

Letters of a Mass Murderer

**THE
PRIVATE
HEINRICH
HIMMLER**

Edited and with Commentary by

**Katrin Himmler and
Michael Wildt**

Translated by

**Thomas S. Hansen, Ph.D
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Introduction

I

In the spring of 1945, in the immediate aftermath of the war, a U.S. intelligence officer in Gmund am Tegernsee¹ encountered two American GIs who had obviously been helping themselves to “souvenirs” from Haus Lindenfycht, the private residence of Heinrich Himmler. The officer was a historian and quickly recognized what the two men were carrying. When he tried to buy their spoils, one of the two agreed. The officer was thus able to obtain a bundle of papers containing private documents of the Himmler family. Manuscripts of the *Tagebücher* [Journals] of the young Heinrich Himmler from the years 1914–22 were among these papers. The other GI moved on, unwilling to sell his trophies.

The officer sent home the diaries and other documents he had purchased, and paid no further attention to them until 1957, when a discussion with a friend of his, the German-Jewish historian Werner Tom Angress, reminded him of them. He then produced them for historical inspection. Working with a young colleague, Bradley F. Smith, Angress transcribed the manuscripts. Both men reported on the discovery in an essay in *The Journal of Modern History* (1959).²

Other versions of this story exist, but must ultimately remain unsubstantiated because neither the GIs could ever be positively identified. Angress later presented the diaries, along with the other documents, to the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace at Stanford University, where they were made available to the public. This “Himmler Collection,” which contained the letters from Marga Himmler to her husband, has been a treasure trove for primary historical research for years. After protracted negotiations, the Bundesarchiv (Federal Archives) in Koblenz purchased the originals from the Hoover Institution in the mid-1990s. They are now catalogued as the *Nachlass Himmler* (Himmler Papers).

A further collection of private documents from Heinrich Himmler’s family surfaced in Israel in the early 1980s. These apparently represent the “souvenirs” that the second GI kept for himself. This material, on microfilm rolls, comprises around two hundred letters written by Heinrich Himmler to his wife in the years 1927–45. The rolls also contain the microfilms of Marga’s *Tagebücher* from 1937 to 1945, the originals of which are now in the collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. In addition, the collection in Israel contains the originals of Marga Himmler’s *NSDAP-Parteibuch* [Party membership book]; her *Jugendtagebuch* [Childhood Diary] from 1909 to 1916; a *Kindheitstagebuch* [Childhood Journal] about her daughter, Gudrun; the daughter’s *Poesiealbum* [Friendship Album] and *Mädchentagebuch* [Girlhood Album] from 1941

April 1945. The collection also contains Marga's notebooks with entries about household expenses, Christmas presents, recipes, official documents, and official Hitler Youth certificates for their foster son, Gerhard von der Ahé. In addition, there are numerous personal photographs, some of them loose and some mounted in an album.

It is unclear how these materials reached Israel. Several stories survive. In the version dating from the end of the 1960s, the man who owned them for years, a Holocaust survivor, claimed to have bought them at a flea market in Belgium. In a different version, he claimed to have purchased them in Mexico from the former secretary of Himmler's confidant Karl Wolff, and kept them in his private possession for years. An Israeli filmmaker supposedly had a plan to use them in a documentary about Heinrich Himmler, but he died before his project could come to fruition. At times there seem to have been negotiations about selling the documents to the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz. To that end, in 1982–83, the Bundesarchiv undertook a comprehensive expert examination, including an inspection of the materials, in order to authenticate the documents. The result of this research was the verdict that the documents were unquestionably genuine. Although the originals of Himmler's letters are not available, a comparison of the handwriting and the references to dates and content in his [microfilm—Trans.] letters with those of Marga Himmler confirms their authenticity beyond all doubt.³

In the meantime, these materials have become the property of the Israeli documentary filmmaker Vanessa Lapa. Her film *Der Anständige* [*The Decent One*, Berlinale 2014] presents these documents, which had never before been seen by the public.⁴

Taken together, these collections of source materials comprise a dense corpus of Heinrich Himmler's private documents, the like of which does not exist for any other member of the National Socialist Party (NSDAP) leadership. It is well known that Hitler left neither journals nor private records behind; and Hermann Göring, the highest-ranking National Socialist to sit in the dock at Nuremberg in 1945–46, left only what is contained in the official written documentation of the Third Reich. Joseph Goebbels wrote a megalomaniacal diary, many thousands of pages long; its function was primarily to document his political role as a National Socialist leader, and he conceived of it as the basis for later publications. But when it comes to intimate details of private life, Heinrich Himmler is the best documented among the highest-ranking NS perpetrators.

Himmler's letters to his wife, Marga—published here for the first time in English, along with her responses—combine to constitute a comprehensive correspondence from their first encounter in 1927 to the end of the war in 1945. The early letters at first seem extremely trite; nothing suggests that the Heinrich Himmler of 1927 would later develop into a mass murderer. Two rather unpretentious people, one a party functionary of the NSDAP and the other a divorced nurse, meet at the end of the 1920s and declare their love for each other in numerous letters. They marry, establish a self-sufficient business [poultry farming—Trans.] in the country, have a children and later take in a foster child. During the following years, while the husband is mostly traveling on official business, the wife stays at home, cares for the children and the house, and looks after the business of the farm. Over time the letters become more earnest: the husband's career is prospering; the couple correspond about daily worries; they telephone each other almost every day, even after the husband has had a mistress for a long time and conceived children with her. The war appears only sketchily in these letters: she writes

of nights during the bombardments of Berlin; he writes about the “lot of work” he has to do on the Eastern Front. Once it becomes clear to him that the war is lost, the correspondence ends with a farewell letter from him.

