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**Christian Adam**  
**Reading Under Hitler**  
**Authors, Bestsellers and Readers in the Third Reich**

**Translated by Franklin Bolsillo Mares**

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**“Heaven don’t you ever let me write a book about books!”**

So why haven’t I heeded Georg Christoph Lichtenberg’s call? The answer lies in a handwritten inscription in one of the books my father saved for me from the time of his youth: “Only he will acquire the world who fights for it!” This dedication from my grandfather to his adolescent son was most likely written at the outset of the 1940s. Then in 1944, my father, having just turned 18, really did go forth to ‘fight the world’ – in Hitler’s Wehrmacht. The young man was quick to realize, though, that it wasn’t his war. He was lucky and survived. Years later this dedication moved me a great deal. What could have possibly motivated my grandfather to bestow such a motto to his son? And at such a time?

The book that was dedicated to my father was Karl Aloys Schenzinger’s *Anilin* – one of the true bestsellers during the Nazi era, as I was to learn much later. Yet as a young-adult reader I also made other discoveries in my father’s bookshelves. There were, for example, the green, cloth-bound volumes by Hans Dominik – Old-fashioned Science Fiction Stories – printed in scarcely legible Fraktur typeface. I found several heroes to be just as strange as the bad guys, but I still kept on reading. And I can also vividly remember the story of the two Hitler youths who experienced “Adventures in Brazil”<sup>1</sup>. At the end of the book they heed the summons to return home since they are needed – in Hitler’s Wehrmacht. Such reading experiences played an important role in directing my gaze towards books in the Third Reich – especially towards works that were truly published and read on a large scale. Works, in other words, of popular literature.

Many important books have already been devoted – and rightly so – to the era’s burned and ostracized literature. One of their primary functions has been to revoke the

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Eduard Dettmann: *Abenteuer in Brasilien*. Berlin: 1942.

death penalty that the Nazis were wont to impose. They have once again raised our awareness for books and authors that otherwise would have been forgotten.<sup>2</sup> Or, by means of commendable, large-scale series,<sup>3</sup> they hope to make the original texts broadly available again. Through these efforts, we can precisely state exactly which books and authors were definitely not welcome in the Third Reich.

On the other hand, whoever goes in search of 'literature' from the NS era that was both widely distributed and read will still come up against numerous obstacles. No survey of the period exists – even though contemporaries were quite aware that important knowledge could be gained by taking a closer look at popular literature: “I told myself that if a doorstopper of over 1000 pages, which was published in 1930, reached a printing of 350,000, then it must somehow be characteristic for the thinking of the time. And therefore I granted myself the authorization to read it.”<sup>4</sup> And it's doubtlessly true that the question of which books really were produced, distributed and read in large numbers under the swastika banner does shed light on an important facet of German mentality of the age.

So why, then, was there only a rather hesitant debate on the topic after 1945? First of all, even when addressing the book market, attention was understandably focused on stories pertaining to the victims of the NS regime. It was only over time that questions were posed concerning the book market in the Third Reich and the conditions of production and reception under Hitler. Thus, the first comprehensive study covering all

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<sup>2</sup> Recently, in fact, 75 years after the book burnings. Volker Weidemann: *Das Buch der verbrannten Bücher*. Cologne: 2008.

<sup>3</sup> The first 10 volumes of an edition expected to run to 120 volumes were also published on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary: *Bibliothek verbrannter Bücher. Eine Auswahl der von den Nationalsozialisten verfeimten und verbotenen Literatur*. Im Austrag des Moses Mendelssohn Zentrums für europäisch-jüdische Studien herausgegeben von Julius H. Schoeps. Hildesheim et al.: 2008

<sup>4</sup> Victor Klemperer's diary from June 28, 1944.

available records on the policies regarding literature in the Third Reich<sup>5</sup> was published less than 20 years ago! Yet without an exact understanding of the framework of text production at the time, certain issues could not even be examined at all. Studying the mass-market literature has also been complicated by the fact that, initially, nobody felt truly responsible for the topic. And when literary scholarship did focus on texts from these genres – which increasingly was the case, beginning in the 1960s –it did so from an ideological perspective, probing for the political interests popular literature may have served and the smoke screens it is said to have produced. Such research largely focused on the published texts themselves. Information on the authors or the market conditions were either only partially available or else played only a secondary role. Which is not to say that these studies were merely dead ends. In fact, they were relevant steps towards understanding specific phenomena of the literary market.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, “literature” was always a slippery term.<sup>7</sup> In the present book it is understood in its most general meaning and encompasses the entirety of written and printed matter, including non-fiction texts, documents, and propaganda, to name just a few.

