LITERATURE AND GERMAN REUNIFICATION

STEPHEN BROCKMANN

© Stephen Brockmann 1999

Contents

Searching for Germany in the 1980s

What Franco Moretti once said of German culture in general was especially true of the political situation after 1945: "Germany is a sort of Magic Stage, where the symbolic antagonisms of European culture achieve a metaphysical intractability, and clash irreconcilably. It is the centre and catalyst of the integrated historical system we call Europe."[1] Historically, the post-1945 division of Germany was not new, since the country had been divided into many different smaller principalities prior to the first unification of 1871. What was new with the emergence of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1949 was not so much the fact of disunity as the division into only two states directly opposed to each other, each claiming to represent the best of the German tradition, and each with the support of one of the world's two superpowers. This stark opposition gave German division an ominousness it had never possessed before. The feeling of foreboding that emerged from Germany's and Berlin's new situation is given voice in a plethora of cold war spy novels, especially John le Carré's renowned *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* (1963).

How did German literature react to the German division? Based on the long history of the German *Kulturnation*, one might have expected that, in the face of political division, writers would stress the importance of German unity; and indeed many writers did. In the West figures such as Hans Werner Richter argued forcefully against the division of Germany, and in the East Johannes R. Becher enshrined the phrase "Germany, united fatherland" in the GDR's national anthem. This phrase was later to become a slogan for the East German crowds demanding reunification in the late fall of 1989, although most of the younger demonstrators probably did not know the provenance of their slogan, since the words to the anthem had been banned from official use in the GDR for over a decade

precisely because of their reference to national unity. A towering figure such as Thomas Mann traveled back and forth between the two Germanys in the early years of the cold war arguing for unity and stressing the indivisible nature of the German cultural heritage.

And yet the division into East and West Germany was not the first and only division for German writers. Many German writers had been separated from their country since Hitler's seizure of power in 1933. Those who came back to Germany generally returned with the intention of building a better, more democratic Germany – which for a great many of them meant a socialist Germany that would avoid the crises of capitalism that, they believed, had contributed to the disaster of 1933. The late 1940s and 1950s were a time of intense ideological opposition between the East and West in Germany, and most writers in the GDR and the FRG tended to go along with and reflect that opposition. While in the 1950s the two German states publicly proclaimed the goal of national reunification, at the same time the two German literatures were very far apart. In the West the 1950s saw an upsurge of nonpolitical, abstractly humanist literature, while in the East writers operated under the dicates of a ''socialist realism'' which saw writers as ''engineers of the human soul,'' in Stalin's terrifying terminology.[2]

Over the course of the 1960s, the ideological credibility won by the Soviet Union because of its rapid industrialization and victory over Nazi Germany was largely lost as it became increasingly evident that the East bloc had entered a long period of stagnation relative to the economies of the capitalist West. With the liberal West at the height of its postwar economic boom and the East bloc seeking to correct the many failings of its command economy via cautious liberalization, economists and political scientists began to speak of a ''convergence'' between the two systems, suggesting that the West was becoming increasingly Social Democratic, while the East was gradually moving from Stalinism toward more political and economic freedom. The father of this theory was the Dutch economist Jan Tinbergen, who, in a 1961 article, argued that the various changes occurring in the two systems were ''in many respects converging movements,'' and that ''the systems begin to influence each other more and more,'' suggesting that ultimately the two systems would move toward an optimum mix of free market and command elements.[3] Tinbergen's suggestion spawned an entire branch of comparative economics known as ''convergence theory.''[4]

The concept soon spread beyond the relatively narrow realm of economics to become part of broader cultural debate about postwar industrial society. Soviet dissidents such as Andrei Sakharov referred precisely to the theory of convergence in suggesting that "the development of modern society in both the Soviet Union and the United States is now following the same course of increasing complexity of structure and of industrial management," and that there would be a general "socialist convergence" in the future.[5] Sakharov and others argued for a democratization of socialism while at the same time maintaining the superiority of the socialist system over its ideological and economic competitor.

By the 1970s, when the disappointing performance of Soviet and East bloc economies had led growing numbers of economists to doubt the validity of convergence theory as an economic model, others welcomed the theory as part of a more general climate of détente, ideological moderation, and coexistence in the face of common problems. In a 1975 open letter to the Soviet writer Konstantin Mikhailovich Simonov, Alfred Andersch described convergence as the theory "that our two technocracies will ultimately even out the differences between our social systems and create a unified, computerized human model."[6] Andersch's definition is particularly useful because it shows that by the mid-1970s the idea of convergence had gone far beyond a relatively specific set of predictions about economic organization and performance to encompass entire societies and the human beings within them.

