

Notes

¹ All subsequent citations to Theodor Storm occur parenthetically in the text.

² For an insightful study of the role played by fiction in broadening the discourse of history in the nineteenth century, see Brent Peterson's article.

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Helga Schubert's *Judasfrauen*: The Use of Narrative in Documentary Literature

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Helga Schubert, born in 1940 in Berlin, spent years as a clinical psychologist before devoting herself exclusively to her writing in 1977. Since then she has written a number of novels and short stories, many of which deal with everyday problems of women. Schubert's distinct style is at once characterized by rational distance and empathy toward her characters.

Helga Schubert's *Judasfrauen*, published in 1990, begins with a chapter entitled "Spitzel und Verräter," an exploration of possible motives and psychological processes behind acts of political denunciation. Ten of the eleven remaining chapters are based on documented cases of denunciation by women in Nazi Germany. These case studies are based on historical documents, but rather than presenting documentary material directly, Schubert incorporates documented fact into narrative form, filling in the gaps when necessary. The result is a narrative that is a blend of fact and fiction. Schubert, however, details her work process so that the reader can discern where the factual basis ends and Schubert's speculation begins.

In the preface to the Luchterhand edition, Helga Schubert states two goals: 1) to subvert what she perceives as a one-dimensional heroization of women (*Frauenveredelung*), which fails to acknowledge female destructive potential; 2) to better understand the behavior of citizens in a totalitarian state. By focusing on denunciation by women in Nazi Germany, Schubert addresses both goals.

Regarding the second goal—understanding the effects of the totalitarian state—Schubert suggests that the historical setting serves as a vehicle for criticism of the GDR. When she began the project in 198 she felt it necessary to offer an "encoded message" rather than direct criticism.¹ Accordingly, the work implies parallels between structure of power and betrayal in the Third Reich and in the GDR.

But the historical material does not play as subordinate a role as Schubert implies. National Socialist Germany does not function as a mere backdrop onto which the issue of denunciation and betrayal in GDR society can be superimposed. Schubert's third agenda, though not explicitly stated, is to expose the failure of the GDR to honestly confront the history of National Socialist Germany.

Because of its focus on denunciation by women, however, the discussion surrounding *Judasfrauen* has taken the form of a debate as to whether the work is antifeminist. While this is an important question, the work raises the equally significant issue of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the former GDR.

In the second chapter, entitled "Judasfrauen," Schubert relates experiences from her research process that show the unwillingness on the part of official East Germany to examine responsibly the history of the Nazi era. Time and again Schubert encounters obstacles to her research. She is encouraged to emphasize the role of the communist resistance and discouraged from delving into such negative aspects as denunciation. Because archive personnel strictly limit her access to documents, she must ironically conclude, that "in diesem doch konsequent antifaschistischen Teil des ehemaligen Deutschland die Denunziantinnen in Sicherheit sind" (Schubert 37).

This chapter also includes a montage of conversational fragments stemming from different occasions, not arranged in chronological or logical order. All, however, share a common element: they are conversations of the author with individuals who are either incredulous or outraged over Schubert's choice of topic. Together they create an impression of the pervasive East German reluctance to confront its Nazi past.

There have been several major trends in literature dealing with the history of National Socialism and the Holocaust: the documentary, the West German mythological novel, and the East German novel of socialist realism. Schubert's work *Judasfrauen* may serve as a useful model because in it she combines documentary with the narrative element of the novel, thus overcoming some of the weaknesses of each. The result is a work more grounded in fact than the mythological or the socialist realist novels, and absent the ambiguity and subtle manipulation characteristic of some pure documentary.

Because of its documentary basis, *Judasfrauen* is more realistic than

most early post-war West German novels. Martin Broszat would no doubt include writers such as Ilse Aichinger, Wolfgang Koeppen, Arno Schmidt, and Martin Walser in his "nachkriegsgeschichtliche Verinnerlichungskultur" that was heavily reliant on parable and metaphor (130).

Also common to West German literature of this period are images of a monolithic system, against which resistance was virtually impossible. Only heroic characters possessing an almost superhuman willingness for self-sacrifice could resist. This, of course, undermines the issue of individual responsibility. Not until the fifties with the *Zeitromane* of authors such as Böll, Grass and Lenz did the portrayal of the Third Reich leave this personal realm, becoming more realistic and differentiated, with depictions of the moral complexities of everyday life under Nazism.

