



THE WRITERS' STATE

Constructing East German
Literature, 1945–1959

STEPHEN BROCKMANN

The Writers' State

Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture

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Stephen Brockmann



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to Claus and Erika Keiper

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Introduction: Reconstructing East German Literature

THIS BOOK EXPLORES THE EMERGENCE of East German literature from 1945–59. The focus on the 1940s and 1950s is relatively unusual, since most studies of East German literature, particularly in the English-speaking world, have addressed primarily later periods, from 1961 onward. That emphasis is understandable, since scholarship on East German literature outside of Germany did not really begin until the 1970s. It was only logical for the scholars who initiated that exploration to focus primarily on more contemporary works—especially since those works also seemed to meet Western standards of literary merit better than some of the more obviously socialist, politicized literature of the 1940s and 1950s.

When scholarship on East German literature began, therefore, many scholars, even in Germany itself, tended to emphasize literary discontinuities between the first decades of GDR literature and later decades. The emphasis on such discontinuities was, as Julia Hell has pointed out, one of the “critical orthodoxies” concerning East German literature in the 1970s and 1980s, and it continues to influence literary criticism to this day.¹ The unconventional, innovative work of authors such as Christa Wolf, Heiner Müller, Irmtraud Morgner, and Volker Braun in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s was seen above all as a critical response to, and break with, the more obviously partisan—and frequently socialist—literature of the 1950s. It was easier to make a claim for the aesthetic value of—to take one prominent example—Wolf’s novel *Kindheitsmuster* (Patterns of Childhood, 1976), which deals in a complex way with a young woman’s coming-of-age in the Nazi period, than for Eduard Claudius’s socialist realist novel *Menschen an unserer Seite* (People on Our Side, 1951), a book that addresses the work lives of laborers in a Berlin factory.² Wolf’s novel satisfied Western literary and aesthetic criteria for modernist literature more easily.³ Similar comparative statements could be made for other pairs of authors as well.

There is much to be said for the narrative of discontinuity between the literature of the 1940s and 1950s and subsequent literature. Writers such as Wolf, Müller, Morgner, and Braun were indeed in many ways responding to the work their predecessors had created, and they also intentionally produced literature that differed from it. There are, however, two fundamental problems with a focus on discontinuity. The first,

as Hell has pointed out, is that such a focus minimizes or even ignores underlying continuities. Even though the East German writers of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were seeking to distinguish themselves from their predecessors of the 1940s and 1950s, they nevertheless, whether consciously or unconsciously, had more in common with them than has sometimes been supposed. Such commonalities include a basic political commitment to antifascism and socialism, a belief in the social and political efficacy of literature, the rejection of *l'art pour l'art*, an emphasis on particular themes, narratives, or characters (conversion, coming-of-age, generational conflict, the world of work, father or mother figures, and so on), and even particular stylistic or aesthetic devices or strategies. For Hell an underlying commonality prevails at the level of Freudian psychology, specifically a preoccupation in both generations with absent but powerful father figures. Other critics might find other commonalities. Whatever those commonalities may be, however, a critic who sets out to focus primarily on discontinuities is unlikely to notice them.

The second problem with the focus on discontinuity is that it tends, *prima facie*, to ignore the 1940s and 1950s. Hell refers to this problem as “the overt rejection or simple neglect of the GDR’s early literature, the ‘dark’ (and embarrassing) age of socialist realism.”⁴ When viewed from the perspective of discontinuity, the entire era before 1961 comes into view not in its own right but primarily as a foil for the subsequent period. The work of the 1940s and 1950s thereby gains interest not because of what it actually is but rather because of what it is not: the work of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Books by an East German writer such as Willi Bredel, for example, are not examined for their own sake, as works with intrinsic historical or aesthetic value; instead they become, as Hell has suggested, “unreadable.”⁵ Such work thus serves primarily as a drab and therefore only vaguely understood background against which the heroic tale of the nonconformist writers of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s can shine even more brightly.

Even a towering figure like Anna Seghers therefore becomes, in Hell’s words, a “borderline case of respectability” and comes into focus primarily because she influenced Christa Wolf or provided material for some of Heiner Müller’s plays, not because what she wrote might have value in and of itself.⁶ The work of other writers of the 1940s and 1950s, such as Bredel, is now largely forgotten and unread. The existence of a largely forgotten body of work from a now long-gone country, however, should prompt critics to pose two questions. First, is there anything that might, for whatever reason, be of value in that vanished body of work? One should not simply assume that the answer will be negative. Not everything that is overlooked *deserves* to be overlooked. Second, is it possible that there is more at stake than simple “overlooking” or neglect in the relative disappearance of early East German literature? Might there be more systematic reasons for the neglect?

Bertolt Brecht, doubtless the most famous East German writer of the 1950s, belongs in a separate category. His work has not been forgotten. It is very much present. But what *has* been largely forgotten or overlooked is the extent to which Brecht indeed was an East German writer—the precursor, in fact, of many of the nonconformist GDR writers of later periods, as Stephen Parker has astutely noted.⁷ Until relatively recently, however, Brecht's continuing status as the preeminent German—or indeed world—playwright of the twentieth century seemed to depend to a large extent on separating him from his East German context. One can recall the furious reaction to John Fuegi's 1994 biography, *Brecht and Company*, a book that, for all its faults, nevertheless insisted on naming, even if inadequately, some of Brecht's East German and socialist commitments.⁸ Even Brecht's last play, *Turandot oder Der Kongreß der Weißwäscher* ('Turandot or the Whitewashers' Congress), which Brecht wrote in the late summer of 1953, after the East German workers' uprising of 17 June, has frequently been viewed outside its specific GDR context, as primarily a parable about fascism or capitalism.⁹ The tendency to ignore Brecht's embeddedness in a GDR context is paradoxical, however, because it was precisely Brecht's work with the Berliner Ensemble in East Berlin that cemented his national and international reputation. Somewhat more pointedly: without the Socialist Unity Party (SED) and the GDR government, there would have been no Berliner Ensemble and no post-war triumph of Brechtian theater throughout Europe and the Americas. All this was sponsored by East German socialists. And yet one wonders how many theater practitioners are aware of this—or, for that matter, of the specific East German socialist context for Brecht's successor Heiner Müller as well.

