

# The Enduring Legacy of GDR Literature and Culture: An Introduction

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Since the tumultuous events of 1989/1990, writers, film-makers and academics have responded to, reconstructed and reflected upon the process and impact of German reunification. Each milestone anniversary has generated a wave of new publications, thereby demonstrating an ongoing fascination with, and evolving interpretations of, the literary and cultural legacies of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) within a united Germany. In the years which have elapsed since the fall of the Berlin Wall, certain broad narratives of events have been established within general discourse, while access to unpublished materials and personal accounts has increasingly allowed a rich cultural landscape to be explored, both on its own terms and as an important foundation to our deeper understanding of contemporary German society.

As early as 1990, Günter de Bruyn had warned against making the type of sweeping statements which risk downplaying the extent of different experiences and thought processes; instead, he pleaded for a nuanced engagement with difference, for open discussion and space for contradictory reactions and emotions.<sup>1</sup> Such calls have all too often been disregarded. Bringing together academic articles and interviews from a wide range of backgrounds and voices, this volume, therefore, seeks to enrich current literary and cultural debates in multiple ways: the different contributions enhance our understanding of artistic responses in different genres, inform our reading and re-reading of literary reconstructions of pre- and post-*Wende* events, and combine in-depth reflection on literary expressions and nuanced critique of, and engagement with, past and present cultural and societal developments. In so doing, the volume demonstrates the diverse ways in which GDR literary and cultural traditions continue to enrich German literature and culture.

The very term ‘GDR literature and culture’ remains a focus of debate. From early anecdotal accounts of its presumed irrelevance after the disappearance of the political entity from which it emerged,<sup>2</sup> debate has continued as to whether at one level it should be narrowly defined as only that literature and culture existing and produced (officially and unofficially) within the borders of the country itself, thus setting it directly in opposition to the literature and culture of the Federal Republic over the same historical period. Or should it more broadly encompass the work of those

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<sup>1</sup> Günter de Bruyn, “Jubelschreie, Trauergesänge: Bemerkungen zum Literaturstreit”, in Günter de Bruyn, *Jubelschreie, Trauergesänge: Deutsche Befindlichkeiten*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1994, pp. 46–54 (pp. 53–54).

<sup>2</sup> Marc Silberman, “German Studies and the GDR: Too Near, Too Far”, *Monatshefte*, 85.3 (Autumn 1994), pp. 265–74.

brought up in the GDR, who moved to the Federal Republic (willingly or unwillingly) before 1989 and who continued to see their country of origin as an object of literary and artistic exploration? Or does it include the post-unification work of those who, before 1989, might have seen themselves as GDR writers, poets and film-makers and who continue to express themselves creatively within the context of a united Germany? In *Rereading East Germany*, Karen Leeder argues convincingly for the centrality of external constructions of the GDR in the pervasive dichotomy between representations of the country as a simple “Stasiland” or the source of a false “Ostalgie”, both of which prevent any deeper understanding of the more nuanced cultural space in between,<sup>3</sup> while Nick Hodgkin and Caroline Pearce, observing the same phenomenon in *The GDR Remembered*, bring together what they term “three kinds of cultural formations: literature and film, museums and memorials, and generational and societal narratives” to demonstrate how “private and collective memory, history, and nostalgia collide”.<sup>4</sup> Leeder’s own conscious extension of this debate into representations in both literature and film is perhaps also a response to criticisms within the field of literature studies that too much emphasis has been placed to date on prose writing as representative of GDR literature. Katrin Max equally seeks to counter this imbalance by expanding discussion into the analysis of literature for children and young adults and *Protokolle*, whilst also illustrating a growing interest in GDR Studies amongst emerging young academics who, unencumbered by direct experience of the country and its culture, bring a critical distance which allows them in particular to explore the impact of GDR traditions on contemporary cultural production.<sup>5</sup>

