

**A HISTORY OF THE MÜNSTER
ANABAPTISTS**

**Other Work by Friedrich Reck-Malleczewen
in English Translation**

Diary of a Man in Despair

Other Books by George B. von der Lippe

Max Schmeling: An Autobiography (Edited and translated)

*The Figure of Martin Luther in Twentieth-Century German Literature:
The Metamorphosis of a National Symbol*

A History of the Münster Anabaptists

Inner Emigration and the Third Reich

A Critical Edition of
Friedrich Reck-Malleczewen's
Bockelson: A Tale of Mass Insanity

Translated and Edited by
George B. von der Lippe and
Viktoria M. Reck-Malleczewen

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A HISTORY OF THE MÜNSTER ANABAPTISTS

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*This work is dedicated to the memory
of Dr. Leonard Paul Stoltz.*

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Translator's Preface

Friedrich Reck-Malleczewen was born on August 11, 1884 into a family of East Prussian landed gentry (Junkers) on the estate Gut Malleczewen, the only remainder of which is a small cemetery in what is today Elk, Poland. From his early memories he wrote that “home . . . was those lonely estates, the broad snowfields, crystal blue lakes in the jewels of autumn—golden beech forests, November fogs. . . . Those expansive plains between the mountain ranges which stretch from the Urals down to Eastern Prussia are desolate, sparsely populated, and filled with demons and dusky gods. Western Germans, even those from just west of the Weichsel (Vistula) River, will never understand this world” (Irmgard Reck-Malleczewen, 21, our translation). For Reck, East Prussia would always be a realm unto itself, at once German and Slavic.

Although family expectations were for him to enter the military or political realm, young Reck's greater interest was for music, and he later studied medicine at the Universities of Königsberg and Innsbruck. He then worked a stint as a ship's doctor, which would give him material for later travel novels. Thereafter he began devoting the majority of his professional life to journalism, while music and the study of history were lifelong passions that would always occupy a portion of his time.

Reck moved south and continued to pursue his literary career as a theater critic for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in Stuttgart. In 1925 he acquired the estate Poing bei Truchtlaching in the Bavarian Chiemgau region, where he would remarry in 1935 and start a second family of three daughters.¹ Writing, much of which were travel and adventure novels as well as some historical novels (a body of work largely written off by critics as so-called *Trivialliteratur*), was his occupation during the Weimar Republic (1918–1933) and the years of the Third Reich (1933 to his death at Dachau concentration camp in 1945).

Reck was most certainly a conservative, indeed, an outspoken monarchist and self-styled aristocrat² (which did not endear him in every quarter) who felt the ill-fated Weimar Republic to be a political mistake, yet who after 1933 came to realize that Hitler's Third Reich would be so much worse—a fatal, all-encompassing disaster of immeasurable proportions. In 1933 Reck converted to Catholicism, which he felt to be “the last bulwark against society's increasing coarsening and loss of individuality” (Reck, *Bockelson*, 24, our translation). The intensity of Reck's complete disdain for Hitler and the Nazi regime and the boldness with which he openly expressed it would only increase in direct proportion to the increase of repression and atrocities within the Third Reich.

In a review of the 2000-edition English translation of Reck's *Diary of a Man in Despair*, Jason Cowley wrote of Reck-Malleczewen: “A cultural conservative, monarchist, snob and extreme pessimist, Reck is a man out of a time, at once listlessly estranged from German modernity and mournfully engaged with it. His prose has a superb *hauteur* and he addresses the world out of the absurd aristocracy of his background. . . . He despises industrialism, mass-man and the ‘termite-heap’ society, Prussian militarism, the new ‘Business German’ spoken by the swarming hordes in Berlin, ‘processed food’ and the petty bureaucrats of Nazism. . . . But, above all, he despises Adolf Hitler. . . .” (Cowley, 53–54). This is indeed a unique individual who, in writing and publishing *Bockelson* while remaining in Nazi Germany, aimed and landed a direct literary blow to the Adolf Hitler whom he loathed beyond all else.

Reck's “prose of superb *hauteur*” often presents one with a challenging read, and it is an even more challenging undertaking for the translator who attempts to retain Reck's style of overwrought and elitist nineteenth-century prose, while at the same time investing the work with the requisite clarity for an English-language reader of the twenty-first century. Though relatively unknown, Reck-Malleczewen's name fits prominently into the phenomenon in German literary and cultural history that was only later given the name *Inner Emigration*. Inner emigrants were writers, artists, and scholars from everywhere across the political spectrum, who remained in Germany during the Third Reich and sought to express varying degrees of protest to the Hitler regime.³

To better explain Reck and his work within the context of Inner Emigration, it is best to pose a few questions. How much of Reck's Bockelson figure can be ascribed to Reck's hatred of Adolf Hitler? What literary techniques did Reck use to establish parallels between

Bockelson/Münster and Hitler/Third Reich such that *Bockelson* would be published (it was, if only briefly) while keeping himself out of harm's way (which ultimately he could not do)?

The first consideration—the relationship of Reck's Bockelson figure to Adolf Hitler—is best addressed by consulting Reck's diary; covering the period from August 11, 1936 to October 1944, it was first published in 1947 and translated into English in 1970. One need not read far to find definitive statements with respect to Hitler: "I saw Hitler last in Seebruck, slowly gliding by in a car with armor-plated sides . . . : a jellylike, slag-gray face, a moonface into which two melancholy jet-black eyes had been set like raisins. . . . What I saw gliding by there . . . like the Prince of Darkness himself. . . was no human being" (*Diary*, 22–23). Compare a description of Hitler contained in the April 1939 entry of Reck's *Diary* with a Bockelson description, already published in 1937:

But Bockelson? His are the blurred and gelatinous features of a bastard born in a roadside ditch, of the barkeep and pimp. . . . (*Bockelson*, 12)

I examined [Hitler's] face through my binoculars. The whole of it waggled with unhealthy cushions of fat; it hung, it was all slack without structure—slaggy, gelatinous, sick." (*Diary*, 75)

The parallels between Reck's Bockelson and Hitler are clear and unmistakable.