Over the course of the last few decades, in the study of both literature and film from post-1945 West Germany there has been a growing emphasis on the immediate postwar period as more complex and also more productive than had hitherto been assumed. Correspondingly, some myths about the development of postwar culture have been reexamined. In the literary sphere, the concept of a "Zero Hour" has been deconstructed, and the belief that the West German writers who called themselves Gruppe 47 were a purely oppositional literary faction untouched by commitments to pre-1945 German culture has been called into question.¹⁰ In film, the long-held notion that 1950s cinema was essentially arid, uninteresting, and unworthy of study has also been cast in doubt, and the claims of 1960s and 1970s filmmakers to a completely new start in opposition to "Papap Kino"—that is, pre-1962 cinema—have been reexamined.¹¹

In both literature and film, the fundamental narratives about one generation triumphing over the other and thus, after a long period of heroic struggle, forcing the breakthrough to a more democratic and open German culture are strikingly similar. That similarity suggests the

presence of an underlying structure in postwar (West) German culture—a structure determined by the nation's need to distance itself culturally, ethically, and psychologically from the Nazi catastrophe. This structure of distanciation has usually expressed itself in generational terms, since the post-1945 younger generation in both literature and film could be perceived by others—and could paint itself—as untouched and unblemished by Nazi crimes. Thus in literature we have Gruppe 47, and in cinema Young German Film. West German postwar culture presented itself above all as a successful generational response to the Nazi catastrophe. Germany, says one character to another in a 1988 novel from Serbia, is a good place to be young after the Second World War: there “they’ll be looking for younger people, who bear no responsibility for the defeat; the generation of fathers has lost the game there; there it’s your generation’s move.”¹² Or so, at least, the myth goes.

What about East Germany? Was it a good place to be young after 1945? Are its literature and film governed by the same structure of generational differentiation that one can observe in West German culture? To a remarkable extent they are. What Hell calls the “critical orthodoxies” of literary scholarship on East Germany constitute a narrative that is strikingly similar to the one that prevails in the historiography of West German literature and film: the triumph of a younger, more innovative generation over more politically compromised elders. This similarity suggests that the fundamental structure of postwar German cultural life was not determined exclusively by the Iron Curtain. The similarity in the narrative also implies that in spite of all the differences between east and west there were more similarities than has hitherto been acknowledged. If this is true, however, then East German culture, even in the 1940s and 1950s—when it was most obviously different from its West German counterpart—must be seen as a fundamental part of postwar German culture more generally. It should not be written off simply as “unreadable.”

Unfortunately, however, the Iron Curtain, the Cold War, and some of the basic preconceptions of literary scholarship about postwar Germany have generally prevented critics from exploring such underlying similarities. This is true in the field of history as well, where, as Andrew I. Port has persuasively argued, various versions of the theory of totalitarianism “have become the banalities of East German historiography—history as comfort food” for historians interested more “in moralistic posturing” than in actually getting closer to the truth. As Port has argued, historical examinations of East Germany have to a large extent “tended toward the provincial,” with “little effort to relate . . . findings to developments outside of East Germany or to issues of greater historical and historiographical importance.”¹³ Port’s assertions about the field of historiography also, unfortunately, apply to literary scholarship. Indeed, the investigation of postwar East German literary culture, particularly the culture of

the 1940s and 1950s—to the extent that it has occurred at all—has been based primarily on the examination of differences, not similarities. But the emphasis on differences separates East Germany from any broader context in which it might be situated. Scholars of literature and culture, like their colleagues in the field of historiography, have generally not made an attempt to relate their examinations of East Germany to other states, even West Germany, and they have, for the most part, not viewed East German film or literature as posing questions “of greater historical”—or one might add, literary—importance.

This is how one 2003 analysis of Cold War culture in Germany explains the development of postwar East and West German culture after the 1960s: “The rigid assumptions of Cold War culture in the Federal Republic, cultivated by the generation of the Nazi era, were yielding to self-scrutiny and the damning criticism of the young. But no such development was allowed in the German Democratic Republic under Walter Ulbricht, Erich Honecker, and the Stasi.”¹⁴ There are two discontinuities on display in this account. First, there is a break between “the generation of the Nazi era” and the “self-scrutiny and the damning criticism of the young.” This is the familiar heroic story of one generation’s triumph over its Nazi-encumbered predecessors. Second, and just as important, the generational break is operationalized in geographical terms determined by the Cold War narrative: the younger generation, with its “self-scrutiny and . . . damning criticism,” is located to the west of the Iron Curtain, while the stodgier, more conservative “generation of the Nazi era” is located in the east. This account also assumes, more or less as an afterthought, that the political leaders of the GDR, “Walter Ulbricht, Erich Honecker, and the Stasi,” somehow had the power to “allow” or not “allow” cultural developments such as “self-scrutiny and . . . damning criticism.” The account, in other words, is governed by the theory of totalitarianism, with no consideration given to the possibility that, as Port has pointed out, “power relations” in East Germany “were far more complex than the simple ‘state vs. society’—‘regime vs. masses’—‘rulers vs. ruled’ dichotomies have suggested.”¹⁵ It is of course quite possible that Walter Ulbricht, Erich Honecker, “and the Stasi” may have wished that they had total power to “allow” or not “allow” particular kinds of culture in the GDR, and the historical record shows that East German leaders often made great efforts to discourage writers and other artists from “self-scrutiny and . . . damning criticism.” The record also shows, however, that they consistently failed.

I cite these lines not to criticize any particular scholar—on the contrary, there is a great deal in the book from which I just quoted that I genuinely admire—but because they demonstrate clearly some of the assumptions that still underlie too many examinations of Cold War culture. These assumptions include first, the idea of an all-powerful

and unified socialist government capable of completely suppressing unwanted cultural developments at will; second, a generational narrative in which more liberal young people rebel against their more conservative elders, who are members of the Nazi generation; and third, the geographical Cold War operationalization of the generational divide, such that the cultural innovators are in the west and the proponents of conventionality are in the east. The Iron Curtain, in other words, becomes not just a geographical, political, and military divide. It is also an insuperable cultural barrier, dividing the free culture of the West from the unfree culture of the East. This, of course, is an analysis that dates back to the Cold War itself and the foundation of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in West Berlin in 1950—an event that plays a significant role in this book. It is disheartening to note that such rigid dichotomies still hold sway even in much academic scholarship well over half a century later. One wonders whether rumors of the end of the Cold War have not been greatly exaggerated.

