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Editing the Socialist Canon:
Forming Identity through Censorship in Poland and the GDR under Stalin

By
Elizabeth Louise Wenger

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
History
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Graduate Division
of the
University of California, Berkeley

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Professor John Connelly, Chair
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Elizabeth Louise Wenger

Abstract

Editing the Socialist Canon:

Forming Identity through Censorship in Poland and the GDR under Stalin

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Elizabeth Louise Wenger

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Berkeley

Professor John Connelly, Chair

My project, “Editing the Socialist Canon: Forming Identity through Censorship in Poland and the GDR under Stalin” considers censorship as a kind of canon formation by exclusion that weeded out the unacceptable works rather than promoting the desirable. By attempting universal control of printed material, the censors implied that anything published was not only acceptable, but in some manner actually Socialist. After the Second World War, literary culture was not a secondary matter to be monitored in case it might become a refuge of sedition. Rather, it was constitutive of the new Socialist state identities that the parties were attempting to form. Within this framework, I consider the Polish and East German cases, which sat at opposite ends of the spectrum of both severity and acknowledgement of censorship. My study aims to determine the extent of and limits on variation that the system allowed between states, as well as deeper patterns of negotiation within them. While the constant pressure of the Soviet Union certainly imposed some uniformity on these constructions, each state worked within the context of its own tradition and responded to its own insecurities. Critically, though, whatever its aspirations, the system was never homogenous. Individual censors perceived matters of tradition and threat differently, and indeed, brought their own understandings and misunderstandings of Marxist orthodoxy to their work, creating a result

that was far more chaotic than an outside view would suggest. To illustrate these wider themes, I will discuss the publication of classic and contemporary novels from both inside and outside Poland and the GDR. In the negotiations between orthodox and popular literature, it becomes possible to understand something of the line between didactic theory and practical exigency as they began to shape each other. The first half of my dissertation considers the meaning and effect of the actual structure of the offices, with chapters devoted to their institutional functioning, to the intellectual formation of the elites who created them, and to the training and supervision of the everyday censors. The second half looks into the margins of the censor's work, where the limits of the permissible and of the censor's power met. It considers the categories of genre, traditional literature, books from foreign countries, and those by contemporary authors at home.

for my parents

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Abbreviations

Archives:

AAN Archiwum Akt Nowych
BA Bundesarchiv

Other:

DDR *Deutsche Demokratische Republik* (German Democratic Republic)
GUKPPIW *Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk* (Main Office in Charge of Press, Publications, and Performance)
KC *Komitet Centralny* (central committee)
PPS *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna* (Polish Socialist Party)
PRL *Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa* (Polish People's Republic)
PZPR *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* (Polish United Workers' Party)
RAPP Российская ассоциация пролетарских писателей, РАПП (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers)
SED *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (German Socialist Unity Party)
ZK *Zentralkomitee* (central committee)

A Note on the Text

Throughout this dissertation, I refer constantly to the Polish and East German censor's offices. This is a choice I have made for the sake of clarity and consistency, though the offices themselves never used this term. The Polish office is the Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji, i Widowisk, and the German censors were contained for most of the period under discussion in the Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen within the Ministry of Culture. Following the same principle, I have translated office names, terms, and titles as often as possible, so that the German and Polish expressions will be equally comprehensible. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

Introduction

In 1955, in a special, tenth-anniversary edition of his agency's *Informational Bulletin*, a Polish censor wrote a short memoir explaining how the censor's office had given him a place and a political education, helping him rebuild his own life as he helped rebuild his country. At its core, the *Bulletin* was only an extended memo, created to help address the censors' constant training deficit, but the more enthusiastic employees, at least, contributed their personal opinions and creative work eagerly. The memoir was followed by a satire "Just For Women," making light of the trials of working while managing to get dinner on the table, but still emphasizing the satisfaction of helping to raise the country's literary standards. These are strange pictures of the censor, who is most often portrayed in the popular imagination as a gray functionary, the embodiment of all the cynicism and malicious repression of bureaucracy. In the years immediately following World War II, the Western imagination quickly crystalized around the image of a Communist censor drawn in books like George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) or *1984* (1949). At the same time, though, as the governments of Poland and what would become the German Democratic Republic (GDR) struggled to establish themselves, these censors' attitudes toward their work were not uncommon. Still, embodying the restriction of cultural production rather than the thing itself, the censor is hard to love. He is the representative of control, limitation, and wasted potential, denying both creativity and criticism in favor of a half-imaginary need for security. In the case of postwar Communism, the censor can easily become a synecdoche for the repressive, balkanized, obscurantist corrupt governments that are the most unpleasant face of postwar Communism.

The strangeness and unexpectedness of the censors' views of themselves suggest that it might be necessary to reconsider both the meaning and the practice of censorship. When this project began, I reflexively assumed that the censor was an enemy to any reader or writer, and certainly would not have imagined the author of the *Informational Bulletin*. I was eager to glimpse the truth behind the regimes' facades of propaganda and self-aggrandizement. I believed that the governments I was dealing with would naturally seek to censor the things they were most afraid of, so that a closer examination of the censor's office would provide a map of their fears and insecurities. By looking at the censor's office during Stalin's harshest and most dramatic censorship under Stalin, from 1945 to 1956, I hoped to find the seeds of problems that would, by the 1970s, grow

into full-blown dissidence. Poland and East Germany existed at opposite ends of the spectrum of East European censorship, with the Poles famously lenient, and the Germans approaching the endeavor with the kind of vigor that goes with an attempt at redemption. The practice of censorship was, in my mind, a way to get at the roots of resistance in those situations before they were deep enough to show up in a documentary trail. To my surprise, though, I found myself almost unwillingly developing a sympathy for my very own devil. Through the chinks in their never-ending bureaucracy, flashes of real devotion and even warmth or humor appeared in the censors' work. Perhaps most surprisingly, I found that at all levels, they were invested in the idea of reconstruction, their part in it, and in rebuilding their countries' literary fields. They almost never used language of excision or purification, and were far less committed to defining an Other than I had expected. Of course, no one is ever the villain of his own story, and it is hardly surprising that workers in a rather dirty job should attempt to justify their work to themselves and the world at large. However, my work suggested that their enthusiasm went a step further. These were not the censors whose interviews one reads from the seventies and eighties, who freely lamented that the government maintained the censor's office, but insisted that they were doing the job to prevent someone worse from taking over and to advocate for real literature as far as possible.¹ Many of these early censors, at least, believed that they were supporting their nations' literature not despite their positions, but through them. So far from being omnipotent outside observers, the people who did the work of censoring were profoundly ordinary. In general, they were low-level civil servants, perhaps a bit better educated than the average, to whom the functions of the party elite were as obscure as they were to most other people.

If this is true, it requires a basic recalibration. What would it mean to conceive of censorship as a constructive force? If nothing else, the question "what were the censors hiding?" would be reversed to ask what they, and the governments behind them, were projecting. At the most basic level, in the face of a staggering lack of raw materials that only began with the severe paper shortage after the Second World War, at least some of these earliest censors tacitly thought of themselves as prioritizing literature for their countries. By making sure that the system was not clogged by work that was either actively pernicious, like the recent Fascist propaganda, or

¹ Robert Darnton, "Censorship, a Comparative View: France, 1789-East Germany, 1989," *Representations*, no. 49 (1995); Stanisław Barańczak, *Breathing under Water and Other East European Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 85-86.

simply worthless, as they would have described most genre literature and contemporary output from the West, they were ensuring that the most essential literature could reach its audience. In choosing literature to make public, they were developing a kind of literary canon that, if it was not actively Socialist, at least met the system's standard of acceptability. This was possible because the level of control to which the state aspired was total. Every legal piece of printed material had to be read, reviewed, and judged acceptable by the state before it could appear. This meant that every piece of literature that appeared in the shops carried the government's imprimatur. Taken as a whole, then, the censor's work creates a picture of the state itself, or at least, the state that the censor understood, aspired to, or wanted to encourage. It is necessary to study the books themselves together with the people responsible for approving them (or not) in order to begin to understand the forces that shaped these new identities.

This picture is complicated, of course, by the fact that there was never anything even approximating a unified voice within the censor's office. Almost by definition, the picture of a coherent literary identity that they created was one that could only be viewed from the outside. From the perspective of outside states, ordinary citizens, and even publishers, the censor's decisions were remote, absolute, and most importantly, coherent. Taking the accounts and evidence from the office seriously, though, means grappling not only with its very real lack of resources and difficulty educating staff, but the wider point that at every level, the censors' reasons for joining the office were diverse. Their interpretations of even the most basic questions of policy were often wildly different. What emerges, then, is not a static picture of the "real" states, or even one of their visions of their ideal selves, but rather the dynamic process of creating those identities, as much through chaotic mistake as through strategy and intention.

The picture of the censor as part of a vast, oppressive monolith reaching from Vladivostok to Berlin, then, gives these systems a bit too much credit. Instead, they were toward the more repressive end of a continuum that includes most governments. It is necessary to keep in mind that during the period of the most draconian censorship in East Germany, the Americans were also busy blacklisting authors with Nazi leanings in West Germany, and ones with Communist leanings at home. To observers at the time, it was often unclear which power was really the more repressive. Even today, we neither have, nor in all cases want, a perfectly free system. In this case, then, the study of East German and Polish censors should not be seen not as an attempt to comprehend the foreign, but as an

exploration of ourselves, and the ways in which we form collective identities.

Historiography of Censorship

In 1981, when Katerina Clark wrote the preface to her *The Soviet Novel*, it was still necessary for her to begin with a charming anecdote about the (mostly) polite incredulity that her subject met at dinner parties and receptions.² At the time, despite Vera Dunham's path-breaking 1976 *In Stalin's Time*, the idea that someone would willingly read so many volumes of Socialist Realism was nearly absurd.³ In the thirty years since, there has been a sea change; Soviet novels, and also radio, television, movies and cabaret are widely recognized as subjects both rich and strange. In all of this work on cultural production, the last slowly crumbling bastion of scholarly resistance is censorship. From the fifties onward, Socialist Realism has often been understood in popular culture as the embodiment of empty, regime-dictated art, with the practice of censorship as the brute power that enforced it. The pair were commonly seen as the moral opposite of the free, daring expression and experimentation of the West. Even within academia now, after the artistic merits of Socialist Realism have been rehabilitated, studies of the censor can still provoke skepticism.

Traditionally speaking, the main question in work on censorship is its effect on and role in civil society. In the Eastern European case, for very good reason, the foundational books, written from the late seventies through the mid- and even late nineties, were at pains to emphasize the destructive consequences of censorship in the region.⁴ This was the era of

² Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

³ Vera Sandomirsky Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction*, enl. and updated ed., Studies of the Harriman Institute (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

⁴ See Georgiæi Iosifovich Lomidze, *National Soviet Literatures: Unity of Purpose*, trans. Nina Belenkaya (Moscow: Raduga, 1983). Also especially Jane Leftwich Curry, *The Media and Intra-Elite Communication in Poland: The System of Censorship*, A Rand Note (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1980); Sue Curry Jansen, *Censorship: The Knot That Binds Power and Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Additionally, in 1977, a censor from Krakow snuck out of the country with secret office material strapped around his middle. It was first published in Polish as Tomasz Strzyżewski, ed., *Czarna ksiązka cenzury PRL* (London: Aneks, 1977), and translated as Jane Leftwich Curry, trans., *The Black Book of Polish Censorship* (New York: Random House, 1984). Finally, for a hint of the work being written in German: Werner G. Hahn, *Postwar Soviet Politics: The Fall of Zhdanov and the Defeat of Moderation, 1946-53* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

the Helsinki Accords, when the states in question were publicly committing, or in some cases, recommitting, to non-aggression, self-determination, and human rights. The latter were significantly defined to include the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion and belief.⁵ Against this backdrop, the first studies were written in a distinctly activist mode, with the primary goal of exposing abuses that would otherwise be hushed and forcing reform. Because these books were wringing information out of states that were trying to obfuscate and control, it is natural that the state tends to stand as a monolith in them, threatening not only the political but even the interior, spiritual life of its citizens in order to fill its rapacious need for power. This is especially true in Poland. In Germany, the greater volume of scholarship prompted a level of specificity that encouraged more nuance. A book devoted to the GDR reception of Heinrich von Kleist, for example, would be scarcely more than a pamphlet if it limited itself to his early postwar publishing history.⁶ It is also true that before the wall fell, the GDR had less active dissidence to swell the tide of criticism of the state. This is especially important, because the Western outlook on Socialist states was further reinforced by the genre of émigré autobiography, written by exiles intent on explaining the cataclysm that had overtaken them. The overall emphasis, then, was on the authoritarian, even totalitarian character of the censor's office, which was assumed to stifle civil society not accidentally or regretfully, but also as a central part of its *raison d'être*.

At the same time that these pioneering works were being written on contemporary Eastern Europe, the confluence of social history and book history as practiced by scholars like Robert Darnton, Roger Chartier, and Elizabeth Eisenstein led to a new interest in early modern censorship as well.⁷ Because these writers wrote about the beginning of a continuous

⁵ This was a marked shift from the earlier Communist position that prioritized the more active, practical freedoms to housing, food, work, etc.

⁶ Theo Honnef, *Heinrich von Kleist in der Literatur der DDR* (New York: P. Lang, 1988).

⁷ Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Clearly, books themselves had been a study for much longer. Two of the earliest that continue to have a bearing on current work are Lucien Paul Victor Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800*, Verso ed. (London: Verso, 1984), first published 1958; and Richard D. Altick, *The*

tradition of state censorship, their work was very much in line with the thematic concerns of the rest of the field. With the benefits of distance and an established literary tradition (topped by the unassailable Shakespeare), these writers were less immediately concerned with the censor's stultifying effect on authors, and more interested in his role within the larger system.⁸

This shift in perspective prompted two distinct lines of insight. The first of these, willing to see the censor as a constructive participant in the creative process and led by scholars like Richard Dutton, keeps a close focus on the relationship between the censor and his subject.⁹ This is not to suggest that these works construct an idyll where authors enjoyed being censored and all parties worked together to make the best possible play. Instead, they maintain that, structurally speaking, the censor's emphasis on licensing and patronage helped drive the move towards professionalization that would ultimately result in greater protection and legitimacy for writers.¹⁰ Creatively, they suggest that the censor was less a panoptic, repressive authority, and in some respects even a liaison to conduct the author through the political intricacies of performing for the aristocracy.¹¹ This function makes more sense in the light of the second thread of studies, led by scholars like Cyndia Clegg and Deborah Shuger.¹² Taking a wider view of censorship's effect on society as a whole, they point out that legally, early modern censorship was rooted in laws against libel. Thus they argue that, as used by the state, it was not envisioned as an ideological tool until later. In this interpretation, censorship can, in fact, be seen in the light of our current laws against hate speech.¹³ Somewhere between these two threads sits Raz-Krakotzin's brilliant work on the complex relationship

English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900, 2nd ed. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), first published 1957.

⁸ For a counterexample, however, see Janet Clare, *Art Made Tongue-Tied by Authority: Elizabethan and Jacobean Dramatic Censorship*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), first published 1990.

⁹ Richard Dutton, *Licensing, Censorship and Authorship in Early Modern England: Buggeswords* (New York: Palgrave, 2000).

¹⁰ Richard Dutton, *Mastering the Revels: The Regulation and Censorship of English Renaissance Drama* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 248.

¹² Cyndia Susan Clegg, *Press Censorship in Caroline England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 24-30; Debora K. Shuger, *Censorship and Cultural Sensibility: The Regulation of Language in Tudor-Stuart England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 102.

¹³ Shuger, *Censorship and Cultural Sensibility*, 23-25, 272-276.

between translations of the Torah and the *Index Liborum Prohibitorum*.¹⁴ He focuses on the quandaries that the translations caused for both Renaissance Catholic and Jewish scholars. The Christians were caught between their very real desire for access to the material and their equally real sense that maintaining close enough contact to translate it would be improper for a Christian. The Jewish scholars were similarly held between their desire for contact with the wider academic world and their loyalty to their own people and traditions. Without minimizing the importance of the power relations in the situation or the prejudices that created it, he nonetheless maintains that the project reconstituted the categories of identity for both sides involved.

Taken very broadly, these combined insights are invaluable for the study of twentieth-century censorship. They suggest a collection of ways in which the coercive, even repressive aspects of the practice can be acknowledged while still allowing room for nuance and more complicated relationships. This way of considering censorship is fundamental to my project. On a more detailed level, of course, the differences between early modern and twentieth-century censorship reassert themselves. Most notably, the arguments made over mastering sixteenth-century performances for the aristocracy hinge on the relatively limited goals of those censors. In the view of these historians, the censor's circumscribed orbit and non-ideological purview mark the line between a problematic but complex and even constructive practice and wholly deplorable oppression.¹⁵ To apply their insights to censorship that was committed to a universal reach and devoted primarily to ideological oversight requires some nuance. At the same time, however, this temporal separation is exactly what makes these works particularly valuable. Their distance from the exigencies of twentieth-century politics and their treatment of subjects who were foreign to our views of heroic authorship and the genius of creation provide an important corrective to our contemporary assumptions.

One of the first scholars to meet the problem of constructively analyzing censorship head on was the Czech feminist Jeřina Šmejkalová-Strickland.¹⁶ Inspired by Judith Butler's work on gender performance, she

¹⁴ Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *The Censor, the Editor, and the Text: The Catholic Church and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon in the Sixteenth Century*, Jewish Culture and Contexts (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

¹⁵ Shuger, *Censorship and Cultural Sensibility*, 62-65.

¹⁶ Jeřina Šmejkalová-Strickland, "Censoring Canons: Transitions and Prospects of Literary Institutions in Czechoslovakia," in *The Administration of Aesthetics: Censorship, Political Criticism, and the Public Sphere*, ed. Richard Burt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 195-215.

set out to create a holistic model of censoring and reading practice that would move beyond easy binaries of victim/oppressor or resistance/complicity and attempt to address the ways that the system was constructed and assented to by all of its participants.¹⁷ Perhaps her most revolutionary insight, for the purposes of this study at least, is that the product of all of these interactions is a new, specifically Communist, canon. More recently, Dominic Boyer, while not employing the idea of canon specifically, has argued that censorship (in this case, of radio and news media) was an integral part of the GDR's bid for legitimacy and understanding of itself.¹⁸ He argues that the eager search for transparent, unequivocal language was part of an effort that had continued since the mid-nineteenth century to unify the nation and let it speak with the voice of the people. It is easy to see, then, how the censors in his study could have considered themselves patriots.

Both of these works share the idea that censorship, canon, and identity are all related. The last two ideas, at least, have a long history together. From their beginning in antiquity until the present, studies of canon formation have traveled hand in hand with the politics of identity. This was particularly evident in the 1990s, when both theory and practice on the subject struggled to change the canon and incorporate the works of marginalized groups. In these efforts, it is clear that the canon is understood both to reflect identity (we should hear an African American voice in American literature, for example, because in reality it makes up well over ten percent of American society) and to shape it (we should read other literatures because they foster understanding and make us tolerant, pluralistic, democratic). Under the Communist system, the idea of popular assent to the canon, and thus the suggestion that it might be a community responsibility, were undermined by the reader's lack of choice and the government's failure to prevent illegal works from being widely distributed. Instead, the official canon actively worked to reflect and create the official picture of the nation's literary identity.

¹⁷ Jeřina Šmejkalová-Strickland, "Censors and Their Readers, Selling, Silencing, and Reading Czech Books," in *Books, Libraries, Reading, and Publishing in the Cold War*, ed. Hermina G. B. Anghelescu and Martine Poulain (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Center for the Book, 2001), 87-103.

¹⁸ Dominic Boyer, "Censorship as a Vocation: The Institutions, Practices, and Cultural Logic of Media Control in the German Democratic Republic," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 3 (2003).

Following all of these scholars, my dissertation aims to answer the question of what censorship meant when it aimed for total control. Whether in Strickland's fashion, where the entire discourse of literary society constitutes, limits, and reinforces the canon, or in Boyer's, where a specific institutional effort attempts to define a canon according to some overarching principle, total censorship produces canons by a process of exclusion. These negative canons differ from the more conventional kind in a number of important respects. Most importantly, they are not, as Western canons are, chosen relatively freely by a vast aggregate of publishers, syllabus mappers, literature reviews, and the like. Because the element of choice is monopolized by a group of authorities in these totalizing systems, questions of what, exactly, the canon encompasses and how it can be said to be chosen both become much clearer. This, in turn, changes the nature of the state identity being reflected. By and large, the literature that was officially published in Communist Eastern Europe during Stalinism was not at all understood as the best or most interesting. Illegality usually made a book much more attractive, in fact, and contraband was readily available. This means that from the perspective of readers, the canon of acceptable, legal books reflected something about the nature of the government. From the perspective of the government censor, the situation was a bit more complicated.

Indeed, the individual censor is the point on which the system of literary control ultimately turned. The most his work represented was his own imperfect reflection of the identity of the state he understood himself to be serving. Even this connection was often tenuous. This element of human fallibility and choice introduced significant heterogeneity into the system. Within the censor's office, there was constant conversation about how books were censored, what it might mean, and whether that was appropriate. These are neither the undifferentiated Everyman censors of Strickland's work nor the entirely alienated Others of earlier studies, but rather something uncomfortably in between. This is to say that the state identity represented by total censorship is not itself ruggedly totalitarian, but, within the imperfectly understood and applied boundaries of Marxism-Leninism, inchoate and mutable.

Perhaps the single greatest factor inflecting choices and understandings within the censors' offices, and indeed, the states that employed them, was the massive trauma left in the wake of World War II. Indeed, the importance of this experience is an idea that has been receiving a great deal of attention of late. One of the greatest ironies of the myth of a monolithic and omniscient censor is the degree to which the offices were

defined by chaos and confusion. Indeed, in many ways, the story of the censor's office is fundamentally a story of the aftermath of trauma. This is true of the entire region, which was tied together by its profoundly difficult experience of the twentieth century.¹⁹ Already battered by the First World War (especially Germany), both countries were devastated by the Second. According to relatively conservative estimates, fifteen percent of the Polish population and ten percent of the German were lost during the war.²⁰ These figures do not include the portions of the population too wounded or traumatized to work, or those whose injuries would kill them soon after. By a narrow margin, Poland edges Russia out for highest percentage of population killed. These numbers are in comparison to about one percent in France and Great Britain, or a third of a percent in the United States, none of which were unaffected by the war.²¹ It was almost unknown for the living not to have known someone, often close, who had died, and anyone who emerged without being wounded, raped, or starved could be counted as nearly implausibly lucky. Moreover, as opposed to the comparative stability of continuous occupation, the lands in the East had experienced almost constant upheaval. Starvation was endemic, agriculture and industry were both in wreckage, and key cities had been laid waste.

This degree of devastation and instability had both tangible and intangible effects for the new government and its censors. It was impossible for this degree of devastation and instability to fail to affect the process of censoring. Most immediately, the censors themselves were often traumatized and working in offices that lacked even the most basic resources. The censors' offices did not have material resources to equal

¹⁹ Most recently, Timothy Snyder has proposed that this common experience of trauma was formative enough that it should redraw both temporal and geographic boundaries in our studies. Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010). Of the extensive literature on the experience of war and its aftermath, Norman Naimark is perhaps the most canonical.

²⁰ Michel Hubert, *Deutschland im Wandel: Geschichte der deutschen Bevölkerung seit 1815*, Vierteljahrschrift Für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte Beihefte (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1998), 272; Wojciech Materski and Tomasz Szarota, *Polska 1939-1945: Straty osobowe i ofiary represji pod dwiema okupacjami* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej--Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2009), 29-30.

²¹ Grzegorz Frumkin, *Population Changes in Europe since 1939: A Study of Population Changes in Europe During and since World War II as shown by the Balance Sheets of Twenty-Four European Countries* (New York: A.M. Kelley, 1951), 60-65, 144-152; Hannah Fischer, "American War and Military Operations Casualties: Lists and Statistics," in *CRS Report for Congress RL32492* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2005), <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL32492.pdf>.

their task, or trained staff to carry it out. Rather, hastily educated censors functioned as well as they could out of ad hoc offices with scarcely enough paper on which to write their reviews. If the war had demolished the censors' resources, though, this same mechanism provided them with a sense of purpose. In these conditions, it was possible to understand the task of censorship in terms of prioritization and dissemination instead of repression and limitation. The desire for unity in the task of rebuilding also made it easier for the censors to overlook very real differences in their own approaches. In this, the censor's office was only the most formal and apparent face of a far larger and more involved system of cultural planning and regulation. In order to understand the official censor's role in the entire process, it is necessary to consider, at least briefly, the breadth of activity that surrounded it.

At the level closest to the book itself, it is always important to remember that the author, all authors, were involved in self-censorship. This occurred on the very conscious level, in which they avoided topics and words like the state of the economy or thorny questions of national tradition that would likely lead to publication delays; it occurred in the way of marketing, where they looked for themes and styles that were likely to be interesting to publishers; and it occurred in the subtle, often unconscious ways in which writers began to frame their identities, either positively or negatively, in response to the state's vision. Of course, this situation was by no means unique to heavily censored states; self-censorship is a basic social convention. As the least obvious and most internalized form of censorship, it is in many ways the most insidiously powerful. Critically, though, it is important to note that self-censorship functions according to the writer's perceptions of the state, not primarily by explicit guidance or prohibition. That is to say, by the time the writer censors himself, the scattered work of the censor's office has been solidified into a coherent set of values and prohibitions, no matter how disorganized and even contradictory they were at the source.

At the next step up, within Poland and the GDR, the publishers also contained their own censorship measures. As they did with the individual writers, these functioned on a number of different levels. Like any publishing house, these state Socialist publishers chose authors and manuscripts based on quality, style, probable appeal to their target audience, and a host of other strategic factors. In the context of planned economies, though, these decisions had to be made ahead of time and submitted to the planning committee, which reviewed the publisher's choices with a view not only toward the publisher's conception of national

security and priorities, but also to the specific purview which the publisher had been assigned. After the plan had been approved, the editors of the individual manuscripts worked with them with the specific awareness that the book would soon have to pass muster. In fact, in both Poland and the GDR, a book's first encounter with censorship per se was at the publisher's office, where a quasi-official censor, straddling the line between state authority and office liaison, was always maintained. The object of this position was, on the one hand, to weed out the truly hopeless cases before they proceeded to clog the formal censors' desks, and on the other, to provide a more immediate resource to help the publisher prepare its books for review. The in-house censor could discuss and negotiate over a book in a way that the Main Office never could (and often did not want to).²²

Once a book left the publisher, in theory, the censor was its last stop before it went to press. In practice, any number of other governmental organizations had already influenced its path, and would continue to do so until it finally reached the reader. The economic role of the planning committees has already been mentioned. Aside from this, the two most significant influences were the Ministry of Culture and the Security Services. In the GDR, in fact, the censor was embedded within the Ministry of Culture, and in Poland the two worked closely together. In theory, the Ministry of Culture set the overarching policies that the censor then implemented. Though the ministry outranked the censor, the latter had enough independence to keep a model of pure transmission from ever really succeeding. In the earliest days of both governments, the Ministries of Culture fought for control of the censor with the Security Services, who could have naturally stepped into the place of the recent military censorship. In the end, though, both sides found the note of raw coercion implied by involving the police in censorship to be generally unpleasant. Nonetheless, mostly in cases related to breaking news, but occasionally when a dissident, émigré, or possibly CIA-affiliated American author was deemed to be a threat, the Security Services continued to intervene. If these were the main influences, the minor ones were legion. The Ministry of Education wanted books for schools, lists of objectionable works to remove from libraries, and input in the planning of educational displays. The Foreign Services helped coordinate copyright trades and delegations of

²² Stanisław Adam Kondek, *Władza i wydawcy: Polityczne uwarunkowania produkcji książek w Polsce w latach 1944-1949* (Warszawa: Biblioteka Narodowa, 1993), 99.

translators, as well as helping to organize celebrations of foreign authors.²³ The list could go on indefinitely. With all of these myriad sources of oversight, it would clearly be a vast oversimplification to imply that the censor was the sole source of literary control. At the same time, it remains true that the censor had to approve every work that was published in a way that no other organization did, and this stamp of approval was a prerequisite for the idea of imprimatur and coherence in the state's control.

This project addresses two main questions. First: how did the members of the censors' offices in Poland and East Germany understand their task of developing a new Socialist identity within their respective nationalist contexts? Second: how were these understandings reflected in the canon of books that each produced? From this, how, intentionally and unintentionally, did this new canon feed back into the national identity of both?

By considering both Poland and East Germany, this study appreciates the range of cultural diversity that Communism permitted, even as it circumscribed. Within the basic parameters imposed by Stalinism, these two states represented opposite poles. Before the war, Germany had the largest Communist Party outside the USSR, and after the war, it was known for its strict hardliner politics. By contrast, the party never found a strong foothold in Poland, and was known for its unenthusiastic attitude toward Communism after the war. Stalin famously declared that implementing Communism in Poland was like "trying to put a saddle on a cow."²⁴ Looking at both of these countries in tandem, then, reveals which parts of their plans were mandated from without, and which expressed some specific need within the state. In this way, each state helps to illuminate the specificity of the other. The work of comparison, therefore, helps to dismantle the myth of monolithic Communism.

Each section of this study deals with one of these main questions. The first half, on the censors' offices themselves, considers the meaning and effect of the actual constitution of the offices. To do this, it considers the offices' antecedents and institutional functioning, as well as the intellectual formation of their guiding elites and the training and supervision of the everyday censors. Chapter One on the interwar precedent asks how interwar concerns about popular reading were reflected in an apparently new Socialist context. The second chapter, on the basic administrative

²³ Ibid., 78-94; Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, and Siegfried Lokatis, *Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer: Zensur-System und literarische Öffentlichkeiten in der DDR bis ende der sechziger Jahre*, Zeithistorische Studien (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997).

²⁴ Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 6.

structures of the offices themselves, asks how their organization both shaped and reflected the identities and needs of their states. The third considers the intellectual and political formation of the men and women who led the censor's office. Finally, the fourth chapter examines those who made up its everyday staff. In this way, the first section gives us purchase on the emerging tableau.

The second half of the study deals with the canons both offices produced. It considers the margins of the censor's work, asking where the limits of the permissible and boundaries of the censor's power met. The first in the section, Chapter Five, considers traditional literature and the questions it raised about national identity. The sixth chapter asks how the regulation of foreign literature was used to negotiate power and identity with the outside world. The last chapter then considers contemporary works written at home in Poland and the GDR respectively, asking how these same issues of identity opened some spaces for literary expression while closing others. The overriding theme of these processes was chaos and diversity that was reflected by a corresponding heterogeneity within the canon. This, in the long run, may have lent the systems both the essential flexibility and the internal contradictions that would contribute to their ultimate downfall.

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neither of us were ever to write another sentence, though, her constancy, charity, and generosity would still help make this a world worth writing in.

Chapter One: Censorship and the Interwar Period

In 1950, a censor in the GDR approved Edgar Allan Poe's collection of short stories, *The Gold-Bug*, specifically to inoculate readers against "the foulness of [hard-boiled authors like] Spillane" and their "capitalist violence."²⁵ At about the same time in Łódź, a book called *Philistines* by H. Czarnecki, dealing with the capitalist tendencies in contemporary Poland, came in for particularly harsh condemnation from the censor. The crux of his criticism was that, despite Czarnecki's heavy-handed indictment of crass materialism, with only the window-dressings of Communist authenticity the author was as much a bourgeois philistine as any of his characters. The book was not published.²⁶ Both of these censors were reacting to the specter of Americanism as it touched either their readers or their home authors. The shape that the specter took, though, was notably different for each of them. Characteristically, the East German censor was concerned with the gangster sex and violence that he saw dribbling across the border, while the Polish one worried about a lack of taste and overall seriousness. Both of these specific preoccupations were of a piece with the standard rhetoric of the new Socialist states. At the same time, though, they were specific not only to the contemporary situations of Poland and East Germany, but echoed the literary debates that had taken place in both countries between the wars. Neither of these new states was at all concerned with replicating or looking towards older systems of censorship, but in many ways unconsciously reproduced many of their standards.

Certainly, censors in East Germany and Poland shared with the wider Socialist world a basic anti-capitalist sentiment. However stubbornly the censors insisted upon seeing their task in a positive and constructive light, the fact remains that this culture-affirming work was achieved by a process of restriction. In order to understand who the censors understood themselves to be and what kinds of literature they wanted to represent their countries, it is first necessary to consider what they opposed. At its simplest and most condensed, this was the West, taken not only as a geographical region, but as a political, aesthetic, moral, and epistemological position. That is to say, the problem was not all literature coming out of capitalist countries—both Poland and the GDR, together with the USSR and the rest

²⁵ Rodrian and Ewert, *Verlagsgutachten*, "Betr.: 'Der Goldkäfer' und 'Im Strudel des Malstroms' von Edgar Allan Poe" [1955], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 5056, bl. 49-50.

²⁶ M. Mikołajczyk, recenzja of *Filistrzy* by H. Czarneckiego [10 March 1950], AAN, GUKPPiW 180, k. 303.

of the Eastern Bloc, published some of this—but what that literature was understood to represent.

To express this pathology, the word that was used with overwhelming frequency belonged to the interwar period in the Soviet Union.

“Formalism” was the most common, most universal, and in some ways the most powerful term of opprobrium by a wide margin in East Germany and a slightly narrower one in Poland. It connoted something in a work that was not only objectionable or flawed, but, intentionally or not, actually opposed to the basic project of Socialist literature. If the idea of formalism as an Other to Socialist Realism was, unsurprisingly, a Soviet import, it acquired new overtones as it became ubiquitous in Poland and the GDR. Though in the twenties, formalism had been an important literary school in the Soviet Union, as an idea it was abstracted until it represented not one specific alternative to Socialist Realism, but any work that opposed that style. By the mid-thirties, the word “formalism” was being paired with aestheticism as an exemplar of decadent theories of art that were insufficiently engaged with the revolutionary struggle.²⁷ After the war, in the mid-forties, this association was pushed further to include both cosmopolitanism and, on the other end of the spectrum, crude naturalism.²⁸ Official formulations like “the reactionary, formalist aesthetics of the bourgeois West” became a neat shorthand for the implied links between these wildly disparate problems.²⁹

When formalism as a term was adopted in Polish and East German contexts, these trends were only intensified and the chain of associations lengthened. Associations with the Russian formalist school were further weakened; prewar leftist intellectuals had been aware of them, and in the case of some like Georg Lukács, had even been actively engaged with them, but, long out of vogue, they were almost never invoked within postwar domestic dialogs.³⁰ For most Polish and East German censors, the word “formalism” had become unmoored from its original context and literary movement, and instead signaled a generic degeneracy in its object. At the same time, amid the growing tensions of the Cold War, the capitalist West

²⁷ Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine*, 3rd ed., Slavistic Printings and Reprintings, 4 (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), 146.

²⁸ E. A. Dobrenko, “Literary Criticism and the Institution of Literature in the Era of War and Late Stalinism, 1941-1953,” in *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism: The Soviet Age and Beyond*, ed. E. A. Dobrenko and Galin Tihanov (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 175.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 174.

³⁰ This is doubly true in East Germany: not only were their writers present at the relevant conferences before the war, their literary conversations were heavily inflected by the occupying Russian presence afterwards.

was increasingly seen as the wellspring of decadence and error. It was finally identified almost completely with formalism. Thus, in a 1949 conference on cultural issues, Berman declared that, “we must revolt from art that carries the content of formalist cynicism and bankruptcy of thought, from decadent capitalist art, from American cosmopolitanism.”³¹ Likewise, the newer understanding of formalism was illustrated two years later, when a similar conference in East Germany declared that, “formalism [...] represents direct support for the belligerent policies of American imperialism.” The piece pressed the point further, declaring that the role of formalist art in the “imperial epoch of capitalism” involved nothing less than the “glorification of trust in brute force, in reactionaries and the low-minded, and in murder, brutality, and pornography.”³² This last trio suggests a further development taking place. The idea of formalism had become so deeply identified with the capitalist West that it embraced not only one specific error of Western fiction (aestheticism, decadence, and failure to engage with relevant questions) but all of them. In fact, it even encompassed literature that had often been understood as the opposite of Western aestheticism: the popular pulp novel. Formalism had become shorthand for the entire spectrum of errors that were understood to be endemic in Western literature.

These developments meant that, on one hand, the idea of formalism had become powerful and compelling enough that it was almost certain to be invoked any time the overall state of Socialist literature was discussed or a wholesale condemnation of Western literature was required. Indeed, the term places its author firmly on the side of Soviet orthodoxy. At the same time, formalism’s very breadth meant that the word lacked specificity and explanatory power. It signified the idea of the West so broadly that it could provide little information on what, exactly, the writer’s vision of the West involved. It meant nothing specific, but could stand for almost any problem. The term had become an empty vessel. It was a Soviet catchphrase whose meaning could be filled with specifically regional preoccupations. Still, though, the term formalism remained the foundational critique behind almost any other that could be leveled. On a wider level, the evolution of the term is representative of the way that broad

³¹ Speech, “Przemowienie tow. Bermana [sic] wygłoszone na konferencji w sprawach kulturalnych w KC. PZPR.” [31 May 1949], AAN, KC-PZPR 237/XVIII-1, k. 1-12. Not surprisingly, the text goes on immediately to associate these problems with Fascism and “pseudo-Catholicism.”

³² Elimar Schubbe, ed., *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED* (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1972), 179-179, 181-182.

Soviet categories were transformed in the postwar Socialist states. The USSR still retained the power to define the important categories—the Soviets' damning critique did not lose power as it moved west, nor could it be entirely reassigned. At the same time, each state had to fill in its specific meaning.

Within this framework, the category of popular literature becomes important for two reasons. First of all, it belongs to the developing meaning of formalism. Trashy pulp was the last element added to the concept of formalism as the forties drew to a close. Just as it helped define formalism, so the definitions and boundaries that the GDR and Poland drew around popular literature help define their sense of the West and of their own identities. Secondly, popular literature was always close to the margin of the censor's disapproval. Mass literature, of the sort labeled "colportage" or "genre" was never entirely trusted: it seemed shoddy at best, exploitive at worst, and almost certainly unserious. Because of this, it can more easily illustrate the contours of the permissible than something placed more squarely in the middle of the censor's approval.

Germany

At first glance, it is not surprising that East Germany's party congresses were the ones concerned with "murder, brutality and pornography." These preoccupations were, in many ways revivals of interwar Trash and Filth (*Schmutz und Schund*) debates that took place in reaction to the excesses of Weimar culture and the influx of American-style pulp. Sex, gangster violence, and crass materialism together comprised one of the consistent themes of cultural anxiety for most of the twentieth century. From a distance, this seems entirely natural; public decency had been one of the major concerns of nineteenth-century censorship, its force was unabated in the postwar West, and even today, it remains the single largest category of accepted censorship.³³ However, within the GDR, it is nearly impossible to find an instance of a particular book being rejected, or even ordered to be revised, based on its pornographic content. In fact, amid all of the practical complaints leveled against contemporary East German writers, it was far more common to worry that they *might* be influenced by

³³ See Beate Müller, ed., *Censorship & Cultural Regulation in the Modern Age* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 4; Deana Heath, *Purifying Empire: Obscenity and the Politics of Moral Regulation in Britain, India and Australia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1, 48-53; George Schöpflin, ed., *Censorship and Political Communication in Eastern Europe: A Collection of Documents* (London: Frances Pinter, 1983), 13.

gangster America than to present evidence that they already had been. This is not to suggest that East Germany had abruptly become a land of virtue and probity in the wake of the Second World War. Rather, the infrastructure of state-planned literature meant that no press would be likely to propose a book that might be considered pornographic in the first place, and that any number of editors and reviewers were on hand to catch anything of the sort that was unwittingly approved. This meant that the very real license that Weimar worthies disapproved and attributed to outside influences was replaced in the GDR by anxiety over American influence without much sign of hedonism at all.

In this way, the most notable aspect of the conversation on decency was that, within East Germany, even the writers themselves appear to have shared or at least internalized the government's understanding of decency. It is difficult to find even a realist work from this period that overstepped the lines of verisimilitude, or a description of Western decadence that dipped too far into salacious detail. Rather, smutty pulp, pornography, and gangster violence were epithets specifically for capitalist works. They leaked over the border from the West, just as the authorities feared. As far as German popular literature was concerned, then, the dangers of the West were of the sex-drugs-and-rock-'n'-roll variety. These concerns were not unique to the GDR; the Federal Republic also tried to erect a bulwark of censorship against the louche, gangster morality of America.³⁴ From the East German perspective, these efforts were futile at best and likely disingenuous; in their view, West Germany was the very epicenter of the danger. Nor were the concerns at all new. Both the Weimar government and its writers had noted the phenomenon, though with varying degrees of concern.³⁵ Their concerns, refracted through the lens of Soviet occupation, provided the contours for the postwar debate.

The debate over Trash and Filth in postwar literature had actually been going on in Germany since the nineteenth century, with censorship

³⁴ Luke Springman, "Poisoned Hearts, Diseased Minds, and American Pimps: The Language of Censorship in the Schund und Schmutz Debates," *The German Quarterly* 68, no. 4 (1995): 414-417.

³⁵ Ibid; Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 179-181; Klaus Petersen, "Censorship and the Campaign against Foreign Influences in Film and Theater During the Weimar Republic," in *Zensur und Kultur: zwischen Weimarer Klassik und Weimarer Republik mit einem Ausblick bis heute*, ed. John A. McCarthy and Werner von der Ohe (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer Verlag, 1995), 150.

crystalizing around it for most of that period.³⁶ The issue was especially prominent in Weimar, where it was one of the few forms of censorship that the government embraced. Even this was a source of some difficulty, since one of the ways the new republic differentiated itself from the *Kaiserreich* was to guarantee in the constitution that there would be no censor. In practice, censorship often worked through prosecutions for blasphemy, treason, and the endangerment of minors, made under laws that had been carried over from the old regime.³⁷ In fact, it was this last idea, that it was essential for the state to protect its youth against degenerate influences, which provided the loophole that made more formal censorship possible. In Article 118, the constitution included a clause providing for the protection of young people against exploitation and neglect. Under its aegis, a panel was created in 1926 to weed out any publications that were judged dangerous to the health of German youth.³⁸ It is necessary to remember that, at this time, these measures were not at all unusual. At the same time in America, for example, enough state censorship was being exercised in the new film industry to make the famously prudish Hayes Code an attractive alternative to movie studios when it was proposed four years later.³⁹ Still, the combination of Weimar's famously liberal culture, large reading population, and inventive legal strategies for censoring gave it a unique character.

Most of the publications that were prohibited or limited by the censor could be described as pulp fiction or dime novels. They were cheaply printed, luridly colored, and fell into categories like detective novels, westerns, general adventure, and moderately racy romance.⁴⁰ The Germans were particularly in love with the detective novel, and with both America and the newly formed USSR they shared a fascination with the detective-

³⁶ Ronald A. Fullerton, "Creating a Mass Book Market in Germany: The Story of the 'Colporteur Novel' 1870-1890," *Journal of Social History* 10, no. 3 (1977): 275.

According to Fullerton, the censorship specifically of colportage began in the 1880s, about a decade after its sudden explosion among the German workers.

³⁷ Springman, "Poisoned Hearts," 412. In fact, Johannes R. Becher himself, along with any number of his left-leaning fellows, was prosecuted under a number of these laws.

³⁸ Klaus Petersen, "The Harmful Publications (Young Persons) Act of 1926. Literary Censorship and the Politics of Morality in the Weimar Republic," *German Studies Review* 15, no. 3 (1992): 507.

³⁹ Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 5-11.

⁴⁰ Springman, "Poisoned Hearts," 413.

cum-western adventures of the Pinkerton series.⁴¹ In fact, many of the novels and serials that were singled out for censorship were either westerns or translations and adaptations of American-style hard-boiled detective novels.⁴² A few years later, it could seem reasonable for a critic to remark that, “the invasion of a detective novel into Germany is comparable to the invasion of a foreign spirit.”⁴³ These concerns over the menace of foreign degeneracy were framed as threats specifically to the nation’s children in order to bring them within the compass of the law. In reality, a large part of the audience was made up of adults, who made their engagement clear by actively opposing bans on their favorite series.⁴⁴ Moreover, it was widely assumed that the adults who read this kind of popular literature were crude members of the working class.⁴⁵ In this way, the discussion subtly shifted into one over the national integrity of the working class. Those who opposed the reading of popular literature typically wanted that time to be spent in improving reading of the German classical canon.⁴⁶

The situation was, however, more complicated than the initial picture of a prudish and condescending elite might indicate. Weimar Germany existed in an atmosphere of almost unparalleled license, and not all of the problems brought before the review board were entirely imaginary.⁴⁷ For the most part, though, the struggle to restrict Trash and Filth constituted a reaction to the disorienting social changes and general sense of chaos. It was mostly driven by an ecumenical, if profoundly conservative, religious lobby that was made up less of church officials than of concerned laypeople and frustrated pedagogues.⁴⁸ From the beginning, the movement to censor smut encountered forceful resistance from prominent writers like Thomas Mann, Alfred Döblin, and Leon Feuchtwanger.⁴⁹ At the same time, though,

⁴¹ Boris Dralyuk, *Western Crime Fiction Goes East: The Russian Pinkerton Craze 1907-1934* (Boston: Brill, 2012), 1-7, 31.

⁴² Petersen, “The Harmful Publications (Young Persons) Act of 1926,” 517.

⁴³ Erich Thier, “Über Den Detektivroman,” in *Der Kriminalroman: zur Theorie und Geschichte einer Gattung*, ed. Jochen Vogt (München: W. Fink, 1971); translated in Todd Herzog, *Crime Stories: Criminalistic Fantasy and the Culture of Crisis in Weimar Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 143.

⁴⁴ Springman, “Poisoned Hearts,” 412-413.

⁴⁵ Fullerton, “Creating a Mass Book Market,” 267.

⁴⁶ Springman, “Poisoned Hearts,” 410.

⁴⁷ Walter Laqueur, *Weimar: A Cultural History, 1918-1933* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), 225. Also cited in Petersen, “Censorship and the Campaign against Foreign Influences,” 152.

⁴⁸ Petersen, “The Harmful Publications (Young Persons) Act of 1926,” 507.

