titled “With Both Eyes,” and his various books, which contained previously published as well as new texts, Knobloch produced over 1,700 articles.

**Herr Moses in Berlin**

In the late 1970s, Knobloch began researching the life of Moses Mendelssohn. Finally published in 1979, his book was not intended as a proper biography but as a more personal essay on the life and work of Mendelssohn in his time and his city, Berlin. He depicts Mendelssohn’s life, origins in Dessau, studies in Berlin, life as an entrepreneur and philosopher, close bonds with Lessing, and contacts with other intellectuals of his day. He frequently quotes directly from the works and letters of Mendelssohn or those associated with him, though rarely provides sources. Mendelssohn’s philosophy is barely addressed or contextualized, and the impact he or his work had at the time and beyond remains vague. In quoting his favorite, rather than the most important, passages of Mendelssohn’s works, Knobloch presents a book about his personal relationship with the philosopher and the relevance of his eighteenth-century writings for Knobloch’s time.

This is the important aspect that Knobloch addresses in his approach to seek traces of Mendelssohn’s, or more generally Jewish life, in Berlin. The opening of the book can be seen as outlining Knobloch’s broader agenda, and his call to “distrust” parks and the city landscape should be seen in this light. Throughout the book, the author strolls around (East) Berlin “not only as a flâneur, but as a detective and an archaeologist,” sharing his thoughts and questions about former inhabitants, buildings, cemeteries, and events.

Although Mendelssohn died long before the rise of National Socialism, Knobloch frequently considers sites related to the Shoah in the book. Beginning with the cemetery at Große Hamburger Straße, “which we innocently thought to be a small park,” the author guides his readers to other cemeteries, parks, squares, and buildings in Berlin, while sometimes going into tangents about their history. The former Jewish school right next to the cemetery—founded by Mendelssohn himself and used by the Gestapo between 1942 and 1945 as a gathering point for the Jewish inhabitants of Berlin prior to deportation—was

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a vocational school in Knobloch’s time. He inquires whether anyone at the school has an interest in the building’s history and is infuriated at the answer he is given: “There is no memorial plaque for Moses Mendelssohn in our house,” a horrible indictment, lacking any mention of six million murdered Jews of which thousands had gone to school in this very building, in these very rooms. *Staatsbürgerkunde* [Political education] …” *Staatsbürgerkunde* was a subject for older pupils in secondary schools of the GDR, which included an introduction to Marxist philosophy and political economy, aimed at fostering socialist consciousness. By closing his remark with a simple, though frustrating, reference to this, Knobloch critiques such socialist education for its lack of any reference to the country’s recent history and the regime’s stance on the memory of the Shoah.

In another scene, Knobloch describes the “vanished culture of Berlin” as he recalls the former Jewish museum, which was opened on January 24, 1933, and a concert held at the synagogue on Oranienburger Straße, where Albert Einstein once played the violin. Knobloch characterizes his work at the outset as an “archaeological book. Excavations everywhere. How many Jews did Hitler leave in the reader’s region? What does the reader know about these people and their religion? What does he know about their history in Germany? Probably little.” It is this assumed ignorance of his readers that he seeks to tackle with his findings and “excavations,” providing a “personal workbook or do-it-yourself manual in the Jewish cultural heritage of the GDR.”

After borrowing from the library a copy of Mendelssohn’s *Brautbriefe*, a compilation of letters to the philosopher’s future wife, Knobloch discovers an inscription revealing that the book was originally purchased privately as a husband’s gift to his wife on Rosh Hashanah in 1936. Answering Knobloch’s request, the library explains to him that the book was incorporated into their holdings in 1945 after having been discovered “in the rubble.” “Back then, rubble did not only imply debris and craters, but abandoned Nazi flats; maybe the ‘Brautbriefe’ were

