



Breeding Hatred: Dissecting the Pedagogy of Propaganda of Nazi Anti-Semitism in German Children's Literature

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Abstract

The coercive possibility of pedagogical tools, especially children's literature has always been recognized by the totalitarian regimes. Other than using radio, television, films, press, theatre as a tool for spreading propaganda, a close study of German children's books show strong racial overtones. These books archive the strategies employed by the totalitarian government to poison the impressionable minds of the German children and indoctrinate them with Nazi ideology. The primary objective of this paper is to argue and expose the venomous xenophobic propaganda behind such texts and how within an educational and pedagogical context, texts like them and others can generate enormous amount of racial discrimination and position the Jews almost as a biological and racial "other". Analysing the propaganda literature intended for children can help scholars and historians of Holocaust understand that racial bias, sense of racial superiority and antagonizing sentiments are not instinctive or inborn, rather these are meticulously instilled. I have referred to popular German picture books like *Trust No Fox on his Green Heath* and *No Jew on his Oath* (1936) and *The Poisonous Mushroom* (1938) among others for this purpose.

Keywords: Children's Literature, Pedagogy, Propaganda, Holocaust, Anti-Semitism.

1.1 Introduction

"Whoever has the youth has the future" (Bullock, 365), is one of Hitler's oft-repeated phrases. To achieve this future, he had taken complete charge of youth's physical, emotional, and intellectual development. The National Socialist Regime remains, for many people, the classic example of totalitarian dictatorship. While living in Vienna before the First World War, Adolf Hitler generated an irrational abhorrence towards the Jewish race. In a speech he made in 1923 he asked the question: "Do we wish to restore Germany to freedom and power? If yes, then the first thing to do is to rescue it from the Jew who is ruining our country" (Bullock 361). In 1926 the Nazi Party formed the Hitler Youth movement. The main objective was to turn the young people of Germany into "good Nazis" (Taylor and Shaw 309). This included the development of hostile attitudes towards not just Jewish adults but also the children. German anti-Semites had escalated their attack on the Jewish race by promulgating the medieval image of the Jew as the personification of Devil himself. It is imperative to understand how and why such a gigantically detestable perspective of a race of people could be established among the common German citizen. This can be understood by examining the Nazi anti-Semitic picture books published for school children.

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The anti-Semitic picture storybooks such as, *Trau keinem Fuchs auf grüner Heid und keinem Jud auf seinem Eid* (*Trust No Fox on his Green Heath and No Jew on his Oath*) and *Der Giftpilz* (*The Poisonous Mushroom*), had multiple editions and had a massive circulation in lakhs. Published by the weekly newspaper, *Der Stürmer*, which was one of the key contributors of the Nazi propaganda machinery. It was run by Julius Streicher, its chief editor, also a member of the Nazi party, who was convicted in the Nuremberg trials and executed. What these children's picture books essentially do is provide a perspective on the anti-Semitic racial biases sustained by the Third Reich. These books archive the strategies employed by the totalitarian government to poison the impressionable minds of the German children and indoctrinate them with Nazi ideology. During the Nuremberg Trial, *Trust No Fox on his Green Heath and No Jew on his Oath*. (1936) and *The Poisonous Mushroom* (1938) were received as documents in evidence. The primary objective of this paper is to argue and expose the venomous xenophobic propaganda behind such texts and how within an educational and pedagogical context, texts like them and others can generate enormous amount of racial discrimination and position the Jews as almost a biological and racial "other".

To understand how the anti-Semitic feelings led to the dehumanising of the Jews and ultimately to the Holocaust, a thorough understanding of the entire machinery of propaganda is necessary. The Nazi propaganda machinery tried to create cognitive biases in their targeted population through various techniques like posters, cinema, radio, art, music, the press, theatre and educational materials, among others. The origin of Nazi propaganda can be traced back to Hitler's *Mein Kampf* which had chapters emphasising on the importance of propaganda. Hitler stated in the *Mein Kampf*:

The function of propaganda does not lie in the scientific training of the individual, but in calling the masses' attention to certain facts, processes, necessities, etc., whose significance is thus for the first time placed within their field of vision. The whole art consists in doing this so skillfully that everyone will be convinced that the fact is real, the process necessary, the necessity correct, etc...its effect for the most part must be aimed at the emotions and only to a very limited degree at the so-called intellect. (Hitler, 1940, p.179-180).

