

POLITICAL SYMBOLISM IN MODERN EUROPE

Essays in Honor of George L. Mosse

**Edited by
Seymour Drescher, David Sabean, and Allan Sharlin**



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Seymour Drescher, David Sabean, Allan Sharlin

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INTRODUCTION

George Mosse and Political Symbolism

Seymour Drescher, David Sabean, and Allan Sharlin

Usually people have false rather than true consciousness
(Mosse, in *Nazism*, p. 117)

How can a good man survive in an evil world? Machiavelli's question runs throughout George Mosse's teaching and writing.¹ This eternal human problem acquires new urgency through the twentieth-century experience of mass murder and the final solution. As a refugee from Nazi Germany, George Mosse emphatically rejects inner migration. Mosse takes up the issue of survival in the context of religious and ideological commitment. His special concern lies with how such commitments engage reality where the fight for an alternative reality is most intense.

How are the urgent demands of religious and political idealism adjusted to the exigencies of everyday life? Mosse first examined this problem in his study of seventeenth-century Puritan casuistry, and its conclusions bear a strong resemblance to his judgment of left-wing intellectuals in the Weimar Republic.² In *The Holy Pretence* Mosse suggests that Christianity requires continual reformulation in its relationship to everyday human affairs, for there is an unresolved contradiction in the need to live in this world while striving for the next. To sustain both virtue and physical survival demands a balancing of the practical logic of action with a capacity for judging action on the basis of absolute values — in Biblical terms, “the endeavor to combine the Serpent and the Dove does not imply hypocrisy.”³

From a similar perspective, Mosse later criticizes Weimar left-wing intellectuals for their inability to descend from the level of absolutes to the practical theater of everyday political life. “These men were not content to build bridges from the present to the future, but rather sought to bypass such dreary work and leap across the stormy river.”⁴ The critique of the Weimar intellectuals lies in their failure to develop a twentieth-century casuistry. In their idealism and concern to seek “salvation” through the pu-

riety of their values, they were unable to find a spring for action to deal with a world that would not bend to their own vision. Unable to act in a manner called for by the moment:

German left-wing intellectuals removed themselves ever further from the realities of their times. The result was a Marxist impulse translated into the realm of idealism, a "Marxism of the heart" rather than one based on the rational analysis of existing facts The German case is especially tragic because there a Republic had to be saved and a growing menace from the right had to be countered In condemning compromise, existing politics, and the exploitation of realistic possibilities, the left-wing intellectuals put forward a vision of society that seemed incapable of realization.⁵

While maintaining his basic question of the survival of good men, Mosse, in shifting his focus from the early modern to the modern period in European history, has given the old question a new and pressing formulation. How is it that evil has triumphed? How is it that masses of men and women could cooperate in the extermination of a people? And, more specifically, how did the Holocaust come to pass? While his earlier focus allowed Mosse to examine how Puritan divines accommodated to the world, this new interest has drawn from Mosse a series of studies on facism, nationalism, and racism involving secular nationalists, utopians, scientists, racialists, and socialists. In shifting from the early modern era, Mosse has also moved from the study of Christians to Jewish idealists, be they Zionists, liberals, or left-wing intellectuals. The subject is a tragedy of almost incomprehensible proportions, and Mosse attempts to dig deeply into the cultural and institutional roots of the story.

In doing so he forsakes the path of traditional intellectual history. Mosse emphasizes that nineteenth-century democratization and industrialization imposed a new form of politics, characterized by mass movements and mass agitation. This "seemed to transform the political process itself into a drama which further diminished the individual whose conscious actions might change the course of his own destiny."⁶ Where liberal and socialist historians have often attempted to place mass antidemocratic ideologies within a spectrum derived from the nineteenth-century classical period of formation, Mosse attempts to understand the new politics on its own terms. Building on his earlier insights into the baroque, Mosse's conception of political symbolism assumes central analytical importance. How are ideas comprehended, shaped, and applied by the masses? Here Mosse perceives that ideas do not take form through formal, rational analyses but through experimentation in the popular arena. Symbols are the means through which political movements develop and ideas are given concrete form. Therefore, his analysis of the impact of the baroque continues to be analytically relevant to a more secularized era. The religious forms that defined

how people perceived their world retained an analogous function when transposed into the institutionally autonomous world of modern politics. In Mosse's perspective the masses were drawn into the political arena not only through the political organizations that fostered and developed these symbols, but at least as much through a wide range of cultural creations: festivals, myths, monuments, art, novels, music, and theater.

