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David Barnett

Joseph Goebbels: Expressionist Dramatist as Nazi Minister of Culture

The young Joseph Goebbels, caught up in the heady mix of ideas and ideals permeating German artistic circles during and after the First World War, expressed both his convictions and his confusions through writing plays. None of these deserve much attention as serious drama; but all shed light on the ideological development of the future Nazi Minister of Culture. While also developing an argument on the wider relationship between Expressionism and modernism, David Barnett here traces that relationship in Goebbels' plays, as also the evolution of an ideology that remained equivocal in its aesthetics – the necessary condemnation of 'degenerate' art tinged with a lingering admiration, epitomized in the infamous exhibition of 1937. David Barnett has been Lecturer in Theatre Studies at the University of Huddersfield since 1998, and was previously Lecturer in German Language and Literature at Keble College, Oxford. His *Literature versus Theatre: Textual Problems and Theatrical Realization in the Later Plays of Heiner Müller* was published by Peter Lang in 1998, and other publications include articles on Heiner Müller, Franz Xaver Kroetz, Rolf Hochhuth, Heinrich Kipphardt, Werner Schwab, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and Peter Handke.

POLITICIANS like to write. From Seneca to Ann Widdecombe, public figures have penned plays, novels, and poems, and sometimes the work becomes 'literature'. Mainly, however, interest resides in the hunt for political allegory or biographical allusion. Yet when the politician is a defining voice in the imposition of cultural policy and the state in question is Nazi Germany, literary output assumes a more privileged position in the relationship between author and state.

Paul Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's *Reichsminister of People's Information and Propaganda* from 1933 to 1945, produced four dramas (and one fragment) between 1918 and 1923, four of the five works being written when he was a student. This article will examine the dramaturgy of three of the plays with a view to understanding a central question about Goebbels' aesthetics which had haunted him ever since the publication of his novel, *Michael: a German Fate through the Pages of a Diary* (1928). The question concerns Goebbels' support for and belief in Expressionism; and the issue is important because the NSDAP promoted, 'a more or

less consistent set of antimodernist [sic] aesthetic principles',¹ a position which would appear entirely at odds with Goebbels' ideas on the function of art in a Fascist state.

The debate about Goebbels' Expressionism has hitherto revolved around two foci: his apparent promotion of modernist art within the Third Reich and the aesthetics of the *Michael* novel. If we examine both instances in turn, we may be able to understand some of the apparent contradictions in Goebbels' artistic allegiances.

Although in dramatic criticism the term 'Expressionist' has for a long time now been used to describe a large corpus of predominantly German plays, it suffers from all manner of abuses and cannot be defined easily. Arним Arnold has traced the history of the term in his book *Die Literatur des Expressionismus*, and concludes:

We therefore confirm that most of the Expressionists never wanted to be Expressionists at all. Some died before the concept gained currency, others distanced themselves from it or maintained it was meaningless. . . . We have to conclude that we can discover little of consequence about the

literary shifts of the name either from the philosophical meaning or the history of the usage of the word 'Expressionism'.²

Goebbels' major modern biographer, Ralf Georg Reuth, reports that in 1933, after the Nazi seizure of power, Goebbels displayed a painting by the Expressionist artist Emil Nolde in his new residence.³ Hitler saw the work and ordered Goebbels to remove it, which he did. It is also known that Goebbels conveyed his congratulations to the painter Edvard Munch on the occasion of his seventieth birthday in 1933.⁴

In July of the same year, an exhibition called 'Thirty German Artists' was opened in a private gallery in Berlin which included the work of Nolde, Macke, Barlach, and other Expressionists. It was closed by order of Wilhelm Frick, the Minister of the Interior, after three days, but Reuth offers convincing circumstantial evidence to suggest that the exhibition had Goebbels' approval. Kai Michel counters that Reuth's material is not watertight, and argues that Goebbels may have been acting politically in a bid to frustrate his conservative antagonist in the arena of cultural policy, Alfred Rosenberg.⁵

What is certain is that Goebbels was a prime mover in the infamous 'Degenerate Art Exhibition' of 1937, in which the works of the Expressionists and other non-realist artists were pilloried. The inconsistent biographical data available make it difficult to say whether Goebbels did indeed favour Expressionism or whether it was a means with which to frustrate Rosenberg and from which to distance himself when the political climate changed.

