

TUESDAY OCTOBER 12, 1999
AFTERNOON SESSION A 14:00-15:30

Propaganda and Children During the Hitler Years
by
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During the Nazi years, German anti-Semites intensified the medieval image of the Jew as an agent of the Devil, portraying him as the Devil incarnate. How could such a monstrously despicable view of a group of people be successfully circulated among ordinary Germans during the Third Reich? This question can be at least partially addressed by a careful examination of several Nazi propaganda books intended for young children. The most notorious anti-Semitic picture storybooks, *Trau keinem Fuchs auf grüner Heid und keinem Jud bei seinem Eid!* (*Don't Trust a Fox in a Green Meadow or the Word of a Jew!*) and *Der Giftpilz* (*The Poisonous Mushroom*), went through several editions and had a circulation of several hundred thousand. They were produced by the hate-mongering publisher, Der Stürmer, owned and operated by Julius Streicher, its chief editor.

Another Stürmer publication, *Der Pudelmopsdachelpinscher* (*The Poodle-Pug-Dachshund-Pinscher*), although less widespread, was, nonetheless, virulently anti-Semitic. These children's books provide an inside view of the anti-Semitic prejudices and practices nurtured by the Third Reich and serve to document the ruthless poisoning of the young minds that were exposed to these storybooks, which represent one of the most insidious tactics used by the Nazis to imbue German children with a deep hatred for Jews.

There are several reasons for using "propaganda literature and children during the Hitler years" as a topic for Holocaust education. The picture book stories offer an insight into the means used to indoctrinate young children in the most extreme anti-Semitism imaginable. During the Nuremberg Trial, *Don't Trust a Fox in a Green Meadow or the Oath of a Jew* and *The Poisonous Mushroom* were received as documents in evidence. Because they document the practices of the Nazis, these books have an authenticity that should sound a very persuasive warning against the dangers of the hate groups that live in our midst. In April of 1999, one such hate group based in Sydney, Australia, placed an English translation of *Der Giftpilz* on the internet. The URL containing this translation is <http://www.ns.aus.tn/propaganda/Julius/Mushroom.html> It is hoped that exposure to propaganda such as *Der Giftpilz* within an educational context would enable students to recognize it for the vile substance that it is. Typically, the horrors of Nazi propaganda are viewed in an adult context. Examining the propaganda literature that targeted children can provide students with an immediacy that, hopefully, will help them understand that prejudice is not something that is inborn; it is something that must be carefully taught.

During the workshop, actual samples of the above-mentioned Nazi picture storybooks will be provided in translation and slides of pictures from the books will be shown. The

purpose of the workshop will be to investigate how such visual and linguistic propaganda may be used effectively with middle school and high school students.

In his preface to *Die Judenfrage im Deutschunterricht (The Jewish Question in Classroom Instruction)*, which was published in 1937 by Der Stürmer, Julius Streicher makes the following statement: “The National Socialist state requires its teachers to teach German children about racial theory. For the German people, racial theory means the Jewish question “...we German educators wish to impart to our young people, from childhood on, knowledge about the Jew. None of our people should grow up ignorant of the dreadful danger posed by the Jew...”² Of the topics teachers were required to teach, the most important was racial theory and the Jewish question.

The image of the Jew as something less than human, unnatural and immoral recurs throughout Nazi propaganda picture storybooks for children. Around the age of six, children were given primers, whose content focused upon camp life, marching, martial drums, boys growing up to be soldiers, etc. Along with these primers, children were given a supplement entitled *Trau keinem Fuchs auf grüner Heid und keinem Jud bei seinem Eid (Don't Trust a Fox in a Green Meadow or the Oath of a Jew)*. This supplement was written by an eighteen-year-old art student, Elvira Bauer, and was a basic educational tool that was typical of the material provided for young children. It was published in 1935/36 by Der Stürmer and went through seven editions. A hundred thousand copies of this picture book were in circulation. This storybook does not have a story in the traditional sense because it lacks an active plot. Its anti-Semitic theme, conveyed through primitive rimes and lurid illustrations, focuses upon a pre-conceived contrast between the German and the Jew, their history of animosity, and the establishment of a justification for the German war against the Jews. According to Nazi ideology, this war was being fought to save the Aryan world from the Jewish alien invaders within its midst.

Upon casual examination of the book, one's attention is immediately drawn to the malicious expressions of the two images accompanying the title. The one is a fox eager to trap his prey; the other is a Jew eager to swear a false oath under the Star of David. Bauer effectively uses the image of the clever and deceptive fox, a figure that is based in antiquity and commonplace in European folklore. Greek legend considered the fox to be a creature of the Devil or even the Devil, himself. While linking the Jew to this universal image of deceit, Bauer simultaneously draws upon another universal theme, loyalty to one's oath as it appears in the German fairy tale *Eid aufs Eisen*. *Eid aufs Eisen* might be translated as “absolute truth.” *Eid* means “oath” and *aufs Eisen* literally means “on iron.” This expression comes from the Middle Ages, where the truth of an oath had to be proven in battle. Figuratively, this is the strongest oath possible. In the German fairy tale, the fox outsmarts another animal by swearing a false oath. An oath sworn by a Jew is thus identified by Bauer as deceitful. Both the title and its accompanying illustration reference an old prejudice against Jews. During the Middle Ages, Jews were required to swear an oath using a special ceremony during a court proceeding. It was not until the nineteenth century with the emancipation of Jews that such rituals, which marked the Jewish oath as something mysterious and uncanny, vanished. Bauer drums

the identification of the Jew with the evil traits of the fox into the minds of her young readers by frequent warnings such as: “Like a fox, he slips about / So you must look out!”

