Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism

Stach, Stephan, Hallama, Peter, Bohus, Kata

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Stach, Stephan, et al.

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zmann had gathered, she refused to have the book published. Her decision not to engage in the troublesome process of censorship seems wise given the low chances of the book’s publication. However, this account also illuminates the diversity of the GDR’s literary scene. Although editors had a genuine interest in helping their authors to publish their works, they could still function as the first step of censorship. This underlines the difficulty of evaluating their actions. While sometimes striving to go beyond the boundaries of ideology and publish the seemingly un-publishable, editors and authors must not be seen as true opponents of the system. Rather, they might be described as struggling between their beliefs in socialism and their critique of it. Broadening a story conventionally told in a narrow way and providing alternative interpretations of history was not equivalent to a total negation of the state or the system they lived under. Knobloch’s books ought to be read in this context. His methods changed, however, after the publication of Mathilde and his attitude toward antifascism was more openly revealed in his final book, which dealt with another character from Berlin’s history.

Der beherzte Reviervorsteher

Knobloch recounted the role of Wilhelm Krützfeld, a police lieutenant who helped preserve the synagogue on Oranienburger Straße from being burned down during the wave of pogroms in November 1938 (Kristallnacht). However, the book only deals partly with the protagonist. Rather, Knobloch assembles a collection of stories about various individuals, who at one time lived in the vicinity of Krützfeld’s police station near Hackescher Markt in central Berlin. Drawing on a wide range of literature, he offers his readers different accounts of the pogrom by Jewish witnesses. Consequently, the Shoah is featured much more prominently in the book. Though Knobloch exaggerated Krützfeld’s role, due partly to a lack of sources, he still reminded his readers that individuals, even those closely engaged with the state and the regime, were able to make decisions whether to collaborate and implement given orders or to refrain from participating.

book, however, was never published, presumably due to the new availability of books from West Germany following the falling of the Berlin wall in November of the same year. See SBBPK, Archiv des Aufbau-Verlages, Dep. 38, A674, 57–86; BArch, DR 1/2240.


The book was published in 1990, and so did not have to undergo censorship, though parts of it, like in the case of *Herr Moses* and *Mathilde*, were previously published in the *Wochenpost*. Knobloch could therefore include sections that were hitherto unimaginable, especially his harsh criticism of the ideology of antifascism. In referring to the 1988 defilement of a Jewish cemetery in Berlin by a group of adolescents, Knobloch ridicules the scarce and often misleading press coverage of the incident, as destroyed Jewish graves and fascist paroles “are not allowed to exist” there. Observing the subsequent trial, he characterized the teenagers as “imbruted,” who would have served as “fine SS men” 50 years ago. Still, he concludes: “They are a product of our society.” Knobloch draws on these thoughts again when condemning the state’s history education program, which dedicated only fifteen minutes to the Shoah as he claimed. Furthermore, he denounced the party’s involvement in the 1988 commemoration ceremonies of the November pogroms 1938 as another one of their “campaigns” that no one believed in. Proclaiming East Germany the “winners” of World War II together with the Soviet Union unmasked how “ghastly” and shallow antifascism had become. By criticizing the regime’s commemorative policy and arguing that the GDR could bring about people capable of “fascist” crimes, Knobloch attacked the Party’s legitimacy and demystified the GDR’s founding myth as the allegedly better Germany. Obviously, such statements could not have been made publicly during the SED’s rule. Thus, though *Reviervorsteher* may not serve as an example for Knobloch’s way of addressing the Shoah within socialist censorship, it does testify more openly to his beliefs and the criticisms he had been holding back.

**Conclusion**

In a speech delivered at the annual *Lion Feuchtwanger Preis* ceremony in 1986, during which Knobloch was honored with the German literary prize, Waltraud Lewin praised him as wise in not immediately presenting his findings to the reader, but rather inviting them to follow him on his many quests. “No detective story is as exciting as the tenacious and adventurous process of research in *Meine...*”

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75 Knobloch, *Der beherzte Reviervorsteher*, 40.
76 Knobloch, *Der beherzte Reviervorsteher*, 41.
77 Knobloch, *Der beherzte Reviervorsteher*, 67.
78 Knobloch, *Der beherzte Reviervorsteher*, 164.