'Michael': Engagement with Modernism

The novel, which allows more of an insight into questions of form and content, presents us with different problems. On the one hand, Ulrich Höver argues that Goebbels, 'as a child of his time, was set alight by Expressionism'.⁶ He justifies his claims in terms of a set of formal qualities, and emphasizes the thematic importance of 'the renewal of Man', the search for values after the Great War, the

turn to the proletariat, the Brotherhood of Man, and the failure of rationalism and objectivity.⁷ Karin Schröder agrees, drawing attention to the overt discussions of Expressionism in the novel.⁸ Three other critics also consider *Michael* Expressionist literature.⁹

The only but major voice of dissent within this small circle of critics is Michel, who argues that Goebbels was not an Expressionist but a Nazi.¹⁰ Although he concedes that Goebbels' apocalyptic visions may have something in common with the Expressionists, he argues that Höver's list of Expressionist features is overstated, and that it is the lack of discipline detectable in Goebbels' poor control of the diary form that accounts for much of the confusion.

Marianne Bonwit has fully demonstrated Goebbels' huge debt to Goethe's epistolary novel *The Sufferings of Young Werther*, and she argues that whereas Goethe used irony to expose the cleft between the importance of Ossian for Werther and himself as author, Goebbels was technically unable to untangle himself from his diarist Michael with respect to their enthusiastic reception of Nietzsche.¹¹ Once more, critics are unable to pin down Goebbels' aesthetic position

A distinct lack of clarity pervades these proceedings. In the first example, biographical data failed to yield material that could resolve the issue. In the second, the possibility of assessing Goebbels' aesthetics seemed possible, yet the very denotation 'Expressionist' became problematic. It was difficult to assess whether Goebbels had adopted a style deliberately or had merely been a poor writer of diarist fiction. In my investigation of Goebbels' dramas, I intend to trace a development in his writing practice that does point to clear aesthetic positions. In order to understand the positions one must broaden the terms of the debate by looking to the plays as examples of modernist practice.

When one tries to apply the term 'Expressionist' to Goebbels' literary output, one is forced to acknowledge its shortcomings as an analytical tool. I therefore feel that understanding Goebbels' attitudes to the broad swathe of ideas gathered under the umbrella

term 'modernism' may be more useful. Indeed, discussions of this term have fascinated academic criticism for many decades. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane argue that 'to distil from the multiplicity an overall style or mannerism is a difficult, perhaps even an impossible, task'.¹² Broad trends may be detected, but definition seems ever elusive.

Richard Sheppard, in his analysis of the academic treatment of modernism over the last forty years, offers a more holistic approach to the problematic, arguing that a checklist of features is reductive and devoid of context, and that a reactive theory, in which modernism is, for example, understood as a backlash to realism, does not stand close scrutiny. He demonstrates how 'Deconstruction has shown us that what a concept or category "claims to exclude is implicated in it"',¹³ and finally settles on an idea of modernism as a dialectical set of interactions with modernity: 'Modernism is both an active response to a seismic upheaval and a heterogeneous phenomenon'.¹⁴ It is Goebbels as modernist who is now under the lens.

Judas as Outsider

The plays¹⁵ that I will be discussing are the first full-length dramas that Goebbels wrote, other than the 'horror tragedies' (*Schauertragödien*) he recalls composing as a child.¹⁶ Poetry and a couple of novellas were written, too, but even they are dismissed by Goebbels in his reflections (*Tagebücher*, 1, p. 53 and 56). I should also like to stress that the following analyses in no way approach Goebbels as a writer of merit. His dramatic technique is unsophisticated and unsubtle, and his treatment of themes and issues overwhelmingly ham-fisted and naive. His construction of character is one-dimensional, and his speeches are often sententious, pompous, and suffused with appalling pathos. The purpose of the investigation is rather to identify the aesthetic modes employed by the writer with a view to gauging his engagement with modernism and the effects that may be achieved through it.

Goebbels' first full-length play, *Judas Iscariot: a Biblical Tragedy in Five Acts*, was written between July and August 1918 in the space of three weeks, and was dedicated to his then girl-friend, Anka Stalherm. It portrays Judas as a restless man of fiery ambition who leaves his mother, sister, and betrothed to follow Jesus. The Jesus presented is one who addresses the social and economic needs of the people, undertaking to lead them out of *Knechtschaft*¹⁷ ('slavery, bondage, servitude') and to offer them leadership.

