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Cultural Transformation and its Academic Contexts: Reflections on the Past, Present, and Future of GDR Studies

Editorial Introduction

While the GDR has become historical, the meanings we ascribe to its cultural artifacts continue to shift along with our subject positions. Imagine two snapshots, one black-and-white, the other in color, of the same German family: mother, father, son, daughter. In the first photograph the children appear to be about seven and ten, and sit with their parents in front of what seems to be a farm house. In the second, the children are visibly older, now teenagers, and the family is framed by a verdant landscape. If we choose to integrate these photos as realia in a German language course, we might include them in a unit on *Traditionelles Familienleben* or *Freizeit*. If we wished to contextualize them further, however, we could also incorporate them into a section dealing with East Germany and German unification, providing captions such as “East German family on vacation in the countryside, Summer 1989” and “Family from Leipzig on vacation in Portugal, Summer 1996.” These captions provide the students with textual clues that could animate their own stories about this family. Their accounts, however, will to a large extent be shaped by their knowledge of the GDR and unified Germany and their associations with regard to communism and capitalism, democracy and totalitarianism. Do the smiling faces in both pictures tell us that GDR citizens lived, worked and vacationed just like their West German counterparts, or does the color of the second photo and the fact that the family can now travel to Western Europe mean that they are much happier than before? Do the Birkenstock sandals worn by three of the family members in the second photo represent new economic opportunities or a new type of conformism? To the family members – or someone who knows them – the photographs might be used to tell a story of the integrity to resist not only a totalitarian system that relied on its citizens to keep each other in check, but also the seduction of crass Western capitalism. In contrast, a student of German with only the pictures and without the benefit of a nuanced discussion about the history leading to German unification might leave the classroom with the undifferentiated assessment that “West is best” since the family evidently appears much better off now. Context, after all, shapes the meaning of the text, the stories we tell, and the gulf that separates the contexts of these snapshots from those in which our students read them may be very great indeed.

The disappearance of the GDR from the political map and the sweeping cultural, social and economic changes since unification have of course left us not only snapshots, but also literary works, films, stories, and histories whose contextual borders are no longer clearly demarcated by geography and ideology. German unification and its aftermath require that we recontextualize our scholarship and teaching within this changed topography, for as Marc Silberman has pointed out, “ultimately we are responsible for (re)constructing the GDR culture that we, as North American teachers and scholars, will convey to our publics” (*Monatshefte* 85.3 (1993): 269). The call for a special section of the *GDR Bulletin* articulated this demand, as we sought to address how our teaching and scholarship reflect and inform this project of reconstruction.

Particularly in the United States, the contours of GDR studies up until 1989 were to a large extent shaped by a generation of leftist scholars with strong subjective attachments to the GDR, many of whom entered the academic ranks in the early 1970s. In the GDR, this was a time marked by political and cultural liberalization following the VIII Party Congress (1971) and the signing of the Basic Treaty by East and West Germany (1972). On the literary front, moreover, recent narratives by writers such as Christa Wolf and Irmtraud Morgner captured the attention of feminist Germanists, while the publication of provocative texts such as Ulrich Pflenzdorf’s *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* and productions of Heiner Müller’s controversial plays *Macbeth* and *Die Schlacht* inspired the hope that Honecker’s proclamation of a literary culture without taboos would mark the beginning of new, progressive reforms within the GDR. Such developments further encouraged leftist North American scholars to project onto the GDR visions of a social utopia that defined itself in opposition to the social, economic, and gender inequality so prevalent in American society. Against the resistance of German departments disinclined to include then unknown writers in the literary canon and within Soviet and Eastern European Studies departments in which Western anti-communist sentiments were not uncommon, these scholars struggled to carve a niche for GDR studies. In Spring 1974, the newly founded interdisciplinary German Studies journal *New German Critique* devoted its entire second issue to the GDR. The first issue of the *GDR Bulletin* appeared in April

1975 as a "Newsletter for Literature and Culture in the German Democratic Republic." The following summer, the first of what would become the Annual New Hampshire Symposium on the GDR – an interdisciplinary forum for scholars in the fields of literature, economics, history, and political science – took place. These events attest to the overwhelming interest, particularly of scholars of the New Left, in the developments in East Germany *and* to their success at mapping the interpretive grids through which these developments would be viewed.

