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“Schreiber, was siehst du?”¹ Processing Historical and Social Change

Heralding the collapse of authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe and the triumph of liberal democracy, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent unification of the two German states are defining images of the late 20th century. A decade beyond formal unification seems an appropriate time to reflect on the historical and social changes that have impacted life in the now-unified Germany. Indeed, interest in the former GDR, as well as the *Wende* and the unification process, has not waned in the ensuing years, but rather has led to what Konrad Jarausch termed an “academic boom” (3). The opening of archives, the greater willingness of writers, artists, and scholars to speak about their experiences has certainly made the study of the former GDR a fruitful academic endeavor. The unification process has been of interest to historians, economists, and cultural theorists. Furthermore, a wealth of scholarly studies has examined German culture and society after unification. It is not only the scholars, however, who grapple with the historical and social changes in Germany; writers and filmmakers have been equally active in contributing to discussions and the processes of change. And so we ask, “Schreiber, was siehst du?” as we investigate how intellectuals have chosen to respond to the challenges of German unification in text and film.

The poem from Peter Rühmkorf, whose title serves as our point of reference, begins with a historical résumé that touches on the horrors of German history, both the Nazi regime and the Stalinist tyranny of the GDR:

Schreiber, was hast du gesehen?
Ich sehe, sah:
zwei für unumstößlich gehaltene Reiche
sah ich zu Grunde gehen,
eins steht noch da.² (267)

1 Peter Rühmkorf, “Schreiber, was siehst du?” “Writer, what do you see?”

2 “Writer, what did you see? I see, I saw: two empires that were once deemed invincible, ruined, one still remains.” There are, of course, other possible interpretations for this citation,

What Rühmkorf views as the remaining empire, is actually an amalgam of the former Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. Somehow these two political enemies, two divergent economic and social systems, have combined to form a nation that has earned the respect of former allies and enemies, a nation which has taken on a leadership role in the New Europe. This is, however, not the image that Rühmkorf conveys in the remaining stanzas of his poem that bemoan the current state of the world: overpopulation, environmental destruction, unfulfilled promises. Rühmkorf's poem (like all of those in this collection) is accompanied by a commentary. In his remarks, Wolfgang Thierse chooses not to share Rühmkorf's apocalyptic vision, and focuses on the positive. He stresses that Germany's long journey towards democracy has reached a new quality that lies in the sovereignty of the citizen: for the first time in the post-World War II era, the people, the voters, have chosen democracy directly. Thierse is also astute in recognizing, as do the German people, that a successful democracy, a successful economy, indeed, a successful society, requires plurality: Germany's success depends, too, on the success and help of its European neighbors and its friends and foes in the global community. This, Thierse views with optimism, asserting: "Kassandra is not always right" (270). This anthology seeks to contribute to this dialogue about Germany, how it has evolved since November 1989, how the people have coped with change.

Political reactions to the possible unification of the two Germanys included fear, in particular the fear that Germany could develop into a new superpower and forget the lessons of its history. Even the reactions of intellectuals focused on negatives: the loss of the dream of a "socialist" alternative to the capitalist FRG. Thus, unification faced prejudice before it even happened and attempts to cope with it were confronted with many challenges. Because Germany has a long tradition of writers whose literary works were packed with political and social commentary (Lessing, Goethe, Büchner, Thomas Mann, Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, to name only the most obvious), it is logical to look to the literary community for its take on this whole process. Yet, the first published "post-*Wende*" text, Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt*, did not portray the contemporary social, political and economic changes, but rather looked back some twenty years. Wolf's protagonist is eerily reminiscent of the author, and the novel's plot, detailing the Stasi's surveillance of a woman writer, mirrors Wolf's experience following the expatriation of Wolf Biermann when she herself was placed under surveillance. Wolf had originally penned the story in 1979, but delayed its publication until after the collapse of the GDR. Critics chided Wolf for postponing publication, claiming that the book's appearance after the fall of the Berlin Wall was almost meaningless. The ensuing

including Kaiser and Führer as the empires that were toppled, even the US as the sole remaining empire.

controversy in the *Feuilleton* unleashed a literary debate about the nature of “critical” East German literature. This *Literaturstreit* was an initial indication of the type of controversy that writers and their texts in the post-*Wende* period would endure.