In that the majority of Reck's diary was written *after* the completion and publication of *Bockelson*, it would appear that the Bockelson and Hitler figures were interchangeable for Reck—a single personification of evil whom Reck had openly presented to a German readership with the 1937 publication of *Bockelson*. In his *Diary* entry for September 9, 1937 Reck writes: "My friends have taken the occasion to give me warning about my own writings. . . . Night after night, I hide this record deep in the woods on my land . . . constantly on the watch lest I am observed, constantly changing my hiding place" (*Diary*, 42).⁴ Hence, a great deal of that journal's content which Reck felt the need to hide "night after night" would have already been reviewed by Nazi censors and published as the political-historical roman à clef, *Bockelson: Geschichte eines Massenwahns*.

Reck's means of getting his text published fall into several basic categories. First there is Reck's primary layer of historical cover: Bockelson's reign over the Münster Anabaptist community of 1534–1535 is the perfect metaphor, as the average person knew little or nothing about it; a secondary layer is afforded by the French

Revolution, about which Reck knew a great deal; further layers consist of historical figures and events from numerous times and places. In short, *Bockelson* abounds in historical red herrings whose often vague relevance to the text at hand could serve to distract and confuse even the most astute reader. Consider an example of a dangerously clear observation followed immediately by a questionably relevant statement concerning the French Revolution: “*Ein König aufrecht über alles. Ein Gott, ein Glaube, eine Taufe...*” (“One King upright above all. One God, one faith, one baptism”). And so we would appear to have come to a parallel with the French Revolution, at that juncture when the states are consolidated and when Napoleon settled in St. Cloud and Malmaison, and persecuted the Jacobins and called for the old emigrated aristocracy to return” (Reck, *Bockelson*, 127). Hence a telling blow is not left simply hanging in midair to be picked off by Nazi censors but is rather followed immediately by a flurry of almost non-sequitur details concerning the French Revolution.

The reader may also be drawn into a pastiche of obscure historical characters and then hit with another Bockelson-as-Hitler jibe, fortuitously attributed to someone else (i.e., Kerssenbroch): “Back then the memory of Karl von Luxemburg and the first Maximilian still lives on in their hearts and when we hear today the reports written around 1450 by lady-in-waiting Helene Kottaner about the crowning of a Hungarian King who was then but four weeks old, so the hymns to the mystical crowns of the Middle Ages still sing to us today. . . . But here fate would have it that someone born in a gutter grabs for the crown—a ‘theater king and commander of whores’ as Kerssenbroch so liked to call him. . . .” (Reck, *Bockelson*, 120–121) In this instance a series of somewhat interesting but ultimately confusing historical jabs allow Reck to land an unexpected and therefore all-the-more punishing shot at the Bockelson-Hitler figure.

Reck’s prose itself, at times academic and arcane, and at times appearing to be simply chaotic and labyrinthine, serves, at least initially, to deflect the notion that therein lies an abiding hatred of Hitler and the Third Reich. Seemingly pompous conventions such as Latin chapter titles,⁵ liberal sprinklings of Latin, French, and old *Plattdeutsch* (Lowland German), as well as numerous historical, literary, and biblical references, support the initial impression that *Bockelson* is nothing more than a scholarly treatise on a little-known incident in German history.

Equally important, *Bockelson* abounds with instances of anti-Bolshevist sentiments and jargon, all sincere expressions of monarchist Reck’s true feelings, yet which could only have improved *Bockelson*’s

chances of being published in the Third Reich of 1937. Consider the following masterstroke at the end of *Bockelson*, which was aimed at Hitler but could have been even more readily applied to Stalin: "It was not religious visions and hallucinations which motivated this first soviet republic, but rather...there was a great political gangster fanning the flames under his witches' cauldron..." (Reck, *Bockelson*, 203). It is indeed ironic that a consistent layer of generally anti-leftist and specifically anti-Bolshevist content would facilitate the publication of a work so brimming with hatred for the fascist Hitler and his regime.

We must ask as well, who was Fritz Reck-Malleczewen in 1937? He was certainly not Thomas Mann, Bertolt Brecht, or Ernst Toller. The arbiters of Nazi culture were simply not expecting serious political protest from this lesser-known author of so-called *Trivialliteratur*. Those who might have been aware of Reck's ultraconservative politics would not have considered him likely to criticize Hitler or the Third Reich. Indeed, Reck's literary/political reputation—or lack of thereof—may well have helped get *Bockelson* by Nazi censors to whom our perspective of literary hindsight was not available.

Reck's tale of a late-medieval theocratic dictatorship was directed at Hitler and the Third Reich, yet it could apply to any number of demagogues and totalitarian regimes before or since the Nazis; and we of a certain age cannot help but think of Jonestown or David Koresh and the Branch Davidians.⁶ But isn't terror spawned by fundamentalist religion a fear with which we have all lived since that otherwise beautiful fall day of September 11, 2001? Reck's *Bockelson: A Tale of Mass Insanity* was written about a sixteenth-century nightmare of approximately eighteen-months duration and costing thousands of lives; but more essentially it was a literary weapon courageously aimed at an even more terrifying twentieth-century nightmare which lasted twelve years and cost millions of lives. Perhaps the great tragedy of Reck-Malleczewen's *Bockelson* is that it will no doubt *always* apply to numerous times and places.

