

The 'Mein Kampf Ramp': Emily Overend Lorimer and Hitler Translations in Britain

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To pronounce an opinion on the present state of Europe without having read *Mein Kampf*, is like looking for the North Pole without troubling to take a compass.

Evan John, *Answer to Hitler* (1939)¹

In an article on Hitler's desire for world domination, Milan Hauner, following Karl Dietrich Bracher, noted that one of the biggest problems of National Socialism 'is that of its fundamental underrating'. As an example of this underrating, Hauner referred to *Mein Kampf*. He claimed that 'in spite of its explosive content, or perhaps precisely because of its extraordinary verbosity, *Mein Kampf* was never taken seriously outside Germany'.² Indeed, even many Germans held the ideas expressed in *Mein Kampf* to be irrelevant; Franz Neumann, for example, in his classic study of the Third Reich, *Behemoth* (1942), argued that 'National Socialism has no political theory of its own, and that the ideologies it uses or discards are mere *arcana dominationis*, techniques of domination'. He did, however, note that this meant 'that the German leadership is the only group in present German society that does not take its ideological pronouncements seriously and is well aware of their purely propagandistic nature'.³ This paper seeks to show that, while the thrust of mainstream liberal thinking in Britain confirms Hauner's position, there were nevertheless significant attempts made to alert the British public to the seriousness of Hitler's intent as expressed in his Landsberg bible. This is not to propose a naïve 'intentionalism' with respect to the Holocaust or to Nazi policies more generally but in order to throw some light on the way in which Nazism was understood in the years before World War II. Those in Britain who argued that Hitler's writings of the mid-1920s should be taken seriously as a guide to his plans as Chancellor of Germany were in a distinct minority.

¹ Evan John, *Answer to Hitler: Reflections on Hitler's 'Mein Kampf' and on Some Recent Events Upon the Continent of Europe* (London, 1939), p. 6.

² Milan Hauner, 'Did Hitler Want a World Dominion?', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 13, 1 (1978), p. 16. On the reception of *Mein Kampf* in Germany see Werner Maser, *Adolf Hitlers Mein Kampf: Geschichte, Auszüge, Kommentare* (Esslingen, 1974); Gerhard Schreiber, *Hitler-Interpretationen 1923–1983: Ergebnisse, Methoden und Probleme der Forschung* (Darmstadt, 1988); Barbara Zehnpeffnig, *Hitlers Mein Kampf: Eine Interpretation* (Munich, 2002); Othmar Plöckinger, *Geschichte eines Buches: Adolf Hitlers 'Mein Kampf' 1922–1945* (Munich, 2006). Maser, Schreiber and Plöckinger also deal with the reception of *Mein Kampf* in other countries, as does Detlev Clemens, *Herr Hitler in Germany: Wahrnehmung und Deutungen des Nationalsozialismus in Großbritannien* (Göttingen, 1996), pp. 330–43, though none mentions Lorimer.

³ Franz Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (London, 1942), p. 381. Neumann's position was a reflection of his orthodox Marxism; as he wrote to T.W. Adorno in 1940, 'I can imagine, and I have done this in my book, that one can represent National Socialism without attributing to the Jewish problem a central role'. Cited in Anson Rabinbach, "'Why Were the Jews Sacrificed?'" The Place of Antisemitism in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*', in Nigel Gibson and Andrew Rubin (eds), *Adorno: A Critical Reader* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 136–7. For an attempt to take Hitler seriously as a thinker see Lawrence Birken, *Hitler as Philosopher: Remnants of the Enlightenment in National Socialism* (Westport, CT, 1995).

One of the most interesting of such efforts, because of what it also tells us about the activities and interests of other, in some cases rather dubious, figures in the book, is the campaign run by Emily Overend Lorimer (1881–1949) to inform the public and, through private activities, influential political and literary figures, as to what she believed to be the real significance of Hitler's book. In particular, her books *What Hitler Wants* (1939) and *What the German Needs* (1942), her translation of Arthur Moeller van den Bruck's *Das Dritte Reich*,⁴ her several articles and reviews in magazines and journals, her wartime work for the Ministry of Information, and her unpublished manuscript *The Mein Kampf Ramp* (1941) add up to a significant attempt to break through the famous British underestimation of Hitler's and his followers' fanaticism. Unlike the majority of British commentators, her focus was squarely on Nazi ideology as expressed through published works; she devoted her attention to Hitler and Rosenberg in a way that many reviewers found rather silly, but she stuck to her guns in her assertion that their views needed to be considered seriously. In this stance she was ultimately proven right, even if individual assertions and ambitions from *Mein Kampf* were not to be realized (such as an alliance with Britain) or if other major policies of the 1930s did not appear there (most notably, the Hitler–Stalin pact of 1939). Lorimer's comments on the story of *Mein Kampf*'s publication in English certainly tell us a good deal about her own nervous fears about the British government's unwillingness to face Hitler, fears that were often couched in sweeping and unfair condemnations of what was in reality a complex and difficult situation, both domestically and internationally. But, once one puts aside the 'guilty men'-style rhetoric, Lorimer's writings still provide numerous insights into the nature of British attitudes towards Nazi Germany before the war. What follows is not an attempt to approve Lorimer's interpretation, thus putting forward a naïve intentionalism or sweeping condemnation of the prewar government's foreign policy; rather, it seeks to show that those who did try to break through the veneer of respectability where pro-appeasement was concerned often had to do so in comically exaggerated ways in order to make their point at all. The kind of orthodoxy that Lorimer was up against is well represented by the military man Evan John, whose claim, used in the epigraph to this article, sounds so reasonable. But after noting the centrality of *Mein Kampf* to an understanding of Nazism, he went on to argue that only a reader predisposed to object to Nazism would be struck by 'political fanaticism', and he domesticated *Mein Kampf* by making it sound as though it had been penned by Hilaire Belloc: 'we cannot call contempt of parliament a sign of the knave and traitor without accusing a large proportion of our countrymen of daily knavishness and treachery'.⁵

Emily Overend was born into an Anglo-Irish family in 1881 and was educated in Dublin. From 1907 to 1910 she was tutor in German philology at Somerville College, Oxford, a position she resigned following her marriage to David Lockhart Robertson Lorimer, who served in the Indian Army and Indian Political Service in many places including Bahrain, Persian Baluchistan, Mesopotamia and Gilgit. She accompanied her husband to South Asia where, with her linguistic skills, she herself soon became deeply immersed in the local cultures.⁶ In 1916 Emily became editor of the *Basrah Times*, a position she held until 1924 when the couple returned to England, where they lived in

⁴ Published 1923, trans. as *Germany's Third Empire* (London, 1934).