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12 Today it is a Jewish secondary school called “Jüdisches Gymnasium Moses Mendelssohn.”
13 Knobloch, *Herr Moses in Berlin*, 332–33. The original letters can be found in Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin–Preußischer Kulturbesitz (hereafter, SBBPK), Nl. 353 (Heinz Knobloch), Material “Herr Moses in Berlin.”
16 Nancy A. Lauckner, “Heinz Knobloch’s ‘Herr Moses in Berlin’: An Innovative Reclamation of the Jewish Component of the GDR Cultural Heritage,” *Studies in GDR Culture and Society* 2 (1982): 129. Still, Knobloch admits to some aspects of an attempted revival of Jewish culture and a commemoration of the Shoah, e.g., when he mentions highly successful books and movies such as *Naked Among Wolves* or *Jacob the Liar* (79) or the reopening of the Jewish community’s library in East Berlin (368).
lying in a Gestapo shed together with other captured books.”⁴¹⁸ In stating this, Knobloch points to the seizure of Jewish deportee’s assets and property, a method that not only benefitted the state, but frequently the arrested person’s neighbors as well.⁴¹⁹ By bringing an individual perspective to the subject, he also provides a more tangible and affective view on the matter, expanding the impersonal and leveling view that dominated the GDR’s hegemonic Shoah discourse.⁴²⁰

This approach is intensified in three other sections of the book, in which Knobloch depicts his experiences as a child and adolescent. First, he mentions an episode from his early school days in Dresden. One morning in 1933, “in the days of the boycott of Jewish shops,” his teacher orders a student to stand on top of his desk. “The boy’s name is Werner Israel. There he stands, uncertain, perplexed, stared at by everyone. The teacher has him utter the sentence: ‘My name is Werner Israel and I am not a Jew.’ He has to say it three times—fairy-tale-like—and now all is well. For him. How I wish to talk to the teacher about those days.”²¹ ‘The student’s exposure and the ritual-like confirmation of his non-Jewish identity seemed to have unsettled Knobloch profoundly. The teacher’s instructions seemed unnecessary, even whimsical, and his reasons remain dubious. Yet, by adding “for him” (i.e., the exposed student), Knobloch alludes to the issue of perspective: for those deemed non-Jewish, such episodes remained a disturbing, albeit harmless anecdote. For those defined as “Jewish,” it was the beginning of various forms of persecution, which all too often ended in death.

Second, Knobloch mentions his treatment by Dr. Schiff, a Jewish ophthalmologist. Fond of the physician as a child, he writes:

No other doctor . . . did I, being a shy child, bring a toy to show to as a companion. I brought Doctor Schiff a teddy bear . . . . One day, the sign of the eye doctor next to the entrance was gone or it was glued over. I can’t remember.

¹⁸ Knobloch, Herr Moses in Berlin, 158.
²¹ Knobloch, Herr Moses in Berlin, 70.
I cannot give a date, but I remember us discussing at home that he might have
gone abroad. Later, much later, when I fathomed the German history I had
experienced as an adolescent, I was relieved by the thought of him having es-
caped the annihilation, surely treating sore eyes in New York or Tel Aviv.22

He adds a quote from a text on Jewish physicians during the National Socialist
period, pointing out their esteemed reputation among the German population.23
In this way, Knobloch stresses the integral role and importance of Jewish doc-
tors in Germany, both before and after 1933. He implicitly challenges the reader
to recollect his or her own contacts and acquaintances from that time. In doing
so, he challenges the impersonal view of antifascism that major segments of Ger-
mans had of “the Jews,” giving individual members of this constructed group a
name. He closes these remarks by stating: “Since he unintentionally opened my
eyes as a child, no superior has ever succeeded in instilling in me or demanding
a general hatred of Jews or Americans or Russians or whose turn it was or might
be.”24 This ambiguous statement can also be read as a challenge to his socialist
superiors because it refers to rejecting a hatred of “Americans.”

Knobloch’s attempt to include the views of non-Jews in 1930s Berlin is
stressed in a point concerning neighbors. Quoting a text by Meyer Kayserling
on the enthusiasm of eighteen-century German Jewry for German (i.e., non-
Yiddish) books, Knobloch refers to the “lurking neighbor,” who must not be al-
lowed to see the prohibited consumption of German texts by Jews:

In Hitler’s time, the neighbor was lurking around to see whether someone was
listening to a foreign radio station. He was also lurking, and quite often suc-
cessfully, to see whether someone was hiding Jews in his flat. Or the lurking
neighbor is himself paid a visit [by the Gestapo] and questioned about his
neighbors. What does he say if he likes them? What does he reveal if his neigh-
bors do not greet him? Do not worry, you will not find out, as the spying
neighbor is exhorted not to talk about his questioning. If he spreads the word,
he cannot know whether he entrusts it to a neighbor lurking around him.25