Reading *Bockelson*, we can only marvel at Reck's historical and personal foresight—his vision took in and recorded not only that which had happened or was happening but also foreshadowed in Münster's collapse the fall of the Third Reich with all its consequences. At the outbreak of World War II, Reck wrote: "I have no doubt that immeasurable suffering is coming, and that it could not be avoided. But I also have no doubt about the thing that has sustained me for six years and maintained me in the darkest hours of my life... the certainty that today the great monster signed his own death

warrant" (*Diary*, 84). As the war escalated, Reck's journal entry for June 1941, foresees that "It is entirely possible . . . that I myself will be pulled by the eddies from this latest stroke of Hitler's genius, and dragged down" (*Diary*, 122).

It has always been thought that Reck died in February or March of 1945. Yet Nico Rost—also a prisoner at Dachau— tells in his diary entry for April 15, 1945 of a haunting encounter with another inmate:

Early this morning as I was at the desk waiting for today's death list—another two hundred names—a man spoke to me. He was about sixty, very nervous and totally exhausted. He was shaking and swaying, and his speech was so convoluted that at first, I really didn't know what he wanted. After a while I understood that he had been a patient but now had to be reassigned to his block. . . .

I asked him for his name. . . .

"Friedrich Reck-Malleczewen."

Immediately I asked, "Not the writer Reck-Malleczewen?"

He saw that I suddenly took greater interest in him.

"Yes, that's me, do you know my books? . . ."

An hour later . . .

When I think back now about my encounter [with Reck-Malleczewen], doubts start to arise. Surely this man's name was Reck-Malleczewen, but was he really the writer? Could it be that his instant, "Yes," to my question was simply a desperate grasp at what he hoped might be a straw that would save him? In any case, if he had tried to deceive me, I certainly forgive him. (Rost, 279–281, our translation)

In a tribute appearing in the 1946 and 1968 German editions of *Bockelson*, Reck's wife Irmgard tells of an end that should not have happened—which came in the very last days of the regime that Reck had consistently opposed:

His fate caught up with him shortly before the collapse of the regime. Some contemptible informer started the avalanche in motion. On the last day of December 1944 he was arrested and dragged off to Dachau. "A judgment? There is no judgment, since there is no crime," was the Gestapo's verbatim explanation to Reck's family. They learned that he was put into "special treatment," and in March the family was notified that he had already "died" in February. Some of his things were handed over to his wife. Much was missing, but there was a letter amongst them which showed that in the end he had been able to overcome hatred and bitterness—that "cancer of the soul" which had haunted

him all throughout the last years of his life—and to sacrifice his life for and to serve that which had always underlain his every endeavor. He closed the letter with: “If you want to honor my memory, repay evil with kindness, indeed, with active help.” (Irmgard Reck-Malleczewen, *Bockelson*, 27)

Reck's detractors—and there have been many—might do well to read *Bockelson* and reflect on the resolve with which he openly opposed unmitigated evil, as well as the courage with which he paid the ultimate price.

George B. von der Lippe

Notes

1. Reck and his first wife, Anna Büttner married in 1908 while Reck was still a university student. They shared a passionate love of music and had four children together but had been separated and then divorced for a number of years at the time he married Irmgard von Borke, the adopted daughter of a close friend.
2. Part of the role that Reck himself quite consciously chose to play was his transformation of the name Reck to a hyphenated “Reck-Malleczewen,” in support of the aristocratic image that he sought to project. In his *Diary* entry for July 25, 1944 he writes: “I derive from monarchical patterns of thinking. I was brought up as a monarchist, and continued existence of the monarchy is one of the foundation stones of my physical well-being” (*Diary*, 196).
3. An excellent collection of recent scholarship on Inner Emigration is to be found in the volume *Flight of Fantasy: New Perspectives on Inner Emigration in German Literature 1933–1945*, edited by Neil H. Donahue and Doris Kirchner.
4. Viktoria Reck-Malleczewen recalls being allowed once to accompany her father to bury his diary under a crabapple tree in an orchard on the Reck-Malleczewen property at Poing.
5. Chapter titles are given in English, with Reck's original Latin titles in parentheses.
6. Of the two cult tragedies, the episode of the Branch Davidians, where a compound in Waco Texas became a latter-day Zion of Münster under siege, resonates most strongly:

In addition to the public drama of a prolonged standoff, we have both parties refusing to negotiate for anything less than total surrender, . . . a final solution that was marked by unnecessary brutality, and the deaths of many people who had taken the wrong path, following the wrong man. The chief rebels, Jan van Leyden and Vernon Howell [David Koresh], were both self-created young men who changed their identities; both saw

themselves in the form of the biblical David; both usurped the authority of the previous prophet; both lacked formal education but had a thorough knowledge of the Bible and complete recall of it; both were talented performers with a marked artistic bent; both took more wives than the law, secular or religious, allowed; both were cunning, unscrupulous, and, in Jan's case at least, murderous; and both were capable of inspiring great affection despite all that was known to be reprehensible about them. (Arthur, 199)

Conservative Opposition: Friedrich Reck-Malleczewen's Antifascist Novel *Bockelson: A History of Mass Hysteria*

