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Catastrophe and Identity in Post-War German Literature

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of History  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in History

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by  
Aaron Horton  
December 2005

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Keywords: Germany, literature, novels, identity, memory

## ABSTRACT

### Catastrophe and Identity in Post-War German Literature

by

Aaron Horton

The purpose of this study is to examine selected German literature dealing with issues of history and identity in light of the catastrophic reshaping of society after World War II and reunification. The research process will involve an examination of selected authors and their works that are most relevant to the topic. In order to provide a clear understanding not only of important literary themes but also of the appropriate historical context, attention will be devoted to providing biographical information in addition to critical literary analysis. Because this study is primarily historical in nature, context is important for determining a given author's possible motives in writing. The research will not only provide a better understanding of how history and identity have been addressed in modern German literature, identifying common and recurring themes in significant periods, but also demonstrate the value of using fiction in historical research.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The past sixty years or so of German history have included a significant number of attempts to come to terms with the past. This problem has been manifest in various situations, including the Historians' debate of the 1960s, touched off by Fritz Fischer's assertion that Nazism was merely a furthering of what he viewed as a long history of German aggression and militarism, and the dispute over the manner and propriety of a German Holocaust memorial. Another major debate involving the Nazi past was the storm of controversy surrounding the publication of Daniel Johah Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, in which the author proposes that a pervasive and violent anti-Semitism common to all Germans enabled the Nazi genocide against the Jews and other groups. Although Goldhagen's claims involved excessive generalization, they were sufficient to cause a great deal of consternation among German historians, several of whom debated him on television. What is perhaps even more telling is that *Hitler's Willing Executioners* sold over a million copies in Germany. Whether the book's sales were a result of the controversy or its subject matter, it is clear that its success indicates a powerful and continuing desire among many Germans to confront the past.

Since the end of World War II, literature has been an important means in Germany not only of confronting the past but a way to define identity as well. Authors such as Günter Grass and Christa Wolf, writing under very different circumstances, have expressed in their literature ideas and sentiments that examine aspects of the nation's cultural and political past, often attempting to evaluate and define its identity in the present as well. Although some would doubtlessly argue that the value of using fiction in historical study is dubious, I consider novels and other writings extremely useful in furthering one's understanding of a given historical period or situation.

Literature represents a valuable primary source that historians can use in order to better understand a culture's understanding of its past and its present identity. This is especially important when studying German history, as the Nazi period was followed by attempts to

reestablish a workable national identity in light of the past atrocities, a situation that has recently reemerged among East Germans as a result of the collapse of the GDR and subsequent incorporation into the Federal Republic. Although the events in novels such as Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* or Grass' *The Tin Drum* may be fictional, the authors' use of powerful imagery and symbolism serves not only to express their understanding of German identity in the light of such catastrophes as World War II and the Nazi period but also to convey a sense of the real experience of people during and after these events.

Of course, one must always be mindful of an author's motives, as they can sometimes, as in the case of Hans Werner Richter, create a somewhat skewed or historically dubious understanding of the past or present. Authors might sometimes use a novel to portray themselves as victims, as Christa Wolf was accused of doing when she published *What Remains*, a criticism of Stasi surveillance, in 1990. Others, like Richter, may seek to absolve themselves or their generation of due responsibility for past crimes. Even those works that may have been written with ulterior motives in mind can be valuable primary sources, as they help provide an insight into the authors' understanding of their contemporary circumstances, which may have inspired them to include an untenable theme or two in a particular work.

This study is particularly concerned with literature that deals with "catastrophe" and its ramifications, especially as it concerns cultural, social, and national identity. Because the Nazi period continues to loom over any consideration of the German past, the first two chapters will deal with two different literary perspectives of the period and their attempts to seek a new definition of identity in light of the Nazis and the destruction caused by the war. Chapter 2 deals with Thomas Mann, who represents the "classical," "bourgeois" Germany of artistic and cultural brilliance. His perspective of the Nazi period is affected by his understanding of Germans as an artistically talented but highly irrational people and the author's attempts to reconcile the Germany of his youth with the madness and destruction of the Nazi period provides a great deal of insight into his generation's emotional and intellectual response to these events.

Chapter 3 involves a study of five authors, four of whom were associated with the *Gruppe 47* literary circle. These authors, which include Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass, two of the most famous post-war German writers, represent an emerging literary tradition that attempts to set itself apart from the past as represented by Thomas Mann and his generation. All five authors served in the *Wehrmacht* during World War II and spent at least some time in Allied captivity. As will be discussed at length in the chapter, these writers, for the most part, believed that their experiences gave them a unique and genuine legitimacy to examine questions of German identity and the past, as opposed to those who, like Thomas Mann, emigrated to escape Nazi persecution.

In Chapter 4, I will examine Eastern and Western literary responses to the collapse of the GDR and reunification. The end of their society, which had stood on a foundation quite different than that in the West, represented a significant catastrophe for East Germans because after the initial euphoria of the opening of the Berlin Wall had worn off they, as well as Westerners, discovered that after forty years of division, the differences between the two were far more pronounced than expected. Some, like Christa Wolf, viewed the end of the GDR as a catastrophe because they supported the ideals of socialism, if not the manner of their implementation in East Germany. Others, such as Ingo Schulze, demonstrate a concern with preserving and conveying a sense of the unique East German experience of the events of November 1989 and beyond. The five writers examined in Chapter 4 have attempted to understand and explain through literature the various problems and issues connected with the end of the GDR and German reunification.

In order to allow for sufficient examination of selected literature, in most cases I will only examine one representative work for each author discussed. Because Mann's *Doctor Faustus* is such a monumental work, and the author took it upon himself to represent the "other" or "true" Germany, the entirety of Chapter 2 is devoted to the examination of the novel and pertinent aspects of Mann's life and career. However, because I have chosen five authors each to examine in Chapters 3 and 4, I will be unable to achieve the same extensive level of biographical detail as

that contained in Chapter 2. Instead, I have attempted to connect the authors thematically in order to create an overall picture of literary trends in the periods under examination, providing relevant biographical information on the authors when it is necessary to the topic at hand.

This study will demonstrate how literature can be used effectively as a primary source in historical research through an examination of the significant themes of catastrophe and identity in German fiction. While the events contained within the works discussed may not be factual (although most are based on events in the authors' lives), the observations and sentiments conveyed provide the reader with a better sense of what it was truly like to experience firsthand certain historical situations. When evaluated critically and in the context of historical study, literature is a valuable tool that allows historians to supplement factual knowledge with a sense of emotion that may sometimes be lacking in a study that only uses conventional sources.

## CHAPTER 2

### BRILLIANCE AND IRRATIONALITY IN THOMAS MANN'S GERMANY

In *Doctor Faustus* (1947), Thomas Mann, writing near the end of World War II, characterizes Germany as “a nation that cannot show its face.”<sup>1</sup> This statement epitomizes the ever-present and recurring sense of despair and catastrophe found throughout the novel. Mann's main protagonist, brilliant but exceptionally flawed German composer Adrian Leverkühn, is clearly intended to serve as an allegorical representation of Germany, as he embodies those many qualities that the author considers characteristic of German nature. Leverkühn, although artistically gifted, is hindered in life by his seeming inability to connect with people on a personal level. When the composer becomes frustrated creatively, apparently unable to advance his artistic pursuits, he makes a pact with the Devil, who grants him twenty-four years of astounding musical success in exchange for his soul. The parallels with German history in the life of Leverkühn are extremely strong, and Mann, writing as the narrator Serenus Zeitblom, often supplements the primary narrative with brief but considerably poignant observations about the nature, history, and potential future of Germany. In writing *Doctor Faustus*, Thomas Mann manages, in the guise of a tale of personal success and tragedy, with considerations of the nature of bourgeois and artistic life, to convey vividly his sense of frustration, despair, and catastrophe brought forth by his understanding of the significance of contemporary events in Germany.

In order to understand properly the underlying themes in *Doctor Faustus*, it is important to consider first both Mann's personal history and the larger historical context in which he wrote the novel. Mann's biographical information can often be quite helpful in understanding the themes in his writings because most of the author's works, including *Doctor Faustus*, include a significant amount of autobiographically inspired material. Mann was born in Lübeck, a city just northeast of Hamburg, on 6 June 1875, the second of five children, only four years after German unification under Bismarck. His father, Thomas Johann Heinrich Mann, was, as a well-respected

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn As Told by a Friend*. Translated by John E. Woods. (New York: Vintage International, 1999) 506.

citizen who ran the generations-old family grain business and served on the city Senate, the model of bourgeois propriety, while his mother Julia, the daughter of a German plantation owner in Rio de Janeiro, possessed artistic tendencies that had a profound effect on the author as a young man.<sup>2</sup> Because of his father's position as an important member of Lübeck's bourgeois society, Mann received a great deal of respect from those around him in his youth, conveying to him the sense that his identity was shaped by his ancestors. For her part, his mother encouraged the development of his artistic talents, such as playing the violin and piano. The often conflicting ideals of bourgeois existence and artistic expression, as represented in his father and mother, became for Thomas Mann a major source of internal conflict, as is evinced by the recurring appearances of this theme in his writings.<sup>3</sup>

Mann's older brother Heinrich possessed, like Thomas, artistic aspirations, and was both admired and envied by his younger sibling especially because he dropped out of school and pursued a career in writing against the wishes of their father. As a result, Thomas' father hoped in vain that his second son would follow in his footsteps by practicing a respectable profession. Mann would have perhaps experienced more difficulty in pursuing a career in writing had his father not died in October 1891. After his father's death, Mann began writing poetry and reading works by philosophers such as Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche, while musically he was influenced by the operas of Richard Wagner.<sup>4</sup> In both his writings and the exceptional nature of his life, Nietzsche was especially influential on Mann, and several tragic aspects of Adrian Leverkühn's life in *Doctor Faustus* parallel those of Nietzsche's.

Throughout his life, Mann appears to have struggled with homosexual yearnings. There are several instances of close friendships with peers in which Mann was seemingly infatuated or in love, which the author powerfully conveys in *Death in Venice* (*Tod in Venedig*, 1912).

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald Hayman, *Thomas Mann: A Biography*. (London: Bloomsbury, 1995) 83-85.

<sup>3</sup> Hannelore Mundt, *Understanding Thomas Mann*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004) 3.

<sup>4</sup> Mundt, *Understanding Mann*, 4.

Probably the most notable of these occasions was his relationship with Paul Ehrenberg, a painter who, some have suggested, is represented in *Doctor Faustus* by the character of Rudi Schwertfeger. It has even been proposed that Mann initially sought a bride as a way to escape and conceal his repressed feelings. Regardless of his possible motivations, Mann married Katia Pringsheim, a highly-educated daughter of a wealthy family, in 1905.<sup>5</sup>

Another important development in Mann's life took place in 1900: the publishing of his first, highly acclaimed novel, *Buddenbrooks*, which in many ways evoked a sense of Mann's experience and understanding of bourgeois life. Mann continued writing, and his first major foray into addressing political issues came in 1914 with the First World War. The onset of hostilities led to a rift between Thomas, who defended German bourgeois humanism and culture, and Heinrich, an advocate of French democracy.<sup>6</sup> Mann unquestionably supported Germany during the war, as is evinced by the selling of his house in order to contribute to war loans.<sup>7</sup> After the war, Mann was initially opposed to the new democracy in Germany. However, the rise of political extremism in the country, especially in Munich, showed Mann the highly unappealing alternative to the Weimar Republic.<sup>8</sup>

In 1924, Mann published *The Magic Mountain (Der Zauberberg)*, in which he explores human nature and the aspects of European intellectual and political culture that contributed to the outbreak of war in 1914. The novel was a critical success, and it firmly established Mann as Germany's preeminent literary figure.<sup>9</sup> As the Nazi party began its gradual journey to complete control over Germany, Mann, who likely sensed the potential for catastrophe in rising right-wing extremism, endorsed the Social Democrats, writing that "the political place of the German

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<sup>5</sup> Mundt, *Understanding Mann*, 3-7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 9-10.

<sup>7</sup> Hayman, *Thomas Mann*, 298.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 334.

<sup>9</sup> Mundt, *Understanding Mann*, 11.

citizen is today with the Social-Democratic Party.”<sup>10</sup> Mann remained hopeful that the feared catastrophe could be avoided even as late as November 1932, when in a letter to Paul Schiemann he expressed his belief that the Germans were certainly more inclined toward freedom than the Nazis realized.<sup>11</sup>

Mann’s strong support of democracy in opposition to the Nazis is evident in many of his writings and lectures, and his opinions did not go unnoticed. In 1932 he received a burned copy of *Buddenbrooks* in the mail, an unsubtle hint of things to come if he remained in the country. When the Nazis attained near-total power in January 1933 with Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor, Mann happened to be in Switzerland with Katia on vacation following a speaking tour of several European cities, including Brussels and Paris. Heeding the warning of his children, Erika and Klaus, Thomas and Katia chose to remain indefinitely in Switzerland.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the Nazis confiscated his cars and searched his house, and in July 1936 Reinhard Heydrich issued an order for Mann’s arrest and deportation to the Dachau concentration camp.<sup>13</sup>

After moving several times, Mann traveled to the United States in 1934, partially at the insistence of his publisher, Alfred Knopf. He and Katia took several extended trips there over the course of the 1930s before settling permanently in 1938.<sup>14</sup> By then he had publicly denounced the Nazi regime on numerous occasions. In 1935, he wrote “Europe Beware,” a speech about rising irrationality, barbarism, and “mob rule” in Europe. In what is clearly an allusion to Hitler and rising German nationalism under Nazi rule,<sup>15</sup> Mann states that:

It is truly heartrending to watch the weakness of the older and more cultured world in face of this barbarism, their badly led, bewildered retreat before him... They

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Mann, *The Order of the Day: Political Essays and Speeches of Two Decades*. Translated by Helen Lowe-Porter. (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969) 67.

<sup>11</sup> Hayman, *Thomas Mann*, 396.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 396-399.

<sup>13</sup> Mundt, *Understanding Mann*, 11-12.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 11-14.

<sup>15</sup> Mann never explicitly mentions either Nazis or Hitler by name in the speech.

stoop to the moral and mental level of their deadly foe, adopt his idiotic phraseology, adjust themselves to his pitiable categories of thought, to the malignant stupidity of his whims and propagandist formulas-and never notice in the least what they are doing.<sup>16</sup>

In this quote, Mann's sense of frustration and outrage at the willingness of the German population to accept and support the Third Reich is extremely significant because the author essentially uses *Doctor Faustus* as the ultimate expression of his perception of ongoing events in Germany.

In February 1936, Mann wrote an open letter to a Zurich newspaper in which he stated that "no good" would ever come from Germany in its present state.<sup>17</sup> Later that year, in response to both the letter and his obtaining a Czech citizenship to allow him to travel, Germany revoked his citizenship and the University of Bonn rescinded his honorary doctorate.<sup>18</sup> Mann lashed out against this action and stated to the dean of the University and also, ironically, to Victor Klemperer, a Jewish professor who would later be forced out of his position as the Nazis attempted to "Aryanize" all professional occupations, "You have the unbelievable audacity to mistake yourself for Germany!"<sup>19</sup> This statement implies that Mann believed himself and others to represent the "true" Germany, a sentiment that appears again in *Doctor Faustus*.

In 1938, partially out of fear that Germany could invade Switzerland, where they had been staying between trips to America, Mann and Katia decided to settle permanently in the United States.<sup>20</sup> There Mann continued to lecture and write, producing such works as "Brother Hitler," in which he compared himself to the dictator, showing insight into the artistic aspects of Hitler's persona. When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Mann wrote in his diary that "if the wretched man (Hitler) had a spark of that 'love for Germany' that allegedly started him on the

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<sup>16</sup> Mann, *Order of the Day*, 82.

<sup>17</sup> Mundt, *Understanding Mann*, 14.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>20</sup> Hayman, *Thomas Mann*, 440.

course of his crimes, he would put a bullet through his head and leave orders that they pull out of Poland.”<sup>21</sup> In this statement, Mann appears to reassert his belief that representatives of bourgeois, humanistic German culture like himself were the true representatives of the nation, not those who followed Hitler. As for his “alleged” love of the country, Mann seemed clearly to comprehend the looming disaster Hitler was preparing for Germany.

By 1943, Allied victory appeared more and more inevitable, and among other activities Mann had been making broadcasts to Germany for the BBC. In a letter dated 6 May to the famous conductor Bruno Walter, like Mann an exile from Nazism, the author wrote of his upcoming literary project, “now I have something very different in mind, something rather uncanny, tending in the theological and demonological direction...the novel of a pathological, unlawful inspiration.”<sup>22</sup> This was clearly a reference to *Doctor Faustus*, which he began on 23 May 1943, the same day he has his narrator, Serenus Zeitblom, begin his account of Adrian Leverkühn’s life.

