REPRESENTATIONS OF FLIGHT AND EXPULSION IN EAST GERMAN PROSE WORKS

BILL NIVEN

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Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture

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Bill Niven

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Rochester, New York

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Introduction

Taboo or Not Taboo?

It is a commonplace that the topic of the flight of Germans from the Red Army at the end of the Second World War, as well as the subsequent expulsion of Germans from eastern Europe, had long been subject to the influence of taboos in West Germany. It is a truism that finds expression not just in popular media, but in a number of scholarly works.[1] Essentially, such works restate notions of taboo that have long been a feature of West German discourse on flight and expulsion. For decades, expellee organizations instrumentalized the concept of taboo; in suggesting that it was somehow forbidden or at least "politically incorrect" in the Federal Republic to address the topic of flight and expulsion, they sought to win sympathy and support for those they purported to represent. Complaints about supposed taboos were generally common in nationalist right-wing circles. Most significant is perhaps Heinz Nawratil's *Schwarzbuch der Vertreibung, 1945 bis 1948* (Black Book of Expulsion, 1945 to 1948), which appeared in 1982 in an attempt, according to the preface written by former Federal Public Prosecutor Ludwig Martin, to "break up this silence, contradict denial, and counteract the culture of apology."[2] Clearly, claims that the topic was "denied" could be used both to suggest that the Soviets, Czechs, and Poles had something to hide, and that the Germans had an ethical and legal right to expect some kind of redress. Such claims could also be used to discredit what was perceived on the right as an undesirable culture of contrition—undesirable because the more West Germany committed itself to remembering, memorializing, and prosecuting the crimes committed under National Socialism, the faster any remaining prospects of regaining the lost eastern territories receded. Furthermore, claims that flight and expulsion were subject to a taboo served to undermine the supposed moral high ground adopted by West Germany's left. For if, as the nationalist right claimed, the process of confronting the Holocaust was being driven forward at the cost of suppressing the memory of injustices committed against Germans, then that process was hardly the model of enlightened coming-to-terms it supposed itself to be.

Even a cursory glance at West German history, politics, and culture reveals that flight and expulsion were never invisible or denied (although

interest in the subject did ebb and flow, and approaches and understandings changed). Over the last decade, indeed, a number of important studies have begun to take issue, explicitly or implicitly, with the validity of the claims that a taboo existed. Scholars have examined, for instance, the political and cultural activities of the expellee organizations in West Germany,[3] the representation of flight and expulsion in memorials[4] and exhibitions small and large,[5] the portrayal of the lost homeland in so-called *Heimatbücher* (Homeland Books),[6] the iconography of the loss of homeland,[7] the representation of flight and expulsion in West German and contemporary German literature,[8] and representations in the media.[9] The compendious study by Eva Hahn and Hans Henning Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern* (Expulsion in German Memory, 2010), represents an almost total deconstruction of the theory that there was a taboo in West Germany.[10]

Widespread assumptions about taboos exist not just in relation to West Germany. In the case of East Germany, in fact, it is often assumed that a pall of silence hung over the theme of flight and expulsion that was even thicker than that in West Germany. A representative opinion is that of Andreas Kossert, who writes in his bestseller *Kalte Heimat* (Cold Homeland, 2008): "the theme of flight and expulsion in the Soviet-occupied zone and the GDR was taboo."[11] This is a view that has been expressed not just by some scholars and journalists but also by the Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel herself. In a 2010 speech given at a reception held by the League of Expellees, she asserted crisply: "Flight and expulsion in the former GDR were taboo." Only after unification, according to Merkel, did it become possible to end this silence and find ways of alleviating the suffering of the expellees in the former GDR.[12]

Those who make such judgments would seem to be on firmer ground in the case of East Germany. After all, expellee organizations were not permitted in the GDR, and there was no equivalent to the West German Ministry for Expellees.[13] The Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, or SED), the governing party in the GDR, liked to claim that there was no need for such organizations in the GDR, where former refugees—or resettlers ("Umsiedler") as they were most commonly called—had been successfully integrated into the socialist state, and where they had found a true economic and political homeland. All their needs, in other words, had been met: there was nothing for them to lobby for. The GDR, in contrast to West Germany, provided no state support for the maintenance of expellee culture or memory. One would be hard put to find an East German memorial that commemorates flight and expulsion. In 1953, the East German sculptor Rudolf Leptien was commissioned to create a memorial to honor the victims of the American bombing of Swinemünde in March 1945 (which had cost the lives of thousands of refugees). But the finished sculpture, showing a