To understand this approach to political symbolism, it is useful to begin with Mosse's understanding of politics. Politics is more than the formal political process. It is even more than behavior of men in institutions indirectly related to the state, in cultural, economic, and military organizations. In everyday life, all human interaction is thoroughly permeated with political implication.⁷ Methodologically, this view makes Mosse skeptical of analyses of political action that content themselves with the in-and-out trays of a foreign ministry or statistical studies of parliamentary and election votes.⁸ Morally, just as Christianity views sin as composed of acts of omission as well as of commission, so it is impossible to be apolitical. Each person is answerable for the political effects of his/her actions, whether participating directly in the formal polity or attempting to ignore or flee such involvement. Mosse dismisses as self-delusion the ideological cocoon which many a *Bildungsbürger* constructed to wait out the future, while avoiding contact with the perpetual dirty, compromising, often humiliating business of politics. His powerful pedagogical talent barely conceals a fundamental moral indignation against the aspiration to the apolitical.⁹

With this definition of politics, what is the role of symbols? They shape political discourse, and political struggle is partly a struggle to control such discourse.¹⁰ The relative success of political contenders in determining the shape and character of the terms of debate has decisive implications for their ability to gain authority or obedience. Those who can find no way of entering into the discourse are squeezed to the periphery and excluded from direct political influence. Mosse is concerned with who most successfully captured a group or a society's central symbols or found a way to be most closely identified with them. The value of Mosse's approaches to European racism, German Volk ideas, and national identity lies in denoting the groups which captured or successfully institutionalized the symbolic linkages through which debate took place. People fit themselves to words as much as they bend them to their own purposes. Mosse identifies unspoken assumptions, unavoidable terms, and above all, the limits that specific rhetoric, myths, and symbols came to place on the thought and action of audience and speaker. In his analysis of the struggle between ideologies Mosse objects to the notion of *propaganda* as misleading. Leaders do not simply manipulate their followers. They are successful in capturing symbolic assent and compliance.¹¹ People require symbols because they objectify myths and thereby offer participation, identity, and salvation.

The Nazi road to victory was already paved from the fact that anti-Semitism was part of a symbolic discourse that permeated all social and political questions of the time. The Nazis vied for power using an idiom they only ultimately epitomized. The success of National Socialism cannot be separated from the fact that, despite the socialist and revolutionary Strasser wing, the party under Hitler was deeply attached to the symbols of a middle class desperate to ensure its collective survival in a hierarchic society. Such a movement could promise to overcome alienation on the level to which the ideology had shifted the question: the aesthetic and the affective. For a community that perceived itself on the verge of disintegration, folk and racial ideas held out the promise of a radical reversal, converting a potential social disaster into an aesthetic and emotional revolution against cultural and social outsiders. This diversion, in turn, rested on prior achievements. The educational system, the student and middle-class movements of imperial Germany had already institutionalized the culturally exclusive assumptions of the nation's problems. By 1933 Hitler was supported by physical violence and naked state terror, but the long-run symbolic repression of alternatives in reducing the potential for organized protest and resistance should not be underestimated.

For Mosse, the peculiar characteristic of myths and symbols adopted by large numbers of people in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany lies in the very tenuity of contact with reality. An ideology only "vaguely relevant to real problems ultimately became normative."¹² The process is partly explained by the fact that racism, Volk ideology, and fascism all upheld bourgeois values of order, cleanliness, honesty, family life, and hard work.¹³ With an educational system upholding the same cultural linkage, *Bildung* reinforced the nationalist nexus of racism and respectability. Just as entrepreneurs of nationalism had appropriated the rituals of formal religion, so they appropriated a middle-class morality that was no longer confined to one class. The "new" German man was the ideal bourgeois.¹⁴ Mosse expresses the effects of the connection thus: "Racism substituted myth for reality; and the world it created with its stereotypes, virtues, and vices, was a fairy-tale world, which dangled a utopia before the eyes of those who longed for a way out of the confusion of modernity and the rush of time."¹⁵ Here in his subjects' confusion of reality and myth, Mosse sounds one of his enduring themes:

The pragmatism of daily politics [speaking of nationalism] lay within a cultic framework and for most people was disguised by it. But "disguise" is perhaps the wrong term in this context, for any disguise which utilized regular liturgic and cultic forms becomes a "magic" believed by both leaders and people, and it is the reality of this magic with which we are concerned.¹⁶