I wish to throw away the “compass” of Cold War presuppositions in this book and re-explore the territory with none of the usual assumptions. Instead, I will treat the Cold War as over, even as I examine the traces of its literary culture. Above all, I wish to let the cultural artifacts speak for themselves. I am not so naive as to believe that I can achieve complete objectivity or some sort of Rankean ideal of the past “*wie es eigentlich gewesen*” (as it actually was). My work is no doubt governed as much by preconceived notions and unspoken assumptions as anyone else’s. But that is precisely why I want to foreground the material itself. If I am wrong in my analysis of it, others can, and hopefully will, correct me. What I hope to show, however, is that East German Cold War culture was more nuanced, sophisticated, and interesting than is commonly supposed, and that the 1940s and 1950s, contrary to their unflattering reputation, were a time of lively debate and cultural ferment, even or especially on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain. In fact this period was arguably more interesting than the better-known 1970s and 1980s, when East German culture, in many ways, came to seem more familiar to Western observers, and to be accepted as a legitimate object of study. “Back then there were still open discussions,” says no less an authority than Heiner Müller, one of the “heroic” writers of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, even “in the party.”¹⁶ In this book I want to take Müller at his word and look at some of those “open discussions.” One of my key contentions is that literary culture—novels, essays, short stories, poems, literary criticism, and the various organizations connected to them—was one of the primary venues for such open discussions, what the socialist writer Johannes R. Becher, who became the GDR’s first Culture Minister in 1954, called “the most highly developed organ of a nation for understanding and coming to consciousness of itself.”¹⁷ In other words, in East Germany literature was

never “just” literature. It was always also about collective identity and the path toward a better future—however imaginary or illusive that future may have been.

One might reasonably ask what harm there is in ignoring the 1940s and 1950s, especially in East Germany, a state that, at least in one historian’s estimation, was merely a footnote in history.¹⁸ In the realm of literature or art one might strengthen the question further by asking: If the GDR itself was just a historical footnote, then is not the literature or art of that bygone state akin to that scholarly absurdity, the footnote to the footnote? After all, literature and art are not “real” in the way that Politburo meetings or Erich Honecker’s 1971 assumption of the East German leadership were “real.” The fiction writings of authors like Eduard Claudius, Anna Seghers, or Bertolt Brecht were unreal artifacts that various literary intellectuals concocted in connection to a state that no longer exists. One could, of course, say the same about almost any fictional literature, including Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* or Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. But at least contemporary Russia and Italy understand themselves as existing in a historical continuity, respectively, with the states inhabited by Tolstoy and Dante. Today’s Federal Republic of Germany, by contrast, does not understand itself as existing in a historical continuity with the German Democratic Republic and, in fact, it has developed its identity to a large extent precisely in contrast to, and in rejection of, the GDR.

If one rejects the state, however, is there any justification for addressing or even remembering its literature? Moreover, can one reasonably compare Dante and Tolstoy to Brecht and Seghers? Or, more pointedly, to a second- or third-tier writer like Eduard Claudius? Historians, after all, need no justification for dealing with footnotes. Addressing the past and the “footnotes” it creates is what historians do. But art and literature are not just about the past; they are also about the present and future. And in all art, questions of aesthetic quality are inevitable. That is why Hell writes that “to work on Socialist Realism still is equivalent to having a ‘leprous nose’”: any art or literature connected to the propagation of socialism is explicitly or implicitly assumed to be of poor quality and therefore not worth studying.¹⁹

Wolfgang Emmerich, one of the foremost Western experts on East German literature, confirms this evaluation of early GDR literature. He argues that the function of such literature was “to continue writing the official socialist discourse via aesthetic means, to decorate it and make it more attractive for the people . . . to affirm it.”²⁰ Emmerich admits that it might be a worthy scholarly goal—even if only for methodological, not for substantive reasons—to reexamine such literature from a post-unification perspective, but he also notes that the results of such a hypothetical reexamination would be a foregone conclusion, since they would merely serve

to confirm that East German literature of the 1950s “follows . . . the discursive rules of the dominant discourse . . . lexicologically, semantically, and at the level of entire texts . . . it affirms” that discourse “and thereby becomes, as literature, wastepaper.”²¹ In other words, a reevaluation of early East German literature would constitute the analysis of trash and would, at any rate, produce conclusions that are already known in advance. Emmerich does not consider the possibility that such a reexamination might, contrary to expectations, uncover a few texts that did not follow or affirm the official discourse; nor does he entertain the hypothesis that official discourse might itself have been contradictory, ambiguous, or contested. It is no wonder that few scholars have taken up Emmerich’s call for a reinvestigation of the East German literature of the 1950s. After all, why bother with such an investigation if the results are already known in advance, especially if the investigation would involve reading primarily trash?

Emmerich is admittedly not alone in his insistence on aesthetic quality as a fundamental criterion for imaginative literature, and I do not wish to dispute this criterion. The aspect of quality—which differentiates literary scholarship in a fundamental way from historiography—is something that Brecht himself, who once jokingly imagined the 17 June 1953 uprising in East Germany as a revolution of irate readers against a hard-line socialist author, would readily have acknowledged.²² What point might there be, then, in reexamining the “bad” literature of a “bad” state?

Are all writers equally good in East Germany? Clearly not—no more so than in any other state. There is a reason why writers like Brecht and Seghers are still remembered, while others, like Bredel or Claudius, are now largely forgotten. Cold War or Freudian repression is not the sole reason for such forgetting; literary merit or the lack thereof is another. Brecht and Seghers were writers of the first order, whereas Bredel and Claudius were not. Nevertheless the work of Bredel, Claudius, and others has both historical and literary value. Such work, after all, was part of the literary-political milieu in which writers like Brecht and Seghers moved, and from which their works emerged. Moreover, in matters of historical truth, one would do well to pay heed to E. M. Cioran’s defense of second-rate writers: “If you want to know a nation, frequent its second-order writers: they alone reflect its true nature. The others denounce or transfigure the nullity of their compatriots, and neither can nor will put themselves on the same level. They are suspect witnesses.”²³ If Stephen Greenblatt, in his study *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, one of the key works of the so-called New Historicism of the 1980s and 1990s, could explore long-forgotten documents of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries lurking in archives and libraries, then surely it is permissible to do the same with what one might call the circulation of literary-political energy in Brecht’s and Seghers’s Berlin of the 1940s and 1950s.²⁴

I would suggest, however, that works by Bredel and Claudius are also of interest in their own right, as attempts, through literature, to address both the German past and the German future. Literature, after all, as Amir Eshel has argued, differs from historiography in its “futurity”—its openness to the future.²⁵ Bredel, Claudius, and other forgotten East German writers were part of a large-scale attempt to use literature to shape the German future. Their historical value is thus obvious. And the attempt to use literature in this way certainly raises key questions about the role of literature in modernity. Those questions may or may not be connected to the question of literary value. I will attempt to address the question of literary—as opposed to historical—value in a series of steps, because the question of aesthetic “value” is one of the most difficult questions of all, and the one most likely to dissuade anyone from giving serious consideration to the East German literature of the 1940s and 1950s.