⁴⁹ Karl Leydecker, *German Novelists of the Weimar Republic: Intersections of Literature and Politics* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), 25, 68.

the political ranks were not necessarily united. Although most of the support for the Trash and Filth laws was conservative, there were also Socialists in the Reichstag who voted in its favor.⁵⁰ Erich Thier, who was so violently opposed to the printing and reading of detective novels was himself a Marxist writer who spent a good deal of his career working to improve working class literacy and access to books.⁵¹ Even Döblin, though he was one of the most steadfast and influential opponents to the censorship passed in 1926, viewed the publication of pulp fiction as exploitation of the masses, and was willing to admit that some form of censorship might be necessary.⁵² Moreover, once the system was in place, a fair number of well regarded, left-leaning authors, even including some like Arnold Zweig, Heinrich Mann, and Leon Feuchtwanger, were willing to sit on its committees in order to insure that the process went as well as possible.⁵³ In this way, then, the conversation was prevented from being one about party identity, and continued to discuss the larger question of German identity.

Outside the political realm among young leftist authors, the concern with popular literature was no less active. They saw many of the same problems in popular literature as their more conservative, political counterparts, but widened the question to ask whether or not its forms could be redeemed. In 1926, the same year that the censorship law was passed, Walter Benjamin began to work with Siegfried Kracauer on a theory and criticism of popular culture. They wrote articles about postcards, tchotchkes, photography, children's books, and, not at all least, detective novels.⁵⁴ In all of these, they treated pieces of popular culture not only as legitimate objects of study, but also as keys to understanding the complexities of the contemporary world. In their hands, popular literature became both a reflection of and a means of negotiating the problems of bourgeois life.

This discussion quickly expanded to include many of Germany's fashionable young writers. Soon, meditations on the meaning of the detective novel had become a kind of fad. They were written by everyone from young intellectuals like Gunther Bein and Erich Their to fiction

⁵⁰ Petersen, "The Harmful Publications (Young Persons) Act of 1926," 510-511.

⁵¹ Gideon Reuveni, *Reading Germany: Literature and Consumer Culture in Germany before 1933* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 229-231.

⁵² Petersen, "The Harmful Publications (Young Persons) Act of 1926," 515.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 516.

⁵⁴ Michael W. Jennings, "Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, and Weimar Criticism," in *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*, ed. Peter Eli Gordon and John P. McCormick (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 204.

writers like Willi Bredel. Of these, the two best known and most influential were Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht, who worked together on the subject for almost a decade. Despite frequent disagreements, they had been close since the late twenties, and were especially instrumental to each other during their exile after 1933. Benjamin negotiated for the publication of Brecht's works; Brecht had Benjamin for extended stays at his family's house.⁵⁵ When Benjamin was there, the two, as well as others in their circle like Hannah Arendt and Helene Weigel, exchanged letters on the books they were reading.⁵⁶ At the same time, they wrote separate essays on the importance of the crime genre; later in Paris, they combined their theories. The two even went so far as to construct the beginnings of a joint detective novel that they toyed with turning into a series. It was apparently to feature a world-weary retired judge pursuing a philandering shareholder. Both believed that the genre spoke specifically to contemporary society, at once reflecting its fragmentation and offering at least the momentary hope of reconnection.

Despite this basic optimism, Benjamin, in a rather surprising moment of accord with Weimar conservatives, was not entirely convinced that the detective novel was necessarily healthy for society. He believed that the fantasy of an easy, ordered world of detective and criminal, cause and effect could be an opiate to ignore the real problems of bourgeois society. On a deeper level, though, he felt that the inherent complications and contradictions of the detective novel could be redemptive. To Benjamin's mind, the detective novel, painting a jungle-like world of danger and concealment, addressed the fears of the bourgeoisie directly. The detective becomes a sort of flâneur, a leisured gentleman who spent his time wandering through and observing the city. The lurking, hidden criminal and equally shadowy detective have a tendency to blend together and emerge less distinct from each other than is entirely comfortable. In this way, it becomes impossible to distinguish the safe world of respectability from the dangers of criminal, dissolute life. At the same time, the detective is dedicated to finding and preserving evidence, the traces of the disappeared, which Benjamin sees at the heart of redeeming modern life from the horror of oblivion.⁵⁷ Brecht, it appears, was sympathetic to Benjamin's insights, but took them in a characteristically pragmatic

⁵⁵ Erdmut Wizisla and Christine Shuttleworth, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht: The Story of a Friendship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 51-58.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵⁷ Carlo Salzani, "The City as Crime Scene: Walter Benjamin and the Traces of the Detective," *New German Critique* 34, no. 1 100 (2007): 185.

direction. In his view, the detective novel offers relief from the necessity of “mak[ing] do with probability estimates,” and instead gives the reader a causal string of facts from which he can deduce and control the causes of the catastrophe around him.⁵⁸ Pressing this point further, Brecht believed that in certain circumstances, the crime novel could even be transformative. In a 1936 piece on the *Threepenny Novel*, Benjamin wrote that Brecht retained “the highly developed technique of the crime novel but neutraliz[ed] its rules. *This* crime novel depicts the actual relation between bourgeois legality and crime. The latter is shown to be a special case of exploitation sanctioned by the former.”⁵⁹

Likewise, during Weimar, a new, specifically German form of the detective novel developed that owed its creation to some of the impulses that drove Benjamin and Brecht. The German detective theorists built their theories on works of the genre as it was defined in America, Britain, and France, and their countrymen read these translations in vast quantities. At the same time, though, German detective novels were developing a new form of the genre that directly responded to the new theories, or at least to arise from many of the same concerns. Unlike their classic counterparts, these German novels focused on the detective rather than the criminal, blurring the boundaries between upright citizens and the evil-doer.⁶⁰ In other words, the new German novels broke down the fantasy of order that theorists like Benjamin and Brecht argued classic detective novels created. Todd Herzog, writing on the development of the genre amidst the excesses of the Weimar republic, maintains that these works are more interested in exploring the relationship between criminals and legitimate society than in identifying criminals and resurrecting boundaries between law and order.”⁶¹ This was the moment when the line between crime fiction and real crime became blurred. More and more, both the criminals and their victims were seen collectively. This innovation would prove formative for the GDR.

Of the Weimar theorists who became influential in the GDR, Lukács was preeminent. In the thirties, Lukács was staying, not entirely by his own choice, in Moscow. While his concerns were certainly informed by the interwar milieu in which they were created, they were also developed closer

⁵⁸ Bertolt Brecht, “On the Popularity of the Crime Novel,” *The Irish Review*, no. 31 (2004): 93-94.

⁵⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, 1935-1938, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1996), 8-9; in Salzani, “City as Crime Scene,” 182.

⁶⁰ Herzog, *Crime Stories*, 26.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

to the center of Soviet power. Unlike the theories of Benjamin or Brecht, they would become the standard for orthodoxy in the GDR. During this period, he participated in the Writers' Congress that worked to define Socialist Realism, and reconciled it to his theory of the novel. He had already spent a great deal of time in Germany and become influential even before the First World War, but it was during his further exile in Tashkent that he met and befriended Johannes R. Becher, for whom he would continue to be influential. Lukács believed with young writers like Brecht that literature, and specifically modern literature, could be politically and socially transformative. Unlike Brecht, though (famously, the two were regularly at loggerheads with each other), he believed that the transformative power came from realism, not alienation. Combined with other elements of his theory, this meant that the goal was to bring the people to the tradition of great literature, not to create for them a literature of their own. This is to say that he could react rather harshly against popular fiction. In this, despite Lukács's very real differences from the Weimar conservatives on almost every level, his suspicion of genre fiction paralleled theirs. These views, with the rest of his theory, were put into practice in the GDR after the war. It combined the aspirations of the interwar avant-garde with the concerns and prejudices of the government. Brecht's position remained as a kind of loyal opposition, while Becher's Lukácsian view represented the orthodox center. Despite a moment of sympathy for the crime novel before the war, Becher was quickly disgusted by their "murderous sexuality" (a phrase he quoted from the newspaper). In his collection of ephemera, *Macht der Poesie*, he commented pessimistically that, "when Mike Hammer [hero of Mickey Spillane's pulp detective novels] kicks into action, the attainments of the human spirit flake away like old lime. The Spillane phenomenon says more about the state of his contemporaries than a shelf full of sociological-psychological studies."⁶² Courtesy of Lukács, the literary elite of the GDR had taken over the anti-pulp position previously held by Weimar conservatives.

When it came to the practical questions of censorship, this central position functioned in a triage system, using whatever means were necessary to keep the worst offenders away from readers. Clearly, books written in the West continued to function under different rules than those from the GDR itself. When classic mystery novels from the West were published, as Poe especially was as early as 1946, these concerns meant that the challenge was to allow the book to participate in a Western literary

⁶² Johannes Robert Becher, *Bemühungen II*, Bd. 14 of *Gesammelte Werke* (Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1972), 50.

tradition that could separate it from cheap sensationalism and violence. One censor reviewing Poe's *Gold-Bug* opened his comments by declaring Poe "one of the best representatives of the American short-story." It was his hope that Poe's skill, combined with his "captivating" subject matter, could "provide a counterweight to the trashy pulp [*Schmutz-und-Schund-Schmöker*] planted by the West." In fact, the censor suggested that Poe could provide a kind of inoculation against these racier crime writers: "the value of this book is that young readers really are fascinated, but here make the acquaintance of a respected representative of the American short story rather than the foul [writer of the hard-boiled detective Mike Hammer] Spillane." In Poe, they met with "good language, [...] the theory of the short story, [...] and [were] made to think logically," rather than being desensitized to the capitalist violence that was understood to be the scourge of more contemporary pulp novels.⁶³

Arthur Conan Doyle's *Hound of the Baskervilles* did not come up for review until 1954, submitted by the New Berlin Press. Although the press often printed popular work, its output was not specifically intended for impressionable children who might be stumbling for the first time into a semi-forbidden genre. Nevertheless, Doyle received reviews similar to Poe's in both their moralizing language and their implication that the detective stories exist in the dream world of logic and deduction that fascinated the interwar writers. After recapitulating the broad lines of the story, the reviewer enthused that, "in an extraordinarily thrilling plot, the reader traces the work of master-detective Sherlock Holmes, whose brilliant logic stimulates the reader to follow along." He then continued to explain that the book was "a particular pleasure to read because the author [took] such a clear, unequivocal stance against law-breaking, leaving no room for the glorification of crime."⁶⁴

Just as the attitudes towards detective fiction in the early postwar period echoed those from the Weimar period, and the censors' attitudes toward Western novels resembled those of conservative Weimar, the detective novels written from inside the GDR bore a surprising resemblance to those developed in the interwar years. This form was attractive because of its emphasis on the collectivity rather than the individual, but in the GDR, the valences changed. Rather than representing a generalized malaise, the absence of a lone detective and villain in the GDR allowed its

⁶³ Rodrian and Ewert, Verlagsgutachten, "Betr.: 'Der Goldkäfer' und 'Im Strudel des Malstroms' von Edgar Allan Poe" [1955], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 5056, bl. 49-50.

⁶⁴ Letsch, Druckgenehmigung for "Der Hund von Baskerville" by Conan Doyle [8 Jan. 1954], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 3966, bl. 299.

novels to indict entire systems. Wolfgang Schreyer's 1952 *Großgarage Südwest*, often cited as one of the first novels of the genre, is illuminating here less because of its individual genius than because it is impressively typical. The story, set in the Berlin of 1948, revolves around a group of criminals, forgers, thieves, and the like who make the eponymous garage the base of their operations.⁶⁵ From the ranks of West Berlin's law enforcement, the reader is presented with a number of options for the position of the classic detective figure, but they all prove to be corrupt and compromised. One, the *Kriminalassistent* from Hamburg, actually joins the gang after being fired for stealing a hundred marks. Likewise, the chief of the West Berlin police proves to be entirely corrupt, actually hiding important pieces of evidence from his underlings. It is one of these underlings, the unpleasant, workaholic Dr. Horn, who remains the only honest member of the West Berlin police. He ends the story broken and disillusioned.

Indeed, both the group of criminals, engaged in ongoing delinquency rather than a single rash act, and the indistinct border between detective and criminal, point towards a narrative much closer to the crime novel than the detective. In the manner of the Weimar novels, *Großgarage Südwest* concerns itself with societal malaise, rather than the creation of a criminal Other. If the motives for crime are economic, they are long-term and systemic, not immediate and specific, and the overall sense has more to do with chaos and collapse than with cool deduction. At the same time, though, for all his true-crime sensibility, Schreyer broke markedly with his interwar models. In some ways his novel was split down the center as much as the city itself. Not insignificantly, the criminals live in the western sectors of Berlin, but commit their crimes in its eastern zone.⁶⁶ Likewise, the eastern police force provides a clear counterpoint to the western version. Where the west is shown with individuals working at odds with each other, the police force of East Berlin only ever appears as an aggregate.

Poland

In many ways, interwar Poland resembled a magnified version of interwar Germany. Like Germany, Poland was concerned with creating a unified identity, the more so because it continued to struggle with the

⁶⁵ Given the relative economic fortunes of the Eastern and Western sectors, this strategy alone could tempt a reader to doubt the gang's cunning. Wolfgang Schreyer, *Grossgarage Südwest: Kriminalroman* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 1952).

⁶⁶ Ulrike Götting, *Der deutsche Kriminalroman zwischen 1945 und 1970: Formen und Tendenzen*, 1. Aufl. ed. (Giessen: Kletsmeier, 1998), 248.

cultural, legal, and until 1920, even military remnants left behind by unification. Like Weimar, Poland distinguished itself from its imperial predecessors by making pre-press censorship unconstitutional. Also like Weimar, and indeed most of Europe and America at that moment, it faced a tension between unprecedented license and a backlash of conservatism. Warsaw shared, in a somewhat muted fashion, in the cocktail of cabaret, film, satire, and genre literature that Berlin was experiencing, as well as in the accompanying fears of excess and degeneracy. In the Polish case, however, all of this ferment turned inwards rather than outwards. Interwar Poland did not develop a theory of redemptive popular art for the masses, and its fears were directed toward its own inadequacies, rather than towards the threat of outside corruption. These factors combined would create a different palette for the postwar picture.

The main censorship in interwar Poland was political. Because the Polish interwar milieu has not been as intensely studied as the German, more inference is required to develop a picture of its cultural life. While this research is very necessary, it is unlikely that it would uncover significant popular discussions about the dangers of popular literature. Within a year of Piłsudski's 1926 coup, the constitution notwithstanding, the government decreed a press law forbidding any untrue (or practically, directly critical) statement about the government. A harsher law was ratified in 1927, beginning a trend that would continue into the 1930s.⁶⁷ Practically speaking, this made political publication by rightist parties like the National Democrats difficult.

By the time these laws began to be passed, Krakow's elite fin-de-siècle art cabarets like the Green Balloon (*Żelony Balonek*) had been transformed by wartime's alternating freedom and tight censorship into more popular shows based on political satire at cabarets like Sfinks, Miraż, Argus, and the Black Cat in Warsaw.⁶⁸ In many ways, their programs, able to function by hints and implied connections, were able to operate as both political news and debate that was stifled elsewhere. Both leftist thinkers and writers like Julian Tuwim, Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, and other Skamanderites, and those on the Right like Adolf Nowaczyński contributed to them. This same dynamic was echoed in the political camps' associated newspapers. The *Literary News* (*Wiadomości Literackie*) scandalized half

⁶⁷ Eva Plach, *The Clash of Moral Nations: Cultural Politics in Piłsudski's Poland, 1926-1935* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), 45-46.

⁶⁸ Harold B. Segel, "Culture in Poland During World War I," in *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918*, ed. Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 79.

of the country and delighted the other half with its leftist, often absurdist news, while *National Thought (Myśl Narodowa)* did the same for the more conservative side.

Closer to the realm of mass entertainment, audiences flocked to the city's new movie theatres to watch both imported films from Germany and Russia and those made by Poland's own Sfinks. Interestingly, documentaries seem to have been the favorites, but they were closely followed by exotic films, gangster movies, and the like.⁶⁹ Poland's film code, similar to those of America and Germany, forbade material that was considered profane, indecent, or brutal. It also included specific prohibitions against "detective-criminal films that provide a practical argument or incentive for crime."⁷⁰ The same themes were reflected in popular literature, where both science fiction and detective novels grew markedly in popularity.⁷¹ Unlike Germany, however, Poland mostly imported its genre fiction, and would not begin significant experiments in the field until well after the war.⁷²

Tellingly, even in the world of cabaret and dime novels, the question of the state's identity remained preeminent. The film code also included a prohibition against anything that would "offend the feelings of the Polish nation."⁷³ The stricture was sandwiched neatly between one on offending religious feelings and another on offending decency. Simply by its presence, it suggests interwar Poland's—and more particularly, the Sanacja regime's—ongoing obsession with the reputation and even honor of the Polish state. Indeed, honor was one of Piłsudski's imponderables, or internal virtues.⁷⁴ It was at the base of both his coup's claim to legitimacy and to the government's decision to employ censorship.⁷⁵ Clearly, this preoccupation was deeply ingrained in both Piłsudski's position as a military leader and in the conception of him as a romantic hero, fighting for

⁶⁹ Note that the film production company Sfinks was separate from the Warsaw cabaret. *Ibid.*, 83-84.

⁷⁰ Stefan Żółkiewski, *Kultura literacka, 1918-1932* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1973), 211n35.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*; Antoni Smuszkiewicz, *Zaczarowana gra: Zarys dziejów Polskiej fantastyki naukowej* (Poznań: Wydawn. Poznańskie, 1982), 103.

⁷² Smuszkiewicz, *Zaczarowana gra*, 105-120.

⁷³ Żółkiewski, *Kultura literacka, 1918-1932*, 211n35.

⁷⁴ Plach, *Clash of Moral Nations*, 5.

⁷⁵ John M. Bates, "Freedom of the Press in Interwar Poland: The System of Control," in *Poland Between the Wars, 1918-1939*, ed. Peter D. Stachura (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 91-92; Heidi Hein, *Der Piłsudski-Kult und seine Bedeutung für den polnischen Staat, 1926-1939* (Marburg: Herder Institut, 2002), 220.

freedom and liberty.⁷⁶ At the same time, though, it is worth suggesting that this position succeeded so well because appeals to honor reflected the young state's sense that it was historically downtrodden and that therefore its honor needed to be actively protected.

In contrast to anything related to governmental honor, pieces of popular literature were, in fact, famous for being censored leniently. This is not to say that interwar Poland did not have a profoundly conservative population that was deeply concerned for the country's moral welfare. Rather, those sections of the population were so distanced from the regime that they organized their own efforts rather than lobbying for state censorship. In Germany, the pervasive fear was that forces outside the nation would creep in and corrupt it. In Poland the same fears of interwar decadence and degeneracy existed, but rather than mobilizing to use the government as a kind of backstop, the more right-wing Poles were persuaded that Piłsudski's Sanacja government was part of the problem. Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, for example, was trained as a gynecologist, and many of his contributions to *Literary News* argued for sexual freedom, legal divorce, and abortion rights for women.⁷⁷ This was widely seen in conservative circles as a direct affront to the traditions, values, and even identity of the Polish nation that was tacitly encouraged by the government's failure to censor the offending pieces. In fact, they argued that it was the anti-Polish lenience of the government that allowed a figure like Boy to exist in the first place.⁷⁸ Without faith in the government's ability to protect the public decency, both church groups and conservative political factions created their own rubrics and blacklists, and attempted to persuade their members to boycott offending authors and books.⁷⁹ Interestingly, this meant that left-wing intellectuals, even when they opposed its actual censorship and its increasingly dictatorial methods, often allied themselves with the government even as they played the bohemian opposition. Thus, for example, in 1931 when Piłsudski imprisoned the leading members of a party that had called for his resignation, a flurry of protest erupted from both the Left and the Right. Still, despite writing

⁷⁶ Hein, *Der Piłsudski-Kult*, 36; Joseph Rothschild, "The Military Background of Piłsudski's Coup D'etat," *Slavic Review* 21, no. 2 (1962): 242.

⁷⁷ Plach, *Clash of Moral Nations*, 133-134.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 136 ff. This is, in fact, a major facet of Plach's argument on Poland's crisis of identity in the Second Republic.

⁷⁹ Żółkiewski, *Kultura literacka, 1918-1932*, 222-226.

sharp critiques of the harsh, dictatorial action, poets like Tuwim and Słonimski continued to view the Sanacja as their best political option.⁸⁰

Part of the Polish authorities' lack of anxiety about genre literature came from the practical fact of its scarcity. Popular fears of degeneracy were therefore focused on the public sphere and away from books, while the government addressed itself to matters that could destabilize the state. Another main area of difference between Poland and Germany lay in the readers themselves. Germany's working population was urbanized, industrial, and had been reading popular fiction eagerly since the late nineteenth century. In Poland, the population was still largely rural, and had yet to embrace the world of pulp, pot-boilers, and genre literature. During the interwar period, the country made substantial strides in education and literacy. By 1934, the percentage of school-age children actually attending school had risen to eighty-eight percent from seventy-eight percent in 1925.⁸¹ Between the ages of eight and eleven, this number reached as high as ninety-six percent, but it is worth noting that school age ended after thirteen, and even in 1935, only sixty-seven percent of children were still attending school at that age. Likewise, the fact that nearly one in five university students came from a working class or peasant background represents both a significant achievement and an ongoing struggle.⁸² Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that fiction was not as large a part of mass culture as it was in Germany. Thus, of the just over ten thousand non-periodicals published in 1933, over two and a half thousand were academic works, twelve hundred were classified as belles-lettres, and just under fourteen hundred were classified as popular literature.⁸³ In this situation, even conservatives who were dedicated to elevating the workers and the peasantry were more concerned to persuade them to read classics like Sienkiewicz and Mickiewicz than they were to amend bad habits.⁸⁴ This is to say that, despite facing many of the same basic tensions that Weimar

⁸⁰ Plach, *Clash of Moral Nations*, 140-141 and especially n48 and 49.

⁸¹ Główny Urząd Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, *Mały rocznik statystyczny 1935*, (Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 1935), 202, table 4.

⁸² Peter D. Stachura, *Poland in the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 39n29.

⁸³ It is worth noting that another 4,400 books were classified as documents of social life, which included legal proclamations, calendars, price lists, and so forth. Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 216.

⁸⁴ Meghann Pytka, "Policing the Binary—Patrolling the Nation: Race and Gender in Polish Integral Nationalism, from Partitions to Parliament (1883 – 1926)" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2013), 331.

Germany did, the combination of the writers' uneasy alliance with the government and the reading habits of the majority of the country created a dynamic that was significantly different. If writers wanted to lead the nation, they did it by writing feuilletons, in cabarets, or in manifestos, not through the medium of popular fiction.

After the war, the relationship between the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) and the interwar Second Republic was difficult. In order to legitimize the new state, it was often helpful to cast doubt on the previous one. Thus, the many vestiges of interwar Poland that remained did so through a haze of official distance. The new postwar histories presented the Second Republic as a failed state, riddled by corruption with ineffectual liberals on one side and would-be authoritarian conservatives on the other.

In fact, Communist Poland actually focused specifically on the twin corruption and ineptitude of the Second Republic censors. Thus, Stefan Żółkiewski, cited above as one of the best and most complete sources on interwar Polish censorship, wrote his 1971 book as an indictment of a lost state that could often be repressive without managing to protect its citizens from harmful influences. Specifically, he wrote that the interwar censors had been "unsupported by modern, organized sanctions" and had therefore "tripped up on the [commercial] aspirations of the publishing market." This led to a situation where even "real" pornography was available for sale, and "the moral authority of the censor was weakened."⁸⁵ The tone of his entire summation of the situation implies that it was not the censorship per se that was objectionable. It was its corruption and misuse that were damaging. This position was particularly interesting because it was clearly part of a very long meditation on the meaning of Poland's interwar literary culture. As early as 1949, he had been involved in writing about the decadence of that period, lamenting in one article that even its leftist authors "avoided any realistic view of the world. They only tried to notice the grotesque, the fantastic, the horrible, and the oddities in the reality that surrounded them, to justify the sad fate of the dying capitalist order."⁸⁶

In this narrative of the Second Republic, one of the major categories that suffered was satire. To both literary and party elites, it seemed to represent a lightness and disconnection from the real problems of the moment that had kept the left intelligentsia in a state of suspended distress. This was symptomatic of Żółkiewski's artists, and led to another writer's critique that satire had "turned to playing its demonic role for the [decadent

⁸⁵ Żółkiewski, *Kultura literacka, 1918-1932*, 208.

⁸⁶ Żółkiewski, "Polityka kulturalna w dziedzinie literatury" [18 May 1949], AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII-69, k. 61.

Młoda Polska writers] and all of their ilk.”⁸⁷ At the same time, though, the form of the satire is also illustrative of the persistence of interwar forms and values. The entire censor’s office seems to have been addicted to satire. More of their own informational bulletins than not contained satires on their own work, written by the censors for each other’s entertainment. More to the point, the satiric tone of authors like Borowski and the feuilleton-like polemics of the postwar newspapers were both respected modes.⁸⁸

Within the realm of popular literature, the intelligentsia’s concerns from the Second Republic mixed with the need to rebuild Poland and a new emphasis on speaking directly to the peasants and working class. In terms of the quantities that circulated at least, the Socialist Realist literature that began to circulate was not meant to replace some other wildly popular genre. Rather, it was the first sustained, native attempt to write mass literature in Poland. It is this situation specifically that party members were referencing when they said that, “the development of Socialist Realism is possible [because of] the beginning of Socialist construction,” and that its main characteristic was to “express the concerns of the masses.”⁸⁹ As much as this kind of statement was created from standard Socialist boilerplate, its specific construction reflected the novelty of the situation. This meant that the concerns over popular literature were more aligned with the wider realm of Polish literature than with the German fears of foreign corruption. Censors and cultural elites working on popular literature were concerned with the problems of connecting with the target audience and, as always, with the question of whether they were measuring up to the standards set by their neighbors. Whether they were elites concerned with the specter of schematism, everyday censors frustrated with philistine authors, or the entire office looking for a national position on satire, the goal was popularity.

Within the lexicon of terms that were used for critique, the censor’s office almost always used schematism for popular literature, or at least literature that was meant to be popular. Its use highlighted both the office’s understanding of the proletariat’s needs and its sense of Poland’s cultural lag. As a metaphor, schematism was closely connected to formalism. The idea was of a schematic as a kind of formal outline that left the real substance of a work to be filled in; it was used synonymously with “artificial

⁸⁷ Transcript [11 Jan. 1951], AAN, KC-PZPR, 237-XVIII-69, k. 23.

⁸⁸ Ibid; Kleynego, “O sztuce dla dorosłych,” *Biuletyn Instrukcyjny*, no. 12 [1955]: 3, AAN, GUKPPIW 420 (165-4), k. 622.

⁸⁹ Stefan Żółkiewski, “Polityka kulturalna w dziedzinie literatury” [18 May 1949], AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII-69, k. 63-64.

concepts” and the colorful *papierowość* or “paper-ish-ness” meaning “something devoid of realism,” “untrue,” or “unnatural.”⁹⁰ Thus, it follows that the opposite of schematism was concreteness, to speak of something filled in and solid, grounded in the specificity of its subject. This idea was not only aesthetically, but also politically and ideologically valuable. Thus, an article praising a polemic opinion piece in a cultural paper remarked that, “our authors and critics, [working] within the framework of schematism, have become a bit unaccustomed to struggles with a concrete viewpoint, with a concrete thesis or conclusion.”⁹¹ In a more literary fashion, the idea of concrete things, as opposed to abstract, artificial ones, was connected to the peasants and workers. The terms rarely occur in the specific reports written by the censors, or in discussions of more erudite literature. They appeared almost exclusively when the office managers evaluated the state of popular or children’s literature, or when work was judged to be backward or inept and blundering. Thus, for example, a speaker at one conference followed the complaint that “schematically, the currently developing situation in performance does not cover anything but the broadest issues in the field” with the exclamation, “I would just like to instruct my colleagues systematically.”⁹²

All of this led to a situation with looser constraints than existed in East Germany. This was not a question of resources; the practicalities of publishing popular fiction were very similar to those in the GDR. For most of the forties, paper was far too scarce and restrictions governing ideological consistency were as severe as they would ever be during the Communist period. Despite all of this, the Poles managed to publish more light fiction earlier than their Western neighbors. Seven volumes of Arthur Conan Doyle, not all of them Holmes stories, were published between 1946 and 1948. More significantly, the same number of novels by Jules Verne were published in the first years after the war, and continued steadily through the 1950s. Even native genre fiction writers found a foothold earlier as magazines like *Nowy Świat Przygód* and even more serious publications like *Kuźnica* published their work in serialized form.

⁹⁰ Jakub Berman, transcript, AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII-69, k. 1.

⁹¹ Kleynego, “O sztuce dla dorosłych,” *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, no. 12 [1955]: 3-17, AAN, GUKPPIW 420 (165-4), k. 622.

⁹² Protokół z narady Wojewódzkich Kierowników Referatów i Referentów Widowiskowych odbytej w Głównym Urzędzie Kontroli Prasy Publikacyj i Widowisk [7-9 Feb. 1948], AAN, GUKPPIW 421, t. IV, k. 10.

Conclusion

No author better illustrates the ongoing effects of Polish and German differences dating from the interwar period than the Polish science-fiction author Stanisław Lem, whose career as a pioneering writer of science fiction would not have been possible in neighboring East Germany. East Germany produced authors who may have been more highly respected or even more famous, but all of them worked within the realm of high-brow literature and not popular fiction like Lem. Most obviously, this difference is one of opportunity: had Lem been a young German author in 1949, rather than a Polish one, it would have been extremely difficult for him to find a publishing outlet. It is similarly unlikely that the editors of Aufbau Verlag would have encouraged Lem as enthusiastically on a chance meeting as did Jerzy Pański, the president of Czytelnik, when Lem met him unexpectedly while on vacation in the mountains in 1951. More profoundly, though, contours that made literature either potentially threatening on the one hand or prestigious on the other fell differently in the two states. Lem's early work was more or less formulaic in its orthodoxy, and until his meeting with Pański he was shut out of the publishing world too thoroughly to write full-time. His career changed in 1951 when, beginning with *The Astronauts*, Lem started to play with the form of the science fiction novel. After 1956, he began to experiment more boldly with its ideological content as well. From that time until the end of his career, he would use his books to test the boundaries of orthodoxy and to serve as something of a critical voice within the state. Again, this was not a unique position. Authors from Brecht to Christa Wolf, an award-winning writer of literary fiction, did much the same in the GDR. There, however, science fiction and detective novels had been dubious genres since the earliest parts of the century. Even when tolerance toward that kind of popular literature increased, it had to stay within a well circumscribed range. Paradoxically, the fact that interwar Poland was more poorly educated and more conservative than Weimar Germany allowed it to sidestep a particular anxiety toward Westernized popular literature, and eventually opened up an unexpected space of freedom. The preoccupations of the interwar world continued to inflect the Communist present.

Chapter Two: Hiding in Plain Sight—Structuring the Censor’s Office

As the reconstruction of Germany and Poland commenced following the Second World War, it was obvious to all parties that the new governments being put into place had to find ways to avoid the fatal weaknesses of their predecessors. The First World War had failed rather spectacularly to make the world safe for democracy, and if the Second did not do a better job, it was unclear whether the world could survive another cataclysmic war. Constructing healthy democracy, though, was complicated by the need to use means that had typically been considered un-democratic. Both the Soviet Union and the Western powers agreed that it was necessary to eliminate Fascist influences and trends in order to create a stable system. To this end, the overarching strategy of denazification sought to identify the most active and committed members of the Nazi party, remove them from positions of influence, and bring them to justice. The reconstruction of cultural life was guided both by these efforts and by an entire complex of ideas and strategies that tried to define the place of culture within the new order. In the West, most of the resources for denazification were focused on politicians or military officers, making the effort to root out writers and artists with Fascist leanings somewhat haphazard.⁹³ Still, outside the formal efforts at denazification, institutions at every stage worked to create a new culture in the image of the victors, from supporting new authors to licensing publication. This atmosphere was positively reinforced by programs that subsidized both democratically minded, politically independent writers and older books that reflected fundamental societal virtues.⁹⁴ Both of these factors, formal denazification and more diffuse support of right-minded work, were magnified in the states under Soviet influence. While it remained a problematic category, denazification was even more thoroughly implemented by the Soviets than it was by the Americans. At the same time, rather than encouraging authors who desired to separate aesthetics from politics, though, these programs promoted work that was explicitly engaged with the political problems of the day. The literature could, then, be part of the search for solutions. Soviet-style prohibitions, though, were expressed in the censorship of particular books, rather than the banning of dangerous authors.

⁹³ Konrad Hugo Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 49-53.

⁹⁴ Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 1999), 21.

From a Soviet perspective, this emphasis on books rather than authors made sense. The Communists viewed Fascism as the natural result of collusion between bourgeois and military powers in Capitalist (and therefore colonialist) states.⁹⁵ The problem was structural, and not limited to a few misguided or malicious individuals. The solution therefore followed suit. The entire system sought to ally literature with the government's efforts to improve society. From this standpoint, censorship could be seen as a necessary, and even beneficial, aspect of state supervision. Such a perspective implied a collaborative, even congenial, relationship between the censor and writer. Nevertheless, the issue was uncomfortable. Members of the newly formed governments in the East believed that the most important aspects of democracy lay in the redressing of social ills and the creation of equality, but they were keenly aware that this was a debatable position. It did not help matters that in twentieth-century narratives, censorship was understood as a tool of oppressors against democracy. To use censorship to create democracy seemed unheard of. Censorship therefore became a problematic and uncomfortable issue for the Soviet states. It constantly forced them to avoid the dangerous implications of their actions on one hand, while creating new and constructive meanings for them on the other.

The strategies of the two different states in this project reflected both their past traditions and their present challenges. In East Germany, therefore, the presence of a censor was utterly denied, while a great deal of effort was expended to make his work professional and impersonal. In Poland, by contrast, the censors' presence was obvious, and their actions meant to be collaborative.

Germany

In 1949, the GDR's new constitution guaranteed that, "all citizens have the right within the laws applying to everyone to express their opinions freely and publicly," and explicitly stated that, "there is no censorship of the press."⁹⁶ This would not prevent a thoroughgoing practice of censorship from continuing for the next four decades. Given these rather incriminating facts, historians often maintain that the government's actions

⁹⁵ Gregory W. Sandford, *From Hitler to Ulbricht: The Communist Reconstruction of East Germany, 1945-46* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 31.

⁹⁶ Verfassung der DDR (7 Oct. 1949), Art. IX

were not only disingenuous but also inept.⁹⁷ In this view, international politics are primary: the Soviets were determined to maintain power in Germany as thoroughly as possible without provoking intervention from America and the other western Allies, and unacknowledged censorship allowed them control without consequences.⁹⁸ This view has some merit. Disagreements between the two sides were escalating, and it seemed possible that a more overt course towards Soviet-style government could have provoked intervention. As both sides became increasingly concerned with their own security, the idea of democracy in the buffer states was seen in the West as a guarantee of minimal security. However, a heavy emphasis on international politics also implies that it could only be through a mistake or ineptitude that the population was widely aware that literature and news were restricted. Its blind spot was the inability to reckon with the fact that Germany's focus was as much internal as external. If the USSR viewed the West primarily as a diplomatic and military opponent, the native German government focused instead directly on its former countrymen, whose respect it desired. West Germany as a sibling state was crucial in the development of GDR identity. Indeed, even through the 1950s, the idea of a united state seemed plausible, making it a priority to win the West over.⁹⁹ In this context, censorship became part of a larger cultural discussion, in which both sides sought the other's approval. The denial of the existence of a censor's office was simply a part of a larger negotiation.

Interestingly, in the debate over Soviet versus American forms of government, both sides agreed on the central terms. The discussion revolved around democracy as a cure for the pathology of the Third Reich. On a basic level, everyone agreed that the cataclysmic war had been caused by profound problems in German politics. A small slippage in their terms for the problem, however, indicated that the two sides were acting from profoundly different interpretations of what had gone wrong. The divergent ideological foundations between the Capitalists and Communists were at

⁹⁷ For a rather extreme, if very informative example, see David Pike, *The Politics of Culture in Soviet-Occupied Germany, 1945-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

⁹⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 281-287.

⁹⁹ Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 56-59. Even in 1949, the constitution insisted stubbornly in its opening lines that "Germany is an indivisible democratic republic," and "There is only one single German nationality."

the base of their postwar strategies in Germany.¹⁰⁰ In the western zones, the operative term was Nazism, appropriate because the governing powers understood Germany's malady to have been ideological. Pernicious facets of Nazi ideology, especially its authoritarianism, racism, and intolerance, were understood to have seduced the German people, left susceptible either by innate historical character or by their difficult experience following the First World War.¹⁰¹ The solution, then, was twofold. First, the country had to be purged of its most powerful Nazi influences, from top SS officers to important Nazi cultural figures, and second, the German people had to be persuaded to give up their authoritarian ways and embrace freethinking democracy.¹⁰² Governmentally, this strategy was defined by an emphasis on free elections with multiple viable parties and on civil rights.¹⁰³ Generally, the Western approach could be described as personal, viewing individuals as the main carriers of Nazism, and in turn, seeking to reform the country using measures that would affect the lives of specific citizens.¹⁰⁴ It was generally believed that if the German people were given political freedom and, preferably, a moderate amount of prosperity, healthy government would follow.¹⁰⁵

The Soviets, by contrast, tended to view the German situation as a structural matter. Thus, they referred to Fascism rather than Nazism, pointing to the entire construction of the state, rather than to one insidious party.¹⁰⁶ According to the prevailing Marxist thought, Nazi Germany represented the peak of Capitalism, in which bourgeois industrialists colluded with Junker landholders who required military dominance to maintain their political power. The result was an inevitably and rapaciously imperialist country that fed both upon its own workers and upon its former

¹⁰⁰ Lutz Niethammer, *Entnazifizierung in Bayern: Säuberung und Rehabilitierung unter amerikanischer Besatzung* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1972), 654-659.

¹⁰¹ Jan-Werner Müller, *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 85.

¹⁰² For an overview, see Jarausch, *After Hitler*, esp. Ch 3.

¹⁰³ David F. Patton, *Cold War Politics in Postwar Germany* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 16-24.

¹⁰⁴ Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1999), 191-194, 239-240.

¹⁰⁵ Raymond Ebsworth, *Restoring Democracy in Germany: The British Contribution* (London: Stevens, 1961). Ebsworth was a headmaster of Eton who had served in the diplomatic corps after WWII; his book is an excellent contemporary example of this thinking.

¹⁰⁶ Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 29-31.

neighbors.¹⁰⁷ In this analysis, Germany's anti-Semitism and the resulting carnage were almost incidental. Practically speaking, this meant that stabilizing Germany required leveling its property relations. While full-scale collectivization was not immediately attempted, it was a Soviet priority to remove the biggest landholders and industrialists.¹⁰⁸ This distinction in the understanding of Germany's pathology speaks to a larger rift in the conception of democracy itself. Although the same word was used on both sides, in the West it primarily pointed towards freedom of thought and enterprise, while in the East, access and equality were at the crux of the definition.¹⁰⁹

If Soviets and Americans meant different things when they spoke of the Third Reich or democracy, they were both very clear that the former was bad, the latter good, and that culture played a critical role in deciding between the two. This left them in an interesting position: it was necessary to control culture in order to make it free. Whether German writers were pulled away from their authoritarian tendencies or from their unthinking support of a pathological system, it seemed clear that the correction would not happen without outside encouragement. This was a difficult proposition, because censoring literature (or even providing decided governmental encouragement) was normally understood to be outside the scope of democratic action. Both East and West were uncomfortable with the proposition, but both were determined to pursue it nonetheless.¹¹⁰

In the West, then, the strategy for renewing German literature followed the more general tactic of prosecuting the high profile offenders and actively reeducating the rest of the population.¹¹¹ Instead of censoring specific books or plays, the authorities in the western zones blacklisted authors who had been committed Nazis. To fill the void, they both funded new, more congenial authors and created lists of suggested books.¹¹² In the Soviet zone, high-ranking Nazi officials were blacklisted and removed as

¹⁰⁷ Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 29-33.

¹⁰⁸ Timothy R. Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet-Occupied Germany: Brandenburg, 1945-1948* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 62-71.

¹⁰⁹ K. Stuart Parkes, *Writers and Politics in Germany, 1945-2008* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), 15.

¹¹⁰ Jaimey Fisher, *Disciplining Germany: Youth, Reeducation, and Reconstruction after the Second World War* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 63-66.

¹¹¹ Jarausch, *After Hitler*, 47-57.

¹¹² Saunders, 21-22.

well.¹¹³ In addition, the military system of censorship that had been used during wartime had been taken over and put to civilian use. The Soviet zone especially emphasized the licensing of publishers in the early years after the war.¹¹⁴ As a means of control, it was appropriately focused on the material foundations of literature. The system also meant that individual licensees were responsible to the government for all of the output of their presses. This structure made it easier for a system to develop in which the focus was on creating an ideal plan for the publishers rather than on individual works of literature. As long as a unified Germany was a possibility, it remained necessary for the Eastern zone to serve as a beacon of liberality and social equity, in order to make a leftist vote attractive to the rest of the country. The campaign for public opinion went on while contact between the zones was relatively uninhibited.

In the literary sphere, a debate was quickly organized, in which each of the two definitions of democracy with its accompanying system of literary regulation associated itself strongly with a specific approach to authorship. This argument mostly revolved around a distinction that had quickly been made between independent and engaged writing. The model supported by Western governments and embraced by many of their writers advocated a strict separation between the political and the aesthetic.¹¹⁵ This is not to say that either the writers or their works were apolitical. Rather, the separation was actively meant to foster democratic dialog. The idea of a “free trade of ideas”—thus, also Capitalist—was opposed what the West increasingly framed as Communist subjugation of free speech to totalitarian uniformity. The Americans, not to mention the less-zealous British and French, were sharply uncomfortable with their restrictive practices; although they were willing to mete out stern punishment to the Germans, further measures like pulling books off library shelves and muzzling authors had the taint of Nazism about them.¹¹⁶ In practical terms, this meant that the occupation quickly withdrew from exercising stylistic guidance or restriction on an author’s work, but also that authors who won grants and honors tended to avoid explicit political engagement within the literary realm. Thus, in the West, accolades and funding were abundant for

¹¹³ David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR*, *Modern German Culture and Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 17-18, 37-38.

¹¹⁴ Pike, *Politics of Culture*, 356-357.

¹¹⁵ Parkes, *Writers and Politics*, 19.

¹¹⁶ Margaret F. Stieg, “The Postwar Purge of German Public Libraries, Democracy, and the American Reaction,” *Libraries & Culture* 28, no. 2 (1993): 146.

authors like T.S. Eliot and the New Critics. The journals they began in Europe followed Eliot's *Criterion* in featuring at least as many former Trotskyites as they did conservatives.¹¹⁷ In Germany, the New York leftist intellectual Melvin Lasky, who had come to Germany as a combat historian, formed the journal *Der Monat* from interwar models like *Criterion* and the *Partisan Review*. *Der Monat* was actually funded by the CIA, which had set up several such institutions to fund sympathetic European intellectuals.¹¹⁸ In France, there was a similar group around *Preuve*, and so forth.¹¹⁹

While they were not specifically associated with a political party, these groups were all dedicated to the idea of Western democracy as the alternative and corrective to totalitarianism. As the Cold War deepened and the Communists were more and more indelibly labeled totalitarian, these groups were driven away from their leftist origins, and toward a less critical relationship with their own governments and the United States. By the mid-sixties, they were perceived as positively conservative institutions. This shift was only hastened when, in America, vocal writers on the Left, from Arthur Miller to scores of others like him, found themselves persecuted and blacklisted for their political engagement.¹²⁰

On the other side of the geographic and ideological line, leftist authors who suddenly found themselves in the majority had long since considered it their duty and purpose to write engaged work that would participate in, if not lead, the political life of their countries.¹²¹ In East Germany, these were especially the émigré authors who had been forced out of the country during the Third Reich. Once the war was over, they found a far more ready welcome in the Soviet zone than they did in any of the other three. Given their experiences futilely trying to raise resistance to Hitler, their insistence on a unified front in moving the country away from Fascism stands to reason. Instead of focusing on creating the conditions for

¹¹⁷ Terry Eagleton, "Nudge-Winking," review of *The "Criterion": Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Interwar Britain*, by Jason Harding, *London Review of Books* 24, no. 18 (2002), <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v24/n18/terry-eagleton/nudge-winking>.

¹¹⁸ Giles Scott-Smith, "'A Radical Democratic Political Offensive': Melvin J. Lasky, *Der Monat*, and the Congress for Cultural Freedom," *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 2 (2000): 271.

¹¹⁹ David Drake, *Intellectuals and Politics in Post-War France*, French Politics, Society and Culture Series (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 89; Saunders, 156.

¹²⁰ Albert Wertheim, "The McCarthy Era and the American Theatre," *Theatre Journal* 34, no. 2 (1982): 219; Ellen Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents*, 2d ed. (Boston: St. Martin's, 2002), 86-97.

¹²¹ Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 208-209.

democratic dialog, then, the post-war cadres were committed above all to anti-fascist unity.

Despite the similarities in the legal systems of censorship then, the stylistic and ideological differences underlying them quickly became insupportable. Passions ran high enough that authors on both sides of the divide found themselves uncomfortable and isolated if their aesthetic preferences clashed with their choice of residence, and many found it easiest to relocate. Some, like Czesław Miłosz, found it impossible to write under Socialist Realism and emigrated, while others from Georg Lukács to Bertolt Brecht found themselves equally reluctant to write outside a real Communist state.¹²² In this atmosphere, East Germany was able to offer authors the attractive ability to aid in the reconstruction on their homeland, as long as the price never seemed too high. By politically emphasizing the importance of intellectual freedom, then, the GDR avoided not only the loss of rhetorical ground, but also a mass flight of authors that would have badly damaged its cultural credibility.¹²³

The solution to the paradox of democratic censorship became straightforward once the occupiers in both East and West came to the conclusion that censors by any other name actually smelled a good deal sweeter. As time went on, the western Allies gradually began to rely less on formal, preventative censorship, and more on the inducements of funding for right-minded projects. At the same time, censors in the GDR, who reached the height of their stringency in the early 1950s, operated as a part of the Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen (Office of Literature and Publishing Affairs), which made all government decisions concerning publishing. Its tasks ranged from the licensing of publishers through the creation of the year's plan for publishing, and even extended to the distribution of paper.¹²⁴ The entire office was a part of the Ministry of Culture. Within this structure, censors became reviewers, support staff in the greater project of producing printed work for Germany. As a rhetorical strategy meant to bamboozle the general public, this was laughable. Only the most unobservant could have missed the fact that some literature was deemed unacceptable in the new state. Dissolving the censor's function

¹²²Czesław Miłosz, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition*, trans. Catherine S. Leach (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 284-286; Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 208-209; Alexander Stephan, "Communazis": *FBI Surveillance of German Emigré Writers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 109-110.

