**The First One**

The First One, space washes over it. It is a leaf in a curling current of matter. It wafts over to time, a thick bubble, like a slowly drying balloon of cement. The First One licks it—*tastes sweet*. It mumbles to itself in its half-whisper—the stirring of the last autumn leaf, dry and crackling in the wind—a stream of long-forgotten words, even it cannot fully remember. A tear rolls down The First One’s cheek, as if something sad was spoken. It dives at time, at the last second expanding its form, disappearing with the dull splash of a child tripping from the top of a diving board.

The First One inhabits a tree, it always starts like this. It thinks, *first a tree, then… then.* The memory is gone. It sits in the tree, the smell of bark and moss a nasal lullaby, essence mingling, until a dull bark-ness envelops it, mind slows, *roots reach down, expand*. Around the tree, the forest grows.

The First One is woken from its tree trance: the swish of the axe and it vacates its vessel. Once or twice it hasn’t been so fast, caught by the blade, feeling with the tree, *pain, wrong, bits gone, time reversing, smaller, smaller.* The memory freezes it for a second before it flits on. It is the axe, feeling the clean clinical steel and the singular mind-voice of the tool, *chop, chop, chop.* It watches, through a glint in the steel, as its before body comes tumbling down.

As the tree dies The First One reaches out, *where is it?* It sees the tree-soul leave the dead stump, *not so fast.* The First One reaches out an arm and plucks the glowing soul, tasting its energy, *where to put you?* It thinks aloud. The axeman hears a rustle of leaves, nothing more.

The First One soars, it has found a bird, a pigeon. The pigeon’s fat body flutters, as The First One uses its little eyes to search for a home for the tree-soul. It’s done this before. It smells a thick ferrous scent like the aftermath of battle. It sees a shape below with golden hair; when it had a body its hair looked like the sun. It pushes into the bird, searching, grasping, pulling, it plunges the soul into its guts. Then searches for the muscle to make it shit, it plays this game sometimes, but this time it has a purpose. It finds the muscle and gently massages it, feeling the pigeon respond and drop a white stream of excrement, with the soul nestling inside, down towards the golden head below.

\*

*And The First One came to El and praised his golden hair and blue eyes, his tall stature and strong muscles. And so The First One waved its hand and blessed him and spoke thus, “go forth and multiply, for a nation thou shalt birth, a nation of air and land, for this land is thine, and the sky is thine and thine alone.”*

*Book of El 2:1-4*

 \*

I raced across the courtyard, my oversized sandals like lolling tongues on the ground. I *couldn’t* be late, missing one of the High Priest’s sermons, was punishable by ritual hair shaving. I rounded the corner before the main temple, a squat redbrick building with the Odal-Rune—two lines like interlocking feet kicking out of a square—over the door, symbolizing kinship through blood. A line of priests and novices slowly filed under the rune. The novices like me, wore black robes, with the Ger-Rune, the backwards N of belonging, blazoned in red on the arm. The priests wore the blood-red robes of office, the Toten-Rune—a line with two small feet—sat smugly from their shoulders, symbolizing death. The thought of the sacrifice to earn the rune made me shudder: I stopped.

I gasped for breath, a sudden wave of panic, dizziness, and nausea swept across me. I saw the back of the line start to turn and mutter, I breathed, *calm, please be calm, please.* I pleaded with my body, physical weakness was frowned upon. I managed to fight back my emotions and joined the back of the line, wiping perspiration from my brow. I walked closer to the door; the air was laced with the tell-tale thick ferrous scent of blood. As I stepped into the doorway, I turned to the priest beside it. He nodded to me, before plunging five thick pudgy fingers into a small iron bowl he held. He extended his arm, almost absentmindedly, his digits curled into a ball then flicked out, scattering droplets of blood over my face. The blessing complete, I entered the temple.

The High Priest entered in gloriously flowing red robes, topped with an ornate mantel, covered in an obscene deluge of arcane runes and symbols. It sat on his shoulders and extended far above his head, like the crest of a reptile. He had a sharp face and eyes that seemed to be always watching, as they flitted constantly around the congregation. The temple awed me, it was all hard lines, drawn up like regiments, waiting for an order. The room was a gargantuan square, every angle right: no curves or deviations. Three perfectly parallel rows of pews, four for the novices and two for the priests, were in the centre. All pointed at a raised dais, complete with eagle’s head pulpit; behind the dais a giant red hanging covered the back wall, emblazoned in black was the Sonnenrad, resembling a spinning spoked wheel, symbolising our powerful spirit.