Mosse does not separate objective reality and the way it is perceived into two discrete analytic moments. Perception of a thing is as real as the thing itself. In such a process, myth, symbol, and value not only give form to perception, but become currency in themselves and the political system brought into action to valorize the dream: for "many people . . . Hitler was necessary in order that the fairy tale could begin."¹⁷

Culture is a fundamental rather than a derivative human activity and like politics, entails continuous interaction.¹⁸ It is part of the human condition to think symbolically, although symbols can be simple or complex, mundane or grandiose, relatively isolated or parts of more complex systems. Inherent in all symbols is a masking quality, which follows from the fact that they impose form on their subjects. When it becomes a question of socially imposed symbols, the discernible facts of authority and domination allow the historian to speak of "mystification."¹⁹ For his examples, Mosse always returns to the seventeenth century: "The baroque is full of myth, theater, and symbols which carry you away from the reality of this world. But the very success of the Jesuits was that while carrying you away from this world they really integrated you into their political system."²⁰

This suggests Mosse's response to those who have taken him to task for neglecting social and economic contexts. Mosse has always argued for the autonomy of culture and myth but not in the sense that they are the result of higher logical processes or an existential expression of human freedom.²¹ Rather, they cannot be considered as existing outside of economic and social contexts and indeed have no function outside of them. While Mosse makes no determination of the desires and myths of people according to their group or class position, no full analysis can be made without reference to collective identity.²² Mosse remarks that history is made by people with false consciousness.²³ It is the definition of *false* and the paradoxes which arise when one seeks to connect interest with ideas and actions, that he takes as the problem to be addressed. To analyze these interactions, Mosse has described *mediation* as the most useful concept available to the historian.²⁴ Symbols, culture, myths, and ideas have to be examined in terms of the complexity of interests and actions mediated through them. He tries to show that the obsession of German anti-Semitism had little to do with Jews themselves or with emancipation. Rather, through the symbol of the Jew, middle-class alienation, fears of attacks on hierarchy, aesthetic values, and unease with cities were causally linked.²⁵ The power of symbols cannot be grasped through the logical categories of the conventional historian any more than such categories can account for the effects of religious liturgy.²⁶ Without proper understanding of mediation, one fails to grasp that in political discourse objective reality is filtered through myths, values, and attitudes.

In the understanding of symbols as giving or imposing form in specific historical situations Mosse is at his most penetrating. Here he counters some recent anthropological thinking.²⁷ The latter undertakes the exposure of meaning within symbols, by a kind of loose base/superstructure framework which assumes that with enough understanding of social and economic conditions, of psychological makeup, or of fundamental epistemological categories, the symbols can be explained. Mosse argues that symbols are the meaning in themselves, that they order perceived reality, have multiple dimensions, and mediate between subjects and between subject and object. Historical actors perceive their own interests in distorted form. The very processes actors set in motion for their purposes rarely function exactly as intended and do so under conditions that often mask sources of tension from them. The only way to handle the problem is for the historian to incorporate the dialectic into historical practice.²⁸

Mosse's assumptions as a working historian have to be brought together from a number of scattered texts. Refusing to limit himself to the works of great thinkers and seeking unusual sources for examining popular culture, he has laid new ground in determining the role of ideas in history. His method is neither easy to define nor to replicate. Myths and symbols have neither the relative precision of market transactions for the economic historian nor the boundedness of the complete works of systematic thinkers. How is it possible to differentiate dominant political symbols from the transient ideas of every crank? Mosse does this in two ways. First, being oriented toward mass audiences, he seeks out authors who sold books in the hundreds of thousands. These writers must have struck chords in popular consciousness. For example, he explores the works of popular novelists Marlitt, Ganghofer, and May.²⁹ Second, he considers it important to trace from diffuse exotic beginnings the subsequent development of symbols that achieved institutional resolution. The most obscure writers can thus be grist for Mosse's sensitive reading. His works *The Crisis of German Ideology*, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, and *Toward the Final Solution* trace the development of Volk ideology, nationalism, and racism from reputable elite beginnings to their triumph under National Socialism. Because Mosse relies on successful conclusions to determine his study of antecedents, he does not turn his attention to historical cases where racial symbolism and aesthetic politics did not capture the forum from other traditional or modern political symbolic systems. He emphasizes that German fascism was not typical of European fascism, but he has not developed that approach in which a variety of possible outcomes are taken as the point of departure.

