Introduction

Nazi Characters in German Propaganda and Literature presents readings of texts that establish positive Nazi stereotypes in nationalist and National Socialist texts in juxtaposition to Nazi constructs in exemplary antifascist works in which these stereotypes are modified and repurposed to express opposition. The function of Nazi characters in literature and propaganda is explored in the context of the struggle for discursive dominance in Germany and Austria from the end of the German Empire to the collapse of the Third Reich. From the outset, the ideological contests were unequal. Nationalists and National Socialists deployed the rhetoric of propaganda and strategies of genre-crossing to appeal to the largest possible readership, while Nazi opponents, including authors whose stated intent was to reach out to the masses, mostly adhered to the aesthetics of high culture. Anti-Nazi literature was more likely to appeal to educated readers, which limited the reception of these often modernist and experimental works. In addition, the views of authors who opposed Nazi tenets were generally minority views held by intellectual Marxist, feminist, and Jewish writers. Their works were of limited interest to the predominantly conservative mainstream readership in Germany and Austria.

Nazi authors and their detractors both concretized their positions through the use of model characters that personified their ideological messages. While *Rassenkunde* (racial science) informed the typology in National Socialist manifestos, Nazi opponents responded with countermodels to discredit the Nazi ideal of a racialized German *Volk* (nation). Both Nazi and antifascist writers deployed stock characters to communicate their ideological codes. Negatively or positively connoted Nazi stereotypes became ensconced in the collective imaginary and were used in texts of different genres and orientations. Nazi writing positioned the respective stock characters as heroes, and antifascist literature represented them as villains and criminals. While Nazi figures were initially suppressed after 1945, they eventually reemerged and were repurposed for use in the postwar literary market.

In contrast to the historical Nazi movement and its representatives, Nazi characters as ideological signifiers have received little scholarly attention. Perhaps because propagandists and more literary authors strategically authenticated stock Nazi characters by references to actual people and events, the lines between fiction and non-fiction in the Nazi era often seem blurred, and scholars, seeking factuality, ignored the intertextual nexus that had produced these fictional characters. Literary versions of Nazis and the Third Reich reflect the authors' respective visions, not reality. Historical studies are based on

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research, archival work, and documents including memoirs and diaries.[1] In non-fiction, the "truth" is essential. In contrast, fiction and propaganda map desires and aspirations. Despite references to actual events and people, their appeal is to the imagination. The political imagery of the Weimar Republic and the First Republic of Austria produced prototypes for Nazi characters as ideological markers that were also used in literature.

Nazi authors aligned their writings with trends in ethnography, nationalist propaganda, and racial theory to frame their notions of race and nation. According to *Rassenkunde*, the quintessentially German traits were those of the "Nordic" or "Aryan" race, which Nazi ideologues declared the superior human race. From their racial model they concocted their vision of a homogeneous nation and proposed that Germany's racial composition needed improvement.[2] Nazi opponents rejected the concept of a racial state and the "Nordic" ideal. Still, in their attempts to deflate racial paradigms, they referenced the core elements of these paradigms and reproduced them in their own critical responses.

Nazi authors infused their writings with seemingly factual information, including specific dates and places, to create an air of authenticity. They embedded their messages in a blend of propaganda and personalized case studies to make them palatable. Their message of German superiority resonated with the pre-World War I vision of a triumphant German Empire and mobilized energy to restore the nation to its alleged former glory. Such simple thoughts were expounded in a variety of genres to suggest an abundance of ideas. The prospect of greatness and entitlement particularly deluded the demoralized German middle class, who lived in fear of economic and social displacement. Questionable theories such as racial science and racial hygiene coagulated with the Nazi program, which pronounced that a leadership role in global affairs was a German birthright. Echoing nineteenth-century Germanophilia, Nazi radicalism also fed into expansionist ambitions. After World War I, reactionary politicians and officers of the former imperial military nurtured nostalgic dreams of colonies and expansionism. Conservatives resented the postwar republics and democratic structures that empowered women and the working class. National Socialists benefitted from these attitudes and entrenched racist and anti-Semitic images, and the notion of Aryan world domination as a divine right. The founders of the Nazi party had esoteric associations and infused the new movement with spiritualist trends, as indicated by the frequent references to God and providence in Nazi speeches.[3]

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1 Philippe Lejeune (*On Diary,* 215) wrote: "The object of an autobiographical text is the truth of the past, and its contract implies both the possibility and the legitimacy of verification."

2 Harten, Neirich, and Schwerendt, *Rassenhygiene,* 12–3.

3 Kurlander, "Supernatural Sciences," 141; Hakl, *Unknown Sources.*