¹²³ Stephen Parker, Peter Davies, and Matthew Philpotts, *The Modern Restoration: Re-Thinking German Literary History, 1930-1960* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 55-60.

¹²⁴ Pike, *Politics of Culture*, 357-360.

within the office for publishing, though, did make the fundamental contradiction of democratic censorship more palatable to those who practiced it. By combining all of the decisions in one office, the work of the censor was directly linked to the active, productive work of printing.

Poland

At the risk of stating the obvious, the main difference between Poland and Germany as the new governments formed was that Poland had neither begun the Second World War nor fought on its losing side. This simple circumstance had a number of important effects on the development of the Polish state and its censorship. Most prominently, in a war narrative that revolved primarily around the fight against totalitarianism, Poles were invariably cast as victims and resisters.¹²⁵ The new state, then, was unhampered by either guilt or any creeping fear of its democratic potential. If East Germany's moral superiority relied on its exiled minority and its new postwar policies, Poland had no such schism to negotiate. According to Stalinist classifications, Poland had been a middling offender on the scale of bourgeois imperialist nations before the war. If it was guilty of oppressing its minorities, especially the Ukrainians, it had also been colonized by all three of its neighboring empires.¹²⁶ Poland might require some land reform, but unlike Germany, it was unlikely to take over the world in a fit of Capitalist military rage. Combined with the *realpolitik* of the day, this meant that neither the western Allies nor the Soviets felt the need to take drastic steps to prevent the Poles from becoming a totalitarian menace. After ceding Poland to the Soviet sphere of influence at Yalta and ignoring the suspect elections in 1947, it seemed clear to disappointed observers that the Allies were "distant and inert," unwilling to disturb the postwar equilibrium by reprimanding the Polish Communists.¹²⁷ This lack of attention also meant, significantly, that Poland had no one to convince but itself. Unlike Germany, it had no twin to win over, nor any real prospect of playing a central role in European affairs. This is not to say that the Polish government's actions were unconstrained, but rather that its persuasions were aimed toward an internal instead of an external audience.

¹²⁵ John Connelly, "Why the Poles Collaborated So Little: And Why That Is No Reason for Nationalist Hubris," *Slavic Review* 64, no. 4 (2005): 771-774.

¹²⁶ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, The Wilder House Series in Politics, History, and Culture (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 36, 325, 422.

¹²⁷ Joseph Rothschild and Nancy M. Wingfield, *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe since World War II*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 81.

Poland did not need to demonstrate its liberality to the world, it needed to emphasize its independence and cohesiveness to its own people. This meant that the central problem was not whether a censor could exist in a democratic state, but whether a censor would help rebuild the Polish state.

If it is true that the existence of a censor's office, or its public admission, was never the key issue in Poland, this is not to indicate that the subject was unproblematic. For a full year while the Polish government was being formalized and ratified, at least two offices fought for control of the country's censorship.¹²⁸ If the conflict began as a commonplace power struggle between governmental factions, the terms in which it was carried out and its resolution would define the tenor of censorship in Poland. For most of 1945, the Ministry of Security, the Ministry of Information and Propaganda, and the General Administration fought for control of the censor's office. The censor's office had actually been created as part of the Ministry of Security in the Provisional Government while the war was still going on.¹²⁹ From the beginning, it functioned separately from the military censor's office charged with protecting strategic information, but during wartime the connection between any censor and the necessity for state security was manifest. This concern was reflected in the wording of the censor's mandate in all of the incarnations of the office's charter. In the most important of these, promulgated in 1946, the first three of the office's five tasks refer to external threats. The censor was mandated to prevent "menace to the Polish People's government, revelation of state secrets, [and] disruption of the Polish state's international relations."¹³⁰ If the Security Ministry's claim to the censor's office came from a similarity of priorities, Information and Propaganda based its bid on the promise of administrative efficiency. The ministry controlled paper production and rationing, as well as the planning for the printers and publishing houses under government control.¹³¹ Whether it was because Europe's centers of

¹²⁸ Oskar Stanisław Czarnik, "Control of Literary Communications in the 1945-1956 Period in Poland," in *Books, Libraries, Reading, and Publishing in the Cold War*, ed. Hermina G. B. Angheliescu and Martine Poulain (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Center for the Book, 2001), 105-106; Mieczysław Ciećwierz, *Polityka prasowa 1944-1948*, Wyd. 1. ed. (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawn. Nauk., 1989), 66-69.

¹²⁹ Kondek, *Władza i wydawcy*, 29.

¹³⁰ On the creation of a Main Office for the Supervision of Press, Publication, and Performance, Article 2 [5 June 1946], reprinted in Daria Nałęcz and Instytut Studiów Politycznych (Polska Akademia Nauk), *Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy 1945-1949*, Dokumenty Do Dziejów PRL, Zesz. 6 (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1994), 28.

¹³¹ Czarnik, "Control of Literary Communications," 105-106.

paper production were under Western influence or because wood was needed for reconstruction and factories were too damaged to produce paper, it was in short supply in the postwar years, and would remain an excuse for censorship for decades afterwards. At the same time, though the most dramatic shift towards state publishing would not take place until the “democratic revolution” of 1948, copyright laws were passed immediately after the war to give state-run houses a distinct advantage.¹³² These factors together meant that the Ministry of Information and Propaganda often controlled more of the practicalities of what was published than the censor’s office itself did. It would have been logical, then, to combine all publishing decisions into a single office in order to streamline production. In the end, though, neither practical option would prevail.

Ultimately, placing the censor’s office in any of the ministries would have created a more streamlined, rational system. The costs of efficiency, however, proved prohibitive. If the role of the security service, thwarting foreign spies and protecting sensitive information, could be comforting during wartime and there were external enemies to fight, it was decidedly less so once peace came and the only targets were at home. The combination of police surveillance and literary control carried the unpleasant hint of Big Brother about it. The Ministry of Information and Propaganda might have been in a slightly better position from a public relations standpoint (its title had yet to acquire totalitarian overtones), but it suffered from the competition with the Ministry of Security. If the stronger office could not win the censor, it would certainly not surrender the prize to a rival.¹³³ Moreover, the failure of the Ministry of Information and Propaganda’s suit indicates a larger point concerning the position of the censor’s office: it was less threatening if it was decentralized.¹³⁴ The appeal of efficiency could never be persuasive as long as the fear of each ministry’s power prevailed. Dividing the publishing apparatus was a bid to control any office’s power. The final decision, then, proved straightforward. The censor’s office was isolated, an autonomous office at ministry level,

¹³² Ibid., 111-112. “Democratic revolution” was the term used to denote the elections of 1948 that brought the Communists (or, more precisely, the Socialist Unity parties) to power. The implication was that these elections took the place of a Russian-style proletarian revolution, and the fact that the elections were rigged was incidental.

¹³³ Ibid., 106; Kondek, *Władza i wydawcy*, 29-46.

¹³⁴ See for example, the official parliamentary (*sejm*) publication: Aleksandra Rodzińska-Chojnowska Regina Wałowicz, *Federalism in the History of Poland: “The Free with the Free, the Equal with the Equal”* (Warsaw: Chancellery of the Sejm, 2009). It includes an entire bibliography of works that reinforce the notion of a uniquely federalist tradition in Poland.

unconnected to any previously existing government administration. The entire discussion leading to this solution was all the more interesting because it was almost entirely internal.¹³⁵ While there was public discussion of censorship as a category, the question of its administrative placement was never aired enough to engender any kind of civic debate, and the early Communists rejected polling. Likewise, the entire decision was made away from the international eye. This is to say that the government was essentially self-limiting. Any pressure, internal or external, was implicit, to the point that the government was representing censorship to itself as much as it was to its constituents. Any struggles over the legitimacy of censorship as a practice had to succeed in official eyes before they were ever presented to a wider community. In a very real way, then, the government was creating its own identity.

Once the offices were in place, their internal divisions continued to follow the patterns that their external positions had begun. In Poland, each province had its own office.¹³⁶ Each regional office handled the first round of censorship for all of the printed material that was created within its borders, but for the smaller provinces, this meant a three-person office with one member devoted part-time to any material that was not periodic.¹³⁷ The Main Office in Warsaw, which also managed the censorship for its entire surrounding province, was easily the largest center for book publishing, but Krakow and Lublin received a high number of submissions as well.¹³⁸ For periodicals or other slight or time-sensitive publications, this was the final word. The regional office received instructions and guidelines to direct its work, as well as regular reviews of its performance, but despite this oversight, and regardless of the substantial negotiation that went on between an editor and his censor, there was very rarely an appeal to the Main Office over a regional decision.¹³⁹ The situation for books was more complicated. They were still vetted within their original province, but it was

¹³⁵ Nałęcz and Instytut Studiów Politycznych, *Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy*, 9-15.

¹³⁶ By “province,” I mean *województwo*, which is technically, if unhelpfully translated as “voivodship.” It is worth noting that the 16 provinces that exist now do now have quite the same borders as the 16 that were created after World War II.

¹³⁷ See “Stenogram z zjazdu delegatów wojewódzkich i miejskich biur kontroli prasy” [23-25 May 1945], AAN, GUKPPiW 421, t. 1. Reprinted in Nałęcz and Instytut Studiów Politycznych, *Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy*, 43 ff.

¹³⁸ Ciećwierz, *Polityka prasowa 1944-1948*, 91-97.

¹³⁹ The archives contain innumerable conversations, and even negotiations, between censor and publisher, but no formal appeals of a refusal. In fact, there was never any legal provision made for the appeal of a censor’s decision, though sufficient political connections may have made them possible in unofficial practice.

much more common for the more significant of them to undergo a second level of review in the Main Office. All told, it was not unusual for a new work of fiction to pass through three separate rounds of censorship before reaching publication.¹⁴⁰ In Germany, the situation was more complicated still. In the very first years after the war, the situation was chaotic, and distinctly more de-centralized than the one in Poland. Several scholars have even gone so far as to refer to the various districts under distinct military control as fiefdoms, due to their unavoidable autonomy and wild difference in governance.¹⁴¹ As the system became more stabilized, though, it centered more and more on Berlin. This happened in all areas of the government, of course, but the concentration of the censor's work was especially marked in comparison to Poland. In part, this was a result of the larger organization of printing in the GDR: the censor's office was united with both economic and cultural planning, and those were necessarily done centrally. The official decisions on whether to license publishers were also made exclusively in Berlin. To receive a license, the publisher had to meet basic political and ideological standards as well as demonstrating their relevance within the state's publishing plan. Once this was done, the firm's manager became liable for its work, and almost even a government representative.¹⁴²

Practically speaking, then, literary censorship in the GDR took place in the capital. It is important to avoid overstating the distinction between German centralization and Poland's distribution of censorship to the provinces; because most of Poland's main publishing firms were located in Warsaw, and because the Main Office there had privileges of oversight, most literary censorship took place in the capital, too. Still, the insistence on the form of the censor's office, making sure that work began at the provincial level in Poland, is significant. A pattern begins to emerge

¹⁴⁰ There is little mention of this in UKPPiW's inter-office communication, but it is not uncommon to find two or three reviews of a book as it passed through the levels of censorship. For a good summary of the working of the office, see Czarnik, "Control of Literary Communications."

¹⁴¹ Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond, *The Workers' and Peasants' State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945-71* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 60, 137; Sandford, *From Hitler to Ulbricht*.

¹⁴² Memo from Min. f. Volksbildung der DDR, "Betr.: Erteilung von Genehmigungen für die Einfuhr von Literatur der Verlage des Vereinigten Wirtschaftsgebietes (VWG) in das Gebiet der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (DDR)," Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1899, bl. 16; Memo, "Aufgaben und Verantwortungsbereich des Amtes für Literatur und Verlagswesen," Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1871, bl. 6; Draft, "Strafbestimmungen zu dem vorgesehenen Befehl der SMAD über die Errichtung und den Aufgabenbereich der deutschen Verlagskommission," Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1899, bl. 5-6. Also, for a synopsis of this process, see Pike, *Politics of Culture*, 132-135.

wherein the Polish Communists, while much freer in owning the presence of a censor, were also much more sensitive to regional demands and the need to separate the powers that directed their culture. In service of this odd bent for decentralization, they willingly sacrificed a good deal of the efficiency of the German system.

Interestingly, this trend towards separation and distinction did not continue within the individual offices. Both the Poles and the Germans separated literary censorship, along with other specialized work, from the day-to-day monitoring of the periodical press. The kind of work done (checking versus evaluation) was different, and literary or scientific censors often received greater prestige, as their work required specialist knowledge. In the GDR, however, the entire publishing apparatus was separate for periodical and non-periodical work, and each section had its own staff to monitor the work it produced.¹⁴³ Within the literature division, moreover, there were special sections for children's books and religious works that did not exist in Poland.¹⁴⁴ Most likely, this followed from the administrative position of the office, rather than from a more significant difference in assessments of these genres' importance. Both Poland and the GDR subjected the planning for religious publishing and performance to different (and in some ways less rigorous) standards than they did secular work. The censors' work echoed that division. Maintaining a separate designation for children's books, however, was a different matter. There was no special children's planning section, nor any outside body lobbying for special rights. Children's books were not a category apart from normal state planning, but rather an especially important part within it. It was a peculiarity of the German censorship forms that they required the censor to state the intended audience for a book, and consider its function for that audience. By separating this particular audience out still further, the office indicated the perception of its vital importance in rebuilding Germany. That the designers of the Polish system did not feel the need for either of these divisions could indicate in part that they had fewer books to manage. This administrative division also reflected the larger German strategy of educating the youth, untainted by Nazi ideology, to create a new, more stable national identity.

In the day-to-day business of the censors' offices, it emerges that the most striking difference between Poland and the GDR was that the Polish censors constantly emphasized their close, cooperative relationship with

¹⁴³ Siegfried Lokatis, *Der rote Faden: kommunistische Parteigeschichte und Zensur unter Walter Ulbricht*, Zeithistorische Studien, Bd. 25 (Köln: Böhlau, 2003), 47-53.

¹⁴⁴ Barck, Langermann, and Lokatis, *Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer*, 25-27.

the authors, while the Germans sought actively to avoid it. Practically speaking, it is unclear how different the two systems were. In both, an author submitted her manuscript to a publisher, who, on accepting it, passed it on to the censor to be vetted. The censor would often engage in a lengthy negotiation with the publisher, and by proxy with the author, but it was rare for censor and author to have direct contact in either context. Structurally, the difference in the two systems was present above the level of the actual censor. Immediately after the war, the governments in all the zones of Germany insisted that publishers be licensed before they could resume printing. In both East and West, this was a major mode of denazification and control. Even more than the Western administrations, though, the Soviets were rigorous in their standards for new publishers. In the first year of the occupation, they expected to approve only five publishers, much to the despair of their German cohorts.¹⁴⁵ Part of the result of this strategy was that the individual licensee for a publisher came to bear responsibility for everything it released. Given the East German planning system, this meant that the government's wishes were transmitted to the publishing house long before any specific manuscript reached an editor's desk. In this way, the basic placement of the office again affected every level of its functioning. In Poland, licensing was closer to a formality, and publishers communicated with two separate government organs to have first their plans and then their books approved.¹⁴⁶ More important was the emphasis that censors in both Poland and Germany placed on the tenor of their relationships with the writers.

By the early fifties, the idea that the censor's office would actually work directly with the writers was apparently dominant enough that the leaders (it is difficult to tell which, as their names do not appear on any version of the document) of the censorship section in the Office for Literature and Publishing felt the need to explain the office's position. They created a memo titled with refreshing candor, "Why We Do Not Work Directly with the Authors," in order to clarify that their system was "in the interests of the writers, the interests of German literature, and in the interests of our people and our future."¹⁴⁷ Although the memo is not unique

¹⁴⁵ Pike, *Politics of Culture*, 132.

¹⁴⁶ Kondek, *Władza i wydawcy*, 194-201. Though Polish publishers did not have to contend with the problem of licensing, after 1950, they did suffer from paper prices that were prohibitive without government subsidies. Their output dropped to less than 5% of the total published (204-205).

¹⁴⁷ Memo, "Warum arbeiten wir nicht mit den Autoren unmittlebar?" Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1889, bl. 28-29. While there is no date listed on the document, it is part of a folder made up of documents dating between 1951 and 1953. The document implies that the

within the censor's records, it is characteristic enough to warrant several pages' consideration here. The document was not secret or classified, but as one of a set papers meant to answer fundamental questions involved in working with publishers, it had the candidness of work meant for an internal audience. Clearly disgruntled by a lack of cooperation and understanding, the office set out to explain in the memo both the shape of an ideal relationship between censor, publisher, and author and why that shape was the best one possible for everyone.

While the document opened with a declaration that working directly with authors would not, in fact, be in their best interests, it soon becomes clear to the reader that the Writers' Union and the publishers were just as much the subject of the piece as the individual writers themselves. The basic argument was that, without creating a "monster office" (literally, *Monsteramt*) that would steal resources from other areas, the Department of Literature lacked the resources to provide the support and attention that the authors really needed to develop their work. The document proposed a twofold solution: that the publishers should oversee the development of specific literary works, while the Writers' Union cared for the ideological development of its members. The idea was that the department should work with the publisher to develop a "common position towards the work," and then that the editor would carry out the "necessary critical, meticulous ideological and redactive work" with the author to develop both the author and the specific manuscript. The memo repeatedly emphasized that this work would simultaneously strengthen and develop the publishing house itself, so that by beginning to take responsibility, the publishers would theoretically gain autonomy as well, becoming independent actors in the work of creating German literature. Once the work of the publishers removed contact between the censor and the author, it became the job of the Writers' Union to reestablish the connection in a manageable form. The Union provided the opportunity for the Department to "speak to the writers collectively," and thus maintain a relationship with them. To this end, the Department enumerated its tasks as "strengthening [...] collective debate," "turning our writers' faces more toward the present" and supporting them in writing "the books for which our people are waiting," and improving "the training and development of new authors."

Writers' Union had only recently been founded as it was being written. Since the Union was founded in 1950 and granted some independence from the Kulturbund in 1952, it seems most likely that the writers were working in '52 and referring to the Union's recent change in status.

Interestingly, throughout the piece, the memo's tone was defensive and sometimes peeved, but towards the publishers, not the public or the writers. These censors assumed that everyone wanted more of their attention, and that they had to justify themselves for not giving it. They took pains to explain the overwhelming amount of work facing them (there was more because, as they explained virtuously, "literature means more than just *belles lettres* to our office!") that made it impossible to give adequate attention to the authors. In a tone of wounded self-denial, they insisted that they would never have dreamt of "go[ing] over the heads of the publishers to work against them with the authors." There was a degree of irony in this protest, as the rest of the document suggested that the publishers might have actually enjoyed someone usurping their duties. The censor's office complained sharply that, "the editors [...] make light of the issue, do not carry out the necessary [...] work, who do not appropriately esteem the importance of the work in the whole scope of literature, and leave it all to the Department." Shortly thereafter, the censor exclaimed that, "it would be far better if the publishers would simply do their work." This frustration edged out of the realm of professionalism and into an oddly personal register when the censor began to fear that the publishers were doing all of the work, while the publishers and authors talked behind their backs. The outburst, "but we are not like that—the evil office'..." sounds almost hurt. The real problem, then, beyond all of the talk of efficiency and development, lay in outsiders' perceptions of the censor's office. Whether, as the document implied, the writers were distressed at the lack of intensive attention to their work or they had more deeply seated problems with a censor's office as such, the fact remained that a problem had developed with the office's identity. These themes in the office's internal communication, its emphasis on egalitarianism, comradeship, efficiency, and professionalism, then, can be read as an effort to construct a professional identity that was above reproach.

This problem of identity was more than a chimera invented by the censors themselves. It is important to remember that official discomfort was enshrined on no less a stage than the constitution itself. The subject of freedom of expression came up repeatedly in early writers' congresses, and was constantly revived by West Germany, which, regardless of its own practices, emphasized freedom of speech as a fundamental liberty. The GDR's rhetorical strategy for negotiating the problem of censorship, then, existed in two parts. The first was to distance itself from the distastefulness of censorship by distancing the office from the author. The veneer of professionalism made the censors' decisions less painfully personal, and

also gave them an air of inevitability, so that the whole process could seem less like a decision being made against a specific author, and more like the creation of priorities within a plan. The office itself said that, ideally, it should be “nearly superfluous” with the exception of “a few questions of coordination and planning.” At the same time, from the perspective of an aspiring democracy, the creation of distance between the censor and author was also a gesture of inclusion towards the other institutions being involved. It was meant to avoid “the danger of bureaucratic authorization of a subjective opinion.”

Particularly because all publishing decisions were located in one office, it became important to avoid the appearance of despotic control. Paradoxically, then, the second part of the strategy was to use the censor’s distance from the author to create a wider sense of closeness and comradeship. In the document writer’s acute frustration with the publishers, one expects the language at any moment to turn to talk of wreckers and class enemies subverting the production of German literature. Given that censors were doing the writing, at least a passing hint of excision or exclusion would seem natural. Instead the language was almost compulsively inclusive. At every turn, there were references to “the necessity of strengthening the publishers” and the “extraordinary importance” of the Writers’ Union. Even the censor’s frustration, although it did carry a certain paternal overtone, implied the assumption that the publishers should be working as colleagues and partners. The censor was not angry because an underling failed to carry out orders, but because a coworker was refusing to carry his weight. The combination of scolding, cajolery, and encouragement is reminiscent of a passive-aggressive business memo more than it is the language of totalitarian oppression. This tack in dealing with writers and publishers followed the larger strategy at work: the censor’s office could not afford to cast itself as a disciplinarian to the publishers, but at the same time, weak or indolent publishers put strain on the idea that the creation of literature was truly a cooperative effort. This dynamic also explains why the Writers’ Union was important enough to prompt the censor to exclaim that it was “dependent upon” the Union for its own functioning. As the link between censor and author, it was meant not only to provide material support or ideological training, but also to foster understanding and cooperation. It gave the censor its opportunity to “speak collectively” to the authors it would not see individually, and resolve any misunderstandings that plagued them. In this way, the German censors balanced a close relationship with their authors with a categorical refusal to

work with them, and their almost overwhelming strength with their technical non-existence.

Because of the differences in their institutional framework, the Poles were not as badly plagued by questions about why their organization should function as it did or how its relationship to the authors it censored should be arranged. These matters were taken for granted and never strictly defined. There was, in fact, a spectrum from positive to negative in the rare times that the authors were specifically discussed. Indeed, in one of the harsher speeches made to the collected censors, Edward Osóbka-Morowski, the Socialist Prime Minister of the Provisional Government, opened the third briefing for regional leaders of the censors' offices in 1946 with the statement that, "our censor is too liberal."¹⁴⁸ He suggested that the censors needed to be more vigilant to combat the "lies and pernicious speeches" that were threatening the new state. At the same time, though, he softened his statement by adding the qualification that he did not understand "the present role of the censor as a policeman whose task is the use of repression, but rather as [...] an editor." His rather stringent perspective was balanced by another that suggested that the censor's office should encourage authors rather than simply corral them. In a 1952 series of articles titled, "On Raising the Level of Our Work on Books," the unnamed author strayed far enough from the more doctrinaire perspective to suggest that censors allow promising authors some dogmatic leeway in order to experiment and develop their art.¹⁴⁹ He further emphasized that clarity should be the censor's first goal, putting the author's understanding and improvement ahead of political purity. He repeated several times that merely noting an error without making any suggestion for its improvement was insufficient. There are subtle points worth noting here. First, these injunctions were, in fact, part of an instructional work for censors: they were describing how to censor, not why the system was arranged as it was. Moreover, the instructor's goals were limited to making the censors' critiques as constructive as possible, so that the problems at hand could be fixed. There is no suggestion of a larger agenda wherein the censor would single-handedly build Communist literature in Poland. While the censor's office did feel certain tensions concerning its positive function, it felt its actual structure to be quite natural.

¹⁴⁸ Edward Osóbka-Morowski, "Stenogram z IIIciej Odprawy Krajowej Kierownikow Wojewodzkich Urzedow Kontroli Prasy" [12-14 Jan. 1946], AAN, GUKPPIW 421, t. 2, k. 15.

¹⁴⁹ "O wyszy poziom Pracy nad ksiazka, II: recenzja z pozycji literackiej—cz. I," *Biuletyn Instrukcyjny*, no. 8 [1952]: 18-24, AAN, GUKPPIW 420 (165-1), k. 343-349.

The tension in Poland came not from problems with its relationships with presumed Western audiences, but from a lack of internal ones. Not surprisingly, the people of the Polish censor's office wished to believe that their work was constructive and positive, and the higher powers of the government believed with them; at least, they found themselves unwilling to support an organization that existed solely to squeeze the lifeblood out of the nation's creativity. The difficulty in all of this was that, by virtue of its independence, the Polish office was isolated from the more constructive branches of the literary establishment. Outside the censor's office, the Writers' Union, for example, provided stipends and support for developing young authors, while the Ministry of Culture was responsible for planning literary events and interacting with publishers. More importantly, it was the ministry that created the Five Year Plans that determined what books would be offered to the public. In this situation, unable to claim a part in the more showy work, the censor's office spoke of its own work in decidedly abstract terms. Statements from the Polish censor's office do not record problems with any specific authors, but neither do they record any positive interaction. The books that crossed the censors' desks were strangely disembodied, detached from their writers, publishers, and anyone else involved in their production. This detachment is highlighted in the most common phrase describing the office's ultimate goal: "to raise the level of our literature." The phrase seems straightforward and predictable enough until one realizes that there are no people involved in this goal. Jakob Berman, in the very first conference of the leaders of the main and provincial censors' offices, spoke at great length about the democratic function of the censor's office. He explained how it would protect against Fascism, create security for the people, and at the same time give them a broader window into a free world. When he narrowed his focus to the practical work of the office, though, he spoke most often of the "works" that would be corrected or improved, not of writers or publishers, or even other government agencies outside the censor's office.¹⁵⁰ Most spoke of the political education they had received, or the warmth and friendliness of their home offices. Doubtless, some of the absence of authors in the rhetoric of the censor's office is a structural matter. While the German office was organized vertically, so that all parts of literature production worked together, while other media like performance or periodicals worked in different offices, the independence of the Polish censor made for a

¹⁵⁰ "Stenogram z zjazdu delegatów wojewódzkich i miejskich biur kontroli prasy" [23-25 May 1945], AAN, GUKPPiW 421, t. 1. Reprinted in Nałęcz and Instytut Studiów Politycznych, *Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy*, 29-78.

horizontal arrangement. Most of the censor's office, that is, simply did not deal with literature, and therefore did not mention its concerns. Still, the combination that emerges of emphasis on the disembodied work of literature and its political ramifications created an oddly outward-focused vision of the censor's office that hinted at its canon-forming function.

In the end, then, the Communist regimes of Poland and the GDR both struggled with the same tension between separation and close collaboration with their authors. In the GDR, the immediate presence of the West in the form of its twin-state made it important for the government to appeal to a wider, outside audience. They wrapped the function of the censor inside a larger structure of literary licensing and planning, tying it securely to the positive, creative work of producing new literature. The highly centralized, efficient organization that resulted was then mediated by strong ties to publishers and the Writers' Union and by a combination of cold professionalism and determined cooperation. In Poland, the existence of censorship did not have to be couched in quite such careful terms, so independent offices for it were established across the country. At the same time, a combined discomfort with really existing censorship and a mistrust of centralization kept those offices separated from the rest of the literary establishment and locally independent. This structure in turn meant that the Poles were especially anxious to demonstrate that their process of censorship was not only democratic, but also constructive. For both the Germans and the Poles, a collegial atmosphere, first within their offices, and as far as possible with publishers and writers, was an important form of legitimation, but larger factors determined where and how this conviviality was to take place. In reality, both countries were engaged in developing definitions of democracy that could coexist with the practice of censorship (and vice versa). While these definitions had, by necessity, to agree with each other in their main points, the particular circumstances of each state (Germany's war guilt and desire to win over its Western counterpart, and Poland's federalism and mistrust of the Russians) created incremental shifts in emphasis that would affect the identity of the censors' offices, and, in turn, the canons they created to define their nations' literature.

Chapter Three: Shaping the Censor's Office From Above— Continuity between Pre- and Postwar Writing

One reason that censorship was explicitly prohibited in the constitution of the GDR is that it was most often understood to be incompatible with freedom and democracy. In the age of the heroic author, many would also add: with good writing. Most assumptions, both scholarly and popular, would follow Czesław Miłosz's position that a writer who allowed his work to be subjected to censorship certainly forfeited his critical voice within the community, possibly imperiled his own moral standing and good faith, and above all, resigned himself to producing sterile work. It is a surprise then, to find that every level of the censor's office and the cultural apparatus that ran it in both Poland and the GDR was staffed by literary people. The upper echelons of the offices were filled with the nations' literary elite, while even the practical censorship was often done by authors, although these were markedly less successful. In the literary organs—whether officially government, merely affiliated with the party, or officially under its aegis—that directed the censor's offices and set their parameters, politicians and writers were nearly indistinguishable.

These men and women, like Johannes R. Becher and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, who, while never censors, made up the group of elite cultural leaders that directed them, had most often been established writers before the war. Their lives provided continuity between the old world and the new postwar one they were trying to build. The new governments could be neither more nor less separate from their antecedents than the people that made them up. Those people had left large portions of their lives, including their homes and libraries, literally burned behind them, but their pasts could not be eradicated. Possibly their most surprising collective feature is their diversity. By and large, right-wing, reactionary writers of the interwar period did not find themselves well-positioned in the new governments, though even here, there were exceptions.¹⁵¹ Writers everywhere on the scale from moderate liberal to militant Communist, however, found themselves participating in the new governments. One of the reasons that the official message was never completely focused was that their initial diversity of opinion never faded entirely. At the same time, one feature shared by all of

¹⁵¹ Even here, though, there were exceptions. See for example Jerzy Putrament, Gamma (one of the archetypes seduced by Communism) in Czesław Miłosz's *Captive Mind*, who had more than flirted with Fascism in the twenties, and still became one of the PZPR's poster children after the war. He did, however, shift allegiances before the war began, and was willing to continue to prove the bona fides of his ideological shift.

the writers who involved themselves in the postwar governments was their interest, whatever other ideology or opportunism moved them, in both their nations and their states.

In both Poland and East Germany, the relationship between state and identity had become badly unmoored and even untenable during the war. In the German case, the taint of Fascism created the desire to rebuild German culture from the ground up, and in Poland, the repeated indignities of colonialism required that the new state should combine the country's heritage with actual (or at least plausible) sovereignty. In the immediate postwar years, these tasks seemed both imperative and nearly insurmountable. To understand these dynamics better, the lives of Becher and Iwaszkiewicz are emblematic. Although on the surface, their biographies display striking resemblances—they were both left-oriented, humanist writers who had aesthetic ties to the nineteenth century and had become prominent in the interwar years—their points of divergence were as important to the formation of the Polish and East German cultural elite. In order to overcome the crisis of the postwar condition, both states were sometimes willing to put aside ideological differences and focus on rebuilding their literary communities. The paths of Becher's and Iwaszkiewicz's lives, the former balancing ideological flexibility with exile experience and the latter combining prewar status with an impeccable record of resistance, echoed the core narratives that their respective literary communities would form themselves around.

Party Structure

The most foundational difference between the careers of Becher and Iwaszkiewicz stems from the makeup of their respective parties. Between the world wars, both Poland and Germany were newly constituted democracies that struggled with authoritarian leaders. Both states were at least suspicious of the Communist Party. The two parties, though, had very different histories and structures. Before World War II, the Communists in Poland were too isolated, both politically and socially, to include writers of international stature, although they were closely associated with the futurists, one of the main Polish literary groups.¹⁵² Conversely, though, the party elite was more closely involved with the artistic community than was the case elsewhere. The Polish Communist Party in those days was small, urban (mainly situated in Warsaw), and relatively well educated by the

¹⁵² Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918-1968* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 14.

standards of both their fellow Poles and international Communists.¹⁵³ The party was also known as a cachepot for radical revolutionaries who found themselves unable to accommodate the expediencies of other parties.¹⁵⁴ This diversity meant that, while there was no specifically Marxist artistic community, the younger members of the Polish party were well acquainted with the left-leaning, avant-garde writers and intellectuals of their generation.¹⁵⁵ At the same time, non-party members often took an interest in members of the Russian Communist avant-garde. Jakub Berman, for example, who would later run the Polish secret police (and who was widely assumed to be both the power and the brains behind President Bierut's throne), tutored various intellectuals curious about Marxism in its tenets.¹⁵⁶ One of his most prominent students was the modernist poet Aleksander Wat.¹⁵⁷ The Russian poet and playwright Vladimir Mayakovski, who had once visited Warsaw briefly, was a hero to them, promising a new writing style that would remake the world along fresh, radical lines.¹⁵⁸ Exposed to a wide variety of avant-gardists, the Polish Left was still primarily influenced and inspired by Russian artists who, at least at the time, bore Moscow's imprimatur.

In Germany, the overlap between the party's cultural and political elites was smaller than in Poland. While there was an impressive contingent of Communist writers and artists, they were distanced from the party leadership. Germany had both a strong, politically engaged urban working class to make up the bulk of its party membership, while a collection of other leftist political parties provided a space for those leftists who were

¹⁵³ Henryk Cimek and Lucjan Kieszczyński, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski, 1918-1938*, Wyd. 1. ed. (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1984), 12-22, 37-49; Gabriele Simoncini, *Revolutionary Organizations and Revolutionaries in Interbellum Poland: A Bibliographical Biographical Study* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), iv, 23.

¹⁵⁴ Gabriele Simoncini, *The Communist Party of Poland, 1918-1929: A Study in Political Ideology* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), 73.

¹⁵⁵ Generally speaking, the men and women who made up the head of the Communist advance guard after the Second World War had been in the party's second rank before the war began.

¹⁵⁶ Marci Shore, "Children of the Revolution: Communism, Zionism, and the Berman Brothers," *Jewish Social Studies* 10, no. 3 (2004): 39. Shore cites Khrushchev's opinion that Bierut made few decisions without Berman's advice (75-76).

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 31; Aleksander Wat, *Mój wiek: Pamiętnik mówiony*, Wyd. 1. ed., 2 vols. (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1990), 126, 231.

¹⁵⁸ Shore, *Caviar and Ashes*, 52-69.

less ideologically pure.¹⁵⁹ Unlike the party in Poland, which was open to radical ideas of various kinds, the German Communist Party required a high degree of Marxist orthodoxy. Leftists who were uninterested in revolution, or who wanted to pursue solutions that Moscow considered Trotskyist or Menshevik were free to join the Socialist Workers' Party, the Social Democrats, or the Independent Social Democrats. The German Communists could afford this kind of selectivity: with between nine and seventeen percent of Germany's vote, they were the largest Communist Party outside Russia, and a significant voice in German politics (not unimpressive for a party that had spent most of its history illegal).¹⁶⁰ Unlike many other national Communist parties, the Germans actually received most their support from the working class, especially the unemployed, and recruited the vast majority of their leadership from those ranks.¹⁶¹ Ernst Thälmann, for example, the party chairman until the war and the model for a new sort of Communist national narrative after the war, was the son of petty store-owners, and had worked as an engine stoker in his youth. Walter Ulbricht was the son of a tailor, and trained to be a carpenter. Wilhelm Pieck, the president of the GDR, had also been apprenticed as a carpenter and was the son of a coachman. Of the entire first central committee that was formed after the war, in fact, only a few had continued their formal schooling after age fourteen.¹⁶²

All of these facts combined meant that during the interwar period, German Communist intellectuals, though a thriving and robust group, were more estranged from the party leadership than many of their foreign Communist counterparts. This is significant partly because it became next to impossible to live openly as a Communist (or a fellow-traveler) in 1933, six years before it would do so in Poland. Connections to the party, or lack of them, could be instrumental in deciding which way writers would flee. Their social circles, removed from the centers of party power, tended to revolve around other leftist artists and intellectuals of various stripes even more than those of their Polish counterparts. Because Germany's own milieu was so rich in prominent leftist thinkers and artists, Moscow's

¹⁵⁹ Stanley Pierson, *Marxist Intellectuals and the Working-Class Mentality in Germany, 1887-1912* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 256-257, for more on radical marxists see 235-241.

¹⁶⁰ Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, 151.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. Even within Germany, the Communist party was distinguished from the Social Democrats by its predominately unemployed, as opposed to merely working class, membership.

¹⁶² Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and Their Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 17.

cultural influence was less pronounced there than it was in Poland. Bertolt Brecht, for example, consulted not Mayakovski but the hardly orthodox Walter Benjamin in the prewar years.¹⁶³ Often, German leftists' professions were the first element in their identities, and the party a sometimes distant second. If nothing else, it is true that their positions simply did not require the level of commitment and orthodoxy that were necessary in the party's elite. The Germans, though, remained in the same revolutionary avant-garde milieu in which their Polish counterparts moved. Their focus was often more westward, and their styles often seemed more radical, but ultimately, they all wanted art to do the same thing. Bertolt Brecht, Johannes R. Becher, and Anna Seghers, like Aleksander Wat and Tadeusz Borowski, desired not to continue representing their current reality, but to create a new world by writing about it.¹⁶⁴ Some of the more tenuous connections that existed among the German Marxist intellectuals were broken by exile and the war.¹⁶⁵ All but the most politically engaged of them, lacking political connections in Russia, fled to the west.¹⁶⁶ After the war, though, the active choice that was required to participate in the Soviet aesthetic experiment created a new, closer community.

Iwaszkiewicz and Becher

As they emerged from the war, both Polish and East German Communists put cultural leaders in place who were of an older generation. Born in 1894 and 1891 respectively, Iwaszkiewicz and Becher were both old enough to fight in the First World War. Interestingly, neither of them did. Iwaszkiewicz had spent the time tutoring in the countryside, apparently more concerned with his intellectual development than with the conflict roiling around him.¹⁶⁷ Becher framed his experience as part of the leftist opposition to the war.¹⁶⁸ While there may have been other factors at play, it is notable that Iwaszkiewicz's bland inattention to the war was a more remote option within the nationalist context of Germany proper. The basically liberal position indicated by their refusal to fight had different

¹⁶³ Wizisla and Shuttleworth, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht*, especially Ch 5, "Brecht on Benjamin," 144-180.

¹⁶⁴ John Neubauer and Borbála Zsuzsanna Török, *The Exile and Return of Writers from East-Central Europe: A Compendium* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009).

¹⁶⁵ Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, 53.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

¹⁶⁷ Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, *Książka moich wspomnień*, Wyd. 2, popr. ed. (Kraków: Wydawn. Literackie, 1968), 64-66.

¹⁶⁸ Jens- F. Dwars, *Abgrund des Widerspruchs: das Leben des Johannes R. Becher* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1998), 58.

resonances in both countries. Just as importantly, both authors were old enough when the war began that they were forced to make a choice. Born in the last years of the nineteenth century, they both felt an attraction to its milieu. Iwaszkiewicz opened his memoirs by explaining that, as the youngest child of middle-aged parents, he often felt himself to have lived in a world a decade or more older than his age would suggest.¹⁶⁹ Becher, likewise, found himself fascinated early on by the writers of the century before his birth, especially Goethe and Kleist.¹⁷⁰ Men like Iwaszkiewicz and Becher would by no means be the only literary influences in the postwar world, but their high positions allowed them to perform key functions there. On one hand, the mere fact of their biographies and prewar prominence allowed them to create crucial ties between the Communist governments and their countries' histories. On the other, the combination of their dedicated liberalism and aesthetic interest in the past made it possible for them to engage with and help shape the directions that Socialist Realism would take after the war.

Not insignificantly, Becher and Iwaszkiewicz occupied rather different positions within their respective writing establishments. During the Stalinist period, they were both the heads of major writers' organizations, and they both went on to serve a parliamentary role. Becher, however, was a major party member destined for the central committee. He was also the guiding genius of the postwar literary community, using his Kulturbund—a literary association that mixed the functions of a Writers' Union and the kind of patron-press that Jerzy Borejsza made out of *Czytelnik*—to set up journals, woo other authors back from exile and emigration, provide for their sustenance, and organize conferences. In Poland, this role was much more diffuse. It was carried out politically by Berman, institutionally by Borejsza, and socially by a group that included writers like Jan Kott, Stefan Żółkiewski, and Julian Przyboś as well as the elder Iwaszkiewicz. Of these leaders, neither Berman nor Borejsza, despite their deep engagement with the literary world, were writers. In addition, Berman's political position was complicated by his more iron-fisted role with the security services. Among the more official writers during the early years, Iwaszkiewicz was the most active of the older generation, and had more experience, connections, and cachet than his younger colleagues. To a certain extent, this situation was the result of the differences in party structures. The higher ranks of the party apparatus were closer to the literary community in Poland, and that community's radically leftist wing

¹⁶⁹ Iwaszkiewicz, *Książka moich wspomnień*, 7.

¹⁷⁰ Dwars, *Abgrund des Widerspruchs*, 35, 58, etc.

was significantly smaller than its East German counterpart. This meant that, while there was no high-ranking party member to take Becher's position in Poland, Berman could plausibly hold up the party end of the job. This also created the need for a non-party member like Iwaszkiewicz to serve as a representative for the writers.

Writing from Harvard in 1990, Stanisław Barańczak suggested that the lives of Poland's interwar avant-garde group, Skamander, were emblematic of the fates of writers of that generation. Of the five writers who survived World War II, Kazimierz Wierzyński remained an émigré in Britain and America, Jan Lechoń committed suicide in New York, Julian Tuwim died early in Poland, unable to write, Antoni Słonimski was a dissident, and Iwaszkiewicz was active in the new regime.¹⁷¹ While Tuwim's presence in postwar Poland was significant and Słonimski ran the Writers' Union from 1956 through 1959, of all of them, Iwaszkiewicz was the most instrumental in shaping Poland's literary world immediately after the war. In 1919, just as Poland's Second Republic was being formed, the five friends had founded their new literary magazine. At that time, Iwaszkiewicz was twenty-five years old, the son of Polish-Ukrainian gentry who had been impoverished by participation in an uprising against Russia in 1863.¹⁷² In many ways, the literary group he joined was everything that the Communist government of People's Poland would campaign against. It was light, expressionistic, and closely connected to the cabarets and satires of the interwar period. The group was international, even cosmopolitan, in its outlook. Iwaszkiewicz forged a community among writers based on relations that were intellectual, aesthetic, and in some cases romantic. Their opening scandal was an obscenity prosecution for Tuwim's translation of Rimbaud, which Iwaszkiewicz later helped him complete and publish.¹⁷³ Iwaszkiewicz himself was bisexual, and the challenges that Rimbaud faced in his life and work may have resonated with him personally. Indeed, he would cite Rimbaud along with Oscar Wilde as two of his earliest and most formative interests.¹⁷⁴

In many of these ways, Iwaszkiewicz and the Skamanderites were representative of the interwar intellectual milieu. Not only Iwaszkiewicz, but also Lechoń served with Polish diplomatic missions, Iwaszkiewicz in

¹⁷¹ Stanisław Barańczak, "Skamander after Skamander: The Postwar Path of the Prewar Polish Pleiade," *Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture* 9 (1990): 331-332.

¹⁷² Iwaszkiewicz, *Książka moich wspomnień*, 8.

¹⁷³ Barańczak, "Skamander after Skamander," 332.

¹⁷⁴ Iwaszkiewicz, *Książka moich wspomnień*, 102.

Denmark and Lechoń in Paris. Miłosz spent a great deal of time in Paris with his writer-diplomat uncle Oscar. Kott, who would become the hammer at the hardline party literary journal, *The Forge*, attended the Sorbonne after the war in 1932 and then, on Jacques Maritain's recommendation, spent nearly a year in 1939 at a Dominican monastery in central France considering whether he ought to take the cloth.¹⁷⁵ Słonimski broke the mold by visiting Brazil, Palestine, and Russia. Even the revolutionary Wat spent time in both France and Russia between the two wars. None of this was any more than was expected for members of the intelligentsia and avant-garde. In the early years of the interwar period, the most innovative artists mingled both internationally and ideologically. Marxist formalists joined Italian futurists who would soon become Fascist in an attempt to understand the contours of the new postwar world. By the time the Second World War came, these groups would split into very firm ideological camps, but many of the resonances of their early acquaintance would carry over.

One of the main factors that separated Iwaszkiewicz and the rest of Skamander from the other avant-gardists at the moment was their close connection to Piłsudski's Sanacja government. After the war, the PRL officially deplored the decadence, excess, and ineffectiveness of the entire project of the Second Republic.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, even six years before Piłsudski's coup in 1926, Iwaszkiewicz recalled being regaled with stories of the leader by his closest advisors at the table of one of Warsaw's most prominent patrons.¹⁷⁷ Likewise, Lechoń actually worked in Piłsudski's press office during the Polish-Soviet War, and the positions of Skamander and the Sanacja were frequently conflated.¹⁷⁸ This acceptance of Piłsudski's regime separated Iwaszkiewicz and his group from the set of people one might have expected to lead postwar cultural policy. Although they were leftist, they were not at all Marxist. The futurists, Wat, Anatol Stern, and Bruno Jasiński, were the group that was strongly oriented toward Moscow. They were, for example, the first in line at the train station when Mayakowski visited in 1927, and they were also the writers in whose work the members of the Communist party took an interest. Berman was Wat's tutor in Marxist theory; Iwaszkiewicz never had one. He was certainly not a party member like Andrzej Stawar, and he did not even have the close

¹⁷⁵ Jan Kott, *Still Alive: An Autobiographical Essay* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 22.

¹⁷⁶ For the connection, see Plach, *Clash of Moral Nations*, 72, 147. For the PPR's position on the Second Republic, see Żółkiewski, *Kultura literacka, 1918-1932*, 90-161.

¹⁷⁷ Iwaszkiewicz, *Książka moich wspomnień*, 214.

¹⁷⁸ Plach, *Clash of Moral Nations*, 72, 146, etc.

connections of a Miłosz, a Kott, or a Żółkiewski. His postwar leadership, then, had less to do with political orthodoxy than it did with continuity and the ability to recreate a literary community.

