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Whose German Literature? GDR-Literature, German Literature and the Question of National Identity

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silence rather than speech.

In terms of re-periodization, the refusal to speak within or even against "the" discourse--Christoph Hein's *Der fremde Freund* and Helga Königsdorf's *Respektloser Umgang* are further examples--signals the end of the wall before the end of the wall. More than just a break with official ideology, it marks the way that within the cultural sphere we begin to get a reorienting of discursive identity as a move toward the end of separatism. This is not to argue for convergence or against the importance of historical experience. It is merely to relocate the historical question within the sphere of textual articulation.

All of which brings me to a final emphasis. To undertake a re-contextualization of GDR literature demands that we return to that tradition with readings far more sensitive to its literary production as discursive practice rather than historical reflection. Whether we are looking at a socialist novel of the 1950s or a recent poem by Christa Moog--we are confronting linguistic organization as re-encoding, as survival, as rejection or as refusal to speak. And it is this re-contextualization through attention to varieties of discourse--our own as well as the metalanguages of a rapidly self-transforming Germany--which can help us generate more differentiated, indeed more historical readings in the years to come.

Notes

¹See Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1980).

²Lothar von Balleseck, *Dichter im Dienst* (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1963)

³See Jack Zipes, "Zur Dämmerung der amerikanischen Germanistik," *Diskussion Deutsch* 7 (1977), 84-103. Zipes reports that between 1945 and 1974 there appeared in *Monatshefte*, *German Quarterly*, and *Germanic Review*, the three leading American journals of *Germanistik*, nine articles dealing with GDR literature, four reports about the GDR and fifteen articles dealing with Brecht.

⁴Peter Demetz, "Galileo in East Berlin: Notes on the Drama in the DDR," *German Quarterly* 37 (1964), 239-245.

⁵Sigfrid Hoefert, "Der Nachhall finnischer Dichtung in der Lyrik J. Bobrowskis," *German Quarterly* 41 (1968), 220-230. Hoefert does not mention Bobrowski's role as a poet in the GDR.

⁶Cited in Theodore Huebner, *The Literature of East Germany* (New York: Friedrich Ungar Publishing Co., 1970), p. vii. Huebner's monograph was the first such work to appear on GDR literature in the USA.

⁷Marcel Reich-Ranicki, *Literarisches Leben in Deutschland* (Munich: Piper & Co., 1965); and *Deutsche Literatur in West und Ost* (Munich: Piper & Co., 1965).

⁸Peter Uwe Hohendahl und Patricia Herminghouse, *Literatur und Literaturtheorie in der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1976), p. 8.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰The first *Hauptseminare* in GDR literature were taught starting in 1970.

¹¹See John Flores' excellent monograph entitled *Poetry in East Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971) for the best example of this kind of approach.

¹²H.G. Hüttich, *Theater in the Planned Society. Contemporary Drama in the German Democratic Republic in its Historical, Political, and Cultural Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976).

¹³*Ibid.*, p. xxii-xxiii.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 112-113.

¹⁵See Helen Fehervary, "Enlightenment or Entanglement," *New German Critique* 8 (Spring, 1976); David Bathrick, "Affirmative and Negative Culture: The Avant-garde in the GDR," *Social Research* (Spring 1980).

¹⁶Sara Lennox and Helen Fehervary, "Introduction," *New German Critique* 13 (Winter 1978), 112.

¹⁷See Marilyn Sibley Fries (ed.), *Responses to Christa Wolf: Critical Essays* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990)

¹⁸The annual meeting of the GDR Symposium at Conway, New Hampshire has provided a focus on GDR literature which has been important for the continued treatment of GDR literature in the USA. Many of these papers have appeared in the annual publication entitled *Studies in GDR*

Culture and Society. Selected Papers from the New Hampshire Symposium on the German Democratic Republic, ed. by M. Gerber (Lanham/New York/London). In addition, annual meetings of the Modern Language Association (MLA) have also continued to include sessions of GDR literature.

¹⁹Bonnie Marranca, "Despoiled Shores: Heiner Müller's Natural History Lessons," *Performing Arts Journal* (1989), 19.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 18.

²¹*Ibid.*, 17.

²²See Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte. Erweiterte Ausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Luchterhand Verlag, 1989), S. 424-245, who divides the literary generations into those born before 1914 (first generation), those born between 1914 and 1929 (second generation) those born between 1930 and 1950 (third generation) and those born after 1950 (fourth generation).

WHOSE GERMAN LITERATURE? GDR-LITERATURE, GERMAN LITERATURE AND THE QUESTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY*

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The issue of national identity as it has affected the reception of GDR literature in the Federal Republic is reflected in the insistence with which the old question of one, two or four German literatures re-surfaced in the 1980s. The debate was not a new one: it emerged simultaneously with West German discovery of GDR literature in the mid-1960s, when it was necessarily characterized more by admissions of insufficient knowledge of this literature than by convincing arguments on either side.¹ At that time some critics, such as Karl-Otto Conrady, thought to recognize an imminent *Wende* in GDR literature which would lead to convergence with West German literature,² while others concurred with Hans Mayer's provocative premise regarding the emergence of "zwei grundverschiedene Strukturen des literarischen Lebens auf deutschem Boden."³ Initially, however, the debate about the claims for a new socialist German literature and language was grounded at least as much in political convictions as in any general knowledge of the literature itself. In the wake of *Ospolitik*, the 1970s were marked by a dramatic increase in knowledge of this literature. A veritable "boom" of research, much of it by a generation of younger critics who were historically and ideologically more disposed to assume its specificity, developed parallel to vastly expanded representation of GDR literature on the West German book market.