refugee woman, was deemed "inappropriate" by the SED, and Leptien's memorial eked out a lonely existence in his garden until 1984, when it was put up in the local cemetery.[14] Unlike West Germany, East Germany had no Homeland Museums for the expellees, no exhibitions on flight and expulsion, and no Homeland Books. In contrast to West Germany, there were no official mass meetings of tens of thousands of expellees, no colorful parades, no public rallies calling for the right to return. All this is undeniable. The GDR's ordained friendship with eastern European countries, not least the Soviet Union, meant that Soviet, Polish, and Czech atrocities against Germans could never be openly addressed. Historians in the GDR, to a greater degree than those in West Germany,[15] steered away from this topic: the political climate was not conducive to recalling Red Army crime.

Yet can one really speak of a complete taboo on flight and expulsion in East Germany? Here, too, scholars in recent years have begun to chip away at such claims, though less persistently and in smaller numbers than in the case of scholars examining West German memory of flight and expulsion. One of the things that emerges from Heike Amos's exploration of the SED's "expellee politics" (Vertriebenenpolitik) between 1949 and 1990 is that the SED went to some lengths to make propagandistic capital out of its belief that West German expellee organizations and the political establishment in the FRG were hell-bent on revising Germany's eastern boundaries. What matters here, though, is not just the propaganda but also the belief itself and the premises on which it rested: first, that the eastern border was a permanent, non-negotiable fixture of postwar agreements, and a prerequisite for peace; second, that the movement of Germans at the end of and after the war was the irreversible price that had to be paid for the war waged by German fascism; and third, that any state-organized or even state-sanctioned political commemorative focus on flight and expulsion was unthinkable, not least because it would run the risk of being interpreted as revisionist. This was not necessarily a view all in the SED shared, at least not initially. It was certainly a view molded as much by obeisance to the Soviets as by inner conviction. But however we assess its sincerity or value, it does represent a "position" on flight and expulsion. This position was often more implicit than explicit, but an implicit position is not the same thing as a taboo. As we will see in this study, it was a position often shared by GDR authors, but also one subjected to (nuanced) literary critique.

Moreover, while there was certainly a political prohibition on expellee organization and expellee discourse, the SED could not easily stop individual expellees from remembering their flight or expulsion, and their lost *Heimat*. Michael Schwartz's magnificently detailed study of East German expellee assimilation politics between 1945 and 1961 makes it clear that it was by no means the case that all expellees living in the

Soviet-occupied zone (henceforth SBZ) and GDR simply put their past identities behind them. Schwartz shows, for instance, that church institutions in the GDR offered a framework within which expellees could retain a certain degree of self-expression; in fact, there existed in the GDR both a Pomeranian and Silesian regional church until their forced renaming in 1968.[16] And expellees did succeed in the 1950s at least in organizing illegal gatherings at Halle's "Bergzoo" (until these prompted mass arrests), and at the Leipzig Zoo. For a while, such meetings represented a chance for expellees to collectively commemorate flight and expulsion, and the lost *Heimat*.[17] But of course the fact that only furtive meetings were possible, whether in a zoo or under church auspices, goes to demonstrate the rigor of the SED's refusal to tolerate expellee organization or the articulation of coordinated expellee opinion. In some East German cities, old, pre-GDR street names referring to places in the former eastern territories were retained well into the 1960s, but this hardly represented a conscious concession to expellee memory: reasons for retaining them, as Christian Lotz has shown for the case of Dresden, were mixed.[18]