The most immediately noticeable element in *Doctor Faustus* is Mann’s use of the character Leverkühn as a representation of Germany. The author does so in a variety of ways, embodying in the tragic composer what he views as both the positive and negative aspects of the German character. Leverkühn is at once a brilliant musical prodigy, hearkening back to the preeminence of German composers such as Beethoven and Bach, as well as an emotionally repressed, distant figure unable to connect with anyone on a personal level. Largely due to the fame and success of its many noteworthy composers, Germany had long been viewed by the French and others as a musical country, which implies an inherent irrationality and romanticism. When the composer finally faces a creative block, he makes a pact with the Devil, a clear parallel to Germany’s support of the Third Reich as a means of restoring the country.

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Mann, *Diaries 1918-1921, 1933-1939*. Hermann Kesten, ed. Translated by Richard and Clara Winston. (London: Robin Clark, 1984) 339.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Mann, *Letters of Thomas Mann: 1889-1955*. Translated by Richard and Clara Winston. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971) 419.

Before attempting to analyze the various aspects of Leverkühn's life and personality, in which Mann invests a great deal of his own perception of Germany, a brief consideration of the suitability of the character as an allegorical representation of Germany is necessary. In his work *Thomas Mann: Doctor Faustus*, Michael Beddow, a professor of German at the University of Leeds, argues that Mann's use of Leverkühn as a global allegory for Germany fails. Beddow asserts that if one reads *Doctor Faustus* allegorically, Mann's intent would appear to be to invest German actions during the Third Reich with an underlying motive of nobility and heroism.<sup>23</sup> The author further claims that if Mann intends Leverkühn to personify Germany, the parallel is a failure, because the "genuinely costly strenuousness of his task and the integrity with which he lives out his hard-won vision, all bear no relation whatever to the self-serving criminal goals of Hitler's party and state."<sup>24</sup>

Beddow's argument is debatable for several reasons. Although Leverkühn does not precisely embody every facet of Germany, Mann imbues the character with the "essence" of the German character. Important elements in the composer's life appear to be extremely strong embodiments of key aspects of what Mann believed was the German character. Leverkühn's pastoral roots, personal detachment, artistic brilliance, and susceptibility to his passions all seem to represent facets of the German character, and each aspect of the composer's life and personality serve to strengthen the parallel and strongly depict Mann's understanding of Germany.

The first important aspect of Leverkühn's life which appears to represent Mann's understanding of the German "essence" is his familial background. The future composer's family is bucolic and pastoral, hearkening back to the classic "Germanic" type, the Germany of the Grimm Brothers. Mann's connection of Adrian with such beginnings is certainly deliberate, as his description of the composer's father Jonathan demonstrates:

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Beddow, *Thomas Mann: Doctor Faustus*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1994) 81.

<sup>24</sup> Beddow, *Thomas Mann*, 82.

[He] was a man of finest German stamp, the kind one scarcely ever sees now in our cities and certainly not one of those who, with what is often overbearing bluster, represent our version of the human race nowadays—a physiognomy somehow marked by the past, preserved out in the country, so to speak, and brought in from a Germany predating the Thirty Years' War.<sup>25</sup>

In the above passage Mann draws a sharp distinction between the modern German and the archetypal, “classic” German as represented by Jonathan Leverkühn. The author’s assertion that Jonathan represents a pre-Thirty Years’ War period is significant, because it suggests that the conflict represented, through its effect of increasing insecurity, a turning away in the German mentality from pastoral roots toward urbanization and increasing submission to authority in order to avoid the sort of chaos and disunity brought on by the war. Mann also makes sure to embody in Jonathan a natural, uneducated enthusiasm for science, as Zeitblom recalls that the character was always performing amateur experiments. In doing so, however, he appears to be conveying his belief that such traits were not only inherent in the German character but were also the source of German other-worldliness. Mann also has Zeitblom observe of Jonathan’s experiments that:

[they] always moved along one particular path, that is the mystical or intuitive semi-mystical, down which, it seems to me, human thought is inevitably led when in pursuit of the natural world. ...Every collaborative venture with nature...comes very close to sorcery...and is the work of the “Tempter.”<sup>26</sup>

This passage, although directly an observation on Adrian’s father, appears partially to explain Adrian’s later susceptibility to “demonic” influences. The trait may also represent a subtle allusion to Goethe, who frequently referred to what he perceived as a constant yearning for the unattainable among Germans. The younger Leverkühn, while possessing a natural curiosity and aptitude for music, is eventually led to madness through his vulnerability to the art’s “irrational” nature. This also evokes a sense of what Mann believed was an obsessive and particularly German quest for knowledge, which can only be achieved through irrational means.

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<sup>25</sup> Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 15.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

Adrian Leverkühn's personal detachment is a significant aspect of Mann's consideration of the German character, especially as it relates to the nation's relationship with its European neighbors. In the novel, as referenced above, Mann, writing as Zeitblom, refers to the German "mistrust of the world,"<sup>27</sup> which in this instance refers to a fear of Swiss cosmopolitanism, as well as a more general anxiety caused by Germany's geographical position in the middle of Europe, between such powerful nations as France and Russia. In *Doctor Faustus*, Mann claims that Switzerland is "far more European" than its northern neighbor, where "the word 'international' has long been spoken as a slur and where gloomy provincialism has fouled the air and turned it musty."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Germany was unique among the majority of its European neighbors in the sense that, long after England and France became nation-states, it remained a disconnected cluster of principalities, connected only by culture. This condition was perpetuated by Germany's powerful neighbors, especially France, forcing Germans to rely on cultural ties in order to achieve some sense of a "nation." This understanding probably formed the basis for Mann's belief that Germany was, more than any other nation in Europe, driven as much by culture as by politics. Mann embodies these traits in Leverkühn, who, with the exception of his nephew Nepomuk, finds himself unable either to love or connect with anyone on a personal level, as is evinced by his reluctance to address even close acquaintances with the informal *du* pronoun. This aspect of Leverkühn's personality evokes a sense of German provincialism, which in part stems from the religious division, political fragmentation, and impotence brought about by the Thirty Years' War.

That Mann's tragic figure is musical in nature is certainly intentional and indeed very significant. Music was, in Mann's time, considered the foremost art in Germany.<sup>29</sup> Mann himself addressed the uniqueness of German culture in regard to its relationship with music in

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<sup>27</sup> Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 190.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 191.

<sup>29</sup> Hans Rudolf Vaget, "'German' Music and German Catastrophe: A Re-Reading of *Doktor Faustus*." From *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Mann*, Herbert Lehnert and Eva Wessell, eds. (Rochester: Camden House, 2004) 230.

his *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, in which he defended Germany against common Western misconceptions. Of course, Mann's views were altered by the events of the 1930s, and *Doctor Faustus* is the ultimate literary expression of the author's re-evaluated perspective of German culture. In order truly to embody in a character what he believed to be the traits most characteristic of German nature, Mann chose to make Adrian Leverkühn a composer, although not quite in the tradition of Beethoven or Bach. Leverkühn finds himself frustrated by conventional forms of music and eventually turns to "demonic" sources for inspiration, after which he produces unconventional and exceedingly brilliant compositions. The parallel with Germany in this is clear. Germany, in many ways isolated culturally and politically from the rest of Europe in conventional terms, especially after World War I, was forced to turn to a "Devil," the lure in this case being the racial nationalism and promise of a new collective identity offered by Adolf Hitler, in order to achieve success. According to Mann, such a decision was facilitated by German susceptibility to the sort of irrationality typically associated with music (especially that of the particularly nationalistic and romanticist Wagnerian variety, one of whose adherents, of course, was Hitler), because he believed that German culture and politics were inextricably linked to the musical nature of the nation.<sup>30</sup>

The "musicality of the German soul," according to Mann, is tied to an inherent "inwardness" and "subjectivity."<sup>31</sup> As evidence of such inwardness, Mann, in a speech to the Library of Congress on 29 May 1945 entitled "Germany and the Germans," recalled almost verbatim the comparison of German cultural and intellectual isolation with Swiss cosmopolitanism from *Doctor Faustus*, reasserting that Germany's diminutive southern neighbor was "far more European...than the political colossus to the north."<sup>32</sup> Eliciting impressions of

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<sup>30</sup> Veget, "German Music and Catastrophe," 230-231.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Mann, "Germany and the Germans." Lecture given May 29, 1945. Transcript from *Addresses Delivered at the Library of Congress 1942-1949*. (Washington: Library of Congress, 1963) 51.

<sup>32</sup> Mann, "Germany and the Germans," 49.

those traits that he embodied in Leverkühn, Mann acknowledged German musical brilliance, asserting that Germans

have given the western world perhaps not its most beautiful, socially uniting, but certainly its deepest, most significant music, and the world has not withheld its thanks and praise. At the same time it has felt and feels more strongly than ever today that such musicality of soul is paid for dearly in another sphere-the political, the sphere of human companionship.<sup>33</sup>

The above quote could easily be understood as a description of Adrian Leverkühn, and strongly demonstrates Mann's intention to embody in the fictional composer what he believed to be the essence of the German character. For Mann, there was never any question that the protagonist of *Doctor Faustus* should be a musical figure. In reference to the classic Faust legend, most famously revisited by Goethe in the early nineteenth century, Mann claimed that it was "a grave error...not to connect Faust with music."<sup>34</sup> Music, Mann argued, is a "demonic realm" that is "calculated order and chaos-breeding irrationality," and Faust must be musical, because "the relation of the German to the world is abstract and mystical, that is, musical."<sup>35</sup> For Mann, music inevitably leads to chaos and mysticism, and the turning point for the character Leverkühn is, significantly, mystic and demonic in nature.

The pivotal act that sets in motion Leverkühn's flourish of brilliance and eventual descent into madness is his surrender to lust for a prostitute named Esmeralda whom he encountered one night when a porter (whom Mann later hints may have been the Devil in disguise) mischievously led him to a brothel instead of his apartment. Although he fled after this first encounter, he later became obsessed with locating and indulging in his lust for the prostitute. After Leverkühn locates her, the prostitute warns him "against her body,"<sup>36</sup> which has been infected with syphilis. This entire episode was clearly inspired by the life of Friedrich Nietzsche, who contracted

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<sup>33</sup> Mann, "Germany and the Germans," 52.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>36</sup> Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 165.

syphilis in a similar fashion, eventually going insane. It also recalls similar themes from *Death in Venice* and *The Magic Mountain* of the seductive, almost erotic, power of disease to which Mann's characters often surrender.

In Chapter XXV, Mann has Zeitblom recall a document written by Leverkühn about a conversation with the Devil in which the demonic figure offers the composer twenty-four years of unmatched musical success in exchange for his soul. In the course of this dialogue, the Devil informs the composer that the German is “gifted, but lame...gifted enough to be vexed by his lameness and overcome it by illumination, and devil take the hindmost.”<sup>37</sup> He goes on, in reference to Leverkühn's indulgence with Esmeralda, to state that “you, dear boy, knew well enough what you lacked, and held true to your German nature when you made your journey and...caught the French measles.”<sup>38</sup> These quotes iterate Mann's belief in a German susceptibility to irrational behavior, especially when faced with a cultural or political impasse. The episode with the Devil also suggests that the tempter sought to appeal to Leverkühn's desire to overcome his inherent flaws through musical genius, perhaps the highest form of irrationality according to Mann.

In “Germany and the Germans,” Mann further supports the above notion of German susceptibility to the demonic. While discussing the Faustian legend, Mann remarked that

The Devil...strikes me as a very German figure, and the pact with him, the Satanic covenant [in Faust], to win all treasures and power on earth for a time at the cost of the soul's salvation, strikes me as exceedingly typical of German nature. A lonely thinker...who, in his desire for world enjoyment and world domination, barter his soul to the Devil,-isn't this the right moment to see Germany in this picture, the moment in which Germany is literally being carried off by the Devil?<sup>39</sup>

In the above statement, Mann very clearly articulates his view not only of German nature but also of the nation's condition in May 1945. The war had just ended, but Mann perceived the widespread devastation in Germany as the price for its temporary success under Hitler and the

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<sup>37</sup> Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 241-245.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 241.

<sup>39</sup> Mann, “Germany and the Germans,” 51.

Nazi regime, which he parallels in Adrian Leverkühn's spectacular rise, downfall, and complete demise.

Mann deliberately leaves vague both the entire episode of Leverkühn's dalliance with Esmeralda and the later encounter with the Devil. One could easily accept Leverkühn's conversation with the Devil as a literal experience during which the composer entered into the pact fully aware of the consequences. The episode could also be interpreted as a figment of Leverkühn's imagination, caused perhaps by his infection, and that his subsequent success in music resulted not from a literal pact with the demonic but rather from his obsession with Esmeralda. In regard to the former, the pact with the Devil could easily be understood as a direct parallel to Germany's support and acceptance of Hitler and the Nazi Party. The fact that Mann had frequently associated Germany with one who barter his soul to the Devil is consistent with such a concept because National Socialism was, after all, a uniquely German movement. If one accepts this view, then Mann would seem to argue that Germany knowingly allied itself with a "demonic" force in order to achieve material success.

In support of the latter perspective, Zeitblom notes Leverkühn's tendency to include underlying harmonies in the composer's later works which spell Esmeralda's name,<sup>40</sup> signifying that the composer's desire for the prostitute, not his involvement with the Devil, was both the underlying inspiration for his compositions and the cause of his downfall due to syphilis. Of course, this view does not deny German complicity in the Third Reich but would seem to argue that the Nazi catastrophe was caused not by a conscious pact with a force known to be "demonic" but rather a consequence of inherent and subconscious desires brought on at least in part by the perceived moral and societal decay which resulted after World War I. This notion that Leverkühn's connection with the Devil was either figurative or at the very least arrived at in a roundabout way, through the composer's desire for Esmeralda, seems to be the most fitting interpretation of Adrian's experience of the demonic and subsequent flourish of brilliance and

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<sup>40</sup> Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 166.

success. Despite his strong criticism of German support for Hitler's regime, Mann never indicates that Germany actively seeks evil, indicating instead that the nation is driven toward it through those elements in its nature, foremost among them musicality, which, when combined with the proper circumstances, are a source of both brilliance and weakness. Instead, Mann implies that a desire for power, community, or knowledge can be destructive if unrestrained, and Leverkühn's yearning for musical greatness serves in part as an allegory for such aspirations.

Mann uses effectively Adrian Leverkühn's madness and eventual death, brought on partly by the death of his angelic nephew Nepomuk in Chapter XLV, as an allegorical reflection on the state of German culture and society, especially in regard to its present and future. Because the composer's pact with the Devil prohibited him from ever loving anyone again, Leverkühn views the fondness he feels for his nephew as the causative factor in the young boy's illness and death.<sup>41</sup> Most likely, this represents an allusion to the hope invested in Germany's brief and unsuccessful first attempt at democracy, the Weimar Republic. Partially in response to Nepomuk's demise, Leverkühn resolves, in his next and final composition, to refute "the good and the noble... what people have fought for and... announced with jubilation," ideas he believes are epitomized in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.<sup>42</sup> In the composer's desire to "take away" all that is good, Mann appears to accuse German society in supporting Nazism of destroying or at least overshadowing all positive German cultural achievements. Furthermore, there is the implied suggestion that, like the composer's love of his nephew, the Germans' love of the *Führer* was the causative factor in their destruction.

In his "Germany and the Germans" speech, Mann certainly anticipated that the war's final result would be nothing short of a devastating catastrophe, one "in which [German] history... culminates."<sup>43</sup> Mann's use of the word "culminates" reinforces the notion prevalent throughout *Doctor Faustus* that the twin catastrophes of Nazism and war were not, as the author

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<sup>41</sup> Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 500.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 501.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Mann, "Germany and the Germans," 48.

asks, almost in a plaintive tone at the end of the novel, a result of the imposition of “something totally alien to [Germans],” but rather a “distorted, vulgarized, debased realization of a mindset and worldview...[found] in the figures of the most imposing embodiments of Germanness.”<sup>44</sup>

Mann believed one such figure was Martin Luther, whom the author describes in the novel as a “giant incarnation” of the German spirit and whom Nietzsche referred to as the “most German of men.”<sup>45</sup> In his “Germany and the Germans” speech, Mann identifies Luther as “exceptionally musical,” thus returning to his intense interest in the musical nature of Germanness. While acknowledging what he views as Luther’s positive accomplishments, such as the monk’s translation of the Bible into colloquial German, Mann argues that the famous theologian embodied those traits that render the German character especially susceptible to irrationality. For example, Mann asserts that although Luther was a “liberating hero” in his promotion of personal freedom from church doctrine, the monk also “knew nothing of [political] liberty,” and indeed found such a notion distasteful.<sup>46</sup> As a primary example, Mann recalls Luther’s strong opposition to the peasant revolt which the author believed would have led to a “happier turn [for] German history...toward liberty.”<sup>47</sup> For Mann, Luther embodies German nature, as he represents what the author feels to be the German propensity for new ideas, as well as musicality and an inherent fear of democratic ideals.