As prosaic as this description may sound, further inspection reveals how clearly this daily correspondence between Heinrich and Marga Himmler shows their perceptions, assumptions, and worldviews. The discrepancy between Himmler’s almost completely concealed murderous daily routine and the private idyll evoked in the letters decreases to the same degree that violence and lack of empathy in everyday life become noticeable in the petty routines of the Himmlers.

II

Heinrich Himmler was born on October 7, 1900, in Munich, the middle son of the Gymnasium [high school—Trans.] teacher Gebhard and his wife, Anna. He grew up with his brothers, Gebhard and Ernst, in a solid middle-class environment. The sons received a comprehensive humanistic education in which secondary virtues such as obedience and duty played a large role. At the end of World War I when Heinrich’s wish to become an officer had not been fulfilled, he went on to study agriculture and subsequently became involved with the folkish⁵ cause, eventually as a speaker for the National Socialist movement. From 1929 on, his title was *Reichsführer-SS* [a designation created uniquely for him—Trans.], and after 1930 he was a delegate to the Reichstag. In 1936, after the National Socialists had come to power, he was put in charge of the entire German police system, responsible for the terror, persecution, and destruction of European Jews and other victims of the regime. As *Reichskommissar für die Festigung Deutschen Volkstums* [Reich commissioner for the strengthening of the German national character], he was responsible for undertaking a huge program of resettlement and murder in both eastern and western Europe. Toward the end of the war, in 1943, he advanced further to become *Innenminister des deutschen Reiches* [Minister of the interior for the German Reich] and ultimately, in 1944, he advanced to the position of *Chef des Ersatzheeres* [Commander in Chief of the Army Reserve]. After being arrested, he took his own life on May 23, 1945.

Marga Siegroth, née Boden, was born on September 9, 1893, in the Pomeranian town of Goncerzewo (Goncarzewy), near Bromberg (Brydgoszcz), the daughter of the landowner Hans Boden and his wife, Elfriede. She grew up with two brothers and three sisters. She lost her older brother during World War I, received training as a nurse, and worked in field hospitals. In 1920 she married, and after this marriage failed, she worked from 1923 on as head nurse in a private clinic in Berlin, in which, thanks to her father, she was also a stakeholder. After marrying Himmler in 1928, she joined the NSDAP, and in 1929 gave birth to their daughter, Gudrun. After 1933 she also cared for the couple’s foster son. During World War II, Marga Himmler worked as *Oberführerin* [female senior leader] of the *Deutsches Rotes Kreuz (DRK)* [the German Red Cross] in Berlin, in which capacity she traveled through occupied European countries. After the war, she and her daughter were interned. She later lived in Bielefeld and in Munich, with her daughter. She died there on August 25, 1967.

Heinrich Himmler and Marga Siegroth met on September 18, 1927, on a train trip between

Berchtesgaden and Munich. Marga had been on vacation in Berchtesgaden, and Heinrich had stayed there for professional reasons. Her blonde hair and blue eyes represented the façade of Himmler's ideal of femininity. They also agreed in many areas: for example, their common rejection of democracy, their hatred for "das System Berlin";⁶ their hatred of Jews, whom they labeled "Jewish rabble"; and their misanthropy ("how false and bad human beings are"). Soon they were dreaming of life in the country together—not only because they wanted to supplement Himmler's modest party salary through their own venture raising animals and vegetables, but also because this corresponded to the folkish idealization of a "return to the soil." The "beautiful, pure home" they wanted to establish was supposed to be a "secure castle," and a place to keep the "filth" of the outside world at bay.

It is striking, however, to note what is absent from these early letters. Neither Heinrich nor Marga shows a real interest in the other. Neither one asks questions about everyday life, family, the past, or the other's desires. The letters occasionally mention "very interesting" experiences or conversations without the "interesting" nature of these ever becoming tangible. In short, on both sides lack of curiosity and empathy are the rule. Their mutual love is expressed in stereotypical formulas and endless redundancies, which are simultaneously attached to grandiose, egocentric expectations ("do not forget you belong only to me"). Receiving the daily letter from the other person is more important to each of them than its content, which varies little. But it is precisely this redundancy that serves to promote amity between them. Doubts about this rapport are seldom allowed to emerge because they have no place in this narrow world in which they exist together ("we must agree; it cannot be otherwise"). Neither one is capable of articulating the basis of his or her attraction to the other. Feelings are expressed, at most, as sentimentality ("so profusely endowed with love and kindness"). Prior to marriage, for their infrequent meetings they arm themselves against impending boredom with puzzle magazines.

The letters clearly show how consistently Himmler behaved through these years, how rigidly he lived and conducted himself according to his ideological convictions. From 1924 on, it was his goal to promote the success of the National Socialist movement through his numerous appearances as speaker and his relentless efforts to strengthen its structures and networks throughout the entire Reich. He was by no means the insignificant secretary of a splinter party that was always in financial difficulty whose career suddenly blossomed after 1933. On the contrary, it is apparent [from the letters] how important his position in the party really was, and how great his proximity to Hitler in the early 1920s. Himmler organized Hitler's speaking engagements and often traveled with him ("am on the road with the Boss"). He himself delivered speeches for the party for years—as a man who had studied agriculture, he agitated in rural areas that were crucial to the NSDAP. At the same time, when he was on-site with his SA and SS units, he was also able to build up those organizational structures and personal contacts upon which he could rely after 1933 to create his powerful apparatus of terror: the SS, police, and Gestapo.