An expectant hush enveloped the room as I took my seat. When the High Priest reached the pulpit, he spoke. His voice, so amplified by his passion and rage, that his presence grew with every word, “Brethren! Stand we as the *chosen* few.”

“The *chosen* few, stand we!” the congregation chanted in reply.

The High Priest continued, “We are the Air-ands of old, god-men who once ruled this world. We are on the cusp of regaining this position. The First One gave thee this land, gave thee dominion over the lesser races: for thou art the fifth root race. It’s in our blood…”

The sermon continued for over an hour, repeating doctrine, and readings from the scriptures, written and copied on parchments made from human skin. It ended with a passionate report from the front lines, the war was going well. As I got up to leave, another novice tapped me on the shoulder, I quickly whirled around, “Hello Brother?”

“*Brother*, you have bird shit in your hair” he sniggered, “I’d wash it before one of the priests sees and cuts off your golden locks.”

\*

*When Delid was footsore the horsemen being upon him, and being sore afraid of death, to the earth he fell and called out to The First One for salvation. Heard Delid the tramp of hooves as the horsemen surrounded him, and thus covering his face waited for the blow, but come it did not. On opening his eyes, saw he the horsemen were gone. In their place stood a circle of trees.*

*The Gospel of Strife 4:3-8*

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The First One pondered. It got like this sometimes, reliving its actions, circling points in time like a fly around a fire; it always got drawn in, the pull too strong. It used to visit the little ones a lot. Used to feel sorry for them: they were so pathetic, small, hairless, except on the head. Forever getting killed by lions, or dying from eating the wrong berries. It would help when it could, when it felt like it. A compliment, or piece of advice, sometimes it would turn their foes into trees, or them. The first one liked trees, liked their ever-changing colours, the way they felt to be, they existed in time in a similar way to it. Circling the present, past, and future in tandem.

Now when the first one visits the humans, as they call themselves, it never reveals itself. They don’t need it anymore, they’d made their own hides, sometimes stealing animals, sometimes forging their own with fire and steel. There were few lions left now, and the humans tended to know what berries to eat. It sighed, they mostly just killed each other, which was fun the first few times, but The First One often tired of their wars.

It liked to make itself really small and find a virus or bacteria buried deep in the earth, or hanging on to some other animal, like a flea. It would take it and a cell from the humans and push them together: this new thing would stare at it, uncertain of itself, then The First One would scream at it. Its voice would rage and rumble like a midnight gale and it would tell it all the awful things it would do to the humans, the sores and tumours and fevers and boils. It especially liked boils, as they would swell and swell, like rosebuds, before blooming with a brilliant blossom of pain, and stench. The First One saved this, this feeling, the despair, the hurt, put it in a jar and savoured it later. It would sniff it, swill it, spit it out, taste it all before gulping it down like a starving man. Once it almost went too far, tricked the humans into guarding against smells, while all the while little insects were biting their doom.

Other times, when The First One was in its deepest throes of despair, circling the endless sea of oblivion, like the last strand of hair circling a drain, it would think to end it. It would dive into the Earth, deep, deep, deep, find a line of power, or a tectonic plate and pull it. Once it got carried away, when the Earth was one big mass, it split it into pieces, and filled the gaps with water.

\*

I woke up in my cell in the novices’ block, crawled out of bed and dragged myself to my washbasin—to wait for the feeling of sickness to come and go. This had become my routine, as my body rebelled each morning.

This morning it didn’t. I stood for almost half an hour waiting but the feeling never came. I was pleased, if not a little unnerved, at this sudden tightening of my nerves. The priests were always saying how pure and strong we were; only those whose families could trace their lineage back several generations, without pollution of the line, could join the order. Perhaps my strength had just taken a little longer to appear?

I quickly washed, the water felt cold and refreshing against my skin. My walk towards the dining hall was pleasant; the early spring light illuminated the grass and trees in shades of green I’d never seen before. By the time I reached the dining hall, the other novices were clearing away. The walk was only five minutes, I must have slept in, or spent longer than I thought waiting to feel sick. I felt like I’d walked straight here, so that must be it. I wasn’t disappointed though, as I was not particularly hungry.

