

participated in various forms of self-surveillance. Nonetheless, continued flight across the border exposed the weakness and failure of these controls.

The strict enforcement of this border reached a shocking watershed, not with the Berlin Wall's erection in 1961, but in 1952 with a campaign the GDR called "Action Vermin" to militarily fortify the border and cleanse the frontier of politically unreliable residents. In one of the book's most dramatic and important chapters, Sheffer suggests that the 1952 militarization of the Prohibited Zone may have been the "critical turning point in German division" (p. 97). Eschewing familiar tropes of totalitarian repression, Sheffer's nuanced account reveals how the East German regime's own weakness necessitated state reliance on local participation, such that border residents contributed to their own captivity. Amid general confusion and bungled execution, community non-compliance and limited upheaval prevented deportation of around 60 percent of Sonneberg County's listed targets, many of whom immediately fled westward. Nevertheless, local administrators and "helpers" drew up deportation lists and supervised transports. Generally, "social discipline prevailed" (p. 109) to enable the state to transplant 8,369 residents overall, 375 from Sonneberg, further inland. No doubt the deportations were coercive, and Sheffer compares categorization of deportees, including the "work-shy," "black-marketeers," "captialist," and "asocial," to those used by the Nazis. But in practice, the population often viewed the targeting of particular individuals as arbitrary. Though ultimately a sign of regime weakness, this randomness bred greater fear among civilians whose paranoid inaction, "cynical conformity" (p. 188), or indeed collaboration then lent the state its power. Successes and gaffes from this effort became lessons for further deportations and division in 1961.

Sheffer further describes how, even after fortification in 1961, crossings abated, but did not cease. Ongoing engagement with the border and adaptation to separate political economies over decades contributed to a mentality of differences that continued after reunification. For example, Neustadters exploited the border for economic profit at home or crossed to Sonneberg for cheap goods and services. The frontier population adopted a new "vocabulary of difference" (p. 49) demarcating the "poor East" and the "golden West," concepts promoted in media and for the cause of Western border tourism into the 1980s. Sheffer's meticulous research into local and federal German archives, interviews, the press, and questionnaires exposes at a micro-level how power was exerted diffusely in Germany's Cold War regimes. The book suggests that through daily actions borders can become instruments of demographic control, both violently coercive and encouraging complicity from average citizens.

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LAURA HEINS. *Nazi Film Melodrama*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2013. Pp. viii, 240. Cloth \$85.00, paper \$30.00.

Through substantial chapters on romance, domestic, and home-front melodrama, Laura Heins explores a universal genre in a very particular time and place. Triangulated with Nazi film and melodrama are gender politics. Drawing out convincing contradictions between theory and practice in Nazi cultural politics, the author catalogues sometimes surprising themes in these films: an absence of weddings; "marriage as a potentially dissolvable, economically defined institution" (p. 107); love triangles "narrated from the position of the rival" (p. 113); the abandonment of family as microcosm of a larger social order; or—the objection of a male critic in 1941—"the eroticization of non-'Aryan' women on Third Reich screens" (p. 172).

As a genre term, "melodrama" runs the inherent risk of being ahistorical. The 12 years of the "Nazi millennium" (with due linkages to Weimar cinema as precursor, and far fewer to any post-World War II continuities) meaningfully stake out the territory covered here. However the comparator throughout, contemporaneous Hollywood melodrama, largely remains in parallel to Nazi melodrama, which blurs a more complex interplay. The book's subject is a focused instance (Nazi cinema within German cinema) of the long-standing interrelationship between Hollywood and European cinemas more broadly. The opening sentence states: "The Nazi film industry, although the weapon of a regime founded on brutal militarism, produced at least ten times more domestic and romance melodramas than war films" (p. 1). But not all the Nazi years were war years, however much the writing was on the wall. Veit Harlan's *The Great King* (1942), ostensibly about Frederick the Great and transparently "about" Hitler's Germany, was both domestic melodrama and war film; indeed "melodrama" is endlessly capable of cross-genre fusion. Mention of Harlan's film also immediately problematizes the book's attention to "the systematic intentions built into the Nazi melodrama" (p. 2). For the system-driven reediting of *The Great King* nonetheless retained a strong sense of the suffering of the "Volk," before that became the norm in historical reality. Throughout the book Hollywood provides a comparator in matters of aesthetics, genre, and style (and film sequences receive some excellent close analysis, secondary literature some lively discussion). But Hollywood is not Washington, and of course up until its entry into World War II, America's own political equation was markedly different. Here "Nazi," however, embraces expansionist nation and national cultural politics as they filtered down to film studios.

