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**DER SOZIOKRIMINALROMAN:  
EIN NEUES GENRE ODER EIN SOZIOLOGISCHES  
EXPERIMENT?**

Eine Untersuchung des Soziokriminalromans anhand der Werke der  
schwedischen Autoren, Maj Sjöwall und Per Wahlöö, und des deutschen  
Autors, -ky.

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2.7.1.9	<i>Polismördaren (Der Polizistenmörder, 1974)</i> .....	124
2.7.1.10	<i>Terroristerna (Die Terroristen, 1975)</i> .....	129
2.8	Zusammenfassung.....	133
<b>3</b>	<b>-ky ALIAS HORST BOSETZKY .....</b>	<b>138</b>
3.1	Der Autor hinter dem Kürzel -ky .....	139
3.2	Zwischen Tradition und Innovation. -kys Grundeinstellung zum Soziokriminalroman.....	143
3.3	Abweichung von den traditionellen Strukturelementen.....	146
3.4	Auswahl der Romane .....	148
3.5	Erzählperspektive: Zeugen der Gesellschaft selbst.....	151
3.6	Berlin und Bramme, Modelle der deutschen Gesellschaft.....	155
3.6.1	Bramme .....	156
3.6.2	Berlin.....	164
3.7	-kys Detektive - Kämena in Bramme, Mannhardt in Berlin .....	171
3.7.1	Detektivfiguren .....	171
3.7.2	Oberkommissar Kämena .....	173
3.7.3	(Ober)Kommissar Hans-Jürgen Mannhardt.....	179
3.8	Inhaltsangabe und kurze Erläuterung der ausgewählten Romane .....	186
3.8.1	Die Bramme-Romane.....	187
3.8.1.1	<i>Stör die feinen Leute nicht (1973)</i> .....	187
3.8.1.2	<i>Kein Reihenhaush für Robin Hood (1979)</i> .....	189
3.8.2	Die Berlin-Romane .....	192

3.8.2.1	<i>Feuer für den Großen Drachen (1982)</i> .....	192
3.8.2.2	<i>Ich wollte, es wäre Nacht (1991)</i> .....	195
3.8.2.3	<i>Unfassbar für uns alle (1995)</i> .....	200
3.9	Opfer und Täter .....	202
3.9.1	Die Opfer.....	206
3.9.2	Die Täter.....	223
3.10	Gesellschaftsdarstellung in -kys Kriminalromanen .....	232
3.10.1	Hindernisse im Wege des neuen demokratischen Systems in Deutschland .....	232
3.10.2	Macht und Geld.....	233
3.10.3	Absage an die moralischen Werte.....	238
<b>4</b>	<b>LITERARISCHE VERSUS SOZIOLOGISCHE WERTKRITERIEN ...</b>	<b>242</b>
4.1	Der Soziokrimi im Banne der Trivialliteratur.....	242
4.1.1	Plädoyer für die Umwertung literarischer Werte.....	243
4.1.2	Soziologische Wertkriterien – Kommunikation - Rezeption.....	245
4.2	Die Rolle der Vermittlung im Soziokriminalroman .....	249
<b>5</b>	<b>ZUSAMMENFASSENDE SCHLUßBEMERKUNGEN .....</b>	<b>256</b>
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHIE .....</b>	<b>261</b>
1.1	Kriminalromane von Sjöwall/Wahlöö .....	261
1.2	Kriminalromane von -ky .....	262
1.3	Sekundärliteratur .....	262

ANHANG ..... 276

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis describes the emergence of the socio-crime-novel (*Soziokriminalroman*) in Germany in the late 1960s. The purpose of the textually based research is to determine what changes were made by the Swedish authors, Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö, precursors of the German socio-crime-novel, and by -ky, father of the German *Soziokrimi*, to the structure of the traditional detective-story, and to evaluate the validity of the claim of the socio-crime-novel writers, that they had created a new genre, which could not be adequately judged by the traditional aesthetically based criteria, and therefore necessitated a re-definition of literary values.

Crime fiction has had a long tradition in Anglo-Saxon countries and has formed an integral part of literary criticism. In Germany, on the other hand, the popularity the genre enjoyed among the general public was not reflected in the scant attention given it by German literary critics. A change in attitude, or rather in cultural values, was brought about in the late sixties, mainly due to the student uprising and the influence of left-wing theorists, who accused the critics of elitism.