In the period since the fall of the Berlin Wall, intellectuals have confronted a number of challenges. Indeed, the term intellectual has come under considerable scrutiny, firstly because of the role ascribed to them in the toppling of Eastern European regimes in general; secondly for the increasing number of controversies that arose, particularly on unified German soil, that allied intellectuals with countless negative aspects of the GDR regime. As a result, Ian Wallace has noted an overall tendency in Europe to write “their [intellectuals’] political obituaries” (87). Particularly after such proclamations as “Für unser Land” (signed by Christa Wolf, Volker Braun and Stefan Heym among others), it became clear that GDR intellectuals were out of step with the will of the people. Thus, leftist intellectuals were left behind as the momentum of the unification process increased. Controversies and repeated revelations about the collusion between writers and the Stasi, from the highly-respected Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller to the darlings of the Prenzlauer Berg counter-culture, Sascha Anderson and Rainer Schedlinski,³ did nothing to help the intellectuals’ causes.

As the 1990s progressed, writers and filmmakers faced the task, of coming to terms not only with historical developments like unification, economic crises brought on by the currency reform and the switch to a market economy, but also with the Stalinist past. This often occurred in a very public way through the media, but the struggles also raged internally, coming to a climax as the East and West PENs merged. Former GDR writers such as Günter Kunert could not, in good conscience, sit at the same table with Stasi spies.

There was a challenge on another level, subconsciously among the people. Although the citizens on both sides of the German-German border were Germans, they had, through 40 years of separation, grown apart. Indeed, Peter Schneider’s statement in 1982 that it will take longer to dismantle the wall inside one’s head (*die Mauer im Kopf*) than it will to tear down the physical barricade was unforeseeably prophetic. For even after the concrete barrier, the Berlin Wall, had almost completely disappeared, *die Mauer im Kopf* remained.

We are certainly not the first to broach the topic of literature and unification.⁴ In *Germany after Unification: Coming to terms with the Recent Past* (1996), social scientists explore the unification of Germany five years after the fact. They focus on how unified Germany views its past, particularly how the former GDR must adapt and re-evaluate its prior outlook on history.

3 Perhaps most disturbing was the continued collusion between Anderson and the Stasi after Anderson moved to the West, making the Stasi story not just an East German affair.

4 In addition to those treated here, see Alter and Monteath, Brockman, Bullivant (1994), Durrani, Good and Hilliard, Hahn, Lewis and McKenzie or Welzel.

This volume also questions the relationship between Germany and its geopolitical neighbors to the East and West. In *Beyond 1989: Re-Reading German Literature since 1945* (1997), Germanists re-evaluated earlier approaches to post 1945 German cultural studies through the lens of a newly unified Germany. Stephen Brockmann's study *Literature and German Unification* (1999) draws on the idea of the *Kulturation* (Germany as both a cultural and national unity) and examines the literary consequences of unification in this light.

At countless conferences, symposia and literary readings, new literary works were put under the microscope, as scholars and journalists sought the elusive unification novel or *Wenderoman*. Only time will tell if there is such a thing as the definitive *Wenderoman*. Writers and playwrights from both sides of the German-German border have treated the fall of the Wall, the unification of Germany, and the political, economic, and social problems that these historical events have caused. Authors and filmmakers of former East and West Germany have responded in a variety of textual forms (fiction, autobiography, drama, film) to the changes they have experienced in their immediate surroundings as well as in their perspectives on the lives they have lived in a divided Germany. This anthology, *Textual Responses to German Unification*, presents a collection of essays dealing with various approaches taken to events, which occurred before, during and after the opening of the Wall on 9 November 1989, and exemplifies the integral contribution texts have made to dismantling the *innere Mauer* (internal wall) separating the two Germanys.

