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*Debating German Cultural Identity since 1989* ed. by Anne  
Fuchs, Kathleen James-Chakraborty, and Linda Shortt (review)

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lyrischen Werks von Erich Fried weniger im einzelnen Gedicht liegt, sondern vielmehr in der Gleichzeitigkeit der Inkommensurabilität zu finden ist" (18), werden oft die als Beispiel angeführten Gedichte entweder als Zeitdokumente oder als manieristische Kompositionen angesehen. Die literarische Bearbeitung der Erfahrung des Exils und die Auseinandersetzung mit der deutschen lyrischen Tradition werden leider nur angedeutet (denken wir nur an die vielen Heimkehr-Gedichte Frieds oder an die vernichtenden Gedichte über den deutschen Wald).

Bei der Stilanalyse der Texte Frieds betont Berendse gerechterweise die rhetorische Gewandtheit und den spielerischen Ton der Sprache. Der Versuch des im Ausland lebenden Autors, der deutschen Sprache nach der Kompromittierung der nazistischen Zeit eine neue Aussagekraft zu vermitteln, findet jedoch hier nicht ausreichend Platz. Berendse zeigt überzeugend, wie Fried in seiner Lyrik wirksam eine Beziehung zwischen dem nationalsozialistischen Terror und dem Staatsterror in der BRD sowie zwischen Holocaust und Neokolonialismus herstellt. Dies kommt jedoch eher auf der Ebene der Inhalte als im Sprachgebrauch zum Ausdruck. Genügt es denn, Fried als nicht hermetischen oder experimentellen Dichter zu definieren, um seine Modernität in Frage zu stellen? Gerade die von Berendse oft hervorgehobene nicht "eindimensionale Weltsicht" Frieds und die von ihm vertretene "Notwendigkeit des Querdenkens außerhalb der dominanten Diskurse" (60) sollte nicht vorwiegend auf das Weglassen der Interpunktion und die Wahl traditioneller rhetorischer Figuren reduziert werden. Eine tiefer gehende Analyse der Sprache Frieds hätte vielleicht die Verbindung zwischen Eros und Thanatos, die produktive Wechselwirkung zwischen Terror und Liebe, die die Grundthese dieser Abhandlung ausmacht, noch besser klargelegt.

Dennoch ist Berendses Verdienst der insgesamt gelungene Versuch, das umfangreiche Werk Erich Frieds nicht nur in einer kulturhistorischen Perspektive zu sehen, sondern auch die stilistische Originalität neu zu bewerten sowie die Gründe seiner Popularität in Deutschland aus neuen Gesichtspunkten vorzustellen.

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—Alessandra Schininà

### **Debating German Cultural Identity since 1989.**

*Edited by Anne Fuchs, Kathleen James-Chakraborty, and Linda Shortt. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011. vii + 256 pages. \$80.00.*

The twelve contributions cum introduction focus on the debate about what constitutes German cultural identity after the opening of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 and the (re)unification of Germany in the following year. As the editors suggest in their introduction, the "vociferous public debates about the past" may be indicative of "imagining a dizzyingly diverse array of possible futures" (12).

The historical underpinnings of these debates are established by historian Peter Fritzsche who draws attention to the coincidence of important events in German history that took place on 9 November: the November Revolution (1918), Hitler's Munich Beer Hall putsch (1923), and the infamous *Kristallnacht* (1938). But Fritzsche goes beyond the German context and justifiably ranks 1989 with momentous years in "the master dating system of the modern West" (17)—that is, 1789, 1914, and

1945. He concludes his essay with the cautionary note that in dealing with 1989 “[n]o one perspective is authoritative” (27).

Perti Ahonen examines what might be called a legacy of the Wall, the *Mauerschützenprozesse* that took place after (re)unification, and attributes to them a significant role in “addressing issues [. . .] widely perceived” as grave injustices committed not only by border guards but also by the “East German authorities.” Ahonen assigns “positive political effects” to the fact that the trials were generally conducted in a spirit of “humanitarian considerations” rather than governed by vindictiveness (41).

In a seemingly surprising departure from the historical and political context, Jennifer A. Jordan devotes her attention almost exclusively to the subject of apples. Yet she makes a fairly convincing case for their significance inasmuch as they have taken on “some of the qualities assigned to [. . .] Heimat” and have continued to “contribute to regional and national identity” after 1989 (47). From yet another perspective, Andrew J. Webber revisits the subject of his book *Berlin in the Twentieth Century* (2008) in which he endeavored “to contribute to the topographical turn in cultural criticism” (67). Webber devotes particular attention to Christian Petzold’s film *Gespenster* (2005), the main character of which (a young woman) Webber perceives of as an “allegorical” figure, that is, “the ghost of history in general and of the *Wende* in particular” (79).