First, I argue that we ignore East Germany and its literature, even the literature of the 1940s and 1950s, at our peril. I argue that there is a real cost to be paid if we ignore it, because it is not just a footnote but rather a fundamental part of postwar German literary culture more generally, which needs to be seen as a system that includes at least two states (and in fact considerably more than two). The Iron Curtain, far from being an insuperable barrier, was porous. It is relatively easy to make this argument simply on the basis of the many East German writers, such as Uwe Johnson, Günter Kunert, Sarah Kirsch, and Jurek Becker, who ultimately moved west and made a profound impact on West German literature. One can also argue that even some East German writers such as Brecht, Müller, Wolf, Christoph Hein, and Volker Braun, who stayed in the GDR, nevertheless influenced West German literature in a variety of ways—and continue to influence post-Wall German literature to this day. Such arguments are convincing. But if one relies on them exclusively, then one will be left accepting the proposition that West German literature is the primary standard of value for East German literature. That is not a proposition that I am prepared to accept.

Therefore I will make a second argument: that East German literary culture maintained and made visible aspects of German identity that tended to be hidden or invisible in West Germany. This is what the West German writer Martin Walser meant when he argued in a controversial 1988 speech, “I believe that in the GDR something has been preserved for us.”²⁶ Walser was suggesting that West German culture lacked or had shunted aside fundamental elements of the national psyche that had, he believed, managed to survive in the east. I believe that Walser was right. How might he have been right?

In order to answer this question, I will have to refer, however briefly, to two of the most prominent German literary debates of the last few decades: the debate about the Holocaust and “silence” about it in postwar

culture on the one hand and the debate about the air war, German suffering, and “silence” about it on the other. The first debate, the one about the Holocaust, goes back to a famous 1960 essay by the critic George Steiner, “The Hollow Miracle: Notes on the German Language,” but it has been reformulated and restated more recently, among others, by Ernestine Schlant in her book *The Language of Silence* (1999).²⁷ The basic argument is that postwar German writers did not adequately address the Holocaust-era victimization of European Jews in their work. This hypothesis is provocative, and if it is true, it may reveal a great deal about postwar German culture and society.

What if East German writers addressed the victimization of Jews in *their* work, however? Might that disprove or alter the hypothesis about “silence?” In fact writers like Willi Bredel and Anna Seghers *did* address the Holocaust and *did* address the victimization of Jews in their work. Admittedly, they wrote as socialists. It is possible, therefore, that Bredel, Seghers, and other East German writers, addressed the Holocaust in ways that might now be viewed as objectionable. If, however, one is going to make sweeping generalizations about “silence” in postwar German culture, then the fact that East German writers sometimes addressed the Holocaust in their work, whereas supposedly West German writers did not, might conceivably be of interest.

Bredel even wrote a moving short story, “Das schweigende Dorf” (The Silent Village), which deals precisely with the question of postwar silence about the murder of Jews in Germany.²⁸ This is a story about Mecklenburg villagers who cover up the evidence of a horrible crime committed in their midst at the end of the war. Some of the villagers who maintain and enforce silence are actually murderers themselves. Bredel’s story appeared in 1949, the year of the foundation of both postwar states, and it lays its finger on precisely the problem of the Holocaust and “silence” addressed by Steiner in 1960 and elaborated by Schlant almost four decades later. Admittedly, Bredel was a Communist, and he was also not the world-class writer that Seghers was. But does that make his story irrelevant for both literary and historical reasons? I would argue: no. Yet I have never seen this relatively simple and accessible story addressed in any consideration of postwar German literature, “silence,” and the Holocaust. It is as if Bredel had never written it. His story about the silencing of murder simply does not come up for consideration; it too has been silenced. It is not worth looking at; it is “unreadable.” And this story is not alone. There are many other examples to be found in East German literature, if one bothers to look. The point, however, is that one does not bother. It is as if an astrophysicist looking for signs of intelligent life in the universe were to exclude a few hundred thousand of the closest galaxies from consideration.

What about Germans’ purported “silence” about the air war and their own suffering? This was a debate initiated by the writer W. G. Sebald in the

late 1990s with his claim, in the essay “Luftkrieg und Literatur” (Air War and Literature) that postwar German writers failed to address the pain and suffering Germans experienced at the end of the Second World War, especially as a result of the bombing of German cities.²⁹ The debate spawned countless books, films, and television series, as well as various scholarly explorations that attempted to get at the question of whether Sebald was right or wrong in his assertions about “silence.” The debate soon moved beyond the air war to cover all the suffering experienced by German civilians in the final years of the Second World War, including the expulsion of twelve million Germans from the country’s former eastern territories.

In the midst of this discussion about the problem of German suffering, however, the debaters failed to consult the record of East German literature. It was not until fifteen years after the beginning of the debate, in 2014, that the British historian Bill Niven finally published conclusive evidence that the subject of German civilian suffering—particularly as it pertained to flight and expulsion—had, contrary to prior opinion, been exhaustively addressed by a great many East German writers.³⁰ Prior to Niven’s analysis, it did not occur to most Western scholars to ask whether, even if West German authors maintained “silence,” there might possibly have been East German authors who wrote about the suffering of German civilians in the Second World War. One would not have had to look far or dig very deep to find evidence of such literature, as Niven has demonstrated. If one takes the trouble to read some of the primary works of now-forgotten writers such as Bredel and Dieter Noll, as well as the multiple examples adduced by Niven, one soon finds that East German literature was full of depictions of the air war, expulsion, and German suffering more generally.³¹ Admittedly, Bredel and Noll, as well as some of the authors that Niven addresses, were East German Communists. But does that necessarily mean that their work constitutes “silence?” Or that it was somehow not “German?”

In these examples one can discern a pattern. First, a critic or a group of critics makes the allegedly surprising “discovery” that postwar German literature “failed” to address a particularly sensitive subject dealing with the national past. Second, that “discovery” then leads to a large-scale debate and a reexamination of the historical and literary record to ascertain whether the claim is true. The reexamination, however—almost axiomatically and as a third step—excludes the literature of the German Democratic Republic. It thus not only fails to find evidence of the missing item on the other side of the Iron Curtain, but it also forfeits the chance to inquire into possible systematic, structural reasons why certain kinds of topics might tend to gravitate to one or the other side of the Iron Curtain, as if following some sort of cultural-magnetic pull. The fourth step is that the exclusion of GDR literature and culture is generally neither noticed nor commented on until much later, if at all.