However, shortly after promising himself to his new lord, Judas is disappointed by him, and herein lies his rebellion. Jesus will not accept the crown offered to him by the people and is thus construed by Judas as a deceiver. The Pharisees pick up on the disaffection and encourage Judas to betray his master. Judas accepts the thirty pieces of silver, but only as a ruse. We learn that he sees himself as the liberator of the people, a mission for which he no longer considers Jesus suitable. Only Annas, the father-in-law of the High Priest Caiaphas, suspects this motivation. Judas betrays Jesus, ignorant that it will lead to crucifixion. When he realizes what he has done, he is overcome with regret and repentance, as only recorded in Matthew, XXVII, 3–5. As the sun rises on a new day, he declares that he will end his life.

Lovis M. Wambach sketches the literary history of this interpretation of Judas's betrayal. He shows that there is little new in Goebbels' treatment; it is part of a tradition that can be traced back to Goethe, and is similar to Carl Sternheim's version, written in 1901.¹⁸ Despite the new slant on the biblical figure, Goebbels received short shrift from his local priest, Chaplain Mollen. The latter made him feel so abject that he wrote to Stalherm saying he would have torn up his one copy if it had been to hand.¹⁹ Unable to break with the Catholicism of his upbringing, Goebbels found it impossible to enact the rebellion he had fictionalized, even though his former German teacher Voss thought that the manuscript would find a publisher.²⁰

The drama flags many issues that were to recur in subsequent plays. Judas, the out-

sider who seeks social justice, founders on the rock of reaction and entrenched power bases. For Judas, life is a *Kampf* ('struggle, fight')²¹ – and the word occurs with unflinching regularity in the text. The concept of sacrifice, not only rooted in the Christian tradition but also in Germanic myths (such as *The Nibelungenlied*) occurs in the mouths of Judas and Jesus (*Judas Iscariot*, p. 21 and 41 respectively). The people are continually referred to as the *Volk*, a term which was later to dominate Nazis discourse, although here, some fifteen years before they seized power, it refers to the feudal masses of Israel.

The dramaturgy of the play shows no real signs of modernist technique. It has a traditional five-act structure which follows the conventional paradigm. The first act introduces Judas, the second develops him, the third signals a *peripeteia*, when the decision is made to betray Jesus, the fourth moves the action towards the *dénouement*, and the fifth ends in tragedy and *anagnorisis*. The attempt at an epic form (in its Hollywood, not Brechtian usage) is here betokened by Goebbels' not entirely unsuccessful use of verse, although it is at its weakest when characters drift into soliloquies in which an inner conflict is portrayed. This modern depiction of the split self, struggling for inner mastery, is hardly a modernist device in itself, but does hint at an understanding of a psychology which was in its infancy. *Judas Iscariot* is not formally a modernist drama.

The New Concern with Class

*Heinrich Kämpfert: a Drama in Three Acts*²² was written less than a year afterwards, in February 1919, and displays Goebbels' growing interest in class division and its connections with social injustice. In his home town of Rheydt, Goebbels had started discussing social and political problems with workers' leaders, and had decided to investigate the lot of the working man (sic) more closely.²³ In addition, Reuth, having read Goebbels' letters, tells us that Goebbels finally turned his back on institutionalized Christianity and Catholicism around Christmas 1918.²⁴

Ideas of sacrifice are still evident, but the context of the work is secular rather than Christian. The play also picks up autobiographical details in that the protagonist, Kämpfert, an impoverished artist (an image Goebbels then had of himself), is involved with a wealthier and thus socially more problematic woman, Else von Hermstädt.²⁵

The drama takes place in three different locations. Kämpfert is first seen giving private Latin lessons to Richard von Hermstädt, Else's little brother, in the opulent family home. Once she arrives, Richard is sent off on an errand, the scene becoming a vehicle for memories of Kämpfert's youth and the vital information that he needs an expensive spa cure for his tuberculosis if he is to live. The second act exposes the profligate lifestyle of Else's older brother Wilhelm and the trivial social whirl of her sister Mechthild. Else announces to her mother that she is in love with Kämpfert and that he needs the money her siblings so irresponsibly waste to survive. The mother rejects the union, but is prepared to give the tutor his money if he will come to see her the next day.

