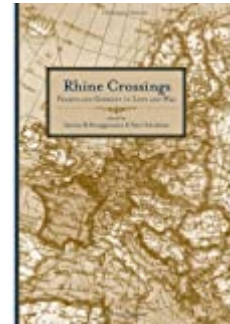




Aminia M. Brueggemann, Peter Schulman, eds. *Rhine Crossings: France and Germany in Love and War*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005. vii + 304 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7914-6437-3.



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Locating the Rhine: Culture and Context in a Franco-German Mirror

This edited volume contains essays devoted to reciprocal French and German influences and the perceptions of one another's culture by artistic and literary luminaries of both countries. The shifting nature of French-German borders—sometimes on the Rhine, sometimes to its east or west—makes “Rhine Crossings” a good metaphor for the study of frequently changing Franco-German cultural interactions. The book's subtitle relates to the considerable attention given to the twentieth century's two world wars and the extensive gender analysis in this book, which focus as much on literature and the fine arts as on love and war. The chapters all make good contributions to the subject and for this reason, this volume is recommended reading for those interested in its subject.

In their introductory chapter, the editors begin by writing: “Caught in an intense relationship oscillating between love and hate. France and Germany have engaged in a dialectic marked by aggression and mistrust, on the one hand, and a mutual fascination and respect, on the other” (p. 3). In a disclaimer they add: “the present volume does not intend to provide an exhaustive histor-

ical or political analysis of the Franco-German dynamic throughout the centuries. We have endeavored, instead, to offer a mosaic of different insights and connections that have not hitherto been covered by historians or literary critics” (p. 11). In these two statements lie the main strengths and problems with this book.

A quick summary of the book's contents will serve to alert readers to the variety of topics covered. In addition to the introductory essay by the editors, the book contains chapters on Germaine de Staël and Sophie von la Roche and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing by Beatrice Guenther and Heidi M. Schlipphacke, respectively. Guenther's contribution focuses on women's education and the sense of community in the novels of de Staël and la Roche, while Schlipphacke's essay points out the contradiction between Lessing's use of “the Frenchman” as “the other,” on one hand, and his grounding in Enlightenment universalism, on the other. Sarah Juliette Sasson's essay addresses the complexities of Heinrich Heine's work and its subsequent reception. Terri J. Gordon contributes a chapter based largely on a Freudian analysis of the sexuality and Franco-German discourse of the interwar

Paris revues; Andrea Gogref-Voorhees's chapter highlights the impact of Charles Baudelaire on Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of decadence. The influence of Aléicien Champsaur's *Lulu, pantomime en un acte* (1888) on Franz Wedekind's subsequent *Lulu* plays is addressed by Jennifer Forrest; Michael Payne holds that Walter Benjamin was "transfixed" by both Paris and Berlin (p. 170). Kimberley Healey examines the dialogue about nostalgia for a happier past expressed in the language and photographs of flowers engaged by Georges Bataille and Karl Blossfeldt, respectively. William J. Cloonan devotes a chapter to Aristide Maillol and Nazism, and Philip Watts examines René Clément's early films in the context of the immediate post-World War II years. A chapter on Ernst Jünger by Elliot Neaman focuses on the metamorphosis of the German writer into a great European cultural figure in the years after World War II. Nina Zimmik contributes a chapter on mythmaking and feminism as related to the film star Romy Schneider. The last chapter, by Sande Cohen, takes up postwar historiography in the Franco-German cultural context.

From this list, it should be clear that interested readers will find a great deal of material relating to luminaries ranging from la Roche, Lessing, and de Staël (in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) to post-World War II figures including Schneider and Hannah Arendt. Although not an exhaustive historical or political analysis, *Rhine Crossings* nonetheless encounters a methodological problem, perhaps endemic in a book focusing on prominent cultural figures, namely a tendency to over-generalize and draw national perspectives from a handful of art or literary works, important as they might be. Sasson, for example, in discussing Heine, states that "[t]he French attraction to Germany had become such a commonplace that in 1948 a critic had devoted to this notion a whole book, entitled *Les Ácrivains franÁsais et le mirage allemand*" (p. 68). One cannot help but wonder to what extent "the French" were really attracted to Germany, especially only three years after World War II. Addressing parallels between the language of flowers in Bataille's writings and Blossfeldt's photography, Healey writes, "[t]his in turn reveals a larger and more problematic dialogue between French and German aesthetics and between visions of the natural and the human that fed contemporary national stereotypes" (p. 177).

