



“Mercilessly Torn to Shreds.” A 1944 Nazi Novel: Between Propaganda and Censorship

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Abstract

The study discusses the suppression of Heinrich Eisen’s novel *Wehrbauer Burglinger*, which was to be published in the Nazi party’s publishing house Franz Eher in 1944. By describing the commitment of special agricultural leaders in German-occupied Ukraine in 1941–1942 deployed by the Wehrmacht to rebuild, administer and secure agricultural production, the aim of the novel was to spur the war-weary homeland to persevere. With the Eher Verlag, the Nazis had a powerful instrument at their disposal to disseminate such literary propaganda. As the case shows, the Nazi’s literary production in wartime was monitored both by Eher’s internal censorship office and the censorship department of the Wehrmacht. The fact that several actors were involved in censorship without a uniform policy led to an obstruction in the decision-making process, which was only resolved by Eher’s director Max Amann. Contrary to his editor, who recommended the book as a “National Socialist standard work,” Amann seems to have followed the arguments of the Wehrmacht censor, who considered the book “unacceptable” due to its damaging portrayal of occupation policy and its unfavorable timing given the “regressive development” of the war. The case demonstrates the precarious situation of war-related fiction and how literary control in wartime enforced a shift from more ideological criteria to mainly extra-literary concerns of situational propagandistic utility, which hampered even the Nazi’s literary production.

Keywords Publishing · censorship · propaganda literature · Nazi Germany · World War II

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Introduction

Censorship and propaganda were the most important instruments of intellectual influence and manipulation in the “Third Reich,” through which the Nazi regime sought to secure its monopoly on power based on open terror and persecution. After Hitler was appointed Reichskanzler by Reichspresident Paul von Hindenburg on January 30, 1933, the Nazis did their utmost to expand and consolidate their power and secure their popularity. The declared aim—as Goebbels urged at the Nuremberg Reich Party Congress in September 1934—was not only to “possess power based on arms,” but also “to win the heart of the people and keep it” (Goebbels 1934). To this end, the regime successfully combined coercive force, state violence and repression with “soft power” of persuasion and propaganda.

In the field of literature in particular, efforts were made to bolster coercion by means of censorship and prohibitive measures with a policy of promoting and supporting the production of literature that conformed to Nazi ideology and was useful for propaganda purposes.¹ While politically unacceptable publishers were expropriated or forced to close and the book market was “cleansed” of “harmful and undesirable” literature (in 1933 and 1934, circa 4,100 titles were banned from bookshops and libraries [Plachta 2006, 179]), pressure from the regime, targeted measures to promote literature and the attraction of profitable sales opportunities soon led many publishers to shift their offerings towards compliant content or even decidedly propagandistic literature.² But the Nazi Party itself also became an important player in the press and book market with the expansion of the formerly small party publishing house, Franz Eher Nachf., into a media group. Through the Eher publishing house, the NSDAP controlled a large part of the German press, but it was also used to distribute an increasingly diversified range of books including propaganda writings (such as Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*), organizational literature and song collections, non-fiction books and manuals, as well as a large number of fiction titles by bestselling Nazi authors such as Franz Zöberlein and Kuni Tremel-Eggert.³ With the help of their central publishing house, the party intended to monopolize National Socialist publications and enforce the dominance of Nazi literature on the book market and in the public sphere in the long term.

This provided the party with a powerful instrument of press and book propaganda, which was used for ideological mobilization, especially during the war. Alongside companies such as the Bertelsmann Verlag, the Eher Verlag held a dominant position in the profitable front book trade (Bühler and Bühler 2002, 179–183), but also in the regular book market as a result of the suppression and (from 1943)

¹ For the central role that the medium of the book—contrary to popular opinion—played as a means of propaganda alongside radio, press and film. See van Linthout (2012, chapters 1 and 2).

² This can be clearly seen in the program development of the publishing houses Reclam and Bertelsmann; see Wittmann (2015, 335–339 [Bertelsmann], 347–349 [Reclam]); Friedländer et al. (2007, 264–65 [graphs], 551–556).

³ Under the management of Max Amann, Hitler’s long-time confidant and Reichsleiter for the press, the company was transformed into the largest publishing group in the German Reich, which in 1944 comprised around 150 publishing companies with a total of around 35,000 workers and employees (Haefs 2023, 8–9; Barbian 2015a, 186–188).

eventual “war-related” closures of most publishing companies; in addition, it was the only publishing house that still had free access to the scarce paper reserves, enabling an unencumbered approach to production decisions (Strothmann 1968, 205, note 439).

In 1944, as hardly any literature was being produced, a novel by the Nazi author Heinrich Eisen was scheduled to be published by Eher Verlag. But the book was never published. After a lengthy censorship process, the novel was suppressed. This case is documented in two letters to the publishing director Max Amann, which, along with a few archival documents from Eher Verlag, survived the war and are now kept at the Bavarian State Library in Munich. The Eher Verlag had already published *Die verlorene Kompanie* the previous year, a propaganda novel about the eastern campaign that had been highly praised by the Nazi press. The opinions of experts at the Eher editorial office and the Wehrmacht censors, documented in these letters, show the bitter dispute over the publication of Eisen’s second novel, which apparently—despite considerable resistance from Eher’s editor—was prevented by the Wehrmacht censors.

It might seem surprising that a propagandistic war novel planned within the Central Party Publishing House was subjected to this kind of scrutiny, since Nazi censorship is generally associated with the suppression of literature deemed harmful or undesirable by the regime. Indeed, the primary focus of Nazi literary politics was to suppress literature by Jewish authors and the party’s political and ideological opponents. However, National Socialist and party literature was also increasingly submitted to surveillance, which expanded during the war. Even the publication projects of the party’s publishing house went through at least one, sometimes two, further levels of censorship beyond to the publisher’s own editorial office before going to print, a topic that has to date hardly been investigated by researchers, partly due to the scarcity of sources.⁴ Thus, censorship in the “Third Reich” has been studied primarily as a challenge to the writing and publishing of non-conformist and oppositional authors.⁵ By contrast, little is known about the censorship of Nazi and propaganda literature and the battles that were fought out between the various players during the war after Wehrmacht censorship was introduced, although in some cases it led to modifications or even the suppression of Nazi books that were already planned for publication.

This case study reconstructs this censorship dispute with regard to the interests, motives and arguments of the censors in the context of the development of the war in the East, to which the novel refers with propagandistic but also critical intent. To this end, the process is first examined in the wider context of censorship policy

⁴ For an overview of the sources and the state of research on Eher Verlag see Haefs (2023, 1, note 1).

⁵ There are numerous studies and documentations on book burnings and banned literature, as well as on the writing and publishing of non-conformist and oppositional authors under censorship conditions during the Nazi regime. Despite the extensive and commendable work of Jan-Pieter Barbian, little research has been done into the details of the production and dissemination of regime-affiliated and decidedly National Socialist literature, as well as its control and management within the web of the polycratic bureaucracy of literature. Foundations and initial approaches to research in book history can be found in general in Fischer and Wittmann (2015) and Fischer and Wittmann (2023), in particular (referring to Eher Verlag, Nazi book trade and propaganda) in Haefs (2023), Lokatis (2021) and van Linthout (2012).

under the Nazis and the wartime situation of the book trade. Subsequently, the context in which the novel was written and its content are explored in order to reconstruct the censorship conflict over the book and its propaganda potential. Finally, some tentative conclusions are drawn about the inconsistencies and dysfunctions of production and censorship control of propaganda literature in wartime.