Himmler himself liked to romanticize his work as a struggle, and in his letters to Marga, he styled himself as a *Landsknecht*,⁷ a term with which he tried to distance himself from the common office routine of a "boring working stiff." The extent to which Himmler moved in his own element throughout these years becomes clear over the long period covered by the correspondence and the

early references to people who later belonged to the leading cadre in the NS regime. The letters show how important the network of these “old comrades” was in all their later careers. Himmler’s cliques within the movement proved inseparable from his private life. Even before his marriage, he kept his company almost exclusively with like-minded individuals. Afterward, upon his return to the countryside, he realized in the private sphere what he had been propagating in his speeches and through his membership in the folkish Bund Artam.⁸

Years before the National Socialists seized power in 1933, the married couple lived in a world peopled by those of similar convictions, with whom they shared their rejection of democracy, their anti-Semitism, their belief in the victory of national socialism through its continued struggle, and their own staunch hubris. Furthermore, Marga Himmler was by no means an apolitical wife. After her marriage she quickly joined the local unit of the NSDAP in Waldtrudering near Munich, a group that her husband had founded. She soon proudly reported to her husband that her house was the meeting place of all the National Socialists in the town.

From their home, Marga followed political developments with intense interest (“How I would really like to be present at all these great events”). From 1928 on she was a regular reader of the party newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter* [Folkish Observer—Trans.] and even hired her housemaid through notices in this right-wing propaganda organ. She was able to persuade Heinrich to take her along on trips several times.

The more mundane letters from their first years of marriage consist largely of daily reports, which seem devoid of content and rarely go beyond listings of facts and names. Nonetheless, it becomes clear that Marga suffered under her husband’s constant absence. Himmler rarely had time to devote himself to their farming enterprise. In the letters he wrote from all corners of Germany, he expressed regret that his wife—first as a pregnant woman and, later, with a small child—has to do all the difficult work at home alone. At the same time, however, his role as delegate to the Reichstag frequently required his presence in Berlin. Furthermore, thanks to government-mandated free travel, the party involved him in an ever-increasing schedule of speaking events.

Only a few of Marga’s letters from 1933 to 1940 have been preserved, and not a single one from Heinrich Himmler survives. This was the time when he was pursuing his career as the head of the German police, SS, and Gestapo; it was when the family purchased Haus Lindenfycht in Gmund (Bavaria), and moved into his official residence, Villa Dohnenstieg, in Berlin-Dahlem in 1937. The only private information we have from these years comes from Marga’s *Childhood Journal*, which she wrote about her daughter, Gudrun, and foster son, Gerhard. Further information comes from the memoirs written during the war by Marga’s sister, Lydia Boden, who lived with them in Gmund after 1934 and looked after the children when both parents were in Berlin. While the *Childhood Journal* ends in 1936, Marga’s own *Journal* from 1937 on records information about her new social life, which she owed to her husband’s advancement and enjoyed to the utmost when she, for example, organized invitations to tea or bridge parties for the ladies of high society, or when she herself was invited to dinners by them. For the most part, we do not learn much more than the bare facts, such as which people were present at which events, or at best that the experience was “very nice.” Beside all the trivia and Marga’s narrow-mindedness, something else can be discerned in these journals: pride in the

proximity to power (“It was nice to converse with the Führer in peace and quiet”). Then there was the conviction of justifiably belonging to this new elite (“I hold the firm view that I have earned this place in the sun for myself”), and the toleration of the ruthless persecution of those who qualified as “enemies of Germany,” for example, when she expresses a wish concerning “lazy” domestic staff: “why aren’t these people all put behind bars and made to work until they die?” After the pogrom of November 9, 1938, she writes impatiently, “this Jewish business, when will this rabble finally leave us so we can enjoy a happy life.”

III

During World War II Himmler seldom resided in Berlin or Munich, but rather, like so many others in the NS leadership, spent most of his time in special trains. These functioned as mobile military headquarters in the vicinity of the shifting theaters of war. In the spring of 1940, during the western campaign, he was on the road in a special train for two months and in Berlin for the rest of the year. The war against the Soviet Union saw this mobile field command post become his permanent residence. A few days after the attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, his quarters became the “Sonderzug Heinrich” [Special Train Heinrich] near Angerburg, in East Prussia, near Hitler’s Wolfsschanze.⁹ In the middle of 1942, when Hitler set up his headquarters in Winniza in the Ukraine, a further field command post was established near Zhytomyr (Jytomyr) under the code name Hegewald. In the following years, Himmler would frequently return to Berlin or Munich for short periods, but he was primarily stationed only in the East.

With the beginning of World War II, Marga began working as a nurse again and often spent many weeks at a time in Berlin, for, according to her principles, she thought, “If everybody helps out, the war will soon be over.” By no means did she merely carry out apolitical tasks. As a high-ranking Oberführerin [female senior leader] in the DRK, she administered numerous field hospitals and, with other Red Cross functionaries, traveled through occupied European countries in order to assess the care of German soldiers and oversee the repatriation of the so-called *Volksdeutsche* [ethnic Germans from eastern Europe—Trans.], which her husband was organizing.

For the period after 1941, numerous letters between husband and wife are preserved. From 1942 on there are only those of Heinrich Himmler, in which he frequently mentions letters from his wife to him. Furthermore, during the war years, Himmler telephoned to speak with Püppi¹⁰ (his daughter Gudrun) in Gmund. He telephoned Marga almost every day when she was in Berlin.