The final act takes place in Kämpfert's lodgings. His silent struggle with life is dramatized in a dialogue with his friend Bagel, in which they discuss Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* – a work and an author who, together with Tolstoy, had fascinated and inspired Goebbels ever since his first contact in Winter 1918–19. Kämpfert, strongly under the influence of Nietzsche, argues that Raskolnikoff should have killed himself rather than given himself up to the police. His mistake was that his link to Napoleon was a 'mis-recognition'²⁶ of himself. Suicide consequently becomes heroic, a rebellion, when one finally recognizes that to continue to live on society's terms is to surrender one's 'essence', according to Kämpfert. Bagel leaves and Kämpfert takes poison, decrying Bagel's claims that all suicides are cowards. Kämpfert's landlady enters, thinking that he is asleep, and mutters about how Frau von Hermstädt has asked him to meet her the following day.

Again we meet the socially wronged outsider, again the theme of *Kampf* pervades the

discourse, again there is the critique of a society that destroys the socially injusticed. An important development occurs, however, in the vocabulary employed. The *Volk* of *Judas* is replaced by an understanding of class. In the second act, Else exhorts her mother with the line, 'There is an enormous responsibility that comes with wealth, a responsibility to the classes who live in want and starve' (*Heinrich Kämpfert*, p. 31). Else's thrust is moral rather than political in that she does not propose a revolutionary change for society. She believes that the rich have a duty to the poor and that a class-based ethics rather than politics is the solution.

Kämpfert himself wrestles with a new morality, too, one in which he could jettison his pride and accept the charity of the rich. If he changed he would become 'a New Man' (*Heinrich Kämpfert*, p. 39), something which he then seems to reject. The 'New Man', away from its contemporary meaning, is a part of the vocabulary of the time. *Der neue Mensch*²⁷ was a term allied to notions of social rebirth, and was a watchword of the late Expressionist drama of the time. 'The New Man' would turn his back on the egocentricity of industrial society and capitalism, and form a cornerstone of a new, fairer community. *Heinrich Kämpfert* is not a drama of 'the New Man': it merely mentions the concept once, and dismisses it soon afterwards. Its presence is more of an acknowledgement that Goebbels had encountered the term around this time.

Otherwise, the play is as conventional as *Judas*. The characters are presented 'realistically', although Goebbels does overdo a satirical linguistic tic in the patrician Wilhelm von Hermstädt and his friend Hans von Eberhard. The 'realism' of the piece is transparently argued for when Mechthild asks Else why she is crying in the second act. She wonders if the novel Else was reading turned out tragically. Else replies that that is the case: however, it is not a novel one reads, but 'a novel that life itself has written with its own pen, for which the hard world has provided the paper' (*Heinrich Kämpfert*, p. 31). The over-the-top sentiments undermine the 'realism' of the speech (a tone adopted

throughout the play) but do attempt to transfigure the work from one of fiction to one of fact.

Goebbels then wrote the fragment *The Struggle of the Working Class* (*Der Kampf der Arbeiterklasse*) in a notebook during the Winter of 1919–20. I have not been able to read this piece, which was described by Goebbels as 'a fragment of a social drama' (*Tagebücher*, 1, p. 72).²⁸ Its generalizing title and its social thrust may indicate that it was a study for the play that was written shortly after it, *Sowing Seeds: an Occurrence in Three Acts*, which was completed by Easter 1920.

New Stimuli in 'Sowing Seeds'

This play gives us a greater insight into the influences and upheavals in Goebbels' life between its composition and that of *Kämpfert*. The *Erinnerungsblätter* record several encounters with modernist texts and performance in the interim period. In the Summer of 1919, Goebbels saw Strindberg's *The Dance of Death*, and wrote shortly afterwards: 'I have been considering the social question. Expressionism' (*Tagebücher*, 1, p. 66). He registers the name only of the Expressionist writer Walter Hasenclever twice in one entry,²⁹ praises the 'Expressionist' play *Gas* by Georg Kaiser for its 'wonderful direction' (*Tagebücher*, 1, p. 72), and engages with Tolstoy's *And the Light Shines in the Darkness*.

The latter, an unfinished play discovered in Tolstoy's literary estate, deals with the application of the Sermon on the Mount to society without the dogma of the Russian Orthodox Church, and had become popular in Germany a year before, following a major production in Berlin under the direction of Max Reinhardt. The drama is not stylized and is 'realistic', yet Goebbels' response to it is interesting: 'A lasting impression. Socialism. Only spreading slowly. Social sympathy. Expressionism. Not yet pure and understood' (*Tagebücher*, 1, p. 70). In addition, Goebbels' close friend Richard Flisges (on whose death in 1923 he completely overhauled the first version of his novel *Michael* to create a second in which Flisges's end as a worker in a mine became the heroic final

scene) gave him volumes of Marx and Engels to read.