Our volume does not seek to provide a comprehensive overview of East German literature and culture (nor is this possible). Rather, in its inclusion of discussions of a broad range of genres, our emphasis on a combination of lesser-known and more established writers, and the juxtaposition of academic articles with personal reflections from those who directly experienced and engaged with the GDR from within or beyond its borders, the current volume continues and expands upon this move towards a more differentiated understanding of the literature and culture of the GDR and its continuing influence on the work of writers, cultural practitioners and academics today. This diversity of interpretation is reinforced by the recognition that individual contributors provide not just East and West German perspectives, but, frequently working in transnational contexts, also bring to bear British (English and Scottish), Dutch, Irish, Italian and

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<sup>3</sup> *Rereading East Germany: The Literature and Film of the GDR*, ed. by Karen Leeder. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State since 1989*, ed. by Nick Hodgkin and Caroline Pearce. Rochester: Camden House, 2011, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Tendenzen und Perspektiven der gegenwärtigen DDR-Literatur-Forschung*, ed. by Katrin Max. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2016.

Swedish cultural influences to their work. Significantly, the contributions in this volume do not, by conscious choice or default, engage with the traditional “Stasiland”/“Ostalgie” dichotomy. This is undoubtedly a feature of the plurality outlined above, but it may also be a sign that the German-German unease of the three decades which have elapsed since the collapse of the GDR are gradually being replaced by broader cultural, aesthetic and societal concerns. Equally, however, the events of 1989/1990 and their topoi of unstable boundaries and nationhood have found a renewed resonance in growing debates on key cultural and political issues such as the influx of refugees, the rise of the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) and groups such as *Pegida*, and the resulting broader discussions, both inside and beyond the borders of the Federal Republic, on the kind of society Germany has, and should, become.

The impetus for the current volume was provided by two events held at the University of Limerick and firmly situated within these national and international debates. The first of these was the fifteenth international conference in Irish-German Studies, entitled *25 Jahre Mauerfall: Reflections on GDR literature, its legacy and connections between the GDR and Ireland* and organised jointly by the University of Limerick and the National University of Ireland, Galway, in November 2014. This brought together international academics and writers to reflect upon the fall of the Berlin Wall twenty-five years later. The second conference took place in May 2015; entitled *Grenzüberschreitungen: Der Blick zurück*, this was the tenth conference of *Movens*, an international German Studies network aimed at transcending borders and offering new perspectives on literary and cultural themes from medieval to contemporary writing. In addition to selected papers from both events, the volume includes invited contributions and personal reflections, all of which take up the themes of reunification and legacy from different perspectives. Whether creative practitioners or academics, contributors engage with the potential of different genres and the work of both lesser-known and more established writers. They all consider the broader literary and intellectual contexts and traditions shaping GDR literature and culture in a way that affords a deeper understanding of the impact of these on post-1990 German literature, well beyond the initial desire for the ultimate *Wenderoman* which would capture and explain the emotions and complexities of 1989/90. Similarly, the interest in, and longing for, “den großen Deutschlandroman” appears to remain unabated.<sup>6</sup> The attempt to trace the fault lines of GDR life and subsequent correlations and discrepancies in post-*Wende* Germany remains a challenge for many German writers.

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Paul Jandl, “Wie Deutschland wurde, was es plötzlich ist: Von Überzeugungslinke, Ex-DDR-Kader und Westler, die den Osten auch 25 Jahre nach dem Mauerfall wie Kolonisatoren durchschreiten. Buchpreisträgerin Kathrin Schmidt wagt den großen Deutschlandroman”, in *Die Welt*, 3 September 2016. Indeed, Jandl claims that Schmidt’s 2016 novel *Kapoks Schwestern* presents “ein hyperrealistisches Bild des Alltags im entideologisierten ‘Nachmauerdeutschland’”.

This bilingual volume is split into three strongly interconnected sections. While their intentionally open headings (“Responding”, “Reconstructing” and “Reflecting”) provide some guidance for the reader, all contributors respond, reconstruct and reflect on reunification and the legacy of GDR literature and culture. Chapters which revisit key works engaging with the Berlin Wall and the *Wende* period combine with personal reflections from writers and academics who look back upon their experiences of that time and consider the legacy of GDR literature and culture from their respective East and West German backgrounds. These reflections re-emphasise the vital contribution literature can make to an understanding of broader cultural contexts by casting a light on nuances all too frequently overlooked or ignored.