Only in one area of the public sphere, however, did flight, expulsion, and the loss of homeland really find expression: culture. Scholars have to a degree recognized this fact. Thus Johannes von Moltke has provided a sensitive and insightful analysis of Arthur Pohl's 1949 DEFA film *Die Brücke* (The Bridge), which focuses on a group of refugees in postwar eastern Germany.[19] My own conviction that flight and expulsion must have left traces in GDR film and television productions led to a journal article that focused particularly on the 1968 GDR television series *Wege übers Land* (Paths across the Land, now available on DVD).[20] In the case of literature, in the 1980s literary scholars began to examine in depth the imprint of the experience of flight and expulsion on postwar German fiction, drama, and poetry. While concentrating mainly on West German authors, Louis Ferdinand Helbig and Ernst-Edmund Keil point, in their study and anthology respectively, to a small number of GDR literary works in which legacies of flight and expulsion were addressed.[21] In his extensive 2005 bibliography listing and summarizing works of German literature and autobiography with a thematic focus on flight and expulsion, Axel Dornemann includes a slightly wider range of GDR titles, although he is often dismissive of GDR literature's handling of the subject.[22] Katja Hartleb's slim 2011 volume on flight and expulsion in GDR literature is also noteworthy, but it discusses very few texts.[23] The greatest possible credit, in my view, is due to Carola Hähnel-Mesnard for her stimulating and balanced appraisal of echoes of flight and expulsion in 1950s' GDR literature.[24] Her work proved an inspiration for my own study, as did the online and newspaper reviews of Jörg Bilke, whose passionate interest in this topic in literature extended to both West and East German works.[25]

Nevertheless, despite this critical recognition by some commentators, the impression prevails that the topic was largely shunned by GDR authors. Paradoxically, perhaps, the wealth of secondary literature specifically on Christa Wolf's novel *Kindheitsmuster* (Patterns of Childhood, 1976),[26] Franz Fühmann's story "Böhmen am Meer" (Bohemia by the Sea, 1962),[27] and Heiner Müller's drama *Die Umsiedlerin* (The Resettler Woman, 1961)[28] has led to the assumption that these were somehow exceptions in addressing flight and refugees. More recently, Anna Seghers's short story "Die Umsiedlerin" (The Resettler Woman, 1951) and Ursula Höntsch-Harendt's novel *Wir Flüchtlingskinder* (We Refugee Children, 1985) have come to the attention even of non-literary specialists on expulsion.[29] But again and again there is a tendency to claim that certain GDR works "broke" with a taboo, as if silence had reigned on the subject of flight before they appeared. Thus historian Philip Ther describes Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* as the "pathbreaking violation of a taboo,"[30] while Kossert describes Höntsch-Harendt's novel *Wir Flüchtlingskinder* as a "caesura," claiming that she "overcame many taboos."

Critics assume, then, that because flight and expulsion was an "undesirable topic," from a political point of view, authors would have avoided it—and, indeed, not have been allowed to address it. When I embarked on the preparation for this book a number of years ago, it was because I was distrustful of this assumption. The SED may have prohibited expellee organizations, and certainly would have prohibited public commemoration of flight and expulsion. But literature—or at least prose works, which I examine here—is produced and consumed individually (aside from public readings). It is much less "visible." While GDR authors were expected to conform, they did have a degree of freedom in choosing their themes. Woven into a narrative, references to flight and expulsion can underpin the state position elaborated above, so might be acceptable in any case. And where they do not, they might only constitute a moment or set of moments in a much wider textual fabric. Their critical potential might be missed by the cultural authorities that managed the GDR's prepublication procedures, and indeed publishers had an interest in marketing works that attracted readers. Literature is about perspective. The attitudes of literary characters evolve, are contrasted with others, do not stand absolute. In the main, this is a different terrain from that of the declamatory memorial or the political expellee rally (although some literary works, as I show in this book, could serve as propaganda). Moreover, the fact that the SED would not tolerate public shows of grief over the lost homeland does not mean they would automatically ban literary manifestations of "Trauer," which might function as a legitimate aspect of characterization. It also seemed to me that, because many GDR authors came from the former German eastern territories or German enclaves, it was likely they would want to address the

loss of their homeland in some way. It was surely just a question of taking a thorough look.

Initially, my intention was to investigate GDR literature as a whole. I began by reading novels and short stories, and some drama and poetry. After less than a year I took the decision to focus solely on prose writing addressing flight and/or expulsion. The reason was simple: there is so much of it. Extensive hunts for possible titles in archives, guides to novels ("Romanführer"),[31] publishing-company yearbooks, newspapers, and above all on the Internet—Germany's Central List of Second-Hand Books (Zentralverzeichnis Antiquarischer Bücher) proved an absolute gold mine[32]—turned up novel after novel. My reading had very soon taken me far beyond the GDR titles provided in Dornemann's bibliography, which soon began to appear rather patchy, at least as far as East German texts are concerned.[33] Colleagues from the former GDR whom I met at conferences drew my attention to yet other titles. I began to feel that only an entire book could do justice to this volume of material. Even then, in this book I have not been able to explore every text to the same degree and have tended to concentrate on works in which flight and/or its legacies play a significant part, and which illustrate well particular trends this study identifies and analyses. I have been able to mention a number of relevant works only in passing, or to refer to them briefly in footnotes. In the bibliography I have also included titles of books that I have not discussed at all (though I tried my best to keep these to a minimum). I offer the following study, then, as a step in what I hope is a fruitful direction—but by no means does it turn all the literary stones, not least because I am sure quite a few titles escaped me, despite my best efforts.