In the section "Authors and Their Worlds," scholars focus on individual authors and their literary responses to German unification. In "The Journey Eastward: Helga Schütz' *Vom Glanz der Elbe* and the Mnemonic Politics of German Unification," N. Ann Rider launches her analysis of Schütz' novel with the observation that German unification has occurred on Western terms. She opens her treatment of Schütz' novel with the statement that: "Helga Schütz' 1995 novel, *Vom Glanz der Elbe*, works on multiple levels to explore the tropes and realities of Western domination after unification." Key to Rider's examination of *Vom Glanz der Elbe* is the novel's exploration of the levels of Western colonialism and the role of public memory. In *Vom Glanz der Elbe* Schütz presents a unification scenario that runs counter to the assumption that unification means bringing the East up to the social, economic and political standards found in the West. Schütz' concern with the reciprocal movement towards the East is represented by the protagonist's return to the East Germany he left thirty years ago and his search for the sister he left behind. In the course of her analysis, Rider demonstrates that Schütz uses her protagonist's journey to call for a new approach to German identity. Rider demonstrates that Schütz undermines the polarized thinking that has governed the understanding of German identity since 1949 to suggest not a unifying of

East and West Germans, but rather a Germany in which both can exist harmoniously.

In “‘ob es sich bei diesem Experiment um eine gescheiterte Utopie oder um ein Verbrechen handelt hat’: Enlightenment, Utopia, the GDR and National Socialism in Monika Maron’s Work from *Flugasche* to *Pawels Briefe*,” Stuart Taberner focuses on Maron’s work against the backdrop of pre- and post-*Wende* literary discussions. Taberner’s comprehensive reading of Maron’s work, including *Flugasche* (1981), *Die Überläuferin* (1988), *Stille Zeile Sechs* (1991), *Animal Triste* (1996), and *Pawels Briefe* (1999), ties Maron’s voice in the post-*Wende* literary scene to her earlier literary statements on East Germany to demonstrate the author’s development (or dismissal) of themes found in her earlier work.

James Reece turns his attention to East German authors and their autobiographies, briefly exploring autobiographical works by both Christa Wolf and Hermann Kant and focusing primarily on Günter de Bruyn’s theoretical writings on autobiography and his *Zwischenbilanz. Eine Jugend in Berlin* (1992) and *Vierzig Jahre. Ein Lebensbericht* (1996). Given de Bruyn’s extensive publications on autobiography following unification, Reece analyzes his texts to reveal de Bruyn’s statement on “both the problems and the possibilities of autobiographical writing from the former GDR.” In the course of his analysis, Reece shows that de Bruyn affirms autobiography as a literary form capable of enlightening both its author and its readers.

In “‘Gefälle in der Landschaft’—On the Critique of Real Existing Capitalism in Volker Braun’s Texts,” Rolf Jucker takes an unusual approach to texts by Volker Braun to reveal that the significance of Braun’s texts extends beyond the narrow perspective of German unification. For Jucker and his reading of Volker Braun, it is not post-unification literature that should be put under the microscope but also post-unification literary scholarship and even the capitalist West as a whole. “Good literature” should serve as a legitimate source of insights into the conundrum of our present human condition. Listing the current weaknesses plaguing capitalist systems, Jucker turns for answers to Braun’s recent publication *Das Nichtgelebte. Eine Erzählung* (1995), whose main character, Georg, finds himself both professionally and personally challenged. References to Braun’s *Die Zickzackbrücke. Ein Abrißkalender* (1992), *Ist das unser Himmel? Ist das unsre Hölle? Rede zum Schiller-Gedächtnis-Preis* (1992), *Wir befinden uns soweit wohl. Wir sind erst einmal am Ende. Äußerungen* (1998), and *Tumulus. Gedichte* (1999) allow Jucker to show the extent to which Braun’s work speaks to the challenges facing the capitalist world. In conclusion, Jucker’s analysis of Braun’s work and its statement on the future calls for a world in which “dematerialization, restraint, respect, deceleration, restriction” will allow the members of Western societies to achieve equality.

Rachel Halverson’s “Comedic Bestseller or Insightful Satire: Taking the Interview and Autobiography to Task in Thomas Brussig’s *Helden wie wir*”

dissects Brussig's novel to expose the double-edged sword of its satire. The hilarity of Brussig's novel tempts readers simply to enjoy it for its pure comedic value. Such a reading risks missing the greater significance of the novel and its popularity. Halverson's close examination of the novel's autobiographical frame, its interview format, and the narrator's statements on his role in German unification and on history reveal the novel's pointed message on literature and the historicization of Germany's past. As a representative of a new generation of German writers, Brussig offers his readers an explanation for the fall of the Berlin Wall which speaks for a Germany undivided by the *innere Mauer: Helden wie wir* (1996), written by a young former East German, implicitly reflects the unified German character apparent in German youth today, rather than the division embedded in the hearts and souls of the older generation. The novel thus belies its retrospective narrative and speaks for a growing group of Germans who know a divided Germany only from their history books.