It would stretch credulity to imagine that mere coincidence is at work here. Instead, we seem to be dealing with deeply ingrained prejudices and assumptions stemming from the Cold War—from a time when, as the historian Wilfried Loth put it in 1994, “people learned that East and West threatened one another’s existence.” As Loth has insisted, this period constituted our “origins,” and to a large extent it determined even—or especially—patterns of scholarly investigation. In Loth’s words: “That realities were more complex . . . will first become comprehensible when we free ourselves from this mindset.”³²

Freeing oneself from prejudices that helped shape one and that constitute one’s origins is easier said than done, however. The examples of literary debates that I mentioned above suggest that in many instances no such attempt has been made. Rather, one simply does not “see” the GDR. It does not exist. One can recall an offhand remark made about East Germany by the West German writer Patrick Süskind not long after the fall of the Berlin Wall: “Austria, Switzerland, Venetia, Tuscany, Alsace, Provence, yes, even Crete, Andalusia, and the Outer Hebrides—and I am speaking only of Europe—were infinitely closer to us than such dubious geographical constructions as Saxony, Thuringia, Anhalt, Mecklen- or Brandenburg.”³³ In this remark Süskind makes explicit what generally goes unstated: the discounting of the historical and literary experience of a significant portion of contemporary Germany—the former German Democratic Republic. After all, what used to be East Germany has by now been part of the Federal Republic for decades; but its literary culture continues, to a remarkable extent, to be uncharted territory, what Süskind calls “dubious geographical constructions.” In general one might prefer to avoid such “dubious . . . constructions,” but if one has to negotiate them, then once again, one will need one’s “compass,” and, more often than not, that “compass” is precisely the Cold War assumptions from which, as Loth argued two decades ago, scholars ought rather to free themselves.

The case of W. G. Sebald, a West German scholar and writer who condemned postwar West German culture for what he saw as its excessive airbrushing of the difficult past, is particularly telling in this regard. Sebald moved to Great Britain in the 1960s partly because he found himself attracted to the generally run-down condition of the United Kingdom in the pre-Thatcher era. The industrial ruins of cities such as Manchester reminded him of a problematic relationship to the past that he believed postwar West Germans had all-too-conveniently sought to evade. There is no record that Sebald ever bothered to explore the GDR in any of his travels or let its ruined, decaying cities make an impact on him. The fact is that he would not have had to go as far away as Manchester in 1966 to find historical ruins and shabbiness; Halle, Leipzig, or Karl-Marx-Stadt (now once again Chemnitz) would have sufficed.³⁴ Sebald appears,

however, not to have been interested in the GDR. Like so many other West Germans.

There is a famous short story by Edgar Allan Poe, “The Purloined Letter,” one of the first great detective stories in world literature. It is a story about the desperate search for an incriminating letter and the clever way that the letter is hidden. It turns out that the letter is hidden in plain sight, which is precisely where investigators are least likely to find it. They go to great pains to look for it in all sorts of out-of-the-way places, but they do not notice what is right in front of their nose. “Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault,” says Poe’s detective Dupin. “Perhaps the mystery is a little *too* plain.”³⁵ Poe’s story is of course a generalized allegory about humanity’s search for knowledge that it often mistakenly presumes to be arcane, and it demonstrates the banal reality that such knowledge is often readily available; however, the very presuppositions of the search make a successful outcome unlikely. I would argue that East German culture functions somewhat like Poe’s purloined letter. It is right there, hidden in plain sight, and it has been there all along; yet for the most part it manages to avoid detection.

I will make one third and final argument about East Germany and its literary culture. Obviously, the GDR was an experiment that failed. One can therefore also view East German literature as the failed literature of a failed state, especially since many East German writers, even critical ones, were supporters of the state and used their work in an effort to shape and improve it. In the absence of the state they were trying to shape and improve, one might logically wonder whether their literature has any conceivable value.

It is important to remember, however, that even in the “hard” sciences failed experiments can sometimes be remarkably productive—that their results are sometimes more interesting, and push progress further, than some successful ones. East German literary culture constituted an ambitious attempt to mobilize literature for the creation of a new and better state. That attempt occurred not on the periphery of Europe but at its center, the place that the Italian critic Franco Moretti has called “the centre and catalyst of the integrated historical system we call Europe.”³⁶ It occurred immediately after the bloodiest war in human history, after the unimaginable crime of the Holocaust, and after the Nazi dictatorship. And it occurred in the midst of and as an integral part of the Cold War confrontation between two vast economic, social, and military blocs that had previously been allied with each other—precisely at the fault line where those two blocs came into direct contact with each other. This confrontation dominated world history for almost half a century, and its reverberations continue to be felt today. Berlin, in other words, was a place that “mattered” very much throughout the years under consideration in this book. It is surely of considerable interest not just for

history but also for literature how and why the attempt to use literature as a means of social engineering in this context might—or might not—have failed. After all, even if one accepts the proposition of East German literature's failure—and I will reserve judgment on that question, since it seems to me to be logically possible that literature can succeed even where a state fails—then it might nevertheless be useful to explore the reasons for that failure. Such a failure, and an exploration of it, might reveal something about the nature of literature in modern society—what it can and cannot accomplish under certain conditions.

My examination of East German literary culture proceeds chronologically, from 1945–59. The end of the war and the early postwar years are particularly important, because they set the stage for what was to come, and because it is impossible to understand East German culture without recognizing the fact that it was above all a postwar and, as Hell has pointed out, a “post-fascist” culture. The historian Mary Fulbrook is entirely correct when she asserts that some aspects of East German history “can only be fully understood in the context of this historical past.”³⁷ GDR culture was “post-fascist” both in the obvious sense that it came *after* the Nazi period, but also in the sense that it responded, in a variety of ways, *to* the Nazi period. This should never be forgotten, because it is an aspect of East German culture that continues until the very end, in 1989–90, long after the historical period that I am considering.

I then proceed to examine, in a series of chapters, key nodal points of East German literary and cultural history: first, the foundation of the state in 1949; second, the workers' uprising of 1953; and third, the literary unrest of 1956, a year whose significance for East German literary intellectuals can scarcely be overstated. At each of these nodal points I look not just at the work of particular writers—Seghers, Brecht, Bredel, and so on—but also at literary critics, bureaucrats, and politicians. My claim is that East German literature emerged not just as the work of *one* of these groups, but as the result of interactions among *all* of them. Literature in East Germany was never just something that writers produced and readers read—although it was *also* that. It was also, however, inevitably, both political and politicized. It is too easy to think of this politicization as a one-way street, with writers as victims and politicians as victimizers. There is, inevitably, more than a little truth in such a (pre)conception. But it is not the *whole* truth, and to look at it as if it *were* the whole truth merely confuses matters.

The fact is that, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s, most East German writers *wanted* their literature to be political and politicized. They were not simply, or exclusively, victims. People such as Bertolt Brecht, Anna Seghers, Johannes R. Becher, and Heinar Kipphardt made a conscious choice to live in East Germany, even though they all originally came from the west. And other writers, like Erich Loest or Heiner

Müller, who grew up in East Germany, had opportunities to leave but did not take them. Uwe Johnson *did* leave in 1959. The point is that there was always an element of choice involved in the decision to stay in the GDR. No East German writer, even Loest—who was incarcerated for seven years from 1957–64—was ever just a victim of cold-hearted politicians. The Berlin Wall was not built until 1961, several years after the period that I am exploring in this book. All the writers I consider were in East Germany because they *chose* to be there.