\*

*And so, The Prophet came to the Air-ands, and told of a vision, all the great civilizations of the world birthed from them. He spoke to the people thus, “Brethren, for we set in motion all the races around us, should we not love them as brethren, call them brethren as we do each other? For once we were the same.”*

*The Book of Prophets 10:3-7 (Declared heretical in the year 890 of the fifth age)*

*\**

The First One played with shapes, drawing lines in the snow near the humans. This was before: when the world was covered in ice. It would plunge its hands into the snow and heat it, until it could feel the water escaping and returning to the air. After it had finished its work, it would hitch a lift on the vapours following them into the sky. The shapes had no meaning to The First One, just lines connected together, it found them pleasing: it loved symmetry, and colour. Later, it saw its shapes begin to appear where the humans lived, on flags, or carved into stones, above doors and on clothes. This pleased it, so it made more, and more. Eventually, it became bored, and flitted off, inhabiting the body of a lion stalking its prey. Feeling the burn of hunger as it moved towards a deer, willing it on, taking control of its muscles, feeling the satisfaction as it got ready to pounce. Then overreaching the jump, laughing as the bewildered beast soared over its prey, and face-first into a bush, the pang of humiliation and hunger a scintillating morsel.

\*

*The Prophet came to the Air-ands with voice of thunder, he proclaimed, “I have seen in the mists of time, that thou art the root race, the first, and all the achievements claimed by the others belong to thee, for thou art the heirs to all that is civilized and all that is good, which they have claimed and squandered, shalt thou call them brethren for this crime?” and answered the people, “Nay!”*

 *The Revised Book of Prophets 10:3-9*

*\**

I woke up for the second morning feeling abnormally refreshed, and fine. Not a hint of sickness. I rose and quickly washed, the water was cold and nurturing. I felt a tingle in my fingers as I plunged them into my washbasin. I began walking towards the hall for breakfast, on the way I noticed the colours; magical and illuminating, as the early morning sun began to pick out the greens of the newly blossoming trees in the grounds. I closed my eyes, and when they opened, I was standing by a large oak that I had never noticed before. I reached out a hand to the bark, and placed it there—tenderly, smelt the rich wet scent of moss. There was a rustling like the wind through fallen leaves, although it was a still morning. I felt like I was hearing words, phrases repeated, over and over. I was brought out of this reverie by the chiming of the bell, the call to mid-morning prayers. For the second day I had missed breakfast, but again, I felt no hunger.

The day was like any other, morning consisted of prayer, led by one of the older priests. After which, we would study the scriptures, followed by rune work and culminating in The Great Work, as it was called. This involved reading old books and copying out any passages which were thought to be of value, before the books were burned. The books were usually old anthologies of stories, folktales and myths. Some were thought to be good, promoting qualities like strength and loyalty; these passages would be copied down, others were seditious, promoting evil traits like cunning, and tolerance.

That day when I began opening the old volumes, I felt nauseous: the paper dead in my hands. The scriptures we studied earlier had been printed on human skin. It was a great honour to be used after death to record the teachings. In the past the feel of the skin, its texture, like rubbery parchment and smell, a linger of decay, had often made me feel sick; now the paper felt the same, like I was handling a corpse.

\*

The First One was tired, it looked down on the land below. It was sad. The ones who seemed to love it: they built statues to it, they prayed to it, they were responsible. They had changed their land so much since it first saw them; before, the land had been full of people, of every kind, now it was a monotone. The First One had tried to find out why, why these people wanted everyone to be the same. It had swooped on one of their leaders, nestling inside his collar bone—waiting. When he fell asleep and his mind was unguarded, it reached up and caressed his brain, whispering to it, feeling its emotions.

Rage engulfs The First One, it is stopped, halted, but it presses on. It catches the rage, holds it in a bear hug and squeezes, until it breaks up. Inside there is anger, but also it sees, like little drops of ice: fear, sadness, regret, and doubt; as soon as they appear, they vanish, as the rage reforms and sucks them into its greedy core.

\*

*Those who commit such a cardinal sin, for which no earthly punishment will suffice, and that death is too swift an end, a change shall befall them, so that from the land they are indistinguishable.*

*Book of Ends 2:1-3*

*\**

I keep not eating; although meals are now more optional than mandatory. Replaced by thirst: I can smell water in the air. The food served us is never appetizing. I think back to home, and mouth-watering memories of my mother’s cooking: still I feel no hunger. My body is beginning to shrink; my skin taut over branchlike bones, they scrape and threaten to push through with each step. I spend more time by the oak, placing my hand on it, hearing its whisper, feeling its pulse.