Deniz Göktürk turns to “The Berlin Wall’s Second Life on Screen”—a “Life” the author perceives as a salutary questioning of the officious discourse of the “‘coming together’” of East and West that tends to exclude non-German immigrants. Specifically, Göktürk recommends Turkish films about Germany such as *Polizei* as a means to question the tendency to engage in “naval-gazing [sic] territorial thinking” when commemorating “German unification” (95). In contrast to Göktürk, Kathleen James-Chakraborty turns to Berlin “Beyond the Wall” by discussing the architectural developments and feuds (notably the fierce, protracted debate about the reconstruction of the Hohenzollern *Schloss* versus the dismantling of the GDR *Palast der Republik*) and their political implications. But she credits the *Reichstag* with its new cupola (designed by Norman Foster) as having evolved into one of Berlin’s “best-loved tourist attractions” as well as “the most potent symbol of the Berlin Republic” (109).

From Berlin to Dresden: in a factual account that avoids addressing the debate about the justification of the controversial virtual annihilation of Dresden during the British-American bombing raids in February 1945, Jürgen Paul provides a fairly detailed description of the reconstruction efforts in “The Rebirth of Historic Dresden.”

Inasmuch as literary works tend to both reflect and shape cultural identity, a comparatively voluminous section of the present volume is justifiably devoted to contemporary literature in East and West. Elizabeth Boa discusses fictional writings by Christa Wolf (1929–2011), undoubtedly one of the chief representatives of GDR literature, as well as works by the younger East German prose writers Ingo Schulze (b. 1962), Antje Rávic Strubel (b. 1974), and Jens Sparschuh (b. 1955). The generational differences between these writers are evidenced, for example, by the fact that “the Third Reich looms large” in Wolf’s fiction but is “virtually absent” in Schulze’s and Sparschuh’s texts (151).

In a different vein, generational differences are also discussed by Linda Shortt who addresses the post-Wall emergence of “Westalgia” as a counterpart to the “Os-

talgia" indulged in by "Ossis" disappointed by the results of (re)unification. In particular, Shortt draws attention to Jochen Schimmang's novel *Das Beste, was wir hatten* (2009) as conveying the attitudes of the "1978ers" who, in contrast to the revolutionary "1968ers," had eventually become "stakeholders in, and defenders of, the West German state" (163). Anja K. Johannsen examines novels by Monika Maron and Angela Krauss; she deems Maron's *Animal Triste* (1995) a "fascinating *Wenderoman*" on account of its "entangling of the political with the personal" (174) and similarly credits Krauss's prose works with subtly "contrasting" the grand "meta-narrative" of the demise of the Berlin Wall "with countless alternative micro-narratives" (181).

In the only contribution on poetry, Anne Fuchs focuses on Durs Grünbein's cycle *Porzellan: Poem vom Untergang meiner Stadt* (2005) in which the poet evokes the rebirth of Dresden as "Elbflorenz" rather than dwelling on Dresden's destruction as well as GDR reconstruction efforts as in his previously published collections. Al-eida Assmann's analysis of Marcel Beyer's critically acclaimed novel *Kaltenburg* (2008) serves as a fitting conclusion to the volume inasmuch as the novel encompasses "seven decades of recent German history"—albeit appropriately from a "bird's eye perspective" on account of protagonist Kaltenburg's profession as an ornithologist (217).

Without doubt, the editors of and contributors to the present volume—most of whom hail from institutions in English-speaking countries—have largely succeeded in their attempt to provide a fairly detailed overview of the current debate about what constitutes post-unification German cultural identity by covering a wide range of subjects from a variety of perspectives. The lack of voices highly critical of the project of (re)unification such as Günter Grass's fiercely attacked *Ein weites Feld* (1995) cannot significantly detract from the general usefulness of the volume.

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—Siegfried Mews

### **Twenty Years On: Competing Memories of the GDR in Postunification German Culture.**

*Edited by Renate Rechtien and Dennis Tate. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011. ix + 244 pages + 11 b/w illustrations. \$80.00.*

### **The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State since 1989.**

*Edited by Nick Hodgin and Caroline Pearce. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011. x + 299 pages + 12 b/w illustrations. \$75.00.*

For those who experienced the German *Wende* primarily through the media, a uniform set of images from that time is ingrained in our collective memory: jubilant crowds astride the Berlin Wall, uncertain East German border guards, parades of Trabis streaming through open checkpoints, enterprising *Mauerspechte* chipping away pieces of history. But how well do those conventional images really tell the story of the fall of the Wall and the subsequent dissolution of the GDR? Prompted by the 20-year anniversary of the *Wende*, these two recent collections of essays seek to diversify our understanding of the momentous events of 1989 and to expand the debate about the legacy of the GDR.