### **Responding**

Within the opening section, contributors, many of whom have spent decades engaged in GDR Studies in a variety of academic traditions, were invited to “respond” in turn to those creative responses they considered central to their understanding of the GDR and the events of 1989/1990. The wide range of genres selected underlines both the diversity of GDR cultural production beyond the prose and poetry to which it is often reduced and the importance of the GDR as an impetus to writers within the borders of the GDR and beyond.

In the first contribution, “‘Like a Dream’: Film, Fears, Fantasies and Nightmares of the *Wende*”, Nick Hodgkin reveals how media representations of the fall of the Berlin Wall provide competing responses – contesting narratives of events – from the standard images broadcast around the world to the fragments of personal memory-building now held captive on online video channels and internet websites. Hodgkin explores how long-held dreams of freedom and a better future turned for many into a seemingly chaotic series of unreal moments which created an increased sense of alienation and bewilderment. Indeed, for many, the dream threatened to become a nightmare. Hodgkin argues that Jens Becker’s *Grönland*, “the first film to respond to the GDR’s disintegration and to explore these shifts between dream and reality”, explores the theme of the carnivalesque in grotesque and chilling tones. By tracing the mental disintegration of its main character Ypsilon, Becker’s film provides “an abstract and sometimes elliptical narrative that matches the disorder and unknowability of the times”. Becker’s response is self-reflective, challenging both portrayals of events around him and the very nature of his chosen genre.

The second chapter, Marieke Krajenbrink’s “‘Wir alle blicken jetzt auf uns zurück’: Revisiting the Portrayal of the *Wende* in Botho Strauß’s Drama *Schlußchor*”, offers a unique revisiting, not only of the West German dramatist’s 1991 play exploring “the awkward encounter, full of misunderstandings and marred by mutual stereotypes” as East meets West, but also of the

contributor's own engagement with the work two years later. Strauß's *Schlußchor*, of course, invokes Beethoven's Final Chorus from his Ninth Symphony; in an equally intriguing moment of intertextuality, this link between past and present is echoed in the handwritten fragmented score of Beethoven's work which symbolically constituted the central focus of the exhibition room "Zusammenführung und Neuformierung" where Frank Hörnigk's video reflections on the *Wendzeit* (transcribed in the third section of this volume) would be broadcast. In relation to Strauß's work, Krajenbrink demonstrates how, nearly a quarter of a century later, the altered political and literary landscape demands a new reading of the text, shining light on hitherto unexplored aspects previously cast in shadows and reinterpreting the significance of specific dramatic elements. Of particular import is the recognition that Strauß's technique of using a lone character who cries out "Deutschland!", once so controversial in the nationally sensitive period immediately following the *Wende*, might in the intervening years be received less nervously by a public more comfortable with a growing mood of patriotic pride.

Anna Chiarloni's "Rückblick auf die *Grenzfallgedichte*: Volker Brauns Weg vom 'Nachruf' (1990) zur dramatischen Dichtung 'Demos' (2015)" provides a discussion of the critical responses by Volker Braun – one of the most important poets, novelists and essayists to emerge from the GDR – to the changing societal circumstances in which he found himself. Braun's poem "Das Eigentum", originally entitled "Nachruf", proves the starting point for Chiarloni's revisiting of the anthology *Grenzfallgedichte*, which was published in 1991 with the intention of capturing the immediate richness of poetic responses to the events of 1989/1990 from both East and West. Braun's work stands out above the rest, and in her tracing of his oeuvre in subsequent years, Chiarloni emphasises how Braun's creative expression is constantly informed by his strong ideological commitment and a rich intertextuality which weaves through his writings, reinforcing his critical societal gaze. Chiarloni demonstrates how Braun's most recent engagement with the post-2008 economic situation – in two as yet unpublished works, extracts of which illustrate her argument – equally demands individual and collective agency in the face of societal inequalities and divisions.