Goebbels had thus been exposed to the following stimuli: 'Expressionism' in the theatre, a new understanding of 'Christian socialism', and the political doctrines of classical Marxism. All make their presence felt in *Sowing Seeds*, which marks a formal break with Goebbels' other dramas while developing and transforming themes already identified.

Sowing Seeds is set in the house of a character referred to only as the Worker (which may indicate the influence of *Gas*, in which such denotations abound). In the first act we hear that wages have been lowered once again. The Worker, in concert with four other unnamed Workers, organizes a peaceful strike. In the second act, which takes place on the following day, the strike is established and receives the full support of the workforce. The peaceful protest is broken when the army intervenes. The Worker and his fellow leaders are arrested by a Lieutenant to the anger of his Son.

The third act initially depicts the Mother's anguish before news arrives that the imprisoned workers have been freed from prison by their comrades (a term actually used in the play),³⁰ and that the Worker is fighting heroically in the front line. The play concludes when the Worker's mortally injured body is brought back to the house. The strike is over, the Worker dies, but his Son will carry on the struggle (*Kampf*). The curtain lines, delivered by the Son are, 'My father is dead!/He has sown the seeds well./They will grow to fullness' (*Sowing Seeds*, p. 55).

Sowing Seeds labours its points much as the other dramas do. This time, however, new articulations and new forms dominate. The *Kampf* motif still pervades the work, but there is a noticeable stressing of a new opposition. 'Man' (*Mensch*) is now contrasted with 'animal' – the text adopting humanist approach in which Man has degenerated to beast because of the socio-economic circumstances of capitalism. The numerous mentions of the word 'brother' point to another stock idea of the modernist drama of

the time, the 'brotherhood of man' (it is present in *Gas* and some of Hasenclever's works, among many others). The socialist–humanist agenda is reinforced by a plethora of natural metaphors concerned with 'sowing seeds', 'ripening', 'harvesting', 'springtime', blood as a 'manure' for the new future, and the tide of change as a 'storm wind'. Most of the imagery is trite, yet it still forms part of Goebbels' rhetorical thrust, underpinning his ideas on common 'natural' humanity.

A Dramaturgy of Collectivism

Here we note a further shift in Goebbels' terminology. In *Judas* the masses were the *Volk*, by *Kämpfert* he is talking of 'class', now in *Sowing Seeds* he moves to the term *Geschlecht*. Here it means 'race', but not in a narrow, bigoted sense. Rather it refers to 'the human race'; the future that is spoken of is a collective one in which humanity, not a class or a people, will be united under a fairer system. Goebbels even embraces an internationalism, which he disavowed publicly in a radio interview with Erwin Piscator in 1930,³¹ when the Worker says, 'there are no countries any more, just the Earth, and whatever lives on this Earth is my brother' (*Sowing Seeds*, p. 15).

Twice, the Worker says that 'a spectre is abroad' ('ein Gespenst geht um': *Sowing Seeds*, p. 3 and 6), the same wording that opens Marx and Engel's *Communist Manifesto*. But Goebbels cannot be understood as a Marxist here. The play is conspicuous for its naivety, like many late Expressionist forays into politics. The workers pursue their utopia with shows of moral resolve, their uprising is peaceful, and their hopes are to continue to work in a fairer society, but not one in which class structures have been abolished. As in *Kämpfert*, Goebbels is looking to a change in attitude.

Goebbels also takes up the ideas of Christian socialism, which certainly find their way into the humanist discourse discussed above, but also manifest themselves in the play's imagery. The Worker says that the *Mensch* in him has 'arisen' (*Sowing Seeds*, p. 5 and 22), that he will preach 'the new gospel'

(p. 17), which includes the commandment, 'thou shalt not be a slave' (p. 32), and the First Worker describes the battle in Act Three in terms of Judgement Day. Goebbels was inspired by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, and their ideas of a mystical socialism in which a reinterpretation of the Bible would deliver working men from their exploited lot. Also present in the play's finale is the Christian theme of redemption through sacrifice.

