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Literature and Propaganda: The Structure of Conversion in Schenzinger's *Hitlerjunge Quex*

Abstract

Propaganda literature as a genre can profitably be analyzed by means of a structuralist approach, as Susan R. Suleiman has shown in her study of the French ideological novel. Extending her discussion of the "structure of confrontation" and the "structure of apprenticeship," this study postulates the "structure of conversion" as a fundamental form of propaganda literature. Through loss of self to a greater entity, the central character in fiction exemplifying this form finds a new identity in self-submergence. A once-popular novel by the German pro-fascist author Karl Aloys Schenzinger, *Hitlerjunge Quex* (1932), serves as a model for investigation into the structure of conversion. Religious and psychological dimensions of the central character's experience merge in a representation of conversion that is all the more powerfully ideological for disguising its political and racial assumptions. Eros and Thanatos meet in the mythic heightening of self-sacrifice, culminating in martyrdom. A consideration often ignored by structuralist critics, the use of stylistic means to reinforce implied messages, is shown to be a significant element in *Hitlerjunge Quex*. The value of a structuralist approach to propaganda lies in its elucidation of hidden assumptions, exposing them to critical judgment.

Keywords

Propaganda literature, structuralist approach, Susan R. Suleiman, French ideological novel, structure of confrontation, structure of apprenticeship, structure of conversion, loss of self, German, pro-fascist, Karl Aloys Schenzinger, *Hitlerjunge Quex*, Religious, psychological, political, racial, conversation, Eros, Thanatos, self-sacrifice, martyrdom

LITERATURE AND PROPAGANDA: THE STRUCTURE OF CONVERSION IN SCHENZINGER'S *HITLERJUNGE QUEX*

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Recently, critics of literature have turned with new interest to the issues arising from the relation of literature and propaganda.¹ Structuralist criticism, semiotics, and reader-response theories have furnished new methods of approaching propaganda as a genre and of elucidating the significations and methods of functioning of specific examples of propagandistic literature. I wish to show, by means of the example of an important but relatively forgotten German pro-fascist author, Karl Aloys Schenzinger, how the narrative model that I call the structure of conversion operates as a fundamental form of propaganda literature.² Schenzinger's *Hitlerjunge Quex*, probably the most famous and influential ideological novel of Nazi Germany, represents the structure of conversion in paradigmatic form.³

The structure of conversion may be defined as follows: it is embodied in a story in which the protagonist encounters an entity greater than himself, yet representative of his potential self. Through his quest for knowledge and identity, given purpose by his early recognition, the hero merges with the larger entity, paradoxically losing and finding himself in the process. The parallels to religious conversion are inescapable, and will be explored later.

Hitlerjunge Quex proves that the criteria established by Suleiman for the *roman à thèse* may be extended to the more general concept of the propagandistic novel, a designation less bound to the French critical tradition alone. The three criteria are: 1) that the work have "an unambiguous, dualistic value system," 2) that it contain "an implicit rule of action addressed to the reader," and 3) that there be present a "doctrinal intertext." All three criteria are met by Schenzinger's novel, a work written between May and September of

1932, the year it was published.⁴ The value system of the novel opposes pro-Moscow communism to “authentic German” national socialism, to the intentional exclusion of all other alternatives, leaving “ein Kampf nur noch von links gegen rechts” [a battle of left against right only] (p. 223). Here, however, there is the interesting complication that Schenzinger is willing to portray communism somewhat favorably as a movement that is supposedly, like national socialism, in defense of the oppressed: “bei beiden Parteien [ist] das Mitleid mit der getretenen Kreatur das treibende Grundgefühl. Das findet man bei keiner feudalen und bei keiner bürgerlichen Partei, in der ganzen Weltgeschichte nicht” [For both parties, pity for the down-trodden creature is the driving motivation. That is not to be found in any feudal or bourgeois party, not in all of world history] (p. 250). Secondly, *Hitlerjunge Quex* presents a “positive exemplary apprenticeship,” in which the total dedication of the martyr-hero stands as a model for the reader to emulate. The rule of action in this novel is not so much political or even ideological, however, as metaphysical and psychological, as I will show. The third criterion, the doctrinal intertext, was fulfilled at the time of writing by the propaganda of the fascists in Germany, which was being spread through speeches, leaflets, demonstrations, and other forms of agitation. Thus the ideas espoused by the Nazis did not need to be explicitly stated in Schenzinger’s novel to be understood by contemporary readers. To choose only one example (but a characteristic and very important one), the novel contains no explicit anti-Semitic statements. However, the stress on the racial unity of the German nation, emphasized in a crucial passage in which the issue being debated is the difference between the national socialists and the communists, implies the exclusion of racial “others,” which to contemporary readers would significantly have referred to Jews.⁵ Thus Schenzinger was free, in a sense, to concentrate on the features of his protagonist’s experience rather than on a problematic issue that might have alienated segments of a broader audience he was aiming to convince.

Hitlerjunge Quex is a prominent example of the “estheticizing of politics” in fascism (“Ästhetisierung der Politik”) described by Walter Benjamin.⁶ It is a novel in which the valorization of a certain kind of innocence is made to serve as an endorsement of an ideological field. The estheticizing of politics takes place through the elevation of the protagonist’s exceptional personal qualities to the status of the symbolic and typical. His personal virtues and the pathos of his

individual fate are transferred to the collective movement he comes to represent.