The second section of the anthology, "Multiple Voices—Generational Views," proceeds from the insight that authors and their work cannot exist in isolation, but rather are products of the historical and social conditions around them. Here literary scholars focus on authors and their responses to unification within the context of the broader literary community. Karoline von Oppen, in her treatment of the older and established generation of writers in East and West Germany, undertakes a thorough analysis of journalistic texts from summer 1989 through late summer 1990. This essay maps out three different phases of the unification debate. She thus fills a gap in critical scholarship that has paid more attention to high-profile writers like Christa Wolf, while ignoring signs that the silencing of critical writers had begun well before the publication of *Was bleibt*. Von Oppen looks first at Stefan Heym, who, through essays in *Die Zeit*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Der Spiegel*, was highly visible during the *Wende*. Following the proclamation "Für unser Land," Heym gradually vanishes from the West German press. Walter Jens, typically grouped with Günter Grass as a representative critical West German voice, is, in von Oppen's view, virtually silent throughout the fall of 1989. When Jens does speak out in support of Christa Wolf, he is vilified in the press. The case of Helga Königsdorf is the opposite, as she is able to publish in both East and West simultaneously. Von Oppen highlights how all three authors, though initially opposed to unification, grow to accept it despite the constant undermining of their positions through their critics in the press.

In "Everyday Stories of Hope and Despair in East Germany: Kerstin Hensel and Ingo Schulze Write About Life After the *Wende*," Alisa Kasle focuses on the youngest generation of East German writers, who face a second Zero Hour as they struggle to grasp the demise of the GDR and the ensuing political, economic, social and cultural turmoil brought about by unification with the Federal Republic. This generation, she argues, does not focus on political messages, as did earlier generations, but looks to the struggles and

issues of everyday people for the thematic basis of their works. Works by these younger authors break through the stigma of providing moral lessons by their sheer avoidance of themes that try to explain past history. Through an examination of Hensel's *Tanz am Kanal* (1994) and Schulze's *Simple Storys* (1998), Kasle highlights how these writers portray the confusing complexity of life after unification, offering that their characters suffer from *Wendeschmerz* ("pain"). She concludes that the strength of these works lies in replacing national and historic events with the subjective experience of individuals as they struggle to come to terms with unified Germany. She further suggests that though both Hensel and Schulze situate their narratives in Eastern Germany, the perspective is not necessarily typically "East German." Instead she proposes that the characters in *Tanz am Kanal* and *Simple Stories* evince a type of *Lebensgefühl*, the sense that life has become complex and even unmanageable. This feeling permeates the younger generation living in post-unification Germany, and can, to varying degrees, be felt on both sides of the German-German border.

Jill Twark also focuses on Eastern German authors, but she examines the tendency of these authors to respond to the unification process with humor and satire. In her examination of Thomas Rosenlöcher's *Die Wiederentdeckung des Gehens beim Wandern. Harzreise* (1991), Bernd Schirmer's *Schlehwins Giraffe* (1992), and Jens Sparschuh's *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen* (1995), she argues that it is difficult to express unification experiences in words. The resultant satirical texts are defensive literary responses to the rapid changes occurring in society. All three authors choose a first-person comic narrator trying to adapt to the political, economic, and social upheaval. While the East-West portrayals in each text may at first seem stereotypical, Twark views them as a necessary expression of the authors' messages. She reasons that the satirical portrayal of West Germans is contrary to the much touted slogan *Wir sind ein Volk* ("we are one people"), thus allowing the authors to assert their own identity against the dominance of West German culture. Because all three narratives are set in the East and deal with East German problems, (Eastern) readers can readily identify with the protagonists. Thus satire can help individuals as they try to come to terms with their new circumstances. Finally, Twark argues that through satire it is also possible for "outsiders" to gain a greater appreciation for the difficulties that ordinary East Germans have had to face in the years immediately following reunification.

