

Christa Kamenetsky, *Children's Literature in Hitler's Germany: The Cultural Policy of National Socialism* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1984)

Preface begins: "In children's literature the Nazis perceived one of their most important tools for re-educating children in the spirit of National Socialism. They were not satisfied with controlling their behavior merely by drill and discipline but aimed through children's books at promoting such values that would induce them to internalize the National Socialist ideology and to defend it enthusiastically [...] To that end, they engaged thousands of censors, drafted mainly from the members of the National Socialist Teachers Association and the Reich Youth Leadership Organization, who would systematically screen every book that was published, sold, loaned, purchased, circulated, or discussed. Through school reforms and a reorganization of libraries throughout the nation they further institutionalized censorship measures that would separate the books they preferred from those that were to be discarded. By abolishing all civil liberties and the possibilities of open dissent, and by centralizing the vast network of the censorship apparatus within the general power structure of Party and State, they hoped to reach their goal not within a year or two but certainly in the decades to come. They generally referred to their long-range goals in this regard as the *Volkserziehungsprogramm* (folk education program)". p.xiii

They tossed out books on the blacklist and sought to fill the empty spaces on the library shelves with material which presented Germany and the German people in a positive light: "To these ends, they gave particular attention to German and Nordic Germanic folklore, because in the inherited values of the past they discovered ideals and traits that they adjusted to their own political purposes. Such remodeled values they hoped to develop into a mythos appealing to romantic, idealistic and patriotic sentiments, thus creating the impression that Hitler's 'folk state' was firmly rooted in the traditions of the Nordic Germanic 'ancestors'". p.xiv

Children were exposed to "an abundance of books dealing exclusively with the German and 'Nordic' spheres of interest, [conveying] a distorted view of German and Nordic Germanic folklore. At the same time, this policy consciously kept them away from books promoting world understanding across racial and national boundary lines." p.xiv

"When Hitler came to power in 1933, literary standards, along with pedagogical, psychological, and universal human perspectives of children's literature had to be sacrificed to the 'one and only goal,' the folk state of the *Fuhrer*. In the name of the German 'folk community,' the Nazis made children's books into the means toward another end that would perpetuate the power of the Third Reich both at the time and in the future." p.xv

Part 1: Literary Theory and Cultural Policy

Ch 1: The Roots of Children's Folk Literature in Pre-Nazi Germany

Kamenetsky presents a general survey of children's literature in the earlier period. It was exactly like that of kids in Britain. I note here that a German edition of *Robinson Crusoe* was published as early as 1720 and was vastly popular with children. There were lots of

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English language texts in translation: Fennimore Cooper, Mark Twain, Kipling, Dickens, Dumas, Verne and Lewis Carroll are mentioned here. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, too. In folk literature, there was, in addition to the omnipresent Brothers Grimm, a tradition of chapbook folktales going back to the middle ages called *Volksbücher* which told of everybody from Dr. Faustus to Reynard the Fox. P.4 [Note, Kamenetsky seems to think that the Grimms actually collected from the folk].

“The Nazis glorified Herder, the Brothers Grimm, and the Romantic movement as a whole, but mainly for their contributions to the discovery of the ‘healthy folk reality’—not for their discovery of free imagination [...] Even in singling out Herder and the Brothers Grimm for their ‘positive’ contributions to the growth of the German nation, as they put it, they would selectively emphasize their collections of *national* folklore while they would ignore their contributions to comparative folklore and literature as well as to international understanding”. p.5

Here’s a useful phrase from Herder, *Urpoesie* (primeval poetry), p.5 Of Herder: “His *Stimme der Volker* (*Voice of the Nations*) contained authentic folk songs from a great number of nations, including the American Indians, and its preface supported the idea that, originally, all nations had sung with ‘one voice’ to honor God who had endowed each one of them with an equal share of love. As a true Christian, Herder believed that each nation, like every individual, was equal and unique before God and that it was equipped with a ‘folk soul.’ To recapture this soul, he said, which civilization had partially buried, it was necessary that each nation should collect the folk songs, myths, folktales and legends of the past, for in these was still living the naïve and pure spirit of ancient times”. p.5