The story concerns a boy of fifteen who, at the outset, is immersed in the communist influences of the "red" neighborhood of the Beusselkietz in Berlin, his working-class father, and the pro-communist KJJ (a fictional youth organization). Heini Völker, the hero, becomes a Hitler Youth leader who, like the historical Herbert Norkus to whom repeated reference is made in the novel, is assassinated by communist attackers. The "positive exemplary apprenticeship" represented by Völker's evolution is complemented and enlarged by the theme of confrontation between communists and fascists, but it is also an idealistic myth of self-discovery through self-annihilation: a structure of individual and collective conversion.

Understanding how the structure of conversion in the propaganda novel functions will help to clarify why, in novels like Schenzinger's, discussion of ideology or of political ideas is relatively insignificant, in some ways even counter to the purpose of the writer, though the total import is no less ideological than in more explicitly dogmatic works. The ideological fields in competition for the reader's loyalty are partially submerged, while the focus of the narrative is on the personal development and fate of the protagonist. Political ideas are introduced and implied throughout the novel, but they are not allowed to dominate the story. Rather, the cultivation and discipline of personal devotion to an ideology supplants recognition of the nature of that ideology itself. In *Hitlerjunge Quex*, the "structure of apprenticeship" and the "structure of confrontation" coexist as strands in one work, one mutually reinforcing the propagandistic impact of the other. Similarly, the valuable distinction made by Jacques Ellul between agitation propaganda, which seeks the overthrow of government or of a dominant set of values, and integration propaganda, which aims to assimilate its readers into the value structure of a party or state, is annulled by Schenzinger's novel; *Hitlerjunge Quex* bridges the revolutionary and the institutional phases of German fascism.⁷

Unlike the story of apprenticeship (*Bildungsroman*), which ends on the verge of a new life for the hero, the structure of conversion may well end with his death (as is the case in *Hitlerjunge Quex* and in François Mauriac's *Le Noeud de vipères*, for example).⁸ In the story of conversion the protagonist does not merely assimilate the lessons or values of a political, philosophical, or religious system; he is absorbed by them. One might say he *becomes* them. In contrast to the

structure of confrontation, the story of conversion, which also represents the activity of conflict, does not require that the adversaries be diametrically opposed in every respect, one "identified as the force of good, and the other as the force of evil," as Suleiman states (p. 102). Though it is necessary that there be two opposed forces, and that one be morally superior to the other, the opposite side may resemble the superior side in important respects and may be shown to have significant positive values also. The "agonistic" model of conflict defined by Huizinga in *Homo Ludens*, in which opponents fight according to established rules and neither side is dishonorable, can apply to confrontation as it is represented in the story of conversion.⁹ The conversion of the hero is made more significant by the fact that he faces a choice between two kinds of good, not merely the self-evident (though not necessarily easy) choice between good and evil.

Let us see how these ideas are exemplified in *Hitlerjunge Quex*. A look at the actantial system of the novel will help to clarify the structure of the story.¹⁰ The subject of the story is Heini Völker, its protagonist. The object, or what is desired by the subject, is a sense of meaning that encompasses belonging, order, harmony, purpose, virtue, and joy, all of which he acquires through his devotion to the Hitler Youth. The receiver of the object (*destinataire*) is both the transcendent entity that Heini becomes a part of, defined in the book variously as Germany or the national socialist movement, and Heini himself, who comes to represent that entity. The helpers are Heini's friends in the Hitler Youth movement, notably Fritz and Ulla Dörries, the educated, middle-class young people who accept him as one of their own. The donor of the object in this novel, in a shrewd psychological conflation, is constituted by two persons: Heini Völker's mother and the Bannführer (group leader), Kass, whose story of losing his mother parallels Heini's loss and establishes the connection between filial attachment and loyalty to the Nazi movement. Heini's mother's suicide gives him his freedom; Kass's linkage of love for his mother and love for Germany gives Heini the hope and direction he needs to make that freedom meaningful. The opponent is multiple: his own pro-communist father, the communist youth leader Stoppel, the Hitler Youth member Oskar Wisnewski (who turns traitor), Heini's own cowardice (which prevents him from joining the Hitler Youth as soon as he wishes), more generally, the political and economic chaos of the times, which results in a sense of helplessness.

frustration and anomie. As this summary statement of the actantial configuration suggests, the novel is concerned more with elementary loyalties that can profitably be analyzed in Freudian terms than with articulated ideologies.

Nonetheless, the novel can be fully understood only in relation to the "intertextual context" of German culture and history. *Hitlerjunge Quex*, a quintessentially German example of conversion literature, stands in the tradition of the conflict between rationalism and romanticism that reaches back at the very least to Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*. Already in the eighteenth-century movement of *Sturm und Drang*, the prelude to German high romanticism, death frequently became the inevitable destiny of the hero who rejected the restraints of rationalistic society to respond to a supernatural call. The variation of this pattern in *Hitlerjunge Quex* involves the fact that, while in killing himself Werther followed the bidding of his own heart, in revolt against collective opinion, Heini's suicidal urge is both individual and collective. If it is romantic, it is also an expression of what Kass, the fascist youth leader, calls "die Idee," the idea of the movement. Whereas Goethe's hero (though not unequivocally admirable) serves in part to illustrate the tragic inadequacy of the external, social world, Schenzinger's hero represents a supposedly triumphant romantic vision of the power of the collective will to conquer all social as well as metaphysical obstacles. He strives to reinstate the innocent unity of thought and action of the epic Greek world.