I wake, or have been awoken. There is a horrible itching feeling in my leg, like a spider bite. I reach down and scratch, the itch eases. I bring my hand to my face, it is covered in dry skin, I sniff it, the soft loamy smell of earth pervades my nostrils. I wash, scrubbing at my leg until the skin is raw. The water is so tantalizing that I cannot help but plunge my face in, and drain the bowl; sucking at it with my mouth and inhaling it through my nostrils until everything is gone. My studies blur into nothing, words with no meaning and rhetoric that stirs little in me. The touch of the books is repellent, they smell rotten like a mouldering heap of bodies. I sleep and the rustling calls.

I am spending each morning by the oak, feel it, place my hand on it, feel it, am it, am me? Sometimes the line seems blurred. The rustling of leaves follows me, it’s in my dreams; every time I hear it, it sounds more and more like words. Or, I understand it more.

One day as I’m looking at the pointless texts one of the priests, *all the same*, walks up behind me and looks at my work:

“Boy, I can hardly read that scrawl of yours, you’ll have to copy it again”

I look down, with an effort focus on the shapes in front of me …*roots, they look like roots…*

“I’ve been standing here for five minutes waiting for you. Answer me!”

I look up, mouth begins to mumble, form words; my voice, when it comes, is like weak gravel, “s…sorry Sir, will do again…I’ll…”. The priest shakes his head and walks off before I finish.

*…Wake…wash…study…sleep…repeat…* This is the cycle my brain has begun to follow, almost on its own, like something has taken over and is pushing it along, it frightens me.

*…Wake…wash…study…sleep…repeat…*

I wake, the itching returns, this time more and when I scratch, I feel hard skin. I scratch and cut with my nails, but it stays firm. Small shavings come off in my hand and the succulent smell of soil covers my fingers. The other novices whisper about me, like they are speaking of someone else. My body is too hurried and manoeuvrable; if I move too fast, I become dizzy. I long to sit or stand and just be:

*…Walking…running…writing: wrong.*

I no longer feel an itch, the sensation has morphed; the rest of me feels like an itch, a burn, a yearn to change, as my skin slowly hardens, both legs now. They are becoming harder to move, they don’t want to move, I don’t want to move, but still, I must. When I walk the outer hard skin moves, like a covering over my inner flesh. There is a small gap between them where they rub and burn, as my flesh shrinks.

I felt my scalp and it had tiny branches covering it, little twigs sticking out, under my hair, for now. I measure time by the length they grow, a little at a time. I no longer sleep. They grow, soon I know they will be seen, and I will be discovered.

*…Wake…wash…study…sleep…repeat…*

I wake thirsty, and need nutrients, go to the bowl, and drink water.

By the oak, it speaks to me, I am certain, I cannot understand its meaning, it seems friendly.

They come, one of the novices told the priests about my scalp.

They strip me naked, prod and poke, not wanting to touch my changed parts.

Both legs now tree, skin hardened, darkened to bark, rough edges and raised sections, feels nothing when poked.

They try to cut my hair, the scissors get caught in the branches protruding from my head.

I’m left in my cell, only water, door—barred—guarded.

Stand—move—follow light.

Feel insides—growing—feet—concrete floor—cracking—an urge to push down—*explore*—*expand—thirst—look for nutrients.*

The concrete holds for now—feel it weaken.

At times—during cycles—feeding—resting—things come—seem familiar.

They prod-poke—weak flesh—cleansing bark.

Prod flesh—sensations—familiar—lost.

Bark feels nothing but—urge—*expand*—*grow*.

They come again—more strange shapes moving too fast.

A different place—something in red mumbling—vibrations—the memory of a memory washes over, *mentioning me? Mentioning what I was? Who I was? The memory fades…I Scream…“Help!”…*

\*

The First One is invisible, in the air, looking down. It watches as a small procession leaves a squat square building. It drifts down, using the warm air as a ladder to descend. This looks interesting, it smiles to itself. At the head of the procession is a man, he is covered in a second skin the colour of the humans’ liquid. The First One knows the colour from the hundreds of battles it has watched; it spills out of the humans when they press steel into each other.

Behind this man are four others carrying a fifth between them. The First One recognises his golden hair, but he has changed. A canopy of leaves now protrudes from his head, green in the light, with the tell-tale hint of blossoms poking through. His body is one homogeneous mass of bark and branches. The First One watches the procession as they carry their charge to an open space near the other buildings, dominated by an oak.