Book Market and Censorship in the “Third Reich”

Already during the regime’s consolidation of power in 1933 and 1934, a number of state and party agencies began to concern themselves with the surveillance and control of literature, but limited themselves primarily to censorship of undesirable literature.⁶ As the central authority, Goebbels had set up the literary department of the Ministry of Propaganda (Schrifttumsabteilung) and the allied Reichsschrifttumskammer (Reich Chamber of Literature), through which post-censorship was initially exercised mainly by secret blacklists. In addition, however, competing literary offices had emerged that also claimed censorship powers. These included Alfred Rosenberg’s Reich Office for the Promotion of German Literature (Reichsstelle zur Förderung des deutschen Schrifttums, which was later absorbed by the Amt Schrifttumspflege) and the Party Commission for the Protection of National Socialist Literature (Parteiamtliche Prüfungskommission zum Schutze des nationalsozialistischen Schrifttums) under the direction of Philipp Bouhler. Rosenberg’s office, which had a large editorial staff, extensively screened the book market by examining new publications for their value to the cause of National Socialism; however, it could only make recommendations and could not issue bans itself. The Bouhler Commission, in turn, had been created in April 1934 to confront the booming production of unauthorized books on National Socialism by subjecting all publications relating to the movement and the state to party control. Closely connected to the NSDAP’s central publishing house, it was granted extensive powers of censorship (pre- and post-publication) and functioned as an instrument for the party publishing house’s monopolization of the Nazi book market.

Thus, after an initial phase of chaotic and inconsistent purges, starting in 1935 the book market was subjected to systematic political and ideological post-censorship by means of indexing titles that had already been published (pre-censorship monitoring was only practiced in individual cases and in Nazi literature). This proved the most effective form of censorship as it shifted the risk to the authors and publishers. The mere possibility that a title could be objected to at any time after publication set in motion mechanisms of preventive self-censorship among authors and publishers, whereby literary products were adapted to the desired framework and the anticipated expectations of the regime in the moment of creation, and politically deviant or even critical ideas could only be articulated occasionally in a coded form and at considerable risk.

Literature control was significantly extended and intensified during the war (1939–1945). The regime gradually transitioned to the pre-censorship of the entire

⁶ The following remarks on NS censorship are drawn from Barbian (1995, 155–364); for the English version, see Barbian (2013, 59–296) and Lewy (2016).

book market by way of paper quotas introduced in 1940, as well as increased military surveillance. In addition to the military censors within the ministry of propaganda (information, press), the domestic department (Abteilung Inland) of the High Command of the Armed Forces (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, OKW) was responsible for the pre-censorship of Wehrmacht publications, writings of members of the Wehrmacht and all writings dealing with the ongoing war.

The longer the war lasted, the more difficult conditions became for publishers and the book trade. The transition to a war economy, which was accompanied by not only paper shortages and the conscription of employees, but also by an absolute prioritization of book supply to the front, resulted in profound distortions in the production and distribution of books. From 1942, for example, a general paper authorization requirement was applied. The books intended for publication had to have a “beneficial influence on the struggle for survival (*Lebenskampf*) of our people,” as the contact person for publishers in the literature department of the Ministry of Propaganda, Rudolf Erckmann, announced (Erckmann 1942, 173). Every publishing project had to be applied for in advance; the domestic department of the OKW decided on the paper allocation in cooperation with the Propaganda Ministry and the business offices. The complex approval process led to considerable delays so that, on average, one and a half years passed between the acceptance of a manuscript and the publication of a book (Simons 2004a; Friedländer et al. 2007, 466–469). From 1943 on, there were also repeated “freezes on paper applications” due to a shortage of raw materials. At the beginning of 1944, attempts were made to plan book production centrally via a production committee, and in April 1944 urgency levels were introduced for print orders (Barbian 2015b, 150–151). This meant that publishers were only allowed to continue “core production,” with the literature department prioritizing “standard works (of the Eher-Verlag type),” while the “flood of so-called ‘political works’ [...] was to be curbed” (cited in Barbian 2015b, 151). As a result of the far-reaching political interventions and the consequences of the expansion of the allied bombing campaign, the regular book trade was considerably thinned out and weakened. During the attack on Leipzig alone on the night of December 3 to 4, 1943, 516 publishing houses and other bookselling companies with around 50 million books in storage were destroyed (Barbian 2015b, 151–52; documented by Buß 2024). At the same time, “non-essential” companies were successively forced to close in 1943 and 1944 because of conscription and wartime economic decisions. Therefore, the book trade came to a virtual standstill. Of 2122 publishing companies, only 220 remained in August 1944.⁷ The remaining publishers were obliged to supply 30 percent of each print run to the Wehrmacht and the Ministry of Propaganda for troop support, to the wholesaler Lühse & Co. to supply evacuees and those affected by bombing, and to the purchasing house for libraries; the headquarters of the front bookshops claimed a further 50 percent, meaning that a total of around 80 percent of each print run was distributed by the authorities, bypassing the regular book market (Barbian 2010, 370).

⁷ By the end of 1944, the entire travel and mail-order book trade (995 companies) was closed, the intermediate book trade (113 companies) and the lending library system (910 libraries) were drastically reduced, and half of the workforce was withdrawn from the product range (closure of 5160 product ranges and book sales outlets) (Barbian 1997, 127–28).

The situation of the publishing industry inevitably exacerbated the problems of supplying the population with literature during the war. As early as Christmas 1939, the book market experienced a boom that lasted until 1943. A growing need for distraction and entertainment, the loss of other leisure activities as well as the curfews and waiting in the air raid shelters ensured a strong demand for books. This was countered by increasingly difficult production due to the conversion of the publishing industry to a war economy. The prioritization of “war-important” assignments and, above all, book production for the Wehrmacht had a detrimental effect on civilian production, which led to a glaring undersupply of literature (Antes 2023, 863–64). This imbalance between supply and demand led to a buyers’ market becoming a sellers’ and suppliers’ market: it was no longer demand that determined supply but everything that was offered was bought (864). In terms of content, too, book supply and book production largely failed to meet the reading demands of the population. The increasing desire for light entertainment literature was countered by an oversupply of political propaganda, ideological and war literature, while fiction was often sold out (867). Despite the promotion of the production of entertaining literature, mainly initiated by Goebbels, as well as state interventionist measures to control consumption and foster alternative forms of supply (such as book lending, recycling old books and book donations), it was no longer possible to provide the civilian population with a basic supply of books. At the latest with the massive restrictions on production and distribution possibilities during the “Total War” described above, both the book industry and book supply came to an almost complete standstill (869–892).

This massive disruption left the central publishing house of the NSDAP largely unaffected. While most of the publishing industry was sacrificed to the war and most remaining companies were barely able to operate, Eher Verlag was the only publishing company that was exempt from the paper permit requirement (Strothmann 1968, 205, note 439) and which, as part of the corporation that had meanwhile become the largest company in the German Reich in terms of turnover, was still able to generate profits in the tens of millions right into the last year of the war,⁸ particularly through the production of field post editions (Bühler and Bühler 2002, 179–83). Nevertheless, the position of power of the publishing house managed by Amann and of the party authorities behind it was not absolute. As the war progressed, the balance of power within the regime shifted so that the Ministry of Propaganda and the Wehrmacht now formed a major alliance. In this context, the Wehrmacht had commercial relationships primarily with those parts of the publishing world (e.g., Bertelsmann) that were not connected to the party corporation (Simons 2004b). Thus, books from Eher Verlag, which had its own sources of supply, were deliberately not promoted with Wehrmacht paper checks, and only a few Eher titles reached the front book trade via the OKW’s Abteilung Inland. This rivalry between the Wehrmacht and the Party resulted in conflict, exacerbated by the fact that the Wehrmacht went its own way in terms of literary production and censorship, sometimes running counter to the propaganda plans of the National Socialists. In the course of this precipitous development, the OKW had grown into a large apparatus whose censorship department included names such as Jürgen Eggebrecht and Günter Eich, whose more liberal censorship decisions often allowed publications by authors who did not conform to the party line (Messerschmidt 1969, 321).

⁸ For sales and profit trends, see the figures in Barbian (2015a, 188), Haefs (2023, 35), Hale (1965, 312) and Tavernaro (2004, 70).

It was therefore common for sometimes fierce censorship conflicts to occur behind the scenes between the party and Wehrmacht offices.