More immediately, the novel is embedded in the context of the economic conditions and political battles of the Weimar Republic. Schenzinger draws on the social and political chaos of Berlin in the early 1930s for a somber portrait of the misery of Germany and more specifically of its working class. That misery is localized and symbolized in the plight of the Völker family: hunger, unemployment, worry, drunkenness, violence, and desperation. The atmosphere of political and personal impotence during the Weimar Republic is graphically illustrated in naturalistic scenes of noisy stairwells, dark, enclosing inner courtyards, street battles, a turbulent fairground, and the depressing, jail-like district of Beusselkietz. As in his earlier novel *Man will uns kündigen* (1931), Schenzinger drives home a political message about the failure of democracy by portraying in the most explicit terms the fate of the *Volk* in the disintegrating Weimar

Republic (the similarity between the Völker family name and *Volk* is not accidental: "Passt ganz gut zu ihm, der Name" [It fits him well, that name] (p. 65), Fritz Dörries says of Heini.

In both novels there is a subtext of indignation at the conditions that drastically limit the protagonist's choices. In *Man will uns kündigen*, the smoldering rage which hero and author seem to share breaks out in acts of violence, in an attack on Jewish students at the university, for example. Violence in *Hitlerjunge Quex* has a more clearly focused direction: it is associated with the chaos of communism, as Schenzinger represents it, and it is directed almost exclusively against the Nazis, thus contextually devalorizing it. At the same time, it is linked to historical events generally known to readers at the time the book appeared, particularly to the killing of Herbert Norkus, a Hitler Youth, on June 24, 1932 in the Beusselkietz, Heini Völker's home district of Berlin. Norkus' death was a *cause célèbre* to the Nazis, and various works commemorated his "martyrdom," but none as effectively as *Hitlerjunge Quex*. Historical and political events are represented highly selectively, however. As Jean-B. Neveux has noted, "Parmi les nombreuses *Tatsachen* de cette année, Schenzinger ne choisit que les plus aisées à comprendre; l'interdiction de la S.A., au printemps, la levée de cette interdiction en juin, les élections de l'été, et le grand rassemblement de Potsdam à l'automne" [From among the many facts of that year, Schenzinger chose only the most easily comprehensible ones: the prohibition of the S.A. in the spring, the lifting of that prohibition in June, the summer elections, and the mass gathering at Potsdam in the fall] (p. 434). Rather than attempt to retell the life and death of the actual Herbert Norkus, Schenzinger, in a brilliant choice, decided to tell the story of a contemporary, in many respects similar, but fictional boy. This fictional character, Heini Völker, is imbedded in a naturalistic context reminiscent of Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* or Erich Kästner's *Fabian*, but he is a cleverly calculated subject designed to convince readers of the worth of the Nazi movement, a device made all the more effective by his plausibility as a character.

One way in which the subject functions is that the object (that which is sought in the structure of conversion, the entity with which the subject seeks to merge) is both metaphysical and psychological as well as social, in a fusion that must be termed religious. The object is religious in that it concerns ultimate meaning, it involves numinous experiences, and it is described in the language of conventional

religion, though it subverts the meanings involved. Perhaps the most important term appropriated from the language of religion for use in *Hitlerjunge Quex* is *glauben*—to have faith, to believe. The relation of each of the major characters in the configuration around the protagonist to the question of faith is indicative of that character's function in the actantial structure. Heini rejects the opponent Stoppel's arguments for communism based on a program of proletarian goals by emphasizing the missing ingredient in the communist youth program: "An dich habe ich nicht geglaubt. Ich hätte nie an dich glauben können, sowenig wie an die Lehrer, oder an Vater etwa—. An meine Führer glaube ich. Da hast du's. Da hast du, warum ich mit dabei bin: weil ich an meine Führer glaube und an meine Kameraden und—" [I never believed in you. I could never have believed in you, nor in my teachers, or even in Father—. I believe in my leaders. There it is. That's why I'm with them: because I believe in my leaders and in my comrades and—] (p. 205). He does not attempt to define why he believes in his fascist leaders and comrades; the act of faith is self-validating. All he can add is that he is fighting for a flag, which is a redundant symbol of the faith he has already declared.¹¹ His inarticulateness and his nonanalytical nature are merely further endorsements of a devotion that eludes rational definition, on the principle that awkwardness and instinct are guarantors of sincerity and authenticity. Although Völker declares that he agrees with the goals Stoppel states, he pronounces Stoppel a leader who is not worthy of belief.