Bauer goes beyond the usual catalogue of “typical” Jewish characteristics by seeking to provide the stereotypes with a mythological-racial context. According to anti-Semitic folklore, the Devil is the creator of the Jewish people. In an attempt to equal God’s creation of humans, the Devil succeeds only in producing unfortunate creatures, among them, the monkey and the Jew. As children of the Devil, therefore, Jews deserve to be ostracized and treated poorly. Their perceived physical and moral defects are regarded as racial characteristics. The positive self-image of the German also has its basis in racial ideology. Germans are, according to Nazi racial ideology, a pure race, and, in contrast to the Jews, a healthy race. Bauer alludes several times to what must be done to keep Germany a wholesome country and thanks the notorious anti-Semite, Julius Streicher, the editor of *Der Stürmer*, for his efforts to keep Germany healthy and free from Jews. Finally, she reduces the Jewish presence in Germany to a plague that must be eliminated. The association between Jews and a fatal disease as well as the justification for the destruction of Jews was being indoctrinated into young children via colorful picture books in 1936, six years before the Wannsee Conference.

Drawing on several centuries of anti-Semitism, Bauer intensifies her assault by making the virtuous German the object of Jewish hate. The German is portrayed as hard working, honest, handsome and courageous. In his character and physical appearance, the Jew is depicted as the antithesis of these qualities. This so-called Jewish hate of Christians actually has its basis in the hatred of Jews by Christians who considered Jews to be Christ-killers. As early as the eighteenth century, the Talmud was depicted as a book that encouraged and justified the commission of crimes against Christians. An example of this concept of the Jew as a Christian-hater occurs in *Uncovered Jewry, Or A Thorough And Truthful Report About The Horrible Ways The Hidden Jews Desecrate The Holy Trinity*. This book appeared in Königsberg, Germany in 1711, and its description of the Talmud as a guide for committing crimes against Christian beliefs was widely accepted by Christians.

Der Giftpilz appeared in Germany in 1938 and leaves little question regarding the intended Nazi solution to the “Jewish problem.” The book begins innocently enough by describing a favorite German pastime, picking wild mushrooms in the woods. A young boy, Franz, accompanies his mother on a walk in a beautiful, wooded area and helps her gather mushrooms. After carefully describing and showing Franz several varieties of both edible and poisonous mushrooms, his mother compares the good mushrooms to good people and the harmful mushrooms to bad people. The most dangerous people are, of course, the Jews. Franz proudly announces that he has learned in school that the Jews are bad people. His mother continues her comparison of Jews to poisonous mushrooms by emphasizing that, just as poisonous mushrooms are difficult to distinguish from edible ones, it is difficult to differentiate Jews from non-Jews because Jews can assume many forms. Franz’s mother repeatedly alludes to the terrible, destructive force of the Jews. One Jew can destroy an entire people because the Jew is the Devil in human form. The Jew poses a deadly threat not only to the survival of the German people but to the

survival of the world! It is Germany's obligation to warn the rest of the world about this terrible toadstool and, thereby, save humanity from destruction. Thus begins one of the most insidious storybooks ever composed for children.

Thematically, the book is organized around an anti-Semitic attack on three fronts: physical appearance, religious beliefs, and moral values. After the introduction comparing the Jews to poisonous mushrooms, there is a chapter dedicated to enabling German children to recognize Jews. In school, during the "Jewish lesson," German children are instructed about the "physical characteristics" of Jews and encouraged to recite them. Even more venomous are the subsequent chapters, whose stories are essentially assaults upon the Talmud and the moral fiber of Jewish society itself.

Several laws of the Talmud are studied by Sally, a boy preparing for his *bar mitzvah*. As the rabbi, "an old Jew with a long beard and a face that looks like the Devil himself," poses questions and the young man answers them, a pattern of pervasion, intended to dehumanize Jews and convert them into the embodiment of an ever-present danger to the well-being of German society, emerges that hammers away at reality, replacing it with distortion. This pattern is evident in the dialogue between Sally, the young Jew, and the rabbi on the subject of work. Sally mentions the German proverb, "Work is no disgrace," and contrasts it to what he supposedly finds in the Talmud. In the *Giftpilz* version of the Talmud, "Work is quite harmful and hardly to be tolerated." Sally elaborates on this statement saying, "for that reason, we Jews do not work; we engage in business. Non-Jews have been created to work and serve Jews..." Here the Talmud, the book of Jewish law and tradition, is represented as advocating the enslavement of Germans to the service of Jews. The absurdity of such a condition is overshadowed by the emphasis placed upon the German work ethic via the proverb, "Work is no disgrace." In what might be considered a rape of language, an innocuous proverb becomes a forceful propaganda tool, with which the Nazis portray the Jews as despising work and threatening to enslave hard-working Germans.