These examples raise the question to what degree the French and Germans were engaged with one another in the years before World War II. According to Marc Augier, who joined the French Anti-Bolshevik Legion as part of the Wehrmacht during the Second World War, most

French and Germans knew very little about one another's culture prior to 1939.[1] In her chapter on Baudelaire and Nietzsche, Gogref-Voorhees implies a similar lack of intense interest in one another's culture on the part of the French and Germans, writing that "[m]ostly French writers have noted the affinities between the two poet critics since the early twentieth century, and only sporadically" (p. 119). Arguments about the influence of specific works or persons on Franco-German discourse would be stronger if supported by publication statistics of French works dealing with Germany or the opposite. Discussion of education manuals addressing German culture in French schools or the reverse could help put the work of Bataille, Blossfeldt, Baudelaire and Nietzsche in clearer historical context. [2]

Not all the chapters adhere strictly to the Franco-German dynamic set forth in the introductory chapter, where, for example the editors write that the chapter on Maillol "contends that Maillol merely echoed a political and artistic conservatism that had already been widespread and accepted in France and Europe as a whole between the wars" (p. 14). Guenther devotes considerable attention to Spanish and English influences in her analysis of la Roche's *Die Geschichte des FraÁleins von Sternheim* (1771) (pp. 29-30). Much of Sasson's essay on Heine addresses his views of paganism, Christ and the Jews (pp. 76-78). Gordon's chapter on the interwar dance revues devotes considerable attention to the American Man Ray (p. 100). Watts offers an enlightening description of the manner in which wartime French collaborators with Nazi Germany were portrayed in Clément's postwar films, but he devotes perhaps as much space to French cinematic quarrels with Hollywood (p. 216) and the Franco-French collaboration-resistance war (p. 221) as to Franco-German relationships in the films. Cohen's concluding chapter on postwar historiography begins and ends with a discussion of Los Angeles and the relationship of California universities to French radical criticism and also raises general questions regarding reasons to discuss historiography at all (p. 285), all stimulating but not clearly related to the book's stated subject.

Several other points with regard to historical context in this book also bear mention. In their introduction, Brueggemann and Schulman refer to the three Franco-German wars between 1870 and 1945 (p. 4), but omit the Napoleonic Wars and the Thirty Years' War. A fuller historical context might also include the wars of Charlemagne and, perhaps most significantly, the defeat of the Romans by Arminius, which set the seed for Franco-German cultural difference. Brueggemann and Schul-

man, as many others, also refer to Otto Abetz, the German Ambassador to occupied France during World War II, as a German Francophile diplomat (p. 7). The postwar French government did not see it that way—a Paris military court sentenced him to twenty years' hard labor in 1949. Finally, the authors write that France began to confront its Vichy past only in 1969 with the release of Marcel Ophüls' film *Le Chagrin et la Pitié* (p. 8); however, by many indices, discussion of the Vichy past was far more intense during the immediate postwar years than after 1969 in France.[3]

Some of the generalizations in this book are open to question. In her discussion of the interwar dance revues, Gordon argues that the trenches of World War I “provided an *ethos* [author's italics] of warfare never before experienced” (p. 88). The possibly higher proportions of casualties in earlier wars under Attila and Genghis Khan suggest caution here. She addresses the revues as interwar phenomena that represented young women as militarized “femmes-machines,” but many of these dance programs dated to prewar times. The Can Can, for example, had achieved a level of popularity by the 1890s, and by 1898 films were being made featuring this dance.