The Hitler Youth Oskar Wisnewski demonstrates a "negative exemplary apprenticeship." His indifference to the ultimate aims of the movement reveals a characteristic cynicism and lack of faith: "Was ihn an der Hitlerbewegung begeistere, sei einzig und allein die Bewegung. Die Richtung dieser Bewegung sei ihm vollkommen gleichgültig. Bewegung allein schon sei Leben, einerlei wohin sie ziele, und je intensiver die Bewegung, um so fulminanter das Leben. Das Ziel der ganzen Sache interessiere ihn nicht. Am Ende werde doch alles profan und banal" [What excited him about the Hitler movement was merely movement itself. The direction of this movement was a matter of complete indifference to him. Movement itself was life, no matter in what direction, and the more active the movement, the more exciting the life. The goal of it all was uninteresting to him. In the end everything became profane and banal after all] (pp. 184–85). That which is sacred to his companions is profane to

him: a contrast that helps to motivate his later desertion of the movement and to underline the religious nature of Völker's faith.

The donor Kass exemplifies the positively valorized faith that Schenzinger places at the center of his novel. In the story-within-the-story that Kass tells in the middle of the book, he recounts his own conversion to fascism. He tells of his father's death at the battle of Peronne in 1916 and of his mother's slow, painful death from tuberculosis. She was deprived of painkiller by the greed of his step-father, who sold the morphine pills for liquor. Exile in America led Kass to humiliating encounters with anti-German sentiment and ultimately to a jail term. Upon his return to Germany, a personal encounter with Hitler, half an hour's conversation with him, gives his enflamed patriotism a sense of direction. He concludes his account of his conversion with a reference to the approaching *Reichsjugendtag* (Reich Youth Day) to be held at Potsdam, when fifty thousand youth will represent "ein Gedanke, eine Idee, ein Glaube" [one thought, one idea, one faith] (p. 154). The suffering and humiliation of Germany's loss in the world war is invoked as a cause to be avenged.

What is the content of the faith Völker and Kass affirm? Dagmar Grenz has perceptively demonstrated how the working-class boy's development from subjection to communist influence to adherence to national socialism is presented not as a process of political education, but rather as a form of liberation from the mis-education of his proletarian upbringing into general human values which are purposely kept vague.¹² Grenz stresses that emotions rather than rational insights are Heini's prime motivation. While this is accurate, Grenz does not entirely avoid the rationalistic error of criticizing the work of fiction for not stating its political and ideological implications explicitly. Granted that there is a certain mystical vagueness to the faith propagated in *Hitlerjunge Quex*, its content is nonetheless identifiable. It is part of the (from an anti-fascist perspective, insidious) artistry of this novel that the foundation of ideological signification has been shifted from the predominantly political to the psychological, and in some form religious. The novel's lines of diffusion move from personal experience to the political arena, not vice versa, and they never detach themselves from the personal, though they reach beyond.

The tenets of the faith that Schenzinger elevates in *Hitlerjunge Quex* encompass belief in the national and racial unity of all true Germans, a mystical sense of the unity of the Hitler movement, and an

apocalyptic expectation of national awakening (reflected in the slogan *Deutschland erwache!*). The racial element of fascist ideology is emphasized far less than is the purely patriotic. One significant experience in the process of conversion is the dramatic moment in the woods when Heini witnesses the massed circle of Hitler Youth singing the German national anthem. The impact on the boy is represented as a moment of religious revelation:

‘Deutschland, Deutschland über alles,’ fiel es mit tausend Stimmen wie eine heisse Welle über ihn her. Ich bin auch ein Deutscher, dachte er, und dieses Bewusstsein kam mit solcher Wucht und so völlig unerwartet über ihn wie nie sonst in seinem Leben, nicht in der Schule, nicht zu Hause, nicht vor dem Reichstag, als die Reichswehr präsentierte. Er wollte mitsingen, aber seine Stimme versagte. Dies war deutscher Boden, deutscher Wald, dies waren deutsche Jungens, und er sah, dass er abseits stand, allein, ohne Hilfe, dass er nicht wusste, wohin mit diesem jähen grossen Gefühl.

[‘Deutschland, Deutschland über alles’ washed over him with a thousand voices like a hot wave. I am a German too, he thought, and this consciousness overwhelmed him with such force and so unexpectedly, as never before in his life, not at school, not at home, not at the Reichstag when the Reichswehr presented arms. He wanted to sing along, but his voice failed. This was German soil, German forest, these were German boys, and he saw that he stood apart, alone, helpless, not knowing what to do with this sudden tremendous feeling.] (p. 47)

This experience of the transcendent unity of the German nation, foreshadowed by Heini’s earlier attraction to the songs, uniforms, and disciplined marching of the Hitler Youth, is a turning point in the structure of conversion. It marks his coming to full awareness of the existence of that entity which it becomes his aspiration to join.

The other-directedness of this religious aspiration is underscored by succeeding experiences of a similar kind. Collective activities in the Hitler Youth are described with terms of heightened sensual awareness that suggest sexual and religious ecstasy. For example, marching on a Hitler Youth excursion becomes an extraordinary fusion with Nature:

Im Schritt und Tritt, der Marsch war Gesang, ein weicher Schwung, im Rythmus, im Takt. Was eben noch Beschwerde war, wurde zur Lust. Eine Feldflasche kam an Heini vorbei. Er trank. Nie schmeckte ein Wasser wie dieses Wasser. Nie klang ein Lied wie dieses Lied. Nie zog ein Weg wie dieser nach vorn. Der Kopf wusste nichts mehr von den Beinen. Es gab keine Last. Das Auge war alles. Alles war Bild. Der Marsch war Klang, ein Rausch, ein beglückender Strom. (pp. 188–89)

[At every step, the march was song, a soft swinging, in rhythm, in time. What had just been burdensome became a pleasure. A water bottle came past Heini. He drank. Never had water tasted like this water. Never had a song sounded like this song. Never had a path stretched out ahead like this one. His head forgot his legs. There was no burden. The eye was everything. Everything was an image. The march was sound, intoxication, an exhilarating stream.]