As for non-fiction, we see that the scholarship on these texts is also comparatively recent. And yet between the years 1933 and 1945, non-fiction represented, similar to

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<sup>5</sup> I’m referring to the work of Jan-Pieter Barbian, which will be cited extensively in the following. Jan-Pieter Barbian: *Literaturpolitik im Dritten Reich. Institutionen, Kompetenzen, Betätigungsfelder*. Munich: 1995. More recently published by Barbian: *Literaturpolitik im NS-Staat. Von der „Gleichschaltung“ bis zum Ruin*. Frankfurt: 2010.

<sup>6</sup> One such example is the examination of science fiction. The first comprehensive study on sci-fi in Germany that included the years from 1933 to 1945 was published in 1972. Manfred Nagl, the author, examined the ideological aspects of the genre. This particular field of research was enriched by the fruitful debates with Nagl during the following decades. Manfred Nagl: *Science Fiction in Deutschland. Untersuchung zu Genese, Soziographie und Ideologie der phantastischen Massenkultur*. Tübingen: 1972.

<sup>7</sup> Refer to the short and precise entry “Literatur” by Erhard Schütz in: Erhard Schütz et al. (ed.): *Das BuchMarktBuch. Der Literaturbetrieb in Grundbegriffen*. Hamburg: 2005. p. 213ff.

today, a substantial portion of the products sold on the book market. Failing to examine non-fiction works only gives an incomplete and misleading picture of the mass-market book trade of the years in question. It wasn't until 1978, with Ulf Diederich's "approach to non-fiction", that a longer text appeared – a text that, until today, is still taken as a starting point for discussion – that, for the first time, also surveyed "factual literature" and the debates on non-fiction in the Third Reich. A more thorough commitment to the topic is still in full swing.<sup>8</sup>

Over the years new research has occasionally been published that has both stimulated debate and examined certain issues of mass-market literature in the Third Reich and that has also shed light on important aspects for the first time.<sup>9</sup> Yet it wasn't until cultural, literary and media studies became more tightly woven that the book market in its entirety, with all its products, stakeholders and laws, could be seen in a more vivid light.

In the present book, the literature of the era will be viewed from the perspective of the readers who lived under a National-Socialist regime in the German Reich. I have specifically examined those works that were actually printed, sold, and read in great numbers. I've opted for a very broad understanding of literature and have included coffee

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<sup>8</sup> Ulf Diederich's "Annäherung an das Sachbuch. Zur Geschichte und Definition eines umstrittenen Begriffs." In: Kindlers Literaturgeschichte der Gegenwart. Autoren, Werke, Themen, Tendenzen seit 1945. Die deutschsprachige Sachliteratur I. ed. by Rudolf Radler. Munich, 1978. For information on the current scholarship on non-fiction texts, see the university-sponsored research project incorporating cultural, literary and media studies at [www.sachbuchforschung.de](http://www.sachbuchforschung.de)

<sup>9</sup> Representative of such work are: Helge Geyer-Ryan: Trivalliteratur im Dritten Reich: Beobachtungen zum Groschenroman. In: Kunst und Kultur im deutschen Faschismus. ed. by Ralf Schnell. Stuttgart: 1978; Ulrich Troitzsch: Technikgeschichte in der Forschung und in der Sachbuchliteratur während des Nationalsozialismus. In: Herbert Mehrrens, Steffen Richter (ed.): Naturwissenschaft, Technik und NS-Ideologie. Beiträge zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte des Dritten Reiches. Frankfurt: 1980; Thomas Lange: Literatur des technokratischen Bewußtseins. Zum Sachbuch im Dritten Reich. In: Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik. Vol. 10/1980 No. 40. Sachliteratur. Göttingen: 1980; Hans Dieter Schäfer: Das gespaltene Bewußtsein. Deutsche Kultur und Lebenswirklichkeit 1933-1945. Munich, Vienna: 1983.

table books, non-fiction novels, as well as guidebooks and pulp magazines. It was my intention to encompass the bulk of mass-marketed literature in the Third Reich. I arbitrarily set a print run of roughly 100,000 for a work to be considered a bestseller.