22 Knobloch, Herr Moses in Berlin, 156.
Ärzte im Dritten Reich: Ein Augenzeugenbericht aus den Jahren 1933–1939,” Leo Baeck Institute Bulletin 6
24 Knobloch, Herr Moses in Berlin, 156–57.
Here, Knobloch points to two phenomena. First, he recalls a feeling of constant uncertainty and distrust, typically associated with societies under dictatorships. The myth of an ever-present Gestapo coexisted with the notion of a self-surveilling society, both during and after National Socialism. Second, although the presence and power of the Gestapo have been shown to be far more limited than previously assumed, and the number and impact of denunciations far less crucial, Knobloch still manages to compel the reader to assess his or her own experience and role under Nazi rule. In an implicit way, he also hints at the activity of the Stasi (the Ministry for State Security) in the GDR and its practice of hiring so-called unofficial informants ("inoffizielle Mitarbeiter, IM"), which neighbors (or readers) could have been and often were. Neighbors secretly observing other neighbors was a phenomenon Knobloch and his readers were quite familiar with. In July 1969, for instance, Knobloch was approached by the Stasi and asked to work as an informant. However, he failed to submit any reports and was ultimately deemed unfit to work for the ministry. He was evaluated as lacking a “solidified class stance,” and regarded as “very sensitive.”

In the longest section on his own childhood, Knobloch reflects on his grandmother who was “a good woman, but—alas, I must say it—she supported Hitler.” He depicts her as ill-treated, hard-working, and kind:

One must be just with this woman. She had always suffered losses when her country was not faring well. She liked Hitler, because he promised to make this country great again. . . . When Hitler rose to power, my grandmother was 61 years old. She died in Berlin in 1942. That was the time when the Gestapo moved into the retirement home [at Große Hamburger Straße] and brought Jews of all ages to their death. . . . Most likely she had never heard the street’s name. She probably did not even know about the crimes, or not

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28 In 1958, Knobloch was asked to provide his home to host secret meetings of Stasi agents, a request that he denied on the grounds that his parents allegedly lived in West Berlin. See Knobloch, *Mit beiden Augen: Mein Leben*, 47–48. For the practice of hiring IMs, see Jens Gieseke, *The History of the Stasi: East Germany’s Secret Police, 1945–1990* (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 77–123.
29 Bundesarchiv (hereafter, BArch), MfS, ZA, BV Berlin, Abt. XX, Nr. 10060, 2. Knobloch was also found to have “revisionist opinions.” See Joachim Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur: Schriftsteller und Staats sicherheit in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1996), 717–18, citation from BArch, MfS, ZA, AIM 5618/71, Bd. 1/1, 67–68.
enough. How am I to blame her or to justify her? What if I had had a grandmother on Große Hamburger Straße, a Jewish grandmother?  

Here, Knobloch addresses the difficulty of assessing the behavior of one’s own family members. Antifascist rhetoric commonly proclaimed “others”—industrialists and Nazi leaders—to be the only guilty ones; it never seemed necessary to ask questions about the individual responsibility of the average German.

One afternoon, Knobloch brought home a Jewish classmate to play with, while his grandmother paid the family a visit. After he left, she explained to him: “It is not good for a German boy to play with a Jewish boy, you know.” Interpreting this episode, Knobloch argues that this, 

smart, respectable woman, who had done much good in her life and often missed out [on life], joined us playing in the corridor that afternoon, as if she was at the Auschwitz platform selecting [prisoners for extermination]; this one yes, that one no. Shall I judge so severely? Did the worldly grandmother . . . not want to assist her grandson in standing against possible disadvantages or worse? Is a grandmother not worried about his acquaintances? Was it not wise to avoid contact with a little Jew? It was even wiser, was it not? The grandmother was not a member of the Nazi party. None of us were members of anything despite the compulsory exercises of air-raid protection and the Hitler Youth. On the bookshelf, *All Quiet on the Western Front* stood next to Thomas Mann and Emil Ludwig hidden in the second row.

Claiming that no one in his family had been a Party member, Knobloch points to the majority of the German population who had not joined it either. Still, as he shows in this episode, one did not have to be an active member of the Nazi Party to tolerate or even endorse its ideology. On the contrary, the initially skeptical assessment of the new regime by many Germans gradually turned into acceptance and approval. After the turbulent years prior to 1933, a feeling of calm and security ensued, turning the majority of Germans into supporters, beneficiaries, and accessories.

