

Leeds-Swansea Colloquia on
Contemporary German Literature

Re-forming the Nation in
Literature and Film /
Entwürfe zur Nation in
Literatur und Film

The Patriotic Idea in Contemporary
German-Language Culture /
Die patriotische Idee in der
deutschsprachigen Kultur der Gegenwart

Julian Preece (ed.)

Peter Lang

In the year that Europe commemorates the centenary of the outbreak of World War I and the European Union faces a crisis of legitimacy, the national question is once again being posed across the Continent. This volume assesses how contemporary German-language writers and filmmakers have approached this troubled question over the last decade. It addresses whether the collective entity known as Germany should more properly be conflated with the Federal Republic, with its successful sixty-five-year history ('the best Germany we have ever had'), rather than the 'nation' with all its tainted connotations and corrupted concepts such as 'Vaterland'. Contemporary Germany is a product not only of its history up to 1945 but also of the process of understanding that history and acting upon that understanding since the defeat of National Socialism. Each of the sixteen essays collected here illuminates a different segment of a bigger picture, whose shape and shades are themselves evolving. Presented as a whole their purpose is to provoke further discussion among observers of the contemporary German-speaking scene.

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/ Entwürfe zur Nation in Literatur und Film

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Contemporary German Literature

Volume 3

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Acknowledgements

Most of the chapters in this volume began as papers delivered at a Colloquium hosted at Swansea University by the Centre for Contemporary German Culture in July 2012 under the slightly different title of 'Constructing the Nation in Literature and Film'. I would like to thank Leeds University, the Research Institute in the Arts and Humanities at Swansea University, and the Austrian Cultural Forum for their generous support, also Cristian Cercel for compiling the index.

JULIAN PREECE

Introduction: Uncertain Nations at the Heart of Europe

According to a self-proclaimed left-wing book about German patriotism by the Green Party politician Robert Habeck there have been two moments of national euphoria in Germany in the recent past. The first was prompted by reunification in 1989–90 and the second by hosting the World Cup in 2006. The problem for Habeck is that both moments were inconclusive. Reunification was sudden, unexpected and unplanned and entailed a mere joining up of territories: ‘vereinigt wurden Länder, nicht Ideen [...] Eine Nation im Aufbruch konnte so nicht entstehen’. At the World Cup sixteen years later two generations of Germans who had been brought up to mistrust national symbols at best discovered that they enjoyed waving the Federal Republic’s black, red and gold flag when cheering on their football team (which they had always done). For Habeck, however, this was no more than ‘spielerischer Patriotismus’ because ‘Ihm fehlte jeder ernste Anspruch.’¹ In other words, there is some work still to be done when it comes to thinking through what it means to be a citizen of Germany in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Habeck’s book is one of a number of publications on the subject which have appeared in the past five years. His own not entirely original recommendation is that German national allegiance and sovereign functions be transferred to the supranational European Union, albeit only once the EU has been reformed and gained greater democratic legitimacy. There have been interventions in other media, such as the collaborative film *Deutschland 09. 13 Kurze Filme zur Lage der Nation* (2009, dir. various), a remake of New German Cinema’s seminal *Deutschland*

1 Robert Habeck, *Patriotismus. Ein linkes Plädoyer* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2010), pp. 30–1.

im Herbst (1978, dir. various), as well as much fiction and travel writing, which are the focus of interest for most contributions to this volume. As European nations in the nineteenth century (the era of nation building) came to exist first in poems, songs and plays, making them first of all the creations of poets, lyricists and playwrights, this volume assesses how contemporary German-language writers and filmmakers have approached the troubled question of the nation over the last decade. Before summarising some of our findings, I will enumerate some further reference points with the aim of anchoring the discussions of the literary and cinematic works which follow in German political history of the last twenty years.

Since the end of the Cold War, Germany and Austria have been once again independent, sovereign states, finally free of control by the victors of World War II. Reunified Germany became at a stroke the largest and richest country in the European Union, and thus de facto the most powerful. As it has weathered the financial crisis since 2008 with greater resilience than its partners and neighbours, in particular France, Germany has recently emerged as the EU's undisputed yet reluctant and often resented leader. This is the subject of a thought-provoking analysis by the country's leading sociologist, Ulrich Beck. *Das deutsche Europa* takes its title from Thomas Mann, who argued in 1953 for a 'European Germany', meaning one that shared both a destiny and a set of core Enlightenment values with other European states, instead of a 'German Europe' that Hitler had waged a war of extermination to achieve. Today Mann's binary opposition has dissolved to give us what nobody in the aftermath of World War II thought possible: a 'European Germany in a German Europe'.² As the question has changed, new answers are needed. Beck's conclusion is that this is happening by default rather than by design because European leaders, whether in Berlin, Paris or elsewhere, are concerned with their own national priorities rather than those of the Union as a whole. Like Habeck, he argues from the left for a strengthened and above all fully legitimised EU.

2 Ulrich Beck, *Das deutsche Europa. Neue Machtlandschaften im Zeichen der Krise* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2012), pp. 7–8.

There is a nationalist dimension to the economic process which has resulted in German hegemony: during the great boom which began in the early 1990s (and which was the longest such boom in modern economic history) Germany largely stuck to its own version of corporate, socially responsible 'Rhenish' capitalism. Gerhard Schröder's 'Agenda 2010' reforms, which cut welfare payments to the long-term unemployed and made it easier for firms to hire and fire workers, may have split his Social Democratic Party in 2003 but they were mild by the standards of the Anglo-Saxon states. 'Agenda 2010' was, however, as far as the German people were prepared to go in the direction of neo-Liberalism. They resisted calls to embrace free-market practices championed by the British and Americans, regarding them not only as unjust but as essentially alien. Whether the EU as a whole and the countries at its core which have adopted the single currency can prosper by following German fiscal policies, as Berlin is at present insisting, remains at the time of writing anything but clear, however. What is beyond doubt is that both the EU and Germany are at a crossroads.