In contrast to the assumption in much scholarly literature that Heinrich Himmler’s marriage foundered early, we know that he did not restrict himself merely to contact with his daughter in Gmund. The letters and supplementary documents further show the unanimity of the Himmlers in their anti-Semitism and their racism (“The Polacks, the indescribable filth”); in their absolute faith in Hitler; and in their enthusiasm for the war (“The war proceeds magnificently. We owe everything to the Führer”). Furthermore, Himmler was concerned with Marga’s health, and considered it important that she read the texts of his speeches. He sent her sweets, while she sent him home-baked cookies

his military postings in the eastern theater of war. Marga's activity with the Red Cross was a constant source of contention with her husband, who preferred to see her back in Gmund with their daughter. Yet she prevailed, stating, "Without work I could not be part of this war."

The intimacy between husband and wife did not change when, at Christmas 1938, Himmler started a clandestine love affair with his private secretary, Hedwig Potthast, twelve years his junior. During the war, they had two children. As early as 1940, Marga complained that her husband was "never home in the evenings anymore." After 1942 his letters are often only hasty notes given to an adjutant through whom he supplied Marga with gifts. Nonetheless, he devoted considerable time and money to provide not only his daughter, but also his wife with sweets, bouquets, and useful things, such as paper of all sorts, that were difficult to procure during the war. As ever, he felt closely allied to his family, as in 1944, when he regretted that for the first time he was not able to celebrate Christmas with them, or when he arranged by telephone that all three of them, both in Berlin and in Gmund, would light their Yule lights at the same time so that they might think of one another and strengthen their mutual bonds.

The many short visits to Gmund and Berlin noted in the official schedule and in Himmler's personal pocket calendar show that during the war he saw Gudrun and Marga no less frequently than he saw Hedwig Potthast and their children, who at first lived near the SS clinic Hohenlychen, Mecklenburg, and later in Schönau, near Berchtesgaden. As early as 1939–40 Himmler made the decision to have children with Hedwig Potthast. This was at the same time that he publicly proclaimed his *Kinderzeugungsbefehl* ["Edict to Propagate"] in support of producing extramarital children by entering into second marriages without dissolving the first ones. In cases of such a so-called *Friedelehe*,¹¹ the first wife retained all her rights. As far as his official duties and the war allowed, Himmler was thus living out the concept of two families with absolute conviction, just as he had promulgated it for his SS. The formulaic nature of Himmler's declarations of love, and his emotional poverty, which was clear from the first letters to Marga, reappear in a letter to Hedwig Potthast. Not only could the style and content almost be taken for that of earlier letters, but the closing words are even identical with those written sixteen years earlier to his wife: "I kiss your dear, good hands, and your sweet mouth."

In contrast to other wives in the NS elite, such as Gerda Bormann, Marga had a difficult time adjusting to her existence as a wife whose husband also had a "concubine." In her *Journal*, she alludes to her distress only obliquely: "I cannot write about whatever else is happening outside of the war." Because she was just as convinced as Heinrich of the NS ideology, and with it of the urgency of producing sons for Germany, she could hardly present solid objections to his decision. However, she doubtless found the situation humiliating, not only because she viewed the infidelity as a betrayal of the marriage they had once both idealized, but also because she herself could not bear any more children after the difficult birth of their daughter.

Himmler barely alludes to his homicidal daily routine during the war years in his letters to his wife: "the struggles, especially those of the SS, are very tough." As he had done earlier, he was fond of emphasizing his huge workload ("there is a lot of work!"), and he sent harmless photographs of his short trips along the Eastern Front: "I am enclosing a couple of little pictures of my last journey

Lublin—Lemberg—Dubno—Rowno—Luck.” Only the historical context reveals the truth about the trips mentioned in his letters. He undertook journeys in his role as “commissioner of settlement,” with its attendant plans to expel and resettle portions of the population (“the trip to the Baltic was very interesting; our tasks are huge”), and also regularly traveled to review SS troops who were responsible for mass shootings of Jewish men, women, and children after the attack on the Soviet Union (“my journey now takes me to Kowno—Riga—Wilna—Mitau—Dünaburg—Minsk”). In 1941–42 one’s subsequent knowledge of the historical context makes it clear that his travels—“in the coming days shall be in Lublin, Zamosch, Auschwitz, Lemberg”—were actually visits to concentration camps.

In the last year of the war, when Himmler was not only minister of the interior, but also commander in chief of the Reserve Army and head of an army himself, he complained to his wife about the ever-increasing responsibilities that weighed heavily upon him. Nonetheless, up until the last, he presented himself to Marga as a joyful, optimistic, forceful man of action who, despite his poor health (chronic gastric problems) selflessly shouldered ever-greater burdens because he understood them to be a necessary “service to the German people.” His wife’s pride in his growing authority is reflected in her *Journal*: “How magnificent that he is called to such great tasks and can master them.”

Gudrun’s *Journal* also contains references to his “tireless diligence” and the difficulty of his assignments: “the whole nation looks up to him; he always stays in the background and never steps into the limelight.” Her father’s “great responsibility” was apparently a topic of conversation not only between mother and daughter, but also in the telephone calls between father and daughter. Her father’s continual absence made him into an ever more distant hero for Gudrun, and despite her worry about him, she was proud of him and of being the “daughter of such an important man.” Presumably she knew hardly anything of his true activities.

Behind the solid middle-class façade, violence and severity are discernible, the origins of which may be traced in part to so-called *Schwarze Pädagogik*,¹² which left its mark upon Heinrich and Marga as it did upon their entire generation. A further source is the National Socialist ideology itself, which declared violence, severity, and ruthlessness to be lofty virtues in all aspects of life. Severity toward oneself justified an equally merciless attitude toward others, as well as—even especially—toward one’s children.

