

Luise Rinser: Response to Hermann Hesse (1946)

Abstract

The writer Luise Rinser had lost her husband in the war and had been arrested in 1944 following a denunciation. At the beginning of the war, however, she had published texts sympathetic toward National Socialism. In any event, in 1946, she agreed with Hermann Hesse's criticisms and complained about the "lack of pride and insight" of the Germans. As she saw it, they were refusing to recognize political reality.

Source

[...] Everything you write is true. Nobody did it; everyone wants to be de-Nazified. [...] Just as one cannot be Aryanized, one cannot be de-Nazified. For me, Nazism was character, an undeniable character trait.

How can the decree of a tribunal free one from a defect that lies in one's very NATURE! One can liberate oneself through a long, tough process of change; that is different. I find it particularly despicable when these people now say: I was only a passive follower [*Mitläufer*]. I would be ashamed to the core to say that. Better an evil, real Nazi, driven by the Devil, than a mere passive follower. What lack of pride and insight!

[...]

Here in Germany there are things that are much worse still, of which you write nothing. There is, for example, the fear of Socialism, which demands change in things large and small. These people are gushing with nice words: liberty, reverence, beauty, German culture [...] and are not inclined to see the real world. Recently, I was invited to a Youth Congress in Frankfurt am Main. People spoke to this poor, confused, war-crippled youth, which has no hope for the future, no money, only all manner of difficulties; they spoke to them about a new constitution, of a life permeated by God, [...] and the young people sat there and said nothing. They want to make a second "Hoher Meissner," artificially arranged by the university professors. Through it, they want to pull the youth away from real political life. (And today EVERYTHING is politics . . .). They do German idealism, but when it comes to doing something political that is real, people shy away. For example, in a recent speech in Munich, I spoke of the misery of young people and demanded the creation of homes for the at-risk German "Besprosonis" [young homeless]. I was officially told that one first had to wait for the solution of the German currency problem. But I probed further and played the Bavarian government off against the Greater Hessian government, and today it says in the *Neue Zeitung* that homes are in fact being set up.

It is very difficult to live here [...], but everywhere there are forces at work. [...] Many women see reality more clearly than men. The men are sulking because they are no longer allowed to play soldier. [...] In your lovely letter, you ascribed to me intelligence and an observant eye. Please trust this eye now when I tell you that there is a segment, not large in number yet considerable in its intellectual vitality and political capacity, that is participating in working for peace. [...]

Source: Luise Rinser, "Antwort an Hermann Hesse," manuscript; reprinted in Klaus Wagenbach, ed., *Vaterland, Muttersprache. Deutsche Schriftsteller und ihr Staat von 1945 bis heute*. Berlin: 1979, p. 53 f.

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