While repressive acts such as Wolf Biermann's expatriation in 1976 fostered disenchantment with "real existing socialism" and spurred the exodus to the West of many prominent GDR writers, they affected neither the quality nor quantity of, nor the approach to research on GDR literature. Indeed, GDR literature increasingly became the window through which GDR reality was viewed, a space that probed and challenged the GDR's official self-understanding and played out ideas of a "third way" divergent from both Stalinist socialism and Western capitalism. With the conservative turn in American politics of the 1980s, the escalating arms race and mounting threat of a "limited" nuclear war in central Europe, as well as increasing environmental degradation, it is no surprise that GDR literary texts that articulated these global concerns in aesthetically innovative ways were received with much enthusiasm.

The toppling of the Berlin Wall, however, and the concomitant revelations about the extent to which some of the GDR's most respected writers were implicated in the day-to-day workings of the regime have led many GDR scholars to reevaluate their previous assumptions. In a 1993 issue of *Monatshefte* (85.3), academics from the United States and abroad offered both reflections on past approaches and preliminary assessments of GDR studies post-*Wende*. In his introduction to that issue, editor Marc Silberman noted that while a rethinking of GDR studies was already underway, the direction this field was taking four years after the collapse of the Wall remained difficult to discern. Attempting to delimit the object of study for GDR scholars in post-GDR times, Silberman asks: "Has GDR literature ceased to exist with the end of the state, or is there a transitional phase during which the specific GDR experience produces an identifiable body of literature?" As he concedes, "There are no simple answers to these questions. We need to investigate the historical GDR culture and be prepared to recognize an ongoing or post-GDR culture. We have to be attentive to our tendencies to exclude or conform." (268-269). Now, another four years later, questions regarding the validity of GDR scholarship persist. Should, for example, the *GDR Bulletin* continue to be published, and how long should we retain its present title? What type of information, beyond the historical, could such a journal possibly

convey? How do we now define a "GDR writer," by country of origin, place of publication, subject matter, or perhaps some other essential quality? Does Barbara Honigmann, a German-Jewish writer who left the GDR in 1984 and published her first collection of short stories in 1986, fit within this interpretive rubric? Do her writings address GDR-specific issues, or must they be read within a larger German and Jewish framework? And what of Uwe Johnson or Monika Maron, whose novels were denied publication in the GDR? Is Christa Wolf first and foremost a "GDR writer" or a feminist writer? And how should we classify Wolfgang Staudte's 1946 film *Die Mörder sind unter uns* or the poetry of Bert Papenfuß? While interpretive contexts are seldom mutually exclusive, might an emphasis on the GDR steer us away from viewing its cultural production within larger German, Eastern European or even Western contexts?

Far from signaling the end of GDR studies, these many questions demonstrate that the work of historicizing the GDR post-*Wende* has begun. Increased access to documents and other archival information as well as greater opportunities for communicative exchange with GDR citizens have greatly enriched recent scholarship. In addition, the writing of a new generation of "GDR" authors such as Reinhard Jirgl, Kerstin Hensel and Thomas Brussig continues to diversify and transform the literary landscape. Developments in the new and old *Länder* since unification have also given rise to issues surrounding national identity brought to the fore not only by the changing demographics of post-communist Europe, but also by the deepening divisions between *Ossis* and *Wessis*. This has become particularly evident in the lacking sense of belonging to unified Germany, of *Heimat*, on the part of many former GDR citizens – a sentiment too easily dismissed or trivialized as "mere nostalgia" or *Ostalgie*. These comprise just some of the factors that lead us continually to revise our positions, as theoretical developments in the areas of poststructuralism, cultural studies and gender studies increasingly facilitate more nuanced understandings of GDR history and culture. While the complexly entwined relationship of writers, State and Stasi so apparent immediately after the Wall's destruction will and should continue to garner much critical attention, the distance afforded by the past years has also broadened perspectives beyond entrenched dichotomies of victims/perpetrators, dissidents/*StaatsdichterInnen*, left/right, the GDR/FRG, East and West.

Since the *Wende*, then, scholars who had once positioned themselves firmly against Western anti-communist, Cold War sentiments prevalent not only outside the academy but also within its ivory towers, have also begun to reflect critically on the extent to which this position engendered significant interpretive blind spots. The contributions collected here reveal an increasing

awareness of the subject positions of the teacher/scholar and the writer, and compel us to consider more closely who is writing what, where, why, when, and for whom – questions that we must direct not only towards the figures we study, but also towards ourselves. Differentiated attempts to understand textual and metatextual dynamics from both the outside and the inside attest to our evolving understanding and interpretations of the GDR, to the fact that the GDR's history and the stories we tell about it continue to be rewritten. We must thus make every effort to ensure that the frame we place around the snapshot of the GDR we present to our students – for some of our students will see no more than one or two snapshots – is as nuanced and complex, indeed even as contradictory, as possible.

