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# HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW

## BETWEEN SAVIOUR AND VILLAIN: 100 YEARS OF BISMARCK BIOGRAPHIES\*

KARINA URBACH  
*Universität Bayreuth*

**ABSTRACT.** *While non-German biographers of Bismarck have usually kept a healthy distance from their subject, German biographers have often allowed their political and religious views to influence their portraits. Most German historians of the 'long nineteenth century' were fascinated by, as Hegel would have called it, the genius of such a 'world historical individual'. Their work greatly influenced the images of Bismarck during the time of the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. Their counterparts in the 1960s and 1970s, however focused critically on the 'impersonal' movements of the Bismarckian empire. These, Marxist influenced, analyses did not include any biographies. It was only in the 1980s that three biographers achieved a politically detached evaluation of the chancellor's personality. With the centenary of Bismarck's death in 1998, a return to the pre-1980s views can be noticed in biographies of the chancellor. They threaten to oversimplify Bismarck's personality and government technique again.*

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In his novel, *Memories of the Ford administration*, John Updike portrays an American college professor who unsuccessfully struggles to write a biography of James Buchanan. After ten years of endless research the professor comes to the paradoxical conclusion that in history, 'as in physics, the more minutely we approach them, the stranger facts become, with leaps and contradictions of indecipherable quanta. All we have are documents which do not agree.'<sup>1</sup> The same is true of Bismarck. The multitude of private letters, speeches, dispatches, and memoranda by him offer constant contradictions.<sup>2</sup> He was the creator of a constitution and yet described it as a toy.<sup>3</sup> He was the Junker who sometimes did not shrink from acting against his own class interests. He was a man who

\* I would like to thank Professor Derek Beales, Professor Hermann Hicry, and Dr Jonathan Steinberg for their assistance on an earlier draft of this article.

<sup>1</sup> John Updike, *Memories of the Ford administration* (New York, 1992), p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> Many authentic Bismarck statements contradict each other completely. Though Bismarck seemed to be surprisingly frank in his conversations, he never said anything he had not intended to say. Every word was calculated, every addressee of his words well chosen. Even the contradictions were part of his plan. His cunning reminds one of another great schemer's remark – Talleyrand: 'parlez vous beaucoup – mais ne dites rien'.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Wilhelm Schüssler, 'Der geschichtliche Standort Bismarcks', in Lothar Gall, ed., *Das Bismarck-Problem in der Geschichtsschreibung* (Köln, 1971), p. 171. Also: Klaus Hildebrand, 'Erich Eyck', in Hans-Ulrich Wehler, ed., *Deutsche Historiker* (Göttingen, 1973), pp. 216–17.

declared war on the socialists and tried to solve the social question.<sup>4</sup> He claimed to be a believer in the monarchical system and toppled German princes when they were in his way. He defined himself as a Prussian and claimed to put Germany above everything else. He wanted stability in Europe and made fun of the idea of Europe.<sup>5</sup> He said that, if Faust claimed he had two souls, he could easily surpass him with the number of souls he felt contending inside his breast. 'It goes on as in a republic.'<sup>6</sup>

As Otto Pflanze observed 'the customary biographical form cannot capture the significance of a political figure of his [Bismarck's] stature',<sup>7</sup> but this has not stopped historians, including Pflanze, from trying. Approximately 7,000 books, including up to 50 scholarly biographies, have been published on Bismarck. His life has been taught to at least six generations, and one can fairly say that almost every second German generation has encountered another version of Bismarck. No other German historical figure has been as used and abused for political purposes. Bismarck served scholars as a martial figurehead during the First World War, as an ideal Nazi predecessor in the thirties, and as a caricature of everything 'Prussian' after 1945. Even in 1997 he was still a *politikum* with German politicians arguing about whether it is a reactionary idea to give a state donation to Friedrichsruh. Eberhard Jäckel has argued that Bismarck's death should not be remembered at all in 1998, because his career (and influence) had already come to an end by 1890.<sup>8</sup> Here Jäckel seems to follow Wittgenstein's observation that 'death isn't an event in life'. It was certainly one for Bismarck and his biographers. For after all, Bismarck's influence did not end in 1890, as Pflanze has shown in his biography, but lasted until 1895. The former chancellor made sure with his appearances, speeches, and inspired newspaper articles that his successor did not forget him.<sup>9</sup> Also the German people continued to love him enough to hate him long after 1890. In the last years of his retirement, opinion on Bismarck was still dividing society. In 1895, for example, the Reichstag refused to congratulate Bismarck on his eightieth birthday<sup>10</sup> (the Zentrum, the Social Democrats, the Danes, and the Poles – to name only a few – were understandably not eager to sign a greeting card). However, he had at the same time collected up to 300 honorary citizenships from German towns, and was constantly confronted with pilgrimages of worshipping university delegations. When he died in 1898, people seemed genuinely shocked.

The only uncontroversial things about Bismarck are the facts of his early life. They have been religiously repeated and copied<sup>11</sup> in almost every biography. The Bismarck

<sup>4</sup> It is an irony that Bismarck's social policies are today religiously studied by Chinese political scientists, who try to learn from him, the 'reactionary'. See Yao Bao, *Grundzüge der deutschen Geschichte* (Shanghai, 1991), p. 263.

<sup>5</sup> Bismarck teasingly asked the British ambassador: 'Who is Europe?' and the Russian ambassador had to listen to accusations that the word 'Europe' was used only by people who 'wanted something from other powers but did not dare to ask for it in their own name'. Quoted in Walter Bussmann, 'Europa und das Bismarckreich', in Gall, ed., *Geschichtsschreibung*, p. 311.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in: Wilhelm Mommsen, *Bismarck* (Hamburg, 1976 edn), p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> See Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the development of Germany. The period of unification, 1815–1871* (3 vols., Princeton, 1963), 1, p. i.

<sup>8</sup> Eberhard Jäckel, 'Jahrestage 1998. Ein historischer Spaziergang auf der Achterbahn', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte. Beilage zur Wochenzeitung Das Parlament*, B 3–4, 16 Jan. 1998, pp. 3–10.

<sup>9</sup> Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the development of Germany: the period of fortification, 1880–1893* (3 vols., Princeton, 1990), III, p. 411.

<sup>10</sup> See Hans-Günther Zmarzlik, *Das Bismarckbild der Deutschen-gestern und heute* (Freiburg, 1967), p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Many of the sources used for Bismarck's early life go back to Erich Marcks's biography, *Bismarcks Jugend, 1815–1848*, which was published in 1909.

family genealogy, until the birth of Otto, is normally simply ignored. As with race horses, the Bismarcks to this day give each member of their family a number in the genealogical tree – Otto's was a humble 309.<sup>12</sup> He was the product of a demanding mother and an unintelligent father, unhappy at school, where he was an average student, uninterested in reading his university subject (law) and after his subsequent failure as a civil servant ('I want to make my own music or nothing else'), he returned to the family estate, where his 'religious' period and the courting of Johanna v. Puttkamer began. It is also widely agreed (and well documented) by his biographers that the turning point in his life occurred in 1847 when he made a conscious decision to leave his Junker obscurity behind.

The most intriguing person who wrote on Bismarck was of course Bismarck himself. His highly praised *Gedanken und Erinnerungen* was 'the ideal handbook', as Gooch put it, 'for a statesman with Machiavellian intentions'.<sup>13</sup> Accounts of Bismarck's public and private life had been published long before his death. During the Berlin conference in 1878 the British, for example, were fed with stories in which the German host was portrayed as a dog lover who adored the countryside,<sup>14</sup> while the French, understandably, seemed more intrigued about the 'night side' of his character.<sup>15</sup> German intellectuals who actually 'lived' with Bismarck, found him baffling and complex.<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche had said after the 1870–1 war that 'public opinion practically forbids mentioning the evil consequences of war, especially of a victorious war... A great victory is a great danger. It is more difficult for human nature to bear than a defeat.'<sup>17</sup> To discuss these 'evils' – to withstand Bismarck's success – was only achieved by a few, such as Ludwig Bamberger<sup>18</sup> and Constantin Frantz.<sup>19</sup> Though this article focuses on biographies after 1898, a few words have to be said about the political stand of the historians of the Bismarckian era who were still very influential during the reign of Wilhelm II. German historians in the 1850s and 60s had yearned for a 'strong man' who would cut the Gordian knot of nationalistic aspirations. Even Theodor Mommsen, the historian of Rome, expressed such a wish when he met Napoleon III in 1863: 'I confess that I left with a feeling of envy that fate has not ever provided us with such a *grand criminel*.'<sup>20</sup> Mommsen was a National Liberal, who had once respected Bismarck

<sup>12</sup> See Marianne Heuwagen, 'Der Clan der Großen Nummer 309', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 5/6 (1996), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Hans Kohn, *The mind of Germany: education of a nation* (London, 1961), p. 182.

<sup>14</sup> See an article the *Times* correspondent in Paris, Herr von Blowitz, wrote about Bismarck in 1878 for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. The article was later translated into German for *Die Gegenwart. Wochenschrift für Literatur, Kunst und öffentliches Leben*, 32 (10 Aug. 1878), pp. 91–5. William Jacks wrote the first study in the English language to span the whole of the chancellor's life: William Jacks, *The life of Prince Bismarck* (Glasgow, 1899).

<sup>15</sup> This was provided by Charles Andler, *Le prince de Bismarck* (Paris, 1899), and Henri Welschinger, *Bismarck* (Paris, 1900).