German voters' preference for sound money is founded in folk memories of the 1923 Inflation and the economic collapse at the end of World War II. These are not rational grounds for policy making but manifestations of the past's continued hold on the present. In both 1948 and 1990, currency reform (the introduction of the D-Mark) or currency union (the merger of the West and East currencies) took precedence over the political settlement and the foundation of states (the Federal Republic in 1949 or reunification in October 1990). In foreign policy, the mistakes of the past loom even larger. The German public's refusal to countenance participation in military interventions has resulted in greater hesitancy when it comes to international leadership. President Horst Köhler resigned in 2010 after his remark that the *Bundeswehr* through its presence in Afghanistan was ultimately helping to defend trade routes was taken to mean that Western capital had declared war on the rest of the world and that Köhler was prosecuting that war on Germany's behalf. The population may not be quite pacifist in its attitudes but the majority does not want to see its soldiers in action in foreign countries under any circumstances. It took the German government some time to understand this. After Helmut Kohl pushed for the EU to recognise Slovenia and Croatia in 1991, both former provinces

of Austria-Hungary, and thus provoked Serbian aggression, Schröder's Red-Green Coalition supported NATO action against Serbia in Kosovo in 1999. In 2002, however, Red-Green owed its re-election to a decidedly nationalist refusal to join the American-led invasion of Iraq, which went ahead without German (or French) participation the following spring. The voters had let their views be known. It is no accident that three chapters in this volume are devoted to German and Austrian responses to the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. The Yugoslavian Wars in the mid-1990s not only saw atrocities committed on European soil for the first time since 1945 and precipitated an influx of refugees into Germany and Austria, they were a mirror in which Germans and Austrians looked at themselves and their own recent history. Schröder's foreign minister Joschka Fischer argued that the Serb massacres at places like Srebrenica made it morally incumbent on Germany to respond with force because the far greater atrocities of World War II and the Holocaust were committed in Germany's name: 'Nie wieder Auschwitz!' One point of continuity was alarming. What disturbed Peter Handke was that when battle lines were drawn up, whether on the ground or in the media, they were similar to those of 1914 or 1939. This prompted him to wonder if the Serbs had resisted first Austro-Hungarian, then Nazi aggression in two world wars, was it legitimate to blame them now?

Debates about identity in both countries continue to revolve around the presence of sizeable Muslim minorities: up to four million in Germany, three million of whom, whether with or without German citizenship, with Turkish roots. The successful German football team may include players from a variety of backgrounds, but in society at large there are unresolved tensions. The leader of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, Mohamed Atta, lived for many years in Hamburg where he studied, went to football matches, and appeared happily integrated. In 2010 Thilo Sarrazin, up to then a distinguished Berlin-based Social Democrat, became notorious for publishing a 400-page anti-Turkish, anti-Muslim tract, which despite a retail price in excess of twenty euros quickly became the best-selling book of the entire post-war era.³ The popularity of his inflammatory

3 Thilo Sarrazin, *Deutschland schafft sich ab. Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2010).

assessment of alleged welfare dependency among German residents with a 'Migrationshintergrund' showed that voters lagged behind their political leaders on this key issue. Sarrazin may not be a profound thinker but the scandal surrounding his book provoked Zafer Şenocak, a leading Turkish-German writer, to produce a minor masterpiece of cultural criticism combining analysis with autobiography to account for German insecurities.⁴ Like his Iranian-German contemporary Navid Kermani in an equally conciliatory pamphlet,⁵ Şenocak illuminates the clash from both sides and returns to the Enlightenment in order to trace the origins of a phenomenon he calls the German 'Unbehagen mit der Moderne'. He recognises that Germans after 1945 were profoundly damaged by their war-time experiences and unable for that reason either to relate to the 'foreigners' in their midst or to provide them with a society and culture into which they could readily integrate:

Ein manisch-depressives wie emsiges Volk, das auch sechs Jahrzehnte nach dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges, zwei Jahrzehnte nach der Wiedervereinigung, keineswegs mit sich selbst im Reinen ist. Die Deutschen werden nervös, wenn sie sich mit anderen beschäftigen müssen, denn sie brauchen die ganze Energie für sich selbst.⁶

This is also a key insight in several of the chapters in this volume. Kermani's polemic is inspired by Lessing's lesser known play on the subject of overweening love for one's country, *Philotas*. His argument is that among writers from the eighteenth to the twentieth century true German patriots opposed 'Deutschland' and that this honourable tradition should be continued in the twenty-first century. Kermani's motivation for publication was not an ignorant book, but the revelations of the racist 'Kebab Murders' committed by the self-styled 'National Socialist Underground'. What he found truly shocking was not that three extremists from good families should commit ten murders over as many years (killing eight Turks, one Greek, and one policewoman), but that despite overwhelming evidence the police did not recognise the murders as racially motivated. In other words, they could not see what they did not want to believe was there.

4 Zafer Şenocak, *Deutsche Ängste. Eine Aufklärungsschrift* (Hamburg: Körber-Stiftung, 2011).

5 Navid Kermani, *Vergesst Deutschland! Eine patriotische Rede* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2012).

6 Şenocak, p. 114.