Karl-Heinz Schoeps

For authors of *inner emigration* it was not possible to comment with impunity on the contemporary political situation within the Third Reich using contemporary subjects. Therefore, authors were forced to find modes of indirect critique that would, first, avoid censorship and reprisal, and second, deliver critical commentary staking out positions at odds with state ideology, or at least allowing for an openness of interpretation, even if it at times amounted to inscrutability. One way to accomplish this sort of indirect critique was through “historical camouflage,”¹ that is, by using the past to illuminate the present. One of the best examples of this technique is Reinhold Schneider’s *Las Casas before Charles V* (*Las Casas vor Karl V*, 1938). Another method of critical indirection (and here, dislocation) was to use exotic lands as the setting, as did Werner Bergengruen in his novel *The Supreme Dictator and the Court* (*Der Grosstyran und das Gericht*, 1935), Ernst Juenger in his novel *On the Marble Cliffs* (*Auf den Marmorklippen*, 1939), or Ernst Wiechert in his short novel *The White Buffalo* (*Der Weisse Büffel*, 1937, first published in 1946). Though less well known than all of these other authors in *inner emigration*, the Protestant East Prussian turned Catholic Bavarian monarchist Friedrich Percyval Reck-Malleczewen (1884–1945) used the historic Anabaptist rule of 1534–1535 in the city of Münster to present the most trenchant criticism of National Socialist rule to appear in print in those years within Germany.

In 1533, four hundred years before the Nazis came to power in Germany and in the wake of Martin Luther’s reformation, the Westphalian city of Münster experienced increasing inner turmoil

that threatened to erupt into civil war. Lutheranism had reached Münster in the early 1530s as it had all other German lands, but neither Catholicism nor Lutheranism was firmly in control in the city. Under the leadership of Bernhard Rothmann, who had the support of the guilds, the Reformation was officially recognized in the Treaty of Dülmen in February of 1533 (after an attack on the episcopal court in Telgte in 1532). Soon the Lutherans who dominated the city council set out to secure the Reformation. But this was only the beginning of the bloody struggle that was to rage in Münster for the next two years. For Rothmann, the city reformer, Luther's reform did not go far enough; he wanted to introduce what he perceived as true Christianity in Münster. At issue were communion (Rothmann favored Zwingli's "that means the body of Christ" vs. Luther's "that is the body of Christ") and Baptism (Rothmann opposed the baptism of children, thereby turning against the prevailing law of the land "geltendes Reichsrecht"). He and his followers challenged the city council and, after three fierce clashes, gained a majority in the council elections of February 23, 1534. To quote Hans-Jürgen Goertz, an authority on the age of Reformation: "The Anabaptists therefore gained power legally by successfully exploiting an unstable situation where Lutheran and Zwinglian tendencies were competing against each other over the Reformation, and guilds were struggling for control of the council" (Goertz, 30). The Anabaptist movements were by no means restricted to Münster but found adherents and prophets in all German lands. Some were more radical than others, some were more militant than others. All of them, however, thought they were the chosen few and all of them were more or less brutally persecuted.

However, it was only in the city of Münster that they gained power for a short while—16 months, to be exact, from February 23, 1534 to June 25, 1535, when Münster was recaptured by imperial troops. One of the better-known Anabaptist prophets, Melchior Hoffmann . . . had selected the city of Strasbourg as the new Jerusalem. Instrumental in gaining power in Münster were prophets from abroad and their followers, notably Jan Matthijs (or Mathtys), a baker from Leiden and one of Hoffmann's disciples, who had arrived in Münster in February 1534 and, in particular, Jan van Leiden, also called Bockelson (after his father Bockel), an actor, playwright, and tailor who had quit his professions to open a bar. Their teachings appealed particularly to women (Ranke, 541), who played an important part in Matthijs's and Bockelson's ascension to power. But Münster was not enough for their ambition. According to Johan Dusentschnuer, one

of the new prophets and Bockelson's official spokesman or, in modern terms, "propaganda minister," the Anabaptist revolution should spread throughout the world: "As Johan Dusentschnuer proclaimed, the renewal of the world should issue from Münster" (Klötzer, 165). Münster figured as the center of salvation for the whole world (the "salvational center of the imminent renewal of the world," Klötzer, 160). Missionaries were sent into surrounding cities to proselytize their citizens.

When Jan Matthijs died on Easter in 1534 in a fight with imperial troops who beleaguered the city, Jan van Leiden succeeded him as leader. Proclaimed king of the city by Dusentschnuer, he erected a theocratic dictatorship, ruthlessly persecuting all enemies. Bockelson abolished the city council and replaced it with a council of twelve elders. Catholic icons were destroyed and pictures, books, documents, and even musical instruments were burned in the marketplace; only the Bible was spared and became the sole ideological guide for the community. Dissidents were either killed or forced to leave town; their belongings were confiscated and became communal property. New laws were introduced that abolished private property and sanctioned polygamy. All valuable metals were confiscated. However, not all of these measures were introduced for purely ideological reasons as Hermann von Kerksenbroch, one of the first and contemporary chroniclers of Anabaptist rule in Münster, claimed (Laubach, 194). According to Ernst Laubach, there was also a military necessity for this measure as the city came under increasing pressure from Bishop Count Franz von Waldeck's forces (Laubach, 184). Metals were needed for defensive purposes, social tensions had to be reduced by abolishing private property, and since women outnumbered men by a vast margin, polygamy seemed to make some sense; it was not done for the personal pleasure of the chief prophet Bockelson, at least not primarily (as Kerksenbroch maintained). The leveling of church spires was not wanton destruction but was carried out to create effective platforms for defensive weaponry and observation posts.