In East Germany, literature and scholarship also treated morality simplistically, but in a different way. They emphasized the East German "resistance heritage" and depicted the Nazi era as a period of foreign occupation from which the East had been liberated. National Socialism was viewed as a fascist outgrowth and direct result of capitalism. According to Peter Schneider:

Das antifaschistische Tremolo, das mangels wirtschaftlicher Erfolge der wichtigste Legitimationsgrund des jungen Teilstaates wurde, verdichtete sich . . . zu einer Geschichtslüge: danach war die DDR nicht nur nach, sondern vor 1945 die Heimat des antifaschistischen Widerstands gewesen, das Naziunwesen hatte wunderbarerweise an der Elbe haltgemacht. (140)

Unlike the West German preoccupation with the personal realm the literature of socialist realism served the official East German concept of history by exalting heroes and martyrs of the communist resistance. This approach has remained dominant, with few exceptions and is still the object of criticism in *Judasfrauen*.

The documentary literature of the sixties provided an alternative to the mythological, metaphorical approach of the West and to some extent to the heroic model of socialist realism. But documentary literature often engages in extreme simplification, described here by Pete Weiss: "Das Faktenmaterial wird sprachlich bearbeitet. In den Zitate wird das Typische hervorgehoben. Figuren werden karikiert"

Situationen werden drastisch vereinfacht" (471). This simplification can frequently lead to heroization not unlike that of socialist realism. Indeed Nikolaus Miller calls the martyr figure "Anlaß und Zentrum dokumentarischer Werke" (39).

In contrast to the above approaches, Schubert deals realistically with moral issues. She does not portray denounciators as purely immoral, or victims and resisters as purely moral characters. Individuals are shown being pulled in many directions, influenced by varied circumstances. The tension between individual responsibility and social forces is always evident. Most of the case studies depict acts of denunciation born not out of moral conviction, but desperation, jealousy, the need for approval, or fear. They also show different gradations of resistance, including the most subtle forms. This differentiated treatment of resistance fulfills Broszat's prescription:

... neben dem kämpferischen, konspirativen Widerstand, der Leib und Leben aufs Spiel setzte, die vielen "kleinen" Formen des zivilen Mutes, der jedem Zeitgenossen des Dritten Reiches zuzumuten war, ... in die Betrachtung einzubeziehen. (71)

In fact, Schubert finds realistic portrayals more powerful than idealized ones. In "Das Böse im historisch Guten," an essay which appeared in the 1994 volume *Die Andersdenkende*, she describes her encounter with the files that served as the basis for Hans Fallada's novel *Jeder stirbt für sich allein*. The files describe a married couple who risked and ultimately lost their lives by writing postcards against the Nazis and distributing them widely to public places. In Fallada's novel the two remain loyal to each other until their execution. According to the files, however, each claims innocence and points to the other as the instigator. Schubert writes:

Für mich ist es viel tragischer und viel berührender, daß Leute, die so mutig viel auf sich genommen, die im Gegensatz zu Millionen anderen etwas getan haben, trotzdem gebrochen wurden durch Folter. (148)

While the tendency to simplify moral questions and depict martyr figures is evident in both documentaries and novels of the post-

war period, documentary is problematic in yet another way by virtue of its form. The subjective element in documentary is not immediately apparent. This seeming lack of creative content may appear to be at odds with the traditional notion of autonomous art. In the subjective selection and arrangement of documentary material, however, lies its creative element. This subjective component conflicts with documentary literature's claim to factuality. The documentary, with its air of authenticity, can easily manipulate the reader by presenting only selected portions of documentary evidence. Political agitation is usually its goal.

On the other hand, documentary has the potential to distance readers through various *Verfremdungseffekte*, thus enabling them to react critically and question assumptions. At its best, documentary literature presents a wealth of material in such a way as to require active participation of the reader, who must draw parallels, notice discrepancies, etc.

When dealing with a sensitive subject, however, the facts cannot always speak for themselves. As evidence of this, Judith Ryan cites Joachim Fest's documentary about Hitler, which left some viewers with a positive image of its subject (161-62). Martin Broszat warns that documentary material alone is often incapable of revealing complex power structures, or of clarifying relationships between events, etc. and suggests that the introduction of narrative could provide such clarification (39).

Schubert draws on the tradition of documentary literature, but by combining documentary and narrative she avoids the problems discussed above. Rather than simply creating a montage of documentary raw material, Schubert integrates quotes and information from documents into narrative form. By using narrative to relate documentary material, Schubert is able to interject commentary and pose thought-provoking questions. This mediating position allows her to overcome the dangerous potential for misunderstanding some documentary literature. Schubert refers to the form of *Judasfrauen* as "kommentierte Dokumentarliteratur" (Thomalla).