The authors of these essays are highly trained in critical seeing and reflection – more capable of overcoming their own prejudices, one hopes, than the officers of the *Bundeskriminalamt*. The essays were not commissioned. Their authors, who teach and research contemporary German literature and film in Germany, the USA, India, Croatia, Australia, as well as the UK, responded to the published theme of the Colloquium which took place at Swansea University from 16 to 18 July 2012. The volume thus offers a snapshot of current interests – mainly among younger and aspiring members of the profession – and does not pretend to be comprehensive. On the first evening of the Colloquium, the Romanian-German Nobel Laureate Herta Müller, who was in Swansea to receive an honorary award from the university, gave a reading, followed by a wide-ranging discussion with a large audience. On the second evening, I screened Kevin Allen's classic film about Wales set in Swansea, *Twin Town*. Produced by Danny Boyle in 1997, the same year that saw a commitment from a new government in Westminster to a referendum on the devolution of political powers, *Twin Town* adapted its title from Dylan Thomas's famous line that the city of his birth was 'an ugly, lovely town'. The film bears comparison with Boyle's pre-Devolution Scottish epic of collective defeat and self-loathing, *Trainspotting* (1994). Much has changed in Wales since 1997. After the establishment of a Welsh Assembly in 1999, public bodies concerned with culture and history have invested in nation-constructing narratives with the aim of fostering a national sense of place and the past. Two weeks after our Colloquium was over, Boyle reached even bigger audiences with the opening ceremony for the London Olympics, which took the form of an emphatically inclusive and forward-looking narrative of British history. As 'Auslandsgermanisten' one of our roles is to suggest approaches and topics from unique standpoints. For the Swansea Colloquium of 2012 and this resulting volume, that standpoint is one of Welsh, Scottish and British self-reinvention.

Among the further reasons for the theme was a conclusion that I reached while writing *Baader-Meinhof and the Novel* (2012) that cultural products which dealt with the recent past of extremist left-wing violence often brought the two unequal halves of Germany, East and West, together. The topic of Baader-Meinhof terrorism could do that essentially for two reasons.

The first was that the German Democratic Republic was involved in the history in various ways, in particular, by secretly offering asylum and new identities to terrorist 'Aussteiger' in the 1980s. The second was that it gave the former West Germany a similarly reprehensible left-wing past to the former East because on both sides there had been misguided idealists who had done wrong in the name of good. What interested me was the way that these shared narratives, which are unlikely to have occurred to many people at the time, were fashioned retrospectively from this subject.⁷ Gerhard Jens Lüdeker in his chapter on recent made-for-television blockbusters about GDR history makes a similar point, except that the costume dramas he discusses, taking their cue from *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006, dir. Florian von Donnersmarck), are driven by Western triumphalism. Most of the other books and films that are examined in this volume are less ideologically assured. One central question which is indirectly posed in most chapters, but never directly answered, is whether the collective entity known as Germany should more properly be conflated with the Federal Republic, with its successful 65-year history ('the best Germany we have ever had'), rather than the 'nation' with all its tainted connotations and corrupted concepts such as 'Vaterland'. That contemporary Germany is a product not only of its history up to 1945 but also of the process of understanding that history and acting upon that understanding since 1945 is one conclusion that a reader of these essays must reach.

The volume begins with three chapters on recent travel writing devoted either to journeys around Germany or to individual regions of the country. There is an appetite among the German reading public for these travelogues, several of which have become bestsellers. Christopher Meid shows how one of the most successful of these by Wolfgang Büscher stakes out the territory, characterising it as shaped irrevocably by the violence of World War II. Moritz von Uslar, a generation younger than Büscher and less encumbered by memories of the past, sets off in search of the wilds of the former East Germany, finding them on Berlin's doorstep in a provincial Brandenburg town.

7 Julian Preece, *Baader–Meinhof and the Novel: Narratives of the Nation / Fantasies of the Revolution, 1970–2010* (New York: Basingstoke, 2012).

However enamoured von Uslar becomes of the people he encounters here, he reports back to his metropolitan readers in the style of an anthropologist visiting an alien but friendly tribe. In the two decades following reunification provincial Brandenburg became a byword for brutish behaviour and unenlightened politics, but when it comes to views about Germany, Greg Bond argues in his discussion of *Deutschboden. Eine teilnehmende Beobachtung*, that the natives are portrayed as relaxed and in their distinctive way no less progressive than their compatriots in the capital. In the third chapter Aniela Knoblich shows that this body of domestic travel writing is overwhelmingly by men and is underpinned by some traditional masculine assumptions, not to say sexist attitudes, of which, she argues, von Uslar is a prime exponent. She notes too that with few exceptions, these travellers originate from the former West Germany. Knoblich cannot account for the Western male bias, but the result is that the victors in the Cold War are writing the history and attempting to control the narrative. The new Germany they evoke is a construct of the old West. The next chapter by Christian Sieg on Judith Schalansky's much praised novel *Der Hals der Giraffe* (2011) is on the subject of the decline of the old East, which Schalansky addresses in complex narrative ways which are inspired by recent American theories of evolutionary biology. While Schalansky (b.1980 in the old GDR) is not a Western male writer, once again the GDR is the object of (pseudo-)scientific enquiry. Her novel shows that these various paradigms are inadequate and ideologically biased and that their proponents tend to see what they want to see rather than working from the evidence.