In the context of the “Total War” proclaimed in February 1943, which demanded the total mobilization of all material and intellectual resources to achieve the “final victory,” communication control was tightened even further as part of the propaganda offensive and enforcement of ideological conformity. Books already accepted for publication in the party’s central publishing house were also subject to separate scrutiny. For this internal pre-censorship, a Central Reviewing Office (Zentrallektorat) for all literary publishers of Eher publishing was set up in 1943 in cooperation with Rosenberg. This office had the large editorial staff of Rosenberg’s Hauptamt Schrifttumspflege (Main Bureau for Fostering Literature), led by Bernhard Payr, at its disposal (Baur to Rosenberg, April 9, 1943). Wehrmacht censorship, which had previously acted largely independently of the party’s literary policy, now also was put to party control: the Abteilung Inland of the OKW was absorbed into the new NS-Führungsstab (Nazi Leadership Staff), which had been formed on Hitler’s orders at the beginning of 1944 for the purpose of “political activation of the Wehrmacht” in order to subject the troops to control and ideological indoctrination by the party (Vossler 2005, 123; Messerschmidt 1969, 458).

It was these two offices, the Zentrallektorat, and the censorship department of the NS-Führungsstab of the OKW, which were entrusted with the examination of Heinrich Eisen’s war novel after it had already been approved by the editor of the Eher’s book publishing house. For his part, the powerful director of Eher and Reichsleiter for the press, Max Amann, reserved the right to decide on the publishing decisions of the publishing house (Haefs 2023, 15).

The dispute over the publication of the novel (whose typescript itself has not survived) can be reconstructed on the basis of two letters to Max Amann, preserved in the archives of the Bavarian State Library. The first, dated November 13, 1944, is signed by Friedrich Klähn, the head of Department 2 in the NS-Führungsstab of the Wehrmacht Oberkommando (see Fig. 1). The letter contains a detailed explanation of why the planned novel publication with the title *Wehrbauer Burglinger* was “from the point of view of the military [...] not acceptable” (7). The second letter, dated December 3, 1944, is a letter from Eisen’s editor Karl Schworm, to whom Klähn’s negative opinion had been forwarded (see Fig. 2). Referring to the favorable assessment by Bernhard Payr from the official party Zentrallektorat, who emphasized the novel’s “consistent National Socialism” (2), Schworm defended the work of the author as “one of the most essential books of this war” (1).

But what was so controversial about this book? And how can it be explained that a work was objected to and suppressed whose National Socialist qualities were explicitly emphasized by both the Eher Verlag editorial office and the Zentrallektorat?

The Novel’s Origins and Subject Matter

“It is without question always a daring enterprise to write a novel in time of war that deals with the events of that war.” This was the view of the Wehrmacht magazine *Offiziere des Führers* in a review of Heinrich Eisen’s debut book *Die verlorene Kompanie* (1943), apparently the first novel on the ongoing war up to that time and

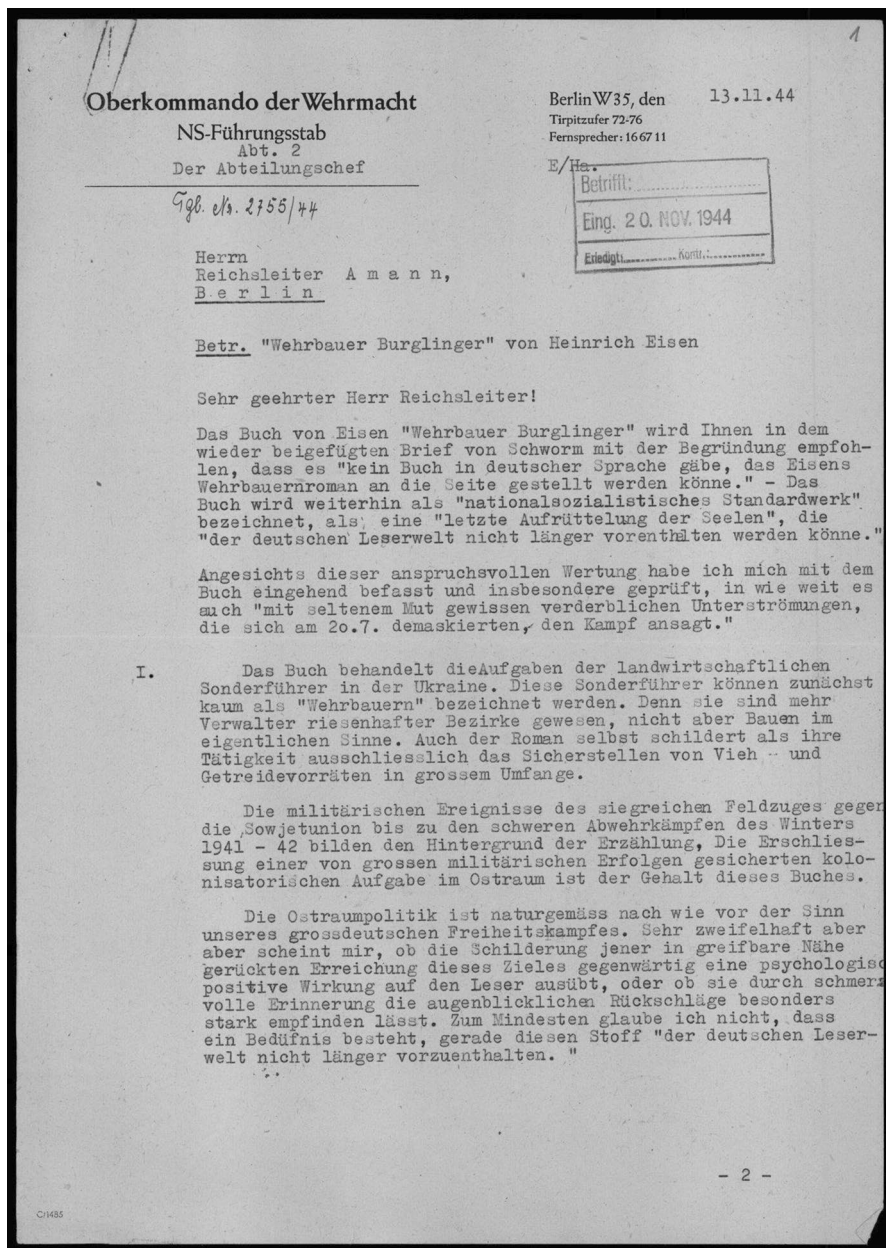


Fig. 1 Friedrich Klöhn to Max Amann, November 13, 1944, fol. 1. (Ana 302, IV.A.1, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München.)