In perusing my ‘virtual bestseller list’ of approximately 350 texts (a summary of which can be found in the index), I quickly came across ten ‘types of books’ that, regardless of their nuances, appear to have been successful again and again. They don’t necessarily conform to any literary criteria, yet should be a close approximation to the categories with which readers, buyers, booksellers and other stakeholders in the book trade labeled their books during those 12 years. Naturally, many of the boundaries are free-floating, such as when non-fiction books or non-fiction novels often segue seamlessly into propaganda. Several books and authors could also have been dealt with under different aspects. Thus, many of the classifications are somewhat subjective, rooted, as they are, in my own arbitrariness. That is also the case with the thoroughness of my depictions. I only attempted to provide a complete overview so that the important types of texts and trends could be represented. I have sought to tell the most interesting stories I could about books and their authors. Well-known facts are generally only touched upon in passing.

The main part of the book centers on the ten most important types of texts and their authors and readers. At the outset I have tried to get a feel for the booklovers themselves – both the prominent and the nameless – and to characterize the framework of literature and the book trade within which the authors, publishers and readers existed. Compiling more than just available statistical accounts of reader requests and reader numbers and how ‘everyday’ readers experienced the books they read, I have also

consulted the recollections of prominent personalities. Especially people who at that time or thereafter were involved with books professionally spend a good deal of time in their memoirs or diaries telling stories about their favorite reads or addressing specific formative experiences they had with literature. Among those who will be cited are Ernst Jünger, Joachim C. Fest, Marcel Reich-Ranicki, Heinrich Böll, and Günter Grass.

The diaries of Victor Klemperer, however, provide an absolutely unique source. Here's a man who read with an obsession, whose elixir was books. Klemperer composed detailed notes on the impressions that books made on him. For Victor Klemperer, who made it his job to document and analyze the *LTI* – the *Lingua Tertii Imperii*, the language of the Third Reich – books were both a source and an objective. The 'Jew Klemperer' – whom the National-Socialists declared to be subhuman along with his fellow sufferers, whom they sought to destroy, and whom they 'spared' in the Dresden philologist case only because he was married to an 'Aryan' who refused to renounce her husband – read, as his calling, whatever he could get his hands on, from light novels to scientific works. And since Jews were being gradually excluded from participating in normal social life, it was only with utmost difficulty and great danger that books could be acquired at all. Yet here was a person who both read and lived believing in his country of poets and thinkers. The Holocaust was to effectively shatter this belief.

The same person whom many National-Socialists wanted to see annihilated commented venomously on the intellectual concoctions they called literature to the bitter end of their regime. For anyone who has to work her way through the literature of the Third Reich today, Klemperer's voice, judgment, and lucid language will appear as a brightly shining beacon amidst the frequently baleful linguistic fog that wafted through

the era. Klemperer was able to present his work – *LTI. A Philologist's Notebook* – following the end of the Nazi regime. Many years after his death, his diaries became veritable bestsellers that bear witness to the crimes committed against the European Jews in a greater and more direct way than many sober academic studies. A bestseller that deeply moves its readers. In retrospect, the story of Victor Klemperer and his wife is perhaps one of the small triumphs of humanity over barbarism in the years 1933 to 1945.

With this history of bestsellers in the Third Reich it has not been my goal to unearth any wrongfully forgotten ‘pearls’, even though a few texts do perhaps deserve a second look. The history of bestsellers is the negative form, the opposite of the history of burned and banned books and authors. It is certainly also an exciting and perhaps even eye-opening account of life in a dictatorship. And ideally, it is occasionally even the missing link to publications of the book market beyond the alleged caesura lasting from 1933 to 1945.



## **Hitler and Goebbels Reading in Bed**

Preferred books by Nazi notables

### **A visit to the 'Führer' and its consequences**

Karl May fever

It was an honorable and important mission that the journalist Oscar Robert Achenbach had been assigned to one April day in the year 1933, making his way through fog and snow flurries from Berchtesgaden up to Obersalzberg. The Munich newspaper *Sonntag Morgenpost* had sent one of its most capable writers. His task: a report on Adolf Hitler's mountainside retreat. Hitler had only recently become chancellor, yet newspapers with close ties to the National Socialist German Workers' Party were already rendering homage to him – bathing him in a godlike aura – as though he had been the indisputable 'Führer' from time immemorial. Achenbach himself was predestined for such propaganda journalism. He had already penned the text to the pioneering illustrated volume *Aus Hitler's Heimat* [From Hitler's Homeland], a book that Achenbach's employer, the Party-owned publisher Eher Verlag, endorsed heavily via advertising in every edition of its newspapers, thereby garnering a large readership. Once arriving at the retreat, Achenbach was welcomed by Angela Raubal, Hitler's half-sister and the 'Führer's' official on-site housekeeper.