In *Doctor Faustus*, Adrian Leverkühn is, like Luther, intensely interested in religion, becoming very fascinated with questions of theology at the University. Mann probably ascribes to his protagonist this interest in religion in order to establish a connection between the character and German Christianity, as embodied by Luther. Despite commonly-held views to the contrary, Mann asserts that Germany “took Christianity more seriously than anyone else,” but in a very

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<sup>44</sup> Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 506.

<sup>45</sup> Mann, “Germany and the Germans,” 52.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 54.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 54.

childlike and “rustic” manner.<sup>48</sup> This stems perhaps from a notion that a serious approach to religion was inherently necessary in order to achieve knowledge and understanding. Mann argues that the Reformation, while inspired by an inward desire for liberty, resulted in an inherent lack of liberty in Germany.<sup>49</sup> The author goes on to assert that the Nazi movement was driven by the same inner need for liberty and produced a similar result.<sup>50</sup> Leverkühn’s experience parallels this concept, as his desire for creative liberty leads to the enslavement of his emotions. In drawing such comparisons, Mann reinforces the idea in *Doctor Faustus* that the catastrophe of the Third Reich and World War II was a result of self-destructive tendencies inherent in the German character.

After his nephew’s death and the composition of *The Lamentation of Doctor Faustus*, his magnum opus, Leverkühn enters a near-catatonic state, a possible allusion to Germany’s desperate condition during the Great Depression, following an emotional outburst at a private party during which he was supposed to perform his new composition for his circle of friends and acquaintances. In the care of his mother, the composer lingers in a condition of helplessness for ten years before he finally dies in 1940. The manner of the protagonist’s demise reveals a great deal about Mann’s perception of Germany’s present as well as his expectations for the nation’s future.

After his period of unrivaled success following the pact with the Devil, which has been established as a clear parallel to German support of the Nazi regime and subsequent albeit temporary and ultimately costly success, Leverkühn, like Germany, finally pays the price for his bargain. If one accepts the composer’s life as a strict allegory of German history, then Mann’s perception of Germany’s condition following World War II is easily understood. Through the composer’s state of mental incapacity and helplessness, Mann attempts to convey his sense of despair and impotent, righteous outrage at Germany’s status as a devastated nation entirely at the

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<sup>48</sup> Mann, “Germany and the Germans,” 53.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 56.

mercy of foreign powers. Again, Mann's belief that innate characteristics of German culture led them to disaster is implicit in the depiction, as is conveyed near the end of the novel:

Damn, damn those corrupters who taught their lessons in evil to an originally honest, law-abiding, but all too docile people, a people only too happy to live by a theory!...A state whose bellowing proclamations...swept the masses up into enraptured frenzy, and under whose garish banners our youth marches with flashing eyes, brazenly proud and firm in their faith.<sup>51</sup>

So does *Doctor Faustus*, in effect, represent a condemnation of German culture on the part of Mann? Mann was clearly disturbed by what had transpired in his homeland since his exile, and several writings seem to indicate that, at the very least, he believed he would never perceive Germany in the same manner again. In a letter dated 25 June 1947 to the editor of *Neue Zeitung*, a newspaper published by the American Occupation Authority, Mann revealed that he would never "be able to shake off entirely" the "deep horror [he] felt of [Nazi] Germany."<sup>52</sup> Mann goes on to write of the German people that he "[pitied them] even [as early as 1933-34], that they should have invested such intensity of belief, enthusiasm, proud hope in something so macabre and depraved."<sup>53</sup>

In the novel as well as in speeches and writings, Mann seems often to condemn what he believes to be innate German irrationality in its many manifestations, such as musicality and "inwardness." However, as is especially evident in his "Germany and the Germans" speech, Mann did not intend to demonize German culture. In his concluding statements from "Germany and the Germans," Mann refers to his speech as "a piece of German self-criticism" that is "faithful to German tradition."<sup>54</sup> After referring to the perspectives of influential German writers such as Goethe and Nietzsche, Mann asserts that "great good really exists [in the German

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<sup>51</sup> Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 506.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Mann, *Letters*, 527.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 527.

<sup>54</sup> Mann, "Germany and the Germans," 65.

character], but it could not come to fruition in the traditional form of the national state.”<sup>55</sup> That the author made this statement in 1947 is significant because it indicates not only his disdain for the nationalism that aided the Nazi rise to power but also a possible reluctance about the prospect of a reconstituted German nation.

Despite possible reservations, Mann, in “Germany and the Germans,” reveals at least some degree of optimism in asking:

...may we not cherish the hope that after this catastrophe the first experimental steps may be taken in the direction of a world condition in which the national individualism of the nineteenth century will dissolve and finally vanish, and which will afford happier opportunities for the development of the “good” in the German character than the untenable old conditions? Should it not be possible after all that the liquidation of Nazism may pave the way for a social world reform which would offer the greatest prospect of happiness to Germany’s very inclination and needs.<sup>56</sup>

In the above statement, Mann appears to endorse a global shift away from nationalism toward internationalism, reaffirming his idea that the German sense of seclusion was a primary factor in the nation’s willingness to accept the Nazi regime. He goes on to say:

In the seclusiveness of the German there was always...longing for companionship; indeed at the bottom of the very loneliness that made him wicked lay always the wish to love, the wish to be loved. In the end the German misfortune is only the paradigm of the tragedy of human life. And the grace that Germany so sorely needs, my friends, all of us need it.<sup>57</sup>

This comment elicits recollections of the many themes and story elements from *Doctor Faustus*, in which Mann explores these same issues. Mann’s intention to use the novel, especially the personal tragedy of the character Adrian Leverkühn, to explore the German “catastrophe,” can easily be extrapolated from these closing statements. German “loneliness,” having never been truly accepted into the European balance of power, and the “wish to love” are both manifest in Leverkühn, and that Mann compares the German “misfortune” to personal tragedy is important because it not only further establishes the author’s use of *Doctor Faustus* as

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<sup>55</sup> Mann, “Germany and the Germans,” 65.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 65-66.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 66.

a means of exploring German nature and the catastrophe of the Third Reich but also indicates a belief on Mann's part that German redemption was possible despite the legacy of Nazism.

Mann's motive for writing *Doctor Faustus* was both personal and explanatory. Firstly, the author was almost certainly attempting to reconcile his personal understanding of Germany and his identity as a German with the Nazi period. On 7 September 1945, Mann wrote a letter to Walter von Molo, a novelist who had initially supported Hitler and the Nazi Party, in which he referred to his "Germany and the Germans" speech as a "declaration of solidarity" with "Germany-which after all succumbed to [National Socialism] and made a pact with the devil."<sup>58</sup> The last statement is an obvious reference to the novel, suggesting the work's centrality to the author's attempts to better understand and explain the Third Reich through an exploration of the German character. As evinced by his statements in "Germany and the Germans" as well as other writings, Mann also sought in writing *Doctor Faustus* to convey a sense of what it means to be German. The novel is intended to explain the German character and demonstrate how the nation was "led astray" by the "demonic," and in it Mann succeeds in conveying his sense of consternation and frustration with the course of German history, as well as an appreciation for positive elements such as cultural brilliance and humanism.

Although the overall tone of the novel is frequently somber and pessimistic, Mann, in writing it, did not seek to condemn German culture. The author strongly conveys his sense of a universal German catastrophe while maintaining his connection with German society. As mentioned previously, Mann sought during the latter stages of the war and afterward to understand and explain how Germany could enter into a bargain with the "Devil" as represented by Hitler and National Socialism. *Doctor Faustus*, while a work of fiction, is extremely valuable because in it Thomas Mann manages to convey the immediate sense of catastrophe felt by those who, like himself, believed themselves to share a deep connection with German culture. The powerful images in *Doctor Faustus* of brilliance and madness, love and the demonic, and life

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas Mann, *Letters*, 483-84.

and death, as well as Mann's interjection of "real-time" events and observations of them, vividly capture Mann's emotional and intellectual response to the Third Reich and provide a deeper understanding of the inner turmoil experienced by so many Germans as a result of the twin catastrophes of the Nazi period and World War II.

## CHAPTER 3

### EMERGING LITERATURE OF THE WAR GENERATION

Between 1946 to 1947, Hans Werner Richter and Alfred Andersch served as editors of the journal *Der Ruf*, in which they and their contributors rejected the massive Allied re-education program for German prisoners-of-war and asserted their generation's separation from complicity in Nazi crimes.<sup>1</sup> Richter, a former POW in the United States, believed it unfair that his generation (those born just before World War I or after) be classified indiscriminately as "Nazis" and therefore in need of official ideological instruction such as that promoted by the American government. Only fourteen editions of the journal were published before the American occupation authorities banned it in April 1947.<sup>2</sup> While there was never an officially listed reason for the action, there are several strong indications that the publication was believed by American authorities to be overly nationalistic in character, and the editors suggested that the Americans suspected Richter of working for the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in the Russian occupation zone.<sup>3</sup> Despite its brief existence, *Der Ruf* represented the beginning of a new literary tradition among a rising generation of writers in Germany, one that consciously attempted to break with past convention.

This emerging generation of German writers, most of whom had fought in the war, expressed a much different literary understanding of the Nazi period and German identity than that contained in *Doctor Faustus*. While Mann's interpretation of the Nazi catastrophe and the Third Reich was heavily influenced by the author's pre-World War I, bourgeois perception of German culture, postwar authors such as Richter, Wolfgang Borchert, Heinrich Böll, and Günter Grass sought to establish a new literary tradition, one that articulated a clear and marked division

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfried van der Will, "The Agenda of Re-education and the Contributors of *Der Ruf* 1946-47." From *The Gruppe 47 Fifty Years on: A Re-appraisal of its Literary and Political Significance*, Stuart Parkes and John J. White, eds. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999) 1.

<sup>2</sup> Clare Flanagan, "Der Ruf and the Charge of Nationalism." From *The Gruppe 47 Fifty Years on: A Re-appraisal of its Literary and Political Significance*, Stuart Parkes and John J. White, eds. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999) 15.

<sup>3</sup> Flanagan, "Der Ruf and the Charge of Nationalism," 16.

from “classic” German literature. With the exception of Borchert, who died on 20 November 1947, these authors were associated with the influential and often controversial *Gruppe 47*, a literary circle founded by Richter as an outlet for the younger generation of writers after the authorities had outlawed *Der Ruf*. This group of writers believed their work represented a new beginning for German literature, just as 1945, the so-called “zero hour,” allegedly signified the start of a new era in German history, separate from the Nazi past. While it is at best doubtful that Richter and the others succeeded in establishing a completely new German literary tradition, in many cases these authors’ works provide excellent examples for a new understanding of German history and identity in light of the “catastrophes” of the Third Reich and the war.

Because of its highly allegorical nature, and with its primary theme being the younger generation’s sense of alienation and separation from the past, Borchert’s play *The Man Outside* is a logical starting point for an examination of the new postwar German literature. In order to better understand the play’s significance, it is important to consider first those elements of the author’s life that influenced his literary understanding of Germany. Borchert was born in Hamburg in 1921, and was therefore never exposed to the highly cultured, bourgeois Germany of Thomas Mann’s formative years.<sup>4</sup> Instead, in his youth Borchert experienced the tumultuous Weimar years, followed by the effort to create the Nazi national community, the so-called *Volksgemeinschaft*. He was conscripted into the *Wehrmacht* in 1941 and was wounded on the Eastern Front in 1942.<sup>5</sup> The future author was imprisoned twice during his four-year military career for writing critical statements about the war in personal letters, once spending six months in solitary confinement.<sup>6</sup> Upon release, he was sent to the Eastern Front, where he contracted a disease with symptoms similar to malaria during the last year of the war and died as a result two

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<sup>4</sup> Wolfgang Borchert, *The Man Outside*. Translated by David Porter, with an introduction by Stephen Spender. (New York: New Directions, 1949) xi.

<sup>5</sup> Borchert, *Man Outside*, xi.

<sup>6</sup> James L. Stark, *Wolfgang Borchert's Germany: Reflections of the Third Reich*. (Lanham: University Press of America, 1997) 20.

years later.<sup>7</sup> Despite his death at the relatively young age of twenty-six, Borchert produced several important and piercing works in which he examined not only the effects of the Nazi period but larger questions about human nature as well.

In his writings, Borchert demonstrates a specific concern with discovering and defining a new existence for his generation in the aftermath of World War II. In addition, he seeks to disavow for his generation any responsibility for the Nazis and the war. What he attempts to convey in the play *The Man Outside*, his most famous work, is an image of the returning soldiers (but only those of the author's generation) as victims of the Nazis and the older generation. Furthermore, he creates an almost nihilistic impression of his generation's future in which there is only rejection and hopelessness.

*The Man Outside*, originally entitled *Draussen vor der Tür* (lit., "Outside in front of the door"), contains powerful images of the postwar disaffection and alienation experienced by so many soldiers upon return to their homes. In the play's introduction, Borchert states clearly his understanding of the returning soldier's place in postwar Germany:

[this play is] about a man who comes to Germany, one of the many. One of the many who comes home-and then don't come home, because there's no home there for them anymore. And their home is outside the door. Their Germany is outside in the rain at night in the street. That's their Germany.<sup>8</sup>

This notion of an alien and unrecognized Germany for the war generation, and by extension for the new literary movement, is the play's key theme. Accordingly, the play's primary character, Corporal Beckmann, is a wounded soldier who, in a scenario not uncommon in postwar Germany, discovers that his wife has found a lover in his absence. This leads him to attempt suicide by leaping into the Elbe, but the river rejects him. During the remainder of the play, Beckmann encounters a series of characters that represent various forms of rejection for Borchert's archetypal returning soldier. There is a prevalent sense of self-pity throughout the work, as is most powerfully embodied in Beckmann's personal circumstances.

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<sup>7</sup> Borchert, *Man Outside*, xi.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 82.

After being spit out by the Elbe, Beckmann is rescued by a girl who quickly appears to become enamored of him. However, in a scene reminiscent of what happened to Beckmann, the girl's now one-legged husband returns to find his former superior with his wife.<sup>9</sup> This episode emphasizes the war's chaotic effect on personal relationships and serves the dual purpose of reminding Beckmann of his guilt, in the form of a soldier who was wounded under his command, as well as shattering his brief hope for the warming comfort of the girl's companionship. In addition, the situation represents a violation, however unintentional, of the bonds of camaraderie.

Beckmann is also rejected by his former commanding officer, the Colonel, who along with his family views the Corporal as a sort of comical specter, with his gas-mask glasses and shaved head.<sup>10</sup> The Colonel is the embodiment of the high-ranking military man who has survived the war with few, if any, lasting psychological or physical effects and has returned to his comfortable life. Beckmann, laden with guilt over the deaths of eleven men temporarily placed under his command by the Colonel, attempts to "return" the responsibility for the dead to his commanding officer but is received with revulsion and derision by the officer and his family. Borchert uses this scene effectively not only to demonstrate the vast separation between the average soldier, who feels detached from any hope of a normal existence and those who, like the colonel, have returned to a wife and family but also to convey his resentment of the older generation, which has seemingly suffered far less than those who, like Borchert, have borne the brunt of the war's devastation.

Like many of the authors of his generation, Borchert vehemently rejects standard religious convictions because for him there seems to be no place for religion in the modern world of war and destruction. In the play, the author depicts God as a doddering old man who complains constantly to Death, who appears initially as an undertaker and later as a street-sweeper, about his helplessness and inability to stop his "children" from killing each other.

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<sup>9</sup> Borchert, *Man Outside*, 92-96.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 97-105.

Indeed God, whom “no one believes in now,” acknowledges Death as the new supreme being in a world of technology-enabled mass destruction:

God: What, Death? You’re all right. You’re the new God. They believe in you. They love you. They fear you. You can’t be deposed. You can’t be denied. No one can give you blasphemy...No one can dodge *you*...you’ve grown fat and round...  
Death: Why, yes, I’ve put on a bit of weight this century. Business has been good. One war after another...Like flies the dead hang on the walls of the century...<sup>11</sup>

And later, Borchert has Beckmann reject God and, by extension, religion:

Beckmann: ...We’re all outside. Even God’s outside, and no one opens a door to him now. Only death, at the last only death has a door for us. And I’m on the way there.<sup>12</sup>

The mystical and ephemeral character of “The Other” is another key allegorical element in *The Man Outside*. Borchert has Beckmann converse frequently with this disembodied voice, which represents the optimistic majority who always says “yes” and “marches on, lame or not.”<sup>13</sup> The Other provides a foil for Beckmann’s rejection of responsibility and duty and constantly attempts to drive him onward despite his lack of desire. Borchert uses the frequent dialogues between Beckmann and the Other to draw a stark contrast between those on the “outside” and the majority who at least attempt to remain within society through compliance and perhaps complacency. Borchert also emphasizes this powerful dichotomy between “yes” and “no” in his short story “There’s Only One Thing,” in which he urges individuals such as factory owners, workers, and researchers to say “no” to participation in a war effort.<sup>14</sup> The consequences of saying “yes,” like The Other in *The Man Outside*, will be total destruction not only of cities and the countryside, but of humanity as well. This concept of subscribing to a mantra of always saying “no” highlights a fundamental problem with Borchert’s viewpoint. Although it is consistent with the nihilistic, hopeless tone of his works, this mantra suggests that no viable

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<sup>11</sup> Borchert, *Man Outside*, 84.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 88.