The emerging rapprochement between East and West over the course of the 1960s also brought the literature of East and West Germany closer together. The relative political freedom inaugurated in the East bloc in the era of détente meant that writers could begin to deal more freely and openly with unresolved problems in socialist society, while the triumph of the protest movement in the FRG in the 1960s made West German writers more critical of capitalist shortcomings as well. In the GDR the rise to power of Erich Honecker in 1971 was accompanied by the new leader's declaration that there were to be no more "taboos" in literature and the admission that even developed socialist society in the GDR was plagued with contradictions and problems.[7]

Six years earlier, at the eleventh plenum of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party in December 1965, cultural figures had been severely attacked by the party leadership. These attacks had

shocked several of the GDR's writers so severely that they began increasingly to distance themselves from party doctrine while at the same time seeking to move their writing away from the controversial realm of politics and toward less problematic areas such as myth and legend.[8] The most famous example of the new questioning and distancing in GDR literature preceded Honecker's rise to power: Christa Wolf's 1968 novel *Nachdenken über Christa T.* [*The Quest for Christa T.*], which ushered in a growing openness about personal problems, especially the role of women in socialist society. This new emphasis on the personal coincided with a growing recognition in West Germany that "the personal is the political" – one of the major refrains of the feminist movement. These words were to become representative of the "new subjectivity," a social shift in both Germanys during the 1970s away from purely political problems to lifestyle issues. In the FRG, the shift away from politics was known as the "Tendenzwende" (change of tendencies). Both Helmut Peitsch and Ulrich Schmidt have identified the "Tendenzwende" as a crucial expression of West German political disillusionment.[9]

What is noteworthy in the context of German literary development in the postwar period is that it is precisely the late 1960s and 1970s, during the heyday of both convergence theory and détente, including the German *Ostpolitik* pioneered by Willy Brandt, that East German literature began to break out of the socialist realist aesthetic of the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s and to win acceptance in the West as part of a larger German cultural project – as contributing not just to GDR literature but to German literature as a whole. German literature began, paradoxically, to "converge" at precisely the moment that the two political systems were tending to acknowledge the permanence of German division. During this period East German literature was to become less specifically East German and more humanistic. As Wolfgang Emmerich has noted, East German literature began to lose its uniqueness during this period.[10] Peitsch has suggested that as a result of Brandt's emphasis on the concept of a German *Kulturnation* that transcended political borders, many writers and scholars during the 1970s began to look for cultural convergence, whereas they had previously stressed cultural differentiation.[11] By 1987, Alexander von Bormann was suggesting that the conception that there were two separate German literatures was itself an ideological relic "from the time of the Cold War, in which

people liked to assert that soon Germans would not be able to talk to each other any more."[12]

Christa Wolf, as the most famous East German writer, is also the best example of literary convergence. Not only did her *Nachdenken über Christa T.* become a major event in the West as well as the East, but her subsequent publications, particularly *Kindheitsmuster* [*Patterns of Childhood*] (1976), *Kein Ort. Nirgends* [*No Place on Earth*] (1979), *Kassandra* [*Cassandra*] (1983), and *Störfall* [*Accident*] (1987), were literary events of significance in both the East and the West. Since Wolf's development was so symptomatic of a more general literary convergence – and since she was to emerge at the center of the first post-reunification literary debate – it is useful briefly to summarize her major literary accomplishments from the 1960s to the 1980s.

Wolf's debut novel, *Der geteilte Himmel* [*Divided Heaven*] (1963), which described a young woman intellectual's idealistic attempt to integrate herself into socialist factory production, had dealt explicitly with GDR content. It would have been difficult to read *Der geteilte Himmel* as anything other than a coming to terms with socialist society. Emerging from the "Bitterfelder Weg," a state-supported literary-political movement in the GDR which sent writers into factories to work side-by-side with members of the proletariat, *Der geteilte Himmel* addressed problems of production in socialist society against a backdrop of intense East–West ideological confrontation. *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, however, opened itself up to a more modernist and multi-layered reading. While it was certainly a confrontation with socialist society, the novel was also a depiction of a young woman's nonconformism in the face of rigid social constraints. Such nonconformism was just as possible or impossible in any modern industrial social structure as in the GDR. Critics could and did read *Nachdenken* as a work primarily concerned with general human problems rather than the specificity of socialist society. As Fritz J. Raddatz wrote in a 1969 review for *Der Spiegel*, this novel was not exclusively "socialist."[13] Noting that the novel defended private life against the encroachments of public reality, the critic Thomas von Vegesack suggested that Wolf was part of a more general humanist revolt in the GDR.[14] Meanwhile Marcel Reich-Ranicki noted Wolf's proximity to German-language writers outside the GDR: "Wolf has assiduously explored recent German fiction, and she has learned much from all the writers, from Johnson, Böll, and Frisch, and perhaps also from Grass and Hildesheimer."[15] Reich-

Ranicki's statement was tantamount to an admission that, because of Christa Wolf, the best East German literature now satisfied the aesthetic criteria of even the most exalted Western authors. Reich-Ranicki's treatment of Wolf was a prefiguration of the reception of much of the best East German literature in the Federal Republic for the next two decades. If Western critics concluded that such literature met their own standards, it became redefined more as German than as specifically GDR literature. The lop-sided terms of this critical appropriation, in which power rested primarily with critics in the West, itself prefigured the modus operandi for the absorption of the GDR state into the FRG at the end of the 1980s.