⁵ John, *Answer to Hitler*, p. 12. To be fair to John, he did go on to note that Hitler's writing in *Mein Kampf* on the Jews was extreme. But for John, this represented an aberration in Hitler's thought rather than its centrepiece.

⁶ See for example Gertrude Bell's description of the Lorimers in her correspondence. Gertrude Bell Papers, University of Newcastle, online at www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk (accessed 4 Oct. 2005).

Welwyn Garden City in Hertfordshire. In 1934 she again accompanied her husband on an anthropological and linguistic expedition to Karakoram. Her love of South and Central Asia did not dim, and she wrote a great deal about the languages and peoples of the region until her death. She never lost her interest in German culture and politics, however, translating Ernst Kantorowicz's *Frederick II 1194–1250* in 1931, and Arthur Moeller van den Bruck's *Germany's Third Empire* in 1934, as well as penning numerous articles and reviews on Germany for newspapers and journals.

From an early stage Lorimer charted Hitler's rise to power, though not at first with the intense fear and mistrust that she later acquired. In October 1932 she wrote from Cologne to her mother in Dublin to express her excitement at having acquired a ticket for a reserved seat to hear Hitler address a 'huge meeting'. The day after the talk she sent her mother a postcard referring to Hitler's 'splendid show' at which there had been 'quite 125.000 people'.⁷ In her major publication on Nazism, the 1939 Penguin Special *What Hitler Wants*, she referred to the notes she had taken at the time of the *Kundgebung*, in order to illustrate the development of her thinking.

Her account of 1932 charted the mystical atmosphere of the meeting, a theme noticed by many British visitors who were favourably inclined towards Nazism. At the end of the meeting, she wrote:

The host of full an eighth of a million dispersed quietly and silently into the night. The spell still held. Scarcely a word was heard . . . Across the water, behind the blaze of city lights, two immense spears thrust up



Figure 26.23: E.O. Lorimer, *What Hitler Wants* (London: Penguin Special, 1939). Published with permission from Penguin Group.

⁷ British Library, Oriental and India Office (henceforth BL-OIO), MSS Eur.F177/38, Lorimer Papers, Lorimer to Mrs Overend, 24 Oct. 1932 and 31 Oct. 1932.

towards heaven, spectrally silhouetted against a sky of indigo. Something of the spirit that reared the Cathedral of Cologne had been throbbing in the Messehalle to-night.⁸

As she commented, she had not read *Mein Kampf* at the time of that meeting, 'and Hitler was not yet being taken over-seriously by the German public at large, certainly not by the circle in which my friends moved'. In 1939 she was pleased to be able to cite Calvin Hoover, who noted in his *Germany Enters the Third Reich* (1933) that 'it cannot be too strongly reiterated that, as late as a month before Hitler became Chancellor, his cause was still accounted hopelessly lost by responsible opinion'.⁹ Any sympathy she may have had for the sense of unity, belonging or purpose engendered by the Nazi meetings soon disappeared, once Hitler came to power.

The year after Hitler became Chancellor, Lorimer's abridged translation of Moeller van den Bruck appeared. The book itself is noteworthy as one of the key formative texts of National Socialist ideology (it was first published in 1923).¹⁰ But here her brief translator's foreword is interesting because of the light it sheds on her later attitudes towards the English translation of *Mein Kampf*. Saying that she hoped that the reader of the English translation will be in the same position as if he had read the original German, Lorimer noted that '[n]othing has been consciously heightened or toned down in deference to English feeling'.

Her book was one of a number of publications in the first two years of Nazi rule, including translations of key Nazi thinkers such as Ewald Banse, critical studies of the significance of the Third Reich, and early reports on the persecution of the Jews.¹¹ The appearance of these works, which were, significantly, considerably more forthright about the implications of Nazism for European peace than the British government at that time (or, for that matter, the British opposition) was ready to accept, meant that those with longstanding interests in German culture and history, such as Lorimer, became increasingly vociferous in their opposition to Nazism. With the exception of a notable literature produced by fellow-travellers, many of the British writings on Nazism of the 1930s were highly critical warning-signals, which took on the daunting task of displacing mainstream—and, importantly, governmental—attitudes to Nazism, which lay on a spectrum running from lack of interest, to scoffing at its significance, to appreciation of its aims in fighting Communism and regenerating the German nation. The words of Lovat Dickson, Banse's English publisher, warning that 'Many people believe that Germany is setting the pace for a new war which will outstrip in horror anything that occurred in the last struggle'¹² made a large proportion of what is known as the 'reading public' sit up and take notice. However, it took longer before the same could be said of official policy, which was more concerned with balancing the budget and, not unreasonably, remaining in step with widespread public opposition to rearmament.

For those such as Lorimer who sought to warn people of the threats posed by Nazism, the publication in 1933 of an abridged version of *Mein Kampf* was a grave disappointment.

⁸ E.O. Lorimer, *What Hitler Wants* (Harmondsworth, 1939 [Penguin Special no. 13]), p. 36, citing her notes from 31 Oct. 1932. Henceforth referred to in the text as *WHW*.

⁹ *WHW*, p. 37. See Calvin B. Hoover, *Germany Enters the Third Reich* (New York, 1933), p. 95.

¹⁰ For a good contemporary discussion of Moeller van den Bruck see Aurel Kolnai, *The War Against the West* (London, 1938).

¹¹ For a discussion of many of these studies see Dan Stone, *Responses to Nazism in Britain, 1933–1939: Before War and Holocaust* (Basingstoke, 2003).

¹² Banse, 'Publishers' Preface', *Germany, Prepare for War!*, p. xiv.

This was not because she did not want British readers to have access to Hitler's views, but because she wanted them to have access to all of them. The 1933 edition brought out by Hurst & Blackett, a subsidiary of Hutchinson Publishing Group, was heavily abridged, containing less than half of the full text, and the omitted sections were those relating especially to Hitler's foreign policy ambitions.¹³ Philip Guedalla later described it as 'that attenuated version in which it was presented to the delicate nerves of British readers'.¹⁴ Lorimer granted in her review that 'Even the mutilated version, "My Struggle", which has appeared in English (Hurst and Blackett, 18s.) suffices to show how his Austrian birth and the cosmopolitan conglomerate of Vienna fired his passionate German nationalism and concentrated the hate of a fanatic nature on the international Jew of whom Treitschke had said, "The Jews are our misfortune".' Indeed, like the *Daily Telegraph* reviewer, she saw that even in shortened form, *Mein Kampf* was 'marked by an appalling sincerity'.¹⁵ Nevertheless, she thought such an abridgement unacceptable in terms of explaining why it was that *Mein Kampf* was 'indispensable to anyone seriously wishing to understand the Nazi movement and the mentality of its Leader', not least because 'The English is written by someone—a German, at a guess—who commands a large dictionary vocabulary, but not all the rudiments of English style or syntax'.¹⁶ Lorimer admired the few attempts to set the record straight, in particular the Friends of Europe's pamphlet on the topic and, later, the efforts of R.C.K. Ensor,¹⁷ yet the failure of these specialist

¹³ Adolf Hitler, *My Struggle* (London, 1933).