Readers should certainly not assume from the focus here on prose works that GDR poetry, drama or, say, radio plays would not prove an equally rich resource. As Louis Ferdinand Helbig has pointed out, flight from Silesia echoes through much of the poetry of Harald Gerlach, whose works of fiction are examined in the current study.[34] The plays of Alfred Matusche often include refugee characters: a refugee camp features in his short drama *Die Dorfstraße* (The Village Street, first performed in 1955), while the loss of Silesia and parts of East Prussia to Poland is addressed in *An beiden Ufern* (On Both Banks, first performed in 1974).[35] Rolf Schneider's comedy *Einzug ins Schloß* (Moving into the Castle, completed in 1971),[36] whose central character is a refugee called Priskoleit, was not only performed on stage in the 1970s but also broadcast as a radio play, and a 1973 production by Mecklenburg State Theater was shown on GDR television that year. Helmut Sakowski—who was responsible for the screenplay for the TV series *Wege übers Land* (with Martin Eckermann)—wrote a two-character radio play, *Schrei der Wildgänse* (The Cry of the Wild Geese),[37] which opens with a harrowing depiction of the

trek over the frozen Frisches Haff in 1945: one of the characters, Lena, recalls the experience with the desperate words, "who can bear it, this terrible long wait for death" (23). *Schrei der Wildgänse* was first broadcast on GDR radio in April 1986. My study, then, will not be able to encompass the full range of literary genres in which flight and expulsion were portrayed or referenced, any more than it will portrayals and references on the (television and cinema) screen and on the radio. But perhaps it can provide a stimulus to further research—research that will surely be aided by the ever-increasing availability of excellent online databases.[38]

One further necessary limitation to this study is the strict focus on texts that address aspects of flight or expulsion, or both. My aim is to analyze how these processes and their effects were depicted and contextualized, and, within this analysis, to explore reactions to the loss of homeland. This means that I have not included texts that depict life in the former German or German-speaking areas only *prior* to the caesura of flight and expulsion. Thus I have not discussed the novels or stories of Johannes Bobrowski, for instance, the Tilsit-born writer whose works are a rich source of meditation on the former German East, its history, and relations in the region between Germans, Balts, Poles, and Jews.[39] Nor have I considered, say, Franz Popp's novel *Verspielte Heimat* (Squandered Homeland, 1968), which focuses on the struggle between Communism and Nazism in the Sudetenland prior to annexation in 1938 (in the 1971 DEFA film of Popp's novel, an anti-FRG narrative strand was introduced depicting continuities between the Sudeten German Homeland Association and Henlein's Sudeten German Party).[40] Jürgen Borchert's semi-autobiographical, semi-fictional text *Die Papiere meiner Tante* (The Papers of My Aunt, 1984),[41] in which the narrator traces the roots of his family back to late nineteenth-century East Prussia (his grandparents left the area in 1895), also finds no place in the current study. There may be drawbacks to the decision not to discuss such texts, because they were written—whatever their historical focus—in full awareness of flight, expulsion, and the postwar loss of German territory. Flight and expulsion, then, form an implicit backdrop. Some of these texts also take up ideas we will encounter in the works of prose analyzed throughout this book, such as the notion that the former German East was semi-feudal and ruthlessly exploitative of the proletariat, so that leaving it could only be of benefit to workers hoping to improve their lot (this idea is encountered, for instance, in *Die Papiere meiner Tante*, and in Theo Harych's 1951 autobiographical "story of an early twentieth-century childhood," *Hinter den schwarzen Wäldern* [Behind the Black Forests], set near Posen and then in Silesia).[42] In the end, however, I opted to write a book not primarily about the depiction of the (lost) German East in GDR prose works, but about the portrayal and framing of flight and expulsion and their impact.

Only when viewed directly through this lens will issues of the loss of the former *Heimat* be analyzed.