Achenbach's goal was to give his readers an intimate behind-the-scenes look at Hitler's life. In his article for the chancellor's 'Birthday Edition', the readers were to be able to accompany him around his retreat. What Achenbach immediately noticed were

the birthday presents arriving from all over the German Reich. They were piled up everywhere. “No less than 24 throw pillows, all embroidered with a swastika,” he noted. Achenbach’s hostess only acknowledged him with a sigh, since “every other package that arrives contains a pillow.”<sup>10</sup> The tour finally led into the inner sanctum – Hitler’s bedroom – where Achenbach came across the chancellor’s private library. “Lined up on a bookshelf are political works, some pamphlets and books on the care and breeding of German shepherds, and then – listen up, all you German boys out there! – an entire row of volumes by... Karl May! *Winnetou*, *Old Surehand*, *Schut*. All of our good old friends!”

Even while writing down his impressions from Obersalzburg, Achenbach could hardly contain his excitement about this discovery. He had finally pinpointed the smallest common denominator his readers shared with their ‘Führer’. “How human this man is for us,” as Achenbach would later write, “who, in addition to intellectual works of gigantic proportions, still finds the leisure to read books from his youth.” As Achenbach, pleased with himself, finally sat down at the end of his visit to enjoy the mid-morning snack prepared for him by Raubal, he didn’t have the slightest notion of the consequences his “discovery” in Hitler’s bookshelf would have.

For many readers, this brief survey of Hitler’s books must have been a revelation. A rather chance discovery turned into a fervent appeal to read Karl May: “In the future, Karl May’s characters will accompany you through life, you Hitler youths, just as they

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<sup>10</sup> Oscar Robert Achenbach: Auf dem Obersalzburg. Ein Besuch im Berchtesgadener Heim des Führers. Sonntag Morgenpost. Allgemeine Ausgabe A + B. Vol 4, No. 17. Munich, Sunday, April 23, 1933.

have lived with us. You will be able to laugh with them and cry, hope with them and fear. The characters aren't shadows, they're real.”<sup>11</sup>

Karl May thus ranked at the top of the 'Führer's' private book hit-list. At the beginning of his reign he is said to have reread May's collected works, in memory of his youth. Many contemporaries in Hitler's circle reported that, not just Achenbach.<sup>12</sup> How and when he managed that – how he found the necessary time – in spite carrying out his governmental duties, remains his secret. Even if he, as Joachim C. Fest relates in his Hitler biography, frequently lapsed “into a bearing of candid idleness”<sup>13</sup> after the initial allure of being chancellor had passed, there were still some 70 volumes of Karl May waiting to be tackled.

### **Hitler's hunger for books as reflected by his contemporaries**

Especially at night, after he had retired for the evening and couldn't sleep, Hitler would read biographies, depictions of technical problems, as well as works on architecture, painting, music, politics and history. Even in *Mein Kampf* he considered reading to have been one of his chief activities during his youth, with his most lasting impressions as a reader stemming from Gustav Schwab's renderings of Greek sagas and his adventure stories. Hitler is said to have Schwab to thank for his first geography lessons and, later, for having opened his eyes to the world.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Bernhard Scheer: Karl May und die deutschen Jungen. In: Siegerländer National-Zeitung from March 2, 1934, cited in: 25 Jahre Schaffen am Werke Karl Mays. Allen Freunden des Volksschriftstellers gewidmet von Karl-May-Verlag. Radebeul bei Dresden: July 1, 1938, p. 43.

<sup>12</sup> Otto Dietrich: Zwölf Jahre mit Hitler. Cologne: n.d., p. 164.

<sup>13</sup> Joachim C. Fest: Hitler. Eine Biographie. Berlin: 1973, p. 614.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 1,034.

Adolf Hitler's appetite for books is attested to in numerous memoirs by people who knew him well. Almost all notable Hitler biographies have picked up this theme of a "well-read Hitler". Only Brigitte Hamann, who took a closer look at his years in Vienna, has cast doubts on his literary diligence – though without offering solid proof for her skepticism. Decisive for Hitler's perceived image was the fact that all contemporaries considered him to be well-read, even if his repertoire of quotes came from completely different sources. Yet the masses wanted to imagine their chancellor surrounded by books, "since every important thought can be found in a book", as one work summed up, which was published by the Ministry of Propaganda under the title *Wohnen mit Büchern*<sup>15</sup> [Living with Books].

