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From Berlin to Neubabelsberg: Nazi Film Propaganda and Hitler Youth Quex

‘Mit kummerergrauten Haaren
tragen—wir—Norkus zum Hügel hinaus
ein Kind noch... von sechzehn Jahren!
Sein traum war das Sehnen, die deutsche Nacht,
das Schicksal der Heimat zu wenden...
Drum—wurde—er—viehisch— — umgebracht
von ruchlosen Mörderhänden!
Du deutscher Knabe! Du tapferes Kind!
Du fielst wie ein Held in tosender Schlacht,
Vom Geiste der Freiheit besessen!
Und wenn lange vergessen die deutsche Nacht—
dich werden wir nie vergessen!’
Pidder Lüng

Seldom have film, myth, and history been so integrated as they were in *Hitler Youth Quex*, one of the most important films produced during the early years of the Third Reich. This work, celebrating the life and death of a symbolic Hitler Youth, became an integral part of Nazi ideology and played a role in influencing millions of young Germans to be prepared to sacrifice their lives for Führer, Volk, and Fatherland. The apotheosis of Herbert Norkus (Hitlerjunge Quex) was the counterpoint to the death, resurrection and return of the Brown Shirt hero, Horst Wessel. But unlike the case of Wessel, the popularization of the saga of Norkus was fundamentally a creation of the film.

Hitler Youth Quex lent currency to Goebbels’s affirmation that ‘film is one of the most modern and far-reaching means of influencing the masses’.¹ It set the standard for subsequent Nazi film propaganda and its effect was enormous. *Hitler Youth Quex* appealed to Goebbels because it was produced in the heroic key of National Socialism, was to the Nazis a felicitous union of political realism

and art, and most importantly because it channelled idealism into action in support of the state. In a letter to Ernst H. Correll, director of production of Ufa, he praised the film, noting that 'Ufa as well as all those involved have not only contributed significantly to the development of the film art, but also to the aesthetic configuration of National Socialist ideology'.²

Hitler Youth Quex could serve as a textbook example of the use of poetic license in the mythical interpretation of historical reality. Although grounded in fact, reality gave way to symbol both in the film and in the novel on which it was based. The epic of Herbert Norkus celebrated the exploits of a model Hitler Youth in the heroic era of Weimar Germany. His behaviour was an exemplary fulfilment of the central tenet of the Hitler Youth — that life is but a preparation for a noble warrior's death. Long-suffering, loyal, and devoted to their Führer, the organized Hitler Youth sacrificed twenty-one lives for Germany's future during the *Kampfzeit*, and Herbert Norkus became the flagbearer of the youthful 'Immortals'.³ The appalling death of Norkus — butchered by communists as he was distributing handbills for a Party rally in January 1932 in Beusselkietz, which lay in his home district of Berlin-Moabit — lent credibility to Goebbels's demagogic claim that 'Bolshevik subhumanity' was loose on the German land. 'Jewish-Bolshevik beastliness' would not waver even at the murder of a proletarian boy from drab, industrial north Berlin. A child of the *Volk*, he saw the star of deliverance shining out of the long night of Weimar agony and he followed it across the abyss to greatness. This fighting, dying hero, worthy son and heir of the tradition of Langemarck, became the twentieth-century embodiment of the classic aphorism: 'Whom the gods love, they call home at a tender age'.

The child-martyr Norkus became the lodestar of Hitler Youth propaganda. In the words of Reich Youth Leader Baldur von Schirach:

This little comrade has become a myth of the young nation, the symbol of the self-sacrificial spirit of all the young who bear Hitler's name. Many died in the battle of the young for the Reich; the name 'Norkus' embraces all of them in the eternal comradeship of the Hitler Youth. Nothing binds us Hitler Youths together more closely than the knowledge of our brotherly link to this dead boy, nothing is more alive than this murdered one, nothing is more immortal than he who has passed away. I'm more proud of this than anything else in my life: that Herbert Norkus belongs to us.⁴

There was little in the background of the historical Herbert Norkus to presage his call to fame. Born in 1916, he was the elder son of the Grenadier Ludwig Norkus, veteran of the Great War who joined Storm 6 of the Berlin SA in 1929. Ludwig had lost what little savings he had to a confidence man, and was employed as an oiler in the Chemisch-Technischen Reichsanstalt factory in Berlin-Plötzensee. His mother had died in a sanitarium in 1931 following repeated communist assaults on the milk store she ran on Wiciefstrasse to help the Norkus family eke out a living in the unstable postwar economy. Herbert lived with his younger brother and father in modest quarters on the factory grounds which offered them security in a hostile environment. The son of a worker, nevertheless he attended the Luisengymnasium on the Zwingli-strasse, the street on which he would be murdered.⁵

To live in Beusselkietz was to know the meaning of poverty and suffering; life there — just as in its sister districts of Wedding, Prenzlauer Berg, and Friedrichshain — was anything but bearable. It was said that the sun never shone in much of this tenement complex, which was as depressing as any slum to be found in Europe. Hunger stalked the district, so sensitively reflected in Slatan Dudow's documentary production *Problems of Our Day: How the Worker Lives* (1930). One scene of this film shows an emaciated little girl gazing up at her mother and asking: 'Mama, are there people who have warm meals every day?'⁶ Unemployment, depression, and hopelessness were the daily fare there, a situation which led to drunkenness as well as physical and sexual abuse of wives and children. The celebrated Berlin milieu poet and artist Heinrich Zille, commenting on these conditions, noted that 'You can kill a human being with miserable living conditions just as easily as with an axe'.⁷

Such was the world of Herbert Norkus. He, like the other youths in the area, never tasted the delights of childhood. For him concrete and dirt fashioned a world of despair, punctuated only by the melancholy tunes of the proverbial organ-grinder making his rounds through the treeless courtyards of the neighbourhood. The polluted Spree River snaked its way through the district, oily and disheartening. The Hohenzollern Canal, where commercial barge traffic worked the quais, seemed not to be composed of water at all, but instead of a fetid brew of unsightly industrial sludge, lethal both to man and fish. Young Norkus knew such despair at first hand, despair which often gave way to suicide. Phil Jutzi's

tragic film *Mother Krausen's Journey to Happiness* — featuring Alexandra Schmitt as the stooped and prematurely aged protagonist who found a way out in a joint suicide with her child — Norkus knew to be an authentic reflection of daily life in proletarian Berlin.⁸ Youth sensed that radical times called for radical solutions, and the road to salvation seemed deceptively simple. Their choice lay between the Soviet star and Ernst Thälmann, or the black-white-red swastika flag of Adolf Hitler.