“The Brothers Grimm shared Herder’s concept of the *Urpoesie*, which they renamed *Naturpoesie* (nature poetry). In respecting this theory of its common origin, they kept alive their vital interest in the folktales of other lands. Folklorists from the Scandinavian countries [...] corresponded with them over many years, and so did folklore scholars from England, Scotland, Ireland, Russia, and Serbia, to name just a few. The Brothers traveled to various foreign countries, and in turn, they received many visitors from foreign lands”. p.5 The bottom line is that “the poetic and scholarly contributions of the Brothers Grimm to international and cross-cultural studies are quite remarkable...” p.6

Nazi theorists explicitly claimed “that Nazism was rooted in the heritage of Herder and the German Romantic movement” p.6 The basis of a “folk” state was worked out by Heinrich Wilhelm Riehl: “For the industrial worker he developed a plan that was to transform him into a member of the folk community: he was to receive a small piece of land that he was expected to cultivate in his free time. Riehl thought that in this way he would not only strengthen his communion with the soil but also with the people of the peasant community. Within this community he would recapture what he had lost as a result of civilization: his creative self, his individuality.” P.7 There was much glorification of the German peasant during the 19th century as the true heart of the nation and as perhaps its ultimate salvation. By 1900 some conservative intellectuals (Kamenetsky tells you who on p.9) were already speaking of “decadent literature” in association with “undesirable cosmopolitan, liberal and Jewish influences”.

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Hitler said “Either we will be a peasant Reich, or we will not be at all!” p.10 In the educational debates of the first third of the 20th century, the internationalists and humanitarians and aestheticians lost the argument to Volkish critics who said that building a patriotic love of country should be at the forefront of school fiction, and that the curriculum should be dominated by German folktales, myths and legends and ballads. This allowed the Nazis to claim that they were merely continuing a “natural” trend. All manner of nationalistic groups active in the 20s, including the Thule Society which used the swastika as its emblem and was very enthusiastic about Nordic Germanicism. P.18 “many of these apparently innocent interests in nature and the outdoors, in storytelling, folk singing, and solstice celebrations (in the old Nordic Germanic style) we shall rediscover a few decades later in the Hitler Youth program.” p.20. “The Nazis were quick to seize upon these ideas for their own purposes. In the *Wandervogel* movement and the [back to the land mystic peasant style] *Artamanen* movement they perceived perfect examples of how German and Nordic Germanic folklore could be applied to festivals and rituals in such a way as to enhance the ‘feeling for community’—something toward which they aspired through their ‘folk education’ program.” p.21 All these pre-existing youth organizations were swallowed up in the Hitler Youth. “By 1939, the Hitler Youth Organization was the only youth organization left, and about seven million children and youths were forced to march, sing, and celebrate according to the same blueprints. By that time, some of the activities had already lost their popularity, mainly because they were no longer based on a freedom of choice and because attendance had become mandatory nation-wide.” p.22 “With the rise of Nazism a didacticism was imposed upon children’s literature for which there was also no equivalent in the past. The didactic trends of earlier times had served at least the moral and religious instruction of the individual child, but now literature and the child were both placed at the service of the State”. p.23 And many people who had been through these earlier less-political culturally more diverse and outward-looking organizations were willing to accept censorship, for example, as a temporary measure on the way towards achieving German cultural unity.