Many official publications of the age tended to address the "essential nature" of a topic (in this case, the Germans' relationship to their books). Even such allegedly banal objects as bookshelves were showcased elaborately und virtually celebrated in unctuous prose. Even if other media, such as film and radio, lay more at the focus of propagandists on account of the immediate and broad effect they had, the great lengths they went to on behalf of books was nonetheless substantial – as can be seen by the work *Living with Books*. "Book and apartment both continuously and steadily shape our essence. They are at once a testimony to and an expression of the way we lead our lives, what we desire and what we think. As foundations they are the aspects of our lives in which we collect and arm ourselves in silence for our work and for our service to our nation."<sup>16</sup> The recommended book furniture offered a wide spectrum, from small bookshelves to a

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<sup>15</sup> Wilhelm Haegert (preface). In: Werbe- und Beratungsamt für das deutsche Schrifttum beim Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda und von der Reichskammer der bildenden Künste (ed.): *Wohnen mit Büchern*. Bücherborde, Bücherschränke, Bücherwände. Berlin: n.d., p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Adolf Ziegler (preface). In: *ibid.* p. 5.

complete library. In the end, however, the majority of the sophisticated designs proved to be more than the average “ethnic German” could or wanted to afford. Yet that a state body, presumably with state funds, could lavish attention on such topics only demonstrates the high esteem books had as prestigious objects. People weren’t merely reading in the rooms depicted here – whether in front of an entire wall unit or a simple bookshelf. Instead, it was reading *an sich* that was being celebrated. The written word was to be internalized. Which is why *Living* expressively criticized those who viewed book spines merely as decorations and who only wanted to adorn themselves with the objects of learning. But in the end books had a positive effect on these ‘social climbers’ since even they effectively bowed down “before intellectuality in recognition of the book as its medium, thereby justifying their efforts to own them, if only in appearance.”<sup>17</sup>

But getting back to the chancellor’s reading habits. In the portions of his private library that survived the war not one Karl May novel was found – which doesn’t go to prove that *Winnetou* and *Old Shatterhand* weren’t the Führer’s most beloved books. Instead, what remained of Hitler’s books reveals that the chancellor’s official library, just as other such book collections, had, above all else, a representative function to fulfill. The books collected here were meant to project an outside image and included the countless works that had been given to the ‘Führer’ from admirers and companions. And there were some curious gifts indeed, such as the dissertation one Dr. Maria Schmidt from the Zoological Institute of the University of Münster dedicated to Hitler “in admiration and gratitude” and which bore the title *The effect of several vertebrate hormones on the*

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<sup>17</sup> Alfons Leitl (text). In: *ibid.* p. 12.

*freshwater polychaete Lydastis raunaensis Feuerborn.*<sup>18</sup> A book that was hardly representative or entertaining for the Führer and his circle.

### **The ‘Führer’ regenerates: Choice books from his youth**

The ‘young Hitler’ didn’t have any opportunity to think about the representative nature of his library – because he hardly owned any books. The few that did belong to him quickly became his favorite, ones he “never let go of”<sup>19</sup>, which included the above-mentioned volume of sagas. Like many others who couldn’t afford their own books, Hitler patronized the numerous public libraries. In Linz he went to the bookstores Steurer and Haslinger, which in addition to selling books also loaned out literature, a customary practice at the time. For Hitler there was no bourgeois household capable of providing its son with books. As an adolescent he seems to have practiced what he would later propagate as “reading yourself up the social ladder”. His friend at the time, August Kubizek, who published his memoir following the war, stated that he “was never again to see him not surrounded by books.”<sup>20</sup> Kubizek writes: “Books were his world. In Linz, in order to be able to get every book he wanted, he registered at three different libraries. In Vienna he went to the Imperial Library and with such a passion that I asked him in all seriousness if he intended to read the entire library, for which I was naturally coarsely berated.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Philipp Gassert, Daniel S. Mattern: *The Hitler Library. A Bibliography*. Westport, London: 2001, p. 263.

<sup>19</sup> August Kubizek: *Adolf Hitler. Mein Jugendfreund*. Graz, Göttingen: 1953, p. 75.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 225.

Observing the young Hitler while reading must have left a lasting impression on Kubizek. He dedicates a great deal of space to the literary predilections of his school-day friend. It was above all the seriousness with which Hitler read that immediately put to rest any doubts about the utility of his activity. “He never read books as a distraction or to waste time. For him, reading books was deadly serious work. Something that I was often made to feel.”<sup>22</sup>

Attributes that proved striking in the future chancellor could already be detected in how he treated books. “The way Adolf took a book in hand was interesting. The most important thing for him was the overview, the table of contents. Then he went to work, whereby he didn’t follow the given sequence at all, but meticulously focused in on the most essential parts. And whatever he had learned in this fashion remained ordered and registered in his memory. One click – and it was immediately present and in such a faithful rendering as though he had just read it.”<sup>23</sup>

One can conjecture – as most Hitler biographers have – that here the foundation was laid for his feared monologs in subsequent years and his “expertise” in every field. “Really, there was enough room in his brain for an entire library,”<sup>24</sup> wrote Kubizek, registering his admiration for posterity.