The next three chapters are all case studies of individual novels by three leading writers, the old Sixty-Eighter F.C. Delius (*Mein Jahr als Mörder*, 2004), the GDR-born Reinhard Jirgl (*Die Stille*, 2009), and the Swiss provocateur Christian Kracht (*Imperium*, 2012). If we take their trio of novels as narratives of the nation, then the overall picture that emerges is contradictory. As Miriam Runge demonstrates, Delius is an optimist. The shadow that was still cast by the Nazi past in 1968, when the main part of *Mein Jahr als Mörder* is set, has all but disappeared. The Sixty-Eighters have made their peace with the establishment, whose ranks many of them have long since joined. In contrast, according to Carmen Ulrich's interpretation of Jirgl's *Die Stille*, the past still very much informs the present in

this intergenerational family novel. My own account of *Imperium*, which is the only chapter not originally given as a paper at the Colloquium, argues that Kracht re-invents some basic narrative patterns found in the fictions of Thomas Mann to fashion a mock allegory of a Germany which has been redeemed from the grotesque transgressions of Nazism.

The next three chapters are on film and television and their authors' conclusions give arguably greater pause for thought. Mathias Uecker uses audience statistics to show that the much vaunted revival of German cinema in the 2000s is something of a chimera when it comes to success abroad. Foreign audiences know the Germany that they like to see portrayed on screen: their favourite films are set either in the Third Reich (*Der Untergang*, *Sophie Scholl*) or the GDR (*Good Bye Lenin!*, *Das Leben der Anderen*). One film that enjoyed great success in Germany is the comedy about German-Turkish identity *Almanya – Willkommen in Deutschland* (dir. Yasemin Samdereli, 2011), which British distributors have sadly ruled to be 'too German' for release in the UK, but which attracted bigger audiences in Germany than any previous Turkish-German film.⁸ As an intervention in the post-Sarrafin debates, *Almanya* reaches out a hand of friendship to the host country. Three other films set in Berlin about inter-ethnic mixing or the lack of it (Züli Aladag's *Wut*, 2006; Agostino Imondi and Dietmar Ratsch's *Neukölln Unlimited*, 2010; and Bettina Blümer's *Prinzessinnenbad*, 2006) show how the original 'German' inhabitants are less secure in their own identity. Alexandra Ludewig echoes Zafer Şenocak in her findings that reveal that reverse racism can be one consequence of this insecurity and that film is where this dynamic is being articulated. Gerhard Jens Lüdeker identifies what amounts to (Western) nationalist populism in a series of big budget made-for-TV costume dramas set in the recent past. While an intellectual, avant-garde novelist like Reinhard Jirgl makes the past unpalatable, mass-market films take the opposite approach by making (at least) Western audiences feel good. The next two chapters strike a different tone. According to Sven Hanuschek, Andreas Maier writes *Heimat* novels with a difference, thus undermining a genre so thoroughly corrupted by

8 According to Daniela Berghahn at the German Screen Studies Network, King's College London, 5 July 2013.

the Nazis and demonstrating a suspicion of ‘interesting’ subjects such as national collectives. The professional theatre critic Thomas Irmer traces the career of the film, theatre and installation director (as well as founder of a political party) Christoph Schlingensief, arguing that his progress from marginalised iconoclastic spirit in the early 1990s to ‘state artist’ by the time of his recent death is more an indication that the state itself evolved than he did. There follow a trio of chapters on novels written in German about the Yugoslavian wars of the 1990s. Readers may be surprised to find this subject broached in a volume about attitudes to the nation in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Understanding these unequal conflicts between Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks (or Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims, as they are more likely to label themselves) impels their northern neighbours to examine their own sense of themselves. Maria Mayr explores three of these novels to show how they depict German, Austrian and finally European failure to respond adequately to the reversion to ethnic warfare on the EU’s southern border. Each time the national or supranational collective could only see these wars through their own recent past. In essence, Mayr takes us back to Šenocak’s point about robust self-understanding as a precondition for engagement with what she, echoing Emmanuel Lévinas, terms the Yugoslavian ‘Other’. Jakob Heller shows how Peter Handke, who repeatedly found himself pilloried for his pro-Serbian statements, is more reflective and self-critical in his recent novel *Die moravische Nacht* (2008). Angelika Welebil, who teaches in Croatia, rounds off this triptych by highlighting the didactic qualities of Oliver Bottini’s Balkan *krimi*, *Der kalte Traum* (2012), which through a fictitious biography shows that national or ethnic identities are themselves ideological fictions. The volume is concluded with the sole chapter which deals with Switzerland but which is the second on Christian Kracht. While in *Imperium* Kracht gently mocks German national myths, in *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten*, according to Julia Schöll in her historical reading of the novel, he shows how a central Swiss national myth is a fictitious construct.

Each of the sixteen essays collected here illuminates a different segment of a bigger picture, whose shape and shades are themselves evolving. Presented as a whole their purpose is to provoke further discussion among students of the contemporary German-speaking scene.

GREG BOND

‘Willkommen in jenem unbekannten Land,
das Deutschland heißt’. Moritz von Uslar,
Deutschboden. Eine teilnehmende Beobachtung

The history of Germany has always involved many definitions and redefinitions of the German nation, and definitions and redefinitions of Germany's role vis-à-vis its immediate neighbours and the rest of the world – or in the parenthetical European decades between 1949 and 1989, its own other half.¹ Since reunification in 1990 the topic has never been off the political and media agendas, with Germany negotiating its regained unity, its renewed international influence, and working at reshaping itself as a society of tolerance within its own borders and a state that is a respected ‘soft power’ beyond them. Today's ongoing Euro crisis and Germany's role as the Euro's most powerful economy and the largest EU state in the centre of Europe make the question even more relevant – Germany is forced to ask and answer, for itself and for the other nations of Europe, what exactly its role is in the world today, and thus also what are the values that make the German nation what it is.