<sup>14</sup> Wolfgang Borchert, “There’s Only One Thing.” From *The Man Outside*. (New York: New Directions, 1949) 268-270.

solution exists for building a better society and precludes acceptance of responsibility for the past. Unlike several of the writers after him, Borchert appears almost to have given up any hope of working toward better circumstances in the future.

Borchert's other characters in *The Man Outside*, such as Frau Kramer, the rude old woman who now lives in the house of Beckmann's deceased parents, and the Cabaret Producer who refuses to give the returned soldier a job as a comic act, represent what Borchert believed to be other important aspects of rejection. The episode with Frau Kramer demonstrates that, for Borchert's returning soldier, there is little if any comfort in going home because home has been largely devastated by Allied bombing. The Cabaret Producer is used to demonstrate the difficulty faced by returning soldiers in incorporating themselves into the workforce again.

After experiencing rejection in his every attempt to "go inside," Beckmann asks in frustration:

Where are you now, optimist? Now answer me! Now I need you, Answerer...Where is the old man who calls himself God? Why doesn't he speak?  
Answer! Why are you silent? Why? Will none of you answer? Will no one answer? Will no one, nobody answer me?<sup>15</sup>

This final monologue represents a summation of Borchert's message. Everyone has gone away, and the returning soldier is truly alone. More than anything else, Borchert seems to want to depict the sense of isolation and rejection felt by so many in his circumstances. This is consistent with the author's larger body of work in which he seldom if ever refers to the Nazis or the Third Reich, preferring to focus in a more limited fashion on the personal and individual consequences of the war and its aftermath.<sup>16</sup> *The Man Outside* is also important because it represents a strong assertion by Borchert that no one else can truly understand the experiences that he and hundreds of thousands of others have had during the war, and only he and others like him, who are "outside" the realm of conventional or traditional literature, can write authentically

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<sup>15</sup> Borchert, *Man Outside*, 135.

<sup>16</sup> Stark, *Borchert's Germany*, ii.

about the new realities of life after the war. In “This is Our Manifesto,” Borchert asserts further this perceived need for a new literary tradition:

We have no further use for a poet’s good grammar. We lack patience for good grammar. We need those with the hot hoarse-sobbed emotion. [Those] who call a tree a tree and a woman a woman and say yes and say no: loud and clear...and without subjunctives.<sup>17</sup>

Wolfgang Borchert’s outlook was overwhelmingly negative. While he did effectively convey his frustration at having been victimized by the war and its aftermath, the author’s reliance on portraying himself and his generation as victims is somewhat dubious. In claiming unequivocally the status of victim, Borchert eliminates any possibility of accepting responsibility for the past. Furthermore, he seemingly ignores the fact that many of his generation ardently supported the Nazi regime and its ideology. The bleak nihilism of his work presents another difficulty in that it suggests that there is no purpose in attempting to strive toward a better future, and that no means exist for doing so. In addition, much of his resentment is directed toward those who reject him, indicating that alienation as much as anything else is the source of his frustration. Ultimately, the problem is that Borchert’s “man on the outside” is not interested in working to change his circumstances but is content rather to remain outside in his self-pity.

Whereas Borchert focused primarily on the personal, paying little to no attention to overtly ideological or political questions, Hans Werner Richter addresses larger questions of guilt and German identity in light of the Nazi period. Like Borchert, Richter believed that the devastation caused by the war could not adequately be addressed in traditional literature, instead requiring a new literary tradition. However, this new tradition was inevitably accompanied by the seemingly contradictory fact that Richter and almost every other writer who claimed to be part of a new German literary tradition fought for, even if unwillingly, a Nazi-controlled Germany during the Second World War. Richter attempted to address this problem in *Beyond Defeat*, a novel clearly inspired by the author’s wartime and postwar experiences.

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<sup>17</sup> Wolfgang Borchert, “This is Our Manifesto.” From *The Man Outside*, translated by David Porter. (New York: New Directions, 1949) 260.

The central theme of *Beyond Defeat* is the notion of “inner emigration.”<sup>18</sup> This term is intended both to draw a distinction between those writers who stayed behind and those who, like Thomas Mann, physically emigrated to escape the Nazi regime, as well as to justify and legitimize the emerging writers’ intention to create a new literature by emphasizing that, although most of the younger authors, such as Richter, Grass, Böll, and others, fought in the war, they still inwardly and intellectually opposed the war. Alfred Andersch, in a paper entitled “Deutsche Literatur in der Entscheidung,” in support of “inner emigration,” even went so far as to express a preference for nationalistic writers such as Ernst Jünger over émigrés such as Mann.<sup>19</sup> In *Beyond Defeat*, Richter attempts to justify “inner emigration” by emphasizing the distinction among those who fought in the Second World War between ardent ideological supporters of the Nazi regime and individuals who felt obligated to serve their country in wartime.

In the novel, Richter’s main character, Gühler, is fighting with his division against the Allied advance in Italy in 1943. Gühler is completely opposed to Hitler and the Nazis but continues to fight out of a combination of fear of punishment and loyalty to his fellow soldiers. In the following dialogue with his comrade Grundmann, Gühler explains his reasons for fighting in the war despite opposition to the Nazis:

“Look,” [Grundmann] said, “do you think [we’ll lose the war] too?”  
“Yes,” said Gühler, “I think that too.”  
“Then you’re against Hitler?”  
“Yes, I’m against Hitler.”  
“And yet you fight for him.”  
“No,” said Gühler, “I’m only a cog in a machine, one that can’t get out.”  
“Why not?”  
“Well,” said Gühler, “court martial, firing squad, you know the story.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Keith Bullivant, and C. Jane Rice, “Reconstruction and Integration: The Culture of West German Stabilization 1945 to 1968.” From *German Cultural Studies*, Rob Burns, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 223.

<sup>19</sup> Bullivant, et al., “Culture of West German Stabilization,” 223.

<sup>20</sup> Hans Werner Richter, *Beyond Defeat*. Translated by Robert Kee. (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1950) 19.

Richter clearly intends Gähler to represent the author and those who, like himself, were not ardent Nazis, but for a variety of reasons found themselves fighting for a cause they did not completely, if at all, believe in.

Once Richter has established that Gähler opposes the Nazis and yet remains loyal to his comrades, it becomes necessary for the author to further justify his character's position by explaining his particular motives for participating in the war. After being captured, Gähler is interrogated about various topics, including morale in Germany and his opinion of Hitler and the Nazi regime. For the most part, Gähler cooperates freely, speaking frankly about his opposition to the Nazis, but he refuses to give away his battalion's positions when asked, saying "there aren't any Nazis up there, just my comrades."<sup>21</sup> Richter then has Gähler explain that opposition to the regime is not the same as opposition to one's country:

"I'm a Socialist and a German. For me there is only one possibility. That is to work to put my ideas across in my own country. But not against my country. Not in the interests of foreigners."<sup>22</sup>

Thus, according to Richter, there is an important distinction between supporting the Nazi regime and supporting one's country (in this instance, fighting in the war). The statement is indicative of the author's nationalism, a trait fairly common among post-war German socialists, and is consistent with the author's earlier attempts to justify his participation in the war. Most significantly, his emphasis on working to put one's ideas across in one's own country could certainly be interpreted as a criticism of those writers, like Thomas Mann, who emigrated rather than attempt to oppose the regime from within. This position, if intended by Richter, is somewhat unfair, especially in light of the fact that many in the artistic community, including Mann, faced a very real and immediate threat of arrest and possible removal to concentration camps.<sup>23</sup> Richter's critical position on Mann and others is especially debatable when one

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<sup>21</sup> Richter, *Beyond Defeat*, 133.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>23</sup> Mundt, *Understanding Mann*, 11-12.

considers that those who remained, especially those who fought in the war, were by extension supporting the Nazis, regardless of what reason they might provide as an excuse. This is not to suggest that all German soldiers during World War II were Nazis but rather to demonstrate the untenable nature of Richter's position in trying to claim greater literary authority due to his personal circumstances.

The most important episode in *Beyond Defeat* is Gähler's experience as a prisoner-of-war in a de-nazification camp in the United States. Like much of the novel, this segment is significantly inspired by the author's own experience, as Richter was taken to a similar camp after being captured in the battle at Monte Cassino in 1943.<sup>24</sup> Gähler becomes frustrated because the American camp officials and soldiers view all German prisoners as Nazis and have little understanding for the dangerous situation in the camp barracks resulting from conflict between loyal Nazi supporters and those prisoners who had openly denounced the regime:

"You damned Nazis," said one of the guards...

"We're all Nazis to them," said Böhmer.

"Yes," said Gähler, "As far as they're concerned, we've all lost the war. You and I and the Nazis who are sitting in the barracks now wanting to see us hung. [The Americans] don't see any difference."<sup>25</sup>

In this exchange Richter again emphasizes the fact that all German soldiers were not Nazis, attempting in the process to convey the frustration of those who, like himself and his character Gähler, did not support the regime.

Richter was an opponent of the American program of re-education of Nazis, especially because he believed, as was evident in *Der Ruf*, that the program was "doomed to failure" because the foremost figures in Anglo-American literature, art, and education did not participate and because he and others felt that there was no need for their generation to be re-educated in the first place.<sup>26</sup> The notion of re-education and its implicit assumption that all German soldiers

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<sup>24</sup> van der Will, "Agenda of Re-education," 5.

<sup>25</sup> Richter, *Beyond Defeat*, 306-307.

<sup>26</sup> van der Will, "Agenda of Re-education," 7.

were Nazis grouped those like Richter with everyone else regardless of political views, thus creating an intellectual conundrum for the author and his peers. How can one claim to initiate a new literary tradition if one must assume a share of complicity in Nazi crimes? Of course, many authors did not shy away from confronting the past, but Richter seemed especially defensive toward attempts to assign collective guilt. Richter's critical attitude toward re-education is evident in this dialogue from *Beyond Defeat*, in which Gähler learns of the Americans' intentions to cut rations and begin the re-education process:

"Have you heard?" said Konz...

"Have I heard what?"

"...the rations are going to be cut from tomorrow. Only fifteen hundred calories a day. Punishment."

"What do you mean, punishment?"

"For losing the war..."

"Nonsense," said Gähler.

"No, it's true. The Amis say we're all guilty. Guilty for the whole dirty mess."

"Where did you hear that?"

"...in the orderly room. Our re-education begins tomorrow. American history and English. We're all going to be democrats now. If we all speak English and know American history, we're good democrats. They say that those who don't go to the lectures will never get home."

"That's all nonsense."<sup>27</sup>

Richter has the two prisoners comment briefly on collective guilt and their own experiences, with a brief but significant emphasis on German victimization:

"My God," said Gähler, "Collective guilt, dried herring, and American history! What lunacy!"

"They're the victors," said Konz.

"But they can't just turn around and repeat the whole dirty mess...again! It would be insane!"

"Aren't you used to it by now?" said Konz. "We're always the ones who get pissed on, one way or another. First they pushed us around in the training camps. Then we got the dirty end of it at Stalingrad and Cassino. And now we wind up here with dried herring."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Richter, *Beyond Defeat*, 310-311.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 311.

Konz' comments about training, Stalingrad, and Cassino are meant here by Richter to reinforce the notion that not all German soldiers were Nazis and, furthermore, many were conscripted against their will, participating only out of a sense of national duty to their country, rather than to Hitler or the Nazis. This echoes Borchert's portrayal of his generation as unequivocal victims. Richter makes this idea clear from the very beginning of *Beyond Defeat*, when he dedicates the book to "my four brothers, who opposed this war and were soldiers in it, who hated a system and yet had to fight for it, and who betrayed neither themselves, their beliefs, nor their country."<sup>29</sup> This comment represents an attempt on the part of Richter to justify his and others' participation in the war and verges on unabashed nationalism, and it seems almost as if Richter believed that fighting in the war was excusable, as long as one did so for the "right" reason, that being love of country rather than of Hitler or Nazi ideology.

*Beyond Defeat* serves in many ways as a means to justify Richter's and others' right to undertake the creation of a new German literary tradition, despite their having served in the *Wehrmacht*, by attempting to emphasize that soldiers like Richter and his colleagues, who did not support the Nazi regime, were not as tainted by the Nazi period as those who ardently supported Hitler and his government. While it may be true that many who fought in the war did not support the Nazis, the author's arguments rest on questionable premises. Almost anyone could claim after the war that he or she did not support the Nazis, regardless of what one believed during it, so Richter's basic argument, while relevant to those who truly did not support the Nazis, does not provide widespread absolution for all who fought in the war.

Richter's fellow prisoner-of-war and editor of *Der Ruf*, Alfred Andersch, also had very strong opinions on the subject of collective guilt and personal responsibility. Unlike other prominent writers in *Gruppe 47*, however, Andersch claimed that his work was most heavily influenced by foreign, especially French, literature and thought.<sup>30</sup> This contrasts sharply with the

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<sup>29</sup> Richter, *Beyond Defeat*, fwd.

<sup>30</sup> Margaret Littler, *Alfred Andersch (1914-1980) and the Reception of French Thought in the Federal Republic of Germany*. (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991) xii.

notion of “inner emigration” that most writers had subscribed to, and his works often demonstrate elements of the mystical and metaphysical, as opposed to the straightforward albeit occasional allegorical realism of writers such as Richter, Böll, or Grass. This tendency to philosophical considerations is evident in such works as *The Cherries of Freedom*, in which Andersch recounts the various events and thought processes that led him to desert his unit in Italy on 6 June 1944.<sup>31</sup>

In *The Cherries of Freedom*, Andersch recounts his experiences of Nazi terror, dating back to his arrest as a member of the KJV (Communist Youth Association) and subsequent placement in the concentration camp at Dachau, from where he was probably released only because of his late father’s party connections.<sup>32</sup> The author goes on to describe the last few days leading up to his desertion, explaining the various thought processes that convinced him to abandon his unit. His primary emphasis concerning desertion was the notion of free will, of choosing one’s own path instead of following a course determined by one’s military “superiors.” This idea is rather resonant with Richter’s attempts to set himself apart from those soldiers who both served in the *Wehrmacht* and believed strongly in Nazism. However, Andersch’s notion of free will severely undercuts Richter’s position, exposing the latter’s nationalistic mindset in his claim to have fought “for love of country.” Of course, Andersch admits that one of the more selfish reasons he deserted was that he “didn’t want to die--to ‘clench my buttocks,’ as the army phrase goes, since that is apparently what one does when one dies.”<sup>33</sup>

Although *The Cherries of Freedom* is interesting because of the insight it provides into the processes that led Andersch to desert, the author limits his focus to that specific event. A more significant understanding of the author’s view of the younger generation and the new

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<sup>31</sup> Alfred Andersch, *The Cherries of Freedom*. Translated and with a foreword by Michael Hulse. (London: Toby Press, 2004) 2.

<sup>32</sup> Andersch, *Cherries of Freedom*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

literary movement can be found in his essay “Das junge Europa formt sein Gesicht” (“The young Europe forms its face”), originally published in *Der Ruf*:

Because the young German generation, the men and women between 18 and 35 years, have been divided from the older [generation] through a lack of responsibility for Hitler, and from the younger [generation] through the front- and captivity experiences, through their own position in life also...they are moving toward a new Europe with passionate speed.<sup>34</sup>

Here Andersch’s understanding of the new German literature differs significantly from that of Richter. According to Andersch, because the “young German generation” between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five is disconnected from both the older generation’s responsibility for Hitler and from the younger generation through the war experience, his generation is “heading toward a new Europe with passionate speed.” Andersch seems to understand his generation within the broader context of a new postwar Europe, rather than within a uniquely German one, a sharp contrast with the heavily nationalist overtones in Richter’s work. Andersch’s cosmopolitan outlook is consistent with the author’s views on the new literature, which he believed should incorporate elements of foreign writing.<sup>35</sup> This is not to say that Andersch did not support a new German literature, but rather that he did so with the belief that it was impossible in light of the Nazi period to create a new literature drawing exclusively from German thought and tradition.