Nor were politicians monolithic or the only people with genuine power. Literature and writers exerted their own kind of power over politicians, and the government and the party never achieved absolute control over them. Moreover, politics within the East German ruling party, the SED, was constantly shifting and changing, as various politicians jockeyed for power and position. It is too easy to overlook such shifts and changes and instead to imagine East German politics as a unified, monolithic entity with what Emmerich refers to as “a discourse of monosemy, of unquestionable unified meaning” that persecuted and oppressed writers and artists.³⁸ Certainly the leaders of the SED wanted the party to be seen as unified and monolithic; but the historical record shows that it was not. That fact needs to be taken into consideration by anyone who seriously wants to explore the relationship between literature and politics in East Germany.

A similar point needs to be made about the Soviet Union, the superpower that underwrote the GDR’s existence. The GDR came into being during the last decade of Stalin’s dictatorship, and Stalin inevitably had a vast impact on it. The Soviet leadership was also divided, however, as became abundantly clear shortly after Stalin’s death, with the arrest, trial, and execution of Lavrentiy Beria—and as the Stalinist purges of the 1930s had also demonstrated to anyone who bothered to pay attention to them. Berlin, moreover, is a thousand miles away from Moscow. Soviet authorities in East Germany therefore had some room to maneuver away from the immediate supervision of their superiors in the imperial capital, and they could often seek to exploit factional infighting in Moscow for their own purposes. The same is true for the leaders of the SED. They were certainly dependent on their Soviet masters, but they were all also survivors themselves, and some of them had considerable experience at infighting and intrigue. In particular Walter Ulbricht, the GDR’s paramount leader until 1971, was highly skilled at following his own relatively independent course while seeming to kowtow to Soviet demands. What this means is that even though East Germany was indeed a satellite of the USSR, it had considerably more maneuverability than has sometimes been supposed, and it often pursued a relatively independent course—sometimes to its own detriment. It is therefore misleading to invoke a supposedly “absolute identity of interests, outlooks, and policies” between

the ruling parties of the Soviet Union on the one hand and the GDR on the other.³⁹ Indeed, the very fact of the GDR's creation and existence, in spite of Stalin's various proposals for German reunification, is evidence of the maneuvering room that Ulbricht and others sometimes enjoyed and exploited. Wilfried Loth has demonstrated all of this convincingly, even though his reflections have not yet made the impact on literary and cultural studies that one might have expected.⁴⁰

In keeping with a growing consensus that the GDR needs to be viewed in a larger context, this study will occasionally look beyond the borders of East Germany, particularly to the Soviet Union, to eastern Europe, and to West Germany. Such an acknowledgment of extramural influence is necessary, because the Soviet Union had a major impact on the history of the GDR, and many of the GDR's founders—in both politics and literature—spent the years of the Hitler dictatorship in exile in Moscow. In fact, as will be seen in the first chapter, planning for postwar East German literature really began in Moscow in 1944, well before the war ended. The importance of the eastern European context can clearly be seen in the fact that the preeminent literary critic and philosopher during the postwar years, Georg Lukács, was a Hungarian and spent most of his time in Budapest. Marcel Reich-Ranicki, one of the most famous postwar (West) German literary critics, originally came from Poland and began his career as Marceli Ranicki. The significance of both critics for the East German context will become particularly clear in the chapters dealing with 1956. Nor should we forget the fact that both these critics—as well as key literary intellectuals such as Anna Seghers and Alexander Abusch—came from a Jewish background, even if they were not themselves religious. In a post-Holocaust German context, that Jewish background was not irrelevant. The connection to West Germany is also significant, because writers were relatively free to move back and forth across the border, and because, throughout this period, both writers and politicians, at a minimum, paid lip service to the goal of German reunification.

In this book I will focus primarily on literary intellectuals living and working in Germany's divided capital, Berlin, with occasional forays to other venues, particularly Leipzig, the GDR's second-largest city and a key publishing center. There are good reasons for such a Berlin-centric approach. After all, the GDR was a relatively centralized state, unlike the Federal Republic. Berlin always exerted more influence on other regions of East Germany than Bonn did on West German regions, and most of the GDR's key writers chose to live in or near the capital. By contrast, the major West German writers lived outside Bonn. Berlin was also where major cultural organizations such as the Writers Union and the Academy of the Arts had their headquarters.

The primary emphasis throughout this study is on literary relations or the literary "field," not primarily on any particular genre, author, or

subject matter. Careful readers will notice, however, that more attention is given to narrative prose than to either poetry or theater—although both theater and poetry also play a role. There is a solid theoretical justification for the predominance of narrative prose. That justification includes elements that are specific to Eastern bloc socialism as well as elements that go beyond it. Within socialist culture there was a strong push to develop the socialist epic, an epic that would situate the individual within his or her social context and convey the essence of society's development from capitalism to socialism. As Katerina Clark has pointed out with respect to Soviet culture, the novel of development or "fictionalized biography" became, in the early 1930s, a synecdoche "for the national biography, for the movement of man and nation over time."⁴¹ A similar phenomenon occurred in East Germany after 1945, as various writers strove to produce the great novel of German socialist transformation.

The treatment of the novel as the primary literary genre with social significance goes beyond socialist culture, however, and extends to the Western world as well, as the search for the "great American novel" or the novel of German reunification after 1990 clearly demonstrates.⁴² Nor has postmodernism or contemporary commercial culture put an end to the search for prose narratives that capture the essence of social development in particular Western cultures at particular times. Astrid Erll is right to point out that in the West the epic form has "mediated foundational memory for many centuries."⁴³ One of the most important theoretical works of Georg Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans* (Theory of the Novel), addresses precisely the importance of the epic for the development of Western culture.⁴⁴ Lukács will play a major role in this study. It is of course conceivable—although by no means certain—that Western cultures are now moving beyond the privileging of the novel and promoting new forms with less emphasis on narrative and epic. That possibility, however, is not the subject of this study, which focuses instead on a period in which the novel still reigned supreme as a literary genre.

This study combines literature, history, and politics in a somewhat unorthodox way, trying to explore the interactions among various players—interactions that ultimately led to the creation of East German literary culture. The book is not "about" any one author, even Brecht or Seghers, although both Brecht and Seghers play prominent roles in the story. Nor is the book "about" the SED or Ulbricht, although the SED and Ulbricht also play important roles. Literary scholarship is often very good at analyzing the work of particular writers, but it tends to be less efficacious at showing how that work is embedded in, and helps to shape, particular historical or political contexts. Historians, on the other hand, are skilled at analyzing political and often even social and cultural contexts, but they sometimes find themselves at a loss when confronted with specific aesthetic artifacts such as works of literature or film. In this book

I seek to combine the work of a literary scholar with the work of a historian. I wish to give writers and other literary intellectuals their due as the producers of imaginative literature and criticism. At the same time, however, I also want to show how writers and the work they produced were, inevitably, part of—and also helped to shape—a political context. Every work of literature was also a political speech act. The realms of literature and politics, which Westerners frequently imagine as being separate from each other, were inextricably intertwined.