Much like Iwaszkiewicz, Becher was a child of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, born at the very end of the nineteenth century. Also like his Polish counterpart, he had an early life that did not necessarily mark him as an obvious choice to become the chief architect of GDR literary life. Especially early on, Becher was given to fads and enthusiasms. When he was still in his teens, he entered into an affair with an older woman. Impressed with the impossibility of their situation, they decided on a double suicide that only proved half-successful. Three months later, Becher emerged from the hospital cleared of charges in his lover's death and a confirmed expressionist. In his twenties, he was befriended and patronized by Harry Graf Kessler, one of the great cosmopolitans of the turn of the century. Kessler was an aristocrat, a soldier, and a diplomat, but he was also one of the century's great patrons of the arts. He was part of the writing team for the journal *Der Rosenklavier*, friends with Nietzsche's sister, who helped arrange for his works to be published, and one of the founders of the Cranach Press. He befriended Becher as part of his work with his secessionist association, the *Deutscher Künstlerbund*, and was one of his formative influences. Like the members of Skamander, he was certainly avant-garde without being futurist or Dada, and thoroughly Left without being Communist.

To say that the war was difficult for the writers of Poland and Germany is a cruel understatement. In terms of the shape it gave to the postwar world, though, where one spent the war was nearly as important as one's experience of the war itself. Of all the leading members of Skamander, Iwaszkiewicz was unique in staying in Poland for the entire duration. Although he was never wounded, deported, or forced into the forests, he and his wife endured sharp deprivations in their home outside Warsaw. Quietly, they began to use Stawisko, their home outside Warsaw, as both a retreat for writers who were still in the country and in need of aid and as a center for resistance activity.

It is worth pointing out that Iwaszkiewicz's decision was simply not open to many of his fellow writers. Members of the gentry with connections and access to homes in the country (with their accompanying produce and livestock) were most often the ones able to stay in one place for the duration of the war. Miłosz began the war in Wilno under the patronage of a Jewish industrialist before making a harrowing journey back to Warsaw

to “think things over.”¹⁷⁹ Other writers who had Jewish backgrounds, were too closely associated with the Communists, or were simply too urban, found their situations growing quickly untenable. Thus, Słonimski spent the war in England and France, Tuwim, after a circuitous flight, found himself sitting anxiously on his suitcase in New York, waiting for the peace. Wierzyński and Lechoń followed similar paths, but found America more and Soviet rule less congenial than Tuwim. Wierzyński stayed in Sag Harbor, working with various émigré publications when the war was over, and Lechoń soon committed suicide.

The circumstances of emigration east toward Soviet-occupied Lviv or the USSR were somewhat more complicated. The shared experience of their difficulty, though, shaped Poland’s postwar literary world. When the invasion began, many Poles, and especially those who had been associated in some way with the Communist Party, felt that Soviet-occupied Lviv or Białystok would be safer than Warsaw under the Nazis. From there, some committed party members like Jakub Berman continued east intentionally, while others like Wat, Peiper, Stern, and Broniewski were arrested and taken first to Lublianka and then to Alma Ata. For people like Berman, the experience of exile followed by admission to Stalin’s inner circle was a crucible. Conversely, arrest and imprisonment finally broke what remained of Wat’s Communist faith.¹⁸⁰ In both cases, the experience provided the lens through which they would understand the postwar world.

Becher’s experience in the Soviet Union was significantly closer to Berman’s than Wat’s. Having fled Germany to Moscow 1933, he went in 1935 to Paris to the First International Writers’ Congress for the Defense of Culture, and then in November, proceeded back to Moscow with Louis Aragon for the anniversary celebrations for the Victory of the Great October Revolution.¹⁸¹ He would stay in the Soviet Union for the next ten years by both choice and necessity, until returning to Berlin with the vanguard of the Soviet army. The character of his experience was complex, combining very real trauma with the continued belief that he was part of, not a captive to, the Communist project. Becher returned to the USSR at the height of the purges, and was almost immediately under suspicion.¹⁸² He, Georg Lukács,

¹⁷⁹ Miłosz, *Native Realm*, 235.

¹⁸⁰ Aleksander Wat, *My Century: The Odyssey of a Polish Intellectual*, trans. Richard Lourie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 117, 254.

¹⁸¹ Simone Barck, *Johannes R. Bechers Publizistik in der Sowjetunion, 1935-1945* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1976), 25; Parker, Davies, and Philpotts, *Modern Restoration*, 249-250.

¹⁸² Parker, Davies, and Philpotts, *Modern Restoration*, 249-251.

Willi Bredel, and many others were forced to give testimony during the trials, and several of his friends were killed during them.¹⁸³ Becher escaped imprisonment, but as the war intensified, he, like other western Communists from Berman to Lukács, was sent into internal exile in Tashkent to work in party education. Since he was not free to leave the country, or even to stay in the increasingly endangered Moscow, this situation appeared severe. It certainly did to Wat, whose circumstances were intensified by a stay in a prison camp before being released into Alma Ata. It is true, though, that the Soviets were evacuating as many valuable personnel as possible, and that party members who were among the cultural elite were at the top of the list. From this perspective, being sent to Tashkent or Alma Ata was actually a privileged position, especially compared to the much colder options of Novosibirsk or Cheliabinsk.¹⁸⁴ In Moscow, Fadeev even worked to procure food for the émigrés' trips. This last detail, however, is telling. Food, in Tashkent and throughout the Soviet Union, was in short supply. The government provided minimal bread rations, but most other provisions had to be bought for exorbitant prices on the black market.¹⁸⁵ Becher, not surprisingly given his experiences in Moscow, was severely depressed during this period, and made a number of attempts on his own life.¹⁸⁶

Despite the almost overwhelming difficulty of his circumstances, Becher's writing does not indicate that he considered his time in the Soviet Union in a punitive or threatening light. To the contrary, he fell back on his work, and considered the time one of intellectual development. Becher and Lukács had known each other, and even worked on the journal *Literary Culture* together before their extended stay in the USSR, but in the interwar years, they became closer. Together, they edited the journal *Linkskurve*. Both in these works and in the wider world of Soviet literary theory, they worked out their theories of cultural heritage, and national tradition, as well as a comprehensive position on anti-Fascism, once the German

¹⁸³ The transcript of the trials has been published as György Lukács and Reinhard Müller, *Die Säuberung : Moskau 1936, Stenogramm einer geschlossenen Parteiversammlung*, Originalausg. ed. (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991). In English, a chapter is devoted to the event in David Pike, *German Writers in Soviet Exile, 1933-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 156-198.

¹⁸⁴ Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 143.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 164-169.

¹⁸⁶ Dwars, *Abgrund des Widerspruchs*, 489-490.

betrayal in 1941 made such pursuits acceptable again.¹⁸⁷ This shared experience is indicative of the situation in many of the exiled party sections in the USSR during World War II. The coercive nature of their terror and hardship was real, and should not be underestimated. In cases like Wat's or Berman's, it could be either fatal or profoundly disillusioning. Those who could reconcile themselves to the harsh realities of implementing Stalinist Socialism during wartime, though, did not only have party orthodoxy imposed on them. They participated in its construction. Statements like Becher's indicate that, however disappointed by a particular conclusion or discouraged by the overall tenor of party discussions they were, these exiles felt their part in developing the Communist state to be real. In fact, especially for writers of the generation of Becher and Iwaszkiewicz, the development of Socialist Realist traditionalism fit in organically with their own paths of intellectual development.

As difficult as their Soviet sojourn had been in many cases, it was unclear that any of the alternatives would have been preferable. In the eyes of the refugees, the entire war stood as an indictment of militant, imperialist Capitalism.¹⁸⁸ If this object lesson had confirmed the USSR's strategies to the outside Communists, their endurance had also confirmed them to the powers in Moscow. They had been tried by fire, so to speak, and from the war onward, members who had joined the party before it rose to power, and who had withstood both the purges and the war, would hold a privileged position in the Communist hierarchy of merit.¹⁸⁹

The personal experience of Stalin's mercurial temper, though reserved for a select few, is emblematic of the wider experience of exile in the Soviet Union. The chance to observe what literature and art was considered dangerous in Moscow was far more formative than any number of official memos.¹⁹⁰ It was through this intimate contact that the leaders of the People's Republics would learn the contours of the acceptable and the boundaries of the dangerous. At the war's end, the Soviets did maintain an extended occupation in Germany, but once the new governments were set up, the USSR rarely gave any practical, day-to-day guidance in cultural matters, especially those concerning domestic literature. In Poland,

¹⁸⁷ See Barck, *Johannes R. Bechers Publizistik*, 84-87, 97-102.

¹⁸⁸ John M. Spalek and Robert F. Bell, *Exile, the Writer's Experience* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 97-99.

¹⁸⁹ Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, 100-101. For a specific example of this dynamic, see Arnold Krammer, "The Cult of the Spanish Civil War in East Germany," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 4 (2004): 531-537.

¹⁹⁰ Shore, "Children of the Revolution," 23, 35-36.

Moscow never specifically directed the workings of either the censor's office or the Ministry of Culture. Contact came via cultural elites, who occasionally went to Moscow for conferences or corresponded with Soviet cultural leaders.¹⁹¹ The German case is a bit more complex. While the occupation force did supervise the initial licensing of publishers, its main strategy was to delay its decisions as long as possible.¹⁹² Moreover, even in the earliest postwar days, native Germans were given relative autonomy in cultural and literary affairs, as long as their choices accorded closely enough with Soviet standards. If the local directors made an error in judgment, a letter of rebuke from local overseers would be near at hand, but this was seldom necessary.¹⁹³ This measure of independence should not indicate that the Soviet Union was prepared to take a blasé or laissez-faire attitude toward either Poland or its German occupation zone. Especially in the wake of Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Cominform, it was plain that the consequences of non-conformity would be stiff.¹⁹⁴ At minimum, the offending state would be cut off from the aid of the Warsaw Pact and the Cominform, and it was not unthinkable that Russia could simply invade. Generally, it was possible to guide the new states through innuendo and the arrangements of favor and disgrace at the Cominform (created for more or less this precise purpose in 1947) because their representatives had internalized Moscow's requirements in the city itself.

Once the war was over the first requirement was to salvage everything and everyone who could be persuaded to return, regardless of ideological position. This unifying function was exactly the one that Iwaszkiewicz was suited to perform in that moment. He was old enough to represent tradition while still recently associated with the avant-garde. His credentials were thoroughly leftist, but never having been Communist, he was able to reach out to colleagues who were leery of the party. And though he was enough a cosmopolitan Skamanderite to avoid associations with integral nationalism that had become distasteful after the war, his house, his older, nineteenth century affect, and his tastes all pointed the way toward the Polish past.

The house itself, Stawisko, was by no means a traditional Polish manor. It had been built in the twenties by Iwaszkiewicz's father-in-law, and left to the couple when he died in the thirties. It was surrounded by a sizable tract of land which had been intended for a development of woodsy

¹⁹¹ Patryk Babiracki, "Co się Sowietom nie udało: Kultura Polska a imperium Stalina," *Res Publica Nowa* 201-202 (2011): 50-56.

¹⁹² Pike, *Politics of Culture*, 357.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 359.

¹⁹⁴ Hahn, *Postwar Soviet Politics*, 98-114.

villas, accessible by a new train from Warsaw. These sales of plots of land surrounding Stawisko helped sustain the Iwaszkiewicz through the thirties and the war.¹⁹⁵ Still, the place took part in some of the traditions, and more importantly, the hospitality, of gentry country houses.¹⁹⁶ This function was dramatically extended in the house's function as a wartime base of underground operations. In fact, as an extension of the Iwaszkiewicz's decision to stay in Poland and aid their countrymen, the house became emblematic of the determined resistance to Fascist imperialism that was at the heart of postwar national mythology.¹⁹⁷ By staying in Poland, Iwaszkiewicz put himself at the center of Polish identity. By working closely with the Communists after the war, he helped extend some of this association to them. When, as president of the Writers' Union, the author opened his home to colleagues across the political spectrum after the war, then, his action helped define the character of the new community.¹⁹⁸

On his return to Berlin, Becher, like Iwaszkiewicz, found himself reorganizing a literary community from the comfort of a large house (the former Stauss villa). Like Stawisko, it hinted at the genteel civility and security of the cultured prewar world, of a return to order, stability, and conversation. In Becher's case, it was no family property or relict of a previous life, but a product of the party's arrangement.¹⁹⁹ Other party writers like Fritz Erpenbeck also received impressive quarters, redolent of the traditions of the *Bildungsbürgertum*.²⁰⁰ From this base, Becher constructed the Kulturbund für demokratische Erneuerung as a sort of scaffold from which to rebuild Germany's culture. The organization was anomalous. It was non-partisan enough to maintain a real West German, non-Communist membership until the western allies cut off its license in 1947. At the same time, it was official enough to serve as the first home of the censor's office and the preliminary reviewer of petitions for press licenses. It replaced neither the Writers' Union nor cohorts that formed around presses, and yet it formed the center of East Germany's cultural life. Initially, to maintain this balance, Becher planned to be a power behind the throne and find some eminently respectable non-party elder of the

¹⁹⁵ Anna Nasiłowska, "Stawisko: The Home of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz," in *Framing the Polish Home: Postwar Cultural Constructions of Hearth, Nation, and Self*, ed. Bożena Shallcross (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002), 237-238.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 240-241.

¹⁹⁷ Connelly, "Why the Poles Collaborated So Little," 771.

¹⁹⁸ Nasiłowska, "Stawisko," 246-248.

¹⁹⁹ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *In a Cold Crater: Cultural and Intellectual Life in Berlin, 1945-1948*, Weimar and Now (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 73.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

community to forge all of its disparate and wounded elements back together. As it happened, and much to his dismay given his open party membership, Becher himself received the overwhelming vote in the election for President of the Kulturbund.²⁰¹ This proved to be less of a disaster than he might have feared, since his own checkered past, his age, and his interest in the classics of the humanist tradition allowed him to fulfill exactly this role. In addition, the very novelty of his borrowed quarters indicated the final, but not the least important, aspect of his qualification to shape the new literary sphere. East Germany had no need for a rooted tradition of protecting the fatherland from invaders. Its postwar mythologies revolved around the bravery and sacrifice of those who were forced by birth or principle to leave their homes for the privations of exile. They were far more the keepers of the national identity than those who had remained at home. In fact, the moral necessity of exile was so strong that the idea of internal exile, a sort of spiritual resistance without physical evacuation was invented to make sense of the experience of those who had remained in Germany. Becher, then, with his combination of philosophic wavering and principled suffering in Tashkent, could become the perfect symbol of national unity.

Even the Socialist Realist literary ideal in which Becher and Iwaszkiewicz worked in the postwar period was not as monolithic as might be imagined. The postwar period did not allow for the vast variety of possible leftist options that had characterized the previous decades. Yet, even as Socialist Realism was enshrined as the true Revolutionary aesthetic, the party cultural elites were more interested in building consensus than in imposing a Socialist Realist ideal. From 1945 through 1947, Communists were both an occupying force and the dominant party in both the GDR and Poland, but the atmosphere was one of relative intellectual tolerance for writers who were left of center. The main literary and artistic questions they asked themselves had to do with reconstruction, on both a personal and a state level. Even after 1948, when Socialist Realism was established and entrenched as the official stylistic ideology, debate about its parameters continued.

In 1950, for example, there was a debate in one of Poland's revolutionary literary journals, *Rebirth (Odrodzenie)*, about whether the Russian futurist poet Mayakovsky should be the model for Polish poetry, or whether the country had an independent revolutionary poetic tradition represented by authors like Broniewski, a university Piłsudskite who had shifted further to the left and begun writing proletarian poetry for the *Red*

²⁰¹ Ibid., 77.

Standard (Czerwony Sztandar) in the thirties.²⁰² In reality, neither Mayakovsky nor Broniewski would have been considered perfectly orthodox by the standards of the USSR in the late forties. That both authors, despite this, were offered up as literary models, is telling. At the same time, there does not appear ever to have been any official pronouncement on the question, and both authors continued to be published widely. Even at this moment of harshest restriction, Poland found room not only to admire authors of imperfect praxis, but even maintain some minor plurality of voices.

Likewise, in East Germany, there was a highly visible debate over Socialist Realism in the official organ the *Daily Review (Tägliche Rundschau)*. In early 1949, one group argued that certain elements of formalism should remain in German art to protect it from becoming kitsch or from falling into the subservient attitude it had adopted under the Nazis. German art, they contended, had to continue to make use of the innovations of the past century in order to develop any further. Moreover, they maintained that that a certain amount of specificity was necessary if their literature was to have any national character.²⁰³ As in Poland, Marxist orthodoxy had to be paired with a sense of the country's literary tradition in order to hold any appeal for either writers or readers.

Conclusion

In his memoir, speaking of his work leading the journal *The Forge* with Żółkiewski, Jan Kott recollected that, “from the first issue of *The Forge*, we had been searching obstinately for what was then called the ‘red thread’ in Polish literature and history.” He was speaking about the eighteenth century Warsaw Jacobins and the group of social and political activists that made up Kołłątaj's *Forge*, which gave his publication its name.²⁰⁴ More broadly, however, the quote references the widespread desire to align Poland's Communist present with its freedom-seeking past. In the GDR, the horror of the Nazi experience made alignments between contemporary anti-Fascism and Germany's historic humanism imperative. This was the strength of Iwaszkiewicz and Becher as cultural leaders. They were able to succeed in the postwar moment precisely because they belonged to an earlier era. Becher had both the sanction implied by a wartime sojourn in the Soviet Union and a wide acquaintance among

²⁰² Pts. 1 and 2, *Odrodzenia* 5 (29 Jan. 1950): 6-7; 11/12 (19 March 1950): 3-5. For an English discussion of the debate, see Shore, *Caviar and Ashes*, 282.

²⁰³ Pike, *Politics of Culture*, 617-618.

²⁰⁴ Kott, *Still Alive*, 232.

prominent leftist writers. Temperamentally, he united a deeply imprinted understanding of Soviet norms with the ideological flexibility necessary to find allies among the established, interwar authors. Stylistically, the narrative that East Germany needed to create for itself already existed in Becher's life, produced by his affinity for the nineteenth century, rootedness in the interwar moment, and prominence in the postwar literary sphere. Iwaszkiewicz, by contrast, had no prewar ties to the party. Poland's closer ties between party elites like Berman and the rest of the literary community made this experience less necessary. In fact, this was Iwaszkiewicz's great strength: that instead of going into exile, he had stayed in his home and participated with the resistance. In this, he combined a sense of place with Poland's tradition of resistance and uprising against occupying powers.

If both of these authors were successful in their postwar roles because they embodied and reinforced the legitimizing narratives, it is also necessary to note that their mere presences as cultural leaders introduced a note of heterogeneity into the proceedings. This was not unintentional. The goal of creating as wide a literary community as possible during the earliest years after the war even made this diversity desirable. Their effect on cultural policy, though, extended not only to returning authors, but also to the censors who would oversee their work. At the very foundation of the new orthodoxies, there were tensions and ambiguities. All of these cultural elites sided with Communism as the best way forward for their countries, and in general, they seem to have believed that the two interests ran along parallel tracks. When reconstructing the nation came into conflict with building Socialism in these new cadres, there was at least the chance that the nation would be the winner.

Chapter Four: Everyday Censors and the Struggle for Unity

The solid orthodoxy of censorship was only visible from the exterior: to observers in the buffer states, anything coming out of the Soviet Union had the stamp of authenticity, no matter how difficult, radical, contentious, or dangerous its publication may have been within its own context. Likewise, to concerned observers in the West and citizens of the new states alike, native books with the censor's imprimatur themselves formed a sort of canon, coherent by definition. These two levels of prescription, Zhdanovist mandate and native censorship, each reinforced the perception of the other's strength. Soviet artistic production seemed ever more cohesive in the context of a collection of other states creating eerily similar work, and new systems of censorship appeared to be both more powerful and more compulsory when backed by the formidable Russian canon. Looking through this double screen of orthodoxy, it is easy to understand how contemporaries and later scholars alike would see a monolith of Socialist Realism. It is less clear that this could have been said from an interior perspective.

Whether individual Polish and German censors aspired to a monumental unity in their countries' literature is difficult to determine; that they failed to achieve it is certain. In order to reach a better understanding of the relationship between aspiration and reality, it is useful to consider the much larger cadre of actual censors, whose commitment to Marxism ranged from the almost fanatical to the nonexistent. Ultimately, this disparate group created a canon, and thus, an expression of power and orthodoxy. It was, however, less an expression of pure, received theory than the product of internal struggle that solidified only as it was made public. More importantly, both within the office and outside it, the postwar years were characterized by a willingness to elide ideological difference in order to create the unity that was necessary in order to rebuild.

The historical literature devoted to the system of censorship tends to a rather monolithic view of the matter. The goal of understanding and explaining an institutional logic results in an enhanced emphasis on its coherence. For scholars working on these complicated systems, then, the task of presenting a legible picture of the workings of the censors' offices requires an inattention to their internal dysfunctions. For historians trying to assign the censor's office to a specific ministry within the government, the dissent among censors is not a priority. The two most relevant authors specifically devoted to Soviet literary censorship, as opposed to scholars

working within the system of censorship or policy makers shaping it, are Herman Ermolajev and Arlen Blyum.²⁰⁵ Both of them have a tendency to speak of the various Soviet censors as straightforward organs of official policy. Though they concede that there may have been static on the line by the time the party's message reached the provinces, there is no sense that this static distorted the party's essential meaning.²⁰⁶ The two most prominent Poles writing on the subject, Oskar Czarnik and his younger and less doctrinaire colleague Stanisław Kondek, take these assumptions a step further to maintain that the Polish censor's office represented the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) less than it did the will of the USSR. More precisely, they suggest that, as an arm of Soviet imperial policy within Poland, the PZPR simply aped its masters in Moscow.²⁰⁷ The outlier here is the German scholarship on GDR censorship, which has the advantage of authors who were both trained within the system and relatively un-disillusioned by it. In particular, the work of Simone Barck along with her frequent collaborator Siegfried Lokatis, and of Birgit Dahlke, pays impressive attention to the often confused and flawed process of censoring, as well as its effects on identity.²⁰⁸

Any attempt to negotiate between the specific and the monolithic, to acknowledge the authority of the canon that was produced while at the same acknowledging the internal chaos inherent in its production, requires scholars to turn more concretely to the daily workings of the censors and their office. Practically speaking, the task of censoring began from a place of profound lack. In the earliest days, adequate facilities for the censor's premises were not guaranteed. Even on the most mundane level, the paper shortage that was so much a factor in publishing books and newspapers affected their censors as well. Even at the best of times, office documents were typed on poor quality paper with narrow margins. It is by no means rare to find them on random scraps of paper, or even the backs of

²⁰⁵ Herman Ermolaev, *Censorship in Soviet Literature, 1917-1991* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997); A. V. Blyum, *A Self-Administered Poison: The System and Functions of Soviet Censorship*, trans. I.P. Foote, Special Lecture Series (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, University of Oxford, 2003).

²⁰⁶ Ermolaev, *Censorship in Soviet Literature*, 5-6.

²⁰⁷ Oskar Stanisław Czarnik, *Między dwoma Sierpniami: Polska kultura literacka w latach 1944-1980* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1993); Kondek, *Władza i wydawcy*; see also Czarnik's shorter piece in English: Czarnik, "Control of Literary Communications."

²⁰⁸ Barck, Langermann, and Lokatis, *Jedes Buch Ein Abenteuer*; Birgit Dahlke, Martina Langermann, and Thomas Taterka, *Literaturgesellschaft DDR: Kanonkämpfe und ihre Geschichte(N)* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2000).

advertisements. More than either of these material problems, though, the office suffered from a severe lack of personnel. Both the Polish and the German offices routinely complained about this “complete lack of political orientation,” Even their “marked efforts [did] not show the particular ability to correct [the censors’] deficiency.”²⁰⁹ During this period, when the censor was intervening most severely (and at greatest length), even as book production levels began to recover, neither state’s office maintained more than a few hundred employees.²¹⁰ Regional offices in Poland generally consisted of somewhere between six and twelve employees and a supervisor to oversee not only book publication, but newspapers (most their work), film, radio, pamphlets, and live performances, as well as the administration of the office and their own continuing training and education.²¹¹

Within these parameters, it is difficult to find much solid information on the everyday censors. By and large, they were ordinary citizens with unexceptional lives, so that the traces of their careers have to be pieced together. In Poland at least, war experience makes it likely many of the censors were women. During the war, the job of postal censorship, like many other clerical positions, went predominately to women.²¹² When the military censorship was transferred over into civilian hands, many of them kept their positions. However, though many of the offices’ personnel appear to be divided almost equally between men and women, the men received more of the advanced jobs like the oversight of books and films.²¹³ Women were more often kept working on the periodical press. Still, they had representatives at every level of the cultural apparatus. Feliksa Skwierczyńska, for example, began as a cleaning lady, before moving to newspapers, and finally classified work.²¹⁴ Women like Janina Lalewicz, Lidia Janasek and Lucyna Dymalska directed offices in Olsztyn, Opole, and

²⁰⁹ This example is from J. Pakuła, *Sprawozdanie za m-c Kwiecień [1953]*, AAN, GUKPPiW 422, k. 66. It is difficult, though, to find a report without some similar sentiment.

²¹⁰ Apparently, in 1947, the Kultureller Beirat only employed 30 censors to oversee all of the country’s literature: Pike, *Politics of Culture*, 358. By the end of 1948, the Polish censor’s office maintained 361 employees: Kondek, *Władza i wydawcy*, 34.

²¹¹ Chart, *Wykaz czynności cenzorskich [18-24 May 1953]*, AAN, GUKPPiW 422, k. 250-251; *Plan Pracy in Olsztyn, Sprawozdanie za miesiąc czerwiec [30 June 1953]* AAN, GUKPPiW 422, k. 28-31.

²¹² Derek Jones, *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), vol. 1, 56-58.

²¹³ Curry, *Media and Intra-Elite Communication*, 41.

²¹⁴ Feliksa Skwierczyńska, *wspomnienia, Biuletyn Informacyjno-Instrukcyjny* 37, no. 1 (Jan. 1955): 52-53, AAN, GUKPPiW 420 (165-4), k. 55.

Poznań.²¹⁵ And at the highest levels, Wanda Wasilewska's influence had been formative in the party's cultural apparatus and though she did not return to Poland after the war, her close friend and fellow writer, Janina Broniewska was the head of the party circle in the Writers' Union and continued to be active in the literary world.²¹⁶

To work with book editing, the censor's office required something approximating a preparatory school (lyceum) diploma. There was no single regulation dictating this, but the level of the censors' reports is well above what could be expected of the seventh-grade level of schooling that was technically required for even basic party work.²¹⁷ Practically speaking, this meant that most of the censors were urban. Though peasants were flooding the cities to help meet the acute labor shortages, in 1947, it was estimated that twenty-five percent of the Polish population was illiterate, and another thirty-five percent only semi-literate.²¹⁸ By some measures, spoken and written language would not really coalesce until the 1960s.²¹⁹ By definition, then, the censors were, if not necessarily members of the intelligentsia, at least men and women who could have plausible aspirations in that direction.

Party membership does not appear to have been a prerequisite to employment.²²⁰ Nor is there indication that the censor's office was used as an incubator for important party members on their way into or out of power. At this point, about one in ten adults, or four to six percent of the population belonged to the newly created PZPR, and between one third and one half of those were workers.²²¹ Because they were the proletariat, even non-party workers could be more easily trusted, whereas white-collar party members were more likely to find desirable positions than their unaffiliated

²¹⁵ W. Stankiewicz, Opole, Sprawozdanie za m-c lipiec [1953], AAN, GUKPPiW 422, k. 71; Lucyna Dymalska, Poznań, Sprawozdanie za lipiec [1953], AAN, GUKPPiW 422, k. 176; Lidia Janašek, Poznań, Sprawozdanie za Październik [1953], AAN, GUKPPiW 422, k. 181.

²¹⁶ Shore, *Caviar and Ashes*, 311.

²¹⁷ Andrzej Paczkowski, *The Spring Will Be Ours: Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 223.

²¹⁸ Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); A. Kemp-Welch, ed. *Stalinism in Poland, 1944-1956: Selected Papers from the Fifth World Congress of Central and East European Studies, Warsaw, 1995* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 10.

²¹⁹ Dariusz Jarosz, "Peasantness' as an Element of Stigma within the Polish Urban Expanse Post-1945," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 102, (2010): 73.

²²⁰ Curry, *Media and Intra-Elite Communication*, 44.

²²¹ Paczkowski, *Spring Will Be Ours*, 223-224.

compatriots.²²² This hints at the fact that, for the entire population, there was a continual tension between zealous belief and crass opportunism in joining the party. Likewise, the party itself struggled with a tension between excitement over the spate of new members and worries about the strength and dedication of its cadre. These concerns were not wholly unjustified. Many of the PZPR's members were neither educated in the basic tenets of Marxism nor enthusiastic about the party's more active requirements. They failed to pay their dues or participate in demonstrations or special collections. In 1948, it was rumored that at many party meetings, leaders resorted to locking the doors to keep members from creeping out early.²²³ Indeed, it was one of the most common complaints of the censor's regional supervisors that their workers were unversed in the foundational theories and values that they were meant to be implementing. A new director in Opole reported that he found the office struggling with very basic problems, and that "systematic ideological development" had been so virtually unknown that it was still "terra incognita" for the censors.²²⁴

The biggest differences between the Polish and East German recruitment situations derived from their pools of candidates. In short, the Germans were better educated, more urban, and more likely to be party members from the outset. Even by 1920, Prussia had been at least eighty percent literate, and the overall German urban population had surpassed the rural.²²⁵ Likewise in the twenties, the German Communist party had between 125,000 and 350,000 members, and polled between nine and sixteen percent of the votes in the Reichstag.²²⁶ This was in addition to the twenty to thirty percent commanded by the Social Democratic Party, which reluctantly unified with the Communists in 1948.²²⁷ Most notably, the proportion of East German party members was nine percent, more than double even the highest Polish percentage from this period.²²⁸ Moreover, because the East German office was centralized in Berlin, it never had to

²²² Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, 167n.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 213, 229.

²²⁴ W. Stankiewicz, Opole sprawozdanie za m-c Lipiec [1953] AAN, GUKPPIW 422, k. 74-75.

²²⁵ Jefferey M. Sellers, "Urbanization and the Social Origins of National Policies toward Sprawl," in *Urban Sprawl in Western Europe and the United States*, ed. Harry Ward Richardson and Chang-Hee Christine Bae (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 208.

²²⁶ Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, 23; Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, 151.

²²⁷ Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, 151.

²²⁸ John Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 39.

struggle to find qualified staff in the provinces. In many cases, both older intellectuals who had participated in the Nazi state and younger ones who had been educated under it would have been eager to associate themselves with the redemptive cause of anti-Fascism.²²⁹ All of these factors lead an observer to expect that the East German office would have been more orthodox and uniform in its judgments than the Polish office, but this was not the case. Complaints from supervisors that their censors lacked educational or theoretical basics were fewer in the GDR, but the actual range of opinions in the censors' reports is no less wide than in Poland. To some degree, this heterogeneity was built into the system. The East German literary censor's office did, after all, begin its work under the aegis of the Kulturbund, the entire point of which was to foster work from as many anti-Fascist ideologies as possible.²³⁰ By the time the censor's office was moved to the Ministry of Culture, this original impetus had been all but lost, but it is possible that even the idea of an all-embracing literary community was enough to provide room for censors who were not models of the strictest Stalinism. At least as importantly, though, the German community, like the Polish, had been deeply traumatized by the war, and was able to find unity in the shared desire to rebuild.

It is important to remember that working in the censor's office was a desirable job, but not universally so. Just as there was an imperfect selection process on the government's side, weeding out the uneducated and the worst of the Fascists, the censors themselves had to opt in—no one was pressed into service. Within the first decade after the war, the censor's office ranked highly for job satisfaction and the feeling of quick professional advancement.²³¹ As a white-collar post in the literary sphere, censoring books was a good job, and one in which members of the office often stayed for over a decade.²³² Their memoirs, written for the Polish office's journal, the *Informational Bulletin*, indicate that some of them, at least, were eager for their jobs. One of them actually opened his account joking, "The censor is like an old mistress. Often, one has had enough of her. Sometimes, one is tired, angry. One knows everything—it becomes boring. Still, though, it is hard to leave." The metaphor continues for two pages. Despite his wry tone, though, the censor speaks of finding his job with all the enthusiasm of a

²²⁹ Wolfgang Emmerich and Peter M. McIsaac, "German Writers as Intellectuals: Strategies and Aporias of Engagement in East and West from 1945 until Today," *New German Critique*, no. 88 (2003): 48.

²³⁰ Schivelbusch, *In a Cold Crater*, 75-76.

²³¹ Jarosz, "'Peasantness' as an Element of Stigma," 82.

²³² Curry, *Media and Intra-Elite Communication*, 41.

romantic comedy, and ends with the conclusion that his love had deepened and grown.²³³ On the other hand, though the publishing houses sheltered major party members both during their rises to power and after their falls, none of these names can be found on the rosters of the censor's office during this period.²³⁴ This is to say that the lower rungs of the censor's office were places for people who were interested in and cared about books. Whether they were true believers who were convinced that the implementation of Socialist Realism was the way into the future, failed writers and journalists trying to get as close to the literary world as possible, or former intelligentsia trying to maintain their countries' heritage, this proximity to literature was more or less all the office had to offer in what was definitely an applicant's market. The combined presence of each of these office worker types meant that, in the end, the office was a great deal more ideologically diverse than anyone had intended.

Among those who did, in fact, begin as Communists, the war had often had a radicalizing effect. While some did, indeed, make their way to Russia or France during the war, the vast majority of the rank and file remained in their homes. Given the deprivations and displacements of wartime, armies crossing and re-crossing the territory, partisan bands representing all levels of lawlessness and zeal, the physical damage done by bombing and pillaging, and the constant threat of labor and death camps, their wartime experience was often enough to make hard labor in Tashkent seem almost pleasant by comparison.²³⁵ Thus, for example one of the censors told the story of a young man who had brought him to the office.²³⁶ The son of a poor, Socialist father, he was searching for the answers to the injustice he saw when "on the road of life, he met a comrade Communist. He understood the great truth of socialism, and clung to it with all the ardor of a young man." He improved himself, fought the Fascists in the war, and wanted to join the censor's office to serve the party. Apparently, it was not rare for these young party members to take it upon themselves to enforce the standards of the revolution in their work as censors, even when official guidelines pressed for a more lenient, conciliatory approach. Confident in

²³³ Leszek Kimlowski, wspomnienia, *Biuletyn Informacyjno-Instrukcyjny* 37, no. 1 (Jan. 1955): 61-63, GUKPPiW 420 (165-4), k. 66-69.

²³⁴ Jacob Mikanowski, "Paper Empire: State Publishing and the Literary Sphere in Stalinist Poland" (paper, ASEEES 44th Annual Convention, New Orleans, LA, 16 Nov. 2012).

²³⁵ Waldemar Lotnik and Julian Preece, *Nine Lives: Ethnic Conflict in the Polish-Ukrainian Borderlands* (London: Serif, 1999).

²³⁶ J. Leżyński, "Pełnomocnik z Połtusza," *Biuletyn Informacyjno-Instrukcyjny* 37, no. 1 (Jan. 1955): 1-3, AAN, GUKPPiW 420 (165-4), k. 5.

the superior virtue of their position, they were occasionally even willing to defy their supervisors in favor of their own understandings of revolutionary necessity. Even in the midst of the rigors of Stalinism, the office's supervisors sometimes found it difficult to restrain their zeal to a practical level.

Far more common, however, were censors who freely admitted that they had come to the office out of a practical need. Feliksa Skwierczyńska, for example, who finally rose to do classified work, began working at the office after she traveled to the city to find some of her family in May of 1945.²³⁷ In June, she began working at the censor's office as a cleaning woman, because the family was sharing her apartment, food, and clothing. She recalled that, "today, the working conditions seem unreal. But the small local office served many workers as their home, and so the task of a cleaner had a different character. We did not just take care of cleanliness and order, fresh towels and curtains, but the everyday maintenance of most of the workers." She made three meals a day, and sustained the censors at night with strong coffee. Zofia Figlewska, who was both excited and terrified, because the censor's office was her first job out of gymnasium, recounted that her school friend had brought her to the office with a promise of sheepskin jackets and new shoes.²³⁸ Józfa Cholewa said simply that, "from a young age, I was forced to work hard to maintain myself. After the war, it was not easy for a young woman to find work."²³⁹

While the new hardliners could sometimes be intransigent and even willing to cut out classic members of the canon for their ideological missteps, a far more significant problem appeared among this majority of workers. They were willing to be convinced by—and to accommodate—current Marxist doctrine, but were entirely ignorant of what that doctrine might involve. Their own accounts often assert this at the outset. The same Figlewska who wanted the shoes, for example, told how, when she began at the office, "I was entirely politically illiterate. [...] I believed deeply that the leftist PPS [Polish Socialist Party] was bad, because in everyday language, 'left' and 'on the left' and so forth had unpleasant connotations compared to a 'right' character, for example." Likewise, almost every memoir had some version of Cholewa's assertion that her "consciousness and ideological level

²³⁷ Feliksa Skwierczyńska, wspomnienia, *Biuletyn Informacyjno-Instrukcyjny* 37, no. 1 (Jan. 1955): 52-53, AAN, GUKPPiW 420 (165-4), k. 55.

²³⁸ Zofia Figlewska, wspomnienia, *Biuletyn Informacyjno-Instrukcyjny* 37, no. 1 (Jan. 1955): 9-12, AAN, GUKPPiW 420 (165-4), k. 13.

²³⁹ Józfa Cholewa, wspomnienia, *Biuletyn Informacyjno-Instrukcyjny* 37, no. 1 (Jan. 1955): 44, AAN, GUKPPiW 420 (165-4), k. 47.

had grown significantly, and [her] worldview had developed.” Their supervisors agreed. This problem was especially acute in Poland, where the general population had been only minimally exposed to Communist theory before the war, and who, moreover, had to be recruited from the provinces as well as the urban centers. The censor’s office had provided an introduction to the wider world, a clearer view of the challenges facing their own country, an overview of Communist philosophy, and a thorough understanding of the party’s position on all of the above.²⁴⁰ Judging from the participants’ enthusiastic reports, this may have been an admirable method for inculcating the correct political sentiments in the citizenry. Its implications concerning the state of raw, untrained workers, though, suggest difficulties for the function of the office itself. Neither the German nor the Polish censors’ offices required significant pre-job training in order to work as a censor.²⁴¹ This meant that new workers were almost necessarily ignorant and confused about what censorship that was both Socialist and democratic might involve. With the very best of wills, many of them were making it up as they went along. The results for the books that they censored could be unpredictable.

Somewhat more predictable, though not necessarily more to the party’s liking, were the men and women who came to the censor’s office with political ideas second in their minds. Instead of viewing their jobs in a spectrum that included agitation, propaganda, and political education, they positioned their work firmly in the sphere of creative writing, editing, and publishing. Indeed, it has already become clear that editors, publishers, and even writers participated in the censorship process, and there was a certain fluidity in their careers, which could include both the creative and restrictive sides of publishing. During the seventies and eighties, as information began to move more freely, and censors clearly felt the need to justify their choice of profession, it was fairly usual for them to cite precisely this commitment to literature. Hans-Jürgen Wesener and Christina Horn from the German office, for example, painted themselves as defenders of literature, championing works that otherwise might never have found an audience.²⁴² In their minds, the party philistines were hardly worse than profit-obsessed publishers in the capitalist West, and for them,

²⁴⁰ “Rozumienie aktualnych zadan naszej propagandy warunkiem dobrej cenzore,” *Biuletyn Informacyjno-Instrukcyjny*, no. 3 (March 1952): 7-13, AAN, GUKPPiW 420 (165-1), k. 110-113.

²⁴¹ Curry, *Media and Intra-Elite Communication*, 45.

²⁴² Darnton, “Censorship, a Comparative View: France, 1789-East Germany, 1989,” 47-53.

the satisfaction of championing remarkable books compensated for the other necessities of the job. In a similar vein, Polish dissident author Stanisław Barańczak recounted a meeting with a writer friend who had recently taken a job with the censors. The man maintained that, far from betraying Barańczak, he was actually supporting him. The writer, at least, would understand and appreciate the work he was altering, rather than simply banging at it with an ideological sledgehammer.²⁴³ Among the earlier censors, there is little sense that loyalty to the party and to the author had to be mutually exclusive, nor that a censor might begin work specifically to thwart the worst instincts of the party bosses. It is clear, though, that whether consciously or by accident, they often put their understanding of a book's literary merit above the party's dictates.

Even more telling than censors' official accounts of their histories in the office or formal defenses of their lives' work is the result of the censoring itself, which often seems random enough to make a true legalist despair. Sadly, it is all but impossible to match the signatures on individual book reports with other biographical data. The records were often haphazardly kept, and turnover was high enough that it is often difficult to isolate a single censor's voice over any period of time.

Although a lack of coherent staff records makes it difficult to trace specific censors through a career, the voices of individual censors and their personal literary and ideological preferences, which result in varied and often contradictory choices, are often very clear. The literary censors were frequently quite passionate about their work. In 1948, one from Poznań enthusiastically recommended a children's book, *Terrible Fate*, set in the early medieval past. The story was about a young Slavic girl kidnapped by evil Teutons, who had to find her way home to her own people again. Essentially a tale of cultural survival, the heroine not only has to use her wits and courage to escape the cruel wiles of her captors, but also must reject their alleged cultural superiority before the escape can even become possible. This censor hailed these themes as "a true representation of the cultural history between Germany and Poland," declaring that their lessons were essential for children's understanding of the world in which they lived.²⁴⁴ She thought, as did many of her colleagues, that the nation was of critical importance, and believed that she was building it through her work. The question of what kind of nation, exactly, was being preserved, and what cultural priorities should form it, thus became essential. Just five months

²⁴³ Stanisław Barańczak, *Breathing under Water*, 85.

²⁴⁴ B. Mawciuciakowa, recenzja of *Straszny Dziedzictwo* by Waleria Szalay-Groele [7 Oct. 1948], AAN, GUKPPiW 181, k. 247.

previously, another censor had turned down what appears to have been a similar work, this time entitled *German Barbarism*, for the same qualities that won praise for *Terrible Childhood*. The censor, this time from Lublin, wrote that the book was made up of “a chaotic mix of anti-German phrases” that “unthinkingly judging [its racist, anti-German screed] Soviet” cast its own country in a bad light. No corrections were suggested, as the *German Barbarism* was deemed a complete waste of paper.²⁴⁵

These contradictions were by no means limited to children’s literature or books with nationalist overtones. In 1949, for example, there was a furor over the publication of one of Sir Walter Scott’s Waverly novels, *Midlothian*. The first censor felt that no modern state with even the slightest pretention of culture could possibly neglect the great Sir Walter.²⁴⁶ By contrast, another reader worried that Scott was reactionary, and unqualified to shape the consciousness of one of the people’s states.²⁴⁷ The work was finally approved in the Main Office, but that reviewer left a plaintive note, asking whether some of the “hard” language of Scott’s dialog could not be adjusted to remove some of its anachronism and make it more accessible and appealing to the common reader.²⁴⁸ Near the same time, another reviewer in the Main Office reviewed *Kenilworth* and found it unobjectionable, if not particularly worthwhile.²⁴⁹

This welter of confusion, dissent, and mistakes is significant because it was, in fact, becoming canon. However far from the official position a book about the brave Polish maiden escaping evil Teutons may have been, its publication made it a de facto part of Polish Communist literature. *Terrible Childhood* was, of course, a small and generally unnoticeable part of the country’s literary output, but it was by no means an isolated case. In this way, even while the countries’ cultural and political elites were struggling to decide what Communist, democratic, Socialist Realist literature should include, a decidedly more heterogeneous version was being created. Of course, from an outsider’s, or even a publisher’s perspective, the fact that the government’s control was often inefficient was scant comfort. The reader’s position naturally left her more sensitive to the imposition of a canon than to its internal inconsistencies. These irregularities, however, drove the orthodox leaders to distraction. The

²⁴⁵ Recenzja of *Barbarzyństwo Niemieckie* by Stanisław Białobłocki [8 May 1948], AAN, GUKPPIW 181, k. 244.

²⁴⁶ Recenzja of *Midlothian* by Walter Scott [1949], AAN, GUKPPIW 180, k. 384.

²⁴⁷ Recenzja of *Midlothian* by Walter Scott [28 Nov. 1949], AAN, GUKPPIW 180, k. 386.

²⁴⁸ Recenzja of *Midlothian* by Walter Scott [1949], AAN, GUKPPIW 180, k.383.

²⁴⁹ Recenzja of *Kenilworth* by Walter Scott [17 Oct. 1949], AAN, GUKPPIW 180, k. 378.

problem was partly control, of course: they could not educate, train, or discipline their workers into stability. On a different level, though, the crisis concerned the countries' identities. What it meant to have a Communist national literature was being obscured by the censors' persistent ignorance and misunderstanding, and this, in turn, was clouding the cultural and ideological understanding of the rest of the country.

Teaching the Everyday Censors

In their efforts to bring some order to this situation, the heads of censorship in both Germany and Poland tried any number of expedients. In Poland, the Main Office created the *Informational Bulletin* whose contents ranged from poems and satires submitted from the provincial offices to political commentary or examples of ideal reviews for the censors to study. More formally, guidelines were sent from the Main Office to its regional outposts, detailing the latest standards for censorship. Most of these were administrative: making sure that a foreign dignitary received his correct title or clarifying that rumored butter shortages did not, in fact, exist, and should not be reported. On occasion, though, they also took up aesthetic matters. In the same way, the local offices sent back reports detailing the amount of work they were accomplishing, worker evaluations, struggles with employee schedules and payroll, and the like. In Germany, the more centralized office made many of these communications and apparatuses unnecessary. Additionally, its personnel issues were handled by the Ministry of Culture's human resources office, removing employee issues from the censor's care. Instead, the Germans made endless plans detailing what tasks needed to be done for the office to succeed, what they would involve, why they were important, and who should be responsible for completing them. Again, most of these tasks were extremely mundane, although the Germans do not appear to have suffered with the Polish problem of enforcing a workday.

All of these strategies, even at their most quotidian, agreed on one thing. It was not enough to provide the censors with the guidelines for their work, general principles to follow, or even specific prohibitions to enforce. To have any really effective censorship, the censors had to be educated in Marxism. Office supervisors were constantly "preparing two lectures on Socialist Realism in art and literature" to "fill in the gaps in the proper evaluation of controlled materials and satisfy the desires of the whole team," or assigning reading of *Capital*, the classics of Lenin and Stalin, or

even the history of Polish literature.²⁵⁰ It is important to note that, while ideological indoctrination certainly represented an attempt to impose orthodoxy on the censor's office, it was not necessarily felt as a repressive measure by the censors themselves. The censors who did write in to the *Informational Bulletin*, were, of course, uniformly positive and even glowing about their ideological education. It was probably the most-cited benefit of working for the office. More tellingly, resentment of Marxist studies was rarely, if ever, listed among the copious complaints of the provincial offices. Most likely, most of the censors were as indifferent to their courses in dialectic reasoning as today's workers are to corporate sensitivity training. Yet some were even actively pleased and enthusiastic at the idea of training.²⁵¹

When it came to the men and women who were actually censoring, though, it stands to reason that some basic knowledge of Socialism would be necessary to select Socialist literature. The party elites worried constantly whether their censors had an adequate foundation in Marxist writings. Indeed, without some kind of common background and understanding, even the idea of censorship would begin to pull apart. For the everyday censor, though, the party's position was quite solid, expressed repeatedly through reading lists, internal memos, conferences, and bulletins. Such directives were aimed at creating unified voices that would be capable of rendering consistent judgment and providing their countries with the literature of a people's republic.