Heinrich Böll is one of the most prominent writers associated with the new literary generation. Böll, who once stated that “[his] biography politicized [him], forcibly, sometimes almost against [his] will,” was born on 21 December 1917, and said his first conscious memory was of seeing defeated German troops march home after the First World War.<sup>36</sup> Like Andersch and the others mentioned above, Böll experienced in his youth the chaos of the Weimar period and in his early adulthood the reviled Nazi period that led directly to another world war. After

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<sup>34</sup> Alfred Andersch, “Das junge Europa formt sein Gesicht.” In van der Will, “Agenda of Re-education,” my translation, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Littler, *Andersch and French Thought*, xi.

<sup>36</sup> Robert C. Conrad, *Understanding Heinrich Böll*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992) 1.

the war, during which he had fought on the Eastern Front, the author believed that it was his duty as a citizen in the newly-constituted Federal Republic to be involved in the political sphere. The author, like many of his colleagues, was a leftist, preferring to support the SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) over the conservative CDU (*Christlich Demokratische Union*) establishment.<sup>37</sup> He made clear his view of the importance of the writer in the world of politics in an acceptance speech for a literary award in Wuppertal, in which he stated that:

There are terrible ways of robbing a person of his dignity...but the worst I can imagine...is something that would force me to say or write a sentence that could not stand before the court I have mentioned: the conscience of a free writer.<sup>38</sup>

As the above statement suggests, Böll was adamant about the writer's duty to address politics in his writing, and in 1978 he caused a storm of controversy when he openly criticized the West German government for its handling of the Baader-Meinhof terrorist group, pleading for restraint and a fair trial instead of what he believed would amount to mob justice.<sup>39</sup> Although Böll seemed almost to view the Baader-Meinhof group as a delayed reaction against Nazism, a compensation for the older generation's failure to resist the Nazis, a more appropriate parallel to the situation would be National Socialist agitation against the fledgling Weimar government. In light of this comparison, Böll's position demonstrated a naiveté not unlike that of Borchert in the deceased author's resolve to say "no" to everything in order to make up for failing to oppose the Nazis in any significant manner. The author's strong political views are evident in most of his writings, which include a wide array of short stories as well as several powerful novels. In works such as *Billiards at Half-past Nine* (1959) and *The Clown* (1963) Böll very strongly conveys his understanding of Germany's past, present, and future.

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<sup>37</sup> James Henderson Reid, *Heinrich Böll: Withdrawal and Re-emergence*. (London: Oswald Wolff, 1973) 10.

<sup>38</sup> Conrad, *Understanding Böll*, 3-4.

<sup>39</sup> Reid, *Böll: Withdrawal and Re-emergence*, 10.

In *Billiards at Half-past Nine*, Böll describes an auspicious day in the life of the Fähmel family: the eightieth birthday of Heinrich, the family patriarch. Heinrich's son Robert is an architect who during the last stages of the Second World War demolished the grand cathedral built by his father. Symbolically, Robert's son Joseph, also an architect, is currently engaged in the process of rebuilding the cathedral built by his grandfather and destroyed by his father. This is an extremely important dynamic, as the author uses it to symbolize important stages in German history. Heinrich's construction of the cathedral is representative of the rapid economic growth in Germany before the First World War. Robert's destruction of it is Böll's symbolic expression of the catastrophic Nazi period, and Joseph, who isn't even sure if he wants to be an architect, represents an uncertainty in regard to the nation's future.

There are other pertinent threads in *Billiards at Half-past Nine*, including Robert's mother Johanna's "madness" and the question of "rehabilitated" Nazis occupying important positions in society. Johanna, who has been institutionalized for many years and has lost a son in each World War, viciously rants against the establishment that she believes has caused her so much grief. In Chapter Eleven, she attacks those who caused the First World War, alluding to the lost potential of the many young men who were killed:

How was it none of you ever had the idea of setting up a machine gun at the entrance of the trade schools and colleges, right after the exams, and shoot dead all those radiant successful graduates?<sup>40</sup>

Her cynicism regarding the German future is not unlike that of the author, and she goes on to express her pessimism, stating "...don't make speeches to me about the German future. I read about it in the newspapers: the German future is all pegged out."<sup>41</sup> More than anything, Johanna is angry and grief-stricken over the loss of her sons, driving her in the novel's climax to attempt to assassinate a government minister, with the intention of preventing the government from sending more of her loved ones, such as her grandson Joseph, to their deaths. This is an

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<sup>40</sup> Heinrich Böll, *Billiards at Half-past Nine*. No Translator listed. (New York: Avon Books, 1962) 218.

<sup>41</sup> Böll, *Billiards*, 219.

excellent indication of Böll's cynicism about the state of Germany in the late 1950s, which he, having seen so many former Nazis return to important positions in civilian life, was frequently inclined to criticize.

Such criticism is most evident in *The Clown*, in which Böll's disillusioned and cynical character Hans Schnier, a clown by trade, voices his frustration with former Nazis who have since become "good democrats," as well as other topics such as religion. Schnier rages against his ex-"wife" Marie's new husband, a former Nazi, and the Catholic beliefs that convinced her to leave the clown. Both of Böll's works discussed above are representative of the author's view of German identity in light of its past, and for the most part are far more pessimistic and cynical than writers like Richter or Andersch. Whereas Richter seemed to view the postwar period somewhat optimistically as an opportunity to establish a new German literary tradition, Böll, while certainly representing new literature, was not confident that the mistakes of the past would not be made again in the future. His works, especially *Billiards at Half-past Nine*, demonstrate a concern with the collective history and future of German society and culture, a particular interest of his colleague Günter Grass as well, rather than the greater emphasis on the individual found in the works of Borchert, Richter, and Andersch.

Günter Grass is perhaps the most widely-known author associated with *Gruppe 47*, and his novels, including *Cat and Mouse* and *Dog Years*, but especially *The Tin Drum* represent significant attempts to address and confront Germany's past, present, and future. Grass was born on 16 October 1927 in Danzig, a city-state created at the end of the First World War.<sup>42</sup> Like Borchert, Grass' birth between the First World War and the Nazi period meant that his youthful experience of Germany was marred by National Socialism and the Second World War. As a young man, Grass was a member of the *Jungvolk* and later the *Hitlerjugend* and enlisted into military service in 1944.<sup>43</sup> He was wounded on 20 April 1945 and sent away from the Eastern

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<sup>42</sup> Julian Preece, *The Life and Work of Günter Grass: Literature, History, and Politics*. (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001) 1.

<sup>43</sup> Preece, *Life and Work of Günter Grass*, 3.

Front.<sup>44</sup> Like Borchert, Richter, Böll, and Andersch, Grass' military experience influenced his writing, but in his works he tends to focus more often on the war's effect on society rather than on soldiers specifically. This is consistent with Grass' view of the new generation of German writers, whose duty he believes was to "take the goosestep out of German."<sup>45</sup> Grass also believed that his generation, who had "had [their] fingers burned," were "the ones to repudiate the absolutes, the ideological black or white."<sup>46</sup>

For Grass, it was important not only to maintain shades of gray in his writing but also to keep the "wound" of the past open and to "prevent the past from coming to an end."<sup>47</sup> The author's most famous and significant attempt to address German identity was made in writing *The Tin Drum*. *The Tin Drum*, like most of Grass' novels, is set in Danzig, his "lost" hometown. In this novel, Grass' protagonist is a supernaturally unusual boy named Oskar Matzerath. The narrative is written from Oskar's perspective, and follows his life and that of his family from his mother's conception in a potato field to his thirtieth birthday, observed during his stay in a mental hospital. Oskar's observations of the various situations around him, from his birth in 1924 until 1954, are often very insightful and are imbued with a great deal of symbolism.

Perhaps the most immediately noticeable and significant aspects of the novel is Oskar's unusual pattern of growth, which seemingly parallels Grass' understanding of German political development. Amidst the chaotic madness among the adults around him in 1927, Oskar wills himself to cease physically growing at age three, so that his appearance remains that of a child despite his mental maturation. This act most likely represents the cessation of German social maturation under the Weimar republic, as more and more people began to turn toward Nazism as a solution. This was especially pronounced in Danzig, as many among the large German

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<sup>44</sup> Preece, *Life and Work of Günter Grass*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Günter Grass, "To Be Continued..." From *The Günter Grass Reader*, Helmut Frielinghaus, ed. (Orlando: Harcourt, 2004) 274.

<sup>46</sup> Grass, "To Be Continued...", 274.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 274.

population there sought to reunite politically with the Reich. Oskar's refusal to grow during the chaos of the late Weimar period is extremely significant because he does not begin growing again until just after the end of the war in 1945, implying that the Nazi period was a time of stagnation and madness during which Germany's growth as a culture and society ceased.

This interpretation is not completely unlike Mann's in *Doctor Faustus*, except that Grass, writing in the late 1950s, had the advantage in *The Tin Drum* of having observed more than ten years of postwar German development, enabling him to address the present and future of Germany as well as the past. This is extremely significant, because when Oskar does decide to grow again with the aid of a rock thrown at his head, a reference to the catastrophic trauma of defeat, he transforms into a misshapen hunchback.<sup>48</sup> In this development, Grass appears to suggest that, although Germany has decided to move forward, it has done so in an awkward and wholly unexpected fashion that has been induced in part by an outside force, the Allied occupiers, as represented by the rock. It is not "whole" or "normal," in that Germany had been physically divided into two separate and opposing political entities. In addition, despite a great deal of economic progress in the 1950s, many issues from the Nazi period continued to plague the nation's collective consciousness, such as the numerous war crimes trials from 1946 through the 1960s that forced Germans repeatedly to confront the past.

Another important symbol in *The Tin Drum* is that of the drum itself. First given a tin drum at age three, significantly the same age at which he decided to stop growing, Oskar obsessively totes and drums on his instrument (which frequently needs replacing) until that moment when, at the burial of his supposed father Alfred Matzerath in 1945, he tosses it away at almost the exact moment in which his growth begins anew. The drum, most often associated with military marches, is a part of Oskar's life during the entire period in which he refuses to grow, a clear parallel to the increasing "madness" of the Nazi period. The drum also recalls Hitler's earliest role in the Nazi Party, that of the "drummer," whose job was to work crowds

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<sup>48</sup> Günter Grass, *The Tin Drum*. Translated by Ralph Mannheim. (New York: Vintage International, 1990) 409.

into a frenzy through incendiary speeches, before he resolved to assume the mantle of leadership. Taking this into consideration, an understanding of the drum as a representation of the Germans' symbolic march to the beat of a Nazi tune is the most appropriate.

Because Grass' understanding of the postwar period is central to this study, the most important elements in Oskar's life are those that take place from 1945 to 1954. Grass includes several significant symbols concerning the question of guilt and responsibility for the Nazi past. Some, such as the Onion Cellar, where Oskar's jazz band plays in 1949, represent an expunging of collective feelings of guilt as people slice onions and cry, relieving themselves of previously suppressed emotions.<sup>49</sup> This also implies Grass' belief that Germans are incapable of sincere remorse, and can only "cry" or repent with the aid of an outside agent, the "onion." This is most likely an allegorical assertion that Germans who supported the Nazis only realized the negative implications of their actions when forced by the Allies to do so, through such means as being forced to watch footage of concentration camps. While this and other episodes are significant, Grass' most vivid symbolic depiction of guilt and responsibility takes place in Alfred Matzerath's cellar as Oskar's family and their neighbors hide from the approaching Red Army. Alfred, a member of the Nazi Party, frantically tosses away his Party pin in hopes of preventing Soviet soldiers from seeing it. Oskar recovers the pin but soon becomes irritated as it pricks his hand and prevents him from picking lice from the neck of a recently-arrived Soviet Soldier. He then tricked Alfred into taking the pin, which stuck in his hand. Then, in a panic, Alfred swallowed and began choking on the pin as the Soviet soldiers shot him.<sup>50</sup> In this episode Grass attempts to convey what he perceives as the older generation's desire to avoid responsibility and the younger generation's determination to assign it to them.

One final key aspect of *The Tin Drum* is the ever-present figure of the "black witch," who, for Oskar, always appears to be lurking at the edge of his consciousness. The witch comes

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<sup>49</sup> Edward Diller, *A Mythic Journey: Günter Grass's Tin Drum*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974) 176.

<sup>50</sup> Grass, *Tin Drum*, 391-394.

from a children's rhyme, first mentioned when the neighborhood youths force Oskar to drink a foul "witch's brew." At the end of the novel, despite having just learned that he will be released from the mental hospital, Oskar's view of his future is bleak and without any sense of direction, as he first reviews the many events in his life during which he sensed her presence and then considers the future:

Don't ask Oskar who she is! Words fail me. First she was behind me, later she kissed my hump, but now, now and forever, she is in front of me, coming closer.<sup>51</sup>

And then, a final rhyme:

Always somewhere behind me, the Black Witch.  
Now ahead of me, too, facing me, Black.  
Black words, black coat, black money.  
But if children sing, they sing no longer:  
Where's the Witch, black as pitch?  
Here's the black, wicked Witch.  
Ha! ha! ha!<sup>52</sup>

For Grass, the Black Witch appears to represent a sense of confusion and hopelessness concerning the future. This idea is supported by various literary experts, such as Julian Preece, who suggests that Oskar has "no perspective, no hope for the future, and no answers."<sup>53</sup> This sense of encroaching despair and hopelessness is indicative of Grass' perception of Germany's condition in the late 1950s as he was writing the novel, and he has managed to very vividly convey the discomfort caused by widespread uncertainty about the future direction of the nation.

Despite the fact that *The Tin Drum* is laden with symbolism relevant to the many questions raised in the search for a postwar German identity, Grass himself has said little concerning its significance. Unlike Mann, who described very clearly in his letters, speeches, and in *Doctor Faustus: The Genesis of a Novel* the various thought processes and symbolic

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<sup>51</sup> Grass, *Tin Drum*, 589.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 589.

<sup>53</sup> Preece, *Life and Work of Günter Grass*, 46.

considerations that led him to write his novel, Grass, in his 1974 essay “A Look Back at *The Tin Drum*, or: The Author as Dubious Witness,” is quite cryptic on the subject:

To answer a common question: I did not write *The Tin Drum* for an audience, because I did not know any audiences. I wrote...for myself, for [my wife] Anna, and for friends and acquaintances...and I suppose I also wrote for an audience summoned by my imagination. The living and the dead...my literary mentor Alfred Döblin...my stepmother...my old German teacher...and my deceased mother...<sup>54</sup>

This statement suggests that *The Tin Drum* was in part an attempt by the author to come to terms with the Nazi period and to express his understanding in literary form. It is important to note that Döblin was highly critical of war and Germany’s first attempt at democracy in Weimar, influences that are evident in Grass’ writing. Grass concludes the essay with a reminder that there are far more thematic elements in *The Tin Drum* than he has specifically discussed:

Have I said everything? More than I intended. Have I concealed something important? Definitely. Will I add anything else? No.<sup>55</sup>

In this statement Grass simultaneously asserts his resolve not to elaborate further on the various themes in *The Tin Drum* while encouraging further interpretation in his claim that he has “definitely” concealed important aspects of the novel.

Grass, in his 1999 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, reflected on the significance of his generation of writers, those who represented a new literary direction in Germany. He said that “postwar German literature, still young, was having a hard time with German, which had been corrupted by the Nazi regime.”<sup>56</sup> The author referred to Theodor Adorno’s famous assertion that there could be no poetry after Auschwitz, recalling that he and his colleagues constantly struggled with this notion. Grass stated that he and his colleagues wrote with the understanding that the only way for literature to move forward is to remember and confront the past, a process that one could certainly apply not only to writers, but to society as well. What is most important

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<sup>54</sup> Günter Grass, “A Look Back at *The Tin Drum*, or: The Author as Dubious Witness.” From *The Günter Grass Reader*, Helmut Frielinghaus, ed. (Orlando: Harcourt, 2004) 73.

<sup>55</sup> Grass, “A Look at *The Tin Drum*,” 78.

<sup>56</sup> Grass, “To Be Continued...”, 273.

about the new German literature, as represented by the authors discussed above, is that it not only signified a new direction in writing in which, among other things, the authors attempted to resolve in various ways their criticism of the Nazi period with their participation in the war, but also provides, through the authors' self-perceived experience of the Nazi period as both victims and soldiers, a sense of their generation's understanding of Germany's past, present, and future.

