

Hans Magnus Enzensberger. *Hammerstein oder der Eigensinn: Eine deutsche Geschichte.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008. 376 pp. ISBN 978-3-518-41960-1.



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Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

While browsing the literature section at the Dussmann bookstore on Friedrichstrasse in Berlin last summer, I was shocked to find Hans Magnus Enzensberger's *Hammerstein oder der Eigensinn*, a narrative about the Hammerstein family and its involvement in the resistance to the Third Reich, sitting on a shelf of new German fiction. While the book is not a typical work of history--it lacks reference notes, for example, and the writing style is somewhat unorthodox--it nevertheless offers a serious examination of Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord and his family's lives under the Nazis. It is by no definition a novel, as Enzensberger clearly explains in his final chapter. Because it is one of the few works tackling the complex life of Kurt von Hammerstein, one of the most powerful leaders of the German army during the Weimar Republic, this book will be of immense interest to military historians as well as scholars of the Third Reich. At the same time, Enzensberger's accessible and unique writing style will make this an appealing book for historians of all fields, as well as general audiences.

Kurt von Hammerstein began his military career as a cadet in 1888 and rose to become the head of the German army (Chef der Heeresleitung) in 1930. As Enzensberger writes, Hammerstein took an interest in politics, and unlike other military leaders, he showed a clear sympathy for the political Left. In a fake, posthumous conversation he initiates with Hammerstein about his relationship with his father-in-law, General Walther von Lüttwitz, Enzensberger specifically asks him to describe Lüttwitz's political views. Hammerstein responds by describing Lüttwitz as a devoted conservative who despised the Left. He continues: "Sie können sich wohl vorstellen, dass ich für die Spartakus Leute nicht viel übrig hätte, aber die marodierenden Freikorps waren noch schlimmer, und mit denen hat der Alte damals traktiert" (p. 27).

As he rose through the ranks, Hammerstein became enmeshed in politics, joining the circle around his friend, Kurt von Schleicher, the last chancellor of the Weimar Republic. Enzensberger describes Hammerstein's political activity during

1932-33 in detail, focusing on his last-minute attempt to prevent Adolf Hitler from becoming chancellor. After his unsuccessful attempt to prevent Paul von Hindenburg from appointing Hitler, Hammerstein briefly flirted with the idea of taking military action to remove the president before he could make the appointment. Ultimately, though, he decided it was a step the army would be unable to take because "Hindenburg werde im Volk wie ein Halbgott verehrt" (p. 106). Although he disapproved, Hammerstein was powerless to stop Hitler's ascent.

Looking at the reactions of military leaders to Hitler's rise to power, Enzensberger writes that many of his fiercest supporters in 1933 ultimately ended up in the resistance of 1944. Hammerstein, however, was not among this group. Of his attitude in 1933, Enzensberger argues, "[d]em General vom Hammerstein allerdings wird man keinerlei Sympathien für den Nationalsozialismus nachsagen können. Dennoch war seine Haltung frei vom Ambivalenzen und Fehleinschätzungen, und es gibt Belege für sein Zaudern" (p. 109). In fact, Hammerstein was well known for opposing the regime. Enzensberger writes that he survived through 1934 largely with the help of Hindenburg, who ensured that Hitler did not take action against him. Although Hammerstein officially retired from the military in 1934 and largely withdrew from public life, Hitler never forgot his ardent opposition. Hammerstein died of cancer in 1943, and the subdued funeral took place clearly under the weight of official disapproval.

One of the more interesting aspects of Hammerstein's story is his collaboration with the Red Army, which began during the Weimar era and continued through September 1933. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the German army worked closely with the Soviet army in training maneuvers, during which Hammerstein was "einer der wichtigsten Gäste der Roten Armee" (p. 84). Although official collaboration between the two militaries ended in 1933, Hammerstein nevertheless

maintained contact with the Red Army through third parties. In 1936, Red Army Marshal Kliment Voroschilov "sprach von ihm mit grosser Wertschätzung" (p. 214) and suggested that Hammerstein immigrate along with his family to the USSR. Ultimately, the Soviets hoped to convince him to lead an uprising of generals who were ready to reject the regime. While he rejected this overture, Hammerstein nevertheless maintained contact with the Soviet Union, even going so far as to offer advice to Voroschilov on how to prepare for a possible future war. If war broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union, Hammerstein reassured the Soviets, he did not plan to participate.

While Hammerstein's life and rejection of the Third Reich offer an excellent example of resistance, what makes this book different from other resistance histories is the way in which Enzensberger expands his narrative to examine the entire Hammerstein family. Resistance historians will find *Hammerstein oder der Eigensinn* particularly valuable, and general audiences will find this story fascinating, because Enzensberger shows how an entire family became embroiled in the effort to resist the Third Reich. The book is just as much about Hammerstein's three eldest daughters as it is about the general himself. Enzensberger describes Marie Louise, Maria Therese, and Helga as practically immune to National Socialist propaganda. Maria Therese, for example, worked frequently among Jews and was fascinated with Jewish culture. In 1934 she convinced her husband to move with her to Israel, where she lived on a kibbutz. She returned shortly thereafter because her husband did not like Israel. In 1935, this time pregnant, she fled across the world to Japan. In Germany, Helga and Marie Louise meanwhile took an active interest in the Communist Party. In addition to establishing connections with the Communist underground, Helga became romantically involved with Leo Roth, a Polish Jew who worked as an informer for the KPD.