The interconnection between literature and politics is a provocation for anyone who postulates that aesthetic production is or should be a realm of freedom clearly separated from the realm of politics. That is one reason why, after the collapse of the East German state, there was a literary debate in Germany that focused on precisely the issue of aesthetic autonomy.⁴⁵ Viewed from the perspective of aesthetic autonomy, any art or literature with political investments can be seen as defective or substandard. Clearly, I reject the concept of aesthetic autonomy and view art and literature as embedded in—but not completely determined by—a social and political context. I would, moreover, contend that the Iron Curtain should not be viewed as an impermeable barrier separating the purported aesthetic autonomy of the West from the purported aesthetic servitude of the East. In both West and East Germany, literature and art served political and social functions in the postwar period, although those functions were frequently different. Even one of the most prominent critics of East German literature, the late Frank Schirrmacher, conceded during the *Literaturstreit* (literary debate) of 1990 that it was not just in East Germany but also in West Germany that literature helped to create a postwar German cultural identity.⁴⁶

Such participation in processes of collective identity formation can only be condemned outright if one views the two spheres—literature and politics—as “naturally” separated from each other. The concept of an absolute separation between the two spheres is relatively recent and forms part of the tradition of Western aesthetic discourse as it has developed since the eighteenth century. A more common approach throughout history, even in the West, has been to view art and society as interconnected. What made the Cold War unusual in terms of aesthetic discourse was not the Western insistence on aesthetic autonomy *per se*; it was, rather, the political operationalization of this insistence. In the West the aesthetic rejection of politics was itself politicized and operationalized. That paradoxical politicization of a purportedly anti-political discourse has continued, as we have seen, to have an impact on post-Wall criticism.

One might reasonably ask what kinds of theoretical approaches might help to capture the interconnection between literature and politics in the absence of aesthetic autonomy. In searching for an answer to this question, one would do well to look at Marxist philosophical discourse, from

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels through their various successors, including Georg Lukács, Theodor W. Adorno, and Bertolt Brecht. Adorno is particularly helpful in his conception of administration and management as being central to modernity—not just on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain but also in the West.⁴⁷ Brecht, for his part, was forceful in his rejection of aesthetic autonomy and viewed “the conversion of intellectual values into commodities” as a “progressive process” that ought to be acknowledged and welcomed rather than obfuscated or denied. Even some anti-Marxist thinkers such as James Burnham have suggested viewing modernization as a process of increasing managerial and administrative control.⁴⁸ To suggest that such control might extend into the supposedly pure realms of art and literature may be painful to aesthetic purists; that is one reason why the Iron Curtain has helped to obscure similarities between East and West in this regard.

A different approach to the development of socialist culture comes from Boris Groys. For Groys, the socialist experiment in the Soviet Union constituted a large-scale attempt to assert the authority of the written word, and thereby of politics and culture, over the economy. Groys calls this process “the linguistification of society.”⁴⁹ By contrast, according to Groys, capitalism asserts the authority of capital—that is, money—over politics and culture. Groys’s theory might help explain why aesthetic culture in general and literary culture in particular were so important to socialist leaders, not just in the Soviet Union but also in other Eastern bloc countries such as the GDR. This approach is intriguing, because it contravenes standard accounts of Eastern materialism versus Western idealism. This is both a strength and a weakness. The strength lies in the fact that Groys forces us to rethink conceptions of idealism, materialism, socialism, and capitalism—and of the complicated interrelationship among these various isms. The weakness lies in the construction of a new—albeit unconventional—fault line between East and West. After all, Groys may reverse standard Cold War assumptions, but he does not eliminate them. It might, therefore, be helpful to supplement Groys’s philosophical approach with a more sociological one, such as that propounded by György Konrád and Iván Szelényi in their book *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* or James Burnham in his classic *The Managerial Revolution: What is Happening in the World*.⁵⁰ If one views the struggle between East and West not as a “naturalized” or “eternal” struggle between logos and capital (Groys) or “freedom” and “slavery” (the Congress for Cultural Freedom) but rather as a struggle among various groups of specialists and experts, all of them seeking to enlist art and literature in their cause, then these struggles become more clearly focused and comprehensible.

None of these approaches, taken on its own, is likely to provide a complete explanation for all the phenomena associated with the

development of East German literature from 1945 to 1959—but then, such totality is not really the function of any cultural or literary theory. I contend, however, that a judicious combination of these various theories—from Marx and Engels to Lukács, Adorno, Brecht, Groys, Konrád and Szelényi, and even Burnham—may help to illuminate at least some of these phenomena. At any rate, as I hope to demonstrate, East German culture at the height of the Cold War was more conflicted and ambiguous than is frequently imagined. There is still much that we have to learn about it—and from it.

Notes

¹ Julia Hell, *Post-Fascist Fantasies: Psychoanalysis, History, and the Literature of East Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 1–22.

² Marc Silberman is a notable exception here. His book *Literature of the Working World: A Study of the Industrial Novel in East Germany* (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1976) did indeed address the work of Claudius (19–28). In the German-speaking world, there has been more recognition of the significance of the GDR's early period. Of particular importance, in the last two decades, have been Gregor Ohlerich, *Sozialistische Denkwelten: Modell eines literarischen Feldes der SBZ/DDR, 1945 bis 1953* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2005); Simone Barck, *Antifa-Geschichte(n): Eine literarische Spurensuche in der DDR der 1950er und 1960er Jahre* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2003); and Helmut Peitsch, *Nachkriegsliteratur, 1945–1989* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2009). In English, David Pike has done important work on the Soviet zone, although he tends to make many of the classic assumptions associated with Cold War dichotomies: Pike, *The Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992). Pike also more or less ignores actual cultural production, and the discourse about it, and instead focuses almost exclusively on politics.

³ Hell, for instance, notes Wolfgang Emmerich's insistence on East German literature that meets the "standards of modern prose." Hell, *Post-Fascist Fantasies*, 15, where she refers to Wolfgang Emmerich, "Affirmation-Utopie-Melancholie: Versuch einer Bilanz von vierzig Jahren DDR-Literatur," *German Studies Review* 14, no. 2 (May 1991): 334. (Hell gives an inaccurate page reference.) Here and elsewhere throughout this book any translations from English to German are my own, unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Hell, *Post-Fascist Fantasies*, 15.