The early 1980s, however, were marked by a renewed tendency to question the particularist notion of separate German literatures. The development can be traced to several factors, not the least of them in the sphere of international politics. Shocked by the potential for nuclear devastation which the armaments race of the two superpowers had thrust upon them, Germans on both sides of the border became increasingly aware of their common concerns on this and other issues. At the same time, the sweeping cultural dislocations which resulted from the Biermann affair of 1976 and the subsequent exodus of East German writers, many of whom still identified themselves with the GDR, cast severe doubt on any notion of GDR literature which was bound to political borders, leading both Raddatz and Mayer to retract their earlier positions on the singularity of GDR literature.⁴ Literature East and West appeared to be growing together both aesthetically and thematically (the preoccupation with individual subjectivity, accelerated environmental disasters, the feminist agenda, and the problematic legacy of the German past), casting ever more doubt on the GDR's continued claims for its concept of a *sozialistische*

Nationalliteratur and leading one critic to remind his audience of Hans Werner Richter's 1965 assertion, "Literatur als Nationalliteratur, als Literatur gar eines Staats ist eine politische Fiktion."⁵

This erosion of confidence in the reliability of the political categories in which GDR literature had heretofore been defined raised questions which provided the theme of entire conferences, such as the 1980 meeting of the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung in Darmstadt, which was devoted to the topic "Gibt es verschiedene 'Nationalliteraturen' deutscher Sprache?" In 1985 a section of the *IVG Kongreß* in Göttingen included more than a dozen papers seeking to answer the question "Vier deutsche Literaturen?"⁶ Many of these contributions took their impetus from Walter Hinck's provocative 1981 "Haben wir heute vier deutsche Literaturen oder eine? Plädoyer in einer Streitfrage,"⁷ which resisted the enlistment of literature in service of a search for national identity. Hinck's somewhat polemical formulation, "Kunst und Kultur lassen sich in Staatsgrenzen nicht einmauern" (310), was cast into historical perspective by his argument that the highpoints of German "national literature" had occurred at a time when the Germans had no national state, when in fact Lessing had remarked bitterly that they could have no national theater, "da wir Deutsche noch keine Nation sind." (292) With few exceptions,⁸ the general tendency until recently has been to recognize the futility of this entire line of questioning.

This debate did not, of course, occur in isolation from similar developments in the realm of historiography. Although it is not possible to retrace here even the most salient features of the national identity controversy which has already filled volumes^{8,2} it may be worthwhile to recall the succinct formulation of Hinrich Seeba, who supported his conclusion that "the question of national identity is raised and discussed only in the absence of such identity"⁹ by remarking that "the concept of national identity, at least as far as Germany is concerned, is nothing but, linguistically speaking, a word without a referent. The word may generate a reality of its own, but it does not reflect a political reality that exists before, outside, and independently of the concept." (155) Without pretending to offer any solution to the theoretical, political and methodological issues which attend the problem of dealing with a construct of such uncertain content, it may be instructive to consider the role assigned to language and literature in this enterprise. The frequency with which Western observers of East German literature have felt compelled to introduce or conclude their studies with a pronouncement on the question of whether it qualifies as a distinct, separate national literature demonstrates the inability of literary criticism to escape entanglement in the political as well as cultural project of constructing national identity. Whether it is articulated directly or not, Western discourse on GDR literature is marked by a tension between attempts to overcome difference (by insisting that the best of it is, in fact, German or, indeed, European literature by virtue of its participation in "Western" aesthetic and thematic trends) and efforts to assert difference (by insisting on interpretative models which confine it within the political history of the GDR itself). A striking congruity can be discerned between currents in the reception of GDR literature and the imperative of assuming a position on the question of German national identity. For this reason, it may be useful to retrace briefly the milestones in the troubled attempt to define national identity in the political realm in the GDR, noting the way in which the process moves in dialectical relationship to West German understandings of the same term.

In the aftermath of the creation of their 1949 constitutions, each state staked its claim as representative of the German nation. Pursuing an insistent course of identification with the Western powers which included both an embrace of modernism and an anti-Communist stance, the policy of the Federal Republic

toward the state which was emerging to its east was characterized by rejection, defamation, denial and isolation. The same, of course, can be said regarding what little was known of the so-called literature of Socialist Realism in the "so-called German Democratic Republic." Attitudes towards literature produced "over there" were often mediated by critics who were themselves former GDR citizens. With few exceptions, the tendency was to depict the literature of the GDR in terms of that state's illegitimate quest for legitimacy, as propaganda for an un-democratic, un-Western system which could only be opposed or ignored.¹⁰ Whether the emphasis was on criticism of non-critical authors or on the failure of cultural policy makers to suppress the critical potential inherent in many texts, the canon of GDR literature which eventually emerged in the West has thus been shaped at least as much by the context in which it was constructed as by the GDR of its origins.