Throughout the 1930s the Hammerstein daughters helped to pass along valuable documents and information to Moscow. For example, on February 3, 1933, Hammerstein hosted a dinner at his office for Hitler and prominent military officials. During that reception, Hitler outlined his future goals for Germany, and stressed the importance of *Lebensraum* in the East. Shortly thereafter, a transcript of Hitler's remarks ended up in Moscow. Enzensberger suggests that the transcript made it to Russia because one of Hammerstein's daughters hid behind the curtains during the reception and took notes on what happened that evening. In another posthumous conversation with Hammerstein, Enzensberger asks him if he knew his daughters were active Communists, and that they took documents from his office for the party. He suggests, via the fictive conversation, that Hammerstein's daughters could have only have carried out their resistance work with his tacit approval.

Hammerstein died in 1943, before the Stauffenberg circle's attempt to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944. Yet, as Enzensberger shows, Hammerstein's family was nevertheless involved in the plot, as two of his sons participated in the resistance. Like their sisters, Ludwig and Kunrat came to the resistance by their own initiative, without their father's prompting. Wounded in combat, the brothers were sent back to Germany where they established contact with members of the Stauffenberg circle. Ludwig actually took part in the coup attempt, disarming a couple of SS men. After it became evident that the coup had failed, they spent the remainder of the war in hiding, avoiding the grasp of the Gestapo.

Enzensberger brings his narrative to a close by tracing the lives of Hammerstein's wife and children after the war. While readers will undoubtedly find these brief postwar biographies interesting, they will be even more intrigued by the concluding chapter, which addresses the question of why *Hammerstein oder der Eigensinn* is not a

novel. Discussing earlier, fictional works about the Hammerstein family, Enzensberger argues that, while they used the Hammerstein story as a framework, they took enough liberties with the story to render it fictional. By contrast, Enzensberger contends that while his book is written in the style of a novel, it tries to provide as historically accurate an account as possible: "Um einen gewagten Vergleich zu ziehen: es verfährt eher analog zur Photographie als zur Malerei" (p. 357).

Enzensberger's style will be the largest obstacle to keep historians from fully embracing this book. While he provides a full bibliography of primary and secondary material, he eschews footnotes, making it difficult to track his references. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, Enzensberger uses fictive, posthumous interviews to examine questions surrounding several major figures in the narrative. While general audiences will find this technique innovative and engaging, historians are more likely to be skeptical. At the very least, though, the book would serve as an excellent text for a historiography seminar. With statements like "[es] wird, wer kein Experte ist, je mehr er sich in die Quellen vertieft, um so weniger verstehen, wie es dazu gekommen ist" (p. 48), this book could serve as the basis for a fascinating discussion about the meaning of history, and how one goes about writing a work of history.

While Enzensberger provides a detailed account of the Hammerstein family's resistance to the Third Reich, several small questions are still left unanswered. For example, he clearly shows how the whole family quickly became opponents of the regime. He never addresses the question, however, of how the Hammerstein family came to form such a strong aversion to Nazism during the Weimar era. Did Hammerstein instill his views in the rest of his family, or did his children arrive at their views independently? In the same vein, how did the Hammerstein family manage to inoculate itself against Nazi propaganda so effectively? Greater attention to the atmosphere in the Ham-

merstein family during the 1920s could reveal answers to these questions.

Another reason specialists may remain skeptical is Enzensberger's bibliography, which reveals several glaring absences. Although he cites an abundance of literature written by participants in the resistance, there is a paucity of recent secondary literature. Most notably, Enzensberger does not cite anything by Peter Hoffman, the pre-eminent historian of the German resistance. At the same time, specialists will also note that the Bundesarchiv in Freiburg, the main repository for material on the German military, is not among the archives cited by Enzensberger. How would these additional sources have altered Enzensberger's conclusion? How does Hammerstein fit in the greater context of the German resistance and the July 1944 plot? These questions are left for a more traditional, academic study.

While not a standard work of history, the work provides a fascinating glimpse into the life of the Hammerstein family during the Third Reich. Although the main subject of the book is the general, Enzensberger effectively draws the entire family into the narrative, demonstrating how they became active participants in the tumultuous and dangerous world of resistance. In this respect, he makes an important and innovative contribution to the historiography of the German resistance that general audiences will find appealing.

Although some historians may be quick to dismiss *Hammerstein oder der Eigensinn* as a historical novel because of its lack of footnotes and Enzensberger's unique writing style, that would be unwise. While certainly unorthodox, this is nevertheless a serious account of the Hammerstein family during the Third Reich and their refusal to yield to Nazi ideology. If anything, as Enzensberger notes in his final chapter, this book should serve as the call for a more traditional, scholarly examination of the Hammerstein family and the broader relevance of their particular brand of resistance.

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