While many intellectual historians are uneasy dealing with second-rate scribblers and the *outré*, Mosse usually mines writers precisely for their unstated assumptions and aesthetic predilections. Often stringing together

a number of unobtrusive aspects of various writings, he offers his judgment about who read them and how they were read. Methodologically, Mosse is interested in the form of communication and the problem of reception. Something of the "oral" quality of his works originally delivered as lectures, reverberates in his texts. He is at his best in "hearing" texts and "seeing" people in action. Because he approaches the subject matter through the producers of cultural artifacts — be they authors, painters, architects, orators, or promoters of popular festivals — Mosse often views audiences as undifferentiated masses. Perhaps his most frequent differentiation for German history is between workers and the bourgeoisie or middle class. He is sympathetic to class analysis, but his approach allows him to make only relatively loose social distinctions.

Mosse has drawn two conclusions from his studies. He refuses to see history as the outcome of logical processes, and denies that historical events can be grasped through the rational categories of traditionally practicing historians.³⁰ Although he recognizes that bureaucratic organization made the "final solution" possible, he is concerned to demonstrate the nonrational substructure to all internally rationalized institutions — of science, bureaucracy, and education.³¹ His aim is to highlight the extrinsic political intentions which inform bureaucratic action or scientific curiosity. Such a viewpoint leads Mosse, for example, to trace the complex interaction between the assumption of classical forms of beauty and such things as the school curriculum, student rituals, and the scientific investigations of linguists, historians, demographers, anthropologists, and biologists.³² He refuses to separate the political from the religious, the scientific from the aesthetic, and the bureaucratic from the mythological and symbolic.³³

Fascist and National Socialist political thought cannot be judged in terms of traditional political theory. It has little in common with rational, logically constructed systems such as those of Hegel or Marx. This fact has bothered many commentators who have looked at fascist political thought and condemned its vagueness and ambiguities. But the fascists themselves described their political thought as an "attitude" rather than a system; it was, in fact, a theology which provided the framework for national worship. As such, its rites and liturgies were central, an integral part of a political theory which was not dependent on the appeal of the written word. Nazi and other fascist leaders stressed the spoken work, but even here, speeches fulfilled a liturgical function rather than presenting a didactic exposition of the ideology. The spoken work itself was integrated into the cultic rites, and what was actually said was, in the end, of less importance than the setting and the rites which surrounded such speeches.³⁴

Scholarship is left with the task of attempting to determine the conditions, whether cultural or social, which tend to foster or retard the mythical and the realistic in political discourse. All of Mosse's historical analysis

rests on the assumption that it is easy, at least in practice, to draw a fairly clear line between myth and reality in the reconstruction of the thought and behavior of the past. To that extent, Mosse the historian of mystification paradoxically draws on categories of the Western Enlightenment. This humanistic or common-sense distinction between myth and reality is the working assumption that enables him to distinguish between the myths he is investigating and the story he is telling. For all his emphasis on the power of myth and the human need to symbolize, Mosse stands unambiguously in the demystifying and unmasking tradition.³⁵

Inherent in such historical reasoning is a thoroughgoing political critique. Mosse has always considered the acts of writing and teaching to be inherently political activities. Historians are always demythologizing or mythologizing, masking or unmasking, demystifying or mystifying, but never neutral, even if commitment to rational procedures hides this characteristic of the activity from themselves.³⁶ Along with this kind of critical work, Mosse has reflected on several of the important political traditions, two of which can be mentioned here as examples.

Fundamental to historic forms of conservatism has been a distinction between culture and civilization, between, on the one hand, true feeling and inward spirituality and on the other, what is considered artificial and materialistic. Transposed to the plane of a society or nation, the stress on culture, on the inward spirituality of a people, has tended to emphasize its uniqueness and worked against reconciliation with other peoples.³⁷ The notions of true feeling and genuine character call for opposing symbols. In the historic German case, this meant the Jew — to whom was imputed materialism, rationalism, and a fossilized religion.³⁸ Mosse argues that:

German anti-semitism is a part of German intellectual history. It does not stand outside it. Above all, it became involved with the peculiar turn which German thought took after the first decade of the nineteenth century. German thought became at once provincial, in its search for roots, and idealistic in its rejection of mere outward progress, in its belief in the irrationality of culture. Here the Jew was the outsider, and if he could at times gatecrash by assimilation in the nineteenth century, that did not fundamentally alter the emerging image of the Jew. Culture was closed to him, for he lacked the necessary spiritual foundations. This differentiation between culture and civilization, still part of the intellectual equipment of many Germans, is one of the clues to the Jewish tragedy of our times.³⁹

In maintaining the distinction between culture and civilization, conservatives played a central role in reinforcing and transmitting the symbolic structure of hostility and nonreconciliation.⁴⁰

Those who advocated a return to Culture, who embraced a "German revolution" . . . were men and women who wanted to maintain their property and their superior status over the working classes. The notion of a genuine social

revolution was anathema to these people, yet they were profoundly dissatisfied with their world. The tension between their desire to preserve their status and their equally fervent desire to radically alter society was resolved by the appeal to a spiritual revolution which would revitalize the nation without revolutionizing its structure.