Soon after Hitler came to power a pertinent step was taken by founding of *Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda* – or the Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, and Dr. Joseph Goebbels was appointed as the minister of propaganda. Under the ministry of propaganda Nazi ideologies were soon translated into oversimplified, easily understandable narratives of right and wrong, good and evil. Using existing stereotypes and biases they demonised Germany's enemies and fostered loyalty towards the Führer. Hence, long before the implementation of the Final Solution, anti-Semitic rhetoric had infiltrated the public perception.

1.2 The Classroom of Nazi Germany: Treatment of Jews as an "Unnatural" Threat to the Moral Framework of the German Nation

Along with using the mass media means, the propaganda machinery used school textbooks for early indoctrination of Nazi ideals in German children. Books praising Hitler and elevating him to a cult status were introduced in the German education system during the 1930s, which

was now wholly aimed towards a structured instilling of Nazi anti-Semitic ideas into the young populace, which would create a young, loyal population who would be young soldiers by 1944. In the introduction to *Die Judenfrage im Unterricht (The Jewish Question in Classroom Instruction)*, which was published in 1937 by the anti-Semitic newspaper *Der Stürmer*, whose founder is Julius Streicher, made the following statement: “The National Socialist state requires its teachers to teach German children racial theory. For the German people, racial theory means the Jewish problem” (Fink 3). The Nazi obsession for preservation of bloodline and Aryan supremacy, led to a belief that the interracial marriage between Germans and Jews were unnatural and threatened the biological order of things. The Nuremberg Laws were hence depicted as the restoration of the natural order that God intended, and the Jew is thus shown as a threat to God’s order. The Jew had to be projected as the enemy of God and an enemy of everything German, and in order to achieve that objective, the teacher’s guide suggests that pictures of ugly and distorted Jews be posted on the board next to pictures of the ideal German. Racial differences are inferred from the visual differences. “The Jews walk differently than we do. They have flat feet. They have longer arms than we do. They speak differently than we do” (Fink, 1937, p.16).

What began with physical differences soon permeated into the sphere of mental faculties: the Jew was projected as a contradiction in terms of not just their physicality but also their thoughts and actions, to the dominant German morality. The depiction of the Jew as someone who swindles as a lawyer, a merchant or a banker and someone who worships money was placed in contrast to the honest German farmer or worker. (“Propaganda and Children During the Hitler Years”).

Examination of some German textbooks throws light upon the strong anti-Semitic propaganda that the educational system propagated. For instance, an elementary school reading textbook that was published before the beginning of the World War, called *Hand in Hand fürs Vaterland* by Otto Zimmermann, had the following picture:

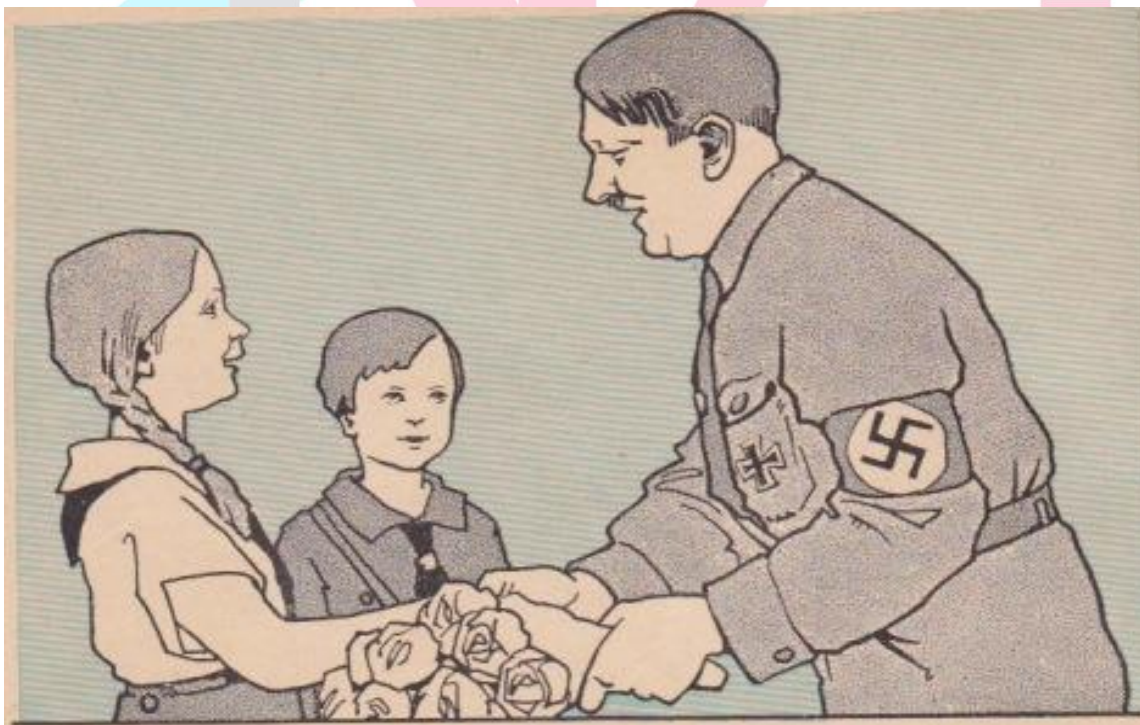


Fig.1. Otto Zimmermann, Children pledging allegiance to Hitler.

The picture is of school children pledging allegiance to Hitler. The following words

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accompany the picture:

Mein Führer! (The child speaks):

I know you well, and love you as I do my father and mother.

I will always be obedient to you as I am to my father and mother.

And when I am bigger, I will help you, as my father and mother do,

And you will be proud of me, as my father and mother are! (Bytwerk, n.d.)

The above words are followed by lines which are attributed to Hitler according to the text. It says that Hitler wants the population to be one with his goal. He instructs them to be loyal, obedient, peace-loving and brave. He asserts that the German children should not be "weak and soft, but rather hard, and [they] must learn in [their] earliest years to be hard" (Bytwerk). Hence it is quite evident that he wants to indoctrinate and instruct the German population in their formative years. He invokes in them the racial pride through his speech as written in these children's book.

A middle school geography textbook claims the Nazi assertion that Germany needed more space. This was a major element of Nazi propaganda (Muller, 1943, p.116). A biology text book for the fifth grade, published in 1942, i.e. the midst of the ongoing war, propounds how the survival of their race is of utmost importance and quotes *Mein Kampf* that the goal of female education is to prepare them for motherhood. Another article titled *The Educational Principles of the New Germany* in a Nazi magazine explicitly summarizes the Nazi educational policies emphasizing chiefly on maintaining purity of the German race, learning of military virtues, following the leadership of the Führer without a doubt, and unshakeable belief in God. (Bytwerk, n.d.)

1.3 Projecting Jews as a Social "Other": The Image of the Jew in Anti-Semitic School Textbooks of Germany

Trust No Fox on his Green Heath and No Jew on his Oath by an eighteen-year-old Elvira Bauer was one of the first of three anti-Semitic children's books published by Julius Streicher's Stürmer Publishing House. At the age of six German children were provided with primers that were used to entice them towards camping, marching, martial activities and boys growing up to be soldiers. This was an obvious effort to get the young minds interested in the Hitler Youth. Along with these primers they were provided with a supplement entitled *Trust No Fox on his Green Heath and No Jew on his Oath*. It was published in 1936 by Der Stürmer and went through seven editions, and one lakh copies of this picture book were in circulation. A careful scrutinizing of the book throws open an array of racial stereotyping which already existed among the common German about the difference between an honest German and the demonic Jew. The anti-Semitic agenda is forwarded through some conspicuous pictures and primitive rhyming. The very cover of the book has two images which capture the essence of the book: the one is a fox eager to trap his prey; the other is a Jew prepared to swear a bogus pledge under the Star of David. The figure of the malicious and cunning fox has been used for its obvious symbolic reference to deception. The opening passages project the devil has the begetter of the Jew, a race to whom deceit and lies come naturally.



Fig.2. Cover of *Trust No Fox on his Green Heath and No Jew on his Oath*.