Three main sections comprise this issue of the *GDR Bulletin*. The first contains essays by scholars from the United States, Norway, and the former GDR who offer perspectives on “Teaching the GDR” that range from the ramifications of the GDR's disappearance in college-level language textbooks and the choice of “representative” texts for seminars and reading lists, to broader issues of canonicity and standpoint. Four syllabi make up the second section and provide concrete examples of how the GDR is presently being shaped and reshaped, contextualized and recontextualized in the classroom. The articles in the final section focus on GDR literature, film, and culture. Together, these diverse contributions illuminate the extent to which the shift in academia towards approaches that devote great attention to minority discourses and Otherness, as well as the changing direction of American educational theory, transform the questions we ask about GDR literature and culture. While no unified new direction emerges, readers will recognize compelling resonances among the various articles, interviews, course descriptions and books reviews collected here.

TEACHING THE GDR

If our goal in teaching culture is to help students work through multiple layers of cultural preconceptions in an attempt to understand another culture from the “inside” – or, at least, as informed outsiders – then teaching the GDR certainly presents numerous formidable obstacles. As Claire Kramsch illuminates in *Context and Culture in Language Teaching* (1993), our perceptions of other cultures are not only confounded by individual factors such as age, race, gender, and class, but also filtered through our culture's (albeit non-uniform) self-perception and its perception of the other (target) culture. The common self-perception of Americans, one deeply embedded in ideals of freedom, democracy, and capitalist prosperity, contrasts markedly with their general equation of communism/the GDR with a severe limitation of

freedoms, the repression of basic rights, and visible economic lack. Particularly among our students, who were perhaps eleven to thirteen years old at the time of German unification, positive associations – or even any associations – with socialism are difficult to evoke. How, then, can we traverse this cultural divide? Within the context of critical pedagogy, Kramsch suggests: “The only way to start building a more complete and less partial understanding of both C1 [native culture] and C2 [target culture] is to develop a third perspective that would enable learners to take both an insider's and an outsider's view on C1 and C2. It is precisely this third place that cross-cultural education should seek to establish” (210).

Articles by Ann Rider and Roswitha Skare point to ways in which German curricula in the United States and Norway might work towards helping students develop such a “third perspective.” Rider takes as her starting point the observation that recent editions of American college German textbooks now represent the GDR through the narrow lens of unification and the “special problems” of integration into the West. This presentation, Rider argues, limits cultural perspectives to those of the West, which functions as the normative standard by which the East and East Germans are judged. While pre-unification textbooks still required instructors to contextualize GDR socialism and engage students critically with the material, their representation of the “Other” nonetheless acknowledged cultural difference – though without, one should add, attributing much validity to it. From the perspective of recent developments in multicultural and critical pedagogy, however, Rider asserts that it is crucial to expose students to “critical differences,” i.e. those differences that diverge from students' own stable points of reference. To these Rider counts qualities of “real existing socialism” such as distinct *Wertgefühle*, guaranteed child care, the right to work and the regulation of property ownership – aspects of GDR society also illuminated in Daniela Dahn's *Westwärts und nicht vergessen* (see Rado Pribic's essay in this issue). Through exposure to these values Rider hopes that students would not only begin to recognize the underlying assumptions of their own society and the ramifications of its unwritten laws, but also deepen their understanding of the idea of democratic socialism and the extent to which socialist and left wing parties in Europe have formed and transformed capitalism on that continent.