Marga’s *Journal* entries about their first years make this attitude toward Gudrun clear: in the strict regimen of cleanliness; in the blows from her parents when she was disobedient; in Heinrich’s strict dealings with his little daughter (“she obeys Pappi much better than me”). When their foster son Gerhard, came to them at age four, Marga predicted that he would be a good influence on her three-year-old daughter: “the boy is very obedient; let us hope Püppi also learns it quickly.” The initial enthusiasm about the boy’s good manners soon waned, since he regularly infuriated his foster parents, teachers, and other authority figures with his pranks. Gudrun, however, who in the early years had begged her mother never to tell Father when she had been mischievous, apparently fulfilled her parents’ expectations with increasing flawlessness. On the one hand, she was often sick and got bad marks in school, but on the other, her parents were proud that Püppi helped out with canning preserves “for hours at a time” and that she produced handmade presents for soldiers at the front and read the

ideologically correct tracts her father regularly included in packages to his wife and daughter. The foster parents' behavior toward Gerhard was far less loving, and as he grew older, they became even stricter, ostensibly to prepare the boy for his future role as a soldier. In the supplementary documents, the *Tagebücher*, and the personal reminiscences of the foster son, it is clear that, for years he feared Himmler's visits in Gmund, because he was always punished with brutal blows. This did not preclude occasional peaceable fishing expeditions with the boy, who recalled, "He could also be a normal father." Marga Himmler soon had nothing good to say about the boy ("He lies beyond belief"), and she refers to the ten-year-old's "criminal nature." Himmler finally advised his wife temporarily to stop signing her letters to her foster son with "Mother," adding, "If he improves his behavior," that might be possible later. Shortly before the end of the war he sent the sixteen-year-old Gerhard for SS training with a tank division, which, finally again earned the boy Marga's respect: "he is very brave and likes being with the SS."

Thus Himmler reveals himself in his private letters as not only a sentimental husband and father but also a severe, National Socialist parent. In this, he knew himself to be in complete agreement with his wife to the end. High expectations were placed on both children—much higher on the boy, as a future warrior, than on the daughter. Obedience was the highest commandment; misbehavior led to corporal punishments and withholding of affection—a form of violence that without doubt affects the capacity for empathy just as destructively as physical blows.

IV

In these private letters, Heinrich Himmler shows himself to be a person who acts out of deep conviction. His was never a split personality, dominated either by a figurative Dr. Jekyll or a Mr. Hyde. In no way did he separate his activity as head of the SS, responsible for carrying out the extermination policies, from his private life, as though he ever had to conceal the fact of mass murder.¹³ He did not boast about this to his wife, but rather considered mass murder a necessary duty that was placed upon him from above, and which he had to carry out conscientiously.

In his letters not a glimmer of doubt or pang of conscience is communicated to his wife. Moreover, he knew that they were united in a belief in the "righteousness" and "necessity" of his activities. From the very beginning, Marga not only shared his anti-Semitism and racism, but after the National Socialists came to power, she endorsed the exclusion of Communists, Jews, and "asocial types" from the community of ethnic Germans. It is unlikely that the increasing violence of Jewish persecution (from expulsion to systematic murder) can have escaped her notice, even if her husband never discussed these things openly with her. In her letters as well as in her private notes, there is no uncertainty whatsoever about the rectitude of her actions.

No "banality of evil" surfaces in these letters. Himmler was by no means what Hanna Arendt incorrectly thought she recognized in Adolf Eichmann, namely, a small cog in a totalitarian mechanism, a person no longer capable of developing an understanding of what his actions meant. Himmler wanted to do what he did, and he wanted to do it thoroughly, dependably, and "decently."

“Most of you will know what it means to see 100 corpses laid out together, when 500, or when 1,000 lie there. To have endured this, and in doing so nonetheless remained decent, that has made us tough—with the exception of a few human weaknesses. This is a glorious page in our history, which has never been, and never will be, written.” These were the core sentences in the first of Himmler’s two infamous Posen (Poznan) speeches on October 4, 1943. He committed mass murder with the same self-assurance and moral certitude with which, in the early years, he took note of his brothers’ and friends’ behavior, raised his own children, and showed himself in his letters to be of one mind with his wife. As Raphael Gross and Werner Konitzer have emphasized, it was not emotional deformity, but rather conviction and “decency” that made mass murder possible for Himmler when he considered it necessary.

These letters allow the reader to see this distortion of normalcy: violence cloaked in innocuousness, the icy coldness that goes hand in hand with a specious solicitude. “Decency” and fulfillment of duty—even when these qualities assist in monstrous crimes—were the guidelines of Himmler’s actions. He himself wanted to be a paragon, as a husband as well as head of the SS, as a paterfamilias as well as the one responsible for the Final Solution. In these letters, we see expressed the single-mindedness of a German couple who believed they were participating in “great times,” a couple incapable of recognizing that these were, in fact, great crimes. Even if the letters occasionally elicit laughter, one must always remember what lies beneath this apparent middle-class normalcy.

Organization of the Edition

The correspondence between Heinrich and Marga Himmler from 1927 to 1945 forms the core of this edition. Heinrich Himmler's handwritten letters from the collection found in Israel and those of Marga Himmler from the Bundesarchiv Koblenz were transcribed in their entirety and printed in the original form for the first German edition. The rules of orthography that applied at the time were preserved, as well as all errors of grammar and spelling.¹ This edition reproduces only a selection—especially for 1928, when the couple was just getting to know each other. These are excerpted because they contain countless repetitions of formulaic phrases. On the other hand, the increasingly brief letters from the years before the National Socialists came to power and from the war years are retained with almost no deletions.