Chapter 2: From Book Burning Toward *Gleichschaltung*

In the spring of 1933 the German Student Association issued a demand that German universities should exhibit greater ‘responsibility’ towards the German race, German language and German literature; weeks later they demanded that all ‘un-German’ books be removed from the libraries. Not long after that, book burning began “in the public squares of numerous German cities” p.31 It was students who did the burning. Interestingly, amongst the writers accused of “decadence, moral decay, sloppy thinking, political treason, and eroticism” was Sigmund Freud. p.32 There’s a marvelous ‘catch-all’ phrase here, used to denounce anything the Party disliked: “lack of respect for the German folk soul”. p.32

“The recommendations followed the same order. The first student praised the idea of the German folk community which from then on literature should portray in idealistic terms. The second one demanded that books be faithful to the German people and the state. The third requested of literature that it portray the ‘nobility of the German soul,’ and the fourth reminded all German authors that their works should reveal respect for German

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history, the spirit of the ancestors, and the spirit of the past. Others still referred to the necessity of promoting a type of literature that would show reverence for the German folk spirit by concerning itself with the love of home and nation, a search for the “roots” of German national identity, with native folklore and history, and a respect for “honesty and truth”. As such, it should be the goal of all literature to serve the German folk community rather than to express the “selfish” interests of its authors. The ceremonies took place at night, illuminated by dramatic torchlight processions and accompanied by marching bands of the military and police. Singing and cheerleading further dramatized the events which neither the public nor the press could overlook”. p.33

“After the burning of the *Reichstag* in Berlin, Goering proceeded to arrest thousands of Communist suspects all over Germany. In the name of the State, he had armed the regular police force, adding to it 25,000 S.A. men and 20,000 S.S. men, which during the election days in Berlin alone arrested 5,000 persons. Only two days after the *Reichstag* incident, Hitler suspended all normal civil liberties guaranteed by the Constitution while turning the Secret Service into an instrument of terror. This meant that Germans were denied freedom of speech and of the press, the freedom to gather in groups, as well as the freedom of privacy regarding mail, telegrams, and telephone calls. Anyone who acted suspiciously or was overheard saying something against the Nazi Regime could be arrested and detained without trial. Even before this time, the Party would send its agents to public lectures and gatherings of groups, and it was known to have dispersed meetings when speakers uttered even some harmless jokes at the expense of the Party. Intellectuals experienced harassment if they were suspected of dissent, and as early as May, 1933 there were arrests, imprisonments and reported mistreatments of those who disagreed openly with the Party’s policy. During the year 1933 a total of 1,684 academics lost their jobs...” p.34

“Simultaneously with the Nazis’ purge of academics and intellectuals there occurred the “cleansing” of the libraries and school libraries. Party and State authorities followed up the public book burning ceremonies so thoroughly that the public no longer was held in doubt who had instigated the “book purge” in the first place. In Bonn alone 20,000 books were thrown into the flames. In Berlin 70,000 tones of books were removed from the libraries...It is estimated that in this process about one-third of all library holdings in Germany was destroyed...Whatever the authorities considered as ‘folk-alien’ or ‘decadent,’ whatever appeared to promote the spirit of Bolshevism, liberalism or internationalism, or whatever had been written by Jewish authors was condemned to go to the incinerator, the public bonfire or the scrap paper collection...eventually it was stabilized within the context of a gigantic censorship apparatus of Party and State authorities that screened every book that was printed, sold, purchased or circulated [....] The frequent references of the Nazi ideologists and Hitler himself to such concepts as the ‘folk spirit,’ the ‘folk soul,’ the ‘folk tradition,’ and the ‘folk community’ harkened back to earlier times when Herder, Grimm, Jahn and Arndt...had appealed to the German people to unite in their quest for unity and German ethnic identity”. pp.34-5

“...it was not clear to many educators...that Hitler actually was out to reverse the Romantic concept of the *Volk* [...] In contrast to the Romantic concept, the Nazis’ concept no longer stood for diversity within unity, but it implied a uniformity that made

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no allowance for individual differences. By abolishing the opposition and by leveling the 'subjective element,' the Nazis hoped to form a society that was totally committed to the *Fuhrer* and the National Socialist ideology.