Without glorifying them, Rider stresses positive aspects of GDR culture that challenge students to reconsider their cultural preconceptions, and thus raises the question of how to paint a more differentiated picture of the GDR. The answer, as simple as it is challenging, is to confront students with multiple viewpoints. Roswitha Skare offers one such perspective in her article discussing

the integration of Monika Maron's *Stille Zeile sechs* into the curriculum at the Norwegian university of Tromsø. Like Rider, Skare remarks that newer language textbooks in her country have replaced the chapter on the GDR with chapter(s) on the *Wende* and unification, yet then goes on to examine how this general shift away from the GDR affects the status of GDR literature in the "Grundstudium Deutsch." She explains that until 1990, GDR literature, commonly represented by Christa Wolf or Erich Loest, constituted an undisputed part of this course of study. With unification, however, came the consideration that this literature could be dropped – the GDR, after all, had ceased to exist. Besides, if one were to include GDR literature on the reading list, which text(s) should be selected? The choice of Monika Maron's *Stille Zeile sechs* may come as a surprise: none of Maron's novels was granted publication in the East, and *Stille Zeile sechs* appeared 1991, a year after unification. While Skare states that one reason for this choice was Maron's visit to Tromsø in fall 1995, she also reveals other significant considerations: *Stille Zeile sechs* addresses students' current interests, teaches about GDR culture by placing readers in the role of cultural interpreters, and, through its poetic language, challenges them to work on the text and develop their own perspectives. The novel's themes, for example the entanglement of victims and perpetrators, generational conflict, historiography, and paternalism. They thereby point to societal contradictions that not only engender a more complex understanding of GDR culture, but open up broader questions central to an understanding of postwar Germany. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, these topics are truly relevant to the students' own cultures – regardless of their country of origin.

Providing students with more direct access to GDR culture becomes the focus of Karen Remmler's essay and interview with GDR writer and dramaturg Holger Teschke. In her essay, Remmler reflects on how developments since unification have forced teachers of GDR culture in the United States and abroad to rethink what constitutes GDR identity. In emphasizing the changing role of GDR writers in the process of cultural mediation, Remmler emphasizes that GDR writers do not comprise a monolithic group. She looks to cultural anthropological approaches to understand how writers themselves "have been made into subjects that represent a discrete culture, itself permeable and not as isolated as one might assume." Their mediation of culture is thus necessarily fragmented.

As Remmler's interview illuminates, the engagement of scholars and students with literature and with "native informants" such as Teschke can function to break down the consensus of what the GDR was, to convey a sense of that culture's multiple voices and instantiations. In discussion of theater workshops he conducted at the University of Kentucky, MIT, Humboldt State University

and Mount Holyoke College, Teschke reveals how direct, corporeal and experimental engagement with literature can heighten students' appreciation of language, literature and culture. Theater workshops, he states, provide a means for students to embark on a journey into a foreign language and world: "Es kann auch die Reise in eine fremde Zeit wie die vierzig Jahre DDR sein, von der nur ihre Literatur bleiben wird – und die Literatur, die über diese Zeit noch geschrieben werden muß." Teschke underlines the cross-cultural readings that emerge from such travel: how a student who served in operation "Desert Storm" related her experience to Heiner Müller's *Die Schlacht*; how Teschke's own college-age son responded to Büchner's *Leonce and Lena* with the recognition: "Das ist die Story von Kurt Cobain und Courtney Love." Moreover, the interdisciplinary focus of the workshops sparked students' interest in specific writers and gave rise to critical questions. Yet while he welcomes the shift towards interdisciplinary German Studies, Teschke is quick to emphasize: "Wenn allerdings bei dem Versuch, German Studies als interdisziplinäres und multikulturelles Fach aufzubauen, die ostdeutsche Literatur plötzlich lediglich als Teil der gesamtdeutschen Literatur erscheint, dann ist das eine problematische Verkürzung."

Like Skare, Teschke approaches the question of "representative texts," asking whether students will learn more about the past and future of united Germany from *Der geteilte Himmel* and *Die Umsiedlerin* or from the newest work by Christoph Hein or Sevgi Özdamar. These remarks lead one to reflect further not only on "representative" texts, but also on the ability of literature and film to represent what facts cannot. As Ingeborg Bachmann aptly states in *Der Fall Franza*: "Die Tatsachen, die die Welt ausmachen – sie brauchen das Nichttatsächliche, um von ihm aus erkannt zu werden." Accordingly it is worth noting that despite their preconceived ideas, when reading *Der geteilte Himmel* in a recent undergraduate literature course at Washington University, the vast majority of students supported Rita's decision to stay in the East rather than join Manfred in the West.