While reticent about expressing his own values in his texts, Mosse's own sympathies apparently lie with the liberalism of the Enlightenment and humanistic socialism. Mosse tries to rescue the humanistic core of all movements while recognizing their historical flaws. Fundamental to traditional liberalism is the belief in the efficacy of various modernizing institutions such as education and parliamentary democracy which should serve as the necessary agents for the enlightenment of the population. In his analysis of educational institutions in Germany, Mosse argued that irrational, antidemocratic values penetrated to the very core of educational institutions.⁴¹ As for parliamentary democracy, Mosse expresses fears for its survival in major crises because of its inability to "integrate aesthetic, political, economic, and social desires."⁴² By lumping all its enemies together under such rubrics as "totalitarianism," liberalism has waged war against other humanistic alternatives.⁴³ While very insistent on distinctions between Stalinism and fascism, his critique of the political failure of liberalism during the Weimar Republic applies equally well to social democracy and communism. Perhaps he offers the same insights to both humanistic liberalism and humanistic socialism. Mass movements have dominated the modern era, a fact with which we must all live. His task, as he sees it, has been to analyze these movements at their most extreme,

in order to produce a confrontation between men and masses. It is the task of the historian to destroy old myths in order to encourage new confrontations with reality. History, after all is a process which contains within it possibilities for both good and evil. That the history with which we are concerned saw the victory of evil over the good does not mean that mankind is unable to shed the sea of pain which radical nationalism has caused. To plumb the depth of evil might strengthen the forces of good, to fill man's consciousness with the need to transform consciousness into a humanistic nationalism. If such hope did not exist there would be no sense in the unpleasant task of chronicling the illusions of domination which follow, even if this book also contains men and women devoted to human creativity and liberty, those who refused to follow false gods.⁴⁴

* * *

The essays in this volume deal with many of the themes which have been considered by Mosse and in some respects also break new ground. Most of them deal with the mediation of social and political power through sym-

bolic representation. One aspect of this mediation is found in the central characteristic of symbols. The components of discourse itself are part of the projection of groups or classes. We must distinguish between the object of discourse, which may appear to be subject to logical analysis and dispassionate debate, and the vehicle of that discourse. While the intent of participants in a particular exchange may be directed toward a specific issue or set of issues, the effect of the debate itself might also be to maintain their own positions as leaders on public issues in general. The effect might also be to support a conception of group identity and that group's proper place in the hierarchy of power.

This is one of the implications of Soloway's essay on the eugenics movement in England. In addition to its ostensible purpose of dealing with a dynamics of demography, the vocabulary of the movement reinforced a specific picture of the working class and justified a specific strategy of domination by its superiors. The movement's chosen values of rationality and science were those of professionals — professors, doctors, scientists, and administrators. Its mode of discourse, like similar movements of the time, was an attack on ascriptive power and inherited wealth in favor of the establishment of social domination through the extension of bureaucratic norms. One fails to grasp the social character of the movement if its significance is evaluated by either the relative success of its stated goals or the empirical validity of the arguments it presented. The importance of the movement in terms of political symbolism is related to the experience professionals underwent in their daily thinking, writing, and debating, solidifying and increasing their claims in the shifting patterns of domination and subordination.

In a more general way, Nye attacks the same problem in his approach to the concept of "degeneration" in late-nineteenth-century France. He shows how the medical model of physical decline became widely embedded in cultural and political discourse. Here the binary opposition normal/abnormal gave one group of professionals the crucial power of definition in the conceptualization of social crises. Nye argues that medical vocabulary saturated the "consensual norms, prejudices, and salient anxieties" of French society. They also mediated the social and political power not only of doctors but bureaucrats, criminologists, public hygienists, social theorists, and polemicists. Rabinbach, dealing with metaphors of energy and fatigue in the late nineteenth century, provides a more diffuse approach to the problem of modes of maneuvering for social domination expressed in categories of will, discipline, control, and character — the primary values and symbols of the period. "Energy" and "exhaustion" were symbols deriving their mythological force from scientific discourse. Such symbols were expressive of widespread anxiety about the problem of maintaining social order and expanded through the supposed threat of degeneration of physical and intellectual power.

