

The Twilight of the Public Intellectual: Germany's Literary Intellectuals and the End of the Cold War

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Six weeks after the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001 on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre, the German weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* published an article with the caption: 'Are the towers still standing?' (Schnibben 2001, p. 223). The towers which journalist Cordt Schnibben had in mind were not those of the World Trade Centre but another set of pillars of stability and certainty that had been toppled a decade earlier. He was referring to Germany's writers and intellectuals. It had not taken long for the events of September 11 to be turned into an occasion for expressing disappointment with the nation's intellectuals. Schnibben's point is simple enough: the terrorist attacks, as worrying as they were, had alerted Germans to a perennial blight on the post-war intellectual landscape: the failure of the country's writers and social commentators, intellectuals and philosophers. What was particularly disturbing was that the country's intellectual classes appeared to have no answers as to why the attacks had occurred. Germany's intellectuals had not only failed to foresee the disaster that struck on September 11, they had been unable to offer an explanation for the attacks or to provide an analysis of the causes. To reinforce the point that this was a collective failure, Schnibben singles out public figures by name: 'We have read Günter Grass in the *FAZ*, Peter Schneider in the *Woche*, Botho Strauß in the *Spiegel*, Diedrich Diederichsen in der *taz*, Alexander Kluge in the *SZ (Süddeutsche)* and were amazed that they were as clueless as we were' (p. 223). As the 'advisors of the powerful' and advocates for all manner of things, for 'Ostpolitik and Vietnam, for the emergency laws and Chile, abortion and Biafra, nuclear energy, Nicaragua and rearmament, always to hand whenever the world's conscience was called for' (p. 223), Germany's intellectuals had failed the nation once again.

The *Spiegel* article invokes a trope of failure and betrayal that has been a habitual feature of German intellectual life in both the Federal Republic of Germany and its now defunct socialist other half, the German Democratic Republic. In West Germany attacks on the integrity and politics of intellectuals were made with predictably regularity under the conservative governments of Adenauer and Erhard in the 1960s,

during the student movements in 1968, in connection with left-wing terrorism in the 1970s right up until the end of the 1980s. Each change of government was accompanied by a shift in intellectual climate, as the incoming political parties favoured those intellectuals, historians and philosophers who allied themselves with their cause and discredited those others associated with the opposition (Evans 1989, p. 15ff). In the GDR as well the intelligentsia was repeatedly accused by the ruling Party of failing to live up to its expectations and of letting the populace down. The intelligentsia was the object of political witch hunts and show trials, it was subjected to secret police surveillance and undercover operations, censored and imprisoned, forced into exile and towards the end the more unruly members of the critical intelligentsia were sold off to the West in exchange for money. Intellectuals in the East were moreover blamed for economic impasses and intractable political problems, they were regularly forced to confess to trumped-up ideological crimes and their works were pilloried and denounced in the highest circles of power.

The forty-year long division of Germany into a capitalist Western-style democracy and a Soviet-style socialist republic had resulted in radically different conceptions of the public intellectual and diverging notions of the 'concerned' intellectual. When the two paradigms from the two Germanies collided with the unification of East and West in 1990 the conflicts were intense, protracted and highly personalised. German unification may have saved East German intellectuals from direct state interference but it did not put an end to the reproaches of betrayal and the accusations of irrelevance. On the contrary, the end of the Cold War saw in many respects an intensification of the rhetoric of failure, fuelled by a diffuse and widespread desire to find new scapegoats on whom to vent public disapprobation with unification. This was most in evidence in the months and years immediately following the collapse of the GDR in November 1989. The dissolution of the SED and the breaching of the Wall in November 1989 precipitated a rather ugly showdown of particularly dramatic proportions in the German print media during which many respected and highly esteemed public figures came under sustained and at times vicious attack. The main target of the attacks were those critical but loyal East Germany's writers and public intellectuals, those frequently referred to as the 'Dagebliebenen' ('Those who remained behind'), who had opted to stay in the former GDR and who had come, somewhat unfairly, to be more or less identified with the regime. Not only were

aspersions cast on the sorts of choices they had made in life, choices such as whether to go into exile or whether to stay in the GDR; the assaults extended to their entire life works and their integrity and morality as public figures.

German unification was thus to become a watershed not only for the most prominent cohort of East German writers who for various reasons did not go into exile; it was a watershed for literary intellectuals in both states. In general terms, it precipitated a crisis for engaged or concerned intellectuals of socialist, leftist or left-liberal persuasion on both sides of the East-West divide. First and foremost, the end of really existing socialism posed a radical challenge to the East German intelligentsia. This in turn implicated many West German writers, who found themselves embroiled in the debates about their East German countrymen and -women and unable to keep out of the crossfire. By and large, however, by far the greatest brunt of the blows was borne by intellectuals from the East. The debates about intellectuals were significant for a number of reasons. First, they forced journalists and publicists, writers and literary historians to rethink their understanding of the role of the intellectual in society. Second, they promoted discussions of the function of literature in a post-communist era. Third, they posed a challenge to the post-war consensus regarding the role of the writer and politics, hastening a reconfiguration of the post-war 'literary field' and the intellectual classes.

The focus of this paper will be on the question of whether German unification resulted in a wholesale retreat of intellectuals from politics and engagement with social issues, as the rhetoric of failure would indicate, or whether the key debates of the period can be read instead as a sign that Germany is on the road to becoming a more 'normal' European nation. Before returning to this question at the end of this paper I wish first to provide a broad historical and theoretical context for my discussion of the role of the concerned intellectual in Germany, before offering an overview of the respective functions of literary intellectuals in both German states in the post-war period. I will then address a series of key debates and discussions in 1989 and the early nineteen-nineties that were responsible for changing the forms of engagement in intellectual debates in post-unification German society.

Charges of failure, betrayal and irrelevance levelled at the intellectual class require careful contextualisation and need to be measured against the various ‘horizons of expectations’ of the historical period in question. In the case of Germany, it would certainly hold true that the higher the nation’s expectations the greater the disappointment when the designated ‘crystal ball gazer’ or ‘high priest’ of the nation, as German intellectuals are invariably seen, fails to see any more of the future than anyone else. Laments and accusations of failure among the intelligentsia have become, some would argue, something of a parlour game among Germany’s intellectual classes themselves. In many respects, they are the result of infighting or factional warfare within the ‘intellectual field,’ as various cohorts of intellectuals fight for cultural hegemony and seek to negotiate intellectual orthodoxies and heterodoxies (Müller 2000, p. 13). These ‘culture wars’ over the role of intellectuals are fought out less between different professional groupings in the intellectual field, such as between writers and journalists, historians and literary theorists, academics and journalists than between different political factions of the intelligentsia.

Germany has a long tradition of elevating its literary intellectuals to iconographic status that extends back to the Age of Enlightenment and the Golden Age of German Classicism. In his famous 1784 essay on ‘Was ist Aufklärung’ (‘What is Enlightenment’), German philosopher Immanuel Kant explicitly exhorted scholars (*Gelehrte*) to make *public* use of their faculties of reason, rather than *private* use, for the greater public good (Kant 1922, p. 168). Even today both left-wing and right-wing nationalism owes much to a largely unspoken ‘myth of origin,’ that can be traced back to Herder’s notion of the *Kulturnation* and German cultural nationalism and the belief that Germany is a nation of ‘Dichter und Denker,’ of writers and thinkers, poets and philosophers. By the same token, it should not be forgotten that Germany has an equally long tradition of persecuting its intellectuals, of monitoring their activities, censoring their writing and of forcing them into exile. It was for instance this counter-tradition that originally gave rise to the figure of the public oppositional intellectual who first made an appearance during the Metternich Restoration of 1815-1848. The turbulent years of the Weimar Republic necessitated the recreation of this figure of the oppositional intellectual as someone who was forced into exile and who came to see it as his/her public duty to oppose power and its abuses in fascism.