Although she maintains a succinct style and remains faithful to facts contained in the documents, Schubert's commentary and questions often stem from her own personal struggle with the material. The result of this mixture is aptly described by Christine Cosentino:

Dem Leser fällt sofort auf, daß die Autorin in jeder der Fallgeschichten unmittelbar anwesend ist, . . . Dieses bohrende Fragen und Kommentieren im Prozeß einer Gewissensforschung gibt den Text die für ein Tagebuch typischen Züge. (110)

The virtue of Schubert's personal commentary on possible motivations or emotional reactions of characters is that her speculation is clearly identifiable as such, often taking the form of a question:

Nach zwei Wochen wurde er ins Gestapo-Gefängnis nach Berlin gebracht und dort seiner Verräterin gegenübergestellt. Was mochte die Frau empfunden haben, als sie in das hungrige und zerschlagene Gesicht des Sohnes ihrer Freundin blickte? (99)

Several of the case studies, though still based on fact, are written entirely in the first person, with Schubert filling in the gaps not provided in the documents. Schubert is again honest about her involvement with the material. She clearly emphasizes the fictional nature of these chapters in her foreword. Schubert thus reflects not only on manipulation of history at a national level, but on a personal level as well. By drawing attention to her own manipulation of the documentary material, and exploring her motivations for writing this book, she forces the reader to take this manipulation into account and to reflect critically on the truth value of what is read.

Preceding the commentary and the provocative questions in the case studies, Schubert devotes an entire chapter, "Spitzel und Verräter," to examining the phenomenon of denunciation. In it Schubert, a psychologist, tries to understand the roles of denunciators and victims. Here Schubert abstracts from the individual cases the basic structures of betrayal. This chapter is not intended to judge or to excuse the perpetrators. Schubert focuses less on the historical material itself and more on our relationship to it. "Nicht um 'Ent-Schuldigung' geht es allerdings, sondern um Be-Schuldigung im Sinne des Akzeptierens potentieller Eigenschuld" (Cosentino 118).

Schubert draws on the tradition of *Alltagsgeschichte* as well as that of documentary literature. One case study takes the form of an interview with a surviving denunciator. This is not really a departure, given that such works as Erika Runge's *Bottroper Protokolle* were consid-

ered part of the surge of documentary literature of the sixties. Here, as in the other chapters, Schubert presents documentary material in narrative form. Rather than presenting directly transcribed dialogue, Schubert gives a narrative account of the interview as it is remembered. It is also not an instance of oral history in the strict methodological sense of Lutz Niethammer, because the author's commentary is interjected into the flow of the narrative. The commentary and the fact that the interview is rendered from memory force the reader to again take into account the author's manipulation of the actual conversation, thus encouraging critical reflection.

But one of the problems of documentary literature remains: that of selection. Although Schubert lists her sources and describes her research process, the reader cannot be sure that the case studies presented constitute a representative sample. Only one of the ten case studies, "Die Kamaradenfrau," involves the denunciation of a Jew. This may in fact reflect a conscious attempt on the author's part to universalize the material. But because it perpetuates the neglect of anti-Semitism as a subject of both literature and study—which has been particularly acute in the East—this neglect must be considered a weakness.

Schubert's case study of the denunciation of Carl Goerdeler also reflects the problem of selection: although Goerdeler opposed Hitler, the historian Christof Dipper has established that Goerdeler was at one time in agreement with the basic idea of the Nürnberg Laws of 1935, and in general favored limiting the equality and freedom of Jewish citizens. Although this information in no way negates Goerdeler's later act of courage, the absence of these facts in Schubert's portrayal is surprising. It seems probable, however, that this information was unknown to Schubert, when one considers her otherwise subtly differentiated treatment of moral character and her limited research resources.

In summary, by filtering documentary material through narrative, Schubert avoids the ambiguity frequently resulting from documentary literature—an ambiguity which can provoke unpredicted responses such as those generated by Fest's Hitler documentary. This has, of course, the consequence that the reader is not called upon to reach as many conclusions independently. But the participation element in *Judasfrauen* is still strong, insofar as the reader, as in most

documentary literature, must still draw parallels between the historical material and contemporary society. More importantly, the reader must constantly discern fact from fiction. Schubert also encourages participation by interjecting provocative questions. The case studies do not offer answers, but rather problematize questions to which no clear answers exist.

Although the problem of selection remains a factor in *Judasfrauen*, the potential to mislead or manipulate the reader is minimized, when Schubert reveals her agenda and describes her writing process. A more complete solution to this problem might consist of providing statistics to verify the representativeness of the selection of case studies. But to hold literature to such standards of scholarship is to essentially destroy the boundary between literature and historiography—something which is neither desirable nor practical. Authors and historians must simply promote responsible treatments of Nazism and the Holocaust by setting examples through their own work and by offering judicious criticism of others. Although Schubert's neglect of anti-Semitism must be criticized, her use of narrative may prove to be a valuable model.

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Note

¹Two editions of *Judasfrauen* appeared in 1990. Perhaps because the Aufbau edition may have been submitted for publication before November 1989, it does not include a preface explicitly stating Schubert's aims as does the later Luchterhand edition.

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