As Germany plays a stronger role in European and world politics, this is again accompanied by redefinitions of the self-image that the German press and German politics present – and the self-definition of what it means to be a German that is held by ‘ordinary’ citizens. This image has been shifting over the last decade. It is still determined by the question of

1 Tony Judt describes this period as a parenthesis in European history in *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 750 (first published 2005), suggesting that there is continuity and normality in Europe both prior to and since the division that the Cold War – and division of Germany – represented.

historical German guilt, now reframed as German responsibility, and has also come to include a firmly established quiet sense of pride in German constitutional democracy, while it still faces difficult debates concerning the integration of 'non-German' cultures. One simple question that for other nations may seem so easy to answer remains so very complex in contemporary Germany. This is the question that the weekly *Die Zeit* placed on its title page and asked new President Joachim Gauck not long after he took office: 'Kann man auf Deutschland stolz sein?' Yes, said Gauck, but he qualified this in good Protestant fashion by saying that the pride derives from a sense of gratitude and pleasure ('Dankbarkeit und Freude') at a job well done.² A nation whose leading press ask questions of this kind is per se a nation with a reserved, and perhaps even sceptical view of its own nationhood. Where else would (another) leading newspaper print a debate on whether, in the light of the Euro crisis and Germany's key role in its resolution, it would be right (in the sense of diplomatic) for Germany to win the 2012 European Football Championship, presenting for and against on its comment page?³

The nation is a topical issue for another very European reason too. Germany is not only playing a larger role in European and world politics, but the concept and constitution of the nation is shifting and likely to be fundamentally transformed across the whole of Europe as greater EU integration is discussed and implemented. Austrian writer Robert Menasse spent a period living in Brussels, observing the work of EU institutions, and planning a novel. Hans Magnus Enzensberger also took a look at Brussels – and both of them came up with rather damning conclusions on the state of the EU, but from very different perspectives. While Enzensberger criticised the oblique and wasteful internal workings of the EU institutions, Menasse concluded that it was the nation-states within the EU that make the EU as an institution unable to function effectively.⁴ They are the forces that work

2 *Die Zeit*, 31 May 2012, p. 1 and p. 4.

3 'Sollen wir die EM gewinnen?', *Welt am Sonntag*, 10 June 2012, p. 11.

4 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Sanftes Monster Brüssel oder die Entmündigung Europas* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2011); Robert Menasse, 'Sarkozy und Merkel sind Repräsentanten nationalen Kleingeists', *The European*, 12 September 2011, <<http://>

against European integration, and the national interests represented at the European Council are those of national politicians who must appeal to their own electorates, and thus must be seen to be working for the nation – and against Europe – to succeed politically. Both Enzensberger and Menasse see a deficit of democracy in the EU, accompanied, so Menasse suggests, by a renaissance of nationalism, a backlash manifest both in mainstream national politics and in the rise of the nationalist right across Europe. Germany, however, remains relatively unaffected by the growth of right-wing movements. While the NPD (National Democratic Party of Germany) has some regional success, there is no national movement of note: no Front National (France), no Northern League (Italy), no Freedom Party (the Netherlands), no True Finns (Finland). Yet as far as mainstream politics is concerned, German politicians face the almost impossible task of promoting further European integration while knowing that their political future depends on being seen to advocate German national interests strongly – against Europe. For Menasse, the answer is stronger European democracy, via the European parliament and the Commission.

The questions facing the German nation today are not the same questions that once set agendas for the post-war generation of writers. While Günter Grass may have been right to warn against German sales of submarines to Israel, and the criticisms raised against him for doing so were frequently below the belt and unfounded, his reasoning remains bound within a discourse from a past age rather than addressing Germany's present political and strategic interests.⁵ Germany has entered a new phase, in which German foreign policy is normalised: as the German nation reconsiders its role in the world, the world has welcomed German normalisation. At the very latest, this normality can be seen to have been reached by 2006, when – to return to football – Germany hosted the Football World Cup and presented a relaxed, tolerant and wise face to the world.

www.theeuropean.de> (accessed 27 June 2012); also 'Europa Countdown', speech delivered on 3 May 2012 at the German Representation of the European Commission in Berlin, <http://www.schwarzkopf-stiftung.de/uploads/europa__countdown_e2c.pdf> (accessed 27 June 2012).

5 Günter Grass, 'Was gesagt werden muss', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 4 April 2012.

I would now like to move from the national and European dimension to the hamlet of Deutschboden, perhaps one of least cosmopolitan and most German pieces of Germany conceivable. Deutschboden lies some seventy kilometers north of Berlin, hidden deep within a large area of managed forests. It consists of Deutschboden Zentrum and Deutschboden Ost, with four and three houses respectively, linked up by a three-hundred-meter clay track. The name is said to derive from a large game fence that crossed this area north of Berlin in the sixteenth century, when traders returning south from the Baltic passed here through a gate that brought them onto 'teutschem Boden' – German soil – according to an information board on a post in the village's one street. This place was where Germany once began – this was home. This name may give rise to unpleasant connotations today, for which historically the village itself is not responsible, being founded and named long before the Nazi period. And for the journalist and novelist Moritz von Uslar the fact that this hamlet with this name lies just north of Berlin was a happy coincidence. It is the perfect title for his book on contemporary Germany.