In the post-war era, these two opposing traditions of intellectual life — of idealization and demonisation — have continued to exist side by side in uneasy symbiosis. On the one hand, both post-war German states habitually looked back with pride on past achievements, drawing much of their sense of national identity from the rich intellectual traditions of 18th and 19th century Germany, even though each state emphasised different parts of the heritage in the name of vastly different political and ideological agendas. Both Germanies publicly invoked the national cultural heritage (*Kulturerbe*) through commemorative events such as anniversaries of the births and deaths of important German writers, thinkers and philosophers, competing in this way for ownership of German cultural traditions. It was logical that such reverence for the cultural heritage fostered a certain degree of respect for the makers of these traditions. On the other hand, however, there remained the massive stumbling block of the Holocaust in German national consciousness. The Holocaust undeniably dealt Germans' faith in their intellectual leaders and national traditions a severe blow that has left its stamp on all subsequent intellectual endeavour. In particular it stymied neo-conservative and nationalistic attempts to establish positive continuities with the German past. While oppositional intellectuals were open about expressing their shame for what their forefathers had done, conservatives in West Germany saw the Holocaust as a hindrance to fostering greater national pride in the polity (Moses 2001, p. 94-95). In West Germany, expressions of national pride, when tolerated by the Left, have been restricted to pride in German intellectual traditions in the fields of culture and the arts, philosophy and music, poetry and opera, which is encapsulated in the notion of the *Kulturnation*. Particularly in foreign cultural policy this quiet pride in the cultural achievements of the past has been translated into the sort of benign cultural imperialism that has brought us institutions such as the Goethe Institute and research fellowship schemes such as the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Generally speaking, however, it was far harder to find explicit expressions of national pride in the former Federal Republic of Germany than it was to witness a highly circumspect and frequently overtly critical stance towards the country's writers, philosophers and poets. While Germans' scepticism towards the figure of the public intellectual may well be regarded a healthy sign of a functioning democracy, in many respects it is indicative of a national predilection for over-investing in the abilities of intellectuals.

In the former West Germany writers were regularly chastised and berated in the media, less so for their silence and passivity than for their failings, their lack of understanding and timely insight and, somewhat surprisingly, for their lack of foresight. Germany's intellectuals arguably proved to be a constant source of disappointment because the nation had come to have such high expectations of them. Much of the discourse of failure and inadequacy serves, perhaps for this reason, a purely rhetorical function, helping to create an air of high drama and a sense of impending crisis as a catalyst for action. The 'hothouse' atmosphere that the media regularly induce and, indeed, produce at various turning points in the political life of the nation, has itself become something of a regular occurrence. While the media obviously see some benefit in perpetually re-staging this crisis of intellectuals, we need to be wary of taking statements of irrelevance and disinterest entirely at face value. Intellectual debates often serve the political purposes of the incoming government of the day (as can be argued in the Historians' Dispute) and can be staged for a range of instrumental reasons, such as the desire to create a scandal around the publication of a new novel by a contentious author or the need to boost flagging sales of a newspaper. It should not be forgotten that for the author of a polemical piece published in the weekly *Der Spiegel* there are no mean financial rewards to be had.

One of the enduring effects of the well-documented moral failure of intellectuals during the Third Reich has been, with good reason, to raise the moral stakes. The Holocaust could not help but heighten awareness of the fallibility of intellectuals as human beings. Charges of failure can therefore be seen as the necessary corollary to lifting the bar for moral-ethical action and may ultimately tell us more about how persuasive the moral imperative to remain vigilant after the Holocaust in Germany became after Second World War. The amount of public invective that is vented on the figure of the concerned or engaged intellectual, whether by journalists, politicians or by fellow-intellectuals, has perhaps less to say about the actual failings of intellectuals than it does about the importance placed in Germany today on fostering a vigilant culture of memory, guilt and responsibility.

Michel Foucault has written that the post-war era saw the demise of the 'universal' intellectual and the rise of the 'specific' intellectual. The 'universal' intellectual used typically to be a writer who was the bearer of universal values and who spoke as a

‘master of truth and justice’ (Foucault 1984, p. 67). After the catastrophe of the Second World War, Foucault argues, the universalist commentator was replaced by the specialist who derives his or her authority from specialist knowledge in a range of disciplines. The activity of writing is no longer as important as expert knowledge and specialist know-how. Disciplinary knowledge such as biology and physics become, according to Foucault, privileged zones of the formation of the new personage of the specific intellectual. Concomitant with development was the ‘disappearance of the figure of the “great writer”’ (p. 71).

In both West and East Germany, Foucault’s thesis appears to hold true, but with one major qualification. In the post-war era the moral-ethical figure of the universal intellectual, who represented the conscience of the nation, was preserved for one domain of specialization and professionalization, namely the literary field. In both German states literature became a fiercely protected and cultivated zone of intellectual activity that made claims to universality. This is not to say that historians and philosophers have not played a significant role in shaping the intellectual debates and culture of Germany — indeed philosophers such as Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas have been instrumental in framing the terms of many post-war debates as have conservative historians such as Ernst Nolte, Andreas Hillgruber, Michael Stürmer and liberals such as Hans-Ulrich Wehler in the Historians’ dispute — but these intellectuals have intervened in debates in their capacity as specialist intellectuals, not as ‘universal’ ones. Their engagement has been based on the specialist knowledges they possess in their capacity as professional historians and philosophers. It appears to have only been in the area of literature that intellectuals were permitted to comment on issues that go beyond their competence as writers of fiction. The special nature of this zone was such that the national writer of fiction was permitted, indeed, actively encouraged, to act out the anachronistic part of the universal intellectual. The writer spoke out on general matters of moral concern to the nation and not merely on matters pertaining to art and literature. That is, the writer was permitted and indeed expected to comment on areas in which s/he had no specialist competence or knowledge, as if the act of writing literature in some way gave him or her privileged access to the truth. The writer’s opinion was sought out especially on political issues, as if there were an intrinsic connection and natural affinity between literature and politics. The truth to which the writer had access was

one, moreover, to which the nation's political leaders were often not privy. Hence, the writer was needed to compensate for the shortcomings of politics and politicians, either to make sure that politicians remained aware of their historical responsibilities or to humanize the cold, cut-throat world of 'mere' politics.

Before turning to the debates about the purported demise of the public intellectual in 1990, it will be necessary to first give a brief overview of the respective status of the writer in East and West Germany along with an appreciation of the very different constraints under which writers in both countries laboured prior to the collapse of communism in 1989. I will attempt to position the meta-commentary in Germany about the place and time for intellectuals in society within the broader trend of what Zygmunt Bauman, Richard Rorty and a whole host of others have called the 'disengagement of the knowledge classes' with social issues. In a collection of recent essays, Bauman asks whether the current 'gospel of the "end of ideology"' or the "demise of grand narratives" (and overarching them all, of the "end of history") is an act of surrender on the part of the knowledge class or whether it can be seen as a newer version of the "self-organic" strategy and, accordingly, of that ideology which supplies its justification and *raison d'être*' (Bauman 2001a, p. 197-198). The question to be answered in this context is whether a decade on from unification German intellectuals have become more like their American and European counterparts and hence increasingly self-referential and introspective. Or is the rhetoric of irrelevance and failure simply part of a broader process of normalization whereby writers have become more specialized and hence freer to choose whether to engage in politics or not?