Censors' reports reflect the variety of knowledge and responses to Marxism among workers. In the GDR in 1953, a certain Löchner, from the foreign language readers' department wrote in a progress report that many of his workers had complete disregard for their Marxist superiors: "the translators are, as a rule, older people who acquired their language proficiency before the First World War. They are still very much entangled in the spirit of those times, and they are more or less dismissive towards us. This means, for example, that they only know the work 'Stalin's Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR' by hearsay, though for us it is extremely important."²⁵² Faced with this problem, the office not only developed

²⁵⁰ Opole, "Sprawozdanie miesięczne za miesiąc Sierpień" [1953], AAN, GUKPPIW 422 (197-10), k. 80-84; "Poznań Plan Zajęć Grupy Samokształceniowej WUKP na Marzec i Kwiecień" [1953], AAN, GUKPPIW 422 (197-10), k. 96-97.

²⁵¹ Stefan Hardej, "Ze wspomnień cenzora," *Biuletyn Informacyjno-Instrukcyjny* 37, no. 1 (Jan. 1955): 4-8, AAN, GUKPPIW 420 (165-4), k. 7-11.

²⁵²Löchner, "Vorschlag für die Verbesserung der Übersetzungen" [23 March 1953], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1886, bl. 32.

strategies to educate and win over its own workers—the same report suggested that encouraging employees to work from the office rather than from home would provide more opportunities for oversight and influence—but also developed stopgap policies to continue office functions while the education progressed.

One of the chief tutelary policies, which operated even in the early days of the Soviet occupation, was the category of Priority Literature (*Schwerpunktliteratur*). In a dedicated memo, this was defined as, “all literature that educates our working people in a spirit of genuine patriotism, that inspires and empowers them to carry out the duties of our five-year-plan, the planned construction of Socialism in our republic.”²⁵³ The category was first designed to build Socialism in the GDR by making sure that work on Stalin and the cornerstones of Marxist literature would be readily available to the public. In the wake of the crisis of 1953, it expanded to embrace more popular fare, even including the possibility of genres like crime and adventure under the banner of national literature relevant to the youth.²⁵⁴

Within the censor’s office, the policy meant first that priority literature was moved to the top of the censor’s pile. In a moment when one of the major obstacles to publishing was the lack of staff to license it, this was a significant advantage. Second, the office was meant to work with the planning commission to be sure that publishers’ proposed plans adhered to the state’s priorities. For supervisors, then, this category served two separate functions. Most obviously, they created a space in which the censor’s individual judgment, whether or not she was educated, had less influence. Only non-priority books, for example, had to be evaluated for their economic or political relevance. Because priority literature was a readily identifiable category rather than a complex assessment of merit, the burden of an advanced, subtle grasp of the current Communist orthodoxy was removed from the censors. The advancement of Marxist aims did not have to be the censor’s individual priority, because it was already the priority of the entire publishing department. Second, given the pronounced shortage of paper during the entire Stalinist period, this strategy also had the effect of determining the contours of German literature in a single stroke. It is true that the harshest restrictions on literature were imposed

²⁵³ Memo, “Aufgaben des Amtes für Literatur und Verlagswesen auf dem Gebiet der Schwerpunktliteratur und Richtlinien für ihre Durchführung” [1953], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1889, bl. 21.

²⁵⁴ Memo, “Einige vorläufige erste Schlußfolgerungen...” [13 June 1953], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1889, bl. 4.

between 1948 and 1956, and that the party faced internal struggles with even more radical elements within its membership. The importance of these factors, though, can easily overshadow the very real material constraints facing the GDR. Until the mid-fifties, prioritizing one thing meant cutting something else. The absence of most genre literature (like science fiction, romance, and even crime novels) until it was specifically prioritized in 1953 could be a function of simple neglect as much as of active party antipathy.

Broad categories of priority books, however much they influenced the character of the East German book trade, could not eliminate all of the problems that the censors faced. To deal with them, the office management from time to time put out instructions concerning specific questions that confronted the censors. Interestingly, while the meaning of their instructions is clear in retrospect, given the kinds of literature that were produced in Communist states, the explanations themselves are remarkably cryptic. That the censors, with their wide variety of political backgrounds and motivations always imbibed the officially approved definitions seems unlikely. For example, the censor who allowed *Terrible Childhood* understood nationalism to mean anti-German censorship, contradictory to the party's position at the time. In this case, the party and the individual censor did not agree on a fixed meaning of the term nationalism. The refrain that literature should be "help in the struggle for national unity and peace, democracy, and socialism" was repeated in some form in almost every description or directive written.²⁵⁵ A draft for guidelines determining which literature to subsidize, for example, includes all of these, with the addition of literature that, among more practical concerns, would "expose American imperialism and its henchmen," and "build up the consciousness of our people."²⁵⁶ At various times, literature was also supposed to be lively, Socialist, colorful, popular, anti-militarist (but not pacifist), accessible, cultured, and high-quality. As often as not, these attributes were simply listed, but even when the supervisor elaborated, the situation remained murky. Earlier, confidential instructions had exhorted the censors to "raise the quality of literary production in all areas through ideological and technical examination."²⁵⁷ Even in the fifties, office functionaries

²⁵⁵ "Entwurf für die Lektoratsgutachten," Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1889.

²⁵⁶ "Entwurf Richtlinien für die Verwendung von Subventionsmitteln des Kulturfonds der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik" [12 May 1955], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1875, bl. 3-4.

²⁵⁷ "Entwurf über die Aufgaben des Amtes für Literatur und Verlagswesen," Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1871, bl. 1.

advocating for literature that was as “multifarious, colorful, lively and rich [...] as life itself” cautioned that it was “not a private endeavor” and that they “had no friendship for authors who, in the words of Zhadanov, ‘saw nothing but the rust in the kitchen and bath.’”²⁵⁸ This is not to say that the catchphrases in these instructions and explanations would have been meaningless to the censors reading them. On the contrary, they were the currency of the day throughout Germany. Both East and West accepted the same lexicon of positive attributes, and each criticized the other constantly for disingenuousness in not adhering to them. The underlying problem was that a multitude of warring definitions existed for each of the crucial concepts.

Moving beyond these terse instructions, the office leadership also produced departmental conferences and wrote a series of articles addressing less topical, more abstract, broadly based issues. The topics ranged from the more-or-less predictable, like Apelt’s 1952 “The Right Books in the Right Hands,” or Antkowiak’s 1951 “Toward a Communist German Literary Criticism,” though extremely practical talks on the law and tradition surrounding the Publisher’s Association (Börsenverein), to decidedly abstract talks on Kantian versus Hegelian theories of the aesthetic.²⁵⁹ Sadly, the transcripts of these talks appear to have been lost, but the fact that the talks occurred indicates that the office tried to view its censors as members of the cultural vanguard, rather than as mere functionaries to be handed formulas.

The primary difference in the supervision of German and Polish censors was related to structural dynamics that were already in place. Because the German office was embedded within the publishing division and was not recognized publicly, it could also avoid explicit definitions of censorship and its purposes within the office itself. For the Germans, the emphasis was always on priority, with the subtle implication that anything could be published if there were only sufficient resources. Within the office, this elision also gave directors the ability to circumvent the vagaries of their own staffs by defining categories of priorities that were concrete and straightforward. Because the Poles acknowledged the existence of censorship and kept it separate from planning committees and publishers, they were not able to make use of “priority literature” as a category. Thus, within the individual offices, they were forced into ontological discussions

²⁵⁸ “Entwurf für die Lektoratsgutachten,” Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1889.

²⁵⁹ “Themenplan für den Lehrgang zur Heranbildung leitender Verlagsmitarbeiter” [7 May 1952], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1994, bl. 6-8.

on the nature of censorship. Repeatedly, a tension appeared between a positive, engaged role and a limited, safe role for the office.

To conclude his address to the first general meeting of the censor's office in 1945, Jakub Berman told his audience, "we know that censors in the past rarely enjoyed popularity, but we know that more than ever we must fulfill its [censorship's] great task and responsibility. It is my hope for you not to be known as irritating, oppressive censors, but as true assistants of a free, democratic, press and vigilant guards of democracy who contribute to the victory of democratic Poland."²⁶⁰ Embracing this positive vision, the censors' writings, their regional office reports, educational bulletins, conferences, and confidential memos, habitually use the language of addition rather than subtraction. The imagery of excision, common in Russia and even in other areas of the Polish regime, was rarely, if ever, used. The metaphor extended far enough that, rather than viewing Poland as a body whose diseases had to be killed or cut out, the censors had more of a semi-ruinous building in mind. They spoke constantly of building the new Polish state, raising the cultural level, and strengthening Polish democracy. Enemies appeared as weaknesses in the structure, and strategic plans as props or scaffolding. Fashioning the Polish nation was not a matter of cutting the diseased parts out, but of building up the remains. Even at their most agonistic, though, the struggle was framed as a heroic undertaking, and a defensive, rather than offensive action, a distinction that was easy enough to accept in the immediate postwar years. Plainly, the censor's role was to excise, but their rhetoric in thousands of pages of text refused to accept this as their identity. Repeatedly, they insisted that they were building the Polish nation in its truest form. In their project, restoration and creation walked side by side as the men and women of the office strove to collect a body of literature that could connect Poland's past to its present and participate in its climb towards the future.

At the same time, the Polish censors worried constantly about the role of national security in the office's work. Coming out of the war, maintaining security secrets was the most obvious function of the office, as well as a major source of its legitimacy. There was no quicker way for an office or censor to be reprimanded than to neglect security regulations. The office chief in Olsztyn, for example, complained in 1953 that a certain Comrade Milanowski, though carefully trained in matters of military secrecy, had left without explaining them to his replacement, resulting in the leak of a

²⁶⁰ Nałęcz and Instytut Studiów Politycznych, *Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy*, 34, from the original transcript AAN, GUKPPIW 421, t. 1.

classified base's location.²⁶¹ The situation could not have been too dire, as neither an international incident nor the firing of the careless Milanowski were ever mentioned, but complaints of this kind were frequent, and the worries about security were constant. At the same time, other leaders in the office worried that all of the attention to state security could, itself, become dangerous. After a meeting of the censors was devoted primarily to security and concerns over non-communist interference, one of its members worried, "What is the new task of censorship? Can it be said that we content ourselves with guarding state secrets? No, that must not be said." At this, even the organizer himself hastened to agree that, "reducing [the censor's] function to a police function is unacceptable," and that communicating the "sense and awareness" of the honor of their work to the censors was as important a task as stemming the "wave of subversion in our political life."²⁶²

Lacking GDR categories like "priority literature" to direct the work of the censors, then, the Polish authorities turned their focus towards education and encouraging a sense of communal identity. Many of their educational strategies were similar to those used by the Germans. The Poles, too, passed out beginners' book lists on the basics of Marxist-Leninist thought and sent their censors to seemingly endless conferences on subjects as wide as Marxism itself and as narrow as the best way to translate party slogans from Russian. In addition to all of this, their regular *Informational Bulletin* included instruction and news of the office. The surprising thing about the *Bulletin*, especially in the sea of departmental documents that give every sign of boring their authors even as they were written, is that they occasionally inspired a feeling of community. Part of this was a matter of office regulation: the provincial offices were told to institute *Bulletin* reading groups in which the entire office discussed their positions on key articles. The office manager would later include these in reports to the Main Office.

Reactions to this strategy ran the entire scale from ennui to enthusiasm. The office manager in Szczecin dutifully reported that he and his colleagues found the *Bulletin* very helpful, noting that the sections with practical guidelines for censoring were the "liveliest and most interesting"

²⁶¹ Olsztyn, "Sprawozdanie miesięczne za miesiąc styczeń" [1953], AAN, GUKPPIW 422, k. 1.

²⁶² Olsztyn, "Sprawozdanie miesięczne za miesiąc styczeń" [1953], AAN, GUKPPIW 422, k. 6.

because the censors “had trouble mastering” more theoretical material.²⁶³ More candidly, Rzeszów reported that the office found the *Bulletin* uninteresting. It was irrelevant to their current work, distanced from their practical concerns, and failed to take the point of view of the provinces into account.²⁶⁴ Intriguingly, the tone of this report is frustrated, as if the official in question, Comrade St. Hardej, had both expected and needed better. Despite all of this, the *Informational Bulletins* occasionally provoked the engaged response they aimed for. In response to a *Bulletin* article on Comrade “EMR” fighting for the militant stance of the party, two of the members of the Olsztyn office, Comrades Aniol and Gogolewska, apparently had a heated argument on the appropriate party stance towards outsiders. Aniol maintained that the party ought not, in fact, to impose its position on outsiders, while Gogolewska countered that, “since the party understood [the situation] better and had more experience than other politicians,” “it should set the tone not only for a meeting, but for all action.”²⁶⁵

All of this focus on group identity and cooperation in the Polish office served a number of purposes. Exposed in a way that their German counterparts were not, it gave Polish censors ways of discussing their work without confronting uncomfortable specifics. Not insignificantly, it created a sense of positive work that was valuable in the face of a task that could feel distasteful. Most practically, close contact between offices was necessary to maintain any kind of discipline in so decentralized a system. In its most efficient, though never realized, form, the office’s strategies allowed the central elites to observe the provinces personally, required additional reports from provincial managers, and spoke directly to the individual workers, thus creating a limited sort of visibility in all directions. At the end of the day, though, all of the strategies have the faintest hint of desperation to them. Ultimately, they were unsuccessful both in achieving a standardized censorship and in maintaining the more modest standard of their neighbors to the west. If Poland’s more spread-out offices were part of the reason for this difference from Germany, it is also necessary to return to the issue of party structure. At their most dedicated, the censors could only work towards their own understandings of the party’s goals, which were

²⁶³ H. Gendecki, Wrocław, “Dotyczy sprawozdania za m-c kwiecień” [8 May 1953], AAN, GUKPPiW 422, k. 264.

²⁶⁴ St. Hardej, Rzeszów, “Sprawozdanie za m-c czerwiec” [3 June 1953], AAN, GUKPPiW 422, k. 228-229.

²⁶⁵ Olsztyn, “Sprawozdanie za miesiac czerwiec” [30 June 1953], AAN, GUKPPiW 422, k. 34-35.

often incomplete or even incorrect. The censors were, as often as not, aiming to please the top, but their ideas of how to do so varied wildly.²⁶⁶ To the extent that even the elites themselves had varying strategies and priorities, that deviation was not a failure of the system, but part of its very fabric. In Germany, where the general population (more than twice as likely to be party members than in Poland) had a sturdier knowledge of Marxism, where there was a literary community already committed to its tenets, and where the office was centralized enough to allow for more thorough monitoring, the scope of possible deviation from orthodoxy was reduced. Eventually, the German office would gain a reputation for maintaining the strictest control in Eastern Europe. In both states, however, heterogeneity remained the order of the day, even as the offices and elites both strove for consistency.

Within this general scaffolding, the particular situations of East Germany and Poland inflected the experience, and therefore also the output, of their censors. The German office, both more clandestine and more centralized than its Polish counterpart, also had access to more educated workers and to those who had a basic knowledge of Marxism. These factors allowed it to police itself more efficiently, while at the same time integrating itself into the more productive parts of the literary system. The Polish office, more decentralized and autonomous, devoted more of its efforts to creating a sense of community and solidarity among its workers. If they were institutionally isolated from the rest of the publishing world, they perhaps developed an esprit de corps to compensate. It could be suggested that this same spirit also allowed them to more thoroughly redefine the process of censorship to make their work itself part of the productive process.

The process of indoctrination, professionalization, and training that went on among the censors was hardly unique to their offices. As the Communists sought to urbanize their populations, train them for industry, and develop new party cadres, this type of educational experience became commonplace, and came to define the postwar generation. If the aggregate of these experiences can be compared to learning a new language, Bolshevik, Stalinist, Socialist, or merely Postwar, the point here is that, like any language students, the censors often learned badly. In principal, the grammar, a combination of Marxist doctrine and Moscow prescription, should have been clear enough. In practice, every stage of transmission created another layer of ambiguity, conflicting aims, and interpretation. In

²⁶⁶ *Biuletyn Informacyjny-Instrukcyjny* 37, no. 1 (Jan. 1955), AAN, GUKPPiW 420 (165-4), k. 48, 55, 64, etc.

this scheme, even the most fulsome of the everyday censors' paeans to the office can be read as exercises in the new tongue. Neither necessarily insincere nor purely disinterested, their work can be seen as part of the process of learning the new system. Moreover, the censors themselves, the speakers and promulgators of this new speech, approached it with various abilities and diverse background commitments. What resulted was less a coherent language than an unstable creole.

Chapter Five: Past Perfect—Recreating the Traditional Canon in Poland and East Germany

In 1949 and 1955 respectively, Germany and Poland raised statues of Goethe and Mickiewicz in their capital cities and around their countries as part of elaborate, all-encompassing celebrations of each author's jubilee. In Germany, there was a new monument in Weimar; in Poland, new statues were created and erected in the place of those of the authors that had been torn down by the Nazis. As their countries continued to rebuild around them, these two authors, inscribed on their landscapes with a thousand busts, portraits, and displays in addition to the monumental statues themselves, represented not only links to the past but also visions of the future. Using these authors represented a bid for legitimacy, but also an impulse towards continuity. In both cases, authors were chosen who could negotiate between the revolutionary demands of a Socialist state and the needs of its traumatized and fragmented people.

One of the most radical departures from traditional regimes of censorship in postwar Germany and Poland was the regulation of books that had been printed freely under previous governments. While there were many ways in which Communist censorship resembled nineteenth-century and earlier systems of censorship, this was a significant break. In general, censorship in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emphasized continuity, so that, though a past permission could be revoked (Ibsen's 1881 play *Ghosts* (*Gengangere*), for example, was banned under its German title, *Gespenster*, in several German cities between 1887 and 1894) the general assumption was that, once released, a book would maintain its legitimacy.²⁶⁷ The Communists, of course, had no such sense of continuity to rely on. In fact, it was precisely such a sense that they desired to undermine. To begin with a blanket acceptance of the previous canon was fundamentally objectionable, even impossible.

The new states, then, were faced with the problem of reconstructing their pasts as well as their presents. This task was the more pressing because a great deal of both of those pasts had been destroyed in the war. Over sixty percent of library holdings in Poland were lost during the war, as well as more than eighty-five percent of the country's publishing

²⁶⁷ Gary D. Stark, "The Censorship of Literary Naturalism, 1885-1895: Prussia and Saxony," *Central European History* 18, no. 3/4 (1985): 328; Janet Clare, "Greater Themes for Insurrection's Arguing': Political Censorship of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Stage," *The Review of English Studies* 38, no. 150 (1987): 169-183.

capacity.²⁶⁸ The situation in East Germany was comparable, if milder.²⁶⁹ This meant that simply replacing copies that had been lost and making major works accessible to the public was a significant task. In both Poland and Germany after the war, there was a constant movement to publish new editions of classic works. Anniversaries of authors' births were major cultural events, accompanied by lavish republications aimed at both scholarly and mass audiences. Lists of the country's most important works were constantly drawn and redrawn, and governments freely subsidized them so they would be available to the widest possible readership.

One indication of the relative eagerness for past works can, in fact, be found in the restrictions that they occasionally encountered. This was a period when the personal conduct of an author was routinely and matter-of-factly conflated with the value of her work. Governments in both the East and the West gleefully blacklisted living authors for anything from holding the wrong political position to making a lapse in personal judgment or offending the wrong bureaucrat. In the case of the usually dead authors of prewar works, though, it was much more common to view elements of an author's oeuvre individually and quietly pass over those that seemed regrettable. In 1956, for example, there was an East German discussion over a possible reprint of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The censors all agreed that the book's overwhelming anti-war stance was both necessary and valuable in their moment, but they were concerned with the reactionary character of Remarque's other work and his decision to live in the United States. After a long exchange of memos, they decided that the work was classic enough to be published on its own, with no mention made of the rest of his career.²⁷⁰ While the solution seems admirably straightforward, it was unavailable for more contemporary authors. With their body of work fixed and unable to publicly embarrass the regime, the errors of past authors could be historicized and, in some cases, excused. Their established canonical status meant that authorities did not need to actively approve of them, but only to not reject them.

As war-torn Germany and Poland began to reconstruct themselves, they viewed their pasts in much the same way as they did the ruined buildings that littered their cities. The national histories had been damaged

²⁶⁸ Barbara Bieńkowska and Halina Chamerska, *Books in Poland: Past and Present*, trans. Wojciech Zalewski and Eleanor R. Payne (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1990), 35.

²⁶⁹ Lester K. Born, "The Archives and Libraries of Postwar Germany," *The American Historical Review* 56, no. 1 (1950): 56.

²⁷⁰ Peter Nell, memo regarding Stellungnahme zur Frage Remarque "Im Westen nichts Neues" [23 March 1956], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1361, bl. 9.

and distorted in the conflict, and needed to be reconstructed on firmer footings in order to move into the future. For Germany, the challenge of creating a democratically-minded narrative without the seeds of totalitarianism embedded was paramount, while the Poles needed a history of national unification. In both countries, it was understood almost intuitively that the trajectories of their pasts would—must—define the course of their futures. This was no fatalist stance, though. Rather, it was a call both to understand the near-fatal mistakes of the past in order to correct them and to identify any sound strands of tradition in order to weave them into the country's present identity. If the First World War had called into question the very possibility of a meaningful narrative of European history, the Second made the power and necessity of such narratives inescapably clear.

There were also more practical reasons for the importance of classics. Both parties made it one of their main priorities to educate their workers to meet industrialized standards. Even among the staunchest materialists, this standard included a working knowledge of their nations' literatures. In Germany, the focus was firmly on literature "in the classical tradition" that was untainted by the nation's twentieth-century history.²⁷¹ Likewise in Poland, most school time was devoted to canonical prewar authors.²⁷² Even outside traditional schooling, one of the People's Republics' main priorities was the development of adult literacy and education. The journey from illiterate peasant to conscious worker was understood to involve not only basic competencies, but also induction into the nation's literary brotherhood. In theory, at least, this all meant that the reading audience had grown exponentially.

When the exigencies of Socialist Realism were added to the postwar need for usable tradition and the party emphasis on education, the question was not whether traditional literature would be used, but which parts of it were most important. This widespread eagerness for tradition can easily be read by contemporary historians as profoundly conservative in spirit, because it led to the wholesale adoption of prewar bourgeois canons. After all, the men and women implementing the cultural strategy had been educated under the previous system, often even in Imperial Germany, and had imbibed an appreciation for its classic works with their earlier lessons.

²⁷¹ Bathrick, 202-203; Sonja Fritzsche, *Science Fiction Literature in East Germany* (New York: Lang, 2006), 69-70.

²⁷² Hermina G. B. Anghelescu and Martine Poulain, eds., *Books, Libraries, Reading, and Publishing in the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress Center for the Book, 2001), 112-114.

Indeed, the mania for the classics can seem incongruous and even contradictory among the calls for a new Socialist literature. In reality, though, the two were deeply connected. The great literary schools of the revolution, from Pereval or the formalists through RAPP (the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) had been scholars and critics as well as writers, and devoted themselves to the interpretation of Russia's literary identity. Thus, at the first day of mourning for Pushkin's death (on its 122nd anniversary in 1921) Eikhnenbaum began his speech by observing that, "the renunciation of the past and the revolt against stable traditions urge one to look back, to see if some of what was left behind, abandoned, and forgotten as unnecessary is not close to us, and actually quite necessary."²⁷³ Two years later, Voronskii's slogan, "Forward to the classics, to Gogol, to Tolstoy, to Shchedrin" was used widely.²⁷⁴ This trio of early Romantic authors, with Pushkin leading Gogol and Tolstoy by a hair, was definitive for the Russian literary tradition, even while authors like Dostoyevsky, still published and studied, were suspected of idealist, reactionary tendencies.²⁷⁵ Use of traditional literature was thus firmly mandated by Moscow itself. A good deal of interpretation, of course, was required in order to put this strategy into practice.

This emphasis on traditional literature met with different responses in Poland and Germany. The Polish party elite, which was generally well-educated and more closely related to the literary world, was enthusiastic about the spread of Polish classics. Not only party members like Jakub Berman and Jerzy Borejsza, who were enmeshed with the cultural world, but even General Secretary Bierut, generally known as a philistine and no friend to the arts, publicly proclaimed Mickiewicz's brilliance and importance to the state, and supported the public works projects that would stamp his image across the country. As the author's statue was erected in Warsaw, Bierut declared, "Today's generation of working people do not only raise a bronze monument to the great revolutionary of Romanticism

²⁷³ Stephanie Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin: Russia's Myth of a National Poet* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 92.

²⁷⁴ Natalia Kornienko, "Literary Criticism and Cultural Policy During the New Economic Policy, 1921-1927," in *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism: The Soviet Age and Beyond*, ed. E. A. Dobrenko and Galin Tihanov (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 28.

²⁷⁵ Caryl Emerson, "Literary Theory in the Twenties: Four Options and a Practicum," in *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism: The Soviet Age and Beyond*, ed. E. A. Dobrenko and Galin Tihanov (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 66, 75.

Adam Mickiewicz, but a monument based on the deepest and ever richer bedrock of the spirit of the Polish people.”²⁷⁶

In contrast, in Germany, older party members, including even one as high up as First Secretary Walter Ulbricht, tended to be suspicious of what they viewed as cultural superstructure, and traditional literature seemed even less concrete, useful, or ideologically sound than contemporary literature. In a conference devoted to the question of educating the country’s workers, Ulbricht broke out in frustration, “too few classics? No! Rather we always have too many.”²⁷⁷ Formally, then, the conferences and talks for the East German (and, to a lesser extent, the Polish) censor’s office and the planning committees gave scant mention to the issue of classics. In theory, their publication was never a priority; it is true that in Germany and Poland, the publication of national classics in the late forties and early fifties hovered between one and four percent of the books published per year, making it natural that they should require more proportional attention.²⁷⁸ On the other hand, it is worth considering that in the United States in 1999, the much larger category of “literature,” comprising both foreign and contemporary writers, made up only three percent of the books published.²⁷⁹ Whatever enemies classical literature had among party philistines, its juggernaut was unaffected.

Part of the reason for this resilience may be that traditional literature had as many unquestioning defenders as it did implacable opponents. Among the everyday censors, there were two main points of view, from which few but the most discerning deviated. On the one hand, there were the radical communists, who were willing to ignore the party’s formal policy in order to restrict any classic that came across their desks. It is difficult to track any single censor closely enough to watch him comment on a range of traditional books, but the tone of their criticism implies that their objection is not to the style or themes of a particular author, but to the irrelevance, or even reactionary danger of all work from the benighted past. Thus, one irate censor, referring to Mickiewicz’s Konrad Wallenrod, said,

²⁷⁶ Bolesław Bierut, „Zespolic romantyzm rewolucyjny naszego Wieszcza z romantyzmem czynu Polskich mas pracujacych,” *Dziennik Polski* 1950, nr 29, 1; cited in Anna Artwińska, *Poeta w służbie polityki : O Mickiewiczu w PRL i Goethem w NRD* (Poznań: Wydawn. Poznańskie, 2009), 40.

²⁷⁷ Hoffmann, memo, “Einige vorläufige erste Schlußfolgerungen” [13 June 1953], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1889, bl. 6.

²⁷⁸ Table [1952], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1871, bl. 64.

²⁷⁹ R.R. Bowker LLC, “New Book Titles and Editions, 2002-2011,” 5 June 2012, from R.R. Bowker LLC website, http://www.bowker.com/assets/downloads/products/isbn_output_2002-2011.pdf.

“Similarly, in matters of national history, there was a clear reluctance toward everything Russian. The editor has removed all of these errors and given explanation and would eliminate, if I may say so much, all of the earlier errors and omissions.”²⁸⁰ At the other end of the spectrum is the majority of censors, who appear to have considered any and all classical authors safe for public consumption. If some of these were the literary types who actually came to the censor’s office to be involved in the dissemination of works they loved, the attitude was prevalent enough to suggest that even more were educated workers whose schools had engrained in them a deep respect for the classics. In this mode, a German censor of a new collection of Goethe’s works declared that he combined “the high humanistic ideals of the era and the living forces of German folk culture in one German national culture.”²⁸¹ Another common form of review might express a wider range of personal feelings on the work in question, but ultimately would decide that its publication was necessary for the sake of the national literature. All but the most zealously militant Communists, in fact, felt some sort of responsibility for the ever-present task of “raising the cultural level of the nation,” and to have assumed that republishing the best books of their own school days was a necessary element in that purpose. None of these responses, wherever they fell on the scale of positive to negative, responded to the question of traditional literature as a unified whole. They did not enter into the question of how the national canon ought to be composed, or which authors within it ought to be promoted or demoted.

It was here that the cultural elite held sway. If the everyday censors tended to pass every established work that crossed their desks, it is also true that those works had previously been culled at a much higher level. Franz Kafka, for example, was not published anywhere behind the Iron Curtain until the late fifties, Zygmunt Krasiński was limited to letters and the *Un-Divine Comedy* until the early sixties, and Heinrich von Kleist disappeared entirely until the mid-fifties. These were not random choices or prohibitions, but the result of intense meditation on the theory and strategy of national literary heritage. Nor were such elite conclusions foregone; these strategies varied to meet the particular needs and exigencies of their states.

²⁸⁰ Mieczysław Flena, recenzja, “Tom VI pism Mickiewicz (czytelnik)” [5 April 1949], AAN, GUKPPIW 145, k. 142.

²⁸¹ Artwińska, *Poeta w służbie polityki*, 96.

In the wake of the Second World War, the nature of Germany's national identity was a problem not only for the divided state, but more broadly for all of Europe. To foreign leaders it seemed clear that the recent cataclysm had been at once a uniquely German phenomenon, propelled by some defect in the nation's character or history, as well as a symptom of a larger Western malaise. The resolution of both of these problems relied on the creation of a grand European narrative according to which Germany's particularity could be evaluated. It is not coincidental that in this era, Western Civilization courses that had begun in the wake of the First World War in the United States became standard throughout the United States and more popular in Europe.²⁸² While the Western allies created a narrative that mainly revolved around the growth of individualism (from the Renaissance to the Reformation and on through the Enlightenment), the Communists focused naturally enough on successive revolutions. In Germany, these narratives were complicated by the haunting presence of the Nazis. Paradoxically, both sides of Germany became centers of European identity at that moment. Faced with a Fascist past that had plainly proven the antithesis of any healthy European tradition and the conviction that rehabilitation was a sounder course than wild vilification of the defeated enemy, the non-Fascist strain in German history became, almost by definition, the very essence of Europeanism. Discovering this strain, though, was difficult. The Nazis had cavalierly labeled most of the significant art of the past twenty years degenerate, but their tastes in earlier work were all-embracing. Because the Nazis had left so little of German literary tradition untouched, it was impossible for the GDR to simply dismiss as fascist all that the Nazis had embraced. Instead, it became necessary for the GDR to resort to some abstract idea of an essence of Fascism that could be detected and deemphasized in earlier works. For these theories, East Germany looked to writers who had early on opposed Nazi aesthetics, and thus had the most credibility.

In the event, the guiding mind behind the GDR's choice of literary heroes was Georg Lukács, the Hungarian theorist and critic. Having converted from an iconoclast existentialism to Marxism in 1918, Lukács spent most of his career integrating classicism and Marxist aesthetics.²⁸³ Although his concerns were formed in the interwar world, rebelling against philistine bourgeois romanticism of his youth, they were almost

²⁸² Gilbert Allardyce, "The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course," *The American Historical Review* 87, no. 3 (1982): 716.

²⁸³ Arpad Kadarkay, *The Lukács Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 3-5.

preternaturally relevant to the post-war German situation. Lukács had, in fact, been among the first to identify what he considered a dangerous romanticism in the Nazi party. His early objection to Hitler won him no small measure of legitimacy. While he was later criticized as a Stalinist toady, from the thirties through the fifties he was the model of a Communist intellectual, and his ideas seemed relevant and timely. Even during Soviet art's most revolutionary period, from the Revolution to the thirties, Lukács had been more interested in the tradition of classical literature than in avant-garde innovation. When the shift to Socialist Realism made an appreciation of this tradition necessary, Lukács's work provided a ready guide. Even before the war, in the twenties and thirties, he had been an influential figure among the leftist academics and critics of Berlin and befriended promising young writers and scholars like Johannes Becher, Anna Seghers, and Alexander Abusch.²⁸⁴ He spent the war arguing with members of the Soviet Academy of Sciences' Institute for Philosophy in Moscow, and when the conflict ended, he and his Berlin friends all found themselves in prominent places in their governments' cultural apparatus.

Lukács, who had spent most of the thirties developing a coherent genealogy of fascism, positioned the Nazis as part of a dark, irrational side within German romanticism.²⁸⁵ Within this context, the opposing values of Enlightenment and rationality became both aesthetically and historically important, allied with the forces of revolution. In Lukács's argument, Goethe, seen as an Enlightenment figure, represented the bourgeoisie in its pure, revolutionary moment. In this scheme, the Enlightenment represented "the avant-garde of the revolutionary bourgeoisie in science, art and life" in tandem with the French Revolution. At the time, the Enlighteners opposed the "intellectualist frigidity as well as [the] irrationality" of the "aristocratic conventions of the time."²⁸⁶ By 1848, though, this revolutionary spirit had died out, and the bourgeoisie had assumed the place that the aristocracy once held. "While on the upsurge, bourgeois philosophy had challenged the feudal absolutist system, and the interpretation of this challenge had occasioned its controversies over objectives, whereas the chief enemy now was the proletarian world-

²⁸⁴ Mary Gluck, "Toward a Historical Definition of Modernism: Georg Lukacs and the Avant-Garde," *The Journal of Modern History* 58, no. 4 (1986): 851.

²⁸⁵ Neubauer and Török; Nicholas Vazsonyi, *Lukács Reads Goethe: From Aestheticism to Stalinism* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1997), 96.

²⁸⁶ György Lukács, *Goethe and His Age*, trans. Robert Anchor (London: Merlin Press, 1968), 36-37, originally written in 1936.

view.”²⁸⁷ Since the proletarian moment had been denied in 1848, Lukács, together with the orthodox Marxist historiography of the time, believed that it had only begun to be fulfilled in 1917 by the Russian revolution and continued in the creation of the postwar people’s republics. In this way, despite the gap of years, postwar Germany could conceive of itself as the direct successor to Goethe’s work. As he was working for a synthesis between modern realism and tradition, Lukács maintained that, “Werther offers an artistic fusion of the great realist tendencies of the eighteenth century.”²⁸⁸ After the shift from revolution as a radical leap to a utopian kingdom to a revolutionary present, embodied in everyday life, this sense of process and culmination became crucial. In the tradition that the GDR constructed, then, realism and rationalism struggled together against the darker forces of formalism and irrationalism. In this understanding, the GDR represented the purest form of the Enlightenment and spirit of Germany’s revolutionary classes in the same way that the Nazis represented the decayed bourgeoisie’s crass, commercial militarism.

Lukács’s historical assessment of the Second World War was shared by scholars from both sides of the political spectrum. The historiographies of the immediate postwar years represented the descent into Fascism not as the dark side of modern rationality, but as a fundamentally irrational episode. The Nazis were represented by blood, nationalism, mysticism, and particularism. The natural antidote to this nineteenth-century romanticism seemed to be the cool, humanist rationalism of the Enlightenment. For both East and West Germany, then, Goethe represented this enlightened historical trend that promised a way toward a democratic future. In the same spirit, Schiller became a national hero second only to Goethe himself, and his work was celebrated (this time on the anniversary of his birth, rather than his death) with similar fanfare in 1955.

The idea of carefully curating a literary heritage was not limited to the classical moment. If Weimar classicism as the keystone of the narrative required disproportionate attention and resources, this meant that other periods had to be even more carefully selected. The overarching strategy behind these choices was rarely, if ever, discussed in official government circles, but the result was a narrative in which the emphasis rested on the classical and realist moments, while the romantic and expressionist were viewed with more suspicion. They were by no means prohibited, occluded, or automatically passed over, but they did receive less prominent places in

²⁸⁷ György Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter Palmer (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981), 310-311, originally completed in 1952.

²⁸⁸ Lukács, *Goethe and His Age*, 44.

national literary histories and came more slowly to press. Heinrich Heine, for example, perhaps Germany's most celebrated poet, did not lose his canonical status. The place of romanticism as a period, though, was diminished. Heine continued to be published in all but the harshest years of austerity, a stamp was commissioned for the anniversary of his death, and literary societies were maintained to study his work. But the contrast between his stamp and the celebration of Schiller's death is striking. There had been moments when Heine could unequivocally be called *the* German national poet, and this was no longer the case. He was, at best, third in line for publishing and public consideration, and his name was absent from as many lists of great German authors as it was present. For less prominent or more suspect authors, the situation was even more marked. Heinrich Kleist, for whom one of Germany's most prestigious literary prizes had been named, was neither published nor performed from 1945 to 1953. Even then, only small portions of his work returned to broad circulation. Roughly a contemporary of Goethe's (he was born twenty-five years later, but also died twenty-one years earlier), Kleist was nonetheless classed as a romantic rather than a classicist. His complex, often ironic relationship to the authoritarian state and to ideas of the nation meant that his work sat uncomfortably with postwar Germany's sensitivity to the taint of militant nationalism or proto-Nazism. This was enough to ensure that an author who had been almost the essence of the canon should become transgressive.²⁸⁹ In contrast, the Expressionists were generally dismissed as degenerate formalists and avoided altogether. This was the more striking because many of them had agendas that were distinctly sympathetic to the Communists.

It bears repeating that the narrative that developed was neither obvious nor even necessarily intuitive. Goethe, for all of his iconic humanism, was no great supporter of the French Revolution.²⁹⁰ He belonged to the generation of thinkers who had been profoundly traumatized by Napoleon's march eastward, and who reacted to it with a turn toward the local and particular. Scholars have noted that while Goethe was certainly progressive, he favored the process of slow, irresistible evolution over violent change.²⁹¹ Daniel Farrelly points out that even *Faust* has a difficult ending, where, just before his death and acceptance into heaven, Faust believes himself to be directing a utopian society. In reality,

²⁸⁹ Honnef, *Heinrich Von Kleist*, 43-44.

²⁹⁰ John R. Williams, *The Life of Goethe: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 249.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

he is hearing Mephistopheles' henchmen dig his own grave. Seen through the lens of one postwar Marxist interpretation, this disturbing view of utopia offers no alternative to an acceptance of the bourgeois, capitalist future.²⁹² It was well known in the GDR that outside his literary work, Goethe was even more explicit in his opposition to the revolution. He referred to it as "this most terrible of events," and declared that its "gruesome deeds [had] shocked the world."²⁹³ Even in his own day, this position was noted by more radical reformers. In a conversation with his friend, biographer, and agent Johann Eckermann, Goethe complained that his critics branded him "a friend of the status quo" because "[he] hated the revolution."²⁹⁴ Even more importantly for the postwar position, the Nazis had adopted this interpretation. In their historical schema, the French Revolution was perverse in that the French nation had divided and turned on itself, and dangerous in that it had then sought to impose its vitiated Enlightenment ideas on its neighbors. In Goethe's rejection of the Revolution's violence, the Nazis read agreement with their own anti-Enlightenment position. In his service to Frederick the Great and indefatigable championing of the German people, they saw a model civil servant and subject of the Volk.²⁹⁵

If the German Communists made Goethe a figure revolutionary enough to champion, they denied his romantic successors any revolutionary potential. The definition of the romantic period is notoriously slippery, encompassing figures as reactionary as Herder and as liberal as Shelley. While the most influential German critiques of the forties and fifties aligned romanticism, irrationalism, and the rise of Fascism, in fact the movement could as easily be associated with a revolutionary reaction to the oppressive structures of the nineteenth century.²⁹⁶ Indeed, during those same postwar years, some writers of both the Right and the Left forwarded an alternate opinion, suggesting that romanticism was inherently

²⁹² Daniel J. Farrelly, *Goethe in East Germany, 1949-1989: Toward a History of Goethe Reception in the GDR* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1998), 89.

²⁹³ Vazsonyi, *Lukács Reads Goethe*, 102.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ Artwińska, *Poeta w służbie polityki*; Rüdiger Scholz, *Die Geschichte der Faust-Forschung: Weltanschauung, Wissenschaft und Goethes Drama*, 2 vols. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011), v. 1, 299-324.

²⁹⁶ Most recently: John W. Bugg, *Five Long Winters: The Trials of British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 3-5; Kenneth R. Johnston, *Unusual Suspects: Pitt's Reign of Alarm and the Lost Generation of the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), xv-xx. Notably, Poland also adopted this interpretation.

revolutionary.²⁹⁷ This was not a concession of one side to the principles of the other, but a shared sense of cultural and historical background.

The postwar model of healthy culture in both East and West Germany, then, was Weimar classicism, understood to be most fully embodied in Goethe. This apotheosis had something of the character of a revival about it: while Goethe had certainly never been unpopular, from the late nineteenth century through the interwar years, his untouchably canonical status had actually led to a backlash in which he was understood as the safe choice of the petit bourgeois who could only aspire to culture. Moreover, both Schiller and Lessing could also make strong claims to be the ambassador of Enlightenment.²⁹⁸ In the light of that rather tepid prewar reception, the amount of attention lavished on the writer even in the immediate postwar years when any publication at all was a struggle was profound—especially considering that publishing through the mid-fifties was a zero-sum game. Resources were scarce enough that the more work by one author was published, the fewer other writers could be printed.

Part of the reason, or at least the excuse, for his wild predominance was that his 200th birthday fell fortuitously in 1949, when Germany was badly in need of a reason to celebrate its literary heritage. The celebrations were impressive. There were two major productions of *Faust*. Goethe's complete works were published in three volumes, with new "reader friendly commentary."²⁹⁹ There were editions of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* for both scholarly and mass readerships. The statue was erected in Weimar. There were special events and displays for school children, and talks, symposia, and conferences from the *Kulturbund* and various literary societies. At one such talk, before the Weimar premiere of *Faust*, Johannes Becher referred to Goethe as "our liberator."³⁰⁰ He was even cast as the source of the German stream of Humanism, which moved from him

²⁹⁷ Ulrike Dedner, *Deutsche Widerspiele der Französischen Revolution: Reflexionen des Revolutionsmythos im selbstbezüglichen Spiel von Goethe bis Dürrenmatt*, Hermaea, (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 2003), especially after p. 191. In the last third of her book, Dedner discusses the views of Paul Weiss, Heiner Müller, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, and others.

²⁹⁸ Paul Gerhard Klussmann and Heinrich Mohr, *Deutsche Misere einst und jetzt: die deutsche Misere als Thema der Gegenwartsliteratur; Das Preussensyndrom in der Literatur der DDR*, Jahrbuch Zur Literatur in Der DDR (Bonn: Bouvier, 1982), 208.

²⁹⁹ Lothar Ehrlich, Gunther Mai, and Ingeborg Cleve, *Weimarer Klassik in der Ära Ulbricht* (Köln: Böhlau, 2000), 140.

³⁰⁰ Johannes Robert Becher, *Publistik III*, Bd. 16 of *Gesammelte Werke* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1979), 251.

directly to Marx, Liebknecht, and Thälmann.³⁰¹ Lukács called him “the living Prometheus, the light-bringer who, for the Germans’ suffering, was freely chained to the rocks, was often rent by the eagles of reaction.”³⁰² Another quote from Becher in a speech inaugurating the Goethe-year proclaimed that “Goethe came near us, Goethe was there when we were lost, Goethe’s omnipresence was the light in our windows. We do not say: back to Goethe, but rather: forward to Goethe, and with Goethe forward. This is the hour of birth and of rebirth. Goethe: the dawn of our people, the dawn of mankind.”³⁰³

The redemptive imagery here is striking and unexpected. Suddenly, it is not the cool rationality of the Enlightenment that is attractive, but something distinctly more visceral. The language is positively messianic; indeed, it echoes Voronskii’s slogan, which urged “forward to the classics.” To understand this odd turn, it may be helpful to look at Bertolt Brecht’s version of Goethe as a Marxist alternative that resolutely resisted this sentiment, and see why it was rejected. Bertolt Brecht was Lukács’s main opponent in literary theory for the GDR. Brecht was the perpetual outsider. His works were consistently treated more leniently than those of less important authors, but they were also always approached gingerly, and even with suspicion. This position served the author well, allowing him to remain Communism’s truest champion while he also critiqued it from the inside. At the same time, Brecht’s iconoclasm reinforced Lukács’s position as the arbiter of Socialist taste. Unlike Lukács, he adamantly opposed the idea of entering into the struggles of the past as a model of the present. Brecht preferred authors who had separated their work most explicitly and honestly from the apparent reality of their day. Among more contemporary authors, Lukács was a great admirer of Thomas Mann, while Brecht carried on an ongoing feud with the author. Conversely, Brecht respected Kafka as one of the great writers of his day, while Lukács saw only meaningless, sterile absurdity. Most importantly, Brecht insisted that the audience must not be allowed to sympathize with the characters in a drama, a position that was fundamentally antithetical to the Lukácsian view espoused by the main current in the GDR.

³⁰¹ Gunther Mai, “Staatsgründungsprozeß und Nationale Frage Als Konstitutive Elemente Der Kulturpolitik Der SED,” in *Weimarer Klassik in der Ära Ulbricht*, ed. Lothar Ehrlich, Gunther Mai, and Ingeborg Cleve (Köln: Böhlau, 2000), 41.

³⁰² Ehrlich, Mai, and Cleve, *Weimarer Klassik in der Ära Ulbricht*, 12.

³⁰³ Gerd Dietrich, “‘Die Goethepächter’: Klassikmythos in Der Politik Der SED,” in *Weimarer Klassik in der Ära Ulbricht*, ed. Lothar Ehrlich, Gunther Mai, and Ingeborg Cleve (Köln: Böhlau, 2000), 159.