It flits down, creeping through the air and wraps itself crown like on the first man’s head. It slithers in, snatching at thoughts and feelings, pride and power swirl and bounce The First One smashes them; ducking through the shards to go deeper, it senses satisfaction, a purging of the sinful, deeper. There is fear, apprehension, a little voice, *who will be next* and fainter still a question, *me?*

The procession stops, the men distribute spades, they attack the earth until they have excavated a hole. They all stand in a circle, producing steel, and pressing it to their hands; their liquid drips into the hole, The First One feels nostrils quiver at the thick ferrous scent and winces as its host’s pain tugs at it. The man’s mouth moves, muscles contracting, air expelled, as the men chant:

“Blood and soil, guard our souls, take the sin, purge the blood!”

They lift the body, as it is pulled across the grass and placed in the ground, roots trail from where its feet would be. The men begin to leave, The First One unwraps itself and floats over to an oak, it waits; feeling the trees age and wisdom press down as it watches. The body changes, slowly, more branches appear from the top; the body begins to lengthen and stretch up towards the sky, until it is indistinguishable from the other trees. The other humans return, and look at it as they begin to chant, over and over:

“Blood and soil, guard our souls, take the sin, purge the blood!”

The First One rests on the newly planted tree and listens to it. First, it hears the tree, *still, expand, grow, still,* its words are a calming wave. It digs deeper through the tree, bits of its consciousness rip and pulp, like bark. It senses the collective stillness, the indifference, deeper it goes, through cracks and knots into the woody soul of the tree to its core. It listens hard, picks a half-forgotten voice, a lost whisper, the everlasting scream, …“*Help!”…* The First One looks out at the monotone conformity of people, and the brilliant colour of the trees, an ever-changing canvas from season to season. It smiles, its *gift* bestowed on the one with golden hair.

**The Grimm Side of Folk**

**The Nazi Party’s Transformation of Folktales to Indoctrinate German Youth into their Ideology**

The Nazi party valued myths and folktales, as a way of indoctrinating young people into their ideology. Kamenetsky explains, the Nazis believed facts were insufficient to instil the kind of character desired in the youth, to achieve this, they used specific folktales.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Nazis censored the past, by transforming folktales as evidence of a mythical German character associated with: ‘courage, strength, loyalty, leadership, and service.’[[2]](#footnote-2) They used this past to promote a utopian future, where the races “diluting” the German character were censored from folktales and removed from society.

Focusing on the purpose they serve society, myths, folktales, and fairy tales will be defined. The appeal they have to children examined, and the advantage of indoctrinating children into an ideology will be explored. The Nazis’ censorship of literature will be examined; the criteria they used, its ideological purpose, and practical application in furthering their racial ideology.

The wider transformation of myths and folktales will be examined, in response to political ideology and social anxieties. ‘The Story of the Youth Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was’ (referred to hereinafter as ‘The Youth’) will be examined through its transformation to promote the Nazis’ mythical German past. By instilling characteristics in young people with a practical application in building Hitler’s Reich.

The purposes of myths, folktales, or fairy tales are in many ways synonymous. In *Myths and Monsters,* myths are defined as stories originating as oral traditions, which through retellings come to define a place and embody its cultural memories.[[3]](#footnote-3) Folktales, as Zipes defines them, are oral traditions which explain how a certain culture perceives the world. He defines fairy tales as an evolution of folktales which became a literary genre. Fairy tales expand on motifs of traditional folktales, to reflect the conflicts between feudalism and early capitalism.[[4]](#footnote-4) All three forms began as oral traditions to: explain the world, express anxieties, reflect changes as society has progressed, and preserve cultural memory.

Zipes defines fairy tales as a progression of traditional folktale motifs. Any analysis of these motifs would apply to both folktales and fairy tales. Bettelheim theorises that fairy tales, and subsequently folktales, have a specific appeal to children; they explain the world as animistic, a feeling and acting environment, which correlates with the child’s view of the world.[[5]](#footnote-5) These tales have a formative impact on children, as their perception of the world is the same. The lessons and teachings of a tale easily fitting into the child’s view of the world. The Nazis used the appeal of folktales to promote their ideology. Dawkins notes, beliefs taught in childhood are often accepted as true without evidence; children’s brains have evolved to accept the wisdom of parents without question, as it could often be the difference between life and death.[[6]](#footnote-6) As Dawkins’s suggests the best time to indoctrinate someone into a set of beliefs is childhood. This is supported by Foucault’s theory, in *Discipline and Punish*,that a regime wishing to create a society that conforms to a rigid mould must instil this behaviour in children.[[7]](#footnote-7) The Nazis were promoting German characteristics and a mythical German past, which they expected the whole of society to follow, and childhood is the best place to plant this seed.