Writers and Politics in East and West Germany 1945-1989

In the post-war reconstruction period both German states looked to its writers for guidance on moral and ethical issues and, increasingly, on questions of day-to-day politics and current affairs. In the case of the first 'Worker's and Peasant's State' on German soil, the German Democratic Republic, writers were afforded a status unparalleled in the Western world and even unmatched in the Eastern bloc. This applied to writers of poetry, fiction, screenplays and drama. From the outset, the literary intelligentsia was burdened with a task of immense national importance in the fledgling new republic. It was the duty of the antifascist writers returning from exile

in Moscow in 1945 to inculcate the populace with the new socialist values and to root out vestiges of fascism and authoritarianism. In relation to the state and its apparatuses, socialist writers were expected to play a key role in state building as well as in the formation and dissemination of state and Party ideology. The ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) demanded partisanship from its writers at all levels of their comportment: in their daily lives as well as in their writings. Partisanship was a central pillar of the dominant socialist realist aesthetic but it was much more than this; it was also an attitude to one's government, even a way of life, that was policed and enforced by various state apparatuses and organs of the Party, mainly by the Ministry for State Security, the Ministry for Culture and the official Writers' Guild. In the first two decades the state apparatuses adopted an overly instrumental attitude to its writers and artists that resulted in strongly didactic and heavy-handed works being written in the 50s and early 60s. While the 1970s and 1980s saw considerable liberalization in the Party's attitudes to the narrow functionalist role it had forced on the arts, literature—as well as the producers of literature—never entirely managed to shed the ideological baggage it was forced to carry (Lewis 1992, pp. 252-255).

Unlike their counterparts in Czechoslovakia and Poland, intellectuals in East Germany continued to adhere to the belief in the reformability of the socialist system and to the viability of a socialist alternative almost up until the end of the Cold War. The reasons for this are complex and have to do partly with the generational differences and partly to do with existence of West Germany and the common fascist past of both countries (Bathrick 1995, p. 10). The persuasiveness of the antifascist discourses of the SED and West German left-wing movements effectively meant that West Germany was never acknowledged, not even by dissidents and trenchant critics of the socialist system, as a desirable alternative to really existing socialism. This was because West Germany was thought to be the natural successor state to Hitler's Germany, due to the dominant association of the time between capitalism and fascism. The SED based its legitimacy on its commitment to the antifascist cause, interweaving antifascist legends into the foundational narrative of the new socialist order. Thus, the antifascism of the SED proved an immensely effective means of binding intellectuals to the socialist project and the Party's socialist utopia. To be socialist meant to be antifascist and to be antifascist meant that intellectuals embraced the socialist dream. To contemplate West Germany and its belief system as an alternative to socialism would be to betray

this antifascist commitment. By declaring itself the heir to antifascist resistance movements, and the antifascist resistance fighters the new heroes of the fledgling nation, the new regime managed to bring its intellectuals on side. Since the logic of this rhetoric necessarily yoked together fascism and capitalism, it conveniently projected all blame for Nazi Germany onto the Federal Republic. As a result, the values of freedom and democracy on offer in the West were regarded with far more scepticism than, say, by dissidents in Poland. Dissidents and ‘critical-loyal’ intellectuals alike, as the term now given to writers like Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller, both continued to work towards a ‘socialism of a third way’ or a socialism with a human face, long after their counterparts in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland had abandoned all hopes for reform.

The Party liked to present an image of the country as a ‘Leseland,’ as a land of voracious readers and writers that had high-brow tastes and disciplined reading habits. As a literary nation, East Germany hoped to be seen as the heir to the great German tradition of poets and philosophers and was keen to be seen to appropriate aspects of this tradition. But cultural politics was extremely selective in its acknowledgment of entire schools of thought and artistic movements, regarding with especial suspicion all forms of modernism, the avantgarde, expressionism and formal experimentation. One problem with the undue importance attributed to literature and the arts was that the socialist writer was constantly at risk of being harnessed to the state’s narrow ideological interests. S/he had to walk a fine line between falling from favour and toadying to the powerful. Public accolades and state interference were the flip sides of the same socialist coin. If co-operation with the state’s ideological goals was not offered freely through a state-subsidized system of inducements, awards and scholarships, it had to be more or less enforced in less subtle ways. Hence, the heights to which state institutions and structures elevated the nation’s writers could be rather precarious places to inhabit. While intellectuals were revered, they were also feared for the power they were imagined to have in influencing the working masses through their works. Their power could all too easily have unintended and random effects, if not managed properly, just as it could readily be ‘abused’ from the perspective of authorities for the more sinister purposes of ‘political-ideological diversion’ and the spread of ‘ideological deviance’. Furthermore, as literature came increasingly to serve a crucial function in socialist society, one that was not originally intended by the

ruling elites, by acting as surrogates for other forms of media, as substitutes for the lack of a genuine public sphere and for an independent media, the literary field became one of the more powerful fields in East German society.

Herbert Marcuse once described Marxism as that 'danger zone of philosophical transcendence.' When Marxism lost its attraction as a locus of alternative visions for the bulk of East Germany's intellectuals, it was partially left up to art and literature to fill the void. Even as late as the nineteen-eighties literature and lyric poetry were regarded by the Party as a particularly dangerous 'zone of transcendence' with the power to subvert prevailing orthodoxy and to disturb the status quo (Bathrick 1995, p. 70). Literary discourse and literary countercultures were able to offer throughout the history of the GDR a serious challenge to official discourses and contributed to what Bathrick has called the 'erosion of a monosemic public space' (p. 23). For Bathrick the 'power of speech' that he attributes to the written word and to works of literature derives not only from the status of the writer as a public figure. Literature was important in the GDR because 'the power of poetic speech *as a system* evolves precisely from its historically derived potential refusal to partake in the language of power; from its *generic* status as a seemingly genuine voice of alternative meaning' (p.44).

There is some irony in the fact that in the end it was the high value accorded the arts and literary discourse that opened up possibilities for change. This enabled literary elites to forge alternatives and counter discourses that covertly challenged official ideology and dogma. Thus, there were considerable opportunities available to writers to reinterpret ideological imperatives and refashion aesthetic orthodoxy if they were careful and inventive and of course persistent. Many writers experimented with forgotten traditions and genres in such ways that allowed them to broach taboo topics in the form of literary disguises such as historical and biblical allegories and genres such as fantasy, fairy-tale and science fiction (Reifarth 2003). In this way writers were able to give expression to a greater range of concerns of the population and to address issues that were not being met by an unresponsive bureaucracy and a static and dogmatic cultural politics. East Germany produced, for instance, some of the most experimental and interesting feminist literature of the seventies and eighties, by

making innovative and bold use of an eclectic amalgam of fairytale, fantasy, myth and science fiction.

There was, to use a phrase coined and theorized by Stuart Hall, a much larger degree of 're-articulation' present in the East German culture industry than is often admitted. Hall understands articulation to mean the 'continuous struggle to reposition practices within a shifting field of forces, to redefine the possibilities of life by redefining the field of relations – the context – within which a practice is located'. Articulation is, according to Bauman, the way in which we can fashion a different number of stories out of the same experiences and thus enable practices to have different effects or outcomes. In the context of East German intellectuals this meant that writers had a degree of artistic license to embed stories in other narratives and to articulate the lives they told into alternative narrative patterns about life under socialism. This became a fruitful way of 'foiling the censor' and permitting writers to respond to their reader's needs for open discussion about taboo topics.

The East German writer of prose, drama and poetry was in many ways a universal socialist intellectual, who derived his or her authority to speak from far more than his or her talents and skills as a writer alone. Writers commanded respect, both nationally and internationally, because of the perceived influence of their craft. This in turn placed them in a unique moral and political position. But this status was in many respects a straightjacket, since it brought with it a high level of responsibility and many hidden obligations to their readers and to the population at large to speak out about injustice and to oppose oppression. At the national level, the writer was valued like a national treasure or resource who was accorded 'an institutional status' unheard of in the Western world, even though this reputation was partly built on the writer's international renown (p. 30). Writers were spokesmen- and -women on issues of moral and political importance, as well as being the transmitters of cultural policy. This in turn enabled them to use their power and influence to help small groups and individuals who had been imprisoned by the Stasi. Writers like Christa Wolf in fact used their power to act as intermediaries between the population and the Party hierarchy. In the absence of a democratic public sphere, writers were often called upon by less well-established authors or writers in distress to put their connections with power to good use. But the honours so generously bestowed on them, all too

frequently turned into a poisoned chalice. Conformism and a certain degree of complicity were asked in return for the privileges the state showered on its cultural ambassadors, privileges such as the chance to travel to the West, to be published without tedious delays or the right to have a voice in one's own country at all. Writers thus had the dubious distinction of acting both as 'figures of official legitimation and as a source for social change' (p. 24). As long as the GDR existed, the moral obligations on the figure of the writer were limited to helping colleagues in need or more vulnerable writers who did not have the protective safety net of a reputation and a reading public in the West. With the implosion of the GDR, however, these moral obligations were suddenly to shift, as we shall see later.