When Brecht began to meddle with Goethe, then, the results were explosive. The 1953 production of *Urfaust*, Goethe's earliest version of the Faust legend, is illustrative of the elite approach to the classical tradition. Predictably, Brecht stood apart from the prevailing attitude of the moment in so far as he attempted to distance his audience from Faust rather than using the character as a proxy for Germany's postwar struggle. In his production, Faust was a legitimately tragic figure, meant to be more closely related to the historical past than to the classical tradition. Rather than falling victim to the infinitely redeemable fault of thirsting for knowledge and enlightenment, the production suggested that his fatal flaw was the betrayal of his peasant roots. This production, staged by the Berliner Ensemble at the Deutsches Theatre, was fairly modest. The reactions to it were not. In the party newspaper, *New Germany (Neues Deutschland)*, Johanna Rudolph declared that the production could "only be understood as a rejection of the classical traditions of our national culture," and suggested that the otherwise talented ensemble had been sadly led astray by Brecht and his methodological principles.³⁰⁴ Even more seriously, Alexander Abusch, a literary critic and party member who would later become the Minister of Culture, had already condemned the production to the Akademie der Künste. In his comments, later printed in *Sinn und Form*, he remarked categorically that the production was "unhistoric and anti-national."³⁰⁵

In the light of his other work, Brecht's production of *Urfaust* does not appear controversial. He was not challenging party leadership or strategy, or even the interpretation of Marxism. The key problem with his production seems to be that it was unfeeling. In 1847, Engels had declared that German history was "one continuing misery." This *misère*, since he had originally used the French word, was understood as the German tendency to accept a lamentable status quo, rather than risking revolution and liberation. Engels had, in fact, used the phrase against Goethe, whom he characterized as "at times world-despising, at times a considerate, contented, narrow-minded philistine," who had ultimately been overcome by the *misère*.³⁰⁶ In the ruins that were left after the war, the idea became especially relevant to the German Marxists. It suggested that the triumph of fascism was the last in a long series of failed revolutions and capitulations to oppressors. If the *Deutsche misère* was an overly charitable reading of

³⁰⁴ Farrelly, *Goethe in East Germany*, 92.

³⁰⁵ David Blake, review of *Die Debatte um Hanns Eislers "Johann Faustus": eine Dokumentation*, by Hans Bunge, *Notes* 51, no. 4 (1995): 1287.

³⁰⁶ Vazsonyi, *Lukács Reads Goethe*, 72.

recent events, it nevertheless provided both a sense of continuity with the past and a way toward the future by finally embracing revolution. One might suggest that it was precisely because Goethe had stumbled over the revolution and struggled with the *misère* that he was so relevant to contemporary Germans who were engaged in the same process. Having been at the same place, he could, in fact, go forward with them, this time escaping the cycle and moving toward real progress. By denying the possibility of sympathy, then, Brecht tore apart this entire narrative.

If Germany in its postwar fervor had all but vilified romanticism, Poland embraced it. Mickiewicz was to the intelligentsia of Warsaw everything that Goethe was to the *Kulturbund* in Berlin. The event that sealed Mickiewicz's place and demonstrated the enthusiasm of his devotees happened in 1948, the sesquicentennial of his birth. The rather whimsical anniversary is an indication of the need at that moment for both celebration and a national poet, especially since the 100th anniversary of Mickiewicz's death was approaching in just seven years. One of the first major literary events in postwar Poland, the celebration of this jubilee was nothing short of a spectacle. For the entire year, there were special editions of his work released, education displays organized, public readings held, and contests organized for everyone from workers to academics.³⁰⁷ With pictures and busts in schoolrooms and public spaces and a prominent statue in Warsaw, the author's presence was strewn across Poland as a symbol of the nation.³⁰⁸ In preparation for the celebrations, the Ministry of Culture had, as early as the previous year, requested the censors office to select the works for both celebratory editions and special reduced-price runs for mass distribution.³⁰⁹ The ministry was the closest connection between the censor's office and both the government ministries and the party; it often requested recommendations for prizes or candidates for subsidized literature. The result in this case was that by the end of the year, the censor and the Ministry of Culture had tacitly awarded Mickiewicz an unquestioned standing in Polish, comparable to Dickens or Shakespeare in English, and saturated the country with his most famous work, *Pan*

³⁰⁷ Minutes on Konferencja w sprawie Komitetu Wykonawczego Obchodu 150-lecia Urodzin Adama Mickiewicza [1948], AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII 94, k. 69-70.

³⁰⁸ Artwińska, *Poeta w służbie polityki*, 31.

³⁰⁹ Transcript, Przemówienie tow. Bremana [sic] ogłoszone na konferencji w sprawach kulturalnych w KC. PZPR. [31 May 1949], AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII 1, k. 16-18. Note that this quote is from tow. Sokorski, not the eponymous Berman.

Tadeusz. This was not a hard sell; he was embraced enthusiastically by most of the population.

Even more than Goethe for Germany, though, Mickiewicz at first appears to have been an unlikely choice as the apogee of a Polish canon that aimed to be Socialist. This is not to suggest that there was ever the real chance of banning his work, but that, like Heine in Germany, he could have been less emphasized while another author took the limelight. There was no shortage of eligible authors in line to be the nation's hero. If the goal had been to highlight a peasant tradition, or at least to shift the historical emphasis away from gentry contributions, Cyprian Norwid might have been an attractive candidate for the spotlight. If realism were the paramount virtue, Bolesław Prus or Eliza Orzeszkowa might have been the leading figures in a literary narrative. Indeed, all of these authors played prominent roles in the literary histories that were drawn up after the war. Balzac, Stendhal, Turgeniew, Gogol, Krąszewski, Prus, and Orzeszkowa were all listed in the cohort that created "literature that speaks to reality, [...] to denounce the power of all social injustice, all the contradictions of antagonism, and the injuries of the capitalist bourgeois order" in the middle of the nineteenth century. One might have expected an author like Mickiewicz, whose mystical, not to say religious, idea of Poland as the "Christ of Nations," equated Poland's suffering under Partition with the crucifixion, to be ineligible. On the contrary, though, he was listed (with Pushkin) as the originator of the style and the transition from the "romantic world of pure fantasy."³¹⁰ The question then becomes: why was Mickiewicz so important? What did he represent that made him more than the leading member of the reactionary bourgeois canon?

As far as the cultural leaders of the 1940s and 1950s were concerned, Mickiewicz was relevant because he shared Poland's greatest national fear: division and loss of independence. Even at his most messianic, the redemption he called for was fundamentally national. Narratives of Mickiewicz's life written in the forties and fifties tended to emphasize the enervated condition of the Polish nation in the years around his birth, and frame his life as a heroic struggle for freedom and justice for his people. It is no coincidence, for example, that Mieczysław Jastrun's 1953 biography situates the year of Mickiewicz's birth as the ending of the French Revolution and the death of the last Polish king; Polish independence and revolution are the two axes of his narrative.³¹¹ Unlike the Germans speaking

³¹⁰ Stefan Żółkiewski, transcript, *Polityka kulturalne w dziedzinie literatury* [18 May 1949], AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII 69, k. 65.

³¹¹ Mieczysław Jastrun, *Adam Mickiewicz* (Warsaw: Polandia Pub. House, 1955), 5-6.

of Goethe, Polish biographers gave their poet no native “eagles of reaction” to torment him, perhaps because in Mickiewicz’s case, there was no need. On the one hand, he had embodied the Polish nation and given its struggle meaning, while on the other, his own life mirrored the ordeals of his state. Exiled to central Russia at age twenty-six for membership in the secret nationalist society he had helped form while at university, Mickiewicz was forbidden to return home even after his five-year sentence had been served. This circumstance, far from dampening his nationalistic feeling, apparently provided enough fuel for him to agitate for a free Poland for the rest of his life. His work, however, was dogged by poverty and mental illness, and he died at fifty-six, attempting to continue his fight against the Czar from Constantinople. He was buried in the cap of a Polish revolutionary.³¹² The Communists were deeply uncomfortable with the language of mysticism and messianic redemption, but it is not surprising that Mickiewicz’s biography resonated with men and women who believed that they, too, had fought and suffered for their nation from afar. Moreover, the tensions in Mickiewicz’s life, between nationalism and internationalism, suffering and revolution, echoed those that Poland faced in the narrative that the cultural elite were writing for themselves. In this way, Mickiewicz’s life became almost as important for cultural revival as his work—or rather, his life and his work combined to create a picture of neither a straightforward political activist nor a literary giant, but of a kind of synecdoche for Poland itself.

The most obvious answer to the question of his overwhelming dominance is that, in the minds of his promoters, Mickiewicz was the ultimate representative of a Polish revolution. Unlike Germany, Poland had no unified historical theory to guide its construction of a canon. Rather, a consensus developed among the artistically engaged party members that created a revolutionary past that could unite the country. One author maintained that Mickiewicz “focused in himself what was creative and progressive in European romanticism: his revolutionism, his democratic thought, his tendency to broad historical synthesis, and his humanism.”³¹³ The implicit idea that Mickiewicz’s political and stylistic revolutions were related was made plainer elsewhere. In the depth of the war, Jerzy Borejsza had written that Mickiewicz “was in his work, and will remain for all time, a

³¹² Roman Robert Koropecyj, *Adam Mickiewicz: The Life of a Romantic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 453-456. Koropecyj begins his conclusion as Jastrun opens his introduction: with a Polish prince and a French emperor. In this case, though, both Napoleon III and Czartoryski are judged defunct.

³¹³ Memo, Uwagi na margenesie montazu utworu A. Mickiewicza p.t. “Wieczoraica Mickiewiczowska,” AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII 94, k. 88.

great revolutionary of literary form and content; he was a revolutionary-democrat who loved the people and the oppressed and boldly stood on the path of revolution.”³¹⁴ The rhetorical move here is interesting, because the poet’s formative revolution was Poland’s November Uprising of 1830, when young Polish cadets and gentry attempted to overthrow Russian rule in the east. Even here, it is worth noting that Mickiewicz was traveling abroad by the time of the uprising, and was not allowed to return to Poland. The concerns of the uprising were more closely allied with an aristocratic patriotism than with the revolutionary desires of the lower classes.³¹⁵ To his twentieth-century reviewers, though, the demands of nationalism were read as a cry for justice and release from tyranny, as “a fight for new life” to make the world “happier and better.”³¹⁶ The idea of a battle “for our freedom and yours,” which began as a remembrance of the failed Decembrist revolt and universalized to become a statement of Polish unity with all struggling nations, here transformed again to become a cry of proletarian solidarity.

The link between Mickiewicz’s political and literary revolutionary movements makes this understanding possible by allowing the themes of his writing to interpret the character of not only his own actions, but the revolution itself. By presenting Mickiewicz as a hero in the struggle for justice for “the brotherhood of all mankind,” the Ministry of Culture and the censor’s office connected national partisanship with the universal proletarian struggle, suggesting that there might be no contradiction between two movements with justice at their center.³¹⁷ In texts from the very early *Ode to Youth* to, most notably, *Pan Tadeusz*, Mickiewicz showed both interest in and sympathy for the peasantry as representative of the earth that formed the nation itself. This was the foundation of the realism that the Communists celebrated in his work, and also the key to his revolutionary activity. The shift tacitly linked Poland’s entire history of failed national uprisings to the rising revolution of the proletariat.

In order to create a unified postwar Polish identity, the past, represented by Mickiewicz, had to create a revolutionary trajectory leading to the Communist present. Part of the key to creating this Mickiewicz lay

³¹⁴ Artwińska, *Poeta w służbie polityki*, 25-26.

³¹⁵ Keely Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848-1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 97.

³¹⁶ Wariant II—Programu dla Wystawy Autobusowej, *Słowo wiążące*, AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII 94, k. 99.

³¹⁷ Memo, Uwagi na marginesie montażu utworu A. Mickiewicza p.t. “Wieczoraica Mickiewiczowska,” AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII 94, k. 88.

with the peasantry. Indeed, Bierut's main statement on Mickiewicz, never recanted though it drew on a position laid out by Gomułka before his disgrace, focused repeatedly on the idea of his bardic role, connected uniquely to the soil of the nation.³¹⁸ The same impulse drove the organizers of the anniversary year, who were at pains to be sure that Mickiewicz was not only the poet of the people, but also the people's poet. To this end, they created separate pamphlets for educated workers, less educated ones, peasants, and students, organized essay contests carefully structured to avoid privileging the intelligentsia, took lending libraries and mobile displays into the countryside, and, of course, printed large runs of discounted editions.³¹⁹ In a way, these efforts can be understood as much as an attempt to unite the nation as one to reposition the author. Mickiewicz already belonged to the intelligentsia—at least one censor was frustrated with editions that seemed to be “only for professors”—but it was to be the role of the communists to bring him to the people who had always been his true audience.³²⁰ Thus, the committee planning the celebration posed itself the question of why the state would spare so many resources for the jubilee when towns were still being rebuilt, and answered, “Socialism is not only a system that fights for a certain economic existence for the broad mass of the people, but also, and this is primary, one that fights for the dignity of every man, for his spiritual and intellectual development, for a new style of life, for a new culture.”³²¹ The implication was that the culture was uniquely related to dignity, and that it could impart meaning even to concrete economics.

Clearly, this nationalist reading sat uneasily with Marxist orthodoxy. It trod perilously close to a conflation of the needs of the revolution with gross chauvinism. Thus, it was important to emphasize the universal import of Mickiewicz's work. One of his descendants, for example, too elderly to travel to the unveiling of his statue in Warsaw, moved from her ancestor's love of the nation to his ideal of a brotherhood of the people, concluding that, “the light of his spirit will pierce all of Poland to radiate through all the world.”³²² More officially, Borejsza concluded his comments

³¹⁸ Artwińska, *Poeta w służbie polityki*, 27-28; Mieczysław Inglot, *Wieszcz i pomniki: w kręgu XIX-i XX-wiecznej recepcji dzieł Adama Mickiewicza* (Wrocław: Wydawn. Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1999).

³¹⁹ Minutes, Protokół z narady partyjnej dla obchodu rocznicy mickiewiczowskiej, AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII 94, k. 73.

³²⁰ J. M. Bates, “Cenzura w epoce stalinowskiej,” *Teksty Drugie*, no. 1-2 (2000): 95-121.

³²¹ Program, imprezy dla czterech wystaw objazdowych opracowany przez Biuro Komitetu Mickiewiczowskiego, AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII 94, k. 97.

³²² Maria Mickiewicz, open letter, AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII 94, k.158.

on Mickiewicz's revolution, "he was an internationalist, who understood that the problem of his nation could be solved only in connection with the problems of other nations; he was far from nationalistic egoism."³²³

Of course, this vision of Mickiewicz was no more naturally occurring than Germany's view of Goethe. The two areas of difficulty were Mickiewicz's mystical turns, especially toward the end of his life, and his major play, *Dziady*. The first problem was a matter of the tension that remained between romanticism and realism. Realism was unquestionably the end toward which the censor's office and Ministry of Culture were trying to push their authors, but their mascot was a wild romantic. The solution was to suggest a divide within romanticism, between the "romantic world of pure fantasy," in Żółkiewski's formulation, and a more sober, more engaged version. In much the same way that Goethe represented a living, revolutionary alternative to the sterile excesses of the Rococo, Mickiewicz was meant to represent revolutionary progress within his own movement; thus, elements of mysticism were out of place, and viewed as aberrations. Even in the essay contests, it was made explicit that work dealing with the author's mystical themes or referring to him as a mystical figure should not be awarded. Older books celebrating Mickiewicz's messianic call were certainly not reprinted.

Much more dramatic was the government's decision to forbid the staging of *Dziady*, which returned with great fanfare two years after Stalin's death in 1955. The drama revolves around the events and ghosts of one Forefather's Eve in Lithuania. For censors sensitive to the problems of mysticism, there was a great deal in the play to criticize. Not only are most of the characters ghosts, they are ghosts interested in metaphysical problems of history, love, and salvation, to which none of the answers are straightforward. In reality, though, it was most likely only the third of the work's four parts that kept it from being performed. Written ten years after the other parts of the play, it was a direct response to the failed uprising against Russia of 1830. Among other memorable lines, it was the work where the idea of Poland as the Christ of Nations was first suggested. Since all of the characters in the third part were prisoners of a Russian tyrant, accused of conspiracy, and since the poetic drama advocates for continuing insurrection that must ultimately end in freedom, the usual explanation for its censorship is a simple matter of political exigency. This is certainly not untrue. At the same time, it is worth suggesting that a performance of *Dziady* might have revealed too much of the complex relationship between

³²³ Jerzy Borejsza, „Mickiewicz—taki, jakim jest,” *Literatura i mistectwo*, 1940, nr 3, s 41, cited in Artwińska, *Poeta w służbie polityki*, 26.

Mickiewicz's life and his work. If his revolutionary activity was understood through the lens of his written expression of proletarian sympathy, and his written work was enlivened and made relevant by his life's work fighting for Polish freedom, then *Dziady*, the piece explicitly about revolution, becomes the crux of his entire identity. Even without being anti-Russian, it would have been tremendously unstable. For this reason it is unsurprising that the piece remained a flash-point for revolutionary activity through the end of the PRL. In 1968, Polish protests involved students and professors marching on Mickiewicz's statue to demand more performances, and Solidarity workers recited *Dziady* along with their own protest songs on the picket lines.³²⁴ In 1981, Katowica's chapter of Solidarity sponsored a hybrid production that marked off the performance space with a cross and a copy of the Black Madonna. Baiting the censor, the players waited until the final performance to add a portrait of Pope John Paul II over the stage.³²⁵

In the final analysis, Goethe and Mickiewicz became something more than canonical for their countries. From one perspective, it would be possible to say that they were actually canon-making, that comparison to their work helped determine what was and was not canonical. More than this, though, they made meaning. They provided narratives that expressed the desires and ambitions of the new states, linking the past to the present, and implying a future that could move beyond its troubles. With the men and women who interpreted them after the war, they also suggested a set of themes for their state's literature. In the GDR, the central concern was not only Germany's immediate past, or even its revolutionary failures, but the sense that they were an affliction to the German people. In Poland, the question was as much one of the country's current independence as its revolutionary past. In this way, past literature could be used to suggest tacitly what contemporary work could not say. It gave each state a way to process its recent trauma. At the same time, they provided a way forward, both by suggesting national greatness and by linking the successes of the past to the postwar context. Through Goethe, East Germany connected itself to a specifically humanist revolutionary promise. Through Mickiewicz,

³²⁴ "The Aftermath of *Dziady*," *Minerva* 6, no. 4 (1968): 759-761; Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 193.

³²⁵ Halina Filipowicz, "Polish Theatre after Solidarity: A Challenging Test," *TDR* (1988-) 36, no. 1 (1992): 81.

the Polish Communist government connected itself to a tradition of revolution in the name of independence and freedom. Thus, as much as hope, they provided sympathy and encouragement. In this way, they moved beyond the status of writers or historical figures, and became symbols of their nations' aspirations. These choices, however natural they might have seemed, were less organic than they were strategic. One they had been made, though, they set their countries on a particular path to consolidate and cultivate their national identities.

Chapter Six: Literature from the Outside World and Questions of Identity

The anniversary of Montesquieu's death was not celebrated in 1955 in Berlin, nor were there remembrances of William Wordsworth in Warsaw in 1950. This is not surprising, as East Germany and Poland were hardly in a state of fraternal amity with Great Britain or France at the time. In their dealings with each other, where such concord existed at least as a formality, Germany and Poland politely observed reciprocal anniversaries of great authors with no great enthusiasm. From the outward, public view, then, it is not immediately apparent that foreign literature was a significant force in negotiating national identity. Publishing records, however, tell a different story. Although neither Poland nor East Germany had a taste for Wordsworth's poetry, both of them did publish Montesquieu, along with a wide assortment of other authors, from Shakespeare to Dickens, or Homer to Jack London. Moreover, each had specific offices set up to facilitate the exchange of books between themselves and other socialist states. Anything with sufficient canonical status in one of these states was guaranteed to be printed throughout the Warsaw Pact area at some point.

When these books are taken as an aggregate, a pattern begins to emerge. If traditional domestic literature had been used to create and respond to national narratives and identities, foreign literature served the same purpose in defining each country's relationship to the outside world. Often, these relationships reflected prewar power dynamics: the GDR continued to make choices that set itself in the center of world literary development, while Poland betrayed a certain anxiety to be accepted as part of the conversation of Western literature. Interestingly, it is in their dealings with each other that these traditional roles broke down for both Poland and the GDR. The moral weight of the war provided enough heft for Poland to overcome its traditional cultural deference toward imperial Germany, while the guilt of perpetrating wartime atrocities compelled the GDR to open itself up to less culpable states, which it had previously dismissed, to negotiate its national identity after Fascism. The hierarchies that defined the two states' postwar cultural exchange were inverted.

Office Politics in Germany and Poland

None of these changes in attitudes towards the outside states, though they may have been dramatic, seem to have been a matter of policy for the censors' offices. Neither the upper echelons of the party nor the rank and file censors developed a really unified position relating to outside literature.

Some hardliners were willing to expunge even standard Western works from their countries' canons: a Polish censor fretted about the difficulty of workers reading Walter Scott, who was considered too bourgeois. Others maintained that it was important to remain aware of even objectionable works. Indeed, German publishers sometimes spent decades building, abandoning, and rebuilding campaigns to publish Western authors.³²⁶ Likewise, there were nationalists in Poland who approached their Socialist neighbors with open enmity, while other groups believed sincerely that the new world order meant it was time to put aside petty grudges. For example, two censors from Lublin and Poznań disagreed over the publication of anti-German books, with one willing to disparage Germans even though they were both now members of the Socialist brotherhood. At all levels of literary production in Poland and the GDR, censors and publishers were convinced that the books could influence both the specific reader and the more abstract narrative of literary history.

Though no one acknowledged it explicitly, the requirements of foreign and cultural policy continually clashed with each other. In terms of foreign policy, the most orthodox position, maintained in Moscow and at least formally adhered to by the highest ranks of the party, insisted on Socialist brotherhood within the Eastern Bloc and extreme suspicion of anything coming from outside.³²⁷ In 1950, Stalin had neatly connected the diplomatic and cultural realms with his immediately iconic formulation that,

every basis has its corresponding superstructure. [...] the capitalist basis has its own superstructure; so has the socialist basis. If the basis changes or is eliminated, then following after this its superstructure changes or is eliminated. [...] having come into being, it becomes an exceedingly active force, actively assisting its basis to take shape and consolidate itself, and doing everything it can to help the new system finish off and eliminate the old basis and the old classes.³²⁸

³²⁶ Anna-Christina Giovanopoulos, "'Humanistischer Aufschrei' or 'Anarchister Protest'?" in *Amerikanische Populärkultur in Deutschland*, ed. Heike Paul and Katja Kanzler (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2002), 87-110.

³²⁷ For a concise overview of the situation, see Norman Naimark, "The Sovietization of Eastern Europe, 1944-1953," in vol. 1 of *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 189.

³²⁸ Joseph Stalin, *Concerning Marxism in Linguistics*, "Soviet News" Booklet (London: "Soviet News," 1950), 3-4.

These positions manifested themselves in literary planning when speakers at censors' conferences cautioned against "militaristic," "imperialistic," or "decadent" Western writing. These tensions also played themselves out in negotiations for international copyright, where any hint of bad faith between East and West could stall bargaining on books written by Western authors for months. On an even more practical level, exchange rates fluctuated wildly in response to international events, putting already expensive Western titles out of reach of the budgets of Socialist states.³²⁹ Conversely, book imports were eased among the Eastern Bloc, where prices were capped and dedicated offices existed to expedite exchange. Amongst these neighbors, transmission was encouraged: in the GDR, for example, the Ministry of Culture set up standards for "priority literature" which revolved around creating work that "unmasked imperialism, especially aggressive USA-imperialism and the resurgent imperialism of West Germany."³³⁰ By the same token, Stalin's rhetoric of Socialist brotherhood discouraged Socialist states from speaking too strongly against the literary efforts of their brothers. Within the world of foreign policy, Socialist authors were often easily publishable. By contrast no author from a capitalist state could be considered safe, and their road to publication was often much more difficult.

At the same time, without any apparent sense of contradiction, the very elites whose foreign policy demanded a Manichean view of relations with the West maintained a literary position that pointed in the opposite direction. The Soviet Union, which had never stopped printing works from capitalist countries, fit them into a wider scheme of Marxist aesthetics, meant to culminate in Soviet literary production.³³¹ Soviet debates routinely focused on Boccaccio and Shakespeare, Balzac and Zola as well as on Russian writers, and writers like Jack London were continually popular.³³² Following this model but inflecting it to their own situations, elites in both

³²⁹ Giovanopoulos, "Humanistischer Aufschrei' or 'Anarchister Protest'?" 88, 98.

³³⁰ Memo, "Aufgaben des Amtes für Literatur und Verlagswesen auf dem Gebiet der Schwerpunktliteratur und Richtlinien für ihre Durchführung," Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1889, bl. 21.

³³¹ Nailya Safiullina, "The Canonization of Western Writers in the Soviet Union in the 1930s," *The Modern Language Review* 107, no. 2 (2012): 563-565.

³³² Katerina Clark and Galin Tihanov, "Soviet Literary Theory in the 1930s: Battles over Genre and the Boundaries of Modernity," in *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism: The Soviet Age and Beyond*, ed. E. A. Dobrenko and Galin Tihanov (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 136; Jonathan Berliner, "Jack London's Socialistic Social Darwinism," *American Literary Realism* 41, no. 1 (2008): 54.

Poland and the GDR wanted a global literary theory that could define all of their states' cultural production as powerfully as possible. This desire for universalism forced them to consider literature that could not be called orthodox. In Germany, this sprang directly from the literary community's adherence to Georg Lukács. The *Theory of the Novel*, published in 1916 but continuing to inform his work throughout the early postwar years, stressed the continuity between ancient and modern literature. The modern novel was to be seen as a continuation of the Greek epic, and its most successful, realistic forms were those that were most classical. When the best German work was argued to stem directly from Homer, Cervantes, and Flaubert, it became impossible to restrict the canon to obviously Socialist authors.³³³ The Poles never ascribed to one single theorist in the way that the Germans did to Lukács, but embraced further levels of contradiction. Formally, in Poland the same standards of realism applied to classical works of the capitalist canon as applied to any other literature. Victor Hugo, for example, was taken to task for "limiting himself to a bitter and witty invective" that was ultimately deemed deeply irresponsible.³³⁴ Practically, though, the more central a book was to the Western canon, the more likely it was to be published. An official memo even instructed censors not to waste time trying to correct the work of "minor authors."³³⁵ Hugo, in fact, was published consistently in Poland from 1947 on. In both cases, this inclination to include capitalist works pushed uncomfortably against the suspicion urged by a more political outlook.

This minor openness was further complicated by the fact that the literary censors and party elites, most of them considerably better educated than most of their compatriots, faced the collection of world classics that had been canonical in their own educations. This competing canon continued to exert a pull, even when it was inimical to the new project that the Socialists had undertaken. All of these claims, when combined, meant that there was no single, focused agenda for the everyday censors to follow.

³³³ See for example: György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1971), 29, 58.

³³⁴ Zbigniew Mitzner, report [1951], AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII-69, k. 25. In this case, the speaker was actually expounding Marx's view on the matter.

³³⁵ "O wyższy poziom pracy nad książką," *Biuletyn Informacyjno-Instrukcyjny*, no. 7 [July 1952], AAN, GUKPPIW 420 (165-1), k. 322.

Capitalist Literature

It is impossible to discuss the use of literature from capitalist states without addressing the question of formalism, the antithesis of Socialist Realism that was understood as the error of favoring form over content. Although the Eastern Bloc used it as a shibboleth for literature of all types and descriptions, much of the power of the term came from its ability to sum up the differences between Communist realism and the degeneracy of the West. In America, Britain, or France, theorists like Clement Greenberg and T.S. Eliot maintained that avant-garde literature was directly opposed to genre fiction, but throughout the Eastern Bloc, these two aesthetic extremes were united: both avant-garde and kitsch were understood as manifestations of formalism.³³⁶ Communists charged modernists and other stylistic innovators with idolatry of technique that led to gorgeous but ultimately empty innovation.³³⁷ In the case of genres like detective or science fiction, widely abominated as kitsch, they maintained that the technique was reduced to a meaningless, endlessly replicated formula.³³⁸ Rejected books from capitalist states, whether they were contemporary or classic, were therefore almost inevitably assumed to be formalist. As often as not, “formalism” seems to have signified “unacceptable literature,” rather than anything specific to form or content.

Poland and the GDR, like all of their Socialist neighbors, used the word constantly, all the while approaching capitalist literature with separate backgrounds and ending with differing selections. Certainly, there were wide swaths of overlap: many of the same authors from the nineteenth century and before were allowed in both states, they both showed an inexplicable fondness for Jack London’s Alaskan wolves, and they both showed a continued suspicion of the generation of authors that immediately preceded their own. When these similarities are more closely examined, though, and taken together with the more sharply differing treatment of contemporary authors, it becomes clear that the two states were putting into practice substantially different understandings of the capitalist West. Germany, with an eye toward Lukács, viewed literary history as a hill, narrowing toward its own output as the peak of cultural progress. Poland, coming more recently from a subservient position, was

³³⁶ Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” *Partisan Review* 6, no. 5 (1939): 36.

³³⁷ Erich Vogt, “Kunst in unserer Zeit,” in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, ed. Elimar Schubbe (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1972) 96. Previously published in *Neues Deutschland* no. 242 (16 Oct. 1948).

³³⁸ See for example Johannes Robert Becher, “Macht der Poesie,” in *Bemühungen II*, Bd. 14 of *Gesammelte Werke* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1972), 49-50.

more interested in inserting itself into what it saw as an ongoing conversation of Western civilization.

Among the more publishable books from capitalist states, the most straightforward category in both Poland and the GDR was classic literature. Jack London, who actually had even minor works like *Smoke Bellew* published as early as 1946 in both Poland and Germany, was by no means alone in his acceptance.³³⁹ We have already seen that the Poles allowed the *Midlothian* and the other Waverly novels, all of them vaguely nationalist romances set in the middle ages, to be published. The Germans would not publish Walter Scott until the mid-fifties, but their devotion to Charles Dickens was unflagging from 1947 on. Both states paid homage to Shakespeare, the Poles with almost constant repeated editions of *Macbeth*, starting in 1947, and the Germans with *Julius Caesar* in 1946, two years before any work by Brecht was published in the new state. Faced with this profusion on one hand and quotes like Ulbricht's that "the most monumental expressionistic nonsense appears in our papers," it can be easy to assume that older works were printable primarily because they had become toothless and unthreatening to the modern state.³⁴⁰ Certainly, these books, even more than their native counterparts, were published as a matter of course, without either fuss or fanfare. If the censors tended not to cavil at their inclusion, they were also not treated to exhibitions, special editions, or celebratory speeches. There was the sense, common to domestic literature as well, that the ideological and aesthetic errors of long-dead authors threatened their readers less critically than those in contemporary works. Whether this came from a high degree of faith in the public's understanding of the grand narrative of literature or from the simple assumption that they would be read less seriously is unclear.

No matter how relentlessly the new states stressed their focus on the future, though, the idea that Germany and Poland published older works out of indifference does not ring true. The legitimacy and identity of both governments were too tied up in narratives of the past to dismiss the idea of historical significance. In the German case, Lukács's revival of Weimarer Klassik provided both a revolutionary tradition and an explanation for its failure, while Poland associated its nineteenth-century nationalist revolutionaries with the new Communist government. More practically, there simply was not paper available to print books that were merely

³³⁹ Jack London, *Wyga (Kurzawa Bellew)*, trans. Jerzy Bandrowski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo B. Matuszewski, 1946); Jack London, *Alaska-Kid*, trans. Erwin Magnus (Berlin: Universitas-Verlag, 1946).

³⁴⁰ Pike, *Politics of Culture*, 524.

unobjectionable. One GDR memo on unlicensed authors exhorted that, “the strictest standards are to be applied, because only truly urgent works can be supplied with paper.”³⁴¹ Even beyond Shakespeare edging out the still-exiled Brecht, the sheer quantity of Dickens or London that was published meant that there was less space available for experimental local authors. The competition was stiff enough that native authors, who could have been expected to support any outside work that might have expanded tolerance for their own stylistic innovations, consistently resisted the publication of foreign works.³⁴² They did not have their way. While there was no single, unified policy on the treatment of early Western works, their inclusion was not a hasty, ad hoc decision that was discarded once clearer and more rigorous standards were established and native writers were returned. All of the classic authors printed immediately after the war continued to be published through the fifties, and others like Jane Austen were added. Classical authors, from Homer and Virgil to Plato and Cicero, were published in both scholarly and popular editions. The interesting difference between these publications and their equivalents in the West is that the Communists grouped ancient works and later novelists together as part of an undifferentiated European heritage. Capitalist histories more often restricted this broadly Western category to classical works and assigned later authors to their individual national histories. For the Communists of Poland and the GDR, then, it is unclear whether Jane Austin belonged more particularly to Great Britain than Homer did to modern Greece.

The censors of Germany and Poland were placing their countries firmly in the tradition of Western civilization, and as much as they differed from their capitalist contemporaries on the current import of that phrase, it was rare for them to quarrel over its historical content. Thus, the Polish censor for Sir Walter Scott indicated reservations about both the author’s politics and his accessibility, but considered him enough a part of the canon that he could not plausibly be refused.³⁴³ Not only did they continue to affirm the existing canon, they also explicitly emphasized the continuities between the historical Western canon and their own works. A number of upper party members whose education impelled them to value classical literature were in the habit of scattering their work with references to figures ranging from Hesiod to Marlowe. Certainly, these allusions were natural for men of their social background and education. At the same time,

³⁴¹ Classified memo, „Liste der nicht lizenzierten Verlage” [19 Dec. 1951], Abt DDR-BA, DR-1 1889.

³⁴² Giovanopoulos, “‘Humanistischer Aufschrei’ or ‘Anarchister Protest?’” 92.

³⁴³ Recenzja of *Midlothian* by Walter Scott [17 Oct. 1949], AAN, GUKPPiW 180 k. 378

their allusions highlight the party's reflexive acceptance of a pre-Soviet canon. Moreover, it actively inserted the contemporary states as heirs to the classical Western tradition.

When Becher published his journal from 1950, for example, he titled it "*Auf andere Art so grosse Hoffnung*" after a speech in Shakespeare's *Tempest*: "Oh, out of that no-hope, what great hope have you! No hope that way is another way so high a hope..."³⁴⁴ In order to elevate his struggle for the regeneration of Germany, then, he turned not to a classical author of the Marxist tradition, but to Shakespeare. The allusion suggests that Becher's work was meant to participate not just in a German literary conversation, but one that extended to all of Europe. Even more notably, a list of nineteenth-century realist authors in a Polish speech on the nation's literary tradition began with Balzac and Stendhal and moved to Russians like Gogol and Turgeniev before finally reaching Polish authors.³⁴⁵ In the same way, Alexander Abusch, the vice president of the Kulturbund and later one of the editors of *Sinn und Form*, wrote an article in defense of Russian culture in which he asked, "How could one speak of modern European culture without the names of Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, Shakespeare, Moliere, Goethe, Pushkin, Balzac, Dickens, and Turgeniev, Tolstoy, Gorki, Romain Rolland, Thomas and Heinrich Mann, von Menzel, Repin, Lieberman and Picasso, von Barbusse and Sholokhov called in the same breath?"³⁴⁶ This more deliberate mixture was also more comprehensive. Intentionally or not, the censors implied that the canons being formed were universal, rather than merely local. In the selection of their own traditional literature, Polish and German censors defined the course of their native histories. By including foreign classics, they positioned these histories firmly in the flow of Western civilization.

Germany

This identification with the West was especially notable in Germany, where the entire tradition of Western literature culminated in the literary production of the GDR. Because of this, a relatively easy sanction existed for most earlier works, but ended approximately with Walt Whitman in the

³⁴⁴ Johannes Robert Becher, *Auf andere Art so grosse Hoffnung; Tagebuch 1950* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1951); from *Tempest* Act 2, Scene 1, Line 969-971. Regrettably, the speaker is one of the villains of the piece, persuading another villain to kill his brother and usurp the throne.

³⁴⁵ Stefan Żółkiewski, "Polityka kulturalna w dziedzinie literatury" [18 May 1949], AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII-69, k. 65.

³⁴⁶ Alexander Abusch, *Kulturelle Probleme des sozialistischen Humanismus; Beiträge zur deutschen Kulturpolitik, 1946-1967* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1967), 55.

later nineteenth century. This narrative was clearly related to the GDR's focus on classicism within its own national history. At home, the GDR's focus on classicism allowed a narrative that was at once revolutionary and sympathetic. If authors like Goethe and Lessing were particularly relevant to the GDR's postwar needs, their selection structured the state's entire understanding of the Western literary narrative. Through that point, theorists like Becher and Lukács understood the forces of progress to be relatively united throughout Europe. For them, after the French Revolution a gradual geographical split began between the forces of reaction and progress that would widen until, in the postwar world, really significant writing could only be found east of the Iron Curtain. In this way, German literature, because it contained Communist writers who had won international acclaim, represented not just German culture, but the vanguard of worldwide civilization.

If earlier authors who could even be suspected of bourgeois conservatism, like Scott, were allowed, later writers from the first part of the twentieth century were sometimes turned down even when their credentials seem impeccably revolutionary. Literary history became a funnel in which progress was directed with increasing speed toward its socialist goal, which the Germans naturally found most clearly expressed at home. André Gide, Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, and Sinclair Lewis all encountered obstructions to their publication before 1954. Part of the problem was stylistic: all of these authors fell under the pall of formalism. If Wilde's arch absurdities fit badly into GDR literary history, James Joyce's deconstruction of the novel was absolutely impossible. In 1957, Alexander Abusch accused him of "bourgeois decadence, a late-bourgeois sense of crisis," and of being "spiritually reactionary."³⁴⁷ André Gide (now not a brother Socialist, but a "Fascist collaborator" and "artistic Pétain") apparently stood perilously close to Sartre and Camus, whose existentialism was understood as "decadent" and "futile."³⁴⁸ If any of these writers had lived a hundred years earlier, they might have been published. Certainly, the language of Joyce's everyday Dubliners could not have been worse than Scott's impoverished aristocratic brogue. What begins to

³⁴⁷ "Zur Geschichte und Gegenwart unserer sozialistischen Literatur," Diskussionsbeitrag auf der Delegiertenkonferenz des Deutschen Schriftstellerverbandes, *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 3 (8-10 Feb 1957), in Alexander Abusch, *Literatur im Zeitalter des Sozialismus*, (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1967), 673-674.

³⁴⁸ Alexander Dymshitz, "Über die formalistische Richtung in der Deutschen Malerei," in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, ed. Elimar Schubbe (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1972), 98.

appear, then, is the sense of a universal, not merely German, literary narrative, in which Socialist Realism was the finishing keystone. After the war, mere leftist leanings no longer sufficed. Thus, Becher maintained at a party cultural conference that in Socialist Germany, the literary field was “not built on Swinborne, Baudelaire, and Edgar Allan Poe, but on the poets of classicism, on Maxim Gorki, on the progressive writers of our time.”³⁴⁹

Between 1945 and 1956, however hesitantly and haphazardly, the complexion of German publishing, especially of foreign material, did begin to change. The Thaw in Germany, following Stalin’s death and Berlin’s uprising in the summer of 1953, was a contentious period. On the one hand, it was distinctly chillier than the thaws in other Eastern Bloc states. On the other hand, its changes were real. If the earliest years of Stalinism were characterized by the elite desire, increasingly realized, to create a clear, inviolable line between vanguard literature and kitsch, the brief Thaw represented a re-blurring of that line. The underlying criteria remained the same and the GDR maintained its position as the ultimate arbiter and standard, but it became possible for authors from further afield to earn a place in the canon. As part of the New Course, party cultural organs made it clear that liberal—which is to say, non-Marxist—critics of the bourgeois order might be worthwhile. In response, cultural friendship societies were formed between the GDR and Western states like Great Britain, a new *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* was founded in 1954, and publishers formulated ambitious plans to release newer literature from the West.³⁵⁰ One of the most ingenious of these was a strategy that Verlag der Nation hit on to publish authors who came recommended by the honor of being blacklisted by McCarthy. Hewart Schumann, who helped lead the plan and advocated for it with the censor, considered lists of potential authors that included, for example, Sherwood Anderson, Erskine Caldwell, John Dos Passos, Theodore Dreiser, Ernest Hemingway, Oliver La Farge, Norman Mailer, Dorothy Parker, Upton Sinclair, and Richard Wright.³⁵¹ At this point, Aufbau Verlag was in competition with Verlag der Nation for the prize of releasing Hemingway first in the GDR, and had been engaged in a long struggle to bring out Dreiser. In the event, this early enthusiasm proved premature. The censors, faced with specific American authors to approve, ultimately found them unsuitable, unsound, and suspect of

³⁴⁹ Johannes Robert Becher, *Über Literatur und Kunst* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1962), 258; from “Weil das Licht heller wurde...Bemerkungen zur Kulturkonferenz 1957,” *Neues Deutschland* 19, no. 10 (1957).

³⁵⁰ Giovanopoulos, “Humanistischer Aufschrei’ or ‘Anarchister Protest?’” 90.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

dealings with the CIA or other enemies. Even after Hemingway began to be published, for example, he apparently made an unfriendly remark concerning the GDR in an interview, and the publication of *The Old Man and The Sea* was put on hold until it could be ascertained that he was not, in fact, working for the CIA.³⁵² To be accepted in the GDR, a contemporary capitalist author practically had to be ejected from the canon at home.

The pressure to exclude contemporary foreign authors came not only from the censor's office, but, intriguingly, from German authors as well. It might be expected that they would welcome the most stimulating of their contemporaries, and would advocate anything that promised more stylistic freedom. Practically speaking, however, the realities of publishing meant that anything published by a Western writer reduced the chance that a German author would make it to press. To make the matter more complex, the censor's office, regardless of its unrelenting obstruction of Western publications, continued to maintain an official enthusiasm for them. These mixed signals led to widespread confusion: publishers were perplexed when the office berated them for their lack of creativity and tenacity in finding suitable candidates. Karl Wloch of the *Gesellschaft für Kulturelle Verbindungen mit dem Ausland der DDR* exhorted that, "publishers ought to work more bravely [...] and not wait for one publisher to clear the way for an author and then (one might almost say blindly) all follow."³⁵³ Both the prohibition and the encouragement of Western authors were made openly by party members highly placed in the censor's office and the Ministry of Culture; this was not a matter of lower-level confusion or defiance. At every stage, the narrative of German literary history was heterogeneous, and its creation was a balancing act between supporting "legitimate" revolutionary literature and maintaining the coherence of the national story.

Poland

Unlike the East Germans, the Poles did not create temporal guidelines for their publishing decisions. They published Hemingway beginning in 1948 and Sinclair Lewis in 1949, just two years after his *Kingsblood Royal* had come out in English. Even genre pieces were not exempt. Agatha Christie was published beginning in 1947, Arthur Conan Doyle from 1948, and Jules Verne in an uninterrupted stream from 1949. It is worth remembering that, while these publishing programs seem excitingly liberal in comparison to those of the GDR, they were hampered

³⁵² Ibid., 91-92.

³⁵³ Heike Paul and Katja Kanzler, *Amerikanische Populärkultur in Deutschland* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2002), 92.

by a lack of economic and physical resources and were unable to print on the same scale as East Germany. What remained, then, was the continuing issue of censor misunderstanding combined with a more distinct sense of conversation with the West than existed in Germany. If the GDR emphasized the division between good and bad art that followed the development of Marxist theory, Poland was more interested in the possibility of a conversation across the divide.

Between 1948 and 1949, for example, there was a surprisingly serious and extended conversation on the possibility of publishing C.S. Lewis, the medieval scholar and Christian writer. If the interest had been in printing either his academic work or his children's fiction, this might have been more understandable. In the first case, Lewis's work on the *Romance of the Rose* especially was a classic in the field by that time, and free from any specifically Christian agenda. In the second, though the *Chronicles of Narnia* are notoriously stiff with Christian subtext, this could be tamped down in the translation. Moreover, the assumption that children were more literal-minded, naïve readers sometimes allowed greater freedom in publishing for them. The book up for consideration in 1948, though, was the *Screwtape Letters*, an imaginary correspondence between an elderly demon and his nephew on the effective temptation of a human subject. It could not have been imagined to be congenial to the party by even the most sympathetic of readers.

All told, the *Screwtape Letters* were given four separate reviews in 1948 before they were finally refused: one by the provincial censor in Poznań, then another from his supervisor, then in the Warsaw main office, a review each from a ground-level censor and, ultimately, his supervisor. The intriguing thing about these reviews is that all of the reviewers seem to have understood Lewis's position, and none of them were trying to champion him or slip the book through unnoticed. Each reviewer in succession noted the author's "mystical Christianity," and pointed out that "the book [was] full of hatred for rationalism and positivism; materialism [was] presented as an idea of Satan."³⁵⁴ One objected that (the typically English) Lewis had declared hatred for one of Hitler's soldiers to be evil.³⁵⁵ Still, each censor hesitated to refuse the book.

At the heart of this reluctance appears to be an implicit belief that Lewis was an important figure in the ongoing cultural conversation. One

³⁵⁴ Recenzja of *Listy starego diabla do młodego* by C.S. Lewis [2 Feb. 1949], AAN, GUKPPIW 181, k. 291.

³⁵⁵ Recenzja of *Listy starego diabla do młodego* by C.S. Lewis [20 Nov. 1948] AAN, GUKPPIW 181, k. 292.

editor, the second in Poznań, actually argued that if he were trimmed and edited correctly, Lewis's work could spark "penetrating and suggestive" conversation.³⁵⁶ The others give the general sense that it was Lewis's public stature that made it difficult to refuse him. The sense overall is less that Lewis could join the Polish Socialist canon and more that he might be an important outside voice for Poles who were keeping pace with a wider Western conversation. If the Germans were involved in representing Communist (and thus, real) culture to the world, the Poles were involved in an effort to bring that culture into dialog with its progenitors.