Whereas the great majority of Moabit youth supported the communists, who ruled the district from the Karl Liebknecht House, Herbert Norkus joined the Hitler Youth in 1931. Initially the political *Weltanschauung* of the NSDAP was of less importance to this child of fourteen than the comradeship and adventure which the Party offered. Charges of 'Jewish-Bolshevik' betrayal of the Fatherland and attacks against the materialist decadence of the bourgeois Weimar system would have meant little to him. It was the intense group life which drew him to the Hitler Youth as well as the sports, hiking, singing, and call of the great outdoors. But the Hitler Youth's political message was inseparable from this ordered life of comradeship, and his later identification as a political soldier flowed from this source. The organization had the added attraction of being led by youth, composed of youth, and promising salvation through youth. In the words of von Schirach: 'Holy Flame of youth, you are the light in the darkness! You will show us the path which leads to the morning's dawning, the way of loyalty, the way of Adolf Hitler.'⁹ The Führer guaranteed deliverance from the dark tenement world of Depression Berlin and a grand future for the entire nation.

According to all accounts, Herbert was a devoted Hitler Youth. He delighted in the rhythm of daily activities of the organization, which afforded a structure to his life now that his mother was gone. Pack meetings, rallies, propaganda work, music and weekends in the country all provided a welcome relief from the tedium of school. His activities in the Naval HJ offered boating in Teltow Park waters, and Zeppelinführer Eisenreich's tales of air battles over France captured his imagination as well.¹⁰ These were days of fulfilment for the lad. According to the chronicle of his unit leader *Kameradschaftsführer* Peter Mondt:

Life was so rich and colourful, now that he was in the group. . . In the afternoon when he had the Bahnhof Beusselstrasse behind him and . . . when he smelled smoke from the ships and breathed in the air of spring, and when he wound his way along the canal under the old trees, then he began to see images before him. He saw the group grow to a whole column, and he saw the misguided boys from the commune fall in step and join in the singing, then he saw a huge, brown army of youth with a sea of flags and pennants, he saw the Führer, and he saw how his eyes danced and glowed in the knowledge that the nation's youth were united and marching in unison toward but one goal.¹¹

The joy of comradeship came at a high price. Violence, intimidation and danger were a way of life for the Hitler Youth in Beusselkietz, where a mere fifteen or twenty boys stood against what their commander called 'a pack of hundreds of hoods from the commune, criminals, pimps and the assorted collected trash of subhumanity'.¹² Norkus knew the meaning of fear, but he took seriously the plea of the Reich Youth Leader for a spirit of self-sacrifice among the corps during the decisive phase of Germany's political crisis.¹³ On many occasions his survival was due to luck and a pair of fast-running legs. Pursued by young communists, he would dash across the Jungfern Bridge and take cover in the forest around Johannes Cemetery. At one point he was cornered and given the choice of joining the Red Front within a week or of being killed. In fact, his days were numbered. Ironically, the words of a song in the repertoire of his unit were strangely prophetic:

There's no retreat for us,
We'll stand man for man
As firm as German oaks . . .
And should out of our hot wounds
Red blood come flowing forth,
We'll die like Hitler Youths
From Beusselkietz Berlin.¹⁴

At dawn on the morning of Sunday, 24 January 1932, Norkus fell victim to a stakeout of communists acting on a tip from a bitter adherent of the pro-Stennes faction of Berlin Nazis.¹⁵ Thirty to forty communists of varying ages lurked in the darkness awaiting their foes in alarm readiness. They cornered Norkus as he was racing from door to door with a comrade in Beusselkietz, dropping leaflets advertising Goebbels's Sport Palace rally later that morning. Stabbed repeatedly, the boy desperately pulled himself up and dripped a trail of blood across dingy Zwinglistrasse in search

of a safe haven. Instead of a chance deliverance, he was stabbed again and trampled mercilessly, finally collapsing in the vestibule of a laundry establishment. He was rushed to the emergency room of the nearby Moabit Municipal Hospital, where he died shortly thereafter. Evidence soon pointed to the communists Klingbeil, Simon and Tack as the perpetrators, desperadoes who had been promised ten mugs of beer for the life of every murdered Hitler Youth.¹⁶

The shocking news of the murder was received in the Sport Palace with bitter cries of ‘Revenge!’ Goebbels — always a timely improviser — swung immediately into a denunciation of the communists, and in the coming days launched a vicious assault against his adversaries. He struck the leitmotiv of the Norkus propaganda in a tawdry, yet moving lead story in *Der Angriff*, which was a study in poetic imagery. Focusing on the body of Herbert Norkus, he wrote:

There in the bleak, gray twilight, yellowed, tortured eyes stare into the emptiness. His tender head has been trampled into a bloody pulp. Long, deep wounds extend down the slender body and a deadly laceration tears through his lungs and heart. . . Yet it is as if life stirs anew out of pale death. And look: the slender, elegant body begins to move. Slowly, slowly he rises as if conjured up by magic, until he stands tall in all his youthful glory right before my trembling eyes. And without moving his lips, a frail child’s voice is heard as if speaking from all eternity:

‘They killed me. They plunged the murderer’s dagger into my breast and mangled my head. . . Warm blood poured out of me and I lost my breath. I didn’t know what was happening. Horrified, I ran for my life. . . I fell one last time and knew that it was all over. Again and again they cruelly trampled my face, streaming in blood. I lost consciousness and then sank into a merciful death. This happened in Germany. In a nation that claims to belong to Western civilization. And only because I — still a child — wanted to serve my country. . . *I am Germany*. . . one of you millions. I am spirit of your spirit, flesh of your flesh. . . I know that from the millions who stand behind me, the troops will form which will bring Germany to her senses again. You comrades will lay my young body to rest in the bosom of mother earth, in pain, grief, anger, and fury. What is mortal in me will perish. But my spirit, which is immortal, will remain with you. And it. . . will show you the way. Until the Reich comes.’¹⁷

