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Claudia Schoppmann. *Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbians During the Third Reich.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. 158 S. $24.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-10220-9.

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Weimar Germany in general and Berlin in particular have a well-deserved reputation for toleration and open mindedness with respect to homosexuality, whereas Hitler's Germany has an equally deserved reputation for repression and reactionary views. What these reputations meant in the daily lives of homosexuals can be assessed in Claudia Schoppmann's *Days of Masquerade*, which retells the life stories of ten lesbians who lived through both Weimar and the Third Reich. Schoppmann is well qualified for her task. This book is her second publication on homosexuality during the Third Reich. Moreover, the prestigious Columbia University Forum for Gender Studies, which has already published some two dozen scholarly studies of homosexuality, has sponsored this English version of the German original that was published in 1993.

The study is presented in two distinct parts. The first is a brief introduction which highlights the main lines of governmental policy towards homosexuality in both Weimar and the Third Reich. The second part is comprised of ten sequentially arranged biographies which the author has composed in third person narratives, largely from interviews she conducted between 1986 and 1988.

In her introduction, Schoppmann shows that there was little uniformity or consistency in the Nazi persecution of the homosexual community. The regime viewed male homosexuals as a greater threat than females to the desired heterosexual order and reproductive process, and it considered women to be politically insignificant in any event. Thus, in contrast to its treatment of male homosexual acts, the government never formally criminalized female acts, although such acts were prohibited. Incarcerated lesbians wore red triangles as anti-social prisoners, while men wore the pink triangles of designated homosexuals, and far more men were murdered than women. By initially closing down the women's organizations which had fought for women's equality during the Weimar years, and by eliminating lesbian meeting places such as bars and dance halls, the government thought that it left women little choice but to marry. Yet though the main work of persecuting homosexuals was left to Heinrich Himmler's Reich Headquarters to Combat Homosexuality and Abortion, there was still no consistent or unified direction in the effort to purge Germany of its homosexual population.

The biographies which Schoppmann has reconstructed present primarily the experiences of women who survived the Nazi years as practicing lesbians and secondarily some suggestions concerning the role of these women in their times. Though the sample is small–the author attributes this to an ongoing fear among lesbians concerning prejudice in Germany against homosexuals–the stories are moving and bear witness to the courage and humanity of these women, all special victims of Nazi tyranny. Although each of the women recognized that society often perceived their same-sex predisposition as either a sickness, a crime, or a sin, they were indifferent for the most part to politics and were disinclined to defend themselves aggressively. But since most had come to believe that their lesbianism was a matter of an "innate predisposition of nature" (p. 24)–something akin to the idea enunciated by the sex expert Magnus Hirschfeld during the Weimar era–they had stubbornly decided that they were not going to try to change what nature itself had decreed. Each of their stories therefore revolves around their acknowledgment of their homosexuality and the consequences thereof as each of these very different personalities went about the business of earning a living, finding accommodations, and meeting friends while risking denunciation and imprisonment for anti-social behavior.

There are many unforgettable portraits. Gertrud Sandmann (1893-1981) makes one think of Anne Frank

hidden from public view in a small room for nearly two years. A Jew and a lesbian, she survived until the war's end in Berlin with the help of her faithful friend and lover, Hedwig, whom she had met in 1927. A painter by profession, Sandmann had only a little inheritance and the generosity of her friends to help her after the Nazis, due to her Jewishness, forbade her from practicing her art. Hilde Radusch (1903-1994) was a communist city councilor who instantaneously became politically unreliable after the Nazis took over. As early as 1921 she knew she preferred women to men, but it was only in 1923, when she had her first job as a postal worker, that she had her first serious homosexual love affair, which dissolved under the stress caused by the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. Her second affair, which began in 1939 and would last for the next twenty years, was with Edda, who lived in her apartment house. Together they established a little restaurant and maintained contact with resistance groups. Stepped-up surveillance forced them into hiding until Russian troops captured Berlin. Radusch thereupon resumed working for the communist party in its department for the Restitution of Victims of Fascism until she was expelled from it in February 1946 for protesting too much. Denounced as a lesbian, she decided to live in West Berlin. In ill health but with a meager pension she and her friend opened up a junk yard which supported the two of them until Edda died in 1960. In the 1970s she lent her support to the women's movement in general and the cause of lesbians in particular by helping to found the group L74. "I never saw myself as a victim," but always a "fighter" (pp. 38-39) was how she wished to be remembered.

There are also some surprising character developments in Schoppmann's stories. The insecure Roman Catholic convert Freia Eisner (1907-1989) –daughter of Kurt Eisner, founder of the Independent Socialists–ended her life in communist East Germany after having spent the worst of the Nazi years in England and then much of the postwar period in the Federal Republic. Ruth Roellig (1878-1969), after publishing a well-known guide to Berlin's lesbian nightspots in 1930 which harshly criticized religious bigotry, extolled blood-and-soil ideology and pandered to anti-Semitic prejudices in a novel written during the Nazi period. Annette Eick (b.1909) was a Jewish lesbian, to whom Roellig once had given hospitality. By escaping from a detention center with the help of a police chief's wife, she missed by one day her death-camp sentence. Finally, the unobtrusive translator Elizabeth Zimmermann (b.1913) spent the greater part of the war in Paris where she carried on a love affair with a colleague in the German embassy while assisting a few French Jews to escape France.

Schoppmann is to be highly commended. Her biographical accounts are all quite interesting and well conceived. They bring to life the existence of a vibrant Weimar lesbian subculture in Berlin which managed to survive the Nazi oppression.

Note:

This book was originally published as, *Zeit der Maskierung: Lebensgeschichten lesbischer Frauen im "Dritten Reich"*. Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1993.

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