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Knobloch struggled with this question of responsibility. The story of his classmate and his grandmother took place in the safe environment of his parents’ home. Active participation in the discrimination of those deemed unfit to be part of the *Volksgemeinschaft* was encouraged by the regime. Yet, it was not mandatory to enforce this discrimination in private life, at least not in the early years of National Socialism. By comparing his grandmother’s actions to SS officers selecting prisoners at Auschwitz, Knobloch does not imply that they are equivalent, but rather raises questions about the functioning of German society in general, its prejudices and relationship with the regime. He points to the reasons why it happened, rather than how. This approach differed significantly from the SED’s economy based explanations of fascism. The ideology of antifascism, thus, helped to exculpate the vast majority of Germans, and it was this exculpation that Knobloch critiqued in the story.35

Knobloch finished the manuscript in early 1978. In order to publish a book in the GDR, the publishing company had to formally apply to the Ministry of Culture, attaching two assessments—one by the editor, another by an external expert. It was common practice among writers and publishers to choose or propose these experts themselves in order to ensure a positive outcome.36 Accordingly, Knobloch turned to Ursula Machlitt, archivist at the municipal archive in Dessau, Mendelssohn’s birthplace.37 In her report, she praised Knobloch’s book, paying special tribute to his method of confronting the reader with contemporary traces of Mendelssohn’s eighteenth-century life. Yet, she criticized his conclusions as rash and at times trivial, suggesting they be abridged, especially his opening description of the park.38 The other reviewer, Maria Schrader-Diedrichs, an editor at the publisher *Buchverlag Der Morgen*, also praised Knobloch’s book, pointing to his writing technique as well. The contemporary reader would be able to relate “emotionally” to the subject, Schrader-Diedrichs argued, because of Knobloch’s excellent description of the social situation of Jews in Mendelssohn’s time.39


In August 1978, Marion Fuckas, an official at the Central Office for Publishing and the Book Trade (Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandel, HV)—a department of the Ministry of Culture—initially refused to grant permission for the book’s publication due to concerns over “some controversial political parts” in the manuscript. The head of the publishing company, Wolfgang Tenzler, was asked to review the text together with Knobloch. In her memo, Fuckas explicitly mentions Knobloch’s references to “fascist horrors against the Jewish people,” yet these were not the source of her objections. Rather, Knobloch’s other allusions and his treatment of “current problems” were regarded as trivial and arrogant. In depicting his travel to West Berlin in the book, Knobloch had mentioned the Berlin Wall, predicting that it would one day come down. Still, he cleverly phrased the episode in a somewhat ambiguous fashion, so that it could be interpreted as an argument in favor of socialism, which Fuckas did.

Knobloch reluctantly conceded to most of the proposed changes, including removing the name of one communist who had fallen out of favor with the Party. Agreeing to these alterations, Fuckas granted the book the imprimatur of the Central Office. Despite a few changes, the book still included several controversial passages, which led Klaus Polkehn, deputy editor-in-chief of the *Wochenpost*, to appreciate the censor’s generous judgment and to conclude: “If all of it is published in this form, I will start believing in miracles.”

The book was finally published in 1979 and renewed in a total of five editions in subsequent years until 1989. The official approval allowed for 10,000 copies of the first edition, which according to Heinz Werner, the director of the Berlin State Library (Staatsbibliothek), did not even come close to meeting the demand. Due to Knobloch’s prestige, the book was reviewed in a variety of newspapers and journals in the GDR. Most critics acclaimed and praised Knobloch’s efforts to shed light on Mendelssohn’s life. Shortly after, the book was published in West Berlin, leading to less enthusiastic, though overall positive reviews. Surprisingly, *Herr Moses* was also reviewed in foreign, mostly Jewish, newspapers, such as the Yiddish *Folks-shtime* in Warsaw and the Hebrew *Arakhim* in Tel Aviv.