Jean E. Conacher also explores a personal response to rapidly changing events in "Capturing the *Zeitgeist*: On Human Experience and Historiography in Helga Königsdorf's *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit*". She revisits this GDR mathematician and writer's individual resistance to those traditional seamless "grand narratives" which Jean-François Lyotard had rejected almost a decade before,<sup>7</sup> but which rapidly came to the fore in the struggle between competing

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<sup>7</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, transl. by Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

interpretations of unfolding events. Königsdorf assembles a collage of personal texts – letters, poems and texts – interwoven with reports of daily events as she seeks to hold onto the humour, ludic quality and performativity of what she repeatedly calls a period of “Karneval” (in a forerunner, perhaps, of Frank Hörnigk’s recollection of the “große komödische Dimension” of the *Wende*). Conacher argues that Königsdorf’s collage, far from being a random collection of subjective responses and reflections, itself constitutes a personal, and indeed highly political, attempt to impose meaning on chaos, to wrest individual agency from officially sanctioned interpretations of societal events and to juxtapose personal and public – autobiographical and historical – narratives in a creative and challenging manner that would increasingly constitute a ‘subjective turn’ in post-*Wende* literary output.

In the final contribution in this section, Corina Löwe’s “‘Wir *waren* die Geschichte’: Erinnerungen an die DDR und den Herbst 1989 in zwei kinder- und jugendliterarischen Texten” explores the response of two writers – Holly-Jane Rahlens, an American living in Germany, and Klaus Möckel, an author who grew up and made his career in the GDR – to changing events in 1989/1990. Indeed, both of the books examined are set in November 1989, although published eighteen years apart, and portray how the main characters come to understand the unfolding narrative of the world around them. Their opening perspective is very different; Rahlens’s character from *Maierblümchen* (2009) lives in West Berlin, while Möckel’s protagonist in *Bennys Bluff oder ein unbeimlicher Fall* (1991) presents a more immediate East Berlin response to events. The chronological gap in publication dates is significant, allowing Löwe to highlight not just differences in ideological standpoint but also the impact of historical distance on the construction of memory and the characters’ ability to deconstruct stereotypical and clichéd images of ‘the Other’.

## **Reconstructing**

In the second section of this volume, we chose the term ‘reconstructing’ as a guiding concept, selecting contributions that not only analyse constructions of the past but also afford us broadening and enriching perspectives of past and present, reclaiming past and current complexities, restoring nuances and rediscovering overlooked or often forgotten authors, genres and questions of differing receptions. In short, our aim is a broadening of perspectives.

Hugh Ridley’s chapter, “‘Nach einem Lenz, der sich nur halb entfaltet’: Aspects of the Reception of Uwe Johnson’s *Ingrid Babendererde*”, positions the work of a writer who has remained a classic of twentieth-century German literature. His ongoing popularity is reflected in countless

studies on his work and the annual publication of the *Johnson-Jahrbuch*, first published in 1994.<sup>8</sup> Ridley considers the reception history of Johnson's first novel, *Ingrid Babendererde*, in the Federal Republic of Germany and in the GDR. Initially, in 1957, it was rejected in both states; following Johnson's death, it was published by Suhrkamp in 1985. The focus on reception is illuminating, especially as Johnson was celebrated following the 1959 publication of *Mutmassungen über Jakob* as "der Dichter der beiden Deutschland",<sup>9</sup> a characterisation at which Johnson himself only scoffed: "Also damit können Sie mich jagen" – in fact, Johnson categorically stated that he neither spoke for both Germanies nor was it possible to read him in both countries.<sup>10</sup> Ridley deconstructs the reasons given for the refusal to publish *Ingrid Babendererde* by Siegfried Unseld in particular, not least in view of his acceptance of *Mutmassungen über Jakob* two years later and in light of the 1969 publication of Christa Wolf's novel *Nachdenken über Christa T.* by Mitteldeutscher Verlag (which had rejected *Ingrid Babendererde* also).

