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Hermann Borchardt.**

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Bold Novel of a Near-Nazi Land

Reviewed by
Klaus Mann

THE CONSPIRACY OF THE CARPENTERS. By Hermann Borchardt. Simon & Schuster. 634 pp. \$2.75.

GERMAN literature in exile—and practically the whole of German literature is in exile, since 1933—has produced an impressive number of interesting or even excellent works, but it has failed, so far, to produce new authors. From now on, however, a new German name will have to be remembered: Hermann Borchardt—undoubtedly a vital, original talent.

His first book, "The Conspiracy of the Carpenters," is indeed an extraordinary piece of work, bold and controversial—and unique. At once fantastic and ponderous, whimsical and didactic, it is one of the most curious, most perplexing experiments in modern literature—incomparable in its particular accents and mannerisms and yet typically Teutonic in its rampant capriciousness and pedagogical pretension. For "The Conspiracy of the Carpenters" is by no means just a baroque extravaganza; it is quite the contrary, conceived and presented as "an important political work," to quote an expression used by Franz Werfel in his warm and eloquent foreword. It is indeed to this political-pedagogical pathos that the fascination of Borchardt's novel is due—a fascination which, in my opinion, is not free of problematical or even dangerous elements. The political fairy tale so fervently recommended by the great Austrian poet, Franz Werfel, is, to put it bluntly, one of the most excessively reactionary books written since Metternich.

Borchardt is against Hitler, all right. His story—taking place in a fanciful land that is almost Germany—describes the rise and fall of a "modern popular leader" named Dr. Urban who could be almost Hitler. He isn't Hitler, though. Everything is a little different: not the real history of Germany in the last 40 years but, to quote Werfel again, "rather a musical variation upon the elements of that history." One might also say, less euphemistically, that it is a purposeful arrangement or even a sly distortion of the historical facts. For, if it is true that the author is a real artist and as such given to childlike and inspired vagaries, it is also true that he is a political preacher and agitator—extremely cunning in promoting his cause, which is the cause of clerical conservatism.

The ruling class in Borchardt's mythological country is represented by the Conservatives, under the leadership of Adam Faust, President of the Republic, owner of factories and mines, also known as "the Fox of God." His teacher and trusted adviser is Prof. Andrew Zorn, the theoretician of the Conservatives, and author of "The Metaphysics of Reaction." Another prominent pupil of Prof. Zorn is Dr. Daruh, personal physician to the president and professor of occult sciences—a spectacular gentleman with piercing eyes, dark-brown hair over a powdered face, a pince-nez dangling on a black ribbon over the high-buttoned white waistcoat with its double row of dark red glass buttons. Others close to the president are Bishop Hesse, who establishes with Andrew Zorn the League of Carpenters—a secret, militant brotherhood and "ideal Christian commonwealth in the vest-pocket form"; Augustus Beyer, leader of the radical Christian and activist



HERMANN BORCHARDT

wing of the Conservatives, a rich textile magnate; and, moreover, some "banking princes" and Christian-reactionary artists (the term "Christian-reactionary" is Borchardt's). These are the heroes of the chronicle.

On the other side we have the "Urbanites" (i.e. the Nazis), backed by the liberals, atheists and adherents to the ugly idea of "progress." Even more despicable than the desperadoes and ruffians gathering around the "modern popular leader"—Urban-Hitler—is "the Iron Phalanx of Intelligence, glittering with all progressive party colors including the blood red of revolution."

According to Hermann Borchardt, the disintegration of modern society, the triumph of "the bog," in other words, Nazism, is the direct, inevitable consequence

is that it is partly true, as are most theories, for that matter. But it is not true, as Borchardt asserts, that all liberal, democratic ideas—all such concepts as Freedom, Civilization, Impartial Science, Enlightenment and so forth—are necessarily stained with the corrosive poison of "materialism," whereas all conservative, clerical tendencies are per se ethical and constructive.

There is a civil war taking place in Borchardt's dream land, with the valiant Conservatives and Carpenters fighting the Urbanites, while the venal intelligentsia waver and accept bribes. The Carpenters come out victorious—naturally they do. Presently they establish a "genuinely Christian conservative commonwealth"; that is to say, the state assumes "a religious character," and unloads "its responsibility for the bodily welfare of its citizens—for a 'weekday'—upon our capitalists and fellowships, that is upon the economic system as a whole."

Thus liberated from all vulgar material worries, the government is free to devote itself to its lofty tasks—the affairs of the "Sunday Mortal." Censorship and the prosecution of the Iron Phalanx of Intelligence guarantee the moral soundness of the conservative commonwealth; as for such minor matters as the production and distribution of vital goods, that's the headache of the Christian millionaires and the pious guilds.

"The forcibly defended past—the strongest force in creation, something almost unshakable—that is what Borchardt admires and recommends. He does so with impressive wit and power,