According to Meinecke, Hitler seized upon the idea of the 'folk community' for two particular reasons: to get rid of the class-egotistical nationalism promoted by the heavy industry patrons of the bourgeoisie and to overtrump the Marxism of the Russian Bolsheviks...When Rosenberg as the Nazis' chief ideologist, announced that the National Socialist Cultural Community had set as its ultimate goal the revival of the German folk culture, this appeal sounded like an echo of Romantic thought and found a sympathetic reception by the German population who welcomed the idea of a cultural renewal on the basis of native folklore and the Nordic Germanic folk heritage". p.37

"...all of children's literature during the Third Reich was subordinated to the Nazi's Volkish ideology..." p.38 "The Nazis' definition of ideological goals echoed the Romantic quest for an 'organic' unity and a metaphysical 'totality,' although the new context changed its meaning to a 'total sacrifice' of the individual to the state and a denial of existence of the individual outside of the folk community. According to Dr. Gross, Director of the Racial-Political Office, the system of liberalism had created an 'individualistic society' that was basically 'unfree' in spirit. In order to regain his true freedom, he said, every individual should sacrifice his desires and goals entirely to the State." p.39

"Like most of the Nazi ideologists, Gross appealed to the spirit of altruism and idealism when he spoke about the individual's contributions to the folk community: 'The human being no longer is a separate entity all by himself...Born into the community of his people he will feel the bond of the blood, and he will consider it the ultimate goal of his life to contribute his very best to the prosperity and preservation of this larger unit. Thus, it should come quite naturally to him that the meaning of his life no longer is bound up with his own small ego but with the community of his folk to whom he owes his life. His fate is inseparably linked with the destiny of his people.'" p.40 "While contemplating the Nazi slogan '*Gemeinnutz geht uber Eigennutz!*' (The Welfare of the Community has Priority over the Welfare of the Individual!), the literary critic Langenbucher explained that life in the folk community was the *only* life style that would guarantee to a person a "higher existence"'. p.40 A lot of people were swayed by this: "Only to the more discriminating minds it was evident from the very start that the Nazis' concepts of folk, community and personality actually stood in direct opposition to the Western humanitarian and democratic traditions; that unity for the Nazis meant uniformity, and that freedom implied slavery within a totalitarian system of controls." p.44 "As children's literature and folklore were the very media through which the Nazis hoped to shape the 'attitudes' of the youngest members of the German folk community toward the Third Reich, these subjects offer a unique testing ground for their methods of indoctrination and their subsequent perversion of traditional humanitarian values." p.45

"To be sure [...] children's literature would be interpreted in the proper manner, the Party and State censorship authorities would issue detailed 'guidelines' for teachers, librarians and youth leaders. In addition, all editors of folklore journals and literature journals were placed under pressure to follow the National Socialist ideology in the interpretation and

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criticism of every article or book review published. Those who did not follow this demand were denied paper for printing or were ordered to stop publishing altogether.

What we today plainly call ‘censorship,’ the Nazis expressed as ‘cultural guidance.’”
P.52

“Hans Friedrich Blunck, President of the Reich Literature Chamber, used the gentle simile of a gardener’s job to explain the task that Goebbels had assigned to him. He said that the State authorities would have to ‘pull out all of the weeds’ from the ‘healthy bed of flowers,’ very much like a gardener who truly cared about his plants. If left untended, the weeds would choke the young plants and stifle growth and development. ‘Thus,’ he concluded, ‘the State has the right to choose and select from among the literary creations and the authors according to its own will and desire. It has the right to do so—and it has always made use of this right—in order to counteract those movements that have a tendency to lead to the disintegration of German culture.’” p.52