It is generally accepted that the Swedish authors, Sjöwall/Wahlöö, were the forerunners of the German socio-crime-novel.<sup>1</sup> A close analysis of their ten-volume cycle, which covered the period from 1965 to 1975, revealed that the influence was restricted to the transformation of the crime-novel into a vehicle for social criticism. The fundamental difference lay in the dominance of Marxist philosophy, both in the critical content and in the structural form of the cycle. Their cycle follows Marx's

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<sup>1</sup> P. Nusser, "Kritik des neuen deutschen Kriminalromans", in: K. Ermert, W. Gast (Hrsg.), *Der neue deutsche Kriminalroman. Beiträge zur Darstellung, Interpretation und Kritik eines populären Genres*, Rehbürg-Loaccum 1985, S. 20. "An dem von Sjöwall/Wahlöö erreichten gedanklichen und künstlerischen Niveau müssen sich deutsche Autoren, die diesen Aspekt betonen, messen lassen." G. Waldmann, "Der Kriminalroman als Gefahr und kritisches Potential", in: ebd., S. 61. "Zum Beispiel Maj Sjöwall/Per Wahlöö oder auch Leonardo Sciascia haben solche kritischen Romane vorgelegt. Und der neue deutsche Kriminalroman, wie er heute u.a. durch Thomas Andresen, Fred Breinersdorfer, Richard Hey, -ky, Michael Molsner, Irene Rodrian, Lydia Tews, Friedhelm Werremeier vertreten ist, ist gerade diejenige Literatursparte, die [...] gesellschaftliche und gesellschaftskritische Absichten verfolgt."

concept of the dialectical progression of history, whereby the change from a capitalist society to a communist society is allegedly pre-determined. Sjöwall/Wahlöö examine the Swedish society and show their readers how the well-being of the general population is being increasingly undermined by the destructive effects of capitalism. Throughout the cycle they gradually increase their stinging attacks on the Swedish government, whom they hold responsible for the deterioration of society and consequent increase in crime. By the tenth novel crime is all-embracing. Sjöwall/Wahlöö show the State in total disarray, on the verge of collapse. They end their cycle with the word *Marx*, implying that the time has come in the dialectic process for the emergence of the communist social order.

-ky, alias Horst Bosetzky, sociologist and self-proclaimed father of the socio-crime-novel in Germany<sup>2</sup>, differs markedly from Sjöwall/Wahlöö both in the structure of his novels and in the philosophy reflected in his social criticism. Within the modified framework of the traditional detective-story, -ky creates two models, one of a small, rural town (Bramme) and one of Berlin, together representative of Germany's political and social landscape. The models provide the basic structure, within which -ky presents his sociological case-studies of German society. Bramme, a fictitious town, represents the clearly defined social order of a typical small town in Germany, where a conservative, fascist and authoritarian mentality, resistant to change, prevails. Berlin, on the other hand, is a unique phenomenon in post-war Germany, mainly due to its exceptional political status and geographical location before unification, and as such a focal point for political, social and cultural tensions. The progressive elements are constantly undermined and disrupted by what -ky describes as the fascist mentality, fostered by a megalomaniacal criminal and his henchmen, which prevents positive interaction between the diverse groups that make up the society as a whole.

In his crime novels, -ky exposes a German society, driven by power-hungry, materialistic self-interest and dominated by a rampant form of capitalism, that threatens to overpower the democratic principles of the State.

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<sup>2</sup> "Ich gelte ja als Erfinder und Begründer des Soziokrimis." -ky, Interview mit -ky, Anhang dieser Arbeit.

Whereas Sjöwall/Wahlöö's social analysis led to the conclusion, that a communist overthrow of the State – the source of all evil – was the only inevitable answer, -ky's work is an appeal to each and every individual in German society to support the democratic principles of the State and to assume the responsibilities of a democratic citizen towards society as a whole and towards all fellow-citizens.

-ky's socio-crime-novels show that serious social analysis can be combined effectively with the elements of entertainment and suspense of the traditional detective-story, and that the "new" genre is a viable literary form to reflect and inform society.

From the sociological point of view, which emphasises the reception of literature rather than the aesthetic quality in the present-day environment, the authors of the socio-crime-novel argue that the traditional literary criteria used to evaluate popular literature are not sufficiently differentiated to do justice to the new genre and need to be modified accordingly.