The elaborately staged funeral for Herbert Norkus offered a vehicle for Goebbels to elaborate on the heroic death theme. For twenty-four hours the body had been attended by a guard of honour of Moabit Hitler Youths at the ‘Leichen-Schauhaus’ of the Dorotheenstädtische Gemeinde on the Hannoversche Strasse. Remarkably, Norkus lay in an open casket, a cruel if very effective dramatization of the singular brutality of his death. On the afternoon

of 29 January 1932 the coffin, draped with the flags of the Hitler Youth and the Marine Jungschar, was moved with all honours to the Neue Johannes Cemetery in Plötzensee for burial.¹⁸

Tears of mourning alternated with declarations of triumph, as the Party elite joined units of Hitler Youth, SA, and SS in the cortège which wound its way through the cemetery. There Goebbels engaged in rhetoric of pathos, calling for revenge and atonement while promising that the child's cross on the road to freedom would be redemptive. The life and death of Herbert Norkus had lent new credence to the ethos of the Hitler Youth.¹⁹

It was a source of irritation for the KPD that the ground had hardly settled over the grave of Herbert Norkus before it became a Nazi shrine. Within two weeks Hitler spoke to the Hitler Youth of Berlin and personally greeted the hero's Moabit comrades at a rally featuring the combined units of HJ, SS, and National Socialist students.²⁰ Baldur von Schirach placed the name of Herbert Norkus at the top of the list of 'Immortals', declaring January 24 as the day of memorial for all fallen Hitler Youths. Thereafter it became an important anniversary in the annual ritual of the Third Reich.²¹ Within weeks of assuming power, the Party elite, with massive police protection, staged a memorial march through Moabit to the martyr's grave. A commemorative tablet was later consecrated where Norkus died, bearing the simple inscription, 'He Gave His Life for Germany's Freedom'.²² Thereafter, memorial plaques were erected throughout the country.

The death of Norkus lent credence to the myth of reawakened German youth which Hitler proclaimed at the storied Potsdam Reich Youth Rally in October 1932. Conjuring up the spirits of Norkus and his bloodied comrades, he called their sacrifice a 'symphony of Germany's life source':

What evil can befall a people whose youth sacrifices everything to serve the great ideal of National Socialism. . . German youth is truest to its people when it finds itself in the greatest danger. German youth, what you glorify in your epic tales and songs, you yourselves must strive to become, so that one day your people will be worthy of a song of heroism. . . It will be the happiest memory of your youth that as young boys you looked danger square in the face. . . and that through your loyalty and readiness to go the limit you created the new Germany.²³

The popularization of the Norkus myth came with its interpretation in literature and cinema. Karl Aloys Schenzinger's novel,

Der Hitlerjunge Quex, was a considerable success; it sold 190,000 copies in less than two years and provided the basis for the screenplay.²⁴ Far more than a tedious chronicle, the novel rendered historical reality into a sensitive morality play. The suffering of the Norkus family, the desperation of the unemployed father, and the suicide of Herbert's mother were credible themes, and Schenzinger skillfully wove a symbolic *völkisch* tapestry out of rather commonplace — if tragic — raw material.

The author treats Herbert Norkus (Heini Völker) as a modern Child-Redeemer.²⁵ His description of Heini's first attraction to the Hitler Youth is at once lyrical and visionary. Forced by his father to attend a weekend outing with the Moabit communist youth, Heini was shattered by their distasteful and disorderly behaviour. Their motley attire was but an outward sign of inner degeneration, and stood in marked contrast to the orderly, colourful uniforms of the Hitler Youth. As Schenzinger portrayed it, among the communists, alcohol, smoking, and sex were the order of the day, and Heini felt out of place with the ragtag clique which called itself 'North Star' Moabit. What he longed for was the purity of sunshine, forest, and water.

Heini escaped from the communist encampment the first night, and creeping through the woods, he saw a great light. From afar he heard the gentle songs of nation and glory — and his heart was pounding. Suddenly he could see boys and girls in uniforms, the picture of contentment and harmony. Their eyes were riveted on their leader, and Heini could hear the words 'Führer' and 'the Movement' and of 'each giving his life to the other'. He was ecstatic as what seemed to be a thousand voices struck up the passionate chords of 'Deutschland über Alles'. German youth on German soil, singing the most German of songs in a German forest! Henceforth he knew where his true home must always be — with the brave comrades of the Movement.

Schenzinger loses no opportunity in his novel to emphasize the theme of social justice in the Hitler Youth, which he characterizes as a bearer of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, transcending caste and class. The 'young nation' was symbolized by the uniform of the organization. The day on which Heini Völker received his new uniform, he was happier than ever before in his life. The Bannführer — a model of 'Aryan' purity and uprightness — spoke to him in nearly religious terms about its true meaning:

Heini, you have hundreds of thousands of comrades throughout the country. They all wear the same shirt you have on, the same insignia, the same stripes on the arm, the same cap. The uniform isn't some decoration or parade ground attire, my boy. It is the clothing of the community, of comradeship, of our ideology, of the unified organization! Do you understand? It makes us all equal, and gives the same to all and demands the same from all. He who wears such a uniform doesn't have desires of his own any more, he has only to obey. . . .²⁶

And obey he did. Heini was conscientious and industrious, ever ready and swift as Hermes. He was given the nickname 'Quex' because he carried out orders faster than quicksilver. Heini was a good comrade and knew no fear.