<sup>16</sup> Among the first German biographies were: Hermann Jahnke, *Fürst Bismarck, sein Leben und Wirken* (Berlin, 1890); Georg Heseckel, *Das Buch vom Grafen Bismarck* (Bielefeld, 1869); Ludwig Hahn, *Fürst von Bismarck: sein politisches Leben und Wirken* (5 vols., Berlin, 1878–91); and Hans Blum, *Bismarck und seine Zeit* (München, 1894).

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from Kohn, *The mind of Germany*, p. 184.

<sup>18</sup> Ludwig Bamberger, *Bismarck Posthumus* (Berlin, 1899).

<sup>19</sup> Klaus Hildebrand has shown that Constantin Frantz's idea of a German 'universal Empire' would never have been accepted by the other European nations. Klaus Hildebrand, *No Intervention: die Pax Britannica und Preußen 1865/66 – 1869/70* (München, 1997), p. 90.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted from Kohn, *The mind of Germany*, p. 186.

but, in the 1880s, turned against him<sup>21</sup> with the prophetic words. 'The injury done by the Bismarckian era is infinitely greater than its benefits. The advances in power were gains which the next world-historical storm might destroy, but the subjugation of the German spirit was a misfortune which cannot be undone.'<sup>22</sup> Yet, according to Mommsen's opponent, Treitschke, such subjection was the inevitable price of unification.<sup>23</sup> The creation of a centralized state was more important to Treitschke than constitutional reforms or even civil liberties.

The main disagreement as far as Bismarck's creation of the *Reich* was concerned lay between the *kleindeutsche* (little-German) and the *großdeutsche* (great-German) historians, whose battle continued into the twentieth century. These two factions have already become historical realities themselves, and the following can only be a simplified account of them. While '1871' was a natural birth for the *kleindeutsche* school, for the *großdeutsche* movement it was more a caesarean section.<sup>24</sup> The main nineteenth-century representatives of the *kleindeutsche* school (also called the 'Borussian' school) were the nationalist historians Heinrich von Sybel<sup>25</sup> and Treitschke. They believed that Prussia was 'chosen' to build a German nation state and promoted this ideal in their works. For them, Bismarck became the man with the masterplan. This did not change after 1871: 'After the foundation of the Reich', Wehler summed up, 'there was the feeling of fulfilment amongst historians ... the status quo had to be supported.'<sup>26</sup> Biographers were conservative in the Latin sense of the word, wanting to 'conservare' (preserve) the achieved status quo. Creating good examples or ideal heroes, for their readers, was their new mission.

As with the countless monuments,<sup>27</sup> which had once been erected in Bismarck's honour, many of the post-1898 German biographies of the chancellor became a casualty of the ravages of time. Their prose style is sometimes difficult for the modern reader to bear. Some of these early biographies by German historians also show us the extent to which the political *Zeitgeist* made them distort the picture of Bismarck. Even though the following discussion will try to avoid putting historians on trial posthumously, one has to say that many of these books are a warning to every biographer to stay as far as possible above politics, if they want to write a work that will last more than thirty years. Franz Schnabel is, however, too strict when he claims that everything written about

<sup>21</sup> Mommsen was sued by Bismarck in 1881. The chancellor refused to believe that Mommsen was referring to someone else when he wrote about 'a great opportunist'. Mommsen, however, won this battle. See Alexander Demandt, 'Theodor Mommsen', in *Historische Kommission*, ed., *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, xviii (Berlin, 1997), p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted from Kohn, *The mind of Germany*, p. 188.

<sup>23</sup> See Heinrich v. Treitschke, *Historische und politische Aufsätze* (4 vols., Leipzig, 1867–97), and *Zehn Jahre deutscher Kämpfe: Schriften zur Tagespolitik 1865–1879* (2 vols., Berlin, 1874–9).

<sup>24</sup> Karl Jaspers summarized this problem in one sentence: '[the notion] that the divided Germany of the early nineteenth century developed with logical necessity towards Bismarck's *kleindeutsche* state is a fiction constructed by political historians of the Bismarckian and Wilhelminian periods and their successors in the present'. Karl Jaspers, *Freiheit und Wiedervereinigung* (München, 1960), p. 42.

<sup>25</sup> Sybel claimed that he was four-sevenths professor and three-sevenths politician. Originally an opponent of Bismarck, he turned into a great admirer of the chancellor and fought for him during the *Kulturkampf*. While Sybel had been a student of Ranke's at the beginning of his life, he later turned more and more towards Treitschke's position and his *Geschichtspersonalisierung*. See Helmut Seier, 'Heinrich von Sybel', in Wehler, ed., *Deutsche Historiker*, p. 133.

<sup>26</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* (München, 1976 edn), p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> By 1896 about 100 Bismarck monuments had been erected.

Bismarck before 1918 is dated.<sup>28</sup> Some of the early works rest on useful primary sources. Heinrich v. Sybel, for example, was one of the first to obtain restricted access to Prussian state documents for his book on the foundation of the Reich.<sup>29</sup> The documents were carefully chosen by Bismarck himself, who also checked Sybel's manuscript when it was finished.<sup>30</sup> This honour must have 'overwhelmed' Sybel and he became a good Hohenzollern 'house chronicler', claiming that Prussia had not initiated the three wars which led to the unification, and that, whilst Bismarck gave valuable support, the chief creator of the German Reich was Wilhelm I. In the Sybel portrayal, Bismarck is simply the good servant who did his duty, which prompted Delbrück's sarcastic comment that 'a tiger [Bismarck] has been turned into a cat'.<sup>31</sup> At the time it was common to stress that the achievements of the Hohenzollerns were superior to those of Bismarck. Horst Schallenberg has shown that in German schoolbooks before 1914 Bismarck's role was portrayed as being secondary to that of Wilhelm I.<sup>32</sup> This was also the line that Erich Marcks took in his early works.<sup>33</sup> Like Sybel, he overestimated the king's intellect. Thanks to Herbert von Bismarck, Marcks had the privilege of obtaining access to the Bismarck family archive and in 1909 he published the first volume of a biography on the chancellor's youth.<sup>34</sup> Max Lehmann was not impressed by the Marckian portrayal of Bismarck and even accused his colleague of 'seeing poetry instead of politics in Bismarck's deeds'.<sup>35</sup> Marcks certainly used florid language, but this biography of the young Bismarck was well researched and even today is still useful for Bismarck's childhood and student years. In his later studies of Bismarck, Marcks divided the life of his favourite subject into three periods: the first one ended in 1862 ('Bismarck's rise in the old Germany'); the second period ran until 1879 (when the 'foundation of the Reich was completed') and the last went from the 1880s to his death in 1898 ('transition to a new age').<sup>36</sup> In these works Marcks's handling of domestic politics leaves something to be desired. In a paragraph on the constitutional conflict of 1862 Marcks dismisses the liberal objections to Bismarck's contempt for liberal rights: '[Bismarck] replied with fanfares! He ignored an enemy whose power just consisted of using words.'<sup>37</sup> Analysing the question of whether Bismarck was a Prussian or a German patriot, Marcks would however become delphic: 'he [Bismarck] remained Prussian till his death... but from 1866 onwards he was fully German... the embodiment of the Union'.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Franz Schnabel, 'Das Problem Bismarck', in Gall, ed., *Geschichtsschreibung*, p. 97.

<sup>29</sup> Heinrich v. Sybel, *Die Begründung des Deutschen Reiches durch Wilhelm I.* (7 vols., München, 1889-94). <sup>30</sup> Helmut Seier, 'Heinrich v. Sybel', in Wehler, *Deutsche Historiker*, p. 144.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> See Horst Schallenberg, *Untersuchungen zum Geschichtsbild der Wilhelminischen Ära und der Weimarer Zeit, Eine vergleichende Schulbuchanalyse deutscher Schulgeschichtsbücher aus der Zeit 1888 bis 1933* (Ratingen, 1964), p. 203.

<sup>33</sup> Marcks (1861-1938) had been influenced by the works of Ranke and Mommsen. He was co-editor of the *Historische Zeitschrift* from 1910 onwards and in 1922 was made historiographer of the Prussian state.

<sup>34</sup> During the Wilhelminian era Marcks published the aforementioned *Bismarck. Eine Biographie: Bismarcks Jugend 1815-1848* (Berlin, 1909). After his death, Marcks's son-in-law published fragments of the second volume of the biography: W. Andreas, ed., *Erich Marcks: Bismarck und die deutsche Revolution 1848-1851* (Stuttgart, 1939).

<sup>35</sup> Max Lehmann, *Bismarck eine Charakteristik* (Berlin, 1948), p. 96.

<sup>36</sup> See Erich Marcks's introduction in Max Lenz and Erich Marcks, eds., *Das Bismarckjahr* (Hamburg, 1915), p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Erich Marcks, *Otto v. Bismarck. Ein Lebensbild* (Stuttgart, 1915), p. 64.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Like Marcks, other leading historians who wrote about Bismarck in the Wilhelminian era had undergone their formative life experiences close to the time of the unification. Marcks's friends, Max Lenz,<sup>39</sup> as well as Max Lehmann,<sup>40</sup> had fought in one of Bismarck's wars (including the 'cold war' against the Catholic church) and had supported him politically. Their admiration of Bismarck could not help but show in their historical works. Max Lenz, in particular, focused on Bismarck's religious background. Lenz saw the strength of Protestantism as playing an essential role in Germany's ascent to power and was one of the first historians to draw a direct line from Luther to Bismarck.<sup>41</sup> His *Geschichte Bismarcks*, in particular, stressed the dangers Catholicism posed for a united Germany. In contrast to people like Treitschke,<sup>42</sup> Lenz and Marcks claimed at the time that they 'wanted to write history not in terms of party allegiances, ... but in terms of the continuity of state power'.<sup>43</sup> They described themselves as Ranke students and were responsible for a 'Ranke Renaissance' at the turn of the century. As Meinecke noted, even though Ranke could not approve of the violent methods Bismarck used to achieve his ends, he was nevertheless impressed by the results they achieved. This was a feeling shared by many of his colleagues and students. Bismarck was to be judged by results (*Ergebnisethik*) and not by intentions (*Gesinnungsethik*). Marcks and Lenz believed that they were carrying on the tradition of Ranke. Yet in many ways they were much closer to Treitschke than they would have cared to admit. This became even more obvious in 1914 when their portrayal of Bismarck was altered to suit the new circumstances. Perhaps Lenz and Marcks were, subconsciously, also affected by some of Max Weber's ideas. Though Weber was a lawyer and economist, he gave a new impetus to historians before the First World War. His main criticism of Bismarck's policies was that the foundation of the Reich had been an end and not a beginning. A population of this size, Weber argued, in a country with such great economic power was bound to ask for more influence in world affairs. Such words encouraged Marcks and Lenz to think about Germany's future expansion.