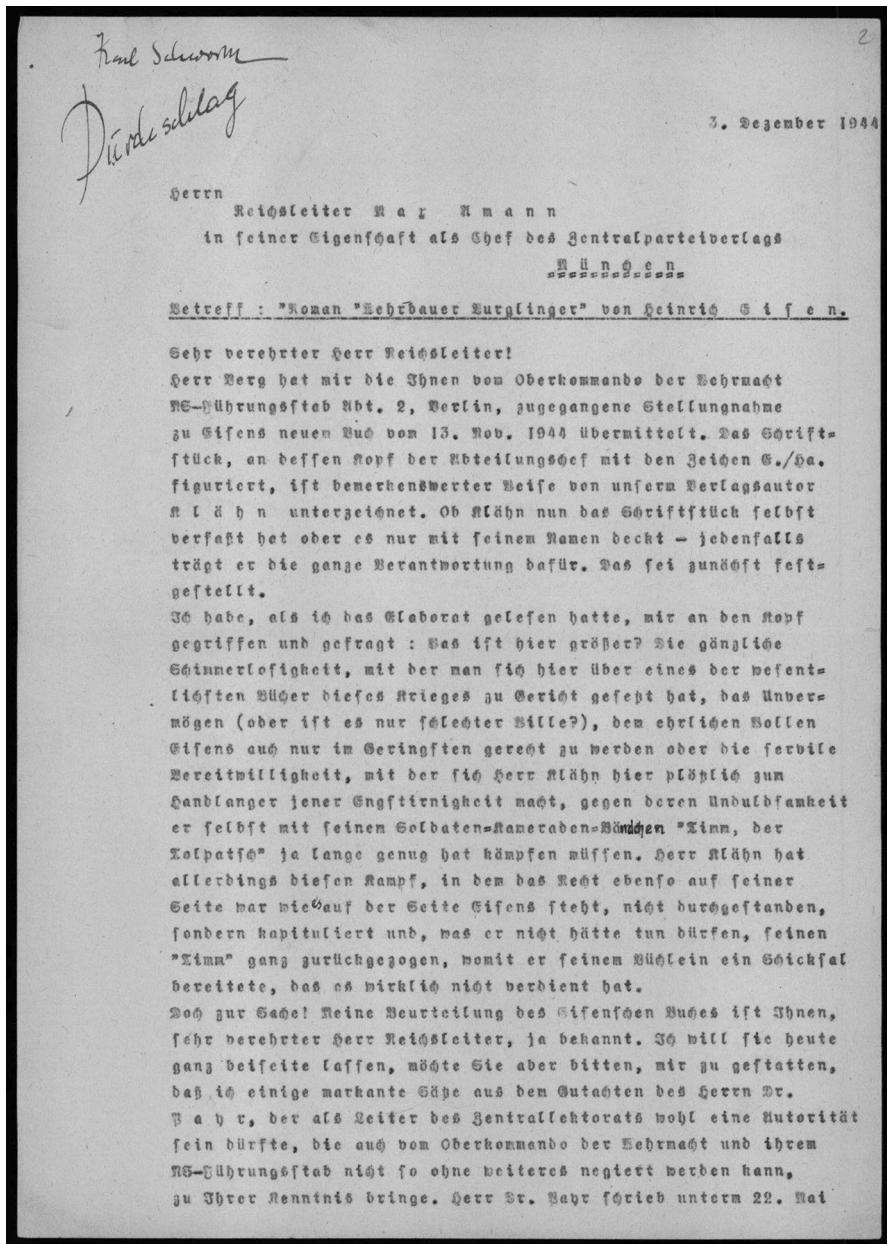


Fig. 2 Karl Schworm to Max Amann, December 3, 1944, fol. 1. (Ana 302, IV.A.2, Ana 302, IV.A.1, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München.)

published by the Eher Verlag. Eisen, the review continues, succeeded in this enterprise through validity, authenticity and exemplarity (Reisner 1944). The book was celebrated in the Nazi party press: this “first work of fiction of our present war,” according to the *Völkischer Beobachter*, showed “the authentic face of war” (Klose 1943). The 749-page novel deals with the difficult defensive battles of the German Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front in the winter of 1941–1942. During the rearguard actions south of the Valdai Mountains, the seventh company loses contact with its regiment and falls behind the Soviet lines. Thanks to the capable leadership of their captain, Rott, the committed unit manages to hide from the enemy in a wooded and swampy area over the winter under the harshest conditions, conduct successful surprise attacks on the “Bolsheviks” and finally fight their way through to the German positions and join the beginning of the German spring offensive.

In the decade following World War I, the book market had already experienced a veritable flood of novels and stories that glorified war and the experience of the front, serving a völkisch-nationalist or National Socialist view of history. By the time the crisis began in 1929, the critical–pacifist reappraisal of the world war had been completely supplanted by mass editions of anti-democratic authors such as Werner Beumelburg, P. C. Ettighoffer, Edwin Erich Dwinger and Franz Schauwecker (Adam 2010, 135–157; Prümm 1976, 139). The standard for the National Socialists in this respect was Franz Zöberlein’s World War I novel *Der Glaube an Deutschland* (1931), to which Hitler himself had written the foreword and which allegedly was one of the most successful war novels of the time with a total print run of 740,000 copies (Adam 2010, 323). Like the radical right-wing Freikorps novels written at the same time, these militant–nationalist descriptions combined combat and communal experience with a revanchist and anti-socialist tendency directed against the “November Republic.” After 1939, war books experienced a renewed boom and there was great interest in reading them. However, the events of the war were predominantly depicted not in fictional prose, but in reports by propaganda companies in the press and in literary reports of experiences or in diary form,⁹ glorified in uplifting poems¹⁰ or interpreted by political and ideological essays as a fateful and natural event.¹¹ Such treatments of the war were based on the völkisch-irrationalist view of life, which focused on heroic masculinity, struggle and sacrifice, community experience, race and nation, whereby the war itself—according to the core narrative of Nazi propaganda—was justified as a fight against “Jewish Bolshevism” and for

⁹ For instance, in the Bertelsmann bestseller *Narvik. Vom Heldenkampf deutscher Zerstörer* (1940) by naval officer Fritz Otto Busch, in publications by Erich Edwin Dwinger (*Panzerführer. Tagebuchblätter vom Frankreichfeldzug*, 1941; *Wiedersehen mit Sowjetrußland. Tagebuch vom Ostfeldzug*, 1942) or Hans Hoeschen (*Zwischen Weichsel und Wolga*, 1943).

¹⁰ So in poetry collections as *Heimat und Front. Gedichte aus dem Herbst 1939* by Heinrich Anacker and *Ostland* (1940) by Agnes Migel or in poems by Ernst Bertram (*Aber erst Gräber ...*, 1943) or Karl Bröger (*Das Vermächtnis*, 1943).

¹¹ Among the numerous essays, treatises and speeches by writers are texts such as *Vom schöpferischen Krieg* by Kurt Ziesel (included in the compilation *Krieg und Dichtung*, 1940), *Von der Freiheit des Kriegers* (1940) by Kurt Eggers or *Krieg – Bericht und Dichtung* by Gerhard Schumann (included *Dichter und Krieger. Weimarer Reden* 1942, 1943).

“living space,” presented as a struggle for survival forced on the German people by enemies wishing to destroy them.¹²

The reason that no major books or novels about the ongoing war were published may be explained by the precarious terrain authors and publishers found themselves in exposing themselves to potential attacks, especially as the literary authorities were skeptical, even critical, of books glorifying the war (Thunecke 1987, 140). As early as the beginning of the war in 1940, the publishers were warned by the Reichsschrifttumskammer (RSK) to exercise “responsible caution,” as a long time would have to pass “before the experience of war can really take on artistic form. A boom in this field [...] would be an utterly unjustifiable relapse into past times” (*Vertrauliche Mitteilungen*, 1940, 5). In the annual report of the head of the publishing house’s department in the RSK on May 11, 1941, the “unwelcome flood of chronicling the Polish campaign” is criticized as an evil to be stopped: “The war and its experiences must never be the subject of an express book production, the aim of which is less the deepening of the experience and more the exploitation of a momentary boom” (*Vertrauliche Mitteilungen*, 1941, 5).

In this respect, with its fictional portrayal of the ongoing war on the Eastern Front, Eisen’s first novel represented an exceptional publication made possible by the privileged position of the party publishing house as part of a propaganda offensive for the war. Amid a paper shortage and waves of closures in the book trade, Eher Verlag was able to make use of its privileged access to the scarce raw material. The novel was first published in the summer of 1943 as a preprint in the *Illustrierter Beobachter* and went through four editions between 1943 and 1944 with a total of 184,000 copies (see Verdict against Eisen, October 19, 1948, fol. 6), some of which were distributed by the Wehrmacht to prepare soldiers for deployment to the front.¹³ At the end of 1943, there were even plans to adapt the novel into a film.¹⁴ In the context of the increasingly disastrous military situation after Stalingrad, the book, with its heroic narrative of the lost company, provided the kind of perseverance propaganda with which the Nazi regime sought to secure popular support for the war.

Just how risky fictionalizations of real events undertaken for propaganda purposes can be, however, is evidenced by the author’s second novel project. Heinrich Eisen, born in Eningen, Swabia, in 1895, a reserve officer with frontline experience, had previously worked as the local editor of the Nazi party newspaper *Völkischer*

¹² On the prevalence of this anti-Semitic and imperialist ideas among Wehrmacht officers, see sources cited in Dörner (2007, 108–9).