A second aspect to the mediation of social power through symbols, namely that of mystification or masking, is also taken up in these essays. The distribution of social power, the many facets of domination, and the arbitrariness of rules are only partly apparent to the actors. They are experienced existentially only through the forms which make domination possible by offering seemingly autonomous rules of behavior. Part of the analytical problem is to grasp how what might appear to be a single symbol means different things in different contexts, while maintaining a social continuity of meaning. Keck deals with a transformation of culture, examining academics in Germany prior to World War I. He discusses the fate of the Marburg Kantians who tried to exercise influence on the ideology of German social democracy, showing how the war experience forced them to make explicit loyalties that their situation had allowed to remain equivocal. These thinkers used the notion of culture as a way of summing up a number of aspects which they never consciously expressed. It was a symbol by which the French could be criticized as mediocre and the English as constantly in utilitarian motion, rewarding only the "productive." They defended a society in which their skills of formal analysis were valued together with other forms of "unproductive" production, a symbolic "package" that ensured a crucial role for the university professor of moral philosophy and the gymnasium teacher. In their campaign to get social democracy to accept their symbol, the categorical imperative, as the fundamental value of the movement, they sought to ascribe a central role to their own expertise as intellectuals.

The problem of symbols as mediating social power involves an analysis of reception. There is a gulf between the producer and the user of the product; reading and hearing involve active processing as much as speaking and writing do; and there is a constant exchange between political discourse and everyday life. This implies the need for a multilayered analysis of mass communication. Kelly's assessment of Darwinism and the German working class in the late nineteenth century takes up the nature of workers' reception of Darwinian ideas in favor of those of Marx. Marxism was received as a kind of Darwinian monism, providing workers with their own religious alternative to the established churches. This may account for the fact that while party leaders were ambivalent, they encouraged workers to read Darwinian tracts. The workers would be divorced from traditional power bases and institutional religion. From the leaders' viewpoint, an alternative, secular religion might also have provided a necessary discipline — a not *too* revolutionary proletariat — whereby the vanguard was to lead rather than follow. Yet one is left with the suspicion that in allowing Darwin to stand beside Marx it was the leaders who were following in the process of mass communication.

Other contributors offer reflections on the problem of reception. Koenigsberg takes up the problem of the substitution of scientific ideology for that of the church during the three centuries after the Renaissance. Noting that intellectuals were socially conservative, he argues that they made no direct attack on the church. If anything, they were in favor of order. Yet the development of an autonomous area of knowledge, of discourse not dominated by revelation, the creation of two cultures (one of science and rationality and the other a "popular" culture) are parallel to the growth of national bureaucracies, with their dependent educational institutions and new leadership criteria organized around the increasingly technical discussion of public policy.

A number of essays in this volume offer a further perspective on mediation, concentrating on the generation and use of symbols in everyday political debate. Looking at discourse in practice, the problem is to discover how ideological structures, myths, and symbols contain, transmit, and alter values and relationships. Scott, in her perceptive analysis of popular theater in late-nineteenth-century France, shows how traditional responses to well-known symbols were redirected through the conscious inversion of received meanings. Her essay draws attention to the fact that mythmaking is not simply a matter of production from above as a means of perpetuating the status quo. Her essay assumes that cultural symbols are protean and that proletarian cultural norms could develop as an extension as well as a rejection of the Christian mythos. Gross' essay on Sorel provides an interesting case study of an attempt to self-consciously fashion a counterbourgeois myth for the working class. Sorel aimed at a fundamental distinction between words as analysis and words as calls to collective cohesion. Yet he was also unconsciously enmeshed in the biosocial characterizations of his age. A degenerating will-less bourgeoisie was pitted against a noble savage proletariat. The Sorelian case also strikingly shows how political symbols are not crystalline signs in the possession of a given group but multiedged weapons whose handle can often be grasped by one's enemy. Just as Sorel could turn bourgeois anxiety about degeneration against its authors, so his own ideas of the fortification of will by myths provided validation, if not inspiration, for the suppression of working-class threats by ultimately more powerful communal myths.