The 'harmless looking Bismarck myth' (Zmarzlik) of the Wilhelminian era played a decisive part in the patriotic feelings of many Germans who wanted to defend Bismarck's inheritance in August 1914.<sup>44</sup> In so doing, no one seemed to remember Bismarck's warnings against such a war. On the contrary, leading Bismarck historians posthumously dressed the chancellor in a grey uniform and claimed him for the war effort. Horst Kohl, for example, who had edited Bismarck's letters and part of the *Gedanken und Erinnerungen*, jumped on the propaganda bandwagon and offered a martial

<sup>39</sup> Lenz was born in 1850 and died in Berlin in 1932.

<sup>40</sup> Lehmann (1845–1929) was at first an ardent nationalist, who favoured the *kleindeutsche* historical school, and was influenced by both Treitschke and Ranke. He was very anti-Catholic and the style of his introduction to the edition of the sources of *Preußen und die katholische Kirche seit 1640* enraged the Catholic Centre party. As a consequence Bismarck intervened and Lehmann stopped his criticisms. See Rüdiger v. Bruch, 'Max Lehmann', in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, xiv (Berlin, 1985), p. 89. Lehmann's political beliefs became more and more liberal with time. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>41</sup> His biography of Luther was first published in 1883 and became very popular. He followed up this subject with *Von Luther zu Bismarck* (München, 1920) and *Wille, Macht und Schicksal* (München, 1922). Also by Lenz: *Geschichte Bismarcks* (Leipzig, 1913), and with Erich Marcks, *Das Bismarckjahr* (Hamburg, 1915).

<sup>42</sup> Who was critical of Ranke because he did 'not give sufficient attention to the struggle for national independence'. Wolfgang J. Mommsen, 'Ranke and the neo-Rankean school in imperial Germany', in George G. Iggers and James M. Powell, eds., *Leopold von Ranke and the shaping of the historical discipline* (New York, 1990), p. 125.

<sup>44</sup> Zmarzlik, *Das Bismarckbild*, p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.



Bismarck bible for soldiers.<sup>45</sup> Others, like Adolf Matthias, indulged in embarrassing outpourings like *Bismarck. Sein Leben und sein Werk*. Matthias was at least honest enough to state that his sole intention was 'to write an eulogy for Bismarck'.<sup>46</sup> He described the chancellor as the father figure who had given the Germans a feeling for their own nation, an identity which 'they would defend with blood and iron'.<sup>47</sup> (This quote was as original as the rest of the book.) Matthias was outdone by more famous Bismarck biographers. It is ironic that Lenz, who had once passionately rejected the Treitschke school of political *Tendenzgeschichtsschreibung*, changed his view with the onset of the First World War to become one of its supporters.<sup>48</sup> In his essay 'The World War mirrored in Bismarck's thinking', he argued that it was only envy of Bismarck's creation which had incited Germany's neighbours to fight.<sup>49</sup> The outbreak of the war also gave Marcks a new impetus for his analysis of Bismarck. His patriotic aim was now to argue that Bismarck would have wholeheartedly approved of the 'crusade'. The title of one of Marcks's published lectures, *Bismarck's inheritance: a speech on war*, is an indication that one should not expect too much objectivity from him.<sup>50</sup> In order to try and solve the burning questions of the time, Marcks looked confidently for answers in Bismarck's work and sought to integrate 'the founder ... of our Reich into the current situation'.<sup>51</sup> Like Lenz, Marcks argued that this war was a war directed against Bismarck's creation. Marcks's key argument in support of this 'Bismarckian war' was the analysis of Russia in *Gedanken und Erinnerungen*. He referred to Bismarck's warnings not to get dragged into the Eastern Question, but, as events had belied the chancellor's expectations, he would have supported Germany's involvement in the war 'if he had known the situation'.<sup>52</sup> Marcks also believed that Bismarck would have agreed with Germany's annexation plans if he had been alive. Bismarck's annexation of Alsace-Lorraine was the perfect precedent: 'to be sensitive about the world's verdict would surely be the opposite of what Bismarck would have wanted'.<sup>53</sup> In his discussion of war aims, Marcks favoured, in the Treitschke tradition, bringing the whole of *Mitteleuropa* under German dominion. Annexation aims played a great part in the analyses of Bismarck at the time and it was unfortunate that the chancellor's 100th birthday was celebrated in 1915. Bethmann Hollweg feared that the celebrations of this date would cause an increase in German megalomania: 'Our people's psyche has been poisoned by demonstrations of superiority'.<sup>54</sup> As bragging was not desired on this occasion, the newspapers were encouraged not to discuss annexation plans. Max Lehmann would have agreed with this careful approach. He had already, before 1914, started to distance himself from his old friends, Marcks and Lenz. Lehmann wrote and taught against the mainstream of his time when from the 1900s onwards he drew attention to the darker side of the Bismarckian empire: 'The historian should not only try to understand success and victory', Lehmann wrote in the tradition of Nietzsche, 'he fulfils his high task completely only if he makes an effort to do justice to the vanquished, too'.<sup>55</sup> Kohn thinks

<sup>45</sup> Horst Kohl, ed., *Mit Bismarck daheim und im Felde. Kernworte aus seinen Briefen und Reden* (Berlin, 1915). <sup>46</sup> Adolf Matthias, *Bismarck. Sein Leben und sein Werk* (München, 1915), p. viii.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 457

<sup>48</sup> See Rüdiger v. Bruch, 'Max Lenz', in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, xiv, p. 232.

<sup>49</sup> Max Lenz, 'Der Weltkrieg im Spiegel Bismarckscher Gedanken', in Max Lenz and Erich Marcks, eds., *Das Bismarckjahr* (Hamburg, 1915).

<sup>50</sup> Erich Marcks, *Vom Erbe Bismarcks: eine Kriegsrede* (Leipzig, 1915), p. 11. <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17. <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted from Egmont Zechlin, 'Der Inbegriff des germanischen Menschen. Bismarck-Bild 1915: eine Mischung von Sage und Mythos', *Die Zeit*, no. 14, 2 Apr. 1965, p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> Kohn, *The mind of Germany*, p. 324.

that Lehmann underwent a catharsis during this time and finally 'freed himself from the fascination with success, from the belief in the supposed Machiavellian necessities of political life'.<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, Lehmann never published a biography of Bismarck.

Even though it might have been expected that as a result of the collapse in 1918 there would have been a revision in German historiography, this was not the case.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps this is not surprising if one considers that most leading historians were still deeply rooted in the monarchy.<sup>58</sup> Marcks and Lenz, who had dominated the biographies of Bismarck for twenty years, still led the field and certainly could not be expected to change their opinions once they were part of the Republic. Marcks, especially, refused to accept 1918 as a fait accompli and was now fully driven into the reactionary camp, distrusting 'Weimar' completely:<sup>59</sup> 'The laws, which still keep us alive and give us order, all date back to Bismarck's world.'<sup>60</sup> Marcks's friend Lenz followed him on his crusades, picked up again his 'from Luther to Bismarck' theories, and fought 'bravely' against the 'war guilt lie'.

In writing about the attitude of his colleagues at the time, Ludwig Dehio noted that 'the defeat was ascribed to the deceit of our enemies, and to errors and treason at home. We brooded over our defeat, but in order to prove to ourselves that it was undeserved, not to understand why it was deserved.'<sup>61</sup> To teach history by recounting stories about past grandeurs was now developing into a form of psychological therapy. Zmarzlik claims that German historians of the twenties and thirties were driven by the idea of giving their countrymen an unchallengeable hero in Bismarck.<sup>62</sup> They needed him as a father figure to provide courage and orientation where there was then spiritual chaos. Despite this adoration of Bismarck, there was, however, another debate on the question of whether the *großdeutsche* idea might have offered a better union for all Germans. Hermann Oncken, for example, argued that, although, the *kleindeutsche* solution had been the only alternative at the time, the 'ideal nation ... would have been a *großdeutsche* national state'.<sup>63</sup> The idea of an *Anschluß* was therefore already being discussed by historians after 1919, and it is not surprising that they would later welcome 1938 and the real *Anschluß* of Austria.<sup>64</sup>

The twenties were valuable for research on Bismarck, because new documents were released from the foreign office archives.<sup>65</sup> As a result many unknown fragments emerged about the first chancellor. Since this new information took time to sink in, it had to be approached in monographs. It was too daring or simply too early to write a

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> There were only a few critical voices emerging. For example: Johannes Ziekursch, *Politische Geschichte des neuen deutschen Kaiserreiches* (3 vols., Frankfurt a.M., 1925–30); Ulrich Noack, *Bismarcks Friedenspolitik* (Leipzig, 1928).