These efforts were, of course, tightly circumscribed. *The Screwtape Letters*, for example, were presented to the censor's office by *Alberinium*, a Catholic press out of Poznań. The religious presses were the unloved stepchildren of the Polish legal publishing apparatus. By definition, they had more ideological freedom than the state-supported presses (though the ability to suggest a book is cold comfort compared to the ability to publish it), but their access to even the most basic resources like ink or paper was limited at best. It is unthinkable that one of the state presses would have championed Lewis. Moreover, the writers whom the Poles allowed into their conversation tended to have already reached its margins by virtue of their cultural ubiquity. Walter Scott's censor approved him despite ideological reservations, because it seemed difficult to take Polish literature seriously without such an iconic figure. The same logic appears to have led to Aldous Huxley's publication in 1949 despite observations that he was "mystical" and "resistant to progress," and the list could continue.³⁵⁷ This dynamic also meant that Polish openness did not stretch as far as avant-garde or experimental texts that had yet to find a wide audience. In 1957, Poland published Joyce and Kafka well before East Germany (which finally accepted them in the late sixties), but also well after they had become common fare in the West.

Within these limited conditions, the individual censors' inclination could decide a matter. Lewis was clearly prominent enough that, had he not been a combination of foreign, religious, and controversial, he might have slipped in with the second provincial evaluation, as did any number of saints' biographies and translations of Augustine. In this way, their rather deferential relationship to the West could have reinforced Poland's continuing colonial status with respect to the canon of the capitalist world.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ E. Ostoj, recenzja of *Czas musi stanąć* by Aldous Huxley [10 Sept. 1948], AAN, GUKPPiW 180, k. 19.

The desire to be accepted as part of the West was so ingrained as to trump the more specific demands of Communist identity.

Ultimately, both Poland and the GDR used Western literature as a mirror in which to work out their own national identities. In each case, the broad strokes of their national narratives proved more important than the specific orthodoxy of any single book. In Germany, the need was to identify with the West of the past while maintaining distinction and superiority in the present. Within the confines of the canon, Germany was the benchmark for both literary excellence and revolutionary rigor. In Poland's case, the continued desire to be part of the West created a canon that was more concerned to use books as a conversation, even a heated conversation among antagonists, than the rigid constraints of orthodoxy might have suggested. For both the GDR and Poland, these agendas overrode a simplistic, straightforwardly hegemonic, communist identity.

Polish-German Relations

If, according to the most official policy, everything outside the Comecon was meant to be a land of hostility and suspicion, everything within was to be brotherhood and concord. Part of the national policy of the Socialist states, proceeding from Lenin's formulation that they should be national in form and Socialist in content, was that they should recognize no cultural hierarchies among nations. In solidarity with the universal workers' movement, they must perforce be equally interested in each others' cultures, from literary festivals to folk-dancing. For this purpose, cultural exchange committees were set up, conferences arranged, and tours planned. When Poland celebrated Mickiewicz's 1955 jubilee, the GDR opened exhibits in his honor. Poland did the same for Goethe's 1949 bicentennial.³⁵⁸ The censor was involved in all of this brotherhood because each state traded exemplars of its literature for a sampling of its neighbors', and created committees to organize the exchange. In Germany, this was part of the work of specific Committees of Socialist Brotherhood set up with the USSR and each of the other Socialist states. In Poland, the projects were more diffuse, each being handled by the most relevant ministry or office. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs played a major role, but so did the Ministry of Culture and the censor's office. In both cases, the books were twice-censored: once to be printed normally at home, and again to be chosen to

³⁵⁸ Program draft, "Akademia ku czci Goethego, część artystyczna," AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII-96, k. 4; List, "Skład prezydium akademii ku czci Goethego," AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII-96, k. 5; Leon Kruczkowski, essay on Goethe, AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII-96, k. 6-7.

represent their country abroad. It is difficult to tell whether they were censored a third time on being received abroad. In most cases, they appear to have been printed by publishers in their originating states, so the apparatuses that might have been used to evaluate them abroad are obscure.

While these structural measures express the purest formal ideal of brotherhood, the books that were actually selected reflect the tensions that continued to exist between the two states. During the war, both the Poles and the Germans had each considered the other in some way sub-human. While the Poles tended to be cast as vermin, almost as inhuman as the Nazis believed the Jews to be, the Germans were seen as rabid and rapining, incurably aggressive.³⁵⁹ These characterizations, of course, began long before the world wars. Even before Poland had been formally partitioned and colonized in 1772, German speakers represented them as fractious, lazy, and penurious, while the Poles came to envision the Prussians as crass, aggressive, and boorish.³⁶⁰ The fraternal terms of cultural exchange, then, were muddied. On one hand, the Germans were the (formerly) imperial force, with a central place in the history of Europe, while Poland remained a perpetually colonized periphery. On the other, world opinion generally supported the Poles in their belief that they had emerged from the war with a considerably higher moral stature than their western neighbors. These conflicting claims to superiority would be worked out within the context of Poland and the GDR's newly fraternal relationship as Socialist states.

Poland

Poland's antipathy toward the GDR is all the more striking in light of its enthusiastic acceptance of other Western classical literature. The reflexive Polish embrace of a Western tradition ended abruptly at the French border. This is not to imply that German literature was ever prohibited or even actively restricted, but that the Poles seemed to view it with distaste and print as little as possible without giving offense. Some of this attitude can be glimpsed in the censors' reports on books not destined

³⁵⁹ John Connelly, "Nazis and Slavs: From Racial Theory to Racist Practice," *Central European History* 32, no. 1 (1999): 26; R. M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 66, 338.

³⁶⁰ Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 334-336; Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth Century Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 210, 216.

for Germany but written about Germans for Polish audiences. Almost none of these books were positive in their approach, and many represented the Germans explicitly as monsters. Just as in the cases of *Terrible Fate* and *German Barbarism* (the children's books about young Poles falling into the hands of dastardly Teutons), the censors' response to this attitude was mixed. Whether or not they would eventually approve this kind of material, though, the censor's office appeared to expect anti-German bias from the books it received. Even the censor who angrily rejected *German Barbarism* spent as much of his review criticizing the author's style ("Baroque" with a "false patois") as he did on the ideological error of the book's "chaotic mix of anti-German phrases." The censor was displeased that the author had "unthinkingly judged [anything anti-fascist as] Soviet" and assumed that "German" meant "Fascist." The censor was disquieted by the assumption that the new regime required such wild anti-German prejudice, but questions of taste overrode even the affront to Socialist brotherhood.³⁶¹ Ultimately, the censor seems to have found a portrayal of Germans as evil Teutons unsurprising, and perhaps even less distressing than bad prose.

In fact, the idea of Fascism as the natural outgrowth of late capitalism was more than a rejoinder to the capitalist idea of Nazism. In many cases, Polish anti-Fascist fervor was precisely a thinly veiled placeholder for anti-German animus. For instance, the League for the Struggle Against Racism, founded by the party and in which the censor's office participated, had a manifesto that was almost more anti-German than it was anti-racist. In the opening paragraph, the League's lament that, "never in history has man more tormented man or nation more debased nation" and that "immense cultural worth has fallen to the dust" is directed to "several million people in the heart of Europe, bound in superstitious racism."³⁶² These people were not identified as anti-Semites, Fascists, or even as capitalists, but as "hitlerite Germans." Even after Americans are introduced two pages later as the successors to this legacy of hatred, Germany continues to be constitutive of the idea; their actions actually define racism. In fact, racism and Fascism are both used more often than not with German as their defining adjective. The contrast is instructive: in theory, America was the present threat against which the League insisted it was no longer defenseless. There is the lingering sense, though, that it must be resisted because it is seductive, while Germany has emphatically lost its allure. The

³⁶¹ Recenzja of *Barbarizystwo Niemieckie* by Stanisław Białobłocki [8 May 1948], AAN, GUKPPIW 181, k. 244.

³⁶² Declaration, "Deklaracja Ideowa Ligi do Walki z Rasizmem," AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII-78, k. 2-7.

declaration even took to referring to Americans in a derogative tone as “Anglo-Saxons” to strengthen connections between them and their “racist predecessors.”

These same dynamics were repeated within the censor’s office. Although Germany was a brother and America anathema, it is difficult to find a German book in the late forties and early fifties that was published with the enthusiasm that the Poles found for London, Poe, or Verne. Even more tellingly, the German books that were published reflected very little investment on the part of the Polish censors. There is no indication that they cared to make requests of the Germans, or that they had particular preferences to express. The impression is that the Poles accepted German literature, not that they desired it. Of the romantics that Poland normally favored, Heine’s slim poem, *Slave Ship*, was published in 1951, and in 1956, Państwowy Instytut Wydawnictwo released his collected works in two volumes. E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *The Nutcracker and the Mouseking* was published repeatedly in the fifties, but none of his other works appeared until 1958. Neither of the Schlegel brothers was published during this period, nor were Novalis or Hölderlin. Oddly, Kleist (in new translation) was published in 1953, just three years after his reappearance in the GDR. At the same time, the classicists who formed the core of German literary identity were more prominent. There was, for example, a fairly broad selection of Goethe to be found, at least half of it in German and printed by publishers in Berlin and Leipzig. Schiller, while not as thoroughly represented, still had a sizeable sampling published, and the realists like Fontane and Keller were given a showing. That Kleist, too closely related to pathological nationalism to be printed in Germany, was published rather than Novalis or Schlegel confirms that the Poles were not selecting or rejecting books out of concern over the Fascist tendencies in German romanticism. Rather, they were simply adapting German preferences without comment or apparent interest.

The Polish distaste for Germany becomes even clearer in the case of contemporary writers. Although several books by Anna Seghers were published beginning in 1949 and continuing at a steady pace through the fifties, Arnold Zweig and Willi Bredel only saw a few works apiece published in Polish. This was despite the fact that both were translated and printed early in the post-war period. Becher and Brecht, two pillars of the GDR literary world, were notably underrepresented. Brecht, who had been published before the war and had his *Threepenny Opera* printed by Książka i Wiedza in 1949, did not reappear until 1953, when he began to be published regularly. Many of Becher’s works in German (printed in the

GDR) appeared in Poland after the war, but the only Polish translation of his work available until the late seventies was the slim *Der Grosse Plan*.

In the context of this deep Polish mistrust for Germany's representation of itself, it can be illuminating to consider approved, usually Polish, representations of Germany. One of the chief among these was the ironically titled 1949 play, *Germans Are People* by Leon Kruczkowski. Born into a craftsman's family and educated as an engineer, Kruczkowski had begun to take up the mantle of the ideal worker-poet even before the war. His early novel, *Kordian and the Boor*, took the aristocratic hero from Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* and Słowacki's *Kordian* and exposed him to the dubious questions of a peasant. The conceit won Kruczkowski a reputation as an inventive young leftist, free from the trammels of the atavistic romance of nationalism. When the new postwar state was constructed, he was given a prominent place in both the Writers' Union and the Ministry of Culture. When he turned to the question of German guilt, then, he spoke with the official voice of tolerance for and brotherhood with Germany. His work was understood as the very antithesis of radical chauvinism. *Germans are People*, then, is the story of a venerable German scientist named Sonnenbruch and the people who make their way to his house for the celebration of his seventy-fifth birthday. Of the ten German characters in the play, one is admirable. Two more are at least pitiable. The rest are greater and lesser personifications of evil. Sonnenbruch's two adult children are perhaps the worst: his son, a member of the Nazi party, extorts a family heirloom as payment to protect a man whom he has already seen executed, and his daughter watches the slaughter of a French village for amusement. Her callousness is driven home when she finishes her tour by stealing a bottle of cognac from the impoverished town as a present for her father's birthday. Even the kindly, civilized professor Sonnenbruch, it transpires, has retired in shame, because he unwittingly invented a deadly new chemical weapon in his research.

The climax of the play comes when Sonnenbruch is confronted by a former student who has joined the resistance and come to acquaint the professor of the use being made of his work and beg him to "pure and simply—fight!" rather than "guarding the treasures of civilization."³⁶³ Sonnenbruch ultimately reveals his cowardice when he refuses all action,

³⁶³ Leon Kruczkowski, *Dramaty: Odwety, Niemcy* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1950), 213, 218. In versions before 1950, these exhortations were part of a single exclamation. In the later version, they are separated by Joachim's extended explanation of "the loneliness, the terrible loneliness of the Germans in Hitler's state." In all versions, this conversation happens in Act 3.

accuses his student of “ruining everything,” and begs him to leave. The professor is left despairing and nearly lifeless. In Kruczkowski’s scheme, then, Sonnenbruch’s passive resistance in the name of preserving cultural heritage is as culpable as his children’s monstrosities. The only Germans left blameless were the tiny minority of the resistance. The non-German characters in the play—a Polish miller, a young Jewish child, two French women facing execution, and the Norwegian mother attempting to save her son—are all positioned as victims. In fact, the most morally complex character in the play is the policeman Hoppe, who is forced by the SS to execute the Jewish boy in the first act before reappearing at the house of his former employers, the Sonnenbruchs. Hoppe, who is the play’s closest representation of an ordinary, working-class German, does kill the child in cold blood, but he does it regretfully, out of fear for his own son’s life. The play’s only Polish character sympathizes with the difficulty of his choice. The two, Hoppe and Juryś, relate to each other primarily through their shared sense of powerlessness in the face of the Nazi hierarchy. In this way, Kruczkowski manages to present the possibility of German redemption and comradeship with Poland while maintaining focus on the predominance of their crimes and inhumanity.

Ultimately, the reception of foreign literature in the GDR and Poland joined the line between the past and the future. Each country’s sense of its place in the past directed the shape of its literary narrative. If Germany’s historic dominance and recent shame inclined it toward a narrative that funneled toward ultimate perfection, Poland’s colonial history made it more eager to construct a trajectory that moved toward joining a larger conversation. This, in turn, shaped not only the states’ understanding of traditional literature, but also their reception of rising postwar authors. Though the publication of these authors undeniably carried a certain prestige, it remains true that the entire apparatus of censorship and licensure represented a minor international power play. Certainly, the treatment of Hemmingway indicates that politics were never absent from these negotiations. Likewise, native authors approached international publications with a mixture of professional eagerness and territorial wariness. They needed conversation with the outside world in order to do their work, but the more foreign books were printed, the less chance that work would have of publication. In this way, the publication of foreign literature provided one of the boundaries within which native authors functioned.

Between Poland and the GDR, both states agreed that the latter had more cultural capital. The balance of both interest and trade ran toward the West. This situation changed, though, when moral capital became more important than cultural. When the events of World War II had to be considered, it was clear that Germany was the guilty party, while the Poles had emerged as one of the few countries that had actively resisted and never collaborated. In this single realm, Poland was the more powerful partner. It imported almost nothing from East Germany concerning the war, while exporting enough to seriously influence the Germans' concept of the war. This was no small matter. The identity of the GDR was caught up in the question of the war and the Holocaust, and it was largely mediated by Polish literature. If this did not overturn centuries of German superiority toward its eastern neighbor, it at least provided a new space for negotiation.

Chapter Seven: Contemporary Literature

In 1948, Johannes R. Becher gave a speech commemorating “authors who died for Germany’s freedom,” and who, by their heroism, created a model for their comrades who survived. He observed that, “it could be said in praise of the dead that they were political writers. However, here the term ‘political’ is used in its real, genuine, in its high sense—and among political writers in such a real, genuine, such a high sense, we count Homer, the Greek tragedian, we count Dante, Grimmelshausen, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Tolstoy, and Walt Whitman, and as a highly political and ideological phenomenon, we also honor the genius of our Goethe.”³⁶⁴ The sentiment was hardly unusual for Becher, who could neatly slip Goethe into a statement about paper allocations. Becher’s invocation of these authors, however, was as much to present a vision for the future as it was to memorialize the past. From Cervantes to Seghers, Becher traced a continuous line of intensely political authors, contributing to the betterment of their states. Between 1945 and 1948, Germany and Poland were desperate for more such contributions. Becher in Germany and the team of Jakub Berman and Jerzy Borejsza in Poland worked tirelessly to bring as many authors as possible home. Far more than presses or paper, writers were needed in order to rebuild the cultural lives of the two states and move them toward the future.

When this task was successful, and the writers could be returned safely back home, the real work was just beginning. As valued and feted as they were, live authors often proved themselves incomprehensible or outright recalcitrant. Nowhere was the censor’s task more fraught than in the review of books by their own contemporary countrymen. Only for authors who were actually reachable, whose copyrights had not yet been set, was there the chance of altering a manuscript, rather than simply accepting or denying it. This increased immediacy brought all of the usual questions about the needs of the nation and the limits of artistic freedom into even sharper relief, but it also introduced another figure, the author, into the conversation between the censor and the nation. The question was no longer simply where a book fit into the larger narrative or what effect it might have on its readers, but also what effect the censorship might have on the author. On closer inspection, the intuitive top-down policing model of the office shifts to one that understands the censors’ offices through a series of tensions or imbalances between censors and authors. While the censors

³⁶⁴ “Gedenkenrede auf die Dichter, die für Deutschlands Freiheit starben” in *Vom Anderswerden*, excerpted in Becher, *Über Literatur und Kunst*, 56.

certainly had political and legal power, established authors especially maintained more cultural and intellectual legitimacy.

The censors in both countries were primarily concerned with attempting to create unified nations. In the GDR, this task was determined by the state's borders. Looking to the West, the East Germans continued to hope for unity even while they competed for the loyalty of German speaking authors. From the East, where swaths of formerly German territory had been ceded to Poland, there were unprecedented waves of ethnic Germans streaming over the border to be accommodated and assimilated. By 1948, nearly a quarter of the East German population was made up of expellees, and over forty percent of the population of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.³⁶⁵ Many of these had been forced to leave in haste, met with violence along the way, and arrived in a state profoundly unprepared for them.³⁶⁶ In Poland, the central problem was to integrate the party and the rest of a population that, not merely ignorant of the Communist party, was often suspicious of its members. The specific shades of this problem of unity called for separate strategies in each state, and these strategies in turn created the atmosphere in which writers either flourished or languished. In both cases, a distinction developed between authors at the center and those at the fringes. At the center were Communist authors and fellow travelers who had been established before the war. At the same time, though, there was mobility toward the center for younger Communist authors and away from it for those established authors who declined to write Socialist prose. Furthest from the center were heterodox authors who never actively supported the state, but could be published if they were understood to contribute in some way to its unity. All of these levels together created a canon that was not strictly Socialist.

Censor's Office

Counter-intuitively, for both the ground-level censors and their supervisors, work with living, present authors constituted the heart of their enterprise, which they conceived of as cooperative and almost editorial. It was here where writing could be changed and perfected, that the superstructure could really be shifted, and souls engineered. The censors

³⁶⁵ Philipp Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene: Gesellschaft und Vertriebenenpolitik in der SBZ/DDR und in Polen 1945-1956* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 13, 133-134.

³⁶⁶ For an overview of the situation, see Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 108-138, esp. 122-132.

themselves were more enthusiastic about this prospect than perhaps any other area of their work, and set out eagerly to rebuild the literary fortunes of their countries. One censor even used the city of Warsaw, in ruins when he began at the censor's office, and gleaming, he said, at his ten-year anniversary, to frame the narrative of his career, equating his cultural work with the more literal rebuilding done by carpenters and workmen.³⁶⁷ He and his colleagues believed that they were integral parts of the creative process, in a manner similar to an editor's, but with a more holistic eye toward the collective body of their countries' literature. Another censor, having described the "deep sense of pride and joy" that he found in releasing a book, explained that he actually felt prouder the less work he had to do. He capped off the series of proud, prouder, proudest by declaring that "the censor has the greatest joy, and almost a sense of co-authorship, when a beautiful and wise book is published without the need to make any intervention at all."³⁶⁸ Even these effusions have a minor undercurrent of pathos: the censor was most creative, most useful, when he was least active or needed. Real success would mean developing authors who could be independent of any need for a censor. There is an implication that the job of censoring was, by its nature, a temporary measure until Socialism was perfected. This conception requires a collaborative effort by the censor, the author, and literary institutions. The idea of a censor as co-author is striking; it raises him to a level of equal creativity and partnership with the author.

If the censors idealized themselves in relation to the author, imagining themselves as supportive, avuncular figures, full of wisdom and enthusiasm, it is equally true that they also idealized the authors. On a purely professional level, any talk of working with an author also implied someone who was willing to accept the censor's office as a creative partner. The offices existed in perpetual hope for authors who appreciated their work, criticized themselves openly, and wrote inspiring and accessible Socialist Realist work. The need to develop such cadres was a leitmotif throughout their goal statements. In a 1952 review, the secretariat even wrote that because it was "not successful for the office to overreach its competence," they should work closely with the Writers' Union on basic

³⁶⁷ Witold Figlewski, letter to the editor, *Biuletyn Informacyjno-Instrukcyjny* 37, no. 1 [Jan. 1955], AAN, GUKPPIW 420 (165-4), k. 30.

³⁶⁸ Maria Szymanko, wspomnienia, *Biuletyn Informacyjno-Instrukcyjny* 37, no. 1 [Jan. 1955], AAN, GUKPPIW 420 (165-4), k. 28.

ideological questions of literature and literary criticism.³⁶⁹ At the base of their hopes was a larger, more abstract imagination of the writer as a representation of the nation as a whole. The literary narratives that both Poland and the GDR had created for themselves meant that the contemporary writers faced all the pressure of fulfilling the office's less-than-modest expectations.

The reality on the ground—with the lack of publishing infrastructure and writers ambivalent about the new governments—was quite different from the idealistic picture dreamt of by the censor's office. Having scattered to the four winds by necessity, some authors found their new homes too congenial to make them hurry to return. Antoni Słonimski, for example, stayed in England and France until 1951, and Heinrich Mann did not finalize his decision to return to the GDR until 1950. Others were simply too penurious to manage it. Even when they were entirely willing to return home, it was not rare to find themselves facing legal barriers. As the war came to an end, it was true that the literary society needed to be rebuilt as much as streets and buildings did. Many authors had fled to safer regions, and even those who had not were generally unable to publish amidst the chaos at home. Czesław Miłosz recounted his wife sewing together copies of his poetry and journeys across the rubble to discuss new translations in occupied Warsaw.³⁷⁰ In the same way, Jan Kott was forced to find time in the midst of black-market trading and foraging to begin a manuscript that he eventually hid along with his last valuables in the rubble of a bombed-out house on the edge of the city.³⁷¹ After the war ended, many publishers no longer had the material capabilities left to publish these books more widely. Even the more stable authors faced difficult decisions on the continuation and use of their work. Early émigré authors like Anna Seghers or Willi Bredel had to decide whether to republish work that had previously been published abroad, subjecting it to the censor's office, or to continue on with new material. Some of Seghers' major exile novels, including the later-famous *Transit*, were entirely ignored in the GDR until the early sixties despite her respected position.³⁷² Return was not easy for anyone.

³⁶⁹ Memo from Sekretariat Propaganda des ZK regarding der Sekretariatsbeschluss der 1.12.1952 [10 Dec. 1952], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1871, bl. 74. In fact, the demand extended to the entire office in which the censor was situated (Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen).

³⁷⁰ Miłosz, 233, 249.

³⁷¹ Kott, *Still Alive*, 105.

³⁷² Birgit Maier-Katkin, *Silence and Acts of Memory: A Postwar Discourse on Literature, History, Anna Seghers, and Women in the Third Reich* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 154.

These material privations and institutional limitations, combined with authors' understandable frustration with the processes of censorship, meant that the censors were disappointed in their dreams of harmonious cooperation. Writers did not only evade or trick the censor, they sometimes deliberately "wrote against" prohibitions.³⁷³ No matter how often they protested that they were advocates, helping to ensure the publication of as many books as possible, the censors always took the place of the cretinous gatekeeper in the popular imagination. They, themselves, conceived of their work as finding "a balance between criticism and the corresponding addition of well-maintained optimism."³⁷⁴ At its heart, this conception was editorial, believing itself to focus less on punishment or restriction than on the best ways to foster growth and development. For censors, it seemed clear that native authors needed all the help that could be provided if they were to accomplish the political and cultural work that the GDR and Poland needed to lead them into the future.

Poland

Between the fall of 1944 and the early part of 1945, Jerzy Borejsza and Jakub Berman began to work together to bring as many authors as possible back to Poland. Borejsza ran *Czytelnik*, the new publishing collective, and used it to find jobs, housing, and care for returning authors, as well as those who had remained in Poland and found themselves impoverished at the war's end. When Anatol Stern, for example, did not have the funds necessary to make the trip back from Palestine, Borejsza arranged it.³⁷⁵ Similarly, Kott recalled actually going to *Czytelnik* for food and supplies, and coming back from its warehouse with blankets and sides of pork.³⁷⁶ At the same time, Berman, second in command of the party, made personal contacts, helped organize the journals *Kuźnica* (*The Forge*—appropriately intended to express a more rigorous party position) and *Odrodzenie* (*Rebirth*—the more ecumenical sibling), and even expedited the resolution of legal problems, as in the case of Aleksander Wat, who had been held

³⁷³ Robert Von Hallberg and Kenneth J. Northcott, *Literary Intellectuals and the Dissolution of the State: Professionalism and Conformity in the GDR* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 68, 178.

³⁷⁴ Janina Lalewicz, "Nasz Bilanz," *Biuletyn Informacyjno-Instrukcyjny* 37, no. 1 [Jan. 1955], AAN, GUKPPIW 420 (165-4), k. 70.

³⁷⁵ Shore, *Caviar and Ashes*, 263.

³⁷⁶ Kott, *Still Alive*, 174.

hungry and sick in Kazakhstan from 1943 through 1946 over a catch-twenty-two passport issue.³⁷⁷

Especially in the case of the established authors, these return and aid efforts were the first level in the creation of a new Polish literary identity. Many of the authors did not have the resources, the freedom, or the health to come back without some form of assistance. Even those who were relatively stable in their exile, or who had managed to survive in Poland, could have easily been lost if there had not been presses willing or able to support their work, papers to review it, or access to international conferences to discuss it. Interestingly, though, the authors they brought back or supported were not only those like Wat and Kott who had been affiliated with the party before or during the war. Tuwim, Słonimski, and Iwaszkiewicz, three of the leading lights of Skamander who had fought with the futurists before the war, were all petitioned to take positions in the post-war scene. Both Iwaszkiewicz and Słonimski were heads of the Writers' Union in turn. Even young poets who had engaged in sometimes intense flirtations with rightist movements were given influential positions. Czesław Miłosz, who had sampled most of the ideological positions on offer, was given posts as a cultural attaché in America and Switzerland. Jerzy Putrament had briefly belonged to the proto-fascist National Democratic Party, and Jerzy Andrzejewski had been associated with a wildly anti-Semitic Catholic community, but both of them had prominent literary positions and eventually became members of parliament.

Even the blackest of sheep had intellectual jobs, good apartments, access to extra supplies, and travel stipends. Wat, for example, hardly the PRL's greatest success, had been disillusioned of Communism by his torturous experience in the USSR, and refused the party positions Borejsza offered, and made contact with Catholic literary circles instead. Nonetheless, with Berman's approval, he was made the chief editor at the State Publishing Institute until the situation grew intolerable and he left Poland altogether in 1959.³⁷⁸ A similar case, popular in the discussions of the censor's office, was Artur Sandauer. After he escaped from the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943, Sandauer was active as a correspondent for the Polish People's Army, and became an editor of *Odrodzenie* after the war. Although he was a wholehearted supporter of the Communist party, Sandauer was impressively outspoken in his opposition to Socialist Realism. In 1949, he was relieved of his editorial position, and lived off of his translations of

³⁷⁷ Tomas Venclova, *Aleksander Wat: Life and Art of an Iconoclast* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 160.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

classical Greek theatre until 1956, when his positions began to appear more congenial to the state. Borejsza even fought to free rightist Catholic Bolesław Piasecki from prison and persuade the party that he could provide a sympathetic voice within the church.³⁷⁹ Writers of all sizes and stamps were not only allowed back into the country, but wooed. It is difficult to miss the sense that Berman and Borejsza, and through them, the Communist party, were making a wholesale effort to preserve what remained of Poland's literary heritage. At this point, establishing a coherent national identity was in fact of greater immediate importance than the demands of Socialist Realism.

Berman and Borejsza were, in fact, explicit in their statements about the role of the returning writers. In an interview decades later with Teresa Torańska, Berman said that, "we wanted to use the old, pre-war elites to the full by including them in the building of socialism."³⁸⁰ Toward this goal, "every conceivable means" had been used to "create an atmosphere in which they would be eager to work, to be active."³⁸¹ In a well-known article he wrote at the time, "The Gentle Revolution," Borejsza, comparing postwar Poland to a Jacobin Paris sans the regrettable guillotine, averred that the nation was being reborn. He proclaimed that, "we can and we must cease to be a musty, provincial, egocentric, out-of-the-way locality of snobs imitating foreign countries. We can and we must achieve an independent expression of our national culture [...]."³⁸² The complexion of this national culture is surprising. Both the article and the reality of the privilege given to authors suggest that the national culture was neither strictly Communist, nor especially wedded to a specific revolutionary aesthetic. It would have been easy to limit benefits to party members, the younger generation of authors, or even those who, like Wat, had been involved in the more radical circle of the avant-gardists. Instead, it appears that the national culture was often older, and enamored of the past.

This approach can be explained in both practical and political terms. Practically, there was the sense that Poland had only just escaped the deluge, and that everything that remained must be preserved. With over sixteen percent of the prewar population dead, Poland had possibly the

³⁷⁹ Shore, *Caviar and Ashes*, 269. As Piasecki turned out to have an eye for his own advantage, this strategy proved to be inspired.

³⁸⁰ Teresa Torańska, *"Them": Stalin's Polish Puppets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 268.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 269.

³⁸² Jerzy Borejsza, "Rewolucja łagodna," *Odrodzenie* 1, no. 11 (1945): 1.

highest death rate in Europe.³⁸³ The first issue of *Odrodzenie* ran heavily to obituaries, including those of Helena Górska, Tadeusz Boy-Żeliński, and Bruno Schulz. Politically, two of the Party's goals were to establish a popular front, and to legitimize the current government by connecting it to the Polish past. Both of these required as many connections to pre-war authors as possible.

Out of this welter of authors returning to work, a picture of Polish literary production begins to emerge that resembles the official rhetoric more closely than one would immediately find plausible. This is not to suggest that postwar Poland housed an idyllic community of like-minded writers and literary censors and officials who worked harmoniously to perfect each book. Rather, the relevant players—both Borezjsa and Berman, with other members of the Party elite, as well as the censors themselves—were interested in creating congenial rhetoric across the cultural sphere in order to foster an image of inclusivity. At the highest levels, the writers' return had been engineered and overseen by Berman and Borejsza. While neither of these men were at all casual in their commitment to Communism, the immediate institution of Socialist Realism was not their first goal.

This spirit of inclusion, aimed at preserving Poland's literary heritage, lasted long enough to get most of the available remnant back to Poland, but in the longer run, it proved politically untenable. While the needs of national unity made it difficult to practice the kind of exclusion that would have been necessary to create a truly homogenous style, the demands of "building a new Poland" grew continually higher. To a certain extent, the shift is prefigured even in the earliest rhetoric. Berman and Borejsza, despite their short-lived tolerant policies, were hardly the elite equivalent of the non-party censors who cared more about Mickiewicz than Marx. Berman, in particular, fell somewhere between dogmatism and zealotry in his beliefs in his adherence to hardline Communism. When not cosseting traumatized artists, he ran Poland's increasingly notorious Security Service. While he seems to have been quite sincere in his early pluralist efforts, they were always in the service of a more lasting change that he was seeking to effect. In his article in *New Roads*, Berman made it clear that there was no room for competition between the old and new intelligentsia, but at the same time, "it [was] no accident that ever more writers and artists [were] joining the ranks of our party." He believed that Poland was entering a

³⁸³ Materski and Szarota, *Polska 1939-1945*, 46.

“Golden Age” but also that it would be an “Age of Reform.”³⁸⁴ From the beginning, any writer who wanted to join the cause was welcome, but there was little room for those who were enemies to new Poland. Still, by 1948, the deepening atmosphere of Stalinism began to make a continued ideological openness more and more difficult. To exacerbate the matter, Borejsza, always the more flexible of the two, and also the most active in arranging the return and support of authors, was seriously injured in a traffic accident and diagnosed with terminal stomach cancer within a span of months in 1949.³⁸⁵ What resistance he might have presented to the system’s increasing constriction is impossible to say.

Even as the state’s requirements tightened, however, the atmosphere of the first years of openness had a lasting effect. They set up structures that continued to provide space for less orthodox authors like Tuwim, Sandauer, and even those who would eventually leave like Kott and Wat, to maintain themselves within Poland. Practically speaking, the Polish literary community was still fairly small and interconnected, functioning almost as much by personal connections and loyalties as it did by state policy. When Tuwim found himself unwilling to blunt his satires for the new state, he was at least able to continue his career as a writer, albeit in the more circumscribed space of writing poems for children. As the case of Sandauer illustrates, even when authors fell sharply from favor, they were often left with university or publishing positions, and sometimes even access to periodicals to print short articles and the like. Their continued presence around the peripheries helped keep the system from ever becoming really homogenous. In addition, their more orthodox colleagues generally kept their official positions, creating a space of some lenience and sympathy, if not much real help. Iwaszkiewicz never seemed terribly dedicated to enforcing Socialist Realism, for instance, and Kott, together with half the literary community, campaigned, if rather anemically, for Leon Schiller to be allowed to stage Mickiewicz’s *Forefather’s Eve*.³⁸⁶

Partly because of this lack of unity at the top, the censors on the ground had a difficult time enforcing issues of style in the work of notable, established authors. Having the “authority” to intervene in or suspend publications was a problem that the offices worried about. Even after a letter to the *Informational Bulletin* that had been generally positive, Jerzy

³⁸⁴ Jakub Berman, “Zagadnienie pracy partyjnej wśród inteligencji,” *Nowe Drogi* 1, no. 2 (1947): 143-145.

³⁸⁵ Shore, *Caviar and Ashes*, 298; Kott, *Still Alive*, 176. Kott implies that the trouble was a stroke.

³⁸⁶ Shore, *Caviar and Ashes*, 302-304; Kott, *Still Alive*, 179.

Raczyński of the Poznań office concluded, “I do not want this claim to obscure the fact that too many interventions at our office are still made illegitimately, or are even compromised. At the same time we have made serious omissions.”³⁸⁷ One of the mistakes Raczyński cites, for example, was caused by a censor who did not understand that the word “fusion” (*fuzja*, used in political and economic contexts) in an article about two social clubs meant “joining together” (*zlanie*), and angrily removed the word as an “unwarranted introduction of hunting weapons into the social organization.” Not knowing the political word, he had assumed the writers were speaking of a *fuzia myśliwska*, a type of fowling rifle. Raczyński fumed that it was “an example of the compromising political and intellectual level of the censor, that lowers the censor’s authority in the eyes of editors.” He concluded that the “authority of the office depends on the political, intellectual, and cultural level of its individual workers,” who needed to “learn and relearn” their trade. The censor’s errors, then, created at least a crisis of confidence, if not one of actual authority, within the office. It led to a pervasive sense of uncertainty, and even deference towards established authors.

If the discussions of the *Bulletin* and the provincial office reports give an accurate picture, the censors often dealt with their lack of clarity by seizing on a single, often minor criterion and making it into their entire critical lens. Such nitpicking aggravated the authors of the *Bulletin*, who urged censors to take a more holistic view of the books they were censoring. One instructional article in the *Bulletin*, for example, critiqued not Zofia Nałkowska’s *Medallions*, but the original censor’s review of it. The book was one of the accounts of the Nazi occupation that was trusted enough to be exported to Germany, and by the time the *Bulletin* article discussing the original censor’s review appeared, *Medallions*’ first edition had been circulating in Poland for a few years. The *Bulletin* took the *Medallions*’ first censor to task for overzealously refusing to publish the book. The article’s criticism was first of all that the censor had parceled his review into discrete parts rather than “giving a general ideological evaluation of the whole.” As seriously, the censor seemed to be aware of “neither the meaning and worth of the whole position, nor of the individual author.”³⁸⁸ Warming to the theme, the article pointed out that, “when it comes to choices of poetry, they [the choices] are characteristically determined by the artist’s

³⁸⁷ Jerzy Raczyński, “List z Poznania,” *Biuletyn Instrukcyjny*, no. 5 [1953]: 51-54, AAN, GUKPPiW (420 165-2), k. 339-342.

³⁸⁸ “O recenzjace zbiorkow literackich,” *Biuletyn Informacyjno-Instrukcyjny*, no. 4 [April 1953], AAN, GUKPPiW 420 (165-2), 236-242.

ideological and aesthetic development. One must remember that some of our greatest poets have spent a period in their youths yielding, in formal and ideological terms, to the influence of decadent bourgeois culture.” As an object lesson in the necessity of patience during these periods, the article gives a particularly heinous example of Słonimski’s juvenile verse, before moving on to Putrament, Ważyk, and Borowski.

This *Bulletin* article, and any number like it, made it immediately clear that literary censors were expected to have an extensive knowledge of both their country’s literary history and its more contemporary developments. In order to heed the *Bulletin*’s suggestions, they would have to be familiar with Putrament or Słonimski’s recent publications, conversant enough with the poets’ histories to pick out developmental similarities, and perspicacious enough to apply them to a relatively unknown third party. Nor were there any objective standards, since the young and foolish poets could not be trusted to adhere to any of the standards of Socialist Realism. In fact, another article explicitly instructed the censors to give leeway to any young author who seemed sufficiently promising. Better to endure stylistic error than to quash a budding talent.³⁸⁹ The *Bulletin* also makes it clear that Słonimski, Putrament, Ważyk, Borowski and company had become unassailable for the everyday critic. The very errors that could have been censured (or censored, as the case may be) had become arguments in favor of permissiveness.

What emerges, then, is a two-tier system. Authors judged promising enough were allowed a wide rein in order for their development to proceed unimpeded. When opposed to their “great worth to the nation,” errors of tone and style could not prevent books like *Medallions* or Tadeusz Borowski’s *This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen (Proszę Państwa do Gazu)* from being published. The censor who either failed to recognize the author’s elect status or simply disliked her book would easily be reduced to pettiness and nit-pickery. Inclusion in this elite was mostly a function of the wider cultural apparatus, the product of so many reviews, a quantity of book sales, and the judgment of the censors themselves. There were, however, certain broad requirements. For Polish purposes, it was not necessary for an author to subscribe entirely to Socialist Realism, but neither could she be actively engaged in any other movement. Likewise, party membership was unnecessary, but other major loyalties could present difficulties. Thus, Iwaszkiewicz’s development was understood to be productive, but Tuwim’s, because he retained his Skamander style, was not.

³⁸⁹ Zbigniew Mitzner, report [1951], AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII-69, k. 24.

In the same way, it was impossible to be an elite writer as a Catholic or too active a Jew.

A different kind of space emerged on the fringes of Polish publishing. Being outside the elect did not necessarily mean going unpublished, but it did imply a different kind of treatment from the censors. Like other Communist states after the war, Poland found itself embracing nationalist politics to a degree that would have surprised early party members. Pursuing national unity, they adopted rhetorical strategies from an entire constellation of right-leaning interwar positions. If political nationalists, racial theorists, and militant Catholics were willing to put their rhetoric in the service of the new state, their basic positions could survive surprisingly unchanged. This was especially true within the formerly German regions that were added to Poland in the peace settlement. Gaining almost 45,000 square miles in the West left Poland a number of populations to assimilate into a coherent whole. While the ethnic German population had been expelled, they left an entire expanse of territory in which the Poles had recently been the minority population themselves. Part of the same situation, there was a sizeable population of Poles from the borderland recently ceded to the USSR that was being moved into the formerly German territory. Decades later, Berman recalled that “the struggle for those territories was one of our main tasks during the first five years; it was a battle waged and won, and even the peasants from the other side of the River Bug, who were probably the most hostile to us, saw a better life opening up before them when they entered the Recovered Territories.”³⁹⁰

Somewhat ironically, this territorial situation closely resembled the program of Poland’s rightist party during the interwar. Against the Socialists’ desire to make common cause with Germany against the threat of Russia, these nationalists argued for an Eastern alliance to help leverage the Western Territories that they believed to be historically Polish. When the Communists found themselves within the old National Democrat program for international relations, they also adopted some of the racial tones of their old enemy’s rhetoric.³⁹¹ In 1946, for example, fliers in these regions exhorted Poles to “defend the western borders of Poland, [...] and explain to all the nations of the world that they are acting against peace,

³⁹⁰ Torańska, “*Them*”: *Stalin’s Polish Puppets*, 256-257, 268-269.

³⁹¹ Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm: Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy Komunistycznej w Polsce* (Warszawa: Wydawn. Trio, 2005), 135-175, esp. 140. It is worth noting that Zaremba argues that in the later Stalinist period, between 1948 and 1955, these tendencies found a cooler reception within the party (Ch 6: 175-223). This did not, however, extend as far as preventing nationalist publications.

against Poland, and on behalf of the Germans.”³⁹² In this, they were actually taking a harder line than the surviving National Democrats. Stanisław Grabski, for example, who had been an extremely right-wing parliamentary delegate during the interwar years, was chosen to be part of the delegation that met with Stalin after the war.³⁹³ After this, he returned to his parliamentary role and actually advocated a “softer line” toward the Germans.³⁹⁴ From 1947 on, he held a chair in Economics (of all things) at the University of Warsaw. Allowing them a few fringe publications, then, did not require any further ideological movement.

From a prewar perspective, these movements towards the National Democrats are deeply surprising. The Endeks, as they were colloquially known, had not been Fascists, but they were close enough to make the comparison compelling. They had almost no common cause with the Communists, and had been formally dissolved in 1947. For all of this, they still commanded significant popular support after the war, especially in Prussian Poland, the area under such demographic stress in 1945.³⁹⁵ Although in general, Endecja’s political aims could not be countenanced after the war, its traditional mistrust of Germany seemed almost prophetic. It could even be suggested that a desire to simultaneously win former Endeks to the Communist cause and establish the Western regions as integral parts of Poland was among the factors behind the decision to expel the ethnic Germans.³⁹⁶ In this atmosphere, a number of endeavors indebted to rightist ideology, and in some cases led by former Endeks, were allowed and even supported. For example, Zygmunt Wojciechowski, a historian at Adam Mickiewicz University, who had been friends with Endek leader Roman Dmowski and led some of the party’s fringe movements before the war, founded the Western Institute (*Instytut Zachodni*) and its accompanying publication the *Western Review* (*Przegląd Zachodni*).³⁹⁷ Among its first publications was a reprint of Wojciechowski’s 1933 *Poland-Germany, Ten Decades of Struggle* (*Polska-Niemcy. Dziesięć wieków*

³⁹² Michael Fleming, *Communism, Nationalism and Ethnicity in Poland, 1944-50* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 66.

³⁹³ Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 180.

³⁹⁴ Fleming, *Communism, Nationalism and Ethnicity in Poland*, 67.

³⁹⁵ Jerzy Lukowski and W. H. Zawadzki, *A Concise History of Poland*, 2nd ed., Cambridge Concise Histories (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 212.

³⁹⁶ T. David Curp, *A Clean Sweep? The Politics of Ethnic Cleansing in Western Poland, 1945-1960*, Rochester Studies in Central Europe, (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 55-79.

³⁹⁷ Connelly, *Captive University*, 158.

zmagania). Its ostensible purpose was to study the politics, economy and history of Germany, but practically, it was wildly nationalist. The most active funding for the Institute ended after 1948, but it continued to work and publish for the entire Stalinist period.³⁹⁸ Its works were censored in much the same way *German Barbarism* and *Terrible Fate* had been: often, they found a censor as nationalist as they were, and from time to time, their wings were clipped by someone who found the entire enterprise repugnant.

In much the same way, the interwar Polish eugenics movement became part of the postwar Socialist fabric. Between 1951 and 1953, Jan Mydlarski, a major proponent of eugenics, was made rector of the University of Wrocław, which had been Breslau. The city, cleared of Germans and repopulated with Polish industrial workers, was at the center of reintegration fervor.³⁹⁹ By the time Mydlarski was elected as the universities rector, he had long since given up his interest in serology that, in the twenties, had suggested that blood type might correlate with national characteristics of body and character.⁴⁰⁰ Nor had his eugenic thought ever been particularly anti-Semitic.⁴⁰¹ It had been and continued to be, however, focused on improving the literal and figurative stature of the Polish nation. Mydlarski belonged, for example, to the Polish Eugenics Society, which supported legislation to sterilize “the handicapped, often degenerate; those that are a permanent burden on state and society; the degenerate,” etc.⁴⁰² In 1951, he published a book titled *Paths and Deviations in Human Development* [*Drogi i bezdroża rozwoju człowieka*], which indicated that his views, diverging from the orthodox Soviet position represented by Victor Bunak, for example, had not substantially changed.⁴⁰³ During his years in Wrocław, he developed a school around his own system that continues to be influential today.⁴⁰⁴

³⁹⁸ José M. Faraldo, *Europe, Nationalism, Communism: Essays on Poland* (New York: P. Lang, 2008), 46. In fact, the Institute continues to exist today.

³⁹⁹ Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, 140.

⁴⁰⁰ Rachel E. Boaz, *In Search of “Aryan Blood”: Serology in Interwar and National Socialist Germany* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011), 110-111.

⁴⁰¹ Magdalena Gawin, “Progressivism and Eugenic Thinking in Poland, 1905-1939,” in *“Blood and Homeland”: Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900-1940*, ed. Marius Turda and Paul Weindling (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007), 176.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 177-178.

⁴⁰³ Katarzyna A. Kaszycka and Goran Štrkalj, “Anthropologists’ Attitudes Towards the Concept of Race: The Polish Sample,” *Current Anthropology* 43, no. 2 (2002): 330.

⁴⁰⁴ Jan Czekanowski, “The Theoretical Assumptions of Polish Anthropology and the Morphological Facts,” *Current Anthropology* 3, no. 5 (1962): 488.

To complete the trifecta of rightists, the party founded a limited alliance with the conservative element of the Catholic Church. Its main exponent would be Bolesław Piasecki's PAX. Piasecki himself had been not only a conservative Endek, but a prominent member of the extreme-right, Catholic-inflected Falangists. After fighting with the more nationalist parties of the resistance and jockeying for a higher place within their ranks, he found himself, unsurprisingly, in Soviet prison at the end of the war. His release and subsequent association with the party seem to be due to a combination of his own brilliant manipulation and Borejsza's intervention.⁴⁰⁵ In all of this, Piasecki's Fascist past was ironically more an aid than a hindrance. Though he renounced his formal allegiances and anti-Semitic stance, his role in the new partnership was to help unite the entire political spectrum under the new provisional government.⁴⁰⁶ In this, his former extremism—combined with his moral flexibility—strengthened his position. If the “reluctant strata of society” that he promised to mobilize were youthful rightists, his practical background spoke to Catholics and nationalists. The combination was powerful. The resulting organization was more dedicated to political expediency than particular policy, but with the Communists' approval, it avowed the values of “God, mankind, nation, and family.” If the censor sometimes treated its publications with nearly the same suspicion it did the product of the Church's several other presses, PAX enjoyed both official sanction and government subsidy.⁴⁰⁷ The official policy was systematically to exclude religious rhetoric from the public sphere, while allowing it to remain a private option. Catholicism was meant to occupy an entirely separate strain of Polish history, removed from the main trajectory of the nation. Stefan Żółkiewski, a prominent literary critic, professor, and founding member of the party, articulated this position systematically to the censors in 1949, maintaining that Catholic literature had followed an entirely separate path through the nineteenth century, consistently “reactionary and traditional, [a] disciple of long-bankrupt

⁴⁰⁵ Shore (*Caviar and Ashes*, 269) attributes most of the credit to Borejsza. Kott (*Still Alive*) agreed, but Berman maintained that the release was solely Soviet General Serov decision, see Torańska (“*Them*”: *Stalin's Polish Puppets*). Kunicki seems to indicate support for both factors, see Mikołaj Stanisław Kunicki, *Between the Brown and the Red: Nationalism, Catholicism, and Communism in Twentieth-Century Poland: The Politics of Bolesław Piasecki* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012), 79-82, 85.