Some of the statements in this book call for clarification or explanation. For example, in reference to Bataille and Blossfeldt, Healey writes that Franco-German dialogues became more difficult in 1929 (p. 173) without explaining why then and, for example, not in 1933 when Hitler came to power. Cloonan argues that World War I took place “almost uniquely on French soil” (p. 196) and although this is true for the Western Front, he seems to ignore the carnage in Russia, at Caporetto and in the Dardanelles. Pointing to Maillol's conservatism, he finds it easy for Maillol to have cohabited with the German occupiers of France in World War II (p. 194). As Cloonan notes, many conservatives in France and elsewhere found intellectual sympathy with Nazism. His analysis, however, which comes off as an apologia for Maillol, could be strengthened by a consideration of Charles Maurras and Action Française and any influence they might have had on the sculptor. A consideration of Maillol's art might also help elucidate his conservatism and possibly his willingness to collaborate with the Germans. Cloonan sees a disjunction between a long tradition of antisemitism and the “Final Solution” but appears to ignore the medieval expulsions of the Jews from England and France, their expulsion from Spain after 1492, and the Russian pogroms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The chapter on Jünger by Neaman is excellent in showing how the German wartime memoirist was later transformed into a great European writer by many in postwar Europe, including French President François Mitterrand, who had his own wartime ghosts in the closet (p. 238). Neaman errs, however (p. 232) in stating that German plundering of Paris began in the summer of 1942. It began with the arrival of the Germans and their setting of the franc-mark exchange rate at twenty to one in the summer of 1940. Nor is the relevance of the Ronald Reagan-Helmut Kohl meeting at Bitburg in 1985 clear for a discussion of Jünger or Franco-German relations (p. 234).

Some of the more insightful observations are made in the closing essays of the volume. “As with Neaman's exposition on the transformation of Jünger, Zimmik's analysis of the ambivalences of mythmaking, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and feminist reconstructions of Romy Schneider's career is also enlightening. She points out that those who equate women with Jews as oppressed and claim that coming to terms with one's Nazi past means identifying fascism with masculinity imply that all men, insofar as they are oppressors, are fascists (p. 268). Lastly, in addressing historians' attempts to make sense of the Nazi era and the Holocaust, Cohen highlights Hannah Arendt's “salvaging” of art as experiences of taste amid all the evidence of barbarism all around her (p. 285). An exploration of this theme with respect to Maillol's work, or that of Arno Brekker, might have been fruitful. Cohen also emphasizes the continuity Simone Weil saw between the 1789 French Revolution and the world of 1943. “Hitler, to Weil—before the name Holocaust appears—fulfills Western history. Hitlerism is no aberration but a logico-social product of the West” (p. 281). Weil was not alone. Marcel Déat, leader of the pro-German Rassemblement National Populaire, made the same case in 1943.[4] Weil saw this history as failure, Déat as vindication. There may be more to say on this subject.

Unfortunately, *Rhine Crossings* is marred by frequent use of jargon and an occasional sentence such as: “Less aggressive and shocking perhaps in Zarathustra's floating Nietzsche's hermit and Nietzsche the hermit show signs of claustrophobia in his constant demand for ‘fresh air,’ and an almost paranoid concern for cleanliness” (p. 129). Words such as “cathected” (p. 107) and “machinic” (p. 108) could be expressed in “standard English. It appears that some chapters were translated from other languages into English and these needed more careful editing. “Rhein” appears instead of “Rhine” (p. 19); “hon-

net homme“ is given instead of ”honnÃ©te“ and then not translated (p. 56); ”Kanzler“ rather than ”Chancellor,“ is used to refer to Helmut Kohl (p. 235). A good editing would have prevented the use of ”discrediting“ for ”discrediting“ (p. 7); ”miscomprehends“ for ”misunderstands“ (p. 47); and ”assailment“ for ”assault“ (p. 125). Grammatical errors include reference to a ”more lighter note“ (p. 8), ”it’s“ instead of ”its“ (p. 9), and ”loose“ instead of ”lose“ (p. 255). Philippe Burrin is misidentified as Philippe Burtin (p. 247); Ziegfeld should be Ziegfeld (p. 90); and Robert Paxton’s article on the Maurice Papon trial is given as having been published in 1995 in the text (p. 203) and in 1999 in the notes (p. 209). The footnotes, however, are helpful and make a useful addition to the many good insights offered in *Rhine Crossings*.

Notes

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[1]. Bertram M. Gordon, ”Interview with Marc Augier,“ conducted in Paris, July 4, 1974.

[2]. For a discussion of a common Franco-German history manual being prepared for the 2006-2007 academic year, see Nicole Mullier, ”Manuel histoire franco-allemand,“ May 3, 2006, discussion logs, H-Francais, <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=lx&list=H-Francais&user=&pw=&month=0605>.

[3]. Bertram M. Gordon, ”The ’Vichy Syndrome’ Problem in History,“ *French Historical Studies* 19 (1995): 495-518.

[4]. Marcel DÃ©at, *RÃ©volution FranÃ§aise et RÃ©volution Allemande, 1789-1943* (Paris: Rassemblement National Populaire, 1944).