The concept of reconstructing operates effectively at several levels in Robert Gillett and Astrid Köhler's discussion of Adolf Endler in their chapter "Tarzan im zerborstenen Rückspiegel: Gedächtnis und Gedenken bei Adolf Endler". On the one hand, the authors are engaged in reconstructing his role in the GDR; on the other hand, they analyse his reconstruction of the GDR in his own writings. The broken mirror to which they refer in their title may have irretrievably lost fragments, but, as Salman Rushdie points out, it might still be "as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed".<sup>11</sup> Arguing that parts of Endler's lyrical and prose work amount to a fragmentary autobiography, Gillett and Köhler focus specifically on Endler's diary entries from the early 1980s. These texts were only published in 1994 in a reworked form as *Tarzan am Prenzlauer Berg: Sudelblätter 1981–1983* by an author for whom most publishing outlets in the GDR had been closed off since his exclusion from the *Schriftstellerverband* in 1979. As in the earlier example of Königsdorf, the manifold complexities and the political potential of explicitly personal writing are clearly demonstrated. Endler, who was a key member and promoter of the *Sächsische Dichterschule* and long-term proponent of the *Prenzlauer Berg* literary circle, overcame his frustration with the realities of political life in the GDR by utilising black humour and surrealism as literary strategies

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<sup>8</sup> It was initiated and edited for many years by Ulrich Fries, Holger Helbig and Irmgard Müller. The yearbook was initially published by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; from volume 17, onwards it appears in the Wallstein Verlag.

<sup>9</sup> Reinhard Baumgart, "Nicht Romeo, nicht Julia", in *Der Spiegel*, 22 September 1965 <<http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-46274245.html>> [accessed 26 July 2017]. However, in this article on Johnson's *Zwei Ansichten*, Baumgart reveals the description "Dichter der beiden Deutschland" to be a cliché and problematic, a marketing ploy that, in this case, includes an impossible demand on literature to bring together divided realities.

<sup>10</sup> Uwe Johnson in interview with Reinhard Baumgart 1967, quoted in Heinz Ludwig Arnold, "Beschreibung eines Beschreibers: Über Uwe Johnson", in Heinz Ludwig Arnold, *Von Umwollendeten: Literarische Porträts*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005, pp. 234–62 (p. 256).

<sup>11</sup> See Salman Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands", in Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991*. London: Granta, 1991, pp. 9–21 (p. 11).

– neither likely to find favour with official cultural policies in the GDR. With the post-*Wende* publication of his diary, Endler’s achievement in reworking his original observations was twofold – firstly, correcting any over-positive presentation of the *Prenzlauer Berg* scene and offering a more complex portrayal of the almost mythical literature that was created there and, secondly, also foregrounding the often forgotten existence of modern and experimental literature in the GDR.

While Jens Sparschuh’s prose writing, especially his *Heimatroman, Der Zimmerspringbrunnen*, published in 1995, has reflected the processes of reunification to critical acclaim, Frank Thomas Grub turns to Sparschuh’s engagement with the often overlooked genre of radio plays and features in his chapter “Zwischen Kyffhäuser und Plattenbau: Rückblicke und Vergangenheitskonstruktionen in Hörspielen und Features von Jens Sparschuh”. The immediacy of the radio medium makes this analysis particularly rewarding as Sparschuh produced a considerable number of plays and features. Five of these, broadcast between 1989 and 2005, form the core of Grub’s study. Despite the generally fast turnaround of radio productions, the fictitious setting of the first broadcast under discussion, “Bahnhof Friedrichstraße: Ein Museum”, written in 1988, had nearly become reality when broadcast a year later, as “*dieser absurdeste Berliner Bahnhof*”<sup>12</sup> had by then almost been transformed into a *lieu de mémoire*. Grub highlights Sparschuh’s willingness to engage with the past and its ambiguities, his explicit emphasis on themes such as remembering and forgetting – and the limitations and selectiveness of these two concepts. Both the importance of and the elusiveness of remembering and forgetting are highlighted by Sparschuh’s skilful interweaving of different layers of time, often by way of intertextual references. The topic of power relations also recurs frequently and reflects ongoing mutations, at times even complete inversions. Taken together, his radio plays and features add considerably to a nuanced and differentiated engagement with the legacy of GDR literature and culture.