And what were some of the books Kubizek remembered? “The German heroic sagas, as I already mentioned, took first place among all his books. They would always be taken off the shelf and read, regardless of his mood or state of affairs. He already knew them all by heart, but he would still read them over and over. The book he owned in Vienna was called, if I am not mistaken, *Götter und Heldensagen, germanisch-*

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

*deutscher Sagenschatz* [Gods and Heroic Sagas – A Treasure of Germanic-German Sagas].”<sup>25</sup>

And yet a few real classical works were also a part of Hitler’s choice reading. “Adolf had already begun reading the classics in Linz. Of *Faust* he once said that there was more in this play than people of today could even grasp.”<sup>26</sup>

“Dante’s *Divine Comedy* made a deep impression on him, although I felt that he read the book when he was much too young. I know he studied Herder, and we saw *Minna von Barnhelm* by Lessing. He enjoyed reading Stifter, probably also for the depictions of his home countryside, whereas, in his words, Rosegger was too popular for him. Yet he would also sometimes sit down with books that were in fashion at the time, though more in order to come to an opinion about the people who read them than about the books themselves.”<sup>27</sup>

Hitler’s reading habits are also said to have extended to sophisticated works of philosophy. “Among his books of philosophy, Schopenhauer was always at hand, as was Nietzsche later on,” Kubizek states. “And yet I saw very little of them since he considered these philosophers to be something very personal, his private possession, so to speak, which he did not wish to share with anyone.”<sup>28</sup>

And yet the reader Kubizek knew was hardly anyone who experienced the world with open eyes, absorbing everything that came his way. Rather, he seems to have frequently sought in books self-affirmation for himself and the opinions he more or less already held. “I did not get the impression from Adolf, especially during the time we

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 228.



lived together in Vienna, that he was looking for something specific, such as a foundation or an outlook on life, in the monstrous piles of books he had. Instead, it was more the opposite, as though he were merely searching, perhaps more unconsciously than consciously, for confirmation of the views he already had. That is why reading for him – aside, perhaps, from the German heroic sagas – was less a matter of edification than a kind of self-control.

When I think about the numerous problems that were preoccupying him in Vienna, problems I was able to share with him, there would usually be some book of which Adolf would triumphantly say, “You see, even the man who wrote this book has the same exact opinion as I do.”<sup>29</sup>

Books were so important for the young Hitler because he could use them as a bedrock for his ideas, as opposed to the classical education he had not enjoyed on account of his background. It is said that until his demise in his bunker within a destroyed Berlin he drew strength from the favorite books of his youth.

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

## 2. The Color of Money

### NS propaganda literature

#### The ‘Book of Books’: Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*

The interrogation of Hitler’s former personal adjutant, Julius Schaub, on October 27, 1947 brought astounding facts to light. The American prosecutor, Rudolph L. Pins, had actually only wanted information from Hitler’s courtier about his financial backers since he suspected that German industrialists had been deeply involved. On the afternoon in question, Pins hoped to learn more about Hitler’s relationship to other members of his administration, but especially to one man in particular: Max Amann. Amann had been Hitler’s sergeant in World War I, in other words, his immediate superior. He bore membership number 3 of the NSDAP and also acted as director of the Party’s central publishing company, Franz Eher Nachf. in Munich, and was thus the publisher of the ‘Führer’ and many of his fellow comrades. In sum, Amann was one of the most powerful figures in the Third Reich’s media empire.

Pins was taken aback as Schaub volunteered what he knew, namely that “the Führer had [...] his bank account with Eher Verlag.”<sup>30</sup> Pins’s incredulity can be detected in the interrogation records: “His entire bank account?” Hitler’s adjutant confirmed: “The entire assets he received from royalties.” Which, Schaub went on to explain, had been the case since the Party’s publishing house was founded – namely, since *Mein Kampf* was

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<sup>30</sup> Hoover Institution Archives, German Subject Collection, Box 44, File: German Subject, Post WW II, Nuremberg, Prosecution.

first published in 1925. “The royalties stopped. He himself didn’t have a bank account because he didn’t want one. When the Führer needed money for private matters, or when he wanted to buy something, I called Eher Verlag, specifically either Mr. Amann or Mr. Pickel. Pickel was his personal bookkeeper.” Pins learned that when Hitler told his adjutant he needed 10,000 or 20,000 reichsmarks, they were immediately provided to him by Eher Verlag. Due to the sales of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler’s bank account was always well-stocked. According to Amann’s testimony after the war, Hitler had pocketed royalties contracted at roughly 15 million reichsmarks, from which he withdrew roughly 8 million by the end.<sup>31</sup>

By 1935, on the tenth anniversary of the first edition of *Mein Kampf*, Eher Verlag stated that over 1.9 million copies had already been sold. Sales rapidly increased especially after 1933. In March 1933, shortly before the putsch, only a quarter of a million copies had been printed and sold.