¹⁴ Philip Guedalla, *The Jewish Past: Presidential Address Delivered Before the Jewish Historical Society of England in the Botanical Theatre, University College London, November 21st, 1938* (London, 1939), p. 7.

¹⁵ E.C. Bentley, 'Hitler on the Hitler Spirit' (review of English translation of *Mein Kampf*), *The Daily Telegraph* (13 Oct. 1933).

¹⁶ E.O. Lorimer, 'Hitler's Germany', *John O'London's Weekly* (11 Nov. 1933).

¹⁷ *Germany's Foreign Policy as Stated in Mein Kampf by Adolf Hitler* (London, 1936), Friends of Europe pamphlet 38, with a preface by the Duchess of Atholl. Lorimer cites Atholl's foreword in *WHW*, p. 10: 'The English edition ... is only about one-third of *Mein Kampf* ... It unblushingly mistranslates passages of which an accurate rendering would have been disconcerting to English readers. No one therefore who reads *My Struggle* can have any idea of the foreign policy set forth in the original'. R.C.K. Ensor, *Hitler's Self-Disclosure in Mein Kampf*, Oxford Pamphlets on World Affairs, 3 (Oxford, 1939); Ensor, 'Review of *Mein Kampf*, unexpurgated edition', *Spectator* (24 Mar. 1939). This was not entirely fair. James J. Barnes and Patience P. Barnes note in *Hitler's Mein Kampf in Britain and America: A Publishing History 1930–1939* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 13–14, that in Dugdale's translation, 'Above all, he [Hitler] is presented so as not to appear ridiculous in the eyes of foreigners. Notwithstanding this whitewash, Hitler's main ideas and policies remain intact, including foreign expansion in the future; the rebuilding of German idealism and self-confidence; Germany's need for strong leadership; the need to manipulate the mass electorate through propaganda; the eternal struggle against Bolshevism and the Jews; the ultimate repudiation of the Treaty of Versailles; and the role which the Nazis hoped to play in the rebirth of the German state'. For other relevant contemporary discussions of *Mein Kampf*, mostly from outside Britain, see: Charles Appuhn, *Hitler par lui-même d'après son livre 'Mein Kampf'* (Paris, 1933); Irene Hamand, *His Struggle: An Answer to Hitler* (Chicago, 1937); Hendrik Willem Van Loon, *Our Battle: Being One Man's Answer to My Battle (Mein Kampf) by Adolf Hitler* (New York, 1938); Herbert N. Casson, *L'Europe après Hitler. La réponse à Mein Kampf* (Brussels, c.1938); A.P. Mayville, *Hitler's Mein Kampf and the Present War: A Critical Survey of the Nazi Bible of Hate and its Effect on Pre-War Events in Germany from Which Emanated the Impending Cataclysm of the World* (New York, 1939); John, *Answer to Hitler*; Karl Billinger, *Hitler Is No Fool: The Menace of the Man and His Program* (New York, 1939); Francis Hackett, *What 'Mein Kampf' Means to America* (New York, 1941). *Mein Kampf* also inspired other rejoinders such as Richard Acland, *Unser Kampf: Our Struggle* (Harmondsworth, 1940 [Penguin Special no. 54]), the curious Richard Ferrar Patterson, *Mein Rant: A Summary in Light Verse of 'Mein Kampf'* (London, 1940), and the splendid *Unexpurgated, Unpurged, Unspeakable Edition of Mein Rampf* (Little Goering, Gobbles, 1939).

publications to penetrate into the public consciousness lay behind her own attempt to explain what *Mein Kampf* was really all about, in her Penguin Special. Lorimer was wrong both about the translator—actually E.T.S. Dugdale, the translator and journalist, whose wife Blanche was the niece of Arthur Balfour—and the reasons why Hurst & Blackett had published an abridged version. Dugdale had offered his existing translation to the press (which they then had to cut further at the insistence of Eher Verlag, Hitler's German publisher). While they were considering commissioning a full translation, this decision nevertheless allowed them to get the book out sooner, in the first flush of interest following Hitler's accession to power. That Dugdale had a translation to offer should not be such a surprise, given that in an article on Nazism published in 1931 he had written of *Mein Kampf* that 'When we consider that it is implicitly believed in by a large section of the German people, it seems not unimportant that English readers should get to know what the National Socialists intend to effect in Germany, if ever they get the chance'.¹⁸ Despite Lorimer's ire having been roused in error, her own book was an important contribution to the British debate about the meaning and implication of Nazism.

Lorimer was not entirely alone in her quest to inform the public. In October 1938 the art historian Arnold Hyde wrote to the *Manchester Guardian* to complain about the lack of seriousness with which the danger posed by the Third Reich was being taken in Britain:

This ignorance of the ultimate aims of the Reich is due not to indifference or to wilful blindness but mainly to the fact that the full text of 'Mein Kampf' is not available to English readers. Many people who have read the English version, 'My Struggle', imagine they have read 'Mein Kampf'—whereas nothing could be farther from the truth. The English edition is a bowdlerised and emasculated version. 'Mein Kampf' contains 700 closely printed pages; 'My Struggle' contains 280 pages almost entirely devoted to an account of the rise of the Nazi party and its hatred of Jewry. Every indication of Germany's aggressive intentions is removed. The amount of mischief that such an edition can cause is incalculable; it is far more dangerous to have a book set before us in this form than not to have it at all—as is the case in France, where Herr Hitler refuses to authorise its translation.

Why may we not have the full text in English? If Herr Hitler refuses to grant the rights of a full translation surely we may have the main subjects of his foreign policy set out in pamphlet form?¹⁹

Hyde and Lorimer subsequently corresponded, and *What Hitler Wants* may be seen as Lorimer's attempt to fulfil Hyde's request that Hitler's ambitions—not just in foreign policy—be set out in an accessible fashion for English readers.