Radio also plays a key role in Sabine Egger’s investigation of Lutz Seiler’s poetic oeuvre as well as his first novel for which he received the *Deutschen Buchpreis* in 2014. In “The Radio Transcending Boundaries and Historical Narratives in Lutz Seiler’s Poetry and in his Novel *Kruso*”, Egger concentrates on Seiler’s employment of radios as a symbol and means of overcoming geographical and political limits and thereby opening up new dimensions which invite different modes of perception and poetic memory. This allows Seiler to create a multifaceted portrayal of the GDR in its final phase, specifically in *Kruso*. The radio becomes shorthand for a presence which provides comfort in times of loneliness. It also contributes to the awareness of parallel worlds and an “extraterrestrial” reality, disrupting, complementing and enriching individual experiences. In

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<sup>12</sup> Jens Sparschuh, *Ich dachte, sie finden uns nicht: Zerstreute Prosa*. Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1997, p. 30 (italics in original).



Seiler's novel, set on Hiddensee in the summer of 1989, the radio, called Viola, turns into a character and, as Egger argues, an additional narrator, adding 'her' voice to a polyphonic narrative space, and providing, almost literally, the soundtrack of events leading up to the end of the GDR. Egger demonstrates that the radio provides us with pluralistic narrative modes and alternative models for reconstructing the past: contradicting, echoing, questioning each other and adding to an insightful and multi-layered description both of the alternative and almost surreal community on Hiddensee as well as of the GDR as a whole prior to its disintegration in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Remembrance here is seen as transgressive historiography, challenging simplified historical narratives with its poetic dialogue.

### **Reflecting**

This third section gives voice to figures from the worlds of literature, the arts and academia. Scholars of German literature, writers and creative practitioners reflect upon their individual experiences of living and working in the GDR. They recall their memories of the fall of the Berlin Wall and describe the aftermath of the *Wende* period for their respective professions in a pan-German context.

Offering eyewitness insights into the cultural life of the East German state, these individual interviews provide an opportunity to broaden and deepen the evidence base for a more nuanced understanding of writing in and about the GDR, both before and after the tumultuous events of late 1989. Many respondents problematise the often reductionist manner in which the GDR has been reconstructed in literature and film during the almost three decades which have since elapsed; all assess the legacy of GDR literature and culture from their respective East or West German experiences.

Email interview proved to be a most successful format in yielding rich and deeply emotional responses. The interviews were semi-structured, with a common set of core questions that were emailed to contributors and to which they were invited to respond in writing. This facilitated a level of reflection that may not have been possible during a face-to-face interview. While the interview with Therese Hörnigk was conducted face-to-face in the summer of 2015 by Jeannine Jud, the questions had also been emailed to her in advance. We chose to call this section of the volume "Reflecting" in order to emphasise the importance of this personal and reflective dimension when revisiting the events of 1989 and beyond, while also foregrounding the level of engagement with which our interviewees had responded.