Similarly, Quex's speech to the Hitler Youth assembled in the Beusselkietz is described in terms of stepping out of ordinary consciousness: "Das ganze war wie ein Rausch, aus dem er erst erwachte, als ein krachender Beifall ihm in die Ohren klang." [The whole thing was like a state of intoxication from which he only awoke when thunderous applause sounded in his ears] (p. 233).

In his second, far less successful Hitler Youth novel, *Der Herrgottsbacher Schülermarsch* (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte, 1934), the story of fascist youth in a provincial southern German town clashing with the Catholic establishment, Schenzinger exploited the parallels between the new fascist faith and Catholicism, but introduced a third element that came to dominate his post-war novels: faith in technology. In a scene of audacious banality, Schenzinger concluded his second Hitler Youth novel with the protagonist's declaring his conversion to fascism by saluting Hitler as God (using a phrase from the Latin liturgy) while flying above a sea of clouds in a fighter airplane.

The evocation of a religious response to fascism, which for various reasons descends into *Kitsch* in *Der Herrgottsbacher Schülermarsch*, succeeds far more powerfully in *Hitlerjunge Quex*. Perhaps the primary reason lies in the earlier novel's subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) fusion of Eros and Thanatos, the life-urge and the death-urge. The apocalyptic teleology of the novel is an

extension of the linking of self-negation and self-realization in the protagonist.

On the one hand, Heini Völker represents a primitive love of life. In the first chapter, he briefly escapes from the squalid confines of his home district to a green park full of lively, joyous children. He loves his mother with surprising intensity. When he joins an excursion to the forests surrounding Berlin, we are told that "Er hatte einen richtigen Hunger nach Freude" [He had a real hunger for joy] (p. 39). As the passages cited above show, he finds in the Hitler Youth an elementary sensual fulfillment. These ecstatic experiences are eventually linked to his interest in Ulla Dörries, the middle-class Hitler Youth girl he falls in love with.

On the other hand, the depressing conditions of his life (his father's unemployment, brutality to his son and his wife, his coercion into the communist youth group) cause him to experience self-destructive urges. His sense of revulsion at the drinking and promiscuous pleasures of the communist youth combined with the desolation of his home life lead him to suicidal reflections: "Die ganze Welt ekelte ihn. . . . Er möchte sich aufhängen oder vor den Zug werfen, dass er von all dem nichts mehr spürt" [The whole world disgusted him. . . . He wanted to hang himself or throw himself in front of a train, so that he would no longer feel any of this] (p. 44). His mother commits the act he dreams of. Motivated by desperation at her situation and by a desire to protect her son from a worse fate, she gasses herself and him, succeeding however only in killing herself. The profound state of lethargy and indifference into which he sinks when he is finally told that his mother is dead comes very close to ending his life. He refuses to eat, and wastes away until Kass succeeds in rousing him from the stupor that is an ambivalent sign of his attachment to his mother and of his desire to die.

But the conflict between Eros and Thanatos is not resolved by his rebirth into Hitler Youth membership, though it does move to another plane. The Thanatos drive in Quex (short for Quecksilber, or quicksilver, Heini's nickname in the movement, given him for his speed at delivering messages) expresses itself in his desire to sacrifice himself for the cause. He risks his life repeatedly, devotes himself passionately to carrying out orders, and is not satisfied until he is transferred back into the Moabit district, where he is in greatest danger of being attacked. As the granting of his nickname indicates, Heini

Völker (alias Quex) finds a new identity in his immersion in the movement: self-annihilation in obedience becomes a form of self-realization. Self-conquest is represented by his superiors as the greatest virtue of a Hitler Youth, and Quex struggles to attain it.

One subtle form of the conflict between Eros and Thanatos lies in the complications of Heini's relationship with Oskar Wisnewski, the German-Polish émigré boy whose mother is an actress and whose father was executed by Polish nationalists. Wisnewski is described as effeminate, his language is effete, and he is knowledgeable in sexual matters where Heini is innocent. His indifference to the goals of the Hitler Youth movement infuriates Heini, leading Heini to insult the other boy. Wisnewski later infuriates Heini again by calling him "our Platonic lover" and telling him to go to the opera or to the zoo to learn lessons about "nature," i.e. sex. Wisnewski is a Lothario with the girls, and his desertion to the communists is vaguely ascribed to an affair with a girl Heini refers to as a "Nutte" (whore). Though Wisnewski is undoubtedly a largely negative character, he does have a more realistic knowledge of sex than the naive Heini. His cynicism, linked to his ambiguous sexuality, represents the opposite of Heini's ideals, yet Schenzinger gives it a measure of validity and attraction. Like the uncommitted cynic Doktor Sauter in *Der Herrgottsbacher Schülermarsch*, he represents a realistic if somewhat contemptuous attitude toward human motives. He is a survivor; Heini is not.