Lorimer explained her aims in the preface to *What Hitler Wants*. She uncompromisingly claimed that

British ignorance of the German language is convenient to the Germans. They can write and teach what they will, secure in the knowledge that scarcely one Briton in ten thousand—and apparently no Cabinet Minister—could read it if he would, and that still fewer will read it even if they can.²⁰

Yet, such an understanding was vital, for 'Not a thing that Hitler has done, not even the official breaches of the Munich Agreement and the seizure of territories beyond even the Godesberg demands, but is foreshadowed in the modern German Bible, *Mein Kampf*'.²¹

¹⁸ E.T.S. Dugdale, 'National Socialism in Germany', *English Review*, 53 (1931), pp. 566–7. And for more on Dugdale see Barnes and Barnes, *Hitler's Mein Kampf*, pp. 2–8. Barnes and Barnes do not mention Lorimer in their otherwise quite thorough survey.

¹⁹ Letter from Arnold Hyde in *The Manchester Guardian* (19 Oct. 1938).

²⁰ *WHW*, p. 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Lorimer went on to impugn the existing translation of 1933. Claiming that the book had been ‘drastically edited for British consumption, with many of the more vital teachings of the Führer omitted’,²² Lorimer explained her decision to write the book thus: ‘In the profound belief that the Cause of Justice and Right can triumph only if the man and woman in the street learn the truth at last, I offer them this modest volume’.²³ Actually, only the first section of the book is devoted to an exegesis of *Mein Kampf*; Lorimer also examined Alfred Rosenberg’s *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, and the last of the three sections was devoted to ‘Nazism in Practice’, which looked at foreign and domestic policy, and Nazi terror. Nevertheless, the bulk of the book was taken up by the analysis of *Mein Kampf*, and the final section was intended to show how the principles expressed therein were being realized.

What Hitler Wants was published in January 1939 and was, on the whole, well received, especially in the provincial press. Many reviewers regarded it as a substitute for *Mein Kampf* itself, which is just what Lorimer had intended. *Time and Tide* noted that ‘Most of us are too ignorant of the German language to read *Mein Kampf* as Hitler wrote it and as it is still presented as obligatory reading for German citizens. But from now on anybody with sixpence to invest can learn just what the Führer and his fellow gangsters mean to do and how they mean to do it’. It recommended that a philanthropist ‘of the Nuffield type’ should distribute twenty million copies.²⁴ Lorimer’s local paper, the *Welwyn Times*, noted the omission of much of the original in the English version and praised Lorimer for making it available. The *Bolton Evening News* and the *Western Telegraph* (Urmston) both praised ‘Mr. Lorimer’ (sic) for making abundantly clear that ‘in the madman dreams of Herr Hitler all freedom loving people stand in peril’ and that

in reviewing Mr. Lorimer’s important book we are actually reviewing the book Hitler wrote 7 years before he came to power ... The obvious matter of importance which emerges from a study of Mr. E.O. Lorimer’s ‘What Hitler Wants’ is that once more ‘You Have Been warned’.²⁵

The *Daily Worker*, the organ of the Communist Party of Great Britain, was equally fulsome in its praise, but drew more sinister and somewhat fantastical conclusions:

it is essential that however ‘indigestible’ these two books [*Mein Kampf*, *Mythus*] may be—and they are, from two different points of view: both the literary and the democratic—the British people should be fully acquainted with them. For they reveal the real aims of the people with whom the present British Government is working so desperately for an alliance. That is why, presumably, there exists no unabridged, undoctored translation of ‘Mein Kampf’ in this country.²⁶

Numerous individuals, ranging from well-known politicians actively engaged in promoting anti-Nazism to letter-writers to local newspapers, also wrote to Lorimer to congratulate her, often in response to the copy that she sent them. Edvard Beneš, soon to become President of the Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile in London, who had turned down Lorimer’s request that she dedicate the book to him, wrote to congratulate her ‘on the impressive and intelligent way you have explained the whole danger which does menace Europe’.²⁷ The Principal of City of London College, Sidney Daly, hoped that

²² *WHW*, p. 10.

²³ *WHW*, p. 11.

²⁴ *Time and Tide* (4 Feb. 1939). All press reviews are in BL-OIO, F177/53 and 54.

²⁵ *Bolton Evening News* (15 Apr. 1939); *Western Telegraph* (21 Apr. 1939).

²⁶ *Daily Worker* (8 Feb. 1939).

²⁷ Beneš to Lorimer, 3 Jan. 1939, BL-OIO, F177/50.

the book would be 'read by every adult in the country'.²⁸ Muriel Whitehouse, the Principal of Arley Castle School in Bewdley, wrote to inform Lorimer that she was reading *What Hitler Wants* with the sixth form, and finding it 'tremendously valuable'.²⁹ And Sir Henry Strakosch wrote to tell Lorimer that he was sending out some 2,400 copies of the book, one to every MP in Westminster and to every member of both parliamentary houses in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Eire, India and the United States.³⁰

But perhaps the most curious response to *What Hitler Wants* came from the poet Michael Barsley, who wrote to Lorimer to tell her that he had found the book 'excellent reading, refreshingly different from the average book on Hitler'.³¹ Barsley was the author of 'Grabberwocky', a skit on Lewis Carroll, which he sent to Lorimer:

'Twas Danzig, and the Swastikoves
Did heil and hittle in the reich,
All nazi were the lindengroves
And the neuraths julestreich.

However, not all the reviews were so inventive or so laudatory. *The Times* rather grudgingly accepted that Lorimer had summarized Rosenberg's book tolerably well. It then went on, in a fine illustration of the British establishment's inability to take ideas other than its own seriously:

One is tempted to ask, nevertheless, whether it is right to worry about its views and influence. Great nonsense was also talked during the middle stages of the French Revolution, and Russian Communism performed tricks with the interpretation of past history which run close to Herr Rosenberg's efforts. Yet both in France and Russia time blew these fantasies away. The same thing, we hope, will happen in Germany.³²

And the *New English Weekly*, the successor to the avant-garde early-modernist journal the *New Age* and organ of social credit and the early organic movement, simply noted in its April review that *What Hitler Wants* 'is rather superfluous now that "Mein Kampf" has come out in full'.³³

Lorimer soon suspected, however, that the new translation by James Murphy was not quite as complete as most expected. In March 1939, Hurst & Blackett brought out a full translation of *Mein Kampf*. The translator, an Irish journalist who had lived in Italy and the USA, was, in 1939, employed by Goebbels' Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda as the official translator of Hitler's speeches. This fact was unknown to Lorimer, but she was in any case dismayed by the translation. Responding to the *New English Weekly*'s review of her book, she noted that although it would seem natural to assume that her book had been rendered superfluous by the new translation, the opposite was in fact true: 'on the contrary it has made it more urgently necessary than before, for the modest aim of *What Hitler Wants* is to reveal to the English reader ignorant of German the full spirit and purpose of Nazism and the practical

²⁸ Daly to Lorimer, 6 Jan. 1939, BL-OIO, F177/51.

²⁹ Whitehouse to Lorimer, 3 Feb. 1939, BL-OIO, F177/51.