These concepts find their expression in the aesthetics of the play. The 'realism' that Goebbels had striven for in his two earlier plays is replaced by a dramaturgy of collectivism and universalism. As has already been noted, there are no named characters in the play – generic attributions have replaced them. The egocentricity of the oppressor is confronted with the collective identity of the representative figures on stage. Psychology is eschewed in the name of typologized and symbolic roles: the Son is left to carry on the fight, for example.

The society presented is also vague and broadly defined. No reference locates it as Germany, and it seems that Goebbels was keen to extend the scope of the drama way beyond Germany's borders. The Workers only talk of 'the world', and this denotation recurs with great frequency. The generalized tone of the dramaturgy suggests that the Workers have organized a global strike. There is never talk of dissension among the strikers, and all-inclusive 'everyone's' and 'all's continually refer to those off-stage. The inclusivity does not bear 'realist' analysis, and neither does the play's time-scheme. The action, compressed into two days, involves a wage cut, a strike meeting, a successful rallying of the workers, initial opposition by force, an offensive from the workers, and a final victory for the dominant order.

Goebbels' reference to 'Expressionism' in the *Erinnerungsblätter*³² helps us to understand the radical shift in his aesthetic stance. He dispenses with the dramatic conventions that informed his earlier works in order to find a more fitting form for his vision of a just society. The brotherhood of man is too constrained by individuated psychology and the demands of dramatic 'realism'. He thus

takes his cue from the new drama he has seen and enthused about. The theatre can be used to transcend the quotidian, and suggest utopias unrepresentable through 'realist' dramaturgies.

Goebbels turns his back on 'the real world' and challenges the limitations of the bourgeois self. This attack is indicative of a modernist response to the contradictions of modernity, and critics have identified, for example, the breakdown of the unified individual with modernist dramaturgy.³³ There can be little doubt that Goebbels has retained certain key themes from his previous plays, but has also consciously adopted a new conception of form. Although this has formerly been termed Expressionist, we may prefer to consider it modernist.

Expressionism, Modernism, Nazism

Goebbels followed *Sowing Seeds* with *The Wanderer* in 1923 – the only play of his that has ever been performed.³⁴ Of all the dramas, though, it is only *Sowing Seeds* to which Goebbels hoped to return (in 1928).³⁵ One may only speculate about how the play was to be changed, but if one looks to the alterations made to the 1923 version of the novel *Michael* in 1928, an interesting model becomes apparent. For the most part, Goebbels changed generalized words like *Mensch* to 'German', *Menschheit* ('mankind') to *Volk* (now in its vehemently nationalist meaning), and inserted a few anti-Semitic passages.³⁶ That is, he did not change the form, but gave the terminology an ideological overhaul to suit his political leanings.

Perhaps Goebbels was indeed pleased with his new modernist form in *Sowing Seeds*, but felt that his content required a more rabidly German slant to match his new far-right opinions. No manuscript exists, but a diary entry made during a state visit to Italy in 1933 praises Mussolini and the fascists for uniting modernity and the workers. Goebbels concludes that Germany can learn a great deal from this (*Tagebücher*, 2, p. 808).

In conclusion, the analysis of Goebbels' development as a dramatist reveals a pro-

found debt to and influence from European modernism. Even if the novel *Michael* does not present conclusive proof, the evolution of the drama affords insights which are quantifiable. Goebbels demonstrates a willing acceptance of experimental and non-realistic forms, frowned upon not only by the Third Reich but seemingly by Goebbels himself through his championing of the 'Degenerate Art Exhibition'. It is difficult to establish whether his involvement in the project betokened an aesthetic *volte face* or a more pragmatic strengthening of his own weak political position in 1936 (as Braimah cogently argues).³⁷

Yet it is also hard to dismiss his own work as that of a Nazi rather than that of an 'Expressionist', as Michel does. Goebbels' later dramaturgy starts life at very least as a strategy to unite mankind. He may well have developed it to accommodate his Nazi ideology in 1928, but the original impetus is humanist. Joseph Goebbels, one of the most significant cultural figures in Nazi Germany, had developed an aesthetic that looked to art as a means of representing the world in manners and forms which discarded the certainties of the nineteenth century and eschewed Hitler's own neoclassical artistic prescriptions. An anti-individualist dramaturgy, driven by naive utopian longings, was Goebbels' aesthetic solution to the social problems raised by *Judas* and *Kämpfert*.