In each of the episodes following the discussion of the Talmud, there emerges a recurrent image of the morally decadent Jew attempting to take advantage of the morally upstanding German. The victims are often portrayed as defenseless, young women, children, and animals. Several of the stories have a decidedly pornographic character that is blatantly obvious in their accompanying illustrations. The image of the Jew as an inhuman monster, who victimizes helpless Germans, is visually reinforced through the use of these grotesque images. The image of the Jewish monster perpetrating misfortune is presented at the end of each episode in the form of a short poem, which capsulizes the specific immoral act allegedly committed by a Jew, connects all Jews to the Devil and serves to warn the reader against the ever-present Jewish threat. The episode about Hans and Else concludes with the following saying, which Hans' mother requires him to memorize:

A devil goes through the land,
It's the Jew, well known to us
As a murderer of peoples,
A race defiler, a child's horror

In all lands!

Corrupting our youth
stands him in good stead.
He wants all peoples dead.

Stay away from every Jew,
And happiness will come to you!

Der Giftpilz ends with a brief description of a speech given by Julius Streicher, in which he declares that humanity cannot be saved without a solution to the Jewish problem. As with *Trau keinem Fuchs auf grüner Heid und keinem Jud bei seinem Eid!*, *Der Giftpilz* also contains many signs pointing to the adoption of the “Endlösung,” the Final Solution that was officially established at the Wannsee Conference in 1942.

Der Pudelmopsdachshundpinscher (The Poodle-Pug-Dachshund-Pinscher), another picture storybook written by Ernst Hiemer and published by *Der Stürmer* in 1940, is, in my opinion, more dangerous than either *Don't Trust a Fox in a Green Meadow or the Oath of a Jew* or *The Poisonous Mushroom*. Realizing that children are basically very interested in the world of nature that surrounds them, Hiemer constructs little stories centered upon what are generally considered to be despicable traits in certain animals and insects and concludes each story by transferring the undesirable characteristics to the human world via the Jews. The Jews are considered the drones of society because they do not work but rather live from the labor of others. Like the cuckoo, the Jews are depicted as thieves, who steal other people's homes. They are the foreigners threatening to displace the Germans from Germany. As hyenas strike disabled animals, Jews are portrayed as preying upon disadvantaged Germans/Christians. Other animals included in these comparisons are the chameleon (the great deceiver), the locust (the scourge of God), the bedbug (the blood sucker), the sparrow (the good-for-nothings), the poodle-mops-dachshund-pinscher (an inferior race created by cross-breeding various types of races), the poisonous snake (the viper of humanity), and the tapeworm (the parasite of humanity). Finally, Jews are compared to deadly bacteria, which threatens the existence of the human race. Just as deadly bacteria must be exterminated, so must the Jew. Hiemer concludes with an exhortation to the youth of the world to become actively involved in the war against Jews. Young Germans are cast as the hope of Germany and the saviors of a world under siege by a Jewish plague. The cumulative effect of so many comparisons with the world of nature, one might think, would be to make the elimination of Jews a natural and expected occurrence. Their extermination is presented as being part of the natural order of things, and the child is invited to rescue the desired natural order from the disaster planned by the Jewish enemy. The opportunity is strongly presented for the child to go from being a passive recipient of information about the destruction caused by the Jews to an active participant in the war against them.

Besides the Nazi manipulation of language, one must also carefully consider the effect of the visual aspect of the propaganda contained in the picture books. To this end, I have included copies of some of the illustrations that appear in the picture storybooks. Close

examination of the language and illustrations that appear in these books reveals a justification for the Nuremberg Laws. The Jew is cast as an infiltrator, who, upon gaining entry into German society, has usurped the political and economic power of Germany and focused his attention upon accomplishing the destruction of all things German. Because the Jew is viewed as such a threat to German society, the Nuremberg Laws are deemed a justifiable act of self-defense. The purpose of the propaganda picture storybooks was to make the status of the Jew as a deadly enemy as concrete as possible to German children. These storybooks may be viewed as both a clear signal pointing to the impending Final Solution as well as a prerequisite for it. Without the hate that these books sought to instill into young children, there could not have been a Final Solution.

Firstly; Propaganda is defined as ideas that are spread (through various media) for the purpose of influencing opinion. Important for a politician yes? Now, by establishing the Ministry of Propaganda as one of his first acts as chancellor, Hitler demonstrated his belief that controlling information was as important as controlling the military and the economy. He appointed Josef Goebbels (another excellent public speaker, arguably just as/more antisemitic than the Fuhrer himself, and particularly skilled with new modern media platforms radio and film) to direct this department. Goebbels's strat