## CHAPTER 4

### IDENTITY IN LITERATURE SINCE REUNIFICATION

On 31 January, 1990, in the midst of the chaos surrounding the opening of East Germany's borders and discussions about unification with the Federal Republic of Germany, Christa Wolf, the most famous author in the German Democratic Republic, produced an essay providing her opinion of the possible end of her nation as a separate political entity in which she stated that, "In a period of a few weeks, we have seen our chances to make a new start at an alternative society vanish before our eyes, and seen the very existence of our nation vanish with them."<sup>1</sup> This perspective, far removed from the widespread sense of euphoria among so many of the author's fellow citizens, demonstrates Wolf's understanding of the collapse of the German Democratic Republic not as a boon or blessing but rather as the catastrophic end of a noble, though flawed, political, cultural, and social experiment. The author continued, writing:

I wonder: what will become of East Germany's forty years of history? A history that is not a phantom, after all, although when it is gone it will leave a phantom pain. Who will continue to express openly the grief, shame, and remorse which I read in many people's letters and see in their eyes-once everyone is busy trying to improve their material conditions?<sup>2</sup>

This statement reflects not only Wolf's distress about the political end of her nation, but, in her description of the memory of East Germany's unique history as a "phantom pain," is also an acknowledgement of the many flaws in a frequently injurious and repressive system that led so many to flee to the West and eventually led to reunification.

Literary responses to the end of the German Democratic Republic and reunification are widespread and varied. Many East German writers, including Wolf as well as younger authors such as Ingo Schulze and Thomas Brussig, demonstrate in their writings a concern for reflecting not only on the ramifications of the collapse of their society but also for conveying and preserving the unique experience of Germans under the socialist system. Western writers such

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<sup>1</sup> Christa Wolf, "Momentary Interruption." From *The Author's Dimension: Selected Essays*, Alexander Stephan, ed. Translated by Jan van Heurck. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 325.

<sup>2</sup> Wolf, "Momentary Interruption," 327.

as Peter Schneider and Günter Grass have also reflected on various historical issues that have arisen as a result of German reunification, often using the opportunity to examine further changing perceptions of the Nazi past. Common to all the authors mentioned above is a desire to understand and convey a sense either of a new German identity or to preserve and explain the unique East German experience within the broader context of German history.

Because she has become such a controversial figure, especially since the collapse of the GDR and subsequent revelations of her cooperation with the Stasi (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*) from 1959 to 1961, Christa Wolf's career and especially her literary understanding of German history and identity in light of reunification require a great deal of consideration.<sup>3</sup> The author, born in 1929, experienced not only the forty years of communist rule but also the entire Nazi period and the invasion of the Red Army. Wolf was a dedicated member of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) for forty years, from 1949 to 1989, and was arguably the foremost author in the GDR. For observers in the West, at least until the end of the GDR, Wolf was a brave voice of dissent who challenged the established structures of her society. Works such as *The Quest for Christa T.* (1968) and *Cassandra* (1983), in which Wolf obliquely and indirectly challenged the conformist and repressive nature of the East German government, were held up in the West as evidence of the author's courageous stance against her nation's policies. However, even before the 1993 revelation of her brief cooperation with the Stasi, Wolf published *What Remains* (1990), a short story that caused almost immediately a critical backlash against the author in the west, even among those who had praised her previous works.<sup>4</sup>

Although *What Remains* is far more direct than Wolf's previous works in its criticism of GDR repression, especially as it concerns Stasi surveillance, the primary cause of negative Western response to the story is the fact that it was mostly written in 1979 but only published

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<sup>3</sup> Derek Lewis, and John R.P. McKenzie, eds. *The New Germany: Social, Political, and Cultural Challenges of Unification*. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1995) 233.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Kienbaum, and Manfred Grote, "German Unification as a Cultural Dilemma: A Retrospective." *East European Quarterly*, v. 31 n. 2 June 1997. 230.

after the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>5</sup> This obviously suggests that Wolf's decision finally to publish the story in 1990 was taken out of opportunism and a desire to portray herself as a victim because the criticism contained within would have been far more effective had it been published in 1979. This issue is, however, much more complicated than many Western critics apparently believed, as a closer examination of *What Remains* will demonstrate.

Before going further, it is important to note that the GDR Writer's Union was held to a fairly strict standard of censorship, and punishments for literature excessively critical of the regime could include prohibition of the author's works, imprisonment, or exile to the West.<sup>6</sup> Certainly exile to the West would be seen by most as a positive development, but, as mentioned previously, Wolf seems to have genuinely believed in the ideals of socialism, despite the obvious flaws in its implementation in the GDR, and thus, as she wrote in *On the Way to Taboo* (1993), she envisioned "for a very short historic moment...an entirely different country which none of us would ever see," in reference to her disappointment that the GDR would be incorporated into the Federal Republic rather than being reformed and maintained as a separate political entity.<sup>7</sup> Her dedication to building socialism meant that the author believed it was her duty to remain in the GDR, not unlike those who stayed in Nazi Germany, and work for reform from within. Having noted this, the "reforming" effect of her works in the GDR was minimal. The most important legacy of her writing in the GDR is that, as one observer writes, "she was the voice of the voiceless and the seer of impending doom."<sup>8</sup> While her status among the reading public as an "icon" provided GDR citizens with an outlet for their unspoken complaints, it is unlikely that her writing would have contributed to any sort of significant political change within the SED government, rendering her goal, if not her intentions, somewhat questionable.

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<sup>5</sup> Kienbaum, et al, "German Unification...", 230.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>7</sup> Margit Resch, *Understanding Christa Wolf: Returning Home to a Foreign Land*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997) 160.

<sup>8</sup> Kienbaum, et al, "German Unification...", 230.

In the narrative of *What Remains*, Wolf recounts in an obviously semi-autobiographical manner the paranoia and discomfort caused by Stasi surveillance, reflecting often on various topics controversial in the GDR. The story was almost certainly inspired by the fact that she and her husband, essayist and editor Gerhard Wolf, were placed under low-level Stasi surveillance beginning in 1968.<sup>9</sup> Low-level Stasi surveillance typically involved maintaining a continuous and conspicuous presence in the subject's life in order to deliberately unnerve the individual or individuals under observation. Throughout *What Remains*, Wolf's narrator obsesses over the "three young gentlemen sitting for hours on end in a white Wartburg directly opposite our window," and is forced often to censor herself even in private conversation for fear of being overheard.<sup>10</sup> At first glance, it seems easy to dismiss *What Remains* as a blatant attempt on the part of Wolf to portray herself, as many Western critics argued, as a victim. However, while she certainly does portray herself to some degree as a victim, she also conveys powerfully the discomfort and paranoia which resulted from Stasi surveillance and, in addition, questions not only her own complicity and passivity but also that of her fellow citizens, an element often overlooked by her critics in the Federal Republic.

In a conversation with a young woman seeking the narrator's evaluation of her writing, Wolf's protagonist discourages the prospective writer, urging her to refrain from publishing until the political climate is more favorable. At the same time, Wolf produces a powerful self-criticism:

Now I had to scare this girl, if it was at all possible. Had to tell her that the greatest talents had already rotted in German prisons by the dozens, and it wasn't true that talented people could withstand the cold and the humiliation and the wearing down better than those with no talent. And that people would still want to read sentences like the ones she was writing in ten years' time.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Resch, *Understanding Christa Wolf*, 164.

<sup>10</sup> Christa Wolf, *What Remains and Other Stories*. Translated by Heike Schwarzbauer and Rick Takvorian. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 234.

<sup>11</sup> Wolf, *What Remains*, 275.

In this passage, Wolf at once explains and criticizes herself for being susceptible to the pressures placed on her by the state in regard to her writing. Furthermore, she attempts to justify her delayed publication of *What Remains* by having the narrator encourage the burgeoning young writer to wait for a more favorable political climate in which to publish her potentially controversial work.

Wolf also directs criticism toward the GDR government and its propaganda that obscured the realities of life in East Germany. When the protagonist goes to meet with her censor about an upcoming public forum, she notices a large sign which read “GROWTH-PROSPERITY-STABILITY.”<sup>12</sup> Already nervous about having to visit the censor in the first place, the narrator reflects:

Once again I read automatically: growth, prosperity, stability. Where were we, anyway? I really felt like sinking my teeth into this question, but I had to admit then that this was neither the time nor the place.<sup>13</sup>

In this comment, Wolf manages both to criticize the official perspective and attempt to justify her delayed publication, demonstrating in the process her passivity and complicity by failing to criticize the regime. What makes the question of justification more complicated, both in this passage and the earlier one, is that there is no way of knowing whether the references to delaying publication were in the original 1979 text or if they were added as the author prepared the story for publication. The fact that Wolf’s narrator told the prospective writer that people would still want to read her works “in ten years’ time,” which conveniently enough would have been 1989, might indicate a later addition to the text, but there is no way to be completely sure.

In light of *What Remains* and the subsequent controversy about Christa Wolf and her literary validity, it is important to take several factors into consideration. Concerning the revelation of her brief cooperation with the Stasi, the fact that she was so quickly dismissed because she failed to provide any significant or useful information sufficiently eliminates this

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<sup>12</sup> Wolf, *What Remains*, 280.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 280-281.

episode as a valid criteria for evaluating the author.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, that she failed to comment in any significant or recognizable way on events such as the 17 June 1953 uprising, the 1961 construction of the Berlin Wall, or the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia certainly indicates her willingness to remain silent in the face of those sorts of events that writers often feel compelled to address in literature.<sup>15</sup>

The most likely explanation is that, as is indicated throughout *What Remains*, Wolf, although ideologically committed to socialism, became increasingly dissatisfied with its implementation in the GDR over the course of several years. This is evident in her 1976 signing of an open letter protesting the expulsion of the poet and songwriter Wolf Biermann as well as the highly critical observations in *What Remains*.<sup>16</sup> The Stasi was so concerned about the apparent solidarity among GDR writers in protesting Biermann's exile that false stories about Wolf withdrawing her signature from the open letter were circulated in the West.<sup>17</sup> In such a climate, it is nearly inconceivable that a work which so directly attacks the Stasi could have been published without severe repercussions for the author.

The repressive situation in which the author found herself in the late 1970s does not necessarily excuse her, but it does provide a better understanding of her reluctance to vocalize many of her criticisms. If anything, Wolf's 1989 lamentations about the exodus of massive numbers of young people into the Federal Republic, first by way of Czechoslovakia and later directly across the newly opened borders, indicate her failure to understand that, for many citizens in the GDR, the "cost" of remaining, the constant repression and paranoia so accurately depicted in *What Remains*, was too high and outweighed any potential benefits of enduring hardship in order to continue working toward an ideal socialist state. Because she continued to believe in such an ideal long after many of her peers had abandoned it, Wolf and other writers

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<sup>14</sup> Resch, *Understanding Christa Wolf*, 164.

<sup>15</sup> Kienbaum, et al, "German Unification..." 231.

<sup>16</sup> Resch, *Understanding Christa Wolf*, 164.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 164.

who did not abandon the GDR became the targets of intense criticism, both justified and unjustified. Despite the many criticisms of Wolf's career, *What Remains* is an important work, regardless of when it was published, because it represents not only the author's criticism of her government's extensive measures of repression as embodied by the Stasi but also a powerful acknowledgement of her personal weakness and failure to act as a result of it.

Other eastern writers have addressed the issue of collaboration and resistance since reunification, as well. Of these, Thomas Brussig, in his *Heroes Like Us* (1996) provides an especially satirical and symbolic examination of the nature of collaboration while also strongly conveying a sense of East German uniqueness in the post-reunification period. Other eastern writers, such as Jens Sparschuh, Mathias Wedel, and Matthias Biskupek, have also taken a satirical approach to unification, but Brussig's work is particularly relevant not only because of his somewhat controversial depiction of the Stasi but also because he addresses issues commonly dealt with by East Germans when coming to terms with the GDR past.<sup>18</sup>

Brussig's protagonist, a hopelessly naïve and backward young man named Klaus Uhltscht, joins the Stasi at the urging of his father, who is already an operative of the seemingly ubiquitous state security police. Klaus and his fellow Stasi operatives are portrayed as bumbling, comical figures, almost as if they were, as Thomas Kraft described it, "a low quality Monty-Python-Show troupe."<sup>19</sup> Other critics have argued that such a portrayal of the Stasi represents an attempt to absolve "all accomplices and collaborators."<sup>20</sup> While these arguments appear at first glance to have some merit, the fact that, in addition to such absurd activities as attempting to discover which uniforms the football club Bayern München plans to wear at a match with an East German team in order to disguise an operative and infiltrate the team, Brussig's Stasi conduct very sinister activities as well. For Klaus, this includes such activities as breaking into a

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Cooke, "Literature and the question of East German cultural identity since the *Wende*." From Jonathan Grix and Paul Cooke, eds., *East German distinctiveness in a unified Germany*. (Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham Press, 2002) 158.

<sup>19</sup> Cooke, "Literature and the question of East German cultural identity..." 159.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 159.

writer's apartment and kidnapping a female librarian's young daughter for an afternoon in order to intimidate the woman. The contrast in Brussig's depiction of the Stasi is most likely intended to force East Germans to confront the past while simultaneously demonstrating the absurdity of the Stasi's extensive attention to observing even the most seemingly minor details of everyday life.

The idea that Brussig attempts, in *Heroes Like Us*, to challenge East Germans to be honest about the past is supported by Klaus' reflection on unofficial informants after the end of the Stasi:

How did the Stasi's "unofficial informants" fare when the Stasi no longer existed? Wasn't it touching, the way they defended themselves against the accusations leveled at them? They hoped against hope that they hadn't been in the Stasi, and when their hopes were dashed they felt the Stasi had duped and hoodwinked them. How else could they have lived with themselves?<sup>21</sup>

And, much later, regarding the ever-present assertion among easterners that they did not support or collaborate with the regime, Brussig seemingly draws a parallel to the notion of "inner emigration" among those who claimed opposition to the Nazi regime while implicitly supporting it through passive acquiescence:

How could our society have endured for decades if all its members had been as discontented as they claim? That's not a rhetorical question...so take it seriously. They were all against the system, yet they integrated and collaborated. Were they pusillanimous, besotted, or just plain stupid?<sup>22</sup>

Brussig is not necessarily condemning all who collaborated in the above passages. What this statement most likely represents is a clear challenge to those who have attempted to deny or forget about the past. For Brussig, it is understandable, if not necessarily excusable, that people informed for the Stasi, especially when one considers the completely different and often controlled circumstances in which East Germans were socialized from childhood onward, but simply to deny that aspect of the past is inexcusable.

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Brussig, *Heroes Like Us*. Translated by John Brownjohn. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997) 91.

<sup>22</sup> Brussig, *Heroes Like Us*, 253.

Through Klaus' exaggerated naiveté, Brussig intends to remind East Germans and inform West Germans of how growing up in the GDR affected one's understanding of politics and society. For example, on the subject of human rights, Klaus reflects:

Shall I tell you the true position in regard to human rights? I didn't have the first idea what they were! I couldn't be deprived of what I'd never possessed, nor could something nonexistent be trampled underfoot. Never question an East German about infringements of human rights in the old days—we're sick of such insinuations. If you really want to peer into the abyss, ask us what human rights *are*. We know them as blind people know colors, by hearsay alone.<sup>23</sup>

In this passage, Brussig highlights the fact that Easterners did not understand many aspects of political and social life in the same context as Westerners. The observation may also represent a criticism on the part of the author of Western attitudes toward East Germans. The author has Klaus recall various other blatantly naïve ideas, such as his belief that only the “paternal kindness” of the Soviet Union prevented the nation from taking over all of Europe<sup>24</sup> or the notion that the Beatles were intentionally writing songs as “insidious attacks on our young minds.”<sup>25</sup> Brussig uses this characterization of Klaus to demonstrate how years of official political and social conditioning in the GDR created an extremely compliant and passive society, and his criticism of those who deny the past is likely grounded in a belief, not unlike that of Grass and others in regard to the Nazi period, that an honest confrontation of the past is the only way for citizens of the former GDR to move forward.

One final important aspect of *Heroes Like Us* is Brussig's critical appraisal of the opening of the Berlin Wall and subsequent reunification. In this satirical retelling of the opening of the Wall, Brussig highlights the chaotic nature of the event through a comical sequence of events. Klaus claims that the real reason the confused border guards began allowing people to pass through the Wall was because the protagonist exposed his unusually large genitalia,

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<sup>23</sup> Brussig, *Heroes Like Us*, 82.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 85.

upsetting the guards sufficiently to force them to open the gate.<sup>26</sup> This takes place after Klaus, still a dedicated socialist and member of the Stasi, attempts to encourage the guards as they struggle against the surging crowd by shouting “Go on, shove harder, damn you! Give it all you’ve got! You can do it, I know you can!”<sup>27</sup> Of course, the crowd, encouraged by what they believe is a citizen brave enough to speak out, becomes even more aggressive. Klaus claims that his story is very plausible when he observes of his fellow countrymen: “look at the East Germans today: as passive now as they always were. How could *they* have demolished the Wall?”<sup>28</sup> This is clearly a criticism of what Brussig views as Easterners’ failure to assert themselves in the reunified Germany.

