

Sabrow's critique of the German judicial establishment and the way it allowed antisemitism to obscure the larger conspiracy behind Rathenau's murder represents a stinging indictment of the conservative biases that informed the administration of justice in Weimar Germany. Sabrow's work on the Rathenau assassination remains an important contribution to our understanding of the frailty of Weimar democracy and the strength of the forces pitted against its survival.

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Coffee with Hitler: The Untold Story of the Amateur Spies Who Tried to Civilize the Nazis

By Charles Spicer. New York: Pegasus Books, 2022. Pp. 392. Hardcover \$29.95. ISBN: 978-1639362264.

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With library bookshelves crumbling under the weight of the scholarly tomes written on the collapse of Anglo-German relations in the 1930s, with many focusing on the policy of appeasing Hitler adopted by the government of Neville Chamberlain, it is refreshing that, in his debut monograph, Charles Spicer so thoroughly and convincingly adds a revisionist and, as he demonstrates, significant perspective on the history of European diplomacy during the interwar era. Attentive to the call by Christopher Andrew and David Dilks in *The Missing Dimension* (1984) to consider the role of intelligence and spies in writing diplomatic history, Spicer casts new light on what he terms "ambulant amateurs" – a fitting description of those individuals outside of official diplomatic circles, who mobilised networks of professional and personal affiliation to provide critical information to the British government when the Foreign Office was otherwise restrained. Despite blunders and missteps, as one might expect of amateurs, the intelligence they passed along to their British masters direct from the lips of the Nazi elite was obtained expediently, proved reliable, and, as Spicer shows, was considered by those at the core of British decision-making regarding policy towards the Third Reich.

To examine this, Spicer's analysis centres on three protagonists: Philip Conwell-Evans, Ernest Tennant, and Grahame Christie. Conwell-Evans was a Welsh historian with deep ties to Germany, who informally advised several prime ministers on all matters German, while Tennant was an avid butterfly collector and businessman, whose friendship with Joachim von Ribbentrop gained greater significance as Ribbentrop climbed the Nazi ranks from German ambassador in London to Hitler's foreign minister. Of the three, Christie has attracted more scholarly attention for keeping his eyes and ears open in Central Europe on the personal payroll of Robert Vansittart of the Foreign Office, but Spicer places Christie at the crux of his narrative and illustrates how Christie collaborated with Conwell-Evans and Tennant, and others, to furnish London with the most sensitive and accurate intelligence concerning mounting German aggression. The common thread that ties these men together is their affiliation with the Anglo-German Fellowship, an organization founded in 1935 by politicians and businessmen to foster friendship between Britain and Germany primarily through commercial pursuits. Here, Spicer departs from the normative scholarly interpretation that the Fellowship was a hotbed of British fascism

and pro-Nazi sympathizers. Instead, Spicer argues that, while a small minority of the Fellowship's members indeed warrant such labels, on the whole its distinguished membership comprising lords, politicians, and industrialists, among others, pursued a proactive, dynamic campaign to "civilize" the Nazis and avoid conflict through the merits of British culture and sensibility as well as a genuine, sustained affection for Germany. In its heyday, the organization was a lynchpin of Anglo-German relations, earning the respect of Hitler and the Nazi leadership as well as being reciprocated by the *Deutsch-Englische Gesellschaft* in Berlin, which together hosted dinners and cultural events in the name of bilateral cooperation and understanding. Spicer makes clear that his examination is not another study of passive appeasement, but that the Anglo-German Fellowship constituted an earnest and unrelenting – informal – attempt to pacify, negotiate with, and withstand the Third Reich.

After a brief introduction and prologue, Spicer's book is divided into twenty-seven short chapters and proceeds chronologically, spanning from Tennant's dinner with the Ribbentrops in Heinrich Himmler's garden on the eve of the Night of the Long Knives in June 1934, to Rudolf Hess crash landing on the estate of Fellowship member the Duke of Hamilton in Scotland in the hope of brokering peace with Britain through the Fellowship in May 1941. This sensible approach enables readers to follow the development of the protagonists' (and by extension, the Fellowship's) campaign to align Germany with Britain, as well as to observe the gradual renegotiation or total disintegration of friendships as the geopolitical situation in Europe escalated. This also enables Spicer to illuminate how the strong Anglophile sensitivities of Ribbentrop, Hermann Göring, Hess, and even Hitler had encouraged the Anglo-German Fellowship and bolstered its efforts, and which only intensified from the Fellowship's inception almost until the outbreak of hostilities in the hope of winning Britain as an ally. The book wraps up with an epilogue and a conclusion, which covers the fates of Spicer's *dramatis personae* after the war and provides thoughtful consideration of how his main protagonists dealt with their past associations, seen as tainted by journalists, politicians, and historians who were quick to stamp the Anglo-German Fellowship with a swastika during a period when little distinction between Germanophilia and fanatical anti-semitic Nazism was made. It is only here, at the end of his narrative, that Spicer explicitly addresses some of the historiographical problems of the published memoirs and scholarship concerning his protagonists – a crafty move, which allows readers, especially those new to this subject, to come to their own evaluation of the Anglo-German Fellowship before confronting the conventional characterization, against which Spicer writes.

Lucidly written and with a pacy and engaging sense of storytelling, Charles Spicer's book is enviably readable and vividly captures not only the drama but also the sense of purpose felt by his protagonists. His argument is clearly defined and substantiated by reliance on rich German and British archival and printed primary sources. Although I would be remiss not to pinpoint that the Austrian chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß was assassinated in 1934, not 1936, Spicer's book is an important, scintillating study of Anglo-German relations on the eve of war, and would be of utility to scholars of unofficial diplomacy, amateur intelligence, and alternatives to appeasements as, indeed, it would appeal to wider readership on this perennially popular historical period.

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