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Zmarzlik, *Das Bismarckbild*, p. 20.  
<sup>59</sup> Marcks longed for another leader like Bismarck: 'Fulfilment, history teaches us, will only come when we have another *Führer* (like Bismarck). We have to pray to get him.' Erich Marcks, 'Bismarck-Jugend', *Deutsches Echo*, 1 (1925), p. 99.

<sup>60</sup> Erich Marcks, 'Die Stimme Bismarcks', *Velhagen und Klasings Monatshefte* (1921), p. 440.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Kohn, *The mind of Germany*, p. 311.

<sup>62</sup> Zmarzlik, *Das Bismarckbild*, p. 19.

<sup>63</sup> See Hermann Oncken's 1920 essay 'Die Wiedergeburt der großdeutschen Idee', in Bernd Faulenbach, *Die Ideologie des deutschen Weges* (München, 1980), p. 68–9f.

<sup>64</sup> Hans Herzfeld claims that the motif of the *Anschluß* idea was prominent in the writings of historians in the twenties. See Faulenbach, *Ideologie*, p. 72.

<sup>65</sup> The most interesting ones were: Johannes Lepsius, ed., *Die Große Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871–1914: Sammlung der diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes* (Berlin, 1922–7), and Historische Reichskommission, ed., *Die Auswärtige Politik Preußens, 1858–1871* (Berlin, 1930). Friedrich Thimme, Werner Fraundienst, Willy Andreas, Wilhelm Schüssler, and Wolfgang Windelband, eds., *Die gesammelten Werke* (Friedrichsruher Ausgabe, 1924–35).

new biography. This slow process of piecing together the fragments was a reflection of the uncertainty of the times.<sup>66</sup> Bismarck's peaceful foreign policy of the 1870s and 1880s was now praised as an example of modesty and wisdom.<sup>67</sup> The authors, struck by the brilliance of the newly released dispatches, were dazzled by them. A similar thing had already happened in the 1870s, when the interested public had, for the first time, obtained a glimpse of how intelligently Bismarck drafted his instructions to German diplomats. In 1874 he had decided to publish documents in connection with the Arnim scandal, to show his absolute intellectual superiority over a 'disloyal' diplomat. Although this had been politically useful at the time, the chancellor himself was dismissive about dispatches as a historical source. Analysing them, he had once claimed, only gave a small part of the overall picture: 'For the most part, they [dispatches] are just paper smeared with ink... As for using them someday as material for history nothing of any value will be found in them... In thirty years' time who will know what sort of a man the writer himself was, how he looked at things, and how his individuality coloured them?'<sup>68</sup>

Apart from studies of Bismarck's foreign policy, a further stream of monographs on other aspects of the chancellor's life appeared. Bismarck had been a good hater. The Poles, the Catholics, the Socialists, the Hohenzollern wives, Hamburg businessmen, or Jews – all at one point or another – experienced his venom. This offered interesting material. In the twenties his anti-Semitism was analysed for the first time by Otto Jöhlinger.<sup>69</sup> Moritz Busch had already revealed some of Bismarck's anti-Semitic remarks in a diary of the Franco-Prussian war.<sup>70</sup> Bismarck's table talk during this war is full of caricatures of Jews he encountered during his time in Russia.<sup>71</sup> Yet Bismarck's anti-Semitism seemed to surface mainly in the company of military men and Junkers. Was he simply expressing the anti-Semitic atmosphere of the nineteenth century or was he trying to curry favour with military men in the relentless macho camaraderie of the casino? There is, as usual with this man, another side – as Fritz Stern uncovered: Bismarck, who was a friend of the banker Baron von Bleichröder and had made him rich and respected. For Jöhlinger, this was the side of Bismarck's character that should be remembered.<sup>72</sup>

The most popular Bismarck biography of the twenties was not written by a historian but by the novelist Emil Ludwig.<sup>73</sup> Ludwig was more interested in Bismarck's personality than in his politics. As a result Bismarck's life is portrayed – in a poetic style – as an ancient Greek drama with a Faustian hero. While the 1920s were, apart from the success of Ludwig's book, an uneventful time for biographies of Bismarck, with the *Machtergreifung* in 1933 the iconography of the chancellor changed drastically. Bismarck had already been compared to Luther by Max Lenz and to Wallenstein by Fontane.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Erich Eyck (who would later write a controversial Bismarck biography) first tried out his criticism of Bismarck in newspapers like the *Vossische Zeitung*.

<sup>67</sup> On Bismarck's policy towards England see, for example, Hans Rothfels, *Bismarcks englische Bündnispolitik* (Berlin, 1924).

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in H. Robolsky, *Aus der Wilhelmstraße: Erinnerungen eines Offiziösen* (Berlin, 1887), p. 105.

<sup>69</sup> Otto Jöhlinger, *Bismarck und die Juden* (Berlin, 1921).

<sup>70</sup> Moritz Busche, *Bismarcks große Tage* (Landsberg a. Lech, 1990 edn).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>72</sup> In the early thirties this closeness to 'Jews' had already made the Nazis suspicious of Bismarck. See Franz Perrot, *Bismarck und die Juden: 'Papierpest' und 'Aera-Artikel von 1875'* (Berlin, 1931 edn).

<sup>73</sup> Emil Ludwig, *Geschichte eines Kämpfers* (Berlin, 1928), p. 11.

<sup>74</sup> Fontane, for example, made his protagonists compare Bismarck with a 'tyrant', or a 'Zivil-Wallenstein'. See Gordon Craig, *Über Fontane* (München, 1997), p. 149.

Now Hitler was added to the list. Popular comparison of Bismarck with Hitler had two origins. The first one was the myth created by the Nazis themselves from 1933 to 1939 and perpetuated by a few willing historians. The second one was allegedly 'born' in England in February 1939 as a result of a relatively short article in the *Spectator*.<sup>75</sup> Contrary to what some historians seem to believe,<sup>76</sup> the *Spectator* did not claim to see a direct line from Hitler to Bismarck. Apart from the first paragraph, in which some similarities between the two men were listed, the article goes on to say that 'the comparison has obvious limits; and no one perhaps could learn more from studying these limits than Herr Hitler himself, if he wishes to achieve Bismarck's undoubted greatness'.<sup>77</sup> The article then continues to show that the actions of the 'fanatical Austrian' would have been the worst nightmares for the 'worldlywise Prussian' Bismarck.<sup>78</sup> In short: the comparison between Bismarck and Hitler did not start with this often quoted newspaper article.<sup>79</sup> It was only during the war that Lewis Namier began to look for historical predecessors to Hitler.<sup>80</sup>

As far as the Nazis were concerned, it was at first difficult for them to claim convincingly that Bismarck was a forerunner of Hitler. Even the most committed Nazi believers, who had skipped history classes, knew instinctively that Bismarck's politics were not theirs. If they had read *Mein Kampf* carefully, they would also have noticed that Bismarck does not get a great accolade. Though the chancellor's fights against Catholicism, liberalism, and the Reichstag seemed appealing to Hitler, the 'kleindeutsche solution' was not exactly a policy the *Führer* admired. After the Second World War, Walter Bussmann would call Bismarck 'the last German who had been scared',<sup>81</sup> and it was probably this fear, this carefulness, that made the National Socialists suspicious of Bismarck. However, at the beginning of the regime, they needed him. Hitler himself had first utilized Bismarck on the 'day of Potsdam', where he glowingly praised his predecessor's work which had, in his view, started the 'ascent' of the German people.<sup>82</sup> The Nazis found 'willing executioners' in historians like Marcks to interpret their value-system in Bismarckian terms.<sup>83</sup> Together with Arnold Oskar Meyer and Heinrich v.

<sup>75</sup> 'Hitler and Bismarck', *The Spectator* (17 Feb. 1939), p. 248.

<sup>76</sup> See Gall, *Geschichtsschreibung*, p. 13.

<sup>77</sup> *The Spectator*, p. 248.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> The Swiss theologian Karl Barth was, from 1945 onwards, one of the greatest propagators of the 'Friedrich der Große-Bismarck-Hitler line'. See Wilhelm Schüssler, 'Der geschichtliche Standort Bismarcks', in Gall, *Geschichtsschreibung*, p. 172. See also, Sebastian Haffner, *Von Bismarck zu Hitler* (München, 1987). Though historians today reject for the most part the idea of a *Sonderweg* from Bismarck to Hitler, this interpretation is still very popular. Lothar Gall was seriously asked by the *Spiegel* about such a connection, which prompted his reply that 'every generation carried its own responsibilities'. *Der Spiegel*, 9 Feb. 1998, p. 54. For the discussion of a *Sonderweg* see, Rudolf Vierhaus, 'Die Ideologie eines eigenen deutschen Weges der politischen und sozialen Entwicklung', in Rudolf v. Thadden, ed., *Die Krise des Liberalismus zwischen den Weltkriegen* (Göttingen, 1978).

<sup>80</sup> See Lothar Kettenacker, 'Preußen-Deutschland als britisches Feindbild im zweiten Weltkrieg', in Bernd-Jürgen Wendt, ed., *Das britische Deutschlandbild im Wandel des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Bochum, 1984).

<sup>81</sup> This fear of encirclement has often been quoted in connection with Bismarck's most famous dream: 'My sleep is no relaxation, my dreams continue my waking thoughts, that is, if I go to sleep at all. The other day I saw a map of Germany in front of me, and on it one by one decayed spot after another appeared and then peeled off.' Bismarck to Lucius von Ballhausen, 5 Mar. 1872. Quoted in Lucius von Ballhausen, *Bismarck Erinnerungen* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1920), p. 84.