As Goebbels' political involvement increased, so did his acceptance of modernist aesthetics as a way of reconciling thematic issues (the lot of the workers) with form. The picture that emerges is that Goebbels was a supporter of modernism as a revolutionary artistic force which later 'naturally' aligned itself with his idea of the Nazis as social revolutionaries (not as the allies of big business and a conservative party).

In this sense, Braimah's interpretation of Goebbels' involvement in the 'Degenerate Art Exhibition' as a tactical move may be correct. We will, of course, never know for sure, but Goebbels' aesthetic beliefs, as revealed by the analysis of his plays in relation to later biographical data, would seem to support the view that the furthering

of his political power, and not a shift in aesthetic allegiance, accounts for his apparent rejection of modernism in art and letters as a Minister of the Third Reich.

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8. Karin Schröder, 'Michael: ein deutsches Schicksal in Tagebuchblättern: Joseph Goebbels als Romanautor. Beiträge zu einer Interpretation' (unpublished Magister thesis, Justus-Liebig-Universität, Giessen, 1993), p. 125.
9. Cf. Braimah, p. 4 and 32; Marianne Bonwit, 'Michael, ein Roman von Joseph Goebbels, im Licht der deutschen literarischen Tradition', in Hans Mayer, ed., *Deutsche Literaturkritik der Gegenwart*, Vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Goverts Krüger Stahlberg, 1971), p. 490–501, here p. 493; and Dieter Saalmann, 'Fascism and Aesthetics: Joseph Goebbels' [sic] Novel, *Michael: a German Fate through the Pages of a Diary* (1929 [sic]), *Orbis Litterarum*, XLI, No. 3 (1986), p. 213–28, here p. 217.
10. Kai Michel, p. 88. The relationship between Expressionism and Nazism is a fraught one. The Marxist critic Georg Lukács was responsible for systematically espousing a direct link in his book *The Destruction of Reason*. Richard Sheppard shows, in his article, 'Georg Lukács, Wilhelm Worringer, and German Expressionism', *Journal of European Studies*, XXV (1995), p. 241–82, that archival evidence 'suggests that by late 1932/early 1933, Expressionism, a movement in which Lukács had taken precious little interest previously, had become a reified mental construct' (p. 264) which could be used as an Aunt Sally for his own ideas on art. The fact that the prominent Expressionist Hanns Johst became an avid Nazi and that the equally celebrated left-wing Expressionist Johannes R. Becher became the GDR's first Minister of Culture show how problematic is an assertion of a direct link between Expressionism and Nazism.
11. Bonwit, *ibid.*
12. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, 'The Name and Nature of Modernism', in Bradbury and McFarlane, eds., *Modernism: a Guide to European Literature 1890–1930* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 23.
13. Richard Sheppard, *Modernism – Dada – Postmodernism* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2000), p. 5.
14. Sheppard, *ibid.*, p. 23.

15. Here I should like to thank Karin Schröder for the three transcriptions which she has prepared for her own doctoral studies and which she has sent to me. Goebbels' handwritten manuscripts, which mainly reside in the *Bundesarchiv* in Koblenz, are exceptionally difficult to decipher, written as they are in the now obsolete *Sütterlin* style. All quotations taken from Goebbels' works have been kindly approved by the solicitor for the literary estate, Frau Cordula Schacht.

16. Joseph Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, ed. Ralf Georg Reuth, five volumes (Munich: Piper, 1992), Volume One, p. 52. The main source from which I am taking biographical information are Goebbels' own *Erinnerungsblätter* ('writings from memory'), *Tagebücher*, 1, p. 49–87. These were written in August 1924, shortly after he decided to keep a diary in June. Michel notes quite rightly that the account is not completely reliable when he points to the re-writing of an early poem (Michel, p. 36). It is difficult to know what one may impute to these memoirs, yet they offer factual information, such as what Goebbels saw in the theatre and when, what he was reading, and other points of information. It is important to remember that Goebbels was writing with hindsight and that opinions and impressions are reconstructed by him.

17. Joseph Goebbels, *Judas Iscariot: eine biblische Tragödie in fünf Akten* (unpublished transcription), p. 26.

18. Lovis M. Wambach, "Es ist gleichgültig, woran wir glauben, nur daß wir glauben." Bemerkungen zu Joseph Goebbels' Drama *Judas Iscariot und den Michael-Romanen*, unpublished manuscript, provided by Karin Schröder with the permission of its author, p. 7. It is uncertain whether Goebbels knew of Sternheim's play – it is not mentioned in the diaries, but this omission is obviously inconclusive.