¹³ In an interview held on October 10, 2023, with Markus Heider about his father Anton Heider (1927–2020) from Hohenfels (district of Neumarkt), whose estate included an edition of the novel bound in gray half-linen (2nd edition, 1943) with a dedication for conscription dated June 13, 1944, it could be confirmed that the book was distributed by the Wehrmacht to newly drafted soldiers, apparently “in preparation” for deployment to the front.

¹⁴ A letter from the head of the Munich publishing house of Eher, Wilhelm Baur, to Eisen dated November 27, 1943, shows that the Zentralfilm-Gesellschaft Ost intended to adapt the novel into a film, for which the publishing house waived the use of the rights in favor of the author, who was therefore left to negotiate the fee.

Beobachter, published by Eher (Curriculum vitae 1942; Veredict against Eisen, October 19, 1948, fol. 6; Dresler 1937, 162). With the conclusion of a lucrative contract for his first novel in September 1942 (Publishing contract, September 15, 1942) and an additional fee of 10,000 Reichsmark for the magazine publication rights in March 1943 (Amann to Eisen, February 19, 1943; Sales department to Eher book publisher, March 6, 1943), Eisen now seems to have pinned his hopes entirely on a career as a writer (Personal Statement from Eisen, September 15, 1946). He likely conceived his second novel already in spring of 1943. In May, the publisher requested a ration slip for the purpose of procuring a travel typewriter for Eisen, who was going on a research trip to Ukraine for a “politically important” “novel about the Ostland [...] in the very near future” (Korth to Wirtschaftsamt München, May 11, 1943; cf. Eisen to RSK, 13 July 1943). However, Eisen did not receive the necessary certificate from the Reichsschrifttumskammer until July 30 (Certificate, July 30, 1943).

By late summer of that year, when Eisen presumably traveled to German-occupied Ukraine, the Wehrmacht had been forced to retreat from previously captured Soviet territories to Ukraine in the wake of the Red Army’s offensive after the crushing defeat at Stalingrad (see Fig. 3). As the “granary of Europe,” Ukraine was of great importance for the food supply of the Wehrmacht and the Reich, but it was also a core element of German plans for the East. With the invasion of the Soviet Union, Hitler and the Nazi leadership pursued one of their main goals: the seizure of “Lebensraum im Osten” (living space in the East). Eastern Europe was to absorb the German “surplus population” through long-term colonization, and to be developed as an agricultural food base for the German Reich (Hitler 1936, 206; Hitler [1925–1926] 2016, vol. 2, 316). This development had already begun directly behind the advancing Eastern Front. For this purpose, so-called “Agricultural Special Leaders” (landwirtschaftliche Sonderführer) were appointed, who were responsible for securing, rebuilding and administering agricultural production as well as requisitioning agricultural products (Hasenclever 2009, 151–156; see Figs. 4 and 5).

For the period after the war, plans for Eastern Europe called for a new settlement and economic structure under the banner of a “racial reorganization.” This included the expulsion or extermination of 80 million people in the western Soviet Union (Müller 2000, 311). The territory extending to the Urals was to be permanently secured by the settlement of Germanic “Wehrbauern”—that is, by armed soldier-farmers (Förster 1983, 1071–1072; Heydecker and Leeb 2015, 665–666). Part of the policy of extermination associated with this settlement plan was implemented in the course of the invasion and occupation by SS and police units in cooperation with the Wehrmacht and local Auxiliary forces. The mass killings carried out with the aim of eradicating “Jewish Bolshevism” primarily targeted the Soviet ruling elite and the Jewish population considered to be their racial roots; the Slavic populations were subjugated, exploited and left to be decimated by starvation. (Pohl 2022, § 5).

In order to supply the Wehrmacht during the war and to avoid a “collapse of the home front” due to hardship and hunger—which Hitler and the generals believed to have been the cause of the defeat in 1918—Hitler and the Nazi leadership relied on merciless exploitation of the food resources of the conquered Soviet

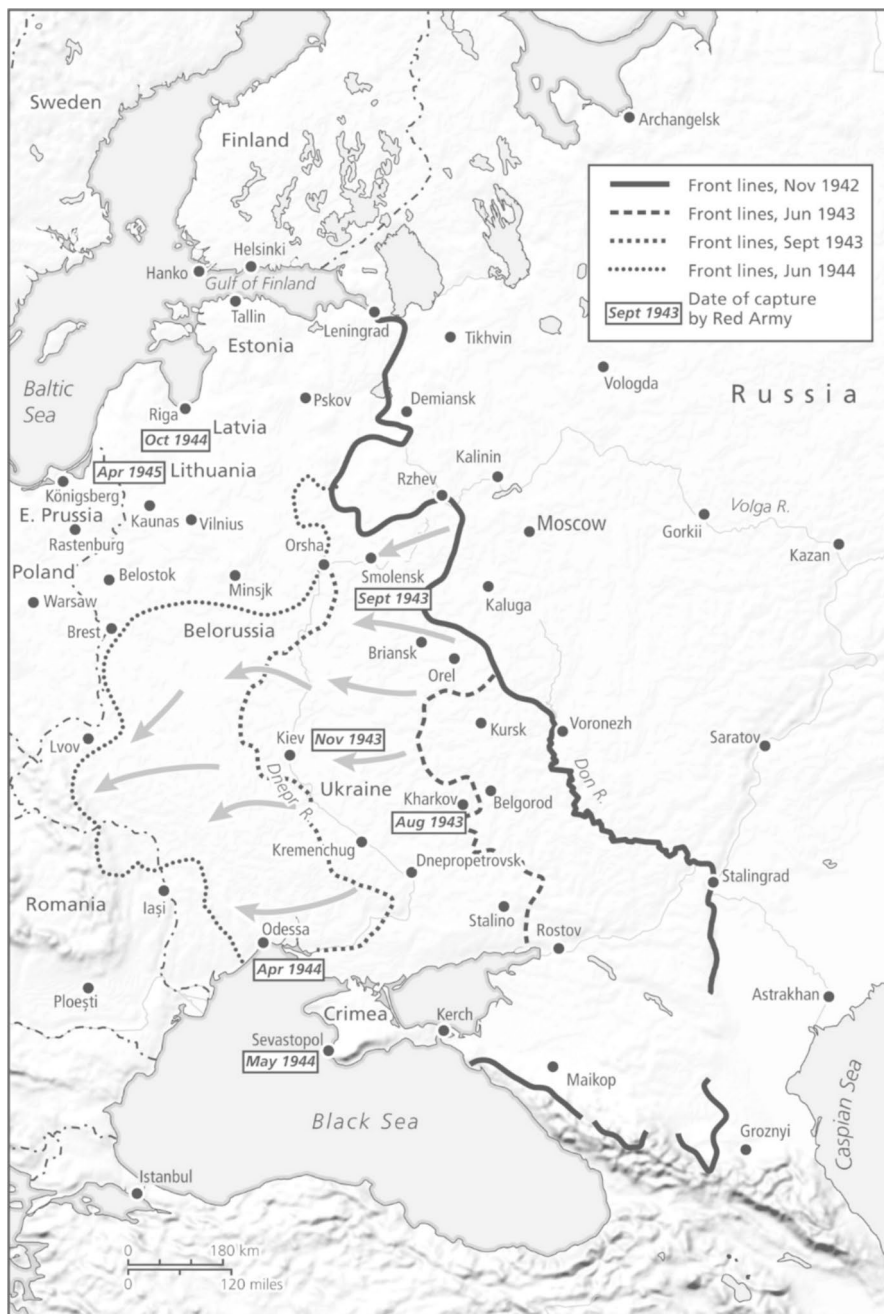


Fig. 3 Soviet–German frontline, 1943–1944. (Source: Ferris, John, and Evan Mawdsley, eds. *The Cambridge History of the Second World War*. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, map 12.2.)