<sup>82</sup> See *Sonderheft der Berliner Illustrierten Zeitung*, 21 Mar. 1933, p. 2. A few days later Goebbels celebrated Bismarck's birthday on 1 Apr. 1933 and compared him with Hitler: 'Bismarck was the great ... political revolutionary of the nineteenth century. Hitler is the great ... revolutionary of the 20th'. *Hamburger Nachrichten*, no. 157, 2 Apr. 1933.

<sup>83</sup> The only point on which they differed was Marcks's belief in the *kleindeutsche* solution.

Srbik, Marcks joined Walter Frank's 'Reichsinstitut for the History of a new Germany' as an honorary member and later 'besottedly' (according to Meinecke) shook hands with the *Führer*.<sup>84</sup> Even the former Republican Wilhelm Mommsen wrote a 'from Bismarck to Hitler' book at the time.<sup>85</sup> For him, three phases had occurred during the period 1871–1933: 'the first generation fulfilled the yearnings of the Germans and built the empire under Bismarck's guidance ... the second ossified ... and the third grew up in the war and built a country that, though connected with Bismarck's creation, also outgrew it in many ways'.<sup>86</sup> This new Reich Mommsen hoped would be built more firmly because it did not grow, like Bismarck's, from 'above to beneath', but 'from the bottom up'.<sup>87</sup> In this historical marathon Mommsen skipped the Weimar period altogether, because it was 'only an interim period'. This attitude was symptomatic of other German historians who were, in the majority, not exactly great opponents of Hitler. Although in 1933 none of the *Ordinarien* (full professors with chairs) were members of the Nazi party, only ten professors lost their chairs for political reasons. Six German history *Ordinarien* had to emigrate for 'racial reasons', three died in camps, and one committed suicide.<sup>88</sup>

During the years 1934–38 an 'emancipation process' seemed to set in for the political leaders of the day and Bismarck was no longer needed until he miraculously surfaced again after the *Anschluss*. It was being suggested that Hitler completed in 1938 what Bismarck had not managed to achieve. As has been shown earlier, this *großdeutsche* idea had already been nourished by historians in the 1920s. It was therefore no surprise that people like Gerhard Ritter saw 1938 as a 'fulfilment' of Bismarck's dreams. The last two occasions on which Bismarck was officially celebrated were at the christening of the battleship *Bismarck* on 14 February 1939<sup>89</sup> and on 20 April 1939, Hitler's fiftieth birthday.<sup>90</sup> Afterwards, not even the 'perfidy of the Nazis' could find a way to use him as an instrument in their totalitarian war.<sup>91</sup> Although he then became a 'film star' as a result of two Bismarck films,<sup>92</sup> these films were surprisingly subtle in their Nazi propaganda. Here, Bismarck was of course not the Prussian who wanted to make Prussia dominate Germany, but the German who rejected federalism and believed in a strong united Germany. In the 1942 Bismarck film 'The Dismissal', the following prophetic words were put into his mouth: 'My work is done. It was only the beginning. Who will complete it?'<sup>93</sup> When the film came out in September 1942 it was first praised by the Nazis as a 'Film of the Nation', but only a few months later forbidden. The reason was Bismarck's warning in the film against a war between Russia and Germany. This was certainly a truth no one wanted to hear any more. After the Nazis

<sup>84</sup> See Peter Fuchs, 'Erich Marcks', in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, xvi (Berlin, 1990), p. 124.

<sup>85</sup> Wilhelm Mommsen, *Politische Geschichte von Bismarck bis zur Gegenwart 1850–1933* (Frankfurt, 1935), p. 252.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> See Karen Schönwälder, *Historiker und Politik: Geschichtswissenschaft im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt, 1992), p. 68.

<sup>89</sup> See Zmarzlik, *Das Bismarckbild*, p. 34.

<sup>90</sup> Lothar Machtan, 'Bismarck-Kult und deutscher National-Mythos 1890–1940', in Lothar Machtan, ed., *Bismarck und der deutsche National-Mythos 1890–1940* (Bremen, 1994), p. 56.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>92</sup> Wolfgang Liebeneiner's first Bismarck film portrayed his rise to power and ended with the triumph at Versailles. One scene in which Bismarck is attacked by Cohn-Blind in 1866 has been edited. The Nazis had used an actor who 'looked' Jewish for the part.

<sup>93</sup> The script for *The dismissal* was written by Curt Johannes Braun and Felix Eckardt. The film was directed by Liebeneiner. Klaus Kanzog, *Diskurs Film: Staatspolitisch besonders wertvoll: ein Handbuch zu 30 Deutschen Spielfilmen der Jahre 1934–1945* (München, 1994), p. 319.

dropped him, Bismarck became, in a new twist, a figurehead for the resistance movement against Hitler.<sup>94</sup> The diplomat and member of the conservative opposition against Hitler, Ulrich von Hassell, in 1944 wrote in his diary: '[in Friedrichsruh] I was close to tears about the destroyed creation ... It is regrettable what a wrong picture of him we have created in the world ... In truth high diplomacy and moderation were his greatest gift.'<sup>95</sup>

The biography of Bismarck that came to be viewed as a product of this time<sup>96</sup> was written by Arnold Oskar Meyer who was reportedly not a Nazi,<sup>97</sup> but a highly conservative historian, who glorified the chancellor in the well known pre-1914 way. (For Lothar Gall Meyer's oeuvre is 'the high-point of the Bismarck-Orthodoxy'.)<sup>98</sup> Meyer knew the Bismarck family archives well and was the first historian to use fully the now published German and French foreign office sources for a biography. The chaos of the war had postponed the delivery of the book (the first edition had been destroyed in a fire), yet when it came out after 1945 it had 'an eerie effect' on its readers, remarked Gall. After reading the bombastic iconoclast Meyer, it is liberating to turn to a radical demythologizer like Erich Eyck.<sup>99</sup> Eyck, who was originally a lawyer (and therefore often seen as an 'amateur historian' by less benevolent colleagues), had to emigrate to London and published his three-volume biography of Bismarck through a Zürich publishing house. Eyck's cardinal mistake was, perhaps, that he declared from the beginning that he was of 'the Liberal persuasion' (Franz Schnabel calls him 'a German Whig').<sup>100</sup> This declaration made him vulnerable. He was immediately put into the category of the 'left-wing liberal-humanitarians', who had already criticized Bismarck in the previous century. It is correct that a possible predecessor for Eyck might have been Bismarck's contemporary, the aforementioned Ludwig Bamberger. In 1898 Bamberger, when writing about Bismarck's selective memoirs *Gedanken und Erinnerungen*, noted that it was sad to see a book cherished by young people in which words like 'humanity' and 'civilization' were ridiculed.<sup>101</sup> This was also Eyck's feeling. As a lawyer, Eyck despised Bismarck's lack of respect for the rule of law, and as a liberal he passionately condemned Bismarck's cynicism towards liberal, democratic, and humanitarian ideals. For him, Bismarck incapacitated the people. The liberal Georg von Bunsen had already said in 1887: 'Bismarck makes Germany great and the Germans small.'<sup>102</sup> It was Bismarck's authoritarian and intolerant style, Eyck argued, the brutal means which he used to achieve his ends, that made it impossible for the Germans to develop and grow under him. Eyck would have found support for his thesis from a contemporary of the chancellor, the British ambassador Lord Odo Russell, who wrote in 1875: '[without Bismarck] the Germans [left] to govern themselves would rapidly

<sup>94</sup> Machtan, 'Bismarck-Kult', p. 56.

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Theo Schwarz Müller, *Otto von Bismarck* (München, 1998), p. 100.

<sup>96</sup> A. O. Meyer, *Bismarck: der Mensch und der Staatsmann* (Stuttgart, 1949 edn). The book was completed in 1943.

<sup>97</sup> Ritter detects in A. O. Meyer a 'Prussian conservative attitude of protest' against Hitler. Gerhard Ritter, 'Das Bismarckproblem', in Gall, ed., *Geschichtsschreibung*, p. 120. This is also the opinion of Wilhelm Mommsen, 'Der Kampf um das Bismarckbild', in Gall, ed., *Geschichtsschreibung*, p. 167.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>99</sup> Eyck was, according to Hildebrand, politically 'left of the centre'. See Klaus Hildebrand, 'Erich Eyck', in Wehler, *Deutsche Historiker*, p. 206.

<sup>100</sup> Franz Schnabel, 'Das Problem Bismarck', in Gall, ed., *Geschichtsschreibung*, p. 100.