The book portrays how the Jewish race survives on cheating rather than hard work, contrary to the hardworking German. Another section of the book describes the Jews race as a race of murderers, and it was hence that God selected this race to murder his son Jesus Christ. There is an allusion to the Jew Ahaseurus who ridiculed Jesus on the way to the Crucifixion and was then cursed to roam around the earth until the Second Coming, and it is told that this cursed the entire race to never have a ‘home’, a land to call their own. Another passage emphasizes on the fact that even a Jew who wishes to convert to Christianity is no real Christian, that he cannot exonerate himself from his racial flaws. Bauer stresses on another theme of focal significance in medieval European culture: loyalty to one's vow. She puts together her story with respect to the German fairy tale *Eid aufs Eisen*, which when translated literally is “Oath on Iron,” or figuratively is “Absolute Truth”. In *Eid aufs Eisen* a fox outsmarted another animal by swearing a false oath. (Mills) And the author builds on the premise that Jew is as deceitful as a fox and takes false oaths and writes: “Don’t trust a fox on the greensward, And never a Jew on his plighted word!” (Bauer) And the significance of an oath in German ideology can be understood if we take into consideration the SS motto: “My honour is loyalty.”

Bauer goes on to the tarnish the Jewish holy book, Talmud, but writing how it propagates evil acts if selling carrion meat to the Christians. The book portrays Jewish doctors, lawyers, meat sellers all corrupt and evil; and goes for the usual prejudices that the German is hated by the Jews. The book reduces Jews to a plague and hence their extermination is projected as the only natural solution to the ‘Jewish problem’. The last image in the book portrays the expulsion of Jews, with a signpost that says: “One-way road. Hurry, Hurry. The Jews are our misfortune”. The words “Hurry, Hurry” and “The Jews are our misfortune” appear in red. Emphasising on the emergency and importance of the expulsion of Jews at the earliest. The association of Jews to a disease and the Germans as the pure race is indoctrinated in German children through this propagandist pedagogical tool of colourful picture book of rhymes in 1936. It is to be noticed that the Wansee Conference took place six years after the publication of this book.

Der Giftpilz (The Poisonous Mushroom), the German word for toadstool, written by Ernst Hiemer and illustrated by Julius Streicher, appeared in Germany in 1938. The book leaves little doubt about its intention and purpose of the Nazi “Final Solution” in relation to the “Jewish problem”. The story begins with a mother and her young boy, Franz, gathering mushrooms in the German forest. The boy finds some poisonous mushrooms and the mother explains that there are good mushrooms and poisonous ones. His mother draws an analogy

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between the edible mushrooms and good people, and the poisonous mushrooms to bad people. She then asked Franz if he could identify the bad people from her analogy, to which he answers that he knows that the bad people are the Jews, as it has been told by the teachers at school. Proving how the education system was structured carefully to ostracize and demonise the Jew. The book goes on to state that the Jews “disguise themselves, or however friendly they try to be, affirming a thousand times their good intentions to us, one must not believe them. Jews they are and Jews they remain. For our Volk they are poison”(Bytwerk). The book mounts its anti-Semitic attacks on the grounds of physical appearance, religious, ethical and moral values. There are chapters which show children having classes on the “Jews” where they are taught that the Jews have bent noses, they are filthy, their bodies are infested by lies and they have protruding ears. The idea that a person's physical appearance mirrors the inner qualities of that person has been emphasised many a times through fairy tales, which presented the princesses as beautiful as well as good and kind, while diabolic stepmothers and witches were more often than not described as ugly, evil and cruel. The subsequent chapters attack the Jews by presenting a skewed idea of the Talmud and assaulting the moral fibre of the Jewish society. For instance, there is a chapter where a Jewish boy, Solly, is reading the Talmud for his bar mitzvah, and in the *Der Giftpilz* version of the Talmud “Work is noxious and not to be done” and on the contrary the German proverb of “Work is no disgrace” is presented. Solly goes on to elaborate on this statement: “Therefore we Jews don't work, but mostly engage in commerce. Gentiles are created to work.” The Talmud is hence shown to be advocating enslavement of Germans and thus an innocent proverb is becoming a powerful tool of propaganda. The Jewish law-book is shown to be advocating a list of wrongdoings: from smuggling, thievery, cheating, to perjury, all is shown to be permitted by this version of the Talmud. Throughout the book we have repeated representations of the morally upstanding German contrasting the decadent Jewish lot. The final chapter glorifies the Hitler Youth, with the effect that the young minds are encouraged to join the said organisation, ending with a brief recollection of Julius Streicher's words- “Without a solution of the Jewish question, No salvation for Mankind!”. It reinforces the necessity of extermination of Jews.