The relative importance accorded the literary field was, as Bathrick has argued, largely the result of the failure of official ideology to offer binding value systems. Writers were thus able to 'speak a language of 'authenticity' in a moment of crisis' (p. 24). Many such as Christa Wolf, Heiner Müller and Günter Kunert walked a tightrope for much of their careers between dissidence and support for the regime. On many occasions, they found themselves 'on both sides of the power divide,' offering a challenge to official discourse from within and participating in the struggle for more freedom of speech within the socialist paradigm. Only the younger generation of poets and writers from the Prenzlauer Berg eschewed all forms of engagement with official discourse and the language of power. With the exception of the last generation of intellectuals, such as those *Hineingeborene*, all intellectuals and writers were caught in the same socialist double bind. As Bathrick reminds us, the 'fact that some of them had been censored, hunted, questioned, and ridiculed does not belie the fact that they were also – and sometimes even simultaneously – privileged, nurtured, courted, and coddled' (p. 11).

For all their differences, developments in the western half of Germany echoed in some surprising ways those in the East. While literary concerns and politics were perhaps never so far apart as they were in the nineteen-fifties, subsequent eras nevertheless saw the progressive politicisation of literature and its authors. From the late fifties onwards the post-war era was dominated by the generation of writers that was born between 1927 and 1929. This is the generation that Jan-Werner Müller has called, in reference to Helmut Schelsky's eponymously named study about the post-

war generation born around 1930 (Schelsky 1963), the 'sceptical generation' (Müller 2000, pp. 8-9). Also described as the Hitler-Youth generation, the generation of Flak helpers and the 45ers (Moses 2000), the 'sceptical generation' cultivated a 'culture of suspicion' towards all ideologies. This was the generation above all that was profoundly committed to addressing the problem of the 'post-fascist democratic deficit' in West Germany by embracing the values of the *Rechtsstaat* (Moses 2000, p. 246). They saw it as their duty to draw appropriate lessons from the failures of the past, in particular from the quietism of the Weimar anti-democratic mandarins and aristocratic intellectuals who refused to sully their hands by engaging with the world of politics (Müller p. 11). In many ways the rise and fall of the figure of the politicised left-liberal intellectual parallels the rise and fall of the Social Democratic Party and the radicalisation of the young knowledge classes — of students and professionals — at the end of the sixties. Literature and drama started to address directly the themes that had been suppressed under Adenauer: peace, the threat of war, Auschwitz, the unmastered Nazi past, revolution, collective guilt and consumerism.

In West Germany, this cohort of writers assumed, along with the slightly older writers such as Heinrich Böll (born 1917) – without any prompting or coercion from above – increasingly more public roles as spokesmen on all manner of moral and political questions. After the post-war literary scene had been polarised between the apolitical expressionism of Gottfried Benn and the revolutionary idealism of Bertolt Brecht, the sixties saw the rise to prominence of the members of the 'Group 47,' a loose grouping of post-war writers who shared no particular ideologies or political visions other than the determination to break with the fascist past. Writers such as Heinrich Böll (1917-1985), Walter Jens, Günter Grass (1927-), Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1929-) and Martin Walser (1927-) all came to be regarded by various sections of the polity as embodiments of the 'conscience of the nation', a title some wore more reluctantly than others. Like their fellow writers in the East, and perhaps even in unconscious imitation of the legendary communist writer's struggles with authority, they intervened habitually in political debates from the sixties onwards. They commented publicly on diverse issues ranging from the media's treatment of the student movement, the Baader-Meinhof group and left-wing terrorism, the division of Germany, capitalism and the Springer media empire, the arms race and the

deployment of nuclear missiles on German soil, and again in the nineties on asylum seekers, the building of a Holocaust memorial and German reunification in 1990.

West German writers with leftist allegiances came to exist and operate in a curious symbiotic relationship with their counterparts in the East. While working under radically different conditions, they frequently came to mirror and echo the habitus of writers in communist regimes, sometimes to an uncanny degree, railing variously at 'the repressive tolerance' of the West and the 'police state' methods of conservative governments. They even saw themselves as struggling under similar conditions of censorship in what they preferred to refer to as the 'the so-called free West.' They cultivated a critical conscience and rallied behind left-wing political movements and parties. Heinrich Böll protested against the introduction of new emergency laws in 1967-68, lent his support to Soviet dissidents and made election speeches for the SPD in the 1970s. He styled himself as a Christian moralist whose main contribution to politics was through his literary works. He considered his literature to be through and through political and spoke of the 'impossibility of political neutrality in literature' (Böll 1978, p. 484). While he remained coy about his role as conscience of the nation, he remained convinced that writers have a duty to act as a prompt to politicians when these are reluctant to act:

There is the danger that conscience becomes a dried flower in the lapels of different ideologies if politicians do not comprehend that they are the ones who can convert moral pressure into political pressure and if they do not relinquish the hypocritical concept of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states.' (Böll 1980, p. 23)

Günter Grass, on the other hand, regarded himself more explicitly as an interventionist in political matters and actively campaigned for the SPD in the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies. His political speeches are deeply literary and deploy to great effect literary technique as political rhetoric. When Böll died in 1985 the baton was handed to the younger Grass, who has continued to intervene in public debate to this very day.

The End of East German Communism and the Failure of Intellectuals 1990-1993

The collapse of Eastern European communism and the abrupt end to the Cold War – which came about in Germany with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the velvet

revolution of the East German populace in 1989 – marked a radical turning point in the life of the German nation and its intellectuals on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In the heated debates that broke about the ambivalent role that prominent East German figures had played in the revolution, writers and intellectuals from both countries faced the first serious and lasting challenge to their moral authority since the War. The end of the Cold War period was to have far-reaching consequences for intellectuals and literature in both East and West Germany. In particular, it brought to a rather unceremonious close the pact between *Geist* and *Macht*, intellect and power that had held sway — to different degrees and under different political banners — in both Germanies since their inception. As a result of the very public castigation and chastisement that significant numbers of German intellectuals received at the time, it looked very much as if German writers had retreated from public engagement with matters of political and social concern, divorced themselves from politics and reverted to doing what they did best, writing literature. I will return to this perception at the end of this paper.

From about mid-November 1989, when the popular revolution was at its height, it started to become clear that prominent intellectuals in Germany would play quite a different role from their counterparts in other communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Unlike writers in Romania and Czechoslovakia, who spearheaded the reform movements in their countries, East German intellectuals found themselves embarrassingly out of touch with the feelings of the population. Instead of leading revolutionary movements, they struggled to position themselves at the vanguard of the revolutionary foment sweeping the country and failed spectacularly to capture the mood of the population. In particular, they were compromised by their less than enthusiastic response to the prospect of unification. The rather optimistic prediction of Pierre Bourdieu in 1989 that ‘the poet, the writer, the intellectual ... will win back his original role as group spokesman or – more modestly – as a public writer’ was proved – in the case of Germany at least – to be disappointingly wide of the mark (Bourdieu 1989, p. 3). In the immediate months following the breaching of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 those same intellectuals that had offered beacons of hope to their less privileged countrymen and women only months before found themselves overtaken time and again by the events of history.

According to Andreas Huyssen the end of the Cold War marked a paradigm shift in which key elements of 'a long-standing, broadly based consensus' were dismantled (1991, p. 109). In 1991 he identified three 'cumulative' phases in what he correctly identified as a 'crisis of intellectuals.' The first phase was characterised by debates about the future of the GDR and how whether the socialist state could and should be reformed. The second phase focused on issues of culture and literature and the third he saw erupting in response to the Gulf War in 1991.