The Nazis selected folktales which promoted a mythical German past through ideas of German characteristics. Teachers, working for the Nazis, Dobers and Higelke selected German folktales that promoted German characteristics, which included, ‘courage’ and ‘loyalty’ and removed any tale that promoted un-German traits, claiming these tales were not truly German.[[8]](#footnote-8) These two characteristics Hitler deemed important to restore Germany to greatness. In an address to his bodyguard, before a potential conflict, he emphasised the need for, ‘unbreakable loyalty to the movement.’[[9]](#footnote-9) Hitler summarised the importance of courage, in the people, to arm themselves and fight as ‘a coward will not fire even a single shot when attacked’.[[10]](#footnote-10) The German characteristics the Nazis identified were important to Hitler in creating his Reich; suggesting that German characteristics reflected the Nazis’ practical needs. The narrative of the past was rewritten, through censorship, to reflect Hitler’s ideal future: Germany great again, achieved through German characteristics. As Zipes summarises, folktales and fairy tales promote feasible ‘utopian alternatives’ to reality.[[11]](#footnote-11) By removing aspects of their cultural past, they perceived to be un-German or negative, the Nazis created a utopian alternative.

The folktale in Nazi Germany became more than a utopian alternative but a past reality, becoming, ‘“realistic evidence” of a community life.’[[12]](#footnote-12) By manufacturing a mythical past that exemplified German characteristics, Hitler viewed the post WW1 state of Germany as the fault of lesser races contaminating German blood and diluting the German character.[[13]](#footnote-13) This reveals Hitler’s belief that the current state of Germany was the fault of other races, diluting German blood and afflicting the invented German character. This narrative was used, as propaganda, to justify removing these races from Germany; if Germany was great in the past, then it could be great again. By linking greatness with racial superiority, through the invented German character, the Nazis manufactured a clear path to greatness, by removing elements of society they had censored from folktales.

The lessons and teachings of a tale can transform as the needs of a society do. *Myths and Monsters* examines the tale of *Robin Hood*, which originated in the 14th century; Robin is a peasant fighting against corrupt aristocrats.[[14]](#footnote-14) The original tale conveys the message to question and challenge corruption wherever it takes place and whomever does it. The message changed under the rule of Elizabeth I; Robin becomes a member of the aristocracy, fighting corrupt aristocrats for the rightful king, Richard I. Robin as a peasant had become a threat to the ruling classes’ power.[[15]](#footnote-15) The transformation of the story is manipulated by the current political regime, to change its original lesson. Robin losses his revolutionary edge; he no longer fights corruption as a commoner, now he fights corrupt aristocracy as a member of the aristocracy, and for the true king. This provides a simple message: some aristocrats are corrupt, but the good ones will deal with them; the people do not need to worry or get their pitchforks.

‘The Youth’ concerns a boy who is unable to feel fear. He is tested by several people he meets on his travels; all the tests are psychological, or supernatural, involving dead men, or ghosts. The boy is unable to comprehend the threat they might pose him, due to his stupidity he only experiences the world in a literal sense.[[16]](#footnote-16) In contemporary studies of the tale, the youth is a comedic hero ‘It is essentially a comedy on two levels: on one, the boy remains cheerfully and stupidly proof against three times three horrors’.[[17]](#footnote-17) He is comically able to overcome his challenges because he does not understand them. Under the Nazis the meaning of the tale transformed; ‘The Youth’, was used by Dobers and Higelke, under the heading of ‘“Courage,”’ as a tale that proved a German past that embodied the same ideals as the Nazis. His attitude of fearlessness showed him as racially superior to his clever brother.[[18]](#footnote-18) This tale creates a mythical German past which correlates with the ideology, and characteristics the Nazis promoted.