A new city ordinance made the respected citizen and merchant Knipperdolling, who was Bockelson's right-hand man, the official "bearer of the sword," in other words police chief of Münster (not executioner, as Kerksenbroch would have it). Bockelson was a gifted orator and had the support of the majority of the citizens. His claim to be a divinely selected leader was bolstered by his military victories against the sieging forces and by the failure of an ill-prepared coup against him. Bockelson saw himself as a "King on David's throne" whose mission was to prepare the millennium rule of Christ. When

the military situation deteriorated after the Bishop's forces had effectively blockaded the city and gained the upper hand, Bockelson emphasized the need for sporting events and games to divert people from the grim realities of hunger, destruction, and the daily chores of keeping up the defenses, a task to which every citizen, whether male or female, young or old, had to contribute. Draconian punishments were meted out for traitors and defeatists. Up to the very end Bockelson and his followers hoped that new weapons and a reserve army of Anabaptists from the Netherlands would change the desperate military situation and lead to final victory. But that was not to be; Bockelson's theocratic dictatorship finally failed. The Bishop's forces finally captured the city at great cost to attackers and defenders alike. Rothmann died in the final battle (or possibly escaped, according to Dülmen, 354), Bockelson and Knipperdolling were captured, interrogated, tortured, executed, and their bodies displayed in iron cages suspended from the tower of the Lamberti church. Münster was again saved for Catholicism (and has remained Catholic to this day).

This then is the historical background for Friedrich Percyval Reck-Malleczewen's chronical of the Anabaptist rule in Münster, *Bockelson: A History of Mass Hysteria*, which was published inside Germany in 1937. Reck-Malleczewen followed the historical events very closely and used a number of sources including Kerksenbrock and Gresbeck, both eyewitnesses of the events in Münster (albeit with a bias against the Anabaptists), as well as the eminent nineteenth-century historian Leopold Ranke. To lend an air of historical authenticity to his work Reck-Malleczewen quotes liberally from his sources in Latin and low German. He uses footnotes and a bibliography citing his sources. Ranke had postulated that history be studied objectively and "sine ira et studio," that is, without anger and passion. Reck-Malleczewen, in his chronicle, followed the opposite path (i.e., "cum ira et studio"). But Reck-Malleczewen's intention was not to achieve historical objectivity. On the contrary, he openly criticizes Ranke for his misplaced objectivity and asserts: "The times of wanting to understand at any price are gone until further notice. In writing history as well" (136). In searching for a convenient vehicle to publish his criticism of the Nazis within Nazi Germany, Reck-Malleczewen chanced upon the Anabaptist rule in Münster.² In this context objectivity and understanding were the last things he needed; both were replaced by attack and polemics. The subject matter Reck-Malleczewen selected for his attack on National Socialism was cleverly chosen because the Anabaptist rule in Münster in the sixteenth century provided, indeed, a number of striking parallels to Nazi rule in Germany in the twentieth

century, particularly when seen through the eyes of some of Reck-Malleczewen's sources: Kerssenbroch wrote from a Catholic stance, and Heinrich Gresbeck was a traitor who had deserted to the Bishop's side and helped to bring about the fall of Münster. Even Reck-Malleczewen noted in his book that neither of them had reason to present Bockelson and his rule in a positive light and may have overshot their goal (66), but by and large the conservative Reck-Malleczewen agreed with them and followed their lead. In reading sixteenth-century sources Reck-Malleczewen was struck by the parallels between Bockelson's rule in Münster and Hitler's rule in Germany, as he noted in his diary (published posthumously in 1947 as *Tagebuch eines Verzweifelten*, translated into English in 1970 as *Diary of a Man in Despair*) on 11 August 1936, and I quote this reference to Nazi Germany almost in its entirety:

I have been working on my book about the Münster city-state set up by the Anabaptist heretics in the sixteenth century. I read accounts of the 'kingdom of Zion' by contemporaries, and I am shaken. In every respect down to the most ridiculous details, that was the forerunner of what we are now enduring. Like the Germany of today, the Münster city-state for years separated itself from the civilized world; like Nazi Germany, it was hugely successful over a long period of time, and appeared invincible. And then, suddenly, against all expectation and over a comparable trifle it collapsed. . . . As in our case, a misbegotten failure conceived, so to speak, in the gutter, became the great prophet, and the opposition simply disintegrated, while the rest of the world looked on in astonishment and incomprehension. As with us . . . , hysterical females, schoolmasters, renegade priests, the dregs and outsiders from everywhere formed the main supports of the regime. I have to delete some of the parallels in order not to jeopardize myself any more than I already have. A thin sauce of ideology covered lewdness, greed, sadism, and fathomless lust for power, in Münster, too, and whoever would not completely accept the new teaching was turned over to the executioner. The same role of official murderer played by Hitler in the Röhm Putsch was acted out by Bockelson in Münster. As with us, Spartan laws were promulgated to control the *misera plebs*, but these did not apply to him or his followers. Bockelson also surrounded himself with bodyguards, and was beyond the reach of any would-be assassin. As with us, there were street meetings and "voluntary contributions," refusal of which meant proscription. As with us, the masses were drugged: folk festivals, useless construction, anything and everything, to keep the man in the street from a moment's pause to reflect.

Exactly as Nazi Germany has done, Münster sent its fifth columns and prophets forth to undermine neighboring states. The fact that the

Münster propaganda chief, Dusentschnur [*sic*], limped like Goebbels is a joke which history spent four hundred years preparing: a fact which I, familiar as I am with the vindictiveness of our Minister of Lies, have most advisedly omitted in my book [he didn't, actually—KHS]. Constructed on a foundation of lies there existed for a short time between the Middle Ages and modern times a bandits' regime. It threatened all the established world—Kaiser, nobility, and all the old relationships. And it was all designed to still the hunger for mastery of a couple of power-mad thugs. A few things have yet to happen to complete the parallel. In the besieged Münster of 1534, the people were driven to swallow their own excrement, to eat their own children. This could happen to us, too, just as Hitler and his sycophants face the same inevitable end as Bockelson and Knipperdolling. (trans. Rubens, 19–20).