Huyssen summarises the first phase in which the failure of intellectual discourse first became apparent as follows:

East and West, the rhetoric and behavior of German intellectuals seemed mostly out of step with events. It lacked sovereignty, perspective, and compassion; it betrayed self-indulgence and arrogance, a fatal aloofness from reality and a desperate clinging to projections, and, when under fire, melancholic self-pity and unrepentant self-righteousness. (p. 110)

During the tumultuous events of October and November of that year, in which the largest demonstrations were staged in cities around the country and in which thousands of disgruntled citizens fled over the borders into Hungary and Czechoslovakia and subsequently to the West, writers remained unmoved in their resolve not to abandon the socialist project. Prominent figures such as Christa Wolf, Christoph Hein, Helga Königsdorf and a host of others made a clear decision to rally behind those sections of the demonstrators that were calling for reforms. In doing so they sided with civil rights groups and citizen action groups (*Bürgerrechtler*) and deliberately against the sections of the demonstrators who were calling for travel freedoms and the lifting of visa restrictions.

For a brief moment at the beginning of November 1989 it looked like the nation's writers would take their rightful place at the vanguard of the revolutionary movement. Barely a week before the startling announcement of the Politbüro to open the borders to the West, a group of writers and intellectuals responded to demands of the refugees occupying the embassies in Prague and Warsaw and those others in Germany anxious to follow them to the West. They reacted by staging a public demonstration on the 4th November 1989 on the Alexanderplatz in the very heart of East Berlin. The demonstration received, rather surprisingly some thought at the time, official approval

to go ahead, and the Stasi was made full aware of the organizers' plans. The dominant theme of the demonstration was the need for reform, albeit reform under the socialist banner, which was expressed in calls for a revolution that retained the sovereignty of the GDR state. In her speech at the rally Christa Wolf threw down the gauntlet to what she mistakenly supposed was still a captive audience: 'Just imagine, we have socialism, and no one leaves,' she cried, in a play on the catch-cry of the peace movement of the eighties ('Just imagine we have a war and no one goes off to it') (Wolf 1994, p. 13).

A few weeks later Stefan Heym, who had the status of an elder statesman of the GDR, started a similarly doomed initiative that was designed to steer the revolution back onto a socialist course. On the 6th November 1989 Heym, who had been dubbed by the *Spiegel* the 'doyen of the protest movement,' had applauded the demonstrators in Leipzig and Berlin in an article for the *Spiegel* (1989a, pp. 30-31). He praised the 'mob' for having the courage to finally thrown off the yoke of paternalism and socialist tutelage and to take to the streets demanding sovereignty. 'Hurray for the mob,' he cried. The 'mob' had not forgotten its historical mission as a catalyst for revolution and had, as indeed Heym himself was trying to do, well and truly seized the day. At the end of November Heym attempted to get together a petition for reform that bore the evocative patriotic title 'For our Country' (Heym 1989b). The petition was duly signed by an impressive list of the country's prominent writers and intellectuals and was even read out on national East German television. It advocated in unequivocal terms a return to the antifascist and humanist ideals of the GDR in an effort to stem the mounting tide of anti-socialist sentiment that was threatening to engulf the entire country. It was not until it became publicly known that Honecker's successor and the crown prince to the GDR throne, Egon Krenz, had opportunistically added his signature to the list that Heym was forced to withdraw the petition. Since the only marginally less hardline Krenz had endorsed it, it was rendered virtually meaningless as a lever for genuine change. This was further evidence that East Germany's intellectuals had seriously misjudged the climate in the country and the will of the people. The petition represented only one of a series of similarly misguided attempts on the part of Heym and others to belatedly breathe life back into socialist ideals.

A rather acrimonious spat that ensued between the younger East German writer, Monika Maron, and Stefan Heym provides an additional example of the sense of helplessness and loss that the older generation of East German intellectuals felt at the collapse of the GDR. A number of Heym's compatriots, notably Günter Kunert and Monika Maron, were especially outspoken in their dismissal of Heym's defense of the socialist project. Where was there evidence of the noble ideals of solidarity, Maron rightly asked in an article in the *Spiegel* on the 12th February 1990, when dissidents were being arrested (1993, p. 86)? How could one talk of antifascist traditions in the face of the draconian censorship practices in the GDR, she reminds him (p. 87). A month after publicly lauding the East German people, Heym published another article on 4th December 1989 in the *Spiegel* commenting on the population's reactions to the fall of the Berlin Wall. In an essay bearing the provocative title 'Ash Wednesday in the GDR' Heym drastically revised his positive assessment of the same 'mob' that had risen up against oppression only a few weeks earlier. In an outburst of disgust, he castigated the masses of East German citizens, who after the opening of the borders could be seen rummaging through the discount bins of low-budget department stores in West Berlin, for their greed and consumerism (1989c, p. 55). In her response in February 1990 Maron takes Heym to task for clinging to a bankrupt system of values that the populace had long since abandoned. She speaks scathingly of the 'new misery of the intellectuals' and the 'arrogance of the well-fed who are disgusted by the bad table-manners of someone starving' (Maron 1993, p. 83). 'No sooner was the heroic deed of the revolution over, than the intellectuals discovered that the people had taken to the streets for the wrong reasons, because they were not their reasons,' she concluded (p. 83). It was, she thought, especially hypocritical for intellectuals like Heym to attack consumerism especially when they had always enjoyed access to consumer goods because they had been privileged to travel (p. 84).

The ambivalence of many West German leftist and East German 'critical-loyal' intellectuals to German reunification led observers to declare 1989 a watershed in the intellectual life of the nation. Intellectuals had spectacularly failed to keep abreast with the changed mood of the times and found themselves confounded time and again by the sentiments of the broad masses. Not only had they failed to predict the course of events that was to change Germany's political landscape in a lasting way; they had been unable to offer any real viable alternatives or a workable vision for the future.

The most telling example of intellectuals' gross misreading of the events in November 1989 comes from a remark made by Helga Königsdorf, a feminist writer and nuclear physicist, who had been a 'literary activist' and concerned intellectual throughout the eighties. While the people of Leipzig were chanting 'We are the people' and 'We are one people', Königsdorf retorted in a fit of pique in an article published in the former communist party daily newspaper, *Neues Deutschland* that 'we are the people too,' meaning of course that the voices of East Germany's writers and intellectuals were also part of the popular revolution (1990, p. 14).

The second phase of the debates of the time dealt more directly with cultural matters and the future role of the literary intellectual. From the middle of 1990 fierce debates were fought out in the West German press about the relationship between art and politics. These discussions presented a further challenge to the status of the engaged and concerned intellectual and one that effectively went to the very core of German self-understanding in the soon to be unified nation. It appeared as if the marriage of leftist politics and literature had come full circle or, to change metaphors, as if Germany was witnessing a 'stock market crash' in which the value of the writer had plunged virtually overnight to unprecedented depths (Emmerich 1991, p. 325). With the drop in share price on intellectual goods the share price of other core cultural values sank to an all-time low. As Wolfgang Emmerich observed: the 'whole of West German literature of non-conformism of four decades and even more than that: *littérature engagée* in general' collapsed into the bargain (p. 325).

The culture debates gained momentum throughout the following two years, as Germany moved from the Literature Debate of the summer of 1990 through to the various Stasi debates of 1991-1993. The occasion for the Literature Debate was provided by the publication of a short novel with the title *What Remains (Was Bleibt*, 1990) by Christa Wolf, who was at the time generally regarded as East Germany's most popular and successful writer. Before it appeared in the bookshops, the book was panned by the critics, with two withering critiques of both the book and its author appearing almost simultaneously in two of the most influential daily newspapers, the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and the left-liberal *Die Zeit*. Although Christa Wolf was not without her supporters from both ends of the political spectrum and on both sides of the East-West divide, the response to the publication of the novel

was overwhelmingly negative (Anz 1991, p. 17ff). The debate was heavily politicised and ran only partially along generational lines. In general, there were no clear front lines in the dispute in which the boundaries between younger and older GDR generations, between those that had stayed and those that had left the GDR and between right-wing and left-wing critics tended to be blurred (p. 15). The conservative Frank Schirmacher, for instance, joined forces with critics from the alternative-left newspaper, the *tageszeitung*, in condemning Wolf for her timid stance on Stalinism (p. 18).