The most intricate connection between Eros and Thanatos is to be found in the ties between Heini's yearning to be with his mother after she is dead and his erotic attraction to Ulla Dörries. Though in waking life Heini's idea of love is worship, in a dream he sees Ulla in her bathing suit, and he has the irrepressible desire to brush against her neck or her arms. This dream disturbs him so greatly that he wakes up screaming, but when he falls asleep again the dream concludes with Ulla offering him a symbolic package: "'Von deiner Mutter,' sagte sie mit einem überirdischen Lächeln, 'sie ist gar nicht tot' "[From your mother,' she said with a supernatural smile, 'she isn't dead at all'] (p. 217). The mysterious, beckoning, yet frightening domains of death and of sexuality merge. They remain synonymous when Heini repeatedly risks being fatally attacked in attempts to protect or impress Ulla. This convergence culminates in the episodes that immediately precede the assassination of the protagonist. He has an exaggerated fear of kissing Ulla, which he is required to do in a play. She finally shatters his fear by robustly taking hold of him and kissing

him heartily on the mouth. "Davon ist noch keiner gestorben" [No one has died of that yet] (p. 260), she jokes in a statement that once again brings to the surface the odd connections between sex and death in this novel. A few sentences later, Heini is mortally wounded, as if to demonstrate by sequence and association that Eros is in fact fatal to the hero of this story. The symbolic linkage established by the novel is as follows:

Heini's love	devotion to the	love for	self-sacrifice
for →	Hitler Youth →	Ulla →	(ultimate
his mother	movement	Dörries	statement of
			love for Germany)

Conversion, as revealed here, is an intensifying sequence of transferences. It is more than apprenticeship, since it is not merely knowledge and ability to act that the protagonist acquires, but new objects of attraction, self-definition, and self-surrender. The fundamental principle is as much cyclical as linear. Frau Völker's self-sacrifice for her son strengthens his devotion to the Hitler Youth movement; Heini Völker's self-sacrifice was intended to strengthen the reader's commitment to the national socialist movement. National socialism as Schenzinger portrays it is the life-death force, a Nietzschean creative/destructive force driving history.¹³

Despite the mythic and psychological nature of Schenzinger's story of conversion, subtleties of social differences are realistically portrayed. In fact, social distinctions add to the structure of conversion by dramatizing the distance traversed by the protagonist, from timid working-class boy to bold Hitler Youth leader, though he never entirely loses the innocence and vulnerability he is characterized by from the start. Not only is he awed and intimidated by the splendor of the Dörries's middle-class home, he does not understand Fritz Dörries' class-conditioned language. "Die alten Herrschaften [The old folks]"; Fritz says, using *Gymnasiasten* slang to refer to his parents. "Was ist das? [What is that?]" (p. 59), is his friend's response. However, Fritz denounces a petty insistence on rank differences as one of the symptoms of what has gone wrong with Germany. He advocates instead what he calls a "natürliche Gemeinschaft" [natural community] and claims that the instinct of animals to separate by species is the best example: "Wir müssen uns ja vor jedem Hirschrudel schämen, vor jeder Elefantenhorde. Die vermischen sich nicht mit anderen" [We have to be ashamed of

ourselves before every herd of deer, every herd of elephants. They don't mix with others] (p. 63). The Dörries' superior education shows through in other ways as well, for instance in Fritz's classical allusions or in his choice of Hans Sachs's plays for theatrical material.

However, Schenzinger makes a point of demonstrating that class differences cannot be assumed to be signs of superiority or inferiority of character. Bannführer Kass employs the same coarse Berlin expressions as the KJJ leader Stoppel. Kass calls an impertinent Hitler boy "Rotzneese" [snot nose]; Stoppel taunts Völker with the expression "Bisschen Arsch mit Grundeis?" [approx.: getting a cold ass?—meaning: getting scared?] (p. 203). Similarly, Oskar Wisniewski's language shows that he belongs to the same educated class as the Dörries, but his diction is stilted and pretentious. Of his father's killing he says, "Die Exekution erfolgte durch den Strang . . . Ich war noch ein Kind" [The execution was carried out by hanging . . . I was still a child], to which Heini indignantly responds, "Mensch, wie redst du bloss daher. Ich war noch ein Kind! Eine Göhre warst du noch!" [Man, how you talk! I was still a child. You were still a little brat!] (p. 184).

Through the protagonist's rise in the Hitler Youth organization, Schenzinger attempts to illustrate how class differences are annulled in the unity of the new Hitler movement. However, the position of the Dörries siblings in relation to Heini Völker betrays a class bias that is not fundamentally eradicated. They remain the initiators and evaluators in their friendship with the working-class boy. Even their approval ("So könntest du eigentlich immer sein, Quex" [This is how you could always be, Quex]) carries with it subtle undertones of friendly but unmistakable condescension. The novel's explicit messages are philoproletarian, but its less explicit messages are pro-bourgeois.

