

Politik des Eros: Der Männerbund in Wissenschaft, Politik und Jugendkultur (1880–1934). By Claudia Bruns. Cologne, Weimar and Vienna: Böhlau Verlag. 2008. 546 pp. €44.90 (paperback).

The antisemite and sometime homosexual rights activist Hans Blüher (1888–1955) would offer a stimulating subject—in equal parts fascinating conundrum and unnerving ideology—for any biographer. Claudia Bruns's study harnesses biography for the grander purpose of an intellectual and cultural history of the *Männerbund*, which Blüher's life and work embody. As an early member of the original *Wandervogel* movement, organized in the Berlin suburb of Steglitz, Blüher developed a complex and original theory based on his personal adolescent experiences and the burgeoning sexological and psychiatric literatures of the early twentieth century. His sociological accounts of the *Wandervogel* and his full-blown historical sociology of the 'Germanic' *Männerbund* gained him the attention of medical doctors, homosexual rights activists, and, by the 1920s, *völkisch* and right-wing antisemites. Only the notoriety of his antisemitism and profound misogyny, which Blüher incorporated into his theoretical corpus before World War I, can seem to explain how such an influential and popular Wilhelmine and Weimar public intellectual appears to be so obscure today. It is Bruns's great contribution not only to have written an insightful and well-researched biography of Blüher but also to have placed his life and work—and the cultural and intellectual history of the *Männerbund*—in such a rich and illuminating context.

Blüher joined the original *Wandervogel* youth group in 1902, soon after it was formally set up. As a fourteen-year-old boy, he relished the homo-social camaraderie of hiking and singing, the charismatic leadership of an adult *Führer*, and his first sexual experiences, all critical elements of the theory he later developed. Although Blüher's *Wandervogel* membership was fairly short-lived, he experienced or closely followed several issues that would come to divide the youth movement and animate his writings. Blüher himself was at the centre of the *Führerfrage* in 1903, when Karl Fischer, leader of the Steglitzer outfit, was criticized for his autocratic leadership style. After another group leader sent Blüher home during an outing—due to Blüher's sexual relationship with another boy—Fischer protected Blüher and chastised his adult colleague, provoking an early division within the organization (pp. 236–9). This led to a discussion of leadership style and spurred theorization of the *Führer* principle (pp. 221–4). A second critical development was the 1907 debate over whether to admit girls, the so-called *Mädchenfrage* (pp. 230–2). The explosive issue of same-sex eroticism was addressed directly in 1910, when Karl Fischer's successor, Wilhelm Jansen, was exposed as a homosexual and forced to relinquish his leadership (pp. 243–4).

Blüher was also inspired by the early homosexual rights movement based in Berlin, of which Jansen had been a participating member. The early rift between the founding member of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee (1897), Magnus Hirschfeld, who embraced a 'third-sex' model of homosexuality—which explained same-sex eroticism as a rare congenital abnormality that endowed homosexual men with a female psyche (p. 126)—and a splinter group of 'masculinists' who viewed same-sex desire as a sign of hypervirility and a product of culture (p. 138), provided important stimulus for Blüher. Although he obviously took his greatest inspiration from the masculinists—rejecting Hirschfeld's implication that homosexuals were mostly effeminate—he also embraced Hirschfeld's view that same-sex attraction was a fixed orientation. As Bruns

explains, Blüher was also influenced by Freud, adopting his view that bisexuality was innate, but countering his emphasis on infant and childhood development; Blüher instead stressed adolescence as the period in which sexual identity was generally established (pp. 285, 292). According to Bruns, the Eulenburg scandal (1907–1909), which disclosed the homosexuality of some of the Kaiser's closest friends, informed Blüher's theory of the role of the homosexual *Männerbund* in the affairs of state (pp. 167, 180, 185).

Blüher assimilated personal experience, contemporary sexology and psychiatry, and Wilhelmine sexual scandal for his three-volume history and analysis of the *Wandervogel* published in 1912. Drawing on the work of Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–1887) and Heinrich Schurtz (1863–1903), Blüher argued for the significance of the masculine coterie or *Männerbund* as the agent of culture and civilization in world history. Like Schurtz, Blüher rejected Bachofen's thesis of a primeval matriarchy, but unlike Schurtz, he explained the *Männerbund* as not simply a homosocial but also—at times—an explicitly homosexual association. Like the masculinists of Berlin's homosexual rights movement, Blüher, too, disparaged women and glorified same-sex eroticism, which for Blüher was the generative catalyst of the *Männerbund*. Although he married twice, Blüher's adolescent dalliances remained formative and he maintained that male-male eros—not merely fraternal loyalty or friendship—was the critical feature that animated the *Männerbund*. While Blüher's *Wandervogel* history gained him the attention and short-term support of Magnus Hirschfeld, and even Freud in Vienna, his emphasis on the homoerotic underpinnings of adolescent male sociability ultimately alienated the *Wandervogel* leadership. The third volume of Blüher's *Wandervogel* history, *Die deutsche Wandervogelbewegung als erotisches Phänomen*, was banned by the *Wandervogel* leadership, which then purged its ranks of any known homosexuals (p. 342).

Blüher's open discussion of homosexuality provoked the criticism of conservatives, including many who attempted to discredit him by questioning his 'German' racial status. In response, racial purity became Blüher's strategy of self-defence (p. 371), and, despite erstwhile support of Jewish psychiatrists and sexologists, he grew increasingly antisemitic after 1912. As Bruns argues, Blüher perfected his theory of the *Männerbund* during the First World War, deflecting conservative homophobia with an ever more virulent antisemitism and misogyny (pp. 14, 324). In his two-volume *Die Erotik der männlichen Gesellschaft* published in 1917 and 1919, Blüher 'Germanicized' the *Männerbund* by explaining virile homosexuality as a particularly German phenomenon, and by denouncing Jews as an alien body incapable of contributing to the German state. Blüher's writings from the 1920s, according to Bruns, made him one of the best-known antisemites of the Weimar period. His *Männerbund* theory inspired the *bündisch* movement and the anti-democratic opponents of the Weimar Republic (p. 390). As Bruns claims, Blüher was among the very first to use the expression *konservative Revolution* in 1918, helping to create the rhetoric that would bind national-conservative and Nazi interests (p. 428). His antisemitism also garnered the attention of the exiled Kaiser William II, whom he met in 1928.

Brun's study is sophisticated, intelligent and incredibly well organized, and therefore eminently accessible. What she considers only in passing, however, is the reception of Blüher's *Männerbund* theory by *völkisch* and fascist sympathizers during the Weimar Republic (pp. 461–6). Was it only Blüher's antisemitic publications that were widely

popular? Did Blüher's explicit advocacy of same-sex eroticism alienate his right-wing reading public? Or was the homoerotic component of his *Männerbund* theory censored or mediated in the process of popularization? These are questions, perhaps, for additional study. What Bruns's marvellous work deserves now is an English-language translation.

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