High quality film stills and posters support the text, but inconsistencies in naming directors means a filmography was needed. More on the *melos* of melodrama, the effect of soundtrack music (not least in Douglas Sirk's *Final Accord* [1936]), would have been welcome: Wim Wenders attributed his embrace of American pop

music to what the Nazis had done to that of his own country. There was a case for greater coverage of after-images and echoes in postwar German film. On both, Caryl Flinn is a gap in the bibliography. The brief epilogue sketches German melodrama of the immediate postwar years only, whereas (perhaps requiring a complementary book) the images and narratives of Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Edgar Reitz burst with allusions to Nazi film melodrama, as a film-historical part of the Nazi stage of German history. In Wolfgang Staudte's *Murderers among Us* (1948) it is true that the "stress on female participation in the labor force" (p. 200) dominates the film's opening sequences. However, this angelically depicted female lead has participated in forced labor in the camps, and both for Staudte and for the author of this book, that remains an unexplored historical paradox. And with German guilt finally thematized in this film, it is important to establish that Hans Mertens was a doctor who had riskily intervened in an attempt to avoid a mass shooting, rather than "a former Wehrmacht soldier" (p. 199).

Sirk's career, one combining prewar "Nazi melodrama" and immediate postwar Hollywood products that established a new benchmark for the genre, raises intriguing issues not really broached here. Did he reinvent himself? What are the implications of any transatlantic continuities? Dual language productions would have further finessed Hollywood/Nazi Germany comparisons, in particular the Joseph Goebbels-sponsored German/Spanish coproduction in 1938 of *Carmen, la de Triana* (*Carmen from Triana*) and *Andalusische Nächte* (*Nights in Andalusia*). Typical of the book is the following fertile provocation: "While Hollywood was dominated by the classic oedipal scenario, Nazism's family romance fantasized an even more sinister reversal in which the patriarch kills the mother in order to possess the daughter" (p. 130). One thinks of possession (in the script) of the dying daughter in Werner Herzog's film *Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* (1972), reinforcing that line of interpretation that sees the title figure as a *Führer*. But in relation to incest, also emphasized elsewhere in the book, particularly in connection to Harlan, one thinks of Richard Wagner, and in literature, of Thomas Mann, Georg Trakl, and Robert Musil. Given this very varied ancestral gallery from the national heritage, Walter Abish's question keeps arising: how German(ic) is it? Or how (German) fascist is it?

By chance, this book finds itself in company with very different, but related discourses of 2013, those swirling round Ben Urwand's highly controversial book *The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact with Hitler* (2013), and the German-television miniseries *Generation War*. Where the three overlap, future scholars can also profitably take *Nazi Film Melodrama* into account, especially for the ongoing questions it poses.

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JANA VOBECKÁ. *Demographic Avant-Garde: Jews in Bohemia between the Enlightenment and the Shoah*. Trans-

lated by ROBIN CASSLING. English ed. Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2013. Pp. xix, 225. \$55.00.

This well-researched study addresses a major issue in modern demographic history: how and why the transition from the general pattern of high fertility and high mortality to much lower rates of fertility and mortality occurred first in European societies. It is lamentable that demographic history today attracts much less interest in the broader historical community than 40 years ago, in the heyday of the *Annales* School, the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Structure, and the population research centers in Princeton, Philadelphia, and Berkeley. Jana Vobecká, who studied in Prague and Dijon and is now a research scholar at the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital in Vienna and the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, has produced a significant book that should attract wide attention among scholars interested in the patterns of modern social, economic, and sociocultural change and the experience of minorities in those processes. This study was first published in Czech in 2007, and it has now appeared in revised form in English. The translation is generally serviceable, but at a number of points the subtleties of Czech grammar and syntax and some Czech and Austrian historical terminology have defeated the translator and copy editors.

The author finds in the Bohemian Jews a well-documented example of the early onset of the modern demographic transition among a culturally, legally, and socially distinct population, which allows for a deeper analysis of causes than is typically possible for a majority population. By the end of the nineteenth century Jews could look back on a 1,000-year history in the Kingdom of Bohemia. The disproportionate size and influence of the Prague community for all Bohemian Jews gave them a strong cultural homogeneity and, in the author's argument, propelled the rapid adoption from the early nineteenth century of modern Enlightenment values and use of the German and Czech vernaculars, along with the fading of religious orthodoxy. They developed patterns of diminishing mortality and fertility rates while still living in ghettos and being subjected to other social and economic restrictions, well before the beginning of industrialization in the region and before the majority population began any similar demographic transition. These circumstances allow Vobecká to postulate the Bohemian Jews as a demographic avant-garde population in Europe, and the book goes on to assess the dimensions of the demographic transition among the Jewish population, to compare their experience to Christians in Bohemia and to Jews in other parts of Central and East-Central Europe, and to analyze the contributing factors. Already in the 1970s and 1980s, a number of scholars identified Jews in various parts of Europe as forerunners of modern demographic changes, but this study offers a much