in June 1934 accelerated this development.

Interesting are Large's explorations of Munich during the Nazi period. Munich, the declared capital of German art, tried to display a cheerful and artistic side of Nazism. This resulted in crude *kitsch* and orgiastic parties by a local party leadership that was extraordinarily corrupt even by Nazi standards. No matter how jovially the party bosses represented themselves, they were always eager to carry out the regime's most repressive and hateful measures. Large duly highlights the shameful compliance of the churches (with very few exceptions). He mentions plans to rebuild the city in the gigantesque manner typical of Nazi architecture but also shows that the townspeople retained some satirical distance to their rulers and their schemes—distance, but not resistance, except in such rare cases as the *White Rose*. Large's analysis of popular opinion in Munich under the Third Reich draws from, and confirms, Ian Kershaw's work. Large ends with a brief analysis of post-war Munich's attempts to revive the image of the cultural city and to disassociate Munich from Nazism. Resentment of foreigners and anti-Semitism obviously did

not disappear after 1945, denazification—as elsewhere—whitewashed some bad Nazis, and only in the 1990s did the city seriously start to cope with its Nazi heritage.

Altogether, this is an interesting account that covers more than the title promises. Large writes well and offers many stylistic *gourmandises*. Yet this sometimes comes at the cost of original analysis and argumentation. Anecdotes and little stories, many of them colorful and some sensationalist, take up much space. To be sure, the fascinating crossroads of culture and politics in this city merit attention. This is particularly true for the bloom of the 1890s avant-garde, the soviet republic of April 1919 (which made idealistic writers and hard-nosed revolutionaries fight shoulder-to-shoulder), and for Hitler's emotional attachment to the city's bo-

hemian flair and artistic claim. Large's passages on Munich in the Third Reich do contribute new insights, but other sections of the book, though spiced up by quotes from Thomas Mann, follow familiar paths. This may have been difficult to avoid, because the Bavarian revolution of 1918-1919 and the early years of the Nazi movement, which was then truly concentrated on Munich, have been the focus of much research. Some of this research, by the way, was done by Large himself in his fine study of the Bavarian home guards from 1918-1921.

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