“During the national conference in 1937, the National Socialist Teachers Association finally agreed to set up definite guidelines for the removal of ‘un-Volkish’ literature and to implement these without delay. The ten points listed covered most aspects of the Nazis’ censorship theory. Significantly, the first one referred to the need of removing books that supposedly contradicted the ‘Nordic Germanic attitude.’ According to the attached explanation, this applied to works portraying unheroic characters, pacifistic themes, or certain ‘weaknesses’ in German history. Implied in this statement was a simultaneous promotion of books dwelling on heroic themes and a ‘positive’ world view. The second point concerned unwanted literature as far as the ‘wrong attitude toward Jews’ and the racial question were concerned. It referred quite explicitly to books which portrayed Jews as ‘noble protagonists’ but Germans as ‘treacherous villains.’ Such themes were not to be tolerated, it said, nor others that presented a cooperation among different races or interracial marriages in a favorable light. The next following point, too, spoke against books depicting the ideals of the brotherhood of man across racial lines...The most drastic National Socialist censorship principles were those which were directed against works written by Jews or by persons who, for one reason or another, had expressed a dissenting view in regard to the Nazi Regime.” p.53

“The question then arises as to what exactly children’s books were expected to accomplish within the new context of German folk education. During the early stages of the Nazi regime, it was Hans Maurer, editor of one of the first bibliographical guides to Volkish literature for children and youth, who also gave one of the first definitions of its tasks. On behalf of the Hitler Youth Organization and the Reich Youth Library in Berlin, he defined the new goals of Volkish literature as follows:

We expect of good books that they will:

1. Arouse among children an enthusiasm for the heroes of sagas, legends and history, for the soldiers of the great wars, the *Fuhrer* and the New Germany, so as to strengthen their love of the fatherland and give them new ideals to live by.
2. Show the beauty of the German landscape.

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3. Focus on the fate of children of German ethnic groups living abroad and emphasize their yearning for the Reich.
4. Deal with the love of nature and promote nature crafts.
5. Relate old German myths, folktales and legends, in a language reflecting the original folk tradition as closely as possible.
6. Give practical advise and help to the Hitler Youth, both in relation to recreational programs and camp activities.” pp.55-56

“The major emphasis in this definition [a later and more explicit version of the one quoted above which contained a formally warmongering and racist element] of the role of children’s literature lies in its needed support of the German ‘fighting spirit.’ In that sense, children’s books, like all literature, represented an ideological ‘weapon’ for the Nazis to establish the principle that the present was a direct continuation of the past, and that National Socialism demanded the same type of heroism as the Nordic Germanic ‘ancestors’ had required. In the spirit of Norse mythology and the sagas, this implied a defiant attitude toward fate and a spirit of ‘action’ rather than of resignation. Throughout the Nazi period, the Nordic heroes were put up as ideal models for children and youth.” p.58

“The Nazis did not really wish to sell a finished product but hoped to stimulate by ‘symbolic literature’ the continuous process of folk education that would turn German children and youth into a homogeneous community of ‘true believers.’ Writers who dwelt upon the theme of human suffering, or on deplorable social conditions and oppressive circumstances were condemned as ‘degenerates’.” p.59.

“One leading educationist, once seemingly liberal, could write by the later thirties that ‘It is the highest goal of political education to develop in the individual the feeling that he is an integral part of the racial folk community, and that he lives his life accordingly.’” p.65

Part II The Interpretation of Children’s Literature

Chapter 4 Folktale, Germandom, and Race

This has been posted as a separate document to the course site. A summary follows: “The German folktale gained significantly in status and popularity during the National Socialist Regime, as the Party promoted it actively within the context of German folk education. A Party official put it quite plainly in 1935: ‘The German folktale shall become a most valuable means for us in the racial and political education of the young.’ To the already fairly large German folktale collections in the libraries the Nazis added a great number of new publications early in the thirties, and the markets were flooded with series of paperbacks promoting the German folk heritage. The schools, too, officially supported the trend by paying close attention to the German folktale at all levels of education.” p.70 Kamenetsky says that it was Nordic Germanic folktale that was twisted to present an image of German ethnic superiority, and that the tales of the Grimms the Nazis rather left alone. Numerous other online sources, although less trustworthy, say that versions of Red Riding Hood were used by the Nazis (including a film version with Little Red Riding Hood in a fetching swastika motif cloak) to portray German youth menaced by the Jewish wolf.

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