While the reviews of Frank Schirmacher and Ulrich Greiner had different emphases, both interpreted the publication of Wolf's novel as an opportunistic move on the author's part to re-invent herself as a victim of the regime (Greiner 1990a, pp. 66-70; Schirmacher 1990, pp. 77-89). This was all the more galling to them in light of the fact that Wolf had become more of a poet laureate ('Staatsdichterin') who had supported the regime rather than being a critic of the regime. Certainly, Wolf's recent behaviour on November 4th and her signing of the petition 'For Our Country' shortly after would seem to reinforce this view. But this took a rather short-sighted view of Wolf's public engagement with the regime, ignoring moreover the fact that she had been a victim of Stasi surveillance and intimidation since the late 60s. Strictly speaking, Wolf was entitled to victim status on the basis of her substantial Stasi file alone. At the same time, however, her status was complicated by the fact that she had continued to lend her support to the regime until the very end, endeavouring to prolong the life of the state as it was crumbling around her.

It has now been widely acknowledged that the debates about Christa Wolf were not really about the book or even about the person of Christa Wolf (Anz, p. 9ff). What the debates were really about was the future status and the enduring value of East German literature and culture. In many ways, the attacks on Wolf and her book say more about the general feeling of outrage and disappointment that many felt at the lack of insight and guidance that was forthcoming from East Germany's privileged class of intellectuals. As Huyssen was to remark:

The failure of intellectuals became now the failure of Christa Wolf: it was a political failure in that she was never really critical enough of the SED regime; it was a moral failure in the sense

that *Was Bleibt* represented Wolf's attempt to claim victim status, to extricate herself from culpability after the *Wende*' (1991, p. 123).

The critical failure of the book was largely due to a miss-match of expectations between her new West German audience and her East German readers. While many East Germans admired her for her courage in coming forward and publishing a previously censored book about such a sensitive topic as the Stasi, West German readers saw her tale about secret police observation as a calculated move to side with the victims rather than the perpetrators of the regime. Christa Wolf was rather unfairly, although not altogether unsurprisingly, made into a national scapegoat over the next few years, whereby she became a general 'cipher for everything that was held to be wrong with post-war German culture' (p. 123).

What was at stake in the debates about Christa Wolf's story of the day-in-the-life of a state intellectual who falls foul of the powerful was the question of how far *Geist* should go towards accommodating *Macht* without loss of integrity. Christa Wolf's tight-rope walk with power was too reminiscent of the collaboration of German intellectuals during the Third Reich for comfort. It came as no surprise, therefore, that the theme of collaboration and complicity was taken up again in the debates about the East German secret police that dominated headlines towards the end of 1991 and for the following two to three years. In the Stasi debates, the suggestion that intellectuals had failed to adequately resist power turned into blatant accusations of collusion and collaboration. Furthermore, critics of the East German intellectuals who had stayed behind in the East ('die Dagebliebenen'), such as Fritz J. Raddatz and Frank Schirrmacher, felt vindicated when the first revelations of collaboration with the Stasi made headlines towards the end of 1991 (Raddatz 1993; Schirrmacher 1993). Why the outrage at the revealing of secrets, asked Schirrmacher smugly, since it was no secret that writers like Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller were loyal to the SED and that the Stasi was an arm of the SED (pp. 161-162)?

No one, however, was prepared for the precise nature of the disclosures, in particular the distressing discovery that the country's most outspoken dissidents in the underground had been secret police informers for the Stasi. The first writers to be exposed were Sascha Anderson and Rainer Schedlinski, two poets in the Prenzlauer

Berg literary underground in Berlin. Other pillars of East German literature, the new opposition and rising new politicians were to fall in rapid succession, as suspicion fell on Christa Wolf, Heiner Müller as well as on key figures in the newly formed Socialist Democratic Party and other political groups. The scandalous nature of the discoveries shattered post-war certainties to the core, serving only to further undermine the reputations and public credibility of the East German intelligentsia. If the two leading figures in the underground, Sascha Anderson and Rainer Schedlinski, had been acting on instructions from the Stasi, while simultaneously working for the underground, it was only inevitable that questions had to be asked about the authenticity of their bohemian image and their avantgarde poetry, especially when it appeared to be nothing more than a fabrication or ‘simulation’ of the Stasi. Frank Schirmacher, who was again at the forefront of the debate, even went as far as to argue that it was time to declare the end of all genuine intact GDR-culture (1991, p. 306ff.). Just how subversive were the illegal art and literature of the underground really and was it possible that oppositional literary movements were the cynical creation of the secret arm of a state apparatus that was becoming increasingly desperate to cling on to power? (Bathrick 1995, p. 22; Lewis 2001; Lewis 2003).

By the time the Stasi debates had run their course, and after Christa Wolf had voluntarily disclosed her own brief associations with the Stasi in 1993, many East Germans started to wonder if there was not a hidden agenda to many of these politicised public disputes about the responsibilities of intellectuals. In the minds of East Germans many contributions to the debates about the moral reprehensibility of the intelligentsia, such as those of Frank Schirmacher and Ulrich Greiner, masked a desire to discredit writers’ reputations and in doing so to devalue the entirety of East German culture. Indeed, it certainly appeared as if the debate was being used by neo-conservatives associated with the reigning Kohl government, and now dominating the West German literary establishment, to end the marriage of aesthetics and politics that had hitherto prevailed and to set a different agenda for the future. It is one of the ironies of the debates that conservatives were joined by sections of the left-liberal intelligentsia in what was an uneasy truce between opposing factions of the intellectual class. Left-liberal intellectuals shifted positions, however, for different reasons. They abandoned writers such as Christa Wolf, it could be argued, out of a belated sense of guilt because the Left had failed to articulate a sustained critique of

Stalinism. Since they had been partly to blame for encouraging East German writers like Christa Wolf to stay in the GDR, so that she might continue the fight for a ‘better’ Germany, writers on the Left shared the blame for the iconoclastic status of the critical-loyal cohort of East German intellectuals like Christa Wolf. The participation of many left-wing intellectuals in the literature debates was driven therefore by the need to face up to the unsavoury aspects of life in the ‘other’ Germany and to admit that the Left’s image of the GDR was in part a wishful projection. If the Left were to acknowledge the legacy of Stalinism, the emotional and ideological investments that the West had made in the ‘other’ Germany as the ‘better’ half would have to be shed as well.

While a sober reassessment of intellectual life in East Germany was clearly in order, what was motivating much of the heated debate was the fact that many on the West German Left had a bad conscience about the role it had played in promoting a particular type of East German literature. The ‘dissident bonus’ that was unceremoniously withdrawn from the personage of Christa Wolf was as much a Western creation as it was an invention of SED apparatchiks. Similarly, the dissident East German writer was not merely the unwanted by-product of East German *Kulturpolitik*; it was also the work of a ‘Western GDR industry’ and *Kulturindustrie* (Bathrick, p. 4). For this reason, the future of the entire cultural industry was at stake and not merely East German culture. The national significance of the literature wars was best encapsulated in the words of Ulrich Greiner: ‘The interpretation of the literary past is no academic question. Who determines what was also determines what will be. The dispute about the past is a dispute about the future’ (Greiner 1990b, p. 208).