Structure and Argument

My prime aim, then, is to demonstrate that flight and expulsion were a frequent enough topic in GDR prose—at no point were they "taboo." The opening chapter sets out to provide key examples of texts that depict or at least make mention of the process in one or both of its aspects. Such texts began to appear in the SBZ—before the GDR was founded—and continued to appear in the following decades; there was no hiatus. In this chapter I also examine the *manner* of these depictions and references: how the causes, context and dynamics of the process were actually understood in GDR novels and stories. Unsurprisingly, rape by the Red Army and other acts of inhumanity by Soviets, Poles, and Czechs against Germans were rarely openly confronted in GDR prose works. This important aspect of flight and expulsion circulated in GDR literature—with one or two exceptions, which will be discussed later—largely in the form of allusion and rumor. But in Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*, as well as in a number of GDR prose works that appeared after this novel, we find a subtle literary discourse reflecting on the lack of public discussion about these brutalities. The importance of this discourse should not be underestimated. It also needs to be stressed that GDR literature's circumnavigation of rape and other forms of violence against Germans cannot automatically, in every instance, be put down to self-censorship or censorship. Nor can the greater literary focus on flight rather than expulsion be explained simply by the fact that the latter process, because it was driven by Soviets, Poles and Czechs, cannot easily be portrayed without reference to arguably anti-German policies, whereas the former process, given that it was in essence a German reaction to the Soviet advance, can. A number of GDR writers focused on flight, and depicted it as they did, because they wanted to explore the ways in which it was symptomatic of the collapse both of the Nazis' concept of the people's community, and of the class-based, capitalist, and exploitative system of which Nazism was deemed the supreme form.

If I use the term "flight and expulsion" when speaking in general terms throughout this book, then it is often for ease of reference: the literature analyzed mainly addresses flight, but there are texts that address expulsion, and some that address both processes. And if I use the term "expulsion," then this is for purposes of clarity. It is true that in GDR prose works expulsion was rarely termed "Vertreibung," although in the texts I examine there is no doubt the Germans are being "removed."[43] However, I was reluctant to deploy the GDR term "resettlement" (Umsiedlung) in reference to expulsion, because resettlement in GDR

official parlance and in East German prose works can signify both flight and expulsion. This is certainly true of the term "resettler" (Umsiedler). There are many GDR prose texts featuring "Umsiedler" characters where it is not clear whether they have fled, been expelled, or both (sometimes it is not even clear where they have fled or been expelled from). Even a word like "refugee" (Flüchtling), in the works I read, is not always clear in its frame of reference. "Umsiedler" or "Flüchtlinge" can be used as vague collective nouns embracing all Germans who lost their former homeland.

In the second chapter I turn my attention to the literary portrayal of what might be termed "resettler figures" in a number of novels typical of GDR "reconstruction literature" (Aufbauliteratur), the dominant literary trend of the 1950s and one that continued into the 1960s and even 1970s. Here I argue that the frequent representation of such characters is not simply a kind of literary tribute to demographic statistics (at the beginning of the 1950s, about 25 percent of the GDR's population was made up of refugees and expellees).[44] Much more importantly, literary resettler figures, in reconstruction novels, acted as a kind of yardstick for the true effectiveness of socialism. In many a narrative such figures move from total isolation to integration, from the social margins to the center, from destitution to relative prosperity, and from victimhood to dynamic commitment. *Resettlement* is really the issue. Yet they are not simply vehicles for the transmission of a congratulatory view of socialism. GDR literature in general evinced considerable sympathy for female and child refugees in particular, and in the second chapter I examine several examples of works of prose that take their suffering and its legacies seriously. Reconstruction literature can trivialize refugee experience, but it does not always do so. In some texts the distress caused to resettler characters by the experience of flight and expulsion and the resulting loss of home is never entirely dispelled.

Literature of reconstruction in the GDR was flanked in the 1950s and 1960s by what I term a "literature of retrospection," relevant examples of which are explored in the first part of the third chapter. Most literature is in some senses retrospective (even science fiction knows the journey into the past), so that the term is of limited value unless one uses it in a specific context, as I try to do here. While GDR reconstruction literature generally begins its narrative after the end of the war, GDR literature of retrospection as understood in the context of this study ends there; while the former builds from a bleak past toward a positive future, and anticipates further progress, the latter explores the descent into and effects of Nazi-induced catastrophe, although some texts include a focus on antifascism, hinting at the better world of socialism waiting beyond the 1945 watershed. Within several novels that can be classified as literature of retrospection, flight is often depicted, and it serves to illustrate not Red Army inhumanity but the implosion of the National Socialist order.