Von Uslar's full title is *Deutschboden. Eine teilnehmende Beobachtung*.⁶ He spent three months living in the town of Zehdenick north of Berlin, where he made no secret of the fact that he was a journalist researching a book about life in the provinces. The participatory observation he undertook was, therefore, not clandestine (as in the case of Günter Wallraff's undercover researches), but transparent; the people he observed for the most part knew they were being observed. His aim, he notes at the beginning of the book, was to take a look at life away from the city – the book's first scene is a chic Berlin bar with steak and champagne – and to find something of interest there. In this introduction, von Uslar – or his narrator – gives the impression that he is searching for authenticity of the kind he cannot find among city intellectuals, and that to achieve this he will need to mimic the small-town macho male, who spits on the street and is a member of a boxing club. Von Uslar claims that he is not looking

6 Moritz von Uslar, *Deutschboden. Eine teilnehmende Beobachtung* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 2010).

to prove anything, but will take a naive approach to observation. At the beginning, he is apprehensive, afraid he will be rejected as a stranger by the tough and indifferent men from the new world he intends to participate in and observe. Already, at this stage of his introduction, there is a sense that von Uslar is not naively and unwittingly reproducing clichés, but quite deliberately setting a stage for his own performance which will be enacted in a world full of cliché. In other words: he is not a naive reporter at all, but a mimic who knows what he is mimicking and why, and the authenticity he posits is no more than a pose.

After driving around Berlin a few times, von Uslar finds the town of Zehdenick, which he calls Oberhavel in the book, and puts up in Haus Heimat, which in reality is called Haus Vaterland. His attempts to conceal the identity of these places are no more than token, a literary device that might seem to highlight the authenticity of his observations, but which in fact transpires to be more complex. During his first few days in Oberhavel he proceeds apprehensively, fearing rejection, but quickly meets the locals, is welcomed by them, drinks with them, is invited to their barbecues, joins a boxing club, hangs out with the adolescents in the forecourt of the Aral petrol station, and joins in with a punk band called *5 Teeth Less* rehearsing their songs in a nearby village – all the time taping conversations and interviews. The result is a book that looks at the contrasts between city and country, capital and provinces, rich and poor, waged and unemployed, German and foreign, intellectual and – what contrasts with intellectual? Von Uslar paints an entertaining and very human picture of how a stranger (and self-styled anthropologist) arrives in and gets to know a new country: Deutschland. The book was marketed with the slogan on its cover, 'Willkommen in jenem unbekannten Land, das Deutschland heißt', and was a great success, with von Uslar taking the band he met in Zehdenick along on reading tours.

Von Uslar's book can in one sense be seen as an investigation of East-West realities in Germany and a resume of the process of unification. To what degree have the West and the East grown together twenty years on – 'wie viel Wiedervereinigung [hat] nach zwanzig Jahren tatsächlich

stattgefunden?’ asked the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in its review.⁷ How far can a young West German intellectual – von Uslar was born in 1970, comes from Munich and attended the elite private school in Salem – understand the East German provinces? Will he discover that Germany is one nation, despite all the differences between East and West? While these questions are legitimate, I believe that the book addresses a more fundamental question: what is the state of the German nation today, and what can we learn about it from ordinary Germans living outside the major centres of public opinion, commerce, and culture? But this question is too naive, as, on yet another level, *Deutschboden* shows that it is nigh-on impossible to separate the answers to the question of Germany identity from all the clichés (and often self-hating) images of Germany that are encountered in the media every day. It is worth recalling that von Uslar is a well-known writer of ‘Popliteratur’, which per se works with the popular media as material. This approach is not overdone in *Deutschboden*, but nonetheless firmly informs the text. When the would-be dynamic narrator announces his intention to live and work in a small town outside Berlin, his Berlin acquaintances declare him crazy, no doubt because of the (erstwhile) reputation of the (East) German provinces as anti-intellectual, uncultured and quasi-fascist no-go regions. The title of the book is a hint at its real topography in the provinces north of Berlin, but also quite clearly indicates that this is a book about images of Germany and German national identity – and the word ‘Deutschboden’ is immediately resonant with all the negative connotations that are associated with Germany, both historically and to a degree still today, and thus also automatically relevant to any investigation of German identity.

Whereas the town of Oberhavel and Haus Heimat on Spandauer Straße do not exist, the hamlet of Deutschboden is real and really named Deutschboden, although von Uslar fails to find it in his narrative, and cleverly claims that there is no such place. On a moonlit night he drives down the sandy country track that the road sign points down, but never finds it. On their way to rehearsals in the village of Kurtschlag, the punk

7 Wiebke Prombka, ‘Moritz von Uslar: Deutschboden. Nachrichten aus dem wilden Osten’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2 October 2010.

band members drive past a sign to Deutschboden, and play out their ritual of sounding their car horn and shouting out the name. This book is about the nation Germany, and there are a number of occasions where this discourse about the nation that the title suggests becomes direct and explicit.

The people of Oberhavel that von UsLAR meets are unanimous in their view that there is only one Germany; the question of East–West divisions and tensions is almost non-existent for them, while probably the West still looks sceptically towards the East. What does Germany look like for these people von UsLAR meets? Most of them are men; von UsLAR hardly talks to women, which is not surprising given the social norms of these provinces, but can be construed as the macho indifference of the naive reporter, combined with his sexist gaze (see the critique by Aniela Knoblich in this volume, which may take this aspect a little too straight, not allowing for von UsLAR's ironic self-staging). Most of these men are on low-wage insecure jobs, or are unemployed – particularly moving is the story of the (female) hairdresser who earns €637 per month after tax. But this does not prevent these people from being proud of their country. 'Deutschland ist nicht böse, Deutschland ist ein feiner Kerl' (p. 82), von UsLAR reflects as he watches the waiter Heiko Schröder at work in the Gaststätte Schröder, where he meets a good number of 'feine Kerle' – Heiko and his father Hansi, both with a welcoming sense of humour, Blocky, Raoul and many more.