Recollections by the late Frank Hörnigk provide a fitting, if poignant, opening to the section.<sup>13</sup> The Emeritus Professor of Modern German Literature at the Humboldt University recalls the restructuring of the Berlin academic landscape during the turbulent period of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In so doing, he vividly captures the sense of potentiality but also of great uncertainty so characteristic of this time. For the author Kathrin Schmidt, the fall of the Wall opened up the possibility of becoming a full-time writer. She reflects at length upon the real existing cultural life of the GDR, emphasising the importance of literary influences from Eastern European traditions often overlooked in the traditional East-West German binary model. Katja Lange-Müller, for her part, had been living in West Berlin for five years when the Wall came down; she recalls her feelings of apprehension at having to “confront” the GDR past which she had left behind. In his contribution, playwright Reinhard Kuhnert describes the difficulties he encountered while attempting to have his plays staged in the GDR. He laments, as he sees it, the continued existence of two separate theatre scenes in contemporary Germany and emphasises the need for greater understanding on both sides “in diesem uneinig vereinten Land”. The contribution of academic Hannes Krauss further broadens the focus of this section by offering a West German perspective. Recalling his experiences as a *Germanist* living and working in the Federal Republic, he notes that literature became a “Projektionsraum für sozialistische Utopien”, also for those academics in the West who believed in the ideal of socialism. Krauss’s description of literature as an “Ort der Zwischenräume und der Zwischentöne” encapsulates the nuanced approach adopted by our interviewees, all of whom emphasise the necessity of such an approach if we are to deepen our understanding of the legacy of GDR literature and culture.

Frank Hörnigk’s memories of the late 1980s and early 1990s contextualise the reflections which follow by reminding us of the euphoria and sense of hope which the fall of the Wall evoked in so many – the climax of what he, with a nod to Enzensberger, terms a short “Sommer der Anarchie”.<sup>14</sup> He offers fascinating personal insights into the experiences of academics and researchers as they navigated an institutional landscape which was undergoing a period of fundamental and radical change. Ruptures (what he terms “Brüche”) and continuity are central

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<sup>13</sup> Professor Frank Hörnigk was one of the most active contributors at the *25 Jahre Mauerfall* conference in Autumn 2014 and was earmarked from the beginning, together with Therese Hörnigk, Katja Lange-Müller and Kathrin Schmidt, to reflect further on their experiences of the fall of the Wall and its aftermath. Following Frank Hörnigk’s untimely passing in early 2016, we were fortunate to receive permission to include in this volume the transcript from a 2010 exhibition, *WeltWissen: 300 Jahre Wissenschaften in Berlin*, in which the German Studies scholar reflected on the changing academic culture in which he found himself. We are particularly grateful to Jochen Hennig, the original curator of the exhibition, for his support in supplying both the text and image for this contribution and for his valuable contextualisation of Hörnigk’s reflections.

<sup>14</sup> Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Der kurze Sommer der Anarchie: Buenaventura Durrutis Leben und Tod*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972.

themes in Hörnigk's account of this period. Indeed, these dichotomous, yet inherently connected terms may serve as a metaphor for the implosion of the GDR and for the afterlife of the literature and culture emerging from a suddenly defunct state. These writers and critics experienced the fall of the Berlin Wall as a caesura, a severing with the past on many levels; however, all of them emphasise the continued relevance of GDR literature and culture for contemporary society.

As discussed earlier in the introduction to this volume, the term 'GDR literature and culture' is not an unproblematic one, however, and, unsurprisingly perhaps, this point is taken up by several of the respondents. Katja Lange-Müller, for example, dismisses the term as an "unsinniger Begriff", while Kathrin Schmidt explains that the prefix "DDR-" should be understood simply as a "chrono-geographische Vorsilbe" used to denote the literature and culture emerging from the GDR in just the same way as it could denote sport, fashion and food from that same state. Significantly, Schmidt argues against what she describes as the ideological appropriation of the term. Drawing attention to the negative consequences of just such an appropriation, Therese Hörnigk notes how "die im Osten entstandene Literatur mit ihrer Staatsangehörigkeit definiert [wird]", thus becoming a literature defined by exclusion and separation and acquiring a "Status von Aus- bzw. Abgrenzung", as she puts it.

Many respondents openly share their reactions to the fall of the Wall, a momentous event that unleashed often pent-up emotions. Hannes Krauss selects the fourth, rather than the ninth of November 1989 as the crucial date from this period – he remembers the "Aufbruchsstimmung" evoked by the mass demonstrations on the Alexanderplatz and his own deep-seated hope that this sense of possibility and desire for change could herald a political alternative to both the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany. For several respondents the collapse of the GDR brought forth conflicting emotions – Reinhard Kuhnert, for example, recalls the joy with which he greeted the end of division, but also the worry that he would have to face those who had triggered, at least in part, his decision to leave the GDR several years before. Such retrospective re-evaluation of this period uncovers feelings of disappointment that a coming together of both states did not, in fact, transpire; the inequality that Reinhard Kuhnert foregrounds in the title of his contribution is echoed by Hannes Krauss in his description of unification as an "Osterweiterung der alten Bundesrepublik".