Readers are asked to forgive a degree of overlap here with the first chapter, as some of the ideas about flight and expulsion encountered in the literature of retrospection are typical of GDR prose writing as a whole; but it is in the literature of retrospection that they are expressed most forcefully. Readers are also asked to forgive what might seem a strange ordering of chapters 2 and 3. Should discussion of the prose works set in the period up to 1945 not come before analysis of the prose works set in the socialist era? The sequence of chapters chosen reflects the relatively greater literary significance and volume of relevant reconstruction literature. There is another reason for the ordering. The second part of the third chapter focuses on prose writing that can be classified as literature of revisiting, where (semi-autobiographical) literary characters living in East Germany return on trips to their former homelands in eastern Europe. These works, which appeared in the 1960s and 1970s, follow on not only chronologically but also thematically from the fictional works discussed earlier in the third chapter. They also represent a kind of imaginative return to the period before 1945, but one undertaken from the explicit vantage point of the present, and in an attempt to understand how this present relates to the past. In this literature the former homeland, flight, and expulsion have not been gradually erased or supplanted by the new homeland, the fundamental message of reconstruction novels, but continue to exert a fascination, not least on the narrators. What is explored here is a need for some kind of return—however brief—and reassessment of a past that, in William Faulkner's famous words quoted at the start of Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*, is not even past.

GDR prose works portraying a revisiting of territories from which protagonists fled (or were expelled) are usually highly critical, and self-critical, in respect of the National Socialist history of these areas, but they nevertheless suggest that the reconstructionist zeal of the 1950s could not sever psychological and emotional bonds with those territories, or simply write out the experience of flight and expulsion. The fourth chapter takes us, as we reach the late 1970s and 1980s, in an even more critical direction. As it became clear that socialism could not escape the atomizing side effects of modern civilization any more than Western democracy could, and as disillusionment and disappointment with socialism itself set in, East German literature began to explore the fractured lives and subjectivities of GDR citizens. In this context several authors, often themselves former refugees, ventured to suggest in their prose works that flight and expulsion had left psychological wounds that socialism had failed to heal; indeed, that had continued to suppurate. Some prose works also focused much more than earlier GDR literature on the discrimination experienced by refugees and expellees in the Soviet-occupied zone and GDR. Deracination, dislocation, and non-acceptance appeared no longer as easily removable obstacles swept away by the integrative force of socialism,

but as severe and sometimes persistent problems. This more skeptical fiction took implicit issue with the reconstruction literature, although only a few of the later prose works featuring refugees abandoned the forward-looking perspective entirely. But it is true to say that the rifts caused by flight and expulsion, which were declared resolved by the SED in the early 1950s, reappeared, as it were, in GDR prose works of the 1970s and 1980s: paradoxically, then, the older the state grew, the more visible those rifts became.

The main argument of this study, then, is that GDR prose writing repeatedly took up the theme of flight and expulsion, and that there was a genuine and evolving literary *discourse* on this theme. The literary contours of the experience of flight, expulsion, and the loss of homeland grew sharper with the years. At no point did GDR prose works lack empathy for the impact of this experience, for all their insistence that that experience was one for which the Germans only had themselves to blame. It is therefore quite wrong to generalize that eastern German authors suddenly "discovered" flight and expulsion as a literary motif after the "Wende" or the collapse of the GDR. Some may have done so, but others were in fact simply continuing to weave a focus on it into their works. The question I address in the final chapter, then, is if, and how, literary portrayals of flight and expulsion in the prose works of eastern German authors changed after unification. Clearly, as the example of Reinhard Jirgl demonstrates, it was now possible to publish texts that openly addressed brutality against Germans by Soviets, Poles, and Czechs. But at the same time Jirgl's prose is in many ways steeped in the traditions of earlier GDR literature. Thus the hallmark of post-unification eastern German literature with a focus on flight and expulsion may be said to be change within continuity.[45]