Despite the refusal of many in the West even to call the state by its official name,¹¹ the GDR itself--particularly in the decade after the building of the Berlin wall--was in the process of constructing its own sense of national identity. The new GDR constitution of 1968 signified its sought-for self-identity by introducing the term "sozialistische deutsche Nation" to replace its original designation as "sozialistischer Staat deutscher Nation." At the Eighth Party Congress in 1971, this usage was displaced by the term, "sozialistischer deutscher Nationalstaat"; the constitution was amended to eliminate all references to the German nation as well as mention of the prospect of a gradual coming together of the two German states. While this change in terminology can be considered a sign both of growing self-assurance and simultaneous *Abgrenzung* from the *bürgerliche Nation* in the West, insistence upon the term "socialist nation" or "socialist nation state" contained its own paradoxes. In refusing to define itself in accordance with the West German concept of the "German nation" or, after the mid-1970s, "German cultural nation," the GDR ironically revived the nineteenth-century notion of *Nationalstaat* associated with the German Reich, whose legacy it had so gladly conceded to the Federal Republic.

With the advent of *Ostpolitik* in the late 1960s, however, the Federal Republic dropped its claim to sole representation of the German nation and acknowledged the statehood of the GDR, paving the way not only for the signing of the Basic Treaty of 1972 but for greatly intensified attention to GDR literature as well.¹² In diminishing its insistence on unification as a political nation, the Federal Republic shifted its emphasis to the maintenance of a more subjective sense of cultural unity by moving towards intensification of intra-German cultural relations. With his revival of the term *Kulturnation*, which Friedrich Meinecke had introduced to suggest that the bond which unites Germans is rooted in consciousness, Günter Grass, at least temporarily, supplanted fixation on the concept of nation as people of one state by focussing on the politically less brisant notion of cultural identity.

Even before the GDR began to define itself politically as the "sozialistischer deutscher Nationalstaat," the fathers of its cultural self-understanding, Alexander Abusch and Johannes R. Becher, had introduced the concept of a "sozialistischer Nationalliteratur" at the IV. Writers Congress of 1956. Since that time, GDR cultural policy insisted on the separate identity of GDR literature. This was made adamantly clear in the introductory chapter, "Sozialistischer Nationalliteratur der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik" of the long-delayed Volume II of its immense *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*.¹³ This conception was again articulated by its chief editor, Horst Haase, at the 1985 IVG meeting where, in pointed resistance to the most recent Western tendencies to emphasize the commonality of German literature, he argued in favor of the "four literatures" theory, emphasizing the stronger affinities of GDR literature to that of other socialist countries.¹⁴ This view has not always been shared by the writers themselves. In a formulation which bears striking

similarity to Walter Hinck's of just a few years later, Stephan Hermlin spoke for many of his colleagues at the 1978 *Schriftstellerkongreß* with his comment: "Die Existenz einer Literatur ist nicht dekungsgleich mit der Existenz von Staaten."¹⁵ That it took the GDR until 1976 to produce that first major history of its own literature, the problematic *Band 11*, is indicative of the difficulties with which this entire enterprise of defining *Nationalliteratur* is fraught. The fact that comprehensive histories of GDR literature first appeared in the West likewise signifies more about the political premises of studying GDR literature than about the literature itself. Upon closer analysis it becomes clear that its reception in the West can be divided into phases which are as distinct as those into which it seeks to divide the object of examination.

The same developments in German-German relations to which the East Germans responded with *Abgrenzung* in the early 1970s led in the West to an increased interest in and market for GDR literature. In the Federal Republic, renewed attention to the GDR and its literature, particularly by a younger cohort of scholars whose formative period marks them as "the generation of 1968," coincided with the shift to social history which was occurring in literary criticism. Given its social orientation, GDR literature quickly became a favored object of study, lending itself particularly well to a surge of activity in thematic studies and social histories of literature¹⁶ which continued unabated into the 1980s. In addition to the texts themselves, multiple aspects of literary life in the GDR, but particularly those relating to the production rather than the consumption of literature, became objects of intense interest: investigations of the cultural-political mechanisms which appeared to control the themes, style, distribution and reception of literary works; of the role of the writer and the function of literature in a socialist society; and, above all, of the problems it reveals and the ways it conveys criticism, have been dominant in this approach.¹⁷ As relations between the two German states improved, the cold-war stance of studies such as Lothar Balluseck's *Dichter im Dienst* (1956) and Jürgen Rühle's *Der Schriftsteller und der Kommunismus in Deutschland* (1960)¹⁸--special editions which were prepared for the Bundesministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen--yielded to titles such as Manfred Jäger's *Sozialliteraten. Funktion und Selbstverständnis der Schriftsteller in der DDR* (1973),¹⁹ but the emphasis on GDR literature as a source of information about the "other," the "second German state" has persisted in Western reception of GDR literature. This is often reflected in the very titles of works, such as Hildegard Brenner's 1967 *Nachrichten aus Deutschland*,²⁰ the first anthology of GDR literature to be published in the Federal Republic, up through the more recent volumes, *Die DDR-Gesellschaft im Spiegel ihrer Literatur* (1986) and *Alltag und Politik. Zur politischen Kultur einer unpolitischen Gesellschaft. Eine Untersuchung zur erzählenden Gegenwartsliteratur der DDR in den 70er Jahren* (1987).²¹ Brenner pointed out that nearly two decades of searching for national identity, defined primarily in terms of opposition to the GDR, would condition her readers' reception of these texts as representatives of the state itself rather than as works of art. Conceding that this literature does indeed possess "einen ... beschränkten Informationswert," she cautioned against simply reading it as "Belegliteratur":

Doch präsentieren sich uns diese Texte nicht im Nachrichtenteil einer Zeitung. Sie sind vielmehr Erfindungen, Fiktionen und im handgreiflichen Sinne--nicht wahr. Wer sie dennoch als Nachrichten liest, unterstellt, daß...Literatur ein Art Fotografie sei. Er unterstellt, daß in dieser Kopie die Wahrheit des Reproduzierten auf der Hand liege. (8)