In Reck-Malleczewen's interpretation, Bockelson is a precursor of the Nazi dictator with whom he shared many negative attributes. He bears, Reck-Malleczewen writes, "the degenerate traits of a bastard born in the gutter . . . who dabbled in literature . . . who probably was a great artist in the eyes of his followers" (11).³ Both Bockelson and Hitler were would-be artists: Hitler was a painter (of sorts).⁴ For Reck-Malleczewen, Bockelson is nothing but a charlatan and an idle prattler, "basically a miserable and unimportant creature who could only emerge briefly in times of turmoil. History occasionally allows itself the cruel joke . . . to make a nonentity into a center of great events . . . but only for a short time" (12). Reck-Malleczewen's chronicle, then, is more than the story of this prophet; it is "the story of a demonic German intoxication during which all those devils and evil spirits escaped into the open from the hidden recesses of the soul, devils and spirits which up to then had only been depicted on Gothic canvases" (12). Hysterical mobs roamed through the streets of Münster proclaiming the end of the world. "Münster," Reck-Malleczewen comments, "has gone mad overnight" (17). Reck-Malleczewen's description of Anabaptist rule in Münster follows history but with its own slant, emphasizing parallels to National Socialist rule in Germany four hundred years later, omitting events that did not fit his theory, and showing the Anabaptists entirely as victimizers and not as the victims they certainly also were. Occasionally, Reck-Malleczewen's language even mimics Nazi language. After the council elections of February 1534, Reck-Malleczewen constructs an analogy to the appeasement policies toward the Nazis of the 1930s, in which the old council tries to negotiate and appease the Anabaptist rebels instead of opposing their

terror with a firm hand. In Reck-Malleczewen's view, determined opposition at this time would have saved thousands of lives later. Thus, the old order collapses without any resistance; its insignia are destroyed and streets are renamed to erase all memory of earlier times—exactly as in Nazi Germany. Some people emigrate, but most citizens fall for this madness. Citing threats from abroad the authorities strengthen their words, “it is the old game of all revolutionary states and cities to divert the attention of the masses from their real plans” (17). The outlook for Münster looks bleak indeed and the Anabaptist Reich is in danger, but Reck-Malleczewen, with clear reference to the situation within Nazi Germany, addresses the city of Münster with words of comfort: “Do not give up and do not bury your head in the sand” (33–34). Adherents of the old beliefs, now called “godless,” are forced out of town, even killed, their possessions confiscated.

With the intolerant Nazi policies in mind Reck-Malleczewen describes how Anabaptists destroyed and plundered churches and cathedrals, burned books—except the Bible—and encouraged residents to identify traitors (imagined and real). Knipperdolling is stylized into a Freisler whose sword threatens all who resist, complain, or criticize those in power. The influential prophet Dusentschnuer assumes traits of Goebbels: “The word of this limping prophet counts a great deal in Münster. One day in September...he runs to the market square shouting that Johann Bockelson, God's holy man, will rule as king not only of Münster but over the whole world and all nobility of the Reich” (83). Just like Goebbels, the Anabaptists made effective use of propaganda, the goal being, as Reck-Malleczewen terms it in obvious analogy to the language of the Third Reich (or *lingua tertii imperti* [LTI], as Victor Klemperer called it), the “propagandistic disintegration of the enemy” (propagandistische Zersetzung des Gegners, 57). Rothmann's propaganda leaflets spread through missionaries and shot into the Bishop's camps around Münster, have the desired effect; some of the Bishop's soldiers join the Anabaptists and new Anabaptist communities emerge in the country. Reck-Malleczewen's venom is directed especially at Rothmann, the intellectual instigator (*intellektueller Drahtzieher*, 115) behind all the evils of Anabaptist rule. He sarcastically calls him “dear Rothman” throughout his book and holds him responsible for all the misery and crime committed in the name of the new millennium, the Thousand Year Reich, envisioned by the prophets of Münster.

In describing the end of Anabaptist rule Reck-Malleczewen even anticipated the end of Nazi rule. The new rulers of Münster do not

have time to savor their victories; the opposing forces have regrouped and tightened the ring around the city. Shortages of food lead to rationing and hunger. Even games and other entertainment can no longer distract the populace from the misery of their situation and the lavishness of the king's court. The situation seems hopeless, but the king prepares for a final victory. He promotes some of his vassals to dukes and promises them lands he has yet to conquer. He responds to criticism with increased terror and forces every remaining citizen to contribute to the defense of the city. The final struggle (*Endkampf*) is a struggle for life and death, which can only end in the destruction of one side or the other. Bockelson wants to defend the city at any cost and appeals to his followers to persevere (*durchhalten*). But in the end the forces of the Bishop capture the city in a bloody battle; the expected relief armies from the Netherlands and the new weaponry in which Bockelson (and the Nazis) believe to the very end never materialize. Bockelson and Knipperdolling are caught, tried, and executed; Rothmann is never seen again and probably dies in the fighting. Before his judges Bockelson recants and promises collaboration against other Anabaptists. In Reck-Malleczewen's view, the great king of Zion turns out to be "a reckless psychopath whom history allowed to play for a time at the controls of its vast machinery causing a great deal of damage" (176).