Hermann's essay likewise revolves around a self-conscious use of the masking power of symbols. Hermann takes up the analysis of painting in Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century, dealing with the political content of the painting of Caspar David Friedrich. Most of the painters worked in a highly coded, allusive form, burying in symbols a range of political ideas and attitudes. Lachance studies generational discourse in France on the eve of World War I and shows that the various political orientations used generational symbols to objectify and shape changes in political balance and focus political debate. This involved map-

ping a political terrain and provided myths that informed action by orienting minds along particular lines. Pois offers a description of Nazi religious notions in terms of discourse systematically ordered along lines of struggle. He argues that in this attempt the Nazis stood squarely in one of the alternative Western traditions, and their notions cannot be passed off as pure propaganda. Taken together with the essays of Kelly, Scott, and Koenigsberger, serious issues are discussed about the nature of religious symbolism in modernizing Europe, the development of an alternative religious tradition to Christianity in the form of an optimistic monism, and the political dimension of religious commitment.

Aschheim's essay, which deals with one of the central themes of German political symbolism, charts the development of the language of dehumanization to dominance in public discourse. A symbol originally used to describe a set of outsiders with clearly distinguishable characteristics was transformed into an essence designed to create a permanent barrier between groups without any visible differential characteristics. In a parallel way Aschheim neatly shows how what was a consensual symbol of a progressive political outlook in the eighteenth century, the social pathology of the ghetto, ultimately became a symbol of an integral biological pathology for those who were precisely most disturbed by the whole social development which produced the dismantled ghettos. Aschheim emphasizes how extreme inequality of political and social power renders irrelevant the rules of rational analysis. The Jews in Germany futilely expended enormous energies on charting optimum personal and group strategies within the parameters of the consensual *Ostjude* symbol. In Germany the ghetto Jew became *the* political metaphor of the second quarter of the twentieth century.

Many of the essays above focus on the unconscious or latent implications of symbols by their progenitors. But in the hands of both artists and polemicists, who not only recognized the masking power of symbols but exulted in them, a more overt manipulation occurred. Perhaps it is not accidental that one of the most successful and calculating manipulators of symbolic discourse in our century was an originally unsuccessful artist who eventually found a whole continent not large enough to paint the bloodiest canvas in its history.

NOTES

Our thanks to the following for criticism and advice: Peter Reilly, Kenneth Barking, Alf Lüdtke, and Hans Medick.

1. First posed in George L. Mosse, *The Holy Pretence: A Study in Christianity and Reason of State from William Perkins to John Winthrop* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), p. 33. On the frontispiece, Mosse quoted from Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. 15: "A man who wishes to make a profession of goodness in everything must necessarily come to grief among so many who are not good."

2. George L. Mosse, "Left-Wing Intellectuals in the Weimar Republic," *Germans and Jews* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1970), pp. 171–225, esp. pp. 176, 180, 213, 217. In an interview, Mosse said that the problem he took up in *The Holy Pretence* was much the same he dealt with later when he studied racism and fascism: *Nazism: A Historical and Comparative Analysis of National Socialism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1978), p. 27, cf. 28–29.
3. *Holy Pretence*, p. 154. On Mosse's later use of the notion of hypocrisy see *Germans and Jews*, p. 7.
4. *Germans and Jews*, p. 32. The issues are handled there at length, pp. 3–33, 171–225. Also cf. *The Culture of Western Europe: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (n.p.: Rand McNally, 1961), pp. 419–23.
5. *Germans and Jews*, p. 217.
6. George L. Mosse, *Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975), p. vii. See also his *Men and Masses* (New York: Howard Fertig, forthcoming).
7. See the formulations in Mosse, *Culture*, pp. 5–7, 240–41, 278 ff., 419–23; id., *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), pp. 2, 5–8, 171–89.
8. Mosse taught at the University of Iowa in the 1950s where a number of people later to pioneer in the application of statistical methods to the historical study of power were his colleagues — among others, William O. Aydelotte, Allan G. Bogue, and Samuel P. Hays. For Mosse's views on the limitation of statistical methods for the study of politics, see *Nazism*, pp. 109–10; *Germans and Jews*, p. 23. On Marxist approaches, *Nazism*, pp. 47–50, 117; *Crisis*, p. 9; *Nationalization*, pp. 2–3, 11–12. For the influence of Hannah Arendt, see *Nazism*, pp. 77–78.
9. See George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1978), pp. 232–37, esp. 235; id., *Nationalization*, pp. 207–16; id., *Culture*, pp. 419–23; id., *Nazism*, p. 74: "I would also say that the corruption of values for which these people [Nazis] stand is not abnormal in our civilization. It's part of a growing brutalization — a part of the idea of a total war which you already have in World War I: The enemy must be killed, and to kill the enemy is a good act. The church blesses it, in fact." See also id., "National Cemeteries and National Revival: The Cult of the Fallen soldiers in Germany," *Journal of Contemporary History* 14 (1979): 1–20.
10. This problem recurs continually in his works. For an introduction to his views see *Racism*, pp. 187, 191 ff., 232 ff.; *Nationalization*, pp. 207ff., esp. 209.
11. *Nazism*, pp. 32, 112: "Facist mass movements were in fact movements of consensus rather than of manipulation."
12. *Crisis*, p. 9.
13. *Racism*, p. 34; *Nazism*, p. 43.
14. *Nazism*, p. 43.
15. *Racism*, p. xiii.
16. *Nationalization*, p. 15.
17. *Nazism*, p. 116.
18. *Nationalization*, p. 211; *Nazism*, p. 109.
19. *Nationalization*, pp. 1–20.
20. *Nazism*, p. 31.