The two cultural critics from the Literature Debate, Ulrich Greiner from the left-liberal *Die Zeit*, and Frank Schirmmacher from the more conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, both issued a compelling appeal for a literature unencumbered with political and moral concerns. They unilaterally called for a literature freed of ‘Gesinnungsästhetik,’ a literature unencumbered by ‘an aesthetics driven by opinion or political conviction.’ According to Greiner the paradigm of ‘Gesinnungsästhetik’ had dominated the literature industry after the war, elevating moral and political concerns over matters of style, form and aesthetics. The alliance between aesthetics

and politics had been a 'marriage of convenience' whose days were now numbered. Karl Heinz Bohrer, the free-thinking editor of *Merkur*, a journal known for its non-aligned eclectic mix of political and aesthetic views, went even further in his condemnation of East German literature. Much of it was little more than 'Gesinnungskitsch', he contended, in obvious reference to Christa Wolf (1990a, p. 1016). The old guard of those responsible for meaning production, whether on the left or the right of politics, had always been a 'religious devotee' who wanted to see in his or her art 'metaphysics instead of aesthetics' (p. 1016). As a secularised society, Germany had no need for quasi-religious high priests of culture; literature was 'not a drug for the oppressed' and ought not to be 'a quietistic balm' (p. 1017).

As early as October 1990 the accusations of irrelevance had spread to implicate West German literature and its authors as well. Both Schirmacher and Greiner called for a 'farewell to the literature of the Federal Republic,' naming writers like Günter Grass, Heinrich Böll and Siegfried Lenz as part of a post-war 'conscience industry' that had outgrown its purpose. Like their counterparts in the East, they too were guilty of lending their support to a morally bankrupt political system. Bohrer concurred with Greiner and Schirmacher and observed that by clinging to the chimera of GDR culture as a more utopian version of their own, West German writers like Grass had sought to turn the GDR into a wildlife park or a 'nature reserve for culture' ('Kulturschutzgebiet'). In this, West Germany's 'cultural pastors' had merely demonstrated their narrowness of vision. 'Who are Günter Grass and Walter Jens today?,' Bohrer asked and offered the following answer: 'Two important public figures to be sure, constantly 'committed' and deserving, but politically and intellectually long since stretched to their limits' (p. 1015). In several articles penned at the time Bohrer continued with his polemics against this cohort of West German writers, calling for a 'coming-of-age of the aesthetic process,' a dawning of a new aesthetic age and a separation of powers in which literature could be literature and politics was allowed to be politics (1990b; 1990c). As Klaus Scherpe summarised: 'the role of the literary intellectual that is predicated on that peculiar relationship between the good, true and beautiful [the role] as soothsayer, someone who says no and who speaks for others, as professional utopianist, as a nonconformist and representative of the whole now seems to have finally exhausted itself' (1996, p. 106).

1990-2002: New Alliances: Renegades, the Resurrection of Fallen Idols and the Rise of a New Generation

The stock market crash in literary values of the early nineties represented an unprecedented low point in the cultural life of the nation. Since that time, the 'share price' of the literary intellectual has managed to recuperate some of its losses, and many writers have managed to regain some of their former credibility in the eyes of the public. While Scherpe's predictions that we are witnessing the end of the post-war paradigm of the writer as the embodiment of the conscience of the nation appear in the main to be true, there are a few notable exceptions to the rule. One group of writers that quickly recovered from the public dressing-down of intellectuals that occurred in the Literature Debate was the generation of West German left-wing writers born between 1927 and 1945, the post-war group originally associated with the 'Gruppe 47.' These writers, many of whom are now approaching seventy, are among the few whose interventions in the political arena are still tolerated. They have continued to speak out publicly against human rights abuses and other social and moral issues of public concern, engaging in public debate and championing various moral and political causes of the day. While their moral authority is subject to periodic attacks,¹ the opinion of this older generation is regularly sought in the print media and talk shows, especially in relation to questions of national guilt and responsibility, on the Holocaust and national memory. Since the Red-Green coalition came to power in 1998, these writers' opinions are solicited again with greater regularity. The same, however, cannot be said for the next generation of writers, those 68ers born between 1938 and 1948, who appear to have returned to more personal themes such as love and relationships.

By and large, the majority of German writers, with the exception of the generation of Christa Wolf and Günter Grass, now appear to be motivated by literary rather than political concerns. Increasingly, the reputations of writers, in particular the latest generation of writers to emerge, are made less on the public stance they take on issues of the day than on the basis of their literature. This is partly the result of a generational shift and the coming-of-age of the 'grandchildren,' as the title of an

¹ The latest attack on a member of this generation came late in 2003 with the publication of a literary lexicon, which alleged that Walter Jens, who had been a pillar of morality in the 70s and 80s, was a member of the Nazi Party during his childhood.

article in *Der Spiegel* in 1999 suggested: ‘The grandchildren are coming’ (Hage 1999b). An additional reason for this shift away from politics towards literature has been a change in political allegiance among much of West Germany’s left-wing intelligentsia. Several years ago it was suggested, only slightly tongue-in-cheek, by a critic in *Die Zeit* that German intellectuals had become a bunch of ‘renegades.’ In his article from 1999, Jörg Lau writes: ‘Never were the renegades so influential as they are today,’ and goes on to ask: ‘Is their inconsequentiality smartness or opportunism?’ (Lau 1999, para. 1). According to Lau, times have changed and it is the renegade who has most changed with the times. Branded a renegade by members of the old Left, the ‘renegade’ has in fact drawn the most appropriate consequences from the loss of leftist utopias. S/he has responded to the challenges of the post-communist era and a reunified Germany. Unlike the typical leftist of the 70s and 80s, the ‘renegade’ lent his/her support to humanitarian military interventions such as the NATO intervention in Kosovo. Indeed, the German response to the NATO intervention in Kosovo, which was led by a newly elected Red-Green coalition, marked a clear turning point for leftist intellectuals and the clearest indication yet of a shift in leftist politics. For the first time in the post-war period, leftist radicals and left-liberal intellectuals previously affiliated with the SDS, KPD and diverse Maoist groups all ranked among the most ardent advocates of the NATO intervention. Among them were ‘Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Hans Christoph Buch, Richard Herzinger, Peter Schneider and Andre Glucksmann as well as Alain Finkielkraut and Bernard-Henri Levy’ (para. 15). The common denominator uniting these intellectuals in their support of a military intervention was a commitment to universalist principles and human rights obligations and a disavowal of early pacifist positions.

Quite apart from the hefty assaults on the integrity of East German writers and their West German allies, the early nineteen-nineties saw the alliance between literature and politics come under attack from other quarters. Sociologists and historians began to speak openly of the demise of the poet as public intellectual. New socio-economic elites would soon take their place in society, it was predicted, journalists and politicians would replace writers as the group of intellectuals whose competence was most in demand. According to Wolfgang Jäger, intellectuals can only maintain their function in society if they continue to offer a competent social critique. He is sceptical whether writers of fiction can fulfil this role as well as intellectuals with specialist

knowledge and skills (Mittenzwei 2003, pp. 17-18). Rainer Lepsius agrees. According to him, East German intellectuals committed a major sin: they betrayed their commitment to critique by endorsing the ideals of one party. They thereby relinquished their intellectual freedom and any commitment to universal values (2001). One notable exception to the general consensus that the poet is no longer suited to fulfilling this role is Werner Mittenzwei. A literary historian, who worked under the communists as a professor in the tertiary sector, Mittenzwei laments the passing of the era of the socially committed intellectual in a recent book titled *The Intellectuals (Die Intellektuellen)* (p. 470). He argues that society has sacrificed an important part of the 'collective memory' that writers are so good at transmitting. He regrets that the decade since unification has not resulted in the formation of any new literary movement or any form of effective protest against the slow and steady decline of literature's social function (p. 470).

While the German media has now softened its approach to the public posturings of intellectuals of the likes of Günter Grass, unfortunately the same cannot be said of many prominent East German writers. Most of East Germany's writers have suffered losses in both existential and social terms. This has moreover not been helped, according to Mittenzwei, by defectors from their own ranks, by so-called 'hate-producers' and anti-patriots like Monika Maron (p. 466). Of especial concern to Mittenzwei is the lack of solidarity among East Germany's writers that has meant that some of the heaviest artillery fired at East German writers has been issued from other East Germans. There is certainly some truth to the assertion that there were many impassioned battles fought between East German intellectuals such as the spat between Monika Maron and Stefan Heym over the 'bad table-manners' of the East German people. However, public disagreements served rather to increase the visibility of East German intellectuals, even if they did highlight the lack of unity among the country's new intellectual classes.