Gerald A. Fetz turns to the theater for portrayals of the *Wende* and post-unification existence since 1991, examining the theatrical works of Botho Strauß, Klaus Pohl, and Christoph Hein. Strauß's *Schlußchor* (1991) portrays West Germans unable to understand the significance of recent German history, while East Germans appear out of place in the new Germany. In this early example of a dramatic treatment of post-unification Germany, it remains unclear whether the new situation is to be greeted with joy or concern. Klaus Pohl has brought three plays to the stage, each representing a different

perspective on unification. While both *Karate-Billi kehrt zurück* (1991) and *Die schöne Fremde* (1991) fall prey to stereotypical portrayals of East and West, Fetz argues that *Wartesaal Deutschland StimmenReich* (1995), though less dramatic in form, convincingly highlights the very real dramatic upheaval experienced on both sides of the German-German border. It is, however, Christoph Hein's *Randow* (1994) that paints perhaps the bleakest picture of Germany today. Fetz even reasons that the characters in this play provide the most accurate depictions of East Germans in the *neuen Bundesländern*, and speak to the incomprehensible nature of the changes that Germany has endured since 1989. Each of these three playwrights conveys the message that the unification process has been a difficult one, and in many instances remains unresolved. Throughout, Fetz demonstrates that *die Mauer im Kopf* has not been completely dismantled.

Both German film scholarship and production of the past ten years (aside from the "new comedy" wave) seem preoccupied with coming to terms with the past. Perhaps it would be better to speak of "pasts" in the plural: to the always-problematic Nazi past has now been added the past of the GDR (with its many stereotypes) and the past of the Cold War itself. In many cases, the coming to terms with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) of German film serves now as a coming to terms with the present (*Gegenwartsbewältigung*), terms that both appear throughout the essays of the section, "Cinematic Responses." Repeating, reciting, reinterpreting, or reclaiming the past in an effort to come to terms with the present: this is the repertoire of narrative strategies pursued by *Wendefilme* and *Mauerfilme* in the past ten years.

Levy and McCormick draw parallels between the post-war period and the post-wall period, pointing out that issues of German identity, racial and otherwise, were not dealt with once and for all in the post-war period, but continue to plague unified Germany today. They argue that the 1947 film *Ehe im Schatten* was a precursor of the later GDR "Antifa" films with a decided difference. While the GDR genre privileged the heroism of Communists as "fighters against fascism," erasing the biologically based victimization of Jews and others, director Maetzig clearly thematizes the Jewishness of his tragic female protagonist. At the same time, "it is Hans' failure to grasp the implications of the political situation until it was already too late that becomes the focus of the film's identification with the victims of the Nazi state." There is thus a tension between seeing and erasing the racial victims of Nazism; later GDR "Antifa" films would choose the latter alternative. Levy and McCormick go on to show that ex-GDR director Helke Misselwitz both continues and inverts these questions in her 1992 film *Herzsprung*. The plot of this film centers on the doomed attraction between an East German woman and an Afro-German man in post-unification Germany; the film directly addresses issues of racism and skinhead violence that broke out with renewed force after, some would claim, forty years of repression in East Germany. Levy and McCormick argue, however, that Misselwitz's narrative and its filmic

portrayal defy simplistic reductions into victim and perpetrator, good and bad. Instead, the dichotomies of power and powerlessness seem to bifurcate each character in the film. Since no single character can become an object of undivided identification or criticism, the film forces the viewer to confront the complexities of real life. Levy and McCormick reason that this is a more subtle and perceptive film, but that it nonetheless demonstrates the extent to which there is a great deal of continuity in the “German question” in the post-war and post-wall periods.

Massimo Locatelli’s “Ghosts of Babelsberg” examines a series of *Wendefilme* against the backdrop of the DEFA style and concludes that this style and its preoccupations lived on after the demise of the GDR. He claims that East German film exhibited “an openly word-obsessed cultural discourse” that privileged the authorial enunciation. Thematically, he says, GDR films and their successors were preoccupied with provincial locations as sites of identity construction (the *Heimat* idea refigured for a socialist and post-socialist Germany), the hypostatization of the female body as an emblem of the country itself, and the “Socialist Holy Family” consisting of the Worker, his Wife, and their Child. The continuation of these topoi in post-*Wende* film is evident in the films *Erster Verlust* (1990), *Stilles Land* (1992), *Jana und Jan* (1992), *Abschied von Agnes* (1993), *Neben der Zeit* (1995). *Letztes aus der DaDaR* (1991) is presented as a positive exception to the rule for its confrontation with the GDR chronotopy and invitation to active viewing.