Fig. 4 German special leader supervises the harvest, July 1942 (Scherl/Süddeutsche Zeitung Photo)



Fig. 5 Harvest in Ukraine under German occupation, September 11, 1943 (propaganda picture). Original caption: “The last harvest is brought in. Supported by our strong front, the last harvest is brought in on the fields of Ukraine. On the nearby tarmac again goes back a transport with prisoners.” (akg-images / Fotoarchiv für Zeitgeschichte)

territories, especially in Ukraine (Streit 2020, 142–143). A planning memo of the Wirtschaftsstab Ost dated May 2, 1941 states: “The war can only be continued if the entire Wehrmacht is fed from Russia in the third year of the war. Tens of millions of people will undoubtedly starve to death if we take what we need from the country” (Nuremberg Document 2718-PS, cited in Streit 2020, 144). To increase agricultural production, more than 10,000 agricultural leaders were to be deployed to the black soil zone to “begin a production battle adapted to the circumstances” (Nuremberg Doc. 126-EC, cited in Streit 2020, 144). In his “12 Commandments for Agricultural Leaders” of June 1, 1941, Herbert Backe, State Secretary in the Reich Ministry of Food and Agriculture, formulated the following guideline:

Be firm and, if necessary, hard on the subjugated. [...] Do not apply German standards and habits, forget everything about Germany except Germany itself. Above all, do not become soft and sentimental. [...] The Russian man has endured poverty, hunger and frugality for centuries. His stomach is elastic, therefore no false pity.” (Cited in Ueberschär and Wette 1991, 32628)

Despite numerous memoranda which, in view of the military situation, called for a provisional departure from this policy of Germanization, better treatment of and increased cooperation with the local population, who would one day be needed to supply labor and as auxiliary troops for the Wehrmacht, the Nazi leadership held to the course it had set. The implementation of this strategy of exploitation led to increasing resistance on the part of the Ukrainian civilian population, many of whom initially sympathized with the Germans, while at the same time the occupiers failed to create a functioning organization and administration (Müller 2000, 330–332). Under these conditions, the Soviet partisans received increasing support. While the first year of the war had been devastating for the partisan movement—also because of the lack of support among the population—it managed to cause the occupying forces enormous difficulties in the years 1942–1943 (Gogun 2016, 36–37, 104–109). The fight against the partisan groups was in turn directly linked to the genocidal policy targeting the region’s Jewish population, whom the Nazi’s imagined to be the base of “Bolshevism.” The civilian population suffered most from the German occupiers’ “pacification operations,” as they were constantly subjected to brutal attacks and collective retaliation—from both sides—in the course of what was officially called a “fight against the gangs (Bandenbekämpfung)” (Pohl 2008, 283–298; Gogun 2016, 104–109).

This is the background for Eisen’s novel. According to Payr, the chief editor, its main content was the “agricultural development of fertile space for the Reich and Europe” that was pursued between the summer of 1941 and the spring of 1942 during the “German land seizure in the East” (Payr, report dated May 22, 1944, cited in Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 3).

The hero of the novel is Götz Burglinger, a Swabian and the editor of an agricultural weekly paper who, despite having lost a leg in World War I, volunteers to go to the East as a Special Agricultural Leader (landwirtschaftlicher Sonderführer). He is deployed in Ukraine and proves his mettle wherever decisive action is required: both in organizing agricultural rebuilding in the

area assigned to him and in fighting gangs, in leading and influencing the local population, whom he largely wins over for cooperation, and in unmasking spies, but above all as a born leader, master of the art of improvisation and exemplary comrade among comrades. He dies at last, after being awarded the Knight's Cross of the *Kriegsverdienstkreuz* (War Merit Cross) for his extraordinary accomplishments, as a result of a severe affliction brought on by his relentless efforts." (Payr, report dated May 22, 1944, cited in Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 2)

According to Payr's report, it appears to have been a work that succeeded in combining gripping entertainment with "consistent National Socialism" thanks to "Eisen's captivating talent for representation" (Payr, report dated May 22, 1944, cited in Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 2). For Eisen's editor, Schworm, the novel was not only a "standard National Socialist work," but also a "last rousing of souls" that was important for the war and that could "no longer be withheld from the German reading public" (Schworm in a first report, cited in Klähn to Amann, November 13, 1944, 1).

Censorship Dispute and Publication Question

The Eher editor's insistence testifies to a lengthy review process. In 1944, when Eisen's novel was to be published, and before a book could appear in the party publishing house, it first had to be submitted to the *Zentrallektorat* headed by Bernhard Payr. Payr's report, dated May 22, 1944, corresponds largely with the positive assessment of the Eher editor Karl Schworm. For both, the special value of the book lay in the courage and uncompromisingness of the author in dealing with his subject, especially in the "criticism of abuses that tend to creep in and spread here and there in the administration of a rear-guard military zone" (Payr, report dated May 22, 1944, cited in Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 2–3). In his first report, Schworm had already signaled to the publishing director Amann that the book would "in some respects cause a stir" (self-quotation in Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 9).

And it did cause a stir, namely in the High Command of the Wehrmacht. Under the pressure of the increasingly grim military situation in the course of 1943, the Party Chancellery attempted to subject the Wehrmacht to increased political-ideological control and indoctrination by appointing Nazi leadership officers (Kunz 2007, 117). To this end, a Nazi leadership staff (*NS-Führungsstab*) was created in February 1944 in the *Oberkommando* of the Wehrmacht, whose department 2 was responsible, in addition to instructional planning and the organization of speakers, for the creation and review of National Socialist literature (Order from Keitel, June 1, 1944). The department, headed by SA-Oberführer and writer Major Friedrich Joachim Klähn (Graff 1956, 265–66), had received the typescript for review together with an initial letter (which has not survived) from the Eher editor Schworm in late summer or fall of 1944. In his report, Klähn also conceded that the work's fundamental stance was ideologically compliant: "The design of the book" grew out of a "National Socialist spirit" and the author conveys "a political worldview with

passion.” The intention of the book, he says, is “to hold up a mirror to the homeland in order to spur it onwards to the utmost efforts in the face of the image of deprivation ‘out there’”—but this was done “in an unfortunate way” (Klähn to Amann, November 13, 1944, 2).

Klähn’s criticism refers above all to the portrayal of the acting special leaders and officers and to the description of the conditions behind the front. Eisen is said to combine the criticism of the officers in the novel, which Schworm had explicitly praised as a “declaration of war” against the “pernicious undercurrents” in the Wehrmacht (cited in Klähn to Amann, November 13, 1944, 3), with “no uplifting tendency whatsoever”, but to indulge “merely in disparagement” (Klähn to Amann, November 13, 1944, 3–4). Instead of “offering a beneficial contrast between the National Socialist fighting spirit and the lack of political insight,” the author almost without exception turned “the officers into completely apolitical caricatures” (Klähn to Amann, November 13, 1944, 3–4). Thus a first lieutenant was described as “‘a mixture of stable and bar’!! (p. 65)” and a major is depicted “yelling so unrestrainedly ‘that he turned bright red and was forced to pause for breath for lack of air’” (Klähn to Amann, November 13, 1944, 3).

The Wehrmacht censor also disapproved of “the moral qualities of the Sonderführer representing Germany,” whose main traits appeared to be their sex drive and corruption. “Even in times of basic struggle for survival,” the Sonderführer’s “imagination was still preoccupied with ‘Schweinerei’ (p. 691)” (Klähn to Amann, November 13, 1944, 5). And “the statement that ‘stealing’ (not, for instance, ‘organizing’ or the like) has a ‘special attraction’ for Sonderführer” was “detrimental to the German reputation.” (Klähn to Amann, November 13, 1944, 6). According to Klähn, the true-to-life, but not exactly favorable characterization of the Special Agricultural Leaders in “contrast” to the novel’s hero Burglinger, who is conceived as a role model, gives “only the impression that the German people do not possess the human material necessary to accomplish this great task” (Klähn to Amann, November 13, 1944, 2).