The author ends with a criticism of those who are dismissive of the unique East German experience, when Klaus recalls his response to a camera crew at the newly-opened Wall:

I blurted out a word that emanated from the deepest quagmires of my soul: “Germany!”...The West Germans took it literally, of course, though...they behaved as if all who said “Germany” meant the “Federal Republic.”...What’s so good about the Federal Republic, aside from the fact that it produces the best BMWs in the world? It isn’t that I consider the Federal Republic a horrific institution, but it’s not so perfect that one can’t conceive of anything better.<sup>29</sup>

Paul Cooke’s assessment of this statement as a representation of Brussig’s resentment not toward the fact, but the manner of German reunification seems most plausible.<sup>30</sup> Klaus’ closing statement that he, former Stasi agent and devoted Socialist, is “recent German history’s *missing link*” without whom nothing makes sense, represents a final attempt on the part of Brussig to challenge Easterners to confront and accept the negative aspects of their past, especially collaboration and passive acquiescence, which are very much a part of their collective identity.

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<sup>26</sup> Brussig, *Heroes Like Us*, 258-259.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 257.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 259.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 261.

<sup>30</sup> Cooke, “Literature and the question of East German cultural identity...,” 160.

The issue of a unique East German identity and experience in light of reunification is the primary concern of Ingo Schulze in his *Simple Stories* (1998). Schulze, born 15 December 1962 in Dresden, was a resident of the GDR until its demise, an important biographical aspect that lends weight to his perspective as embodied in the novel. *Simple Stories* is a series of twenty-nine different tales, written from the perspectives of various characters in and around the East German town of Altenburg. The stories often overlap and intertwine, creating a focused picture of the many ramifications of reunification for various types of people in the east. The larger picture that Schulze creates is less concerned with the greater political issues of reunification than the affect on everyday life. As almost all of the individual stories address significant issues, it will be most efficient to address Schulze's broader themes, drawing from examples when needed.

The most immediately evident theme in *Simple Stories* is the economic impact of reunification. In chapter two, aptly entitled "New Money", Connie Schubert recalls an incident from May 1990 in which Harry Nelson, a western real estate speculator whom she had come to know while serving as a waitress in a hotel restaurant, forced himself upon her. This memory is accompanied by her recollection of her coworker Erika's moving from restaurant to restaurant, each only remaining open for a short time. Of this, Connie recalls: "That happened to her four times. Before long she had the reputation of bringing bad luck. But not for long, because by then people realized how bad things were going in general."<sup>31</sup> In this episode, Schulze uses the "rape" incident to imply the nature of western business ventures in the east. Schulze also acknowledges, however, Easterners' initial compliance, if not enthusiasm, by having Connie initially respond favorably to Harry's advances before later deciding they were unwelcome. By drawing a parallel between the rape and Western profiteering in the East, Schulze strongly conveys his perception of the economic situation as something that people found initially but tentatively acceptable but eventually left them feeling used and cheated.

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<sup>31</sup> Ingo Schulze, *Simple Stories*. Translated by John E. Woods. (New York: Vintage Books, 1999) 16.

Another example of the economic ramifications of reunification can be found in the several stories that involve Martin Meurer. Martin, whose father fled to the West in 1969, experiences the economic impact on both a personal and professional level. As a result of an influx of westerners at eastern universities, his teaching assistantship was not renewed at the University of Leipzig. Because of the decrease in household income, he is later unable to pay a speeding ticket and thus forced to surrender his driver's license, which in turn forces his wife Andrea to ride a bike for transportation. Because she is inexperienced and travels frequently on a dangerous road near their house, she is killed in a hit-and-run accident. Martin's son then goes to live with his sister-in-law, while eventually the father, in the final story "Fish", is forced to take an embarrassing job advertising for a seafood restaurant, which requires him to walk around in flippers and scuba gear. Schulze uses this series of misfortunes in Martin's life to illustrate the possible extent to which the ramifications of reunification could reach.

Schulze also addresses the ever-present issue of collaboration. The character Dieter Schubert, Connie's uncle, was expelled from his teaching position after being denounced by Martin's stepfather, Ernst, who was the school principal. Of course, this was not uncommon, but Schulze adds depth in order to raise further questions. On a group trip to Italy, Schubert climbs onto the ledge of a church, causing a major media scene where he denounces Herr Meurer, who is later castigated in the press and forced out of his job, eventually landing in a mental institution. Schulze issues the same sort of criticism of post-reunification denials of collaboration as Brussig, when he has Ernst's wife Renate reflect on her husband's denouncement of Schubert that "it had all happened long ago. And Ernst didn't like doing it at the time. I'm sure of that."<sup>32</sup> This comment, and the entire episode with Schubert and Meurer, is a criticism clearly aimed at those who attempted or still attempt to justify their collaboration in one way or another, a topic that is masterfully addressed by Peter Schneider in *Eduard's Homecoming* (1999), which will be discussed later.

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<sup>32</sup> Schulze, *Simple Stories*, 9.

The final element in *Simple Stories* which bears some discussion is the fact that, among Schulze's many characters and intertwining tales, there is an ever-present sense of the deterioration of traditional family structures. Almost every major character switches partners at some point in the novel, conveying a sense of domestic instability. Martin's son lives with his sister-in-law, and his mother Renate leaves Ernst for another man while he is in the mental institution. Schubert cheats on his wife with Jenny, a young nursing student, and there are countless other examples of this type of interpersonal volatility. It is certainly no mistake that Schulze allows no stability in the personal lives of his characters because in doing so he fosters a pervasive sense of confusion and relationship wanderlust, as if the very foundations of society have been altered in such a way as to prevent any sort of normality or stability, even in interpersonal relationships. Although interpersonal instability is certainly not limited to eastern Germany, the fact that none of Schulze's characters is in a stable relationship signifies the author's intention to use this fact to further illustrate the extent of social upheaval caused by the end of the GDR and reunification.

Unlike Brussig, who was more concerned with challenging Easterners to confront the past, Schulze is ultimately concerned not only with highlighting various ramifications of the end of the GDR and incorporation into the Federal Republic but also with encouraging acceptance of a unique East German identity within the larger context of a reunified Germany. Paul Cooke supports this notion, noting that earlier works such as that of Brussig indicate a "sense of defiance within the East...which refuses to accept itself as marginalized within the unified state."<sup>33</sup> Although there are elements of this defiance in *Simple Stories*, Cooke suggests that Schulze's primary theme is one of acceptance in which Easterners "simply wish to point out differences from West Germans in their experience...which mark them out within the new state."<sup>34</sup> This is apparent in the fact that Schulze's novel, while critical of certain aspects of

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<sup>33</sup> Cooke, "Literature and the question of East German cultural identity..." 161.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 162.

reunification, is far more concerned with exploring and explaining the unique experiences of Easterners and the problems that have been created as a result of the incorporation of the former GDR into the Federal Republic. In the final paragraph of the novel, Schulze provides a sense of uneasy acceptance as Jenny describes her walk through town, in full scuba gear, in their new job as advertisers for a seafood restaurant:

We hold hands, because the goggles restrict our peripheral vision and neither of us can tell if the other is still walking alongside or not. The band is...playing something louder and faster, a polka, I think...Maybe it's just a march or something. Whatever it is, Martin and I fall in step with it. And that doesn't change even when we leave the pedestrian zone.<sup>35</sup>

This final passage indicates an acceptance of the present in the characters' falling in step with the band while simultaneously acknowledging the uncertainty of the future in the goggles that prevent peripheral vision. In *Simple Stories*, Schulze attempts to create for the reader a sense of the unique East German experience, both past and present, while acknowledging the fact that acceptance is the only option for Easterners seeking to reconcile their identity within the larger framework of a reunified Germany.

Eastern writers such as Wolf, Brussig, and Schulze provide useful insights into the issues of reunification and German identity, especially because they, like Grass, Böll, and others of the post-Nazi generation, experienced firsthand the catastrophic collapse and reshaping of their society. Western writers have also addressed the issue of German identity after reunification, and examining the issues raised by authors such as Peter Schneider and Grass will provide a more complete understanding of how German identity has been addressed in literature since reunification. Schneider, a longtime resident of West Berlin, demonstrates through his works an intense interest in the divergent identities and cultures of the two Germanys. In the novel *The Wall Jumper* (1982) and in *The German Comedy* (1990), Schneider addresses, often in a comical fashion, the differences between Easterners and Westerners. While both of these works provide valuable insight, the most relevant to this study is his 1999 novel *Eduard's Homecoming*.

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<sup>35</sup> Schulze, *Simple Stories*, 280.

In the novel, the protagonist Eduard, a German-born scientist who grew up in Berlin but lives in California with his American wife Jenny and their children, returns to Germany's capital city to claim an apartment building on the Eastern side inherited from his grandfather, who may or may not have used his position in the Nazi party to force a Jewish family to sell it for a fraction of its value. Schneider uses this situation as an opportunity both to address current and ongoing issues of identity caused by reunification and to reflect not only on the history of divided Germany but the Nazi past as well. Many of the questions he raises through various situations in the novel provide a great deal of insight into these themes.

The most immediately noticeable element in *Eduard's Homecoming* is the protagonist's sympathy for former citizens of the GDR. Reflecting on the fact that his new job at a research institute in East Berlin was provided at the expense of an Easterner, Eduard comments:

Here was a pampered and, until yesterday unemployed Western academic who had doubtless usurped the job of an East German colleague at least as competent as himself and had nothing to offer but pretensions. His complaints identified him as a representative of the German species that mistook its postwar good fortune, geographically speaking, for talent.<sup>36</sup>

This comment indicates a criticism on the part of Schneider not only of the widespread influx of Westerners at Eastern academic institutions but also of a perceived Western arrogance enabled only by "postwar good fortune." The statement also suggests the author's willingness to engage in self-criticism, lending validity to his observations. Schneider later uses a similar line of thought in order to address the topics of collaboration and resistance, one of the most powerful themes in the novel.

First, however, Schneider's commentary on the "catastrophe" of the demise of the GDR and subsequent reunification merit some consideration. Schneider acknowledges, as he had in previous works, the sometimes comical differences between people in the two Germanys, but his

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<sup>36</sup> Peter Schneider, *Eduard's Homecoming*. Translated by John Brownjohn. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000) 7-8.

perceptions reach beyond the superficial. In a key passage, Eduard recounts his wife Jenny's reaction to the fall of the Berlin Wall:

She regarded the happy release of all these long-oppressed people as a... seizure of the West by the East that would destroy the precarious, insular cosmopolitanism of West Berlin. What would come to pass, doubtless applauded by the unsuspecting West Berliners, was nothing more nor less than the Germanization of their city.<sup>37</sup>

The last sentence is a subtle yet powerful reference to the notion that, because it had not been influenced to any great extent by Western culture, the East contained a more authentically "German" culture, one that contrasted sharply with the "Americanized" West. Certainly, Easterners had long been told officially that they lived in the "true, antifascist" Germany, which of course had the effect of preventing any sort of meaningful reckoning with the Nazi past because the GDR's official position was that all who were responsible for the Nazi period were in the West.<sup>38</sup> The above statement, then, perhaps represents a concession on the part of Schneider to the notion that Easterners were possibly the true representatives of German culture, although the author certainly does not indicate any sort of acknowledgement of a superiority of the GDR government. The author's criticism of the socialist East German state is quite clear in comments such as "one impartial look at the state of [East Berlin] buildings should have sufficed to predict the collapse of socialism in action long before it occurred."<sup>39</sup>

Unlike Eastern writers, who demonstrate a concern for the partial or total absorption and annihilation of a unique East German identity following reunification, Schneider has Eduard express a fear that Eastern culture will negatively affect the West, especially in Berlin:

On what did they base their belief that the West had won? Wasn't it far more likely that the morsel of the West on display in West Berlin would now be sucked into the vortex of the East?...Had [East Germans] genuinely become democrats overnight?...What about the hatred of capitalism drummed into them since childhood, their obedience to superiors...unavowed anti-Semitism...mistrust of foreigners...defiant feeling of

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<sup>37</sup> Schneider, *Eduard's Homecoming*, 51.

<sup>38</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999) 156-157.

<sup>39</sup> Schneider, *Eduard's Homecoming*, 17.

superiority, their unsublimated urge to redeem others? What did the sheltered West Germans, who'd never had to fight for anything, have to pit against those energy-charged orphans of socialism?<sup>40</sup>

This fear, almost the complete opposite of that of the Eastern writers discussed above, further demonstrates the stark contrast in literary perception between East and West. Günter Grass' understanding of reunification and German identity will later provide another key example of this.

The most powerful issue raised by Schneider in *Eduard's Homecoming* is the nature of collaboration and resistance. The author uses the examples of Eduard's grandfather Egon and the protagonist's superior at the research institution, Rürup, to explore this important theme. In order to distance themselves from the past, Eduard's family had told him little about his grandfather, who was a member of the Nazi party. While attempting to assess the legitimacy of his claim to the apartment building in East Berlin, Eduard and Jenny discuss the topic of his grandfather. Jenny, an outside observer, becomes extremely frustrated with her husband's lack of knowledge about his ancestor and what she perceives as an inability or refusal to confront one's familial history:

“So who *did* you settle accounts with?” Jenny snapped. “With an age group? With some aliens who'd landed in Germany by accident? How did you yourselves turn up in Germany? Like angels who tumbled...onto that particular patch of ground? You Germans can't even tell your children who bequeathed them their red hair or talent for music or predisposition to diabetes!”<sup>41</sup>

This statement represents a powerful self-criticism on the part of Schneider of what he perceives as a willingness only to come to terms with a generation's past misdeeds but not with one's own family, whose guilt could perhaps be ascribed to oneself despite having no involvement in past crimes. Another possible interpretation is that Schneider intends to criticize also the Nazi period's disproportionately large place in German history, which often overshadows nearly everything that had occurred before or after it and precluding for many the possibility of any sort

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<sup>40</sup> Schneider, *Eduard's Homecoming*, 52.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

of positive exploration of the past, unencumbered by a necessity to address and apologize for Nazism.

In addition to the issue of coming to terms with one's familial past, Schneider strongly considers how collaboration and resistance are remembered and often twisted to suit selfish interests. The initial focal point of the character Eduard's consideration of this issue stems from the situation of his superior, Dr. Rürup. Eduard describes Rürup, who refused to inform for the Stasi at international science conventions and was subsequently blackballed, stating:

He felt rather like those Germans whom the Red Army had appointed to be mayors, judges, factory managers, and school heads half a century ago. Generally speaking, their sole proof of competence was the fact that they'd refrained from collaborating with the Nazis or had even opposed them.<sup>42</sup>

After investigating further his grandfather's past and discovering that his forbear had actually, in buying the apartment building, been trying to help the Jewish family who owned it, even allowing them to stay there for free, Eduard begins to wonder why his grandfather's act of resistance had gone unnoticed. He asks Rürup, who has been largely ostracized by his fellow Eastern colleagues, why people "feel vaguely threatened by the discovery that there had been one or two courageous people...among the cheering conformists?"<sup>43</sup> In his response, Rürup states that:

[The conformists] feel that they had no choice, and they want to preserve that sensation... The petty dissidents who...opposed the regime spontaneously, without any plan or organized backing-*they're* the spoilsports, *they're* the ones who injure the conformists' self-esteem most of all. They disprove the myth that anyone who failed to conform was doomed...In the Nazi period, no one who refused to shoot a civilian was ever put up against a wall for disobeying orders. Likewise, no one who refused an invitation to collaborate with the Stasi-and many did just that-had to fear for his life or liberty.<sup>44</sup>

In this dialogue, Schneider has issued a powerful criticism of those who rely on the excuse that they had no choice but to collaborate with the Nazi or SED regimes by illustrating in the

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<sup>42</sup> Schneider, *Eduard's Homecoming*, 86.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 236.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 238.

examples of Eduard's grandfather and Rürup what the author perceives as a tendency to bury or ignore examples of resistance in order to maintain the myth that there was no alternative to collaboration. Such instances of resistance serve as both a constant reminder and a silent accusation against those who collaborated and, thus, are often overlooked for fear that they might invalidate popular rationalizations for supporting either the Nazi or SED regimes. This is perhaps the most powerful idea in *Eduard's Homecoming*, as it deals with the continuing question of how best to deal with and come to terms with the past, and Schneider's literary exploration has done an excellent job of conveying the significance of such issues.