³⁰ Strakosch to Lorimer, 22 May 1939, BL-OIO, F177/52.

³¹ Barsley to Lorimer, 30 Aug. 1939, BL-OIO, F177/46. 'Grabberwocky' was published in Michael Barsley, *Grabberwocky and Other Flights of Fantasy* (London: John Murray, 1939) and Cyril Alington, ed., *Poets at Play* (London: Methuen & Co., 1942), pp. 179–180.

³² *The Times* (21 Jan. 1939).

³³ *New English Weekly* [NEW] (20 Apr. 1939). On NEW see Philip Conford, 'A Forum for Organic Husbandry: The *New English Weekly* and Agricultural Policy, 1939–1949', *Agricultural History Review*, 46, 2 (1998), pp. 197–210.

results of this spirit and purpose'.³⁴ In a letter to Arnold Hyde, she wrote that her suspicions about the source of the translation had led her to check the book 'phrase by phrase' against the original German. What she found confirmed her in her worries:

[H]ere is another most subtle and ingenious attempt to hoodwink the English reader as to the true spirit of the original ... It is infuriating to realise that Hitler will reap the enormous royalties from this 'English' version and the publishers of it harvest enormous profits while (I understand) its publication here was arranged in the nick of time to prevent the importation of the pirated American translation (wh. wd. I presume have been an honest one) the profits of which were to go [to] the refugee funds.³⁵

A week later Hyde replied to Lorimer with comments that strike at the heart of debates at this time: was the National Government furthering its policy of appeasement because it was the only way to gain enough time to build up sufficient military strength to take on Germany in the inevitably coming war, or was it doing so because it was already some way down the path of introducing a form of fascism into Britain? Hyde first noted, echoing the *Time and Tide* reviewer, that 'if the Government had issued a copy of "What Hitler Wants" to each household instead of the National Service Handbook, there would be some real enthusiasm for National Service!' Then he turned to the difficult questions:

All this is very well, but it is really depressing—and even alarming—to see such astonishment at truths of which every citizen in the British Isles ought to have been informed years ago ... It is inconceivable that our statesmen and publicists are unaware of the full implications of Nazi philosophy and 'ideals', and that being so, how can one assort their conduct with rational behaviour? ... Even if one draws the rather dramatic conclusion that the ruling classes are Nazi at heart, you are still left with the problem of why they are anxious to assist in the destruction of the Empire.³⁶

Here we see the perceived connection between the translation of *Mein Kampf* and the broader political situation. If commentators such as Hyde and Lorimer, but also Wickham Steed, Leland Stowe, Robert Dell and many others, were more concerned with foreign policy rather than with, say, Nazi racial policy—in contrast to historians today—this is a reflection of the fact that they feared that the British government was somehow complicit in helping Hitler achieve his goals, even at the expense, ultimately, of Britain and its empire. Rather paranoid as this may have been, it was certainly an opinion held by many serious students of Nazi Germany before Chamberlain's demise.

In another article in *Time and Tide*, Lorimer set out her own position, with a detailed analysis of the new 'unexpurgated' edition. She first outlined what she took to be the task of the translator: to give readers not just a literal rendition but to stir their emotions and to shake their aesthetic sense as if they were reading the original text. By this standard, she regarded the text as substandard:

Mr. James Murphy's translation is a travesty of *Mein Kampf*. With a few minor lapses which may readily be condoned in a work done as his must have been under time-pressure, he does give the English reader the literal meaning of each sentence in Herr Hitler's book, BUT—and what a 'but'—he conveys not a hint, nor the shadow of a hint, of the gripping power, the dynamism, the fire, the vigour, the brutality, the *passion* of the original.

³⁴ Letter in *NEW* (22 Apr. 1939), BL-OIO, F177/85.

³⁵ Lorimer to Hyde, 24 Apr. 1939, F177/85. On the publication of the competing American editions see Barnes and Barnes, *Hitler's Mein Kampf*, Ch. 5.

³⁶ Hyde to Lorimer, 30 Apr. 1939, BL-OIO, F177/51. For examples of authors for whom such conclusions were neither 'inconceivable' nor 'rather dramatic' see Stone, *Responses to Nazism in Britain*, p. 168. See also Christina Bussfeld,

By contrast with the German original, which 'screams and screeches violence' and is 'a book to rob you of sleep o' nights', Murphy's English rendition is so respectable that 'it might be a reprint of Johnson's *Tour in the Hebrides*'; it is 'a book to drop asleep over'.³⁷

Lorimer offered numerous examples of what she meant, ranging from the presentation of the book, the layout of the page, to the grammar and vocabulary. For example, where Hitler talked of 'Hottentots and Zulukaffirs' Murphy talked of 'Hottentots and Zulus'; where Hitler used the word '*Vernegerung*' ('negrification'), Murphy translated 'becoming more and more obsessed by Negroid ideas'; and where Hitler referred to '*Stimmvieh*' ('voter cattle'), Murphy opted for the slightly more dignified 'herds of voters'. All in all, Lorimer detected more at work here than just an inadequate translation:

Thus by padding, by circumlocution, by the use of well-worn tag and cliché, by long Latinised words instead of Anglo-Saxon monosyllables, by the avoidance of every term not found in standard dictionaries, by the substitution of conditional for indicative tenses, this 'literal' English translation subtly transforms Hitler's breath-taking, sleep-destroying evidence into a draught of Mother Siegel's Soothing Syrup.³⁸

To prove that this domestication of *Mein Kampf* was no accident, Lorimer refers to Murphy's Introduction, in which he reminds the reader that 'Hitler has also declared that, as he was only a political leader and not yet a statesman ... when he wrote this book, what he stated in *Mein Kampf* does not implicate him as Chancellor of the Reich'. In her turn, Lorimer offers this rejoinder:

But it is Adolf Hitler, Führer and Reichskanzler, who makes *Mein Kampf* a compulsory text book for every German citizen, for every German boy and girl, and who has enriched himself by putting five million copies into enforced circulation. It is Adolf Hitler who by every act of violence that shocks the civilized world sets the seal on *Mein Kampf*.³⁹

After a little more investigating, Lorimer found out that her suspicions were—she believed—confirmed. Murphy, it became known, had worked for Goebbels for four years (1934–1938) and must therefore have been a convinced Nazi.⁴⁰ Thus, Lorimer embarked on a further campaign to alert people to the new risks attendant upon the 'unexpurgated edition', which seemed to her even greater than those associated with the

'Democracy versus Dictatorship': *Die Herausforderung des Faschismus und Kommunismus in Großbritannien 1932–1937* (Paderborn, 2002), pp. 167–194.