Brenner's comment, "Diese Literatur ist ihrem theoretischen Begreifen voraus" (14), maintained its validity through subsequent decades. By the mid-1980s, a sense of crisis seems to have set in, as critics impatient with the theoretical abstinence of GDR studies began to demand reflection on the definition and meth-

odological premises of the enterprise.²²

Despite Brenner's admonition, the appeal to the notion of "literarische Spiegelung der Wirklichkeit" has continued to focus interest on GDR literary texts as socio-historical source materials, particularly as they provide "evidence" of problems and critical revelations of unsatisfactory conditions *drüben*. In regarding GDR literature as a lens which could compensate for deficits of information about this society in the public sphere, Western critics clung to primitive conceptions about the theory and practice of Socialist Realism which had long since been abandoned in the GDR. This reduction of literature to its *Abbildfunktion* ironically created a critical double bind, of which most practitioners seemed blissfully unaware: it relied on the very notion of socialist realism which it repudiated on political and aesthetic grounds to legitimate this effort to extract from GDR literature knowledge about the scorned social reality which it is presumed to reflect. The tendency to conflate the critical function of GDR writers with criticism of the political system per se, is, of course, one which was often shared by political functionaries of the GDR. Even when the agenda was less transparent than in monographic studies of such topics as the literary depiction of the events of June 17, 1953, or August 13, 1961, uncritical acceptance of the *Abbild* theory has undergirded most attempts to study literature for political purposes. While such readings are quick to deride aspects of the text which can be interpreted as political propaganda, they have been equally quick to seize upon criticism--in whatever form--as representing the "truth" which can be extracted by the alert reader: "die Entlarvung des politischen Systems durch die Literatur," as one practitioner refers to it.²³ But this view has not been limited to the West. In her introductory remarks on the function of literature in the GDR, Helwig cites Jürgen Kuczynski's opinion,

daß für künftige Historiker die Lektüre unserer Gegenwartsromane viel wichtiger sein wird als die meisten gesellschaftswissenschaftlichen Schriften, die wir heute herausbringen. Denn unsere Romane schildern den sich bei uns entwickelnden Sozialismus real, mit allen seinen Widersprüchen und Ärgernissen, auf dem großen Hintergrund einer sich entfaltenden neuen Welt, während unsere Gesellschaftswissenschaftler zwar vom realen Sozialismus sprechen, aber in ihren konkreten Beschreibungen der Realität so oft der Neigung zur Schönfärberei verfallen.²⁴

The significance which the senior social scientist of the GDR attaches to literature recently gained support from GDR writers themselves. Since 1987, Christoph Hein and Volker Braun in particular stressed the debt which GDR literature owed to the reticence of a press which was unable or unwilling to report that which is new and true.²⁵ Recent events have shown, however, that the very literature which has been credited with assuming the functions of journalism and social science quickly loses its stature when the course of events it has helped to precipitate eliminates this source of its privileged status.

Excessive confidence in the seismographic or mimetic value of literature which leads to an acceptance of its critical content as "authentic" completely ignores the extent to which this "reality" has been consciously or unconsciously deformed by both the writer and the reader. It is often not easy to distinguish between instances where the study of GDR literature has been merely ancillary to the political agenda and those where the political ideology and logic of power are so deeply implicit in the enterprise that they are simply taken for granted. For the most part, even academic criticism of GDR literature has been informed by instrumental rather than readerly interests, with little attention paid to inherent epistemological and methodological difficulties. As the particularly sharp criticisms of Wolfgang Emmerich and Bernhard Greiner assert, Western critics have sought in GDR literature confirmation of their own politically conditioned expectations, positive or negative.²⁶ By producing a coherent construct of this literature as being merely derived from rather

than engaged in any sort of dialectical relationship with its political matrix, this approach has trapped most depictions of GDR literature into the familiar pattern of offering a historical sketch of the social system of the GDR, followed by an outline of cultural policy, against whose coordinates the literary landscape is surveyed.

Such ontologizing of GDR literature as an archive of knowledge to be mined for the "truth" about the GDR also sustained a tendency in the West to institutionalize it as an object which can be "taught, researched, administered and pronounced upon" in ways strikingly similar to patterns which Edward Said identified in his characterization of "Orientalism." Factors more powerful than the semantic playfulness regarding the relationship between Said's Orient and the eastern German state suggest the appropriateness of his critique for the way in which GDR literature became the subaltern object of much West German criticism. Said defines the Orient as "a locale requiring Western attention, reconstruction, even redemption,"²⁷ a place "always in the position of both outsider and of incorporated weak partner for the West" (208). Despite the absence of racial and language differences, the striking asymmetry in the relation of the two German states²⁸ often results in a one-way construction of the "reality" of the East (Germany) by the more powerful West which indeed takes on many of the characteristics Said attributes to the style of thought which he calls "Orientalism." The impulse to dominate and restructure this intra-German Orient was accompanied by an entire network of institutional structures set in place to produce knowledge of the GDR "by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it"⁽³⁾. Like the Orientalism which Said described, scholarly study of East German literature was thus drawn into the political agenda of articulating the GDR within the dominant Western framework of perceived national interests, of interpreting for and from GDR literature what it is presumed cannot or will not be said without the help of the West. This principle of inequality prevails from the moment that the determinations are made of what will--or will not--be regarded as GDR literature. More often than not, extra-literary categories establish the terms of a discourse which can simultaneously characterize the whole of this literature as somehow alien, while at the same time selecting certain parts of it for incorporation into the body of "German" literature.