In Reck-Malleczewen's conservative view of history the tragedy of Münster was caused not so much by one individual but by the emerging power of the masses. For him the National Socialist mass hysteria had its origins in the mass hysteria of the Anabaptist state of the sixteenth century. The Anabaptist rebellion had already displayed the evils contained in all subsequent mass movements, be they the French Revolution of 1789, the German revolutions of 1848 and 1918/19, or the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Münster was "the embryo of a modern council republic (*Räteterepublik*) on a puritan basis" (45). The Anabaptist war was "the first example of a 'total war'" (40). Reck-Malleczewen sees only the destructive aspect of revolutions and invariably sides with the old order; in Münster's case with the Catholic Bishop Franz von Waldeck. Revolutions are seen not as reactions to oppression and social evils but as "safety valves for the discharge of pent-up mass resentments" (91). In Reck-Malleczewen's analysis "it came to these products of mass hysteria only because of the total breakdown of the social order. It was the unhappy fate of this city that a great political gangster stirred up the fire under this witches' cauldron and it had to pay dearly enough for this" (187).

To even a casual reader with no knowledge of the events that took place in Münster in the sixteenth century, Reck-Malleczewen's chronicle appears subjective and polemical. Nevertheless, some astounding parallels emerge between Nazi rule in Germany in the twentieth century and Anabaptist rule in Münster in the sixteenth century. Both Bockelson and Hitler came to power legally and with support of the middle and lower middle classes in times of social and economic turmoil (Münster suffered an economic crisis in the wake of the declining Hanse and increasing religious strife; Weimar Germany suffered the results of the Wall Street crash of 1929 and political strife between the right and left). Both consolidated their power through terrorism and ruthless persecution of opponents in order to create a dictatorship. Both shared in the idea of a thousand-year Reich, albeit not on the same ideological basis: the Anabaptists saw themselves in religious terms as precursors of Christ's thousand-year rule, whereas the Nazis envisioned one thousand years of their own secular rule and did not see themselves as precursors of some other ruler. Both their leaders, Hitler and Bockelson, came from humble origins. Both had artistic ambitions, both were gifted orators and demagogues, and both came from a foreign country to take over the reigns of government. Yet to describe the Anabaptist rule in Münster solely in terms of Nazi rule or in terms of any other mass movement does injustice to history, as experts have pointed out. According to Richard van Dülmen, the rule of Jan Matthijs and Jan van Leiden cannot be defined in terms of modern mass movements:

The charismatic leadership under Jan Matthys and the institutionalized kingdom of Zion under Jan van Leiden are inadequately defined when seen as an outbreak of mass hysteria and rule of arbitrary terror in anticipation of modern totalitarian systems. Though it cannot be denied that those elements existed, social life in the Anabaptist state under conditions of siege was far more rational than generally accepted. . . . Nor was the Anabaptist rule the result of a "plebeian revolution" or the final act of an early bourgeois revolution. (van Dülmen, 364–65, my translation)

Van Dülmen also points out that the Anabaptists came to power quite legally and with the support of the established wealthy citizens, not just the rabble, and that all segments of the populace participated in their rule, although craftsmen constituted the largest single group (van Dülmen, 365). The beginnings of Anabaptist rule were peaceful; it changed its character to a more militant society only under the onslaught of the Bishop's forces. Jan Bockelson was a charismatic

leader but he was neither a “Christian communist idealist,” as Ernst Bloch or Georg Lukacs would see him, nor a modern demagogue and leader of the people, as Reck-Malleczewen would have it, at least in van Dülmen’s view (316). Perhaps Friedrich Dürrenmatt got it right when he warned in the foreword to his play *Es steht geschrieben* (*It Is Written*, 1947), which also deals with the Anabaptist rule in Münster: “To what extent our times are reflected in it is another question. It would, however, be closer to the author’s intention to be very cautious in drawing parallels which are, at best, tentative” (my translation).

But the problem is more general. How legitimate is it to use historical events and figures to transport other ideas? Some critics have pointed out that a number of representatives of the so-called *inner emigration*, not just Reck-Malleczewen, have resorted to that device as mentioned before. But writers and filmmakers closer to the Nazis also used history as a vehicle for their ideas. There were numerous plays and films about Fredrich II of Prussia. One of the more blatant examples is the film *Jud Süß* (*Jew Süß*), in which the screenwriters Ludwig Metzger, Veit Harlan, and the noted playwright Eberhard Wolfgang Möller used real events that occurred in Württemberg and Stuttgart in the eighteenth century to advance the anti-Semitic policies of the Nazis in the 1940s. In his seminal work *Literarische Innere Emigration 1933–1945* (1976) Ralf Schnell devotes a chapter to the problems arising from fictionalizing history; one of the authors he singles out is Reck-Malleczewen. One of the main problems in selecting historical parallels is that events that are seemingly similar are chosen and highlighted at the expense of those events that do not fit the theory of historical parallelism. Schnell faults particularly Reck-Malleczewen’s *Bockelson* in this respect, but one suspects that Schnell is biased against Reck-Malleczewen for his conservative stance, as he makes amply clear in his discussion of Reck-Malleczewen’s *Diary of a Man in Despair* (42–46). In Schnell’s view Reck-Malleczewen’s conservative stance prevented him from arriving at a genuine analysis of fascism (42). However, it seems to me that Schnell could be faulted for his leftist ideological blindness just as much as he faults Reck-Malleczewen’s limitations resulting from his conservatism. In the end it does not really matter whether *Bockelson* is historically accurate (he is [often] not); what does matter is that the book could be published in Nazi Germany in 1937 despite its obvious criticism of Nazi rule. It is, as Günter Scholdt pointed out in a 1982 lecture held at the Deutscher Germanistentag in Aachen, indeed “one of the most astonishing belletristic works to appear in the Third Reich” (Scholdt, 350).