Of East Germany's writers and intellectuals, Christa Wolf is one of the few icons still standing in 2004. In 1996 she had her moment of reckoning with her critics when she published an allegorical novel about the mythical figure of Medea. In *Medea* the Greek heroine, who flees from a repressive regime in her home of Colchis into exile in the more prosperous but corrupt Corinth, is cleansed of her mythical qualities as the

murderer of her children (1996). Instead, she is portrayed as an object of hatred and envy and the innocent victim of a ruthless public conspiracy to ostracize her. By the time of the publication of her second post-unification novel, *Leibhaftig*, in 2002, the critics seemed willing to absolve her of her sins of the past, and the reviews of the book were predominantly positive. Wolf still believes, however, that East German writers have not fared well under a unified Germany. In a recent *Spiegel* article, she admits that unlike many of her compatriots she has had the good fortune of retaining much of her readership. There are, she remarks, countless good East German writers of the post-war period whose works are no longer in print. The example she cites of a writer whose views do not suit the political climate of the time is Irmtraud Morgner (2003). It is also worth noting in this context the relative absence in more recent public debate of many East German intellectuals who were among the most outspoken commentators of the day in 1990, writers and commentators such as Monika Maron. Instead, the arts and review pages are more likely to publish the essays of younger writers who grew up in the East and started publishing after 1989. This generation of writer arguably comes with less ideological baggage, and its representatives regularly write features for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on topics not strictly related to day-to-day politics.

In 2002 Thomas E. Schmidt observed in *Die Zeit* on the occasion of the publication of the latest work by Günter Grass: 'Something is coming to an end' (2002). As we witness a changing of the literary guard, the role of the public writer as public intellectual that the 'Group 47' arrogated to itself will become increasingly hard to sustain, as the succession of public debates throughout the nineties has shown. Looking back over the first decade since unification it would appear that the more pessimistic predictions of a 'stock market crash' in the value of literature and the intellectual have only partially come true. The first decade of unification represented for many previously 'engaged' East German writers such as Christa Wolf, Christoph Hein, Volker Braun and Stefan Heym a difficult period of readjustment during which they lost their privileges, much of their readership, some their publishers and all of their special links to power. For dissident writers such as Monika Maron, Jürgen Fuchs and Wolf Biermann, who had already severed their links to the regime before 1989, unification provided a small window of opportunity in which to cultivate a new readership, among East Germans as well as West Germans. However, the early

honeymoon phase when the German media sought out and published opinion pieces from East German intellectuals such as Maron was relatively short-lived.

Both groups of East German writers have been forced to seek new public roles for themselves, new modes of operating in the public sphere and to woo new audiences for their political views as well as their works. Adapting to the conditions of the West German media and publishing industry has not been easy. No longer were East German writers the high priests of culture and the sooth-sayers of the nation, having been forced to return to being mere writers of literature. The broad group of writers like Christa Wolf and Stefan Heym that stayed in the GDR, found themselves in a situation where they were no longer showered with state subsidies to write, with their works exposed for the first time to the forces of the free market. Those writers denied publishing rights under the communists, also found the adjustment difficult, despite obvious advantages of being free from censorship restrictions. With few exceptions, the exponents of dissidence and reform that were vocal during 1989 and 1990 have subsequently been pushed to the margins of the media and the literature industry.

Towards the end of the millennium, the publishing industry proclaimed triumphantly the emergence of a new entertaining German literature and a new generation of ‘young, chic and cheerful’ stars (Herzinger 1999). Constantly on the look out for new talent and fresh faces to promote, the arts pages of the print media discovered first ‘das Fräuleinwunder’ (Hage 1999a) and then the ‘boy wonder’ in a new generation of writer, who is neither East nor West (Hage 1999b). The main asset of the new ‘boy’ and ‘girl wonders’ of literature, who quickly acquired cult status, young writers such as Benjamin Lebert, Judith Hermann, Karen Duve, Judith Hermann and Zoe Jenny, was said to be their ability to write light-hearted, readable literature, literature above all that was not fixated on the past and perennial ‘German’ themes.

The end of the Cold War and communism spelt the demise of the paradigm of the socialist public intellectual and his or her affiliation with state socialism. This meant perforce a partial disengagement with politics, which was a necessary price to pay for democratisation. Although the detachment from discredited socialist utopias was for most of East Germany’s intellectuals a painful process, it was necessary for the ‘normalization’ of Germany in a post-communist era. Neither the ideal of socialism,

nor the practice of really existing socialism held out any realistic promise of redemption. The notion of a socialist alternative to the capitalist West that had led to what I have called elsewhere a ‘hopelessly depressive-paranoid sense of national identity’ among socialist intellectuals in the East was recognised for the illusion it was (Lewis 1992, p. 260). The repositioning of the literary field that has occurred since was inevitable. It did not however result in a total separation of powers – the separation that Bohrer called for in 1990 – between literature and politics. What occurred instead was a repositioning of the literary field to incorporate a greater diversity of themes and styles, greater pluralism in literary approaches and political habitus. This does not mean that the writer cannot simultaneously be a concerned intellectual, when the occasion arises and calls for. But it does mean that the writer has become in the main a professional and a specialist.

Perhaps the most telling indication that engaged writers like Günter Grass are an obsolete breed — a type of self-confessed ‘dinosaur’ — can be seen from a dialogue between Grass and the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu about the role of critical European intellectuals — and the tradition of ‘opening one’s mouth’ — published in *Le Monde* and republished in *Die Zeit* (*Le Monde* 4 December 1999, para. 1). It was now rare, remarked Grass, that intellectuals from different specializations, such as a writer and a sociologist, should cross paths and converse in public about politics. Two conclusions can be drawn from the exchange in the context of this discussion. First, the interview provides a tentative answer to the question raised earlier whether Germans are becoming more ‘normal’ and more like their European counterparts. According to Grass German intellectuals are a sectarian lot; it would be common, he argues, to find philosophers in one corner of the room, sociologists in another and writers all alone in the backroom (para. 2). This would seem to indicate that the engagement of a writer of fiction in the public arena has become an anomaly in Germany as well. The second point that can be made is that Grass evidently is one of the few exceptions to the rule of non-engagement. Judging from the pessimistic predictions of a loss of activism on the part of writers made in the interview, it would seem unlikely that successive generations will take over from Grass and build their careers on public engagement.

Journalist and literary scholar Richard Herzinger contended in 1999 that, despite considerable convergences, there were still substantial differences between the German and American publishing industries. Whilst in America the writer was an individualist, in Germany the writer continued to be regarded as a 'promoter of national values and identity' (para. 19). Even though German writers were taking their first tentative steps as individualists in 1999, he reminds his readers that Germans still have a significantly different concept of the social role that literature has to play than their American counterparts (para. 18). He warns that any attempts to forcibly 'modernise' the German publishing industry by declaring a new affirmative literature written by a sexy new generation of cosmopolitan, profoundly un-German writers, will inevitably fail (para. 18).

One of the effects of the 'literary Fräuleinwunder' debates in 1999 has been to shift the co-ordinates of the literary field even further in the direction of a cosmopolitan, Americanised understanding of literature and the role of the writer. This has hastened the disappearance of the writer as a universal intellectual and focused attention on the writer as an individualist and a professional. Today's youngest generation of writer in Germany is a specialist intellectual who intervenes in political and social matters from time to time but who is not expected to take a moral-ethical stance on most issues of national and international concern. S/he is one who frequently writes about personal subjects, but may also occasionally, as witnessed after September 11, turn his or her pen to topics of global concern as in terrorism and Islam. More often than not, however, writers now leave the work of commenting on political affairs to writers of the older guard and to other 'senior' specialist intellectuals such as the veteran philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas.

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