We have included further supplementary documents from the collection of the archive in Tel Aviv, especially selections from Gudrun's *Journal* and the *Childhood Journal* that Marga Himmler kept about her daughter and later about her foster son. Furthermore, we have included selections from Heinrich Himmler's *Taschenkalender* [Pocket Calendar]; letters from Gudrun to her father; and documents and letters from Hedwig Potthast. Other sources were also extraordinarily useful: the exhaustive biographies of Himmler by Peter Longerich (2008) and Klaus Mies-Baron (2011), and the editions of Heinrich Himmler's *Dienst-und Taschenkalender* [official appointment books and pocket calendars] from 1933, 1940, and 1941–42.

The reader will find thematically organized commentaries inserted throughout the transcribed correspondence. These sections have been added to provide relevant context and background for the most important people, events, and places mentioned. An appendix at the back of the book contains more complete information about the persons in the text. Here we have consciously made a selection that includes information pertinent to these letters. We have avoided biographical sketches of people who may otherwise be found easily in handbooks, dictionaries, and other research tools about the Third Reich.

For the commentary and the biographical appendix, the following sources were consulted: the extensive holdings in "Bestand NS 19" ([Inventory NS 19] *Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer-SS* [Personal Staff of the Reichsführer-SS]), as well as countless other holdings of the Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde. These include *SS-Führungsakten* [Regulations of the SS], *NSDAP-Parteimitgliedsakten* [NSDAP Members' Files], as well as personal files of the *Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamts* [SS Central Office for Race and Resettlement].

To make the text more readable we have kept notes to a minimum and have not included citations

to source material. An extensive apparatus of sources and scholarly literature may be found in Appendix 2. In the commentaries, we have retained the common German place names used in the letters. The translators have included a glossary of German terms that occur frequently, especially NSDAP ranks and titles that have no obvious English equivalents.

Translators' Introduction

This, the first English translation of the correspondence between Heinrich and Marga Himmler, reproduces the tone and meaning of the original documents as closely as possible, while also presenting a text that is readily comprehensible to English-language readers. Certain aspects of expression present direct challenges, and we have thus chosen various strategies to make the original transparent. For example, political terms such as government positions and especially military ranks of the SA and SS, have a variety of English equivalents. Our glossary, therefore, cites the most comprehensible English translations. When such terms first occur, English equivalents follow the original in square brackets. In subsequent occurrences, we retain the German titles.

Endearments and nicknames can seldom be rendered literally. The best example of this usage is a favorite word repeated in the early letters: *Dummerle* (literally, “stupid little thing”). In context, however, it is obviously a teasing endearment, more like “silly little thing.” At times it appears to convey something interior, such as doubts or depression (see letter 39 from 2.2.28). German frequently uses adjectives as nouns to designate people. *Gut* (good), for example, then acquires a flavor different from English. For example, *Guter* or *Gute* convey “good man/husband” or “good woman/wife.” The word *Frau* can be translated as either “woman” or “wife,” depending on the context, just as *Mann* corresponds to “man” or “husband.” How, then, to choose between “my good woman” and “my good wife”? This translation switches from “man” or “woman” (in the early letters) to “husband” or “wife” once the couple is making wedding plans. The endearments *Mutti* and *Pap* (literally “Mommy,” “Daddy”) have been retained, as has *Püppi*, Gudrun’s pet name in the family, which connotes “little doll.” When she is called this by another form (*Püppchen*, *Püpperl*, *Püpperlein*), we retain *Püppi* for consistency. Nuances of intimate language are explained in the glossary and notes.

Landsknecht, as Himmler styles himself, is a different example retained here in German, because it best conveys the archaic notion of a “military follower of a king or other superior.”

The writing style of any intimate correspondence necessarily contains inconsistencies, errors, repetition, redundancies, and shorthand techniques. These letters are no exception. While the German edition retains the writers’ spelling and punctuation errors, this English translation, in all but a few cases, tries to avoid reproducing them as much as possible, because retaining them would make the letters opaque. When such errors or idiosyncrasies convey significant information about the letter writer, however, we have retained them. The English text does not reproduce the abbreviations that the Himmlers inconsistently used to save time and space as they wrote by hand, often in haste or under

pressure. We have expanded “B.” to Berlin; “M.” to Munich; “R.” to Ribbentrop; “H.” to Herr; “Teg.” to am Tegernsee,” etc., to make reading easier.

When the letter writers use a German place name that has since changed, the modern version follows in parentheses, e.g., Kulmhof (Chelmno).

All dates in the correspondence appear as in the German original. Thus, one reads the day before the month: 13.12.30 is December 13, 1930.

Thomas and Abby Hansen

Wellesley, Massachusetts

March 2015

Correspondence with Commentary

Letters

1927–28

*“All that is filthy is kept far from our
home—our castle.”*

H

After a long search, Heinrich Himmler finally found employment in the illegal National Socialist Party (NSDAP) in the summer of 1924. In May of that year Gregor Strasser (a pharmacist from Landshut), the chief party functionary, was elected to the Bayerischer Landtag [Bavarian parliament] on the ticket of the Völkischer Block (a folkish splinter party), a front for the NSDAP. In December he was even elected to the Reichstag at the national level. Because Strasser no longer had the time to devote to party organization in Lower Bavaria, the young Heinrich Himmler took over the administrative function within the party. In August 1924 he described his new activity to an acquaintance: “I have an enormous amount to do. I am in charge of organization and expansion in all parts of Lower Bavaria at all levels. Given all the work I have, there’s never a moment to think about finding the time to write a letter. The organizational work, which I supervise by myself, suits me well. What would make the whole thing particularly wonderful would be knowing that one were preparing for the imminent victory and fight for freedom that lie before us. But as it is, we in the folkish movement are engaged in selfless work, which will not bear visible fruit in the near future, always knowing that the fruit of this work will ripen later and that, for the moment, our business is to fight what seems to be a losing battle.”