The difficulties which surround the attempt to constitute the categories of East or West German literature only compound the liabilities which attend any attempt to construct representations of post-war German literary history. With few exceptions, the East-West dichotomy has resulted in separate chapters, sometimes volumes, being devoted to the literature of the Federal Republic and the literature of the GDR. More often than not, however, the former category also includes writers such as Max Frisch, Ingeborg Bachmann and Thomas Bernhard, sometimes with no mention of the national origin of those "German" writers. In his recent literary history, *Die Literatur der Bundesrepublik*, Ralf Schnell justifies such integration by arguing that Austrian and Swiss authors often choose publishers in the Federal Republic and do, in fact, exert major influence on literary developments there, whereas GDR authors are "...anders als ihre Kollegen aus Österreich und der Schweiz--keine 'westlichen' Autoren. Nicht die Nähe, sondern die Fremdheit ihrer Gesellschaft läßt sie attraktiv erscheinen und sichert ihnen Aufmerksamkeit in einer Republik, der sie selber 'eigentlich keine autochthone Kultur' (Heiner Müller) zubilligen mögen. Wenn also DDR-Autoren nur peripher Erwähnung finden, so bedeutet dies nicht Abgrenzungsdrang, sondern Wahrnehmung eines Unterschieds."²⁹ The fact that Swiss and Austrian critics have been strikingly absent from the discourse which attempts to define East German literature, however, only underscores the political particularity of the entire debate and suggests the need for skepticism about any map of the literary landscape which is sketched primarily against political coordinates. It will become

increasingly difficult for conceptual models which insist on positioning "national" literatures on one side or the other of political borders to avoid absurdity. By the final chapter of his literary history, Schnell seems to have recognized that focusing critical energies on drawing lines of demarcation forecloses other opportunities for re-mapping the literary landscape that might yield different understandings. He concludes his last chapter, "Zu guter Letzt: Deutsche Literatur, wie viele?"--which is accompanied by a picture of Heiner Müller's production of his drama, *Der Auftrag*, in the Schauspielhaus Bochum--with a rather dramatic statement:

Nicht eine, zwei oder vier "deutsche Literaturen", sondern deren ungezählte einzelne, nicht Einheit, sondern Vielfalt des Widersprüchlichen und Mannigfaltigen gilt es wahrzunehmen. Es existiert eine Sphäre des Austauschs, des kritischen Bezugs, die sich aller Systematisierung entzieht. Wer sich auf ihre labyrinthischen Verzweigungen einlassen will, muß allen Begriffskolonialismus abstreifen. Er muß, um die schöpferische Unordnung des Nicht-Begradigten zu erkennen, die modisch wechselnden Zuordnungsraster hinter sich lassen--und hat so, vielleicht, die Chance, bislang unerhörte Zwischentöne zu erlauschen, unbekannt Nuancen zu entdecken, Schattierungen eines geheimen Gesprächs. Schon der Versuch begrifflicher Umzäunung wird unerbittlich bestraft: mit Wahrnehmungsverlust. Aber es gibt eine Wahrnehmungsgewähr so wenig wie eine Gewißheit, Antworten auf brennende Fragen zu erhalten.... [Literatur] besteht--und so die ihr entsprechende Lektüre--auf dem Verlust von Identität, auf der Suspendierung von Sinnstiftungsansprüchen. Darin, das sagt ihr Binnen-Diskurs, findet sie ihre Identität--als Kunst. (364)

The unresolved issue of national identity continues to shape patterns of reception. The often simplistic division into "good" dissident and "bad" affirmative writing has tended to perpetuate a binary model of critical discourse which reinforces different paradigms of cultural identity even as it objects to them. The "*Dissidentenbonus*"³⁰ which--sometimes temporarily--has increased the marketability of some GDR writers in the West, has also tended to preclude more differentiated and productive modes of investigating the implications of literary transgression of political boundaries. Recent developments have only compounded the all-too-familiar aporias of this system of categorization: by now, there exists a considerable, but shrinking, body of literature surrounded by controversy, the "dissident" literature which has been the object of the broadest media attention. The official elimination of censorship in the GDR reform movement has, however, led to the "rehabilitation" both of writers who remained in the GDR, even when their works could not be published there, as well as those who moved to the Federal Republic. Among works now being published with great fanfare in the GDR itself are texts by Walter Janka, Monika Maron, Günter Kunert, Sarah Kirsch, Stefan Heym, Jurek Becker and Rolf Schneider, to name a few. The very notion of publishing "in the West" is in the process of losing all meaning. (The West, on the other hand, is unlikely to "rehabilitate" any parts of the immense body of literature written by authors in the GDR which has never been published--nor read to any significant extent--outside the GDR!) Parallel to the emergence of the category of *Dissidentenliteratur*, caught as it is between East and West, there has also been a tendency to classify writers who have enjoyed resonance far beyond the borders of the GDR, such as Christa Wolf or Heiner Müller, as "German" or even "European" writers, emphasizing the universality of their concerns and the affinities of their writing to major intellectual and aesthetic trends in Western literature. While this may be considered an appropriative gesture--albeit one which enabled these writers to escape the fate of being read primarily as representatives or critics of their social system--it does open new possibilities for readings which transcend the limitations of contextualizing GDR literature in terms of the East-West paradigm.