While Payr and Schworm had praised the novel as a “courageous book” primarily because of its “criticism of abuses” (Payr cited in Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 3), it was precisely those descriptions of the conditions in the army’s rear guard that received the harshest rebuke from Klähn. It is scenes like the following, which point to moral coarseness and war crimes committed by Wehrmacht officers in the course of the fight against partisans, that earned the author the gravest accusation. According to the censor, the author repeatedly undertook “to portray the German officers in the light of their inhumanity towards the Ukrainian population (S. 264/273).”

German officers show themselves to be “reckless, heartless, and unjust” by planning to shoot 70 innocent women and adolescent boys! The hero of the novel must first make clear to these “embarrassingly disconcerted” German officers the criminal nature of their plan and enjoys the triumph of having saved innocent Russians from the German shooting frenzy.

Such depictions, which are indeed astonishing for a Nazi war novel in 1944, had to be suppressed from the point of view of the Wehrmacht censors, because

they “rendered assistance for enemy agitation” (Klähn to Amann, November 13, 1944, 4). The excesses, which Eisen’s novel described with an almost naïve realism in order to emphasize the ideal of the honorable German soldier in its main character, were not allowed to be addressed under any circumstances as they provided an opportunity to confirm the criminal character of German warfare, which had long since become notorious in foreign media and through oral reports (Dörner 2007, 93–134).

On December 3, 1944, Eisen’s editor responded to the scathing verdict of the military censor with a detailed statement on behalf of Amann, in which he defended the book, which had been “mercilessly torn to shreds” (Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 9), against what he saw as a “truly hair-raising condemnation” and a “blatant error of judgment” (Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 8). He accused Klähn of deliberately judging individual passages selectively and thereby suppressing the positive through abbreviation. Thus, the portrayal of human shortcomings such as the selfishness of the officers would have had the very purpose of opposing them with the selfless heroism of the protagonist in order to combat the harmful tendencies (Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 6–7).

Schworm responded to the accusations of treason, which referred to the above-mentioned depiction of attempted German war crimes, by explaining the context of the criticized passage:

Members of the population who had been captured in company with snipers were to be shot. Since young women and some older boys were among these Ukrainians, Burglinger advocated for them to the leadership of the troop:

Schworm did not see this as treason, “but at most as a testimony to a humane attitude characteristic of the German people, which in this case perhaps did a little too much of a good thing” (Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 8).

While the military censors saw such descriptions in terms of their potential effect of providing material for enemy propaganda, Schworm’s defense pointed to the author’s intention, namely, to show with this scene the “humane disposition” of the Germans despite the tendency towards brutalization inherent in war. When the novel’s hero advocates more humane treatment in the interest of engaging the civilian population in the fight against “Bolshevism,” this contradicted the policy of exploitation and extermination implemented by Hitler and the Nazi leadership. In Eisen’s novel, the war of extermination is thus latently present.

These kinds of attacks and shootings against the civilian population in the rear areas of the army were indeed the order of the day and were not just reprisals against partisans, but rather were connected to large-scale mass executions, mostly of Soviet Jews. Members of the occupation administration and Wehrmacht soldiers, some of whom were directly involved themselves, were well aware of these events. News of the horrendous events in the East also reached families in hints via field post or during visits home, so that at least a vague knowledge of systematic mass murder spread among the German population. (Dörner 2007, esp. 93–134). Among the troops and members of the occupation administration, there were at times fierce protests against the brutal actions against the Soviet civilian population, which the party

and the hardliners in the Wehrmacht fended off and defamed as “sentimentalism” and “subversion” with the argument that the terrorist partisan attacks made “ruthless action” necessary (examples in Hasenclever 2009, S. 359–456). The regime sought to demonstrate unity and firmness to the outside world and to counter the spreading news of German crimes in the East with anti-Bolshevik counter-propaganda, in which (as in the Katyn campaign in April/May 1943) public attention was to be diverted by the media to the mass crimes of the other side, in order to make the German population aware of what to expect in the event of defeat (Fox 1982, 467–469). The regime’s attempts to suppress the internal conflicts and protests, including by force, were widely unsuccessful, as the murderous actions in the East were considered by many – even by staunch National Socialists such as Heinrich Eisen – to be “un-German” per se and detrimental to the Wehrmacht’s reputation (examples in Hasenclever 2009, 543–46; Dörner 2007, 467–68).

And if the author processes the horror of what he probably learned on his trip to Ukraine in the novel in the sense of a criticism (also expressed by other members of the Wehrmacht and occupation forces) of the way the war and occupation were conducted, the dimension of mass extermination is nonetheless omitted. Instead, the attempted murder of civilians (averted by the novel’s protagonist) appears as an excessive reaction inscribed in the escalatory logic of violence of war provoked by the ruthless warfare of the other side, and which the German soldier is meant to be able to resist: No matter how cruel the enemy is, the admonishing message goes, “we remain German” (Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 8).

The accusation of treason made by the Wehrmacht censorship regarding this episode seemed to Schworm to be a “monstrosity” that deserved “the severest rebuke and reprimand” (Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 4–5). Schworm was stunned by the fact that this “uncomradely attack” (Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 5) came from Klähn in particular, whom he had always benevolently supported as an editor (despite his stylistically inadequate manuscripts) and defended against censorship (Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 4–5), which is why Schworm suspects that he was covering up for the actual author with his name (Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 1). As the person responsible, Klähn, with “servile willingness”, made himself a “henchman of the narrow-mindedness [...] against whose intolerance he himself had to fight long enough in the case of his ‘Soldaten-Kameraden’ booklet ‘Timm, der Tolpatsch’” (Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 1). (The soldiers’ short story from World War I, published in 1939 in the Eher-Feldpost series,¹⁵ was objected to in November 1941 by the Reichsbund der Deutschen Beamten (RDB) because of its disparagement of Wehrmacht officers—Klähn portrays the figure of the paymaster “as a ridiculous coward”—and subsequently withdrawn by the author (Reichsbund der Deutschen Beamten to the OKW, November 12, 1941); in 1943, the story was then published in a version without the offending passage).

To reinforce the defense of his author, Schworm then went on the counterattack against the Wehrmacht censorship. In his letter to Amann, he questioned the

¹⁵ Reprinted during the war in many editions totaling 210,000 copies, Klähn’s story *Timm der Tolpatsch* (1938) was one of the most successful titles in Eher Verlag’s Feldpost series.

censorship office's judgement generally by contrasting the harshness with which it judged Eisen's novel with the inconsistencies and ideological laxity with which, as late as 1944, it had allowed a "descent of Jews, or at least a friend of the Jews" and an "enemy of the National Socialist movement" like Walter von Molo to be published (Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 10). However, neither by disavowing Wehrmacht censorship nor by doggedly defending his author did Schworm succeed in getting Eisen's book published.

The main reason for this seems to have been the extra-literary reality. Eisen's *Wehrbauer* novel tells of the invasion and occupation of Ukraine in the summer of 1941 until the repelling of the Soviet winter offensive in 1941–1942. At the time the novel was written, in the spring and summer of 1943, the war situation had changed decisively since the German defeat at Stalingrad (see Fig. 1). By the end of March, the Red Army had recaptured all the territory that the Wehrmacht had taken the previous year. When Eisen, in late summer or fall, possibly undertook his study tour, Ukraine was only still barely held by the Wehrmacht. And by November 1943, the Red Army had succeeded in liberating the eastern half of Ukraine. During the winter of 1943–44, it also regained control of western Ukraine. Thus, while Eisen had begun his novel under the impression of the vastness of the conquered "Ostraum," the efforts made in the following year to publish the book took place under the least favorable conditions. The opening of a second Allied front in the West on June 6, 1944 was followed in the same month by the collapse of the Central Heeresgruppe in the course of the major Soviet offensive. As a result, German troops were pushed back to the border of East Prussia by late summer.