Heini learned at first hand the joy of class unity when he visited the home of Fritz Dörries, a fellow Hitler Youth. The Dörries villa on the Altonaer Strasse in the Tiergarten represented another world when compared to Heini's crowded proletarian quarters. He was anxious, knowing that the Spree River which he crossed at the Gotzkowsky Bridge stood like a moat separating the rich and the poor. Instead of being patronized by this upper-bourgeois family, Heini was received openly and as an equal. Not only did Frau Dörries's attitude signal the dawn of a new era, but Ulla, Fritz's blond teenage sister, a member of the *Bund deutscher Mädel*, radiated a nearly divine, virginal glow on the young guest. But it was Fritz who won Heini over with his attack on wealth, the capitalist spirit, and elitist traditional education. Learning, to be sure, but for a nobler purpose — for swift action:

I want to train myself, outwardly and inwardly, to become a model of courage. I want to feel my blood flowing, and that of others who are of the same blood. We have to develop an organic community again. Today we just have bastards. The word 'Volk' has become a joke. We should be ashamed to show ourselves to a herd of deer or even elephants. They've got the sense to breed only with their own. . . . the zoo is the best university of all. . . . With us Hitler Youth there are no classes. There are only those who get the job done and parasites, and those we'll throw out.²⁷

Heini was warmed by the comradeship of the Hitler Youth, and he became a paragon of good humour, courage, and devotion. 'Castle Beusselkietz', the HJ lair, was his milieu, and he joyfully played piano accompaniment for the spirited songs of the Movement which proclaimed the light of the dawn in the east. Music had the effect of a tonic on Heini, encouraging him to serve the cause heroically. The song of the Hitler Youth, which called for

self-sacrifice, had a special attraction for him:

Our flag waves before us,
 Our flag is the new era,
 Our flag leads us to eternity,
 Yes, the flag means more than death!²⁸

Schenzinger reserves his most passionate description for the death of Heini, a thinly veiled parallel with Christian Resurrection. His Beusselkietz comrades have gathered around the bed of their dying friend, when:

Finally they see the little face in the pillow, flushed, now and then wincing around his mouth and nose, sighing and groaning occasionally. So this is Quex, the Bengal. . . His friends are overcome with sympathy, and anger gives way to the call for revenge. There they stand. . . helpless before the incomprehensible. . . has he already passed away? . . . No, he's moving. . . Suddenly there is a scream. . . Heini is sitting up in bed, his eyes wide open. . . He is singing. . . They don't recognize the words, but they know the melody. . . It's the song they sing every day, every evening together, on every march. . . Everyone knows what it all means — death is singing here.²⁹

Not a soldier fallen in France, yet a soldier nonetheless. Heini Völker — a good comrade — had passed away.

The ennoblement of Herbert Norkus awaited the film devoted to his life. The Ufa production *Hitlerjunge Quex*, based on the novel by Schenzinger, was filmed in Neubabelsberg in the summer of 1933 and was released in September of the same year. Directed by Hans Steinhoff and employing Karl Ritter as production director, it enjoyed legendary success in the annals of film propaganda.³⁰

Hitler Youth Quex was under the honorary direction of Baldur von Schirach, who put great store on the effect it would have as a symbol of the heroism of the postwar generation.³¹ A stellar cast joined Jürgen Ohlsen as Quex and units of the Berlin Hitler Youth in the film. Heini's father was played by the massive figure of Heinrich George, and his mother was sensitively portrayed by Berta Drews. Claus Clausen was a convincing HJ Bannführer and Hermann Speelmans took the role of the sympathetic Beusselkietz leader Stoppel. Karl Meixner, cast as the shadowy figure Wilde, was the incarnation of the 'Jewish-Bolshevik' will to destruction.³²

Hitler Youth Quex, a blend of historical fact and myth, contains all the elements of a passion play: an innocent blond child; a desperate mother figure who attempts a joint suicide with her son;

a drunken father drawn to communism for reasons beyond his control; the dark slums of starving Beusselkietz; German communists as tools of a foreign power; idealistic and heroic Hitler Youth; the redemptive death of a lamb of the Volk; and the promise of regeneration of the nation through Adolf Hitler. Schirach found it a noble chapter in German history celebrating ‘eternal youth which knows neither darkness nor dawning’, thus joining Goethe’s *Faust*, the Ninth Symphony, and the will of Adolf Hitler at the interface of gods and men.³³

Hitler Youth Quex reflects the theme of universal suffering and the desperation of Weimar in a gripping manner and its message is compelling — both heartless capitalism and criminal Bolshevism are found wanting. The troubled Völker family is symbolic of the German nation as a whole. Father Völker has been out of work for several years and is beside himself with woe. The left-leaning actor Heinrich George gave vent to his true political instincts in this role, and he is at once a titanic and elemental force. Völker’s brutal treatment of his long-suffering wife and son clearly are not due to a faulty character; instead they are caused by the miseries of the economic and social system. He has become fat, decadent, and a drunkard because the inequities of the capitalist system have made him a forgotten man, fated to stand in endless lines awaiting a minimal welfare payment. There never was a joyful Christmas at his apartment, seldom a happy moment for Mother Völker and lovable Heini.

Völker was a man conscious of his class identity — a proletarian to the core. In a singularly touching scene, he acknowledges Heini’s manhood and makes an emotional declaration of his political creed. The time has come for Heini to declare for the Party and join the Communist Youth International. Father Völker turns to his son, saying:

Look, there’s a lot going on today that you can’t understand, but we proletarians have to save our skin — that’s what it’s all about! Look how we live here, your mother and you and I — it wasn’t always like this, there were better days — before. But my God, we’ve been derailed. I wanted to do more for you, and many was the night my head was spinning as I tried to find a way out for us [his voice breaking], but no work, no income for years, that wears you down. . . And now you young ones must help. You must sign on with us, with us the old! Otherwise we’ll all be destroyed!³⁴

Finally he gives Heini the keys to the apartment, signalling the

father's acceptance of the son as an adult and a fellow communist.

Heini, caught in a dilemma, appreciates his father's love; yet he feels that his political solution is completely wrong. True to himself, he declares for the Hitler Youth. According to the Nazis, loyalty to parents must give way to political truth in the case of a conflict. One night his father overhears him singing the words of the Hitler Youth anthem to his mother, who has clung in desperation to the chimera that Heini would take the line of least resistance and join the communist youth. Fatherly love turns to rage, and he beats Heini, forcing him to sing the *Internationale*. In a pitiful scene, Heini — the battered victim of the battle of two world views — chokes out the hated refrain. His troubles are only beginning.