<sup>101</sup> Quoted from Zmarzlik, *Das Bismarckbild*, p. 9.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted in Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Unbewältigte Geschichte: Stationen deutschen Schicksals seit 1763* (Berlin, 1964), p. 108.

settle down to commerce, industry and science'.<sup>103</sup> Eyck's ideal of a statesman was Gladstone (about whom he had written a biography)<sup>104</sup> and certainly not Bismarck. For Eyck, England was almost the perfect nation, a model which the 'unfinished' Germany had to emulate.<sup>105</sup> Germany had taken, in Eyck's view, a wrong turn from 1862 onwards. Its development was 'defective'. Though he acknowledged Bismarck's artistic diplomacy, Eyck also highlighted the artificiality of the whole alliance system which ultimately had to end in devastation.<sup>106</sup> To him, it was a benevolent fate for Bismarck to have left office in the deadlock situation of 1890, before everything collapsed.<sup>107</sup>

It took the Germans some time to read Eyck's biography and when, in the 1950s, reviews emerged, the criticism was surprisingly harsh. While von Hagen quipped that Eyck's conception of Bismarck had a lot in common with that of Empress Frederick's,<sup>108</sup> Rothfels<sup>109</sup> and Schnabel were kinder in their criticism. Both had lost their chairs in the 1930s,<sup>110</sup> and could therefore not be accused of being vengeful national socialists. Both argued that Eyck's belief in a 'liberal option' for a united Germany was not justified, that no one but Bismarck could have united Germany.<sup>111</sup> A severer critic, Gerhard Ritter, seemed to be under the impression that Germany still had a reputation to defend so shortly after the war and wrote to Eyck that 'the effect of your book on other countries will be a negative one, I fear, because you confirm the cliché that many have of German history'.<sup>112</sup> Klaus Hildebrand, on the other hand, was one of the few who retrospectively stressed Eyck's courage in writing 'against the tide of eulogies of Bismarck'.<sup>113</sup>

After the final collapse of Germany in 1945, Bismarck, the creator of the nation, was bound to be seen differently.<sup>114</sup> Unlike Cavour's or Lincoln's creation, his seemed to have been a failure in the long term. Friedrich Meinecke postulated in 1946 that German historians should 'accept entirely new perspectives' in the 'evaluation' of Germany's past: 'The staggering course of the First, and still more the Second World War no longer permits the question to be ignored whether the seeds of later evil were not already present in the Bismarckian Reich'.<sup>115</sup> He, who had once celebrated Bismarck's achievements, thought it would be impossible for some time to celebrate the man again.<sup>116</sup> The question for German historians after the Second World War was,

<sup>103</sup> Odo Russell to Lord Derby, 24 Apr. 1875, Liverpool Record Office, Derby papers, 920 DER (15) 16/1/15.

<sup>104</sup> Erich Eyck, *Gladstone* (Zürich, 1938); idem, *Bismarck and the German empire* (London, 1950).

<sup>105</sup> Hildebrand, 'Erich Eyck', in Wehler, *Deutsche Historiker*, p. 211. <sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>107</sup> 'Bismarck was at the end of his art.' See Erich Eyck, *Bismarck und das Deutsche Reich* (München, 1978 edn), p. 306.

<sup>108</sup> M. v. Hagen, 'Das Bismarckbild der Gegenwart', *Zeitschrift für Politik*, 6 (1959), p. 79.

<sup>109</sup> See Hans Rothfels, 'Problems of a Bismarck biography', *The Review of Politics*, 9 (1947), pp. 362–80.

<sup>110</sup> Rothfels emigrated in 1939. Franz Schnabel, who had originally worked at the TH Karlsruhe, was only able to publish under great difficulties.

<sup>111</sup> 'Schnabel claimed that Eyck was inconsistent in his analysis, because, although he supported the *kleindeutsche* solution, he did not approve of the means by which it was achieved.' Quoted from Hildebrand, 'Erich Eyck', p. 217.

<sup>112</sup> Letter from Ritter to Eyck, 1 Aug. 1950. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 216. <sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>114</sup> Quoted from Gall, ed., *Geschichtsschreibung*, p. 9.

<sup>115</sup> Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe* (Wiesbaden, 1946), p. 26.

<sup>116</sup> However, in 1965 the German parliament already celebrated Bismarck's 150th birthday and the post office printed special stamps for the occasion.

therefore: how should one write about Bismarck after Hitler<sup>117</sup> Wilhelm Mommsen was the first to publish a new biography on Bismarck in the 1950s.<sup>118</sup> It did not include any spectacular new sources, but the author tried to write matter-of-factly, as free from any political colouring (including his own) as possible. The idea was not to write judgmentally about Bismarck but to give a short, terse summary of his life. Mommsen claimed that he did not want to make the mistake of only seeing the results of Bismarck's endeavours.<sup>119</sup> As far as domestic affairs were concerned, Mommsen was very benevolent with Bismarck, claiming that these problems should not darken the achievements of such a statesman.<sup>120</sup> In this biography, Mommsen, in particular, showed Bismarck's great flexibility. The chancellor liked to talk with the 'devil' – whether he was called Napoleon III at the time or Lassalle: 'We have to work with the realities, not with fiction.'<sup>121</sup> And: 'You don't play chess when sixteen squares out of sixty-four are out of bounds from the start.'<sup>122</sup>

A. J. P. Taylor's biography of Bismarck appeared at the same time as Mommsen's and was very controversial.<sup>123</sup> The book suffered from some minor mistakes and lacked footnotes. It was seen as 'superficial' and 'trivial', but is certainly more entertaining than Mommsen's biography. Taylor had the advantage of a healthy distance from the Bismarck myth. Unlike German historians, he was not afraid of psychoanalysing the chancellor, a technique especially effective in describing Bismarck's youth. Taylor was very perceptive in working out the two worlds in which the young Bismarck had been raised, confronted with his mother's intellectual background and the male world symbolized by his father's love for 'the soil' and *Junkertum* per se. Taylor showed how Bismarck profited from both of these worlds and how, later on in his career, he flexibly adopted his 'female' and 'male' side whenever it was appropriate.<sup>124</sup> Like Eyck, Taylor was, of course, aware of Bismarck's moral shortcomings as a person and did not approve of them. Bismarck was more concerned with the effect other people's behaviour had on him than with what he himself did to them. His enemies found his hostility a draining, full-time occupation which could often ruin the strongest of characters. However, as Taylor showed, Bismarck's overt combativeness was only one side of his character. He was also, whenever he wanted to be, a great charmer. When he tried to persuade William I, he transformed, as the monarch put it, the worst news into 'couleur de rose'. On such occasions one can see not only Bismarck's great intellectual gifts, but a manipulative emotional intelligence. How else could he have become one of the best propagandists of the nineteenth century? Taylor also understood Bismarck's excellent political instinct after 1875. In a German television show in 1965, Taylor expressed his very personal feelings about Bismarck. While he claimed that the majority of his countrymen would associate Bismarck with 'iron, three wars and as the predecessor of Hitler', he, as a historian, saw the chancellor 'as a man who wanted peace for his country and helped to give Europe such peace for forty years. This was certainly his greatest achievement.'<sup>125</sup> This achievement had already been seen by earlier generations of British people. Lord Randolph Churchill, for example, was keen to meet a man 'who

<sup>117</sup> Hans Hallmann, ed., *Revision des Bismarckbildes: die Diskussion der Deutschen Fachhistoriker 1945–1955* (Darmstadt, 1972).

<sup>118</sup> Wilhelm Mommsen, *Bismarck – ein politisches Lebensbild* (München, 1959). A shortened version appeared as a Rowohlt paperback in 1966 and sold well: Wilhelm Mommsen, *Bismarck*, p. 20.

<sup>119</sup> To him Bismarck was simply a Prussian.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>123</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *Bismarck: the man and the statesman* (London, 1955).

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>125</sup> Taylor interview with the Westdeutscher Rundfunk, 31 Mar. 1965.



had created a nation'.<sup>126</sup> Though there are great differences between Taylor and the other British biographers of Bismarck (including Palmer and the critical Crankshaw), the tenor of their works seems to be influenced by what Gladstone wrote of Bismarck in 1874: 'Bismarck's ideas and methods are not ours, they spring out of other traditions, but my sympathies tho' they don't go with him ... are more with him than against him.'<sup>127</sup>

In the 1960s the biographical form was at its lowest esteem in Germany. German historians, though not the interested public, turned away from Bismarck the person and looked at the 'impersonal powers' that determined events. Hans Ulrich Wehler's 'new school' came to be part of the revolutionizing way in which the chancellor was seen in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>128</sup> Wehler challenged the previous tradition of Rankean *Großmachtsdenken* by postulating a reorientation in the perception of the Reich. One of his most famous theories was that the *Primat der Innenpolitik* had been decisive in dictating the chancellor's foreign policy.<sup>129</sup> The historical fashion which Wehler and other iconoclasts represented can be seen as a necessary phase which led to the creation of at least two standard works in Bismarck historiography.<sup>130</sup> Members of the Wehler school were right to criticize their colleagues for ignoring economic and sociological factors in the creation and functioning of the empire. In their works, the new school made the person of Bismarck part of a theory, and pressed him into schemes. Expressions for describing Bismarck's governing techniques (*Herrschaftstechnik*), which came into vogue in the 1960s, were *Negative Integration*, *Sammlungspolitik*,<sup>131</sup> and *Bonapartismus*.<sup>132</sup> Recently Wehler has developed a new approach to Bismarck's personality. In his latest book, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte: von der Deutschen Doppelrevolution bis zum Beginn des 1 Weltkrieges*,<sup>133</sup> he employs Max Weber's analysis of 'charismatic rulers'. According to Weber the charismatic ruler is a prophetic leader, a man of the opposition who seizes

<sup>126</sup> Robert Rhodes James, the biographer of Randolph Churchill, thinks that the conversation took place in 1893 in Gastein. Robert Rhodes James, *Lord Randolph Churchill* (London, 1959), p. 366.

<sup>127</sup> W. E. G. Gladstone to Lord Odo Russell, 3 Mar. 1874. Quoted in Paul Knaplund, *Annual report of the American Historical Association for the year 1942: letters from the Berlin embassy 1871-1874, 1880-1885* (2 vols., Washington, 1944), p. 127.

<sup>128</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich, 1871-1918* (Göttingen, 1973).

<sup>129</sup> For example, Wehler believed that Bismarck's sudden turn to imperialism in 1884 was spurred by economic problems in the Reich. This has lately been challenged by a new book on the 'crown-prince hypothesis'. See Axel T. G. Riehl, *Der 'Tanz um den Äquator': Bismarcks antienglische Kolonialpolitik und die Erwartung des Thronwechsels in Deutschland 1883 bis 1885. Quellen und Forschungen zur Brandenburgischen und Preußischen Geschichte* (Berlin, 1993).