Von UsLAR later joins Blocky in his garden for a barbecue, during which a new German flag is ceremonially hoisted. It cost €15.90 at Netto supermarket, was bought because it has a truly golden instead of yellow stripe, and featured the 'Bundesadler'. Blocky explains why he has hoisted it: 'Ich unterstütze Deutschland im Allgemeinen und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland im Besonderen' (217–18). The speech as the flag is hoisted goes: 'Auf meinen Garten. Unser schönes Vaterland. Und darauf, dass immer Bier im Kühlschrank ist' (217). Conversation turns to German history and the Holocaust, as von UsLAR asks about the small Jewish cemetery in the town, which was defiled years ago by unknown perpetrators. Blocky explains that this was probably the work of some drunken kids, and then begins to talk about Sachsenhausen concentration camp, which is between Zehdenick and Berlin. At one point von UsLAR 'corrects' Blocky for comparing the genocide of the Jews with the incarceration of sexual

abuse offenders in Sachsenhausen, and Blocky accepts: 'Niemand will hier die Verbrechen der Nazis relativieren' (219). The intellectual von Uslar wins the argument but feels like a man defeated, because in the face of the normality of a decent life under the innocently raised German flag and with a fridge full of beer, the argument misses its mark.

Another key scene takes place towards the end of von Uslar's stay, when he finally plucks up the courage to ask the young men he has got to know about the neo-Nazi scene. They are perfectly frank with him, and explain that in the 1990s pretty well every youth in the town was involved, including themselves. Skinhead culture dominated, and the town was like a Nazi state; but now there are only few Nazis left, and the band members themselves (three of them unemployed) would probably now vote FDP (Free Democratic Party), they say. 'Man findet es schön, hier in Deutschland zu wohnen' (352) is their simple conclusion. There is, apparently, no debate: Germany has attained normality. The normality that allows a man like von Uslar to research the allegedly dangerous neo-Nazi provinces and return enriched, the normality that allows the men of Oberhavel – Zehdenick – to meet and enjoy drinking in their local pub, that includes the tedium of provincial life, where the main entertainment for the youth on summer evenings is provided by the petrol station forecourt or consists in cruising slowly round town in cars. It is also the normality that allows German politicians to be cautiously proud, and to promote the interests of Germany on an international stage. This normality makes German football so attractive and German footballers so well-behaved, so straight and presentable; there are no charismatic rebels in this national team. This is the normality about Germany which leads von Uslar to conclude: 'Ich musste doch jetzt noch irgendetwas Abschliessendes über Deutschland denken. Mir fiel natürlich Gott sei Dank nichts ein' (378). There is nothing much to say about Germany. Of course that is not exactly true, but there is nothing much to say that makes Germany that different from anywhere else.

There is no talk of Europe in the small town of Oberhavel, and no talk of winding down national powers in favour of European integration. For now, Germany has achieved a sense of nationhood that includes a place like Oberhavel; Germany has achieved this simple normality: 'Deutschland, so Blocky und Raoul, könne stolz auf sich sein – aber sicher' (108).

Epilogue

Moritz von Uslar, or his alter ego, the naive and would-be macho reporter, fails to be accepted in the local Oberhavel boxing club. He is welcomed, but does not fit in, neither socially nor in terms of his boxing abilities, and is ultimately asked not to return. In this respect at least, he fails in his project of mimicking a small-town working-class male. And – as mentioned above – he never finds Deutschboden, although it does exist and is not exactly difficult to find. Perhaps von Uslar's discourse of authenticity is not so clear-cut after all? On closer inspection, the scene in which the German flag is hoisted for a garden barbecue hardly rings true; it is too staged. In this book, von Uslar's narrator attempts to keep up his naive reporter guise, but tries so hard that readers can hardly fail to notice that it is just a guise. While, on the one hand, the book provides insight into provincial life in a small town in Land Brandenburg, it also provides insight into the clichés and images that accompany small-time life in the provinces. The discourse of authenticity that von Uslar sets up at the beginning – leaving a diet of steak and champagne in Berlin for the real Germany – is by no means as authentic as it seems. It is replete with stock images concerning the provinces and particularly the East German provinces. Von Uslar's narrator is a construct, like the world that he narrates. The idea that the real Germany is to be found in the provinces is constructed too, which is why von Uslar playfully deconstructs it. Or does he confirm it and cement it?⁸ The answer is simply not clear, and each reader will decide according

- 8 The Berlin versus the provinces / provinces versus Berlin discourse in German literature is not new. It was particularly virulent around 1930, when the nationalist provinces were contrasted with liberal Berlin, with deeply engrained conflicting values and grave political connotations. See *Marbacher Magazin*, 35 (1985), *Berlin Provinz. Literarische Kontroversen um 1930*, ed. Jochen Meyer (Marbach, 2nd rev. ed.n 1988). Von Uslar draws on this topos in *Deutschboden*, while the historically-informed sceptical view of the provinces (that he notes at the beginning of his book, but without the history) may well be reflected and reproduced in critical readings of this book.

to his or her own preference, ideology, or politics. Could it be that von Uslar's anecdotal findings on German normality are equally constructed and unreliable? Is Germany really such a 'feiner Kerl'? Are German politics really normalised? In *Deutschboden* there is a lot more ambiguity than first meets the eye.