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40 Marion Fuckas, Aktennotiz, August 21, 1978, BArch, DR 1/2321a, 467–68.
42 Fuckas, Aktennotiz, August 21, 1978, 468.
43 Marion Fuckas, memo, September 15, 1978, BArch, DR 1/2321a, 473.
44 Klaus Polkehn to Knobloch, October 1978, 1, in SBBPK, Nl. 353.
In 1981, Günter Hartung, professor of German Studies, published a review of the book in the literary journal *Weimarer Beiträge*. He tore the book to shreds, criticizing Knobloch for his “blatant, slightly coy dilettantism,” especially in his treatment of Mendelssohn’s philosophy and his description of eighteenth-century Berlin.\(^{47}\) Still, he lauded Knobloch for his attempts to commemorate the destroyed Jewish life of Berlin.\(^{48}\) The review led to several indignant reactions by readers and academics, some of which were published in two subsequent issues.\(^{49}\) Kristiane Taegers, a librarian from Schwerin, defended Knobloch in her letter to the journal, arguing that his book was among the rare few that dealt with the persecution of Jews between 1933 and 1945. Thus, she saw him as actively contributing to the preservation of Jewish heritage, which led to the question: “What do you [the author of the review] do to make amends for the enormous guilt of our parents and grandparents about their deeds against their Jewish fellow citizens, the survivors and their descendants—as far as it is even possible?”\(^{50}\) Hartung, the reviewer, and Taegers, the reader, drew different conclusions from Knobloch’s book, and apparently differed in their interpretation of the author’s intentions. While the reviewer expected a proper biography of Mendelssohn, the reader praised it as an attempt of commemorating Jewish victims of National Socialism.

Knobloch himself did not seem amused by this review. He wrote to Ursula Ragwitz, head of the “culture” section at the Central Committee of the SED, complaining about the style and tone of the review which, he argued, betrayed a political rather than a literary motive with a distinctly “anti-Jewish tendency.”\(^{51}\) The debate surrounding *Herr Moses* shows that the relatively few passages in which Knobloch focused on the Shoah and its aftermath apparently had an impact on many readers’ impression of the book. In his review, Hartung treated the book as a study of Mendelssohn, while many others read it primarily as an eyewitness account of the persecution of the Jews and a comment on the often neglected


\(^{50}\) Rönisch, “Fortführung,” 153.

\(^{51}\) Knobloch to Ragwitz, November 9, 1981, BArch, DY 30/23231, unpagedinated. The ministry tried to calm Knobloch by underlining their own critical assessment of the review. Knobloch also complained to the journal’s editors, arguing that the book was treated with a tone suitable for an argument with “the enemy.” Letter to Hähnel, January 7, 1982, SBBPK, Archiv des Aufbau-Verlages, Dep. 38, W0151.
Distrusting the Parks

commemoration of a lost Jewish culture. Thus, Knobloch’s hints, allusions, and criticism were mostly overlooked by the officials, but understood as important by his readership. In his next project, his intentions became much more visible.

Meine liebste Mathilde

After the publication of *Herr Moses in Berlin*, Knobloch began researching the life of Mathilde Jacob. Born to a Jewish family in Berlin, Mathilde worked as a translator and secretary for Rosa Luxemburg between 1915 and 1919. Afterwards, she assisted Paul Levi, newly elected chairman of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), before they both joined the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD). After Levi’s death, Mathilde Jacob continued her work as a translator and typist, retiring in the 1930s. On July 27, 1942, she was deported to Theresienstadt, and died in April 1943.

About half of Knobloch’s book is concerned with Mathilde’s work for Rosa Luxemburg. However, similar to *Herr Moses*, he narrates not only Mathilde’s life, but his own thoughts and walks through Berlin. He even invites the reader to experience his process of research and discovery in an attempt to make his sources as transparent as possible. He even reveals his contact with the Hoover Institution in Stanford, which holds a number of her letters and documents. The other half of the book tries to reconstruct aspects of Mathilde’s life. Here, Knobloch again looks for traces of former Jewish life in Berlin. He draws on all manner of texts, such as phone books, commercial registers, and newspaper ads, enacting his call to scholars in the preface to use non-traditional sources: “Is the historian not required to set aside his history books and put on his shoes every now and then?” This question can be read as an appeal to both historians and the general public to take an interest in everyday life rather than solely the history of classes and nations, as was conventional at the time. Accordingly,

52 During that time, one of her customers was Ismar Elbogen, a historian, who wrote the introduction to the edition of Moses Mendelssohn’s *Brautbriefe*, the book Knobloch had discovered a few years earlier. Heinz Knobloch, *Meine liebste Mathilde: Geschichte zum Berühren* ([East] Berlin: Buchverlag Der Morgen, 1985), 255–56.