But the battle was not lost. In May the Völkischer Block won 17.4 percent of the votes in Bavaria, as many as the Social Democrats won; in these elections the right-wing parties were also able to win an above-average number of votes for themselves. In December 1924 Adolf Hitler was released from prison,¹ and in February 1925 he reestablished the NSDAP, even though the ban on public speaking that had been imposed on him was valid for a few more months. In Bavaria the ban lasted until March 1927, and in Prussia until November 1928.

It was now Himmler’s task to integrate the one thousand or so party members in Lower Bavaria (who were organized into twenty-five local groups) into the reconstituted NSDAP. Given the difficulties of issuing new party members’ documents, collecting membership dues, etc., this was no easy matter.

This also meant that he was on the road a lot in Lower Bavaria visiting local groups, giving

speeches, and clarifying organizational details on-site. Between 1925 and May 1926 alone, he addressed twenty-seven different meetings in Lower and Upper Bavaria and another twenty in Westphalia, Hamburg, Mecklenburg, Schleswig-Holstein, and elsewhere. In his incessant travel commitments he was no different from other party functionaries. In 1925–26, Joseph Goebbels was also tirelessly on the road, speaking all over Germany and supporting local National Socialist groups. In April 1926 Goebbels even came to Bavaria on a lecture tour. “In the afternoon, with Himmler, in Landshut,” Goebbels noted in his diary on April 13, and he continued: “Himmler: a good fellow, very intelligent. I like him.”

At the *Reichsparteitag* [annual party rally of the NSDAP] in Weimar in July 1926, Gregor Strasser was made *Reichspropagandaleiter* [propaganda chief] and Himmler rose in the ranks accordingly: he was named acting chief of propaganda, transferred to party headquarters in Munich, and at the same time became acting *Gauleiter* [regional leader] of Lower Bavaria. Whereas he had previously been responsible specifically for Bavaria, his sphere of activity now spread to encompass all of Germany. Since Gregor Strasser was completely occupied as a delegate to the Reichstag and a high-ranking party functionary, the daily propaganda work fell to Heinrich Himmler. He had to make sure that propaganda material was sent out. He also stayed in contact with the local groups, had to coordinate party speaking engagements throughout Germany, and most important, had to organize the so-called *Hitlerversammlungen*.² As a result, a very special role in the party apparatus fell to him, for on the one hand, it was up to him to determine which local group would enjoy the privilege of an appearance by Hitler, and on the other hand, he kept in close contact with Hitler in order to arrange his speaking engagements. Despite the fact that in retrospect a picture of Himmler as a pale party functionary has emerged, he was actually at the very heart of the power center of the NSDAP and enjoyed very good contacts with the “Boss,” as Himmler refers to Hitler in his letters, and as he was generally known by those in his inner circle.

On his travels Himmler read, among other things, Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, then still in the two-volume edition. The first volume, which presented a stylized political autobiography of Hitler, had appeared in 1925; the second volume, which outlined the political program of National Socialism, appeared in 1927. Himmler bought the first volume as soon as it appeared in July 1925 and, as his handwritten marginalia show, began to read it immediately. He interrupted his reading, however, and did not finish the book until 1927, according to an entry in his *Leseliste* [reading list]. “There are amazingly many truths in it,” he noted. “The first chapters about his youth contain certain weaknesses.” Perhaps this was the reason he interrupted his reading.

Himmler also bought the second volume immediately upon its publication. By December 17, 1926, he had reached the end of the third chapter, and on December 19, when he had already been in Berlin with Marga for a day, he read to the end of the eighth chapter. This suggests that Marga might also have been reading *Mein Kampf* in these days.

If one follows the checkmarks and underlinings, it appears that Himmler was especially interested in Hitler’s statements on *Volksgeundheit* [racial hygiene] and racism. He underlined this sentence: “The assertion that defective people must be prevented from producing other defective people is an assertion of purest rationality and, in its methodical application, signifies the most humane deed

humanity.” He noted in the margin “lex Zwickau.” With this Himmler refers to the initiative of Gustav Emil Boeters, the doctor from Zwickau, who in the 1920s unsuccessfully demanded a racial law requiring enforced sterilization, which was later passed by Hitler’s government in July 1933. Hitler had issued a vehement warning against miscegenation and against the danger for the racial pure that occurs through products of racial mixing. Himmler commented: “The potential for undoing racial mixing exists.” In a note to Hitler’s demand for “the recognition of blood”—meaning “racial bias in general” and also “for individuals in the population” who must be evaluated differently according to their “racial affiliation”—Himmler writes this question: “Are consequences drawn from this?”

Himmler also emphasized Hitler’s program to structure all education and training to give every young German “the conviction of being absolutely superior to others. In his physical strength and agility, he must recover the belief in the invincibility of the entire “Volkstum.”³ Himmler’s comment on this was “education of SS and SA.”

He continued to travel a great deal, both in Bavaria and throughout Germany. In January 1927 he held speeches in Thüringen preceding an election to the regional parliament. In February he was in Westphalia; in April, in the Ruhr; in May, in Mecklenburg and Saxony; in June, North Germany; and in July, Vienna. On one of these trips, in September 1927, on the train that returned to Munich from Berchtesgaden, he made the acquaintance of Marga Siegroth.⁴

Marga Siegroth, née Boden, had spent a week’s holiday at Berchtesgaden and stayed on for a further week in Munich before returning to Berlin. She had been unhappily married from about 1920 to 1923, but nothing is known of her first husband except his family name, Siegroth. Marga’s father, Hans Boden, a former landowner in Goncerzewo (Goncarzewy), near Bromberg (Bydgoszcz) in Pomerania, had purchased a thousand-dollar gold savings bond as his portion of a private women’s clinic in Berlin at the height of the inflation. The clinic was located in a block of flats at 49 Münchner Strasse, in the middle-class neighborhood of Schöneberg, where Marga lived and worked as head nurse.