³⁷ E.O. Lorimer, 'Men and Books', *Time and Tide* (1 Apr. 1939), p. 422.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 423

³⁹ *Ibid.* See Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, unexpurgated edition, trans. James Murphy (London, 1939).

⁴⁰ See, among his many publications: *Adolf Hitler: The Drama of His Career* (London, 1934); and, 'The Spirit of the New German Army', *English Review*, 62, 4 (1936), pp. 435–443. On Murphy see Barnes and Barnes, *Hitler's Mein Kampf*, especially pp. 51–72, and Barnes and Barnes, *James Vincent Murphy: Translator and Interpreter of Fascist Europe* (New York, 1987). Barnes and Barnes' detailed investigations into Murphy's life and career reveal that he was actually not a Nazi, as Lorimer believed. Nevertheless, their biography does tend to give him the benefit of the doubt. For example, they describe him (*Murphy*, p. 179) as 'a minor cog in the complicated machine, but from this position he was able to witness the Nazi administration from the inside'. They do acknowledge that he was ambivalent towards Nazism, and was to a degree antisemitic; yet, even though with his Irish passport Murphy may have been right to believe that 'he could always leave if things didn't work to his satisfaction' (*ibid.*, p. 190), it is hard to see how someone could take a job at Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda in a purely disinterested manner. Nevertheless, on his return to Britain, there is no sense that the authorities regarded him with suspicion. Unlike one of his predecessors in Berlin, Cola Ernest Carroll, who founded the *Anglo-German Review* in 1936, he was not interned under Regulation 18B (*ibid.*, p. 169).

earlier, abridged version. She wrote, for example, to Robert Vansittart, probably the most vehemently anti-German of British officials, who replied:

I have only read *Mein Kampf* in German—a dreadful job—but had always heard there was no proper English edition. The bowdlerised form was all too prevalent, and I had heard the Murphy production criticized before I got your letter. I hope that the course of events will prove the best corrective of any illusions based on an imperfect view or version of Hitler.⁴¹

Indeed, Vansittartism—the belief that only a total destruction of Germany's infrastructure, a pastoralization of the land, and the break-up of the nation-state—seemed to appeal to Lorimer. She joined the Never Again Association, which, with Vansittart as its president, was pledged to preventing Germany from ever acquiring the capacity to wage war again, and produced articles for it that situated her at the more extreme end of postwar plans for the country. In one, she took to task an imaginary reader, who felt sympathy for the 'ordinary' Germans:

[L]et him, as he values our future hope of decontaminating Germany, read the books of those who know Germany and the Germans (as he himself does not) and face the stark and ugly facts like a man, rather than lazily—selfishly—disastrously—hug the fatal illusion that the Prussianised, Nazified German of to-day is a sane and decent human being, not in essentials different from ourselves.⁴²

Her second book on Nazi Germany, *What the German Needs* (1942), developed this theme, which is no doubt why it received considerably less publicity than *What Hitler Wants*; but she continued to write in a similar vein articles for the Ministry of Information to broadcast to Aden, and was well paid for her trouble.⁴³

Yet her most important contribution to the controversy over *Mein Kampf* was not published, but was a privately circulated memorandum setting out the circumstances of the translation. In order to understand its sensitivity it must be made clear that the object of Lorimer's attack was not only Murphy, but his publisher Walter Hutchinson and the popular Tory historian Arthur Bryant. In other words, the point of her memorandum was to take on a broad swathe of right-wing opinion, not merely what she regarded as the mistranslations of a fellow traveller of the Nazis.

In the late 1930s, in response to Victor Gollancz's Left Book Club (LBC) and to the extraordinarily successful Penguin Specials, the right in Britain attempted to fight back on the cultural front.⁴⁴ The Right Book Club (RBC), under the aegis of Christina Foyle of bookshop fame, was founded early in 1937, publishing mainly reprints of existing works, from the nostalgic 'Merrie England' type to attacks on Communism to more aggressively pro-Fascist publications, such as those of Gerald Wallop, the Earl of Portsmouth, or Francis Yeats-Brown. And the National Book Association (NBA) was launched by Arthur Bryant shortly after the appearance of the RBC (and much to his annoyance). Unlike the RBC, however, the NBA aimed to commission new works (like the LBC) and to tap into an influential network of Conservative Party institutions such as

⁴¹ Vansittart to Lorimer, 25 Aug. 1941, BL-OIO, F177/85.

⁴² 'Must We Always Be Fools?', typescript for Never Again Association, 8 June 1941, BL-OIO, F177/75.

⁴³ E.O. Lorimer, *What the German Needs* (London, 1942); For Lorimer's 1943 articles for 'Miniform' ('We—the Germans'; 'The Soul of the German'; 'Two Protectorates'; 'The Religion of the Germans is the Religion of Satan'; 'Two World Wars') see BL-OIO, F177/76. For Vansittart's views see his *Black Record: Germans, Past and Present* (London, 1941)

⁴⁴ The best discussion is in E.H.H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2002), Ch. 5: 'The Battle of the Books'.

the Bonar Law Memorial College at Ashridge. He had support from Stanley Baldwin and the publisher Walter Hutchinson. And he aimed to absorb the RBC into the NBA.⁴⁵

With the NBA's decision to select the translation of *Mein Kampf* as its book of the month in February 1939, Baldwin resigned as President of the NBA. As Green notes, publishing *Mein Kampf* can be seen as the NBA's attempt to give its 'middle-ground' readers some sense of political 'balance'; after all, it had already published the old Bolshevik Victor Serge's memoirs as well as a selection of Neville Chamberlain's speeches. However, 'it is also the case that the decision to publish *Mein Kampf* reflected Bryant's own strong pro-German, and indeed pro-Nazi, sympathies'.⁴⁶

Lorimer's paper, 'The *Mein Kampf* Ramp', was written in August 1941, and was meant as an exposure of the machinations that lay behind this attempted publication by the NBA. 'Ramp' here may be understood in two senses: the OED defines it as 'A swindle, a fraudulent action; *spec.* the action or practice of obtaining profit by an unwarranted increase in the price of a commodity'. But it might also be understood as the attempt to elevate *Mein Kampf*, to give Hitler's stance heightened publicity. Either way, it is clear that Lorimer was furious and disgusted by this renewed attempt to propagandize on Hitler's behalf. Indicting 'as suspect quislings' Hutchinson, Murphy and Bryant, Lorimer exploded forth:

I found and find it beyond words disgraceful that a historian of repute, who could not conceivably be in ignorance of the fact that the book he was thus recommending was a dangerous, Nazi-produced fraud and that he was grinding a most prejudicial axe, should have been accessory to the hoodwinking of the members of the National Book Club [sic] and should have pressed on them this piece of Goebbels' propaganda.⁴⁷

Disgraceful it may have been, but, to Lorimer at least, it was not surprising. After all, Bryant had in 1940 published *Unfinished Victory*, an unashamed eulogy to Nazism. Remarkably, for this was during the war (although the so-called Phoney War had not yet ended), *Unfinished Victory* was largely well-received by the press, and only the dawning realization that rapidly-changing circumstances were threatening him with internment led Bryant to buy up as many copies of the book as he could lay his hands on, and to write and publish in a matter of weeks his 'apology', the 'island story' *English Saga*.

