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Willi Winkler. *Die Geschichte der RAF.* Berlin: Rowohlt Berlin Verlag, 2007. 528 pp. EUR 22.90 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-87134-510-4.

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Explaining the Evil

In this highly readable, well-researched book about the German leftist terrorist group, the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF), Willi Winkler deftly weaves together previously published material with original interviews and correspondence. The new material provides interesting new information about the RAF's influence and organization, focusing on the complexities of the interactions of members and associates. Winkler breaks new ground with the rejection of previous scholarship that has sought facile answers to questions about RAF violence.

Winkler notes the extensive literature on the RAF, from general studies to dissertations to autobiographies, with no end to continued research in sight. Indeed, the bibliography that he includes is impressive in its scope. Still, claims Winkler, the RAF can only be understood by examining its origins "beim Wort" (p. 515). Indeed, the RAF has captured imaginations and critical attention for almost forty years because of the step that the group took from word to action, that is, by acting on its complaints. Officially disbanded in 1998, all that remains of the group's spirit and exploits–perhaps appropriately–are the various texts that have attempted to examine and explain it.

Winkler positions his project in contrast to the medical examination in 2002 of Ulrike Meinhof's brain, which had been kept in formaldehyde since the autopsy following her alleged suicide. The result of an analysis of her brain, as reported by *Bild Zeitung*, showed that the long-term effects of an operation to remove a brain tumor had damaged the part of her brain responsible for emotion. Science had finally proven what caused Meinhof, the ideological center of the RAF, to become a cold-blooded terrorist. For Winkler, however, such simplified information does not offer sufficient explanation of what drove these men and women to violent acts. The result of his dissatisfaction with extant scholarship is a five-hundred-page examination and reconstitution of the RAF's history.

Many factors distinguish Winkler's book from its predecessors in the genre of RAF/1968 histories, such as Stefan Aust's *Der Baader-Meinhof Komplex* (1985) or Gerd Koenen's *Das rote Jahrzehnt: Unsere kleine deutsche Kulturrevolution* (2002). Probably the most (in)famous of these efforts, Aust's book was one of the first attempts to create a coherent picture of the origins, activities, and results of the RAF's existence, based on his experience as a coworker of Meinhof. Koenen's work suffered from the author's difficulty in distancing himself from an epoch to which he belonged. Winkler, a generation older than Aust and Koenen, did not feel constrained by such closeness to the subject. The result is a balanced analysis, with both the RAF and its sworn enemy, the (West) German state, receiving equal time. Winkler accomplishes this difficult feat by contrasting the thoughts and theories given by the historical actors of the time (in letters, essays, interviews, and so on) with criticisms made from four decades of remove. Winkler thus writes–tongue in cheek–with reference to Horst Mahler's claim that it would not be possible to contextualize the RAF historically without recognizing the role of the state's misdeeds and the group's resulting hatred, that the assessment is accurate, despite the source.

Winkler's tome includes a discussion of the many philosophers and literary theorists involved in the construction of a history of the RAF. Winkler adds to this public forum about the history of the RAF. For instance, he discusses a 2004 letter from the publisher Klaus Wagenbach, who admitted to having knowingly helped the group to free Andreas Baader in 1970. Wagenbach signed a book contract that Meinhof and Gudrun Ensslin later used to set up the ruse leading to their escape. Such examples of an instrumentalization of media by the RAF were not rare, as Winkler notes: the well-known philosopher Karl Heinz Bohrer had also spoken with Meinhof

about her impending leap into illegality. Such interactions between literature, politics, and philosophy went beyond mere biographical connections between authors and publishers and drew on the deeper cultural structures and affinities of the times.

The book is extremely accessible to a wide-ranging public. To readers with a background in literature and philosophy, for instance, it offers both a refreshing mixture of sources and an often subtle narrative voice that is at times amused, fascinated, or dumbfounded by the subject at hand. Although this subtlety sometimes turns to more obvious indignation or criticism, Winkler is nonetheless able to convey his material incrementally. The author thus provides the reader with a slowly built up, chronologically portrayed picture of the political, social, and philosophical environment in Germany, starting in the 1950s and moving into the twenty-first century. Winkler gives equal attention to journalistic, essayistic, and literary texts as well as film in his attempt to construct the "Psychogramm" of the Federal Republic of Germany promised on the cover. For instance, he considers specifically *Viva Maria!*, directed by Louis Malle (1965), and *Deutschland im Herbst,* directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder (1978).

One of Winkler's important contributions to the historiography of the RAF is his inclusion of an analysis of the group's so-called third generation. In a summation on how some of the RAF's later victims understood the group, Winkler cites Carlchristian von Braunmühl, whose brother, the diplomat Gerold von Braunmühl, was murdered in 1986. Braunmühl famously wondered whether the terrorists had simply appeared out of nowhere, or had grown out of social issues. He answered his own question with the conclusion that every community produces some very unhappy people. Those who suffered through the injustices of the 1950s and 1960s, he continued, did not protest as "amoralischen, kalten Killern" (p. 193). Von Braunmühl's generous and even strangely apologetic assessment of the RAF forms the core of Winkler's undertaking. According to Winkler, it would be banal to claim that the RAF–the historical phenomenon, not the terrorists themselves–was merely the result of megalomania and a desire for violence. The explanations for the RAF, as Winkler shows, go beyond scientific or psychoanalytical analyses. By bringing in multiple fields of inquiry, Winkler does an impressive job of retracing the deep-seated origins of the RAF in German and world history.

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