Approach

A final word on my approach. While the influence of politics on culture will be a topic in this book, this is not an archival study about the workings of censorship. What interests me, by and large, is not what GDR authors were not able to publish but what they did publish; not what remained unsaid but what was said (which, sometimes, articulated frustration at what it was not possible to say). I did, however, explore the archive of the Mitteldeutscher Verlag (MDV) in Magdeburg. Many of the texts discussed in this study were published by MDV. One reason for this may have been that the head of MDV between 1973 and 1996, Eberhard Günther, although a native of Dresden, was himself an expellee (he had moved to the Sudetenland with his family at the start of the war).[46] Initially my interest in the archive was prompted by curiosity: would there be evidence of authors having obstacles put in their way when they tried to depict flight and expulsion? In this respect—give or take one or two exceptions, discussed later in

my book—I was soon disappointed. But as indicated earlier, we cannot just assume that cultural authorities would necessarily object to depictions of flight, or even expulsion. The "taboo" theory is often based on the premise that flight and expulsion were essentially about crimes against Germans, which of course in the GDR it was indeed hard to address openly. But it is surely quite legitimate to understand flight and even expulsion as the result of German hubris, as a boomerang effect, as the consequence of a Nazi war of annihilation. This is how they were understood in GDR prose, and even if authors had been able to speak freely about Soviet brutality, it is unlikely this understanding would have changed fundamentally. In the end, I used archive material—including files held in Berlin relating to the prepublication permission-to-print process that GDR authors had to subject themselves to—to highlight particular aspects of the genesis or interpretation of individual texts.

This is not a very theoretical book. I could have approached the topic through the lens of trauma theory, for instance, which has given rise to much interesting literary-critical work recently. Generational theory might also have unlocked secrets. To a degree, generational shifts do explain some developments discussed in the book, and I make reference to such shifts, especially in the final chapter. But their explanatory power has limits. It is true that the 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of prose works depicting flight by authors who were in their teens or were young adults at the end of the war (such as Christa Wolf, Hildegard Maria Rauchfuß, Werner Heiduczek), and that several authors who were infants at the war's end began their literary exploration of the theme in the 1980s or 1990s (for example, Jürgen Bernt-Bärtl, Christoph Hein). However, I remain uncertain of the value of these classifications: Wolf was sixteen at the war's end, Rauchfuß twenty-seven: two very different ages. Horst Bastian, six at the end of the war, began writing about the topic in the early 1960s already. Furthermore, while I briefly felt tempted to systematically read the emergence of particular texts at particular times against the various shifts in GDR cultural policy—in methodological deference to the argument that GDR literature necessarily reflects such shifts—I grew skeptical of too schematic an understanding of literature, even in an arguably totalitarian state. In the end I adopted an empirical method, seeking general trends in the patterns of representation in the texts concerned, and broad, generally applicable explanations.

I have, then, written a work of literary criticism with a historian's eye and intent, and if this has led me to neglect certain theoretical perspectives, or questions of form and aesthetics, then I have done so because it seemed to me in the first instance most important to chart and interpret the basic terrain. I hope that the book will encourage others to explore aspects I have overlooked, or genres I have not discussed, for there is clearly still much work to be done. I would also encourage others not to

be put off by the kind of questions sometimes voiced at the conferences where I presented parts of this book as it was evolving. Was not GDR literature all about ideology? Is a literature in which you cannot write about violence against Germans not so blinkered as to be worthless? The first objection presumes that, if a work of literature assumes a "position" that is consonant with that of the SED, then this represents a kind of "ideological" knee-jerk reaction. Effectively, this is what Andreas Kossert suggests when he laments the fact that the "few" works of GDR literature that address flight and expulsion "had" to present the new German-Polish border as final. Kossert gives little thought to the possibility that authors might actually have agreed with its finality, and does not register the fact that many German politicians and intellectuals in the West also accepted the border—indeed it was accepted de facto in the course of "Ostpolitik." Surely, then, such a position is defensible. The second objection is also one expressed by Kossert when he observes that GDR authors had no alternative but to overlook Soviet crimes.[47] But as already suggested, it is not self-evident that flight and expulsion are coterminous with injustice toward Germans. Kossert raises his own subjective understanding of the essential character of flight and expulsion to the level of an absolute, objective standard. In so doing, he appears to reproduce the arguments of many expellee organizations over the years, whose equation of flight with anti-German violence served the "ideological purpose" of fomenting the Cold War. This is not to justify the fact that in the GDR addressing Soviet crimes against refugees was—at least until the 1980s—barely possible. But it is important to point out that it can be equally "ideological" to emphasize such crimes as it can be to steer away from depicting them.