Lorimer was one of the exceptional reviewers who objected to *Unfinished Victory*, writing in *Time and Tide*, 'All the best and biggest Nazi lies are here, presented with a garnish of scholarship and erudition ... Please God, your clever book has come too late to take any readers in'.⁴⁸ The following year she drove the knife deeper in:

[H]is *Unfinished Victory* of 1940 is a subtle, admirably written, plausible piece of pure Nazi propaganda, so skilful that it may well take in any reader not exceptionally well-informed and wide-awake, as it no doubt

⁴⁵ King's College, London, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Bryant Papers C41 and C49. See Stone, *Responses to Nazism in Britain*, pp. 144–5 for a fuller discussion. On Ashridge and its role in interwar Conservatism, see Clarisse Berthezène, 'Creating Conservative Fabians: The Conservative Party, Political Education and the Founding of Ashridge College', *Past and Present*, 182 (2004), pp. 211–40.

⁴⁶ Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, pp. 147–8. See also Andrew Roberts, 'Patriotism: The Last Refuge of Sir Arthur Bryant' in his *Eminent Churchillians* (London, 1995), pp. 287–322.

⁴⁷ E. O. Lorimer, 'The *Mein Kampf* Ramp', typed memorandum, BL-OIO, F177/85.

⁴⁸ Arthur Bryant, *Unfinished Victory* (London, 1940); *Time and Tide*, 10 February 1940. For a discussion of the reception of *Unfinished Victory* and of Bryant's relationship with Macmillan, see Richard Griffiths, 'The Reception of Bryant's *Unfinished Victory*: Insights into British Public Opinion in Early 1940', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 38, 1 (2004), pp. 18–36. Lorimer's attack on Bryant, coming as it does from a writer who could in no way be described as being on the political left, can profitably be read alongside Julia Stapleton, *Sir Arthur Bryant and National History in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Lanham, MD, 2005), which seeks to remove the taint of pro-Nazism from Bryant.

took in the reputable publishers Messrs. Macmillan, who I presume would not intentionally have lent themselves to Hitler's service. It is significant that James Murphy had in fact been from 1934–1938 a hireling in Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry in Berlin.⁴⁹

Finally, Lorimer turned to Hutchinson, in a deeply sarcastic passage that exposes all the hypocrisies involved in *Mein Kampf's* publication history:

When war broke out Hutchinson unctuously announced that he was giving to the Red Cross the royalties which would otherwise have gone to Hitler. (If Judas had thought of it he need not so precipitately have gone out and hanged himself; he could have handed his silver pieces to some fund for distressed Pharisees).⁵⁰

Indeed, Lorimer anticipated a scandal over royalties that echoed the debate in the US in 1939 and that resurfaced again only recently.⁵¹ But if Lorimer was right about Bryant, her attack on Hutchinson was misplaced; the latter was no Nazi, and he went ahead with bringing out the 'unexpurgated version' despite Eher Verlag forbidding its publication and in order not to give the impression that Hurst & Blackett were suppressing important information about the Nazis' true aims.

Lorimer's fierce attack on Nazism and on *Mein Kampf's* proponents in Britain place her in a somewhat exceptional position. It is all the more important, then, to provide some context that shows the extent to which she was a child of her time. To today's reader the attacks on Murphy, *Mein Kampf*, and the rebarbative *Unfinished Victory* all suggest a leftist pedigree for Lorimer. But this was far from being the case; rather, she readily identified herself as part of the 'respectable', professional middle class, was favourably inclined towards eugenics, and displayed a residual antisemitism that was typical of the time. For example, in *What Hitler Wants*, she wrote disparagingly of Hitler's attacks on the Jews that this policy would only be harmful for Germany. The reasons seem curious today. First, she noted how English readers, 'remembering with gratitude how much the stability of British finance has owed to the co-operation of generations of British Jews with English bankers', would find it odd that Hitler thought the opposite about Jewish finance in Germany.⁵² Similar, and more surprising, is the comment she made in private correspondence regarding Jewish émigrés. Browsing through a bookshop in Cambridge, Lorimer came across Joseph Leftwich's anthology of Yiddish poetry. In considering some of its contents, she allowed her Vansittartism to get the better of her:

Leftwich also quotes Geo. Eliot about Heine: 'True, he is also a Jew, but he is as much a German as a pheasant is an English bird or a potato an Irish vegetable'. This reinforces my feeling of caution vis a vis [*sic*] our Jewish refugees. They must be fiercely anti-Hitler, granted. They are not necessarily anti-Deutschland über Alles or anti the Herrenvolk myth or anti-War or anti-Despotism. They may in their hearts be just as keen on German World Domination as Hitler or the Kaiser or the pan-Germans. Failing some spiritual

⁴⁹ Lorimer, 'The *Mein Kampf* Ramp'.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ In the US the debate centred on whether Houghton Mifflin & Co. and Hitler were the American copyright owners of *Mein Kampf*, or whether, as rival publishers Stackpole Sons, Inc. argued, Hitler had declared himself to be a 'stateless man' and therefore not a citizen of any country with which the US had a copyright agreement. The rival 1939 'unexpurgated' editions brought out by Reynal & Hitchcock under licence from Houghton Mifflin and Stackpole Sons competed for the market until, on appeal, the courts upheld Houghton Mifflin's argument that they were the legitimate copyright holders, thus preventing further sales of the Stackpole edition. Stackpole Sons made great play of the fact that they were donating all royalties to refugee funds, but Houghton Mifflin also promised that, after the deduction of royalties from their net receipts (as with Hutchinson) they would donate the profits to refugees from Nazi Germany. See *The Times* (1 Mar. 1939 and 14 June 1939) for discussions. And, for a fuller discussion, Barnes and Barnes, *Hitler's Mein Kampf*, pp. 73–134.

⁵² *WHW*, p. 49.

X-ray apparatus or some very positive proof of bona fides, it is I think wise to suspend one's judgment and beware of over-trustfulness.⁵³

For a woman who had stressed the importance of Nazi ideology, this confusion of Nazism with Prussianism constituted a serious error of judgment, though one no more egregious than her confusion (echoed by the British state's internment policy) of Jewish refugees with a potential Nazi fifth column.