The book’s subsequent tremendous success had not been foreseeable at the time of printing. The book market was in a terrible crisis in 1925, and the first volume was priced at an exorbitant 12 reichsmarks. The book’s first buyers were largely comprised of Hitler’s immediate supporters, and so by Christmas of the first year roughly 10,000 copies had been purchased.<sup>32</sup> Sales were considerably more sluggish when the second volume appeared on the market in December 1926, yet they truly bottomed out in 1928, when both volumes sold a total of only 3,000 copies. However, the balance sheet looked radically different at the end of the day: by the time of the Third Reich’s demise a total of

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<sup>31</sup> Othmar Plöckinger: *Geschichte eines Buches: Adolf Hitlers Mein Kampf 1922 – 1945*. Munich: 2006, p. 184.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 177.

over 12,450,000 copies had been printed and bought, 40% of which in just the final three years of the war.<sup>33</sup>

What applies to Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, applies to the large print runs of NS propaganda literature in general. The production numbers of these texts tell us nothing about how they actually found their way into consumer hands or if all these books were even read at all. They were, however, 'mandatory reading' and 'mandatory gifts' and were not to be found missing on any bookshelf. That said, bestseller lists of the era can not be imagined without them. In 1934, for example, all disabled veterans from the First World War and all those injured in the 'National Uprising' received a copy of Hitler's book through the help of donations made by German industry. From 1933 onwards, the book naturally topped all the lists recommending good NS literature and was to be housed in every library. One reason frequently given for its tremendous circulation is that *Mein Kampf* was presented as a gift to all wedding couples at the civil registry office.



Aggressive use of publication numbers as a means of advertising: Publisher's ad in the *Börsenblatt für den Deutschen Buchhandel* from June 1933.

Sales had apparently nosedived so precipitously after 1933 that Eher Verlag had to look for new markets and thus heavily solicited municipalities and their civil registry offices –

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 188.

with, at times, only lukewarm success. Even years later larger cities like Frankfurt and Berlin apparently refused to spend 7.20 RM per wedding couple. Ultimately, Eher Verlag wasn't able to tap into a lucrative and centrally controlled market until its enormous sales to the Wehrmacht during the war.<sup>34</sup>

“In Germany there are still ethnic Germans, homes, and families that do not own the Führer's work *Mein Kampf*. And yet *Mein Kampf* is the holy book of National Socialism and the new Germany that every German must own. It is not a book to be merely read, but a book to be worked through and lived by.”<sup>35</sup> These are the words the man of letters Will Vesper used to express the duty each German had towards this book. Naturally, the 'Führer's' work was not allowed to be sold in used bookstores. What authors even today don't always appreciate – namely, finding themselves in a bookstore's bargain bin – represented a true sacrilege in the case of *Mein Kampf*. Hans Friedrich Blunck, president of the Reich Literature Chamber, thus announced “that used copies [are] to disappear from display cases.” That was on October 11, 1938. “No assortment of goods can be so politically antiquated anymore to not inwardly agree with this remark.”<sup>36</sup>

Prior to 1933 it apparently wasn't easy for the 'Führer' to live solely from his royalties, either. Yet what we can observe in his case also applies to most of the other writing functionaries in the Third Reich. Once in power they used their influence and name to successfully sell their 'products' – that is, their books and articles – to the masses. But even during the so-called “fighting period” many tried to reap profits from their work as authors. In other words, the written word had become a means to an end in

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 432-443

<sup>35</sup> Cited in Manfred Overesch et al. (ed.): *Das Dritte Reich. Daten, Bilder, Dokumente*. Berlin: 2001. Digitale Bibliothek Band 49, p. 8,279.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p. 8,524.

two ways. It was meant to convey National Socialist propaganda and, at the same time, provide the movement and its principal supporters with the necessary financial means. With the royalties they received from their writing and publishing activities, Hitler & Co. initially financed their work for the party and, later on, their own extravagant lifestyles. As is clearly demonstrated in the example of the Ministry of Propaganda, books (and the royalties stemming from them) were thus able to become the tangible financial basis of power within the ruling elite.