The immediate post-unification years were turbulent ones for writers from the former GDR as they were forced to re-evaluate their role in society. Confronted with the implosion of an entire political system within and often against which they had written, they experienced a sudden and definitive loss of function. As Wolfgang Emmerich reminds us in the introduction to the third edition of his *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, literature had fulfilled the role of

“Ersatzöffentlichkeit” in the GDR.<sup>15</sup> Therese Hörnigk emphasises this very specific function of literature and culture as a substitute public domain: “Literatur und Kunst waren in dieser geschlossenen Gesellschaft ein ganz wichtiges Kommunikationsmittel, um die Widersprüche der Gesellschaft, die Erwartungen, Utopien und Enttäuschungen auszudrücken. Sie galten als moralische Instanz oder sogar als Lebenshilfe.” In her article “The Ex-GDR Poet and the People”, Ruth J. Owen foregrounds the profound effect of the *Wende* on writers as they struggled to come to terms with “a new self-understanding”.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps this is one of the reasons for the lack of literary engagement with the fall of the Wall in the years immediately following this caesura. Reinhard Kuhnert notes how the initial post-unification years were characterised by a conspicuous lack of literary engagement – the “Sprachlosigkeit der meisten DDR-Schriftsteller nach dem Mauerfall”, as he puts it. Our respondents emphasise the necessity of temporal distance from such tumultuous and historically significant events in order to process them individually, but also in literary form.

A recurring theme throughout all of the reflections is the need for a more nuanced engagement with the GDR in contemporary German society. Taking what she describes as the instrumentalisation of the term “Unrechtsstaat” as an example, Therese Hörnigk highlights just how unhelpful such “andauernde Pauschalverurteilung” is. Katja Lange-Müller criticises the nostalgia and even romanticisation characteristic of so many literary and cinematic representations of the GDR: “Es wird vieles verklärt und nostalgisch geschönt oder scherzhaft verharmlost”. Re-assessing the legacy of GDR literature and culture also enables the respondents to remind us of writers from the GDR who have been unfairly overlooked or forgotten. For Katja Lange-Müller, one such writer is Adolf Endler, also discussed by Gillett and Köhler in the second section of our volume.

If literature’s function in the GDR was that of an “Ersatzöffentlichkeit”, fulfilling a complex role as a substitute public domain, contemporary engagement with the literature and culture emerging from that state must recognise this complexity. As such, Hannes Krauss’s understanding, to which reference was made earlier, of the role of literature as an “Ort der Zwischenräume und Zwischentöne in einem meist schematisch struktuierten Diskurs (schwarz-weiß bzw. gut-böse)” is particularly fitting for our volume. A literature that fully appreciates and explores East German identity can result in a (necessary) challenging of perceptions, both of self and of other – “Revision verfestigter Selbst- und Fremdbilder” is how Krauss puts it. The wealth of experience which the respondents so generously brought to this volume has yielded rich

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<sup>15</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR: Erweiterte Neuauflage*. Leipzig: Kiepenheuer, 1996, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Ruth J. Owen, “The Ex-GDR Poet and the People”, *German Life and Letters*, 52.4 (October 1999), pp. 490–505 (p. 490).

contributions as they combine their own personal experience of writing in and about the GDR with considered analysis of the political, literary and cultural landscape of the *Wende* and of the post-unification years. In so doing, these reflections, like the academic contributions in both earlier parts, enrich our perspective on the enduring legacy of GDR literature and culture by contextualising, revisiting, re-assessing, and, most persuasively of all, by foregrounding the necessity of a nuanced and multifaceted approach.

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