As critics are finally discovering, the youngest generation of GDR writers has never accepted the idea of writing in service of national ideology. Both in their radically avant-garde texts, characterized above all by skepticism about the ability of language to represent "truth," and in their refusal to integrate themselves into the institutional functioning of literary life in the GDR (insistence on alternative forms of publishing and alternative life styles) these young poets may well be writing the end of GDR literature as we have known it.

The evolving political and cultural context in which the question of national identity is currently being played out presents a healthy opportunity for intensified self-consciousness and reflection on our own position in the process of defining and producing meaning in GDR literature. No doubt the very reasons for which GDR literature is read at all will continue to shift. There is clearly a risk that it will lose some of the significance and prestige it enjoyed in a profoundly different political context. If, as Russell Berman has recently argued, the loss of prestige for literature in the Federal Republic has led to the proliferation of texts by authors from other German-speaking countries, including the GDR, in the literary market place,³¹ one can only wonder whether GDR authors will maintain their relevance if they cease to represent otherness in an oppositional system. GDR literature as we have known it may well become only another of the many arenas in which interpretations of personal and regional identity have been negotiated. As we come to see how it participates in other traditions besides the construction of national identity, the old question about one, two or four German literatures might then fade into deserved oblivion.

Notes

*This paper grew out of concluding comments made at the Washington conference; in its present form it is a slightly revised version of a presentation at the MLA annual meeting a month later.

¹For a summary of the debate cf. Eberhard Mannack, *Zwei deutsche Literaturen? Zu: G. Grass, U. Johnson, H. Kant, U. Plenzdorf und Ch. Wolf* (Kronberg: Athenäum, 1977)

²Karl-Otto Conrady, "Zur Lage der deutschen Literatur in der DDR" in *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 17 (1966), 737-748.

³Hans Mayer, "Über die Einheit der deutschen Literatur" in: *Zur deutschen Literatur der Zeit. Zusammenhänge, Schriftsteller, Bücher*. (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1967), 347; For the earliest stages of the discussion, cf. the focus on "Zwei deutsche Literaturen" in *alternative 7* (1964).

⁴Hans Mayer, "Stationen der deutschen Literatur. Die Schriftsteller und die Restauration, die zwei Deutschlands und die Konvergenz" in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 16, 1979; Fritz J. Raddatz, "Gedanken zur Nationalliteratur" in *Politik und Kultur* 7 (1980), H. 5. [Raddatz' *Traditionen und Tendenzen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1972) began with the blunt assertion, "Es gibt zwei Literaturen." (p. 7)]

⁵Helmut Müssener, "Deutsche Literatur oder deutschsprachige Literaturen? Tendenzen und Fragezeichen." (Vortrag, gehalten auf der Jahrestagung des schwedischen Deutschlehrerverbandes am 17. November 1979 in Uppsala) = *Schriften des deutschen Instituts der Universität Stockholm*, 30 (1980)

⁶*Kontroversen, alte und neue*, Hg. A. Schöne (Akten des VII. Internationalen Germanistenkongresses, Bd. 10), (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986).

⁷Walter Hinck, "Haben wir heute vier deutsche Literaturen oder eine? Plädoyer in einer Streitfrage" in: *Germanistik als Literaturkritik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983).

⁸Cf. for example Werner Weidenfeld, Hg. *Die Identität der Deutschen. Fragen, Positionen, Perspektiven*. (München: Hanser, 1983); Peter Boerner, ed. *Concepts of National Identity -- An Interdisciplinary Dialog* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1986); Helge Pross, *Was ist heute deutsch? Wertorientierungen in der Bundesrepublik*. (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1982); Werner Weidenfeld, *Die Frage nach der Einheit der deutschen Nation* (München: Günter Olzog Vlg., 1981).

³²Most recently: Theo Buck, "Deutsche Literatur, deutsche Literaturen? Zur Frage der Einheit der deutschen Literatur seit 1945" in: *Bestandesaufnahme Gegenwartsliteratur: BRD, DDR, Österreich, Schweiz*. Hg. Heinz-Ludwig Arnold (München: *Text & Kritik*, 1988), 183-192; Wolf-

gang Emmerich, "Wie viele deutsche Literaturen? Alte und neue Literaturszenen im deutschsprachigen Raum" in: Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR. Erweiterte Ausgabe* (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1989) 438-470.

⁹Hinrich C. Seeba, "Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit: The German Quest for National Identity in the Nineteenth Century" in: *Concepts of National Identity*, p. 164.

¹⁰Cf. for example Hans-Dieter Sander, *Geschichte der schönen Literatur in der DDR* (Freiburg: Rombach, 1972) or Karl-Heinz Brockerhoff, Hg. *Gedichte von drüben II. Lyrik und Propagandaverse aus Mitteldeutschland für die Schule* (Bad Godesberg, 1968).

¹¹Cf. the instructive article based on a dissertation by Silke Jansen, "Zwei deutsche Staaten -- zwei deutsche Nationen? Meinungsbilder zur deutschen Frage im Zeitablauf" in: *Deutschland Archiv* 22 (1989), H. 11, 1132-1143. Jansen reproduces the results of various West German surveys, including historical data on the terms West Germans have used to refer to the two post-war states. Unsurprising as the dramatic switch from designations such as "Mitteldeutschland", "Ostzone" or (at a somewhat later date) "Ostdeutschland" to the now-accepted usage "DDR" (75% in 1987) is in light of historical developments, it assumes particularly interesting dimensions in the light of a parallel switch from "Bundesrepublik (Deutschland)" -- 57% in 1974; 26% in 1987 -- to simply "Deutschland" -- 22% in 1974; 66% in 1987 (Tables 16 and 17, p. 1143)

¹²Cf. comments of Lutz W. Wolff, Hg. in: *Fahrt mit der S-Bahn* (München: dtv, 1972).