Der Pudelmopsdackelpinscher (The Poodle-Pug-Dachshund-Pinscher) by Ernst Hiemer was the last of three anti-Semitic children's books published by Julius Streicher's Stürmer Publishing House. Each of the eleven fable-like stories of this book compares Jews with animals and unpleasant life forms such as drones, hyenas, chameleons, coo-coos, locusts, bedbugs, starlings, mongrels, poisonous snakes, tapeworms, and the lowest of life forms such as bacteria. The title of the book is derived from one of the stories which draws an analogy between the Jew and a mongrel, a poodle-pug-dachshund-pinscher, which was racially inferior than the pure-blood German. Throughout the book an array of such analogies is drawn. Jews are compared to the cuckoo, shown as stealing other people's homes. They were said to be like hyenas preying upon the weak and disadvantaged; a deceiver like a chameleon, a blood sucker like the bed bug, a parasite like the tapeworm; like a venomous snake, which has its biblical connotations of being the deceiver of mankind. Finally, the Jews were compared to life-threatening microbes that compromised the very existence of humankind and subsequently, must be wiped out. The fable-like style of writing makes the book attractive to young readers and helps in forwarding the Nazi propaganda. The book concludes with an incitement to not just the German youth but also to the youth of the world to build a new world on the path shown by Hitler, a world where the Jews are defeated, because they are told to be the real enemies of the world. The book ends with these lines:

Therefore, we call the youth of the world! We call it to a battle for the freedom

of humanity. The end of the Jewish parasite of the peoples will forever free the world from “drones,” “locusts,” “bed bugs,” “hyenas,” “poisonous serpents,” “bacteria,” and the “poodle-pug-dachhund-pinscher” in human form! (Hiemer, 1938).

Besides the Nazi manipulation of language, one must also carefully consider the effect of the visual manipulation of the propaganda contained in the picture books. Philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s ideas about children’s literature being appealing to the natural interests of the children, had great influence in Germany. It was then that popular textbooks started including illustrations. According to Hans-Heino Ewers in *The International Companion Encyclopaedia of Children's Literature*, "It can be argued that from this time, the history of European children's literature was largely written in Germany." (Hunt 1057). In Nazi Germany a lot of emphasis was laid on the educational policies of the country keeping in mind their totalitarian agenda. The coercive potential of children’s literature has been always been recognized by totalitarian regimes. For example, in accordance with Mussolini’s agenda to indoctrinate the Italian youth into the ways of fascism, in 1938 the Futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti wrote a *Manifesto on Children’s Literature (Manifesto della Letteratura Giovanile)* identifying certain traits that the ideal children’s book must convey, he mentioned “absolute patriotism and dedication to the nation” as well as promoting physical courage, hard work, and a spirit of modernity and dynamism in accordance with Futurist principles. Mao Tse Tung also considered children’s literature as an important tool for propagating Communist ideology, and in 1938 he wrote a statement for the new journal *Children of the Border Areas* in which he urged the young to ‘Rise up’, free themselves from Japanese oppression, and transform themselves into ‘the masters of a new era’. (Reynolds, 113).

It can be argued that young and impressionable minds have always been the target of propagandist tools to influence them into maintaining the status quo. The classrooms of Nazi Germany acted as tools for conditioning of young minds to take forward the Nazi agenda. On assessing the language and illustrations of the aforementioned textbooks, it is understandable how they try to legitimize the Nuremberg Laws and the Nazi anti-Semitic ideology. Their blatant projection of the Jew as a usurper trying to take away everything that rightfully belongs to the Germans, makes them viewed as an enemy to the German society. Hence, the Nuremberg Laws could be esteemed a reasonable demonstration of self-protection and self-preservation by the German populace. The picture books serve the purpose of making the status of the Jew as a destructive adversary as concrete as conceivable to the impressionable minds. Therefore, it can be safely inferred that these picture books gave a clear indication of the impending Final Solution. The hatred that these books imparted and instilled into the young minds assisted in the culmination of the Holocaust. What these children’s books also prove is that racial prejudice is neither inborn nor instinctive, rather they are carefully instilled, taught and constructed through these well-planned pedagogical tools.

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Bio-note

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