The University of Bielefeld's Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence has been carrying out surveys on 'group-based enmity' in Germany over the past decade and has always found significant indicators for racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim attitudes, and sexism. This research was expanded to produce a 2011 comparative report on eight European nations, with a 'group-based enmity' index derived from the six categories I have just mentioned. Germany scores fifth out of eight countries.⁹ Is this also normality? And is German normality not all that different from the rest of Europe?¹⁰

9 Andreas Zick, Beate Küpper, Andreas Hövermann *Intolerance, Prejudice, and Discrimination: A European Report. Berlin 2011*, <<http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/ikg/IntolerancePrejudice.pdf>>, p. 74 (accessed 10 July 2012).

10 *Deutschboden* has now been made into a feature film. Directed by André Schäfer it premieres in 2014.

‘Nur die Germania konnte ich noch ansteuern’ Wolfgang Büschers literarische Deutschlandreise

Es gibt in Deutschland zu viele Deutschlandbücher. Sie waren wohl unvermeidlich nach all den Untergängen. Und doch ist es nicht gut, wenn eine Nation sich der Selbstgrübeleien, dem Selbstberauben allzu sehr hingibt.¹

Diese Äußerung stammt von einem Autor, der selbst etliche ‘Deutschlandbücher’ verfasst hat, nämlich von dem Berliner Reisejournalisten Wolfgang Büscher. Er beginnt damit seine Dankesrede anlässlich der Verleihung des Ludwig-Börne-Preises für literarische Publizistik, mit dem er auch für seinen Reisebericht *Deutschland, eine Reise* (2005) ausgezeichnet wurde.²

Die ironische Pointe ist beabsichtigt. Büscher unterscheidet in seiner knappen Ansprache zwischen zwei Arten der literarischen und publizistischen Auseinandersetzung mit Deutschland: Eine lange dominante Tradition der Kritik, zu der Büscher auch die ‘Selbstgrübeleien’ und das ‘Selbstberauben’ zählt, stehe einer sinnlichen ‘Kultur des Erzählens’ gegenüber, die er für sein eigenes Schreiben reklamiert. Es gebe ‘nur diesen Ausweg aus dem deutschen Begrübelungszirkel: Hinaus ins Freie, in die Abenteuer des Erzählens. Sehen, was da ist’.

Mit anderen Worten: Gerade die Gattung des Reiseberichts verbürge die Sinnlichkeit und Welthaltigkeit, die dem übrigen Schreiben über Deutschland so sehr fehlten. Im Falle Büschers trägt die Art des Reisens

1 Wolfgang Büscher, ‘Hinaus ins Freie, ins Abenteuer’, *Die Zeit*, 29 Juni 2006.

2 Vgl. Wolfgang Büscher, *Deutschland, eine Reise* [2005] (2. Auflage Berlin: Rowohlt, 2006). Zitate aus diesem Text werden fortan in Klammern im Text nachgewiesen.

wesentlich dazu bei: Er geht meist zu Fuß und scheut dabei auch vor großen Distanzen nicht zurück: Erinnert sei hier nur an seine Fußreise von Berlin nach Moskau.³

Das Schreiben über Reisen garantiere authentische Erfahrungen, eine Nähe zu den beschriebenen Gegenständen und schließlich Reflexionen, die auf Anschauung und gründlich erworbenen Kenntnissen basierten:

Das Reisen ist nicht tot. Es ist eine vitale literarische Möglichkeit, man muss nur ein bisschen was wagen, ein bisschen was hinter sich werfen und ein bisschen was auf sich nehmen. Wenn das gelingt, erfüllt sich der stille Vertrag des wandernden Autors mit dem Land, durch das er geht. Paragraf eins: Ich liefere mich dir aus für einen ganzen Sommer, einen Herbst. Paragraf zwei: Dafür gibst du mir dein Gemurmel, dein Geheul, deine Bilder. Ich finde, das ist ein fairer Vertrag. Wer ihn einhält, wird belohnt.⁴

Der Erfolg der Reise stellt sich laut Büscher aber nicht von selbst ein, sondern erfordert Mut und Ausdauer. Letztlich müsse sich der Reisende dem Gegenstand seiner Reise ausliefern. Das anthropomorphisierte Land wird so zum Partner eines imaginären Dialogs, der Reisende zum Medium der Geschichten, die ihm das Land bzw. seine Bewohner anbieten.

Dieser Befund legt nahe, das eben entwickelte Authentizitätsparadigma kritisch zu hinterfragen. So hat die Literaturwissenschaft zu Recht hervorgehoben, dass auch und gerade das Schreiben über Reisen in hohem Maße intertextuell ist: Es hängt ab von kulturellen Prägungen und literarischen Prätexten.⁵ Dies gilt auch für Büschers Reisebericht, der kulturelles und historisches Wissen transportiert und dies über die literarischen Strategien der Reisebeschreibung versinnlicht und beglaubigt.

3 Vgl. Wolfgang Büscher, *Berlin – Moskau. Eine Reise zu Fuß* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2003).

4 Büscher, 'Hinaus ins Freie'.

5 Vgl. Manfred Pfister, 'Intertextuelles Reisen, oder: Der Reisebericht als Intertext', in Herbert Foltinek u.a. (Hrsg.), *Tales and 'their telling difference'. Zur Theorie und Geschichte der Narrativik. Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Franz K. Stanzel* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1993), S.109–32; Ders., 'Autopsie und intertextuelle Spurensuche. Der Reisebericht und seine Vor-Schriften', in Gisela Ecker/Susanne Röhl (Hrsg.), *In Spuren Reisen. Vor-Bilder und Vor-Schriften in der Reiseliteratur* (Berlin: LIT, 2006), S.11–30.