



Daniel Half Human

Books Reviewed:

[Daniel Half Human](#) [1]

Issue:

[153](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Geoff Fox](#) [3]

Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

Many of the most moving books for young readers about WWII have originated in Germany; their focus is not only on the war, but also on the intensifying assault throughout the 1930s upon the Jewish race. Here, Daniel and his friend Armin are eager to join the Hitler Youth - drawn by the comradeship, the uniform, the marches through the streets singing martial songs, even the excitement of nocturnal sorties to daub swastikas on walls. And then, Daniel discovers that his own mother is Jewish. The boys' stories unfold throughout the approach to war and take a final surprisingly harsh twist when the two meet again in June, 1945. The content of **Daniel Half Human** is strong meat indeed. The detail of the racist lessons the boys are taught at the gymnasium, for example, in pre-war Hamburg might well absorb and disturb young readers with a reflective interest in war and human rights in general. The violence of thought and action, culminating in Kristallnacht, is graphic but not sensationalised. The divisions Hitler's policy drove between friends and within families are sharply plotted. And, perhaps because of its German authorship, there is a largely convincing otherness of period, place and culture (though a writer for young readers ought to know that substitution from the bench in soccer was a much later innovation). Yet the book is too frequently diminished by an awkwardness in translation. It surely will not do to offer, as dialogue, a sentence such as 'The Nazis are the snows of yesteryear'; or to translate literally an idiomatic phrase (presumably) as 'Let's not paint the devil on the wall'; and 'Umpires' have no place on a soccer pitch. The book reaches its British publication via the States, so there are occasional oddities such as 'You'd be amazed who all is in the Party' and OED gives 'tuckered out' as a mid-19th-century New England colloquialism. These are quibbles, perhaps, but such quirks tend to break a reader's engagement with the pre-war Nazi world; which is a pity, since tighter desk editing would have made this an even more provocative novel.

Running Order:

10

Source URL (retrieved on *Jul '20*): <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/153/childrens-books/reviews/daniel-half-human>

Links:

[1] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/daniel-half-human>

[2] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/153>

[3] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/geoff-fox>