<sup>130</sup> See the works of Helmut Böhme, *Deutschlands Weg zur Großmacht* (Köln, 1970), and Hans Rosenberg, *Große Depression und Bismarckzeit: Wirtschaftsablauf, Gesellschaft und Politik in Mitteleuropa* (Berlin, 1967).

<sup>131</sup> The expression *Negative Integration* describes the use of negative propaganda and policies to bind the social classes to the state. An example would be the manipulated fear of Jesuit conspiracies which many Germans shared during the Kulturkampf. The expression was introduced by Wolfgang Sauer. Wolfgang Sauer 'Das Problem des deutschen Nationalstaates', in Helmut Böhme, ed. *Reichsgründungszeit* (München, 1967). The term *Sammlungspolitik* is applied to the time after 1878. It postulates that Bismarck combined two power groups, the great landowners and leading industrialists and encouraged a 'merger movement' policy. Wehler calls it an 'alliance against progress', which fought against the liberalization of the state and later targeted the socialists as the arch enemy.

<sup>132</sup> For an analysis of this idea, see Lothar Gall, 'Bismarck und der Bonapartismus', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 223 (1976), pp. 618-37.

<sup>133</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte: von der Deutschen Doppelrevolution bis zum Beginn des 1. Weltkrieges* (München, 1995).

power in time of crisis and mesmerizes his people. In a review of Wehler's new book, John Breuilly claims, however, that many of the characteristics of a charismatic ruler do not apply to Bismarck.<sup>134</sup>

As a result of the 'Wehler awakening', the 1960s and 1970s were a fruitful time for monographs on the domestic problems of Bismarck's Reich. The *Kulturkampf*, for example, became a subject analysed ad nauseam.<sup>135</sup> When it comes to this issue, historians are critical in different degrees (yet even a declared Bismarck admirer will not defend the *Kulturkampf* wholeheartedly – after all, the chancellor eventually distanced himself from it). While Thomas Nipperdey played down the brutality of the laws,<sup>136</sup> David Blackbourn,<sup>137</sup> and Wolfgang J. Mommsen,<sup>138</sup> both in their different ways, have illuminated best the religious hysteria and the repercussions of the laws.

It was inevitable that a reassessment of Wehler's 'sixties approach' would occur: 'When a great historian can mistake a person for a trend,' Derek Beales wrote, 'when it is thought more important to analyse social background than opinions, then the time has come for a reaction.'<sup>139</sup> The reaction, without being reactionary, was performed by three excellent historians. In order of appearance of their biographies, they are: Pflanze, Gall, and Engelberg.<sup>140</sup> Their books seemed to indicate that 'sociological' theories may have, at least in part, outlived their usefulness. In an essay Pflanze convincingly criticized the theories of *Negative Integration* and *Sammlungspolitik*<sup>141</sup> and doubted whether it was possible to force Bismarck's multiple personalities into a generalizing framework. Instead he advocated a return to the sources. His three-volume biography of Bismarck offered such a return.<sup>142</sup> Being a student of Hajo Holborn, he fulfilled excellently what his teacher had once encouraged him to do. Like Taylor, yet in much more depth, Pflanze is not afraid to use psychological history and to analyse in detail, for example, Bismarck's psychosomatic illnesses and their effect on his work. The emphasis of Pflanze's biography, unlike those of Gall and Engelberg, is on the period after 1871. (Gall spent one third of his book on the years after 1871, Engelberg half of his work, while Pflanze devoted up to two-thirds.) Pflanze's main criticism of the chancellor's politics after 1871 is that he tailored the constitution too much to his own needs and played around with it dangerously: 'Germany's first chancellor demonstrated by his

<sup>134</sup> John Breuilly, 'Auf dem Weg zur deutschen Gesellschaft?', in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Zeitschrift für Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, 24 (1998), p. 155.

<sup>135</sup> There are a lot of standard works on the subject: Erich Schmidt-Volkmar, *Der Kulturkampf in Deutschland, 1871–1880* (Göttingen, 1962); and Manfred Scholle, *Die preußische Strafrecht im Kulturkampf, 1873–1880* (Marburg, 1974).

<sup>136</sup> Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1866–1918* (München, 1992).

<sup>137</sup> David Blackbourn, *Class, religion and local politics in Wilhelmine Germany: the centre party in Württemberg before 1914* (Wiesbaden, 1980).

<sup>138</sup> Wolfgang J. Mommsen gives the most critical and detailed description of the discrimination the Catholics had to suffer, showing how, step by step, they were 'legally' turned into second-class citizens. Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Das Ringen um den nationalen Staat: die Gründung und der innere Ausbau des Deutschen Reiches unter Otto von Bismarck, 1850–1890* (Berlin, 1993).

<sup>139</sup> Quoted from T. C. W. Blanning and David Cannadine, eds. *History and biography: essays in honour of Derek Beales* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 282.

<sup>140</sup> For a review of these books see Bruce Waller, 'Talking points: Bruce Waller looks at the recent debate about modern Germany's greatest statesman', *History Review*, 3 (1998), pp. 41–4.

<sup>141</sup> Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck's Herrschaftstechnik als Problem der gegenwärtigen Historiographie* (München, 1982).

<sup>142</sup> For a well-researched and subtle review of Pflanze's biography, see Hans-Christof Kraus, 'Mythos und Wirklichkeit des Eisernen Kanzlers. Bemerkungen zu einer neuen Bismarck-Biographie', *Der Staat*, 33 (1994), pp. 439–67.

willingness to break the constitution that he recognized in the final analysis no higher authority than the expediency of power.<sup>143</sup> The same can be said of Bismarck's handling of the parties: 'His manipulations fragmented the party structure and reduced the possibility of stable majorities.'<sup>144</sup> Ergo: Bismarck created an 'unfortunate precedent ... upon which men of other aims and other conscience were to capitalize'.<sup>145</sup> Pflanze also tackled the question of Bismarck's 'loyalties'. While Wilhelminian historiography and Nazi ideology had cherished Bismarck as first a German, and then a Prussian, Pflanze, like many of his post 1945 colleagues, set the record straight again: 'His [Bismarck's] aim was not to unify the German cultural nation, but to expand the Prussian state within the limits of the European balance of power.'<sup>146</sup> It was only later that Bismarck styled himself as a German nationalist.

In 1980 Gall's biography of Bismarck came out and received excellent reviews. Unlike Pflanze, Gall did not uncover new sources – his strength was pure analysis. In addition, Gall's focus was not so much on the personal side of Bismarck, but on his relationship with power. The title of his biography was already indicative of this approach: *Bismarck – The White Revolutionary*. Gall was of course not the first to describe Bismarck as a 'white revolutionary'. Ludwig Bambergler had written that: 'one is born a revolutionary. It is the circumstances which decide whether the same person turns into a red or a white one.'<sup>147</sup> (Henry Kissinger, too, had picked up this idea and used it for an essay on Bismarck.)<sup>148</sup> Gall's approach to Bismarck's politics was first to describe the circumstances the chancellor faced and then to see the way he reacted to them. Gall wanted to show how Bismarck, when faced with developments he had not created himself, turned them to his advantage. In this biography, the chancellor was not the great genius who knew and guessed it all well in advance. Gall used one of Bismarck's own quotes to illustrate this point: 'One cannot possibly make history, although one can always learn from it how one should lead the political life of a great people in accordance with their development and their historical destiny.'<sup>149</sup> Though Gall could not help admiring Bismarck's intelligence, he portrayed him after 1871 as the *Zauberlehrling* (sorcerer's apprentice) who had lost the magic touch and was, unlike in Goethe's poem, not saved by his master. This was an appropriate metaphor for the last phase of Bismarck's regime.

The eighties were a good time for Bismarck analysis.<sup>150</sup> Only five years after Gall, another German, this time from the East, presented the first part of his two-volume biography of Bismarck, which simultaneously came out with an East German and a West German publishing house.<sup>151</sup> To the West, Engelberg's approach was a pleasant surprise. The author, wrote, to everyone's relief, in a manner free of any jargon. Yet a

<sup>143</sup> Pflanze, *Period of unification*, p. 14.      <sup>144</sup> Ibid.      <sup>145</sup> Ibid.      <sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>147</sup> Quoted in H. Kissinger, 'The white revolutionary: reflections on Bismarck', *Daedalus*, 97 (1968), pp. 888–924.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. Kissinger: 'You see my idol is not Metternich, my idol is Bismarck.' Quoted in Rudolf Augstein, *Otto von Bismarck* (Frankfurt, 1990).

<sup>149</sup> Bismarck statement of 1892, also quoted in Pflanze, *Period of unification*, p. 16.

<sup>150</sup> See Helmut Scier, 'Bismarck und der Strom der Zeit. Drei neue Biographien und ein Tagungsband', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 256 (1993), pp. 689–709.