It was probably this desperate military situation, as well as the Nazi leadership's heightened, even paranoid literary scrutiny following the July 20 assassination attempt, that contributed decisively to the refusal to publish Eisen's novel. In his report in May 1944, Payr had already given consideration to postponing the publication "until the future developments in the East become clearer and more tangible." He had justified this on the basis of the novel's potential psychological effect: "Thus, at the moment when we have had to vacate these territories, which have cost so much German blood and sweat, reading the book evokes the most painful feelings in every German person" (Payr cited in Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 3). Klähn concurred when saying that the "painful memory" of the lost eastern territories must make German readers "feel the momentary setbacks particularly strongly" (Klähn to Amann, November 13, 1944, 1).

Schworm, on the other hand, claimed a significance for the novel that transcended the moment as part of German history: "Steps backwards," he argued, could "take nothing away from the importance of the events in the East." It would be unjust to condemn Eisen "to silence, simply because the setting of his book is no longer in our hands" (Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 3–4). In order not to jeopardize the publication of the novel, Schworm nevertheless showed himself willing to make concessions to the Wehrmacht censors by offering for Amann to lobby "the author for the softening or deletion of some of the sharper passages" (Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 9). The letter concludes with an appeal "to the common sense of the old soldier and National Socialist" to convince himself of the "value of the book" by reading it (Schworm to Amann, December 3, 1944, 11).

Because there are no surviving sources on Amann's handling of the case, it is impossible to determine whether the publishing director, called upon by Schworm to act as a final authority, decided the case at all and what motives he might have had in doing so. In view of the appraisals, however, it can be assumed that the publishing director, confronted with Schworm's urgings, Payr's concerns and Klähn's objections, refused to publish the novel, which was apparently no longer persuasive for propaganda at that time.

Conclusion

Several observations can be made and several conclusions can be drawn from this case of censorship with regard to research on Nazi literature and propaganda policy. First, it is astonishing that at the end of 1944, amid a military situation that had become catastrophic for the German Reich with the eastern front heading towards collapse, such an extensive and petty dispute about literature could still take place. The fierce seriousness with which the dispute was fought, however, shows the regime's conviction that the printed word could have a great influence and explains why not only literature distant to the regime, but also the National Socialist production of propaganda literature was subjected to strict censorship early on (and even more so during the war). And the more critical and threatening the situation became for the regime itself, the greater the internal tensions and conflicts, and the more the support of the demoralized population threatened to wane, the more this control was extended and tightened—parallel to propaganda activity. This provides an explanation of how the novel of a Nazi author, who had already successfully proven his literary–propagandistic abilities, was of interest as a “militarily important” project within the scope of the party's propaganda efforts, but at the same time also had to be considered with regard to its functionality and potential impact in terms of supporting the war effort. This demonstrates the fundamental intertwining of censorship and propaganda, of controlling and directing opinion.

Another surprising aspect of the case is how differently, and with how little consensus, the authorities involved—the editor of Eher (Schworm) and the central editorial office (Payr) on the one hand and the censorship department of the OKW (Klähn) on the other—assessed the same text, and how inefficiently the censorship process, which dragged on for many months and was only concluded by the decision of the powerful Reichsleiter and publishing director Amann, was organized. The lack of agreement can be explained by the fact that the publishing house editor and the Wehrmacht censor represented divergent interests corresponding to their different functions who therefore based their assessment on different points of view, which are expressed quite clearly in the review reports sent to Amann; at the same time, the competition between party publishers and the Wehrmacht in literary policy and the book market may also have played a role here. While Schworm, as the supervising editor, emphasized (as Payr had) above all the readerly qualities and the ideological–moral value of the text, the assessment of the Wehrmacht censor was determined primarily by military–propagandistic considerations external to the text and in connection to the altered circumstances of the war. The decisive factors

here were not ideological and literary criteria, but the desired portrayal of the ongoing war and reader–psychological effects. Above all, Eisen’s depiction of attacks on the civilian population and corruption (which the Eher editors emphasize as “courageous” criticism) did not fit in with the propaganda narrative of the chivalrous struggle of an unimpeachable Wehrmacht.

Under the conditions of the “Total War” in 1944, the situational and functional evaluative perspective of tightened military censorship was given precedence over the text-centered evaluative mode of the publisher’s editor. This shows how the censorship requirements for Nazi literature changed with the war. With the establishing of Wehrmacht censorship, the focus shifted from the unadulterated reproduction of “invariable” political and ideological content (as was still the case during the regime’s “peace period”) to a form of review adapted to the situationally variable communication requirements of the war, which focused entirely on the war-promoting effect and (especially after the attempted coup of July 20) sought to suppress any statements that potentially endangered support for the war as “corrosive” and “defeatist.”

The disagreement over the book’s publication exemplifies not least how contradictory and incoherent censorship under the Nazi dictatorship could be, even in the case of decidedly National Socialist literature in the middle of the war. Although the acts of censorship conducted by the respective authorities were largely consistent in themselves, the lack of cooperation between the individual entities resulted in an inefficiency and slowness which, in the case examined here, led to even “war-important” National Socialist literary production being hampered and restricted. As the publication projects had to undergo multiple checks carried out by different agencies, but at the same time there were no clearly regulated decision-making powers and a lack of a uniform censorship policy, publication decisions had to be negotiated time and again (Haefs 2023, 15–16). This, too, confirms what scholarship (and Barbian in particular) has described regarding the polycratic character of the system (Barbian 1995, esp. 840–844). Despite its increasing power over literary life, at no point did the regime succeed in establishing uniform and total control of literary activity. Led by power-hungry party officials on the basis of unclearly defined competencies and overlapping claims of control, these agencies formed a disparate, polycratic literary bureaucracy that was characterized by changing power constellations over time, but (despite Goebbels’ initial efforts at centralization) had no coordinating center. For the practice of censorship, this meant that officials often acted inconsistently and without plan, or even became entangled in protracted conflicts over trivial aspects that in some cases (as the one of the war book *Narvik*) were only resolved by a “decision of the Führer” (case documented in Friedländer et al. 2007, 435–440).

As can be concluded from the case examined here, war propaganda literature seems to have been subject to particularly rigid communication controls from the outset, due to the effect on public opinion expected of it. In general, the production of literature relating to the ongoing war, especially fictional literature, was restricted by the Ministry of Propaganda via the Reichsschrifttumskammer (Reich Chamber of Literature) to prevent a proliferation that would be difficult to control. The production of war literature, although economically profitable, was quite risky for publishers, who had to fear complaints and bans from unpredictable

censors. Eisen's *Die verlorene Kompanie* was probably the first (and seemingly only) novel within war literature to be an exception in this respect, probably due to the privileged position of the Central Party Publishing House. Nevertheless, the status of such literary propaganda production during the war was precarious, as the present case of Eisen's second book illustrates: a novel that explicitly refers to an ongoing war makes its being used as war propaganda entirely dependent on military-political developments, and on the communicative requirements that follow from them. In the case of the second novel, which is set in German-occupied Ukraine, it was the reference to extra-literary reality inherent in the propagandistic relation to the ongoing war that made the novel's fictionality precarious. Thus, the question of publishing such propaganda literature, which is primarily aimed at extra-literary effect, is fundamentally subject to a situational calculus of the novel's potential utility value. And in the case of Eisen's "Ostraum" novel, the propagandistic function was no longer opportune considering the fundamentally changed reality. In this case, the fictionalization of the ongoing events of the war as a means of influencing these events was outpaced by the reality to which it referred. Propaganda fiction, once it can no longer be reconciled with a changed reality, forfeits its plausibility as a tool to influence the course of that reality.

Due not only to the radically changed war situation, but also to the criticism of the developments behind the front in the East and at home, Eisen's *Wehrbauer* novel was at odds with the propaganda goals of the regime, which during the "final battle" did everything possible to divert attention from its own crimes with aggressive anti-Bolshevik counter-propaganda focused on demonizing and dehumanizing the enemy and mobilizing the population's fear of the "Asian hordes." Although the novel, from an ideological point of view, may appear to be a "standard National Socialist work" aimed at the "last stirring up of souls" (Schworm), its value for the propaganda of perseverance must have seemed doubtful, if not counterproductive.

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