The predominance of a humanist worldview in Wolf's work was even more obvious in the author's next major work, *Kindheitsmuster*, which focused on the problem of Germany coming to terms with the Nazi past. The 1933–1945 experiences of Nelly, the young subject of *Kindheitsmuster*, occurred well before the foundation of the GDR in 1949 and could have happened to almost any German girl born around 1929, no matter where she happened to find herself after 1949. While the narrative voice in *Kindheitsmuster* was clearly a GDR voice, her subject was Germany as a whole, not the land of postwar division. Wolf's subsequent books *Kein Ort. Nirgends* and *Kassandra* dealt with a past that was even further removed: the former with two figures from early nineteenth-century German romanticism and the latter with the mythical Trojan prophetess. While these books clearly can and must be read within a specific GDR context, they also appeal to more general German and human problems. Finally, *Störfall* returned to very current events – the 1986 explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear reactor – but it did so in a way which made the border between East and West Germany virtually irrelevant. Neither nuclear radiation nor most other ecological problems respect such political and ideological borders, and hence the problems of instrumental rationality discussed in Wolf's text were in no way system-specific. *Störfall* was to be the primary German literary response to the Chernobyl disaster, as popular in the West as it was in the East.

From the appearance of *Der geteilte Himmel* in 1963, Wolf had excelled at a personal, intimate kind of narration that many critics hailed as specifically female; her stories and novels were frequently autobiographical and almost always dealt with a woman's attempt to come to terms with her own individuality and with the people and society around her. *Störfall*, for instance, had literally told the news of

one woman's late spring day in 1986: ''I switched off the TV, locked the front, then the back door, did the supper dishes, put the cold cuts in the refrigerator.''[16] This quotidian passage from a novella about the problem of nuclear technology in modern society is typical of the way in which Wolf interweaves the personal with the political in her novels, stories, and essays. It was to a large extent this ability to combine the personal and the political that helped to make Wolf a crucial link between East and West German literature in the era of ''new subjectivity.''

As much as it points to important commonalities between East and West German literature during the 1980s, however, *Störfall* can also be used to illustrate an ongoing difference. In a society with no open public sphere for debates about politics, a writer such as Wolf provided, through her books, stories, articles, and public readings, a forum for discussion and debate about matters which frequently went far beyond the purely literary. To continue with the example of *Störfall*, Wolf's 1987 novella made it possible for East Germans to recreate at least in the privacy of their armchairs and via literary means the public debate about nuclear energy which had occurred in West Germany; through the life and thoughts of one woman as she attempted to cope with the ''news of the day,'' East German readers could address important debates about technology and society.

The fact that *Störfall* was able to function in the GDR as a fill-in for a necessary but missing political discussion demonstrates that in East German public life a writer such as Wolf was not ''just'' a creator of elegant literary entertainments. She became an essential medium for social communication. Wolf herself took on aspects of the seer or the prophet that she had depicted in her novel about the fall of the walled-in city of Troy. As important as this role was in the context of the authoritarian GDR, it was to become problematic after German reunification. And yet Wolf's political role within GDR society was neither incomprehensible nor unknown for writers in the West, many of whom had at times sought for themselves a similar role. The political importance of literature in East German society was not solely a function of GDR authoritarianism; it contained important elements of a long German tradition.

This abbreviated summary of Wolf's production from 1964 to 1987 is not intended to be exhaustive. It is clear that during this time Wolf made a transition from relatively limited socialist-realist narra-

tive and content to a more open and humanistic approach. This transition made it possible for Wolf to be received in the West as both a GDR writer and a representative of larger German, feminist, and human concerns. The transition involved a number of different factors: 1) a change in Wolf's texts toward a more critical and open narration and content; 2) the recognition inside the GDR that the advent of fully developed socialist society had not eliminated all social or personal contradictions; and 3) a growing willingness on the part of critics and readers in the West to look beyond system-specific differences at similarities and convergences in modern industrial society, including a wealth of difficult problems such as ecological devastation, individual integrity, instrumental technology, and the role of women. All of these developments occurred in a context characterized by détente and its scholarly correlate convergence theory, as well as by a general feeling in the late 1970s that the age of ideology had come to an end.[17] Moreover, the transition in literature of the GDR and its reception in the West occurred at precisely the time of the so-called "new subjectivity" in West Germany, an increasing confrontation with the National Socialist past, and disillusionment with the reformist politics of the Social-Liberal coalition government installed in the West in 1969. The path taken by Wolf was also open to other GDR writers, especially women authors who began to join a larger discussion among feminists internationally: Irmtraud Morgner, Helga Königsdorf, Maxi Wander, Brigitte Reimann. A decidedly non-feminist writer such as Heiner Müller, however, showed a remarkably similar development: from the GDR-specific "production plays" of the 1950s (socialist realist theatre about factory work, especially the fulfillment of state-imposed production norms) to pessimistic meditations on modern catastrophe in the 1970s and 1980s.[18] And Christoph Hein's spectacularly successful 1982 novel *Der fremde Freund* [*The Distant Lover*] became successful in West Germany largely because its tale of alienation and spiritual numbing transcended East–West dichotomies and appealed directly to the state of human beings in the modern age. As David Roberts has suggested, Hein's "diagnosis of sickness relates to the process of civilization, i.e., the dialectic of enlightenment, which cannot be reduced in the specific history of the GDR."[19]