¹³Horst Haase et al, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur, Bd. 11: Literatur der deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin: Volk und Wissen, 1976)

¹⁴Horst Haase, "Zur Spezifik der Literatur der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik" in *Kontroversen, alte und neue (Akten des VII. Internationalen Germanistenkongresses, Bd. 10)*, (Tübingen, 1986), 76.

¹⁵Stephan Hermlin, Speech at the VIII. Schriftstellerkongreß der DDR, in: *Neue Deutsche Literatur* 26 (1978), H. 8, p. 70.

¹⁶Among the social histories: Hans-Jürgen Schmitt, Hg., *Die Literatur der DDR (= Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart, Bd. 11)* (München: Hanser, 1983); Jan Berg et al, *Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur von 1918 bis zur Gegenwart* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1981). Of the chapter on GDR literature, "Von den antifaschistischen-demokratischen Anfängen bis zum Bitterfelder Weg" in the Fischer volume, Hinck remarks pointedly, "In den sechzehn Überschriften zur Literatur der DDR kommen keine Autorennamen vor, wohl aber die Namen zweier Staatsratsvorsitzenden (, Von Ulbricht zu Honecker: Wandlungen in der Kulturpolitik')" (287)

¹⁷Representative titles include: Helmut Fischbach, Hg. *Literaturpolitik und Literaturkritik in der DDR* (Frankfurt a. M./Berlin/München: Diesterweg, 1976, ³1979 (durchges. u. erweitert); Irma Hanke, *Alltag und Politik. Zur politischen Kultur einer unpolitischen Gesellschaft. Eine Untersuchung zur erzählenden Gegenwartsliteratur der DDR in den 70er Jahren (Studien zur Sozialwissenschaft, Bd. 61)* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag 1987); Anneli Hartmann, *Lyrik-Anthologien als Indikatoren des literarischen und gesellschaftlichen Prozesses in der DDR (1949-1951)* (Frankfurt a. M./Bern: Lang, 1983); Manfred Jäger, *Sozialliteraten. Funktion und Selbstverständnis der Schriftsteller in der DDR* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1975); Reinhild Köhler-Hausmann, *Literaturbetrieb in der DDR. Schriftsteller und Literaturinstanzen* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1984); Bernhard Mayer-Burger, *Entwicklung und Funktion der Literaturpolitik der DDR (1945-1978)*. (München: Tuduv, 1984); Günther Rüther, Hg. *Kulturbetrieb und Literatur in der DDR* (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1987, ²1988) (*Veröffentlichung der Konrad Adenauer Stiftung*).

¹⁸Lothar von Balluseck, *Dichter im Dienst. Der sozialistische Realismus in der deutschen Literatur* (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1956, ²1963)(Wiesbaden 1956 = *Sonderausgabe für das Bundesministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen*); Jürgen Rühle, *Literatur und Revolution: Die Schriftsteller und der Kommunismus in Deutschland. Mit Beiträgen von Sabine Brandt*. (Köln, Berlin: Kiepenheuer u. Witsch, 1960) (*Sonderausgabe für das Bundesministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen*).

¹⁹Manfred Jäger, *Sozialliteraten. Funktion und Selbstverständnis der Schriftsteller in der DDR* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1975).

²⁰Hildegard Brenner, Hg. *Nachrichten aus Deutschland. Lyrik, Prosa, Dramatik. Eine Anthologie der neueren DDR-Literatur*. (Reinbek: Rowohlt 1967).

²¹Gisela Helwig, ed. *Die DDR-Gesellschaft im Spiegel ihrer Literatur* (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1986); Irma Hanke, *Alltag und Politik*, see note 17 above.

²²Cf. Wolfgang Emmerich, „Gleichzeitigkeit: Vormoderne, Moderne und Postmoderne in der Literatur der DDR“ in: *Bestandsaufnahme Gegenwartsliteratur*, 193-211; Bernhard Greiner, „Annäherungen: DDR-Literatur als Problem der Literaturwissenschaft“ in: *Mitteilungen des deutschen Germanistenverbandes* 30 (1983), 20-36; Anneli Hartmann, „Was heißt heute überhaupt noch DDR-Literatur?“ in: *Studies in GDR Culture and Society* 5 (1985), 265-280; Heinrich Mohr, „DDR-Literatur als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland“ in: *Deutschland Archiv* 21 (1988), 844-849.

²³Günther Rüter, Hg. *Kulturbetrieb und Literatur in der DDR* (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1987, ² 1988) (*Veröffentlichung der Konrad Adenauer Stiftung*), 29. Cf. Jürgen Scharfschwerdt's 1982 observation „...nicht wenige Zeitgenossen [meinen] heute noch immer ihr ideologisches Süppchen bevorzugt mit Hilfe der Literatur kochen zu können.“ [*Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft in der DDR* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1982), 13].

²⁴quoted in Helwig, p. 14.