21. See the discussion in the introduction to *Culture*, pp. 1–9; *Nazism*, pp. 108–17; *Crisis*, pp. 1–10; *Racism*, p. x iii.
22. *Nazism*, p. 117; *Crisis*, p. 9; *Nazism*, p. 109: "The true Marxist approach . . . must be based on a dialectic and cannot be based on a universal approach, i.e., all economics, all politics, all social class. This is a static approach. It ignores the essence of Marxism — namely its Hegelian ingredient, its dynamic, its dialectic."
23. *Nazism*, p. 117.
24. *Nazism*, p. 117.
25. *Crisis*, pp. 7–8, 36, 292, 301–2; *Nazism*, pp. 45–46; *Racism*, pp. xii–xiii.
26. Mosse first approached the methodological problem in *Culture*, p. 4: "The intellectual occupies the foreground, for he systematizes thought, making it understandable to historians." This negative judgment on the capabilities of historians and their need for someone to simplify things for them developed into a critique of "liberal," "traditional," or "Anglo-Saxon" historians as he tried to develop the notion of symbol in his later works. See *Nationalization*, pp. 6–20, esp. 9. Cf. *Nazism*, pp. 108–9.
27. For a sharp criticism of the various anthropological approaches to symbolism, see Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1975).
28. *Nazism*, p. 117: "We must finally discard unmediated and positivist analyses for the examination of a mediated dialectic." Also, p. 30: "Obviously today we cannot be pure Hegelians. We realize, after all . . . that the dialectic is, in fact, between myth and social forces. I would say between myth and what Marx called objective reality, that is social, political, and economic forces." Cf. also pp. 17, 30, 37, 109; *Nationalization*, pp. 15, 208–9; *Racism*, p. xiii; *Crisis*, p. 9.
29. "Was Sie wirklich lassen: Marlitt, Ganhofer, May," *Popularität und Trivialität* (Bad Bomburg, V.D.H., 1974), pp. 101–20.
30. *Nationalization*, pp. 1–20.
31. *Culture*, pp. 8–9; *Crisis*, pp. 149–70, 190–203; *Racism*, pp. 1–34, 234.
32. *Racism*, pp. 35–50, 77, 82, 85, 234–35; p. 2: "The continuous transition from science to aesthetics is a cardinal feature of modern racism."
33. See citations in notes 31 and 32 and remarks in *Crisis*, p. 202; *Nationalization*, p. 28; *Nazis*, p. 72.
34. *Nationalization*, pp. 9–10.
35. See his remarks in *Nazism*, pp. 29–31, 116–17; also *Culture*, pp. 419–23.
36. *Culture*, pp. 1–6.
37. *Culture*, pp. 1–3, esp. 2, 419–23; *Germans and Jews*, pp. 15–18, 34–60, 116–43; *Crisis*, pp. 6–7.
38. *Germans and Jews*, p. 37. On bringing together both antiimages, Jew and red, *ibid.*, pp. 27, 61–76. Also *Culture*, p. 2.
39. *Germans and Jews*, p. 60.
40. *Crisis*, pp. 242–43.
41. Liberalism is discussed at length by Mosse in *Culture*, pp. 93–124. On educational institutions, see *Crisis*, pp. 5, 149–70.
42. *Nazism*, pp. 51, 123; *Germans and Jews*, p. 117.
43. *Germans and Jews*, p. 77. See also remarks in *Nationalization*, pp. 2–4.
44. *Men and Masses*, Introduction.