The story begins with the two brothers, the older being smart and sensible, the younger stupid. As a result, the older knows fear, when asked to go to churchyards he says, ‘“I’ll not go there, it makes me shudder!” for he was afraid.’[[19]](#footnote-19) This reflects the Nazis’ ideology, of a mythical German past. As Kemenestky states, ‘the hesitant and cowardly man had as little to do with the genuine German folktale traditions.’[[20]](#footnote-20) The clever brother reflects Hitler’s assertion that ‘a coward will not fire even a single shot when attacked’.[[21]](#footnote-21) Due to his cowardice, and understanding of fear, he would be unable to enter the places his younger brother does, and complete the challenges; little use in Hitler’s Reich.

In his first challenge the youth, the younger brother, is tasked by the towns sexton to ring the church bell at midnight. The sexton goes to the bell tower before him and hides, pretending to be a ghost to frighten him. The youth asks the ghost to speak if he is honest and threatens to throw him down the stairs if he does not. The youth gets no reply so he, ‘ran against him and pushed the ghost down the stairs, so that it fell down ten steps and remained lying there in a corner. Thereupon he rang the bell.’ [[22]](#footnote-22) This passage reinforces the importance of loyalty. The youth’s actions are loyal to the sexton, who has given him a task. He deals with an interloper who should not be in the bell tower and still completes the task, unperturbed by the confrontation. Royce describes loyalty as completely committing to a cause.[[23]](#footnote-23) In this case the ringing of the bell, which the youth commits himself to completely, and unquestioningly. Hitler required, ‘unbreakable loyalty to the movement.’[[24]](#footnote-24) Loyalty is reflected in the youth’s actions. He follows his cause with loyalty and quickly resorts to violence when his actions are disturbed. Loyalty is an important characteristic for soldiers. Bartovstates, unquestioning loyalty to the army, and Führer was important, especially in the wake of widespread disobedience during the end of WW1.[[25]](#footnote-25) The mindless obedience to orders and loyalty to a superior are favourable characteristics to instil in youths destined to fill the ranks of the SS.

The Nazis published the story under the heading ‘“Courage,”’.[[26]](#footnote-26) Throughout the story, the youth is courageous, although this could be due to his stupidity. In one of the more comically bizarre scenes in the story, the youth is confronted by a funeral procession carrying a coffin. He opens the coffin, and on inspecting the man inside and finding him cold (dead) warms him by the fire and with his body heat. At which point the man is revived and threatens to strangle the youth, the youth declares, ‘“What!” said he, “is that the way thou thankest me? […] and he took him up, threw him into it [the coffin], and shut the lid.’[[27]](#footnote-27) This echoes Hitler in the importance of courage to take up arms.[[28]](#footnote-28) The youth is courageous enough to defeat the dead man; he ignores the supernatural terror that most would feel when confronted by a corpse returned to life which has threatened to kill them. The youth is subsequently able to defeat the corpse through his physical strength. Kateb links courage with war, the courage to fight.[[29]](#footnote-29) The advantage of instilling courage in children is paramount to a regime that would use them, when grown, in its conquest of Europe.

The Nazis censored the past, transforming folktales as evidence of a mythical German character associated with: ‘courage, strength, loyalty, leadership, and service.’[[30]](#footnote-30) They used this past to promote a utopian future, where the races “diluting” the German character were censored from folktales and removed from society.

Myths, folktales, and fairy tales have been defined by their purpose; to preserve cultural memory and teach lessons, which have an appeal to children, due to their depiction of the world as children view it. The Nazis recognised the importance of instilling characteristics in children, to mould society along their ideological lines.

The Nazis censored folktales to create a mythical German past, which instilled Hitler’s militaristic German characteristics in children. Presenting a censored past, along racial lines, which promoted a utopian future, by removing races Hitler saw as “polluting” German blood. This essay has examined how tales, like *Robin Hood*, have been transformed by the political ideology of the ruling classes.

It has conducted a close reading of ‘The Youth’. A Grimm’s folktale used by the Nazi regime to exemplify the German characteristics, ‘courage’ and ‘loyalty’. The story has been examined as comedic, in contemporary studies, to explore how the Nazis transformed its meaning to promote courage in the youth’s actions defeating dead men, and loyalty in blindly following orders.

In conclusion, the Nazis transformed folktales to promote a mythical German past, defined by their ideology along racial lines. Folktales were selected that promoted German qualities, any that did not fit this censorship were simply not German. The Nazis indoctrinated children, understanding the appeal of these stories and the importance of indoctrination at a young age. Promoting characteristics with a practical application suggests the Nazis transformed folktales to foster a generation of soldiers, loyal to the Führer, and courageous enough to take up arms.

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