Heini's mother suffers even more than he does, being constantly subjected to brutal beatings and harassment by Father Völker. Undernourished, pale, and old beyond her years, she carries the weight of the world on her shoulders. Berta Drews creates a cinematic *tour de force* in her role as a bearer of grief, the quintessence of eternal motherly love. A victim of the political and economic system, her life is in shambles; she seems to live only to sacrifice for her beloved son. Sensing that young Heini might well be killed by the communists for his role in aborting a terrorist plot, she makes a decision in despair to commit suicide and kill Heini as an act of mercy. The orchestra strikes up a discordant, throbbing cacophony skillfully interwoven with the mother's love motif, preparing the audience for the haunting spectre to follow. In an unforgettable scene, with the silver lights of the city reflecting an eerie cast over their faces, Frau Völker kisses her son goodbye and whispers, 'Now everything will be all right'. She turns on the gas, never to awaken. Heini, on the other hand, was rescued from the jaws of death only to meet a more terrifying end.

Hitler Youth Quex is striking in its focus on international communism. More than any other film made in the Third Reich — including *Hans Westmar* and *SA Mann Brand* — the stereotype of the 'Jewish-Bolshevik' is shattering. The Communist Party is viewed as a pack of marauding wolves with but one goal in mind — to destroy what they cannot control. Traitors and agents of the Soviet Union, they sing of human rights while deploying their notorious *Rollkommandos* to carry out their evil deeds. They work only for the welfare of the Soviet Union, never for the German nation and the Volk.

When the devil took human form, he came as Wilde and the clique of gangsters and shadowy figures who composed the neighbourhood KPD. His physiognomy alone betrays an inner nature of decomposition; here, indeed, was a 'subhuman', the product of miscegenation, venereal disease, and criminality. Unshaven, squint-eyed, and repulsive, he was the incarnation of Bolshevism. The gutter was his milieu. To see him gathered with his comrades in a smoky pub beneath posters of Lenin and Stalin was to know a twentieth-century Judas. He led the red guards who set out to destroy the Beusselkietz Hitler Youth, the noble vanguard in the cause of Germany's regeneration.

Promiscuous sex was also a tool of the enemy, and the loose virtue of the communist street girl Gerda (Rotraut Richter) is boldly portrayed. Her raw sexuality is devoid of Germanic refinement, not to mention soul. Gerda seduces Hitler Youth Gundler, utterly ruining him for future work in the service of Adolf Hitler. She plies her erotic wares on the protagonist as well, but the purity of the future martyr remains unsullied. In young Völker's estimation the girls in the ranks of the *Bund deutscher Mädel* are much more desirable. Above all he is attracted to Ulla, whose close-cropped blond hair, gentle features, shining eyes, and enthusiasm for the cause stand in marked contrast to Gerda, the painted street-girl, a walking catalogue of Berlin vice. On the other hand, what glory it was to behold sunny Ulla in command of her BdM unit. How proudly she took part in the pagan incantations over the crackling summer solstice fire! With such leadership the German nation was assured a heroic future.

Hitler Youth Quex presented the directors Steinhoff and Ritter with a rare opportunity to romanticize the role of youth in the 'rebirth' of Germany. Quex is the son any mother and father would have cherished. He unites in his person all the best qualities of idealistic youth: courage, vision, unselfishness, and love. He is at once bold, ingratiating and ever ready to serve. It was these qualities which endeared him to his comrades, and they demonstrated their love for him. After Heini's first brush with death, Fritz and Ulla lead a group of comrades to the hospital to visit their young friend. There they presented him with a new Hitler Youth uniform. Star-struck by this show of acceptance, Heini thanks them, affirming that this was the happiest day of his life. Thereafter the Hitler Youth organization assumed the role of his surrogate family. He was to have need of the support of his fellows. For not only had he lost his mother, but his father had sold the family's furniture to a secondhand dealer for a few marks and closed the apartment. The Party

was now the boy's only home.

Variations on this theme follow in a remarkable scene in the garden of the hospital, a study in contrast of the communist and Nazi world views as portrayed in the film. Both the Hitler Youth commander and Father Völker visit Heini simultaneously. Claus Clausen, who plays Bannführer Cass, is a model Aryan — blond and upright, pure of heart and soul. Reflecting on the eternal spirit of youth, with its wanderlust and love of adventure, he fascinates Heini with his enthusiasm. The question he asks is in fact directed to all German youth: 'Where does a boy belong today?' 'Two million boys volunteered in the Great War!', he continued. 'They were all sons of a father and above all of a mother! And where did they belong?' Father Völker turned the question around and asked, 'Where do I belong then? With my class brothers, that's where. And where I belong, the boy belongs too!'

The next verbal exchange between the two laid the seed for the conversion of Father Völker from communism to National Socialism:

Bannführer: 'With your class brothers... with the 'Internationale' you mean?'

Völker: 'Of course, with the Internationale!'

Bannführer: 'Where were you born?'

Völker: 'In Berlin of course!'

Bannführer: 'Well, where is that anyway!'

Völker: 'On the Spree!'

Bannführer: 'On the Spree, right! But where? In what country?'

Völker: 'For heaven's sake, man. In Germany naturally.'

Bannführer: 'In Germany, yes! In our Germany! Think about that.'³⁵

Viewers of the film are left with the indelible impression that the boy's only sensible alternative was to follow Hitler; to serve the cause of the red star was to be a traitor to the nation.

The struggle for the Fatherland led to Heini Völker's tragic death; yet at the same time it guaranteed him immortality. In the coming months he was more active than ever in the cause of Adolf Hitler. The Bannführer withdrew him from the Beusselkietz sector because he was on the communists' murder list. Yet Heini longs to return to the neighbourhood where he knows every store and apartment, every street and alley. He confronts the Bannführer, playing on his sense of honour and duty: 'You've always said that to be a Hitler Youth is to be a soldier... and you were an officer in the war... Did you forbid your soldiers going into the front lines

because there would be some shooting?’ Cass relents, and Heini beams at the prospect of participating in the battle for the final victory.