<sup>151</sup> Ernst Engelberg, *Bismarck* (Berlin, 1975). The second volume came out in 1990. The book became a bestseller in West Germany. This could have been achieved in East Germany as well but for a miraculous lack of printing paper at the time. As a consequence, only 27,8000 copies were sold, despite a waiting list of 108,000 orders. See Peter Alter, 'Bismarck und die Historiker der DDR', in Jost Döffler and Hans Hübner, eds., *Otto von Bismarck: Person-Politik-Mythos* (Berlin, 1993), p. 24.

positive interpretation of the chancellor was not so unexpected for insiders. Peter Alter showed in his article on 'Bismarck and the DDR historians'<sup>152</sup> that since the early 1980s there had been a growing interest in East Germany in looking at the Prussian past in a fresh way. DDR historians had been increasingly fascinated by the chancellor's 'fighting nature' and seen him as an outsider in his time.<sup>153</sup> The events of 1871 had already been welcomed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.<sup>154</sup> As a result, communist historians in the 1980s interpreted the *Reichsgründung* as a phase of social progress that helped the working class to develop from a national base.<sup>155</sup> Engelberg shared this interpretation. His biography of Bismarck was divided into two volumes. The first went up to 1871 and included extensive new research on Bismarck's ancestors. When it came to Bismarck's first years as a politician (from 1847 onwards) Engelberg used much of the old research of Erich Marcks and A. O. Meyer. His biography is, however, not as narrative as Marcks's but includes (and here there is a slight similarity with Gall) more analysis. Both Gall and Engelberg see Bismarck as someone who tried to control the current of the time and not as a creator of 'that tide'. Engelberg's fascination with Bismarck is clear. Apart from welcoming the events of 1871, Engelberg even defended Bismarck's stand in 1866: 'despite the machinations, [Bismarck] was far from acting like an adventurer... On the contrary his preparations... proved to be prudent.'<sup>156</sup> That Bismarck connected his foreign policy aims with his domestic policy agenda was seen by Engelberg as something which was self-evident. Naturally these domestic policies were criticized, especially the tough *Sozialistengesetze*. However, when it came to analysing Bismarck's character flaws, Engelberg adopted a protective attitude, attributing them to the chancellor's social background, in particular his 'Junker-egoism'. As far as the collapse of the Bismarckian system was concerned, Engelberg made Bismarck's successors responsible for gambling away the inheritance. 1914 was therefore not at all inherent in the chancellor's testament.

A. J. P. Taylor once claimed that historians who wrote about Bismarck all had 'some political axe to grind, they were all concerned to show that he [Bismarck] had failed or ... succeeded'.<sup>157</sup> This in some ways still holds true for the leading generation of German historians of today. In particular Nipperdey,<sup>158</sup> Stürmer,<sup>159</sup> and Mommsen have again and again occupied themselves with Bismarck and often brought, involuntarily, party political aspects into their work. Richard Evans pointed out that if Wehler was 'the counsel for the prosecution, and Nipperdey the counsel for the defence, Mommsen ... stands somewhere in between... he takes a markedly more critical view of the Bismarckian Empire than Nipperdey did'.<sup>160</sup> Andreas Hillgruber, however, is a

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Engels had also once described Bismarck ironically as a 'Royal Prussian Revolutionary'. This was taken seriously by East German historians who admired the revolutionary side of Bismarck. See Alter, 'DDR', p. 19. Some East German historians (like Gustav Seeber, Günter Vogler, and Klaus Vetter) were of the opinion that in 1871 he had been 'above his class'. Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>154</sup> This was in opposition to the German socialists who did not welcome the war. Quoted from Heinz Wolter, *Bismarcks Außenpolitik, 1871-1881* (East Berlin, 1983), p. 5.

<sup>155</sup> Ernst Engelberg, 'Zur politischen Vorbereitung des Krieges', in G. Seeber and K. Noack, eds., *Preußen in der Geschichte nach 1789* (East Berlin, 1983), p. 203.

<sup>157</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *Europe: grandeur and decline* (London, 1967 edn), p. 96.

<sup>158</sup> Who died 1992.

<sup>159</sup> Michael Stürmer, *Bismarck* (München, 1987); idem, *Bismarck und die preußische Politik* (München, 1978); idem, *Die Reichsgründung* (München, 1984).

<sup>160</sup> Richard J. Evans, 'From unification to world war', *German Historical Institute Bulletin* (London, 1996), p. 15.

Bismarck expert who is more difficult to categorize. In his studies Hillgruber focused, in particular, on the limits of German foreign policy (i.e. Bismarck's endeavours to protect Germany from the results of its foundation) and showed how Bismarck struggled to work within these limitations.<sup>161</sup> For Hillgruber, Bismarck had sometimes just simply been lucky. Had not Napoleon already seen *fortune* as a vital prerequisite for his generals?

In the summer of 1998 a new 'Bismarck Renaissance' seemed suddenly to set in. Two conferences,<sup>162</sup> a memorial speech by Kissinger,<sup>163</sup> as well as a television show, tried to resurrect him in the public mind.<sup>164</sup> Bismarck coffee table books,<sup>165</sup> a Bismarck lexicon,<sup>166</sup> two portraits<sup>167</sup> as well as two biographies<sup>168</sup> of Bismarck came out in 1997 and 1998. The two short portraits written by Voker Ulrich and Theo Schwarzmüller respectively are good summaries of Bismarck's life written in a style which will be a pleasure for history students and laymen alike to read.<sup>169</sup> Both authors are balanced in their verdict on Bismarck's achievements and failures and, especially in Schwarzmüller's case, leave room for anecdotes as well as beautiful illustrations.<sup>170</sup> The new biographies by Willms and Krockow, however, try to adopt a more scholarly air and fail miserably. Both of them are in their different ways a reaction against all that has been achieved by Pflanze, Gall, and Engelberg. Krockow has obviously fallen in love with proverbs of Bismarck and quotes them at length (which perhaps reflects the author's intention to show Bismarck's 'artistic side'). To Krockow, Bismarck is, once more, the 'creator' who guessed it all. He defends Bismarck against Crankshaw's critical biography, yet at the same time has to admit that his hero is fallible (for example, he makes Bismarck fully

<sup>161</sup> Andreas Hillgruber, *Otto von Bismarck: Gründer der europäischen Großmacht Deutsches Reich* (Göttingen, 1978). Bismarck's relationship with France, Austria, England, and Russia to this day still remains of greatest interest to historians and has even left an impact on politicians. When, after German reunification in 1990, the Soviet ambassador to Bonn expressed his hopes that his country would be as close to Germany as during Bismarck's time, Helmut Kohl did not seem to be pleased. Perhaps he is, after all, too good a historian to fall for this compliment. Russia was for Bismarck a sometimes useful, but not much loved and often feared, partner.

<sup>162</sup> The first one in Bad Kissingen in July 1998 under the title 'Bismarck und die politische Kultur in Deutschland'; the second one in Friedrichsruh in October 1998 on 'Bismarck und der Osten'.

<sup>163</sup> Given in Friedrichsruh on 13 July 1998. See Friedemann Bedürftig, 'Kissinger und das Kissinger Diktat', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 15 July 1998, p. 12.

<sup>164</sup> Amongst others, the *Spiegel* ran a cover story on Bismarck and Fontane. Rudolf Augstein, 'Heros und Heulhuber', *Der Spiegel*, 6 July 1998. Ferdinand von Bismarck tried to defend his great-grandfather against such 'press criticism'. See 'Eine Lanze für meinen Urgroßvater', *Welt am Sonntag*, 12 July 1998, p. 31.

<sup>165</sup> Lothar Gall, *Bismarck. Lebensbilder* (Bergisch Gladbach, 1998). There is also a new book on Bismarck's marriage and family life: Waltraud Engelberg, *Otto und Johanna von Bismarck* (München, 1998), as well as a little monograph about his death: Lothar Machtan, *Bismarcks Tod und Deutschlands Tränen* (München, 1998).

<sup>166</sup> Friedemann Bedürftig, *Taschenlexikon Bismarck* (München, 1998).

<sup>167</sup> Volker Ulrich, *Otto von Bismarck* (Hamburg, 1998); Theo Schwarzmüller, *Otto von Bismarck* (München, 1998).

<sup>168</sup> Christian Graf von Krockow, *Bismarck* (Stuttgart, 1997); Johannes Willms, *Bismarck – Dämon der Deutschen* (München, 1997).

<sup>169</sup> See Hans-Cristof Kraus, 'Die große Gabe des Maßhaltens. Zwei kleine Biographien Otto von Bismarcks', in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 July 1998, p. 11.

<sup>170</sup> For example, the picture by A. Lemerrier 'Notre drapeau quand même', showing three ladies wearing blue, white, and red dresses in 1871 shortly after it had been forbidden to wear the tricolours in Alsace Lorraine. See Schwarzmüller, *Otto von Bismarck*, p. 122.

responsible for the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war).<sup>171</sup> 'No one dies before fulfilling his task, some survive the fulfilment of their task', wrote the German philosopher and novelist Ernst Jünger. It is an argument that Johannes Willms might have used against Bismarck. His book is more a pamphlet than a biography, full of hatred for the man who, in the eyes of Willms, made it impossible to unite the Germans. In a very old-fashioned way Willms portrays Bismarck again as the brutal Junker who raped the 'honourable spinster' *Germania*. To him, Bismarck is not a revolutionary at all, but someone who continued the tradition of the Prussian *Staatsräson*. Willms even brings up the old *Sonderweg* discussion – it was Bismarck who was responsible for the catastrophes of the twentieth century.

The latest 1998 assessment of Bismarck has shown that his personality is still surrounded by many myths. Though the majority of historians have succeeded in showing the complexity of the chancellor's personality, some, to this day, do not seem to have emancipated themselves from the historical problems which troubled earlier generations. Fortunately for future historians, it will probably never be possible to write the definitive biography of Bismarck. His contemporary Fontane, the centenary of whose death was also celebrated in 1998, had realized this when he tried to write his own portrait of Bismarck. Today he might have said about the never-ending analysis of his chancellor's personality: 'Es ist ein zu weites Feld.'

<sup>171</sup> Krockow, *Bismarck*, p. 223.