On the question of eugenics she was also ambivalent. In *What Hitler Wants*, Lorimer wrote of the Third Reich's eugenic legislation that:

So much of Hitler's doctrine runs counter to our every deepest instinct that we could applaud with real pleasure this sound eugenic principle of saving avoidable suffering to posterity if we had any confidence that it would be applied with scientific detachment. The columns of the *Stürmer* unfortunately bear witness to the vindictive manner in which Nazi Germany is using the sterilisation law of July 1933 for her own ends.⁵⁴

In a letter to her future son-in-law in 1940 she again expressed pro-eugenic sentiments, arguing that the professional middle classes were placed under a special burden of marrying late and maintaining status in a way that was 'awfully bad for the country': 'It means later and smaller families (even the criminal one-child family) among the very pick of our stocks. It is a tendency against wh.[ich] I think wise parents—as contrasted with merely prudent ones—s[houl]d. earnestly fight'. Her advice to Neil was clear. Despite the ravages of the World War II, many couples chose to have children, and the same should apply now.⁵⁵ Here Lorimer typified the British middle-class's receptivity to eugenics, especially among the intelligentsia. Fear of the rapidly-breeding 'unfit' classes combined with admiration for a biologized reading of Nietzsche and a widespread racism, meant sympathy for eugenicist aims was easy to engender even as these aims simultaneously elicited suspicion, drawn from analysis of Europe's authoritarian regimes, of eugenic legislation.⁵⁶ All of this simply places Lorimer in context, and none of it detracts from her visceral anti-Nazism, which she did so much to promote. The fact that in some minimal regard Lorimer shared a mental space with ideas that fed Nazism is simply a way of saying that Nazism did not come from nowhere, but was an extreme version of ideas that were commonplace throughout the western world in the first half of the twentieth century. Lorimer, then, can be seen as a conservative anti-fascist, for, despite her general outlook, unlike Bryant she was never to be found among the fellow travellers of fascism.

The case of Lorimer's conservative anti-fascism, then, not only places her unexpectedly close to the émigrés who penned the sternest warnings to the British public about the danger of Nazism;⁵⁷ it also distinguishes her most clearly from those, such as Bryant or Philip Gibbs, whose intellectual trajectories took a swift turn in 1939/40, as they

⁵³ Lorimer to 'Dix', 13 May 1942, BL-OIO, F177/46.

⁵⁴ *WHW*, p. 65.

⁵⁵ Letter of 22 Aug. 1940, BL-OIO F177/46.

⁵⁶ See, for example, John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1800–1939* (London, 1992); Dan Stone, *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain* (Liverpool, 2002); Gavin Schaffer, *Racial Science and British Society, 1930–62* (Basingstoke, 2008).

⁵⁷ Such as Franz Borkenau, Aurel Kolnai and Sebastian Haffner, on whom see Dan Stone, 'Anti-Fascist Europe Comes to Britain: Theorising Fascism as a Contribution to Defeating it', in Nigel Copsey and Andrzej Olechnowicz (eds), *Varieties of Anti-Fascism in Britain, 1919–1950* (Basingstoke, forthcoming).

abandoned appeasement and threw themselves into the war effort. Until the turning point of the period between the invasion of rump Czechoslovakia (March 1939) and the end of the Phoney War (April 1940), mainstream opinion in Britain continued to think of Nazi Germany in normal diplomatic, geopolitical terms, that is to say, as a problem only if Britain's own imperial interests were threatened. Few commentators were able to break through this analysis and awaken an understanding that Nazism was a far more fundamental threat. Lorimer's efforts thus reveal the importance—and the quite impressive extent of their success—of private initiatives in combating conventional wisdom. Although her correspondent Arnold Hyde, and many others on the left such as John Strachey, were wrong to believe that the National Government was promoting a creeping fascism in Britain, nevertheless the history of the reception of Nazism in Britain until 1940 does centre around the question of its underrating and how to combat it. The kind of 'historical translation studies' that this article has engaged in aids our understanding of the reception of Nazism in Britain by showing how the case of one book, albeit an unusually important one, highlights issues of appeasement and its opponents, the press, the government and the 'reading public', and the development of anti-fascism in Britain.

Finally, it is worth repeating that this piece is not meant to promote a naïve intentionalism; it was not enough for people to read *Mein Kampf* closely to be able to predict what Hitler would do next. Nevertheless, Lorimer's example does show that a clear understanding of the danger represented by Nazism was obstructed in Britain not just by officials' justifiable fears of the public's response to rearmament, but by a great deal of filibustering on the part of intellectuals who were spellbound by the new Germany. It was of course the case that people arrived at their attitudes towards Hitler and Nazism, whether in Germany or Britain, for many, complex reasons, not just on the basis of what they knew of Hitler's intentions. Yet even anti-intentionalist postwar historians of Nazism nevertheless agree that *Mein Kampf* tells us a good deal about Hitler's mindset, even if it can only be a rough guide to Nazism in action. In March 1939, following the occupation of Prague, J.L. Garvin, the editor of *The Observer*, wrote in his newspaper that 'We can now see that certain passages in "Mein Kampf" expressed an illimitable infatuation, and that what he aims at is German supremacy in the world'.⁵⁸ Emily Lorimer, unlike so many of her peers, had the courage to stand up and make this claim far earlier than most other commentators, to insist that the Nazis—as typified by Bause, Hitler and Rosenberg—meant what they said, and to do her utmost to counter the pro-appeasement stance that reigned in Britain where Nazism was concerned at least until after Prague and, for many, until well into the war.

Abstract

In the 1930s, the translation of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* into English caused considerable consternation. Many feared that both the first, abridged version and the later, unabridged translation were bowdlerized and deliberately downplayed Hitler's aggressive foreign policy intentions. Much has been written about the controversies that surrounded the publication of the key text of Nazism, but the contribution of Emily Lorimer to these debates has until now been overlooked. Lorimer's book, *What Hitler Wants* (January 1939), her correspondence and her work as a translator and political analyst provide rich insights into the way in which

⁵⁸ J.L. Garvin, 'The Truth', *The Observer* (19 Mar. 1939), p. 6.

Nazism was understood in Britain. Lorimer's argument that *Mein Kampf* should be taken seriously is presented here not in order to defend a naïve intentionalism, but in order to bring some nuance to the stereotype that Britons were unable or unwilling to consider the claim that the Nazis meant what they said. This study in historical translation studies and history of ideas shows how the case of one book, albeit an unusually important one, highlights issues of appeasement and its opponents, the press, the government and the 'reading public', and the development of anti-fascism in Britain.

Keywords: Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Lorimer, translation, appeasement, Britain

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