⁴⁰⁶ Kunicki, *Between the Brown and the Red*, 81.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

ideas” while the realist strand pursued “everything new, revolutionary, and progressive.”⁴⁰⁸

None of the writers in these marginal categories could hope to enter the privileged circle that was already accepted as canonical by the people who censored their work. All of their works were subject to the censor’s whim and the vagaries of the moment. A nationalist text might be published in Poznań but not in Lublin, or a biography of St. Theresa refused because the saint’s life was hagiographic, while any number of prayer books were published.⁴⁰⁹ Certainly, in these realms, the censors showed more confidence in their own opinions. These were the reviews that used expansive phrases like, “the entire work [of this bourgeois philistine] belongs in the trash” or, “a useful education in our political realities.”⁴¹⁰ At the same time, while a censor might peremptorily require that a line or a phrase change to protect party sensibilities, it was less common for them to waste time objecting to the themes or sentiments at hand. These dubious services were saved for more worthy objects. Some of what these religious or nationalist writers gave up by working outside the elite sphere, then, they regained in the form of certain freedoms. Content itself was chief among these. While there was certainly never the freedom for writers to choose a perspective without regard for the government’s viewpoint, a surprising number of positions were allowed to survive on the fringes, among authors who were not members of the Writers’ Union and who published from second-tier presses that did not receive paper or state subsidies.

Germany

Although the destruction of Berlin was less extensive than the wreckage of Warsaw, and the population less dispersed, many of the dynamics of rebuilding were the same in the two countries.⁴¹¹ Beginning in 1945, Becher played a role in the GDR’s Kulturbund and Aufbau Verlag that was similar to Berman and Borejsza’s through Poland’s Czytelnik. He organized talks, arranged for housing, ran fundraisers for impoverished

⁴⁰⁸ Stefan Żółkiewski, “Polityka kulturalne w dziedzinie literatury” [18 May 1949], AAN, KC-PZPR 237-XVIII-69, k. 76.

⁴⁰⁹ Recenzja of *Przedziwny wódz* by Zofia Zawszańska [12 Nov. 1948], AAN, GUKPPIW 180, k. 253.

⁴¹⁰ M. Mikołajczyk, recenzja of *Filistrzy* by H. Czarnecki [10 March 1950], AAN, GUKPPIW 180, k. 303; B. Mawciuciakowa, recenzja of *Straszne dziedzictwo* by Walaria Szalay-Groele [7 Oct. 1948], AAN, GUKPPIW 181, k. 247.

⁴¹¹ Kenneth Hewitt, “Place Annihilation: Area Bombing and the Fate of Urban Places,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 73, no. 2 (1983): 264.

writers, and wrote long letters to friends and colleagues who were considering return.⁴¹² Likewise, *Sinn und Form*, the extremely prestigious journal founded by Becher and run by Peter Huchel, played a similar role to Poland's *Odrodzenie*. Both were designed to accommodate the widest possible variety of opinion, to appeal to readers outside the immediate circle of dedicated party members, and to show themselves to be seriously intellectual. Especially in the earliest years, cultural activity followed these lines. It was explicitly and actively pluralist, working for a unified German culture that would be centered on anti-Fascism, democracy, and the classical tradition. Becher, for example, helped set up cultural houses around Germany and traveled through all four of the zones to attend meetings and give speeches urging unity.⁴¹³ Not shockingly, this proximity to Western Germany was a determining factor in the treatment of contemporary authors. It had the contradictory effect of simultaneously opening spaces that would have been unthinkable in Poland, and made the GDR one of the most rigorously Socialist Realist states in Eastern Europe.

Until the Berlin Blockade in 1948, and to a lesser extent until the Wall was built in 1961, the border between East and West Germany was porous, to say the least. Coming and going was easy enough for ordinary people to manage it fairly regularly, and books traveled with even greater ease.⁴¹⁴ Throughout the fifties, party papers in the GDR published reviews of books that were not—and could not be—published on their side of the border.⁴¹⁵ There was no pretense, even, that the books were not being read. To a certain extent, this was true in Poland as well. Certainly, there was never a shortage of illegal books from the West throughout Eastern Europe, and the situation was not one that the authorities concerned themselves about unduly.⁴¹⁶ In Poland, however, outside books required either a translator and/or someone to distribute copies in Polish or an audience familiar with their original language. *Odrodzenie* and *Nowe Drogi* did not find it necessary to review works by unreturned exiles like Gombrowicz, much less

⁴¹² Alexander Stephan, Sara Lennox, and Frank Lennox, "Johannes R. Becher and the Cultural Development of the GDR," *New German Critique*, no. 2 (1974): 77-78.

⁴¹³ See for example Johannes Robert Becher, *Deutsches Bekenntnis, fünf Reden zu Deutschlands Erneuerung*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1946), 38.

⁴¹⁴ Edith Sheffer, "On Edge: Building the Border in East and West Germany," *Central European History* 40, no. 2 (2007): 317-318.

⁴¹⁵ Rhys W. Williams, Stephen Parker, and Colin Riordan, *German Writers and the Cold War 1945-61* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 53.

⁴¹⁶ Alfred A. Reisch, *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-Funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program Behind the Iron Curtain* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), 212, 244-246.

those by non-Polish westerners. Likewise, the border controls in Poland were not extreme. More than one author returned and then left again when the climate became uncongenial, and the unofficial movement of people in the earliest years was significant. For Polish authors living in Poland, though, the PRL was the only place that their work would be published and read in its native language. In some cases, it was the only place they felt they could find a truly engaged audience.⁴¹⁷ In Germany, there was always an option to live and work in the western state. It is important to remember that the East Germans were not merely hoping to persuade individual authors, but to woo the entire Federal Republic. Until 1948, the official assumption was that Germany was and would remain a single state—Socialist, of course. Becher wrote of the “bitterness” mixed with the joy of return when the refugee found only “wreckage and a shattered people.”⁴¹⁸ Even after the split had become undeniable, it was perforce seen as a temporary aberration.

This essential fact was one of the cornerstones of the GDR’s new literary identity. The belief in a unified Germany went hand in hand with the state’s emphasis on peace and anti-Fascism. Indeed, Becher said explicitly that “this interest in the fatherland, this new democratic patriotism that we must kindle, demands of poetry a new pathos, capable of imbuing all peace-loving Germans, all German men of good will, with enthusiasm for the struggle for peace and ardor for the struggle to reunite Germany.”⁴¹⁹ Both peace and anti-Fascism had their own separate origins and trajectories, but it is clear that they were also meant to be the markers of GDR superiority, and its lure for Western Germans. This Western orientation meant that connections with the Other Germany were of paramount importance, and work coming from there had a heightened luster. Moreover, for all of its moral superiority, the GDR quickly became profoundly aware of its material inferiority to its western sibling. The book industry worried constantly about its appearance at major international gatherings like the Frankfurt Book Fair, fretting that it did not have enough exciting new authors, that the paper was of poor quality, that the illustrations might not be stylish enough to compete with its other half, and

⁴¹⁷ Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind*, trans. Jane Zielonko (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), xii.

⁴¹⁸ Johannes Robert Becher, *Bemühungen I*, Bd. 13 of *Gesammelte Werke* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1972), 55.

⁴¹⁹ Becher, *Bemühungen II*, 208.

that overall, they “so profoundly lack[ed] an equivalent literature.”⁴²⁰ For its own literary narratives, both national and international, to function, then, required the corroboration of outside German authors. If it would have been most preferable for established authors to decamp entirely to the GDR, participation from the West was only slightly less helpful. Their mere presence publishing new works in the GDR, attending ceremonies and accepting awards, ratified the GDR’s position on national unity, while their implicit criticism of West Germany lent strength to the state’s claims to peace and anti-Fascism. It is no surprise, then, that for the support of an indisputably recognized author like Thomas Mann, they would have been willing to go to almost any lengths.

As the war ended in 1945, Thomas Mann was just turning seventy, and had already written most of his literary output. *Buddenbrooks*, *Death in Venice*, and *The Magic Mountain* had already been generally hailed (and won him a Nobel prize for literature in 1929), but *Doctor Faustus* was yet to be published in 1947. While his highly symbolic, ambiguous style was emphatically outside the bounds of Socialist Realism, it was infinitely preferable to the absurdist aesthetics of a Kafka, and straightforward enough to be acceptable from a prewar author. Moreover, Mann had long espoused liberal causes and left Germany in opposition to Hitler in 1933. It is notable that Thomas’s older brother, Heinrich, lacked his troubling early monarchist tendencies, wrote more explicitly revolutionary work, and had actually left Germany even earlier. His work was less prominent, however, and although he was admired in the GDR, he was differently sought after. Heinrich Mann had a difficult relationship with Ulbricht, whom he found untrustworthy and suspected of “creating a popular front for himself.”⁴²¹ He had been forced to wait for his invitation to return, and though the GDR was enthusiastically preparing for his homecoming in 1950, he died before it was accomplished. Had he reached the GDR, Heinrich would have become the editor of the state’s new German Academy for the Arts, and likely had some degree of political power.⁴²² Certainly, his books were published widely and acclaimed in the GDR. His brother Thomas was approached more eagerly, though with less promise of political power.

⁴²⁰ Memo, “Betr.: Verlagsstatistik im Frankfurter Börsenblatt Nr. 32/53,” Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1905; Memo for files “Betr. A) Leipziger Buchmesse B) Frankfurter Buchmesse” [15 Aug. 1953], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1901, bl. 4-6; Copy of letter from Droste Verlag und Druckerei KG to Ehm Welk [29 Sept. 1953], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1905, bl. 33.

⁴²¹ Jean Michel Palmier, *Weimar in Exile: The Antifascist Emigration in Europe and America*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2006), 753.

⁴²² David Gross, “Heinrich Mann and the Politics of Reaction,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 8, no. 1 (1973): 126.

Becher and the Kulturbund were desperate for Thomas Mann's participation, not as a party writer, but as a symbol of German literary excellence. There is no sense that he would have held political power if he had moved to the GDR. Repeated, high level delegations were sent to persuade him to move east, and when it became apparent that their chances of success were dubious, they made it clear that any participation he might be interested in would be welcome.⁴²³ Early plans for *Sinn und Form*, for example, had called for the magazine to be titled *Mass und Wert* after a similar prewar publication founded by Mann. The name was only changed after Mann rebuffed the request for rights to his title.⁴²⁴ When he did deign to accept an invitation to speak at Goethe's jubilee celebration in Weimar, he was given top billing. The same year, when Mann won the prestigious, but notably West German, Goethe Prize, Becher wrote a rather fulsome congratulation in the *Daily Observer (Tägliche Rundschau)*, thanking him for ensuring that "the power of the German spirit that [he] represents is a power for peace and that the messages of peace that bore [his] name were among the noblest expressions of our people's desire for peace."⁴²⁵ These pronouncements tended to ally Mann's work to the priorities of the GDR's cultural project.

In the same way, the censor embraced Mann's work as a fusion of Germany's classical and antifascist pasts. Considering an edition of the epic work, *Joseph and His Brothers*, the censor was enthusiastic, to say the least. "It is obvious that not the least objection can be raised to printing Thomas Mann's four Joseph books," he pronounced at the opening of his four-page review. The remaining pages were devoted to demonstrating first that the books fit securely into Germany's tradition of anti-Fascist literature. Next, the book's historical framing (moving the "brutal Amnon-cult" to make it contemporary with "Joseph, the reformer and public benefactor") indicated "[Mann's] partisanship with enlightened humanism" and "struggle against brutal anti-human decadence." In the same vein, the censor maintained that by "demythologizing the mythology" of the Joseph story in the best Lukaścian manner, Mann further clarifies this tone and emphasizes that he has "appropriated the biblical mythos to one of Hitler's Fascism or today's decadence." Finally, the censor turns to Joseph's development from individualistic narcissism towards a free association

⁴²³ Stephen Parker and Matthew Philpotts, *Sinn und Form: The Anatomy of a Literary Journal* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 23, 38; Stephan, S. Lennox, and F. Lennox, "Johannes R. Becher and the Cultural Development of the GDR," 78.

⁴²⁴ Parker and Philpotts, *Sinn und Form*, 16.

⁴²⁵ Parker, Davies, and Philpotts, *Modern Restoration*, 159.

with the community. While this emphasis is plainly one that the censor finds more than sympathetic in Mann's work, it is also almost the only place where he suggests criticism: "Mann is not in a position to comprehend the turn to 'we' under the protection of the ego as a real fact." Rather, he is left with a moral duty, an abstract choice to be made rather than a concrete fact. This weakness, which the censor magnanimously allowed was understandable in "this moment of the general crisis of capitalism," was the only exception to the general campaign to present Mann's person, as well as the structure and themes of his work, as anti-Fascist and peaceable.⁴²⁶

Mann was only the most pronounced example of a treatment that was relatively common for established writers. Alfred Döblin, who had written an entire four-part saga, *November 1918: A German Revolution*, in exile, was also courted assiduously. Just as it did in the case of Mann, the language surrounding Döblin focused on humanism, peace, and a unified German tradition. Even when they worried about his "expressionism," "bourgeois humanism" and Catholicism, censors emphasized that he should be "undeniably classified within the humanistic heritage of democratic Germany."⁴²⁷ In both cases, there is a fine balance between real respect for the considered opinion of elderly statesmen of German literature, and a rather crass competition to win the greatest number of legitimizing authors. This same dynamic was at work in the special ten-year anniversary edition of *Sinn und Form* in 1954. Meant to display the depth and breadth of the GDR's literary achievement, the issue was carefully balanced between leading figures from both East and West. Its point, and the point of the journal as a whole, was to provide an East German showcase that would also attract interest and respect in the West. To that end, the double issue included new pieces from Alfred Döblin, Leonard Frank, Hans Henry Jahnn, and Herbert Ihering.⁴²⁸ On a purely political level, the inclusion of so many West German authors echoed the state's insistence that there ought to be only one Germany, just as their prestige lent credibility to the larger cultural project. This no doubt helped overcome scruples that might otherwise have been felt about their publication.

⁴²⁶ All quotes from: Druckgenehmigung for *Joseph und seine Brüder* by Thomas Mann [22 Sept. 1953], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 5033, bl. 299-305.

⁴²⁷ Druckgenehmigung for *Berlin Alexanderplatz* by Alfred Döblin [30 Sept. 1954], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 3966, bl. 64.

⁴²⁸ Parker and Philpotts, *Sinn und Form*, 12-15.

At the same time, although the westerners certainly did not belong to the camp of Socialist Realism, they were members of the larger order of exile writers. Defined by their shared experience of fleeing Germany to resist Fascism abroad, these exile writers provided the most basic narrative of the East German state. This narrative was so dominant that even Germans who never left invented a new category to participate in it: those who stayed but refused to collaborate with the Fascist state were said to have experienced internal exile. By definition free from the taint of Nazi collaboration, writers who had been forced to flee were especially privileged in both halves of Germany. They were particularly important in the GDR, though, where the idea of exile was central to the state's identity and most immediate historical narrative. Many of the GDR's political and military leaders had fought in the Thaelmann unit or its brothers, specifically made up of German Communists in the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War. Their military experience paralleled the authors' exile, and both had a passion for anti-Fascism.⁴²⁹ As the Spanish conflict became a synecdoche for principled resistance in the GDR's party history, exile narratives grew similarly necessary in its literature, even to the point of overlooking the author's strict ideological affiliations. An exile experience could even be strong enough to overcome former Nazi sympathies. Bodo Uhse, one of the most prominent authors of the GDR, had actually been an active member of the Nazi party and editor of its newspaper until 1930, when he transferred his allegiance to the Communists. In 1933, he fled to Paris to escape arrest, and later fought in the International Brigades. In his case, the experience of exile was almost literally redemptive.⁴³⁰ Authors who were neither Communist nor willing to move to the GDR were not held quite to Uhse's standard, but neither did they have his fascist associations. Like Mann, these authors were being drawn into the GDR's national narrative. Beyond merely implying that the narrative belonged to the larger German whole, though, it might be suggested that their work also helped to universalize that history within the GDR itself. These were exiles who were not staunch party members, so they could provide something of a bridge between the party and the rest of the population. This threshold between

⁴²⁹ Krammer, "The Cult of the Spanish Civil War," 32-35.

⁴³⁰ Josie McLellan, *Antifascism and Memory in East Germany: Remembering the International Brigades, 1945-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 32. Interestingly, McLellan also writes on the use of anti-fascist identity to prove that a new dissident could never have really supported the Stalinist state; Josie McLellan, "The Politics of Communist Biography: Alfred Kantorowicz and the Spanish Civil War," *German History* 22, no. 4 (2004): 536-562.

the elite world and being an outsider ultimately made their striking freedom of expression possible.

The same dynamic that created the odd East German open space for West German exile writers also paradoxically restricted the freedom of authors within the GDR. Whereas in Poland, both party and non-party members occupied the same space, in Germany, Thomas Mann or Günter Grass, the rough equivalents to a Tuwim or Wat, could as easily live in Munich, or even Paris or Santa Monica, and visit on holidays. Those who actually chose to live within the GDR, then, were held—and often held themselves—to a higher standard. The writers whom Becher and his office helped come to East Germany at the close of the war differed from their Polish comrades most significantly in that they had a longer history of Marxism. The older generation among the Poles came mostly from the Skamander group, and while they may have committed seriously to Marxism, their intellectual and artistic formation, and indeed, most of their careers in some cases, had been elsewhere. The older generation in the GDR had spent its entire life in Marxism, and the effect was formidable. In fact, of all of the literary elites reforming themselves under Communism, the group in the GDR was the most dominated by its older generation. The influence of these authors was weighty enough, in fact, to create a continual question concerning the balance between unity, at which they did not always excel, and the sort of Socialist zeal that could provide the GDR with its own, independent identity.

The reverse side of the GDR's surprising tolerance for West German authors was also one of the most definitive factors in literature within the GDR itself: they were all in the Communist state by choice. On one level, this is obvious. Most exiles after the war faced decisions about where to live. East German writers, though, had to choose not to live in another Germany where their native language was still spoken, the war devastation was less severe than in Berlin, and the recovery quicker. They came, in fact, because of the publishing conditions, rather than in spite of them. Some of this was merely practical; the Western zones had censors and stylistic preferences as well as the East, and theirs leaned away from both political activism and exile narratives.⁴³¹ At the same time, the authors often sincerely believed that the Communist course was Germany's only way forward and away from Fascism.

In their letters, it is clear that these authors returned with the explicit purpose of participating in the Communist reconstruction of the state. Often, they were willing to sacrifice their own preferences towards that

⁴³¹ Palmier, *Weimar in Exile*, 642; Parkes, *Writers and Politics*, 13.

cause. It is important to remember that these intellectuals had participated in anti-Fascist and Communist organizations while they were in exile, and that they often understood the two to be linked. In Mexico, for example, there was a large and well established German anti-Fascist community that, with other exiles throughout the Americas, wrote the Communist-leaning, “anti-Hitler” *Freie Deutschland*. The journal, distributed even in the USSR, included work from authors as diverse as Thomas Mann and Uhse.⁴³² In California, the normally loose-knit exile community, including Bertolt Brecht, Heinrich and Thomas Mann, Leon Feuchtwanger, and Bruno Frank, convened to draw up a meticulous statement in support of the National Committee for a Free Germany that had just formed in the Soviet Union.⁴³³ When the time came to return home, authors who were not entirely comfortable with the eastern state still found that they preferred it to what they saw as West Germany’s collusion with the Nazi past. Thus, for example, in 1958, Victor Klemperer wrote in his diary that, as much as he “[found] the people of Bonn hateful,” he was frustrated by “the pig-headed hostility to culture, the lack of education and the tyranny of the Party” in the GDR. At the end of the day, though, he continued to prefer these difficulties to the “open Hitler regime” of the Bonn state.⁴³⁴

This is not to imply that the GDR was a paradise of harmony and cooperation between writers, censors, and authorities. Some authors, like Brecht, spent the lion’s share of their careers in the GDR giving the censors and cultural authorities the determined hell of a loyal opposition.⁴³⁵ Brecht, who had conspicuously emigrated to Switzerland rather than Russia, had ongoing conflict with the GDR’s main theorist, Lukács, over aesthetics, never conformed his work to Socialist Realism, and continued to criticize the cultural bureaucracy. In the midst of the 1953 uprising, he not only had two caustically critical poems published in the *Berlin Times* (*Berliner Zeitung*), for example, but also an entire interview in which he denounced Zhadovism and maintained that the anti-formalism campaign reeked of

⁴³² Christiane Zehl Romano, “‘Armer und lieber Sagetete’ Anna Seghers und Frans Carl Weiskopf,” in *Anna Seghers in Perspective*, ed. Ian Wallace (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 50; Palmier, *Weimar in Exile*, 578-579.

⁴³³ Ehrhard Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles and the Crisis of Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 225-226.

⁴³⁴ Victor Klemperer, *So sitze ich denn zwischen allen Stühlen*, vol. 2: *Tagebücher, 1950-1959* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1999) 280-282, cited in Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 252.

⁴³⁵ David Bathrick, “The Dialectics of Legitimation: Brecht in the GDR,” *New German Critique*, no. 2 (1974): 102-103.

Nazism.⁴³⁶ Even the more communally-minded tended to view the censors as bureaucratic philistines, necessary evils at the very best. Still it would be equally untrue to suggest that the authors at large were struggling to express their artistic freedom against the censor's restraints. Rather, on a number of occasions, they honestly set aside opinions for what they understood as the exigencies of reconstruction. During the war, for example, Anna Seghers had opposed Lukács's view of literature, arguing in favor of more experimental modernist authors like Dos Passos and Joyce in the Expressionism debates.⁴³⁷ After the war, within the Kulturbund and in writers' congresses, she fiercely debated issues of style from a perspective that never fully broke from her former one, but did emphasize the need for connection and political relevance more heavily. At the same time, her own work became more recognizably Socialist Realist.

In both East and West, the need for unity was paramount. The same spirit that deemed ideological and stylistic flexibility a fair trade for continued connection with the Federal Republic was also invested in creating a unified Germany out of the sometimes sharply differing regional groups within the country's borders. The most immediately difficult of these were the refugees streaming in from the rest of Eastern Europe. At least 12 million ethnic Germans in all were expelled from what had become Poland and Czechoslovakia, as well as from Romania, Hungary, and Yugoslavia.⁴³⁸ Between 2 and 2.5 million of them arrived in the Soviet Zone in the summer of 1945 alone, about ten percent of whom would not have spoken German.⁴³⁹ Most of these were women and children who were bound for Brandenburg farms, not Berlin writers' clubs. Still, a surprising number of the most prominent authors had come from the same regions. Hans Marchwitza had been born in Silesia, as had Arnold Zweig, Peter Hacks, and Alfred Kurella. Alexander Abusch, one of the most prominent members of the Kulturbund, deputy Minister of Culture, and eventually member of the Central Committee, was actually born in Krakow. The list could continue to include Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and more. All were prominent exile writers, but it was precisely the exile that they wrote about, not any earlier portion of their lives. In the case of Jewish authors like

⁴³⁶ Stephen Parker, "A Life's Work Curtailed? The Ailing Brecht's Struggle with the SED Leadership over GDR Cultural Policy," in *Brecht and the GDR: Politics, Culture, Posterity*, ed. Laura J. R. Bradley and Karen J. Leeder (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), 66, 77.

⁴³⁷ Romano, "Armer und lieber Sagetete," 37.

⁴³⁸ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 1.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 306, 301.

Seghers or Stephan Hermlin, even those who had lost family members tended to stress the experience of exile and the persecution of Communists more heavily than their ethnic heritage. It is difficult to say how much of this silence is due to the censor's pen. Certainly, the situation was ripe for self-censorship, as many Germans considered their eastern cousins little better than foreigners, and were sometimes even inimical toward them.⁴⁴⁰ Moreover, the government's policy quickly shifted the expellees into settlers, and then avoided the issue altogether.⁴⁴¹ It is possible that the writers were collectively too interested in assimilation to devote themselves to stories of their former homes. It is also possible that the overall urge to find some kind of unity and stasis was so great that censorship happened informally on the level of the publishers, without the censor's office ever having to intervene.⁴⁴²

Interestingly and problematically, the same desire for unity that made the exile narrative so compelling also militated against its success. The experience may have provided a lynchpin for the writers' German and Communist identities and established their revolutionary bona fides. It could not do the same for the majority of their countrymen, who had neither fled Nazi Germany nor resisted it internally while remaining, and thus could not draw on the experiences of the literal or internal exile of many authors. Once the country's focus turned to rebuilding, the separation between writers and the majority of reading Germans began to be troubling. The writers themselves often encouraged this effect. Brecht, never a model of patience or diplomacy, declared that he was glad of the misery waiting for his countrymen. In view of their actions during the war, he maintained that, "the Germans are a shitty people [*Scheißvolk*]." ⁴⁴³ Even Seghers admitted at the first Writers' Congress in 1948 that her generation

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 313.

⁴⁴¹ Pertti Ahonen, "Taming the Expellee Threat in Post-1945 Europe: Lessons from the Two Germanies and Finland," *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 1 (2005): 8-9. Both the words „*Vertriebene*” (expellees—the term of choice in West Germany) and „*Umsiedler*” (resettler—the initial East German formulaiton) were avoided after 1948.

⁴⁴² Pawel Zimniak, "Verlorene Heimat'--zum deutschen Topos in der polnischen Erinnerungskultur Nach 1945," in *Gedächtnis und Literatur in den "geschlossenen Gesellschaften" des Real-Sozialismus zwischen 1945 und 1989*, ed. Carsten Gansel (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2007), 76-77.

⁴⁴³ Hans Christoph Buch, *Parteilichkeit der Literatur oder Parteiliteratur? Materialien zu einer undogmatischen marxistischen Ästhetik* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1972), 185.

of writers often had trouble connecting to the rest of the country.⁴⁴⁴ She wrote in a journal at the time that, even back in Berlin, she was homesick. “I was ashamed the first week, because I was not surprised. The second week I was very surprised...I had, for example, always believed I knew exactly what a Nazi is, what a thief is, and what an honest man is.”⁴⁴⁵ It is unsurprising, then, that at the same Congress where Seghers had engaged in self-criticism, Ulbricht indicted some of the exile literature for a lack of public spirit, a refusal to surrender private trauma and speak to the needs of the community. “The exile happened, and now it is over,” he said. “If, after the fact, [the writers] have a private desire, that cannot be prevented. But they cannot demand that we give them paper for it.”⁴⁴⁶ This idea—that even the most irreproachably orthodox former exiles were failing to connect with the rest of the population—was widespread during the entire period, as were thinly veiled calls for less private interest and more public spirit from the writers. The censor’s office, in an internal memo for its workers, insisted that, “our literature is no private undertaking.”⁴⁴⁷ If one of the central goals of writing in the GDR was to create a direct language that could unite the nation, it is clear why this problem was significant.⁴⁴⁸

While it continued to be a vexed issue, it is important to note that this question was almost entirely an internal one. Publically and practically, the exile writers were feted and lionized. Seghers’ major novels, including *Transit (Transit)* and *The Seventh Cross (Das Siebte Kreuz)* were standard in schools across the country through the sixties, and were routinely praised in the most effusive terms.⁴⁴⁹ The everyday censors even tended to be rather deferential toward these authors. In a number of reviews for publications that came out in celebration of her overall work, the reviewers simply explained that that Seghers had requested some feature or another, and left her preference as its own justification.⁴⁵⁰ In the same way, Uhse’s

⁴⁴⁴ Marc Silberman, “Writing What- for Whom? ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’ in GDR Literature,” *German Studies Review* 10, no. 3 (1987): 527-538.

⁴⁴⁵ Hunter Bivens, “Anna Seghers’ ‘The Man and His Name’: ‘Heimat’ and the Labor of Interpellation in Postwar East Germany,” *German Studies Review* 30, no. 2 (2007): 317.

⁴⁴⁶ Silberman, “Writing What- for Whom?” 530.

⁴⁴⁷ Memo draft, “Entwurf für die Lektorsgutachtung,” Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 1889.

⁴⁴⁸ Boyer, “Censorship as a Vocation,” 511-545.

⁴⁴⁹ Anna Seghers, *Transit* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch, 1944); Anna Seghers, *Das siebte Kreuz* (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1942); John Rodden, *Textbook Reds: Schoolbooks, Ideology, and Eastern German Identity* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 204.

⁴⁵⁰ Druckgenehmigung for *Sagen von Artemis* by Anna Seghers [8 June 1964], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 5074, bl. 163.

second major novel, *The Patriots (Die Patrioten)*, was actually reviewed by the office's chief censor. The review itself was less a critique than a paean, declaring that the book was "significant as a literary contribution to German national culture [*nationalen deutschen Geschichte*]," not least because it "spoke great truth [*Wahrheitstreue*] out of its free artistic workmanship."⁴⁵¹ Like Seghers', his books, both *The Patriots* and the earlier *Lieutenant Bertram (Leutnant Bertram)*, were standard reading for school children.⁴⁵²

Conclusion

After the war, Poland and the GDR, like many other Eastern European states were deeply in need of unity, culturally as well as politically. This fact, within the very geographical and cultural specificities of their new boundaries, filled in the contours of acceptance and rejection of contemporary authors more distinctly than differences in doctrine. In Poland, a deep mistrust and anger toward Germany united groups from the nationalist right to the Jewish left. By leaving them some latitude in publishing, the government could work to co-opt these disparate groups while defining itself as the defender of the nation. This same desire to unite and preserve brought writers of all stamps back to Poland. At the same time, though, it created the paradoxical need to differentiate between those who were allowed on sufferance because of their positions in the prewar canon, and those whose new work was understood to be fundamentally canonical. In Germany, this differentiation between prestige authors from the prewar period and working members of the socialist state was automatically created by the division between East and West. Heterodox authors with prewar importance could remain in West Germany while still playing a prominent role in East German literature. Those who returned to East Germany were expected to participate fully in the creation of a Socialist state. This allowed the GDR to maintain a tension between freedom and respect for tradition on one hand, and ideological and stylistic rigor on the other. Conversely, in both Poland and the GDR the emphasis on national unity meant that outside the sphere of elite authors, there was less latitude for discussions of national or ideological difference. Those who were outside the orthodox center fought constantly for the right to publish

⁴⁵¹ Druckgenehmigung for *Sontagsträumerei in der Alameda* by Bodo Uhse [27 Dec. 1952], Abt. DDR-BA, DR-1 5095, bl. 44.

⁴⁵² Bodo Uhse, *Leutnant Bertram* (Berlin: Verlag Volk und Welt, 1947); Bodo Uhse, *Die Patrioten* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1954); Klaus Walther, *Bodo Uhse: Leben und Werk* (Dresden: Volk und Wissen, 1984), 126.

and for the paper with which to do it. The question, then, is not which state was the more liberal, but where the spaces for permissiveness opened. In their foundational moments, both states allowed and even encouraged the publication of heterogeneous material that became part of their canons and their identities.

Conclusion

In 1956, as Soviet tanks rolled through the streets of Budapest, Poland came perilously close to an uprising of its own, and the Polish censors decided to quit. The moment was troubled. Just a few months earlier, in February, Khrushchev had given his Secret Speech denouncing Stalinism, which was promptly leaked through Poland. Bierut died shortly thereafter, and tensions between reformists and hard-liners increased within the party. By June, there were strikes and demonstrations in Poznań over shortages and poor work conditions. Rumors sprang up that statues of the Virgin had been seen weeping all over the city, petitions were drawn up to return the Polish eagle to the flag, and awkward questions were asked aloud about Soviet involvement in the Katyń massacres.⁴⁵³ Ultimately, after the deaths of over fifty protesters and mass arrests, wages were raised and peace was restored to the city. Strikes and protests continued throughout the rest of the country, though, and by October, the situation appeared to be at a boiling point.

Throughout the year, the political climate had been growing more and more difficult for the censors.⁴⁵⁴ Because the wider government was divided between those who wanted a continuation of Bierut's Stalinist policies and those who wanted liberalization and greater autonomy for Poland, the myriad organs that directed the censor's office were at loggerheads. As the year progressed, their instructions grew more contradictory and mutually exclusive. The censors, who also had to contend with growing disapproval from their families and friends, became increasingly frustrated and bewildered. Having first tried to cope by releasing many of the standard restrictions, they found themselves only more beleaguered. Finally, in October, the members of the main office in Warsaw sat down to a meeting that lasted all night. Having decided that the situation was untenable, a majority agreed to disband and go on strike "against censorship."⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵³ Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁴⁵⁴ The wider account of the censors' strike is related in Jane Leftwich Curry, *The Media and Intra-Elite Communication in Poland: The System of Censorship*, A Rand Note (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1980). Although a number of other sources attest to the event, none offer Curry's level of specificity. She herself relates that the meeting about the strike was never officially recorded, and though it was widely known in Warsaw, it was technically secret. Given that her interviewees were aging even in 1980, it is possible that the full account will never be known.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-5.

Although the government, fearing invasion by the Soviet Union at this latest sign of insurrection, quickly set up an emergency board of representatives from the government, party, and presses to keep the periodicals in print, all of the regional offices were suspended, and formal censorship did not begin to resume for four months. It was not fully functional for another six months after that.⁴⁵⁶ This dramatic hiatus was a very vivid representation of the deep fissures that had grown up within the censor's office. For ten years, it had maintained a convincing façade of unity. As the country fell deeper into crisis, though, and the demands of its various supervisors grew increasingly shrill, the deeper divisions within the office became clear.

These rifts came from any number of directions. Setting aside the usually reactionary demands of the security services and the persistent requests from publishers for a longer rein, there still remained the conflicting desires and aims of the censors themselves and their superiors. By 1956, the moment before Berman was forced to resign from his positions (and go to work, ironically enough, at the *Książka i Wiedza* publishing house) but after Borejsza had died, there was a last gasp of unity from the elite cadre that had molded the postwar literary world. It did not extend down into the everyday censors, however. Their decisions remained unexpected from the perspective of elite orthodoxy, and at odds with each other. There was still room for nationalist anti-German rhetoric in the western part of the country, for example, that was rarely allowed in the east.

In the GDR, the crisis never came. This is not to suggest that the East German office was free from the conflicting pressures that its Polish counterpart faced. Similar government and publishing agencies vied for control over its output, and it faced many of the same divisions within the ranks of its censors. In 1953, just before Stalin's death, the GDR faced a popular uprising not dissimilar to the one that rocked Poland in 1956. Only the presence of the Soviet military in the streets prevented the necessity for a change in leadership. In an effort to stabilize the country developed just before an increase in production quotas sparked the riots, a New Course was created, promising greater access to consumer goods, more private business loans and available materials. In the realm of literature, it signaled an increased willingness to allow traditionally popular genres like adventure stories and mysteries. The stress of the uprising was as great as the unrest in Poland, and the internal problems of the office were as

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 5-6.

significant, but even as the censors were being moved from one government office to another, their work continued uninterrupted.

Together, these two uprisings mark the end of the postwar period in both Poland and the GDR. The preoccupations and strategies of that moment did not fade away at once; indeed, many of them continued to inform the censors' offices for decades to come. Their immediate urgency, however, began to fade. Later generations of censors were better trained and organized with more resources, but were not more enthusiastic about their work.

The real engagement of the early censors in their work and the idea that it could be constructive is continually surprising. The canon that they ultimately developed reflects a group of people who were more enthusiastic than they were coherent. The building-up of this canon was not a direct progression from plan to execution, but a slow and often contradictory amalgamation. This is especially clear in the play of historical narrative through the formation of the canon. Both Poland and East Germany were deeply influenced by the nineteenth-century past, but in ways that were often contradictory. The GDR's resolute censorship of genre literature, for example, echoed Weimar policies that had been supported by groups on both the left and the right. Weimar censorship in turn bore a deep debt to nineteenth-century fears of popular literature and its ongoing attempt to create a connection between the *Bildungsbürgertum* and the people.⁴⁵⁷ At the same time, though, the censors more explicitly rejected what they read as the mysticism and irrationalism of nineteenth-century romanticism. Some authors, like Kleist, they entirely refused to publish. Others, like Herder, were unrestricted and even taught, but of distinctly secondary status to classical authors like Goethe or Schilling. It might have been possible, of course, to reconcile these two pieces of the recent past, but no one seems to have considered the issue. They were two separate areas of censorship, developed without reference to each other.

The picture is complicated still further when we consider the Polish canon. The Polish censor's wholehearted embrace of romantic authors like Mickiewicz—to the detriment of the classical or realist traditions—makes it clear that the choice of historical narrative was not passed down from the Soviet Union, but tailored to each state's need. In Poland, the narrative of (usually failed) national uprisings was grafted onto a more Marxist,

⁴⁵⁷ Dominic Boyer, *Spirit and System: Media, Intellectuals, and the Dialectic in Modern German Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 538-39.

revolutionary framework. In this case, the nineteenth century became not only positive, but central to the country's understanding of itself. Moreover, Poland had a complex relationship with its past censors. The Prussian, Russian, and Austrian imperial censors of the nineteenth century could be easily dismissed as oppressive outsiders, but the native Polish tradition was more difficult to reconcile. While it unexpectedly deplored the interwar censor's laxness, corruption, and complicity with Piłsudski's Sanacja, the Communist censor's office inherited its predecessor's lenient attitude toward popular literary genres and its preoccupation with the idea of backwardness. This insecurity, though it was produced by the same cause, was at direct odds with the redemptive narrative of Poland's nineteenth century. While the latter suggested that Poland was distinctive, and that its long struggles had ultimately been successful, daily practice seemed to intimate doubts. This relative openness allowed Polish readers greater access to works of Western literature, but it also presented challenges to the contemporary, postwar literary milieu.

If the prewar past provided a set of patterns and assumptions that the censors worked from, the Second World War dramatically shaped the world in which they worked. The war functioned paradoxically for early censorship in Poland and East Germany, rendering effective censorship nearly impossible at the same time that it provided one of the few persuasive explanations that people of the period could accept for participating in censoring. If the main challenges of the postwar period were the lack of organization and resources, which fed off each other in a vicious cycle, the censors' greatest strength was the ability to attach themselves to the cause of rebuilding. If there had been more infrastructural resources, or even the organization to use them better, it is possible that more personnel or better training could have been found, and the individual censors molded into a more coherent whole. Still, the overwhelming necessity of rebuilding, combined with the public enthusiasm for anything related to it, was a necessary condition for the idea of a constructive censor. Indeed, the need to move on, away from the war, was strong enough to create a "mutually willed inattention to difference."⁴⁵⁸ The censors did not intentionally ignore or overcome their differences, precisely, as much as they allowed themselves to believe that there were no

⁴⁵⁸ Richard Kieckhefer has evocatively explored this concept in the medieval period among different religious groups which deliberately ignored well-understood differences to instead focus on commonalities. Richard Kieckhefer, "Mystical Communities in the Late Medieval West" (plenary lecture, International Medieval Conference, Leeds, July 10, 2007).

differences, or that they were insignificant. They created a flexible shared vocabulary that could foster community while accommodating a range of meanings. Words like “formalist,” “realist,” or even “nation” were used by everyone while holding varying and even contradictory meanings for different offices. While censors could certainly recognize the vast differences between them, the fundamental necessity of recreating and reaffirming their respective communal identities after the war led the censors to repeatedly emphasize continuity and homogeneity. Difference remained not through negligence or (laughable in a Stalinist state) an embrace of diversity, but through a widespread desire for unity that led the censors and other cultural actors to adopt the same vocabularies, even when their meanings remained different. That these attempts met with varying degrees of success is demonstrated by the reactions of the two censors’ offices in times of crisis.

In East Germany, the narrative of anti-Fascism provided a greater overall coherence than any that were on offer in Poland. This narrative did not originate in the censor’s office, and it did not dampen the very real diversity there. It does seem, however, to have provided a kind of tensile strength that allowed the office to withstand its own internal strain. Part of anti-Fascism’s power came from the general agreement among Soviets, Westerners, and Germans alike that the question of the past was the most glaring and immediate problem facing both parts of Germany. Having been the avowed narrative of the group of writers who had come through the war with the most moral stature was an added boon. The idea was straightforward, persuasive, and adhered to at all levels of government. It was also able to unite narratives of the war, of German reconstruction, and of Marxist progress under one, specifically German banner. This is to say, the narrative of anti-Fascism was on one hand accessible to the censors and on the other applicable to the categories they were censoring.

This coherence is apparent in the themes that arose as East German literature was censored. In the realm of traditional literature, the rubric of anti-Fascism distinguished between humanistic work of authors like Goethe, who was understood to embody the Enlightenment, and the apparently dangerous currents of irrationalism in romantic work. The same yardstick was at work in the GDR’s literary relationships with its western neighbors. In the specific case of its association with Poland, however, the need to reject Fascism and ally with the resistance gave the Poles unusual leverage. In the same way at home, return was made easiest and most rewarding for anti-Fascists who had gone into exile, and cross-border relations with authors in the Federal Republic were made easier if the

Western writer had at least some connection to the exile groups. None of this made the censors better Marxists, or even provided guidance for questions that continually plagued the office, like how to encourage popular literature that would actually be read. It did, however, provide a focal point for the office that was not insignificant.

Poland's postwar canon, by contrast, was not defined by any single, overarching narrative. The nearest apparent option was the idea that Poland, by embracing Socialism, was finally completing the revolution for its own sake and the world's (for our freedom and yours!), but this could address neither the wartime experience nor the question of Polish unity. It was further hampered by doubts about how independent People's Poland really was. Nor could this idea help unite the needs of postwar Polish literature with the work of interwar Communist authors like Aleksander Wat. Instead, questions presented to the censor's office were dealt with on an ad hoc basis. To simplify radically, if the idea of Poland's revolutionary tradition was the framing narrative for traditional literature, then the need for national unity was the guiding criteria for contemporary literature, and a desire to finally move beyond the insecurities of a colony was the motivation for the censor's rulings on international literature.

In this way, the Polish state under Stalinism can be seen as the reverse of the East German case. If the GDR created unity around the narrative of anti-Fascism and the *Deutsche misère*, Poland tried to achieve the same goal by embracing diversity, folding as many perspectives as possible into the Communist base. In the west of Poland, looking toward the formerly German Western Territories, the Polish Communists were willing to allow the rhetoric of their erstwhile enemies, the National Democrats, as long as it was directed against Germans rather than providing opposition to the party. Likewise, the party financed PAX, a group of regime-friendly Catholics, and allowed other Church organs to publish in an attempt to allay the fears of Poland's dubious Catholic majority. These freedoms were limited and particular; none of them were available at all times or everywhere, and none of them carried the benefits of being a committed party author. Still, they meant that rather than a central group of themes, Poland had a collection of distinctly unorthodox positions, all of them peripheral enough to be subject to the whims of the most minor censors.

In reality, it should not be surprising that Polish and East German narratives were incoherent, because they never came from a single source. Theoretically, the elite levels of the party had a well-articulated plan for every aspect of culture. Practically, though, part of the plan was to

encourage unity across as broad a spectrum of established authors as possible. With this in mind, they put leaders in place after the war whose biographies embodied the national narratives, and whose connections were impeccable, but whose orthodoxy was not necessarily the highest priority. Johannes R. Becher and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz were both bridges between the old and new worlds, rather than representatives of the new. Becher was a party member, an early anti-Fascist, and an émigré, and Iwaszkiewicz was an established leftist who had supported and participated in wartime resistance. Both of them, though, were chosen as much for their deep ties to the prewar literary communities, and thus introduced heterogeneity even at the most basic levels of the systems. These elites, who hired and directed the everyday censors, generally had a fairly clear sense of the orbit that had been inscribed for them in Moscow; some were more interested than others in testing its limits. The everyday censors, in their turn, seem to have been more than willing to work within the boundaries set for them by their superiors. The problem is that they consistently misunderstood where those boundaries might have been. Generally not party members, and without necessarily having more than a high-school degree, the earliest censors shared a history of trauma more than any formal training.

The profound ignorance and perpetual confusion of the censors make them a paradoxically helpful lens through which to survey the literary landscapes of Poland and East Germany. It is a commonplace in studies of nationalism that identity is made at the borders, in the Pyrenees rather than in Paris.⁴⁵⁹ In a more figurative sense, that is true here as well; the censors, whether they were constructing literature as they wished to believe or restricting it as their authors charged, stood on the boundaries of the permissible. Their ground-level perspective stands between the orthodoxy at the center of the system and the authors, who too often found themselves outside it. Like all border keepers, the censors faced contradictions from all directions. They were meant to find exciting, high-quality literature that was, at the same time, entirely safe and orthodox. They were also meant to create a unified literature for a nation that, reeling from war and a major territorial shift, was anything but unified. There was never any single resolution to these dilemmas. Working without material, educational, or institutional resources, the individual censors made improvised, often contradictory decisions that were inflected by their own backgrounds and geographies. The literary contours defined by the censors were unexpected, as identities created from the peripheries often are. The resulting

⁴⁵⁹ Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Berkeley, 1989).

landscapes included Catholics, capitalists, and former Fascists, but they also excluded Communist authors eager to participate in the state. It was only when these were all added together that something resembling a solid border appeared, albeit always strained by competing internal pressures.

From this perspective, Polish and East German reactions to their respective uprisings are more comprehensible. If they were not predetermined, or independent of the movement of troops within the streets, they were at least of a piece with general trends that already existed within each office. Whether or not they were successful at maintaining an internal unity, these dynamics were the result of men and women who paradoxically, often absurdly, believed in the importance and helpfulness of their work. The actual aid they provided to the reconstruction of their states' cultural lives was negligible. In their efforts, however, they did play a role in defining the complicated, contradictory narratives that would continue to define their countries.

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