Given these considerations, there were good reasons for Hans Mayer to declare in 1979 that "there is a movement of convergence in German-language literature of our day." Mayer stated that "the

convergences are obvious'' and ''amazing,'' and he spoke of con-
temporary German literature as a ''concrete totality.''[20] Likewise
Frank Trommler suggested five years later that there was only one
German literature irrespective of state boundaries.[21] Working with
specifically literary criteria, as opposed to national-political ones,
Trommler identified areas of commonality and convergence in all
German-language literatures. While Trommler's declaration seemed
provocative given the history of cold war criticism and the institu-
tionalization of literary studies in the 1980s, it seems much more
reasonable in a post-reunification framework. As Trommler wrote in
1984: ''The thesis of the two separate German literatures now
reveals its historical-political function and limitations.''[22] During the
1970s and 1980s, as the permanence of German political division
came to appear increasingly self-evident, German literature moved
in the opposite direction, as if literature were following the role
Meinecke had laid out for it in guaranteeing a German cultural
unity in the absence of a unified state. What primarily characterized
the literature of the 1970s and 1980s was its lack of ideological
specificity. ''It is the same suffering individual . . . of whom the
literature in the GDR and the Federal Republic speaks,'' wrote
Heinrich Mohr in 1980, suggesting that the literary spheres in the
two German states had become a single ''inner-German commu-
nications system.''[23] Because of these internal literary developments,
it was not unrealistic for the 1990 state treaty on German reunifica-
tion to ascribe to culture an important role in preserving national
unity during the years of German division.

   The era of détente that had coincided with the convergence of the
two German literatures in the 1970s came to an end in 1980 because
of larger geostrategic tensions related to the Soviet invasion of
Afghanistan and the NATO decision to station medium-range
Pershing II and cruise nuclear missiles on West German soil. The
resulting friction between an ongoing internal German détente and
increasing superpower confrontation led to a remarkable revitaliza-
tion of the German national question, expressed in the form of the
largest German postwar mass movement: the peace movement of
the early 1980s, in which thousands of people marched on the streets
of West Germany against the NATO armament decision. The peace
movement was not limited to West Germany; in the GDR as well,
Germans protested against both NATO and Warsaw Pact nuclear
weapons, and some, like the dissident physicist Robert Havemann,

explicitly connected their agitation for disarmament with calls for German reunification.[24] This upsurge in German national feeling, identified by Peitsch as a "renationalization," was directly related to German discomfort with larger international developments that seemed to threaten not only German-German cooperation but world peace. German national thinking was informed by two simple facts: 1) the growing realization among Germans that even after thirty years no peace treaty had been signed to end the Second World War, which meant that Germans still lacked full political sovereignty and might not have any choice in accepting foreign nuclear missiles; and 2) the simultaneous realization that their country, lying at the fault line of the cold war, would be the first to be destroyed in any nuclear war, even a "limited" one.

German writers responded to the threat of the "new cold war" of the early 1980s in a major show of support for the peace movement. Writers like Heinrich Böll and Walter Jens marched in antinuclear demonstrations and even participated in acts of civil disobedience at nuclear weapons sites in West Germany. Within the realm of literary politics the peace movement spurred a new focus on the German *Kulturnation* and the role of writers as prophets and seers in a spiritual Germany that transcended the merely political border between the GDR and the FRG. This new focus was embodied in two widely publicized all-German writers' conferences in East and West Berlin in 1981 and 1983, called the "Berlin Encounters for the Furtherance of Peace."[25] As Parkes has written, the fact "that such gatherings took place at all . . . was a major new development" in literary politics.[26] Quite aside from the discussions and debates that occurred at these writers' conferences themselves, the very fact that East and West German writers were coming together to discuss questions of war and peace in such a highly public context spoke volumes both about the writers' ultimate sense of belonging together and about their view of their role in German society. Parkes identifies the writers' sense "of a common purpose" in the struggle for peace, while Peitsch has suggested that in both Germanys writers saw themselves as part of a literary opposition to the political status quo.[27]

Several years later, the film director Werner Herzog invoked the status of writers as guarantors of German unity in the face of political opposition when he suggested that "it is only culture and language that really hold us together," and that in the long run only

writers "can save Germany."[28] This renewed concept of the *Kulturna-tion* as the compensatory site of national identity also emerges from Günter Grass's 1980 declaration that "the only thing in the two German states that can be proven to be pan-German is literature."[29] Indeed, the specific intent of the writers gathered in Berlin during the conferences of the early 1980s was to overcome political tensions through cultural rapprochement and to achieve at least a minimal "convergence" on the question of peace. However in the German context convergence was necessarily linked to the national question and the problem of reunification. Although Peitsch has criticized the national turn among some German literary figures of the 1980s as a flight from political responsibility, it would seem that what was occurring was in fact a move toward a different politics of national reaffirmation, not a departure from politics altogether. Nevertheless, in the context of a literary culture that still understood itself primarily as the nay-saying "conscience of the nation," this reaffir-mation of national identity was bound to cause controversy and elicit criticism.