The most prominent Western writer to voice his opinion of reunification and subsequent issues of German history and identity is undoubtedly Günter Grass. As discussed in the previous chapter, Grass has long concerned himself with reconciling German identity with the negative aspects of the nation's history, especially the Nazi period. In 1990, he openly opposed reunification, claiming that such an arrangement was "doomed to failure" in light of the atrocities "summed up in the image of Auschwitz."<sup>45</sup> Grass' perspective of prospective reunification demonstrates an obvious irrationality, however, as he insisted in his essay "Writing after Auschwitz" that "no late-born benevolence can modify or dispel the experience that we, the criminals, with our victims, had as a unified Germany."<sup>46</sup> The author's collective definition of all Germans as criminals represents, as Mary Fulbrook argues, a view "that is deeply a-historical, in not even considering the contingency of political developments."<sup>47</sup> For Grass, there can never be a total reconciliation with the past, or a point at which the Germans as a collective nation can be completely absolved of past atrocities. Grass also expressed a concern that East Germany would be dominated by the West in a reunification that he believed would amount to colonization.<sup>48</sup> The author argued that such a situation would only serve to create resentment

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<sup>45</sup> Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust*, 187.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 187.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 188.

<sup>48</sup> Kienbaum, et al, "German Unification..." 227.

and prevent successful reunification.<sup>49</sup> A viable alternative, according to Grass, would be a loose confederation of the two states that would eliminate the Iron Curtain while preventing the sort of cultural envelopment he envisioned as part of reunification. Of course, Grass' arguments were largely moot, as the rapid process of reunification was already under way, and it is doubtful that his suggested arrangement would have been any more viable than the incorporation of the five states of the former GDR into the Federal Republic.

Since reunification, Grass has produced several works that address the issues of German identity and history. Several of these bring to light interesting issues, such as that of the situation for German-speaking residents of Danzig, now Gdansk, in *The Call of the Toad* (1992), or the various parallels in German history in *Too Far Afield* (1995), but his most recent novel, *Crabwalk* (2002), is probably the most precise in identifying a particular problem of historical perception and requires a brief examination.

Although the issue of reunification is not the primary focus of *Crabwalk*, the action is centered around Paul Pokriefe, a journalist, and his son who has become a right-wing extremist as a result of his obsession with recognizing the German victims of World War II as embodied by the sinking by a Soviet submarine of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, a former *Kraft durch Freude* cruise ship carrying refugees away from Danzig in January 1945. Paul's mother Tulla, who was a minor character in Grass' *Cat and Mouse*, gave birth aboard the doomed ship and was rescued along with her child.

The central theme of the novel is that if the older generation fails to be completely honest about all aspects of the past, both positive and negative, others can twist the past toward their own purposes. Grass himself has been guilty of focusing primarily on German guilt, as evinced by his use of Auschwitz in his argument against reunification, but in *Crabwalk* he appears to recognize the need to report more completely the past in order to avoid its possible distortion. This represents a drastic change in direction for the author, who along with his associates on the

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<sup>49</sup> Kienbaum, et al, "German Unification..." 227.

left had long believed that the crimes committed by Germans during World War II precluded any possibility of a discussion of German suffering.<sup>50</sup>

It is extremely significant that Paul's mother Tulla, whose influence has contributed to and perhaps even begun her grandson's interest in German suffering, lived in East Germany (Paul had fled to West Berlin in 1961), because of the especially pronounced lack of awareness of, or any sense of responsibility for, the Nazi past in the GDR. While there was extensive discussion and acceptance of collective responsibility for past atrocities in the West, the official position in the GDR was that, since it was a proletarian workers' state, all those responsible for the Nazi period were in the Federal Republic, essentially absolving Easterners of any responsibility and avoiding any sort of meaningful confrontation with the Nazi past.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps this fact indicates Grass' concern about rising right-wing and anti-Semitic movements in the East. Certainly, *Crabwalk* demonstrates the danger of failing to confront the past in its entirety, especially through the example of Konny, Paul's son.

Konny's passionate argument for the recognition of German suffering appears at first to illuminate a long-overdue issue and encourage a more complete examination of the past. However, Grass makes sure to demonstrate the danger of Konny's beliefs, which are fueled by the sort of anti-Semitism that has been especially prevalent in post-reunification East Germany, when the young man murders another youth whom he met online and who claimed to be Jewish. Konny intends this act to represent a retribution not only for the victims of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, but for the ship's namesake, a Nazi official murdered by a Jewish medical student. Grass intends this incident of cold and calculated murder to demonstrate the extreme extent to which a partial denial of the past can lead, and implicit in this notion is the belief that, as Robert Moeller has identified, an ongoing awareness of and honest confrontation with the past is necessary in order

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<sup>50</sup> Robert Moeller, "Sinking Ships, the Lost *Heimat* and Broken Taboos: Günter Grass and the Politics of Memory in Contemporary Germany." *Contemporary European History*, v. 12 n. 2 2003. 162.

<sup>51</sup> Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust*, 157.

to prevent certain aspects from being appropriated by fringe groups such as the right-wing *Republikaner* party and others.<sup>52</sup>

Grass' insistence on an honest confrontation with the past is echoed in Christa Wolf's most recent work, *In the Flesh* (2002). In this novella Wolf, who as mentioned before experienced a great deal of consternation at the demise of the GDR, appears finally to come to terms with the past. *In the Flesh* is the first-person account of an extremely ill woman in an Eastern hospital near the end of the GDR. The patient suffers from a mysterious ailment that the doctors attempt to cure in a variety of ways. It is clear that the sick woman represents Wolf's understanding of the fading East German socialist state, and her criticism of the "doctors", which represent the increasingly desperate SED leaders who tried in vain to preserve it, seems to reinforce her old argument that the socialist ideal was worthwhile but poorly implemented. While it is certainly true that the author still appears to maintain some of her previous positions, *In the Flesh* represents a more honest appraisal on the part of Wolf of the particular history and demise of her country.

As she fades in and out of consciousness, the main character muses on a variety of subjects, most of which appear disjointed or allegorical due to her condition. Wolf's understanding of the fundamental nature of the GDR is most evident in an exchange between the patient and one of the nurses:

[The suffering] really has to be the work of the devil. I think that's a really good idea. It's just possible that it's simply the work of the devil...But which devil? Listen, I say: Is there a devil that always wills good and always does evil?<sup>53</sup>

The devil in this passage is clearly the GDR, as it had, for Wolf, failed to implement ideal socialism as she and others envisioned it, creating instead the tense atmosphere of repression and paranoia addressed by the author in *What Remains*. In the same passage, the patient recalls asking her friend Urban what happens "when petty demons appropriate the dreams?" to which he

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<sup>52</sup> Moeller, "Sinking Ships, the Lost *Heimat* and Broken Taboos...", 181.

<sup>53</sup> Christa Wolf, *In the Flesh*. Translated by John S. Barrett. (Boston: David R. Godine, 2005) 81.

replies “What then? Then reason is in big trouble.”<sup>54</sup> Here the author clearly draws a parallel between the SED leadership and the “petty demons”, and although this passage may signify that Wolf has still not completely accepted the end of the socialist dream, her comment that the “devil” always “does evil” represents at least some degree of acceptance of the notion that the GDR was beyond reform.

The novella’s resolution can be viewed in two ways. The patient, who has finally been healed and is to be released from the hospital, is pleased to have finally made it through her tribulations. This could easily be read as an expression on the part of Wolf of a continuing belief in the ideal of socialism, despite the demise of the GDR. Wolf’s “devil” parallel might suggest that socialism in Germany could still be a viable option if implemented correctly, and this notion would be consistent with her earlier views as discussed above.

More likely, however, the fact that the patient recovers indicates both Wolf’s acceptance of the demise of the GDR as well as the idea that East Germany continues to exist as a cultural entity despite the end of its existence as a separate political state. Several passages indicate that the author has finally accepted that the GDR as a political body was beyond reform, regardless of the merit of its intentions. In a discussion with the patient, a pathologist states that “If there’s anything that doesn’t have the least influence on what we do or don’t do or what happens to us, it’s doubtless our intentions, don’t you agree?”<sup>55</sup> In this statement the author appears to admit that her views on working toward the socialist ideal were perhaps irrelevant, as is evinced by their highly flawed implementation in the GDR. Wolf admits, through the patient, that she regrets the end of the socialist experiment in a conversation when she asks the nurse if she “knew that the pain one felt over a loss was the measure of the hope one had had beforehand.”<sup>56</sup>

However, Wolf implies along with the regret a sense of acceptance in alluding to the “loss” of the GDR. Because her narrative is intentionally allegorical, it is difficult to ascertain the precise

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<sup>54</sup> Wolf, *In the Flesh*, 81.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 114.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 125.

message of these statements. In light of her past views, it is certainly conceivable that the author still maintains her belief in a workable socialism, but the imagery in the novella seems to lean slightly toward a final acceptance of the end of the socialist dream.

The end of the GDR and German reunification provided a new opportunity for authors to examine the nation's history and changing identity through literature. Some, such as Wolf, have attempted to come to terms with the dissonance between the ideal and reality of the GDR past. Other eastern writers, including Brussig and Schulze, demonstrate a concern with preserving the unique East German historical experience and identity in the face of incorporation into the Federal Republic. Western authors such as Schneider and Grass have used reunification as an opportunity to reflect not only on the new and evolving German identity created by reunification, but also on how best to deal with the ever-present concern of reconciling the Nazi, and now also SED, past with the present. These issues will be significant concerns in Germany for the foreseeable future, and literature will certainly continue to contribute by providing a means for people to confront the past and work toward a workable collective identity made possible through reunification.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Through nearly sixty years of literature, Germans have attempted to define their identity in light of such catastrophes as the Nazi period and the end of the GDR. Each of these situations marked the end of a society, bringing the issue of identity to the foreground. Authors in different periods and from differing circumstances used the particulars of their own perspectives when dealing with the problem of defining German identity and conveying the realities of the nation's collective experience of catastrophes in literature. Many themes recur throughout post-World War II German literature, from the end of the Nazi regime to the present, demonstrating historical continuity and highlighting important problems in continuing attempts among Germans to define their national identity. The question of who represents the "real" Germany is perhaps the most consistent and important theme in post-war German literature because it is deeply connected with the perception of identity.

Thomas Mann attempted to explain, both for himself and for others, how it was possible that, in a country as renowned for its cultural and intellectual achievements as Germany, ardent, racist nationalism as represented by Hitler and the Nazi party could enjoy widespread support or at least acquiescence. Mann's Germany was the classic Germany of famous thinkers such as Nietzsche and Hegel or composers such as Beethoven and Bach, and individuals such as these, for the author, represented the "real" Germany. What Mann tries to do in *Doctor Faustus* is to reconcile his Germany with Hitler's Third Reich, and the powerful themes in the novel convey his sense of frustration hinging on despair concerning events in his native country while explaining, through the parallel of Adrian Leverkühn, how an overwhelming desire for success or power can sometimes lead to bargains with the "demonic."

The emerging writers of the late 1940s through the early 1960s attempted to establish a new literary tradition, based on the belief that only they, through their war experiences, could legitimately speak for the nation through literature. Authors such as Borchert and Richter set themselves apart from Thomas Mann, who had emigrated, by asserting that only those who

experienced firsthand (and in most cases, participated to some degree in) the devastation of the Nazi period could address these themes in literature. In other words, for the authors of the immediate post-war era, only those who remained during the Nazi period could represent the “real” Germany. Although in most cases they had implicitly supported the regime through military service, the authors largely believed that “inner emigration,” that is, acquiescing to the Nazi regime while inwardly opposing it, provided a valid justification for their claim of literary authority because they remained and suffered the indignities of the Nazi period while others “fled.”

Another important element in the emerging post-war literature was the tendency to ascribe a disproportionate majority of blame to the older generation. Presumably, the previous generation also represented Germany, but most writers conveniently dismissed this concept through the notion of a *Stunde null*, a “zero hour” that represented a new beginning in literature. Accordingly, in addition to confronting and attempting to explain the past, the writers of the younger generation, especially Grass and Böll, manage in their works to express a powerful uncertainty about the future, although sometimes they appear perhaps overly pessimistic.

The end of the GDR represented a different sort of catastrophe, and the resultant problems of reestablishing a unified German identity after forty years of highly divergent socialization have provided recent authors an opportunity to identify and evaluate this issue in fiction as well as to further explore the ever-present questions of the “real” Germany and “inner emigration.” Christa Wolf is perhaps the best example of this most modern manifestation of the “inner emigration” argument. In *What Remains*, the author is highly critical both of the regime and of herself but also implies her own qualifications as an “inner emigrant” who secretly opposed the implementation, if not the ultimate goals, of her government’s socialist ideology. Peter Schneider also addresses this concept, suggesting that those who claim “inner emigration” are antagonistic toward those who resisted, either passively or actively, because such examples serve as a silent but constant reminder of their inaction. In addition, the author manages to highlight the fact that East Germans believed themselves to represent a “real” Germany,

untainted by Western, and especially American, influences, recalling previous arguments by Mann, Richter, Borchert, and others.

Eastern writers have also sought to force a confrontation with their collective past, including the pervasive issue of Stasi and other forms of collaboration, and to provide understanding of the unique Eastern identity that had developed over forty years of socialist rule and continues to manifest itself in such forms as “*Ostalgie*,” a wave of nostalgia for all things GDR. Western authors have also provided valuable insight into the political, social, and economic problems of reunification, and many, including Schneider, have used the opportunity to reexamine and draw parallels to the Nazi past as well.

Common to the three periods discussed in this study is a desire not only to understand but to explain historical questions such as, “Why were the Nazis so popular?” or “If everyone was opposed to it, why did the GDR last for forty years?” In many instances, such as in the literature of Mann, Grass, or Wolf, a work is probably written as a means for the author to personally resolve an inner desire to understand a particular problem or to justify their own actions, as much as it is to illuminate and explain the problem to the reading public. Because all of the authors discussed in this study were personally affected by the various catastrophes that they address in their writings, their literature represents a valuable source of knowledge, regardless of whether the events they describe are completely factual. The end result of these authors’ attempts to understand significant historical problems and issues of identity in Germany is that they not only provide insight into these themes but also convey a powerful sense of how deeply they have affected and continue to concern a large portion of the German population.

It is perhaps necessary to consider briefly the future of German identity. Germans have always been, perhaps as a result of not having formed a true nation-state until 1871, regionally-minded, where one’s local affiliations often take precedence over national ones. This mentality ensures that, although the political reunification of Germany took place within a matter of months, the process of true cultural and social reunification will last for many years. Perhaps the most relevant historical parallel to the current situation in Germany is the United States

following the Civil War and Reconstruction. While regional affiliations have certainly not disappeared in the United States (nor will they most likely ever do so), the cultural and social rifts have largely disappeared over the last 130-odd years, aided in no small part by new standardizing agents of culture such as radio, television, and the internet. If we can accept the United States' experience of division and reunification as a relevant and similar example, then the process of true reunification in Germany will be a long and arduous one. It is almost certain that, in the future, German authors will continue to address issues of identity, both old and new, in literature, providing a valuable tool for any who seek to explain and understand German culture and self-perception.

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**Education**

**Bachelor of Arts in History**, May 2003  
Minor concentration: Japanese

**Master of Arts in History**, December 2005  
Thesis: "Catastrophe and Identity in Post-War German Literature"  
Advisor: Dr. Stephen Fritz

**Teaching Experience**

**East Tennessee State University**  
Teaching assistant, Department of History  
August 2003-May 2004  
Courses:  
    U.S. History since 1877  
    World History to 1500

Graduate instructor, Department of History  
August 2004-May 2005  
Courses taught:  
    U.S. History to 1877

Adjunct faculty, Department of History  
August 2005-December 2005  
Courses taught:  
    World History since 1500 (2 sections)

**Presentations**

**Johnson City Kiwanis Club**  
November 2004  
Johnson City Holiday Inn  
"Observations as a Historian on a Trip to Germany"

**Tennessee Regional Phi Alpha Theta Conference**

February 2005

Tennessee Technological University

“William ‘Lord Haw-Haw’ Joyce and the Ineffectiveness of Nazi English-Language Propaganda” (Received Award: Best Graduate Paper in European History)

**Virginia Regional Phi Alpha Theta Conference**

April 2005

University of Virginia’s College at Wise

“Albert Speer’s Testimony and its Effect on his Sentence at Nuremberg” (Received Award: 1<sup>st</sup> Place Graduate Paper in European History)

**Awards**

Best Graduate Paper in European History, February 2005,  
Tennessee Regional Phi Alpha Theta Conference

1<sup>st</sup> Place-Graduate Paper in European History, April 2005,  
Virginia Regional Phi Alpha Theta Conference

**Honor Societies**

**Phi Alpha Theta (National History Honor Society)**

Alpha Epsilon Epsilon Chapter

2003-present

President, 2003-2004

**Phi Kappa Phi (Cross-discipline National Honor Society)**

Chapter 112

2005-present