The scenes in connection with Heini’s murder evoked an intense response on the part of great numbers of viewers who saw the film during the Third Reich. Not sensing that his end was near, Heini saves the day for the Nazi propaganda effort in Beusselkietz through quick-witted improvisation. He spends his few remaining marks for flyers to replace those the communists have cast into the Spree. Racing through the district on his propaganda mission, Heini’s smile of confidence and his joyous enthusiasm is juxtaposed to the dark and ugly world of sooty tenements which conceal the murderers who are stalking him. Precisely at this point the music of Herbert Windt and Hans-Otto Borgmann proves most compelling. The persecution motif gives way to the drums and trumpets of the Hitler Youth anthem, thus signalling the hero’s imminent death.

The recurrent shrill double whistle — the communists’ crude yet effective alarm system in the ghetto — rings out, and the *Rollkommando* swarms into the darkened streets prepared for action. A horrifying expression of fear crosses Heini’s face, and he runs for his life. Finding all escape routes blocked, he dashes for the carnival field and takes cover in an amusement tent. The inhuman Wilde and his bellowing followers join in hot pursuit, finally discovering him there. An ungodly shriek pierces the ugly Berlin dawn, as the drunken, unsightly Moscow hit-men carry out their nefarious deed.

In a final scene, Fritz and other Hitler Youth rush to the side of the dying boy, whose eyes are fixed on heaven. As if already in a transfigured state, Heini strikes up the words of the song of the flag — ‘Unsere Fahne flattert uns voran!’ — and perishes. A heavenly scene of Resurrection opens up and several converging columns of marchers — the ‘Immortals’ — take up the chorus of the song which Heini began. This baroque display is bathed in sunshine and gorgeous billowing clouds, a resplendent martial demonstration. Their spirits return to earth, and the martyrs join the columns marching toward victory below, fading out with the words, ‘Our flag is the new era’.³⁶

The premiere of *Hitler Youth Quex* on 11 September 1933 at the Ufa Phoebus Palace in Munich took on all the aspects of a Nazi festival. Long columns of Hitler Youth formed a ceremonial guard

outside the theatre, blowing trumpet fanfares to the delight of the crowd gathered to catch a glimpse of the Führer. The guests in attendance included many of the elite of Third Reich officialdom: Göring, Hess, Ley, Röhm, and von Papen, as well as von Blomberg and other high-ranking generals.³⁷ Searchlights outside the theatre added a dramatic touch, and the hall was aflame with red, white, and black flags of Party and nation. Flowers were banked in the national colours before the stage, featuring a floral raised swastika. Franz Adam and the Reich Symphony Orchestra played Anton Bruckner's Fourth Symphony. No touch had been overlooked for the celebration of the living dead.

Turning to Hitler and guests of honour, Baldur von Schirach offered a brief testimonial:

I want briefly to direct your thought to that young comrade, whose fate is the subject of this film. To this little comrade, who can't be with us anymore, because he has laid buried for a year and half. It was in the time of the worst terror, when I stood before 2000 Berlin Hitler Youths . . . and spoke to them of sacrifice, of Führer, and of heroism. An oppressive atmosphere lay over our meeting, and it was as if we expected something horrible to happen. I spoke of the bravery that everyone must show, and that there might be one of us out there who I would never see again. And I said to him: thank you that you take this fate on your shoulders, that you have the honour among the millions to bear the name of Hitler Youth, to become a leader in the community which you embody.

On the next morning, the Hitler Youth Herbert Norkus was butchered by Marxist murder bandits. As I stood at his casket, communists threw stones against the wall of the mortuary. Today a youth movement of a million and a half fighters stands where that little Hitler Youth fell. Every single one of them is wedded to this spirit of sacrifice, this comradeship. . . We want to fight on in his unbending spirit. Heil Hitler!³⁸

After the playing of the Hitler Youth March, the director of the Bavarian State Theatre, Hans Schlenk, read the prologue from Kurt Klawitter's work 'Ours the Victory — Ours the Power'. The film itself was greeted with grand approval and boisterous shouts of 'Heil!'. At its conclusion Jürgen Ohlsen, who had played Quex, appeared on the stage in the company of the directors Hans Steinhoff and Karl Ritter. Looking like the wandering Parzifal, he saluted Hitler who was standing with his entourage. Deeply moved, Hitler smiled approvingly, and lost in memories of the *Kampfzeit*, he slowly returned the salute.³⁹

The reporter for *Kinematograph*, Germany's oldest film magazine, gave a breathless description of the conclusion of the

ceremonies:

The shouts and Heils! were heard throughout the neighbourhood and they carried out into the dark blue fall evening. Blood, tears, and victory — the story of our times — were relived that night in the presence of those who gained the *Endsieg*. . . As the Führer left the theatre, the Hitler Youth band played the Badenweiler March.

Hitlerjunge Quex is a German film, produced not with the aim of making money, but with the goal of recreating the genuine atmosphere and deeply-felt experiences of those days, a film which is a fanfare of German youth and of the German future.⁴⁰

There is little question that during the Third Reich *Hitler Youth Quex* fulfilled the mission assigned to it. It was at once a propaganda and aesthetic success, an ornament to Goebbels's dream of utilizing the best of modern technique in the service of the mythical National Socialist ideal. Above all, it appealed to youth in a remarkable way. Through both Party and Ufa commercial channels, its audience numbered well over 20,000,000 viewers.⁴¹ Curt Belling, a senior official in the Goebbels film apparatus, referred to it as 'the film of National Socialist youth'.⁴² As late as 1942 it was being shown in the *Jugendfilmstunden* of the Hitler Youth, an important propaganda activity of the organization.⁴³

The reasons for its success are many. Above all, it was a film of youth, by youth, and for youth. As such, it both fascinated and inspired the young and met the requirements of the Party elite. It paved the way for the other major films of the genre which followed, setting a standard for them: *Ich für dich—Du für mich* (Carl Froelich, 1934), *Kopf hoch, Johannes!* (Viktor de Kowa, 1941), *Jakko* (Fritz Peter Buch, 1941), *Himmelhunde* (Roger von Norman, 1942), *Hände hoch!* (Alfred Weidenmann, 1942) and *Junge Adler* (Alfred Weidenmann, 1944). From the point of view of the Party, *Hitler Youth Quex* had the great merit of laying the foundation for the central motif of Hitler Youth martyrology. Further, it schooled a generation to prepare for a sacrificial death for *Grossdeutschland*. False myths and false Führers ultimately took a terrible toll in the second world war.⁴⁴