²⁵Cf. Christoph Hein's keynote address at the *X. Schriftstellerkongreß der DDR* in 1987. „Die DDR wird gelegentlich als Leseland bezeichnet... Das ist, bei aller erwiesenen Qualität, jedoch nicht das Verdienst unserer Literatur, sie ist nicht besser und nicht schlechter als die anderer Länder. Auch wird bei uns nicht mehr und nicht weniger als in anderen Ländern gelesen. Es werden hier jedoch weit mehr als in anderen Ländern Bücher gelesen. Die korrekte Bezeichnung wäre also: Buchleseland. Das Verdienst dafür gebührt unserer Presse, unseren Medien.“ 233. (*X. Schriftstellerkongreß der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. Arbeitsgruppen*, hg. vom Schriftstellerverband der deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1988). Volker Braun also made trenchant remarks at the international conference on GDR literature in Pisa.

²⁶Cf. Emmerich and Greiner, note 22 above.

²⁷Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979; Orig. Random House, 1978), 206.

²⁸Cf. Klaus von Beyme, „Attitudes of German Youth toward Relations between the Two German States“ in: *West Germany, East Germany and the German Question* (= *German Issues 1*, publ. by American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, Washington, D. C.), 33-43

²⁹Ralf Schnell, *Die Literatur der Bundesrepublik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986), 7.

³⁰Müssener, 23.

³¹Russell Berman, „Writing in the Republic“ in: *German Politics and Society* 16 (Spring, 1989), 31.

GDR LITERATURE IN THE INTERNATIONAL BOOK MARKET: FROM CONFRONTATION TO ASSIMILATION

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In 1961 Klaus Wagenbach was a young editor at S. Fischer Verlag working on an anthology of contemporary German authors entitled *Das Atelier*. His attempt to include authors from the GDR was rejected by the Bermann-Fischers, although they did allow him to mention their censorship in the afterword. Shortly thereafter, S. Fischer was sold to the Holtzbrinck Group. When Wagenbach wrote a letter to *Generalbundesanwalt* Martin protesting the internments of GDR-publisher Günter Hofé during the 1964 Frankfurt Book Fair, he was immediately dismissed from the publishing house. Der Bayerische Rundfunk also informed him that his services would no longer be required, supposedly because the network was restructuring the format of its political commentaries.¹ Wagenbach started his own publishing house with some financial assistance from his father and the support of friends and authors (Ingeborg Bachmann, Johannes Bobrowski,

Günter Grass, Christoph Meckel and Hans Werner Richter). However, the socio-critical profile of the “Quartheft” and his commitment to leftist politics soon led to new problems:

Das erste Jahr brachte dem Verlag aber auch die ersten Schwierigkeiten. Die eine bestand im Boykott der konservativen Presse (hauptsächlich wegen der Veröffentlichung von Stephan Hermlin, dessen Bücher bis dahin von westdeutschen Verlagen boykottiert worden waren, aber auch wegen der Veröffentlichung von Wolf Biermann). Die zweite bestand in einem Herrn, der sich zu Silvester 1965 mit mir konspirativ im Café Kranzler traf, um mir mitzuteilen, daß, falls ich weitere Publikationen von Wolf Biermann unterlasse, die DDR offenstehe für Lizenzen jeder Art, umgekehrt aber leider... So kam es, daß ich ab 1966 für sieben Jahre weder in die DDR noch sogar durch die DDR reisen konnte.²

Wagenbach's experience was symptomatic of a general climate within the publishing industry and the Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels during the 1950s and early 1960s, which reflected the confrontational nature of political and cultural politics during the Cold War.³ The foundation for the ideological confrontation, which had so thoroughly permeated the collective consciousness by the late 1960s, had already been established through the economic and political policies of the occupation forces from 1945 to 1949.⁴ While a number of leading authors (including Brecht, Plivier, Seghers and Tucholsky) were published in both the East and the West, they were the exception to the rule. Attempts to bridge the East-West gap by publishing works of contemporary German authors, irrespective of their momentary residence, were not only restricted by chronic material shortages, complicated rights questions and distribution problems, they were virtually eliminated after the monetary reform and the Berlin Blockade in 1948.⁵ Thus, Klaus Wagenbach's experiences in the early 1960s illustrate the extent to which ideological positions within the GDR and the FRG had hardened during the 1950s and were further entrenched during the early 1960s, particularly after the construction of the Berlin Wall.

These attitudes changed gradually during the late 1960s and then more rapidly in the 1970s as a result of the liberalization of political philosophies regarding the GDR and the subsequent normalization of relations.⁶ Wagenbach's programmatic decision to publish works by GDR authors and his recognition of works from the GDR as a significant body of literature, which should be published and read in the West, symbolized his response to the Cold War and marked the beginning of a new willingness to publish GDR literature in the Federal Republic. The fact that Wagenbach's publishing house was immediately beset with problems, precisely because his program represented a literary and political statement, reflected an increased consciousness among many authors (e.g. Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, Peter Härtling, Franz Xaver Kroetz, Siegfried Lenz, Martin Walser and Gabriele Wohmann, among others) that literary and political spheres could not be divorced from one another. The dynamics of new socio-political forces, including the APO, the internationalization of the student movement, as well as *Ostpolitik*, were accompanied by extensive socio-economic changes in the literary marketplace.⁷

The *Systemkritik* of western, capitalist societies and the interest in alternative models of Socialism and Marxism, which had been largely limited to academic and intellectual subcultures, now had a direct impact on publishing, bookselling, literary criticism, indeed on the whole system of literary production, distribution and reception. Demonstrations by the APO during the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1968 and 1969 were the most visible manifestation of this revolution within the literary marketplace, but the desire for systematic reforms was also articulated by authors, editors, booksellers, and some publishers, and their politicizing of publishing houses ultimately had an even greater impact on publishing and