The question arises as to why this book could appear at all. Ralf Schnell suggests as a reason that it is close to Nazi ideology (Schnell, 154; Scholdt, 355). I agree with Scholdt that Schnell is too eager to throw all conservatives into one pot—tempting as that may be. To be sure, Reck-Malleczewen was against all mass movements and revolutions, whether they come from the right or from the left. Reck-Malleczewen's writing was also tainted by racism when he talked about the “*Verniggerung*” (niggerization) of Germany in his *Diary*. But his *Diary of a Man in Despair* (published in 1947) makes amply clear that he was a staunch anti-Nazi, albeit a problematical German conservative. It is more likely that *Bockelson* escaped censorship and was published simply by accident, or because it found a publisher willing to take the risk of publishing it because no one had denounced it. Reck-Malleczewen's book may also have benefited from the numerous rivals and conflicting opportunists in the cultural bureaucracy of the Third Reich who allowed a number of works slip through. Jan-Peter Barbian confirms the possibility of such scenarios in his recent study *Literaturpolitik im “Dritten Reich”* (1995). Perhaps a censor chose to assume that it was all directed against Bolshevism, which indeed it was to a certain extent, but in Reck-Malleczewen's mind Bolshevism was equated to Nazism. In any case, it was a courageous act to write and publish such a work. Reck-Malleczewen eventually paid dearly for his antifascist stance. He was denounced to the Gestapo, arrested and taken to the Dachau concentration camp, where he died in February of 1945. His book *Bockelson: A History of Mass Hysteria*, despite all its shortcomings, is more than another document of *inner emigration*; it is a document, in the guise of historical fiction, of active resistance against an inhuman regime.

Notes

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1. Term borrowed from Ralf Schnell, 113.
2. Reck-Malleczewen's *Bockelson* is not the only treatment of the subject matter. Other works dealing with the Anabaptist rule of Münster include Robert Hammerling's epic *Der König von Sion*, Lulu von Strauss und Torney's novel *Der jüngste Tag* (1922), Friedrich Dürrenmatt's drama *Es steht geschrieben* (1947); revised as *Die Wiedertäufer* (1966), and Franz Theodor Csokor's *Der Schlüssel zum Abgrund* (1955).

3. My translation. Page numbers in the text refer to the 1946 edition of the original; all translations are mine.
4. Friedrich Dürrenmatt in his comedy *Die Wiedertäufer* (The Anabaptists), the second version of his play about the Anabaptists, written in 1966, made ample use of the fact that Bockelson was a playwright. The first version dates from 1946 and is entitled *Es steht geschrieben* (*It Is Written*).

The Last Sunday

Viktoria M. Reck-Malleczewen

Most childhood memories appear to be like those loose Polaroid pictures in book pages. One knows about when they were taken, but somehow you can't pinpoint the exact occasion or date.

It was different with this last day of 1944, I am almost sure it was a Sunday. The house still smelled of Christmas, the parents were less nervous about the war, in a festive mood even, and the house was warm and full of candlelight, set to bring in the new year. Beethoven's Fifth Symphony was playing on the radio. The year to come would bring an end to the war. As a five-year-old I only sensed this, not yet having the vocabulary to speak about it. Writing about this brings back the feel of that day, and all that happened.

The doorbell rang, followed by the dog's alarmed barking and disruption of the harmonious afternoon; or was it evening—I don't know. The cook answered it, and called my father. I was curiously alarmed by the shrill noises, and the hushed tones in which the three men and my father spoke, and I made my way down the stairs to eavesdrop. I believe my sister was behind me. Something was off, something made me start to scream with a terror that was, up to then, only reserved for nightmares. My father had already been handcuffed.

There is a gap in my memories. I found myself sitting on an old chest in the lower hallway, my sister next to me. We were crying and the cook tried to console us. Mother had disappeared into her room. Life itself had changed for us all that day. The capacity for joy had left with him. We never saw our father again. We were never allowed to speak of him or of that Sunday, nor did anyone tell us what had happened. People, still in the mindset of those Hitler-years, despised us, and we, who had been comfortable even in those last years of the war, had become dirt poor.

My aunt, in her dying days, told me that my father had asked to be unshackled for just a moment, to bestow upon me a thorough

thrashing. As darkly humorous as it may seem, the stormtroopers did indeed grant his request. His nerves, frayed by the knowledge of his certain death, had not been able to tolerate my wailing. How well I do understand him. When I saw my mother one last time before her own death, she finally told me something about that day: We were all to be taken to Dachau, my father and his wife and children along with him. My youngest sister was one year old then. According to Mother it was the Bavarian policeman who had accompanied the SS who had talked them out of it. Bavarians in the remote area where we lived were mostly not all too fond of Hitler and his minions. It appeared that the SS could not afford to make enemies in that isolated place.

I am not sure, but it seems to me that those of my generation belonging to either side of the opposing parties, the children of camp victims and those of Nazi leaders alike, suffer a very similar form of isolation. I am certain that my father has been an unseen, silent presence in me every day of my life.

Note

“The Last Sunday” is Viktoria Reck-Malleczewen’s brief reminiscence of December 31, 1944, the day her father was arrested by the SS, shackled, and taken to the concentration camp at Dachau, where shortly thereafter he was murdered.



Figure 1.1 Reck-Malleczewen relaxing next to the Alz River, which flowed through his beloved estate of Poing bei Truchtlaching in the Chiemgau region of southern Bavaria. The picture was taken in the late 1930s or early 1940s, a time in which Reck was already well into his own “inner emigration.”