## **The Death of the Little Prince:**

### **Antoine de Saint-Exupéry**

“The perfection of an invention comes very close to being no invention whatsoever. Not until every visible trace of technical processing has disappeared from our machines and we can take hold of them as naturally as we do pebbles worn smooth from the sea, will we slowly forget that it is even a machine at all.” The man who wrote these lines, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, also penned, with his *Little Prince*, one of Germany’s most beloved books, even today. The lines above are taken from his work *Wind, Sand and Stars*, first published in French in 1939 and then just a year later in Germany. The avid pilot described his fascination with aeronautics in an absorbing language and a tone that was also struck a chord in Germany. With his notions of a technology that transforms itself back into nature and thus assumes organic characteristics, he was rather in line with a broad trend of technical philosophy present in 1930s Germany. Yet above all, instead of boring readers with philosophical mind-games, he was able to entertain them with his stories of flight. Saint-Exupéry is presumably the only best-selling author of the Third Reich who actively fought against the Germans – in the end, as a pilot for the Americans – but whose books were allowed to be sold until the end of the war. Following France’s defeat, he traveled via Lisbon to New York in December 1940. After the war began, undesired authors from ‘enemy states’ were withdrawn from the bookshelves. Except for Saint-Exupéry. In fact, his name can be found on lists of books that lending booksellers, for example, were supposed to strongly recommend. And his name is still there in 1940 –

who knows why – together with other English and French authors “who, on account of the critical perspectives they hold towards the policies of their respective homelands, are able to impart to us important information.”<sup>37</sup> And just a few month prior to that, Saint-Exupéry’s *Night Flight* was reviewed in the same journal, a book that – according to the short synopsis written by Dr. Vernunft [Reason] (sic!) – completely evokes the heroic individual: “But the bliss of the individual has no room before the total violence of action. The cause must be served. Without the sacrifice of the private individual, nothing is won for humans.”<sup>38</sup> No matter how mercilessly everyone was expunged from literary life who turned their backs on Germany – this Frenchman was somehow overlooked. And he didn’t even remain silent. In November 1942 he wrote an open letter to “all Frenchmen” in the *New York Times Magazine*, in which he called for unity in the fight against the Germans.<sup>39</sup> Later, he also voluntarily re-enlisted in the war, as a reconnaissance pilot for the Americans. That the books of this exposed Nazi combatant continued to be sold and read in Nazi Germany reveals that the censor and monitoring agencies were anything but omniscient.

Saint-Exupéry hoped that no later than during a joint fight with “five or six Messerschmitts” the differences would be forgotten between the French of different political camps. Yet the encounter with the Messerschmitts didn’t go well for the author of the *Little Prince*. He never returned from a July 1944 reconnaissance flight over the French Mediterranean coast. His remains were still being looked for sixty years hence. His plane was finally recovered, and a former German fighter pilot admitted in several

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<sup>37</sup> Großdeutsches Leihbüchereiblatt 2 (1940), No. 1, January, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Großdeutsches Leihbüchereiblatt 1 (1939), No. 2, May, p. 70.

<sup>39</sup> An Open Letter to Frenchmen Everywhere. In: The New York Times Magazine. November 29, 1942, p. 7.



interviews that he had shot down the famous author. Horst Rippert was also on a reconnaissance flight, from Marseille in his Messerschmitt 109, during the time in question when he spotted an enemy airplane and abruptly shot it down. By that time Rippert had already read everything by Saint-Exupéry: “He was one of my favorites. Because he also wrote a lot about flying.”<sup>40</sup> And there was one other Wehrmacht soldier who raved about the Frenchman: Ernst Jünger. He considered that Saint-Exupéry belonged, with few others, “to the very small, yet elevated knighthood that arose of the First World War. Not until the embers cool do diamonds appear, as it were, out of a black river of coal.”<sup>41</sup> Thus wrote Jünger in his typical style in his French diary, no doubt considering himself among the diamonds.

Published by the Karl Rauch Verlag in Leipzig, *Wind, Sand and Stars* sold no less than 135,000 copies by the year 1945.

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<sup>40</sup> See the interview with Horst Rippert: Rätsel um Saint-Exupéry gelöst? “Ich bedaure es zutiefst, den verehrten Autor getötet zu haben.” In: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. March 17, 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Ernst Jünger: Gärten und Strassen. Aus den Tagebüchern von 1939 und 1940. Paris: 1942. p. 104f.