A significant component of the propaganda novel neglected by structuralist critics such as Suleiman is the matter of style. Choice of style (level of diction, sophistication of syntax, tone) is an important means of reinforcing implied meanings and of disguising authorial control. Schenzinger employs a laconic, understated style that is at times almost telegraphically abrupt. One of the effects of the brevity of his sentences is the illusion of reportorial objectivity. The absence of authorial comment encourages the impression that readers are intended to form their own judgments of events, independent of the writer. The deceptive appearance of objectivity of the narrator is

reinforced by the mixture of expressionism and naturalism in his style, which mirrors the turbulence of his subject, city life in the politically and socially chaotic Weimar Republic. The journalistic verisimilitude of passages reflecting social upheaval resembles the techniques of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* as practiced by Hans Fallada, for example. Schenzinger employs a technique that can be compared to the cinematic style of the cross-cut: he builds an impression of disorder by juxtaposing brief, apparently unrelated scenes, e.g. a political brawl in a courtyard, an agitated bird in its cage, and the frenetic confusion of the fair. The presentation of disjointed scenes, in blunt, abrupt language, emphasizes the theme of chaos which serves an important function as counterpoint to the meaningful order associated with the Hitler Youth movement. Chaos in this novel is a condition of anxiety and imprisonment, though also of a certain dangerous allure. Schenzinger implies through his choice of setting, characters and situation that the only way out of chaos and powerlessness is for Germany to embrace either communism or national socialism. The understated, journalistic style serves to disguise the elimination of other alternatives and the archetypal nature of the central plot. The didactic intent is not diminished by the omission of explicit didactic statements; on the contrary, it is given added force.

The simplification of historical reality through fictional representation in Schenzinger's novel is achieved by means of style in three ways. First of all, the combination of terse prose and photographic starkness of description disguises the selectivity of the "lens," the narrator's perspective. A sense of historical verisimilitude is achieved while in fact the conversion of the individual protagonist and the highly selective events surrounding that conversion become the organizing principle of the narration. Second, the simplicity and, frequently, the seeming lucidity of the language contribute to the mythic dimension of the story. The forces acting upon the hero are intended to be seen in sharp relief, but not to be understood in ways that more complex language would permit. Third, the very absence of evaluative or affective commentary from the narrator (or even, frequently, from characters in the story) is a technique of evoking responses from the reader. For example, no character directly expresses grief at Frau Völker's or Heini Völker's deaths. The reader's sympathy is solicited through the author's paradoxical strategy of avoiding the expression of sympathy. Thus, the narrator approximates the objectivity of the camera lens but in effect evokes a

predictable, calculated response. Furthermore, political content is replaced by symbolism. As Dagmar Grenz states, "Die inhaltliche Abstraktion der politischen Zielvorstellungen wird ersetzt durch die Hochstilisierung der Attribute und Formen, in denen sich die Partei darstellt" [The abstraction of the contents of the political goals envisioned (in the novel) is supplanted by the attributes and forms by means of which the party represents itself] (p. 135). Examples of this are approving use of uniforms, flags, and ritual public displays such as marching in formation that are the Nazi party's symbols of unity and identity.

The selectivity invoked by the organizing principle of the novel serves to disguise a central contradiction of the author's aims. There is an inherent conflict between the notion of individual heroism and self-discovery on the one hand and the collective, conformist, authoritarian nature of the movement the book seeks to glorify on the other. In the skillful handling of this conflict lies the explanation for Schenzinger's ability to write an agitation novel that also served the Nazis as a tool for integration after their accession to power. The issue is notably present in the second half of the novel, after the protagonist has actually joined the Hitler Youth. The form in which it is presented is mostly that of Heini's excessive zealotry, which leads his superiors to discipline him repeatedly. The potentially chaotic element of Eros enters into the equation when Quex takes it upon himself to protect Ulla from attackers, without having sought permission from his superior to do so. Yet the theme of Eros is kept subordinate to the theme of integration, i.e. conversion. As Suleiman points out, "love, or the quest for possession of another, is rarely, if ever, an important preoccupation of the hero in the *roman à thèse*."¹⁴ By portraying Heini as more eager to risk his life than his leaders are willing to allow, the impression is created that discipline in the Hitler Youth is protective rather than what it actually was: ruthless and indifferent to individual fates. Eventually the contradictions between the protagonist's drive towards self-realization (the strand of story that deals with Völker's rebellion and with his erotic attraction to Ulla) and the authoritarian organization's impersonality and need for total subordination of self to the group (hidden by Kass's standing *in loco parentis* for Völker) are only resolved (if that is the appropriate term) by the hero's death. In death, the transference of Eros into the realm of Thanatos is complete: in martyrdom, Heini Völker is symbolically united with Ulla and the movement she represents, more effectively

and totally than he ever could be alive. The mass movement of fascism is depicted from the perspective of the individual hero, who also comes to symbolize it. In a symbiotic fusion, the central character is thoroughly and finally converted to the mass movement by dying for the cause.

The articulation of the structure of conversion, as in my discussion of the example of *Hitlerjunge Quex*, enables the critic to elucidate the hidden assumptions and mythic elements of works of fiction that reside in the realm where literary art and propaganda overlap. While the process of analysis of literary structures does not itself constitute moral or political judgment, it can illuminate the shadowy moral and political features of literary works employed for propagandistic purposes, and thus make clearer judgment possible. In this case, the explication of the text reveals in its stark outline the destructive yet seductive mythos of Schenzinger's art. We condemn the uses of that mythos, but it is comparatively easy to do so in hindsight, since the nature and consequences of fascism are clearly known to us. It remains to apply the method of analysis set forth here to other works, including more contemporary works of fiction in which the structure of conversion reveals ideologies and movements acting analogously in our time.