The two major works of German literature to come out of the peace movement and the Berlin writers' conferences were Christa Wolf's *Kassandra* and Günter Grass's *Die Rättin* [*The Rat*] (1985). Both of these works are protests against the threat of nuclear war and pleas for an overcoming of the differences between East and West. What is particularly revealing about both is that they do not take sides in the East–West debate. Instead, they argue from a third position which rejects the confrontation between the other two. The critique of the cold war is clearest in *Kassandra*, in which Wolf returns to the oldest motif in Western literature, the battle between the Greeks and the Trojans depicted in Homer's epics, not to celebrate the male heroes of those epics, but rather to meditate on the fate of the Trojan princess Cassandra, condemned by the god Apollo always to tell the truth but never to be believed. Although daughter to the Trojan king Priam, Cassandra is equally critical of both Greece and Troy, and she refuses to be pressured by war-time paranoia into unthinking support for her father or his peons. At one level *Kassandra* is an allegory of the cold war between the West and the East, with the Greeks as representatives of the triumphant West and the Trojans as representatives of the defeated East. However, Wolf's interest lies not so much in the exploits of the Greeks and Trojans as in the possibility of a non-confrontational way of life that

transcends the East–West conflict. In *Kassandra* the vision of a community that goes beyond the bipolar East–West division is embodied in the feminist collective of which Cassandra becomes a part. While this collective is ultimately disbanded with the fall of Troy, it remains real as a memory of a different form of life, of a "third path." For Wolf the seeming ideological differences between Troy and Greece (and between the East bloc and the West bloc) are outweighed by a fundamental convergence at the level of patriarchal domination.[30]

Grass's fantastical dream-novel *Die Rättin* tells the story of a post-apocalyptic world in which the nuclear catastrophe feared by so many Germans during the early 1980s has already occurred and the only mammalian survivors are rats, who are able to form a community of solidarity and peace so unlike the warlike communities of human beings. Central to Grass's critique of human stupidity is the ecological devastation of the planet earth, represented in the book by the German forest. This devastation eliminates not only the physical conditions for the survival of the human race but also its spiritual center. As the place of mystery occupied by so many figures in German fairy tales, the forest is a cultural as well as an agricultural and ecological value.

German literature of the early 1980s is full of the fear of nuclear war and a sometimes desperate critique of the United States and its leaders, an anti-Americanism rightly criticized at the time by Andrei S. Markovits.[31] A typical example of such anti-Americanism is a 1985 poem by the veteran Austrian leftist writer Erich Fried entitled "Conversation Between Two Great Statesmen in Heaven or in Hell:"

> "Maybe
> I ought
> to have
> remained
> a painter,"
> said the one.
>
> "And I
> an actor,"
> said the other.[32]

The point of the poem is on the one hand a direct comparison between Adolf Hitler and Ronald Reagan underlined by the fact that both are in either heaven or hell together; and on the other

hand the suggestion that the world would have been better off if the two artists, however untalented, had stuck to their original professions. While such a comparison may be offensive to both American sensibilities and the historical record, it is fairly typical of the edgy atmosphere in Central Europe during the early 1980s.

Probably the most controversial German literary critique of the United States and its President in the early 1980s was Rolf Hochhuth's 1984 play *Judith*, which addressed the moral question of whether political murder is acceptable in order to prevent greater harm. Hochhuth prefaced his play with a quotation from the biblical *Judith*: "Bring to pass, O Lord, that his pride may be cut off with his own sword,"[33] and used the story of the Jewish princess Judith, who sleeps with the Persian tyrant Holofernes and then cuts off his head, as the basis for both his title and the two main strands of the play. *Judith* tells the story of two different political assassinations, the first of which is based on historical reality, and the second of which is therefore suggested to be at least a real possibility: respectively the murder of the German General Commissar of Belarus in 1943 and that of the President of the United States in the early 1980s. In the first plot, the heroine Judith murders the German official as an act of protest and defiance against the ongoing Holocaust of the Jews in Eastern Europe. In the second plot, the heroine (also named Judith) uses the chemical weapon being developed by the United States for a future war to kill the murderous President at whose request it is being manufactured. Judith has tried to reason with the President and stop his experiments with chemical weapons, but to no avail. The President scorns the peace movement and believes only in war. Trying to explain her act after the President's assassination, Judith refers to the Biblical injunction to beat swords into ploughshares, one of the most important images of the German peace movement:

> I stood next to him, as he mocked those
> who, even in this country, want to
> beat their swords into ploughshares.
> And when he slapped away Arthur's professor
> like a stupid fly, the chemist
> who opened his eyes
> to what he had ordered
> to be produced . . . Swords into ploughshares . . .
> His arrogance, as he quoted that.
> That those in favor of disarmament are simply fools, supplicants

who never shoot – this habit of thought
of the power-sick:
has an end – since I made an end of *him*.[34]

Hochhuth's play was highly controversial because of its perceived
anti-Americanism, justification of political assassination, and equa-
tion of American foreign and military policy with Nazi genocide. As
an overtly political work seeking directly to influence the German
debates of the 1980s, *Judith* was in no way a major work of literature,
in spite of Hochhuth's somewhat pretentious affectation of free
verse. Nevertheless, the play is a relatively accurate representation of
German discomfort with the United States in the early 1980s.