Both Herbert Norkus and Horst Wessel had taken up the banner of the Feldherrnhalle martyrs of 1923, whose blood had originally drenched the *Blutfahne*. Thus they had joined the corps of the 'Eternal Guard', and in Hitler's words, 'have not died, but have been resurrected in us and live in us, as long as we ourselves shall

live and they live in our youth, as long as a German youth shall exist'.⁴⁵ Blood of his blood, flesh of his flesh, they had answered the call to immortality. As Hitler said of them, 'The blood that they have shed has become Holy Water for the Third Reich'.⁴⁶

Notes

1. Goebbels, address to 'Fachschaft Film', Kroll Opera, 9 February 1934. *Der Kinematograph*, 13 February 1934, cited in Gert Albrecht, *Film im Dritten Reich* (Karlsruhe 1979), 267-68.

2. Oskar Kalbus, *Vom Werden deutscher Filmkunst*, II, *Der Tonfilm* (Altona 1935), 123.

3. See 'Baldur von Schirach' in Joachim C. Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich* (New York 1970), 229-231; Michael H. Kater, *Bürgerliche Jugendbewegung und Hitlerjugend in Deutschland von 1926 bis 1939*, Archiv für Sozialgeschichte, Band XVII, 1977, 151-152; George L. Mosse, *Nazi Culture* (New York 1966), 266.

4. Schirach, introduction to Arnold Littmann, *Herbert Norkus und die Hitlerjungen vom Beusselkietz* (Berlin 1934), 6.

5. Ludwig Norkus was interviewed by the *Angriff* staff shortly after the murder. See *Der Angriff*, 26 January 1932, no pagination. Compare Littmann, op. cit., 9-15, and Rudolf Ramlow, *Herbert Norkus?—Hier! Opfer und Sieg der Hitler Jugend* (Stuttgart 1933), 46-52.

6. *Zeitprobleme: Wie der Arbeiter Wohnt*, produced by the communist-controlled Weltfilm Kartell in 1930, Nr. 394, Budesarchiv.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (Prometheus 1929). See Helmut Korte, *Film und Realität in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt am Main 1980), 103-168.

9. May Day, 1934, NSDAP/Hauptarchiv, Roll 18, Folder 366. See Peter D. Stachura, 'The Ideology of the Hitler Youth in the Kampfzeit', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 7, 3 (1973), 155-167.

10. Ramlow, op. cit., 55-59; Littmann, op. cit., 77-81.

11. *Ibid.*, 72-73.

12. *Ibid.*, 49-52, 81-82; Ramlow, op. cit., 52-54.

13. Reichsführer HJ Kurt Gruber, 'Verfügung Nr. 2: Die Septemberaktion,' *Kommandobrücke*, 20 July 1931, NSDAP/Hauptarchiv, Roll 18, Folder 342.

14. Littmann, op. cit., 112.

15. *Ibid.*, 134-140. Six months later a trial of the perpetrators took place in the Schwurgericht am Landgericht I, Moabit, but a few blocks from the scene of the murder. For the Nazi reaction to the proceedings, see the *Völkischer Beobachter* (Munich), 14 July 1932. For obvious reasons, the Stennes connection with the murder was meticulously avoided by the NSDAP in the florid hagiography devoted

to their young hero.

16. Kriminal-Polizeirat Reinhold Heller of the Berlin Police was responsible for the case which resulted in prison sentences of up to three years for the defendants. See Hsi-huey Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic* (Berkeley 1970), 140-141.

17. *Der Angriff*, 26 January 1932, 1-2. Compare the memorial tribute to Norkus in *Der Junge Sturmtrupp* (February 1932).

18. See *Der Angriff*, 28 January 1932, 1, and 30 January 1932, 9. The Norkus murder paralleled that of Horst Wessel; both resulted in firming up Nazi resolve to gain the final victory. Prinz Schaumburg-Lippe described the effect of the funeral on that cold January day, noting that it 'was in harmony with the desperation of the times and the danger of the moment. . . The torches at the casket shone far beyond the borders of Berlin and burned in our hearts forever and ever. . . I myself became a National Socialist by and through the death of Herbert Norkus. Such a death was far less a national than a socialist deed. Such a sacrifice meant that thousands and thousands came over to our flag, people who before were repressed by the chains of class and caste.' Friedrich Christian Prinz zu Schaumburg-Lippe, *Als die Goldne Abendsonne: Aus meinen Tagebüchern der Jahre 1933-1937* (Wiesbaden 1971), 65-66. For examples of Norkus hagiography see *Herbert Norkus, der Hitlerjunge in Die Fahne hoch!* (Die braune Reihe), 20, 1934, 1-25; Will Decker, *Kreuze am Wege zur Freiheit* (Leipzig 1935), 145-146, 150-151, and Kurt Langner, *Gedenkhalle für die Gefallenen des Dritten Reiches* (Munich 1935), 134-135.

19. See 'Abschied von Herbert Norkus: Die letzte Fahrt des Hitlerjungen', VB/M, 31 January 1932, 3. The bourgeois press reacted with condemnation of the murder and consternation about Weimar's continuing political crisis. With their own fallen to mourn, the KPD responded with contempt. While *Die Rote Fahne* relegated coverage to the back pages, the Münzenberg press trust was innovative in its reaction to the situation. It seems that a group of workers 'happened to be passing by' when they were accosted by some twenty-five Nazi hoodlums who assaulted them, firing their revolvers in all directions. 'Apparently the knife which struck Norkus was really meant for a worker.' See *Die Welt am Abend*, 25 January 1932.

20. Max Domarus, *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen 1932-1945*, 1 (Munich 1965), 90; Littmann, op. cit., 141-142.

21. See von Schirach's message to the HJ celebrating their bravery in 'Verordnungsblatt der Reichsjugendführung', Munich, 22 January 1933, NSDAP/Hauptarchiv, Roll 18, Folder 337.

22. See photograph with caption 'Die Gedenktafel am Mordhause Zwinglistrasse 4 nach der Enthüllung am 26.7.33, davor drei Kameraden mit der Herbert Norkus-Fahne', Ramlow, op. cit., 1.