Roland Berbig also discusses what remains to be learned from such texts and how story and history are complexly entwined. "Vor dem Geschichte-Schreiben kommt das Geschichten-Erzählen," he emphasizes. Berbig's personal account of his experiences as a student in the GDR raised on "GDR literature" further illuminates issues of canonicity, of which texts belong to "DDR-Literatur" and what their authors represent. He remarks that while courses relating to early GDR literature and its classic representatives (Christa Wolf, Franz Fühmann, women writers) still predominate at the Humboldt Universität, other offerings include seminars on GDR children's and youth literature, literature of the *Wende*,

INTRODUCTION

Uwe Johnson, and the *Prenzlauer-Berg-Szene*. Regarding directions in scholarship, Berbig cites both a trend towards historicizing GDR literature and a “Weg in die Aktualität” forged through recourse to past texts and themes. In addition, he sees the tendency towards and importance of archival work. Berbig ends his essay with seven suggestions for approaching GDR literature that emphasize the need for continual involvement, situated knowledge and the (re)conceptualization of GDR literature within broader interpretive frameworks, in particular in relation to literature of the old Federal Republic. Berbig challenges earlier approaches while confirming the continued validity, vitality, even the allure of GDR studies: “Die DDR-Literatur muß als eine Forschungsquelle verstanden werden, die noch fließt, von deren Geheimnis noch nicht allzu viel bekannt ist.”

SYLLABI

The syllabi collected in this issue’s second section exemplify various ways GDR literature and culture are being framed in the classroom. The accompanying descriptions, study questions, film list, reading lists and bibliographies further reveal how instructors define the category “East German Texts,” mediate between historical and aesthetic readings, and construct innovative interpretive frameworks.

Reflecting recent efforts to recontextualize and rehistoricize the GDR for students who may have little background knowledge of its history and culture, Carol Anne Costabile-Heming and Marc Silberman present syllabi for survey courses on the development of East German literature that seek to illuminate the extent to which readings of texts, and thus of culture and history, change over time. In her syllabus, Costabile-Heming takes a two-pronged approach. First, she has students examine individual GDR texts from the perspective of their original historical context and initial reception. Then, she shifts the focus to reconsider the works in light of changing perceptions regarding, for example, literary production under censorship and writers’ complicity in upholding the status quo. In his graduate seminar on “Historisierung der DDR-Literatur,” Marc Silberman sought to involve students in self-reflection about the constitution of contemporary and historical judgments passed on literature by examining not only primary texts, but also the debates surrounding the publication and textual production under the SED regime as well as the more recent *Literaturstreit*. While Silberman and Costabile-Heming both remark that the students’ lack of background knowledge – of the GDR, its literature, or larger traditions of socialist literature or Marxist aesthetics – presented obstacles, through a combination lecture/seminar format both were able to engage students

with some of the contexts they view as prerequisites for more differentiated readings.

Barton Byg’s syllabus on the often neglected area of GDR-, and specifically DEFA-produced, film takes a reverse chronological approach, beginning with post-Wall films such as von Trotta’s *The Promise* and Beyer’s *Nikolai Church* and moving back in time to Wolfgang Staudte’s 1946 production *The Murderers are among us*. Byg’s course organization and choice of secondary readings gives students a sense of the development of East German cinema while its also situates films within multiple discursive frameworks. For example, the course examines the depiction of the GDR as “the repressed national Other” in West German films such as Helke Sander’s *Redupers* and Wim Wender’s *Kings of the Road*, and addresses topics such as the anti-fascist tradition, the depiction of Jews, censorship, and gender. One obvious explanation for the neglect of GDR films in the North American classroom has been their limited availability. The founding of the DEFA Film Library at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, the compiled list of “East German and GDR-Related Films Available in North America,” and the upcoming conference on DEFA film (see the final section of this issue) will certainly help to remedy this situation.

Anke Pinkert offers yet another intriguing angle on the GDR in her proposed syllabus for an English-language undergraduate humanities course that situates the GDR within an Eastern European context. Her proposal suggests innovative pairings of readings that place selected GDR texts within larger discursive contexts of power and legitimacy, opposition, construction of gender in a paternal state, joke theory and dissidence, and counter-cultural movements. In addition to recontextualizing the GDR, Pinkert’s juxtaposition of texts by Vaclav Havel and Ian McEwan in her final unit encourages students to reflect on issues of power and resistance in the present.

The authors of these syllabi all attempt to encourage students to resist the dichotomy of either idealizing or condemning East German writers and their texts. They consider both the distance and connections between biographies and literary production, and thereby animate GDR texts for new readers through combinations of “old” and “new” readings.