⁵ Julia Hell, "At the Center an Absence: Foundationalist Narratives of the GDR and the Legitimatory Discourse of Antifascism," *Monatshefte* 84, no. 1 (1992): 23.

⁶ Hell, "At the Center an Absence," 23.

⁷ Stephen Parker, *Bertolt Brecht: A Literary Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 586.

⁸ John Fuegi, *Brecht and Company: Sex, Politics, and the Making of the Modern Drama* (New York: Grove, 1994). This is not the place to reiterate the many problems with Fuegi's book. But the chapters that follow will disprove Fuegi's

contention that “Brecht served Ulbricht for seven years, from late 1948 until the middle of 1956” (612). For detailed criticism of Fuegi’s book, one may refer to John Willett, James K. Lyon, Siegfried Mews, and Hans Christian Nørregaard, “A Brechtbuster Goes Bust: Scholarly Mistakes, Misquotes, and Malpractices in John Fuegi’s *Brecht and Company*,” *Brecht Yearbook* 20 (1995): 259–367.

⁹ See Jan Knopf, ed., *Brecht Handbuch*, vol. 1, *Stücke* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001), 611.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Klaus Briegleb, *Mißachtung und Tabu: Eine Streitschrift zur Frage: “Wie antisemitisch war die Gruppe 47?”* (Berlin: Philo, 2003). For the concept of the zero hour more generally, see, among others, Stephen Brockmann, *German Literary Culture at the Zero Hour* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), 1–20.

¹¹ See, for instance, John Davidson and Sabine Hake, eds., *Framing the Fifties: Cinema in a Divided Germany* (New York: Berghahn, 2007).

¹² Milorad Pavic, *Landscape Painted with Tea* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 41.

¹³ Andrew I. Port, “The Banalities of East German Historiography,” in *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler*, ed. Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 14.

¹⁴ David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 270.

¹⁵ Port, “The Banalities of East German Historiography,” 5.

¹⁶ Heiner Müller, *Krieg ohne Schlacht: Leben in zwei Diktaturen* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1992), 64.

¹⁷ Johannes R. Becher, *Erziehung zur Freiheit: Gedanken und Betrachtungen* (Berlin: Volk & Wissen, 1946), 112.

¹⁸ Hans Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, vol. 5, *Bundesrepublik und DDR, 1949–1990* (Munich: Beck, 2000), 361.

¹⁹ Hell, “At the Center an Absence,” 23.

²⁰ Emmerich, “Affirmation-Utopie-Melancholie,” 332.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 333.

²² Erich Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß: Ein Lebenslauf* (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1981), 205.

²³ E. M. Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Arcade, 1998), 108.

²⁴ Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

²⁵ Amir Eshel, *Futurity: Contemporary Literature and the Quest for the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 4. Of course Eshel is discussing contemporary literature, not the literature of the 1940s and 1950s, and certainly not the literature of East Germany. I claim, however, that even in the 1940s and 1950s, when it may have appeared to outside observers to be a closed system, East German literature promoted “futurity” “by prompting reflection and debate,” as Eshel puts it.

²⁶ Cited in Stephen Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 44.

²⁷ George Steiner, "The Hollow Miracle: Notes on the German Language," *Reporter* (New York), 18 February 1960, 36–41. Reprinted in George Steiner, "The Hollow Miracle," in Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 95–109. Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust* (New York: Routledge, 1999). See also Ralph Giordano, *Die zweite Schuld: Oder von der Last Deutscher zu sein* (Hamburg: Rasch & Röhring, 1987).

²⁸ Willi Bredel, "Das schweigende Dorf," in Bredel, *Auf den Heerstrassen der Zeit: Erzählungen* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1957), 526–72.

²⁹ W. G. Sebald, *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (Munich: Hanser, 1999); English translation as "Air War and Literature" in Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Random House, 2003), 1–104.

³⁰ Bill Niven, *Representations of Flight and Expulsion in East German Prose Works* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2014). Niven deals not with the air war but with flight and expulsion; the two are connected, however, by the problem of German suffering.

³¹ See, for instance, Willi Bredel, *Die Enkel* (1953; repr., Berlin: Aufbau, 1979), 482–89; and Dieter Noll, *Die Abenteuer des Werner Holt*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Aufbau, 1964), 300–305. Both these examples reference the air war. Niven produces multiple examples of the theme of flight and expulsion.

³² Wilfried Loth, *Stalin's Unwanted Child: The Soviet Union, the German Question and the Founding of the GDR*, trans. Robert F. Hogg (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), xii.

³³ Cited in Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification*, 163.

³⁴ See Stephen Brockmann, "W. G. Sebald and German Suffering," in "Germans as Victims" in the *Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic*, ed. Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), 24.

³⁵ Edgar Allan Poe, "The Purloined Letter," in *Complete Stories and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 126.

³⁶ Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders* (London: Verso, 1988), 251.

³⁷ Mary Fulbrook, "The 'State' of GDR History," *Francia* 38 (2011): 269.

³⁸ Emmerich, "Affirmation-Utopie-Melancholie," 333.

³⁹ Pike, *The Politics of Culture, 1945–1949*, 34.

⁴⁰ Loth, *Stalin's Unwanted Child*, 174. Among literary scholars, Peter Davies has made the most productive use of Loth's findings. See Davies, *Divided Loyalties: East German Writers and the Politics of German Division 1945–1953* (Leeds, UK: Maney, 2000), 10–37.

⁴¹ Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931–1941* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 104.

⁴² For additional consideration of the novel as a generic form with particular social significance, see Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification*, 19–20.

⁴³ Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. Sara B. Young (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 123.

⁴⁴ György Lukács, *Theory of the Novel* (1920; repr., Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971).

⁴⁵ For more on this debate, see Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification*, 64–79.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁷ See Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Eugen Kogon, “Die verwaltete Welt oder: Die Krise des Individuums—Aufzeichnung eines Gesprächs im Hessischen Rundfunk am 4. September 1950,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 13, *Nachgelassene Schriften, 1949–1972*, ed. Max Horkheimer (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1989), 121–42. See also Adorno, “Kultur und Verwaltung,” in Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 8, *Soziologische Schriften 1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), 122–46.

⁴⁸ See Stephen Brockmann, “James Burnham und der deutsche Nachkriegs-Konservatismus,” in *Perspektiven konservativen Denkens: Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten nach 1945*, ed. Erhard Schütz and Peter Uwe Hohendahl (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), 195–212.

⁴⁹ Boris Groys, *The Communist Postscript*, trans. Thomas H. Ford (London: Verso, 2009), 1.

⁵⁰ György Konrád and Ivan Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979); and James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution: What is Happening in the World* (New York: John Day, 1941).

Part I. The Absence of State (1945)