23. Domarus, op.cit., 137.

24. Karl Aloys Schenzinger, *Der Hitlerjunge Quex* (Berlin 1932), was written between May and September 1932 and was published in December of the same year by the Steuben Verlag. In 1934 Schenzinger published another novel in the heroic genre with the Zeitgeschichte Verlag of Berlin entitled *Der Herrgottsbacher Schülermarsch*.

25. This has long been a theme in Teutonic culture. The German historian Gerhard Reinhard Ritter (not to be confused with the Freiburg historian Gerhard Ritter) wrote in 1936 that 'The nature of the German is not without reason also a

symbol of eternal growth. It is represented most beautifully and significantly in the type of the German youth. Why otherwise would so many great masters of our history have been able to choose as the incarnation of the German people a youth as symbol—Siegfried, Parsifal, Horst Wessel! All of these representations involve the Faustian thought of the eternal seeker in a significant way.' See Gerhard Ritter, *Die geschlechtliche Frage in der deutschen Volkserziehung* (Berlin/Cologne 1936), 207.

26. Schenzinger, *Der Hitlerjunge Quex*, 164.

27. *Ibid.*, 60-61.

28. Georg Walther Heyer, *Die Fahne ist mehr als der Tod* (Munich 1981), 22-23.

29. Schenzinger, *op. cit.*, 254-256.

30. For an example of what Goebbels expected from the film industry, see his speeches of 28 March and 19 May 1933 in Gerd Albrecht, *NS Filmpolitik* (Stuttgart 1969), 439-447.

31. Both von Schirach and the ardent Nazi director Karl Ritter did not want the boys of the Hitler Youth to be confused with actors. As a result, the young man who played Quex, Jürgen Ohlsen, culled from the ranks of the corps, did not receive credits in the billing of the film. See 'Wie der Hitlerjunge Quex gefunden wurde', *Die Filmwoche*, 37 (13 September 1933).

32. Alfred Bauer, *Deutscher Spielfilm Almanach 1929-1950* (Munich 1976), 191. For a discussion of the film, see Manfred Dammeyer (ed.), *Der Spielfilm im Dritten Reich*, XII. Westdeutsche Kurzfilmtage, Oberhausen, 13-19 February 1966, 34, 51-62, 165-168; Erwin Leiser, *Nazi Cinema* (New York 1975), 34-39; David Stewart Hull, *Film in the Third Reich* (Berkeley 1969), 21, 25, 32-34, 222.

33. Schirach made no secret of his mystical concept of nationalist aesthetics, which was grounded in racism and the exaltation of the spirit of eternal youth. See Baldur von Schirach, *Die Hitler-Jugend: Idee und Gestalt* (Berlin/Leipzig 1934), 18-19.

34. Thomas Arnold, et. al., *Hitlerjunge Quex: Einstellungsprotokoll* (Munich 1980), 99-101. In a parallel scene in Schenzinger's novel, the communist neighbourhood leader Stoppel berates Heini, saying: 'The proletarian fights for his rights, for human rights if you know what that means. He fights for something to eat and drink, for a little air and light for the stinking hole he calls home... for a warm bed under his ass. Now it's all on the line. The battle is reaching a showdown. Everyone's got to be at his battle station, and that's where you belong.' Schenzinger, *op. cit.*, 198-199.

35. *Hitlerjunge Quex: Einstellungsprotokoll*, 169-175; Leiser, *op. cit.*, 36-38.

36. *Hitlerjunge Quex: Einstellungsprotokoll*, 208-237. See also notes of Friedrich P. Kahlenberg in Bundesarchiv, Kulturamt der Stadt Koblenz, *Ausstellung zur Filmreihe 'Jugend im NS-Staat': Katalog* (Koblenz 1978), 8-12, and Pierre Cadars and Francis Courtade, *Le Cinéma Nazi* (Paris 1972), 34-41.

37. See 'Platzeinteilung der Ehrengäste im Einvernehmen mit der Reichsjugendführung Berlin für Welturaufführung'. *Hitlerjunge Quex*, File *Hitlerjunge Quex*, Deutsches Institut für Filmkunde, Wiesbaden-Biebrich.

38. Kalbus, *op. cit.*, 121-123. Compare *Völkischer Beobachter*, 13 September 1933, 7.

39. *Kinematograph*, 176, 12 September 1933. The Berlin premiere followed the Munich world premiere on 19 September 1933. Walter Redmann, film critic of the *Berliner Morgenpost*, offered a graphic description of Jürgen Ohlsen in the role of

Quex: 'This boy is simply fascinating, especially when one realizes that he is no actor but simply a boy playing himself with a freshness and a spirit which is natural and reflects his idealism. He is the incarnation of the idealism of many thousands of German boys today.' *Berliner Morgenpost*, 20 September 1933.

40. *Kinematograph*, 176, 12 September 1933.

41. The Abteilung Film of the Reichspropagandaleitung der NSDAP was extraordinarily efficient in turning out audiences for their sponsored films. In 1935 alone, for example, they sponsored 48,615 film assemblies for school children totalling 10,234,815, as well as 72,730 showings for 11,532,969 adults. Reaching some 21,767,784 people in one year must set a record in film propaganda annals. Curt Belling, *Der Film in Staat und Partei* (Berlin 1936), 74-75.

42. Curt Belling and Alfred Schütze, *Der Film in der Hitler-Jugend* (Berlin 1937), 69.

43. Dammeyer, op. cit., 52.

44. According to one song of the Hitler Youth during wartime: 'Fastt an, Kameraden, fasst an! Wenn am Ende dieses Krieges, einst am Tag des grossen Sieges, unser Führer um sich schaut, soll er leuchtend neben den Armeen, auch die Banner seiner Jugend sehen.' From the youth propaganda film series *Junges Europa* (Filmschau II, 1942), cited in A.U. Sander, *Jugend und Film* (Berlin 1944), 36.

45. *Völkischer Beobachter* (Berlin), 9 November 1935, 2.

46. Hitler address, Bürgerbräukeller, Munich, 8 November 1934, in Domarus, op. cit., 1, 458.

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