

„Undeutschen“, die schließlich in der Entstehung von estnischer und lettischer Nation, auf Sprache und Ethnie gegründet gipfelt, und letztlich – allen anderen Versuchen zum Trotz – die weitgehende Isolation der „Deutschbalten“ bewirkte. Der Sammelband bietet in diesen komplexen Zusammenhängen tiefe Einblicke in Literatur und Kultur der Zeit und offenbart immer wieder die vieldimensionale Verflechtung der baltischen Literaturen. Die Verbindung von kolonialer und nationaler Perspektive erweist sich dabei als trefflicher Schlüssel zum Verständnis.

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Ernst Piper: Nacht über Europa. Kulturgeschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs, Berlin: Ullstein Verlag, 2013, pp. 587.

How many more books do we need about the First World War, particularly ones that run to almost six hundred pages in length? Haven't these years been worked and re-worked enough? The point is banal, but still it casts a shadow over this title. True, the author's focus on cultural history provides the text with some freshness and originality, but there's just no escaping the fact that, especially in a text of such length, you keep on bumping into sections that tell you what you know very well already. This is particularly the case given that the book is organised not just thematically but also, broadly, chronologically. Since the narrative facts of the event won't change, what else can an author do but repeat the very well-known framework? In this light it's a shame that Ernst Piper didn't approach his text with more courage. A readiness to produce a much more concise study which took its shape more purely from the cultural themes scattered across its pages would have produced a more unusual, more innovative finished product. It could have been a different "Nacht über Europa" – one constructed solely from the more interesting material which the author relates – but maybe it would have been a still more saleable one as well. (The book retails at about 27 Euros.)

Piper's book certainly does contain material that provokes thought. He points out, for instance, that 600,000 soldiers were treated for nervous disorders (p. 432) while, of the 73 million combatants of all sides who were mobilised, as many as 20 million were wounded (p. 448). More specifically, 66,934 German men lost limbs in the war and 2,888 were blinded during it. These unfortunates became, to quote Joseph Roth, "living war memorials" whose damaged bodies mirrored the carnage inflicted on the German nation in general (p. 471). Moreover, while nine million soldiers were killed as a result of conflict, so were as many as six million civilians (pp. 447 f.). These are massive figures which can only make a reader stop and ponder about their intellectual- and cultural-historical significance. With so very many soldiers succumbing to mental illness, how did the development impact on both popular and professional attitudes to psychological sickness? With so many wounded and incapacitated men returning from the Front to domestic society, what were the consequences for ideas about disability in society? And with so very, very many people dying, what can the results of the conflict have been in terms of attitudes to death and experiences of bereavement in all of the societies affected in their own particular ways?

Piper is to be applauded for producing a stimulating text which highlights so clearly important, but too little-discussed, questions such as these; yet he also begins to provide some answers. So for example, discussion of Ernst Jünger's dehumanised characterisation

of war finds a counter-point in the work of Ernst Friedrich who, in 1924, published “Krieg dem Kriege”. Here, Friedrich displayed images of soldiers who had survived the war having suffered dreadful facial injuries. If doing this was not sufficiently subversive in its own right, the sad images were accompanied by jarring quotations from German warlords such as Hindenburg. So, one photograph was juxtaposed with the old Field Marshal’s following words: “I regard war as a like a bathing cure.” Under another image, Friedrich added the comment: “The bathing cure of the proletariat: almost the whole face shot away” (p. 473). Here, then, we have injury and disfigurement being adopted as a tool for a subversive kind of politics which certainly must have tapped into a deep and lasting current of popular post-war sentiment. Piper also does us the service of highlighting what an interesting figure Ernst Friedrich must have been. Not only did he produce controversial books in the 1920s, but he was arrested following the Reichstag Fire and subsequently opened an anti-war museum in Brussels. No doubt this would have been a fascinating institution presenting a singular vision of the past.

So in “Nacht über Europa” we have a book which is not only well written and well produced, but which can stimulate considerable and valuable reflection on one of the major events in world history. It is very much to Piper’s credit that he can do this for an event about which so very much ink has been spilled already. It’s just a shame he didn’t do it 250 pages.

Martyn Housden, Bradford

Jānis Siliņš: Padomju Latvija 1918–1919 [Räteretland 1918–1919], Rīga: Vēstures un popularizēšanas biedrība 2014, 263 S., 12 Abb.

1919, das Jahr nach dem Waffenstillstand von Compiègne, war in Europa das Jahr der Räterepubliken. Nicht nur in Russland, wo die Bolschewiki unter Lenin bereits ab dem Winter 1917 Sowjetrußland formal als Räterepublik installiert hatten, auch in Deutschland (Bremen, Mannheim, Braunschweig, München, Würzburg u.a.) oder in Ungarn unter Béla Kun entstanden, teilweise nach sowjetrussischem Vorbild, kurzlebige Räterepubliken oder Rätekommunen. Dies gilt auch für die baltische Region, wo es im Zuge der zeitweiligen Rückeroberung durch die Rote Armee ab November 1918 zu kurzzeitigen Gründungen von Räterepubliken unter der Führung estnischer, lettischer und litauischer kommunistischer Spitzenfunktionäre und Anhänger Lenins kam.¹ Für Lenin stellte die Proklamierung „selbstständiger“ baltischer Räterepubliken die Antwort auf die Gründung bürgerlich-demokratischer baltischer Staaten 1918 und ein wichtiges strategisches Element seiner Friedensbemühungen an der Westfront dar.

Am längsten konnte sich die „Sozialistische Räterepublik Lettland“ (lett. Latvijas Sociālistiskā Padomju Republika, LSPR)² halten, offiziell vom 17. November 1918 (Manifest

1 In Sowjetestland Jaan Anvelt (1884–1937), in Lettland der erste sowjetische Justizkommissar Pēteris (auch Pjotr) Stučka (1865–1932) und in Sowjetlitauen Vincas Mickevičius-Kapsukas (1880–1935).

2 Im Unterschied zu „Lettlands Räte-sozialistischer Republik“ (Latvijas Padomju Sociālistiskā Republika, LPSR), wie die offizielle Bezeichnung Sowjetlettlands ab 1940 lautete.