Another important literary reflection of German politics in the
early 1980s was Stefan Heym's 1984 novel *Schwarzenberg*. Heym's
novel was based on a little-known but nevertheless true piece of
history. In 1945, when the Soviet Red Army was sweeping through
Germany to the West and the American army was moving toward
the East, the two armies met at the Elbe river and, with their Allies,
occupied all of Germany except for a small portion of land twenty
kilometers wide and twenty kilometers deep along the Czechoslovak
border southwest of Chemnitz and southeast of Zwickau. This area,
named after its major town, Schwarzenberg, remained free of
occupying armies for about a month in the spring of 1945. Commu-
nists and Social Democrats in Schwarzenberg organized a mini-
revolution against the Nazis and set up a free, democratic socialist
government. This brief experiment in socialist democracy becomes
for Heym the memory of a German utopia. Schwarzenberg repre-
sents the possibility of a democratic, socialist Germany that rejects
adherence to either of the two superpowers. Heym begins the novel
with a quotation from Schiller's poem "The Commencement of the
New Century" that directly speaks to the early 1980s:

Two mighty nations strive, with hostile power,
For undivided mastery of the world;
And, by them, each land's freedom to devour,
The trident brandish'd is – the lightning hurl'd.
. . .
Although thine eye may ev'ry map explore,
Vainly thou'lt seek to find that blissful place,
Where freedom's garden smiles for evermore,
And where in youth still blooms the human race.[35]

Within the context of Heym's novel it becomes clear that

Schwarzenberg is precisely that free and "blissful place" which Schiller could not find on his maps, and that a neutral, free Germany could fulfill in the future the unfulfilled promise of Schwarzenberg in the past and present. At this point Heym is close to the utopian dream of a free and unified German *Kulturnation* propagated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

In 1984 Peter Schneider published a long story entitled *Der Mauerspringer* [*The Wall Jumper*] in which the divided state of Germany became the primary theme. Schneider's book was a series of stories about people who had traveled from the one Germany to the other, sometimes quite literally by jumping over the Wall. The stories were held together loosely by a framing architecture in which the first-person narrator, who resembled Schneider himself, told about his own experiences in West and East Berlin, and in particular his troubled personal relationships with a close male friend and a female lover from the East. The book was a kind of German comedy of errors, in which primarily ideological misunderstandings worked to conceal the fundamental similarity among Germans on both sides of the wall. The narrator's final statements on German identity closely resembled Schiller's eighteenth-century declaration on the same subject: "If I were asked where it [Germany] lies, I could only locate it in its history and in the language I speak." Schneider's reflections on German identity were a clear declaration in favor of the *Kulturnation*:

If my fatherland exists, it isn't a state, and the state of which I am a citizen is not a fatherland. If I respond to queries about my nationality by saying without hesitation that I'm a German, I am clearly opting not for a state, but for a people that no longer has a state identity. At the same time, however, I assert that my national identity does not depend on either of the German states.[36]

Schneider suggested that the two German governments in East and West were so slavishly devoted to their respective superpowers in Moscow and Washington that they had forgotten the larger unity guaranteed by language, culture, history, and tradition. This unity was possible only when individual Germans recognized their own lack of completeness. Each of the individual stories in Schneider's book is therefore incomplete; it is only the entirety of the German stories that gives a true picture. As the narrator says, "Every story lacks something that the next one has; but then the next story is missing something from the one before."[37] The narrator ultimately

suggests that the real problem of German unity is not political but rather psychological: "It will take us longer to tear down the Wall in our heads than any wrecking company will need for the Wall we can see."[38] These words of 1984 were to prove prescient for the relations between West and East Germans after 1990.

One of the most determined literary proponents of German unity in the 1980s was Martin Walser, whose controversial spy novella *Dorle und Wolf* [*No Man's Land*] (1987) was a tragicomedy about German division and a plea for unity. In this novella Walser told the story of an East German spy and virtuoso piano player named Wolfgang Zieger (nickname: Wolf) who moves to West Germany, acquires West German citizenship, marries a West German named Dorris (Dorle) and works his way up to a high position in Bonn in order to pass on technological and scientific information to his bosses in East Berlin. Wolf's motivation is primarily patriotic, but not in the conventional bipolar sense of the 1980s. Wolf considers himself to be neither an East nor a West German but rather a citizen of the lost German whole. Refusing to pay fealty to either of the temporary states which existed in the 1980s, Wolf devotes his loyalty to a Germany no longer – or not yet – existent. His activity as a spy is an ingenious way of working to destabilize German division. Given the East's seemingly hopeless scientific-technological backwardness, Wolf hopes that his illegal technology transfers will decrease the harshness of German division by bringing the two Germanys together technologically. For him spying is simply a patriotic attempt to keep the more backward part of Germany closer to the more advanced part. In a divided Germany characterized by mutual contempt and historical forgetfulness, Wolf seeks to preserve the memory of what has been lost:

In the West, Wolf had discovered how much of the East had been lost here. He had experienced the growing coldness toward everything the two parts had in common, as well as the crass want of understanding, the overweening insensitivity and arrogance toward what was happening in the GDR. The two parts reverberated with mutual want of understanding. Each wanted to outdo the other in rejection. Each wished to lay claim to more historical justification, thereby relegating the other to proportionately less. Each vied with the other as an ardent shield-bearer for the camp to which it had been allocated. Each wanted to be a model student in its own school. In this way each had developed hostility toward the other as the most vital ingredient of its self-awareness. And this was what Wolf wanted to remedy, in a precarious field – that of armaments.[39]

Just as in Schneider's *The Wall Jumper, Dorle und Wolf* presents the personal as the political and the political as the personal. However Walser's apparent longing for Germany is much more acute than Schneider's. Dorle is a West German, while Wolf is an East German, and their marital union is already an image of a future reunified Germany. Moreover, Wolf experiences the division of Germany as an elemental split in his own psyche. German national division has created in Wolf a schizophrenic self-perception. Thomas Steinfeld and Heidrun Suhr have suggested that in *Dorle und Wolf* the abstract idea of a unified national "We" takes over the center "of the . . . individual, as an element of personal identity."[40] And yet it would be more accurate to say that in *Dorle und Wolf* the seemingly abstract becomes the concrete, or that the imagined becomes the real. In Walser's novel, the powerful force of eros itself, which Freud had identified as the primary force in human civilization, is directed toward an overcoming of German division. The coming together of man and woman is imagined on the same plane with the coming together of the German East and the German West. Wolf's description of the divided Germans recalls what is probably the most famous account of love in Western literature: Aristophanes' description of the origin of the sexes in Plato's *Symposium*, in which male and female were originally part of a single, attached body and sexual desire is explained as a longing for the restoration of a lost whole. According to Aristophanes, "each of us is a mere fragment of a man," and "we're all looking for our 'other half.'"[41] Walser's description of divided Germans differs from Aristophanes' description of man and woman, however, in that the knowledge of fragmentation has been lost, thus rendering a future coming together even more problematic. In a train station in Bonn Wolf observes his fellow passengers and imagines that he recognizes in them a lack of wholeness that corresponds to his own intense feelings of lack. As Wolf sees it, German division has entered into the very bodies of the West German people:

The other travelers on the platform, in their compactness, neatness, smartness, and purposefulness suddenly seemed to him like half-people. A mass of half-people were pushing their way back and forth.[42]

Of course it was precisely as half-people that Aristophanes had described man and woman in the *Symposium*. But in that account, men and women were constantly in search of each other, always

trying to regain their missing wholeness. Because contemporary West Germans have lost the sense of their own incompleteness, Wolf believes that they lack the erotic drive to push for personal and national reunification. Part of the horror of German division is that the half-people walking around the train station are completely unaware of their own inadequacy. They mistakenly believe themselves to be whole:

They don't know what they lack. And not one of them would say, if asked, that he lacked his Leipzig half, his Dresden part, his Mecklenburg extension, his Thuringian depth. They appear lost in one extreme. And the ones over there are trapped in the other. This is more divisive than that hateful stroke across the map. One should proclaim it loudly on a station platform. But he didn't have the courage. Yet he was surprised that no one shouted: We are half-people![43]

Although Walser's attempt to create a strict parallel between the individual and the nation remains unconvincing, Wolf's recognition here is a subtle one. It is not just the fact of division that is problematic; what is equally problematic is people's lack of awareness of that division. What is necessary for the process of healing to begin is a recognition of sickness. Walser's picture here was an explicit critique of what the author saw as West German attempts to repress the fact of national division.[44] Significantly, the bearer of the knowledge of German incompleteness is an East German, not a West German. In Walser's view, West Germans, as citizens of the more successful and prosperous German "half," are less likely to understand the need for national unity than East Germans, who live in a much less successful, much poorer half-state and for that reason are more capable of recognizing their neediness.

   Botho Strauß expressed a similar concern for German division in a long poem entitled *Diese Erinnerung an einen, der nur einen Tag zu Gast war* [This Memory of One Who Was a Guest for Only a Day] (1985). For Strauß, German division was less a problem of personal or geographical division than of historical memory. Far from being the schizophrenic product of German division, the poem's lyric voice is unified by national memory, which remains undivided even in a present characterized by separation. The voice asks, "was I, then, not born in my fatherland?" and laments the fact of German division, because it goes against the grain of historical memory. Germany's unified cultural heritage belies the reality of its present division:

No Germany known during my lifetime.
Two foreign states only, which forbade me
ever in the name of one people to be the German.
So much history, thus to end?

One must sense: the heart of a Kleist and
the division of the land. One must think: what a reunion
if one, in us, were to open the stage of history!