Another question posed at the occasional conference was this: is there a GDR novel that is actually *about* flight or expulsion, that is, where it is the central dominant theme? But the same question might be asked of West German literature. Is it not enough that authors include a focus on it, some a greater one than others? The war and its aftermath, after all, the subjects of almost all the works I consider, encompassed experiences of which flight and expulsion constituted only one dimension. A final question that I did reflect upon a great deal concerns the role in GDR literature of resettler figures, "Umsiedler": was not the focus on *re-settlement* a denial of the upheaval that had preceded it? A way of suggesting that life proper began after flight, so that flight was somehow not relevant? This is certainly true of some 1950s' texts, but not of all, and certainly not of later texts. My book is about the literary shadow cast by flight and expulsion in GDR prose writing, one that grew longer as the years went by.

Notes

[1] See, for instance, Astrid von Friesen, *Der lange Abschied: Psychische Folgen für die 2. Generation deutscher Vertriebener* (Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2000), particularly 41–42; Manfred Kittel, *Vertreibung der Vertriebenen? Der historische deutsche Osten in der Erinnerungskultur der Bundesrepublik (1961–1982)* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2007); and Andreas Kossert, *Kalte Heimat: Die Geschichte der deutschen Vertriebenen nach 1945* (Munich: Siedler, 2008).

[2] See Heinz Nawratil, *Schwarzbuch der Vertreibung, 1945 bis 1948*, 12th ed. (1982; repr., Munich: Universitas, 2005), 8.

[3] For example, Christian Lotz, *Die Deutung des Verlusts: Erinnerungspolitische Kontroversen im geteilten Deutschland um Flucht, Vertreibung und die Ostgebiete, 1948–1972* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007); and Matthias Stickler, *"Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch": Organisation, Selbstverständnis und heimatpolitische Zielsetzungen der deutschen Vertriebenenverbände, 1949–1979* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2004). For a particularly critical, if not polemical, take, see Samuel Salzborn, *Grenzenlose Heimat: Geschichte, Gegenwart und Zukunft der Vertriebenenverbände* (Berlin: Elefanten Press, 2000).

[4] On memorials, see Stephan Scholz, "Erinnerung im Denkmal: Vertriebenendenkmäler in Deutschland und die Denkmalanlage in Oberschleißheim," in *Fachgespräch Politische Bildung an historischen Orten des Nationalsozialismus und Gedenkstättenpädagogik*, vol. 3 of *Flucht und Vertreibung*, ed. Manfred Huber (Gauting: Gautinger Protokolle, 2012), 17–28. Scholz is currently completing a book on expellee memorials in West Germany.

[5] Tim Völkering (University of Münster) is currently finishing a PhD dissertation entitled *Die Musealisierung der Themen Flucht, Vertreibung und Integration: Historische Ausstellungen seit 1950 im Vergleich* (cf. Völkering, *Flucht und Vertreibung im Museum: Zwei aktuelle Ausstellungen und ihre geschichtskulturellen Hintergründe im Vergleich* [Berlin: LIT-Verlag, 2008]). See also Cornelia Eisler, "Historisch-ostdeutsche Heimatsammlungen in Deutschland: Eine interdisziplinäre Untersuchung zur Erinnerungskultur von Flüchtlingen und Vertriebenen nach 1945," in *Berichte und Forschungen: Jahrbuch des Bundesinstituts für Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen im östlichen Europa* 16 (2008), ed. Detlef Haberland and Jens Stüben (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), 143–62.

[6] Jutta Faehndrich, *Eine endliche Geschichte: Die Heimatbücher der deutschen Vertriebenen* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2001).

[7] Elisabeth Fendl, *Zur Ästhetik des Verlusts: Bilder von Heimat, Flucht und Vertreibung* (Münster: Waxmann, 2011).

[8] See, for instance: Michaela Peroutkova, *Literarische und mündliche Erzählungen über die Vertreibung: Ein deutsch-tschechischer Vergleich* (Duisburg: WiKu-Verlag, 2006); Björn Schaal, *Jenseits von Oder und Lethe: Flucht, Vertreibung und Heimatverlust in Erzähltexten nach 1945* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2006); Wolfgang Schneiß, *Flucht, Vertreibung und verlorene Heimat im früheren Ostdeutschland: Beispiele literarischer Bearbeitung* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995); and the as-yet-unpublished PhD dissertation by Karina Berger, *The*