NOTES

1. See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981); A. P. Foulkes, *Literature and Propaganda* (London & New York: Methuen, 1983); Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), and Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage, 1973). I wish to thank Margaret Higonnet and Barbara Rosen for their insightful suggestions concerning this article. Research for this study was supported by a Humanities Summer Stipend from the Center for Programs in the Humanities, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
2. I am indebted to the work of Susan Rubin Suleiman, whose book *Authoritarian Fictions* has as its immediate subject the French *roman à thèse*, but whose theoretical considerations have far broader application. By means of her analysis of the novels of

Paul Bourget, Paul Nizan, and Maurice Barrès, Suleiman proposes two fundamental (though not necessarily mutually exclusive) narrative structures that are to be found in the *roman à thèse*: the “structure of apprenticeship” and the “structure of confrontation.” Using A. J. Greimas’ theory of actants, or syntactic categories, she delineates the multiple variations of the “structure of apprenticeship,” in which the protagonist, through “positive exemplary” or “negative exemplary” apprenticeships is led to a positive or negative relation to the political, philosophical, or religious values implied or stated by the author. According to Suleiman, the distinction from the *Bildungsroman* is to be found in the non-problematic or simplistic nature of the categories of value affirmed in the *roman à thèse*. Specifically, the “structure of confrontation,” according to Suleiman, places the protagonist in any one of a number of possible relations to a polarized reality. This polarized representation is distinct from historical reality because the complexities of reality are simplified into dichotomy. Suleiman’s constructs, despite their acknowledged limitations, offer opportunities for precise distinctions about propaganda by making discriminations of degree possible within the new generic categories. The “structure of confrontation,” for example, facilitates analysis of the degree of simplification of ideological positions or movements, and thus the degree of propagandistic content of a work of fiction.

3. *Hitlerjunge Quex* (Berlin and Leipzig: Zeitgeschichte, 1932) reached an edition of nearly half a million copies. After Hitler’s accession to power, the Nationalsozialistischer Lehrerbund (the national socialist teachers’ organization) promoted the book very vigorously. The book was required to be placed in virtually every public and school library in the country. All translations in the text are my own. See Peter Aley, *Jugendliteratur im Dritten Reich* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1967), pp. 60 and 153–54. The film version of the story was seen by up to eleven million (mostly young) viewers. Gregory Bateson discussed the film version in some depth in his article “An Analysis of the Nazi Film *Hitlerjunge Quex*,” in *The Study of Culture at a Distance*, ed. Margaret Mead and Rhoda Métraux (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 302–14.

4. Jean-B. Neveux, “La jeunesse et les luttes politiques dans ‘Der Hitlerjunge Quex’ de K. A. Schenzinger,” *Revue d’Allemagne*, 8, No. 3 (1976), 432.

5. George L. Mosse in *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964) presents a thorough discussion of anti-Semitism in the youth movements that preceded the Hitler Youth (pp. 126–45) and in the Hitler Youth itself (pp. 294–311). See also the discussion of Völkish ideology in Christa Kamenetsky, *Children’s Literature in Hitler’s Germany* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1984), pp. 51–68.

6. Walter Benjamin, “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, II (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1974), 469.

7. Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage, 1973), pp. 72, 75.

8. Other examples of the structure of conversion may be found in American literature in *Native Son*, in which Bigger Thomas is converted to revolutionary race consciousness; in Italian literature, in *Bread and Wine*, where Silone's anti-hero becomes a convert to a skeptical brand of secular humanism; in British literature, in George Orwell's *1984*, which represents a negative exemplary conversion to Big Brother's totalitarianism.

9. Conflict in the story of conversion is unlike Suleiman's definition of the structure of confrontation, which, as she points out, excludes "agonistic" conflict (p. 103).

10. A. J. Greimas defines the syntactic categories that constitute the elements of a story as: the subject, or protagonist; the object, that which is desired, valued, or sought by the subject; the receiver (or *destinataire*), the one who benefits from the object; the helper (or *adjuvant*), who aids the subject in obtaining the object; the donor (or *destinateur*), who gives or aids in giving the object to the receiver; and the opponent, who acts in opposition to the subject's efforts. As Suleiman points out, these categories are drastic simplifications, but precisely therein lies their usefulness (p. 266, n. 6).

11. Redundancy is a major, necessary means of specifying and reinforcing meaning in literary communication, especially (but not by any means exclusively) in propaganda, as Suleiman very convincingly argues (pp. 149–97).

12. Dagmar Grenz, "Entwicklung als Bekehrung und Wandlung, Zu einem Typus der nationalsozialistischen Jugendliteratur," *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik, Beiheft*, 7 (1977), 127–28.

13. This Nietzschean ideology also animates his novelizations of science history, written during and after the war. It is expressed in the climactic scene of his novel *Atom* (1950), which represents the dropping of the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima as the inevitable consequence of a process of science and history driven by fate.

14. Suleiman, p. 80. The film *Mephisto* (dir. Istvan Szabo, Hungary, 1981) displays the paradoxical kindness of fascist authority figures, but unmasks their brutal ideology and practice of force in scenes of extraordinary power. One might argue that *Mephisto* represents an example of the structure of conversion, but treated with the ironic distance that exposes fascist ideas for what they are.