19. Cf. Reuth, p. 35, quoting from Goebbels' correspondence in the *Bundesarchiv*.

20. Reuth, *ibid.*

21. Nowadays our associations with the word *Kampf* are inextricably linked with Hitler's turgid tract *Mein Kampf*. It is important to note that the first volume was published in 1925, two years after Goebbels completed his final play. Goebbels came into contact with the Nazis in 1922, but did not commit himself straight away. All his plays, except for *The Wanderer*, were thus written before he found a party-political focus for some of the critiques he makes both in his diary and his drama.

22. Its original title was *Silent Heroes* (Reuth, p. 623).

23. Reuth, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

24. Reuth, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

25. The 'Herm' at the beginning of this name is almost certainly a reference to Arka Stalherm. Goebbels was fond of using 'meaningful names', something which now appears unsubtle, as in the protagonist's surname, Kämpfert.

26. Joseph Goebbels, *Heinrich Kämpfert: ein Drama in drei Aufzügen* (unpublished transcription), p. 47.

27. Although the German word *Mensch* signifies 'human being' or 'person' as well as 'man' in the sense

of 'mankind', I have stayed with the masculine generalization to underline that Goebbels had no interest in female emancipation.

28. The text has not yet been deposited in the *Bundesarchiv*, and so was not available at the time of writing.

29. Both instances occur in the section entitled 'Summer 1919 in Freiburg' (*Tagebücher*, 1, p. 66), although Hasenclever's play *Der Sohn* (1913), an 'Expressionist classic', is mentioned by name but without further comment in the 'Winter 1919–1920 in Munich' section (*Tagebücher*, 1, p. 70). Hasenclever became disillusioned with politics after the German Revolution (1918–19), and so Goebbels' enthusiasm for the writer may be linked with his earlier work.

30. Joseph Goebbels, *Die Snat: ein Geschehen in drei Akten* (unpublished transcription), p. 10.

31. 'Nationale oder internationale Kunst? Rundfunkgespräch zwischen Erwin Piscator und Joseph Goebbels', in Knut Boeser and Renata Vatková, eds., *Erwin Piscator: eine Arbeitsbiographie in zwei Bänden*, Volume One (Berlin: Fröhlich and Kaufmann, 1986), p. 280–92. It is important to note that Goebbels tried to woo Piscator back to Germany through no less a figure than Edward Gordon Craig in 1935. The attempt failed, but shows how Piscator's 'epic', modernist techniques were valued even then by the Minister.

32. 'Expressionism' is first mentioned in the 'Summer 1919 in Freiburg' section, and occurs twice therein (*Tagebücher*, 1, p. 66). It recurs in the 'Winter 1919–1920 in Munich' section (*Tagebücher*, 1, p. 70), and finally appears in an art-historical context in the 'from January 1921 to January 1923 in Rheydt' section (*Tagebücher*, 1, p. 81). The dates are important, since Goebbels' earliest notes coincide with the period before *Sowing Seeds*.

33. Cf., for example, Silvio Vietta, 'Zweideutigkeit der Moderne: Nietzsches Kulturkritik, Expressionismus und literarische Moderne', in Thomas Anz and Michael Stark, eds., *Die Modernität des Expressionismus* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1994), p. 9–20; or Silvio Vietta and Georg Kemper, *Expressionismus* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1983), particularly the chapter headed, 'Ichdissoziation im Expressionismus', p. 30.

34. It had its premiere on 6 November 1927, in a performance by unemployed actors at the Wallner-Theater in Berlin (Reuth, p. 131). It re-emerged after 1933 and was performed in Gotha, Leipzig, Jena, Göttingen, and Würzburg (Breimah, p. 27). Braimah reports that the play is about the 'loss of individuality' and 'a united community led by a Statesman with messianic qualities' (*ibid.*). She also calls it 'Expressionist' (p. 32) in its aesthetics, which may suggest that *The Wanderer* follows *Sowing Seeds* in both form and content.

35. Cf. *Tagebücher*, 1, p. 312, in which Goebbels mentions that he intends to 'configure *Sowing Seeds* anew'. No subsequent reference is made to the play. Although it seems Goebbels never did return to the play, his desire to do so is telling.

36. Schröder, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

37. Braimah, *op. cit.*, p. 26.