ARTICLES

Scholarly articles on film and literature, an interview with Joochen Laabs and two review essays comprise the final section of this issue. Though none of these submissions was written with the intention of addressing pedagogical issues, their approaches echo those found in the aforementioned articles and syllabi. In them one finds a dis-

GDR BULLETIN

cussion of reception, investigations of the relationships between history and biography, critical standpoints as well as positive assessment of the *Wertgefühle* emphasized by many former East German citizens and writers.

Two articles focus on the GDR as a totalitarian state. In "Personal Vendettas and their Public Appropriations: The Politics of Film Reception in Sibylle Schönemann's *Verriegelte Zeit*," Angelica Fenner combines a feminist reading of Schönemann's film with a discussion of its marketing and reception in a manner that allows for criticism of the totalitarian GDR state yet resists the often concomitant gesture of valorizing the West. As Fenner illuminates, the film's marketing as a realist documentary goes hand in hand with its scathing indictment of the GDR. In Fenner's view this strategy limited interpretive possibilities by fortifying a Western sense of self. Fenner broadens this perspective by reading *Verriegelte Zeit* as a highly subjective, disturbingly intimate, and feminist exploration of the intersection of Schönemann's autobiography with the GDR past.

Andrea Reiter likewise investigates the relationship between the individual and the totalitarian state in her discussion of Monika Maron's novels *Die Überläuferin* and *Stille Zeile sechs*. Describing these texts as examples of "close experimental observation," Reiter shows how Maron situates the same protagonist, Rosalind Polkowski, in two distinct environments in order to "observe" how these settings affect Rosalind's thoughts and behavior as well as the respective narrative styles and voices of Maron's texts. Reiter thus exemplifies ways in which historical events affect artistic production.

Petra Fiero's article on "Identitätsfindung und Verhältnis zur deutschen Sprache bei Chaim Noll und Barbara Honigmann" considers these writers as part of a larger Germany whose National Socialist past continues to mark its present. Both of these Jewish writers were raised in East Germany by parents who were committed socialists. Although one of the few aspects of German culture that they can embrace as theirs is the language, both eventually emigrated to non-German-speaking countries. As Fiero's article shows, Noll and Honigmann contribute to a minority discourse often neglected in the consideration of East Germany and its literary production. At the same time as their works challenge common divisions between East and West Germany, these authors themselves defy classification as East German or even German writers.

While the aforementioned essays focus more on the GDR and the German past, Fritz König's interview with Jochen Laabs, Rado Pribic's discussion of Daniela Dahn's *Westwärts und nicht vergessen* and Boria Sax's essay on Lutz Rathenow more specifically address post-*Wende* issues. In his conversation with König, Laabs illuminates the diverse reactions of GDR writers to unifi-

cation and thus underscores the impossibility of delimiting a unified position or distinct new trend in literary production. Effectively countering the thesis that, with unification, GDR writers lost the very foundation of their writing, Laabs asserts that the inspiration for literary production springs from the disparity between individual expectations and their fulfillment. To be sure, this disparity was not unique to the GDR: Daniela Dahn's provocative *Westwärts und nicht vergessen* reveals that it exists everywhere, even in unified Germany. As Pribic documents, Dahn's latest work relates numerous facets of her own "Unbehagen in der Einheit," an uneasiness she relates to her life as a writer, an anti-fascist, a leftist, a former GDR citizen, a woman, and a citizen of the new Federal Republic. Dahn's insistence that the West is not paradise, that something could in fact be learned from the former GDR and its citizens, has found resonance in both parts of now unified Germany. Yet, predictably, reception in the eastern part of Germany was much more enthusiastic, and critics writing in newspapers such as the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* did not restrain from expressing their own distinct "Unbehagen" with Dahn's claims.

Boria Sax takes Lutz Rathenow's acceptance of the 1996 Adenauer Prize as the starting point for reflections on politics, kitsch, and literature that challenge simple classification of writers as "dissident," "left," or "right." As Sax shows, such terms lose their meaning with changing historical contexts and power configurations.

Lastly, through personal, often humorous recollections culled from his acquaintance with Jurek Becker, who visited Washington University on numerous occasions to read from his works, teach as Writer in Residence in the German Department, and speak at international conferences, Paul Michael Lützelers pays tribute to a GDR writer of international renown. From his literary masterpiece *Jakob der Lügner* to his successful television series *Liebling Kreuzberg* and *Wir sind auch nur ein Volk*, the diversity of Becker's oeuvre exemplifies the continual transformation of history into story. It compels GDR scholars further to reflect on the past, present, and future of GDR studies.