Perhaps whoever is German learns to supplement himself.
And every tiny piece of understanding
is like one cell in the national fabric,
which always contains the blueprint of the whole.[45]

Whereas Walser had been concerned with the effects of German division at the personal level, Strauß's concern went from the personal to the large-scale political, with each personal act of understanding contributing to the national project. Significantly, the rhetorical opposite of the "separation of the country" is drawn from the realm of literary culture as the traditional guarantor of German identity above and beyond political barriers: "the heart of a Kleist." It is also noteworthy that Strauß chooses not Goethe, the Weimar classicist, but rather the despairing, riven Kleist as the embodiment of "the division of the land." Strauß uses a biological metaphor to illustrate the relationship of individual Germans to each other in the larger context of the nation: each German individual is a cell, and the nation itself is a unified organism, however torn. The word "Geweb," used to refer to the nation, can mean both biological tissue and woven fabric and is hence connected to the Latin meaning of the word "text." Significantly, the poem's voice refers to both Germanys as being "foreign," suggesting that, like Walser's Wolf, Strauß recognizes himself not as a citizen of either one or the other, but rather as part of the missing German whole. Indeed, the fact that the two extant German states "forbade me / ever in the name of one people to be the German" suggests that East and West were in fact unpatriotic and anti-German.

As the development of West German society and the West German economy accelerated, the Federal Republic left the East German society and economy ever further behind. It was precisely the recognition of this growing gap between the two Germanys that had led Walser's fictional Wolfgang Ziegler to become a patriotic spy. The success of the postwar West German economic miracle had made possible a modernization of the FRG's villages and cities, the

emergence of automotive culture, and a dominance of new media such as television. In the course of this rapid modernization, the signs of the destruction caused by the Second World War had largely been eliminated, and along with those signs had disappeared many traces of an older, more bucolic, less hurried German lifestyle. In the GDR, economic difficulties associated with the country's less efficient system of production had meant the preservation not only of war ruins but also of architectural and cultural traditions. As Wolf Biermann suggested two years before the Wall came down, "the GDR-Germans have not become as Russian as the West Germans have become American."[46] In a post-1989 book the author Andreas Neumeister agreed. Referring to the former GDR as "the area of the Reichsbahn" ("Reichsbahngebiet") because the old pre-1945 Imperial German train service ("Reichsbahn") had continued to exist in Germany after the war only on the territory of the GDR, he wrote: "Germany is at its most German in the area of the Reichsbahn."[47] This statement expresses the widespread belief among West Germans that because the GDR's status as poor brother to the FRG had made rapid economic change less possible there, the other Germany had remained more uniquely German.

The first West German emissary to the GDR after the two governments extended partial diplomatic recognition to each other with the "Grundlagenvertrag" (Basic Treaty) in December of 1972 was the Social Democratic journalist and diplomat Günter Gaus, who served as the head of the "ständige Vertretung" (permanent representation) of the Federal Republic of Germany to the German Democratic Republic from 1974 to 1981 and became one of the most important theoreticians of the German Question during the 1970s and 1980s. Gaus suggested that the GDR was largely characterized by an apolitical "Nischengesellschaft" (society of niches) in which people sought to live undisturbed by larger political issues. Within the space of these niches many older German "prewar-bourgeois" (vorkriegsmäßig-bürgerlich) traditions had, he argued, been preserved. Gaus suggested that "in some good and bad habits and traditional values, the GDR is . . . the last bourgeois state on German soil."[48] The relatively slower pace of modernization in the GDR had, according to Gaus, allowed for "the conservation of behavior patterns that, since about 1950, have been ever more rapidly leveled out, melted away, and internationalized in our part of the country."[49]

What Gaus was suggesting ran counter to the conventional understanding of the Communist system as a radical attack on conservative values. It also contradicted the Communist party's own understanding of itself as a progressive force for social change. In Gaus's view, Communist domination in the GDR had, paradoxically, resulted in the preservation of traditional, conservative German values. As Gaus wrote, "a number of factors have meant that traditional family structures, positive and negative attitudes toward one's social surroundings, behavior patterns, sentiments, and resentments have to this very day been preserved more strongly over there than over here."[50] It was capitalist society that was revolutionary because of its progressive destruction and elimination of traditional social values. Gaus explicitly urged observers of the German-German relationship to go beyond the level of verbal ideology to the level of day-to-day social relations and interactions. There, he argued, observers would see that the GDR was the more truly traditional German state. Gaus wrote that West Germans who traveled to East Germany experience a shock of recognition that comes from the national past:

To West German eyes, much of the way of life in the GDR appears, in a strangely moving way, . . . prewar-bourgeois. That is what a fifty-year-old man says . . . a man who has occasionally felt a kind of throbbing of memory against his heart during his trips to the beautiful countryside over there, when he happened to pass through a village in Mecklenburg or a small town in Thuringia. As he thought more about it he realized that even though he had never been there as a child, he had transformed the external impression into the epiphany of an automobile trip with his parents in the 1930s: through another village and another small town, and yet the very same – and here I have to say: German – small-town feeling.[51]

Gaus's narration of the West German's memory of traveling with his parents and the recognition that the East German landscape more closely resembles the landscape of a fifty-year-old's childhood are remarkably similar to Botho Strauß's invocation of the East German university city Jena and the memory: "did I not see it early / and walked with my father along the bank of the Saale and Unstrut."[52] Karl Heinz Bohrer suggested in January of 1990 that "this depth dimension of the one-time 'Zone' has always appeared to West German visitors . . . as an exotic attraction in which a romantic Germany, long since lost in the West, resurfaces like a remembered dream in the cities and landscapes of Thuringia,