Jenifer Ward looks at Margarethe von Trotta’s oeuvre from the perspective of her “Wall Movie,” *Das Versprechen* (1995). This tale of two lovers separated by the Berlin Wall, who conceive a son in Prague, “on neither West German nor East German soil,” evokes the theory of hybridity. Ward argues that “some of the building blocks of hybridity—borders and complicated identities—have been present in German cultural production in the earlier films of von Trotta since the late 1970s.” She reviews von Trotta’s frequent use of incomplete identities: pairs of female friends who complement one another, German protagonists who find their own culture lacking and “shop” for characteristics in non-Western cultures. Ward concludes that *Das Versprechen*, while evoking hybridity, cannot embrace it, since “German-German hybridity [. . .] is of no use at the advent of a (re-) unified Germany, which so desperately wants to see itself as a unitary culture finally put together again.

Kristie Foell revisits theories of melodrama and claims that it is the commensurate genre for the portrayal of German division and unification, which is, after all, a family story. She analyzes two post-*Wende* melodramas—*Nikolaikirche* (1995) and *Das Versprechen*—against the background of traditional versus “sophisticated” melodrama. *Nikolaikirche* effectively employs traditional melodramatic ingredients, including easy identifications of characters with preexisting cognitive schema, to present an emotionalized account of the Leipzig Monday demonstrations leading up to the opening of

the German border. The film's adherence to traditional melodramatic formulae invites the viewer to identify with the German project of unification as well. In contrast to other critics, Foell finds that *Das Versprechen*, while employing many of the stock ingredients of melodrama and inviting strong personal identification, resists indulging traditional melodrama's formulas of closure. In refusing the traditional melodramatic happy ending (a wedding), the film opens a critical space for reflecting on the grand German "marriage" as well.

Helen Cafferty analyzes Leander Haußmann's recent film *Sonnenallee* (1999), the screenplay for which he wrote with Thomas Brussig, and asks why this light comedy touched such a nerve. Not only was the teenage romance set in 1970s GDR a box-office hit in both East and West; it also inspired a lawsuit against Haußmann under Paragraph 194 of the German penal code on the basis that the film represented an insult to those whose escape attempts at the wall resulted in injury, imprisonment, or death. Cafferty examines how the filmmakers used comic techniques to correct discourses on the GDR past that theorize deformation of GDR citizens or that erase the GDR past altogether. Varying degrees of satire are used, from gentle to mocking, in order to establish sympathy with some characters and critical distance to others. Hard-edged satire is reserved for GDR functionaries while "ordinary" GDR citizens, i.e. those without power within the system, are portrayed sympathetically. The film also demonstrates solidarity with these ordinary citizens by citing aspects of GDR life and culture that would be most recognizable to former East Germans. Cafferty further argues that "the film may have knocked a small chunk out of *die Mauer im Kopf*" precisely by normalizing aspects of the GDR past through the genre of romantic comedy, while reclaiming the legitimacy of personal memories of former East Germans. "The comedy works to obliterate 'otherness' for a West German viewer while preserving the 'difference' that makes visible the memory of lived experience in the GDR." At the same time, Cafferty argues, the film resists simplistic nostalgia for an idealized GDR past by celebrating the end of the GDR system in the opening of the Wall.

In its totality, this anthology reflects the multifarious points of view that comprise the unification experience for both East and West Germans. Its strength lies in its treatment of both print and visual media, its inclusion of both younger and older generations and their respective viewpoints, and its incorporation of both West and East German responses to events that have radically altered the worlds in which all Germans live. Just as unifying Germany is taking place on multiple levels in German society, our anthology provides a forum for the critical voices contributing to the unification process; as such it can serve as a valuable resource for students and scholars of contemporary German literature, film, cultural studies, and intellectual history.

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