There is absolutely no doubt that if she attracted the attention of Heinrich Himmler, it was not merely because of her blonde hair and blue eyes, but also because of her profession—all the more so because during World War I she had taken a job as a Red Cross nurse, which in his eyes was an exemplary occupation for a woman. In their subsequent letters, they both write about that war and refer to it specifically, as when Marga writes, “Ever since the battlefield I have gotten used to writing without a table” (22.12.27).

As the head nurse in this private clinic, she led a very independent, rather comfortable life with a workday of only a few hours. She had her own maid, and her meals were provided by the clinic’s cook. There was time in the afternoons and evenings for shopping in the city and dates with friends to attend cultural events. Nonetheless, she does not seem to have been happy with her life. Although her employment contract ran until the month of April 1929, she often considered leaving this position before the end of her tenure, or even changing clinics. One reason was clearly her bad relationship with the doctors in the establishment: “If only it were not for these impossible doctors,” she complains repeatedly. It may be that she also considered her work as a desperate move after the

failure of her marriage, especially since the status of a divorced woman was hardly a glorious one at the time. The clinic secured her financial independence—but she would soon voluntarily abandon her work to enter into her second marriage.

Marga Siegroth not only dreaded human company, but was almost “terrified” by anything that disturbed her routine and her daily tranquility. As she never ceased to emphasize later on, dealing with others was nearly always a source of “annoyance” or “disappointment” for her. Her misanthropy (“There are also very different sorts of individuals,” letter of 4.11.27), coupled with an extremely high standard for other people, and her own rigidity and lack of warmth in dealings with others, later quickly cooled her relations with the Himmler family. Although they welcomed her cordially at first, they soon limited their contacts to infrequent formal visits.

Her skepticism about other people in general, and men in particular, is a theme that reappears chiefly in her first letters, when Heinrich Himmler hopes that she will stop mistrusting him. But this was difficult for her, for in her own words, she has “lost faith, in particular, in the honesty and sincerity of a man’s respect for a woman” (26.11.27).

During the train trip of nearly three hours, both certainly had occasion to note what separated them: a Prussian mentality on one side, Bavarian on the other; a Protestant religion for one, Catholic for the other; and the fact that Marga was not only a divorced woman, but also seven years older than Heinrich. However, they not only shared the same aversion to the Weimar Republic and the Jews (“this rabble”), but also had common interests. As his journals show, when Heinrich was a student of agriculture, he had dreamed of one day owning a property with “a beloved girl.” With Marga, an old dream suddenly came back to life because, although at that time she was a confirmed city dweller, she had a much better idea of actual country life than he himself did—more than most young girls of good family could ever have, because she had grown up on a large farm. Marga thus had practical experience with cultivating fruits and vegetables and raising animals. Not only could she preserve food for the winter, but she could also turn over the soil in the garden beds and even slaughter pigs. In addition to that, she was a head nurse with bookkeeping skills, and not least of all, Himmler found it appealing to think that she could care for him and his delicate health. Marga, too, was soon filled with enthusiasm at the prospect of moving to the country and building a life there together with her new husband.

They clearly got along well enough that, on the very next day, Marga wrote him a formal postcard (showing a scene of Berchtesgaden) in order to make plans to meet. She told him where she would be staying in Munich, at the Hotel Stadt Wien, right near the central railroad station. Their first disagreements became apparent during a long walk together along the Isar River (“the path where we nearly came to blows at the time,” 25.12.27). Both of them later refer frequently to their early disputes. At one point Himmler writes, “you know, in the early days, we argued, and for as long as we live, we *never* have to do that again” (13.2.28). And she confirms this: “I believe you are right, in the early days we argued enough to last us the rest of our lives. Every sentence was an argument and doubt” (14.2.28).

19.9.1927

Herr Heinrich Himmler

Diplom-Landwirt [certified agronomist]

Munich

Barerstr. 44/45

Am staying at the Hotel Stadt Wien.

Cordially

M. Siegroth

—————

Himmler's first letters have been lost, but in his correspondence folder, he notes that he first wrote Marga Siegroth ("M.S.") on September 26, 1927. After the date of Marga's letters, he also noted, by hand, the date on which he received them—as he did with all his correspondence. The editors have indicated this convention with parentheses. All other parentheses in the letters are by Heinrich and Marga Himmler themselves. Editorial notes are in brackets and set in italics.

—————

Berlin West 30. 29.9.27

(Munich. 4.10.27, 9:00)

Dear Herr Himmler!

Thank you for your lovely note. It found me in a less than good mood, for I have found more annoyances here than I ever would have believed possible. I will and must put an end to this business. But it is difficult to start from scratch; but that is why it must be done.

How are you? Your health? How about the mustard, vinegar, and onions?

Have you been back to a "good" café? If so, then please write me a card.

Say hello to the Hofkino for me [a local movie theater—Trans.]. (Sarcasm, as usual!!) I await the promised letter. Demanding as always, don't you think?

I have read your writings with great interest. What can I send you in return? Just the red book, yes?

The weather is so beautiful. And it rained so often in Munich.

Very cordially yours,

Frau M. Siegroth

Berlin W. 30. 16.10.27

Münchener Str. 44/45

Dear Herr Himmler!

Today is the first quiet day, and I have enjoyed it to the hilt. As for the rest, just work and boredom. How are you? Much to do, surely, and your health? But whatever you can do, you want to do, and whatever you want to do, you can.

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