

## Summary of Christa Kamenetsky's Argument

---

We turn to Christa Kamenetsky's "Folktale and Ideology in the Third Reich". And the first thing we learn about is

- censorship: the desire by the state to restrict access to certain facts and ideas.
- and on the positive side, the active "ideological training" of German citizens in which a highly politicized kind of folklore was to play a major role.
- book burning and the re-invention and diffusion of a Nordic/Germanic fakedlore.
- Numerous editions of the Grimm Brothers' tales sponsored by the Party.
- the 'peasant' aspect of the cultural inheritance was strongly stressed because this by implication was the most Germanic strand of society and also as an aid to group identification on aggressive patriotic principles.
- this reflects a distinctly anti-urban and romantic/sentimental view of the German past. [Germany lagged significantly behind the UK in terms of urbanization: Germany still has the preponderance of its population, about 52 %, living in rural settings in 1910; by which stage the UK had nearly seventy percent of its population living in communities of 5,000 or more].
- the folk heritage took on huge new importance, but folklore was kept under tight ideological control: folklorists were forbidden to emphasize the international aspect of their work.
- the "peasantry" redefined as a fighting as well as an agricultural phalanx, and the folktale becomes the main way of indoctrinating German youth; the Grimm's Tales saluted as the new "bible".
- ethnic struggle, racial cleansing and so on, substituted for the class warfare of rival socialist doctrines.
- the nation seen as a kind of extended village community.
- stress on German folktales as unique and sui-generis, repudiating the international element.
- Fairy Tales identified as the ultimate source of national identity and patriotism.
- urge to filter out the pure Aryan strain in the folktales, partly obscured by years of allegedly too pluralistic collecting, and confused internationalist thinking.
- the results were authoritarian, racist, and profoundly anti-intellectual.
- the Nazi desire to capture "true German nature at its very source" sounds remarkably like the Brothers Grimm.
- there's a useful passage summarizing the values prized by the Nazi ideologues at the bottom of p.173.
- no attempt was spared to link the motifs of German FT with old Norse mythology, pp.174-5.
- Norse mythology refocused to repudiate its life denying and apocalyptic doom-laden characteristics.
- here's her conclusion: "the new folktale interpretation achieved the very opposite of what it officially set out to do. While transforming the folktale into a state product of Socialist Realism, it severed it from its genuine connection with the living folk tradition, thus stifling its growth and creative development. Finally, the folktale was no longer a true reflection of the common peasant folk, but only a medium for the Nazi ideology, and a mouthpiece of racial propaganda." P.178

MIT OpenCourseWare  
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21L.430 / CMS.920 Popular Culture and Narrative: Use and Abuse of the Fairy Tale  
Fall 2015

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.